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## Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary

By Alan C. Dessen

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, United Kingdom, 2006.

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\*\*\*\*\*. 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 on-stage effects (e.g. the sick-chair, early entrances, tomb scenes) easily obscured or eclipsed today. Basing his analysis on the 600 English professional plays performed before 1642, Dessen identifies a vocabulary of the theatre shared by Shakespeare, his theatrical colleagues and his playgoers, in which stage directions 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 assumptions that underlie how Shakespeare is read, edited and staged today.



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