

Inventing Stage Directions; Demoting Dumb Shows

Stern, Tiffany

License:

Other (please provide link to licence statement)

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Stern, T 2017, Inventing Stage Directions; Demoting Dumb Shows. in S Dustagheer & G Woods (eds), *Stage Directions and Shakespearean Theatre*. Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 9-43.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

1

Inventing Stage Directions

Demoting Dumb Shows

Tiffany Stern

It was in 1726 that Lewis Theobald coined ‘stage direction’ for a prompter’s note on a play. He popularized the term, however, in his *Works of Shakespeare* published in 1733. There he used ‘stage directions’ to describe the ‘blundering’ content of the dumb show in *Hamlet*, and a similar ‘shew’ in *Macbeth*, both written, he believed, by Heminges and Condell. In the phrase’s first editorial outing, then, a ‘stage direction’ was a term of abuse; it described instructions for dumb action that were too bad to be authorial.

This chapter is in three parts. In the first, it will investigate the oddity of dumb shows and similar sequences – their redundant titles, their easy loss and misplacement in playbooks, their unusual typography, their non-authorial content – to show why Theobald condemned them with the insult ‘stage direction’. In the second, it will examine the way Theobald’s noun phrase was adopted and adapted over time, creating ‘stage directions’ as we now understand them. In the third, it will explore how applying the modern concept of ‘stage

direction' to Shakespearean plays has misled scholars. Considering early modern 'scribe directions', 'stage keeper directions', 'prompter directions' and 'fiction directions', it will ask whether any Shakespearean paratexts are 'stage directions', either by our definition, or by Theobald's.

Dumb shows in print and performance

It is no surprise that the look, authorship and textual placement of dumb shows – small mimed sections of play – worried eighteenth-century editors. For dumb shows sit oddly in playbooks, often differing in typeface as well as content from the dialogue surrounding them. As Lewis Theobald was to use them to define what we mean by 'stage directions', this chapter starts by analyzing early modern dumb shows *in situ*. Only then will it be clear what features Theobald saw and disliked in Shakespearean dumb shows and why in fact such features may be there.

Meeting dumb shows in early modern plays, performed or on paper, is often a confusing experience. In the fictions in which they occur, they are 'unnecessary' in that they are generally followed by, preceded by or interspersed with explanations, meaning that plays with dumb shows convey the same information twice: once in action; once in words. Much has been written about the 'redundancy' of dumb shows, and a number of explanations have been offered for them: that they intensify the drama they are in; that they allow large plot moments to be compressed at speed; that they provide code-cracking pleasure for an audience habituated to analyzing emblem books.¹

But in fact, as the presentation and placement of dumb shows inside playbooks reveals, the very way that dumb shows came into being and circulated made them from the outset different from other so-called 'stage directions'.

Take the label itself, 'dumb show', which stands above many such paratexts, and even opens the anonymous play *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (1600):

A dombe showe.

After an Alarum, enter one way the Duke of Burgundie, an other way, the Duke of Aniou with his power, they encounter, Burgundie is slaine . . .

(A3r)

‘A dombe showe’ will not be spoken, and cannot itself be performed; the words are apparently superfluous, as the action they herald is described beneath. Yet most dumb shows have similar titles, usually situated above the content, and often, as here, centred. The result is that dumb shows, despite their (generally) italic typeface, stand out from other directions in plays, as though they constitute mini-genres in their own rights. This remains the case even for those dumb shows that do not have separate headings. In Robert Armin’s *Valiant Welshman* (1615), the instruction is ‘*Enter a dumbe show, Codigune, Gloster, and Cornwall at the one dore . . . enter at the other dore, Octauian, Guiniuer, and Voada . . .*’ (C4v), where ‘*dumbe show*’ is a collective noun that is part of the direction itself. As above, however, it is instantly glossed by a list of the people who are in fact to enter, and so is again ‘unnecessary’. It once more serves to differentiate this variety of paratext from others.

Even when directions lack the ‘dumb show’ label altogether, particular ‘pantomimes’ tend to be distinguished from other paratexts. Thus the direction in the Induction to Middleton’s *Michaelmas Term*, ‘*Enter the other 3. Termes, the first bringing in a fellowe poore, which the other 2. Advanceth, giving him rich Apparell, a page, and a pandar. Exit*’ is encased in a large bracket labelled ‘*Musicke playing*’: on the page, it is highlighted, as it will be in performance, as a special kind of action (1607: A2v). Given that music, or instrumental calls, were the typical complement to dumb shows, the bracket and its labelled content seem to be this play’s way of designating a dumb show and, as ever, setting it apart from other kinds of non-dialogue paratexts.²

A reason why dumb shows so often look different from other ‘stage directions’ is revealed by their placement in printed playbooks. Several plays have dumb shows situated en masse

before or after the dialogue. This suggests that the printer(s) received the shows on detached papers, aside from the rest of the drama. Thus George Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1573) opens with 'The order of the dumme shewes and musickes before every Acte' (71); while Thomas Hughes' *Certaine Devises and Shews* (1587) has, at its start, 'The Argument and manner of the first dumbe shewe' (A1r). In Robert Wilmot's *Tancred and Gismund* (1591), the dumb shows ('introducios') to acts 2, 3, 4 and 5 are crushed together on the verso of the 'epilogus', and abbreviated, so that the errata list can fit on the same page – the 'introducios' are, like the errata, 'additional' texts, appended after the rest of the play had been set (H4v). As *Tancred and Gismund* is a 1591 revision of a play from 1568 for which there are no dumb shows, the 'introductio' sequences are, it seems, new embellishments for the play, presumably by a different 'author', that have not made their way inside the book (Foster 1912: 10).

Sometimes dumb shows are placed at a wrong spot in the dialogue: a further indication that they were sometimes delivered to the printer aside from the 'play'. Such is the case in George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594), in which the Presenter has to give a speech to introduce the dumb show. It is set, on the page, like this:

PRESENTER

... [Muly Mahamet] now you may behold,
With deuils coted in the shapes of men.

The first dumbe shew.
Enter Muly Mahamet and his sonne, and his two young
brethren, the Moore sheweth
them the bed, and then takes his leaue of them, and they
betake them to their rest.
And then the presenter speaketh.

Like those that were by kind of murther mumd,
Sit downe and see what hainous stratagems
These damned wits contriue ...

(A2r-v)³

Here punctuation and layout render this sequence nonsensical: the Presenter should presumably say '[Mully Mahomet] now you may behold, / With deuils coted in the shapes of men, / Like those that were by kind of murther mumd' – meaning that you may now see Mully Mahomet with his 'devils' (attendants) silenced in just the same way that people murdered by their kindred are silenced.⁴ Not only is 'mumd' ('silenced') the logical end of the sentence, it is also the logical last word before silent action. In this instance, the compositor, unable to follow the speech, has apparently set the dumb show a line too high. He has, however, inserted the correct dumb show at this point, aided by numbering: this is 'The first dumbe shew' (subsequent dumb shows in the play are titled 'The second dumbe shew', A2v, and 'the last dumbe show', E4v). That sequence, unnecessary for the reader, may reflect a theatrical numbering system, but seems here to have been supplied to help the printer place the shows in the correct order.⁵ Either way, the point is that the printer has received separate texts that he has been able to put in the right order, but not necessarily in the right place.

The typography of playbooks sometimes makes dumbshows look 'other', even when correctly placed in the text. In Thomas Heywood's *If You Know not Me* (1605), the dumb show is the focus of the page on which it features, being in larger type than the rest as well as having the 'A *dumb show*' title (D1v). Here it is not clear whether the dumb show actually came from a separate paper – its different look expressing its different origins – or was simply distinguished from the surrounding dialogue in the manuscript behind the printed text for reasons that will be touched upon later. Whatever the cause, it had, or demanded, different treatment in manuscript, traces of which are visible in the printed playbook.

On occasion, only the fact of the dumb show, not its substance, makes it to the text. This suggests that the content of the paratext remained on its own paper and was never transferred into the play; it has consequently been 'lost'. One instance can be seen in Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West*

(1631), where a dumb show was obviously staged inside the Chorus' speech – it is narrated there – though its action no longer survives:

What happen'd [to] them if you desire to know,
To cut off words, wee'll act it in dumb show.

Dumb Show.

The Dukes by them atton'd, they graced and prefer'd,
Take their next way towards Florence . . .

(G4r)

Similarly, in Kyd's *Spanish Tragedie* (1592), the Ghost asks for, and is given, an explanation from Revenge about the dumb show he has seen, but, again, the show's actual substance is not recorded in the printed text:

REUENGE

Beholde *Andrea* for an instance how
Reuenge hath slept, and then imagine thou,
What tis to be subiect to destinie.

Enter a dumme shew.

GHOST

Awake *Reuenge*, reueale this misterie.

REUENGE

The two first the nuptiall Torches boare,
As brightly burning as the mid-daies sunne:
But after them doth *Himen* hie as fast . . .

(I2v)

In both examples, the 'dumb show' title is left stranded, shorn of its contents. But not all 'lost' dumb shows leave such clear traces.

There may, but may not, have been a dumb show in John Lyly's original *Endimion* that was only later recovered. That play was first published in 1591 without a dumb show, so

that Act 2 ended in dialogue and Act 3 started in dialogue, as below:

DIPSAS

Well then let vs in, and see that you doo not so much as
whisper that I did this, for if you do, I will turne thy
haire to Adders, and all thy teeth in thy heade to
tongues, come away, come away.

Exeunt.

Actus tertius. Scaena prima.

CYNTHIA, *three Lordes*, TELLUS.

CYNTHIA

IS the report true, that *Endimion* is striken into such a dead
sleep, that nothing can either wake him or mooue him?

(D3v–D4r)

When the play was reprinted in 1632, however, the same two
acts were divided by a dumb show concerning Endimion's
dream (later to be related in 5.1.):

DIPSAS

Well then let vs in, and see that you doe not so much as
whisper that I did this, for if you doe, I will turne thy
haire to Adders, and all thy teeth in thy head to tongues,
come away, come away.

Exeunt.

A dumbe shew.

Musique sounds.

*Three Ladies enter; one with a Knife and a looking
glasse, who, by the procurement of one of the other two,*

offers to stab ENDIMION as hee sleepes, but the third wrings her hands, lamenteth, offering still to prevent it, but dares not. At last, the first Lady looking in the glasse, casts downe the Knife. *Exeunt.*

Enters an ancient man with bookes with three leaues, offers the same twice.

ENDIMION *refuseth, hee readeth two and offers the third, where hee stands a while, and then ENDIMION offers to take it.*

Exit.

Actus tertius. Scaena prima.

CYNTHIA, three Lordes, TELLUS.

CYNTHIA

IS the report true, that *Endimion* is stricken into such a dead sleepe, that nothing can either wake him or moue him?

(C7v–C8r)

This particular dumb show *may* have been a new addition to the 1632 text as Jeremy Lopez suggests – he is the first to draw attention to its graphical oddities and to ask ‘why was it written out at all and by whom?’ (2013: 302). If it is ‘new’ to the play, then it is, like the dumb shows added to *Tancred and Gismond* and discussed above, written by someone other than the playwright and at some time later than the rest of the play-text. But the history of the publication of *Endimion* raises a different possibility. The revamped *Endimion* is the first of Lyly’s *Sixe Court Comedies* published by Edward Blount in 1632. Each of Blount’s *Sixe Court Comedies* are re-settings of earlier Quartos, with dialogue largely unchanged but a significant quantity of paratextual material added. Twenty-one

additional songs, as well as this dumb show, feature in Blount's reprint. As the songs are not, however, 'new' – several of them have pre-1630s manifestations and some had been parodied years before – it seems that they had been performed in Lyly's original productions, but did not make it into print the first time round, presumably because they were on separate papers from the dialogue.⁶ The dumb show, too, is likely to be a further 'lost' Lyly paratext that had been re-found, although if so, it circulated in a way distinct from other forms of 'stage directions', but similar to, and probably in the company of, song texts (Stern 2012b: 70).

So dumb shows can have their own titles, can be misplaced in playbooks, and are often printed in such a way as to make them look dissimilar from surrounding text; they can also disappear from, or be added to, plays without disturbing the rest of the dialogue, and can be by people other than the playwright. All of this is typical of certain other play paratexts: scrolls (staged texts like letters, proclamations and riddles), prologues/epilogues, and songs.⁷ But the connection between dumb shows and other spoken/sung paratexts presents a problem. For scrolls, prologues/epilogues and songs had a reason for being written on papers aside from the dialogue: they were inscribed, and sometimes composed, as detached texts, and they were regularly handed to performers for reading on stage. But as dumb shows were unspoken, and would not therefore be brought to the stage for reading, why would they require separate inscription, and why – and how – might these silent texts have separate 'authorship'?

One answer relates to the 'devisor' of the shows. Despite being unspoken, dumb shows had to be written – or, rather, crafted and co-ordinated. Often the people best suited to do so were action-experts, not playwrights. This is visible in the Quarto edition of Thomas Hughes' *Misfortunes of Arthur*, which has an explanatory note printed at its end: 'The dumbe showes were partly deuised by Maister *Christopher Yeluerton*, Maister *Frauncis Bacon*, Maister *Iohn Lancaster* and others, partly by . . . Maister *Flower*': Hughes, the writer of the play, is

not one of the dumb shows' creators (1587: G2r). A manuscript note added to the title page of the Geneva copy of *Locrine* similarly relates to a dumb show 'devisor'. Written by Sir George Buc, Master of the Revels, it explores the notion that *Locrine* contains the bones of a lost play by Charles Tilney, *Estrild* – a play for which, Buc recalls, he once created dumb shows:

Charles. Tilney wrote <a>
 Tragedy of this matter <which>
 hee named Estrild: <& which>
 I think is this. it was l<ost>
 by his death. & noew[?] s<ome>
 fellow hath published <it>
 I made dumbe shewwes for it
 Which I yet have. G. B <.>⁸

Intriguingly, Buc still has in his possession the dumb shows he wrote, but seemingly not the dialogue of *Estrild* itself, which he only half recalls: he thinks *Locrine* is *Estrild*, but cannot be sure. He is a proud dumb show 'maker' who is vague as to the content of the play he once helped to design. Dumb show 'authors', as this indicates, need not be play authors, and their 'shows' need not therefore have been devised at the same time, or to the same remit, as the rest of the drama.

Buc's dumb show knowledge, and play ignorance, relates to a second feature of these paratexts. They also required their own form of rehearsal, independent of the rest of the play. This is partly because of their interactive content: while the dialogue of a play could be distributed and learned in separate actors' parts, the dumb shows will have needed to be rehearsed ensemble from 'group rehearsal' scripts. And it is partly because they employed dance-like movements that in themselves probably required separate practice: dumb shows are so often preceded by music cues that Linda Austern calls them 'pantomime[s] to music' (1992: 91–94); and Gary Taylor and Andrew J. Sabol maintain they were 'inset dance drama[s]' (2013: 130). It is likely that players themselves sometimes

helped co-devise this interactive dance-like action: some ‘detachable’ dumb show texts may in fact be records of action rather than prescriptions for it.

Separate rehearsal demands, from separate papers aside from the play, also provide an explanation for the strange disjunction between the dumb shows in the two assured ‘good’ texts of *Hamlet*, the Second Quarto (‘Q2’) (1604) and the Folio (1623).⁹ In both texts, a dumb show precedes the inner play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, and tells its story. Yet despite the fact that the actions required from the performers will be the same, the texts of the dumb show in Q2 and the Folio are ‘needlessly’ dissimilar. Below, Q2 is reproduced over the Folio; core verbal differences are highlighted in bold:

The Trumpets sounds. Dumb show follows.

Hoboyes play. The dumb shew enters.

Enter a King and a Queene, the Queene embracing him, and he her,
Enter a King and Queen, **very louingly**; the Queene embracing him. **She kneeles,**

he takes her vp, and declines his
and makes shew of Protestation vnto him. He takes her vp, and d[e]clines his

head vpon her necke, he lyes him downe vppon a banke of flowers, she seeing him
head vpon her neck. Layes him downe vpon a Banke of Flowers. She seeing him

asleepe, leaues him: anon come in an other man, takes off his crowne, kisses it,
a-sleepe, leaues him. Anon comes in a Fellow, takes off his Crowne, kisses it, and

pours poyson in the sleepers eares, and leaues him: the Queene returnes, finds
powres poyson in the Kings eares, and Exits. The Queene returnes, findes

the King dead, makes passionate action, the poysoner with some
the King dead, and makes passionate Action. The Poysoner, with some

three or four come in againe, seeme to condole with her, the dead
two or three Mutes comes in againe, seeming to lament with her. The dead

body is carried away, the poysoner wooes the Queene with gifts, shee seemes
 body is carried away: The Poisoner Wooes the Queene with Gifts, she seemes

harsh *awhile, but in the end accepts loue.*
 loath and vnwilling awhile, but in the end, accepts his loue.

(*Ham* Q2: H1v)

(*Ham* F: TLN 1990–2002)

What is strange about these *Hamlet* dumb shows is that most of their differences would not be discernible in the performances they bring about: the murderer who ‘pours poison in the sleepers ears, and leaves him’ in Q2 will not alter his action when he ‘pours poison in the King’s ears, and Exits’ in the Folio; while the murderers’ companions who, in Q2, ‘seem to condole’ with the Queen are unlikely to change their gestures when they ‘seem’ in the Folio ‘to lament’ with her. Though it has been suggested that the Folio dumb shows may have been revised for the page, the verbal differences between the two do not readily admit of that explanation (Stern 2012a: 279). Is ‘fellow’ (Folio) an obvious improvement on ‘man’ (Q2), or ‘exits’ (Folio) more literary than ‘leaves him’ (Q2) (it is, if anything, more theatrical)? Moreover, both texts are markedly ‘stagy’, with their vague though variant requests for additional players to accompany the poisoner: ‘three or four’ (Q2); ‘two or three’ (Folio). The main substantive difference between the two dumb shows is that the Q2 dumb show is to be accompanied by trumpets, while the Folio dumb show requires hoboys, an early form of oboe. As the strident sound of the trumpet was favoured in outdoor environments, and as hoboys worked well in intimate indoor spaces, it is possible that the text was redeviſed, and hence rewritten for fresh rehearsals (or in the light of fresh rehearsals having taken place), when *Hamlet* was worked up for a different theatre. If that were the case, the Q2 dumb show might reflect the demands of an outside space like the Globe and the Folio dumb show an indoor space like Blackfriars or the court. Rehearsal for a different place, at a different time, and perhaps with a different

set of people, may explain the ‘unnecessary’ textual variants on what is essentially the same show: loose ‘rehearsal texts’, likely to become worn and need replacing more often than full playbooks, may have been written out afresh, and so mildly revised, more frequently than other passages of the play.

‘Devisor’ or authorship issues, or, rather non-authorship issues, beset both *Hamlet* shows equally, however: neither is apparently by Shakespeare. Though the play that they gloss, *The Murder of Gonzago*, is about a duke and duchess, the dumb shows are for a king and a queen. ‘Updating’ in the Folio does not alter that discrepancy (again, suggesting that ‘literary’ concerns are not governing this text). In its misdirection, the *Hamlet* dumb show resembles other ‘non authorial’ dumb shows: in the first dumb show of Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc*, the title character is called Duke Gorboduc, though throughout the play he is ‘King Gorboduc’. Eric Rasmussen, pointing out the duke/king discrepancy, concludes that the shows for *Gorboduc* were memorially reconstructed and (re)placed within the dialogue later than the rest of the play (1986: 418). That is possible, but, as shown, it is in the nature of dumb shows to be poorly integrated: the *Gorboduc* and *Hamlet* shows alike seem, like others explored above, simply to have been differently authored, perhaps at different times or occasions from the rest of the play, or perhaps at the same time but for different forms of rehearsal.

Dumbshows, then, really are separate in nature not just from dialogue but also from other ‘stage directions’. Even when written authorially into their plays, they are likely to have been differentiated by title or layout, so that they could be extracted by a scribe onto individual papers for rehearsal. When not authorially written, they will have been separate from the start, conceived by people other than the playwright, and not combined with the play-text until it was retranscribed, revised or handed to the printer – and sometimes, as has been shown, not even then.

That means, though, that we cannot assess – or, indeed, know – the fashion for dumb shows over time. Yes, roughly 120 dumb shows survive from plays published between 1562–1626,

and fewer feature prominently after that, but the story of the loss and/or replacement of dumb shows seems to run parallel to, rather than together with, the story of the rest of the play (Pearn 1935: 386). As Heidi Brayman Hackel points out, The Prologue to 'The Slip' in Middleton's *A Mad World* (1604) promises 'dumbshows', though none are now in the text – how many other plays contained dumb shows now lost, without highlighting the fact (Hackel 2012: 336)? Given that from creation to presentation to circulation dumb shows could be separate from – and separable from – other aspects of playbooks, their absence from a book does not mean that they were never there, their presence does not mean that they are permanent aspects of their play, and neither presence nor absence (necessarily) reveal anything about the playwright.

The invention of stage directions

It is ironic, then, that it was the dumb show that promulgated the use of 'stage direction' as an editorial term. For it was when Lewis Theobald, in his 1733 Shakespeare *Works*, glossed the opening of the *Hamlet* dumb show 'Enter a King and Queen very lovingly' that he first used 'stage direction' editorially. He protested 'Thus have the blundering and inadvertent Editors all along given us this Stage-Direction, tho' we are expressly told by Hamlet anon, that the Story of this Interlude is the Murther of Gonzago Duke of Vienna' (Shakespeare 1733: VII.295). He traced the king/duke discrepancy of the *Hamlet* dumb show to the people he nominated 'the Editors' of the Folio, the actors John Heminges and Henry Condell, who had, he believed, misrecalled what 'the Poet' Shakespeare had actually intended:

The Source of this Mistake is . . . from the Stage's *dressing* the Characters. Royal Coronets being at first order'd by the Poet for the Duke and Dutchess, the succeeding Players, . . . mistook 'em for a King and Queen.

Here, Theobald uses 'Stage-Direction' as a term of opprobrium for a passage he believed to have been written for the page by actor-editors.

In that same 1633 *Works* he also used 'stage direction' for a processional 'shew' in *Macbeth* that likewise does not make sense: 'A shew of eight Kings, and Banquo last, with a glasse in his hand' (*Macbeth*: TLN 1657–58). 'The Editors', he protested, 'could not help blundering even in this Stage-Direction. For tis not Banquo, who brings the Glass; as is evident from the following Speech' (he refers to the fact that, in the speech to come, the *first* king is said to be Banquo, while the *last* carries a looking glass: once again, he implies, the actor-editors misremembered what they saw on stage) (Shakespeare 1733: V.443). In stating moreover, that 'stage directions' were written by the players who prepared Shakespeare's texts for publication, he makes clear that by 'stage' he means not a text for acting, but a text *by* actors; by 'direction', he means not advice as to what to do, but a record of what was done. Indeed, 'stage direction' might better be replaced with 'page reflection'. Given that both times the term is used, 'stage direction' is associated with 'blundering', it is in itself an insult as far as he is concerned.

Confusingly, 'stage direction' had had a different remit when Theobald coined the term eight years earlier. In *Shakespeare Restored* (1726), Theobald had attacked Alexander Pope's recently published edition of Shakespeare. Pope had claimed that the Folio's nonsensical line about Falstaff in *Henry V*, 'for his nose was a sharpe as a Pen, and a Table of greene fields' (TLN 838–39) was actually a '*direction crept into the text from the margin. Greenfield was the name of the Property man in that time . . . A Table of Greenfield's*' (1725: I.xviii). Quite apart from the general illogicality of the argument – the text was later to be amended to 'and a' babled of green fields' (1733: IV.30) – Pope, claimed Theobald, failed to understand the nature of a 'Stage-Direction' (a word he coined by expanding Pope's own term, 'direction'). Pope lacked, wrote Theobald, 'that Acquaintance with Stage-Books, which it has been my Fortune to have' (1726: 137), and so did

not realize that a stage direction would be ‘mark’d . . . at about a Page in Quantity before the Actors quoted are to enter, or the Properties be carried on’ (1726: 137). As no table would be needed in the following scene, ‘A Table of greene fields’ could not therefore be a ‘stage direction’. At the point of first creating ‘stage direction’, then, Theobald used it neither as a term of opprobrium nor of praise: it simply indicated a practical addition made to a play by a prompter.

Disconcertingly, then, ‘stage direction’ from the first had two meanings: a paratext written by a prompter for some kind of stage keeper (Theobald in his criticism of Pope); and an errant paratext – for dumb action – written by actor-editors for readers (Theobald in his edition of Shakespeare). By giving the term two distinct meanings and authors, Theobald created a confusion about what stage directions are, who writes them, and for whom, that has haunted the term and the concept ever since.

The next major editorial outing of ‘stage direction’ was in the 1750 edition of the works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Though Theobald had died by the time these *Works* were published, he had written notes for the commentary, using his ‘stage direction’ phrase, largely contemptuously, to describe paratext that he variously traced to prompters and editors. Thus ‘*Sound Trumpet*’ is criticized for finding its way into the text of *The Two Noble Gentleman*, though it ‘possibly was once only a Stage Direction’, seemingly a reference to a prompter’s note (Beaumont and Fletcher 1750: VIII.441). But ‘*Enter two Servants. Roul. Ashton*’ in *Love’s Pilgrimage* is glossed by a tirade against the playwright James Shirley, ‘the Editor of the first Folio’ of Beaumont and Fletcher in 1647, who ‘has in a great Measure forfeited my once good Opinion of him’:

And I wish we may not have too much reason from this careless Oversight, to imagine that a great many of the Pieces in the whole Collection were not printed from any better Manuscripts than these (too often sad ones) of the several Prompters.

(Beaumont and Fletcher 1750: VII.27)

Here ‘the Editor’ is guilty of stage directions, not because he wrote them, but because he failed to take them out of the prompters’ scripts that he had received. Whatever they were, ‘stage directions’ were non-authorial texts that did not, Theobald believed, belong in print.

The term ‘stage direction’, with all its opprobrium, and lack of clarity, slowly worked its way into later eighteenth-century editorial parlance. By 1788 the editor George Steevens, trying to rationalize the proliferation of dumb shows in *Pericles*, suggested the interested reader consider a list he supplied of other ‘solemn pantomimes’ which, he explained, ‘are now called the *stage-directions*, throughout the folio 1623’ (Steevens 1780: II.163). For him, ‘stage directions’ at root meant ‘dumb shows’ – though he extended their remit to include other silent actions – presumably because he was taking the term from Theobald’s Shakespeare edition. For Steevens, too, ‘stage directions’ were generally, and perhaps always, by Heminges and Condell: he explains that ‘The stage direction of entrance, where the bleeding captain is mentioned,’ in *Macbeth*, ‘was probably the work of the player editors, and not of Shakespeare’ (Shakespeare 1778: IV.445); while his friend/rival/enemy Edmond Malone, maintained, in 1790, that ‘the very few stage-directions which the old copies exhibit, were not taken from our authour’s manuscripts, but furnished by the players’ (Shakespeare 1790: I.58).

As this brief history makes clear, the phrase ‘stage direction’ arose in the eighteenth century, partly through a *misunderstanding* about the way dumb shows had come about; partly through an *understanding* about prompters’ notes. Its two meanings – a player-editor’s recollection of a show as preserved for a reader, or a prompter’s advice for a show as preserved for staging – shared one common denominator: a stage direction was not written by a playwright. Shakespeare, then, did not write ‘stage directions’ according to the eighteenth-century meaning of the term, for any non-dialogue paratext he did write was, by definition, therefore not a stage direction.

Outside the world of editing, attitudes to ‘stage directions’ began to change. Nineteenth-century spectators, enthralled

by contemporary staging, started to desire theatrical information in their reading texts. A habit grew of inserting up-to-date 'stage directions' into old plays in order to provide the text of the dramas as currently performed. William Oxberry advertised that his 1822 *Julius Caesar* was 'THE ONLY EDITION EXISTING WHICH IS FAITHFULLY MARKED WITH THE STAGE BUSINESS, AND STAGE DIRECTIONS, AS PERFORMED AT THE THEATRES ROYAL. BY W. OXBERRY, *Comedian*': this was (a version of) Shakespeare's play, enhanced by the latest stage directions from an actor. Likewise, *Cumberland's British Theatre* (1823–31) supplied Shakespeare's and others' plays from acting copies with added '*Stage Directions*' that, gushed the preliminary matter, had been garnered from 'personal observations, during the most recent performances': these 'stage directions' (in fact, again, 'page reflections') were from specific modern performances (Shakespeare 1828: 10). As all such 'stage directions' preserved particular productions, and ensured Shakespeare's plays were manifested on the page as performance texts, they also contributed to the 'stage versus page' battle for ownership of Shakespeare that has raged ever since.

It was later in the nineteenth century, when the actor manager evolved into the director, that playwrights themselves started crafting their own, telling stage directions. This was because the newly-emergent 'stage directors' came to plays with concepts of their own about performance, and playwrights were side-lined. Only through providing full and explicit 'stage directions' for actors might a playwright hope to provide some guidance for his or her own productions. Hence the otiose directions of Bernard Shaw and, later, the dogmatic directions of Samuel Beckett. But a hidden consequence of this change in theatrical governance was that 'stage direction' itself altered in meaning. 'Direction' in 'stage direction' was now the counterpart to the 'direction' offered by the 'director'; 'stage directions', as a result, came to be seen not as descriptions of staging written by a prompter or a

player-editor, but as prescriptions for acting written by playwrights.

Modern dictionary definitions of ‘stage direction’ only reflect that last, most recent, permutation of the phrase. The *OED*, which currently traces ‘stage direction’ back only as far as Edmond Malone in the 1790s (thus neglecting the term’s origin and first sixty-six years), defines it as ‘a direction inserted in a written or printed play where it is thought necessary to indicate the appropriate action, etc’;¹⁰ the Merriam-Webster dictionary maintains a stage direction is ‘a written instruction in a play telling an actor what to do’.¹¹ Yet, as will be shown, Shakespearean directions are seldom, and perhaps never, for an actor. That means that not only do few to no Shakespearean (or other early modern) paratexts meet the Theobaldian definition of ‘stage direction’; they also do not meet the modern one.

Shakespeare’s (non) stage directions

The blanket term ‘stage direction’, is, these days, applied to a variety of quite different paratexts in Shakespeare’s plays, written by and for a number of different people. A study of the dumb show has illustrated how that particular text in fact stands out from other non-dialogue paratexts in authorship, preservation and rehearsal requirements. But many other varieties of so-called ‘stage direction’ also have unique qualities that suggest they had their own authorship, occasion, meaning and, perhaps, circulation.

Take, for instance, the moment in *Pericles* when Pericles is to read a riddle:

PERI

Like a bold Champion I assume the Listes,
Nor aske aduise of any other thought,

But faythfulnesse and courage.

The Riddle.

I am no Viper, yet I feed

On mothers flesh which did me breed:

. . . As you will liue resolute it you.

Sharpe Phisicke is the last: But ô you powers!

(Shakespeare 1609: A3v)

Here '*The Riddle*', a statement about the text that follows, is, like the label 'dumb show', a title that is not to spoken that cannot be performed. It is not, then, a direction for an actor, though an editor is likely to turn it into one: '[*He reads*] *The Riddle*'. As touched upon above, '*The Riddle*' is a direction for the scribe, instructing him not to write this text onto the actors' part, but to place it on a 'riddle' stage document to be given to the actor of Pericles to read on stage. The same can be said of all such labelled 'scrolls' – letters, prologues, songs etc. The labels, and/or sometimes the layout of the texts themselves, are 'scribe directions' and precede staging. Scribe directions constitute some of the main directorial paratexts in Shakespearean plays.¹²

Other Shakespearean paratexts are 'stage keeper directions'. These include directions for large objects to be brought to the stage, like '*A small Table vnder a State for the Cardinall, a longer Table for the Guests*' (*Henry VIII*: TLN 1661–62), or the directions for the apparitions in *Macbeth*, which read '1. *Apparation, an Armed Head*' and '2. *Apparition, a Bloody Childe*' (*Macbeth*: TLN 1604; 1617). The purpose of that last is either to instruct a stage functionary to create an armed head and a bloody child or to tell a stage functionary to take these already-created props and lift them through the trap door sequentially. The numbering of the apparitions, '1' and '2', suggests the latter: someone is being told in which order to raise which apparition. 'Stage keeper directions' are another major strand of paratext in the plays of Shakespeare.

Other directions are, it seems, for prompters. As Theobald had pointed out, 'advanced' prescriptions for characters or

props to be made 'ready' for a future stage moment are often found on manuscript plays prepared for performance, like Philip Massinger's *Believe as You List* which has 'Table ready: & 6 chaires sett out' a page before these will be needed; and Thomas Heywood's *The Captives* which has 'Ink: paper ready', again, in advance of use (Werstine 2013: 209). These may be further 'stage keeper directions', but their being written in advance of use suggests that they are probably to remind a prompter, who has to have a full sense of the organization of a play, as to what is *about* to need staging. That is certainly the case with some of the directions in the printed Quarto of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen*, which includes advanced directions for characters and props to be 'ready': '2. Hearses ready with Palamon; and Arcite: the 3. Queenes. Theseus: and his Lordes ready'. That same text also supplies entrance calls for actors by name, 'Enter . . . some Attendants, T. Tucke: Curtis' (1634: C3v; L4v). Lois Potter calls these *Two Noble Kinsmen* directions 'prompter's annotation[s], not meant for printing', agreeing with Theobald that advanced directions are for prompters, and maintaining, just as he does, that they are a form of direction so stagy as to be inappropriate for publication (Potter 1997: 275).

The more usual kinds of non-dialogue paratext found on full plays are entrances and exits, and directions for action – 'whisper', 'die' etc. The recipients of such directions are generally, these days, thought to be actors. But actors in the early modern playhouse, who will have received directions on their individual parts, will not obviously have been privy to directions in the full playbook. True, the directions in the book may be instructions as to what should be written on the actors' parts, but if so, they are further 'scribe directions'. Alternatively, they may serve the purpose of alerting the prompter standing in the tiring house as to what is happening on stage during performance: Warren Smith long ago suggested that most 'time taking' stage directions, for silent hand-holding, kissing, dying etc., were designed to alert the prompter to the moments when

not to prompt (1950: 178). If that is the case, they are further ‘prompter directions’.

After removing from the muddle of what have been called ‘stage directions’ the ‘scribe directions’, ‘stage keeper directions’ and ‘prompter directions’, what is left? What remains are directions imbued not with staging, but with the fiction of the story that they tell. As Alan Dessen explores, there are many directions that take the form ‘*Enter on the Walls, Puzel, Dolphin, Reigneir, Alanson, and Souldiers*’ (1 *Henry VI*: TLN 639–40) (1995: 55–58 et passim). In staging terms, the actors are to be ‘above’, of course – but in this stage direction the fictional ‘walls’ have taken over. Other ‘fictional’ directions include ‘*Alarum, the Romans are beat back to their Trenches*’ (*Coriolanus*: TLN 523) and ‘*Witches vanish*’ (*Macbeth*: TLN 179). But actually *all* directions, regardless of who they are for, struggle with fact and fiction.¹³ For when a text asks Macduff to enter ‘*with Macbeths head*’, it does of course mean that the actor playing Macduff should enter with a simulacrum of Macbeth’s head (*Macbeth*: TLN 2504); when a text asks for ‘*Lauinia*’ to enter with ‘*her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and rausht*’ (*Titus Andronicus*: TLN 1068–09), it means that a boy player dressed as a mutilated girl is to come on stage acting *as though* those terrible things have happened. Even a simple direction like ‘*enter Ophelia*’ is fictional: it asks that Ophelia, the fictional character, enter, rather than that a boy playing Ophelia enter. Should any text be called a ‘stage direction’ when it privileges fiction over staging? Are there in fact no stage directions in Shakespeare?

This is entirely separate, of course, from the question of whether or not Shakespeare wrote non-dialogue paratext. He certainly sometimes did, though evidence is inconclusive on the subject. So E.A.J. Honigmann maintains that ‘stage-directions printed only in the Folio have a smaller chance of being Shakespeare’s than those in the Good Quartos’ (1998: 187), but others have maintained that stage directions are mostly ‘authorial in origin’ (Dessen and

Thomson 1999: viii–ix). The question, though, is whether ‘stage direction’ is ever appropriate as a term for such texts. Could it be the case that, although ‘stage direction’ was invented to describe Shakespearean text, and has been used for that purpose ever since, the term actually obscures what the paratexts are?

This chapter has explored the muddled history of the word and concept ‘stage direction’. It has shown how ‘stage direction’ was used first for a prompter’s text, then for a player-editor’s dumb show, then for a paratext by an author for an actor. Throughout, it has argued that the imposition of the term ‘stage direction’ onto the works of Shakespeare has confused all assessments of who wrote his paratext and what it is. It has hidden the varied people for whom these paratexts were intended – scribes, stage keepers, prompters (and perhaps, though that is less certain, actors); and hidden, too, the varied people by whom they may have been written. It has united Shakespeare’s non-dialogue paratexts as a shared unit, although a brief look at them reveals that dumb shows, scribe directions, stage keeper directions and prompter directions may have been devised at different times, and for different reasons. Whatever a ‘stage direction’ is, and that is still by no means clear, the very fact of the term has, paradoxically, hidden the nature, intention and authorship of the paratexts it set out to describe.

Primary references

- A., R. [Armin, Robert] (1615), *The valiant VVelshman, or The true chronicle history of the life and valiant deedes of Caradoc the Great, King of Cambria, now called Wales*.
- Fletcher, John and William Shakespeare (1634), *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.
- Gascoigne, George (1573), *Jocasta*, in *A hundreth sundrie flowres*.
- Gayton, Edmund (1654), *Pleasant notes upon Don Quixot*.
- Heywood, Thomas (1605), *If you knowv not me, you know no bodie*.

- Heywood, Thomas (1631), *The fair maid of the vvest. Or, A girle worth gold*.
- Hughes, Thomas (1587), 'The Argument and manner of the first dumbe shewe', in *Certaine deu[is]es and shewes presented to her Maiestie by the gentlemen of Grayes-Inne*.
- Kyd, Thomas (1592), *The Spanish Tragedie*.
- Lyly, John (1591), *Endimion, the man in the moone*.
- Lyly, John (1632), *Endimion*, in *Sixe Court Comedies*.
- Middleton, Thomas (1607), *Michaelmas Terme*.
- Peele, George (1594), *The Battell of Alcazar*.
- Shakespeare, William (1609), *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.
- Theobald, Lewis (1726), *Shakespeare Restored*, London.
- The vveakest goeth to the vvall* (1600).
- W., R. [Wilmot, Robert] (1591), *The tragedie of Tancred and Gismund*.

Editions

- Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher (1750), *The Works of Mr. Francis Beaumont and Mr. John Fletcher: In Ten Volumes*, ed. Lewis Theobald, Thomas Seward and Thomas Simpson, London.
- Leinwand, Theodore B., ed. (2007), *Michaelmas Term*, in Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (eds), *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peele, George (2005), *The Battle of Alcazar*, in *The Stukeley Plays*, ed. Charles Edelman, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Potter, Lois, ed. (1997), *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Walton-on-Thames: Nelson.
- Shakespeare, William (1725), *The Works*, 6 vols, ed. Alexander Pope, London.
- Shakespeare, William (1733), *The Works of Shakespeare*, 7 vols, ed. Lewis Theobald, London.
- Shakespeare, William (1778), *The Plays*, 10 vols, eds Samuel Johnson, George Steevens, London.
- Shakespeare, William (1790), *The Plays and Poems*, 10 vols in 11 parts, ed. Edmond Malone, London.
- Shakespeare, William (1828), *A Midsummer-Night's Dream in Cumberland's British Theatre . . . Printed from the Acting Copies*,

as Performed at the Theatres-Royal, London, vol. 20, ed. George Daniel, London.

Shakespeare, William (1968), *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies [The Norton Facsimile]*, prep. by Charlton Hinman, New York: Norton.

Steevens, George (1780), *Supplement to the edition of Shakspeare's Plays Published in 1778*, 2 vols, London.

