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Michela Calore

ELIZABETHAN PLOTS: A SHARED CODE OF THEATRICAL AND FICTIONAL LANGUAGE

I

Among the most intriguing dramatic documents of the Elizabethan age are seven plots, drawn up at various times between the early 1590s and early 1600s. Even though they provide revealing insights into Elizabethan staging practices, they have often been neglected by Shakespearean scholars. This neglect is easily explained when we consider that a close scrutiny of the plots has major and inconvenient consequences for some widely accepted beliefs about the transmission and function of Elizabethan playscripts.

Six of the plots survive in their original manuscript form and present varying degrees of decay, negligible in some cases but serious in others.[1] There is general agreement that they were aimed to meet casting demands for specific productions (in some cases, for revivals of older plays), listing as they do the names of actors and extras assigned to specific roles. Broadly speaking, each plot consists of a series of stage directions, principally indicating entries, that occupies a single sheet of paper; there is no trace of dialogue in any of these outlines. Some of them describe other aspects of stage business—for instance, exits, sound effects and music, the employment of stage properties, and the representation of locales such as walls, tents, and prisons. Others are silent about one or more of these, while the only characteristic shared by all these "lists" of stage directions is a preoccupation with clearly indicating successions of entrances and doubling patterns. As is well known, Elizabethan and Jacobean plays involved a number of characters that often exceeded the number of actors available in a company. As a result, some actors had to take on more than one role in the same play. The plots clearly testify to this practice, since some actors' names are assigned to different characters in these documents.[2]

The only plot for which there is also a printed text (a quarto of 1594) is that of *The Battle of Alcazar*. A meticulous comparative analysis of these two

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Michela Calore is a Leverhulme-funded postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Reading. She is working on a project entitled A Dictionary of Music and Musical Imagery in the Complete Works of Shakespeare*. She has published on the staging practices of the Elizabethan theatre.*

documents was undertaken by W. W. Greg, who argued that the quarto is a shortened version for a reduced cast of the original playbook.[3] In recent years however, scholars such as Laurie Maguire, Bernard Beckerman, and David Bradley have demonstrated in separate studies that the assumptions on which Greg's analysis is founded should not be taken for granted, and that the question of textual transmission is not as straightforward as it appeared to him.[4] By comparing the plot and the quarto of *The Battle of Alcazar* from a viewpoint that accounts for staging practicalities, Beckerman and Bradley have concluded that these two parallel documents seem to have required the same number of actors, except for a few more supernumeraries in the plot. Hence, the quarto does not necessarily represent a version for a reduced cast, even though both scholars agree with Greg that it antedates the plot by at least four years.[5]

So far, the scholars who have devoted their attention to the plots have explored fundamental questions such as composition date, company ownership, casting methods, and staging practices revealed by these documents,[6] but their studies have been only marginally concerned with scrutiny of the linguistic codes adopted in these documents. The present essay concentrates on this important aspect by putting to the test the validity of popular definitions adopted to describe the nature of stage directions (such as "theatrical," "fictional," "descriptive," and "permissive").

Throughout the essay, I refer to directions that are partly legible in the extant manuscripts as well as those that are clear because, even though names of actors and characters cannot be fully deciphered in the decayed parts of the plots, these fragments sometimes reveal precious clues about the use of specific areas of the stage, such as opposing doors. There are one hundred and eighty-four directions in total. In my calculation, a single stage direction often includes sequences of actions belonging to a whole scene, a working procedure dictated by the fact that, for example, the locution "to them [him, her]" unaccompanied by a verb, frequently employed in the plots, makes it difficult to split up into discrete directions different sequences of actions.

II

A number of Shakespearean scholars have argued that a specific category of words used in stage directions and referred to as "fictional" or "literary" pose an interpretive problem. Whereas technical (generally called "theatrical") terms of the kind "behind the curtains" or "above" strongly point to the expectation that a setting had to be represented on a specific area of the stage, words such as "study," "walls," and "forest" appear to be more concerned with the narrative of the story than with its actual rendition during a performance.[7] Even though Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson have recently argued that the distinction between "fictional" and "theatrical" terms is often blurred, their *Dictionary of Stage Directions* is still governed by this dichotomous logic. Implicit in this taxonomy is the assumption that "fictional" locutions disclose authorial origin,[8] whereas "theatrical" ones may be derived from somebody other than the playwright, that is, from the prompter or bookkeeper.[9]

So far, commentators have not devoted much attention to the theatrical bookkeeper, probably because their main aim has been to establish the degree of literary authority shown by the surviving playtexts, and thus the bookkeeper's role has been considered of secondary importance.[10] This approach is evident in *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses*, where Greg refers to the fictional and descriptive terms in the plots using significant expressions such as "relics" or "survivals" of the "Book." He hypothesizes that they were copied by the plotter from the playbook, and is convinced that they "can have no theatrical significance" and that "certain ambiguities and anomalies [in the plots] are due to imperfect assimilation or understanding of directions in the same source."[11] Even more important, he goes on to assert that most of these "purely literary phrases . . . must go back for their origin to the author himself."[12]

These presuppositions disregard the working circumstances of the early modern professional theatre. As Beckerman has recently observed, Elizabethan actors "never played the same show on successive days and . . . probably added a new play to their repertory every other week."[13] In these circumstances, the plot was an indispensable "guide to memory."[14] Thus, before judging the plotter as incompetently reproducing the narrative of the playbook on several occasions, we should remember that the theatre of Shakespeare's time entailed a degree of collaboration among dramatists, players, and bookkeepers unknown to the modern theatre.[15] If we assume that plotters cared about the success of a production and worked toward that aim, we should ask ourselves why they resorted to fictional and descriptive—along with theatrical—language. Once this has been established, the pertinence of certain "literary" phrases and locutions to everyday theatrical practice may become clearer, and the thorny question of the relationship between authorial and derivative dramatic documents can acquire unexpected answers.

An illuminating example is given by the locutions used in the plots to describe settings, which we might reasonably expect to be technical rather than literary. Table 1, which summarizes the references in these documents to various features, reveals that fictional words describing stage action either on the upper-stage or in an enclosed space outnumber the purely theatrical terms. For example, the technical adverb "above" is observed only in one of the plots, whereas the other two providing for "above" action prefer its fictional counterpart "walls"; similarly, an enclosed area, which might have been either a permanent feature such as the discovery space or a portable curtained structure, is referred to with the technical locution "lying behind the curtains" on one occasion, whereas more ambiguous (to us) terms with a fictional flavor are observed in three other plots. It is, therefore, difficult to share some of Greg's confident conclusions about the derivation of these directions. For instance, he claims that the literary term used to describe the setting "prison" in *The Dead*

Table 1. Locutions Used to Describe Settings

Play	Upper-stage level	Curtained space	Doors
Alcazar	Above (25, 56)	Lying behind the curtains (27)	At one door/[at] another door (68, 70–71); at one [door]/at another [door] (77, 81)
Dead Man’s Fortune		In prison (26)	At several doors (8); at several doors (29)
2 Fortune's Tennis			At one [door] (24)
Frederick and Basilea	Upon the walls/ come down (36–37)		
2 Seven Deadly Sins		Tent (3)	At one door/at another door (3, 6 and 39, 40); one way/at another door (27, 28); X and Y several ways/Z in the midst between (31, 33); severally (36)
1 Tamar Cam			At one door/at another door (47, 49)
Troilus and Cressida	On the walls (16); on the walls/ they on the walls descend (47, 50)	Tent (36)	At [one door]/[at the other] door (1, 5)

Note: Words in square brackets indicate conjectural reconstructions where the text is decayed; a slash (/) between two directions indicates that these occur in the same scene; the numbers in parentheses refer to the “Through Line Numbers” system adopted in the second volume of Greg's *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses.*

Man’s Fortune “is clearly [taken] from the Book.”[16] Elsewhere, he goes so far as to distort the straightforward meaning of the opening direction of *2 Seven Deadly Sins*, which reads as follows:

> *A tent being plast on the stage for Henry the sixt he in it a sleepe to him the Leutenant a purcevaunt R*[ichard] *Cowly Jo*[hn] *Duke and i wardere R*[obert] *Pallant: to them Pride Gluttony Wrath and Covetousness at one dore at an other dore Envie Sloth and Lechery The Three put back the foure and so Exeunt.* (3–9)

It is in this locale that, throughout the play, Henry has dreams that allegorically illustrate the deadly sins of envy, sloth, and lechery. This setting stands for the Tower of London, where he was imprisoned during the Wars of the Roses before being restored to the throne for a brief period. That the setting is the Tower of London is confirmed by the presence of the Lieutenant and the warder in the direction quoted above, of a keeper at line 10, and by Warwick's arrival at the end of the plot (at line 87).[17] Greg argues that the tent would have been represented by the curtained area beneath the stage balcony, and that the locution "A tent being plast on the stage" had no real bearing on the physical rendition of the setting. He concludes that the whole clause "may possibly be a relic copied from the original Book prepared for a performance upon a stage of a more primitive type."[18] However, if we look at this direction from a practical viewpoint, we can undermine the shaky foundation on which Greg's assumption is based. The theatrical functionality of the instructions at lines 3–9 is evident: They disclose the plotter's carefulness to signal that Henry VI must be revealed to the audience in his captive state. The choice of the verb "place" points to the use of a portable curtained structure to represent the Tower.[19] Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that a permanent curtained area was an alternative solution for different productions.

As Table 1 shows, six out of seven plots mention several doors (or "ways") for the entries of distinct groups of *dramatis personae*. A stage direction in *2 Seven Deadly Sins* deserves special attention:

> *Enter Queene with 2 Counsailors Mr Brian Tho*[mas] *Goodale to them*
> *Ferrex and Porrex severall waies with Drums and Powers Gorboduk*
> *entering in the midst between.*
>
> *Henry speaks.* (30–3)

This is one of the rare occasions when the use of three distinct means of entrance is explicitly signaled: According to the *Dictionary*, the indication of the use of a middle door for entries or exits is found only in six other plays.[20] It should be noted that in this scene the majority of characters' names are not accompanied by their relevant actors' names. This peculiarity derives from the convention adopted by some plotters usually to identify "the actor playing each role . . . at his first entrance in that role, but not necessarily at subsequent entrances in that role."[21] In other words, it was theatrically necessary at this point to name only the two actors who were assigned the minor roles of the counselors. The stage direction analyzed here is only one among many instances that prove the plotter's competence and understanding of theatrical workings.

In the plots, there is an extensive use of the formula "to *X*" on the one hand, and the omission of the theatrical term "within" on the other: These factors are revealing about the purpose served by these documents. "To *X*" indicates midscene entries of one or more characters toward another character (or group of characters) already on stage; the *Dictionary* explains that there are about two hundred and fifty examples of this locution in the five hundred plays considered by the authors.[22] Remarkably, out of this total, one hundred and fifty examples are found in the plots. It can reasonably be inferred that the adoption of a shorthand version for the longer clause "Enter *X* to *Y*" would have greatly helped in the organization of stage traffic during rehearsals (as David Bradley has recently proposed),[23] and/or during performances (if Greg was right in believing that the plots were hung up behind the *frons scenae* to be consulted by the actors, especially those who had to double roles). As far as "within" is concerned, according to Dessen and Thomson's calculations this adverb is widely used with "roughly 800 examples" in plays of the period.[24] Inexplicable as it may seem at first, the absence of "within" from the plots is perfectly reasonable from a bookkeeper's backstage perspective.

III

Another widely held principle informing the study of the genesis of Elizabethan dramatic texts deserves analysis. It is generally maintained that words and phrases with permissive and descriptive qualities are authorial. In the eyes of modern interpreters of Elizabethan playscripts, permissive locutions of the type "three or four citizens," or "as many soldiers as can" would have been of no use when putting on productions, as these needed to be very specific about numbers of actors and supernumeraries. A similar reasoning is applied to the so-called descriptive directions, which are deemed to be concerned with the narrative of the story. These are often characterized by a complex syntax and grammar and/or give details about the relationship among characters, their occupations, or similar qualities. It is often suggested that specifications of the type "wife," "son," "young," "schoolmaster," and so on accompanying the name of a character would have been of little interest to actors, who needed to devote their attention to the technical aspects of staging, and that such details would have been more useful to prospective readers.[25] An attentive study of language use in the plots, however, casts doubts on these tenets.

Table 2 summarizes the distribution of the twenty permissive and eighteen descriptive locutions in the plots. A detailed analysis of the most outstanding locutions belonging to these categories is provided in the text. It is interesting to note that examples are found even in the two fragmentary plots (*2 Seven Deadly Sins* and *Troilus and Cressida*).

Although the number and/or proper names of actors (or extras) playing minor roles is often specified in the plots, there are twenty occasions when the bookkeeper remained silent about such details, especially in scenes involving military or royal processions. More specifically, vagueness about numbers and proper names is observed in the following cases: attendants (5 examples), gatherers (4), soldiers (2), mutes (1), lords (1), satyrs (1), children (1), "colours" (1), drums and powers (1), and "&c.," referring to Frederick's guard in *Frederick*

Table 2. Descriptive and Permissive Locutions

Play	Descriptive	Permissive	Total
Alcazar	8	0	8
Dead Man's Fortune	3	5	8
2 Fortune's Tennis	1	0	1
Frederick and Basilea	0	7	7
2 Seven Deadly Sins	5	2	7
1 Tamar Cam	1	5	6
Troilus and Cressida	0	1	1

and Basilea (1). There are also two vague indications for stage props: "as many jewels and robes as he can carry" (1), and "chest or trunk" (1).

Descriptive language characterized by complex grammar and syntax frequently indicates (as in playtexts) framing devices such as dumb shows, which are sometimes accompanied by music; outstanding examples are found in *2 Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Dead Man's Fortune*.[26] The elaborate nature of these directions strongly contrasts with the otherwise succinct quality of indications for stage business characterizing the drama of that period. This peculiarity seems to disclose that the Elizabethan theatre relied on a specialized code that differentiated, by means of careful linguistic choices, those aspects of stage business that would have required special effects and/or actions and gestures. This code could have been shared by playwrights, actors, and bookkeepers alike and would have made perfect sense in the process of putting on a play; hence the use of "fictional" language even in the plots, which more than any other extant theatrical documents are concerned with the practicalities of preparing a production.[27]

Close scrutiny of other descriptive stage instructions illuminate the weaknesses in Greg's assumption that "relics of the Book" can be traced in a number of directions in the plots. Greg found several instances in the plot of *Alcazar*—including the indication that "raw flesh" must be carried by Muly Mahamet (44)—that were, in his opinion, descriptive and not theatrical. Since the same wording is repeated in a marginal notation at 43–4, however, it is worth asking whether the plotter was incompetently repeating nontheatrical details from the "Book," or whether he had purposely decided to highlight the use of this stage property, whose symbolic importance cannot be overstated. This raw meat, which Muly Mahamet and his wife must eat in order to survive, visually evokes the privations they suffer while in exile. (From the dialogue of the quarto we know that it is the flesh of a lioness killed by Muly Mahamet.)[28] *Alcazar* abounds with gruesome details, such as the blood, heads, and bones of dead men; the "bloudie meat" (as it is described at 612 of the quarto) would have enhanced the overall macabre atmosphere of the play.

A case of what Greg terms "duplication" betraying the narrative intentions of the playbook is found at line 35, when a character (played in this production by Richard Alleyn) makes his first appearance:

> *Enter Diego Lopis: Governor of Lisborne: Mr Rich:*[ard] *Allen*.[29]

Rather than duplication, however, the seemingly redundant description of Lopis's occupation may have had an important theatrical significance, if we consider that this historical play portrays characters belonging to different races and nationalities such as Moors, Portuguese, Spaniards, Italians, and Englishmen. A careful reading of this direction tells us that it was fundamental to underline that Lopis was Portuguese in order to avoid confusion between his nationality and that of characters belonging to similar cultures (Spaniards and Italians). This distinction would have been achieved by means of costume when translated into the language of a performance. The opening directive of the plot of *Alcazar* points toward the same conclusion in an even more significant way:

> *Enter A Portingall Mr Rich:*[ard] *Allen to him I Domb Shew.* (3–4)

Thanks to the directions in the quarto and to those found later in the plot, we know that the role of Richard Alleyn at this point was that of the presenter (or Chorus). His entry as a "Portingall" points once again to the costume that he was to wear, unusual for a Chorus figure; thus the "duplicated" directive "*Enter Diego Lopis: Governour of Lisborne*" acquires outstanding significance once it is clear that the same actor was assigned both roles. This doubling pattern would have been extremely effective: The actor playing the Chorus and wearing a Portuguese costume also undertook the role of the person representing the nation whose army was disastrously decimated during the Battle of Alcazar.

In the same plot, it is clear that the roles of Muly Mahamet, the elder, and his son (who bears the same name) were assigned respectively to Edward Alleyn and Anthony Jeffes. The wording of the direction signaling their first appearance is intriguing:

> *Enter Muly Mahamett mr. Ed*[ward] *Allen, his sonne Antho*[ny] *Jeffes.* (5–6)

Knowing that the two actors were not father and son, it is evident that the description "his son" refers to the relationship existing between the two characters in the fiction of the play. In this case, no emphasis is given to the proper name of Muly Mahamet's son. Later on, the entries of the son are marked by the description "Young Mahamet" (20, 41, and 47). The adjective serves the purpose of distinguishing him from his father, referred to as "Muly Mahamet" in scenes where they appear together. It should be noted that in these cases, except for line 20, the names of the actors are not specified, and that the adjective "young" provides therefore the only way of distinguishing between the two actors/characters. This is an outstanding example of how common it was for Elizabethan bookkeepers to intersperse directions that had to meet production demands with fictional signals. On the other hand, actors playing minor roles in the same plot were sometimes distinguished by the relationship they had with other actors, as is the case for instance with the "*ij Pages to attend the moore mr Allens boy, mr Townes boy*" (7–8). Such inconsistent ways of indicating fictional and real relationships among actors may be deemed very confusing and unpractical nowadays, but it was obviously acceptable in the repertory system of the early modern professional theatre.

Another notable instance of a permissive directive, judged by Greg as authorial, is found in *2 Seven Deadly Sins*:

> *Enter Arbactus pursuing Sardanapalus and the Ladies fly. After enter Sarda*[napalus] *with as many Jewels and robes and Gold as he can cary.* (64–7)

Bradley has noted that this type of clause sounds "like a note of what the Plotter expects to see, or perhaps to hear, and its practical function is, more likely, to mark an immediate re-entrance that will involve a short pause in the action and a momentary silence on stage."[30] He adds that Sardanapalus's final entry would have had a remarkable effect if he crossed the stage without speaking, "laden with treasure, on the road to immolation in his palace."[31] This alternative reading of a permissive instruction proves that, when different perspectives are taken into account, the picture that emerges can give surprisingly fresh insights into matters that seemed to have been definitively settled by Shakespearean scholars decades ago.

Three other plot directions are worth mentioning here. The first is taken from *The Dead Man's Fortune* and specifies that two characters enter "mad" (40–1). The second is from the same plot and reads:

> *Enter the panteloun & causeth the cheste or truncke to be broughte forth.* (65–6)

The third instance is found in *2 Seven Deadly Sins*:

> *Enter Progne with the Sampler to her Tereus from Hunting with his Lords to them Philomele with Itis hed in a dish. Mercury Comes and all Vanish to him 3 Lords Th*[omas] *Goodale Hary w*[illiam] *sly.* (80–4)

The adjective "mad" in the first directive and the locution "from hunting" in the third seem to be descriptive at first, but may equally have been theatrically functional as shorthand versions of longer "as if" clauses, implying the use of stage properties and body language to signify particular conditions and situations. “Vanish” in the third example is equally baffling, since it is reticent about the way in which the characters were expected to leave the stage; the use of this verb may either point to a sudden, spectacular disappearance through the trapdoors in the stage or, more simply, to a routine exit through one of the main doors. The permissive phrase “chest or trunk” of the second directive might have made sense in a theatre where the daily alternation of different plays would have meant that some properties could not be expected to be at hand at all times; hence the necessity of allowing for a degree of flexibility in the choice of properties with a similar appearance.[32]

The exemplary cases discussed in this section show that efforts to label stage directions as “descriptive” and “permissive” completely ignore two simple truths about Elizabethan acting conditions: that availability of supernumeraries and resources were liable to change very frequently, and that actors who were expected to play a range from six (in the case of leading actors) to over a dozen roles (in the case of secondary actors) every week would indeed have found the “fictional” details included in descriptive and permissive instructions very useful.

Detailed scrutiny of the salient linguistic aspects of the extant Elizabethan plots seems to confirm that these concise outlines were aimed at summarizing vital aspects of stage business during rehearsals and, possibly, during performances. The vocabulary adopted in these dramatic skeletons is, therefore, revealing for those who wish to grasp the logic underlying the dramatic documents of Shakespeare’s day. The plotters’ linguistic choices ultimately put into question a number of assumptions concerning the early modern professional theatre, which are all too often taken for granted by modern interpreters.

The prevailing emphasis on authorship that characterizes some critical approaches has led to the widespread belief that fictional terms and elaborate syntax in stage directions must have originated from the playwright’s own draft of a play. This holds true only if such directions are assumed to reflect the abstract narrative of the story, distinct from its actual rendition on the stage. The frequent occurrence in the plots of directions with a seemingly fictional and descriptive nature, however, should make us reconsider this tenet. Since the plotters’ choices must have been influenced by their highly demanding working schedule, it would have been counterproductive, from their point of view, to adopt a vocabulary that was not appropriate for staging purposes. Even Greg’s extreme position, which envisages the plotter copying entire stage directions from the playbook, reflects a practice that would have been undertaken to meet the demands of a repertory system alien to our own frame of mind. The most significant message to be derived from the plots is, perhaps, that distinctions such as “descriptive” and “permissive” directions versus “prescriptive” directions, or “fictional” directions versus “theatrical” directions, can be dangerously misleading.

ENDNOTES

1. Taking into account differences of opinion among theatre historians, the chronology and ownership of the plots can be summarized as follows: five of them—*Frederick and Basilea* (c. June 1597), *2 Fortune's Tennis* (c. 1597–1598), *The Battle of Alcazar* (c. 1598–1599), *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1599–1600), and *1 Tamar Cam* (c. 1602)—can be connected with the Admiral's Men; *2 Seven Deadly Sins* (c. 1590–1593) is generally ascribed to Strange's Men (or perhaps, as Scott McMillin suggests, to the Chamberlain's Men of the late 1590s). *The Dead Man's Fortune* cannot be confidently assigned to any company because of the limited number of names of actors appearing in it, but it is generally accepted that this plot is the earliest of the seven (c. 1590). It has also been noticed that *The Battle of Alcazar* and *Troilus and Cressida* are in the same hand, and that *2 Seven Deadly Sins* was probably written by the same scribe responsible for *2 Fortune's Tennis*, who might be identified with Hand C in the manuscript playbook of *Sir Thomas More*. It must be noted that *1 Tamar Cam* exists only in the Shakespeare "Variorum" of 1803 and is derived from a transcript made by George Steevens. Regarding the condition of the manuscript plots, although *The Dead Man's Fortune* and *Frederick and Basilea* are in an excellently preserved state, *Troilus and Cressida* and *2 Fortune's Tennis* survive only as fragments, the second column of *The Battle of Alcazar* is badly mutilated, and *2 Seven Deadly Sins* presents negligible signs of decay. Despite these complications, the plots offer a unique opportunity to reconstruct the methods adopted by professional companies in mounting a production in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign.

2. Here is W. W. Greg's description of the plots: "The Plot . . . consisted of a thin pulp board, with an extreme measurement of seventeen inches high and thirteen wide, on either side of which was pasted a sheet of stout paper. The sheets were divided, by lines ruled in ink, into two main columns, between which was left a narrow margin, and towards the top of this was cut a small oblong hole by which the Plot might be suspended on a peg in the wall." W. W. Greg, *Dramatic Documents from the Elizabethan Playhouses: Stage Plots, Actors' Parts, Prompt Books*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 1:70. The presence of a hole in the board of the plots that have come down to us in a better condition should not escape our attention, since it is revealing of their practical purpose in the theatre, whether or not we follow Greg in assuming that they were used as call sheets in the tiring-house. A division into sections is found in all of these documents, even those in a fragmentary form. This was, more than likely, a method of distinguishing scenes in a visually effective manner. In none of the plots, however, do we observe attempts at numbering the sequence of scenes and/or acts, with the exception of *The Battle of Alcazar,* where the dumb shows (but not the relevant scenes) are numbered in their progressive order.

3. W. W. Greg, *Two Elizabethan Stage Abridgments: "The Battle of Alcazar" and "Orlando Furioso,"* Malone Society Reprints (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922).

4. See Laurie Maguire, *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The "Bad" Quartos and Their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78–85; Bernard Beckerman, "Theatrical Plots and Elizabethan Stage Practice," in W. R. Elton and W. B. Long, eds., *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of S. F. Johnson* (Newark: University of Delaware Press/AUP, 1989), 109–24; David Bradley, *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

5. Beckerman has observed (118) that Greg's theory about the reduced cast in the quarto originates from "the tacit assumption . . . that staging is a matter of transference from one document [the playbook] to another [the plot] rather than an interaction between players and text."

6. Besides Greg's magisterial accounts of the plots already mentioned, studies relating to one or more such aspects are, in chronological order: E. K Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), especially vols. 2 and 4; R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, eds., *Henslowe's "Diary"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 326–33; David Bevington, *From "Mankind" to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); Beckerman, op. cit.; Scott McMillin, "Building Stories: Greg, Fleay, and the Plot of *'2 Seven Deadly Sins,'*" *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in*

England 4 (1989): 53–62; David Bradley, op. cit.; and T. J. King, *Casting Shakespeare's Plays: London Actors and Their Roles, 1590–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

7. Among the studies on this fundamental question are Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare's Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Richard Hosley, "Shakespeare's Use of a Gallery Over the Stage," *Shakespeare Survey* 10 (1957): 77–89.

8. Dessen and Thomson's definition of "fictional" signals is revealing in this regard: "In fictional directions a dramatist sometimes slips into a narrative, descriptive style seemingly more suited to a reader facing a page than an actor on the stage so as to conjure up a vivid image more appropriate to a cinematic scene than an onstage effect at the Globe; . . . some fictional signals show the dramatist thinking out loud in the process of writing (so that the details anticipate what will be evident in the forthcoming action)." Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson, *A Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90.

9. It is important to underline that "prompter" is a rather imprecise term when applied to the Elizabethan theatre: Prompting as such was in fact not possible in those days because of the limitations imposed by acting venues. I therefore believe that "bookkeeper" and "plotter" are more acceptable definitions: These are used interchangeably throughout the present essay. For a thorough discussion on this topic, see William B. Long, "'A Bed/For Woodstock': A Warning for the Unwary," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 2 (1985): 91–118; and idem, "'Precious Few': English Manuscript Playbooks," *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. D. S. Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 414–33.

10. The studies by Long on the Elizabethan manuscript playtexts cited in note 9 are among the few works emphasizing the vital role of the bookkeeper. Beckerman, too, stresses the importance of the plotter and criticizes Greg's tendency to identify the role of the scribe with that of the plotter. See Beckerman, 110–11.

11. Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, 1:87.

12. Ibid., 1:88.

13. Beckerman, 109. The tangible evidence about the repertory system at the Rose, derived from Philip Henslowe's records, has been thoroughly analyzed by Neil Carson in *A Companion to Henslowe's "Diary"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

14. Beckerman, 109.

15. This concept has been meticulously reviewed both by Beckerman, in "Theatrical Plots," and by William Long in the works cited in note 9.

16. Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, 1:99.

17. According to Edward Hall's chronicle, which seems to have been the source for *2 Seven Deadly Sins*, Henry VI was released from the Tower by Warwick and Clarence.

18. Greg, *Dramatic Documents*, 1:118.

19. In his study of the manuscript play *Sir Thomas More*, McMillin dedicates a chapter to the Rose Theatre repertory. He argues that both *Sir Thomas More* and *2 Seven Deadly Sins* were produced by Lord Strange's Men in their period of tenancy there (from 19 February 1592 to 1 February 1593). According to McMillin, this company would have employed a portable structure for the staging of these two and most other plays in their repertoire, which would have required extensive use of raised and enclosed spaces. See Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and "The Book of Sir Thomas More"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), esp. 113–34.

20. These are: *Eastward Ho, Landgartha, The Trial of Chivalry, The English Traveller, Covent Garden*, and *The Parson's Wedding*. See Dessen and Thomson, 143. I have found another reference to the "midst" as a means of entry in *Patient Grissil*.

21. King, 27.

22. The authors of the *Dictionary* note that expressions such as "to him," "to her," and "to them" are common also in manuscript playbooks. See Dessen and Thomson, 231–32.

23. Bradley, 80

24. Dessen and Thomson, 253.

25. That this classification is open to contradiction is demonstrated by the fact that

"descriptive" directives have never been systematically defined and that some of them have sometimes been considered to be an indication of pirated or memorial reconstruction.

26. Two of the most significant directions are as follows:

"*A senitt. Dumb Show. Enter King Gorboduck with 2 Counsailares R Burbadg mr Brian Th Goodale The Queene with ferrex and Porrex and som attendaunts follow saunder w sly Harry J Duke Kitt Ro Pallant J Holland. After Gordbeduk hath consulted with his Lords he brings his 2 sonns to severall seates. They enving on an other ferrex offers to take Porex his Crowne he draws his weapon. The King Queene and Lords step between them. They thrust them away and menasing ech other exit. The Queene and Lords depart heavilie. Lidgate speaks*" (*2 Seven Deadly Sins*, 14–25).

"*Enter kinge Egereon allgeryus tesephon with lordes the executioner with his sworde & blocke & offycers with halberds to them carynus & prlyor then after that the musicke plaies & ther Enters 3 antique faires dancynge on after a nother the firste takes the sworde from the executioner & sendes him a waye the other caryes a waie the blocke & the third sends a waie the offycers & unbindes allgeryus & tesephon & as they entred so they departe*" (*The Dead Man's Fortune*, 49–59).

27. The essentially theatrical nature of such "anachronistic" and complex directives has been highlighted by Linda McJannet in a recent study on stage directions in historical plays of the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline ages: "many dumb shows and visions are allegorical and/or convey a deliberately old-fashioned or amateur quality . . . ; thus their being cued by directions reminiscent of those in medieval drama seems appropriate." See McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (Newark: University of Delaware Press/AUP), 156.

28. The equivalent direction in the quarto is "*Enter Muly Mahamet with lyons flesh upon his sworde*" (582–83). It appears that "lion's flesh" has a more fictional nuance than "raw flesh," although this is not necessarily true when put in the context of the quarto, with its dialogue referring to the killing of the lioness.

29. The quarto has the same reading at this point, except, of course, for the actor's name: "*Enter Diego Lopis governor of Lisborne*" (423).

30. Bradley, 77.

31. Ibid.

32. This observation applies not only to the companies' repertory system in London, but to their habit of traveling in the provinces, which became a necessity whenever the London theatres had to close because of outbreaks of plague. The ability of Elizabethan actors to adapt to changing acting conditions has recently been underlined by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa, who argue that "the players fitted their scripts to the various occasions. They did the same with their staging. . . . Their performances had to be inherently portable, and their staging traditions reflected that need more than any other." See Gurr and Ichikawa, *Staging in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22.