

Shakespeare's Asides Presentation
By Elissa Wolf

Introduction:

Throughout Shakespeare's quartos and folios there are only four stage directions for asides and two vocal directions to address one's self. These markings appear in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. This is compared to the roughly six hundred asides marked in the *New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*. It is from these four marked asides and two vocal directions that we can obtain a glimpse at the possible deliveries and functions of asides, as far as Shakespeare—or, perhaps, his publishers—were concerned.

What do the differences between Shakespeare's text and modern editions mean?

- The assessment of marked asides among modern editions affects the multiple functions and performance options of asides. The performance workshops, I conducted during my research, highlight how certain aside deliveries can change the understanding of a scene.

When looking through modern editions of Shakespeare's work I noticed that some lines were marked as asides in certain editions, while unmarked in others.

Here we can see the differences in marked asides among modern editions.

	Merry Wives	Richard III	Titus Andronicus	Merchant of Venice
Norton 3 rd Edition	38	21	15	2
NOS: Modern Critical	36	32	18	13
Arden 3 rd Series	24	20	14	10

This got me thinking about how editors determine how to mark a line. There must be indicators. So, I began looking for what I call aside indicators.

My dissertation explores how the language structure and words in and surrounding marked asides indicate aside deliveries and functions, and how these functions and deliveries affect performance choices and audience understanding.

For my paper I looked at the *Norton Third Edition*, *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*, and *The Arden Third Series*.

Definitions:

Here are some definitions for terms I will be using throughout my presentation

The Oxford English Dictionary's definition of an aside: Words spoken aside or in an undertone so as to be inaudible to some person present. Words spoken by an actor which the other performers on the stage are supposed to not hear.

- This is the definition that I am using and working off of
- “Generally Recognized Asides” : For the purpose of my dissertation “generally recognized asides” are asides that have been marked the same in the *Oxford*, *Norton*, and *Arden* editions.
- The definition I developed for “Ambiguous Asides” : are they are unmarked lines that contain aside indicators or lines that are marked as asides in some editions but left unmarked in others, both situations allowing a performer the choice of public or aside delivery.

By analyzing the language structure and words used in and surrounding the “generally recognized asides” marked in the *Oxford*, *Norton*, and *Arden* I noticed patterns that indicate a line is an aside, as well as delivery indicators. The indicators found in the “generally recognized asides” help us to locate “ambiguous asides”.

Now we will discuss overall aside indicators, these are indicators that a line is an aside.

First

Lack of Response

In a private email correspondence with John Jowett, one of the general editors of the new oxford Shakespeare, he discussed how the definition of an aside states that the line is supposed to be inaudible to surrounding characters, its inaudibility is what prevents characters from responding, so one way to determine if a line is an aside is to see if surrounding lines respond (Jowett Private Correspondence).

- He further addressed that asides are typically lines that provide information that, if shared with others on stage, would spark reactions: “The words of an aside offer a provocation but fail to provoke...” (Jowett, Email).
- Lack of response is often the most prevalent indicator, and typically appears alongside other indicators, re-enforcing the fact a line is an aside.

Next

Rhyming couplets

When there are no other rhyming lines in a scene, rhyming couplets can interrupt the dialogue and call attention to specific lines. Audibly we notice that the lines are different, and we wonder why. E.A. Abbott suggests that rhyming couplets amongst non-rhyming dialogue was one convention that, “...mark(ed) an aside, which otherwise the audience might have great difficulty in knowing to be an aside “(428-429).

Thirdly the

Midline Switch

The midline switch has been available to direct the actor to move from addressing others to speaking 'asides' this is according to (381 Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern).

- This of course is also dependent on the surrounding context; other times midline switches can indicate switches in forms of public address. So, shifting from talking to one person in public to switching to talk to another person in public.
- Sometimes marked in editions with a "—" to show the switch.

Now we will look at indicators that inform us on specific forms of address that asides will use.

Self-Addressed Indicators

First

Rhyming Couplets

Not only do rhyming couplets indicate asides, but Palfrey and Stern mention that when delivered in the presence of others on stage, and not overtly directed to someone else, rhyming couplets indicate self-address. Rhyming couplets can be especially suggestive for an actor when they are rare. When couplet lines are unprompted by previous couplets and then go unanswered, this signals self-address" (344 Palfrey and Stern).

- For example, there are many lines in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where one character will say a rhyming couplet and the other characters will respond with a rhyming couplet, this indicates a dialog, but rhyming couplets that are started on their own indicate self-address.

Now we will turn to

Stage Directions

As previously mentioned only a few of Shakespeare's early texts contain stage directions that explicitly indicate when a line is "self-addressed." Both of these examples happen in the presence of others, with no responses, indicating their aside nature.

Audience-Addressed Indicators

First we will look at

Words like; look, see, mark, etc..

The significant features of these asides are what linguists refer to as 'relational markers', which, Ken Hyland states "...address readers, either by selectively focusing their attention, or by including them as participants in the textual situation' (Hyland 444). When words like look and see are in an aside they instruct spectators to view something, as a way of getting them to pay close attention.

- Since the other characters can't hear what is being said, these relational markers indicate a character is addressing the audience.

Another indication of audience-address is when

Characters provide information in an aside, that they would logically already know.

When characters share information that they themselves know only too well. Such as asides that contain information about themselves, what they've been up to recently, where they've come from, or information about other characters.

- The purpose of these asides is to share information that the character already knows. Marcus Nordlund explains the character has no conceivable reason to deliver this expository information to himself, the speech is motivated exclusively on an external level of communication. It is spoken entirely for the audience's benefit (Nordlund 25-28).

Dialogical Address Indicators

*Information on dialogical asides is a combination of Manfred Pfister and Roberta Mullini's research on dialogical asides.

These asides are

Very Contextual

They depend mostly on the dramatic situations, with most dialogical address happening in conspiratorial/plotting dialogue or in eavesdropping scenarios. Often justified by the risky nature of a topic being discussed.

- Indeed, many comments or conversations between characters that contain risky topics or refer back to previous discussions about risky topics, help contextualize a line to be dialogical address.

Grouping is another indicator of dialogical address

Scenes where dialogical address typically happen involves scenarios where separate groups emerge and don't want to be overheard (Example: Dueling, one group already on stage when another enters, a group eavesdropping on another, etc.)

- Grouping can be implied by language that involves movement phrases, like discussing where characters are going or moving from one point on stage to another. This language has characters begin to separate from others, putting distance between them, thus forming groups.

We also find dialogical-address when one character involves another.

Involving Others

Others involved in an aside dialogue are often selected by the speaker or called into an aside by the use of a name.

- Again, typically paired with the lack of response by others on stage.

Indistinct-Address/Performers Choice

The definition I developed for Indistinct-addressed asides defines them as lacking the "address indicators" mentioned previously. These lines contain "overall aside indicators", but not indicators for specific forms of address. This allows the performer to decide how the lines should be delivered (that is Self-addressed, audience-addressed, dialogical-addressed, or in some cases public)

- Since they do not have a strong indication of delivery, I believe they can be delivered as the actor sees fit.

Originally, due to COVID I had to hold my workshops online. However, recently I was able to hold an in-person workshop with vaccinated participants.

For both workshops I gave my participants a beginning questionnaire to answer before we got to the performance aspect of the workshops. The results from the Beginning Questionnaire showed that 11 out of 19 participants didn't know that asides were marked by the editor and many of my participants only described asides functioning in one or two ways. With many omitting the dialogical aside but acknowledging asides to the audience or to oneself.

Here we will look at two examples

One being a "Generally Recognized Aside" and the other an "Ambiguous Aside".

This is a self-address generally recognized aside.

Example 1:

The definition I developed for "Self-addressed asides," are asides where characters address themselves in away that is supposed to be inaudible to the others on stage.

It is not always obvious when a performer should deliver a "self-addressed aside" and as previously discussed only a few of Shakespeare's early texts contain stage directions that explicitly indicate when a line is "self-addressed." But how do we know the lines are asides? These stage directions appear in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard III*.

In *Richard III* Act 1, Scene 3, Richard discusses Margaret's curses:
If we look at line 317. We see the stage direction (speaks to himself) before he says "Being well advised, For had I cursed now, I had cursed myself".

RICHARD DUKE OF GLOUCESTER Yet you have all the vantage of her
wrong.
310 I was too hot to do somebody good
That is too cold in thinking of it now.
Marry, as for Clarence, he is well repaid:
He is franked up to fatting for his pains.
God pardon them that are the cause thereof.
315 RIVERS A virtuous and a Christian-like conclusion,
To pray for them that have done scathe to us.
RICHARD DUKE OF GLOUCESTER So do I ever—
(speaks to himself) being well advised,
For had I cursed now, I had cursed myself.
Enter Catesby
CATESBY Madam, his majesty doth call for you—
320 And for your grace—and yours, my gracious lord.

Contextually if others had heard Richard's line they would have commented because his words reveal that, if he were to curse those that did wrong, he would be cursing himself. Especially regarding Clarence, whose pain has been caused by Richard. By offering a pardon to those who have caused Clarence's pain Richard is pardoning himself. Again, this is a line that prompts a reaction and does not receive one. Additionally, a dash is used in this edition to indicate Richard's switch in address from public to himself. The midline switch indicator paired with the lack of response indicator shows Richard's line is an aside. Furthermore, the explicit stage direction paired with the "overall aside indicators" reveal Richard's line is specifically a "self-addressed aside."

When workshoping this scene, we discussed how Richard's "self-addressed aside" affected the scene. Those watching felt it was a way to direct the audience's focus back to Richard, especially since the "self-addressed aside" comes so closely after Margaret's many curses. We noted this line seemed out of place within the context of the whole show since Richard often delivers asides to the audience. This led us to discuss what possible emotional motivations Richard could have had for saying the line to himself instead of to the audience. For Alex, who read Richard's line in the scene, he felt the "self-addressed" line showed Richard was doubting himself. The "self-addressed aside" portrayed an internal struggle, compared to the confidence Richard typically portrays when sharing his schemes in "audience-addressed asides." Alex also noted, because so many of Richard's asides are to the audience, he found it helpful to have directions for a specific delivery ("Workshop Day 2").

Example Two:

Is an "ambiguous aside" and comes from Act 1, Scene 3 in *The Merchant of Venice*: Going back to the aside indicators discussed, we can determine line 90 would be a dialogical aside. Because it uses the involving others indicator.

ANTONIO This was a venture, sir, that Jacob served for,
 85 A thing not in his power to bring to pass,
 But swayed and fashioned by the hand of heaven.
 Was this inserted to make interest good,
 Or is your gold and silver ewes and rams?
 SHYLOCK THE JEW I cannot tell; I make it breed as fast.
 90 But note me signor—
 ANTONIO Mark you this, Bassanio? 1.3.90-5 Mark . . . hath!
 Antonio may deliver these words
 aside to Bassanio; if spoken
 publicly, they may further offend
 Shylock, motivating the rate and
 bond he sets.
 The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
 An evil soul producing holy witness
 Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
 A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
 95 O, what a godly outside falsehood hath!
 SHYLOCK THE JEW Three thousand ducats, 'tis a good round sum.
 Three months from twelve, then let me see the rate.
 ANTONIO Well, Shylock, shall we be beholden to you?

The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works: Modern Critical Edition.

Antonio uses Bassanio's name to bring him into the aside. The aside indicator being lack of response since Shylock does not respond to Antonio's cruel remarks. However, one could argue Shylock chose to ignore these remarks to successfully seal the deal with Antonio, allowing him to enact his revenge. Indeed, what is interesting about this aside is it is marked in the Arden edition but goes unmarked in both the Norton (1.3.91-96) and Oxford editions (1.3.90-95). Though the Oxford edition does contain a performance note suggesting, "Antonio may deliver these words aside to Bassanio; if spoken publicly, they may further offend Shylock, motivating the rate and bond he sets" (1220). These various interpretations allow the line to have both a public or a private delivery, showing not all asides have to be delivered as marked.

I workshoped this scene with Ed who played Shylock, and Kas and Mikkle switched off playing Antonio and Bassanio. When I first introduced the two forms of address, the participants weren't sure how public-address would come across. When the line was first performed publicly Ed felt it reinforced Antonio's hate, that Shylock mentions and additionally shows Shylock's resolve to let it slide in order to get what he wants, the chance to enact revenge. Mikkel felt the public address showed a way for Antonio to take back control of the deal. Those watching noted the public address made them curious about how Shylock would react. When performed with dialogical address, it was noted that this form of address kept the scene on the lighter side, because Shylock was not directly confronted, and there was a more personal connection between Bassanio and Antonio. Overall, those watching noted that depending on the form of address used you are able shape the tone of the play and how Shylock and Antonio are seen.

In Conclusion

Through these workshops, I determined asides contain various functions and forms of address, discovering further that each form of address functions in a specific way. Each form providing insight for both the actors and the audience. "Self-addressed asides" provide insight into a character's emotional state, and their inner thoughts, particularly thoughts they are struggling with, in a specific moment. They emphasize the vulnerable state a character is in. "Audience-addressed asides" bring the audience into the world of the play by using them as a sounding board; with characters sharing information or seeking validation on their thoughts or actions. "Dialogical-addressed asides" act as a way for characters to plot or have urgent conversations with each other, while others are on stage. This highlights the relationship dynamics that exist between certain characters depending on who is included or excluded from the aside. Lastly, "indistinct-addressed asides" offer performers various options for different impacts, allowing them to create a more nuanced performance (Wolf, "Ending Questionnaires"). By applying these various forms of address to scenes, the participants were able to see how each form of address could alter the perception of a scene. Consequently, shaping an audience's understanding of a scene or character in a specific way.

Performers no longer have to solely rely on editor marked asides to influence their performance choices. By analyzing the language used in and around asides, as well as the variations in marked asides among editions, performers are able to determine the performance choices available to them.

By having a list of "overall aside indicators" performers are able to locate asides in a general sense, while the specific "aside address indicators" help them determine the delivery of asides once they are located, giving them a new way to shape their character.

Through the analysis of aside variants among modern editions, paired with close and dramatic readings, I was able to take linguistic clues and patterns and back them up with theatrical application. Marked aside variants provide performers with delivery choices.

In turn different aside functions affect how a scene is understood, showing how an audience's understanding of a scene is contingent upon both aside functions and the choices a performer makes. Thus, re-enforcing the relationship asides create between the audience and the performer. By understating these aside dynamics actors are able to make aside delivery decisions based on the character and moods they wish to present, not just what an editor has presented them with.

Thank you!