

The Theatre Historian as Director

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To do theatre history is to encounter few breakthroughs and many frustrations. In my case, having spent three decades puzzling over elliptical stage directions and deafening silences, I remain painfully aware of the many difficulties in the attempt to reconstruct what the original playgoers actually saw at those first performances of *Twelfth Night* and *Hamlet*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *Volpone*. Yes, some evidence does survive in a few documents (several much-debated drawings, Henslowe's papers, an occasional eye-witness account) and in thousands of stage directions. However, to make sense of opaque signals and fill in the many gaps, theatre historians must repeatedly extrapolate from the available evidence - in a sense, connecting the dots when there is not one answer to the puzzle. In this process, readerly or theatrical reflexes inevitably come into play so as to produce hypotheses and supposed solutions that can easily harden into fact or unqualified truth claims. The question then follows: if the reconstruction of the first stagings of X is intertwined with the scholar's deeply embedded reflexes, pet interpretations, and unacknowledged essentialist assumptions, how far is the practice of the theatre historian from the practice of today's hands-on director?

To tackle this question requires a series of case studies, but first some attention must be paid to the role of the modern director. Evidence from theatre history has had little impact at most commercial venues, especially those with significant budgets that allow for designers, elaborate sets and costumes, and directorial "concepts." Several theatres, however, have invoked the term "original practices" (OP) for some or all of their productions (the London Bankside Globe,¹ Ralph Cohen's Staunton Blackfriars, Jeff Watkins' Atlanta Tavern Theatre), though in practice the phrase is variously interpreted. My less-than-scientific survey suggests that OP can include some combination of 1) universal lighting; 2)

¹The term was invoked during the artistic directorship of Mark Rylance but is no longer current under Dominic Dromgoole.

period costume; 3) period and/or acoustic music; 4) no sets; 5) rapid pace in speaking and scene continuity; 6) emphasis on the poetry-language; and 7) all-male casts.²

However, from the point of view of the scholar-outsider looking in, two facets of the twenty-first century mindset get in the way of supposedly historical OP effects. The first is what I term theatrical essentialism: a set of assumptions widely held among actors and directors that, regardless of other changes in language, culture, and social practice, a basic core of truths about theatrical practice persists and can therefore be best understood by those in the theatre community regardless of the findings and strictures of scholars and other laymen. The second can be summed up as: "if you have it, use it." To be sure, a director at the Bankside Globe or Staunton Blackfriars does not have access to variable lighting, so that, as befits an OP approach, all the scenes must be played with the same illumination, but Globe directors regularly use the yard as a playing area (a practice for which no evidence survives) just as until recently Blackfriars actors had left the stage so as to penetrate into the playgoer's space. Similarly, today's director with access to an acting area above will use that resource (e.g., for short cross-cut scenes) regardless of the paucity of evidence that such usage is OP.

Comparable essentialist or ahistorical reflexes can bedevil the theatre historian. A classic example is provided by an eminent scholar of a previous generation, Allardyce Nicoll whose interpretation of the stage direction *pass over the stage* - to denote "a movement from yard to platform to yard again" - had, despite a few significant demurrals, gained general acceptance and can be found in the glosses of many scholarly editions.³ Recently, however, Leslie Thomson has provided a detailed critique of Nicoll's reasoning backed up by a mass of evidence that includes citations from plays performed in indoor theatres lacking a yard. The specific details contained in such signals vary widely (and the key phrase itself has several variants) but all of them, she notes, "have essentially the same

² For a recent critique of OP see Jeremy Lopez, "A Partial Theory of Original Practice," *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008): 302-17.

³ "Passing over the stage," *Shakespeare Survey* 12 (1959): 47-55.

meaning: figures entered, moved across the stage, and exited.”⁴

Of particular interest is Thomson’s demonstration how in Nicoll’s reasoning essentialist assumptions can trump evidence. As she notes, Nicoll quickly dismisses the possibility that figures “might have been supposed to come in at one door and go out by another,” because “No very deep theatre sense is required to show that for a processional movement this would have been hopelessly ineffective; after all, the doors in Elizabethan theatres cannot have been much more than 12 ft. apart and any such ‘passage over the stage’ would certainly have proved flat, stale and unprofitable.” After this summary rejection in Hamlet-like terms, he turns to a second possibility - that “the characters, entering by one door, moved outwards on the acting area, round the posts, making a great sweep over the platform and turning to make their exit by the other door.” As an example he singles out the opening of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* where Vindice comments at length on the ducal party as they pass over the stage. To Nicoll “it is evident that he must take up a position well to the front of the platform,” but if he does so “and the procession perambulates the acting area: how could he effectively be kept distinct from the others, how could he avoid becoming involved in the sweeping train?” Nicoll concludes: “No skilled actors, no ‘producer’, would permit such a disposition of the players.” As to the suggestion that Vindice might stand at one of the stage posts, “the situation would not only be worse, it would become absurd; in that case his long poetic commentary could only have been spoken from the midst of a circle, over the heads of the processional figures. This certainly will not do.”

As part of her critique, Thomson provides various strategies for staging Vindice’s 1.1 soliloquy, none of which requires a procession that involves the yard and all of which “will do.” I invoke this debate not to belittle Nicoll but to highlight his terms and rationale. To state that “No very deep theatre sense is required to show that for a processional movement this would have been hopelessly

⁴ “‘Pass over the stage’ - Again,” in *Staging Shakespeare*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin and Miranda Johnson-Haddad (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 23-44. The passages quoted from Nicoll are from pp. 49-50 of his essay and are to be found on pp. 23-25 of Thomson’s essay. The quote from Thomson and her discussion of *The Revenger’s Tragedy* are on pp. 35-36 of her essay.

ineffective” is to sidestep the question: whose “theatre sense” is at stake? What seems “hopelessly ineffective” to a reader in the 1950s may, in fact, have worked effectively in the early 1600s at the Globe or Blackfriars and could work at those venues today. The comment that “No skilled actors, no ‘producer’, would permit such a disposition of the players” anticipates comparable comments by Sir Peter Hall and others in the late 1990s about the placement of the onstage posts or pillars at the reconstructed Bankside Globe - that no theatrical professional, then or now, would construct a Globe stage with the two posts supporting the canopy or "heavens" as positioned in the Bankside reconstruction because such a configuration interferes with sightlines and impedes the flow of the action.⁵

To an essentialist building upon long-established reflexes, whether Nicoll in the 1950s or a Globe dissident in the 1990s, such an objection seems self-evident. Thomson’s extensive display of evidence establishes that the yard was *not* used by figures that passed *over the stage*. As to claims about the placement of the posts, the theatre historian can respond with a question: was the ability to see all the events onstage from a good vantage point prized as highly then as it is now? Those playgoers seated in some of the most expensive seats at the original Globe (in the area above and behind the stage) could not see tableaux or other special effects presented in the discovery space. In addition, Tiffany Stern has provided evidence that playgoers, whether in the yard or in the galleries, felt free to move when they could not see something onstage.⁶ Both instances provide case studies of how theatrical essentialism can trump historical evidence.

The links between the editing of texts and theatre history can be equally problematic. Some modern editors have chosen to adjust the signals that survive in the early manuscripts and printed texts so that they better serve the perceived needs of today's students and theatrical professionals. In defense

⁵ For an informative review of the controversy see Paul Nelsen, "Positing Pillars at the Globe," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997): 324-35.

⁶ "You That Walk i'th Galleries': Standing and Walking in the Galleries of the Globe Theatre," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51 (2000): 211-16.

of such a practice 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. Secondly, some stage-directions in the good Quartos, and many more in the Folio, were added or misplaced by scribes, prompters, Folio editors or compositors." Given such lack of precision in the early texts, Honigmann concludes 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," for "our general understanding of a character . . . or of what can and cannot be done successfully in the theatre . . . must always override the printed stage-directions."⁷

As Honigmann notes, stage directions that today's readers deem useful, even essential, are regularly omitted or left incomplete in the early texts, whereas others seem out of place - at least according to our reflexes. In his section on "Misplaced Stage-Directions" he therefore defends the editorial practice of repositioning such signals. According to his argument, since the Elizabethans were "careless about the precise placing of stage-directions," editors should be "free to standardise" early or late entries, especially those linked to "see where he comes" signals where the placement of the stage direction may vary before or after the spoken line. He notes that "editors usually prefer to leave well alone," but "by moving a stage-direction a line or two we can quite often improve the sense or stage-effect, and so we must ask ourselves whether there is any real need to follow the first Quarto or Folio".⁸ His preference for more rather than less intervention is therefore based upon his perception of Elizabethan carelessness and his sense, given today's greater editorial rigor, of an opportunity for improvement.

Honigmann is surely correct that in many respects the Elizabethans were far more casual than today's editor, so that authorial, scribal, or compositorial error cannot be ruled out. Moreover, as he

⁷E. A. J. Honigmann, *Myriad-minded Shakespeare*, Second Edition (London and New York, 1998), p. 187. For an alternative view see my *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), especially chapter 1.

⁸Honigmann, *Myriad-minded Shakespeare*, pp. 171-72.

and others will note, an obvious pitfall in any alternative line of argument is that interpretative ingenuity may elevate authorial errors or printing shop exigencies into meaningful, significant signals, supposed gems that have too long been ignored or suppressed. Still, his arguments and the working practice of many editors raise questions about the links between editing and interpretation. In Honigmann's terms, at what point does appropriate intervention (to "improve the sense or stage-effect") end and translation or rescripting begin? If (as I prefer to assume) Shakespeare and his colleagues knew what they were doing in theatrical terms, what is the price tag for "improvement" or standardization by a scholar who, although an expert on matters bibliographical and compositorial, may not be in tune with the logic of today's theatre, much less the onstage vocabulary of the 1590s or early 1600s?

Honigmann ends his section on misplaced stage directions with a brief treatment of several examples.⁹ First, he singles out a pivotal moment in *Coriolanus* where the title figure capitulates to his mother by silence and a gesture ("*Holds her by the hand silent*" - 5.3.182)¹⁰ rather than spoken words. After noting that "the actor has the very difficult task of conveying an overwhelming emotion without the help of words," he asks: "Is that really what Shakespeare intended?" For Honigmann, "The actor's task would be easier if he could at least begin to express his emotion - an alternative that involves moving the stage direction one or two lines down" (i.e., after rather than before "O mother, mother! / What have you done?" - 182-83). In defense of such a repositioning he notes that the adjusted version is closer to the narrative in Plutarch and that "we may assume that the direction was written in the margin and not properly aligned with the text - a common fault in surviving MS texts of the period," so that he can conclude: "the placing of this stage-direction in the Folio, and in many modern editions, is again unacceptable."

The verdict of "unacceptable" seems (to say the least) unduly strong. Should the determination

⁹Honigmann, *Myriad-minded Shakespeare*, pp. 172-74.

of what makes an actor's task easier or more difficult be the province of an editor - or a theatre historian? Having seen a dozen or more productions of this script, I can attest that this moment as scripted in the Folio regularly emerges as one of the most powerful in the show (e.g., as played by Greg Hicks in David Farr's 2002-03 RSC rendition). Indeed, the scripted silence and taking of Volumnia's hand strike me as Shakespeare's gift to an actor.

Consider too Honigmann's next example where he cites the surprising of the old duke by Vindice and Hippolito in *The Revenger's Tragedy*:

Duke. O, Hippolito, call treason.

Hippolito. Yes, my good lord. Treason, treason, treason!

Stamping on him

Duke. Then I'm betrayed. (3.5.155-57)¹¹

To Honigmann's ear, the duke's response ("Then I'm betrayed") "sounds out-of-place" from a man who has just been stamped on, so that he would have the stage direction "moved down, perhaps as much as ten lines." I have no desire to defend the poetic or psychological merits of "Then I'm betrayed," but I can readily imagine Hippolito's three words "treason, treason, treason!" accompanying three stamps upon this hated and now prostrate figure. The laboratory to test the positioning of "*Stamping on him*" is the rehearsal room, not the scholar's study.

Honigmann's final example is from another pivotal moment mid way in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* when the Duchess is confronted by her brother Ferdinand. He calls attention to the following passage:

You shall get no more children till my brothers

Consent to be your gossips: - have you lost your tongue?

¹⁰Citations from Shakespeare are from the revised Riverside edition, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston and New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1997).

¹¹*The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. MacDonald P. Jackson, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, 543-93 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[*Turns and sees Ferdinand.*]

'Tis welcome:

For know, whether I am doom'd to live or die,

I can do both like a prince.

Ferdinand gives her a poniard.

Ferd.

Die then, quickly!

(3.2.67-71)¹²

As Honigmann notes, to print the Quarto signal ("*Ferdinand gives her a poniard*") "at the end of the Duchess' speech is to associate it with Ferdinand's command, 'Die then,' but leaves 'tis welcome' a puzzle." Editors therefore usually insert a stage direction after "have you lost your tongue?" (as does John Russell Brown in his Revels edition from which I am quoting), a choice that for Honigmann "helps to give some sense to 'tis welcome', though the words still sound odd." He concludes that "The difficulty disappears, however, if we move the direction two lines up," a solution he can justify because 1) Ferdinand's "enigmatic gesture prefigures the later offer of the dead man's hand" in 4.1 and 2) this signal "was added to the text while it was being printed (in the corrected sheets of Q), when there was no room for it where I think it should have gone." If the original placement is retained, however, "'Tis welcome" could equally well be the Duchess' reaction to the unexpected appearance of Ferdinand brandishing a dagger and seemingly ready to kill his sister (as it is usually played today), so that his "Die then, quickly!" accompanies the removal of this threat by his handing the weapon to her.

Readers familiar with these three plays can judge for themselves the validity of Honigmann's tidying up of these moments. I cite them here to demonstrate what can happen when an editor's sense "of what can and cannot be done successfully in the theatre" takes precedence over the extant texts (indeed, "must always override the printed stage-directions"). The final sentence of his chapter is: "We have a great opportunity, and a great responsibility: to see the plays, not as editors direct, but as we

¹²*The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. John Russell Brown, Revels Plays (London, 1964). In a recent edition targeted at students

would wish to direct them ourselves" (p. 187). To bring a theatrical sensibility to the editing of playscripts is a consummation devoutly to be wished, but the notion of the editor as a director who can "override" the evidence that does survive, even if that evidence initially seems anomalous, is troubling.

Among the most rigorous of theatre historians is the late Scott McMillin whose book on the play *Sir Thomas More* is one of the classics in the field. His chapter on the staging of that play is a model of precision and clarity and provides the best available interpretation of the surviving text with all its problems and controversies. That reading in turn demonstrates both the assets and potential liabilities of the theatre historian as director.

McMillin starts his analysis with some shrewd comments about the difficulties of such reconstruction. Most Elizabethan playscripts, he notes, "were composed not to be privately read but to be used in the theatre, used by practitioners who knew the stage and could be trusted to understand the elements of an implied visual design," so that "Elizabethan stage directions explain practically nothing." As a result, any theatre historian seeking to recover what an Elizabethan playgoer actually saw "must be a most patient reader, listening to the implications of the text without much explicit help, because the positive evidence that we would like to depend on for the sake of objectivity is largely missing." *Sir Thomas More* with its few theatrical signals is no exception, so McMillin constructs his proposed staging largely on the basis of "one helpfully explicit stage direction" from scene 2: "*An Arras is drawn, and behind it (as in Sessions) sit the L. Mayor, Justice Suresby, and other Justices, Sheriff More and the other Sheriff sitting by, Smart is the Plaintiff, Lifter the prisoner at the Bar.*" His procedure will be "to build upon that one piece of explicit evidence by listening to the staging implications of the rest of *Sir Thomas More*."¹³

(*English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen [New York: Norton, 2002]) editor David Bevington also provides "*She turns and sees Ferdinand*" (3.2.70).

¹³*The Elizabethan Theatre and "The Book of Sir Thomas More"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 96-97. The stage direction is taken from the Malone Society edition of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, ed. W. W. Greg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), lines 104-6. Here and in subsequent citations from other old spelling editions (*The Two Merry Milkmaids, The Lover's Progress, The Spanish Curate, A Warning for Fair Women, The Tragedy of*

Initially McMillin dismisses the “inner stage” notion advanced by earlier scholars such as Ashley Thorndike and John Cranford Adams, a postulation that relied heavily on this stage direction, for, as he notes, “Normal staging, no matter whether the fictional location is interior, upstairs, at court, or in the woods, is now assumed to have been platform staging.” Nonetheless, scenes involving curtains, as in this signal from *Sir Thomas More*, must still be explained (“That they indicate special staging rather than normal staging does not make them disappear”). Many of these scenes involve “discoveries” or tableaux “intended to make a sudden impact upon other characters as well as on the audience” and would likely have been displayed by means of the central opening at the rear of the platform, but he argues that “Larger curtained scenes, especially those that imply substantial action and dialogue within the curtained space, seem unlikely to have been staged in a confined remote space.” He therefore calls attention to a suggestion made by several scholars “that an ample curtained pavilion or enclosure, perhaps one that was set up for occasional plays, was probably employed for large scenes of this sort.” He continues: “If a large curtained space is explicitly referred to in one scene, we must recognize the likelihood that it was intended to figure elsewhere in the action, although no other stage directions call for its use.” He reasons: “Theatre tends to use its prominent space, and it seems more reasonable to assume that the curtained space of scene ii figured in other scenes than to assume that all scenes other than scene ii managed to avoid it.”¹⁴

Much virtue in it. If indeed a curtained pavilion was used for scene 2 of *Sir Thomas More* and remained in place for the remainder of the performance, McMillin’s analysis does make excellent sense. He points out that “Scene ii is an interior scene which uses stage furniture to highlight a moment in More’s career” and is followed by “five other interior scenes in the original version of the play which do the same thing: they center on More, and mark the stages of his career through attention to stage furniture,” so that “These interiors become both more frequent and more prominent as the action

Chabot, The True Tragedy of Richard III, Fair Em) I have modernized the original spelling.

moves away from the public insurrection scenes and toward More's downfall and death, the sense of location in the play becoming private and withdrawn as a successful public career turns towards tragedy." In support of this sequence he calls attention to references to stage furniture in the dialogue that act out "the decline of the family group" and "give a visual delineation to the *de casibus* theme of the play." In this account, such objects (a table with purse and mace, chairs to receive the Mayor and his entourage, a council table, low stools, a barely furnished prison cell) "change in accordance with More's disgrace, but the implied use of a curtained area retains a unity of theatrical place through the different interiors." In addition, McMillin argues that the series of interior scenes is bracketed by two defining scenes, "More's quelling of the May-Day insurrection and his speeches on the scaffold before his execution," two public actions that "define the rise and fall pattern of the play." In his suggested staging "A raised acting area projecting from the tiring-house facade and probably remaining in place throughout the action, answers the staging requirements" of both scenes.¹⁵

Here is an excellent example of a theatre historian teasing out the staging of a lightly regarded play from clues in the script using the skills of a director and literary detective. The performance as imagined by McMillin would have had a visual design (to use his term) and narrative integrity rarely associated with this play. Still, the question remains: to what extent has the theatre historian here been superseded or at the least conditioned by the director? More specifically, is a pavilion necessary for the staging of scene 2? Would that pavilion have stayed in place for the remainder of the performance? Does the presence of the pavilion fit with the use of the scaffold? Finally, is the pavilion essential to a successful presentation of the visual design promoted in this analysis?

The key building block, as McMillin notes, is the scene 2 stage direction. The drawing of a curtain or arras to reveal a group of figures is commonplace from the mid 1580s on, as are various *as [if]* signals or their equivalents comparable to "*as in Sessions*," some of them for trial scenes:

¹⁴McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and "The Book of Sir Thomas More"*, pp. 98-99.

“*Hermione (as to her trial)*” (*The Winter’s Tale*, 3.2.10); “*Enter the Duke, Judges, Raymond, with others, the form of a Court*” (*The Two Merry Milkmaids*);¹⁶ “*The bishops place themselves on each side the court, in manner of a consistory*” (*Henry VIII*, 2.4.0). As McMillin observes, such signals were targeted at “practitioners who knew the stage and could be trusted to understand the elements of an implied visual design” and who understood the vocabulary of the theatre shared by playwrights, players, and playgoers. What is distinctive, even unique, about this particular discovery (if the stage direction was followed rigorously) is the combination of the large number of figures and items of furniture to be displayed in a small space (given the absence of any “inner stage”) and the two uses of *sit-sitting* to suggest an initial tableau. The presence of a pavilion with a curtain that can be drawn solves the problem and in turn sets up the remainder of McMillin’s visual design.

What is puzzling is that in the large number of plays with courtroom scenes found in Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline drama, only *Sir Thomas More* calls for the drawing of a curtain to reveal a large group of seated and standing figures. Rather, most trial scenes do no more than list the figures that initially are to enter, as in *The Merchant of Venice*, 4.1 or *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, 1.2. If more details are provided,¹⁷ the property most often specified is a bar for the accused, sometimes with other objects, as in two examples from the Fletcher canon: “*a Bar set forth, Officers*” (*The Lover’s Progress*); “*A Bar, Table-book, 2 Chairs and Paper, standish set out*” (*The Spanish Curate*).¹⁸ The eventual onstage configuration established in the *Sir Thomas More* stage direction is not unusual, for the setting out or preparing of the stage for a trial is sometimes signaled: “*Enter Officers preparing seats for the judges*” (Webster, *The Devil’s Law Case*);¹⁹ “*Enter some to prepare the judgment seat to the Lord Mayor, Lord Justice, and the four Lords, and one Clerk, and a Sheriff, who being set,*

¹⁵McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and “The Book of Sir Thomas More”*, pp. 100-2.

¹⁶Ed. John S. Farmer, *Tudor Facsimile Texts* (Amersham, 1914), I3r.

¹⁷For a fuller account see the entries for *as [iff]*; *bar*, *trial*, and *scaffold* in Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹⁸Citations from *The Lover’s Progress* and *The Spanish Curate* are from *The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*, ed. Arnold Glover and A. R. Waller, 10 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905-12), 5:144, 2:98.

*command Browne to be brought forth" (A Warning for Fair Women).*²⁰ Particularly elaborate are the two courtroom scenes in Chapman's *The Tragedy of Chabot*, as in: "*Enter Officers before the Chancellor, Judges, the Proctor general, whispering with the Chancellor; they take their places. To them enter Treasurer and Secretary who take their places prepared on one side of the Court. To them the Captain of the Guard, the Admiral following, who is placed at the bar.*"²¹

That no other extant courtroom scenes call for a curtained pavilion does not prove that the scene 2 signal in *Sir Thomas More* is an error or an unrevised first thought in the manuscript, only that it is unusual, even unique, and, if implemented, would represent a practice that was superseded by a more efficient or fluid method of presentation. The same is true for the presence of a scaffold as a continuing presence "probably remaining in place throughout the action" to accommodate the two execution scenes, for in subsequent plays this large property was "*thrust forth" (The Virgin Martyr), "put out" (Sir John van Olden Barnavelt), or "set out" (The Knight of Malta)*²² onto the stage for executions and other special events, with ascents and descents also specified, as in "*Leaps up the scaffold" and "staggers off the scaffold" (Touneur, The Atheist's Tragedy).*²³

In a note McMillin cites several previous theatre historians who had suggested a special structure such as a pavilion for staging a play of this period and also notes a dissenting voice. One author had proposed a "fit-up booth" for the staging of Desdemona's bed in the final scene of *Othello* based not on a specific stage direction but on his imagined staging of the scene. In a subsequent issue of the same journal Richard Hosley amassed a huge number of bed scenes from the repertory of the King's Men, none of which appeared to require a special structure and a few of which specifically

¹⁹Ed. Francis A. Shirley, *Regents Renaissance Drama* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 4.2.0.

²⁰Ed. John S. Farmer, *Tudor Facsimile Texts* (Amersham, 1912), H3v.

²¹*The Plays of George Chapman; The Tragedies with "Sir Gyles Goosecappe,"* ed. Allan Holaday (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), 3.2.0. See also 5.2.0.

²²*The Virgin Martyr in The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4, vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953-61), 4.3.4; *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt*, ed. T. H. Howard-Hill, Malone Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1980), 2852-53; *The Knight of Malta in Works of Beaumont and Fletcher*, ed. Glover and Waller, 7:109.

²³Ed. Irving Ribner, *Revels Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 5.2.130, 241.

directed the property to be thrust onto the stage.²⁴ My citing of other trial or scaffold scenes does not constitute that kind of rebuttal but is intended to make the scholar-director pause before building an edifice upon the signal from scene 2, especially since much of the visual design proposed by McMillin could be realized by a sequence of interior scenes (with that interior status signaled by stage furniture, costume, and dialogue) without recourse to a verisimilar enclosed space provided by a pavilion. That a series of scenes displays the descent of More from the pinnacle of power to prison and the scaffold is without doubt, but that the sequence as scripted for the early 1590s would have been acted out in a curtained pavilion (so that “the implied use of a curtained area retains a unity of theatrical place through the different interiors”) is by no means certain. My own hypothesis, based on the stage practice signaled in other plays, is that after an initial parting of an upstage curtain the figures assembled for scene 2 would have moved forward onto the main stage and set up or prepared the appropriate configuration. Again, the sequence as imagined by McMillin is attractive, even elegant, but may reflect the skills of a director as much as those of a theatre historian.

Similarly, in another major work, this time a study of the Queen’s Men company, McMillin and his co-author Sally-Beth McLean acknowledge that this touring company’s “flexibility in dealing with a variety of staging conditions is the indispensable element of their plays,” and note that, though descent machinery and trap doors would be handy, especially in plays involving onstage magic, “where special effects are called for, the directions avoid specifying the method of staging.” At the outset of their analysis of key scenes in the company’s repertory they distinguish between “successive” staging (“which assumes a change of location with each clearing of the stage” as in most plays of the period) and “simultaneous” staging in which “scenic indicators remain in view throughout the action” (as evident in two Queen’s Men plays, *The Old Wives Tale* and parts of *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*). With reference to Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, they acknowledge: “We are,

²⁴See Lawrence J. Ross, “The Use of a Fit-Up Booth in Othello,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 12 (1961): 359-70; and Hosley,

of course, imagining some of these details, but the basic device of using simultaneous staging as a plot element is unmistakable.” Lacking the unusually specific stage direction found in scene 2 of *Sir Thomas More*, they infer the presence of a portable “curtained pavilion or ‘canopy’” (comparable to the device used in royal progresses) to enhance scenes played by this touring company.²⁵

As in the *Sir Thomas More* analysis, the suggestions here are imaginative and attractive, but some of the uses imagined for this canopy-pavilion are questionable. I was least convinced by the analysis of *The True Tragedy of Richard III* where the authors posit a sequence of scenes wherein the canopied area represents a “safe space” that is violated when sanctuary is penetrated and violated again for the murder of the two princes. The “safe space” sequence, according to the authors, starts with a scene that survives only in a stage direction: “*Enters the mother Queen, and her daughter, and her son, to sanctuary.*”²⁶ Here they argue that “the emblem which stands for the sanctuary space must remain in view for several scenes” because two scenes later when the Archbishop speaks to the Queen “it must be clear that this encounter takes place in the sanctuary.”²⁷ The sequence suggested here (that climaxes with the murder of the two princes in their beds) provides integrity to a playscript that appears underdeveloped, even chaotic, but “must” an onstage pavilion be present to establish such an effect? If the enter “*to sanctuary*” signal is understood as *theatrical* (to denote a visible effect) as opposed to *fictional* (an author lapsing momentarily into a narrative mode)²⁸ the entering figures could just as easily proceed to another stage door or to a central opening where they would be welcomed by an actor in clerical costume, perhaps backed by an altar or some other religious item. That same image could

“The Staging of Desdemona’s Bed,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 14 (1963): 57-65.

²⁵ Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen’s Men and their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 139, 141.

²⁶ *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, ed. W. W. Greg, Malone Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 585.

²⁷ McMillin and MacLean, *The Queen’s Men and their Plays*, p. 140.

²⁸ The terms are borrowed from Richard Hosley for whom *theatrical* signals “usually refer not to dramatic fiction but rather to theatrical structure or equipment” (e.g., *within, at another door, a scaffold thrust out*), whereas *fictional* signals “usually refer not to theatrical structure or equipment but rather to dramatic fiction” (e.g., *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. See his “The Gallery over the Stage in the Public Playhouse of Shakespeare’s Time,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 8 (1957): 16-17.

then be repeated for the subsequent violation of sanctuary and for a discovery of the two princes in their bed - all this without the presence of a canopy-pavilion. My alternative is no more definitive than that offered in the chapter but has the virtue of not requiring a large piece of stage equipment unspecified in the text.²⁹

As an admirer of both books, I have no wish to carp at details. Rather, my goal is to call attention to the kind of problems generated when even the most astute of theatre historians slips into the mode of director. Indeed, in support of McMillin's focus on visual design I confess to one of my long time weaknesses - a readerly penchant for analogies, especially those wherein disparate elements in a given play appear (at least to me) to be linked so as to generate a potentially meaningful connection or, more simply, a pleasurable recognition on the part of the playgoer. In the final section of this essay I will cite three examples to highlight the tension between this predilection and the actual evidence.

Finding analogical connections between disparate personae, properties, or situations has long been a popular indoor sport among readers of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Moreover, with the rise of "Shakespeare in performance" criticism in the 1970s those links have regularly been keyed to imagined stagings which have been given a variety of labels: linking analogues (my 1977 choice);³⁰ dramatic rhymes; visual echoes; visual design. However, the actual evidence in the early manuscripts and printed texts is often inconclusive. Some repeated actions or situations are fairly obvious: the gages thrown down in *Richard II*, 1.1 and 4.1; Richard's wooing of Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, 1.2 and 4.3; Volumnia's appeals to Coriolanus in 3.2 and 5.3. Occasionally, a case for such

²⁹Leslie Thomson has pointed out to me a third invocation of such a pavilion where McMillin argues: "It has long been suspected that a curtained pavilion erected against a tiring-house facade, its lower level serving as a large enclosed space accessible from a central opening in the tiring-house, its higher level serving as a large raised area accessible from the gallery, would answer some of the scenes puzzling to interpretation in Elizabethan drama (such as Cleopatra's monument)." See Scott McMillin, "The Rose and the Swan" in *The Development of Shakespeare's Theater*, ed. John H. Astington (New York: AMS Press, 1992), 163.

³⁰See chapter 3 of *Elizabethan Drama and the Viewer's Eye* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 50-70.

a connection can be made on the basis of the original signals, as with the link between the appearance of Coriolanus "*in a gown of humility*" to ask for the voices of the plebeians and his subsequent appearance among the Volscians "*in mean apparel, disguis'd and muffled*" (2.3.39, 4.4.0). Other paired stage directions are less telling. For example, would Hermione's appearance "*like a statue*" in the final moments of *The Winter's Tale* have clearly echoed her appearance earlier "*as to her trial*" (5.3.19, 3.2.10)?

What often happens (as in McMillin's analysis of *Sir Thomas More*) is that one item in a supposed analogy is spelled out whereas a second is not and therefore must be teased out by a reader with a penchant for such links. Consider first *Fair Em*,³¹ a two-plot comedy from the early 1590s comparable to Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. In the final scene William the Conqueror, who has been deceived by Mariana and Blanch, rejects all women as "disloyal, unconstant, all unjust" and defines "a lover's state to be the base / And vilest slavery in the world" (1405, 1356-67) but then has his mind changed by the climax of the other plot wherein the title figure, a faithful woman, shows up the fickle Manville who ends up rejected by both Em and a second woman he has pursued. As with comparable two-plot plays, an ingenious reader can tease out various images and motifs that may (at least in the eyes of that reader) link the two strands. Although I confess to some doubts about how far such an analysis of this light romance can be taken, a sequence in the middle of the play is worth noting.

First, William, eloping from the Danish court with what he thinks to be Mariana, brings in "*Blanch disguised, with a mask over her face*" (855-56) and pledges to preserve her chastity. In the next scene Fair Em, who has resorted to various tricks to fend off unwelcome suitors, is led in, pretending to be both blind and deaf. These back-to-back scenes in which the two key female figures are led onstage set up a fairly obvious comparison and contrast: the masked Blanch is pursuing a man

³¹Citations are from the Malone Society reprint, ed. W. W. Greg (London: Oxford University Press, 1927).

who seeks another woman, Mariana; the supposedly blind and deaf Em is seeking to hold onto a man (Manville) who, as a result of her ploy and his growing jealousy, rejects her ("Both blind and deaf, then is she no wife for me?" - 942).

Of interest here is one stage direction. Em is led onstage (908) by her servant, Trotter, the play's clown, who is an accomplice in her deception, so that in response to her "where's my father?" Trotter provides a sarcastic rejoinder and "*thrusts Em upon her father*" (925-26). The woman, as object of desire, is scorned by one or more suitors and thrust back into the arms of her father. In the play's final scene, with William about to engage in battle with Blanch's father, the wooer finally discovers he has abducted the wrong woman ("Was it Lady Blanch which I conveyed away?" - 1375) and refuses to accept her as his wife, arguing that owing to "the false dealing of Mariana, / That utterly I do abhor their sex" (1403-4). Blanch responds: "Unconstant Knight, though some deserve no trust / There's others faithful, loving, loyal, and just" (1409-10). What follows is the climax of the Fair Em plot with its alternative image of a constant woman and inconstant man.

My suggestion is that William's very visible and potentially dangerous rejection of Blanch, much like Claudio's rejection of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, 4.1, would have been accompanied by an appropriate action comparable to "*thrusts Em upon her father*." The earlier rejection of the title figure (which led eventually to a marriage to another suitor capable of seeing through such surface deceptions) would then be visibly mirrored by a parallel rejection in the second plot which, after William learns from Em's example ("I see that women are not general evils" - 1489), leads to a second marriage as befits the closure of such a romance. The links between the two stories, such as they are, are clear enough without any onstage analogue, but to have the key female figure in each plot physically thrust back upon her father only to achieve an appropriate marriage thereafter both satisfies a sense of patterning and makes such a connection fairly obvious to a first-time viewer. To ignore this potential link is not to undermine a playgoer's experience of the play, but to highlight the connection is

to add a dimension to the pleasure of playgoing. Such a hypothesis, however, is not supported by firm evidence in the Quarto, so that (as is often the case) only one of the two supposedly analogous actions can be documented with any certainty.

My second example is generated by an atypical stage direction from a familiar script, *1 Henry IV*, that sets up the re-robbing of Falstaff and his cronies at Gadshill: "*As they are sharing the Prince and Poins set upon them, they all run away, and Falstaff after a blow or two runs away too, leaving the booty behind them*" (2.2.101). The use of the initial *as* clause is not unusual, for many stage directions are keyed to the timing of an action (with *while* clauses the most common), but this particular action is rare - indeed, our database of over 22,000 stage directions contains no other use of share/sharing.³² As with "*thrusts Em upon her father*," this unusually specific signal can point to the problem in the use of such evidence to interpret this and other plays today.

In general terms, readers of *1 Henry IV* have teased out an analogy between the Gadshill robbery of Act 2 and the rebellion that climaxes with the confrontation at Shrewsbury in Acts 4 and 5, but what if the original staging italicized this analogy? First, as detailed in the Quarto's "*As they are sharing*," when interrupted by Hal and Poins the four thieves (Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill) are somehow dividing up the spoils, probably grouped around their loot which is laid out in front of them. A few scenes later (3.1) four figures again appear onstage (Hotspur, Glendower, Worcester, and Mortimer) and again are grouped around an object of common interest (this time a map of England) in order again to divide up the spoils (this time the kingdom itself). The two scenes could be blocked to highlight the analogy so as to call attention to a link between two seemingly disparate actions which are not as disparate as they first appear, a relationship that can easily elude a reader faced only with the printed page.

How firm is this connection? Yes, the unusually explicit signal from 2.2 does set up an onstage

³² See Dessen and Thomson, *Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama*.

image of four thieves starting prematurely to share "the booty," but more typical of Elizabethan playscripts are the silences in 3.1. The initial stage direction is only "*Enter Hotspur, Worcester, Lord Mortimer, Owen Glendower*" (3.1.0) with no mention of any stage furniture or even the map. The latter prop is referred to several times in the dialogue (6, 69) and is the focus of attention for a major segment of the scene (69-138); chairs, stools, or cushions are implied by Hotspur's "Lord Mortimer, and cousin Glendower, / Will you sit down? And uncle Worcester" and Glendower's "Sit, cousin Percy, sit" (3-5, 7). If they had not already seen the possibility, Shakespeare could have noted an analogy between 2.2 and 3.1 to his actor-colleagues (and here is one of many advantages of having an in-house playwright). Nonetheless, the silences in 3.1 are typical of other such moments (when a possible, even likely configuration is left open) - as opposed to the unusual specificity of the signal in 2.2 (presumably owing to its more complex or atypical nature).

As my third example consider a provocative moment in one of the most maligned of Shakespeare's plays, *1 Henry VI*. At the nadir of her fortunes just before her capture by York, Joan de Pucelle appeals for help to a group of onstage "*Fiends*" (5.3.7), but in response these fiends, according to the Folio stage directions, "*walk, and speak not,*" "*hang their heads,*" "*shake their heads,*" and finally "*depart*" (stage directions at 5.3.12, 17, 19, 23). This exchange has not fared well on the page or on the stage, for to deal with this script is inevitably to run afoul of this scene and this appeal-rejection that in several ways test the reflexes of today's interpreters. The Folio's call for fiends and for specific reactions is unusually clear (and would have posed few problems in the 1590s for playgoers attuned to *Doctor Faustus*), but Elizabethan onstage presentation of the supernatural repeatedly strains our paradigms of credibility (and canons of taste), with this moment a particular challenge.

What if this sequence is seen not as a one-shot effect designed to malign St. Joan and the French but rather as the climactic example of a larger progression of images and moments? From her first appearance Joan has claimed supernatural powers (see 1.2.72-92), a claim tested in the first

meeting between her and Talbot that results in a stand-off; still, Joan scorns his strength (1.5.15) and leads her troops to victory at Orleans. Moments later, Talbot, aided by Bedford and Burgundy, scales the walls and regains the town, so that a united English force wins back what had just been lost. The three leaders working together therefore accomplish what Talbot, facing Joan alone, could not.

Shakespeare then provides a gloss on both this victory and the larger problem of unity-disunity by means of Talbot's interview with the Countess of Auvergne. Her trap for Talbot fails, as he points out, because she has only caught "Talbot's shadow," not his substance. The set of terms is repeated throughout the remainder of the scene (e.g., "No, no, I am but shadow of myself. / You are deceiv'd, my substance is not here") and is explained by the appearance of his soldiers, at which point he points out: "Are you now persuaded / That Talbot is but shadow of himself? / These are his substance, sinews, arms, and strength, / With which he yoketh your rebellious necks" (2.3.45-66). The individual standing alone, no matter how heroic (one thinks of Coriolanus), is but a shadow without the substance of his supporters, his army, his country.

As two generations of critics have reminded us, however, *I Henry VI* is about division, not unity, a division that has already been displayed in the split between Winchester and Gloucester and widens in the Temple Garden scene (that immediately follows Talbot's lecture to the countess), with its symbolic plucking of red and white roses. The figures who had joined Talbot in the victory at Orleans, moreover, soon disappear (Bedford dies, Burgundy changes sides). Factionalism thrives, to the extent that the division between York and Somerset (unhistorically) undoes Talbot himself. When the hero is "hem'd about with grim destruction" (4.3.21), Sir William Lucy appeals in Talbot's behalf first to York (4.3.17-23) and then to Somerset (4.4.13-28), but neither of these rivals provides the necessary timely support. Lucy can only point to "the vulture of sedition" that "Feeds in the bosom of such great commanders" and lament that "Whiles they each other cross, / Lives, honors, lands, and all, hurry to loss" (4.3.47-53). Lucy's listing of Talbot's titles (4.7.60-71) can then be mocked by Joan as "a silly

stately style indeed," for "Him that thou magnifi'st with all these titles, / Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet" (72, 75-76).

In the terms of 2.3, Talbot has been denied his substance and, along with his son, must face death as a shadow of his heroic self. Joan's scene with her devils follows less than a hundred lines after her exchange with Lucy. With the French forces fleeing the conquering York, all Joan can do is call upon her "speedy helpers" or "familiar spirits" to help with their "accustom'd diligence," but neither the offer of her blood, with which she has fed them in the past, a member lopped off, her body, or even her soul will gain the needed support. She therefore concludes: "My ancient incantations are too weak, / And hell too strong for me to buckle with: / Now, France, thy glory droopeth to the dust" (5.3.1-29).

No one makes grandiose claims for the imagery of this sprawling play. But a verbal patterning involving shadow and substance is clearly set forth in Act 2 and echoed thereafter (see also Alencon's speech 5.4.133-37); moreover, Talbot eventually falls (and France ultimately is lost to England) because of divisions whereby "substance" is denied and the hero must stand alone as shadow of himself. In her scene with the fiends, Joan too is deserted, denied by the forces that formerly supported her. Like Talbot, her heroic status cannot exist alone, so that she becomes a mere shepherd's daughter, not the figure who raised the siege at Orleans and was a match for Talbot in battle.

In general terms, as with the Gadshill robbery/rebellion link, the denial by the fiends that undoes Joan is analogous to the denials by the squabbling York and Somerset that undo Talbot. Would this link have been reinforced (or italicized) onstage in those first performances? In particular, what if the fiends' scripted reactions to Joan's offer echo similar walking apart, hanging and shaking of heads, and departures by York and Somerset in their responses to Lucy's pleas in behalf of Talbot? Such iterated actions would highlight for the playgoer parallel failures by first Lucy and then Joan, rejections that visibly set up the deaths of two previously triumphant figures. Just as Lucy fails to get the necessary support, a failure that means Talbot must give way to the new factions, so Joan fails to get

the support she desperately needs and must give way to the third Frenchwoman, Margaret, who appears immediately after Joan's exit with York. However interpreted in theological or political terms, such a staging would make the highly visible fiends not an end in themselves (a bizarre one-shot display of English chauvinism and anti-feminism) but rather the climax to an ongoing pattern of images or configurations linked to the central themes of the play.

As a reader, I find this patterning attractive, particularly (as in *Sir Thomas More*) in a script not known for its integrity or imagistic continuity. As a theatre historian, however, I am aware of the thin ice under the postulation of a visual analogy between Lucy-York-Somerset and Joan-fiends. As with the sharing at Gadshill (or Trotter thrusting Em upon her father) one part of the hypothetical analogue is spelled out in the stage directions - again because the actions are distinctive or because there is no accompanying dialogue³³ - but Lucy's interactions with York and Somerset provide no such signals.

To repeat, the silences linked to William-Blanch-father, Hotspur and group, and Lucy-York-Somerset are the norm, whereas the scripted actions (the Trotter-Em thrusting, the Falstaff and group sharing, the fiends' reactions) are the exception, so that here as elsewhere the actual stage directions rarely provide firm support for such hypothetical stagings.³⁴ How then is the theatre historian or "Shakespeare in performance" reader to distinguish between choices that correspond to the original performances and choices that make theatrical or interpretative sense today but may, in fact, be a product of a post-1642 sense of aesthetic unity or of a critic-teacher-director's tastes? Are staging choices that enhance a sense of patterning somehow inherent in a given script (a stance maintained by the first generation of performance critics and by some theatrical professionals - e.g., Trevor Nunn talks of "unlocking the script") or are supposed analogous actions no more than a product of the interpreter's

³³ For comparable reasons the signals provided for dumb shows rank among the most detailed of the extant stage directions (the dumb show that precedes the play-within in *Hamlet*, 3.2 is but one of many examples).

³⁴ To posit such staged analogies in the first performances when one of the two moments is not scripted is to assume a collaborative partnership between playwright and player-colleagues, a collaboration suggested elsewhere by the many extant "permissive" signals that leave open the implementation of a given effect (e.g., enter "*with others*" or "*as many as can be*"; "*speaks anything, and Exit*"; descend "*out of a tree, if possible it may be*"). See the entry for *permissive stage*

eye? The original players (with the playwright often at hand) were adept interpreters of the playscript (a document, as noted by McMillin, “composed not to be privately read but to be used in the theatre, used by practitioners who knew the stage and could be trusted to understand the elements of an implied visual design”), but would those players’ script-to-stage reasoning correspond to ours?

For me, the distinctive "*As they are sharing*" or the actions of the fiends set up a certain credibility that the "image" may have been repeated elsewhere and that such an echo-repetition was part of the playwright's strategy, but such a conclusion is anything but bedrock. In-the-theatre directors may make such choices without qualms (that is what directors do), but what happens to supposed theatre history when a reader's aesthetic, editorial, or theatrical instincts extrapolate from or even trump the evidence? My final question is: whether we admit it or not, are we all theatrical essentialists?

directions in Dessen and Thomson, *Dictionary of Stage Directions*.