

The “Science of the Countenance”: Full-Bodied Physiognomy and the Cosmography of  
the Self in Seventeenth-Century England

by

Christa Hunfeld  
B.A., Dalhousie University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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**Supervisory Committee**

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## **Abstract**

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Physiognomy is generally assumed to be, and has been historicized as, the science of judging human character according to the features of the face. However, the type of physiognomy favoured by seventeenth-century English authors was one which adapted the Aristotelian claim that physiognomy be a full-body study. This project explores how physiognomic focus on the entire body – from the forehead, fingers and feet to the breast, belly and back – was shaped by contemporary religious and “scientific” legitimating claims, and how it interacted with the century’s anxieties regarding disorder and the self. The implicit suggestion that few bodies and the souls which helped shape them were perfectly symmetrical and, by extension, virtuous, illustrated human variety and depravity and stressed the need for self subordination. Only through reason and God’s grace, it was argued, could humans moderate the interconnected and essentializing influences of sin, the stars and the humours, and thereby embody the godly values of truth, virtue and harmony. The full-bodied practice of seventeenth-century physiognomy simultaneously emphasized human uniqueness and God’s omnipotence, and was both a part and product of predominant tensions and mentalities.

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## **Dedication**

Voor Papa.

Ik hou van jou.

## Introduction

### “The nature of Man”: Sin, Moderation and God

Described as “that most Noble, Ingenious and Useful Science”<sup>1</sup> which revealed “Mans Inwards by his Outwards,” physiognomy promised to provide answers to the age old adage: “know thyself.”<sup>2</sup> Strikingly, nearly every physiognomic work on how to decipher the self cited a classical story in which a likeness of Socrates’ face was read by a famous physiognomer. To the indignation of Socrates’ students, their master – “the most nasty and unhandsome of all men living”<sup>3</sup> – was revealed (in the prying eyes of the physiognomer) to be “a great leachour, a craftye fellow, subtile and given to all wyckednes.”<sup>4</sup> Socrates surprised his students by confessing – “to the wonder of all” – that contrary to what they knew of his current virtue, he had been judged correctly: the physiognomer had “said true.”<sup>5</sup> While he was indeed prone to such wicked inclinations of character, stated the philosopher, he had overcome them through grace, education and reason. To seventeenth-century tellers of this tale, Socrates’ “natural self” illustrated the degree to which all people, even the most seemingly virtuous, were innately sinful. It also illustrated that “reason and grace may bridle nature or turne the provocations thereof unto

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Saunders, *Palmistry, the secrets thereof disclosed; or a familiar, easie, and new method, whereby to judge of the most general accidents of man's life from the lines of the hand with all its dimentions and significations. Also many particulars added, discovering the safety and danger of women in child-bed. With some choice observations of physiognomy; and the moles of the body, and other delightful conclusions. The fourth time imprinted, and much enlarged by the author: Richard Saunders, author of the former book of chyromancy and physiognomy* (London, 1676), 135.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie, metoposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive-significations* (London, 1671), sig. b2v. All following citations are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hill, *A brief and most pleasant epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie, gathered out of Aristotle, Rasis, Formica, Loxius, Phylemon, Palemon, Consiliator, Morbeth the Cardinal and others many more, by that learned chyrgian Cocles: and englished by Thomas Hyll Londoner* (London, 1556), v.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jackson, *An exact collection of the works of Doctor Jackson* (London, 1654), 3135.



goodness.” Just as “the cholericke or ireful man maye eyther by grace repressse hys lust or els use it well in correctying of vices,” so “the malicious man maye by grace asswage hys lust, or els turne it against the wicked.”<sup>6</sup> No matter how much human reason and, especially, God’s grace had aided Socrates in overcoming his nature, his body – which had been singularly “stamped” and “signed” by God’s own hand – stood as a permanent reminder of his unique imperfections and depraved identity.



**Figure 1: Socrates<sup>7</sup>**

The first physiognomic treatise to be “Englysh’d” was Thomas Hill’s *A brief and most pleasant epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie*, from 1556. Significantly, the interpretation of the Socrates story found there emphasized the need to consider all the various marks and signifying features of the entire body – from foreheads, chins, necks and shoulders to hands, pubic hair, thighs and ankles – before drawing conclusions about

<sup>6</sup> Hill, *most pleasant epitomye*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Caspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy; calculated to extend the knowledge and love of mankind*, vol. 1, trans, Henry Hunter (London, 1797), 150.

a person's character. Hill suggested that, had Socrates's physiognomer looked at more than a likeness of the famous philosopher's face, a much more complete physiognomic judgment would have been made: "one thyng I warne (as I my selfe am warned) 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 deceyved. I meane we shall not bee decyved to know the trueth of the naturall disposicion, and yet we may fayle of the mans condicions, which Socrates hymselfe well declared."<sup>8</sup> While (as Hill's warning implies) the "naturall disposicions" of humans were innately sinful, and therefore somewhat simple to determine, "mans condicions," or the degrees to which humans had sought to alter their sinfulness, were likely to be deceitful and dissimulative. Truth about the self lay in its sinful state.

The nature of the early modern self has been studied by numerous scholars, who have approached the topic with an eye to such categories as religion, gender, and, to a lesser degree, national identities, and by means of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century autobiography, fiction, philosophy, exploration and cultural revolutions.<sup>9</sup> Many of these studies focus on how early understandings of corporate and mutable selfhood shifted into more modern notions of fixed, essential and individual identities. Amelia Rauser, for instance, remarks that modern notions of selfhood – identifiable by their "valorization of private authenticity, individualism and consistency across time" and their belief in a 'gold nugget' of identity deep within" – "rather suddenly replaced older, more flexible notions

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Ulricke Tancke, *'Bethinke Thy Selfe' in Early Modern England: Writing Women's Identities* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010); Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591-1791* (San Francisco: Stanford University Press, 1996); Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Jürgen Schlaeger, "Parallel Explorations: Exploring the Self in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," in *Mapping the Self: Space, Identity, Discourse in British Auto/Biography*, ed. Frédéric Regard (Saint-Étienne: Saint-Étienne University Press, 2003): 33-55.

of identity” around the late eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> In their respective studies, Charles Taylor and Ian Watt track developing discourses of individualism both among the intellectual elite, and within the broader culture.<sup>11</sup> Watt describes individualism as involving “a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual’s intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought,” and notes that in their focus on the individual, eighteenth-century novels were markedly different from their predecessors.<sup>12</sup> Rather than relying on conventional characters and story arcs, he argues, eighteenth-century novels concentrated on the personal particulars of their subjects’ lives and experiences. His findings, and the majority of such studies, tend to agree with Conal Condren’s recent revision of Renaissance self-fashioning. Warning against imposing anachronistic conceptions of identity on early modern assumptions of the self, he illustrates that early modern selves were characterized more by socially prescribed roles, obligations, or “offices” rather than autonomous individualities. In the period under discussion, “it is the subordination of any postulated ‘self’ that is likely to be deemed praiseworthy.”<sup>13</sup>

Due to its focus on the self, physiognomy provides an interesting historical landscape for exploration into early modern notions of identity. Martin Porter, for instance, has found that the empirical battles which physiognomy, as an “occult” science, had to contend with were believed to be worth the fight largely because self-knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> Amelia Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992); Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957).

<sup>12</sup> Watt, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Colan Condren, “Shaping Identity in Early Modern England: Historicism and the Problem of Renaissance ‘Self Fashioning,’” in Philippa Kelly, ed., *The Touch of the Real: Essays in Early Modern Culture in Honour of Stephen Greenblatt* (Crawley: UWA, 2002), 116.

was the science's principal object.<sup>14</sup> Roy Porter and Dror Wahrman both argue that physiognomy reveals the degree to which seventeenth-century conceptions of identity were drastically different from those found a century later.<sup>15</sup> Seventeenth-century physiognomers, notes Porter, read bodies for quintessential types rather than essential identities, and are therefore comparable to Watt's description of early novelists. However, Porter's findings in this regard have been revised by Barbara Benedict and Juliana Schiesari who suggest that seventeenth-century writings already display a degree of essentialism usually associated with more modern notions of identity. Schiesari, for instance, argues that "there can be no question that physiognomy played a crucial role in the construction of race as well as gender."<sup>16</sup>

Recent studies into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century caricature and facial expression, as well as works such as Simon Swain's *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul*, Christopher Rivers's *Face Value*, Sharrona Pearls's *About Faces*, Kay Flavell's "Mapping Faces," Roy Porter's "Making Faces" and Barbara Benedict's "Reading Faces," all demonstrate how both the science of physiognomy and its representation in historical contexts have become studies primarily of the face.<sup>17</sup> In her historical

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: University Press, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Roy Porter, "Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England," *Etudes Anglaises* 38:4 (1985): 385-396; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Rauser; 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; Simon Swain ed., *Seeing The Face, Seeing The Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy From Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Harvard University

exploration of physiognomy “through time,” for instance, Pearl tellingly defines the science as “the study of facial traits and their relationship to character.”<sup>18</sup> Conversely, I will emphasize the degree to which physiognomy in seventeenth-century England was a full-bodied study. Raymond Martin and John Barresi explain that in the seventeenth century, “the self had been a soul,” whereas, “by the end of the eighteenth century it had become a mind.”<sup>19</sup> The full-body physiognomy studied here is suggestive of how the soul and the various influences which affected it were perceived, and exploration into how and why seventeenth-century physiognomers focussed on the entire body, and how that focus interacted with contemporary anxieties, reveals both continuities and changes in early modern notions of the self. Full-bodied physiognomy displayed essential and unique identities generally attributed to more modern notions of identity, and the revealing ways in which this uniqueness and essentialism was framed and understood is worthy of more explicit attention.

The science of physiognomy has deep classical roots which penetrated various aspects of early modern life including (among others) moral philosophy, art and medicine.<sup>20</sup> Although Martin Porter’s detailed work on Europe’s engagement with this “ubiquitous subject” may be the most extensive study of early modern physiognomy, several studies have touched on the science’s presence in early modern England. In

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Press, 2010); Kay Flavell, “Mapping Faces: National Physiognomies as Cultural Prediction,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 18 (1994): 8-22; Porter, “Making Faces”; Benedict.

<sup>18</sup> Pearl, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 2.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Peter Harrison, “The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth-Century Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 50 no. 3 (1998): 463-484; 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).

*Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy*, for instance, Sybille Baumbach explores expressions of physiognomy on the Elizabethan stage, and, in particular, suspicions that humans were more apt to use the practice to obfuscate rather than reveal true natures.<sup>21</sup> As works by Juliet McMaster, Josh Epstein, Shearer West, Lucy Harley, Melissa Percival and Sharrona Pearl indicate, physiognomy and questions surrounding subjectivity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has attracted the largest amount of academic attention.<sup>22</sup> This is largely due to its representation in literature from the period, but mostly because of the lavishly illustrated and widely popular late eighteenth-century writings by a Swiss minister named Johannes Caspar Lavater which, as Percival notes, almost singlehandedly resuscitated physiognomy's drowning scholastic reputation.<sup>23</sup>

In her study on character and facial expression, Melissa Percival explores mid-eighteenth-century French physiognomy, an area which scholarly focus on the late eighteenth century and Lavater and his legacy has left "somewhat neglected."<sup>24</sup> In a somewhat similar vein, this project aims to bring a concerted focus back to full-body physiognomy within seventeenth-century England and to ways in which early modern selves, as depicted in the period's physiognomy texts, were understood in relation to God, human depravity, the forces of the planets and humours and society at large. In these texts, the term self is synonymous with sin and the passions, or emotions fed by sin. Subordination of the self for the larger public and social good was largely seen in the

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<sup>21</sup> Sybille Baumbach, *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (Penrith: Humanities- Ebooks, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Juliet McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Josh Epstein, "Neutral Physiognomy: The Unreadable Faces of *Middlemarch*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2008): 131-148; Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2001); Melissa Percival, *The Appearance of Character: Physiognomy and Facial Expression in Eighteenth-Century France* (Leeds: W.S. Maney & Sons, 1999); West; Pearl.

<sup>23</sup> Melissa Percival and Graeme Tytler, eds., *Physiognomy in Profile: Lavater's Impact on European Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>24</sup> Percival, *Appearance of Character*, 4.

context of mitigating the irreversible effects of the Fall and moderating the personalized, external influences to which everyone was subject. Therefore, the physiognomic search for the self, rather than celebrating human faculties, was to reveal how frail and dependent on God's mercy humans actually were. Significantly, complete subordination of the sinful self was actually impossible without divine assistance. As W. Ayloffe's *Government of the Passions* argued at the close of the century, human reason could govern the passions, but only through divine assistance, by grace, could sin be successfully subordinated, or transmuted "into so many Virtues."<sup>25</sup>

Rather than transformation or redemption of the self – which was outside of human ability – the emphasis was on moderation of the self. Human reason was an "emanation from the Divinity" and the primary faculty which set humans apart from the rest of Creation.<sup>26</sup> 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"<sup>27</sup> ensured that calls to human reason still emphasized human frailty and dependence on God's mercy. Peter Harrison argues that the "historical event" (as opposed to mere theological doctrine) of the human Fall from grace was an essential aspect of how seventeenth-century scholars discussed and understood the passions. Through the reality of the Fall, "seventeenth-century thinkers [linked] the mastery of the

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<sup>25</sup> W. Ayloffe, *The government of the passions according to the rules of reason and religion viz, love, hatred, desire, eschewing, hope, despair, fear, anger, delight, sorrow, &c.* (London, 1700), 14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

passions to the scientific enterprise and the quest for dominion over nature.”<sup>28</sup> Within seventeenth-century physiognomy texts, mastery of the passions equated to dominion over the natural self and was nearly inseparable from astrological and humoral influences; moderation by reason, dependence on divine assistance, and recognition of God’s omnipotence were what knowledge of the self instructed.



Figure 2: Adam and Eve<sup>29</sup>

Physiognomic focus on the entire body was an integral part of this process. The moderation or “mediocrity” which physiognomers cited as the essential quality of the rational self was complemented by using moderation in making physiognomic judgements. Solely deciphering the face, or a single physical “note,” would be too impulsive: “I warn thee to use moderation and do nothing rashly ... there are so many things whereby we may be deceived, as the wisdom and circumspection of the man, the

<sup>28</sup> Peter Harrison, “The Fall, the Passions and Dominion over Nature,” in *The Soft Underbelly of Reason: The Passions in the Seventeenth Century* ed., Stephen Gaukroger (New York: Routledge, 1998), 49-115.

<sup>29</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Legacy: or, his golden cabinet of secrets opened* (London, 1699), 19.



dispensation of God, and our uncertain judgement.”<sup>30</sup> Failing to heed various signs would assure that “you shall never Prognosticate, or fore-shew any truth ... many have erred and have been foully deceived, who thinking themselves sure, have been (As they say) sixteen feet off from the mark or prick.”<sup>31</sup> More importantly, physiognomers often reminded readers that they were made in God's image and that, by studying the entire body and, through that, the various workings of the soul, a degree of knowledge about God could be reached. Few bodies, when examined closely, were in perfect moderation or symmetry, which emphasized the degree to which few if any were virtuous. The various discordant parts of the flesh, and the forces which governed them, acted as a reminder of human frailty, while the “infinite” and unique marks, lines and features God had etched on each body emphasized His omnipotence. God was harmony and truth, and to draw near to God meant to overcome the flesh and to physically display and embody such divine attributes.

Physiognomy was argued to be essential to everyone. In 1653, Richard Saunders wrote that “it is a science very necessary for *Ministers* and *Physicians*, in their visitation of the sick,”<sup>32</sup> while another writer remarked that “There are few men of what quality or condition soever, but are interested in things of this nature.”<sup>33</sup> Physiognomy was for “the Divine, the Philosopher, the curers both of the body and the soule, I meane the Preacher and Physitian: the good Christian that attendeth to mortification, & the prudent ciuill gentleman that procureth a gratefull conuersation, may reape some commodity touching

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<sup>30</sup> Johannes Indagine, *The book of palmistry[sic] and physiognomy being brief introductions, both natural, pleasant and delectable, unto the art of chiromancy, or manual divination and physiognomy, with circumstances upon the faces of the signes*, trans., Fabian Withers (London, 1676), sigs. A5r-A5v.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, sigs. I2r-I2v.

<sup>32</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. (a2)r.

<sup>33</sup> Marck De Vulson, *The Court of Curiositie. Wherein, by the ALGEBRA and LOT, the most intricate Questions are Resolved, and NOCTURNAL DREAMS AND VISIONS Explained, According to the Doctrine of the Antients. To which is also added, a Treatise of PHYSIOGNOMY*, trans., J.G. Gent. (London, 1669), 109.

their professions, & in fine, euery man may by this come to a knowledge of himself, which ought to be preferred before all treasured and riches.”<sup>34</sup> Despite such suggestions of universal interest, England never boasted a particularly large body of vernacular physiognomy literature.<sup>35</sup> However, publication numbers 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 publishing, the practice still “was a central, if not all pervasive phenomenon” amongst all levels of early modern society.<sup>36</sup>

Of the various physiognomy pamphlets which did reach English readers, few were original. The writings of Thomas Hill, Richard Saunders and John Evelyn, for instance, were all either compilations or complete plagiarizations of classical works by men like Aristotle, Cocles, and Rasis, while other popular works were translations of French writings. English translators felt that certain physiognomic texts would resonate with the English public, and they were proven correct by the number of editions in which some of their texts appeared. Fabian Withers’s translation of Johanne Indagine’s *Book of Palmestry [sic] and Physiognomy* was published at least eleven times between 1558 and 1683, while William Warde’s translation of Richard Roussat’s physiognomic writings ran through at least twelve editions between 1592 and 1686.<sup>37</sup> Richard Saunders, who can be considered as England’s most avid advocate of physiognomy, attracted wealthy buyers with his expensive and highly illustrated *Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metaposcopie*

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in General* (London, 1620), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 84-100. Martin Porter notes that due to the pervasiveness of physiognomic type thought, it can be difficult to define a “treatise on physiognomy.” He suggests, however, that between 1600 and 1700 there were approximately fifty-six works printed within England that can be clearly identified as physiognomic.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Indagine; Richard Roussat, *The most excellent, profitable, and pleasant book of the famous doctor, and expert astrologian; Arcandam, or, Alcandrin To find the fatal destiny, constellation, complexion & natural inclination of every many & child by hisbirth [sic]. With an addition of physiognomy, very pleasant to read*, trans., William Warde (London, 1644).

which was first published in 1653, and 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.<sup>38</sup>

Wide public familiarity with the science's basic concepts is apparent in Baumbach's study of physiognomy representations on the early modern stage and in the prevalence of popular proverbs. In his 1697 *Digression concerning Physiognomy*, for instance, John Evelyn considered "trite and vulgar sayings" as "gathered from the long and constant Observations of so many" and "confirmed by much Experience.": "The Red is Witty, the Brown 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."<sup>39</sup>

Also suggestive of the study's permeation of seventeenth-century English culture was its role in the period's public religious controversies. At the close of the century, Charles Leslie, a non-juring Church of Ireland clergyman (who was both anti-Quaker and anti-Latitudinarian) supported an ex-Society of Friends member named Francis Bugg in a pamphlet war Bugg had initiated with his former Friends. In addressing arguments between Bugg and the Friend George Whitehead, Leslie implied that the Quaker practice of discerning between saints, devils and apostates by their looks bordered on

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<sup>38</sup> Martin Porter, "Saunders, Richard (1613–1675)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals, ancient and modern together with some account of heads and effigies of illustrious and famous persons ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (London, 1697), 300.

physiognomy. He exclaimed “if *Envious* and *Fallen Countenances* be such sure Marks of Devils, I wou’d advise some *Friends* to go to the *Dancing-School* and learn a more Gentile and Graceful *Meen*: For it wou’d be a sad thing to be made a Devil of, for *scrouling* down ones *Head*, or their *Hat* hanging over their *Eyes*! ... Alas! Poor *George*! Is the Infallible *Quaker* dwindled down to a meer *Gypsie*, or Paltry *Fortune-Teller*, to nothing but a little Skill in *Physiognomy*!”<sup>40</sup> Stressing the fallibility of physiognomic judgement in truly rooting out deceit, Leslie continued “Ah! *George*! What a blessed Spirit wouldst *Thee* have thought *Satan*, if *Thee* hadst seen him, when he was Transform’d into an *Angel of Light*! ... smaller *Juglers* than he, can easily deceive these Infallible *Physiognomists*.” The Quaker Joseph Wyeth responded to Bugg and Leslie’s criticisms with scripture. Stating that “there often are exterior marks of inward wickedness,” he quoted from *Isaiah*: “*The Shew of their Countenance doth witness against them*: and in the 16<sup>th</sup> vers. the Lord numbers up, among the exterior marks of inward wickedness, *wanton Eyes, mincing and tinkling with their Feet*.” Wyeth concluded, “Reader, is it possible for one [Leslie] who so profanely ridicules, both the Inward Discerning, and the Outward Marks of Secret iniquity, to advance the great end of good Life and Conversation? No, such ridiculing is in direct opposition to them, and is destructive to Exemplary Modesty.”<sup>41</sup>

This altercation is illustrative of the Janus-faced quality of seventeenth-century physiognomy. Leslie’s criticism is suggestive of how physiognomy was increasingly

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Leslie, *The snake in the grass, or, Satan transform’d into an angel of light discovering the deep and unsuspected subtilty which is couched under the pretended simplicity of many of the principal leaders of those people call’d Quakers* (London, 1697), 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Wyeth, *Anguis flagellatus, or, A switch for the snake being an answer to the third and last edition of The snake in the grass : wherein the author’s injustice and falshood, both in quotation and story, are discover’d and obviated, and the truth doctrinally deliver’d by us, stated and maintained in opposition to his misrepresentation and perversion* (London, 1699), 106.

considered – by certain religious figures and leading members of the “new science” – to be a vulgar and irrational superstition. In response to such sneers, physiognomers argued that, since the term “science” was synonymous with knowledge and truth, then physiognomy should be regarded as the most revealing of the sciences, for it furnished expertise “in the knowledge and composure of Man, to which all other Sciences are subservient.”<sup>42</sup> Saunders noted that, since a familiarity with “the nature of man” was “the principal duty and labour of men,” then physiognomy ought “to have the most welcome desired acceptance; as also the most grateful reception, amongst Mortals.”

While Wyeth’s use of scripture as a means for substantiating physiognomic truth resembled the ways in which leading physiognomers also sought to establish the truth of their controversial science. Additionally, his description of physiognomy as a study which incorporated everything from the eyes to the feet and, importantly, his emphasis on how it revealed “inward wickedness” and “secret iniquities,” is illustrative of the science’s emphasis on the sinfulness of every individual. Wyeth’s mention of “exemplary Modesty” can be read as criticism that Leslie – unlike Socrates – had failed in moderating his inclinations and had let his sinful self subsume his reason.

### **The “Science of the Countenance”**

“Countenance” is a slippery term which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines in a number of ways. The definition most applicable to the term’s usage in seventeenth-century physiognomy texts is “Bearing, demeanour, comportment; behaviour, conduct.”

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<sup>42</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. (a2)v.

Aristotle used the term “countenance” in his warning against relying solely on facial physiognomy, which he found to be “defective in more than one respect.” Different characters can easily share a facial expression and “a man may at times wear an expression which is not normally his: for instance a morose person will now and again spend an enjoyable day and assume a cheerful countenance.”<sup>43</sup> In his use of the term “countenance,” however, Richard Saunders referenced Aristotle’s insistence on “physiognomating” by “movements, gestures of the body, colour, characteristic facial expression, the growth of the hair, the smoothness of the skin, the voice, condition of the flesh, the parts of the body, and the build of the body as a whole.”<sup>44</sup> In the 1676 edition of *Palmistry: The Secrets thereof Disclosed* 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, saith Aristotle, are pregnant & External Notes and Signs of the Internal Cogitations, all which are contained within the verity of Physiognomy.”<sup>45</sup>

At the time of Saunders’s writing, the term “countenance” was already in the process of shifting to its predominant definition of “the face, visage.” By 1763, John Clubbe 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, in his day, 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

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<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, “Physiognomics,” trans. T. Loveday and E.S. Forster, in *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* vol.1, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1237. While early modern physiognomists confidently attributed this classical work to Aristotle, scholars have recently questioned its authorship and choose instead to refer to it as a pseudo-Aristotelian work.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 1239.

<sup>45</sup> Saunders, *Palmistry*, 135.

same thing.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, in his 1747 lecture to the Royal Society, James Parsons stated that “People now-a-days mean no more by the former [physiognomy] than what regards the Countenance.”<sup>47</sup> Tellingly, his *Human Physiognomy Explained* dealt solely with the muscular motions of the face.

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. For instance, he uses the term in different ways, sometimes associating it with the face only, and other times allowing it to include the conditions of the entire body. He also cites a story about Hippocrates in which the Greek physician reputedly saw a young woman walk by him one morning. 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 with an admonition that, despite such instances, there must be more to physiognomy and the work of its practitioners than simple face reading: “there seems more in the Artist than one would think should be detected by bare inspection of the Countenance only.”<sup>48</sup>

While the sense that the face or visage could be enough for physiognomic diagnoses hovers over physiognomy’s history, the science’s alignment in seventeenth-century England with interpretations and controversies surrounding the effects of the Fall, astrology and humoral medicine, as well as its intersection with ways in which social

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<sup>46</sup> John Clubbe, *Physiognomy; being a sketch only of a larger work upon the same plan: wherein the different tempers, passions, and manners of men will be particularly considered* (London, 1763), 5.

<sup>47</sup> James Parsons, *Human Physiognomy Explained in the Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion. For the Year MDCCXLVI. Read before the Royal Society* (London, 1747), i.

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn, 304.

disorder was described and understood, all reinforced its focus on the body and influenced its descriptions of the sinful self. Seventeenth-century physiognomy was a full-bodied study in every sense of the word. It explored every feature, limb, wrinkle, mole and gesture, and argued that concentration of each of these physical “notes” were necessary to the complete understanding of the whole. It argued that decoding each mysterious mark was a means to moderation and bringing everything into alignment and beautiful balance. It was full-bodied in that it outlined the degree to which each unique self was but a small part of all of Creation and, therefore, a reflection of God’s omnipotence. To the current student of England’s seventeenth-century, physiognomy is a full bodied study in that it reveals dominant mentalities, anxieties over dissimulation and disorder, and through each of these, early modern understandings of the unique yet social self.



Figure 3: Man, Creation and a treatise on "the whole art of chiromancy, physiognomy, metaposcopy, and astrology."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> J.S., 174.



## Chapter One

### “Diffused through the whole body”: Physiognomy and “Truth”

In *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of physiognomy* (1613), Thomas Hill related a story of how the medieval physiognomer named Michael Scotus reputedly came upon his skill in metaprosopy (forehead divination). Scotus approached a “Jew” whose ability to “physiognomate” by lines in the forehead allowed him to divine “matters past and to come. He also could utter of riches, honors and calamities: yea of the fortune and misfortune both of the father and mothers, and many other matters besides.” When Scotus asked the man to share the secrets of his ability, the man refused, prompting Scotus to draw him skillfully into debate in order to extract information. After asking the right questions, Scotus soon deciphered that, save for reading forehead lines, the “Jew” was actually ignorant of physiognomy. Unlike a judicious and moderate physiognomer, the “Jew” relied on one aspect of the body alone, and unlike a credible man of science, he presumed to keep his knowledge hidden.<sup>1</sup>

With his greater knowledge of the whole art of physiognomy, and through much industry, labour and practice, Scotus was able to transform the mysterious man’s “worthy jewell, and most rare secret” into “an infallible or most certaine truth.”<sup>2</sup> Whereas the “Jew” had been suspiciously secretive with his limited skill, Scotus improved it and published it alongside his physiognomic writings for all to see and study. In this scenario, the “Jew” is representative of mysterious knowledge, which only the most persistent and learned of scholars can decode and perfect. The revelations which the “Jew”, like each

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hill, *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of physiognomy orderly uttering all the special parts of man, from the head to the foot* (London, 1613), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

human body, held onto so tightly, needed to be applied to the right lines of rational questioning and debate in order for them to become truths. The truths of the mysterious man's traditional skill only reached their full potential through the mediation of a scholar with a willingness to test and honestly display them. Hill's tale of Scotus illustrates the role of the "rational" man in questioning and revealing mysterious truths while simultaneously suggesting that there are limits to human knowledge. God's universe is so grand that there will always be the likelihood of stumbling across a new mystery to marvel at and to attempt to comprehend.

Hill's mention of Scotus also highlighted the degree to which physiognomy had a long and learned history: "The observation and science of Signs, Marks, and Moles of the body (by which things our natures are unveiled) hath ever been observed and heeded by Philosophers, acknowledged and highly estimated by Physitians ... from all knowing men in the whole world, in all ages, hath been had in great price and admiration."<sup>3</sup> This was a history which physiognomers were proud to display, and which prompted Richard Saunders to write that his work "hath not been conceived, nor composed of the vile seed of Imaginary Sciences and foolish Controversies of these times: but of the purity of Ancient Sciences, which have been revealed to Men, who have surpassed others in Honesty, Esteem, Reputation, and in the Knowledge of what was past, present, and to come."<sup>4</sup> The traditional, astrological methods of inquiry, to which seventeenth-century physiognomy was closely tied, were suffering beneath the weighty criticisms, by leading advocates of empirical study, that such practices were irrational and superstitious. In

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<sup>3</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie, metaposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive-significations* (London, 1653), 259.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii – iii.

Saunders's invocation of the term 'imaginary,' this equation is flipped. Here, it is the "new" opinions, theories and methods which are fanciful fictions.

Saunders, like Hill, felt that for any science or study to be a source of truth, it must be proven, or "composed of" ancient, or already time-tested truths. While he was far from unique in this belief, it was, nevertheless, a view which was being subjected to increasing scrutiny. It is interesting that, in tying himself and his work to ancient authority, Saunders sought to release physiognomy from contemporary controversies. For traditional "truths" or ways of knowing and believing were at the heart of many of the religious and intellectual altercations of England's tumultuous seventeenth century. As numerous historians have noted, England's seventeenth century was also one which witnessed considerable shifts in the nature of academic inquiry – particularly following the Restoration and inception of the Royal Society in 1660.<sup>5</sup> An essential characteristic of the "new knowledge" was the increased stress placed upon practical experimentation, human reason and "direct individual experience." Defenders of the "new knowledge" sought to displace customary ideas and assumptions, and to appropriate the traditional reliance upon ancient authorities.<sup>6</sup> Andrew Wear describes this seventeenth-century trait as a "battle between the ancient and the moderns" which was fought in various religious, scientific and medical fields.<sup>7</sup> This was a battle remarked upon by Thomas Cooper in his

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform 1626 – 1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975); Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 359. For discussion of the influence of "rationalism" particularly in regards to religious fact-making, see Barbara J. Shapiro *A Culture of Fact: England 1550-1720* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000), 168-189.

late eighteenth-century essay entitled “Observations respecting the History of Physiognomy.” The seventeenth century, he wrote, was one in which the literati disputed “the comparative merit of the ancients and moderns” – a dispute which, at Cooper’s time of writing, he suggested, had greatly abated: “the few late attempts by some of our writers to reinstate Plato and Aristotle at the head of the ranks of science, have been coolly received; and the moderns in general have acquiesced in their own pre-eminence.”<sup>8</sup>

The outcome Cooper described is detectable in Lavater’s late eighteenth-century physiognomy. Although, as Kevin Berland has noted, Lavater was actually much more indebted to ancient authorities than he stated<sup>9</sup>, he did, nevertheless, seek to establish his position and validity by displacing classical writers – including Aristotle’s famous and influential physiognomic treatise in his argument of how “this beautiful Science [physiognomy] has been disfigured.” “From Aristotle downward,” Lavater wrote, “treatises the most insipid, the most ridiculous, the most offensive to good sense and taste have been written on the subject. And, unfortunately, there was no good Book in favour of Physiognomy, which could be opposed to such trash. Where is the enlightened Man, the Man of taste, the Man of genius, who has applied to the examination of this Science with the impartiality, the energy, the love of truth, which it requires.”<sup>10</sup> To the “moderns,” then, the traditional systems of truth and knowledge upon which physiognomy was founded, could, and should, no longer claim the same efficacy.

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Cooper, “Observations Respecting the History of Physiognomy,” *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester*, vol. 3 (Warrington, 1785-1802), 408.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Berland, “Inborn Character and Free Will in the history of Physiognomy,” in *Physiognomy in Profile*, eds. Percival and Tytler; Kevin Berland, “Reading Character in the Face: Lavater, Socrates and Physiognomy,” *Word and Image* vol. 9 no. 3 (1993): 252-269.

<sup>10</sup> Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy, designed to promote the knowledge and love of Mankind* vol.1, trans., Henry Hunter (London, 1789), 37.

Despite, or even because of its tensions between shifting paradigms of truth and the emergence of the “new science,” physiognomy provides an interesting arena in which the polarity of much seventeenth-century cultural and intellectual life was staged. As Martin Porter has suggested, physiognomy should not be teleologically depicted as superstitious “road kill” (as it were) on the straight and narrow road to “progressive science”: “the intellectual light and ‘empirical’ experiences of the natural magic of the ‘occult’ physiognomical universe were not simply and universally obscured and numbed by the luminosity and mechanistic logic of the new rising sun of rationality.” Physiognomy, he argues, bridged “rational” and magical mentalities and, for this reason, has much to teach about the role played by occult studies in the birth of modern science.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, Christopher Rivers has suggested that, although seventeenth-century physiognomy never fully succeeded in aligning itself with contemporary scholastic changes, it was still marked by them.<sup>12</sup> Rather than separating himself from his period’s controversies, then, Saunders was actually choosing sides.

Steven Shapin has argued that truth claims are reliant on collective action to become actualized and that creators of knowledge are largely at the mercy of the assessments, beliefs and assumptions of their larger society: “Truth consists of the actions taken by practical communities to *make* the idea true, to *make* it agree with reality.”<sup>13</sup> Although, viewed in retrospect, the nature of physiognomic study would seem to relegate its writers to the scientific sidelines, they were in fact still very much a part of the

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 29, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6-7.

“culture of truth” characteristic of their time and place. By highlighting physiognomy’s relationships to religion, astrology and humoral theories, writers like Saunders made their science “agree with reality” and drew legitimacy from cultural mentalities with widespread currency. These were relationships which both bolstered and shaped the science as one which centered on the entire body. They also were relationships which underscored the sense that each human self was wholly vulnerable to divine forces and was out of balance. Vulnerabilities and imbalances could be tempered by self moderation which drew humans nearer to God and to communion with all Creation.

### **“Give me leave to take thee by the hand”: Physiognomy’s Truth-tellers**

Part of the process of making theories “real” and “true” was establishing the credibility of those proffering them. Shapin has shown how, in early modern England, the construction of truth (which relied on trust and social order) rested in the hands of a select few. In particular, gentlemanly civility and scholarship became synonymous with virtue and truth-telling, and “seventeenth-century commentators felt secure in guaranteeing the truthfulness of narratives by pointing to the integrity of those special sorts of men who proffered them.”<sup>14</sup> Such “eminent” and “honourable” men not only lauded themselves as the gatekeepers of truth, but were also its explorers and instructors who, following the dictates of the “new science,” uncovered knowledge on their own accord and displayed it to others for discussion, debate and education. Physiognomy writers took part in this culture in a number of ways. One such way was to depict classical or foundational physiognomic writers as the first among the rational and genteel arbiters of truth who

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 410.

were increasingly attracting such esteem. Thomas Hill's relation of the Scotus story is an example of this.

More commonly than re-characterizing past authors, however, seventeenth-century physiognomy writers claimed the place of leadership in the business of truth construction. Each of them displayed their refinement and scholastic prowess through their translating and referencing abilities, and because England had few extensive physiognomic writings in the vernacular, each of these writers could claim that they were the first to explore and reveal this ancient knowledge to England's greater public. Although Thomas Hill's 1556 compilation was the first of such writings to "Englysh" the works of various classic physiognomy authors, his later contemporaries conveniently overlooked this fact. In 1669, for instance, the English translator of Marck de Vulson's *Treatise of Physiognomy* remarked that he was "taking up this new Subject (for I presume there are few Tracts of this nature in any Language, and fewest in our Own)."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Saunders noted, "my end aimed at herein is the common utility ... in these respects. As first the scarcity of the subject throughly handled, this being the first of Physiognomy, that hath appeared in the English Tongue in this age; and the first discovering the Moles of the Body that ever appeared here."<sup>16</sup>

By positioning themselves as new conduits to ancient knowledge from which seventeenth-century readers could learn, physiognomy writers depicted themselves as credible experts. While, in theory, the material in these texts allowed readers to also become arbiters of truth and knowledge, the implication was that this could only happen

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<sup>15</sup> Marck De Vulson, *The Court of Curiositie. Wherein, by the ALGEBRA and LOT, the most intricate Questions are Resolved, and NOCTURNAL DREAMS AND VISIONS Explained, According to the Doctrine of the Antients. To which is also added, a Treatise of PHYSIOGNOMY* trans., J.G. Gent. (London, 1669), sig., A4r.

<sup>16</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. b2v.

if they closely followed the guidance and careful instruction of the authors. Richard Saunders was especially paternal in his language, regularly addressing the “courteous Reader” and asking him or her to “give me leave to take thee by the hand, and briefly conduct thee through all the parts and species of Physiognomy *preceding* this work, that seeing the magnitude and splendour of this Subject, thine eyes may covet the beauty thereof.”<sup>17</sup> This style of speaking placed Saunders and his contemporaries in the roles of gentle guides and instructors.

Saunders particularly presented himself as a rational researcher and empiricist. He criticized those who provoked controversy and challenged the “purity” of traditional authorities: “the wisdom of the Antients being of so honourable accounts in any estimation, that I shall not think myself to see slightly without their light ... although some delight to be obstinate and contemn that light that others have, because they like their own darkness better.”<sup>18</sup> Despite his self-proclaimed mission to keep ancient wisdom from being lost, however, he did make it clear that he did not blindly follow the ancient lights, for “they have frequently shot wide the mark.” The variety and number of ancient writings on the subject, he suggested, had caused too much disorder and misunderstanding, “for many are tost too and fro, as from Racket to Racket, being forc’d to change their thoughts as oft as they change their Authors; and conceiving they have pitcht upon a right point (just like ticklish weathercocks) are necessitated to shift with the next puff.”<sup>19</sup> Readers were to trust that Saunders had effectively distilled the disorder into a clear and useful text to “benefit the vulgar” – his general inferiors in both station, scholarship and authority.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., sig. (a2)v.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., sig. av.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



Saunders demonstrated his trustworthiness by highlighting his rational exploration and testing of other writers' physiognomic assertions. In his discussion on signifying moles, for instance, he found that the work done on the subject by other authors and astrologers "seems to savour something of truth: yet I have experimentally found these discoveries vain and frivolous."<sup>20</sup> Various popular authors, such as the *British Merlin*, he continued, were "all depraved with manual errors, that no light of truth could I derive from those fountains: and whatsoever shews of truth did therein appear, I have found them rather mistaken fallacies then real verities." This was a travesty which, he assured his readers, he had rectified by applying his patient reason and learning. By "at length consulting with experience (as also the authorities of more sounder Authors)," he had discovered, tested and established the truth – including the fact that "we may observe the nose to answer to the privy member, as it being long, obtuse, short, or acute, the same formall proportion retains the other." His "strong desire of the indagation [sic] of truth," argued Saunders, was evident in his public exploration into its depths: "I have appeared on the publick Theater, and lancht out into the depth of this discovery, exactly and diligently sifting, examining, and holding forth a Subject that in its own nature is difficult, yet profitable to be known."<sup>21</sup>

Significantly, Saunders argued that, particularly in England, "this so profitable a Science, hath been hitherto so improperly and perversely handled that ... it hath rather merited the notion of old Wives Fables than a useful Science."<sup>22</sup> By "rescuing" and expanding this knowledge from the corruption of village wives (much like Hill's account of Scotus and the "Jew"), these men claimed the roles of wisdom's storekeepers.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid (1653), 260.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. (1671), sig. (a2)r.

Saunders's confidence in the purity of wisdom "revealed to men" is also illuminating, for the term "reveal" suggests that some men are specifically chosen, or at the very least, are more open to and aware of certain types of knowledge. For this reason, these special men should be trusted as dependable seekers and purveyors of truth. In this regard, not only Saunders's beloved physiognomy, but also his very self is substantiated and proven by the "purity" of classic scholasticism. By placing himself amidst the historic company of "esteemed" and "honest" men to whom knowledge had been "revealed," Saunders sought authority for his work and added "truth" to his words. His credibility, and that of his colleagues, was further implied to rest in the nature of their study. Physiognomy, when correctly applied, was meant to teach people of their sins so that with that knowledge they would strive to "fix" their souls. In being experts on the subject, these writers implied that they had already moderated their sinful selves (as much as human ability would allow) and were therefore especially virtuous and trustworthy. A good Christian, like a good scientist, was "ruled by reason, and not tyrannized by preposterous affection."<sup>23</sup> These writers presented themselves as both.

### **"Our nature is depraved": Physiognomy and Religious "Truth"**

Recourse to religious "truths" was especially frequent among the century's physiognomers, and religion infused all aspects of physiognomy, including the truth claims of both astrology and medicine, which it also invoked. Physiognomy was an obvious companion for religious inquiry due to its foundational creed that the body signified the state of the soul and, accordingly, that by physiognomy, "the humors and the

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in General* (London, 1620), 5.

inward part of the soul is so truly known.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, its moralistic emphasis on the physical distinctions between virtue and vice made it a natural platform for religious doctrine. The relationship between physiognomy and religious instruction is simultaneously indicative of the degree to which religious thought infused all aspects of seventeenth-century life, and of the degree to which recourse to foundational religious truths could be seen as effective legitimating claims.

In repeating the common physiognomic claim that humans were made in God’s image, Saunders noted that, through a “disquisite search into the natural qualifications” by way of physiognomy, the “ingenious might solace itself ... and thence with a cheerful boldnesse acknowledging the wonderful Works of his Creatour, be sweetly constrained by a Holy Violence to the love of God himself, to love him for Himself, and the Creature for his sake.”<sup>25</sup> It would seem that since humans were formed in God’s image, and since examination of their “true” natures was argued to inspire love, then physiognomic examination should reveal favourable and naturally virtuous traits and inclinations. However, while some features – such as “hollow feet”, a “nose in comly form crooking,” or “a meannesse of colour” – suggested honesty and good judgment, the majority of physical traits and corresponding characteristics revealed little that was positive or reassuring.<sup>26</sup> These texts generally imply that the figure closest to embodying the nature of a virtuous, upstanding 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 have skin not too sickly white, too malevolently black, too cunningly red, or too

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<sup>24</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 164.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Hill, *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of physiognomy orderly uttering all the speciall parts of man, from the head to the foot* (London, 1613), 106, 16.

effeminately yellow; he would be of a medium height, strength and hairiness, and each of his features would be perfectly exact and proportionate. The more peoples' physical forms diverged from this male ideal, the more outwardly – and inwardly – “deformed” or immoral would they be. Such an ideal could never, or at least rarely, be realistically replicated, and amidst the myriad deceitful, lustful and vain characteristics found within these texts, there is implicit recognition of this fact. Readers were led to believe that they were surrounded by a striking amount of potential thieves and murderers.

What physiognomy really rooted out, then, were the sin-fed and unbalanced “passions,” which Thomas Wright entitled “the sores of the soul.” The basic religious “truth” implicit in each of these texts was that all of humanity was affected by the Fall and carried the physical echoes of it on their bodies. Wright, for instance, summarized the common consensus that “sores of the soul” which scabbed the body were “thorny briars sprung from the infected root of original sinne.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Thomas Hill wrote that people were prone to follow “their sensuall will and appetities ... for by a naturall frailty, proceeded from our for-Father *Adam*, every Creature (after Nature) is drawne and allured unto the like dispositions and passions.”<sup>28</sup> It was this ultimate truth of original sin and God’s grace and redemption which, physiognomers argued, the uncovering of veiled natures and sinful inclinations was to reveal. It was a truth which was meant to enable English people to “give God thanks for his infinite mercies and goodnesse in setting before their eyes these visible natural warnings, at the leastwise glorifie him in the midst of their greatest afflictions.”<sup>29</sup> The “visible natural warnings,” worked as reminders that humans were united in their frailty and depravity; the “violent love” which recognition of

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<sup>27</sup> Wright, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Hill, *art of physiognomy*, i.

<sup>29</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. b2v.

these warnings was meant to inspire was formed by realization of the complete dependence humans had on God and his mercy. By demonstrating the truths of original sin and salvation, these writings simultaneously reinforced, and were reinforced by, traditional tenets and assumptions of Christianity.

Although symmetrical and perfectly balanced bodies may have denoted naturally honourable inclinations, or may have been indicative of the choice to live virtuously, physiognomers suggested that it was very easy to find some mark or defect, no matter how seemingly inconsequential, to remind their 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.”<sup>30</sup> For instance, an upstanding and well-formed gentleman may be hiding veins above his temples which only appear “upon the doing of some violent action, or when one laughs.” If this be the case, he has inclinations to “treachery and perfidiousness”<sup>31</sup> and is not as virtuous as he initially appears. To the same effect, under his clothes and beneath his navel may be hidden two “unequal lines” which indicate that he is actually “very wicked,” and that there is “little trust to be had in him.”<sup>32</sup>

There would, however, be hope for this furtively sinful man, just as there was for the most unfortunately featured persons. Everyone had potential for redemption. As Hill remarked, “creatures which are regenerated through the holy Ghost, doe not onely endeouour to mortifie their fleshy appetites, but seeke to put away and correct, all other inormities and vices resting in them.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Saunders found that persons who

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. (1653), 154.

<sup>32</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 192

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., ii.

closely read their bodies for the inner inclinations and fortunes written there could, “through divine grace assisting,” resist and “fix” the bad features they found and, conversely, encourage the good.<sup>34</sup> He wrote, “the imperfections of Nature may be reformed by Vertue, and that a man may in some sort resist his destiny, if he be wise, and allay his ill fate with a syrup of the punishment or shame that must follow.”<sup>35</sup>

Although such didactic declarations were implicit in all physiognomy texts and embraced by physiognomy writers, they, arguably, were employed as much as a means of religious instruction as they were an attempt to buttress the physiognomy’s credibility as a science. Thomas Hill wrote that it was precisely because humans were naturally drawn to “liue after their affection and appetites” that physiognomy was so infallible a method of inquiry. He concluded that, because “men (for the more part) do liue after a sensuall wil in themselues, and that none but the wise and godly (which is by an inward working of the spirit) do liue after reason: for that cause is physiognomy accounted and named a Science.”<sup>36</sup> Lamentably, he continued, even among those wise and rare individuals who did “endeuour to mortifie their fleshly appetities,” and “liue after reason,” there still “continueth a frailtie to sinne, and offences daily committed.”<sup>37</sup> In this regard, Hill’s words were comparable to those of the Church of England clergyman Robert Gell who in 1649, argued that “We our selves furnish the Astrologers, the Chiromantes, and Physiognomers with ... the matter of prognostication and prediction,” in “readily yielding” to our passions and inclinations. Even “though there be in us the power of God through faith to lay those turbulent Spirits & break their force and vigour,” we make such

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<sup>34</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. (1671), 164.

<sup>36</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., ii.

practitioners “speake truth, who otherwise, by our resisting the temptation and suggestion unto sinne, would easily be deceived.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, because original sin was so pervasive, recognizable and inarguable a truth, so too was physiognomy a reliable and truthful source of knowledge. The implication is that an imaginary society, unmarred by the effects of the Fall, would not need a science which, “by the outward notes of the body,” found the unique assortment of sins to which everyone was inherently subject. Were there no such thing as original sin, full-bodied physiognomy would fail to fulfill its duty in rooting out the self, and would no longer be “a necessarie and lawdable Science.”<sup>39</sup>

Martin Porter has argued that, due to its basic act of self-reflection, physiognomy encouraged self-confession. In this manner it “circumvented the need for a pastoral “middle man”” and was particularly resonant with early Protestant reformers.<sup>40</sup> Although in this regard, as in others, physiognomy seemed a natural partner for Protestant expressions of truth, the nature of that partnership was complicated by contemporary controversies and tensions. Firstly, its association with mysticism, occult sciences and Catholic authors made it an easy target for anti-Catholic critics. Sensitive to such critiques, Saunders stated that “this subject is best seen in a homely and plain dress, and will not admit of a Romanical strain.”<sup>41</sup> More specifically, however, numerous historians have shown that, although seventeenth-century England was generally united in its anti-Catholicism, it was not united in how to correctly define or practice Protestantism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Gell, *Stella Nova, A New Starre Leading wisemen unto CHRIST or, A Sermon Preached before the learned Society of Astrologers, August 1, 1649. In the Church of S. Mary Alder-Mary*, (London, 1649), 19.

<sup>39</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 221-223.

<sup>41</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. b2v.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (Oxford: University Press, 2003); Christopher Hill, *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

What constituted religious truth was a matter of much political, social and cultural contention and was, therefore, a shaky foundation upon which to frame physiognomic legitimacy. Questions surrounding the relationship between original sin and God's grace were a particularly predominant point of dispute among the nation's religious leaders and sects. They also were often at the core of tensions between the competing truths of free will and predestination.

Simply put, from the early seventeenth-century onward, there was a deepening split between believers in more Calvinist doctrines of predestinarian election and those who favoured an Arminian-influenced Laudianism which preached that humans had free will to accept or decline salvation. As noted above, heated disagreements between these two positions, and their various offshoots, were often enflamed by interpretations of the Fall. According to Nicholas Tyacke, Francis Rous greatly intensified the debates over Arminian notions of free will through his radical writings in favour of predestination.<sup>43</sup> In 1626, Rous argued that it was precisely because of the Fall that humans had no agency: "The nature of man, through the transgression of our first parents, hath lost Free-will, and retayneth not now any shadow thereof, sauing an inclination to euill, those only excepted whom God of his meere Grace hath sanctified, and purged from this Originall Leprosie."<sup>44</sup> Although they stressed the inherent depravity of human nature, physiognomic treatises generally did not conclude, like Rous, that original sin had completely and unalterably predetermined the fate for all humanity. Instead, as suggested

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<sup>43</sup> Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530-1700* (Manchester: University Press, 2001), 146.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Rous, *Testis veritatis the doctrine of King Iames our late soueraigne of famous memory, of the Church of England, of the Catholicke Church: plainly shewed to bee one in the points of predestination, free-will, certaintie of saluation: with a dicouery of the grounds naturall, politicke of Arminianisme*, (London, 1626), 15.



above, they emphasized God's almighty mercy and grace in aiding to overcome such sinfulness. In this regard they were more in line with views like Gell's, which stated that no matter "howsoever by our Fall, according to the first *Adam*, our nature is depraved, and that primitive Symmetry & harmony between heaven and earth, dissolved and lost," it is still possible to "recover our selves out of the Fall," causing "all those destructive and noxious influences [to] loose their power upon us."<sup>45</sup>

Physiognomers' focus on the truth of free will and, as John Evelyn noted, "the stupendious Effects" which education and religious living could have on "even the most averse, and brutish Nature," closely aligned them with Arminian beliefs which came to dominate after the Restoration.<sup>46</sup> Despite this apparent association, however, characteristic aspects of physiognomic study lent it to criticisms of fatalism. In his coverage of controversies surrounding occult sciences, Keith Thomas argues that astrology's perceived denial of human will or moral autonomy formed "the real origin of the theological attack on astrology." The "more specific the [astrological] prediction," he writes, "the more did it offend against the belief in free will."<sup>47</sup> It was physiognomy's same practice of making specific predictions upon people's unique characters and fortunes which gave critics cause to condemn it. In 1652, for instance, the Church of England clergyman John Gaule argued that astrological predictions enforced "a necessitation to Good or Evil," and made "our Wills servile."<sup>48</sup> To Gaule, physiognomy was a leader among the ranks of superstitious, blasphemous and misguidedly determinist

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<sup>45</sup> Gell, 17

<sup>46</sup> John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals, ancient and modern together with some account of heads and effigies of illustrious and famous persons ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (London, 1697), 338.

<sup>47</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 361.

<sup>48</sup> John Gaule, *Pus-mantia the mag-astro-mancer, or, The magicall- astrologicall- diviner posed, and puzzled*, (London, 1652), 49.

practices which “seduce us from destiny, to predestination.” Physiognomy’s “vain predictions” and “ridiculous ominations,” he wrote, were not based on “conjecturing only (upon mens manners, and fortunes), but defining.”<sup>49</sup> By “defining,” or determinedly diagnosing a person’s character and fortunes, physiognomy diminished human action and moral responsibility and was therefore an irrational, irreligious and destructive exercise.

Considering the specificity of physiognomic pronouncements, and the period’s influential and foreboding doctrines of reprobation, it is evident how physiognomy could be regarded as a means through which people might be discouraged 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,”<sup>50</sup> might feel there was no point in fighting to curb the “wickedness” common to all. The discouragement caused by his forefinger might very well have been compounded by his having the wrinkles of a “murtherer”, the hairy “Beetle-brows” of a “malevolent person”, the long ears of “bold impudent, unlearned gluttons and whore masters”, and the hunched and “ill-compacted” shoulders of someone “covetous and sordid.”<sup>51</sup> Such an unfortunate assortment of features could suggest this man’s reprobation to be set and resolute.

In their respective studies, Alexandra Walsham and Tessa Watt have each described ways in which grim, determinist Calvinism was popularly reinterpreted into

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>50</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 50.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 197, 253, 251.

something more palatable.<sup>52</sup> In her discussion of the various “ideological marriages of convenience” between pre-reformation practices like astrology and reformation doctrines, Walsham demonstrates how Calvinism both complied with, and sometimes even encouraged, traditional beliefs.<sup>53</sup> Seemingly fatalistic physiognomy had the same potential for adaptability. For 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 redeeming signs. The hypothetical “murderer” mentioned above may, for example, also notice that he has a small mouth which “denotes a man or woman, peaceable, faithful, fearfull, eloquent, full of wisdom and learning.”<sup>54</sup> This might encourage him to access his will and, with “divine grace assisting,” proportion the rest of his body to the characteristics signified by his mouth. In examples of physiognomic texts which have been marked up by early modern readers, Martin Porter notes an edition of Saunders’ *Physiognomie* from 1671 which contains the markings of “one late seventeenth/early eighteenth-century reader ... [who] does not appear to have liked what he or she found.” Beneath the significations which denote “a bold impudent person” and a “wrathful and cruel person,” this anonymous reader has drawn large ‘X’s’ which suggests at least one person’s refusal to be victimized by his or her physiognomically forecasted fate.<sup>55</sup>

Physiognomers were quick to emphasize their study’s flexibility in regards to self-diagnosis, and highlighted it in their arguments for physiognomy’s encouragement of human agency and moral autonomy. Like astrologers who sought to assuage criticism by

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<sup>52</sup> 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, 1993).

<sup>53</sup> Walsham, 23, 168.

<sup>54</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 196.

<sup>55</sup> Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 272-273.

insisting that the stars only inclined and did not determine, so physiognomers insisted that their practice revealed peoples' true inclinations, but not necessarily their set and immutable traits. As John Evelyn reminisced, "therefore we determine nothing *Dogmatically*, but as they use to speak of *Constellations*, that *tho' they Compel not, they shrewdly Dispose*; where (as we said) Education, Religious Principles, and Virtuous Habits do not timely interpose."<sup>56</sup>

In particular, seventeenth-century physiognomic works insisted that everyone must diligently collect and consider various features of the entire body. While the nature of these works suggests that the collection of many signifiers was more to find each person's specific weaknesses, physiognomers argued that full body examination was also to guard against unfair stigmatizations. For this reason, John Evelyn – in pondering the common physiognomic query of how a "great soul" can be lodged in a "homely cottage" – reminded his readers that "the most inestimable Jewel looses nothing of its Value, for not being kept in a Velvet Case."<sup>57</sup> Inwardly honourable people, he wrote, are sometimes framed by the "coursest out-side" to reveal the grandeur of God's mercy and grace. Such people 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."<sup>58</sup>

In a similar vein, Richard Roussat warned against giving unfortunately featured people short shrift: "You may not be hasty in giving judgement or advice in one of these signs: but take the testimony of them all." If variant bodily signifiers do not seem to piece

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<sup>56</sup> Evelyn, 338.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 309.

together into a comprehensive whole, then, rather than assuming the worst, “turn always to the better part, and the most approved. Then may you prognosticate and give judgment more assuredly of great and small things to come, yea of every man whatsoever he be.”<sup>59</sup> Thomas Hill, for his part, argued that it was necessary “to gather and marke sundrie other Notes of the bodie, and after to pronounce Judgement and the same not firmly, but conjecturally,” thereby leaving room for the effects of free will.<sup>60</sup> Such an argument also emphasized the degree to which human judgments are naturally fallible, thereby making recourse to many of God’s infallible handwritten “signatures” a necessary aspect of discovering the self.

Significantly, in Johann Lavater’s late eighteenth-century physiognomy, the truth of the Fall has adopted a different guise. Although he recognized the doctrine of original sin to be “an object of pleasantry in this philosophic age,” he did agree with earlier physiognomers that it was, nevertheless, a doctrine with “every character of evidence to the true Philosopher, to the sage Observer of Nature.”<sup>61</sup> He also regularly referred to humans as “polluted,” the “enfeebled and depraved epitome of the creation.” Despite these important correspondences, however, his overall view of human depravity was markedly different. Rather than implying that all were born sinful and must spend their lives fighting against the effects of the Fall and its impression on their bodies, Lavater argued that children were born naturally neutral and pristine:

no one brings into the world with him dispositions morally bad or morally good: in other words, men are born neither vicious nor virtuous. They all

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Roussat, *The most excellent, profitable, and pleasant book of the famous doctor, and expert astrologian; Arcandam, or, Alacandrin To find the fatal destiny, constellation, complexion & natural inclination of every man and child by hisbirth [sic]. With an addition of physiognomy, very pleasant to read*, trans., William Warde (London, 1644), sig. M4v.

<sup>60</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Lavater, 171.

begin with being children; and then, one is neither wicked nor good – but innocent. Very few arrive at a high degree of virtue, and as few carry vice to excess. Almost all keep floating between the two extremes; and it might be affirmed, that Man has not sufficient energy to attain a very extraordinary degree of either virtue or vice.<sup>62</sup>

Overall, he concluded, nature only bestows upon men an “instinct to act, to enjoy life, to extend their existence: and this instinct, considered in itself as a spring, is good, but naturally it is neither moral nor immoral.”<sup>63</sup>

Seventeenth-century physiognomy texts, in contrast, argued that the truth of original sin and innate human depravity ensured that any such “instinct to act” would naturally be immoral. Whether or not people could change their fates, the assumption that they began in a state of sin was widespread. Indeed, Roussat’s warning against assuming the worst can be understood as an indication of the degree to which assuming the worst was standard practice. For this reason, attention to the entire body for the myriad sins and unbalanced passions it revealed was essential. Human bodies were walking reminders of the Fall through which, as Gell had stated, the “primitive Symmetry & harmony between heaven and earth” had been “dissolved and lost.” The least, or most, that humans could do was aim to moderate their passions, or selves, and strive for physical symmetry, thereby restoring some of that original balance.

### **“This glorious Universe”: Physiognomy and Astrological “Truth”**

As a traditional system of truth and knowledge, seventeenth-century astrology was under increasing religious and academic attack. Judicial astrology which made predictions on human behaviour and was, therefore, most closely connected to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 171.

physiognomy, was singled out as particularly vulgar and superstitious.<sup>64</sup> Astrology's intersection with popular religion and the continuation of pre-reformation practices (such as the reverence for specific times and places) helped stigmatize it as irrational, superstitious and deceitful.<sup>65</sup> It was further weakened by the demotion of previously predominant ancient doctrines. For instance, the interconnections between humans and all Creation which astrology stressed, and particularly those which situated humans as the mystical meeting point for all of Creation, were a product of ancient microcosm theory which perceived humankind to be an imprint of the cosmos. According to Keith Thomas's classic argument, microcosm theory collapsed under the weight of seventeenth-century scholasticism, and with it "went the destruction of the whole intellectual basis of astrology, chiromancy, alchemy, physiognomy, astral magic and their associates."<sup>66</sup>

Increasing favour and faith in contemporaneously sought out and testable truths stigmatized mysterious occult sciences as fallible, irrational and impractical. Truth was meant to remove darkness and be open and apparent to the wider public; mystical practices, such as astrology, were singled out as untrustworthy sources of knowledge which kept people in the dark and under the dominion of wandering "gypsies." In its reliance on ancient writings, its association with fortune-tellers, and as Martin Porter has shown, in its alliance with hermetic mysticism, physiognomy was easily stigmatized as superstition. Indeed, it is generally agreed that it was largely due to the influence of rationalism and the "new science" that, by the dawn of the eighteenth century, traditional

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<sup>64</sup> Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 131.

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Alison A. Chapman, "Marking Time: Astrology, Almanacs, and English Protestantism," in *Renaissance Quarterly* 60 (2007): 1257-1290.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas, 643.

physiognomy had largely lost its intellectual respectability,<sup>67</sup> as is evidenced by John Clubbe's 1763 essay in which he questioned the "general soundness of the science itself."<sup>68</sup> The difficulty, he wrote, was to trace physiognomy "out with that precision and exactness, as will exclude all conjecture or surmise; for nothing can be more arbitrary than determinations founded upon mere imagination, because it has not one property that can be absolutely depended on." To further demonstrate what he considered to be physiognomy's inherent incompatibility with the dictates of rational inquiry, Clubbe satirically suggested that it be paired with the more infallible system of weights and measures. Why not weigh the gravity, or foolishness of a person with the aid of a human scale machine? Such a contraption, he jested, "could take men out of the false scales of conjecture and weigh them in the balance of equity and truth."<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, as it illustrates the Janus-faced character of much seventeenth-century scholarship, Francis Bacon, hailed as an early father of the "new science," argued that there was much value in physiognomic inquiry. In his *Doctrine of Man*, he argued that the practice had "a solid foundation in Nature and use in life." Indicative of the course physiognomy was eventually to take, however, he lamented that the practice had been "debased ... with superstitious and fantastical mixtures." Were physiognomy to be "purged" from its connections to "vain" and "unworthy" divinatory practices, and were the classical Aristotelian model of physiognomy to be reworked, suggested Bacon, then would the practice be "fully restored" as a source of truth.<sup>70</sup> Bacon's lamentations on

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<sup>67</sup> See for instance, Porter, *Windows of the Soul*; Roy Porter, "Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England" *Etudes Anglaises* vol. 38 no. 4 (1985): 385-396.

<sup>68</sup> John Clubbe, *Physiognomy; being a sketch only of a larger work upon the same plan: wherein the different tempers, passions, and madders of men will be particularly considered* (London, 1763), 7.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Shaw, *The Philosophical works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Veralum, Viscount St. Albans, and Lord High-Chancellor of England; methodized, and made English from the originals, with Occasional*



physiognomy's debasement were echoed by Saunders who also felt that the science was hurt by its association with travelling fortune tellers and magicians. Unlike Bacon, however, Saunders argued that the divinatory practices imbedded within physiognomy's framework were an essential part of its utility and veracity. He felt that physiognomy's disgrace, rather than being the fault of the science, was actually on account of critics whose "ignorance in, and passion against this science" made them purposefully "debase it so far, as to attribute the invention and greatest practice of it to those miserable Vagabonds we call Gypsies [sic]."<sup>71</sup>

John Evelyn's *Treatise on Physiognomy* from 1698 – nearly a full century after Bacon's writing – is another significant example of physiognomy's position in the battle for competing truths. As a learned gentleman and member of the Royal Society, Evelyn is generally recognized as a "participant in the reception of the new science."<sup>72</sup> At the time his extensive work on physiognomy was published, however, his relationship with the Society had waned. As Douglas Chambers explains, although Evelyn's interest in, and general support for the work of the Royal Society was lasting, "he was increasingly out of sympathy and touch with the direction that it took – towards an exclusivist science and away from the arts and the wide range of humanist interest that had been part of its early mandate."<sup>73</sup> Although Evelyn did not join Bacon in firmly speaking out against physiognomy's more explicitly divinatory elements, he did chastise "knaveish and

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*Notes, to Explain what is Obscure; And shew how far the several Plans of the Author, for the Advancement of all the Parts of Knowledge, have been executed to the present Time. In three volumes. By Peter Shaw, M.D.* (London, 1733), 93.

<sup>71</sup>Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. (a2)r.

<sup>72</sup>Douglas D. C. Chambers, "Evelyn, John (1620–1706)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004).

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

ignorant stargazers” in other writings.<sup>74</sup> Accordingly, the astrological component of his late physiognomic work was decidedly muted. In the debates over the validity of classical claims and conclusions, however, Evelyn fell in line with other physiognomers and argued in favour of the ancients’ lasting truthfulness. Invoking such names as Aristotle, Plato, Hippocrates, Ptolemy, Galen, Seneca and Pliny, Evelyn wrote to resuscitate “the Reputation of a *Science* not altogether, we see, so vain, fallacious and uncertain, as some imagine.” To recognize the practice’s truth, “One has (As we said) but to read, and consider what the great and most Learned of the Antients, and other sober and judicious Authors have written upon this Subject.”<sup>75</sup>

John Evelyn’s decidedly anti-astrological, late-seventeenth-century take on physiognomy is an indication of the degree to which “new science” theories and beliefs marked the approaches of intellectuals who still, in opposition to their contemporaries, saw some value in physiognomy. Indeed, the post-Restoration period is widely regarded as a turning point for astrological inquiries in that they were “now confined to a purely popular level, to which few persons of any higher learning or ambitions would willingly be seen to stoop.”<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, the few early to mid- eighteenth-century scholastic writings on physiognomy were regularly prefaced with denial of any association with astrology. In *Philosophical Letters Upon Physiognomies*, from 1751, for instance, the author was aware of the criticism that awaited his endeavours: “some will anathematize me as a Magician; others despise me as a meer Philosophaster, the generality at least, will sneer at me as a Visionary; for the Illustration of Physiognomy is too mysterious to

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<sup>74</sup> Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 46.

<sup>75</sup> Evelyn, 337.

<sup>76</sup> Curry, 86.

escape such Attacks.” In an attempt to preempt such sneers, he determinedly distanced himself from any astrological connections by declaring, “I am an Enemy to all Divination.” It is exceptionally grievous, he continued, “to see Creatures made in the Image of God, give Credit to vague Predictions, drawn from the Lineaments of the Face and Hands, to imaginary Analogies or Connections betwixt the celestial Constellations and a human Birth.”<sup>77</sup> Significantly, the author’s separation from astrological physiognomy was paired with his separation from full-bodied physiognomy: “I am to shew, that Men carry in their Physiognomies certain and strongly marked Indications of what they actually are, (not from any Comparison with the Brute Creation) 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.”<sup>78</sup>

To seventeenth-century minds, it was precisely because humans were made in the image of God that they were both unique in the universe, yet also closely and naturally connected to all God had created. To sever those ties, and imply that the human self was somehow separate, would upset the balance of Creation, which God had ordered, back into chaos. “It plainly appears in Holy Writ,” wrote the author of *Aristoteles [sic] Master-Piece*, “that this glorious Universe, bespangled with gaudy Fires, and every where adorned with wonderful Objects, proclaiming the Wisdom and *Omnipotence* of the great Work-Master, who in six days erected all things for his pleasure, was at first drawn out of nothing, or at most a formless Chaos of Confusion, a disordered and confounded heap of jarring Elements toss’d and jumbld together.”<sup>79</sup> To the seventeenth-century

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<sup>77</sup> Jacques Perneti, *Philosophical letters upon physiognomies. To which are added, dissertations on the inequality of souls, philanthropy and misfortunes* (London, 1751), 1, 3.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Anon., *Aristoteles [sic] Master-Piece* (London, 1684), 1.

physiognomers studied here, singling out the face or a single feature for physiognomic investigation drew too much attention away from the degree to which the “jumbld” and “jarring elements” of the depraved human body depended on God’s grace and His gift of reason to resist “chaos and confusion.” In constantly reminding humans of their connections to all Creation, the astrologically governed body, and the self which it encased, were at all times haunted by the fact that the serenity of that first Creation had forever been ruptured. Running parallel to the century’s increasing criticism of ancient wisdoms and astrological practices, then, was widespread interest and reliance on them.

As writers such as Keith Thomas, Bernard Capp, Patrick Curry, Alison Chapman and Louise Hill Curth have all shown, astrological thought infused many aspects of early modern life and experience, especially before and during the Civil War.<sup>80</sup> The degree to which that astrology was embedded within the majority of the seventeenth-century’s physiognomy texts is indicative of its influence, as well as its potential as a tool in legitimizing physiognomy as a natural truth. As Johannes Indagine’s *Book on Palmestry [sic] and Physiognomy* illustrates, especially popular and frequently published physiognomy works were those which emphasized the astrological nature of their science, or which were primarily astrology texts with a physiognomic section. Within such texts, internal and external balance caused by human reason was emphasized as a way to impede astrological influences. Although no one could escape, or subordinate, the effects of the constellations under which they were born, they could moderate them. For instance, Indagine wrote that “the stars do not provoke or force us to any thing, but onely maketh us apt, and prone: and being so disposed, doth, as it were, allure and draw us

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas; Capp; Curry; Chapman; Louise Hill Curth, *English Almanacs, Astrology and Popular Medicine: 1550-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

forward to our natural inclination.” Such allurements, although always at play, could be counteracted: “if we follow the rules of Reason, taking it to be our onely guide or Governour, they lose all their force, power, and effect ... Contrariwise if we give our selves over to follow our own Sensuality & Natural Disposition, they work even the same effect in us, that they do in bruit beasts.”<sup>81</sup>

As an astrological physician, friend to men like William Lilly and Elias Ashmole, and a popular author on various astrological and physiognomic practices, Richard Saunders exemplifies the currency of physiognomy in mid-seventeenth-century England. His popular publications argued that astrologically informed divinations by chiromancy (the reading of palms), metaprosopy (the reading of forehead wrinkles and lines), and even oneirocracy (the reading of dreams and visions) were inseparable from physiognomy. In regard to palm reading, for instance, Saunders wrote that the chiromancer “is not perfect nor accomplished if he have not Physionomie ... no man can well foretell anything and judge of Chiromancie without Physiognomie.”<sup>82</sup> He postulated physiognomy as the groundwater which fed the various wells of astrological knowledge and truth. In privileging physiognomy – after God and ancient scholars – as the ultimate verifier of favoured astrological practices, Saunders drew its legitimacy from presiding mentalities of his time and place.

Although, as Martin Porter notes, Saunders’s especially forthright interest in mysticism and hermeticism is perhaps not fully representative of all of England’s

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<sup>81</sup>Johannes Indagine, *The book of palmistry[sic] and physiognomy being brief introductions, both natural, pleasant and delectable, unto the art of chiromancy, or manual divination and physiognomy, with circumstances upon the faces of the signes* trans., Fabian Withers (London, 1676), sig. A5r.

<sup>82</sup>Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 143, 145.

physiognomy writers,<sup>83</sup> his emphasis on the excellence of ancient astrological sciences, and on astrological physiognomy's potential to reveal the interconnections between all Creation, is a common and significant aspect of seventeenth-century physiognomic thought. Every part of Creation – from “heavenly bodies,” to humans, to scorpions and herbs – carried imprinted marks and unique characteristics which, in some way or another, were in communion with each other. 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 hang as signes or bushes of their inward formes.”<sup>84</sup> Evelyn also highlighted the interconnectedness, or unitedness, of all Creation, with an especial focus on humans as the particular locus of the various connections: “*Man* being not only all creatures in *Synopsi* and *Compendium* (for what is singular in them, is in him united) but in whom all the Imperfections, as well as Perfections, centre.”<sup>85</sup>

In a similar fashion, George Spinola described “the *Microcosme* or lesser world of Man” as a “little transcript of the great Universe.”<sup>86</sup> Writing in favour of traditional royal rule during the acceleration of the Civil War, he found that the “Systeme of the greater World” had degenerated, and suggested that the insistence by “moderate men” that “the glorious body of the sun ... [had] sunke two degrees nearer to the Earth” was an

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<sup>83</sup> Porter, *Windows of the Soul*, 8-11.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642), 116.

<sup>85</sup> Evelyn, 193.

<sup>86</sup> George Spinola, *Rules to get CHILDREN BY WITH HANDSOME FACES: or, Precepts for the Extemporary Sectaries which Preach and Pray, and get Children without Book to consider and look on, before they leape. That So, their Children may not have such strange, prodigious, ill-bodeing Faces as their Fathers, who (unhappily) become so ill- phisnomied themselves, not only by being born before their conversion, by originall sin, and by being crost over the face in baptisme; but by the lineall ignorance of their parents too in these precepts, for begetting children of ingenuous features and symmetrical limbes*, (London, 1642), sig. A1v.

indication of this degeneration. Since the universe was in such a state, it only followed that the human world, so closely connected and influenced by it, would also be out of order. The king, like the sun, was sinking, and “the whole Frame and Systeme of Nature, is hamstringed and lame.”<sup>87</sup> When “perfectly mixt” and “rightly and fully handled,” wrote Saunders, 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.”<sup>88</sup> The human self, then, rather than being a solitary autonomous being, was but one small part of an incomprehensibly large Creation.

Similar to ways in which “all vegetables relate to the seven Planets” and also share “signatures” with certain stars, so people born under a certain constellation were believed to be influenced by its specific characteristics and carry signs of that influence on their bodies. In *Aristotle’s Legacy* (1699), knowledge of “the *Planets* and *Signs*, that Govern the Parts of the Body” was assumed to be the foremost definition of physiognomy. With such a knowledge, “one may, as it were, Read men and women, and understand by the outward parts their manners, inclinations, and intellectual faculties; as well as what shall befall them in the progress of their Lives.”<sup>89</sup> Here, the focus was particularly on the face : “thus the forehead is governed by *Mars*; the right Eye by *Sol*; the left by the *Moon*; the Right Ear by *Jupiter*; the Left by *Saturn*, the Nose by *Venus*; and the Mouth by *Mercury*.”<sup>90</sup> However, for the majority of the century’s physiognomic texts, belief in the interconnections between all of Creation was reflected in their emphasis on the interconnectedness of astral influences over the entire body. Just as the

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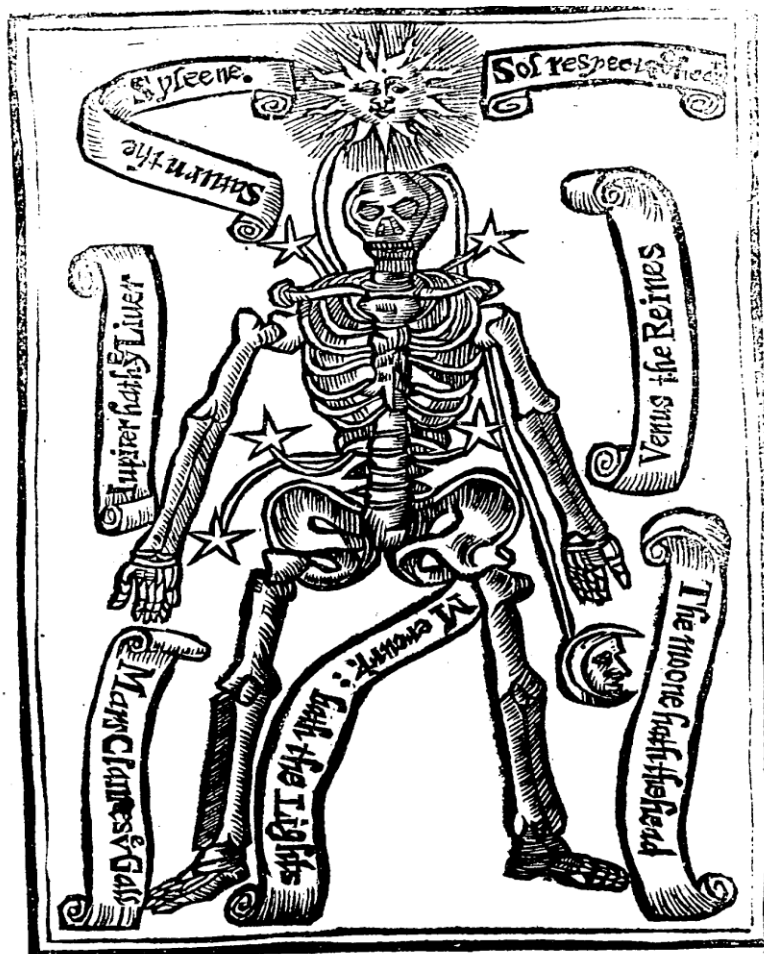
<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. (a3)v.

<sup>89</sup> Anon., *Aristotle’s Legacy: or, his golden cabinet of secrets opened* (London, 1699), 11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 12.

effects of the Fall and controversies surrounding free will made studying all parts of the body for the soul's secret virtues and vices essential, so the period's astrological knowledge made necessary the examination of various features which were each affected by the stars and, particularly in Saunders's case, the signs of the zodiac.



The Seven Planets.

☉	The Sun	{	The Head.
☾	The Moon	{	The right Arm.
♀	Venus	{	The left Arm.
♃	Jupiter	{	The Stomach.
♂	Mars	{	The Genitals.
☿	Mercury	{	The right Foot.
♄	Saturn	{	The left Foot.

Figure 4: Planetary dominion over the body.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 29.



Saunders detailed – down to each person’s very fingerprint – the specific relationships between human and heavenly bodies. His queries into what these relationships revealed about each person’s inclinations resembled those of other writers. For instance, in his discussion of what could be deduced from a person’s hair, Thomas Hill wrote, “when in the other parts of the body, there is over-much hairiness seene, there do the stars of *Saturne* and *Mars* worke their vertue, who are noted to be robbers on the highway, especially when the Eyebrows be very thick ioyning ouer the Nose, and that the eyelids be hairy.”<sup>92</sup> Indagine charted the body types born from the twelve astrological signs of Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces, as well as the three phases of the sun which affected the nature of the signs. Of the sun’s various phases in Leo, for instance, he wrote:

in the first face of Leo, is the gift of life; and it maketh them of a small comely body, ruddy coloured, mixed with some white, rolling eyes, straight body, full of diseases in their feet, and especially in age: famous and notable, simple, and beloved of the kings and rulers of the earth. In the second Face, it maketh them large breasted, and the stoned and privy members slender, hearty and honourable. In the third Face, short of stature, rose-coloured mixed with white, bered with much sickness, a whoremonger, and lover of women.<sup>93</sup>

The full-bodied nature of the “domination of the stars” and interconnectedness of signs was reflected in the astrologically influenced divinations of character and fortunes by the reading of moles. By examining the visible moles of the face, hidden secrets could be revealed, for they corresponded with moles elsewhere on the body. *The True Fortune Teller, Or Guide to Knowledge*, from 1698, for instance, found that “a mole on the Throat, on the left side othe Wind-pipe, signifies another on the left side the Hip,

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<sup>92</sup> Hill, *art of physiognomy*, 16-17.

<sup>93</sup> Indagine, sig. H6r.

denoting the party to suffer much by falls and bruises, if on a man it happens but if on a woman, it denotes to her danger by water, or blasting by lightning.”<sup>94</sup>

Tensions between truth claims created by high scholasticism’s self-conscious separation from “vulgar” or “popular” beliefs and persistent faith in traditional knowledge are recognizable in ways in which erudite physiognomers such as Thomas Hill and Richard Saunders envisioned their core audience. The ways in which these writers presented and argued their material, established their own and their sources’ credibility, as well as the sheer length of their texts, are indicative of ways in which they both sought to, and arguably did, fit within their century’s transitioning culture of scholastic truth. Well aware of the increasing criticism which their topic afforded, and of their ties to widespread popular mentalities, they included disclaimers which stated that their work was meant for the “vulgar” (a claim which conflicted with the sheer length and expense of their texts). Hill, for example, wrote that he wished his wise readers to correct any faults they found with his writing, but to keep in mind that his primary aim was to benefit the unlearned. After a considerable amount of self-effacement, he wrote, “I doubt not, but the wise wil consider my good intent to please the common sort, for whose sake only have I taken this pains in publishing this book.”<sup>95</sup> Similarly, Saunders wrote, “Happily Reader thou mayest slight me for my homely dress; it’s true I have not furbished my Book with the filed Phrases of glittering Eloquence, I not being so studious of words as matter; and desiring to be understood of all: and it may be my lot whiles I seek the benefit of the Vulgar, to displease the Learned.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> J.S. *The true Fortune-teller, or, Guide to knowledge Discovering the whole art of chiromancy, physiognomy, metaposcopy, and astrology* (London, 1698), 88.

<sup>95</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 130-131.

<sup>96</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. b2v.

Hill and Saunders' self-effacement is certainly not unique to physiognomy writers; rather, it is a common feature of writings across various genres from the period. Their suggestion that their simply structured work (despite its length) was meant for the "common good," and the most unlearned of readers fit with changing notions of truth which dictated that truth could be detected by its simple and uncomplicated dress and ability to be benevolently shared and displayed. Such statements also implied that, since physiognomy was meant to improve people, the "meaner sorts" to whom these texts were intended must be in need of the most improvement and instruction. While each of these aspects was likely at play in the above mentioned disclaimers, such phrases are also illustrative of tensions between competing "economies of truth." While the truth of astrology may have been largely supplanted in scholastic spheres of study, it does not follow that it failed as a truth system altogether. Rather, for the majority of the population of England in the seventeenth century (and beyond), it continued to maintain its status as a system of truth and authority. In his discussion of astrology and "popular" culture, for instance, Patrick Curry argues that "nowhere do we find the single or simple death of astrology."<sup>97</sup> Astrology's persistent presence strengthened visions of the physiognomic self as a conglomeration of variant parts, each with harmful influences in need of moderation.

### **"Equal Poise and Measure": Physiognomy and Humoural "Truth"**

The closely entwined truth systems of religion and astrology also overlapped with that of humoural medicine in both verifying and shaping physiognomic truth.

Emphasizing the connections that each person had to the greater universe, classic medical

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<sup>97</sup> Curry, 96.

theory argued that everyone had a unique blend of humours – blood, phlegm, choler and bile – which decided the look and temperament of the body. These humours were produced by combinations of hot, cold, dry and wet constitutions which were linked to the seasons. Charles Taylor cites early modern understanding of the humours as an example of how modern boundaries between the psychic and the physical were not yet constructed. Using melancholy as an example, he describes how it was a mental state and characteristic which was not only caused by the body's reserves of "black bile," but rather was one and the same: "on the earlier view, black bile doesn't just cause melancholy; melancholy somehow resides in it."<sup>98</sup> Significantly, the passions, otherwise known as the "sores of the soul," were regarded, 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."<sup>99</sup> The sinful self, then, was a sore which festered in each of the body's organs and parts.

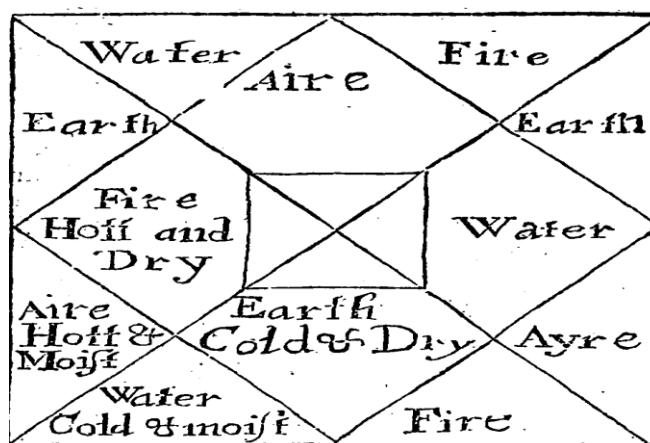


Figure 5: "Some Ancient and modern Physicians very eminent; have considered the 12 Houses thus, in reference to the temperaments which in practice will be found necessary, the better to judge of the nature of disease."<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Taylor, 188-189. Also see, Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>99</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 266.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Saunders, *The Astrological Judgment and Practice of Physick* (London, 1677), 99.

As the widespread popularity of medical recipe books, almanacs and health manuals can attest, there was considerable familiarity and trust in various aspects of classical humoral theories.<sup>101</sup> And in making physiognomic assessments, attention to humoral information was regularly cited as essential. Someone of a melancholic constitution, for instance, could be expected to be

Black, cold, dry, rough-skin'd, with thin, harsh and curled hair, meager in body great eaters, have the joints of their body outwardly visible are slow, backward in their resolutions, Dreamers, Diffident, Suspicious, Ingenious, and generall malicious; persons of few words, which they put forward with a designe to sound those that approach them; They are Close, Hypocritical, Conceited, Enemies to all Drolleries and Privacie, Retir'd within themselves, and Lovers of Solitude.<sup>102</sup>

*The True Fortune-Teller Or, Guide to Knowledge*, suggested that no person could claim medical knowledge without an aptitude for physiognomy. It taught how to read “the inmost secrets” of peoples’ hearts by their “external parts,” as well as the humours, diseases and bodily constitutions to which they were inclined: “nor can any man justly pretend to skill in Physick, if he be deficient herein, and in this case the Signs and the Planets are greatly significant, and have domination and influence chiefly in the succeeding parts of the body.”<sup>103</sup>

As the abovementioned treatise suggests, most physiognomic diagnoses were a mix of moral, astral and medical judgments. Richard Saunders succinctly stated: “the temperaments of all men come within the compass of four humours *Choler, Sanguine,*

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<sup>101</sup> 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 *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds., Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996); Curth.

<sup>102</sup> De Vulson, 148.

<sup>103</sup> J.S., 61

*Flegmatic*, and *Melancholy*; of these the two first are hot, the two last cold. And the internal natural inclinations and propensities of Man, (as to the habit) follow his natural temperament, the habit being contingent to Man, as considering the intellectuals and morals, vertues and vices.”<sup>104</sup> Thomas Hill noted that cold and moist dispositions could be attributed to the moon; hot and dry qualities to Mars; dry and cold, and hot and moist natures to Saturn and Jupiter, respectively; and that the governance of the sun could account for hot and dry constitutions.<sup>105</sup> People born with naturally cold complexions were generally “dull of wit” and tended toward heaviness with copious eyes, slow pulses, small voices and delicate hair.<sup>106</sup> 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 not onely seduced by light credite, but prone to be ravening Wolves, and put forward themselves to utter their cruelty, and (become in time) wicked Tyrants.” The “meaner sort” of choleric or melancholic conditions “are given to be Robbers by the highway, yea, and Murtherers of Men.”<sup>107</sup>

The humoural imbalances to which all humans were subject depended on various factors, such as sex, genealogy, planetary influences and lifestyle. As with the passions, which were unbalanced and driven by sin because of the Fall, and as with the effects of astrological influences, humans could not completely subordinate the unique assortment of humours which held dominion over their bodies and souls. However, they were required to moderate them and bring them into a state of harmony. Evelyn, for instance, wrote that “nothing in excess” was the goal, and “where neither Cold nor Moist, Hot nor

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<sup>104</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 263.

<sup>105</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 50-51.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 27.

Dry domineer, but amicably meet in equal Poise and Measure ... must needs render the happy Person, as Beautiful in Mind as in Body”:

For every Part being furnish'd with so just and benign a mixture of Heat and Moisture, perfectly temper'd, giving motion, and spriteness to the Blood; a due, and just proportion of the whole must of necessity accompany it, with Vivacity in the Eyes, Colour in the Cheeks and Lips, a decent Elevation of the Nose, and more prominent Parts; a smooth, and serene Forehead, chearful composure of the Mouth, a tender plumpness of the Visage, &c. in short, where nothing is in excess, nothing deficient in the outward Structure; there will be found a natural Affability, Generosity, Courage with Discretion; quickness of Apprehension, great Ingenuity and Invention; Eloquence in the Tongue; a facetious Easiness in Conversation, with aptness to the softer Passions of Love and Friendship, and a sincere Candor in all his Actions.<sup>108</sup>

In a similar vein, Saunders concluded that “that temperament is superlative which is most temperate.”<sup>109</sup>

The medical field was far from impervious to the century’s epistemological shifts. As Lester S. King has succinctly stated, “At the end of the seventeenth century British medicine differed markedly from what it had been at the beginning of that century.”<sup>110</sup> One aspect of this difference was increasing criticism of classic Galenic, Aristotelian and astrological approaches to medicine. For a developing system of knowledge which dictated the importance of practical, experimental and accessible truths, the seemingly secretive and mystical moorings of humoral medicine was losing its foothold. Like leading scholars of the “new science” more generally, medical practitioners were increasingly sceptical of astrological frameworks and, inspired by the rise of more empirical – as opposed to “learned” – methods, were slowly separating themselves from the very sorts of traditional truth systems which informed physiognomy. Such changes

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<sup>108</sup> Evelyn, 326.

<sup>109</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 263.

<sup>110</sup> Lester S. King, “The Transformation of Galenism,” in *Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 7.

prompted physiognomers like Indagine to vilify “the foolish and unadvised sort of Physicians, which in these our days, we see so much to advance themselves the Supremacy over us.” Medical practitioners critical of astrology were “distant from the true knowledge of Physick ... [and] ought not rightly to be called Physicians, but Deceivers ... how can they find any time to bestow or occupy themselves in Astrology, which have no leisure to read Gallen or Hippocrates, but do all things ahead or unadvisedly by certain prescript receipts.”<sup>111</sup>

Andrew Wear has argued that, despite monumental shifts in approach and philosophy – some of which were prompted by such things as the printing press, Civil War, “rationalism,” consumerism, and the inception of the Royal Society – there were far more continuities in seventeenth-century medical practice than drastic changes, particularly in regard to the longevity of traditional understandings.<sup>112</sup> Despite the scholarly proliferation of “fashionable” new medical theories, many physicians still felt the need to couch their diagnoses and treatments in the traditional and astrologically influenced humoral language which their patients trusted and understood. In this way, the public shaped the transmission of medical truth as well as the legitimation and character of physiognomic truth about the body, and the self.

### **“Marks of the body”: Physiognomic “Truth”**

Tensions between whether or not physiognomy could rely primarily on the face – everyone’s most visible feature – were a natural part of physiognomic inquiry.

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<sup>111</sup> Indagine, sigs. I3r-I3v.

<sup>112</sup> 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), 294-321. Also see Juliet McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1-3.



Considering his profession as an astrological physician who recognized the astral and humoural connections between all the body parts, it would seem that Richard Saunders's belief in a full-body study would be constant. At times, however, he does comment on ways in which the face's shape, fullness, and features – especially its eyes—could be enough to determine a person's inclinations. In describing the boundlessness of God's wisdom and power, he found 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 [“the Almighty”] 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, as also to explicate the state and affections of the soul it self.”<sup>113</sup>

Significantly, Saunders's above mentioned comment on facial signs still emphasized the degree to which all the body was important. Despite its focus on the face, the ultimate reading is still of the entire body, for God, in His omnipotence, had created links between the body's secret marks and those which were most publicly visible. Despite tensions regarding how much the face could be trusted, religious understanding of the passions, controversy regarding the effects of the Fall, the predominance of astrological mentalities, and the relationship of physiognomy to humoural theories all shaped the study into an inquiry of the entire body. Through these three systems of knowledge, the physiognomic promotion of self subordination, moderation and balance was emphasized as virtuous, fortuitous and healthy.

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<sup>113</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 267

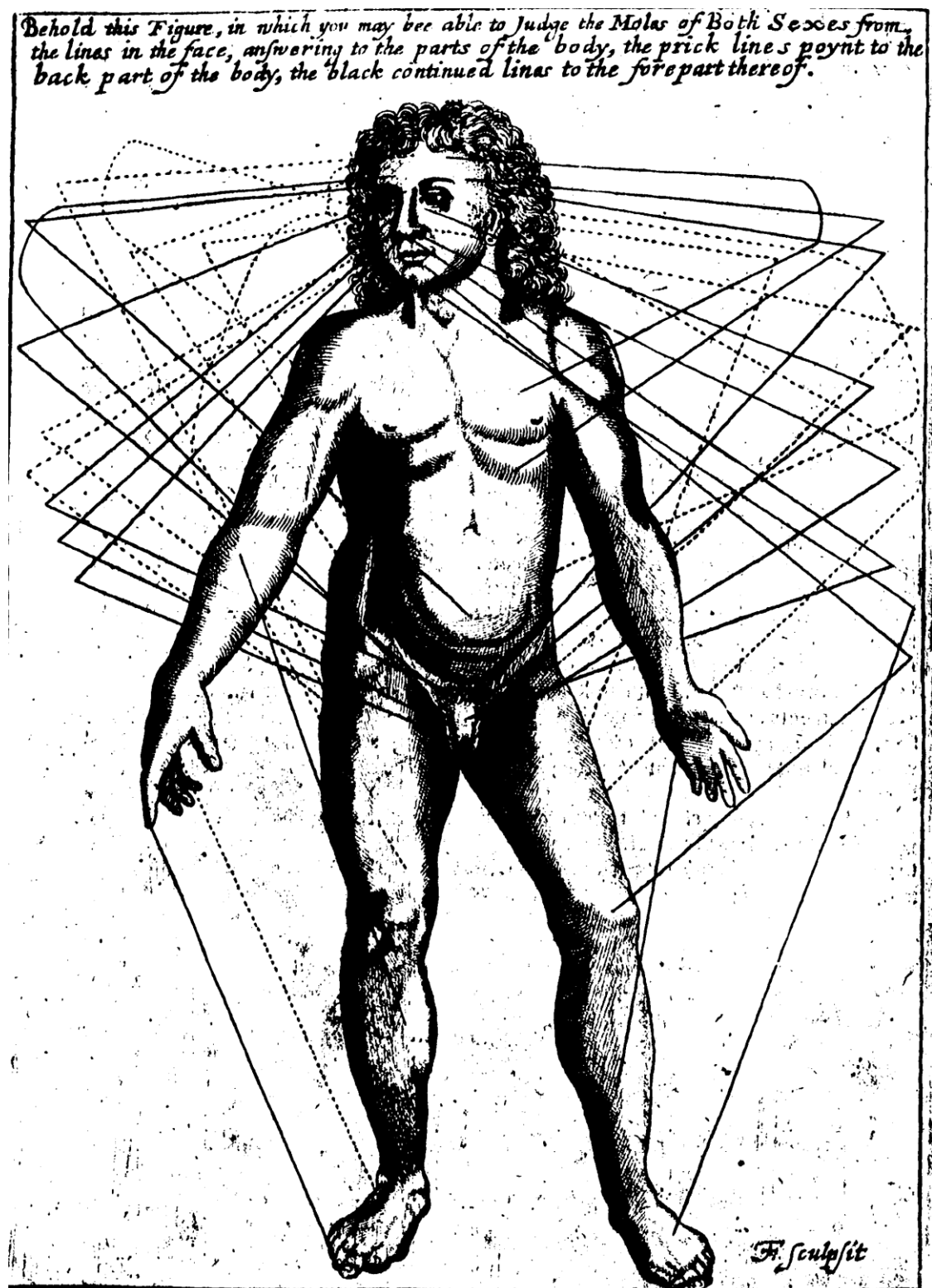


Figure 6: Relationships between moles of the face and body.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 288.

## Chapter Two

### **“All in Man should be in a mediocrity” Dissimulation, Disorder and Bodily Balance**

Thomas Wright composed his *Passions of the Minde in General* during a period of imprisonment for being a Catholic in a nation anxious to define and declare its Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps reflective of his own experiences of confinement and feeling besieged, his work compared the soul – the seat of truth and virtue – to a castle surrounded by the armies of sin and unbridled passions. Echoing the common physiognomic conviction that a study of personal inclinations, leading ultimately to a knowledge of the self, “ought to be preferred before all treasures and riches,” he argued that this was especially the case for a Christian who “ought to be imployed in the expugnation of these molestfull Jebusites ... to know the nature of his enemies, their strategems, and continuall incursions, even unto the gates of the chieftest castell of his soule, I meane the very wit and will.”<sup>2</sup>

By comparing each person’s passions and sins to “molestfull Jebusites,” or enemies of God’s people, Wright made explicit connections between internal battles for truth and virtue and those in society at large. His recommended strategy for defeating the incursions of sin and winning spiritual equilibrium can be understood as his antidote for England’s religious controversies – controversies with which he directly engaged.<sup>3</sup>

Wright’s early connections between personal and public states of spiritual fortitude are illustrative of the ways in which physiognomic claims as to the relationship between

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Milward, “Wright, Thomas (c.1561–1623),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in General* (London, 1620), 5.

<sup>3</sup> As Milward notes, Wright often spoke out against what he considered to be the “absurdities” of Protestantism, and was regularly imprisoned for it.

internal virtue and orderly, symmetrical features intersected with the period's anxieties over dissimulation and disorder. "True" and "mortified" Christians, wrote Wright, will learn to detect and "bridle" their sins, or enemies of the soul, and, in doing so, achieve peace and "a great quietnesse of minde."<sup>4</sup>

Wright's comments on how battles for the soul may be overcome by striving for spiritual balance was originally published in 1601 and was reprinted at least four times by 1630. It had a lasting influence on seventeenth-century physiognomers and was plagiarized nearly word for word in De Vulson's *Treatise of Physiognomy* in 1669 and 1681. The metaphorical connections Wright drew between internal and social disorder were further fused by his mention of St Paul's lesson on punishing the temptations of the flesh: "I chasten my body and bring it into servitude."<sup>5</sup> St 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. In his letters to the Corinthians he wrote, "for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12: 12-31). The body cannot be made up solely of noses, fingers or feet; all the variant parts or members were essential to the rightfully balanced and orderly working of the whole, and had been granted their proper placement by divine wisdom:

If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But hath not God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? But now are *they* many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

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<sup>4</sup> Wright, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

As much as individual bodies needed chastisement to bring them and their souls into alignment with truth and salvation, so too did the social body need careful instruction; praise for the body's divergent parts and roles did not equate to approval of nonconformity among those various members. Rather they were a sign of God's ability to draw order and balance out of seeming chaos. Within the body of Christ, "there should be no schism."

As numerous historians have demonstrated, England's seventeenth century excited heightened anxieties over social disorder and degradation, and these anxieties were often expressed through the discussion of bodies. For instance, Julie Crawford and David Cressy each highlight connections between tales of malformed or "monstrous births" and, among other things, the period's entwined religious and political tumults.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Mary E. Fissell explores patriarchy and representations of women's bodies in connection to the Reformation and Civil War. Like Laura Gowing, she notes that gender relations and all such dynamics of power are perpetually precarious, yet also argues that periods of intensified social stress or transition are particularly fertile for anxieties over social order to thrive.<sup>7</sup> Discussions of this nature have yet to explore ways in which such early modern anxieties intersected with England's seventeenth-century physiognomic texts, yet it is precisely within this context that these texts can be comprehended.

As a Catholic recusant and priest – and therefore a vulnerable minority in seventeenth-century England's variously reformed and politically charged religious

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<sup>6</sup> Julie Crawford, *Marvelous Protestantism: Marvelous Births in Post-Reformation England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005); David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For the seminal work on the seventeenth century as a period of crisis, see Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, *The general crisis of the seventeenth century, Second Edition* (Routledge, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Mary E. Fissell, *Vernacular Bodies: The Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Oxford: University Press, 2004); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford: University Press, 1999).

climate – Wright’s invocation of St Paul’s comments is illustrative of how the character of the English church was both a matter of considerable controversy and an area wherein the century’s various competing voices could find common ground. While the exact character of the church body was hotly debated, the idea that it needed to be unified was widespread. In a sermon he preached in the mid-1650s and then, significantly, had published in the year of Restoration, the Presbyterian preacher Richard Baxter wrote that “As the Natural man hath *One Body*, and *One Soul*, which constitute it a man; so the Church which is the mystical Body of Christ, is one Body, consisting of many members united by *One Spirit*.”<sup>8</sup> The church is like a political body which has laws and obediences which “perfect its Being” and in which are the “Sovereign and the Subject conjoined in their Relation.” The duty of the church’s subjects, or members, “is to keep the unity of the spirit”: “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.”<sup>9</sup>

Although many of his principles and the Presbyterian communities with whom he associated label Baxter as a radical Puritan, he was, as N.H. Keeble details, wary of fundamentalism.<sup>10</sup> Baxter waded into and stirred up the controversial waters of his time and place with arguments for beautiful, truthful and godly unity. Interestingly, Baxter, who argued for church unity throughout his life, returned to the topic in 1683, when anti-

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Baxter, *Catholick vnity, or, The only way to bring us all to be of one religion* (London, 1660), 7-10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> N. H. Keeble, “Baxter, Richard (1615–1691),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, October 2009.

Catholic riots, sparked in part by the Duke of Monmouth, filled London streets. In *The dangerous schismatick clearly detected*, published that year, he wrote “Now as a member is a member of the whole Body (not meerly of any part of it, &c.) All the Subjects of *England* who never saw nor converst with each other, are members of the same Kingdom.” It was not necessary that all the people of the body be the same, just as the human body could not be made of all the same parts. What mattered, however, was that they found Christian unity and balance in that diversity: “these several degrees of Union are found in Bodies natural and Politick. 1. The union of Soul and Body makes a man ... 4. That is have Hands and Fingers, Feet and Toes, and all integral parts, makes it an intire Body. 5. The due site, temperament and qualities of each part make it a sound Body ... 7. To have all parts of equal quantity and office, would make it uncomely: And to have the same hair, colour, &c. is unnecessary.”<sup>11</sup>

The fusion of personal moderation and balance amidst God’s diverse body of believers paralleled physiognomic pronouncements on the “symmetry of parts.” In *The Art to Know Men*, first “rendred into English” in 1665 by the Presbyterian John Davies, Marin Cureau De La Chambre argued that it was impossible to completely fulfill the physiognomic instruction to “know thyself,” unless people also know others and understand their relations to them.<sup>12</sup> We are all too biased in our own passions and inclinations to truly grasp their utter irrationality, unless we also look to society and have our faults and frailties mirrored back to us: “it is a thing out of all dispute, that there is no better way for a man to come to the knowledg of himself, then by studying that knowledg

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Baxter, *The dangerous schismatick clearly detected and fully confuted for the saving of a distracted nation from that which would destroy Christian love and unity* (London, 1683), 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> Marin Cureau De La Chambre, *The Art How to know MEN. Originally Writtin by the Sieur De La Chambre, Counsellour to His Majesty of France, and Physician in Ordinary*, trans., John Davies. (London, 1670).

in others.”<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup>

Like De Vulson and other physiognomic writers of his day, La Chambre also emphasized the disorderliness and ugliness of combined physical and temperamental imbalances and stressed that “all ought to be in a just *equilibrium*.” In exploring and “righting” the soul’s passions, people should strive for conformity, balance and “mediocrity.”<sup>15</sup> This mediocrity, or moderation of character and appearance, was best found in following the correct and orthodox social path to which everyone was destined. 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. In seventeenth-century physiognomic texts like *The Passions of the minde in General* to *The Art to Know Men*, the self is inherently social.

Anxieties regarding the century’s religious and political controversies often strengthened the idea that rational moderation and balance were the definition of truth. The staunch royalist William Chillingworth fluctuated between Catholicism and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., sigs. B3r-B3v.

<sup>14</sup> Marck De Vulson, *The Court of Curiositie. Wherein, by the ALGEBRA and LOT, the most intricate Questions are Resolved, and NOCTURNAL DREAMS AND VISIONS Explained, According to the Doctrine of the Antients. To which is also added, a Treatise of PHYSIOGNOMY*, trans., J.G. Gent. (London, 1669), 114.

<sup>15</sup> La Chambre, 3-4.



Protestantism and, like Baxter, was wary of radical dogmatism.<sup>16</sup> In the end, he settled on “middle way” Anglicanism, and in 1638 he wrote *The Religion of the Protestants a Safe way to Salvation*. Although this work generally sought to highlight the common ground between Christians of different creeds, it was vilified by both Calvinists and “Papists,” yet experienced considerable success and was republished numerous times throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Praised by John Locke as strongly argued and filled with “right Reasoning,”<sup>17</sup> Chillingworth’s writing nicely encapsulated the fusion of “mediocrity,” bodily symmetry, religious unity and truth. Our Christian obligation, he wrote, “is to keep within the meane, betwixt uncharitable bitterness, and pernicious flattery, not yielding to worldly respects, nor offending Christian modesty, but uttering the substance of truth in so *Charitable* manner.”<sup>18</sup> Defining faith as God’s infallible truth, charity as a sign of His goodness, and the “two peccant humours” of schism and heresy as deceitful deformities, he also revisited St Paul’s words: “Unity, or Onenesse (if so I may call it) is effected by Charity, uniting all the members of the Church in one *Mysticall Body*; contrary to which, is *Schisme*, from the Greeke word signifying *Scissure*, or *Division*.” Like Baxter, Chillingworth concluded that “the chiefest Unity is that of the *Whole*, to which the particular *Unity* of *Parts* is subordinate.”<sup>19</sup> As much as truth is a social construct (as Steven Shapin has argued), so too is social order, and in this seventeenth-century context, the two – truth and social order – were inseparable.

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<sup>16</sup> Warren Cherniak, “Chillingworth, William (1602–1644),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> William Chillingworth, *The religion of protestants a safe way to salvation*, (London, 1638), 235.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 235–237.

### **“Subtilty and hypocrisie”: Dissimulation and Physiognomic Efficacy**

The emphasis which physiognomers and religious writers placed on the virtue of uniformity was paired with an equally strong fear of dissimulation. Perez Zagorin notes that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, religious dissimulation was an especially prominent and “unprecedented” point of discussion and that “the idea that people commonly went masked and habitually dissimulated their true beliefs came readily to contemporary minds.”<sup>20</sup> A person may appear to be a true member of God’s body of believers but may be secreting deceitful schismatic inclinations. Towards the close of the Interregnum, Thomas Hall wrote that if “any sin ruin *England*,” it was the nation’s loss of sincerity and the fact that “True devotion is now turned into Hypocritical dissimulation.”<sup>21</sup>

While the well-loved Socrates story was largely one which verified physiognomy’s validity, it was nevertheless also a tale tinged with angst. People may, like Socrates, effectively make use of education, reason and good habits. Unlike the famous philosopher, however, they may merely wear the effects of education as a mask, rather than having genuinely and wholeheartedly chastened their bodies into submission. Their education may be nothing more than dissimulation. The belief that dissimulation was all around was reinforced by the fact that only those who were completely mad and stripped of “common sense and Reason” were considered to be readily readable. Thomas Tryon wrote, “for when men are so divested of their *Rational Faculties*, then they appear

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<sup>20</sup> Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying: Dissimulation, Persecution, and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 255.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Hall, *A practical and polemical commentary, or, exposition upon the third and fourth chapters of the latter epistle of Saint Paul to Timothy wherein the text is explained, some controversies discussed, sundry cases of conscience are cleared, many common places are succinctly handled, and divers usefull and seasonable observations raised* (London, 1658), 124-125.

naked, having no *Covering, Vail, of Figge-leaves* before them, to hide themselves in, and therefore they no longer remain under a Mask or Disguise, but appear even as they are, which is very rare to be known in any that retain their *Senses* and *Reason*.”<sup>22</sup> In wishing that everyone would eschew “all subtilty and hypocrisie,” Tryon envied the state of “mad innocents” and their inability to dissemble: “The truth is, as the knowledge of evil is mans fall, 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.”<sup>23</sup>

Ironically, then, to the same degree that reason aided people in fighting the intertwined effects of the Fall, the stars and the humours, so could it aid them in deceiving others. Accordingly, physiognomers were wary of ways in which the story written on the body may be a fiction. In 1604, for instance, Dr Gwithers recognized the confusing and thus disorderly force of deceitful fronts. Like all physiognomers, he contended that “repeated acts, or frequent entertaining of the ideas of a favourite passion of vice, which natural temperament has hurried one to, or custom dragged,” will be etched, “sometimes unalterably,” on the body. For this reason, the eyes of ardent drinkers are regularly “set towards the nose ... to let them see their loved liquor in the glass at the time of drinking.” Similarly, dour sectaries, revengeful men and the Quakers’ “expecting face, wanting the pretended Spirit,” can all be detected. However, he continued, the

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Tryon, *A treatise of dreams & visions wherein the causes, natures, and uses, of nocturnal representations, and the communications both of good and evil angels, as also departed souls, to mankind. Are theosophically unfolded; that is according to the Word of God, and the harmony of created beings. To which is added, a discourse of the causes, natures, and cure of phrensie, madness or distraction*, (London, 1689), 261.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

physical clarity of such important distinctions can be clouded if “some present object ... obliterate that more natural impression by a new, or dissimulation hide it.”<sup>24</sup>

Richard Saunders cited the Socrates story to remind readers that any attempt at the practice of physiognomy should “penetrate the institutions and education of Man,” for “these particulars are much to be heeded, as conducing much to the benefit of a certain judgment.”<sup>25</sup> His physiognomic treatise, first published in the declining years of the Interregnum, made a clear distinction between bodily traits and assumed behaviours. It warned that people must always take heed of the whole body and not be swayed in their judgments by any ostensible goodness: “those signs which arise from the parts of the Body, are preferred before them which we gather from the apparent moral behaviour.”<sup>26</sup> As Martin Porter and Bernard Capp have rightly noted, and as Saunders’s own works on how to improve the human race by “scientific breeding” reveal, Saunders had grown increasingly exasperated with “worldly governments.”<sup>27</sup> His suspicion of the space between what people seemed to be and what they actually were was informed by the religious and political tumults of his time; while tensions and uncertainties in regard to dissimulation were a part of physiognomy from its classical inception, they were exacerbated by the turbulent seventeenth-century context.

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<sup>24</sup> Isaac Disraeli, *Curiosities of Literature. Consisting of anecdotes, Characters, Sketches, and Observations, Literary, Critical, and Historical* (London, 1794), 277-280.

<sup>25</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 264.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>27</sup> Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), 83-84; Porter, “Saunders.”

### “A self-deformed nation”: Cosmetics

In seventeenth-century England, concerns regarding dissimulation and artificiality regularly centered around the use of cosmetics. Commentators from various religious and political positions pinpointed cosmetics as extreme examples of wilful bodily deformity which both endangered the spiritual conformity and welfare of their wearers, and of the nation in general. Like physiognomy texts, anti-cosmetic treatises emphasized the sense that truth was synonymous with symmetry and natural beauty. In 1654, the ejected clergyman and anti-royalist Thomas Hall wrote, “Lying is unlawfull, but this painting and disguising of faces is no better than dissimulation and lying.”<sup>28</sup> People who painted their faces and made use of bodily artifices – such as hair dyes, wigs and beauty patches – purposely appeared to be what they were not, and “so by deceiving others, at last they deceive themselves, getting deformity instead of beauty, losing that true beauty which they have by Nature.”<sup>29</sup> Like people with “disfigured” and “ugly” bodies, cosmetics wearers corrupted both their outward and inward forms, and had not “bridled” their passions; like people who appeared beautiful and virtuous through the application of reason, so cosmetic wearers applied “counterfeit beauty” to appear as something other than what God had intended.

There have been numerous studies on the properties of early modern dress as markers of social distinction, as well as on fears that social and moral order were endangered by excessive emphasis on fashion and ostentation rather than true moral

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Hall, *Comarum akosmia the loathsomnesse of long haire, or, A treatise wherein you have the question stated, many arguments against it produc'd, and the most materiall arguements [sic] for it refell'd and answer'd: with the concurrent judgement of divines both old and new against it: with an appendix against painting, spots, naked breasts* (London, 1654), 102.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

worth.<sup>30</sup> Cosmetics, however, were singled out as particularly pernicious. The Church of England clergyman and staunch anti-parliamentarian named Thomas Tuke condemned cosmetics as worse than excessive dress, stressing their innate artificiality: “Pride may show it selfe in rich apparel, but it doth singularly appeare in a painted face; because they that paint, would have that which is artificiall and borrowed, taken to be naturall and proper.”<sup>31</sup> Cosmetics were associated with the sins of (among others), lust, vanity, jealousy, pride and deceit, all of which “true” Christians were meant to regulate. “We are oft commanded to walke before the Lord in sincerity and truth,” wrote Hall, “but in painting is neither sincerity nor truth, nothing but cousening and deceit.”<sup>32</sup> Not only did cosmetics wearers signify deceit, they seemed to revel in it: while clothes, at their most basic level, were still a necessity, cosmetics, in contrast, did not have the Fall to excuse or explain their use. The effects of Original Sin required humans to wear clothes; it did not require them to wear cosmetics and parade their depravity. As it was the Fall which first created disorder and imbalanced passions, those who wantonly painted, powdered and periwigged their bodies acted as walking billboards for society’s disorder, disunity and disgrace. Cosmetics “*blaspheme, and scandalize Religion*” and drew their wearers into “Idlenesse, Pride, Effeminace, Wantonnesse, Sensualitie, and Voluptuousnesse, by degrees; and from thence to Incontinency, Whoredome, Deboistnesse, and all Prophanes, to the eternall wreck and ruine of [their] soul.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Tuke, *A discourse against painting and tincturing of women Wherein the abominable sinnes of murther and poisoning, pride and ambition, adultery and witchcraft are set foorth & discouered. Whereunto is added The picture of a picture, or, the character of a painted woman*, (London, 1616), 30.

<sup>32</sup> Hall, *loathsomnesse of long haire*, 102-103.

<sup>33</sup> William Prynne, *The unlovelinesse of love-lockes. Or, A summarie discourse, proving: the wearing, and nourishing of a locke, or love-locke, to be altogether unseemly, and unlawful unto Christians* (London, 1628), sigs., a3r-a3v.

William Prynne was exceedingly suspicious of Laudianism and hated cosmetics for their association with French fashion and popery. Suggestive of his self-declared desire for unity and “mediocrity,” Prynne, despite his Puritanism, opposed the Calvinist independency and Presbyterianism of the civil war years, and although he was critical of Charles I, he was not critical of monarchy, arguing that he was a royalist to the core.<sup>34</sup> He disdained the dissimulation which seemed to rule the nation and found that the social chaos and spiritual confusion of his time was recognizable in predominance of artificially and vainly “bedecked” bodies. In 1628 he lamented how England “is of late degenerated from what it was in former Ages” and complained that cosmetics were “an Art that offers violence unto God himself, in obliterating that Naturall and lively Image, forme, and Beautie which he hath stamped on his creatures: in correcting, changing, and Nullifying of his worke; and so taxing him for an imperfect, Bungling, or Unskillfull workeman.”<sup>35</sup>

By “obliterating” or painting over their natural physiognomies, cosmetic wearers not only suggested ingratitude for God’s work but interfered with the divinely ordained variety upon which the Christian body stayed in balance. Such a balance required clear social demarcation, but cosmetics dissolved such differences and “metamorphosed” their wearers, thereby transforming orderly, godly society into a topsy turvey one. To commentators like Prynne, cosmetics not only obscured the truth, they violated it. “In these Dangerous, Unnaturall, and unmanly times,” wrote Prynne, “sundry of our Mannish, Impudent, and Inconstant female sexe, are Hermaphrodited, and transformed

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<sup>34</sup> William Lamont, “Prynne, William (1600–1669),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Prynne, sig. Bv.

into men.” If that were not bad enough, he continued, “so divers of our masculine and more noble race are wholly degenerated and metamorphosed into women.”<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary attacks like those of Tuke, Hall and Prynne have interested various scholars. Tanya Pollard and Annette Drew-Bear have both emphasized the moral associations created by polemicists and then exploited by playwrights, while Frances Dolan and Kim Hall have explored the role played by cosmetics in discussions of gender and race.<sup>37</sup> In his article on physiognomy in Georgian England, Roy Porter notes that the eighteenth century was one in which fashion, luxury and extravagant cosmetics proliferated, engendering numerous critiques and concerns among commentators. Trust in traditional physiognomy was especially shaken: “one’s appearance was no longer the proud escutcheon of self, but a device for going hidden. Thus fashion threw down its gauntlet to physiognomy.”<sup>38</sup> To Porter, then, it was just as much the eighteenth-century’s fears regarding dissimulation and the artificiality of fashion as much as the “new science” which destabilized physiognomic study and, eventually, inspired its revision. Considered in this regard, solely seeking the eyes (the “windows of the soul”) and the face, rather than the entire body can be seen as an outcome of excessive fashion and eighteenth-century anxieties over “true,” authentic selfhood.

However, as criticisms from the seventeenth century suggest, such anxieties over artificiality and physiognomy’s efficacy, which discussions of cosmetics both

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., sig. A3r.

<sup>37</sup> Tanya Pollard, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: University Press, 2005); Annette Drew-Bear, *Painted Faces on the Renaissance Stage: The Moral Significance of Face Painting Conventions* (London: Associated University Press, 1994); Frances Dolan, “Taking the Pencil out of God’s Hand: Art, Nature and the Face Painting Debate in Early Modern England” *PMLA* vol. 108, no. 2 (1993): 224-239; Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Roy Porter, “Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England” *Etudes Anglaises* vol. 38 no. 4 (1985): 389.



appropriated and propagated, were not unique to the eighteenth century. In his discussion of anxieties regarding female legibility and identity in the Restoration era, Will Pritchard, remarks that “painting injected an element of behavior (doing) into what ought to have been pure, bodily “being.” It made the otherwise authentic face a site for counterfeiting.”<sup>39</sup> He concludes, however, that, despite the mistrust which cosmetics stimulated, the dream still remained among early modern intellectuals – whether they be theologians, playwrights, philosophers or scientists – that dissimulation and artificiality could be thwarted by close attention to bodily cues. This was a dream which the physiognomy of the period promised to fulfill. For one thing, as numerous writers were eager to demonstrate, despite being morally and socially meretricious, cosmetic wearers did bear a legible mark.<sup>40</sup> The characters and inclinations of cosmetic wearers could be easy to diagnose, for only the most vain, vile and “unbridled” of persons would bother with such arts. Due to their inherent artificiality, those who wore cosmetic “slibber slabbers” could not value honesty.

Beyond the sense that a person tainted without by cosmetics was similarly tainted within, and therefore easy to judge, physiognomers also suggested that they – like the man who diagnosed Socrates – were able to see beyond any type of counterfeit beauty, be it by way of education and reason, or cosmetic “artifices.” Richard Saunders’s physiognomic treatise opened with a poem entitled “TO the deserving LADIES Satyrically,” warning ladies who employed washes, powders and fashion patches that the physiognomer would be able to detect their secrets and define “whether white or blacks your Soul/By the dimension of the Mole.” The poem told women to keep on their gloves

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<sup>39</sup> Will Pritchard, “Masks and Faces: Female Legibility in the Restoration Era,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 24 (2000): 42-43.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

and “veil [their] panting breasts” in order to hide their bodies’ telling features from the body reader’s prying eyes. It suggested, however, that the only way to fully confound physiognomic inspection was to live virtuously: “Put on your Masques, not for your face/ To keep its Painting, but your grace/ And hide your eyes, and do not role/ For here’s one judges by the bole/ And magnitude of all the parts:/ Now keep pure and sincere hearts./ If Nature’s crooked, straight your Souls/ By heavenly virtue that controles/ And gives mistake to those of skill.” The poem concludes on the basic physiognomic premise that all are born marred by original sin and must keep constant vigil for godliness: “Not by inclination, but by will/ You virtuous are.”<sup>41</sup> In his physiognomic work (1613), Thomas Hill noted that cosmetics were a good indication of how “the mind (For the most part) doth like ensue and answer to the disposition of the body.” Like the vehement critics of cosmetics, Hill repeated the ancient warning to “beware of the counterfeit beauty of most women” and instructed how their characters could be discerned. Such women carry “the head after the manner of the Hart, with the eyes rolling now upward, then downward: which argueth an especiall vnstableness, and an vnstable luxury in that creature.”<sup>42</sup>

Although Roy Porter and Pritchard focus on critics of female fashioning, male cosmetics use was similarly vilified. In 1650 John Bulwer published his *Anthropometamorphosis*, which can be read as a vindication of the natural order and traditional hierarchy by a “despairing conservative” living in the aftermath of civil war

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<sup>41</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy, metaposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive significations* (London, 1671), sigs. cr-cv.

<sup>42</sup> Hill, *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of phisiognomy orderly uttering all the speciall parts of man, from the head to the foot* (London, 1613), 19-20.

and regicide.<sup>43</sup> Amidst his demonstrations of peoples “deformed” by worldly arts and inventions, he wrote that “painting is bad both in a foule and faire woman, but worse of all in a man; for it be the received opinion of some physicians that using of complexion, and such like Slibber Slabbers, is a weaknesse and infirmity in itself, who can say whether such man as use them be sound or no?”<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, Hill deemed men who bedecked in “artifices” as “lasciuious and weake, both of will and courage.”<sup>45</sup> Overall, men were meant to be bastions of reason and rationality and women the same of virtue and obedient innocence. The use of cosmetics was a sign that neither godly ideal was currently in leading practice. Of both men and women who painted, powdered and ornamented, Hill wrote: “for such be noted of experience to be vnfaithful and euill reporters & lyars for that through their counterfeiting answer in parts, to be kinde, fraudulent and wily.”<sup>46</sup> Physiognomy reminded cosmetic wearers that beautifying the external body by artificial, human means did nothing to correct the soul. Beauty must be achieved within by moderating the unbalanced passions, which cosmetics, in their excessive luxury, personified.

Anxieties over disorder and dissimulation intensified questions regarding physiognomy’s efficacy while simultaneously reinforcing the pertinence of the revelations of physiognomy texts. Despite his concerns, Saunders had no doubt in the potential of his science to ameliorate the social ills of his time. La Chambre bridged these two positions of criticism and confidence in the presentation of his own work. He argued

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<sup>43</sup> William E. Burns, “The King’s Two Monstrous Bodies: John Bulwer and the English Revolution,” in Peter G. Platt ed., *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1999): 187-205.

<sup>44</sup> John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: = man transform’d: or, the artificiall changling ...With a vindication of the regular beauty and honesty of nature*, (London, 1653), sig. Nnr.

<sup>45</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

that his approach was a carefully constructed “Art of Knowing Man” which should not be considered as nothing more than physiognomy whose “power reaches no further, then to make a discovery of the present inclinations and thence draw some light conjectures, in relation to Vertues and Vices.” While his style of inquiry into people’s bodies and corresponding characteristics did such things, he continued, it did so “with greater exactness” and also went beyond, in that “it promises to shew, what were, or will be, the inclinations and passions, past and to come, the strength and weakness of mens minds, the dispositions they have to certain Arts and Sciences, the Habits they have acquir’d: and what is most important, it teacheth the way to discover secret designs, private actions, and the unknown Authors of known actions.”<sup>47</sup> Above all, he concluded, no one need worry about being 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.”<sup>48</sup> While La Chambre may have hoped to set himself apart from other physiognomers of his day, his earnest fascination with unmasking artificial fronts to reveal “true” self was regularly argued as physiognomy’s most practical and necessary application.

Displaying both his favour for moderation, or “the meane” in political and religious matters, the royalist John Evelyn wrote that Oliver Cromwell was an excellent example of a body which betrayed its inner unbalanced passions: “Let him that would Write and Read the History of the late Times, particularly that of the late Usurper *Cromwell*, but seririously [sic] contemplate the Falls and Lines of his ambiguous and double Face ... to read in it, without other Comment, Characters of the greatest

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<sup>47</sup> La Chambre, sigs. B7r-B8v.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., B7v.

Dissimulation, Boldness, Cruelty, Ambition in every touch and stroak.”<sup>49</sup> In a similar fashion, he cited Monmouth as an example of how “very beautiful Persons have seldom met with lucky Destinies.”<sup>50</sup> Significantly, 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.”<sup>51</sup>

### **“Never trust a wry neck”: Symmetry and Sectarianism**

As I have suggested, physiognomic treatises regularly linked disfigured or disorderly bodies with dissimulative tendencies. Features which failed to fit physiognomers’ idea of correct bodily proportion were generally indicative of souls and intellects out of spiritual and social balance. In his coverage of the “notes,” “marks,” and “signatures” found written on everything, from foreheads, chins, necks and shoulders, to hands, pubic hair, thighs and ankles, Hill established firm connections between the perfection and orderliness of such parts and the passions they revealed. For instance, we read that gaping nostrils are indicative of overly large testicles and that a man with such features is “lecherous, a betrayer, deceitful, a lyer, envious, covetous, a niggard, of a grosse wit, and somewhat [sic] fearefull.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly, crooked feet with toenails like hawk’s talons denote “Deceivers, Theeves, violent Catchers, and Filthy talkers.” A

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<sup>49</sup> John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals, ancient and modern together with some account of heads and effigies of illustrious and famous persons ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (London, 1697), 339-340.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Shaw, *The Philosophical works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Veralum, Viscount St. Albans, and Lord High-Chancellor of England; methodized, and made English from the originals, with Occasional Notes, to Explain what is Obscure; And shew how far the several Plans of the Author, for the Advancement of all the Parts of Knowledge, have been executed to the present Time. In three volumes. By Peter Shaw, M.D.* (London, 1733), 94.

<sup>52</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 93.

person can be read as a fool if his or her head, like that of an ass, is “not answerable to the neck and body and proportioned orderly after nature.” Followers of “many of the hypocriticall religions,” we read, were ridden with “vnshamefastnesse, irefulnesse, greedy catching and rash boldnesse, which proceedeth through the hotnesse and drinesse of the braine.” Such wayward souls have “the head Pineapple formed ... in such manner that the neather part shall be bigge and round, but the vpper part sharpe to a Pineapple fashioned.”<sup>53</sup> We are to understand that, if the heads of fools and the “hypocriticall religions” were uniform to nature’s symmetrical perfection, their inclinations, humours and entire bodies would also be in harmony. Through “conformation of parts,” the “truth” about a person’s personal, and therefore social, conformity was made evident by the body. Through such moderate conformity, a person with “rightly” proportioned features was likely to “have a lawdable minde, nighest approaching God, through an upright behaviour.”<sup>54</sup>

In a similar vein, Richard Roussat found that “he hath a good memory, and well composed nature, that hath a soft flesh, moist and mean, between rough and soft, and when he is neither too great nor too little.” A person could be expected to be composed and spiritually proportionate “when he is white, declining to redness; or when he is neither too much, but meanly black, gentle of countenance, having the hair full and mean, great eyes, somewhat round: A mean head after a good fashion with a great neck and equal set.”<sup>55</sup> La Chambre argued that beauty – which is “the perfection of parts, and

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 201, 25-26.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Roussat, *The most excellent, profitable, and pleasant book of the famous doctor, and expert astrologian; Arcandam, or, Alcandrin To find the fatal destiny, constellation, complexion & natural inclination of every many & child by hisbirth [sic]. With an addition of physiognomy, very pleasant to read*, trans., William Warde (London, 1644), sigs. M4r-M4v.

consists in the just Conformation they ought to have” – can be found in harmony with social norms and expectations. “The Body is the Instrument of the soul,” he wrote, “and the greater number of faculties and different powers this latter hath, so much the greater diversity of parts must the former have ... the Instrument ought to be proportionate, both to the cause by which it is used, and to the action which it is, by its means, to perform.”<sup>56</sup> Saunders, for his part, also extensively detailed how symmetrical silhouettes most likely denoted symmetrical souls. In his summary of how to read bodies, Saunders (like William Chillingworth) saw truth and symmetry as being one and the same. The well balanced “characters of truth and sincerity,” he noted, have “the mediocrity of the face, and the proportional composure of the cheeks and temples,” with a “voice mean, betwixt big and small.” On the contrary, however, the “signs and characters of a Lyar” include “the body crooked and deformed,” “the face fleshy,” and “the speech quick and fawning, pronounced something through the nose.”<sup>57</sup>

As a particularly pertinent example of nonconformity, and therefore disorder, the supposedly “unsymmetrical” bodies and opinions of religious “sectaries” became targets of more politically moderate physiognomers. Writing in 1642, at the outbreak of the Civil War, George Spinola warned against religious enthusiasm and argued that “impressions of slovenesse, disorder and disproportion must need affect the Spirits of such as are habitually averse from decencie, order and proportion.”<sup>58</sup> Compared to the more erudite

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<sup>56</sup> La Chambre, 37-38.

<sup>57</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 275.

<sup>58</sup> George Spinola, *Rules to get CHILDREN BY WITH HANDSOME FACES: or, Precepts for the Extemporary Sectaries which Preach and Pray, and get Children without Book to consider and look on, before they leape. That So, their Children may not have such strange, prodigious, ill-bodeing Faces as their Fathers, who (unhappily) become so ill- phisnomied themselves, not only by being born before their conversion, by originall sin, and by being crost over the face in baptisme; but by the lineall ignorance of their parents too in these precepts, for begetting children of ingenuous features and symmetrical limbes*, (London, 1642), sig. A2v.

and “scientific” treatises by men like Hill, Saunders and Evelyn, Spinola’s short (five pages) and polemical pamphlet was especially forthright, accessible and easy to comprehend. Entitled *Rules to get CHILDREN BY WITH HANDSOME FACES*, it played on the classical physiognomic axiom that a person’s immoral lifestyle could manifest itself through the procreation of ugly children. The pamphlet purported to tell parents how to “beget good and Orthodox Faces” among their offspring through religious conformity. Conflating Protestant nonconformists with “Roman Priests” to discredit both, and highlight what he perceived to be their deviant irrationality, Spinola defined the “very essence” of sectaries as “the abjuring of all Order.” Their unchecked sinful inclinations, he wrote, made them and their succeeding generations the physical manifestations of foolishness and disorder.<sup>59</sup>

Resembling Prynne’s claims that England, as cosmetics made clear, had never been so degenerate, Spinola claimed that never before had England witnessed such a profusion of sectarianism and ugly faces: “I confesse in all my observations of the Phisnomies of Men, I have 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.” Take, for instance, a “presbytery,” we read, “which neither he nor the Christian World, for this almost fifteen hundred years, well understood.” Such an individual “begets a thing of such doubtfull shape, that when it is presented to a Minister that can see, he may justly doubt whether it be a thing that ought to be Christened at all, or not.” A combined “love of Presbitery” and “dislike of Episcopacy” has the effect of making such a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



“miscellaneous” – and therefore motley, or confused and disjointed – “Impression ... in the blood, that any thing begot of that is very likely to look monstrous scurvily.”<sup>60</sup>

Significantly, Spinola confirmed imbalance of the passions as the source of sectarian disorder. This followed the physiognomic assertion that, as much as “knowing thyself” was about discovering personal partialities to certain passions, so “perfecting thyself” – the job of any “true” Christian – was about regulating those passions to a state of “mediocrity.” Love and hate, wrote Spinola, “cut deepe Impressions on our Soules,” and when overly nourished, or misguided, they have the effect of destroying the body. Just as hate can create “dismembered, strange unshapen figures” so can “extemporary Cock-Sparrow devotion,” or unbridled love: “if you chance to mingle your loves promiscuously (Which I will not say) as you interweave opinions, and beget monsters, in reason, your Church may well *Vie* with Africk for monstrous shapes ... Take heed therefore, (good private Christian) of these hot, private, lusty, and promiscuous meetings.”<sup>61</sup> Spinola firmly advocated orthodoxy and “the meane” with regard to religion, social mores and expectations. In this particularly “promiscuous” time, his work implied, be rational and vigilant, and do not be overcome by the combined effects of passions, inclinations, emotions and appetites.

Interestingly, Spinola’s short piece did not explicitly invoke dissimulation as a danger; rather, the implication was that close attention to the “physnomies of men” would readily reveal their inner inclinations and wayward beliefs, thereby penetrating deceit. Perhaps Spinola was suggesting that sectaries and separatists – who “of imagination, they are known to have a greater share, then of Reason” – were like madmen. Their reason had

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., sigs. A1v, A3r.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., sigs. A4r-A4v.

been sacrificed by “the ignorant heat of [their] desire,” ensuring that such disorderly disturbers, although dangerous, were no longer dissimulative. Other polemicists did fear that people might be fooled by religious enthusiasts. For instance, in *An Old Bridle For a Wilde Asse-Colt* (1650), Raunce Burthall admonished people not to be drawn in by the “seducing ways” of those “Antichristians” called Ranters who lack righteousness and “rationall and civil deportment.” Many of these “false prophets,” he wrote, have been “very beautiful and glorious professors of the gospel, so that in appearance to all men ... Christ was their end both in profession and conversation.” Their proud looks and convincing eloquence was likely to ensure that “these false Prophets shall have many followers.” Despite their seeming beauty, however, “truth suffers deeply by them”: “witness, their high and eminent expressions, even to admiration, one while: and in a moment curse and sweare like Bedlams: Is this the spirit of reformation? Is this restoring the creature from its fall, to its primitive excellency, they pretend so indeed, but it appeares otherwise.”<sup>62</sup>

### **“Moderate and peaceable”: Envisioning the English Body**

One of the many anxieties characteristic of seventeenth-century English political and social life revolved around questions of natural, or true, Englishness. This was an anxiety especially prominent among writers who worried that England’s natural beauty, honesty and godliness were being marred and deformed by the corruption of cosmetics and excessive fashions. In *The English Gentlewoman*, for instance, Richard Brathwaite

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<sup>62</sup> Raunce Burthall, *An Old Bridle For a Wilde Asse-Colt Or, The new mystery of iniquity unfolded, briefly discovering the Physiognomy of a wanton youthful King Carnall Reason, who under the name of true reason bewitcheth, and deceiveth many unstable soules; for these whose sakes is here declared their cunning wiles, and flights; by which they do deceive and draw disciples after them, to their own perpetuall disgrace, if not destruction*, (London, 1650), 3-4.

worried that English love of foreign fashion was deconstructing its important delineation from other nations: “We usually observe such a fashion to be French, such a one Spanish, another Italian, this Dutch, that Poland. Meane time where is the English? Surely, som precious elixir extracted out of all of these. She will neither relye on her own invention, nor compose her selfe to the fashion of any one particular Nation, but make herself an Epitomized confection of all. Thus becomes she not only a stranger to others, but to her selfe.”<sup>63</sup> By depicting innate national temperaments, physiognomy promised to help alleviate such anxieties. La Chambre’s work argued that, if physiognomic study was important for people to discover the nature of those around them, then how much more important must it be for people “entrusted with the management of Embassies, and the most important Transactions of Crowns and Scepters, and consequently, oblig’d to treat with People of different Tempers and Climates?”<sup>64</sup> In diplomacy and politics, “it suffices not, to be guided by those common observations and characters of men, which are obvious to the Populace, and commonly mask’d and disguiz’d but the grand secret is, to penetrate into the Closets and insinuate into the very bosoms, of Princes and Favourites.”

Although penned by writers with decidedly different agendas, there was little distinction between cosmetic and religious dissimulation. Both were considered indicative of England’s spiritual imbalance and disunity. As much as the body served as a metaphor for the church, so cosmetics emphasized the degree to which that body was in a state of corruption. Although these authors may have had varying ideas on the form England’s body of believers should take, they were, nonetheless, in agreement that the

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlewoman drawne out to the full Body: Expressing, What Habilliments doe best attire her, What Ornaments doe best adorne her, What Complements doe best accomplish her* (London, 1631), sig. Cv.

<sup>64</sup> La Chambre, sig. A4v.

body's members, should be in conformed proportion, for unity and "mediocrity" was synonymous with truth. Combining the metaphor of cosmetic masking, or "dawbing," with what he saw as the nation's current insincerity, Hall deplored "how many in our days pretend Religion" and "dawb over their wickedness with pretences of Godliness."<sup>65</sup> He regarded cosmetics as "spots of Malignity and Rebellion" or "the botches of Christian society," and in evaluating the true destiny and character of the English nation, he wrote, "the beauty of God's people is an inward beauty consisting in holiness, humility, meekness, modesty, mercy ... the people of God must not contend with the people of the world about *fashions*, indulgence in such cases cannot stand with sincerity."<sup>66</sup> Thomas Wright found that England had a "naturall inclination to Vertue and honestie,"<sup>67</sup> while George Spinola wrote that England's people should be similar in their handsomeness and share "but one Name, and that Christian."<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 7: Adam and Eve before the Fall. Their linked arms and mirrored postures suggest unity and balance.<sup>69</sup>**

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Hall, *A practical and polemical commentary, or, exposition upon the third and fourth chapters of the latter epistle of Saint Paul to Timothy wherein the text is explained, some controversies discussed, sundry cases of conscience are cleared, many common places are succinctly handled, and divers usefull and seasonable observations raised* (London, 1658), 124.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Hall, *Comarum akosmia the loathsomnesse of long haire, or, A treatise wherein you have the question stated, many arguments against it produc'd, and the most materiall arguements [sic] for it refell'd and answer'd: with the concurrent judgement of divines both old and new against it: with an appendix against painting, spots, naked breasts* (London, 1654), 102.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, sig. A5v.

<sup>68</sup> Spinola, sig. A3r.

<sup>69</sup> Anon., *Aristotle's Legacy*, 19.

In 1655 Richard Baxter applied the metaphor of the body to scripture. People who did violence to scripture to suit their own ends, he implied, disfigured truth: “It is certain that the Truths of God’s Word are one perfect well jointed Body; and the perfect symmetry or proportion, is much of its beauty ... no man can know Gods truths perfectly, till he see them all as in one Scheme or Body, with one view, as it were, and so sees the Location of each Truth, and the respect that it hath to all the rest; not only to see that there is no contradiction, but how every Truth doth fortifie the rest.”<sup>70</sup> To the same degree that the true church and true scripture were each “one perfect well jointed Body,” so within physiognomic texts did a symmetrical and well- proportioned body denote honesty, goodness and a well-moderated self. At the onset of the Civil War, Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* noted that the soul was ruled by “a kind of Triumvirate, or triple government of three competitors” – affection, faith and reason – which “distract the peace of this our commonwealth.” To treat the rebellious “conspiracy of Passion and Reason” Browne prescribed “a moderate and peaceable discretion [which] may so state and order the matter, that they may be all Kings, and yet make but one Monarchy, every one exercising his Sovereignty and Prerogative in a due time and place, according to the restraint and limit of circumstance.”<sup>71</sup> Comparing the body to “a little world, or a certain type of the great world,” Saunders noted that when “in the body all parts and qualities 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.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Baxter, *The arrogancy of reason against divine revelations, repressed, or, Proud ignorance the cause of infidelity, and of mens quarrelling with the word of God*, (London, 1655), 23.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642), 36.

<sup>72</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy* (1653), 266.

Critics of cosmetics and sectaries implied that maintaining a natural and beautiful balance would serve as an antidote to the disorder in which their nation was mired. In this regard, the physiognomic stress on examining and monitoring all parts and features of the body, and the striving for its perfect conformity and symmetry, can be read as a reflection of this broader theme. Within physiognomy, readers were assured, lay the antidote to dissimulation and the key to social order. Hall reprimanded the English people to seriously ask whether they merely pretended virtue, or actually and truthfully embodied it; whether they were “a Formall, or a real Christian.”<sup>73</sup> To the physiognomers of his day, the answers to such questions were written on the body

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<sup>73</sup> Hall, *Practical and Polemical Commentary*, 124-125.

### Chapter 3

#### **“Even in things alike there is diversity”: Uniqueness and Identity**

In *Religio Medici*, Thomas Browne compared each limb or signifying mark which God had printed on each body, to letters which – when placed in their proper order – made up a single word. With the letters of the alphabet, a nearly infinite number of words could be created. Similarly, human “letters,” – lines, wrinkles, moles, limbs, parts, etc. – uttered infinite possibilities. Browne noted that people regularly wonder how it can be that, among millions of people, there were none alike. The real query, he continued, was not so much how there were *none* alike, but how there could ever be *any*. Like the majority of England’s physiognomers, he argued that the sheer volume of human variety was both mysterious and providential: “he that shall consider how many thousand severall words have been carelessly and without study composed out of 24. Letters; withal how many hundred lines thereare to be drawne in the fabricke of one man; shall easily find that this variety is necessary.”<sup>1</sup> “Even in things alike there is a diversity,” he wrote, “and those that doe seeme to accord, doe manifestly disagree. And thus is Man like God, for in the same things that we resemble him, we are utterly different from him.”

Browne’s discussion of diversity eventually delved into that of identity. He argued that it was precisely because of divinely-appointed variety that it was impossible for humans to be anything but unique: “There was never any thing so like another, as in all points to concurre, there will be ever some reserved difference slip in, to prevent the Identity without which, two severall things would not be alike, but the same, which is impossible.”<sup>2</sup> Such ruminations on the “truth” of identity are a common characteristic of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (London, 1642), 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

seventeenth-century physiognomic writings. Building on the Aristotelian claim that “in physiognomy we try to infer from bodily signs the character of this or that particular person and not the characters of the whole human race,” Evelyn and Saunders also insisted on each human’s “particular” or “peculiar” identity. Evelyn, for instance, wrote “so has the Wise *Creator* tempered and formed Mankind, that tho’ we are all of us composed of Members and Parts like, no Man is alike.”<sup>3</sup> Claiming – albeit tongue in cheek – that “A Natural Fool can never be made a Wise Man,” he drew attention to the innateness of character.<sup>4</sup> Saunders, similarly, stressed the diversity of bodily “significations” and temperaments. There is such variety that “in the whole Universe you shall not find two men alike answerable in all conditions, for the temperament is, as men are, various.”<sup>5</sup>

### **“The composition of the body”: Uniqueness**

Seventeenth-century physiognomic truth claims regarding the orderly diversity of humankind and unique identities seem, upon first glance, fairly straightforward. As Christopher Rivers notes, “Physiognomical thought is by definition essentialist and deterministic, the body always serving as an index to some fundamental, innate truth which orders and explains an individual.”<sup>6</sup> However, discussion of each person’s unique physical marks, and therefore unique natural and innate personality, had to contend with early modern notions of identity and assumptions regarding collective interests and outer

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<sup>3</sup> John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals, ancient and modern together with some account of heads and effigies of illustrious and famous persons ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (London, 1697), 337.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>5</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie, metoposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive-significations* (London, 1671), 263.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 9.



influences. Physiognomic calls to “know thyself,” rather than being an encouragement to foster individual action and belief, was more about self moderation and, through God’s grace, self-abnegation. As I have argued, the uniqueness that “thyself” referred to was the various combinations of astrological and humoural influences and, most significantly, the assortments of sin which varied from person to person.

Similar to how there were more commonly “noxious” planetary and humoural influences and imbalances, so there were many more vices than virtues, making a sort of smorgasbord of sin from which each person was dished out different fares. John Bulwer reminded his readers that only Adam and Eve were actually created by God firsthand, “but the rest were made and born answerable to the discourse of Mans invention.” He noted God’s supreme knowledge and judgment in suggesting that He had realized from the very beginning that humans were prone to “deprevations and deteriorations”: “But of man it seems, God was distrustful from the beginning, he did not pronounce upon Mans Creation that he was good, because his goodnesse was a contingent thing, and consisted in the future use of his free will.”<sup>7</sup> Beneath man’s inventions, we all still retain a kernel of “those degrees of goodnesse that God imprinted upon them at first,” but to draw near to it, we must always search for it and strive against the everlasting effects of the Fall. The primary reason for learning about one’s innate nature and individual inclinations was to make them subservient to education and morality. In this regard, the tale of Socrates’ free will and identity can be considered as a lesson in moderating and suppressing the self. In admitting that the physiognomer was right to declare him depraved, Socrates emphasized

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<sup>7</sup> John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: = man transform'd: or, the artificiall changling ... With a vindication of the regular beauty and honesty of nature*, (London, 1653), sig. B4r.

the degree to which he was aware of his natural inclinations and had formulated and balanced his identity against them.

Roy Porter argues that physiognomic studies pre-dating Lavater are quintessential examples of early modern constructions of identity. He depicts Lavater's late eighteenth-century style of physiognomy as a "physiognomical revival" for, rather than reading the visage for types, or "public and universal messages – the face of fear, dignity, nobility, beauty," as he suggests early physiognomers had done, Lavater "read the integrated ensemble of the face – all features, in their mutual relations, to reveal the unique self."<sup>8</sup> Porter's conclusions resemble Kay Flavell's remarks on Lavater's "reproduction of many actual traces of *individualized* faces as well as types."<sup>9</sup> They have also been recently revisited by Dror Wahrman, who argues that the late eighteenth century introduced a "new regime" of identity in which categories such as gender, race and class were no longer "understood primarily as collective categories, but as individual traits stamped on every person."<sup>10</sup> He describes this "sharp" shift as a sudden and monumental "rupture," meriting the designation of a "cultural revolution." Like Roy Porter, he suggests Lavaterian physiognomy as an ultimate example of this far-reaching and complete shift from traditional to more modern understandings of identity. What Lavater offered, he argues, "was distinctly different from that which had characterized the earlier heyday of physiognomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Roy Porter, "Making Faces: Physiognomy and Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England," *Etudes Anglaises* 38:4 (1985), 395.

<sup>9</sup> Kay Flavell, "Mapping Faces: National Physiognomies as Cultural Prediction," *Eighteenth-Century Life* vol. 18 (1994): 12.

<sup>10</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

In his discussion on freedom and necessity, Lavater compared people to caged birds whose spaces, or abilities to act, feel and experience or comprehend the world around them, was limited by the size of the cage to which they had been assigned. “To force a man to think and feel like me,” wrote Lavater, “is equal to forcing him to have my exact forehead and nose; or to impart unto the eagle the slowness of the snail, and to the snail the swiftness of the eagle ... Each individual can but what he can, is but what he is.”<sup>12</sup> To Wahrman, Lavater’s example of the birdcage “epitomizes” the late eighteenth-century entry of a new notion of identity: “deep and consequential, fixed and real, determined and determining: it does not take much of an imaginative leap to see Lavater’s bird as the newly fixed inner core of selfhood, and the cage as those impermeable boundaries of identity, now essentially inscribed in the physicality of the body, from which the self can no longer fly away.”<sup>13</sup>

This chapter suggests that notions of the self as depicted in seventeenth-century physiognomic texts already demonstrated the essentialism or a “fixed inner core” which Porter and Wahrman date to later physiognomy. In the seventeenth century, however, focus on innate and essential natures was not to demonstrate human mastery and individualism but, rather, to diminish it. Thomas Browne’s focus on the infinite variability of human forms emphasized the degree to which humans could never fully comprehend the mysteries of the universe, whereas God, the creator of it all, could. Richard Saunders wrote that, in discovering the very 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,” as well as why

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<sup>12</sup> Johannes Caspar Lavater, *Essays on physiognomy; calculated to extend the knowledge and love of mankind*, vol. 1, trans., Henry Hunter (London, 1797), 91.

<sup>13</sup> Wahrman, 297.

each uniquely etched person, and all of humanity, in its variety, is termed “a *Microcosm* or little world”: “That great Creator of all things having drawn lines and marks on our bodies, that we may (in considering and discovering them) with greater admiration, contemplate his Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Infinite mercy, in stamping such mysterious characters on us, and forming us after his own image.”<sup>14</sup> Although Socrates could alter his behavior and character, human attempts to recreate the original goodness and divorce the body and soul from the influences to which they had been fated, could never match God’s. Focus on the world’s vastness and God’s omnipotence was essential to the sinful and unique self defined within these texts: focus on the body was an extension, or rather a reflection, of these understandings. As much as Lavater’s depiction of the bird confined by the limits of its cage may characterize the movement to modern notions of identity, so does the fact that his physiognomy focused primarily, if not solely, on the face.

The style of physiognomy which Roy Porter and Dror Wahrman link to older, collective, constructions of identity is certainly recognizable in England’s seventeenth-century physiognomic texts. A number of these works, for instance, replicate the Aristotelian style of indicating how to spot certain categories or types. De Vulson’s *Treatise on Physiognomy*, for example, groups signifying physical traits under such headings as the “rude and unciviliz’d person”, “the foolish”, “the drunkard”, “the lyer”, “the bold and hardy” or “poisoners.” Murderers can be spotted by their thick, tufted and joined eyebrows, while timorous types are indicated by, among other things, their stooped frames, soft skin, feeble extremities, hairless bodies, thin thighs and “an ill

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<sup>14</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy*, sig.(a2)v.

colour'd squinting eye.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Frederick Hove's *Physiognomical Characters of Persons of several different Humours and Inclinations*, from 1680, groups 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 can be categorized as “Impudent.”<sup>16</sup>

The signification of types, rather than attention to autonomous selves, can be considered as a feature of the period's astrological physiognomy. For instance, rather than listing physical traits which supposedly correspond with certain social categories or caricatures, Indagine attributes them to certain astrological signs. In “Of Physiognomy,” we find that those born when the Sun is in the first ten degrees of Cancer are “comely both of body and hair, narrow brows, quick and pregnant witted, marked in the right arm and thighs, having a good spirit and disposition, and plenty of friends.”<sup>17</sup> Humans born when the sun is in the third “face” of Cancer, however, “maketh them gross and dull, with hairy brows full of itch, and as it were blown or puffed up in the face.” Grouping physical and corresponding character traits under certain astrological signs is comparable to linking them with familiar temperaments, or, as Charles Taylor describes it, “archetypes”; both practices can be interpreted as signs of a prevailing notion of identity which favoured socially prescribed or expected roles over individual subjectivity. Indeed, the very malleability of seventeenth-century physiognomy as a method of inquiry can be seen as reflective of older forms of identity. The practice did not have one sole

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<sup>15</sup> De Vulson, 182 -202, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Hendrick Hove, *Oniopolus, or dreams interpreter. Being several aphorisms upon the physiognomy of dreams made into verse. ... To which is added several physiognomical characters of persons of different humours and inclinations. After which follows the praise of ale. And lastly, the wheel of fortune, or Pithagoras wheel* (London, 1680), 51-73.

<sup>17</sup> Indagine, sigs. H5v-H6r.

designation or purpose, but could easily be absorbed by various studies and types of interest. In addition to its manifestations in medical, philosophical and astrological literature, physiognomy -- as Michael Shortland has noted -- had “a wide array of domains” and “nothing is easier” than finding its influences in everything, from social and political theories, to various forms of art and speeches and sermons.<sup>18</sup>

Wahrman writes that a characteristic feature of the traditional, or what he entitles the “ancien regime” identity, was its flexibility. Using, among other things, literary depictions of female knights who donned male-designated dress and actions, and climatic theories as examples, Wahrman argues that, while before the eighteenth-century recycled and familiar identity roles may have been carefully constructed and policed, they still maintained a degree of mutability and agency which later “disappeared with remarkable speed.”<sup>19</sup> Up until the late eighteenth century, he writes, criticism of “unnatural” behaviours, such as manliness in women, or effeminacy in men were couched by the ability to imagine “alternatives to the prevalent norms as viable, tolerable, unthreatening, at times even appreciable.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, more mutable categories such as fashion and dress tended to designate identity – as opposed to more “fixed” attributes of complexion or physicality – thereby allowing captives, or peoples who looked physically different, to assume the clothes and behaviours of the dominant culture and undergo a “gradual metamorphosis.”<sup>21</sup>

Recourse to the signifying or divinatory properties of multiple body parts can be seen as reflective of this more fluid sense of self. While the body’s marks and

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Shortland, “The Power of a Thousand Eyes: Johann Caspar Lavater’s Science of Physiognomical Perception,” *Criticism* 28:4 (Fall, 1986): 381.

<sup>19</sup> Wahrman, 40-41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

characteristics did suggest a person's innate, "natural" personality, the fact that there could be a number of such telling and sometimes contradictory features from which to choose, or focus on, reduced such restrictions. Everyone contained numerous natural imprints and corresponding characteristics which, at least in theory, made possible identities as various as the members and marks which constructed the human body. Like the early heroines discussed by Wahrman, who – by donning different dress and behaviours – could successfully alter their identity, readers of early physiognomic texts could cover certain bodily identity indicators and choose instead to expose others. 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. Designations were sometimes vague, leaving room for self-interpretation. For instance, in his detailed coverage of the meanings behind nostrils, Thomas Hill averred that "nostrils (after nature) thinne and very large open do denote after the mind of the phisiognomer such a person to be irefull cruell, and of a disdainfull mind." A little further down the page, he wrote that nostrils "formed large open, doe witnesse such a creature to be given to mirth, and strong in the composition of body."<sup>22</sup> It was up to the readers, or amateur physiognomers, to decide whether their large nostrils, or that of their subjects, fit the first or second description best. This type of self diagnosis flew in the face of fixity and allowed for a range of flexibility, or agency, especially compatible with early modern notions of identity.

In his discussion of Lavater's engagement with the Socrates story and notions of self, Kevin Berland briefly traces "shifts in the notion of character." He argues that Lavater's struggle with the implications of the classic physiognomic story resulted in his

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<sup>22</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 107-108.

“stand[ing] the traditional pattern on its head.” Rather than agreeing that Socrates was born bad but overcame his innate failings, as did seventeenth-century writers, Lavater insisted that, although Socrates’s face was eventually marred with the onset of inclinations, he was actually born naturally moral.<sup>23</sup> In this regard, Lavater resembled many eighteenth-century philosophers (Rousseau most famously) who believed that individuals were born innocent before eventually being corrupted by society. The contrast highlighted here reflects changing views on human sin, salvation and morality – themes which Charles Taylor argues are under-recognized, yet essential to the formation and comprehension of identity. In seventeenth-century texts, Socrates is born sinful according to the period’s dominant interpretations of original sin. The sense that the marks of sinful inclinations can increase with age and experience is, of course, not a concept unique to the eighteenth century. George Spinola’s pamphlet from 1642, for instance, accounted for people being “ill-phismomied” by reason of original sin, but also by disorderly society, wrongful instruction and wayward life choices.

Spinola, like so many seventeenth-century physiognomy writers, also recommended that parents take note of astrological influences in play before conceiving. A man should not “dare to enter the armes of his mistris, before he has praemeditated, and is certainly inform’d whether benign stares [sic] be in the Horoscope, whether happy Planets smile upon one another with a gracious aspect, that a Childe may not be got (as *Spencer* speaks) *Under ill-disposed Skies, when sullen Saturne sits ‘ith’ house of obloquies.*”<sup>24</sup> To some, astrological influences worked in similar ways to Lavater’s

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<sup>23</sup> Kevin Berland, “Reading Character in the Face: Lavater, Socrates and Physiognomy,” *Word and Image* vol. 9 no. 3 (1993): 252-269.

<sup>24</sup> George Spinola, *Rules to get CHILDREN BY WITH HANDSOME FACES: or, Precepts for the Extemporary Sectaries which Preach and Pray, and get Children without Book to consider and look on,*



interpretation of Socrates' inclinations. For instance, in John Butler's controversial defense of astrology as a "sacred science" from 1680, we read the following:

Pretty it is to observe, how a Child, as soon as it draws breath, becomes *Time-smitten* by the Face of Heaven; and receives an impression from all the parts of Heaven and the Stars therein, which taking Rise from the Ascendent Sun and Moon, and other significant places, does operate as the Impressors stand in distance, nearer or farther off: and this seems to be a concatenation of many knots which untie by course, and by distance turns, and as every knot unties, different times seem to fly out, and to do their errands; and of these sometimes you shall have two or three or more lucky knots opening together, and otherwhiles as many bad ones.<sup>25</sup>

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 that Socrates was born pristine but had his inner inclinations etched into his appearance as he grew older. Despite such similarities, however, the Lavaterian interpretation of the Socrates story suggests a decidedly different view of human nature and autonomy. As discussed in chapter one, the traditional truth that humans were more likely to be reprobate than righteous had softened; the dominant Lavaterian idea that people were born as separate sheets of paper which grew increasingly blotched with time – as opposed to something already stained, connected to all of Creation's past and present and, ideally, in search of regeneration and balance – was a decidedly different foundation from which to formulate identity.

Seventeenth-century physiognomic texts indicate that Wahrman's seemingly quick birth of the new identity "regime" in fact had a long period of gestation. In her

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before they leape. That So, their Children may not have such strange, prodigious, ill-bodeing Faces as their Fathers, who (unhappily) become so ill- phisnomied themselves, not only by being born before their conversion, by originall sin, and by being crost over the face in baptisme; but by the lineall ignorance of their parents too in these precepts, for begetting children of ingenuous features and symmetrious limbes, (London, 1642), sig. A3v.

<sup>25</sup> John Butler, *Astrology A Sacred Science. Shewing the Excellency and great Benefit thereof, where it is rightly understood, and Religiously observed* (London, 1680), sig. (c)3v.

discussion of eighteenth-century novels, Barbara Benedict demonstrates physiognomy's compatibility with the eighteenth-century's culture of sentimentality.<sup>26</sup> Like Porter and Wahrman, she notes that seventeenth-century physiognomy was primarily concerned with social categories; however, she is also sensitive to the deep roots of developments regularly associated with the eighteenth century and ways in which seemingly contradictory "truths" coexisted. She argues that late seventeenth-century physiognomy already recognized the importance of private – as opposed to corporate – actions, and significantly, she cites Aristotle's conclusions regarding doctors and musicians to illustrate how attention was paid to personal traits rather than social identities. While the professions or stations to which people might be best suited could be read on their faces, the actual fields which they had fostered, or fallen into, did not alter the signs upon which true body readers relied. No matter how commendable an acquired "piece of knowledge" may be, wrote Aristotle, any sort of physical alteration that knowledge may produce is but a "transitory sign," and "no doubt if you took a transitory sign to be permanent, it might be true once in a way, but still it would be worthless because it would not be a constant concomitant of the affection."<sup>27</sup> Taking their cue from Aristotle, seventeenth-century texts by writers like Hill and Saunders depict social identities as "transitory signs" and not the sole sum of all a person's parts. Recognizing private action, however, is not the same as sanctioning it, and as I have argued in the previous chapter, private actions were highly suspect and in need of physiognomic deciphering to encourage conformity.

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<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, "Physiognomics," trans. T. Loveday and E.S. Forster, in *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* vol.1, ed. J. Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1238.

While self-diagnosis of physical signs could be variously interpreted, 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 God had originally etched on the body. Physiognomy was foundationally concerned with classifying and contemplating differences, be they between people, or even between the various signifiers of a singular form; two identity categories in which seventeenth-century physiognomy's essentialism is made particularly clear are gender and race. Both of these categorizations are social constructions which overlook the unique individualism so valued by modernity. In making these categorizations a matter of divinely determined nature and a set of permanent stamps which people could read on the body, however, physiognomy tied people to these constructions in fixed and pernicious ways.

### **Essentialism: "Gender"**

Aristotle noted that men and women, and their opposing shapes and inclinations, were the most natural, and basic classifications: "I will now first attempt to make a division of animals by the marks in which they are bound to differ if they are respectively brave or timorous, upright or dishonest. We have to divide the whole animal kingdom for this purpose into two physical types, male and female, and to show that mental attributes are congruous with each of these types."<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, he wrote that man is naturally opposite to everything female. Like a lion, his is "the braver and more upright nature,"

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1243.

well and moderately built, and exhibiting bravery, generosity, liberality, pride, fairness, ambition and camaraderie. Females, on the other hand, he compared to spotted leopards, whose “whole body [is] ill-articulated and ill-proportioned,” with the corresponding traits of mischievousness, thievishness, obstinacy, intractability and “low cunning.” Women, he claimed, also shared characteristics with domesticated animals and “beasts of the field” who must apply themselves to herdsman and hunters.<sup>29</sup> Although they are both animals, and therefore share the same general classification, lions and leopards – like men and women – were depicted as naturally opposite and unequal.

Aristotle’s basic divisions fundamentally informed seventeenth-century physiognomy. In La Chambre’s *Art to Know Men*, we read that of “those rules of Physiognomy which *Aristotle*, and other great Persons among the Antients, have left us,” there is “no truth so well established” as that which demonstrated the natural division of the sexes.<sup>30</sup> Although La Chambre recommended Aristotle’s work, he also modified it, for he did not feel that the comparisons of men to lions and women to panthers correctly captured the intransigence of their respective natures. In his animal comparisons, La Chambre implied, Aristotle was depicting generalizations rather than innate natures. The lion, he wrote, “is more proper to frame an Idea of the *strength*, than of the *perfection* of the Sex.” Among other characteristics, the sometimes violent tempers, big voices, unbalanced gait and overly large features of lions deviate “too much from the mediocrity most befitting humane nature.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, La Chambre argued that Aristotle’s discussion of the leopard (translated as “panther” in La Chambre’s text) is but another

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Marin Cureau De La Chambre, *The Art How to know MEN. Originally Writtin by the Sieur De La Chambre, Counsellour to His Majesty of France, and Physician in Ordinary*, trans., John Davies. (London, 1670), 35.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 20.

sign that Aristotle had not entirely captured the full truth: “when he proposes the Panther for the Idea of the Female Sex, it is easily perceiv’d, that his consideration runs more upon the strength of the Sexes, than their natural perfection, since that is a creature, which is indeed very stout and courageous, but hath not the docility the fearfulness, and other qualities proper to a woman.”

For substantiation of the truth which La Chambre argues he can thoroughly reveal, readers need only exercise close physiognomic examination of bodies. Of women, for instance, we read, “of all the figures and lineaments which contribute to the Beauty of the Woman, there is not any one but denotes a vicious inclination. We need produce no other proof of this truth than the natural weakness, which is remarkable in the body of the Woman.” Under the heading entitled “shewing wherein consists the natural perfection of the Woman,” we find that women are made perfect in their imperfections, for from their naturally cold and moist constitutions “it follows [they] should be *weak*, and consequently *fearfull, Pusillanimous, Jealous, Distrustfull, Crafty*, apt to *Dissemble, Flatter, Lie*, easily *Offended, Revengefull, Cruel* in her revenge, *unjust, Covetous, Ungratefull, Superstitious ... Unconstant, Light, Unfaithfull, impatient*, easily *perswaded, Compassionate, Talkative*.”<sup>32</sup> Conversely, “of all the parts, which make up the Male Beauty, or which is beseeeming a Man, there is not any but denotes an inclination to some particular virtue.” La Chambre suggested that a person’s sex bestowed his or her “faculties and inclinations” upon the soul.<sup>33</sup> By making sex the foundational truth from which the soul and body receive instruction, La Chambre implied a fixedness which may not – as studies of literature and pamphlets of the day denote – have yet had considerable

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 23.

cultural purchase, but was, nonetheless, a strong feature of the “famous science” of seventeenth-century physiognomy.

Earlier in the century, Thomas Hill wrote that a woman attired in men’s clothes suggested that her nature was comparable to a man’s. He cited a story of “that courageous woman named *Fracassa*” who, like the Amazons and female knights, was able to mask her gender with “mans apparell: and would on a brauery many times arme herself at all points.”<sup>34</sup> She even had physical attributes which were regularly reserved for men and manly inclinations. These included an upright stride and “hips, buttocks, thighs, and legs, neare agreeing to mans.” She was not free of quintessential female features, however, for she also reputedly sported a disproportionate, “pineapple like” head, large breasts, and the same “bearing her head playing like to the Hart,” which was characteristic of deceitful “strumpets in their wanton decking and alurements.”<sup>35</sup> That her truth-telling body could contain both male and female marks suggests an ambiguity expected of early modern notions of identity and demonstrated by Wahrman. However, her body was also marked with “sundry notes” that indicated she “was subject to some violent death.” Had her body been less ambiguous, and more “natural,” perhaps her fate would have been more favourable. As discussed in chapter one, there was potential to change fate through education and grace. Had Fracassa hoped to change hers, she would have had to search out and attempt to reform the manly inclinations which “deformed” her. Elsewhere, Hill repeats the “worthy lesson” to “flye and eschew that Womans company when shee is of composition manly: for there is a sure token in hir, both of Luxury and Wickedness.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hill, *art of physiognomy*, 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

Wahrman writes that a substantial shift in the construction of femaleness was the tightening of the cord between women and motherhood. In Hill's description of breasts, he wrote that women whose breasts have no veins "are vnfitte to giue suck vnto Children: For that such a posture doth argue a flewmatick, and an inordinate matter. Such women also are of a rude nature, and beastly: & giue suck with paine through some greeuous accident."<sup>37</sup> That a woman whose body supposedly belied her inability to breastfeed was correspondently also rude and, in being "beastly," bordering on the inhuman, suggests the degree to which restrictive truths about female identity were already tightening. Rather than being simple criticisms of behaviour, gendered diagnoses like these suggested that deviations from the norm was a disorderly deformity, deemed so not only by social expectations, but also by divine dictate and the uniqueness of self. Just as each sex was prone to certain tempers, so were they associated with certain innate and essential inclinations which both made them unique and required abrogation.

Unlike *The New School of Love*, which noted that each of its correlations between physical and character traits "will hold generally true in either sex," seventeenth-century physiognomy texts clearly depict sex as the foundational diagnostic difference.<sup>38</sup> There are, however, some exceptions. In Saunders's breakdown of "types," – an intemperate person, or a "lyer" for instance – the emphasis is on general body traits and not sexually determined differences. Nonetheless, the predominant assumption is that even when they share similar traits and similar diagnoses, men and women cannot necessarily be read in the same way. In the instances in which generalized body traits mean the same thing for

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>38</sup> Anon., *The New School of love, or, True art of courtship. Shewing how every one may know his partner's disposition and temper by their hair, their eyes, and their nose, &c. With the interpretation of dreams and moles. To which is added several love-letters, and songs, toasts and sentiments* (London, 1786.), 3.

men and women, Saunders clearly notes as much. A mole on the right side of the forehead, for instance, is a sign of good fortune for each. Similarly, “a mole on the left side, near the corner of the Eye, and towards the Hair, inclining to the Ear signifies another on the left side of the Hickle-bone, behind, denoting the party, either man or woman, to be of a sullen, morose temper, viciously inclined, insomuch that punishment is threatened.”<sup>39</sup> The fact that these similarities in male and female fate are not assumed, but must be continuously pointed out, is indicative of the assumption that there is a natural division between the two sexes and that shared fortunes and inclinations are exemptions to the rule rather than the norm. The majority of physical diagnoses found within these works continuously distinguish between the two sexes by demonstrating that although men and women may sometimes share similar signatures, such as bushy eyebrows, full lips, crooked feet or bent backs, they usually mean different things. Although the right-handed mole mentioned above may have foretold good fortune for both men and women, the nature of that fortune was determined, and limited, by gender:

A Mole appearing on the right side of the Forehead under the line of the Moon and not cutting or impeding the line ... sheweth another to be on the right side of the belly, and demonstrates the man to have good fortune in Merchandize, in buying and selling, as also to be fortunate in short and long journeys ... To a woman, her chieftest fortune comes by marriage, if it [the mole] be of honey colour, she marries a stranger, a man of another contrey, if red, then it signifies riches to her; if black, her husband shall undertake a long journey and stay much from her; if it appear like a lentil raised up, she travels with her husband.<sup>40</sup>

Arguably, the physiognomic assessments of men restricted them, in some ways, to an even greater degree than those of women. There is an implicit sense among seventeenth- century physiognomers that, if women were naturally unbalanced and sinful,

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<sup>39</sup> J.S., *The true Fortune-teller, or, Guide to knowledge Discovering the whole art of chiromancy, physiognomy, metaposcopia, and astrology* (London, 1698), 81.

<sup>40</sup> Saunders, “A Treatise of the Moles,” *Physiognomy and chiromancy* (1653), 4-5.



then, following the argument, falling victim to their passions and wills (rather than exercising reason) displayed their true femininity. Since men were meant to be naturally less imperfect, there was, in theory at least, very little flexibility. The amount of attention these texts pay to determining signs of sinful effeminacy is equal to that of murder and thievery. As the above mentioned examples suggest, while there was considerable focus on the delineation of male and female, the majority of diagnoses were still directed at men. In this regard, these texts were largely instructional pieces for men (who were supposed to exhibit bodily and moral perfection) to realize how imperfect, and therefore unmanly, they were.

Physiognomic concentration on male shortcomings can be understood in the context of gender ideologies spouted by such literature as conduct books and anti-cosmetic treatises. William Prynne, for instance, found the looking glass to be “the proper passion and madnesse of women.” He could not find, however, any cause or excuse for what he considered to be male vanity. Such behaviour, he exclaimed, “is no ornament, Grace, nor comelinesse, but rather a deformitie, and disrespect to men: as being unsuitable to their Magnanimous, Masculine and Heroike sexe.” Barnaby Rich wrote that, while female nature wavered, and could therefore be induced to good or ill, men, on the other hand, “are composed of an uneven temperature of the elements together with the malicious influence of the planets, prefiguring them to be sturdie, stubborne, forward and overthwart ... there is more possibility to reclaime ten ill living women, to a conformitie of a better life, then to reforme one misliving man.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, physiognomers’ insistence on the myriad signs of male physical and character

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<sup>41</sup> Barnaby Rich, *My ladies looking-glasse Wherein may be discerned a wise man from a foole, a good woman from a bad: and the true resemblance of vice, masked under the vizard of virtue* (London, 1616), 14.

degradation emphasized both the difficulty and importance of getting men to strive for symmetry and proper self-control. Despite the effects of original sin, however, writers like La Chambre were more apt to insist on the natural perfection of men, thus implying apparent male physical and character degradation to be an unnatural deformity.

As mention of works by Prynne and Rich indicate, the gender descriptions which informed physiognomy writings were far from unique. Numerous historians have demonstrated seventeenth-century England's commonly shared gender assumption among men and women of various religious and political persuasions.<sup>42</sup> Sermons, ballads, dramas, criminal proceedings and conduct books all spoke to the morality and godliness of gender distinction and inequality. In his *Advice to a Daughter*, for instance, George Savile emphasized that “there is Inequality in the sexes, and that for the better Oeconomy of the World, the Man, who were to be the Law-givers, had the larger share of Reason bestowed upon them; by which means your sex is the better prepar'd for the Compliance that is necessary for the better performance of those Duties which seem to be most properly assign'd to it.”<sup>43</sup> Physiognomy combined and essentialized such claims through arguments of “innateness” and “truth.” In her discussion of eighteenth-century novels, Barbara Benedict argues that physiognomy added additional authoritative sanction to the natural division of the sexes. Similarly, Juliana Schiesari argues that Della Porta's seventeenth-century physiognomic codification of animal/ human comparisons legitimated early modern gender roles and bolster received stereotypes “by making of

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<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and the Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: University Press, 2004); Susan D. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender & Class in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University, 1993); Sara Mendelson & Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: University Press, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> George Savile, *Advice to a Daughter as to religion, husband, house, family, and children, behaviour and conversation, friendship, censure, vanity and affectation, pride, diversions*, (London, 1699), 26

them something ‘natural’ as well as essential.”<sup>44</sup> Assumptions regarding essential truths about character and identity permeated England’s seventeenth-century physiognomic writings.

### **Essentialism: “Race”**

In *Making Sex*, Thomas Laqueur notes that, although late eighteenth and particularly nineteenth-century empirical science may have instituted new “truths” about the nature of sex and gender, it is still best understood as merely a new, albeit particularly pernicious way of legitimating persistent ideologies.<sup>45</sup> In this regard, his conclusions on the differentiation and construction of sex are comparable to Stuart Hall’s discussion of race as a “floating signifier.” Scientific sanction, notes Hall, is but one relatively recent discourse, or “discursive soother,” which “makes true what cannot be made true in any other way” and then transfers to a different “soother” once its efficacy runs dry.<sup>46</sup> Like the constructions of gender, then, constructions of race can be understood as ongoing and fluid processes of negotiated meaning. Despite such a description, however, the complexity of the term “race” is compounded when attempting to track its construction in an early modern context. As numerous theorists and historians conclude, if hardened, cohesive discourses of race are the product of modern scientific developments generally dated to the late eighteenth century, then they cannot be accurately applied to a

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<sup>44</sup> 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), 58.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Stuart Hall, *Race: The Floating Signifier* (Northampton: Media Education Foundation, 1996, videocassette).

seventeenth-century context when the term was understood differently, and when identity categories were, arguably, much more mutable.<sup>47</sup>

There seems to be a contradiction, however, between the important argument that race is a social construct in all times and places -- and in constant need of loosening from its ties to scientific “truth” -- and the notion that it cannot be accurately spoken about in an early modern context, when biological fixity was not yet a foremost source of truth. In *Race in Early Modern England*, Ania Loomba and Jonathon Burton seek to dissolve arbitrary divisions between pre-modern cultural/social and modern scientific assertions of race. The problem is that the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries are recognized as a historical period in which capitalism, empire building and individualism began to take shape, yet “when it comes to the question of race, the Renaissance is routinely understood as drastically *different*.”<sup>48</sup> Recent scholarship has sought to complicate such hard and fast temporal boundaries. Colin Kidd, for instance, highlights the persistence of religious and classical influences within the race-making realm of empirical science.<sup>49</sup> Kidd, like Hall, refers to race as a “moving and fuzzy target” and, along with other historians such as Roxanne Wheeler and Kim Hall, argues that early modern societies employed a number of tools, including religion, history and habit from which to construct and discuss race.<sup>50</sup>

Wahrman is sensitive to such early discourses of difference and focuses, for example, on the effects of fashion and climate. Although the transition to an innate racial

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Anthony Appiah, “Race,” in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study, Second Edition* (Chicago: university of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton, eds, *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> Kidd, 2; Hall, *Things of Darkness*; Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

identity is “messier than that for gender,” he writes, the theme of “repeated stories of successful *passing*,” is nevertheless readily recognizable in both.<sup>51</sup> Like the amazons, English peoples, like those in west and east Indian climates, could “metamorphose” into “blackness” through acclimatization. Similarly, Wahrman analyzes images which depict interactions between European and indigenous peoples and finds that, rather than “the traits of complexion and physiognomy that some might consider as more reliable, perhaps even immutable,” people are differentiated by the “mutable attributes” of dress and fashion.<sup>52</sup> Wahrman appears hesitant to apply the term “race” to the early fluid, yet persistent depictions of difference, favouring, instead, cultural difference as a more appropriate measure of pre-modern notions of ethnicity. He writes, “it was culture – be it religion, dress, education, or level of civilization” which was “privileged above all other markers of difference.”<sup>53</sup> It was from such cultural delineations, however, which discourses of race – or at least, in the words of Wheeler, “proto discourses” – can be considered to have been created. Furthermore, if, as Wahrman implies, a sense of fixity or essentiality is imperative to the accurate definition and application of race, then there is still room for discussion of ways in which, as Juliana Schiesari notes, seventeenth-century physiognomy systematically helped harden constructions of gender as well as race.<sup>54</sup> Physiognomy’s foundational function was to reveal truth about each person’s unique and innate nature, and therefore it acts as an interesting avenue through which theories of race and racialization can be explored.

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<sup>51</sup> Wahrman, 102

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 83-104.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>54</sup> Schiesari, 57.

Stuart Hall's emphasis on the organization of human difference as a potent seed which, when planted in beds of language, propagates race, is particularly pertinent for early modern contexts in which racial "othering" through interconnected discourses of difference predominated. However, while his useful model of discursive "soothers" highlights the changeability of racializing processes and challenges the sense that race-as-empirical science was inevitable, it does not acknowledge ways in which numerous sanctions or "soothers" can operate simultaneously. As I have argued, seventeenth-century physiognomy combined a number of epistemologies, such as astrology and humoral medicine, which stressed each person's innate behavioural tendencies. While, in theory, people could act against the influences of original sin, the stars and tempers, such influences did nevertheless have a degree of divine and unchangeable authority. In regards to astrological influences, for instance, birthdates were fixed and could not be changed.

Whether people were born cold, hot, dry or moist, or sanguine, choleric, melancholic or phlegmatic, would decide the colour of their skin and the feebleness or strength of their limbs and then, of course, the character tendencies associated with such humourally determined features. Thomas Hill repeated Aristotelian associations between skin colour and inner temperament, finding, for instance, that blackness, redness, yellowness and sickly pallour were the product of humoral imbalances. Blackness, he wrote, "dooth declare a weake, fearefull, & craftie man, applied vnto them which dwell farre south, like as the Indian: & that because such are Melancholick, whose property is to be fearefull. Againe, the Moores and the Egyptians, and thorough the inordinate heate,

vnder which they be borne, are thereby but weake.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, redness – the product of too much “hotnesse” – suggested someone to be a “wine-bibbler,” or more especially, “the colour very red, doth declare such a person (of experience knowne) to be craftie, and applyed to the Foxe: also the Prouerbe sayeth, that we sildome see a little man meek, and a ruddy man faithfull.”<sup>56</sup> Frederick Hove combined his grouping of character types with medical types. “The Phlegmatick,” for instance, had, among other things, soft skin, running eyes, watery mouths, heavy eyes and pale complexions and “as for the temper of the Mind they have much of the dullness and slowness.” There was a sense that a humourally informed character could be adjusted and was therefore mutable, for application to a physician could bring humours back into balance. However, any applications that the physician may recommend to alter the causes of someone’s “blackness” or “redness” would be artificial adjustments: the natural and inborn temperament would always be present – something to be constantly vigilant of, and fought against.

In searching out the character, inclinations and complexion of English people, Thomas Wright argued that although the English were regularly misunderstood as stupid and simple, this was simply an effect of their innocence and goodness. Spaniards and Italians, he found, will prefer English servants to those from their own country, for unlike those hotter regions, Englishmen are naturally inclined to “virtue, honestie ... fidelitie, sinceritie, and diligence.” Furthermore, “the very blushing also of our people, sheweth a better ground whereupon Vertue may build, then those brazen and darke countenances who never change themselves although they commit, yea and be reprehended of

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<sup>55</sup> Hill, *art of phisiognomy*, 12-14.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

enormious offences.”<sup>57</sup> One of the reasons which Wright cited as proof of England’s virtue was its love of education. This was an argument also adopted by Evelyn, who found that a “true *English Man* ... has innate Courage, Liberality, Mercifulness” and is naturally “generous, a Lover of Liberty and Religion.”<sup>58</sup> These are characteristics which flow, in part, from the nation’s “sound and steady religion and just and easy laws” : “In a word, where Peace, and Liberty is prudently managed, Men excel in all the Moral Improvements; where Tyranny reigns, Ignorance, Sloth, Dejection of Spirit, and Superstition abound.”

Proper religious instruction, education, reason and rationality (aspects in which England was generally cited as excelling) were suggested as ways in which to reform sinful souls, thereby creating more beautiful bodies. When considering peoples whose bodies appeared to be drastically different from the virtuous ideal, physiognomers often identified lack of proper instruction, liberal government and rationality as causes. In his discussion of the “unfortunate” physical features and characteristics of various nations, Evelyn remarked that due to corrupting and tyrannical rule of “the haughty, injurious *Mahumetan*,” Africa’s various “tracts” were “Ignorant, Servile, Rash, Perjurious, Superstitious ... fearful, and consequently Cruel, Treacherous, full of Revenge ... and exceeding Bestial.”<sup>59</sup>

Using national generalizations as a descriptive quality was common feature of physiognomy texts. For instance, Richard Saunders wrote that “he that hath a great and broad mouth is shameless, a great babler and lyar, a carrier of false tales, very foolish,

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in General* (London, 1620), sig. A5v.

<sup>58</sup> John Evelyn, *Numismata, a discourse of medals, ancient and modern together with some account of heads and effigies of illustrious and famous persons ... to which is added a digression concerning physiognomy* (London, 1697), 323.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.



[and] impudent ... black people are subject thereto, approaching the nature of Ethioipians.”<sup>60</sup> In this instance, then, as in many others, the so-called “Ethiopes” are depicted as the walking personification of sinful passions and an image for English readers to strive against. Considering that the assortment of sins unique to all individuals were the great variety to be sought out and “fixed,” associating Ethiopians with such sin emphasized their otherness and essential unsuitability and implied a lack of human reason and moderation.

The relationships created between the inclinations and features of other nations on the one hand, and the type of governance, education or climate found there, on the other, is indicative of the mutability of early modern categorizations. The implication is that, were these people to apply more just government and religious instruction, their inclinations would be improved and their bodies would grow more beautiful with each new generation. However, since the just government and religious instruction recommended was strictly an English Protestant one, that mutability was actually somewhat restricted. More significantly, seventeenth-century physiognomists advertised their science for its ability to look past any adjustments of education and find the original, essential nature. Evelyn firmly stated that physiognomy was “throughout, and all along to be understood, as distinguishing Inclinations in general, ... and not such as are improved by Custom an institution, which is a second, and better Nature.”<sup>61</sup> The Catholic French and Spanish were invoked as examples of societies with the benefit of much education and civility which English physiognmers could always see beyond. Written on the body, we read, is the “cruel, bigotish and superstitious nature of the Spaniard and the unstable,

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<sup>60</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 196.

<sup>61</sup> Evelyn, 316.

and fraudulent nature of the French.”<sup>62</sup> Just as Socrates’s physiognomer recognized his personal, sinful self which stuck with him despite his human efforts to subjugate it, so could seventeenth-century physiognomers detect the essential identity beneath any metamorphosis by way of clothes or adjusted behaviour. In this regard physiognomy texts fulfill the requirements of constructed otherness – through truth statements and focus on essential natures – upon which more modern definitions of race depended.

### **“Diversity of parts”: Divinely Ordained Diversity**

Thomas Hill wrote that, by decoding the bodily secrets of peoples’ innate natures, “we maye knowe whom to make our frendes and familiars, whom to reserve from being our foes & whom to avoyde as dangerous to have to do with all.”<sup>63</sup> For this reason, physiognomy was essential knowledge, for being guided by false appearances of virtue, rather than the truth of providentially dictated and balanced variety, led to chaos. Evelyn remarked that providence had “ordain’d such a variety of looks” for the very reason of keeping society well balanced. If this were not the case, “the whole Government and Polities of the World, must long since have run into Confusion and sad Disorder. For who could have distinguish’d the *True-man* from the *Thief*?”<sup>64</sup> In his discussion of whether “monstrous nations” replete with “deformed” men could be considered “of *Adams* Progeny,” Bulwer remarked, “God made all, and when or how he would forme this or that he knows best, having the perfect skill how to Beautifie the universe by opposition

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 326-327.

<sup>63</sup> Hill, *physiognomy* (1556), iv-v.

<sup>64</sup> Evelyn, 336.

and diversity of parts.”<sup>65</sup> There was a correct, natural and “true” moderation in variety, for too much of the same would be unbalanced.

The sheer variety of everyone’s unique bodily marks, traits and inclinations was not only necessary, it was, as Saunders had noted, a sign of God’s omnipotence and wisdom. Studying the scriptures, he argued, is “not sufficient, unless we also read and see him in his Creatures, which is done, not so much by outward speculation, as by a sedulous search into their Velated [veiled] nature and abscond [hidden] disposition.”<sup>66</sup> What such a search would reveal is the degree to which God was, in the end, unknowable. For, considering how difficult it was to grasp the infinite variety imprinted on each individual, trying to master the personalized marks of each unique individual God had ever created was beyond any human capacity.

It is interesting that Lavater’s late eighteenth-century physiognomy writings – which Kevin Berland, Roy Porter and Dror Wahrman all agree are a telling example of more modern notions of the autonomous self – focus specifically on the face. Whereas the previously popular seventeenth-century physiognomy texts carefully and exhaustively listed each body part and its corresponding character traits, Lavater instead primarily studied the face alone. The profuse illustrations of famous busts and faces which populate his pages are a testament to this shift in physiognomic focus. Like physiognomers before him, Lavater marveled at variety, and noted that humans are made in God’s image as a testament to God’s omnipotent glory. However, although he does mention that humans have largely disgraced that image, the overall impression of the body, human nature and the source of selfhood which he provides is decidedly different:

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<sup>65</sup> Bulwer, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Saunders *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, iii.

Observe the human figure. What an exquisite model of beauty and harmony! Unity sublime! *Harmony blended with variety*! What grace, what sweet accord, what symmetry in its members and contours; and what softness, what delicacy of shadowing in its unity! Observe that *divine*, that *soul-inspired countenance*; that forehead, the seat of thought! The glance of that eye; the breath of that mouth the nameless graces which overspread those cheeks. Every thing speaks, all is in unison.<sup>67</sup>

“I have seen the worst of men,” continued Lavater, “yet could not all their vice, blasphemy, and oppression of guilt, extinguish the light of good that shone in their countenances; the spirit of humanity, the ineffaceable traits of internal, eternal, perfectibility. – The sinner we would exterminate, the man we must embrace.”<sup>68</sup>

English physiognomy texts from the seventeenth century were much less willing to distinguish between man and sin. Rather, as I have argued throughout, selves and sin were conflated. Rather than embracing “the man,” humans were to embrace the moderation and self- subordination made possible by God’s gifts of reason and grace. Physiognomy texts from the seventeenth century challenge the notion that the “cultural revolution” of the “modern identity” largely rested in the “sudden” transition from amorphousness to fixity. As much as these texts are representative of the corporate early modern self, so are they flooded with demonstrations of identity fixity, or essentialism. What shifted was ways in which diverse uniqueness was perceived and treated. Focus on the entire body and how its divergent parts expressed unique and essential assortments of sin and astrological and humoral influences both highlighted the extent of Creation’s diversity and was a reflection of it. Through such a full-body focus, seventeenth-century physiognomers were more apt to emphasize deformity and discord and the need to strive

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<sup>67</sup> Lavater, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 12.

for unison. Physiognomy's transition from the flesh to the face is indicative of shifts in attitudes away from the innately sinful self-as-soul and the increased influence placed upon, and encouragement of autonomous, human action.

### Conclusion:

#### **“Truth no one need doubt”: Physiognomy and the Cosmography of the Self**

In his discussion of metoposcopy (forehead divination) Richard Saunders found that “it is commonusual reception, that right and straight lines have the signification of good conditions; crooked lines the contrary, as denoting crafty dissembling persons; that this is a truth no one need doubt thereof.”<sup>1</sup> Why this was truth was shrouded in mystery: “from whence the cause is, I know not.” Although physiognomy sought to remove much mystery about the sinful self by mapping out the significations of the body, there was always space for more exploration. The relationship between bodily significations and innate character was an “infallible truth,” but the ways in which that relationship worked was a puzzle and God held all the pieces.

Comparing God to a “skilful knowing Geographer,” Saunders reminded his readers that “the only Creatour of all things ... created the Fabrick of the Universe, which for the magnitude, and variety of things obvious to the eyes was infinite, difficult to be searched out with the piercing eye of reason.” After having done so, He then decided that “the Universe, should be delineated and described in this little Table, even in man himself, and comprehended in him as in a compendium most perfectly, that man might be as a type of the whole Creation.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in *Religio Medici* (1642), Thomas Brown found that all the mysteries, questions and adventures which the universe afforded could “without further travel” be considered by an expedition into the “cosmography of myself.” His comments compared and united the human self to the universe whose

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<sup>1</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie, metoposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive-significations* (London, 1671), 219.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. (1653), 265.

infinite mixtures of features and elements were carefully balanced yet remained vulnerable to catastrophic chaos. All of us “carry with us the wonders we seeke without us,” and in comparing the body to “that universall and publique Manuscript, that lies exposed to the eyes of all,” he suggested that those who did not get a full sense of God in books of scripture should turn, instead, to the book of the body. Browne’s description of the body as a blueprint for the self and its various connections and influences is emblematic of the type of physiognomy which seventeenth-century English writers and translators favoured. Interestingly, a few years following Browne’s contribution, René Descartes’s *Passions of the Soul* (1650) was translated into English. Descartes’s ruminations aligned with physiognomic stress on dissimulation and moderation, yet differed in concepts of the self in significant ways.

Christopher Rivers has suggested that, although he is rarely identified as a physiognomer, Descartes is nonetheless “the most influential figure in the history of seventeenth-century physiognomy.”<sup>3</sup> According to Rivers, this influence is founded upon his engagement with more “scientific” discourse. Following the seventeenth-century trend away from classical authorities, Descartes wrote that his journey for truth directed him off avenues traveled by the ancients: “what the Antients have taught concerning [the passions] is so little, and for the most part so little credible, that I cannot hope to draw nigh truth, but by keeping aloof off from those roads which they followed.”<sup>4</sup> Taking his cue from developments in anatomy and the divorce between humoral theories and

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavater, Balzac, Gautier and Zola* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>4</sup> René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul in three Parts* (London, 1650), 2.

astrological influences, Descartes compared the body to a machine.<sup>5</sup> Rather than contending, like the physiognomers studied in this project, that the soul and its passions were woven into and indivisible from every part of the body, he limited its residence to a deep interior “kernel” within the brain: “the soul can have no other place in the whole body but this kernall where shee immediately exercises for functions.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite his detail of how the residence of the soul connected to the body’s nerves, veins and members, Descartes believed in divisions between the body, the mind and the self. Significantly, his arguments for the soul’s residence in the brain influenced the late-seventeenth-century French painter Charles Le Brun’s focus on the distortions of the face. In his *Method to Learn to Design the Passions* which was first presented as a lecture in 1668, Le Brun provided an overview of ancient physiognomic views which united the soul to all parts of the body. He concluded, however, that “if there be a Part, where the Soul more immediately exercises her functions, and if it be the Part mentioned, in the middle of the brain, we may conclude that the Face is the Part of the Body where the Passions more particularly discover themselves.”<sup>7</sup> Elaborating on Descartes’s theories, Le Brun suggested that “as the gland in the middle of the brain, is the place where the Soul receives the images of the Passions; so the Eye-brow is the only Part of the whole face where the Passions best make themselves known; tho’ many will have it to be in the

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: Physiognomy in European Culture 1470-1780* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 26; Juliet McMaster, *Reading the Body in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Descartes, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Le Brun, *A method to learn to design the passions, proposed in a conference on their general and particular expression. Written in French, and illustrated with a great many figures excellently designed, by Mr. Le Brun, chief painter to the French King, Chancellor and Director of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture*, trans., John Williams (London, 1734), 19-20. For discussions of Le Brun’s influence, see 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); McMaster, 73-101.



Eyes.” If “man be truely said to be the Epitome of the whole World, the Head may well be said to be the Epitome of the whole Man.”<sup>8</sup> Considered in retrospect, and with a knowledge of the course physiognomy was to take, it is difficult to argue against Descarte’s influence. Focus on his influence in this regard, however, should not be paired with an implication that such a transition was inevitable.

Facial physiognomy did not necessarily require a shift in the placement of the passions to find a following. Even Thomas Hill (1613) who diligently detailed “all the special parts of man from the head to the foot,” surmised that “no part there is of mans body, which like expresseth the passion of the mind, as the face properly dooth.”<sup>9</sup> Richard Saunders also noted that “the face is a part so fit to disclose all the affections of the inward parts.”<sup>10</sup> As this project has demonstrated, however, such brief statements were soon drowned by the sinful and externally influenced self which the full-body study of seventeenth-century texts revealed. Johannes Indagine (1676) found it to be the act of a “mad man” to “give judgement of the life and all the states of mans body” by “rashly” considering a single feature. He found it offensive that “any man should think to include or shut up the knowledge of so high and great things into so straight and narrow corners,” and recommended that everyone follow his example:

[I] behold the whole body, with the Lineaments, and Proportions of the same, which is called his Physiognomy ... Then I cast mind to the hour of nativity, month, day, or year ... then plainly judging none of these by themselves sufficient and thinking it better to judge them fools in giving light credit, than I to be counted rash, foolish and hasty, in giving sentence.

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<sup>8</sup> Le Brun, 55.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hill, *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of phisiognomy orderly uttering all the special parts of man, from the head to the foot* (London, 161), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, sig. (a2)r.

So that when I have gathered all these together, and taken hold of that which I think meet for my use, I utter my judgement.<sup>11</sup>

In a similar vein, Saunders simultaneously encouraged human reason and warned against hubris, insisting that everyone “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.”<sup>12</sup>

In seventeenth-century physiognomy texts which carried the most cultural purchase within England, each reader was encouraged to discover his or her essential and unique self. However, this was not a self separate from the body, and natural uniqueness was not a product of the mind’s subjectivity. Rather, it was a product of human interference with the serenity of Creation and was decided by God, and through Him, the combined influences of the stars, planets and humours. As a mirror of the various elements of the universe, each individual was meant to work in harmony with the society of which they were a part and in symmetry with nature. Full-bodied physiognomy mingled with metaphors regarding the body of the church and nation in stressing the need for balance and unity during a time in which anxieties regarding disorder and dissimulation were especially ardent. Examining all the body’s limbs and marks – including ears, belly buttons, buttocks and skin colour – revealed the utter sinfulness of the self and its vulnerability to various forces. It emphasized the need to vigilantly suppress and, through “divine grace assisting,” mitigate such influences, and thus made learning the unique self akin to learning how to best moderate that uniqueness. The

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<sup>11</sup>Johannes Indagine, *The book of palmistry[sic] and physiognomy being brief introductions, both natural, pleasant and delectable, unto the art of chiromancy, or manual divination and physiognomy, with circumstances upon the faces of the signes*, trans., Fabian Withers (London, 1676), sigs. Br-Bv.

<sup>12</sup>Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancy*, 281.

“science of the countenance” was shaped by the predominant assumptions, epistemologies and concerns of seventeenth-century England.

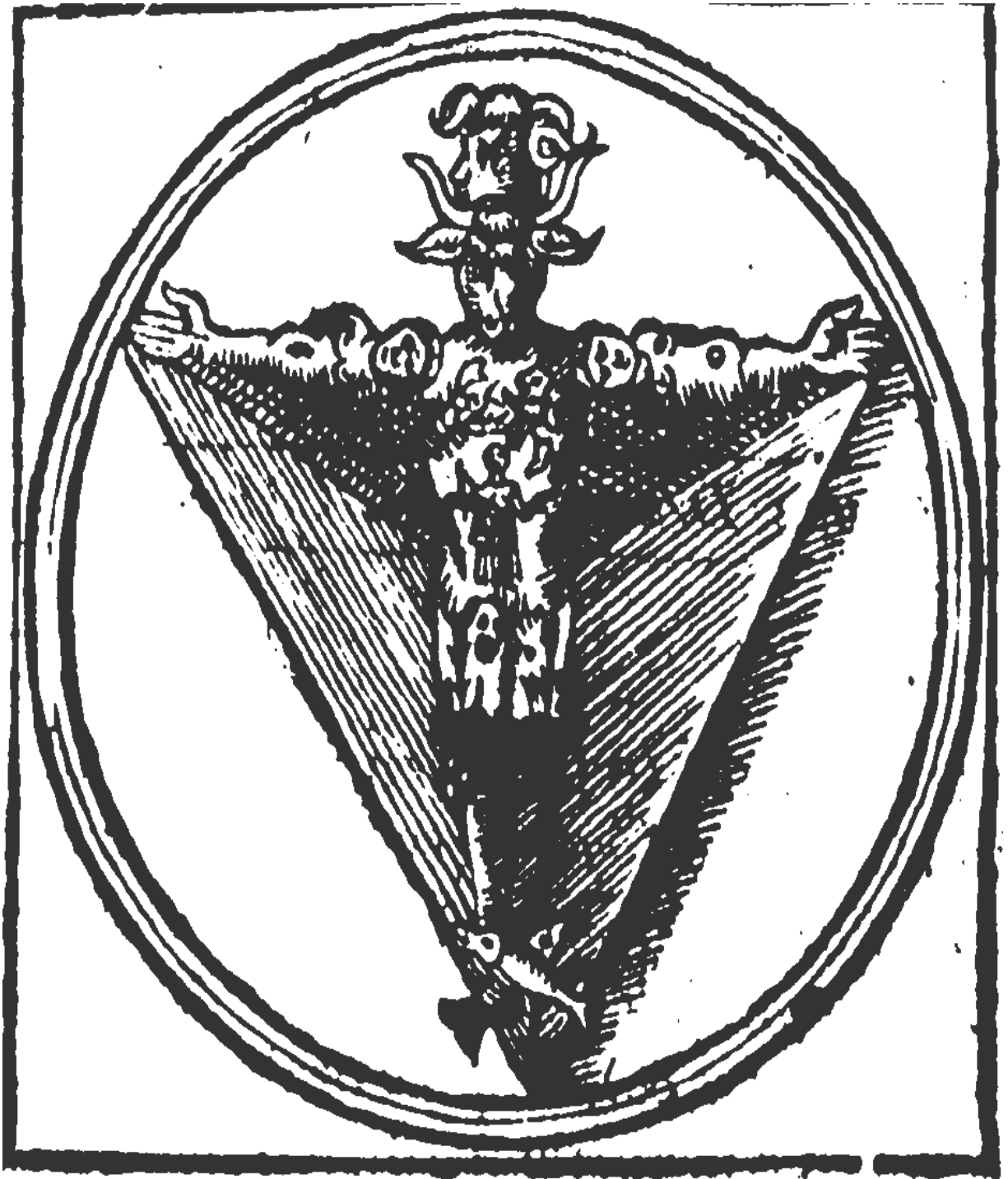


Figure 8: "The twelve signs of the *Zodiac* which contain the whole body of man."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Saunders, *Physiognomy and chiromancy*, 10.

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