

The Face-to-Face in Shakespearean Drama

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“Face to face with love”

The paper presents an exploration of the depictions of love in two early Shakespearean texts through identifying their main drivers as the work of actors at play. Through this play, I argue, Shakespeare crafts a practice of “discovery” in which the emotional trajectory of a character is mapped onto and troped from the practical work of generating a performance that the actors participate in, face to face on the stage. I argue that the peculiar “liveness” now widely recognized as a particularly strong feature of Shakespeare’s depiction of his characters is a strategic by-product of, and itself a discovery within, attentiveness to the texture and direction of actorly play. Emotions such as love, from this point of view, are not passionate essences to be abstracted or allegorized, but products of a relation performed before and towards another (including the self overhearing itself as another) and discovered through a complex process of play. My main examples will be drawn from *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with possible passing glances at *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Comedy of Errors*.

Bibliography:

Michael Goldman, *The Actor’s Freedom*

Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper*

Nancy Selleck, *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne and Early Modern Culture*

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“Bed Tricks and Fantasies of Facelessness”

Shakespeare’s bed tricks hinge on humans without faces. In such dark environs, one is unable to perceive the face of another, and therefore unable to recognize, to acknowledge, or even to deny. *Measure for Measure* in particular illustrates not only the precise Angelo’s enjoyment of this faceless encounter, but also his shame when Mariana boldly reclaims her face, declaring, “This is that face, thou cruel Angelo, / Which once thou swor’st was worth the looking on.” This sudden reemergence of her face leads Angelo to decry his own faceless desire “[t]o think I can be undiscernible.” Conversely, in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, when Helena at last resurfaces in the play’s final scene, she describes herself as “but the shadow of a wife you see, / The name and not the thing.” These interactions suggest that, when confronted with the faces of those with whom they have had sex, Angelo and Bertram are surprised less by their identities than by the fact that these figures have faces at all.

Like the bed tricks in *Measure* and *All’s Well*, *Macbeth* revolves around a dark bedroom scene that expresses a similar aversion to faces. In a chamber where faces are both avoided and unavoidable, Duncan is murdered. Guided by Duncan’s anxious concern that “There’s no art / to find the mind’s construction in the face,” *Macbeth* charts its own attempts to escape the face and the claims it makes upon us.

But what are the consequences of imagining a faceless human? Out of what desires or temptations might a fantasy of facelessness emerge? Wittgenstein repeatedly drew on the face as a symbol of the interconnected nature of inner experience and outer expression, culminating in his assertion that “The face is the soul of the body.” By saying this, he challenges a particular fantasy of privacy that would seek to see the face as the external machinery of inner feelings. According to such a fantasy, doing away with faces might resolve the threat of duplicity through the erasure of human expression altogether. In my paper, then, I’d like to explore how these plays, through comic and tragic modes, investigate fantasies of facelessness—efforts to disavow the face and thus to alter the demands of human relations.

Bibliography:

Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*

Marliss C. Desens, *The Bed-Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power*

Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre-Nous: Essays on Thinking-of-the-Other*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations; Blue and Brown Books; Culture and Value*

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"Hamlet and the Scene of Judgment"

Hamlet is a play of judgments. Its action is littered with scenes of judicial observation, careful discernment, and methodical decision-making. When these events occur they are almost always collaborative in form, taking place in social and theatrical spaces and developing out of conversation, contest, and transactional thinking. Shakespeare is not simply interested in judgment in *Hamlet*, but more precisely in something we might call the "scene of judgment"—the interactive environment in which adjudication takes place and the role that performance, interpretive spectatorship, and aesthetic perspicacity play therein.

When we read *Hamlet* from this perspective, it becomes difficult to recognize the post-Romantic account of the play as a study in interiority, individuality, and bounded subjectivity, a reading most readily associated with Hegel and A. C. Bradley, but which persists in various forms in more recent criticism, too. John Lee, for instance, contends that Hamlet possesses a "self-constituting sense of self, and this sense of self is central to his tragedy." Peter Holbrook, similarly, develops an interpretation of *Hamlet* that builds on the work of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, both of whom viewed Hamlet as a figure of alienation and radical autonomy. Accordingly, he argues that Hamlet "holds himself back from the world," and further, that the character's appeal lies precisely in this "aggressive singularity." Hamlet, Holbrook continues, "insists on his difference from 'the others'. His conduct is eccentric and anti-social but also deeply attractive because human and free." Judgment, however, requires engagement with the world, a face-to-face encounter to use the terminology of this seminar; holding back is not an option. To judge is to participate, which means finding a middle ground between autonomy and dependency, speaking and listening. By staging scenes of judgment in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare offers a series of case studies in the sociality of thinking and the intersubjective grounds of moral agency.

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“Reading Faces in *Hamlet*”

Faces are loaded with meaning: they are the privileged sites of subjectivity and of individuation. In portraits, it is assumed that the face represents the person, the individual. Yet the face is the locus of contradictory constructions. In the words of Mary Ann Doane, it conveys both “an intense phenomenological experience of presence,” yet is simultaneously “a surface that demands to be read.”

It is on the cusp of this contradiction between the face as the most compelling sign of human presence, yet at the same time, an enigmatic sign of something underneath “that demands to be read,” that I would situate an interpretation of how faces matter in *Hamlet*, a play that notably concerns itself with the question of faces as true signifiers of their owners’ characters. The device on which the entire play hinges, “The Mousetrap,” depends on Hamlet’s expectation that Claudius’s “occulted guilt” will, when he sees his crime enacted onstage, break down his customary composure as one who “may smile, and smile, and be a villain,” to become fully visible in his face (1.5.108). As Claudius watches the play, Hamlet plans to “observe his looks If a do blench, / I know my course” (2.2.592-4).

In Hamlet’s struggle to read his uncle’s face, the play makes brings into collision two prominent Renaissance discourses of the face. On the one hand, Erasmus’s well known conduct book, *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), instructs aspiring courtiers how to train their faces into expressions denoting the frame of mind required by their social status, their immediate social environment, their ambitions. He provides detailed directions for the management of the eyes, eyebrows, nostrils, mouth, teeth, and hair. On the other, the ancient study of physiognomy, established by Aristotle as the rules of nature by which the passions of the soul are imbricated in the material processes and organs of the body, holds that the face is the index of the mind, revealing a person’s ineluctable inner truth.

When do faces lie, and when do they tell the truth? In *Hamlet*, how can anyone know? Can anyone rely on an “art”—a rule, or even a rule of thumb—to guide him in reading faces?

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"The Face of Ethical Experience: Romance & Recognition in *King Lear*"

At the end of *King Lear*, Shakespeare gives his audience a scene straight out of the romance tradition: a mystery knight challenges "Edmund, supposed Earl of Gloucester" and "manifold traitor." After the challenge is issued, the unknown knight appears at the sound of the third trumpet. When asked by the herald "what" he is – "Your name, your quality, and why you answer / This present summons" – the knight responds that his "name is lost" (5.3.110-119). The face – first obscured, ultimately revealed – is crucial both to this scene and to the device of the mystery knight in the romance tradition. Elsewhere, I have argued that Shakespeare introduces the generic conventions of romance recognition in *King Lear* in order to play with expectations and thereby draw attention to the ways in which his characters apprehend the unknown, and, in particular, the other person, the stranger. Here, I take up Fredric Jameson's account of romance to explore Shakespeare's almost systematic subversion of the genre in *King Lear* and to think through the way the conventions of romance shape the ethico-political dimensions of recognition in the play. Turning to the thought of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, I read *Lear* in relation to a fundamental incompatibility between Levinas's conception of the face and Derrida's analysis of *xenia*. At the end of the day, I am interested in the ways in which veiling or withholding of the face – both in the scene of the mystery knight and throughout the play – creates a certain experience of the ethical for Shakespeare's audience.

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Modern Philology 111: 3 (2014)

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Face to Face with Cordelia

In the last lines he speaks, Lear asks those around him to look on Cordelia's face (5.3.285-86). In contemporary performance, it's not uncommon for the actor playing Lear to raise Cordelia and present her to the audience while speaking these lines--as if to clarify that audience members are also included in this invitation. But what do we see if we answer Lear's call and look on Cordelia's face? In an attempt to answer this question, I turn to the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995), the twentieth-century's foremost phenomenologist of the face. In particular, I attend to Levinas's belief that the signifyingness of the face is not only ethical (putting me in mind of my responsibility for the other) but also metaphysical (putting me in mind of God). I propose that the face-to-face encounters enacted in Lear uphold this idea, bearing out Levinas's belief that "the dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face" (*Totality and Infinity*, 78).

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"Linguistic Intimacy"

In this paper, I speculate about how some varieties of Shakespearean erotic intimacy come into being not at the level of face-to-face encounter but linguistically. Shakespeare can describe something in verse that is perfectly lucid, that conjures for us a series of familiar actions, one following the next with narrative plausibility. But in some such instances, somewhere along the way, we also may hear harmonics: a

fundamental frequency (according to physics, the lowest frequency of a periodic waveform) triggers (something like musical) overtones. This can occur in the theater, when a gap opens between the actions that we see on stage and what we hear/understand in the form of unactualized spoken verse: if we are “tuned in,” a wholly other meaning filled with unexpected import registers, at least initially, in the domain of language. Alongside what we see, things (scenarios) cross our minds when we hear certain words and so take on a life of their own. This also occurs in our studies, when double entendres register. Something prosaic suddenly becomes charged or, in the cases I sample here, erotically intimate in the harmonically resonant domain of language. My proof texts are *Hamlet* 5.2.12-17 and *Antony and Cleopatra* 4.15.19-69.

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“Face to face” in *Richard II*

To the early modern world, “face to face” would have had a heavily scriptural resonance. The phrase, as it occurs in *The Geneva Bible (1587)*, accounts for man’s immediate relationship to God (*Genesis* 32:30), and to God’s relation (*Deuteronomy* 34:10), indeed, his revelation, to man (*Numbers* 14:14), though, as Gideon discovers, this is a relationship that man rarely survives (*Judges* 6:22). The phrase emphasizes the physical nature of the encounter as well as its clarity and directness (there being no interference). Whether a mirroring or a confrontation of parties, “face to face”, from the Greek *prosôpon pro prosôpon*, in which one notes the triple use of “pro” (“facing one”), does not cancel the notion of mediation. The mediation, however, as evoked by “pro”, resides *in* the face, is secured *by way of* a face, a front, a “brow” – a *métôpon* as well as a countenance. Extended as a synecdoche, the “irreducible relation” (Levinas 79) contained within the basic preposition “to”, represents that which faces our eyes, or the eyes of another: a persona, a character, a mask, which “creates a confrontation between the dramatic action and the public, while by the same token, mediating this confrontation” (Calame 28). This paper argues that Shakespeare’s *Richard II* taps into

both heritages, the scriptural and the classical, by resorting to the phrase “face to face” very early in the play, in a way that rehearses the very choreography of the history play and tragedy to come. When the king introduces the two feuding Dukes: “Face to face,/ And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear [...]” (1.1.15-17), the eponymous hero prepares the audience for the double mode on which the narrative of the play and its poetics will unfold. These lines we are prepared for the dramatization of a negotiation of distances, and the interweaving of a tragic vision of characterization (the appellant’s fixed and undifferentiated expression recalls the tragic mask thus reinforcing “the mimetic effect of dramatic fiction”) with the Christ like construction of the character, Richard, whose aloof narrative distancing leads to a shattering of his *persona*, especially in the mirror scene (4.1.) : “For nowe we see through a glasse darkely: but then shall wee see face to face.” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

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1. How is virtue understood, defined, staged, and tested in the plays of Shakespeare, and how does virtue imply an account of co-presence?
2. How does the practice of Shakespearean theater, as an art of co-presence, afford the cultivation of particular virtues for those who participate as actors, audience members, or theater makers?

I plan to focus on the virtues of courage and trust. I will probably read a scene from *Macbeth* that dramatizes the decay of trust and the difficulty of courage.

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“Everybody’s Somebody’s Fool”: *Folie à Deux* and the Duet in Shakespeare

I am planning a paper on “face to face” relationship as it limns a boundary of love with folly/madness in works of Shakespeare. I will be playing off terms and concepts in the psychiatric diagnosis of *folie à deux* (“shared psychotic disorder” in the DSM-5) against some of the formal properties of what I am going to call the “unchaperoned duet.”

My current understanding is informed by Bernard Beckerman’s articles on what he calls “the duet” in Shakespeare. Where Beckerman distinguishes the “actor-actor” relation in the “duet” (as an elemental principal of performance) from the “actor-audience” relation in solo performance and finds that most (maybe 80%?) of what isn’t “solo” performance in Shakespeare is a series of “duets,” I will be looking at some much more specific cases – rare enough to seem deliberately highlighted as theatergrams – where couples are permitted onstage privacy (in the tragedies, these tend to be between husbands and wives: Brutus and Portia, the Macbeths, while Romeo and Juliet, Troilus and Cressida, and Othello and Desdemona are the boundary cases). I will be testing how “face to face” encounter works in the absence of onstage observers and with no advantages of disguise or knowledge enjoyed by either party. (This last qualification begs a huge set of questions that perhaps touch upon the pathology of *folie à deux* and the particular kind of duet I have in mind.)

Among the items I’m considering at the moment are:

- The transitions that set up such scenes, especially the “subtractions” that establish the disinhibited conditions and expectations of face-to-face intimacy.
- The different kinds interruptions and exits that terminate such scenes.
- The related (short-term or long-term) delays that create, in ABA fashion, the “da capo” desire and for more on the part of both audience and characters (like the Senecan ghost or the baroque aria, the unchaperoned dialogue tends to be almost necessarily reprised).
- The dynamics of resistance and convergence (or rhetoric of persuasion and influence), since each party is both actor and audience to the other. This will be the place to talk about “chemistry” and why it is found in such surprising cases as Angelo and Isabella (though I’m not sure I want to go there). It is certainly the place

to speak of *folie à deux* and questions about leading vs following, echoing, chiming, and collaborating in dubious actions.

- Approximations of marriage in unchaperoned duets.
- Adjacent matters like Sir Kenelm Digby's thoughts on sympathy, William Weber's fascinating recent work on the prevalence of vocatives and other heuristic "leads" in scenes involving apprentice actors, and various musical influences and analogues.
- I may focus on *Much Ado*.

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"Face-to-face without mutual recognition"

Face-to-face scenes gain an edge when, despite a prior intimate relationship between the characters, one of them is disguised and unrecognizable. The disguised character clearly recognizes the other, but there is no reciprocity in the relationship. The two central disguised characters in *King Lear* generate a host of moving scenes that depend on their being unrecognized by their interlocutors. When Gloucester does not recognize his own son Edgar, disguised as Tom o'Bedlam, this stretches our willing suspension of disbelief. This lack of recognition creates dramatic irony: the spectator experiences, together with one of the characters, the full significance of the meeting, while one of the characters is being deceived.

Both Edgar and Kent announce in soliloquies the alteration of their identity, thus alerting the audience to their changed appearance. The dramatic irony ensures the continuity of the character despite the disguise he assumes. The unity of character, not one of the declared "dramatic unities", but taken for granted in classical drama, is at stake, on the brink. But it is protected by the spectator's awareness that the character is

merely playing a role. Revealing his identity within the dramatic world will endanger him, but it is imperative that the spectator recognize the character throughout. Disguise is a basic feature of theatre, so that disguise within the play is highly theatrical, a disguise within a disguise. The layered acting demanded of the actor undermines the possibility of deciphering the face. The limitation on understanding the face brings us to the philosophical problem known as Other Minds, the realization that we cannot penetrate the inner world of the other.

According to Aristotle, Recognition (*anagnorisis*) is an important component of tragedy, leading to reversal (*peripeteia*). Whether understood as recognition of the other or the self, the change of face prevents its reciprocity. Both Edgar and Kent have the urge to finally reveal themselves and be acknowledged by the others that have faced them.

After Edgar overcomes Edmund in the final, heraldic duel, he reveals his true identity and only regrets he did not reveal himself to his father until just before he died, and Kent attempts to remind the dying Lear of having served him as Caius.

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"Performative Character: 'Face' as the Topos of the Inter-Subjective Self in Ben Jonson's Literature"

In this paper, I will argue that the Jonsonian concept of character—underpinned by classical rhetorical theories of Quintilian and Plutarch—should be understood as a rhetorical effect of interaction and exchange and not as a manifestation of consciousness. In concrete, I aim to highlight the notion of the face as a topos of the social construction of character which is pervasive in Jonson's literary representation of personhood. To Jonson's literature which is more 'about the duplicity and self-deceptions of the characters' who are obsessed more with 'disguise, deception, impersonation and misdirection' than with 'profound self-expression,' it will be more instructive for us to refer to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (Loxley and Robson, 71). By focusing on the moment when the performance materializes the absent subject, Butler

deconstructs the whole concept of original and imitation and invalidates the concept of performative as a consequence of pre-existing self and identity: ‘The appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and perform in the mode of belief’ (Butler, 44, 179). Butler’s view of the performance of character as a re-confirmation of the constructed identity within the readily established mode of belief is in effect a paraphrase of Jonsonian observation of the imitative persons/characters in *Discoveries* and the performances of the humorous character as a contractual execution in *The Alchemist*, *Every Man Out of His Humour* and other dramatic works.

To create the intentionally ambiguous and deceptive duplicity in his characters, Jonson finds a solution, as Annette Drew-Bear explicated, in the characters’ ‘cosmetic deceit’ of face-painting as well as in their interpretations of the manipulative faces of others. Although Jonson shared, on the one hand, the medieval view of ‘facial alternation’ as ‘the devil’s attempt to disguise himself to deceive and seduce mankind,’ he did, on the other hand, make use of this image in his comedy ‘in a peculiarly Jonsonian way to dramatize pretence in all its forms’ (Drew-Bear, 35, 81). To understand the Jonsonian and Jacobean mode of performative character, I will examine some scenes from Jonson and Shakespeare’s drama where the face functions as an indispensable legibility of the characters’ social attribute.

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“Laertes’s Face”

My paper, provisionally titled “Laertes’s Face,” focuses on a face-to-face encounter that might be more precisely described as a hand-to-throat encounter: the moment in Act 4

of Hamlet when Hamlet and Laertes fight at (or in) Ophelia's grave. With their coupling of question and self-disclosure, the words Hamlet speaks as he steps forward and reveals himself—"What is he whose grief / Bears such an emphasis [. . .] This is I, / Hamlet the Dane"—frame the impassioned face of the other as a phenomenon that recalls Hamlet to himself and provokes him to action. The play presents us with several such scenes in which Hamlet experiences others' displays of passion, but what interests me about this particular one is the fact that in the Folio text, Hamlet will later recall and reflect upon this encounter in a moment of ethical thought—a reflection that, through a knot of metonymic operations, turns on, and returns to, Laertes' face ("I am very sorry, good Horatio, / That to Laertes I forgot myself, / For by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his").

My paper will explore the resonances between this retrospective account Hamlet gives—where he asserts that he "sees" and understands Laertes as he knows himself—and Levinas's notion of the ethical relation, in which the face figures the irreducible opacity and alterity of the other, a difference that both constitutes and calls the self into question. By juxtaposing these opposing formulations, I hope to bring into relief the play's staging of the question of how theater, especially in its presentation of the other's passion, operates as an interface for the ethical. This question, I argue, requires us to return to Ophelia's grave and to the struggle between Hamlet and Laertes, and to attend to the discrepancy between the audience's perception of Hamlet's experience and Hamlet's own recounting of that experience.

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"Outface and Interface"

To face: shifting attention from the noun to the verb changes the dynamics of the interface. *To face* a person, an object, or a situation is an act of volition. The actor's own face becomes several things at once: an exteriorization of the actor's will, an optical

device to be looked through, a text to be read by other people. In this paper I will explore Shakespeare's distinctive ways with *to face* as a verb. In plays written throughout his career, in comedies, histories, and tragedies alike, Shakespeare uses the verb *to face* in multiple senses: to defy, to challenge, to feign, to disguise, to transform. Particularly does Shakespeare seem drawn to the verb *to outface*. The "out" in that idiom catches the force and the directionality of *to face* as well as its reciprocity with the person or thing being faced. Those reciprocal dynamics are teased out in Richard II's address to his face in the mirror: "Was this the face that faced so many follies,/ And was at last out-faced by Bolingbroke?" (R2 4.1.275-76). The "out" in *to outface* ultimately rebounds and returns the actor to the *inter-face*.

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As is well known, with some shifts in practice around 1600, most early modern playhouses ended the performance of play by staging a jig. This attests to the general atmosphere of music and revelry at play performances and encourages us to consider plays as holistic *events*, inclusive of the occasion, pre-show entertainment, inter-act and so-called "incidental" music, clowning, and indeed the after-piece jig. For comedies and tragicomedies, this scene is easy to imagine, but it is historically more problematic in the case of tragedies. Many scholars have noted—but few have addressed—the curious but frequent occurrence of the tragic catastrophe immediately followed by jig song and dance. Early modern anti-theatricalists and some successful playwrights complain that post-tragedy jigs defile the classical integrity of the genre; and the typical scholarly explanation follows suit in assuming that jigs were accidental to the play and were included primarily to sell admittance to lower-class audience members. Neither the festive mood nor the clown's practice of "facing" the audience, many argue, are appropriate to or historically important for understanding tragedy. But these positions, derived from the expressed opinions of some early modern writers, fail to account for the phenomenon itself. The fact remains that song and dance definitively shaped the performance, reception, *and* authorship of tragic plays for much of the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods, and despite early modern and modern editorial practice usually to publish printed plays on their own, the tragedy *in performance* was rarely disconnected from contextual popular music.

Using *Romeo and Juliet* as a base, my interest is in attempting to theorize some points of thematic, practical, and phenomenological cohesion between tragedies and their jigs. And my starting point is the observation that the jig by no means signaled a sudden transition away from the play but instead *extended* the play's own copious employments of music and musical movement in the forms of narrative music, sound

effects, dance scenes, ceremonial instrumentalization, ballads, inter-act music, and other forms of theatrical song and dance. Given the ways that music and dance often invited unique and often more familiar and festive attention from the audience, the after-piece jig might even be understood to collect the audience into to the drama— in a sense, to integrate a tragedy’s ancient genre form with England’s medieval festival and liturgical performance culture.

I want to attend in particular to the duet and dialogue aspects to stage jigs, as almost all printed “jig” broadsides are dialogue ballads. And I want to speculate about how their performance of duality and human relationship responds to related themes in the tragedy and serves as a phenomenological context through which to experience the classical tragic emotions of pity and terror. In other words, how do tragedies use the after-piece jig to *face* the audience?

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