Shakespeare and the Art of Making an Exit

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The genius that marks Shakespeare's work is apparent not just in such large matters as plotting, characterization, and language; it is also to be found in the smaller details—such as exits. In Shakespeare's use of them, exits do not merely get characters offstage, but are a means of dramatizing and encapsulating the chief concerns of a play. While I would not insist that he was the only playwright to capitalize on exits as he does, I believe one would be hard put to find the same subtle and ingenious use of them in the plays of his contemporaries. Even in Shakespeare's work, of course, not every exit can be related meaningfully to what the play is about: some are merely necessary, and are managed as simply as possible; but more often than not a character's departure from the stage is both itself a visual and verbal event which is directly pertinent to the issues at stake as well as one in a series of exits that highlights the tragic, comic, or tragicomic process of a play. And on the stage for which Shakespeare wrote, which had minimal scenery and no variable lighting, the potential significance of exits was doubtless more apparent, and perhaps more real, than it is today for both the playwright and his audience.

Entrances and exits are necessary in most kinds of drama. There is, however, an important difference between the two events, especially in the early modern theatre where stage management was minimal: while entrances are controlled from the tiring house, exits must be managed from the stage by the players.

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My focus here is admittedly narrow in that I do not consider other functions of exits, such as how they can initiate new action, mark the segments of a play, or be related to other structural elements. These are important aspects, which have been noted and studied by others, but my concern here is with the exits themselves and, in particular, with the visual effect and thematic significance of which character manages them. To my knowledge no studies deal with Shakespeare's use of exits as I do here, and those which mention this aspect of a play's structure do so largely in passing, and always in the context of other matters. See, for example, the discussion of the 'exit beat' in Hallett and Hallett, 68–79.

There was also a bookkeeper, who seems to have acted as a part-time prompter, but he could probably not be relied on, since so far as we know he was also responsible for organizing properties and business such as offstage sounds. For a detailed study of the bookkeeper at work see Bradley.
by means of some combination of dialogue, rhymed couplet, and stage direction. Of these three, the one least required and often absent from both printed and manuscript texts is, not surprisingly, exit or exeunt. Once on stage, players were necessarily directed by the words which they and other characters spoke, as well as by the rhyming note of departure. If we take ‘exit’ to mean simply the act of leaving the stage, certainly the moment was itself short; the greater opportunities for emblematic and thematic implications lay in the business of motivating and cueing a departure, when the verbal and visual could work together to punctuate the action and emphasize issues, conflicts, and relationships. Furthermore, since exits occur regularly throughout a play, the opportunity for repetition with (or without) variation was available to be exploited. The purpose of this study is, as I have said, to show that Shakespeare realized and capitalized on this opportunity, and did so to a remarkably subtle effect. As elsewhere in his work, the relationship between form and content – how a governing idea permeates the language and visual imagery of a play and is apparent in the most basic actions – can be examined in his treatment of exits.

Exits can be classified and differentiated. Probably the most common is the departure that ends a scene, but this itself can vary widely: the exit can be that of a single character or a group, simultaneous or one after another, together through the same door or separately through different doors; it can be initiated by the departing character or by another; it can be willing or forced. Gestures such as waving away or back, or business such as pushing or pulling, are common at such moments and can heighten their emblematic quality. Characters can also leave in mid-scene, fostering an impression of either their control or their vulnerability. Exits both from the stage and from the play include the removal of dead bodies and figures going to execution or exile. Departures can be immediate or delayed, expected or unexpected. In Shakespeare’s work, all of these versions of this basic stage business can be found, as I will show here by focusing on exits in Richard III, As You Like It, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale. The choice and order of these plays are not random – but neither is the progression from near the beginning of Shakespeare’s career to near the end intended to suggest any chronological change in his use of the technique, because it seems to me that his use of character exits to express meaning is as much a factor early as late. To indicate both the range and generic particularity of Shakespeare’s use of exits, my examples are a history, a comedy, a tragedy, and a romance. Significantly, though, each play in its own way explores the exercise of power – something that exits will be seen to be especially effective in dramatizing. 4 In the four sections that follow, I consider a selection of the exits in a specific play in sequence, both because that is how an audience experiences them and because their use is tied to the

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4 It is also worth noting that being the one to do the necessary and important theatrical job of managing an exit or exits also gave a player power over his fellows.
development of the plot. Since no play will be analysed in detail, I hope I shall be permitted some leeway in making assumptions about what we can generally agree a play is ‘about’ – at least to the average reader and playgoer.

1 RICHARD II

Set on towards London, cousin: is it so?

Always discernible amid the shifting perspectives of this play is the process by which Richard loses – or gives up – power to Bolingbroke. The rising and falling imagery the king uses to impose his meaning on events is countered if not belied by the literal and figurative business of arrival and especially departure which more accurately expresses the complex yet inevitable shift from one ruler to the other. By looking at what Shakespeare is doing, rather than listening to what Richard is saying, we can see how Richard’s initially tenuous and gradually decreasing control over himself and his world is conveyed to an audience through exits – especially, though not exclusively, his own. More generally, the political and moral issue, and problem, of usurpation and the need – on the part of both Bolingbroke and Shakespeare – to justify it is repeatedly explored in the business of coming and going.

The end of 1.3 focuses on metaphoric and literal departures, all emphasized by characters leaving the stage. Arbitrarily changing the duration of Bolingbroke’s banishment, Richard dismisses him: ‘Cousin, farewell; and uncle, bid him so. / Six years we banish him, and he shall go’ (236–37); but it is the King who exits first, as if to avoid argument and keep the upper hand. In this play where Richard’s timing is repeatedly shown to be unwise, it is significant that when he departs here he leaves father and son on stage for a sympathy-inducing leavetaking. As they go off, between them Gaunt and Bolingbroke control the effect of the latter’s scene-ending exit from his country and the stage:

GAUNT Come, come, my son, I’ll bring thee on thy way. Had I thy youth and cause, I would not stay.6
BOLINGBROKE Then England’s ground, farewell. Sweet soil, adieu, My mother and my nurse that bears me yet! Where’er I wander, boast of this I can: Though banished, yet a trueborn Englishman. (1.3.267–72)

5 All quotations are from William Shakespeare, The Complete Works, gen eds Wells and Taylor.
6 Gaunt’s words are an implied stage direction for him to reach out to his son and lead him off, adding visual punctuation to their departure.
As the exits of Richard and Bolingbroke are essential to the development of the plot and to promoting an audience's acceptance of the events to come, so too is the departure of the dying Gaunt (2.1.138-39). After Gaunt is carried off, Richard tells York of his plan to take Gaunt's title and property, whereupon York leaves rather than agree. This would seem to put Richard in control, but again he quickly departs, unwisely planning his own exit from England to Ireland, this time leaving Northumberland and his cohorts on stage to plot against him and to initiate their own departures 'in post to Ravenspurgh' (2.1.298). Shortly into the next scene Bushy says to the Queen, 'I hope the King is not yet shipped for Ireland' (2.2.42), but of course he has already left, making possible Bolingbroke's re-entry into England - the event that will lead to Richard's final exit in a coffin.

The scattered, fearful departures of Bushy, Bagot, and Greene from 2.2 are immediately followed by the entrance of Bolingbroke, and 2.3 ends with him in charge, inviting York 'to go with us / To Bristow Castle.' Although York responds, 'It may be I will go with you - but yet I'll pause' (162-63, 167), the 'Exeunt' implies a group departure and nothing contradicts it. If the two were to leave through the same door, it would emphasize what is indeed the case: that York has effectively given up the absent Richard's power to the very present Bolingbroke - a man who rarely departs the stage before others. As the middle act begins, Bolingbroke's control is conveyed by his quick command that Northumberland see Bushy and Greene 'dispatched' (3.1.35). Worth noting is that this short scene does not end with their departure, which might perhaps lead the audience to feel sympathy for them, but with Bolingbroke's words of concern for the Queen and York's reply that he has 'dispatched' a gentleman to her with letters of reassurance (40-41). The scene is ended by Bolingbroke's confident rhyme: 'Come, lords, away, / To fight with Glendŵr and his complices. / A while to work, and after, holiday' (42-44).

Richard's maudlin return to England at the start of 3.2 is obviously to be contrasted with the earlier upbeat arrival of Bolingbroke, and this contrast continues in Richard's departure from the scene, which begins the reverse coronation that soon follows. His series of what might be called self-conscious scene-ending couplets here begins, 'Go to Flint Castle; there I'll pine away. / A king, woe's slave, shall kingly woe obey' and ends, 'Discharge my followers. Let them hence away / From Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day' (205-6, 213-14). The sad and telling irony of a Richard who fools himself that he is in control of his defeat is emphasized by how his opponents manage his movements in the immediately subsequent scenes. Richard's appearance on the walls in 3.3 would seem to give him the superior position, but as his mocking language nevertheless indicates, it is he who must descend into the control of his enemies, helpfully engineering his own exit (in, one might note, a couplet):
KING RICHARD Set on towards London, cousin: is it so?
BOLINGBROKE Yea, my good lord.
KING RICHARD Then I must not say no. (3.3.206–7)

Shakespeare's use of York to chart the play's shift - and foster an audience's - from Richard to Bolingbroke is, as already shown, apparent in York's exits. When in the middle of 4.1 Bolingbroke tells York to 'fetch hither Richard, that in common view / He may surrender. So we shall proceed / Without suspicion,' York readily goes off, saying, 'I will be his conduct' (146–48). After the public ceremony of deposition and Richard's self-pitying, self-dramatizing ruminations, he turns to his cousin, asking to 'beg one boon, / And then be gone and trouble you no more'; a momentarily careless Bolingbroke replies, 'Name it, fair cousin,' and tells him to 'ask':

KING RICHARD And shall I have?
BOLINGBROKE You shall.
KING RICHARD Then give me leave to go.
BOLINGBROKE Whither you will, so I were from your sights.

While this might seem to give Richard the upper hand, at least rhetorically, his ironic mocking is again undercut when he is taken off under guard while others remain. Seemingly unruffled, Bolingbroke is clearly in charge as he exits saying, 'On Wednesday next we solemnly set down / Our coronation. Lords, prepare yourselves’ (309–10). But Shakespeare again continues a scene past a possible point of ending; this time Carlisle, Aumerle, and the Abbot of Westminster stay on stage to begin their plot against the king-to-be who has just left. This repetition of an earlier pattern can remind an audience of what happened to Richard when he exited before others, even as they recall the historical fact that the man soon to become King Henry IV will not be defeated as his cousin was.

In the final act is a series of exits that reinforce the reasons for Richard's defeat and Henry's success even as they continue the subtle process of qualification which underlines rather than obscures the fact and problem of usurpation and its consequences. The first scene ends with the Queen asking Richard, 'Must we be divided? Must we part?' and his confirmation that such is the case (5.1.81–82). Despite her pleas that they remain together, she is led off to France and he to prison - almost certainly through separate doors. The next two scenes focus on York's attempts to get to Henry before Aumerle does. Not surprisingly, the potential of exits to convey or reinforce meaning is apparent here where we see a father who must choose between
his son and his new king, and a mother who must fight with her husband to save her son, who has plotted to usurp that same king. The comic business that ends 5.2 is created by York's increasing frustration as he tries to leave: first he calls a servant to saddle his horse and bring his boots, without which he cannot travel; when the boots finally come, the Duchess tries to prevent him from putting them on, then pleads with her husband not to betray their son. York's determination to go and her attempt to restrain him physically are signalled in his brief exit line: 'Make way, unruly woman' (110); but after he leaves the Duchess cues her son's speedy and her own slower but determined departure:

After, Aumerle! Mount thee upon his horse.
   Spur, post, and get before him to the King,
   And beg thy pardon ere he do accuse thee.
   I'll not be long behind - ...
   ... Away, be gone! (5.2.111-14, 117)

When Aumerle bursts in on Henry and asks to speak with him privately, Henry tells those with him to 'Withdraw yourselves, and leave us here alone' (5.3.27). The confidence Henry displays in sending the others off is further demonstrated as he patiently listens to Aumerle's confession and the Duchess's pleas that her son be forgiven. But after he has heard them out, Henry acts, sending York off to find the traitors. His final words convey his unruffled control over the situation: 'Uncle, farewell; and cousin, so adieu.
   / Your mother well hath prayed; and prove you true.' The Duchess ends the scene, and completes the rhyme with 'Come, my old son. I pray God make thee new' (5.3.142-44). This dialogue suggests that Henry should leave through one door, and the three Yorks - the mother protectively leading the son - through another. The essential irresolution of the final words is therefore emphasized by this divided departure.

If Richard's taunting but acquiescent 'Set on towards London, cousin: is it so?' is paradigmatic of how he cedes control to Bolingbroke by managing his own exit, the short scene between Exton and his servant (5.4) exemplifies Bolingbroke's ability to initiate the actions of others - especially their departures to follow his orders. In this brief episode Exton uses Henry's words (or what he believes he has heard him say) to direct himself and his man off to kill Richard. First Exton repeats Henry's 'Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?' (2); then he as much as puts words in Henry's mouth, words that motivate and signal his own exit:

7 There is no direction for an exit here, and perhaps they do only 'withdraw,' but Henry specifies that he should be 'alone' with Aumerle, and nothing suggests that his men disobey him.
And speaking it, he wisely looked on me,  
As who should say 'I would thou wert the man  
That would divorce this terror from my heart,'  
Meaning the King at Pomfret. Come, let's go.  
I am the King's friend, and will rid his foe. (5.4.7-11)

This departure leads directly to the Keeper's order to the Groom talking with Richard: 'Fellow, give place. Here is no longer stay' (5.5.95). Richard consents, and in so doing ensures that he is alone when Exton and his men attack and murder him. The scene ends with Exton left to manage the exits of those who have already, so to speak, departed: 'This dead King to the living King I'll bear. / Take hence the rest, and give them burial here' (5.5.117-18).8

The final scene begins with a series of entrances that Henry expects, followed by one that he does not: that of Exton with the coffin containing Richard's body. Henry responds by sending Exton off to a kind of exile: 'With Cain go wander through the shades of night, / And never show thy head by day nor light' (5.6.43-44). And his quick reassertion of control is signalled by a closing direction worthy of the showman he is:

I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land  
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.  
March sadly after. Grace my mourning here  
In weeping after this untimely bier. (5.6.49-52)

Significantly, given the ambiguities that haunt the play, although Bolingbroke here manages Richard's exit from the stage for the final time, even though, or because, Richard is represented by a coffin, the new king's control of his own departure, however seemingly complete, is subtly undermined by the old king's presence. Bolingbroke's campaign to supplant Richard does not end with Richard's death - and it will, as we know, continue into the next two plays of the tetralogy.

II AS YOU LIKE IT

Support him by the arm. Give me your hand.'

In this play concerned with civilized and uncivilized behaviour, especially as demonstrated in caring for or mistreating others, it is significant that the exits can be divided into the positive, in which characters leave together, and the negative, in which one figure departs alone. In the light of the history play just discussed, it is noteworthy that the action of this comedy also begins with characters being exiled; indeed, the initial emphasis in As

8 Such specific signals for the removal of bodies are relatively rare in plays of the period.
You Like It is as much on the implications of exile as it is in Richard II, although the particular focus is very different in each. With the entrance of Orlando and Adam together, and then with the physical and verbal violence between Orlando and Oliver, who is both Orlando’s brother and Adam’s master, Shakespeare establishes the context for what follows. After their confrontation, Oliver dismisses Orlando – ‘I pray you, leave me’ – and sends Adam with him: ‘Get you with him, you old dog’ (1.1.73–74, 77). As he exits with Orlando, Adam articulates values he embodies and Oliver lacks:

Is ‘old dog’ my reward? Most true, I have lost my teeth in your service. God be with my old master, he would not have spoken such a word. (78–80)

The danger for Orlando is compounded when Duke Ferdinand discovers who he is just as Orlando is falling in love with Rosalind. In an act of kindness, Le Beau warns Orlando and, fearful of his own safety, quickly departs alone, saying,

Sir, fare you well.
Hereafter, in a better world than this,
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you. (1.2.273–75)

Orlando is left on stage to spell out his position between danger and love, so that although he too goes off alone, his last words are, ‘But heavenly Rosalind!’ (279). The act ends with the departure of Celia and Rosalind together – a movement away from the uncivilized danger of Duke Ferdinand’s rule, as Celia’s departing couplet emphasizes: ‘Now go we in content, / To liberty, and not to banishment’ (1.3.136–37).

The role of exits in helping to dramatize the concerns of the play begins to become apparent with the move into the supposedly uncivilized forest. The first scene of act 2 ends with Duke Senior asking to be taken to hear ‘the melancholy Jaques’ and the First Lord’s willing reply, ‘I’ll bring you to him straight’ (2.1.41, 69), so that they too exit together through the same door – a pair headed for the same place. By contrast, the second short scene ends with Duke Ferdinand sending off his men to search for Orlando, Rosalind, and Celia. Although the signal is ‘Exeunt,’ given the Duke’s commands to and implicit dismissal of the others, it is likely that he is to depart alone, probably by a different door. The third scene begins with the entrance of Orlando and Adam through separate doors, but by the end of the scene, after Adam has warned Orlando that his brother has threatened his life (a reminder of the archetypal act of uncivilized humanity), the audience is prompted by their departing exchange to appreciate the significance of their exit together:
ORLANDO. But come thy ways. We'll go along together,
And ere we have thy youthful wages spent,
We'll light upon some settled low content.
ADAM. Master, go on, and I will follow thee
To the last gasp, with truth and loyalty. (2.3.67–71)

Having established the twosomes of Celia and Rosalind, Orlando and Adam, the play now broadens to include the various lovers, and here too exits have relevance. After the brief discussion in 2.4 between Corin and Silvius about the latter's unrequited love for Phoebe, Silvius describes his solitary departure:

Or if thou hast not broke from company
Abruptly, as my passion now makes me,
Thou hast not loved.
O, Phoebe, Phoebe, Phoebe! (37–40)

The scene ends with a return to the concern with the kind of civilized service epitomized by Adam - demonstrated here by Corin, who invites the disguised Celia and Rosalind to go with him to see the sheep-cote that his master 'of churlish disposition' wants to sell:

Go with me. If you like upon report
The soil, the profit, and this kind of life,
I will your very faithful feeder be,
And buy it with your gold right suddenly. (2.4.96–99)

As the brief scene in Richard II where Exton uses Bolingbroke's words to cue his own exit exemplifies the future king's control over others, 2.6 in As You Like It encapsulates both the play's concerns and how they are conveyed - and again because of the scene's brevity, the focus is inevitably placed on the characters' exits. Here, Adam and Orlando enter together (as they have twice before), as Adam collapses from fatigue and hunger, ready to give up and die. His 'Farewell, kind master' (2–3) might elsewhere signal his death and departure from the play, but in this comedy Orlando refuses to go alone and the scene ends with him describing their exit together - one that makes literal, visual, the idea of civilized behaviour:

Come, I will bear thee to some shelter, and thou shalt not die for lack of dinner
if there live anything in this desert. Cheerly, good Adam. (14–17)

This ideal of civilization, further embodied by Duke Senior through the next scene, is emphasized again as 2.7 ends with the Duke's invitation to Orlando and Adam to go with him to his cave. His words and actions encourage an
audience to perceive the emblematic aspect of the departure and its thematic significance:

(To Adam) Good old man,
Thou art right welcome, as thy master is. -
(To Lords) Support him by the arm. (To Orlando) Give me your hand,
And let me all your fortunes understand. (201-4)

In the short scene that begins act 3, a negative contrast is again established when Duke Ferdinand (in an echo of Richard's treatment of Bolingbroke) banishes Oliver with words of explicit incivility:

Well, push him out of doors,
And let my officers of such a nature
Make an extent upon his house and lands.
Do this expediently, and turn him going. (3.1.15-18)

This is another instance where it is clear from what is said both that some physical force is used on Oliver and that the Duke exits, probably alone, through a different door.

The play's concern with love comes to the fore again in 3.2 with another exit of a unified threesome that acts as a visual contrast with single, angry or unwilling departures. Rosalind's testing of Orlando (and of herself) moves to its next stage when she invites him to 'come every day to [her] cot and woo [her]' (411). When a willing Orlando asks where it is, Rosalind replies, 'Go with me to it, and I'll show it you. And by the way you shall tell me where in the forest you live. Will you go?' Orlando agrees to do so, and as they leave Rosalind explicitly invites Celia to make up the departing trio: 'Come, sister. Will you go?' (3.2.414-19). From this point in the play Rosalind is, not surprisingly, increasingly in charge of exits, both signalling and urging them. When Corin offers to take her and Celia to eavesdrop on Silvius wooing Phoebe, Rosalind initiates the exit - of another group of three:

(To Celia) O come, let us remove.
The sight of lovers feedeth those in love.
(To Corin) Bring us to this sight, and you shall say
I'll prove a busy actor in their play. (3.4.51-54)

Rosalind's control not surprisingly falters briefly in 4.3 when first Orlando - whom at 4.2.190 she has reluctantly allowed to leave her - is late returning and then Oliver appears to tell how Orlando was injured in saving him. Upon hearing this, Rosalind, as Ganymede, faints and asks to be taken home; Celia's response creates another departing threesome - and if such
repeated visual business makes an impression on an audience, surely it will do so here. Celia says to Rosalind, 'We'll lead you thither,' and to Oliver, 'I pray you, will you take him by the arm?' Probably they would continue to support Rosalind as they leave; certainly Celia, now in love with Oliver, makes sure to invite him along: 'Good sir, go with us.' Rosalind, it should be noted, speaks the exit cue: 'Will you go?' (4.3.163–64, 179, 183).

The short first scene of act 5 might seem relatively unimportant and is likely to be cut in performance, but cutting it would remove two more sets of exits that provide repetition with variation. First the simple William, bested in language and in love, is told to leave by Touchstone and Audrey—and he goes off alone without protest. Immediately Corin comes on to tell Touchstone that he is wanted, to which he responds, 'Trip, Audrey, trip, Audrey. I attend, I attend,' and the three exit together.

As the play ends, it calls attention to the civilized unity that has been achieved both by conventions that enhance awareness of it and by an exchange that provides a contrast of solitariness. The process of departure begins with Jaques saying to the four couples: 'So, to your pleasures; / I am for other than dancing measures' (5.4.190–91). Duke Senior asks Jaques to 'stay,' but he refuses and departs alone: 'To see no pastime, / What you would have / I'll stay to know at your abandoned cave' (192–94). Finally the Duke signals the general leavetaking: ' Proceed, proceed. We'll so begin these rites / As we do trust they'll end, in true delights' (195–96). But of course the play is not yet over; it ends, untypically for Shakespeare, with an epilogue,9 spoken by the character who has been not one but two—Rosalind and Ganymede, male and female—for most of the play. She begins by acknowledging that 'It is not the fashion to see the lady the epilogue'; but having it so inevitably calls attention to another duality—that of female character and male actor, the idea with which she ends: 'If I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleased me ...' (1–2, 16–18). I say 'she' because the last words spoken—the exit cue—imply that the actor departs with a 'curtsy,' a woman's action. Much can and has been made of this gender-bending doubleness, but my particular concern here is with the continued emphasis on exiting twosomes: 'Rosalind'—presumably still dressed as a bride—asks the audience to 'bid [her] farewell' (21), thus becoming two figures at two levels of theatrical reality, representing both genders. This comes at the end of a play which has included Jaques's sardonic observation, 'There is sure another flood toward, and these couples are coming to the ark' (5.4.35–36).

9 Five other Shakespeare plays have a formal epilogue (A Midsummer Night's Dream, 2 Henry iv, Henry v, All's Well That Ends Well, and The Tempest); Pericles and the first quarto of Troilus and Cressida have informal epilogues (i.e. not so titled).
The events of this tragedy about the domination of the mind of one man by another are precipitated by a departure the audience does not actually see, although it is the initial focus – that of Desdemona from her father’s house. The story of the romance later told by Desdemona makes it clear that she chose to leave and Othello encouraged her to join him; that is, they acted of their own volition. But as the two previous studies here have shown, to the extent that a play is about the acquisition and exercise of power, exits are a significant verbal and visual means by which Shakespeare dramatizes its use and abuse. Thus, while there is nothing new in saying that Iago stage-manages events until he gains control of Othello’s thoughts and actions, it is, I hope, worth showing how this domination is achieved partly through Iago’s (and Shakespeare’s) management of the characters’ exits. Iago’s ability to manipulate others is established from the first moments; in particular, his control of Roderigo’s exits can be seen to prefigure how he will direct those of others – most notably Othello himself. Furthermore, at least until the last equivocal moment of the play, Iago always chooses his own moment to leave. In the first scene Iago is in charge of awakening Brabantio and making the insinuations that will send him off in search of Othello. But before Brabantio can recognize him, Iago leaves, telling Roderigo to ‘Lead to the Sagittary the raised search’ (160) – thereby directing Roderigo’s and Brabantio’s subsequent exits:

RODERIGO I think I can discover him, if you please
To get a good guard and go along with me.
BRABANTIO Pray you lead on. ...
On, good Roderigo. I will deserve your pains. (1.1.180–82, 185)

When Brabantio’s search party finds Othello and forcibly attempts to take him off to the Duke, Othello seemingly takes charge of his own exit – but, as Iago knows, it has already been determined (1.1.149–55). Othello asks Brabantio, ‘Whither will you that I go / To answer this your charge?’ and when Brabantio answers ‘To prison,’ Othello counters with the information that he is even now answering a summons from the Duke. Their exit is signalled by Brabantio’s ‘Bring him away,’ but Othello is as much (or as little) in control as is Brabantio (1.2.85–86, 95).

The reason for the Duke’s summoning Othello is of course to send him to be commander in Cyprus: a positive and willing departure. And when Desdemona asks to join Othello there, it is he who decides that she should travel with Iago. Certainly Othello is in control, at least for the moment, as he gives Iago his orders and then turns to his wife, very probably holding
out his hand to her as he signals their exit: 'Come, Desdemona' (1.3.298). The audience sees and hears Othello lead Desdemona off again at 2.1.211, both times leaving Iago and Roderigo on stage, whereupon Iago manœuvres Roderigo off and remains alone. This use of repetition firmly establishes Iago's mastery of Roderigo and of the stage-world to which the audience responds. More particularly, Iago repeatedly gets Roderigo to leave by convincing him to believe what the audience knows is a lie. His management of Roderigo's exits is almost comically exaggerated in 1.3, with Iago's multiple injunctions: 'Go, make money,' 'Traverse, go, provide thy money,' 'Adieu,' 'Go to, farewell' (363, 369-70, 371, 373). As Iago almost immediately says of Othello, Roderigo too will 'as tenderly be led by th' nose / As asses are' (1.3.393-94). Iago knows how to plant an idea, either by insistence or insinuation, in the minds of his victims so that they are effectively programmed to behave as he intends. As the scene ends, the contrast between Roderigo's and Iago's exits is apparent: no one tells Iago when to leave or what to do except himself, in a couplet: 'I ha't. It is ingendered. Hell and night I Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' (395-96). A similarly telling sequence occurs in 2.3 where, during the confusion he has engineered, Iago sends the gullible Roderigo off with 'Away, I say. Go out and cry a mutiny' (150). After this, Othello and Desdemona come on and Othello seems to take charge as he tells others to remove the wounded Montano, then directs his wife: 'Come away to bed' (247). But Iago remains on stage, and the audience watches him first send Cassio off; then, when Roderigo enters to say he has decided to return to Venice, Iago again takes control of him: 'Retire thee. Go where thou art billeted. / Away, I say. Thou shalt know more hereafter. / Nay, get thee gone' (2.3.370-72). The second act ends with Iago once more directing his own departure in a couplet: 'Ay, that's the way. / Dull not device by coldness and delay' (377-78).

As act 3 begins, Iago's method of control-by-deception broadens to include other characters, something his managing of their exits helps to make apparent. In his soliloquy at the end of act 2, he develops a plan to include his wife in his manipulation of Cassio and Desdemona, and in 3.1 the audience sees this plan unfold as Iago leaves Cassio on stage, where Emilia finds and reassures him before leading him off: 'Pray you come in. / I will bestow you where you shall have time / To speak your bosom freely.' As he follows her Cassio replies, 'I am much bound to you' (52-54). He might as well be speaking to Iago, whose control of his wife is also increasingly evident. At this point, before returning to Iago's domination of Othello, Shakespeare gives the audience a paradigm of what the Othello-Iago relationship should be in a brief scene (3.2) that shows Othello in charge, directing the exits of others, including Iago:

**OTHELLO** These letters, give, Iago, to the pilot, And by him do my duties to the senate.
That done, I will be walking on the works.
Repair there to me.

IAGO Well, my good lord, I'll do't. Exit

OTHELLO This fortification, gentlemen – shall we see’t?

GENTLEMEN We'll wait upon your lordship. Exeunt

In 1.3 and 2.1, Othello led a willing Desdemona off. The effects of Iago's insidious insinuations at the start of 3.3 can be seen when Othello asks his still compliant wife to leave him alone:

OTHELLO ... I do beseech thee grant me this:
To leave me but a little to myself.

DESDEMONA Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord.

OTHELLO Farewell, my Desdemona. I'll come to thee straight.

DESDEMONA Emilia, come. (To Othello) Be as your fancies teach you.

Whate'er you be, I am obedient. Exeunt Desdemona and Emilia (3.3.85–90)

In the next sequence Iago works on Othello's 'fancies' to the point where he says, 'Farewell, farewell. / If more thou dost perceive, let me know more. / Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago' (243–45). Iago seems to comply – 'My lord, I take my leave' – but in fact returns to pretend to downplay his 'fears.' Othello's reply ironically confirms Iago's control – 'Fear not my government' – and only now does Iago exit, on his own cue: 'I once more take my leave' (246, 258, 261).10 Whether by Shakespearean design or accident, later in the scene, in language of particular resonance in the context of my emphasis on exits, Othello cries 'farewell' six times in ten lines, concluding 'Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone' (353–62). By the end of this pivotal scene, Othello seems to be leading Iago off, but an audience can hear and see how completely Iago has taken over Othello's thoughts and actions:

OTHELLO Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her, damn her!
Come, go with me apart. I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift means of death
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

IAGO I am your own forever. Exeunt (478–82)

Iago's power over the others is effectively demonstrated in 4.1 as he first sends Cassio away when he comes upon Iago and Othello after the latter's collapse (54), then manoeuvres Othello to withdraw to watch Cassio and Bianca (91), and then gets Cassio out of the way when he has served his purpose (158). Later in the same scene when Othello confronts Desdemona, the focus on her exit creates a sadly ironic contrast with their departures together at the start of the play. After raging at his wife, Othello cries 'Out

10 See Hallett and Hallett, 78–79.
of my sight!'; starting to leave, Desdemona replies 'I will not stay to offend
you'; but at Lodovico's 'Truly, an obedient lady. / I do beseech your
lordship call her back,' Othello sarcastically does so, then sends her off
again. The physical business of Desdemona, starting to leave, then halting,
then finally going calls attention to the event – the exit – a focus emphasized
by Othello's cruel taunts:

OTHELLO Mistress!

DESDEMONA My lord?

OTHELLO What would you with her, sir?

LODOVICO Who, I, my lord?

OTHELLO Ay, you did wish that I would make her turn.

Sir, she can turn and turn, and yet go on
And turn again...

(To Lodovico) I am commanded home. (To Desdemona) Get you away;
I'll send for you anon. (To Lodovico) Sir, I obey the mandate,
And will return to Venice. (To Desdemona) Hence, avaunt! (4.1.247-56, 260-62)

First Desdemona exits, then Othello does likewise, so that Iago remains with
Lodovico to exercise his powers on him as he formerly did on Roderigo. Of
course Iago motivates their departure, urging Lodovico, 'Do but go after,
/ And mark how he continues' (282-83).

Several exits in the last act are particularly noteworthy, although by this
point they should need little discussion. The final movement of the play
begins when Othello, ostensibly signalling his own exit but actually
demonstrating the degree of Iago's control, cries 'Strumpet, I come.... / Thy
bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted' (5.1.35, 37). The scene
ends with Iago managing the departures of Lodovico and Graziano, Bianca,
Emilia, and finally himself:

Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio dressed.
Come, mistress, you must tell 's another tale.
Emilia, run you to the citadel
And tell my lord and lady what hath happed.
Will you go on afore? This is the night
That either makes me or foredoes me quite. (126-31)

When Emilia finally begins (too late) to understand what has happened, she
disobeys Iago's command to 'Be wise, and get you home' (5.2.229). Instead
of leaving, she tells the truth about the handkerchief, and Iago kills her. It is
important to realize that what happens next is rare if not unique for a major
character in a Shakespeare play: Iago exits without a word. Only Graziano's
after-the-fact statement marks the event: 'He's gone, but his wife's killed'
(245). This silent disappearance is an effective reminder of Iago's satanic
essence. He is brought back; then wounded by Othello, and is to be punished; but having watched him control himself and others throughout the play, an audience will have little doubt that he means it when he says ‘From this time forth I never will speak word’ (310). His words have done their worst.

When finally Lodovico tells Othello, ‘You must forsake this room and go with us,’ then commands the officers, ‘Come, bring away,’ Othello says, ‘Soft, you; a word or two before you go’ (5.2.339, 346-47). He seems to be in charge again, as he was at the start of the play, when he both forestalls their exit and engineers his own departure from life. But even at the end it might be said that Iago is still in control. Not only does Lodovico devote most of his concluding speech to him, he also ends by signalling his own departure for Venice to tell of the ‘heavy act’ (381) for which Iago is responsible. Furthermore, that Iago is not carried off as a dead body but exits from the play still alive constitutes, I think, a significant visual commentary for an audience to consider.

**IV THE WINTER’S TALE**

*Exit, pursued by a bear.*

In the present context, the most significant fact about this famous stage direction is that it is a forced exit, and as such is representative of exits through the first half of this romance. More particularly, the bear represents a primitive, animal force – like jealousy – rather than a rational, planned exercise of power, such as the manipulations of a Bolingbroke or an Iago. Similarly, whereas Othello is unknowingly ruled by another, Leontes’ misrule is self-induced. Until Leontes turns control of himself and his world over to Paulina, his childish, irrational tyranny is made apparent by his attempts to force the departures of other characters. But when the tragi-comic hourglass is turned, the importance of departures diminishes in favour of arrivals – except, that is, for those exits which somehow echo the action of the first part, inviting an awareness of the changes effected by faith and time.

Although I did not choose them for this reason, it is perhaps worth noting that in each play discussed here the action is somehow initiated by an exit or exits: the exile of Bolingbroke; the escapes of Rosalind, Celia, and Orlando; the departure of Desdemona from her father’s house; and in *The Winter’s Tale* Polixenes’ desire to return to Bohemia. After Hermione has succeeded in persuading Polixenes to delay his return home, Leontes implies that the two should leave him and Mamillius: ‘We two will walk, my lord, / And leave you to your graver steps. Hermione, / How thou lov’st us, show in our brother’s welcome’ (1.2.173-75). Hermione takes the hint: ‘If you would seek us, / We are yours i’th garden. Shall’s attend you there?’ (178-79). Since Leontes has encouraged them to leave, his angry
'Gone already' (186) is almost laughable; but of course he sees their ready departure as Hermione's eagerness to be alone with Polixenes. When Leontes' jealousy leads to his insistence that Camillo murder Polixenes, the result is the forced exile of the one and escape of the other:

POLIXENES Come, Camillo,
I will respect thee as a father if
Thou bear'st my life off hence. Let us avoid.
CAMILLO It is in mine authority to command
The keys of all the posterns. Please your highness
To take the urgent hour. Come, sir, away. (1.2.460-65)

Seeing this departure as confirmation of an affair between Hermione and Polixenes, Leontes storms in on her in 2.1 and demands that Mamillius be taken from her: 'Bear the boy hence. He shall not come about her. / Away with him' (61-62). He next turns to accuse his wife of treason and when she denies it he cries, 'Away with her, to prison!' But as his 'Shall I be heard?' (105, 117) indicates, no one obeys him. Not only do Hermione's words in her own defence here stop Leontes' men from taking her off, but she also takes charge of her own exit:

Who is't that goes with me? Beseech your highness
My women may be with me, for you see
My plight requires it. ...
... This action that I now go on
Is for my better grace - Adieu, my lord. ...
... My women, come, you have leave. (118-20, 123-24, 126)

Although as Hermione is leaving Leontes speaks as if he is in charge - 'Go, do our bidding. Hence!' (127) - his frustrated impotence and her queenly self-command are apparent. In an exchange similar to that in Othello, Leontes' astonished men ask him to 'call the Queen again' (128), but he refuses and the scene ends with his demand that his men 'follow' him (198), which they do, though with obvious reluctance. Indeed, it is Antigonus, not Leontes, who has the final lines in the scene - ironically mocking his King's authority both verbally and visually, since he prob-ably disobediently lags behind Leontes and the others to exit last while suggesting that laughter is the appropriate response to Leontes' accusations.

The principal figure of rebellion against Leontes' tyranny, however, is not Antigonus but his wife, Paulina, when she confronts the King in 2.3. She enters, it should be noted, despite several attempts to stop her and Leontes'

11 There is no stage direction for Mamillius's exit, but it is very unlikely that Leontes would remain silent if his son were not removed at this point.
immediate insistence that she be removed — ‘Away with that audacious lady!’ (42). In the next segment of this scene, visual and verbal emphasis is put on Leontes’ demands that his men ‘Force her hence’ (62) and Paulina’s refusal to leave. The physical business is signalled in the dialogue: as she harangues him, Leontes cries, ‘Out! / A mankind witch! Hence with her, out o’ door’; ‘Will you not push her out?’; ‘Once more, take her hence,’ and finally, ‘On your allegiance, / Out of the chamber with her! / ... Away with her!’ (67–68, 74, 112, 121–22, 124). After this last, Paulina explicitly leaves of her own accord:

I pray you do not push me, I’ll be gone.  
Look to your babe, my lord; ‘tis yours. Jove send her  
A better guiding spirit. What needs these hands?  
You that are thus so tender o’er his follies  
Will never do him good, not one of you.  
So, so. Farewell, we are gone. (125–30)

Since Paulina has refused to take the baby, Leontes now demands that it be removed; but of course it cannot exit on its own, so he forces Antigonus to take it in another lengthy sequence which emphasizes that his commands for an exit are not immediately obeyed:

Thou, traitor, has set on thy wife to this.  
My child? Away with’t! Even thou, that hast  
A heart so tender o’er it, take it hence  
And see it instantly consumed with fire.  
Even thou, and none but thou. Take it up straight.  
Within this hour bring me word ‘tis done,  
And by good testimony, or I’ll seize thy life,  
With what thou else call’st thine....  
... Go, take it to the fire;  
For thou set’st on thy wife. (131–38, 141–42)

The command ‘Take her hence’ from Leontes will be heard only once again — when, hearing that Mamillius is dead, Hermione faints and must be carried off (3.2.148). Paulina takes charge of this exit, and by removing Hermione from Leontes’ and the audience’s view, is able to begin the process by which faith is renewed.14 By the end of 3.2, rather than insisting that Paulina be removed from his presence, Leontes asks her to ‘Prithee bring me / To the dead bodies of my queen and son’ and, as they exit together: ‘Come, and lead me / To these sorrows’ (233–34, 241–42). The

Again, there is no direction for the exit here, but everything suggests that this time Leontes is obeyed.
difference between this quiet request and his earlier angry demands, manifested in the action of leading rather than pushing, should create a fundamental and important visual and verbal impression on an audience, one which is developed in the events and mood to follow. But when Antigonus obeys Leontes’ command to abandon the baby, he is still acting under the old dispensation, as his ‘Exit, pursued by a bear’ confirms. His own cue, ‘I am gone for ever!’ is correct (3.3.57).

Once the action moves to the shepherds’ world, the exits are very different: voluntary, not unwilling or coerced – until, that is, Perdita and Florizel are confronted and threatened by Polixenes and forced into their own exile. In an echo of the end of 1.2 when he enabled Polixenes to escape from Leontes, Camillo now helps Perdita and Florizel to flee from Polixenes to Leontes – ‘The swifter speed the better’ (4.4.670). Back in Sicilia, the complete contrast with the irrational Leontes of the first two acts is apparent in his first exit in act 5 when, having discovered that Perdita and Florizel are not married, he leads them off in an unforced action which emphasizes welcome, not rejection:

I will to your father.
Your honor not o’erthrown by your desires,
I am friend to them and you. Upon which errand
I now go toward him. Therefore follow me,
And mark what way I make. Come, good my lord. (5.1.228–32)

The Clown’s invitation to Autolycus that closes 5.2 signals not only an exit but a movement towards the final scene: ‘Hark, the kings and the princes, our kindred, are going to see the Queen’s picture. Come, follow us; we’ll be thy good masters’ (171–73). After all have gathered at Paulina’s to see the statue, her control over the event – and over Leontes in particular – is heard as twice she explicitly offers them the opportunity to leave: ‘Either forbear, / Quit presently the chapel, or resolve you / For more amazement’ and ‘those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart.’ Leontes replies, ‘Proceed. / No foot shall stir’ (5.3.85–87, 96–98). As with the other plays considered here, the concluding speech is especially significant in that it signals the last exits, and again the relevance to the concerns of the play and how they have been manifested in the management of exits is striking. Paulina, who earlier refused to leave despite Leontes’ orders that she be pushed out, and who later was asked by Leontes to lead him to repentance, is now explicitly included and deferred to by him, the visual once more enacting the verbal. When Paulina attempts to remove herself from the final celebrations, Leontes not only refuses to leave without her, but puts her in control of their exit:

PAULINA Go together,
You precious winners all; your exultation
Partake to everyone. I, an old turtle,
Will wing me to some withered bough, and there
My mate, that’s never to be found again,
Lament till I am lost.

LEONTES  O, peace, Paulina!
Thou shouldst a husband take by my consent,
As I by thine a wife. ...

... Come, Camillo,
And take her by the hand, whose worth and honesty
Is richly noted, and here justified
By us, a pair of kings. Let’s from this place.

... Good Paulina,
Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand and answer to his part
Performed in this wide gap of time since first
We were dissevered. Hastily lead away.  (5.3.131-38, 144-47, 152-56)

Contrast this final departure of characters from the stage with the conclusions of the other three plays considered here and the distinctiveness and particular relevance of each ending is apparent – not just in a vague generic way but in details which echo the exits that have preceded the last one. In all four, however, the similar cumulative effect is to emphasize verbally and visually the concerns of the whole work. Thus, although character exits are likely to be taken for granted on the page, it is worth keeping in mind their effect on actual spectators, who repeatedly hear the dialogue, see the manoeuvring, then watch the characters depart. When these plays were first performed, with limited time for rehearsal and little incentive to alter a playtext deliberately, the exits were probably staged pretty much as written. If so, the characters’ movements off the stage would have helped to illustrate the struggles for dominance that underlie the action of each piece. But because exits can seem to be merely basic elements of a play’s structure, in modern productions they are particularly vulnerable to alteration or even elimination. With such changes, as I hope I have shown, something important can be lost.

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