SAA 2020 Short Scenes in Shakespeare

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Abstracts

David Baker, [essay on Cymbeline]

I will be dealing with Act 5, scene 3 of *Cymbeline*. In this scene, Posthumus recounts to a "Briton lord" how an "ancient soldier" and "two stripings" (whom we know to be Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus) turned the tide of a battle between Britons and invading Romans, taking their stand in a "strait lane" choked with the dead. Critics often relate the scene, and the play as a whole, to the debate over a proposed union, under James I, between England and Scotland, and they parse it in terms of the explicit or tacit ethnic identities that can be assigned to the characters. They also focus on the year it was first written and performed--1607? 1610?--since that has implications for how we understand it. I will argue that more definitive dating allows us to link the scene to ongoing debates, but not in the way that critics have argued so far. *Cymbeline* does not reflect the "failure" of James' unifying ambitions, but their protracted and ambiguous afterlife. The scene pivots on an odd expostulation by Posthumus, who assails the "Briton lord" for "wonder[ing]" at his narrative and then angrily accuses him of refusing to act. I will show how Posthumus' story expresses one, ultimately self-defeating, account of "Britain," while the "Briton lord" intimates, not another story, but an anti-story on which the first founders. At stake in this scene is the *reception* of a "British" union, and it provides, for us, a glimpse into its complexities.

Bergeron, David. "Two Short Scenes in *Richard III*"

 It must seem slightly perverse to talk about "short scenes" in *Richard III*, the second longest of Shakespeare's plays. But, that makes the challenge interesting. I will focus on 2.3 and 3. 6 as my exemplars of important, albeit short, scenes, the first of 40 lines, and the second, 14 lines. Immediately, one sees that none of the characters in either ahistorical scene has a name nor is the location indicated. This phenomenon stands in stark contrast to most of the play, which offers a tangle and plethora of names of historical figures.

Act Two, scene three consists of three "Citizens," who offer their perspectives on what is happening, specifically after learning of the death of King Edward IV. I will distinguish among these three, demonstrating the range of their views from optimistic to pessimistic or resigned about the future. The language of the scene highlights notions of fear and apprehension. The scene is a kind of lamentation about the country, echoing in a way the lamentation of the women in 2.2. These anonymous characters enable the audience to catch its breath and take provisional stock of where we are.

The appearance of the Scrivener in 3. 6, the only character in the scene, offers a similar assessment. Here, the Scrivener responds to the cruel execution of Hastings, reported in 3.5. Indeed, the Scrivener in soliloquy provides a moral statement and judgment of the prior action. His perspective may be captured in his question, "Who is so gross / That cannot see this palpable device?" (10-11). Only willful moral blinders prevent everyone from understanding the cruelty and evil that operate in the kingdom, Hastings being but one example. In some ways, 3.6 is a culmination of what the Citizens understood in 2.3. The scenes may be small, but they convey moral force, which seems to be their purpose, as if these characters are in the world but not exactly of the corrupt world of the play. These scenes highlight Shakespeare's judgment about the narrative.

Margaret Maurer, "It's about time: 2.2. of *Twelfth Night"*

A short scene can seem more trouble than it's worth if it risks confusing the temporal and spatial parameters of what is transpiring in the play's action. In its mere six lines, *Othello* 3.2 has Othello giving letters to Iago to convey to a captain who will take them to Venice, some twenty-one kilometers away from Cyprus as the crow flies. Lest an audience wonder what is in those letters, whether Iago interferes with them before setting in motion his effort to ruin Othello, how long it would take the captain to get them to Venice, and whether they arrive before the play's conclusion, the scene is routinely cut from productions of the play. Productions of *Twelfth Night* do not remove the temporarily troubling short scenes 1.3 and 2.1, but these scenes are sometimes relocated in the plot to reconcile them with what Antonio and Orsino say in 5.1 about how long Sebastian and Cesario have been in Illyria. And the even shorter 2.2 has, I have learned (from Laurie Osborne, *Twelfth Night and the Performance Editions*, p. 46), in one instance has been omitted altogether from a text of the play (the 1937 Globe Theater edition).

My interest in *TN* 2.2 is focused on its opening stage direction. Editors and directors routinely ignore it or finesse it with some stage business rationalizing it with the ending of 1.5 that would seem to flatly contradict it. I want to consider how "Enter Viola and Malvolio at several doors" signals that play's overriding interest is in how the players will manage to effect the distinctly theatrical juggling trick that is the resolution of the play.

Dan Moss, "The Triumph of the Boy: Metadrama and Anticlimax in *Coriolanus"*

The peculiar brevity and anticlimactic quality of Volumnia's triumph in the penultimate scene of *Coriolanus* is paradoxical both in itself and as the expression of a metatheatrical ambivalence at the heart of Shakespeare's last Roman tragedy. The triumph is simultaneously a civic honor and a public shaming for a woman who has both saved her city and destroyed her son. In metatheatrical terms, this self-contradiction corresponds to the apprentice boy-actor's success in impersonating and superseding the company's leading man on the one hand, and the reimposition of the boy's anonymity and subordinate status by the rest of the adult company on the other.

Indeed, the scene is designed to let the audience, in our fictive identity as Rome's plebeians, judge Volumnia, whether to "Cry welcome" at the Senator's behest and thus acclaim her as the savior of her people, or to remain silent or even hiss, condemning her as a monstrous filicide. At stake is our willingness to allow the triumph of a woman in a man's rightful place, which entails the triumph of pacifism over militarism, passivity over vigorous action. At the same time, our choice of applause or rejection again carries metatheatrical implications: do we approve the boy's upstaging of the celebrity actor we paid to see and expected to applaud, or do we reprove the apprentice's replacement of his master as the subversion of backstage order and a clear threat to professional theater?

The play's fraught, ultimately negative depiction of the apprentice boy's appropriation of masculine heroism may well be Shakespeare's ironic comment on the troublesome competition the King's Men encountered from the boys' companies ascendant early in the decade, but it is also in my view the culmination of a long metadramatic arc, especially pronounced in the Roman plays, in which the restive first boy increasingly upstages the company in general and its leading man in particular. Volumnia's uncomfortable triumph both allows the boy his victory and puts him back in his place.

David Nee, "*Othello* 3.2 and Shakespearean Design"

Mark Rose's *Shakespearean Design* (1972) convincingly shows that Shakespeare employed the scene as a basic compositional unit, arranging scenes with symmetry and proportion into patterns that convey meaning. Yet recent criticism rarely shows an awareness of the compositional principles explored in Rose's book. *Othello* 3.2 belongs to a special class of short scenes that do

not "count" as scenes within a play's symmetrical design, but serve rather to mark a division between scenes: 3.2 marks out with greater clarity the center and fulcrum of the play, the long and virtuosic "temptation scene" (3.3). Yet 3.2, in the startling economy of its mere six lines, does more than demarcate. It subtly heightens the play's "double-time" scheme by inserting an indefinite interval into what could have been a continuous scene. And it participates in the play's intimations of allegory. Immediately before 3.3, in which the devil-Iago lays siege to Othello's faith in Desdemona's chastity, 3.2 shows Othello heading off to examine the fortifications of Cyprus. This apparently ornamental detail links a realistic, novella-derived plot with the *psychomachia* that the play simultaneously shadows forth. *Othello* 3.2 thus shows how short, seemingly dispensable scenes often provide a foothold from which to grasp the patterned, meaning-laden forms of Shakespeare's greatest works.

Marie Roche, "Performance and Vernacular Theology: *All's Well that Ends Well*, Act 1, Scene 1"

This short essay revisits, Act 4 scene 1(70 lines) of *All's Well that Ends Well* (*AWEW*) by William Shakespeare (1564-1616). In this scene, Parolles is blindfolded and taken in an ambush by Lord Dumaine and his soldiers, with one of them pretending to be an interpreter. The scene is consistent with and reinforces the nature of Parolles as a notorious liar and a coward. In *AWEW*, Helena, the orphan protected by the Countess and in love with Bertram, says that she loves Parolles "for his sake" (1.1.97-99) but that she knows him a "notorious liar," and a "coward." In this love comedy, Parolles has, indeed, a poor reputation. However, this long-term standing of the "pseudo-soldier" is slowly being questioned for the benefit of the understanding of the play as a whole. This essay comes in conversation with the scholarly reassessment of Parolles. It is unquestionable that in Roman languages, Parolles' name means "words"; however, such assertion is too restrictive. While it is true that the literal translation of *parole* from French into English means "word(s)," the term *parole* has yet other connotations. The different meanings and associations brought forth by the word must be examined when seeking to understand Parolles' role in the play, and in Act 4, scene 1 in particular. Parolles, I suggest, is a subversive "voice"; It functions as an allegory for speech. In Roman languages, the word *parole* refers to the capacity of expression, of communication, via language, or phonation; in this sense, the meaning comes closer to orality, or speech. Contemporaries of Shakespeare did explore the nuances of the term *parolles*, i.e., In John Florio's dictionary, *parolles* means a word, a motto, the Word, speech or talk; in Lefèvre d'Etaples' 1523 Nouveau Testament, *parolles* is a translation of the Greek word *Logos*, and implies Christ. The key to the theory of Christian allegory, as we recall, is taken to be the historical Incarnation of God through Christ, the Word. In conversation with Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti, among other recent scholarship on Shakespeare and religion, I will reexamine Parolles in Act 1, scene 1 in view of the word's nuances. I suggest that in choosing the name of his character, Shakespeare playfully points at the nature of speech, at its inherent susceptibility to ambiguity and deceitfulness arguing that Act 4, scene 1 is suggestive of an act of redemption of "*la parole.*" The approach will be tropological and propose a participatory

exegesis on Shakespeare's part, an example of vernacular, oral, theology on the stage; a musing on humanity's search for Truth in a historical period of religious concerns.

Christina M. Squitieri, " Claiming Identity in Induction 2 of
Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew"*

At the beginning of Shakespeare's play, *The Taming of the Shrew,* the audience is presented with the "Induction," an unfinished frame story that is used to set up the play about to be performed. In it, a poor drunk named Christopher Sly is taken into the wealthy man's home where he is told that his identity as a poor tinker was part of a dream from which he has finally awoken: instead, he is a lord with a beautiful home, servants, and a wife. The expectation, perhaps, is that Sly will rejoice in his newfound life of luxury, but this is not the case. Instead, Sly refuses the goods and titles, firm in his identity as Sly the beggar, and attempts to offer proof of his poverty. In analyzing this short scene—almost always omitted from performance—I argue that Sly's insistence on the identity he knows himself to have presents a dramatically constructed "sense of self," what I will call a *selfness*, that is created through language and performance. This selfness, distinct from a character "essence" or psychology, is important enough for Sly to demand to be acknowledged as Sly, despite alleging his noble pedigree in Induction 1. While Sly is eventually convinced that he is a lord, his presentation of a selfness—and by extension, Induction 2 as scene—is significant for the play as a whole: it exposes, at the start, the play's interest in both society's role in the construction of identity, perhaps including Kate's identity as a shrew, and how that can trouble what you "believe" yourself to be; second, it suggests a deeper and more complicated conception of individual identity in the early modern world that has been previously considered.