

Gilbert Austin

1753–1837

Like Thomas Sheridan, Gilbert Austin was an Irishman and a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and devoted himself to elocution. But unlike Sheridan, Austin distrusted the natural method. Though the vast bulk of *Chironomia* (1806; excerpted here), his treatise on elocution, is devoted to presenting the views of ancient and modern rhetoricians on the subject, the work is best known for the mechanical system of notation that Austin proposed for recording and choreographing speech performances.

Austin had a number of admirers and imitators, and his book encouraged closer attention to the details of nonverbal communication. But the reigning view was articulated by Richard Whately in 1828, in *Elements of Rhetoric*: "Probably not a single instance could be found of any one who has attained, by the study of any system of instruction that has hitherto appeared, a really good Delivery; but there are many, — probably nearly as many as have fully tried the experiment, — who have by this means been totally spoiled." Whately praises Sheridan and advocates the "natural" method.

Reprinted here are one of a number of examples in *Chironomia* showing how symbols can be used to indicate the delivery of a speech, four of eleven plates of illustrations, and a summary of Austin's notation system.

Selected Bibliography

Our excerpt is from the facsimile of the first edition of Austin's *Chironomia; or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*. First published in 1806, the facsimile is edited by Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonssen (Carbondale, 1966). The editors' introduction provides useful information about Austin, the history of the elocution movement, and the development of the elocution curriculum in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Little scholarship is devoted specifically to Austin, though he figures prominently in discussions of the history of elocution. G. P. Mohrmann, one of the few exceptions, defends Austin against complaints that he is merely mechanical, in "The Real *Chironomia*" (*Southern Speech Journal* 34 [Fall 1968]: 17–27). For general studies of elocution, see the headnote on Thomas Sheridan.

From *Chironomia*

SYMBOLS FOR NOTING THE FORCE AND RAPIDITY OR INTERRUPTION OF THE VOICE IN DELIVERY

The symbols are to be marked in the margin near the commencement of the passage which they are to influence.

	Symbols
Piano - - - - -	====
Uniform loudness, or forte - - - - -	^ ^ ^
Crescendo (as in music) - - - - -	< /
Diminuendo (as in music) - - - - -	/ <
Rapid - - - - -	o o o
Slow - - - - -	- - - -
Suspension of the voice, the break or dash after a word } - - - -	—
Long pause, or new paragraph - - - -	
Whisper or monotone - - - - -	———
<i>Compound Symbols</i>	
Piano and slow - - - - -	=====
Piano and quick - - - - -	o o o
Loud and slow - - - - -	^ ^ ^
Loud and quick - - - - -	o o o
Monotonous or whisper slow - - - - -	- - - -
Monotone or whisper quick - - - - -	o o o

Compare with page 24 of Steele's *Prosodia Rationalis*.

It is requested to be understood that the various passages, which are marked with the notation, are intended merely to illustrate the foregoing system: and that among the innumerable methods of possible delivery, that which is chosen and represented is to be considered as one

method only, how far soever removed from the best. It is one property of this system of notation, that whilst it furnishes the means of recording each person's ideas of gesture, it does not presume to dictate. It is a language, which may be used to express every variety of opinion.

In the portion of Gay's fable of the Miser and Plutus, which is doubly illustrated both by engraved figures¹ and by notation, it has been found necessary to omit in the notation some circumstances, in order to express nothing more than what is seen in the figures, and in others for the same reason to be redundant. Thus the retired hand and also the feet are sometimes noted of-
tender than absolutely necessary, and some transitions are of necessity omitted. It is hoped, however, that the great pains and attention bestowed upon these illustrations will suffice for the purpose of conveying to the reader a tolerably accurate knowledge of the manner of using the notation.

For the greater convenience and precision each figure is numbered in the Plate, and referred to accordingly in the following notation.

The perpendicular line — divides the portions of writing which refer to each numeral and figure.

THE MISER AND PLUTUS

Gay²

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <p>1. 2. The wind was high,</p> <p style="text-align: center; margin-left: 100px;">R Bvhf r — q.
a.R. 2.</p> | | <p style="text-align: right;">peq n—pdq</p> <p>the window shakes;</p> |
| <p>veq c—vbx c
sR1x</p> | | |
| <p>3. With sudden start</p> | | <p>the miser wakes!</p> |
| <p>F pdb ad — phq—
aR2</p> | | |
| <p>4. Along the silent room he stalks;</p> | | |

¹Austin seems to have intended to illustrate some of the positions with drawings, but none accompany the text he refers to here. [Ed.]

²John Gay (1685–1732), English poet. [Ed.]

5. 6. Looks back, | and trembles as he walks! |
B vhx—vhq c | Bvhf tr |
sR1x
7. Each lock and ev'ry bolt he tries, |
vhq— —vhx c |
aL2
8. In ev'ry creek and corner pries; |
shq o— . . . —shc i |
aR2
9. Then opes his chest with treasure stor'd, |
Bpdq ————n
10. And stands in rapture o'er his hoard: |
D Bseq |
Ra
11. But now with sudden qualms possest, |
Bvhf c |
rR1
12. He wrings his hands, he beats his breast. |
Bfl. hf— ————a ————Bfl.br.
13. By conscience stung he wildly stares; |
g.br— —veq
14. And thus his guilty soul declares. |
Bshf sh.
15. Had the deep earth her stores confin'd, |
Bdf d— ————n |
aR2
16. This heart had known sweet peace of mind, |
br—R |
R1
17. 18. But virtue's sold! | Good Gods! what price |
vhf—vhx | U Bsef sp— ————a |
aR2
19. Can recompense the pangs of vice? |
F—R
20. O bane of good! seducing cheat! |
D Bsdf d— ————n |
rR1
21. 22. Can man, weak man, | thy power defeat? |
Bvhf—vcf | shf st—sdq
23. Gold banish'd honour from the mind, |
scb sw—sdq |
rL1
24. And only left the name behind; |
br—R

25. Gold sow'd the world with ev'ry ill; |
Bphc— ————x
26. Gold taught the murd'rer's sword to kill: |
ceb sh—cdq |
L1x
27. 'T was gold instructed coward hearts |
shf sh—sdq |
aR2x
28. In treach'ry's more pernicious arts. |
Bvhf rj |
rR1
29. Who can recount the mischiefs o'er? |
scq—sdq |
R2
30. Virtue resides on earth no more! |
Bpdf d

Observations on the Notation

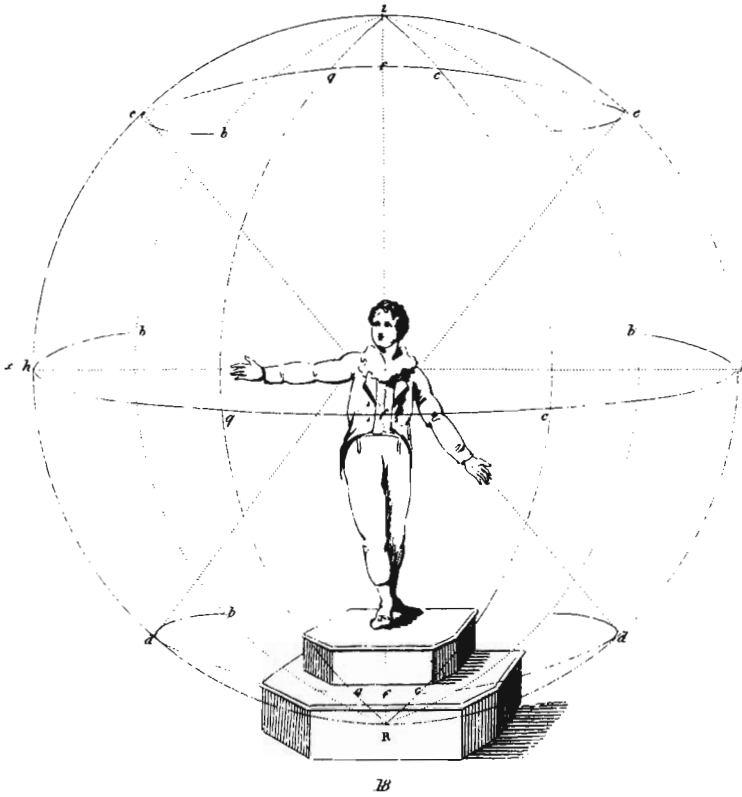
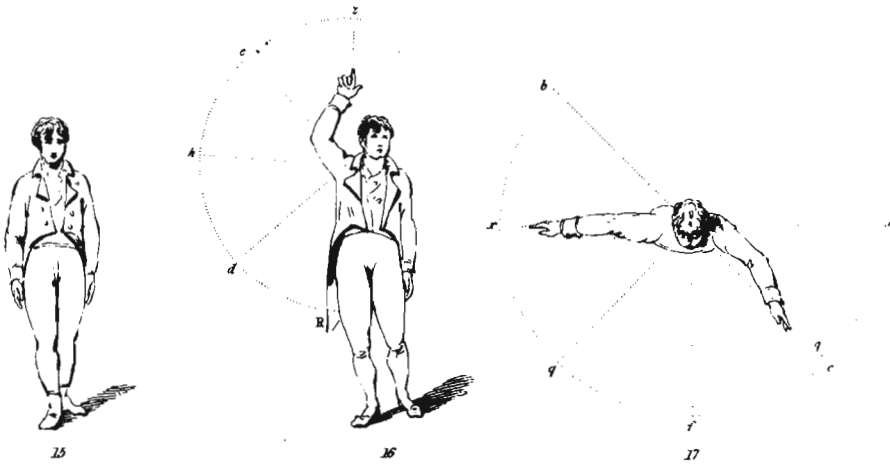
No. I. The direction of motion expressed by the 4th small letter *r*, means that from the position in which both hands are presented *vhf*, they should move both towards the right and stop at the position *oblique* as noted by *q*, connected by a dash to the position mentioned.

No. II. The 4th small letter *n* signifies noting. See manner of motion in the synoptical table, and Chap. XIII. . . .

No. XII. The position of the hands at first is, *both folded horizontal forwards* as expressed in the notation *Bfl. hf*. At the *a* connected by the dash, which signifies *ascending*, the hands are raised up, and at the next notation *Bfl. br*. they are forcibly withdrawn back on the breast.

No. XXI. This position begins *horizontal* as first noted *Bvhf*, and ends *elevated* as in the figure, *Bvhf*, but the *B* is omitted over the word *weak*, being understood by the connect-dash.

No. XXV. The *third small letter* relating to the transverse direction of the arm is often placed alone, but connected by a dash with a preceding set of letters, as already observed No. I. In such case it is to be understood that the position of the hands remains as before, and that the transverse direction only of the arm is changed. Here each arm passes through the whole semicircle from the position *across* to *extended*.



W. Del.

Thorne sc.

Figure 1

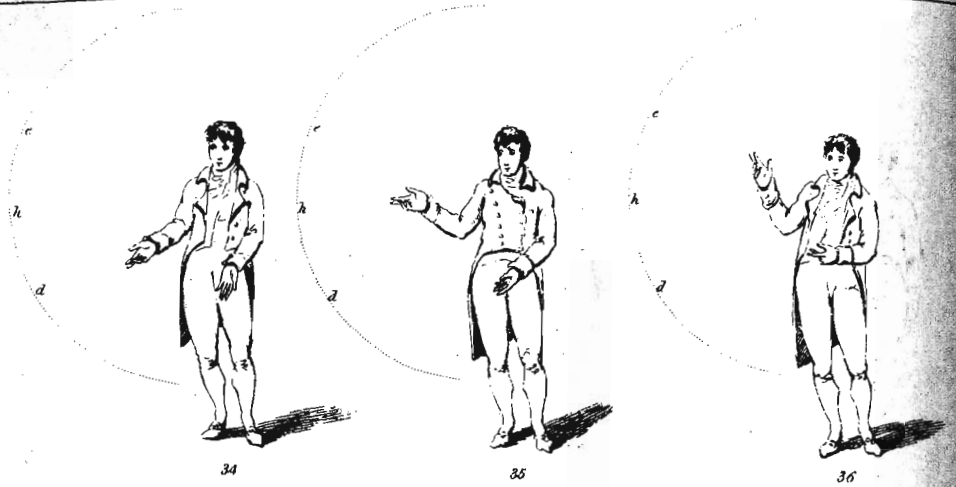
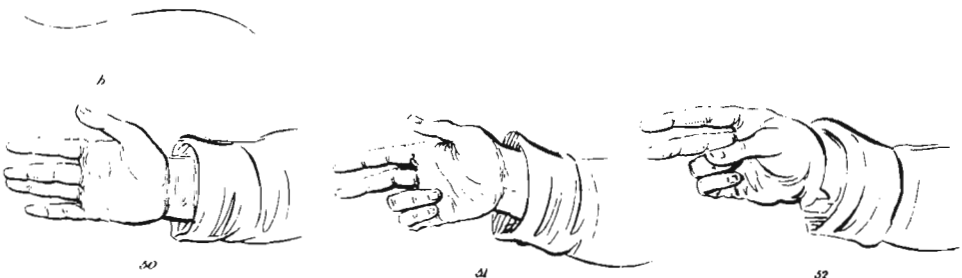
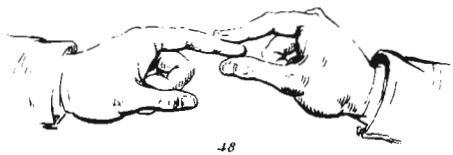


Figure 2

Positions of the Hands used by ancient Orators.

from Quintilian's



Edley del. *Warner sc.*

Figure 3



Figure 4

