

“Through a glasse darkly”:
Secrecy and Access to Arcane Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century England

by

Christa Hunfeld
B.A. (Honours), Dalhousie University, 2008
M.A., University of Victoria, 2010

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

In seventeenth-century England, pursuits of knowledge were shaped by two seemingly paradoxical, yet interwoven beliefs: a persistent belief in the devastating effects of the Fall on human reason, and a growing trust in human ability to sharpen understanding and pierce the seemingly impenetrable. This dissertation explores how writers of works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history simultaneously presented human conjecture and intuition as limited and flawed but also capable of providing ordinary people with access to privileged information. The authors of these “do-it-yourself” manuals made distinctions between God’s secrecy and human secrecy and provided tips on how each could be tapped. Physiognomy inspired constant searching for hidden sources of insight; shorthand encouraged the sense that there was often more than met the eye; astrology emphasized the usefulness of uncertainty. Secret histories suggested that the very skills which the practices of physiognomy, shorthand, and astrology honed could be used to unveil the secrets of carnal monarchs, ministers, and royal mistresses. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the limits of attainable knowledge – and who could reliably present and access it – were being defined and redefined. To leading philosophers and political figures, human uncertainty necessitated the weighing of probabilities and the idealization of transparent, empirical and elite approaches to information. I argue that to writers of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history, it reinforced the notion that arcane knowledge could be accessed by anyone. Such writers variously suggested that information that mattered to people’s daily lives depended upon personalized, conjectural and intuitive approaches to knowing. In short, secrets that were once divine and impenetrable were actually up for grabs.

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List of Abbreviations

Bodleian	Oxford, Bodleian Library
BL	London, British Library
DWL	London, Dr. Williams Library
TNA, SP	The National Archives, State Papers
Wellcome	London, Wellcome Library
WRO	Wigan, Wigan Record Office

All folio and signature references are to the recto unless otherwise noted.

Brackets indicate page numbers that have been inferred, due to inconsistent foliation or the absence of a signature.

Published primary sources have predominantly been accessed through *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*. Only short titles have been noted. For longer titles, please consult the bibliography of this study. For complete titles, consult the databases mentioned above.

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Introduction

In the seventeenth century knowledge did not need to be entirely transparent, certain or wholly accessible in order to be a valuable diagnostic and prognostic tool.¹ In *Spiritual Opticks* (1651), for instance, theologian Nathaniel Culverwell wrote that, although religion is shrouded in mystery, it “is no fansie, opinion or conjecturall thing: no, we have a certain knowledge of God and his wayes here; we see through a glasse, though it be but darkly: there is truth in a riddle, though it be obscure.”² The fact that valuable knowledge was often secret and uncertain made it attractive to those who believed they could obtain privileged access to information not readily available to others. Physiognomers, shorthand masters, astrologers and writers of secret histories provided such access. They suggested that the most secret things should also be the most sought after and that they knew of the most accessible means by which to obtain such knowledge. At a time when transparency (or, at least, pretensions to it) was increasingly presented as the goal for makers and purveyors of reliable knowledge, these writers revelled in the enticing promises of the hidden, or arcane.³ The works of seventeenth-century physiognomers, shorthand masters, astrologers, and writers of secret history demonstrate both the persistence of belief in human carnality and emerging, more

¹ For more on the uncertainty of knowledge see Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law and Literature* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983); Francis Dolan, *True Relations: Reading, Literature and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 5. Dolan notes uncertainty “was a crucial part of how the seventeenth-century understood itself.”

² Nathaniel Culverwell, *Spiritual Opticks* (Cambridge, 1651), 12. The reference is to I Corinthians 13:12.

³ For more the public image of scientific transparency, see, Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Michael Hunter, “Robert Boyle and Secrecy,” and Michelle Dimeo, “Openness vs. Secrecy in the Hartlib Circle: Revisiting ‘Democratic Baconianism’ in Interregnum England,” in Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, eds., *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science, 1500-1800* (London: Ashgate, 2011), 87-124.

optimistic Enlightenment notions regarding human ability, often existing in creative tension with each other. Given the degree to which belief in the Fall and the ensuing corruption of human nature and reason dogged seventeenth-century England's pursuit of knowledge, how did custodians of arcane knowledge market their skills to people who desired insight and guidance? More often than not, this took the form of defining what knowledge and reason were and of assuring readers that the information they desired was readily accessible to them: housed either in their bodies, minds and souls or in their ability to read signs, weigh rumours and make informed conjectures. Growing optimism regarding human learning and comprehension assisted curators of arcane knowledge in suggesting that any of their readers could decode cryptic messages. Ultimately, however, it was emphasis on human limitation which energized and legitimated commentary on the endless search for secret information, particularly because it facilitated a more inclusive approach.

This study questions how fascination with secrets, knowledge, and reason materialized in different genres and amongst different authors. It analyzes seventeenth-century works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history with an eye to the ways in which access to arcane knowledge was presented and marketed. It also considers other sources which provide context, such as printed sermons and philosophical treatises. Some of the well-studied writers of these works, such as the natural theologian and philosopher John Wilkins and the shorthand master Thomas Shelton, are familiar to scholars for their larger intellectual influence. Others, such as the astrologer William

Lilly and the Whig polemicist John Phillips, are known for their political scheming.⁴ Many of the authors are less familiar to modern scholars, but their works were well-known to contemporaries and reflected interests and concerns which dominated seventeenth-century print culture. Together with publications on arcane knowledge, manuscript sources such as astrological casebooks, personal and official correspondence (in the State Papers and the Bodleian Library's Ashmole Manuscripts, for instance) also shape and inform this study. These various print and manuscript sources come from a variety of seventeenth-century political contexts but they all demonstrate the centrality of religious belief, the allure of arcane knowledge and diverse ways in which increasing confidence in human reason intersected with growing scepticism regarding absolute certainty.⁵ They reveal how the push and pull of confidence and scepticism could be engaged for different political ends, as well as for personal profit.

How humans could know things, whether things could ever be known with certainty, and what things were appropriate to be known were questions which permeated all aspects of intellectual, religious, political and daily life. Nathaniel Culverwell's paradoxical desire to situate religion as both more incomprehensible and more certain than human opinion can be seen as a response to the divisions and "enthusiasms" of the Civil War years (during which his writings first took shape) and are also reflective of an evolving, yet persistent belief in postlapsarian human frailty. Particularly interesting,

⁴ Although he shifted his alliances and was friend and advisor to people of various political backgrounds, Lilly's legacy is largely linked to his republicanism during the civil wars. Phillips, an adversary of Lilly's, aided Thomas Oates and was investigated, but never convicted, for his involvement in the Popish Plot.

⁵ Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, finds that England's seventeenth-century intellectual climate was distinctive in its treatment and embrace of uncertainty and in its preparedness "to face the imperfections of all human knowledge and, nevertheless, to seek that intermediate goal which they called moral certainty," 272.

however, is the apparent tension between conjecture as something humanly fallible and the insistence that things did not need to be comprehensively known or understood to be true. Arcane knowledge recognized the limits on human intellectual ability and offered ways around them. It was attractive because it could be manipulated, because it allowed people to believe that they might be the only ones who truly knew how to approach and apply it and especially because it was presented as difficult to access, yet nevertheless open to all. Access to arcane knowledge was often premised on the belief that humans could never fully comprehend divine secrets, but could, and should, attempt to uncover as much as possible, for “the more knowledge we have of the things for which we praise God [such as the order of Creation, and the stirrings of grace], the more we praise him with understanding.”⁶ Scholars such as Stephen Shapin, Barbara Shapiro and Peter Harrison have noted the degrees to which increased focus on human uncertainty and cultural assumptions, such as those regarding the Fall, shaped and inspired elite approaches to knowledge.⁷ This study argues that similar concepts stimulated a variety of writers who were intent on reaching and informing a broader audience.

Arcane knowledge shared and drew from characteristics of the period’s craft knowledge and empirical research – a focus on probabilities, interest in the subjective nature of knowledge and experiential reliance on the senses (particularly sight).⁸ It also

⁶ Richard Carpenter, *Astrology proved Harmless, Useful, Pious* (1657), 15.

⁷ See, for instance, Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*; Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁸ For more on the recognition and employment of subjectivity and personal passions, see Vera Keller, *Knowledge and the Public Interest, 1575-1725* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), summarized on page 7; Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*. In her discussion of “sensory apprehension,” Pamela Smith notes that tasting, “smelling, seeing, feeling and even hearing God—gave a kind of certain knowledge that words and propositional knowledge could not.” Pamela Smith, “What is a Secret? Secrets and Craft Knowledge in Early Modern Europe,” in Leong and Rankin, eds., *Secrets and Knowledge*, 50.

drew on traditional approaches to knowledge which prioritized inquiry into the causes of known “facts” over uncovering something new. The “facts” which certain writers sought to make intelligible, however, were changing. It was known, for instance, that God ordered the universe through providence and revealed His purposes in the scriptures. But how did providence work? And were there ways to reliably access divine knowledge without depending on external authorities? It was known that human reason and intentions were corrupt, but to what degree and through what means was hidden corruption both surmountable in one’s self and detectable in others? One essential area in which some avenues of arcane knowledge differed from both empirical and traditionally scholastic approaches to learning was in its suggestion that anyone, potentially, had the tools at their disposal to uncover invisible secrets and provide the reliable testimony needed for their verification. The credibility of popular testimony regarding empirical knowledge was increasingly doubted and there was belief that “the sublime mysteries of the universe were beyond the capacities of the common people” but to various writers of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history, popular testimony and capability were especially suited to the uncovering of secrets.⁹ The peddlers of arcane knowledge who form the focus of this study suggested that, with correct guidance and instruction, people could – and should – learn to rely on their own conclusions and not be swayed by external input or comparison.¹⁰

⁹ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 266. For more on trust in the necessity of, yet “acute anxiety” regarding the need for, testimony, see Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, 211-228.

¹⁰ In this sense, and as will be discussed below, seventeenth-century writers of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history can be compared to sixteenth-century religious reformers who argued for the primacy of the scriptures and for how individual conscience – one’s relationship and duty to God – could take precedence over worldly authority.

ii. Authors and Audience

Unlike the majority of the authors studied here, the early seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist Nathaniel Culverwell with whom I opened, did not (aside from his engagement with theological questions) publicly delve into and attempt to spread access to arcane knowledge. Yet he touched on many of the themes discussed in this study. Furthermore, his attempts to establish or redefine the parameters of certainty in the face of divine mystery are representative of a larger cultural concern that helped create the audience for the works discussed here. This study attempts, whenever possible, to recreate the assumptions, beliefs and desires of the myriad readers who were attracted to vernacular works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history. For the most part, these assumptions are established through the writings of authors rather than through first-hand reader accounts. This is a shortcoming that is difficult to overcome.¹¹

There is sufficient basis, however, to suggest that people were drawn to works which encouraged degrees of self-diagnosis, self-education, and self-discernment. Studies into sixteenth-century books of secrets, for instance, have demonstrated their prominence as a kind of early modern “how to” genre. As William Eamon, Alison Kavey and others have shown, books which taught ways in which to make the world more predictable and

¹¹ In his call for greater attention to a history of audiences, Jonathan Rose has noted that questions surrounding how readers absorbed and applied the things they read are not only difficult to ascertain, but also largely overlooked by many modern scholars. People did not always read books as their authors may have wished or intended. Jonathan Rose, “Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 53 no. 1 (1992): 47-70, 64. For summary of some of the difficulties and opportunities surrounding questions on why, how and through what means people read, spread and interpreted information, see, James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor, eds., *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-22. Kevin Sharpe notes the difficulties in delving into the accounts and practices of readers, particularly since readership is difficult to generalise. Reading is both a personal and cultural action and “is specific to moments and places.” Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 34-62, 36.

manageable were steady sellers. They bridged “high” and “low” cultural divides and attracted both elite and non-elite readers.¹² Jennifer Richards has argued that early modern readers approached publications of this sort (and indeed books in general) as interactive instruments; as something that would provide useable knowledge or skill. What was considered practical in this context included those works which not only offered hands-on information, but also, or even solely, inspired “healthy rumination” or restorative self-reflection.¹³ The line between practical “hands-on” and contemplative use was, as Lori Anne Ferrell has shown, far from clear. Her study of the relationship between Calvinist divinity and English instructional manuals demonstrates not only the general physicality of Protestant devotion but also the degree to which its instruction, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, employed belief in the certainty and understanding garnered by meaningful touch.¹⁴ The notion of difficult theology as a practical skill that could be taught, internalized and externalized through the combined motions of the introspective mind and hand was manifested in England’s first published system of shorthand, Timothy Bright’s *Characterie* (1588). Bright’s “how to” manual, as Ferrell demonstrates, indicates the alignment of secular and sacred skill and suggests relationships between meditation, the formation of thought, and practical instruction.¹⁵

¹² William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 105; Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550-1600* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 10-16, 57.

¹³ Jennifer Richards, “Useful Books: Reader Vernacular Regimens in Sixteenth-Century England” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 73 no. 2 (2012): 247-271, 248-250.

¹⁴ Lori Anne Ferrell, “How-To Books, Protestant Kinetics, and the Art of Theology,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 71 no. 4 (2008): 591-606.

¹⁵ Lori Anne Ferrell, “Method as Knowledge: Scribal Theology, Protestantism, and the Reinvention of Shorthand in Sixteenth-Century England,” in Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt, eds., *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects and Texts, 1400-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Richards's focus on medical regimens, like Ferrell's discussion of Bright, is centered on the sixteenth century, but the characteristics of vernacular print culture and reader expectation which they describe are applicable to the publications considered in this study. Seventeenth-century writings on physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history variously provided interactive tools with which to consider and moderate one's negative tendencies, expedite the discovery and digestion of spiritual insight, and anticipate or clarify confusing events. Each sought (and would have been expected) to impart practical skills, outline useable knowledge, and provide information worth contemplating and analyzing more closely.

As mention of sixteenth-century books of secrets suggests, the desire for some of the "how to" concepts sold by seventeenth-century physiognomers, shorthand masters, astrologers and writers of secret histories was not unprecedented. Nevertheless, as studies which explore the impact of print and political culture indicate, the potential audience for such works was broadening, as was access to them. Jason Peacey's recent assessment of the seventeenth-century's social and geographical "promiscuity of print" finds that widespread access to topical, popular, and influential publications was likely much greater than previously imagined.¹⁶ Over the course of the seventeenth century the book trade was periodically hampered by disasters such as the Great Fire of London (1666) and government attempts to limit its growth, but on the whole, it blossomed and grew. Ian Green estimates that the sixty years between 1641 and 1700, produced two and a half times more printed editions than in the previous century and a half.¹⁷ Print generally

¹⁶ Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90.

¹⁷ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 13.

became cheaper over time and as Tessa Watt has noted, lengthier books became more affordable as they aged and lost favour among London's most fashionable circles – a factor which would have affected some of the larger publications considered in this study.¹⁸ While literacy rates, print runs, and cost all influenced access, consideration of these factors alone does not adequately account for different and creative ways in which published materials were communally read, shared and freely distributed.¹⁹ As Adam Fox has argued, early modern England experienced a “dynamic continuum” between oral and literate cultures – each reinforced the other.²⁰ The nexus between rumour and published news is particularly evident in this study's examination of secret histories. Peacey, Watt, and Fox are primarily interested in cheap chapbooks, pamphlets, and broadsides and, while various sources in this study fit within these parameters, many do not. Sharing and free distribution, however, was not a preserve of cheap print. Furthermore, although many of the works discussed in this study were not the smallest and cheapest on the market, they were offered in widely affordable formats and could regularly be purchased second-hand. Late seventeenth-century book auction catalogues, such as those from the libraries of coal merchant Thomas Britton and lawyers Ralph Hough and Roger Belwood, contain some large and expensive folio works of arcane knowledge. The majority of works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history found in these

¹⁸ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 262.

¹⁹ Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics*, 29-54; Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 24-27.

²⁰ Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 50.

catalogues, however, are grouped in the quarto and especially the cheaper octavo and duodecimo categories.²¹

In his examination of reader engagement with physiognomy through such things as book lists and marginalia, Martin Porter finds that the large range of prices, formats, and categorizations among works of physiognomy suggests that they were made available to people of varying social and economic backgrounds.²² Although such works defied consistent classification, they were regularly listed among weighty works of theology. In the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, they adapted according to the demands of the market and shifting approaches to knowledge and could, for instance, adopt a more playful form geared towards female and parlour room readers. *The Court of Curiosity* (1669) included games and questionnaires drawn from works of physiognomy and astrology and was dedicated to the “Ladies of our British Isles.” In “this our Modern Age,” it stated, arcane knowledge was especially suitable for women as a form of “Innocent Divertisement” and “Rural Recreation.” It “was not invented to unhinge the Brain, or torture the Phancie; but rather to Divert and Exercise in your Ladyships that pleasant Ague of the Diaphragm, Laughter.”²³ As this suggests, a similar trend can be traced for works of astrology. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, the fast growing market for cheaply printed astrological almanacs and other astrological writings ensured that men and women from most walks of life were fairly well versed in

²¹ J. Bullard, *A catalogue of the library of Ralph Hough, Esq* (1699), 5, 47-52, 54; J. Bullard, *The library of Mr. Tho. Britton, smallcoal-man* (1694), 13, 15, 25-27; J. Bullard, *A Catalogue of the Library of Roger Belwood, of the Middle-Temple, Serjeant at Law* (1694), 15, 17, 22-24, 48.

²² Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 110-119.

²³ J.G., *The Court of Curiositie* (1669), A3v.

at least the basics of astrological prediction.²⁴ Indeed, the cultural purchase and credibility of astrology was deeply rooted in early modern popular, intellectual and religious practices and pursuits.²⁵ Seventeenth-century manuscript recipe books, notebooks, medical casebooks and diaries illustrate the widespread influence of astrological readership, thought, and practice across the social spectrum.²⁶

Although intellectual interest in astrology never completely disappeared, in the latter half of the seventeenth century it faltered. As numerous historians have indicated, this occurred for myriad, sometimes contradictory, reasons, including pushback against the perceived enthusiasms of the Civil War, technological developments, and changing intellectual interests and approaches.²⁷ However, it remained popular among (and was

²⁴ See, for instance, Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 335-382; Alice Chapman, "Marking Time: Astrology, Almanacs and English Protestantism" *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol 60 No 4 (Winter 2007), p 1257-1290; Louise Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine: 1550-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 22. Curry notes that "among radicals and mainstream alike ... astrology found a large and sympathetic constituency."

²⁵ Paul Monod, for instance, notes the viability of astrology as a successful business at least until 1689 and demonstrates how its complex and flexible relationships with mainstream thought and practice helped maintain its role in seventeenth-century intellectual culture. Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 53-81; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 383-424.

²⁶ Elaine Leong, "Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household," *Centaurus* vol. 55 (2013): 81-103; Lauren Kassell, "Casebooks in Early Modern England: Medicine, Astrology and Written Records," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* vol. 88 no. 4 (2014): 595-625; Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory, eds., *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye, 1652-1699* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Wellcome, Astrological diary of a Wapping clothier, Norris Purslow, MS 4021; WRO, Notebook of Lady Cecilia Bindloss, MS D/D st C 2/2.

²⁷ Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth-Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 12, 272-282; Bernard Capp, *Astrology*, 238, 255-259; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power*, 59-86; Paul Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*, 134-144.

marketed towards) fashionable men and women as a kind of parlour game, as well as in the daily practices and outlooks of common people.²⁸ Changes in readership and marketing were far from precise. There was still strong astrological interest among leading intellectuals and antiquaries such as Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) and John Aubrey (1626-1697). Although Lady Cecelia Bindloss's (d. 1730) astrological queries could certainly be categorized as a fashionable hobby (sandwiched as they are between transcriptions of bawdy songs and her gardening notes), her library of weighty books on arcane knowledge also suggest her desire to ensure that her use of astrology was grounded in the most current intellectual methods.²⁹ Although, as scholars such as Martin Porter suggest, the focus of divinatory sciences shifted from intellectual endeavour to fashionable entertainment, the trivializing effects of such a shift can be overstated. Regular engagement with such practices, whether for intellectual stimulation, medical information, spiritual succor, revelation, or amusement, ensured that they continued to influence the period's mental perspectives and approaches to secret information. In particular, such multifaceted engagement helped establish a healthy combination of conjecture and uncertainty as a realistic way for fallen humans to approach otherwise impenetrable knowledge. It also grounded a do-it-yourself approach to the acquisition of arcane knowledge in the daily lives of common people.

Shorthand masters and writers of secret histories were aware of the continued popularity and appreciation for divinatory sciences and, regardless of their own varied views on those subjects, they understood the appeal held out by promises to provide

²⁸ Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power*, 96-105; Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 254.

²⁹ WRO, MS D/D st C 2/2.

access to secret or privileged information. Shorthand and works of secret history were distinctive from other genres discussed here in that they appealed to a fascination in secrecy as a practice in and of itself: learning shorthand or “secret writing” could be a way to keep one’s own secrets, while secret histories promised to uncover what powerful figures preferred to keep hidden. Shorthand manuals and secret histories also followed a different trajectory than that of physiognomy and astrology. Over the course of the seventeenth century, the latter two lost prominence while the former were on the rise.³⁰ In the seventeenth century, as Michael Mendle has demonstrated, shorthand constituted something of an information revolution.³¹ It was taught in schools and attracted not only students and teachers, but also diarists, the growing community of news reporters, and professionals such as lawyers, clerks, and statesmen. Andrea McKenzie, for instance, has recently discussed how the Whig MP and lawyer George Treby (c. 1644-1700) used and adapted shorthand systems previously published by Jeremiah Rich. This was during Treby’s work as Chairman of the Committee of Secrecy, tasked with investigating the Popish Plot (1678-1681).³² Shorthand was especially popular among Protestant

³⁰ It could be argued that similar to physiognomy and astrology, shorthand eventually became “feminized” but this did not occur until the images of female typists and secretaries really took hold over the course of the twentieth century. See, for instance, Rosemary Crompton, “The Feminisation of the Clerical Labour Force since the Second World War” in Gregory Anderson, ed., *The White Blouse Revolution: Female Office Workers Since 1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 121-143.

³¹ Michael Mendle, “News and the Pamphlet Culture of Mid-Seventeenth-Century England,” in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron, *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), 63.

³² Andrea McKenzie, “Inside the Committee of Secrecy Investigating the Popish Plot: Deciphering George Treby’s Shorthand,” unpublished paper presented at the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies in Santa Barbara, California, April 2018. See also, Frances Henderson, “Reading, and Writing, the Text of the Putney Debates,” in Michael Mendle, ed., *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers, and the English State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36-50; Mendle, “The ‘prints’ of the Trials: The Nexus of Politics, Religion, Law and Information in Late Seventeenth-Century England,” in Jason McElligott, ed., *Fear, Exclusion and Revolution: Roger Morrice and Britain in the 1680s* (London: Routledge, 2016); R. Latham and W. Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (11 Vols., London: HarperCollins, 1970-1983).

churchgoers who judiciously took note of, and sometimes published, lengthy sermons. As Chapter Two demonstrates, various shorthand masters emphasized the union between the skill and practice of shorthand and religious devotion. Diaries and notebooks from the period indicate that shorthand was used by both men and women and, while contemporary satirists often associated it with Puritanical pretensions, shorthand's appeal transcended religious and political boundaries. Lois Potter, for instance, has noted its involvement in the creation and sustainment of royalist communities and literary genres.³³

Secret histories also enjoyed a widespread appeal. They intentionally mocked, and often explicitly attempted to deconstruct conventions of more traditional histories, often written by political insiders and intended for elite audiences. As Martine Brownley has noted, readership for politically driven memoirs, polemics, and secret histories expanded from the Restoration onwards.³⁴ Secret historians specifically targeted popular, more inclusive audiences, both with their willingness to expose the salacious sorts of details which people were eager to read and by publishing in smaller textual formats which were cheaper as well as easier to conceal. Paul Griffiths has noted that although secrecy is always an essential aspect of daily, political relations, there are times when the uncertainty of authority and the interplays between secrecy and publicity which help uphold (and undermine) it are “more keenly felt.”³⁵ These times breed increased

³³ Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing Royalist Literature, 1641–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), especially chapters 2-5.

³⁴ Martine Brownley, “Secret History and Seventeenth-Century Historiography” in Rebecca Bullard and Rachel Carnell, eds., *The Secret History in Literature, 1660-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 33-46.

³⁵ Paul Griffiths, “Secrecy and Authority in Late Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century London” *Historical Journal* vol. 40 no. 4. (1997): 925-951.

speculation and desire for information, regardless of how fragmentary or insincere it might be. Secret histories came to the fore in the second half of the seventeenth century – a period that witnessed Charles II’s declarations of indulgence and his secret diplomacy, the Exclusion Crisis, the Popish and Rye House Plots, the Monmouth Uprising, and the warming pan scandal. Contemporary writers of secret histories gauged the tenor of the times and sought to strip monarchical authority of its aura of sanctity. Brownley and Rebecca Bullard have noted that in parodying traditional histories, casting doubt on historical accounts, regularly failing to live up to their divulging promises, and in emphasizing that secrets – the very things they ostensibly peddled – are often the preserve of deceptive and treacherous conspirators, secret histories regularly and often intentionally undermined their own credibility.³⁶ This dissertation argues that they did so not only to cast doubt on traditional structures of authority, but also to suggest that common speculation, conjecture and personal intuition or opinion – familiar aspects of arcane knowledge more generally – had just as much of a role in the public sphere as so called rational discourse. Indeed, they implied that the two were more alike than they were opposed. Exploration into the ways in which physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history each sought to engage audiences demonstrates how shifting seventeenth-century approaches to knowledge, particularly ones which encouraged speculation and inference, both informed those who claimed to purvey arcane knowledge and catered to the interests and desires of their readers.

iii. The Certainty of Signs

³⁶ Martine Brownley, “Secret History,” 41; Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Before more optimistic Enlightenment notions of rational religion gained ground, from about the eighteenth century, God's ways and ultimate rewards were unknowable largely because the human actions which precipitated the Fall forever blinded and blunted human comprehension. At present, wrote the seventeenth-century Huguenot theologian Moses Amyraut, humans "see nothing but the fringes of those sciences and the superficialities or outside of the wisdom of God in the subjects that are explained in them."³⁷ God did, of course, reveal certain things to certain people and regularly provided them with opportunities to witness a fragment of the glories and marvels which awaited the elect after death, but it was only the final release from one's "earthly vile body" which could, and would, reveal all. Even St. Paul, wrote Amyraut, "who hath explained to us so clearly the Mysteries of Religion keeps those other secrets hidden as far surpassing our present condition, and the capacity of our understanding."³⁸ Although the human capacity for certain knowledge was severely restricted by sin, it did not necessarily preclude some kinds of certainty. Faith, wrote the Presbyterian divine Richard Baxter in 1660, is made up of secret and invisible things, but was, still "a certain infallible sort of knowledge."³⁹ It was more powerful than "presence, possession and sight" and could reveal things that were otherwise hidden. "Let the things invisible," he wrote, "be your daily solace and the satisfaction of your souls."⁴⁰ The notion that the contemplation of divine mysteries and secrets necessitated a faith-based approach to knowledge and could also provide a sort of instinctive certainty excited the various authors which populate this study.

³⁷ Moses Amyraut, *The evidence of things not seen* (1700), 205.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

³⁹ Richard Baxter, *The Life of Faith* (1660), 6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

This dissertation is inspired by studies which discuss how grappling with the increasingly blurred line between certain and probable knowledge was characteristic of seventeenth-century thought. Barbara Shapiro, for instance, defines the intellectual culture of seventeenth-century England as one which increasingly weighed factual propositions according to their combined degrees of probability and certainty. Truth and opinion were no longer clearly defined opposites; rather, aspects of both were increasingly understood as foundational to how and what things were known. Furthermore, the turn towards the privileging of probability over certitude – often associated with the New Philosophy of Francis Bacon and his heirs – was discernable in early and mid-seventeenth-century theological discussions before it shaped post-Restoration approaches to scientific knowledge.⁴¹ The present study similarly privileges religious thought and culture as a dominant frame of reference and intellectual stimulant. It reinforces, for instance, aspects of Peter Harrison’s work on the degree to which belief in the Fall shaped and propelled the period’s intellectual endeavours.⁴²

One area in which this work broadens our understanding of themes raised by Shapiro and Harrison is in its focus on arcane knowledge. It explores some of the most popular genres of writing and action which dealt with arcane, enigmatic or secretive matters. Physiognomy (the subject of Chapter One) explored the significance of the marks and features on human bodies and ostensibly revealed people’s insides by their outside features. Shorthand (Chapter Two) focussed on personal notes, thoughts and

⁴¹ Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*. See also, Nicholas McDowell, “Self-Defeating Scholarship? Antiscripturism and Anglican Apologetics from Hooker to the Latitudinarians,” in Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith and Rachel Willie, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 237 – 256.

⁴² Harrison, *The Fall of Man*.

inspirations of spiritual concern and, in so doing, methodized the uncovering of meaning. Astrology (Chapter Three) delved into the mysterious relationship between celestial and earthly realms, charting fates and fortunes by the movements of stars and planets. And secret histories (Chapter Four) promised to uncover plots and taught readers how to peer into the closed recesses of life at court. I am interested not only in how religious assumptions and increased focus on probabilities helped characterise the nature of these endeavours, but also in how such concerns shaped the ways in which such endeavours were made palatable or marketable to the general public, be it for principled, propagandistic or purely monetary reasons. This work also breaks new ground in its interest in how purveyors of arcane knowledge placed importance upon the careful observation and interpretation of signs and, in so doing, encouraged trust in the reader's own powers of discernment (honed and guided, of course, by their own publications).

The early modern preoccupation with revelatory signs or “providential tokens” has received considerable attention, often with a focus on the degree to which pre-Reformation beliefs did not disappear so much as they accommodated Protestant belief and practice.⁴³ Alexandra Walsham demonstrates how older customs and patterns of thought were renewed and refashioned according to shifting ideological and political currents. Natural phenomena, prophecies, political occurrences and physical marks were often thought to signify more than met the eye. If properly interpreted, they could reveal facets of God's providential designs. At the very least, they were constant reminders of

⁴³ See, for instance, Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Bob Scribner, “The Reformation, Popular Magic and the ‘Disenchantment of the world’,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (1992-1993): 475-94; Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding their Peace* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 143-154.

God's omnipotent presence and of how little humans actually knew. The varied seventeenth-century efforts to interpret and regularly reframe signs speak to religious and political factionalism, intellectual change, burgeoning public spheres, and the cultivation of public opinion. William E. Burns has demonstrated the importance of mysterious but meaningful occurrences to the period's religious and political contests.⁴⁴ Religious, intellectual and political attempts to assert authority over the interpretation of signs and to strip them of their providential meaning did not eradicate their traditional allure as revealing wonders, but prodigies and ostensibly divine occurrences were, nevertheless, considerably reconceptualised. What had been a common cultural practice increasingly came to be a marker of difference. Over the course of the Civil Wars, contrasting interpretations of signs differentiated mainstream Anglicans from Puritans and other Protestant sectarians, with the former labelling the beliefs of the latter as enthusiastic and fanatical, and the latter accusing the former of superstition and popery. Simultaneously, developments in natural philosophy and politics stigmatized providential meanings ascribed to certain signs as vulgar, superstitious, credulous, and feminine. Elements of these changes are noticeable in the works studied here, particularly in the ways in which they sought to establish their religious and intellectual validity. These changes, however, also opened a window of opportunity. In a period in which people still felt drawn to "providential tokens" and the various ways of knowing they inspired, efforts to reimagine their continued relevance and persuasive importance were particularly attractive. This was a service which physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history each provided, albeit in different ways. A focus on the reality and ever-present influence of the lure of

⁴⁴ William E Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics and Providence in England 1657-1727* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 97-107.

secret and arcane knowledge to human curiosity was a key element of their endeavours, as was their distinction between God’s secrets and those of humans. Secret knowledge, whether held by God or people, was privileged knowledge, but it was a privilege which could be widened. Human carnality stressed the need for searching and yearning while simultaneously placing checks and balances on it – only those secrets which God felt humans could reasonably obtain would be revealed. Human secrets, while difficult to uncover with complete certainty, were more easily within reach.

Exploration into the assimilation of older beliefs regarding signs and portents in post-Reformation England reveals parallels to how signs were purposed and repurposed by the authors studied here. As Burns has noted, critics and sceptics of the various meanings ascribed to wonders had not merely to contend with particular authorities on interpretation, but, rather, on personal preferences and assumptions or “habits of mind” which often superseded religious or political affiliations.⁴⁵ Burns notes such customs as the interpretation of providential signs, to which I also add such things as active reading and the mining of texts for practical information (as discussed above). It was to these habitual ways of thinking, knowing and applying which physiognomers, astrologers, shorthand writers and secret historians variously appealed. While the processes of accommodation and manipulation they tackled were haunted by the religious complexities and fallout of Reformation and revolution, my focus is on how the significance of signs and skills was sustained and brought to bear on contemporary thought regarding probability and access. Part of this process was a renewed focus on providence which positioned it as God’s way of compassionately working through

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

secondary causes, such as human intellect and the movements of the stars, rather than regularly and harshly interfering in human affairs through such things as earthquakes, draughts and plagues.⁴⁶ As Shapiro notes, “God became more distant as he became more benevolent.”⁴⁷ This, arguably, opened up a space within which ordinary people, armed with the evidence and the tools provided by works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history could themselves access arcane knowledge.

Rather than positioning suggestive signs as fragments of unobtainable knowledge which could only be conveyed by stimulating wonder or fear in an otherwise unknowing human, the authors studied here were more liable to emphasize the potential of human reason and the likelihood that signs could be carefully collected, studied and weighed in order to establish certain probabilities. In their work on wonders, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park have shown how the seventeenth century witnessed a “unique moment” when phenomena which elucidated the boundaries between things known and unknown became valued commodities of inquiry and important stimuli for further investigation.⁴⁸ The authors in this study embody such a moment, but, arguably, they went even further. They did not necessarily wait for wondrous or mysterious occurrences to inspire them. Instead, they plotted ways in which to foresee, identify and classify signs and wonders. Rather than being at the behest of revelatory events, their works suggested that people

⁴⁶ On the often “eclectic” response to early modern natural disasters, see Alexandra Walsham, “Deciphering Divine Wrath and Displaying Godly Sorrow: Providentialism and Emotion in Early Modern England,” in Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, eds., *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400-1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁴⁷ Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 87.

⁴⁸ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 13.

could actively seek them out, consider points of overlap, and tune their minds to the chorus of divine wisdom which those signs embodied and in which readers might share.

iv. Secrets, Mystery and the Contours of Arcane Knowledge

What is arcane knowledge? Seventeenth-century definitions of the term “arcane” employed such concepts as “hid, secret, privy, unknown.”⁴⁹ Contemporaries referred to such things as “the profound and arcane meaning of the Scriptures,” the “arcane or centrall actions of God in nature” and “arcane and enigmaticall wisdom.”⁵⁰ It could be said that all knowledge is, at least to some degree, naturally arcane since all things worth knowing are secret until they are discovered and made known. Arcane knowledge, however, is distinct in that while it implies that something can be found, publicized and made known, it inherently entails a degree of impenetrability and requires indirect means of investigation. Arcane sources of knowledge were inherently secretive in that they did have information to share, but would not readily reveal anything. But such knowledge, of course, could be accessed with the right tools. In her study of cryptography manuals, Katherine Ellison notes that seventeenth-century secret writing practices were as much about sharing knowledge as they were about limiting readership.⁵¹ This notion of secrets as being as much about communicating as concealing is one which fits nicely with arcane knowledge more generally.

⁴⁹ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (1661), D6.

⁵⁰ Robert Fludd, *Mosaicall philosophy grounded upon the essentiall truth* (1659), 61, 225; Ralph Cudworth, *The true intellectual system of the universe* (1678), 315.

⁵¹ Katherine Ellison, *A Cultural History of Early Modern English Cryptography Manuals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

Daniel Jütte's study into the early modern period's myriad sources of knowledge and abiding fascination with secrets (even, or especially in the face of calls for transparency on the part of the "new science") makes a distinction between secrets and mysteries. Secrets are things which are purposefully concealed and can (at least in principle) be uncovered, whereas mysteries are in theory wholly unknowable.⁵² Among the majority of writings studied here, however, such distinctions were seldom made, and it is worth noting the degree to which the terms "secret" and "mysterious" were often used synonymously. Physiognomers and astrologers regularly referred to people adept at various sciences as those to whom it was natural to "search after secret things ... penetrate hidden mysteries ... [and] unfold mens secrets."⁵³ They claimed to open windows into "cabinets of mysteries" and to provide insight into "secret sciences."⁵⁴ Shorthand masters and cryptographers spoke of "mysterious and hidden things," as well as secret, yet telling, symbols.⁵⁵ Secret history writers noted how the mysteries and "arcanas" of politics came to light by way of secret, ciphered letters.⁵⁶ They ruminated on how the intrigues of court were mysterious and were made ever more alluring by the veil of secrecy under which they were conducted.⁵⁷ That there often was little clear or consistent distinction between secrets and mystery suggests that complete comprehension

⁵² Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800*, translated by Jeremiah Riemer (New Haven: Yale University press, 2015), 4.

⁵³ Johann Rothmann, *Keiromantia, or, the art of divining* (1652), 120.

⁵⁴ J.S., *The True fortune-teller, or, Guide to knowledge discovering the whole art of chiromancy, physiognomy, metoposcopy and astrology* (1698), 60.

⁵⁵ Noah Bridges, *Stenographie and cryptographie, or The arts of short and secret writing* (1659), 32.

⁵⁶ Varillas, *Anekdotia eterouiaika, or, the secret history of the house of Medicis* (1686), 404.

⁵⁷ Person of quality, *The secret history of the most renowned Q. Elizabeth and the E. of Essex* (1680), 28.

of hidden things was beyond human ability and that the value of endeavours to obtain knowledge lay in the search itself. This was a notion already familiar to Protestant audiences who believed in the spiritual importance of redemptive yearning and these works employed that yearning, at least in part, as a marketing ploy.⁵⁸ People were attracted to the promise that they alone could get access to things, or that they could do so through their own efforts in a kind of a seventeenth-century spiritual do-it-yourself.

The combined use of the terms “secret” and “mystery” is also a reminder of how the boundaries between what was and what was not worth searching after were far from fixed. Mysterious celestial bodies (such as stars and comets), human bodies, scripture, daily occurrences and the intentions of individuals all concealed mysterious secrets which could, with varying degrees of efficacy, be rooted out. The secrets they held, however, could potentially be unwrapped without ever revealing their mysterious and most essential core – God’s overarching design. For the ultimate author of mysteries was, of course, God, and the emphasis of such works on limited human understanding references the impenetrability of His intentions and demonstrated (or at least paid lip service to) official church doctrines which highlighted the need for learned, clerical authority, especially when speculating upon His secrets.

The limitations of human knowledge in things divine, the mysteriousness of God and the ways in which He revealed His secrets through telling signs in scripture, providence and the saving effects of grace, were all matters of contention during the seventeenth century. Catholicism, in the minds of England’s Protestants, was guilty of obscuring things too much. To various English Protestant divines, too great a focus on the

⁵⁸ On the sustained importance of spiritual yearning, see, for instance, Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 80.

unknowability of God was dangerously suggestive of popery. Freethinking philosophers such as John Toland (1670-1722) helped fuel the Restoration's political storms regarding authority and religious toleration by arguing that it was organized religion and church officials, not God, which worked in secrecy and created mystery.⁵⁹ Writing at the close of the century, Toland was informed by years of heated debate regarding relationships between religion, revelation and reason. His conclusions differed greatly from those of theologians like Nathaniel Culverwell, who maintained that reason alone, particularly faulty human reason, was not enough to lead people to salvation. In particular, Toland's opinions regarding the extent to which "probability is not knowledge," and his claim that probability and certainty were complete opposites, were much too stark for writers who favoured more flexible understandings of what constituted and led to knowledge.

John Toland is worth mentioning, however, because the beliefs and assumptions with which he wrestled were similar to those of the authors studied here. His convictions are an indication (or reminder) that exploring similar subjects, questions, and concerns did not necessarily lead people to the same conclusions. Within the works studied here, we can discern the intellectual influences often associated with "new science" as well as contemporary religious and political controversy. Equally noticeable are the nods to traditional and/or different ways of accessing and making knowledge. It was not a foregone conclusion which instruments or avenues of knowledge would be most effective or appealing to the greatest number of people and purveyors of arcane knowledge had a variety of approaches from which to choose. Toland denigrated mystery as a corrupt

⁵⁹ John Toland, *Christianity not mysterious* (1696); For more on Toland's reception, significance, and political context, see, Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Michael Brown, *A Political Biography of John Toland* (London: Routledge, 2015).

construct of the powerful to deceive the ignorant and the credulous, and some writers discussed here, particularly the authors of secret histories, expressed similar sentiments. The writings studied here reflect a comparable impulse to encourage widespread inquiry into apparently mysterious matters in an effort to dispel confusion. However, they also paradoxically encouraged belief in the reality of some things – particularly divine things – which would always be inaccessible to human rational faculties and the important role of mystery in encouraging the exercise of reason.

v. Reason and Conjecture

To physiognomers, reason was generally understood as the ability to govern oneself and to exert self-control. All humans, like all animals, were led by base instincts, but what set people apart from the rest of creation was their potential to contend with those instincts and attempt to overcome them. The eclectic translator and physiognomer Thomas Hill (c. 1528-c. 1574), for instance, wrote that “reason hath made man to differ from the brutishe generation and therefore more excellent, but by his disabilitie and weake ruling of himselfe, the other is his superior. The beast doth all thinges, by the instinct and provocation of nature: Man without reason, not able to bridle hys sensualitie, degenerates from that he ought to bee.”⁶⁰ Contemporary astrologers regularly defined reason as the ability to weigh probabilities and make dependable judgements. “Rational conjecture” – as opposed to “conjecture at rovers” (i.e., at random) – could be synonymous with reason.⁶¹ In shorthand manuals, reason was regularly aligned with the ability to probe, inquire and look beyond the immediately visible. Physiognomers and astrologers

⁶⁰ Thomas Hill, *The contemplation of mankind contayning a singular discourse after the art of phisiognomie* (1571), iii.

⁶¹ William Lilly, *Mr. Lillies late prophecy come to pass* (1673), 6.

largely held fast to the notion that reason was a gift from God, something very closely tied to the state of a person's soul, and that the most reasonable were also the godliest. There are elements of this belief among shorthand writers as well. What really comes to the fore in their manuals, however, is the degree to which reason – the ability to perceive meaning – can be sharpened by human application and industry. Among secret historians, reason emerges as the ability to make assessments according to self-evident things. Like astrologers, secret historians applauded carefully-weighted judgements, but consciously presented their material as less unintelligible than the movements of stars and planets.

Defining what was (and was not) self-evident was a prominent preoccupation among these writers. Different writers prioritized different aspects of what reason was at different times, and elements of each can be detected among the various works studied here. Good self-government, judgement, inquiry and assessment might all lead to increased knowledge of arcane things, but they were not depicted as an end in themselves. They did not eliminate mystery, but rather made it manageable and delineated how it could lead to revelation. Significantly, the authors studied here suggested – albeit to different degrees – that these various characteristics of reason were ones which all humans could employ, particularly if they used the author's work to become well versed in which signs were worth studying.

Although physiognomy has not received the same amount of scholarly attention as astrology, it is widely understood that both were closely intertwined and often drew from the same sources of information. The connection between these two sister-sciences and instructional writings on shorthand and the accounts of “secret” court intrigues and political maneuverings may seem more tenuous. The grouping of these various genres

within this study points to an important seventeenth-century preoccupation; namely, seeking access to knowledge that was apparently hidden or secret. I initially thought my interests lay in the fate and fortunes of sciences which have been earmarked as “occult” by writers such as Keith Thomas and Paul Monod.⁶² However, the more I moved beyond the (now) well-established fact that occult knowledge continued to attract considerable attention in the seventeenth century and instead began to ask how different writers peddled access to that knowledge, the more it became apparent that contemporaries also craved access to branches of arcane knowledge not generally recognized as “occult.”

Throughout the seventeenth century, physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret histories promised to afford readers access to secret or privileged information. All were popular among various levels of society. These genres permeated seventeenth-century life and culture and each elicited praise, scorn and satire in turn. Various factors drew audiences to these works – political convictions, religious self-examination, the pressures of daily life, and morbid curiosity to name a few. While some of these themes have been explored by such scholars as Martin Porter, Bernard Capp, Michael Mendle, Peter Lake, Alastair Bellany, and Thomas Cogswell, this study is new not only in that it examines various sources that have hitherto been largely neglected, but also because it asks different questions.⁶³ First, it addresses the ways in which physiognomers, astrologers, shorthand masters and writers of secret histories navigated and employed the

⁶² Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Paul Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*.

⁶³ Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul*; Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*; Michael Mendle, “News and the pamphlet culture of mid-seventeenth century England”; Mendle, “The ‘prints’ of the Trials”; Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?: Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *Murder of King James I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

contemporary tensions between certainty and knowing. They suggested that since absolute certainty, due to the Fall, was illusory, reason and revelation were furnished by conjectural knowledge and intuitive wisdom. Second, it proposes that many of these authors placed authority, albeit variously conscribed, within the hands of broad swathes of readers. They implied that people did not need to be members of a particular religious community or political affiliation or have specialised education or training: they only needed the treatise or manual in question, along with their own interpretive skills. Access to arcane knowledge need not be restricted to the very few.

vi. The Intellectual Climate

Certain key features of the early modern era helped shaped seventeenth-century writings on physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history. The Reformation, for instance, emphasised the authority of scripture and de-emphasised the mediation of the clergy while encouraging the redemptive yearnings of laypeople.⁶⁴ The seventeenth-century breakdown of religious consensus – due, in part, to the legacies of both the Reformation and the Civil Wars – brought concerns regarding the secrecy of authorities and institutions to the fore.⁶⁵ There was suspiciousness and uncertainty surrounding people’s religious and political allegiances and, in various ways, purveyors of arcane knowledge sought to provide direction, coherence and control in familiar and/or

⁶⁴ For more on these topics, see, Paul S. Seaver, *Wallington’s World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985); Leif Dixon, “*Practical Predestinarians in England, c. 1590-1640* (London: Routledge, 2014); Jonathan Willis, *Sin and Salvation in Reformation England* (London: Routledge, 2016); Alec Rylie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, eds., *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Religion and Politics, 1603-1642* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1989); Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky, eds., *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

comforting and accessible ways. Widespread challenges throughout the period to religious and political authorities helped create a climate favourable to the emergence of political parties and propagandizing.⁶⁶ The abovementioned *Court of Curiosity* (1669), for instance, associated arcane knowledge with light amusement or female entertainment in part because diminishing its power and influence as a reliable source of information served royalist political interests. Licensed by press censor and Tory propagandist Roger L'Estrange, the publication was re-issued in 1681, at the height of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis. Tory propaganda at that time ascribed the fanaticism associated with providential interpretation, rumour-mongering and secret or subversive speculative knowledge to Whigs. In noting that even those who eagerly pursue the study of the “dark intrigues of State-Politie” often had recourse to arcane knowledge’s “innocent divertissements” in order to have a laugh, *Court of Curiosity* suggested that such enigmatic pursuits were separate from, and not suited to, rational, political engagement. It quietly implied that intelligences which were informed or shaped by these sorts of entertainments were not to be taken seriously; they had no other “foundation to support them but the instable basis of conjecture.”⁶⁷ Within this environment, in which different institutions and traditions (Parliament, the Church, scripture, the law) and groups (Puritans/dissenters, Laudians/Anglicans, Whigs and Tories) jockeyed for position and asserted competing claims to authority, the authors analysed in this study presented their guidance as reliable,

⁶⁶ The literature is vast, but for a recent study of partisan culture, see Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁷ J.G., *The Court of Curiositie* (1669), A3v.

and accessible, in part because it could be adapted by readers to suit their own interests and interpretations.

As the example of Nathaniel Culverwell suggests, the writings studied here reflect types of thought which have been generally grouped under the umbrella labels of Cambridge Platonism, Latitudinarianism and liberal dissent. While the mid-seventeenth-century thinkers whom scholars have retrospectively labelled as Cambridge Platonists – men like Culverwell, Benjamin Whichcote, Ralph Cudworth, and Henry More – differed in important ways from each other, and especially from their later Latitudinarian and liberal dissenting counterparts, they shared certain commonalities in their approaches to knowledge which are also demonstrated in the writings studied here.⁶⁸ In particular, writings on physiognomy, shorthand, astrology, and secret history shared the impulse to align faith and reason and to prioritize human reason as a divine gift. Additionally, the works assessed in this study generally shared, or at least implied the related and somewhat levelling concept that all humans were created with intellectual faculties that could be, if not perfected, at least refined. Their ability to know and discern was already housed within, and merely needed a guided awakening.⁶⁹

Differences of opinion and suspicions about sources of authority – from scripture and personal revelation privileged by Puritans or Protestant sectarians on the one hand,

⁶⁸ For more on these labels and the differences and similarities between the philosophies they signify, see, Sarah Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Louise Hickman, *Eighteenth-Century Dissent and Cambridge Platonism: Reconceiving the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁶⁹ For more on Cambridge Platonism and its relationship to beliefs in revelation and the resourcefulness of human minds, see, Dominic Scott, “Reason, recollection and the Cambridge Platonists,” in Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 139-151.

and the sacraments, Book of Prayer and divine right privileged by conforming Anglicans on the other—encouraged many of the writers discussed here to focus less dogmatically on God’s power and might as opposed to his justice and goodness. As Shapiro has noted, Nathaniel Culverwell and writers of his persuasion were sensitive to the predominance and destructive effects of human confidence and partiality. They generally favoured a less certain approach to knowledge, as well as a view of humanity which stressed its goodness.⁷⁰ They tended to downplay the eternal effects of Original Sin, yet maintained that the effects of the Fall had damaged the divine gift of reason. Efforts to restore a prelapsarian state through living a carefully guided, faithful life were argued to be essential to sharpening reason and obtaining grace. Among these rationalist strains of thought remained a committed belief in God’s mysterious grace as the key to salvation, as well as in the importance of revelation. Without revelation, and especially scriptural revelation, argued Benjamin Whichcote (1609–1683) and his contemporaries, the restoration of reason could never be complete.⁷¹

While strains of thought associated with Cambridge Platonism are certainly apparent within the writings studied here, the fit is sometimes messy. This is most obvious in my discussion of seventeenth-century physiognomy, which outlines the degree to which Original Sin and the innate corruption of humanity took precedence over any discussion of human goodness. Physiognomers did imply that humans could employ their divine gift of reason to draw closer to God, but they were more likely to suggest that

⁷⁰ Barbara Shapiro, “Latitudinarianism and Science in Seventeenth-Century England”, *Past and Present* 40 (1968): 16-41.

⁷¹ Dominic Scott, “Reason, recollection,” 140.

recovery of reason lay in delving into the depths of human depravity rather than in an exploration of human perfectibility. Among astrologers, shorthand masters, and secret history writers, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, a continuing emphasis on traditional assumptions about universal human depravity intersected, often messily, with more optimistic notions. This speaks to the complex nature of seventeenth-century knowledge-making and the varied interests which fed it. While truth, as Steven Shapin has argued, was increasingly associated with educated, rational gentlemen, in these writings reason – or the ability to gain insight, judge claims and understand significant signs – was not necessarily a preserve of the upper-class male.⁷² Although the writers discussed in the present study often sought to situate themselves among the ranks of masculine, “rational” truth-tellers, they also drew promiscuously from and acknowledged the benefit of other sources of information: speculation, intuition, faith, gossip, and the identification and interpretation of meaningful signs all had a role to play.

The works studied here also caution against making straightforward associations between ideas associated with Cambridge Platonism and the growth of a more enlightened and tolerant society. Scholars such as Christopher J. Walker have suggested that the harmonization of reason and religion, which various seventeenth-century intellectuals and writers sought to achieve, was akin to the introduction of moderation, toleration and “humanity” in religion and society at large. The “broad sympathies” associated with such thought “meant a love of reason, and opposition to narrowness and to shrill, hard, self-righteous exclusive dogmatism.”⁷³ The deep and abiding political and

⁷² Stephen Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, 66-86.

⁷³ Christopher J Walker, *Reason and Religion in Late Seventeenth-Century England: The Politics and Theology of Radical Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 11-12.

religious discord which underscores many of the writings studied here, however, are indicative of the degree to which definitions of reason could shift according to context and were often used as political tools.⁷⁴ The obstinate anti-popery and partisanship of the majority of seventeenth-century secret history writers has been noted by various scholars, and astrology is notorious for its involvement in the period's religious and political upheavals.⁷⁵ Seventeenth-century physiognomers and astrologers, such as Richard Saunders and William Lilly, may have been committed to the exercise of reason, but they employed it in the service of various religio-political actors, depending on which was most publicly advantageous.⁷⁶ The calls to reason found within these works are often contingent and partisan rather than universal and consensus-building.

vii. Dissertation Structure

The nature, growth and development of England's public sphere has excited considerable research for the last sixty years. The classic Habermasian account of the rise of the public sphere has been modified and adjusted to the point where most British historians now generally agree that there was never one definitive public sphere.⁷⁷ It is

⁷⁴ For more on the use of reason and consensus as religio-political tools, see, Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky, eds., *Political Culture and Cultural Politics*; Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, eds., *Conflict in Early Stuart England*; Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Rebecca Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*; Peter Burke, "Publicizing the Private: The Rise of 'Secret History'" in Christian Emden and David Midgley, eds., *Changing Perceptions of the Public Sphere* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth-Century Mind*; Burns, *Age of Wonders*.

⁷⁶ Martin Porter, "Saunders, Richard (1613–1675), medical practitioner and astrologer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Patrick Curry, "Lilly, William (1602–1681), astrologer," *ODNB*.

⁷⁷ Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," in *Journal of British Studies* (April 2006), 260-292.

now more common to speak of multiple spheres of public debate, interest, opinion and persuasion, with greater and lesser degrees of intensity and prominence in different times and places.⁷⁸ In the seventeenth century, however, as Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus have shown, there did occur an important transition which situated the contextually contingent ebb and flow of the public sphere from an episodic occurrence to a regular and normative aspect of daily life.⁷⁹ An important feature of this increasingly permanent, politicized public sphere, as Mark Knights has demonstrated, was its relationship to the period's debates over reason. Increased interest in rational discourse owed less to neutral intellectual principles than to a partisan contest over establishing credibility in the minds of a discerning public.⁸⁰ The lack of confidence among contemporary intellectuals, as noted by Shapiro, was also a central characteristic of the period's political culture. Nothing was certain, it was difficult to know whom and what to trust, and public negotiations of authority had to navigate divergent interests and persuasions.⁸¹

Appeals to human reason had always to contend with belief in the continuing and confusing effects of Original Sin. Much of the material in this study reflects ideas which lessened the severity of the Fall's eternal damage on human comprehension of divine, mysterious things, but nevertheless, the spectre of Original Sin remained central to

⁷⁸ Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Christian Emden and David Midgley, eds., *Changing Perceptions*, 1-14.

⁷⁹ Lake and Pincus eds., *Politics of Public Sphere*, 11, 18-21.

⁸⁰ Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, 2005), 56.

⁸¹ For more on the reciprocal and complex nature of authority, see Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle, eds., *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (New York: Macmillan Education, 1996); Tim Harris, ed., *The Politics of the Excluded c. 1500-1850* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Michael Braddick and John Walter, eds., *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

seventeenth-century religious mentalities. By situating the effects of the Fall as both a limitation and an explanation for the need to search into arcane matters, purveyors of arcane knowledge massaged deep-seated beliefs to suit their interests. Chapter one addresses ways in which belief in human depravity served as a foundation for physiognomy. It contains some of the earliest sources to be found in this study and serves as a reminder of the degree to which belief in the Fall was an ever-present factor. The practice of physiognomy employed the mysterious signs and symbols of the body to peer into what lay within the soul. To be able to recapture the purity of the soul through diligent search into, and correction of, the ways in which it had been bogged down by the effects of sin was deemed to be a valuable endeavour, for only those pure of soul could come close to comprehending God. Professors of divine or secret sciences, for instance, generally agreed that human souls were naturally inclined to “dive into the vast abiss of things unknown,” for “the soul of man being a spark of immortality and the infused breath of its almighty maker, does even, while ‘tis clogg’d with flesh and blood, retain so great a relish of its first original, that it is extreamly covetous of knowledge.”⁸² Constant, humble searches for difficult to obtain knowledge could thus mark innocence and godliness. Through physiognomy – the practice of uncovering “secret inclinations” – every soul’s potential could presumably be unlocked. As the practice of it made clear, however, the stain of Original Sin could never be easily or completely removed. This ensured that humans need not worry about stepping beyond their cognitive bounds – their sinful states both necessitated the need for teachable access to arcane knowledge and held them back from delving in, or comprehending too deeply.

⁸² Anon., *The compleat book of knowledge* (1698), A2.

In many ways, this sets the stage for themes and shifts explored in later chapters. Chapter one contains this study's earliest sources, but it also dips into the eighteenth century to explain how physiognomy studies shifted in focus from the flesh to the face – a transition which reflects changing notions regarding human nature. Basic assumptions regarding human depravity informed the majority of seventeenth-century writings on physiognomy, but this changed as depictions of humans became somewhat more favourable. Since, as this study contends, beliefs in, and interpretations of, human corruption shaped the type and degree of access people were understood to be capable of achieving, changes in the former were certain to have an effect on the latter. Perhaps this goes some way toward accounting for the official decline of divinatory sciences like physiognomy. As its restraints – beliefs in the eternal damage of Original Sin – loosened, its implications for potentially unlimited access to divine or arcane knowledge risked becoming too difficult to contain. The large time span of this chapter provides space in which to consider how traditional certainties – such as belief in human depravity – were in flux and how this uncertainty could create tensions and opportunities among knowledge makers and purveyors.

Through examination of published shorthand manuals, chapter two demonstrates one way in which shifting views regarding human nature, human reason and the ability to know and be worthy of God's salvation were actuated. In the early modern period, all learning was, at least to some degree, meant to decode the scriptures, and as scholars have recently noted, there was growing interest amongst the seventeenth-century clerical elite to minimize the role of the scriptures as the one and only source from which to build

and sustain a person's faith.⁸³ This was largely a response to the claims made by various Civil War sects whose biblical interpretations were often obtained through personal revelation, or divine inspiration – a trend which worried religious and political authorities alike. While the Bible retained its status as an infallible source of divine knowledge, many doubted the ability of humans – particularly uneducated humans – to interpret its secret messages and mysteries with any degree of certainty. Aspects of this concern over human uses and misuses of biblical knowledge are woven into the period's shorthand manuals. Like physiognomy and astrology, the practices of short (or swift) writing experienced something of a national revival in seventeenth-century England.⁸⁴ The majority of published shorthand manuals solely contained lists of alphabets, recommended symbols, useful phrases and little overt commentary. Nevertheless, within their seemingly straightforward pages reside tensions between direct inspiration and insight, on the one hand, and careful, studious approaches to discovering and comprehending knowledge on the other. While these tensions and concerns energized clerical elites as well as shorthand writers, many shorthand manuals implicitly undermined a clerical monopoly on information. They agreed that scriptures, sermons and personal spiritual insights were often enigmatic, difficult to clarify and required careful rumination. They suggested, however, that anyone with sufficient determination and the right set of interpretive tools could uncover divine secrets.

⁸³ See, for instance, Lori Anne Ferrell, "The Church of England and the English Bible, 1559-1640" and Nicholas McDowell, "Self-Defeating Scholarship?," in Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith and Rachel Willie, eds., *Oxford Handbook of The Bible*.

⁸⁴ Michael Mendle, "News and the Pamphlet Culture," 63.

It is interesting to see how increased mistrust in the certainty of human interpretation and growing trust in the potential of human reason – seemingly opposing trends – worked hand in hand. The attraction of different shorthand methods, as suggested by the words of its masters and purveyors, was largely fueled by the value placed upon redemptive yearning and the belief that “truth in a cloud, in a riddle is more amiable than a black and palpable ignorance.”⁸⁵ Constant searching, it was argued, was a certain way in which to exercise godly reason, acquire grace and ensure salvation. Like physiognomers and astrologers, shorthand writers encouraged people to perceive the mysterious world around them in a coded, yet accessible way, but with a particular eye toward ways in which shedding the baggage of words and writing, and focussing instead on symbol recognition and interpretation, could sharpen understanding.

Chapter three examines ways in which seventeenth-century astrologers sought to advertise the revelatory potential of their science and simultaneously maintain its public integrity. By focussing on the usefulness of contingencies, astrologers carefully suggested that God and His designs could (to a certain degree) be known, while keeping in view a general agreement as to the unknowability of God. To various astrologers, contingencies (or probabilities) were not only avenues to knowledge: they could very well be considered conduits of revelation in and of themselves. They encouraged readers and clients to maintain the wide parameters of what was or what created certain knowledge.

Lack of absolute certainty meant that humans were searching and learning in line with the limitations placed upon them at the Fall. It meant that they were doing it right. While laboriously mapping out the grand schemes of peoples’ lives and the likely

⁸⁵ Nathiel Culverwel, *Opticks* (Cambridge, 1651), 24-25.

“accidents” or events which would befall them was a main aspect of astrological practice, William Lilly’s mid-century casebooks indicate that many clients simply wanted quick and helpful responses to immediate concerns. Questions such as “where is my stolen cloak?”, “where is my runaway wife?”, and “is my sister dead?” required quick, practical answers rather than lengthy philosophical musings on the subjective nature of knowledge. When approached with such queries, Lilly often verified the accuracy of his judgements by noting the mysterious spots, moles, scars and markings sported by the bodies of the querents. These mysterious marks, as with the physical characteristics which informed the practice of physiognomy, were the result of the exact movements of stars at the moment of each person’s birth. By referring to such things in order to establish certainty and trust, Lilly reinforced the notion that the greatest secrets could be viewed by attention to, and discussion of, the signs which spoke to their existence. Such signs were accessible and could be sought out and confirmed by informed, piercing eyes. While certain knowledge was illusive, common consensus could reliably stand in its stead.

Seventeenth-century secret histories have excited the interests of various literary and historical scholars keen to explore the “practices of communication” they employed and the practical political uses to which they were put.⁸⁶ Chapter four considers ways in which seventeenth-century writers of secret histories appealed to readers. In particular, it explores how they employed the ways of knowing also encouraged by contemporary physiognomers, astrologers and shorthand writers. The calculated ways in which secret history writers assured people that they could peel away layers of court secrecy would have resonated with readers who were also encouraged to seek, perceive and interpret

⁸⁶ For a recent overview, see Brian Cowan, “The History of Secret Histories,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 81 no. 1 (2018) 121-151.

signs in other popular media. This chapter looks at ways in which secret history writers appealed to human curiosity, deployed shifting beliefs regarding human nature and emphasized the persistent, interpretive value of informed speculation and sign-reading. Drawing from recent arguments and ideas which suggested that God could be made knowable (at least by outward signs, if not wholly), they suggested that if God was accessible by means of common human reason, then monarchs most certainly were. By focussing on rumour, human nature and the legibility of secret, internal motivations, the authors of secret histories created a commonality between royalty and subjects. More importantly, they provided a space for guesswork, encouraged conjecture and the search for telling signs and, in so doing, they privileged accessible modes of arcane knowledge.

The various purveyors of arcane knowledge examined in this study paired traditional propensities for interpreting meaningful signs with contemporary notions and uncertainties regarding reason and the creation of and access to knowledge. Using the language of signs, and appealing to people's widespread familiarity with their revelatory potential, offered a way in which to draw divergent interests together. As with various other streams of knowledge, there was growing scepticism as to the ability of different authorities to correctly or impartially interpret signs. The ability to employ the use of signs and wonders for partisan purposes became particularly transparent during the Civil Wars and their immediate aftermath and continued to be a source of conflict in the political upheavals of the latter half of the century. As Knights and others have noted, the period's religious and political crises undermined the accounts of traditional authorities such as the church and the crown, creating a certain "vacuum of authority" which could be filled, in part, by print and public opinion. In the hands of various intellectuals, divines

and politicians making bids for authority, sign-reading became synonymous with credulous and dangerous fanaticism. In the hands of others, however, they were a particularly informative, persuasive and rational source of probable knowledge. The period's "vacuum of authority" gave physiognomers, astrologers, shorthand masters, and secret history writers all the more reason to suggest that people could and should trust their own instincts and abilities. They provided tools with which people could ostensibly hone their interpretive skills, and they set the reading of symbols pointing to the presence of mysterious secrets on a sound basis. As the following chapters indicate, these tools often came with conditions which reinforced the need for authoritative guidance. (The authors, after all, wished to sell books!). But the way in which such studies argued that secret knowledge was potentially accessible to all was also a significant aspect of their allure.

Chapter I.
“A Character of Sin”: Physiognomy and the Nature of Fallen Bodies

Seventeenth-century English works of physiognomy claimed to offer the ability to decode all the significant and telling marks which covered, shaped and animated bodies. This emphasis on the prognostic value of bodies is a feature of the period’s works of physiognomy which has not received much scholarly attention. Yet, as this chapter indicates, it was essential to the messages such works conveyed. Focus on bodies in their entirety, as opposed to faces alone, reflected the degree to which God’s secrets were – like hairs, wrinkles, and freckles – numerous. Any human attempt to try and understand them or even recognize their existence required diligent search and study. In detailing the information conveyed by every bodily characteristic, contemporary physiognomy emphasized the wretchedness of humanity, the ultimate limits of human ability and comprehension and the need for moderation and self-control. This insistence on human limitation is significant to the nature of arcane knowledge more generally. It explained the need for accessible tools, adapted to the limited abilities of human beings, with which to approach secret information. It also suggested that since complete comprehension was an elusive goal for fallen humanity, careful collection of a little bit of knowledge could go a long way towards accessing privileged information. Focus on myriad unique and telling aspects of human bodies ensured that everyone could find parts of themselves, if not all of themselves, addressed within the pages of physiognomy manuals. This not only suggested that everyone was wretched but also that the information which various physical features provided could be accessed by everybody.

Thomas Hill’s *Whole Art of Phisiognomy orderly uttering all the Speciall Parts of Man, from the Head to the Foot* (1613) offered instruction on how to carefully observe

and read people's secret natures according to their bodily characteristics. To judge correctly, it was necessary to translate all the body's marks, members, and movements – from forehead to fingernail, stomach to step (and everything in between) – into a comprehensive text. The revealing carriage of a “stowt and furious” man, for instance, would include a flat and hollow nose, bulging breast, short neck, long torso, booming voice, fast tread, hairy body and beard, long, veiny arms, and big hands. Comparatively, a person more inclined to good than evil and who sported a “stoutnes of courage” would display proportionate uniformity between head and body, a face more long and bony than round and fleshy, a big neck, thin yet curly hair, comely shoulder points, large breast, round legs, muscular haunches, big feet, comely heels, and good posture.¹ Shrewd attention to all the body had to disclose was essential to the practice of physiognomy. A singular feature or “note,” it was believed, could not accurately reveal deeply-rooted instincts and tendencies, whereas the relationship between various features could speak volumes. “No one note alone,” wrote Hill, “may be taken of any especiall part of the bodie: in that by the nature of one particular, doth not the Nature of man in general consist.”² Physiognomy was a study of “the nature of man” and the full extent of that nature could not be known until every physical characteristic was accounted for.

Hill's sentiments regarding the full-bodied nature of physiognomy were echoed in successive writings on the practice for the remainder of the century. *The book of Palmistry and Physiognomy* (1676), for instance, found it to be an act of madness to judge the state of a person's life and character by “rashly” considering a single feature

¹ Thomas Hill, *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of phisiognomy orderly uttering all the speciall parts of man, from the head to the foot* (1613), 115v-117.

² *Ibid.*, 115.

and found it offensive to think that the vast and multifaceted knowledge which bodies provided could be so narrowly contained. When judging the internal state of a person, it stated, “behold the whole body, with the Lineaments and Proportions of the same, which is called his Physiognomy.” Only after all the body’s aspects had been sifted through and tested for meaning could a judgement be pronounced.³ In a similar vein, the physician Richard Saunders (1613–1675) simultaneously encouraged reason and warned against hubris, insisting that everyone should use diligence in the collection of many physiognomic signs, “least his judgment rashly and ridiculously precipitate his reason ... for he is no wise workman that shall think with stubble to build a tower of Babel.”⁴ It was important to be attentive to all aspects of the body, for each fingernail, mole, errant whisker and limb had been divinely appointed. Human nature was such that it could not readily attain knowledge, but God, through the appointment of so many signifiers, provided clues. To rely on only one aspect of the body, such as the face, was to rely too heavily on human understanding – an understanding which, contemporary physiognomy was quick to point out, was incomplete and fraught with errors. In bringing focus back to the brand of seventeenth-century physiognomy which stressed the importance of all parts of the body, we find the deep dependency humans were believed to have on God (as opposed to the rational faculties) for access to secret wisdom, beauty and salvation. Emphasis on human nature and reason as represented and constrained by various aspects of the body reflected the uneasy yet persistent belief in human depravity and limited understanding. Paradoxically, it simultaneously helped define how human ability to access secret information could be put into action.

³ Johannes Indagine, *The book of palmistry and physiognomy* (1676), Br- Bv.

⁴ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1671), 281.

Martin Porter's work on Europe's engagement with this "ubiquitous subject" is the most extensive study of the topic, but several others have touched on physiognomy's presence in early modern England (especially in the eighteenth century), particularly in regards to its representation in literature and in its relationship to understandings of identity, "race" and gender.⁵ Little consideration is given to physiognomy's change in focus over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As works by scholars such as Sharrona Pearl, Christopher Rivers, Kay Flavell, Roy Porter, and Barbara Benedict suggest, physiognomy is generally defined as "the study of facial traits and their relationship to character."⁶ Physiognomy's characterization as a study of faces, however, was the result of a significant shift that was closely tied to understandings of the fallen body. Seventeenth-century insistence on prognostication according to each of the body's significant signs went hand in hand with suggestions that the decoding of each mysterious mark was a means by which humans could recognize the chaotic effects of the Fall, humbly realize their frailty and need for grace, and attempt to bring everything into moderate and beautiful balance. Secrets and particularly human secrets, as the body details of works of physiognomy suggested, were not only myriad, but also often ugly.

⁵ See, for instance, Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Barbara M. Benedict, "Reading Faces: Physiognomy and Epistemology in Late Eighteenth-Century Sentimental Novels," *Studies in Philology* vol. 2 no. 3 (Summer 1995): 311-328; Juliana Schiesari, "The Face of Domestication: Physiognomy, Gender Politics and Humanism's Others," in *Women, "Race," & Writing in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 57; Juliet McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Shearer West, "Wilkes's squint: Synecdochic Physiognomy and Political Identity in Eighteenth-Century Print Culture," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 33 no. 1 (1999): 65-84.

⁶ Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1; Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Kay Flavell, "Mapping faces: National Physiognomies as Cultural Prediction," *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 18 (1994): 8-22; Roy Porter, "Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England," *Etudes Anglaises* vol. 38 no. 4 (1985): 385-396.

This did not mean they were not worth pursuing. On the contrary, the “ugliest” of secrets were often the most important to root out and contend with (an implication to keep in mind when considering secret histories). Physiognomy taught readers how and where to search for iniquity and morality and, along the way, helped situate human limitation as both a stumbling block to knowledge, and a reason for why the search for arcane knowledge was so sorely needed.

Early modern physiognomy had deep classical roots which penetrated various aspects of life, including moral philosophy, art, astrology and medicine.⁷ It was represented by its proponents as essential to everyone, but despite claims for its universal interest, England did not boast a particularly large body of vernacular physiognomy literature.⁸ Publication numbers, however, are not always fully indicative of cultural purchase, and although writings with physiognomy as their primary focus occupied a fairly marginal place in early modern English publishing, the practice, as Martin Porter suggests, “was a central if not all pervasive phenomenon” amongst all levels of early modern society.⁹ In 1556, Thomas Hill’s *Pleasant epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie* was the first of its kind to be “Englished.” Like Hill, English translators of ancient or continental works felt that certain texts on physiognomy would resonate with the English public, and they

⁷ See, for instance, Simon Swain, ed. *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon’s Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Peter Harrison, “The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth-Century Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 50 no. 3 (1998): 462-484; Jennifer Montagu, *The Expression of the Passions: The Origin and Influence of Charles Le Brun’s Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Ludmilla Jordanova, “The Art and Science of Seeing in Medicine: Physiognomy, 1780-1820,” in *Medicine and the Five Senses*, ed. W. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁸ Martin Porter notes that due to the pervasiveness of physiognomic thought, it can be difficult to define a treatise on physiognomy. He suggests that between 1600 and 1700 there were approximately fifty-six works printed within England that can be clearly identified as physiognomic.

⁹ Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470–1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 27.

were proven correct by the number of editions in which some of their texts appeared. Fabian Withers's *Book of Palmistry and Physiognomy*, which was originally written in the sixteenth century by Johanne Indagine, a Carthusian monk, was published at least eleven times between 1558 and 1683. Similarly, physician William Warde's translation of French astrologer Richard Roussat's physiognomic writings ran through at least twelve editions between 1592 and 1686. Richard Saunders, the period's most celebrated advocate of physiognomy, attracted wealthy buyers with his expensive and extensively illustrated *Physiognomy and Chiromancie, Metaposcopie*, which was first published in 1653, and then again in 1671. Hoping to gain a wider readership, he also wrote a smaller and cheaper version of this large work, simply entitled *Palmistry*, which went through four editions between 1663 and 1676. Clergyman James Granger (1723-1776) noted that from Saunders's folio on physiognomy, "various extracts and abridgements [had] been made, and sold by the hawkers."¹⁰

Wide public familiarity with the science's basic concepts is not only suggested by the several printings of various editions, but also by its representation on the early modern stage and appearance in newspaper advertisements for suspected criminals.¹¹ It also permeated popular proverbs. In his 1697 *Digression concerning Physiognomy*, for instance, the diarist and antiquarian John Evelyn (1620-1706) considered "trite and vulgar sayings" as "gathered from the long and constant Observations of so many" and "confirmed by much Experience." Such sayings included, "The red is witty, the brown

¹⁰ James Granger, *A biographical history of England* vol. 4 (1769), 382.

¹¹ Sybille Baumbach, *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (New York: ACLS Humanities – Ebook, 2008); Mark S. Dawson, "First Impressions: Newspaper Advertisements and Early Modern English Body Imaging, 1651–1750," *The Journal of British Studies* vol. 50 no. 2 (2011): 277–306.

trusty, The pale peevish, the black lusty, And therefore, To a red man read thy read, At a pale man draw thy knife, With a brown man break thy bread, From a black man keep thy wife.” Another such proverb recited, “If little men but patient were, The tall of courage free, And red men trusty and sincere, The world would soon agree.”¹² Before even opening a book on the topic, most people would have already known physiognomy to be a study of the entire body due to the prevalence of such common sayings and to the use of physiognomic principles in astrology, descriptions of criminals and various types of medicine. In the recently deciphered diaries of dissenter Roger Morrice (1628-1702), worries over the prospect of a Catholic heir are expressed through physiognomic principles, with a particular focus on how bodies could reveal what heads alone could not. The information Morrice received about James II’s newborn son noted, “the child was a large full child in the head and the upper parts but not suitably proportioned in the lower parts.”¹³

Human bodies were among the most obvious of mysteries. The relationships between their secret inner workings and their visible outward functions inspired (and continue to inspire) fascination. As Laura Gowing and others have shown, the more they were interpreted, the more unclear or secretive they appeared to be.¹⁴ To seventeenth-century physiognomers, it was precisely because bodies were so enigmatic that they had much to teach about the complex, multilayered secrets of human souls. Historians have shown how the prominent role of ambiguous bodies as both objects of inquiry and

¹² John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (1697), 300.

¹³ Mark Goldie, ed., *The entring book of Roger Morrice* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

instruments of experience shaped the growth of seventeenth-century empiricism and how the “open interpretive space” of bodies – particularly women’s bodies – was a means through which people made sense of turbulent changes related to Reformation and the Civil Wars.¹⁵ Indeed, the seventeenth century was a period in which relationships between social and cultural politics and corporeal analogies of bodies were particularly rife. Studies into the growth of the medical marketplace have focussed on the degree to which the character of medical authority was shaped, in large part, by the demands of patients – a circumstance which sheds light on the reciprocal nature of power more broadly.¹⁶ In his study of the use of the royal touch among the Stuarts, Stephen Brogan finds that not only did Stuart monarchs touch an unprecedented number of people for healing, but that the demand for them to do so complicates historical narratives of that desacralisation which was supposedly prompted by Charles I’s execution.¹⁷ Monarchs were not the only ones who healed by touch. Charles II’s actions were mirrored by the great Restoration “stroker” Valentine Greatrakes (1629–1683), who, as Peter Elmer has shown, not only positioned himself as a healer of individual bodies, but also of a body politic divided by religious discord.¹⁸ Regardless of Greatrakes’s political motives, the

¹⁵ See, for instance, Charles T. Wolfe and Ofer Gal, eds., *The Body as Object and Instrument of Knowledge: Embodied Empiricism in Early Modern Science* (London: Springer, 2010); Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ See, for instance, Mark Jenner and Patrick Wallis, eds., *Medicine and the Market in England and its Colonies, c. 1450-c.1850* (London: Springer, 2007); Roy Porter, “The People’s Health in Georgian England,” in Tim Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England c. 1500-1850* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 124-142. For more on authority as “a function of process,” see Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steven Hindle, eds., *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁷ Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin* (Suffolk: Boydell, 2015).

¹⁸ Peter Elmer, *The Miraculous Conformist: Valentine Greatrakes, the Body Politic, and the Politics of Healing in Restoration Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 10.

great degree to which people of varying intellectual and social backgrounds were attracted to his services speaks to the persistence of beliefs which situated bodies as conduits for the divine, particularly during times of heightened uncertainty. Bodies harboured secrets, and were mystically connected to all of Creation. They had the potential to be a source of considerable revelatory power, provided, of course, that people did the work necessary for its realization. Such work included the digging through and discarding of layers of sin and “fleshy appetites” and with the help of a book on physiognomy, it was a work which, theoretically, anyone could do. Only a small few could ever become “stokers” but, in terms of seventeenth-century practicalities, knowing how to spot sin and the signs of grace (in both one’s self and others) and knowing how to recognize and adequately speculate on God’s secrets was a much more useful power and desirable skill.

ii. Wretched Humanity and the Physical Effects of the Fall

Seventeenth-century physiognomy revealed the degree to which humans of every shape, size, and inclination were afflicted by the Fall and carried the physical scars of it on their bodies. The translator of physiognomical works Thomas Hill (c. 1528–c.1574) wrote that it was precisely because humans were naturally enslaved by their infirmities and appetites that physiognomy was so infallible a method of inquiry. He based that conclusion on a perception that people “live after a sensuall wil in themselves, and that none but the wise and godly (which is by an inward working of the spirit) do live after reason: for that cause is physiognomy accounted and named a Science.”¹⁹ Lamentably, even among those wise and rare individuals who did work to moderate their “fleshy

¹⁹ Thomas Hill, *A brief and most pleasant epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie* (1556), 1.

appetities” and live according to goodness and reason, there still “continueth a frailtie to sinne, and offences daily committed.”²⁰ Hill’s words are comparable to those of the clergyman Robert Gell who, in 1649, argued that, because humans happily humour their passions and inclinations, they legitimate the prognostications of astrologers, chiromancers, and physiognomers. He felt that all people had it within them to weaken the force of the fallen state through faith in God, but that they also regularly failed in that faith and therefore made practitioners of physiognomy and its sister sciences “speak truth, who otherwise, by our resisting the temptation and suggestion unto sinne, would easily be deceived.”²¹ Because Original Sin was so pervasive, recognizable, and inarguable a reality, so too was physiognomy a reliable source of knowledge. The implication was that an imaginary society, unmarred by the effects of the Fall, would not need or have reason to learn and apply a science which examined all parts of the body and found the unique assortment of sins to which everyone was inherently subject. Because of the reality of Original Sin, however, the combined notes of the body composed a reliable score.

Belief in the degree to which the effects of the Fall influenced and directed human thoughts and encounters on Earth, and potentially even in Heaven, provided structure and gave character to various aspects of seventeenth-century cultural experience and expression. In 1626 the Presbyterian-turned-Independent parliamentarian Francis Rous argued that the Fall stripped humans of their agency, save for their predilection to different vices. “The nature of man, through the transgression of our first parents,” he wrote, “hath lost Free-will and retayneth not now any shadow thereof, saving an

²⁰ Ibid., ii.

²¹ Robert Gell, *Stella Nova, A New Starre Leading wisemen unto Christ* (1649), 19.

inclination to evil.”²² His words demonstrate that intensified dependence which early seventeenth-century Protestants – particularly the especially zealous ones – placed upon God’s grace (as opposed to the sacraments and good works) for salvation. Although heated religious and political debates over such theological linchpins as free will, election and damnation were in a near constant state of flux, there was general agreement that the Fall had ripped the symmetry between Heaven and Earth and forever riddled human nature with sinful passions, deceit and confusion. Humans, wrote the physician and Anglican religious poet Henry Vaughan (1629-1695), are “always subject to & overcome by many noxious passions, which fill us up with foule and ulcerous sins and most odious corruptions.”²³ To the Latitudinarian bishop Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), religious faith, morality and knowledge were difficult for humans to secure and maintain. Sloth and vice, however, revealed themselves in so many different ways amongst all people, and from such an early age, that it was reasonable to assume that they were natural to human nature: “[T]he Aversion that we naturally have to all the Exercises of Religion, and the Pains that must be used to work us up to a tolerable Degree of Knowledge, and an ordinary Measure of Virtue, shews that these are not natural to us.”²⁴ Adam and Eve’s disobedience stunted the original purity of the union of body, soul and mind, leaving only noxious enslavement to intertwined passions, temptations, humours and base instincts.

While God’s secrets were salvific and beautiful, human secrets were corrupt. Through physiognomy, however, corruption could be spotted, evaluated, and if not

²² Francis Rous, *Testis veritatis* (1626), 15.

²³ Henry Vaughan, *The Mount of Olives: or, Solitary devotions* (1652), 178.

²⁴ Gilbert Burnet, *An exposition of the Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England* (1700), 113.

overturned, at least redirected. It is safer “to judge of vices than of vertues,” remarked clergyman George Hakewill, for the effects of the Fall have thoroughly marked all humanity to the core. Everyone will try to appear virtuous, and all are eager to conceal vice, yet no one can conceal “so cunningly, but that it shews it self at times, as it were in a glasse, either in our speech, or in our apparell, or in our gait, or in our countenance, or in our actions, or in all.”²⁵ To Vaughan, the “secret transgressions” which plagued humans on Earth were so ingrained and essential an aspect of humanity, that even after Christ’s redemptive healing and deliverance, they would be remembered. Humans cannot even begin to be appropriately thankful for their salvation if they forget from what they have been saved. “I dare affirme,” he wrote, “that those sinnes for whose remission thou doest then give thanks, shall likewise be openly known, not to thy confusion but to the glory of God.”²⁶ For these reasons, physiognomers argued, close study of the cloaks of sin which every person wore would turn eyes and hearts to God and the beauty of his grace. Although they too stressed the inherent depravity of human nature, physiognomical treatises generally did not, like Rous, conclude that Original Sin had completely and unalterably predetermined the fate for all humanity. Instead, they emphasized a reliance on God’s mercy and grace in aiding humans to work against their weaknesses. In this regard, they were more in line with views like Gell’s, which stated that, no matter how much the Fall had ripped the symmetry between Heaven and Earth and sullied human nature, redemption was still possible. Uncovering sin in its various guises and places of residence, and thus thirsting and searching after secret knowledge, was a way in which to glorify God.

²⁵ George Hakewill, *King Davids vow for reformation of himselfe* (1621), 192-193.

²⁶ Henry Vaughan, *The Mount of Olives: or, Solitary devotions* (1652), 163.

In repeating the common physiognomic claim that humans were made in God's image, Richard Saunders noted that thorough examination of the body could provide a degree of solace, for in acknowledging the true extent of God's works, each person could become "sweetly constrained by a Holy Violence to the love of God himself, to love him for Himself, and the Creature for his sake."²⁷ It would seem that since humans were formed in God's image, and since examination of their "true" natures was believed to inspire solace and love, physiognomic examination should reveal favourable and naturally virtuous traits and inclinations. The opposite, however, was usually the case: a striking number of potential thieves and murderers fill the pages of seventeenth-century physiognomy texts. While some features – such as "hollow feet", a "nose in comly form crooking" or "a meannesse of colour" – suggested honest and good judgment, the majority of physical traits and corresponding characteristics revealed little that was positive or reassuring.²⁸ These texts generally implied that the figure closest to embodying a completely virtuous and exemplary individual was that of a beautiful man whose features, and therefore soul and character, were all in perfect symmetry and balance. He would not have skin too sickly white, too malevolently black, too cunningly red, or too effeminately yellow. He would be of medium height, strength and hairiness, and each of his features would be perfectly exact and proportionate. Saunders noted that, when all the parts of the body "are so fitly dispensed and composed, that they consist together in a united fit natural proportion, so likewise is it in the soul, all things being so aptly moderated and fitly composed."²⁹ The more people's physical forms diverged from

²⁷ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie* (1653), A4.

²⁸ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), 106, 16.

²⁹ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 266.

the perfectly aligned male ideal, the more outwardly and inwardly “deformed” or immoral they would be.

Amidst the myriad deceitful, lustful and vain characteristics found within these texts was implicit recognition of the fact that the physiognomic ideal could never – or at least very rarely – be realistically replicated. The controversial Catholic writer Thomas Wright (c. 1561-1623) voiced the common consensus that the human passions, or “sores of the soul” which scabbed the body, were “thorny briars sprung from the infected root of original sinne.”³⁰ Similarly, Hill wrote that all are inherently driven by sensual appetites and wayward wills because of a “natural frailty” drawn from humanity’s forefather, Adam.³¹ Even symmetrical bodies were stained by sin. Physiognomers suggested that it was almost unfailingly possible to find some mark or defect, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, to remind fair wearers of their fallen condition. As Saunders reminded his readers, each body contained telling marks which “cannot be alwaies seen, being oftimes in secret places and the privy parts.”³² A well-proportioned and moral gentleman, for instance, may be hiding veins above his temples which only appear when in the throes of laughter or violent activity. If this be the case, he is not as virtuous as he initially appeared and has deeply rooted inclinations to “treachery and perfidiousness.”³³ There may even be two “unequal lines” hidden beneath his navel, speaking of a secret wickedness and suggesting that there is “little trust to be had in him.”³⁴ Even those whose

³⁰ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde* (1604), 2.

³¹ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), A3.

³² Richard Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁴ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), 192.

bodies and souls sported virtuous attributes had much to bring into harmonious balance, for regardless of their goodness, “all natural inclinations are defects.”³⁵ Some physiognomers believed that “the virtues that come along with the birth are not real virtues.”³⁶ They are inclinations a person might have towards a given virtue rather than being the complete realization of such a virtue. Furthermore, people born with some excellent virtues were more likely to also have the greatest of vices. Perfection of body and soul was found in equal indifference to all attributes and in the capability to proportionately embody all the virtuous inclinations in equal measure, rather than excelling in one or two.

Not all works of physiognomy were painstakingly detailed. The style which Roy Porter, Dror Wahrman and others link to older, collective constructions of identity often replicated the Aristotelian style of indicating how to spot certain categories or types.³⁷ The early seventeenth-century French Huguenot writer Marc De Vulson, for example, grouped physical traits under such headings as the “rude and unciviliz’d person,” “the foolish,” “the drunkard,” “the lyer,” “the bold and hardy,” or simply, “poisoners.”³⁸ Similarly, Frederick Hove grouped personalities beneath the headings of “the prudent person,” “the luxurious,” and “the irreligious.” All people with red hair, loud laughter, hasty movements, a sanguine colour, and thick legs could be categorized as impudent.³⁹

³⁵ Marin De La Chambre, *Art how to know Men* (1665), 7.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 127; Roy Porter, “Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Etudes Anglaises* vol. 38 no. 4 (1985): 395; Kay Flavell, “Mapping faces: National Physiognomies as Cultural Prediction,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 18 (1994): 12.

³⁸ Marc De Vulson, *Court of Curiosity* (1669), 182 -202.

³⁹ Frederick Hendrick Hove, *Oniropolis, or dreams interpreter. Being several aphorisms upon the physiognomy of dreams made into verse* (1680), 51-73.

The flexibility inherent to the practice of physiognomy reflected the mutable selfhood associated with the period. In addition to having various body parts from which to determine their inclinations, or identities, there was also the possibility of interpreting a single body part in different ways. Even detailed designations were sometimes vague, or perplexingly similar, leaving room for readers to practice (and doubt) their own interpretive skills. In his detailed coverage of the meanings behind nostrils, for instance, Thomas Hill averred that gaping nostrils indicated a cruel and disdainful person while nostrils with large openings indicated mirthfulness. It was up to readers, or amateur physiognomers, to decide whether their large nostrils, or that of their acquaintances fit the first or second description best.⁴⁰ The confusion which could arise when reading physical signs further reiterated the difficulty in searching secret matters. It also suggested that uncovering secrets always involved a degree of uncertainty and thus required an equal degree of intuitive wisdom — a skill which could be sharpened by constant practice.

Historians have noted the degree to which dissimulation – grounded as it was in beliefs regarding the baseness of human nature – was a prominent concern in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴¹ There was anxiety over the possibility that a person might appear to be a true member of God’s body of believers while simultaneously harbouring schismatic inclinations. Towards the close of the Interregnum, for instance, Presbyterian clergyman and (later) ejected minister Thomas Hall wrote that if “any sin ruin England,” it was the fact that “true devotion is now turned into hypocritical

⁴⁰ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), 107-108.

⁴¹ See for instance, Peter Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990).

dissimulation.”⁴² The period’s fearful fascination with dissimulation speaks to the dark and furtive concealments which were seen to plague and characterize human affairs.⁴³ To the royalist clergyman Anthony Farindon, the “clokes and covertes” of dissimulation were truth’s biggest enemies. They are “a kind of cheat or juggling by which we cast a mist before mens eyes, that they cannot see us.”⁴⁴ Farindon reminded his listeners that their dissimulations and hypocrisies were always unmasked by God, who, through providence, observes everything and can hear their thoughts as loudly as their words. In the closet of people’s souls, he wrote, God keeps a book entitled “Sins.” It is dedicated “To the prince of Sin; The several chapters so many several sins and every letter, a character of Sin.” Attempts to close the book and hide its contents beneath different covers were futile, for its words could still be read.⁴⁵ Similarly, the Anglican clergyman Richard Sibbes (c.1577-1635) asserted that dissimulation formed the bedrock of human nature and was the first thing children learned. People of all ranks are hateful plotters who know how “to cover hatred with fair words, to kill with kindnesse ... [and] to cover revenge and hatred with fair carriage.”⁴⁶ There were two sorts of people, those who dissimulate, and those who are forthright and have – or at least strive for – grace. Regardless of what sort a person was, however, there will come a time “when you will be uncased, when you will be laid open and naked,” and the heaviest sin which all will have to account for is dissimulation,

⁴² Thomas Hall *A practical and polemical commentary* (1658), 124-125.

⁴³ For more on the period’s pervasive interest in, and concerns over, dissimulation see Jon R Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (California: University of California Press, 2009); Verena Lobsien, *Transparency and Dissimulation: Configurations of Neoplatonism in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010).

⁴⁴ Anthony Farindon, *XXX sermons lately preached at the parish church of Saint Mary Magdalene* (1647), 70.

⁴⁵ Anthony Farindon, *Fifty Sermons preached at the parish-church of St. Mary Magdalene* (1674), 365.

⁴⁶ Richard Sibbes, *A learned commentary or exposition* (1655), 250.

or double-dealing. Dissimulation veiled sin and since many frailties were secret even to those afflicted by them, all were guilty of it. It was “vain to skin over a sore, whilst the dead flesh remains within” and it was godly to spot how sores which festered within manifested themselves in the look and conduct of the body.⁴⁷

The abovementioned clergymen, physicians and writers are a small sampling of the variety of voices which informed seventeenth-century religious culture and helped shape and reflect beliefs regarding the depth of human corruption and dissimulation. They wrote at different times for different reasons and the ways in which their words were received or interpreted were likely to change according to context. Richard Sibbes’s sermons and writings on personal piety, for instance, became posthumously associated in the mid to late seventeenth century with nonconformity – a development quite removed from his conformity earlier in the century.⁴⁸ This sampling suggests, however, that concerns regarding the depraved nature of humanity and concealed inclinations and intentions were greater than any one individual or creed. Contemporary physiognomers argued that these pervasive concerns could be addressed in contemplative solace through the accessible means of physical signifiers. The divine purpose of physiognomy, they argued, was awareness of the various iterations of “dead flesh” which plagued humanity and the ability to read secret “characters of sin” in oneself and others. However, such a skill was believed to be God’s prerogative and a sign of His omnipotence. The suggestion that humans could acquire such knowledge existed in tension with belief in the degree to which human reason and mental capability were stunted. This tension encouraged

⁴⁷ John Bramhall, *The right way to safety after ship-wrack* (1661), 14.

⁴⁸ Mark E. Dever, “Sibbes [Sibs], Richard (1577?–1635), Church of England clergyman” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2007).

physiognomers to emphasize full-bodied depravity even while offering instruction on how to gain divine insight. People could never be entirely certain that they had successfully spotted every hidden iniquity. This ensured their humility, their endless hunger for knowledge and the importance of instruction in the finer details of the practice of physiognomy.

The belief that dissimulation was inherent to the human condition was reinforced by suggestions that only people who had lost their senses were easily read. The latter and hermetical author Thomas Tryon (1634-1703) wrote that, when humans are “divested of their Rational Faculties, then they appear naked, having no covering, vail, or fig-leaves before them to hide themselves in, and therefore they no longer remain under a mask or disguise but appear even as they are.”⁴⁹ Tryon wished it were possible for all people to abandon the cunning hypocrisy natural to them. He envied “mad innocents” for their inability to dissemble. “As the knowledge of evil is mans fall,” he wrote, “so if this sort of Madness were practised amongst all men that have the use of Reason and their Senses, it would be more like Innocency and Christianity then most mens general practises are now-a-days.”⁵⁰ Physiognomers, like their contemporaries, were deeply anxious about the ways in which the stories written on bodies might be dissimulative fictions. Saunders noted that any attempt at physiognomic judgement should “penetrate the institutions and education of man.” He made clear distinctions between bodily traits and assumed behaviours and warned that people must always take heed of the whole body and not be swayed in their judgements by any ostensible goodness. “Those signs which arise from

⁴⁹ Thomas Tryon, *A treatise of dreams and visions* (1689), 261.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 262.

the parts of the Body,” he wrote, “are preferred before them which we gather from the apparent moral behaviour.”⁵¹

Anxieties over dissimulation intensified questions regarding physiognomy’s efficacy while simultaneously reinforcing the pertinence (and advertising the potential) of the revelations that physiognomy promised. The translator John Davies (1625–1693) forwarded physiognomy as an essential tool for ambassadors. His translation of the French physician De La Chambre’s *Art how to know Men* (1665) suggested that everyone could act the spy and uncover people’s past, present, and future weaknesses, their acquired habits, “secret designs, private actions and the unknown Authors of known actions.”⁵² It advertised its approach as one which could not be fooled, for “there is no dissimulation so deep unto which it does not penetrate, and which, in all likelihood, it will not deprive of the best part of those veils under which it lurks.”⁵³ A simple physiognomy of faces would never be enough for, although fleeting passions and emotions often readily presented themselves in the eyes and mouth, ingrained habits, temperaments, and inclinations more certainly revealed themselves in the deportment of all the body’s movements, actions and signs. Francis Bacon, in his hesitant – and conditional – acceptance of physiognomy, valued its potential ability to cut through the deceptions of the body and lay bare the soul, conceding that physiognomy “must be acknowledged an excellent way of discovering Dissimulation in others.” To Bacon, it

⁵¹ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1671), 263.

⁵² Marc De La Chambre, *The Art how to know Men* (1665), B7r-B8v.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, B7v.

was especially physiognomy's attention to physical gestures and bodies in motion which recommended it as "no small part of civil prudence."⁵⁴

If physiognomers like Richard Saunders likely agreed with Tryon that insane subjects were easier to read, they were unlikely to agree that madness demonstrated a degree of Christian innocence not seen since the Garden of Eden. On the contrary, the madness they interpreted to be all around them drove people farther from God.

Physiognomy's popularity in the mid-seventeenth century reflected anxiety over the period's atmosphere of disorder and chaos. Some argued (or sought righteous comfort in the notion) that the subversive secrets harboured by various sectarian groups could be decoded by their physical forms. In 1642, for instance, the (likely pseudonymous) George Spinola argued that in all his experience with different body types, he had "not found such strange, exotick, forrain, ridiculous deformities and non conformities of parts in the Faces and Limbs of any kinde of Men as in those which at this day are familiarly called the Sectaries and Seperatists."⁵⁵ Richard Saunders, a fair-weather royalist and, briefly, a Cromwellian, also saw ugliness all around him. He felt that the physiognomies of all Creation could reveal all things "necessary to the health and welfare of man" and have the effect of "nature restored to sanity."⁵⁶ Through careful examination and treatment of corrupted and distorted bodies, he hoped to heal England of its disunity and disorder and restore it to its rightful position as a unified and beautifully-balanced people. As Martin Porter and Bernard Capp have noted, and as Saunders's own works on how to improve

⁵⁴ Peter Shaw, *The Philosophical works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam* (1733), 94.

⁵⁵ George Spinola, *Rules to get Children by with Handsome Faces* (1642), A1v-A2. For more on Spinola, see Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Monstrous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 160-161.

⁵⁶ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie* (1653), (a3)v.

the human race by “scientific breeding” reveal, Saunders had grown increasingly exasperated with “worldly governments.”⁵⁷ His fearful suspicion of the gap between what people seemed to be and what they actually were was sharpened by the tumults of his time. Striving for conformity amongst all the various limbs and markings of an individual was a reflection of the grander project geared towards uniformity amongst a people riven by religious and political strife.

iii. Blighted Bodies and Beautiful Grace

Physician Thomas Browne noted that, from stars to animals, “the finger of God hath left an inscription upon all his works.” There is a “physiognomy not onely of men,” he continued, “but of Plants and Vegetables; and in every one of them, some outward figures which stand as signes or bushes of their inward formes.”⁵⁸ His comments compared the human self to the universe whose infinite mixtures of features and elements were carefully balanced yet remained vulnerable to catastrophic chaos. Those who did not get a full sense of God in scripture should turn, instead, to the book of the body. Browne’s description of the body as a blueprint for all of Creation is emblematic of the type of physiognomy which seventeenth-century English writers and translators favoured. Every part of the universe – from heavenly bodies, to humans, scorpions and herbs – carried imprinted marks and unique characteristics which, in some way or another, were in communion with each other. To sever the ties between bodies and all of Creation, and to imply that the human body was somehow separate from the intertwined workings of the soul, would upset the balance of Creation which God had ordered. Singling out the

⁵⁷ Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs*; Martin Porter, “Saunders, Richard (1613–1675), medical practitioner and astrologer,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁵⁸ Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1642), 116.

face or a single feature for physiognomic investigation drew too much attention away from the degree to which the “jumbled” and “jarring elements” of the depraved human body depended on God’s grace to resist chaos and confusion.

Richard Saunders wrote that, in discovering the variety of their own bodies, people would find a very real and personal demonstration of God’s greatness. Within physiognomy, he wrote, lies indication of the “vastness of the world” and a call to realize human frailty and dependence on God’s goodness. The “great Creator,” he wrote, drew “lines and marks on our bodies, that we may (in considering and discovering them) with greater admiration, contemplate his omnipotence, omniscience and infinite mercy.”⁵⁹ The vastness of God’s love could not be recognized unless humans conducted a complete account of how desperately it was needed. Saunders wrote that God had decided that the fabric of the universe should be worn as a human cloak so that “man might be as a type of the whole creation.”⁶⁰ As this take on micro/macrocosmic theory suggests, the secrets of Creation were housed in the body and could potentially be accessed through it. If the order of Creation was perfectly aligned and humans were symbols which, when decoded, revealed the secrets behind that order, then it followed that the human potential for divine balance was already housed within. It was lost in layers of carnality but could, ostensibly, be uncovered.

Particularly since humans were both made in God’s image, and physically marked by the Fall, discussions of sin and saving grace often turned to the corrupt and vile body. As human bodies were linked to all Creation, so the natural elements and unique

⁵⁹ Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), (a2)v.

⁶⁰ Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie* (1671), 219.

combinations of humours determined people's temperaments and degrees of health. In the 1650s, the popular religious writer and nonconformist minister Richard Baxter (1650-1691) exchanged letters with one of his readers, the gentlewoman Katherine Gell (1624-1671), who worried that she was not a beneficiary of God's grace. Baxter told Gell that her preponderance for fear, guilt, and grief were the effect of the mixed bag of humours common to her sex and temperament. Even "the most gracious soul," he wrote, could "hardly expect to prevaile against such a temperature of body." The secret workings of grace could greatly abate the evils and passions which certain natures were inclined to, but "sudden risings of such feares & griefes in such a temper will hardly be avoided."⁶¹ In his declarations regarding conversion and the shedding of a sinful life, the Presbyterian minister John Sheffield (1653/4-1726) noted that "the new man is from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head, all made up of grace, and all the links in the golden chain of salvation, are all of pure beaten and massy grace."⁶² Grace was thought to work through the humours and natural inclinations, whether or not they tended to good or evil. Choleric or malicious people, for instance, could, by the secret and powerful workings of grace, repress their lusts, or use them in correcting other sinful inclinations. For such reasons, someone could use physiognomy to highlight the inclinations of another but may "not perfectly judge hym except he know whether he have grace or no."⁶³ The saving effects of grace could be made all the more evident through the physical examples of how sinful and wretched humanity actually was. Emphasising the effects of the Fall and using

⁶¹ DWL MS RB/2/5/11, f11-12.

⁶² John Sheffield, *Salvation by Grace and never the less of Grace Tho it be through Faith and not without it* (1698), 25.

⁶³ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomie* (1556), 5.

them as a foundation for contemplative physiognomy highlighted the need for and dependence upon God's grace and mysterious providence.

The nonconformist minister Nathaniel Vincent (1637/8-1697) depicted "perfect man" as "the most glorious and lovely of all visible creatures." He wrote that the "image of the invisible God does shine forth in him" and that, "out of the rubbish and ruins of corrupt Nature," God works His grace and makes a remarkable transformation.⁶⁴

Significantly, many believed that when a person was wholly virtuous, it was not due to an inherent propensity for goodness but because that person was a vessel for God's light.

All other attributes were just noxiously human. Just as it revealed secret iniquities, physiognomy of the entire body gave people a chance to catch a glimmer of God's grace at work. The Anglican clergyman and royalist Daniel Featley (1582-1645) noted that Satan, an expert physiognomer, matched the assortment of temptations he threw at each person to the weaknesses he found in his or her natural tempers. Rather than succumbing to the devil's use of the science, Featley encouraged his listeners and readers to "also make use of Physiognomy, and take advantage of our naturall inclinations to further the worke of grace in us." "If wee finde our selves by nature timorous," he exclaimed, "let us endeavour to improve this feare into awfull reverence: if audacious, to improve this boldnesse into spirituall confidence: if gladsom and merry, to improve our mirth into joy in the holy Ghost: if cholericke, to improve our wrath into zeale: if melancholy, to improve our pensiveness into godly sorrow."⁶⁵ People's secret iniquities, wrote religious writer Richard Younge (1636-1673), were a gift which drew them closer to God. Human

⁶⁴ Nathaniel Vincent, *The perfect man described in his life and end* (1696), 5.

⁶⁵ Daniel Featley, *Clavis mystica a key opening divers difficult and mysterious texts of Holy Scripture* (1636), 381.

pride illuminates beauties and blinds people to their deformities. It reveals our “parts, but not our spots.” With grace, the variations of “extream vileness” hidden within each person could be realized and thereby affect the humility needed to be acceptable to God. “It must be the work of grace,” he wrote, “that must shew a man his want of grace.”⁶⁶ Physiognomy, in its illumination of spots and sins, could therefore be seen as both an extension of God’s grace, and a means by which the secrets of grace could be accessed.

Physiognomy was criticized, however, for having the adverse effect. Instead of bringing people to God, its pronouncements could, it was feared, discourage people from walking the path to salvation. For instance, a man who found he had the exact forefinger lines which signified “excessive fornicators, given to sodomy, bestiality, incest, chambering and such dishonest actions,” might feel that there was no point in fighting to curb the wickedness common to all.⁶⁷ The discouragement caused by this forefinger might well be compounded by his having the wrinkles of a murderer, the hairy brows of malevolency, the long ears of “bold impudent, unlearned gluttons and whore masters,” and the hunched shoulders of the “covetous and sordid.”⁶⁸ Such an unfortunate assortment of features could suggest the man’s reprobation to be set, resolute and unchanging. Criticisms and concerns surrounding the importance physiognomy placed on the determining physical effects of the Fall encouraged physiognomers to stress examination of the entirety of the body even more. Just as beautiful and virtuous-looking people were suspected to have some sinful stain hidden somewhere on their body, so “ill-favoured” persons might bear secret but no

⁶⁶ Richard Younge, *Self-Examination with the likeliest means of Conversion and Salvation* (1663), 27.

⁶⁷ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), 50.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 197, 253, 251.

less significant redeeming signs. Those with the most signs pointing to lasciviousness and murder, for instance, might also find a mole on their right calf. Such a mark “denotes a man to be provident and industrious, whereby he shall not only procure himself wealth, but a good name; to a woman it denotes advancement in happy marriage.”⁶⁹

Thus, while the nature of these works suggests that the careful collection of many features and signifying marks was more to find each person’s specific weaknesses, physiognomers argued that full body examination also guarded against unwarranted despair. In his query into the quandary of how a “great soul” can be lodged in a “homely cottage,” the diarist and antiquarian John Evelyn concluded that inwardly honourable people are sometimes coarsely framed in order to reveal the grandeur of God’s mercy and grace. Such people, he wrote, are born “on purpose to shew that vertue may be born any where and that if it were possible to produce souls stark naked, she [Nature] would have done it: She has now done a greater thing, brought forth some clogg’d with body that yet surmount and break thro’ all impediments.”⁷⁰ In a similar vein, others warned against giving unfortunately-featured people short shrift and underlined the need to take testimony of all the body’s signs. If variant bodily signifiers did not seem to piece together into a comprehensive whole, then, rather than assuming the worst, it was suggested that people consider instead the best: “then may you prognosticate and give judgment more assuredly of great and small things to come, yea of every man whatsoever he be.”⁷¹ In delineating every feature of the body, seventeenth-century physiognomers

⁶⁹ J.S., *The True fortune-teller, or, Guide to knowledge* (1698), 97.

⁷⁰ John Evelyn, *Numismata*, 309.

⁷¹ Richard Roussat, *The most excellent, profitable and pleasant book of the famous doctor and expert astrologian; Arcandam* (1644), M4v.

both emphasized human depravity *and* attempted to skirt controversies over the determinist implications of fallen bodies. They offered readers a way in which to access the secrets of iniquities and grace and, paradoxically, were aided by their emphasis on the degree to which human judgement of such divine secrets was flawed. If it was not flawed, there would be no need to search so restlessly, and it was only through such active and uncertain or humble meditation that signs of grace could be found.

Emphasizing the need to search and collect numerous physical signs highlighted the uncertainty of human judgements and the degree to which physiognomy was a practice which rested upon probabilities. The sixteenth-century physiognomy translator and compiler Thomas Hill wrote that the “common sort,” who lack reason, learning and the careful observation of telling signs, “pronounce and iudge certaine matters verie strange of men: as when he saith of any fowl look, this person pleaseth me nothing. They also say, God defend and keepe mee from the fellowship of that person marked; as are the bunch backed, and goggle eyed persons.” Declarations such as these made it appear “that the bodily notes of Phisiognomating by the naturall conditions of men, do procure & cause a great probablenesse, although no necessitie.”⁷² By connecting degrees of reason to degrees of probability, Hill suggested that the sharpening of reason and physiognomic precision were mutually reinforcing. Since, however, reason would always remain somewhat blunted, it was necessary to recognize the strength of probability as a medium of knowledge and how, through the careful interpretation of signs, it had much to reveal. Furthermore, arcane knowledge of probabilities could be accessed by the “common sort” if they were properly instructed. Since, as their supposed impression of

⁷² Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), B3v.

“bunch backed” people suggested, they were already attuned to the possibility of the telling features of bodies, there was reason to suggest that their powers of discernment, with the help of an instructive manual, could become fine-tuned.

Seventeenth-century understandings and approaches to bodies and their treatment were, as Andrew Wear and others have shown, an area of study in which continuity and change were especially intermingled.⁷³ While changes in medicine are outside the scope of this study, it is worth noting the relationship between physiognomy and the highly adaptable and patchwork assortment of practices which fell under the umbrella term of Galenism. These practices, such as diagnoses, regimens and therapeutics based in humoral theory, persisted long after Galenic medicine was decisively disputed, and they were also an essential component of physiognomy. The author of *The True Fortune-Teller or Guide to Knowledge* (1698) argued that no person could claim medical knowledge without an aptitude for physiognomy, for it not only taught its practitioners how to read “the inmost secrets” of people’s hearts by the “external parts”, but also the humours, diseases and bodily constitutions to which they were inclined – physical inclinations which further helped reveal secrets.⁷⁴

People’s placement on the humoral scale could be determined by their appearance, and thus physiognomy was argued to be essential to good physical as well as moral health. Someone with a phlegmatic constitution, for instance, could be identified by skin that was moist, soft and white, hidden joints, running eyes, fast growing hair and

⁷³ Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁷⁴ J.S. *The True Fortune-Teller, or, Guide to Knowledge* (1698), 61.

nails, fearfulness, insomnia and lechery, and could be treated accordingly. Saunders explored the ways in which “the temperaments of all men come within the compass of four humours,” and Hill outlined the physical attributes and inclinations common to different humoral dispositions. People born with naturally cold complexions, Hill noted, were generally “dull of wit” and tended toward heaviness with copious eyes, slow pulses, small voices and delicate hair. Those with bodies that suggested either choleric or melancholic constitutions should not be trusted, and if such people “happen in authority and beare rule,” they are bound to be utterly tyrannical. Meanwhile, the “meaner sort” of choleric or melancholic conditions “are given to be Robbers by the highway, yea, and Murtherers of Men.”⁷⁵ Bringing humours into balance was at the core of physical health, and as humours and temperaments were so intimately intertwined, it was also an essential aspect of spiritual health. To “discover what is most secret, in Body and Soul,” required strict examination “of the conformation of parts, the temperaments Spirits, Humours, Inclinations, Passions, and Habits.”⁷⁶

Physiognomy’s relationship to humoral practices, displayed in household and lay medical culture, is further suggestive of widespread familiarity with the importance of a full-bodied approach and indicative of the importance placed upon moderation.⁷⁷

Significantly, the passions, otherwise known as the “sores of the soul,” were regarded,

⁷⁵ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), 27.

⁷⁶ Marc De La Chambre *Art how to know Men* (1665), 11.

⁷⁷ For persistent, adaptable familiarity with humoral theories, see Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Michael MacDonald, “The Career of Astrological Medicine in England,” in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham, eds., *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scholar 1996); Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist and Physician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press*; Louise Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine: 1550-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

along with the “elemental humours,” as an essential part of the “humane Fabrick.” The soul, wrote Saunders, “hath similitude with the Elements,” and as Thomas Wright noted, the passions “are drowned in corporall organs and instruments.”⁷⁸ The sinful self, then, was a sore which festered in each of the body’s organs and parts. As with the passions, which were unbalanced by the Fall, humans could not completely subordinate the unique assortment of humours which held dominion over their bodies and souls. They could, and should, however, strive to bring them into a state of harmonious balance. In his ruminations on physiognomy, John Evelyn wrote that “nothing in excess” was the goal and that, “where neither Cold nor Moist, Hot nor Dry domineer, but amicably meet in equal Poise and Measure,” the result is a “happy Person, as Beautiful in Mind as in Body.”⁷⁹ Rather than transformation or redemption of excessive inclinations or sins – which was outside of human ability – physiognomy emphasized moderation. Human reason was an “emanation from the Divinity” and the primary faculty which set humans apart from the rest of Creation.⁸⁰ In employing that reason to moderate inescapable sins and afflictions, people drew as near to God as was humanly possible and became a reflection of the divine balance with which He governed the universe. Emphasis upon the degree to which “no Man was ever so very moderate, as not sometimes to be shaken with their fatal violence,” ensured that calls to human reason still made note of everyone’s frailty and dependence on God’s mercy.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy*, (1671), 226 (sig. Qq2v); Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde* (1604), 8.

⁷⁹ John Evelyn, *Numismata* (1697), 326.

⁸⁰ W. Ayloffe, *The government of the passions according to the rules of reason and religion* (1700), 14.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

Physiognomic calls to “know thyself” were more about self-moderation and, through God’s grace, self-abnegation. Only Adam and Eve were actually created by God firsthand, whereas the rest of humanity was “made and born answerable to the discourse of Man’s invention.”⁸² Beneath man’s invention, all people still retained a kernel of “those degrees of goodnesse that God imprinted upon them at first,” but to draw near to it, they must always search for it and strive against the everlasting effects of the Fall.⁸³ Contemporary understandings of moderation help contextualize contradictions (such as that between belief in the utter dependence upon God and the ability to better oneself), which are particularly traceable in physiognomic discussion. In the early modern period, as historians such as Ethan Shagan and Alexandra Walsham have demonstrated, moderation was often associated with violence, restraint and repression in ways that would seem incompatible to more modern understandings of the term.⁸⁴ Original Sin and the attendant depravity of human nature made it natural for moderation to be externalised in the form of ecclesiastical and/or governmental authority. Due to the fallen state, self-control was incredibly difficult to maintain without external restraints and (especially) divine guidance and grace. Physiognomy’s acceptance of the “stupendious effects” which education, moral government and carefully-directed religious instruction could have on “the most averse and brutish nature,” is a reflection of such belief.⁸⁵ It was necessary to carefully study the body and learn about one’s innate nature and individual inclinations,

⁸² John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: man transform'd* (1653), B3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, B4.

⁸⁴ Ethan H. Shagan, *The Rule of Moderation: Violence, Religion and the Politics of Restraint in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁸⁵ John Evelyn, *Numismata* (1697), 338.

for in recognizing them, someone could be made subservient to education and externally-regulated morality. Physiognomy manuals also implied that, if people were fully aware of the unique assortments of sins which plagued them, they would have the knowledge needed to better themselves, potentially without any additional instruction. This implied a degree of optimism regarding human spiritual potential, one which freed it from religious and governmental authority. It also, however, is evidence of the degree to which moderation of the self and moderation of others were, as Shagan has noted, two sides of the same, coercive coin.⁸⁶

The Elizabethan Catholic recusant Thomas Wright's comments on how battles for the soul may be overcome by striving for spiritual equilibrium were originally published in 1601 and reprinted at least four times by 1630. Wright's work had a lasting influence on seventeenth-century physiognomers and was plagiarized nearly word for word in French Huguenot De Vulson's treatise on physiognomy, which was translated for English readers in 1669 and 1681. Echoing the common physiognomic conviction that a study of personal inclinations "ought to be preferred before all treasures and riches," Wright argued that this was especially the case for Christians.⁸⁷ He compared souls to castles besieged by armies of unbridled passions and noted that every soul ought "to know the nature of his enemies, their stratagems and continuall incursions." Genuine, "mortified" Christians will achieve peace, balance and "a great quietnesse of minde" through violent purging of the enemies of God's people which surrounded them.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Shagan, 8.

⁸⁷ Thomas Wright, *passions of the minde* (1604), 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

The metaphorical connections Wright drew between internal and social disorder were further fused by his mention of Saint Paul's lessons on punishing the temptations of the flesh: "I chasten the body and bring it into servitude."⁸⁹ Saint Paul, significantly, personified the Christian church as a body which needed all its members to be in uniform and healthy communication in order to properly function. As much as individual bodies needed chastisement in order to prepare for salvation, so too did the social body need careful instruction and restraint. Similarly, the ejected nonconformist minister Richard Baxter likened the church to a political body which had laws to "perfect its being" and which relied on conjoined relations between rulers and ruled. He wrote that, just as "every natural body must by eating and drinking, and fit exercise and usage, be a cause of its own preservation ... and as every political body must by government and arms in case of need preserve themselves under God; so must the Body of Christ, the Church, be diligent in using their best endeavours to preserve the Being and well-being of the whole."⁹⁰ Examining the secrets and conduct of others, then, was as important as investigating one's own.

The fusion of personal moderation and balance amidst God's diverse body of believers paralleled physiognomic pronouncements on the "symmetry of parts." *The Art how to Know Men* (1665) argued that it was impossible to completely fulfill the physiognomic instruction to "know thyself" unless people also knew others and understood their relations to them. It stated that humans were too biased in their own passions and inclinations to truly grasp their own utter depravity, but they could have

⁸⁹ The biblical reference is 1 Corinthians 9:27.

⁹⁰ Richard Baxter, *Catholick unity, or, The only way to bring us all to be of one religion* (1660), 7-10.

their faults and frailties mirrored back at them by more general descriptions. “It is a thing out of all dispute,” wrote the author, “that there is no better way for a man to come to knowledge of himself, then by studying that knowledge in others.”⁹¹ Similarly, De Vulson wrote, “consider what company you most phancy, they are the mirror wherein you may take a survey of your own self for every individual person affects him that most resembles himself.”⁹² Seventeenth-century physiognomers stressed that “all ought to be in a just equilibrium.”⁹³ In exploring and “righting” the soul’s passions, people should strive for conformity, balance and “mediocrity.” This mediocrity, or moderation of character, was best found in following the correct and orthodox social path to which everyone was designed. And since the state of the society in which all people moved was reflective of their own moral state, it followed that, just as each bodily limb carried its own significance in relation to the body and soul to which it was attached, so the more each person concentrated on conformity (meaning the “straight” or “right” opinion), the more unified and orderly society as a whole would become. As Scott Sowerby has shown, James II’s speeches on toleration were not well received, including the latter’s argument that religious opinions, like complexion, were involuntary and thus should not be punished.⁹⁴ Rather than serving as a convincing argument for toleration, however, the contemporary physiognomic association between divergence of complexion and opinion as innate qualities connected both to the effects of the Fall, and for that very reason, served as an argument for coercion rather than toleration.

⁹¹ Marin De La Chambre, *Art how to know men* (1665), B3v.

⁹² Marc De Vulson, *Court of Curiosity* (1669), 114.

⁹³ Marin De La Chambre *Art how to know men* (1665), 3-4.

⁹⁴ Scott Sowerby, “Of Different Complexions: Religious Diversity and National Identity in James II’s Toleration Campaign,” *The English Historical Review* vol. 124 no. 506 (2009): 29-52.

iv. The “Science of the Countenance”: Identity from Flesh to Face

Physiognomy’s transition to a primary focus on faces was a messy one and not without earlier precedent. The sixteenth-century physiognomer Thomas Hill had diligently detailed “all the special parts of man from the head to the foot,” surmising that “no part there is of mans body, which like expresseth the passion of the mind, as the face properly dooth.”⁹⁵ In 1653 Richard Saunders also noted that “the face is a part so fit to disclose all the affections of the inward parts.”⁹⁶ Similarly, in 1697 John Evelyn found that Oliver Cromwell’s face was an especially good example of one which betrayed inner corruption. On “the late Usurper Cromwell,” he wrote, all could “contemplate the Falls and Lines of his ambiguous and double face [and]... read in it, without other comment, Characters of the greatest Dissimulation, Boldness, Cruelty, Ambition in every touch and stroak.”⁹⁷ Statements such as these, however, were soon drowned by the pages of careful body description which filled physiognomic works and were quickly lost in their stress on fallen bodies, human depravity and the need to combat uncertainty with restless searching. Furthermore, within these formulations, the face was often the most expressive because it contained signposts to physically visible corruptions otherwise hidden by clothes. Facial moles, for instance, were connected to the map of revealing moles which punctuated the body. As Richard Saunders suggested in 1653, God wisely made them

⁹⁵ Thomas Hill, *art of physiognomy* (1613), 92.

⁹⁶ Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), (a2).

⁹⁷ John Evelyn, *Numismata* (1697), 339-340. Cromwell’s own alleged comment that he be painted “warts and all” could be seen as a defiant response not only to the vanity, as opposed to personal piety, of traditional court paintings, but also in response to physiognomic works such as Spinola’s (mentioned above) which drew correlations between fervent conjectures about predestination and reprobation and marked and marred bodies. Choosing to be realistically depicted could be interpreted as his way of demonstrating humility and recognition of his fallen state – an action which, in itself, was considered a marker of God’s grace.

visible on the face so that they could be read as signs which pointed to hidden iniquities. He wrote that, because moles and marks “do exceed in number, being diffused through the whole body, some as occult, others covered, and as it were hid from the sight, he epitomizing them together, hath dispersed them in the face which serve (as signs hung at the dores) to discover and demonstrate these latent and veiled marks of the body.”⁹⁸ To seventeenth-century physiognomers, if any one body part were to be particularly revealing, it would not be the face, but instead, the hand. Informed by chiromancy, the hand, it was believed, made up for the face’s confusing “defects” and “deformities” caused by such things as age and experience. The hand was “the common aid & power of the whole body.”⁹⁹ In the seventeenth century, full-bodied approaches to physiognomy still dominated. They served to balance convictions regarding Original Sin and human depravity with the desire to provide access to arcane knowledge. They assured readers that insightful judgements could be made by continuously assembling bits and pieces of interpretive information.

The shift in focus from bodies to faces is a reflection of Enlightenment notions regarding human potential which had roots in seventeenth-century ideas famously associated with writers such as John Locke and which are tangible in each of the genres which inform this study.¹⁰⁰ Locke built upon Latitudinarian concepts which maintained the corrosive effects of the Fall and humankind’s need for God’s grace and mercy, but

⁹⁸ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), 267.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁰⁰ John Locke, *The reasonableness of Christianity as delivered in the Scriptures* (1695); John Locke, *An essay concerning humane understanding* (1690).

emphasized the salvific effects of proper education and the Christian faith.¹⁰¹ The shifts in emphasis which writers like Locke signify are particularly traceable in physiognomic discussion of Socrates. Described by many as the “most nasty and unhandsome of all men living,” Socrates’s features communicated an unintelligent, brutal, wanton and drunken character.¹⁰² The dissonance between his ugly form and his renowned intelligence, moderation and morality intrigued early modern physiognomers and nearly every contemporary work of physiognomy cites a classical story in which a likeness of Socrates’s face is read by a famous physiognomer. Socrates was revealed to be a “great leachour, a craftye felow, subtyle and given to all wyckednes.”¹⁰³ In traditional accounts of the story, Socrates confesses that the physiognomer was correct. Contrary to what everyone knew of his current virtue, he was indeed prone to wicked inclinations of character, but had fought them through grace, education and reason.

Over the course of the early modern period, this famous story was given different glosses. To sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physiognomers, Socrates’s “natural self” illustrated the degree to which all people, even the most seemingly virtuous, were innately sinful. No matter how much human reason, faith and God’s grace had aided Socrates in overcoming his nature, his entire body stood as a permanent reminder of his unique imperfections and depraved identity. Socrates could alter his behaviour and character, but human attempts to recreate the original goodness could never match God’s. Significantly, Thomas Hill’s 1556 interpretation of Socrates emphasized the need to consider the

¹⁰¹ W.M. Spellman, “Locke and the Latitudinarian Perspective on Original Sin” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* vol. 42 no. 165 (1988): 215-228.

¹⁰² Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie* (1671), b2v.

¹⁰³ Thomas Hill, *art of phisiognomie* (1556), v.

various marks and signifying features of the entire body – from foreheads, chins, necks, and shoulders to hands, thighs, and ankles – before drawing conclusions about a person’s character. Hill suggested that, had Socrates’s physiognomer looked at more than a likeness of the philosopher’s face, a much more complete physiognomic judgement would have been made. “One thing I warn,” he wrote, is “not to judge by any one part alone but by all (or at least) by many together: so shall we be sure not to be deceived. I mean we shall not be deceived to know the truth of the natural disposition and yet we may fail of the mans conditions, which Socrates himself well declared.”¹⁰⁴ The ability to take note of frailties and potentially avoid future pitfalls relied on careful, top-to-toe reading. Eighteenth-century interpretations were more likely to suggest that Socrates was born innocent but became physically marred with the onset of human inclinations and the influence of social ills. The late eighteenth-century English translation of theologian Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Essays on Physiognomy* (1789-1798) argued that previous physiognomers, and even Socrates himself, were all mistaken in their depictions of Socrates’s ugliness and need for external regulation. Had they taken into account the “spirit” of the philosopher’s physiognomy and the potential his facial features proffered, their diagnoses would have been different and more accurate.¹⁰⁵ To the untrained eye, wrote Lavater in 1789, “the form of the countenance of Socrates might appear distorted,” but to those who understood human propensities for goodness (and how to look for them), they would have seen that his features displayed “a celestial beauty.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Hill *art of phisiognomie* (1556), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy; for the promotion of the knowledge and the love of mankind* Vol. 1 (1789), 213.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Sounding much like Locke, Lavater wrote, “No one properly speaking, brings into the world with him dispositions morally bad or morally good: in other words, men are born neither vicious nor virtuous. They all begin with being infants; and then, one is neither wicked nor good – but innocent.”¹⁰⁷ In Lavater’s view, Socrates was born pristine but had his inner inclinations etched into his face as he grew older. His suggestion that the face becomes marred and stained over time was not a concept unique to the eighteenth century. George Spinola’s pamphlet from 1642, for instance, accounted for people being “ill-phisionmied” by reason of Original Sin, but also by disorderly society, ill instruction and wayward life choices. Additionally, to some seventeenth-century commentators, astrological influences on the body worked in similar ways to Lavater’s interpretations of Socrates’s inclinations. John Butler’s 1680 defense of astrology as a “sacred science,” argued that, as soon as a newborn takes its first breath, all the parts of heaven weave together an impression of the child’s fate and personality. Some of the knots within the material of the child’s body will be lucky, others will not, but they will all slowly untie and reveal themselves.¹⁰⁸ Butler’s description of heavenly-directed knots, which untie over the course of a life and gradually influence a person’s fortune and demeanour, is comparable to Lavater’s suggestion. Again, though, it focusses on bodies in their entirety in ways that Lavater does not.

Despite similarities, the Lavaterian interpretation of the Socrates story suggests a decidedly different view of human nature – one which was not necessarily built on innate sinfulness or entirely predetermined instincts, but, instead, on potential. Lavater echoed

¹⁰⁷ Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy; calculated to extend the knowledge and the love of mankind* Vol. 1 (1797), 153.

¹⁰⁸ John Butler, *Astrology A Sacred Science* (1680), (c)3v.

Locke's comments, comparing human minds to "white paper, void of all Characters" and suggested that all people were born as clean sheets of paper, which grew increasingly blotched with time and experience. This was a notion which, as Peter Harrison has noted, had ancient roots and was not necessarily incompatible with belief in innate corruption.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, while seventeenth-century physiognomers addressed and were familiar with such notions, they prioritized their period's more predominant beliefs regarding depravity, physical deformity and limitation. As Phyllis Mack has noted of seventeenth-century prophets, there was desire to be rid of the very sorts of sins, predilections and habits which personified individuals and, instead, as one Quaker writer noted, to become blank as a book which had not yet been inked.¹¹⁰ In their comprehensive studies of bodies, seventeenth-century writings on physiognomy encouraged readers and practitioners to strive for a return to innocence. It sounds paradoxical, but it was implied that such innocence or purity of soul grew from constantly searching, uncovering and learning from divine secrets. Thirsting for knowledge hidden within one's self and others was thus a way in which to moderate and beautify society, as well as a way in which to return to an Adamic communion with God.

Lavater's notion of a socially- and time-etched face accorded with changing interpretations of the term "human nature." In his exploration into the history and meaning of the term, Roger Smith has suggested that, over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an understanding of humanity in relation to the

¹⁰⁹ Peter Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 230.

¹¹⁰ Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of California Press, 1992), 7.

divine shifted to exploration into human nature as a “this-worldly nature.”¹¹¹ Rather than one essential nature, represented by Adam and Eve and the choices they made, people’s natures were increasingly seen as the conditioned result of history and experience. This transformed focus fit with Enlightenment ideals regarding human improvement and progress, but trust in proper education and social mores was not, of course, new to the eighteenth century. As seventeenth-century interpretations of the Socrates tale indicate, a mixture of reliance on God and education could help people overcome (although never completely escape) the failings stamped on their bodies. Earlier notions of proper instruction, however, illustrated a reliance on God and society to help suppress the sinful self and bring the body into alignment, whereas physiognomic works like Lavater’s suggested a belief in the value of history and experience for drawing out the good that was inherently there and which could be seen in the rational faculties of the face.¹¹²

The classic Socrates tale and, in particular, its representation in Lavater’s writings, has interested various scholars.¹¹³ Along with physiognomy, it has played a role in studies on the development of modern notions of identity. Roy Porter and Dror Wahrman, for instance, both argue that physiognomy reveals the degree to which

¹¹¹ Roger Smith, “The Language of Human Nature,” in Christopher Fox, Roy Porter and Robert Wokler, eds., *Inventing Human Science: Eighteenth-Century Domains* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 97.

¹¹² Interestingly, by the time of Lavater’s writing, early Enlightenment optimism in human improvement, through social instruction and responsible government, had been clouded over by the experience of state repression. The popularity of Lavater’s work in England stemmed, in part, from its focus on an inherent goodness and the promise of betterment which could be found within rather than through dependence upon social institutions. Written on people’s faces was a promise of inner goodness and perfectibility that circumvented governmental and, to some extent, even social regulation.

¹¹³ See, for instance, Raymond B. Waddington, “Socrates in Montaigne’s ‘Traicte de la Phisionomie,’” *Modern Language Quarterly* vol. 41 no. 4 (1980): 328 – 346; Kevin Berland, “Inborn Character and Free Will in the History of Physiognomy,” in Melissa Percival and Graeme Tytler, eds., *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater’s Impact on European* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 25-38.

seventeenth-century conceptions of identity were drastically different from those a century later.¹¹⁴ Seventeenth-century texts indicate, however, that the seemingly sudden birth of a new identity regime in the eighteenth century had a long period of gestation. While, as Wahrman and Porter note, physical attributes were often grouped under corporate headings and self-diagnosis of physical signs could be variously interpreted, this was not the total sum of physiognomy's parts. The physiognomic texts' predominant practice of listing specific character traits beneath particular bodily features tied people to their identities in ways in which social category headings could not. While, in theory, people could adopt different categories, their bodies made them unique. And while they could mask certain features and overcome certain inclinations, there was no erasing what had originally been etched upon the body. Physiognomy was foundationally concerned with classifying and contemplating differences, be they between people, or even between the various signifiers of a single form. In making categorizations a matter of nature and a set of permanent stamps which people could read on the body, physiognomy tied people to their sinful states in fixed and, in regards to gender and processes of otherness, often pernicious ways. Such attention to detail was important, for it reinforced the difficulty in uncovering secrets in their entirety (and thus the need for useful tools with which to do so) and, in the implied suggestion that details have the potential of being overlooked, it maintained the human propensity to uncertainty – a trait which was necessary to the continual refinement of reason, the realization of grace and an important safety net which kept humans from overstepping their cognitive bounds.

¹¹⁴ Wahrman, *Modern Self*, 295-299; Porter, "Making Faces," 385-396.

The physical shift from fallen bodies to human faces can be detected in physiognomic language. “Countenance” is a slippery term which can, and has, been defined in a number of ways. The definition most applicable to the term’s usage in seventeenth-century physiognomy texts is that which focusses on behaviour, comportment and conduct. In his use of the term, Richard Saunders wrote, “the countenance is the index and detector of the heart, the very demeanour and deportment of the body in walking, the voice, the motions of the head and eyes ... are pregnant & external notes and signs of the internal cogitations, all which are contained within the verity of physiognomy.”¹¹⁵ At the time of Saunders’s writing in the mid-seventeenth century, the term was already in the process of shifting to its predominant definition of the face, or “visage.”¹¹⁶ In John Evelyn’s 1697 discussion on the “science of the countenance,” the tensions in how to best understand “countenance” and, more importantly, how to apply it to the study of physiognomy, are evident. He used the term in different ways, sometimes associating it with the face only, other times allowing it to include the conditions of the entire body. He also cited a telling story about Hippocrates. Apparently Hippocrates saw a young woman walk by him one morning and, taking note of her face, he greeted her as “fair virgin.” The next morning, he saw her once again but “bid good morrow *Woman*” for, by reading her looks, he was able to discover that “she had play’d the Wanton and been vitiated the Night before.” Evelyn concluded this tale about the telling nature of faces with an admonition that, despite such instances, there must be more to physiognomy and the work of its practitioners than simple face reading:

¹¹⁵ Richard Saunders, *Palmistry* (1664), 135.

¹¹⁶ Elisha Coles, *An English dictionary* (1670), I.

“there seems more in the Artist than one would think should be detected by bare inspection of the Countenance only.”¹¹⁷

By 1763, the satirist and clergyman John Clubbe (1703-1773) noted that the ancient “observations upon the complexion, lines and shape of the body in general, compared with the manners, tempers and understandings of men,” had been distilled down to the examination of the “lineaments of the face only; and has taken so large a stride as to make *Phyz* [“face or facial expression“] and Countenance the same thing.”¹¹⁸ Similarly, in his 1747 lecture to the Royal Society, the physician James Parsons (1705-1770) stated that “People now-a-days mean no more by [physiognomy] than what regards the Countenance.”¹¹⁹ The French clergyman Jacques Perneti’s work on physiognomy, published in English in 1751, reflected not just an emerging separation of physiognomy from astrology, but also a withdrawal from the more traditional focus on the full body: “I am to shew that men carry in their physiognomies certain and strongly marked indications of what they actually are ... that their inside is to be known by their outside, and that an attention to the features of their face will give a just idea of the faculties of their soul, without any other investigation.”¹²⁰ By the time of Clubbe, Parsons and Perneti’s writing, more modern conceptions of human nature and ability (as opposed to depravity and limitation) had begun to dominate religious and intellectual endeavours.

¹¹⁷ John Evelyn, *Numismata* (1697), 304.

¹¹⁸ John Clubbe, *Physiognomy* (1763), 5.

¹¹⁹ James Parsons, *Human Physiognomy Explained* (1747), i.

¹²⁰ Jacques Perneti, *Philosophical letters upon physiognomies* (1751), 1, 3.

v. Conclusion

In his *Method to Learn to Design the Passions*, which was first presented as a lecture in 1668, the French painter Charles Le Brun (1619-1690) provided an overview of ancient physiognomic views which united the soul to all parts of the body. He concluded that the face had utmost prognostic importance and suggested that, if “man be truly said to be the epitome of the whole World, the Head may well be said to be the epitome of the whole man.”¹²¹ Significantly, however, unlike Thomas Hill, Richard Saunders and their physiognomic contemporaries, Le Brun’s understanding of the expressive qualities of the head was not translated and published in England until the mid-eighteenth century. A few years later, in 1769, clergyman James Granger (1723 -1776) published his *Biographical History of England* and demonstrated how collection and categorization of English heads, by way of portraiture, could bring the character of England’s past to life. Granger was not a physiognomer, but his desire to insert order into an otherwise unruly history is comparative to seventeenth-century physiognomers’ interests in how to reflect the original order of Creation.

Granger also grouped people according to types, or “classes” in order of importance, including those such as “Kings, Queens, Princes, Princesses,” “Commoners who have borne great Employments; namely, Secretaries of State,” “Ladies, and others, of the Female Sex, according to their Rank” and “Persons of both Sexes, chiefly of the lowest Order of the people, remarkable from only one circumstance in their Lives ... such as lived to a great Age, deformed Persons, Convicts, &c.”¹²² Interestingly, in its

¹²¹ Charles Le Brun, *A method to learn to design the passions* trans., John Williams (1734), 55.

¹²² James Granger, *A biographical history of England, from Egbert the Great to the Revolution* Vol. 1 (1769), ar-av.

section on metascopy (which read inclinations by the wrinkles of foreheads) Richard Saunders's *Physiognomy and Chiromancy* (1653, 1671) also contained a small collection of heads. Whereas the volumes of heads collected by Granger reminded readers of unique historical moments through the faces, experiences and identities of individuals, Saunders's heads encouraged readers to find themselves in the sorts of marks which, since the historical event of the Fall, were common to all. In Saunders's collection people may find that they have the sorts of lines which suggest they are "too plain and honest to thrive, without a miracle", others may find their features reflect "prudence and a good nature," and still others may realize that they are "mutable, unconstant, false, deceitfully treacherous, and of a vain glorious proud minde."¹²³ Of the forty-nine assortments of forehead wrinkles displayed, very few reveal inclinations completely free of fault, and four denote "the character of a murtherer." While Granger's individualized heads unite in telling the story of England, Saunders's examples are united by the ways in which they mirror the inclinations of many, by their connection to arcane forces and signs and by the universal stain of sin. Saunders's wrinkled heads also stress the importance of paying attention to the small and sometimes most easily overlooked interpretive signs.

Seventeenth-century physiognomy encouraged and legitimated a culture of restless searching for secret sources of insight. It instructed readers on how to uncover some of the most hidden, and therefore most valuable, secrets in all of Creation, according to "contingently probable" signs.¹²⁴ Even the secrets of women – the trickiest to ascertain of all – could be divulged by physiognomy. A satirical poem from 1653

¹²³ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomy and Chiromancy* (1653), 192-200.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, (a3).

warns secretive ladies not to fall subject to “the curious eye of this strange art”: “Have a great care; for here’s One writes Those secret characters; indites Your passions at the center, by the lines That cross the palm; nay he defines Whither white or black’s your soul By the dimension of the Mole.”¹²⁵ Study of seventeenth-century physiognomy demonstrates how deep-seated beliefs in the Fall and Original Sin shaped understanding of divine secrets and of how arcane knowledge could be acquired. Examination of bodies in their entirety reflected the vastness of God’s secrets and the need for humans, whose capacity for arcane knowledge was limited, to search as much and thoroughly as possible, even if only to achieve a glimpse of those secrets. In order to legitimate the revelatory access they provided, physiognomers, who shared in the beliefs regarding human depravity and limitation, needed to keep them in view. By elaborating the depth of depravity through thorough analysis of bodies, physiognomers demonstrated why God had secrets – because fallen humans were imperfect and not worthy of divine information. They also demonstrated why humans could not fully access God’s secrets – because they were limited by flesh and incapable of complete understanding. Significantly, the reality of human limitation served to highlight the need for more knowledge and the tools which physiognomers provided. Carefully taking stock of and interpreting the body’s marks in their entirety was a way in which to employ, demonstrate and strengthen the gift of human reason which God, in His mercy, had granted. Since everyone was marked in some way, whether for good or ill, the access which physiognomers provided was achievable by any ordinary, literate person. In stressing human limitations, the works discussed in this chapter implied that specialized

¹²⁵ Ibid., (b5).

or elite ability was, just like absolute knowledge itself, neither realistic nor necessary. Specialized training, therefore, was suggestively less essential than recognition of, and instruction in, avenues of knowledge which were already within reach. This was an implication which, as the following chapters indicate, was broadly characteristic of various works which sold access to arcane knowledge.

The focus on Original Sin and fallen bodies was particularly pronounced amongst seventeenth-century physiognomy writings but, by the eighteenth century, views of human nature, reason and ability were clearly shifting. Shorthand writers, astrologers and secret historians all played with suggestions that humans could know many more things than previously imagined and that they could trust their own insights into what they perceived in themselves and others. As a form of arcane knowledge, it is difficult and inaccurate to suggest that physiognomy was representative of a different set of beliefs. Instead, I argue that negative and more optimistic views of human ability existed in tandem and that one body of work could contain arguments for both. Views of the fallen body as representative of human frailty and suggestions regarding the human need and ability, despite that frailty, to conduct “common, serious, diligent and fervorous enquiry” of secrets, were both representative of, and integral to, the fitful transition from fallen bodies to reasoning minds.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Richard Carpenter, *Astrology proved Harmless, Useful and Pious* (1657), 4.

Chapter II. “Adam in his Innocency”: Shorthand and the Secrets of Salvation

The overlaps between seventeenth-century shorthand and physiognomy are readily identified. The features and marks of human bodies, for instance, were considered a style of shorthand. As long as one knew and carefully followed their dictates, much could be revealed. Beneath an image of the celebrated seventeenth-century shorthand master Jeremiah Rich (d. c.1666), Nathaniell Stringer wrote in 1675, “Nature writes short-hand too, for here we find True Character of an ingenious mind. In every feature of this modest face Symbols of witt and Industry wee trace.”¹ Similarly, the likeness of Rich’s contemporary William Hopkins is thus described: “see here his mild but serious visage darts The true proportion of his noble parts.”² Both shorthand and physiognomy drew from the same impulse towards finding symbolic meaning in mysterious or perplexing things, and both sought to explain their purpose and place in society in ways that showcased both their mystery and utility. They both indicated that blunt human reason could be sharpened, and that knowledge of God was within human reach, even if it never could be fully grasped. There was one important distinction, however: while seventeenth-century physiognomy largely remained committed to demonstrations of carnality and utter reliance on the mysterious gift of grace, shorthand systems signaled a more positive view of human nature. Human minds, if given the proper helps, were in fact capable of great things. The Anglican clergyman Thomas Swadlin (c.1600-1670) defined grace as “that which gives us light in the knowledge of the glory of god.”³ Statements such as

¹ Nathaniell Stringer, *Rich Redivivus or Mr Jeremiah Richs short-hand improved* (1675), [1].

² William Hopkins, *The Flying Pen-Man, or The art of short-writing* (1674), [1].

³ Thomas Swadlin, *Divinity no Enemy to Astrology* (1653), 3.

these suggested that a person in a state of grace had access to divine knowledge otherwise secret. Whereas physiognomy treatises often stressed the degree to which grace was a gift which only God could grant, and of which few humans were worthy, shorthand manuals implied that perhaps humans could do more than simply wait and hope they would be chosen recipients. By modeling a learned life of grace, they could actually achieve a state of grace. As with access to secrets more generally, as the previous chapter discussed, this required both active and meditative searching, as well as a dependence on personal industry, reflection, interpretation and supposition.

In seventeenth-century England, shorthand was known by a number of long names, including swift-writing, secret-writing, characterie, brachygraphie, tachygraphy, semographie, stenographie, and William Hopkins's fanciful "flying pen-man." In 1641 the theologian John Wilkins (1614-1672) noted that the systems of thought and writing designated by these names had become so commonplace within England that they no longer warranted extensive or careful demonstration. "Any common mechanic," he remarked, could both scribble and design shorthand. In 1618 the speed-writer Edmond Willis regretfully depicted London as a city with walls and posts "be-sprinkled" with advertisements for various short-writers and with people so eager to share in the short-writing market that, as "soon as they have attained to a little knowledge either by a few papers stolne out of another mans study or by a little service to one that hath knowledge therein, they presently become teachers of others when they are yet to learne themselves."⁴ Shorthand experts regularly published new and not-so-new editions of their writing manuals throughout the century, at a variety of prices. In 1634, as Michael

⁴ Edmond Willis, *An abbreviation of writing by character* (1618), A3v-A4.

Mendle has shown, a manual from celebrated shorthand master Thomas Shelton could cost students at Oxford about 2s 6d.⁵

Shorthand manuals did not guarantee access to secret knowledge as much as suggest that for committed and studious students, shorthand could open the otherwise barred door to deeper exploration and understanding. Short (or swift) writing put into everyday practice the concept of how believers might approach formidable, inspiring and divine wisdom through careful observation of signs. It reduced large words, phrases and ideas to single characters, thereby reflecting in miniature the patterns of Creation which were written by God. Shorthand promised its practitioners the ability to compile more words in less time and implied that the ability to peer past the opacity of letters opened the mind to the divine secrets which they enclosed, and even – as the work of the Elizabethan shorthand writer Timothy Bright illustrates, promised the possibility of a universal (Protestant) language to replace Latin.⁶ In particular, it provided tools for people anxious about the secrets of salvation and grace.

In his 1664 edition of *Stenography, or, The art of short-writing*, Thomas Heath aimed to bring industrious people and all “unlearned to the knowledge of truth, discovered by the light of truth,” regardless of their sex or age.⁷ Shorthand, or “character” writing was “a means granted by the most sage persons to reduce men to knowledge, and

⁵ Michael Mendle, “News and the pamphlet culture of mid-seventeenth century England” in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina Baron, eds., *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), 64.

⁶ Lori Anne Ferrell, “Method as Knowledge: Scribal Theology, Protestantism and the Reinvention of Shorthand in Sixteenth-Century England,” in *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects and Texts, 1400-1800*, eds., Pamela H. Smith and Benjamin Schmidt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 172.

⁷ Thomas Heath, *Stenography, or, The art of short-writing more easy and plain than formerly hath been extant* (1664) 5, 4.

that of the revealed mind of God.”⁸ Throughout the seventeenth century, many of the most popular short writing manuals emphasized the connection between their “short, swift and secret art” and the aims and “service of the church”, promising anxious readers that they could, in learning the art, “lay up a Treasure in Heaven.”⁹ In her study of the rebirth of shorthand writing in late sixteenth-century England, Lori Anne Ferrell argues that Calvinism was taught as a learnable skill and, as such, was consciously boosted by the grasp of complementary arts. In the 1580s, Timothy Bright’s influential shorthand method *Characterie* was contrived to deepen knowledge of Calvinist theology.¹⁰ Bright’s difficult and tedious method, Ferrell notes, was soon replaced by more accommodating systems and thus can be seen as a “stenographic analogy to Puritan practice itself.”¹¹ Elsewhere, Ferrell argues that English Calvinism and its focus on assurances of election, through such activities as observation, vigilant listening and careful reading, were largely founded in English secular pedagogy.¹² Seventeenth-century short writing manuals can be understood as an explicit example of this mutually reinforcing relationship. They aligned themselves with Protestantism’s fetishization of both the inspired words of learned divines and of the Word. Both of these sources of information and learning contained coded messages. And, as John Wilkins wrote, “if a man were but expert in

⁸ Ibid., 11.

⁹ Job Everardt, *An epitome of stenographie* (1658), 90; Thomas Shelton, *Short writing the most exact method* (1630), A3r; Jeremiah Rich, *Semigraphy or Arts rarity* (1654), A3v-A4.

¹⁰ Ferrell, “Method as Knowledge,” 163-177.

¹¹ Ibid., 168.

¹² Lori Anne Ferrell, “How-To Books, Protestant Kinetics, and the Art of Theology,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 71 no. 4 (2008), 591-606.

unfolding of them, it were easie for him to get as much knowledge as adam had in his innocencie, or humane nature is capable of.”¹³

Shorthand writing was uniquely popular in seventeenth-century England, and the English affinity for notetaking during sermons and criminal trials often attracted comment on the continent. In 1641, the Moravian pedagogue Comenius was amazed to find English children learning shorthand in school and commented that the practice was so common and widespread that it had “come into vogue even among the country folk.”¹⁴ Shorthand manuals, notes James Dougal Fleming, took seventeenth-century England by storm and because of this, the period has been labeled as the “coming of age of shorthand.”¹⁵ Scholars have traced the history of shorthand in its own right and have considered its relationship to news reporting, pamphlet culture, political intrigue, royalist literature, understandings of intelligence and the growing importance placed on personal privacy.¹⁶ Over the course of the seventeenth century, shorthand’s place in courts of law and Parliament grew, but it sustained its initial ties to sermon note-taking, divine secrets and revelation. Various divines emphasized the need for faith in invisible and

¹³John Wilkins, *Mercury, or the secret and swift messenger shewing how a man may with privacy and speed communicate his thoughts to a friend at any distance* (1641), 83.

¹⁴ As quoted by Francis Henderson in “‘Swift and Secrete Writing’ in Seventeenth-Century England, and Samuel Shelton’s Brachygraphy”, *British Library Journal* (2008): Article 5, 4.

¹⁵ James Dougal Fleming, *The Mirror of Information in Early Modern England: John Wilkins and the Universal Character* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 21; Michael Mendle, “News and the pamphlet culture,” 63.

¹⁶ E. H. Butler, *The Story of British Shorthand* (London: Pitman, 1951); James Dougal Fleming, *Mirror of Information*; Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing Royalist Literature, 1641 – 1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); “Secret Letters,” in James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practice of Letter Writing, 1512-1635* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Katherine Ellison, *A Cultural History of Early Modern English Cryptography Manuals* (London: Routledge (Kindle Edition), 2016). Frances Henderson, “Reading, and Writing, the Text of the Putney Debates,” in Michael Mendle, ed., *The Putney Debates of 1647* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 36-50.

unknowable, but deeply desired knowledge. This encouraged interest in seeking out patterns and signs which signified grace and led believers to a deeper awareness of God. Collecting signs of grace through consideration of such things as fallen bodies and enigmatic scriptures was the closest humans could come to “partak[ing] of the divine nature,” for “in grace there is the image of God.”¹⁷ Masters of the art argued that ruminating on sermons and scripture through shorthand equipped the faithful to know God better. For seventeenth-century shorthand masters, commercial interests were obviously a compelling consideration. It suited them to maintain the connection to scriptural works, sermons, speeches and the secrets of salvation not just because there was a wide audience for such subjects, but because their work promoted a kind of spiritual self-help which was also marketable.

Shorthand aimed to promote spiritual introspection and to both temper and buttress personal interpretation with specific dictates and rules. As scholars such as Kate Narveson have noted, writing increasingly became a critical aspect of lay engagement with divinity.¹⁸ This created a larger space within which shorthand writers could advertise the spiritual utility of their systems. Narveson’s work explores the emergence of devotional writing in the early seventeenth century and finds that lay writers, many of whom were women, became adept at distinguishing symbolic passages and insights and at drawing correlations between scriptural and personal life events. The devotions which their close reading inspired were felt to be more than mere compilations – they were understood to be new works. Such engagement could not be easily regulated, since it

¹⁷ Richard Carpenter, *Astrology proved Harmless, Useful, Pious* (1657), 38.

¹⁸ Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England: Gender and Self-Definition in an Emergent Writing Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016).

occurred in private letters, notes and musings written outside the purview of the church. Even though meditations of this sort were guided by the material of sermons and theological writings, the outcome of such practices could not be easily controlled.¹⁹

While determining the degree to which shorthand actually did aid such lay engagement and shape its results is outside the scope of this study, it seems clear that for some, at least, it constituted an important aspect of devotion. In his prescriptive funeral sermon for Lady Anne Brook, for instance, the bishop of Salisbury Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715) praised her careful study of scripture and religious instructional materials. She employed shorthand for her own and for her children's spiritual benefit and growth. "She made Extracts out of many books," he remarked, "but in short-hand, since they were only intended for her own or her Childrens use; she also used her short-hand in taking the edifying Parts of Sermons, which she went over in private afterwards with her Children."²⁰ In 1672, short writer William Facy suggested that the extent and depth of personal devotion amongst England's godly owed largely to the century's proliferation of shorthand. "The manifold advantages that come by short-writing now is well known," he wrote, "every study and almost every Christian Family in this nation being beholden to it, for those many pious and learned sermons taken hereby from the preachers mouth, which else had vanished with the breath that spake them."²¹

Shorthand writers reinforced the relationship between spiritual reflection and religious interpretation found in personal devotional writings. They outlined

¹⁹ Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and Their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139-148.

²⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *A sermon preached at the funeral of the Right Honourable Anne, Lady-Dowager Brook* (1691), 23-24.

²¹ William Facy, *The complement of stenography* (1672), A3.

straightforward steps to proficiency in the skill of shorthand and its substantial promises regarding God's grace and salvation. Seventeenth-century shorthand manuals implied that these were steps that all could take, that the community of elect might be larger than previously thought, and that one could potentially join the community through knowledge of God and through the industrious and earnest solicitation of God's graces. This was not an entirely solitary act, however, but one dependent on the authoritative interpretations found in sermons, the Bible – and now, the assistance of shorthand experts as well. In effect, shorthand manuals encouraged self-reliance while simultaneously suggesting or reassuring individual practitioners that they were conformed to church teachings, or at least still responsive to external authority. They sought to incorporate the esoteric and often contentious balance of increased human knowledge and continued dependence upon God, which salvation was said to require, into daily life and action. Before minds could be opened enough to peer beyond the immediately visible, they required studious and guided conditioning. Through their methods of instruction, shorthand manuals encouraged people to consider their daily interactions and conversations in a coded way and to orient their mental landscape and any incoming information around personalized cipher systems. The foundational methods from which to begin such reorientation were what manual writers offered.

ii. Selling Shorthand

Some shorthand manuals encouraged readers to use whichever shorthand alphabet in which they were already adept and asked them only to consider changing certain rules within those familiar alphabets. For reasons such as this, it has been noted that short writing experts shared goals of unification, standardization and communication and

generally approved of one another's work.²² This collaborative spirit was not a sentiment that was always (or often) emphasized in public, however, nor did it curb commercial self-interest and competition even when it was in play. Suggesting that readers need not change their chosen alphabet or their approach to note-taking, but should only make some small adjustments for refinement, was a useful way to target seasoned shorthand writers who otherwise might not be interested in something wholly new. Elisha Coles's *Newest Plainest and the Shortest Short-Hand* (1674) conveniently listed the alphabets of the various English shorthand masters from the past century to whom he was indebted. Although he stated that he was inventing "a more certain rule and method" than any which had come before, he noted why the rules of certain authors worked best in certain cases. Many of his contemporaries, however, were not so gracious: writers like Jeremiah Rich and Thomas Shelton (c.1600-c.1650) exaggerated rivalries for commercial and/or entertainment value when attempting to distinguish the excellence of their respective methods from those of their peers.

A 1654 edition of Jeremiah Rich's *Semigraphy* denigrates other shorthand writers for their susceptibility to sluggishness and dangerous mistakes. In the 1642 preface to his uncle William Cartwright's system, Rich remarked that shorthand had received much deserved praise but that, while deserved, it was often employed for narcissistic ends. Too many shorthand masters "have so far strained their finest complements to boast out their own works, that the strongest cords thereof have not only crackt, but very Complementall-like, they have broken out into large lies."²³ Rich claimed to position himself above such

²² James Dougal Fleming, *Mirror of Information* (Palgrave, 2016), 88.

²³ William Cartwright, *Semography, or Short and Swift Writing* (1642), A2.

distracting rivalries, stating that all systems had their advantages and that, at his time of writing, there were yet to be any systems which were different enough from each other to warrant the degree of boasting found in other publications.

The value and use of shorthand among secretaries, reporters, lawyers, businessmen and politicians was often noted and rarely overlooked by the period's most celebrated shorthand masters, and shorthand's general applicability (i.e., it was not just for taking notes of sermons) was increasingly emphasized as the century wore on. A 1691 edition of Thomas Shelton's *Tachygraphy* took aim at competing shorthand systems, with a particular focus on Jeremiah Rich's rules, which (he argued) were too numerous and too limiting for the necessities of general usage. The promoter argued that Rich's systems, which relied on pre-framed sentences as opposed to flexible words, were solely suited to one subject – scripture phraseology – and did not suit the needs of contemporary sermon reportage. Many of their set phrases, he wrote, “are scarce applicable to two instances and some of them hardly to one (eg) in his 20th rule (women of god) a sentence one shall not often hear.”²⁴ Unless shorthand writers could procure a morally reprehensible patent “for the invention to oblige all preachers and speakers in their discourses and sermons to use phrases and words suited to such [contrived] contractions and fancies,” short writing must open itself to general usage and be freed from the confines of stock characters. In Shelton's mind (and in his marketing interests), then, Rich's system was too confined to exact creeds and thus limited the growth of personal interpretations and spiritual reasoning, while his system promised greater returns.

²⁴ Thomas Shelton, *Tachygraphy The most exact and compendious method of short and swift writing that hath ever yet been published* (1691), A5v-A6.

In the 1670s and 1690s, Samuel Botley's revised versions of Rich's shorthand systems featured terms of law and noted that "the sacred pulpit is not its confine."²⁵ Similarly, a 1680 re-issue of Rich's *Pens Dexterity* expanded far beyond biblical examples, including words used not only in sermons or courts of law, but also those relevant to war, trades, agriculture, food, etc.²⁶ While the promotion of more secular systems, or of the applicability of old systems to secular uses, was on the rise by the close of the century, it was a movement which, as Michael Mendle has noted, still rowed "crosswise to the current."²⁷ Appealing to the secrets of salvation and to the potential for the acquisition and interpretation of divine knowledge interested numerous shorthand manual writers. These things concerned them because shorthand writers were influenced by a religious culture which placed a premium on salvation and grace and which had become accustomed to the ready purchase of competing "how-to" manuals in such fields as medicine and housewifery.²⁸ Suggesting tips on how to ensure greater potential for salvation proved to be a profitable endeavour.

Shorthand manuals not only reflected seventeenth-century religious culture in their search for signs of God's grace through divine inspiration and revelation, but also in their insistence that a degree of proficiency could be achieved in the practice of shorthand

²⁵ Samuel Botley, *Maximum in Minimo or Mr Jeremiah Richs pens dexterity completed with the whole terms of the law* (1674), [1].

²⁶ Jeremiah Rich, *Pen's Dexterity* (1680).

²⁷ Michael Mendle, "The 'prints' of the Trials: The Nexus of Politics, Religion, Law and Information in Late Seventeenth-Century England," in Jason McElligott, ed., *Fear, Exclusion and Revolution: Roger Morrice and Britain in the 1680s* (London: Routledge, 2016), chapter seven.

²⁸ See, for instance, Elaine Leong and Alisha Rankin, eds., *Secrets and Knowledge in Medicine and Science 1500-1800* (London: Ashgate, 2011); William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550-1600* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

– as in the practice of Protestantism – with little else but guided meditation on one book. Mid-seventeenth-century shorthand masters like Thomas Heath and Theophilus Metcalfe argued that their students and “many hundreds in this city and elsewhere that are able to write sermons word for word” could attest that their respective manuals were sufficient instruction.²⁹ Metcalfe promised that shorthand could be a gateway to habitual industry and grace for even the most lowly of learners. He encouraged people “not to feare your owne imbecility, or weaknesse of your capacitie for the attaining of mature perfection, in this art, by this booke alone without any other teacher.”³⁰ Heath echoed such claims, writing that “I hope by little industry a man, or youth, yea women and children may (if but able to read) in a short time need no further help than this my book.”³¹ In the competitive shorthand market, instructors touted the ease with which their respective systems could be commanded. The cover image of Thomas Ratcliffe’s *New Art of Short and Swift Writing without Characters* (1688) depicts a humorous variety of writers gathered around tables, carrying notebooks and making such remarks as, “We can finde our words so well,” “The method’s easy our instructions plain,” and “This cannot bruise the reed nor break the brain.”³² Both Jeremiah Rich and his contemporary Job Everardt declared that with daily diligence (and divine assistance) it would only take a week to attain a reasonable handle on the intricacies of shorthand using merely the rules and

²⁹Theophilus Metcalfe, *Short writing the most easie exact lineal, speedy method that hath ever been obtained or taught. Which book is able to make the practitioner perfect without a teacher* (1652), [1].

³⁰ Theophilus Metcalfe, *Short Writing the most easie exact lineall and speedy method* (1645), 7.

³¹ Thomas Heath, *Stenography, or, The art of short-writing more easy and plain* (1664), 5.

³² Thomas Ratcliffe, *A new art of short and swift writing without characters* (1688), cover image.

practices found in their manuals.³³ In 1649, and in response to criticisms of the degree to which his systems taxed the memory, Shelton trumped Rich and Everardt's claims by insisting that, with the aid of his newly published system, only a matter of hours was necessary. He wrote, "I have now at the request of many by Gods assistance after long study and paines composed a new art more compendious and exact (I am certaine) then any that was yet brought to light and so easie that an ordinary capacity (by god's blessing) may be able in two houres learning to write any chapter in the bible and to give an account of every word."³⁴ Touting their systems of shorthand as easy on the brain and memory is interesting in light of the period's fascination with memory as a marker of intelligence and wit.³⁵ The ejected minister Nathaniel Vincent (1637/8-97) described a person renewed by grace as being perfectly endowed with an enlightened mind and a "memory [which] retains things necessary and worthy to be remembred."³⁶ While one of the draws of short hand was that it could potentially help improve the memory and thus one's chances of appearing simultaneously intelligent and godly, the marketable suggestion that people need not have a powerful memory in order to partake in shorthand's promises widened the path to spiritual insight and grace. It cast the general human capacity for comprehension and for discerning goodness in a favourable light.

³³ Jeremiah Rich, *Charactery, or A most easie and exact method of short and swift writing whereby sermons or speeches may be exactly taken word for word from the mouth of the speaker with much ease and speed: the full understanding of this art is easily attained in one weeks time by the help of this book only* (1646); Job Everardt, *An epitome of stenographie; or, an Abridgement and contraction of the art of short, swift and secret writing by characters both fair, lineall and legible* (1658), B2v.

³⁴ Thomas Shelton *A new art of short-writing* (1649), Av.

³⁵ Ellison, *Cryptography Manuals*, chapter six.

³⁶ Nathanael Vincent, *The perfect man described in his life and end* (1696), 4.

The seemingly egalitarian and optimistic claims of many shorthand manuals promised to empower readers and to provide them, as it were, with tools for spiritual “do-it-yourself.” Accordingly, some manuals encouraged practitioners to use shorthand systems as frameworks for more personalized styles. In his section on emblematical figures, for instance, Job Everardt provided a number of instructive examples, such as a symbol resembling a “Y” to express a sentence from the book of Matthew (“enter ye in at the straight gate”). The symbol was meant to “represent the state and condition of man in this world. The lower part notes infancy in which age it doth not appear to what course of life the childe is inclinable: the upper part ... representeth the two wayes in one of which every man walketh, the right side which is the narrower, shewing the way of life and the left which is the broader shewing the way of death and distruction.” From such examples he encouraged every reader to “add and invent more or other as he shall judge them useful.”³⁷ George Ridpath’s *Short-hand yet shorter* (1687) called into question the usefulness of outdated tables and noted that strictly following the dictates of one master was not worthwhile, “for there is as much variety of expressing conceptions (upon the same subject) as there is of faces.”³⁸ Ridpath suggested that, by his example, a practitioner might “compose tables to himself which he will more easily remember than those of another composition.”

Other shorthand writers, in contrast, discouraged such attempts at personalization. Thomas Heath, for instance, warned that any adjustments made to his system were

³⁷ Job Everardt, *epitome of stenographie*, (1658), E8v, Fv.

³⁸ George Ridpath, *Short-hand yet shorter* (1687), 41-42.

certain to be a hindrance and that people rarely err if they follow a rule.³⁹ In either case, there is the expectation that a degree of constant guidance, or at the very least preliminary instruction, is necessary and that there must be, as in any religious practice, a rule or method directing and shaping the faithful practitioners' actions. "Without a method," wrote Jeremiah Rich, "there is nothing but confusion in the tracts of each mysterious art."⁴⁰ Reflecting warnings from physiognomers who emphasized the importance of carefully and judiciously considering all telling signs and thereby enforcing the importance of their guidance, Rich and his contemporaries emphasized the importance of "diligent observation" in the use of shorthand. Even the slightest stroke of the pen, or "small variation of a rule" could completely alter the intentions of a word or sentence.⁴¹

The importance placed upon loyalty to a particular system can be seen as reflecting the proprietorial claims of different shorthand masters. For the most part, the differences between various systems were fairly slim, but creators and promoters of different methods regularly criticized their competitors for being too tedious, taxing or ineffectual. By exaggerating the degree to which their personal systems could be grasped with greater ease and speed, shorthand masters competed for clients and customers. The fact that the often complex and highly intricate systems they touted often fell far short of promises of speedy mastery emphasized the need for careful guidance into the upper echelons of intelligent spirituality. While shorthand manuals made appeals to all levels of comprehension and ability (and thereby widened their commercial net), they also

³⁹ Thomas Heath, *Stenography, or, The art of short-writing more easy and plain* (1664), 9.

⁴⁰ Jeremiah Rich, *Semigraphy or Arts rarity known* (1654), 37.

⁴¹ Jeremiah Rich, *The Pens Dexterity* (1669), 20.

reinforced the degree to which not everyone may hold the same potential for excellence. Rich, for instance, wrote that “God has not given to every man a capacity alike, and so the Art may be abused by them that cannot learne it, because their wits are sordid.”⁴² Interestingly, however, his continued explanation of why pretenders to the practice missed the mark had less to do with an incapacity for such learning than with incorrect instruction. He indicated the ways in which their incomplete understanding of shorthand rendered their attempts futile; in contrast, students of his particular method had shown themselves to be dependably proficient. Were the witless to apply themselves to his dictates, his explanations imply, their wits would surely be sharpened, as would their capacity to write well and attune their minds to concepts beyond the confines of words and letters. Here, his comments on the incapacity of some appears to have less to do with corrupt human nature and more with efforts to distinguish his expertise as an instructor from that of his competitors.

Seen in this proprietary light, the focus on sermons, self-examination, the gathering of grace and the revelation of God’s secrets can be understood as a marketing ploy more than, or at least as much as, an honest reflection of the shorthand masters’ religious intentions. Yet if so characteristic an aspect of these manuals was merely marketing, that says much about the desires and interests of the people to whom they were directed. The secrets of salvation – ways in which to recognize them, tap into them and weigh them with the realities of one’s life – helped sell shorthand manuals. Furthermore, to draw too firm a line between marketing talk and religious speak does not adequately reflect a culture in which the two were not necessarily separate entities.

⁴² Jeremiah Rich, *Semigraphy or Arts rarity* (1654), 37.

iii. The “Secrets of Salvation” and Spiritual Yearning

Much against some of their explicit intentions, religious writers who stressed the impenetrability of secrets regarding grace and salvation – by highlighting a redemptive yearning for knowledge of God – also helped set the scene for shorthand writers who indicated that such knowledge was potentially attainable. In *Spiritual Opticks* (1651), the theologian Nathaniel Culverwell (c.1619-1651) contemplated the mysteries of salvation and the limitations of human knowledge. Human carnality, he wrote, ensures that the mysteries, riddles, or secrets of religion remain cloaked, obscured and enigmatical. Only with the death of the “gross earthly body” could the soul come face to face with God. He argued that, although the signs of God’s sovereignty were everywhere, and that much could be learned from close observation of Creation, when it came to “the treasures of free grace and infinite mercy, the whole plot of the gospel, not the least shadow of these to be found.”⁴³ Culverwell noted that the sacrament of baptism is like “a looking-glasse where the first beam of God’s favourable countenance shews it self, the first expression of his love to a sinfull creature.”⁴⁴ In a similar manner, Bishop Samuel Bradford remarked that, since God’s influences were almost wholly imperceptible, it was necessary “for us who are us’d so much to converse with sensible objects, to have some stated, external, and sensible means, for the deriving his internal grace to our spirits.”⁴⁵ His list included such things as the Bible, ministers, the church and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Comments and ruminations such as these indicated that knowledge which was

⁴³ Nathanael Culverwell, *Spiritual Opticks* (1651), 16.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁵ Samuel Bradford, *The Excellency of the Christian Revelation* (1699), 17.

divinely secret in nature was beautiful, truthful and beyond the reach of human comprehension. The closest humans could come to attaining it was through symbolic riddle, emblem or external means that relied on something greater than human industry alone.

Protestant distrust of secrets as the tools of popish mediation, hypocrisy and plotting did not, of course, extend to God. When it came to God, secrets and even secrecy were seen as essential. They helped furnish a redemptive yearning: “the things that remain to be seen, will always appear to us as much and more worthy of our contemplation than those that we shall have seen already.”⁴⁶ They also served as humbling indications of human frailty and hopeful reminders of the marvels awaiting the saved in the afterlife. Distrust of secrecy’s seditiousness neither negated the desire for the sharing and deciphering of secrets, nor did it hamper the commercial gains to be made from the peddling of secrets.⁴⁷ Seventeenth-century shorthand writers suggested that God’s mysterious and secret ways could be known. The practice of shorthand was sold as the very sort of “external and sensible means” through which the reality of God’s favour could be examined and revealed. Like the sacraments, it was touted as having the potential to provide “effectuall signes of grace and Gods good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisible in us, and doth not onely quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.”⁴⁸ It could “invest the true believing Receiver in the Right of Pardon, Adoption and Salvation.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Moses Amyrout, *The evidence of things not seen* (1700), 213.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Katherine Ellison, *Cryptography Manuals*; Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians, and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁴⁸ Church of England, *Articles of Religion* (1642), 7.

⁴⁹ Richard Baxter, *R. Baxter’s sence of the subscribed articles of religion* (1689), 11.

Salvation and grace were amongst the most prominent of God's secrets.

Salvation, wrote the Presbyterian minister John Sheffield (1653/4-1726), distinguishes people from their neighbours "by election in the bosome and secret purpose of God." Grace, according to Sheffield and believers of different persuasions, was the only means to salvation and "hath a secret, powerful, though of an undiscerned hand, in leading a straying sinner unto Christ."⁵⁰ Recent works on the nature of early modern English Protestant doctrine and practice stress the degrees to which theological musings by ministers like Sheffield engaged and reflected the interests of ordinary people.⁵¹ They were fashioned by broad swaths of cultural experience and expression, and they provide insights into contemporary belief and thought; the preoccupation with salvation was not just a distinctive characteristic of Puritan communities but was ubiquitous amongst Protestants in general. Questions, beliefs and assumptions regarding salvation and grace shaped day-to-day experiences, and while their particularities were hotly debated, their centrality remained steadfast.⁵² Seventeenth-century people tended to view their world through a religious lens, and there was as much acceptance of divine riddles and secrecy as there was unease and suspicion with worldly concealment. Secrets emphasized the binary between good and evil which punctuated daily life and experience. Generally, the secrets which were uplifting and good were the ones which would, to some degree, remain forever locked – an assumption which, as chapter three indicates, astrologers

⁵⁰ John Sheffield, *Salvation by Grace and never the less of Grace* (1698), 15-1

⁵¹See, for instance, Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England c. 1590-1640* (London: Routledge, 2016); Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Alec Rylie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵² See for instance Jonathan Willis, ed., *Sin an Salvation in Reformation England* (London: Routledge, 2015).

employed as legitimation (or a safety net) for their study. On the other hand, the foul secrets of humans, as secret historians were apt to emphasize, would always be outed. For the generality of shorthand masters, attention to patterns in scripture and spiritual thought enriched understanding of the secrets which demonstrated God's omnipotent presence. It could also aid believers' searches into the silent yet stirring ways in which God was at work in their own lives.

Recent studies have emphasized that predestination was a more flexible, responsive and temperate belief than much traditional scholarship has allowed and that reliance on an unknowable, providential God who worked in unseen ways was often deeply reassuring, with ministers often encouraging confidence rather than angst.⁵³ It is above all important to note that modern depictions of uncertainty as a cause of anxiety or internal torment may not fully apply to seventeenth-century communities which may have been much more comfortable than we are today with the inscrutability of God's will. Similarly, recent studies of melancholy and emotion in early modern Protestantism have largely silenced any lingering correlations – such as those forwarded by Lawrence Stone and Michael Schoenfeldt – between Calvinist or Anglican belief and emotional control or stunted affect.⁵⁴ They have recently begun to illustrate the range, nuances and

⁵³ Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians*; Kate Narveson, "Resting Assured in Puritan Piety: The Lay Experience," in Alece Ryrie and Tom Schwanda, eds., *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 166-193. See also, Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Angst was nonetheless a reality for many individual believers; see for instance the classic study, Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London: Methuen & Co., 1985).

⁵⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves In Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

cultivation of Protestant emotion.⁵⁵ While the burden of melancholy was felt to be “no helpe in religion or any holy duty but a great hinderance,” the “deep aggravation” of “Godly sorrow” was understood differently: a sign that God’s silent spirit was at work in people’s lives.⁵⁶ “God sees in secret,” wrote Presbyterian John Barret. When humans follow his example and come face to face with their secret sins they feel an intense, private and redemptive sorrow. “Spiritual joy,” he concluded, “is not wont to come in, till Godly Sorrow hath prepared and made a way for it.”⁵⁷ Although God’s ways were secretive, it did not follow that any knowledge of them must be mired in human opinions and mistakes. True believers have an “appropriating,” or ever-thirsting knowledge, which only grows with each and every revelation. “Spiritual minds,” he concluded, “are not only for more knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, as revealed in the scripture: but for an experimental knowledge of him in his special works of Grace on them.”⁵⁸ The clergyman George Hughes noted that the recently departed William Crompton must certainly have been a “soule in Christ,” for in his “bosome-day-booke,” or “booke of secrets,” which, in effect, was a physical record of his conscience, he had thoroughly and most insatiably “ript up his heart.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ For more on the importance of emotions to Protestant belief, practice and ministry, see Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda, eds., *Puritanism and Emotion in the Early Modern World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ George, Hughes, *The art of embalming dead saints* (1642), 47,

⁵⁷ John Barret, *The Christian Temper* (1678), 104, 111, 395.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁹ George Hughes, *dead saints* (1642), 45-46.

John Sheffield noted that grace saves freely while simultaneously compelling extreme “diligence in working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.”⁶⁰ Election is a secret, but when a soul is called and converted, the path to salvation begins and the “precious and saving fruits and effects” of election can be discerned. In a similar manner, Nathaniel Vincent argued that a Christian’s willingness to uncover his or her hidden sins and transgressions illustrated “truth of grace.” “There is a kind of spiritual instinct in true believers,” he wrote, “which inclines them both to a jealousy of themselves, and a desire to have their hearts laid open.” “We should therefore be the more strict,” he continued, “in searching, that sin wherever it lurks may not escape our knowledge and that grace also may be made manifest.”⁶¹ Like William Crompton, whose godly death was praised above, true believers were those who were constantly yearning to be freed from the odious limitations of their carnality. Agitation, discomfort and the undeniable urge to “strive and fight and run and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure” were among the effects of the mysterious workings of grace.⁶²

Some English Calvinists who became dissenters after the Restoration, such as the “reluctant nonconformist” Richard Baxter (1615-1691), were more nuanced in their approach to the necessity of spiritual suffering as the primary witness of God’s saving grace.⁶³ Grace was essential to salvation and the redemptive alteration of mind, soul and body, Baxter noted, but it “will not take away your thirst or hunger.” Instead, “it will

⁶⁰ John Sheffield, *Salvation by Grace and never the less of Grace* (1698), 31.

⁶¹ Nathaniel Vincent, *True Touchstone which shews both Grace and Nature* (1681), 35.

⁶² John Sheffield, *Savation by Grace*, 16, 31.

⁶³ N. H. Keeble, "Baxter, Richard (1615–1691), ejected minister and religious writer." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

keepe you from drunkenes & gluttony in satisfyng of it; so it may keepe you from ungodly meanes of Expressinge your feare or rememberinge the things feared, & yet not overcome the feares themselves.”⁶⁴ In this expression of the means to salvation, it is not necessarily suffering or insatiable thirst which evidences the work of grace, so much as the way in which such yearning is directed. Restoration Anglicans, as Jeremy Schmidt has shown, distanced themselves from more stringent associations between uncertainty, emotional affliction and evidence of God’s grace.⁶⁵ In the popular *Parable of the Pilgrim* (1665), for instance, the latitudinarian clergyman Simon Patrick (1626-1707) emphasized God’s compassion and his loving desire to see all humans joyful and saved. “Purge your mind of all unworthy thoughts of God,” he wrote, “and perswade your self that he is very good, a lover of souls ... Be sure you leave not so much as a suspition of his willingness to make you happy, and to afford you sufficient means to attain your end.”⁶⁶ Godly sorrow, notes Schmidt, was not, however, unique to Puritans.⁶⁷ It had a long theological history which continued to influence various branches of mainstream religious belief and practice throughout the seventeenth century. Most Restoration Anglicans valued and encouraged the saving effects of godly sorrow, but they were careful to distinguish physiological and brutish or ostentatious and superficial demonstrations of fear and angst from what they considered to be true, redemptive cases of conscience. The importance of

⁶⁴ DWL MS RB/2/5/11.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness in Early Modern England* (London: Ashgate, 2007), chapter four.

⁶⁶ Simon Patrick, *The Parable of the pilgrim written to a friend* (1665), 27.

⁶⁷ Schmidt, *Melancholy*, 102. For discussion on the controversial but still useful employment of the term “Puritan,” see Rylie and Schwanda, *Puritanism and Emotion*; J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), chapter 2.

hungrily searching for secret sins and signs of grace, however, remained central to Anglican piety. The spiritual guide (i.e., the established church) accompanying Simon Patrick's pilgrim to Jerusalem slowly reveals the secrets behind his lessons, layer by layer as they journey together. Before beginning the journey, he tells the pilgrim, "search your Conscience very narrowly to find out all the sins whereof you stand guilty: some of which may lurk so secretly, or look so demurely, that a Faith which is not very busie, may either not espy them, or let them pass for no offences. These must all be purged out and left behind, as things that can by no means be permitted to go along with you."⁶⁸ Delving into secret sins and embracing the obscured parables or truths in the Bible could set one on the course to salvation. Furiously recording religious insights, passages and sermons through shorthand was a tangible demonstration of "a searching faith, a busie faith, an examining faith" and an ever-growing thirst for wisdom which could lead one to a state of grace.⁶⁹

At their most rudimentary level, the majority of seventeenth-century shorthand styles provided symbols for the letters of the alphabet which made them quicker to write and connect into words and phrases. Once comfort with a given alphabet was established, experts encouraged practitioners to begin designating specific symbols to stand for entire words or concepts. They also suggested ways in which to organize the symbols into certain groupings or headings which would help organize the information to be remembered. As James Dougall Fleming has noted, shorthand was as much a way in which to manage and communicate knowledge as it was a way in which to remember and expand upon it. Pages of written symbols, however, were more than aids to memory or management. They were

⁶⁸ Simon Patrick, *The Parable of the pilgrim* (1665), 33.

⁶⁹ Francis Cheynell, *The man of honour, described in a sermon* (1645), 12.

comparable to parables and, like any knowledge worth seeking, contained layers of meaning. Seventeenth-century shorthand masters like John Wilkins noted common superstitions which various written symbols carried. In his comments on shorthand, for instance, he recorded a particular symbol favoured by new mothers. “There are many superstitious women in these times,” he wrote, “who believe this to be so lucky a character, that they always worke it upon the swaddling clothes of their young children, thinking thereby to make them more healthful and prosperous in their lives.”⁷⁰ Similarly, the early-seventeenth-century shorthand expert John Willis (d.1625) made note of parchments found with intriguing words and symbols which “simple people” believed contained weighty prophecies and which frauds falsely interpreted “to the deluding and beguiling of the credulous.”⁷¹ While shorthand masters distanced themselves from such associations, they were sensitive to the potential power of how the substance of things in nature and in scripture could be denoted and revealed by signs and symbols. They also knew the proclivities of their audiences. Shorthand, it was argued, freed minds from the clatter and fear of words, and like Daniel who wisely interpreted God’s handwriting on Balshazzar’s wall, trained them to hone in on the essential meaning of messages.

In her analysis of seventeenth-century cryptography, Katherine Ellison indicates how secret-writing manuals argued for the practicality of “emblematic reading” and encouraged “readers to sharpen their symbolic interpretation skills in order to function as more informed citizens.”⁷² A comparable trend is woven through shorthand manuals,

⁷⁰ John Wilkins, *Secret and Swift* (1641), 98.

⁷¹ John Willis, *Art of Stenographie* (1602), F7r.

⁷² Katherine Ellison, *Cryptography Manuals*, Introduction.

many of which also delved into the interconnected world of cryptography. The concept of shorthand as a quick conduit to the essence of things, and the degree to which such a concept was readily understandable to seventeenth-century audiences, is evident in the ways in which contemporaries used shorthand as an explanatory metaphor. In a sermon on the importance of living lovingly, royalist clergyman Henry Hammond (1605-1660) preached that everyone, including imprisoned bankrupts, wounded soldiers, malefactors under torture, and gallant criminals on the scaffold, were worthy of compassion. “The secure, senseless sinner,” he continued, “is the brachygraphy of all these.”⁷³ More to the point, he entreated hearers to keep the Sermon of the Mount imprinted in their hearts and to model their lives after it and the Beatitudes. He depicted the Sermon as a shorthand to complete understanding of the various ways in which to be Christ-like: “If you will have the *Brachygraphy* of that, the *Manual picture* that maybe sure, either in words of sense, never to depart from your bosom, but remain your constant *Phylactery* or *Preservative*, from the danger of all *ungospel spirits*, then take the *Beatitudes* in the front of it.”⁷⁴

The moderate Parliamentarian John Bond (1612-1676) also employed familiarity with the allegoric potential of shorthand. In *Salvation in a Mystery* (1644), he argued that those “in the present times and controversies” who turned their backs on Parliament and its goals were “shallowheaded narrowhearted carnalists” puzzled by the mysterious (or yet to be understood) workings of salvation. “The mere *natural man*,” he observed, “can reade in the *booke* of the *creatures*, ‘tis so faire a print in *Capitall letters*. The *Prudentiall* man can perceive the *character*, and construe the *language* of *common providence*.” The

⁷³ Henry Hammond, *Sermons* (1675), 45.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

spiritual literacy of base and fair-weathered carnalists who were cowed by temporary defeats, however, “were not so much as *A-b-c-ederians* in the *Lords Archivis* (as they say) in his *Manuscripts*, in his *Brachigraphy*, I meane in the strange language and abstruse character of *Reformation*, and mysterious Babylonish redemptions; they wanted both *Dictionaries* and *Spectacles* in those particulars.”⁷⁵ Depictions of “brachigraphy” or shorthand as a symbolic language which carried, in signs and figures, knowledge beyond common understanding emphasized its potential as more than marks on a page. Such depictions also fortified the implicit link between shorthand mastery and election.

The sense of shorthand as a translator of deep, inner truths, and a way to “open to the understanding” to profitable things which might otherwise be lost, was particularly suited to communities who valued contemplative examination or the regular dredging up and inspection of secret sins.⁷⁶ The Presbyterian minister Henry Gearing (d. 1694) was praised by his contemporaries for regularly examining his body and soul for “marks and signs of the truth of Grace” – a habit which, it was believed, evidenced the sincerity of his faith, repentance and obedience. Every night he depended on shorthand to help reveal the most meaningful, telling, and secret aspects of his soul, such as his sins, mercies, providences, and the composition of his heart in the realization of his duties.⁷⁷ While the collection and perusal of sermons was one way to attain insights and grace, so too was the collection and perusal of one’s self assessments. Gearing noted that “by looking over my books, in which I have wrote down in short-hand every night, how it was with me in

⁷⁵ John Bond, *Salvation in a mystery* (1644), 41.

⁷⁶ Laurence Steel, *A new method of short-writing* (1679), A2v.

⁷⁷ John Shower, *Some account of the holy life and death of Mr. Henry Gearing* (1699), xxi; xxiii.

the day,” he found that he was often out of order in his duties, regularly emotional during prayer, often felt fervent desire in his heart, and had experienced “some meltings more than usual.” The regular perusal of these recorded experiences did not bring him much comfort, but they did evidence that “God hath wrought *true* Grace in me,” and in the end, this, he felt, was more reassuring, for “Grace is better than Comfort.”⁷⁸

Alongside deep-rooted belief in the ultimate depravity and dissimulative nature of humanity ran belief in the spiritual beauty of secret (or private) piety. Because virtue is frequently feigned, it followed that outward expressions of piety could not be trusted as readily as those which were never publically seen. Simon Patrick’s spiritual guide encourages his pilgrim to find as many opportunities as possible for solitude and “secret conference and discourse between God and your soul.”⁷⁹ The truth of private piety could and would, of course, be sullied and taken advantage of by human weakness. A jocular but damning story of King Charles II’s feigned commitment to Protestantism, for instance, finds him withdrawing to his closet for a supposedly private conversation with God in order to convince gullible eavesdroppers of his religion.⁸⁰ Despite the potential for misuse, the praise accorded secretive communion with God through prayer, meditative reading and self-inspection was, as various scholars have shown, characteristic of Protestant devotion.⁸¹ The importance of a personal relationship with God did not suggest, however, that an entirely secretive pious life was commendable. Sinners who delivered secret confessions were liable to backslide, but the public nature of confessions made before a

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-7.

⁷⁹ Simon Patrick, *Parable of the pilgrim* (1665), 129.

⁸⁰ John Phillips, *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II, and K. James II* (1690), 21.

⁸¹ Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant*; Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie, eds., *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (London: Routledge, 2012); Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers*.

community held individuals to account. Although privacy was essential at certain seasons in one's spiritual journey, Simon Patrick noted in 1665 that "it is not fit to design to live always in secret."⁸² Modeling one's life after Christ necessitated a more active public engagement. Furthermore, the blessings such solitude granted would alter the bearing or physiognomy of spiritual pilgrims to such a degree that their piety would not be so secret after all. Love and divine charity, wrote Patrick, "diffuseth a secret joy through the whole soul which cannot be dissembled; but casts a splendor into the countenance of those in whom it resides."⁸³ God's love and mysterious ways were so secret that humans could not know them thoroughly enough to counterfeit them. True, godly souls would not be hidden, but instead would shine through the bodies and actions of those by whom they were carried. As an activity which was both personal and public, an act of redemptive yearning, and a product of "busie faith," shorthand encapsulated the balance between meditative journey and outward show which salvation and grace were said to require.

iv. Decrypting Divine Secrets

Truth, according to some, was founded in divine inspiration, and if the impassioned words of inspired preachers could be captured, collected and compared to others, perhaps an inkling of God's secrets could be revealed. Shorthand, notes Fleming, captured and illuminated the tongues of preachers as "wild, strange and pure."⁸⁴ To Jeremiah Rich, who was famous in part for his record of the 1649 trial of the Leveller John Lilburne, shorthand allowed its practitioners to "gather Grace as fast as some do

⁸² Simon Patrick, *Parable of the pilgrim* (1665), 112.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸⁴ James Dougal Fleming, *Mirror of Information*, 99.

gold.”⁸⁵ In the preface to *Semigraphy* (1654), he noted that a near-death experience clarified the degree to which his life was not spotless nor the direction of his afterlife certain. Humans cannot run from death nor time, but through shorthand, the eternal certainty of the former can be provided for with the swiftness of the latter. This certainty is founded in the ways in which shorthand allowed the inspiration and directions of learned divines and “heavenly oracles” to remain alive, which otherwise would fall victim to the frailty of human memory. Shorthand, like no other art or practice, could furnish faulty human memory and experience “with things moral and divine.”⁸⁶

In 1675 Nathaniel Stringer (one of Rich’s pupils) compared the swiftness of shorthand to the flights of angels carrying prayers to heaven. He boasted that his method could record the most fluent of sermons, though they be “utter’d faster then shee quakers preach.” Drawing on contemporary stereotypes regarding irrational women and, particularly the impassioned “ramblings” of female prophets, Stringer’s reference to “shee quakers,” acted as a sort of shorthand for illegibility. He implied that even the most scattered and obscure of sermons and spiritual insights could be refined and strengthened by the sensible, practical and revelatory clarity provided by shorthand. “The heavenly seed which powerfull preachers sowe,” he continued, “by help of this is made more like to growe For manna gather’d thus, lasts many a yeare which else too oft is lost by the treacherous Ear.”⁸⁷ Similar comparisons of shorthand to divine, miraculous and mysterious manna were regularly repeated. In 1650 the renowned Puritan shorthand

⁸⁵ Jeremiah Rich, *Semigraphy or Arts rarity known* (1654), A3v-A4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ Nathaniell Stringer, *Rich Redivivus or Mr Jeremiah Richs short-hand improved* (1675), [7].

master Thomas Shelton, for instance, remarked that shorthand could sustain true Christians through times of persecution should “the revolution of times” bring a repeat of “the marian dayes” (i.e., the persecution of the godly). “Notes of wholesome divinity (taken in this art, now in this harvest of the gospel),” he wrote, would be particularly precious and much like “the jewes manna on the Sabbath when there was none to be gathered abroad.”⁸⁸ Just as manna fortified the bodies and resolve of the disaffected Israelites, shorthand, it was argued ennobled, sharpened and redirected the mind. Consider, wrote Jeremiah Rich (himself a former soldier of the New Model Army), “how it makes us resemble Angels, how it opens the eares, how it enlightens the eyes, how it directs the feet to walk, and teaches the fingers to fight; how it gives us rest for wearinesse, courage for faintnesse, and kindles fire instead of fear.”⁸⁹ In 1654 John Farthing noted that shorthand ensured that those whose memories or attention spans kept them from getting much from a sermon could overcome such impediments. It could help them improve themselves and others: “those also who have such weak memories that they can carry away nothing considerable of a sermon or otherwise may by the help of short writing carry away all and so may improve it for their own good and for the advantage of others.”⁹⁰ The yearning and/or careful observation which secrecy helped inspire could fizzle out if such secret messages were not kept firmly in view. Through recording and collecting various sources of divine inspiration, it was implied, shorthand kept the presence and reality of God’s secrets from being silenced or forgotten.

⁸⁸ Thomas Shelton, *Zeiglographia, or, a new art of short-writing* (1650), Av.

⁸⁹ Jeremiah Rich, *Semigraphy or Arts rarity* (1654), 4; Frances Henderson, “Rich, Jeremiah (d. 1666x9), stenographer.” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹⁰ John Farthing, *Short-writing shortmed* (1654), A5v.

The clergyman Gilbert Burnet, who was generally accounted to be a gifted preacher, argued that the most effective sermons were those which “makes every one go away silent and grave, and hastning to be alone, to meditate or pray over the matter of it in secret.”⁹¹ Putting more of the onus on congregations than preachers, John Sheffield remarked that those who were scarcely affected by the words of sermons were those more thickly mired in sin and damnation and in most dire need of merciful grace.⁹² Nathaniel Culverwell felt that the role of ministers was to guide and encourage their listeners in their thirst for knowledge. Rather than avoiding the discussion of enigmatical scriptures, ministers were encouraged to formulate better explanations, encourage and facilitate fruitful exploration and open congregations to “these hidden oracles.” “Let the people themselves,” he wrote, “search the scriptures, dig for knowledge as for silver and for wisdom as his treasure. Again, they had better see in a glasse, though but darkly, then not to see at all: truth in a cloud, in a riddle is more amiable then a black and palpable ignorance.”⁹³ The allure of shorthand, as it was advertised, was that it could provide for the sort of contemplation encouraged by Gilbert Burnet, help bring focus and grace to the restless sinful as defined by Sheffield, and draw the laity, in line with Culverwell’s remarks, near to the enlightening, mysterious truths of salvation. Indeed, regular practitioners were often praised for their active diligence. At Lady Guilford’s death in 1699, for instance, her chaplain Philip Horneck illustrated domestic and religious devotion an example to others. “Her attention at Church,” he wrote, “was always fix’d; and having the advantage of a Tenacious Memory, she could easily Command, not only

⁹¹ Gilbert Burnet, *A discourse of the pastoral care* (1692), 224.

⁹² John Sheffield, *Salvation by Grace* (1698), 105.

⁹³ Nathaniel Culverwel, *Spiritual Opticks* (1651), 24-25.

the general Heads, but likewise all the material Passages in a Sermon, which she committed to Short-Hand before Dinner, and afterwards digested more Regularly, in order to ruminate on them the succeeding Week.”⁹⁴

It did not follow, however, that many preachers favoured scribbling congregations. As Arnold Hunt has shown, the growing trade of shorthand sermons among the laity concerned preachers who worried over inaccuracies and feared the loss of control over the content and intention of their words.⁹⁵ Many spoke out against the practice, while others suggested that it was the availability of shorthand which compelled them to publish their sermons. Clergyman Thomas Sharp stated that he would have refused to put his words to print had it not been for a report that “some sermons taken from me in shorthand would unknown to me crowd into the world.”⁹⁶ Similarly, the Anglican clergyman Robert Gell (1595-1665) was incensed by those whom he perceived to be overnight proselytizers or feigned experts on scripture, who cared only for profit. The “fashion of the times,” he stated, was such that “they have been so industrious as to learn *Brachygraphy* and have gathered some *Short-hand notes*, they doubt not then, but, when *all trades fail*, to *step out of the shop into the pulpit* and *out-preach*, yea, *preach-out* any not so qualified Divines out of their places.”⁹⁷ The hustling hands of such pretenders, bemoaned Gell, did not have an actual gift of interpretation granted to them by God, but instead, by “a kinde of *Legier de main*,” or sleight of hand, had boldly assumed the look of one who did. Significantly, Gell’s criticism was founded in his

⁹⁴ Philip Horneck, *A sermon occasioned by the death of the Right Honourable the Lady Guilford* (1699), 19-20.

⁹⁵ Arnold Hunt, *Art of Hearing*, 139-148.

⁹⁶ Thomas Sharp, *Tanhumim, or, Divine comforts* (1700), 4.

⁹⁷ Robert Gell, *An essay toward the amendment of the last English-translation of the Bible* (1659), 320.

frustration over the very thing which shorthand manuals encouraged – the strength of the educated and disciplined mind to sideline the effects of the Fall and legitimately reach for knowledge of God. In his eyes, however, the minds of such “pretenders” were not wise or somehow freed from the confusion of language, but instead remained selfish and carnal. Instead of waiting for inspiration from God, “they have taken it to themselves by *Brachygraphy* or *Short-hand*; and so by a competent measure of boldness, *intrude* into the Priests office, and into the *things which they have not seen, vainly, pufte up by their fleshly minde.*”⁹⁸ Interestingly, Gell (as noted in the following chapter) approved of access to arcane knowledge as provided by astrology.⁹⁹ He felt that astrology’s treatment of secrets and the limits of human understanding could aid spiritual growth and moderate hubris. The style of access provided by shorthand, however, was too presumptuous and approving of human industry for his liking. It too easily lent itself to abuse.

In his thoughts on “heavenly meditation” and how it brings “refreshment every moment,” the theologian Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83) argued that habitually focussing the mind on divine secrets and truths would unleash the wisdom and powers of the soul in bringing believers closer to the nature of God. The greatest satisfaction available to humans, he wrote, is found “in meditation, in reading, in conference about divine things, in Application to God by Prayer, and other holy exercises.”¹⁰⁰ Shorthand, like physiognomy, was said to be just such an exercise. The short writer Simon West echoed Jeremiah Rich in noting that, in a fast-moving world full of distractions, vanities, temptations and frailties, shorthand offered repose, stillness and reflection. “Some time,”

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁹⁹ Richard Gell, *Stella nova, a nevv starre, leading wisemen unto Christ* (1649).

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Whichcote, *Select sermons of Dr. Whichcot in two parts* (1698), 67-68.

he wrote, “might be taken for meditation, by this saving, chewing, clean recalling comfort.”¹⁰¹ This depiction of shorthand as a practice which brought focus and moulded minds and bodies in line with the habits of the godly is palpable in the ways in which various manuals encouraged students to become proficient. Most emphasized the necessity of constant, daily practice and attention to the rules and dictates of their system. They encouraged learners to take it slowly and considerately, symbol by symbol. It was important that students proceed “orderly learning one rule thoroughly first, before they goe to the next.”¹⁰² The tables of examples and practice phrases found in most contemporary shorthand manuals were largely made up of words and phrases readers would hear from the pulpit, recite in church or find in scripture. These statements, prayers, scriptures, and creeds would have been familiar to all audiences. This made them useful teaching tools, but is also suggestive of ways in which shorthand masters were careful to keep formal church doctrine in view – a move perhaps meant to try and appease those for whom the “wild strange and pure” words of passionate divines were perhaps a little too enthusiastic. In challenge to Presbyterian styles of preaching, for instance, the Anglican clergyman Matthew Hole (1639/40-1730) argued for the importance of formal liturgies. The “unpremeditated speech” of various preachers, he asserted, distracted people from the purposes of spiritual meditation with their “nauseous and vain repetitions.”¹⁰³ In his arguments, shorthand is surprisingly forwarded as a means by which church-goers could keep their ministers in check. One overly zealous and wordy preacher, he recounted in 1697, had one of his rambling prayers recorded in

¹⁰¹ Simon West, *Arts Improvement: or, Short and swift writing* (1647), Av.

¹⁰² Nathaniel Stringer, *Rich Redivivus* (1675), [6].

¹⁰³ Matthew Hole, *The expediency of a publick liturgy* (1697), 27.

shorthand and, after seeing it, was filled with “blushing and confusion” and vowed to thereafter stick to established devotions.¹⁰⁴

Seventeenth-century shorthand masters like Thomas Heath generally sidestepped religious controversy to focus on the urgency of the task at hand – “it is but a moment on which depends eternity” – while asserting that even the meanest capacity could, according to their methods, record a sermon as fast as it was preached. Heath warned against writing at church, however, until “you have written at least ten or twenty of the psalms, or the book of Solomon’s song and are able to read them over without the help of the bible.”¹⁰⁵ Like its fellow shorthand manuals, Thomas Shelton’s *Tachygraphy* (1641) lists the symbols for commonly spoken phrases (such as “the torments of hell” or “the power of God”) as well as a reference table with characters for common words. In his table, each letter of the alphabet tells a moral tale with the various words it highlights. For instance, the letter “S” contains the words and their correspondent symbols in the following order: “Stand *for* Salvation of Soule *and* Spirit See *to thy* Selfe *for* Small Secret Sinnes of Self-love Shall Seeme So Strong *they* Send *for* Severall Sacrifice. Scripture.”¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Edmond Willis’s suggested list of words to commit to memory in order to improve speed of practice are listed in the following order: “doe ye not se that Jesus Christ is our god king and lord of all [and etc.]”¹⁰⁷ Willis and Job Everardt both suggested that the mastery of shorthand necessitated constant study and practice in all contexts of everyday life. For improved proficiency and speed Willis advised true

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Heath, *Stenography, or, The art of short-writing* (1664), 8.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Shelton, *Tachygraphy* (1641), [37].

¹⁰⁷ Edmond Willis, *An abbreviation of writing by character* (1618), B11.

students to attend to every word they hear spoken in company and immediately consider how they might transpose it into short writing.¹⁰⁸ In Samuel Botley's *Maximum in minimo* (1674), the tables of common and useful words are elegantly stylized with arched columns, not unlike familiar depictions of the Ten Commandments. Within the arches are little illustrations with accompanying biblical verses that state, "Fly as an Eagle Hab 1.8", "His word runeth very swiftly Psa 147.15", "Ye did run well Gall 5.7" and "as swift as the rose upon the mountains Lev 1.12.8."¹⁰⁹ Through such instructional and stylistic characteristics, shorthand manuals sought to reinforce church and Bible teachings – the teachings of salvation – into the memory and actions of practitioners. While the outcomes of their encouragement of self-reflection and inspiration could not be regulated, they kept established church doctrine and tradition within view.

Shorthand, wrote Simon West in 1647, was for those who wished to benefit from "the many precious truths that might be preserved for their after thoughts which are otherwise many times lost."¹¹⁰ One of the regularly advertised features of the practice was that its speed, as described by shorthand master George Dalgarno in 1657, allowed humans to dip into the ink wells of their souls, and bypass "what strife hath been in the world merely about words."¹¹¹ Inner thoughts and secret impressions could be committed to paper before they were troubled or changed by the encumbrance of language, the frailty of human memory, politics, the worries of the day, or dissimulation. William

¹⁰⁸ Edmond Willis, *An abbreviation of writing by character* (1618), Cr; Job Everardt, *epitome of steonography* (1658), 79.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Botley, *Maximum in Minimo* (1674), F-K.

¹¹⁰ Simon West, *Arts Improvement* (1647), A4.

¹¹¹ George Dalgarno, *Tables of the Universal Character* (1657), [2].

Hopkins compared the shorthand taught by his 1674 instruction manual to “lightning, solar-beams or quickest thought.”¹¹² One of the manual’s dedicatory poems (likely written by fellow stenographer Elisha Coles) highlighted the restorative potential of shorthand. “Thoughts easily out-strip the whirling Sun,” it noted, but “Thy lines with ease our utter’ thoughts out-run. The mind of man runs down the very wind: Thy pen runs down the expressions of ye mind. What Maia’s Son had stoln thy soul had lost, Is now restor’d as Mercury’s apost.”¹¹³ Similarly, Job Everardt noted in 1658 that whispers from the soul must be written down quickly, before they either get lost in the busyness of daily life, or, if ignored, could fester, preventing a person from attending to needful business. Human infirmity and the rapidity of time, he wrote, can be redeemed “by a sudden and swifte penning down of your most weighty, needful and necessary memorandums or mementos of business every day, your hearings, readings, meditations, dictates, notions, conceptions, thoughts, resolutions, designes and transactions . . . before they passe from you.” Shorthand, he concluded, “helps both words and thoughts to write. As swift as spoke or thought, in black and white.”¹¹⁴ Shorthand manuals encouraged all readers to believe that their thoughts had value. Intelligence or wit, defined as the ability to quickly make significant connections and inferences unnoticed by others was, as Katherine Ellison has discussed, a growing matter of interest in the seventeenth century.¹¹⁵ By depicting shorthand as a tool which both trained the mind to be quick and which speedily

¹¹² William Hopkins, *The Flying Pen-Man* (1674), a8.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Job Everardt, *An epitome of stenographie* (1658), A8.

¹¹⁵ Katherine Ellison, *Cryptography Manuals*, chapter six.

inscribed the connections made by quick minds on paper, manual writers suggested that the elite circles of knowledge, like the closed communities of the elect, could be widened.

v. Shorthand and Cryptography

Seventeenth-century criticisms, praise and competition over shorthand positioned themselves within the period's shifting religious politics, and the ubiquity of "that mark of the beast called shorthand" ensured that it was caught up in, and sometimes acted as a catalyst for, various religious and political controversies.¹¹⁶ In 1688 Thomas Ratcliffe derisively reminded shorthand students of Thomas Shelton's enthusiastic support of the newly formed Commonwealth government of 1649. In the preface to his system of abbreviation, he noted that Shelton's claims to proficiency within a mere matter of hours were as accurate as the Cromwellian government "was in their solemn oaths, protestations and declarations to that sacred power above them."¹¹⁷ In *Speculum crape gownorum* (written in the wake of the Popish Plot), the politically flexible and often satirical writer John Phillips held a critical light to the established clergy. His character Priestlove describes Presbyterians as insolent hypocrites who never part from their pens and hats during sermons. In the midst of a meeting-house sermon, Priestlove rails, "you shall see a company of people, young and old, rich and poor, sitting upon their bums, their hats pull'd over their eyebrows, with their pens and their books and their blotting-papers, all so busily employed ... and this in such a strange Ethiopic Character that nobody can tell what they write."¹¹⁸ The notion that shorthand writers were secretive, or that

¹¹⁶ John Phillips, *Speculum crape-gownorum* (1682), 18

¹¹⁷ Thomas Ratcliffe, *A new art of short and swift writing without characters* (1688), 3.

¹¹⁸ John Phillips, *Speculum crape-gownorum* (1682), 11.

no one could readily understand or translate the marks and scratches on their pages, created a sense of unease, especially since being so public with their secret writing could be seen, like the wearing of hats in church, as an act of sectarian defiance against established authority.¹¹⁹

The boundaries between shorthand and cryptography were often blurred. Indeed, John Wallis's manuscript on deciphering included a letter in shorthand among its collection of highly secretive cyphered correspondence. Wallis wrote that, since he was originally unfamiliar with the style of shorthand sported by the letter, it seemed at first to be a cypher of some importance. He later recognized it for what it was – “only Mr Shelton's new Way of short-writing” – but decided to keep it with the collection of cyphered correspondence as an example of a seemingly intimidating form of writing which, in actuality, would not cost “much more than an Hours Time to find out.”¹²⁰ The affinity between shorthand and secret writing was sometimes employed as a selling feature. John Willis, for instance, provided tips on how a person proficient in short-writing could easily advance to greater levels of secrecy and “set a further locke on his notes and writings.” With a few alterations and creative additions to their shorthand, writers could “easily beguile the search of the most curious.”¹²¹ In the 1622 edition of his *Art of Short-Writing*, William Folkingham referenced mythic craftsmen and all-seeing giants, he wrote instructions on the contrivance of “a daedalian locke and key ... to shut

¹¹⁹ For more on the significance of hat honour, particularly in relation to religious politics, see Andrea McKenzie, “‘God's Hat' and the Highwayman's Shoes: A Gestural and Sartorial History of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Trial and Execution,” *Canadian Journal of History* (2012), 231-257.

¹²⁰ Dr. Wallis bequeathed his manuscript on deciphering to the Bodleian Library in 1653 and John Davys published it later in the eighteenth century. John Davys, *An Essay on the Art of Decyphering* (1738), 16.

¹²¹ John Willis, *The Art of Stenographie* (1602), A2v, G2.

up secrets from discovery of the most pierce-ey'd argus.”¹²² To the writing master William Hopkins, spiritual safety and righteousness sometimes necessitated secrecy. He noted that his interest in shorthand stemmed partly from his desire to offer doctrinal solace to English travelers in religiously inhospitable lands. He hoped to help those at sea with the provision of a “succinct secret and little pocket consort that there in despite of misguided zeale the doctrine which is only necessary (but forbidden to be read in our native language on the other side of the water) may be read secretly and at pleasure with saftie because secret.”¹²³ In 1654, shorthand master John Farthing indicated the strengths and potential drawbacks of secret shorthand, stating “for secrecy, there are divers things which as they need not be written in a hand that every one can reade, so it may sometimes be an advantage to write them in a hand which none can reade; (though short-writing being legibly writ, may be easily read by others who write the same hand).”¹²⁴ The royalist clerk and schoolmaster Noah Bridges (1643-1662) differentiated between shorthand and secret (or cypher) writing but delineated their shared foundations and points of overlap. He argued that the privacy of secret correspondence should be available to everyone. “I conceive it cannot be prejudicial to matters of state,” he wrote in 1659, “for every ordinary person to be able to conceal his own concerns in a character only legible to himself ... [and] prevent intrusion into his private affairs.”¹²⁵ Shorthand provided practical tools necessary not only to the daily challenges of spiritual living, but also to the conduct of temporal affairs.

¹²² William Folkingham, *Brachigraphy* (1622), 17.

¹²³ William Hopkins, *Pen-Man* (1674), a6.

¹²⁴ John Farthing, *Short-writing shortned* (1654), A5v.

¹²⁵ Noah Bridges, *Stenographie and cryptographie* (1659), 2.

Instructions on how to conduct personal business in secret suggested, as Katherine Ellison has noted, that privacy was not a privilege of the great. It also recognized the potential for all people to have enemies or (at the very least) overly curious acquaintances. It suggested that there were eyes everywhere and that interfering in the business of others was commonplace, and something to be both wary of and proactive about. As much as some manuals included instruction for more secretive correspondence, they also aided prying eyes in understanding what sorts of things to look for when attempting to decipher the secret writings of others. They emphasized that it was judicious to be mistrustful since, as common assumption and belief instructed, humanity's fallen state bred selfishness, greed and dishonesty. As Alan Marshall has shown, celebrated cryptographers such as Samuel Morland justified the efforts of intelligence gatherers and state-sponsored prying eyes on precisely that basis.¹²⁶ Such belief was particularly intensified by experiences, memories and accounts of the Civil Wars, when (as John Wallis put it) "the intermingling of opposite parties [made] it difficult, if not impossible to distinguish Friends and Foes."¹²⁷

The association between cypher and seditious plotting regularly placed the world of shorthand in the midst of high-profile treason trials.¹²⁸ In 1651, for instance, the Presbyterian Christopher Love was executed for harbouring cyphered correspondence between himself and the exiled Stuart court. Although he claimed that he always wrote "in longhand ... [and] never used cypher or character in all [his] life," the taint of

¹²⁶ Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1994), 1.

¹²⁷ John Davys, *An Essay on the Art of Decyphering* (1738), 10.

¹²⁸ For more on important relationships between shorthand and trials, see Michael Mendle, "The 'prints' of the Trials."

clandestine writing proved too difficult to shake.¹²⁹ His case illustrates how actions considered subversive were relative to time and place and dependent upon the affiliations of the moment. His blend of secret letters and Presbyterianism was considered problematic to the Cromwellian regime because of its association with royalism. It is also indicative of tensions and suspicions surrounding the increased use of shorthand and cypher systems among larger groups and sorts of people. Although the spectre of sedition haunted secret writing, it was also increasingly normalized as a necessary feature of state business, as well as a means by which various intellectual communities and domestic circles could protect valuable information and keep control over its spread.¹³⁰

Much like shorthand, writing in cypher encouraged careful observation of meanings behind messages and awareness of the significance of symbols and signs. Distinctions between the two, however, were regularly publicized. Clandestine letters and secret writing, for instance, were the source of suspicion and guilt in the case of Christopher Love. Yet his scaffold speech was “printed by an exact copy, taken in shorthand by John Hinde.”¹³¹ The suspicion of secret writing brought an end to Love’s life, but the use of shorthand at his death provided an opportunity for his comments on the discrepancy between God’s justice and that of contemporary politicians to be discussed, analyzed and debated. Love was recorded as saying that “it may be this last speech upon a scaffold may bring God more glory then many sermons in a pulpit.”¹³² Because of the

¹²⁹ Christopher Love, *Mr. Love's case: wherein is published, first, his several petitions to the Parliament* (1651), 11.

¹³⁰ See, for instance, Alisha Rankin and Elisha Leong, eds., *Secrets and Knowledge*; Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage*.

¹³¹ Christopher Love, *Mr. Love's case* (1651).

¹³² Love, *Mr. Love's Case*, 16. For more on the religio-political significance of scaffold speeches, see Andrea McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs: Execution in England, 1675-1775* (London: Hambledon Continuum,

use of shorthand, contemporaries could ruminate at the least on the degree to which his dying confessions were “savory and Christian” and employ his final words as a revelatory religious lesson. While it dealt in arcane knowledge and was utilized in efforts for hiding intelligences from others, shorthand, unlike cryptography, was routinely argued to be revelatory device – a tool for discovery rather than further concealment.

The State Papers are peppered with attempts to decipher intercepted letters. They also contain queries between correspondents regarding the creation of agreed upon cypher systems to better facilitate information exchange. In 1640, Royalist army officer Sir John Conyers wrote his friend Viscount Edward Conway, telling him of the growing disorderliness of the army and asking that he make use of a self-made cypher (“zyfer”) so “we maye the more freely wright toe one the other.”¹³³ Similarly, in January 1647, Parliamentarian officer Edward Montagu, Earl of Manchester, wrote Colonel Robert Hammond that secret intelligences could be safely entrusted with the Committee of Both Kingdoms and that, “for the better secrecy of what you shall write wee shall send you a cypher by the next messenger.”¹³⁴ It was not uncommon for concerned correspondents to use as many different cypher systems as they had people with which to secretly correspond, and cypher styles were often created to be unique to certain capabilities and types of information. For instance, Charles II’s secretary of state Henry Bennet, Earl of Arlington (1618-85) was required to maintain information-sharing relationships with various people and could not always rely on the same systems. In 1663 he sought the

2007). For relationships between scaffold speeches, shorthand and news reporting, see Mendle, “The ‘prints’ of the Trials;” “News and the Pamphlet Culture.”

¹³³ TNA, SP, 16/471: Sir John Conyers to Edward Conway (Nov. 13, 1640), f.115.

¹³⁴ TNA, SP, 21/24: Edward Montagu to Colonel Hammond (Jan. 20, 1647-1648), f.1.

assistance of cypher maker A.G. Granger, who promised that a personalized cypher system could be created in two days as long as certain requirements were discreetly met. Before a new cypher is framed, he wrote, “it is absolutely necessary that its use be possited: whether for state & publique overtures, diery transacts, or your owne private observes ... I intend the first evening of my liberty, secretly to waite on your Honor that soe your verball commands may better instruct mee.”¹³⁵

If correspondents did not agree on a form of communication, or if they failed to receive each other’s’ cypher systems, communications could be frustrated. In 1666, when Roger Boyle, Earl of Orrery received Bennet’s proposed cypher, he responded that it was insufficient and gave tips on how it might be bettered. All cyphers, he wrote, ought to have separate significations for each of the letters of the alphabet. He noted that he could not share certain particulars until the two of them had settled on a more secure system.¹³⁶ Similarly, over the course of November and December 1666, John Allen repeatedly requested a cypher from Joseph Williamson, the “*de facto* head of the Restoration government’s intelligence system,” in order to share news on religious unrest in Scotland.¹³⁷ “If you please,” he wrote, “send me some characters for considerable words: I have ... somethinge [which] might (in my shallow oppinion) have been worth your knowledge.”¹³⁸ A few weeks later, he again mentioned to Williamson that he could include more specifics in his letters “when I have the small cypher you write off.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ TNA, SP 29/73: A.G. Granger to Henry Bennet (May 1, 1663), f.1.

¹³⁶ TNA, SP 63/321: Roger Boyle to Henry Bennet (June 8, 1666), f.85.

¹³⁷ Marshall, Alan, “Williamson, Sir Joseph (1633–1701), government official” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹³⁸ TNA, SP 29/178: John Allen to Sir Joseph Williamson (Nov. 18, 1666), f.14.

¹³⁹ TNA, SP 29/180: John Allen to Sir Joseph Williamson (Dec. 3, 1666), f.63.

Later, he reiterated his willingness to inform Williamson of any considerable information regarding his affairs and somewhat impatiently noted, “you promised to send mee a small cypher which if I had now, you might have some thing more.”¹⁴⁰ In April 1667 Allen was still frustrated by the lack of a shared cypher with Williamson and pleaded that Williamson please send some indication that he had received Allen’s earlier requests.¹⁴¹

As Boyle and Allen’s frustrations suggest, cyphers sometimes proved to be as much of a hindrance as a help. Unlike shorthand, which was ideally committed to memory, embedded within daily thought patterns and intended to free practitioners from the baggage of words and cumbersome writing, cyphered messages often required separate solving keys and were most effective when too puzzling to memorize. In April 1657 Sir Edward Hyde could not immediately discern the information sent to him by Secretary Nicholas. “I left your cypher behind,” he wrote, “and so I do not know the contents of your last [letter] which seems to be important. I hope the cypher is on its way and then I will answer you.”¹⁴²

The creation, use and sharing of cyphers sat at the core of relationships between people, be they friends, patrons, business acquaintances, or necessary informants. Cyphers regularly required previously agreed upon arrangements between people who wished to share sensitive information or remain secretive in their dealings with one another. This was a characteristic exaggerated by published cryptographers like Noah Bridges, who insisted on certain methods for ensuring that no one but the concerned

¹⁴⁰ TNA, SP 29/182: John Allen to Sir Joseph Williamson (Dec. 27, 1666), f.180.

¹⁴¹ TNA, SP 29/196: John Allen to Joseph Williamson (April 7, 1667), f.134.

¹⁴² TNA, SP VOL. CLIV., [81b]: Edward Hyde to Edward Nicholas (April 13/23, 1657), 340.

“confederates” would be able to understand the correspondence between them.¹⁴³ Shorthand was not necessarily based in the same reciprocal arrangement, and such secretive reciprocity or relationship-building was not something that shorthand manuals stressed. On the contrary, shorthand was more likely to be presented as a contract between a single person and his or her own spiritual yearning or, as was the case with the transcribers and publishers of sermon and trial notes, as information to be shared for more widespread edification. While it was likely to be used to conceal secretive and private dealings, it was generally depicted as a vehicle through which enigmatic messages and insights could be released and ruminated upon and from which wisdom could be derived. Rather than being a source for the creation of elitist and exclusionary relationships, it was argued to be a polishing tool for people whose minds were already accustomed to searching for meaning behind mysterious occurrences and signs, but could use further refinement. It was argued to be open to any diligent, literate person who desired ways in which to recognize, interpret, collect, and organize the signs of grace.

vi. Conclusion

Shorthand emphasized the critical importance of who it was who possessed, sought after or gave up secrets. The practice could imply both a need for and a challenge to worldly authority. Although the majority of shorthand writers emphasized the need for specific structures and guidelines, shorthand manuals, like works of physiognomy, astrology and secret history, empowered readers and practitioners to search for secrets and analyze what their searches revealed. Their focus on the limitations of human knowledge and the importance of a robust and active faith highlighted the need for God’s

¹⁴³ Noah Bridges, *Stenographie and cryptographie* (1659), 33.

grace and salvation, and thus, the legitimacy of searching divine secrets. Paradoxically, the more secrets were uncovered, the more humans would realize how little they did or could possibly know. In this way, dependence on God's secret, salvific wisdom was made manifest. Shorthand manuals also played upon and developed growing belief in the ability of humans to learn of God through reason and careful observation. They suggested that human industry, when focussed on the collection and interpretation of spiritual insights could help otherwise damned and carnal humans attain grace or (for more doctrinal Calvinists who rejected free will) demonstrate the power of God's grace by revealing its presence in the most humble receptacles. As the following chapter illustrates, this uneasy balance between pessimistic and optimistic understandings of human ability was one which seventeenth-century astrologers had to be especially careful not to upset. It was a balance which helped legitimize uncertainties and possibilities as viable sources of knowledge.

Chapter III. **“Much Knowledge is Necessary”: Astrology and the Secrets of the Stars**

Seventeenth-century purveyors of arcane knowledge, as examination of writings on physiognomy and shorthand suggest, had each to contend with prevailing beliefs regarding the effects of the Fall on human reason and ability. Rather than fixed and rigid, these beliefs were dynamic and changing and could be interpreted in different ways. Writers, with varying degrees of emphasis, drew them into their discussions of how and why humans can and should search for, collect and analyze emblematic signs and sources of secret knowledge. There were many points of overlap in terms of what physiognomers and shorthand masters emphasised, but the former were, as we have seen, more likely to argue that human beings were frail and wholly dependent on God’s mercy. This justified the study and use of signs which God, in His mercy, had imprinted on the body and which, when charted correctly, could be used in the eternal struggle to identify and moderate sin. Writers of shorthand manuals also emphasized the importance of God’s grace and the spiritual importance of searching after divine wisdom and secrets. However, they implied that humans could be trained to tap into their interpretive abilities and, in the act of searching, uncovering and categorizing meaning, could become more godly. For more Latitudinarian-minded individuals, this could be understood as a way in which to actively further along the work of grace in their lives. Both physiognomy and shorthand helped create a culture of active seeking, examining and uncovering. Their interpretive flexibility served to broaden their audiences – a feature also particularly characteristic of astrology, which appealed to different people from all walks of life. Through examination of seventeenth-century astrology’s interaction with contemporary concerns and practices regarding providence, human reason and religious and political

uncertainty, this chapter considers how the push and pull between understandings of human limitation and ability, could, in the hands of astrologers and their followers, help situate uncertainties, likelihoods and contingencies as viable and practical forms of knowledge.

If England's astrologers and their supporters agreed on anything, it was the frequently repeated adage that the stars greatly inclined but did not compel. In 1680, the Anglican clergyman and subsequent nonjuror John Butler wrote that heavenly bodies uniquely influence all earthly subjects and operate upon them "to incline and lead them here and there, and more or less in the constitution of their Qualities, and Contingencies of their Destinies (though not absolutely to force their wills)."¹ The stars, it was generally believed, had determining power only if humans completely resigned themselves to the conduct of their corrupt natures.² Grace, free will, reason, holy ambition and good education prevented such power, but just as humans were forever haunted by Original Sin, so would they forever be haunted by the inclinations granted them at birth by way of the stars. "At birth," states a laudatory poem from 1698, "the stars do influence our fate, reduces rich and makes the poor man great. Our inclinations all follow their wills, who give us health and subject us to ills."³

Astrologers had good reason to preface their works and actions with the familiar adage, for critics regularly targeted their predictions as fatalist. As the Anglican clergyman John Gaule (1603/4-1687) remarked in 1652, astrological and physiognomic

¹ John Butler, *Hagiastrologia, or, The most sacred and divine science of astrology* (1680), 5.

² See, for instance, John Gadbury, *Astrological predictions for the year* (1679), A2r; Valenetine Weigelius, *Astrologie Theologized* (1649); Richard Carpenter, *Astrology Proved Harmless, Useful, Pious* (1657), 16.

³ Israel Hiebner, *Mysterium sigillorum, herbarum & lapidum* (1698), (*)v.

predictions enforced “a necessitation to Good or Evil,” and made “our Wills servile.”⁴ In seventeenth-century England’s heated and intermingled religious and political arenas, public revelations of celestial secrets could have considerable repercussions. Indeed, as the actions of famed astrologer William Lilly (1602-81) and his claims regarding the Civil Wars, the death of Charles I and the destiny of the Stuarts in general indicates, they had the potential to assert considerable influence.⁵ Much more than a defensive reflex, however, repetition of the familiar adage (i.e., that the stars inclined but did not compel) is indicative of ways in which astrologers – the custodians of celestial secrets – navigated authority. Just as astrology tackled and, for a time, thrived on such tensions as those regarding secrecy and revelation, knowledge and superstition, and certainty and doubt, so did the reputation of this science require careful negotiation. Like physiognomy, which – with its focus on fallen bodies and complete dependence upon God – conveyed the impression that although glimpses of God’s secrets could be explored, His ultimate intentions were wholly unknowable, astrologers recognized the unknowability of God as a standard which needed to be upheld. Their emphasis on contingency, however, implied that God’s intentions and plans might be, if not knowable, then at least traceable. The language of contingency afforded them space in which to suggest that carnal humans might nonetheless gain access to divine secrets.

The proviso that astrology could only suggest possibilities, not infallibly predict certain outcomes was partly a response to critiques of determinism, but it was also a

⁴ John Gaule, *Pus-mantia the mag-astro-mancer, or, The magicall astrologicall-diviner posed and puzzled* (1652), 49.

⁵ See, for instance, Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth-Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Catherine Blackledge, *The Man who Saw the Future: The Seventeenth-Century Astrologer who Changed the Course of the English Civil War* (London: Watkins Media, 2015).

deep-seated belief which was absorbed, or at the very least parroted, by the astrologer's clientele. For instance, a man who fought for King Charles, and whose brother was killed by the "parliament party," felt it important to inform his astrologer that he understood that inclinations could "be prevented or at least moderated." He did not, his letter stated, consider intelligences gleaned from the stars as fixed or "an old almanac" but rather as knowledge that could help him "resist following inconveniences" that were caused by his nativity. His query into what may await him in business and travel, and how he should best conduct himself in these matters, indicates his belief in the complementary notion that astrological information need not be certain in order for it to be useful and instructive. He asked that the stars' messages not be downplayed, no matter what disasters they revealed, for "the ill is not feared but may wisely be presented for much knowledge is necessary."⁶ The "knowledge" he referred to was the knowledge of contingencies. Regardless of whether or not a particular event would actually come to pass, knowledge of its possibility – a possibility uniquely tailored to the tangible circumstances of birth and life experiences – was what made it a useful or instructive piece of information. Unlike the more mysterious workings of divine providence, which caused events which could not generally be foreseen by humans, the knowledge of secret contingencies could be used as a preventative or directive measure.

The agreement between inference, possibility and usable knowledge is further portrayed in the extensive astrological narrative, or nativity, of the iron mill overseer and law clerk John Stansby (born c. 1622), whose astrological forecast, offered advice about a variety of future contingencies. Regarding his marital prospects, for instance, it stated,

⁶ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 174, 101-102 and 163.

“we conjecture the native either doth not marry at all or els hath no great inclination unto it: yet if it chance the native do marry, he will procure a wife with ease...the native (if hee marry at all) will marry in his youth.”⁷ Stansby’s astrological forecast demonstrates a certainty regarding the influence of certain stars and celestial occurrences, but a cautiousness regarding the degree to which that influence will direct his life. Such reticence could be understood as calculated hesitancy to make precise claims, but also reflected contemporary beliefs regarding the unpredictable, imperfect and subjective nature of knowledge. While it was generally agreed that “the misery of humane life” lay largely in the truth that “there are in it more incertainties then certainties, more evill then good,” there was increased interest in, and desire for, the degree to which uncertainties carried great potential for discovery and the exploration of possibilities.⁸

Over the course of the seventeenth century, as scholars such as Barbara Shapiro and Vera Keller have shown, “probable particulars” and believable explanations superseded universal certainties as the building blocks of knowledge.⁹ The work of Keller and Shapiro reflect a growing skepticism about traditional triumphalist narratives of the role of reason and the experimental method, narrowly defined, in the rise of modern science.¹⁰ To Euan Cameron, an essential aspect of the bumpy and incomplete transition from truths based primarily on divine revelation or religious or classical authorities to

⁷ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 174, 13.

⁸ Robert Turner, *Ars notoria: the notory art of Solomon* (1657), 151.

⁹ Vera Keller, *Knowledge and the Public Interest, 1575-1725* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Barbara J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact: England 1550-1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Margaret J. Osler, ed., *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Fleming, *The Dark Side of the Enlightenment: Wizards, Alchemists and Spiritual Seekers in the Age of Reason* (New York: Norton & Co., 2013); Bruce Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

testable truths founded in collectable data, was the way in which “superstition” was regularly constructed and reconstructed. In the post-Reformation period understandings of what constituted superstition were created by confessional politics, and in the late seventeenth century, sceptics adopted the term to refer to any belief which suggested that supernatural forces were constantly battling it out on earth while anti-sceptics limited the term solely to things that could not be plausibly proven.¹¹ Seventeenth-century astrology bumped up against each of these circumstances. If observable and testable plausibilities were an essential aspect of the “new knowledge,” astrology could, at least in theory, have survived the empirical maelstrom. Examination of accidents and the attendant judging of future contingents were tools and avenues of knowledge in which contemporary astrologers claimed to have the most authority largely because, like most officially approved experiments, they could be collated and demonstrated. There was also demand for them. It is clear that myriad social and cultural forces influenced the ebb and flow of astrology’s credibility and cultural currency, even if a monocausal explanation is impossible to establish.¹² Factors such as the practice of medicine, popular demand, scientific experimentation and the development of public politicking in fact helped to perpetuate astrological practices and beliefs.¹³

¹¹ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, & Religion, 1250 – 1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹² Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800* (London: Faber and faber, 1979); William E. Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics and Providence in England, 1657 – 1727* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹³ See, for instance, Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1987); Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Andrew Wear, “Medical Practice in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England: Continuity and Union,” in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, eds., Roger French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge:

In addressing the question of whether or not there was any certainty in astrology, Robert Turner (1619/20-1664), an avid translator and defender of astrological works, reminded readers of astrology's connection to astronomy. He argued that astronomy, which was daily proven by the defects or eclipses of the sun and the moon, should be considered vain if attention was not also turned to "what the defects, and other contingencies in the stars do signify."¹⁴ He agreed that, due to the inconstancy of humans, the certainty of judgements could be demoted solely to the probability of future events, but he was not satisfied with probabilities alone. Particularly in the context of mysterious accidents – the experiences of sickness and health, affections of the mind, profit and want – "the power of the stars appears amongst all people." Since astronomy showed that "there may be obteined great wisdome and knowledge" in the diligent observation of the stars, it followed that astrology had much to reveal. Since there was a science of astronomy, he concluded that there had also to be a science of astrology, "for if the efficient cause be certain, as it is, what doubt is there of the event of it?"¹⁵

Robert Turner's display of confidence was more unconditional than that expressed by many of his contemporaries, but even so, desire for astrology's potential precision fueled much astrological inquiry and business, and astrologers took pride and

Cambridge University Press, 1989), Lawrence Principe, *The Aspiring Adept: Robert Boyle and his Alchemical Quest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Michael Hunter, *Robert Boyle Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); William Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Peter Elmer, *The Miraculous Conformist: Valentine Greatrakes, the Body Politic and the Politics of Healing in Restoration Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory, ed., *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye 1652-1699* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*.

¹⁴ Robert Turner, *Ars Notoria: The Notory Art of Solomon* (1657), 143-144.

¹⁵ Ibid.

interest in remarkable cases of accuracy. Both the antiquarian John Aubrey (1626-77) and the astrologer Elias Ashmole (1617-1692), for instance, were intrigued by the curious case of William Herbert, the third Earl of Pembroke, who allegedly had the secrets of his death astrologically revealed by his tutor Hugh Sanford. Although he was in good health on April 30, 1630, Pembroke recalled his tutor's starry message and decided to throw one last party. "Because of the fated direction which he lay under," noted Aubrey, he "made a great entertainment (a supper) for his friends, went well to bed and died in his sleep."¹⁶ The attention which such remarkable cases attracted suggests their rarity; inaccuracy, as the many explanations for it suggests, was more common. But as exceptional as such (apparently) accurate predictions were, they served to sustain belief that, if only it were understood better, or treated with more care, astrology had a lot of revelatory potential.

William Lilly, as discussed below, was particularly invested in demonstrating the accuracy of his judgements. Nevertheless, astrology was a science which deliberately dealt in, and depended upon, unknowns. Rather than ensuring its demise in the wake of scientific developments in official knowledge-making, astrology's management and manipulation of secret influences and informed conjecture gave it life and legitimacy. If, as I have pointed out, seventeenth-century people were more comfortable with ambiguity, uncertainty and mystery than we are today, they nonetheless sought out tools with which to navigate the many unknown pitfalls which could befall them. One of the science's most foundational services was "how to give a *probable conjecture* of inclination & of the temperament" and to make predictions of future developments from that.¹⁷

¹⁶ Bodleian, MS Aubrey, 2, 13.

¹⁷ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 174, 187.

“Accidents,” or unexpected life experiences, were the basis upon which maps of the skies could be discerned, adjusted and refined, and probabilities or informed conjectures were the cornerstones of instruction and advice.

ii. Contingency and Providence

The renowned astrologer/mathematician Henry Coley (1633-1704) defined astrology, or “the doctrine of the stars,” as the method by which the movements, relationships and meanings of heavenly bodies “teacheth us to pronounce, judge and predict of future contingencies; the effects, events and mutations of things to come.”¹⁸ Definitions of “contingency,” however, were controversial amongst seventeenth-century England’s philosophers and divines, and this weighted contemporary discussions of astrology with considerable baggage. In general, contingencies, such as sudden illnesses, the stumbling of a horse, or inadvertent murder by way of a dropped axe, were understood to be accidental occurrences that could equally occur or not occur. Contingencies were often understood to be a mixture of benign, seemingly insignificant or detrimental choices which could have as easily been made by a given person as not. They had an air of chance and triviality to them which sparked tension with many religious tenets, particularly Calvinist predestinarian doctrines and beliefs. As such, seventeenth-century definitions of the terms “contingency” and “accident,” much like studies of astrology and foreknowledge, were haunted by debates and discussions regarding free will.

Were there such things as contingents, accidents and chance if God foresaw and organized all miniscule and enormous events? Fuelled by the heated politics of the Civil

¹⁸ Henry Coley, *Clavis Astrologiae Elimata: Or A Key to the whole art of Astrology* (1676), sig. B3.

Wars and questions regarding Arminian theology, for instance, were the infamous and acrimonious free will debates between Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Bishop John Bramhall (1594-1663).¹⁹ Hobbes argued that contingent occurrences did have causes and were only called contingent because their causes were of such a nature that humans could not perceive them. He made distinctions between necessary, free and contingent acts, but concluded that all were inherently necessary or preordained (and thus could not be reversed or mediated by sacraments and the clergy).²⁰ Bramhall was offended by such conclusions and argued that chance was but a branch of contingency; liberty, its subordinate. Various realities or secret instincts, such as the lodestone's magnetic properties, were imperceptible but nevertheless understood to be necessary and not contingent. Conversely, a rock falling on a person's head has a known cause but can be called contingent due to its accidental nature.²¹ By aligning contingency with accident, Bramhall defined the term as an event which lacked careful design.

The Independent minister John Owen (1616-1683) defined contingency as the complete opposite of necessity: a goddess (or idol) of self-sufficiency erected by Arminians. Those who dared to question the extent of God's foreknowledge and immutability perilously "ascribe the presidentship of all humane actions, to omnipotent contingencie, and her Sire Free-will."²² To the Calvinist-turned-Arminian clergyman Thomas Goad (1576-1638), contingency was "the middle point between necessity and

¹⁹ Nicholas D. Jackson, *Hobbes, Bramhall and the Politics of Liberty and Necessity: A Quarrel of the Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Of libertie and necessitie* (1654), 41.

²¹ John Bramhall, *Castigations of Mr. Hobbes* (1657), 231.

²² John Owen, *Theomachia autexousiastike: or, A display of Arminianisme* (1643), 14.

impossibility of being.”²³ Contingent (or voluntary) acts were God’s decree, and these included such things as human temperaments and inclinations. God foresaw every contingency and His secret purpose could shape the outcome of contingent acts and events in unexpected ways. Yet this did not alter the fact that, at their core, these acts were born of free will. God’s intention for, or redirecting of, contingent occurrences could not be fully known, but could the occurrences themselves be correctly foreseen by humans? To Goad, “fore-sight of future contingents is the true character and Royal prerogative of Divine knowledge.”²⁴ Astrologers and physiognomers can be shown to be impostures, if it is noted that the things they foretell hinge upon temperaments and complexions, that is, upon natural causes. Similarly, the late seventeenth-century critic John Brinley wrote that, considering “natural things and such as depend meerly upon Natural Causes, cannot be positively affirmed, but only go under the notion of possibilities, ’tis not to be thought that contingencies and things depending upon mans will (and such are most wherein Astrologers have to do) should be hit of by their doubtful and fantastical rules of art.”²⁵ Brinley and his contemporaries did not deny and, indeed, firmly believed that secret forces and intelligences, be they divine or demonic, infiltrated daily life and experience, but they did not trust the intentions or methods of astrologers to interpret them. However, since absolute certainty regarding providence was the preserve of none, contingencies and possibilities were for many the only tools with which to

²³ Thomas Goad, *A disputation partly theological, partly metaphysical, concening the necessity and contingency of events in the world, in respect of Gods eternal decree* (1661), 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵ John Brinley, *A Discovery of the impostures of witches and astrologers* (1680), 113.

access otherwise privileged information. This was a reality which astrologers stressed and to which they readily responded.

There was genuine concern among various contemporaries that interpretation of the signs which revealed the impact of the stars on people's lives and bodies could lead to despair. As with the study of physiognomy, discussions of astrology wrestled with the fact that their astrological pronouncements, particularly those regarding the body's reflection of starry influences, often seemed fatalistic. Just as physiognomic diagnosis could seem to fix certain physical features to particular fates, so astrological diagnosis of the stars which dominated moments of birth, inquiry or action seemed to leave little room for movement or changes in fortune. For instance, people determined by the stars to be both melancholic and ruled by Saturn were, according to the rules of astrology, "nasty, slovenly, clownish, unconstant" and likely to waste away their lives in taverns.²⁶ Practitioners of these approaches to knowledge, however, were constant in their arguments that even their most baleful warnings could be instructive or even salvific. The Tory John Butler, writing in 1680, intimated that Saint Paul's holiness was largely dependent on his awareness of his celestially-directed inclinations. Saint Paul's "rugged nature," he wrote, suggested that he and "the late Usurper Cromwel" shared the same stars and aspects in their nativities. Through his virtue and attention to his failings, however, Saint Paul "overcame Nature, and so brought his body into subjection, and by that means made use of all his violent passions of Nature, to stir up the more zeal and fervency in Gods service; whereas the other, for want of that Virtue, became so much the greater Villain."²⁷ By showing how people born with comparable influences could differ

²⁶ See, for instance, Richard Saunders *physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), 151.

²⁷ John Butler, *Hagiastrologia: The most Sacred and Divine science of Astrology* (1680), 24.

greatly in their lives and actions, Butler took an optimistic line on free will and human ability. He also emphasized the degree to which the exact character of inclinations and likely occurrences in a person's future could only ever be guessed at.

At the core of much concern over the degree to which astrology impeded free will or, at best, was misguidedly meddling were beliefs regarding God's providence and the degree to which it, as the anti-Presbyterian clergyman John Cockburn (1652-1729) argued, was essentially nothing if not secret.²⁸ Confidence in the impenetrability of providence and the ways in which it held all things in interconnected harmony was a point upon which both astrologers and their critics could agree. While astrologers argued that deciphering the secrets of the stars was one way in which to cultivate and deepen reverence for the awesomeness of divine providence, their critics felt that doing so was presumptuous and wholly impious. "The Wisdom of God," wrote Cockburn, "hideth from Mankind what he is about to do; and generally doth not discover to any the Designs he carries on, until the Event declare them. The generality of Mankind are not worthy to have such important Secrets revealed unto them."²⁹ Such secrecy, he argued, was essential to human learning, for if humans had access to knowledge of all that had past and was to come, there would be little impetus to study the various virtues necessary for the production of reason. Certainty and complete transparency quelled the endeavour for spiritual betterment, learning and human development, whereas secrecy encouraged it. Knowledge of things to come, of "even the most contingent, secret uncertainties," wrote the Presbyterian Francis Crow (1627-1692/3), was a divine privilege and one of the

²⁸ John Cockburn, *An enquiry into the nature, necessity, and evidence of Christian faith* (1699), 184-185.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 186.

defining “flowers of God’s crown.”³⁰ It was more than presumptuous for astrologers to claim that they had access to such knowledge: it was deceptive, dangerous and blasphemous. For astrologers, however, the access which they claimed to provide was in line with the belief that secrets were central to the endeavour towards, and the exercise of, human reason.

Contemporary astrologers felt that critics like John Cockburn and Francis Crow were mistaken not in the existence of providence, but in the degree to which God, through His providence, interfered in human affairs. As scholars such as Michael Witmore have shown, the Calvinistic view of divine providence which prevailed in seventeenth-century England assumed that the active, judicial hand of God was discernible in all human and earthly incidents.³¹ According to rigid interpretation of such belief, astrology removed God from the governance of the world and sequestered him to an “everlasting playing day.”³² Prevailing beliefs in providence and God’s justice, however, were not monolithic or exclusively normative, but could be flexible and even subversive.³³ Writing in 1684, the clergyman John Edwards (1637-1716) – who was known for his Calvinist views and Whig sympathies – argued in favour of the belief that the stars inclined and foretold possible occurrences. The orderly and predictable movements of the heavenly bodies most certainly pertain to natural and political affairs.

³⁰ Francis Crow, *The Vanity and impiety of judicial astrology* (1692), 18-19.

³¹ Michael Witmore, *Culture of Accidents: Unexpected Knowledges in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 22.

³² John Chamber, *A treatise against judicial astrologie* (1601), 4.

³³ See, for instance, Andrea McKenzie, “God’s Tribunal: Guilt, Innocence, and Execution in England, 1675-1775” *Cultural and Social History* vol. 3 no. 2 (2006) 121-144; Anne James, *Poets, Players, and Preachers: Remembering the Gunpowder Plot in Seventeenth-Century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

It was only in motions and events that are “above nature’s order” (such as comets, for instance) that the direct, prodigious hand of God made a tangible appearance.³⁴ Aside from the fact that the stars and their influences were, from the first, directed by God, the predictions of astrology, concluded the physician William Ramesey (1627-c.1676), “hath nothing to do with Divine providence or matters beyond the common course of nature.”³⁵ Unlike the mind of God, the secrets of nature were there for humans to uncover, or recover, from the effects of the Fall, and astrology was one way in which to do so. Although God created, worked through and sometimes intervened in the courses of nature, nature was not God and, astrologers were apt to argue, it was merely nature – of which humans were an integral part – whose secrets they sought. While opinions regarding free will and strict Calvinist predestination were often starkly opposed in print, in practice, as Alexandra Walsham has shown, belief was much more flexible.³⁶ Opinions regarding astrology can be seen in a similar light.

The seventeenth-century resurgence of interest and practice in English astrology can be ascribed, in part, to the efforts of soldier, government official and writer Sir Christopher Heydon (1561-1623). In 1603 he refuted clergyman astronomer John Chamber’s efforts to outlaw astrology with an instructional treatise aimed to demonstrate astrology’s scientific and religious validity. His comments inspired ensuing astrologers who built upon the defenses he had constructed. Heydon remarked that, from the very beginning, God appointed the stars to manage the earth and, through them, worked

³⁴ John Edwards, *Cometomania* (1684), 193.

³⁵ William Ramesey, *Lux Veritatis or, Christian judicial astrology vindicated* (1651), 105.

³⁶ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 156.

remotely. “The providence of God in the ordinarie government of the world,” he wrote, “doeth as well shine in disposing the meanes as in ordaining the ende.”³⁷ Every defining characteristic, every bout of sickness, every answer to prayer, every sinful act, every blessing, tragedy or occurrence of any kind, was wrought by the methodical scheme of nature which God appointed at Creation. Furthermore, time – which determines the length and limits and life – and chance – which, within those limits, decides good or bad fates – were nature’s attendants.³⁸ God’s providence had so perfectly foreseen and accounted for all that even the Fall and humankind’s manifold sins did not necessitate its modification. Astrology, wrote Butler, “shews us so plainly the wonderful contrivance of God in Nature, that we see it with our Eyes, as it were, written in great and plain Characters upon fair paper.”³⁹

While claiming to know all of God’s secrets was blasphemous, the act of striving to understand them could be a godly exercise. This was the small margin within which astrology flourished. The papers of the astrologer Henry Coley (1633-1704) include assertions made by astrological physicians, philosophers and others that although the heavens certainly act upon nature, “contingent and fortuitous” human actions cannot be foretold with certainty and that “sounder astrologers” would not dare attribute precise prediction to themselves.⁴⁰ Similarly, William Lilly’s landmark *Christian Astrology* (1647) is rife with confidence, certainty and assurances, but still leaves room for “the

³⁷ Christopher Heydon, *A Defence of Judiciall Astrologie* (Cambridge, 1603), [6].

³⁸ John Butler, *Hagiastrologia: The most Sacred and Divine science of Astrology* (1680), (d).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, (d4).

⁴⁰ BL, MS Sloane, 2283 ff 24v-25v. See also, Daniel Sennert, *Thirteen books of natural philosophy* (1660), 61.

great uncertainty of humane affairs.”⁴¹ William Herbert’s astrologer may have predicted the date of his death (as noted above), but Lilly publicly frowned upon such activity and wrote that it was particularly in predictions surrounding death that astrologers should be most uncertain. Warning clients of potential dangers was important, he noted, but one must “be not too bold ... referring all to the divine providence of God.”⁴²

The spectrum of accuracy among astrological predictions was argued to be relative to the godliness of the practitioner. “The more holy thou art, and more neer to God,” wrote William Lilly, “the purer judgment thou shalt give.”⁴³ Furthermore, if “future contingencies” were to be foretold with any degree of certainty, practitioners must demote their own error-prone judgements and adhere, instead, “to a divine Spirit; for those things which to the eye of the world, seem to be matters failing, or uncertain, to a minde that is Divine, and invariable are firm and sure.”⁴⁴ Lilly argued that the openness of regular people to astrological instruction was divinely designed. Many of Sir Christopher Heydon’s astrological writings and predictions were not published in his lifetime, but in 1650, his manuscript on the harmonious relationship between celestial and elementary bodies was printed with a laudatory preface by a politically-motivated Lilly, which stated that readers must acknowledge and “admire the divine Providence of God, who so long since elevated the Conceptions of this learned Kt, to go on with, to perform and perfect so high and so sublime a piece of learning, and yet deferred its publication, until both the times, and mens minds also were by his all-guiding hand made capable of

⁴¹ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647), 420.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 650.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁴ William Lilly, *The world's catastrophe* (1647), 3.

its reception.”⁴⁵ No matter how hard individuals worked towards greater access to knowledge, it was up to God whether the time was right for people to receive it.

Providence not only guided astrological skill and reception, it also obstructed it. God, according to secret purposes of His own, ensured that even the most skilful and reverent astrologers were sometimes inaccurate. Like William Lilly, the physician and apothecary William Drage (1636-1668) noted that any given time an astrologer mapped the skies, there would always be a degree of conflicting information, for the movements of planets and stars was such that some might deny what others affirm.⁴⁶ Butler similarly noted that even the most proficient astrologer could easily make mistakes and, in so doing, “shall perceive the good hand of God upon him, confounding his skill.” The virtue of astrology lay in allowing humans “to observe the overruling work of God even in the astrologer’s very mistakes.”⁴⁷ Only that which God wished to be known and which had, from the beginning of time, been ordained to be known, could ever be discovered. Astrology’s critics, wrote Butler, objected that God’s works are secret and cannot be found out. “So say we too,” he continued, “but yet these secrets have also an out-side, and that’s all we pretend to be skilled in.”⁴⁸ To men like Butler, intimate knowledge of God’s ways and plans were forever scrambled by human corruption and the Fall, but their signs, echoes and reflections were the structure of Creation. Deciphering such signs or “out-sides” was a calling, or vocation, but one that could be taught. Because “the hidden secrets of God are impenetrable,” wrote Lilly, “we intend (not as speculators, and

⁴⁵ Christopher Heydon, *An astrological discourse* (1650), A2.

⁴⁶ William Drage, *A physical nosonomy* (1664), 24. Also see BL MS Sloane 2279.

⁴⁷ John Butler, *Hagiastrologia: The most Sacred and Divine science of Astrology* (1680), e2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

screwers out of the secrets of God) to prognosticate any thing, but (with the Philosophers and Astrologers) it is lawfull and requisite, that we conjecture somewhat about the signs according to the effects of the Stars.”⁴⁹ Accessing arcane knowledge through “conjectures of contingencies” and a healthy dose of uncertainty was not only useful, practical and revealing, it was a necessary part of God’s mysterious plans.⁵⁰

iii. Knowledge and Reason

Scholars have noted that seventeenth-century astrologers like Lilly were less concerned with proving the scientific validity of their endeavours than demonstrating their religious conformity and/or the sanctity of religion.⁵¹ This desire to align astrology and religion, and the shifting strategies to accomplish this over the course of the century, have been demonstrated by Bernard Capp and others, and is certainly apparent in the discussions related above.⁵² It is also evident in astrology’s preoccupation with discussions of a prelapsarian state. The royalist clergyman Thomas Swadlin (c1599-1670), for instance, rejected the notion that astrological knowledge – based as it was in the focus on celestial bodies and their movements – was a form of idolatry. Rather than idolatry, he wrote, the roots of astrology were deeply grounded in prelapsarian innocence. “Adam in Paradise,” he noted, “was the father of this Art; and had he as well observed the starre of knowledge, for the direction of his will, as the tree of knowledge for the pleasing of his phancy, he had not yet been banished.”⁵³ The tree of knowledge, this

⁴⁹ William Lilly, *Worlds Catastrophe* (1647), 12.

⁵⁰ William Lilly, *Annus tenebrosus, or The dark year* (1652), *3v.

⁵¹ Geneva, *Astrology*, 9.

⁵² Bernard Capp, *Popular Press*, 134.

⁵³ Thomas Swadlin, *Divinity no Enemy to Astrology* (1653), 2.

implied, resulted in too much desultory clarity and, rather than being instructive or usefully revelatory, was merely a base, human craving. Star knowledge, on the other hand, was instructive and a useful aid to human reason, for it revealed much but simultaneously maintained mystery. In a similar manner, the Anglican clergymen Richard Carpenter argued that “common, serious, diligent and fervent enquiry” into the intelligences of the stars was a prelapsarian legacy and should be treated as such.⁵⁴ By locating celestial knowledge before the Fall, its advocates made astrology an essential ingredient for the Adamic knowledge of the natural world which natural philosophers craved, and it aimed to highlight astrology’s access to godly and reliable wisdom.

Astrological information, wrote John Butler, is the result of “natural causes and rules gained by painful observation and hard study.”⁵⁵ It requires meticulous labour and its conjectural nature is a testament to the careful consideration fostered by such diligence. In contrast, witches and conjurors come by their knowledge easily, by way of evil spirits and diabolical inspiration. True Christians must be content with “likelihood and probability,” for consistent exactness in astrology can only be attained through “correspondence with Lucifer” or “a confederacy and compact with spirits.”⁵⁶ If astrology had been an exact science, wrote William Drage, government, trading and all human actions would be greatly inconvenienced by its infallible predictions, but God, in His foresight, ordained uncertainty in order to keep things in proper balance.⁵⁷ Certainty is devilish, and it is telling that “of all the relations ever I read of the commerce betwixt

⁵⁴ Richard Carpenter, *Astrology Proved Harmless* (1657), 4

⁵⁵ Butler, *Divine Science* (1680), e2.

⁵⁶ John Edwards, *Cometomantia* (1684), 228-232.

⁵⁷ William Drage, *Nosonomy* (1664), 25.

witches and evil spirits, or also heard, I never could find the devils told any thing of the stars, nor do they know any thereof, or practise any thing thereby; they are God's creatures made for our books, to read such destinies as it pleaseth god man should foreknow.”⁵⁸

Although the religious justifications and underpinnings of astrology were often a source of contention, the suggestion that critical concerns regarding religion, rather than those respecting science, drove much astrological inquiry is over-simplistic. As Peter Harrison has outlined, the traditional notion of religion and science as mutually exclusive and conflicting categories obscures the degree to which both bodies of thought were sustained by similar streams of information.⁵⁹ Astrologers created boundaries between the focus of their study – the natural world – and that of theology (salvation and the supernatural), but the narrative of the Fall and the attendant limits of human reason informed and shaped religious, astrological and “scientific” inquiry. The considerations of certainty, which underscored much debate regarding astrological knowledge, may have been framed in what we determine to be largely religious language, but they simultaneously and interchangeably conversed with understandings of the ways in which human reason could be refined and with the fledgling principles of “new science.”

Francis Bacon's influential knowledge program was based on the cumulative experimentation and confluence of myriad interests, curiosities and observations.⁶⁰ With the certainty of knowledge in question (due to mankind's fallen state), reason lay in the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁹ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); -- *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ Keller, *Public Interest*, 12-16.

weighing of unknowns toward a most likely probability or hypothesis. John Butler and his contemporaries attributed the cumulative refinement of astrological knowledge and observation to Adam's direct progeny, likening the foundational model of the Royal Society to the work and legacy of biblical wise men and philosophers. From his "memoirs of the state of Innocency," wrote Butler, Adam communicated astrological wisdom to his son Seth, which began a chain reaction linking wise and learned men like Noah, Abraham, Moses and Solomon to the communal and ageless quest for greater precision. It was passed on and honed through study, comparison, discovery and observation, from generation to generation, and civilisation to civilisation, and the sum of all such ongoing experiments were compiled "into a body of rules and maxims, which do make up the frame of that learning which we call the science of astrology."⁶¹

Various scholars have analyzed how assumptions between men and intellectual prowess were created, and they explore the ways in which traditionally female areas of expertise, such as midwifery, were actively overrun by the construction and professionalization of male expertise.⁶² As Shapin, Harrison, Keller and others have shown, it was not just traditionally female areas of expertise that were gradually rearranged over the course of this period. Knowledge in general underwent a process of re-characterization. An integral part of this process was the expansion and solidification of traditional views regarding feminine and masculine methods of inquiry, and the elevation of "masculine" methods as the preeminent sources of verifiable and transparent

⁶¹ John Butler *Divine Science* (1680), (c).

⁶² Mary Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Adrian Wilson, *The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England, 1660-1770* (London: University College London Press, 1995); Doreen Evenden, *The Midwives of Seventeenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

truth. Masculine (or scientific) knowledge, it was argued, could be proven through experiment and human reasoning; it was an empirical and demonstrable. The secrets it handled could be entrusted to learned communities and could be revealed when their honourable members felt it was safe or useful to do so. Feminine knowledge (like witchcraft, intuition, gossip and seduction), on the other hand, was closed in the hidden recesses of unmoderated human passions, languished without the accountability of a learned community and rigorous schooling, and it was often employed for unreliable and selfish reasons.

In the 1660s and 1670s, the physician Richard Saunders (1613-1675) lamented the associations between female fortune-tellers and his favoured sister studies of astrology, chiromancy and physiognomy. Especially within England, he felt, the purity of such studies had been perverted to the point where they “rather merited the notion of old wives Fables than a useful science.”⁶³ The “laudable utility of [the] Christian Prudent Science” of astrology, he wrote, is not only wounded by ignorant sycophants from other countries, but by those who “lurk about in obscure corners” within London and teach “many *illiterate* peices of *non-sence* and *impudence* of the *Female* kind.”⁶⁴ The “babbling women and obscure persons,” whom Saunders labels “the very shame and bane of science,” are those lacking the learning, diligence, discretion and mental strength touted above by John Butler and John Edwards. A principal purpose of Saunders’s work, as with the writings of various other seventeenth-century astrologers, was to emphasize the demonstrable legitimacy of their science and the depth of intricate study and communal

⁶³ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and Chiromancy* (1671), (a2).

⁶⁴ Richard Saunders, *Palmistry, the secrets thereof disclosed* (1664), A11r-A11v.

accountability (what we could today call “academic peer review”) necessary for its success. To William Lilly especially, the intent was to combat the “vulgar” or unlearned practitioners of astrology by encouraging the practice of those who had the requisite time and diligence. Although it could be argued that he did not fully follow his own advice, to Lilly, human reason in the employ of astrology exhibited itself through restraint, studious labour, tenacity, and a steadfast determination to “betray no ones secrets.”⁶⁵ In principle, or at least for appearances, then, most astrologers were likely not in favour of widespread access to celestial secrets. They also, however, had almanacs, instructional manuals and services to sell and they were most successful in doing so if they cast their nets widely. Manuals such as Lilly’s suggested that as long as people referred to the professional astrologer’s specialized skills, carefully followed his guidance and augmented what they already knew with his expertise, then degrees of access to arcane knowledge could potentially be open to anyone (God willing, of course).

Vernacular instructional manuals influenced amateur astrologers from various walks of life, such as the late seventeenth- early eighteenth-century Quaker clothier Norris Purslow and the natural philosopher William Stukeley (1687-1765), both of whom felt that that the study of astrology contained “many useful hints to guide them thro the wilderness of life.”⁶⁶ Lady Cecelia Bindloss (1646-1729), daughter of a staunch Anglican royalist and wife to the prominent (likely Jacobite) Catholic, William Standish (1638-1705), adopted the “manly” model of knowledge prescribed by men like Saunders and Butler. Her library lists show her to be well-versed in the leading English works on astrology, including folio and quarto volumes by Vincent Wing (1619-68), William Lilly,

⁶⁵ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647), B.

⁶⁶ Wellcome, MS 4729, MS 4021. Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*, 143.

Richard Saunders and John Gadbury (1627-1704).⁶⁷ Her interaction with these works is apparent in her careful record of planetary characteristics and configurations for different days, seasons and years, and in her calculation of nativities. At the behest of friends, neighbours and family members, she consulted the skies for such reasons as to assist her sister in finding lost jewels, to learn more about burglaries, to discover whether or not her son would win upcoming horse races, to reveal which marriages would come to pass and to predict the fate of newly-born family members. She made astrological inquiries into people's health and tested her astrological calculations according to when people fell ill. She coupled her human-interest inquiries with advice on opportune times for making tree cuttings or planting vines. The secret forces which, to seventeenth-century minds, were thought to generate, move and rule all aspects of Creation colour Bindloss's notebook, as do the complex relationship of humans as being both a part of, and having dominion over the natural world. Studious and conjectural access to coded information was a common feature of Lady Bindloss's daily life, and she felt she had both an ability and a right to inquire. While her calculations and consultations may have been for entertainment as much as for guidance, they indicate belief in the potential approachability and daily usefulness of the arcane. For those who, unlike Lady Bindloss, had neither the learning nor leisure, access to secret knowledge was already enclosed within their bodies, experiences and birthdates and trusted experts could help them draw it out.

iv. Accidents

In *Christologia* (1671), the clergyman John Butler lamented that, among the Interregnum's other "bitter fruits" was the refusal to celebrate Christ's nativity due to a

⁶⁷ WRO D/D st C2/2.

belief that the actual date of his birth could not be correctly ascertained.⁶⁸ Astrology, he asserted, could conclude controversies surrounding the issue, for although Christ's innocence dismissed celestial influences over his nature and inclinations, his humility was evident in the degree to which he surrendered his body to the ordering of the stars and the happenings, or "accidents," they decided. "As for the Accidents of his life," wrote Butler, "in respect of what befell him, as for matter of love or hatred, sickness and health, life and death, the stars had as free and full liberty and power over him and his body as upon any the least of us." These "accidents," such as his flight into Egypt around two years of age, his debates over doctrine in the temple at twelve, his priesthood at twenty-five, his baptism and temptation by the devil at twenty-nine and his crucifixion at one hundred and one days over thirty two years of age, trace back "to the moment of time when he was born."⁶⁹ Butler's detractors argued that casting Christ's nativity according to the accidents of his life implied that, rather than being symbols of his love and pity for humankind, such things as his "high zeal" in whipping money lenders out of the temple could be attributed to the malicious influences of Mars over him, while his requisition of another person's colt for a ride into Jerusalem indicated the thieving effects of Mercury.⁷⁰ Such focus on celestially activated accidents, it was feared, suggested that religion itself was a chance occurrence, "but an influence of Nature and transient blast of the stars."⁷¹

⁶⁸ John Butler, *Christologia* (1671), A6. Also found in Henry Coley's papers, with notes by Coley, BL MS Sloane 2283 ff 46-50.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 256, 258-259.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

In dictionaries of the period, accidents were generally defined in conjunction with such terms as “incident,” “symptom,” “circumstance” and “contingency.”⁷² They were chance occurrences, as well as the effects of chance occurrences, and their very ambiguity suggested their potential as stores of information. Physicians read accidents, or signs of disease, in order to treat their patients, and astrologers determined future accidents to which individuals were prone in order to help guide their lives. Providence and accidents were intimately connected, yet astrologers generally attempted to distinguish between them by ascribing the occurrence of accidents to nature and thus to something that could potentially be at least partially unlocked. Although providence was the source of all events, it could only be revealed by God after the fact. Possible accidents, as products of nature’s celestial alignments, could be foreseen by humans. Saunders noted that all “future contingencies of the world” could plausibly be predicted, “for in this voluminous universal book of nature, he hath miraculously described and ingraven as it were, all future accidents that are within the compass of natures bounds.”⁷³ Similarly, William Lilly’s creed stated: “I beleeve god rules all by his divine Providence, and that the Stars by his permission are instruments whereby many contingent events may be foreseen as well in the general accidents of the world as in particular men’s fates.”⁷⁴

Daily accidents and events had as much influence on each person’s course of life and character as their humoural inclinations. Echoing Sir Christopher Heydon’s earlier comments, William Drage noted that, when it came to human temperaments, God was

⁷² See, for instance, Elisha Coles, *An English dictionary* (1677); Henry Cockeram, *The English dictionarie* (1623); Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (1661).

⁷³ Saunders, *Palmistry* (1664), A5r-v.

⁷⁴ Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647).

impartial and blameless, for he tasked the stars with the responsibility for keeping balance in nature. Naturally foolish, proud or passionate people may wish they were different and wonder why they were born with their particular assortment of frailties, but it was necessary for them to be as they are so that others could be wise, meek and patient. They, like all others, just happened to be born when the stars were configured a particular way. A melancholic person may ask why he or she was made “to be dejected at every small business and to swoon at every light grief, and to be discontented with my life?” Some, continued Drage, “must be melancholy as some are merry; there must be variety; and it fell according to their nativity to be such, without any partiality, or ill respects in God towards them.”⁷⁵ Astrological interpretation of the unexpected occurrences which defined people’s lives and daily interactions fit within a providential view of the world, but in an indirect way. Perhaps, noted William Drage, someone determined to take revenge on their enemies unexpectedly falls sick and decides against it. By the same token, perhaps someone resolves to never turn Quaker, but happens, after having their curiosity piqued by hearing a Quaker sermon, to completely change his or her creed. In loosening human accidents from supernatural moorings and anchoring them instead to natural causes, astrologers smoothed the sometimes harsh contours of Calvinist predestination and privileged nature as the more accessible book within which knowledge of God was written.

Michael Witmore’s consideration of early modern interpretations of accidents demonstrates ways in which contingencies became revelatory sources of knowledge about God, humans and natural science.⁷⁶ His book does not give astrology much more

⁷⁵ William Drage, *physical nosonomy* (1664), 18.

⁷⁶ Witmore, *Culture of Accidents*, 3.

than a cursory comment, but for astrologers from the period, accidents were a foundational aspect of their study, as well as a bedrock of their business. When people asked astrologers for guidance, they asked for insights into what accidents might befall them. Anne Veisey, for instance, wrote to William Lilly for information regarding the men who broke into her house and also to inquire “what accidents are like to happen this yeare to us either by thefes quartering or payments or what elsce you pleas to insert.”⁷⁷ People also regularly recorded accidents that had already befallen them in order to garner more detailed astrological interpretation. The papers of contemporary astrologers are filled with compilations of accidents from people throughout history, as well as those of their clients, ranging from the commonplace to the colourful and confidential. In 1684, for instance, John Aubrey sent Elias Ashmole the accidents of Edmond Wylde, twice requesting “that the same should be kept secret” due to ongoing lawsuits. Included among his account of encounters with plague, agues and surprise sicknesses is the admission that in 1644 “he had misfortune to kill a man in a quarrel upon a great provocation.”⁷⁸ Sir Kenelm Digby’s noted accidents included the execution of his father for his involvement in the Gunpowder Plot, many bouts of nearly mortal sickness, travels, fights, wounds and his knighting by the King at the age of twenty years, three months and seventeen days.⁷⁹ This aspect of astrological study and practice emphasized and helped develop the notion that observation, analysis and record of the events of one’s life (and others’), had the potential to reveal secret intelligences – a notion, which as chapter five indicates, was useful to writers of secret histories.

⁷⁷ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 420, 129.

⁷⁸ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 243, 395.

⁷⁹ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 174, 77.

Accidents were also necessary ingredients for accurate and revealing nativities. Anthony Grafton notes that the practice, publishing and debate over nativities has been largely overlooked by historians but was nevertheless an important aspect of both everyday life and scholarly practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸⁰ Many early modern physicians depended on the narrative of a person's life to diagnose their illnesses, and nativities provided them with invaluable insights. For astrologers, nativity charts were the sites in which the secrets of the skies could be deciphered and interpreted. In their interactions with clients, and their observation of social events and heavenly phenomena, astrologers used nativities to capture the precise position of the heavenly bodies at any given time. A nativity, wrote Sir Christopher Heydon, "must alone be considered as the foundation whereon to build an astrological judgment; and this is the Philosophy of the Elements, when the stars stamp their permanent effects on the body, mind and estate of the native, agreeable to the Divine Wisdom."⁸¹ Positions of heavenly bodies at birth were especially sought-after sources of information, but unless it was judiciously jotted down by their parents or birth attendants, it was difficult for many people to pinpoint their precise moments of birth. In 1682, for instance, the woodcarver Grinling Gibbons requested that Elias Ashmole consult the skies regarding "a consarne of great consquins." He was curious to know if this important endeavour (potentially his commission from Charles II) would be successful or not and had to write to his sister in order to determine his date of birth for the query. His sister replied that she could not tell whether their father wrote it in the Old Style Calendar or the New and noted that "it is set

⁸⁰ Anthony Grafton, "Geniture Collections, Origins and Uses of a Genre," in Marina Frasca-Spada and Nick Jardine, eds., *Books and the Sciences in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49-69.

⁸¹ Christopher Heydon, *Astrology: The Wisdom of Solomon in miniature* (1792), 87.

down thus 4th Aprill 1648 about 3 or 4 Aclocke in the morning being Tuesday I have hard my mother say it was ester Tuesday you were born so if you could git an almanack you mit know by that.”⁸² Mysterious accidents could remedy such confusion. In his demonstration of things to be considered before judging someone’s nativity, Lilly wrote that it was necessary to first amend “your nativity by accidents which alone of all other wayes is most certain.”⁸³ The “quality of those accidents,” wrote Lilly, should fall within two related categories. The first should be those which encompass the workings, trials and characters of bodies, and if needed for further verification, the second can include various significant life events, such as marriage, career and the making of powerful friends.⁸⁴ Accordingly, most astrological judgements included a list of “accidentes for the correction of the nativitie, if the time should not be rightly noted,” many of which focussed on the workings of, or inflictions to bodies.⁸⁵

Sicknesses, deaths of family members, wounds and descriptive physical features are all prominently featured. Hugh Hamersley, for instance was born at 9am 7 March 1639/40, and in addition to his stint in a London printing house and the finishing of his bachelor’s degree at Cambridge, his memorable accidents included being “miserably stung on the head” after knocking down a beehive, small pox at seven or eight years, the deaths of his uncle and grandfather, another “long fitt of sickness” and a “fall of a horse ye effects of wch I feel to this day.” Hamersley ended his list of accidents by noting that he was presently in debt and had “a mole upon my left arme, my left cheeke, ye left side

⁸² Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 243, 333.

⁸³ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647), 524.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 507-508.

⁸⁵ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 174, 77.

of my belly towards ye bottom."⁸⁶ Although Dr. Crompton of Basingstoke had his time of birth from his father, the clues of his life and body suggested that it might be unreliable. His astrologer noted that, although the doctor's father had given after nine in the morning as the time of birth, the ascendant constellations suggested that "about halfe an houre of 6 dos better agree with his discription for he is middle statur'd thin bodyed light brown hayr, bred a schollar &c Physician a person ingenious & crafty enough and of no obliging principle of honesty."⁸⁷ Establishing or (as in the case of Dr. Crompton) adjusting the exact moment of birth by way of accidents was important, for if astrologers, or their readers, had it, they "need not ever mistrust the verity of [their] judgement."⁸⁸

Because nativities identified the relationships of the planets which molded the unique lives of individuals, they could function much as do celebrity gossip magazines today. Collections of the nativities of famous historical and contemporary personages circulated widely in both manuscript and print, making transparent otherwise secret information regarding people's illnesses, personalities, actions and future fates. They encouraged the use of the stars as a way in which to make informed speculations on significant events. In 1662 royalist John Gadbury could not resist commenting on abiding rumours regarding the death of King James I/VI at the hands of the Duke of Buckingham. "Some ignorant Artists have Parasitically printed it," he wrote, "that this eminent and famous prince died by poyson: which suggestion, as it is most untrue, and scandalous to the memory of an eminent peer late of this realm (whose nativity was too sympatheticall

⁸⁶ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 180, 30.

⁸⁷ BL, MS Sloane, 2282, f25r.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

with his kingly natives, for the perpetration of so prodigious a mischief and murder) it is also purely anti-astrological, and not to be read in the heavens at the time of this great Kings birth which were it true must needs have been found there.”⁸⁹ Knowing what a person actually looked like revealed much about the personality traits he or she shared with others of similar birth. At the request of Elias Ashmole, for instance, Lilly constructed the image of King Edward III “from the schem of his nativitie.” He identified him as strong, big boned, ruddy, curly haired, quick, hazel eyed, confident, able to withstand hardship, and generally “an active and fearfull person.”⁹⁰ He also concluded that King Edward’s son, the Black Prince, was thin, bushy haired, long armed, judicious, witty, benevolent and “desirous of knowledge.” The sketches of King Edward and his son were completed, partly out of historical curiosity, and also, as Lilly’s careful and precise observation of the planets and comparison of capable astrologers’ “schemes” of the individuals indicates, as a way of testing and refining the methods of astrological inquiry.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, astrologers such as John Gadbury attempted to shake astrology of its radical and populist associations and to align the science with the elitist and experimental philosophies of the Royal Society.⁹¹ Collecting and correcting accidents and nativities as testable sources of data was an integral part of this process. Gadbury’s printed collection of nativities clearly marked where he

⁸⁹ Gadbury, *Collectio Geniturarum: or, A Collection of Nativities* (1662), 15. For more on rivalries among restoration astrologers, see William Burns, “Astrology and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England: King James II and the Almanac Men,” *The Seventeenth Century*, vol. 20 no. 2 (2005): 242-253. For more on the prevalence and abiding polemical significance and political influence of rumours regarding King James I/VI’s death, see Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

⁹⁰ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 1744.

⁹¹ Monod, *Secret Arts*, 68-69.

concluded other astrologers – particularly those, such as William Lilly, who were associated with a more “vulgar” brand of astrological practice – had failed to discern the precise nativities of their subjects. This was particularly the case with Queen Elizabeth I, whose accidents of imprisonment, coronation and death, Gadbury argued, indicated that his nativity was the correct one.⁹² Gadbury’s interests for “correcting” the uses and abuses of astrology were not purely scientific. They grew from his political interests which had morphed from republican to a conservative brand of High-Church royalism. Astrology had the ability to appeal to, and shift with, different religious and political tides and, although a cause of its ultimate intellectual disgrace, this characteristic was also a source of its strength as a practical, accessible source of knowledge. People could take what they wanted or needed from it, regardless of authorial motivations.

Collections of famous and historical nativities, such as those compiled by John Gadbury, provided people with ways in which to compare themselves to well-known historical figures and contemporary notables. Sometimes, as was the case for the Royalist tutor, estate manager and pursuivant John Gibbon (1629-1718), such comparisons could be cause for alarm. Gibbon wrote to Elias Ashmole about his concern regarding the similarity between his nativity and that of French astronomer Peter Gassendus.⁹³ Gadbury had given Gibbon a book in which Gassendus, according to the placement of the stars and planets at his birth, was described as sickly, rotten and corrupt in body, envious, traitorous, fraudulent, atheistic and, in sum, “a toad swell’d with pride and malicious venom.”⁹⁴ When Gibbon asked Gadbury for clarification as to how the slight differences

⁹² John Gadbury, *Nativities* (1662), 13.

⁹³ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 436, 51-2.

⁹⁴ John Gadbury, *Cardines Coeli* (1684), 26.

in his nativity might suggest a different fate, he was left confused and turned to Elias Ashmole for satisfaction regarding the matter. Mark Noble's classic account of England's heralds blames Gibbon's "arrogant insolence" on his obsession with the frequent casting of his nativity and his ensuing conviction that his ill behaviour would not change his fate.⁹⁵ What is of interest here is that Gibbons did not falter in his belief in astrology, despite being presented with material which may have given him cause to question its accuracy. Instead, he assumed that discrepancies were due to incomplete understanding of the available data and that, in combining information gleaned from his own calculations and recalculations with those of Gadbury and Ashmole, he might come closer to a more certain assessment. As Gibbon's experience suggests, there was room for movement and differences of opinion within astrological thought without necessitating disbelief in its use as a daily guide. The secrets which astrology promised to reveal could be moulded to suit different conclusions – a characteristic which was well suited for widespread access.

v. William Lilly and the Certainty of Bodies

William Lilly was careful to highlight the limits of his judgements. In 1647 he noted that "because that Arts, which remain in their proper subjects, can affirm nothing for certain concerning future events: Therefore, an Astrologer ought not pronounce any thing absolutely concerning future accidents."⁹⁶ Particularly during the Civil Wars, however, Lilly often made firm and certain pronouncements – and suffered very public

⁹⁵ Mark Noble, *A History of the College of Arms: And the Lives of all the Kings, Heralds, and Pursuivants from the Reign of Richard III, Founder of the College, Until the Present Time* (London: J. Debrett, 1804), 363.

⁹⁶ Lilly, *Word's Catastrophe* (1647), 12.

embarrassment because of the inaccuracies of some of them. In 1648, for instance, he found that Scotland would not side with the King, but was proven wrong when, in May of that year, the Scottish parliament joined the royalist cause. Lilly cited the hand of God in overpowering the stars with His providence, and thus confounding Lilly's judgement. "God reserves unto himself," he wrote, "the unchangeable Decrees of Kingdoms, and I perceive his sometimes checking or retarding, at other times his hasty putting in execution the influence of the Planets, that man hath not yet attained so full a perfection in Astrology, whereby he might without fallacy give a determinable and positive judgement."⁹⁷ This conventional explanation fell on various unsympathetic ears, including those belonging to royalist astrologer H. Johnsen, who denounced Lilly as a "cheating sycophant" and "demigorgon."⁹⁸ To others, however, it was an explanation which suited the complex interplay between certainty and human fallibility, as well as a reminder regarding the need for constant, vigilant searching and thirsting after knowledge.

Lilly had similarly predicted that the solar eclipse of March 19, 1652 – commonly known as Black Monday – would stir up dramatic events in its wake – particularly those regarding bodies of water, priests, Presbyterians, lawyers and authority figures.⁹⁹ He suggested that these events would probably culminate in the unified voices of soldiers and the people calling for "a New Representative in this Commonwealth."¹⁰⁰ While the

⁹⁷ William Lilly, *An astrological prediction of the occurrences in England* (1648), A3v-A4.

⁹⁸ H. Johnsen, *Anti-Merlinus: or a confutation of Mr. William Lillies predictions for this year 1648* (1648), A7.

⁹⁹ See, for instance, William Burns, "'The Terriblest Eclipse That Hath Been Seen in Our Days': Black Monday and the Debate on Astrology during the Interregnum," in Margaret J. Osler, ed., *Rethinking the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ William Lilly, *Annus tenebrosus, or The dark year* (1652), 54.

eclipse did occur, it hardly darkened the sky or ruptured society, and the resultant backlash against Lilly, his contemporaries and the practice of astrology was considerable. Referring to Lilly and his friends as the “divining crue,” the author of *The wizard unvizor’d* warned that, when people are “in doubt Touching contingencies how they’l fall out,” they should stay away from “the gypsie, canter, the natvitiy-caster, and figure-flingers.” If Black Monday taught people anything, implied the piece, it was that God did not favour the efforts of astrologers. “These impious wretches,” taunted the author, “thought to be familiar with God, and’s secrets see, By their sage prudency they thought to pry into his counsels hid from mortal eye: But God who jealous of his glory is, Made it appear they did Divine amiss.”¹⁰¹ Mistakes and criticisms such as these may have harmed astrology’s reputation, particularly in the long run, but as much as they suggest reason for astrology’s decline, they also suggest the degree to which many people still valued the access which astrology provided.

Like his friend, the astrological physician and physiognomer Richard Saunders (1613-1675), William Lilly situated people’s bodies as the outside of secrets – the binding of God’s hidden workbook – and encouraged attention to the visible proofs they provided. Bodies, in many ways, were considered the central accident from which all others could potentially be deliberated. Their defining features and marks, as well as the ways in which they would be vitiated by disease and deformity, or blessed with beauty and vitality, were contingent upon the precise movements of the skies at the moment of birth. Translations of the precise movements and influences of the stars could be obtained by comparing astrological intelligences to what was known of various people’s lives, and

¹⁰¹ Anon, *The wizard unvizor’d* (1652), 3.

the use of physical traits was considered an especially telling way of determining accuracy. In *Christian Astrology* (1647), Lilly asserted that it was the conclusiveness caused by bodily blemishes which encouraged him to study astrology so seriously. "What marke, mole or scarre the querent hath in any member of his body," Lilly wrote, "I have many times admired at the verity hereof and it hath been one maine argument of my engaging so farre in all the parts of astrology for rarely you shall find these rules faile."¹⁰² He carefully outlined the rules which related what kinds of moles and marks would arise according to the placement of the heavens in a person's nativity, and he concluded that, as long as the person's birth had been correctly determined (a task which a person's physical traits and attendant accidents could help establish), then "you shall rarely find error in this rule."¹⁰³ Consequently, Lady Cecilia Bindloss measured her skill by discovering the hidden physical "notes" of friends. According to a nativity chart calculated for a particular acquaintance, for instance, she found, "upon ye loynes et reynes there is a mole. Ye have another upon yr left foote, yr belly, et neck et throate; as also upon yr right knee et thigh and againe on yr left syde of yr reines, knees et thighs."¹⁰⁴ In listing hidden marks and traits in such a manner, Bindloss fulfilled a fundamental aspect of astrological inquiry and legitimation. Human bodies carried the written language of the stars in marks and features, and as much as they were indicative of Original Sin and the limits of reprobate humanity, as approaches to physiognomy demonstrated, they could also corroborate the veracity of human inquiry.

¹⁰² William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647), 148.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

¹⁰⁴ WRO D/D st C 2/2, 34.

The famous casebooks and commentaries of William Lilly, studied by Keith Thomas and others, survive intermittently between 1644 and 1666, and at their peak, demonstrate a bustling business which dealt with at least two thousand clients a year, both by correspondence, and in person.¹⁰⁵ These clients ranged in background from labourers and artisans to gentlefolk and seventeenth-century celebrities. They came to Lilly searching for thieves, lost wives, information regarding pregnancies, and countless variations of legal, medical, travel, religious, military and political advice. While much has been written about the infamous astrologer and his casebooks, historians have largely overlooked the degree to which assessments and appraisals of his clients' bodies were an essential aspect of his work. Comments on bodies shape the majority of his consultations and are indicative of the tangible way in which Lilly sought to inspire confidence in his judgements. In August of 1635, for instance, a woman named Ellen Broukebanke came to Lilly about a stolen pistol. Lilly noted that she must have some sort of hurt or mark on her left breast and Broukebanke verified that this was true, "for she had been stabbed with a knife in the same place."¹⁰⁶ In January of 1636, a Mrs. Paulet of Fleet Street asked Lilly if her sister was alive or dead, and Lilly first noted that she must have a mark on her leg. Paulet verified this by mentioning that she had been burned there by a fire.¹⁰⁷ A woman named Em Ward came to Lilly about some stolen goods and confirmed his judgement that she had a mark on her leg and a hurt on her foot.¹⁰⁸ In September of 1636,

¹⁰⁵ See, for instance, Thomas, *Decline of Magic*; Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts*; Blackledge, *Man who saw the future*; Geneva, *Astrology*.

¹⁰⁶ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 209, 6v.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 20v.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

Justinian Jewell inquired about a cloak and suit of apparel that had been stolen, and Lilly determined that he must have a "mole or wart upon his belly wch he confessed."¹⁰⁹ The signifying marks, which Lilly determined through his celestial calculations, were often ones not readily visible to the human eye. As the above examples indicate, they were often hidden on people's legs, feet, breast, back and in other secret places such as their "privy members." Lilly indicated that he could only know that they were there if his calculations were accurate, and in this regard, secret marks on bodies served as visual and tactile demonstrations of accuracy.

Demonstrating privileged access to celestial information was important to the business of identifying and tracking thieves, especially since inquiries regarding stolen property concerned a large part of Lilly's clientele. As Malcolm Gaskill has shown, early modern beliefs in providence functioned as both a deterrent and explanatory paradigm for criminal activity. Over the course of the seventeenth century, however, trust in human enterprise, administrative agencies and dependence on empirical evidence were eventually prioritized over the role of providence in criminal concerns.¹¹⁰ These shifts were very gradual and Lilly's skills as a providential informant were especially sought after. Comparable to juries of matrons, who examined bodies and were trusted to discover the telling marks of witches, Lilly took pains to consult and calculate the skies in order to describe the physical attributes of unknown thieves.¹¹¹ Whoever stole goods

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 15v.

¹¹⁰ Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), especially chapters six and seven.

¹¹¹ On juries of matrons, see, Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 41-48; Francis Dolan, *True Relations: Reading, Literature, and Evidence in Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 56; Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 298-301.

from Mr. Humphry's shop in St. Martins in November of 1636 was, according to the skies, "of a midle stature, a longe vissage, pale and leane, a longe noase, a high forehead, longe fingers, smooth hayre, ingenious and subtile."¹¹² Em Ward's thief is described as "of a resonable midle stature, a round vissage, browne collour, bettle browss, somewhat leane, hayre curling."¹¹³ In September of 1637, Anthony Whitehead of Fleet Street had a coat and carpet stolen from him and learned from Lilly that the thief was "of a round vissage, somewhat clear complexion, a full eye, a small forehead, resonable fleshy, fayre spoken, courteous and merry."¹¹⁴ Alice Staples's thief is described to be "of a reasonable stature, his face not round nor longe, a high forehead, somewhat cleare of complexion, broad breasted, resonable full of flesh and of a fayre caryage."¹¹⁵ Presumably, Lilly's descriptions of the thieves were meant to aid in their capture, even though most were never discovered. His ability to describe them indicated the depth of his ability as an interpreter of celestial secrets, but it is his first mention of the client's physical traits which make his assessments of the thief ring true. By first showing his clients that he could identify hidden marks on their bodies, he suggested that any subsequent information he had to share was equally revelatory.

In addition to verifying the validity of his evaluations through a diagnosis of his clients' physical characteristics, Lilly also used such assessments to help him reach a judgement. Ann Greene of Gardiners Ally came to Lilly in November of 1635 and told

¹¹² Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 209, 17.

¹¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Interestingly, most thieves are described very similarly and generally tend to be courteous, merry and "fayre spoken."

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

him she had not seen her sister in six years. She was very anxious to know if her sister was still alive and Lilly, true to form, identified the scars and marks on Greene's body and then sketched the appearance of her sister, who was "of a middle stature, somewhat leane, of a round visage, browne cullor, beetle browes, choleric."¹¹⁶ Because of the place of the planets which determined the sister's appearance, Lilly decided in which direction she had disappeared and that she was dead. In the case of lovesick Ann Hall, Lilly first suggested that there may be little hope her indifferent love interest would renew his affections for her. He had Hall verify his calculation of the suitor's body and then – with this information in hand – was able to study the stars more closely and observe that it was likely that Hall would soon make this man her husband after all.¹¹⁷ In the query from Mrs Paulet mentioned earlier, Lilly determined that her sister was most certainly dead. He communicated to an affirming Paulet that her sister must be "of a long visage, pale and leane, a high forehead, witty and ingenious."¹¹⁸ Through his verification of the sister's bodily traits, he could more clearly and confidently read the signs which signified her fate, and in the end, he was proven correct, for shortly after the consultation, Paulet returned to Lilly and "certified that she had certayne newes her sister was dead."

Lilly actively sought information regarding the outcome of his judgements and often conversed with his clients and their friends who affirmed whether or not his judgments on people's deaths, losses and successes were accurate. He found out, for

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 8v.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 20v.

instance, that, as predicted, Anne Hall did eventually marry her erstwhile lover and that his judgement of Anne Greene's sister's death was likely correct for she had "not heard of her sister this 12 yeares wether she be living or dead."¹¹⁹ Similarly, in June of 1642, Lilly advised a servant named Eliza Homan that the thief who took off with her petticoat would be discovered. Sure enough, the thief was found, thrown in prison, and Homan's underclothes were given back to her, "as by the testimony of one of the querente [Homan's] frends I was truly informed."¹²⁰ In May of that same year, Lilly assured the butcher Lancelot Gun that his stray oxen would be recovered, "all wch was truly demonstrated for presently after the same day the queren found out his oxen agayne towards the north east suitable to my directions and after came and informed me of the truth thereof."¹²¹ When Elizabeth Cooke was told by the midwives that she was with child, she asked Lilly and the stars for a second opinion. Lilly decided that, contrary to the midwives' conclusions, she was not pregnant, "all which in the future did evidently appeare true, for she was not with child as she expected, by her neighbors and the querente own testification I was truly informed."¹²² As Gaskill and others have noted, local knowledge, gossip and consensus were important to the formation of truth and interpretation of providence. By seeking validation and verification of his conclusions among the broader community, Lilly tapped into the authority of local opinion. In doing so, he also built upon and encouraged the sense that the insights, rumours and opinions of regular people mattered. In this sense, his actions are characteristic of other purveyors of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 12, 8v.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1.

¹²² Ibid., 7v.

arcane knowledge who similarly implied that people already had the ability to access and evaluate secret information, but could benefit from the tools and skills provided by experts. Revelation was a communal endeavour as much as it was a personal, meditative one.

In Lilly's manuscript and published works, the centrality of the body as both a verifier and corrector of astrological studies is affirmed. The casebooks indicate that the communities in which Lilly and his clients lived were familiar, not only with the methods and activities of his practice, but also with the terms used for physical descriptions. People who came to him understood what he meant when he described a lost family member or wanted thief as mercuric or choleric, and they were familiar with such phrases as "reasonable stature," "fayre caryage," "broad breasted [and] full of flesh," "betle browed," and "round vissage of a darke white wth some red." The currency of this descriptive shorthand has been noted by historians of early modern medicine and by explorations into the criminal advertisements found in newspapers.¹²³ Considering, however, that Lilly's clients always had specific questions in mind, and not ones which always (or even usually) had to do with the signifying warts, moles and marks on their or their friends and families bodies, it is interesting that Lilly begins his consultations in this manner. That he does so reveals much about his clientele's desire for certainty in secret or hidden matters, regardless of cultural assumptions that certainty in such matters was beyond human ability.

¹²³ Mark S. Dawson, "First Impressions: Newspaper Advertisements and Early Modern English Body Imaging, 1651 – 1750," *The Journal of British Studies* vol. 50 no. 2 (2011): 277 – 306; Louise Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine: 1550 – 1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist & Physician* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Identifying marks and features in this fashion was also an effective tool for confidence artists. Liars would be expected to spew generalities in efforts to minimize the risk of being wrong, but Lilly, in the extreme specificity of his observations, inspired belief in his skill. If it was purely the trick of a confidence artist, however, it was a trick made ever more effective by the degree to which its success rested in abiding beliefs. The people who came to Lilly and read his works already knew that stars and bodies were signifiers of secret information, just as they already knew that human understanding was limited and prone to mistake due to the effects of the Fall. In addition, it was known, and indeed a daily reality, that possibilities, as opposed to certainties, were what the majority of humans most often had to work with. In combining possible outcomes with convincing interpretation of the mysterious relationship between bodies and stars Lilly provided a potent degree of certainty. There was more than one way in which to define the parameters of certain knowledge and astrologers like Lilly made use of this flexibility to full effect.

vi. Political predictions

Seventeenth-century astrology was intimately connected to the politics of its day, especially since it was understood that comment on political matters was one of astrology's predominant functions. Among the most essential aspects of astrology were included "the beginning, mutations and destruction of kingdoms, cities and countries," as well as judgements on "peace, war, sects, religions and the transaction of princes."¹²⁴ The use of astrology as a tool with which to strengthen people's resolve was employed by the court and the political opposition alike.¹²⁵ William Lilly, who was known for his

¹²⁴ Robert Turner, *Ars Notoria* (1657), 143.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Sara J. Schechner, *Comets, Popular Culture and the Birth of Modern Cosmology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

friendships with people throughout the political spectrum, was especially sensitive to the persuasiveness of astrological inquiry. In a letter to Elias Ashmole in February 1666, he made a bid for favour and offered his collection of prophesies as an aide to the interests of the king. Publication of relevant prophesies and astrological insights, he wrote, “would putt much corag into his Majestys subjects—now in the nick of tyme, when his Majesty is preparing his forces ... I well know, how to humor the people in such like business.”¹²⁶ In the hands of astrologers, the potential for political turbulence generated by the marriage between public opinion and arcane knowledge was especially pronounced.

Lilly’s controversial role in the century’s political maelstrom has attracted considerable comment and interest.¹²⁷ He assumed the role of political prophet, and although he befriended and counselled both independents and royalists, and he was known to change his creed at opportune times, his most memorable public prophecies served the aims of the republicans during the Civil Wars and Interregnum. Within his works, the potential for a fruitful relationship between astrology and republicanism is particularly evident. Astrology emphasized the degree to which monarchs were not immune from the rules and fates that governed their subjects – a potentially subversive notion. “We must admire Providence,” wrote Lilly, “and acknowledge ... that the general fate of any kingdome is more prevalent, then the private geniture or question of any subject or king whatsoever.”¹²⁸ Various commentators felt that the political unrest typical of the Civil Wars and their aftermath was largely due to the claims of Lilly and other

¹²⁶ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 423, ff 256-257.

¹²⁷ See, for instance, Blackledge, *The Man Who Saw The Future*; Geneva, *Astrology*; Curry, *Prophecy and Power*.

¹²⁸ William Lilly, *Christian Astrology* (1647), 142.

republican astrologers who incited insurrection by baldly interpreting Parliamentary victory as God's will, and thus futile to resist. Royalist astrologer H. Johnsen, for instance, felt that Lilly had convinced people it was madness to support a doomed King. "Many a thousand in this Kingdome," he wrote, have "been hobgoblin'd into Rebellion, against their lawful Sovereigne."¹²⁹ Astrologers like Lilly and Johnsen knew that insinuation, especially informed insinuation, had greater power and resonance than absolute certainty.

In demonstrating the validity of his judgements for clients, acquaintances and friends, William Lilly sought to strengthen the force of his political prophesies. The "small glimpses of the great affaires God intends upon earth," which he eagerly shared in the press, were often prefaced with the caveat that the rules of astrology could easily elude him or that God might cloud his understanding and make him incapable of judgement. His daily interactions, however, were not usually couched in the same guarded terms. In 1645, for instance, Lilly and his powerful friend, the parliamentarian lawyer Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-75), happened upon each other in the street, where Lilly shared his views regarding parliament's impending success at Naseby. Lilly, wrote Whitelocke, "asked me the news of the two armys being near one another I told him it was true & that very likely they wd engage He then replyed if they do not engage before the 11th day of this month the parliament will have the greatest victory, they ever yet had & it proved accordingly."¹³⁰ The flexible ground between certainty and uncertainty which Lilly traversed was offensive to authorities and critics, not necessarily because it was

¹²⁹ H. Johnsen, *Anti-Merlinus* (1648), A7.

¹³⁰ Wellcome, MS 4729.

conjectural, but because his indiscretions could pose a national security risk – a dangerous endeavour when the secrets of those in power and the unknowability of the future were necessary to social order, not to mention providing a forum for dangerous speculation about political figures. Criticisms of astrology as merely gossip and guesswork often had less to do with belief that other forms of inquiry had more certainty or value than with the concern that astrology’s revelatory insights could be a powerful weapon.

Astrologers regularly made inquiries into parliamentary proceedings and interrogated the skies to learn where discussion and debate might steer the country. The apothecary and physician Francis Bernard (1628-98), for instance, calculated the fate of the parliament which first assembled in April 1660. He found that there was like to be “great affection” between parliament and the King and predicted what specific days of May might bring, including the return of the King, the great likelihood that he would be crowned, and ultimately unprosperous designs among “phanatics” to either murder General Monck, set London on fire or divide the army. Bernard later returned to his predictions to note their degree of precision, remarking “so there was” for his conjecture that a seditious paper designed by “ye phanatic party ... against ye parliament, general or King” would be written on May 12.¹³¹ Elias Ashmole’s papers are also rife with astrological inquiry regarding current political figures, such as the informant and agitator Titus Oates, and parliamentary events, such as his extensive celestial analyses concerning the political aftermath of Charles II’s Declaration of Indulgence.¹³² In the mid-1670s, amidst political unrest related to the Test Acts, anti-popery and growing fears regarding

¹³¹ BL, MS Sloane, 1683, ff 146v.

¹³² Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 436, ff 112; ff 13-25.

the succession, the politician Sir Robert Howard (1626-98) regularly consulted Ashmole for insights into how relationships between parliament and the King might play out. In March 1675, for instance, he asked after the likelihood of prorogation and “whither this session of Parliament may consider things temperately and not passionately.”¹³³

Astrologers, by way of the stars, presented themselves as insightful political analysts. While astrologers who were known for their depth of learning, godliness and rapport with the skies were likely to attract more clients than those reputed to be vulgar hacks, the absolute certainty of their analysis was not as central as their ability to predict likely trends. Writings such as Lilly’s *Christian Astrology* (1647) suggestively implied that calculating such trends was something careful readers could do themselves.

Ultimately, the relationship between astrological prophecy and political turmoil, which Lilly personified, became astrology’s loudest and most resounding misfortune. The politicized friction and very public animosity between royalist and independent astrologers in the latter half of the seventeenth century fatally associated astrology with factionalism. The mid-century surge of astrological commentary, as well as that which helped characterize the political turmoil of the 1670s and 80s, both illustrated the uses of astrological prediction as a political weapon and the risks such practitioners ran of being branded as tools of a particular faction, dismissed as venal, corrupt or charlatans. The contradictory prognostications between such prominent astrologers as Lilly, Gadbury and Partridge, which changed “according to the Times, or the interest they are of,” wrote Tory James Yonge, “shews their Ignorance, or Knavery, and the Vanity of their Art.”¹³⁴

¹³³ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 436 ff. 26-28.

¹³⁴ James Yonge, *Sidrophel vapulans, or, The quack-astrologer* (1699), 24.

In 1684 the Whig sympathizer John Edwards' take on the politics of his day caused him to suggest that the present propensity for evil and depravity necessitated the accuracy of astrological judgements. "Astrologers of this degenerate Age, these dreggs of Time," he wrote, "have the better of most of those who have been their Predecessors. Now they may come the nearest to Certainty in their Prognosticks. They may the more easily tell true, because so few resist their own vitious Inclinations."¹³⁵ Both Whigs and Tories had partisan astrologers, and although the propagandistic nature of various astrological works did not in themselves discredit the tenets of astrology, it was increasingly difficult to trust that interpretations of celestial intelligences were free of factional interest. Knowledge could never be entirely certain because it was filtered through the understanding, desires and faulty reasoning of humans. But the use of secret knowledge in the service of partisan politics made it too transparently partial.

vii. Conclusion

The Tory physician James Yonge's (1647–1721) disparagement of astrological studies was a calculated move. In the late seventeenth century, he received the esteem of the Royal College of Physicians for his public criticisms of William Salmon (1644-1713), and other astrological physicians, who blatantly challenged the College's authority. Yonge specifically targeted astrology in an effort to champion the College and discredit Salmon's work and stance on the College's policies. The only thing certain about astrology, he noted, is uncertainty.¹³⁶ He emphasized William Lilly, the "arch-imposter's" legacy, and how he and men like Salmon, his successors, sought to "poyson

¹³⁵ John Edwards, *Cometomantia* (1684), 208.

¹³⁶ James Yonge, *Sidrophel vapulans, or, The quack-astrologer toss'd in a blanket* (1699), 40.

the people” with groundless judgements.¹³⁷ Significantly, although Yonge publicly denounced astrology and its practitioners in this manner, his journal suggests more of a curiosity, rather than critical concern, with its conjectural aspects. He had his nativity charted by a local astrologer in his hometown of Plymouth and transcribed his predictions for further reference. In examining his “accidents” for the year of 1679, he noted: “thus this year proved a year of mixed fortunes, good and bad; and was no other than what was predicted to me the year before by Mr. Jerome Roche, an ingenious astrologer and my good friend.”¹³⁸ As this suggests, the attractions of arcane knowledge sometimes manifested themselves in unexpected places. Battles over certainty and conjecture—particularly those which revolved around the validity of astrology – were less clear-cut in practice than they were in the press. For people accustomed to them, calculations and conjectures served as useful sources of knowledge with which to inform and conduct their daily lives, regardless of the uncertainty surrounding the outcome of what such calculations revealed. For those worried about mutually reinforcing relationships between uncertainty and partisan propaganda, their connection to the information astrology could provide was maintained, if by nothing else, at least by curiosity.

People came to astrologers when anxious about life choices, medical concerns, political unrest and lost relations and items – secret or opaque aspects of daily life and experience. By probing the outer casing of such secrets, astrologers offered sureties and probabilities that sometimes provided solace and guidance and other times worried people into action. Although astrology was tightly entwined with debates regarding

¹³⁷ Ibid., 7, 8.

¹³⁸ F.N.L. Poynter, ed., *The Journal of James Yonge, 1647-1721, Plymouth Surgeon* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963), 162.

human knowledge, providence and certainty, and required considerable comment and clarification because of it, its promise of access to the secrets which defined present and future circumstances fulfilled a need for people who not only desired such access but believed that it was obtainable. Useful knowledge of unknown things was finite – it began and ended with God – but the search for it was infinite, and complete access to it was always, in one way or another, barred. Uncertain knowledge, or information which rested in contingencies and possible occurrences was, as some astrologers suggested, not only more realistic, but also more godly. It was a knowledge which stretched the confines of human ability, but also recognized their limits. The value of secret knowledge increased with the improbability of its unlimited access to the majority of common human minds. Those who could claim a degree of proficiency in such knowledge could secure privileged, or at least influential positions for themselves. They drew on contemporary religious, academic and political beliefs and debates, and they created a widely-credited platform which drew assurances out of conjecture and instruction out of unknown contingencies. In their careful (and not so careful) “conjectures of contingencies,” seventeenth-century astrologers variously claimed such a proficiency and, as the following chapter indicates, so too did writers of secret history.

Chapter IV.
“Shrew’d Conjectures”: Secret Histories and Subversive Ways of Knowing

If yearning after, and actively searching, divine secrets was an important and necessary function in the life of a believer, what did that mean for the relationship between subjects and monarchs? If God willingly revealed his secrets, albeit enigmatically, through such things as the contours of creation, the body, the stars, the Bible, the inspired words of ministers and personal spiritual musings, did monarchs have the right to keep their secrets hidden? Over the course of the seventeenth century, secret histories argued that it was wrong to keep certain secrets from subjects and that the politics and the private lives of monarchs should, unlike God’s, be entirely transparent. As previous chapters have shown, writers of physiognomy, shorthand and astrology variously suggested that arcane information could be accessed by all readers of their works. Although such access drew on habits or abilities which most people already possessed – such as ruminating on and interpreting mysterious signs – it also demanded careful study of the inside information and expert methods provided by authors. Writers of secret history, as this chapter illustrates, also situated themselves as particularly informed, and were more apt than even shorthand masters to emphasize the degree to which people already had it within them to access secret information with little additional learning. Writers of secret history implied that gossip, intuition, careful and curious observation about others and speculation about their motives, and even the interception or theft of private correspondence and other documents, were all sufficient and legitimate means of accessing the otherwise arcane motives and machinations of monarchs, ministers and royal mistresses.

The Key to the King's Cabinet Counsell (1644) tells of an army of royal agents who were deployed to places “that were knowne to stand affected to their party” and instructed to inform the “giddy headed” multitudes that the parliament at Westminster was corrupt.¹ Amongst references to nefarious dealings with Catholic France and Spain on behalf of “his Majestie’s partie,” the author argued that “it was thought no small peece of policie, in their best (of worst) councellers, to cover the kings hostile act against the five members and to have it distilled into the eares of the people ... that his majesties intentions towards them was no waies ill, but of a royall inclination to sift out truth.”² The author conceded that even though curiosity was “the itching disease of active spirits” and that even though “we are forbidden to dive into Arcana Dei & Arcana Imperij,” his love of country compelled him to perform his duty. The “nice curiositie and desire of friends” to know and spread secret information made his publication of such “destructive passages” a political necessity.³ Even if reverence for God, King, religion and country were stripped away, curiosity would remain and enforce “a desire in [man] to know, as near as his Intellect giveth leave, such matters of importance, as occurre in his own or other states.”⁴

The authors of the infamous *King's Cabinet Opened* (1645) similarly claimed to save their “seduced brethren” from the nefarious secret dealings of royalists: “those that wilfully deviate and make it their profession to oppose the truth.”⁵ Here, as numerous scholars have shown, the division between the divine image and mortal person of Charles

¹ Anon., *The Key to the Kings Cabinet-Counsell* (1644), 3.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid. 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Anon., *The Kings Cabinet Opened* (1645), A3.

I was exposed for all to see – a factor which ultimately contributed to his execution and the desacralisation of monarchy.⁶ Readers were encouraged to contemplate Charles I in his intimate moments and reflect upon the connection between those moments and his duplicitous policies. “It concerns you to look both forward and backward,” advised the authors, “and having now taken the dimation of the kings minde by his secret letters, turne about awhile and looke upon the same in his publike declarations. See if you can reconcile his former promises to his present designs.”⁷ Michael McKeon argues that this admonition is illustrative of how, by the seventeenth century, the idea that truth lay in public actions had begun to reverse, placing it instead in the deep and dark realm of private thought.⁸ It also suggested, however, that knowledge of secret thoughts was achievable and that the actions of the great could be mulled over and deciphered by commoners. *The Key to the King’s Cabinet Counsell* and *The King’s Cabinet Opened* subversively suggested that the curiosities, capabilities and conjectures of subjects could breach the monarchical monopolization of information. In this regard, they were precursors to the predominantly Whig secret histories which flourished in the late Stuart period.

The author of one of these, *The Secret History of the Four Last Monarchs of Great Britain* (1695) encouraged his audience to read the actions and lives of monarchs in much the same way as they might read their own or those of their peers (sounding, incidentally, much like contemporary physiognomers):

⁶ See, for instance, Derek Hirst, “Reading the Royal Romance: Or, Intimacy in a King’s Cabinet,” *The Seventeenth Century* vol. 18 no 2 (2003): 211-229; Joad Raymond, “Popular Representations of Charles I,” in Thomas N Corns, ed., *The Royal image: Representations of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁷ *Kings Cabinet* (1645), 49.

⁸ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 482.

Tho it hath pleased God to reserve the art of reading men's thoughts to himself; yet as the fruit tells the name of the tree, so do the outward works of men so far as their cogitations are acted, give us whereof to guess at the rest: no man can long continue masque in a counterfeit behaviour; the things that are forced for pretences having no ground to truth, cannot long dissemble their own natures.⁹

Similarly, the late seventeenth-century translator Ferrand Spence compared secret histories to a “historical inquisition” into the secrets of the great – secrets which could be divined through attention to, and discussion of, signs which pointed to hidden motives and inclinations. “Nature is never so curb'd and under the hatches,” he argued, “but that it still as much influences our actions as we can regulate its movements ... irresolution and passion prevail equally in the great as in the vulgar. And often a little cabinet-pique or bed-chamber quarrel, occasions a rumbling world and is the source of the greatest transactions.”¹⁰ Amidst the period's characteristic debates over definitions of reliable knowledge, late Stuart secret historians consciously dealt in “shrew'd conjectures.”¹¹ They offered a modicum of political participation and argued that the skills needed to penetrate state mysteries were already within the reach of England's people. By focussing on human nature and the legibility of internal motivations, as revealed in scandalous reportage of state secrets and rumours, the authors of secret histories posited a hitherto unimaginable degree of commonality between royalty and subjects. They encouraged the search for signs and the validity of suspicion and provided a space for common opinion.

The ideological and political functions of secret histories and their reception has interested numerous scholars in recent years. Seventeenth-century secret histories have

⁹ R.B. *The Secret History, of the four last monarchs of Great Britain* (1691), A2.

¹⁰ Antoine Varillas, *Anekdotia Heterouiaka. Or, The secret history of the house of Medicis* (1686), A4v, A6.

¹¹ David Jones, *A continuation of the secret history of White-hall from the abdication of the late K. James in 1688 to the year 1696* (1697), 200.

been used to chart the emergence of modernity through their contribution to such phenomena as identity, the novel, the emergence of political parties, liberalism, empiricism and the public sphere.¹² This scholarship has made clear that secret histories marked a departure from traditional biographies of the elite, which accounted for much of their appeal. Secret historians, wrote Antoine Varillas in his *Secret history of the house of Medicis* (1686), sought to penetrate the darkest regions of people's inclinations and intentions. The historian considers people in public whereas the secret historian "examines 'em in private." While the former "thinks he has perform'd his duty when he draws them such as they were in the army, or in the tumult of cities," the latter "endeavours by all means to get open their closet door." Secret historians examined the "inward lives" of their subjects and deduced "what occurs in secret and in solitude."¹³ A common, defining feature of secret histories was their promise to help readers decode past, current and upcoming events through the study of both recent and ancient history. This was a study which often required careful attention to the marks or signs of secrecy and corruption.

England's first print publication with "secret history" in its title was an anonymously translated work by the sixth-century historian Procopius. Entitled *The Secret History of the Court of the Emperor Justinian* (1674), it contained many of the

¹² See, for instance, Brian Cowan, "The History of Secret Histories," *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 81 no. 1 (2018): 121-151; Michael McKeon, *Secret History of Domesticity*; Annabel Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Melinda Alliker Rabb *Satire and Secrecy in English Literature from 1650-1750* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Eve Tavor Bannet, "'Secret History': Or, Talebearing Inside and Outside the Secretorie," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68 (2005), 375-396; Erin Keating, "In the Bedroom of the King: Affective Politics in the Restoration Secret History," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* vol. 15 no. 2 (2015) 58-82; Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?: Libels, Secret histories and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹³ Antoine Varillas, *secret history* (1686), a4v-a5.

same characteristics of the secret histories which followed it.¹⁴ It revelled in salacious state secrets and detailed the sexual depravity and tyrannical rules of Justinian, Theodora and General Belisarius. Its English packaging and publication in the 1670s encouraged contemporaries to make correlations between Justinian – “crafty and yet easie to be deceived” – and Charles II.¹⁵ As this suggests, secret histories are often fiction, diatribe, romance and pornography, and they appealed to readers who were thirsty for salacious gossip about important people. When secret history writers dwelt on the sexual exploits and tyrannical actions of monarchs and political celebrities, they titillated and entertained, but they also encouraged critical thinking about political authority.¹⁶ They are, above all, political documents from an oppositional culture, one in which appeals to the good of a wider public became an increasingly essential and even “normative” aspect of politicking.¹⁷

In his recent study of secret histories in Tudor England, Peter Lake defines “public pitch making” as the actions of enterprising individuals who, during particularly tense political episodes, refined the techniques of public politicking through “plot talk,” carefully crafted pamphlets, and the use of various kinds of social media.¹⁸ George

¹⁴ Procopius, *The Secret History of the court of the emperor Justinian English* (1674).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶ For more on libellous information as a source of agency or “weapon of the weak,” see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Alastair Bellany, “‘Rayling Rymes and Vaunting Verse’: Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628,” in Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, eds., *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (California: Stanford University Press, 1993); Thomas Cogswell, “Underground Verse and the Transformation of Early Stuart Political Culture,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 60 (1998): 303-26. For discussion on the relationship between private reading and political opinion, see Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Peter Lake and Stephen Pincus, eds., *The Politics of the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess?: Libels, Secret histories and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2, 14, 468.

Eglisam's *Forerunner of Revenge upon the Duke of Buckingham* (1626), for instance, packaged rumours regarding James I's murder into an amenable narrative which, as Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell have shown, continued to serve political agendas throughout the seventeenth century.¹⁹ In her reevaluation of associations made between seventeenth-century knowledge making and objectivity, Vera Keller argues that theorists broached the question of how to unite a society riven by cultural and political discord through appeals to subjective passions, interests and desire.²⁰ Mark Knights agrees that, as a representational form of politics emerged, knowledge and truth were entangled in, and defined by, partisan conviction.²¹ These tendencies are apparent in secret histories, which sought to harness the desire for information on what occurred in secret to political ends. Although they pretended to deplore faction, their "pitch-making" was intensely partisan. It was also at least potentially popular, reinforcing the importance and the validity of more accessible and informal ways of knowing.

In a letter from 1655, the Scottish preacher and ecumenist John Dury (1596-1680) reflected upon the difference between what people say and do, on the one hand, and how their words and actions are perceived on the other.²² The human tendency to look for the worst in others springs from human nature as well as human policy, and it is particularly strong among those who search for the secrets behind people's intentions in

¹⁹ Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *The Murder of King James I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Vera Keller, *Knowledge and the Public Interest, 1575-1725* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²¹ Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005).

²² M. Greengrass, M. Leslie, and M. Hannon, eds., *The Hartlib Papers*, 1/3/2A-1/3/3B (August 25, 1655): Dr Horn To Hartlib, Dury To ?.

the same conjectural ways that alchemists attempt to uncover the secrets of nature. Statesmen are particularly prone to such responses when suspecting others of secret plots. This kind of “perverse policy,” however, is not unique to politicians: it is a larger human failing. To Dury, each person’s own inclinations and flaws compelled his or her searches into another’s secrets, and any detected faults were actually a reflection of the reader’s own weak nature. Just as Dury’s attempts to preach church unity faltered in a climate of fierce religious factionalism, so too did his hopes of calming the storms of suspicion in a politically partisan world.²³ Secret histories drew from beliefs regarding human depravity and employed the same truism which Dury found exasperating. They suggested that, since all people, even (or especially) kings and queens, were inherently corrupt, it followed that they could reasonably be judged and understood by awareness of, and comparison to, one’s own personal frailties. The sins of political figures, however, were particularly important (and thus more worthy of examination) because they could have disastrous results for the nation. Expanding upon popular beliefs and ways of knowing in this manner boosted the “cultural traction” of secret histories and served to heighten their subversive appeal.²⁴

ii. Subversive Ways of Knowing: Secret Writing, Gossip and Conjecture

Works such as *The Kings Cabinet Opened* indicated that there was a market for state secrets. They also show that means of deciphering code and enemy intelligences long predated the first great Age of Party during the Restoration and Glorious Revolution.

²³ John T. Young, "Durie [Dury], John (1596–1680), preacher and ecumenist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁴ Bellany and Cogswell, for instance, discuss the “cultural traction” provided by medical “facts.” Alastair Bellany and Thomas Cogswell, *Murder of King James I*, 183-184.

If we look to genres, such as books of secrets or secret writing manuals, which also purported to be for the public good, we find that the connections made between secret knowledge and power was familiar to readers of late-seventeenth-century secret histories. Scholars of sixteenth-century books of secrets have shown how such works “empowered” ordinary readers by revealing how the forces which directed the natural world could be manipulated.²⁵ Similarly, authors of secret-writing manuals indicated that anyone could potentially shape political events. In 1641, on the eve of the Civil Wars, the theologian and natural philosopher John Wilkins (1614-1672) published instructions on the myriad methods by which confederates could safely communicate secret messages without arousing suspicion.²⁶ In the midst of the Monmouth and Argyll rebellions of 1685, the Tory John Falconer borrowed heavily from Wilkins’s work in order to illustrate the ways in which all such secret messages, no matter how expertly contrived, could be detected.²⁷ The motivation behind both of these works is founded in their respective religio-political climates. They both, however, place some degree of power in the hands of the public, even as they attempt to shape the bounds of that power. The readers of secret histories were participants in, or at least familiar with, the century’s “craze” for secret and short writing manuals.²⁸ The appeals and concerns voiced in these manuals are closely related to those found in secret histories, and they are one means by which the environment which gave secret histories cultural clout was shaped.

²⁵ See, for instance, Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550-1600* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 5; William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁶ John Wilkins, *Mercury, or the secret and swift messenger* (1641).

²⁷ John Falconer, *Cryptomenysis patefacta, or The art of secret information* (1685).

²⁸ Michael Mendle, “News and the pamphlet culture of mid-seventeenth century England” in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron, eds., *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), 57-80.

Both John Wilkins and John Falconer stressed the degree to which “secret and swift conveyances, hath often proved fatall, not onely to the ruine of particular persons, but also of whole armies and kingdoms.”²⁹ But whereas the Tory loyalist Falconer actively pursued the prevention of such upheaval, Wilkins’s compilation was decidedly more ambivalent. Wilkins noted that, although skill in secret messaging could assist “gaming cheats and popish miracle-imposters . . . in their cousening trade of life,” it did not follow “that everything must be suppress which may bee abused.”³⁰ Before parading examples of republican codes, he illustrated the power of parables, which are persuasive for being surreptitious. “Plaine arguments and morall precepts barely proposed,” he wrote, “are more flat in their operation, not so lively and perswasive as when they steale into a mans assent under the covert of a parable.”³¹ With its focus on political subterfuge, infiltrating enemy camps, the defeat of armies and toppling of regimes, and how messaging is only truly secret if free from suspicion, Wilkins’s work (ostensibly written to appease innocent curiosity) reads like a covert parable itself. Its implied (or secret) message is that its instructions on how to conceal and reveal pertinent information can be useful in England’s current troubles. His writing depicts a world in which nothing is as it seems, reflecting the anxieties and suspicions caused by the mysteries of human nature. Each squint of the eye, twist of the beard, or twitch of the finger; each musical note, gunshot, woven knot or smoking fire; each turn of phrase, symbol, number or human design of any sort could convey damning, subversive or essential intelligences. In his work, secret messages are often the forces directing social and political tides, but people

²⁹ John Wilkins *Mercury* (1641), 8-9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 118, 169.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

need not be merely suspicious or aware of these forces: they can make them their own. By adopting any of the methods he detailed, anyone might convey secret information, confound enemies, and overthrow the political establishment.

In the early 1680s, the dissembling and “sufficiently fanatical” Earl of Argyll (1629-85) tried to “disturb the settled government” by plotting with “the fanatical [i.e., Whig] party.”³² In 1683 damning letters regarding the Rye House Plot were deciphered through the efforts of a royally-appointed secret committee, and the celebratory relation of this fact supposedly inspired Falconer to devote himself to the study of secret communications. In 1685, during Argyll’s Rising in support of the Monmouth Rebellion, Falconer felt compelled, by the “open rebellion now on foot,” to quickly publish his findings.³³ In denigrating Argyll, he situated himself in support of the then-Duke of York’s succession and revealed his stance on the relationship between secrecy and insurrection. In his mind, only subversive “policy-menders” and “plot-makers” would think to create a coded language before inevitably turning their “intentions against an establish’d authority to acts.”³⁴ His view of the Civil Wars was similarly informed by this stance: “in the beginning of the late troubles of ever cursed memory the convening (I would say covenanting) people of both kingdoms studied a part of this black art as their first degree in the mystery of rebellion.”³⁵ He also contended that Thomas Overbury’s poisoning (in 1613) was facilitated by secret messaging. In referencing contemporary recollections of the affair, Falconer noted that Overbury and the Earl of Somerset “made

³² George Mackenzie, *A true and plain account of the discoveries made in Scotland* (1685), 1.

³³ John Falconer, *secret information* (1685), A7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, A6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

play of all the world besides themselves: So as they had cyphers and jargons for the king and queen, and all the great men; things seldom used, but either by princes and their ambassadors and ministers or by such as work or practise against or at least upon princes.”³⁶ Secret codes were the province of princes and authorities in civil and military affairs.

It did not follow, however, that people should be in the dark about such arts. On the contrary, they should be alert and on guard. Falconer’s dissection of secret intelligences conveyed through gestures, invisible ink, cyphers, messages hidden in food and etchings in trees was a kind of call to arms: “if a private sentinel, by deciphering an intercepted epistle, should save an army, &c. ‘tis no Crime, I hope, that he be more clear sighted than his superiours.”³⁷ In baring the means by which knowledge could be made secret, and in instructing an army of decipherers (even if only in his mind), Falconer’s work warned any would-be rebels that, no matter which design they use, their secret plotting would be unearthed and brought to light. The sense that all have a part to play in revealing plots and secrets which endanger the nation is one of which secret historians took full advantage. The idea that anyone could become an expert decipherer or witness of such matters was often the foundation upon which secret histories rested.

It has been noted that much of what such histories revealed was not necessarily new knowledge but often mere repetition of rumour and well-known assumptions, stereotypes and scandals. As Bullard argues, secret histories *claim* to uncover secrets but often deliberately fail to do so. Although the information forwarded was not necessarily

³⁶ Ibid., B2v.

³⁷ Ibid., B4.

new, its printed form made it especially politically charged.³⁸ The reiteration of rumours is also significant, however, because of the ways in which the types of knowledge they signify were privileged as trustworthy and valuable. *The Great Bastard, Protector of the Little One* (1689), which argued that the sons of both Louis XIV and James II were illegitimate, stated that “common fame was ever look’t upon as a great presumption of the truth of a thing, especially if joined to other concurring circumstances.”³⁹ In aligning “common fame” with truth, and in drawing attention to ways in which “concurring circumstances” could be deciphered by the eyes, ears and minds of subjects, secret historians argued that conjectural knowledge and political knowledge could be symbiotic.

The power of gossip and secret sharing has been studied by various scholars who reveal its social subversiveness, its ability to grant (or deny) agency, spread illicit knowledge and shape the character and course of events.⁴⁰ Many secret histories show servants, common folk and gossips peeking through keyholes, overhearing secretive information being discussed in private corners and verifying facts regarding certain cases. The Whig conspirator and “hack writer” John Phillips, in his account of the apparent suicide of the Earl of Essex in the Tower of London in 1683, noted that “The most conceal’d of Villanies have been detected by strange and little accidents”, arguing that

³⁸ Rebecca Bullard, *The Politics of Disclosure, 1674-1725: Secret History Narratives* (London: Routledge, 2009, Kindle Edition), “A Rhetorical Approach towards the Motif of Revelation; or, Does Secret History Really Tell Secrets?”

³⁹ Anon, *The Great Bastard, Protector of the little one* (Cologne, 1689), 11.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy*, chapter two ; Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Steve Hindle, “The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England,” *Continuity and Change* vol. 9 no. 3 (1994), 391-419; Thomas Cogswell, “John Felton, Popular Political Culture and the Assassination of the Duke of Buckingham,” *Historical Journal* vol. 49 no. 2 (2006), 357-385.

Essex had in fact been murdered in order to camouflage Catholic (and he implied, Stuart) plots.”⁴¹ Apparently, a trusty maid distinctly overheard the Duke of York consulting with a number of known Catholics about whether Essex should be poisoned, stabbed or have his throat cut. Another working-class woman, who happened to be walking by Essex’s window before his death, claimed to have “heard a very great trampling and bustling in the Earl’s chamber, saw three or four heads move close together and heard a loud and doleful cry of murder.”⁴² The English translator of Claude Vanel’s *Royal Mistresses of France* (1695) noted that it is enough for “fabulous” stories to act as a sort of parable and “agree exactly with what they call the *Truth of History*.” Situations and details which may have been added or embellished “may be justly thought rather to illustrate the Stories, and discover the Causes of those odd Events, which others only barely and obscurely relate.” The “*True Historian* (as they call him) is at a loss for the Reason of these Whimseys of Fortune,” but in the words of the secret historian, “the Riddle is unfolded.”⁴³ In this regard, secret historians placed themselves in line with the period’s increased favour for free rather than literal translations of scripture and ancient works.⁴⁴

In the pages of secret histories, the watchful eyes and alert ears of England’s ordinary subjects enjoy the power of such forms of knowledge as gossip and rumour – the “tattles of the multitude” are given official license.⁴⁵ This was a sore point for critics, such as the anonymous author of *The Blatant Beast Muzzled* (1691), which takes issue

⁴¹ John Phillips, *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II, and K. James II* (1690), 177-179.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ M. Vanel, *The Royal Mistresses of France, or, The Secret History of the Amours of all the French Kings* (1695), A2v.

⁴⁴ See Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 51-54.

⁴⁵ N.N. *The blatant beast muzzl’d* (1691), 52.

with secret histories in general, and particularly those of the Stuart kings written by John Phillips, which were “just the style of babbling gossips at their meetings when they have a mind to slander some neighbour they hate.” Secret historians, like their “babbling” counterparts, were sneered at for their use of a “supernatural optick” to peep into the intentions of the mighty. Phillips “fancies himself a little God almighty and dives into their very thoughts; and (which is a prerogative peculiar to the divinity) searches their very hearts and most retruse intentions.”⁴⁶ He “thinks himself some kind of peerless thing” and has no consideration for order, authority, reason and truth. No wise man would or should heed the words of rebellious, scurrilous triflers, but sadly, “there is no nation under the scope of heaven so barbarously rude and sillily addicted to forge or believe spiteful and infamous lyes as England has been of late years.” The writing and publication of *Blatant Beast Muzzled* was apparently compelled by fear that “abominable fictions” were being taken as absolute truths and had “begun to gain a kind of authority with the ordinary sort of people.” The “wild career of slander,” adopted by “factious sticklers,” was now “insinuating itself into the belief of the credulous, who make up a considerable part of the generality.”⁴⁷

The Tory propagandist Roger L’Estrange (1616-1704) similarly bemoaned the gossip-mongering of secret histories, depicting seventeenth-century England as “a wicked generation [who] will not more bear truth in a book than an ill-favour’d woman will bear it in her picture or in her looking glasse.”⁴⁸ Writing with the Popish Plot in

⁴⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁷ Ibid., A7.

⁴⁸ Roger L’Estrange, *A Brief History of the Times, &c. In a preface to the third volume of Observators* (1687), 1.

mind, he observed that the world is governed by passions, affectations, and insinuating looks and words. “[M]an have got the trick of trouping one after another, in flocks, like sheep; they follow the bell and if the foremost leaps the bridge, the rest drown for company.”⁴⁹ The “bitterness of spirit” L’Estrange found in party writings worried him, for “the multitude are prone enough to faction of themselves; without incentives to’t and need no encouragement or example to transport them into distempers.”⁵⁰ Despite such concerns over giving unofficial forms of knowledge license, as well as “the unwarrantableness of subjects stepping out of their province, to intermeddle in matters of state,” he also appealed to the discernment of readers. This is apparent, for instance, in his secret history of Catholic silversmith Miles Prance, who was accused of conspiring to murder the magistrate Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey (1621-1678). L’Estrange revealed the Whig cabal of republican bullies to be the real conspirators. Prance was made into an “instrument of the state” and bullied and beaten into pleading guilty, perjuring himself and saying whatever his tormentors requested of him. After producing a series of official depositions relating the tortures which Prance first withstood and eventually succumbed to, L’Estrange recounted how the Whig Earl of Shaftesbury instructed Prance as to the “great persons” he must slander, including the king. L’Estrange concluded that “Prance affirms every syllable on’t to be true,” but he also took pains to add that “the reader is yet at liberty whether to believe it or not.”⁵¹ L’Estrange would argue that, unlike secret historians, his evidences were not forgeries or baseless impressions; any hearsay that he

⁴⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 12.

⁵¹ Ibid., 64-81.

included was firmly grounded in traceable, demonstrable proof. His ostensible reason for adopting the secret history title was to illustrate how conniving Whig cabals manipulated events in shady ways. “That which I call Prance’s secret history,” he wrote, concerns the period in which he wavered in his resolve – “a parenthesis that lyes much in the dark and a period too remarkable to be bury’d in silence.”⁵² Despite his self-conscious repudiation of secret histories, L’Estrange uses similar methods, yoking evidence to political arguments while simultaneously suggesting that readers are really in control of the result or proofs of such information.

Sensitive to invectives regarding their falsity and unreliability, secret historians (some more so than others) were careful to include (or create) letters and a variety of official (or official-seeming) documents to back up their arguments, insinuations or hearsay. David Jones’s *Secret History of Whitehall* (1697), for instance, claims to reference private papers which reveal secret leagues, parties and agreements which, we are told, were fetched “out of the dark and almost inscrutable recesses of the French cabinet-minutes” by a spy at the French court. According to Jones, these papers proved that the threat of Catholic France during the Stuart reigns – at which, he suggested, earlier historians could only hint – were incontrovertible facts. There was something very engaging in “bringing state arcana’s [sic] to light by way of letters, which, in the very notion of them carry something of secrecy.” Their entertainment value, however, did not compromise their evidentiary value, for “the reader cannot but observe an air of history to run, in a manner, through the whole composition.”⁵³ Antoine Varillas, for his part, noted

⁵² Ibid., 65.

⁵³ David Jones, *The Secret History of white-hall* (1697), A6. For more on Jones and claims to historicity, see Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, conclusion of chapter two.

that private letters are often filled with clandestine information which often escape the eyes of traditional historians.⁵⁴

Although sometimes citing letters and private papers as a means of legitimation and corroboration, many secret historians also suggested that such avenues of intelligence were not always trustworthy as fact. They reveal how persons used letters as ways to dissemble or to obfuscate the truth. The enemies of Madame de Montespan, for instance, counterfeited a note and covertly sent it to Louis XIV. By doing so they were, at least for a time, successful in humiliating him and putting him in a rage against his mistress.⁵⁵ The revelatory letters – “those evidences of truth” – printed in *The King’s Cabinet Opened* are well-known to scholars.⁵⁶ They would have been vivid in people’s memory, but so too were other contemporary accounts of secret communications and hidden intentions. The famous case of dissimulation and betrayal provided by the (1644) correspondence between the political administrator George Digby and the Civil War army officer Richard Brown was, as Lois Potter notes, “well publicized.”⁵⁷ While *Kings Cabinet Opened* disclosed the “tyrannical” designs of Charles I, the account of Digby and Brown publicized how Brown utilized his cordial correspondence with Digby to make it seem as though he would join the royalists while actually ensuring Parliamentary victory. As much as the letters of Charles I highlighted the revelatory potential of private papers, so Richard Brown’s manipulation of letters to “play with [Digby] at [his] own game”

⁵⁴ Antoine Varillas, *seceret history* (1686), c3.

⁵⁵ M. Vanel, *The Royal Mistresses of France, or, The Secret History of the Amours of all the French Kings* (1695), 233.

⁵⁶ *Kings Cabinet* (1645), A3.

⁵⁷ Lois Potter, *Secret Rites*, 56.

demonstrated the pitfalls in reading letters or other “factual” documents as true reflections of intent.⁵⁸

Like the works of Wilkins and Falconer, secret histories are full of examples of intercepted letters. As much as these letters may corroborate the authenticity of these accounts, they also suggest that, since the risk of interception is so great, much revealing or pertinent information is often left uncommitted to paper and related by mouth or some other private activity instead. When Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (1565-1601) is locked in the Tower, for instance, his captive wife bribes her way into his chambers so that she can converse with him. The anger of Elizabeth I and the danger in which Essex found himself compelled her to do so. She felt she could not “by letter convey with safety to her husband the advice she thought good for him.”⁵⁹ The focus of many secret histories on the bedchamber or closet as the space in which state mysteries are transacted through private conversations and sexual exploits, as well as the occasional use of the term “correspondence” as innuendo (or indeed a synonym for intercourse), further blurred the lines between written and unwritten documentation. Mary of Modena, for example, is depicted as maintaining a most agreeable and active “correspondence” with the papal nuncio Father D’Adda in the hopes of becoming pregnant and producing a sham prince.⁶⁰

In his secret histories of the Stuarts, John Phillips wrote that the actions and true behaviours of kings are “written in such dark characters and relating to so many several ends, as they are not easily deciphered.”⁶¹ However, although suspicions, rumours and

⁵⁸ Richard Browne, *The Lord Digbys designe to betray Abingdon* (1645), 34.

⁵⁹ Person of Quality, *The Secret History of the Most Renowned Queen Elizabeth and the E. of Essex* (Cologne, 1680), 68.

⁶⁰ Woman of Quality, *The Amours of Messalina, Late Queen of Albion* (1689), 33.

⁶¹ John Phillips, *The Secret history of K. James I. and K. Charles I.* (1690), 30.

imaginings “left floating upon the Waves of Conjecture, which hath tossed them from one side to another” can lead to uncertainty and confusion, such rough waters can and should be explored and navigated (especially with a captain such as Phillips at the helm) by paying attention to circumstances, effects and telling signs. In his comments on the suspicious death of Prince Henry (older brother to Charles I), for instance, Phillips made a case for informed conjecture: “it is so common with report to rate the sickness or death of princes at the price of poison; as I should quite have omitted this conjecture, or left it wholly to the decision of the great tribunal was it not certain that his father did dread him.”⁶² Conjecture also had the potential to reveal other secret information. As a baby, Charles II could not part with his beloved wooden billet, an affectation which led many people to believe that, when he reached maturity, he would probably choose oppressors and blockheads as his closest acquaintances and would more likely choose to reign over his subjects with a club than a scepter. “Indeed,” Phillips wrote, “they that made [these] ... conjectures found in due time they were not altogether in the wrong.”⁶³ As for the circumstances of Charles II’s death, Phillips was not as explicit as other secret historians in suggesting that the King was murdered by his brother, but the story had become so familiar that he need only hint at the possibility: “the opinions of the world are various and some severe and bearing hard enough upon his successor: but in regard it is a mystery, as yet the embrio of conjecture, which is only to be matur’d in the womb of time and to be midwiv’d into the world by future discovery, we leave it to a higher scrutiny.”⁶⁴ Such accounts suggested, as did discussion of forged documents and correspondences,

⁶² Ibid., 18-19.

⁶³ John Phillips, *The Secret History of the Reigns of K. Charles II, and K. James II* (1690), 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 183.

that conjectures and clandestine sources of information could be just as reliable as more official knowledge.

The importance of conjecture to the uncovering of secret information was acknowledged by the period's growing community of cryptographers. In order to piece the puzzling symbols of ciphered letters into something comprehensible, contextual inference was a necessary tool. In his posthumously published treatise on deciphering, John Wallis (1616-1703) – who deciphered letters both for Parliament and the royal court – noted that, since cipher styles constantly change and adapt, it was nearly impossible to have a consistent method for interpreting them. Anyone wishing to be a successful decoder must, with patience and sagacity, “make the best conjectures hee can, till hee shall happen upon something that hee may conclude for Truth.”⁶⁵ In his *Collection of letters and other writings relating to the horrid Popish plot* (1681), George Treby illustrated that, although many of the ciphered letters written to and by Catholic courtier Edward Coleman were accompanied by a key, various words and phrases could only be guessed at. In several of the letters, “there were used figurative words, or words of Cabal; the meaning of which, is conjectured from the Tenor and Sense of the Correspondence.”⁶⁶ The terms “creditors” and “East-India Company,” for instance, most probably signified adversaries and the Parliament, respectively. The letters written to Coleman by the Earl of Berkshire contained various secretive expressions for which a key was deciphered, but it was done so “by conjecture onely; and therefore it is not warranted for certain.”⁶⁷ The

⁶⁵ John Davys, *An essay on the art of deciphering* (1737), 14.

⁶⁶ George Treby, *A Collection of letters and other writings relating to the horrid Popish plot* (1681), A4v. Treby's own use of “secret writing” is explored by Andrea McKenzie, “Inside the Committee of Secrecy Investigating the Popish Plot: Deciphering George Treby's Shorthand”, unpublished paper presented at the Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies in Santa Barbara, California, April 2018.

⁶⁷ George Treby, *Collection of letters* (1681), 97.

uncertainty of the probable contents did not overshadow their potential usefulness, and Treby suggested that readers use either the imperfect key or their own sense to make conjectures upon the letters in question. Discussions such as these, on the need for conjectures and the degrees to which they helped make conclusions, supported the purposes of secret histories which encouraged illumination by way of supposition.

In dictionaries of the period, the term “conjecture” is regularly defined as a guess that is informed by divination.⁶⁸ In the seventeenth century, such forms of occult knowledge were losing ground in official circles, but still retained currency amongst numerous influential antiquaries and intellectuals. More importantly, knowledge through prognostication and the reading of signs was one which still retained considerable currency amongst the general populace.⁶⁹ By allowing for the authority of conjecture within their pages, secret historians tapped into contemporary debates regarding knowledge, providence and authority, and they created a space which privileged accessible ways of knowing. Similar to ways in which Puritans sidestepped earthly hierarchies by appealing to God’s authority, so too did a number of secret histories suggest that secret information was open to all.⁷⁰ Just as Charles II helped legitimate his position by touching for the king’s evil, so secret historians appealed to “popular”

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (1656); Robert Cawdry, *A table alphabeticall* (1604); Guy Miege, *A new dictionary French and English* (1677).

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); Paul Kleber Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason and Religion, 1250-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁷⁰ J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (Yale University Press, 1976).

knowledge in their bids for truth.⁷¹ By treating the discovery of secrets as a science of inference, curiosity, conjecture and the reading of signs, secret historians aligned their works with other popular forays into arcane knowledge written by physiognomers, shorthand masters and astrologers.

iii. Dissimulation: Passions, Bodies, the Signs of Truth

The Secret History of the Duke of Alançon and Queen Elizabeth (1691), like most of Stuart England's secret histories, is a subversive story about politics and dissimulation.⁷² The "extreamly politick" and poison-wielding Elizabeth is depicted as riddled with the all-too-common passions of jealousy, anger, suspicion and duplicitousness: the driving forces behind her decisions. She is also portrayed as an expert in the princely art of dissimulation – the ability to mask one's identifying passions – but not quite expert enough to keep her natural, fallen, self from shining through. A wrong word or look could "prove a mortal blow to the queen's policy" and cause her to grow pale, blush and expose herself to the carefully watchful eyes of all.⁷³ The definition of tyranny, in this sense, is twofold: it refers to the tyranny of monarchs, but also to the much more personal tyranny of one's own passions. Seventeenth-century secret histories revealed the connection between private passions and state policy, the personal and the political. In demonstrating the passions behind political leadership, secret historians presented arguments for why England had been so grossly mismanaged and revealed how dissimulation, the cornerstone of "kingcraft," could be detected by anyone.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin* (Boydell & Brewer, 2015).

⁷² Anon, *The Secret History of the Duke of Alançon and Queen Elizabeth. A True History* (1691).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷⁴ Anthony Weldon, *Court and Character of King James* (1651), 94-95.

Dissimulation has been described as “hallmark of [the] period,” closely connected to the rise of Neoplatonism and deeply entangled with searches for signs of grace.⁷⁵ The controversies which it engendered would have been well-known to people who regularly heard it excoriated in the pulpit. The politician and philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) described dissimulation as “the skirts or traine of secrecy.”⁷⁶ To Bacon, a degree of secrecy was a moral and necessary thing, especially among gentlemen, for “nakednesse is uncomely, as well in minde as body.” It followed that secrecy required a degree of dissimulation, for reserved people would always be pestered by rivals to reveal their secrets. Dissimulation, then, had various advantages, including its capacity to learn and help oppose the minds of others. It also had numerous disadvantages, however, not least in that “it depriveth man of one of the most principal instruments for action; which is trust and belief.” Bacon concluded that “the best composition and temperature is to have opennesse in fame and opinion; secrecy in habit; dissimulation in seasonable use; and a power to faigne if there be no remedy.”⁷⁷ While a dash of dissimulation may be morally defensible for the true gentlemen, secret histories of the Stuart Kings suggest that the courtiers, politicians and favourites of the Stuart courts do not exemplify gentlemanly virtues in other regards, and therefore should not be granted the gentlemanly prerogative of secrecy. Rather than being straightforward, trustworthy and reserved in their actions, for instance, they are shown to be duplicitous, driven by lusts and constantly betraying each other’s confidences.

⁷⁵ Verena Lobsien, *Transparency and Dissimulation: Configurations of Neoplatonism in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 243; Jon R Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁷⁶ Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall of Francis Lo. Verlam, Viscount St. Alban* (1625), 29.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 31.

While part of Charles II's fractious exiled court, the author Edward Walsingham (d.1663) – who worked as secretary to the duplicitous statesman George Digby (mentioned above) – declared public life to be an ocean full of danger and deceit. To help navigate the waters, he repackaged a number of French courtier Eustache Refuge's instructions on policy into a book on court secrets, or “prudential maxims for the statesman and courtier.” These maxims delineated the ways in which to uncover the hidden inclinations of the prince and his closest servants (while still maintaining one's own secrecy) in order to gain their favour and win power. Despite the fact that Walsingham was both a Catholic and known for his double-dealings and factionalism, his compilation was re-issued at the close of the century, ostensibly to remind contemporary subjects and politicians of their duty. The preface stated that “being now fall'n into a world of a more *Active, Enterprising Humour*, when, in truth, Every *Plough-Jobber* sets up for a *Politician* and the *Secrets of Government* are become the *Common Topick of Christendom*, I could not do my countrymen a better service” than to revive the work and demonstrate the hidden motions and motives behind political maneuvers.⁷⁸ Walsingham asserted that inherently dissimulative princes had considerable influence over the flavour and shape of a court and the behaviours of its members. “To live in the court of a wise prince, that loves honest and vertuous men,” for instance, made it relatively easy to preserve one's integrity. Such wisdom was rare, however, for pride is “the inseparable handmaid of greatness” and causes those in power to believe that such things as virtue, truth, faith, law and reason are beneath them. This side-effect of greatness corrupts not

⁷⁸ Eustache Refuge, *Arcana Aulica, or, Walsingham's manual of prudential maxims for the states-man and courtier* (1694), 5.

only the weakest of princes but also the strongest, for “the minds of the best men ... [are] blinded also with the witchcraft of power and rule.”⁷⁹

This relationship between the personalities of monarchs and their courts was expanded upon by secret histories which suggested that national mistrust and division emanated from corrupt monarchy. The double-dealings of Queen Elizabeth’s court are shown (in 1691) to be rooted in her own slavishness to her passions and reliance on dissimulation. We are told that the insincerity and duplicitousness that were characteristic of all royal courts were particularly rife in hers: “there men were forced to consider of their words and actions, to study their looks and motions, to be always diffident of themselves and hidden even from their own thoughts.”⁸⁰ In her presence, the affable French Duke of Anjou learns to be suspicious, and Elizabeth’s captive step-sister Marianna (an invention) learns to dissemble. In the end, however, all precautions and courtly arts are vain or futile, for Elizabeth murders Marianna and breaks the duke’s spirit. Similarly, Justinian (i.e., Charles II) caused people who generally were good in temperament and judgement to act terribly and lewdly in order to comply with him.⁸¹ The wayward Charles II, who intended to “let the world know how much he could out-do Tiberius in dissimulation,” managed to “poyson and corrupt the minds and deprave the manners of the English people.”⁸²

Secret histories suggested that the yoke of tyranny could be broken by awareness of ways in which royal dissimulations could be read. To show “how perfect the king was

⁷⁹ Ibid., 42.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ Procopius, *secret history* (1674), 72.

⁸² John Phillips, *K. Charles II and K. James II* (1690), 96, 25.

in the art of dissimulation,” parliamentarian and secret historian Anthony Weldon (1583-1648) wrote that James I met with his disgraced former favourite Robert Carr and made it look as though his affections for him were rising rather than setting: when Carr kissed James I’s hand “the king hung about his neck, slaboring his cheeks; saying, for Gods sake when shall I see thee again? On my soule I shall neither eate, nor sleep, until you come again.” Following this demonstration, the king’s comportment quickly changed and he “used these very words ... *I shall never see his face more.*”⁸³ Similarly, the royal physician and writer George Eglisam (fl. 1601-1642) argued, “if any dissimulation be greater then [sic] Buckingham’s let any man judge.” In public, the Duke of Buckingham (1592-1628) grieved most miserably and “put on a most mournfull countenance” for the death of his supposed friend James Hamilton. In private, however, “he triumphed and dominired with his faction so excessively as if he had gained some greate victorie.”⁸⁴ Readers were led to believe that careful observers and interpreters of the demeanours of James and Buckingham would have known that their excessive demonstrations of feeling were mere dissimulations. “‘Tis always observed,” wrote the author of *The Royal Wanton*, “that art, when the imitatur of nature, paints with the boldest stroaks, even beyond the life.”⁸⁵ While sitting next to the murdered body of her fictional stepsister Mariana, for instance, Queen Elizabeth covered herself in “all the signs of a person really afflicted.” This could have been her downfall, however, for “if anything did testifie her affliction to be counterfeit, it was the excess of it.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Anthony Weldon, *Court and Character* (1651), 94-95.

⁸⁴ George Eglisam, *The Forerunner of Revenge* (1626), 18.

⁸⁵ Woman of Quality, *The Royal Wanton* (1689), 69.

⁸⁶ *Duke of Alancon and Q. Elizabeth* (1691), 193.

Since a deceitful and passionate monarch was to be expected, it was imperative that courtiers and other subjects constantly have their eyes and ears open for those fleeting moments when the dissimulative façade would crack and allow the monarch's true inclinations to shine through. Wary princes would conceal and smother their passions, but eventually they would reveal themselves. "Since all their actions are so exposed to the eyes of men," argued Walsingham's manual, "it cannot be but some one or other, must observe whereunto their inclinations tend."⁸⁷ Even Tiberius, "a most skilful mast in dissembling, could not set so good a face upon but that time would by little and little bring all his arts to light."⁸⁸ In Procopius's secret history, Belisarius's wife Antonina is comparable to characterizations of Queen Elizabeth. We read that "she was the person of the whole world, who knew how to dissemble her indignation and cover that venome which lay boiling in her soul."⁸⁹ Despite such skill, however, even she, like Elizabeth, was unable to completely mask her passions, especially lust. When her lover entered a monastery, Antonina was so adversely affected that "not only her habit, but her looks and deportment represented nothing but sadness."⁹⁰ Once a keen awareness of the prince's hidden pleasures and displeasures were known, courtiers could adjust their approaches and actions in order to have the best success at gaining favour and power. Or, in the case of England's subjects, secret histories implied that such achievable insights provided an opportunity to access otherwise hidden information.

⁸⁷ Eustache a, *Arcana Aulica* (1694), 7-8.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Procopius, *secret history* (1674), 5.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

An important theme characteristic of secret histories – that of the power gained by closely examining and reading others – is especially prevalent in *The Secret history of the Dutchess of Portsmouth* (1690), Louise de K roualle (1649-1734), favourite mistress of Charles II. From the beginning we read of characters watching for changes in others’ countenances and adjusting how they act according to the insights gleaned from such a search. Portsmouth, or Francelia, as she is known here, shows herself to be adept at enflaming the passions of others (men in particular) from an early age. She is informed of Charles II’s “humour to a tittle” and dons a guise of reserved chastity and virtue – the female attributes known to inflame his heart. Through these means, “she made her self mistress of his mind ... [and] got such an ascendant over him that all the policy in the world was never able to remove.”⁹¹ She could “work more with him” in one night than any other ministers could do in days of reasonable arguments, and she thoroughly “alienate[d] his mind from his own interest, that he should be brought to act absolutely contrary to his own design.”⁹² Whenever Parliament came too close to threatening or exposing French interests and designs, Francelia was able to convince the king to prorogue and make deals which went against the interests of the nation. Because of this, she won the heart of the French king, who welcomed her to “secret consultations” and gave her a voice in all his affairs and interests. More importantly, her command of the king ensured that “what all the arts of the most refin’d politicks and rhetoric could never have been able to bring about in a long succession of Time, was done with ease and diligence by a woman’s tongue and tail.”⁹³

⁹¹ Anon, *The Secret History of the Dutchess of Portsmouth* (1690), 126.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 132.

When occasions arise in which the disposition of the prince must be contradicted, the trick was to find “some other passion or humor in him, whereunto he is equally inclined and so beget a strife and contention in the prince’s minde.”⁹⁴ Constant and careful observation, then, is a means by which to gain power. In secret histories, monarchs and leading figures are often spotlighted at those very moments when it is particularly difficult for them to maintain their dissimulation. The passions of hatred, jealousy, joy, lust and Catholic zeal are all shown to be too powerful for rulers to dissimulate and control forever, especially when plotters and cabals are all itching to make use of them for their own advantage. The power of love also opens a window onto the inclinations, for although “love has a thousand tricks to deceive spies,” it cannot last “long in a heart without making it self known, and the effects it produceth there are the marks that discover it.”⁹⁵ For Justinian (Charles II), it was appeals for mercy and selfless acts which excited him to the point of discovery. In general, his dissimulation was so perfect that “he had no need of the assistance of joy or of grief, to bring the tears into his eyes, having some of them ready in reserve upon every occasion.” He forever seemed composed, and none of the cruelties he devised ever made any alteration in him. From his demeanour, any person would believe him to be the most gentle and good-natured man in the world. Terrifyingly, “he never expressed any passion, nor the least resentment against those he had destined to destruction; but with a countenance peacable and serene; and a voice without any commotion he appointed the murders of an infinite multitude of innocent persons; the sacking of several towns and confiscation of estates.” Even he,

⁹⁴ Eustache Refuge, *Arcana Aulica* (1652), 23-24.

⁹⁵ *Duke of Alancon and Q. Elizabeth* (1691), 140,138.

however, could not maintain this composure if someone were to ask for mercy or “expostulate on behalf of one that was oppressed, then it was he would be angry, his colour rise and his indignation against his subjects appear.”⁹⁶

As the depicted character of Justinian (Charles II) indicates, dissimulation is all the more culpable because it is so carefully, covertly and coolly planned. According to the clergyman Richard Sibbes (c.1577-1635), sins committed in the height of passion are more excusable than the wilful sin of dissimulation. Where there is dissimulation, or “doubling,” he wrote, “there is advisement, there is much will, and little passion to bear a man out, to excuse him; but he doth it (as we say) in coole blood, and that makes dissimulation so grosse, because it is in cold blood.”⁹⁷ By showing the natural, fallen passions of the soul to be a stronger force than headstrong dissimulation, secret historians assured readers that secrets could be uncovered, that truth will always be brought to light, and that they have the knowledge skills to pierce the power of princes. In detailing scenarios in which the masks of monarchs break, they drew on and sought legitimation from beliefs regarding human nature and providence. As the physician and controversial writer George Eglisam wrote, “wilfull and secret murder hath seldome bene observed to escape undiscovered or unpunished even in this life.”⁹⁸ The author of *The Secret History of the Four Last Monarchs of Great Britain* (1695) noted that divine providence was so inescapable that, no matter how carefully things were concealed by “colourable pretences (men often acting like tumblers that are squint-eyed, looking one way and aiming another),” eventually truth will out. “In these our days,” we read, “God

⁹⁶ Procopius, *secret history* (1674), 68-69.

⁹⁷ Richard Sibbes, *A learned commentary or exposition* (1655), 249.

⁹⁸ Eglisam, *Forerunner* (1626), 3.

hath brought great things to light, discovering many secret and close contrivances, many private consultations, and hidden designs which otherwise probably neither we, nor our posterity should have ever known.”⁹⁹

In addition to the clues afforded by the monarch’s passions, it was also worthwhile to consider their bodies. Walsingham’s manual stated that “it doth conduce that we know the inclinations of our princes, which depend upon the natural temperature of their bodies.”¹⁰⁰ It was even suggested that royal bodies were easier to read than those of subjects, since they “are more powerful then [sic] others, so they are less masters of their affections and inclinations; which are for the most part, more violent and more unreasonable in them then [sic] in meaner persons.”¹⁰¹ Mirroring the language and concepts found in popular medical, astrological and physiognomic treatises, the manual listed the attributes of choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic princes and how to best treat them. The best dissimulators will be betrayed by their bodies if people are tuned to the intelligences bodies can provide. Due to the ways in which they were encouraged to search for signs of God’s grace and advice regarding their health and fates, seventeenth-century people were tuned in to such intelligences and this was a feature which secret history writers could fully exploit.

As numerous scholars have shown, in stripping royal figures bare, secret historians created intimacy between readers and rulers, compromised the reverential dignity of kingship and sought to undermine absolute power. They accentuated the degree to which common, human mistakes made by those with arbitrary or

⁹⁹ R.B. *The Secret History, of the four last monarchs of Great Britain* (1691), A4v.

¹⁰⁰ Eustache Refuge, *Arcana Aulica* (1652), 31-39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

unconstitutional power had severe ramifications. Consideration of the theme of dissimulation adds another dimension to such discussion. For audiences accustomed to reading bodies like books, access to the details of royal or ruling bodies provided the material needed for them to decode the dissimulations inherent to sacral kingship and to judge what they found. Secret histories, then, were not just about making monarchs human but about authorizing types of intelligence which relied on inference and conjecture and empowered readers, albeit for political ends. In so doing, they implicitly took on the mantle of Tacitus, aiming to “subtilize and sharpen the sight of the vulgar people” so that they could “plainly discover...that they are cheated, cozened and deceived.”¹⁰² Secret histories offered readers “a kinde of spectacles, that work most pernicious effects for princes, for so much as being put upon the noses of silly and simple people, they so refine and sharpen their sight as they mae then see and prie into the most hidden and secret thoughts of others, yea even into the centre of their hearts.”¹⁰³

By outlining ways in which dissimulation could be pierced, and by licencing communities of watchful sentinels, secret historians encouraged a culture of suspicion. Just as the passions of monarchs betray them, so do the passions of subjects. Procopius drew parallels between the tyranny of the emperor and empress and their ability to read and take advantage of the sins of others. He argued that, in looking for a new favourite, “they resolved to chuse none, but the worst that they could find, that he might be a faithful minister of the cruelty and oppression which they designed against their subjects. For this reason they were very curious in examining the spirit and humors of all people

¹⁰² Traiano Boccalini, *The New-Found Politicke* (1626), 31.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 29.

about the court.”¹⁰⁴ In *The Amours of Messalina, Late Queen of Albion* (1689), Mary of Modena falls victim to the “pernicious counsels” of the pope’s nuncio and his Jesuit henchman who were “sent on purpose to work on the restless humour of this queen.” The two “crafty workmen” created their plan for promoting Catholicism in England according to “the main points whereon all the queens satisfaction seem’d to depend; to wit, amour and religion.”¹⁰⁵ Critics of Whig secret histories also warned that the power of one’s passions could be subtly corralled by another’s agenda. Roger L’Estrange wrote that “a man may be too zealous for a good thing as well as against it” and warned that people must keep their zeal, or their natural inclinations in check, lest someone or some party take advantage of it. Similarly, Tory sympathizer John Dryden showed England’s crowds to be blinded by Monmouth, who “form’d by nature, furnished out with arts ... glides unfelt into their secret hearts.”¹⁰⁶ In their focus on ways in which politicians and cabals take command of government by massaging monarchical inclinations, or vice versa, secret histories illustrated the temporal danger of not constraining one’s sinful self.

This complicates the narrative that places secret histories on the road to the modern identity. Identity, in the pages of secret histories, was something hidden, which may anticipate the eighteenth-century preoccupation with interiority detailed by McKeon and other writers.¹⁰⁷ It was, however, very much an interiority which carried the baggage of seventeenth-century beliefs in the frailty of human nature and the sinful state of the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰⁵ *Woman of Quality, Amours of Messalina* (1689), 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ McKeon *Secret History of Domesticity*; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

soul. Identity in these works was not just something to hide, but something to overcome. The passions were seen as the building blocks of identity, but they were also seen as tyrannical, vulnerable and in need of proper governance. Monarchs shown to be incapable of governing their own sinful inclinations were suggested to be incapable of aiding others in their own journeys of grace and salvation. Like any other common subject, they revealed themselves to be wholly incapable of fully accessing or properly handling the power of omnipotent knowledge and unchecked authority.

iv. Jesuits, Mistresses and Messalinas: Anti-popery and Bedroom Politics

Secret histories were useful vehicles for political pandering, but they were also written for financial gain. Much of their allure lay in their scandalous reportage and salacious content. In a secret history on the life of James II's wife Mary of Modena (1689), this is particularly explicit. The author acknowledged that "Intrigue and amour" were "the main delight of the generality of my readers" and apologized that the lack of it, in sections where Queen Mary is busied more by politics than by love, "lessen the satisfaction."¹⁰⁸ In England, Queen Mary "sat at the helm and the fatigue of business and guidance of empire," which gave her little time to devote to her pleasures, but since her expulsion to France, "love seems to fill her whole ascendant ... which generally occasions more variety of accident and adventure than the heavier movements of state" – a development, we are assured, which will make for much more invigorating reading.¹⁰⁹ However, a political message is never far from the surface. Queen Mary's tantalizing discussion on how it should be a woman's choice where and how to lose her virginity, for

¹⁰⁸ Woman of Quality, *Royal Wanton* (1689), 53.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, A2.

example, merely acts as a mask for a darker message on the absurdity of hereditary succession, not to mention calling into question the paternity of the so-called “warming-pan baby”, her son James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766).¹¹⁰ The mix of religious, politics and scandal drew on a longstanding antipapist tradition of linking Catholicism and aberrant sexuality.¹¹¹

Secret histories comprise a considerable part of a larger collection of texts which revel in associations made between Catholicism, arbitrary government and petticoat government.¹¹² Stuart monarchs, according to many of these histories, were ruled by women (beginning, of course, with the infamous Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots), who in turn were not only driven by natural female tyranny but also by the manipulative designs of Catholic leagues.¹¹³ The lewdness which haunted discussions of female politicking made for much scandalous and pornographic content, but these were not necessarily their primary allure. Subversive arguments regarding state politics, which gave the salacious accounts structure, were an essential and inseparable aspect of what made them so alluringly risqué. Details of the sexual excess of Mary of Modena (Messalina), for instance, highlighted and lent credence to suggestions that her son was illegitimate. They

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 15-16.

¹¹¹ Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999); Rachel Weil, *Political Passions: Gender, the Family and Political Argument in England, 1680-1714* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 94-95.

¹¹² Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, Introduction; Erin Keating, “In the Bedroom of the King: Affective Politics in the Restoration Secret History,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* vol. 15 no. 2 (2015) 58-82; Alison Conway, *The Protestant Whore: Courtesan Narrative and Religious Controversy in England, 1680-1750* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*; Rachel Weil, *Political Passions*.

¹¹³ Woman of Quality, *The Amours of Messalina, Late Queen of Albion* (London, 1689); Eustache le Noble, *The Cabinet Open'd or the Secret History of the Amours of Madam de Maintenon, with the French King* (London, 1690); Phillips, K. *Charles II and K. James II*.

also were an important part of the arguments made for how conjecture, gossip, “common fame” and “concurring circumstances” could be reliable sources of deep and dark truths.

The 1694 edition of Edward Walsingham’s *Manual for the States-man and Courtier* opens with an image of a queen with sceptre and orb presiding over two wary-looking women, one of whom is two-faced and holding a mask, the other sporting a snake around her arm. Court politics as stereotypically feminine and underhanded are demonstrated here, as is their joint comparison to the subtle and devilish tortuousness of serpents. From early in the century, and due in part to the works of Machiavelli, the correlation between the term “policy” and factious political innovation influenced ways in which leading courtiers and politicians were measured.¹¹⁴ Contemporary writers and social commentators noted that “crafty, knavish and worldly policy and true and religious piety never shake hands together.”¹¹⁵ Policy was defined as vain opinion and a gateway to atheism. Although a “specyall part of government,” nothing is nearly as “pestylent” to Christian princes as selfish and divisive policy, and “politicians that have squared out their governementes by the rule of their owne wites, have ever been found to be most dangerous states men.”¹¹⁶ In Claude Vanel’s *The Royal Mistresses of France* (1695), any policy emanating from the throne is really just a reflection of bedroom politics: “Many times, what is attributed to Policy, has no other foundation then an erroneous Indulgence of Princes to their Mistresses, or their Favourites: And at the same time that they were

¹¹⁴ Keller, *Knowledge and the Public Interest*, 132; Andrew McRae, *Literature, Satire and the Early Stuart State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 121.

¹¹⁵ Henry Harflete, *The hunting of the fox* (1632), 26.

¹¹⁶ Barnaby Rich, *Opinion deified* (1613), 13.

believ'd to have in their Thoughts nothing more then the welfare of their Dominions, twas only a burning Desire to revenge the quarrels wherein the Amours had engag'd 'em."¹¹⁷

Secret histories typically depict Jesuits and Catholic officials as the ultimate masters of policy. If politicking is mentioned favourably, it is only in regards to “plain and downright Protestant politicks,” which, we are led to believe, is rarely seen, especially at court.¹¹⁸ Studies on the depth and character of anti-popery in early modern England have shown it to be a malleable ideology tied to specific political agendas and contexts.¹¹⁹ It was powerful, in part, because of the anxious instability of Reformation within England, but also because it served as both a source of unity and accord.¹²⁰ Anti-popery rhetoric traversed political divides and was “massaged” by both Whigs and Tories in their bids to stain the reputations and designs of the opposing party, especially in the midst of restoration crisis.¹²¹ In the process of a “politicization” that was rapidly accelerating in the seventeenth century, the ideology of anti-popery, in all its forms, was a dominant force, ever able “to motivate and mobilize people.”¹²²

¹¹⁷ Claude Vanel, *Royal Mistresses of France* (1695), 1.

¹¹⁸ John Phillips, *K. Charles II, and K. James II* (1690), 102.

¹¹⁹ Peter Lake, “Anti-Popery: The Structure of a Prejudice,” in Richard Cust and Anne Hughes, eds., *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Religion and Politics 1603-1642* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1989).

¹²⁰ Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and intolerance in England 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Lake, *Bad Queen Bess*; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹²¹ Andrea McKenzie, “Sham Plots and False Confessions: The Politics of Edward Fitzharris’s Last Dying Speech, 1681,” in Brian Cowen and Scott Sowerby, eds., *The State Trials and the Politics of Justice in Later Stuart England*, forthcoming with Boydell Press, in the “Studies in Early Modern Cultural, Political and Social History” series.

¹²² Lake, “Anti-Popery,” 97. For discussion on “politicization as a process,” see Mark Kishlansky, “Turning frogs into princes: Aesop’s *Fables* and the Political Culture of Early Modern England,” in Susan Amussen and Mark Kishlansky, eds., *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 338-361. On how cultures (political or otherwise) are shaped

Secret histories incorporated the established rhetoric of Catholic corruption into their critiques of politicians. In 1610 an anonymous translator published a French insider's glimpse into – arguably, a secret history of – Jesuit trickery entitled *A discoverie of the most secret and subtile practises of the Jesuites*. This text was originally produced in Bohemia and can be understood as a response to Rudolph II's *Letter of Majesty* (1609), which granted a degree of tolerance to both Protestants and Catholics. In England the pamphlet was released as that union between King and parliament, which had been forged by the Gunpowder Plot, began to dissolve. In *A Discoverie*, Jesuits are portrayed as the ultimate double agents: greedy, murderous spies who travel in secret passageways and mask themselves as courtiers, teachers, poor passengers or whatever identity will best provide them with the intelligences needed to further their “fatall deseignes.”¹²³ Within each Jesuit cell, there are “regents” who punish those beneath them who have failed to gather enough secret intelligences about where Protestant princes can be found and “of what disposition every one is; wherein hee takes delight; if hee have any care of the state; if hee bee any way religious; or rather if hee bee given to drunkennesse, women or hunting; if hee have any catholikes in his court, and what they bee; [and] what people say of their prince.”¹²⁴ Such intelligences are shown to be essential, for it was only through access to such illicit knowledge that their plans of domination could be realized. The text tells of one “conjuring jesuite” who has “a looking glasse of astrology, wherein he made the [French] king to see plainly what-soever his majestie desired to know.” With the aide

according to developments and circumstances see Tim Harris, ed., *Popular Culture in England, 1500-1850* (New York: Palgrave, 1995).

¹²³ Anon., *A discoverie of the most secret and subtile practises of the Jesuites. Translated out of the French*, (1610), C2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, B3v-B4.

of this “devilish glasse,” and the Catholic expertise in handling it, “there is nothing so secret, nor anything propounded in the privy councills of other monarckes which may not be seene or discovered.”¹²⁵ The text references Rudolph II, stating that it was through such dark means that Jesuits drew “unto their party one of the greatest princes of the empire, although he were a protestant.”¹²⁶

In the English context, such a text can be understood as a warning that James I was also susceptible to being subverted from Protestantism. It was certainly a suggestion pursued by later secret histories, which vilify James I’s “faction balancing,” or attempts at maintaining consensus, as a sign of weakness.¹²⁷ Anthony Weldon’s *Court and Character of King James* (1650), for instance, was regularly recycled throughout the rest of the century and served as the foundation for John Phillips’ secret histories of the 1690s. In it, James’s peacefulness is depicted as less of a sign of virtuous moderation and more as an indication of his misplaced passions and expertise in “kingcraft” or dissembling. His true character, we read, was evident in his demeanour and the “accidents” of his life and was delicate to a fault. He had skin “as soft as taffeta sarsnet,” and his legs were so weak that “he was not able to stand at seven yeares of age.” His inherent weaknesses obliged him to lean “on other mens shoulders [and] his walke was ever circular, his fingers ever in that walke fiddling about his codpiece.”¹²⁸ In such a caricature, the motto “*beati pacifici*” (“blessed are the peacemakers”) is treated with

¹²⁵ Ibid., B2.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Scott Sowerby, *Making Toleration: The Repealers and the Glorious Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 20.

¹²⁸ Anthony Weldon, *The Court and Character of King James* (1650), 178-179.

decided irony: “such a king I wish this kingdome have never any worse, on the condition, not any better; for he lived in peace, dyed in peace and left all his kingdoms in a peaceable condition.”¹²⁹ Interestingly, the image of James’s walk is very similar to the features of a dissembler as delineated by physiognomer Richard Saunders (1613-1675): a dissembler “hath a frisking humour in his walking or travels, soon here, and soon there.”¹³⁰

In the pamphlets of the Puritan polemicist William Prynne (1600-1669), suggestions such as those made by the abovementioned tract on “secret and subtle” Jesuits, are brought to their logical conclusion, and James is shown to be completely swindled by the “popish faction.” Prynne’s *Hidden works of darkenes brought to publike light* (1645) continued the ever-developing account of the Jesuitical politicking and “romish agents” within England. This publication was commissioned in support of the 1644 show trial of Prynne’s enemy, the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud for treason.¹³¹ Prynne, an adept propagandist, prompted by the political tide as well as his personal resentments, worked the already tarnished public image of Laud into the personification of secretive, treasonous popery.¹³² Laud’s alleged attempts to sever relationships between the people and the King during Charles I’s personal rule are shown to be the result of “sundry plots” and “workes of darknesse” by Catholic cabals within the Anglican Church. “For many yeers past,” we read, there has been “a secret plotted conspiracy and serious endeavour between sundry pretended members of the church of

¹²⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁰ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and Chiromancie* (1671), 275.

¹³¹ On William Laud and the power of “imperfectly shared ideologies and political vocabularies,” see D. Alan Orr, *Treason and the State: Law, Politics and Ideology in the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108.

¹³² On Prynne’s religio-political stance and personal motives, see Mark Kishlansky, “A Whipper Whipped: The Sedition of William Prynne,” *The Historical Journal* vol 56 no. 3 (September 2013) 603-627.

England and reall sonnes of the church of Rome to extirpate the Protestant religion settled amongst us and reduce our dominions unto their ancient vassalage, to the superstitions and power of the Roman sea.”¹³³ Prynne wrote that one of the most perniciously effective methods the Jesuits and Catholic priests had for planting Catholic tyranny in England was through marriage. As evidence of this, he referred, through the transcription of letters and petitions, to the attempted Spanish Match and how, despite its ultimate failure, it encouraged English Catholics of all sorts to multiply in numbers as well as in boldness and insolence. In the French Henrietta Maria, the plotting succeeded, for the wedding opened the floodgates and left England awash in popery.¹³⁴

Many of the themes addressed in anti-popish propaganda, such as those regarding sexual immorality, the sly and secretive policies of Jesuits and long-standing and persistent Catholic conspiracies, served as fodder for secret histories. In his *Secret History of Whitehall* (1697), David Jones demonstrated the extent of Catholic France’s sly attempts at foiling English liberty. His sharing of secret, privileged information warned people that Catholic intrigue is like an unsuspected disease which can silently infect the unlikeliest of people. We read that “there is not one part, or sect of men in England, much less the court exempted ... [who] have all of them, in their respective turns, though many quite against their knowledge, been imposed upon by French emissaries and made tools of to serve the interest of France, to the prejudice of themselves and of their own country.”¹³⁵ Similarly, in discussing the actions of the alleged Elizabethan traitor Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, the anonymous author of *A*

¹³³ William Prynne, *Hidden workes of darkenes brought to publike light* (1645), 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³⁵ David Jones, *The Secret History of white hall* (1697), A7v-A8.

Brief History of the Life of Mary Queen of Scots (1681), wrote “what a strange bias and almost prodigious influence popery has even on the best dispositions, prevailing so far with this unfortunate earl, that even contrary to nature it self (and yet bate but his religion, he is represented as a good-natur’d man), He rejoiced with hopes of the ruine of his cuntry.”¹³⁶ Histories like these drew heavily from the century’s widespread anti-Catholic sentiments and, in so doing, built upon stereotypes and hearsay that had become a form of common knowledge.

Brief History of the Life of Mary Queen of Scots was published at the height of anti-Catholic sentiment during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis.¹³⁷ It tied its subject (the Catholic great-grandmother of the current Stuart monarch Charles II) to the swirl of revealed conspiracies, both past and present, and persisted with the sorts of themes found in Andrew Marvell’s influential *Account of the Growth of Popery* (1677), which famously claimed that “There has now for diverse years, a design been carried on to change the lawfull government of England into an Absolute Tyranny, and to convert the established Protestant Religion into down-right Popery.”¹³⁸ “History,” the *Brief History* argued, “is one of the best tutors of policy, whereby the ingenious will easily perceive how far former occurrences hold parallel with or may be considered in relation to modern affairs.”¹³⁹ The aim of this text was to show that conspiracies such as the Babington Plot,

¹³⁶ M.D., *A brief history of the life of Mary Queen of Scots* (1681), 22.

¹³⁷ For more on the popish plot, see Andrea McKenzie, “Sham Plots and False Confessions,” forthcoming; Rachel Judith Weil, “‘If I did say so, I lyed’: Elizabeth Cellier and the Construction of Credibility in the Popish Plot Crisis”, in Susan Dwyer Amussen and Mark Kishlansky, ed., *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1995).

¹³⁸ Andrew Marvell, *An account of the growth of popery* (1677), 3.

¹³⁹ M.D., *brief history* (1681), 22.

the Gunpowder Plot and the Popish Plot, were, and ever had been, part of a larger Catholic conspiracy and not simply the rash acts, as some argued, of “a few private high-spirited gentlemen, extremely provoked.”¹⁴⁰ During Elizabeth I’s reign, we read, conniving Catholic officials used their networks of influence to attempt to place her Catholic relative, Mary Stuart, on the throne. The primary objective of all such conspirators was – and remained – to “root out Protestantism and set up popery.” During Elizabeth I’s reign, they were, at least for a time, “animated by the prospect of an immediate popish successor, viz., the said Mary Queen of Scots.” It was from the prospect of a Catholic successor that “the popish conspirators laid the foundation of all their trayterous practices.”¹⁴¹ In illustrating how Mary Stuart was a tool of conspirators, and in tying the past to the present, the text implicitly suggested that if James, Duke of York were to take the throne, it would be a sign that Catholic plotting had at last succeeded.

The history suggested that the unfortunate Mary Queen of Scots was “addicted to and influenced by the jesuites and their counsels” who exploited her weaknesses. These dissimulative “rebels” pretended that their devotion to Mary was “out of pure zeal to the family of the Stuarts (as many of them will boast to this very day),” but in reality they “minded nothing but their own interest” and were more than willing to betray her as soon as it seemed politically advantageous to do so. Any who might desire to work with such plotters were sure to come to ruin, for not only did Mary die, she did so largely at the behest of those who were supposed to champion her cause: “as they egg’d on the Scottish queen to ill practises against queen Elizabeth, so when they had done (imitating their

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 1, 17.

father the devil, who first tempts and then accuses) they betray'd her too."¹⁴² Although the text explicitly stated that the plotters “despaired of turning her son, king James, to their religion,” its implicit message (which marries the Stuarts to Catholic politicking) spoke louder. Its secret insinuations would have been especially audible to seventeenth-century audiences caught up in Exclusion Crisis propaganda, and its creative genius lay in the fact that it refrained from being too “overtly hostile” towards the monarchs it referenced.¹⁴³ The picture of Mary provided by this text was one of a beautiful, intelligent and courageous woman, raised on “violent principles” and badly used by her counsellors. While Mary may have been the face of the plots, the real course of events was dictated by Jesuitical politicians – they are presented as the real villains.

The abovementioned *Secret History of the Dutchess of Portsmouth* (1690) – about a French Catholic mistress turned politician – can be read as an extended metaphor for the duplicity and immorality of all Stuart statesmen. In this text, much of the plotting, policy-making or politicking is acted out by women in their bids to gain the attentions of certain men and shape their actions. Portsmouth, the “French Dalila,” is depicted as not only an expert dissembler with a natural excess of “subtle policy and craftiness” and ambition of her own, but also as a player in the theatre of trickery and enslavement designed by Catholic France and its officials/“mercenaries.”¹⁴⁴ Gender and class coalesce in depictions of her maidservant Nell Wall as a lowly menial made great by her wiles

¹⁴² Ibid., 9.

¹⁴³ For discussion of both implicit and explicit messaging in seventeenth-century political propaganda, see Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Andy Wood, *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁴⁴ Anon, *The Secret History of the Dutchess of Portsmouth* (1690), 6.

and her Catholicism, who “became a great states-woman as well as a common whore.”

¹⁴⁵ Politicking and prostitution were seen as synonymous in women, but in their focus on the pandering of favourites and politicians, secret histories suggested that all favourites and politicians were “whores.”

The focus on female politicking served to tar politics more generally with the imputation of feminine duplicity, underhandedness and treachery; as Rachel Weil and others have demonstrated, the conflation of sex with politics was a common theme in Restoration propaganda.¹⁴⁶ The *Secret History of the Dutchess* was not only an attack on the Stuart monarchy, or potentially monarchy in general, but a more general critique of party politics. Kings and Queens are first among the main characters/tyrants in most secret histories, but particularly after the revolution of 1688/9, politicians take centre stage. Late Stuart secret histories link their often-fictional examination of “bedroom politics” to very real events, such as the Treaty of Dover and the Popish Plot. The interpretation and memory of such developments were shaped, directly by Whigs, and indirectly by Tories, to be legible signs of monarchical treachery and Catholic attempts to overthrow Protestantism and liberty in England. They are also an important part of, and reaction to, a real mistrust of politicking.

Early secret histories may have attacked royal favourites as an indirect way to criticise monarchy, but these attacks on the Stuart monarchs Charles II and James II become more direct after the Glorious Revolution. Furthermore, attacks on counselors (no longer merely scapegoats), take on additional meaning as they become a shorthand

¹⁴⁵ John Phillips, *K. Charles II and K. James II* (1690), 107. For more on connections made between Catholicism and disorderly women, see Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*.

¹⁴⁶ Rachel Weil, *Political Passions*, chapter four.

for the intrigues of scheming politicians. Phillips relates that Charles II had just settled his throne when, “through the influence of evil counsellors upon a disposition naturally vicious and easily corrupted with effeminate pleasures, he abandoned himself to all manner of softness.” He came to be ruled by conniving plotters who insured that he “betray’d himself that he might betray his people.”¹⁴⁷ James II is shown to be the worst of kings, largely because he first played the part of a consummate conspirator. From the burning of London (intended to be a “general massacre of the people”) to the murder of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey, the Duke of York is depicted as the most despicable plotter behind many of Charles II’s designs. Comparatively, in the “wildly popular” *Secret History of the most renowned Q. Elizabeth and the E. of Essex* (1680), the cold, vengeful and dissimulative plotting of Elizabeth I’s counselor and favourite confidant – Robert Cecil and the Countess of Nottingham – come across as more threatening than Elizabeth’s own dissimulative inclinations.

The Duchess of Portsmouth’s depiction as effectual in the face of other politicians’ impotence suggests that, in the world of court politics, a politician can only get things done if he or she is able to manipulate and capitalise on the monarch’s passions and be willing to truly “know” the monarch.¹⁴⁸ For instance, in *The Royal Wanton* (1689), which portrays James II’s wife, like Portsmouth, as an extended arm of the French and papal thrones, Queen Mary of Modena (Messalina) recites the following: “Let boasting man to profound wit, plot, sense. And deep intrigue lay his long false pretence. Let Faction and Cabal their Embryo’s hatch, No Politicks can Wit of Woman match. Her

¹⁴⁷ Phillips, K. *Charles II and K. James II* (1690), 1-2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 160-163.

teeming Brain, such vaster Product fill, that Love alone's th' immortal Macchiavil."¹⁴⁹ Pornography and farce – for instance, improbable stories of mistaken identity in the bedroom, often involving royal mistresses and Catholic priests – figure prominently in secret histories. Such humour serves not only to desacralize the monarchy: it also suggests that court politics makes for strange bedfellows.¹⁵⁰ It implies that, because of the equivocation inherent in dissimulative feminine or Jesuitical politicking, it is difficult to truly know who is in the royal bed. The bawdiness of secret histories is part of a larger critique of secretive and oppositional politicians, brought about by a society which “put a premium on consensus,” was wary of “hidden darkness,” and was encouraged to trust the informal, consensual or conjectural knowledge which was within its reach.¹⁵¹

The depiction of politicians within secret histories is a good reminder of the oppositional environments which bred them. As the Tory John Dryden noted, “He who draws his pen for one party, must expect to make enemies of the other. For, wit and fool are consequents of Whig and Tory: And every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side. There's a Treasure of Merits in the Phanatick Church, as well as in the papist; and a pennyworth to be had of saintship, Honesty and poetry for the leud, the factious and the blockheads.”¹⁵² The well-documented ways in which seventeenth-century Whigs and Tories were characterized is dramatically illustrated by both secret histories and critiques to them.¹⁵³ Whig writers drew from long-established “truths” regarding the nature of

¹⁴⁹ Woman of Quality, *The Royal Wanton* (1689), 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ For more on this topic, see Andrea McKenzie, “Biting the Biter: Sex, Scatology, and Satirical Inversion in Augustan Highwayman ‘Lives,’” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 7 no. 2 (2013): 236-256.

¹⁵¹ Rachel Weil, *Political Passions*, 5.

¹⁵² John Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel. A Poem* (1681), A2.

¹⁵³ See, for instance, Mark Knights, “The Tory Interpretation of History in the Rage of Parties,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 68 no. 1-2 (2005): 353-373.

popish politicking. They insinuated that Tories were bred from a long line of corrupt, Catholic favourites and that their backgrounds and current interests had shaped them into perfect “politicians”, in every negative sense of that word. Tories, in turn, also charged their opponents with imposture and conspiracy, for “plots, true or false, are necessary things, To raise up common-wealths and ruin Kings.”¹⁵⁴ They claimed that Whigs – the “monster faction” – were the true conspirators.¹⁵⁵ According to Roger L’Estrange, “when treason shall come once to be cloth’d and dress’d up under the masque, face and countenance of [parliamentarian] authority, ‘tis not the name that will consecrate the conspiracy; no, nor all the gay plausible pretences in nature neither, that will justifie an imposture. We the commons in forty two, was neither better nor worse than wee the rebels in the 25th of Edward the third; and we the knights &c.”¹⁵⁶ Each side emphasised different moral failings – popery or fanaticism, sexual immorality or king-killing, tyranny or rebellion – but both broadly agreed with the character of the politician as secretive, hypocritical and equivocating. Politicians, like monarchs, were corrupt humans unworthy of unchecked or divine, omnipotent power. They could be read by common people who had comparable frailties of their own and who had been taught how to root out such iniquities in themselves, and in others.

v. Conclusion

As Rebecca Bullard argues, the Whig monopolization of secret histories, evident from the 1680s, was not a forgone conclusion.¹⁵⁷ Although the subversive potential of

¹⁵⁴ John Dryden, *Absalom* (1681), 4.

¹⁵⁵ Nahum Tate and John Dryden, *The Second part of Absalom and Achitophel. A Poem* (London, 1682), 29.

¹⁵⁶ L’Estrange, *Brief History*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ Rebecca Bullard, *Politics of Disclosure*, chapter four.

Procopius's adversarial tale was certainly corralled by Whig politicians in their scathing critiques of Stuart rule, this was informed by the specific political atmosphere of the late 1670s and 1680s. Bullard's focus on how secret histories were a product of their times, as well as the different politicians or propagandists who deployed them, stresses their dynamism. Similarly, Melinda Alikier Rabb finds that, due to its basis in the fluid realms of gossip, libel and satire, secret history "accommodates Tory and Whig, feminine and masculine, and conservative and liberal."¹⁵⁸ Interestingly, however, various themes characteristic of secret histories were subsequently drawn into the mainstream; most famously in the so-called "Whig theory of history." These include the reading of past events through the concerns and goals of the present and the focus on the progressive march of parliament in placing checks and balances on monarchical control and in representing the interests and concerns of the people. Within the pages of late Stuart secret histories, checks and balances largely came in the form of exposing hidden intrigues and representation of interests in the form of encouraging engagement and opinion. While iterations of these themes changed with later historians and historical events, their presence in seventeenth-century England's polemical secret histories ties them to the onetime "received wisdom" of the Whig narrative of history, a narrative which continues to intrigue and inform contemporary scholarship.¹⁵⁹

By encouraging the desire to know the secrets of the great, and in encouraging readers to trust their abilities to decode such deep, inner mysteries, secret historians constructed a world which could be turned inside out as much as upside down. They

¹⁵⁸ Melinda Alliker Rabb, *Satire and Secrecy*, 69.

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Annabel Patterson, *Nobody's Perfect: A New Whig Interpretation of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Mark Knights, "Tory Interpretation of History," 354-359.

argued that secret plotting and internal motivations could be known and, in so doing, authorized accessible, unofficial systems of knowledge. Through their combined discussions of dissimulation and politicking, secret historians demonstrated to readers that “simple,” downright and time-tested attention to conjecture, rumour and readings of signs and consequences could dissect secretive layers of policy and reveal reality. The secret diplomacy and backroom politics of monarchs and courts were arcane because they were impenetrable to the majority of people and because they often stemmed from internal motives and desires which were supposedly hidden from all but God. Unlike the divine secrets which could be indirectly accessed through practice in physiognomy, shorthand and astrology, however, the hidden intelligences accessed by secret histories were presented as secrets which were very much worldly and human, as were the monarchs and courtiers they described.

Conclusion

In seventeenth-century England, pursuits of knowledge were shaped by persistent belief in the effects of the Fall on human reason. Human carnality ensured that little could be known with absolute certainty and that all things worth knowing – particularly divine things – would, to some degree, remain secret. There was also growing trust in human potential and the ability to sharpen reason and pierce the seemingly impenetrable. This dissertation was born of interest in the tension between these seemingly paradoxical, yet interwoven beliefs. It considers how reliance on uncertainty and conjecture was seen as both a human failing and a useful way to access otherwise impenetrable knowledge. In particular, this dissertation explores how works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history variously drew strength from understandings regarding human carnality – a failing common to all – and forwarded a “do-it-yourself” approach to the recognition and revelation of secrets. They suggested that the privilege of accessing secret information could be widened to include people who did not usually enjoy influential positions of wealth and political power. All that was needed was a restless desire to search out and interpret signs, an ability to apply intuitive wisdom and communal speculation and the instructions provided by published manuals.

The secrets which informed the writings on physiognomy, shorthand and astrology were described as divine in nature. Those which shaped the character of secret histories were intentionally outlined as temporal. In either case, writers emphasized that, due to the effects of the Fall, there were limits to what could be conclusively known. They drew from contemporary interest in the general uncertainty of knowledge and agreed that human comprehension would always be burdened by human frailty.

Collectively, the works examined in this thesis demonstrate the extension and remodeling of a sixteenth-century “how to” genre (associated with such things as books of secrets and religious instruction) into the seventeenth century.¹ They indicate that negative perceptions of human reason, ability and industry were changing. There was growing optimism that, given the right tools and direction, people of varying backgrounds and interests were able to improve their capacity for knowledge. What is more, if properly prompted, this improvement could come from within, without much external help or input. Rather than a linear narrative which marries growing trust in human potential with greater access to knowledge, however, this is a story about how focus on human limitation and the ultimate impenetrability of the arcane could increase thirst for the pursuit of knowledge. Learnable practices, habits and skills which tapped the arcane were like “treasure hid in a field. They sharpen desire and heat industry.”² Acceptance of limitations and understandings of human frailty meant that people needed to strive to gain what access they could. It also suggested that they could do so carefully, without violating divine privilege. Writers of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history emphasized the practicality of the revelatory relationship between secrets and desire and suggested ways in which to direct, refine and employ peoples’ yearnings and inquiries.

Physiognomers argued that every physical feature of every human body mirrored both the potential turmoil and triumphs of humanity. Human transparency, openness and righteousness were lost by the Fall, leaving only corruption and enslavement to sin in its

¹ William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994); Allison Kavey, *Books of Secrets: Natural Philosophy in England, 1550-1600* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Lori Anne Ferrell, “How-To Books, Protestant Kinetics, and the Art of Theology,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 71 no. 4 (December 2008): 591-606.

² Richard Carpenter, *Astrology proved Harmless, Useful, Pious* (1657), 36.

wake. The practice of physiognomy – of searching and interpreting the body’s manifold “notes” – provided access to secrets of how the Fall had uniquely stamped each individual. This was information which could, if used correctly, help moderate innate human depravity and potentially restore a state of innocence. It also emphasized the need for constant, uncertain searching and the necessity of tools to aid such exploration. Each of the physical features sported by human bodies provided glimpses into the ways in which everyone was connected to (and united by) the Biblical narrative of depravity and redemption. Writings on shorthand similarly emphasized reverence for and dependence upon God’s merciful gift of grace. They suggested ways in which to contend with the impenetrability of both the scriptures and the deep spiritual musings of the soul. Meaning, if not complete clarity, could be pulled from enigmatic things and, through shorthand, people could ideally abandon some of the trappings of human weakness and culture (including words and language) and tune their minds to the presence and salvific messages of divine secrets in their midst. Writings on shorthand generally took a slightly different approach from most mainstream physiognomers. They engaged notions of human limitation and premised their instructions on spiritual yearning for knowledge and transcendence, but they placed greater emphasis on human industry in the struggle for grace and salvation and also offered a marketable, hands-on, multi-purposed skill. They encouraged people to adjust the tools they provided and come up with their own interpretive systems.

Astrologers addressed uncertainties which arose from the timeless questions surrounding day-to-day decision-making and future events. They assured people that these were secrets which could be revealed with at least enough certainty to provide

guidance and argued that “accidents” – everything from mundane life events to political trends – were telling, divinatory signs that could be mapped out and tested according to precise celestial calculations. Particularly because of human carnality and the mysterious workings of providence, God was ultimately in control of which divine secrets were held and released, and to what extent. Astrologers suggested that since this was so, people could – and, indeed, should – explore and make use of the revelatory aids held by Creation and, in particular, by the stars. They implied that since absolute knowledge and certainty was unachievable, even blasphemous – a construct of humankind’s fallen state – knowledge drawn from probabilities, contingencies and uncertainties was the best way in which to access secret, useful information. Finally, the value of uncertain or conjectural knowledge and the ways in which it could be legitimated by religious beliefs was not lost on writers of secret history. Secret historians drew from, and at times utilized, each of the methods of access variously prioritized by physiognomers, shorthand masters and astrologers. They pointed to the signs, physical and otherwise, which exposed the corrupt humanity of political leaders and monarchs and outlined the events of history as coded messages to be collected, unscrambled and used as interpretive tools for the present. If, as various purveyors of arcane knowledge suggested, God’s secrets could be reasonably explored and probed, then those of powerful, yet carnal monarchs could be made known. Since all struggled with human depravity, people could expect it in others (including monarchs) as much as they recognized it in themselves. Therefore, common, accessible ways of knowing through such methods as speculation and gossip could, secret histories implied, be revelatory.

In each of these approaches to arcane knowledge, different authors addressed issues of certainty and conjecture and explored creative ways in which the means of

knowing they provided and encouraged could be tested and verified. However, they did not shy away from – and, in fact, often highlighted – the degree to which the types of access they provided required, much like religious life more generally, a leap of faith. All humans were flawed and in need of tools which provided indirect access to privileged information. In many ways, the implications of this belief reflected developments in elite circles. As Barbara Shapiro has demonstrated, seventeenth-century England's intellectuals and knowledge-makers increasingly questioned the certainty of knowledge. Testing and measuring degrees of probability, rather than studying the causes of facts, increasingly became the bedrock of knowing. In this climate, purveyors of arcane knowledge, particularly those who wished to directly influence public opinion, made bids for the types of testing and measuring tools which could be used. They highlighted the need for their instructive and interpretive expertise. The calculations required of astrologers in particular argued for the necessity of at least some expert assistance. Nevertheless, an interesting implication within each of their works – one which built on Protestant belief in universal depravity and stress on the importance of individual conscience – is that since certainty, strictly defined, was an elusive and perhaps futile goal, so human authority had its limits. When it came to arcane knowledge, formal instruction was not necessarily essential, especially since the requirements for access were already at everyone's disposal. Purveyors of arcane knowledge argued that with the guidance found in their manuals, familiar methods of access based on sign reading, intuitive interpretation, conjecture, speculation and gossip could be further cultivated and adapted to both personal and political contexts.

This work has not been exhaustive in its study of genres and practices which dealt in arcane knowledge. It has not explored, for instance, the practices of dream interpretation, alchemy, magic or the world of secret societies.³ How ingrained and shifting conceptions of human reason and ability, the increased focus on the uncertainty of knowledge and the influences of a burgeoning public sphere both influenced and were shaped by these practices merit further exploration, but are outside the scope of this study. This is in part because they tended not to be as widespread within seventeenth-century England's bustling print market as the works studied here. While aspects of alchemy and dream interpretation were often packaged with physiognomy and astrology treatises (in addition to stand-alone publications), some additional sources of arcane knowledge were not as available for widely accessible public consumption and did not obviously constitute as a popular genre. A number of the authors studied here were interested in additional, experimental ways of creating and accessing knowledge, but were not as public with these interests, instead investigating them privately and sharing them, if at all, with family and acquaintances by manuscript and word of mouth. William Lilly, for instance, entertained interests in such things as scrying and the summoning of angels – interests he shared by way of lettered correspondence with friends and leading antiquaries such as Elias Ashmole. Although his interest in these matters was not exactly secret, they did not figure prominently in his published work. This is likely at least partially due to their especially controversial nature, but also because such subjects did

³ For more on these topics, see, for instance, Ann Marie Plane and Leslie Tuttle, eds., *Dreams, Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Paul Kléber Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Bruce Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Donald R. Dickson, *The Tessera of Antilia: Utopian Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

not lend themselves to practical skills which could be feasibly obtained, let alone taught through perusal of a single manual or treatise. Although hardly uncontroversial, works of physiognomy, astrology, shorthand and secret history were all regularly published and reissued and, as this study has argued, their attraction was largely due to the approachable and practical or immediately applicable ways in which their authors promised access to arcane knowledge.

Physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and styles of writing similar to late Stuart secret histories were not new to the seventeenth century.⁴ They each, however, reaped degrees of popularity not experienced in previous centuries. This was largely due to changes and growth in print culture and readership – developments inseparable from the unique cultural and political circumstances which particularly encouraged the draw of these works. The intensification of religious discord characterised by the Civil Wars and their aftermath, the development of political partisanship, resulting, in the late seventeenth century, in the emergence of contesting political parties and changes in intellectual interests regarding such things as empiricism and human reason created environments of uncertainty in which works which offered access to privileged information and degrees of authority could really flourish. Historians of sixteenth-century books of secrets have argued that in the seventeenth century an increasingly influential “ethics of openness” overrode the foundational allure of “how to” manuals

⁴ Simon Swain, ed. *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); William Eamon, *Secrets of Nature*; Lori Ann Ferrell, “Method as Knowledge: Scribal Theology, Protestantism, and the Reinvention of Shorthand in Sixteenth-Century England,” in *Making Knowledge in Early Modern Europe: Practices, Objects and Texts, 1400-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London: Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Peter Lake, *Bad Queen Bess: Libels, Secret Histories, and the Politics of Publicity in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

which dealt in secret information.⁵ On the contrary, however, the authors studied here adapted the “do-it-yourself” nature of books which dealt in impenetrable sorts of knowledge. They employed uncertainty and creative and accessible interpretive strategies as revelatory and useful approaches to knowledge acquisition and creation. In particular, they drew from and expanded upon the contentious, yet deep-seated tradition of sign reading and encouraged readers to carefully observe, interpret and pay attention to commonplace objects, events, features and traits which could be observed and measured and which all functioned as a kind of mirror through which secret information could be glimpsed, even if only imperfectly.

It is now generally acknowledged that writings about and practices associated with divinatory knowledge remained an important and ever-present part of seventeenth-century England’s shifting (and interconnected) religious, intellectual, political and popular spheres. Various scholars have shown that occult sciences and traditional beliefs were maintained through widespread interest among various levels of society – a cultural feature particularly exemplified by the period’s approaches to science and medicine.⁶ Scholars have also explored different ways in which mentalities were often flexible enough to adapt, shift focus and meet the challenges posed by changing social conditions,

⁵ See, for instance, Eamon, *Science and Secrets*, 253.

⁶ See, for instance, Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971); Paul Klèber Monod, *Solomon’s Secret Arts*; Peter Harrison, Michael Hunter and Annabel Gregory, ed., *An Astrological Diary of the Seventeenth Century: Samuel Jeake of Rye 1652-1699* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic*; Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1987); Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Andrew Wear, “Medical Practice in Late Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century England: Continuity and Union,” in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, eds., Roger French and Andrew Wear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

intellectual currents and market demand.⁷ This study emphasizes how the alluring world of secret and enigmatic wisdom was not confined to sources of knowledge recognized as “occult”. Instead, it permeated, drove and sometimes put a face to forces and developments which have come to characterise England’s seventeenth century, including the emerging public sphere. As Daniel Jütte has shown, secrets fascinated, inspired and energized early modern communities and, far from being remote and inaccessible in everyday life, most things labeled as secret were daily exchanged, documented and displayed.⁸

The authors which populate this study can be understood as a part of the routine and reachable “economy of secrets” described by Jütte. They did not necessarily create a culture sensitive to the daily reality and importance of secret information: it was already a familiar and enticing aspect of seventeenth-century life. The ultimate inaccessibility of the secrets in which they dealt, however, was an essential feature of their production and appeal. Human intentions and inclinations, scriptural enigmas and revelations, celestial messages and future fates, and political intrigues and court conspiracies were each areas of interest that were wrapped in mystery and, for the majority of people, could never be fully uncovered. Their unreachable character was due primarily to the inaccessible workings of divine providence and, in part, to the corrupt and dissimulative (ie. intellectually stunted) nature of humans. While transparency and openness (associated as it increasingly was with the elite, masculine and “reliable”) was increasingly touted as the goal amongst intellectual, religious and political contemporaries, authors of

⁷ See, for instance, Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500-1800* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979); Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning Folk in English History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

⁸ Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy: Jews, Christians and the Economy of Secrets, 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 224.

physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history reminded readers that they were rarely the reality; rather, a more realistic view acknowledged and embraced the pervasiveness of hidden, enigmatic occurrences.

Secrets inspired investigation and contemplation and were thus argued to be essential to spiritual self-improvement and informed engagement with the wider supernatural, natural and political worlds. Reflecting the shifting assumptions regarding human ability and drawing from debates which increasingly questioned the certainty of knowledge, such writers variously argued that secrets – and their bedfellow, uncertainty – were important to the exercise of reason. They implied that since secrecy and uncertainty necessitated the weighing and testing of probabilities, intuitive insights, assumptions and conjectures based in the interpretation of significant signs and patterns – particularly those which could potentially be accessed by many – warranted a seat at the table. Works on arcane knowledge were not just about uncovering secrets, but about maintaining ways of knowing, or methods of accessing information which were less socially limited than those increasingly favoured by the intellectual elite. They promised revelation or “insider information” to their readers, but at their core, as their emphasis on impenetrability and the need for indirect or speculative means suggests, they valued the perpetuation of the arcane. Indeed, an interesting subtext within these works – one which caused concern among, and created fodder for, their critics – is that readers could learn to be secretive. Shorthand, for instance, easily morphed into secret writing, or cryptography. Jeremiah Rich’s *Charactery* (1646), for example, mentioned shorthand’s ability to be secretive as one of its primary benefits. “[I]f any would set down anything that he would not have another know; if he set it down in these characters, it is usefull for himself but a mystery

to others.”⁹ Similarly, although marketed as a tool with which to uncover sins inherent to one’s self and others, the information physiognomy provided could be used to dissimulate more effectively.

Interest in secrets and complex relationships between the hidden and the revealed, the certain and the uncertain are not unique to the seventeenth century. A key to the popularity of secret information as provided by the period’s works of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history, however, was that in a nation especially divided by religious and political strife, people of various stripes could make practical use of them. In this context, as scholars of the history of the book and the culture of readership have discussed, “practical” ranged from hands-on practices that could be put to daily use to matter that inspired contemplation and discussion.¹⁰ Although the authors often had easily discernible political or pecuniary motives, audiences were free to cherry-pick or adapt what they found useful regardless of the authors’ motivations. The astrological skills and information provided by the politically opportunistic but essentially republican William Lilly, for instance, were sought after by people with widely divergent political and religious affiliations. People even came to him hoping for unbiased information regarding where to best place their allegiance. In 1644, for instance, someone asked him to consult the skies for information on “whether best to adhere to king or parliament.”¹¹ Lilly’s clients, like those who employed the practice of shorthand, included high-profile Royalists and Parliamentarians, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Independents.

⁹ Jeremiah Rich, *Charactery* (1646), 1.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Jennifer Richards, “Useful Books: Reader Vernacular Regimens in Sixteenth-Century England” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 73, no. 2 (April 2012): 247-271; William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

¹¹ Bodleian, MS Ashmole, 184, 3.

Writers of physiognomy, astrology, shorthand and secret histories were sensitive to the “habits of mind” or “mentalities” which informed the comprehension of their readers and piqued their interest.¹² These were habits which, as scholarship into the prevalence of “wonders” has demonstrated, tended to perceive things in emblematic, intuitive ways and which, as historians such as Bernard Capp and Malcolm Gaskill have shown, often relied on the prevalence of “local knowledge” or rumour for determining the likelihood of events.¹³ Understandings of the Fall, carnality, grace, spiritual hunger and providence were an essential aspect of how early modern communities understood the world and, in appealing to these themes, purveyors of arcane knowledge shaped information and instruction in opportune ways.¹⁴ Furthermore, widespread lack of confidence in the ability of humans to conclusively penetrate divine or otherwise arcane mysteries legitimated their exploration and substantiated the need for tools or practices which could provide some degree of access. Seventeenth-century writers of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history were aided in their aims by the reality of a widening, literate market increasingly accustomed to interaction with various forms of print.¹⁵

¹² The “habits of mind” concept is adopted from William E Burns, *An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics and Providence in England 1657-1727* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 8.

¹³ Lorrain Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Alexandra Walsham, *Providence*; Leif Dixon, *Practical Predestinarians in England c. 1590-1640* (London: Routledge, 2016); Arnold Hunt, *The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences, 1590-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jonathan Willis, ed., *Sin an Salvation in Reformation England* (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁵ Jason Peacey, *Print and Public Politics in the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90.

Historians have noted the increased degree to which broad swathes of seventeenth-century people were politically engaged. As Kevin Sharpe has shown, many people who interacted with print media did not do so solely for aesthetic or sentimental reasons, but, rather, in order to reinforce and further their understanding of themselves as political examiners and agents. They read politically, came to different conclusions regardless of their shared cultural experiences and manufactured meaning for themselves in ways that made sense to them.¹⁶ In her study of the reading and notetaking habits of two seventeenth-century gentlewomen (Elizabeth Freke and Margaret Boscaswen) Elaine Leong has demonstrated how published herbals were digested and reorganized and how the information found within was reimagined according to personal interest and application.¹⁷ As this suggests, people were accustomed to experimenting with and adjusting received wisdom to better meet their needs and match their personal experiences. The tradition of putting books to use and testing things out for oneself, in other words, was alive and well. These are aspects of readership which the writings analyzed in this study sought to both harness and reinforce. Many of them implied that, although people might need clues, prompts and instruction, they possessed the internal resources to access, and experiment with, the arcane. Access to information considered secret and uncertain promised to widen the boundaries of knowing and authority and this was a large part of the power and appeal of arcane knowledge as presented by the works examined in this study.

¹⁶ Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Elaine Leong, “‘Herbals she persueth’: reading medicine in early modern England,” *Renaissance Studies* vol. 28 no. 4 (2014), 556 – 578.

This study considers a significant aspect of the public sphere to be the influence accorded to the opinions, insights and judgements of ordinary people, as well as recognition of the increasing reality that public opinion mattered. With this in mind, secret information, uncertainty and inclination, as opposed to transparency, confidence and rationality, were essential to the construction of the public sphere. They were essential not exclusively because the intrigues of secret occurrences – be they scientific, religious or political – inspired curiosity and inquiry (although they did), but because they could be added to and absorbed into the intellectual repertoire of regular readers. Seventeenth-century English authors of physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history differed in their immediate concerns and reasons for writing; there were also, obviously, differences between the genres. They all, however, explored the contours, limits and creative access points of arcane knowledge for ordinary readers and promised widespread entry into otherwise hidden worlds.

The power and pull of arcane knowledge and the wish to access information believed to be secret, is not unique to seventeenth century England; to this day, similar impulses continue to flourish and to feed the full gamut of harmless, entertaining, subversive and sometimes dangerous theories and conspiracies.¹⁸ Although, in the seventeenth century, different ways of knowing, including what we would now consider pseudo-sciences, still coexisted and vied for predominance, the Enlightenment idealisation and prioritization of empirical experimentation has since relegated knowledge based upon secrets, hearsay, personal intuition, conjecture and the identification and interpretation of significant signs to the realms of pseudohistory,

¹⁸ See, for instance, Ronald H. Fritze, *Invented Knowledge: False History, Fake Science and Pseudo-Religions* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009).

crackpot theories and hoaxes (significantly, the preface “crypto”; i.e., secret/hidden, is applied to such endeavours as the search for Yeti/Sasquatch and the Loch Ness Monster: “cryptozoology”). The role of secret or arcane knowledge within the public sphere, however, has proven more difficult to eradicate or sideline. Brian Cowan, for instance, has noted the degree to which the “politics of disclosure” or “paranoid style of politics” associated with secret histories, and particularly liberal Whig partisan politics has also been, and continues to be, an enduring characteristic of conservative and political thinking.¹⁹ The study of seventeenth-century interests in arcane knowledge and its public uses resonates with current contemporary interests in “fake news.” It provides a context for investigations into the susceptibility of rational discourse – the foundational ideal of the public sphere – to political demagoguery and populism. The “do-it-yourself” nature of seventeenth-century writings on physiognomy, shorthand, astrology and secret history helped create not only the informed and active political citizen, but the narrowly informed, partisan and “paranoid” one as well.

¹⁹ Brian Cowan, “The History of Secret Histories,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* vol. 81 no. 1 (2018), 151.

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