A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642

This dictionary, the first of its kind, defines and explains over 900 terms found in the stage directions of English professional plays from the 1580s to the early 1640s. The terms are taken primarily from surviving printed and manuscript sources, and from the plays performed on the London stage, by both minor and major dramatists. The authors draw on a database of over 22,000 stage directions culled from around 500 such plays. Each entry offers a definition, gives examples of how the term is used, cites additional instances, and gives cross-references to other relevant entries. Terms defined range from the obvious and common to the obscure and rare, including actions, places, objects, sounds, and descriptions. The authors have also provided a user's guide and an introduction which describes the scope and rationale of the volume. This will be an indispensable work of reference for scholars, historians, directors, and actors.

ALAN C. DESSEN is Peter G. Phialas Professor of English, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His previous books include *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (1984) and *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (1995).

LESLIE THOMSON is Associate Professor of English, University of Toronto. She edited Middleton and Webster's *Anything for a Quiet Life* for the Oxford edition of Thomas Middleton, and has published articles on original staging and stage directions.

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ALAN C. DESSEN and LESLIE THOMSON

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Acknowledgments

This dictionary, and the database on which it relies, could hardly have been compiled without the resources of the Folger Shakespeare Library. Its collection of original and later editions of the plays, as well as of other relevant material, is second to none. But it is the librarians and the atmosphere of the place that have made the often tedious work a pleasure to do. We especially want to thank Reading Room Supervisor Betsy Walsh, Rosalind Larry, Camille Seerattan, LuEllen DeHaven, Harold Batie, and Susan Sehulster. All the effort compiling the database of stage directions would have been next to useless without the contribution of David Thomson, who wrote the program enabling us to search a term to discover how often and where it is used, and who was always ready to give assistance even when he did not really have the time. Numerous colleagues offered comments and suggestions which helped us to establish the format of the entries, the kinds of information to be included, and the range to cover. In addition to the many who responded to our questionnaires, we have especially appreciated the help of R. A. Foakes, Andrew Gurr, William Ingram, Rosalyn Knutson, Richard Kuhta, James Lusardi, Paul Nelsen, Lena Cowen Orlin, Bruce Smith, Stanley Wells, and those who, early in the project, attended and contributed to a lunchtime presentation by us at the Folger. Most particularly, for the list of Plays and Editions Cited and for his many useful ideas for improvements and solutions to problems, we thank Peter W. M. Blayney. To Sarah Stanton, whose advice, patience, and encouragement helped make the task easier than it might have been, we are most grateful.

Introduction

The purpose of this volume is to define and provide examples of terms found in the stage directions of English professional plays that date from the 1580s to the early 1640s. By providing such definitions we hope to make readily available information about English Renaissance theatrical terminology already known to specialists but not to other readers of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and to present information and documentation unfamiliar even to theatre historians and editors. This reference work is therefore designed to serve as both a handbook for the generalist and a scholarly tool for the specialist.

To accomplish such goals requires a large number of decisions, some of which (the sparing use of evidence from dialogue, the exclusion of evidence from masques) may seem arbitrary or puzzling to readers. The primary function of this Introduction is therefore to explain our procedures and the rationale behind them.

In preparing what we hope will be a useful and usable resource, our focus is on the terms – what we conceive of as the *theatrical vocabulary* – actually used by the playwrights, bookkeepers, and scribes of the period as reflected primarily in the stage directions to be found in the surviving manuscripts and printed texts of plays. Behind this phrase lies our postulation of the presence then of a language of the theatre shared by playwrights, players, and playgoers that can easily be blurred or eclipsed in modern editions, stage productions, and on-the-page interpretations. In some instances, to re-establish such meanings is easy, no more than translating a Latin word (*exiturus*, *manet*, *rustici*). In other situations, to recover such meanings is more challenging but nonetheless possible, a process analogous to the work of an iconographer who ranges widely in the available literature so as to explicate an image appropriately (see *booted*, *hair*, *rosemary*). Elsewhere the meaning or implementation of a theatrical signal remains very much in doubt, a matter of scholarly controversy (see *shop*, *study*, *trees*, *vanish*). Our goal has been to isolate terms and then gloss them as best we can by referring principally to other stage directions rather than to the *OED* (which we have, however, regularly consulted).

With few exceptions, the entries in this dictionary are therefore keyed to words or phrases actually found in the stage directions of this period. Modern scholarly terms will occasionally be defined (*fictional stage directions*, *permissive stage directions*); inevitably, some use must be made of information provided in the dialogue. The emphasis, however, is on that theatrical vocabulary found in the tens of thousands of stage directions that constitute the primary evidence for what we know (or think we know) about the presentation of such plays to their original audiences.

The significance of stage directions

For the reader not familiar with the underpinnings of English Renaissance theatre scholarship, such heavy emphasis on stage directions may seem curious. Why not give equal weight to other kinds of evidence? After all, no account of English Restoration staging would be complete without reference to the playgoing accounts of Samuel Pepys, so why not build here as well on eye-witness accounts? What about theatrical documents such as Henslowe's papers? Most tellingly, why relegate to a lesser status references in play dialogue to actions, costume, properties, and parts of the stage?

What most readers do not realize is how little evidence has actually survived about the staging of plays in this period – the norm is silence. A few eye-witness accounts from playgoers are available (including several for Shakespeare plays), but these accounts can be singularly unrevealing, often amounting to no more than partial plot summaries. Similarly, scraps of useful information do turn up in Henslowe's inventory of costumes and properties (and are cited here when appropriate), but again surprisingly little can be gleaned about theatrical practice from these and comparable documents.

Dialogue evidence is far more plentiful, but this material represents shifting sands, not bedrock. Even when dealing with seemingly concrete stage directions (Q1's "*Romeo opens the tomb*," *The Tempest*'s "*they heavily vanish*") the interpreter today cannot be certain whether the original playgoer saw a verisimilar effect (an elaborate tomb property, a disappearance by means of theatrical trickery) or whether the "tomb" or the "vanishing" was generated by a combination of dialogue, mimed action from the players, and the spectator's imaginative participation. If stage directions can be opaque rather than transparent, dialogue evidence is far trickier to interpret. At least one scholar has argued that a verisimilar "wall" property was necessary for *Richard II* because Hotspur refers to Flint Castle as "yon lime and stone" (3.3.26). Similarly, consider Brutus's reaction to Caesar's ghost: "Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil, / That mak'st my blood cold, and my hair to stare?" (4.3.279–80) or Gertrude's description of Hamlet in the closet scene: "Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep, / And as the sleeping soldiers in th' alarm, / Your bedded hair, like life in excrements, / Start up and stand an end" (3.4.119–22). Are we to conclude from these two passages that Richard Burbage had a fright wig or that he had the ability to make his hair stand on end? Or are such descriptions substitutes for what cannot be physically displayed to a playgoer? To tease out stage practice from dialogue is repeatedly to encounter this problem.

To rely almost exclusively on stage directions is, by contrast, to stay within the realm of what was or could have been done in the original productions, particularly when the play in question is linked to a professional company or to an experienced playwright (as distinct from university players and amateur authors). The exigencies of the playhouse are reflected

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in so-called "permissive" signals, as with the use of *or*, *as many as may be*, or "*Exit Venus. Or if you can conveniently, let a chair come down from the top of the stage, and draw her up*" (*Alphonsus of Aragon*, 2109–10). Scholars rightly observe that these and comparable stage directions may more reflect the playwright's original conception than the actual staging (we are assuming that most stage directions are authorial in origin). But who would be a better judge of what could or could not be accomplished by the players than an experienced writer who had seen many of his plays move from script to stage? When documenting our entries we have therefore made plentiful use of evidence from the canons of such seasoned (and prolific) playwrights as Dekker, Shakespeare, Heywood, Middleton, Fletcher, Massinger, Brome, and Shirley. The thousands of extant stage directions provide the only substantive clues to the language shared by these and other theatrical professionals.

Drawing upon stage directions as evidence, however, is not without its problems. First, editors and theatre historians rightly point to the importance of provenance (place of origin, derivation) in dealing with these signals. Thus, a theatre historian seeking to reconstruct the physical features of a particular building such as the Globe will draw only upon evidence from plays known to have been performed in that building. For an editor, a different question of origins is also crucial: did the manuscript from which the text was printed preserve the pre-production concept of the author(s); had it been annotated for performance (and if so, by whom) or recopied and perhaps "improved" by a scribe; or was it compiled by one or more of the players who had acted in it?

When widely scattered stage directions are used as evidence, the provenance of individual plays cannot be completely ignored (as when Marston, writing with a particular theatre in mind, refers to a *music house*), but in practice we have found this distinction less important than other variables. Indeed, the study of thousands of stage directions does not elicit a technical backstage vocabulary that is the exclusive property of one or another group of theatrical professionals or is linked to specific venues. Some usages are more likely to turn up in texts annotated for performance – e.g., *ready*, *clear* – but examples of the former are sprinkled throughout printed texts of the period, and examples of the latter, although plentiful in the manuscript of Heywood's *The Captives*, are to be found in only two other texts. The language used by a professional dramatist may not be exactly the same as that used by a bookkeeper, a scribe, an amateur writer, an academic, or a Ben Jonson refashioning his play for a reader, nor is there an exact correlation among varying venues or during disparate decades. Nonetheless, by proceeding carefully (and by not building edifices upon unique or highly idiosyncratic usages) we hope to isolate and define a range of terms that would have made excellent sense to Marlowe, Shakespeare, Dekker, Heywood, Jonson, Marston, Chapman, Middleton, Massinger, Brome, Ford, and Shirley.

Similar questions of chronology (when a play and its theatrical signals were composed) can sometimes be relevant to the entries, but with a few exceptions we have not attempted to trace the evolution of terms in the manner of the *OED*. Some locutions found in the 1580s and early 1590s are superseded or simplified in the playtexts that follow (see *let, proffer*); the earlier signals are often longer, without the shorthand forms that later become commonplace. For the bulk of the period up through the 1630s, however, continuity rather than evolution appears to be the norm. To minimize the importance of chronology is not to argue that staging procedures and the terms used to signal those procedures stayed the same in all theatres between the 1580s and the early 1640s. Nonetheless, the fact that a host of playwrights in many theatres over many decades appear to be using the same shared language strikes us as significant. In compiling dictionary entries some account of changes in usage can be instructive as can identifying any distinctive terms or procedures limited largely to Peele, Greene, and the 1580s. But if (as is often the case) Shakespeare/Heywood and Brome/Shirley make use of much the same theatrical vocabulary, the importance of chronological distinctions is greatly diminished. Of greater significance for an investigation of the original stage practice are those signifiers that remain useful and meaningful over the full stretch of Elizabethan–Jacobean–Caroline drama.

When provenance and chronology are invoked, what needs stressing is that there is indeed a widely shared theatrical vocabulary, especially from the 1590s on, and that the major variations in that vocabulary arise less often from different venues or different decades than from authorial idiosyncrasy. For example, Chapman is more likely than any other professional dramatist to use Latin terms, but it is Massinger who is particularly fond of "*exeunt praeter . . .*" where another dramatist would use *manet* or "*exeunt all saving . . .*" Similarly, Massinger and others regularly use *aside* to mean *speak aside*, but Shakespeare, for one, prefers other locutions (e.g., *to himself*) and uses *aside* primarily to denote onstage positioning. In short, there are variations aplenty which, whenever possible, are signaled in our entries.

Inclusions and exclusions

The origins of this dictionary project are to be found in the work of Alan Dessen, who for over twenty years has been collecting materials from medieval, Tudor, Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline playtexts – a selective rather than inclusive process that most recently produced *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). Leslie Thomson has also considered problems related to stage directions and original staging in a number of articles. The writing of the entries has been divided more or less evenly, with each of us working on various subject areas.

Our primary tool in constructing entries is a database compiled by

Professor Thomson that consists of over 22,000 stage directions culled from roughly 500 plays (some of them in more than one version). Although we make occasional reference to early Elizabethan troupe plays from the 1560s and 1570s, the database itself does *not* include items from before 1581 (the date of Robert Wilson's *The Three Ladies of London*, the first extant play linked to the London professional theatre); plays with academic auspices; translations; or masques, pageants, and other theatrical events not linked to the professional repertory theatre. The database does, however, include a few plays of uncertain origin that seem to us to be "professional" (e.g., *Tom a Lincoln*); a few of late but uncertain date that seem likely to antedate the closing of the theatres (*The Platonic Lovers*); and some not published until the 1650s or later but certainly written earlier (*The Thracian Wonder*).

As noted at the outset, our primary focus is on the shared theatrical language linked to the professional theatre in London. The moral interludes and other forms of Tudor and early Elizabethan professional drama are not without interest, but are geared to performance by smaller troupes on the road who lacked the resources of the larger companies that developed when permanent theatres were built in London. Some academic plays (e.g., the tragedies of Thomas Goffe written for students at Oxford) include theatrical signals very much in tune with the professional drama, but most of these plays are scripted with very different circumstances in mind.

To sidestep completely the plentiful evidence about the presentation of masques at court may puzzle some readers, especially since their authors are responsible for many of the plays in our database. Masques, however, were no-expense-spared productions with one-time-only effects and therefore tell us little about the exigencies of professional repertory theatre where any onstage devices or choices had to be practicable and repeatable – although masques or pageants included within professional plays often provide suggestive evidence about special effects that could be achieved with the same resources (and the same limitations) as everything else presented in a particular theatre. In dealing with a shared theatrical vocabulary the issue of what is feasible within the constraints of time, budget, and available facilities is of some importance.

In constructing entries, the two most difficult questions have proven to be which items should be glossed and how much documentation should be provided. As to the former, we have heeded the responses to questionnaires distributed to scholars and theatrical professionals and have been as comprehensive as possible. Included, therefore, are a number of unique items (see *astringer*, *helter skelter*, *pewter*, *pot birds*) along with other terms that recur only once or twice in our database. At the other extreme, we have also included items that might not seem to need explanation (verbs such as *bring*, *carry*, *lead*; adverbs or prepositions such as *before, behind, forth, in, off, out*) when we have found usages that we consider theatrically significant or suggestive.

Given the wealth of material available in our database, the question of

how much documentation to provide has presented a particularly difficult set of choices. Some theatre historians who responded to our queries wanted everything – in essence, a complete concordance of usages of each term. For the non-specialist, however, such massive documentation can drown a reader in a sea of italics and citations (how does one present roughly 375 examples of *sword* or 600 examples of *door*?). At the risk of disappointing everyone, we have sought to satisfy both constituencies. As a general practice – but especially in complex, heavily documented entries – we have placed the essential information or distinctions at the beginning. When the number of examples is within manageable limits, we include everything. When the number proliferates (as is often the case with verbs and widely used properties such as swords and crowns), we quote representative examples and then offer a sampling of citations that can epitomize the rest of the evidence, with the plays in such series placed in roughly chronological order so as to suggest the range of that evidence. As noted earlier, when singling out specific examples we rely more heavily upon signals from veteran professionals such as Heywood, Dekker, Fletcher, Middleton, Massinger, Brome, Shirley, and especially Shakespeare, and draw less upon material from figures such as Killigrew, Glapthorne, and Carlell. We have not sought to "privilege" Shakespeare over his contemporaries, but we recognize that most users of this volume will be more familiar with his plays than with those of Massinger or Brome.

Several omissions should be noted. Even though the names of actors do occasionally appear in stage directions (most notably in Webster's Induction to Marston's *The Malcontent*), we do not include entries for proper names. Similarly, with few exceptions we do not include the many professions or social types regularly cited in these signals. To avoid making our documentation even more unwieldy we have made no attempt to incorporate into our entries information about the dimensions and configurations of theatre buildings, the history and composition of theatre companies, and the economics of the playhouses and playgoing – important topics but beyond the range of this dictionary. Some terms familiar to theatre historians are not among our entries because they do not appear in stage directions, so a reader will encounter *discover* but not *discovery space, hell* but not *hellmouth*. Again, our goal is to isolate and define the terms actually used by playwrights and theatrical personnel in this period as reflected in our database.

A comment is needed about the stage directions provided by Ben Jonson. The first printed version of *Volpone* (the 1607 Quarto) contains no stage directions at all, not even an *enter*; the first printed version of *The Alchemist* (the 1612 Quarto) has only one ("*Dol is seen*" at 2.3.210). The various signals in these two plays now familiar to readers (e.g., the entrance of Volpone in Act 4 "*as impotent*") were added later for the 1616 Folio. Jonson was a professional dramatist highly knowledgeable about his theatre, but throughout his career and especially in the plays that follow *Bartholomew Fair* he often

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chose to augment his texts with a reader in mind. We have incorporated some of these signals when we have found them instructive or provocative (e.g., "*This Scene is acted at two windows, as out of two contiguous buildings,*" "*He grows more familiar in his Courtship, plays with her paps, kisseth her hands, etc.*," *The Devil Is an Ass*, 2.6.37, 71) but have been sparing in our use of what we deem to be "literary" stage directions from the Jonson canon.

Texts, documentation, and procedures

In choosing texts from which to draw our citations we have tried to combine accuracy, efficiency, and accessibility. The editorial tradition that started with Shakespeare's plays in the early eighteenth century has not been kind to the original stage directions, so that these theatrical signals have been regularly omitted, rewritten, rearranged, and moved. Thanks to the resources of the Folger Shakespeare Library and microfilm, our database has been compiled from the early printed texts, not from modern editions, so that the documentation within the entries *could* have been linked exclusively to those most authoritative first versions of the plays. To have done so, however, would have made it difficult for users of this dictionary (many of whom will not have access either to the originals or to reproductions of them) to find items they might wish to pursue. We have therefore sought when possible to draw citations from editions that reproduce accurately the original stage directions and are accessible in many libraries (e.g., the Bowers *Dekker*, the Edwards–Gibson *Massinger*, the Revels Plays, Malone Society Reprints, and Tudor Facsimile Texts). Some nineteenth-century collections of plays (of Heywood, Day, Davenport, Brome, Davenant, and Glapthorne) are more reliable on stage directions than are the critical editions produced by the "New Bibliography." See the User's Guide for a summary of our citation practices.

Since Shakespeare is almost always read in modern spelling, we have modernized the spelling of all passages drawn from old-spelling texts. In addition, to avoid obvious inconsistencies we have regularized the use of italic and roman type in the presentation of stage directions and have also expanded abbreviations and contractions – although for the most part we have retained the original capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of proper names. Any minor distortions caused by such changes are offset by the added ease for readers and, in symbolic terms, by the presentation of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as orthographic equals – as opposed to "modern" Shakespeare versus "primitive" Heywood.

To sidestep a host of scholarly controversies and to economize on what can be massive documentation we have for the most part omitted authors' names from our entries. In the attempt to reconstruct a theatrical vocabulary the authorship of specific plays or parts of plays is usually not of major importance. Since an index to plays and topics would be very unwieldy, we have provided plentiful cross-references within the entries by means of

bold type and also a list of Terms by Category. References to scholarly works do not appear in entries, but our Select Bibliography includes relevant studies.

A final word is needed about accuracy. In constructing entries from a database various generalizations are inevitable, as with "this term occurs only twice." These claims are subject to the limitations of the compiler of the database (whose eye may have skipped over a stage direction or two, or even an entire page) or to unusual variations in the original spelling (*hood-winked/hudwincked*, *malcontent/male-content*, *panting for breath/painting for breth*). Such generalizations should therefore be understood as "to the best of our knowledge and according to the information in our database." In addition, some items will inevitably be omitted or skewed in any attempt at amassing such entries, whereas terms not found in stage directions may be commonplace elsewhere (and therefore may be conspicuous by their absence here). We welcome additions, corrections, and comments from our readers.

Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson
Chapel Hill, Toronto, and Washington DC, 1998

User's guide

Terms in bold italic within entries are cross-references to other entries (e.g., *rapier* in the *sword* entry).

Play titles in lists of citations are in roughly chronological order; examples for quotation are not necessarily chronological.

For plays in the Shakespeare canon, citations include not only reference to a quarto and/or the First Folio, but also act–scene–line reference to the Riverside edition. For the occasional item found in the Riverside textual notes but not in the text, the reference in square brackets indicates where the term belongs (e.g., *breast* in Quarto *2 Henry VI*, E2r, [3.2.0]). In a few cases where even the Riverside notes do not include the entry term, this fact is indicated in the square brackets.

Square brackets are also used for a few non-Shakespearean plays when the edition cited does not include the original term.

For directions found in the textual notes but not in the text of the Glover–Waller *Beaumont and Fletcher*, citations give the page number where the stage direction belongs and the page number of the note, separated by a slash (e.g., *ambo* in *Philaster*, 95/406).

All references are to stage directions, so *s.d.* is not included. Because many editions do not provide line numbers for stage directions, the line cited is the one preceding the direction in question. When line numbers are not available, page numbers or signatures are given. References to a play in multi-volume works of an author (e.g., Heywood, Fletcher, Brome, Davenant) give page numbers but not volume numbers, which can be found in the List of Plays and Editions Cited.

The source for play titles, authorship attributions, and dates is the third edition of the *Annals of English Drama 975–1700*. In citations the initial articles are omitted from play titles, and longer titles have been shortened. See the List of Plays and Editions Cited for complete information.

For citations within parentheses, "also" is used to refer to a similar usage in the play being quoted, whereas "see also" is for similar usages in a different play or plays. The absence of either "also" or "see also" from a parenthetical list following a quotation means that the uses are the same; "see also" outside parenthetical references generally indicates that the examples cited are broadly similar in their use of the relevant term or phrase. In addition, "see also" is used to cite related terms, usually at the end of an entry.

There are no entries for proper names, and with few exceptions professions and social roles are not glossed (so there are no entries for *friar*, *nurse*, *merchant*, etc.). The reference work to be consulted for this information is *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama*, compiled by Thomas Berger, Sidney Sondergard and William Bradford. With two exceptions

(*fictional stage directions* and *permissive stage directions*) entries are only for terms found in stage directions.

Generalizations such as "this term is found only twice" or "there are roughly 600 examples of *door*" should be understood as implying "in our database" and "in stage directions of the period." References to the use of a term are only to its use in stage directions.

The following abbreviations are used in the *Dictionary*:

DS	dumb show	Riv.	*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed.
F	First Folio		G. Blakemore Evans. Boston, 1974.
Q1	first quarto	r	recto (right page)
Q2	second quarto	v	verso (left page)

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