

"Language in their very gesture": Shakespeare's Actors and the
Body.

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The word "gesture", as my title indicates, formed part of Shakespeare's vocabulary: the quoted line is from The Winter's Tale. The word first took its place in his writing (as we now know it) in the rather consciously literary poetry of the Chorus speeches of Henry V, in which a central concern is to theorise, one might say, the relationship between language and action, between what is reported or formulated orally on the one hand, and what is seen on the other. The symbolic languages of the stage do both, but the stage's power of opsis, particularly, is limited, as the Chorus of Henry V is at pains to remind us ("Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them" Prologue.26, my emphases). The word "gesture" continues to recur in such contexts during the remaining decade or so that Shakespeare continued to write for the stage; in the Shakespearean vocabulary, then, it is a term of the early seventeenth century. It is a word which overlaps with the far commoner term "action"; both words, "action" and "gesture" are used as English translations of the Ciceronian oratorical term "vita", to signify the physical animation of a speaker, whether on stage, in the pulpit, in its Christian sense, or on the lecturer's or legislator's podium. Both words, as we shall see, might refer to

facial expression as much as to movement of the hands, limbs, or torso, but whereas "action" is a term referring particularly to mimetic activity--the actor's portrayal of a character's or a speaker's movement and physical expression--"gesture" in Shakespeare's usage seems reserved for the actions of fictional characters. "Gesture" is within the frame, as it were, and "action" outside it.

Consider, to begin with, the use of the two words in Hamlet. Action, famously, is what has to be suited to the word in order for stage playing to have its profoundest effect. Hamlet's advice in 3.2 begins with a warning about "mouthing it"--overdoing vocal emphasis or production (Cicero's "vox"). He follows with a condemnation of pointless action ("vita"): "do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus" (3.2.4-5). Avoiding the opposite vice of being "too tame", wooden and dull, one should "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature" (3.2.17-19). Vocal and physical expression should be organic, and "natural", that elusive concept; but what Hamlet suggests by it, in context, is that actors should avoid exaggeration, caricature, and staginess.

If acting succeeds in being entirely natural, however, if genuine human speech and action is indistinguishable from its mimetic copy, then how can one tell the real from the fake; the genuine word, and its supporting action, from the simulated, the

pretended, the false, the deceitful? Such a conceptual linkage-- stage playing=fiction=deceit--dogs the not very sophisticated discussion about theatrical art which was carried on in print in Renaissance England. Hamlet's reaction to the player's speech about Priam's death and Hecuba's grief is, in the Latin sense, admiration; he is moved, but also distraught by the insubstantiality which lies at the heart of the actor's skill:

Is it not monstrous [i.e. specifically not natural] that this player here,
 But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
 Could force his soul so to his own conceit
 That from her working all his visage wann'd,
 Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
 A broken voice, an' his whole function suiting
 With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing!
 For Hecuba!
 What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba
 That he should weep for her? (2.2.551-60)

The actor, no doubt, would reply, were he asked, that it is not at all a question of nothing, but rather the invocation and transposition of something into the fictional context of the play. But simulated grief for a murdered husband is not exactly a neutral subject in the world of Hamlet, and the title character's unease about acting is expressed at a time and in a place where the very sense of what is "natural" has become confused and corrupted. "Action", for all Hamlet's commendation of it as a technical skill, is suspect, like costume, in being able to cover over or disguise true motives or impulses. Early in the play, in a speech which in many ways prefigures his reaction to the player, and the terms and phrasing of that reaction, Hamlet objects to his mother's use of the word "seems".

<Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
 Nor customary suits of solemn black,
 Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,
 No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
 Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
 That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
 For they are actions that a man might play;
 But I have that within which passeth show,
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe. (1.2.77-86)

The relationship between the inner and the outer, within and without, is precisely at the centre of the actor's art. He cannot afford to have anything "which passeth show", since showing is all, as Hamlet later has occasion to remark to Ophelia, as they watch the play in the court. If one is playing either Hamlet or Claudius in the scene from which the lines above are taken, then, one's words and actions should already be indicative, to an audience which as yet are working out the terms of the fiction, of what kind of men they respectively are: they enter the stage invested with their histories.

Gestural language, particularly, is also read by watchers on the stage when characters either do not speak for themselves, or do not speak clearly. The play put on for the court, you may remember, has both silent action and speech; The Mousetrap is preceded by a pantomimed prologue which plays out the murder and wooing like a speeded-up silent film. As commentators have pointed out, it is evidently not so precise in its application as to shock Claudius into recognition of his sin at the start of the evening, and Ophelia is not entirely sure of what she has seen: "What means this, my lord?" she asks of Hamlet (3.2.136). Action without word may be ambiguous, exaggerated, and unnatural; Hamlet

urges the posed player of Lucianus to "Begin, murderer, leave thy damnable faces and begin" (3.2.251-2). The play cannot proceed until the actor speaks, and in speaking, ceases mugging. (What he speaks, of course, may be the line or two Hamlet has added to the play, and in which he has a particular stake.)

The play scene dramatises the conventions of the theatre. Outside that context, characters whose action is divorced from speech are more unsettling, and more ambiguous: the first is the Ghost, and the second is the distracted Ophelia of act four. The appearance of the broken, abandoned daughter of Polonius is preceded by a brief scene of introduction, in which her speech and action are reported by an anonymous gentleman.

She speaks much of her father, says she hears
There's tricks i' th' world, and hems, and beats her heart,
Spurns enviously at straws, speaks thing in doubt
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection; they yawn at it
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts,
Which as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily. (4.5.4-13)

Ophelia has become a spectacle, and hence a focus for meaning, like the actor speaking of mythic suffering, though in herself incapable of conscious performance. "Her speech is nothing" might be taken as some kind of echo of the earlier "And all for nothing"--two variations on grief and its expression, with very different registers. But without the deliberative intentionality of the actor Ophelia is confined to "gestures" rather than action: a term from nature rather than art, one might say.

Lacking a coherent "conceit" which might find "forms" she is a disjointed jumble of signifying words and actions. "Gesture", then, here (and only here--it's the sole occurrence of the word in Hamlet) points to an external, objectified view of a character's physical movement and expression; the far commoner "action" signifies mental control and consciousness, though also, as we have observed, a slippery downward path into falsity and deceit--deceit also being a function of mental control and consciousness.

The Ghost, then, silent in its first appearances, until it engages Hamlet alone, is read entirely through its movement and facial expression: frowning, moving "with martial stalk", "with solemn march", "slow and stately", and with "a countenance more in sorrow than in anger". What the characters of the play say they see, of course, will be set against the casting, costuming, and staging decisions in any given production--what the audience will see. When Hamlet finally encounters the Ghost it meets his enquiries first with gesture rather than speech. In two of the three early texts of the play this receives a marginal stage direction, echoing the language of Horatio: "It beckons you to go away with it" (1.4.58). This is followed by lines of Marcellus which, if you accept the argument I've been presenting so far, are couched in language which underlines uncertainty and dubeyty.

Look with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removed ground.
But do not go with it. (1.4.60-62)

"Courteous" is matched with "action", that a man, or a former man, might play, for who knows what end--a devilish tempter, perhaps, as Horatio suspects. Ophelia's later fragmented gestures are perhaps a response to a series of puzzling, false, and misleading physical actions in which she is engaged throughout the play. Her famous report of Hamlet's appearance in her closet, unbraced, ungartered, and the rest of it, is a set piece of silent play-acting, seen at second hand, ambiguous and disturbing. Later she is posed as a silent model by her father, and handed a prayer book as a prop and a motive. The prosy moralising with which Polonius follows underlines the falsity of her position.

Ophelia, walk you here. . . .
 . . . Read on this book,
 That show of such an exercise may color
 Your loneliness. We are oft to blame in this--
 <Tis too much prov'd--that with devotion's visage
 And pious action we do sugar o'er
 The devil himself. (3.1.42-48)

Hamlet's rejection of her in the scene that follows is frequently played in the modern theatre, at least, in revulsion at a pose he either suspects or sees directly through, ironically due to her own lack of conviction in the part she has been made to play.

To take my remarks rather further I want to move from Hamlet to Othello, a play written and performed some years later, in the early Jacobean period; it was played before the king at the Whitehall Banqueting House in early November 1604. There is very little to do with the theatre in Othello, but its story turns on deceit, and on a malicious deceiver, a master of seeming honesty,

and committed, he tells his companion early in the play, to "show", invoking a familiar word in defining his conception of integrity.

For when my outward action does demonstrate
 The native act and figure of my heart
 In complement extern, 'tis not long after
 But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
 For daws to peck at: I am not what I am. (1.1.61-65)

A final declaration which in theatrical as well as ontological terms is paradoxically intriguing. Though I say the play has little overt theatrical reference, then, unlike Hamlet, Iago's declaration as a deceiver has a theatrical lineage, going back to the vice and similar quasi-demonic figures from earlier English drama; it also has a lateral relationship to contemporary comedy. Ben Jonson's Volpone, of a couple of years later, acted by Shakespeare's troupe, also explores the legends of Venice, a place famed for its great wealth and sophistication, but also for its trickery, deceit, and sexual licence, its "spells and medicines bought of mountebanks", those theatrical performers. Iago also enlists the humour of complicity, in the tradition of Shakespeare's earlier Richard of Gloucester, speaking directly to the audience about his manipulations ("And what's he then that says I play the villain?" 2.3.336), a disarming engagement with an actor's skill at assuming other identities, and pleasant shock at the ease with which he can do so. If Othello may be said to be metatheatrical, then, it closely associates "outward action" with deceit.

The play is centrally about the reading and misreading of words, actions, and motives, and as Iago weaves his web one of his instances of seemingly incriminating evidence is that of "gesture", so nominated in the play. In act four, Iago arranges things so that Othello watches Cassio speak to Iago about his mistress Bianca, who then conveniently enters with the stolen handkerchief, exhibit A in Iago's case. We watch Othello watch the others, and hear him misinterpret what is going on, as he has been led to do by Iago's framing of the situation. Like so much else in the play, the scene has a comic structure. Its propositions are preposterous, and it is in fact scored with laughter, from the unknowing Cassio. As an overhearing scene, or rather a scene of supervision, in which one character secretly watches others, it is something of a chestnut, set up by the principal manipulator.

Do but encave yourself
 And mark the fleers, the gibes, and notable scorns
 That dwell in every region of his face,
 For I will make him tell the tale anew:
 Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
 He hath, and is again to cope your wife.
 I say, but mark his gesture. (4.1.81-87)

The pressure of the scene for Othello, however, is that it represents a displaced version of an earlier scene of supervision which Iago has suggested in response to Othello's earlier demand for "ocular proof" (3.3) of his wife's adultery.

Make me to see <t; or (at the least) so prove it
 That the probation bear no hinge or loop
 To hang a doubt on (3.3.364-6)

Iago's considered response, as a professional in such matters, is one of the rawest moments of this disturbing play.

How satisfied, my lord?
 Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
 Behold her topp'd?

Oth. Death and damnation! O!

Iago. It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
 To bring them to that prospect; damn them then,
 If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
 More than their own. What then? How then?
 What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
 It is impossible you should see this
 Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
 As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
 As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
 If imputation and strong circumstances
 Which lead directly to the door of truth
 Will give you satisfaction, you may have <t. (3.3.394-408)

Through insisting on the impossibility of seeing the adulterous copulation--a thorough truth, we might note, since it is an invention--Iago loads Othello's subsequent observation of Cassio, in a scene carefully stage-managed by Iago, with a freight of prejudicial meaning.

Here he comes.

Enter CASSIO.

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad;
 And his unbookish jealousy must conster
 Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors
 Quite in the wrong. (4.1.99-103)

The decorum of the action here is of two soldiers joking about light-hearted sexual adventures; Cassio's "gestures", whatever they are, suit Iago's ribbing him about his entanglement with Bianca, a woman they both treat as belonging to an entirely different class and character from Desdemona. Cassio, in acting out his story, engages Iago in a demonstrated embrace.

I was the other day talking on the sea bank with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble, and by this hand, falls me thus about my neck--
Oth. Crying "O dear Cassio!" as it were; his gesture imports it.
Cas. So hangs, and lolls and weeps upon me, so haies and pulls me. Ha, ha ha!

(4.1.133-40)

What gesture "imports", then, depends on the context of its interpretation. The actor charged with performing Cassio in this scene will suit his action to the word, that of a youngish man in a confidential male exchange about sexual adventures, marked by playfulness, self-display, and a certain excited unease. An audience can both observe the gesture as true and appropriate to character and situation, and observe its simultaneous misinterpretation, the ironic distance between the meaning intended by its performer, and that read by its most committed observer. Cassio has been manipulated by Iago into presenting gesture as action that a man might play--he has in fact become Iago's player, though entirely without any awareness of being so, in that Iago has conditioned one crucial member of his audience to a particular seeing. It is Othello's monocular vision, we might say, which creates the disaster. Insufficiently aware of the ambiguities of visual signs, and increasingly confined within the perceptual prison Iago creates for him, he is unable to share with a wider audience their reactions to what is seen and heard. Othello's ironic isolation from the theatre audience's knowledge is one source of the peculiar power of Shakespeare's tragedy, and a central locus of that isolation lies in the reading of gesture.

Marking Cassio's gesture, Iago implies, involves not only watching movements of the limbs, torso, angles of the head, signals with hands and fingers, and so forth, but the finer motions "That dwell in every region of his face". Facial expression is to be understood as included within the general term "gesture", as, I think, it also is within its commoner companion, "action". Contemporary English terms for acting and oratory generally lack a version of the third Ciceronian term, "vultus", resolving themselves to the Hamlet formula of action and word, or, as it's put in Love's Labour's Lost in reference to the lords instructing a page boy in a formal speech, "Action and accent did they teach him there / <Thus must thou speak,' and <thus thy body bear'" (5.2.99-100). Since Elizabethan schoolmasters knew and applied their Cicero and Quintilian, bearing the body in a speech involved appropriate facial animation as much as it did sawing the air with the hand. One early Tudor manual that does distinguish "De vultus et gestus compositione" sounds, in speaking of facial changes, remarkably like Hamlet: "Therefore take heed that the countenance be made conformable to the purpose: now with gravity, now cheerful, now rough, now amiable, shapen meet unto the matter (as I may say) like a glove to the hand." The word "countenance", also used by Richard Hooker, for example, must count as the Tudor English version of "vultus". It is not commonly distinguished with reference to stage practice, and it has a rather odd etymology; I

don't think it a particularly central term in the territory I'm examining.

The passage quoted in my title, from The Winter's Tale, is part of a report of an event the audience doesn't see, concerning the reunion of King Leontes with Camillo, his former counsellor, who sixteen years in the past, at the beginning of the play, has saved Polixenes, King of Bohemia, from Leontes' misguided jealousy. Since that time Leontes' guilt for his false accusation has been demonstrated, his wife and children are apparently dead, and as a consequence of his actions he has lived the life of a penitent. The description of the meeting is as follows: "They seem'd almost, with staring on one another, to tear the cases of their eyes. There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they look'd as they had heard of a world ransom'd, or one destroy'd. A notable passion of wonder appear'd in them; but the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could not say if th' importance were joy or sorrow; but in the extremity of the one it needs must be" (5.2.11-19). Deep feeling, in other words, is registered primarily in the face: the only gesture specified here, in which there might be language, is a mutual concentrated gaze. Not only that, but feeling of such depth and complexity--a mingling of sorrow, joy, regret, loyalty, pain, relief, shame, gratitude--is unlikely to be visually legible without a context--narrative, as here--or that of accompanying dialogue. Only rarely on the Shakespearean stage are characters so moved as to be entirely deprived of speech; one such moment,

in fact, occurs in the final scene of The Winter's Tale itself. The report, I think, is not a result of Shakespeare's mistrust of his fellows' being able to achieve in front of an audience what is described here--to embody this action--so much as that he has a great deal to get on with, dramaturgically, at the end of the play. If one plays this reunion live, largo affetuoso, one gives away too much too soon. This reported reconciliation is a kind of preparation for the remarkable final scene in which deep, complex emotion finds expression in physical gesture: concentrated gazing, once more, a moment of extended silence, once more (having revealed the statue to Leontes with "Behold, and say 'tis well" Paulina has to break the ensuing pause with "I like your silence. It the more shows off / Your wonder; but yet speak" [5.3.20-22]), a change from a fixed pose to mobility, as Hermione changes from statue to living woman, and the simple joining of hands between wife and husband.

The face is a central focus in this scene, as a fascinated Leontes examines the image of his dead wife, imagining that the fixed eye of a sculpture "has motion in 't", and as, when Paulina summons the music freeing Hermione from her pose, the actor's face moves with the rest of the body. So facial expression in Shakespeare's plays generally receives verbal attention from speakers. Though it has been claimed, as may be partly true, that many such passages are amplifications of expressions or characteristics which either an audience may not be able to see well in a large or a dimly lit theatre, or an actor readily able

to produce at will--tears or blushes, for example--I think that on the whole such words are cues for reactive actions, or themselves reactive to action. Shakespeare's actors would have made as much of the interpersonal language of gesture and expression as they could: the face was, and remains, the centre of the actor's communicative medium. Actors' faces, I think, could be seen reasonably well in the theatres of Shakespeare's time, whether outdoor or indoor. In the relatively large space of the rebuilt Globe on modern Bankside the expression of actors performing in daylight conditions can be seen quite clearly from most parts of the house; when the actors happen to be facing in your direction, of course. In the less evenly lit indoor Tudor and Stuart playing spaces audiences were smaller and closer to the stage; in either kind of venue performers would have counted on a full play of facial expression as part of their expressive language.

Theory of facial expression, as it were, is perhaps most marked in Macbeth, where Duncan is amazed to discover he has been betrayed by a man who gave no visual sign of treason. "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face: / He was [he says of the first Thane of Cawdor] a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust" (1.4.11-14). His successor, on the other hand, has all too sensitive an outward register of his mind, as his wife thinks: "Your face, my thane, is as a book, where men / May read strange matters. To beguile the time / Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye, / Your hand, your tongue [vultus, vita,

vox, you may notice]; look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under <t" (1.5.61-66). There is an art, then, to hide the mind's construction through the construction of the face, so long, at least, as the mind remains strong enough to resist the unease, guilt, and depression which might break down its resolution and control. The woman who gives the advice quoted above will end up as the blank-eyed, haunted sleepwalker of act five, in a scene which has a very precise track of physical gesture.

The importance of facial gesture may be appreciated if we move from tragedy, from which much of my evidence has so far been drawn, and consider the acting of Shakespearean comedy, conventionally taken up with the course of true love, though frequently seen satirically. Love conventions on Shakespeare's stage may be well represented by Prospero's phrase about the young pair he engineers into meeting in The Tempest, towards the end of the long second scene. "At first sight," he says of Miranda and Ferdinand, "They have chang'd eyes." These wonderful lines, in which the word "chang'd" acts both as a verb (exchanged: they both now see as the other does) and as an adjective (the way they see has been transformed), always remind me of lines from another contemporary poet, those of John Donne in "The Extasie": "Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred / Our eyes upon one double string." Two people joined at the eyes, unable to pull away, or break gaze. Stage lovers register themselves by the intensity and palpable strength of their

contact, eye to eye, across whatever distance may separate them. Such a simple physical law governs the playing of both 2.2, the orchard scene, and 3.5, the descent and farewell in the morning, in Romeo and Juliet.

Scenes of wooing and flirtation, evidently, leave the players free to defer the moment of changing eyes: offering, withholding, teasing, denying. There will be far more gestural activity, then, from Benedick and Beatrice than from Ferdinand and Miranda, frankly entranced with each other from first sight. The gestural games of wooing are subjected to situational parody in a favourite Shakespearean motif: cross-dressed disguise. In As You Like It Rosalind becomes the pert boy tutor of her lover, but in Twelfth Night, Viola, in the identity of Cesario, lands the job of go-between, and inadvertently becomes the object of Olivia's affections, finally to be conveniently replaced in them by her twin brother. The farcical accidents of such a plot as, particularly, that of Twelfth Night might give the actors some latitude in holding the mirror up to nature, though the encounter between the two leading female characters is in fact psychologically intense, and still extremely demanding for modern performers.

What difference the original conditions of performance may have made to the effect of the scene seems not entirely clear to me. Since the Restoration two women have played the roles which originally were taken by two boys--though I think the term "boys" needs some qualification. As long and taxing parts Viola and

Olivia would have been assigned to the senior, experienced apprentices of Shakespeare's company, who were in their early twenties by the time they completed their term. However much later puberty may generally have been in 1601 it was not a matter of more than a year or two, and it seems that specialists in the senior female roles may well have had larger physiques and broken voices. Evidently individual appearance and vocal quality would have fitted some young men better than others to continue in female roles until their third decade, but continue many of them did. The central point is that they were experienced and skilled actors in the kinds of role in which they had apprenticed, and they were performing within an accepted convention of representation. The joke that the girl disguised as a boy is actually a boy may not have had a great deal more resonance than that, in subsequent stage history, of seeing an adult female actor dressed in male clothes. (In the nineteenth century particularly Viola was a part to show off one's legs; some of the posed photographs of Violas from this period verge on the risqué, in contemporary terms.) Olivia's question of the strange youth, "Are you a comedian?", on the other hand, is likely to have drawn more laughter at the Globe than it generally does in contemporary performances.

But to return to the gestural demands of Shakespeare's writing. 1.5 of Twelfth Night concludes with a two-handed interview, the first meeting between Olivia and Orsino's new page. After some verbal sparring, in which Viola attempts to

sustain her role as a pert and witty youth, she persuades Olivia to remove the veil she has been wearing since her entry. Henceforward they are, potentially, face to uncovered face, and the formal admiration of Olivia's appearance is Viola's first business. Subtly, it is both formal compliment ("in character") and frank female avowal--the kind of admiration only a woman can make of another woman's beauty. The mixture, evidently, is an unsettling one for its addressee: Cesario has a secret weapon of sympathy. As Cesario pleads his master's case, using a fairly conventional rhetoric of love poetry, the vox, inspired by Viola's own love, has a tone Olivia has not heard before.

The scene, then, is one of some psychological and physical complexity and wit. We watch the two principals watch each other; one, we know, has a public and a private face; the other's face is changing as she becomes increasingly fascinated with her interlocutor. Both are watching their cards in the conversational contest; both are attempting to maintain their public faces--gentleman's page and great lady in family mourning--and both are watching and assessing the other when not being directly watched in return. Viola, for example, is anxious about getting away with it. The actual ways in which actors might work all this out are various: there is no one way of doing it. We can observe, for instance, how Imogen Stubbs and Helena Bonham-Carter play it in the film of a few years ago, although of course film can cheat, especially in scenes of close interaction, in a way that live performance cannot. My general point is that performers are given

a fairly precise general path governing their gesture within such a scene.

The interchange also has a number of retrospects. Once Cesario leaves, Olivia repeats some of their dialogue to herself, and assesses her reactions:

How now?
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes. (1.5.294-8)

And having despatched Malvolio to follow the recently departed envoy, further reflection:

I do I know not what, and fear to find
Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind. (1.5.308-09)

The relationship between the eye and the mind, a favourite focus of Shakespearean comedy particularly, also is a principal cue to the performer, who must show the watching and the reaction to what is seen. The focus of the face, and the face as a register are principal gestural elements of such comedy as that of 1.5 of Twelfth Night.

Two scenes later Malvolio, charged with returning a ring, catches up with Cesario. In weighing up what this fuss may be about, Viola, left to herself, gives us her retrospect, and simultaneously a newly enlightened rereading of the earlier interview.

I left no ring with her. What means this lady?
Fortune forbid my outside have not charm'd her!
She made good view of me; indeed so much
That methought her eyes had lost her tongue
For she did speak in starts distractedly. (2.2.17-21)

Here, in the last line, is a cue for the relationship between action and word in the earlier scene, although once again its emphasis in individual performances will vary. Viola's realisation that "I am the man", played out over a further twenty lines, itself calls for subtle vocal variation in relation to an expressive language of the face (covering, for example, shock, sympathy, and amusement) as the "poor monster", as she calls herself, copes with her dilemma. A careful performance will work on our emotional sympathies even as it makes us laugh at the mechanical paradox of farce.

If 1.5 of Twelfth Night requires its performers to work out in detail its quite specific requirements about mutual contact and facial gesture, other internal indications are invitations to virtuosity, one might say. Though Hamlet issues his famous warning "to let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them" (my emphasis), he does not forbid physical invention. Evidently the player of Falstaff, for example, takes on a part in which physicality--that of a Rubens Silenus--is as central as is verbal dexterity, and in which a balance must be found between energy and inventiveness on the one hand and weight ("gravity"), awkwardness, and weakness on the other: "an old fat man, a tun of man"--a kind of walking cartoon, a carnival giant, with an emblematic significance as Gula, the embodiment of gluttony and the excesses of the flesh. We in fact know something of the actual physicality of one of the first players of Falstaff (though not the first), John Lowin. He did not join Shakespeare's

troupe until about 1603, in which year he was twenty-seven. He continued acting into his seventies, and by the middle of his career he was playing leading roles: he premiered the part of Bosola in Webster's The Duchess of Malfi in 1614, for example. Lowin was a big man, though not, on the evidence, excessively fat; probably, like many actors since, he padded up to play the fat knight. Not only was he, like his fellows, a King's Man (a Groom of the Chamber in Ordinary) in rank, but he also held the court post of Groom Porter--probably a position held mostly nominally and honorifically, but in so far as it was practical awarded to people of more than average size and strength; the royal porters hauled the king's household stuff from place to place. A portrait of Lowin at the age of sixty-four is one of the very few good and attested paintings of English actors from before the Restoration. (In the talk a slide of the original, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, was shown.) In the picture we see the face of a renowned performer of Falstaff in the 1620s and 1630s. The sitter not dressed for the stage, but as a respectable, prosperous, and well-established citizen of London. The face and the manner, however, have a kind of weather-beaten truculence that one can imagine Lowin putting to use in his art.

As a representation of gesture, right hand grasping the edge of the cloak in a manner at once aggressive and defensive, the portrait might be read as suggesting something about individual character, or about actors, those secretive, exhibitionist people. It might also be taken, in its period, however, as simply

a representational mannerism: the display of the hand was a popular motif of portraiture from Van Dyck onwards. One might compare the Lowin picture with another of roughly the same date, showing the actor Richard Perkins towards the end of his life, in his late sixties. (Slide shown; original in the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.) Perkins has a far more handsome, sensitive face than Lowin's, with large, liquid eyes; he has an elegant hand, with long fingers, held in a more relaxed pose than Lowin's, over the breast. Perkins's elegance and sensitivity in the picture may be a little misleading about his stage career. Where we can read a match between Lowin's bluff exterior and the parts we know him to have played--apart from Falstaff and Bosola also Volpone, Sir Epicure Mammon, Henry VIII in Shakespeare and Fletcher's play, Domitian in The Roman Actor, inter alia--Perkins too played at least two outstanding stage villains. He was in all likelihood the first Flamineo in The White Devil by John Webster, and he was a successful Barabas in a 1630s revival of Marlowe's The Jew of Malta.

In his portrait it is Perkins's left hand rather than his right which is chosen for display: his favoured hand in life and on the stage, perhaps. But the pose itself, the cut of the figure's hair and beard, and even the rather melancholy manner are attributes of a style, specifically Royalist, and thus in the late 1640s, when the picture was made, declaring a political affinity--if made after early 1649, in fact, even a kind of memorial painting. Perkins ended his career as a member of the

company of Queen Henrietta, consort of the executed monarch. The great models for such paintings as that of Perkins were Van Dyck's portraits of Charles I made between 1632 and 1638. Particularly the triple portrait of Charles, showing his head from three angles, and made for Bernini as a study for a sculptured bust, shows both a right and a left hand displayed in distinct parts of the entire composition.

Poses and gestures in portraits follow contemporary fashions and iconographic habits, and even if we had more pictures of actors from Shakespeare's time they might not tell us a great deal more about the ways in which such bodies and faces as they display were employed on the stage. Faces and hands were principal gestural media of such men as Lowin and Perkins, but in their pictures they are not posed chiefly to show their attributes as actors. A certain physical fluidity and adaptability, matching similar vocal capability, were, in very general terms, the desiderata of contemporary performers. Thomas Heywood, like Shakespeare an actor and sharer in a playing company as well as a prolific playwright, begins with physical appearance and character--"Actors should be men pick'd out personable, according to the parts they present"--and proceeds next to voice, stressing both natural vocal power, or enough natural power to be capable of training, and the importance of understanding to govern modulation, emphasis, and stress; ?but where a good tongue & a good conceit both faile, there can never

be good actor." "Conceit", you will remember, is a word at the centre of Hamlet's understanding of the actor's power.

In returning to the internal indications of the plays themselves, let me consider the way in which "conceit", in its seventeenth-century sense, governs gesture in places which I earlier called invitations to virtuosity. One such is to be found in Twelfth Night. Malvolio, the solemn, authoritarian steward of Olivia's household, becomes the target of festival revenge, humiliated by being fooled into exposing himself as an absurd lover. The falstaffian forces of the play, as it were--those representing feast and holiday--trap him into believing a forged letter, a rather oblique declaration of love, as he thinks, from his aristocratic mistress. The scene of the letter's discovery, and of the observation by Toby, Andrew, and the rest of Malvolio's taking the bait is justly famous; it is a variation on a type of situation Shakespeare uses in another way in Othello. Malvolio's letter contains a number of outrageous instructions to be used as secret signs of understanding, some agreeing with his inclinations as we have seen them so far ("Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants; let thy tongue tang arguments of state" 2.5.149-51), and some not, including the absurd items of wardrobe in which he later appears. The cruellest twist comes in the postscript: "If thou entertain'st my love, let it appear in thy smiling; thy smiles become thee well. Therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee." Jove, I thank thee. I will smile, I will do every thing that thou wilt have

me." (2.5.175-9). Here, suddenly, is a physical focus for the entire part. Malvolio never smiles; "He is sad and civil," Olivia says of him, shortly before he reveals his transformed self to her. The effort of smiling, then, and to continue smiling, is the opportunity for a masterpiece of comic facial gesture--what contemporary Italian actors might have called a lazzo. The actor wrenches the character's face into a position it has never spontaneously known, and the result is some kind of grotesque rictus: a smile without a smiling conceit behind it, one could say. There is no one way of doing this-- it is an invitation to the actor's physical inventiveness and creative wit. Those of you who have seen photographs of Laurence Olivier playing the part in 1955 will not forget the spectacle of that remarkably mobile face twisted into an absurd rabbit-like leer, teeth bared and eyes popping. A piece of physical clowning is written in to Shakespeare's text, and it is absolutely required that the actor respond. "God comfort thee! Why dost thou smile so, and kiss thy hand so oft?" (Olivia, 3.4.32-33). We might remark that the man who teaches himself to smile never gets beyond the preliminaries. Laughter, rather than revenge, Fabian says towards the end, should mark the resolution of the confusions and deceits which have run their course during the play. Malvolio makes his own choice clear with a verbal gesture of refusal: "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you" (5.1.378). The possibility of a grim sneer marking these words is worth thinking about. The ghost of a smile.

In the suiting of action to word the evolving style of dramatic writing had evidently given players greater freedom by 1616 than they had had in 1564--the two ends of Shakespeare's lifetime. If one considers what action and gesture might be possible in Gorboduc, the blank-verse tragedy acted in the Inner Temple and at Whitehall before the queen early in 1562, one realises that for the actor--and one should say, in this instance, not the professional actor, since the performers were gentlemen lawyers--that for the actor faced with long speeches and declarations the challenge is first and foremost that of vox: how to keep the rhetoric aloft, connected, and compelling. The play is not written in anything approaching naturalism--movement, gesture, and facial expression are seldom indicated or required by context--and the words of the play are at a long remove from lived experience. If one is charged with suiting the action to the word, in this case, the best one can hope for is that skillful modulation keeps the audience listening, since, apart from the dumb shows which serve as prologues to each act, there is very little for them to watch.

When Shakespeare wants to separate off acting within his plays as a different perceptual realm--as in Hamlet, as in the Henry IV plays, and as in the relatively early Love's Labour's Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream--he consistently gives his actors or fans of acting the ancient, rusty, inflexible rhetorical styles with which to work: "Ercles' vein, a tyrant's vein". Theatre within theatre, in Shakespeare, is something that

is hopelessly out of date, reeking of mothballs at best, and mimetically ludicrous at worst--the Nine Worthies and the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. (There is, one might say, a Prospero complex at work. "Dost thou forget / from what a torment I did free thee?" "It was mine art / When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape / The pine, and let thee out.") The only professionals engaged in such on-stage theatre--those in Hamlet--after all the advice they receive about not overstepping the modesty of nature, suiting the action to the word, holding the mirror up to nature, and so on, are stuck with a wordy, cumbersome piece in rhymed verse, always a potentially bathetic, broken-backed style, which is full of Polonian wise saws and commonplaces. It is, unsurprisingly, commonly cut fairly drastically in modern production. The player's speech about Troy, by contrast, is written in a freer blank verse, if with a rather out-of-date elaboration in its vocabulary and semantic structure, but it does invite action: certainly facial expression to match content (which impresses Hamlet), and a certain indicative gesture with head, torso, and arms as the narrator retells the story of the night of invasion and massacre. The mood is tense, wrought, latent with threat, appalled, and sorrowful as the various stages of the story unfold. Polonius's complaint that "This is too long" seems far less justified than Gertrude's quasi-discreet reaction to The Mousetrap: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." As for the frankly ludicrous theatricals in the early plays the

targets are, after all, enthusiastic amateurs whose ambitions exceed their skill, and whose texts are howlingly bad.

The acting style of Shakespeare's fellows changed, and continued to change, in its balance of expressive elements and in its ideas of the "natural". Shakespearean styles of writing were widely copied by his successors as dramatists, while his own plays--many of them, at least--continued to be acted until the civil wars closed the theatres for eighteen years. John Lowin, according to a later legend, was given his instructions in first playing the part of Henry VIII by Shakespeare himself. Lowin was acting as late as 1648, surreptitiously and illegally by then. Lowin is supposed to have passed Shakespeare's pointers on to Sir William Davenant, who then gave them to Thomas Betterton, leading actor in the part after 1660. This may be one of those stories, of course, but there were continuities in tradition. Several people who worked with Shakespeare trained apprentices who later rejoined the Restoration acting profession. What Shakespeare himself did, more fully and completely than any dramatist before him, was to write in a manner alert to all the expressive power of performance; he is a gestural writer, rarely forgetting the continuous line of physical presence that every performer must sustain. As I have tried to indicate in the range of examples I have given, he leads and directs the actor's gesture through the logic of the text. His words are instinct with action; the work of the rehearsal hall, and the pleasure of watching new

performances of his plays, is to discover that connection once again.