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**Address in Washington, D.C., 10 April 2009**

At last this moment has arrived. Like all the former SAA presidents I know, I've been agonizing over it for two years, ever since you were so generous as to elect me vice-president. In states of low, medium and high anxiety I've mulled it over on two continents, waking and sleeping; during department meetings, on the exercise bicycle, in the shower and in the supermarket. I've juggled various topics in the air: "the battle with the Centaurs," "the riot of the tipsy Bacchanals, / Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage," and especially in this bleak economic season, "The thrice three Muses mourning for the death / Of Learning, late deceased in beggary" (*Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.44-53). I think I remember my immediate predecessor, Peter Holland, whom I have never known to be at a loss for words, describing himself as lying despondent on the living room couch, like the speaker in Sidney's sonnet, "biting [his] truant pen" and "beating [him]self for spite" as he searched for a topic for his luncheon speech. I've been there, too.

On March 10, 2009, I was released from this state of desperation by a fast-breaking news story girdling the globe: "Is this a Shakespeare which I see before me?" read the headline on my *New York Times*, one of many in which reporters would show off their knowledge of Shakespeare by deliberate (or unwitting) misquotation of his words. **[On screen: Cobbe portrait]** There on the front page was a color photograph of a painting that Stanley Wells, chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, had presented to the world the day before as "almost certainly the only authentic image of Shakespeare made from life" (SBT press release, 3/9/09). I quote from the description in the *Times* article:

The Cobbe portrait, as the scholars now call it, shows a head-turner of a man. In middle age, this Shakespeare has a fresh-faced complexion, a closely trimmed auburn beard, a long straight nose and a fashionably full, almost bouffant hairstyle. He is dressed in [an] elaborate white lace ruff and a gold-trimmed blue doublet of a kind worn only by the wealthy and successful men of his age.

The eminent Stanley Wells, who needs no introduction in this company, hadn't rushed into print with this claim. Three years ago, Alec Cobbe, the owner of the portrait, visiting the exhibition "Searching for Shakespeare" at the National Portrait Gallery in London, had seen a portrait on loan from the Folger Shakespeare Library, and "immediately realized that this was a copy of the painting in his family collection." Searching for Shakespeare, like Dorothy in "The Wizard of Oz" he had found Shakespeare right at home, not in Kansas but at the Cobbe family estate outside Dublin.

Cobbe and Wells then arranged state of the art scientific tests to establish the date of the painting: X-ray examination, tree ring dating, and infra-red reflectography. These studies show that it had probably been executed in 1610, when Shakespeare was forty-six, and establish it as the original of which several copies, including the Folger portrait, had been made. Three of these copies, according to the Birthplace Trust press release, have "independent traditions" as portraits of Shakespeare, two of them dating back to "within living memory of the poet." A further claim—or fact, depending on which article or website you consult—links the painting more provocatively to Shakespeare: that it came to the family through the marriage of a Cobbe to the great-granddaughter of Shakespeare's only literary patron, Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton.

Now, what distinguishes this portrait from those previously accepted as "likenesses" of Shakespeare (a term I'll examine in a moment)—the all-too familiar Droeshout engraving of the first Folio, and the Janssen bust in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church—is that it is alleged to have been painted from the life (another term I will soon question). The engraving and the bust were both produced after Shakespeare's death. Only the Cobbe portrait, we're told, represents the poet as he lived. Indeed, in the

opinion of Paul Edmondson, director of learning at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, “This is Shakespeare alive, with fresh blood pumping through his veins” (*Huffington Post*, 3/25/09).

The brochure accompanying an exhibition of the portrait that will open at the Trust on April 23 (when else?), ventures farther, reading character from, or into, the face:

His face is open and alive, with a rosy, rather sweet expression, perhaps suggestive of modesty. There is nothing superior or haughty in the subject, which one might well expect to find in a face set off by such rich clothing. It is the face of a good listener, as well as of someone who exercised a natural restraint (qtd. *New York Times*, 3/10/2009).

In a different vein, a handout given to reporters by the Birthplace Trust teasingly speculates, “This Shakespeare is handsome and glamorous, so how does this change the way we think about him? And do the painting and provenance tell us more about his sexuality, and possibly about the person to whom the sonnets are addressed?” “Provenance” alludes to the alleged descent of the painting from Southampton’s great granddaughter, suggesting that the picture might have been a love-token destined for him, long a prime candidate for the original “young man” of the sonnets.

So: this newly certified counterfeit of Shakespeare shows him to be a member of aristocratic circles, yet not haughty; richly and fashionably dressed, yet modest; a person of restraint, yet courting the affections of a nobleman high above him. This portrait is someone we can recognize: he’s sexy and he’s rich but he’s also a nice guy, truly a Shakespeare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reflecting its public relations savvy, and its style-conscious, celebrity-oriented visual culture.

Evidently, there *is* an “art to know the mind’s construction in the face” (*Macbeth* 1.4.11-12). This art is well established, and familiar to us as Shakespeare scholars, for it has long been practiced with regard to the Droeshout engraving and the Janssen bust. **[On screen: Droeshout portrait and Janssen bust]** The Droeshout is instantly familiar, with its prominent bald cranium, the head oddly divided from the body by a stiffly wired collar, and so is the plump bust with head vacantly staring above hands grasping quill pen and paper. Both arguably are “authentic” images of Shakespeare, even though not created from life. Shakespeare’s friend Ben Jonson said that the engraver “hath hit the face,” and the Shakespeare family paid for the bust. If these images didn’t bear some resemblance to the living poet, it’s unlikely they would have been accepted as Folio frontispiece or hometown memorial. But the “likeness” to Shakespeare that subsequent viewers of these images have seen isn’t their resemblance to the living man, which could hardly be verified. Rather, they have projected onto these faces the ideal mind and personality that they believe he possessed. A 19<sup>th</sup> century phrenologist praised the Droeshout forehead as indicating “an ample endowment of the higher sentiments . . . ideality, wonder, wit, imitation, benevolence, and veneration” (qtd. by Garber, in Nolen, 164). Contrariwise, John Dover Wilson saw in the bust a “general air of stupid and self-complacent prosperity [that] might suit well enough with an affluent and retired butcher, but does gross wrong to the dead poet” (qtd. by Garber in Nolen, 169).

As Marjorie Garber comments with her usual perspicacity, “What is always at stake is the question of whether the image fits the Man,” that’s man with a capital M, the god of our bardolatry. For in 2009, no matter how accurately the tree rings of its wood date the Cobbe portrait, what we see in its counterfeit is still deeply conditioned by a persistent cultural desire for “an image of Shakespeare that matches a romantic conception of genius . . . that doesn’t put on weight, develop two chins, and go bald.” I’m quoting a blogger named Ellis. **[On screen: Chandos portrait]** The Chandos portrait, of a bearded man with a high forehead and long curly hair, his face set off by a simple lawn collar and the rakish gold earring glinting above it, might answer to that romantic conception. It too has been dated to 1610, and in 2006 was certified by the National Portrait Gallery as “the only painting with any real claim to have been done from the life” (Wikipedia, “Portraits of Shakespeare”). **[Sanders portrait]** And then there’s the

Sanders Portrait, “kept in a cupboard in the upstairs hall” of an Ottawa family until 2001. According to family tradition, it was painted by their ancestor John Sanders, an actor in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, who wrote “Anno 1603” and “Shakspere” on it. The usual forensic tests have verified the date, but as is the case with the Cobbe portrait, the sitter’s identity, as Shakespeare or anyone else, can’t be verified. He has, though, a full head of attractively wavy hair, a wispy goatee, and a piquant gaze that might tally with “a romantic conception of genius.” But the Sanders portrait never got anything near the publicity of the Cobbe portrait and still languishes in Ottawa—perhaps awaiting the attention of our incoming, Canadian, president. Paul, will you have a go at it?

What is at stake for us as Shakespeare scholars in this exciting claim that a “true likeness” of our poet, created “from life,” has been found? What’s in a face? A whole lot. In merely recounting the facts of the claim, I’ve named two major Shakespeare institutions: the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, and the Folger Shakespeare Library here in Washington, D.C., which owns a copy of the Cobbe picture. A third institution that figures in the claim is also closely linked to Shakespeare: the National Portrait Gallery in London. To illuminate the investment of Anglo-American culture in portraits of Shakespeare, let me recall briefly two ideas from which these three institutions were generated.

First, the idea that the secret of Shakespeare’s genius lies in his origins. When in 1857 a public-spirited group of benefactors purchased the Henley Street house in Stratford, one of two houses owned by John Shakespeare, they didn’t call themselves the Shakespeare Trust, but rather, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. A certain room in that house had already become known as the room in which the poet was actually born. When in 1819 Washington Irving visited the “squalid chambers,” as he called them, he interpreted the handwritten names which covered its walls as “the spontaneous and universal homage of mankind to the great poet of nature” (qtd. Willbern, 226). In 1855, Nathaniel Hawthorne observed the same phenomenon: the names were still there. Thousands of visitors had thought to fuse their identities, represented by their names, with Shakespeare’s genius, the source of which was to be found in the very room where he first drew breath. Eliding the fact that he lived in London for the major part of his career, that the theaters of London gave him the stage on which he performed, literally and figuratively, for over twenty years, the mystique of origins still drives the tourist industry of Stratford. Similarly, looking into the eyes of a face alleged to be Shakespeare’s promises a *frisson* like that of visiting the birth room: the thrill of seeing the very origin of his art.

Second, the idea that Shakespeare is the genius, in the classical sense, of England as a nation: its secular saint. In 1853, Thomas Carlyle, responding to a suggestion from Prince Albert, proposed a national portrait gallery that could be a “Pantheon, or home of all the National Divinities, for these our historical heroes are” (qtd. Barlow, in Woodall, 221). That gallery was then established in 1856 not by private benefactors but by an act of Parliament, linking visual images of national figures to the nation *per se*. **[On screen: Chandos portrait]** The Earl of Ellesmere donated its first portrait, happily enough of Shakespeare, England’s number one cultural hero: the Chandos portrait that you see here. As is also true of the Cobbe portrait, sitter and artist can’t be documented, but the painting, which was made during Shakespeare’s lifetime, was taken to be authentic in 1856. The third Shakespearean institution, the Folger Shakespeare Library, represents a variation on Shakespeare as the icon of England. It began with Henry Clay Folger’s private collection, which he acquired through buying up rare books owned by wealthy British families. Folger’s aim, however, as Michael Bristol argues in his book *Shakespeare’s America, America’s Shakespeare*, was to make his private library a public trust, for *American* Shakespeare lovers. Resisting pressure to locate the library in Stratford-upon-Avon, he bought a parcel of land located within eyesight of Congress and nearly in a straight line with the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The library’s very location bespeaks the idea that “America is a successor-culture to England,” indeed, makes Shakespeare the icon of a historically unified Anglo-American culture (Bristol, 77, 76).

Not only institutionally, but personally for us as scholars, teachers, students of Shakespeare, the Cobbe portrait raises the issue of how we perceive our object of study and present it to the world. This is a teachable moment, for us and our students. Is Shakespeare's face being loaded with a significance it wasn't meant to bear? I think so. Even if a document emerged from a vault, or a cupboard in the upstairs hall, on paper verifiably dated, in a hand identical to the hand that wrote those lines in *Sir Thomas More*, a document, for example, attesting that Shakespeare had commissioned a likeness of himself painted "from the life," even if we could prove beyond a doubt that Shakespeare sat for that very likeness, it wouldn't tell us about Shakespeare as an artist—or even as a man.

The work of Harry Berger, Jr.—one of our very own—enables me to make this argument (though I exempt him from any responsibility for it). In a brilliant book titled *Fictions of the Pose*, Berger challenges the idea behind any claim that early modern portraits represent "an epitome of the sitter's character as it was generally manifested in his life," or in a memorable phrase, "the face as index of the mind" (109). Rather, he says, both technical innovations in the arts and sciences, and the rise of *sprezzatura* in courtly culture, moved toward "a constructivist view of the semiotic relation between body and soul, face and mind." Enabled by new technologies of perspective and anatomy, painters offered what patrons wanted: faces and bodies not merely lifelike but rather, "exemplary images . . . that commemorate the individual as the model, the embodiment, of the status, values, norms and authority of a particular class, institution, or profession" (120).

A good likeness of Shakespeare might have been an exemplary image of him as, depending on what he wanted it to show, a poet or a prosperous landholding gentleman. If it were painted "from the life," he would have posed for it in the sense of composing himself for it, in the same way that he would have marshaled stance, stride, gesture and facial expression for the part of Adam in *As You Like It* or the Ghost in *Hamlet*. Not only actors, but anyone with aspirations to authority and social status, composed himself—and herself—in accordance with an exemplary type of the social identity to which a portrait testified. As laid out in Erasmus's well known conduct book, *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), "the well-ordered mind of a boy . . . is most strongly manifested in the face," and that boy's eyes "should be calm, respectful and steady: not grim, which is a mark of truculence; not shameless, the hallmark of insolence; not darting and rolling, a feature of insanity," and there follow seven more prescriptive directions merely for the management of the eyes (qtd. Berger, 128). Even if the Cobbe, the Droeshout, the Chandos, or the Sanders portrait were proven to be the spitting image of Shakespeare as he lived and breathed, it wouldn't offer us a clue to or even a hint of either the poet's artistry or his personality. Rather, it would show us the painter's ability to record Shakespeare's ability to make his face appear to be an index of the exemplary qualities of a poet or a gentleman.

A genre of literary portraits, says Tanya Cooper, Curator of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Painting at the National Portrait Gallery in London, was emerging at about the same time as the Cobbe portrait was painted. Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, Michael Drayton, and of course John Donne all commissioned counterfeits (the commonly used term, rather than portrait) of themselves. Donne's is striking for its strong features, for the rich lace collar untied with deliberate carelessness, and for the long slender fingers highlighted against black velvet. The poet evidently wanted to pose in the fashion of that moment, and that is all the picture tells us. We won't find in that face an index of the mind that wrote "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," nor should we look at the Droeshout, the Janssen, the Chandos, the Sanders (my personal favorite) or the Cobbe as an index of the mind that wrote "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face."

Rather, we should look where we're already looking: at Shakespeare's works and the myriad traditions and institutions that enabled him to write at all, at the scholarship and criticism that make up the constant conversation through which interpretation changes with each era, at the centuries of performance in multiple media, at the diverse afterlives his works have led in uncountable historical moments and

cultural sectors. It is only in Shakespeare's words that we will find his art, and may we keep on reading and re-reading them, interpreting them, debating what they mean, and changing our minds about them, for as long as the Shakespeare Association of America lasts, which I hope will be a good long time.