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Book Review: Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson (eds.). *Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama*.

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difficult questions regarding continuity and consistency within them remain, and it would be valuable to take account of these questions.

The study might also have been strengthened by further shifts in emphases. For example, Cox underestimates the political concerns of John Heywood, whose plays are intimately related to the public events of the early 1530s, especially those surrounding the divorce. In *Four PP*, the Pardoner recounts a visit to hell, where he found the somewhat Henrican chief devil watching the souls play at 'racket' (ll. 881–8). The treatment of the Vice is also open to question. Cox does not always discriminate accurately between the stage convention commonly called '*the* Vice' by theatrical practitioners and publishers for a period of about thirty years, and vices in general (often part of the Seven Deadly Sins, and lasting for much longer in the history of the early drama), though he is aware that there is a difference. The important thing for this study is that 'the Vice' was a stage convention, used for all sorts of practical staging necessities in a period when acting companies were small and players had to make the most of a key player whose professional skills had high entertainment value. He was usually so busy that it was impossible to double his part. If the devil did have an emotional impact, as I have suggested, the Vice invariably did not: his expressions of emotion are always comically insincere. For a time he must have been an indispensable element in the business of making a profit. In places the conduct of Cox's argument could also be tighter. For example the function of Fansy and Foly in Skelton's *Magnyfycence* is not addressed, and yet the play is considered as though devils were present.

As an historical survey, however, this study has much in its favour. It is notably effective in showing the long-term continuity of the devil on the stage, especially by illuminating many manifestations in seventeenth-century plays. This aspect has not previously been treated in such detail, and as such it is a significant contribution, and one which will, one would hope, stimulate further investigation.

PETER HAPPÉ

Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson. *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp 289.

Since the 1980s, at the meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) a band of scholars, often including Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson,

the authors of the present volume, participated in an annual research seminar devoted to theatre history. Their archive encompasses the records of the companies (such as Henslowe's diary) and of the court, the counties, towns, and parishes in which the players lived and worked in addition to the evidence of the theatrical playbooks and early printed texts of the plays themselves. As a sometime participant and regular auditor of this seminar, I can attest that it has been one of the most genial, collegial, and productive of the scholarly communities fostered by the SAA. The members' good humor and candor in discussing each other's work is notable, and the synergy created by their varied but related interests is reflected in the significant body of work they have produced over the years.[1] Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson's current book is a fitting and impressive contribution to a major aspect of that work.

The stated purpose of the dictionary 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' and thus to serve as 'both a handbook for the generalist and a scholarly tool for the specialist' (vii). Each entry glosses a term, relates it to other terms, and offers a list of examples (sometimes selective, sometimes exhaustive, depending on the frequency of the term). The examples are drawn from a database compiled by Thomson consisting of more than 22,000 stage directions from roughly 500 plays. Collectively, the authors assert, these terms and examples illustrate 'the theatrical vocabulary' (vii) or 'the shared theatrical language' (xi) of the major professional playwrights and other theatre personnel (such as players, bookkeepers, and scribes, and even some amateur and academic writers). The authors' ultimate goal is not merely to elucidate the 'language' itself, but to infer from the stage directions the constraints, resources, and to some extent the premises of the professional Elizabethan theatres. Not overtly stated, but clear to readers familiar with Dessen's earlier work on stage directions, is the recurring theme of the degree to which this theatrical vocabulary activated and relied upon the imaginative participation of the audience.

In their introduction, Dessen and Thomson defend their reliance on the terms used in the stage directions, rather than on stage action described in the dialogue, extant inventories of props and costumes, or eyewitness accounts of performances. The information available from eyewitness accounts, they argue, is meager. Though Henslowe's diary contains information on props and costumes, it tells one little about how they were actually used. Staging information implied in dialogue can be useful but is often ambiguous or unreliable; effects implied or described in a character's lines may or may not

have been actually performed or visible on stage. They offer, by way of example, Brutus's lines to Caesar's ghost: 'Art thou some god, some angel, or some devil, / That mak'st my blood cold, and my hair to stare?' (*Julius Caesar*, 4.3.279–80). The stage directions themselves, the authors argue, are the best evidence of stage practice: '[W]ho 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?' (ix). Thus they devote their efforts to identifying and defining 'the range of terms that would have made excellent sense to Marlowe, Shakespeare, Dekker, Heywood, Jonson, Marston, Chapman, Middleton, Massinger, Brome, Ford, and Shirley' (xi).

The principles of inclusion are clearly and thoughtfully explained. The focus is squarely on plays for the professional London theatres, not on moral interludes or academic drama or civic entertainments. Only stage directions found in the early printed texts are included, though examples are keyed, wherever possible, to modern scholarly editions that preserve the original directions unaltered. Directions in masques are excluded on the grounds that masques are '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' (xi). With the exception of two entries ('*fictional stage directions*' and '*permissive stage directions*'), the terms are those used in the directions themselves, not in modern critical discussions of them ('*discover* but not *discovery space*, and *hell* but not *hellmouth*' [xii]). Spelling is modernized in order to present examples from Shakespeare (whose plays are usually read in modern spelling editions) and his contemporaries on equal footing. A helpful 'User's Guide' follows the introduction; a list of plays and editions cited and a select bibliography of relevant criticism conclude the book.

The entries and accompanying examples explain what is literally meant by such directions as '*trussing their points as new up*', '*horrid*', '*haling him up and down*', '*enter in bed*', '*moritur*', '*make a leg*', '*enter as from dinner*', or '*pass over the stage*'. They also gloss iconographic meanings, such as the significance of '*rosemary*' (which, *pace* Ophelia, is chiefly associated with weddings, not 'remembrance') or '*hair about her ears*' (associated with madness, shame, rage, or grief). The entries also suggest affinities among different terms (with cross-references indicated by boldface) and delineate sub-categories of gestures or effects. Thus the discussion of '*hand*' (occurring nearly 500 times in their database) establishes seven distinct uses: '[T]he most common locution is to *enter* with an object in one's *hand* but also signaled are (2) *kissing* a *hand*, (3)

wringing hands, (4) *hand in hand*, (5) a variety of actions such as *holding, taking, joining, offering hands*, (6) severed *hands*, (7) a *hand* as a manifestation of heaven.' Entries for unusual terms are equally informative and suggestive. The entry for '*harp, harper*', for example, cites three of the five uses from *The Valiant Welshman*, from which one can infer the playwright's deliberate choice of a Celtic instrument to emphasize a 'Welsh' rather than an 'English' setting.

Dessen and Thomson stress the continuity and consistency of terms during the period under consideration, rather than the variations typical of different decades or venues or authors, and they are right to stress the wide use and acceptability of the Elizabethan dramatic language once it was established. Nonetheless, vestiges of earlier forms and authorial idiosyncrasies emerge in their discussions of specific terms. The entry for '*here*' ('*Kent here set at liberty*', '*Here enters the Mayor and the Watch*') notes that in about half of the 45 instances in their database, the term is found in 'locutions especially prevalent up through the early 1590s'. I would disagree that their examples suggest that the term is used in two different ways, one calling 'attention to timing or placement' of an action or entry in the flow of the performance or narrative ('*Fight here*') and the other typical of these early locutions. Both uses seem to me examples of the spatio-temporal markers typical of directions for the liturgical drama and the moral interludes that preceded the professional plays Dessen and Thomson focus upon. They are thus vestiges of an earlier 'theatrical vocabulary' suited to the constraints and premises of the earlier period.[2]

At the back of the volume, Dessen and Thomson provide analytical lists of terms by category – such as, actions, clothing, emotions, hand properties, stage furnishings, offstage sounds, musical instruments, body parts, military items, and so on. These lists provide a topical index to the dictionary as well as a suggestive synopsis of the elements of Elizabethan dramaturgy. For example, the list of props – from apricocks and axes; to meal, milk, and money; to whips, wine, and wreaths – vividly suggests the variety of concrete hand-held objects called for in these 500 plays. A simple tally of the items listed reveals that no fewer than 183 different objects appeared on the stage when these plays were performed. Individual entries also often indicate the relative frequency of a particular direction or stage effect. For example, the term '*flourish*' occurs over 500 times in the database, often with specified instruments, such as *cornets*. That term, in turn, yields another 120 instances. Our impression of the violence of Elizabethan drama might be tempered by discovering that the direction '*kill*' occurs 180 times in these plays, while the direction '*kiss*' occurs three times as often. However, as Dessen and Thomson would acknowledge,

not every stage kiss or fatal thrust is marked by an explicit stage direction. Indeed, the entry on '*poison* 'explicitly reminds the reader that stage 'directions cite only a few of the many uses and kinds of *poison* in the plays of the period'. Thus, the summary lists are suggestive rather than definitive about theatrical practices in the plays represented in the database.

The volume's emphasis on the importance of the imaginative participation of the audience in Elizabethan dramaturgy is most evident in the entries for a group of directions beginning with '*as*' ('*as*', '*as at*', '*as if*', '*as from*', etc) Dessen and Thomson begin the entry on '*as from*' thus: '[A] large sub-category of *as [if]* signals used to denote recently completed offstage actions or events that (1) pose significant staging problems or (2) have been sidestepped in order to speed up the narrative; the result can be a sense of actions, places, or a "world" just offstage to be imagined by the playgoer' (13). Similarly, the entry on '*as [if]*' begins: 'a large family of directions distinctive to the drama of this period', and ends with a discussion of signals linked to *night* which suggest 'how onstage "darkness" was generated by a combination of suitable acting (groping in the *dark*, tiptoeing) a shared theatrical vocabulary (the use of lighting implements and appropriate costumes such as *nightgowns*), and the imaginative participation (and acquiescence) of the playgoer – all in the spirit of *as* if' (14). One might argue, as I have done elsewhere,[3] that there is a modest but significant difference between the theatrical self-consciousness of '*as* if' (which calls attention to the illusion involved) and the self-effacing descriptive formula '*as* at' or '*as from*' (which does not). But the authors' fundamental point is indisputable.

All in all, the authors amply fulfill their goal of providing a handbook for the generalist and a scholarly tool for the specialist. Generalists will be grateful to have authoritative explanations of the terms used in the directions of the day. Specialists will delight in having such a wealth of examples ready to hand to aid in the analysis of a specific class of prop, stage locale, or stage action. Both will find that the entries will prompt additional insights and connections. And last, but not least, the volume serves as a testament to the lively physicality of the drama of the period, in which 'action is eloquence'.

linda mcjannet

Notes

1 Other frequent members of this seminar have included William B. Long, William Ingram, Rosalyn Knutson, S.P. Cerasano, John Astington, Scott McMillan, Frances Teague, Andrew Gurr, Paul Nelson, and others. Books and essays by the participants include Alan Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* and *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984 and 1995, respectively); Leslie Thomson, '*Enter Above*: The Staging of *Women Beware Women*', *Studies in English Literature* 26 (1986): 331–43 and 'Window Scenes in Renaissance Plays: a Survey and Some Conclusions', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1990): 225–43; John H. Astington, 'Descent Machinery in the Playhouse', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985): 119–33; William B. Long, 'Stage Directions: a Misinterpreted Factor in Determining Textual Provenance', *TEXT* 2 (1985): 121–37; Scott McMillan, *The Elizabethan Theatre and 'The Book of Sir Thomas More'* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987); Roslyn Lander Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company, 1594–1613* (Little Rock: Arkansas University Press, 1991); William Ingram, *The Business of Playing: The Beginnings of Adult Professional Theatre in Elizabethan London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Frances Teague, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties* (Lewisberg: Bucknell University Press, 1991).

2 See Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 117–24.

3 *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions*, 129–30.

Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds). *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

As its title page suggests, this collection of articles introduced and edited by Susan Frye and Karen Robertson focuses on ways in which women in early modern England combined together in order to validate, strengthen, or otherwise better their circumstances in life, whether those circumstances involved their kinship relations, their working lives, their social and civic engagement, or their material and intellectual well-being. So doing, the editors suggest in their Preface, the authors of these articles have given us 'an overview of women's activities that challenges prevalent conceptions of women's limi-