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James B. Nicola

Interpretation

A man may be the measure of a face
as a face might be the measure of a man.
A small face on a big man's out of place;
a strong one on a small suggests he can

do things you'd not at first expect him to.
Like you. When I gave you the compliment
then, how could you infer I meant that you
were small? I meant the opposite. I meant

I never really knew you. That's all. Laugh
and blink, too, at your candid photograph,
so cryptic while so honest. But I'll ask
you outright what I once knew better than
to ask about who lies behind a mask.
Or is your mask the measure of the man?

James B. Nicola is author of six collections of poetry; the most recent of these is *Fires of Heaven: Poems of Faith and Sense*. He has worked for many years in the theater, which were the basis of his book *Playing the Audience: The Practical Guide to Live Performance*, which won a *Choice* award.