Modern stage conventions of realism : a defence of mimetic inconsistencies

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Chapter 1

Modern Stage Conventions of Realism[1]

A Defence of Mimetic Inconsistencies

> [*Arnoldo.*] 'tis no illusion.
> Mine eyes are not deceiv'd, all these are reall
>
> (*The Custom of the Country* 3.2.22–3)

> [*There are*] *situations in Shakespeare where the unities are violently transgressed and which even the conventionless modern theatre cannot always rescue from absurdity. In* Richard II, *for example, the telescoped time-scheme of the sequence between Bolingbroke's departure for exile and the report of his return to England fails markedly to satisfy our post-Ibsenite sense of probability.*
>
> (Bradley 1992: 28–29)

> *As we are all aware, the more realistic the stage gore, the less we believe in it, the more distracted we become by wondering 'How did they do that?' … Naturalists… find it wonderfully easy and gratifying to reveal contradictions, silly conventions, artifice of motive and timing and language. They find it less easy to explain why Shakespeare's fictions convince, more than their own.*
>
> (Taylor 1985: 54–55)

This chapter proceeds from the observation that most modern acting is too literal, too realistic to suit early modern dramatic writing. To have almost the same physical conditions as the Elizabethans is not enough; stage conditions are just the externals. What is also needed is to get closer to their acting style. The King's Men performed on the proscenium at the Blackfriars, and presumably, produced the same plays with virtually the same acting as in the Globe; appropriate acting is not merely a question of the acting space. Before baroque visuality prevailed in the English theatre, audiences in general went to 'heare' a play, not to 'see' it.[2] Performances were founded on language; acting in the modern sense was second-

1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented as a paper at the Scaena conference at St. John's College, Cambridge, UK, in August 2001.

2 In 1647, Cokayne, in his verses *On the Deceased Author*, prefixed to Moseley's edition of Beaumont-Fletcher plays, refers to *The Mad Lover* 'As wonder of our ears once, now our sight.' The opposition of reading ('our sight') plays and hearing them in performance ('our ears') is sufficiently marked for Cokayne to build upon it a minor culmination of the poem.

ary. To a certain extent, it is necessary that this style is reconstructed and applied if the plays are to be produced adequately and fully.[3]

Peter Brook, in *The Empty Space*, points to our doomed mistreatments of Shakespeare, caused by our tradition-based, institutionalized, Deadly Theatre. In my view, it is not so much the deadliness of modern theatre, but rather the deadliness of modern impersonation, which identifies the actor and the character too much.[4] The development of acting has been crucially affected by the approaches to character of Baroque illusionist theatre, Romanticism, Victorianism, Stanislavsky, and others. My claim is that these developmental achievements come short of realizing early modern plays adequately, and result in attacks aimed at the plays on account of their inconsistency or illogicality. Until we 'strip off' these realistic and visualistic habits, or—what I call—modern conventions of realism, no 'historically appropriate' stage rendering of early plays may be possible. The following paragraphs propose a way of getting over these inconsistencies, and coming closer to the reconstructed acting style.

In Jacobean plays, there are many instances of seeming inconsistencies, or illogicalities, that fail 'to satisfy our post-Ibsenite sense of probability' (to quote David Bradley). Early modern theatre was figurative not only in its physical stage conditions—as Alan C. Dessen has comprehensively stated[5]—but also in the actor–character relation. The inherent logic is that the theatre provides mere stimuli that evoke fiction in the spectator's mind. These stimuli are often hints, figurative representations of the fiction, and are therefore fragmentary and inconsistent.

It takes a lot of energy/money/time to show and prove a point in practice. Criticism often comes short of explaining why certain things are true in the theatre, while others, though logical, are not. Paradoxes are efficient in the theatre; in critical discourse, however, they are not. I will therefore draw less on critical discourse and logic, and more on my practical theatrical experience. Most examples in this article are taken from *The Queen of Corinth*, a 1617 Fletcher, Massinger and Field tragicomedy, a rich, spectacular play, and a mature representative of Fletcherian drama.[6]

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3 For a different approach to the 'quest for a historically correct acting style for Shakespeare', see Chapter 2 in Brown 1966. Brown's essay is analyzed in Chapter 2 'Theatre and Theory: Dramas and Doctrines' below.

4 It is Otakar Zich, the founder of modern semiotics of theatre, who (in his essential *Estetika dramatického umění*, Aesthetic of the Dramatic Art, 1931) differentiates between the *actor*, the *acted figure* (or role) and the mental, fictional image created in the spectator's mind, *dramatic person* (or character), and keeps them separately. Modern theatre often lacks this minuteness.

5 In *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and the Modern Interpreters* (1984). My study stems from, and develops, issues treated in Dessen's book. Most other books on dramatic language and acting, such as J. L. Styan's *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (1967), operate, in fact, outside the theatre.

6 For textual inconsistencies of *The Queen of Corinth* see Turner 1987.

I Dramatic Synecdoche and Metonymy

Manuell. Wonders are ceas'd Sir, we must worke by meanes.
(*The Custom of the Country* 5.4.14)

himselfe behind
VVas left vnseene, saue to the eye of mind,
A hand, a foote, a face, a leg, a head
Stood for the whole to be imagined.
(*The Rape of Lucrece* 1426–8)

As theatrical semioticians point out, everything on the stage is a sign, including actors: the language of the theatre and drama is figurative. Thanks to that, imperfect sign-vehicles may represent the 'perfect' significance recreated in the audience's mind. Early modern theatre self-reflectively admits its imperfection as a medium of communication, and at the same time turns this apparent handicap into an advantage. Sidney's 'two Armies… represented with foure swords & bucklers' are a case in point; stage battles were very popular, even though supplied by four or five wooden swords. Speeches expressing the characters' inability to express their meaning in words (such as Goneril's 'Sir, I loue you more then word can weild y^e^ matter', *King Lear* TLN 55), admit the imperfection of available means, and at the same time figuratively express it.

From the modern point of view, the dichotomy of 'perfection' and 'imperfection' means the respective success and failure to portray something naturalistically. Modern theatre tries to be as perfect as possible, often not realising that it does not serve the play; in these perfectionist efforts I see one of the fundamental causes of their frequent failure.[7]

Avoiding the literal is a characteristic feature of early playacting. Although Jacobean theatre, influenced by the visuality of court masques, gradually takes in elements of illusion and perfection, at the same time, it consciously applies figurative, not realistically mimetic, representation, as the standard. I will refer to it as *dramatic synecdoche* or *dramatic metonymy*, and try to show some spheres in which this acknowledged imperfection manifests itself and why it does so.[8] (For the sake of simplicity, I will subsume *synecdoche* under the heading of *metonymy*.)

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7 Pauline Kiernan (1996) discusses the distinction between *hermetic* and *orphic* drama; *hermetic* stands for the attempt to create a real, independent presence in language or onstage, whereas *orphic* is a means to *evoke* life in the reader's/audience's mind. Gary Taylor (1985: 53–55) discusses the dichotomy of 'realistic' and 'imaginative' theatre.

8 Alan C. Dessen treats physical, onstage realisation, using the terms *stage shorthand* and *stage metaphor*. In general theatrical semiotics, the Prague School structuralists termed this phenomenon 'scenic metonymy' (Jiří Veltruský, 'Man and Object in the Theater', 1940, and Jindřich Honzl, 'Dynamics of the Sign in the Theater', 1940; quoted in Elam 1980: 28). Elam discusses the appropriateness of the use of *synecdoche* and *metonymy* as terms. Here, however, my approach goes a step beyond; I am using the terms to point to the fact that Jacobean stage representation avoids clear-cut figurativeness. My point is that (in this case) Jacobean drama *intentionally* avoids the literal, the 'onstage presence'. Sometimes the figures in question are the *metaphor*, the *paralipsis* (passing by an issue), *synonymy* (or interpretation), *aposiopesis* (an issue left unfinished), *periphrasis* (circumlocution), *catachresis* (intentional

Poetic dramatic language is not normally perceived as an inconsistency any more. Yet it is in fact a transgression against modern mimesis. It is a case of dramatic metonymy, deliberately detaching the stage from the fiction towards a code. One reason for this might be that mimetic representation is not the most straightforward code of communication. Another, that dramatic language needs foregrounding (or highlighting). In naturalistic mimesis there is little or no emphasis on the sign; it is the everyday.[9] Let me give a brief example of how metonymic language works. When Merione says in *The Queen of Corinth*,

> [*Merione.*] all the worlds eyes have been sunk in slumbers
> (*The Queen of Corinth* 2.1.8)

it is obvious what she means without much interpretive effort. The process of decoding brings us certain satisfaction and delight, and at the same time, it *internalizes* the meaning. A literal line, such as 'it is night and everyone's asleep' would be taken in only superficially. It does not fully satisfy us, and we expect more. We are looking for a reason why the character has said that. The metaphoric line provides verbal scenery on the bare, day-lit Jacobean stage. It may be uttered with a full stop and the image itself is potent enough to entertain us for a second or two, before we are given another line. Consequently we are not so overtly 'eager' to learn why the actor tells us that and what happens next. The poetic figure is detaching us from the literal presence of the stage and its 'eager' rhythm, into the figurative space of the mind and its more-or-less meditative 'timelessness', where its meaning is evoked.

If we watched a film version of the same play instead, we would know that it is night and that no one is awake, and the line would become redundant and potentially tedious. On the modern stage, we are frequently provided with a stage night and other symptoms of consistent stage-rendering. Little is left for our imagination to supply. Again, we automatically expect something more. We bide our time until given a satisfactory piece of idea to ponder on. Then it depends more on the direction, on the rhythm and the suspense which the production is capable of creating.

The 'all the worlds eyes' sentence is an easy mimetic inconsistency; there is no problem delivering it as a part of a monologue. Merione, when she says so, is

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inexact use of concepts) or *allegory* (as described in e.g. *Ad Herennium*, IV.xxvii-xxxiv). The attribute 'dramatic' is purposefully applied to distinguish the mode from the Prague Structuralist and Russian Formalist notion of '*scenic* metonymy' and '*scenic* synecdoche'. What is meant in this case is the dramatic awareness, encoded in the text, of the text-fiction, actor-text, actor-fiction and actor-persona relations.

9 Bohuslav Havránek (in 'The Functional Differentation of the Standard Language', 1932, p. 11) suggests that 'we find *maximum foregrounding*, used for its own sake, in *poetic language*' (quoted in Elam 1980: 19). *Cf.* his concept of *aktualisace*, or 'foregrounding', as defined in Elam (1980: 17): 'Linguistic foregrounding in language occurs when an unexpected usage suddenly forces the listener or reader to take note of the utterance itself, rather than continue his automatic concern with its 'content': 'the use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon, as deprived of automatization, as deautomatized, such as a live poetic metaphor' (Havránek 1932, p. 10)'.

alone on the stage. In the play, she has just been raped by the disguised Theanor, and bemoans her fate. A more inconsistent situation, however, occurs a little later when to her enter 'Theanor, [and] Crates [his accomplice], *with Vizards*'. They come to derange her and make her lose a clear remembrance of what has happened. How would Merione's language combine with whatever stage business the two evildoers indulge in? Merione's 'aria' is poetic counterpoint to the stage business we witness. These two onstage lindes combine in the spectator's mind in the resulting fiction that is to be evoked. However, the stage business is not a realistic representation of the fiction.

Enter [*to Merione*] Theanor**,** Crates, *with Vizards.*
[*Merione.*] My shame still followes me, and still proclames me;
He turnes away in scorne, I am contemned too,
A more unmanly violence then the other;
Bitten, and flung away? What ere you are
Sir, you that have abus'd me, and now most basely
And sacrilegiously rob'd this faire Temple,
(I fling all these behinde me) but looke upon me,
But one kinde loving look, be what ye will,
So from this hower you will be mine, my Husband;
And you his hand in mischiefe, I speake to you too,
Counsell him nobly now; you know the mischief,
The most unrighteous act he has done, perswade him,
Perswade him like a friend, knock at his Conscience
Till faire Repentance follow:——yet be worthy of me,
And shew your self, if ever good thought guided ye;
You have had your foul will, make it yet fair with marriage;
Open your self and take me, wed me now: *Draws his Dagger.*
More fruits of Villany? your Dagger? come
Ye are mercifull, I thank ye for your medicine:
Is that too worthy too?

Enter the rest disguis'd.

Devill, thou with him,
Thou penny Bawd to his Lust, will not that stir thee?
Do you work by tokens now? Be sure I live not,
For your owne safeties knaves. I will sit patiently:
But as ye are true Villaines, the Devills owne servants,
And those he loves and trusts, make it as bloody
An Act, of such true horrour Heaven would shake at,
'Twill shew the braver: goodnesse hold my hope fast,
And in thy mercies looke upon my ruines,
And then I am right:

Enter sixe disguis'd, singing and dancing to a horrid Musick, and sprinkling water on her face.

my eyes grow dead and heavy:
Wrong me no more as ye are men. [*Swoons.*]

(*The Queen of Corinth* 2.1.22–51; Fletcher's portion)

The production cannot be too visual, otherwise we would come close to the over-explicit absurdity of a film version, and the scene should be suggestive enough to make us accept Merione's final loss of consciousness. At the same time, there has to be a wide margin between the words and the onstage action. That requirement should be fulfilled by figurativeness of acting, by dramatic metonymy.

A metonymic hint is more than the thing itself. We need metonymic detachment and inconsistency which force us to get involved and overcome them. We need improbability when at a play. A joke stops being funny once we do not know it for a lie. Fiction and illusion are this kind of lie, a *trompe l'oeil*, or rather a *trick of the eye of the mind*.[10]

An instance of dramatic metonymy, related to Merione's monologue, is Euphanes's brief meditation on patience later in the play. Conon is puzzled by Euphanes's calm reaction to the wrong his brother and the Prince have just done him. This is how Euphanes explains his recent reaction:

> *Conon.* Why beare you this my Lord?
> *Euphanes.* To shew the passive fortitude the best;
> Vertues a solid Rock, whereat being aym'd
> The keenest darts of envie, yet unhurt
> Her Marble Heroes stand, built of such Bases,
> Whilst they recoyle, and wound the Shooters faces.
>
> (*The Queen of Corinth* 3.1.246–251; Field's portion)

Euphanes may have acted his 'passive fortitude' and his 'vertue' well. As the stage does not allow minute, zoomed-in playacting, his emotion needs underlining through verbal expression. The action needs to be *heard*. The resulting figurative speech is suggestive of his indecision and puzzlement. Metonymically, Euphanes does not say 'I am patient', but speaks—by detour—about 'passive fortitude' and 'a solid Rock', suggesting that he shares the implicated virtues. By this conceptualization, the actor has to become as if external to Euphanes.[11] By avoiding direct enacting, he is something close to a narrator (or a chorus-figure) of Euphanes. He 'circum-acts' his persona, and gives two coherent, synonymic perspectives of his personality, seen from the outside. This speech, like Merione's 'all the worlds eyes', stops the pace of the plot, and outside the time-frame, explicates Euphanes' behaviour. Then, it returns to the time-sequence of the story.

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10 Keir Elam (1980: 14) quotes and discusses Launce's clownery with his shoes (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, 2.3) from the semiotic point of view. This comedy rests on the fact that Launce plays with the illusion of the farewell scene he puppets, and with the absurd juxtaposition of the scene's pathos and his literally down-to-earth means of impersonation.

11 In Tadeusz Kowzan's taxonomy of theatrical communication sign-systems, this most likely belongs to Formal Representational Theatrical subcodes: 'Conventions of direct address, metatheatrical reference, etc., breaking the mimetic illusion' (Elam 1980: 59). Cf. also Zich's distinction in endnote 4, discussed in Chapter 6 below, and the analysis of onstage action in *Bonduca* (Chapter 5).

Euphanes's distancing self-commentary is a common early modern, pre-realistic dramatic device. Our modern conventions of realism understand the actor as the physical as well as mental, or psychological impersonator of the character. However appropriate it seems today, it is misapplied for Jacobean drama. An alternative approach to character may be found in folk theatre.[12] (Perhaps the closest one may get to it in a living tradition are Japanese Noh and Kabuki.) In keeping with the origins of the theatre, the narrative art, the early actor is extraneous to his role, very often commenting on it or addressing it from the outside. Thus he provides the necessary foregrounding, a firsthand interpretation as well as a narrative of the role. I see Jacobean acting somewhere between early (narrative) acting—which I call figurative or metonymic—and naturalism; in this 'strategic' position it takes advantage of both approaches.[13]

II Figurative Theatre and the Opera

Jacobean acting moves freely along the *involvement-detachment continuum*. In its dramatic logic, full of 'self-narratives', it is closer to the opera than to the realistic theatre.[14] The figurative language alleviates the dramatic dynamics and has much of the musical quality of the operatic form. The play may thus stop and rest on a single theme. In other words, the fast pace of the operatic *recitative* (the time when action proceeds) comes to a halt, and a five-minute *aria* follows, relishing the moment.

One example of an ariatic sequence, from Fletcher's *The Loyal Subject*, is Alinda's plaintive rebuke of the lustful Duke for disgracing her in the eyes of Olimpia; this rebuke Alinda addresses to the Duke's new victims, Viola and Honora, in a generic *memento* speech. Here passages of—what opera would call—recitatives combine with an elevated declamation, heightening Alinda's pathos, her anger and pity over the loss of Olimpia's favour:

12 Jindřich Honzl (in 'The Hierarchy of Dramatic Devices', in Matejka and Titunik 1976: 126n.) describes that 'the medieval actor did not seek a concurrence between the verbal message and his own expression' and quotes from an essay by Golther (included in a book of selected essays, *Der Schauspieler*, ed. By E. Geisler, Berlin: 1926): 'Every player is to step to the center (of the stage), turn to all sides, even to the rear of the stage where Christ stands. … (During the course of the play) the movements are clear and measured throughout the pauses, whereas during the singing and speaking parts the actor stands still'.

13 This issue is reopened in the following chapter, where I discuss J. R. Brown's essay on Elizabethan acting.

14 It may be of relevance that many of the Beaumont-Fletcher plays were taken later as sources of operas.

Alinda. My Royall Mistris favour towards me,
Woe-worth ye sir, ye have poyson'd, blasted.
Duke. I sweet? *recitative*
Alinda. You have taken that unmanly liberty,
Which in a worse man, is vaine-glorious feigning,
And kild my truth.
Duke. Upon my life 'tis false wench.
Alinda. Ladies, take heed, ye have a cunning gamster,
A handsome, and a high; come stoar'd with Antidotes,
He has infections else will fire your blouds.
Duke. Prethee *Alinda* heare me. *aria*
Alinda. Words steept in honey,
That will so melt into your mindes, buy Chastity,
A thousand wayes, a thousand knots to tie ye;
And when he has bound ye his, a thousand ruines.
A poore lost woman ye have made me.
Duke. Ile maintaine thee, *return of recitative*
And nobly too.
Alinda. That Gin's too weak to take me:
Take heed, take heed young Ladies: still take heed,
Take heed of promises, take heed of gifts,
Of forced feigned sorrowes, sighes, take heed. *aria resumed*
Duke. By all that's mine, *Alinda*——
Alinda. Sweare by your mischiefes:
O whither shall I goe?
Duke. Goe back againe,
Ile force her take thee, love thee.
Alinda. Fare ye well Sir,
I will not curse ye; onely this dwell with ye,
When ever you love, a false beliefe light on ye. *Exit.*
(*The Loyal Subject* 4.3.133–54)

Alinda's 'aria' is one of the early modern set speeches that are far from verisimilar if taken from the point of realistic mimesis. It is almost a universal speech on disgrace and a reminder to Alinda's audience to beware of perfidiousness in love. Just like operatic arias, this speech may be seen as an autonomous unit—as if—an 'absolute' piece of art. This autonomy is a certain violation, or disruption, of the mimetic consistency of the play. However, violation and disruption in this sense need not be negative features only. (For a discussion of figurative readings of such 'absolute' parts see Chapter 7.) This aria, in a mode of figurative detachment, separates the stage from the fiction, and offers the audience an insight into Alinda's sentiments.

I believe that it is this proto-operatic logic that underlies the following passage too; this one is from John Fletcher's satirical city comedy *Wit Without Money* (1614). In an agitated moment during an exchange between the two main characters, Vallentine and the Widow (who is trying to get Vallentine to marry her), Vallentine, very abruptly, bursts into a song:

Widdow. You nere said truer,
I must confesse I did a little favour you,

And with some labour, might have beene perswaded,
But when I found I must be hourely troubled,
With making brawthes, and dawbing your decaies
With swadling, and with stitching up your ruines,
For the world so reports——
Vallentine. Doe not provoke me.
Widdow. And half an eye may see——
Vallentine. Doe not provoke me,
The worlds a lying world, and thou shalt finde it,
Have a good heart, and take a strong faith to thee,
And marke what followes, my Nurse, yes, you shall rocke me:
Widow Ile keep you waking.
Widdow. You are disposed sir.
Vallentine. Yes marry am I Widdow, and you shall feele it,
Nay and they touch my freehold, I am a Tiger.
Widdow. I thinke so.
Vallentine. Come.
Widdow. Whether?
Vallentine. Any whether.

Sings.

The fits upon me now,
The fits upon me now,
Come quickely gentle Lady,
The fits upon me now,
The world shall know they are fooles,
And so shalt thou doe too,
Let the Cobler meddle with his tooles,
The fits upon me now.

Take me quickly,
While I am in this vaine, away with me,
For if I have but two houres to consider,
All the Widdowes in the world cannot recover me.

(*Wit Without Money* 5.4.39–64)

The tension and the rhythm of the exchange just before the song intensify towards, and virtually culminate in, the song itself. Right after the song, Vallentine moves back into the mode of the energetic verbal exchange. How would we handle this on today's stage? Would not the song come out as particularly undercutting the pace? Would not it even be embarrassing? To my view, realistic or naturalistic acting would be, in this particular case at least, perfectly unproductive and misplaced.

Still, if one wanted to stage it today, how could this scene be done? Or: is there a way of staging this without tongue-in-cheek? My suggestion would be a thorough *dramatic metonymy*, that is, a figurative, detached, *code-like* approach to the situation and to the personae. In other words, what is on the stage is not to be understood as happening *in* the play; the persons, who are quarrelling at one instant, and singing at another, are at a narrative (or perhaps chorus-like) remove

from the characters of the implicit fiction; just like in a ballet, one does not expect that the fictive Montagues and Capulets are (or were) dancing while stabbing each other through.[15]

A similarly 'illogical' analogy to the preceding situation from *Wit Without Money* is in *The Queen of Corinth*, Scene 4.4. Here a dumb show is introduced. This occurs rather far into the play to take it for a homogeneous, consistent part of the whole. To the modern reader, used to realistic theatre, this may seem another instance of a clumsy dramatic device:

> *Enter (at one Doore)* Queen, Theanor, Crates, Conon, *Lords*, *Souldiers, (at another)* Euphanes *(with two swords)* Agenor, Leonidas, *Souldiers*: Euphanes *presents* Leonidas *on his knees to the* Queen*:* Agenor *bare-headed makes shew of sorrow to the* Queen*, she stamps and seemes to be angry at first,* Euphanes *perswades her, layes their swords at her feet, she kisses him, gives them their swords againe, they kisse her hand and embrace, the Souldiers lift up* Euphanes*, and shout:* Theanor *and* Crates *discovered,* Conon *whispers with* Crates, Euphanes *with* Agenor*, and* Leonidas *observes it, who seeme to promise something,* Euphanes *directs his* Page *somewhat. Exeunt all but* Theanor *and* Crates. (*The Queen of Corinth* 4.4.0.1–12)

By 1617, the traditional dumb show was an out-of-date technique. Yet, it was still in use. Field, an experienced actor, used it, and it did not seem strained to him, or perhaps made purposeful use of its affectedness.[16]

Much of the formal inconsistency of Jacobean drama comes from the fact that the figurative code has to be rich and diverse enough to avoid becoming

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15 The closest I have got to an adequate acting style was in Mike Alfreds' 2001 production of *Cymbeline* in Shakespeare's Globe, London. This performance intentionally disrupted illusion, being performed by six characters only, with ever-present doubling (even simultaneous) and without any changes of costume. Though this might seem to have necessarily resulted in chaos (in respect of today's notion of representation, that is), the opposite was the truth; the actual performance was strikingly lucid and compact, and—most importantly—enjoyable.

In April 2001, RSC at the Barbican organised a public rehearsed reading of *Edward III*, in preparation for a production. As is usual with rehearsed readings, the whole performance was predominantly aural and marginally visual. Actors had texts in their hands; there was virtually no blocking, and all the actors did was deliver the text pronouncedly, with occasional fragments and hints of character acting. Those sitting to the left were the English (all in black), those to the right were the Scots and the French (in blue). Props (such as daggers and letters) were symbolic. The actors were consciously playing with the fact that they were the roles only 'as-if', not really impersonating them. They switched into their roles and back, and sometimes jokingly pointed to the fact that they carried along their texts and were really only two metres from their chairs, and not in the battlefield of Crécy. All the performance rested on was the language, which came across as a great boon to the play.

16 Dieter Mehl (1965: 169–71) suggests that the form was newly reintroduced after 1608. In the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, there are three other instances of the use of dumb show: in *Henry VIII* (Katherine's heavenly visions), *Four Plays, or Moral Representations, in One* (three in Field's 'The Triumph of Love'), and in *The Prophetess* (in 4.1; Massinger's portion). Besides, most of the plays contain a related device, the masque or the 'show'. R. K. Turner (1987: 331n.) summarizes the problems of ascribing the dumb shows in *The Queen of Corinth*.

a new standard. Realism with its consistency, trying to behave with full motivation and probability, is the opposite of this richness. As a spectator, I have often felt embarrassed that an actor (or a production) is over-acting and over-explicit—perhaps for the sake of verisimilitude. The result is unsatisfactory, a kind of semiotic entropy, lacking the playful detachment from the fiction.

In the following section, I will discuss a dramatic technique which uses the figurative detachment, or dislocation of the physical and the fictive. This is virtually impossible to act in a naturalistic way without a conscious separation between the actor (stage figure) and the fictive persona (dramatic person).

III Dramatic Polyphony

> For a cultural epoch, there seems to be a spot too much talk about culture in ours, don't you think? I'd like to know whether epochs that possessed culture knew the word at all, or used it. Naïvete, unconsciousness, taken-for-grantedness, seems to be the first criterion of the constitution to which we give this name. What we are losing is just this naïvete, and this lack, if one may so speak of it, protects us from many a colourful barbarism which altogether perfectly agreed with culture, even with very high culture. I mean: our stage is that of civilization—a very praiseworthy state no doubt, but also neither was there any doubt that we should have to become very much more barbaric to be capable of culture again. Technique and comfort—in that state one talks about culture but one has not got it. Will you prevent me from seeing in the homophone-melodic constitution of our music a condition of music civilization—in contrast to the old contrapuntal polyphone culture?
>
> The young Adrian Leverkühn in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (58)

Another example of a 'violation of realism' occurs in the exposition of the relationship between the Queene of Corinth and her favourite, Euphanes. Before Scene 3.1, we hear reports of them on two or three occasions, and witness them together onstage twice only, and that fleetingly in two cameos. In the second one the Queene says to him only: 'You know my pleasure. … Be not long absent, | The suit you preferr'd is granted' (2.3.52–54). Although we do not know what suit it is, we are shown a miniature of their relationship: the Queene fulfils Euphanes's wishes. This impression is supported by a reminiscence of the Queene's offer in Scene 1.3: 'finde out something that | May doe you good, and rest assur'd to have it' (1.3.103–4). In Scene 2.3, we overhear a shorthand of their conversation, and might interpret it as a realistic stroke to the dialogue. In Scene 3.1, we learn more:

Enter [*to* Euphanes *and* Conon] Queene *and* Ladies.
Conon. My Lord, the Queene.
Queene. Gentle *Euphanes*, how,
How do'st thou honest Lord? oh how I joy
To see what I have made, like a choyce Workman,
That having fram'd a Master-peece, doth reape
An universall comendations.
Princes are Gods in this. Ile build thee yet,
(The good foundation so pleases me)
A story or two higher; let Doggs barke,
They are fooles that hold them dignifi'd by blood,
They should be only made great that are good.
Euphanes. Oraculous Madam.
Queene. Sirrah, I was thinking
If I should marry thee, what merry tales
Our neighbour Islands would make of us;
But let that passe, you have a Mistris
That would forbid our Banes: troth I have wish'd
A thousand times that I had been a man,
Then I might sit a day with thee alone,
And talke,
But as I am I must not; there's no skill
In being good, but in not being thought ill.
Sirrah, who's that?
Euphanes. So't please your Majesty
Conon, the friend I su'd for.
Queene. 'Tis dispatch'd.
Conon. Gracious Madam, [...]

A

B

(*The Queen of Corinth* 3.1.252–273; Field's portion)

Section A are the initial 20 lines after the Queene and her Ladies enter. In B, the Queene meets Conon for the first time. In A, we see the Queene talking to Euphanes only. We may find a realistic interpretation: she has not noticed Conon, or he is standing aside. But that is strained; this would sacrifice the Queene's character. By making the actor/actress play realistically that the Queene does not notice Conon, we might infer that she is 'blinded' by her affection to Euphanes, or otherwise point to her 'simplicity'. The likely purpose of sequence A is to finally portray the Queene's affection for Euphanes. In order not to mix two different things—joy at seeing Euphanes, and meeting Conon—Field keeps these two events separate. The complex situation is dispersed—as if spectrally—into two discrete vistas. In other words, the stage–audience communication is kept transparent by metonymically separating the two actions.

In the theatre, complexity may be created generally in two ways: the one is to play 'the life', that is, the complexity of a character at all instances: that is realism. The other option is to 'unweave', or disassociate the complexity into diachronically separated facets, as is the case in the previous example: that is figurative theatre. This dichotomy has a historical parallel: the life-like complexity of realism is similar to homophonic music; the diachronic sequencing of moments is

analogous to polyphony. (The analogy is not arbitrary; both arts operate in the co-ordinates of time.)

Like Tudor and Stuart polyphony, Jacobean plays were imparting their message in terms of separate, diachronically composed voices which, in the mind of the audience, got woven into complex realities. A single voice in polyphony is inseparable from the others, as opposed to homophony. In drama, the parallel polyphonic voices are asides and other voices of a single character (which I have called perspectives or facets above). These are similarly inseparable. Asides, for instance, may express a figurative perspective of a character, complementing the voices that are supposed to be heard.[17] The result is that at any given moment in the play, we are not witnessing the real thing, the *presence*, but a figure at a remove from the fictional situation. Everything is fragmented into voices of the play's polyphony.

In today's practice, actors often intuitively—and correctly I believe—deliver their asides half-admittedly, half-jokingly, as if subverting their persona. This is one way of distancing. How else would one react to the following lines if delivered in earnest and with involvement?

> [*Count*] *Clodio.* What masque is this?
> What pretty fancy to provoke me high? [*sexually*]
> (*The Custom of the Country* 1.2.51–2)

> [*Noble lady*] *Hyppolita.* Upon my conscience, I must ravish thee,
> I shall be famous for the first example:
> With this I'le tye ye first, then trye your strength Sir.
> (*The Custom of the Country* 3.2.183–5)

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize again the necessity for approaching fictive elements figuratively. Modern theatre, as if by default, mostly takes the most visual way of representation, that is one which is the most superficial. This frequently results in an over-explicit scenic dullness that no longer appeals to the spectators and their imagination.

A performance is supposed to occupy the audience's attention. This is often done, again, by visual means; the production gives us enough stimuli to keep us engaged. However, in performances of early modern drama, this is only a substitute for what the production itself has removed. While reading, we have a different sensation of rhythm; we listen to the language, and have to rely on it as our only source of cognition. Besides, we have a bare stage in our mind. In producing, the task seems to be—with a little overstatement on my part—to find the ideal balance between tedium, and a chaotic deluge of stage incentives, and at the same time, to distort the text as little as possible. In other words, to find the golden mean between the timelessness of reading, and a well-cut film.

17 Early modern playwrights only rarely found it necessary to denote asides. This might be perhaps supportive of the hypothesis of ever-present *detachment* from the role, the *metonymic* removal from the literal.

To interpret scenically is to narrow down the semantic and often even the pleasing potential of the play and present our own view to the audience. Why not rest more on the uninterpreted, the inconsistent? Why not leave the play in its mystery? Why not rely on its playfulness?

Mature Fletcherian drama operated along these lines. In *The Queen of Corinth*, the act of uninterpreted onstage ostension is formulated explicitly: Neanthes introducing a new set of characters puts it plainly:

> [*Neanthes.*] ile not stale them
> By giving up their characters, but leave you
> To make your owne discoveries: here they are Sir.
>
> (*The Queen of Corinth* 1.3.12–14)