

Cambridge University Press

0521311616 - Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters

Alan C. Dessen

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

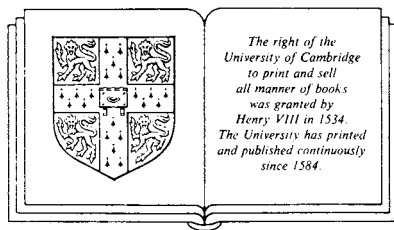
Elizabethan stage conventions and  
modern interpreters

Cambridge University Press  
0521311616 - Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters  
Alan C. Dessen  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

# ELIZABETHAN STAGE CONVENTIONS AND MODERN INTERPRETERS

ALAN C. DESSEN

*Professor of English  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

*Cambridge  
New York New Rochelle  
Melbourne Sydney*

Cambridge University Press  
0521311616 - Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters  
Alan C. Dessen  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1984

First published 1984  
First paperback edition 1985  
Reprinted 1988

Library of Congress catalogue card number: 83-23970

*British Library Cataloguing in publication data*

Dessen, Alan C.  
Elizabethan stage conventions and modern  
interpreters.  
1. Shakespeare, William – Criticism and  
interpretation  
I. Title  
822.3'3 PR2976  
ISBN 0 521 25912 6 hard covers  
ISBN 0 521 31161 6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

Cambridge University Press  
0521311616 - Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters  
Alan C. Dessen  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

*To Shirl*

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Note on texts and old spelling</i>	xi
1 The arrow in Nessus: Elizabethan clues and modern detectives	1
2 Interpreting stage directions	19
3 The logic of 'this' on the open stage	53
4 Elizabethan darkness and modern lighting	70
5 The logic of 'place' and locale	84
6 The logic of stage violence	105
7 Theatrical metaphor: seeing and not-seeing	130
8 Conclusion: Elizabethan playscripts and modern interpreters	156
<i>Notes</i>	164
<i>List of plays and editions</i>	181
<i>Index</i>	187

## *Preface*

This project was begun in 1976–7 during my term as a National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Earlier versions of some sections have since appeared in print, so for permission to incorporate such materials here I wish to thank the editors of the *Yearbook of English Studies* (and their publishers, the Modern Humanities Research Association), *Renaissance Drama*, *Renaissance Papers*, and *Elizabethan Theatre IX*. In addition, parts of this argument have been presented to various scholarly gatherings, so for helpful comments my thanks are due to colleagues at the Folger Institute Colloquium; the Southeastern Renaissance Conference; several seminars of the Shakespeare Association of America; the NEH Symposium on ‘Shakespeare in Performance’ (Urbana, 1977); and, in particular, the 1981 International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre at Waterloo, Ontario (with special thanks to G. R. Hibbard). Of the many people in the academic and theatrical worlds who have been generous in sharing insights and responding to my questions, let me single out Homer Swander, Audrey Stanley, Bernard Beckerman, David Bevington, Michael Warren, Steven Urkowitz, Gary Taylor, G. R. Proudfoot, Pat Patton, Denis Arndt, James Edmondson, Martha Henry, Urjo Kareda, Ian Richardson, Terry Hands, and Patrick Stewart.

## *Note on texts and old spelling*

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, general editor Alfred Harbage (Baltimore, 1969). Elsewhere, whenever possible I have used facsimiles of the earliest texts (as in the Tudor Facsimile series), diplomatic editions (as with the reprints provided by the Malone Society), or later editions that, for the most part, faithfully reproduce the original stage directions (e.g., the six volume 1874 edition of Thomas Heywood or the ten volume Waller and Glover edition of Beaumont and Fletcher).

To avoid a cumbersome apparatus, I have not provided a footnote or endnote for each of my many citations from the plays but instead have included line, signature, or page numbers in my text (for example, *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*, ll. 2109–10; *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, Blr), and then listed the plays cited and editions used at the end of the book. For the many references to Heywood and Fletcher in the editions cited above (which do not provide line numbers), I cite volume and page numbers (for example, *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*, II, 41).

Since Shakespeare is almost always read in modern spelling, I have chosen to modernize the spelling of many non-Shakespearean passages both from the plays and from Sidney and other contemporary spokesmen. To avoid some obvious inconsistencies in my own text, moreover, I have also regularized the use of italic and roman type in my presentation of stage directions. Any minor distortions caused by such changes are more than offset by the added ease for some readers and, in symbolic terms, the presentation of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as orthographic equals (as opposed to ‘modern’ Shakespeare versus ‘primitive’ Heywood).