The Forms of Things Unknown:

Navigating Possibility in Shakespeare's Implicit Action

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Contents

Acknowledgements, pp.3-4

A Note on Texts p.5

Introduction pp.6-38

1 Part-Texts, Rehearsal and Dialogic Instruction pp.39-71

2 Orchestrating Conflict: Commands and Actorly Disobedience pp.72-124

3 Editing Shakespeare's Stage Directions: A 'Modal Realist' Approach? pp.125-159

4 Getting On and Off Stage: Missing Stage Directions and Uncued Entrances and Exits pp.160-188

5 Staging Reported Action: Retroactive Narration and Rescripting the Staged Past pp.189-218

6 Interpreting 'Uncued Actions' pp.219-249

Conclusion pp.250-257

Bibliography pp.258-266

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A Note on Texts

This thesis puts under the spotlight questions about what can be inferred from Shakespeare's playtexts. As a general rule, I therefore avoid quoting from modern editions unless I am specifically addressing the editorial decisions of a particular edition, choosing instead to provide quotations from the Folio, using Through Line Numbering (TLN) from *The Norton Facsimile* prepared by Charlton Hinman, second edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996) unless otherwise stated. When referring to Quarto editions, act, scene and line number has been provided from the *Shakespeare Quarto Facsimiles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964). In all quotations from these texts, I have retained the punctuation and orthography of the original apart from silently altering the long ''s'' to the modern ''s'' and normalising u/v and i/j. All references to modern editions have been provided with their own citation.

Introduction

The title of this thesis derives from the final act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As the play approaches its conclusion, the Duke of Athens and his Queen enter the stage and reflect upon the extraordinary events that have been related to them by Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius and Helena. ''Tis strange', comments Hippolyta, 'these lovers speake of' (1793). When Theseus rejoins that what they have heard reported is 'More straunge than true' (1794), his initial expression of scepticism soon morphs into an enraptured encomium on the nature of truth, art and the imagination:

> The Poets eye in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance
> From heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.
> And as imagination bodies forth the forms of things
> Unknowne; the Poets pen turns them to shapes,
> And gives to aire nothing, a local habitation,
> And a name. (TLN 1804-1809)

The reason I have chosen Theseus' words for my title is that they convey, better than I myself could have done, the sense of bewilderment out of which my research for this thesis began. Like Theseus, I too have often found myself confused, dumbfounded and even unnerved by the presence in Shakespeare's plays of 'things unknown.' So too have I often found myself doubting the 'forms' which these 'things' might take. Theseus' reference to 'things unknown' provides perhaps the best summation there could be of this thesis' origins in questions about knowability, whilst his emphasis on 'form' points to my other preoccupation with dramaturgy, or the forms via which the action of any given play is 'bodied forth.'

The emphasis on 'forms' in my title might therefore be taken in two senses of the word: firstly, it refers to the particular dramaturgic forms of implicit or embedded action in

Shakespeare's plays, whilst secondly, 'form' can be taken in its broadest sense as describing a particular way that a thing might be said to exist or be. Hence, this thesis begins with the rather straightforward observation that there are, within the Shakespearean playtexts that have come down to us, many 'things unknown'. In response, my primary interest has been in trying to find out what forms – in that latter sense of the word – these 'things unknown' might take.

It is a truism, after all, that a play consists not only of dialogue but of action, not only of what is said and heard but of what is seen and done. The printed words on the page, that is, tell only half a story. They do so, moreover, because subtending the words of any playscript are the events and occurrences that we know must be happening but which are not explicitly 'revealed' by those playtexts alone. Much of 'what happens' in a play is, in this way, not only uncertain but perhaps even unknowable, the earliest printed texts being full of gaps, fissures, lacunae, silences and what one group of scholars have recently been termed 'blind spots.'[1] It might be said, then, that what interests me in this study is that which is 'missing' in the playtexts. As is often commented, the paucity of extratextual data in the folio and earliest quartos raises manifold interpretive challenges. What is less often observed, however, is how our interpretations of these plays hinge upon our knowledge of what happens within them. At a much more fundamental level, the fragmented nature of any given Shakespearean playtext calls into focus the problem of both what and how we can know.

Arguably, this question about how we can know is one of the most urgent questions for interpreters of Shakespeare, no matter what one's creed or critical persuasion, because it is only once we have knowledge of the things that happen that we can really begin the vital task of interpreting or of providing explanations for those said things. As critics, we might therefore take heed of the notion – prominent in the philosophy of David Lewis, whose ideas will

[1] See *Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World*, ed. by Subha Mukherji (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019).

resurface throughout this thesis – that 'the truth is supervenient on being.' Put in the most straightforward way, this means nothing other than that the truth of things depends upon material facts about reality and on what can actually be said to exist. Though more will be said on Lewis shortly, it is this simple notion that largely underpins the philosophical project he dubs 'Humean supervenience.' If we are to have any chance of getting at 'the truth' in Shakespeare, then Lewis would probably suggest that our first step has to be ascertaining the actual matters of fact that pertain within any given dramatic world, since it is only from this basis that we can make inferences about things like character, motive and psychology, what causes what, the ethical justice of an action and indeed the whole range of issues that tend to preoccupy us as critics of Shakespeare's plays.[2]

The original aim of this thesis could therefore be described as an attempt to establish a theatre-specific epistemology, one which would delimit and define the extents and limits of knowability in Shakespeare's plays whilst probing how they repeatedly, to quote Lauren Robertson, dramatize a 'confrontation with the limits of one's theatrical knowledge.'[3] At root, this was an effort that was borne out of both anxiety and desire, a desire not only 'to know' but to know the extremities of what can be known. Of course, this necessarily requires that we acknowledge, to rephrase Subha Mukherji, our own position as knowing subjects to 'the object of knowledge' that is a playtext.[4] But it also, in an even more fundamental sense, means

[2] The phrase 'the truth is supervenient on being' originates not with Lewis but with John Bigelow. See David Lewis, 'Humean Supervenience Debugged', in *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.224–47 (p.225). An accessible introduction to Lewis' philosophy can be found in Daniel Nolan, *David Lewis* (Chesham: Acumen, 2005). On 'Humean supervenience', see Chapter 2 'The Humean Mosaic'.

[3] Lauren Robertson, *Entertaining Uncertainty in the Early Modern Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), p.189.

[4] Subha Mukherji, 'Introduction: Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World', in *Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World: A Conversation*, ed. by Subha Mukherji (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019), p.8.

uncovering how the theatre models its own methods of knowing and being, or even the ways that being in the theatre might be said to be contingent on what can be known.

My first step in exploring these issues was to identify textually indeterminate moments and to ask, in a way that took things right back to basics, how – or on what grounds - we can claim knowledge of what is happening within any given dramatic fiction. The truth is that this is a problem with no easy solution. To take just one notable example, at the start of *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes memorably becomes suddenly and inexplicably convinced that his wife Hermione has had an affair with Polixenes, the king's childhood friend, during the latter's sojourn in Sicily. We all know – don't we? - that Leontes is wrong. The issue becomes more complicated, however, when we pause for a moment to ask ourselves *how* exactly we know this. Whilst the play is undoubtedly about the problem of knowledge – as memorably noted, for example, by Stanley Cavell in his sceptical readings of Shakespearean tragedy – it is also as though the playtext at times purposefully frustrates our own claims to knowledge by withholding the matters of fact, especially when, near the start of the play, the precise cause of Leontes' jealousy is not stipulated but is instead signified by a gap, a textual silence that points to something but refuses to yield answers about what that 'something' is.[5] In this way, Leontes' experience of 'unmastered and unmasterable knowledge' within the play simultaneously invites what Mukherji calls 'a recalibrated encounter *with* the text', even if this is not something that readers of most modern editions are likely to realise, encountering a stage direction in which it is stipulated that Hermione takes Polixenes by the hand.[6]

[5] Cavell cautions against dismissing Leontes as quite simply mad. Though mad he may be, Cavell stresses that 'the problem he had fallen prey to is real, and remains without a perfect solution.' What also remains without a solution is the way the playtext mirrors Leontes' situation within the fiction, refusing to grant readers certainty about what precisely sparks Leontes' jealousy in the first place. Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.217.

[6] Mukherji, pp.3-5. Virtually every modern edition of *The Winter's Tale* adds some variation of a stage direction in which Hermione and Polixenes take each other by the hand. The evidence for this, however, is scant, reflecting an editorial consensus that has excluded any number of alternatives in which Hermione's behaviour could be more

The absent cause of Leontes' jealousy – or rather the event that is 'missing' in the text of the folio – is one particular manifestation of the wider problem which this thesis seeks to explore. How, in other words, are we supposed to 'get at' the truth of this moment? This is not a new problem, of course, and nor am I the first or the only person to have pointed it out. Writing in his introduction to the textual companion of the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works*, Gary Taylor emphasises how playscripts are necessarily limited in the information they provide about extratextual matters regarding staging:

> The written text of any […] manuscript thus depended upon an unwritten para-text which always accompanied it: an invisible life-support system of stage directions, which Shakespeare could either expect his first readers to supply, or which those first readers would expect Shakespeare himself to supply orally.[7]

As Alan Dessen has commented, Taylor's formulation of the 'unwritten para-text' is 'geared towards the editorial practice in a monumental project', and one that involved 'a distinctive and controversial approach to stage directions.'[8] Arguably, this 'controversial approach' has now been taken even further by Taylor in his more recent work for The New Oxford Shakespeare, where the principle of editorial interventionism has been given near free rein. Whilst one chapter of this thesis will directly address this question about how we should edit, Taylor's notion of the 'unwritten para-text' is important because it highlights – here from the practical perspective of the editor – the fundamental and probably insurmountable knowledge gap which these playtexts present us with.[9] As he goes on to observe, all of the earliest playtexts 'fail' – 'more or less grossly', in his own words – 'to supply this unwritten text.' Consequently,

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modest or more improper than this stage direction implies. The full implications of the choices editors have made when it comes to stage directions will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[7] Gary Taylor, 'General Introduction', in *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.2–3.

[8] Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.10.

[9] As Dessen further notes, 'The reader of the early printed editions is therefore left with many gaps and puzzles.' Dessen, *Recovering*, p.11.

it is left up to editors to 'rectify the deficiency', and especially, he argues, by 'conjecturally writing for him the stage directions which Shakespeare himself assumed or spoke but never wrote.'[10]

Thus, for Taylor, as for others before him, in the absence of sure knowledge what we have instead – and what we have to make the best of – is our ability to conjecture or to make, in other words, reasonably sound guesses. This is a sentiment expressed by Samuel Johnson in his 'Preface to Shakespeare' as early as 1765. Here, Johnson refers to the practice of editing as 'conjectural criticism', although he simultaneously bemoans its limitations: 'As I practised conjecture more', he writes, 'I learned to trust it less.'[11] The concerns expressed by Johnson are further echoed in Taylor's own contention that 'to fill in' the 'lacunae' of the original printed texts poses a challenge that is at once necessary but 'necessarily hazardous': 'necessary, if we are to relish the texts as scripts for theatrical performance, but hazardous,' he asserts, 'because the filling which modern editors conduct might not always be to Shakespeare's taste.'[12]

There is a certain irony in not being able to trust the very procedures via which you must conduct your practice, and yet as the comments of Johnson and Taylor testify, such is the lot of Shakespeare's editors. The other noteworthy thing about Taylor's passage, however, is his conception of the playtext as a script originally designed for Shakespeare's 'first readers.' These 'first readers' he refers to are the players, those same players who, uniquely, Shakespeare would spend most of his writing career working in collaboration with. Thus, one way of approaching these playtexts is to do so from the perspective of the players – to conceive of them as scripts which, separated into parts, were designed to instruct and provide direction to those whose duty

[10] Taylor, pp.2–3.
[11] Samuel Johnson, '*The Plays of William Shakespeare: Preface*' in *The Major Works*, *including Rasselas*, ed. by Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.419-456 (p.453).
[12] Taylor, 'General Introduction', pp.2–3.

it was to bring these scripts to life upon the stage.[13] To recall the words of Theseus, whilst it might be the case that it is the poet who gives shape to 'airy nothing' in the form of the words he sets down upon the page, it is the player who in fact 'bodies forth' and gives true form, who indeed *embodies* these things conjured by the poet's imagination.

A playtext, in its most rudimentary state, is nothing more than a medium of communication between individuals partaking in a shared collaborative endeavour – the endeavour, that is, of putting on a play. This act of communication has been characterised by scholars in a variety of ways – Styan referred to it as a 'code of signals', Dessen as a 'theatrical vocabulary' – though fundamentally, what this act of communication points to is the peculiar way that dramatic language might be said to function on one level that is 'fictional' and another that is 'theatrical' – the one relating to the significance of the words as they are spoken to and by characters, and the other relating to the messages and signals directed at the players.[14] This is to echo Peter Womack's sentiment that 'playwrights are people who write things for actors to say.'[15] As he goes on to note:

> the theatrical word is the site of a fraught conversation between three speakers – the writer, the dramatis persona and the actor. Although these three sources may converge on the moment when a line is actually spoken upon a stage, they remain separable because each has its own orientation: the writer is addressing himself to a reader, the dramatis persona to another dramatis persona, and the actor to an audience.[16]

Womack invites us to think of each of these orientations as 'a ''line'' of communication'.[17] A line of communication is defined by the participants within that act of communication, and

[13] '[I]n putting quill to paper Shakespeare was crafting theatrical scripts rather than literary texts; the stage directions and other signals in these scripts were directed not at us but at players, playgoers, and readers who shared a language of the theatre easily lost or obscured today.' Dessen, *Recovering*, p.39.
[14] J.L. Styan, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p.3; on the distinction between 'theatrical' and 'fictional' language see Richard Hosley, 'The Gallery over the Stage in the Public Playhouse of Shakespeare's Time', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 8.1 (1958), pp.15–31.
[15] Peter Womack, *Ben Johnson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.14.
[16] Womack, p.14.
[17] Womack, p.31.

although each of these lines are separable, they are also complexly interconnected, all of them being alive and present within the language at once. When we speak of the 'theatrical' dynamics of the language, we tend to have in mind that first line of communication identified by Womack between playwright and player. It is via this channel, of course, that words in the theatre have the instructional or advisory quality of telling the players what they should be doing and how they should be doing it. Meanwhile, to speak of the 'fictional' dynamics of the language is to understand the meaning of the words within the world of the play – the words as they are spoken, that is, by those who inhabit, suffer and occupy that world.

Shakespeare's Instruction of the Players

In light of the above, this thesis intends to pay attention to the instruments of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, to that first line of communication identified by Womack between the playwright and his players. This is not to ignore the fact that the precise demarcation between a 'theatrical' and 'fictional' domain is sometimes ambiguous. As Mariko Ichikawa has observed, 'one of the major characteristics of the drama of the early modern period is the way it allows the imaginative truth of the fictional world to intersect with, even interpenetrate, a recognition of the wood, lath and plaster reality of the playhouse itself.'[18]

At times of course the lines get blurred, yielding an elaborate interplay between the 'imaginary' world of the play and the 'real' world of the theatre which an audience is always implicitly aware of. As has recently been emphasised by Lauren Robertson, Shakespeare's plays are always calling on spectators 'to see with doubled vision', requiring them 'to apprehend the mechanics of stagecraft as the fictional elements for which they must

[18] Mariko Ichikawa, *The Shakespearean Stage Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.27.

substitute.'[19] In his work on doubling in Shakespeare's plays, Brett Gamboa has similarly called attention to the way Shakespeare invites spectators to 'fluently participate in two concurrent worlds of coherence', sowing 'doubt about the boundaries of reality and fiction' whilst 'generating truths outside the fictional frame regarding the characters and situations within it.'[20] Nowhere, perhaps, is this interrelationship between the dreamworld of the fiction and the mechanics of the stage more apparent than when it comes to one of Shakespeare's most rudimentary dramaturgical instruments: the prompt. Throughout this thesis, the word 'prompt' will be used to designate the ways in which players are incited to perform specified actions. This is distinct from the word 'cue', which also has the more general meaning of a signal to action but which, in the period Shakespeare's plays were first performed, referred more specifically to the up to three words that appeared on a player's part-text and which indicated to that player when he was required to speak, enter or exit. Another way of describing a 'prompt', then, would be as an implicit or implied stage direction. As signals to the players, these instructions most certainly have a function that is performative and 'theatrical'. As things which are said and uttered by characters, however, they are also of course part and parcel of what is going on within the 'fiction'. This is to say that there is a sense in which prompts capture the convergence of the 'theatrical' and 'fictional' domains which any play is comprised of, pinpointing the actor's peculiar status as a fellow human being who lives in the real world, 'while simultaneously participating in an alternate, imaginary realm.'[21]

As such, it is these devices from which the players would know – or could choose – what actions to perform to which this thesis will turn its attention. In my attempts to uncover those things that are *not* revealed by the playtexts themselves, my response has been to hone in on

[19] Robertson, pp.6–7.
[20] Brett Gamboa, *Shakespeare's Double Plays: Dramatic Economy on the Early Modern Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.24; p.224.
[21] Gamboa, p.3.

the underlying engineering of these plays at their most rudimentary level: to lay bare, that is, the theatrical mechanics at work within any given play. Inevitably, part of this has involved the attempt to retrieve 'a language of the theatre shared by playwrights, players, and playgoers', and one which, as Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson have noted, 'can easily be flawed or eclipsed in modern editions, stage productions, and on-the-page interpretation.'[22] And yet, whilst this thesis draws upon the impressive work of those scholars who have contributed to the 'recovery' of this language, in this study the attempt 'to recover' is not an end in itself but instead functions in the service of an epistemological project that aims to navigate the plethora of dramatic possibilities which any playtext comprises – to posit and think through the implications, that is, of the abundant range of alternative ways which the action of any given play might conceivably come about.

The questions I will ask throughout this thesis all share a similar thrust, stemming from a core concern with the epistemology of Shakespeare's stagecraft: is such and such a character present at such and such a time? Is a given action performed? Does what a character say match with what has happened? Will a character necessarily act as he or she is commanded to? Is what a character witnesses really what is happening? All of these questions call attention to both the limits and extents of what can be known. In order to try and provide some sort of explanation to account for these enigmas, my response has been to put Shakespeare's implicit 'direction' of his plays under the microscope, focusing attention on some of the smallest implements of his stagecraft – things like prompts, cues, exits and entrances, reports and 'uncued actions'. These are the sort of minute, at first glance negligible devices that critics sometimes overlook. But in fact, to ask *how* these dramaturgical instruments are working is to unavoidably raise the question of *how* we can know, since it is these very theatrical technologies

[22]Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.vii.

– first designed to 'instruct' the players – which now constitute our primary means of conjecturing the staging possibilities that are generated in and through the dialogue.

Myriad-Minded Shakespeare?

The main problem with Taylor's notion of the 'unwritten para-text' discussed above is this: in assuming that such a 'para-text' actually existed, Taylor implies that there was some single, clearly determined way in which it would have been brought about. However, whilst it is true, as Robertson notes, that the surviving playtexts are one of the core 'material traces of the ephemeral event of performance', therefore containing 'troves of untapped evidence about what the plays *did* on the stage', it is the case that these same playtexts typically yield nothing more than what Anthony Hammond has termed a 'plethora of mights, could haves and possiblys' – a range of epistemic possibilities that all constitute some way the action of a play might come about.[23]

At this point, then, the issue shifts from being a purely epistemological one to a more broadly metaphysical one. That is to say, aside from investigating what and how we as theatrical subjects can know (i.e., claim to possess knowledge of theatrical events), this thesis explores the question of what can be said to exist, and how, by extension, we can go about characterising the nature of Shakespearean dramatic 'reality.'[24] Indeed, when attention is paid to the implicit staging of Shakespeare's plays – to the action generated, that is, out of the dialogue that characters speak – one of the things that soon becomes apparent is the need to adjust one's

[23] Robertson, p.4; Hammond, p.81 (n.22).
[24] On defining metaphysics, see Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Routledge, 1998), p.11.

mode of thinking and speaking: to speak not, as Hammond observes, of what is or is not happening at any given moment, but of what might or could be the case.

This semantic shift from *is* to *might* should encourage us to acknowledge some rudimentary truths: for example, that the playtexts which have passed down to us are records not of any single but of many *possible* events, producing worlds where, in Brett Gamboa's words, 'contradictory possibilities cohere.'[25] Yet, because it is not really possible to determine which of many possible states of affairs constitutes some play's actual state of affairs, the issue is not so much one of 'knowing' as of coming to terms with the co-existence of multiple lines of action that not only differ from, but sometimes even conflict with and wholly contradict one another. Out of the problem of knowability emerges the question of possibility. And thus, it is by pinpointing and interrogating this crossroads between the unknowable and the possible that this thesis aims to explore perhaps the biggest commonplace of all about Shakespeare's dramatic fictions – namely, his plays' abundant and manifold plurality.

In addressing this longstanding critical truism, even cliché about Shakespeare, this thesis nonetheless aims to present an alternative account of Shakespeare's multiplicity compared with how it has generally been conceived in the past. Traditionally, plurality in Shakespeare has more often than not been associated with what Coleridge termed his 'myriad-mind.' When he first coined this term around two centuries ago, Coleridge appears to have been applauding Shakespeare for the sheer range of his dramatic output, the almost limitless bounds of his imagination.[26] Yet today, critics are just as likely to associate Coleridge's phrase with the renaissance's broader rhetorical culture of arguing *in utramque partem*, wherein Shakespeare might be taken as a particularly paradigmatic example of what Altman called the 'Tudor play

[25] Gamboa, p.4.
[26] For Coleridge's criticism on Shakespeare, see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge, 2008); see also E.A.J Honigmann, *Myriad-Minded Shakespeare: Essays, Chiefly on the Tragedies and Problem Comedies* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989).

of mind' – the ability to hold two antithetical, conflicting points of view in mind at once.[27] From this perspective, what gives Shakespeare's drama its enduring appeal is his refusal to take sides (or rather, his readiness to entertain the credence of all sides of an argument). Through a willingness to lend an equal voice to every point of view, Shakespeare above all his contemporaries mastered what Emrys Jones in *The Origins of Shakespeare* called a 'rhetorical dialectic', a mode of writing brought about by a 'continuity between rhetorical training and dramatic practice', wherein every conversation becomes 'a contest, an exchange of views, a struggle for precedence.' Thus, for Jones as for others before and since, multiplicity in Shakespeare derives largely from his 'dialogic method': whilst the plays stage a clash between different perspectives, this proliferation of viewpoints gets further amplified by Shakespeare's interpreters themselves, all of whom will inevitably seek to make meaning out of an array of conflicting and juxtaposed arguments.[28]

There is no question that Shakespeare had a remarkable versatility of mind, not to mention an arguably unrivalled knack for harnessing his medium to explore and probe a range of different points of view. But conceived in this way, the notion of the 'myriad-minded Shakespeare' alone falls short of capturing the full extent of his dizzying multiplicity. It is not just that Shakespeare was an incredibly multifaceted thinker, or even that he could explore an issue from all possible angles. Another dimension to plurality in Shakespeare can be described as an evental multiplicity, emerging from the ontological peculiarity of the dramatic medium which exists in one form on the page and in another on the stage: as a text to be read and as a script to be performed. As a performance (and in this case, philosophically inclined) critic like Philip McGuire would argue, much of what makes plays interesting – and Shakespeare's

[27] See Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[28] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.14–15; compare also with Graham Bradshaw, who describes Shakespeare's dialecticism as a 'poetic-dramatic perspectivism.' Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987), p.x.

especially – is the power they provide to performers and producers 'to give them shape and coherence, thus ensuring that the plays will vary from production to production, even from performance to performance.'[29]

In this respect, arguing 'from both sides' is a vital though single facet of plurality in Shakespeare's plays, whilst the other source of this multiplicity comes from what McGuire terms 'open silences', which are the meanings and effects 'established by nonverbal, extratextual features of the play that emerge only in performance', occurring when a play 'makes the quantum transition from multifaceted potentiality to a single actuality.'[30] As Mukherji observes, McGuire's notion of the 'open silence' alludes to 'features that determine the meanings of speechless moments by drawing on the emotional environment *around* them', with the result that McGuire sees Shakespearean plurality largely as a product of the interplay between play-as-text and play-as-performance, the former equating to an unactualized substate consisting of various possibilia, whilst performance serves to realise these possibilities.[31] According to McGuire, a play can thus be defined as

> a coherent superposition of coexistent potentialities. Standing in the middle between the idea of an event and the actual event, a play does not exist in a single mode – as a playtext – but as an ensemble of various possibilities that may overlap and even conflict with one another.[32]

By coopting concepts like 'superposition' and 'complementarity' from the field of quantum mechanics, McGuire has posited an updated version of the older Aristotelian distinction between potentiality and actuality as a model for theorising the relationship between playtext and performance.[33] As W.B Worthen has noted, in McGuire's formulation, the 'text describes

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[29] Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p.xxi.
[30] McGuire, p.xvi; p.139.
[31] Mukherji, p.10.
[32] McGuire, p.138.
[33] Aristotle's discussion of potentiality and actuality can be found in his *Metaphysics*: 'In potentiality,' he writes, 'a single thing can be simultaneous opposites. In actuality, however, it cannot.' Aristotle, *The Metaphysics* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.99.

… the limits of possible forms which the work might take in performance, and so limits performance to reproducing a ‘‘work’’ which is somehow already inscribed in the text.’[34] Yet additionally, McGuire correctly discerns how a plurality of staging options in Shakespeare emerges from the dialogue between playwright and players, where ‘open silences’ provoke actors to make choices and determine effects for themselves.

Like McGuire, this thesis identifies Shakespearean plenitude at points of textual indeterminacy, although it will resist performance criticism’s wider penchant for privileging the actualisations of performance over the ‘imaginary performances’ that occur when a play is read. After all, from the performance perspective – as Worthen notes – stage production is regarded to be ‘the final cause for the writing of plays, which are fully realised only in the circumstances for which they were originally intended: theatrical performance.’[35] Yet, whereas McGuire claims that the non-verbal meanings of a play will ‘emerge only in performance’, in what follows, the readings I offer of Shakespeare’s plays instead respond to Harry Berger Jr.’s call for ‘a critical *reading* practice that responds to the essential dynamics of stage performance’, paying attention to the ‘textual dramaturgy’ which Berger defines as the ‘indications of staging given by the Shakespeare text.’[36]

Any single performance, as McGuire observes, can only ever bring to fruition one of multiple possibilities, even whilst these possibilities are, as Margaret Jane Kidnie has observed, ‘potentially limitless.’[37] To this extent, then, although performance may be harnessed to explore

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[34] W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.14–15.
[35] Worthen, p.4.
[36] Harry Jr. Berger, *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Erickson (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.168; quotes also taken from W.B. Worthen's discussion of Berger's critical approach to Shakespeare in *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance*, pp.176-177.
[37] A contrast should be drawn with the claim, made by Stanley Wells in his introduction to *The Division of the Kingdoms*, that ‘plays written for performance are not fully realised until they reach the stage.’ Though he goes on to state that ‘critics who treat such plays purely as literature are choosing to work in blinkers’, Wells’ statement is not as incontrovertible as he might suppose: when, after all, has a play ever been ‘fully’ realised? If a play was ever to be ‘fully’ realised, then this would involve the realisation of all the possible ways that a playtext might be brought about, whereas a single performance can only ever bring about one manifestation of the multiple

– and indeed even discover – a range of possible meanings inherent in the text, ultimately, all productions are beset by very similar limitations to that of the editor – namely, by the need to make choices.[38] Yet one of the things this thesis hopes to emphasise is the need for critics to work within an idiom that allows them to be alert and sensitive to the entire breadth of Shakespearean possibilia. And this, I suggest, can only be found by turning to a different mode of philosophical discourse altogether – namely, to the philosophy of modality.

Necessity *versus* Contingency

In philosophical lingo, modality refers to the theory of necessity, contingency, possibility and impossibility. When we refer to something as being necessary, what we usually mean is that the said thing cannot be other than as it actually exists: necessity refers to that which *must* or *has to be* the case. A possibility, on the other hand, is something which may or may not be the case, whilst contingency refers the absence of necessity, and impossibility to something which could never be the case.[39]

Everything which happens in a Shakespeare play occurs, broadly speaking, either because it is necessary or contingent. As long ago as the 1940s, Arthur Colby Sprague pointed out the difference in Shakespeare's plays between action which 'is called for by the lines themselves', in contrast to those occasions when there is 'alternative business' to choose from.'[40] By way of

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possibilities of the text. Stanley Wells, 'Introduction: The Once and Future King Lear', in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, ed. by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.1.

[38] Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p.4.

[39] As John Divers notes, these four cases of modality are definitionally related: '[p]ossibility rules out impossibility and requires (exclusively) contingency or necessity. Impossibility rules out possibility, rules out necessity and rules out contingency. Necessity requires possibility, rules out impossibility and rules out contingency. Contingency requires possibility, rules out impossibility and rules out necessity.' John Divers, *Possible Worlds* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.3–4.

[40] Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors: The Stage Business in His Plays (1660-1905)* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1944), pp.xv-xx.

example, Sprague drew attention to the moment in *Richard II* when Richard smashes the glass, which is signified in the dialogue when Richard comments on the shards of glass dispersed across the floor: 'For there it is, crackt in an hundred shivers' (2212). According to Sprague, this means that before he speaks the last line, Richard 'must … break the glass.' In contrast, Sprague compares this to the moment when Bolingbroke kneels before Richard, at which point Richard commands him to rise: 'Up Cousin, up, your Heart is up, I know, / Thus high at least, although your knee be low' (1784-5). This time, Sprague notes how 'Thus high' is something which will be 'explained by the actor's gesture', although he also observes how the precise gesture in question is subject to doubt and uncertainty: does Richard 'point to his own head', he asks, or to 'the crown which he still wears?' On this occasion, then, Sprague writes that the stage business 'may be appropriate to the lines without being demanded by them.'[41]

Although he doesn't use these terms, what Sprague has essentially done is to draw a distinction between action which is necessary and action which is contingent. In truth, the distinction he draws is even too restrictive: he assumes that the actor playing Richard 'must' smash the glass. But what if the glass is imaginary, the action a mime? Even assuming that there was or is a prop and that a glass will be smashed, then what are we to suppose is the manner in which Richard destroys it? He might, in some situations, lunge it across the stage, whilst in others he might drop it by accident. Or perhaps, as Kitamura Sae has recently suggested, he might not break the mirror at all.[42] All action, then - even where it is apparently or genuinely necessary - usually consists of further contingencies. These contingencies usually involve some sort of actorly choice, whereas that which is necessary refers to those aspects of the staging mandated by the dialogue and which the players were required to follow.

[41] Sprague, p.xv.
[42] Kitamura Sae, 'Did Richard II Really Break the Mirror on Stage? A Close-Reading of the Close-Reading Scene', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 76.1 (2025), pp.56–63.

Towards a Plurality of Worlds

Another definition of necessity, common in the philosophy of possible worlds, holds that a necessary truth is something which is true at all possible worlds.[43] Inevitably, there are many places to which we might turn to get a better idea of what exactly this means.[44] The one philosopher who towers above all others on this subject, however, is the twentieth-century American philosopher David Lewis. Indeed, throughout the latter half of the twentieth-century, Lewis was notorious for his support of what he termed 'modal realism,' which first gets a hearing in his book *Counterfactuals*:

> I believe that there are possible worlds other than the one we happen to inhabit. If an argument is wanted, it is this. It is uncontroversially true that things might be otherwise than they are. I believe, and so do you, that things could have been different in countless ways … I therefore believe in the existence of entities that might be called 'ways things could have been'. I prefer to call them 'possible worlds'.[45]

The world in which we live, the world of which we are a part and which we call actual is, from a Lewisian point of view, but one of a plurality of worlds. The things that happen here are only one way that things might have happened, and for Lewis, a 'possible world' – a world which exists and which is no less real than our own – is a place where the things that might have happened here *do* happen. Some years after his publication of *Counterfactuals*, Lewis went on to develop his thesis of 'modal realism' in his now classic *On the Plurality of Worlds*:

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[43] 'The familiar analysis of necessity as truth at all possible worlds was only the beginning.' David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.3.

[44] 'It is also no surprise that philosophers have proposed rather different answers to whether there is necessity, whether there is necessity to be discovered, how necessity is to be characterised, whether there are more and less restricted kinds of necessity, whether necessity is a fundamental part of reality's architecture, how we might come to know the scope of necessity, and the like.' Otávio Bueno and Scott A. Shalkowski, 'Modal Matters: Philosophical Significance', in *The Routledge Handbook of Modality*, ed. by Otávio Bueno and Scott A. Shalkowski, 1st edn (Routledge, 2020), pp.1–7 (p.2).

[45] David K. Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p.84.

> Are there other worlds that are other ways? I say there are. I advocate a thesis of plurality of worlds, or *modal realism*, which holds that our world is but one world among many … There are so many other worlds, in fact, that absolutely *every* way that a world could possibly be is a way that some world *is*. And as with worlds, so it is with parts of worlds. There are ever so many ways that a part of a world could be; and so many and so varied are the other worlds that absolutely every way that a part of a world could be possibly be is a way that some part of some world is.[46]

So, put in the most straightforward way possible, modal realism encompasses the thesis that every way a world could possibly be is a way that some world is. Occupying a point in logical space, all of these worlds are isolated and inclusive entities, which is to say that there is no causal relation between them: nothing that happens at one world can, in Lewis' own words, 'cause anything to happen at another.'[47] Unsurprisingly, Lewis' belief in the genuine existence of these other worlds is not uncontroversial. His main reason for arguing that we should believe in them, however, is simple enough: because doing so is useful. Thus crucially, modal realism is not a licence for believing in all manner of fantastic and outlandish things. To reiterate: the rule is that every way a world could possibly be is a way that some world is, and this is not the same as to say that everything and anything is possible. As Simon Palfrey has argued, the reason for taking Lewis' realism about possible worlds seriously is

> because the possible world reveals the conditions of the actual. It is only through counterfactuals that we discover – perhaps for the first time, perhaps with the immediacy of objective recognition – what is at stake in our actuality.[48]

The crucial thing, then, is that once we agree to the terms of Lewis' philosophy, his thesis about the plurality of worlds becomes central to the evaluation of a whole set of ethical

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[46] Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, p.2.

[47] Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, p.2.

[48] Palfrey is one of the few scholars to have recognised the utility of Lewis' ideas in application to Shakespeare. He continues: 'If the counterfactual is ''gratuitous'' – untethered, remote from experience, unearned, insufficiently indebted – then it won't come home to us, it will drift into arbitrariness, into impossibility.' Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p.304; see also Michael D. Bristol, 'Is Shakespeare a Moral Philosopher?', in *Shakespeare and Moral Agency*, ed. by Michael D. Bristol (London: Continuum, 2010).

preoccupations. In the way that they reveal 'the conditions of the actual', possible worlds are conceptually useful instruments for mapping consequentiality, determining what is at stake in a choice, positing what causes what, and ultimately, they can thus provide us with a much fuller description of the state of reality.

Shakespeare the Modal-Realist?

But what has all of this got to do with Shakespeare? The philosophy espoused by Lewis is not, after all, one which Shakespeare was of aware of, and neither did Lewis take any apparent interest in Shakespeare. Where Lewis comes in handy, however, is in providing us with the conceptual framework to map – and indeed to place restrictions upon – the numerous alternative courses of action that any play might take. Yet lest there be any mistake, this is not to propose a Lewisian reading of Shakespeare; it is not about imposing or mapping Lewis' ideas or theories onto Shakespeare. It is more to suggest that Shakespeare already wrote what Lewis would go on to articulate in his philosophy some four centuries later: what Lewis proposed in his metaphysics is already there, in other words, present in the plays that Shakespeare wrote.

A more appropriate case-study than that which was provided by Sprague, then, would be some big and hugely consequential event: the assassination of Caesar, let's say. On Lewisian terms, we know that Caesar's death is necessary because it is something that is going to happen in every conceivable version of the play. Sure, it might be possible to imagine some alternative play in which Caesar survives – a sort of counterfactual history play, if you like. But clearly, this would not be the same play that Shakespeare wrote and it is not one of the possibilities that his play allows: in fact it is an *impossibility*, because his survival is something that will happen in no truly conceivable version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. So Caesar is always going to

die, and he is always going to die after being attacked by assassins. And yet the play's scripting, of course, is remarkably open about the precise manner in which Caesar will finally meet his end:

> *Cask*. Speake hands for me.
>
> *They stab Caesar*.
>
> *Caes*. *Et Tu Brutè?* – Then fall Caesar.
>
> *Cin*. Liberty, Freedom; Tyranny is dead.
>
> Run hence, proclaime, cry it about the Streets. (TLN 1286-1290)

At the time when Caesar is attacked, it is not so much the lines spoken as what is going on in between the lines that is important. As is sometimes stipulated in modern editions through the insertion of a stage direction, it is strongly implied that Caska is the first to attack – 'Speake hands for me' – whilst Brutus will be the last: '*Et Tu Brute*?' Almost everything that happens in-between, however, is up for grabs, hinging in the folio-text on nothing more than an unrevealing punctuation mark - a dash.[49]

There are, therefore, many important questions left unanswered. How, we might want to ask, do the assassins go about their butchery? How does Caesar conduct himself in his last moments? To this very day, the violence of this moment can still prove extremely shocking in performance, and we should not fool ourselves into thinking that these questions are somehow marginal to the central event: on the contrary, *how* the assassination plays out can and will have a huge impact in shaping and manipulating our political sympathies. This fact is made plain, of course, when both Brutus and Antony vie to control the narrative surrounding Caesar's death in their respective funeral orations. At an even later point in the play, it is maintained by Antony

[49] In an attempt to make 'the non-verbal dynamics that animated plays on stage legible in print', Claire Bourne has proposed that the presence of dashes in early modern printed plays often signals 'the timing and presence of extra-lexical business.' Claire Bourne, *Typographies of Performance in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2020), p.3; p.23. See also Chapter 2 'Jonson's Breaches and the Typography of Action'.

that Caska strikes Caesar from behind in what is an apparent attempt to frame the assassins in the most dishonourable light possible. Whether this retrospective report provided by Antony indicates how the moment is supposed to be staged is one of the questions I will be asking in a later chapter.

What it most certainly does suggest, however, is the huge importance placed upon these contingent matters of fact that can and will differ from one version of a play to the next. It could be, for instance, that Caesar puts up a fight and maybe even manages to defend himself until Brutus delivers the fatal blow. In some other scenario, maybe he offers himself up defencelessly and lets the assassins have their will. Alternatively still, it might be that Caesar tries to flee in a cowardly affront to his honourable reputation. Though all resulting in the inescapable fact of Caesar's death, all of these alternatives have repercussions that require us as 'knowing subjects of the play' to readjust the way we look at this moment and situate it within the wider play. In the event that Caesar does fight back, it might be – depending on the character of our own values – that Caesar earns our respect in his valiant attempt to fight to the end. If he doesn't and lets fate take its course, it could be that this will have the effect of stirring our sympathies even further: maybe, when Caesar proves unwilling to fight back, this is the moment we learn that the assassins have acted out of proportion and have overestimated – if they haven't intentionally exaggerated – the danger posed by Caesar.

All this points to the fact that where there is possibility – where, in short, there are choices to be made – there is usually something of ethical consequence at stake. In Shakespeare, it is more often than not these moments of choice – a player's doubtful response to a prompt, an uncertain entry, an open silence – that are truly responsible for determining the significance of events and their consequences. And here is where Lewis again emerges as an instructive philosophical model. At the heart of his entire philosophical project is the thesis he terms 'Humean supervenience,' which encompasses

> the doctrine that all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another … All else supervenes on that.[50]

As Palfrey has commented, what Lewis posits here is 'a kind of physicalism, whereby all ideas, purposes, coherences, and principles are generated by or grow from the particular local qualities of things.'[51] According to Lewis:

> all there is to the world is its point-by-point distribution of local qualitative character. We have a spatiotemporal arrangement of points. At each point various local intrinsic properties may be present, instantiated perhaps by the point itself or perhaps by point-sized bits of matter or of fields that are located there … Are the laws, chances, and causal relationships nothing but patterns which supervene on this point-by-point distribution of properties?[52]

The metaphysical picture provided by Lewis goes some way to explaining 'the laws' of Shakespearean possibility.[53] In Shakespeare's dramaturgy, as in Lewis' mosaic, what we encounter is various 'points' at which all local, contingent matters of particular fact are instantiated. These points will come in a whole variety of forms – a dash, an actor's cue, an entrance or exit, a line, stage direction or, of course, a prompt or implied action. Yet no matter the form of the particular dramaturgical instrument, they all function as points in the vast mosaic upon which all else ultimately hinges or indeed supervenes.[54] It is in this way, then, that some of the most basic questions we have about Shakespeare's dramatic worlds hinge upon the choices or possibilities that are opened up at these supervenient points – questions about the possession of power and agency, cause and effect, the permission or prohibitions of action,

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[50] David Lewis, 'Introduction', in *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp.ix–xvii (p.ix-x).
[51] Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*, p.137.
[52] *On the Plurality of Worlds*, p.14.
[53] Compare with Jonathan Bates' discussion in 'The Laws of the Shakespearean Universe', where he refers to William Empson's criticism of Shakespeare as 'the literary-critical equivalent of quantum mechanics' for demonstrating that 'a text may have two contradictory meanings at once, something impossible under previous literary theory.' Lewis' philosophy provides yet another model for understanding the existence of contraries in Shakespeare's drama. Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 2008), pp.295–340 (p.315).
[54] 'Supervenience' is a term that describes a relation whereby there can be no change in one thing without a change in the other. In Lewis' words: 'Supervenience means that there *could* be no difference of the one sort without difference of the other sort.' Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, p.15.

motive, psychology, the relation between characters and, amongst many other innumerable things, ethical responsibility and culpability.

A Counterpart Theory of Character

One of the things this thesis proposes to explore is a Shakespeare working in collaboration with his players. Although this is not to say that the players of the Chamberlain's / King's Men were Shakespeare's co-authors, as such, it is to suggest that they possessed *some* authorial agency to determine given courses of action through their choices. A good six decades ago now, J.L Styan referred to this as a '*controlled freedom*', wherein players were encouraged to improvise responses within the parameters demarcated by Shakespeare's prompting.[55] A central contention of this thesis is that players are in many instances positioned to shape the ethical conduct of the characters they are performing, specifically when forced to make choices about how to respond to prompts and implied directives.

The result of such opportunities for actors to make choices is that any single character's conduct can and will differ from one version of a play to the next, often in ways that significantly changes that character's moral standing in the world that he or she inhabits. Rather than speaking of characters in the singular – Hamlet does this, say, or Hamlet does that – what is needed is some way of differentiating between a version of Hamlet who acts in one way and the Hamlet who acts in another. In Lewis' philosophy, these alternative Hamlets – existing in different *Hamlet*-worlds – correspond to what Lewis terms *counterparts*, which he defines as follows:

> The counterpart relation is our substitute for identity between things in different worlds. Where some would say that you are in several worlds, in which you have somewhat different properties and somewhat different things happen to you, I prefer to say that you

[55] Styan, pp.198–99.

> are in the actual world and no other, but you have counterparts in several other worlds. Your counterparts resemble you closely in content and context in important respects. They resemble you more closely than do the other things in their worlds. But they are not really you. For each of them is in his own world, and only you are here in the actual world. Indeed we might say, speaking casually, that your counterparts are you in other worlds, that they and you are the same; but this sameness is no more literal identity than the sameness between you today and you tomorrow. It would be better to say that your counterparts are men you *would have been*, had the world been otherwise.[56]

Along with his 'modal realism', a great benefit of Lewis' counterpart theory is that it provides us (so long as we are willing to make the leap) with the conceptual apparatus to take into account how a character's conduct will vary from one version of a play to the next. Yet what this requires, as Lewis himself maintains, is that we discard the very idea that the same character does exist across one version of a play to the other. When we refer to the character of Hamlet, what we are really referring to is the sum total of all that character's counterparts – all of the incalculably various ways that Hamlet *might* act over the course of the play. There cannot be any two counterparts who act in exactly the same way over the course of any single version of *Hamlet*. Though there are many counterparts of Hamlet living in many *Hamlet*-worlds, all of whom will resemble and differ from one another in slightly different ways, every single one of these Hamlets is unique, and neither one of these counterparts represents in any way a 'truer' version of Hamlet than any other.

The useful and revelatory thing about counterpart-theory, then, is that it leaves no room for avoiding the ethically consequential ways that one version of a character's behaviour is distinct from that of all his other counterparts. In the famous closet-scene of *Hamlet*, a good example of the need for actors to be able to react to a range of eventualities can be found when Gertrude, calling out for help – 'What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murther me? / Helpe, helpe, hoa' (2401-2) – ignites the causal chain reaction that results in Hamlet's murder of Polonius. As I will

[56] David K. Lewis, 'Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic', in *Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.27–28.

argue at a later point in this thesis, critics have tended to turn a blind eye to the possibility that Gertrude is reacting to a genuine threat on her life. But when read with an ear to the theatrical mechanics of Shakespeare's language, Gertrude's cry emerges not so much as a response to Hamlet's threatening behaviour as its originating cause - a prompt, that is, which potentially incites the player of Hamlet to attack the player of Gertrude. Of course, this is not to say that the player cannot interpret the line in any number of ways: perhaps he might take it as a signal that Hamlet attempts to kill Gertrude, or perhaps not. But from the point of view of Lewis' counterpart theory, a Hamlet who attempts to murder his mother is not the same character as a Hamlet who does not. So we are talking not of Hamlet but of Hamlets. These are alternative versions of the apparently 'same' character whose behaviour will, in fact, vary from one possible version of a play to the next, and whose behaviour will therefore require completely different ethical evaluations. It is not just, then – as I quoted Styan above as saying – that Shakespeare's players are in possession of a controlled freedom. In fact, what makes Shakespeare an especially provocative playwright is that he provides his players more with what David Lewis calls a '*significant* freedom' – namely, a 'freedom in choices that matter.'[57] In the options that he makes available to players, this thesis will emphasise how Shakespeare's dramaturgy establishes the conditions that make possible the players' possession of moral agency, granting them the freedom – but also the responsibility – of making choices when it matters most.

Aims and Literature

All things said and done, this thesis aims to pinpoint the intersection between questions about dramaturgy, epistemology and metaphysic possibility, seeking to advance our understanding about how questions of an epistemological and ontological nature are generated out of

[57] David Lewis, 'Evil for Freedom's Sake?', in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.106.

Shakespeare's stagecraft, out of what Michael Witmore has described as Shakespeare's 'staging of theatrical reality … emerging from what the plays *do* and *are* rather than what they and their characters say.'[58] Hence, although it might be argued that scholarly interest in Shakespeare's stagecraft reached its peak in the twentieth century, with notable publications in this area coming from Arthur Colby Sprague, J.L Styan, Bernard Beckerman, Neville Coghill and Ann Pasternak-Slater, this thesis revisits questions about stagecraft in light of more recent scholarship which has aimed – to borrow Alan Dessen's familiar phrase – at 'recovering' the staging practices, conventions and conditions of early modern playing. Whilst drawing upon the work of theatre historians such as Tiffany Stern, Evelyn Tribble, Scott McMillin, Paul Menzer, Brett Gamboa, Leslie Thomson and John Astington, I intend to link this body of research to the approaches adopted by a number of scholars – for example Simon Palfrey, Lauren Robertson, Michael Witmore, Subha Mukerji and Andrew Sofer – who have all in some way looked at the metaphysical immanence and epistemology of plays, identifying how such questions are embodied *within* theatrical form.

As such, throughout this thesis, an interest is taken in theatre history – and indeed editing - insofar that the questions which have tended to preoccupy theatre historians and editors are implicated in issues surrounding theatrical epistemology and possibility, calling attention to the way that theatre history and editorial approaches can illuminate Shakespearean 'blind spots', whilst simultaneously presenting their own problems about the extents and limits of what is theatrically knowable.

To this extent, then, *The Forms of Things Unknown* is a study which examines the dynamic between stagecraft, epistemology and possibility, ultimately encouraging Shakespeare's interpreters to take the plurality of his dramatic worlds at face value, with implications for a

[58] Michael Witmore, *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp.1–2.

broad range of areas within Shakespearean scholarship. In places, there are occasions when I will allude to the particular choices which have been made in modern editions or productions of Shakespeare, usually with the intention of highlighting the staging possibilities that have previously been acknowledged, or, more frequently, in order to draw attention to points of existing interpretive consensus. As a general rule, I avoid questions surrounding adaptation and performance history, whilst this is equally not a thesis about Shakespeare's audiences. Time and again, of course, Shakespeare's plays dramatize situations that interrogate the tenuous link between seeing and knowing, not infrequently encouraging audiences to question how far it can rely on the act of witnessing as reliable basis of knowledge. In Shakespeare, seeing by no means always equates to knowing, and where the role of the audience directly bears upon this question about the epistemology of the events staged – or indeed unstaged – then this thesis will highlight how Shakespeare's way of orchestrating events is sometimes ambiguous, diffusing the multiplicity of perspectives that will be brought to bear upon the action. But since the reactions and responses of Shakespeare's first audiences are a further 'thing unknown', the readings I offer are aimed at constructing conjectural scenarios that posit possible spectators and possible listeners, seeking to ascertain what might or might not be witnessed by them based on the knowledge we have of the techniques used by Shakespeare, and the conditions under which his plays were first performed.

A Note on Method

The methodology pursued for this study has been predominantly inductive. It starts from the premise, first put forward by Emrys Jones in *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (1971), that one of Shakespeare's defining characteristics as a dramatist was his resourcefulness – namely, in the

way that he continually revisited earlier plays as 'sources' for his later plays.[59] One of Jones' revelatory claims in this book was to emphasise how Shakespeare repeatedly recycles his old material in ever new and innovative ways. This goes not only for his thematic and conceptual preoccupations, but also, in the way that he will repeat, with ever slight variations – sometimes inversions – the same scenes across different plays. As such, throughout the research for this thesis, my starting point has been to look at how Shakespeare implicitly 'directs' the action within comparable dramatic scenarios – crowd scenes, say, or when characters petition, take leave from one another, fight, eavesdrop, exchange tokens, kill and get killed, make threats or succumb to fits of passion, accuse one another of adultery, take on disguises, perform plays-within-plays, torture one another or exchange kisses. Thus, the research underpinning this thesis has involved compiling a comprehensive database gathering the implicit prompts and implied stage directions that occur within comparable dramatic situations, whilst also collating the various stage directions which appear in the earliest texts and modern editions. Although there can be no easy classification of 'type' when it comes to the different forms or modes of implicit prompt in Shakespeare's plays, the thesis is nonetheless structured so that each chapter concentrates on a particular mode or technique via which the players are instructed in their actions and gestures, examining the epistemological dilemmas that emerge from Shakespeare's use of these techniques.

In the first chapter, I probe the question of what can be known about the conditions of early modern playmaking, looking at how Shakespeare's dialogic instruction of the players worked in practice. This involves considering where and from what sources playwrights developed these techniques, as well as how English renaissance plays were prepared for the stage. As a way of providing a picture of *possible* staging conditions in Shakespeare's theatre, the chapter focuses on the different arguments that have been made about whether plays would receive a

[59] Emrys Jones, *Scenic Form in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

group rehearsal and in what form, how much of what was staged would be worked out in advance, whether Shakespeare was on hand to provide verbal advice to the players and, perhaps most crucially, whether players could viably prepare for a performance from their part-texts alone. Though the chapter is intended to provide an overview of the existing scholarly debates about these issues, it also makes its own contribution by highlighting two forms of implied action that complicate Palfrey's and Stern's argument that rehearsal consisted predominantly of each player's private study of his part: firstly, the existence of repeated commands that would have required a player's foreknowledge that an initial command should not be acted upon, and secondly, what Leslie Thomson has recently termed 'uncued actions,' where one character observes another character perform an action but in doing so informs the relevant player about the action he needed to perform. Ultimately, the chapter concludes by proposing that whilst plays would probably not have received a full run-through before performance from start to finish, different scenes could have received different types of rehearsal based on the specific requirements of a scene.

Having established a general picture of the various possible ways Shakespeare's plays were prepared for the stage, Chapter 2 goes on to look at how players would need to react to prompts embedded within their own part-texts but also to those that were transmitted by other players during a performance in the form of commands. These prompts – which occur when a character commands another to perform a specified action – foreground issues of power and agency, authority and resistance at moments of high ethical stakes, as when the servants are repeatedly compelled by Cornwall to bind Gloucester, when Richard II is forced to abdicate or when Isabella is repeatedly coerced into doing men's bidding. Contrary to what has sometimes been assumed, this chapter will argue that rather than a prompt that comes in the form of a command requiring a necessary response from players, the potential for players to disobey these directives can result in rich alternative scenarios where characters might resist the power

exerted over them by others and instead assert their own moral agency, ultimately calling into question whether it is even correct to regard these commands as a category of implied stage direction.

The third chapter considers how editing is implicated in the question of what can be known about Shakespearean staging possibilities, proposing an approach to the editorial treatment of stage directions that is informed by Lewis' 'modal realism.' Focusing specifically on moments of implicit violence, the chapter looks at these moments as a test-case for thinking about the ethical implications when editors have inferred – or indeed failed to infer – one possible course of action over others. This means that almost all modern editions have portrayed Oliver as the aggressor in the first scene of *As You Like It*, when the fight might actually be instigated by Orlando. Meanwhile, editions routinely shy away from adding stage directions indicating Petruchio's potential violence towards Kate, Antonio's abuse of Shylock or indeed Hamlet's possible violent attack on Gertrude. This chapter considers whether and how stage directions might be harnessed as a tool for illustrating the various contingent outcomes brought about by actorly choices, and finally, the merits and drawbacks of adopting an interventionist approach towards stage directions that might obscure rather than provide knowledge of 'what happens' when a play is staged.

In the fourth chapter I turn my attention to the pivotal question of entrances and exits. Whilst it is widely known that entrances and exits are inconsistently marked in the earliest printed texts, in this chapter I focus on those occasions where no stage directions are provided but also where there is no cue in the dialogue indicating to the player when he had to enter or exit. Taking into consideration plausible instances of so-called 'early' entrances, delayed exits and other moments when characters may or may not be present onstage, an emphasis is placed on the potential consequences when characters might enter and exit at alternative points, ranging

from the opportunity to produce humour to moments when characters potentially overhear what other characters have to say without their knowledge.

The sixth chapter focuses on retrospective reports, when a character recounts or narrates an event that has already been staged. Though discussions of this technique are rare in the existing literature, it has previously been argued that these reports functioned to retrospectively 'direct' the staging of the scenes in question. Whilst acknowledging that retrospective reports might be indicative of which parts were doubled and which scenes rehearsed, I argue that many also potentially involve characters falsifying or 'rewriting' the past, resulting in a discrepancy between what the audience witnessed staged and what a character goes on to claim has happened. The possibility that character might be falsifying or attempting to rewrite the past, I argue, requires a revaluation of the status of these reports as instruments of directorial control.

In the final chapter, I return to the question of 'uncued actions.' Many of these prompts occur within episodes characterised by intense paranoia and suspicion, whether that be at moments of political intrigue or, even more commonly, scenes of sexual suspicion when women are accused of sexual misconduct by men. During these episodes, the attempt to infer the staging from the dialogue becomes ethically problematic: whilst men putatively observe women engaged in sexually licentious behaviour, it is these men whose words potentially determine the gestures of the actors playing the accused female characters. Though this issue is present in scenes from plays such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Othello*, it reaches a climax in *The Winter's Tale*, where many of Leontes' utterances might plausibly have functioned as stage directions directed at the players of Hermione and Polixenes. The chapter therefore considers whether 'uncued actions' uttered by paranoid character types are a reliable indication of what is really happening within the fiction or whether, on the contrary, they reflect what is going on inside a character's head. In the end, I conclude by proposing that 'uncued actions' at these moments give rise to a kind of 'psychological realism' – one in which the inversion between

what characters ‘see’ and what happens signals to the audience that the staging represents what a given character is imagining.

Chapter 1

Part-Texts, Rehearsal and Dialogic Instruction

The first question this thesis must address is how Shakespeare's dialogic mode of instructing the players worked in practice. To do this, it is imperative to have some idea of the conditions under which Shakespeare's plays were originally produced: what form – if any – did rehearsals take in the period? To what extent was the individual player's part-text all that he had to go off? What sort of verbal instruction might players have received from Shakespeare? When can we suppose that the dialogue is providing directorial 'instruction', rather than fulfilling some other function?

These are the sorts of questions that have tended to preoccupy theatre historians; but they are also vital in ascertaining the necessary conditions of playmaking and the possibilities or evental outcomes that these conditions determine. In David Lewis' philosophy, events are understood as local matters of contingent fact, which he claims have built-in essences 'in the form of necessary conditions for their occurrence.'[60] In the theatre, a play is charged with contingency - a sense that '[t]hings could always have been otherwise' - insofar that events will depend upon the existence of certain necessary conditions if they are ever to occur at all.[61] Yet, as Lewis goes on to explain:

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[60] David Lewis, 'Events', in *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.241–69 (p.243; p.247).

[61] Michael Witmore, 'Eventuality', in Early Modern Theatricality, ed. by Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.386–401 (p.391).

> [n]ot only does an event have built-in necessary conditions for its occurrence; it has built-in necessary *and sufficient* conditions. … If we could manage to express … and thus state necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of an event, then not only could we clarify that event by its essence; we could specify it uniquely.[62]

In any play, the modalities of the action will be circumscribed by theatrical conditions of the necessary and the possible. If, as Lewis claims, we were able to define (in terms uniquely specific to the theatre) such 'necessary *and sufficient*' conditions, then perhaps we might find ourselves in a position to specify the sorts of events that grow out of the techniques Shakespeare harnesses to prompt his players.

The problem, however, is that these conditions can only be spelled out to the extent that theatre historians have felt able to 'recover' the staging practices and conventions of Elizabethan and Jacobean playmaking. With little surviving in terms of hard evidence, 'recovering' these practices comes with its own epistemological challenges, calling into question how and what about these conditions can actually be known. One problem is the lack of surviving physical or written evidence; another is the outright absence of it in the first place. Yet over the past number of decades, a lot of scholarly energy has been directed at helping us better understand *how* an early modern play would make the journey from the page to the stage.

More than anything, what this laudable body of research has demonstrated is that such a journey was far from straightforward – so far from straightforward, in fact, that it is no longer even clear whether to speak of a simple journey from playwright's manuscript to performance is the right way to go about framing the matter. As Tiffany Stern's inexhaustible research into this area has shown, it turns out that what we call 'a play' consisted of much more than the words that a playwright wrote and the players' final realisation of these words upon the stage: on the contrary, plays comprised a whole assortment of documents – plots, part-texts, songs,

[62] Lewis, 'Events', p.249.

prologues and epilogues – that were at once separate from one another and yet interdependent. All of these documents were part of what would become 'the play', though sadly, most of these documents are now lost.[63] More sadly still, also lost are the unwritten conventions and practices that Shakespeare and his colleagues no doubt took for granted, and which scholars today are so eager to recover.

Accent, Action and the Influence of Seneca

A good starting point is to observe that in Shakespeare's theatre, there was no figure comparable to the modern-day director.[64] This lack of directorial authority in the period had two important implications. It meant, on the one hand, that the staging of plays was not controlled centrally but that the business of playing was a distributed cognitive enterprise of the like envisaged by Evelyn B. Tribble.[65] On the other, it meant that a playwright like Shakespeare's principal medium for instructing the players was through the words which they themselves spoke – almost everything which the players needed to know is there within the dialogue itself, in such a way that the staged action is generated out of the dialogue which characters speak. In making these observations I am hardly saying anything new. In *Shakespeare the Director* (1982), Ann Pasternak-Slater examined the way Shakespeare implicitly 'directs' the staging of his plays and argued 'in favour of a theatre that carried out the directions of the dialogue.'[66] Yet whilst she was attentive to the visual imagery encoded within the dialogue, Pasternak-Slater was less concerned with how the players might have responded to these implicit signals in practice.

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[63] Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[64] '[B]etween the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries there was no "director" or "producer" in charge of production'. Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p.2.
[65] Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Time* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[66] Ann Pasternak-Slater, *Shakespeare the Director* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p.14.

To address this question, it will be useful to have some idea what sources the playwrights of the period derived these strategies of dialogic instruction from, with one of the primary influences being Seneca – the roman philosopher-cum-dramatist whose ten tragedies left an indelible mark on the aesthetics of the English renaissance stage. Whilst it has long been known that this influence extended to Shakespeare, relatively little emphasis has been placed on the way that Seneca potentially informed Elizabethan / Jacobean staging techniques. The main reason for this, no doubt, is the widely accepted view that Seneca's plays were not written for performance but were instead intended to be read or recited, contrasting with the vast majority of English renaissance plays that were written to be staged. Early modern playing consisted of more than the mere mastery of verbal diction. In equal measure, acting demanded from the player a command over 'accent' and 'action' alike, with 'action' comprising all forms of movement and extending even to facial expression.[67] The need for players to supplement their words with appropriate gestures was a commonplace in the period, suggested not least by Hamlet's injunction to the players to 'Sute the Action to the Word, / the Word to the Action' (1865-6). In his *Apology for Actors*, Thomas Heywood stresses the need for actors to 'shew action, passion, motion, or any other gesture', whilst echoing Hamlet's sentiment that any competent player should be able to 'fit his phrases to his action, and his action in his phrases, and his pronunciation to them both.'[68]

All this points to a style of acting in which the ability to articulate oneself through gesture was key. As much as the aim was to represent human passion and emotion in a manner that was

[67] Tribble writes that "'Action" comprises all forms of movement, including gesture and facial expression, while "accent" describes the arts of speech and pronunciation, the delivery of the words themselves.' Astington has also emphasised how 'Gesture, or "action", was […] recognised as a chief medium of the actor's communicative power, and as a term it subsumed even fine gradations of facial expression.' Tribble, *Cognition*, pp.69–85; John H. Astington, 'Shakespeare's Actors', *Literature Compass*, 6.5 (2009), pp.1031–40 (p.1037).

[68] Bart Van Es has emphasised the importance of Heywood's pamphlet as 'the only substantial defence of the acting profession to be published in Renaissance England', noting Heywood's 'remarkable … emphasis on the player's craft.' Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.206–7; Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors.* (London: N. Okes, 1612), pp.10–15.

'lifelike', the actor's communicative power would involve his mastery of an expressive though conventional, and sometimes, even amplified form of gesture.[69] This has been pointed out by John H. Astington, who notes the peculiarly excessive ways players would go about – perhaps had to go about – externally representing a character's experience of passion or grief:

> The limits, for any actor at any time, are plain: distress and outcry have to be indicated, as in dance, with movement, pose, and expression only: raised arms, contorted facial mask, hands lowered to cover face, and so forth. The subtlety and force of such expressive movement is a challenge to the skill of the individual performer … action becomes language[70]

Acting, as Astington makes clear, meant harnessing a language of gesture. The interminable, and – as Paul Menzer has persuasively argued – rather fruitless debate about whether early modern acting was 'formalistic' or 'naturalistic' is beside the point: it is clear that the Elizabethans valued what they thought, at least, was an incredibly natural and lifelike style of acting.[71] Far from simply having to learn their lines and cues, when receiving their parts, players would have to be on the lookout for prompts alerting them to any required actions. Whilst players could probably, as Palfrey and Stern have observed, 'add' their own contributions in the form of gesture, many of the actions a player would be required to perform would – where not stipulated in stage directions – 'be determined based on the words provided

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[69] As Andrew Gurr notes, 'To know that natural acting, ''counterfeiting'' nature and playing a part ''to the life'' or with ''lively action'' was the Elizabethan norm is not necessarily to know how an Elizabethan player would have rendered his part on the stage … The language of gesture is more or less conventional, and therefore as liable to change as any other language.' Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p.74.

[70] John Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p.20.

[71] These debates were in vogue throughout much of the twentieth-century, with B.L. Joseph making the most convincing case in favour of an acting style that was 'naturalistic.' B.L. Joseph, *Elizabethan Acting*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964). Menzer, however, has argued that the debate over 'formalism' versus 'naturalism' 'fundamentally misunderstands trans-historical truths about performance', writing that 'acting does not get better; it gets different. The best acting is ''natural.'' Bad acting is not. It has always been *thus*.' A similar case has been made by Astington: 'If one probes the term ''natural'' … in discussions of the effect of performance over the course of the last four hundred years, one soon discovers its variability.' Paul Menzer, 'That Old Saw: Early Modern Acting and the Infinite Regress', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 22.2 (2004), pp.27–44 (p.28); John Astington, p.18.

by the part.'[72] Many of these are largely formulaic or conventional gestures: prompts to kneel, say, or to fall to the ground, weep, kiss and exchange tokens.

A number of the most obvious examples can be found, as Astington highlights, at moments when a player is required to embody – through his actions and gestures – the emotional passions of his character. Thus, one of the notable things about the part of Titus Andronicus, for instance, is the constant demand it places on the player to embody this character's unrelenting flood of grief, the part constantly stirring the player into outbursts of passion that each have to 'out-climax' the last. At the start of 2.4, the player of Titus is instructed through his part to fall to the ground in an uncontrollable flood of tears:

> For these, tribunes, in the dust I write
> My harts deepe languor, and my soules sad teares:
> Let my teares stanch the earths drie appetite.
> My sonnes sweet blood, will make it shame and blush:
> O earth! I will be friend thee more with raine
> That shall distill from these two ancient ruines,
> Then youthfull Aprill shall with all his showres
> In summers drought: Ile drop upon thee still,
> In Winter with warme teares Ile melt the snow,
> And keepe erernall spring time on thy face,
> So thou refuse to drinke my deare sonnes blood. (TLN 1147-1157)

The folio direction '*lyeth downe*' aside (1146), the player is expected to pick up on the signals embedded in his speech, making the appropriate inference that he is supposed to collapse, face to the ground weeping: 'O earth! I will be friend thee more with rain'. The affective power of the performance – and indeed much of what will make the player's rendition of Titus' grief

[72] Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.325.

convincing – is the way he is compelled to perform the gestures stipulated within his speech. And yet the speech is also, in the way that it renders Titus' grief through figurative language, unmistakably reminiscent of Seneca. In *Thyestes*, for example – which was almost certainly a source for *Titus Andronicus* – an emphasis is placed on the external signs of Thyestes' inner turmoil at moments of high passion:

Thyestes

You ask the reason for my fear: I do not know it myself. I
see nothing fearful, but I fear nonetheless. My intention is
to proceed, but my body is weak-kneed and faltering, and I
am pulled away from the goal I struggle towards. Just so a
ship, urged on by oar and sail, is carried back by the tide
resisting oar and sail.

[Causam timoris ipse quam ignore exigis. / nihil timendum video, sed timeo tamen. / placet ire, pigris membra sed genibus labant, / alioque quam quo nitor abductus feror. / sic concitatem remige et velo ratem / aestus resistens remigi et velo refert.][73]

The declarative mode through which Thyestes' actions are inscribed into his speech – 'my body is weak-kneed'; 'I am pulled away' - has the effect of providing the reader and / or listener with an ekphrastic verbal image of his powerless attempts to move. Towards the end of the play, this technique reaches a climax when Thyestes seems almost to become the very personification of his grief:

Who prevents me
from binding my hair properly with flowers,
prevents me, prevents me?
The roses of spring slide from my head,
my hair, though soaked in heavy myrrh,

[73] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 'Thyestes', in *Tragedies*, trans. by John G. Fitch, Seneca (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 3.434-439. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition.

bristles in sudden shivering fits,

teardrops fall from my eyes unbidden,

Sorrow loves its familiar tears,

the unhappy have fearful craving to weep.

I long to utter ill-omened laments,

I long to rend these garments steeped in Tyrian purple,

I long to howl.

[quis me prohibit / flores decenti vincire coman, / prohibit, prohibit? / vernae capiti fluxere rosae, / pingui madidus crinis amomo / inter vultu nolente cadit, / venit in medias voces gemitus. / maeror lacrimas amat assuetas, / flendi miseris dira cupido est. / libet infaustos mittere questus, / libet et Tyrio / saturas ostro pumpere vestes, / ululare libet.] (5.944-957)

This kind of visual language – almost cinematic at times in its verbal detail – points to something other than a theatrical language of actorly instruction. As when Thyestes claims that his hair 'bristles in sudden shivering fits' or when he describes the teardrops falling from his eyes, the purpose is not to 'instruct' an actor but to compensate for the absence of a visual spectacle, evoking the staging in the mind's eye when it is not actually 'present'. And yet, no doubt some of what is implied in Thyestes' speech would not be beyond the performative range of a competent actor – when he tears off his clothes, say, or when his trembling voice is intermittently interrupted by the need to sob and howl. This raises a question about how much of the implied action in Shakespeare is, actually, intended to advise the players. Commenting on Gertrude's descriptions of Hamlet's hair standing on end in the closet scene, this problem has also been noted by Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson:

> Are we to conclude from these two passages that Richard Burbage had a fright wig or that he had the ability to make his hair stand on end? Or are such descriptions substitutes for what cannot be physically be displayed to a playgoer? To tease out stage practice from the dialogue is repeatedly to encounter this problem.[74]

[74] Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, p.viii.

There are, evidently, some things which the players would not be able to display. Those things might include extravagant hair-raising antics, but also, more 'naturalistic' outbreaks of emotion like weeping. Assuming that Elizabethan players were, much like ourselves, unable to weep at will, then a line like Titus' 'with warme teares Ile melt the snow' is clearly designed to supplement and amplify the pitiable spectacle of his grief.

This is not to say, however, that a player might not be expected to convey tears by some less direct means – maybe by wiping his eyes or sinking his head, and no doubt via a change in his diction. In *3 Henry VI*, a notable case in point can be found when York, after having valiantly resisted the urge to shed tears, eventually breaks down when the mock crown is humiliatingly placed atop his head:

> Bidst thou me rage? why now thou hast thy wish.
> Would'st have me weepe? why now thou hast thy will.
> For raging Wind blowes up incessant showers,
> And when the Rage allayes, the Raine begins.
> These Teares are my sweet *Rutlands* Obsequies,
> And every drop cryes vengeance for his death,
> 'Gainst thee fell *Clifford*, and thee false French-woman. (TLN 609-615)

The tactic of delaying York's outbreak of tears is intended to portray the would-be king as both valiant but also capable of moving the spectator to pity, just as he does Northumberland: 'Beshrew me, but his passions moves me so, / That hardly can I check my eyes from teares' (616-7). Along with this, York's excessive - characteristically Senecan - declarations that *now* he will begin to shed tears informs the player that he should refrain from providing any indication that York might be weeping until this moment. As a consequence, the player will know to initially resist the command to weep he receives from Margaret some lines earlier – 'And if thine eyes can water for his death, / I give thee this to drie thy Cheekes withall' (545-

6) – and, most probably, to resist taking up the handkerchief of his dead son thrown to him by Margaret. When he does finally begin to weep, the player can convey this by then covering his face with the handkerchief so that, as David Bevington has stated, 'Words and signs reinforce one another, using the conventional language of gesture and of sorrowful utterance to intensify […] a moment of painful realisation.'[75]

These moments of 'painful realisation' tend, as we have seen, to bear many of the impressions of Seneca's influence. Quite often, the prompts contained within an individual part will be concentrated at these moments of acute emotional passion, with another notable case in point being the part for Richard II. When studying his part-scroll, one of the first things the player would have noticed was these clusters of action-prompts that can be found when Richard is suffering from some emotional breakdown or other. This would have immediately alerted the player to his character's emotional susceptibilities, informing him that Richard is not so much somebody prone to outbursts of passion as somebody who is *controlled by* passion. Most notably, this is again apparent from the recurring insinuations that Richard must fall to the ground, as when coming to terms with the reality of Bolingbroke's uprising – 'And yet not so; for what can we bequeath, / Save our deposed bodies to the ground?' (1509-1510) – but also, when he first returns to England in the third act and falls to the ground weeping:

Rich. Needs must I like it well: I weepe for joy
To stand upon my Kingdomw once againe.
Deere Earth, I doe salute thee with my hand,
Though Rebels wound thee with their Horses hoofes:
As a long parted Mother with her Child,
Playes fondly with her teares, and smiles in meeting;
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee my Earth,

[75] David M. Bevington, *Action Is Eloquence: Shakespeare's Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.83.

And doe thee favor with my Royall hands. (TLN 1364-1371)

As when Titus fell to the ground in tears, the player of Richard is similarly instructed to collapse, presumably putting his face to the floor so that the actor could pretend to weep without actually having to produce tears. Though these lines bear all the hallmarks of Seneca, it is notable how Shakespeare appears to have translated the *literary* conventions of the roman playwright into a theatrical context. Thus crucially, although Seneca's plays might not have originally been written *for* performance, they have subsequently been reappropriated for the stage and especially, as Helen Slaney has uncovered, in early modern England.[76] Although this was mostly, as Curtis Perry has also highlighted, at the universities, this does not diminish the fact that they were also 'drawn upon in Elizabethan popular theatre often enough to be mocked as cliché by Thomas Nashe.'[77] Hence the Senecan manner of channelling action through the dialogue has, it seems, been reappropriated in this period by playwrights as a practical mode of instruction to the players, meaning that the very way Shakespeare and his contemporaries went about 'directing' the staging of their plays derived from the conventions of a form of drama that was not, in fact – or at least so far as is known – intended to be staged at all.

The Forms of Rehearsal

One of the great mysteries of the early modern theatre is how the plays were rehearsed. Since a different play would be put on every day, this meant, as Bernard Beckerman emphasises, that as soon as 'a poet turned over his play to the actors, they would introduce it to the repertory

[76] Notably, Slaney highlights how the study of these texts in sixteenth-century universities and classrooms would have involved 'not only memorization and written *imitation*, but also physical activation.' Helen Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic: A Performance History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.39.
[77] Curtis Perry, *Shakespeare and Senecan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p.2.

with very little delay.'[78] This pressure to constantly put on new plays must have been so great, it is almost difficult to imagine that the players *did* have chance to rehearse, leading to a manner of staging that Peter Thomson has claimed 'would seem shockingly rough-and-ready to a modern audience.'[79]

The scholarly views on rehearsal thus tend to fall into two camps between those think that some form of group or ensemble rehearsal is likely to have occurred, and those who, on the contrary, think group rehearsals were kept to a minimum if they ever occurred at all.

The scholar who has made the most forceful case in favour of the latter view is Tiffany Stern. In her book *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (2000), one of Stern's most provocative assertions is that rehearsals were not, in fact, a standard feature of English renaissance theatre practice at all, or at least not in the way that we understand of rehearsals today. Apart perhaps from those scenes involving large groups and complex blocking, most scenes, she maintains, wouldn't need to be rehearsed at all. Instead, Stern has proposed that an Elizabethan player learnt his role predominantly if not exclusively from his individual part-text, which is a contention that has been developed further in her collaboration with Simon Palfrey in *Shakespeare in Parts* (2007). As opposed to having full and prior access to the playtext as a whole – and with limited opportunity for group rehearsal – Palfrey and Stern have suggested that performance hinged almost completely upon a part-based cueing system which only came together for possibly the first time when a play was staged in front of an audience. Actors, they argue, rehearsed or 'studied' their roles for the best part independently,

[78] According to Andrew Gurr, the evidence from Henslowe's diary for the Admiral's Men suggests that a different play would be put on every day, whilst there would be a new play provided every two or three weeks. Although there is no comparable evidence available for Shakespeare's company, it is likely that the situation wouldn't have been much different over at the Globe. As Tiffany tern has noted, London was a much smaller city than it is today, meaning that 'there were not enough people to supply a daily audience for the same play if it were repeated too frequently.' Andrew Gurr, *Shakespeare's Opposites: The Admiral's Company, 1594-1625* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.1; p.36; Tiffany Stern, *Making Shakespeare: From Stage to Page*, Accents on Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 2004), p.62; Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe, 1599-1609* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp.10–11.

[79] Peter Thomson, *On Actors and Acting* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p.57.

familiarising themselves not only with the lines they were required to speak but with the cues which allowed them to navigate what was otherwise a frighteningly ill-rehearsed, unpredictable performance: with Shakespeare having embedded his direction of the plays within the dialogue, it was left up to the players to infer action from their parts whilst responding serendipitously to theatrical instructions delivered by other players in the heat of the moment.

As Stern herself has put it, assuming that playwrights were not always or not even usually at hand to 'convey too much by word of mouth', it appears that they 'seem to have enwrapped their ''direction'' into the form in which they wrote their plays in the first place: they produced texts that, divided in parts, would bring about the action required in performance – without the actor necessarily needing to understand what is going on.'[80] This method of harnessing the dialogue to produce the action is combined with the fact that contact between playwrights and players was typically limited, with most playwrights usually having nothing more to do with their manuscripts once they had written a play and submitted it to a company. If there was any exception to this norm, however, then it is likely to have been Shakespeare. As a co-sharer of his own acting company and as an actor himself, Shakespeare may well have been a much more hands-on participant in the journey his plays made to eventual performance.[81] How exactly the model proposed by Palfrey and Stern might have worked in practice is, meanwhile, an open question, as they themselves have acknowledged:

> There can be no single rule about how this might have worked. Many actors may have prided themselves upon their brisk adaptability to non-cued provocations or invitations, responding with easeful immediacy to 'action-prompts' arising in the middle of other actors' speeches (many of which they may not have known about until performed).[82]

[80] Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, p.88.
[81] This is to echo what has already been convincingly argued by Bart Van Es: 'Even though Shakespeare must previously have had some experience of acting, his position in a fellowship inevitably draw him closer to the mechanics of a play's transfer to the stage.' Van Es, pp.80–81.
[82] Palfrey and Stern, p.123.

The most provocative assertion here is the last – namely, that players need not have known about certain prompts in advance of performance. Inevitably, one question this raises is whether this could have been a practical or even plausible approach to staging. The novel, and rather ingenious solution provided by Stern is that performances were, in themselves, a kind of rehearsal, or at least 'continuations of the rehearsal process.'[83] In fact, according to Stern, legally speaking all 'public performances were practices for eventual private performance in front of the queen', leading her to conclude that 'it is performance itself that emerges as a major forum of revision.'[84] Thus, having learnt from parts, players would have always needed to be on their toes, awaiting the unexpected and never resting on their laurels, with a first performance possibly characterised by the occasional blip as players processed what was going on around them. The sentiment that Shakespeare 'wrote plays to be read *in part*' has, similarly, been echoed by Paul Menzer. Yet for Menzer, this does not diminish the likelihood that a group rehearsal occurred, arguing that any such group rehearsal would represent 'another stage in the ongoing evolution of a script', whereby 'the first rehearsal of an early modern play was an ensemble act of re-membering as players came together to link up their individual parts.'[85] What Menzer doesn't say is what form exactly these rehearsals are likely to have taken, and when, given the lack of available time, they are likely to have occurred. A suggestion that has been put forward by Scott McMillin is the possibility of *partial rehearsals*, which would have been between smaller groups of actors, and especially, in pairs of master and apprentice. In his reading of Desdemona's part, McMillin has discovered that over half of Desdemona's cue lines come from one other single character – Othello – meanwhile, over half of the cue lines she gives are answered by Othello. According to McMillin:

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[83] Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, p.92.

[84] 'The first performance particularly offered the opportunity for cuts and revisions to be made, for it was the 'audition-like rehearsal of the text.' Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, p.92; p.112.

[85] Paul Menzer, *The Hamlets: Cues, Qs, and Remembered Texts* (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p.18; p.75.

> There must have come a moment when the actors did partial rehearsals in order to familiarize themselves with the source of the cue lines, and, given the system of apprenticeship that obtained for the boy-actors, some of the boy-actor's rehearsal and memorisation would have been done in the presence of his master.[86]

The conclusion McMillin reaches from the patterns of cue sources he identifies is that some rehearsals probably took the form of what he terms 'training sessions with master-actors'.[87] In *Cognition in the Globe* (2011), Evelyn Tribble has echoed McMillin by arguing that whilst 'full group rehearsal of the ''dress'' or ''technical'' variety' may not have been standard, this 'does not thereby rule out the possibility that actors worked together in smaller, more *ad hoc* groups.'[88] This reflects Tribble's wider critique of the model proposed by Palfrey and Stern, whose exclusive emphasis on part-learning she claims leads to an 'overly individualist model of behavior in what is after all a group enterprise', arguing that 'stressing the part alone does not give sufficient attention to social cognition and group dynamics.'[89] As she further observes, one of the main problems presented by parts is how players would have been able 'to avoid an unintentionally funny mismatch between dialogue and action', there being a need for 'constant modulation of the performance in light of the actions and speech of other actors.'[90] In fact, whilst most of the discussion surrounding parts has focused on the salience of cues – the up to three words telling the player when to speak his lines – less attention has been paid to what the implicit action embedded within the dialogue can tell us about part-learning.

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[86] Scott McMillin, 'The Sharer and His Boy: Rehearsing Shakespeare's Women', in *From Script to Stage in Early Modern England*, ed. by Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp.231–45 (p.224).
[87] McMillin, 'The Sharer and His Boy: Rehearsing Shakespeare's Women', p.242.
[88] Tribble, *Cognition*, p.66.
[89] Tribble, *Cognition*, pp.65–66.
[90] Tribble, *Cognition*, p.59; p.66.

Repeated Commands

There are two forms of implied direction in Shakespeare's plays to suggest that a player's private study of his part might not have been enough to prepare him for a performance. The first is when a theatrical instruction comes in the form of a repeated command, involving the repetition of an action prompt that the relevant player would need to disobey at first. Meanwhile, the second occurs when one character observes another perform a specified action, and thereby transmits a signal that the stipulated action has to be performed. When it comes to repeated commands, one of the obvious problems this raises is how a player would have known not to follow the initial, what might be termed premature or 'false' prompt in cases when it was not readily apparent from his part that he had to do so.

A notable example can be found during the moment in *Hamlet* when Laertes bursts on to the stage with a band of rag tag followers. At some point during the kerfuffle that ensues, it is apparent that Gertrude restrains Laertes, prompting Claudius' command for her to let him go:

> What is the cause *Laertes*,
> That thy Rebellion looks so Gyant-like?
> Let him go *Gertrude*: Do not feare our person:
> There's such Divinity doth hedge a King,
> That Treason can but peepe to what it would,
> Acts little of his will. Tell *Laertes*,
> Why thou art thus Incenst? Let him go *Gertrude*.
> Speake man. (TLN 2865-2872)

Although Claudius twice orders Gertrude to let Laertes go, there is no way the actor playing Gertrude could have anticipated these commands from his part alone. This is problematic for two reasons. The first is that the Gertrude-player must have received some prior warning that

he had to take hold of Laertes in the first place, whilst equally, he must somehow have been informed prior to performance that he needed to disobey Claudius' first directive. Now, it is wholly plausible that Gertrude might resist Claudius' command a second time, which is an issue that will be discussed in the chapter to follow. But clearly, it would not make sense for Gertrude to release Laertes, only to be commanded to let him go again. Nor would it make sense for Claudius to deliver this command if Gertrude fails to restrain Laertes in the first place. So, whilst there is an expectation that the player of Gertrude will fail to act upon the initial false prompt, the player is also required to perform an action which is nowhere else stipulated in either the dialogue or a stage direction. How he was supposed to know he had to do so without a rehearsal is unclear, especially given that Gertrude speaks only two lines amounting to a total of six words following Laertes' entry.

A similar thing, in fact, occurs later in the play when Hamlet scraps with Laertes at Ophelia's funeral, and demands that Laertes' 'take thy fingers from my throat' (3456). Again, there is no prior indication in the dialogue – including in Laertes' part – that Laertes already has hold of Hamlet by the neck. So how was the player to know that he had to perform this gesture? It has been argued by Stern that rehearsals would have been reserved for scenes involving large groups and complex blocking, with Matt Vadnais having added that this probably also included what he terms 'collaborative action.'[91] These are the actions, he maintains, that 'could not have been rehearsed alone' and which 'would remain undefined in some way until they were performed.'[92] This most likely went for things like fights, but also scenes involving crowds which necessarily require the coordination of large groups.[93] As such, although the sequence

[91] Stern writes that 'Jigs, songs, and, perhaps also, dances, swordfights, slapstick, and other complicated action – everything, in other words, that cannot be perfected from the part alone – seem to have been the emphasis of group rehearsal.' Tiffany Stern, 'Actors' Parts', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. by Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 496–512 (pp. 496–512); Matt Vadnais, 'Speeches, Speech Order, and Performance in Shakespeare's Printed Playtexts', Shakespeare Bulletin, 35.4 (2017), pp.521–39 (p.534).
[92] Vadnais, 'Speeches, Speech Order, and Performance in Shakespeare's Printed Playtexts', p.534.
[93] '[P]articular *group* elements of the play – jigs, songs, dances, sword fights, perhaps crowd or climatic scenes – will have benefited from ensemble rehearsal.' Palfrey and Stern, *Shakespeare in Parts*, p.72.

which follows Laertes' entry revolves around an exclusive conversation between him and Claudius until the entrance of Ophelia, the presence of these repeated commands might suggest that at least the first part of this scene was anticipated as having required a rehearsal by Shakespeare as he wrote.

This possibility is further corroborated when attention is drawn to the other places where these repeated commands can be found. In 1.2 of *Richard III*, for example, Richard twice orders the gentlemen bearing the coffin of Henry VI to set it down: first, at TLN 208 ('Stay you that beare the Coarse, & set it down'), and secondly, at TLN 211 ('Villaines set downe the Coarse'). Again then, the large number of people required on stage, as well as the potential acts of violence resulting from Richard's threats – of which more will be said later in this thesis – suggests that this is a specific kind of scene which would have required some prior working out of the action. Towards the end of the play, another example occurs when Richard twice commands his men to take up his tent at TLN 3441('Up with my Tent') and TLN 3448 ('Up with the Tent'). Occurring just before the Battle of Bosworth, the repetition of this command occurs in a sequence involving at least four participants but most likely much more if account is taken for the presence of soldiers not included in the folio stage direction.

An arguably more striking example of a repeated command, however, can be found in *Pericles*. When the Bawd and Pander enter and demand that Marina be taken away after she has dissuaded Lysimachus from using her for his pleasure, it is notable how the sequence is framed around Boult's repeated command for Marina to 'Come your ways.' It is necessary to quote the passage in its entirety, here as it appears in the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works*:

BOULT How's this we must take another course with
you. If your peevish chastity, which is not worth a
a breakfast in the cheapest country under the cope, shall
undo a whole household, let me be gelded like a spaniel.

Come your ways.

MARINA Whither would you have me?

BOULT I must have your maidenhead taken off, or the common executioner shall do it. We'll have no more gentlemen driven away. Come your ways, I say.

Enter Bawd and Pander

BAWD How now, what's the matter?

BAWD How now, what's the matter?

BOULT Worse and worse, mistress, she has here spoken holy words to the Lord Lysimachus.

BAWD O, abominable!

BOULT She makes our profession as it were to stink afore the face of the gods.

BAWD Marry hang her up for ever!

BOULT The nobleman would have dealt with her like a nobleman, and she sent him away as cold as snowball saying his prayers, too.

[PANDER] Boult, take her away. Use her at thy pleasure. Crack the ice of her virginity, and make the rest malleable.

BOULT An if she were a thornier piece of ground than she is, she shall be ploughed.

MARINA Hark, hark, you gods!

BAWD She conjures. Away with her! Would she had never come within my doors. – Marry, hang you! – She's born to undo us. – Will you not go the way of womenkind? marry, come up, my dish of chastity with rosemary and bays. *Exeunt Bawd and Pander*

BOULT [catching her rashly by the hand] Come, mistress, Come your way with me.

MARINA Whither wilt thou have me?

BOULT To take from you the jewel you hold so dear.[94]

Some variation of the command 'come your ways' is repeated by Boult on no less than three occasions, being repeated again in the final line of the scene: 'Come, I'll / do for thee what I can. Come your ways' (19.222-223). This seems to indicate that Boult is ordering Marina to approach him but that she persistently refuses until the end of the scene, by which point she has had the opportunity to work her rhetorical magic upon him. Like the examples above, the actor playing Marina would have to know to resist these commands until the right moment, making sure he didn't act upon these commands as though they were signalling his movements but instead recognising that they were duds – false prompts which it was necessary for him to resist.

It is, of course, more likely that in this case this was something that the actor could have worked out for himself: in seeking to retain agency over her body, Marina's disobedience of Bault is already plain from the start. Moreover, the first of these commands serves as the actor's cue that would have appeared on his part, whilst it is possible that the third reiteration also forewarned the player about the repetition of the command, again appearing – albeit in a contracted form ('- [your] way with me') – as the cue indicating when the player was required to speak. Yet, the passage also contains hints of the sort of 'collaborative action' highlighted by Vadnais that may have required some form of rehearsal amongst the scene's participants. This is suggested, firstly, in Pander's command for Boult to 'take her away', and subsequently, when Marina cries out in response to Boult's menacing threat: 'An if she were a thornier piece of ground than she / is, she shall be ploughed.'

[94] William Shakespeare, 'Pericles', in *William Shakespeare, the Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 19.147-180. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition.

Thus Bolt, it would seem, is supposed to approach Marina – maybe he even attempts to violate her – until she calls upon the gods and manages to liberate herself. In this way, the Oxford stage direction would probably be better placed earlier at line 170, suggesting that there is some bit of stage business (which might be much more violent than is indicated in the Oxford text) that might have benefited from rehearsal. Curiously, 'come thy ways' is a command which is also delivered twice by Lafew when Helen first enters in 2.1 of *All's Well that Ends Well*. This is the moment as it appears in the folio:

> *Laf*. Nay, come your waies.
>
> *Enter Hellen*.
>
> *King*. This haste hath wings indeed.
>
> *Laf*. Nay, come your waies,
>
> This is his Maiestie, say your mind to him,
>
> A Traitor you doe looke like, but such traitors
>
> His Maiesty seldome feares, I am *Cresseds* Uncle,
>
> That dare leave two together, far you well. *Exit* (TLN 698-705)

At a first glance, this example is similar to the others in that Lafew has to deliver his command twice before he gets the response he wants from Helen. The difference, however, is that the first command is delivered whilst Helen is still offstage – the first thus serving as the player's cue to enter, and the second inviting the player to make an appropriate movement across the stage. If, as some editors have conjectured, Helen actually enters *before* Lafew's first command, then this would complicate what I have been proposing about the presence of these repeated commands in scenes involving large groups and 'collaborative actions', this being an episode which doesn't meet this criterion. In all likelihood, then, the folio placement of Helen's entrance is correct, avoiding any potential mismatch between the player's actions and the dialogue in the event that he had no prior knowledge of Lafew's repeated command. This contrasts with the moment in the final act of *Measure for Measure* when, for instance, Mariana

twice implores Isabel to join her on her knees: once at TLN 2822 ('Lend me your knees'), and again at TLN 2829 ('doe yet but kneele by me'). Although Palfrey and Stern have proposed that Isabel 'can be dragged to her feet by the Duke' if she kneels the first time, this seems less likely than that the player of Isabel knew in advance that he had to resist at least the first command.[95] In fact by their own measure, the final scene of this play is one which most likely would have been singled out for a rehearsal, the huge number of characters who are present for this scene making this doubtless desirable if not essential. In *King Lear*, further evidence that certain scenes involving complicated bits of action and large groups would get a rehearsal can be found when Cornwall repeatedly commands the servants to bind Gloucester's arms and then to bind him to a chair. As I will argue in the next chapter, it is entirely plausible that the servants may never act upon this command at all, choosing instead to resist Cornwall's authority. The players of the servants must have known, however, that they at least needed to resist the first of Cornwall's commands – 'Binde fast his corky armes' (2091) – and this is something that they could have only learnt from a rehearsal, unless, that is, a first performance really did figure as an effective trial or run-through.

Theatrical *Italics* and 'Uncued Actions'

A central contention of this thesis is that Shakespeare does more with implied stage directions, prompts, cues and the like than to simply orchestrate the action. In fact, part of what makes Shakespeare's drama interesting is the way he is especially attentive to the exegetical potential of these instruments, utilising them to provide reflexive commentaries upon given aspects of a play. As interpreters of these playscripts, it is therefore necessary that we remain attentive to these signals and that we listen to what they are trying to say or reveal, recognising how they

[95] Palfrey and Stern, p.451.

can provide an interpretive window onto many of Shakespeare's ethical and thematic preoccupations. This is especially pertinent when it comes to what have recently been termed 'uncued actions.'[96] These occur when one character comments on the actions that he or she has witnessed another character performing, and in doing so, transmits a signal to the relevant player that the stipulated actions have to be performed. In *Shakespeare the Director*, Ann Pasternak-Slater alluded to this mode of instruction whereby the dialogue 'at once describes and directs the scene.'[97] A question she did not address, however, is how the players would have been able to respond to these prompts on time, especially if, as Palfrey and Stern have since maintained, they potentially received no forewarning about what gestures were required of them. It goes without saying that this diminishes the likelihood that rehearsal consisted predominantly (if not exclusively) of each player's study of his individual part. So how could this have worked? In a recent and thought-provoking reassessment of early modern performance practices, this is the very question that has been addressed by Leslie Thomson, who has highlighted the anomaly

> of actions and gestures that are cued not by the performer of them, not by another player in advance, not by costume or props, and not by stage directions; rather, the only signal is in the dialogue (and therefore the part) of another player as or after the event occurs.[98]

'Uncued actions' of this sort, as Thomson has termed them, can be found not only in Shakespeare but across the corpus of early modern English drama. At issue is the degree of fortuity that might have characterised a first performance. A theatre in which actors responded serendipitously to prompts they did not know about in advance would have been radically vertiginous, always on the brink of breaking down if players failed to quickly respond to the

[96] I borrow this term from Leslie Thomson, who is one of the few scholars to have discussed the phenomenon in Chapter 4'Uncued Actions' of Leslie Thomson, *From Playtext to Performance on the Early Modern Stage: How Did They Do It?* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2023), pp.100-116.
[97] Pasternak-Slater, *Shakespeare the Director*, p.27.
[98] Thomson, *From Playtext to Performance*, p.102.

signals transmitted. Indeed, Thomson's main concern is that without some prior warning that these prompts were going to be delivered, it would not have been possible for players to perform in the 'naturalistic' manner that Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences expected.

This might have been less of problem if, as Palfrey and Stern themselves argue, a play was always given one full group reading during which many aspects of the performance to come would be noticed and noted.[99] On the only surviving Elizabethan part-text which once belonged to Edward Alleyn, there is evidence in the form of annotations to suggest that players might have had the opportunity to add stage directions to their parts by hand.[100] As Evelyn Tribble has conjectured, it seems that the additional annotation of Alleyn's part for Orlando (who he most probably played in *Orlando Furioso*) works 'to avoid an unintentionally funny mismatch between dialogue and action.'[101] Sometimes, however, it is possible that this so-called 'mismatch' is something which Shakespeare exploits for particular dramatic effect. As a case in point, take the following lines from *Much Ado*, delivered shortly after Don Pedro has successively 'wooed' Hero for Claudio:

> *Beatr*. Speake count, tis your Qu.
>
> *Claud*. Silence is the perfectest harault of joy, I were but little happy if I could say, how much? Lady, as you are mine, I am yours, I give away my selfe for you, and doat upon the exchange.
>
> *Beat*. Speake cosin, or (if you cannot) stop his mouth with a kisse, and let not him speake neither.
>
> *Pedro*.. Infaith lady you have a merry heart.
>
> *Beat*. Yea my lord I thanke it, poore foole it keeps

[99] See Palfrey and Stern, pp.56-60.
[100] W.W. Greg thought that some – but most probably all - of the various 'corrections and insertions' on the part 'are by Alleyn.' W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses: Stage Plots: Actors' Parts: Prompt Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p.115.
[101] Tribble, *Cognition*, p.59.

on the windy side of care, **my coosin tells him in his eare**
that he is in her heart.
Clau. And so she doth coosin. (TLN 704-715)

This is one of those moments when, in Brett Gamboa's words, Shakespeare harnesses the theatrical techniques at his disposal to generate 'truths outside the fictional frame regarding the characters and situations within it'.[102] Indeed, most curious in this passage is the line I've put in bold, when Beatrice observes Hero whisper in Claudio's ear. Imagining that the players *did* only have knowledge of their parts to navigate this moment, it is notable how Beatrice, whilst putatively a passive commentator of this moment centred on Hero's and Claudio's courtship, actually plays a dominant role in bringing the two lovers together. That is to say, because Claudio is far too awkward – perhaps still in a mood of ill-founded apprehension – to seize the moment for himself, it is instead left up to Beatrice (who is, of course, none-too-shy) to take charge of the situation. Yet she does so, importantly, by satirically adopting the role of a prompter: 'Speake Count, tis your Qu.' As Paul Menzer has noted, no doubt this line is preceded by an uncomfortable pause 'during which an audience may not know whether Claudio's silence is scripted or not.'[103] But if the players had studied previously with only their parts, what is notable is the way the Beatrice-player is granted control over this pause. Not without irony, ''tis your Qu.' is the very cue that would have appeared on Claudio's part-text, with the actor playing Beatrice well aware that his fellow playing Claudio was anticipating – no doubt eagerly – these lines to be delivered. As such, it is easy to imagine a situation in which all of those onstage were left wondering what was going to happen next – perhaps even wondering whether somebody had forgotten his lines – as the collective anticipation as to whether Claudio was finally going to break the awkward silence grew increasingly uncomfortable. At this moment,

[102] Gamboa, p.224.
[103] Menzer, *The Hamlets*, p.36.

then, Shakespeare appears to be composing with parts at the forefront of his mind: far from being 'unnaturalistic', Shakespeare is producing desired effects by putting his players in a situation mirroring that of the characters they are performing. Yet, what this also underscores is the control exerted by Beatrice over the dramatic scenario, which is evident in the way that she is responsible for prompting the two nervous lovers: 'Speake cosin, or (if you cannot) stop his mouth / with a kisse.'

The control that Beatrice exerts over the dramatic situation is therefore mirrored in the way the player of Beatrice is responsible for directing the scene in a theatrical sense. As a consequence, whilst the line about Hero whispering in Claudio's ear putatively comments upon something which Beatrice has observed, it is plausible that the line simultaneously doubled-up as a command, instructing the Hero-actor to fulfil the appropriate gesture. This would have involved some sort of delayed response from the Hero-actor. And yet, this need not pose a problem if we put to one side our present-day expectations for verisimilitude. In fact, forcing the playtext to conform to an interpretive logic that makes sense to a modern playgoer will not really help in the attempt to 'recover' what meanings might have originally been generated. So it is, then, that Alan Dessen has invited Shakespeare's 'modern interpreters' to let go of anachronistic expectations for 'realism', or at the very least to acknowledge that the Elizabethans' sense of realism was not the same as our own. Instead, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that within Shakespeare's theatre, a different theatrical logic can be observed at work, where meaning may have been generated according to what Dessen has termed a 'logic of theatrical metaphor.'[104] Hence for Dessen, this means that 'respecting the surviving signals and viewing them in theatrical rather than solely literary terms' is integral to the process of recovery.[105] Indeed, in *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*, Dessen

[104] Alan C. Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.153.
[105] Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions*, p.138.

associates this with his concept of 'theatrical *italics*', which he defines as a device which 'calls attention to itself and provides a clear signal that something of importance is happening, thus encouraging a thinking precisely on the event.'[106] That is to say, a theatrical *italics* is something designed to underscore the dramatist's point, but also, a device intended 'to ensure that a moderately attentive playgoer will recognise that *some*thing of importance is happening.'[107]

When faced with something that seemingly defies 'common sense', then, Dessen encourages us to consider that such a phenomenon may 'equally well signal a gap between the theatrical vocabulary shared then and what is assumed today.'[108] As a guide for thinking about 'uncued actions', Dessen's concept of the italicised signal is illuminating. To take just the example from *Much Ado*, if what an audience saw was Hero whisper in Claudio's ear only *after* Beatrice had already observed her do so, then it is possible that this served to *italicise* Beatrice's assumed role as the couple's matchmaker, which is something also emphasised in the metatheatrical playfulness of her language. And this is not the only occasion where this sort of thing happens in this play. Take these following lines, delivered by Hero when Beatrice enters and overhears the women discussing Benedick's 'love' for her:

Enter Beatrice

For looke where Beatrice like a lapwing runs
Close by the ground, to heare our conference.

To which Ursula adds the following:

So angle we for Beatrice, who even now,
Is couched in the wood-bine coverture. (TLN 1117-1118)

If these observations instructed or directed the Beatrice-player, then it is possible to see how Shakespeare was using this technique to produce the intended comic effects. As can be seen,

[106] Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions*, p.143.
[107] Dessen, *Recovering*, p.89.
[108] Dessen, *Recovering*, p.88.

in the folio (as well quarto) the stage direction for Beatrice's entrance is printed immediately before Hero notices her. One question that might be worth pondering, however, is in what manner she initially does so. Either 1) Hero delivers these lines when Beatrice is still offstage, thereby prompting the actor to quickly run onto the stage and stow himself away, or 2) first Beatrice enters, *and then* Hero prompts Beatrice to hide by observing how she 'like a lapwing runs'. Assuming that the Beatrice-actor hadn't been given prior warning that he was supposed to run on to the stage and hide himself from the view of the other actors, it is curious to speculate over the possibility that Shakespeare is here intentionally orchestrating a staging mishap. In a first performance, this might have meant that the comedy of Beatrice's pathetic attempt to hide without the other characters noticing was exacerbated if the actor was hearing this instruction for the first time. Imagine: perhaps at first the actor simply unsuspectingly strolled onto the stage, only then rushing to respond to his prompt after it was already too late. Certainly, this manner of staging might not strike us as having been 'realistic'; yet, it is also true that comedy thrives on the exploitation of such opportunities to expose the theatrical illusion. In fact here, the actor's inability to respond to the prompt on time would have actually mirrored Beatrice's clumsy attempt at secrecy, whilst also *italicising* the control the other women exert over her at this moment when she is galled and tricked.

As these examples demonstrate, there is a need to look beyond the apparent incongruity of character observations that worked as theatrical prompts, attending instead to the possible meanings generated by these signals. In doing so, it becomes easier to imagine how these prompts didn't so much disrupt the flow of a performance but functioned, in some sense, to provide meta-commentaries on what was staged. This should alert us to the possibility that group rehearsals may not have been necessary if a player's delayed response to his prompt was sometimes not only purposefully orchestrated, but loaded with potential significance. As it so

happens, earlier in *Much Ado*, another interesting example of this sort of thing occurs when Don John watches the dance of the masque from the shadows:

Musicke for the dance

John. Sure my brother is amorous on Hero, and hath
Withdrawne her father to breake with him about it: the
Ladies follow her, and but one visor remains.

Borachio. And that is Claudio, I know him by his bearing.

John. Are not you signior Benedicke?

Clau. You know me well, I am hee. (TLN 562-568)

Via Don John's observations, Shakespeare is able to direct the players' movements across the stage. Indeed, since it was necessary for playwrights to find some means of feeding information to the players through the dialogue, this appears to have been one mode in which they did so: hardly would it have been desirable for players to always utter their own prompts, nor could all directives exchanged between players come in the form of commands. As such, having characters observe and then comment on – indeed 'note' – what they see, would have been an economical way for playwrights to communicate instructions to the players. Imagining that rehearsal did mostly involve players studying alone with their parts, then far from being incompatible with, this makes 'uncued actions' essential to the part-based cueing system. It is possible, yes – maybe even likely – that some form of group rehearsal did sometimes happen before a public performance. But perhaps what really mattered was that this could never be guaranteed. A playwright like Shakespeare would, as a consequence, always have to assume a worse-case scenario – that no rehearsal would occur. Yet in *Much Ado*, Shakespeare also seems to use this mode of instruction as a way of framing the play's wider thematic concern with rumour and gossip, with noting harnessed as the channel via which theatrical signals are exchanged between the players. As a consequence, it is almost as though the act of noting

becomes in *Much Ado* a presiding medium: not only a game in which characters will participate, but also a way for Shakespeare to get his message across to the players. Here, the important feature to note is the fact that Don John is a character always hiding in the shadows, watching from a distance whilst opportunistically awaiting the chance to set his machinations in motion. As the rest of the cast dances, it therefore says a lot that Don John specifically is made the mouthpiece of these directives, providing the other players with their cues: first, Don Pedro is directed to withdraw Hero to Leonato, who will then exit along with Hero and her ladies, leaving only Claudio behind. This means that what Shakespeare's first audience might have witnessed was Don John clear the stage before luring Claudio into his trap. That is to say, to hear Don John deliver these lines *and then* to see the thing witnessed realised, would have involved exposing – for however split a second – the mechanics of the theatre working behind the illusion. Yet by doing so, Shakespeare draws an association between Don John's machinations and the player's extra-fictive command over the theatrical apparatus, drawing attention to Don John's role as a plotter of fictions-within-the-fiction, wielding power over the behaviour of the other characters.

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This chapter has probed what can be known about the conditions of playing in the early modern English theatre. In the process, a focus has been placed on some of the most notable theories about how plays were prepared for the stage, or more specifically, what preparation players are likely to have received ahead of a live performance before an audience. Inevitably, it has not been possible to touch upon every aspect of a play's journey from page, stage and back to the page, and an emphasis has been placed on the question of whether – and in what form – rehearsals are likely to have preceded performance.

It has been important to address this question as a way of positing what staging eventualities are likely to have come about under set hypothetical conditions of possibility. At the centre of all this is Palfrey's and Stern's claim that group rehearsals were neither a required nor were a standard feature of Shakespearean theatre practice. Instead, all the player had to go off was his part – the long scroll that contained nothing more than his own lines and the short cues that indicated when he was required to speak.

This posits a very atomised way of doing things, and indeed, it is an idea that has been criticised on such grounds. Yet, perhaps the biggest challenge to Palfrey and Stern comes from the evidence provided by the implicit staging embedded in the dialogue. In fact, whilst it has been maintained by Stern that it is the dialogue itself which is predominantly responsible for orchestrating stage business, it is sometimes difficult to see how the techniques harnessed by Shakespeare as a means of dialogic instruction are compatible with the idea that players could have prepared for performance from their parts alone. It is these techniques, after all, which provide the necessary conditions for an event. But many of the 'action-prompts' a player would have been required to follow appear not in his own part but in that of another player. This does not pose much of a problem where the prompt comes in the form of a single command or order, which players would have been able to respond to naturally in real time. A problem does emerge, however, when such commands are repeated, or more significantly, when a prompt comes in the form of one character observing another perform a specified action.

These techniques provide, in this way, a glimpse at *possible conditions* of playing, conditions which cannot be known for certain and which remain subject to a high level of doubt. In the case of repeated commands, the relevant player must needs have received some prior warning *not* to act upon the initial 'prompt', whilst in the case of 'uncued actions', there would result an inevitable 'mismatch' or delay between what was spoken in the dialogue and the appropriate player's response. Yet in spite of these apparent incongruities, I have suggested

that this need not lead to a complete abandonment of the idea put forward by Palfrey and Stern in *Shakespeare in Parts*. As it turns out, 'repeated commands' might well provide further evidence to bolster it, occurring at moments for which Stern suggests a group rehearsal is likely to have been necessary anyway. Meanwhile, I have posited a counterintuitive reading of what Leslie Thomson has termed 'uncued actions' to account for the temporal disunity that they are responsible for producing between the dialogue and action. As a particularly challenging and problematic form of implicit instruction (the interpretive and ethical implications of which will be explored towards the end of this thesis), 'uncued actions' provide a good demonstration of the way that staging possibilities hinge upon questions about how some or other mode implied direction functioned in practice.

This should serve as a reminder that the attempt to 'recover' the conventions and practices of the early modern stage is a conjectural exercise – one which leaves open a multiplicity of conditions that *might have* obtained in the theatre of time. It is, however, an important exercise for this thesis in that the possibilities engendered out of Shakespeare's dialogic instruction are shaped and are to an extent determined by these theatrical conditions. Hence, rather than adopt any single model as the basis for my readings going forward, throughout this thesis, I will test out and explore the different propositions about rehearsal in the period by thinking through the interpretive implications *if* such and such were the circumstances of performance. This is in tune with a thesis about plurality. Yet equally, it is to suggest that what have typically been thought of as incompatible theses about the nature of rehearsal are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, whilst private study of one's own part-text may have been the focal emphasis of 'rehearsal', this is not to say that some scenes were not identified as requiring a full group rehearsal, whilst on separate occasions, small groups of players could gather together informally, perhaps in pairs of master and apprentice as suggested by McMillin. In conclusion, what this means is that early modern plays *would* receive a rehearsal, but never or at least very

rarely of the full-dress kind or of the complete play that are familiar today. This is to propose a more comprehensive picture wherein different scenes were rehearsed differently depending on the specific requirements and demands of each scene – some requiring a group rehearsal, others requiring a small grouping of players whilst others would never be rehearsed at all, in which case the player's part really *was* all he had to go off. As such, if we are to speak of 'rehearsal' in the early modern period, it is best, if one may appropriate the term, to speak of a rehearsal *in parts* – not in the sense of the individual part-text, but in the sense that an entire play would receive different forms and types of rehearsal that were conducted separately and on separate occasions, in a way that economised limited and precious time.

Chapter 2

Orchestrating Conflict:

Commands and Actorly Disobedience

In harnessing the dialogue as a channel through which to orchestrate stage business, Shakespeare utilises numerous means of getting a message across to the players. As well as the prompts directed at a player within his individual part, prompts will also be transmitted between parts. By far the most common example of this is when a character commands another to perform a specified action, simultaneously informing the relevant player about what he needs to do. At the end of *The Winter's Tale*, a good example can be found when Paulina 'magically' delivers the commands that will awake the statue of Hermione:

> *Paul*. It is requir'd
> You doe awake your Faith: then, all stand still:
> On: those that thinke it is unlawfull businesse
> I am about, let them depart.
> *Leo*. Proceed:
> No foot shall stirre.
> *Paul*. Musick; awake her: Strike:
> 'Tis time: descend: be Stone no more: approach
> Strike all that looke upon with mervaile: Come
> Ile fill your grave up: stirre: nay, come away:
> Bequeath to death your numnesse: (for from him,
> Deare Life redeemes you) you perceive she stirres:
> Start not: her Actions shall be holy, as

You heare my Spell is lawfull: doe not shun her,
Untill you see her dye againe; for then
You kill her double: Nay, present your Hand:
When she was young, you woo'd her: now, in age,
Is she become the Suitor? (TLN 3299-3317)

The awakening of the statue is a theatrical miracle that will only come together serendipitously in the *now* of the performed moment, highlighting the need for players to be alert to the theatrical signals they might receive from other players. This is most obvious where Paulina's words double-up as theatrical prompts, indicating to all those onstage that they should 'stand still', whilst giving the player of Leontes a nudge when she encourages the king to present his hand to the newly awakened statue. Most telling, however, is the way Paulina's commands will indicate to the actor playing Hermione when is the right time to move. Until this point, of course, the audience has been observing what it has been led to believe is a very lifelike statue, no doubt sharing in Leontes' bemused wonder when he observes that this effigy of his dead wife appears to be breathing and blinking: 'Would you not deeme it breath'd?' (3261); 'The fixture of her Eye ha's motion in't' (3265).

All this while, the player will be awaiting his signal. Until the moment comes, no doubt he will have been anticipating the command to relax his muscles and to finally begin the transition from statue-like stillness to a living, breathing human being. Furthermore, the way Paulina's words are utilised to orchestrate the staging, and indeed to direct the player of Hermione's movements – 'descend', 'approach', 'come' – here has a reflexive connection to Paulina's role within the fiction. In that she is made the mouthpiece of these prompts, an equivalence is drawn between Paulina's power to control the other characters' actions and the player's assumed role of a prompter, openly exposing – for however brief a moment – the theatrical mechanics at work within her utterances. This makes Paulina's speech an instructive example of how

commands will function as prompts. Typically, the obvious benefit of these signals is that they function almost invisibly, without necessarily drawing attention to the way they function as instructions directed at the players. As the power Paulina wields also suggests, however, very rarely is the presence and distribution of these prompts separable from the question of who has the power and authority to command who.

'Master bid me kneele'

A common type of prompt in Shakespeare is when players are instructed to kneel. As Ann Pasternak-Slater has highlighted, kneeling figures as a prominent form of symbolic action in Shakespeare's plays, and most typically, indications to kneel will come in one of two forms: either when a character commands another to do so, or when the player required to kneel is instructed to do so through the lines which he himself speaks.[109] One standard situation in which kneeling figures is during scenes of petitioning. At these moments, Shakespeare will usually instruct the player whose character is positioned as the petitioner to kneel as a way of intensifying the emotive force of the supplication. In *King John*, this is apparent when Blanche and Constance implore the Dauphin not to go to war:

Blanch.

even for that name
Which till this time my tongue did nere pronounce;
Upon my knee I beg, goe not to Armes
Against mine Uncle.

Const. O, upon my knee made with kneeling, (TLN 1239-1243)

[109] 'The knee is not merely a dutiful and humble orator; kneeling is a visible symbol of order … Its rejection or perversion is an infringement of that order. Its reciprocal action, of raising the suppliant, is a further extension of that order.' Pasternak-Slater, p.63.

These sorts of statements are one of the most obvious ways Shakespeare will instruct a player through his part, where a character will refer to his or her own actions as a way of telling the player what he needs to do. So it is not just, as Peter Lichtenfels observes, a question of Shakespeare telling 'the actor […] what he wants them to do within the text.'[110] This ignores a very important question about where a given instruction appears – is it embedded within the relevant player's part, or not? Here, the signal to kneel does appear on the relevant player's part, and so clearly, there is no scenario in which Blanche or Constance is not going to kneel. This demonstrates, on the one hand, Shakespeare's directorial control over his player's actions.[111] And yet, whilst the necessity for the player to kneel is undeniable, the player might be free to decide when is the most appropriate time to descend to his knees – either when these lines are spoken, or perhaps, as for example is stipulated in the Oxford *Complete Works*, some lines earlier, maybe when Blanche first implores her husband to 'heare me' (1238). Though the player must kneel, there is therefore the opportunity for him to determine how long to draw out the time on his knees. Sometimes, this might have only negligible implications. But elsewhere, the length of time a character spends on his or her knees can be quite significant.

In the last scene of *Measure for Measure*, a notable case in point can be found when Mariana requests the duke – or possibly Angelo – to 'Let me in safety raise me from my knees, / Or else for ever be confixed here' (2606-7). This obviously implies that Mariana has already been kneeling. Yet, the example is noteworthy in that Mariana makes reference to the length of time she spends on her knees without the lines actually indicating when she will rise or when, for that matter, she got to her knees in the first place. The player is therefore expected to make an inference from these lines, but left with a choice about when and how long he should kneel. It

[110] Peter Lichtenfels, 'Shakespeare's Language in the Theatre', in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language: A Guide*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson et al. (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p.158.
[111] 'Instructions to the actors are always found built into the text, rooted in the words selected, and our notion of Shakespeare as director starts from that.' Styan, p.53.

could be, then, that Mariana will simply get to her knees at the start of the speech. Alternatively, if she were to kneel earlier, then this would prolong the painstaking time she spends in visible discomfort before she may – or indeed may not – be raised, as though 'for ever … confixed' to the spot she occupies.

In much the same way, it is not without care and attention for the visuals of the staging when, in *Julius Caesar*, the player of Portia is instructed to kneel before Brutus - 'And upon my knees, / I charme you' (911) – or when, in the following scene, Calpurnia prostrates herself before her similarly distant husband: 'Let me upon my knee, prevaile in this' (1045). Again, it is unclear when exactly the two wives will arise from their supplications, although this has not always been acknowledged in modern editions, some of which (notably the Oxford *Complete Works*) infer an implied stage direction from Brutus' command – 'Kneele not gentle *Portia*' (920) – then adding a stage direction for Portia to rise.

The truth is, however, that there is little reason why Portia *must* do as her husband bids, perhaps choosing instead to resist Brutus' command by staying on her knees. By doing so, the player might strengthen the emotive force of Portia's supplication by remaining in a position of symbolic deference: 'I should not need, if you were gentle *Brutus*' (921). This is likely to emphasise Brutus' detachment from his wife, as he refuses to reveal what troubles him whilst she prolongs the time on her knees without success. It is also likely that Caesar will gesture for Calpurnia to arise when he gives in to her petition:

> Let me upon my knees, prevaile in this.
>
> *Caes*. *Mark Antony* shall say I am not well,
>
> And for thy humor, I will stay home. (TLN 1045-1047)

Caesar will shortly change his mind, of course. Yet in contrast to Brutus, it is possible that Caesar will prevent Calpurnia from descending to her knees, consenting to her wishes and

gesturing for her not to do so before she reaches the floor. This would square with Caesar's demand that the conspirators do not kneel before him in the moments immediately preceding the assassination.[112] At the same time, this staging possibility could give rise to a potentially significant juxtaposition between Caesar and Brutus: thus Brutus, whose wife is forced to draw out her time kneeling, refuses to give in to Portia's implorations; meanwhile, Caesar consents to Calpurnia before she can so much as get to her knees.

The visuals accompanying the dialogue can, in this way, play an important role in determining a scene's emotional temper. They will frequently, moreover, form sub-plots all of their own, with gestures like kneeling recurring as visual motifs that sub-tend the main thread of a storyline. Thus later in the play, one of the most notable examples of kneeling occurs in the aftermath of Caesar's death, when a servant enters and entreats the conspirators on the part of Antony:

> Thus *Brutus* did my Master bid me kneele;
> Thus did *Mark Antony* bid me fall downe,
> And being prostrate, thus bade me say: (TLN 1341-3)

The instruction for the player to kneel here comes in the form of an order the servant has received from Antony. Through this false show of deference, Antony – via his servant – thereby pulls the very same trick that the conspirators had employed just before they killed Caesar when, in a disingenuous show of loyalty, they lowered themselves to their knees. Tellingly, this is an irony which is all but lost on the assassins. And yet throughout the play, this demonstrates how kneeling functions as an important symbolic device for registering the subtle dynamics of power and allegiance between the characters, whilst it is also abused as an instrument of

[112] '*Metel*. Most high, most mighty, and most puissant *Caesar* / *Metellus Cymber* throwes before thy Seate / An humble heart. / *Caes*. I must prevent thee *Cymber*: / These couchings, and these lowly courtesies / Might fire the blood of ordinary men, / And turne pre-Ordinance, and first Decree, / Into the lane of Children. (TLN 1239-1246).

duplicity and deceit when 'kneeling subserves', as Pasternak-Slater puts it, 'the dominant Shakespearean theme of seeming'.[113]

Thus even whilst such visible, symbolic gestures can still prove powerful today, it is important to remember that for Shakespeare's first audiences, these gestures must have meant more at a time when inferiors were routinely expected to kneel to their superiors, and subjects to their monarch. In this regard, it is unsurprising to find that instructions for players to kneel are especially rich in the histories. At the start of *2 Henry VI*, Suffolk – who will later fall from the king's favour – kneels when first introducing Henry to his new wife Margaret ('humbly now upon my bended knee' (17)). As the play progresses, kneeling takes on especial significance when characters begin to take sides and form alliances. When Warwick and Salisbury declare their support for York, for example, this is accompanied by the former imploring the latter to join him on his knees: 'Then father *Salisbury*, kneel we together' (1023). And yet, of equal importance are those moments when characters are specifically instructed *not* to kneel, with a notable example of this occurring when Suffolk disobeys Witmore's command to 'stoope' (2287):

> no, rather let my head
> Stoope to the blocke, then these knees bow to any,
> Save to the God of heaven, and to my King: (TLN 2292-4)

In this case, Shakespeare is careful to stipulate that the actor playing Suffolk should not follow Witmore's command, suggesting that he was keen to assert his authorial control over this local staged effect. This contrasts with those moments when players do seem to be given a choice. In the last act of the play, it is plausible that York either may or may not kneel when Henry enters, and he puts on a show of courtly deference:

[113] Pasternak-Slater, p.67.

In all submission and humility,
Yorke doth present himself unto your Highnesse. (TLN 3051-2)

Conventionally, lines like these would be accompanied by the speaker descending to his knees. But though feigning his loyalty here, York will soon, when the opportunity presents itself, reveal his treachery - 'Then Yorke unloose thy long imprisoned thoughts, / And let thy tongue be equall with thy heart' (3083-4) – even being commanded to kneel by Somerset: 'O monstrous traitor! … Obey audacious Traitor, kneele for grace' (3101-4). Yet there is – initially when York first enters, at least – no indication as to whether York will or will not kneel: the choice, assuming no verbal instruction was given, is left up to the player. Most modern editions refrain from adding a stage direction, and Pasternak-Slater assumes York will not kneel, thereby 'absurdly but effectively demonstrating his better fitness for the crown' when Clifford enters some lines later and York demands that he kneel to him.[114] The potential for York to kneel is not, however, without consequence: *if* he kneels, then the audience is provided with a visual sign of York's duplicity, turning, as Pasternak-Slater has herself commented, an 'outward symbol' of loyalty into an instrument of deceit.[115] But alternatively, the choice not to kneel might have the result of exposing the discrepancy between York's words and deeds, prompting Henry's bemused response: 'Then what intends these Forces thou dost bring?' (3051). It seems, in this way, that the lack of clear instruction is intended to force an internal reckoning on the part of the player: how far is my character's pretence of loyalty to go? Should I kneel before the king York deems illegitimate? How will my actions be interpreted? The player might therefore have a choice, but it is a choice that leaves little option for York to come out positively, with the player being forced to make a choice that mirrors the precarious situation of the character he is playing.

[114] Pasternak-Slater, p.66.
[115] Pasternak-Slater, pp.67–68.

As a symbolic motif, kneeling thus focalises wider tensions and conflicts, with characters frequently being compelled to kneel whilst putting on an active show of resistance. Later in the same scene, this is perhaps most obvious when Clifford enters the stage and kneels to King Henry, prompting a command from York that he should show this deference to him:

Enter Clifford

Qu. And here comes *Clifford* to deny their baile.

Clif. Health, and all happinesse to my Lord the King.

Yor. I thanke thee, *Clifford*: Say, what newes with thee?
Nay, do not fright us with an angry looke:
We are thy Soveraigne *Clifford*, kneel againe;
For thy mistaking so, We pardon thee.

Clif. This is my Kinge York, I do not mistake:
But thou mistakes me much to thinke I do:
To Bedlam with him, is the man growne made? (TLN 3119-3128)

As a Lancastrian, it is hardly likely that Clifford will yield to York's command, with Clifford's response to York providing an unambiguous indication of his resistance. Often, a character's willingness or unwillingness to kneel at somebody else's bidding is far less certain. As it turns out, a notable case of this occurs hard on the heels of Clifford's refusal to kneel, when Salisbury and Warwick – both of whom will soon reveal their support for York – enter and apparently neglect to kneel to King Henry. Whilst Henry's response is one of aghast dismay – 'Why Warwicke, hath thy knee forgot to bow?' (3161) – he then attempts to recover his authority by commanding one of the two men to kneel: 'For shame in dutie bend thy knee to me' (3173). The richest possibility, perhaps, is that Henry addresses Warwick. At this point in the play, it is not yet clear – to the king at least – that Warwick has defected. Yet equally, between Salisbury and Warwick, it is the former who is the more explicitly vocal in coming out in support of York.

As a consequence, Warwick's response to the king's demand will be important in communicating his stance not via words but gesture. Nor need we assume that Warwick simply refuses to kneel. He may, on the contrary, waver in his decision, unable to make up his mind whether to kneel or resist. Or alternatively, an interesting possibility might involve Warwick's reluctance to openly disobey the king, only to declare his support for the Yorkist faction once Salisbury has taken the lead. In this last case, Henry would be seen to possess a residual regal authority to command his rebellious subject, whilst Warwick, cowardly or ambivalent, fails to fully commit to the cause which is about to receive his backing.

Thus, moments at which characters choose, are forced or feel compelled to kneel can provide a powerful indication of one character's loyalty, but also subjection to another. Aside from the histories, perhaps the most formidable emphasis on kneeling in all of Shakespeare can be found in the last act of *Coriolanus*, when the general's family implore him to desist from sacking Rome. Initially, the first to get to his knees is Coriolanus himself: 'Sinke my knee I'th'earth' (3399). But immediately, this is followed by a command from Volumnia, who orders her son to his feet before proceeding to kneel herself:

> Oh stand up blest!
> Whil'st with no softer Cushion then the Flint,
> I kneele before thee, and unproperly
> Shew duty as mistaken, all this while,
> Betweene the Childe, and Parent. (TLN 3402-3406)

Whilst alluding to the shamefulness of her action, Volumnia is nonetheless engaged in a performance designed to manipulate her son's behaviour. Hence here, kneeling is no straightforward act of submission but rather forms part of a strategy that is successful in altering Coriolanus' determined course of action. The main indication of the power she still wields over her wayward son, however, occurs when she commands him to rise: 'Oh stand up blest!' It is

standard in modern editions for a stage direction to stipulate that Coriolanus gets to his feet, as is also true of Peter Holland's text for the Arden third series. Whereas most editions indicate that Coriolanus rises immediately following Volumnia's command, however, in this text the stage direction appears five lines later during Coriolanus' next speech, at the end of which a stage direction suggests that Coriolanus raises her:

VOLUMNIA
Whilst with no softer cushion than the flint
I kneel before thee and unproperly
Show duty as mistaken all this while
Between the child and parent. [*Kneels*]
CORIOLANUS What's this?
Your knees to me? To your corrected son? [*Rises*.]
Then let the pebbles on the hungry beach
Fillip the stars; then let the mutinous winds
Strike the proud cedar 'gainst the fiery sun,
Murdering impossibility to make
What cannot be slight work. [*Raises her*.]
VOLUMNIA Thou art my warrior.
I holp to frame thee. [*Gestures to Valeria*.]
Do you know this lady?[116]

This arrangement of stage directions still maintains that Coriolanus will rise before his mother, when in fact, there is always the chance that he might remain kneeling until she rises first – in which case, there might be a brief, no doubt profoundly emotive period during which the two characters address one another whilst both on their knees. The interesting and peculiar thing about Volumnia's command is, after all, the way she orders her son *not* to show her the due

[116] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, ed. by Peter Holland (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5.3.52-63.

respect and curtesy she is owed. Whichever way the player of Coriolanus may decide to respond to this prompt, no option is available which is favourable: if, on the one hand, he decides to rise, then Coriolanus' initial show of deference comes to nothing. But if, on the other, he remains kneeling, then he is guilty of having disobeyed his mother. Hence Volumnia, in other words, has her son in a checkmate. Moreover, this demonstrates not only her remarkable ability to harness a rhetoric of gesture, but it captures the very ambivalence and trepidation which characterises the precarious path that Coriolanus has embarked on.

This is not, of course, a sense of ambivalence that is conveyed when editors assume that Coriolanus rises. In fact, the easy assumption that a necessary connection obtains between the command and Coriolanus' response fails to acknowledge the complexity of Shakespeare's dramaturgy: the point is that the player is given a choice; but it is a choice that can in no way work in Coriolanus' favour. That is to say, the prompt mirrors at a very local level the way Coriolanus is trapped in circumstances from which there is no way out: if he sacks Rome, then he risks the slaughter of his family and the shameful destruction of his native city. His alternative option to desist, however, would mean betraying the Volscians. What is worse, it would involve betraying that ultimate source of his pride – his constancy – only to result in his inevitable demise. It is not always, then, as though all apparent prompts in the form of commands will necessarily be followed. In fact, just some lines later, there is similar doubt as to whether Martius will kneel when commanded by Volumnia:

Volum. Your knee, Sirrah.
Corio. That's my brave Boy. (TLN 3429-3430)

It is as good as universally accepted that Martius kneels, there being no edition I have consulted which doesn't include a stage direction for him to do so. But the alternative – that he refuses – would also be extremely significant in light of the fact that this is the son of the mighty and

stubborn Coriolanus. It could be, surely, that Martius demonstrates his likeness to his father by stubbornly refusing to kneel. When Coriolanus expresses his approval – 'That's my brave boy' – it is unclear whether he is uttering this remark in approval of his son's deference to his grandmother, or whether inversely, he is expressing admiration of his son's adoption of his own, ultimately self-destructive ways.

'Keep this holy kiss'

As well as kneeling, kissing is another prominent form of embedded prompt in Shakespeare's plays. In *Titus Andronicus*, this is evident when Lucius and Marcus kiss the dead body of Titus: 'Oh take this warme kisse on thy pale cold lips' (2657); 'Teare for teare, and loving kisse for kisse, / Thy Brother *Marcus* tenders on thy lips' (2660-1). In this example, the instruction embedded in the two players' parts functions fairly straightforwardly: because the recipient of these kisses is a corpse, all that is required is that the players in question fulfil the stipulated gesture and kiss the other actor who is playing dead. But usually, of course, a kiss involves two parties, and sometimes tension or doubt can emerge depending whether or in what manner a kiss will be reciprocated.

At the close of *Henry V*, it is uncertain how Catherine will respond when King Henry attempts – after having already been rejected once – to kiss her. Though the dialogue strongly intimates that Henry finally gets what he wants – 'You have Witch-craft in your Lippes' (3263) – it is uncertain whether Catherine willingly grants this kiss or whether, amongst other possibilities, she is compelled or coerced. Thus, prompts to kiss are interesting in that they rely of the participation of two players but quite frequently only appear in the part of one player – whilst the speaker of a line is therefore compelled to kiss his cohort, the response of that other

character is frequently far more uncertain, producing potentially awkward or unnerving scenarios if a player chooses to reject, spurn or dismiss the advances of his peer.

A notable example of this can be found in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. When Proteus departs for Milan, it seems apparent that he will share a kiss with Julia:

> *Pro*. When possibly I can, I will returne.
> *Jul*. If you turne not: you will return the sooner:
> Keepe this remembrance for thy *Julia's* sake.
> *Pro*. Why then wee'll make exchange;
> Here, take you this.
> *Jul*. And seale the bargaine with a holy kisse.
> *Pro*. Here is my hand, for my true constancie. (TLN 570-6)

Everything about the language is striving here to convey an aura and sense of harmony. This includes the rhyming couplets ('take you this' / 'holy kiss') and repetition ('I will returne' / 'you will returne'), but also, the exchange of tokens and the lovers' parting kiss: 'And seale the bargain with a holy kisse.' One's natural assumption is that the line will therefore terminate with a kiss, as indicated in many editions – Arden 3, Oxford, RSC - by the inclusion of a stage direction: '[*They kiss*]'. Ann Pasternak-Slater, on the other hand, has proposed that all that is required is a 'marriage handshake' or 'palmer's kiss' of the like that can be found in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Love's Labour's Lost*.[117] In his New Cambridge edition (1990), Kurt Schlueter cautiously refrains from adding a direction whilst still maintaining that a kiss is the most plausible outcome based on a conception of character, arguing that the 'impulsive Julia is not

[117] Pasternak-Slater, pp.84; 214, n.7.

likely to speak the line in question with her hand stretched out for the ‘‘marriage handshake’’, nor is Proteus, the later would-be rapist, likely to avoid a proffered kiss.’[118]

The interesting thing, however, is that just some lines later, Julia will exit in silence whilst Proteus is mid-speech: ‘*Julia*, farewell: what, gon without a word?’ (584). What precisely causes this sudden departure is unclear. Maybe she storms off in anger; or maybe she simply cannot bear to prolong saying goodbye any longer. But one possibility, surely, is that she departs out of a sense of rejection after Proteus has refused to kiss her: ‘Here is my hand, for my true constancie.’[119] It could be that Proteus playfully hushes her with his finger, maybe offering his hand instead. Or perhaps he proves himself to be thoroughly apprehensive. In any case, what is clear is that whilst Julia will be prompted to kiss Proteus, it is by no means necessary that Proteus need reciprocate – the player being able to anticipate the kiss in the form of the cue that would have appeared on his part-text: ‘[a] [holy] kisse’. This demonstrates the apprehension and unease that can sometimes attend moments characters potentially – or perhaps potentially will not – kiss.

In *2 Henry VI*, for instance, it might similarly be asked whether Margaret, when first made Henry’s Queen, will really be so eager to share a kiss with her new husband: ‘I can expresse no kinder signe of Love / Then this kinde kisse’ (25). This means that Henry will make as if to kiss, although Margaret’s response might be more nuanced – awkwardly turning so that he kisses her cheek rather than lips, say, or perhaps avoiding Henry’s advance altogether. The effect of this would be to visually highlight Margaret’s questionable fidelity to Henry, especially in light of her implicit sexual attraction to Suffolk. If Margaret was to somehow

[118] William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. by Kurt Schlueter, Updated edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), see 'Appendix: A Further Note on Stage Direction', pp.165–66.
[119] As in fact is acknowledged by the editors of the New Oxford Shakespeare: ‘Proteus either kisses Julia or, in contrast, rebuffs her enthusiasms by literally keeping her at ‘‘arm’s length’’.’ William Shakespeare, ‘The Two Gentlemen of Verona’, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by Gary Taylor and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.77, n.2.2.7-8.

reject or recoil at Henry's approach, this could provide a powerful visual contrast to the scene when, later in the play, she potentially exchanges multiple kisses with Suffolk:

> Go, speake not me; even now be gone.
> Oh go not yet. Even thus, two Friends condemn'd,
> Embrace, and kisse, and take ten thousand leaves,
> Loather a hundred times to part then dye;
> Yet now farewell, and farewell Life with thee. (TLN 2067-2071)

The implied physical intimacy of Margaret and Suffolk has, conventionally, encouraged editors to stipulate that they will kiss on three separate occasions: first, at TLN 2058 ('Oh, could this kisse be printed in thy hand'); secondly, at TLN 2113 ('To have thee with thy lippes to stop my mouth'), and lastly, just before the pair part ways at the end of the scene at TLN 2126 ('And take my heart with thee'). Out of these, it is the first kiss which is most strongly implied in the dialogue: in the second the syntax is ambiguous, maybe only alluding to Suffolk's unfulfilled desire – '*if* I could have thee…' – whilst in the third case, there is no kiss implied. This is significant because whilst it is implied that Margaret will kiss Suffolk's hand, if the second kiss is to occur, then it is implied that this should be on the lips, taking the pair's forbidden and seditious love affair a step closer towards outright adultery. Where editors have surprisingly neglected to add a direction that the pair kiss, however, is within the passage above. This is all the more surprising given that here, the physicality of the pair's amorous exchanges is arguably nowhere more explicit: first Margaret orders Suffolk to depart, before she changes her mind and – so it is suggested – they fall into one another's arms and exchange kisses. Again, however, the indecision of Margeret is mirrored in the equivocal form of the instruction transmitted to the player, which is premised upon an ambiguous 'Even thus'.

Two characters who have less reluctance to fulfil their forbidden desire, however, are Romeo and Juliet, with the sonnet shared between the couple providing a notable case in point:

Rom. If I prophane with my unworthiest hand,
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,
My lips to blushing Pilgrims did ready stand,
To smooth that rough touch, with a tender kisse.
Jul. Good Pilgrime,
You do wrong your hand too much.
Which mannerly devotion shewes in this,
For Saints have hands, that Pilgrims hands do tuch,
And palme to palme, is holy Palmers kisse.
Rom. Have not Saints lips, and holy Palmers too?
Jul. I Pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
Rom. O then deare Saint, let lips do what hands do,
They pray (grant thou least faith turne to dispaire.
Jul. Saints do not move,
Though grant for prayers sake.
Rom. Then move not while my prayers effect I take: (TLN 670-685)

Shakespeare's finest trick is to transpose what is a poetic form into a dramatic context, something which is primarily achieved in the way that the sonnet is embodied through the players' physical gestures. From this perspective, perhaps most impressive is that the sonnet is not so much spoken as enacted, culminating in the lovers' first kiss but also with the first occurrence of a visual motif that will surface throughout the play.

Some scenes later, on the morning of their wedding day, this emphasis on kissing recurs when Romeo requests 'one kisse' (2075) before fleeing from Juliet's bedroom window. Though this is the last opportunity that they will get to share a kiss, there exists the potential for a more tragic alternative: as he rushes out of the window, it is entirely plausible that the pair fail to exchange a final kiss before intruded upon by Juliet's mother. The poignancy of this would be

exacerbated when, one scene later, Juliet is then compelled by Paris to 'keepe this holy kisse' (2338). Thus, whilst the player of Paris would have been prompted to motion towards Juliet, what is less clear is how Juliet responds, but also, what character Paris' attempt to kiss Juliet might take. This must have forced upon the players some deliberation. When studying alone with his part, for the player of Paris no doubt this meant deciding where exactly he should kiss Juliet – the hand? the cheek? the lips? At the same time, it is notable how the player of Juliet – as with Proteus above - is also warned about the kiss in advance, in the form of the cue which would have appeared on his part-text: '[this] [holy] kisse.' This might be providing the boy-player of Juliet with important information if there hadn't been time for a rehearsal, most of his training having probably been provided by his master who likely played Romeo rather than Paris.[120] Assuming that he had worked out who the cue was coming from, the Juliet-player would then have had the opportunity to deliberate how he might respond: would he go along with Paris' advance, or instead somehow defer or avoid the kiss? No matter what choice he made, how would he know in any event what manner of kiss his colleague would approach him with?

Accounting for the possibility that there was no prior rehearsal, this would have required both players to prepare for eventualities that couldn't be anticipated from the private study of their parts alone. As a result, each players' inability to predict with certainty how the other had prepared for this moment would have had the potential to produce some compelling, though largely unscripted, outcomes in a performance. Perhaps most likely, it would have resulted in an awkward situation whereby both players were left second-guessing what the other was going to do, producing the very tension and discomfort that attends Paris' unbeknownst attempt to

[120] As was highlighted in Chapter 1, Scott McMillin has proposed that at some point, the actors must have done 'partial rehearsals in order to familiarize themselves with the source of the cue lines.' This, he suggests, means that 'some of the boy-actor's rehearsal and memorisation would have been done in the presence of his master.' It remains less clear, however, how or in what manner the boy-players would have prepared for those scenes which didn't involve their master. McMillin, 'The Sharer and His Boy', pp.231–45 (p.234).

take Romeo's place. To this extent, then, the directive embedded in Paris' part has the potential to produce different outcomes, depending that is how the player of Paris acted upon this prompt and how the player of Juliet decided to react. This differs from those kisses which occur at the end of the play, when both Romeo and Juliet die with a kiss: 'Thus with a kisse I die' (2977); 'I will kisse thy lips … Thy lips are warme' (3027-3030). When the play is brought to a close, it is thus with a physical gesture that Shakespeare determines to set the seal of finality upon his tragedy – a gesture which takes the play full circle back to the fatal moment when the pair first met, sealing their fates with a kiss.

Commands from Superiors to Inferiors

In that commands reflect the wider dynamics of power between the dramatis personae, they will frequently be directed by superiors to their inferiors, with unnamed messengers, servants and gentlemen unsurprisingly the common recipients of these instructions. Yet whilst many of these commands are straightforwardly generic – when a messenger is ordered off the stage, say – what characterises this mode of prompting most is, as Hallet and Hallet have observed, 'the element of compulsion.'[121]

Thus sometimes, Shakespeare will utilise these prompts to generate moments of particularly acute dramatic and ethical tension, giving rise to potential acts of resistance as one character attempts to impose his will on another. As a case in point, the second scene of *Richard III* commences when Lady Anne enters mourning over the corpse of Henry VI, accompanied by a group of gentlemen carrying the coffin who she orders to 'Set downe, set downe your honourable load' (175). When she then implores the men to take it up again – 'Come now

[121] Charles A. Hallet and Elaine S. Hallet, *Analyzing Shakespeare's Action: Scene versus Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.183.

towards Chertsy with your holy Lode' (203) – she is interrupted by the entrance of Richard, who commands the men to do the opposite: 'Stay you that beare the coarse, & set it down' (208). That the gentlemen will initially resist is clear from the exchange that follows:

> *Rich*. Villaines set downe the Coarse, or by S Paul,
> Ile make a Coarse of him that disobeyes.
> *Gen*. My lord stand back, and let the Coffin passe.
> *Rich*. Unmanner'd Dogge,
> Stand'st thou when I commaund:
> Advance thy Halbert higher then my brest,
> Or by S.Paul Ile strike thee to my Foote,
> And spurne upon thee Begger for thy boldnesse. (TLN 211-218)

At a first glance, it seems reasonable to infer that by the time Richard finishes, the coffin will be lowered. In fact, at some point, the coffin *must* be lowered so that Anne can command Richard to peer inside and 'Behold this patterne of thy Butcheries' (231). The most common place editors will include a stage direction for the gentlemen to '[*Set down the coffin*]' is after Richard threatens to 'spurne' one of them. Whoever receives this threat – presumably an individual halberdier – it is uncertain at what point the gentlemen will deign to do as Richard bids: in fact, perhaps they might even continue to resist him outright.[122] That the first of Richard's commands is disobeyed is, after all, implied by the fact that it is a command which he repeats. Nor is it implausible that this is a resistance which the gentlemen will persist in. Far from submit to Richard's authority – 'Villaines set downe the Coarse, or…' – the absence of a stage direction in both quarto and folio should alert us to the possibility that they refrain.

[122] There is debate about who exactly Richard addresses. In the Oxford *Complete Works* (1.2.38), the Gentleman's speech prefix is amended to 'Halberdier', presumably under the assumption that Richard delivers his threat 'Advance thy Halbert' to the same character who orders him to 'let the Coffin passe.' If the Gentleman who utters the line is one of the men carrying the coffin, however, it might be, as James R. Sieman notes, that 'Richard could command another individual, an eager halberdier, to cease threatening him.' There is therefore scope for multiple characters to put on a show of defiance to Richard, rather than any single individual. William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, ed. by James R. Siemon (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2009), p.151 (fn.39-40).

Though shaking with fear – '*Anne*. What do you tremble?' (229) – the gentlemen would thereby hold their nerve until some lines later, perhaps when Anne goes on to invite Richard to 'Behold this patterne of thy Butcheries' (231). In doing so, the gentlemen would at once demonstrate their loyalty to Anne and their courage in resisting Richard. This scenario would also, however, involve Anne smartly outmanoeuvring Richard as she relieves her men from the pressure – indeed the danger – of resisting him, allowing them to follow his command *as though* they were following hers. Whilst Anne is thus able to save face, it also means that she is able to turn Richard's own command against him – demanding that he look into the coffin which he had ordered to be set down.

These commands can, then, provide telling indications of the control that a given character may or may not exert over a given situation. They will also, on occasion, expose when a character has lost the authority to command, as when Antony laments his fortunes after his defeat at the battle of Actium:

> I have fled my selfe, and have instructed cowards
> To runne, and shew their shoulders. Friends be gone,
> Which has no neede of you. Be gone,
> My treasure's in the Harbour. Take it: Oh,
> I follow'd that I blush to looke upon,
> My very haires do mutiny: for the white
> Reprove the browne for rashnesse, and they them
> For fear, and doting. Friends be gone, You shall
> Sweepe your way for you. Pray you look not sad
> Nor make replyes of loathness, take the hint
> Which my dispaire proclaims. Let them be left
> Which leaves it selfe, To the Sea-side straight way:
> I will possess you of that ship and Treasure,
> Leave me, I pray a little: Pray you now,

> Nay do so, for indeede I have lost command:
> Therefore I pray you, Ile see you by and by. (TLN 2031-2048)

Antony's admission that he has 'lost command' is underscored by the impotency of his commands to direct his attendants offstage. Typically, it is assumed that the attendants will exit when Antony's self-pitying outcry has come to an end, where most modern editions provide a stage direction: '[*Exeunt Attendants*]'.[123] In this way, the speech provides a stark visual emphasis on Antony's lost authority, as his attendants, though presumably out of loyalty, refuse to obey his commands. Alternatively, however, it could be that the servants prove their *disloyalty* by following through on Antony's commands, perhaps rushing off the stage when they are commanded to take Antony's treasure. Further, it might be imagined that the number of attendants present gradually dwindles every time Antony delivers one of his orders, until eventually, he is left alone on an empty stage to deliver his commands to no one: 'Leave me, I pray a little.' And yet, the absence of an '*Exeunt*' direction in the earliest texts might suggest – as will be explored more fully in a later chapter - that the attendants might linger on the stage still further, paradoxically disobeying their master in a way that conveys their absolute sense of fidelity to the man they serve.

The failure of Antony's words to prompt his fellow player's actions expose, in this manner, his inability to direct those whose very duty it is to enact his will. This demonstrates that where commands putatively function as prompts, the refusal of one character to obey another will sometimes expose the subverted power relation between given dramatis personae. A highly instructive example of this sort of thing can be found in Shakespeare's Spanish contemporary, Lope de Vega. Of course, de Vega is sometimes referred to as the 'Spanish Shakespeare', a comparison which has some basis in the two playwright's shared dramaturgical affinities: both

[123] In fact, I have been unable to find a single edition that doesn't include such a stage direction.

men felt no need to follow the classical unities, whilst neither of them felt any qualms about mixing genres or blurring the lines between high and low. This makes de Vega an appealing candidate for comparison when it comes to points of dramaturgy.[124] More to the point, in what is probably his most famous play to English-speaking audiences – *Fuente Ovejuna* – it is notable how de Vega harnesses commands to capture moments of suspense and provoke an uncertain response from players.[125]

In the opening scene of the play, the Commander Fernán Gómez de Guzmán enters complaining that he has been snubbed by the boy Master of the Order of Calatrava who he serves, Roderigo Téllez Girón. Soon thereafter, the Master himself enters, at which point the pair deliver the following exchange:

COMMANDER. I have good reason to
Complain. My love and background led
Me to expect much more respect
From you, Master of Calatrava,
Towards your most obedient servant and
Commander.
MASTER. I was expecting the warmest
Of welcomes, Fernando. Let me

[124] The similarities have been further elaborated by Jonathan Bate, who writes of de Vega: 'His characteristic form was a mingle of tragedy and comedy, high and low, the poetic voice accordingly shifting from elegance to coarseness … Lope de Vega wrote plays of every kind which appealed to every rank.' Such are the resemblances, that had Shakespeare ever cared to write a treatise on the art of writing plays, it is not hard to imagine that it wouldn't have been too dissimilar from de Vega's own *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias* (1609): 'Lo trágico y lo cómico mezclado, / y Terencio con Séneca, aunque sea / como otro Minotauro de Pasife, / harán grave una parte, otra ridícula, que aquesta variedad deleita mucho; buen ejemplo nos da naturaleza, que por al variedad tiene belleza.' ('Tragedy mixed with comedy / and Terence with Seneca, even if / it be like another Minotaur of Pasiphaë / will make one part serious, the other ridiculous: for this variety is greatly pleasing. Nature gives us good example, because through such variety it is beautiful.') Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Picador, 2008), pp. 338–40; Lope de Vega, *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, ed. by Enrique García Santo-Tomás, Letras hispánicas, 585, Octava edición. (Madrid: Cátedra, 2020), 174-180 (my translation).

[125] The scarcity of translations of de Vega's plays into English has made an appreciation of the playwright wellnigh impossible in English-speaking parts of the world. In what follows I quote from Gwynne Edwards' translation of *Fuente Ovejuna* in Lope de Vega, *Three Major Plays*, trans. by Gwynne Edwards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.1-79. Any references to the Spanish come from Lope de Vega, *Fuente Ovejuna*, ed. by Rinaldo Froldi (Barcelona: Espasa, 2010).

Embrace you.

COMMANDER. You are right to honour me.

How often have I risked my life

On your account, before the Pope

Acknowledged you had come of age! (1.30-40)

As a play in which the entire plot revolves around a village's uprising against their tyrannical overlord, *Fuente Ovejuna* is a uniquely appropriate case-study for how commands focalise issues of power and resistance. It is difficult to think of any other early modern play so concentrated on the question of rebellion, and consequently, comparing what de Vega does here with what Shakespeare does in his plays will help to underscore what makes Shakespeare's use of these prompts compelling and distinctive.

The noteworthy thing about passage above, then, is the visual signals that the audience is expected to pick up on, specifically the Master's command to 'Let me / embrace you'. Though easy to miss, this implicit prompt captures much of the repressed tension that simmers beneath the two men's half-hearted courtesies, inciting alternative responses from the Commander who may or may not be willing to accept this physical gesture of reconciliation. In the event that he objects, then it is possible to imagine a potentially awkward scenario emerging when he defies the boy whose command it is his duty to fulfil. At the same time, this option speaks to the inverted power dynamic that is implicit in the very form of the Master's utterance: where the Master feigns to command, he is, at the same time, asking the Commander for permission. A more literal rendering of the Spanish into English makes this clear: 'Quiero volveros a dar / los brazos' (1.54-55), which is to say, 'I want to give you my arms again'. The Master's apparent command thus plays with an ambiguous modality, at once making a demand and expressing a wish, in such a way that the sentiment can be read both literally – as a prompt inciting the two men to embrace – or figuratively, as articulating the Master's desire to be returned to the

Commander's favour. Hence, what is putatively a command from a superior to his inferior actually exposes that superior's very dependency on his servant, with the Commander plausibly opting to flout Roderigo's authority.

This move on the part of de Vega is particularly 'Shakespearean' in the way that it telescopes larger dramatic tensions, with the Commander's doubtful response to the Master's request focalising the unspoken power struggle between the two individuals. As the play progresses, Guzmán's role as 'commander' is further underscored in the way that his words control – at least ostensibly – the other dramatis personae. Yet, the fact that the play centres around the people of Ovejuna's resistance to Guzmán's tyranny means that these prompts will sometimes be disobeyed, with the villagers potentially putting on a valiant show of resistance as they are compelled to submit to his authority.

The best example of this occurs in the second act, where it is unclear whether Mengo will relinquish his sling when ordered by the Commander:

COMMANDER. I give them leave to take revenge on you
On you. Hand over the sling at once!
MENGO. My lord!
COMMANDER. Flores, Ortuño, Cimbranos,
Use it to tie his hands. (2.303-306)

The order for Mengo to hand over the sling might be said to leave the player with a choice. It could be, of course, that he will respond by doing as the Commander bids, although he might just as equally choose to resist. Hence like Shakespeare frequently does, de Vega here appears to force a choice upon his player at a point of acute ethical tension. And in many ways, it is as though this choice compresses many of the play's most pressing moral dilemmas into a single instant: at what point should the people of Ovejuna make a stand? When is it legitimate or

acceptable for them to do so? When does the Commander lose the moral authority to compel the citizens to do as he bids?

Assuming that de Vega is, indeed, placing the burden on the player to decide how to respond to this prompt, then the player would have been thrust into an equivocal situation mirroring that of the character he was performing, able to respond in any of numerous possible ways. He might, say, drop the sling or keep it at hand. Or maybe he even fires it at the Commander. Indeed, imagining no prior direction was given to the player, it is as though the script is designed to catch the player off guard, producing the very same sense of trepidation and uncertainty in the actor that marked the behaviour of his character. Whatever choice he makes, it is notable that the passage contains further gaps in the staging. At some point, the soldiers must somehow come into possession of the sling as the Commander orders them to 'Use it to tie his hands.' Maybe Mengo willingly hands it over, or maybe the soldiers are forced to physically wrench it from him. In any case, whatever Mengo's choice, it is a choice that has the potential to alter what causes the actions that follow: if, for instance, he makes to fire the sling, then the soldiers will bind his hands in order to neutralise this threat. But if, say, Mengo hands over the sling willingly, then the Commander's subsequent order emerges as not only excessive but also deeply cynical and gratuitous.

In fact, this gratuity becomes impossible to ignore when the soldiers are ordered by the Commander to tie him to a tree and to flog him:

FLORES. Is he to die?
COMMANDER. Don't tarnish your swords
On him! They'll find more honourable tasks
Ahead.
ORTUÑO. What, then?
COMMANDER. He shall be flogged!

That oak tree there! Tie him fast, remove
His clothes, and use these reins!
MENGO. My lord,
Have pity! You are a noble man.
COMMANDER. Beat him, until the studs fly free
From their stitching!
MENGO. Oh, Heavens, will you
Allow such cruel deeds to go
Unpunished? (2. 311-219)

The sadistic delight the Commander takes in punishing Mengo is comparable to one of the most memorable scenes in all of Shakespeare – namely, the blinding of Gloucester in 3.7 of *King Lear*. As when Gloucester is blinded, here the violence is shocking – yes, because of its brutality – but perhaps more so because the perpetrators of these atrocities feel little need to find a justification for their actions: in both Shakespeare and de Vega, an emphasis is placed on the unwarranted horrors those in power inflict upon the powerless. Yet associated with this, de Vega and Shakespeare alike are sensitive to the fact that all autocrats rely on their minions to do their dirty work for them. Hence, what is notable is how Cornwall's and the Commander's power – and at the same time their dependency – is signified via the theatrical prompts that they will deliver to their servicemen: in de Vega's case, to the soldiers. And, in Shakespeare's, to the servants:

Enter Gloucester, and Servants.
Who's there? the Traitor?
Reg. Ingratefull Fox, 'tis he.
Corn. Binde fast his corky armes.
Glou. What meanes your Graces?
Good my Friends consider you are my Ghests:
Do me no foule play, Friends.

Corn. Binde him I say.

Reg. Hard, hard: O filthy Traitor.

Glou. Unmercifull Lady, as you are, I'me none.

Corn. To this Chaire binde him,

Villaine, thou shalt finde. (TLN 2088-2101)

At a first glance, it appears as though Cornwall is the one calling all of the shots, prescribing the other player's actions and movements in the form of commands and setting in motion what Hallet and Hallet term a 'command sequence', where 'someone in authority issues an order, which instigates action or creates suspense.'[126] This begins when Cornwall earlier gives the order for Goneril and Edmond to exit, but most especially, it involves his compulsion of the servants in the passage above to bind Gloucester.

In any other situation, this might suggest that Cornwall possesses the uninhibited power – indeed what Hallet and Hallet characterise as 'total authority' - to dictate the other characters' actions.[127] Yet Cornwall's command for the servants to bind Gloucester are, as Thomas L. Berger has observed, repeated on several separate occasions.[128] As such, the true extent of Cornwall's power is called into question when it is realised that he is forced to repeat most of these commands, suggesting that they are initially resisted or that events are spiralling out of his control.[129] In fact, the absence of a stage direction in the earliest texts – both quartos and

[126] The Hallets define a sequence as 'a unit of action', such that a single scene may consist of multiple sequences or a single sequence may stretch across multiple scenes. Within such sequences, 'Shakespeare raises a single dramatic question and answers it', whilst 'Direction in the sequence comes from the thrust toward some climactic resolution of the pending question, and the action moves consecutively through stages of exposition and complication toward the climax.' Hallet and Hallet, pp.7; 185.

[127] Hallet and Hallet, p.185.

[128] See Thomas L. Berger, 'The (Play) Text's the Thing: Teaching the Blinding of Gloucester in King Lear', in Teaching Shakespeare through Performance, ed. by Milla Cozart Riggio (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1999), pp.196–219.

[129] This is evident from the very start of the scene, when Cornwall commands Goneril to 'Poste speedily to my Lord your husband' (TLN 2060). Her apparent reluctance to 'Poste speedily' is signified when Cornwall then orders Edmond to accompany her, only for their exit to be interrupted by the entrance of Oswald. When Goneril has finally exited, there is the suggestion that Edmond initially fails to join her in what is another implicit act of disobedience to Cornwall's authority:

folio – might suggest that the servants never act upon Cornwall's commands to bind Gloucester at all. The truly unsettling thing, after all, is how Cornwall compels the servants to act against their own moral consciences – a fact emphasised not only when one of the servants challenges the duke, but also, by the quarto-only passage in which the servants express their horror at the blinding.[130]

Yet throughout most of the play's editorial history, it has been routinely assumed that the servants will assist Cornwall, with most modern editions following the precedent set by Nicholas Rowe who was the first to insert a stage direction: '*Servants bind him*'.[131] This decision seems logical enough in that Rowe has inferred the servants' actions from Cornwall's theatrical prompt. In making this intervention, however, Rowe has assumed a necessary connection between Cornwall's command and the servants' response where no such thing exists: in fact, it is quite plausible that they refuse to do as they are commanded. With his authority on the wane, in this scenario, Cornwall might be forced to bind Gloucester himself as he impotently spits his commands at his inferiors:

Corn. See't shalt thou never. Fellowes hold y Chaire,
Upon these eyes of thine, Ile set my foote.
Glou. He that will thinke to live, till he be old,

Corn. Get horses for your Mistris.
Gon. Farewell sweet Lord, and Sister. *Exit*.
Corn. *Edmund* farewell: go seek the Traitor Gloster,
Pinnion him like a Theefe, bring him before us: (TLN 2080-2083)

Most modern editions stipulate that Goneril exits with Edmond at 2082. It could be, however, that she exits at 2081 with Oswald, meaning that Edmond, for whatever reason, lingers behind on the stage a moment longer. This might be one explanation why Cornwall says farewell to Edmond but not Goneril.

[130] *Servant*. Ile never care what wickedness I doe,
If this man come to good.
2 Servant. If she live long, & in the end meet the old course
of death, women will all turne monsters.
1 Ser. Lets follow the old Earle, and get the bedlom
To lead him where he would, his madnes
Allowes it selfe to any thing.
2 Ser. Goe thou, ile fetch some flaxe and whites of egges to
apply to his bleeding face, now heaven helpe him. (III.vii. 99-107)

[131] There are some exceptions, notably the Oxford *Complete Works* and the New Cambridge text edited by Jay L. Halio (2020).

Give me some helpe. – O cruell! O you Gods. (TLN 2139-2142)

Whilst Cornwall orders them to hold the chair, less immediately obvious is how the actors playing the servants receive a conflicting signal from Gloucester – namely, when he calls out for help. In the preceding passage, Shakespeare pulls a similar trick when he follows Cornwall's first command for the servants to 'Binde fast his corky armes' with Gloucester's appeal for sympathy: 'Do me no foule play, friends'.[132] If this plea is directed at the servants, then Shakespeare can be observed feeding conflicting signals to the players in such a way that reproduces the disquieting predicament in which the servants are caught: on the one hand, they owe their service to Cornwall who is their master; on the other, following Cornwall would mean participating in and even facilitating an act that any decent human being knows is beyond repugnant.[133]

The problem thus concerns the fact that the servants are not willing but *unwilling* participants in Cornwall's and Regan's atrocities. According to Michael Neill, in the early modern period, it was generally assumed that 'male domestic servants *voluntarily* surrendered any claim they might have to authority over their own lives', whilst Judith Weil has similarly observed that 'many servants were thought to have given up autonomy.'[134] As Weil further

[132] A similar question about who is being addressed occurs when Cornwall delivers his threat – 'Villaine, thou shalt finde' – which is sometimes assumed to be directed at Gloucester. Coming as it does after Cornwall has ordered the servants to bind Gloucester, however, it might be that the threat is delivered to one of the servants in response to their resistance, carrying the sense not only of somebody who is of debased moral character but of somebody who is low-born (i.e., 'villein').

[133] I have assumed, of course, that the servants are Cornwall's rather than Gloucester's. M.M. Mahood disagrees, arguing that 'the distant way they speak of Cornwall as "this man" and Regan as "she"' in the Q-only passage demonstrates as such, as does 'their knowledge of the Bedlam outside the gates.' This is not entirely persuasive. It is possible for a servant to resent and dislike a master, as no doubt these servants resent and hate Cornwall. Their knowledge of 'the Bedlam', meanwhile, doesn't really prove anything, even if we are to treat Q1 one as a source of answers for things that the two other texts stay silent about, which we need not. The servant who stands up to Cornwall explicitly claims to have served him all his life, and it is therefore undeniable that this servant is Cornwall's. Maybe the others are Gloucester's or Cornwall's – the text is not clear and leaves open the possibility that they could be either man's servants. M. M. Mahood, *Bit Parts in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.170.

[134] Neill bases this claim on William Gouge's treatise *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), where Gouge writes that during the term of their service, servants 'are not their own … Both their persons and their actions are their

stipulates, however, this view tended to be qualified by the idea that within very exceptional circumstances, it was possible for a servant to justifiably resist a master's command.[135] The framing of this sequence around 'action driven by the activity of commanding' gets, then, right to the heart of an ethical debate about when and in what circumstances disobedience is morally acceptable.[136] It is, of course, a theme that runs throughout the play – as when Cordelia refuses to participate in the love test, or when Kent demonstrates his 'good service' by disobeying the king at the start of the play.[137]

In what is yet another inversion in the 'natural' order of things, true service manifests itself in acts of disobedience, as the servant who eventually challenges Cornwall makes clear:

> Hold your hand, my Lord:
> I have serv'd you ever since I was a Childe:
> But better service have I never done you,
> Then now to bid you hold. (TLN 2145-2148)

As an instrument of apparent 'directorial control', Shakespeare's exploitation of commands in this sequence opens up a profound moral debate about what really constitutes 'true service'. This contrasts with de Vega's *Fuente Ovejuna*, where Flores and Ortuño find little reason to question their master's authority, and will not, when the Commander gives the order for Mengo to be flogged, stripped and tied to a tree, under any circumstances disobey. It is true, of course, that de Vega like Shakespeare is also interested in the ethical tension emerging out of scenarios where those who lack power are commanded to act against their will by those who wield power over them, as when Mengo is ordered to drop the sling. And yet, Shakespeare's exploration of

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master's.' Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p.22; Judith Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.8.

[135] Weil, *Service and Dependency in Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 8.

[136] Hallet and Hallet, p.185.

[137] Jonas A. Barish and Marshall Waingrow, '"Service" in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 9.3 (1958), pp.347–55 (p.349).

this issue goes still a little deeper. In de Vega's play, it is after all Mengo's designated role to be part of the villagers' resistance, to stand up to and to eventually kill their oppressor. This means that de Vega allocates these potential acts of disobedience to those players whose characters' very role – their assigned place within the fiction - is to resist, fight back and rebel. Yet in Shakespeare, the ethical dilemma brought about by Cornwall's commands is in many ways much more sophisticated, and much more morally complex and transgressive in that the potential act of disobedience comes from those whose normative role is to do as they are told, to be nothing more than 'the instrument or slave another's will.'[138] When it has been assumed that the servants will automatically 'bind' Gloucester, both editors and critics have done the servants a disservice: firstly, by failing to acknowledge their possession of agency, and secondly, by failing to realise that they might act upon this agency by making a choice to actively resist Cornwall's commands. The truth is that Shakespeare knows better than this. He knows that servants, like the rest of us, are moral actors in the world and are not – as no one is – free of the responsibility that comes with the burden of choice.[139]

Richard II: The Deposition Scene

The compulsion of the servants to act out Cornwall's will is comparable to the moment in *Richard II* when Richard is urged to abdicate. Of course, Richard is not a servant but a king. As a result of his inexorable decline from power, however, Richard ends up in a situation where he is unable to act autonomously. Like the servants, he too is repeatedly ordered to act against his own conscience, and at times, he will attempt to assert his agency by resisting as he is

[138] Weil, p.125.

[139] The very notion of ethics, as Patrick Gray and John D. Cox have commented, 'assumes human choice as foundational.' Patrick Gray and John D. Cox, 'Introduction: Rethinking Shakespeare and Ethics', in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Ethics*, ed. by Patrick Gray and John D. Cox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 3.

commanded. This is most apparent when Northumberland repeatedly urges Richard to read the articles of his crimes:

> *Rich*.
> What more remains?
> *North*. No more: but that you reade
> These Accusations, and these grievous Crymes,
> Committed by your Person, and your fellowers,
> Against the State, and Profit of this Land:
> That by confessing the, the Soules of men
> May deeme, that you are worthily depos'd. (TLN 2143-2149)

The irony is that the attempt to depose Richard requires Richard's consent. In fact, there is no better demonstration of this than Northumberland's oxymoronic wish to have Richard 'worthily depos'd'. The implication is that if Bolingbroke is to have legitimacy as king, then it is necessary that Richard should go along with the deposition willingly – an anxiety further voiced when Northumberland responds to Bolingbroke's 'urge it no more' (2193) by claiming that the 'Commons will not then be satisfy'd' (2194). The challenge facing Bolingbroke's faction is not quite so straightforward as simply compelling Richard to abdicate. Rather, the problem is that Richard must somehow be compelled or coerced into willing this for himself, as Bolingbroke understands better than anyone: 'I thought you had been willing to resigne' (2111). Thus, whilst the dramatic scenario is concentrated on the question of Richard's will – and specifically, the paradoxical quandary of how and whether Richard can be willed to will what he doesn't – Northumberland's repeated commands for Richard to 'reade o're these Articles' (2165) and 'Read o're this Paper' (2191) exposes the contradictions inherent in the attempt to depose the king.

In Marlowe's *Edward II*, a comparable situation emerges when King Edward is forced to sign the papers calling for Gaveston's banishment. Here, the same sort of commands for the king to yield occur as his nobles repeatedly order him to 'Subscribe as we have done to his exile' (4.53); 'Come, come, subscribe' (4.75); 'For shame, subscribe' (82).[140] Yet unlike Richard, who offers the crown but never reads the articles aloud, Edward eventually succumbs: 'Instead of ink, I'll write it with my tears' (4.87); 'Tis done, and now, accursed hand, fall off!' (4.88). As such, Richard's decline from power is much more ambiguous, and in the end, it isn't clear whether he abdicates or is forcefully deposed. Moreover, this is associated with the way Marlowe's nobles lack the sense of moral apprehension that can be found haunting the consciences of Shakespeare's nobles. Indeed in Marlowe's play, it doesn't really matter to the nobles whether or not the king is a willing actor of the actions he is incited to perform. All that really matters is that he performs them: 'Curse him if he refuse, and then may we depose him and elect another king' (54-55). There is a telling contrast between Mortimer's 'depose him' and Northumberland's 'worthily depos'd'. In Marlowe's play, we therefore encounter an open declaration in favour of deposing the king, whereas in Shakespeare, one finds a curious preference for legality mixed with genuine apprehension about whether the king should be, and indeed can be, toppled.

In *Richard II*, this ambivalence is further exacerbated by the uncertainty surrounding Bolingbroke's actions, and by extension, his intentions. As Peter Lake observes:

> What the play leaves open is the question of when precisely in his progress from aggrieved subject, to armed petitioner, to rebel, to rival claimant to the throne, Bolingbroke had first formulated his intention to depose Richard and claim the throne for himself.[141]

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[140] Quotes taken from Christopher Marlowe, 'Edward the Second', in *The Complete Plays*, ed. by Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey (London: Penguin, 2003), pp.397–505.
[141] Peter Lake, *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage: Power and Succession in the History Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), p.256.

According to Lake, it is only after being commanded by York to 'Ascend' (2031) Richard's throne that Bolingbroke 'acknowledges or owns', for the first time, 'his designs on the throne' by declaring that 'In Gods Name, Ile ascend the Regall Throne' (2033).[142] The precise significance of Bolingbroke's response to York's invitation will differ, however, depending how exactly the line is delivered and whether it is a sentiment which he actually acts upon. As Lake goes on to say, there is a 'fundamental ambiguity' to the form which Bolingbroke's words take: on the one hand, his reply might express a 'pious warning against even contemplating usurpation', or it might, on the other, 'betoken a willingness to follow wherever the logic of events might lead, even if that meant eventually seizing or 'accepting' the crown.[143]

Yet besides the words themselves, there is also a question about whether Bolingbroke is, in the end, willing to act to achieve his desired aim and even whether his articulated wish is uttered publicly for all to hear. After all, one possibility is that Bolingbroke delivers this as an aside, in which case, he might express a private wish to be king but fail to act upon this wish. And yet alternatively, the player might have interpreted this line as an instruction, prompting him to move towards and perhaps sit in the throne. Whilst Richard is compelled to renounce his crown, it is equally the case that Bolingbroke is commanded and encouraged – perhaps contrary to his own inclinations – to fulfil his kingly ambitions. Imagining that Bolingbroke does ascend the throne, then this in turn will become what prompts Carlise to declare his opposition: 'Mary, Heaven forbid' (2034). Like Richard, Bolingbroke might equivocate. At first, maybe he follows York's command before restraining himself when commanded by Carlise. Or alternatively, it might be that Carlise directly intervenes, perhaps standing in Bolingbroke's way when declaring his opposition: 'Prevent it, resist it, and let it not be so' (2068). The biggest crux of all, however, occurs when Richard orders Bolingbroke to take hold of his crown:

[142] Lake, p.256.
[143] Lake, p.256.

Give me the Crown. Here Cousin, seize y Crown:
Here Cousin, on this side my Hand, on that side thine. (TLN 2103-2104)

The image of king and king-to-be sharing possession of the crown and staring down its hollow centre is one of the most iconic in the Shakespearean canon. It might seem odd, therefore, to imagine a scenario in which Bolingbroke doesn't take hold of the crown. And yet, if Bolingbroke was to resist Richard's orders, he would thereby reveal his reluctance to depose Richard. Meanwhile, it also true – though the detail is easy to miss - that at some point the crown must be returned to Richard's head, anticipating the moment when he offers the crown to his challenger:

I give this heavie Weight from off my Head,
And this unwieldie Scepter from my Hand,
The pride of Kingly sway from out my Heart.
With mine owne Teares I wash away my Balme,
With mine owne Tongue denie my Sacred State,
With mine owne Breath release all dutious Oathes;
All Pompe and Majestie I doe forsweare: (TLN 2123-2132)

Before he delivers these lines, someone has to be responsible for placing the crown back on Richard's head. Maybe that someone is Richard himself; but it could also be Bolingbroke. In the latter case, clearly this has important repercussions for how Bolingbroke's actions provide a window onto his motives and intentions. He might, for instance, first place his hands on the crown when ordered by Richard. But what would the consequences be if Bolingbroke, recognising Richard's unwillingness to abdicate – 'I thought you had been willing to resigne' – was then to return the crown to Richard's head? Assuming that Bolingbroke's actions are crucial in determining not whether but *how* he becomes king, the point is that there exist various

possible courses of action – various alternative histories, if you like – via which this outcome might be reached. Thus whilst Bolingbroke might refuse to take the crown and sceptre, thereby proving his unwillingness to depose Richard 'unworthily', the playtext simultaneously leaves open possibilities in which Bolingbroke's actions have the opposite effect. Same outcome, only reached in different ways. Meanwhile the final, conclusive sign of Bolingbroke's rise and Richard's fall comes at the scene's close, when Richard commands Bolingbroke to give him leave:

> *Rich*. Then give me leave to goe.
> *Bull*. Wither?
> *Rich*. Wither you will, so I were from your sights.
> *Bull*. Goe some of you, convey him to the Tower. (TLN 2238-2241)

Note now how the focus is no longer on Richard's but Bolingbroke's *will*. A reversal in the men's roles is signified by an inversion in who has the power and authority to command who. In this way, it is not without irony that Richard's final order comes in the form of a request, feigning to command where at the command of his all-powerful subject.

Isabella in *Measure for Measure*

Another character who is repeatedly called upon to act as others bid her is Isabella. The question as to whether she will accept the duke's proposal at the end of the play is familiar enough. Yet throughout the entire play, all that Isabella ever really craves is autonomy – control over her own mind, body and choices. The fact is, however, that almost all of Isabella's interactions throughout the play involve some sort of attempt on the part of others – especially men – to deprive her of this. As soon as she makes her first appearance, this is apparent when Francisca the Nun instructs her to answer the door to Lucio:

It is a mans voice: gentle *Isabella*
Turne you the key, and know his businesse of him;
You may; I may not: you are yet unsworne: (TLN 356-359)

Francisca's commands for Isabella to 'Turne you the key' and 'know his businesse of him' represent a rupture in her hitherto secluded existence. This is a rupture which is largely associated with the intrusion of men into her life, and to this extent, Francisca's command for Isabella to 'answere him' (364) is something which will come to almost define Isabella's entire existence, as men repeatedly call upon her to 'answer' them. Upon opening the door, Isabella's life outside the nunnery is one that constantly finds her caught between obedience and resistance, between doing as others bid her and her own efforts to cling onto her agency and independence.

Apart from the duke's proposal – or rather his command - for Isabella to 'Give me your hand' (2891) at the end of the play, the place where this is perhaps most evident is when Isabella first visits Angelo to plead for her brother's life. When they depart at the end of the first act, Lucio instructs Isabella how she should conduct herself in her next scene:

Goe to Lord *Angelo*
And let him learne to know, when Maidens sue
Men give like gods: but when they weepe and kneele,
All their petitions, are as freely theirs
As they themselves would owe them. (TLN 435-439)

The direction for Isabella to weep and kneel might be taken as an indication of her actions when she first petitions Angelo in 2.2. This seems unlikely, however, when stood beside her the whole time is Lucio, eagerly prompting her to plead with Angelo more forcefully:

Isab. Oh just, but severe Law:

I had a brother then; heaven keepe your honour.

Luc. Give't not ore so: to him againe, entreat him,
Kneele downe before him, hang upon his gowne,
You are too cold: if you should need a pin,
You could not with more tame a tongue desire it:
To him, I say. (TLN 788-794)

What is notable is how Lucio's commands are embedded with prompts, thereby compelling the player of Isabella to do as he says. In this way, whilst the Isabella-player is likely to have inferred from his own line – 'heaven keepe your honour' – that he should turn and begin to depart, tension is produced when the player receives a conflicting instruction from Lucio: 'To him, I say.' The prompts delivered at the player – both of which demand him to do different things – thereby encapsulate the very predicament that Isabella finds herself unable to escape from, desirous to be controlled by her own will only, but constantly finding herself at the mercy of others'. Thus, there is a sort of symbiosis here between the 'theatrical' and 'fictional' dynamics of the language, as Lucio both 'prompts' Isabella's behaviour and the actor is prompted to act upon the directives fed to him. The question is whether these prompts embedded within Lucio's speech *must* be followed, or on the contrary, whether the player of Isabella might plausibly have chosen to resist. The player would, of course, have known that he was required to persist with his supplication. And yet, he might at the same time have chosen *not* to act upon Lucio's precise instructions to 'Kneele downe' and 'hang upon his gowne'. This might serve to portray Isabella as seeking in earnest to get her brother freed, whilst equally, she would be seen attempting to cling to any vestiges of autonomy that she can, perhaps by stubbornly refusing to do precisely as Lucio commands. Some lines later, the player is presented with a similar choice about how to respond when Lucio encourages – maybe forces? – Isabella to 'touch' Angelo:

Ang. Pray you be gone.

Isab. I would to heaven I had your potencie,
And you were *Isabell*: should it then be thus?
No: I would tell what 'twere to be a judge,
And what a prisoner.

Luc. I. touch him: there's the vaine. (TLN 816-821)

There are multiple possibilities that hinge upon the word 'touch'. It could simply be that Isabella has finally managed to move or sway Angelo, which he might demonstrate through a visible show of discomfort. Alternatively, it is possible that Isabella has physically touched Angelo, with Lucio uttering this remark as an observation, or if not, then as a command: 'I. touch him'. How exactly Lucio expects Isabella to 'touch' Angelo is uncertain, however, once it is realised that the word quibbles over further numerous semantic possibilities. 'To touch' could, on one reading, mean to test the purity of something, in which case Lucio is inviting Isabella to test Angelo's moral integrity as though marking the quality of gold or silver. Yet beyond this, 'touch' can also mean to bring about an effect, or, more provocatively, it could carry a euphemistic suggestion of sexual contact.[144]

The player of Isabella is therefore forced to consider not only whether but *how* to respond to this command. Moreover, whether he chooses to follow or resist will, to some extent at least, feed into the broader issue surrounding Isabella's attempts – and her degree of success at – retaining control of her own autonomy. There are, after all, countless moments in this play when Isabella is pressured into doing things that she doesn't want to, whether that be Angelo's demand for her to 'lay downe the treasures of your body' (1104) or when her own brother requests that she sacrifice her virginity to 'let me live' (1353). In the event that she repeatedly

[144] All of these meanings are cited in the Oxford English Dictionary. 'Touch, v. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary' <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/touch_v> [accessed 20 September 2024].

refuses to do as she is directed, the unusual regularity with which the part of Isabella is subjected to command-prompts has the potential to place a stark visual emphasis on her fierce independence, or perhaps, depending on one's perspective, her stubbornness. After the duke informs her – falsely – that her brother has been executed in 4.3, there is again the possibility for Isabella to put on a show of resistance, with the duke's superficially benign attempts to comfort her perhaps producing instead a vitriolic show of resentment when he commands her to 'drie your eyes' (2217) and to 'Command these fretting waters from your eies' (2237). This is suggested not least in Isabella's furious pledge to 'pluck out' (106) Angelo's eyes. One of the final, most curious examples of another character attempting to control Isabella's actions, however, comes not from a man but from a fellow woman, when Mariana pleads with her to kneel towards the end of the play:

> *Mar*. Oh my good Lord, sweet *Isabell*, take my part,
> Lend me your knees, and all my life to come,
> I'll lend you all my life to doe you service.
> *Duke*. Against all sence you doe importune her,
> Should she kneele downe, in mercie of this fact,
> Her Brothers ghost, his paved bed would breake,
> And take her hence in horror.
> *Mar*. *Isabell*:
> Sweet *Isabel*, doe yet but kneele by me,
> Hold up your hands, say nothing: I'll speake all.
> They say best men are moulded out of faults,
> And for the most, become much more the better
> For being a little bad: So may my husband.
> Oh *Isabel*: will you not lend a knee? (TLN 2821-2834)

Most editions prefer an interpretation in which Isabella kneels, no doubt in the expectation that Isabella will be keen to show her female solidarity with Mariana. But as Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern have argued, there is instead the possibility that 'Isabella might remain standing throughout, immovably resistant, so that even her eventual speech of pardon is spoken powerfully on her own terms.'[145] Yet by remaining standing, it is far from self-evident that Isabella *is* acting 'on her own terms', when in fact, she has been explicitly warned not to kneel by the duke: 'Should she kneele downe … Her Brothers ghost, her paved bed would breake, / And take her hence in horror.' As such, Isabella is faced with an impossible situation. Whether or not she kneels, the point is that somebody else has already made this decision for her. In this way, the 'choice' – though what sort of 'choice' is it really? – focalises the nightmare that she has endured throughout the entire play, wherein she has strived so hard to do things, indeed, 'on her own terms'. In this last scene, the contradicting signals directed at the player – on the one hand from Mariana for her to kneel, and on the other, from the duke for her to desist – captures Isabella in a situation where there is no option available but for her to act as somebody else demands. This reflects the fact that throughout this play, Isabella is given choices, although these are choices which she never asks for and which she never really wanted to have to make in the first place. To this extent, the option left open to the player at the end of the play – to marry, or not to marry – is not especially unique, but is rather the culmination of a series of choices that the player has been forced to make throughout the play, at once pressured to act upon the prompts that come from other players in the form of commands, though simultaneously invited to put on a show of defiance.

[145] Palfrey and Stern, p.450.

Crowd Scenes

One of the places where commands are most frequently utilised to orchestrate onstage activity is during crowd scenes. In *Hamlet*, this is demonstrated shortly after Laertes has learnt about the death of his father, when he barges onto the stage and struggles to control the mob he has incited:

> *Noise within. Enter Laertes*
>
> *King*. The doors are broke.
>
> *Laer*. Where is the King, sirs? Stand you all without.
>
> *All*. No, let's come in.
>
> *Laer*. I pray you give me leave.
>
> *Al*. We will, we will.
>
> *Laer*. I thank you: Keepe the doore.
>
> Oh thou vilde King, give me my Father. (TLN 2851-2858)

Although Laertes' sway over the crowd is signified via the theatrical signals embedded within his commands, the fragility of his authority is exposed when his first command – 'Stand you all without' – is disobeyed and his followers are instead prompted to 'come in', threatening to overwhelm the situation before Laertes manages to pacify them. Through an emphasis on the conflicting instructions transmitted to the players of the crowd, the staging thus comes dangerously close to getting out of hand until, that is, the mob itself declares its intent to relent: 'We will, we will.' In the likely event that a handful of extras had to stand in for a sizeable crowd, the dialogue first instructs Laertes' followers to fight their way onto the stage before being directed to stand by one of the exits. This would have made it seem as though the mob had begun to trickle through the stage doors, producing the illusion that just beyond the stage, there awaited a huge crowd of rebellious subjects.

In fact, this ability to direct scenes involving putatively large crowds is evident very early in Shakespeare's career, as exemplified in the scenes revolving around Cade's rebellion in *2 Henry VI*.

When he enters with his followers at the beginning of 4.7, Cade immediately asserts his authority by ordering his men to 'pull down the Savoy: / Others to'th Innes of Court' (2635-6) and directing them 'Away, / burne all the Records of the Realme' (2646-7). In response, no doubt the minor players who represented the members of the crowd rushed off the stage to the imaginary locations specified, again producing the illusion of a much larger crowd spilling beyond the borders of the stage. Thus, Cade's command over his men is inextricable from his adopted role as a theatrical prompter, as his utterances – 'Knocke him downe there' (2624); 'Come, let's away' (2632); 'Give him a box o'th'eare' (2719) – direct the movements and actions of his peers. As the scene progresses, these are actions which become increasingly barbarous. With the revolt quickly descending into an orgy of indiscriminate violence, Cade instructs his followers to commit all manner of atrocities on his behalf - the climax coming when the rebel leader demands the removal of Saye's head:

> Away with him, he ha's a Familiar un-
> der his Tongue, he speakes not a Gods name. Goe, take
> him away I say, and strike off his head presently, and then
> breake into his Sonne in Lawes house, Sir *Iames Cromer*.
> and strike off his head, and bring them both upon two
> poles hither.
>
> *All*. It shall be done.
>
> *Say*. Ah Countrimen: If when you make your prair's,
> God should be so obdurate as your selves:
> How would it fare with your departed soules,
> And therefore yet relent, and save my life.
>
> *Cade*. Away with him, and do as I command ye: the

prondest Peere in the Realme, shall not weare a head on
his shoulders, unlesse he pay me tribute: there shall not
a maid be married, but she shall pay to me her Mayden-
head ere they have it: Men shall hold of mee in Capite.
and we charge and command, that their wives be as free
as heart can wish, or tongue can tell. (TLN 2740-2757)

In modern editions, a stage direction is usually added following Cade's final command – 'Away with him, and do as I command ye' – stipulating that one or more of his followers will exit. That Cade addresses his followers with the plural 'ye', however, is significant in light of the folio direction that occurs once Saye and Cromer have been beheaded offstage:

Enter one with the heads.

Cade. But is not this braver:
Let them kisse one another: For they lov'd well
When they were alive. Now part them againe,
Least they consult about the giving up
Of some more Townes in France. (TLN 2763-2768)

So, whilst Cade orders numerous men to fulfil his will, only one returns. This should alert us to the possibility that many of Cade's men are not, on closer inspection, willing participants in his bloodthirsty revolt at all. In fact, as though this is the moment at which Cade's followers begin to question the moral authority of their self-appointed leader, there is scope for the crowd to demonstrate its ambivalence and hesitancy when Cade repeatedly delivers the order for Saye to be taken away and his head struck off. This might involve a few of the men first grabbing hold of Saye – 'It shall be done' – and dragging him across the stage, perhaps then changing their minds once Saye has begged them to spare him: 'yet relent, and save my life'. When Cade responds furiously by ordering the men to 'do as I command thee', there is no guarantee that

he will get the reaction he wants. Some of the men might stay put and resist. Others, perhaps, might leave the stage and never be seen again. Though Saye will, in the end of course, lose his head, there is therefore a question mark placed over the true extent of the crowd's willingness or unwillingness to take things to Cade's next level. This is to confute the idea that Cade's followers are simply instruments of his will. When Cade demands that the decapitated heads be made to 'kisse one another', there is nothing stopping the commanded player from either hesitating or resisting outright. Maybe eventually he is forced to perform this demeaning act, or maybe one of the other men volunteers to do it for him. In any case, for all that Cade's command over his followers seems absolute, there exists the potential for individual acts of disobedience to expose cracks in his authority, especially, as here, when his men are commanded to perform actions that are degrading and shameful.

In contrast to the Cade rebellion, later in his career, Shakespeare begins to hint at the potential power of a crowd to act of its own will rather than being controlled by any single individual. In the crowd scene written by Shakespeare for *Sir Thomas More*, for example, the citizens do not so much carry out a commander's instructions as express a will that is their own. The scenario differs from that in *2 Henry VI*, then, in that the main emphasis is on the ruling classes' attempts to bring the lower orders to heel - 'hold!' (6.32); 'keep the peace' (6.34); 'hear me!' (6.1) – with the prentices seeking to exercise their collective power by resisting these commands: by refusing to be silenced, say, or maybe even rushing at the Lord Mayor when he commands them to 'Hold, in the king's name, hold!' (6.32).[146] When Lincoln and the other nobles prove inadequate at commanding the prentices 'to a stillness' (6.61), this means that the task is left up to More, whose pacification of the mob is ultimately signalled when he delivers the players of the crowd with a series of prompts that it is expected they will follow:

[146] All quotations of this play are taken from William Shakespeare, Anthony Munday, and Henry Chettle, *Sir Thomas More*, ed. by John Jowett (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011).

Wash your foul minds with tears, and those same
hands
That you, like rebels, lift against the peace,
Lift up for peace; and your unreverent knees,
Make them your feet. (6.122-125)

That the prentices are persuaded by More is clear from the line they collectively utter when he has finished speaking, with a change in their attitude from one of hostile aggression to one of Christian goodwill: 'Faith, 'a says true. Let's do as we may be / done by' (161-162). Nonetheless, at this point in his speech, More still has his work cut out, and it may be the case that his commands will fall upon death ears. In a scenario where these directives are followed, however, then More's ability to command the prentices to weep, kneel and lift their hands will provide a powerful visual demonstration of the crowd's submission to his authority, his political clout in bringing the mob to heel mirrored in the way that his words prompt the actions of his theatrical peers.

A character who is much less astute at the subtle, clearly theatrical art of controlling the mob is Coriolanus. Throughout this play, the citizens of Rome obviously have a huge part to play, with Shakespeare keen to individualise particular members of the crowd by having specific citizens take a lead in directing their peers. This is evident from the play's opening protest over the lack of corn. Yet, the biggest showdown between Coriolanus and 'the people' occurs in the third act, when the Tribunes demand that Coriolanus be arrested and the general draws his sword:

Brut. Sir, those cold ways,
That seeme like prudent helpes, are very poisonous,
Where the Disease is violent. Lay hands upon him,
And beare him to the Rock. *Corio. Draws his Sword.*
Corio. No, Ile die here:

There's some among you have beheld me fighting,
Come trie upon your selves, what you have seene me.
Mene. Downe with that Sword, Tribunes withdraw
a while.
Brut. Lay hands upon him.
Men. Helpe *Martius*, helpe: you that be noble, helpe
him young and old.
All. Downe with him, downe with him. *Exeunt*. (TLN 1936-1948)

There is an opportunity here for Coriolanus to take the moral high ground. Yes, he draws his sword in response to Brutus' provocation. But this makes it only more significant that no comparable direction is provided when Menenius demands Coriolanus to drop his weapon. The most obvious reading is that he doesn't, thereby prompting Brutus to reiterate his call for him to be apprehended. A far more interesting possibility, however, could involve Coriolanus following Menenius' command, which then reverses the scenario so that Brutus delivers the order to 'Lay hands upon him' once Coriolanus has disarmed himself. There exists, in other words, the potential for either man to play the role of the provocateur, culminating in the citizens' call to take Coriolanus down – a call which Coriolanus might have brought upon himself, or which alternatively, might be unjustified in light of his goodwill gesture.

Antony's Funeral Oration

This brings us finally to Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar*. In contrast to the nobles' attempts to pacify the mob in *Coriolanus* and *Sir Thomas More*, Antony's job is not to quell but to incite the crowd, with the result being a masterclass in the art of demagoguery. The problem facing Antony is that he has to somehow persuade his listeners to act out his will without letting them know that this is what he is doing. It is unsurprising, then, that Antony

relies heavily on the rhetorical device of apophasis, which involves his repeated denial that he is inciting the plebians' passions. Of course, through these denials, the result is that Antony is able to stir the people into a rage whilst refuting that this is his intention: 'If I were dispos'd to stirre / Your hearts and minds to Mutiny and Rage' (1658); 'let me not stirre (you up / To such a sodaine Flood of Mutiny' (1747-8). The result of this, it seems, is that Antony is able to lure the crowd into the belief that it is acting out its own will, when in fact realising his. How Antony is able to pull off this coup becomes even more apparent once attention is paid to the commands exchanged between Antony and people. It is not just, then – or even predominantly – that Antony's oration is designed to 'persuade' his listeners. It is more as though the whole episode depicts a power struggle between the demagogue and his followers wherein Antony's challenge involves granting 'the people' the illusion of power and authority. To appreciate this, it needs to be remembered that Antony begins his oration on the backfoot. When he ascends the podium, it is the plebians who demonstrate *their* authority by giving Antony leave to speak:

1 Stay ho, and let us heare *Mark Antony*.
3 Let him go up into the publike Chaire,
Wee'l heare him: Noble *Antony* go up. (TLN 1596-1598)

At this moment it is the plebians who occupy the position of command: firstly, in their willingness to hear what Antony has to say. And secondly, as demonstrated by the third plebian's instruction for Antony to ascend the public chair. To succeed, Antony needs to subvert the plebians' position of command. So rather than resist, Antony's strategy is to let the plebeians have what they think is their way:

Ant. You will compel me then to read the Will:
Then make a Ring about the Corpes of *Caesar*,
And let me shew you him that made the Will:

Shall I descend? And will you give me leave?

All. Come downe.

2 Descend.

3 You shall have leave.

4 A Ring, stand round.

1 Stand from the hearse, stand from the Body.

2 Roome for *Antony*, most Noble *Antony*.

Ant. Nay presse not so upon me, stand farre off.

All. Stand backe: roome, beare backe. (TLN 1694-1705)

On the surface it is Antony who is at the command of the plebians. It is he who must ask for their permission to come amongst them, with the plebians ordering him to 'Come downe' and 'Descend'. The irony, however, is that the power dynamic between the sender and recipient of these commands has now been reversed. As he puts on a show of reluctance to read the will, Antony outrageously claims to have been compelled to do so against his own wishes. His first line – 'You will compel me then to read the will' – can notably be read in two ways, either 1) as an acknowledgement of the plebians wishes ('would you therefore like me to read the will?'), which is emphasised in some editions by the addition of a question mark, or 2) the statement can be read as providing the plebians with a subliminal order ('make me read the will').

Whilst Antony's language is thus designed to conceal double-meanings and hide his true intentions, this allows him to contrive a situation where the plebians are led to believe that they are the ones in control. When they continue to demand that Antony read the will – 'The will, the Will; we will heare *Caesars* Will' (1675) – the effect, as Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern have eloquently put it, is like 'the fissioning of an atom into an explosion', ultimately resulting in the conflation of the plebians' will with Antony's, and yes, even the dead Caesar's in what

amounts to an 'unstoppable will of 'mutiny''.[147] The point, however, is that the plebians are thereby led to believe not only that they are in control of Antony, but more importantly, that they are in control of themselves. As Palfrey and Stern have further noted, it is of course the case that this scene 'is *about* the power of theatre to move great assemblies', with 'Antony's techniques […] there for all to see' as he 'knowingly' plays 'the part of the demagogue'.[148] Yet for Shakespeare, at the heart of what demagoguery is all about is something more than the theatricality of it all. If anything, demagoguery consists of the power to make 'the people' believe in the illusion that they are acting of their own will and volition, when in reality, their will belongs to the demagogue to whom they have unwillingly relinquished it.

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This chapter has looked at two forms of implied stage direction. The first concerns the actions stipulated within a player's own part, whilst conversely, there are those prompts transmitted between parts which take the form of one character commanding another to perform a specified action. In both cases, the extent of control that these prompts exert over players correspondingly reflects the sort of agency possessed by characters: if a player is left with no choice about whether he should or should not act upon a specific directive, then this narrows not only his own ability to determine his character's actions but usually also tells us something about whether – and to what degree - that character possesses autonomy. Even fairly standard gestures – kneeling or kissing, say – will capture points of tension where there is something contingent at stake: is a character willing to show deference, and for how long? Will a kiss be reciprocated? When will a character rise and at whose command? Though many of the gestures contained within a player's part are mandatory, they will often require choices about things like

[147] Palfrey and Stern, p.170.
[148] Palfrey and Stern, p.170.

timing and the precise demeanour in which an action will be performed – things which can and will alter the significance of those actions.

Where the question of agency and the possibility of choice comes most to the fore, however, is when a command delivered from one character to another will indicate to the actor playing the latter character what actions to perform. The occurrence of these prompts becomes, during sequences structured around commands – the blinding of Gloucester, Richard's deposition, Isabella's supplication of Angelo – ethically consequential in that they involve one character's compulsion of another to act out his (and it is usually his) will. Whilst this may be unsurprising, command-prompts can thus provide an important interpretive window onto the dynamics of power between the dramatis personae: when a character demands another to perform a specified action, then this might be taken as an indication of the power which that character possesses to force, pressure and coerce another character to do his or her bidding.

There are, of course, many uncontroversial examples of commands being used in Shakespeare to provide instruction to players – the Boatswain's orders to the Mariners at the start of *The Tempest* might be one example, whilst the commands delivered by Paulina to awaken the statue of Hermione might be another. Yet throughout this chapter, I have focused on examples that force us to call into question how commands function as a technique of theatrical instruction. Mostly, this has involved calling into question the assumption that these were directives which the players would necessarily have to act upon in all circumstances. When we do make this assumption, the result is to reject the possibility (before it has even been considered) that players might have had the opportunity to make alternative choices, thereby giving rise to different scenarios in which characters resist the power exerted over them and instead assert their own moral agency. It has long been argued, after all, that the player of Isabella is granted a choice at the end of *Measure for Measure* whether or not to accept the duke's proposal. And yet, rarely has this led to reflection about other cases where characters

might potentially make a choice to resist the power that others attempt to assert over them. In the end, perhaps what this suggests is that the very category of the implied stage direction – being as it is embedded with assumptions about people's partiality to power and authority – is the wrong way to go about thinking about commands altogether.

Chapter 3

Editing Shakespeare's Stage Directions:

A 'Modal Realist' Approach?

At the beginning of this thesis, I highlighted some of the potential benefits of probing Shakespearean possibility through the lens of David Lewis' 'modal realism' – the notion that every way a world could possibly be is a way that some world *is*. One of the great provocations of a realist approach to possible worlds is that it forces us to question our own ethical presuppositions. By inviting us to take the notion of possible worlds at face value – to accept, that is, the existence of other worlds that are no more or less real than are own – Lewis' philosophy leaves us with no room to avoid the ethically complex and at times uncomfortable questions that an honest engagement with Shakespeare's 'myriad-mind' requires. In his book *Counterfactuals*, Lewis makes it abundantly clear that he intends his 'modal realism' to be taken literally:

> When I profess realism about possible worlds, I mean to be taken literally. Possible worlds are what they are, and not some other thing … Our actual world is only one world among others. We call it alone actual not because it differs in kind from all the rest but because it is the world we inhabit.[149]

A modal realist is someone who believes in a plurality of actualities. The point is that no single possibility is in any sense truer than any other because they are all, in some world at least, realised in actuality. As such, the result of modal realism is to establish a sort of equality or

[149] Lewis, *Counterfactuals*, p.85.

equivalence in the ontological status of various alternative possibilities.[150] For we as Shakespearean practitioners – critics, editors, directors – what this means is that we are ultimately in no position to pick and choose which preferred alternatives we'd like to accept as real.

A further benefit of accepting the premises of Lewis' modal realism, then, is that doing so will heighten the degree of objective clarity which we bring to our encounters with Shakespeare's textual 'blind spots'. There is, from a Lewisian point of view, no reason to favour one possible reading over any multitude of others, all of which have a valid claim upon some dramatic world's 'reality' so long as they are indeed possible. Ascertaining what can be regarded as possible therefore becomes imperative, although more often than we might care to admit, our modal judgements about what *could be* the case get distorted by what we believe *should be* the case, and nowhere, perhaps, has this been more evident than in the editorial tradition – especially in editors' approaches to stage directions.

Indeed, ever since Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition of Shakespeare, it has been customary for editors to incorporate stage directions into their editions that are absent from their copy-texts. The earliest printed texts, so the argument goes, are deficient in their paucity of stage directions, meaning that there is a need for editors to clarify, and sometimes to disambiguate, aspects of the staging where it is not readily explicit.[151] It is small wonder, then, that stage directions have

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[150] As John Heil observes, '[e]ach of Lewis's universes is the ontological equal of our universe … The choice of labels is unfortunate. Impressionable minds easily read 'possible' as 'ontologically attenuated', lending the alternative universes an undeserved air of innocence. This is not Lewis's intention, however. All those other universes are as upstanding as our own.' John Heil, 'Modal Angst or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Modal Realism', in *Perspectives on the Philosophy of David K. Lewis*, ed. by Helen Beebee and A.R.J. Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp.13–22 (p.17).

[151] This idea has perhaps been best summed up by Stanley Wells: '… ever since Shakespeare's plays were first submitted to the editorial process it has been accepted that the editor of a critical edition has a responsibility to amplify the directions of his original texts.' Wells adds that every editor since Rowe has 'been willing to add directions which have no claim to explicit authenticity, and to adjust the original directions in the interests of clarity and consistency.' More recently, Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods have emphasised how 'modern scholars and editors find the stage directions in surviving plays ''inadequate'''. Stanley Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader: Based on Lectures given at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.63; Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods, 'Introduction', in *Stage*

always been – and no doubt always will be – as Emma Smith has noted, 'a point of considerable editorial intervention.'[152] More often than not, these interventions will be justified on the grounds that they are 'necessary', though in reality, editors typically rely on nothing more than their ability to infer – and indeed make conjectures – about the staging to make their decisions.[153]

The distinction this thesis draws between necessary and contingent action is, therefore, relevant to the editor's task of inferring stage directions from the dialogue. Recovering Shakespeare's dialogic instruction of the players can help inform approaches to the editorial treatment of stage directions because it is from these signals originally directed at the players – in the form prompts, cues, implied gestures – that editors can go about inferring what was, plausibly, staged. And yet, as this thesis is eager to emphasise, it is frequently the case that the action embedded in the dialogue might take any of various possible courses. This means that editors will often face a choice between equally valid alternatives, even where such choices are not always acknowledged. One response to this problem might be to adopt a policy on non-intervention, to simply allow readers to make their own inferences. But such an approach contradicts many of the expectations demanded of modern editions, which conventionally resort to square brackets to indicate when an editor has included a direction absent from his copy-text.[154]

Directions and Shakespearean Theatre, ed. by Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), pp.1-16 (p.3).

[152] Emma Smith, 'Reading Shakespeare's Stage Directions', in *Stage Directions and Shakespearean Theatre*, ed. by Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), p.99.

[153] A similar point has been made by Antony Hammond: 'Even the most conservative of editors may turn out to be prepared to add or alter directions without any *textual* authority, relying rather on his sense of theatrical necessity'. Hammond, pp. 71–99 (p.71).

[154] Sometimes, but not always, and not always consistently. The benefits and drawbacks of square brackets have been surveyed by Leslie Thomson, who puts the Oxford *Complete Works* under the microscope for having abandoned the practice. Leslie Thomson, 'Broken Brackets and 'Mended Texts: Stage Directions in the Oxford Shakespeare', *Renaissance Drama*, 19 (1988), pp.175–93.

This chapter therefore investigates what problems Shakespeare's plurality poses for the editorial treatment of stage directions. What can editors do – and indeed what have they already tried to do – to highlight when there exist conflicting potential lines of action? How, in other words, can stage directions be harnessed as a tool to illustrate the multiplicity of Shakespeare's playtexts? What would be the benefits, but also the limitations of any such approach? To address these questions, in what follows a focus is placed on episodes of implicit violence in the plays – moments of particularly high stakes when an ethical dilemma hinges upon the presence or absence of a stage direction.

'Wilt thou lay hands on me':

Orlando *versus* Oliver & Hamlet *versus* Laertes

Amongst the most contentious places editors have interfered with the staging implicit in the earliest texts is when characters fight with one another. The best example of this comes from the opening scene of *As You Like It*, when Oliver and Orlando engage in an intense physical showdown. In Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition, the moment in question includes two stage directions absent from the folio:

> *Oli*. What, boy! [*menacing with his hand*.
>
> *Orla*. Come, come, elder brother, you are too young in this. [*collaring him*.
>
> *Oli*. Wilt thou lay hands on me, villain?[155]

[155] William Shakespeare, *The Plays of William Shakespeare: In Eight Volumes, with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators*, ed. by Samuel Johnson (Printed for J. and R. Tonson, C. Corbet, H. Woodfall, J. Rivington, R. Baldwin and 6 others in London, 1765), p.6.

The notable thing here is how Johnson attempts to harness these directives to clarify ambiguities in the staging, helping the reader to visualise the action which is supposed to accompany the dialogue. This comes in the form, firstly, of a direction indicating that Oliver gestures menacingly with his hand, whilst in retaliation, Orlando is said to 'collar' him (which is to say, grab him by the neck). As regards the second of these two interventions, Johnson makes what appears to be a straightforward, even obvious inference from the dialogue: some lines later, Oliver will implore Orlando to 'Let me go', with Orlando pledging to 'not take this / hand from thy throat, 'till this other had pulled out / thy tongue'.[156] The inference of implicit stage directions like this from the dialogue is, as I have stressed, routine practice in editing. This needs no better demonstration than the stage directions editors continue to insert into this passage. Yet in doing so, what is striking is how editors' choice of stage directions will vary: in the Oxford *Complete Works*, for instance, a stage direction indicates that Oliver 'assails' Orlando, meanwhile the New Cambridge edition indicates that Oliver is seen '*Raising his hand*.'[157] The Riverside and Norton editions, on the other hand, offer further variations – the former suggesting that Oliver 'strikes' Orlando, and the latter that he 'attacks' him. When attention is paid to the folio, however, what precisely causes the fight is uncertain:

> *Oli*. What Boy. (this.
> *Orl*. Come, come elder brother, you are too yong in
> *Oli*. Wilt thou lay hands on me villaine?
> Orl. I am no villaine: I am the youngest sonne of Sir
> *Rowland de Boys*, he was my father, and he is thrice a vil-
> laine that saies such a father begot villaines: wert thou

[156] *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, p.7.
[157] William Shakespeare, 'As You Like It', in *William Shakespeare, the Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp.655-680 (1.1.49); William Shakespeare, *As You like It*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, Third edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1.1.41; William Shakespeare, 'As You Like It', in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd edn. (Boston, Mass: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), pp.399-436 (1.1.52); William Shakespeare, 'As You Like It', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others, 3rd edn. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), pp.1613-1683 (1.1.44-45).

not my brother, I would not take this hand from thy throat, till this other had puld out thy tongue for saying so, thou hast railed on thy selfe.

Adam Sweet Masters bee patient, for your Fathers remembrance, be at accord.

Oli. Let me go I say.

Orl. I will not till I please: you shall heare mee: my father charg'd you in his will to give good educati-on: you have train'd me like a pezant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities: the spirit of my father growes strong in mee, and I will no longer endure it: therefore allow me such exercises as may be-come a gentleman, or give mee the poore allottery my father left me by testament, with that I will goe buy my fortunes. (TLN 54-74)

As Johnson correctly discerns, from the folio it is clear that at some point, Orlando must grab Oliver by the throat and refuses to let go until some point not specified. Equally, it is important not to downplay the violence with which Orlando threatens to pull out his overpowered brother's tongue: as if the prolonged strangulation wasn't bad enough, Orlando's threat need not be read as a mere figure of speech but might instead have prompted the player to attempt just that, maybe only being deterred by Adam to follow through on his word. This can be excused, however, if we assume that Oliver was the aggressor. It is Orlando, after all, who has been unjustly deprived of what he is owed in his father's will. Neither was it Orlando who started the fight in the first place. On closer inspection, however, matters seem far from this straightforward. In fact, for one thing, Orlando's complaint about how he has been treated by his brother is an accusation only ever brought forward by Orlando himself. As opposed to the stage directions which can be found in the afore mentioned editions, in the Arden third series,

instead a footnote draws attention to the way editors have cast, as Sprague has observed, Oliver as the aggressor. In doing so, the Arden breaks with the precedent first set by Johnson, whilst highlighting how Oliver may either attack Orlando or 'make only a menacing or rude gesture'.[158] These kinds of gestures are not, of course, uncommon in Shakespeare, as when Sampson ignites the riotous armed conflict that opens *Romeo and Juliet* by biting his thumb.[159] Moreover, as part of a similar attempt to highlight both of these possibilities, in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works* – whose novel approach to stage directions I will return to – the reader encounters the stage directions familiar to previous editions combined: '*Raises his hand or hits him*'.[160] The irony here is that whilst seeking to highlight the availability of alternative possibilities, the RSC still falls foul of an editorial blind spot which has persisted since at least Samual Johnson's edition of 1765 – namely, that it is Oliver who is the one to attack Orlando first.

The result, of course, is that readers of most modern editions are presented with a version of this scene in which Orlando acts out of self-defence, maybe taking hold of Oliver before or after the older brother manages to strike. There is nothing especially self-evident about what is implied in the dialogue that necessitates Oliver attacking Orlando, however, rather than the other way around. This is an uncomfortable proposition, as it turns Orlando – the putative 'hero' of the play – into the aggressor, whilst it makes Oliver – the apparent 'villain' – into the victim of an unprovoked attack. Whilst Oliver's 'What boy', then, has tended to be understood as implying some violent attack on his part, the language is sufficiently ambiguous to

[158] Sprague, p.125; William Shakespeare, *As You like It*, ed. by Juliet Dusinberre (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), see p.125 (fn.49).
[159] '*Sam*. Nay, as they dare. I wil bite my Thumb at them, / which is a disgrace to them, if they beare it. / *Abra*. Do you bite your Thumb at us sir? / *Samp*. I do bite my Thumbe, sir' (43-46).
[160] William Shakespeare, 'As You Like It" in *The RSC Shakespeare: William Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2007), pp.476-525 (1.1.35).

accommodate various staging possibilities, including some where Oliver's line instead expresses his shock at having been attacked by Orlando.

The fact that editors have failed, or indeed refused to acknowledge this possibility is telling.[161] And yet across the full range of Shakespeare's plays, indeterminacy about characters' actions can be found at similar ethically contentious moments. In many modern editions of *Hamlet*, for example, it is common for a stage direction to stipulate that Hamlet leaps into Ophelia's grave when he fights with Laertes at her funeral. This derives from the first quarto, where a stage direction absent from Q2 and F makes an appearance: '*Hamlet leaps in after Laertes*'. Add to this the famous elegy in which Burbage is memorably described as having leapt into the grave during a performance, and the decision seems justified.[162] It is not, after all, unusual to encounter stage directions in the so-called 'bad' quartos that are unique to those texts. This is just one reason why the first quartos have sometimes been thought to derive from specific performances.[163] And in this case, it is instructive to compare how the moment plays out in both Q1 and F.

First, the folio:

> *Ham*.

[161] Staunton's reluctance to accept that Oliver might not be the first to attack is representative: 'Stung by the sarcastic allusion to his *reverence*, Oliver attempts to strike his brother, who seizes him'. Quotation taken from William Shakespeare, *As You like It*, ed. by Horace Howard Furness, A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1890), p.13 (n.54).

[162] The relevant part of the elegy reads as follows: 'Oft have I seen him leape into a grave / Suiting the person (which hee vs'd to haue) / Of a mad lover, with so true an eye, / That there I would have sworne hee meant to dye.' As quoted in G. P. Jones, 'A Burbage Ballad and John Payne Collier', *Review of English Studies*, 40.159 (1989), pp. 393–97 (p.394). An account of the salience of this and other elegies in recovering Burbage's qualities as an actor can be found in Chapter 11 'Richard Burbage' in Bart Van Es, *Shakespeare in Company*, pp.232-248.

[163] The provenance of the 'bad' quartos has, of course, been long debated. Assuming that they are the work of 'actor-reporters', Ann Pasternak-Slater has argued that they provide a rare glimpse of Elizabethan stage practice. Thus, accounting for the fact that some directions implied in the dialogue of the folio are actually inserted as stage directions in the 'bad' quartos, Pasternak-Slater proposes that from these texts, 'we can infer that the actors embodied the acts noted in their words'. More recently, Paul Menzer has proposed that far from being the more 'theatrical' of the earliest printed texts, the first quarto of *Hamlet* is arguably the more 'literary' of them, it having been 'designed for a reader, not for any practical use.' This idea is supported by Menzer's systematic examination of 'the treatment of cues within the text of Q1', which he argues 'would seem to militate against the idea that the text represents some sort of ''performance'' text. Pasternak-Slater, p.1; Menzer, pp.59-68.

This is I,

Hamlet the Dane.

Laer. The devil take thy soule.

Ham. Thou prai'st not well,

I prythee take thy fingers from my throat;

Sir though I am not Spleenative, and rash,

Yet have I something in me dangerous,

Which let thy wisenesse fear. Away thy hand. (TLN 3451-3459)

And here as printed in the first quarto:

L*eartes leapes into the grave*.

Now power your earth on, *Olympus* hie,

And make a hill to o're top olde *Pellon*: *Hamlet leapes*

Whats he that coniures so? *in after* L*eartes*

Ham. Beholde tis I, *Hamlet* the Dane.

Lear. The dievell take thy soule.

Ham. O thou praiest not well,

I prethee take thy hand from off my throate,

For there is something in me dangerous,

Which let thy wisedome feare, holde off thy hand:

I lou'de *Ofelia* as deere as twenty brothers could:

Shew me what thou wilt doe for her:

Wilt fight, wilt fast, wilt pray,

Wilt drinke up vessels, eate a crocadile? Ile doot:

Com'st thou here to whine?

And where thou talk'st of burying thee alive,

Here let us stand: and let them throw on us,

Whole hills of earth, till with the heighth therof

Make Oosell as a wart. (V.i. 273-306)

As with the example from *As You Like It* where Orlando has Oliver in a choke, in both Q1 and F, it is implied in the dialogue – 'I prythee take thy fingers from my throat'; 'Away thy hand' – that Laertes must take Hamlet by the throat. In another echo of the earlier play, however, less certain is whether it is Hamlet or Laertes who is the first to attack. When editors follow the first quarto by stipulating that Hamlet leaps into the grave with a stage direction, they thereby lean towards an interpretation that places the blame on Hamlet. One edition which does not do so is the Arden third series edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. Instead, here an alternative direction can be found in which Laertes '[*Leaps out and grapples with him*]'.[164] The justification provided for this is that 'Hamlet cannot be the aggressor', with the editors arguing on the contrary that 'Laertes must come out of the grave to attack him.'[165] The emphasis on the word 'must' is noteworthy, highlighting the arbitrary sense of necessity that has informed the editors' decision. In fact, the editors do not so much allude to what they believe is theatrically necessary as posit a staging possibility that is necessary to support their ethical interpretation of Hamlet's behaviour. It is not as though anything implied in the dialogue precludes the more widely accepted alternative; it is just that Hamlet's leaping into the grave offends the moral sensibility of the editors. In a repeat of the opening scene from *As You Like It*, however – a scene which was potentially played by the same two actors – the action is designed to unfold in any of various conflicting ways: in this manner, either Hamlet *or* Laertes might be the first to attack the other.

In some scenario, then, it might be that Laertes restrains Hamlet in an act of self-defence after the prince has unexpectedly leapt into the grave and assaulted him. Yet equally, it might

[164] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, Third Series, Revised edn. (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 5.1.247.
[165] See, p.459 (fn.247).

indeed be that Laertes, in an uncontrollable fit of rage – 'The devil take thy soul!' – instead leaps out and attacks Hamlet. Nor need the range of possibilities end there. Hamlet might after all leap into the grave and immediately wrap his arms around the corpse of Ophelia, only for Laertes to understandably take offence. Or maybe Hamlet leaps into the grave *after* the men have already fought, perhaps when he expresses the wish to buried with Ophelia:

> *Ham*. Come show me what thou'lt doe.
> Woo't weepe: Woo't fight? Woo't teare thy selfe?
> Woo't drinke up *Esile*, eate a Crocodile?
> Ile doo't. Dost thou come here to whine;
> To outface me with leaping in her grave?
> Be buried quicke with her, and so will I. (TLN 3471-3476)

On this reading, 'so will I' functions as the implicit signal prompting the player of Hamlet to leap into Ophelia's grave. This means that Burbage – assuming that this folio passage was what appeared on his part-text – had the opportunity to decide whether to act upon this prompt at an earlier time (perhaps at the conventionally assumed 'This is I / *Hamlet* the Dane'), when he delivered the line or perhaps not at all. The latter of these two possibilities is not one available in the first quarto. It is noteworthy, however, how the two texts differ in other respects besides the presence of the Q1 stage direction, especially in terms of the implied staging. That is to say, in Q1, even without the presence of a stage direction, it is clear from the dialogue itself that both Hamlet and Laertes are stood in Ophelia's grave: 'Here let us stand, and let them throw on us / Whole hills of earth.' The folio, on the other hand, alludes to this possibility without specifically mandating it.

As such, imagining that Q1 does somehow record a specific performance, it is quite plausible that the stage direction derives from an improvised choice made by Burbage – one which was so emotionally raw, so spontaneous in its outburst of passion that it has stuck with

us. But this is not to say, importantly, that Burbage could not have made any number of other choices.[166] When editors adopt the Q1 stage direction in editions otherwise derived from the folio, they assume that something is 'missing' from the folio when the opposite might be true, with the folio 'removing' something which is not supposed to be there. The fact that the folio dialogue does not require Hamlet to leap into the grave might be further evidence of this. As with Oliver's and Orlando's fight, the scripting is designed to play out in any of various possible ways with either of the players being the first to act violently. In the scene from *As You Like It*, for instance, what is notable is how the player of Oliver is thereby placed in a position to either attack or refrain from attacking. He will know from his own part – 'Wilt thou lay hands on me villaine?'; 'Let me goe' – that Orlando is going to grab, maybe even throttle him. In this way, a situation in which he decided not to strike or threaten his brother would have had the potential to subvert Orlando's earlier assertion to Adam that Oliver 'will shake me up' (31): on the contrary, what Shakespeare's first audience might have seen was Orlando shake Oliver up. In both these examples, then, the interventions of editors have tended to narrow – if not completely eradicate – possibilities that complicate safe and easy assumptions, especially when these pose difficult questions about a particular character's ethical conduct. In the case of Q1 *Hamlet*, it might be argued that *if* this text constitutes a record of a specific performance, then this must be counted amongst its defects: as a record of just one performance, it reduces the array of staging possibilities offered by the openness of the folio. And yet, as well as their readiness to insert stage directions that obscure possibilities, it is also true that editors will

[166] Although his discussion focuses specifically on clowning in the period, Richard Preiss has emphasised the scope for actors to make improvised choices in performance that might, potentially, have shaped the texts that eventually made it to print. Whilst actors, he claims, could do things differently on each day of a performance, he adds that '[d]oing it differently may have been the point.' Richard Preiss, 'Improvisation, Rehearsal, and the Clown', in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, ed. by Tiffany Stern (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), pp.68–88 (p.79).

sometimes fail to adequately draw attention to potential lines of action that are subtle, unobvious and far too easily missed.

'This kindness will I show': Violent Triggers

In Shakespeare, prompts will often be used to trigger violent actions, provoking one player to physically abuse another. Some of the most notable examples of this involve cases of spitting. Of all provocative gestures, there is perhaps none other which so conveys the sheer contempt that one character has for another. A good demonstration of this can be found in *Richard III*, when Anne, responding to Richard's determination to help her to a 'better husband' – namely, himself – provokes her to spit at her 'wooer' in abject disgust. In this case, the fact that Anne spits is not only evident from the dialogue but is indicated in a stage direction - '*Spits at him*' – though in other places, sometimes the urge to spit is triggered by an embedded prompt alone. This is the case when Mowbray accuses Bolingbroke of treachery in the early moments of *Richard II*, denouncing his accuser in the most forceful way possible: 'I do defie him, and I spit at him' (65). This might have prompted the player of Mowbray to spit at Bolingbroke, which is a favour Bolingbroke is invited to return:

> Ere my toong,
> Shall wound mine honor with such feeble wrong;
> Or sound so base a parle: my teeth shall teare
> The slavish motive of recanting feare,
> And spit it bleeding in his high disgrace,
> Where shame doth harbour. Even in *Mowbrayes* face. (TLN 199-204)

These verbal slurs can be delivered as threats whilst simultaneously urging the players to act upon these threats. In this way, they function not so much as directives as provocations upon

which the players may or may not act, with the potential to elicit a range conflicting responses: on the one hand, it could be that both men are guilty of spitting at each other. And yet on the other, there is scope for either of the two men to act in a more dignified way by refraining from doing so. In some scenario, then, it is possible to imagine that Bolingbroke here spits in retaliation after he has already been spat at by Mowbray. Yet equally, Bolingbroke may not spit back at Mowbray at all. Or maybe he is even the first to spit. One interesting course of events might involve Mowbray initially spitting at the floor, only for Bolingbroke to then spit at Mowbray's face in what would constitute a serious escalation, mirroring the polity's spiralling descent into lawlessness. In any case, what is significant is how linguistic triggers like this have the potential to alter the precise way a given scene plays out depending what reaction they elicited from the players, with either Bolingbroke or Mowbray here able to come across as the more dignified individual if one player was spat at and the other was not.

An even more contentious example of the same kind of thing occurs in *The Merchant of Venice*. As in *Richard II*, this occurs early in the play during a showdown between Antonio and Shylock, when the latter accuses the former of having spat at and 'spurned' him. It is necessary to quote the relevant passage in full:

> *Shy*. Signior *Anthonio*, many a time and oft
> In the Ryalto you have rated me
> About my monies and my usances:
> Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
> (For suffrance is the badge of all our tribe)
> You call me misbeliever, cut-throate dog,
> **And spat upon my Jewish gaberdine**,
> And all for use of that which is mine own.
> Well then, it now appears you neede my helpe:
> Goe to then, you come to me, and you say,

Shylocke, we would have moneyes, you say so:
You that did voide your rume upon my beard,
And foote me as you spurne a stranger curre
Over your threshold, moneyes is your suite.
What should I say to you? Should I not say,
Hath a dog money? Is it possible
A curre hould lend three thousand ducats? or
Shall I bend low, and in a bond-mans key
With bated breath, and whispering humbleness,
Say this: Faire sir, **you spet on me Wednesday last**;
You spurn'd me such a day; another time
You cald me dog: and for these curtesies
Ile lend you thus much moneyes.
Ant. **I am as like to call thee so againe,**
To spet on thee againe, to spurne thee too. (TLN 434-458)

As can be seen from the lines I've put in bold typeface, Shylock accuses Antonio of having spat at him on no less than three occasions. Yet like Orlando's case against Oliver, the problem is that these accusations allude to historical instances of abuse which there is no way of verifying, having putatively occurred 'outside' the timeframe of the plot. This is one way Shakespeare manages to generate the illusion of what Lorna Hutson has termed an 'extra-mimetic' sphere of action, stretching beyond the temporal and spatial boundaries of the staged 'reality'. When characters refer to unstaged events and actions like this, their words are thus helping to evoke the presence of other locales and times that are not directly accessible to an audience, and which, as we know, do not really 'exist' at all. As a consequence, Hutson has further shown how the evocation of such implied events will usually induce a sense of epistemic vertigo, as characters allude to things that *might have happened* or *might be*

happening offstage with no means available to verify for sure.[167] Thus, Shylock's accusations are designed to stimulate uncertainty about whether his testimony can be trusted.[168] A further question which might be asked, however, is whether Antonio's actions during this episode might go any way to verifying Shylock's complaints.

To understand how, it is worthwhile pausing over the possibility that this showdown was, once again, played by the same two actors who would go on to perform as Orlando and Oliver, Hamlet and Laertes in the two respective scenes discussed above. The fact that Shakespeare was writing for the same players throughout his career should even encourage us to think that this was likely.[169] This would, after all, have allowed the two players to develop a rapport and a close working relationship, perhaps even a rivalry with one another that would continually resurface in different permutations throughout the rest of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. With this in mind, it is important to remember that whilst Shylock and Antonio might well be, as Palfrey and Stern have maintained, 'deadly enemies', they are surely right to note how the players will nonetheless be 'feeding off one another.'[170] In fact, having most likely been embroiled in similar confrontations in the past, and knowing perhaps that they will again in future, the players are likely to have been eager to outvie one another in a competitive though no doubt high-spirited clash of actorly egos, which audiences too are likely to have gotten a kick out of. Thus, when Shylock makes his allegations against Antonio, it is

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[167] As Charles Whitworth has also highlighted, these 'virtual scenes', as he terms them, are 'essential to the dramatic plot', creating 'a sense of places elsewhere, out of sight, beyond the confines of the space defined by the stage's boundaries.' Charles Whitworth, 'Reporting Offstage Events in Early Tudor Drama', in *Tudor Theatre: 'Let There Be Covenants' = Convention et Theatre : Table Ronde VI.*, ed. by Peter Lang, Collection Theta : Essays on Semiotics of the Theatre = Etudes de Sémiologie Théâtrale, v. 4 (Bern: Lang, 1998), pp.45-65 (pp.47–49); see Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[168] A comparison here can be made with *The Tempest*, when Prospero accuses Caliban of the attempt to rape Miranda: 'Thou most lying slave, / Whom stripes may move, not kindness: I have us'd thee / (Filth as thou art) with humane care, and lodg'd thee / In mine owne Cell, till thou didst seeke to violate / The honor of my childe' (484-488)

[169] In fact, assuming that the anonymous funeral elegy referred to above is accurate, we already know that Burbage played two of these characters: Shylock and Hamlet.

[170] Palfrey and Stern, p.195.

notable how Antonio doesn't so much deny these allegations but instead doubles down: 'I am as like to … spet on the again, to spurne thee too.' When coming across this line in his part, the Antonio-player's immediate response was probably to wonder whether he was being provided with a prompt. After all, one possibility is surely that Antonio's outburst of rage incites him to enact the gestures embedded in his speech – first spitting, and then maybe, whichever way the player interprets his line, 'spurning' him as well.[171] The options available to the player are thus manifold. Maybe he chooses to deliver this line as an impotent threat, or maybe directs his rheum to the ground. Yet, aside from potentially prompting the Antonio-player, the line is of course vexing in the way that it fails to reveal Antonio's true meaning: is he confessing? Or is this just something he utters out of frustration? A comparably ambiguous response is given by Caliban when he is accused by Prospero of having attempted to rape Miranda, and unsurprisingly, editors have been reluctant to include a stage direction indicating that Antonio spits.[172]

The potential for this to downplay Antonio's abusive treatment of Shylock becomes more apparent, however, once further attention is paid to the implicit theatrical signals instructing – or more accurately, manipulating - the Antonio-player's conduct. One of the truly noteworthy aspects of Antonio's goading threat to spit and spurn is, then, the fact that it follows a repeated cue embedded in Shylock's preceding speech. This has been noted by Palfrey and Stern, observing that whilst this episode 'proffers two characters … simultaneously attempting to turn

[171] It is notable how possibilities are further engendered out of semantic ambiguities. The OED cites two relevant pre-1700 usages of the verb 'to spurn': 1) to treat someone or something contemptuously; to scorn or despise, and 2) to kick. A third possibly significant meaning is 'to spurn' in the sense of 'to urge' or 'to incite'. This would involve Antonio's 'spurning' of his foe inciting a similar response from Shylock. The ambiguity of the word adds to the Antonio-player's conundrum – is he being instructed to perform a physical action, or merely to express his disgust of Shylock? 'Spurn, v.1 Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary' <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/spurn_v1> [accessed 10 October 2024].

[172] The utter shamelessness of Caliban's response all but seems to confirm Prospero's allegations: 'Oh ho, oh ho, would't had bene done: / Thou didst prevent me, I had people'd else / This Isle with *Calibans*.' (489-491). Yet, the emphasis on the conditional 'would't' results in ambiguity: Caliban might be saying that he attempted to assault Miranda, only to be stopped by Prospero. Plausibly, however, 'would't had been done' may express something like a belated wish, as though Caliban is saying 'if only I had attempted to do what I have been accused of.' Needless to say, in any case the implied sentiment is uncomfortable.

the other into a derisive object', this is a dynamic which could have been exacerbated if the Antonio-player's speech on his part was preceded by a one-word cue – 'moneyes' – which is repeated on no less than three occasions before Antonio's time to speak actually arrives.[173] Thus, Palfrey and Stern have noted how this would have induced Antonio to repeatedly interrupt Shylock, first at TLN 436, then at 444 and again at 457, on all of which occasions 'Antonio's cued line, or part of it, makes immediately spiteful sense.'[174]

Yet aside from repeatedly interrupting Shylock, what Palfrey and Stern have overlooked is how this is also likely to have encouraged the player of Antonio – had he already made up his mind to act upon the prompts embedded in his speech – to repeatedly spit at Shylock as well: 'I am like to call thee so againe, / To spet on thee againe, to spurne thee too.' There exists the opportunity, therefore, for these repeated cues to simultaneously provoke the Antonio-player to spit at Shylock at various points throughout the latter's speech, until eventually, in a climax of built-up frustration, perhaps this ends with Antonio acting upon the threat to 'spurne' him. And yet, no single modern edition so much as suggests the possibility through the presence of a stage direction, whilst elsewhere, editors have by no means refrained from making these kinds of inferences.[175] So where is the line to be drawn? A bit like editors' reluctance to frame Orlando as the aggressor in the opening scene of *As You Like It*, the choice here seems to be motivated not in small measure by a sense of ethical propriety. Accepting that Antonio might spit at and maybe even strike or kick Shylock in an antisemitic outburst of fury is not, after all, a comfortable proposition, in what constitutes only one possible course of action anyway – a prompt which the player of Antonio may or may not choose to act upon. As such, it should be

[173] Four, if we include 'Hath a dog money' at TLN 449.
[174] Palfrey and Stern, p.200.
[175] A prime example would be the unique stage direction included in the Oxford *Complete Works* when Gloucester loses his eyes: '[*Cornwall pulls out one of Gloucester's eyes and stamps on it*]' (Q 14.68-69; F 3.7.68-69). The idea that Cornwall stamps on the eye is inferred from Cornwall's preceding statement: 'Upon those [F these] eyes of thine I'll set my foot' (Q 14.66; F 3.7.66). But why make this sort of inference here and not elsewhere?; see Thomson, 'Broken Brackets and 'Mended texts', p.185.

asked whether there is any way editors can allude to this possibility, without precluding the other possibility in which Antonio does not spit.

One instructive way of approaching this problem is to turn to the experiment which the Royal Shakespeare Company has conducted in its treatment of stage directions in the *Complete Works* (2007). Hence in this edition, there has been an effort to admit uncertainty when inferring stage directions from the dialogue, in what the editors claim is 'a reminder to the reader and the actor that Shakespearean stage directions are often dependent upon editorial inference alone and are not set in stone'.[176] In this edition, readers will therefore encounter permissive stage directions punctuated with questions marks, as well as modal verbs like 'may or 'could' – all as part of an attempt to emphasise when there exists doubt about whether or in what manner a given action might occur. Whilst rare, there is a precedent for these kinds of permissive directives in a number of early modern texts, with some examples of stage directions that appear to have presented players with an 'either / or' choice.[177] It could be, then, that one simple solution is to append any stage direction that Antonio spits with a question mark: '[*He spits?*]'. This has the advantage of letting the reader know that Antonio's behaviour is unfixed; yet it also draws attention to a potential action which a novice reader might otherwise miss. This sort of approach can only really work if there is consistency across a whole edition, but neither the Royal Shakespeare Company – nor for that matter the New Oxford Shakespeare, which might be said to have taken the RSC's approach even further – includes here any suggestion that Antonio spits at Shylock. Another similar moment to this occurs in *Hamlet*, when the prince famously confronts his mother in her closet:

> *Q*u. Why how now *Hamlet*?

[176] 'User's Guide', in *The RSC Shakespeare: William Shakespeare Complete Works*, pp.58-59 (p.59).
[177] William B. Long has drawn attention to one such kind of direction in the manuscript playbook of Thomas Heywood's *The Captives*, emphasising that these directions constitute 'the *locus classicus* of leaving an artistic decision up to the players.' See William B Long, '"'Precious Few'": English Manuscript Playbooks', in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), pp.414–33 (p.428).

Ham. Whats the matter now?

Qu. Have you forgot me?

Ham. No by the Rood, not so:

You are the Queene, your Husbands Brothers wife,

But would you were not so. You are my Mother.

Qu. Nay, then Ile set those to you that can speake.

Ham. Come, come, and sit you downe, you shall not

Boudge:

You go not till I set you up a glasse,

Where you may see the inmost part of you?

Qu. What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murther me?

Helpe, helpe, hoa. (TLN 2390-2402)

The standard reading of this passage is that Gertrude somehow overreacts. So far as Dover-Wilson was concerned, Gertrude's cry for help can be explained by the fact that Hamlet seizes his mother's arm and 'forces her roughly into a seat', at which she 'naturally takes fright'.[178] Not only is this reading deeply patronising towards Gertrude; it is rooted in a misunderstanding about how the action is generated out of the dialogue. Most noteworthy, in fact, is the obvious lack of any identifiable cause that incites Gertrude to cry out, culminating in her oblique reference to murder: 'What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murther me? / Helpe, helpe, hoa.' It is easy to mistake Gertrude's cry for help as a response to, rather than the cause of, whatever Hamlet does to so terrify her. Yet looking at the language from a theatrical standpoint, it is not so much Hamlet's actions which produce Gertrude's response as the reverse: it is Gertrude's cries which transmit a prompt to the player of Hamlet. To this extent, it is as though the theatrical link between cause and effect runs in an opposing direction to the straightforwardly linear way effects might be imagined to succeed their causes within the fiction. That is to say,

[178] John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p.247.

whilst it is no doubt peculiar, what is interesting is the way Gertrude's cry of murder will bring about the very cause which makes her appeal for help in the first place – a verbal trigger that might have prompted Burbage-as-Hamlet to act upon the implicit theatrical command embedded within Gertrude's utterance.

In this way, theatrical 'double time' might be conceived as reversing the standard connection between cause and effect: first, Gertrude cries out murder, *and then* Hamlet makes his move. As anathema to commonsense this sounds, this is likely to have been the result if players were approaching the scene having had only prior study with their parts. So how should editors respond? Typically, it might be expected that editors would want to help readers visualise the staging through a stage direction. As Suzanne Gosset has commented:

> For a conscientious editor trying to help her reader envision the actions necessary to make sense of the plot, the greatest temptation is to impose an interpretation through her additions, and these are much more likely to be stage directions than emendations to dialogue.[179]

When Gertrude cries out murder, however, Gosset has highlighted how 'editors uniformly hold back', with no single modern edition opting to provide a stage direction where the early texts too fail to do so.[180] Rather than strive to illustrate the staging through the inclusion of a direction, in this case the opposite is true: by failing to take Gertrude at face value, editors have neglected to highlight a staging possibility that is important to a reader's understanding and interpretation of Hamlet's behaviour. As has already been seen in the cases of Orlando and Antonio, in many ways, this is just another example of editors choosing not to add stage directions that pose uncomfortable questions about a character's moral conduct. And yet, this example also highlights how editors have sometimes failed to sufficiently draw attention to

[179] Suzanne Gossett, 'When Is a Stage Direction Missing?', in *Stage Directions and Shakespearean Theatre*, ed. by Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2018), pp.141–62 (p.156).
[180] Gossett, pp.156–57.

instances where women specifically are the potential victims of physical abuse. The other most significant example of this occurs in *Much Ado About Nothing*. In 4.1 after she has been falsely accused of adultery on her wedding day, Hero is forced to endure the further beratement of her enraged father:

> Do not live *Hero*, do not ope thine eyes:
> For did I thinke thou wouldst not quickly die,
> Thought I thy spirits were stronger then thy shames,
> My selfe would on the reward of reproaches
> Strike at thy life. (TLN 1786-1790)

As ever, Leonato's speech is embedded with hints and clues from which the player would derive an interpretation of his actions and gestures, with the crucial nub occurring with the mid-line pause that cuts Leonato short: 'My selfe would on the reward of reproaches / *Strike at thy life*'. Throughout most of the play's performance history, this speech was thought to be so shameful that it was routinely cut in a move designed, so John F. Cox has argued, to 'dignify and idealise' Leonato.[181] But the speech is not only shocking because of its verbal violence. In fact when learning his part, the player of Leonato most likely would have scanned his lines not only for prompts but also for pointers as to the emotional temper and register of the speech. These demands are further complicated, however, by the fact that the speech revolves around a series of conditional clauses. The player of Leonato is not just, then, provided with a straightforward prompt to strike Hero. Instead, it is implied that he *would* do so if a number of conditions had not already been met: '… did I thinke thou wouldst not quickly die, / Thought I thy spirits were stronger then thy shames.' Whilst this might suggest that Leonato's desire to strike remains a hypothetical wish, he might instead find himself unable to resist his violent

[181] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. by John F. Cox, Shakespeare in Production (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), see p.181 (fn.113-136).

urges, with the successive build-up of each conditional clause inciting the player's passions until finally, with an abrupt mid-line break, he terminates by giving Hero what he thinks is a well-deserved blow.

As with the last couple of examples, no modern edition goes so far as to indicate that Leonato strikes Hero with a stage direction, although the Arden text alludes to the possibility in a footnote.[182] This conservatism is understandable when these verbal triggers need not have necessarily been acted upon. The danger, however, is that editors thereby obscure or downplay these potential acts of violence, especially when this involves the abusive treatment of a religious outcast like Shylock, or an attack on women for their perceived sexually transgressive behaviour. An approach in which editors *conditionalize* their interventions thus has a lot in its favour. In the case of both Hamlet and Leonato, a question mark would be a handy way of alluding to possibilities whilst warning the reader that this is not the only valid course of action: '[*He strikes her?*]'; '[*He attacks her?*]'. The importance of whether Leonato and Hamlet *do* strike or *do* attack for our understanding of both men's characters cannot be understated. Hamlet's specified task is, after all, to take revenge on his uncle and not, as the ghost explicitly makes clear, his mother. Yet throughout the play, there are intimations that Hamlet is unable to resist the urge that compels him towards the attempted murder of his mother:

> Soft now, to my Mother:
> Oh Heart, loose not thy Nature; let not ever
> The Soule of *Nero*, enter this firme bosome:
> Let me be cruell, not unnaturall,
> I will speake Daggers to her, but use none:
> My Tongue and Soule in this be Hypocrites. (TLN 2263-2268)

[182] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series, Second edn. (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2016), p.303 (fn.127).

Hamlet might tell himself to only speak daggers to Gertrude. And yet, his allusion to Nero – the matricidal emperor whose actions he promises not to follow – provides the suggestion that Hamlet may not have it in him to keep this promise. In fact, read in light of Gertrude's subsequent cry of murder, it is notable how the player of Hamlet is thereby sent a contradictory message. He may, recalling these lines, choose not to act upon Gertrude's provocation. But when the moment comes, it might be that Hamlet is unable to resist the murderous urges that he is unable to control.

'If you strike againe': Conditional Prompts

The contingency of a character's actions is sometimes emphasised within the dialogue itself. This is most evident when Shakespeare deploys what might be termed *conditional prompts*, where a player is required to perform a specified action only *if* some action has already been performed by another player. That is to say, the technique involves one player's response to an initial prompt triggering a potential reaction from another player, whose response to his own prompt is predicated upon the other player's fulfilment of a prior action. To clarify the point, it is worth revisiting the moment in *Richard III* when Richard orders those bearing the coffin of Henry VI to lower it to the ground:

> *Rich*. Villaines set downe the Coarse, or by S Paul,
> Ile make a Coarse of him that disobeyes.
> *Gen*. My lord stand backe, and let the Coffin passe.
> *Rich*. Unmanner'd Dogge,
> Stand'st thou when I commaund:
> Advance thy Halbert higher then my brest,
> Or by S.Paul Ile strike thee to my Foote,
> And spurne upon thee Begger for thy boldnesse. (TLN 211-218)

When he orders Richard to 'stand backe, and let the Coffin passe', the Gentleman challenges Richard's authority in a way that has the potential to result in a number of different outcomes. This becomes clear when Richard responds to this act of disobedience with a threat: 'Advance thy Halbert higher then my brest, / Or by S.Paul Ile strike thee to my Foote, / And spurne upon thee Begger for thy boldnesse'. Whilst courageously adopting a position of command, the Gentleman thereby ends up in a precarious situation where he must evaluate whether to persist in his resistance at the risk of being attacked, or instead back down. As a theatrical prompt, 'Advance thy Halbert' thus throws down a gauntlet to the player who must decide how to respond. If he has the courage, he may well disobey Richard. But if indeed he does, then this in turn will force the actor of Richard to decide whether he should act upon his word to 'strike' and 'spurn' the Gentleman. In this way, the prompt aimed at Richard to attack the Gentleman is conditioned upon the Gentleman's response to Richard's threat, so that one prompt is made contingent upon another. Thus *if* the gentleman refuses to lift his halberd, then Burbage-as-Richard too is forced to decide whether to act upon his threat. If he does not, then he risks losing face. But it is equally likely that the Gentleman will be forced to pay the price for his disobedience.

The presence of conditional prompts like this is one way Shakespeare will multiply the possible courses of action, and thereby magnify tension by making available diverging outcomes. According to Peter Thomson, where 'suitable actions' were 'not indicated by explicit or implicit stage directions', they were instead 'supplied by the versatility of the performer.'[183] Yet in the case above, what is interesting is the way Shakespeare stipulates an eventuality by

[183] Peter Thomson, 'Rogues and Rhetoricians: Acting Styles in Early English Drama', in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. by John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 321–35 (p.330).

conditioning one prompt upon another, resulting in scenarios characterised by a high degree of unpredictability.

Maybe the best example of this can be found in *The Taming of the Shrew*, during the episode in 2.1 when Petruchio and Kate have their first encounter. After Kate strikes Petruchio, she receives a threat from her unsought suitor to respond in kind:

> *Pet.* Who knows not where a Waspe does weare
> his sting? In his taile.
> *Kate*. In his tongue?
> *Pet*. Whose tongue?
> *Kate*. Yours if you talke of tales, and so farewell.
> *Pet.* What with my tongue in your taile?
> Nay, come againe, good *Kate*, I am a gentleman,
> *Kate*. That Ile trie. *She strikes him*
> *Pet*. I sweare Ile cuffe you, if you strike againe.
> *Kate*. So may you loose your armes,
> If you strike me, you are no Gentleman,
> And if no Gentleman, why then no armes. (TLN 1089-1100)

In much the same way that Petruchio and Kate are engaged in the attempt to verbally out-spar one another, so too can the players be imagined striving to catch each other off guard through sudden, unanticipated and improvised actions. When looked at in this way, the passage reveals itself to be highly volatile in the abundant range of performance options it makes available to the players, being full of hits, misses and potential surprises. The central crux comes when Petruchio reacts to being struck: 'I sweare Ile cuffe you, if you strike againe.' To read this line as a mere threat is hardly satisfactory. In fact, when examined from a theatrical standpoint, 'if you strike againe' reads not so much as a threat as an invitation to the player of Kate to repeat his prior action, striking Petruchio for a second time. Thus, Kate might either 1) strike Petruchio

again, or 2) refrain from striking. The really notable thing, however, is how Kate's action is then liable to produce Petruchio's *reaction*. Just like Richard's threat to the Gentleman, what needs emphasising is how the prompt for Petruchio to 'cuff' Kate is conditioned upon the latter's response to the prompt to 'strike againe'. This means that there is the potential for different responses to these prompts to ignite alternative chains of causal reaction, which may or may not result in Petruchio acting upon his threat.

Hence, the action embedded in the dialogue is not so much prescribed as implied, not so much 'directing' the players as providing them with a spring board of hints and suggestions. For one thing, it is notable that the last three words of Petruchio's first line after he has been struck – 'you strike againe' – would likely have been those that appeared on Kate's part-text as the actor's cue. This is not to say that a longer or shorter cue couldn't have been provided; but in the case that the cue consisted of three words, the actor may have taken this as an explicit instruction – only to be caught off guard when hearing for the first time that the cue was preceded by the word 'if'. As Palfrey and Stern have emphasised, learning from parts would have necessitated a player's hypersensitivity to these kinds of unforeseen effects, with the player of Kate having to quickly evaluate whether (s)he should respond to Petruchio's – but also to Shakespeare's – challenge. This being said, even in perhaps the more likely scenario where a rehearsal between the boy-actor and his master took place, this need not have diminished the element of surprise that might have attended a performance: not only might different choices have been made during different performances, but the choices made during any performance may well have differed from those 'settled upon' during rehearsal.

Thus, the options available to the players are multifarious, with four implicit prompts following on the heels of one another in rapid succession: 1) 'I sweare Ile cuffe you'; 2) 'if you strike againe'; 3) 'So may you loose your arms', and 4) 'if you strike me'. But this does not mean that there exist only four potential lines of action – in fact sometimes, it is not even clear

what action is being stipulated. The obvious example of this comes with the word 'cuff'. At the very least, there are two senses in which 'cuff' might be interpreted: firstly, Petruchio threatens to hit Kate, or alternatively, perhaps he intends to restrain her. It is the second option – that Petruchio takes hold of her – which is suggested by Kate's riposte: 'So may you loose your armes.' In this manner, Kate is not just making a joke about the threat to Petruchio's 'gentlemanly' status but is demanding, quite literally, that he loosen his grip of her. And yet, there remains an array of alternative choices that the player might make. To enumerate just the most obvious, either: 1) Petruchio never acts upon this threat at all; 2) he restrains her, or 3) he strikes her. Whatever choice he makes will, moreover, alter the fundamental nature of Petruchio's attempt to 'tame' Kate. Indeed, imagining a scenario in which Petruchio restrains Kate after having been struck for a second time differs, no doubt, from one in which he strikes her without any provocation. In the first scenario, it is at least somewhat plausible to see how Petruchio might perform his action defensively: after having been struck twice, he then acts to neutralise any possibility of a further blow. Alternatively, if he hits her, then obviously his actions take on a much darker quality. The remarkable thing, nonetheless, is how the players are required to respond to hypothetical scenarios that will only become clear in the midst of the performed moment, which is something repeatedly emphasised by the conditional nature of the prompts in question: 'I sweare Ile cuff you, *if* you strike againe'; '*If* you strike me, you are no Gentleman.' This results in a situation where the players are invited to outsmart and outmanoeuvre one another, just like the characters they are performing. When prompted to 'strike againe', no doubt the player of Kate was second-guessing the Petruchio-actor's anticipation of his response, whilst in turn, the Petruchio-actor would need to calculate how to respond to a variety of possible outcomes. In short, the array of choices made available to the players provides a window onto the plurality of ways this scene might have been brought about; but it is this plethora of possibilities which is likely to cause editors a headache.

A New Approach to Stage Directions?

The obvious fact is that editors can only take one of two positions when it comes to stage directions: either they can take a hands-off approach, or they can adopt a policy of intervention. If favouring the latter course, this raises pressing questions about why some inferences are made from the dialogue, whilst others are not. But equally, it is telling to observe where editors have been willing and unwilling to insert stage directions in that such choices are very rarely neutral – more often than not, even the decision *not* to make interventions entails something of ethical consequence. Thus, when Petruchio provokes Kate with a verbal jest just before he is struck – 'What with my tongue in your taile?' – what is notable is how many editions will provide a gloss on the word 'taile' in a footnote. This means that readers can pick up on the pivoting wordplay between 'tail' / 'tale' if they haven't already done so, whilst also being informed that the word puns on the sense of 'vagina'. A reader is perhaps less likely to pick up on the fact, however, that Petruchio might deliver this line with an accompanying lewd gesture. There have, for example, been productions in which Petruchio physically harasses Kate, even in one 1950s production 'goosing' her.[184] But editors, on the other hand, have been much more conservative, and there is no modern edition which includes a comparable stage direction. In large measure this is sensible, since it is understandable that editors have not wanted to impose this sort of reading at the expense of all others. And yet, the reluctance to add a stage direction also comes at a cost: in their texts, editors have thereby made it seem as though Kate is the first to act violently, when in fact, she may well be responding to an indecent grope or some other violation of her body.[185]

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[184] A concise summary of the variety of ways Kate has been known to receive her injury throughout the play's performance history can be found on p.138 (fn.210) in *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Elizabeth Schafer, Shakespeare in Production (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[185] Michael Cordner has proposed that the folio stage direction is printed in the wrong place, and that Kate is actually supposed to strike earlier than the placement of the stage direction suggests: 'In this version Petruchio's aggressive 'tongue in your tail' line leaves Katherina speechless and only able to express her outraged feelings by

A similar thing can be said of the moment Petruchio threatens to 'cuff' Kate. Where editors have included a stage direction, they have usually favoured an interpretation in which Petruchio takes hold of Kate. Again, this compares with the array of choices that have been made in performances, where Petruchio has been known to strike her – and not even just once, but repeatedly.[186] Assuming that Petruchio does take hold of rather than strike Kate, however, this still raises a question about when exactly he does so. This is apparent by comparing just two editions published in the last hundred years: G.R. Hibbard's New Penguin (1968), and Ann Thompson's New Cambridge (2003).[187] In both these editions, whilst a stage direction indicates that Petruchio takes hold of Kate, a preceding direction – '*She turns to go*' – also notifies that Kate attempts to exit before Petruchio delivers his 'my tongue in your taile' line. As he delivers this line, in the Penguin text this is accompanied with another stage direction – '*He takes her in his arms*' – whilst in the Cambridge text, the comparable '[*He holds her*]' occurs some lines later: notably *after*, rather than before Kate strikes him. Thus in the Penguin edition it is Kate who responds to Petruchio's provocation, though in the Cambridge text this situation is reversed, with Petruchio holding Kate only once he has been struck. Meanwhile, in both editions, Petruchio is indicated to release Kate when he observes her limp like a horse.

Here is the passage as it appears in the folio:

> Why does the world report that *Kate* doth limpe?
> Oh sland'rous world: *Kate* like the hazle twig
> Is straight, and slender, and as browne in hue
> As hazle nuts, and sweeter then the kernels:
> Oh let me see thee walke: thou dost not halt. (TLN 1131-1135)

lashing out at him.' Michael Cordner, 'Actors, Editors, and the Annotation of Shakespearian Playscripts', *Shakespeare Survey*, 55 (2002), pp.181–98 (p.195).

[186] Schafer reports that this was a feature of Nickell's 1950 production, in which 'Charlton Heston's Petruchio struck Katherina hard across the face several times.' See, p.138 (fn.216).

[187] William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968); William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by Ann Thompson, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Updated edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The editors of the New Penguin and New Cambridge texts infer that Petruchio will let Kate go when he demands to see her walk, assuming that he will refuse to do so when, some lines earlier, Kate exhorts him to 'Let me go' (1121).[188] Yet besides this, the precise significance of Petruchio's obscure reference to Kate's gait is difficult to decode: does Kate suffer from some sort of disability, which Petruchio then cruelly mocks? Or has Kate suffered some injury during the scuffle to free herself from Petruchio's grip, maybe stumbling or stamping her foot? Perhaps. But another possibility is that she receives this injury from Petruchio. At Petruchio's line – 'Why does the world report that *Kate* doth limpe?' – in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works*, readers will therefore encounter a startling and suggestive stage direction: '*Kicks her?*'. As elsewhere in this edition, the presence of this stage direction has the benefit of alluding to a possibility which readers should probably be made aware of. At the same time, the inclusion of a question mark also emphasises the contingency of Petruchio's actions, stressing the unfixed nature of the ways Petruchio might attempt to 'tame' Kate. And yet, the odd thing is why such a direction should be included here, whilst nowhere else in this edition is it suggested that Petruchio might physically abuse Kate – as when he threatens to 'cuff' her, say, or when he potentially grabs or gropes her. In fact, applying the Royal Shakespeare Company's approach more consistently, the passage analysed earlier might look in a modern edition something like the following (here quoted as the passage otherwise appears in the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works* (2007)):

PETRUCHIO Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail.
KATE In his tongue.
PETRUCHIO Whose tongue?
KATE Yours, if you talk of tails, and so farewell. [*She begins to leave?*]
PETRUCHIO [*groping her?*] What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay, come again.
Good Kate, I am a gentleman.

[188] The Penguin text reads this as instruction to the player of Kate, adding a stage direction: '*She struggles*'.

KATE That I'll try. *She strikes him*

PETRUCHIO I swear I'll cuff you, if you strike again.

[*Kate might strike again*]

KATE So may you lose your arms:

If you strike me, you are no gentleman,

And if no gentleman, why then no arms.

[*Petruchio could strike or restrain Kate, if either*]

The disadvantage of this, of course, is that it still limits the range of options. Maybe Kate attempts to strike Petruchio but is prevented, say. Or maybe Petruchio is about to strike, before then restraining himself. There is, quite simply, no way of highlighting *all* possibilities. Yet, one advantage of the approach is that it would at least make the reader alert to the abundant courses of action that are generated out of the dialogue, encouraging the reader to think through for him or herself the interpretive consequences of these conflicting possibilities.

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This chapter has focused on the problems posed by Shakespeare's plurality for the editorial treatment of stage directions. At least since the first modern critical editions were published in the eighteenth century, the inclusion of wholly novel stage directions in editions of Shakespeare has become standard practice. More often than not, these directions will be inferred from the implied staging contained in the dialogue. But the problem, as this chapter has emphasised, is that the dialogue frequently functions so as to generate multiple and conflicting courses of action, not unusually at some of the most ethically contentious moments. As Sarah Dustagheer and Gillian Woods have commented, this is indicative of the way that stage directions 'foreground the familiar ontological difficulties … of plays', pinpointing, as they have put it, the

> contradictory nature of a play which is always in some sense incomplete: as text it lacks performance; but as performance it is only ever one manifestation of the multiple possibilities of the text.[189]

The question I have addressed in this chapter, then, is how stage directions might be utilised as a tool to illustrate the myriad 'possibilities of the text.' These are possibilities which grow out of moments of epistemic doubt, uncertainty or ambiguity, though far too frequently, editors have inserted stage directions in places where their choices could be substituted for any number of alternatives. Whilst stage directions are often thought of as a valuable readerly aid, ironically, editorial interventions of this sort often have the contrary effect: rather than providing readers with knowledge and access to the events that would have been staged, editors' choices can actually obscure and withhold knowledge from readers by limiting the available possibilities.

As a potential solution to this problem, I have suggested in this chapter that editors might instead adopt a 'modal realist' stance towards to stage directions by *conditionalizing* their interventions through the use of things like questions marks, modal verbs and 'either / or' phrasing. Taking my philosophical cue from David Lewis, I have suggested that such an approach would in many ways be more faithful to the scripts that Shakespeare wrote, refusing to treat any single possibility as in any way truer than another.

As I have also noted, however, adopting this approach does not come without manifest drawbacks and complications. In the twenty-first century, there are in fact two editions which have already attempted to pursue something similar to what I have proposed: the first is the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Complete Works* (2007), and the second is The New Oxford Shakespeare (2016). The Royal Shakespeare Company's inclusion of things like question marks and permissive directions does, for example, have the benefit of illuminating possibilities at moments of high ethical stakes, as when Petruchio potential injures Kate before

[189] Dustagheer and Woods, p.6.

mockingly comparing her gait to a horse. But there is nowhere any indication that this approach is informed by a rigorous and systematic method, resulting in inconsistency about where such conditional directions are appropriate. Why stipulate that Petruchio might kick Kate, but not that Antonio might repeatedly spit at Shylock? This problem is compounded by the fact, of course, that not all possibilities can conceivably be accounted for in the space of any single edition. The possibilities are simply so many, the array of alternatives so vast, that any such edition would be overwhelmed by the distracting presence of a potentially limitless stock of stage directions.

In a print edition, certainly. But perhaps where this approach could be made to work is in a digital edition – one that functions as a sort of hypertext wherein different stage directions could appear at the click of a mouse. This would allow the reader – or more accurately, user – to see how a scene might play out in a variety of different ways depending which stage directions show up. As a supplement, rather than an alternative to the editions of Shakespeare available in the bookshops, such a digital text could serve as a valuable learning aid in the effort to reconceive of players as determining agents, capable of influencing the possible courses of action that any play might consist of. Yet this aside, perhaps the ultimate conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter is that the very policy of editorial interventionism is in the end misguided. This is not to say that modern editions of Shakespeare should abandon the attempt to provide points of clarification for readers – as in footnotes, say. But as this chapter has aimed to demonstrate, not only is it extremely difficult – if at all possible – for any single editor or group of editors to avoid projecting his or her own interpretive biases (or even the biases of tradition) onto the text, it is even questionable as to whether we are positioned to make accurate and conclusive inferences about the staging from the dialogue at all. The safest approach, then, would probably be to stay clear of inserting any new stage directions that do not appear in the original printed editions. This might defy and contradict centuries of editorial convention, but

it is an approach that would at least stay true to the plenitude of the plays that Shakespeare wrote.

Chapter 4

Getting On and Off Stage:

Missing Directions and Uncued Entrances and Exits

A thesis focused on the implicit action in Shakespeare's plays wouldn't be complete without some attention paid to entrances and exits. It hardly needs stating that without some mechanism for getting actors on and off the stage, any performance would simply fall apart, the need for the right players to be on the stage at the right time obviously being foundational to any successful staging of a play. Small wonder, then, that David Bradley has gone so far as to claim that any 'Elizabethan play *consists* of entrances', adding that they are 'the means by which the story is told; the controllers of the illusion of time and place; the sign-posts for the understanding of the plot.'[190] The specific moments at which actors emerge onto and depart from the stage are, in short, nodes upon which possible courses of action hinge – further points in the 'Humean mosaic' upon which, in David Lewis' philosophy, everything ultimately supervenes. Anything that happens in a play will be affected by the arrangement of entries and exits regulating the flow of dramatis personae to and from the stage. Much more than mere instruments via which to mechanistically structure the action, like all the rest of the tiny, point-sized dramaturgical forms that make up the nexus of this mosaic – prompts, cues, absent stage directions - entries and exits can be characterised as supervenient points at which any of various possibilities might be instantiated, with any change in the essential quality of such an entrance

[190] David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.29.

or exit (when does it occur? does it occur? where does a character enter from or exit to?) necessarily bringing about a change in the fundamental structure of a given dramatic reality.

In the way that many entrances and exits in Shakespeare's plays are marked by uncertainty, they present openings at which alternative possibilities become available, affecting everything from our understanding of a character's motives and intentions to the causal chains that make up a plot. As is well known, entrance and exit directions are notoriously inconsistent in the earliest printed texts – sometimes varying from one text to another, sometimes being misprinted and often, although determining when exactly is difficult, 'missing' altogether.[191] This means that many characters' movements onto and off the stage have to be inferred from the dialogue. But as with all such inferences, this often necessitates an evaluation between competing alternatives, which has led Mariko Ichikawa to conclude that sometimes, whether 'entrances and exits really do occur or not is almost impossible to establish.'[192] So central are entrances and exits in managing a play's staging, in fact, that whether a player enters or exits at one point rather than another can – sometimes – radically change the significance of a scene's action and even the courses of action which that scene might take. In what follows, the question of how we can know when a given character is or is not present is addressed by thinking about how the players would have known to get themselves on and off the stage. The 'openness' of many entrances and exits can, I propose, bring about changes in the action that in turn alters how those moments - and indeed characters' conduct – can and probably should be interpreted.

[191] This problem has been explored by Suzanne Gosset, who notes that besides stage directions more generally, 'It is not always clear when exits are missing.' Gossett, p.153.
[192] Mariko Ichikawa, *Shakespearean Entrances* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.118.

Shakespeare at Work: More's Missing Entrance

It has been said that Shakespeare had a lax, maybe even careless attitude towards stage directions, including when it came to stipulating which players needed to be on the stage and when. In his lectures on 're-editing' Shakespeare in the 1980s, Stanley Wells observed that Shakespeare

> could content himself with the sketchiest of stage directions, sometimes even omitting to indicate that a character should be present, frequently omitting to indicate when he should leave, sometimes not even bothering too much about who should speak particular lines or about providing dialogue to cover necessary action.[193]

The recurring omission of 'necessary entrances and exits' in the early printed texts is, as Wells observes, perplexing.[194] Yet, the absence of '*Enter*' / '*Exit*' directions is not in itself a problem where such movements to and from the stage are signalled within the dialogue – as indeed many of them are. Being the professionals that they were, players would have been well trained to listen out for and respond to these signals, many of which come in some stock-in-trade variety: when a character bids farewell, calls for the presence of another, declares his intention to depart, observes another character approaching or is commanded to vacate.[195] These are all ways players could be informed about where they needed to be and when. When it comes to the practicalities of the staging, the absence of many entrance and exit directions need not have caused any issue – in fact, many of those that do appear in the earliest texts may never have been intended for the actors at all, instead having been inserted with readers in mind.

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[193] Stanley Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader: Based on Lectures given at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p.58.
[194] Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader*, p.74.
[195] The particular function such statements served in the Elizabethan theatre to direct the players has also been emphasised by Peter Thomson, who has observed that phrases like ''Lo where he comes', 'Here comes the lady', 'Here comes one in haste'' are especially common in the drama of the period, whereas 'such lead-ins are uncommon in medieval drama.' Thomson, *On Actors and Acting*, p.18.

A problem does emerge, however, where there is neither any stage direction provided and no hint in the dialogue about when a character is supposed to be present or absent. A notable example of this can be found in the scene generally accepted to have been revised by Shakespeare for *Sir Thomas More*. As the only surviving manuscript of a play in which Shakespeare had a hand, this document provides a unique, though tantalisingly brief glimpse of Shakespeare at work, with one of the most revealing aspects of the manuscript being Shakespeare's apparent lack of concern for indicating which characters should be present on the stage and when.

Two hands have been identified on the part of the manuscript believed to be Shakespeare's: that of 'Hand D' (aka Shakespeare), and that of a scribe ('Hand C'). This is important because most of the scribe's interventions concern the correction of speech prefixes, but also, the insertion of stage (specifically entrance) directions. Whilst Shakespeare is therefore responsible for providing a stage direction for the entrance of the Lord Mayor, Surrey and Shrewsbury about a quarter of the way into the scene, it is the scribe who provides the massed entrance at the start of the scene and a duplicated entrance for the Sergeant-at-Arms.[196] This has led Scott McMillin to propose that whilst the scribe does a fairly good job of cleaning up the prefixes and dialogue, the stage directions on the other hand remain incomplete – something underscored by the fact that neither Shakespeare nor the scribe indicates when Thomas More himself should enter.[197]

That care should be taken to provide entrance directions for the other characters but not the star of the show requires some explanation. This challenge is not made any easier by the fact that it is not clear what function the manuscript served in the first place. Thus, citing the

[196] See Appendix 2, 'Addition II: Shakespeare and Hand C', pp.378-382 in William Shakespeare, Anthony Munday, and Henry Chettle, *Sir Thomas More*, ed. by John Jowett (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011).
[197] Scott McMillin, '"The Book of Sir Thomas More:" A Theatrical View', *Modern Philology*, 68.1 (1970), pp.10–24 (p.12).

unfinished condition of the stage directions, McMillin has argued that it is unlikely to have served as a prompt book, suggesting instead that it might have played some role in the preparation of actors' parts.[198] Meanwhile, John Jowett has argued that the absence of More's entry is a result of Shakespeare having worked separately from his collaborators, revising the scene without knowledge of the scribe's opening stage direction which appends the preceding folio.[199]

The uncertainty surrounding More's presence is further compounded by the lack of any identifiable entrance cue in the dialogue. As it stands, the manuscript allows More to enter at any of various opportunities: he could, no doubt, enter as part of one of the massed entrances, although he might also enter alone at some point. The precise timing of More's entrance is, moreover, strikingly significant when it is remembered that the character is here caught in a dilemma, faced with a choice about when is the right time to intervene and make his presence felt. This raises a question about how long More will be seen to stand back, watching from afar before he realises that he needs to do something to bring the disorder to an end. Imagining that he was to enter at the beginning of the scene, no doubt one effect would be to highlight More's presence as a passive observer, emphasising his reflective and calculating nature as he awaits the right opportunity to make his voice heard. On the other, a scenario in which More enters alone – say, just before he speaks his first line – has the potential to underscore his authority, visually setting him apart from the rest of the nobles as he advances on to the stage alone. Of course, Shakespeare was not writing this scene for his usual collaborators in the Chamberlain's

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[198] 'We cannot suppose that this manuscript was meant to serve as a prompt book, for its unfinished stage directions and occasional illegibility count heavily against such an idea. But the process of preparing a play for production includes one stage which has received little attention from bibliographers, and that is the preparation of actors' parts. I think *The Book of Sir Thomas More h*as been finished to a point which would allow it to serve for the copying of parts', McMillin, '"The Book of Sir Thomas More', pp.15–16.

[199] 'The best possibility is […] that Shakespeare was uncertain about More's entry … working without benefit of Hand C's transcript of Sc. 5, he was not aware of the SD Hand C had provided for the beginning of the scene he was reworking, which named the clown but did not name More'. Jowett argues that Shakespeare expected the scribe to 'clarify the staging', and therefore leaves 'plentiful space around the direction' he himself provided to allow for this. See 'Appendix 2', pp.344-394 in *Sir Thomas More* (pp.379-383).

/ King's Men. The amount this document can tell us about Shakespeare's writing habits more generally is therefore limited. What this snapshot of Shakespeare at work does hammer home, however, is the well-nigh impossibility of establishing with any degree of certainty the precise timing of a character's entry when that entrance is neither cued in the dialogue nor stipulated in a stage direction. In the face of this uncertainty, what we have is possibility – conflicting points of entry that can change and alter the way a scene plays out.

Alternative Entrances

In the earliest quartos and folio, where stage directions are missing it is usually possible to infer from the dialogue who should be on the stage and when. Most obviously, this is evident from which characters have lines to speak. That aside, Shakespeare resorts to a number of routine methods of cueing players' entrances, especially when one character calls for another to be present or when one character notes another's approach. Most likely, players could also have consulted the backstage plot that helped them gage when they needed to be on the stage. These documents, seven of which survive from the period, show clear signs of having been hung up in the tiring house, and it has been suggested that one of their primary functions was to assist players navigate a performance.[200] All of these plots have a shared concern with getting players onto the stage, with each one consisting, as Michela Calore notes:

> of a series of stage directions, principally indicating entries, that occupies a single sheet of paper; there is no trace of dialogue in any of these outlines. Some of them describe other aspects of stage business – for instance, exits, sound effects and music, the employment of stage properties, and the representation of locales such as walls, tents, and prisons. Others are silent about one of more of these, while the only characteristic

[200] As notes Tribble: 'Some of the plots show signs of a hole at the top, presumably for hanging on the wall of the tiring house.' Tribble, *Cognition*, p.45.

> shared by all these ‘‘lists’’ of stage directions is a preoccupation with clearly indicating successions of entrances and doubling patterns.[201]

Though the precise purpose and function of these plots is controversial, their overriding preoccupation with entrances suggests that they were probably used by actors, and most likely belonged to the tiring-house in contrast to the ‘plot-scenarios’ purchased by acting companies.[202] W.W. Greg thought that the plots were intended ‘for use in the theatre’.[203] More recently, this sentiment has been echoed by Evelyn Tribble and Tiffany Stern, the former suggesting that ‘they were useful and important backstage artifacts’, and the latter concurring that the plots are ‘‘backstage’ in their nature’, designed ‘to control entrances onto the stage in one direction.’[204] At least one of the primary functions of the plots, then, seems to have been in regulating the flow of performers onto the stage, ensuring that players were aware when they were required to enter and ensuring that they could prepare themselves accordingly. As a backstage artifact, plots provided a skeletal outline of plays, no doubt easing the cognitive burden on any individual player and distributing this burden amongst the cast: though the information they provide is limited, they supply just enough information to ensure that a performance ran smoothly.[205] Furthermore, when the existence of these plots is considered alongside the possibility that the bookkeeper had a role in getting players ready to enter, it

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[201] Michela Calore, ‘Elizabethan Plots: A Shared Code of Theatrical and Fictional Language’, *Theatre Survey*, 44.2 (2003), pp.249–61 (p.249).

[202] Not all scholars are convinced by this distinction, proposed by W.W. Greg in the 1930s. Grace Ioppolo for one sees the ‘author-plots’ and ‘theatrical-plots’ as one document serving two functions – as an author composed aid to the production of a play, which might also double as a document that could be posted backstage. Grace Ioppolo, *Dramatists and Their Manuscripts in the Age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood: Authorship, Authority and the Playhous*e (London: Routledge, 2006), p.55; W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses: Stage Plots: Actors’ Parts: Prompt Books* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), pp.70–93; for more on 'plot scenarios', see Chapter 1 'Plot Scenarios' in Stern, *Documents of Performance*, pp.8–31.

[203] ‘we may suppose that these were prepared for the guidance of actors and others in the playhouse, to remind those concerned when and in what character they were to appear, what properties were required, and what noises were made behind the scenes.’ Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, pp.1–3.

[204] Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition*, p.45; Stern, *Documents of Performance*, p.210; see also Evelyn Tribble, ‘Distributing Cognition in the Globe’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 56.2 (2005), pp.135–55.

[205] See Tribble, *Cognition*, p.50: ‘But if plots do not in themselves provide the information we think they should, is this not to be expected in a theatrical system that relies on the complex interaction of its component parts and is not regulated by master text and master director?’

becomes apparent that huge efforts were made to ensure that players got on to the stage at the right time.[206] Nothing about this is surprising. The utter necessity of players arriving on stage at the right time is obvious enough. As the scene from *Sir Thomas More* demonstrates, however, sometimes ambiguities arise about when a given character is supposed to be present. A comparable example to that from *More* can be found in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when the mechanicals get together for their rehearsal of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. At some point during their rehearsal, Puck – who is seen by the audience, but unseen by the amateur players – enters and observes from afar:

> *Enter Robin*.
>
> *Rob*. What hempen home-spuns have we swagger-
> ring here,
> So neere the Cradle of the Faierie Queene?
> What, a Play towards? Ile be an auditor,
> An Actor too perhaps, if I see cause. (TLN 889-893)

In the folio, a stage direction – '*Enter Robin*' – precedes his first speech of the scene, providing what at least appears to be a clear indication of when he should enter. Some twenty-four lines earlier, however, this is contradicted by the fact that another stage direction has already been provided for Robin to make an appearance: '*Enter Pucke*' (865). This is similar to the repeated entrances provided for the Sergeant-at-Arms in the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*. There, Shakespeare jams the Sergeant's entrance in the right-hand margin otherwise used for speech-prefixes just before he goes on to speak, whilst the scribe provides another entrance for the Sergeant as part of the massed entrance that opens the scene. Although, as William B. Long has argued, many of the stage directions that have made it into the original printed texts are as

[206] Though it is unclear just how much control the bookkeeper had over a performance, Leslie Thomson has argued that 'entrances were the aspect of the onstage action over which a bookkeeper had most control'. Leslie Thomson, 'A Quarto "Marked for Performance": Evidence of What?', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 8 (1996), pp. 176–210 (p.181).

likely to derive from the author as much as any other part of the text, Shakespeare's contribution to *More* shows that scribes were also in the right circumstances proactive in adding, amending and altering stage directions.[207] It could be, then, that Puck's / Robin's repeated direction to enter derives from a similar scribal intervention – one of the stage directions being Shakespeare's, the other belonging to a scribe. Unless Robin is supposed to exit at some point during these intervening lines and then re-enter – in which case it is an exit direction which is missing – this means there are at least two viable opportunities at which he might emerge onto the stage. If he enters on the earlier occasion, the result is to prolong the period he spends on the stage in silent observation. As the audience observes Robin observe the mechanicals who remain blissfully unaware of his presence, this scenario has the potential to maximise the audience's anticipation of what is coming next in a way that is both sinister but also potentially quite funny: with the players pretending not to see the fairy in their midst, there arises the opportunity to milk the ironic situation whereby the audience can see what the characters cannot. As such, what the existence of the earlier entrance direction suggests is the potential for players to draw out their time onstage for particular theatrical effect.

In Puck's case, ambiguity about when he will enter derives from the existence of two stage directions. Usually, however, this sort of uncertainty results from the absence of a stage direction or any clear cue in the dialogue. In such cases, the natural response of most editors is to insert a stage direction only when a character's presence is undeniably explicit. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a good example of this can be found in the opening scene when Slender acknowledges the presence of his servant Simple, who has apparently just entered. Here is the moment as it appears in the *Complete Works* of the Oxford Shakespeare:

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[207] 'So infrequently do theatrical alterations occur', writes Long, that 'if a stage direction exists in a late sixteenth- or early seventh-century play text, manuscript or printed, it is most likely to be a playwright's. … When playhouse notations are added, they solve problems – generally that of ensuring proper timing.' William B Long, '"Precious Few"', pp.414–33 (p.417); see also, William B. Long, '"A Bed / for Woodstock": A Warning for the Unwary', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 2 (1985), pp.91–118.

SLENDER I had rather than forty shillings I had my book
of songs and sonnets here.
Enter Simple
how now, Simple, where have you been? I must wait
on myself, must I? You have not the book of riddles
about you, have you? (1.1.181-185)

The insertion of Simple's entrance at this point specifically is sensible, coming as it does immediately before he is addressed. In fact, because folio text of this play – less so the quarto - is abundantly lacking in entrance and exit directions, it is a play that places a high demand on the editor to make repeated decisions about which characters should be present and when. This is not helped by the fact that the folio makes especially heavy use of massed entrances, even when it is clear that not all those included in such entrance directions are supposed to be present throughout the whole duration of a scene. The result is that the folio text is quite messy, and clearly, editors have a responsibility in cleaning this mess up. This being said, it should not be forgotten that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is, in many ways, a fairly 'messy' play – it is fast paced, all about the confusion of identities and stages recurring near-misses as characters play tricks on one another and come repeatedly close to foiling each other's stratagems.

This means that most of the humour results from dramatic irony. As a consequence, it might be wondered whether Simple's entrance above affords the same opportunity to elicit a laugh by exploiting the gap between what an audience knows and what the characters of the fiction do not. That is to say, an alternative scenario to that portrayed in the Oxford text might involve Simple having arrived on stage some moments earlier – or maybe even much earlier in the scene. When Slender then asks where he has been, the effect would be ironic as Slender realises what the audience has known the whole time: namely, that his servant has been present all along. This has the potential to be quite funny in that it would expose the master's neglect of

his servant, until he specifically demands and wants something from him. In light of the dramatic context, an early (or rather earlier) entry for Simple could therefore feed into the comedy. At the same time, so too might a 'late' entrance. Thus, imagining that Slender's 'how now, Simple, where have you been?' functioned as the cue for Simple to enter, then the player's entrance would have inevitably been mistimed – the player arriving only *after* Slender has apparently already noted Simple's presence. In this event, the effect would again be ironic but in an obverse way, farcically exposing the mechanics of the theatre at work via a cued 'mishap' that might function as some self-referential gag.

In fact, elsewhere in the same play, a similar opportunity to generate comedy out of a 'mistimed' entry can be found when Mistress Page enters reading the letter she has received from Falstaff. As noted earlier, in the folio – which makes preponderant use of massed entries – all entrances that will occur throughout the scene are clumped to together in a single stage direction at the start of the scene.[208] Most modern editions will distribute these entrances across the scene: first, Mistress Page enters and reads the letter she has received from Falstaff, only then to be followed by Mistress Ford who immediately begins to speak: '*Mistress Page*, trust me, I was going to your / house' (579-580). Again, however, an earlier entrance could be utilised for comic purposes: entering unseen, perhaps Ford's curiosity is piqued by what she initially overhears, thus choosing to listen in on Page's monologue. When Page realises her presence, this might result in Ford's clumsy attempt to provide an excuse for her presence.

To illustrate the point, one way of 'staging' this scenario on the page might be as follows, here as the passage otherwise appears in the first folio:

[*Enter Mistress Ford, unseen*]
What a *Herod* of *Jurie* is this? O wicked, wicked world:

[208] This adds up to quite a list of characters: '*Enter Mistris* Page, *Mistris* Ford, *Master* Page, *Master* Ford, Pistoll, Nim, Quickly, Host, Shallow' (551).

One that is well-nye worne to peeces with age
To show himself a yong Gallant? What an unwaied
Behaviour hath this Flemish drunkard pickt (with
The Devills name) out of my conversation, that he dares
In this manner assay me? why, hee hath not beene thrice
In my Company: what should I say to him? I was then
Frugall of my mirth: (heaven forgive mee:) why Ile
Exhibit a Bill in the Parliament for the putting downe
of me: how shall I be reveng'd on him? for reveng'd I
will be? As sure as his guts are made of puddings.

[*Mistress Page sees Mistress Ford*]

Mis Ford. *Mistris Page*, trust me, I was going to your house. (TLN 568-580)

There is no reason why Ford's entrance couldn't come at the moment I have indicated. As one of various staging possibilities, an earlier entry along these lines could be exploited for comic effect: unseen by Page, Ford might look on in astounded silence as she begins to realise that Page has also received a love letter from Falstaff, the undisclosed 'he' who she is likely to infer is the subject of her fellow mistress's rant. The comic potential of an 'early' entrance is further suggested, however, in the way that Ford appears to feel the need to justify her presence when the pair accidentally 'bump into' one another: '*trust me*, I was going to your house.' This could just be a courteous greeting. And yet, 'trust me' seems to suggest that Ford is speaking defensively – as though, that is, she has been caught doing something she shouldn't. When Page replies with a mocking retort – 'And trust me, I was coming to you' (581-582) – it could be that she is sarcastically teasing Ford, who has clumsily failed to hide the fact that she had been eavesdropping on Page's preceding speech. Of course, the two women will soon share the letters they have both received from Falstaff, before proceeding to hatch a plot against him. The fact is, however, that it is having overheard Page's earlier monologue that encourages

Mistress Ford to reveal the fact that she too has received a letter from Falstaff – a possibility that results from an earlier entry than has typically been assumed.

This sort of ambiguity resulting from massed entrances is also notable in the folio text of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The opening stage direction of 1.3, for example, is '*Enter Antonio and Panthino. Protheus*' (301). Most modern editions amend this so that Proteus enters later in the scene, after approximately forty-five lines during which Antonio reveals his intention to send Proteus to Milan. There is no reason, however, why Proteus might not occupy some removed part of the stage whilst his father discusses his plans for his son in private with Panthino. This could have the (plausibly comic) effect of underscoring Proteus' obliviousness to what his father is planning, as he reads – possibly with some affected and exaggerated reaction – the letter he has received from Julia. In turn, this separation of father and son upon the stage is likely to visually emphasise their conflicting desires – on one side of the stage stands Antonio, declaring his wish for his son to attain some worldly experience, meanwhile on the other, Proteus' desire to remain in Verona would be evident as he visibly reacts to opening and then reading the letter.

There is similar uncertainty about whether Panthino is present when Proteus and Julia part ways in 2.2. Again, most modern editions include Panthino's entrance after Julia has exited and Panthino encourages Proteus to begin his departure: 'Sire *Protheus*: you are staid for' (587). If – as his inclusion in the folio's massed entrance suggests – Panthino is present throughout the duration of this short scene, then his presence is likely to disrupt the atmosphere of intimacy that otherwise prevails in his absence, compelling the two lovers to hasten their separation through the mere fact of his being there. Meanwhile, in 3.2, it has similarly been assumed that the Duke of Milan will enter in private with Thurio, reassuring his daughter's suitor that he will attain her favour following Valentine's banishment. The editorial convention for amending the massed entrance and placing Proteus' entry after this brief conversation ignores, however, the

possibility that Proteus too might be present from the start of this scene – whether that be with or without the Duke's and Thurio's knowledge. It could be, for instance, that Proteus enters by the duke's side in such a way that visually emphasises how Proteus has managed to ingratiate himself into the king's favour. Or alternatively, if Proteus was to secretly listen-in on this conversation, then this would serve to emphasise his plotting and deceitfulness.

Opening Scenes and Overhearing

This uncertainty about a particular character's presence is further evident at the start of *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Lear*, where the massed entrances that open each play are ambiguous as to whether Helena and Edmond are privy to the conversation taking place between the other characters.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, the opening stage direction stipulates that Bertram, the Countess, Helena and Lord Lafew will all enter the stage. Helena, however, will only utter her first line some forty lines in, and rather than actively participate in the conversation, she is somebody who is not so much spoken to as spoken about. It is therefore unclear where exactly Helena is supposed to be stood on the stage, and in turn, how much of the preceding dialogue before her first line she is likely to have overheard. One possibility is that she stands amongst her cohorts the whole time, with the Countess doing all of the talking for her: 'This yong Gentlewoman had a father … Would for the Kings sake hee were li-ving' (21-26). In this case, the physical proximity between Helen and the Countess might emphasise the Countess's care and protectionism for Helen. Yet alternatively, it might be that Helen stands apart, maybe even entering separately from the three other characters in a way that visually emphasises her isolation and outsider status. In these circumstances, it might be that Lafew first notes Helen shed tears from afar – 'Your commendations Madam get from her / teares' (48-49) – with the

Countess maybe then approaching to provide comfort or alternatively admonishing her: 'No more of this *Helena*, go too, no / more' (53-54).

In a similar way, at the start of *King Lear*, Kent and Gloucester converse about the coming division of the kingdom, until the subject of their conversation turns to Edmond, silently occupying some area of the stage:

> *Kent*. Is not this your son, my Lord?
> *Glou*. His breeding Sir, hath bin at my charge. I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him, that now I am braz'd too't.
> *Kent*. I cannot conceive you.
> *Glou*. Sir, this yong Fellowes mother could; whereupon she grew round womb'd, and had indeede (Sir) a Sonne for her Cradle, ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?
> *Kent*. I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it, being so proper. (TLN 15-21)

The key issue here – as Stanley Cavell has emphasised in his reading of the play - is acknowledgement, it being uncertain whether Gloucester will deliver this joke in the knowledge that his son can hear him.[209] The lack of information provided by the play's opening stage direction – '*Enter Kent, Gloucester, and Edmond*' (1) – therefore raises a number of pressing questions: where is Edmond stood at this moment? Is he listening and can he hear? Does Gloucester *know* whether his son can hear him? What is Edmond's reaction? For one thing, Simon Palfrey has noted how Gloucester's emphasis on the word 'charge' plays off a number of semantic possibilities: firstly, 'charge' refers to the financial cost of Edmond's

[209] See 'The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of *King Lear*' in Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, pp.39-123.

upbringing. At the same time, it also has resonances of the moral responsibility Gloucester has for his son, and, as Palfrey suggests, the 'bullish headlong violence' of his conception.[210] A further possibility, however, is that 'charge' refers not so much to the cost of Edmond's upbringing as to the cost incurred when Edmond was conceived – that is to say, to the payment he made to Edmond's mother before they had sex. In this regard, Gloucester's later admission that the 'horson must / be acknowledged' (26-27) can be taken at face value, with 'whoreson' meaning, quite literally, that Edmond's mother was a prostitute. Whether Edmond is within hearing distance is, however, uncertain. It could be, no doubt, that Gloucester cracks this joke whilst his son is stood right beside him. Yet, it might be that Gloucester speaks behind his son's back, with Edmond potentially – though by no means necessarily – overhearing him from afar:

> But I have a Sonne, Sir, by order of Law, some
> yeere elder then this; who, yet is no deerer in my ac
> account, though this Knave came something sawcily to the
> world before he was sent for: yet was his Mother fayre,
> there was good sport at his making, and the horson must
> be acknowledged. Doe you know this Noble Gentle-
> man, *Edmond*? (TLN 22-28)

There is possible irony here as Gloucester fails, contrary to what he says, to 'acknowledge' the presence of his son. He might, in such a scenario, have his back turned on Edmond until belatedly realising that he is beside him, then awkwardly attempting to quickly change topic: 'Doe you know this Noble Gentle-man, *Edmond*?' Whilst this is likely to increase an audience's initial sympathy for Edmond, it also, through a sort of italicised comment, has the potential to either undermine or validate Gloucester's claim to 'acknowledge' his son depending whether at that moment he does so. This has important implications for interpreting Gloucester's and

[210] Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*, p.21.

Edmond's father / son relationship. Still more, it might even provide some explanation for why Edmond goes on to behave as he does.

Thus, within this opening scenario – and to a lesser extent in *All's Well That End's Well* – Shakespeare devises a strategy whereby characters are provided with a potential motive for their behaviour that cannot be ascertained from the playtext alone. This is something which Shakespeare pioneers. And yet, in the opening scene of Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, it is unclear how much of Leantio's conversation with his Mother Bianca will overhear. As in Shakespeare, it is the case that Bianca figures as the very subject of the other two character's conversation, with Leantio and his Mother talking about Bianca as though she wasn't in their presence:

Lean.
Now say, if't be not the best piece of theft
That ever was committed; and I have my pardon for't;
'Tis sealed from heaven by marriage.
Moth. Married to her!
Lean. You must keep counsel, Mother, I am undone else;
If it be known, I have lost her; do but think now
What that loss is – life's but a trifle to't. (1.1.43-48)

It could be, on the one hand, that this entire exchange occurs in the full knowledge that Bianca is listening, maybe even stood beside her husband. Alternatively, it might be that Bianca listens in secret from a distance or perhaps she doesn't overhear anything at all. In any case, what any audience will want to know is how Bianca will react – if indeed she is within hearing range – to what is said. How, for instance, is she likely to take Leantio's reference to their marriage as a 'theft'? Or more contentious still, how is she likely to react when her mother-in-law proceeds to express her disapproval:

Such a creature,
To draw from her fortune – which no doubt,
At the full time, might have her proved rich and noble –
You know not what you have done. (1.1.58-61)

Whilst neither confirming nor refuting the fact, the playtext is sufficiently ambiguous to leave open either alternative in which Bianca may or may not overhear this putatively 'private' conversation. This is further emphasised by the fact that the dialogue itself teasingly alludes to the possibility that Bianca might be listening in on the conversation, first when Leantio gives his mother a warning – 'Speak low, sweet mother' (71) – and also, when he proceeds to express the fear that his mother might inadvertently end up influencing Bianca's behaviour, instructing her to rebel:

Speak low, sweet Mother; you are able to spoil as many
As come within the hearing; if it be not
Your fortune to mar all, I have much marvel.
I pray do not you teach her to rebel
When she's in a good way to obedience; (1.1.71-75)

With his warning, Leantio unwittingly posits a causal explanation for his wife's subsequent elopement with the Duke. At the same time, this is an explanation that clashes with that provided by his Mother, who is assured that Bianca will eventually be led by her 'affections, wills, and humours' (70) to rebel. That Leantio expresses the fear that his mother may instead be putting ideas in her head stresses, therefore, the importance of whether Bianca overhears this exchange, with the potential to alter how we account for her subsequent behaviour. In this way, the play posits conflicting explanations as the cause of Bianca's future sexual transgressions. And yet, Middleton's strategy for achieving this appears to have come straight

out of Shakespeare's playbook, rehashing the scenic ambiguity that characterises Edmond's entrance in the opening scene of *King Lear*.

Missing Exits and Absent Cues

More difficult than getting players onto the stage must have been getting players off it. Without the backstage plot to consult, and with the bookkeeper's role in handling exits unclear, once they were on the stage, players appear to have been left to their own devices in determining when was the appropriate time to vacate the playing space.[211] Even where stage directions are missing, it is not surprising that most exits are therefore cued in the dialogue: when a player was unsure how long he was supposed to remain on the stage, he no doubt would have expected to receive the relevant hint from another player.

This is complicated by the fact that a great number of exits are peculiar and deviate from these expectations. Sometimes, cues are delivered early or are repeated, as when an exit is 'interrupted' by the entrance of another character.[212] On other occasions, it is not even clear whether a player who is directed to 'exit' is supposed to leave completely or instead move to some other part of the stage. The exits which are perhaps most baffling, however, are those for which there is no cue in the dialogue whatsoever and also no stage direction. This is not helped by the fact that, more so than entries, stage directions for exits are frequently missing in the

[211] The plots far less frequently specify exits compared with entrances. As Tribble notes: 'Internal exits are rarely mentioned; once an actor is on, he can get off either cued by the dialogue or with the help of his fellow actors (p.49). Meanwhile, E.K. Chambers writes that 'The bookkeeper … does not trouble about exits, and many, clearly required by the action, remain unnoted. Actors might be trusted to find their own way of the stage'. Evelyn B. Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe*, p.49; E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p.120; see also, Paul Werstine, *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.208. Besides the scarcity of exits on the plots, Werstine notes how they are also more generally absent from playhouse texts as well.

[212] On 'interrupted exits', see Ichikawa, 'Interrupted Exits and Their Implications' in *Shakespearean Entrances*, pp.21-32.

earliest printed texts.[213] It is unclear – if there was no guarantee of a rehearsal and players had learnt from parts – how they would have known to vacate the stage at the right time without some sort of prior warning. As a case in point, towards the end of *Macbeth*, Alan Dessen has drawn attention to the moment when Seyton brings news of Lady Macbeth's death:

A Cry within of Women

Sey. It is the cry of women, my good Lord.

Mac. I have almost forgot the taste of feares:
The time ha's beene, my sences would have cool'd
To heare a Night-shricke, and my Fell of haire
Woulde at a dismall Treatise rowze, and stirre
As life were in't. I have supt full with horrors,
Direnesse familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me. Wherefore was that cry?

Sey. The Queene (my Lord) is dead. (TLN 2328-2337)

In the folio, there is no indication, either in the dialogue or through a stage direction, that Seyton exits. This makes little sense because otherwise, how is Seyton supposed to know that Lady Macbeth has died? Most editions therefore insert a stage direction for Seyton to exit and then to re-enter before Macbeth enquires about the cause of the women's cry. At one glance, this makes good sense: first, the women cry, at which point Seyton exits, leaving Macbeth alone to deliver his speech until the women cry again and Seyton returns with the news of Lady Macbeth's death. It is plausible, perhaps, that the player required no instruction to exit as this was something that he could infer from the cue that would have appeared on his part-text: '– [Wherefore] [was] [that] cry?' This would have alerted the player of the need to remove

[213] 'in both promptbooks and early printed editions exit directions are omitted altogether far more commonly than entries.' Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), p.147.

himself. At the same time, the problem with this is that it requires us to assume that the player was provided with an unusually large cue of four words.

The other possibility, then, is that which has been suggested by Dessen – namely, that Seyton never exits the stage at all, and in fact, he stays put. Whilst this might seem to fly in the face of commonsense, Dessen is adamant that we should acknowledge the implicit, less readily apparent meanings that would be generated should Seyton (perhaps pronounced no differently to 'Satan') remain standing by Macbeth, as though possessing preternatural-like knowledge of what had happened offstage.[214]This reading is in tune with Dessen's more general warning that Shakespeare's first audiences did not share the same expectations for 'realism' as his 'modern interpreters'. In this regard, an attempt to find a 'realistic' solution for an apparent textual anomaly has obscured the potentially significant implications of alternative staging options.

The further reason that Dessen's example is noteworthy, however, is that it points to what many editors have assumed is an exit where no such exit is cued in the dialogue. In the opening scene of *King Lear*, a similar question arises about when precisely Edmond leaves the stage. As well as the ambiguity about his entrance at the very start of the play, it is unclear, in the absence of any specific direction or cue, whether Edmond is present to witness Lear's division of the kingdom or whether he will leave the stage beforehand. One possibility is that Edmond's exit is cued by Gloucester: 'He hath bin out nine years, and away he shall / againe' (35). Plausibly, 'away he shall / againe' could be accompanied by Gloucester pointing towards one of the stage doors, thereby directing the player of Edmond to leave. And yet, Michael J. Warren for one has argued compellingly that Edmond could remain onstage, with Edmond's 'experience of Lear's mistreatment of the daughters' going on to 'color for an interpreter the

[214] Dessen, *Recovering*, pp.91–92.

perception of Edmund's behavior in the second scene.'[215] This is certainly true, even if it doesn't go far enough. In fact, once Lear is done with the whole business of dividing his kingdom, the direction '*Flourish*. *Exeunt*.' (291) indicates that most of the characters will depart. Most, but not all: Cordelia, France, Goneril and Regan all still have lines to speak. So clearly, '*Exeunt*' does not include them. But does it include Edmond?

In most editions, the answer is no – it being stipulated that Edmond either exits when the king does or at some earlier moment, perhaps with Gloucester when he is ordered to fetch France and Burgundy. An alternative possibility, however, might involve Edmond lingering behind, clandestinely watching from a distance as Cordelia bids farewell to her sisters. More significantly, this might mean that Edmond is present when Goneril and Regan proceed to conspire against Lear, potentially overhearing when they pledge, cryptically, to 'do something, and i'th'heat' (332).

This demonstrates the fact that, as Suzanne Gosset has observed, '[t]he problem of exits segues into the problem of privacy, demanding decisions about when a conversation is overheard', whilst sometimes, a character's presence can provide 'a meaningful comment on the action.'[216] When, in the scene immediately following, Edmond goes on to set his own machinations in motion, the fact that he has heard the two sisters scheming against Lear might be what provides him with his rationale for acting against his father, seizing the opportunity that has temporarily become available. This would square with Edmond's role as a Machiavellian schemer, and in this way, the lack of any explicit cue for him to exit might be no accident – it presents the opportunity for Edmond to be seen gathering intelligence, which he will then go on to weave into his plots and stratagems.

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[215] Michael J. Warren, 'Textual Problems, Editorial Assertions in Editions of Shakespeare', in *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p.29; see also Ichikawa, *Shakespearean Entrances*, p.124.
[216] Gossett, p.154.

As a consequence, it is possible to see how Edmond's departure from the stage is not so strict or necessary – in fact, the player *might have* chosen to exit at any number of moments, potentially altering the available explanations for his subsequent behaviour.

In *Titus Andronicus*, it might be wondered whether Aaron – another wily trickster – is similarly able to prolong his time onstage when taking leave of Tamora:

> Now question me no more, we are espied,
> Heere comes a parcel of our hopefull Booty,
> Which dreads not yet their lives destruction.
> *Enter Bassianus and Lavinia*
> *Tamo*. Ah my sweet *Moore*: Sweeter to me the life.
> *Aron*. No more great Empresse, *Bassianus* comes,
> Be crosse with him, and Ile goe fetch thy Sonnes
> To backe thy quarrel what so ere they be. (TLN 784-792)

In this case, the dialogue *does* – perhaps - provide the player of Aaron with an instruction to exit: 'Ile goe fetch thy Sonnes'. Yet, rather than depart immediately, it is uncertain whether Aaron will manage to remove himself from the stage before Bassianus approaches and proceeds to probe Tamora: 'Whom have we here? / Romes Royall Empresse' (793-4). As such, the ambiguous staging of Aaron's exit – purposefully orchestrated so that he may or not be seen with Tamora – mirrors his fear that the two of them have been 'espied', with the folio text unclear as whether and to what extent both he and Tamora have been 'caught' in their illicit rendezvous. It could be, then, that Aaron flees just before Bassianus comes forward, or perhaps his exit is interrupted by Bassianus' prolonged entrance. At the same time, it could be – like Edmond – that Aaron removes himself to somewhere where he can overhear Tamora's succeeding exchange with Bassianus and Livia, emphasising his duplicity and opportunism as

he checks to see whether Tamora follows through on his command to be 'crosse with' Bassianus.

This is not to say that the usual positioning of Aaron's exit is wrong per se, just that it diminishes the array of alternative ways in which Aaron's leave of Tamora might play out. As such, whilst the player is instructed to act upon his cue – 'Ile goe fetch thy Sonnes' – the timing of his departure will be central in determining the sort of dramatic situation that results, with the player able to time, and indeed fashion his response to this cue in a number of different ways. This is to reconceive of exits as allowing some degree of actorly choice. Yet, as the earlier examples demonstrate, this would appear to apply most strongly in those cases where there is no explicit exit-cue supplied in the dialogue. A similarly doubtful exit can be found, for instance, in 1.2 of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. At 263-264, editors will usually indicate that Lucetta exits before Julia goes on to deliver a soliloquy, emphatically declaring her love for Proteus and expressing her regret at having torn the letter she has received from him. Before she putatively exits, Lucetta notes how Julia has acted against her own secret wishes in a mocking aside:

> *Lu*. She makes it strage, but she would be best pleas'd
> To be so angred with another Letter.
> *Ju*. Nay, would I were so angred with the same:
> Oh hatefull hands, to teare such loving words; (TLN. 262-265)

Whilst she continues in this vein, it is understandable that Julia is thought by most editors to occupy the stage alone: first Lucetta exits, then Julia delivers her soliloquy, following which Lucetta re-enters and informs Julia that 'dinner is ready: and your father staies' (290). The scenario is therefore comparable to Seyton's missing exit in *Macbeth*. At first sight, Lucetta's departure is necessary to 1) clear the stage for Lucetta to deliver her soliloquy, and 2) because otherwise it is unclear how she comes to learn that 'dinner is ready.' Julia certainly delivers her

soliloquy *as though* she is alone, then. But the possibility that Lucetta never departs is again suggested by the absence of any dialogic signal instructing the player to either exit or re-enter. Plausibly, this is something the player could have inferred for himself. Yet, Lucetta's sarcastic comment before she apparently departs also hints at the comedy that would result from her remaining onstage, surreptitiously watching when Julia proceeds to behave just as she predicted. Rather than Lucetta returning to inform Julia that her father awaits at dinner, an amusing alternative could be that Lucetta is inventing an excuse to awkwardly interrupt Julia, who is by now lovingly caressing the pieces of the letter she earlier tore apart: 'Now kisse, embrace, doe what you will' (289).

The opportunity for characters to overhear one another in this way is, as we have already seen, not uncommon in this play. In fact, another case in point can be found in 2.4, when Proteus arrives in Milan and sets his eyes on Silvia for the first time, instantly falling in love with her. In the folio, it is unclear whether the man Silvia is expected to marry – Turio – is present to witness the occasion. Again, not only does the folio provide no stage direction but neither is Turio provided with any exit-cue in the dialogue. After some eighteen lines during which Turio is silent, however, he then informs Silvia that the duke her father has requested her presence. As when Lucetta calls Julia for dinner, editors have understandably asked how Turio comes by such knowledge – some choosing to indicate that he will exit and re-enter, and others altering the text so that it is a servant who enters and informs Silvia of her father's request. This is another one of those occasions where editors' bias towards the 'correction' of their copy-text has obscured the potential comedy that might result from Turio remaining onstage. Turio might, in fact, simply be telling fibs. As the man who is supposed to become Silvia's husband, this would mean that he remains on the stage but is pushed out of the conversation whilst Proteus – possibly in a state of visible rapture – is first introduced to Silvia. Most likely, Turio would have been stood awkwardly aside the whole time watching, until finally, he decides to intervene

and invents a pathetic excuse to draw Silvia, who may have quite simply forgotten about his presence, away.

In cases like this, then, it may be that editors have identified 'missing' exits where none existed or were intended in the first place. Thus, Turio's exclusion from his 'wife-to-be's' interaction with two other men and his petty attempt to lure her away could be a cause for humour and amusement. In *Measure for Measure,* meanwhile, the common assumption that Francisca the Nun exits when Lucio comes knocking in search of Isabella might also be misplaced:

> It is a mans voice: gentle *Isabella*
> Turne you the key, and know his businesse of him;
> You may; I may not: you are yet unsworne: (TLN 357-359)

As most editors have suspected, it might be that Francisca's order for Isabella to answer the door functions as her cue to exit. But nothing about this seems necessary. In fact, in a play that is all about sexual hypocrisy, it would be ironic if Francisca instead lingers on the stage, making the most of an opportunity to get a rare glimpse of a man. As such, Francisca's presence on the stage doesn't really cause any problem but might instead be of interpretive significance.

In *Hamlet*, a similar question hangs over the exit of Gertrude during what most editions designate as either 4.4 or 4.5. This is the scene that begins with Laertes barging onto the stage with his band of followers, and which includes Ophelia's final appearance in the play when she distributes the flowers and departs after delivering her song beginning 'And will he not come again'. All three of the earliest texts vary at this point: in Q1 the direction *'exit Ofelia*' (68) is supplied, in Q2 there is no stage direction, and the folio includes the stage direction '*Exeunt Ophelia*' (2950). The convention in modern editions is to also include Gertrude's exit at this point, suggesting that she will accompany Ophelia off the stage. This follows a period of some

seventy-five lines during which Gertrude doesn't say a word, whilst nowhere in the dialogue is there any suggestion or clue as to when Gertrude should depart. The idea that Gertrude will exit when Ophelia does can, perhaps, be inferred from the presence of the plural 'exeunt' in the folio, in which case the two women might exit together in a female bond of sympathy and affection. A less sentimental alternative in which Ophelia exits the stage alone cannot, however, be discounted. This would not only emphasise Ophelia's isolation, but also means that Gertrude will be present when the king seeks to console Laertes in his grief, appending his condolences with a reassurance that the person responsible for Polonius' death will be held to account: 'And where th' offence is, let the great Axe fall' (2970). It could be that Gertrude overhears this threat against her son at a distance, or perhaps the king – if he is aware of her presence - mutters it privately in Laertes' ear. The ambiguity surrounding the precise timing of Gertrude's exit here feeds into the broader uncertainty about what she does or perhaps does not know about her husband's stratagems: imagining that she is present somewhere on the stage, it might that Gertrude can be seen attempting in some way to gain intelligence about what her husband is up to.

In a similar way, it might be asked whether the Nurse is really required to exit in 3.5 of *Romeo and Juliet* when, just before Romeo flees from Juliet's bedroom window, she hurriedly rushes onto the stage and warns them of Lady Capulet's approach: 'Your Lady Mother is coming to your Chamber, / The day is broke, be wary, looke about' (2071-3). The standard move of editors is to indicate that the Nurse then exits. This means that Romeo and Juliet will be left alone as they bid farewell to one another and share a final kiss. But on the other hand, a less sentimental alternative might involve the Nurse remaining onstage and anxiously hurrying them. In fact, earlier in this thesis, I have already emphasised how Romeo's desire for 'one kisse' (2075) before he departs might not necessarily be fulfilled. As a play in which the two lovers barely get a minute's privacy together, the Nurse's presence would thereby exacerbate

and feed into the sense that Romeo and Juliet are constantly intruded upon. At this crucial moment when, without knowing it, they say their last goodbyes, it could be then that the pair are deprived of the opportunity to kiss one another as the Nurse pressures Romeo to leave. This would not be out of character for the Nurse who is, of course, an interfering busybody.

What this also suggests, however, is that many 'missing exits' are potentially not really 'missing' at all. In fact, there is a need to pay more attention to the potential significance of characters remaining onstage when it is uncertain how players themselves would have been able to infer that their departure was necessary. As a matter of fact, the conclusion that can be drawn from the examples above is that there is usually nothing 'necessary' about characters exiting at these moments at all. This would appear to suggest that sometimes, players would be trusted to make their own choices, at least on those occasions when the dialogue provided them with little in the way of instruction.

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This chapter has emphasised the plurality of staging possibilities emerging from the alternative points at which a player may or may not enter or leave the stage. What this has revealed is the way that entrances and exits are tied to other important critical concerns by a relation of supervenience, whereby there can be no difference about when a character is or is not present without causing a difference in the whole nexus of incidents and occurrences that make up the world of a play. Not only are entrances and exits thereby causally tied to the rest of the action in a consequential way, but the epistemological problem posed by 'missing' entry and exit directions supervenes upon a range of other questions: what do different characters know about each other? What information has a given character had access to, and how has this influenced this character's behaviour? Often, it is simply not possible to know for certain when or for how long a character is supposed to be on the stage. Instead, what we have is a range of alternative

possibilities that will alter the significance of the action in others ways too. Even where an entrance or exit might seem obvious or necessary, I have drawn attention to the implications of a range of alternate entries and exits, with the timing of these affecting everything from the potential for conversations to be overheard, to the silent presence of a character provoking anything ranging from laughter to pity, sorrow or sympathy. More importantly, perhaps, I have highlighted how whether a character is present at any given moment can alter the basis upon which we will go about inferring his or her motivations and intentions. I have focused not just on instances where stage directions are apparently missing, but more crucially, where there seems to be no signal in the dialogue telling the relevant player that he needs to either enter the stage or depart from it. This suggests that sometimes, the absence of any explicit signal in the dialogue means that there isn't any exit intended, or maybe this lack of instruction was intended to leave players free to determine for themselves when they should depart.

Chapter 5

Staging Reported Action:

Retroactive Narration and Rescripting the Staged Past

Another notable, albeit problematic mode of implicit action in Shakespeare comes in the form of reports. Of course, reports can be encountered everywhere in early modern drama – when messengers bring news from distant offstage locations, say, or when characters recollect events that occurred long ago in a play's distant, imagined past. Indeed, because dramatists required techniques for 'representing all that is not showable', this kind of reportage was utilised by Shakespeare and his contemporaries to evoke what Lorna Hutson has termed an 'extramimetic' sphere of action spilling beyond the borders of the stage and the timeframe of a given plot, inviting audiences to imagine events and occurrences taking place in the 'unscene' – 'the whole inferred or virtual "world" which apparently subtends the performance we watch, but which … is actually an effect of our trying to make sense of it.'[217]

Besides relaying information about events that have not been staged, however, characters will sometimes provide accounts of events that have occurred during the course of a play and which an audience will have witnessed for itself. In contrast to the diegetic strategies explored by Hutson, this aspect of Shakespeare's dramaturgy has rarely attracted sustained scholarly

[217] Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare*, p.5; on the concept of the 'unscene', see also Marjorie Garber, '"The Rest Is Silence": Ineffability and the "Unscene" in Shakespeare's Plays', in *Ineffability: Naming the Unnamable from Dante to Beckett*, ed. by Peter S. Hawkins and Anne Howland Schotter (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), pp.35-50.

attention. When it has, it has usually been argued (if not assumed) that such reports will be harnessed to direct, usually retrospectively, the staging at other points in the play.

Thus, in an influential article written in the 1990s, Antony Hammond categorised 'retroactive' reports of this sort into his 'fourth kind' of stage direction, 'where something a character says later in the play contains a direction for an earlier event.'[218] Although he also highlights how ambiguities will sometimes 'present alternative staging possibilities', Hammond thereby assumes nothing short of a necessary connection between what is implied in the dialogue and what must have actually been staged.[219] But clearly, if Hammond is right, then this problematises Palfrey's and Stern's hypothesis that players need only have studied with their own parts prior to any live performance. Imagining that one player was required to perform a gesture or action that only figured as a retroactive narration in another player's part, then how was that player supposed to know that he was required to perform the said gesture? This question is not addressed by Palfrey and Stern themselves, who have little to say about such reports in *Shakespeare in Parts*. As such, in what follows, a focus will be placed on the question of how – and indeed whether – Shakespeare utilises reports to orchestrate moments that have yet to be or already have been staged during the course of a given play. What Hammond and others have failed to emphasise is the context in which many of these retroactive or anticipatory narrations will occur. Many of them, in fact, can be found at moments when characters are potentially falsifying or presenting a misleading account of what has happened, in such a way that the events of a play are retrospectively 're-written' as the events of that same play are in the very process of being realised.

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[218] In total, Hammond identifies 'six classes or kinds of stage direction', the third of which encompasses 'whatever the words leave out.' The fourth kind he thus defines as 'a sub-class of the third: directions implicit in the dialogue, in which what a character says about himself, or what other characters say about him, contain action-directions.' Hammond, pp.71–99 (pp.73-75).

[219] He does so, in fact – as was highlighted in the third chapter of this thesis – whilst noting how editors will frequently rely on their sense of 'theatrical necessity' when adding or altering 'directions without any *textual* authority', Hammond, p.94; p.71.

Retrospective Reports, Doubling and Group Rehearsal

The most obvious function of a retrospective report is to add detail and to 'fill in' earlier gaps in the staging. Putatively, most of these reports will inform characters who were not present for an earlier scene about something which has happened in their absence. These reports will simultaneously fulfil a theatrical function, however, by informing players what actions and gestures they should perform at earlier points in the drama. Although M.M. Mahood – noting how 'doubling was extensively practised' – has maintained that 'bit-part actors were for the most part subservient members of the company', it might be that the presence of such reports actually indicates which roles a particular player doubled, with 'bit-parts' like messengers potentially supplying dramatists with the opportunity to further instruct players through the reports delivered by messengers.[220]

In his recent study on doubling in Shakespeare's plays, Brett Gamboa has challenged the older orthodox view that the Chamberlain's / King's Men relied heavily on so-called hired men to perform minor roles, proposing instead that the majority of Shakespeare's plays can be performed by a minimum of twelve players.[221] Thus, although messengers far more frequently bring news about things that have happened offstage, when they report about an event that has occurred earlier in the staging of a play, it would have been useful if the messenger delivering that report was played by the same player who had earlier performed the reported action. When in *King John* a messenger brings news of Constance's death, it could be then that it was this same actor who had earlier been playing Constance:

> *Mes*. My Liege, her eare

[220] Mahood adds further that 'nearly all small parts were assigned to the hired men.' Mahood, p.10.

[221] Gamboa writes that 'it seems probable that Shakespeare's company used hired men when they were available and cost-efficient. But it likely employed hired men to reach the number necessary to play rather than paying a premium to give audiences worse acting and greater pretences to verisimilitude – neither of which appear to have been desirable.' Gamboa, pp.124–25.

Is stopt with dust: the first of Aprill di'de
Your noble mother; and as I heare, my Lord,
The Lady *Constance* in a frenzie di'de
Three days before: but this from Rumors tongue
I idely heard: if true, or false I know not. (TLN. 1838-1843)

The last appearance Constance makes in the play is in the preceding act, when she exits after having unbound her hair: 'I will not keepe this forme upon my head, / When there is such disorder in my witte' (1486-7). Though the messenger's report alludes enigmatically to what has occurred offstage (so that Constance's fate is never actually confirmed), his emphasis on how she 'in a [frenzy died]' is corroborated by the unloosening of her hair – a gesture symbolising mental distraction - during her final appearance on the stage some scenes earlier, such that the messenger's report can be seen providing the player with extra information to guide his performance in the earlier scene.[222]

A similar case of doubling might also be at work in *Antony and Cleopatra*, when a messenger arrives from Rome to deliver news of Antony's marriage to Octavia, commenting specifically how Lavinia was 'led between her Brother, and *Mark Anthony*' (1634-5). In the way that Shakespeare 'engineered plays particularly suited to small companies', if the player of Octavia doubled as the messenger, then not only would he have known to walk between the other two players, but he could also have taken the messenger's further description of Octavia's comportment as an instruction for how he should carry himself: 'She creepes: her motion, & her station are as one./ She shewes a body, rather then a life, / A Statue, then a Breather' (1646-1648).[223] In *King Lear*, meanwhile, another example of this can be found when a messenger

[222] 'True or false, Constance's fate is never confirmed; as with many issues in the play the facts prove difficult to ascertain. Significantly, this means that the credibility of rumour is never seriously compromised.' Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p.91.
[223] Gamboa, p.19.

reports back to Albany about the servant who stood up to Cornwall when Gloucester had his eyes removed:

> *Mes*. Oh my good Lord, the Duke of *Cornwals* dead,
> Slaine by his Servant, going to put out
> The other eye of Glouster.
> *Alb.* Glousters eyes.
> *Mes*. A servant that he bred, thrill'd with remorse,
> Oppos'd against the act: bending his Sword
> To his great Master, who, threat-enrag'd
> Flew on him, and among'st them fell'd him dead,
> But not without that harmefull stroke, which since
> Hath pluckt him after. (TLN 2313-2322)

Again, assuming that this report was delivered by the same player who also doubled as the servant – and one who is unlikely to have been a hired man - then the report is functioning not so much to inform Albany as to instruct the player who performed both characters the precise manner he should challenge Cornwall in the preceding act, as though Shakespeare is using this messenger's report as an opportunity to provide the player with a clear set of instructions.[224] The reports delivered by one character about another – in this case messengers – might therefore have been one way in which players could be informed about actions they were required to perform if both those characters were played by the same actor. This would have facilitated the players' study of their parts in isolation. More complex, however, are those occasions when one character retrospectively provides an account of an event that contains not only instructions for himself, but for numerous other players.

[224] 'Shakespeare cannot reasonably have desired to hire surplus, presumably less competent, actors to take on work that sharers could do, and that the plays were structured to let them do.' Gamboa, p.71.

Two instructive cases in point can be found in *Romeo and Juliet*. Twice in this play, Benvolio recounts scenes involving large numbers of players and complex blocking: first, when he tells of how the brawl broke out between the Montagues and Capulets at the start of the play; then secondly, when he provides a similar account of the fight between Mercutio, Tybalt and Romeo later in the play. In both cases, Benvolio delivers these prolonged narrations upon the request of characters who were absent during the events in question. As with the example above, moreover, the player of Benvolio is provided with directions for his own behaviour when recalling how the servants of the two rival families were 'close fighting ere I did approach', and when, responding to this, he claims that he 'drew to part them' (109-110). From this, the Benvolio-actor will know to approach the quarrelling servants when the time is right, before going on to draw his sword. Yet matters become more complicated when Benvolio proceeds to recount how Tybalt, 'with his sword prepar'd … swong [it] about his head' (111-114). The question this raises is how the player of Tybalt could have known – unless he received the appropriate instruction from elsewhere – that he was required to swing his sword above his head if a discrepancy was to be avoided between Benvolio's report and Tybalt's actions. At a first glance, this seems to call into question Palfrey's and Stern's idea that rehearsal revolved mostly around the players' private study of their parts, until, that is, it is recalled that the most likely scenario in which group rehearsals would have occurred according to Stern is for scenes like this, which involved complex blocking. Thus, whilst Palfrey and Stern write that 'collective rehearsals were far less important' than the individual player's 'conning' of his part and that they were 'occasionally dispensed with altogether', they do maintain that 'particular *group* elements of the play – jigs, songs, dances, sword fights, perhaps crowd or climactic scenes – will have benefited from ensemble rehearsal.'[225] Hence to this extent, far from discrediting their hypothesis, the existence of these retrospective reports might well provide

[225] Palfrey and Stern, see pp.62 & 72.

further evidence in support of it, providing indications of which scenes were the most likely to have been rehearsed in groups. Take the moment when Benvolio recounts the moments leading up to Tybalt's death:

> *Tybalt* here slaine, whom *Romeo's* hand did slay,
> *Romeo* that spoke him faire, bid him bethink
> How nice the Quarrell was, and urg'd withal
> Your high displeasure: all this uttered,
> With gentle beath, calme lookem knees humbly bow'd
> Could not take truce with the unruly spleene
> Of *Tybalts* deafe to peace [etc.] (TLN 1596-1602)

A notable detail concerns Benvolio's specific emphasis on the way Romeo is said to kneel. This is nowhere else implied in the dialogue, and again, it suggests that some sort of group rehearsal probably occurred in which Benvolio's report functioned as a template for the rehearsing players. But need Romeo necessarily have kneeled? At a cursory glance, there is nothing much about Benvolio's report that is likely to raise eyebrows. The audience, after all, will already have seen all of this for itself: Tybalt's provocations, Romeo's attempts to pacify him and Tybalt's spurning of Romeo's offer of peace. And yet on closer inspection, Benvolio's report contains inconsistencies giving the lie to his claim that 'This is the truth, or let *Benvolio* die' (1619), offering a misleading account of what happened that is favourable to Romeo's faction and exaggerates Tybalt's responsibility for the fight with Mercutio. This only becomes apparent once Benvolio's report is compared with the moment itself:

> *Rom*.
> And so good *Capulet*, which name I tender
> As dearely as my owne, be satisfied.
> *Mer*. O calme, dishonourable, vile submission:
> *Alla stucatho* carries it away.

Tybalt, you Rat-catcher, will you walke? (TLN 1503-6)

As can be seen, Tybalt and Mercutio begin to fight when Mercutio takes offence at Romeo's unwillingness to rise to Tybalt's challenge. It is thus quite clear that Mercutio is the principal aggressor. But when Benvolio reports what happened some ninety or so lines later, no mention is made of Mercutio's attack on Tybalt:

Could not take truce with the unruly spleene
Of *Tybalts* deafe to peace, but that he Tilts
With Peircing steele at bold *Mercutio's* breast (TLN 1601-4)

Sure, Benvolio describes Mercutio as 'bold'. He does, nonetheless, miss out the part where Mercutio challenges Tybalt, thereby reversing the chronology of events as they actually happened: rather than Mercutio drawing on Tybalt, Benvolio reports that it was Tybalt who was the first to 'tilt' his sword at Mercutio. Benvolio is far from a reliable narrator, then. In fact, it might be said that he is a wholly *unreliable* messenger. As such, it is plausible that Romeo might never even have kneeled at all. Instead, such a discrepancy between what Benvolio reports and what actually occurred might demonstrate Benvolio embellishing the truth, doing everything he can to portray Romeo and his friend in the most positive light possible.

Ambiguous Retrospective Reports

The scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* were, in all likelihood, subject to a group rehearsal, with Benvolio's subsequent narratives helping to direct any such a rehearsal. This accords with Palfrey's and Stern's claim that group rehearsals were reserved for those scenes with the most

complex blocking.[226] That being said, this does not mean that Benvolio necessarily portrays what happens with total accuracy – as has been seen, his reports are sometimes misleading, omitting details in such a way that fails to provide a full, accurate picture of the facts. This should alert us to the potential discrepancies between what characters say happens and what actually happens. In the case of Benvolio, readers (as well as audiences) are well positioned to point out the inconsistencies within the second of Benvolio's two reports, since it is clearly implied earlier in the dialogue that Malvolio is the first to challenge Tybalt, rather than vice versa. As such, Benvolio attempts to explicitly 're-write' this earlier staged event, whereas elsewhere, a later reference to an earlier event might only serve to further ambiguate what was already ambiguous in the first place.

To demonstrate the point, it is apt to revisit the moment of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* discussed earlier in this thesis, when Julia and Proteus ambiguously part ways. As I highlighted in the second chapter, during 2.2 after the pair have exchanged tokens, Julia exits whilst Proteus is mid-speech without uttering a word, thereby prompting Proteus' bemused response: '*Julia*, farewell: what, gon without a word?' (584). It could be, as I stressed earlier, that Julia departs in any number of ways and for any number of reasons: maybe she begins to shed tears, giving Proteus a parting kiss. And yet alternatively, maybe her silence betrays her resentment or upset, as she storms off the stage in a visual show of frustration with the man who is leaving her behind. Towards the end of the act, however, what is notable is how Lance will retrospectively fill-in this gap, when asked by Speed on what terms Julia and Proteus parted:

> *Speed*. Come-on you mad-cap: Ile to the Ale-house
> with you presently; where, for one shot of five pence,
> thou shalt have five thousand welcomes: But sirha, how

[226] At least this is one conclusion that can be reached from their suggestion that there was simply 'no need for over-much ensemble preparation before performance', which implies a needs-based approach such that only those scenes that were specifically identified as requiring an ensemble rehearsal would end up being rehearsed. Palfrey and Stern, p.74.

did thy Master part with Madam *Julia*?

Lan. Marry after they cloas'd in earnest, they parted very fairely in jest. (TLN 879-884)

In response to Speed, Lance's report appears to clarify the earlier uncertainty. It might be asked, however, whether the alternative staging options I have alluded to above must be discarded in light of Lance's claim that the lovers 'parted / very fairely in jest.' In fact, if anything, Lance's report itself is ambiguous, with an emphasis placed on the antithesis between 'cloas'd in earnest' and 'parted / very fairely in jest'. On the one hand, 'cloas'd in earnest' implies the seriousness with which they said their goodbyes – something which accords with their exchange of tokens and, potentially, kisses. On the other, 'fairely in jest' clearly contradicts this, and is perhaps spoken in irony. Thus far from having parted 'fairly', Lance might in fact be saying the opposite: namely, that for some reason which is not clear, Julia and Proteus did not depart on the cordial terms which might otherwise be expected. All of this is further compounded by the fact that Lance wasn't, in any case, present to witness the moment in question anyway. As such, he can hardly be regarded as a reliable source of information. There is, however, another possible explanation – namely, that Lance has received this information from Antonio's servant Pantino, who does make an appearance alongside Proteus and Silvia in 2.2. Though most modern editions place Pantino's entrance *after* Julia has departed, in the folio, his entrance is included as part of a massed entry at the start of the scene, so that Pantino is possibly present to witness the lovers part ways. These sorts of ambiguous exits will be looked at in more detail later in this thesis. Maybe it's the case – as is here demonstrated between Speed and Lance – that the servants have been gossiping amongst themselves, in which case Lance is reporting something which has been reported to him by Pantino. But the point still stands that the accuracy of Lance's report is doubtful. So rather than clarify the staging, Lance's report simply compounds the existing uncertainties. This sort of thing is not uncommon in

Shakespeare. In the first quarto of *Hamlet*, for example, during an exchange with Claudius, Gertrude recollects her encounter with Hamlet in the closet just one scene earlier, providing some revealing details about what actually happened before the fatal moment when Hamlet stabbed Polonius-cum-Corambis through the arras:

> Alas my lord, as raging as the sea:
> Whenas he came, I first bespake him faire,
> But then he throwes and tosses me about,
> As one forgetting that I was his mother:
> At last I call'd for help: and as O cried, *Corambis*
> Call'd, which Hamlet no sooner heard, but whips me
> Out his rapier, and cries, a Rat, a Rat, and in his rage
> The good olde man he kilies. (IV.i.7-13)

This Q1-only passage seems to clarify what happened one scene earlier. To this extent, Gertrude's recollection provides some indication of why she called out for help after she was attacked, apparently, by Hamlet who 'threw' and 'tossed' her about. Whilst many scholars have thereby taken Gertrude's words as a reliable indication of the staging, it is surprising how little this has encouraged reflection about how potentially violent Hamlet's treatment of his mother really is. As I argued earlier in this thesis, Gertrude's cry for help – 'What wilt thou do? thou wilt not murther me?' (TLN 2401) – plausibly functioned as the Hamlet-player's prompt, causing him to make some threatening attempt upon Gertrude's life. As such, Gertrude's report here can be seen to corroborate this reading, evoking the violent attack she suffered when her son lost his temper until he was abruptly disrupted by Polonius calling from behind the arras. And yet, it is important to remember that Hamlet's behaviour is not something which is prescribed by the dialogue – like Hamlet himself, the player's actions during this episode will be extremely unpredictable and might play out in any number of ways. Although he might, then, make a genuine attempt on his mother's life – an attempt from which she is only saved

by Polonius' intervention – her report is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for other possibilities, accommodating a variety of contingent outcomes that *might have* been realised when the moment in question was staged just one scene earlier.

Rumour, Rhetoric and Rewriting the Past

These retrospective reports will, then, sometimes take the form of rumours, accusations and allegations that may or may not have a basis in what has earlier been staged. Nowhere is this more evident than when characters have a clear motive in falsifying another character's actions. As has been noted by Charles Whitworth, 'actions which have been represented on stage [and which] are subsequently reported' are significant in that they 'call attention to the motives of the speaker and the manner of reporting'.[227] In fact, it transpires that many 'retroactive stage directions' occur at moments when characters are plausibly, if not likely, distorting what an audience has already witnessed. Take the following lines from *Henry VIII*, when Norfolk provides an account of Wolsey's behaviour for the king:

> *Nor*. My Lord, we have
> Stood here observing him. Some strange commotion
> Is in his braine: he bites his lip, and starts,
> Stops on a sodaine, looks upon the ground,
> Then layes his finger on his temple: straight
> Springs out into fast gate, then stops againe,
> Strikes his brest hard, and anon, he casts
> His eye against the moone: in most strange postures
> We have seene him set himself. (TLN 1971-1980)

[227] Whitworth, p.46.

This example is interesting, because throughout *Henry VIII*, Wolsey's behaviour is a constant source of speculation and rumour. Immediately preceding this speech, Norfolk and Suffolk have been providing a running commentary on Wolsey as they spy on him from afar, noting how 'hee's moody' (1926), 'discontented' (1945) and 'vex'd at something' (1962). At this point, Wolsey has now exited. Yet Norfolk's speech is embedded with a series of action-prompts that the player of Wolsey has apparently already performed: to bite his lips, stop 'on a sodaine', look upon the ground, lay 'his finger on his temple' and to strike his breast. This might suggest that the player of Wolsey was somehow informed that he was required to perform these gestures in advance, though alternatively, it could be that there is a potential mismatch between Norfolk's report and Wolsey's precise actions in what is a kind of falsified report that nonetheless serves to imaginatively embellish what has just happened. It could be, then, that Norfolk's account is exaggerated in an effort dimmish Wolsey's reputation. Yet, in an ironic comment upon the play's assertion that 'all is true', it is the mere fact that these words are uttered that engenders the imaginative possibility of their fulfilment. What this means is that a report which is demonstrably false in one set of playing circumstances might, in some alternative version of the play, turn out to be true – the theatrical presence of this description deriving from the mere fact that it is spoken.

Another consequential example of this kind of thing can be found in *Julius Caesar*, when Mark Antony delivers his funeral oration to the roman plebians. As he attempts to stir the people to mutiny, Antony memorably recounts the assassination by drawing attention to the wounds left by each conspirator on Caesar's corpse, reaching his climax when recalling how Brutus delivered the final blow:

> This was the most unkindest cut of all.
> For when the Noble *Caesar* saw him stab,
> Ingratitude, more strong then Traitors armes,

> Quite vanquish'd him: then burst his Mighty heart,
> And in his Mantle, muffling up his face,
> Even at the Base of *Pompeyes* Statue
> (Which all the while ran blood) great *Caesar* fell. (TLN 1720-1726)

Ann Paternak-Slater has argued persuasively that Antony's speech is designed to retrospectively orchestrate how the assassination is staged one scene earlier. Given the complexity of the blocking, it is likely that this scene would have been rehearsed. The other curious thing, however, is what Pasternak-Slater notes about Antony's emphasis on specific details - details that can be traced back to Plutarch's description of the assassination in Shakespeare's source:

> Men report also that Caesar did still defend himself against the rest, running every way with his body. But when he saw Brutus with his sword drawn in his hand, then he pulled his gown over his head and made no more resistance, and was driven, either casually or purposedly by the counsel of the conspirators, against the base whereupon Pompey's image stood, which ran all of a gore-blood till he was slain.[228]

There are two notable details that Shakespeare transfers from Plutarch: firstly, the description of Caesar with 'his Mantle, muffling up his face', and secondly, the depiction of him falling 'at the base of Pompeyes statue'. According to Pasternak-Slater, Shakespeare's appropriation of such details indicates that he visualised the staging of the assassination as 'a replica of its historical original', arguing that if Antony's speech is to have dramatic force, 'it must describe the scene as the audience actually saw it.'[229] Slater, then, argues in favour of a strong necessary connection between what was staged and what is subsequently implied in the dialogue. A closer look, however, reveals Shakespeare transmuting his source material in more sophisticated ways than this. For one thing, in his translation of Plutarch, what is most significant is the way North

[228] Plutarch, 'The Life of Julis Caesar', in *Shakespeare's Plutarch*, ed. by T. J. B. Spencer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 21–101 (p.95).
[229] Pasternak-Slater, p.25.

stresses the conditional nature of the history he is narrating, self-consciously declaring that his account is derived from what, in his own words, 'men report'. It is this detail, as opposed to any particular gesture, that I suspect really caught Shakespeare's attention – something which becomes more apparent once it is recognised that Antony might never have been present to witness the assassination at all. In the moments immediately preceding the assassination, Brutus observes Trebonius draw '*Mark Antony* out of the way' (1232). The typical response of editors is to add a stage direction that Antony and Trebonius exit, as pretty much every major edition has done since Malone.[230] But this raises an obvious question that seems to have troubled editors little: if Antony exits, then how is he so informed about the most precise, minutest details of Caesar's final moments when he goes on to deliver his funeral oration? It needs to asked, then, what exactly it means for Trebonius to 'draw' Antony 'out of the way': it could mean that the two men exit, but it could be that Trebonius lures Antony into some neutralised area of the stage.

In the case that Antony *does* exit, however, it should further be asked why his speech should be regarded as a reliable source for inferring how the assassination was staged when Antony is obviously engaged in an exercise of skilled oratory – intended not to relate matters of fact but to act upon its present audience, which includes not only the Roman plebians but also the crowd of Elizabethan playgoers. It would, as Charles Whitworth has observed, after all make complete sense if Antony was embellishing his 'recollection' of what happened with details designed to lend his rhetoric added emotive and persuasive force. In contrast to Pasternak-Slater,

[230] An exception is the New Oxford Shakespeare, which includes an exit direction but stipulates in a note that they might instead draw aside and exit at a later point. All other editions I have consulted – Arden, Cambridge, Oxford, Norton, Riverside, Royal Shakespeare Company – follow Malone's precedent. The question as to whether Antony is present when Caesar dies is, however, surely an important one. Though in Plutarch Antony is reported as being absent during the assassination, the New Oxford Shakespeare is right to question what it really means when Brutus delivers the cue for Trebonius to lure Antony away. This might be directing the two players to exit or to remove themselves to some other part of the stage.

Whitworth has emphasised how Antony 'recreates' the scene of the assassination for which he wasn't even present, arguing that this

> invites comparison of the two versions of the actions in question, the staged one and the narrated one, and draws attention upon the character of the reporter, possible discrepancies in the event staged and the report given, and his or her motives.[231]

When looked at in this way, it becomes clear why Antony hones in so hard on the point of Caesar covering his face with his mantle. As it turns out, this is not just any old garment but one which comes with its own backstory, which Antony provides just some lines earlier during his oration:

> If you have teares, prepare to shed them now.
> You all do know this mantle, I remember
> The first time ever *Caesar* put it on,
> 'Twas on a Summers Evening in his Tent,
> That dayhe overcame the *Nervy* (TLN 1706-1710)

Antony is whetting his listeners' appetites, establishing a sentimental link between himself, the mantle and his listeners before evoking the image of Caesar cowering behind the mantle as he breathed his last. Though Caesar might well have covered his face with the mantle, then, there is little about this implied gesture which seems particularly necessary. After all, this is the world of ancient Rome, where if enough people can be persuaded that something is true then it is, for all and intents and purposes, true. In this way, Antony is not only engaged in a game to persuade the Roman populace to act out his will but to hoodwink the hoard of Shakespeare's playgoers, manipulating and distorting the facts in such a way that only the most attuned of playgoers would notice the discrepancy in Antony's report. Later in the play, when Antony faces down

[231] Whitworth, 'Tudor Theatre', p.51.

Brutus and Cassius with Octavius, he proves similarly eager to portray the assassins in the most dishonourable light possible:

> Villains: you did not so, when your vile daggers
> Hackt one another in the sides of *Caesar* :
> You shew'd your teethes like Apes,
> And fawn'd like Hounds,
> And bow'd like Bondmen, kissing *Caesars* feete ;
> Whil'st damned *Caska*, like a Curre, behind
> Strooke *Caesar* on the necke. O you Flatterers (TLN 2372-2378)

Maybe Casca did strike Caesar from behind, and maybe he didn't: the staging might have gone either way. The important question is not so much whether Casca did or did not do so, but what are the implications of either alternative. In the event that he didn't, then what is important is the way that Antony can again be seen rescripting the play's history. Though these retrospective reports might seem to function *like* a mode of implicit instruction, this does not mean that the scenes must necessarily be staged as Antony goes on to maintain. In fact, by staging the assassination as it is described by Antony, are we too not falling gullably for his narrative? And yet, one of the powerful things about theatre as a medium for the reenactment of history is the window it provides onto the processes whereby the past is told and retold, repeatedly transmuted into something anew. Antony's version of events is, then, just one of many possible histories that might be realised every time the play is staged. What in the source is a straightforward narrative retold as fact thus becomes in Shakespeare just one of many suspect versions of what *might have been*. In the event that Antony *is* engaged in the attempt to rewrite the past, then what the audience witnesses is a version of the play in which Antony's rescripting of events gradually becomes the accepted version of history – eventually even finding its way into Shakespeare's own source, and indeed, many subsequent future performances of the play.

Alternative Pasts in the History Plays

All of the examples examined in this chapter testify to the fact that Shakespeare's plays are 'replete', as Dermot Cavanagh has commented, 'with invented material, hearsay [and] belated report.' Yet nowhere is this more apparent than in the history plays, where Shakespeare's use of reports allows him 'to make a truly historical enquiry into history writing's claim to the truth.'[232] Here, what is said about the past is overtly central to what these plays are about. Throughout the histories, the problem of how the past can be known is explored by enticing audiences – and indeed readers – to be alert to potential discrepancies between what characters report has happened and what audiences will actually see occur.

In *2 Henry VI*, an instructive case in point occurs when Duke Humphrey faces accusations of having abused his position in the Protectorship:

> *Queene*.
> We know the time since he was milde and affable,
> And if we did but glance a farre-off Looke,
> Immediately he was upon his Knee,
> That all the Court admir'd him for submission.,
> But meet him now, and bei it in the Morne,
> When every one will give the time of day,
> He knits his Brow, and shewes an angry Eye,,
> And passeth by Stiffe unbowed Knee,
> Disdaining dutie that to us belongs. (TLN 1303-1311)

Much like Julius Caesar or Wolsey, Humphrey's behaviour is the constant source of other characters' rumours, speculations and allegations, inviting the audience to evaluate whether

[232] Cavanagh, p.102.

these reports can be trusted. In the above quotation, the Queen complains that Humphrey no longer shows due submission and respect by kneeling, adding to the existing imputations that the duke is ambitious. When Humphrey enters not long after this speech, the audience is therefore expected to note whether or not he will kneel:

Enter Gloucester.

Glost. All happinesse unto my Lord the King:
Pardon, my Liege, that I have stay'd so long.

Suff. Nay *Gloster*, know that thou art come too soone,
Unlesse thou wert more loyall then thou art:
I do arrest thee of High Treason here. (TLN 1390-1395)

As can be seen, there is no indication - either through a stage direction or in the dialogue - as to whether Humphrey will kneel. In light of Margaret's complaints, this hardly seems accidental: the action, in accordance with the early modern habit of arguing *in utramque partem*, is designed to work dialectically. This means that Humphrey can either kneel or not kneel, in what is supposed to be a sign of his innocence or guilt. Hence if, on the one hand, Humphrey enters and does not kneel, then this lends credit to Margaret's accusations. But if, on the other, Humphrey enters and submissively kneels at his nephew's feet – 'All happiness unto my lord the king' – then clearly Humphrey's actions will undermine the Queen's attempts to frame Humphrey as disloyal.

It is not insignificant that Shakespeare situates these bifurcating possibilities at the precise moment when, whether he kneels or not, Humphrey is arrested on charges of treason. The result is that he may be arrested on allegations that are demonstrably false, or equally, ones that perhaps do have some basis in the way he actually behaves. This is a contentious aspect of the staging which is, of course, lost when editors (note the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works*, 3.1.93-94) add a stage direction that Gloucester kneels. But crucially, Shakespeare's

dramaturgy here reflects a critical awareness in the period that 'the truth-status of rumour was contingent.'[233]

In *1 Henry VI*, a similar thing can be said of the moment when Burgundy suggestively implies that the French dauphin Charles has been sexually intimate with Joan la Pucelle:

> My selfe, as farre as I could well discerne,
> For smoake, and duskie vapours of the night,
> Am sure I scar'd the Dolphin and his Trull,
> When Arme in Arme they both came swiftly running,
> Like to a payre of louing Turtle-Doves,
> That could not live asunder day or night. (TLN 797-802)

In this case, Burgandy specifically cautions that his vision was impaired by 'smoake, and duskie vapours' as the English besieged the French garrison. The important detail, however, comes when Burgandy stresses how Charles and Joan, as though suddenly startled from bed with each other, rushed on to the stage 'Arme in Arme' like a 'a payre of louing Turtle-Doves.' The apparent implication is that Burgandy's attack had distracted the Dauphin from the sexual liaison it is implied throughout the play he might be having with Joan. As it turns out, this is a rumour not only fostered by the English but by the French themselves, as when, during the pairs' entrance in the preceding scene, the Bastard of Orleans comments upon their intimacy: 'Tut, holy *Joane* was his defensive Guard' (734). Many an edition will here highlight the Bastard's suggestive play on words in a footnote. And yet, for all of the suspicion which attends Charles' relationship with Joan, the true extent of their 'friendship' is something which is never fully disclosed. In this regard, Burgandy's report contributes to and fuels these rumours. At the same time, it is a report which may or may not have a basis in what the audience itself has seen,

[233] Cavanagh, p.90.

in such a way that the visual staging of the play might here potentially provide a corroborating piece of 'ocular proof', suggestive of the illicit affair Charles *might be* having with Joan offstage.

An audience is therefore expected to be on the alert to decipher whose reports can be trusted and whose cannot, whose actually match with what the audience – if it has been listening and paying attention – has actually witnessed. To return to the *2 Henry VI*, this is apparent in the moments leading up to Suffolk's death, which is preceded by Suffolk and the Lieutenant evoking specific details of each other's past behaviour. Thus, Suffolk begins by highlighting the Lieutenant's previous deference to him before he fell out of the king's favour:

> Hast thou not kist thy hand, and held my stirrup?
> Bare-headed plodded by my foot-cloth Mule,
> And thought thee happy when I shooke my head.
> How often hast thou waited at my cup,
> Fed from my Trencher, kneel'd down at the boord,
> When I have feasted with Queene *Margaret*? (TLN 2221-2226)

The curious thing is that this is the only scene in which the Lieutenant makes an appearance. It could be, then, that Suffolk's description of his gestures – his kneeling at the board, the kissing of his hand and holding of Suffolk's stirrup – allude to things which have reputedly taken place offstage, if Suffolk is not simply denigrating the Lieutenant's lowly status. The report is also, however, suggestive of possibilities that could have been made a point of somewhere earlier in the staging of the play. Thus imagining, say, that the player of the Lieutenant had entered as one of the many guards in an earlier scene, Suffolk's fall from power could have been given a stark visual emphasis if the man who ends up giving the order for his murder is earlier seen to perform these symbolic gestures of deference. Whether or not this likely to have been the case, it is certainly a bit of implicit stage business which productions to this day might wish to pick

up on. Meanwhile, another reference to an earlier piece of stage business occurs when the Lieutenant responds by alluding to Suffolk's dubious relations with Queen Margaret:

> Thy lips that kist the Queene, shall sweepe the ground:
> And thou that smil'dst at good *Duke Humfries* death,
> Against the senselesse windes shall grin in vaine,
> Who in contempt shall hisse at thee againe. (TLN 2243-2246)

The Lieutenant's accusation that Suffolk 'kist the Queene' refers back to 3.2, when Suffolk and Margaret said their farewells. During this scene, the dialogue provides various opportunities for the pair to exchange an illicit kiss, firstly, on the hands – 'O, could this kisse be printed in thy hand' (2058) – but also, and much more seditiously, on the lips: 'Even thus, two friends condemn'd, / Embrace, and kisse' (2068-9); 'To have thee with lippes to stop my mouth' (2113). Whilst the Lieutenant's allegation is thereby validated by what the audience has already seen, this raises a larger question about how the past emerges as a site of contestation in these plays. As characters routinely refer back to the events which have happened earlier in the play – and indeed, to the other plays which make up the cycle of histories – the danger of 'misreading events' becomes 'a constant hazard', when 'equally compelling (or contingent) versions of the truth and legitimacy are being promulgated.'[234]

In the *3 Henry VI*, Richard of Gloucester and Edward learn of their father's death when a messenger enters to deliver the news:

> By many hands your Father was subdu'd,
> But onely slaught'red by the irefull Arme
> Of un-relenting *Clifford*, and the Queene:
> Who crown'd the gracious Duke in high despight,
> Laugh'd in his face: and when with griefe he wept,

[234] Cavanagh, p.95.

The ruthlesse Queene gave him, to dry his Cheekes,
A Napkin, steeped in the harmelesse blood
Of sweet young *Rutland*, by rough *Clifford* slaine: (TLN 712-719)

The messenger's account of what happened when York was killed is perfectly accurate. Where delivered by messengers as opposed to a named character, reports tend to be on the whole trustworthy, which might, as I hypothesised above, suggest that these reporting roles were doubled by the same players who were earlier required to perform the specified actions. Thus here, the messenger may have been played by the same actor who played either the Queen, Clifford or maybe even York, with the messenger's emphasis on Clifford's and the Queen's responsibility for finishing York off corroborating what can already been inferred from the playtext back in 1.4:

Clifford. Here's for my Oath, heere's for my Fathers
Death.
Queene. And heere's to right our gentle-hearted
King. (TLN 642-645)

It is easy to forget, from these lines alone, that there was in fact another character present at the time when York was murdered – namely, Northumberland. His absence from the messenger's report, however, makes sense when it is remembered that Northumberland had begun to weep when the Queen placed the mock crown upon the would-be king's head. Whilst the Queen and Clifford are thus prompted to stab York, Northumberland's silence suggests that he takes a back seat, maybe looking on in horror as York is butchered.

This congruence between what is earlier implied in the dialogue and what the messenger subsequently relates suggests that the messenger's report is faithful to the facts. But it also, perhaps, draws attention to an intentional silence designed to make sure Northumberland's

precise role at the time of York's murder is left sufficiently ambiguous. The alternative to this is when characters attempt to frame past events in a way that is demonstrably false. The play which looks back to other plays in the history cycle most, perhaps, is *Richard III*. As the play which brings the history of the Wars of the Roses to its conclusion, this should probably come as little surprise. Yet there is, throughout this play, a constant demand placed on the audience not to forget what had happened in the earlier *Henry VI* plays. As early as 1.2, the audience is therefore invited to recall how the last instalment in the sequence concluded when Anne berates Richard at Henry VI's funeral:

> *Rich*. Nay, he is dead, and slaine by Edwards hands.
> *An*. In thy foule throat thou Ly'st,
> Queene *Margaret* saw
> Thy murd'rous Faulchion smoaking in his blood:
> The which, thou once didd'st bend against her brest,
> But that thy brothers beate aside the point. (TLN 272-277)

An audience member who had seen both plays should have been able to see straight through Richard's lies. Throughout his career, Shakespeare wrote not only for the same players but also, let us not forgot, for the same audiences, as evidenced not least in the epilogue of *2 Henry IV* which promises the return of Falstaff in the play to follow. This, alas, is a promise that fails to materialise.[235] Yet far from his audience simply requiring a knowledge of history, more important is the fact that Shakespeare seems to have composed these plays on the assumption that many in the audience of one play will also have seen at least some of the other history plays, at a time when, as Lauren Robertson has suggested, spectators 'made sense of new plays

[235] In fact, the epilogue makes Falstaff's return contingent upon the audience's desires: '*One word more, I beseech you: if you be not too much cloid with Fat Meate, / our humble Author will continue the Story (with* Sir John *in it) and make you merry, with faire* Katherine *of* France*: where (for any thing I know)* Falstaffe *shall dye of a sweat, unlesse already he be kill'd with your hard Opinions'*. This points even more strongly to a Shakespeare who was working in collaboration not only with his players, but his audiences too.

with increasingly deep recourse to those plays they had already seen.'[236] This means that they are expected to bring their knowledge of previous plays with them when they again re-enter the theatre, recalling, in this case, that *3 Henry VI* had concluded with Richard murdering the then king in cold blood. Anne's further claim that Richard once bent his sword against Margaret is, moreover, similarly something which was staged in the earlier play, when Richard and his brother murdered the young Prince Edward.[237] Meanwhile, another example of this sort of thing occurs in the next scene, when Buckingham recalls how Northumberland wept when York was killed by Margaret and Clifford.[238] All this serves to remind the audience – but also to test its memory – about the history preceding this particular history.[239] As such, whilst the issue of 'trying to remember' (to borrow Lois Potter's phrase) clearly has a thematic resonance throughout the history cycle, it is also notable how this problem extends to the audience's ability to remember, whilst highlighting how the past is repeatedly evoked to justify the endless cycle of violence from which the players of this history cannot seem to escape.[240]

Thus, although Richard's brazen attempt to rewrite the ending of the previous play falls flat on its face, a more contested aspect of this history concerns its causal origins in Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard II. In *3 Henry VI*, nowhere better is this demonstrated than when King Henry and York offer clashing narratives about how Bolingbroke came to possess the crown:

> *Henry*. And if he may, then I am lawfull King:
> For *Richard*, in view of many Lords,

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[236] Robertson, p.6.
[237] A fact reinforced by the presence a stage direction: '*Qu*. Oh, kill me too. / *Rich*. Marry, and shal. *Offers to kill her*' (3019-3020).
[238] '*Buck*. *Northumberland*, then present, wept to see it' (656).
[239] Observing that 'Characters constantly hark back to the events of *Richard II* and the words spoken there', Lois Potter has observed that 'If *Richard II* had been dropped from the repertory these repetitions might have been necessary for the plot. If, on the other hand, the audience had the opportunity to see all three plays staged in close proximity to each other, the test of memory would have affected not only the actors but the audience as well.' Lois Potter, '"Nobody's Perfect": Actors' Memories and Shakespeare's Plays of the 1590s', *Shakespeare Survey*, 42 (1990), pp.85–98 (p.94).
[240] '[C]omedy is about showing off one's memory, history is about trying to remember, and tragedy is about being unable to forget' Potter, '"Nobody's Perfect"', p.90.

Resign'd the Crowne to *Henry* the Fourth,
Whose Heire my father was, and I am his.
Plan. He rose against him, being his Soueraigne,
And made him to resigne his Crowne perforce. (TLN 155-160)

The dispute over who has the legitimate claim to the throne revolves, note, about what has supposed to have happened at a particular moment in the past – a moment which, moreover, the Chamberlain's Men would stage when Shakespeare finally got around to writing *Richard II*.

Most remarkable about this passage is thus how it looks both simultaneously forwards and backwards. In terms of chronological history, then yes, the dispute harks back to the originating cause which has led, all these years later, to a crisis wherein two claimants have what they regard as a legitimate right to kingship. And yet, because in the history of the theatre the moment under contention was still to be staged, the result is to infuse 'the past with a sense of future-oriented possibility.'[241] This brief little passage reveals Shakespeare looking ahead to the play he was yet to write, inviting his audience to look ahead too. Yet it also, in the way that it projects the historical past of the play into the future of theatre history, flouts what David Lewis described as the 'asymmetry of openness', wherein the past is seen to fundamentally differ from the future in the way that the one is 'fixed' and the other 'open.' As he puts it in his own words, although 'we have alternative possible pasts as well as alternative possible futures,' there is an

> obscure contrast we draw between the ''open future'' and the ''fixed past''. We tend to regard the future as a multitude of alternative possibilities, a ''garden of forking paths'' in Borges' phrase, whereas we regard the past as a unique, settled, immutable actuality.[242]

[241] Robertson, p.76.
[242] David Lewis, 'Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow', in *Philosophical Papers Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.32–52 (p.36).

There is, so commonsense dictates, only one past that is fixed, immutable and unchangeable. This is the past that we call actual, whereas the future – as something which is yet to be realised in actuality – is multiple, open and unfixed. In Shakespeare's theatre, however, these standard metaphysical limitations do not apply. Instead, Shakespeare transcends the 'asymmetry of openness' by charging his theatrical representations of the past with an open endedness that is more characteristic of the future. Even here, at this very early stage in his career, Shakespeare conceives of history not in the singular but the plural, as different characters struggle to make their version of the past history. Thus, on the one hand is Henry's claim that Richard willingly gave up his crown; meanwhile on the other, York claims that Richard was forced to resign. When the Chamberlain's men actually came to stage this moment some years later, it seems likely that Shakespeare's first audiences – assuming they had seen both plays – would have been eager to find out who was right. These conflicting accounts of Richard's deposition thus encapsulate everything about Shakespeare's understanding of history. That is to say, for Shakespeare, history is no set thing but it is, and always will be, contested – something which is never quite 'past' but which is, paradoxically, always situated in some possible future and existing in a state of *becoming*, forever revised and rewritten. As I have argued earlier in this thesis, the remarkable thing about the staging of Richard's deposition is how Shakespeare manages to translate the indeterminacy of York's and Henry's reports into a dramatic context, in such a way that both men articulate versions of history that *could be*. There is, to this extent, no such thing as history but only 'histories' – alternative variations of the past that are still awaiting, perhaps forever will await, to be realised.

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There are two things to take away from this chapter. On the one hand is a practical point about how Shakespeare's plays were potentially prepared for the stage; but related to this is a question about the actual extent to which reported action has to be followed in the staging of any given

play. As regards the first point, what I have suggested is that in some cases, the presence of a 'retroactive' report might indicate which scenes specifically were rehearsed in ensemble. Taken as a technique to retrospectively direct scenes that involved complex blocking, reports can thus be seen to corroborate the idea posited earlier in this thesis that early modern plays would be rehearsed 'in parts' – that is, as separate elements that would only receive a collective rehearsal when required. This means that though a play would rarely (if indeed ever) receive a full group rehearsal from start to finish, those scenes which were understood as requiring a rehearsal *could* be rehearsed. Thus, Benvolio's account of the brawl at the start of *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that this is a scene which would have received a rehearsal given the complex action it involves. At the same time, there are some retroactive narrations that might indicate the doubling of roles amongst players, so that the same actor who later provides a report is the same actor who performs – though as a different character – the original action.

Aside from these practical issues, however, this chapter has cautioned against an overly prescriptive attitude towards the implicit action transmitted via characters' descriptions of events. When such reports are delivered by messengers or *nuncio* figures, they tend for the most part to be accurate. Where delivered by more central characters, however, they are more often than not suspect. Even Benvolio, whose role in *Romeo and Juliet* is relatively neutral, on closer inspection turns out to be subtly manipulating the precise course of events that result in Malvolio's death. There is therefore little reason to assume that what characters relate can be taken as a reliable indication of the staging in all circumstances. Characters in Shakespeare habitually lie, make up falsehoods, tell fibs, misremember events, distort details, deliver unreliable, second-hand information and more generally engage in the attempt to rewrite the past. As I have endeavoured to show, an unquestioning readiness to take what characters say at face value somewhat misses the point. The fact is that characters are constantly engaged in the attempt to shape and control how the past – and one's role within it - will be remembered. If

there is any doubt about this, one need only recall Othello's attempt to redeem himself once he realises the horrors of his murderous crime:

> When you shall these unluckie deeds relate,
> Speake of me, as I am. Nothing extenuate,
> Nor set downe ought in malice.
> The must you speake,
> Of one that lov'd not wisely, but too well:
> Of one, not easily Jealious, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreame: (TLN. 3651-3657)

Othello cannot undo what he has done. What he can do, however, is seek to reframe the narrative of his actions so that he will be remembered not as the perpetrator but the victim of a crime. In his attempt to reauthor his role in this cataclysmic tragedy from one of bloodthirsty revenger to that of a gull and dupe, Othello would have us believe that he was somebody who loved too passionately rather than prudently, somebody who is not inclined to jealousy but who was manipulated to act against his will.

Given what he has done, Othello's attempt to salvage his once great reputation is well-nigh reprehensible, in what is yet another case of a character attempting to 're-script' the past. Yet, where critics have tended to be rightly sceptical of Othello's attempt to frame his past actions as 'unlucky deeds', the same scepticism has not always been extended to those instances when characters recount particulars in the staging.[243] A glaring example of this would be Antony's depiction of the Caesar assassination. But as this chapter should have made clear, the potentially distorted account Antony provides of Caesar's last moments is by no means an uncommon phenomenon in Shakespeare's plays.

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[243] Harold Bloom notes that whilst Othello 'seeks to expiate what cannot be expiated', 'we need give no credence to the absurd blindness of ''loved not wisely, but too well,'' or the outrageous self-deception of ''one not easily jealous.''' Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), pp.474–75.

One place where these kinds of reports are especially prominent is the histories. As plays that depict – and allow the audience to witness - the past *becoming* history, the histories depict worlds where the facts about what has happened in the past are contestable and constantly getting rewritten. Associated with this is the burden placed on the audience to recollect what has happened over the course of not only a single but multiple plays, with the dramatis personae engaged in a contest to control how the past will be remembered. Another example of this sort of thing is, of course, the Chorus of *Henry V*, which routinely invites audiences to note the discrepancies between its narrative of Henry's victory at Agincourt and what actually happens during the course of the play.[244] As the putative voice *of* 'history', the Chorus figures as a reporting mechanism that repeatedly posits an alternative version of the history which it purports to truthfully represent. And yet, in this way, the Chorus is but a new manifestation of an old problem that haunts all of the histories – the idea that the past, once past, exists as nothing more than report and narrative and is consequently terminally subject to being rewritten and revised. The conclusion that can be taken from this is that there is often nothing 'necessary' about the correspondence between an event-as-reported and an event-as-staged. As a technique for implicitly determining the staging, the existence of reports – retrospective or otherwise – is often difficult to separate from instances where characters are engaged in the attempt to rewrite the very plays in which they are performing.

[244] As Anthony Brennan has put it: 'The Chorus presents a play within a play, or rather a play within its flow of grandiose rhetoric. The Chorus claims that the stage is not worthy to present reality but makes us aware that its own affinities are more with poetical transmutation, overblown hyperbole, than with reality.' Anthony S. Brennan, 'That Within Which Passes Show: The Function of the Chorus in "Henry V"', *Philological Quarterly,* 58.1 (1979), pp.40–52 (p.43).

Chapter 6

Interpreting ‘Uncued Actions’

This thesis has placed an emphasis on how Shakespeare’s instruction of the players can provide an interpretive window onto the plays. More than just a means of implicitly ‘directing’ the staging, I have argued that Shakespeare frequently harnesses the instructions directed at the players to provide a reflexive gloss on the action. A prompt will often not just tell, or provide a player with a choice about what to do. Far more consequentially, Shakespeare will harness implied directives to capture moments of particular localised tension, contriving epistemically indeterminate scenarios wherein ethical cruxes hinge upon the question of *how* a particular dramaturgic device is working or on the choices that a player might make.

Nowhere perhaps is this truer than of ‘uncued actions’, when a prompt comes in the form of one character observing another perform a specified action. As was emphasised in the first chapter of this thesis, the problem with this mode of instruction – as Leslie Thomson has highlighted – is that the stipulated action a player was required to perform would not have appeared in the part of that same player. The term ‘uncued action’ points, therefore, to the inevitable mismatch between the dialogue and the staging that must have resulted *if* players had only studied prior to a performance privately with their parts. Whilst this has led Thomson to argue that some form of group rehearsal must have been necessary, instead I proposed looking into the implications in the event that players gave a delayed reaction to their uncued prompts. Drawing upon Alan Dessen’s notion of ‘theatrical *italics*’, I argued that Shakespeare

sometimes appears to take advantage of the potential irony produced when an action is 'observed' happening before it actually does occur.

Taking this hypothesis further, in this chapter I will explore more fully the apparent anomaly of 'uncued actions', highlighting how Shakespeare frequently harnesses them at moments characterised by suspicion, paranoia and especially sexual mistrust. Not only are uncued actions a controversial category of prompt, but they are also ethically contentious, especially when men who accuse women of sexually licentious behaviour are made the mouthpiece of these directives. This requires an evaluation of the consequences *if* players were expected to react to 'uncued actions' without prior knowledge, although first, it is necessary to make it clear what really does constitute an 'uncued action' as opposed to other modes of description and report.

'Looke you': Reports in Realtime

A number of critics have suggested that descriptions of onstage action were originally directed not at actors, but at the audience – providing theatre-goers with knowledge of occurrences beyond what was visible to them. This idea dates back at least as far as the 1950s to Warren D. Smith, who notably emphasised the peculiarity of implied directions that are 'spoken too late to have served as instructions for the actors.'[245] The conclusion that Smith surmises from the existence of these directions is that not all spectators within an Elizabethan playhouse would have been guaranteed a clear view of the stage. As a consequence, he argues that descriptions of staged action were harnessed by playwrights to mediate and impart knowledge to an audience, all of whose members might not have been able to see what was happening for themselves. This idea has since been reiterated by Andrew Gurr, although not all critics –

[245] Warren D. Smith, 'Stage Business in Shakespeare's Dialogue', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 4.3 (1953), pp.311–16 (p.311).

notably John Astington – have been convinced.[246] As was emphasised back in chapter one, at least in some cases, it does seem likely that certain character observations are intended not so much to instruct a player but to compensate for what cannot be clearly seen, evoking for the listener – or indeed the reader – what is not before the eye.

In *2 Henry VI*, an instructive case in point can be found when Eleanor provides the following description of Duke Humphrey:

> *Elia.* Why droopes my lord like over-ripen'd corn,
> Hanging the head at Ceres plenteous load?
> Why doth the great Duke Humfrey knit his browes,
> As frowning at the favours of the world?
> Why are thine eyes fixt to the sullen earth,
> Gazing on that which seemes to dimme thy sight? (TLN 274-279)

As David Bevington has noted, a description like this provided by Eleanor functions akin to a 'visual language', where the imagery is designed not so much to instruct the player of Humphrey but 'deictically or demonstratively to inform viewers about identity, character, intention, or mood.'[247]

There is a need, then, to distinguish this sort of description – one in which Eleanor provides a verbal picture of Humphrey's inward struggle – from 'uncued actions' which stipulate some precise gesture that players would have been able to act upon, and which equally, most audience members are likely to have been able to see.

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[246] In Gurr's own words: 'Writers always expected their audience to have impeded views at times, whether from the large posts holding up the front of the gallery, the headgear of other audience members, the stage posts or (mostly with the groundlings) from the crowd of players standing on the stage'. Astington, on the other hand, finds this 'altogether unlikely as a general rule, the more so after watching daylit performances in the rebuilt Globe on the Bankside, London, where actors' facial expressions can be seen quite well at a distance.' Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.26; Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time*, p.23.

[247] Bevington, p.22.

Whether an audience can see something for itself, or whether it has to rely on a character's report obviously alters the epistemic conditions upon which it can claim 'to know.' When Eleanor draws attention to Humphrey's knit brows, his fixed eyes and dimmed sight, the effect is to supplement and enhance the spectacle of Humphrey's grief by figuratively evoking details beyond the audience's optical range. This is most apparent when characters comment upon and mark one another's facial expressions.[248] As a point of comparison, in *Julius Caesar*, this same technique is harnessed when Caesar and his train return from the festivities of the Lupercalia. Having missed what happened during the celebration – which takes place offstage – Brutus attempts to infer what the earlier cheering amongst the plebians was about by noting and commenting upon the visible reactions of the entering characters. Whilst imploring Cassius to note the 'angry spot' (285) upon Caesar's brow, this also involves Brutus drawing attention to Calpurnia's pale cheek and Cicero's 'ferret' and 'fiery eyes' (298). To some extent, this might be regarded as part of a strategy to increase the audience's sense of intimacy with the conspirators, similar to the way the audience is made privy to their covert operations. And yet in no time, the frame switches from Brutus' perspective to Caesar's, who comments upon Cassius' 'leane and hungry looke' (296), adding his fear that 'Seldome he smiles, and smiles in such a sort / As if he mock'd himself, and scorn'd his spirit / that could be mov'd to smile at any thing' (307-9).

The overall effect of this is to almost transform the action into a sort of virtual reality framed by characters' mutual suspicions of one another: here there is no need for any visible action or expression, because the comments articulate and reflect the characters' fears, paranoia, and

[248] Astington disagrees, arguing instead that audiences would pay acute attention to actors' facial expressions. His main evidence for this comes from Henry Jackson's 1610 eyewitness account of a performance of *Othello* in Oxford, in which is evoked a vivid description of the actor's facial expression. Yet as valuable as this testimony is, it records a performance that most likely took place at an inn, and is not necessarily a reliable source for considering what conditions obtained in the public playhouses. As Daniel Blank has noted, the King's Men arrived in Oxford after being hired by the municipal government to perform, 'probably either in the town hall or a local inn, as travelling players usually did.' Astington, p.23; Daniel Blank, *Shakespeare and University Drama in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p.155.

suspicions. This can be contrasted with the moments leading up to the assassination, when Brutus and Cassius provide a running commentary on the other characters' movements:

Bru. What said Popillius Lena*?*
Cassi. He wisht to day our enterprize might thrive:
I feare our purpose is discovered.
Bru. Looke how he makes to Caesar: marke him.
Cassi. Caska be sodaine, for we feare prevention.
Brutus what shall be done? If this be knowne,
Cassius or Caesar never shall turne backe,
For I will slay my selfe.
Brut. Cassius be constant:
Popillius Lena speakes not of our purposes,
For looke he smiles, and Caesar doth not change.
Cassi. Trebonius knows his time: for look you Brutus
He draws Mark Antony out of the way. (TLN 1220-1232)

Ann Pasternak-Slater has identified this as a passage wherein 'the spectator dominates the scene, controlling it by his observation.'[249] Apart from when Lena smiles, there is a marked difference between the implied stage directions embedded in Brutus' and Cassius' dialogue and the sort of virtual descriptions discussed above. As was noted earlier in this thesis, it is likely, given the complex blocking of this sequence, that it would have required a rehearsal. Whilst control over the staging is channelled through Brutus' and Cassius' commentary in their attempt to interpret and narrate events as – or perhaps just before – they happen, what this means is that the actors playing Lena, Trebonius and Antony would have known in advance of any first performance the movements they needed to make across the stage.

[249] Pasternak-Slater, p.29.

This does not diminish the fact that Brutus' and Cassius' words – 'Looke how he makes to Caesar'; 'He draws Mark Antony out of the way' – serve to both comment upon what is happening *and* to direct the movements of the relevant players. Even with a rehearsal, it is still likely that the players might only have begun to make the required movements immediately *after* these lines had been delivered: contra Leslie Thomson's assumption that rehearsal would have necessarily eradicated this delay-effect, a rehearsal might only have better equipped players to anticipate the prompts without necessarily acting upon them in advance. The alternative, after all, would have necessitated the relevant player memorising the lines immediately preceding the 'uncued action' in such a way that would have increased the cognitive burden on that player. Quite plausibly, it may have been that a player's relevant response to the 'uncued action' – 'for look you Brutus, / He draws Mark Antony out of the way' – was fulfilled almost seamlessly by the time an audience would have had the opportunity to redirect its gaze from those speaking to those being spoken about. More than just 'direct' the action, however, Ann Pasternak-Slater has drawn further attention to how the implied stage directions contained within the conspirators' lines hold up a mirror to the unfolding action. In their 'struggle to control the drama they have set in motion,' Pasternak-Slater argues that this is an impression 'subtly heightened by Shakespeare's attribution of the panicky, powerless descriptive directions' they utter.[250] One consequence of this is that Shakespeare is able to amplify the dramatic tension by adopting the conspirators' paranoid viewpoint as a filter for the action: when both men voice their anxiety about having lost control, this is juxtaposed with the way that their words function – from a theatrical standpoint – to orchestrate the staging.

[250] Pasternak-Slater, p.27.

Troilus and Cressida, 5.2

A comparable moment when a character provides a commentary of what is happening onstage can be found – albeit in very different circumstances – in *Romeo and Juliet*, when Romeo surreptitiously watches Juliet emerge onto her balcony:

> But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
> It is the East, and *Juliet* is the Sunne,
> Arise faire Sun and kill the envious Moone,
> Who is already sicke and pale with griefe,
> That thou her Maid art far more faire than she: (TLN 794-799)

Aside from moments of political intrigue, by far the most common type of scenario in which staging directives will be channelled through a character's observations is during moments similar to this, when women are secretly viewed and spied on by men. It is standard, of course, to read these lines as expressing Romeo's reaction when he catches sight of Juliet: first, Juliet makes her way on to the balcony, followed by Romeo's enraptured paean as he observes her from below. The missing quarto and folio direction points, however, to a different story. Whilst some editions choose to place Juliet's entrance immediately before Romeo delivers these lines, it is more likely that the player's entrance is prompted *by* Romeo's sight of her approach – whether that be during the lines above, or, as some other editions suggest, when Romeo first ascertains that the girl he is watching is indeed the same one he shared a kiss with one scene earlier: 'It is my Lady, O it is my Love' (803). This is important because it indicates the way in which Romeo's speech is designed to instruct the player of Juliet, first by signifying when he is required to enter but more importantly, when Romeo observes Juliet lean her cheek upon her hand, informing the player of Juliet that this is what he is required to do:

> I am too bold 'tis not to me she speakes:

Two of the fairest stares in all the Heaven,
Having some businesse do entreat her eyes,
To twinckle in their Spheres till they returne.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head,
The brightnesse of her cheeke would shame those stares,
As day-light doth a Lampe, her eye in heaven,
Would through the ayrie Region streame so bright,
That Birds would sing, and thinke it were not night:
See how she leanes her cheeke upon her hand,
O that I were a Glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheeke. (TLN 807-817)

Romeo's wish that Juliet has his name on her lips will soon become true. Though caught between his audacity and apprehension, his willingness and reluctance to make his presence known, what Romeo wants most of all is obvious enough: that he is on Juliet's mind in just the same way that she is on his. It could be, of course – maybe it is even likely – that the player of Juliet knew he was supposed to place his hand upon his cheek. Yet in the event that he didn't, a version of the scene emerges in which it is almost as though what the audience will witness is the realisation of Romeo's physic fantasy: first comes Romeo's 'observation', followed by the Juliet-player's response to his prompt. Rather than Juliet leaning her hand upon her cheek and then Romeo commenting upon it, what results from the player's potentially delayed reaction to his 'uncued' prompt is a reversal in these normative causal relations: what happens is that Romeo initially imagines Juliet leaning her hand upon her cheek, which subsequently *becomes* true once Romeo has uttered his wish. As opposed to being 'unrealistic', the effect of this might be to give rise to a different sort of 'realism' – one rooted in Romeo's psychic reality, and where the temporal reversal between what is 'seen' and what is done signals to the spectator the manner in which Romeo's fantasies are on the verge of being realised.

What this suggests is a sort of psychological realism. Because the gesture is prompted by Romeo's speech – and would not have appeared on the Juliet-player's part-text – it is not so much that Romeo simply witnesses Juliet put her hand to her cheek, more that this is something Romeo imagines, anticipates and desires, with this desire being realised when the Juliet-player belatedly responds to his prompt.

This sort of thing becomes ethically problematic at times when men not only watch women without their knowledge but do so in order to pass judgement on their sexual conduct. One play where this is extremely pertinent is *Troilus and Cressida*, where the staging is frequently channelled through characters' observations as they note, report and pass comment on each other's behaviour. From the very start of the play, this is evident when Pandarus and Cressida observe the Trojan soldiers pass over the stage. At this point, it is Cressida – with the encouragement of Pandarus – who takes pleasure in watching the fine specimens of men who delight, or sometimes displease her. Yet later in the play, Cressida's role is reversed as she ceases to be the subject who observes males and is instead positioned as their observed object, figuring, as Subha Mukherji has put it, as 'the blind spot in the visual field of the dramatic action.'[251] Once she has been separated from Troilus, the first sign of this comes when the Greek soldiers prove desirous to take their turn at kissing her. After his request for a kiss is apparently rejected, Ulysses goes on to express his resentment at being snubbed:

> Fie, fie, upon her:
> Ther's a language in her eye, her cheeke, her lip;
> Nay, her foote speakes, her wanton spirites looke out
> At every ioynt, and motive of her body:
> Oh these encounterers so glib of tongue,
> That give a coasting welcome ere it comes;

[251] Mukherji, p.12.

And wide unclaspe the tables of their thoughts,
To every tickling reader: set them downe,
For sluttish spoyles of opportunitie;
And daughters of the game. (TLN 2611-2620)

The implied licentious sexuality that Cressida exhibits towards the Greeks is intimated in the very suggestiveness of Ulysses' language, which at once alludes to Cressida's titillating gestures but fails to reveal what exactly these gestures are, ranging from the 'language in her eye', to the way her 'foote speakes' and to the more general 'motive of her body'. And yet clearly, Ulysses speaks with all the hallmarks of a misogynistic reject: first comes his expression of disgust when she refuses to grant what he wants, then comes the insinuation that she is being deliberately provocative, until finally, he settles upon the predictable conclusion that Cressida is no more than a common harlot whose mere body language invites 'sluttish spoyles of opportunitie.'

The problem for us as interpreters of the text, of course, is that Cressida's implied gestures are not only wholly ambiguous but that this ambiguity itself is framed according to Ulysses' perspective – a man who, let us not forget, will soon be responsible for 'exposing' Cressida's betrayal of Troilus.[252] What this means is that the text frustrates the very idea that we are somehow positioned to infer from the dialogue what is really happening, and whether – if this is even an ethically appropriate thing to be asking in the first place – Cressida's behaviour matches with what Ulysses is saying. The fact is, after all, that Cressida's actions can - and indeed will - take on many and various forms depending how the player in question decides to interpret and act upon the implicit hints and suggestions contained in Ulysses' speech: it might

[252] A similar argument has been made by Emma Smith in relation to *Hamlet*, observing that 'Just as Hamlet's own descriptions of events, such as his condemnation of unseemly public intimacies between his mother and stepfather, 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.' Smith, p.106.

be that he wholeheartedly adopts the idea that Cressida is playing the tease, maybe by performing some lewd or obscene gesture. Yet equally, of course, the almost limitless possibilities available include many wherein Cressida's behaviour will gainsay Ulysses, exposing his speech for the slanderous slut shaming that it is.

This sort of thing, wherein ambiguous prompts uttered in aside provide a running commentary on the action they at once produce is a technique harnessed by Shakespeare from the early days in his career. In *3 Henry VI*, a comparable case in point can be found when Edward IV attempts to seduce Lady Grey, with the latter responding equivocally towards the king's sexual advances:

> *Wid*. What you command, that rests in me to doe.
> *King*. But you will take exceptions to my Boone.
> *Wid*. No, gracious Lord, except I cannot doe it.
> *King*. I, but thou canst doe what I meane to aske.
> *Wid*. Why then I will doe what your Grace com-
> mands. (TLN 1553-1558)

Ambiguity characterises Grey's attitude towards Edward's propositions. It could be that she has worked out what he is up to, and is craftily evading his insinuations. Yet equally, it might be that she quite literally has no idea what Edward intends, not excluding the possibility that she is playing the flirt – teasingly provoking the king but withholding his desired prize. How the actor decides to play his lines will of course be decisive. And yet, through her equivocation, Grey is able to protect herself against the charge of disloyalty whilst simultaneously guarding her honour, appearing to catch the king off guard when he fails to seize the moment:

> *Wid*. Why stoppes my Lord? shall I not heare my
> Taske?
> *King*. An easie Taske, 'tis but to love a King. (TLN 1562-1564)

Grey's probing of Edward – 'Why stoppes my Lord?' – would appear to indicate that the king has lost his nerve. At the same time, it is not especially clear what has prompted Edward's sudden hesitation, resulting in his awkward silence. One suggestion is provided by the king's two brothers – Richard of Gloucester and Clarence – prompting the players of Edward and Grey from the sidelines as they provide a running commentary on the king's clumsy attempts at wooing:

> *Rich*. Hee plyes her hard, and much Raine weares the
> Marble.
> *Clar*. As red as fire? nay then, her Wax must melt. (TLN 1559-1561)

Richard's first line – 'Hee plyes her hard' – comes directly after Grey has told Edward that she 'will doe what your Grace com- / mands'. As such, the line is placed so as to provoke Edward to throw himself into his uneasy role of the wooer, maybe – if the actor felt so inclined – making some physical pass at Grey. This might involve him grabbing, or maybe attempting to kiss her. But whatever form exactly his response to Gloucester's provocation took, it is one that is likely to have received added force when Clarence adds that Edward behaves with a fervour 'As red as fire'. And yet repeatedly throughout this episode, the scripting returns to this sort of ambiguity in the way that information is drip-fed via these asides that putatively describe, though in reality implicitly control what is going on. Thus, earlier in the scene, Gloucester observes that 'I see the Lady hath a thing to graunt' (1512), whilst later, he will observe Grey 'Cursie' [curtesy] (1569) and comment on how she 'knits her / Browes' (1595-6) and 'lookes very / sad' (1628-9). In the first case, 'thing' carries a lewd suggestion that the player of Grey might have chosen to take as a guide for his behaviour. Yet subsequently – and following Edward's attempt to 'plye' [ply] her – a change in her behaviour is signalled by Gloucester's observation that she 'knits her / Browes', which ironically contrasts with the king's own aside that 'Her Looks doth argue her replete with Modesty' (1599). The crucial thing here, however,

is that it is not so much Grey's sexual conduct that is put under the microscope as the king's attempt to play the wooer. As both Richard and Clarence incite the king to make his move, there exists the potential for irony as they then go on to comment that 'Hee is the bluntest Wooer in Christen/ dome' (1597-8).

This contrasts with the central crux that arrives in 5.2 of *Troilus and Cressida*, when Troilus spies on his one-time lover apparently fooling around with Diomedes. Like Grey, Cressida's behaviour is ambiguous from the playtext, but what is striking is how the scene reads completely differently when Troilus' words are seen to *direct* rather than to merely comment on Cressida's behaviour when he observes her from afar:

> *Enter Cresid*.
> *Troy*. *Cresid* comes forth to him.
> *Dio*. How now my charge?
> *Cres*. Now my sweet gardian: harke a word with you.
> *Troy*. Yea, so familiar?
> *Ulis*. She will sing any man at first sight.
> *Ther*. And any man may sinde [sing] her, if he can take her
> Life: she's noted. (TLN 2980-2987)

There is, of course, scope for Cressida's actions to contradict what Troilus *thinks* he is seeing. And yet, another possibility that cannot be discounted is that Troilus' and the other men's observations function as 'uncued actions' prompting the player of Cressida. The first example of this occurs as Cressida initially enters, when Troilus observes her approach Diomedes: '*Cressid* comes forth to him.' Though putatively commenting upon Cressida's movements, it may be that this apparent observation in fact anticipates them, with the ironic result that Troilus' words prompt and compel the player of Cressida to act out Troilus' very suspicions.

Ambiguous though many of these implicit directorial hints may be – 'Yea, so familiar?' – this thrusts the player of Cressida into a situational dilemma where he might not know whether or not these comments are intended to advise him in the interpretation of his role. And here lies a problem. Although much about Cressida's conduct is left up to the individual player's discretion, the player is also compelled to act upon the theatrical prompts that he receives from the other players. Though at times Cressida may put up an active resistance to Diomedes' advances – 'Sweete hony Greek, tempt me no more to folly' (2994) – this is juxtaposed against the possibility that the player of Cressida is repeatedly coerced to act in ways that affirm the viewpoints of the men who have positioned themselves to judge Cressida. The cruel irony of this is that those who accuse Cressida of sexual transgression – 'She will sing any man at first sight'; 'any man may sinde [sing] her' – are those very men whose words potentially dictate her actions, meaning that what Cressida is accused of is brought about by the very fact that she is accused in the first place.

After Cressida has approached Diomedes, Troilus' next comment that the pair are 'familiar' might provoke any number of reactions: maybe Cressida takes Diomedes' hand, or maybe she goes to kiss him. The point, however, is that what is important is not so much Troilus' reactions to Cressida's conduct as the way Troilus' words prompt the player of Cressida. When this is combined with the delay separating what Troilus says he sees from the Cressida-player's belated response to his uncued prompts, the result will be to produce spectatorial uncertainty for the audience about what it is witnessing, calling into question whether the staging *actually* represents what is going on or whether it reflects what is happening inside Troilus' head. As he works himself into a frenzy – 'Hold, patience' (3005); 'O plague and madnesse' (3011) – this effect might reach a climax when he sees Cressida stroking Diomedes' cheek:

Ulis. You shake my Lord at something; will you goe?
you will breake out.

Troy. She stroakes his cheeke.

Ulis. Come, come.

Troy. Nay stay, by *Iove* I will not speake a word.
There is between my will, and all offences,
A guard of patience; stay a little while.

Ther. How the divell Luxury with his fat rumpe and
potato finger, tickles these together: frye lechery, frye. (TLN 3031-3039)

As when Romeo observes Juliet place her hand upon her cheek, if it is only *after* the player of Troilus has uttered his line – 'She stroakes his cheeke' – that the Cressida-player will respond, then it might be that this serves to visually signal to the spectator the gap between what Troilus believes is happening and the actual, whatever that might be, matters of fact.

Again then, it is these apparently passive observers – Troilus, Ulysses and Thersites – who almost seem to control what is happening via their observations. This is not to suggest that these men – certainly not Troilus – are somehow in control of their mental temperaments, only that their words possess the bewitching power to bring about their mental fictions upon the stage. Of course, this is associated with the way in which this scene is split into different perspectival angles, with the focal centre of the action – Cressida's and Diomedes' rendezvous – being channelled through characters' multiple ocular frames of reference: at one remove Troilus and Ulysses secretly spy on Cressida and Diomedes, whilst Troilus and Ulysses are themselves watched by Thersites. Watching them all, however, is of course the audience. Yet whilst it might be assumed that the result of this is to put the audience, too, in the uncomfortable position of playing witness and judge to Cressida's apparent sexual betrayal of Troilus, in fact the effect is quite the opposite, encouraging the audience to judge the judgements passed on Cressida.

The scene is, then, framed and orchestrated in such a way that the focus is placed not so much on what is happening as on the different perspectives of what is happening. As the audience witnesses those internal observers within the scene prompt those other characters being watched, it is put in a position to point out the discrepancy when the players of Cressida and Diomedes are seen *reacting to* the observing characters' comments.

This is not to say that every case of an 'uncued action' is potentially a fantasy of the describer, only that here, at what is a moment of sexual suspicion when men habitually mistake and misinterpret the actions of their female counterparts, this possibility is opened up when it is paranoid lovers or – as is the case with Thersites – voyeur-like fantasists who are made the mouthpiece of these prompts. Thus, not only do 'uncued actions' here come in the form of Troilus' fears, but they also – as when he delivers his line 'frye lechery, frye' – give vent to Thersites' desires. It doesn't really matter that what Troilus imagines results from fear and suspicion, whereas what Thersites imagines is the result of a sexual fantasy: at this moment, their imaginations converge in such a way that urges the players of Cressida and Diomedes to enact what Troilus fears and Thersites wishes for. Assuming that the players respond to these prompts *after the fact*, it might be that the delay sends a signal to the spectator that what he is seeing is not so much 'the real thing' as the psychological projection of those characters who are made the mouthpiece of the prompts.

Master of Puppets: Iago as Stage Manager

The examples above require us to look beyond the apparent incongruity of character observations that worked as theatrical prompts, attending instead to the possible meanings generated by these signals. A play where 'uncued actions' take on especial significance is *Othello*, and hardly is it surprising that the mouthpiece of many of these prompts is the play's

chief antagonist. Yet whilst it is obvious that Iago plots a series of stratagems that other characters will mistake for reality, what is less often recognised is how the actor of Iago exercises an extra-fictive control over his fellow players. In fact, when attention is paid to how the dialogue engenders action, it transpires that Iago is not only an adept spin-doctor, but somebody whose words will actually determine what an audience itself will see onstage:

> *Iago.* He takes her by the palme: I, well said, whis-
> per. With as little a web as this, will I ensnare as great
> a fly as Cassio. I smile upon her, do: I will give thee
> in thine owne courtship. You say true, 'tis so indeed.
> If such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenan-
> trie, it had beene better you had not kiss'd your three fin-
> gers so oft, which now againe you are most apt to play
> the Sir, in. Very good: well kiss'd and excellent curt-
> sie: 'tis so indeed. Yet againe, your fingers to your
> lippes? Would they were cluster-pipes for your
> sake. (TLN 942-952)

Iago's observations – 'takes her by the palme', 'smile upon her', 'your fingers to your / lippes' – may well have transmitted a signal to the actors playing Desdemona and Cassio, thereby prompting the said actions as they are putatively observed happening. Whilst reading the text presents us with a straightforward scenario in which Iago watches the pair from afar, what might occur is an inversion: first Iago delivers the instruction, *and then* the other players respond. At a time when Iago is in the midst of concocting his stratagems, this is not without consequence, suggesting that Iago possesses an insidious control over others that goes much deeper than his ability to spin circumstantial evidence into a plausible 'narrative of suspicion.' Instead, Iago's words produce the actions he is describing, with the delay between the delivery of the prompt and its realisation exposing the way Iago's utterances – weaving in and out of

observation and command - bring into being a new reality, materialising and *becoming* actual once having tacitly informed the other players what to do. Hence whilst Desdemona and Cassio are transformed into Iago's puppets, it is as though somehow the latter is made to possess a sort of demonic, extra-fictive command over the drama, providing the theatrical instructions that shape the dramatic reality brought to life on the stage. In this way, Shakespeare puts Iago into the role of stage prompter. But this does not just mean that Iago performs a role within the drama analogous to a prompter. It means, quite literally, that at moments like this, Iago's utterances direct the performance, yielding an elaborate interplay between the theatrical and fictional associated with Iago's process of manufacturing a conspiracy, and, at the same time, a play-within-the-play:

> *Iago.*
>
> Didst thou
>
> not see her paddle with the palme of his hand? Didst not
>
> marke that?
>
> *Rod.* Yes, that I did: but that was but curtesie.
>
> *Iago.* Lecherie by this hand: an index, and obscure
>
> prologue to the history of lust and foule thoughts.
>
> They met so neere with their lippes, that their breathes
>
> embrac'd together. (TLN 1036-1042)

As he retrospectively recounts the gestures he prompted just one scene earlier, Iago construes the touch of Desdemona's and Cassio's hands as a visual sign of their infidelity, adding the provocative suggestion that the pair were so close as to almost meet with their lips. Yet these lines are delivered far too late to have practically served as stage directions, unless the two players in question had received the same instruction from elsewhere. As with the retroactive stage directions looked at earlier in this thesis, it could be that Iago is here exaggerating what an audience has already seen for itself. When it did so, however, the audience will have

witnessed not only *what* actions were performed but also *how* those said actions came about: namely, as caused by Iago's utterances. This would have had the result, not only of exposing the theatrical mechanics of the language – that is, how the dialogue produces the action – but also of providing a comment upon that same action, *italicising* how Desdemona and Cassio are unwittingly performing in the plot engineered by Iago.

Therefore *if* what an audience saw was Iago deliver his prompt – 'he takes her by the palme', say – and then witnessed Cassio do so, this would have served as a very powerful visual comment on how these characters have been reduced to puppets acting out Iago's will; all the while, it is those very actions which Iago will then appropriate to provide evidential support for his conspiracy: 'Didst thou / not see her paddle with the palme of his hand?'.

Viewed in this light, Thomson's concern that the signal is delivered only 'as or after the event occurs' appears misplaced.[253] Master manipulator that he is, with Iago, the occurrence of uncued actions is seldom separable from his internal plotting of an alternative reality within the play, resulting in a situation where Iago's devilish machinations are constantly underscored by his extra-fictive command over the theatrical apparatus.

The next time there is a comparable occurrence of such prompts is in 3.3, when Iago, having memorably pretended to withhold something from *Othello*, first cautiously informs the general of his wife's 'infidelity'. Here, Iago will observe how Othello is 'moov'd' (1840), whilst later expressing his regret at having brought down the general's spirits: 'I see you are eaten up with passion: / I do repent me, that I put it to you' (2037-2039). Though clearly not prompting specified actions, these lines do however convey a signal about a character's internal emotional state, leaving it open to the Othello-actor how to represent this through his external gestures

[253] Thomson, *From Playtext to Performance*, p.102.

and expressions. Some scenes later, Iago will play the same trick when encouraging Desdemona to refrain from tears: 'Do not weepe, do not weepe' (2831).

In both these cases, irony derives from the fact that whilst saying one thing – encouraging Desdemona to refrain from tears - Iago's words in fact do the opposite, prompting the actor to do just that. As such, the theatrical instruction contradicts what Iago is saying in a manner that exposes his hypocrisy and duplicity, with Iago's words wielding a dark and magic-like influence over the other characters. Nowhere is this dark magic more evidently on show, however, than when Othello falls down in an epileptic fit. Initially, the direction for this (besides the stage direction: *Falls in a traunce*, 2420) is embedded within Othello's lines: 'I tremble at it' (2416); 'It is not words that shakes me thus' (2418). Yet when Cassio enters and enquires what is happening, further evidence is provided of the control that Iago's words effect over his victim:

> *Cas.* What's the matter?
> *Iago.* My Lord is falne into an epilepsie,
> This is his second fit: he had one yesterday.
> *Cas.* Rub him about the temples.
> *Iago* The lethargie must have his quyet course:
> If not, he foames at mouth: and by and by
> Breakes out to savage madnesse. Looke, he stirres:
> Do you withdraw your selfe a little while,
> He will recover straight. (TLN 2428-2436)

Once we attend to Iago's language from a theatrical standpoint, it becomes apparent that Othello's fit is under Iago's command, it being the ensign's words which indicate to the player of Othello when his fit should cease. Indeed once we really pay attention, only when Iago delivers his cue – 'Looke, he stirres', 'He will recover straight' – will Othello come out of his

trance. If he so desired, the actor playing Iago was granted the power to prolong and delay the time it took for Othello to regain his senses, in such a way that Shakespeare can be seen depriving Othello – and indeed the actor playing him – of agency over his own mind and body, all of which now belong in Iago's bewitching power.

The Winter's Tale, 1.2

The play where Shakespeare most thoroughly explores the creative potential of 'uncued actions' is in *The Winter's Tale*, Act 1 Scene 2. Throughout the first half of the play, Leontes is on a mission to convince his court – and at times it seems the audience – that he is the victim of a humiliating scandal: his wife's affair with the best friend of his childhood.

Of course, it is generally accepted that Leontes is mistaken in this belief if he isn't also mad. Not only does he initially defy the oracle that eventually 'proves' Hermione's innocence; his conviction is one on which he is willing to stake everything – his marriage, his reputation and even the life of his son and heir. Yet with good reason, not all critics have been entirely convinced that the play provides anything approximating to absolute certainty when it comes to the question of Hermione's chastity. As Gillian Woods has written, *The Winter's Tale* encourages us to doubt the state of our knowledge from the word go, with 'gaps in the audience's knowledge of the action' creating – as Howard Felperin first pointed out – a situation where 'we cannot be sure that Hermione is as chaste as the oracle claims.'[254] Unlike *Othello*, where the audience is privy to Iago's stratagems, in *The Winter's Tale*, the conditions that determine whether audiences and readers can really know what has happened is far more

[254] In his reading of the play, Felperin highlights the difficulty posed by 'unrepresented action' for interpreting the events that appear to motivate Leontes' jealousy. The problem, as he says, is that the event in question is 'not actually 'there'' at all. Howard Felperin, *The Uses of the Canon: Elizabethan Literature and Contemporary Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.35; Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.169; pp.170-171.

precarious, such that Leontes' fevered doubt is something which Shakespeare almost wants his readers and audiences to share.

Much of this uncertainty derives from the absence of any identifiable cause to explain Leontes' suspicions. In the source, Leontes is provided with manifold (albeit ultimately misleading) reasons to suspect his wife of infidelity.[255] In his play, arguably Shakespeare's most daring ploy is to muddy the epistemological waters. As long ago as the 1970s, William H. Matchett argued that the early stages of the play are carefully orchestrated to stimulate the audience's suspicions, manipulating its sense of belief until the oracle's revelation.[256] As it so happens, this reading would appear to be supported by the only surviving contemporary eye-witness account of the play – Simon Forman's diary entry of 1611, in which the oracle is one of the key things he remembers about the performance.[257] But as the likes of Felperin, Woods and Cavell have emphasised, an oracle is hardly a reliable or stable basis of knowledge, and if anything, its authority derives from precisely the same sort of irrational belief that entraps Leontes in the first place.

At the outset, then, a problem emerges in the form of a textual lacunae that anticipates Leontes' descent into jealous rage. Though most modern editions add some variation of Nicholas Rowe's stage direction in which Hermione takes Polixenes by the hand, the absence

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255 The prose narrative on which Shakespeare based his play describes the affection between Bellaria and Egistus (the characters corresponding to Hermione and Polixenes) increasing daily, with the pair even meeting on occasion in the latter's bedchamber. Yet in Green's narrative, the reader is never encouraged to consider the possibility that the affair between Bellaria and Egistus might have actually occurred. Aside from the story itself, this is indicated in the prefatory matter of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century printed editions, which place an emphasis on the victory of truth over falsehood, brought about a 'triumph of time': 'Temporis filia veritas' ('the truth is the daughter of time).' Robert Greene, *Pandosto the Triumph of Time. VVherein Is Discovered by a Pleasant Historie, That Although by the Meanes of Sinister Fortune Truth May Be Concealed, yet by Time in Spite of Fortune It Is Most Manifestly Reuealed.* (by R. Field for I. Brome. dwelling at the signe of the Bible, neere vnto the North doore of Paules, 1592).

256 William H. Matchett, 'Some Dramatic Techniques in 'The Winter's Tale', *Shakespeare Survey*, 22 (1970), pp.93–108; see also Nevill Coghill, 'Six Points of Stage-Craft in The Winter's Tale', *Shakespeare Survey*, 11 (1958), pp.31–41.

257 The account in question can be found in Simon Forman's *Booke of Plaies and Notes thereof per formans for Common Pollicie,* Bodleian Ashmole MS 208, fols. 201^{v}-202^{r}, a modernised transcription of which is provided in Appendix A of William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.233.

of a stage direction in the folio produces possibility where there is otherwise insurmountable uncertainty: rather than take his hand, who's to say that Hermione doesn't kiss Polixenes? Or alternatively, it might be that Polixenes somehow makes a pass only to meet with Hermione's reproach – in which case, centuries of the play's editors have been at fault for a misogynistic misdemeanour, assuming that Leontes' jealousy must have some attributable explanation to be found in Hermione's genuine behaviour, however innocent her actions.

All of this testifies to one of this thesis' central claims – namely, that epistemic uncertainty in Shakespeare runs in tandem to questions of an ontological or metaphysical bent, where the presence of 'things unknown' points to the existence of possibility, to the co-existence of competing ways things *could be*.

In his recent work on 'dark matter' in drama, Andrew Sofer has referred to this as a form of 'quantum dramaturgy,' arguing that unobserved events that take place offstage 'exist in various states of indeterminate probability held open by the text', foreclosing direct knowledge of what has supposed to have happened in a space that remains inaccessible to audiences.[258] Of course, in *The Winter's Tale*, such a dramaturgy is apparent to the extent that the entire first half of the play is subsumed by the question of what might or might not be happening away from the prying eyes of spectators. As Philip McGuire first highlighted, however, 'quantum dramaturgy' applies not only to the offstage, extrascenic events that subtend the visible world that is staged before an audience's very eyes. When a play is performed, many things will be brought about in the form of embodied action which, in the playtext, exist as conflicting possibilities.[259]

All of these possibilities, from a Lewisian point of view, are realised at some playworld in actuality: it is not just that the playtext provides an array of staging possibilities to be realised

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258 See Chapter 2 'Quantum Mechanicals: Desiring Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'. Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p.12.
259 'The transition from the possible to the actual, from multifaceted potentiality to single eigenstate, is a quantum jump, a leap into actuality out of an aggregate of possibilities.' McGuire, p.37.

in performance, but more that all conceivably possible versions of the play occupy a point in logical space, whose extremities the playtext demarcates. There is no need to take into account those possible states of affairs which are too far removed, too detached from what we know about the conditions of the early modern theatre to be of any relevance. Rather, what matters is those possibilities which emerge out of our understanding – and indeed the gaps in our understanding – about how the theatre in Shakespeare's time worked.

And yet, in this respect *The Winter's Tale* poses a challenge, since the entire play is premised upon a textual silence that makes almost anything that can be imagined seem possible. In some scenarios, the audience really will see Hermione act inappropriately or indecently, whilst in others not. Yet a further complicating factor emerges in the way that the play calls into question the evidentiary validity of seeing. In the way that the opening moments of the play can be staged to undermine an audience's attempt to draw conclusive inferences from visual signs, Shakespeare's dramaturgy explores the relation between what we see and what we can know, reflecting, as Supriya Chaudhuri has argued, a wider phenomenon in Renaissance Europe when 'vision came to be characterised by uncertainty and unreliability, such that access to visual reality could no longer be normally guaranteed.'[260]

A further dimension to this vertiginous epistemology, however, comes from the way – as Simon Palfrey has observed – that Shakespeare makes 'almost everything hang upon *tales* – that is, upon reported scenes.'[261] Sometimes, these reports concern things that happen offstage. But at other times, such reports describe events as or after they occur onstage, such that the text provides 'access' to what is happening only via hearsay.

[260] Supriya Chaudhuri, 'Eyes Wide Shut: Seeing and Knowing in Othello: A Conversation', in *Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and His World*, ed. by Subha Mukherji (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan Publications, 2019), pp.75–88 (p.56).
[261] Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*, p.246.

At least in the first half of the play, most of these reports come from Leontes himself:

> But to paddling Palmes, and pinching Fingers,
> As now they are, and making practis'd Smiles
> As in a Looking-Glasse; and then to sigh, as 'twere
> The mort o'th;Deere: oh, that is entertainment
> My Bosome likes not, nor my Browes. (TLN 187-192)

Probably the most standard interpretation of these lines is that Leontes is seeing things. In performance, this can be conveyed by setting what everyone else will see – encompassing the other characters as well as the audience itself - against what Leontes says he is seeing. This discrepancy between the reported action and what is actually seen happening can serve, of course, to expose and emphasise the delusory nature of Leontes' mistaken belief, the irony of this being exacerbated when he attempts, notably during his interrogation of Camillo – 'Ha' not you seene *Camillo*?' (359) - to force others to see what 'he has' but what they haven't.

Yet, there are few clearer examples of implied stage directions than when Leontes observes Hermione and Polixenes 'paddling Palmes' and 'pinching Fingers.' After all, these are the sort of hints contained within the dialogue which would usually serve as the basis for inference about the staging. As was discussed earlier in this thesis, sometimes it is statements of this kind which will encourage editors to go about adding stage directions. In any other context, these lines would probably be read as implied directives, indicating to the players of Hermione and Polixenes what actions they needed to perform. More likely than not, the reason that they often don't get read in this way is that doing so leads to some uncomfortable possibilities: what if Leontes – and what if we – do see something suspicious? Can we be sure that Leontes' suspicions really are wholly baseless? None of this, of course, is to suggest that Leontes' behaviour is in any way excusable. And yet, if these lines really are functioning as implied

directives, then how exactly are we supposed to distinguish what is going on in Leontes' head from what is actually happening?

In this way, Shakespeare utilises 'uncued actions' to transform – as Lauren Robertson has put it – the 'doubled vision' required of early modern playgoers into an 'epistemological dilemma.'[262] The particularly telling and elegant indication that the lines are providing instruction for the players of Hermione and Polixenes is when, with the line beginning 'As now they are', Shakespeare almost seems to anticipate the reluctance or doubt of the two players as they considered their response, providing them with a nudge and prod that yes, *now* is the time to act upon what they've heard. This means that when the players heard these lines – 'paddling Palmes'; 'pinching Fingers'; 'practis'd Smiles' – one possibility is that they would have interpreted them as prompts, encouraging them to perform the actions stipulated. They would have been prepared to do so, it is not difficult to imagine, because no doubt they will have performed in many similar scenarios before: 'paddling Palmes' is after all a phrase we have already come across, when Iago observed Cassio taking Desdemona by the hand. As an ambiguous gesture that could be interpreted as either lascivious or courteous, here Emrys Jones' emphasis on Shakespeare's resourcefulness can be seen in the way that Shakespeare recycles the same imagery.

The effect of this is likely to have triggered some audience members' memory of the moment in *Othello* when Iago framed Desdemona's gestures as proof of her 'guilt', something which would have been truly uncanny in the not unlikely event that the same players were put into the same roles – the boy-player of Hermione possibly having been the same one who also played Desdemona. Yet, what this means is that the players would have been well trained to respond to lines like these, suggesting that it is not really satisfactory to maintain that Leontes

[262] Robertson, p.8.

is simply 'seeing things.' On the contrary, the problem is that what Leontes thinks he is seeing appears to tell the players of Hermione and Polixenes what actions they should be performing. If we are to make our inferences from the dialogue, then the result is something as unsettling as it is strange: a version of events in which Leontes' psychosis *becomes* what is staged.

It might be assumed, then, that before Leontes delivers his lines there is nothing suspicious to note. Once they have been uttered, however, it may be that they will bring about the actions that had previously existed only within the king's head, the audience almost witnessing the paranoid fanatic's fantasies brought to life before its very eyes:

> How she holds up the Neb? The Byll to him?
> And armes her with the boldnesse of a Wife
> To her allowing Husband. Gone already. (TLN 265-267)

Aside from the final signal 'Gone already', buried within the metaleptic conceit of Hermione imagined as a bird are at least two further prompts directed at the players of Hermione and Polixenes.[263] The first – 'How she holds up the Neb? The Byll to him' – implies that Hermione might offer her lips to Polixenes or even kiss him, variants of the word 'bill' elsewhere signalling when characters kiss in Shakespeare (as when Pandarus comments on Troilus and Cressida kissing: 'what billing againe' (TLN 1689)). The second, meanwhile – 'And armes her with the boldnesse of a Wife' – could suggest further physical intimacy, with Hermione maybe allowing herself to fall into an embrace with Polixenes. Some hundred or so lines later, Leontes

[263] Brian Cummings has provided the following definition of 'metalepsis' as it was understood in Renaissance rhetorical discourse: '… metalepsis was a term used to describe a process of transition, doubling, or ellipsis in figuration, of replacing one figure with another figure, and of missing out the figure in between in order to create a figure that stretches the sense or which fetches things from far off … Sometimes metalepsis is seen as a doubling of metaphor, a metaphor within a metaphor.' Thus, whilst Hermione is depicted as offering her lips to Polixenes, this comes buried within two layers of figuration: first, 'neb' and 'byll' [bill] are synecdochic for a bird, whilst the bird is the metaphoric substitute for Hermione. Brian Cummings, 'Metalepsis: The Boundaries of Metaphor', in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.117–34 (pp.219–22); see also, Palfrey, *Shakespeare's Possible Worlds*, pp.180–81.

might be recollecting this episode when he alludes to Hermione and Polixenes as having kissed 'with in-side lip':

> Is whispering nothing?
> Is leaning Cheeke to Cheeke? is meating Noses?
> Kissing with in-side lipe? Stopping the Cariere
> Of Laughter, with a sigh? (a Note infallible
> Of breaking Honestie) (TLN 377-381)

It could be that Leontes is retrospectively narrating what maybe has – or perhaps has not – been staged some moments earlier. Typically, it has been assumed that by the time these lines are delivered Hermione and Polixenes will have departed the stage, when Leontes comments that they are 'Gone already'.[264]

Yet the absence of a stage direction in the folio might suggest an alternative: instead of exiting the stage, it might be that they instead remove themselves to some other area of the platform, still visible by an audience but representing a different fictional location. Through this split-staging technique, it might be that Hermione and Polixenes mime the gestures stipulated in Leontes' speech, forcing the audience to question whether what it is witnessing is *actually* happening or whether the players are visually enacting what is taking place in Leontes' head.

As with the other examples from this play, the occurrence of these 'uncued actions' calls 'the very reliability of spectators' vision into question.'[265] Yet equally, they also feed into the play's strange and weird ontology, weaving the staged action in and out of what is real and fantastical, what is fictional and what is actual. Michael Witmore has described *The Winter's*

[264] I have been unable to find a single edition which doesn't follow Rowe by adding an '*Exeunt*' direction for Hermione and Polixenes.
[265] Robertson, p.128.

Tale as a 'story about its own fictions', where 'theatrical action' and 'imagined action' are treated as 'ontologically interchangeable.'[266] As he further highlights, the play involves a 'counterfactual metaphysics' where the distinction between what is and what is not is always in some sense unclear, and nowhere is this more relevant than when it comes to the way Leontes' words have the potential to control what happens on stage.[267] Whilst he can thereby be seen attempting to transform the dramatic reality into a fiction of his own making – a play-within-the-play in which he performs the role of the cuckold – from a meta standpoint, the directives embedded in his speech provide a sort of implicit running commentary upon his attempts to compel his court to perform in his own psycho-drama.

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This chapter has emphasised the ethical complexities resulting from 'uncued actions,' many of which occur at moments characterised by paranoia and suspicion, whether that be during episodes of political intrigue or, even more contentiously, within scenes of sexual suspicion when men accuse women of sexual transgression. The most common type of situation in which 'uncued actions' occur is when one character or a group of characters – usually male – stand aside and watch a female character's encounter with another male, typically to pass judgement on her sexual conduct. As they observe from afar, uncued actions are uttered when the characters watching what is happening pass comment on what they are witnessing.

In plays such as *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* – all of which revolve around the question of a woman's chastity – the presence of uncued actions problematises the attempt to make inferences from the dialogue, especially because the mouthpiece of the implied staging is men who will go on to accuse their female counterparts of sexual misconduct. This

[266] Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp.152–59.
[267] Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p.170.

means that eye-witness reports about what is happening come from those very characters who are responsible for accusing the other character in question of wrongdoing. One possibility, of course, is that there might be a discrepancy between what is reported in a character's speech and what is actually staged. When it comes to *The Winter's Tale*, for instance – which is probably the most extreme case in point – it is not uncommon for productions to oppose what Leontes says he is witnessing against Hermione's and Polixenes' actual conduct. This can undoubtedly serve to emphasise Leontes' inability to see the truth before his very eyes, but it also ignores the elephant in the room – namely, that in any other context, Leontes' comments upon the action in the early parts of the play would be read as implied stage directions designed to inform the players of Hermione and Polixenes what actions they needed to perform.

So does this mean that what Leontes claims to be witnessing is true? Maybe – dare we believe? – Hermione and Polixenes really will be seen doing something inappropriate. And yet, in this chapter I have proposed an alternative possibility, arguing that had the sort of implied directives uttered by Leontes been acted upon, then the actions they produced would have been performed *after* they have apparently been 'observed.' This is to take account of the peculiar potential of uncued actions to bring about an inversion in the standard relation between cause and effect: rather than an event producing a reaction from those who have witnessed it, it is these 'reactions' to what has apparently happened that produces the said event in the first place. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to posit the interpretive implications that might result from players responding to uncued directives *after the fact*. Within the moments I have looked at, I have proposed that what results from this is often a sort of psychological realism – episodes wherein the staging is transformed into the projection of a particular character's imagination or mental fantasy. The hallucinogenic reversal between what is reported in the dialogue *and then* what happens could, in this way, function as not only a signalling device to players but to the audience, informing it that what it was seeing was not what was 'really' happening but was

a visual enactment of what is going on inside a character's head. Whether this is how these moments were really staged we'll never know, but such is one of the many possible forms they might take.

Conclusion

The underlying thread that has linked all of the readings in this thesis has been an attempt, at a very localised level, to work out what is going on in Shakespeare's plays at moments characterised by epistemic doubt or uncertainty. As this thesis started out by emphasising, the earliest Shakespearean playtexts which have come down to us from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are remarkably devoid of extratextual data – silent, that is, about what is going on between the lines and besides the words that are spoken.

Any Shakespearean playtext is, in this way, strikingly 'open' but also frighteningly suffused with unknowables. By putting Shakespeare's stagecraft under the microscope – by paying attention to his use of theatrical instruments like prompts, reports, implied stage directions and entrance and exit cues – what this thesis has uncovered is abundance, plenitude and almost limitless possibility. With a focus on the strategies via which Shakespeare implicitly 'directs' his plays, I have sought to elucidate how Shakespeare's dialogic 'instruction' of the players serves to bring about multiple possible courses of action made available at points of high uncertainty, when an array of contingencies might be brought about as a consequence of actorly choices or even, sometimes, by accident.

Ultimately, then, this thesis has been about much more than how Shakespeare implicitly 'directs' his plays. In the preceding six chapters, I have emphasised how the events and occurrences that comprise a Shakespeare play are contingent – and contingent, that is, not just on actorly choice but upon the manifold ways these tiny dramaturgical instruments – these supervenient points – might actually be working. It is these instruments and techniques, I have argued, which ultimately function as the points at which any of various possibilities are instantiated, and thus upon which different evental outcomes hinge. As such, a significant

portion of this thesis has drawn upon the work of theatre historians as a way of establishing an idea of *possible* conditions of early modern playmaking, conditions which allow us to posit, specify and delimit the range of ways that the action of a play *might have* come about. This has included considering the forms of rehearsal in the period, the role of part-texts, the extents of an actor's agency and when, amongst other things, spectators might or might not have been able to witness what was occurring on the stage.

In addressing these questions, a picture has been provided of the pervasive, vertiginous unpredictability of Shakespeare's drama, which no doubt required actors to remain constantly on the alert as much as it is likely to have been thrillingly true to life. Arguably, only plays being written, prepared and performed in such a context could be so alive with potential as are Shakespeare's, and to this extent, perhaps the fact that they were 'of their time' is what makes these plays 'for all time.'

In the end, perhaps this thesis' ultimate contribution to Shakespearean scholarship has been to help us better understand what it is we are talking about when we talk about a Shakespeare who is 'myriad-minded', which entails much more than how the plays accommodate opposing voices or opposite points of view. Another, far less thoroughly understood aspect of Shakespeare's 'myriad-mind' is the evental multiplicity of his plays where alternative, sometimes contradictory versions of dramatic reality coexist. Yet whilst this is not necessarily a new insight, it is one which this thesis has encouraged scholars to take at face value: what are the moral, the ethical stakes of accepting that there are many, seemingly incalculable versions of the 'same' play? Why have some possibilities – for example, in editorial decisions - been acknowledged and others not? How are we supposed to account for the different choices that a character might make, altering the nature of his moral conduct? What are the extents, the limits of Shakespeare's plurality, and how on earth are we supposed to know? Inevitably, not all of these questions can be answered within the space of a single thesis. But in the way that this

thesis has endeavoured to reveal the sheer plenitude of Shakespeare's drama, it is my hope that it will point the way to further lines of scholarly inquiry.

The reality, after all, is that the pervasive presence of plurality in Shakespeare touches every aspect of our endeavours as critics to make sense of these plays, affecting how we think about everything ranging from character to causation, action and ethics, to more practical issues surrounding questions about how we should edit. To this extent, to be able to account fully for these plays, it is almost as though what they require is an entire rethink in the metaphysical assumptions that underpin our encounters with them, a rethink which would provide us with some sufficient explanatory discursive framework to acknowledge, and to think through the implications of, the evental multiplicity in Shakespeare's plays.

For some critics – note McGuire, Sofer and earlier still Emerson – such a framework could be found via analogy to quantum mechanics, whereas for a critic like Simon Palfrey, an alternative model exists in the philosophy of Leibniz. In this thesis, the other philosopher I have turned to is David Lewis, whose ideas about a plurality of worlds makes him an ideal candidate for theorising about possibility in Shakespearean dramaturgy.

This is not to say that this thesis has made any attempt to systematically impose Lewisian ideas on Shakespeare, and nor is it to say that Lewis is the only viable model for an investigation into the issues that this thesis has interrogated. Rather – and in this thesis' wider spirit of embracing multiplicity – it is more that I have posited Lewis as just one possible model for navigating the limits, extents and consequences of possibility in Shakespeare's implicit action. In the end, Shakespeare will always transcend any attempts that are made to reduce him to a single philosophical system. And yet, the potential advantages of drawing our metaphysical assumptions from Lewis could – I have attempted to demonstrate – be great indeed. Even where this thesis hasn't always explicitly alluded to or cited Lewis per se, he has nonetheless always

figured as an underlying presence, a premise and point of departure which has informed my basic understanding about the nature of Shakespearean dramatic reality, what it is and about how it is engendered out of Shakespeare's dramaturgy.

As I noted in the introduction, underpinning Lewis' entire philosophical project is his theory of 'Humean supervenience'. Taking its name from David Hume who famously refuted the idea of necessary connections between distinct causal phenomena, 'Humean supervenience' reflects Lewis' instincts as a materialist, growing out of the fundamental notion that 'the truth is supervenient on being.'

All truths about the world, according to Lewis, supervene upon local matters of particular fact, which he claims are instantiated at points, or at 'point-sized occupants of points.'[268] In Shakespeare's drama, comparable to these points in the 'Humean mosaic' are those smallest of dramaturgical forms, those tiniest of theatrical instruments like a cue, entrance or exit, prompt or report at which different possibilities – alternative dramatic facts – might come into being. When it comes to uncovering what exactly it means to speak of 'truth' in Shakespeare, what this thesis has uncovered is how the truth of things ultimately depends upon the array of possibilities opened up at these points of instantiation.

A Lewisian picture of the universe is, then, one in which the fundamental quality of the things in existence or of the things that occur determines what can be deemed true. And yet, Lewis is of course also famous his 'modal realism' – the idea that every way a world could possibly be is a way that some world *is*. From a modal realist point of view, there is no single thing that is possible, no conceivable way that a Shakespearean world could be that is not a way that some Shakespearean playworld *is*. So far as Lewis is concerned, possibility and actuality almost amount to one and the same thing: if something *could be* happening, then

[268] Lewis, 'Humean Supervenience Debugged', p.226.

somewhere, that something *is* happening. The radicalism of Lewis' philosophy thus lies in its ostensible explosion of any distinction between the possible and the actual. What begins as an attempt to account for contingency, however, ultimately gives way to a larger metaphysical picture in which, as John Heil has recently commented, 'necessity rules': to say that everything that could possibly be *is*, is not after all too different from saying that everything that could be the case *has to be* the case.[269]

Hence, accepting Lewis' metaphysic comes not only with potential advantages but also at great cost. If we are to believe in the reality of other possible worlds, and that all of these worlds have an equivalent ontological status, a problem emerges about how we are supposed to avoid a resulting ethical permissiveness. Are we to accept, for example, that in some version of *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione and Polixenes are seen by Leontes and an audience acting inappropriately? Whilst this would not entail our acceptance that Leontes goes on to act justly, it would, in a way that cannot be honestly avoided, require a different explanation as to *why* Leontes behaves in the way that he does, requiring in turn a revision in our own understanding of the moral truths of the play. And of course, exactly the same can be said about a whole range of examples: as to whether Hamlet attempts to murder Gertrude, say, whether Bolingbroke accepts Richard's crown or whether Petruchio strikes Kate. Sometimes, attuning our critical ear to these sorts of possibilities forces an uncomfortable moral reckoning. But at other times, doing so can reveal moments when characters behave in laudable ways that haven't – as exemplified in the editorial tradition, for example – been fully appreciated. A good example would be the servants' potential resistance to fulfil Cornwall's commands during the blinding scene of *King Lear*. But the catch is that there always has to be an opposing outcome, a conflicting way for things to be that will turn a scene or moment on its head. If some versions of the servants *do* resist and thereby demonstrate their possession of agency to do so, then to

[269] Heil, p.19.

what extent are those versions of the servants who do not do so culpable for their decision, to what extent should they be held accountable for their participation in their master's crime?

In Lewis' philosophy, our way of accounting for these modalities in the conduct of a character is through reference to his concept of counterparts. The servants in the version of the play who do resist are not, according to Lewis' counterpart theory, the same individuals as the servants who in another version of the play do not. Rather, they are counterparts, and the difference in how one counterpart of a character acts compared to another is one way that our ethical interpretation of character hinges upon modalities of action and behaviour.

Yet the counterpart theory postulated by Lewis also pinpoints a discrepancy between his own metaphysic and a Shakespearean ontology of playworlds. After all, as much as Lewis goes a long way to dismantling the distinction between the possible and the actual, he does not obliterate it entirely: never does he deny that such a thing as the actual actually exists, nor does he refute the idea that the world in which we live *is* the actual world, albeit one among many.

A counterpart, according to Lewis, is an individual who lives in another world besides our own. This individual will call his own world actual. But Lewis never has any doubt that both you and me – individuals who are living 'here' and 'now' – are also living in a world that we call actual. So Lewis tells us that actuality is indexical. To say that we are in the actual world is context dependent, 'actual' being a relative term akin to 'I', 'here' or 'now', the meaning of which alters depending on the context in which it is uttered. In this sense, actuality is relative to the time and place at which we ourselves exist and to the world in which we just so happen to live.[270] But in Shakespeare, it is far from clear where 'here' is supposed to be, and consequently where actuality can be located. After all, there is ultimately no Hamlet who lives 'here' in this world as opposed to a Hamlet who lives 'elsewhere' in some other world. When

[270] On the indexicality of actuality, see David Lewis, 'Anselm and Actuality', in *Philosophical Papers Vol 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.10–25; see also Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp.92–96.

it really comes down to it, Shakespeare's plays posit an even more radical collapse in the distinction between possibility and actuality than even Lewis is able to account for. To the extent or in the sense that it is not possible to draw any such distinction in Shakespeare's plays, the problem is that there ultimately exists no such thing as an 'actuality' to which we can finally gain access or which we can act as witnesses to the truth of.

Hence, as liberating a heuristic as Lewis' modal realism might be, it too in the end falls short of describing and fully capturing the even more radical and bespoke metaphysics of plays. There is something yet more strange in Shakespeare, more alien to our commonsense apprehension of modality which even Lewis' philosophy fails to articulate fully. And this brings us, finally, back to the question with which this investigation started about how we can know, and about what it means to know in terms which are uniquely specific to Shakespeare's theatre. 'To know', we might say, means to have access to what is actual, to possess knowledge of what is really the case and of what in actual fact has or has not occurred. The problem with Shakespeare, however, is not so much the prevalence of actualities as the absence of any actuality, a sense that we cannot know because ultimately, there is nothing 'there' to know. All that there is *is* possibility, coming in the form of 'things unknown.' And predictably, this study alone has not even scratched the surface. So incredibly vast are these possibilities, so infinitely incalculable is the plenitude of Shakespeare's drama, that I doubt there could ever be any single work of criticism that could wholly do Shakespeare's plurality justice. Yet in providing even just a brief snapshot of the plurality of Shakespeare's dramatic worlds in action, I hope that this study has gone at least some way to explaining what gives these dramatic works their perennial lease of life. The greatest testament to the profusion of possibilities in Shakespeare is, after all, the appeal that these plays still retain all these centuries after they were written and first staged – the fact that they are still being read, performed, discussed and written about in a thesis like

this. Even if this thesis has provided just a glimpse, a tantalising peep at the dizzying multiplicity of Shakespeare's dramatic worlds, then it will have met its objective.

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