



# Shakespeare and the Power of the Face

*James A. Knapp*

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## **Shakespeare and the Power of the Face** James A. Knapp

Throughout his plays, Shakespeare placed an extraordinary emphasis on the power of the face to reveal or conceal moral character and emotion, repeatedly inviting the audience to attend carefully to facial features and expressions. The essays collected here disclose that an attention to the power of the face in Shakespeare's England helps explain moments when Shakespeare's language of the self becomes intertwined with his language of the face. As the range of these essays demonstrates, an attention to Shakespeare's treatment of faces has implications for our understanding of the historical and cultural context in which he wrote, as well as the significance of the face for the ongoing interpretation and production of the plays. Engaging with a variety of critical strands that have emerged from the so-called turn to the body, the contributors to this volume argue that Shakespeare's invitation to look to the face for clues to inner character is not an invitation to seek a static text beneath an external image, but rather to experience the power of the face to initiate reflection, judgment, and action. The evidence of the plays suggests that Shakespeare understood that this experience was extremely complex and mysterious. By turning attention to the face, the collection offers important new analyses of a key feature of Shakespeare's dramatic attention to the part of the body that garnered the most commentary in early modern England. By bringing together critics interested in material culture studies with those focused on philosophies of self and other and historians and theorists of performance, *Shakespeare and the Power of the Face* constitutes a significant contribution to our growing understanding of attitudes towards embodiment in Shakespeare's England.

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