

‘Dove-like looks’ and ‘serpents eyes’: staging visual clues and early modern aspiration

Jackie Watson

The traditional sensual hierarchy, in the tradition of Aristotle, gave primacy to the sense of sight.¹ However, there is much evidence to suggest that the judgements of many late Elizabethans were more ambivalent. In this chapter I shall ask how far an early modern playgoer could trust the evidence of his or her own eyes. Sight was, at the same time, the most perfect of senses and the potential entry route for evil. It was the means by which men and women fell in love, and the means by which they established a false appearance. It was both highly valorized and deeply distrusted. Nowhere was it more so than at court, where men depended, for preferment and even survival, on the images they projected to others, but where their manipulation of one another was often interpreted as morally dubious. In their depictions of the performative nature of court life and the achievement of early modern ambition, late Elizabethan plays were engaged in this debate, and stage and court developed analogous modes of image projection. Here, I shall explore conflicting philosophical and early scientific attitudes to visual clues, before examining the moral judgements of seeing in late Elizabethan drama. Examples from these plays show appearance as a practical means of fulfilling courtly aspiration, but also suggest the moral concern surrounding such ambitions. These issues were of personal interest to the ambitious, playgoing young gentlemen of the Inns of Court. Finally, suggesting the irony of such a debate in a medium which itself relies so much upon appearance and deception, I shall conclude by considering the ways in which writers for the ‘new technology’ of the playhouse were engaged in guiding their audiences both in how to see, and how to interpret the validity of the visual.

Classical writers opened a debate on the operation of the eyes and the process of visual perception, which emerged as two contrasting theories. The ‘emission theory’ maintained that seeing was the result of rays being emitted from the eyes and falling upon an object in the outside world, with Euclid’s *Optica* examining the idea that sight was enabled by beams from the eyes, and Ptolemy’s *Optics* beginning to explore the properties of light which enabled vision. Contrasting ‘intromission’ theories were championed by Galen and Aristotle.

Their speculative ideas on the entry into the eye of something representative of the object viewed was subsequently found by experimental scientists to be nearer the truth. In *De Oratore* Cicero shows himself to be in sympathy with earlier writers in his preoccupation with seeing, and the popularity of this text in the education of Tudor England makes examination of his ideas important. He notes, 'the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight', and in his allusion to the 'memory palace' of the lyric poet, Simonides of Ceos, he proposes a method of memory and subsequent rhetorical deployment which he shares with another major influence on Renaissance education, Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. In developing this idea, Cicero demonstrates how sight enables the memory to be effectively deployed:

perceptions received by the ears or by reflection can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes, [...] things not seen and not lying in the field of visual discernment are earmarked by a sort of image and shape so that we keep hold of as it were by an act of sight things that we can scarcely embrace by an act of thought.²

Cicero implies that there is a direct link between the eyes and the mind. Through whatever channel the images reach the eye, input progressing to the mind through that means is the most easily assimilated and the most long lasting, and the mind is able to embrace ideas through seeing that it can barely conceptualize. There is no sense here of deception. The implication is that sight conveys truth, and the action of the eyes leads the brain to perceive what exists.

The French physician André du Laurens followed this classical lead. Du Laurens connects his work firmly with the classical tradition and claims to convey 'the common judgement of all the Philosophers' in his conclusion that sight is 'the most noble, perfect and admirable' of the senses.³ Despite his argument that the body could continue to exist with only taste and touch, his hierarchy continues in the Aristotelian mode and fixes hearing, and especially sight, as superior: those senses are allied to the mind. His explanation of sight's perfection is in religious terms. He lists four reasons for sight's supremacy, the first three of which clearly link seeing with virtue and bring this sense closer to God. The fourth has a moral quality of its own; sight is perfect 'in respect of the certaintie of his action' (p. 13). This belief in the veracity of visual perception, and its ability to convey truth to the mind, is developed further, and du Laurens establishes his reasons for 'the certaintie of [its] function':

For it is out of all doubt that this is the most infallible sence, and that which least deceiveth: according to that which men are wont to say [...] that they see it with their owne eyes. And the proverbe used amongst men of olde time, is most true, that it is better to have a witnes which hath seene the thing, then ten which speake but by hearsay. (p. 17)

His faith in sight's veracity is shared by Robert Burton, who remarks in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*: 'Of [the] five Senses, Sight is held to bee most pretious, and the best, and that by reason of his obiect, it sees all the body at once, by it wee learne, & discerne all things, a sense most excellent for vse.'⁴

Du Laurens is also aware of the classical debate surrounding emission and intromission:

Some [classical writers] would have that there should issue out of the eye bright beames or a certaine light which should reach unto the obiect, and thereby cause us to see it: other some would have it, that the obiect commeth unto the eye, and that nothing goeth out of the eye: the first doe hold that we see by emission or having something going forth of the eye, the latter by reception or receiving of the obiect into the eye. (p. 37)

Explaining the points of conflict, and outlining the reasons on both sides of the debate, du Laurens admits that emission is 'the most common receiued opinion', and begins his list of the arguments on the side of the 'manie learned clerkes', including Plato and Pythagoras, who support this view, presenting the evidence provided by the Basilisk and continuing: 'Women hauing their natural courses, infect the looking-glasses vpon which they cast their eyes. Some report, that if a Woolfe doe first see a man, that then such a man will become hoarse' (p. 38).⁵

On the 'intromission' side of the debate, the arguments supported by Aristotle 'and an infinite number of others', according to du Laurens, are based on the crystalline nature of the eye, and its being composed of water, rather than Plato's proposal of the eye being composed of fire and capable of emitting beams. Thus, as water is made to receive not to emit, the eye, he argues, sees by receiving:

euery action therefore of the sences is accomplished by recieuing, and not by sending forth of any thing, which is an action; as for example the eare heareth by receiuing of sounds; smelling, by receiuing of odours; taste, by receiuing of tastes; and feeling, by receiuing of such qualities as may be felt: and then why should the eye by debarred of this receite? (p. 41)

In conclusion, du Laurens positions himself on the intromission side of the debate by way of a clear analogy: 'we see by receiving in, and not sending forth of anything [...] the eye is like unto the looking glasse, and this receiveth all such shapes as are brought unto it, without sending anything of it owne unto the object' (p. 41).

That this debate was perceived in the latter part of the sixteenth century as important, and that it was not regarded as a decided matter, is shown by Henry Wotton's choice of the subject in 1588 for his final university disputation. His three lectures on the eye, at the culmination of his studies at Queen's College, Oxford, were followed by a disputation on the 'Optique question, *Whether*

we see by the emission of the Beams from within, or the Reception of the Species from without'.⁶ Wotton, who was later to join the Middle Temple, was apparently persuasive in his arguments and impressed the much-admired academic Albericus Gentilis.

Much early modern discussion of the operation of sight emphasizes the link between the eye and the brain, rather as du Laurens does in his *Discourse*. A further connection is commonly made between the eye and the heart, the centre of emotional 'truth'. This link is perceived to be equally self-evident. Evidence of the ubiquity of this belief is shown in the Middle Temple's *Prince D'Amour* revels of 1597/8 where the subjects of the 'worthy Prince' are said to 'express their mindes by looks and touches, the most significant utterance of amorous Passions'.⁷ There is humour, and suggestive innuendo, in the revels, but the equation here of the emission of looks with the utterance of love relies upon a general acceptance of the connection between love and seeing.⁸ Du Laurens continues his account of the power of sight with the question 'how many soules have lost their libertie through the sight of the eyes?' Referring to theories of emission and intromission in this context, he explains that the link can be seen in two ways. The 'blind archer', Cupid:

men say [...] doth enter into our hearts by this doore, and [...] loue is shaped by the glittering glimces which issue out of the eyes, or rather by certaine subtile and thin spirits, which passe from the heart to the eye through a strait and narrow way very secretly, and having deceived this porter, doe place love within. (p. 12)

Although du Laurens is still extolling the virtues of the visual, and argues throughout that the eye is superior to other sensual receptors in the body, in this account he has suggested the potential for even the 'most noble, perfect and admirable' of the senses to be an entry for the passion which overcomes reason. He has thus also introduced the idea of visual deception.

In the play in which Shakespeare makes the largest number of references to eyes, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written only a few years before the publication of Surphlet's translation of du Laurens, the playwright enters into the debate about the uncertain relationship of sight with the centres of feeling. This confusion is shown from the start, as Helena sets the play's debate about the nature and action of love into a multi-sensual context:

O happy fair!
Your eyes are lodestars, and your tongue's sweet air
More tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear [...]
Sickness is catching. O, were favour so!
Your words I catch, fair Hermia; ere I go,
My ear should catch your voice, my eye your eye,
My tongue should catch your tongue's sweet melody.
(1.1.182–89)

Shortly after this plaint from Helena, Hermia's address to Lysander, just before she exits to prepare for their flight to the woods, plays on the synaesthetic nature of love, telling him that 'we must starve our sight | From lovers' food, till morrow deep midnight' (ll. 222–23). Yet, despite the sensuousness sustained throughout the play, there is no doubt that the most influential sense is that of sight, shown clearly in the recurrent use of 'love-in-idleness', deceiving the visual perception of Titania as well as the human lovers. Hermia's 'lodestars', admired by Helena, suggest the Platonic vision of eyes composed of fire, emitting beams, and the conflicting ideas of emission and intromission are a preoccupation of the play as a whole. In her soliloquy at the end of the opening scene Shakespeare has Helena lament that Demetrius did not fall in love 'ere [he] looked on Hermia's eyne' (l. 242), showing her uncertainty as to whose eyes were the actors and whose the receivers. She is clearly confused, as du Laurens admits is common, as to whether the action of his looking caused the love to flow from him, or whether beholding Hermia's eyes allowed him to perceive something in the beauty of those eyes that she was emitting. Just prior to these lines, she has concluded, ironically, that 'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, | And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind' (ll. 234–35). Her image of 'Cupid painted blind' brings us back to du Laurens's 'blind archer' who placed love within by deceiving 'this porter', the eye. Helena's confusion over the source of love and Oberon's ability to influence the reception of viewed images through the action of Puck, added to the 'deception' referred to by even the admiring du Laurens and show a common awareness of the moral problems of sight.

Much distrust of sight was the effect of contemporary theological writing. Luther famously argued that Christian faith was not to be grasped by human sight, and Erasmus's illustration of the limitations of human free will, analogous to the limitations of sight, shows a clear belief in the inadequacy of the senses:

A human eye that is quite sound sees nothing in the dark, a blind one sees nothing in the light; thus the will though free can do nothing if grace withdraws from it, and yet when the light is infused, he who has sound eyes can shut off the sight of the object so as not to see, can avert his eyes, so that he ceases to see what he previously saw[.]⁹

Doubts concerning the reliability of the senses, particularly vision, lay behind the arguments of many of those opposing the playhouses. The battle of anti-theatrical tracts around 1580, for which Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579) proved the catalyst, demonstrated a consistent attack on the arts' engagement with the senses of their audiences.¹⁰ Gosson in later life became a Church of England clergyman, but he knew that of which he spoke, having dabbled with play writing during his early life in London. Anthony Munday, in support of Gosson, also wrote and acted for the theatre he apparently condemned. Though the purpose of his anonymously published 1580 polemic

was to attack the watching of plays, and not all kinds of visual perception, the means of achieving the former equally condemned the latter. In stridently moral terms, he reveals a fear of sensual experiences and their connection with the mind and the heart: a link that, as we have seen, philosophers and early scientists took to be close. Plays, Munday argues, lead to sin through the action on playgoers' eyes:

Are not our eies [at the playhouse] carried awaie with the pride of vanitie? [...] Are not our hartes through the pleasure of the flesh; the delight of the eie; and the fond motions of the mind, withdrawn from the seruice of the Lord, & meditation of his goodness?¹¹

Although the experience is clearly a multi-sensory one, Munday supports others' opinions that the power of sight is above that of all the other senses and ironically this makes it an area of particular vulnerability, providing as it does access to the heart, the mind and the soul. He declaims, 'There commeth much evil in at the eares, but more at the eies, by these two open windowes death breaketh into the soule'. Munday justifies the potential harm of vision, with reference to the memory palace (which he associates with Petrarch rather than with Simonides of Ceos, Cicero or Quintilian):

Nothing entereth in more effectualie into the memorie, than that which commeth by seeing; things heard do lightlie passe awaie, but the tokens of that which wee haue seene, saith Petrarch, sticke fast in vs whether we wil or no [...] Alack what violence carieth vs awaie, to be merie an hower, and always after to be sad; to see that at one time, which a thousande times after wee shal rue that euer we sawe it! (pp. 95–96)¹²

Gosson, with a similarly anti-theatrical purpose in his second tract, *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), claims that 'the longer we gaze, the more we crave'.¹³ In the work of both men, the action of seeing is inherently luxurious and sinful and allows death to enter man's spiritual core. The vulnerability of the eyes, and the potential for love, or evil, to enter therein is further demonstrated in *Twelfth Night* where Shakespeare develops a plot to untangle what appears initially to be another chain of unreturned affections. This time, rather than the magical effects of the juice of 'love-in-idleness' applied to the eyes, Olivia exemplifies the common belief that sight of one's beloved renders one helpless to resist. Comparing falling in love to succumbing to plague, she exclaims that she feels Cesario's 'perfections | With an invisible and a subtle stealth | To creep in at mine eyes' (1.5.286–88). The combination of images of bodily invasion, secrecy and disease suggests common ground with those who believed the eyes to be an entry point for evil. As with the actions of a miasma, the individual body – the soul and the mind, as well as the heart – are penetrated, corrupted, deformed by the material entering at the 'open windowes' of the eyes.

As we saw earlier, eyes rendered one vulnerable to deception as well as to love. Munday makes his dread of visual deception clear in his comparison of sin and misleading appearance:

It were il painting the Diuel like an Angel, he must be portraied forth as he is, that he maie the better be knowen. Sinne hath alwaies a faire cloake to couer his filthie bodie. And therefore he is to be turned out of his case into his naked skin, that his nastie filthie bodie, and stinking corruption being perceaued, he might come into the hatred and horror of men. (p. 44)

This argument takes for granted that moral judgement is naturally based on appearance and revealed by dress. In other parts of the tract, it is viewed behaviour which establishes the virtue, or lack of it, in the playgoing public: 'For who can see man or woman resort to an house which is notoriouslie wicked, but will judge them to be of the crewe of the wicked and vngodlie?' (p. 55). There is a causal connection between what a man sees and the judgement he makes. Rather than questioning whether people should trust the judgement of their eyes, however, Munday argues that because of this natural link people should work hard to appear as they wish to be judged. If they are innocent, they should not look or behave as if they were sinful.

The audience's perception of appearance and reality on stage, for instance their apprehension of Viola's transformation into Cesario, shows this judgement in practice. This is an example of a key area of objection to playgoing. Gosson's *Playes Confuted* is the first of the anti-theatrical tracts to cite *Deuteronomy's* sanction against cross-dressing, though he is not the first to find this aspect of early modern theatre morally reprehensible. Analogous with Munday's description of the devil's deceptive clothing, a boy actor in women's dress was open to an accusation of sin through taking on a false appearance. Known to Gosson from sermons attended while he was a student at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, John Rainolds, a leading voice in late Elizabethan Protestantism, also wrote strongly against boys in female costume on the stage. His strength of feeling perhaps derived from his acting of the role of Hippolyta in *Palamon and Arcite* in his own student days at the college.¹⁴ An epistolary exchange between Rainolds and William Gager, much of which was published in 1599, was the means of their debate on theatrical morality, and in response to Gager's rather disingenuous defence of cross-dressing (that one who only adopted female clothing for an hour or two could not be said to 'wear' it) Rainolds tells an anecdote which stresses the importance of visual perception to the theatre-going audience:

For how many hundreds are there of eye-witnesses, that your *Euryclea*, *Melantho*, *Penelope*, *Phaedra*, *Nais*, others, did weare wemens raiment? Howe many did obserue, and with mislike haue mentioned, that *Penelopes* maides did not only weare it, but also sate in it among true women in deed [...] neither were more

knowne to them to bee men, then *Achilles* was at firste to *Deidamia*; vntill they suspected it, seeing them entreated by the wooers to rise and dance vpon the stage. I wish there had not bene so bad a token to convince you; nor so many beholders to testifie thereof: though I am glad withal that they had such mislike of the thing testified.¹⁵

What Rainolds describes here is the belief of the female playgoers in the evidence of their own eyes. The actors who appear in the garb of Penelope's maids sit amongst them, dressed as women amongst women, and taken as such without question. The visual clues lie in their dress, probably their pre-pubescent complexions and perhaps learned feminine gestures. But there is no doubting their ability to deceive the eyes of spectators, as elsewhere we are told, of a good actor, that 'what we see him personate, wee thinke truly done before vs'.¹⁶ John Manningham, at the Inns of Court and ambitious for success, may well have been such a spectator. His well-known summary of the 1601/2 performance of *Twelfth Night* at Middle Temple is as follows:

A good practice in it to make the steward believe his lady-widow was in love with him, by counterfeiting a letter as from his lady, in general terms telling him what she liked best in him and prescribing his gesture in smiling, his apparel etc. and then, when he came to practice, making him believe they took him to be mad.¹⁷

Henk K. Gras, exploring the importance of Manningham's diary entry, proposes that the young Innsman was entirely convinced of Olivia's being a woman and a widow, reliant both on the visual clues of the actor and his appearance. Gras suggests that Manningham 'notices the characters as if they were living beings and more in terms of what they did than of what they said, more in terms of what they looked like, than of what they were'. Suggesting that the most likely reason for Manningham's assumption that Olivia is a widow would be the black costume the actor would have worn to signify her mourning for her brother, Gras concludes, 'Manningham takes Olivia to be a lady, not particularly responding to the fact that a boy played the part. Since he commented on a performance, not on a literary text,' just like the playgoers taken in by Penelope's maids 'the theatrical illusion of reality worked for him'.¹⁸

Manningham's focus appears to be not on the Olivia/Cesario/Orsino plot, but, as we can see, on that of the steward, Malvolio. *Twelfth Night* demonstrates the importance of appearance to those, like Manningham and his peers, who desired patronage and preferment. Malvolio is an example of such a man, keen to rise through his career. In his case it was through marriage with a social superior, as, indeed, it was for John Manningham himself. Malvolio recognizes that to do this he must first 'look the part', and the humour of the letter scene begins with Maria's description of the Steward 'yonder i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half-hour' (2.5.15–16). The comic effect of the scene, of course, is reliant upon observation, and demonstrates further an

aspiring man's need to appear to be not only what he wished to be judged by others, but also what he wished to *become*. Contemporary 'courtier literature', like anti-theatrical tract writing, reveals simultaneously a belief that appearance reflected reality, and the potential for visual deception.

Writings about the appearance and behaviour of men in power, which sometimes explicitly and sometimes inadvertently advised those who wished to be in power, seem to have seen visual clues reflecting moral worth directly.¹⁹ Giovanni della Casa, whose *Galateo* was translated by Robert Peterson of Lincoln's Inn in 1576, explores this correlation between visual clues and the reality which underlies them. The book is subtitled 'A treatise of the ma[n]ners and behauiours, it behoueth a man to vse and eschewe, in his familiar conuersation. A worke very necessary & profitable for all Gentlemen, or other'. In it, della Casa explicitly advises his gentlemen, and aspirant gentlemen, on the expectations of sophisticated courtiership. Implicitly casting doubt on the self-sufficient value of virtue, men need to behave appropriately, he comments, as 'Without [gracefulness] even goodness has no beauty and beauty has no charm [...]'. The implication is again that there is a connection between goodness and beauty which it is the courtier's responsibility to make explicit by his behaviour. Della Casa goes on to establish this correlation between appearance and moral value more firmly, noting how self-evident it is that 'all forms of vice are in themselves obnoxious, for vice is ugly'.²⁰ The courtier's appearance of social ease, giving the visual clues of being comfortable in his rank, knowing how to dress, act and so on, creates in the observer a belief in his worth.

Late Elizabethan drama is rich in examples of those who, like Malvolio, desired to rise by appearing to be sophisticated: to be what Michelle O'Callaghan terms the *urbanissimus homo*. She outlines 'the change in behaviour and "ways of seeing" during the Renaissance, occasioned by the dissemination of civility from forms of aristocratic distinction to codes of conduct for the expanding "gentle" classes'.²¹ That is, young men who had benefited from the increased access to education, at the universities and the Inns of Court, and who aspired to use this learning to gain preferment, needed to learn to *appear* as their predecessors, mainly of more elite, aristocratic origins, had *been*. As in the construction of theatrical performance, this action was conscious and 'codes of conduct', such as *Galateo* and many others like it, encouraged men to build up a deception which could, in time, become a new reality. As Harold Brooks comments in his introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'Identity [...] rests in great measure upon perception, upon how we appear to others and to ourselves'.²² The 'ourselves' here suggests that the barrier between reality and appearance is rather a permeable one; that what is originally a posture, masking a man's lack of real courtly sophistication, by repetition becomes the thing it apes. The eyes begin by deceiving, but in time what was false becomes true. Observers may conclude, 'Cultivation of the surface shapes concern over what,

if anything, lies below, and the notion of identity comes to seem increasingly precarious.²³ Virtue and truth risk losing their existential reality.

This process was not a hidden one and many were conscious of the processes involved in the social mobility which surrounded them. Such rising men became the victims of satirical stage portrayals. Just as Gosson and Munday were able to write more effectively about the threats posed by theatrical performance because of their having been part of the playing world, many of those who wrote the most effective satires of aspirant young men were from that same background and environment. One might consider Templar playwright John Marston's *Balurdo*, the persistent, if not very bright, young man of ambition in the *Antonio* plays, who shows his desire to succeed at court by carrying around 'tables' where he can jot down his thoughts, in a parody perhaps of Hamlet.²⁴ Henk K. Gras suggests that this was by no means unusual, and that "note-taking" is thought to have been written practice, both at plays and at sermons'.²⁵ Certainly Jonson comments on 'narrow-eyed decipherers with their writing tables' in *Every Man Out of his Humour* and, as we might expect of Marston, at this point still a legal student, the depiction of *Balurdo* is closely based on the appearance and behaviour of real young men of his acquaintance.²⁶ Rather than the debate upon the value of existence we see in *Hamlet*, *Balurdo*'s thoughts are considerably more limited, and practical. Marston demonstrates his understanding that the aspirant courtier needs to appear more sophisticated than he is in visually comic *tours de forces* such as the dumb-show which opens Act 3, Scene 2 of *Antonio and Mellida*:

Enter *Balurdo*, backward; *Dildo* following him with a looking glasse in one hand, & a candle in the other hand: *Flavia* following him backward, with a looking glasse in one hand, and a candle in the other. *Rosaline* following her. *Balurdo* and *Rosaline* stand setting of faces[.]²⁷

The focus is on conscious visual deception, with the looking glasses demonstrating the vanity that accompanies such aspirations. The character *Balurdo* is a means by which Marston satirizes those who try to learn their trade and to rise by means of their appearance, delivered before a Paul's playhouse audience with many of those present trying to 'achieve greatness' through the adoption of courtly behaviour. The assumption that audience members went to the theatre to learn as they were watching the actors what visual clues to project to those watching them is parallel to Munday's belief that watching infidelity on stage will lead the spectators to engage in similarly sinful behaviour:

some hauing noted the ensamples how maidens restrained from the marriage of those whome their frends haue misliked, haue learned a policie to preuent their parents by stealing them awaie; some seeing by ensample of the stage plaiier one carried with too much liking of an other mans wife, hauing noted by what practise she hath bene assailed and ouertaken, haue not failed to put the like in effect in earnest, that was afore shoven in iest. (pp. 97–98)

While Balurdo's fascination with clothing and imagery of textiles reveals the importance of visual appearance for those aspirant young men whom the playwright knew and who formed one of his most important audience segments, Marston aims to shape their response to this phenomenon through his characterization of Balurdo.²⁸ The boy actor playing the role at the Paul's playhouse announces in the opening metatheatrical Induction that he is to play 'the part of all the world [...] the fool' (Induction, 29–31) and it is in sensual terms that Balurdo's foolishness is framed from the beginning. His opening words in *Antonio and Mellida* reveal his lack of 'sense' in the confusion of 'Oh, I smell a sound' (1.1.44). This is not the overpowering synaesthesia of love seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the confusion of one uncontrolled in both his sensory perception, and the clues he gives to others. There is no doubt that, as Catzo tells his fellow servant, Dildo, who works for Balurdo, 'thy master' is an 'Idiot' (2.1.24).

The actor playing Balurdo also tells us of his social status, as 'a wealthy mountebanking Burgomasco's heir of Venice' (32), and the would-be courtier's wealth allows him to base his courtly aspiration on the costly appearance he believes will impress potential patrons or a mistress. Reassuring Rossaline that she may have had his 'thought for a penny', he cannot help swearing in passing 'by this crimson satin that cost eleven shillings, thirteen pence, three pence halfpenny a yard' (2.1.74–77), and a little later returning to the subject, noting approvingly that 'my silk stocking hath a good gloss and I thank my planets my leg is not altogether unpropitiously shap'd' (100–01). In focusing so intently on his dress and appearance, Balurdo is following the advice of texts such as *Galateo*, where della Casa tells his reader, 'Your apparell must be shaped according to the fashion of the time, and your calling [...] Euery man may applie those fashions, that be in common vse, ye moste to his owne aduantage, that he can', then spends some time discussing flattering fabrics and fashions for specific body shapes.²⁹ The potential for superficiality and vanity to be the results of the process of courtly advancement is implied by Marston, and may be a warning, or even a reprimand, to the aspirant members of the Inns of Court he knew so well and whose attitudes would be affected by what they observed on stage. As one recent scholar has noted, 'The more glittering the surface the more doubt it created about the nature and quality of what might be "below" it'; Balurdo's demonstration of the courtier's fixation with transmitting the appropriate visual signals makes him '[t]he figure of fashion, who stages his own persona as a carefully manufactured display of collected fragments, [and who] becomes a focus of interest and anxiety'.³⁰

Balurdo is mocked by his on-stage audience, the malcontent Feliche, as Malvolio was by Sir Toby and his associates. For his Paul's playhouse audience Marston satirizes the shallowness of a court so driven by considerations of appearance. The visual clues that a fool such as Balurdo attempts to give to

those observing him are attempts to conceal his lack of worth. One cannot help but recall the deception and manipulation of playgoers' sight described by Gosson, Munday and Rainolds. Marston, though not opposing the theatre, shares with those who argued its immorality many of their beliefs about its affective power.

Playwrights thus did not merely reflect what they saw in society. But as well as the satirical depiction of foolish courtiers, some did more to suggest disapproval of that societal shift which made reality uncertain, and mixed vice and virtue in a potentially dangerous fashion. Pettie's 1581 translation of Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* notes:

That he which is evill and taken to bee good, may doe muche mischiefe. Notwithstanding, I put these same in the number of the tollerable: for though it trouble your conscience to come in their companie, yet you give no occasion of mislike to the worlde, for that they are not reputed evill[.]³¹

The recognition of evil, while at the same time deciding to classify it as 'tollerable', is a demonstration of the pragmatic moral attitude that many commentators feared. Guazzo's Count Annibale, later in the same text, argues for a version of the sumptuary laws, that the ruler should restrict those who are not gentry, 'forcing them to weare such apparel as may bee at least different from Gentlemen' as 'under such a maske there may be much falshood wrought'. Princes, also, 'ought not to suffer the honour and degree of gentrie to be disgraced by the presumption of malapert clownes'.³² The inappropriate assumption of a false place in society by della Casa's 'and other' is one issue identified here, and is perhaps seen as a greater problem than those who are evil but who, by their manipulation of visual clues, are not taken to be so. Yet the potential for deceptive appearance to equate with falsehood and evil intent is demonstrated by the whole succession of villainous stage figures of this period who manipulate the noble and the good by their 'mischiefe'. From Shakespeare's Iago, Edmund and Don John, to Marston's Piero, or Jonson's Sejanus, those writing for the stage deliver a clear sense in histories and tragedies of the threat of visual deception. And it is impossible for a modern student of this theatre not to see irony in their seeming disapproval of the mechanism of deception, for upon what, if not that, did theatre itself rely? Marston and others of his profession, such as Gosson, who had worked for the theatre, and Munday, who was to do so again, were conscious of the dubious morality of theatrical presentation, of the ambiguity of visual clues in society itself and of the way that stage performances used those clues to manipulate their audiences.

The practicalities of sixteenth-century social mobility, and the demands it made on people's need to 'see' differently as well as to judge sight itself in a new way, had for the theatre an unexpected effect: one which allowed contemporary dramatists to work with their audience to develop a new way of interpreting

action in the playhouse. It is clear that many commentators on the new Elizabethan theatrical experience felt that audience behaviour would be directly affected by what was seen on stage, as we saw Munday argue earlier.³³ There is a direct causal link envisaged between the stage example and the real lives of the playgoers, yet while watching a play in the theatre itself, the relationship between playgoers and what they saw was perhaps in nature somewhere *between* their reaction to fact and that to fiction. During the performance, audiences undoubtedly perceived the action as to some degree mimetic but, accustomed in life to developing a new *modus operandi* in terms of visual clues, they found themselves called upon to use those strategies in the theatre.³⁴ There was a connection between stage representation and reality: the interaction between the two was complex, but it is my proposal that there was a closer link than, perhaps, in much theatre today, and, among this social group, a kind of circularity. Plays of the late Elizabethan period represented rising courtiers working to suit their appearance to the career they desired, and those plays were being watched, and in some cases written too, by the men of the Inns of Court, many learning their trade as rising courtiers and reading the literature which advised them how to appear.

I conclude this chapter with an example from the work quoted in my title. This is a play unusual in its depiction of an ambitious man who succeeds through increased Tudor social mobility without being a villain. Written by the intriguing W.S., and performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the play has much to say to its initial audience about the visual.³⁵ It may have had a particularly powerful effect on that segment of the audience who were themselves ambitious for courtly preferment. *Thomas, Lord Cromwell* shows the famous Henrician reformer coming from his roots in a London smithy, and, through intellect, education and generous behaviour towards others, becoming the King's highest courtier. His rise provokes opposition from those representatives of the established elite that such a man challenges. Chief amongst those is Bishop Stephen Gardiner, whose desire to defeat Cromwell's ambitions leads him to build a false case against the Lord Chancellor. In his opposition to the honest Cromwell, Gardiner lies and deceives, showing all the signs of a typical stage villain; he is a man who, as Guazzo warned us, 'is evill and taken to bee good' and by this he 'may doe muche mischief'. Yet the ambivalent moral attitude of Guazzo also warned us that the world does not always punish wrongdoers and champion the cause of the right. *Thomas, Lord Cromwell* stages the existence of such evil men unpunished in the world, 'for that they are not reputed evill'. In the less than perfect world in which theatre audiences live, 'we ought to satisfie rather others than our selves, and to give place to the common custome', so Gardiner's plots succeed, and he manages to bring his opponent down through his slander.³⁶ Almost the last words addressed to Cromwell are the churchman's jubilant summation, 'Your Dove-like looks were view'd with

serpents eyes.³⁷ Suggestive of the split between reality and appearance at the court where Thomas has been conspicuously successful, the strange accusation also shows the ambivalence surrounding the visual sense. It appears to evoke the ancient debate on emission and intromission theories of sight, asking how much meaning lies in the eyes of the man viewing, and how much in the looks seen. Gardiner intends to cloud his opponent's virtue, suggesting what appears to be a dove is actually a serpent, but his words suggest the potential for visual clues to put in doubt, at least on stage, the existential reality of moral concepts and of virtues; Gardiner's real achievement in his ambiguous utterance is, as Cromwell responds, that we think of Gardiner himself, the man of God, as the real serpent.

Finally, this discussion illustrates how the playwright guides audience members on the cultivation of response through the manipulation of visual clues. A segment of that audience, such as the men from the Inns of Court who were themselves treading the paths of courtly ambition, could well have seen in *Thomas, Lord Cromwell* the enactment of a process with which they would engage in their own lives. A man whose beginnings were lowly, whose intellect, appearance and behaviour enabled him to rise, is at his downfall represented in terms of problematic visual clues. Rising courtiers, as other members of W.S.'s audience, became, in this way, increasingly adept at recognizing the ambiguities and potential deceptions of things they 'saw' on the late Elizabethan stage.³⁸

Notes

- 1 Aristotle, *De anima (On the Soul)*, trans., intro. and notes H. Lawson-Tancred (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), bk. II, chap. 7–11, pp. 173–86.
- 2 *De Oratore*, trans. E.W. Sutton, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1967), 2.87.357.
- 3 *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight: of Melancholike diseases; of Rheumes, and of Old age. Composed by M. Andreas Laurentius, ordinarie Physition to the King, and publike professor of Phisicke in the Universitie of Mompelier. Translated out of French into English, according to the last Edition, by Richard Surphlet, Practitioner in Phisicke* (1599), pp. 12–13. Further references cited in the text.
- 4 *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), Cr: Part 1, Section 1, Member 2, Subsection 6.
- 5 The Basilisk was a mythological creature whose looks could kill; cf. *Winter's Tale* (1.2.388–90) where Polixenes shows his despair to Camillo: 'Make me not sighted like the basilisk. | I have looked on thousands who have sped the better | By my regard, but killed none so', or *2 Henry VI* (3.2.51–53) where the king cries out to Suffolk, 'Look not upon me, for thine eyes are wounding – | Yet do not go away. Come, basilisk, | And kill the innocent gazer with thy sight.'
- 6 Isaac Walton, *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, and Mr. George Herbert* (1670), p. 12.
- 7 Benjamin Rudyard, *Le Prince D'Amour* (1660), pp. 4–5. For more on the connection between Inns of Court revels, drama and aspiring courtiership, see my article,

- “He writes, he railes, he jests, he courts, what not,/ And all from out his huge long scraped stock/ Of well penn’d plays”: learning the performance of courtiership at the early modern Inns of Court’, in *Spectatorship at the Elizabethan Court*, eds Susanne Scholz and Daniel Dornhofer, special issue of *Zeitspruenge. Forschungen zur Fruehen Neuzeit*, 17 (2013), 63–83.
- 8 For further discussion of the connection between sight and love, see Aurelie Griffin’s essay in this volume.
 - 9 ‘On the Freedom of the Will’, translated by E. Gordon Rupp, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 91.
 - 10 For further discussion of the sensory engagement antitheatricalists associated with theatregoing see Hannah August’s Chapter 11, in this volume.
 - 11 *A second and third blast of retrait from plaies and Theaters* (1580), p. 64. All further references are cited in the text.
 - 12 For further examination of the role of the mind, as well as the eyes, in visual deception see Stuart Clark’s *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): ‘visual experiences were constructed out of mental expectations as well as data transmitted by the crystalline lens’ (p. 60). This clearly has relevance for my later comments here on Manningham.
 - 13 *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), F6r (4th Action).
 - 14 According to Mordechai Feingold, in his entry on Rainolds for the *ODNB*, ‘judging by the vehemence with which he criticized stage plays a quarter of a century later, this experience left an indelible impression on him’.
 - 15 *Th’Overthrow of Stage-Playes, by the Way of Controversie betwixt D. Gager and D. Rainoldes* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1599), p. 102.
 - 16 ‘An Excellent Actor’ from Thomas Overbury, *Characters* (1616), M2v.
 - 17 *Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple and of Bradbourne, Kent, Barrister-at-Law, 1602–3*, ed. John Bruce, Esq. (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1868), p. 18.
 - 18 ‘Direct Evidence and Audience Response to *Twelfth Night*: The Case of John Manningham of the Middle Temple’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 21 (1995), 109–154 (p. 112).
 - 19 For further discussion of the purposes, both those declared and those undeclared, of courtier literature, see Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).
 - 20 Giovanni della Casa, *Galateo*, translated by Robert Peterson of Lincoln’s Inn (1576), p. 106.
 - 21 Michelle O’Callaghan, *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 27.
 - 22 Harold Brooks (ed.), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, The Arden Shakespeare Second Series (London: Methuen, 1979), p. cxxxvii.
 - 23 Janette Dillon, *Drama, Court and City, 1595–1610: Drama and Social Space in London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 65.
 - 24 Tables, ‘A small portable tablet for writing upon, esp. for notes or memoranda’ (*OED*, 2b.), were commonplace amongst the educated; cf. *Hamlet*, ‘O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain! | My tables, | My tables – meet it is I set it down | That one may smile and smile and be a villain’ (1.5.106–09).
 - 25 ‘Direct Evidence and Audience Response’, p. 114.

- 26 *The Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. by Herford and Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925–52), III, 2.6.171.
- 27 *Antonio and Mellida*, ed. by G.K. Hunter (London: Edward Arnold, 1965); all further quotations are from this edition and are cited in the text.
- 28 See Charles Whitney's *Early Responses to Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), which proposes the term 'segments' for different portions of an audience, each of which has its own background and interests, and thus a different relationship with the performance.
- 29 della Casa, pp. 108–09.
- 30 Dillon, p. 64.
- 31 *La Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo*, trans. by George Pettie (books 1–3, 1581) in *The Tudor Translations*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1925), I, 62.
- 32 *La Civile Conversation*, I, 196–97.
- 33 *A second and third blast*, pp. 97–98.
- 34 See Laurie Maguire's comments on mimesis and representation in, 'Audience-Actor Boundaries and *Othello*', *Proceedings of the British Academy – 181, 2010–11 Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2012), p. 131. In this lecture she suggests that audiences of early modern drama were being directed and educated in their responses to the work being presented on stage by regular textual guidance.
- 35 The seventeenth-century attribution of the play to Shakespeare is now generally doubted, and the author is still unknown; first published in 1602, critics also dispute the time of writing, dating the play most often from the final years of Elizabeth's reign.
- 36 *La Civile Conversation*, I, 62.
- 37 *The True Chronicle Historie of the whole life and death of Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1602), F3v.
- 38 This chapter comes out of a paper presented at the Birkbeck Senses PhD Forum in October 2011. I should like to thank all those present who gave comments and asked questions, and especially Katherine Duncan-Jones for her helpful advice.