Shakespeare’s Faces

The third definition given by the OED for the word “face” is, “A representation of a human visage”. With “representation” itself meaning an “appearance, impression on the sight” or an “image, likeness or reproduction in some manner of a thing”, the word takes on a new, theatrical meaning. A face is not only what it appears to be; it can be a representation of something else, a created image or likeness of a human visage. In other words it is flexible, changeable, not a fixed and unalterable entity.

Dramatic performance is of course then the perfect place to explore the extent to which faces can be altered, and Shakespeare seems very aware of the different kinds of faces which can be created in drama. Playing a character gives the actor a new face, face-paint hides the real face behind the performing face, and faces can be created simply through verbal description. But what then happens in a dramatic situation when the characters are not given a face?

The plays of Samuel Beckett are examples of theatrical performance which feature what could be called ‘faceless characters’. In his “dramaticule” *Come and Go*, Beckett’s specific stage directions state that the three characters, Flo, Vi and Ru, should all look “as alike as possible”, wearing “drab nondescript hats with enough brim to shade faces”. Beckett is deliberately hiding the faces of the characters from the audience, deliberately making them look alike. The lines spoken by these almost identical characters and the actions they perform are also very similar, repetitively following the same pattern with only small differences, emphasising that these characters lack differentiation; they seem to be more one entity than three separate ones. A similar method can be observed in Beckett’s *Play*: according to the stage directions the characters’ faces protrude from “three identical grey urns”, and are “so lost to age and aspect that they seem almost part of urns. But no masks”. In both plays there is virtually no difference in the characters’ appearances, and this makes it very difficult for the audience to distinguish between the characters at all. The direction forbidding the use of masks in *Play* is very important to this idea; to hide the faces would leave open the possibility that, underneath the masks, the characters could all look different. Without masks, the audience sees the characters as indistinguishable faces, which they hence cannot interpret, because there are no differences, no facial expressions or marks, to create the alphabet with which one reads faces.

Faced with this new incomprehensibility which is rarely encountered in the real world, an audience might then assume that the characters Beckett has created are not life-like. Faces hidden, or all identical, showing no facial expression that the audience can discern; how can these shadowy figures be accurate representations of human beings? However, there are rare circumstances in which lack of facial expression can also be a feature of everyday life. There exists a syndrome, Möbius syndrome, which is “a

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1 *Come and Go*, Samuel Beckett, first published in English 1967
2 *Play*, Samuel Beckett, first published in English in 1964
condition in which children are born without movement of the face. Hence, they have no facial expressions to be observed and understood by those around them. It would be fanciful to suggest that Beckett had this syndrome in mind when creating his ‘faceless characters’, indeed it is probable that he was not even aware of the existence of the Möbius syndrome; however, there are undoubtedly interesting concepts which arise from the consideration of this syndrome alongside the nature of faces in drama.

The Invisible Smile: Living without Facial Expression is a book written by Jonathan Cole which examines what it is like to live with Möbius syndrome, mostly through interviews with sufferers. In the fourth chapter of the book, Cole interviews a woman named Celia, asking about her experiences as a child suffering from Möbius. The way in which she describes her problems with communicating is very enlightening in relation to communication in drama:

Now, as an adult, I will say, “This is nice!” when I see something I like, just as you smile. Then, with adults, I would have conversation but with children I was a bystander. Children had another language, a body language, a facial language.

Celia’s recognition of the existence of a “facial language”, and the fact that, she was a “bystander” observing it, could almost be a description of the communication which occurs in a theatrical performance. The audience sit and watch the story that is communicated to them by the actors, but often that communication is not verbal; the audience watches the actors’ body language, the way they stand, their faces, in order to fully understand what is happening onstage. The face is an essential tool of communication, one which forms its own “facial language” to be understood.

Shakespeare seems aware throughout his plays of the important part that faces play in communication, and that in many ways they possess a language of their own. Particularly in Richard II and Macbeth, the imagery that Shakespeare employs illustrates the lexical quality of the face:

K. Rich. ...I’ll read enough,
When I do see the very book indeed
Where all my sins are writ, and that’s myself.

Enter one with a glass.

Give me that glass, and therein will I read.

(4.1.273-276)

Richard describing the reflection of his face as a “book”, within which he can “read” of himself and his sins, emphasises that there is a kind of language present in his face and his facial expressions; his face communicates something to him. It also illustrates the idea which seems to be suggested by the OED that a face is a “representation”; faces can be rewritten to say

3 The Invisible Smile: Living without Facial Expression, Joanthan Cole with Henrietta Spalding, Oxford University Press, 2009
something else, they can be fabricated and created, like books. Shakespeare employs the same image in *Macbeth*:

*Lady M.* 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; look like th' innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't.

(1.5.62-66)

The noticeable difference between the “book” of Richard’s face and the “book” of Macbeth’s face is that it is only Richard himself who can ‘read’ his own face, whereas Macbeth’s face is “a book, where men/May read strange matters”. His face, whatever countenance he puts upon it, does not only belong to him. Once an emotion is registered upon it, his face is the property of everyone; no longer personal, it can be read and known by all.

A comment made by another of the interviewees in *The Invisible Smile* illustrates this uncontrollable aspect of facial expression. In the aptly named chapter *The Spectator*, James speaks similarly on the notion of faces being open books which can be read by anyone around them:

I can read faces but I can’t give a face in return. In that sense, I am invisible or blank...
Other people may not want to have thoughts that they’re feeling portrayed to others. I know that none of my thoughts will ever be seen by others on my face.

James too speaks of being able to “read” faces, but in a sense which differs from Celia’s earlier recognition of a childhood “facial language”; James can speak this language, he can “read” what other people’s facial expressions mean, but he is unable to answer in that same language. The strangeness of this particular comment, especially considered alongside this instance in *Macbeth*, is that it is as if James is seeing a positive side to having the Möbius syndrome; his face is unable to move, which means he is never at risk of his thoughts being read on his face when he does not want them to be. He is “invisible or blank”, but in a way that makes him impenetrable.

Thinking back to Beckett’s ‘faceless characters’, their lack of definition could now seem to be more understandable. James’s inability to make a facial expression does not mean that he is not feeling the emotion behind the expression, it merely means that nobody can see his emotion as obviously as it could be observed through facial expression. Could it then be argued that Beckett is challenging his audience to try and understand a new form of communication in his plays? In removing the standard way in which to communicate emotion and personality – through facial expression – Beckett has created characters that the audience has to study harder. They have to work to understand the emotion, the character, hidden behind the veil which Beckett has given them, which makes them appear to be “invisible or blank”.

In many ways, it is as if Beckett’s characters have gone all the way to the end of the road that Lady Macbeth is leading her husband down: they “beguile the time” by looking “like the time”, they show no individual facial expression, they mirror one another in each other’s faces, and hence their individual identities are successfully masked. This then seems to support the
idea of the face as a "representation"; the face is an instrument which can be
manipulated to reflect others, and hide the real face behind the glass.

This image of the face as mirror is one which can be seen elsewhere in
Shakespeare's work, for example in The Winter's Tale:

_Her._    You look
    As if you held a brow of much distraction.
    Are you mov'd, my lord?

_Leon._   No, in good earnest.
    How sometimes nature will betray its folly!
    It's tenderness! And make itself a pastime
    To harder bosoms! Looking on the lines
    Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil
    Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreech'd
    In my green velvet coat...

(1.2.158-160)

Hermione's introduction to Leontes's speech indicates that it is through facial
expression that people notice and understand the emotions of others; it is
from observing his "brow of much distraction" that Hermione realises that
Leontes is troubled by something. Just as Macbeth's face can be "read" by all
those who view it, so Leontes's face is similarly readable to his wife. Neither
man's face seems to be entirely his own, and this can also be applied to
Mamilius. The young prince's face is not personal to him; it seems also to
belong to Leontes, because he can see himself in his son's face. In this
respect, the speech seems to echo one of Shakespeare's sonnets:

Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee
 Calls back the lovely April of her prime,
 So thou through windows of thine age shalt see,
 Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.

(Sonnet 3, lines 9-12)

The faces of children serve as a "glass" for their parents, which they in their
old age can look upon and see the face of their youth reflected back to them.
This idea is present in The Winter's Tale, but is in some way pushed further
than it is in Sonnet 3; not only does Leontes see himself in Mamilius's face,
"unbreech'd/In [his] green velvet coat", but the boy's face also seems to in
some way become Leontes's. Leontes saying, "Looking on the lines/Of my
boy's face" suggests this; it is interesting that Leontes speaks of "lines" on his
youthful son's face, when it is surely more likely that Mamilius's face is as yet
unlined by age, whereas Leontes's older face will have lines. It is as if Leontes
sees both his young self and his present, older self in his son's face.

As well as supporting the suggestion that our faces are not really our
own, but the possessions of those around us, this also seems to imply that a
person's interpretation of a face is frequently subjective. Leontes sees some
of himself in the face of his son: is there then a suggestion that a person is
able to put part of themselves into the people and faces that they see? Are all
visions in some way subjective and altered by an element of the viewer's
being?
Shakespeare's poem *Venus and Adonis* seems to explore this idea further. The importance of faces in this poem is emphasised from the very first line: "Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face/Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn...". This image of a "purple-colour'd face" is revived at the end of the poem when Venus "stains her face with [the] congealed blood" of the dead Adonis, which is described in line 1054 as "purple tears". The fact that the image of the face at the beginning of the poem is re-evoked at the end gives the impression that a blushing face – or a bloody face – is always present throughout the poem, which indeed it is in various different forms; Adonis's face "burns with bashful shame", is "rose-cheek'd" and "red for shame", and Venus's face has "red cheeks" and is a "blushing rose". Yet there is also the suggestion that these blushing faces are viewed subjectively, even falsely, by those who look upon them.

Shakespeare first creates this impression in lines 251 and 252, when he writes:

Poor queen of love, in thine own law forlorn,
To love a cheek that smiles at thee in scorn!

To the reader it might appear slightly absurd that Venus is so entranced by the dimples in Adonis's face – they know that they are merely the mocking curves which are formed when he "smiles as in disdain" (line 241), and yet to Venus they appear to be "lovely caves...round enchanting pits" (line 247). She sees them not as they are, but through the blurred vision of love; she sees not what is, but what she wants to see. Later in the poem Shakespeare emphasises this further, when he writes that Adonis's eyes are to Venus "Two glasses, where herself herself beheld/A thousand times, and now no more reflect" (lines 1129-1130). The implication is that, when Adonis was alive, Venus saw part of herself when she looked into his face, his eyes were "glasses" in which she saw her own reflection rather than the eyes of Adonis. Hence any image she ever sees of Adonis is in some way shaped by her; an image of her own face is somehow present in his. A statement made by Walter Pater seems to aptly reflect this situation:

...the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. 
Experience...is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us...4

Pater's description of the individual mind as a "narrow chamber" seems to support the idea that all visions and experiences are subjective, that there is no room in the human mind to allow the intrusion of others. Unable to breach the "thick wall of personality" encircling her, Venus sees some of herself in Adonis, and constructs an image of him as she wants to see him, because her sight cannot be freed from the constraints of her personality.

The meeting scene from Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film *Romeo + Juliet* is a good illustration of this idea. Romeo is shown first, gazing into the water of a large fish tank, his reflection clearly visible in the water. The lovers' eyes first

4 *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Walter Pater, 1873
meet when Juliet’s eye is glimpsed on the other side of the water, appearing where the viewer expects Romeo’s reflected eye to be; the scene could almost be a visual realisation of the John Donne line, “My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears”\(^5\). As Romeo gazes at his new-found love, his reflection stands right beside her; when he attempts to kiss her, momentarily forgetful of the transparent barrier between them, what he touches instead is his own reflection. Juliet’s reflection is similarly noticeable standing beside Romeo; the reflection of the lover acts like a shadow of the beloved. As Romeo gazes infatuatedly into the water, there are moments when his eyes appear to be looking at his own reflection, rather than at Juliet. The reflection of the self seems to be a part of the beloved object.

Apart from a suggestion of Narcissism, in what way does this original interpretation of the meeting scene add to the nature in which faces are viewed and interpreted in Shakespeare’s work? As in The Winter’s Tale, the lovers see elements of themselves mirrored in one another’s faces. This could then suggest that reflected images are more than just a copy of the object being reflected, that they are in some way interpreted or amplified through being reflected. This can be extended to instances when images of faces, are conjured up through the words of another character, since voiced descriptions are in themselves a kind of verbal reflection, another interpretation of the character from a point of view outside of themselves; the reflection of a character can be conjured up through the words of an actor for the audience, and for the character themselves, to see.

There are other moments in Romeo and Juliet which appear to support this:

\[\text{Rom.} \]
\[...O\ my\ love,\ my\ wife,\]
\[\text{Death, that hath suck’d the honey of thy breath,}\]
\[\text{Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:}\]
\[\text{Thou art not conquer’d, beauty’s ensign yet}\]
\[\text{Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,}\]
\[\text{And death’s pale flag is not advanced there.}\]

(5.3.91-96)

Here, the image of Juliet’s face is verbally conjured up by Romeo for the audience, but an air of mistrust surrounds the image which he conjures. On the one hand, there is a tragic dramatic irony behind Romeo’s speech: the audience is aware that Juliet is in fact still living, that “death’s pale flag” has not advanced in her face because she was never in danger of warring with death to start with. However, in spite of this, there is also the question of whether or not the audience can take Romeo’s words literally, or whether they are heard as exemplifying a moment in which a character interprets what he sees as what he wants to see, not what is actually in front of him.

This doubting of Romeo arises from a remembrance of Friar Lawrence’s speech in Act 4 scene 1:

\[\text{Fri. L.} \]
\[...No warmth, no breath shall testify thou livest;\]

The roses in thy lips and in thy cheeks shall fade
To wanny ashes, thy eyes’ windows fail,
Like death when he shuts up the day of life;
Each part, deprived of supple government,
Shall, stiff and stark and cold, appear like death,
And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death
Thou shalt continue two and forty hours...

(4.1.98-105)

The image of Juliet’s face conjured up by Friar Lawrence directly contradicts what Romeo sees in her still figure. In contrast to the friar’s prediction that “The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade/ To wanny ashes”, Romeo sees “beauty’s ensign” still “crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks”. Romeo’s vision of Juliet might seem more robust, stronger, since he is describing her defying death with “crimson” blood still high in her face; she is battling with death and the advance of his “pale flag”, “not conquer’d” yet, fighting against him with “beauty’s ensign” blazing in her cheeks. However, the battle imagery which is embedded in this description of Juliet does not make the image that Romeo conjures any stronger, or any more believable; it is as if he is the one battling against death, refusing to accept the death of Juliet, the sight of her “stiff and stark and cold” and the disappearance of life from her face. So he creates through his words another image of her, in which she is “not conquer’d” by death. He is altering the actual vision that is set before him. The position of the audience at this point is hence a complicated one; they might feel inclined to doubt the credibility of the face that Romeo paints for Juliet, and yet lying beneath this is the knowledge that Juliet actually is still alive. There is a conflict between Romeo seeing signs of life in Juliet, but believing her dead, and the audience having been previously told that Juliet will look as though she is dead, but knowing that she is in fact still alive. Both presentations of the face, the true face and the verbal description, are deceptive and illusory.

Ephemeral faces conjured through description can be seen in many of Shakespeare’s plays, and notably in Antony and Cleopatra. Cleopatra’s speech in which she remembers Antony as a man far greater than he actually was (“I dreamt there was an Emperor Antony...” 5.2.76) shows how words can conjure faces which, though with foundation in real life, are largely based upon fiction; but perhaps a subtler moment concerning the scrutiny of faces can be found towards the end of this scene:

Caes.

O noble weakness!
If they had swallowed poison, ’twould appear
By external swelling; but she looks like sleep,
As if she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(5.2.344-348)

Though he does not specifically mention Cleopatra’s face, Caesar is here creating an image of her for the audience, one which is strangely tangible and yet also somehow out of reach. He is describing the face of Cleopatra and her servants using what is not there, not by using any discernable features which
he can see; Caesar indicates that there is no “external swelling” upon her face, and so the audience assumes, whether they can see her face or not, that it is unblemished by death. “She looks like sleep” implies quietude and peace, and yet this seems contradicted by the image of her chasing and ‘catching’ another Antony. It seems oxymoron, as does the final line, “her strong toil of grace”: a “strong toil” is not something generally associated with “grace”, and yet it seems an apt description for Cleopatra’s enigmatic combination of elegance and strength. This speech is then in many ways merely Caesar describing his own reaction to the sight of Cleopatra’s face, his own interpretation, but that in itself conjures up a new face, a new representation, for the audience to view.

Instances of this sort of ‘close-up’ are striking when they appear in Shakespeare’s work, and so the importance of the face of Cleopatra seems highlighted by the fact that there are two such instances in this one scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Charmian’s short speech following the death of Cleopatra seems to zoom in on her face in a way which brings it up in intimately close detail:

Char. Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies A lass unparallel’d. Downy windows, close, And golden Phoebus never be beheld Of eyes again so royal! Your crown’s awry, I’ll mend it, and then play –

(5.2.315-319)

This differs from Caesar’s description of Cleopatra’s face, if only because it is Charmian’s speech and actions at this point which create the face of Cleopatra as Caesar sees her at the end of the scene; her line “downy windows, close”, is a sort of stage-direction for the act of her closing Cleopatra’s eyes, which is what makes her look “like sleep” to Caesar. “Downy windows, close” also creates a potent moment because it is a moment in which one character touches another’s face, and so is a moment of great intimacy, and yet it is a line which also seems to take in a wider context than only the relationship which exists between Charmian and her mistress. “Downy windows” refers to Cleopatra’s eyelids, so in that sense it is focussing on one minute object, in a way which is close and intimate and microscopic. And yet the use of the word “windows” creates the image of Cleopatra’s body as a building, and in closing the windows of her eyelids Charmian is closing up a space of great potential and worth inside. This impression of the greatness of Cleopatra is extended in the lines which follow. Describing Cleopatra’s eyes as “so royal” after she mentions “golden Phoebus” seems to give Cleopatra a status even more elevated than that of Phoebus; she sits higher, and shines brighter, than the sun. And yet the speech ends with “Your crown’s awry,” I’ll mend it, and then play-”, which seems to be a return to the more intimate, everyday occurrence of a maid perfecting her mistress’s appearance; the “awry” crown undermines the image of a queen “so royal” that has just been created. The speech, the moment of Charmian touching Cleopatra’s face and straightening her crown, seems to have two levels. To the audience it could be a historic moment, the recognition of the death of
Cleopatra, the finality of closing her eyelids, the formality of straightening her crown so she can look perfect even in death. But it is also the final moment of tenderness between a "lass unparallel'd" and her maid, a small moment of peace and intimacy magnified in the final scene of a famous tragedy.

This balance between the minute and the great creates an illuminating way of looking at faces in theatre, and particularly moments in which characters describe the face of another character; they are focussing on the description of one small thing, and yet the very closeness of the attention makes that small thing important. The meaning of the face is being changed; it no longer stands simply for that character, for that one individual, but for a much greater dramatic moment. In many ways this is another example of faces being amplified and changed through their interpretation by somebody else; the face becomes a "representation" of itself, reflecting not just itself, but also the way in which it is observed and interpreted by others, and the moment and time in which it is observed.

A face taking on different layers of meaning, representing many things at once, emphasises that it is not just the words spoken by characters about faces that can be a performance; the face itself is an instrument of performance. This is illustrated *The Invisible Smile*, when Celia is discussing the nature of what a smile really is, following her having had an operation which gave her enough facial movement to form a kind of smile.

It is still not involuntary to use the "smile", many years later. I do it. I must have been told that it would be helpful as a smile...
I missed loads at school and when I went back everyone commented. It became known as my little smile, though it had no relation with emotion, which is what a smile is. It allowed a performance...
People's faces were doing something; teachers are a good example, they are often demonstrative and perform.

Celia's use of the words "performance" and "perform" highlight the dramatic quality of the face in everyday life. But what it also highlights is the falsity of facial expressions. If expressions on the face are a "performance", is there any genuine emotion behind them? Celia does not use her 'smile' as an involuntary impulse when she is happy; she uses it when it would be "helpful", as a "performance", because everyday life demands the appearance of facial expression. There is a suggestion that faces and facial expression are deceptive, that the face is a mask, that facial expression is a costume, and that neither display true emotion.

Shakespeare seems aware of this deceptive aspect of faces too, and illustrates it in *Hamlet*. A face as a "representation", a performance of some kind, is taken to the extreme in this play, as if Shakespeare were trying to illustrate the well-worn phrase "putting on a face". The creation of new faces, particularly women 'disguising' their faces with make-up, is treated with contempt by Hamlet.

*Ham.*  I have heard of your paintings, well enough. God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance...

(3.1.142/143)
In this speech to Ophelia Hamlet equates a woman painting her face with a woman acting and affecting an alternative personality; transforming the face with make-up is the same as disguising the voice with a "lisp" and changing the way one walks with a "jig". Therefore in Hamlet the owner of a face can alter what it says, make it "perform", use it as a disguise. In a play, the face is just as much of a costume as the clothes an actor wears; appearance is everything.

But how does this sentiment sit alongside Act 5 scene 1 of the play? In this scene, the performance is of a different nature; Hamlet's words evoke a different kind of face, clothing for the audience the bare skull of Yorick and filling out his features with those of a "fellow of infinite jest" (5.1.185), describing the "lips that [he had] kissed [he knows] not how oft" (5.1.188), and the "flashes of merriment" (5.1.190) which used to pass over the jester's face. But however vividly Hamlet conjures up Yorick's face, his words are refuted by the image of the bare, grinning skull in his hand, the face that is no longer a face. His costume of words is torn apart by this new "chop-fall'n" (5.1.192) face. Hence the created faces in Hamlet are always rendered hollow by the knowledge that, whether painted in make-up or painted in words, no substantial reality lies behind the performing faces: "to this favour [all] must come" (5.1.194).

An instance where one of Shakespeare's characters doubts the credibility of the face before him can be observed in King Lear:

Lear. ...Do not laugh at me,
    For (as I am a man) I think this lady
    To be my child Cordelia.
Cord. And so I am; I am.
Lear. Be your tears wet? Yes, faith...

(4.7.67-70)

Lear has learnt through the betrayals of Regan and Goneril that outward appearance can be deceptive; he now distrusts not only Cordelia's forgiveness, but even the image of her face before him. His line, "Be your tears wet?" accompanied, one assumes from his answer, with the actor reaching out a hand to touch Cordelia's face, creates a unique moment in Shakespeare. Lear is playing the role of the audience at this point, questioning the reality of the image that is set before him, wondering if it is all a costume, all an illusion. And yet he is given an opportunity that the audience never has: the chance to reach out a hand and test the reality of the image before him, to touch it himself and decide upon its truth. The moment in which he touches Cordelia's face and feels the wetness of her tears is a moment in which the whole audience could hold its breath, waiting for Lear to answer his own question: to answer 'yes' is to preserve the reality; to answer 'no' is to shatter the illusion. It is one minute moment between two characters, one which may even be difficult for all members of the audience to see, and yet it should resonate with everyone, for Lear's question concerns not just him and his own personal tragedy, but also the reality of the illusion of the play itself.
The fact that Lear has to touch Cordelia’s face in order to be sure of its reality raises the question of how real faces and imaginary faces operate alongside one another onstage. There could be several interpretations of Cordelia’s face present in this scene: the imagined face which Lear has in his mind, the actual face of the character Cordelia which he touches, and the face of the actress playing Cordelia, which is separate to the face of the character. In some cases of celebrity, the face of the actor can entirely overshadow the face of the character. A painting by Benjamin Wilson, from 1761, of the storm scene in King Lear bears the caption, “Garrick as Lear in the storm, with Kent and Edgar but without the Fool”. The notion of Garrick as Lear is an interesting one in itself, but this is compounded by the fact that the other figures in the painting are identified by their fictional names only, presented as the characters Kent and Edgar rather than the actors playing the characters, whereas in the case of Lear/Garrick the indication is that it is a painting of the actor Garrick, rather than of Lear. The actor’s presence, his face, has become more important than that of the character he is personifying. The audience is then left with the bewildering question of how many different faces are present onstage in a play.

Hence there is a sense that in any play there is a multitude of faces present for each character: the face of the actual character; the face of the actor playing the character; the face conjured up through words of others; the face of the character as seen by other characters. In the attempt to fully consider this shifting myriad of faces, it seems that perhaps Beckett’s ‘faceless characters’ are not so confusing after all; their faces, their identity, seem to be no less blurrily defined that those of the many-faced characters which the audience sees on Shakespeare’s stage. As James says in The Invisible Smile, “I’ve often thought of myself as a spectator rather than a participant”. James sees himself as a spectator because all he can do is watch facial expressions on others, but that is what faces and facial expressions are designed to create: a performance to all who are watching, a layer of costumes and fictions. On the face of it then, in drama, are they really any true faces at all?