Dumb Shows in Performance on the Early Modern Stage
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THE dumb show is a reminder that early modern plays are products and relics of a theatrical milieu very different from our own. Perhaps this is one reason why dumb shows have received very little critical attention. But as extended action without dialogue they are not only foreign to modern critical sensibilities; they were also anomalous in their original performance contexts. In the repertory system of the time, a company of players was simultaneously both performing plays in loose rotation and preparing others for future performance. In addition, they performed the same plays in different venues under different physical conditions. Most of any play consists of dialogue, which each player memorized from a “part” containing only his own speeches and a few words from the speech of another player as cues. Recent studies have argued that players relied primarily on these parts and that there was little or no group rehearsal. When the critical focus is on what the characters say, as it usually is, these premises raise few problems—but under such conditions, how did players in a dumb show prepare to perform it? Once they were out on the stage (not only in the first performance, but also in later iterations) how did they know what to do and when to do it?

Dumb shows typically presented events crucial to the plot, so it was important that their action be understood by playgoers. At the same time, the basic format of stage directions for dumb shows remained essentially unchanged between 1580 and 1642, so presumably it was functional—playwrights would surely not have continued using conventions that could not be successfully implemented in performance. Were there, then, methods of fostering success? Did a prompter direct the performance of silent actions? Could there have been a separate document of dumb show directions, used by bookkeeper and players? Might elements that recur in dumb show directions have compensated for the absence of the cues usually generated by dialogue? These and related matters are the focus of this study. But it is important to stress at the outset that because dumb shows are all action and no talk they raise difficult questions about early modern staging
practices. They force us to confront the disconcerting fact that time and change have rendered much about early modern playtexts and performance unknown and perhaps unknowable.

Dumb shows have rarely been given specific critical attention from any perspective, let alone performance. In the earliest of three significant studies, B. R. Pearn focuses on their origin and function. He defines a dumb show as "a part of a play which presents by means of action without speech an element of plot which would more naturally be accompanied by speech."¹ Pearn’s survey is based on "fifty-seven plays containing a total of over 120 dumb-shows" from between 1562 and 1626.² The most extensive study is the book-length analysis by Dieter Mehl of "the structural relationship between the dumb shows and the plays in which they occur."³ Mehl comments that "Pearn’s definition is certainly rather narrow and does not cover all existing examples." But although he observes that "One can usually apply the term dumb show to all cases where one or more characters advance and retire without having spoken," Mehl admits that there are "transitional forms" that "make a precise classification difficult."⁴ In an appendix, he lists seventy-three plays with about 150 dumb shows. A more recent study by Jeremy Lopez seems to follow Pearn’s definition and count.⁵ Lopez’s purpose is to "revalue the dumb show not simply by arguing that it is the source of complex theatrical effects, but also by arguing that the complex effects it achieves are closely related to the problems the convention presents for a criticism (or spectatorship) that privileges efficiency."⁶ Although their approaches are different, for Pearn, Mehl, and Lopez the absence of dialogue is what differentiates dumb shows from other dramatic action, while for me that same defining characteristic is what raises questions about how they were performed.

My definition of a dumb show is action without dialogue—pantomime—typically by at least two (and usually more) figures. A simple procession on and off the stage is not a dumb show, but one that pauses for onstage silent action is.⁷ I exclude silent fighting because the actions and choreography would have been conventional and formulaic. Masques in plays, which typically have dialogue, are also excluded. But not every dumb show is explicitly so described in the surviving texts (such labelling can be inconsistent within a single play), and I have included a number of instances that are dumb shows in all but name.

Since my interest is the practical business of getting plays on stage in the commercial, repertory system of an early modern London playing company, my focus is dumb shows in plays written between 1580 and 1642 for the public playhouses (both indoor and outdoor), where the number and frequency of performances put considerable demands on everyone involved. I have not considered plays written for the universities or Inns of Court or other private venues, where the absence of a commercial motive and the use of
amateur actors probably resulted in longer and more frequent rehearsal time. By my rough count there are almost a hundred extant plays written for the commercial playhouses with at least one event (and often more) conforming to my dumb show definition. A breakdown by decade demonstrates both the continued use and substantial number of dumb shows in plays of the period:

1580–89: 16 shows in 8 plays
1590–99: 34 shows in 19 plays
1600–09: 44 shows in 20 plays
1610–19: 49 shows in 22 plays
1620–29: 14 shows in 9 plays
1630–42: 29 shows in 20 plays

Dumb shows require stage directions because, unlike fights or simple processions, they consist of actions that are unique to a specific context in a particular play. And while the phrasing of these directions might seem to be descriptive, given that a dumb show is an extended segment of action without dialogue by at least two (and usually more) figures, descriptive language is necessary and inevitable. Close study of the directions for these episodes reveals that for the most part they are also prescriptive—written in the language of the theatre for implementation by players. Because dumb show directions are longer and lack dialogue they seem to be simply descriptive like a narrative; but it is a narrative of instructions, prescribing actions to be performed in a sequence without spoken cues.

In a study of the playhouse plots, Michela Calore notes that “Descriptive language characterized by complex grammar and syntax frequently indicates (as in playtexts) framing devices such as dumb shows” and that “The elaborate nature of these directions strongly contrasts with the otherwise succinct quality of indications for stage business characterizing the drama of that period.” For Calore, this “seems to disclose . . . a specialized code that differentiated, by means of careful linguistic choices, those aspects of stage business that would have required special effects and/or actions and gestures. This code could have been shared by playwrights, actors, and bookkeepers alike and would have made perfect sense in the process of putting on a play; hence the use of ‘fictional’ language even in the plots, which more than any other extant theatrical documents are concerned with the practicalities of preparing a production.” Calore’s “seems to,” “could have,” and “would have” at least acknowledge the speculative nature of this idea; but her argument is circular and there is no actual evidence of such a code. Furthermore, she seems not to have realized that the difference in language is more apparent than real; as noted, it is largely the absence of dialogue that makes dumb show stage directions seem distinctive.
Some shows would have required relatively little advance preparation, but others would have needed much more. Indeed, when difficulty of implementation is considered, dumb shows range widely from the simple to the complex. By “simple” I mean a sequence of entrances for one or more figures, often with properties, requiring a single action or a series of separate onstage actions for each figure, such as this show in The Changeling, into which I have inserted vertical lines to mark off each action:

Enter Gentlemen. | Vermandero meeting them with action of wonderment at the flight of Piracquo. | Enter Alsemero, with Jasperino, and Gallants, Vermandero point to him, the Gentlemen seeming to applaud the choyce. | Alsemero, Jasperino, and Gentlemen; | Beatrice the Bride following in great state, accompanied with Diaphanta, Isabella, and other Gentewomen; | Deflores after all, smiling at the accident; | Alonzo’s Ghost appears to Deflores in the midst of his smile, startles him, shewing him the hand whose finger he had cut off. | They passe over in great solemnity. (F2r)

A “complex” show requires several onstage actions by and interactions among figures once they have entered, such as in this show in The Queen of Corinth (again with dividing lines added):

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 seems to be angry at first, | Euphanes persuade her, lays their swords at her feet, | she kisses him, gives them their swords again, | 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. (6C1v)

Relatively simple shows are more common—doubtless partly because the fewer the actions, the easier they would have been for players to remember once on stage. But shows such as this one that involve multiple interrelated actions by several players recur through the period and necessarily raise provocative questions about how—and how successfully—they moved from page to stage.

Tiffany Stern argues that “partial rehearsals of group ‘moments’—songs, dances, sword-fights, and slapstick—were all that it was absolutely necessary to rehearse before a production.” Dumb shows are not mentioned; but none of the “moments” listed involves a group of players performing one-off scripted actions. And dumb shows are perhaps implied but are not specified when Stern states that “Jigs, songs, and, perhaps also, dances, swordfights,
slapstick, and other complicated action—everything, in other words, that cannot be perfected from the part alone—seem to have been the emphasis of group rehearsal.”13 Again, dumb shows are “complicated” in ways that the other business is not. Furthermore, this claim is made in a context that downplays the importance of group rehearsal. Simon Palfrey and Stern similarly argue that “The part was more important to the production than the group interaction. It was learned in full before any group rehearsal; consequently, collective rehearsals were far less important, and indeed occasionally dispensed with altogether.”14 Moreover, “more than one rehearsal was rarely desirable: the event was unpaid, and actors who were anyway concentrating on solo performance simply did not have the same concern to practise together.”15 Once more there is the acknowledgement that “particular group elements of the play—jigs, songs, dances, sword fights, perhaps crowd or climactic scenes—will have benefited from ensemble rehearsal”;16 but here too there is no mention, much less discussion, of dumb shows. It seems to me that in ignoring or avoiding any consideration of how they were treated in the playhouse, these statements—and the theories on which they rest—are inadequate. In not mentioning dumb shows they elide or efface a number of interrelated questions about early modern performance practices. What follows is an attempt to call attention to some of these questions (if not answer them) by examining the various playhouse texts—players’ parts, backstage plots, manuscript playbooks, and printed plays—with dumb shows in mind.

What we know about the part that each player used to learn his role is based primarily on the part of Orlando, which includes notations by Edward Alleyn, whose role it was in Orlando Furioso.17 Another part, of Poore, is for a role in a university play but very similar to the other in format and detail.18 The Orlando part includes a few stage directions in Alleyn’s hand, and the Poore part includes a number of directions in the same scribal hand as the rest of the text. In both cases, however, these directions are for brief actions performed during dialogue; they also seem to have been included arbitrarily, and certainly do not signal all the actions required of the players whose parts they are. As Palfrey and Stern note, “Alleyn ... is given no hint about ‘blocking’ more generally on the stage—where or at whom he is to look, how far forward he is to walk, and so on. Such very basic matters are simply not indicated.”19 More particularly, neither part gives any indication of extended silent action, so neither tells us anything about how a player incorporated dumb shows into his preparation process. According to Palfrey and Stern, a part was prepared by a scribe extrapolating a player’s dialogue and cues from the full playtext, then a player took the part away to memorize it. But what was done with the segments of the playtext that involved group action? Was this dense paragraph of text included in the players’ parts? On the one hand,
this would have been like being given all the dialogue rather than just a single role with cues; but the nature of dumb shows is that one player’s actions and blocking cannot be separated from the others’. In any case, of the few surviving parts, none is from a play with a dumb show, so it is impossible to know whether parts ever included such directions.

It might seem more likely that the playhouse plots would have been used to manage group action not signaled by dialogue. But only three of the plots include dumb shows and, not surprisingly, studies of the makeup and function of these documents do not consider how the shows were staged. In his detailed analysis of the quarto and plot of *The Battle of Alcazar*, David Bradley concludes that the “primary concern” of the plot “is with the management of the acting cast: the fitting of the character roles called for by the text to the cast of available actors. The Plotter appears to have worked with his cast about him, carefully filling the text’s demands for entering actors, keeping check of the doubling of roles as the supply runs low, and occasionally correcting himself when it is found that an actor is unavailable for a part for which he at first seemed free.”

21 By contrast, Bernard Beckerman states that “What a Plot supplied was the division of the play according to scenes, the sequence of entrances for the actors, and, in most copies, the assignment of roles. It might also give sound cues and list properties. More a guide to memory than a thoroughly detailed set of instructions, Plots probably were standard items in the working tools of the principal London companies.”

22 And according to Palfrey and Stern, plots “inform the individually prepared player . . . what is happening more generally to him and to others in the scene, mapping his progress through the play in a series of entrances and properties; simply put, they make collective performance from separate parts easier.”

The plots themselves provide no evidence that either those who prepared them or the bookkeepers whose performance annotations are present in some manuscript and printed playtexts paid special (or any) attention to dumb shows. Only the plots for *The Battle of Alcazar* and *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins* use the term “dumb show.” 24 *The Battle of Alcazar* plot has four dumb show directions, each concerned with who enters, where, when, and with what props—very much like the directions for a dumb show in a playtext, but with the addition of players’ names. This is the second show (with damaged or missing letters silently supplied):

2 dumb shew

*Enter aboue Nemesis, Tho : Drom to them 3 , ghosts w. kendall Dab. & Harry : to them lying behind the Curtaines 3 . Furies : Parsons : George & Ro : Tailor one wth a whipp : a nother wth a blody torch : & the 3d wth a Chopping knife: exeunt* 25

A note in the left margin—“sound / sennet / a whipp / brand & / Chopping knife”—suggests that this plot was prepared by the person responsible both
for getting the players on stage in the right order with the necessary props, and for cueing or providing sound at the start. Although the actions to be performed by the players once on stage are perhaps implied, the plot includes no details about them.

The two dumb shows in the *Seven Deadly Sins* plot are more complex, and provide descriptions of what the players are to do once on stage; but these directions too resemble those for a dumb show in the text of a play—again with the addition of players names:

_A senitt. Dumb show._

Enter King Gorboduk with 2 Counsailers. R Burbag m't Brian. Th Goodale. The Queene wth ferrex and Porrex and som attendants follow. saunder w fly Harry J Duke. Kitt. Ro Pallant. J Holland After Gordbeduk hath Consulted w'h his Lords he brings his 2 soms to to severall seates. They enuing on on other ferrex offers to take Porrex his Corowne. he draws his weapon The King Queen and Lords step between them They Thrust Them away and menasing ech other exit. The Queene and Lords Depart Heuillie.²⁶

The details about onstage actions raise the possibility that this plot could also have been intended for use during a performance by players to remind themselves (and/or by a bookkeeper to remind players), which raises questions about how this might have been done. I shall address these questions below.

Some of the extant manuscript playbooks also have theatrical provenance, as evidenced by notations added by the man referred to by modern scholars as the bookkeeper, bookholder, or prompter.²⁷ And since this figure was responsible for getting a play on stage, it seems reasonable to expect that these documents would show the kinds of things he was interested in. Again, though, the evidence is sparse because only four manuscripts with bookkeeper annotations include dumb shows, all fairly basic: *Edmond Ironside, The Two Noble Ladies, The Second Maiden’s Tragedy,* and *The Launching of the Mary.* And as with the plots, these texts provide no evidence that the bookkeeper paid attention to what happened once the performers in a dumb show were out on stage. The manuscript of *Edmond Ironside* includes bookkeeper annotations, but not in relation to these directions for a battle that included business with a “dead man’s head”:

_Alarum Enter Canutus at one dore and Edmu< > at the other they fight Canutus gives backe and flies Enter the soouldiers of Edmond persuing Canutus and his lords Edricus takes a dead m< >head vppon his swords poynt holdinge yt vppe< > Edmonds soouldiers they flie Enter Edmond a< > Cheeringe them vp and makes Canutus flie:/

(II. 986–92)

The dumb show in *The Two Noble Ladies* manuscript is more complex, but only the music receives attention from the bookkeeper, who added the signal
for cornet music at the start and deleted the scribe’s “Hoboes” (l. 1542). Evidently this was the only aspect of the show in which he was interested as he prepared the text for performance, perhaps because the music was produced in the tiring house rather than on the stage.

Lesson Corn:
A Dumb Shew. Enter at one Dore the Souldan with souldiers, from the other a Herald meets him, delivers him a paper. The Souldan sends in a souldier, who brings Lysander. Hee kneels, the Souldan embrases him, and shews him the paper, hee kisses it, beckons to the Herald, houlds out the paper with his left hand and lays his right hand on his sword. With courtesy they part. The Souldan and Herald goe of severally. Lysander stays.

(ll. 1541, 1543–49)

According to Paul Werstine, the playtexts with playhouse annotations “suggest that during the course of performance the prompter’s most time-consuming task was to follow intently the delivery by the actors of the play’s dialogue so as to be able to prompt them if they dried or forgot their lines” and that “The prompters’ unremitting attention to plays’ dialogue may . . . account for tolerance of apparently deficient SDD in the playhouse texts.” But Werstine also states that “In running a performance, the bookkeeper’s responsibility, besides prompting actors with dialogue, was the timing of events like entrances, or the playing of music, or the making of noise, in relation to the delivery of the dialogue onstage. Only he could discharge this responsibility because he alone among the members of the acting company had in hand a complete text of the play, the actors having only rolls of paper containing the speeches for the particular parts they were playing and the cues for those speeches.” Similarly, William B. Long points out that “The manuscript plays from the theater show that this person had various duties dealing with play preparation other than aiding a player who was out of his part.” While Stern argues that “the prompter [directed] basic blocking during the play’s enactment. And this means, from the actors’ point of view, that items of a play that might otherwise have had to be learnt in collective rehearsal, did not actually have to be known in advance of production; much of what was necessary for performance would be prompted within performance itself.” More explicitly, Palfrey and Stern assert that “the prompter offered ways in which separately prepared actors could be successfully brought together on the stage: certain ensemble elements of the drama—the kind of things that might not be gathered from a part in advance—could be controlled or ‘conducted’ from backstage by the prompter. Use of prompter [sic] together with backstage ‘plot’ were two ways to bring the separate constituents together to make a full play. There simply was no need for over-
much ensemble preparation before performance.” 32 Stern also states that “In terms of readying a performance, group rehearsal was only actually necessary for parts of plays that could not be learnt alone—songs, sword fights, quick changes etc.—and was therefore the most dispensable part of play preparation, especially as blocking, music, even, perhaps, some gestures, seem to have been conducted during performance by the prompter and his men.” 33 By contrast, Andrew Gurr says that “On the stage the players were left largely to their own devices. Their fellows if they were to hand might help to prompt them, but backstage the work all went into setting up the next player’s entrance.” 34 And Paul Menzer similarly argues that “the business of the stage” was “the province of players not prompters.” 35 That it is possible to hold these opposing views indicates how inconclusive the evidence actually is. Significantly, though, none of these scholars mentions dumb shows, which are typically more than “some gestures.” And surely this kind of “business” required special attention from someone, both before and during performance.

According to Stern, there was “a prompter whose main duty in performance was to ‘prompt’ the actors, for which reason he was constantly occupied, during a performance, with the book he held in his hand.” 36 She is referring to “a complete copy of the play”—or the manuscript “book”—but the dumb shows in the three manuscript playbooks that include them are (like dumb show descriptions in playtexts) dense paragraphs describing entrances and onstage actions by several or more players. Given the numerous tasks that seem to have been the bookkeeper’s responsibility, how did he prompt from such a text? Was there a separate document with an action-by-action breakdown of dumb shows? If so, no trace of anything of the kind remains. More generally, one wonders how a single man could have managed to cue player entrances and sounds from off stage and to prompt onstage actions effectively. When (not if) players in a dumb show forgot what to do once they were on stage, did all the action stop until the prompter realized and told them what to do?

The directions for dumb shows in printed texts are much more plentiful than those in the plots and bookkeeper-annotated manuscripts, but they give no more indication of how the staging was organized and managed. Regardless of provenance or date, however, dumb show directions are similarly phrased and often include similar details, such as the use of different stage doors, signals for the timing of onstage actions, the use of specific properties and costumes, a focus on a key figure, the use of music or sounds, and descriptions of the action provided by a Chorus or Prologue figure. While these characteristics occur too inconsistently to be evidence of common practices, I suggest that they could have helped to manage the performance of silent action in the absence of dialogue cues and with little or no rehearsal.
The best way of illustrating this idea is by quoting specific examples, but by their very nature dumb show directions are usually long, detailed, and, essentially, foreign to modern readers. I have therefore used bold type to draw attention to which of the several elements present is the one under discussion. And in each case I have listed other examples for further reference.38

Entrances receive special attention in dumb show directions; indeed virtually all such directions begin with “enter.” Entrances can of course be controlled from the tiring house; indeed, since the entrances of dumb show figures are never cued by dialogue, they must be managed by the bookkeeper. By their nature, dumb shows involve more than one and usually several players, and many directions specify the use of different doors for their entrances. Whether or not by design, this “at one door . . . at the other door” formula would have helped a bookkeeper organize a number of players in costume and with properties in the constrained space of the tiring house. In addition, entrances from different doors often signify opposing sides in the plot, which could have reminded the players of the dramatic context and their function in it as they entered. This example of a simple show from A Chaste Maid in Cheapside is typical of many entrances of separate processions that meet on stage for some brief action:

Recorders dolefully playing: Enter at one Dore the Coffin of the Gentleman, solemnly deck’; his Sword upon it, attended by many in Blacke, his Brother being the chief Mourner: At the other Doore, the Coffin of the Virgin, with a Garland of Flowers, with Epitaphes pin’d on’t attended by Maidens and Women: Then set them downe one right over-against the other, while all the Company seeme to weep and mourn, there is a sad song in the Musick-Room. (K2r–v)

But this direction from a complex show in The Prophetess brings on figures through separate doors, then requires a sequence of related actions by at least eleven players:

Loud Musick.
Dumb Shew.

Enter (at one door) Delphia, Ambassadors, they whisper together; they take an oath upon her hand; She circles them (kneeling) with her Magick rod; They rise and draw their Swords. Enter (at the other door) Dioclesian, Charinus, Maximinian, Niger, Aurelia, Cassana, Guard; Charinus and Niger persuading Aurelia; She offers to embrace Maximinian; Diocles draws his sword, keeps off Maximinian, turns to Aurelia, kneels to her, lates his sword at her feet, she scornfully turns away: Delphia gives a signe; the Ambassadors and Souldiers rush upon them, seise on Aurelia, Cassana, Charinus, and Maximinian; Dioclesian and others offer to rescue them; Delphia raises a Mist: Exeunt Ambassadors and prisoners, and the rest discontented. (4E3v)39
With dumb shows the onstage action was what mattered, and because they often included a series of actions, timing was crucial. In the Chaste Maid show quoted above, the timing of the entrances would have been managed from the tiring house, presumably by a bookkeeper—but even this example includes information for the players once onstage: “then” to indicate that the coffins should be set down after both groups have entered, and “while” to signal simultaneous action. In The Prophetess it is only the order in which events are described that indicates the timing. Both kinds of dumb show direction are found through the period, and the difference seems to be a reflection of the playwrights’ practice. This suggests that the use of specific “timing words” in dumb show directions had little to do with performance and is merely a narrative device; nevertheless, these terms do regularly occur and the additional clarity they provide could have been a help to both players and bookkeepers. In this simple show from Look About You, for example, a sequence of entrances, each initiating a new action, is clearly signalled:

Enter a Sinet, first two Herraldes, after them Leyster with a Scepter, Lancaster with a Crowne Imperiall on a cushion: After them Henry the elder bareheaded, bearing a sward and a Globe: after him young Henry Crowned: Elinor the mother Queene Crowned: young Queene Crowned. Henry the elder places his Sonne, the two Queenes on eyther hand, himselfe at his feete, Leyster and Lancaster below him. (K3r)

Over thirty years later, the same language is still being used in A Maidenhead Well Lost:

A Dumbe show. Enter the Duke of Milleine, a Midwife with a young Childe, and after them Stroza: the Duke shewes the Childe to Stroza, hee takes it: then the Duke sweares them both to secrecy vpon his Sword, and exit with the Midwife: then Stroza goes to hide it, and Parma dogs him: when hee hath laide the Childe in a Corner, he departs in haste, and Parma takes vp the Childe and speakes. (D4v)

In both these examples, and in dumb shows generally, the sequence of events is partly what creates the meaning; indeed, one action is often caused by or dependent on a previous one, so even more than with dialogue, timing mattered. In addition, the entrance of figures in a dumb show would have functioned as a kind of cue for those already on stage, because a particular figure typically signals a new action. This direction from Match Me in London is certainly clear in conveying sequence, but how did the players coordinate this series of actions once they were on stage? The dividing lines I have inserted between the separate actions emphasize the show’s complexity: each player had a number of actions to remember, and those actions were to be performed in a particular order, sometimes with other players.
Hoboyes: Enter two Fryers setting out an Altar, | Enter Iago, Alphonso, Gazetto, Maleveno, two Churchmen, Tormiella next and the King, Ladies attending, | Cordolente steales in, and stands in some by place, | the King stayes or sits in a chayre, | Tormiella is brought to him, as she is comming the King meets her; | as the ring is putting on, Cordolente steps in rudely, breaks them off, | Tormiella flyes to his bosome, | the King offers to stab him, is held; | she kneelles, sue, weepes, | Cordolente is thrust out, | Gazetto laughs at all, | they are preparing to it againe, | it Thunders and Lightens: all affrightedly—Exeunt. (K4v)\textsuperscript{42}

By their nature, actions without dialogue are almost inevitably emblematic: it is the visual that conveys the meaning. Much of this meaning is created by costumes and properties. Each player in a dumb show would have entered wearing a certain costume and often carrying a particular property, which would have served as cues or mnemonics for the player wearing and carrying them. Each direction already quoted (and to follow) includes plentiful—indeed necessary—use of both features; this short pantomime from The Silver Age provides a good additional example:

Enter Amphitrio with two Captaines and Socia with drum and colours: hee brings in the head of a crowned King, sweares the Lords to obeyance of Thebes. They present him with a standing bowle, which hee lockes in a Casket, and sending his man with a letter before to his wife, with news of his victory. He with his followers, and Blepharo the maister of the ship, marcheth after. (C2v)\textsuperscript{43}

Each of the nine players would have been appropriately costumed to signify his particular role—not just the named figures but also the two captains, the drummer, the standard-bearer, the lords, and the master of the ship. The crowned head, standing bowl, casket, and letter not only tell the story, they also effectively tell the Amphitrio player what to do. Furthermore, because the provision of costumes and properties was done in the tiring house, this aspect of a performance was something over which a bookkeeper would have had direct control before the players went on stage.

The Silver Age dumb show also illustrates another element that would have helped manage onstage action—the centrality of one figure. Amphitrio is the focus of the others’ actions, and the manager of everyone’s exits. That is, one player was put in a position to direct the show from within it. As the previous example from Match Me in London makes clear, however, other shows involve several primary figures, so the responsibility for stage management is dispersed. In Herod and Antipater, two figures (in bold) dominate the action:

Enter at one Doore, Augustus triumphant with his Romans; at another Antipater: he kneelles and giuses Augustus Letters; which lookt on, Augustus raises him, sets
him in his Chayre, and Crownes him, sweares him on his Sword, and deliueres him
Letters: then, Enter Niraleus, he giues Antipater Letters; hee shewes them to
Augustus; then, imbracing, they take leaue and depart severally. (14v)\textsuperscript{44}

In all three examples minor figures are also required to perform certain
actions, presumably guided by the player(s) of the main roles. For such
shows, informal rehearsal by a few players might have been sufficient. But
again, other shows are much more complex than these and involve a number
of players performing multiple actions that would have required considerable
advance coordination. In any dumb show, after all, when a player entered he
had to know where to go and what to do; he could not (and presumably did
not) simply enter and stand at the door, looking confused.

Calls for sound—including music, a sennet, cornets, trumpets, hobyys,
recorders, drums, an alarum, and thunder—are often found especially at the
start, but also during and at the end of a dumb show. In addition, the evidence
in early modern playtexts with theatrical provenance suggests that sound cues
were often not added until the play was being prepared for performance.
Aural accompaniment for dumb shows was therefore probably even more
common than the extant playtexts indicate.\textsuperscript{45} In a study of dumb shows in
Middleton’s plays, Heidi Brayman Hackel notes how one such direction
“places Musicke first,” and she concludes that “its placement in the margin
to the left of a brace enclosing the rest of the direction neatly represents the
relationship of instrumental music to dumb action. Framing and containing
the dumb action, Musicke is separate from and indeed marginal to the
action.”\textsuperscript{46} As previously noted, however, the manuscript playbooks show that
the placing of a call for music or other sound in the margin is a sign of inter-
vention by a bookkeeper, signalling to himself that music is required at a
certain point.\textsuperscript{47} And since sounds were typically managed from the tiring
house, they could have given bookkeepers a means of cueing action during a
show, just as they were frequently a way of initiating one. It is impossible to
know how (or how often) music and sounds were part of a show’s choreogra-
phy or helped to manage the timing of events, but that they could be used in
this way seems clear. At the very least, sounds would have helped to counter
the absence of dialogue while creating their own special effects. And perhaps
the noise served a more practical purpose: if, as seems likely—even neces-
sary—the players were in the habit of reminding each other what to do once
onstage in a dumb show, music would have been an effective way to mask
their voices. Among the examples already quoted, those from the two plots,
\textit{Battle of Alcazar} and \textit{2 Seven Deadly Sins}; the two playhouse manuscripts,
\textit{Edmond Ironside} and \textit{Two Noble Ladies}; and a number of the other plays,
\textit{Chaste Maid, Propheteess, Look About You, Maidenhead Well Lost} and \textit{Match
Me in London} all include signals for sounds, always before and sometimes
also during and at the end of dumb show directions. In the show in \textit{Cymbeline}, music is called for at each entrance of figures:
Solemn Musicke. Enter (as in an Apparition) Sicillian Leonatus, Father to Posthumus, an old man, attyre like a warriour, leading in his hand an ancient Matron (his wife, & Mother to Posthumus) with Musicke before them. Then, after other Musicke, follows the two young Leonati (Brothers to Posthumus) with wounds as they died in the warrs. They circle Posthumus round as he lies sleeping. (3b3r)

Note also how “then” indicates a relationship between the music and action. Similarly, in The Broken Heart the recorders “cease” during part of the show, then start again:

Two lights of Virgin wax, during which musicke of Recorders, enter foure bearing Ithocles on a hearse, or in a chaire, in a rich robe, and a Crowne on his head; place him on one side of the Altar, after him enter Calantha in a white robe, and crown’d Euphranoea; Philema, Christalla in white, Nearchus, Armestes, Crotolon, Prophitus, Amelius, Bassanes, Lemophil, and Groncas. Calantha goes and kneelles before the Altar, the rest stand off, the women kneeling behind; cease Recorders during her devotions. Soft musicke. Calantha and the rest rise doing obeysance to the Altar. (K2v)

A Chorus, Prologue, or Presenter figure is frequently introduced before or after the stage directions for a dumb show. But while it might seem that he would have been a useful means of helping to manage the action, he is not a regular feature, and when he does appear neither the point at which he speaks nor the kind of information he provides is consistent from play to play. Referring to the show that begins The Bloody Banquet, Julia Gasper and Gary Taylor assert that “Here as in other plays, the long stage direction describing a dumbshow is, in the printed or manuscript text, placed before the speech which explains the mimed action. This is a convention of textual display, which almost certainly does not reflect performance; performance can and regularly does present simultaneously material which has to be presented sequentially in the very different medium of a written text. The complex action of this opening dumbshow would be unintelligible to any audience without the Choric commentary which seems meant to accompany and explain it.” While Gasper and Taylor are probably right about the shows in Bloody Banquet, however, their generalization is repeatedly contradicted by evidence in many plays. In particular, it is sometimes clear that the Chorus speaks before a dumb show; in other cases it is equally apparent that he speaks afterwards; in relatively few plays does it seem likely that he speaks during the show, and it is often impossible to be sure when he speaks. Furthermore, although sometimes the Chorus provides a description of the action, in other instances he merely justifies the forthcoming use of pantomime to summarize what would take too long to perform with dialogue, and in others he moves the plot forward by picking up where the show left off.
In the quarto of *The Battle of Alcazar* two stage directions for dumb shows end with “And then the Presenter saith” followed by his speech (A2v); but later in the same play the Presenter enters “before the last dumb show, and speakeeth” and his speech is interspersed with directions for the show (E4v–F1r). In *Locrine* the chorus figure Atey enters at the start of the four dumb shows but the directions for two of them end with “Ate remaining, saying” (C2r, G1v), which introduces a speech about the show from Atey. In *Pericles* Gower introduces the first dumb show saying, “But tidings to the contrarie, / Are brought your eyes, what need speake I” (C1r), which suggests he does not speak during the ensuing silent action. At the end of his long speech before the second show Gower says “What’s dumbe in shew, I’le plaine with speach” (E1r), but this anticipates his speech after the show, in which he provides much more detail than was shown. And Gower introduces the third show with “Like moats and shadowes, see them / Moue a while, / Your eares vnto your eyes Ile reconcile” (G2v) and again speaks when the mime is finished, moving the action forward. Similarly, in the *Two Noble Ladies* show quoted above, the “Lysander stays” (l. 1549) at the end of the direction specifies that he remains after the show to explain what playgoers have just seen.50

In *Captain Thomas Stukeley* a Chorus summarizes the action so far, briefly introduces a complex dumb show, then tells playgoers, “Regard this shew and plainly see the thing,” making it clear that he speaks before this show begins then allows the action to unfold:

*Enter at one doore Phillip King of spaine, Alua and soouldiers they take their stand: / then Enter another way, sebastian Don Antonio, Avero with drumes and enсинes they likewise take their stande. / After some pause Antonio is sent forth to Phillip, who with obeysance done approching away againe very disdainfully: / and as the spanish soouldiers are about to follow Antonio, Phillip with his drawn sword stops them and so departs. / Whereat sebastian makes showe of great displeasure, but whispering with his lords each incoraging other as they are about to depart. / Enter stukly and his Italian band: who keping aloof, / sebastian sends Antonio to him, / with whom stukley drawes neere towarde the king, and having awhile confered, at last retirs to his soouldiers, to whom he makes show of perswading them to ioyn with the portugeese: / at first they seeme to mislike but last they yeede / and so both armie meeting imbrace / when with a sudden Thunder-clap the sky is one fire and the blazing star appears / which they prognosticating to be fortunat departed very joyfull. (K1r)*

And when this show is over, the Chorus provides a detailed description that begins “as you haue beheld,” confirming that his speech follows the action. This example is longer than many and relatively complex, involving at least fourteen players who enter, exit, and move about the stage, behaving in par-
ticular ways and miming specific emotions. A playwright who would provide such a show must surely have had reason to expect (or at least to hope) that what the Chorus said about the show immediately after it would bear some resemblance to what playgoers had just seen.

The pivotal event in A Christian Turn’d Turke is presented in “The dumbe shew, with Chorus of Ward turning Turke” (F2v). This combination of pantomime and report begins with an introductory speech from the Chorus who contrasts the “white” deeds of the play so far with the “black” actions of Ward, about to be shown: “And with a blushlesse front he dares to doe, / What we are dumbe to thinke, much more to shew” (F2v).

Enter two bearing halfe-moones, one with a Mahomets head following. After them the Muffy, or chiefe Priest: two meane Priests bearing his traine. | The Muffy seated, a confused noyse of musiecke, with a shoft. | Enter two Turkes, one bearing a Turban with a halfe-moone in it, the other a robe, a sword: a third with a Globe in one hand, an Arrow in the other: two Knights follow. After them Ward on an Asse, in his Christian habite, bare-headed. | The two Knights, with low reverence, ascend, whisper the Muffy in the eare, draw their swords, and pull him off the Asse. | He layd on his belly, the Tables (by two inferior Priests) offered him, he lifts his hand vp, subscribes, | is brought to his seate by the Muffy, who puts on his Turban and Robe, girds his sword, then sweares him on the Mahomets head, vngirts his sword, offers him a cuppe of wine by the hands of a Christian: | hee spurnes at him, and throwes away the Cuppe, is mounted on the Asse, who is richly clad, and with a shoft. Exeunt. (F2v)

A second speech from the Chorus is printed immediately after this show in the quarto, but it reports events in the present tense, which might indicate that it was spoken as the show was performed. If so, the first twelve lines of the speech would have given playgoers a fairly accurate, if condensed, description of the action as it occurred:

The accursed Priests of Mahomet being set,
Two Knights present the wretch, who finds no let
To his perdition: to whom nor shame, nor feare
Gieue any curse. Dismounted from that steed
Did best befit the rider: they then read
The Lawes of their dam’d Prophet: he subscribes,
Inroles his name into their Pagan Tribes.
Now weares the habit of a free-borne Turke,
His sword excepted, which least they should worke
Just villany to their seducers, is deny’d
Unto all Runnagates, vnsesse imployd
In warres ’gainst Christians. Last, oh be he last
Forsweares his name! with what we blush to tell,
But ’tis no wonder, blackes the way to hell,
Who though he seeme yet happy, his successe
Shewes he exhangel’d with it, and wretchesnesse.

(F2v–F3r)52

If this speech were spoken as the stage direction was being performed it could also have told the players what to do if they forgot. But in the context of the play, the focus of this event is conveyed in the last five lines of the Chorus’s speech, which moralizes on Ward’s conversion. Perhaps, therefore, the point would have been made more effectively by having the silent show first, then the message afterwards. Furthermore, the second of the play’s two dumb shows—Dansiker’s contrasting “poenitence”—is prefaced by a speech from the Chorus that explicitly says that the show will be silent: “what befell / This shew presents, which words deny to tell” (H1v). That is, the speech printed after the show in the quarto, although in the present tense, also came after it in performance. Assuming a common practice was used at least within a single play, it therefore seems more likely that the Chorus’s speech would have followed the first show too.

Quoting long dumb shows such as the two above might seem excessive, but doing so also helps to emphasize my point that some shows were long episodes that involved many players who were required to perform multiple actions and react to the actions of others, all in a particular sequence. These facts bring me back to a central question: if the paragraphs of text that I have quoted were what the players and bookkeeper had to work with before and during a performance, how did they do it? More particularly, how accurately did the performance of such dumb shows reflect what the Chorus described (whenever he spoke)? Could his words compensate or substitute for confused actions by the players? One of the longest and most complex dumb show texts occurs at the beginning of The Devil’s Charter. It is introduced by the chorus-figure, Francis Guicchiardine: “And first by what vngodly meanes and Art, / Hee [Pope Alexander] did attaine the Triple-Diadem, / This vision offer’d to your eyes declares” (A2r); then,

Enter, At one doore betwixt two other Cardinals, Roderigo in his purple habit close in conference with them, one of which hee guideth to a Tent, where a Table is furnish’d with divers bagges of money, which that Cardinall beareth away: and to another Tent the other Cardinall, where he delivereth him a great quantity of rich Plate, imbraces, with joyning of hands. Exeunt Cardinals. Manet Roderigo. To whome from an other place a Moncke with a magical booke and rod, in private whispering with Roderick, whome the Monke draweth to a chaire on midst of the Stage which hee circlethe, and before it an other Circle, into which (after semblance of reading with exorcismes) appeare exhalations of lightning and sulphorous smoke in midst whereof a diuell in most vgy shape: from which Roderigo turneth his face, hee beeing conjured downe after more thunber and fire, ascendes another diuell like a Sargeant with a mace under his girdle: Roderigo disliketh. Hee discen-
deth: after more thunder and fearefull fire, ascend another diuill in robes pontiffical with a triple Crowne on his head, and Crosse keyes in his hand: a diuill him ensuing in blakke robes like a pronatory, a cornerd Cappe on his head, a box of Lancets at his girdle, a little piece of fine parchement in his hand, who being brought vnto Alexander, hee willingly receiueth him: to whome hee delivereth the wryting, which seeming to reade, present[y] the Pronotary strippeth vp Alexanders sleeue and letteth his arm brood in a saucer, and having taken a piece from the Pronotary, subscribeth to the parchement; delivereth it: the remainder of the blood, the other diuill seemeth to suppe vp: and from him disrobad is put the rich Cap the Tunicle, and the triple Crowne set vpon Alexanders head, the Crosse-keyes deliuered into his hands; and withall a magickal booke: this done with thunder and lightning the diuills discend: Alexander advanceth himselfe, and departeth. (A2r–v)

Guicciardine does not speak during the show, but when it is over he briefly summarizes the essentials of what the stage direction describes, so perhaps it mattered less than we might think if the players’ performance missed some elements and improvised others.

Thus first with golden bribes he did corrupt
The purple concluue: then by diuelsea art
Sathan transfigur’d like a Pronotarie
To him makes offer of the triple Crowne
For certaine yeares agreed betwixt them two. (A2v)

But surely if the players were to perform this and other long dumb shows with any smoothness, let alone accuracy, they would have had to organize and rehearse before the first performance. Even, indeed, when much of the action is performed or controlled by a few main players (as in examples discussed earlier), a certain amount of planning and coordination would have been not just useful but necessary to avoid confusion at best and chaos at worst. In responding to Palfrey and Stern’s statements about minimal or no rehearsal being common practice, Evelyn Tribble observes that “to argue that full group rehearsal of the ‘dress’ or ‘technical’ variety was not a feature of early modern theatrical practices does not thereby rule out the possibility that actors worked together in smaller, more ad hoc groups.”53 This is true; but the lengthy shows just quoted are not merely a few rare instances that require a large group of players—both members of the playing company and those hired for a particular play. In practical terms, therefore, when and where did players rehearse dumb shows, especially those with numerous players? Did they do their own blocking, or did they work with the bookkeeper/prompter? Did the principal figures in a show organize it, then bring all the participants together for a rehearsal? If only the bookkeeper had the full playbook, what
did the players use? Did they have a copy of just the dumb show(s)? Would one run-through have been sufficient? Would further rehearsals have been done when the play was remounted sometime later?

Different kinds of questions are introduced by those dumb shows for which no stage directions are provided. There are not many—they occur in about a dozen plays, some with more than one show—but that they exist at all is significant, because it raises the question of how the players knew what to do in the absence of directions and therefore invites speculation that there might have been separate documents that provided those directions. In *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* Mercury acts as a kind of chorus figure when he says “Let them appeere to vs in silent showe, / to manifest a truth that we must knowe” (B1r), initiating a sequence of five pantomimes. The stage direction for the first is merely “Enter the show of Troylus and Cressida,” and Mercury says “Beholde how Troylus and Cresseda / Cryes out on Loue that framed their decay” (B1r). No further information is provided, and each of the other four shows—of Alexander, Dido, Pompey and Caesar, and Hero and Leander—is similarly summed up by a title and two generalizing lines from Mercury. Of course all these figures have famous stories attached to their names, so the players could have improvised some representative action. But even then some advance planning and rehearsal would have been necessary.54 *The Spanish Tragedy* offers a different version of the problem when the stage direction “Enter a dumme shew” is followed by Andrea’s “Awake Reuenge, reuеale this mистerie” (I2v), and only then does Revenge explain. In doing so he provides a five-line description of the show; was it also intended to serve as a stage direction? If so, again the players would have required some time to prepare. The text of Revenge’s descriptive speech would have been in his part, not theirs, so presumably it was provided to them in some other form, otherwise how could they have rehearsed it? The possibility that separate texts with dumb show descriptions existed might be given some support by *Endymion*, of which there are two quartos, the first (1588) without a stage direction for the dumb show of Endymion’s act 2 dream vision, the second (1632) with a direction. The first quarto does, however, include Endymion’s detailed act 5 description of his dream, so possibly the second quarto stage direction inserted into act 2 was extrapolated from his speech at some point between 1588 and 1632. Or perhaps the directions for the show existed when the play was first performed in 1588 but were not included in the printed text until the second quarto.55 In *The Revenger’s Tragedy* only the simple direction “In a dum shew, the possessing of the young Duke. with all his Nobles” (I2v) signals what must have been a fairly elaborate pantomime of Lussurioso’s accession to power, involving a number of players and therefore some planning and rehearsal. Again questions arise: was a text of directions prepared for the players’ use? If there was no such text, how did the bookkeeper manage even the entrances, which must have
been formal and have reflected each figure’s position at court? Similar questions can be asked about Macbeth, which includes “A shew of eight Kings, and Banquo last, with a glasse in his hand” (mm6v), because the only description of it comes from Macbeth as the procession passes. The players and/or bookkeeper would, presumably, have had to work up the show from what he says.56

The larger question, raised by the many dumb show directions that do exist, is what actually got performed. As we have seen, there are some elements that recur, but not regularly enough to have been consistent staging practices on which the players could rely. All things considered, it seems likely that what playgoers saw was not exactly what we read in a playtext; but how great were the differences? Playwrights’ continued use of dumb shows suggests that despite seemingly long odds what playgoers saw was probably more reductive than chaotic. There are two plays with two versions of dumb shows, one shorter and more basic than the other, so although it is impossible to know if the shorter versions reflect performance, they warrant consideration. The first is Hamlet, in which the Q2 directions for the dumb show are considerably longer than the directions for the show in Q1.57 These are the directions in the 1604 version:58

*The Trumpets sounds. Dumbe show followes.*

*Enter a King and a Queene, the Queene embracing him, and he her, he takes her vp, and declines his head vpon her necke, he lyes him downe vpon a bancke of flowers, she seeing him asleepe, leaues him: anon come an other man, takes off his crowne, kisses it, pours poyson in the sleepers eares, and leaues him: the Queene returns, finds the King dead, makes passionate action, the poysoner with some three or foure come in againe, seeme to condole with her, the dead body is carried away, the poysoner woes the Queene with gifts, shee seemes harsh awhile, but in the end accepts loue.* (H1v)

This is the shorter 1603 text:

*Enter in a Dumbe Shew, the King and the Queene, he sits downe in an Arbor, she leaues him: Then enters Lucianus with poyson in a Viall, and powres it in his eares, and goes away: Then the Queene commeth and findes him dead: and goes away with the other.*

(F3r)

This version contains almost all the necessary information for a basic performance of the dumb show as written in Q2 (or in the Folio)—the reentrance of Lucianus is missing. That the Q1 version would take less time to perform and be much less interesting to watch is certainly true; but at least something like the fuller version would have made it to the stage. If players had only minimal opportunities to rehearse dumb shows, it might be expected that the
basic actions would have been retained but the supplementary business forgotten. Indeed, and perhaps more importantly, the Q1 version prompts the question of whether much of the onstage business in Q2 was ever actually performed.

_Hengist, King of Kent_ exists in two manuscript versions (with minor variants between them)\(^59\) and in a 1661 quarto titled _The Mayor of Queenborough_. There are some differences between manuscripts and quarto, notably an altered ending for the quarto, but in both formats there are three dumb shows followed by explications from the chorus figure, Raynulf. All of the manuscript shows are longer because they include details absent from the quarto. This is the second show as it appears in the Portland manuscript:

_Hoboes Dumb show. Enter 2 Villaines to them Vortiger seeming to solisitt them giues them gold, then sweares them Exit Vortiger Enter to them Constantius in private meditation, they rudely Come to him strike downe his booke and draw there swordes upon him he fairely spredds his armes, and yeilds to there furie, at which they seeme to be ouer come with pitty, But lookeing upon the gold kills him as hee turns his back and hurry away his body. Enter Vortiger Deuon: & Stafford in private Conference: to them Enter the Murderers pres[en]ting the head to Vortiger, he seems to express much sorrow, and before the astonished Lorde, makes officers lay hold on em; who offering to Com towards Vortiger are Commanded to be hurried away as to execution: then the Lorde seeming respect Crowne Vortiger, then brings in Castiza, who seems to be brought in unwillingly Deuon: & Stafford who Crowne her and then giue her to Vortiger, she goinge forth with him, with a kinde of a Constraint Consent; then enter Aurelius & Vther the two Brothers, who much astonished seeme to fly for safety. (ll. 586–603)\]

This is the later, quarto version:

_Dumb show. Enter two Villains, to them Vortiger, who seems to sollicite them with gold, then sweares them, and Exit. Enter Constantius meditating, they rudely strike down his Book, draw their Swords, he kneels and spreads his arms, they kill him, hurry him off. Enter Vortiger, Devonshire and Stafford in Conference, to them the Villains presenting the head, he seems sorrowful, and in rage stabbs them both. Then they crown Vortiger, and fetch in Castiza, who comes unwillingly, he hates her, and they crown her. Aurelius and Uther Brothers of Constantius, seeing him crowned, draw and fly. (C2r)\]

Here it seems that editing has turned an excessively detailed description into a stage direction. Indeed, the differences between the two versions make it possible to speculate that the simplified quarto direction reflects an awareness of what was likely to be retained in performance. But the complexity of even the shorter versions of this and the play’s two other dumb shows is also noteworthy: for these shows to make sense the bookkeeper and as many as seven
players would have had to coordinate a sequence of entrances, on-stage actions with props, and a sequence of exits.

Previously in this study I have quoted dumb shows from two Shakespeare plays—Hamlet and Cymbeline—and referred to another in Macbeth. The only other non-collaborative Shakespeare play with shows is The Tempest, and like those already cited they are neither long nor elaborate:

Solemne and strange Musick: and Prosper on the top (invisiblie:) Enter severall strange shapes, bringing in a Blanket; and dance about it with gentile actions of salutations, and inuiting the King, &c. to eate, they depart. (B1r)
Enter certaine Reapers (properly habited:) they ioyne with the Nimphes, in a gracefull dance, towards the end whereof, Prospero starts sodainly and speaks, after which to a strange hollow and confused noyse, they heauily vanish. (B2r)
Here enters Ariel before: Then Alonso with a frantick gesture, attended by Gonzalo, Sebastian and Anthonio in like manner attended by Adrian and Francisco: They all enter the circle which Prospero had made, and there stand charmd: which Prospero observing, speakes. (B2v)

Two collaborative plays, Pericles and Henry VIII, include dumb shows, but the three in the former are probably by Wilkins, and the "Vision" in the latter could be by Fletcher. Although the shows in Pericles are short, they are more demanding than any of those certainly by Shakespeare, and that in Henry VIII is long and complex. This might suggest that even though Shakespeare would have been in a position to help the King's Men with the staging of dumb shows, he kept things simple when he used them, and perhaps even avoided them. This could simply be a reflection of his artistic style, of course, but maybe experience with staging and watching elaborate shows by others had taught him that the result could be the "inexplicable dumb shows" that Hamlet mentions so disdainfully.

Ideas about rehearsal are tied to ideas about performance. At one extreme is the view of Peter Thomson, who writes, "Of one thing we can be certain. Dumb shows required particularly careful rehearsal, since any intrusive or random movement would blur their effect. They are vivid evidence of the store set by visual features on Shakespeare's stage." In diametric contrast, Stern's view is that "Playwrights seem to have written in such a way that the appropriate action would simply happen in performance; they wrote for a part-based system of acting." They can't both be right; but perhaps neither is. On the one hand, there is no actual evidence of extensive rehearsal; but on the other, to be successfully staged, the shows that have been the focus of this study would have needed more than each player's separate dialogue part. Lopez is right that "The dumb show provides a means to confront the alterity of the past," and, I would add, especially of past staging practices. It is because of their archaic qualities that dumb shows are usually ignored or avoided by modern critics. But the questions they raise about the conditions
and methods of early modern performance are important and the lack of certain answers even more so.

Notes

2. Ibid., 386.
4. Ibid., xii–xiii.
6. Ibid.
7. Sometimes what seems to be a simple procession on and off is termed a “dumb show” in a playtext, in which case I have included it.
8. These are essentially the same limits, and reasons for them, as those set out in Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xi.
9. Lopez notes that “this most theatrical . . . of early modern theatrical conventions is necessarily transmitted to us in densely textual form” (293).
11. I have used italic regardless of how a stage direction appears in the original text, but have retained the original spelling and punctuation, partly as reminders that these directions were written four centuries ago, in contexts very different from ours. See the Bibliography for full listings of all plays quoted.
15. Ibid., 71.
16. Ibid., 72; original italics.
18. For a detailed analysis, including a list of stage directions on this part, see David Carnegie, “Actors’ Parts and the ‘Play of Poore’” (*Harvard Library Bulletin* 30 (1982): 10. Carnegie also compares the part of Poore with “the Alleyn manuscript as a working theatrical document” (5).


24. The plot of *The Dead Man’s Fortune* also includes what seems to be a dumb show (Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, vol. 2, no. 1, ll. 49–59) and there might be some in other plots but given the plots’ cryptic nature it is impossible to know.

25. Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, vol. 2, no. VI, ll. 24–30. In this and the next quotation, what look like periods with spaces either side are actually slightly raised points.


27. Different scholars prefer different terms for a variety of reasons. In “Stage-Directions: A Misinterpreted Factor in Determining Textual Provenance,” TEXT 2 (1985), William B. Long argues that “the term ‘prompter’ unnecessarily limits expectations of what this person’s duties involved. The Elizabethan terms ‘bookholder’ and ‘bookkeeper’ are much more accurate” (125). In *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Paul Werstine refers to “the playhouse personnel who functioned as bookkeepers in anticipation of performance and prompter during performance” (9), thus he uses each term accordingly. In “Behind the Arras: The Prompter’s Place in the Shakespearean Theatre” *Theatre Notebook* 55 (2001), Stern notes that “a brief look at Renaissance plays shows a marked preference for the word ‘prompter’ over any other” (110). Since “prompter” indicates a particular function, one which I am calling into question in relation to dumb shows, I have generally preferred the broader and more neutral “bookkeeper.”


29. Ibid., 239.


37. Ibid., 220.

38. For the most part, I have chosen shows from plays that were written by experienced playwrights and certainly or probably performed in an early modern playhouse.

39. For a selection of other dumb shows that use this formula see *Captain Thomas Stukeley, K1r; 1 Hieronimo, A2r; Warning for Fair Women, E3v; Antonio’s Revenge*, 40
I2r; Devil’s Charter, A2r; Birth of Merlin, C3r, G4r; Pericles, C1v, G3r; Golden Age, C4r; Four Plays in One, 8E2r, 8E2v; Queen of Corinth, 6C1v; Herod and Antipater, I4v; Maidenhead Well Lost, F4v; Queen and Concubine, C3v; Bloody Banquet, A2r; Fatal Contract, E3v. Here and below, all references to further examples are to the first edition of the play.

40. Timing signals that recur in dumb show stage directions are: after, done/which done, then, while/whilst, as, during, here, til/until, pause, at last, at length, anon, ended, next, follow/going.

41. For a selection of other shows that use “then” see Three Lords and Ladies of London, G1v; Battle of Alcazar, A2v; Locrine, A3r, C2r, E3r, G1v; Warning for Fair Women, D1r, E3v, G3r; Whore of Babylon, A3v, C1r, G2v; White Devil, D4v; Four Plays in One, 8D4v, 8E2v, 8F3r; Duchess of Malfi, H1v; Herod and Antipater, C3r, F3v, F4r, I4v; Fatal Contract, E3v; Lovesick Court, I2v.

42. Other shows with only or primarily punctuation and the order in which they are written to indicate timing include Antonio’s Revenge, C3r; 1 If You Know Not Me, D1v; Christian Turn’d Turk, H1v; Brazen Age, C2v; Silver Age, C2v.

43. For other examples where properties would have functioning as implicit cues see Three Lords and Three Ladies of London, G1v; Locrine, A3r, G1v; Old Fortunatus, A3v–A4r, C3r; Devil’s Charter, A2r, E1r; Macbeth, mm6v; Whore of Babylon, A3v, G2v; Pericles, C1v, E1r; Golden Age, C4r, G3r, K2v; Queen and Concubine, C3v.

44. For a selection of other shows with one or two central figures see Doctor Faustus (1616), E4r; 1 If you Know Not Me, D1v; Birth of Merlin, C3r; Pericles, C1v, G3r; Lovesick Court, I2v, L3v.

45. By my rough count, almost thirty percent of the 185 shows on my list include music or other sounds.


47. The manuscript plays with bookkeeper directions for music or sounds in the margin at a dumb show are John of Bordeaux, Second Maidens’ Tragedy, Two Noble Ladies, Launching of the Mary. See also the plot of Battle of Alcazar.

48. For other examples of music or sounds before or during dumb shows see Doctor Faustus (1616), E4r; Old Fortunatus, C3r; Warning for Fair Women, D1r, E3v; Antonio’s Revenge, C3r, E3r; Devil’s Charter, E1r; Two Maids of More-Clacke, A1v; Birth of Merlin, C3r, G4r; Woman is a Weathercock, H3v; Noble Spanish Soldier, B1r, H2r; City Wit, F3v; Queen’s Exchange, D4v; Messalina, F1v; Antipodes, I3v, L3v.


50. See A Warning for Fair Women for examples of several different shows with the chorus figure apparently speaking before, after, and possibly during the mimed action depending on the show (D1r–v, E3v, G2v–G3r).

51. For this and the following example I have again inserted lines to mark the separate segments of the action.

52. For a selection of other shows with a Chorus figure see Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntington, A2r–A3r; Death of Robert, Earl of Huntington, D3r–v; Thracian
Wonder, B4v; Travels of Three English Brothers, D1r–v, H4r–v; Birth of Merlin, G4r; Golden Age, C4r, E3v, G3r, I3v, K2v; Valiant Welshman, C4r–v; Prophetess, 4E3v; 2 Fair Maid of the West, G4r.


54. The playhouse manuscript of John of Bordeaux includes “Enter the show of Lucres” (I. 1267) but provides no directions. Again, it is a famous story for which a mime could have been improvised by the players; but it is worth noting that the bookkeeper’s only interventions at this point in the manuscript are “sennett,” “Sound,” and “Enter the show” (II. 1265–67).

55. In his edition of the play, David Bevington comments that “the omission in Q of the dumb show at II.iii.67.1–2 seems especially to underscore the literary nature of this text. Rather than upstage Endymion’s own account of his dream in Vi with a purely theatrical description of stage action, Lyly omits the dumb show from his text” (Endymion, by John Lyly [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996]), 5. See Lopez’s discussion of this show (302–3).

56. For other examples of minimal information—and no stage directions—for dumb shows see A Knack to Know an Honest Man, D3r; The Two Maids of More-Clacke, A1v; The Travels of Three English Brothers, D1v; The Fair Maid of the West, part 2, G4r; All’s Lost by Lust, H2r–v.

57. This is not the place for yet another discussion of this quarto’s provenance or origins; whatever their source, the dumb show directions are coherent and performable, thus they raise questions and possibilities in the context of this study.

58. The Folio directions are essentially the same as those in Q2, although the wording differs.

59. The manuscripts are presentation copies and do not have evidence of theatrical provenance.


61. Hamlet (1604), G4r.


63. Stern, Rehearsal, 92.

64. Lopez, “Dumb Show,” 301.

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[History of the two maids of More-Clacke] The history of the two maids of More-clacke, with the life and simple maner of John in the hospital. Played by the Children of the Kings Maesties Reuels. By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.