Spring 1999

Stage directions uncovered: the author's voice in modern English drama

Erin Nelson

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Recommended Citation
Stage Directions Uncovered:
The Author's Voice in Modern English Drama

Erin Nelson
English 499: Honors Thesis

Prepared for:

Dr. Irby Brown, Thesis Advisor
Dr. Josephine McMurtry
Prof. Walter Schoen

April 1999
This paper is part of the requirements for honors in English. The signatures below, by the advisor, a departmental reader, and an outside reader demonstrate that Erin Nelson has met the requirements needed to receive honors in English.

(Advisor)

(Departmental reader)

(Outside reader)
This paper is part of the requirements for honors in English. The signatures below, by the advisor, a departmental reader, and an outside reader demonstrate that Erin Nelson has met the requirements needed to receive honors in English.

(Outside reader)
Walter Schaefer
“The best playwright is a dead playwright”

A view frequently expressed backstage, the phrase above describes the strained relationship that sometimes grows between controlling playwrights and the theatrical professionals trying to stage their plays. Horror stories abound of testy living playwrights showing up during rehearsals to bully the director, intimidate the actors, and generally ask for the impossible. A playwright who has envisioned his play’s look, sound, or feel may not approve of certain design and directorial choices. Directors and designers may resent a playwright who rejects their contributions and artistic visions.

Historically, playwrights have been directly involved in the staging of their plays, sometimes as producers, managers, or actors. Up to and through the eighteenth century, playwrights or leading actors like David Garrick, William Davenant and Moliere usually directed stage business (Wilson & Goldfarb 306). Most leading actor-managers and managing directors also dabbled in playwrighting, affirming the playwright’s direct role in production. Only in the last two hundred years has there been a “director,” controlling all aspects of a theatrical production, who does not consider himself an emissary of the playwright. In past eras the playwright was frequently the lead actor, the company manager, the producer; the playwright had direct control over the staging of his plays.

Our modern practice of distancing the playwright from actual production creates an entirely new paradigm. Suddenly, he is responsible only for generating a script in the privacy of his own home—and discouraged from participating in the production process. He tries to create an idea of a play, one that will play well on stage, but he is not supposed to help translate the idea to the stage. A creator stripped of the ability to finish the creation, he is a Frankenstein who assembles the parts but must leave the laboratory while someone else brings the creature to life. The playwright wants to be familiar with all workings of the theatrical process in order that they might better inform his ideas and writings, but he also wants to distance himself from the theatre as it might impair his “originality of vision” or his “individuality of method” (Archer 7). He may feel compelled to control productions of his scripts in
order to guarantee adherence to his creative vision, but he also wants to stand back and see what a
talented director can create from the script. He is an artist creating a work of literary art, but the resulting
text is intended for theatrical production rather than home reading.

In today's theatrical world, the general consensus is that a playwright should not direct a play he
has written. The rationale is that the playwright has internalized the play to the extent that he cannot view
it objectively with the distance of an audience member unfamiliar with the story and its underlying
concepts. Conclusions or information that might perplex an audience member seem painfully obvious to
the writer. While he may be the only person who knows the message of the play or understands a
character's psychological motivation, the playwright is not the right person to present it to actors or
audience. An outside director is better able to read the script from a distanced perspective and find a way
to convey the information comprehensibly.

No matter how faithfully the production follows the script, the choices performing artists must
make ensure that the final staging will be different each time the piece is performed. Each production,
each performance of a single production, even, will have slightly different nuances or implications. This
difference is what draws an audience to see more than one staging of the same play, sometimes the same
play every year (e.g. *The Nutcracker, A Christmas Carol*). Every production of a play may be different,
but the script itself remains the same. Through the words of the script, the dramatist may communicate to
generations of readers what he cannot speak directly to an audience.

The introduction of the modern director at the end of the nineteenth century had a major impact
on both the role of dramatists in the theatrical process and the way they use stage directions within
playscripts. This change will be demonstrated by a study of the way English-speaking dramatists make
their intentions known through the scripted stage directions, or didascaliae, in dramatic texts.

**Didascaliae Defined**

A play is a living piece of art viewed by an audience. The script is the written basis of the play
through which a playwright attempts to convey an idea. A script consists of many components (plot, setting, character, music, atmosphere, action, etc.) conveyed by two means: dialogue and didascaliae. Dialogue is all of the words spoken aloud by the characters. Didascaliae is the written text that is not dialogue: any expository prefaces or epilogues not spoken; qualities, appearance, or background of characters; descriptions (or proscriptions) of the setting, mood, atmosphere, or emotions which the play should convey.

Didascaliae did not become widely used as an integral part of dramatic texts until the introduction of a director as the primary creative force in modern theatre, and the rise of new dramatic forms from expressionist, absurdist, dadaist, post-modernist, feminist, naturalist, and gay and lesbian movements that de-emphasized dialogue by focusing on the unconscious world, individual spirit, and fractured surface reality (Carlson 350). These new movements and forms of drama created a need for explicit stage directions in order to convey the subjective understanding of abstract thoughts and principles. In a Greek tragedy, all is revealed through the dialogue. In an absurdist play, dialogue may be rendered meaningless; actions and images may carry more significance than words, even contradicting dialogue ("they do not move").

Contemporary writers, comfortable with the widespread use of elaborate scenery, lighting, costumes, props, and special effects makeup, include perceptions of those elements in the script as didascaliae. A playwright who envisions a blue stage may prefer to state that visual aspect in a descriptive line of didascaliae targeting directors and designers rather than write lines of dialogue in which the characters comment on the physical appearance of their surroundings, thereby wasting playing time describing a physical attribute of the setting that should be readily apparent to any audience member who isn't color-blind. A different playwright more interested in physical movement on the stage may want a character to kneel in front of a fireplace during a scene, and may find writing in a stage direction to that effect more constructive than writing dialogue in which the character comments on his movement.

Dramatic literature and Narrative Didascaliae.
The nature of a script is a subject of ongoing debate; is it a literary text or a blueprint for a production? Is the script a work of art on its own, or does it require the contributions of director, actors, designers, and technicians to realize the art? In most cases, it is all of these possibilities. The dramatist is both an artist and an architect. The end product can be both dynamic, an evolving play, and static, a fixed work of literature. In one way, theatre is a collaborative art form, and most practitioners agree that as a “composite art,” all of its elements must “serve together, not separately” (Gassner 1). The script is one factor contributing to the creation of a play, the blueprint for a play that must be realized by other theatrical artists. On the other hand, a play, like a novel, can win a Nobel Prize for literature. At least eleven Nobel prizes have been awarded to playwrights since the prize’s 1901 establishment (Huberman et. al. 154). A script can be read like a novel—and is in classrooms. Courses on dramatic literature are offered throughout American institutions of learning and classical plays like Oedipus Rex and Hamlet are required reading in many high school curriculums.

Some theatrical professionals treat a script as a fixed work. Actors learn their lines verbatim, down to every “a” “an” and “the.” Any transgression from the lines in the script is an error worthy of halting a rehearsal. If the script is exactly what the playwright intended and the purpose of production is to stage that intent, altering the dialogue also alters the flow, rhythm, and meaning of the play. Other people deal with scripts more liberally, cutting away lengthy passages, replacing anachronisms, or altering lines to better fit the production, audience, and performers. “The Playscript is like a freeway leading toward the final production” (Grote vi), and may require interpretation in order to make the play more accessible for a particular audience. The most important role of the actors is to convey the play to their audience; therefore imperfectly learned lines are not a cause of concern as long as the essence or central meaning of the play remains. That essence or central meaning, however, is still derived from the words of the script.

Didascaliae is an essential part of the literary dramatic text. The concept of “sub-text” and Aristotle’s prioritizing of plot, character, and thought over diction indicate that dialogue is only a skeletal
form, not the entire play (Suchy 73). Didascaliae often functions like an author talking directly to a reader without the filter of a character's voice; it complements dialogue by conveying unspoken information and helps a reader visually imagine or understand the scenario. Literary didascaliae functions as narrative, architectural didascaliae acts as a blueprint for a play, a reference and guide to interpreting and translating the script.

Didascaliae serves several different functions, a reference for both readers and producers. The careful reader sees the stage directions as aids to imagination, helping to suggest sensory perception. Some readers prefer a story to be open ended or vague about certain points, allowing them the freedom to form images in their minds, while others prefer to have every detail spelled out. The writer uses didascaliae as a way to control a production by describing important aspects of the setting. Playwrights also script stage directions specific enough to make the point clear, but open enough to encompass any number of different approaches. A director producing *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* can decide to stage "a somewhat oedipal embrace" (81) in any number of ways, all of which would convey the same basic sense of impropriety. Similarly, during a scene in *Oleanna*, Carol begins to leave the room and a stage directions notes that John "restrains her from leaving" (57). This one action is absolutely essential, as it allows the student to bring a formal charge of rape against her professor—yet the scripted direction is tantalizingly ambiguous. He could "restrain her from leaving" in any number of ways; he could grab her arm, push her against a wall, or physically block the door. A director staging the play can do almost anything he wants with that scene, as long as John touches Carol.

"Stage directions must be considered in the totality of the theatre event, not as inscriptions on a page" (Suchy 77). They affect the overall production: its look, texture, and atmosphere. The narrative quality of the script would be significantly altered without them. Susan Glaspell, author of *Trifles* and *A Jury of Her Peers*, uses two different forms to tell the same story. One is written as a one-act script, the other as a short story. The women in the playscript are in a situation where they cannot speak freely and thus are inhibited by a dialogue-based script. Since the characters cannot voice their thoughts and feelings, meaning must be conveyed to the audience by the physical choices of the actresses and how they
interpret Glaspell's stage directions for *Trifles* because there is no dialogue at all in the climactic scene:

*Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat.* (210)

The same scene in *A Jury of her Peers* more clearly explains the situation.

Martha Hale sprang up, her hands tight together, looking at that other woman, with whom it rested. At first she could not see her eyes, for the sheriff's wife had not turned back since she turned away at that suggestion of being married to the law. Slowly, unwillingly, Mrs. Peters turned her head until her eyes met the eyes of the other woman. There was no evasion nor flinching. Then Martha Hale's eyes pointed the way to the basket in which was hidden the thing that would convict the third woman—that woman who was not there, and yet who had been there with them through that hour.

For a moment, Mrs. Peters did not move. And then she did it. Threw back the quilt pieces, got the box, tried to put it in her handbag. It was too big. Desperately she opened it, started to take the bird out. But there she broke—she could not touch the bird, she stood there helpless, foolish.

There was a sound at the door. Martha Hale snatched the box from the sheriff's wife and got it in the pocket of her big coat just as the sheriff and the county attorney came back into the kitchen. (221)

The short story form allows the author to describe the feelings, thoughts, and motivations of the two primary female characters in a way that dialogue cannot. The script form, on the other hand, is more ambiguous. The didascaliae works through the actresses who must interpret the actions along with
existing dialogue and character information fully enough to convey all of that meaning to an audience.

History of Playwright's Role in Europe and American

From the first Greek tragedies through the English Restoration period and well into the nineteenth century, playwrights had an integral role in the production of their plays. Not until the end of the nineteenth century and the creation of a "director" with total control over a theatrical production was the playwright disassociated from the staging of his own plays. Playwrights in classical Greece were high-ranking citizens, military officers, priests, and elected officials, all highly valued by the community. Greek tragedians wrote the script, composed the music, choreographed the dancing, acted a principal role, and instructed and directed the rest of the cast. They had complete control over each play from inception to performance.

Most medieval dramatic performances were stagings of biblical or moral stories, performed by amateur townspeople and run by a pageant master who supervised the mounting of elaborate cycle plays on wagons. There were no professional playwrights because the church condemned theatre as a source of immorality. Despite those church regulations banning theatre as a profession, companies of performers did roam Europe creating and performing various kinds of entertainment. The Italian commedia dell' arte is famous for its improvisational facility. Performers worked from plot outlines, making up dialogue as they went. Although use of stock characters, limited plot situations, and standard gags were consistent, the improvisational performances were not documented carefully enough to be repeated with the consistency of a play. After the "dark ages" (both historically and dramatically) of Europe, theatre was re-introduced as a form of doctrinal teaching by the same church which had condemned it centuries before. Church-based theatre, such as passion and morality plays, led to an immensely popular theatrical environment in England until Puritan rule closed all houses of entertainment.

Theatrical performances during the seventeenth and eighteenth century were generally produced in repertory, with as many as fifty plays actively rotating from day to day. Didascaliae in these plays is
typically limited to entrances, exits, locations, and basic movements, e. g. "drinks," "sings," "fights," "lies down and sleeps." An atypically verbose stage direction in *The Tempest* describes an elaborate spectacle: "Enter certain Reapers, properly habited; they join with the Nymphs in a graceful dance; towards the end whereof Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hallow, and confused noise, they heavily vanish." (IV. i.). If George Bernard Shaw were to re-write that scene, the didascaliae for that small section alone would probably be longer than the entire script of *The Tempest. Didascaliae in Ben Jonson's *Bartholmew Fair* never gets more complicated than: "as they open the stocks, Wasp puts his shoe on his hand, and slips it in for his leg" (IV. vi. 73).

There are many reasons for the lack of descriptive didascaliae in Elizabethan plays. Like most playwrights of his age, Shakespeare was also an actor in his company, and therefore directly involved in the stagings of his plays. He had no need to include didascaliae for posterity because he was writing only for performance—not publication (Mathews 3). Contemporary Ben Jonson was openly ridiculed for publishing some of his plays, insinuating that his plays were literary works. Elizabethan playwrights churned out scripts regularly, sometimes on a weekly basis. Playwrights were much like today's television writers; income was dependent on producing new manuscripts aimed at the public audience frequently and then selling those scripts to acting companies (Huberman et. al. 152). Constantly generating scripts, a popular playwright was more concerned with selling a play than with creating a work of enduring art. In order to keep costs down, companies relied on stock characters, stock costumes, stock scenery and props which could be used in almost any play. These companies did not build sets, props, or costumes for a specific play—they used what was available. Knowing ahead of time the talent and supplies present, Shakespeare could write a role knowing who would play the part, his appearance, demeanor, and vocal abilities. A playwright for the King's Men had no need to describe the setting, costumes, or properties in a play because the company would use what was available. The playwright was more likely to match to play to the supplies than to ask designers to create new supplies for the play. There was no need to describe the appearance of props, costumes, or set pieces because the playwright usually knew exactly what was available.
Intra-Textual Directions

Elizabethan plays, typified by the plays of William Shakespeare and excluding courtly masques, tend to express stage directions through dialogue, rather than didascaliae. Physical settings and actions are woven into the dialogue as characters describe their surroundings and behavior. The "set speech" describing location is frequently used to imply what would now be included in the stage directions. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Demetrius briefly explains his whereabouts by recalling that Hermia and Lysander have “stolen unto this wood, and here I am . . . within this wood” (II. i.). In Act three Scene one Quince announces that “this green plot shall be our stage, this hawthorn-brake our tiring house,” explaining to the audience or reader that they have found their way to a clearing in the woods. Theseus reveals the time of day during the final scene when he asks for entertainment “to wear away this long age of three hours between our after-supper and bed time?”

Shakespeare’s plays, like those of his contemporaries, frequently contain dialogue that describes the action of one or more characters. These sections of dialogue function somewhat like modern stage directions, motivating movement of actions. An example of this didascaliae/dialogue combination is a section of Othello’s speech, contemplating his Desdemona before killing her.

So sweet was ne’er so fatal. I must weep,

But they are cruel tears. This sorrow’s heavenly,

It strikes where it doth love.

Othello is not simply describing his emotional state of mind; he is also describing the physical action of a tear falling on his wife’s sleeping body. The line of dialogue gives the actor direction, thus functioning as didascaliae (Lahr 84).

English theatre took a brief hiatus in the mid-seventeenth century when the Puritan Commonwealth closed the theatres. The theatres re-opened with the restoration of Charles II to England’s throne. As in Elizabethan England, playwrights were still regular collaborators in theatrical
production. Sir William Davenant, Poet Laureate, playwright-manager, and pseudo-director, is known to have coached actors although the company managers like Thomas Betterton were responsible for superintending rehearsals (Payne 45). A statement attributed to famous actor, instructor, and manager Thomas Betterton disparages young actors in training who “take it amiss to have the author give them any instruction; and tho they know nothing of the art of poetry, will give their censure and neglect or mind a part as they think the author and his part deserves . . . whereas it has always been mine and Mrs. Barry’s practice to consult e’en the more indifferent poet in any part we have through fit to accept . . .”5 Although they were not in charge of rehearsals, playwrights during the Restoration typically instructed actors in matters of character and action (Payne 44). This direct control over a major production component (acting) mitigated a primary need for didascaliæ in the playscripts themselves.

Introduction of Didascaliæ

The invention of the printing press and resulting availability of printed, often unauthorized, versions of plays created the possibility for companies to produce a play without having seen a performance of it or having consulted with the playwright in any way. Wise playwrights like Pierre Corneille and Harley Granville-Barker included “margin notes” to guide actors working from their scripts. The margin notes, functional didascaliæ, found in plays from this time period are directed toward actors. Pierre Corneille, a contemporary of Moliere and often considered France’s first great tragic playwright, advised all playwrights to use margin notes liberally, unlike the ancient Greeks who neglected such modern niceties. “Printing puts our plays in the hands of actors who tour the provinces and whom we can thus inform of what they ought to do, for they would do some very odd things if we did not help them by these notes” (Qtd. in Suchy 74). Harley Granville-Barker, dramatist, director, producer, actor, and leading theatre scholar of the early twentieth-century, echoed a sentiment similar to Corneille. In his On Dramatic Method, Barker wrote that “the problem for the dramatist is how to write [a character] so that he may prevent it—his character—from perishing in the process” of an actor’s interpretation (Barker
Turn of the century Star Vehicles

John Gassner says that in certain periods, most notably the middle ages of Europe and the late nineteenth century of England and America, poor playwrighting resulted in the production taking dominance over the play (Gassner 10). Whether poor playwrighting produced huge spectacle or huge spectacle produced poor playwrighting, turn of the century theatre in America and England was a moneymaking venture. Theatre had become a form of light, popular entertainment. Audiences wanted to see some action, a little romance, and a lot of movement for their ticket price. Star actors brought in the audience just as today's film makers can sell movie tickets based on "big name" film actors like Harrison Ford or Tom Cruise—stronger box office draws than the content of the film. Production aspects including spectacle, lavish costumes, complicated machinery, improvisation, and star actors all took precedence over the story and script. Some consider these the "dark ages" of theatre, particularly for the professional playwright.

By 1918, the average author of a play was "about as welcome at a rehearsal of his own play as a chaperone at a May picnic" (Allen 88). Playwrights were not a part of the production process after submitting their scripts. Authors of the time only needed to produce an idea, story line, and basic action or situation; the director and actors would provide the rest. A carry-over from Elizabethan practice, producers legally held all rights to a play after its premiere, having paid the playwright a set sum for the script (Chinoy 62). The most successful producers in eighteenth and nineteenth century England were actor-managers, leading actors who ran companies and played the starring roles. Actor-managers such as David Garrick, David Douglass, and Edwin Booth would naturally pick plays to highlight their talents. The actor-manager or director was considered the single guiding light in theatrical production, the playwright little more than a word processor. Didascaliae concerning physical staging and blocking was not necessary to a script, as the actors would deliver speeches to the audience from a fixed spot on stage.
or wander about the stage as the spirit moved them.

Didascaliae was unnecessary for a turn of the century playwright because his script was merely a tool, a vehicle for the producer and actors who would stage the play as they saw fit. Playwrights weren’t artists as in classical Greece or today’s theatrical world; they produced situations and dialogue, not plays. The director would make all decisions pertaining to the performance. Gordon Craig, whose 1911 work *On the Art of the Theatre* formulated the concept of theatrical art as an aesthetic form created by the stage director, considered stage directions to be useful only to readers, and an “offense to the man of the theatre” (Qtd. in Chinoy 78).

**Rise of Director**

Innovative playwright-managers and actor-managers of the nineteenth century began to pay more attention to production details such as historically accurate scenery and costumes as well as more realistic acting styles, paving the way for directorial authority. Actor-managers like Charles Macready and Edwin Booth and playwright-managers like Augustin Daly made strides toward more unified productions, overseeing all elements of staging the plays they starred in or penned (Wilson & Goldfarb 336). The genesis of the “Director” in today’s sense of the word did not become a significant force in English theatre until the late nineteenth century. In the United States, the director began as a technical role, coordinating the technical requirements of a production, rather than the creative one it is now (Chinoy 58). The introduction of elaborate scenery, complicated machinery, electric lighting, and sophisticated staging made theatrical productions in the late nineteenth century increasingly complex and overwhelming for actor-managers or playwright-managers who were also concentrating on multiple other aspects. The need for a single person to oversee all aspects of staging a popular play became more evident. This one role, an amalgamation of the classical dramatist, renaissance producer, and nineteenth century actor-manager, would control the entire production.

In Germany, prototypical directors like Richard Wagner and the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen set the
stage for non-performing directors. As the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, Georg II had absolute control over his subjects, including all the actors and designers in his troupe. As ruler he was able to keep productions in long rehearsal periods until he felt all areas of the play were ready. Since he did not write plays or perform in them, Georg II is closer to our modern conception of a director than the actor-managers and playwright-managers who were still active throughout Europe and America (Wilson & Goldfarb 340). Unlike Duke Georg II, Richard Wagner wrote the plays he meticulously staged. Arguably the most obsessive director in the history of modern theatre, Richard Wagner dictated all aspects of production. He envisioned a complete living theatre where all aspects would congeal into a single unified art form integrating all aspects of performance, religion, art, and social values—the Gesamtkunstwerk. This idea of a complete art form necessitated a single artist (creator, composer, and director) to pull all aspects together. Controlling his productions was so important to Wagner that he used operatic form in order to have scripted control over intonation of an actor’s voice and speed of delivery (Chinoy 84). As one of the first theatrical directors, Wagner designed the sets for his operas at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, and the Festspielhaus itself, in addition to writing the music and lyrics of his many musical dramas.

Today’s director is necessary as a bridge between writer and actor, among other functions. Ultimate directorial control created a new dynamic relationship between playwright and director. The playwright (in most scenarios) is no longer involved in the rehearsal and production process for mainstream theatre. He writes the play, the director takes the script, interprets it with his own vision, and uses that unifying vision to create a theatrical production. The auteur theory gaining dominance in film production carries over in a lesser extent to the theatrical world. The director of a play becomes as much an author as the playwright. The triumph of the director as supreme artist in the theatrical process raises crucial questions about the relationship of words, or dialogue, and stage business (Chinoy 95). Which is most important in communicating meaning in the theatre? The director as ultimate artist became the final word in all movement and action on stage. Recognizing this shift in authorial control over theatrical production, many playwrights began to take control within the dramatic text itself, asserting their intention through increased use of didascaliae.
Alternative Theatre and the Return of Dramatist’s creative control

Conflict between the routine commercialism of Broadway and the social and artistic aspirations of theatre practitioners split the American theatrical scene into two different arenas, offering playwrights the opportunity to function as artists. Big business enterprises stayed on New York’s Broadway and smaller art centers began springing up around the country. By 1917 there were at least 50 “little theatres” scattered throughout the United States, producing new and sometimes commercially risky plays by playwrights unknown to the Broadway community (Chinoy 128). The introduction of these non-profit and subsidized theatre houses outside of America’s Broadway offered an alternative to big-business entertainment. Playhouses subsidized by the government did not have to worry about folding because of a financially risky endeavor. At the same time, the increasing popularity of movies and television diverted the bulk of commercial entertainment away from the theatre, encouraging producers to try more experimental theatrical forms in order to continue drawing an audience.

While authors were increasingly unwanted in big budget, commercial theatre production, experimental groups like the Theatre Guild and the Provincetown Players were supporting full collaboration—including the author (Chinoy 197). The Theatre Guild, formed from the Washington Square players in 1919, was considered the only American Art Theatre of its time. An essential part of its mission was to produce plays as written—a very unusual practice in 1919 New York where script doctors were still quite active (Chinoy 234). The Theatre Guild worked extensively with Shaw, staging many of his plays for American audiences. Working with Shaw—notorious for insisting his plays be produced exactly as written, with no change to a single word, direction, or a scene design—reinforced a “hands off the script” attitude of considerable importance in their work (Chinoy 234-241).

The Provincetown Players, later the Playwright’s theatre in Greenwich Village, encouraged playwrights like Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell to use the collective art of theatre as a highly individual means of artistic expression. Their published intention was to establish a stage where
playwrights could see their plays in action without submitting to the commercial manager's interpretation of public taste (Chinoy 170). The constitution required that the author must personally supervise the production of each play, or the project would not be produced. Young playwrights were not only allowed but also required to participate in the production process in a manner reflective of classical theatre. They would typically be present for all rehearsals, allowing the opportunity to produce the plays according to their own ideas, while contributing to full productions (Chinoy 176). The experience Eugene O'Neill gained while working collaboratively with the Playwright's Theatre helped him gain the production insight necessary for creating the wholly integrated works that made him famous. As a dramatist-director, O'Neill worked out every detail of action, setting, characterization and even lighting in his plays within the written text.

Other experimental groups since the 1950's have used techniques of ensemble writing, improvisation, and group creation to guide performances in place of a written script, bring new life to an existing script, or develop an entirely new play. "Developmental ensembles" such as the Open Theatre, Living Theatre, and the Performance Group generate scripts like A Chorus Line and Nicholas Nickleby through improvisational rehearsals that are recorded, unified, and dramatized by a playwright. The form is derived from the commedia dell'arte and other improvisational groups. The open and improvisational atmosphere breaks down barriers between playwrights and performers, allowing both to actively participate in the creative process. Working on the script directly with actors allows playwrights like Caryl Churchill to modify text in order to produce an end result that plays well and conveys authorial intent. Churchill's work with experimental theatre companies like Monstrous Regiment and the Joint Stock Company during the 1970's produced plays though active group collaboration. Each member of the group researched a particular subject in order to create a focus or basic intention for a play through discussion and improvisation. Churchill later wrote the actual script on her own before bringing the play back to the group for a rehearsal and re-write period (Churchill, “Intro” 785).
Shifting Balances—Theatres of Cruelty, Politics; and Absurdity

The postwar theatrical scene in Europe featured three influential schools of innovation in dramatic writing and theatrical production, each of which significantly altered modern drama and approached the role of playwright in a different manner. Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty excluded playwrights from the creative process. Bertold Brecht’s political theatre elevated the script to a tract as important as the performance. Theatre of the Absurd abruptly shifted the dialogue/didascaliae balance to an extreme where the stage directions are often more important than the spoken lines. 7

The Theatre of Cruelty, inspired by the writings of Antonin Artaud, emphasized the experiential aspect of live theatre over the representational style currently in vogue. His revolutionary ideas in staging, including audience participation and assault against preconceived notions of representational theatre, were rooted in live performance rather than dramatic writing. By attempting to destroy the idea of masterpieces, or great works of fixed art, Artaud insisted that the script itself, composed by fixed words on the page, was not a valid form of art. Only the process of creating a living work of theatre from the script through theatrical means could be considered valuable art, and the director and actors were thus the artists. While a spattering of new scripts were written in Artaud’s style, experimental groups were more likely to adapt an existing work to meet their needs than to write a new one. Playwrights weren’t as important as talented and committed performers. Artaud believed that “no one had the right to call himself author, that is to say creator, except the person who controls the direct handling of the stage” (Rabkin 143). Experimental performance-based groups like the Living Theatre, organized in 1947 and influenced by Artaud’s philosophy, attempted to offer intense experiences half ritual and half dream to American audiences (Carlson 419).

Like the Theatre of Cruelty movement, Political Theatre sought to change prevailing attitudes by assaulting the preconceptions of the audience through radically different means of staging live productions. The Political Theatre movement headed by Brecht criticized notions of social and political “representation” in an effort to change the oppressive attitudes found in conventional ideas of theatrical
representation. This movement relied on the scripts of writers like Brecht as well as the performance techniques of politically conscious theatrical groups, bringing a measure of artistic control back to the dramatist. Brecht also uses didascaliae in *The Life of Galileo* to convey philosophical and political commentary through images. The opening of scene 11 describes Barbarini's moral and philosophical change in terms of the symbolic robes in which he is being dressed: "...at the beginning of the scene he is plainly still Barberini, but as the scene proceeds he is more and more obscured by the grandiose vestments" (280). When the scene begins, Barberini still sides with Galileo's scientific reason. Throughout the scene he is weakened by his duty to the church until he finally relents and turns against scientific truth when he is fully robed as Pope Urban VIII.

Most of Brecht’s didascaliae, like subtitles for scenes, focus on production elements intended to create the “alienation effect” characteristic of his writing and movement. Didascaliae capping the end of scenes three, five, and twelve in *Life of Galileo* gives the instructions: “Before the next scene a curtain with the following legend on it is lowered...” Not only does this repeated direction conceal time-consuming scenery changes, it also reminds readers and viewers of the physical and psychological division between audience and stage. Brecht emphasizes that same division in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by directing the musicians to “sit on stage with the singer and join in the action.” The musicians and singer who are telling the story also take part in that story, constantly reminding the audience that the events are a story, not reality.

The Theatre of the Absurd, with its beginnings in French writing, was a new form of playwriting, rather than the performance-based theatrical experimentation of Artaud. Absurdist writers created dislocated and arbitrary worlds within their scripts “in which arbitrary or ‘absurd’ events both confront and mystify the characters and often seem like allegories of our own indirect and confused lives” (Worthen 423). As with many other absurdist dramatists like Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter, the stage directions in Samuel Beckett’s plays are equal to and sometimes more important than the dialogue. The Irish-born playwright used didascaliae to prescribe physical actions that contradict dialogue—contradictions essential to plays like *Waiting for Godot*, where Didi and Gogo’s intention to proceed
elsewhere is punctuated with the direction “they do not move,” or *Come and Go*, where the final line of dialogue “I can feel the rings” is accompanied by directions stating that there are “no rings apparent.” Some of his plays can be considered play scripts composed entirely of stage directions—including those words spoken aloud. His *Act Without Words* I and II consist solely of stage directions, using no dialogue whatsoever (Suchy 72).

The stage directions in absurdist scripts like *Endgame* are often as important as the dialogue, particularly when the words convey little information or explanation. In *Endgame*, Hamm orders Clov to bring on a three-legged toy dog:

Hamm: Can he stand?

Clov: I don’t know.

Hamm: Try

(He hands the dog to Clov who places it on the ground.)

Well?

Clov: Wait!

(He squats down and tries to get the dog to stand on its three legs, fails, lets it go. The dog falls on its side.)

Hamm (*Impatiently*): Well?

Clov: He’s standing.

Hamm (*Groping for the dog*): Where? Where is he?

(Clov holds up the dog in a standing position.)

Clov: There

(He takes Hamm’s hand and guides it toward the dog’s head.)

Hamm (*his hand on the dog’s head*): Is he gazing at me?

Clov: Yes

Hamm (*proudly*): As if he were asking me to take him for a walk?

Clov: If you like.
Hamm (as before): Or as if he were begging me for a bone.

(he withdraws his hand.)

Leave him like that, standing there imploring me.

(Clov straightens up. The dog falls on its side.)

Clov: I'll leave you.

In this section, as in much of Samuel Beckett's writing, the didascaliae provides more information about the physical action occurring on stage than the dialogue. This section of Endgame is diametrically opposed to the scene in Shakespeare's Othello in which Othello's tear drops on Desdemona. Beckett describes action within didascaliae, while Shakespeare describes action through dialogue.

The process of Translation

In modern theatre, the director is a necessary step in converting a written script into a living play. While the playwright may be able to connect with a few readers in a literary manner, the medium of theatre requires the intermediate step of production. The playwright uses a written script to communicate his wishes to the director, who in turn attempts to convey those intentions to the audience through actors and technicians. A script is still a blueprint for production until it is actually produced. Every script is a "potential play," according to Tom Stoppard, until a director makes it a play (Qtd. in Gussow 110).

Today's director is expected to formulate a "concept" for each play that he directs. This concept or vision for the production is derived from close script analysis. Sometimes the concept involves changing location, time period, gender or other aspects of characterization. These changes use directorial license to adapt the play for a specific audience. The director might substitute a familiar word for an unfamiliar one in a script, cut out explicit or racially derogatory terms, or cut out sections to fit time constraints. These common changes are generally unquestioned, and not thought to significantly alter the overall value of the play in any way other than to clarify it for a specific audience.
Playwrights and Directors: A Battle for Authorial Control

The practical fact of theatrical production is that scripts are dynamic—every interpretation is different. Playwright Tom Stoppard recognizes the limitations of dramatic form and acknowledges the hazards of translation: “In an optimum situation, with the most sensitive director, the best actors and the most brilliant designers, you get about 65 to 70% of what you mean—and that’s the top. The other 30% consists of secrets between you and the play. You can’t ever get a play on paper like a music score” (Qtcl. in Gussow 9). However, unlike Stoppard, there are other playwrights who believe that the play they have created in their minds must be the play staged for the audience. These playwrights consider the director a vehicle for conveying their intentions onto stage verbatim, and use stage directions to control a production as Wagner used music. Among musicians, older scores are still performed as they were originally written. Later conductors and musicians can reproduce the same piece of music in an endless array of variations without every changing a note. A piece of sheet music is almost identical to a script in intention. A composer does with music what a playwright does with words and ideas, yet performers are expected to adhere note for note to a symphony but can vary dramatically from the lines in a script. A director has the creative license to change what a conductor can only interpret.

There is obviously a potential conflict between playwright and producers in every theatrical production utilizing an existing script. The director’s voice, present in the appearance, rhythm, flow, style, and intent of the production, can drown out the playwright’s original message—particularly if the playwright’s intention is vague or poorly expressed. This sort of alteration can bring revelation to a dramatist who sees the play from a new angle. Other times the superimposition of directorial concept can detract from the play by reducing it to one flat focus. “Interpretation is one thing . . . but interpolation is quite another, not to mention extrapolation, and the intrusion of a subtext that clearly distorts instead of illuminating its text” (Schneider 467). Nearly every playwright has a horror story of a director who “destroyed” one of his plays with a divergent production concept 10(Sitt 12).

Sometimes, a playwright with a very strong sense of personal vision attempts to reclaim his
creation from a director taking liberties with the script. Beckett, whose stage directions are an integral part of his plays, challenged the notion that stage directions are unimportant by making the didascaliae in *Endgame* the focus of a potential lawsuit. The American Repertory Theatre’s production of *Endgame* staged by Joanne Akalitis in 1984 set the play in a subway tunnel rather than in a “bare room” as described in the script. The director felt that staging the play in an abandoned subway tunnel was fundamentally equivalent to staging it in an empty room in an uninhabited environment. Beckett wanted the play produced “as written,” including the scripted didascaliae. "My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theatre production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me” (Program for Play). The resulting theatrical controversy centered on the question and limitations of interpretive freedom. Dramatic practitioners and critics were forced to reevaluate the playwright’s relation to text and reader, the boundaries of “legitimate” interpretation, and how a playwright can “assert or codify intention” (Suchy 70). The suit never made it to court, but the question of authorship was publicly raised; who is the final author of a play? The person who writes the words or the one who gets the words on stage?

For those authors with a very specific point to make, idea to show, or thesis to prove, the script is crafted to convey the author’s intention. Any direction away from the author’s intention compromises the integrity of the play, at least in the eyes of the author. Not all authors feel this way; many like American playwright Lanford Wilson welcome directorial creativity to bring out meaning. Wilson has worked extensively with director Marshall Mason. Mason and Wilson have a clear agreement on production choices: “. . . we agree that the words are his responsibility and anything else is mine. Usually [Wilson] does not have a visual concept for the play” (Qtd. in Huberman et. al. 216). Statements advocating directorial license and those in favor of dramatists control are both valid. A playwright should have control over the realization of his creative vision, and a director should have creative license. A creative interpretation of a script, diverging from the playwright’s vision can be painfully distorted or refreshingly original. The primary intention of this discussion is to show the various ways playwrights react to disputed control and the creative process of theatrical production.
Stage Directions: An Important Aspect of Dramatic Communication

To reiterate Issacharoff's premise: both scripts and novels consist of two components: dialogue and didascaliae. Since we have a tendency to read scripts like novels, those who ignore the didascaliae are essentially removing the narrative from dramatic texts completely. “Given the semiotic richness of a dramatic text, it is curious that so many critics of drama privilege the dialogue of a playscript, even to the point of erasing the stage instructions” (Des Roches 49). Inversely, how would a novel read with no dialogue? Dialogue isn’t necessary; fiction can be written solely as narrative. We recognize that many novels absolutely require dialogue to reveal the nuances and rhythm of human discourse or differences in local inflection or dialect. Just as dialogue can be an essential feature of a novel, didascaliae can be an essential feature of the dramatic text. A stage direction is the author’s description of some aspect of that play. Ignoring the stage directions of a play is tantamount to skipping over all the quoted bits in a novel.

While directors tend to agree on the importance of maintaining the dialogue as written, they often consider the stage directions to be suggestions rather than requirements. Some critics and theorists believe that the didascaliae are mostly irrelevant, useful only as an expedient until the director comes along to give the script life. Parvis, for example, argues that “Stage directions concerning the circumstances of utterances are not the ultimate truth of a text, a formal command to produce the text in such a manner, or even an indispensable shifter between text and performance. Their textual status is uncertain. Do they constitute an optional extratext? A metatext that determines the dramatic text? Or a pretext that suggests one solution before the director decides on another?” (89). Performers argue for complete creative license with staging, but seldom alter the dialogue. It is interesting that theatre professionals and students alike can read a script and dismiss half of the narrative (who reads a novel and ignores all of the dialogue?). Somewhere along the way, dialogue became more important than didascaliae in a dramatic text.

Digressing from the playwright’s written directions changes the essence of the play by altering components like emotion, characterization, physical setting, visual images or emphasis. If the playwright
directs a character to stand in a moment of great emotional distress, and a director tells him to sit, they have created two different characters who react differently to the same stimuli.

Didascaliae presents itself as the only way a dramatist can have any control over the performance of a play without being directly involved in rehearsals. We say that a picture is worth a thousand words, and recognize that a stage picture and the physical relationship between characters can be just as important as the spoken words in a play. "Every producer of plays must know that the action and stage business of the play are often a more effective source of comedy and tragedy than is the dialogue, and that an objective representation is often less tedious than dialogue" (McCague 48). A playwright often composes more than just the spoken discourse, and has a distinct perception of how certain moments should look, sound, or feel on stage. That image is conveyed by the stage directions. Dialogue alone is incapable of succinctly creating the same visual images within a reasonable playing time.

Didascaliae can further plot, show background or local color, tell a story without words through pantomime, provide comic relief, portray meaning and emotions not expressed in words, create suspense, or control attention through visual means. Effective use of explicit didascaliae can solidify the author's intention if he knows how to accurately record his ideas in a way that future readers will be able to convert into mental images or emotions. When the didascaliae becomes as evidently integral to the text as the dialogue, directors are less likely to take great liberties. Most plays are full of generic or nonspecific directions: "pause," "she sits," "he laughs," "they exit," "afternoon light," or "a lovely dress." These generalities require and rely on performers and directors to flesh them out; interpretation is necessary. "Ugly light" is not a direction that a lighting designer can easily reproduce; someone must decide exactly what color and intensity of light will be unpleasant to viewers. Few playwrights meticulously denote every possible detail required to stage the play; instead, they dictate only those aspects of staging that are essential to the play.

Caryl Churchill uses introductions (an important part of the didascaliae) and specific notations to make sure that anyone reading one of her scripts will know exactly which aspects of production she considers essential. Her introductory production notes to Cloud Nine emphatically explain why cross-
gender casting is necessary for exposing categories of gender, race, sexuality and sexual orientation that the group intended to question within the play.

Betty, Clive’s wife, is played by a man because she wants to be what men want her to be, and, in the same way, Joshua, the black servant, is played by a white man because he wasn’t what whites want him to be. Betty does not value herself as a woman, nor does Joshua value himself as a black. . . . It is essential for Joshua to be played by a white, Betty (I) by a man, Edward (I) by a woman, and Cathy by a man. (785)

The cross dressing and role doubling not only reflect the composition of the group when the play was in conception, but more importantly illustrate the relationship between colonial oppression in the nineteenth century and present day sexual oppression.

The production notes Churchill includes with her scripts are sometimes suggestions and sometimes requirements. In her introduction to Cloud Nine she designates which notes are most important, allowing the reader or producer flexibility with certain issues, like which performers double which roles in Cloud Nine: “any way of doing the doubling seems to set up some interesting resonances between the two acts” (786). Churchill, of course, is no more a representative playwright for the English language than Edward Bond, August Wilson, Edward Albee, or Marsha Norman. Every playwright is unique, and none approach writing a script in the exact same way. It would be unthinkable to attempt cataloging every British and American playwright within the last few decades, and impossible to mention each one within the last century. Instead of trying to tackle English speaking playwrights as one body, this discussion will focus on a handful of relatively well-known playwrights and general patterns or correlations that may become evident.

Ways and Means of Textual Control

Beginning writers are told to “write what you know,” and that axiom sometimes holds true for more experienced writers as well. A playwright who started out as a lighting designer is likely to include
stage directions describing the time of day, the climate, local weather, light sources, and the gist of the atmospheric lighting in his plays. A set designer won’t ignore the physical surroundings of a play he scripts. A costumer might include all of the background traits that would affect a character’s wardrobe and the fashion period of the play. Directors might emphasize little details that would help future directors and actors. George Bernard Shaw, firm believer in waxing lyrical within his *didascaliae*, claimed that “many modern plays, highly successful on the stage, are not merely unreadable but positively unintelligible without visible stage business” (Qtd. in Suchy 74). That stage business must be included in the script in order for the reader to accurately visualize it or for the director to accurately stage the play. This approach to documenting physical action explains why Shaw diagrams stage business in his texts with such meticulous specificity.

More generally, visually-influenced writers who can see the play before or while writing the script are more likely to focus stage directions on visual aspects: how the set, lights, or costumes appear, what characters would look like, how they might move, how they would physically react to each other and the space, specific images or impressions. Aural writers are more likely to focus on the patterns and rhythms of speech, how dialogue overlaps, dovetails, and interrupts, creating a specific tone and rhythm for the play.

The Scenographer’s Perspective: No Room for Mistake

A handful of well-known playwrights try to influence (if not dictate) every aspect of production. These authors use *didascaliae* to describe an entire production in great detail, leaving little room for artistic speculation on important production facets. They may act as director, actor, scene designer, lighting designer, costume designer, properties master, and prompter within a single script. They also prefer to continue guiding productions by either directing themselves or sitting in on rehearsals. As our turn-of-the-century actor-managers found out, controlling every part of theatrical production is not an easy task. No one can anticipate every question about storyline, every interpretation of characters, or
every problem that might spring up from new technology sixty years from now. Inclusion of detailed notes on production within the text as didascaliae can preserve those notes and ideas as a part of the dramatic text. Since plays do continue to be produced after the author’s death, careful use of didascaliae can continue asserting the playwright’s intentions.

O’Neill

Eugene O’Neill, Nobel Laureate, winner of four Pulitzer Prizes, and considered by many to be the most important American dramatist, made his plays “director proof” by writing the most important elements of staging into the script, and by attending rehearsals whenever possible (Chinoy 339). Working with the off-Broadway Playwright’s Theatre, O’Neill was able to take a firm role in the original production of The Hairy Ape, designating who should be hired to direct, act, and design. Authorial presence during the rehearsal process allowed him the advantage of seeing firsthand whether or not his ideas were “taking” with the director and cast, and the ability to modify either the text or the performance to remove any inconsistencies before an audience became involved.

O’Neill took great care in his writing to explicate a wide range of production details. His didascaliae detail aspects of the setting, atmosphere, characterization, costuming, and even lighting for his creations. Through didascaliae, O’Neill not only influences character and emotion, but he describes the setting as a fundamental aspect of the play. In Desire Under the Elms, the Elm trees towering over the house are characters as important as any other is. The two elms on either side of the house

*bend their trailing branches down over the roof. They appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing, jealous absorption. They have developed from their intimate contact with the life of man in the house an appalling humaneness. They brood oppressively over the house. They are like exhausted women resting their sagging breasts and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears trickle down monotonously and rot the shingles.* (318)
A director attempting to get a "fresh" staging of the play by setting it elsewhere, or modifying the trees, would be altering a central character.

The playscript of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* is startling in its didascaliae/dialogue ratio. More than 56% of *The Emperor Jones* is didascaliae; less than 44% of the 1513 lines comprising the play are actually spoken aloud.¹¹ Scene seven contains nine lines of dialogue, and 115 lines of directions describing a Congo Witch Doctor performing a frightening and ritualistic dance, "a charm to allay the fierceness of some implacable deity demanding sacrifice," luring Jones to the mouth of a waiting crocodile with "eyes glittering greenly" (48). Among the 61 lines of didascaliae opening the script, O'Neill describes the environment as "late afternoon but the sunlight still blazes yellowly behind the portico and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat" (6). This one sentence, isolated from the rest of the text, can still give important information to the designers, actors, and director. The lighting designer has an image of color and intensity, the scene designer can infer from the description that the play takes place in a hot, tropical climate, the costume designer is also aided by knowledge of the climate, the director can infer generalizations about social customs and behavior that help with blocking, and the actors know that they should be hot.

The didascaliae in this play is obviously of great importance to the playwright. In the first scene, didascaliae describes everything from the furniture, consisting of "one huge chair made of uncut wood which stands at center . . . . painted a dazzling, eye-smitting scarlet," to Smithers' apparel, "a worn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and . . . a white cork helmet" (6). The frightening images Jones sees in the jungle are conveyed more effectively by stage directions than by Jones' verbal responses to them. In scene five, Jones' horrified scream "And you sells me? And you buys me? I shows you I'se a free nigger, damn yo' souls!" is followed by didascaliae describing how "he fires at the AUCTIONEER and at the PLANTER with such rapidity that the two shots are almost simultaneous. As if this were a signal the walls of the forest folds in. Only blackness remains and silence broken by JONES as he rushes off, crying with fear—and by the quickened, ever louder beat of the tom-tom" (41).
George Bernard Shaw, both a director and a playwright, is known as one of the most controlling playwrights in the history of the English language, and also one of the first to provide long introductory essays and precise stage directions in an effort to help readers visualize his plays (Wilson & Goldfarb 370). His scripts contain the most “explicit and practical stage directions that the theatre has ever known,” encompassing physical setting, characterization, and motivation for the actors (McCague 2). Shaw considered these stage directions strictly as instruction for actors or producers, a map detailing how the production ought to end up, but not necessarily how to get there. “A stage direction need not tell an actor how to act; it should tell him what he is to act. There is only one effect to be produced but there may be fifty different ways of producing it” (Qtd. in McCague 35). Reading one of Shaw’s scripts, it is perfectly conceivable that a production could be mounted with no director, only actors and designers following the script. Shaw’s well-documented interference with productions of his plays indicates a distinct need to influence (if not completely control) all aspects of staging. Cyril Maude, stage manager and actor at the Haymarket Theatre in London, worked with Shaw early in his career and related how “he forced us into incomprehensible agreements by torturing us with endless talk until we were ready to sign anything rather than argue for another hour” (Qtd. in McCague 5).

The opening didascaliae of *Heartbreak House* fills a full sixty-two lines, seven paragraphs, or a page and a half. This includes descriptions of the locale (“The hilly country in the middle of the north edge of Sussex”), the time (six o’clock on a late September evening), the shape and configuration of the room (“the after part of an old-fashioned high-pooped ship with a stern gallery, etc.”), the interior lighting (electric), the furniture in the room (including a “sturdy mahogany” sofa, “oddly upholstered in sailcloth, including the bolster, with a couple of blankets hanging over the back”), the floor (“narrow boards caulked and holystoned like a deck”), and the garden, observatory, hammock and garden seat outside the window. Shaw also describes the appearance (“pretty, slender, fair . . . nicely but not expensively dressed”), temperament (“weary resignation . . . almost at the end of her patience . . .
evidently not a smart idler"), and disposition ("reading Shakepear") of the young lady seated on a window seat. Each new character receives a thorough description upon arrival into the play, and their movement within the space is carefully mapped out.

The final page of Too True to be Good contains a rousing speech delivered as fog "swirls up from the beach, rising and thickening" around the preacher until finally "the fog has enveloped him; the gap with its grottoes is lost to sight; the ponderous stones are wisps of shifting white cloud; there is left only fog; impenetrable fog; but the incorrigible preacher will not be denied his peroration." But Shaw does not end the play here, or even at the end of Aubrey's speech. He continues to inform us that at this point

the audience disperses (or the reader puts down the book) impressed in the English manner with the Pentecostal flame and the echo from the Lord's prayer. But fine words butter no parsnips... The author, though himself a professional talk maker, does not believe that the world can be saved by talk alone. He has given the rascal the last word; but his own favorite is the woman of action, who begins be knocking the wind out of the rascal, and ends with a cheerful conviction that the lost dogs always find their way home.

So they will, perhaps, if the women go out and look for them.

Shaw not only recognizes a reading audience, but also caters to it with explanatory and narrative didascalie like the passage above. The final scene in performance simply cannot realize everything packed into the italicized paragraphs, but the person reading the script has access to Shaw's frequent intra-textual philosophical diversions.

Controlling even beyond the script, Shaw directed almost all original performances of his plays at the Court Theatre (McCague 2). His policy as a director was to get the rote and mechanical businesses of the play mastered and out of the way as soon as possible (McCague 16). His habit of writing specific stage directions into each script is thus explained as a means for other directors and actors to conquer the mechanics of production without wasting weeks of precious rehearsal time blocking or discussing outward character traits. The didascalie in his plays spells out every technical detail of the play, as well as all essential points the actors need to know in order to create the characters Shaw imagined. Shaw's
introductory, armchair-philosophy essays are also an integral part of the didascaliae for his plays, albeit a rather lengthy part.

BECKETT

As we have already seen with the ART production of *Endgame*, Samuel Beckett was intent on preserving his artistic vision from divergent directorial choices. Directorial interpretation is not the only danger Beckett sees in the translation process. Actors can subtly alter scripts by means of acting choices concerning characterization or stage business. Even the way a character walks can change the tone of the play. The exacting playwright once said that "the best possible play is one in which there are no actors, only text" (Qtd. in Rabkin 142). Beckett began directing his own plays in 1965, and as a director focused entirely on the physical, concrete aspects of performance. He would dictate every gesture, movement or intonation an actor could make; he even counted out timing of pauses (Cohen 474). When directing *Happy Days* in Berlin, he carried a cross-lined notebook containing answers to the most minute physical and concrete nuance of performance, "practically Cartesian in its organization of information and insight" (Schneider 470).

A glancing study over Beckett's shorter plays reveals precise notes following most of the later works. Some of the plays, like *Act Without Words I* and *II*, consist solely of stage directions with no dialogue. The script for *Breath* (see appendix 1) is entirely notes (unless the pre-recorded sound of breathing is considered dialogue) covering timing for sound and lights, level and intensity of lights, set dressing, and a description of the sound cues. The only major aspect the notes do not cover is the sound level for the breathing; the note on breath is simply "amplified recording." Beckett's notes for *Come and Go* (see appendix 2 B) covering movement, lighting, costuming, physical setting, and vocal intonation, level, and variation, are nearly as long as the script (appendix 2 A). The opening didascaliae for *Play* (see appendix 3 A) leaves little to the imagination. The notes for "light" and "urns" (see appendix 3 B) are so emphatic about certain production elements that it is tempting to stage *Play* contrary to Beckett's vision.
just to think he would be turning over in his grave.

The meticulous descriptions of external, mechanical activities and technical aspects in Beckett's plays conceal a scarcity of inner character meaning. Rather than encourage actors to identify with (or even understand the motivation of) characters, he planned external characteristics in order to create the illusion of an internal life—creating the character from the outside in. Every gesture, every movement, every pause and vocal inflection was carefully calculated and dictated. He would not talk about the play to the actors; there was no discussion of "directorial concept" or analysis of meanings, themes, images, or symbols before physical rehearsals began. Some actors felt that performing Beckett's works would inhibit their creative freedom by forcing them to be "impersonal or even disembodied puppets of his will" (Schneider 472). Not everyone can be comfortable trusting wholly in the author's vision and ability to record that vision within the dialogue and didascaliae.

Powerful Images and Explanatory Details

Theatre is a visual form. Written words on paper become a living play that an audience can see, hear, in some cases even smell, touch, or taste. American playwright Samuel Shepard and British playwright Tom Stoppard both use didascaliae in their scripts to convey sensory impressions, particularly visual images.

Shepard

American playwright Samuel Shepard uses the narrative possibilities in a playscript to create powerful images that cannot be conveyed through dialogue. His extensive notebook and journal writings focus on sensory perceptions—how things look, sound, feel, smell, and taste—and how to convey those feelings and ideas through words (Grant 552). That focus translates into an ability to convey evocative images through written didascaliae. In *Lie of the Mind* Mike's intense hatred for his brother-in-law Jake
is given reign.

From deep upstage center, Jake emerges into the light, walking on his knees straight toward the audience with the American flag between his teeth and stretched taut on either side of his head, like a set of driving reins for a draft horse. Behind Jake, holding an end of the flag in each hand, Mike walks along, clucking to Jake like a horse... the deer rifle is tucked under Mike's arm. (120)

The strong image of domination and humiliation is partially illuminated by the red glow of a fire in another part of the stage. The image is striking and hard to forget.

Shepard's Pulitzer prize-winning play Buried Child provides a cornucopia of loaded images for interpretation. Tilden carries unexpected fruits of the farm—corn, carrots, and finally a decaying baby—into the house. In the first scene he dumps fresh corncobs into his father's lap before methodically husking them through the course of the scene. Later Tilden “gently spreads the corn husks over the length of Dodge's body... he gathers more husks and repeats the procedure until the floor is clean of corn husks and Dodge is completely covered in them except for his head.” In the next scene, Tilden enters with an armload of carrots. He “crosses slowly center stage with the carrots and stops.” He stares at his son Vince, still “holding carrots” all the while. Tilden passes on the produce to Shelley, who then “stands there holding the carrots.” Later Tilden leaves, and “Shelley stands center, arms full of carrots.” She looks at Vince, “then down at the carrots.” Vince “tries to knock the carrots out of her arms. She turns away from him, protecting the carrots.” Finally, Tilden enters with the child he has been searching for and slowly carries it up the steps to his mother while “his eyes never leave the corpse of the child.”

All of these evocative images are described in the stage directions, not the dialogue.

Younger son Bradley emasculates his father by shaving sleeping Dodge's head, asserts power by placing his hand in Shelley's open mouth, and covers Dodge's shorn head with Shelley's rabbit fur coat. Bradley's wooden leg, the physical sign of his inadequacies, is used to taunt him. Shelley steals the leg, holding it “as though she's kidnapped it” while “Bradley reaches pathetically” for it. Vincent “dangles it over Bradley's head like a carrot,” taunting his brother who continues to make desperate grabs, trying to
make himself whole again.

Vince aggressively cuts his way into the house through a screen wall instead of walking through the door. The stage directions opening Buried Child describe “a large, screened-in porch” “behind the sofa, upstage.” In this semi-realistic configuration, Vince cuts a hole “big enough to climb through” in the screen upstage. As his grandmother Halie describes young Vincent as “a guardian angel,” “Vincent is now climbing through the porch screen onto the sofa.” Halie’s affirmation that Vince will “watch over all of us” is voiced as Vince is quite literally over his grandfather, Dodge, dying on the sofa. Then, “as Dodge proclaims his last will and testament, Vince climbs into the room, knife in mouth and strides slowly around the space, inspecting his inheritance.” He climbs into the room straight towards the audience—a very powerful entrance. A designer choosing to set the stage in a different configuration might diminish the violent visual impact of Vince’s non-traditional entrance by drawing attention away from his return. Placing the screen porch on one side of the living room, for example, or arranging the set in a more realistic manner with a solid wall in between the porch and house would lessen the visual power of the entrance.

In addition to his reputation as a playwright and screen writer, Shepard is also well known as an actor, and his image-laden stage directions are often geared towards actors, guiding the processes of characterization through physical and relative information. Some say he is the most subtle and sympathetic chronicler of character emotions since O’Neill (Rosen 1). By describing what a character physically does to another, or how siblings interact with each other, the playwright uses didascaliae to help actors and directors create specific and dramatic images in performance. The opening didascaliae in Lie of the Mind describes lighting that gives the “impression of huge dark space and distance between the two characters with each one isolated in his own pool of light” (1). Those two characters are brothers standing on opposite sides of the stage, distanced physically to illustrate an emotional separation. Husband and wife Jake and Beth, geographically separated, each spend a scene in “the identical position and attitude of sleep” (28), lying down and facing away from the audience, while family members discuss their states of health. The image of both in the same position and situation visually demonstrates their
dangerously strong emotional attachment.

Shepard’s didascaliae tends to focus on images or sensory-related details within his plays. While he does have very definite ideas, he is open to interpretation and variation. The descriptive didascaliae opening Act II of *Lie of the Mind* describes an interior setting that “should be very simple and stark yet maintain a sense of realism. If wallpaper is used, it should be very subdued and very faded” (42). Shepard’s stage directions are flexible enough to allow a range of production possibilities within the perimeters of his creative vision.

**STOPPARD**

Tom Stoppard is often compared to Shaw because of his critical background and strong philosophical beliefs. Also like Shaw, Stoppard is self-admittedly dogmatic about how he thinks things ought to be done: “You don’t just write a la carte when you write plays.” He sees his plays as “set menus. Take it or leave it” (Qtd. in Gussow 9). Stoppard’s creative vision has “very few concessions in it” (Qtd. in Gussow 23). However, he does allow actors and directors a certain amount of creative play. “The production doesn’t have to produce the noise that the play makes in your head when you wrote it—not all the time” (Qtd. in Gussow 65).

Stoppard’s favored comic set up is to build up to “an absolutely bizarre image which has a total rationale to it being seen by different people” (Qtd. in Gussow 7). Examples of this sort of image occur frequently in *Jumpers*. A man walks into a room carrying a tortoise in one hand, a bow and arrow in the other, with shaving cream covering part of his face. Six Jumpers assemble themselves into a human pyramid. The center jumper on the bottom row “is blown out of the pyramid. He falls downstage, leaving the rest of the pyramid intact”(21). Soon the unstable pyramid “slowly collapses into the dark, imploding on the missing part, and rolling and separating, out of sight” (21). The isolated image of these five gymnasts tottering unstably before collapsing is one of Stoppard’s inspirational images (Gussow 14).

Other examples of bizarre images that may incite humor occur in the second act of *Rosencrantz*
and Guildenstern are Dead. Hamlet (intentionally or not) sets up his two school friends into two embarrassing situations. Attempting to “trap” Hamlet between them, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern both unfasten their belts. “They join the two belts, and hold them taut between them. Ros’s trousers slide slowly down. Hamlet enters opposite, slowly, dragging Polonius’s body. He enters upstage, makes a small arc and leaves by the same side, a few feet downstage” (89). After the spectacle of their friend dragging the old man’s dead body has passed, Rosencrantz quietly pulls up his trousers. Neither speaks a word about the de-briefing, only the didascaliae mentions a grown man standing on stage with his trousers around his knees. Later in the same scene, didascaliae describes how Hamlet

bends low in a sweeping bow. Ros and Guil, cued by Hamlet, also bow deeply—a sweeping ceremonial bow with their cloaks swept round them. Hamlet, however, continues the movement into an about-turn and walk off in the opposite direction. Ros and Guil, with their heads low, do not notice.

No one comes on. Ros and Guil squint upwards and find that they are bowing to nothing. Claudius enters behind them. At first words they leap up and do a double-take. (91)

Our two interchangeable friends, by behaving in a polite and cultured manner, are found holding their backsides up in the air to greet a king.

Stoppard, a dramatic critic, actor, and director, is aware of the many different ways people approach a dramatic text. His didascaliae speaks conversationally to the reader, explaining situations in the matter of fact way a director might speak to an actor during rehearsal. Almost midway through the first act of Jumpers, a stage direction mentions a character and then remarks off-handedly: “it may as well be stated now that she never speaks” (28). At the beginning of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, the two primary characters are betting on the toss of a coin, and “have apparently been doing this for some time.” Stoppard brings us in at the seventieth toss. Rosencrantz, he tells us, “is nice enough to feel a little embarrassed at taking so much money off his friend. Let that be his character note.” In the second scene of Arcadia, a line of didascaliae notes that Bernard’s pauses “Are false promises—and [Hannah] is not quick enough. That’s how it goes” (26). This conversational direction serves double duty; it gives
the actor playing Bernard information about his vocal patterns and psychological motivations, while the actress playing Hannah learns something about her own pacing and personality. Stoppard’s conversational didascaliae speak to the reader—whether that reader is a director, an actor, or a student rifling through plays in the library.

The playwright’s didascaliae often describes images from which plays emerge (Gussow 49). The image comes first, character and plot develop later. “I write little stage directions which are like little time bombs that go off in the director’s hands when he picks them up” (Qtd. in Gussow 23). The description of a scene change in Jumpers states that “the flat assembles itself” around Dorothy as she stands, frozen (21). We rarely see buildings assemble themselves with grace and speed, Stoppard’s phrasing is attention grabbing. Bernard, an academic in Arcadia, “prepares to listen as though listening were an oriental art” (89). The image is strange and unexpected, creating a character to fit such an image. Rosencrantz tosses a coin to Guildenstern. “Simultaneously, a lighting change sufficient to alter the exterior mood into interior, but nothing violent” (34). The image of a coin flying through the air as the external environment changes around it reads like a transition on film, eye catching.

Stoppard’s “quest for ambiguity” (Gussow xi) frequently shows up in didascaliae describing certain props, physical attributes, or even character quirks. A direction in the second scene of Arcadia expresses some doubt about Hannah’s character: “possibly she smokes; if so, perhaps now. A short cigarette-holder sounds right, too” (22). While the playwright isn’t sure if one of his characters smoke, he knows exactly what she would smoke and the sort of image she would create by standing and smoking while the man in the room sits. The eight jumpers in Jumpers “are not especially talented, . . . possibly using a trampoline” (18). They may possibly be using a trampoline, but Stoppard isn’t quite certain. In another uncertainty-generating bit of didascaliae, Arcadia’s central table serves double duty in both the present and 1809; the reality of its presence in two different times, separated by more than a century, spawns ambiguity about the props that accumulate on the table. Stoppard’s directions in Act I Scene 2 specify that

*both periods must share the state of the room, without the additions and subtractions*
which would normally be expected. . . . there is no absolute need to remove the evidence
of one period to make way for another. . . . During the course of the play the table
collects this and that, and where an object from one scene would be an anachronism in
another (say a coffee mug), it is simply deemed to have become invisible. (15)

In Act I Scene 4, Valentine's present-day tortoise Lightning "is on the table and is not readily
distinguishable from Plautus" (43), Septimus Hodge's tortoise in 1809. Of course, the physical prop
turtle on the table is the same in both periods, no one is sneaking on stage during blackouts to switch back
and forth between two different turtles. During the convergence of time and place in the final scene, the
turtle on the table is both Plautus and Lightning simultaneously, as the wine glass and decanter are used
by both Septimus and Hannah and the apple Gus brings Hannah today is eaten by Septimus in 1809. An
audience watching the play will see these seeming incongruities occur repeatedly, undermining the initial
sense of temporal differentiation. Without didascaliae describing these congruent images, a reading
audience would not pick up on the temporal disunity, parallel images, and merging of two stories that
ends the play.

Aural Emphasis and Vocal Patterns

Playwrights use didascaliae to serve different ends. While image-based writers like Shepard and
Stoppard might use stage directions to focus on the visual presentation of set, characters, and stage
pictures created for the viewing audience, aural writers like Churchill and Mamet focus on the patterns of
speech and rhythms of dialogue, devoting prologues, notes, or intertextual stage directions in order to
convey the play that they hear. For these playwrights, talking is action; the physical act of speaking, its
timing and pauses, can convey more information than the words spoken. Didascaliae can be a
complement to dialogue, instructing actors and directors how to deliver lines in order to achieve the
playwright's desired effects.
Caryl Churchill began her writing career with radio plays, much like her compatriot Harold Pinter. Early attention to sound and dialogue as the sole medium of communication fostered a realization of how much information vocal patterns can convey without visual accompaniment. In *Top Girls* (for example) Churchill develops a fairly simple system of notation directing when character should begin or end lines, and how the dialogue should overlap in performance. The notation replaces more lengthy explanations like those used by Mamet. The result is a realistic rhythm of overlapping dialogue, one character finishing a thought as another picks up on it or diverges on a different tangent.

Introducing the play, she explains “The Layout:”

*A speech usually follows the one immediately before it* but:

1. *When one character starts speaking before the other has finished, the point of interruption is marked “/.”*  
   
   E.g.,  
   
   Isabella: This is the Emperor of Japan? / I once met the Emperor of Morocco.  
   
   Nijo: In fact he was the ex-Emperor.  

2. *A character continues speaking right through another’s speech.* E.g.,  
   
   Isabella: When I was forty I thought my life was over. / Oh I was pitiful. I was  
   
   Nijo: I didn’t say I felt it for twenty years. Not every minute.  
   
   Isabella: sent on a cruise for my health and felt even worse. Pains in my bones, pins and needles ... etc.  

3. *Sometimes a speech follows on from a speech earlier than the one immediately before it,* and continuity is marked *. E.g.,*
Griselda: I'd seen him riding by, we all had. And he'd seen me in the
fields with the sheep.*

Isabella: I would have been well suited to minding sheep.

Nijo: And Mr. Nugent went riding by.

Isabella: Of course not, Nijo, I mean a healthy life in the open air.

Joan: * He just rode up while you were minding the sheep and asked you to
marry him?

where “in the fields with the sheep” is the cue to both “I would have been” and “He just
rode up.”

In a standard situation, the director would decide how to order and overlap dialogue, and whether to brave
the possibility of linguistic confusion resulting from eight characters speaking at the same time,
overlapping each others words. By noting exactly where lines should begin, and which previous lines a
character is responding to, within the script, Churchill provides director and actor with very specific
instructions on how to deliver and pace the dialogue. These instructions are particularly useful in the first
dinner scene where six women converse on a wide range of topics. Churchill’s dialogue moves quickly,
often with more than one conversation taking place at the same time and characters interrupting or
interjecting comments as people do in normal life. This dialogue on its own, without the explanatory
didascaliae or notation system, is often confounding. The didascaliae in Top Girls clearly maps out the
flow and rhythm of dialogue, explaining an important aspect of the play.

Churchill is not the only influential playwright concentrating on the sound of plays; American
David Mamet specializes in the rhythms and dialects of middle and lower class people, basing dialogue
(at least superficially) on everyday speech. The initial illusion of realistic speech is just convincing
enough to lull the audience into a false sense of artistic security that is shattered when the sublingual
violence begins to surface during loaded silences and obstructed dialogue. While Churchill’s vocal
notation system emphasizes overlapping dialogue and allows conversations to proceed at a rapid pace
while remaining intelligible, Mamet stress the silences; the loaded pauses dotting halting dialogue. The
points of interruption Churchill diagrams are not necessary in Mamet’s plays because characters trail off, or stop speaking as soon as they are interrupted, unlike the talkative women in *Top Girls* who continue on, often ignoring an interruption or secondary conversation.

MAMET

Like Churchill, Pulitzer prize winning playwright David Mamet is very concerned with the cadences and rhythms of dialogue in his plays. Unlike Churchill’s rapid and chaotic dialogue, Mamet’s befuddling blank verse controls and regulates speed and variation of vocal delivery (Deane 17). The patterns of speech created within dialogue are far more important in Mamet’s plays than questions about plot, characterization, even physical actions. A pivotal scene in *Oleanna*, already mentioned earlier in this study, occurs at the end of the second scene when John “restrains [Carol] from leaving” (57). While the action is essential, Mamet recognizes that exactly how John restrains his student is irrelevant, just as long as physical contact is made. The ball has already started rolling and everything he does after her report to the tenure board can only damn him further. The indeterminate didascaliae in this instance allows the director room for experimentation without violating the script.

The characters in Mamet’s plays interrupt each other, not allowing others to complete thoughts. Instead of dovetailing or overlapping lines, Mamet’s characters break off words or thoughts, trailing off into Pinter-esque pauses punctuated by question marks and ellipses.

John: ... Tell Grace that I’m coming home and everything is fff...


Jerry. They . . . who, who, what can they do . . .? (Pause) NO. (Pause) NO.

(Pause) They can’t do th . . . What do you mean? (Pause) But how . . . (Pause)

She’s, she’s, she’s here with me. To . . . Jerry. I don’t underst . . . (Pause) (He hangs up.) (To Carol:) What does this mean?
Carol: I thought you knew.

John: What. (Pause) What does it mean. (Pause)

Carol: You tried to rape me. (Pause) According to the law. (Pause)

John: ... what . . . ? (77)

Each "(Pause)", each "..." is a moment of silence or interruption marked by didascaliae. These characters don't finish sentences, often making it difficult to assess a character's thoughts or motivation and building up dramatic tension. In most plays dialogue is composed primarily of characters talking to each other in complete sentences or thoughts. For the characters in Oleanna, finishing a sentence or thought is the exception rather than the rule; rarely can a character speak a full paragraph without interruption. These "fragmentary utterances and obliquities" give voice to a game of manipulation and a struggle for power (Schvey 106). As Carol explains in the final scene of Oleanna, "it is the power that you hate. So deeply that, that any atmosphere of free discussion is impossible."

Mamet's scripts tend to read like an impenetrable code. However, some actors like Colin Stinton find understanding through the sound of the play; "if you trust him, and give thoughts to the words within the brackets or above the underlinings, if you 'hit' the words he advises you to 'hit,' the meaning will eventually become clear (Qtd. in Deane 41). While both playwrights focus on language as action, emphasizing the timing and rhythm of linguistic patterns and delivery, they do not manifest that focus in the same way. Churchill's overlapping notation moves the dialogue and actions along at a quick, almost frantic pace, constantly shifting focus from one character to another. Mamet incorporates both rapid interruptions and meaningful intra-textual pauses in an aggressive manner.

Productions defying Textual Directions

We have seen many examples of flexible or ambiguous didascaliae that allows directors considerable leeway deciding how to achieve a certain effect. While most playwrights do leave room for
interpretation, they also consider certain production aspects—like Churchill’s cross-gender and cross-racial casting in *Cloud Nine*, Shepard’s produce, or O’Neill’s trees discussed earlier—“essential” to the play. Ignoring these production notes or deliberately casting against character descriptions alters the intentions of the play as created. There are hundreds of possible interpretations of well-known plays that could cast an entirely new, if unintended, light on a play. Portraying *Waiting for Godot*’s Gogo and Didi as homosexual lovers, relocating *Buried Child* to New York City, or staging *Fences* with a Hispanic cast would distinctly alter the core of each play. According to the authors of these plays, these choices would be wrong. For some directors, they are exercises of creative license. There are many directors who think *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* would play well with four men in the cast instead of two men and two women specified in the script. Albee closed down one all-male production and his response to those who request permission to stage the play in this manner is always the same: “do the play the way it was written” (Qtd. in Stern). Staging *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* with a single-gender cast sheds an entirely new, if unintended, light on a play. While some directors feel that using cross-gender casting would heighten certain currents in the play, the playwright believes that such an attempt would trivialize the play and obscure the intended meaning.

Samuel Shepard is also against cross-gender casting in his plays, and says that he would not want to see the brothers in his play *True West* played by women: “it’s a scam on the play; it’s not the play . . . it would distort my meaning” (Qtd. in Rosen 7). The opening didascaliae of *True West* contains a note on the set:

*The set should be constructed realistically with no attempt to distort its dimensions, shapes, objects, or colors. No objects should be introduced which might draw special attention to themselves other than the props demanded by the script. If a stylistic ‘concept’ is grafted into the set design it will only serve to confuse the evolution of the characters’ situation, which is the most important focus of the play*.

(3)

These unambiguous directions express the playwright’s intention quite clearly. Deviation from those directions, stylistic choices that go against the author’s expressed desires will alter the play in production.
CONCLUSIONS: A Dynamic Artist Knows How to Use Directions

The "Performing Arts," drama, music, and dance, are those which require other artists to deliver them (Huberman et. al. 15). A director can be likened to a conductor or the head of a dance company, and a playwright to a composer or choreographer, yet in today’s theatre world there is still uncertainty in the relationship between director and playwright that is not as pronounced in music or dance. The major difference between a playwright, a composer, and a choreographer is the availability of a recognized system of notation. Composers use diatonic notation to convey their music to the audience through a conductor and musicians. Choreographers have a system of laba notations to record dance movements. The ability of a dramatist to write in a standard notation system, like that used in music, could help reduce production discord significantly. It would not mean giving up creative control for the director; two versions of the same concerto orchestrated by different conductors are not exactly alike, and performances of the same ballet staged by different dance companies are not identical.

In the battle of authorial intention verses directorial interpretation rights, the easy solution is for the playwright to direct his own works. It may be a flop, but it will be what he conceived of, providing the playwright is capable of directing. Playwrights, like Edward Albee, George Bernard Shaw, Edward Bond, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, David Mamet, and Sam Shepard have chosen to direct their own plays in order to get their personal intentions through more articulately. While self-direction does guarantee “an accurate first production,” or the possibility of “correcting a tradition of false concepts” (Stitt 12), there are some drawbacks, including “lack of objectivity, lack of other people’s contribution” (Stuart 167), and the possibility of stagnation. Stoppard prefers to not direct his own plays because “there is a kind of author’s blindness” (Gussow 23) that can sabotage such an effort, although it would be much easier to direct his own plays than someone else’s. As Albee warns, “you won’t necessarily end up with the most effective production. But you will have what you originally intended” (Qtd. in Stern).

The playwright’s role in production has changed throughout theatre history. From the sole
creator in ancient Greece to the Medieval Pageant master through to the melodramatic hack writer, a playwright's role in society and art has changed dramatically. In today's production process, the dramatist functions on two different planes. On the literary plane he has produced a finished work, a text that contains a vision or idea. On the theatrical plane he offers a coded plan that speaks to the director and production staff, ideally in a way that they can understand. If the playwright can successfully use didascaliae to clearly demonstrate the essential core of meaning to any reader, he can hope his message will be received by subsequent generations of readers.
NOTES

1 Playwright Mathew DiCintio was scolded for his "stupid, stupid, stupid" desire to direct his own play by director/dramaturg John D. Welsh.

2 Some dramatic texts are published as "acting versions," which include stage directions such as blocking and production notes that were not part of the original manuscript. These production versions are not relevant to this study, which attempts to recognize only those stage directions included in the dramatic text by the original playwright. In older scripts it is not always possible to discern if stage directions were indeed penned by the author. Didascaliae from plays written before the late nineteenth century are of questionable authorship and used only for comparative purposes. The modern examples of didascaliae presented in this study are legitimate vehicles of a playwright's vision or intent, included in the dramatic text by the original author.

3 Theoretician Michael Issacharoff uses the term "didascaliae" in reference to literature. While he never applied the term to drama, it is more specific than "stage direction" by including all written information in a script that is not spoken by a character. He divides literature into two aspects: the Didascaliae (authorial voice) and the Dialogue (glossing comments or direct speech of characters). When dealing with a theatrical text, these two parts are differentiated by use of parenthetical punctuation, different font styles, or varied spacing between lines. Issacharoff further delineated didascaliae into four types: Extra-textual, such as a preface or epilogue; autonomous, occurring when the author challenges or severs the referential bond between dialogue and didascaliae; technical, such as a description of stage business or functioning of a mechanical device; and normal, those phrases subordinate and referential to the dialogue.

4 The didascaliae in Shakespearean plays is highly questionable. Many of the extant texts were pirated, with no clear authorship. Companies would frequently obtain or create illegitimate versions of a rival's play and perform it as their own. These examples are drawn from the early printed editions of Shakespeare's plays.

5 Charles Gildon. Life of Thomas Betterton and History of the English Stage. Qtd. in Payne 44.

6 A common exception is the debut of a play. The playwright by law today has a certain amount of creative control over the first production of his play.

7 Overviews of all three movements are provided by Worthen, 423-426.

8 page 101. This direction is not imbedded in the script, but is one of a series of notes Brecht wrote on the play and that was included the 1994 printing by Arcade publishing.

9 While Beckett wrote some of his plays in French, he was born and raised in Ireland, was greatly influenced by Irish writer James Joyce, and translated his own French plays into English.

10 This tendency will be discussed in more detail later.

11 The Emperor Jones (New York: Vintage, 1972) contains approximately 1513 lines of text. All of the didascaliae together numbers 856 lines. Dialogue warrants only 657 lines in the text.

12 John: Well, perhaps it's not well written . . .
Carol (Simultaneously with "written"): No. No. No. I want to understand it. (11)
APPENDIX 1: *BREATH* BY SAMUEL BECKETT

CURTAIN

1. Faint light on stage littered with miscellaneous rubbish. Hold about five seconds.

2. Faint brief cry and immediately inspiration and slow increase of light together reaching maximum together in about ten seconds. Silence and hold about five seconds.

3. Expiration and slow decrease of light together reaching minimum together (light as in 1) in about ten seconds and immediately cry as before. Silence and hold about five seconds.

CURTAIN

NOTES:

RUBBISH
No verticals, all scattered and lying.

CRY
Instant of recorded vagitus. Important that two cries be identical, switching on and off strictly synchronized light and breath.

BREATH
Amplified recording.

MAXIMUM LIGHT
Not bright. If 0 = dark and 10 = bright, light should move from about 3 to 6 and back.
Sitting centre side by side stage right to left FLO, VI and RU. Very erect, facing front, hands clasped in laps. Silence.

VI: When did we three last meet?
RU: Let us not speak.

[Silence. Exit VI right. Silence.]

FLO: RU.
RU: Yes.
FLO: What do you think of VI?
RU: I see little change. [FLO moves to centre seat, whispers in RU's ear. Appalled.] Oh! [They look at each other. FLO puts her finger to her lips.] Does she not realize?

FLO: God grant not.

[Enter VI. FLO and RU turn back front, resume pose. VI sits right. Silence.] Just sit together as we used to, in the playground at Miss Wade's.

RU: On the log.

[Silence. Exit FLO left. Silence.]

VI: Flo.

FLO: Yes.
VI: How do you think Ru is looking?
FLO: One sees little in this light. [VI moves to centre seat, whispers in FLO's ear. Appalled.] Oh! [They look at each other. VI puts her finger to her lips.] Does she not know?

VI: Please God not.

[Enter RU. VI and FLO turn back front, resume pose. RU sits right. Silence.] May we not speak of the old days? [Silence.] Of what came after? [Silence.] Shall we hold hands in the old way?

[After a moment they join hands as follows: VI's right hand with RU's right hand, VI's left hand with FLO's left hand, FLO's right hand with RU's left hand, VI's arms being above RU's left arm and FLO's right arm. The three pairs of clasped hands rest on the three laps. Silence.]

FLO: I can feel the rings.

[Silence.]

CURTAIN
NOTES

Successive positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FLO</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>RU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hands

RU VI FLO

Lighting
Soft, from above only and concentrated on playing area.
Rest of stage as dark as possible.

Costume
Full-length coats, buttoned high, dull violet (Ru), dull red (Vi), dull yellow (Flo). Drab nondescript hats with enough brim to shade faces. Apart from colour differentiation three figures as alike as possible. Light shoes with rubber soles. Hands made up to be as visible as possible. No rings apparent.

Seat
Narrow benchlike seat, without back, just long enough to accommodate three figures almost touching. As little visible as possible. It should not be clear what they are sitting on.

Exits
The figures are not seen to go off stage. They should disappear a few steps from lit area. If dark not sufficient to allow this, recourse should be had to screens or drapes as little visible as possible. Exits and entrances slow, without sound of feet.

Obs
Three very different sounds.

Voices
As low as compatible with audibility. Colourless except for three 'ohs' and two lines following.
APPENDIX 3 A:  INTRODUCTORY DIDASCALIAE OF PLAY BY SAMUEL BECKETT

Front centre, touching one another, three identical grey urns (see page 159) about one yard high. From each a head protrudes, the neck held fast in the urn's mouth. The heads are those, from left to right as seen from the auditorium, of w 2, m and w 1. They face undeviatingly front throughout the play. Faces so lost to age and aspect as to seem almost part of urns. But no masks.

Their speech is provoked by a spotlight projected on faces alone (see page 158).

The transfer of light from one face to another is immediate. No blackout, i.e. return to almost complete darkness of opening, except where indicated.

The response to light is immediate.

Faces impassive throughout. Voices toneless except where an expression is indicated.

Rapid tempo throughout.

The curtain rises on a stage in almost complete darkness. Urns just discernable. Five seconds.

Faint spots simultaneously on three faces. Three seconds. Voices faint, largely unintelligible.
APPENDIX 3 B: EXCERPTS FROM CLOSING NOTES OF PLAY BY SAMUEL BECKETT

LIGHT

The source of light is single and must not be situated outside the ideal space (stage) occupied by its victims.

The optimum position for the spot is at the centre of the footlights, the faces being thus lit at close quarters and from below.

When exceptionally three spots are required to light the three faces simultaneously, they should be as a single spot branching into three.

Apart from these moment a single mobile spot should be used, swiveling at maximum speed from one face to another as required.

The method consisting in assigning to each face a separate fixed spot is unsatisfactory in that it is less expressive of a unique inquisitor than the single mobile spot.

... 

URNs

In order for the urns to be only one yard high, it is necessary either that traps be used, enabling the actors to stand below stage level, or that they kneel throughout the play, the urns being open at the back.

Should traps be not available, and the kneeling posture found impracticable, the actors should stand, the urns be enlarged to full length, and moved back from front to mid-stage, the tallest actor setting the height, the broadest the breadth, to which three urns should conform.

The sitting posture results in urns of unacceptable bulk and is not to be considered.
WORKS CITED


---. "Trifles." 1916-206-211.


McCague, Wilma Gallagher. *The Influence of Shaw's Experiences as a Director of Plays on his Stage Direction*. Ohio: Ohio State University, 1937.


WORKS CONSULTED


Green, Amy. The Revisionist Stage: American Directors Reinvent the Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University 1996.


