

In this rigorous investigation of the staging of Shakespeare's plays, Alan Dessen wrestles with three linked questions: (1) what did a playgoer at the original production actually see? (2) how can we tell today? and (3) so what? His emphasis is upon images and onstage effects (e.g. the sick-chair, early entrances, tomb scenes) easily obscured or eclipsed today. The basis of his analysis is his survey of the stage directions in the approximately 600 English professional plays performed before 1642. From such widely scattered bits of evidence emerges a vocabulary of the theatre shared by Shakespeare, his theatrical colleagues, and his playgoers, in which the terms (e.g. *vanish, as in ... , as from ... , "Romeo opens the tomb"*) often do not admit of neat dictionary definitions but can be glossed in terms of options and potential meanings. To explore such terms, along with various costumes and properties (keys, trees, coffins, books), is to challenge unexamined assumptions that underlie how Shakespeare is read, edited, and staged today.

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0521470803 - Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary - Alan C. Dessen

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To the memory of Bernie Beckerman (1921–1985)

“The best in this kind are but shadows”

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Preface

This project has evolved over many years, a process greatly abetted by a Fall 1990 fellowship at the Institute for the Arts and Humanities at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a Spring 1991 National Endowment for the Humanities Senior Fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Along that tortuous path a treatment of keys in *The Merchant of Venice* that became a part of chapter 8 appeared in *Shakespeare Bulletin* (1985); some material now in chapters 1 and 2 appeared in *Word and Image* (1988); a discussion of *Romeo and Juliet*, 5.3 that now frames chapter 9 was published in *Shakespeare and the Sense of Performance*, edited by Marvin and Ruth Thompson (1988); and an early version of chapter 4 appeared in *Renaissance Papers 1991*. I wish to thank the editors of those journals and the University of Delaware Press for their permission to incorporate such materials here. In addition, parts of this argument have been presented to various groups, so for helpful comments my thanks are due to my graduate students in a 1992 seminar and to colleagues at several seminars of the Shakespeare Association of America, a 1991 seminar of the New York Shakespeare Society, the 1991 Southeastern Renaissance Conference, and the 1992 Ohio Shakespeare Conference. Of the many people who have been generous in sharing insights and offering criticisms, I would like to single out Homer Swander, Andrew Gurr, Robert Hapgood, George Walton Williams, G. B. Shand, Steven Urkowitz, John Astington, Cary Mazer, D. F. Rowan, William Long, Lena Orlin, Catherine Belsey, E. Pearlman, Peter Blayney, Leslie Thomson, and June Schlueter. I am also grateful for the help provided by Todd Stabley and by Betsy Walsh and her staff at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Note on texts and old spelling

Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, general editor Alfred Harbage. Elsewhere, I have relied heavily upon facsimiles of the earliest texts (as with the Tudor Facsimile series, The Norton First Folio, and the Huntington Shakespeare Quartos), diplomatic editions (as with the reprints provided by the Malone Society), and the early printed texts themselves (thanks to the resources of the Folger Shakespeare Library). I use only those nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions that faithfully reproduce both the wording and placement of the original stage directions (e.g., the six-volume 1874 edition of Thomas Heywood) and, in many instances, have checked relevant passages in these modern editions against the original texts.

To avoid a cumbersome apparatus, I have not provided a footnote or endnote for each of the myriad stage directions that constitute the bulk of my evidence but instead have included line, signature, or page numbers in my text and then listed the plays cited and editions used at the end of the book. When a multi-volume edition does include line numbers (as with Peele, Dekker, and Massinger), I do not provide the volume number in my citation. When line numbers are not provided, however (as with Heywood, Fletcher, Brome, and Davenant), I cite volume and page numbers (for example, Heywood, 2 *The Iron Age*, III, 413).

Since Shakespeare is almost always read in modern spelling, I have chosen to modernize the spelling of non-Shakespearean passages. To avoid some obvious inconsistencies in my own text, moreover, I have also regularized the use of italic and roman

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type in my presentation of stage directions and expanded some abbreviations. 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).