

Stage Directions and the Theatre Historian

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When watching the first performances of *Twelfth Night* or *Hamlet*, what did an Elizabethan playgoer actually see? For the theatre historian, that question leads to another: wherein lies the evidence for such an investigation? And, given the dearth of eye witness accounts, drawings, and other external records of theatrical practice, that second question leads to the internal evidence found in extant manuscripts and printed plays. Hence - *enter* the stage direction.

To build edifices upon these signals in italics, however, can be a daunting task. Sometimes, interpretation is easy, no more than translating a Latin word (*manet, exiturus*). Occasionally, directions can be detailed and evocative, as with accounts of *dumb shows* (as in *Hamlet*, 3.2),¹ a few battle scenes (as in *Cymbeline*, 5.2), or scenes involving special effects or pageantry (*The Tempest*, *Henry VIII*). More typical, however, are directions that lack specific details but instead invoke a formula (*vanish; they fight; enter unready, mad, or in his study*) where the implementation of the onstage effect is left to the players or to the imagination of a reader. In some instances such formulas can be fleshed out by invocation of material from comparable scenes elsewhere where more details *are* available, a process analogous to the work of an iconographer who ranges widely in the available literature so as to explicate an image (*booted, rosemary*) - and here is a major asset of a stage direction dictionary. Nonetheless, many texts (*Measure for Measure* is a good example) provide few signals other than straightforward entrances and exits - and the first published version of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, the 1606 Quarto, provides no stage directions at all.

To use stage directions as evidence is therefore to confront many puzzles and potential sources of confusion. First comes the question: who is responsible for the extant signals? In his landmark 1790 edition Edmund Malone stated categorically that they were 'furnished by the players' and were therefore subject to change by the editor (Malone 1790, 1: lviii); other candidates have been scribes who copied the manuscripts (notably Ralph Crane to whom have been attributed the massed entries in *The Winter's Tale* and some unusual items in *The Tempest*), composers in the printing shop, and bookkeepers in the playhouse who supposedly transformed a playwright's draft into a promptbook suitable for performance. Recent scholarship, however, has demonstrated that a high percentage of stage directions are authorial in origin. Indeed, close attention to the surviving manuscripts and printed texts with playhouse annotations has shown how few were the additions or corrections made by the bookkeeper - most commonly to specify sound effects, spell out which actors are to play supernumerary roles, and anticipate the introduction of large properties (Long 1985). Occasionally, one of these practical in-the-theatre signals survives in a printed text, as with '*two Torches ready*' (Fletcher, *Love's Cure*, 7: 205).

Questions about origins are linked as well to the issue of *provenance* (place of origin, derivation). Scholars seeking to reconstruct the physical features of a particular theatre such as the Globe will concentrate on evidence from plays known to have been performed in that building. If the goal is to tease out the number of stage doors or the presence of flying machinery at the Rose, that scholar will not invoke scenes or stage directions from a play linked to the Red Bull. When widely scattered stage directions are invoked as evidence, the provenance of individual plays cannot be completely ignored (as when John Marston, writing with a particular theatre in mind, refers to *music houses*), but for those whose primary concern is not the reconstruction of a specific theatre this distinction becomes less important than other variables.

Similar questions pertain to *chronology* (when were a play and its theatrical signals composed?). Some locutions found in the 1580s and early 1590s are superseded or simplified in the playtexts that follow (*proffer, let*); the earlier signals are often longer, without the shorthand forms that later become commonplace. However, for the bulk of the period up through the 1630s continuity rather than evolution is the norm. To downplay the importance of chronology is not to argue that staging procedures and the terms used to signal those procedures stayed the same in all theatres between the 1580s and the early 1640s. But if (as is often the case) Shakespeare/Heywood and Brome/Shirley make use of much the same terminology, the importance of chronological distinctions is greatly diminished.

Although the theatre historian cannot discount provenance and chronology, what needs stressing is the presence in the extant stage directions of a widely shared theatrical vocabulary, especially from the 1590s on. Admittedly, the language used by a professional dramatist may not be exactly the same as that used by a bookkeeper, a scribe, an amateur writer, an academic, or a Ben Jonson refashioning his play for a reader. Still, the major variations in that vocabulary arise less often from different venues or different decades than from authorial idiosyncrasy. For example, George Chapman is more likely than any other professional dramatist to use Latin terms; most dramatists regularly use *aside* to mean *speak aside*, but Shakespeare, for one, prefers other locutions (e.g., *to himself*) and uses *aside* to denote onstage positioning. By proceeding carefully and not building edifices upon unique or highly idiosyncratic usages the scholar can set forth a range of terms that would have made excellent sense to Marlowe, Shakespeare, Dekker, Heywood, Jonson, Marston, Chapman, Middleton, Massinger, Brome, Ford, and Shirley.

Next to consider are the different functions of stage directions. Their major role is traffic control - getting actors and properties on and off the stage - so that the most widely used term by far is *enter*. A large majority of the extant signals therefore consist of *enter* and some combination of proper names (Hamlet, Faustus, Hieronimo); titles or professions (queen, bishop, merchant); and generic types or collective nouns (army, citizens, others, servants, soldiers, women). Also plentiful are signals that specify the place where or from which the entrance is to be made (*above, below, at several doors, in a prison, shop, or study*) and modifiers that characterize the entering figure as *amazed, bleeding, booted, disguised, marching, mourning, muffled, raging, reading, running, sick, solus, or weeping* (to cite but a few examples). Equally important are the many uses of *exit* and its plural *exeunt*, along with related terms such as *manet-manent* and *offers to go*. Even here at the most basic level, however, problems and inconsistencies abound, particularly for mid scene exits and re-entrances which are regularly omitted.

When one moves beyond *enter-exit* and traffic control, problems increase exponentially. What can be frustrating for both first-time readers and theatre historians are the many silences when we today most want specifics about the onstage action (is Hamlet aware of the eavesdroppers during the nunnery scene? if so, when?). What is characteristic of most playscripts of this period is not explicit detail about how to stage a given moment but some combination of 1) silence and 2) coded signals directed at playhouse professionals who knew their craft well.

As a case study, consider *The Two Merry Milkmaids*, one of the few examples of a printed text (as opposed to a manuscript) of an Elizabethan or Jacobean professional play that has been annotated for performance, in this instance in two different hands (Thomson 1996). To set up the play's central trial scene the Quarto first directs: '*Enter the Duke, Judges, Raymond, with others, the form of a Court*' and then '*Enter Dorigen placed at the Bar*' (13r). The two annotators then *do* spell out several items not available in the Quarto: from one a sound effect (a *sennet* at the entrance of royalty) and a table (presumably for the judges and perhaps the duke himself); from the second a sound effect (*hoboyes*), a guard to place the accused at the *bar*, and an expansion of "*with others*" into

several named courtiers. Nonetheless, neither annotator spells out the number of judges (subsequent dialogue has two judges speak), any distinctive costumes, the presence and number of chairs, and how the table and chairs are to be configured. Here then, for a major ensemble scene that requires at least two significant pieces of furniture, the author of the printed stage direction has left a great deal to the expertise of the players; the playhouse annotators have inserted marginal signals to ensure the availability of large properties and sound effects; but those annotators have not felt it necessary to expand or improve upon “*the form of a Court.*”

In preparing the Quarto for playhouse use the two annotators did not have today's reader in mind — and here is the basic problem that confronts today's theatre historian. Certainly, the staging of court and trial scenes may have varied somewhat from theatre to theatre or even in the same theatre over a span of years, but the configuration probably remained roughly the same: a bar; a table; seats and placement for the judges; and something important that is implicit but not spelled out in the many signals: distinctive costumes for judges, sheriffs, advocates, and other court personnel. Indeed, along with the bar such costumes would probably have been the most significant part of the 'code' to signify 'a courtroom'. An experienced dramatist, however, could assume a theatrical vocabulary shared by both players who knew their craft and playgoers familiar with such scenes; such a playwright could therefore provide few or no details or could fall back upon some formula: '*the form of a Court*'; '*as to her Trial*' (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.2.9); '*in manner of a Consistory*' (*Henry VIII*, 2.4.0).

To deal with this scene in *Two Merry Milkmaids* is to confront a larger problem linked to **permissive stage directions**, a category wherein key details are left indeterminate or open. By far the most common situation is to leave indefinite the number of actors required for an entrance, a lack of specificity that may result from either 1) theatrical exigency or 2) a necessary lack of precision at the time of writing (as when a playwright is not familiar with the personnel of the theatrical company that is to perform the play). In either case the writer of the stage direction may not be certain how many actors will be available as supernumeraries (e.g., early in a show some personnel may be busy taking tickets and unavailable as extras).

The number of figures in an entrance can be left indeterminate by a variety of means. Most common is the use of a collective noun (**army**, *attendants*, *followers*, *lords*, *men*, *others*, **train**, 'and the rest'). Typical of hundreds of examples are: '*Lucius, Iachimo, and the Roman Army at one door: and the Britain Army at another*' (*Cymbeline*, 5.2.0); '*Enter Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano, and their followers*' (*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.126). Various modifiers also allow for indeterminacy: **certain**, **diverse**, **sundry**, and most commonly **several**: '*certain Romans with spoils*' and '*certain Volsces come in the aid of Aufidius*' (*Coriolanus*, 1.5.0; 1.8.13); '*diverse Spirits in shape of Dogs and Hounds*' (*The Tempest*, 4.1.254); the Muses '*playing all upon sundry Instruments*' (Greene, *Alphonsus of Aragon*, 45); '*a Masquerado of several Shapes and Dances*' (Fletcher, *Women Pleas'd*, 7:308). Most obvious are the eight entrances that include some version of '*as many as can be*', as in *Titus Andronicus* (1.1.72).

Other signals leave costumes, properties, or stage business open: '*with as many Jewels robes and Gold as he can carry*' (2 *The Seven Deadly Sins*, 15) (Greg 1931: 2: no. 2); '*The Ghosts use several gestures*' (Massinger, *The Unnatural Combat*, 5.2.278); '*A Spirit (over the door) does some action to the dishes as they enter*' (Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, 4:206). For costume the term of choice is sometimes *proper* (in the sense of 'fitting, appropriate'), as in '*certain Reapers (properly habited)*' (*The Tempest*, 4.1.138). Occasionally a stage direction calls for a speech or song but leaves the specific words or melody to the performers: '*Jockey is led to whipping over the stage, speaking some words, but of no importance*' (Heywood, 2 *Edward IV*, 1:180). The verb **prepare** is used to set up an onstage action: '*Prepare to play*' for the fencing in *Folio Hamlet* (5.2.265);

'Prepares for death' at an execution (Heywood, *A Challenge for Beauty*, 5:68); and when special properties are involved: 'An Altar prepared' (Fletcher, *The Sea Voyage*, 9:62); 'two prentices, preparing the Goldsmith's Shop with plate' (Heywood, *1 Edward IV*, 1:63). Most common are versions of 'A banquet prepared' as in *Macbeth* (3.4.0). Again, how to prepare an **altar**, **banquet**, **execution**, **shop**, or **trial**, is not specified but is left to the expertise of the players, as is what is *proper* or the number of items or actions encompassed by *certain*, *diverse*, *several*, and *sundry*.

Along with *as many as can be*, the most obvious set of permissive signals consists of those that include an *or*. These signals are used widely for personnel, properties, costumes, and actions. The most common use of *or* is to leave indeterminate the number of entering figures: 'three or four with tapers'; 'two or three other' (*Much Ado*, 5.3.0; 5.4.33); 'Enter two or three setting three or four Chairs, and four or five stools' (Field, *A Woman Is a Weathercock*, 5.2.0). Comparable locutions are used to leave open the number of repetitions of an action or sound: 'makes a conge or two to nothing' (Fletcher, *The Nice Valour*, 10:149). Less plentiful are uses of *or* with reference to alternative actions, sounds, and properties: 'makes legs: or signs' (Jonson, *Epicoene*, 2.1.10); 'musical songs of marriages, or a mask, or what pretty triumph you list' (Greene, *James IV*, 2051-3). Sometimes at issue is the availability of a particular property or resource: 'Exit Venus. Or if you can conveniently, let a chair come down from the top of the stage, and draw her up' (Greene, *Alphonsus of Aragon*, 2109-10).

The indeterminacy clearly evident in *others*, *as many as can be*, and *or* can also be glimpsed in a much larger group of stage directions that contain coded or shorthand terms that omit significant bits of information so that much is left to the implementation of the players (as is the case with verbs such as *prepare* and **entertain**). The most visible examples are what can be termed *elliptical* or *metonymic* signals in which the missing details are easy to spot and flesh out. Few readers will take literally a direction such as 'Exit corse' (*Richard III*, 1.2.226) or 'The organs play, and covered dishes march over the stage' (Middleton, *A Mad World My Masters*, 2.1.151) where the attendants who carry the bier or the covered dishes are assumed, not specified. Such a practice is widespread, most notably with signals that call for the entrance of figures bearing a **body**, **halberd**, **musket**, **torch**, **drum**, or **trumpet**: 'Enter Buckingham from his Arraignment, Tipstaves before him, the Ax with the edge towards him, Halberds on each side' (*Henry VIII*, 2.1.53); 'Enter four torches' (Heywood, *1 If You Know Not Me*, 1:234); 'Enter Edgar at the third sound, a trumpet before him' (*Quarto King Lear*, 5.3.117). Such shorthand usages are practical, unremarkable, and easy to document (indeed, signals for *halberds* without designated bearers are more common than those for *officers with halberds*).

More tantalizing for the theatre historian are those situations where what is omitted is less certain. An ellipsis may be obvious when an object is cited without the player who must carry it but is much harder to recognize when personnel or effects are signaled without any accompanying costumes or properties. A reader today who confronts such theatrical shorthand will either expand the phrase ('Exit corse') or at the least recognize the existence of some coded effect (*enter in a shop*, 'the form of a Court') even if the exact implementation of that effect remains in doubt. But, as already noted, the vast majority of surviving stage directions consist only of an *Enter* followed by one or more named figures or generic types (doctor, forester, friar, jailor, lawyer, lord, merchant, nurse, sailor, servant, soldier) with no information about costume, make-up, and hand-held properties, all of which were presumably the province of the actor (as opposed to an **altar**, **bed**, **bar**, **bier**, **coffin**, **scaffold**, or **table**). For example, an apparently straightforward stage direction such as *enter a jailor* or *keeper* may be as elliptical or incomplete as 'Exit corse' if such a figure would be assumed to have a distinctive costume and be carrying a large set of **keys** so as to convey to a playgoer a sense of *enter in prison*.

To borrow from Hamlet, the norm is silence. Signals for the most elaborate *tavern* scenes (e.g., *1 Henry IV*, 2.4; *1 The Fair Maid of the West*, Act 1) provide nothing more than entrances for the relevant figures, and the same is true for many comparable busy scenes. Costume signals are plentiful and therefore too complex to characterize easily, but the standard procedure is to have figures that were probably readily identifiable by their distinctive garments or properties (doctor, forester/woodman, friar, gardener, jailor, lawyer, merchant, nurse, scholar) enter with no further details provided. Large properties, as noted earlier, are sometimes *prepared*, but more often an altar, bar, bed, bier, coffin, scaffold, or table is *borne, carried, placed, set, or thrust in/out/forth*, sometimes with a permissive or coded term attached: '*a Tomb, placed conveniently on the Stage*' (Greene, *James IV*, 3). Although not elliptical in the fashion of '*Exit corse*', the many signals that call for generic figures or large properties are couched in a form of shorthand that conveyed a great deal to a knowledgeable theatrical professional but is often opaque to a reader today.

Admittedly, not all items left to the implementation of the entering actor remain murky or indecipherable today, as when players are directed to enter *discontented, drunk, malcontent, or melancholy*. Today's reader or actor can readily understand '*Caliban sings drunkenly*' (*The Tempest*, 2.2.178), but harder to piece out are the signals and silences linked to madness. Few of the plentiful *mad* scenes that start in the 1580s with plays such as *1 Tamburlaine*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, and *The Cobbler's Prophecy* provide any details in the stage directions, as with '*Enter Lear*' (Folio *King Lear*, 4.6.80). The occasional more specific direction is usually generic, most commonly *enter mad* (ten examples, including Quarto *King Lear*, 4.6.80) and *enter distracted/distractedly* (eight examples, including Folio *Hamlet*, 4.5.20). Variations include '*with distracted looks*' (Massinger, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, 5.1.88) and '*raving and staring as if he were mad*' (Quarto *2 Henry VI*, 3.3.0). The use of generic signals that leave the implementation to the actor is best seen in John Webster's *The White Devil* where the speeches of the dying Bracciano '*are several kinds of distractions and in the action should appear so*' (5.3.82; see also 5.4.82). The one detail that is supplied with any regularity is disheveled *hair* for mad women, usually phrased as '*with her hair about her ears*' (Folio *Troilus and Cressida*, 2.2.100; Heywood, *1 The Iron Age*, 3:269). The variations from silence to specificity can be seen in the three versions of Ophelia's first mad appearance in *Hamlet* (4.5.20): '*Enter Ophelia*' (Q2); '*Enter Ophelia distracted*' (Folio); '*Enter Ophelia playing on a lute, and her hair down singing*' (Q1).

Also instructive are the many variations in directions for an actor to *enter unready*. As with *mad*, sometimes a variant of the term can stand alone, so that figures enter: '*unready*' (Fletcher, *The Coxcomb*, 8:323); '*all unready*' (Heywood, *2 The Iron Age*, 3:381); '*not full ready*' (Dekker, *1 The Honest Whore*, 2.1.12); or '*as in his Chamber in a morning, half ready*' (Field, *A Woman Is a Weathercock*, 1.1.1-2). To join Danae in bed '*Jupiter puts out the lights and makes unready*' (Heywood, *The Golden Age*, 3:69). Unlike the situation with such terms as *discontented, drunk, mad, and malcontented*, an even larger number of signals spell out how to stage unreadiness, most commonly by means of costume. Many *unready* situations result from interrupted sleep, as with '*half unready, as newly started from their Beds*' (Heywood, *2 The Iron Age*, 3:413), so that various items of night attire, especially the nightgown, are regularly specified. The number of actual uses of *unready* itself is then dwarfed by a much larger number of signals that direct an actor to enter in a *nightgown, nightcap, shirt, or slippers and trussing, unbraced, or half naked*.

If the authors of stage directions leave much to the implementation of the entering actor (e.g., details about what we term *make-up* are rare), the same is true for that category of signals linked to the placement of the actors on the stage, an equivalent to what we term *blocking*. A reader today may assume that the two onstage posts or pillars that supported the heavens (at least in the large public amphitheatres) were used regularly for various actions, most notably the many eavesdropping or observation scenes (e.g., *Much Ado*, 2.3 and 3.1; *Othello*, 4.1; *Troilus and Cressida*, 5.2), but only

one such signal survives: '*stands behind the post*' (Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil's Charter*, F3v). Rather, the few theatrical signals that mention a *post* call for some distinctive business, as with '*practicing, to the post*' (Jonson, *Folio Every Man In His Humour*, 3.5.141). Given the large number of observation or concealment scenes, surprisingly few specific signals are available, and those few are generic or non-prescriptive, as with '*stand unseen*' (Heywood, *The Escapes of Jupiter*, 1583). That '*behind the post*' (as spelled out in *The Devil's Charter*) should be understood as implicit in '*stand unseen*' is a possible inference, but such an expansion is far less obvious than a comparable expansion of '*Exit corse*'. The evidence suggests that the staging of such eavesdropping was either 1) a matter of standard practice that did not need specific signals (so that Barnes's usage is anomalous or superfluous) or 2) something to be left to the players.

Other directions for onstage placement are also less than informative to a reader today. Admittedly, references to figures and actions *above/aloft* and *below/under the stage* are common, presumably because such entrances or effects were to be distinguished by the bookkeeper and players backstage from the normal flow of action on the main stage. As already noted, anything to do with traffic control is likely to receive attention, as with widely used locutions such as *enter at one door . . . and at the other door*; *enter severally*; *enter at both doors*. However, the few terms used to denote movement or location on the main stage leave almost everything to the implementation of the actor, as when attendants are directed to '*stand in convenient order about the stage*' (*Henry VIII*, 2.4.0). Signals that correspond to today's sense of blocking are rare and usually are linked to some special effect or configuration: '*They place themselves in every corner of the stage*' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.3.8).

Stage directions linked to onstage placement are therefore open rather than specific. An exception is found in the relatively few signals that invoke the term *side*: '*the Pope taketh his place, three Cardinals on one side and captains on the other*' (Barnes, *The Devil's Charter*, L1r); '*four stand on one side, and four on the other*' (Folio 3 *Henry VI*, 4.1.6). More permissive and therefore more typical are terms such as *apart*, *aloof*, and *afar off*: '*Enter Hamlet and Horatio afar off*' (Folio *Hamlet*, 5.1.55); '*She spies her husband, walking aloof off, and takes him for another Suitor*' (Heywood, *1 Edward IV*, 1:83). In Dekker's *Satiromastix* Horace enters *aloof* so as to elicit the comment 'Captain, captain, Horace stands sneaking here' (4.2.24, 46); in Folio 3 *Henry VI* the French king asks a group 'to stand aside' and '*They stand aloof*' (3.3.111).

Similarly, signals for rapid movement, violence or threatened violence, and interrupted exits (as in variations on *offers to go*) may be widespread, but, except for items already cited, indications of onstage placement are surprisingly few. A number of figures are directed to *withdraw* or *retire*, often to be observers or eavesdroppers: '*withdraw to the other part of the stage*' (Jonson, *Every Man out of His Humour*, 2.3.20). The term of choice for such onstage movement is often *aside* (to be distinguished from the more familiar use of the same term as applied to speech). Most of the many examples provide only *aside* linked to a verb, most commonly *go*, *stand*, *step*, and *take*: '*takes Amy aside, and courts her in a gentle way*' (Brome, *The Jovial Crew*, 3:426); '*walks aside full of strange gestures*' (Fletcher, *The Mad Lover*, 3:14).

Although sporadic use of terms such as *aloof*, *apart*, *aside*, *post*, *retire*, and *withdraw* suggest at least some attention to positioning or blocking, a survey of hundreds of plays and thousands of stage directions provides no equivalents for terms we take for granted today: *onstage*; *offstage*; *upstage*; *downstage*; *stage right*; *stage left*. The one consistent signal that is to be found is the term *within* which is regularly linked to offstage sounds or voices. However, the term *without*, which would seem to be the logical extension or antithesis, is rare. Similarly, onstage figures are regularly directed *off*, but rarely is the term *on* invoked to bring actors onto the stage. Rather, the key words in their vocabulary that would correspond to our *onstage-offstage* are *in*, *out*, and *forth*. The

problem is that a review of the use of these terms by such seasoned professionals as Shakespeare, Dekker, Fletcher, and Heywood not only yields no clear, consistent distinctions but offers numerous examples of apparent contradictions, sometimes within a given scene. Indeed, in some instances the verb being used (*bring, draw, lead, set, thrust*) appears to be more important than the adverb that supposedly provides the direction.

A few examples can be instructive. Some signals do provide what appear to be clear, consistent distinctions, as with '*He goes in at one door, and comes out at another*' (Heywood, *The English Traveller*, 4:69). Here *out* clearly corresponds to our *in*-onstage and *in* corresponds to our *out*-offstage. What could be more straightforward? But from another Heywood play comes: '*They march softly in [off the stage] at one door, and presently in [onto the stage] at another*' (2 *The Iron Age*, 3:379 - and *presently* means "immediately"), so that the same stage direction can provide two opposite meanings for *in*. Similarly, the same scene in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* supplies '*Bedford brought in sick in a Chair*' and '*Bedford dies, and is carried in by two in his Chair*' (3.2.40, 114); and the Folio version of *3 Henry VI* provides first, '*enter Warwick, Somerset, and the rest, bringing the King out in his gown*' and later '*They lead him out forcibly*' (4.3.27, 57). Similarly, in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* Ursula '*Comes out with a fire-brand*', but, when she reappears a hundred lines later, she '*comes in, with the scalding pan*' (2.5.59, 155); for the same climactic moment in *King Lear* (5.3.238) the Quarto has '*The bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought in*' (L3r), but the Folio has '*Goneril and Regan's bodies brought out*' (TLN 3184), so that, in this instance, *brought in* and *brought out* are synonymous.

In citing such examples, my purpose is not to belittle Shakespeare, Heywood, Jonson, and others as sloppy or inconsistent. Rather, my point is that a firm sense of *onstage* and *offstage*, although crucial to *our* theatrical vocabulary and habits of thought, was far less important to them (and the varying uses of *forth* further reinforce this argument). Although I am reluctant to draw any far-reaching conclusions from this evidence, I do sense that their mindset is actor-centered and therefore closely linked to the presence, needs, and perspective of the entering or departing actor. As Bernard Beckerman has argued (Beckerman 1981: 152, 158), today's actors and directors 'expect to turn the stage area into an idiosyncratic world that can house the events of the play in question' so that 'somehow the stage is to be altered to suit the play at hand and *only* the play at hand', but for the Elizabethans 'whatever sense of locale a play or scene showed was derived from what the actors brought on stage' so that 'doors, posts, and walls did not convey information about locale independently'. Rather, 'the players projected an identity upon the individual part of the stage by calling, for instance, the upper level the walls of Corioli or one of the doors Brabantio's house', so that 'the environment that the players projected onto the facade or about the platform needed to be only as detailed as the narrative required for the moment'.

In practice, such an approach can then be oblivious to rigorous distinctions that to us seem logical, even essential. Similarly, signals such as '*Exit corse*' and '*covered dishes march over the stage*' may at first seem amusing or quaint but, especially when combined with permissive stage directions, can point us towards a fundamental problem that underlies any attempt to reconstruct English Renaissance theatrical practice. Admittedly, details *are* available about many onstage effects, but in some areas the inconsistencies can be puzzling and the silences deafening. Because the signals were directed at theatrical professionals who needed no tutoring, exactly how much coded information was conveyed by *enter a friar/doctor/jailor* or '*stand unseen*' is difficult, perhaps impossible to reconstruct today.

Another hurdle in the path of reconstruction is linked to Richard Hosley's distinction between *fictional* and *theatrical* stage directions (Hosley 1957: 16-17). For Hosley *theatrical* signals 'usually refer not to dramatic fiction but rather to theatrical structure or equipment' (*within, at another door,*

a *scaffold thrust out*), whereas *fictional* signals 'usually refer not to theatrical structure or equipment but rather to dramatic fiction' (*on shipboard, within the prison, enter the town*). The same onstage event can therefore be signaled by both *enter above* and *enter upon the walls* [of a city], with the second locution the fictional version of the first.

The most theatrical of signals can be seen in a playhouse annotator's call for a specific property such as a bar or a table. At the other extreme are those fictional directions in which a dramatist slips into a narrative or descriptive style seemingly more suited to a reader looking at a page than an actor on the stage. Some of these fictional signals show the dramatist thinking out loud in the process of writing so that the details anticipate what will be evident in the forthcoming action: '*Parolles and Lafew stay behind, commenting of this wedding*' (*All's Well That Ends Well*, 2.3.184). Such stage directions can be valuable insofar as they provide evidence about the dramatist's thought processes or his sense of the narrative but often tell us little about what the playgoers saw.

In interpreting such evidence, however, various complications can arise when today's reader cannot be certain if a signal is *theatrical* and therefore calls for a significant property such as a tomb or a tree or *fictional* so that a sense of a tomb or forest is to be generated by means of language, hand-held properties, and appropriate actions in conjunction with the imagination of the playgoer. Such complications are further compounded by the presence of an explicit or implicit *as* or *as if*. A seemingly straightforward fictional signal such as '*Enter Marius solus from the Numidian mountains, feeding on roots*' (Lodge, *Wounds of Civil War*, 1189-90) initially may appear to tell the story rather than provide a signal to an actor, but a starving Marius who has been alone in exile could enter '[*as if*] *from the Numidian mountains*' so that the actor will use '*feeding on roots*' (as in *Timon of Athens*), along with disheveled costume and hair, to signal his mental and physical state. Similarly: '*Enter old M. Chartly as new come out of the Country To inquire after his Son*' (Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, 5:340) tells the mission of the old man in narrative terms but may also signal some 'country' costume or other property (a staff, a basket). A fictional signal such as *enter on the walls* requires only that the figure enter *above* or *aloft*, whereas other seemingly fictional signals may convey some practical albeit coded instructions.

In this context consider the many and varied stage directions that either incorporate or omit the tiny word *as*, particularly in constructions that involve *enter from* and *enter in*. Uses of *enter from* often show a playwright using a stage direction either to enhance the story being told or to indicate a particular stage door. A selection from Shakespeare's plays includes entrances '*from his arraignment*' (*Henry VIII*, 2.1.53); '*from the murder of Duke Humphrey*' (Folio 2 *Henry VI*, 3.2.0); '*from the Courtesan's*' and '*from the bay*' (*Comedy of Errors*, 4.1.13; 4.1.84); and '*from the cave*' (*Cymbeline*, 4.2.0). To see the potential significance of the omission of an *as*, however, one need only set up some pairings: enter '*from hunting*' (*Titus Andronicus*, 2.4.10) versus '*as from hunting*' (Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, 4:171) or '*with her Hawk on her fist . . . as if they came from hawking*' (Quarto 2 *Henry VI*, 2.1.0); enter '*from dinner*' (Quarto *Merry Wives*, B1r, 1.2.0) versus '*as from dinner*' (Massinger, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, 3.3.0) or '*as it were brushing the Crumbs from his clothes with a Napkin, as newly risen from supper*' (Heywood, *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, 2:118). The largest group consists of variations on '*as from bed*' (e.g., Fletcher, *The Lovers' Progress*, 5:128; Heywood, 2 *The Iron Age*, 3:381), a version of *unready*, including such costume signals as '*Dalavill in a Nightgown: Wife in a night-tire, as coming from Bed*' (Heywood, *The English Traveller*, 4:70). Most of these signals use the *as from* formula with few or no details to set up a recently completed offstage action: '*as from a wedding*' (Fletcher, *The Woman's Prize*, 8:2); '*as from prison*' (Massinger, *The City Madam*, 5.3.59). The effect is to create a sense of actions, places, or a 'world' just offstage to be imagined by the playgoer.

Harder to interpret but potentially more revealing are the *enter in* signals. For many scenes the ongoing narrative fiction requires that the action take place *in* a particular place (a *courtroom*, *garden*, *prison*, *shop*, *study*, or *tavern*). As already noted, most of the relevant scenes provide no more than an *enter* followed by a list of proper names or generic types. Some, however, do provide a shorthand signal, as when Brutus is directed to enter '*in his orchard*' (*Julius Caesar*, 2.1.0). A number of figures therefore enter *in prison*, *in his study*, or *in the shop*, and a smaller number enter *in* other venues. To read such signals today is almost inevitably to draw upon reflexes gained from reading novels or watching cinema, television, and modern stage pictures linked to properties, sets, and lighting.

But what if an implicit *as* or *as [if]* is factored into this equation? Eleven plays may specify entrances '*in prison*', and a few of these stage directions do provide more details, as with '*in prison, with Irons, his feet bare, his garments all ragged and torn*' (Heywood, *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, 2:127). However, four Caroline playwrights signal an entrance '*as in prison*' (e.g., Brome, *The Queen and Concubine*, 2:35). Again, consider the following pairings: enter '*in the woods*' (*Timon of Athens*, 4.3.0) versus '*Andrugio, as out of the woods, with Bow and Arrows, and a Cony at his girdle*' (Whetstone, *Promos and Cassandra*, K4r); enter '*in his Study*' (Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, A-text 30, 437) versus '*as in his Study*' (Fletcher, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, 9:193); '*Enter Luce in a Seamster's shop, at work upon a laced Handkerchief*' (Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon*, 5:284) versus '*as in their shop*' (Field, *Amends for Ladies*, 2.1.0). For a related usage compare two versions of *Richard II*, 4.1.0: '*Enter Bullingbrook with the Lords to parliament*' (Quarto) versus '*Enter as to the Parliament*' (Folio).

As with '*Exit corse*,' to omit an implicit *as* from an *enter from* signal does not cause major problems, for a theatre-oriented reader can readily imagine the appropriate costume and effects for entrances in a Noel Coward comedy *from tennis* or *from swimming*. However, the same omission from an *enter in* signal can make a significant difference. An entrance *in the woods*, *in a garden*, or *in his orchard* may suggest onstage greenery, but an implicit or explicit *as* suggests that any sense of woods, garden, or orchard is to be generated for the playgoer by the entering actor's costume, hand-held properties, and dialogue. For example, the sense of a tavern can be linked to easily recognizable figures in distinctive costumes (most commonly drawers) along with portable objects such as wine, cups, tobacco, and towels. Specific directions to *enter in the tavern* may be scarce, but far more common is a signal such as '*Enter Drawer with Wine, Plate, and Tobacco*' (Field, *Amends for Ladies*, 3.4.36) which is comparable to *as in a tavern* or perhaps *a tavern prepared*.

To focus upon *as from*, *as in*, and related entrances is then to confront a variety of situations that bring into focus distinctive features of the drama before 1642. Starting in the Restoration but especially in the 1700s, movable scenery became an integral part of both staging and theatrical thinking, so that, from the beginning of the editorial tradition until very recently, scholars, drawing upon their sense of playgoing or imagined performances, have attached specific locales to Shakespeare's scenes, even when such specificity clashed with the original effects. As Beckerman notes, what is assumed in such post-1660 or post-1700 thinking is that an actor arriving onstage enters to a pre-existing, already established 'place'. But as indicated by the plentiful *as from* and *as in* signals, before the emergence of scenes and sets the pre-1642 actor entered to a neutral, unlocalized space. If the locale was for some reason important, that actor then, whether through dialogue, properties, costume, or distinctive actions, brought that 'place' with him or somehow signaled the place-activity he had left behind him offstage. In short, the locale did not precede the actor; rather, the actor created or signaled the locale. To specify 'place' in our texts (a practice still to be found in editions of Shakespeare) is then to impose a later editorial-theatrical logic upon the received texts so as to eclipse features basic to the original onstage vocabulary.

Another tricky issue when dealing with stage directions is their placement in a given scene, particularly for mid scene entrances and exits - and here is an issue where theatre historians and editors may part company. In an influential essay E. A. J. Honigmann describes what he sees as Shakespeare's carelessness with stage directions: 'He often omitted them, or left them incomplete, or inserted them in approximately but not precisely the correct place'; he argues, moreover, that some of these signals 'were added or misplaced by scribes, prompters, Folio editors or composers', to the point that the editor or reader 'cannot avoid giving a higher authority to the "implied stage-directions" of the dialogue than to directions printed as such' (Honigmann 1998: 187).

Honigmann rightly calls our attention to omissions or incompleteness in the surviving stage directions, but the line between 'carelessness' and 'permissiveness' (wherein one knowledgeable theatrical professional is talking to another) is a hard one to draw. Of interest here is a recurring phenomenon: that a number of figures in the early printed texts enter one or more lines before they are noticed by those onstage. Readers of Shakespeare who do not work directly with the original quartos or the First Folio will not be aware of many of these potential anomalies (roughly one or two per play), because editors regularly move the signals so as to have them conform to normative usage. To Honigmann and many editors these odd placements represent carelessness (by the dramatist or compositor) or the result of exigencies in the printing shop or an indication of the depth of the Globe stage (so that a few lines were needed for the entering figure upstage to join a downstage group). The latter explanation (that extra lines were inserted for practical reasons) makes good sense until one asks: why is such a special allowance granted to one entrance but not to the fifteen to thirty comparable moments in the same script?

Since I devote much of a chapter to this phenomenon (Dessen 1995: 64-77), I will limit myself to one highly visible example, the entrance of a smiling Malvolio in yellow stockings and cross-gartered (*Twelfth Night*, 3.4). Most modern editions (here the Riverside is an exception) place that entry just before Olivia's 'How now, Malvolio?' (15), so that she and the playgoer see the entering figure at the same time. In the Folio, however, Malvolio is directed to enter two lines earlier, just after Olivia's 'Go call him hither', so that the only authoritative early printed text of this comedy places Malvolio onstage for her 'I am as mad as he, / If sad and merry madness equal be' (13-14).

To some readers the difference may seem unimportant; to many editors the Folio version appears illogical or impractical. But what happens if we take this placement as seriously as any other bit of evidence in the Folio *Twelfth Night*? For example, what would be the effect upon Malvolio if at his entrance he overhears Olivia talking about her own madness? Could such words reinforce in his mind the evidence gained from the letter in 2.5 and therefore serve as another building block for the cross-purposes and comic delusion that follow? Or would a playgoer who sees Malvolio enter while at the same time hearing Olivia talk of her own malady be more likely to see an analogy between the two instances of comic madness or self-delusion? Again, how does one distinguish between 'carelessness' and a valid theatrical logic?

To puzzle over the placement or timing of stage directions is to confront a related yet different set of problems. Dealing with permissive or coded signals is regularly to encounter silences in the original manuscripts and printed texts. In contrast, provocative evidence *is* available about early entrances, but those signals are regularly deemed dispensable by many scholars because their placement is out of phase with our paradigms or expectations - and if an editor repositions such a signal, users of that edition will be unaware that such an option even exists. In this instance, provocative evidence may survive, but, whether because of the editorial process or because of the lenses through which today's reader views a Shakespeare play, no one is paying attention. In seeking to recover the original staging practice, the theatre historian is therefore bedeviled by both the *absence* of evidence and the *presence* of seemingly anomalous signals that can easily be ignored. Both silences and anomalies,

however, can be crucial if the goal is to open up a window that will reveal how Shakespeare's theatrical assumptions and practices differ from ours.

Behind my attempts to open that window lie the twin assumptions that 1) the original theatrical artists knew what they were doing but 2) their methods and working assumptions are not what we take for granted today. Shakespeare and his colleagues were not benighted primitives who lacked our superior know-how and technology but were highly skilled professionals who for many decades sustained a repertory theatre company that is the envy of any comparable group since. However, when putting quill to paper Shakespeare (or Heywood or Fletcher) was crafting his plays for players, playgoers, and playhouses that no longer exist. In reading their playscripts today we enter into the middle of a conversation - a discourse in a language we only partly understand - between a playwright and his player-colleagues, a halfway stage that was completed in a performance now lost to us. Although we will never reconstitute that performance, we may be able to recover elements of that vocabulary and hence better understand that conversation, whether the pre-production concept of the playwright or the implementation by the players. Nonetheless, despite such efforts in historical recovery we remain eavesdroppers.

The collaboration that underlies this process and the conversation on which we are eavesdropping have various implications for scholars. Honigmann's argument in favor of 'implied' stage directions in the dialogue or 'signals in the script' (a term regularly invoked by Shakespeare-in-performance critics and teachers) sounds attractive, but anyone who has followed the path of theatre history over the last century is aware of various false hypotheses (the postulation of an 'inner stage' quickly comes to mind) linked to a reader's assumptions about how *X must* have been staged, assumptions based upon notions of theatre contemporary to that reader and often alien to the 1590s and 1600s. To deal justly with the original stage practice is to unlearn what today we know or think we know about how a play should or must work onstage (the absence then of anything comparable to our variable onstage illumination for night and darkness scenes remains the best example). To overcome the significant but often invisible gap between theatre practice then and now, the best place to turn remains the stage directions that survive from the professional repertory theatre, for to build upon those signals as evidence is to stay within the realm of the possible: what was or could have been done in the original productions.

What emerges from this scattered but nonetheless suggestive evidence is a sense of a collaborative theatrical process where the authors of the surviving stage directions took for granted the professionalism and expertise of the players. The editor or theatre historian would much prefer 'spell it all out' signals, but the actual stage directions provided by professionals usually display a 'leave it up to the players' approach characterized by permissive terms, *as if* thinking, and a lack of specificity about gestures, costume, blocking, make-up, and hand-held properties. The abundant presence of permissive, elliptical, and coded signals highlights the collaborative nature of this theatrical enterprise and the need for editors, theatre historians, and other eavesdropping readers to attend carefully to a conversation in a language we at best partly understand. The alternative is spelled out by Hermione: 'You speak a language that I understand not' (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.2.80).

Endnotes

1. To streamline this essay I have drawn my examples when possible from Shakespeare (Riverside 1997) and from plays in the collected works of Beaumont and Fletcher (Glover and Waller 1905-12); Thomas Dekker (Dekker 1953-61); Thomas Heywood (Heywood 1874); Philip Massinger (Massinger 1976); and Richard Brome (Brome 1873). For fuller documentation of various items see the dictionary of stage directions (Dessen and Thomson 1999). Terms in my text for which there are dictionary entries are printed in ***bold italics***. As is the practice in the dictionary, when citing stage

directions from old spelling editions I have modernized the spelling. Playwrights' names attached to titles are for the convenience of the reader and do not take into account multiple authorship.

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