

## Silence, Silences, and Shakespeare's Silence

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As a theatre historian my elusive goal over four decades has been to reconstruct what the original playgoers actually saw at those first performances at the Globe or Blackfriars. Such a pursuit is fraught with problems, because the evidence, whether in stage directions, dialogue, or the rare eyewitness account, is murky or non-existent. My mantra has therefore been "the norm is silence" - and those silences can be deafening. My goal in this essay is to provide some representative examples in order to raise a series of questions. What are the limitations of the evidence that can be gleaned from stage directions? Are we missing now what would have been obvious then? To what extent have hit-the-playgoer over the head onstage images, actions, or configurations in the 1590s and early 1600s been lost or blurred today? In short, what are the implications of the various kinds of silence?<sup>1</sup>

### What Stage Directions Do Not Tell Us

Occasionally, the surviving stage directions can be detailed and evocative, as with accounts of dumb shows (as in *Hamlet*, 3.2), battle scenes (as in *Cymbeline*, 5.2), or scenes that involve special effects or pageantry (as in *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII*). More typical are open or permissive signals, as with entrances that call for specified figures "*and others*" or "*with as many as can be*," or a larger group that contains coded terms or formulae (*vanish; they fight; enter unready* or *in his study*) that leave much to the implementation of the players. The most visible examples are what can be termed *elliptical* or *metonymic* signals in which the missing details are easy to flesh out. Few readers will take literally a direction such as "*Exit corse*" (*Richard III*, 1.2.226)<sup>2</sup> 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.

More tantalizing 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 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 recognize the existence of some coded effect (*enter in his study, enter in a shop*) even if the exact implementation remains in doubt. But the vast majority of surviving stage directions consist only of an *Enter* followed by one or more named figures or generic types (friar, jailor, lord, merchant, servant, soldier) with no information

about costume, make-up, and hand-held properties, all of which were presumably the province of the actor. 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 to convey to a playgoer a sense of *enter in prison*.

The surviving evidence therefore suggests a collaborative theatrical process where the author of a stage direction takes for granted the expertise of the players. Editors, theatre historians, and readers may prefer a “spell it all out” process, but the actual signals provided by professionals usually display a “leave it up to the players” approach characterized by permissive terms and a lack of specificity about gestures, costume, blocking, and hand-held properties.

### The Silence of Lost Plays

A major barrier to theatre history lies in the many lost plays that survive only as a title – or not at all. Leslie Thomson’s database, the basis for our stage direction dictionary,<sup>3</sup> contains over 22,000 items drawn from roughly 500 plays performed by professional companies in London between 1580 and 1642, seemingly a substantial body of evidence. Still, major gaps can be noted - in particular, the dearth of plays that survive from the mid-1570s to the mid to late 1580s when London-based companies were growing in size and expanding their repertoires.

This silence generated by the shortage of play-texts leads to various problems. First, one of my projects has been to trace the evolution of terms found in stage directions, part of what I term the *theatrical vocabulary* of the period. I have tracked some usages (I think of them as *markers*) found in the plays usually dated between 1581 (*The Three Ladies of London*) and the early to mid 1590s, items that are rarely if ever found thereafter, but dealing with only a small fraction of the actual theatrical fare weakens such a study. The evidence available is not sufficient to assign authorship or provide a firm date for a given play, but some items do read as more “primitive” (e.g., from plays such as *Lochrine* and *Alphonsus King of Aragon*), whereas (for whatever reason) few of these markers turn up in the Marlowe canon or in early Shakespeare (the first tetralogy, *Titus Andronicus*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*).

One persistent marker in the extant early plays is the use of *let* as an imperative, as with “*Let Fraud make as though he would strike him, but let Dissimulation step between them*” (*Three Ladies of London*, A3v).<sup>4</sup> *Lochrine* provides thirteen examples, including “*Let them fight*” twice (797, 832), while *Three Ladies of London* has six and *Wounds of Civil War* five. Another marker is the use of stage directions as a substitute for speech prefixes, with variations of *say-sayeth* the most

plentiful. Out of roughly fifty examples in our database, twenty-six are found in *Alphonsus of Aragon* (e.g., “*Medea do ceremonies belonging to conjuring, and say*” - 939-40), seven in *Lochrine*, and four in *Edmond Ironside*. Also common is the use of *speak-speaketh* followed by dialogue, with seven examples in *Arraignment of Paris* (e.g., “*The song being ended Helen departeth & Paris Speaketh*” - 549), and six in *Edward I*. Roughly ten plays, almost all of them early, have a figure *sing, say, read, whisper, or speak as followeth*.

The high percentage of plays in the repertory that have not survived is even more of a problem for another project: the investigation of the possible afterlife of onstage allegory in the 1590s and thereafter. No one will be surprised that the two earliest extant plays linked to the emerging professional London theatre (*The Three Ladies of London*, *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*) have allegorical frameworks. Moreover, those familiar with the canon of regularly cited plays will be aware of Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*, the two angels and various devils in *Doctor Faustus*, Rumor in *2 Henry IV*, Time in *The Winter’s Tale*, and perhaps Tamora and her sons masquerading as Revenge, Rapine, and Murder in *Titus Andronicus*. However, allegorical personae rarely appear in the romantic comedies of the 1590s (the presence of Envy and Comedy to frame *Mucedorus* is a notable exception) or the history plays (again, *The True Tragedy of Richard III* is an exception, along with Ambition and Insurrection in dumb show visions in *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington*).

Nonetheless, allegorical personae and effects do persist, albeit sporadically, outside of what is perceived today as the mainstream of drama. Consider the various plays linked to contemporary murders. Most visible in this sub-genre is *Arden of Faversham* and, to a lesser extent, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, both of which can be cited in support of a “Triumph of Realism” narrative. But two other comparable plays, *A Warning for Fair Women* (with its allegorical framework and three elaborate allegorical dumb shows) and *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (with the continuing presence of Truth, Avarice, and Murder) provide a different model (and the former item was in the repertory of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men). The variations among these four plays generate the question: would plays now lost to us (*Cox of Cullompton*, *Page of Plymouth*, *Stepmother’s Tragedy*, *Orphan’s Tragedy*)<sup>5</sup> have included allegorical personae or signposts? In her efforts to reconstruct such lost plays from their titles, Roslyn Knutson makes adroit use of potential sources, but she starts with a disclaimer: “From Golding’s *A Brieve Discourse*, we could not have predicted the extravagant dumb shows of *A Warning for Fair Women*.”<sup>6</sup> If a theatre historian is to re-imagine such lost items, which of the surviving plays should serve as models for the extrapolations?

Similarly, a scattering of extant plays include an allegorical prime mover (most notably Honesty, the knave-catcher in *A Knack to Know a Knave* and Contempt, the Vice-like antagonist of *The Cobbler's Prophecy*) or some form of allegorical super-structure in which allegorical entities compete for dominance. Are such items (*Mucedorus*, *Rare Triumphs*, *Soliman and Perseda*, *Old Fortunatus*, *Histriomastix*) nothing but archaic vestiges of outdated procedures? Or would a larger survival rate make a difference to an assessment of the role of allegory in this watershed period of Elizabethan drama?

Comparable questions can be raised about another feature of many extant plays: the multiple plot. Would the lost *Cloth Breeches and Velvet Hose* have been solely a debate in the style of John Heywood or would the two distinctive onstage figures have been integrated into a pseudo-historical plot (as with *A Knack to Know a Knave* or *Nobody and Somebody*)? Would *Page of Plymouth*, *Stepmother's Tragedy*, or *Orphan's Tragedy* have had a second plot? A lost play title may highlight a contemporary headline (*Old Joiner of Aldgate*, *Keep the Widow Waking*) but what other onstage events might the playgoer have witnessed? *Black Bateman of the North* is lost, but *The Vow Breaker*, a much later version of the same story, does include an elaborate historical over-plot along with clowning from a Puritan who almost hangs his cat for killing a mouse on Sunday. In short, silences in this area have an impact on any narrative about the development of dramatic forms and procedures.

### Silences and Analogous Action

As one fond of patterning and analogous actions, I zero in on distinctive stage directions as important clues. Unique in Leslie Thomson's database of over 22,000 examples is the signal that sets up the re-robbing of Falstaff and his cronies at Gadshill: "*As they are sharing the Prince and Poin set upon them, they all run away, and Falstaff after a blow or two runs away too, leaving the booty behind them*" (*1 Henry IV*, 2.2.101). 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 Poin 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 can easily be blocked to highlight the analogy 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. However, the signal to begin 3.1 is "*Enter Hotspur, Worcester, Lord Mortimer, Owen Glendower*" and even the map is supplied only by means of dialogue. Here as elsewhere the second part of a possible analogous action that may have been available to the original playgoers is not spelled out, a silence that may hide a suggestive one-two punch.

Comparable silences may be linked to a provocative moment in one of the most maligned of Shakespeare's plays, *1 Henry VI*. At the nadir of her fortunes, Joan de Pucelle appeals for help to a group of onstage "*Fiends*," but in response these fiends "*walk, and speak not,*" "*hang their heads,*" "*shake their heads,*" and finally "*depart*" (5.3.7, 12, 17, 19, 23). To deal with this script is inevitably to run afoul of this appeal-rejection that many find offensive, but what if this sequence is not a one-shot effect designed to malign St. Joan and the French but rather is the climactic example of a larger progression of images and moments not spelled out in the Folio? Joan's loss of support is preceded in Act 4 by Talbot's demise occasioned by the division between York and Somerset. When the hero is hemmed in by the French, Sir William Lucy appeals in Talbot's behalf first to York and then to Somerset, 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). A few scenes later, 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, 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).

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. 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. 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 linked to the central themes of the play. Given the silences in the Folio, such conjectures can easily be written off as overly ingenious, but, despite recent attribution studies that argue for hands other than Shakespeare's responsible for most of the dialogue, filling in some gaps or silences could provide integrity to a major sequence of scenes.

A stage direction in *Coriolanus* sets up another potentially meaningful sequence not supported in the Folio. In 2.1 Coriolanus returns in triumph from the Volscian wars to be greeted in public; 2.2 moves the narrative to the Senate; 2.3 takes Coriolanus in his gown of humility into the streets to seek the voices of the plebeians; 3.1 moves back to the Senate for a major confrontation between Coriolanus and his enemies within Rome. As is the norm throughout the period, the Folio stage directions, with one notable exception, provide no information about "place." That exception is found in the first of the two Senate scenes: "*Enter two Officers, to lay Cushions, as it were, in the Capitol*" (2.2.0). The locale for this scene is clearly "the Capitol," but that "place" is to be created by the dialogue, by the costumes of first the officers, then the senators, and by the laying down of cushions, an action that initially defines the theatrical space - an *as [if] in* technique that typifies the narrative flexibility of Shakespeare's chameleon stage.

Such a Jacobean approach to "*in the Capitol*" can in turn italicize images blurred or eclipsed today - in this instance the *cushion*. In the second Senate scene an angry Coriolanus tells the senators that if they give in to the commoners, "Let them have cushions by you. You are plebeians / If they be senators" (3.1.100-1). For me, this line suggests that the cushions, although not cited again in a stage direction, were a visible presence here as well as the earlier Senate scene. Later in the play Aufidius notes the title figure's inability to move "from th' casque to th' cushion" (4.7.43), from war-generalship (as symbolized by the warrior's casque or helmet) to peace-politics (as symbolized by the cushion). These two passages and, more important, the larger process being described are much clearer if the playgoer has seen the Capitol or the Senate defined onstage not by furniture or what we think of as a set but by the laying down of cushions. Two dialogue references are easily missed, but these properties may have had a strong theatrical presence in the first performances of this script, especially if the tumult occasioned by Coriolanus' conflict with the tribunes and plebeians in 3.1 involved disruption of the cushions.

To extrapolate further, consider the potential effect of casques and cushions in the play's complex final scene. The Folio calls for three groups for this final confrontation: Aufidius and his conspirators who commit the murder; the

commoners who enter with Coriolanus; and the lords of the Volscian city. In today's productions the voices of restraint provided by the lords are often pared back, while the role of the commoners is also streamlined. As I understand Shakespeare's strategy here, this final scene sets before us in a Volscian city the same elements (lords, conspirators, commoners) that Coriolanus had faced in Rome between 2.1 and 3.3 (patricians, tribunes, plebeians), a confrontation that, despite the support of one group (the patricians), had led to his banishment, his "I banish you," and his "There is a world elsewhere" (3.3.120-35). To include the same elements in the final scene in the Volscian city, again, with one of the groups, the lords of the city, supportive, is to act out the obvious fact that there is no world elsewhere, that the hero's second confrontation with such a city leads to a second defeat, this time resulting in his death. Imagine a Coriolanus in armor and bearing a casque-helmet who twice confronts the Roman senators seated on their cushions only to be banished from Rome. What if this casque-bearing figure appears again in the play's final moments to confront the Volscian lords also seated on their cushions? As in the second Roman senate scene (3.1), those cushions would be disturbed when Aufidius and his fellow conspirators, cheered on by the commoners (who moments earlier had cheered Coriolanus), kill him. Whether here, in *1 Henry IV*, or in *1 Henry VI*, to suggest such linking images may move us into the misty realm of conjecture, but this approach builds on both the original signals in the script and the original stage practice to flesh out what may have been a heightened configuration for the original playgoers but is now silenced.

### **Bertram's Velvet Patch**

A potentially significant silence is linked to the presence or absence in the final scene of *All's Well* of Bertram's velvet patch. At the end of Act 4 Lavatch describes the arrival of Bertram offstage "with a patch of velvet on 's face," adding: "Whether there be a scar under't or no, the velvet knows, but 'tis a goodly patch of velvet. His left cheek is a cheek of two pile and a half, but his right cheek is worn bare." Lafew's comment - "A scar nobly got, or a noble scar, is a good liv'ry of honor; so belike is that" - elicits Lavatch's rejoinder: "But it is your carbonado'd face" (4.5.94-101). As I read this passage, Shakespeare here uses theatrical italics to prepare the audience for something soon to be seen and provides in advance three different ways to evaluate that image. Most obvious is Lafew's inference that the velvet patch covers "a noble scar" or "a good liv'ry of honor," a worthy emblem of heroic deeds (the kind of scar one associates with Coriolanus). In contrast, Lavatch's cynical reference to "your carbonado'd face" suggests that under the patch lurks a scar of less worthy origins, an incision "made to relieve syphilitic chancres" (G. K. Hunter's gloss in his *Arden 2* edition). The third possibility is supplied in the clown's comment: "Whether there be a scar under't or

no, the velvet knows, but `tis a goodly patch of velvet." Bertram's left cheek, like his right, may be bare of any scar at all.

In the absence of any further references to patch or scar, what are we to conclude? Parolles, under extreme pressure, describes Bertram as a woman-chaser but does not associate him with venereal disease. Lafew's "noble scar" is in keeping with Bertram's martial exploits in Florence, but the dialogue emphasis, starting in 2.3, has been upon his less than honorable behavior, as in the King's comments on "dropsied honor" (2.3.128) and his mother's judgment that her son's "sword can never win / The honor that he loses" by deserting Helena (3.2.93-94). Repeatedly, Bertram's honor is called into question in Act 4, especially in his dialogue with Diana about the ring. Note that Parolles too tries to fake an honor he has not earned: "I would the cutting of my garments would serve the turn, or the breaking of my Spanish sword" (4.1.46-47). Both the general comments on honor and the specific analogy to Parolles seem to me to preclude Lafew's generous inference about the velvet patch and to suggest instead a Bertram who is using that patch to direct attention away from his shameful treatment of Helena and his loss of the ring.

At the end of 4.5, before we see the returning Bertram, Shakespeare signals the presence of a velvet patch and provides three possible interpretations, one of which (that it, like Parolles' scarves and military bearing, covers nothing of substance) follows from a well-developed cluster of images. But no further mention of patch or scar is to be found in the Folio. As a result, critics and editors rarely comment upon the patch's presence or function in the final scene; directors usually either ignore the problem completely or cut the Gordian knot by eliminating Lavatch's lines in 4.5.7 But what if Bertram *is* wearing such a patch, particularly a patch large enough to recall Parolles' blindfold of 4.3? If then at some point during the climactic scene that patch should fall off or be taken off to reveal no scar beneath, the loss of the last symbol of "dropsied honor" would be juxtaposed with the "new" Bertram who (perhaps) accepts Helena and transcends his former self, just as Parolles' blindfolded state, once transcended, had led to new insight and new status. The loss of the patch, moreover, would be offset by the regaining of the ring, the symbol of true, lineal honor, and with the restitution of Helena as wife, thereby undoing the sin against honor that, as noted by various figures, had offset any chivalric gains (so I can imagine Helena putting the ring on Bertram's finger and taking off the patch). Reunion with Helena, not a velvet patch covering a non-existent scar, may bring honor back to Bertram. An italicized presence and removal of the patch would reinforce key images, ideas, and analogies and buttress the change in Bertram that troubles so many readers.

All of these analyses are iffy, not definitive. In each case, however, a potentially meaningful image or configuration emerges, one that I have rarely if ever encountered in decades of playgoing. My question remains: what are we today missing on the page and on the stage? Do such silences matter?

### **Silence in *The Winter's Tale***

A different problem is related to a stage direction that has not fared well in today's editions. At the outset of Hermione's trial in *The Winter's Tale* the signal for "*Silence*" is regularly changed from an italicized stage direction as printed in the Folio (TLN 1185) to a word spoken by the officer (3.2.10). The New Penguin editor notes that *Silence* "would be a very unusual stage direction but is a traditional law-court cry. The entry of Hermione may be supposed to cause some stir in the court, which must be silenced before the indictment can be read." In at least one production, moreover, director Nicholas Hytner (National Theatre 2001) not only treated *Silence* as a word to be spoken but moved it earlier to be the first utterance in the scene.

The emendation of "*Silence*" to "Silence" is linked to a larger problem of who is onstage at this moment. The Folio's opening signal reads: "*Enter Leontes, Lords, Officers: Hermione (as to her trial) Ladies: Cleomines, Dion*" (TLN 1174-5, 3.2.0). Most editors assume this stage direction to be a massed entry (a practice found elsewhere in the Folio printing of *The Winter's Tale*) in which all the figures to appear in a given scene, even if they are to enter later, are included in the opening entrance. The standard choice is therefore to divide the Folio entrance into three sections as signaled by the colons, so that Hermione and her ladies appear after lines 9-10 (the officer's statement that "It is his Highness' pleasure that the Queen / Appear in person here in court"). The Riverside therefore begins the scene with "*Enter Leontes, Lords, Officers*" and then provides "[*Enter*] *Hermione (as to her trial), [Paulina, and] Ladies [attending]*" (3.2.0, 10); in his 1996 Oxford edition Stephen Orgel provides essentially the same signals minus the square brackets. Later, when a lord says: "therefore bring forth, / And in Apollo's name, his oracle" (117-18), editors insert a stage direction (in both the Riverside and Orgel "[*Exeunt certain Officers*]") so as to have Cleomines and Dion (the oracle-bearers) escorted in at line 123, the end of Hermione's "The Emperor of Russia" speech.

The scene as emended, with three inserted stage directions and "Silence" as a word to be spoken, is the scene most of us know. In defense of such altering of the Folio one might ask: if massed entries are prevalent elsewhere in this text, why not here

also? If Hermione is already onstage, why would she be formally ordered to "Appear in person here in court"? For just such a moment, however, one can turn to *Henry VIII* where Queen Katherine, not only onstage but also, like Hermione, the focus of attention, is nonetheless called to "come into the court" (2.4.10-11). Obviously, as used here "into the court" has a formal, procedural meaning as opposed to "bring her to this room from some other place." Moments earlier, in response to a parallel call ("Henry King of England, come into the court"), the king, without moving from his throne, had responded: "Here" (6-9). At least in *Henry VIII*, 2.4, "to come into the court" is formally to acknowledge one's presence rather than to *enter* from offstage. Admittedly, the two situations are similar, not identical, but the presence of Katherine from the outset, despite the call for her to "come into the court," points to the possibility, even the likelihood, that Hermione too is present from the beginning - as would be the case if we take the Folio stage direction literally rather than as a massed entry.

More potential insights into the situation in *The Winter's Tale* then follow, for a stage direction spells out Katherine's response to "come into the court": "*The Queen makes no answer, rises out of her chair, goes about the court, comes to the King, and kneels at his feet; then speaks*" (12). That Katherine "*goes about the court*" provides further context for the call for Hermione to appear "in court," for, as is clear in context and in the Holinshed passage upon which this scene is closely based, "*the court*" consists of some but not all of the figures onstage so that the queen must bypass this group in order to reach the king. More important, the signal in *Henry VIII* that "*The Queen makes no answer*" suggests that "*Silence*" in *The Winter's Tale*, 3.2 may not be an error, as is assumed when editors turn it into a spoken word at the end of the officer's speech, but rather is a signal that Hermione initially should not speak (presumably, an appropriate response would have been: "Here") and thereby like Katherine does not recognize the authority of Leontes' court.

What then is the potential theatrical effect if *Silence* is a stage direction rather than a word to be spoken? If Hermione, like Katherine, is onstage during the officer's appeal for her to appear "here in court," a total silence from her (when all eyes are riveted upon her) could be a highly "theatrical" response. In such situations, "*Silence*" in the theatre can be electric. What follows *Silence*, if it is treated as a stage direction, is Leontes' "Read the indictment" (11) which then can emerge not as a mere pro forma comment but rather as an act of frustration after her non-response or non-compliance if she initially refuses to appear or respond as requested (i.e., no "Here" here). The *Silence* problem becomes more interesting, moreover, when one thinks forward to the famous final scene. Would a

conspicuously silent Hermione in 3.2 prepare us more tellingly for the "statue" later (and for Paulina's "I like your silence, it the more shows off / Your wonder"--5.3.21-2)? What "images" or building blocks does the Folio version establish or italicize at the beginning of 3.2?

### **Justice Silence and Silent Justice in *2 Henry IV***

For a final provocative Shakespeare silence consider *2 Henry IV*, 5.1. In Act 3 Falstaff in his pursuit of recruits enters the domain of Justice Shallow and his cousin, Silence, who is "in commission with" Shallow (3.2.88). Before Falstaff's arrival Silence has a series of short speeches, but after the arrival of first Bardolph, then Falstaff, he is true to his name and has only two lines. In the Quarto this less than central figure is then not present in 5.1, Shallow's reunion with Falstaff and company, but makes his second and final appearance in 5.3, drinking and singing, and is carried off to bed. In today's productions Justice Silence provides a comic turn: a figure initially silent who then will not shut up and initially sober who unexpectedly becomes a party animal.

Missing in this brief account is the larger context, for Shakespeare goes to some lengths in this play to display the parlous state of Justice under Henry IV. In 1.2 and 2.1 the Lord Chief Justice cannot control Falstaff. This Justice reappears in 5.2 with dire expectations of his fate under Henry V to deliver an eloquent defense of almost thirty lines (no silence here) and ask if the new king would be "contented, wearing now the garland, / To have a son set your decrees at nought? / To pluck down justice from your awful bench," adding "And then imagine me taking your part, / And in your power soft silencing your son" (5.2.84-86, 96-97). The king's response is: "You are right justice, and you weigh this well, / Therefore still bear the balance and the sword" (102-3). Justice here is associated with the "soft silencing" of the most elevated in the kingdom when decrees are set "at nought."

Does Justice Silence play a role in this larger picture? The question is complicated by a textual problem: is or is not Silence present in 5.1 at Falstaff's return to Gloucestershire? Most of the dozen editions I have consulted follow the Quarto and do not include him, for, from a solely textual point of view, if X does not speak, he or she does not exist. However, several additional items should be factored in. First, that a figure has no lines does not necessarily mean that he or she makes no contribution to a given scene. A second consideration is the textual evidence, for the Quarto stage direction that begins 5.1 is crowded into a small space and, moreover, is the only scene-opening signal in this text not centered on the page.

But beare me to that chamber, there ile lie, *Enter Shallow,*  
 In that Ierusalem shall Harry die. *Falstaffe, and Bardolfe*  
*Shal.* By cock and pie sir, you shal not away to night, what  
 Daury I say? (I2v)

In contrast, the Folio, with plenty of room, includes Silence along with the Page and Davy:

*Actus Quintus. Scoena Prima.*

*Enter Shallow, Silence, Falstaffe, Bardolfe,*  
*Page, and Daurie.*

*Shal.* By Cocke and Pye, you shall not away to night.  
 What *Dauy*, I say. (TLN 2785-89)

A third consideration is a well-documented proverb linked to silence: “Silence is (gives) consent.”<sup>8</sup> A Shakespeare version is provided by Imogen who, seeking to get rid of Cloten, says: “But that you shall not say I yield being silent, / I would not speak” (*Cymbeline*, 2.3.94-95). A figure with the name Silence who is silent at a key moment can indicate consent without recourse to the spoken word.

If (as signaled in the Folio) Justice Silence is indeed included, the obvious question follows: what is he doing during 5.1 if he has no lines? The silent presence of a figure named Silence who, moreover, is a Justice figure (a fact that can be highlighted by costume), opens up a variety of to-be-imagined options in staging. The key moment would be Davy’s petition to Justice Shallow to “countenance” a known knave (William Visor of Woncote) against an honest man (Clement Perkes of the Hill). Shallow comments: “That Visor is an arrant knave, on my knowledge,” but Davy responds:

I grant your worship that he is a knave, sir; but yet God forbid, sir, but a knave should have some countenance at his friend’s request. An honest man, sir, is able to speak for himself, when a knave is not. I have serv’d your worship truly, sir, this eight years; and I cannot once or twice in a quarter bear out a knave against an honest man, I have little credit with your worship. The knave is mine honest friend, sir, therefore I beseech you let him be countenanc’d.

to which Shallow responds: “Go to, I say, he shall have no wrong” (5.1.38-52).

Note the placement of Davy's plea and Shallow's decision. This scene is preceded by the final appearance of the dying king, the end of the old order at court (and the problems with Justice that have to this point pervaded the play), and is followed by the first major public action of the new king, an elevation of the Chief Justice that defies expectations and foreshadows the king's climactic rejection of the alternative old man, Falstaff, in the play's most famous moment. Henry V's unexpected vindication of the Chief Justice, moreover, is followed by 5.3 which ends with Pistol bringing news of Henry IV's death and Falstaff's response: "I know the young king is sick for me. Let us take any man's horses, the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends, and woe to my Lord Chief Justice!" (5.3.135-38). Sir John's false expectations lead to the arrests in 5.4 and 5.5, and it is the Chief Justice who orders: "Go carry Sir John Falstaff to the Fleet. / Take all of his company along with him" (5.5.91-92), a company that may include Justice Shallow. Now the figure silenced is Falstaff (all he can manage to say is "My lord, my lord" - 93).

Under Henry IV, Justice, as epitomized in the Chief Justice, is neutralized - in a sense silenced or rendered "shallow" - as demonstrated by Davy's successful plea in which a knave is countenanced over an honest man. My suggestion is that, despite the absence of any lines to be spoken, the presence of Justice Silence in 5.1 sets up an onstage psychomachia. Justice Shallow is the chooser, Davy the tempter to this miscarriage of Justice, and Silence the alternative in a brief but visible tug-of-war. For example, if Davy is placed on one side of Shallow and Silence on the other, the latter could be overruled, ignored, or simply mute in disagreement. Moreover, in this staging the "silence is consent" proverb is being acted out and linked to the state of Justice under the dying Henry IV. What starts as a textual anomaly - a difference in detail between the two early printed versions to be adjudicated by an editor - may be the residue of a meaningful onstage effect in the original performances, albeit one in their theatrical vocabulary rather than ours.

In any kind of historical investigation, to deal with silences when hoping for answers is to encounter frustration, but the situation is particularly murky when the focus is on something as evanescent as the history of onstage practice. Whether the silences are linked to coded signals, lost plays, analogous actions, textual anomalies, or problematic scenes, the result is often uncertainty. Here and elsewhere, the theatre historian can only offer options or educated guesses, not neat solutions, and fall back on Richard Plantagenet's question: "what means this silence?" (*1 Henry VI*, 2.4.1).

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<sup>1</sup> In pursuing such questions my own silences will be evident, for I will forgo treatment of several much-discussed moments in the Shakespeare canon – e.g., Isabella’s reaction to the Duke’s proposal of marriage or Coriolanus’ “*holds her by the hand, silent*” (5.3.182). For my take on the four O’s that follow Hamlet’s final spoken word in the Folio (and may have broken that climactic silence) see my “Much Virtue in O-Oh.”

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted citations from Shakespeare are from the revised Riverside edition.

<sup>3</sup> Dessen and Thomson, *Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama*.

<sup>4</sup> For the sake of economy I am paring back my citations. For fuller documentation of this and subsequent markers see the relevant entries in *Dictionary of Stage Directions*. Other markers of potential interest include uses of *must* and *shall*; *here* and *then*; *proffers to*; *to the people*; and *make as though-make as if*.

<sup>5</sup> Information about lost plays is drawn from the Lost Plays Database.

<sup>6</sup> The citation is from “Plots and Lost Plays,” a paper for the 2005 Shakespeare Association Theatre History seminar, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, the possibility exists that Lavatch’s speech is an unrevised first thought, part of a Plan A that was discarded in favor of a Plan B.

<sup>8</sup> See Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England*, S446 (p. 605).