

Attitudes (Sources and Realizations)
in
Scenes from The Tragical History of D. Faustus



Jed Wentz

Introduction

I have put together this portfolio of images taken from *Scenes from The Tragical History of D. Faustus* in order to explain the methodology behind my work with historical acting and attitudes.¹ Let me hasten to add here that attempting to do ‘what Marlowe intended’ was never part of my methodology. Rather, I wanted to utilize my embodied knowledge from a wide variety of sources without any reference to ‘authenticity’.² That would be a very worthy undertaking, but it explicitly was not the one for which I have striven here.

It will be clear in viewing the photos side-by-side with illustrations drawn from historical sources that I adapted the attitudes to fit the meaning and energy of the text. To strike an attitude was, in the context of this research project, to allow it to be moulded by my actor’s imagination in order to fit the individual line; I did not envision performing a series of exact copies of images taken from historical sources. I attempted to see how the actor’s primed imagination, relying on embodied techniques, could create a flow, a ‘melody of gesture’ if you will, that suited my conception of Marlowe’s verse.³

¹ The film, and materials relating to it, can be found on the Research Catalogue: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net>.

² For some of my past work in which ‘authenticity’ is discussed see: <https://jedwentz.com/publications/>.

³ I use the term attitude loosely here to include full-body stances or poses; also included are manners of sculpting an acting body that remains in motion. Gestures and attitudes are not mutually exclusive. From the anchor-point of any given attitude various gestures may arise; movements in the eyes, face, hands and feet all belong to the category ‘gesture’. Attitudes can be neutral or amplify the actor’s emotion. For a fuller engagement with this topic, see: ‘“De Storm der Hartstogten Woedt”: The works of Johannes Jelgerhuis Rienkszoon as a source of stagecraft for the historically informed performer’, doctoral dissertation, Universiteit Leiden (2025): <https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/4284591>. Neuman’s work has strongly influenced my understanding of attitudes as pliant, adaptable and dynamic.

This research project had two distinct phases, each with its own separate research question.

The first phase spanned the first half of 2024. In it I explored the idea that making practical, nuts-and-bolts decisions about historical acting – about blocking, how and when to stand or sit, what look to have in the eyes, what prop to hold and when, etc. – was in and of itself a form of textual analysis. The second phase, which took place between the summer of 2024 and September 2025, explored the idea that similar nuts-and-bolts choices, made in the context of realising a film, could *create the character* of Dr. Faustus.

I further wanted, during the second phase of the project, to stretch my range of historical techniques. I felt a need to improve my technique when using attitudes and to integrate poses seamlessly into an acting style that I would find aesthetically appealing. When I first started training my body with historical acting techniques back in 2005, I relied mainly on Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* (1806). Although Austin's book does contain a list of full-body attitudes, I at that time, like most others who engage with the book, was fixated on the realization of Austin's notation for hand gestures. Later, under guidance of Laila Cathleen Neumann, I began working on techniques involving attitudes drawn from Johannes Jelgerhuis' *Theoretische Lessen* (1827-29). I therefore already had some practical knowledge before I began this Marlowe project, but I wanted to work many more –and more varied– attitudes into my embodied technique. I chose, during the second stage of the *D. Faustus* project, to integrate as many attitudes into the film as I could, and further to challenge myself with historical attitudes that I initially didn't necessarily like artistically – particularly those which seemed forced, exaggerated or unnatural to me, or which I feared I would

not be able to perform believably. After all, well I remembered what Austin had written in *Chironomia*:

Attitudes are dangerous to hazard; the whole powers of the man must be wrought up to their highest energy, or they become forced and rigid. [...]. Where all the solid foundation of just and appropriate action has been laid, attitude, when regulated with taste and discretion, may be added to ornament the superstructure; but introduced unseasonably or overcharged, it is an evidence of deficiency of understanding as well as of depravity of taste.⁴

By selecting attitudes that were not initially congenial to my artistic practice, I aimed to explore embodied acting through historically inspired challenges to my technique and taste; I also knew that I would have to work myself up in my imagination to a level that would make the attitudes ‘believable’. I therefore, in order to test myself, consciously chose some attitudes from Edmund Shatesbury’s *Lessons in the Art of Acting* (1889) precisely because *I thought they looked unnatural, even impossible, on the page*. Could I ‘rev up’ my energy level, emotion and imagination sufficiently in order to make the attitudes ‘believable’ within the context of my historically imagined acting style?

Whether or not I succeeded in this project is very much in the eye of the beholder. Given our current cultural-aesthetic climate, which prioritizes realism in acting above all else, it’s anybody’s

⁴ *Chironomia*, 497-8.

guess just what the criteria for believability would be in an historical acting style that refers primarily not to daily life, but to the arts of painting and sculpture.

I hope that the following images will make clear what went into the creation of the film, but allow me just to point out two specific attitudes and the difficulties they posed to me.

If one looks at the attitude ‘perplexity’ and how I used it in the film, a very particular difficulty is revealed...how to perform an attitude when a character is insincere, lying or feigning? My conception of the opening scene in Marlowe’s play where Faustus evaluates his future course of action by examining his library was one of *feigned* deliberation. In my view, Faustus has already decided, in his heart, to become a magician: the entire scene is just a show, a sham performed in order to convince himself intellectually to yield to the devilry that has already ‘ravished’ him within. I therefore, in performing ‘perplexity’, do not fully engage the imagination with the movement, but instead remain fully engaged with Faustus’ intellectual fraud. This lends a quality of posturing to the attitude, which corresponds with my intention. However, coming at the beginning of the film, as it does, at a point when the spectator has little to compare it to, it could simply be read as ‘posing’ on a very basic level: as ‘bad acting’.⁵ This is something to reflect on in future engagements with attitudes in acting, particularly when a character is duplicitous.

⁵ A similar problem occurs in Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922), where Hutter’s creepy and bizarre acting at the beginning of the film (when he laughs as he brings flowers to Ellen) does not yet have enough context within the acting styles of the entire film to be properly legible for modern audiences.

A further example of the learning process such an artistic research project affords can be found in the gesture ‘enumeration’ (see page 12). This was one of my ‘challenging’ attitudes. I wanted to see if I could integrate it into the scene without having been particularly enamoured of it from the outset. I used it at the line ‘Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please’, and as one can see by comparing Shatesbury’s image to the photo of myself in action, I changed the attitude considerably. However, on further reflection – having seen the result in the film, and searched among various sources for different solutions – I came to the realization that I could have used it much as Austin describes the gesture ‘enumeration’, by repeating the basic gesture of the right hand, but adding a finger at each of the two succeeding lines:

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please, (tapping palm with one finger)
Resolve me of all ambiguities, (tapping palm with two fingers)
Performe what desperate enterprise I will? (tapping palm with three fingers)

This would have allowed me to focus my energy and develop it to a higher pitch with each line, as motivation for me then to rush forward in glee at the start of the next section (‘Ile haue them flye to *India* for gold’, etc.).

In short, this project was one of (1. imprinting the image of an attitude in my imagination (2. imitating the image physically (3. Adapting it to a specific line, and finally (4. drawing conclusions about the results after viewing the filmed sequence. It was, ultimately, a process of learning through experimentation by giving one’s sincere best in the moment of performance and evaluating the results afterwards. I am aware that some artistic researchers use different methodologies.

Jed Wentz

Main Sources

Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia* (1806)

Johannes Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen* (1827-1830)

Edmund Shaftesbury, *Lessons in the Art of Acting* (1889)

Charles Aubert, *L'Art Mimique* (1901)

Influences

Otto Rippert, *Homunculus* (1916)

Viktor Sjöstrom, *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924)

Fr. Wilhelm Murnau, *Faust* (1926)

Federico Fellini, *Giulietta degli Spiriti* (1965)

LESSONS IN THE ART OF ACTING.

A Practical and Thorough work for all persons who aim to become

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And for all Readers and Orators who desire to make use of the power of

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BY

EDMUND SHAFTESBURY.

Author of "Voice Culture;" "Emphasis;" "Facial Expression;" "Deep Breathing;" "Personal Magnetism;" "Grace and Deportment;" "Extemporaneous Speaking."

1889.

THE MANTON COLLEGE PRESS.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

CHIRONOMIA;

OR A

TREATISE ON RHETORICAL DELIVERY:

COMPREHENDING MANY PRECEPTS, BOTH ANCIENT AND MODERN, FOR
THE PROPER REGULATION OF

THE VOICE, THE COUNTENANCE, AND GESTURE.

TOGETHER WITH AN

INVESTIGATION OF THE ELEMENTS OF GESTURE,

AND

A NEW METHOD FOR THE NOTATION THEREOF;

ILLUSTRATED BY MANY FIGURES.

BY THE REVEREND GILBERT AUSTIN, A. M.

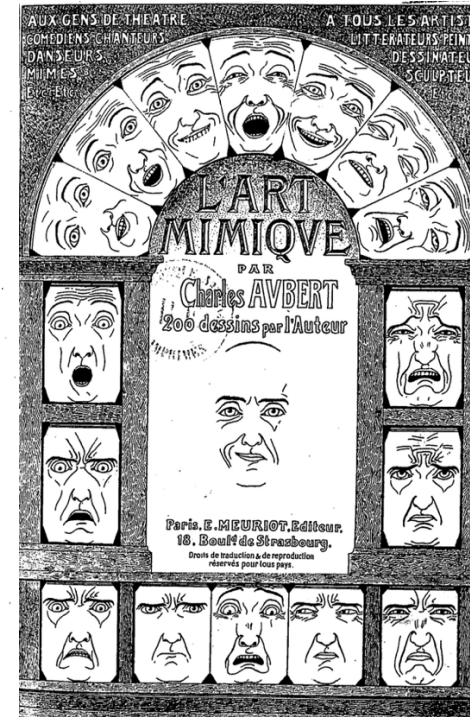
Et certe quod facere oportet, non indignandum est discere, cum præsertim hæc Chironomia, quæ est (ut nomine ipso declaratur) *lex gestus*, et ab illis temporibus heruicis orta sit, et à summis Græciæ viris, et ab ipso etiam Socrate probata, à Platone quoque in parte civilium positæ virtutum, et à Chrysippo in præceptis de *liberorum educatione* compositis non omitta. Quia. Non sum nescius, quantum susceperim negotii, qui motus corporis exprimere verbis, imitari scriptura conatus sim voces. *Rhet. ad Herenn. l. 3.*

LONDON:

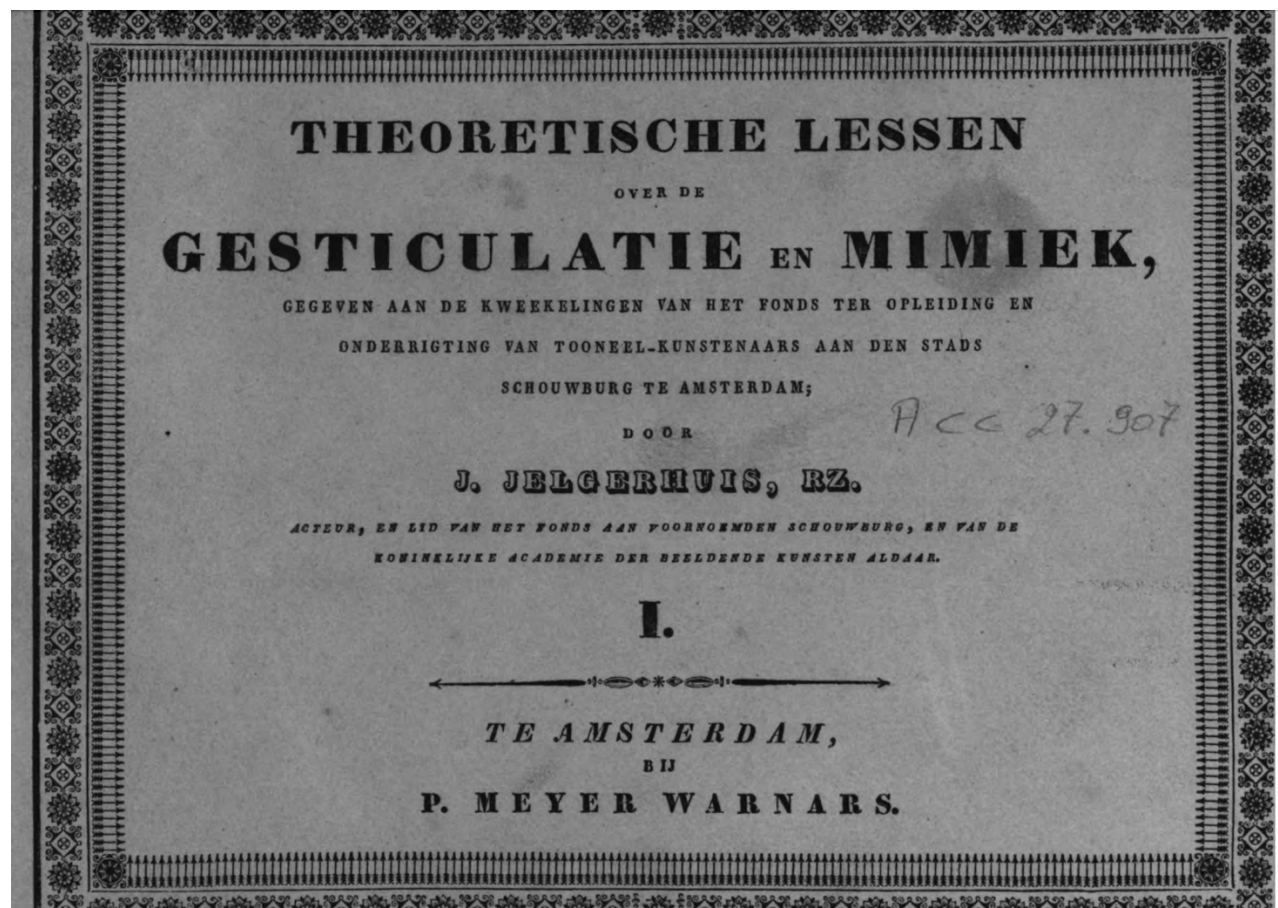
PRINTED FOR T. CADELL AND W. DAVIES, IN THE STRAND;

BY W. BULMER, AND CO. CLEVELAND-BOW, ST. JAMES'S;

1806.



Titlepages of Books by Austin, Shaftesbury and Aubert



Titelpage Jelgerhuis' *Theoretische Lessen*



21st ATTITUDE: PERPLEXITY.
The Ninth Sitting Attitude means *Perplexity*.
It is made by placing the palm of the left hand on the left leg. The right hand lightly touches the forehead. The eyes are slightly raised. The torso rests against the back of the chair.



The still from the film on the left shows perplexity, but feigned (the eyebrows do not contract), while that on the right shows a new thought (the eyes move to indicate thinking). For a discussion for Faustus' insincerity at this moment, see the introduction.

Deliberation, Fig. 87, text p. 490:



Deliberation on ordinary subjects holds the chin, and sets the arms akimbo.



I didn't want to cover my mouth here, so I settled for just holding the chin/beard.



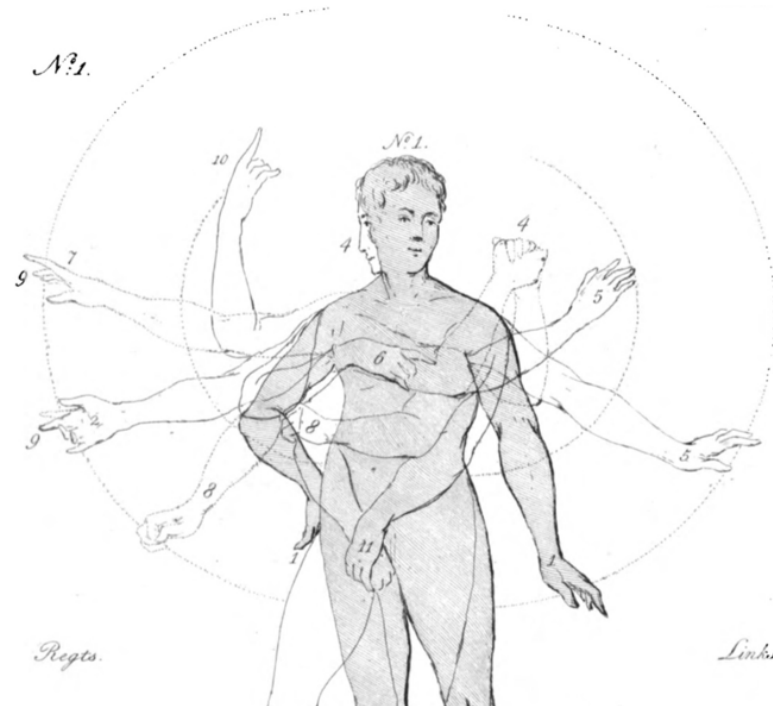
Horror, Fig. 102, text p. 488:



Here the full attitude was not achieved (hand positions contracted rather than extended),
but horror is suggested.



"Tis Magicke, Magicke that hath ravished me



Here I use Jelgerhuis' tragic attitude number 4, but with the hands clasped over the heart.
The lower clasped hands are more clearly visible against my black robe.



Will be as cunning as *Agrippa* was
Whose shadowes made all *Europe* honour him



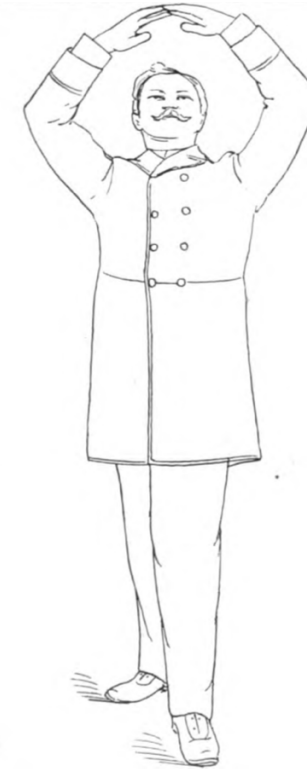
The influence of *Chironomia* on my basic technique can be discerned throughout.



Building up energy to leap up out of the chair and strike the most challenging attitude...



How am I gluttred with conceit of this



33rd ATTITUDE: JOY.

The clasped hands are mentioned in Shaftesbury's text, though not shown in the drawing. The joy in my version is tempered by malicious enthusiasm: 'How am I gluttred with conceit of this!' The body weight is on the left, not the right, as Shaftesbury suggests. I added this attitude to the scene because it challenged my technique: could I screw my imagination up to such a height as to make this gesture believable?



The joy is not a generic one, but maniacal in keeping with Faustus' character. The chin and eyes are only slightly raised: I did not want this to be mistaken for an address to God.

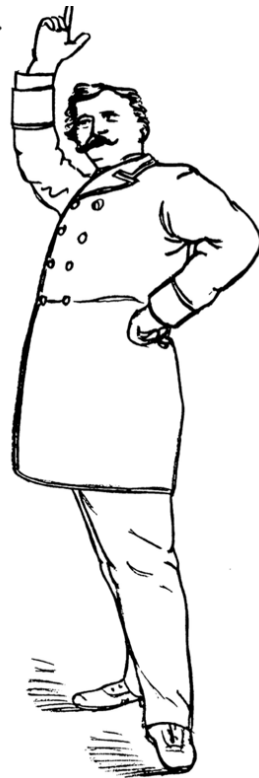


38th ATTITUDE: EXPLANATION.

This attitude is made by standing with the weight on the right foot advanced, the body leaning forward, and the first finger of the right hand in the palm of the left.



The energy of ‘joy’ carried me onwards into the next section. I wanted to open this attitude outwards to the audience and make the face very expressive. For more comments on this attitude, see the introduction.



86th ATTITUDE: TRIUMPH.
This attitude is made by stepping back with the weight up-
on the right foot, the right index hand raised over the head.



And I, that have with Concissyllogisms



In this take I do not have the left hand akimbo, though I often did at this point in the scene. The right hand is lower, closer to the face, than in the Shaftesbury on the left, which reflects my training with earlier sources. The degree of shading of Shaftesbury's torso position was discouraged by Austin, who did not want orators to go into the 'en garde' position on the right. See following pages for possible finger and thumb positions when pointing or indicating.







64th ATTITUDE: SELF-CONCEIT.
This attitude is made by touching the hands at the points of the fingers, pointing downward.



Now Faustus must thou needs be damn'd
And canst thou not be savèd

I chose to read this line ('Now Faustus must thou needs be dam'd') as self-congratulation, in order to gain a greater variety of affect in the development of Faustus' character. The shoulders and arms are lower than in Shafetbury's image: The magician is mighty pleased with himself.



47th ATTITUDE: FAITH.

This attitude is made by standing with the weight on the left foot retired, both hands crossed on the chest, the face looking up obliquely, and the head inclined slightly to the right.



Here I chose to parody a well-known attitude of religious faith, because Faustus puts his trust in the devil rather than in God ('Trust in Beelzebub.'). I look down and to the left (associations with Hell and evil) rather than up and to the right (associations with Heaven and goodness). My facial expression is malicious, gleeful and rapacious.



69th ATTITUDE: UNPLEASANT SOUNDS.

This attitude is made by placing the crooked fingers to the ears and showing facial disgust.



O something soundeth in mine eares

I have not precisely imitated Shaftesbury here, because I wanted to express surprise and awe rather than disgust. The fingers point upwards rather than backwards, as in Shaftesbury.



Accursèd Faustus.....



...where is mercie now?

The previous page: The first image represents Faustus' recognition of a thought ('mental distress'), which brings the right hand to the forehead; the second represents his recognition of a feeling ('mental pain'), which brings the left hand inward to the heart. The fist here indicates the intensity of his pain (unlike Shaftesbury's milder image). The head also inclines towards the heart, rather than away from it, more in keeping with earlier acting styles (see the following plate from Jelgerhuis).

Distress, Fig. 86, text p. 490:



92nd ATTITUDE: MENTAL PAIN.



I do repent...





89th ATTITUDE: DISCONSOLATION.

This attitude is made by inclining the head slightly forward; the eyes looking off; the shoulders elevated a little; the hands clasped, palms downward.



...and yet I do dispaire

Anxiety (from Engel), Figs. 114, text p. 493:



This and the previous page: Here a number of attitudes are mixed in a suite or ‘melody’ of gestures. The final gesture of the sequence is unfortunately out of the frame (the hands in this photo are in the position of the image on the right, from *Chironomia*). The head and eyes in the final image are angled downwards, but over the heart. I am now fairly sure that this is not the best use of this attitude, and would not use it again in this manner. I now think that it works better as Austin and Jelgerhuis suggest that one use it, to express anxiety.



8th ATTITUDE: PRAYER.

The Eighth Kneeling Attitude means *Prayer*. It is made by advancing the weight in the act of kneeling, and placing the two hands palm to palm, the fingers pointing upward, and the thumbs lightly touching the center of the chest.

PRAYER.

"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below."
Hamlet, Act III, Scene III.

I preferred this palm-against-palm position (for a gesture of prayer) to Austin's 'touching' (where only the fingertips lightly meet), as it seemed more earnest and urgent to me. The sensation of the palms pressed flat together strongly stimulated my actor's imagination. I did not look upwards as I was not addressing Heaven (see next page for a prayer, eyes raised, directed towards God).

Touching (tc), Fig. 80, text p. 340:



Deprecation, Fig. 106, text p. 489:

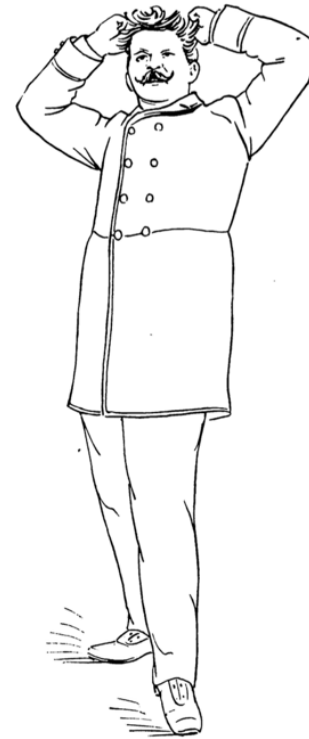


Oh God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soule

Austin's significant gesture 'Deprecation'.



But mine must live still to be plagued...



90th ATTITUDE: FRENZY.

This attitude is made by inclining the head backward; looking up; and clutching the hair with both hands.

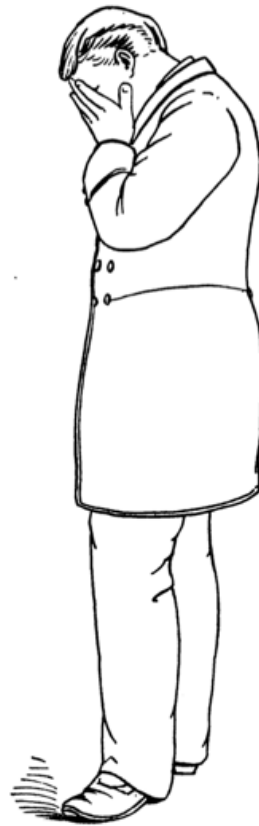


...in hel

This page and the previous show Faustus' frenzy. I preferred this contracted position to Shaftesbury's more expanded one, once again the feeling in the palms strongly stimulated my imagination. Also, it was less painful to pull the hair upwards rather than outwards.



I wanted to show Faustus' rings on both hands here: he gave up his soul for wealth. See Shafetsbury's and Jelgerhuis' versions on the next page.



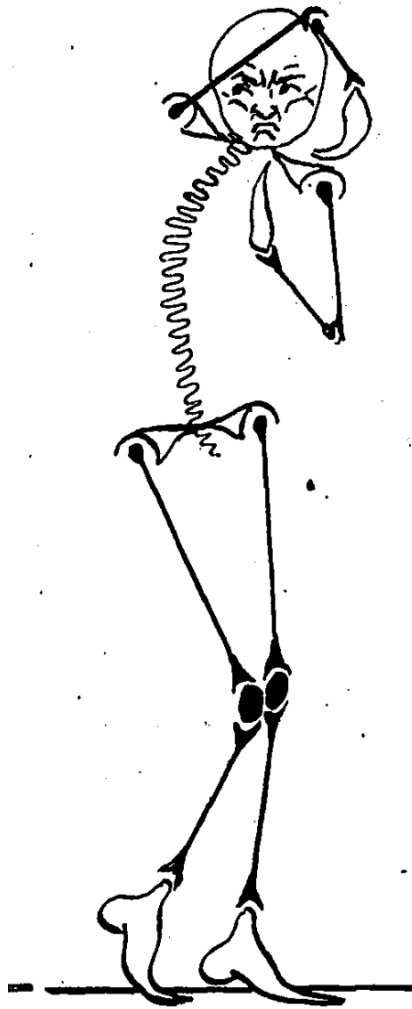
100th ATTITUDE: MORTIFICATION.

This attitude is made by inclining the head downward, and hiding the face in both hands.





I struck this attitude of fear with bent knees and bent back, in accordance with Jelgerhuis' drawing.



I took this attitude from Aubert, but adapted to correspond to God's wrath falling from above.