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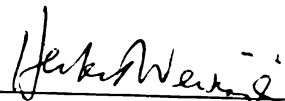
Some Uses of Physiognomy In The Plays  
Of Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and Dekker.

presented by

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## ABSTRACT

### SOME USES OF PHYSIOGNOMY IN THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE, JONSON, MARLOWE AND DEKKER

by John D. Wilson

The purpose of this study is to examine the status of the pseudo-science of physiognomy in Elizabethan England and to determine how extensively and in what specific ways it was used by four of the leading dramatists of the period.

Physiognomy represented, in Renaissance Europe as in the ancient world, a most useful body of knowledge. Its basic pretension. . .to reveal the secrets of a man's temperament, intelligence and character (and occasionally his future), merely by consulting his outward features-- attracted all manner of men, physicians, schoolmasters, businessmen, jurists, even slave-buyers in the bazaars of the Arab East. Its most exalted use was, of course, in the Presence Chamber of the prince, for upon his assessment of the men who came before him, both his own counsellors and envoys from abroad, rested the security and comfort of the realm.

Such a useful science could not but be popular. While its claims were enormous, its justifications were large enough to continue to attract devotees for over two thousand





years. But by the sixteenth century, in England as on the continent, physiognomy was no longer unequivocally accepted by all learned men. While Montaigne and Francis Bacon were still able to recommend its study, others were offended by the outrageous character it was given by wandering bands of gypsies and vagabonds. Physiognomy's drift toward outright prophecy, which it could scarcely resist, continued throughout the sixteenth century to embroil it in controversy. It was a body of knowledge which was, at once, practised in the court of James I and outlawed by the Statutes of the Realm.

If physiognomy occupied an ambivalent position in the larger society of Elizabethan England, eliciting the endorsement of some educated men and ridiculed by others, so too was it admitted on shifting ground to the great public and private stages of the period. Ben Jonson may openly mock its pretensions, but in so doing he demonstrates how useful those pretensions are to a dramatic examination of hypocrisy and outward seeming. Shakespeare, too, may appear to smile at the pseudo-science in Antony and Cleopatra, or openly question its truth in Macbeth, but in Richard III and in Hamlet he does not hesitate to invoke its language and its point of view to explore the relationship of appearance and reality. Marlowe and Dekker also find inventive ways to place physiognomy in the service of dramatic ends, from Marlowe's straightforward portrait of Tamburlaine to Dekker's satiric untrussing of Horace-Jonson in Satiromastix. This pseudo-science was,

[illegible]

in brief, very much a part of the dramatists' world and in their preoccupation with the character and conduct of men they could not but be interested in the science which purported to reveal that very secret.

It is not the argument of this study that physiognomy deserves a central place in the intellectual history of Elizabethan England or that its elaborate mode of thought is to be found pervasively or even consistently employed by the dramatists of the period. However, it does occupy a small and interesting place in that intellectual history and does warrant the attention of the student of dramatic literature, if only because of the imaginative uses which were found for it by Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and Dekker.

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OF SHAKESPEARE, JONSON,  
MARLOWE AND DEKKER

By  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The pseudo-science of physiognomy--the occult art by which men purport to read the secrets of other men's souls in the curve and color of their bodies--has a very long if not especially honorable history. It is, in fact, as old as western civilization and, in not a few corners of the modern world, continues to attract devotees to this very day. This study is about that curious science and, more particularly, about its place and purpose in the dramatic literature of Elizabethan England.

That the science of outward appearance should have proven interesting to poets and dramatists is not altogether surprising. Physiognomy, after all, represented for hundreds of years an esteemed and highly codified index to the character and motivation and inclinations of the human personality. And it is in an attempt to understand the human personality that poets invariably invest their lives and their art. So long as the pseudo-science earned some respect in the world and continued to hold a curious if skeptical audience, so long too did its certainty and its economy of method attract the men who in plays and poems were bound to explore the complexities of human character.





The literary utility of physiognomy has, of course, received scholarly attention. Professor Walter Clyde Curry's admirable study of Chaucer's use of the pseudo-science is only one of the more well-known investigations devoted to this subject.<sup>1</sup> Geneva Misener's study of iconistic portraiture and Elizabeth Evan's thorough examination of physiognomy's employment in Roman biographical and historical writing have done much to call attention to the literary possibilities of the pseudo-science realized in the ancient world.<sup>2</sup> Similarly thorough treatment has been given to physiognomy's place in modern fiction from the novels of Henry Fielding to those of Herman Melville.<sup>3</sup> In the light of these studies and the fact of physiognomy's

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<sup>1</sup>Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, (Oxford, 1926).

<sup>2</sup>G. Misener, "Iconistic Portraits," Classical Philology, XIX (April, 1924) 97-123. E. C. Evans, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography," Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, XLVI (1935), 43-84.

<sup>3</sup>For a lengthy study of physiognomy in Fielding and George Eliot see the unpublished doctoral dissertation of John Graham, "The Development of the Use of Physiognomy in the Novel" (Johns Hopkins, 1960). Charlotte Bronte's use of physiognomy has been examined by W. M. Senseman, "Charlotte Bronte's Use of Physiognomy and Phrenology," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, XXXVIII (1953), 475-86, and in the same author's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Demi-Science and Fiction" (University of Michigan, 1950). For a study of Melville's use of phrenology and physiognomy see Tyrus Hillway, "Melville's Use of Two Pseudo-Sciences," MLN, LXIV (March, 1949), 145-50. Zola's fondness for physiognomical portraiture, based upon animal analogy, is discussed by E. P. Gauthier's "New Light on Zola and Physiognomy," PMLA, LXXXV (June, 1960), 297-308.



prominence in medieval and Renaissance England, it is surprising to discover how comparatively little attention has been given to its place and function in Elizabethan dramatic literature. Certain students of the old physiology and the theory of the passions have, of course, noted physiognomy's relationship to these "disciplines" and to the Renaissance's characteristic desire to uncover all of the secrets of the microcosm.<sup>1</sup> Professor Carroll Camden has also contributed more directly to our subject by examining the currency the pseudo-science seems to have enjoyed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres.<sup>2</sup> But neither Professor Camden or anyone else known to me has considered the range and flexibility of the uses to which physiognomy was put, sometimes ignobly, by some of the greatest of English dramatists.<sup>3</sup> And this, it seems to me,

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<sup>1</sup>Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York, 1959), discusses the problem of "Nosce Teipsum" and physiognomy's supposed contribution to its solution. Also of interest is Ruth L. Anderson's study, Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays (University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, 1927), III, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup>"The Mind's Construction In the Face," PQ, XX (July, 1941), 400-412.

<sup>3</sup>I do not by this wish to overlook the valuable contributions which have been made to our understanding of the meaning of the pseudo-science in individual scenes and plays. I am indebted to the work of Professor Johnston Parr, notably his "Non-Alchemical Pseudo-Sciences in The Alchemist," PQ, XXIV (October, 1945). See also Camden's study of Tamburlaine's choleric temperament, "Tamburlaine: The Choleric Man," MLN, XLIV (November, 1929), 430-35 and for a much briefer and more general account, Hardin Craig's "Shakespeare's Depiction of Passions," PQ, IV (October, 1925), 289-301.



is the chief justification for examining this old and now hopelessly discredited science. For however dead and dust-ridden it may be in the history of science, or how curious in the history of ideas, it does come marvelously alive in the plays of Jonson and Marlowe and Dekker, and preeminently, in the plays of Shakespeare. And it comes alive in the playhouses of Elizabeth's time, not only when it is taken seriously, but when its pretensions are irreverently invoked and its claims upon our intelligence are satirized and scorned. It comes alive, in short, because, more than the ludicrous left-over of a once flourishing science, it is looked upon as a useful dramatic device and made to serve a variety of explicit dramatic purposes. And it is to an examination of physiognomy first as science but subsequently and primarily as dramatic device that the following chapters of this study are devoted.

## CHAPTER II

### PHYSIOGNOMY: ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1778 the Swiss divine, John Caspar Lavater, finished the fourth and final volume of what was to be considered by much of Europe and America one of the truly great intellectual achievements of all time. The Essays on Physiognomy created a sensation wherever it appeared and it appeared virtually everywhere. By 1810 there had been sixteen German, fifteen French, two American, one Dutch, one Italian and no less than twenty English versions--fifty-five editions in less than forty years.<sup>1</sup> The perceptions which so excited the western world are epitomized by this incisive judgment on the eyebrow:

A clear, thick, roof-shaped, over-shadowing eyebrow, which has no wild luxuriant bushiness, is always a certain sign of a sound, manly, mature understanding; seldom of original genius; never of volatile, aerial, amorous tenderness, and spirituality. Such eyebrows may indicate statesmen, counsellors, framers of plans, experimentalists, but very seldom bold,<sup>2</sup> aspiring adventurous minds of the first magnitude.

Lavater, of course, comes too late to enter our story directly. But it may be instructive to pay him the briefest

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. John Graham, "Lavater's Physiognomy in England," JHI, XXII (1961), 561-572.

<sup>2</sup>Lavater, Essays on Physiognomy, trans. Thomas Holcroft, (London, 1853), p. 470.

attention at this point for he unquestionably represents the final flowering of physiognomic sophistication. While by no means the last of its devotees, Lavater is by far the most comprehensive. In his own view, and it was one shared by most men of his time, he had succeeded finally in rescuing a venerable truth from the distorting hands of incompetent quacks. Physiognomy had at last been supplied with the certain scientific foundation it had sought in vain since its first codification in ancient Greece.

This superbly detailed example of the science of physiognomy did not just happen in the latter part of the eighteenth century. While Lavater is at pains to dissociate himself from his predecessors,<sup>1</sup> ancient and modern, and while he was widely acknowledged by his contemporaries as having succeeded, the fact is that he is merely the most confident and precise of a long line of practitioners. Indeed, I am unable to discover any truly significant difference in either his methods or his findings from those which we shall discover in the works of his predecessors.

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<sup>1</sup>"This sublime science has been debased with the most puerile of follies. It has been confounded with divination by the countenance, and the quackery of chiromancy. Nothing more trivial can be imagined, more insulting to common sense, than what has been written on this subject, from the time of Aristotle to the present." Essays on Physiognomy, p. 20.



[illegible][illegible]

At the best, then, the science of physiognomy has undergone an evolutionary development.<sup>1</sup> While it was largely articulated in ancient Greece, refinements were worked out over time, and new, and usually more occult, elements were added. However, as shall be seen, these elements are all very closely related one to the other. If they are separated in the following pages it is only because it is easier, this way, to talk about them. They are all reflections of a single, consistent view of man and the created world he shared with all other living and inanimate things.

#### Animal Analogy: The Zoological School of Physiognomy

While its origin is buried in the unrecorded past, it is not unlikely that the pseudo-science of physiognomy owes its beginning to the first time man told a story about himself and employed animals as personae. This pre-Aesopian fable, whenever it might have been told, called upon two habits of mind, both of which are essential to physiognomy. The first of these is the capacity to see the world and its living creatures in a broad and inclusive way so as to make analogical thought natural and effortless. It is this

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<sup>1</sup>While a fuller account of my indebtedness to modern students of physiognomy's development will be found in the bibliography, special mention must here be made of two admirable works of scholarship upon which I have heavily depended. These are Lynn Thorndike's History of Magic and Experimental Science. 8 volumes (New York, 1929) and

[illegible]

imaginative capacity which first suggested the frame of our ur-fable. The second is the ability to narrow one's view to a quintessential quality to the exclusion of everything else. While the first creates metaphors which undo the distinctions between humankind and the animal world, the second seizes upon a single characteristic of a given creature as the dominant and telling one and rejects all other contrary characteristics as irrelevant.<sup>1</sup> Thus the lion is equated with courage, the fox with cunning, the deer with cowardice. The gentleness of the deer, his beauty of form, his speed, his acute hearing--all these are neglected. He is made to symbolize cowardice. We can see that this particular anthropomorphic conclusion had long since been drawn by Homer's time. Achilles insults Agamemnon in the first book of the Iliad by calling him a "wine sack, with a dog's eyes, with a deer's heart."<sup>2</sup> In any event, once man gave the deer or the lion a single defining trait and permitted him to play a human role, the distance to Lavater and the esteemed sophistication of his science had been markedly shortened.

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George Sarton's Introduction to the History of Science.  
3 volumes (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1927-47).

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the antiquity of this habit of mind cf. P. A. Robin, Animal Lore in English Literature (London, 1932).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Lattimore, trans. (University of Chicago Press, 1962), BK. I, l. 288.

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There is, however, an important intervening step, and it is by no means clear how it might have been taken. The lion's "character" must be directly related to the details of his physical appearance. Leonine soul must be related to leonine body, interior to exterior, before the physiognomist can, with any confidence at all, predict courage in a man with a broad, spacious forehead or an equally broad and leonine set of shoulders. And in the dawn of recorded time we can only guess that man's budding gift of analogy served him here as well. The sweetness of a fruit, its intrinsic quality, can, after all, be guessed at if not discovered by the sheen and wholeness of its outer skin. And lest this be thought a peculiarity of vegetable life, is it not true that very large men are commonly very bold and very small men less inclined to fight? From this line of reasoning we can suppose the development of a simple syllogism, a syllogism, incidentally, which will continue to do service through the sixteenth century: all lions are courageous; all lions have big shoulders and broad chests; therefore, all creatures with big shoulders and broad chests are courageous. It is only later that Plato will provide a philosophical foundation for the belief in a fundamental correspondence between the soul and the body which houses it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Timaeus," Dialogues of Plato, B. Jowett, trans. (New York, 1937), II, p. 64: "Everything that is good is fair, and the fair is not without proportion, and the animal which

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It would be unwise to try to insist upon this patently crude reconstruction of physiognomy's origins, for it is neither very certain nor very profound. All we know is that comparative zoology became linked with comparative psychology at a very early point in time and that the ultimate fruit of this union was the pseudo-science of physiognomy.<sup>1</sup> And it was at this point that the defense of physiognomy and its methods began the long and involved process of refinement and elaboration which ultimately led to the pompous certainties of Lavater.

In the introductory paragraphs of the Physiognomics, the author, whether Aristotle or one of his immediate

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is to be fair must have due proportion. Now we perceive lesser symmetries or proportions and reason about them, but of the highest and greatest we take no heed; for there is no proportion or disproportion more productive of health and disease, and virtue and vice, than that between soul and body." Aristotle's conception of the interrelatedness of soul and body was equally influential in the development of physiognomy. As Herschel Baker so succinctly points out "Organic matter signalizes the emergence of soul, and soul to Aristotle, is merely the function or form of the body. It is form working on matter. . . ." The Image of Man, (Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p. 58. Aristotle's notion of the hierarchical gradation of soul, nutritive, sensitive and rational, is of critical importance, of course, to the concept of microcosmic man and thus joined his zoological concepts in giving support to physiognomy's basic assumption.

<sup>1</sup>The uncertainty of this view must be emphasized. Geneva Misener quite properly points out that the earliest recorded branch of physiognomy may be supposed to be the ethnological, for Hippocrates in the treatise "de aere, aquis, locis," emphasizes the influence of geography and climate on both temperament and physique. "Loxus, Physician and Physiognomist." Classical Philology, XVII (January, 1923), p. 1. I discuss the ethnological school



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successors in the Peripatetic school, has a great deal to say about the zoological school of physiognomy.<sup>1</sup> He does not at all question its validity; in fact, he speaks of it as the traditional branch of the science, but he does warn against the errors which careless application of its tenets will foster:

But those who base this science of physiognomics on wild beasts do not make their selections of signs correctly. For it is impossible to go through the forms of each of the beasts and say that, whosoever resembles this beast in body, will also be similar in soul. For first of all, no one would find it possible to say simply that a man was really like a beast, but only that he resembled it to a certain extent. (p. 89)

A very strong light of commonsense is here shining, almost brightly enough to expose the improbable character of the

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below, see p. 18. Aristotle, in Physiognomics, discusses both schools of thought. The primitive anthropomorphism of animal analogy strikes me as the more likely point of origin.

<sup>1</sup>Aristotle: Minor Works, W. S. Hett, trans., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963). Professor Hett believes the author to have been a member of Aristotle's school and to have written it within fifty years of Aristotle's death in 322 B.C. It is interesting to note, however, that there is nothing in the Physiognomics inconsistent with the views of Aristotle as expressed in the physiognomic passages of Historia Animalium: "Straight eyebrows are a sign of softness of disposition; such as curve in towards the nose, of harshness; such as curve out towards the temples, of humor and dissimulation; such as are drawn in towards one another, of jealousy" The Works of Aristotle (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), II, 13. Whether Aristotle wrote it or not, either date makes the Physiognomics our earliest extant treatise devoted to the science.

enterprise before it truly gets under way. But "Aristotle" continues his criticism by pointing out how the zoological physiognomist can avoid these faulty conclusions. Principally, he tells us, one must distinguish between the common and peculiar characteristics of animals and to insure this, should select signs from the largest possible sample. He sagely concludes that the lion is not the only courageous beast and that a more broadly based examination would have made this evident. While on the whole his approach is shrewd and cautious, "Aristotle's" basic quarrel is with his colleagues' and predecessors' failure to take pains with their collection of data.<sup>1</sup>

But not many paragraphs later we encounter this unabashed litany, which may be the result of extensive zoological investigations but sounds suspiciously like something less empirical:

Those whose forehead is small are ignorant;  
witness the pig. Those whose face is too large  
are sluggish; witness cattle. Those whose face  
is round are insensitive; witness asses. . . .  
Those with small ears are ape-like, and with  
large ones asinine; one can observe that all the  
best dogs have moderate-sized ears (p. 125)

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<sup>1</sup>Lavater says almost the same thing in 1778: ". . . the old authors say generally: high foreheads, and large foreheads betoken a feeble and slothful man. We certainly find feeble and slothful men with large and high foreheads; but all large and high foreheads are not signs of feebleness and sloth--such erroneous judgments can only be avoided by the most accurate predictions." (p. lxxxiii).



And this crude catalogue of virtues and vices, noses and ears, cats and dogs, continues down the torso and beyond that to the equally revealing signs of the voice timbre, speed of pace, hair quality and color, each related to the appropriate animal and the controlling characteristic assigned to that animal. The golden mean has never been more ringingly espoused than by the statement, "one can observe that all the best dogs have moderate-sized ears."

Unquestionably it is animal analogy which remains at the center of our science from the very beginning, even though more modern students of the face prefer to forget this. Lavater makes comparatively little of it, acknowledging that he consulted animals primarily in an attempt to arrive at distinctions between common and peculiar human characteristics, almost exactly, let it be noted, as advised by pseudo-Aristotle. But from the classical period through the 17th century it is the lion or the ape or the donkey which we meet with in the pages of our treatises. Giambatista della Porta's study De Humana Physiognomonia<sup>1</sup> is not least well known for the extensiveness of its illustrations which feature men, and the animals they most closely

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<sup>1</sup>The edition I have consulted was published in 1650, "Rothomagi, Sumptibus Ioannis Barthelin Bibliopolae." It was first published in 1586. While it was never translated into English, De Humana Physiognomonia was widely acknowledged as the definitive work on the subject and was translated into most European tongues. Dryden in the Preface to his Fables, Ancient and Modern acknowledges Porta's mastery of the pseudo-science.

[illegible]

resemble, side by side on page after page. And these, of course, are amply supported by the text, as this passage on the lion (with its primitive syllogism enshrined) clearly indicates:

Uni leonum generi, robustissimum esse & animosissimum, largiuntur; aiuntque necesse esse aliquod signum inesse ei, quo animositas, & fortitudo ea pernoscat, idque esse latum pectus, amplos humeros, & magnas extremitates habere, & ex his syllogismum desumunt: omne habens latum pectus humerosque, ad magnas extremitates: forte est & animosum (p. 9)

This search throughout the animal kingdom for clues to the behavior of men does not abate in the new world of seventeenth-century science. Richard Saunders' thesis is studded with animal tokens and John Evelyn, writing at the very close of the century, gives this remarkable testimony to the persuasive, and metaphor-producing power of this mode of analogical reasoning:

Thus some [men] are conspicuous for their Aquiline noses; and look like Hawks and Eagles, are of sublime and towering Spirits; others are Sheepish, Hog-jaw'd, Rabbit-mouth'd; some Bird-fac'd, as well as witted, whom my Lord Verulam would have fixed by studying Mathematics; and there are who resemble Owls, Buzzards, Storks, Wood-Cocks etc. . . .<sup>1</sup>

The passage goes on and on including, of course, the ubiquitous lion whose features were discovered, Evelyn tells us, indelibly imprinted on the countenance of an English sea

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<sup>1</sup>Numismata, A Discourse of Medals. . .to which is added a Digression concerning Physiognomy (London, 1697), p. 292. Richard Saunders' treatise is entitled Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopie. . .with the Subject of Dreams (London, 1671).





captain calling in at Venice and who was subsequently known by the Venetians as "Capitano Lione." It is so obvious a compliment that Evelyn does not even trouble to tell us what a brave, bold, magnanimous man the Captain was.

The exceedingly popular and influential Secreta Secretorum records the distinctive signs of the forehead when accounting for the leonine type: "Tho that have the forhedes vprerid, bene lyberall and likenyd to lyones."<sup>1</sup> Not so Thomas Hill, who would have his readers consult the gradations of color in the eye: "The eyes not very black, to a yellownesse tending, like to the Lyons doth declare an honest and friendly person."<sup>2</sup> That Hill, in all probability,

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<sup>1</sup>The Secret of Secrets or Pryvete of Pryveteis trans. by James Yonge (1422) edited by Robert Steele for The Early English Text Society, ES LXXIV (London, 1898). For an account of this extraordinary pseudo-Aristotelian document, parts of which are traceable to the third century B. C., the reader should see Professor Steele's Introduction to the poetic translation by Lydgate and Burgh: Secrees of old Philisoffres, EETS, ES LXVI (London, 1894). The physiognomic section probably owes its origin to the work of Polemon of Laodicea whose treatise on physiognomy dates from the second century. Its extant form was presumably shaped in a Syriac work of the 8th century from which it was translated into Arabic by Abu Yahya ibn Batriq and then into Latin first by Johannes Hispalensis in the 12th century then separately by Philip Tripolitanus one hundred years later. Once translated into Latin its influence was enormous. There are over 200 manuscripts extant of the Latin version besides numerous translations. Hoccleve's De Regimine Principium (1412) was directly influenced by it as was, of course, Wm. Forest's poetic account, The Poesye of Princely Practise (1548). Michael Scot, Roger Bacon Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, John Gower and many others have been shown to have been directly influenced by the Secreta.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Hill, or Hyll, The Contemplation of Mankind (London, 1571) Chap. xii. Hill, a Londoner, was an



never saw a lion in his life, let alone the iris of his eye, is quite beside the point. Indeed he may never have seen a man with the peculiar yellowing eye he so carefully chooses as a leonine token. Bacon might, at this very moment, be insisting upon the necessity of observation to sustain scientific hypotheses, but he cannot for yet a good many years hope to have an appreciable effect upon the principal Elizabethan criterion of truth, authority. And who in the sixteenth century, could ask for a greater authority than Aristotle?<sup>1</sup>

But this is clearly the wrong question. It would be more revealing to ask who in Elizabeth's time knew more about the natural world than Aristotle, or saw that world from a substantially different angle of vision? The willingness to believe a man honest and friendly because his dark eyes show a yellowing tendency strikes the modern reader as so ludicrous as to be beyond even Aristotle's power to enforce.

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exceptionally successful popularizer of the science of his time. In addition to his treatise on physiognomy he produced popular accounts of gardening, astrology, bee culture, chemistry, Hippocratic medicine, animal husbandry and countless other esoteric subjects. Louis B. Wright, referring to Hill's importance, says, "For the Elizabethan, such works on physiognomy took the place of popular treatments of psychoanalysis written to appeal to middle-class intelligences of the present time. . . . His books are typical of an enormous literature supplying middle-class readers with information similar to that purveyed by modern magazines that traffic in science and pseudo-science" Middle-Class Culture In Elizabethan England (Cornell Univ. Press, 1958), p. 570.

<sup>1</sup>Professor Lawrence Babb's account of Aristotle's influence on the affectation of melancholy in Renaissance England

Microcosmic Man

But it was not ludicrous when the book in which it is found was first sold under the sign of William Seres at the "west ende of Pauls Church." And it most certainly was not ludicrous in the eyes of pseudo-Aristotle's predecessors, the zoological school of physiognomists, who recorded similarly blunt equations. If it were smiled over, as it might have been in the Inns of Court, or in the Mermaid, it was primarily because of its extravagance and not for a moment because it was ludicrous to suppose that man was a totality, body, mind and soul, or that he was so intimately a part of nature, rock and rill, bird, fish and creeping things, as to be beyond the thought of separation. It did not require a Darwin to postulate man's relationship with the rest of creation. That relationship, if not precisely the same one, was well known to both Aristotle and Shakespeare, and in approximately the same terms. A Darwinian hierarchy based upon morphological complexity is a small and simple thing compared to the far-ranging cosmological hierarchy of the pre-Copernican world.

It is unnecessary for me to rehearse the details of this view of the universe, for they have been noted by a

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is an interesting measure of the enormous respect his every work commanded: Elizabethan Malady (Michigan State College, 1951). See also Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, Born Under Saturn (London, 1963) especially chapter V.



great many modern students of the Renaissance.<sup>1</sup> Our purposes will be served by recalling its principal features: geocentrism, the concentric spheres of the fixed stars and the planets, each presided over by the appropriate angelic order, a parallel hierarchy of all terrestrial matter from the inanimate metals and liquids of the earth, through the various plants and animals, ascending finally to man who, of course, occupied the highest rung on the ladder of terrestrial things. Man saw himself as lord of an animate earth, the fruit of the sixth day, the copy of God, the map of the world and the epitome of the universe.

And what led him to such a generous conclusion? Both his metaphysics and his natural science. On the one hand he knew from Aristotle that his soul encompassed the nutritive soul of the plants, and the sensitive soul of the animals and was, in addition, crowned by the unique and divine gift of a rational soul. And he knew too that his body, like all matter in the terrestrial sphere, was made up of the four basic elements: fire, earth, air and water, and that these in turn conferred upon him, as upon all living things, the four basic qualities (hot and dry, cold

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<sup>1</sup>I am especially indebted to Professor M. H. Nicholson's The Breaking of the Circle (Northwestern, 1950), Prof. Arthur Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being (New York, 1960), and E. M. W. Tillyard's Elizabethan World Picture (London, 1943). And these are but a few of the best known accounts of the cosmological view of our period.

and moist), with their several possible combinations. Thus it was not fancy that led him to suppose that he was the epitome of the universe, that he contained all of creation, all of the macrocosm, within himself. He literally did--matter and spirit, body and soul, he was the crystalline pool in which was reflected, however darkly, every crevice and corner of the universe.

Now this teeming universe was the making of a Creator who, to be sure, was infinite Goodness but who was, in addition, infinite Craftsman too. The hierarchy of things was marked by innumerable distinctions of the most subtle and significant kind. As Professor Nicolson reminds us, man's intimate connection with the rest of nature was such as to suggest his resemblance even to plant life, but of course he differed from plants too, even as he differed from every other created thing. The point worth making is that these differences were anything but haphazard and anything but obvious. In Sir Thomas Browne's phrase, "the Finger of God. . .hath left an inscription upon all his works. . .which doth express their natures."<sup>1</sup> He is referring, of course, to the doctrine of "signatures," which is fundamental to physiognomy, and an intricate part

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<sup>1</sup>Religio Medici, Part II, section ii, cited by M. H. Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle, p. 25.

of the overarching vision of man as a perfect model of the universe. These "signatures" are located, in Browne's view, in the "several forms, constitutions, parts and operations" of the creature, indeed in the externals which fall under the scrutiny of the physiognomist. Richard Saunders is expressing a perfectly orthodox view when he suggests that "God adorned all things created with signatures, so that the ingenious might solace itself by a disquisite search into the natural qualifications thereof."<sup>1</sup> It was beyond question, in other words, that these subtle distinctions which mark everything touched by the hand of God, the curve of your nose and the sharp bend of mine, were made for a purpose--and that purpose to reveal, if only to the ingenious, the wholeness of the natures they adorned.

That this view of man as containing all of the universe, writ small, within himself provided the ease with which he found meaningful analogies in the animal world has already been implied. But let us listen to a voice from the 16th century which discusses this notion within the precise context of "the little world of man." I am quoting from the Kalendar and Compost of Shepherds:

. . .for there is no condition nor manner in a beast but that it is found comprehended in a man. Naturally, a man is hardy as the lion, worthy as the ox, large and liberal as the cock, avaricious

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<sup>1</sup>Saunders, Physiognomie, "Epistle Dedicatory."



as the dog. . .malicious as the leopard. . .  
 dolorous and guileful as the fox, simple and  
 debonair as the lamb, shrewd as the ape. . .  
 dissolute and vagabond as the goat. . .lecher-  
 ous as the boar, strong and puissant as the  
 camel, traitorous as the mule, cunning as the  
 mouse, and reasonable as an angel. And there-  
 fore he is called the little world for he par-  
 ticipeth of all, or he is called all creatures  
 for as said he participeth and hath condition  
 of all creatures. . .<sup>1</sup>

In the Secreta Secretorum James Yonge devotes chapter forty-  
 nine to precisely the same microcosmic lesson in animal  
 psychology, which in addition to the creatures contained in  
 the Kalendar extols the bee and the bull and comes down un-  
 compromisingly on the swyne ("lecherus") and the toode  
 ("malicious"). It closes its account with a repetition of  
 what must have been a commonplace in medieval and Renais-  
 sance England:

And sortely [sic] to say ther nys noone creature  
 in the worlde, of wych a man nath sum propirte:  
 And therfor a man is callit the lytill worlde.  
 (p. 212)

A final instance, this time from John Evelyn and the Restor-  
 ation, may be worth the risk of quoting at too great length.

At virtually the very beginning of his "Digression

<sup>1</sup>Ed. G. C. Heseltine (London, 1930). The basis of  
 Heseltine's text is the translation of R. Copland (London,  
 1518). The Kalendar was also extraordinarily popular in  
 the sixteenth century. John Graham records English editions  
 appearing in 1503, 06, 08, 18, 28, 56, 59, 60, 70, 80, 81,  
 96, 1600, 04, 11, 12, 31 and 1656. "Dev. Use Phy.," Appendix B.

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concerning Physiognomy" Evelyn seeks to assure his reader of the soundness of the analogies which are to follow--and he does it, not by an appeal to physiology or authority or comparative anthropology. He does it, after Copernicus and Harvey and Galileo and Newton, by appealing to the "little world of man:"

There are some [physiognomists] of no small Reputations; who have undertaken to discover, and make out by the different Countenances of Men, not only the Resemblances they carry to the several species of brute Animals; but to their very Natures and Dispositions also: Man being not only all the Creatures in Synopsi and Compendium (for what is singular in them, is in him united) but in whom all the Imperfections, as well as the Perfections, centre:<sup>1</sup>

I have troubled to quote these various sources not because any one of them represents a sound source book for the zoological physiognomist (they are all rather curious and uncertain in this respect) but because they admirably illustrate the angle of vision from which for most of the last 2500 years the physiognomist and his fellow mortals looked upon the universe and upon man's place in it. As a consequence of this cosmological view it was not in the least fanciful to suppose that a man exhibiting leonine features likely partook of the spirit of that substantial beast and it most certainly was not ludicrous to conclude that, however one might analyze the "signatures" of the

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<sup>1</sup>Numismata, p. 292.



body, they were put there by God to permit the skilled amongst men to discover the secrets of the soul--and thus, the very secrets of the universe.

But animal analogy supplied by no means the sole method by which facial and the other external tokens might be made to yield their meaning. There were other ways and these, too, were supported directly or at some remove, by the concept of the little world of man.

#### Geography and Anthropology

In the Hippocratic writings there is a small but interesting treatise dealing with the effect of environment on the health, habits, character and appearance of human beings. Entitled Airs Waters Places,<sup>1</sup> it is as much an ethnographical essay as a medical one, citing as it does several neighboring peoples and accounting for their behavioral peculiarities by reference to the climate and topography of their lands. Clearly Airs Waters Places demonstrates that ethnography represents a second justification for physiognomy. In fact, it had become so closely identified with physiognomy by the third century, B.C., that the author of the Physiognomics cites it, along with the zoological, as a distinct school.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hippocrates, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1923), I, 67-137.

<sup>2</sup>Physiognomics, p. 85. The author does not, however, comment extensively on it or suggest methodological errors as he does with the zoologists.

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That it, in turn, was supported by the notion of man as microcosm is implicit in these sentences by Hippocrates:

Some physiqués resemble wooded, well-watered mountains, others light, dry land, others marshy meadows, others a plain of bare parched earth. For the seasons which modify a physical frame differ; if the differences be great, the more too are the differences in the shapes.  
(pp. 109-111)

Once again we might illustrate the tenacity of this view, this time in its geographic context, by turning to John Evelyn who records the learned Italian physiognomist and astrologer of the 16th century, Jerome Cardan:

As to climate and other Accidents, Cardan observing that where Trees take but slender, and shallow Roots, or the Country is subject to furious and tempestuous winds; the people are unconstant and unstable also. . . .(p. 317)

So the trees, so too must men be for they are part of nature too and are subject to the same forces and contain the same elements.

To return to Hippocrates, the burden of the argument of his little treatise rests primarily on changes wrought by climate and topography, although these in turn are sometimes related to physiological, or "humoral" alterations. Those who live in rugged, mountainous country, with sharp changes of seasons are hardy, courageous and bold, i.e., all the things they would have to be to remain and thrive in such a climate. By contrast those who live in the "hollow regions," with more hot than cold winds, will not be well-made physically but, on the contrary,

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will incline toward fleshiness and dark hair, the latter accounted for because they "are less subject to phlegm than bile" (p. 135). They are, most significantly, neither brave nor hardy like their cousins in the mountains.

There is an admirable unwillingness on the part of Hippocrates to indulge in the grosser kinds of character assassination which are usually associated with efforts to describe "barbarians." He sticks very tightly to his hypothesis and assigns few character traits which do not seem closely allied with the conditions of the environment.

Tribalism, however, soon supplements "environmental medicine" (actually there is very little medicine in Airs Waters Places) as the principal rationale for ethnological judgments of this kind. And inevitably it shows up in later physiognomical treatises. The Secreta Secretorum is content with the common north-south distinction:

For thay that dwellyth towarde the northe bene stronge and couragious, and have harde here. And tho whyche dwellyth towarde the sowthe, bene gastefall and have nesshe here, as thay of Ethiopy. (p. 221)

As we will see later, this geographic commonplace is underscored by a fundamental sexual distinction, masculine hard hair versus feminine soft hair with the "Ethiops" unknowingly suffering, not only from their proximity to the equator, but by assignment to the feminine sex which, of course, houses all the weaknesses capable of display by living things.

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Thomas Hill does not mention the Ethiopians, but fastens his judgment of the darker pigmentations of the south upon the Indians:

. . .the black colour, very soft, doth declare a weake fearfull, and craftie man applied unto them which dwel farre South, like as the Indian: that because such are Melancholick whose property is to be feareful. Againe, the Moores and the Egyptians and [sic] through the inordinate heate, under which they be borne, are thereby but weake. (chap. xii)

There is an obvious relationship suggested here between climate, racial characteristics and the physiological theory of the four humours. In fact, this relationship is an intimate one in most of the treatises which attempt to deal seriously with the distinctions among men conferred by place; there is no more obvious way for climate to work its way upon the body and the soul than through the mediating "cauldron" of the humours.

In his Examination of Men's Wits,<sup>1</sup> the Spaniard Juan Huarté cites Galen who, in turn, invokes the overpowering triumvirate, Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, as his authority for stating that "the difference of nations, as well in composition of body, as in conditions of the soule, springeth from the variety of. . .temperature" (p. 22). Huarté does not limit his discussion to

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<sup>1</sup>Translated by Richard Carew in 1594. Carmen Rogers, ed., *Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints* (Gainesville, Florida, 1959).

[illegible]

the gross division separating the north from the equator, or Europe from Asia. Indeed, he maintains that so subtle are these differences of environment that every region or province of Spain puts its mark upon the character and appearance of the people born and raised there.

One of the very well known physiognomists of the 15th century, Michael Savonarola of Padua also indulged in ethnological observations even though he depended chiefly upon animal analogy for his Mirror of Physiognomy. The reliance upon the theory of the humours as the rationale for these environmental observations is demonstrated by his pronouncements on his fellow citizens:

Other things being equal, the natives of Ferrara have better intellects than the Paduans because they are tinged--or rather singed--with the burning of melancholic choler. . . . They are therefore more ready of speech but the Paduans have better judgment because their spirits are not so mobile.<sup>1</sup>

The testimony of John Evelyn must be called upon to close our account of "ethnographic physiognomy," for in this, as in other matters, he fastens upon every conceivable theory which has come down to him and tries desperately to hold them all together. His paragraphs on ethnology are extensive in scope and character and invoke topography, air, water, wind, cloud cover, the humours, wildlife characteristics and dendrology, all

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by Thorndike, History of Magic, IV, p. 183 ff. I have not seen Savonarola's book.



as bearing upon and helping to reveal the dispositions and physical appearance of the indigenous people. Huarté's analysis of Spanish provincial variations is crudely conservative compared with Evelyn's precision:

There are Topical inclinations likewise, idiosyncritical and peculiar. Hence the Genoeze are of all others reputed the most Crafty and Subtle-pated. The Venetians Grave, Deliberate, extreamly Circumspect, Jealous, Sedate, and Moderate, Friendly, Constant to their Maxims. Those of Florence (where the air is very pure and dry) have sharp, defecate and polite Wits. . . . (p. 318)

These judgments and the far-ranging ones which precede them (Evelyn covers the globe from the Chinese to the North American Indians) are supported, for the most part, by Hippocratic notions of how climate affects the human constitution, i.e., the humours and the resultant complexion produced by their balance or imbalance. In fact, the old physiology is everywhere apparent. The inhabitants of hot countries are "commonly foolish" and for the very obvious reason that heat dissipates the vital and animal spirits even as excessive cold is likely to "hinder them from due motion" (p. 312).

#### The Four Complexions

Physiognomy's debt to the theory of the four elements, their qualities and their related humours and complexions in man, will have been made amply clear by now and I shall not trouble to discuss it at any length. Clearly the old physiology is of the greatest significance to the

pseudo-science, for above all the other "proofs" it evidenced, the physiological explanation must have been considered, from the time of Hippocrates forward, the most firmly grounded. It can readily be understood that the skeptical Elizabethan who balks at having his character judged by the amount of grizzle in his ear lobe might be more receptive to the same judgment if it is supported by an analysis of his complexion--an analysis surely sanctioned by the Royal College of Physicians.

Shakespeare's countryman knew that the humours flowing through his body were exceedingly important, not only to his physical well-being but to his mental and emotional states as well. He knew that his sanguine complexion was a function of a slight imbalance obtaining in his humoral constitution and that this in turn affected every organ and member of his body and his very capacity to respond to experience. And he knew that he was inclined to behave in certain ways--that he was physiologically bound to covet the "company of women and moche slepe and syngynge"<sup>1</sup>--and that he had therefore a defined problem, though as a sanguine man, not an especially trying one, for the reasonable soul to cope with if his conduct were to be regulated. And it goes without saying that he knew these things, not simply because indeed he did covet the

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<sup>1</sup>Yonge, Sec. Sec. chap. 58, p. 219.



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company of women and enjoyed a late sleep, not merely because his physician, or his own medical manual had told him so, but because he could look in a mirror and see that he was sanguine--that he was ruddy of cheeks, that his hair was pale yellow or dark brown, his forehead large, his nose straight, his skin texture soft, his lips full and becomingly red.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this he may also have learned, from a physician-physiognomist, that the size of his body could be a critical index to his general intelligence. While there were clearly other factors to be taken into account, the small man presents a less formidable communications problem for the vital spirits--the distance between the heart and the brain being considerably shortened. As a consequence, in the small trunk the vital spirits are not only compacted but ascend, according to Saunders with "facile celerity" (p. 266). Thus nature "supplies in wit what is wanting in body." And thus, too, does the size of the body reveal, on the most uncompromisingly materialist ground, an important secret about the mind of man.

That physiognomy and the health sciences were closely related is shown, in a curious way, by the De proprietatibus rerum of Batholomeus. Stephen Batman's translation of this

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<sup>1</sup>See Saunders' chart of the sanguine signs, Physiognomie, p. 201.



popular medieval compendium of useful knowledge<sup>1</sup> shows, in its medical sections, a remarkable austerity. The members and organs of the body are taken up one at a time and each is soberly discussed. Function is defined first, as a rule, then the anatomy and physiology of the organ is described. Physiognomy is given no place in this straightforward account at all, and there is no special section or chapter reserved for it before or after. Then, suddenly, at the close, usually ending the anatomical paragraph, a sentence will invoke Aristotle and the physiognomical tokens of the appendage will be duly noted. Thus the chapter on the ear (chap. 12), remarkably conservative throughout, closes with the note that great ear size "is a token of dulnesse and of slow wit and understanding, as Aristotle saith."<sup>2</sup> It is as if the author recognized that no account of the human body could be considered complete without some reference to its physiognomical significance. And so it is tacked on the end.

But to return to the point, the doctrine of the four complexions is central to Bartholomew's diagnostic system:

And if they [the cheeks] bee browne in colour,  
either citrine or yeolow, and thinne and leane  
in substance, they betoken mastery of too great  
drought and heate, as it fareth in cholaricke  
folkes.(chap. 14)

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<sup>1</sup>Batman Uppon Bartholome his booke. . .De proprietatibus rerum (London, 1582).

<sup>2</sup>If Bartholomeus recognized that this judgment was based on the simplest animal analogy--donkey's ears--he does not trouble to say so.

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The key to the complexion of course, is commonly found in outward appearance, the special province of the physiognomist but one he was glad to share with his more respected brethren, the physicians.<sup>1</sup>

### Pathognomy

While the distinction between pathognomy--the scientific study of expressions--and physiognomy, its mother discipline, was long recognized it was not truly insisted upon before Lavater. In his desire to achieve the utmost precision Lavater separates them, defining pathognomy as "the knowledge of the signs of the passions." Thus it teaches us truths about character in motion, what a man

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<sup>1</sup>It may be of some interest to note what sequence of procedures was followed by a thorough-going prophetic physiognomist, Camillo Baldi (1547-1634) who begins with an examination of complexions. Thorndike quotes from Baldi's commentaries as follows: "First we seek to discover the 'complexion'. . . of the human body concerned. Then from signs with which sense will supply us we learn the nature of the blood in the veins; this known, the spirits are made known to us; and when we know of what sort the spirits are, then the propensities made up from soul and body are revealed. . . they induce thoughts, appetites, dispositions and inclinations; these are followed by acts which form habits and character from which may be predicted to some extent one's probable fortune, disease, health and length of life. This is not to deny free will or to affirm necessity or assert anything certain as to future contingents, or to call the soul corporeal and educed from matter." (Hist. Magic, VIII, p. 451) But of course, it was to come very close to doing all these things--and it was precisely this tendency to pass beyond the point of predicting character or inclination that was responsible for physiognomy's difficulties with both church and state.

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becomes at particular moments, not what he is in general. For Lavater, then, pathognomy is of secondary importance. Unlike physiognomy, it is short-lived and, because it is based upon the moveable parts of the face, is capable of conscious manipulation and deception.

But this dismissal of the lesser science is expensive, for with it must go one of the more obvious defenses of physiognomy itself. It is not especially difficult to prove that a man under emotional stress will alter his facial expression and in more or less predictable ways. Thus the angry man will wrinkle his brows and curve his lips downward at the corners. In the most elementary exercise of pathognomic transfer, this simple fact may confer upon the tables of physiognomy two signs--furrowed brows and downward-curving lips--which in turn reveal a veritable catalogue of traits. Such a man, permanently so marked, will be irascible, bold, arrogant, cruel and so on down the list of characteristics suggested by the fleeting evidence of momentary anger.

The use of pathognomic observations was the last of the three schools of physiognomy mentioned by pseudo-Aristotle and, while he says very little about it, it is clear that it was a sanctioned and venerable method and one which, with least possible strain, demonstrated the oneness of body and soul. James Yonge, our translator of the Secreta Secretorum, makes much of this proof in terms



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which could not but have elicited agreement from the great majority of his fellows who also lived in the world and knew about the effects of wine:

And Kynde is so grete a fellowe betwen body and sowle, that the Passyons of body chaungeth the sowle; and the Passions of Sowle, chaungyth the body. (chap. 57)

This reciprocity is shown by (a) drunkenness--which induces forgetfulness in the soul "by reyson that the grete smokkes gone up to the brayn, and troubelyth the yamgynacion, whych servyth to the understandyng. . . ." an example of the body's effect upon the soul, and (b) love, anger, fear and the like which "makyth grete chaungynge to the body, as knowyth every man that ham hath knowid."

This commonplace of simple observation will not, 275 years later, be quite sophisticated enough for the members of the Royal Society of London. The Philosophical Transactions for the year 1694 records a physiognomical "Discourse" by a certain Dr. Gwither which puts the matter in its proper scientific context and in acceptably abstruse language:

The animal spirits, moved in the sensory by an object, continue their motion to the brain; whence the motion is propagated to this or that particular part of the body, as is most suitable to the design of its creation, having first made an alteration in the face by its nerves, especially the pathetic and oculorum motorii, actuating its numerous muscles as the dial-plate to that stupendous piece of clock-work, which shows what is to be expected next from the striking part. . . now, if by repeated acts or by frequent entertaining the ideas of a favourite passion or vice which

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natural temperment or custom has hurried one into, the face is so often put into that posture which attends such acts, that the animal spirits find such passages into its nerves, that it is sometimes unalterably set. . .but most commonly such habit is contracted, that the face falls insensibly into that posture, when some present object does not obliterate that more natural impression by a new one, or dissimulation hide it; hence it is, that we see great drinkers with eyes generally set towards the nose, the adducent muscles being often employed to let them see their beloved liquor in the glass, in the time of drinking. . . .<sup>1</sup>

And so we have the flexible or "dynamic" characteristic becoming fixed or "static" and thereafter shouting to the world, or at least to those few members of the Royal Society who heard Gwither to the end, the truth of a misspent youth.<sup>2</sup>

#### Sexual Distinctions

While physiognomy never, to my knowledge, harbored a "school" of practitioners devoted exclusively to the study of sexual differences, it might easily have done so. The science of outward appearance simply could not remain oblivious to the ready-made indices provided by sex, or resist the temptation to codify the anti-feminine prejudices which were so much a part of the earlier periods of our history.

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<sup>1</sup>Philosophical Transactions, XVIII, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Indeed, Lavater maintains that this process is so certain as to affect even the "bony parts" if the vice or habit is sufficiently exercised in the earliest years of childhood.

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Begun as a small but rewarding adjunct to the zoological school, the study of sexual differences came to be one of the major buttressing elements of the science as a whole. I do not know a physiognomical treatise which fails to take into account the weaknesses of Eve and her sisters. Indeed, both della Porta and Thomas Hill devote separate chapters to feminine nature and the revealing signs its understanding will provide.<sup>1</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle does not isolate his sexual judgments in this way, but rather, scatters them throughout the text. It is in the Physiognomics that we encounter the strange notion of the panther as the epitome of feminine traits. The panther, selected as a reputedly "brave" animal--as if to give women every break in the inevitable comparison, has the small face, longish neck, and "imperfectly" proportioned body that suggest femininity. The panther's character, in contrast to the lion, of course (the lion seems to have the most perfect share of the male type) is "petty, thieving, and generally speaking, deceitful" (p. 111).

But the deceit of the panther cannot begin to exhaust the variety of flaws displayed by the typical female. The

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<sup>1</sup>Porta, Book I, chap. xiii. "Quod ex distinctione habituum & passionum masculini & feminini generis de moribus multa coniectentur;" Hill, chap. 12, "The devyding of mankinde into two formes or natures; and a perfite description or distinction of the man from the woman, after Physiognomy; uttered by the Singular Conciliator."

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catalogue recorded by Hill, with Avicenna cited as the primary authority, begins in an unusually low key but rises quickly to the heights of lecherousness and stupidity and then subsides, almost to the point of admitting feminine virtues:

women are more pittiful, and gentle than men:  
more convertible, lighter perswaded, sooner  
seduced, envious, fearefuller. . . more  
foolish, lyars, more fraudulent, more receive  
fraude [sic], more esteeming trifles, slower,  
tenderer, weaker. . . .(chap. xii)

The physical signs that are certain indicators of these particular vices are equally precise. One must be on the look-out for small feet, big buttocks, flat-lying shoulder points, flat heels, small and "febrille" voice, indeed, even a perceptible lean to the right while walking. The least damaging conclusion that any one of these signs will support is that its unhappy owner is in James Yonge's phrase, "neshe [soft] after the Propyrte of women."

#### Astrological Associations

We must close this account of physiognomy's evolving rationalizations with the briefest mention of astrology, the queen of the pseudo-sciences, which clearly reigned over one branch of physiognomy as it did over alchemy, metoposcopy, chiromancy and many others. I refer, of course, to celestial physiognomy which was little more than astrology dressed in the more modest-appearing garb



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of a "natural" science. The celestial physiognomist used physiognomical signs primarily as aids in his prophetic work. Richard Saunders makes this clear when he suggests the obligation of physiognomy to help in the discovery of important data needed for the casting of a horoscope. After linking physiognomy with astrology and chromancy<sup>1</sup> as those sciences "which hold forth the cognition of futures" he states:

It is a certain thing that every Humane Creature when it is born hath in some part of the body the mark of the Sign or Planet that governed at the hour and minute of their Conception and Nativity. (p. 167)

Clearly this astro-physiognomical information is of the first importance, for the exact time of conception is needed to determine the ascendant sign and dominant star which are supposed to rule the subject's fortune. And, patently, this data cannot be discovered in any other way than by analyzing the "marks" which are found on the body. Thus the ability to read planetary marks is required of the celestial physiognomist, but chiefly to serve the main business of horoscope casting.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George Sarton, Introduction (III, pp. 270-1), points out that physiognomy's connection with astrology was forged, not in the ancient world, but in the hands of the Arab practitioners of the middle ages.

<sup>2</sup>See Professor Curry's essay on the Wife of Bath and her "prente of Seynt Venus seel," Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, p. 91.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and their corresponding dates. The names are listed in a column on the left, and the dates are listed in a column on the right. The names are: John Doe, Jane Smith, and Bob Johnson. The dates are: 1/1/2020, 2/1/2020, and 3/1/2020.

2. The second part of the document is a table with two columns. The first column is labeled 'Name' and the second column is labeled 'Date'. The table contains three rows of data:

Name	Date
John Doe	1/1/2020
Jane Smith	2/1/2020
Bob Johnson	3/1/2020

3. The third part of the document is a paragraph of text. It describes the process of data collection and the importance of accurate record-keeping. It states that the data was collected from a series of interviews and that the dates are accurate to the day.

4. The fourth part of the document is a conclusion. It summarizes the findings of the study and states that the data is reliable and that the dates are accurate. It also mentions that the data will be used for further analysis.

This is not, of course, the only relationship between the two sciences. Far more important is the connection which permits the influence of the planets to preside over the vast train of significance for health of body and mind which follows in its wake. We must recall again that the judicial astrologer, or the celestial physiognomist, was not discredited for believing in astral influences. He was interdicted because he displayed a sacriligious presumption of omniscience which carried with it a willingness to question the doctrine of free will. That the celestial bodies had some influence over man and the earth was not seriously questioned. The tides told that truth well enough.

We have already seen that the effects of environment, of geography and climate, were most logically brought to bear upon man through the mediating fluid of the four humours. It is not surprising therefore to discover that the natal stars also shape the body and mind of man in this way, conferring their dominant qualities upon his complexion. If Mars is hot and dry, then so will the complexion be of the man born or conceived under his influence, and from this fundamental humoral constituency follows a prescribed set of physical features.<sup>1</sup> Here, clearly, the celestial

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<sup>1</sup>This account of the matter is woefully simplified. For a full account the reader is advised to consult Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, pp. 7-36. Also Richard Saunders' treatise is as clear as any primary source I have seen on this complex subject.

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bodies are the primary cause and the old physiology the secondary cause of our physical and mental states.

It seems obvious that the distinction drawn between celestial and natural physiognomy is more apparent than real. To be sure, the celestial practitioner was really an astrologer, complete with an elaborate metoposcological map which rendered the most exacting clues to the future. The lines of one's forehead were assigned to the planets (as was every limb of the body) and these crossed and convoluted their ways across the path of the life yet to be lived. But the fact is that both the natural and the celestial physiognomist shared the same manual, as they shared the same view of the universe, up to a certain point--up to the point of analyzing "secondary" causes. This was far enough for the natural physiognomist and only the beginning for his colleague.

And so it was that physiognomy gathered up adherents, indeed made a commodious place for itself in the life and thought of men over many centuries. Invoking now animal analogy, now a crude ethno-psychology, and calling upon astrology, pathognomy, sexual prejudice and Galenic medicine as necessary, it survived the fall of Rome and came safely into 12th century Europe, chiefly by gift of the preserving civilization of the medieval Arab world. To be sure, other and more fanciful justifications were

[illegible]

*Journal of Management Studies*, 36(7), 809-824.

occasionally expounded.<sup>1</sup> But these were ordinarily the fruit of a latter day anxiety to overcome sceptics who, although they are to be found throughout the long history of our pseudo-science, became more outspoken in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And as the sceptics became more outspoken, so too did the justifications. But the fundamental "proofs" were those touched upon in this chapter. They were all intimately related, one with the other, and with the reigning cosmology. And they maintained their currency long enough to insure that the science they defended entered into the life and literature of the Renaissance.

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<sup>1</sup>I am thinking of Lavater's tripartite division, first of the nature of man into animal, moral and intellectual "lives," then of his body, then by transfer and extension of his face. Lavater postulated that while all three "lives" coexist in all parts of the body, it is still true that each has its "peculiar station." Obviously animal life is to be found in the belly and genitals, the lower third of the body; the moral life resides principally in the region of the heart, the chest or middle third; and intellectual life is stationed in the head. The acute physiognomist, according to Lavater, will recognize that the countenance is a mirror for the entire body and that therefore it is proper to impose this tripartite division on the face. The lower third--chin and lips--thus reveals signs of the animal life in man, the middle third presents tokens of moral character, and the upper third is to be searched for signs of intellectual ability.



### CHAPTER III

#### ELIZABETHAN ATTITUDES TOWARD PHYSIOGNOMY

Fond Physiognomer, complexion  
Guides not the inward disposition,  
Inclines I yeeld. Thous saist Law Iulia,  
Or Catoes often curst Scatinia  
Can take no hold on simpring Lesbia,  
True, not on her eye, yet Allom oft doth blast  
The sprouting bud that faine would longer last.

John Marston, The Scourge of Villainy.

In these concise lines John Marston cryptically phrases the argument which throughout the sixteenth century raged about the pseudo-science of physiognomy. The legitimacy of the science was tried, in fact, almost entirely on this point alone. Does one's physical constitution, one's complexion, determine character entirely or, with Marston, can we be content to grant that it merely "inclines" the character in one way or another? No less powerful an intellect than Montaigne's hesitated before this puzzling question. In his essay on physiognomy Montaigne readily concedes that there is "nothing more likely than the conformity and relation of the body to the spirit." And then he edges closer to the question of necessity:

It seems as if some faces are lucky, other unlucky.  
And I think there is some art to distinguishing the  
kindly faces from the simple, the severe from the  
rough, the malicious from the gloomy, the disdainful  
from the melancholy, and other such adjacent qualities.

There are beauties not only proud but bitter;  
 others are sweet, and even beyond that, insipid.  
 As for prognosticating future events from them,  
 those are matters that I leave undecided.<sup>1</sup>

But while Montaigne hesitated, the publication of physiognomical treatises in England and on the continent continued unabated. We have already seen how frequently reprinted were those two main bastions of the popular scientific imagination, The Secret of Secrets and The Kalendar of Shepheards. And these, exceedingly important as they were, by no means represented the only sources for the dissemination of the pseudo-science. Continental practitioners, such as Giambattista della Porta, John de Indagine, and the renowned Bartolommeo Cocles, saw their physiognomical treatises printed over and over again in Latin and in most of the modern European languages. Porta's De Humana Physiognomoniam, while never translated into English, went through twenty-one editions in Italy alone between 1586 and 1655.<sup>2</sup> Indagine's "Introductiones apotelesmatical," a series of tractates covering astrological and physiognomical notions, was published in Strassburg in 1522 and, after several editions on the continent, was translated by Fabian Withers in 1558 and was reprinted,

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<sup>1</sup>The Complete Works of Montaigne, Trans., D. M. Frame (Stanford, 1948), Bk. III, p. 811.

<sup>2</sup>Thorndike, Hist. Magic, VIII, p. 448.

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in Withers' English, in 1598.<sup>1</sup> Again, "the most excellent, profitable and pleasant booke of the famous doctour and expert astrologien Arcandam. . ." was translated from the French by William Warde and successively printed in 1562, 1592, and 1634.<sup>2</sup> These, along with Thomas Hill's successful translations of Cocles' works on physiognomy,<sup>3</sup> served a wide audience as the most modern works devoted exclusively to the science of outward appearance. They were joined, of course, by the medieval encyclopaedists, still very much in fashion, and by certain anonymous treatises on the subject.<sup>4</sup> They could not, for all of that, compete with the authority of Aristotle which invested the Secreta Secretorum and the Kalendar of Shepheards with their claim--seldom refused--upon the attention of the period. The learned might consult Baptista della Porta or Bartholommeo Cocles; but the Londoner of Shakespeare's time who wished

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<sup>1</sup>Thorndike, V, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>See John Graham, "Dev. Use of Phy.," Appendix B

<sup>3</sup>The Contemplation of Mankynde (1571) was the second of three separate editions of Hill's physiognomical treatise. The first, "A brief and most pleasant epitomye of the whole art of Physiognomie" appeared twenty years earlier and the third "A pleasant history declaring the whole art of physiognomie" was printed in 1613.

<sup>4</sup>Two anonymous treatises which have come to my attention are (a) "On the Art of Foretelling Future Events by Inspection of the Hand," printed in 1504 and (b) "A Pleasant Introduction to the Art of Chiromancie and Physiognomie," printed in 1588. Michael Scot's translation into Latin of Aristotle's History of Animals, while made in the early 13th century, was not printed until 1477. It went through eighteen editions before 1660.

to come into quick and not-too-painful contact with the venerable names of "antiquity"--Aristotle, Plato, Hippocrates, Melampus, Galen, Polemon, Avicenna,--was more than content with a prose version of the Secreta or, better still, with Thomas Hill's Contemplation of Mankynde which thoughtfully supplied the ancient authority for very nearly every judgment it rendered.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Carroll Camden, in his interesting essay on physiognomy in the Renaissance,<sup>2</sup> suggests that the science's chief appeal lay in the promise of power and wisdom which it invariably claimed would be realized by the "gentle reader." There is clearly a good deal of truth in this conclusion, for only an extraordinary desire to know everything could account for the proliferation of titles in Elizabethan England which center upon a "secret" about to be shared. But physiognomy's attraction never depended entirely upon the urge to master the deepest secrets of the universe; it could promise as little (or as much) as the ability to master the undisclosed nature of

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<sup>1</sup>It goes without saying that such citations were exceedingly important. In the seventeenth century Richard Saunders' thesis contains a "Catalogue of Authors Consulted," in which appear Albertus Magnus, Aristotle, Avicenna, Bonaventura, Cicero, Demosthenes, Empedocles, Galen, Herodotus, Hippocrates, Homer, Horace, Loxus, Michael Scot, Moses, Palemon, Philemon, Polemon (these three, of course, were all one man, Polemon of Laodicea), Plato, Pythagoras, Rhases, Suetonius, and many, many others.

<sup>2</sup>"The Mind's Construction in the Face," PQ. XX (July, 1941), p. 400.

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one's neighbor or one's potential customer. Physiognomy, the science which traditionally claimed for itself the very key to human character and conduct, was, in every age, looked upon as an eminently useful art. The ability to recognize, instantaneously, the corrupt and the honest, the stupid and the wise, the virtuous and the secretly licentious amongst men is a talent which can be employed in all but the most solitary walks of life. It is, then, a social art with as many uses as people on the street, in the drawing room or, indeed, in the great Presence Chamber at Court. And it was because of its supposed utility, above all else, that it was able to attract devotees from virtually every corner and station to be found in sixteenth century England.

#### Regimine Principum

It is not surprising to find that its cultivation was most frequently recommended, and this in every age, to the prince for his was the task of selecting ministers and counselors whose wisdom, honesty and integrity are beyond question--that is, ministers who do not hide in their souls a hidden lust for power or a fatal inclination toward one of the more serious weaknesses of the flesh. The ubiquitous Secreta Secretorum may well lie near the beginning of this tradition, for it is cast as an epistle from Aristotle to Alexander and amongst the secrets of successful rule it supplies is the long concluding section on the principles





and uses of physiognomy. Professor George Sarton, in fact, credits the famous medieval Arab cosmographer, al-Dimashqī, with first associating physiognomy with the possibility of wise government.<sup>1</sup> The expert physiognomist "might help the sultān to select his wuzarā (ministers) and the members of his dawāwīn (councils)."

James Yonge's translation of the Secreta emphasizes the immediate results the science provides, a characteristic of special importance to the prince. There is no need to wait several months until the minister or ambassador has been thoroughly tested:

But for-als-moche as stronge is to fynde and know condycones and good vertues and maneris of Pepil wythout long Prewe, hit is a ful convenabille and profitabill thyng to every Prynce, that he cane the scyence of Physnomy, by wyche he may know by syght every man of wych maneris and thewis he sholde be by kynde. (p. 216)

Thomas Blundeville's sixteenth century contribution to the genre, Of Councils and Counselors,<sup>2</sup> does not slight physiognomy, but it is by no means as confident about its invaluable service as was James Yonge. Still he cannot leave out the usual judgments of the "vysage" and, in fact, strongly suggests that the prince maintain someone close at hand who can help him read the "complexions" of those who come before him:

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<sup>1</sup>Introduction, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 800.

<sup>2</sup>Karl L. Selig, ed., Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints Gainesville, Florida, 1963). This is a translation of Federico Ceriol's El consejo: consejeros del principe (1559).



. . .so mine Author would have the Prince also to consult with his learned Physitians touching that matter. For to judge well of complexions is a thing chiefly appertaining to their Arte.  
(pp. 99-100)

Blundeville's apology for closing his treatise with an account of physiognomy is indicative of the uncertain reputation which the pseudo-science, at least in its most outrageously prophetic forms, had achieved by 1570. He bases his inclusion of physiognomy upon the notion that everything of conceivable relevance ought to be entered. After all, while the analysis of the face and body may appear a small and trifling matter to some, the prince can take absolutely no chances on the men into whose hands "hee must commit both his goodes, his lyfe, and his honor," not to mention the goods and lives of his subjects. He clinches his argument by suggesting that if the prince would peer into the opened mouth of a horse before buying and would analyze the shape and proportion of the beast, how much more important it is that he choose his counselors with equal, if slightly different, care. And so Blundeville, presumably, quieted the cynical few.

Sir Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier must also be counted amongst those courtly advice books which include references to the utility of physiognomy.<sup>1</sup> There is, of course, no specific section

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<sup>1</sup>Everyman's Library, No. 807. Hoby's translation appeared in 1561.



or chapter devoted to the pseudo-science, still less any detailed account of its methods or its rationale. But in several places Castiglione emphasizes its importance, notably in Book IX where there is to be found an extended discussion of the relationship of outward beauty of person and inward harmony of spirit. The qualities of the ideal courtier are summarized in this fashion:

To come therefore to the qualittie of the person, I say he is well, if he bee neither of the least, nor the greatest size. For both the one and the other hath with it a certaine spiteful woonder, and such men are marvelled at, almost as much as men marvel to behold monstrous things. Yet if there must needes be a default in one of the two extremities, it shall be lesse hurtfull to bee somewhat of the least, than to excede the common stature of height. (Bk. I, p. 39)

The reason for the preference, we are later told, is based upon the notion of large men being dull witted, not to mention clumsy, both of which qualities must be avoided in the ideal courtier.

If we can believe the testimony of John Evelyn, writing one hundred years later, the uses of physiognomy were not unknown in the court of James I. Evelyn, in the course of recommending physiognomy to those who must govern men, cites several ancient princes who were either themselves accomplished in the art or employed others who were. The unofficial physiognomist of James I, according to Evelyn, was Philip, Earl of Pembroke, who had

. . .so wonderful a sagacity in diving into, and discovering the intentions of men by their



countenances, that he could shrewdly guess at the very secret of their Negotiation; so as King James the First made no small use of that his extraordinary Talent on the first arrival of Ambassadors at Court.<sup>1</sup>

So far as I know we have no evidence of a similar kind indicating that James' great predecessor trusted to physiognomy in quite this way. But Professor J. E. Neale records, in his biography of the Queen, an extraordinarily suggestive conversation which supposedly took place between Elizabeth and Sir James Melville, the envoy of Mary, Queen of Scots. Melville was the adroit young courtier that Castiglione might have been writing about and he had to be precisely that to survive the clash of personalities with which his mission in 1564 involved him. I have not myself had an opportunity to examine Melville's account of his exchange with the Queen in his Memoirs, but Neale records it this way:

She wanted to know what coloured hair was considered best, and how hers compared with Mary's. Then followed a whole series of comparisons. Who, she asked, was the fairer, Mary or she? a question Melville tried to dodge by declaring that she was the fairest queen in England and theirs the fairest Queen in Scotland. As Elizabeth was not to be put off, he replied that they were both the fairest ladies of their courts, but the Queen of England was whiter, their Queen "very lusome." Next she wanted to know who was the higher. Mary was, answered Melville. Then is she over high, retorted Elizabeth; she herself being neither over high nor over low. . . .<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Numismata, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>2</sup>Queen Elizabeth I, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City, 1957), pp. 128-9.





Now clearly this conversation need not have had any physiognomic significance at all; it could as easily have been solely devoted to a feminine inquisition prompted by pride and jealousy. But this was the same queen who demanded the most detailed accounts of her would-be continental suitors and who received them complete with physiognomic interpretations attached.<sup>1</sup> And it was the Queen who entertained the astrologer-scientist Dr. John Dee and held his work in apparent respect. But the most interesting side of this interrogation about her rival Mary is the amazing parallel it will later be given by Shakespeare in Cleopatra's scene with the messenger who has just returned from Rome with news of Octavia.<sup>2</sup> And it could as easily have had the same physiognomical significance.

In any event, if the prince were first in employing physiognomy to serve his ends it was mainly because of the primacy of those ends; if he could wisely choose his counselors through its use, then his middle-class subject could as easily employ it to choose his household servants. And, apparently, he did.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Neale, pp. 142-145.

<sup>2</sup>See below, pp. 57-65.

<sup>3</sup>See Dekker's poetic prologue to The Wonderful Year discussed below, pp. 166-8.



### Aptitude For Learning

And so, too, could the schoolmaster choose his pupils scientifically, avoiding, if only he would consult physiognomy's lessons, the dull and untoward. The physiognomical aptitude test, in fact, seems to have been something of a convention in the literature of the pseudo-science. R. A. Pack calls our attention to Robert Burton's Latin play Philosophaster, in which Polupragmaticus, the professor in the piece, is asked how long it will take to educate a young man presented to him (I, vi).<sup>1</sup> His response is amusingly filled with high foreheads, hair color, Mercurial lines and the like, all of which together argue for a good mind and an excellent memory. Pack concludes that Burton borrowed the idea from Aulus Gellius, who reports in Attic Nights that Pythagorus used to subject would-be students to an examination of this kind.<sup>2</sup> Professor Pack may well be right, given Burton's eclectic reading habits, but he need not have gone all the way back to the second century. Burton was interested in physiognomy, we know, and he might easily have come upon a copy of Thomas Hill's The Contemplation of Mankind, which recommends the pseudo-science for its pedagogical utility:

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<sup>1</sup>R. A. Pack, "Physiognomical Entrance Examinations," CJ, XXXI (1935), pp. 42-43.

<sup>2</sup>Attic Nights, John C. Rolfe trans. (Loeb Classical Library, 1927), Vol. I, chap. IX: "It is said that the order and method followed by Pythagorus and afterwards by



Further this art procureth no small commoditie and profite to Scholemasters in searching out and knowing the aptnesse and pregnancie of their scholars unto learning. . . .(Epistle)

And a very great deal more of the same can be found in Juan Huarte's Examen De Ingenios which, while not a physiological treatise in the purest sense, nonetheless devotes necessary attention to its signs and tokens. Indeed, Huarte's study in many ways represents the culmination of "pedagogical physiognomy."

#### Diagnostic Uses

And so physiognomy's obvious utility carried it to the attention of all manner of men in the England of Elizabeth's time.<sup>1</sup> If it could help select the grammar school student, so, too, could Thomas Vicary suggest that it be consulted by those who are to train surgeons:

There must also be chosen a man apt and mete to minister surgerie, or to be a chirurgion. And in this poynt al Authors doo agree, that a Chirurgion should be chosen by his members wel proportioned. For Rasis sayth, whose face is not seemely, it<sup>2</sup>is vnpossible for him to have good manners. . . .

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his school and his successors, in admitting and training their pupils were as follows: At the very outset he 'physiognomized' the young men who presented themselves for instruction. . . ."

<sup>1</sup>Evelyn suggests inadvertently that it would be useful to those assigned to policing the stews: "Tis storied of the Famous Hippocrates that one day passing by a brisk young Maid, he saluted her by the name of Fair Virgin, whom meeting again the morning after, he bid good-morrow Woman, discovering by her looks she had play'd the Wanton, and been vitiated the Night before." (Numismata, p. 304).

<sup>2</sup>Anatomie of the Bodie of Man (1548), F. J. and Percy Furnivall, eds., EETS, ES. LIII (1888), p. 13.



And in this orthodox counsel Vicary was merely recognizing the intimate relationship of complexion to character which made physiognomy such an indispensable aid to the medical practitioner. Richard Saunders does not hesitate to recommend the science to the physician confronted with a sick patient for he may

. . .by their face and hands . . .discover their condition; for the symptoms quickly appear in the face; the heart (by reason of the tenuity and subtilty of the skin in that place) painting forth (as it were) the notes of its affections.<sup>1</sup>

Professor Thorndike records an interesting and not unamusing story told by Bartolommeo della Rocca (Cocles) which sheds some light upon the sometimes bizarre relationship which might obtain between the physiognomist and the physician. The patient in this instance was suffering from head wounds, but he was also complaining severely to his wife of them. The medical men apparently found this strange and were baffled as to how to proceed in the case:

Cocles pointed out to the surgeons and physicians present that the patient had a small pointed head and was exceedingly choleric and that his left shoulder was humped, and that therefore his character could not be otherwise. They agreed and confessed to their inadventure. The patient recovered from his wounds but not from his folly.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Physiognomie and Chiromancie. . . .op. cit., "preface to the readers." The obvious advantage to the physician of knowing the patient's complexion is too commonplace to need much documentation. Sir Thomas Elyot's The Castle of Helthe (1541) and Batman uppon Bartholome his booke (1582) both discuss the matter.

<sup>2</sup>Thorndike, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 59.

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The point to be made is a simple one: physiognomy, based as in part it was upon the physiology of the humours and complexions, and informed as it came to be with astrological significance, could not but be employed by the physician in Elizabethan England. It was, in fact, an indispensable tool of the diagnostic art and it appeared, in discussions of the complexions and their signs, in many of the popular medical treatises of the time.<sup>1</sup> This association with medicine, then, both helped to disseminate the pseudo-science throughout the society and conferred upon its practice whatever prestige the medical profession could command.

#### "Commercial" and Other Uses

It is not hard to imagine other uses to which such a versatile science could be put by an inventive people. The world of commerce, always receptive to profit-insuring ideas, may have embraced physiognomy in the market places of England<sup>2</sup> even as it did in the bazaars of the Arab East.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Sir Thomas Elyot's The Castel of Helthe (1541) for a typical account, including physical signs, of the four complexions.

<sup>2</sup>See below, p. 160, for a discussion of Jonson's satiric use of physiognomy to predict commercial success for Abel Drugger in The Alchemist.

<sup>3</sup>George Sarton identifies Ibn al-Akfānī, a famous occultist of the 14th century, as the physiognomist-physician to whom we are indebted for this recommended use of physiognomy. It was especially valuable in choosing slaves, especially female slaves, Introduction, III, p. 899.



The same is true of its use before the criminal bar. Not only paternity cases, but questions of criminal culpability were decided on these grounds--which is not surprising, given the physiognomist's propensity to describe composite pictures of villainous types. That this was not merely an Arab practice might be inferred from the fact that in Italy in the early sixteenth century Cocles calmly suggests "that judges might apply torture more intelligently by examining the palms of the person in question first."<sup>1</sup> While clearly he is referring to the art of chiromancy--palm-reading was only one of the several intimately related occult sciences practiced by this rogue--this art was considered, especially when used to determine character, a branch of natural physiognomy.

But we must not suppose from this that physiognomy was of interest to the Englishman of Elizabeth's reign only because it could help him in his profession or in discovering the integrity, or the lack of it, in his neighbor--whether that neighbor be a foreign ambassador or the man living next door. He lived, we must remember, in an age which believed profoundly in a universe governed by Divine Providence. And he never questioned that he was involved, too, in a drama of sin and salvation which to close in his favor would

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<sup>1</sup>Thorndike, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 62. Chiromancy was also used, of course, by the celestial physiognomist who merely assigned planetary significance to the several lines in the palm, thus permitting him to prophecy future events through astrological analysis.

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require, beyond the grace of God, the assiduous use of his reason and his will. Thus physiognomy, which could discover the most subtle inclinations toward sin, in himself as in others, and which, when bent to prophetic or astrological uses, could arm him against future danger and temptation, was the welcome fruit of his study of the way God's universe was made--and could, therefore, be legitimately employed to save him from himself. The lesson is recorded by James Yonge:

The Thyrde Partie of Prudencia is Purveyaunce, by the whyche a man hym avysyth of thyngis that byth to come. Thegh a man haue never so good fortune hym nedyth of Purveyance. (p. 155)

This is clearly a defense of astrology and celestial physiognomy, and in the name of virtue. In another chapter, indeed, Yonge puts the matter in coldly practical terms. You must acquaint yourself with the movement of the stars and the planets and what these were meant to tell us so that you will be able to anticipate "dyvers adventuris. . .and enchu [sic] harmys by witte and Purveyance" (p. 196). This is, of course, a commonplace of astrological justification.

Richard Saunders is a bit more subtle and infinitely more pious with his account of the matter, even though he is far more interested in the prophetic dimensions of physiognomy. He would have us judge the utility of his volume



. . .as being such whereby wise men may know themselves, and approach nearer to God; I mean in the Knowledge of his most excellent Works. . . .For in the beginning God adorned all things created with signatures, that so the Ingenious might solace it self, by a disquisite search into the natural qualifications thereof. . . .(Epistle Dedicatory)

The point of course is precisely the same: salvation will be the more easily assured for the student of physiognomy for an acquaintance with His works will constrain us by a "Holy Violence" to the love of God. While it is pointless to question his sincerity, one has the suspicion that Saunders is trying his best to ward off clerical disapproval before it has a chance to spoil the sale of his book. Whatever his motive, there can be no doubt cast upon the conclusion that to know oneself, in the Renaissance and in earlier times, was considered the surest way to an understanding of and a reverence for the handiwork of the Creator.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that physiognomy was widely recognized in Elizabethan England as one of the certain ways to this laudable end. So far as I have been able to discover, the pseudo-science was not then, or at any other time, considered the handmaiden of theology. On the contrary, its inevitable tendency to entangle itself with astrology and the prophetic sciences was forever calling down upon its practitioners the charge of quackery, if not, indeed, heresy. The uneasiness of the physiognomist in offering his wares to the public seems to

grow throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, from Blundeville's half-hearted apology in 1570<sup>1</sup> to Saunder's disarming announcement 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 the Ancient Sciences, which have been revealed to Men who have surpassed others in Honest, Esteem, Reputation, and in the knowledge of what was past, present and to come. . . ." <sup>2</sup> And this unmistakable defensiveness was not without cause, for there were charlatans and gypsy fortune tellers who, roaming the countryside, happily attached the venerable science to their prophetic baggage. If we are accurately to assess the status of physiognomy in the society of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists it will be necessary to examine, not merely the record of proliferations of popular treatises, nor even the approbation of men like Sir Francis Bacon; we must also see the science as it was practiced by the Subtles and Faces of the time.

And, clearly, charlatans seized upon it with as much avidity as the Earl of Pembroke. That it was but another string to their bow is made clear in an extraordinary series of statutes which, beginning in the reign of Henry VIII,

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<sup>1</sup>Or Hill's in 1571: "The Arts of divination by the Starres, the face and hands, is a percell of Philosophie and grounded upon long experience and reason: and therefore not so wicked and detestable as some men do take and repute these." (Preface to the Reader).

<sup>2</sup>The Epistle Dedicatory.





continue through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the thirteenth year of the reign of Queen Anne. I refer, of course, to the statutes concerning vagabonds and sturdy beggars, a class of helpless drifters and anything but helpless cony-catchers which, aided by the dramatic changes in agriculture and the dissolution of the monasteries, increased tremendously during the 16th century.<sup>1</sup> Of course there were vagabond statutes prior to 1530 (22 Henry VIII, c. 12), but none before that date, so far as I can discover, cites physiognomy as one of the "arts" practiced by these wayfarers. The class of persons and activities proscribed by law is an ever widening one and includes by the end of the sixteenth century<sup>2</sup> begging scholars from the universities, sailors pretending loss at sea, idle players and minstrels, hospital beggars or alms collectors, jugglers, tinkers, peddlars, petty chapmen, and all wandering persons who seem to be unemployed and, moreover, uninterested in employment. We are especially interested in the stipulation concerning,

. . . all idle persons going about in any Cuntry. . . fayning themselves to have knowledge in Physiognomye, Palmistry or other like Crafty Seyence, or pretending that they can tell Destenyas, Fortunes or such other like fantastical Ymagynacions;

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<sup>1</sup>For a full discussion of the social forces at work see F. Aydelotte, Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds (Oxford, 1913).

<sup>2</sup>Statutes of the Realm, 39 Elizabeth, c. 4; 159-8.



This phrase, in approximately the same language, appears in all of the many re-enactments of the statute for nearly two hundred years and in most of them physiognomy is clearly linked with fortune-telling. Gypsies, of course, entered England in significant numbers at the beginning of the sixteenth century--and not long after they also entered the statute books of their adopted home. They are commonly included in the proscriptions against sturdy beggars and wayfarers, usually in apposition to the references to the "crafty sciences." The inference is unmistakable that physiognomy's manuals had joined tea leaves and crystal balls in the carts of roaming gypsy bands.<sup>1</sup>

The shadow which was cast upon the pseudo-science by the law was paralleled by the difficulty it was forever encountering with ecclesiastical authorities on the continent. And here again it suffered mainly by association with judicial astrology.<sup>2</sup> The bull of Pope Sixtus V, issued on 5 January, 1586, was directed against those who practiced the art of judicial astrology, and other forms of divination, the last phrase bringing celestial physiognomy into the net, as indeed it should have.<sup>3</sup> However, as

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<sup>1</sup>Saunders, op. cit., (Preface to Readers) specifically mentions "Egyptians" and scoffs at those who have come to question physiognomy because of its unfortunate association with such idle trash.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to judicial astrology, the usual and discredited prophetic arts--geomancy, hydromancy, pyromancy, necromancy, aeromancy, etc.--were commonly associated with physiognomy, metoposcopy and chiromancy.

<sup>3</sup>Thorndike, op. cit., VI, p. 156.

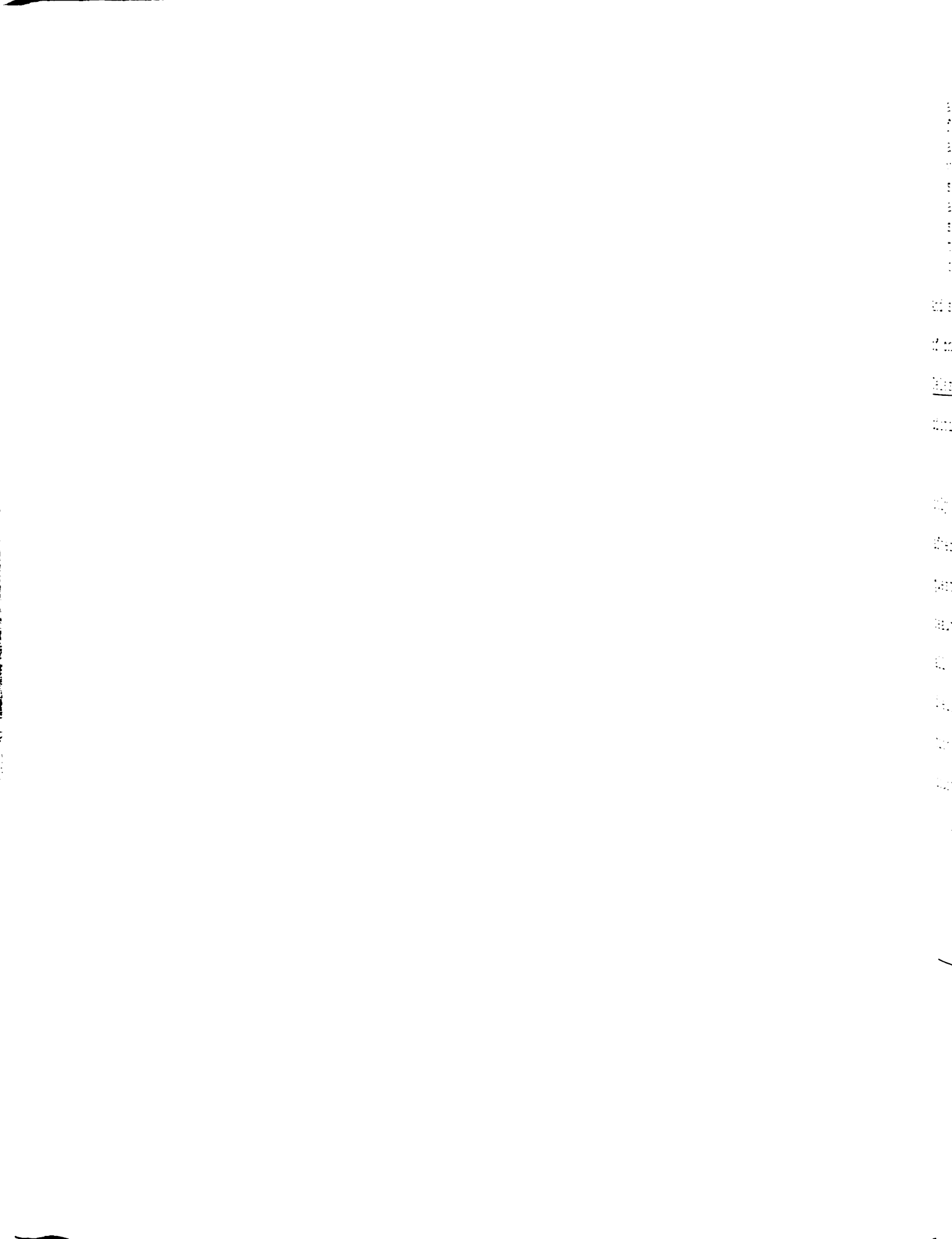
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Professor Thorndike points out, even here one must be exceedingly careful not to misconstrue the position of the Church. The bull, for example, affirms that each soul has a guardian angel to aid it against the malevolent influence of the stars and it excepts from censure the prediction of future events which occur necessarily or from natural causes. No physiognomist, no matter how unsophisticated, could fail to prove that, indeed, his exercise of the science conformed to the laws of nature and that in no way did it presume to pry into or question the workings of Divine Providence.<sup>1</sup> Baptista della Porta, whose physiognomical writings were by no means confined to De Humana Physiognomonica, gives us an excellent example of the effect of the bull on the practice of physiognomy. Professor Thorndike's account is instructive:

In 1603 he published at Naples six books of (his) Celestial Physiognomy, in which the future could be easily conjectured from inspection of the human countenance, but in which also astrology was refuted and shown to be inane and imaginary. In the proemium Porta stated that among all peoples in all ages the arts of divination had received much attention. He from boyhood had been devoted to astrology, until by order of the supreme pontiff it had been forbidden to Catholics. Thereafter he abhorred it

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<sup>1</sup>Thorndike cites the publication of a physiognomical treatise in Italy by Giorgio Rizza Casa in 1588, soon after the publication of the bull of Sixtus V. Casa states, interestingly enough, that he had had difficulty in persuading the inquisitor to allow him to publish the work in Italy. Thorndike explains that "this seems to have been owing to the fact that he had not merely dedicated his volume to Queen Elizabeth of England but wished to make favorable prognostications as to her emprise against the King of Spain." Thorndike, Hist. Magic, VI, p. 160.



as much as he had earlier pursued it, and upon further examination found it to be a pretended and imaginary science, in which the basis of truth was physiognomy rather than the influence of the stars. In short, he now contends that what the astrologers state as the effect of the planets, signs and constellations are rather to be attributed to the qualities, humours and other peculiarities of the human body.<sup>1</sup>

And so with an appropriately pious recollection of the errors of one's youth, even a work with the unpromising title of Celestial Physiognomy was able to skip past the papal interdiction of Sixtus V.

Clearly, then, physiognomy had its bad moments, not only in the sixteenth century but before and increasingly, after that time. No one, of course, would have seriously questioned Spenser's evocation of the correspondence between beauty and virtue in Belphoebe's "yvorie forehead" wherein all "good and honour might. . . be red/ For there their dwelling was."<sup>2</sup> Nor would his perfectly orthodox description of the melancholy humour of Phantastes have prompted doubts or disbelief:

A man of yeares yet fresh, as mote appere,  
Of swarth complexion, and of crabbed hew,  
That him full of melancholy did shew;  
Bent hollow beetle browes, sharpe staring eyes,  
That mad or foolish seemed: one by his vew  
Mote deeme him borne with ill-disposed skyes,  
When oblique Saturne sate in th' house of agonyes.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thorndike, VI, p. 163.

<sup>2</sup>Fairy Queen, II, iii, 24.

<sup>3</sup>Fairy Queen, II, ix, 52.



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This is precisely what one should be able to detect in the "vew" of another man and so long as physiognomy confined its "truths" to diagnosis of this modest sort, avoiding the excesses of determinist prophecy, so long too was it to be seriously regarded as a way of knowing. But the attraction of prophecy was irresistible and physiognomy continually drifted from the small center of truth which recognized the importance of the mind-body relationship to the enormities of the most occult arts. And when it did it was subject not only to the penalties of the law but to the severer strokes of the satirist's pen. Rabelais' unhesitating ridicule of the versatile Herr Trippa may be said to be the satiric counterpart to Montaigne's measured confidence in the pseudo-science in Renaissance France.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Francis Bacon's support of the pseudo-science in England was more than compensated for by the scorn with which Thomas Nashe dealt with its pretensions in Terrors of the Night:

Lives there anie such slowe yce-brained beefe-witted gull, who by the riveld barke or outward rynde of a tree will take upon him to forespeak how long it shall stand, what mischances of wormes, caterpillers, boughs breaking, frost bitings, cattells rubbing against, it shall have? As absurd is it, by external branches seames or furrowed wrinkles in a mans face or hand, in particular or generall to coniecture and foredoome of his fate. . . . My owne experience is but small, yet thus much I can

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<sup>1</sup>The Complete Works of Rabelais, trans. by Jacques Le Clercq, The Modern Library (New York, 1936), Book III, chapter 25.

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say by his warrantize, that those fatall brands of phisiognomie which condemn men for fooles and for idiots, and on the side for trecherous circumuenterers and false brothers, have in a hundred men I know been verified in the contrarie.<sup>1</sup>

And so physiognomy was regarded in Shakespeare's London, sometimes with respect, even at times with awe, but also with amusement and occasionally, with the same scorn that was reserved for the worst sort of wandering highwayman. If, as we shall see, the Elizabethan dramatist did not consistently use it to delineate character, it is still true that Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson and Dekker were openly curious about its claims and pretensions and ever watchful for ways in which it might be employed to achieve dramatic ends. It was very much a part of their world and in their preoccupation with the human condition--with the conduct and character of men--they could not but be interested in the science which purported to reveal that very secret.

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed., R. B. McKerrow (Oxford, 1958), I, pp. 370-71. For a similar sentiment see Simion Grahame, The Anatomie of Humors (1609): "Who is a more selfe-deceiving foole in wisdom? or who is a greater Asse? then a Prognostication-maker who saith that the Conjectures, which they have is founded upon probabilitie, and not upon absolut necessities & so consequently, the most perfite Prognosticators sometimes must erre. . . .I think such Fortun-tellers or such Aegiptian-palmisters when they set downe such physicall rules to a man or womans bodie, should be prejudiciall to the wise Physitian because he leives him nothing to say seeing he. . .so audaciouslie intrudes himselfe in the secretes of the Omnipotent GOD." edited by R. Jameson (Edinburgh, 1830), p. 26.



## CHAPTER IV

### SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF PHYSIOGNOMY

Shakespeare's intense interest in the human face has never, I think, been adequately noticed: its frowns and wrinkles, smiles and tears, the tint and shape of the nose, the tension of the nostrils, the eye, its colour and character, 'in flood with laughter,' sparkling, sun-bright, quick, merry, fiery, mistful, dim, lack-lustre, heavy, hollow, modest, sober, sunken or scornful; the peculiar beauty of the eyelid, the betrayal of the gnawing of a nether lip, the dimples on a child's chin, and, above all, the way in which he continually makes us see the emotions of his characters by<sup>1</sup> the chasing changes of colour in their cheeks.

Caroline Spurgeon

Shakespeare was preeminently an Englishman of Elizabeth's time and the ideas and customs and manners we have come to characterize as "Elizabethan" are everywhere found in his plays. It is, therefore, in no way surprising to discover that he shared his society's interest in the pseudo-science of physiognomy and freely adapted its language and its peculiar mode of thought to suit his dramatic purposes. I am not here raising the question of personal belief. With an artist so consummately detached from his recreated world as was Shakespeare, such questions are not fruitfully asked. Ample evidence both of sympathetic belief in physiognomy and waspish scorn for its pretensions may easily be

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us (Cambridge, 1958), p. 58.

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discovered not simply within the wide limits of the canon but, indeed, within the narrow compass of a single act in a single play. The assumptions of the pseudo-science are granted, and the audience is tacitly asked to share them for the moment, or they are harshly discredited, as the exigencies of his dramatic material require. Upon hearing of Cawdor's defection, Duncan is forced to conclude:

There's no art  
To find the mind's construction in the face.<sup>1</sup>

But it is that very art about which Lady Macbeth, in the next scene, is most frightened. Speaking to Macbeth she warns:

Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men  
May read strange matters.

(I, v, 63-64)

That, in fact, they have been unable to do so is one of the chief ironies of the play; it sounds a theme to which Shakespeare is to return time and time again. And insofar as physiognomy lends itself to the development of that theme, so far too is Shakespeare willing to exploit its point of view and employ its special diction.

But we can form no sharply defined judgment of what Shakespeare himself believed to be true of our pseudo-science. That he shared the commonly held belief that man's

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<sup>1</sup>I, iv, 12-13. The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. G. L. Kittredge (Boston, 1936). Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Shakespeare are cited from this edition.



[illegible]

interior life is determined in some measure by his physical constitution is beyond reasonable question. We can also safely conclude that he consented to the modest claims of pathognomy, that branch of physiognomy which purported to "read" the emotions as they are made manifest by predictable, if temporary, changes in one's countenance. Beyond this, however, we cannot go with any confidence, except, I think, to rule out the furthest extremes of which physiognomy, as prophetic science, was so capable. Shakespeare would have laughed, or perhaps wept, at the elaborate certainties of a Thomas Hill or Richard Saunders. According to their assumptions, and those shared by their fellow physiognomists, deceit and guile are virtually impossible; men may try to mask the inmost secrets of their personality, but they cannot. An evil nature, or a good, is written in the unalterable features of the body and can be read, given the proper sophistication, in the face as in a book.

It is abundantly safe to say that the dramatist who created Hamlet could not have so grossly misconstrued the matter. The fact of tragedy itself testifies to the success with which men may mask their true natures. If Shakespeare had been prepared to subscribe to what I shall call "hard" physiognomy--the predictive science shorn of its traditional caveats and confident it can discover indelible tokens of the heart's affections--he could never have written Hamlet or Othello or Lear or Macbeth. Tragedy is impossible in a world deprived of the uncertainty of human character.

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1. *Introduction*



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When we have said this, however, we have not advanced very far toward an examination of how Shakespeare actually used physiognomy in his plays. We might profitably turn first to a remarkable scene in Antony and Cleopatra, in which physiognomy's assumptions are shared by everyone. I have in mind the queenly interrogation of the messenger who has just returned from Rome with news of Octavia (III, iii). The episode is, of course, essentially comic; it cleverly reveals the will-to-malign and the need for purposeful self-deception which reside in the soul of a jealous woman. Charmian and the dutiful messenger play their parts in the fugue to perfection, Charmian because she has long and faithfully served her tempestuous mistress; the messenger because his service has only recently been severely punctuated by a beating administered by Cleopatra when he had the audacity to tell the truth about Antony's marriage to Octavia (II, v). It was, in fact, at the close of this earlier scene that Cleopatra issued the orders to her chastened messenger calling for a physiognomical report on Octavia. Distraught though she was at the time, she still had wit enough to send him off to collect precise and meaningful detail:

Bid him  
Report the feature of Octavia, her years,  
Her inclination; let him not leave out  
The colour of her hair. . . .  
Bring me word how tall she is. . . .(II, v, 111-117)

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Feature, inclination, hair colour, height--these are all useful indices, not only to a beautiful woman anxious to assess the beauty of another, but to a physiognomist anxious to assess character and intelligence as well.

And so the messenger has returned and joins with Charmian to make certain that Cleopatra is given no second cause for violence. They know what must be said and they know that their mistress knows that they know and yet all three pipe in turn the inevitable tune. The secret is to offend the truth only as often as majestic vanity demands. Cleopatra must be told what she so desperately wants to hear about her rival but her capacity to believe must not be stretched too far. It is wondrously delicate from beginning to end.

And the pseudo-science of physiognomy is at the heart of the exchange.<sup>1</sup> To be sure, not all of Cleopatra's questions require learnedly physiognomic answers; she is as much interested in Octavia's feminine charms and no scientific manual need be consulted for a report on that critical matter. But she is afraid to put the question that directly. It would not do at all to have the messenger, under pressure, declare bluntly that her rival was ugly as a toad; this would hopelessly violate the fragile web of self-deception which Cleopatra must spin to protect

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<sup>1</sup>That physiognomic judgments are involved has been noticed by Carroll Camden in his interesting essay, "The Mind's Construction In The Face," PQ, XXIII (July, 1941).

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her vanity. And so she anatomizes Octavia, directing her questions to certain key features and, taking absolutely no chances with the messenger, accompanying the questions whenever possible with a clue to the desired answer. As we shall see, there is room to doubt who is the more practised physiognomist, the messenger or his jealous queen.

The exchange opens in an appropriately professional manner; the messenger's credentials as first-hand witness must be established. In answer to Cleopatra's question about where he beheld Octavia, the messenger's reply amusingly reveals his frightened willingness to be helpful. Every conceivable angle is covered:

Madam, in Rome.

I look'd her in the face, and saw her led

Between her brother and Mark Antony. (III, iii, 11-13)

Having carefully established this much, she gives the poor man trial by asking for the first detail--but with great care. Cleopatra does not ask how tall her rival is but whether she is "as tall as me." The clue is obvious enough and with a sigh we cannot hear he gives comfort with an unequivocally negative reply. With the next question she takes no chances whatsoever:

Cleo.: Didst hear her speak? Is she shrill-tongu'd  
or low?

Mess: Madam, I heard her speak. She is low voic'd.

Cleo: That's not so good! He cannot like her long.

The trick of the question is to limit the responses to two equally unattractive alternatives. Anyone familiar with



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physiognomical literature will immediately recognize the significance of Cleopatra's having rule out the possibility of a clear, full, evenly modulated voice, that is, a voice neither shrill nor low. As John Metham has it, "a mene voyse ys most commendabyl."<sup>1</sup> Pseudo-Aristotle most succinctly denotes the damaging character of the extremes;

Those who have a deep, braying voice are insolent; witness the asses. . . .those who have a shrill, raucous voice are gluttonous; witness the goats.  
(p. 133)

We should acknowledge, however, that the messenger could have been a little more helpful in his reply. It would have been wiser to elaborate on the excessive lowness of Octavia's voice if only to save Cleopatra a moment's concern, for she betrays an uneasiness about his straightforward answer which Charmian rushes in to dispel.<sup>2</sup> In reply to the tentative plaint, "he cannot like her long" Charmian provides the wanted assurance: "Like her? O Isis! 'tis impossible." and Cleopatra is immediately restored: "I think so, Charmian. Dull of tongue, and dwarfish!"

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<sup>1</sup>The Works of John Methan, ed. Hardin Craig, EETS, 132 (London, 1916), p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Later critics have also been made uneasy by the messenger's stark reply. In the Variorum edition of the play Malone is reported as convinced that "low" is worse than "shrill," while Irving supposes the reverse, thus reading Cleopatra's "That's not so good" as directed at her own situation, rather than Octavia's low voice. Quite apart from the physiognomy of low and shrill voices, Irving, I think, must be wrong. It is unbelievable that the messenger, who is no fool, would immediately invite a second beating by praising Octavia's voice. He could have as easily denied having heard her speak--and would have.

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At this point the questioning picks up in tempo and the messenger, having witnessed the lightning-quick but revealing charade with Charmian, quietly vows to make his remaining answers more responsive. Indeed, in reply to the question about Octavia's grace in moving, the wanted reply is so explicitly indicated that the messenger very nearly outreaches himself:

Cleo: What majesty is in her gait? Remember,  
 If e'er thou look'dst on majesty.  
 Mess: She creeps!  
 Her motion and her station are as one.  
 She shows a body rather than a life,  
 A statue than a breather. (III, iii, 20-24)

The natural syncopation of this exchange should be understood to fall first with a long pause at the end of Cleopatra's question, during which the messenger is looking about for any clue at all to determine how far he should trespass upon the truth in his reply; then Cleopatra's boldly enunciated warning, accompanied by a pronouncedly arrogant tilt of her chin; finally, freed of any need of restraint, his absurdly improbably reply rushes out in relief--"She creeps!." This is, of course, orthodox physiognomical doctrine, made outrageous only by its application to the attractive sister of Octavius Caesar.<sup>1</sup> There is a moment, in fact, when we

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<sup>1</sup>Lavater sums up his predecessors' views on a woman's gait with this telling judgment: "If the manner of walking of a woman be disgusting, decidedly disgusting, not only disagreeable, but impetuous, without dignity, contemptible, verging sideways--let neither her beauty allure thee to her, nor her understanding deceive thee, nor the confidence she may seem to repose in thee, betray thee. . . . Her mouth will be like her gait; and her conduct harsh and false like her

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must wonder if he has not gone too far--if even Cleopatra's towering jealousy will accept this slander at face value:

Cleo: Is this certain?  
 Mess: Or I have no observance  
 Charm: Three in Egypt  
       Cannot make better note.

As usual, Charmian senses when her assurance is needed to keep her mistress on an even keel. The situation is restored when she confirms that the messenger is amongst the top three physiognomists in all of Egypt; Cleopatra can trust his analysis implicitly. And this is all Cleopatra needs to hear:

                                  He's very knowing;  
 I do perceive't. There's nothing in her yet.  
 The fellow has good judgment.

Indeed he has, for in the double-meaning of this line Shakespeare comically records the messenger's plight--simultaneously to "read" the features of the distant Octavia and to assess the temper of his jealous mistress.

Emboldened by this bit of encouragement the messenger-physiognomist confidently works his way through the rest of the interview to the gold which rewards so pleasantly perceptive a report. In reply to Cleopatra's request that he guess Octavia's age he deftly reminds everyone that she was, after all, a widow when Antony was forced to marry her.

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mouth. . . Compare her gait with the lines of the Forehead, and the wrinkles about the mouth, and an astonishing conformity will be discovered between them." p. 482.

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Having taken comfort from this, Cleopatra returns to Octavia's features and in the process reveals her own not inconsiderable knowledge of physiognomy:

Cleo: Bear'st thou her face in mind? Is't long or round?

Mess: Round even to faultiness.

Cleo: For the most part, too, they are foolish that are so. (32-34)

She is on perfectly sound ground for reaching this conclusion. Thomas Hill, in his Contemplation of Mankynd, explains why this is so:

The head spericall or throughly rounde, doth denote a quicke mooving, unstableness, forgetfulnesse, small discretion, and little witte in that person; for this<sup>1</sup> motion of the spirits never ceaseth nor resteth:

The middle ventricle which approaches a perfect sphere cannot but be a kind of wild merry-go-round for the vital spirits and thus is bound to be the mark of an unstable, foolish, envious and importunate human being. Nothing could have given Cleopatra more pleasure.

It is interesting to note that in her question about the shape of Octavia's face, Cleopatra repeats her earlier performance by supplying her "very knowing" messenger with two possible answers, each of which, it is to be understood, will be equally damning. The "Is't long or round?" exactly parallels her phrasing of the question about the voice

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<sup>1</sup>Chap. XIII. This passage from Hill is cited in the Arden edition of the play.



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("Is she shrill-tongu'd or low?"). With regard to long faces Thomas Hill points out that they invariably reveal a personality "forward and injurious" (Chap. XXI). Cleopatra is still unprepared to take many chances with her messenger.

And yet the next question shows how far we have come from the careful sparring with which the interview opened. Her confidence, bolstered no doubt by the vision of a "dull-tongu'd" dwarf with a foolishly spherical head, has been wholly restored. It is the first question she has ventured to ask without an explicit hint as to the desired response. In every other instance, save the request that he guess Octavia's age, Cleopatra either poses equally unacceptable alternatives in putting the question or, as in the comparative question about height, in some other obvious way predicts the answer. But now she gambles, asking him flatly what colour Octavia's hair is:

Brown, madam; and her forehead  
As low as she would wish it.

Confidence was never more adequately rewarded. Not only does the messenger avoid the idealized extreme, golden blond, but to cinch the matter gratuitously adds the damning detail about her low forehead. Thomas Hill's physiognomic comment on this feature is typical. The person blessed with a low forehead must be "foolish and [has] small likelihood in him to be taught, or to conceyve any learning to purpose" (Chap. XV). Thus Octavia's low forehead nicely corroborates

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the "round face" of a few lines earlier: both overwhelmingly suggest stupidity--not to mention ugliness. And all this, one must keep in mind, of a lady described by Plutarch, in North's translation, as "having an excellent grace, wisdom, and honestie, joined unto so rare a beautie." In this brilliantly imagined scene Octavia has been metamorphosed by a physiognomically subtle messenger and a jealous but no less learned queen into an ignorant, dwarfish, brown-haired block whose spherical head and low forehead are only less reprehensible than her creeping gait.

I have troubled to analyze this brief exchange in some detail because it demonstrates to perfection the satiric versatility of our pseudo-science. In Chaucer, physiognomy is employed literally and directly; its satiric possibilities are realized at the expense of the character being described. In this light-as-air scene in Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare reverses this; the object of the satire is not the person upon whom physiognomic description is lavished but the avid quasi-physiognomist herself. It is not Octavia's character which is revealed by reference to her supposedly spherical face but Cleopatra's, for it is she who puts the question to her willing conspirator in physiognomical terms and in such a way as to reveal her own jealousy and uncertainty.

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The scene also tells us something about Shakespeare's knowledge of the pseudo-science and what he assumed his audience to know about it. Surely his own reading must have been fairly extensive, for he goes beyond its general assumptions to the specific tokens with which it deals. But we can see that he, unlike Chaucer, did not suppose his audience to be similarly equipped. Chaucer tells us of the wart on the Miller's nose; he does not explain what it means. Shakespeare supplies us with both the physical detail and its supposed significance.<sup>1</sup> The success of the scene is not made to depend at all upon the special scientific knowledge of the audience.

It is accurate to say, then, that amongst her many talents Cleopatra could rightfully number an ability to ready character and intelligence in the physical features of others. And she is by no means Shakespeare's only amateur physiognomist. Constable Dogberry has recourse to the science to reassure Leonato of the honesty and trustworthiness of Verges:

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<sup>1</sup>Curiously enough there can be cited a brief passage from The Merry Wives of Windsor in which a wart figures in a most provocative but undisclosed way. It is Mistress Quickly who discovers significance in Fenton's wart (I, iv, 156-172).

Quick: . . .I'll be sworn on a book, she loves you.  
Have not your worship a wart above your eye?

Fent: Yes, marry, have I. What of that?

Quick: Well, thereby hangs a tale. Good faith, it is such another Nan! but, I detest, an honest maid as ever broke bread. We had an hour's talk of that wart. I shall never laugh but in that maid's company! But, indeed, she is given too much to allicholy and musing: but for you--well--go to.

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Leon: What is it my good friends?  
 Const. Dog: Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off  
 the matter--an old man, sir, and his wits  
 are not so blunt as, God help, I would  
 desire they were; but, in faith, honest  
 as the skin between his brows. (Much Ado,  
 III, v, 10-14)

This peculiar testimony has not, I think, been altogether understood by earlier readers of the play. Professor Furness, in the Variorum edition, cites a similarly phrased judgment by Dame Chat in Gammer Gurton's Needle, "I am as true, I wold thou knew, as skin betweene thy browes." He speculates that the phrase might have arisen from the fact that it was on the forehead that "the brand of shameful conduct was set." Surely, however, the point made in both instances is that a good and honest man can be measured by the distance between the eyebrows. This is made even clearer by still another example of the phrase's currency, this time from Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour, in which magnanimity is the chief virtue found to repose in that blank space. Puntarvolo is enjoying his usual vain charade with his lady love (II, i) when, in an obvious physiognomic context, this exchange takes place:

Punt: What complexion, or what stature bears he?  
 G.W.: Of your stature and very near upon your  
 complexion.  
 Punt: Mine is melancholy. . . .

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Fent: Well, I shall see her today. Hold, there's money for thee. Let me have thy voice in my behalf. If thou sees't her before me, commend me.  
 Quick: Will I? I'faith, that we will! and I will tell your worship more of the wart the next time we have confidence, and of other wooers:



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Carlo: (So is the dog's just)  
 Punt: And doth argue constancy, chiefly in love.  
 What are his endowments? is he courteous?  
 G.W.: O, the most courteous knight in Christian  
 land, sir.  
 Punt: Is he magnanimous?  
 G.W.: As the skin between your brows, sir.<sup>1</sup>

The answer, though by no means clear, may well be supplied by physiognomy. That the eyebrows are considered singularly important indices is obvious by the attention they invariably receive. Indeed, Thomas Hill devotes an entire chapter (XIX) to "The Judgment of the Spaces between the Eyebrows After the Minde of Michael Scotus."

Especially important, apparently, are eyebrows which extend to the nose. Hill points out that when they are uniformly thick and also come together in this fashion, the direst predictions are warranted. Possessors of this imposing feature are bound to be "of an evil nature, yea wicked persons. . .theeves, ravishers of maydens, murderers, but deceyvers always. . .all vices and wickedness are comprehended and knowne in these persons" (Chap. XIX). Therefore by the argument of opposites--a favorite and flexible method of physiognomic analysis--a modest but noticeable space between the brows would seem to be welcome.

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<sup>1</sup>In Bartholomew Fair Jonson amusingly rephrases this commonplace in the scene (IV, v) in which Captain Whit tries to convince Mrs. Littlewit that she can lie with twenty players at no personal cost:

Mrs. Lit: What, and be honest still! that were fine sport.  
 Whit: Tish common, shweet-heart, tou may'st do it by my  
 hand: it shall be justified to thy husband's  
 faish, now: tou shalt be as honesht as the skin  
 between his hornsh, la.

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Straight black brows divided with a discrete space are most commendable, for as Hill points out "such overbrows hadde our Saviour Jesus Christ and the chaste virgin, his mother" (Chap. XIX). Ambiguity is admitted only when excess is involved. If the "spaces between the eye-brows. . . be large this doe denote such a person to be of a dull capacitie." One can assume that poor Verges has more than enough whiteness peeping through to prove his honesty.

One can also safely assume that Leonato, if not everyone in the audience, understands Dogberry's assurances. For he too is one of Shakespeare's physiognomists. In Act V he is still suffering from the illusion that Hero is dead:

Which is the villain? Let me see his eyes,  
That, when I note another man like him,  
I may avoid him. (Much Ado, V, 1, 268-70)<sup>1</sup>

The Duke in Measure for Measure is equally adept and invokes the "ancient skill" as an instrument of flattery. The Provost must be made to execute Bernadine in Claudio's place, and the disguised Duke's first effort to win the

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Mrs. Littlewit's "honesty" is to be measured not on her own forehead but on her husband's and between the horns she herself placed there.

<sup>1</sup>This is a most accurate reflection of precisely how physiognomists went about collecting tokens. Thomas Hill cites an example of a physiognomist who carefully notes a man afraid to pick a louse from his nose. All of the details, slender neck, narrow shoulder points, evil fashioned "Marses line in the forehead". . . indicated a man "not only fearefull but light of beleefe and brutish in conditions" (Chap. XIII).

[illegible]

confidence of his man is devoted to an analysis of his forehead:

. . .There is written in your brow, provost,  
honesty and constancy. If I read it not truly,  
my ancient skill beguiles me; but in the bold-<sup>1</sup>  
ness of my cunning I will lay myself in hazard.

The Duke, of course, "hazards" nothing at all by the boldness of his physiognomic cunning, for he can reveal himself at any time. As it is the provost pays not the slightest attention to the metoposcopic compliment and remains steadfast. It would have been more helpful to the Duke if the provost were able to read foreheads, assuming that in the "monk's" an auspicious configuration were discernible.

One of the interesting aspects of this brief encounter is the Duke's reference to physiognomy as an "ancient skill." Certainly this does not necessarily suggest that Shakespeare meant, with the phrase, to cast any discredit upon the science; quite the contrary could as easily be true. But it does show that he knew something of the origins of physiognomy and in part it explains, too, the frequency of

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<sup>1</sup>This is very like Proteus' remark to Julia (Sebastian) in Two Gentlemen of Verona (IV, iv, 72):

But chiefly for thy face and thy behavior,  
Which (if my augury deceive me not)  
Witness good bringing up, fortune, and truth.



physiognomic reference and imagery in the plays set in the ancient world. I do not mean to suggest by this that anything like a consistent dramatic principle can be discovered at work in Shakespeare's plays and poems. But it is worth noting that in the Roman plays characters are permitted to employ physiognomy positively, i.e., everyone grants the pseudo-science's assumptions and credits the observations flowing from them. This is less often true in the "later" plays. For almost every positive invocation of the science there is someone or some action which throws all in doubt.

But in his recreated world Shakespeare gives physiognomy, if not always as prominent a place as in Antony and Cleopatra, at least an unquestioned one. Aaron's coldness to the advances of Tamora in Titus Andronicus is phrased in the language of celestial physiognomy:

Madam, though Venus govern your desires,  
 Saturn is dominator over mine.  
 What signifies my deadly-standing eye,  
 My silence and my cloudy melancholy,  
 My fleece of wooly hair that now uncurls  
 Even as an adder when she doth unroll  
 To do some fatal execution?  
 No, madam, these are no Venereal signs. (II, iii, 30-37)

And indeed they are not. The dominant physical sign selected by Aaron to pin-point his "un-venereal" allegiance is the uncurling of his "fleece of wooly hair." It is precisely this hair characteristic which is normally associated with Venus. Richard Saunders refers to "the hair, thick, handsomely curling or crisping" (p. 172) as one of the signs by



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which Venus' disciples are discoverable. The deadly-standing eye and cloudy melancholy simply reinforce the identification with Saturn and, once again, in terms which do not call upon exceptional audience sophistication. The rhetorical question--"what signifies, etc."--was answered in the first two lines of Aaron's reply.

In Coriolanus physiognomy again enters freely and unchallenged into the vocabulary of character assessment. The opportunistic tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, in sounding the first adverse comment on the pride of Coriolanus, do so in terms of physiognomic analysis:

Sicin: Was ever man so proud as is this Marcius?  
 Brutus: He has no equal.  
 Sicin: When we were chosen tribunes for the people--  
 Brutus: Mark'd you his lip and eyes?  
 Sicin: Nay, but his taunts! (I, 1, 256-60)

Here, of course, we have only the notion of physiognomy, injected by Brutus but turned aside as quickly by Sicinius who, it seems, needs no corroboration of a scientific kind. Poor Brutus is even denied the chance to show us how cleverly he has "read" the mouth and eyes of Coriolanus.

In Act IV, after his banishment, Coriolanus is again subjected to a physiognomic analysis, this time made necessary by his disguised and ragged appearance. The servingmen of Tullus Aufidius treat Coriolanus as the poor creature he appears to be. Having been beaten off, they return with their master. His eye is better trained:

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Say, what's thy name?  
 Thou hast a grim appearance and thy face  
 Bears a command in't. Though thy tackle's torn  
 Thou show'st a noble vessel. What's thy name?  
 (IV, v, 65-67)

After Coriolanus and Aufidius exchange lengthy explanations and go off together to plan revenge upon Rome, the baffled servingmen are left to do a comic turn. And they launch their conversation by recalling how they greeted Coriolanus before the recognition scene. They knew the man had something distinctive about him but their training in physiognomy was simply not advanced enough to give the judgment with any confidence:

- 2 Serv: By my hand, I had thought to have stroken  
 him with a cudgel--and yet my mind gave  
 me his clothes made a false report of him.  
 1 Serv: What an arm he has! He turn'd me about  
 with his finger and his thumb as one  
 would set up a top.  
 2 Serv: Nay, I knew by his face that there was  
 something in him. He had, sir, a kind of  
 face methought--I cannot tell how to term  
 it.  
 1 Serv: He had so, looking as it were--Would I were  
 hang'd but I thought was more in him than I  
 could think. (IV, v, 154-166)

And so they stumble on, substituting "I thought there was more in him than I could think" for the precise vocabulary of signs and tokens which someone learned in our science could provide.

Earlier in the play there occurs a more sharply focused use of physiognomy in the scene in which Menenius confronts the two tribunes, Scinius and Brutus, and tells them exactly what knaves they truly are:

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. . .and though I must be content to bear with  
 those that say you are reverend grave men, yet  
 they lie deadly that tell you have good faces.  
 If you see this in the map of my microcosm fol-  
 lows it that I am known well enough too? What  
 harm can your beesom conspectuities glean out  
 of this character if I be known well enough too?  
 (II, 1, 61 ff)

The reference to "good faces" does not, of course, have anything to do with handsomeness. Rather it refers to the "maps of their microcosms"--the detailed outlines of their vicious characters which they cannot hide. Understood as a physiognomic reference, it gives point to the irony of "reverend grave men." Menenius "bears" with those who have so judged the two tribunes only so long as it takes him to enter the incontrovertible evidence of their own damning features. And as he invites them to search his own countenance for whatever, in their blindness, they can hope to discover there, they are checked by his scorn and rest content with "Come sir, come, we know you well enough."

A review of the ancient plays for references to physiognomy would not be complete without recalling the practised eye of Julius Caesar. His suspicion of lean and hungry men is straight out of Plutarch's Life ("these pale-visaged and carrion-lean people I fear them most")<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cited in the appendix of the Arden Edition, ed. T. S. Dorsch, Sixth Edition (Cambridge, 1965).

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but unquestionably invokes the traditional antithesis between the portly, ruddy and reliable sanguine type and the lean and leaden, treacherous man of choleric temperament. Thomas Hill cites the "leane and pale" countenance as the mark of a coward and a betrayer.<sup>1</sup> In contrast the sanguine complexion, while not necessarily fat, is, in the words of the Kalendar of Shepherds, "large, plenteous attempered, amiable, abundant in nature, merry, singing, laughing, liking, ruddy, and gracious" (p. 151). Caesar's "would he were fatter," which really means "would his complexion were put more closely into balance" is, as it turns out, followed too closely by his overconfident "but I fear him not." He might have trusted more to his generalized but accurate initial assessment.

Before leaving Shakespeare's ancient world it may be worth noticing, and in some detail, the elaborate use of physiognomy in his "ancient" poem, Lucrece. As we shall discover, the pseudo-science is not here employed merely to embellish a scene or give added point to a brief satiric exchange. Rather, it is used to advance and enrich the central theme of the poem. Physiognomy's pretensions provide a metaphorical frame within which the poet is free to explore the problem of human trust and human treachery.

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<sup>1</sup>Chap. XXI, "What notes to be learned, in judging of the face and countinaunce."



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The 93rd sonnet, though in an altogether different context, gives a concise statement of the problem which is explored at greater length in Lucrece:

In many's looks the false heart's history  
Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange;  
But heaven in thy creation did decree  
That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;  
Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's workings be,  
Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.

The difficulty of course is to anticipate who is, like the dark lady, capable of masking deceit and who, on the contrary, reflects the harmony which ought to prevail between the appearance of the body and the condition of the soul.

In Lucrece Shakespeare's exposition is remarkably brief. Aided by the prose Argument, he moves Tarquin and Lucrece to center stage in seven stanzas. And at their first meeting (line 50) he sounds the note which is to toll throughout the poem. It is muffled, however, when we first hear it and, as a consequence, we give it less attention than it deserves. The moment Tarquin arrives our gaze is directed to Lucrece's face. Shakespeare does not, however, supply us with the traditional Petrarchan catalogue of charms. Rather, he develops an elaborate heraldic image of Virtue struggling with Beauty for mastery in "her fair face's field." This silent war is permitted to rage for almost four stanzas (50-77) with each changing colors, red to white and back again, until it is finally conceded that they have equal claims to

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sovereignty. Beauty and Virtue are wedded in the countenance of our heroine.

That this represents no unusual combination should not lead us to suppose that it is merely decorative. In fact it serves two functions: it gives appropriate emphasis to the beauty which enflames Tarquin and the virtue which, in a sense, measures the depth of his outrage and the validity of her grief--and it focuses attention upon the ideal relationship which ought to obtain between outward appearance and inner reality. Lucrece is, in the correspondence obtaining between her beauty and her virtue, an example of physiognomical perfection.

But her unexpected guest is not. If she is an "earthly saint," he is a "devil;" if there is perfect correspondence between her face and her heart, there is to be discovered no correspondence at all in Tarquin. He is a master of deception

Whose inward ill no outward harm express'd:  
For that he colour'd with his high estate,  
Hiding base sin in plaits of majesty; (91-93)

And yet even Tarquin cannot totally mask the lust which consumes him:

That nothing in him seem'd inordinate,  
Save sometime too much wonder of his eye,  
Which, having all, all could not satisfy; (94-96)

This fleeting pathognomic sign would not reveal itself to an inexperienced child of the world, we are told:

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But she, that never cop'd with stranger eyes,  
 Could pick no meaning from their parling looks,  
 Nor read the subtle-shining secrecies  
 Writ in the glassy margents of such books:  
 She touch'd no unknown baits, nor fear'd no hooks;  
 Nor could she moralize his wanton sight,  
 More than his eyes were open'd to the light."  
 (99-105)

While the figure is too common to warrant the suggestion of direct attribution,<sup>1</sup> the "baits" and "hooks" of line 103, made almost inevitable by the rhyme scheme, are more than echoed in the fourth book of Hoby's translation of Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier in which Sir Frederick interrupts the interesting discussion of beauty's relationship to virtue to say something about the possibility of wickedness lurking beneath a fair surface:

There be also many wicked men that have the comelinesse of a beautiful countenance, and it seemeth nature hath so shaped them, because they may bee the readier to deceive and that this amiable looke were like a baite that covereth the hooke. (p. 308)

And so it is with Tarquin.

On his way to Lucrece's room in the dead of night, Tarquin has a flicker of conscience about what he is to do. Interestingly enough Shakespeare converts his sense of shame quickly to a concern for his reputation-- and in so doing adds to the poem's growing conception of

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<sup>1</sup>In Romeo (I, iii, 85 ff) Lady Capulet praises County Paris in similar if more elaborate terms:

Read o'er the volume of young Paris' face;  
 And find delight writ there with beauty's pen;  
 Examine every married lineament,  
 And see how one another lends content;  
 And what obscur'd in this fair volume lies  
 Find written in the margent of his eyes.

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physiognomic correspondence. The sin he is about to commit is "so vile, so base / That it will live engraven in my face." (11 202-203).

We are, of course, used to the notion of a dissolute life making itself visible in the premature wrinkles of a man's face. And it may be something like this which King Richard, to turn to another play, has in mind when, confronted by Bolingbroke and the demand to read his indictment, he says:

. . .I'll read enough,  
When I do see the very book indeed  
Where all my sins are writ, and that's myself  
Give me the glass, and therein will I read.  
(Richard II, IV, 1, 270-73)

But this is clearly not what Shakespeare has in mind for Tarquin or his heroine. One sinful act, one act of shame, can permanently engrave the face--or so Lucrece believes. It is this belief, in fact, which is reflected in virtually everything she says about the rape. She longs for the cloak of darkness to stay, for her "true eyes have never practis'd how/ To cloak offenses with a cunning brow" (748-49). Again, her eyes will reveal her shame, not directly but by admitting a stream of tears to grave, "like water that doth eat in steel,/ Upon my cheeks what helpless shame I feel." (755-56). Most conclusive is the stanza in which the familiar book image reappears:



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The light will show, character'd in my brow,  
 The story of sweet chastity's decay,  
 The impious breach of holy wedlock vow.  
 Yea, the illiterate, that know not how  
 to cipher what is writ in learned books,  
 Will quote my loathsome trespass in my looks. (809-12)

There should be no question of the nature of her concern:  
 it is based upon physiognomy's primary assumption--that  
 nothing in one's interior life can long escape imprinting  
 its character upon the "mirror of the soul." And yet when  
 Lucrece earlier laments that she must suffer her shame  
 alone<sup>1</sup> and that there is no one,

To cross their arms, and hang their heads with mine,  
 To mask their brows, and hide their infamy (793-4),

the editor of the Arden edition, F. T. Prince, adds the  
 misleading note, "to pull one's hat down over one's face  
 was another sign of grief." While this is true, it has  
 little to do with Lucrece's lament. It is infamy, imprinted  
 clearly on the brow, which must be masked.

The notion of shame and sin made visible on the  
 countenance is reinforced consistently throughout the poem.  
 Lucrece frantically demands of Tarquin whether he proposes  
 to make himself the "glass wherein lust shall discern  
 authority for sin,"--that is, where lust can "in thee  
 read lectures of such shame" (618). While, obviously,

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<sup>1</sup>This sense of loneliness and isolation is an important  
 link to the long digression on the Troy tapestry. She must  
 share her grief and her shame with someone who might under-  
 stand it.



Collatinus has no secret shame to worry about, Lucrece's imagination conceives of the damage done to him as visible, at least to Tarquin's eye, "unseen" and "invisible" though it be to others. Thus,

Reproach is stamp'd in Collatinus' face,  
And Tarquin's eye may read the mot afar. (829-30)

The verb "stamp'd" is worth noting as but one more indication of the consistency with which the indelible nature of this visible blot is insisted upon. The permanence of the sin-mark and the violence with which it was engraven or stamp'd upon her forehead literally infects Lucrece's imagination. She cowers before the thought of it and when, in its innocence, the sun reaches her she must, in a weeping apostrophe, resort to still another synonym:

Brand not my forehead with thy piercing light  
For day hath naught to do what's done by night  
(1091-92)

It is a sign, a token, which figuratively, at least, will be beyond removing--"The blemish that will never be forgot" (536), worse, even, than the hideousness of a birth defect.

The image of sin made visible is really designed to reinforce and comment upon the central problem of the poem. We must remember that while on one occasion Tarquin worries about its effect upon himself, it is Lucrece who is consumed by it and sees it as disfiguring, not only herself and her ravisher and his family, but indeed her husband as well. Tarquin worries in vain, for if lust were powerless to reflect itself in his face (his eyes did show

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something but she couldn't comprehend it), then the rape which follows is unlikely to. Why this should be so is never really answered, although Lucrece at one point supposes that it must be related to sex:

Though men can cover crimes with bold stern looks,  
 Poor women's faces are their own faults' books.  
 (1252-53)

But for whatever reason, the burden of the poem is that we are not always what we seem to be.<sup>1</sup> Lucrece reflects the appropriate bewilderment when confronted by this truth:

Thou art not what thou seems't; and if the same,  
 Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king;  
 (600-601)

Hypocrisy and show, flattery and deceit can, in a consummate actor, undo the most worldly and perceptive of men. And lest we think that it is the innocence of Lucrece which was solely responsible for the success of Tarquin's mask, we are invited to look upon the Troy tapestry and to see, not an innocent woman but a wise and venerable King Priam fall victim in precisely the same way.

That Shakespeare meant us to understand the physiological character of the painting is everywhere apparent.

<sup>1</sup>Juliet is moved to a passionate antiphonal outburst when she suspects Romeo of a similar deception. After Tybalt's death is reported she exclaims: (III, ii, 73-78)  
 O serpent heart, hid with a flow'ring face!  
 Did ever dragon keep so fair a cave?  
 Beautiful tyrant! fiend angelical!  
 Dove-feather'd raven! wolfish-ravens lamb!  
 Despised substance of divinest show!  
 Just opposite to what thou justly seem'st.

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"Grace and majesty" are readily perceived "triumphing" in the faces of great commanders; "pale cowards" are skillfully interlaced "here and there" along with the "dexterity" and "quick bearing" of younger men:

In Ajax and Ulysses, O, what art  
Of physiognomy might one behold!  
The face of either cipher'd either's heart;  
Their face their manners most expressly told:  
In Ajax' eyes blunt rage and rigour roll'd;  
But the mild glance that sly Ulysses lent  
Show'd deep regard and smiling government. (1394-1400)

That a painter should have become thoroughly versed in the pseudo-science of physiognomy and should have used that science to depict the hidden passions and character of his subjects is not surprising.<sup>1</sup> We find contemporary testimony to this effect in Nicholas Hilliard's Treatise on the Art of Limning,<sup>2</sup> though to be sure, Hilliard's interest is chiefly pathognomic. He is especially anxious to underline the importance, in portraiture, of what he calls "grace in countenance, by which the affections appeare, which can neither be well ussed nor juged of but of the wisser sort and this principall part of the beauty a good painter hath skill of and should diligently noet. . . .(p. 207). He develops this notion at greater length a little later when he discusses how to alter each

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<sup>1</sup>For an interesting discussion of Dürer's use of the physical manifestations of the complexions see Panofsky's The Life and Art of Albrech Dürer. (Princeton, 1955), pp. 156-171.

<sup>2</sup>Cited and discussed by Erna Auerbach, Nicholas Hilliard, London 1961, chapter VII, p. 198 ff. The treatise was apparently written between 1597 and 1603.





of the several features, eyes, nose, forehead, etc., to accommodate laughter, and then continues:

. . .in like sort countenances of wroth, of feare, or of sorowe, have their severall alterance of the face, and fare according to the mind is affected, maybe many faces, some lovly, some loathsom, some grave and wisse, some foolish and wanton, some proude and audatious, some poore and couvardly, wherfor it would be longe to handel every severall countenance. (p. 208)

It is not necessary to suppose that this Elizabethan precursor of Charles Le Brun avidly read physiognomical manuals to prove that he was vitally interested in the portraiture of the passions.<sup>1</sup>

Testimony of a more amusing but no less compelling kind is offered by John Eliot in his Parlement of Pratlors (1593),<sup>2</sup> the fruit of an age so full of life that even its textbooks were, and are, worth reading. In any event one of the lighter episodes recorded by Eliot is entitled The Painter (p. 63 ff), in which Nicholas and John enter the painter's shop, ostensibly to buy but really to amuse themselves with the proprietor's eagerness to sell them something. It is interesting to note that they all three share an awareness of physiognomy's place in the art of portraiture. The painter has only just welcomed the

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<sup>1</sup>See Brewster Rogerson, "The Art of Painting the Passions," JHI, XIV, 68-94). For a more extensive treatment of 'ut pictura poesis' see Jean H. Hagstrum, The Sister Arts (Chicago, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>"A series of Elizabethan Dialogues and Monologues illustrating Daily Life and the Conduct of a Gentleman on the Grand Tour extracted from ORTHO-EPIA GALLICA, a book on



young rakes when their eyes light upon the physiognomical defects of his work:

John: What portraiture is that thou paintest there?  
 Painter: Of Esope the sage.  
 Micholas: O what lips and nosethrills of an Ape he hath!  
 John: He is eared like an Asse.

The painter having despaired of selling Aesop that day shifts to a second canvas:

Paint: What say you of this figure?  
 Nich: I say that if it be Venus, she hath not her face well painted.  
 John: It is an Italian Harlekin.  
 Nich: He is beleeeve me, verie well counterfeited for a foole.  
 John: He is not verie well shadowed for a wise man.  
 Paint: What wanteth there?  
 John: He is crump-shouldered and crokked and hath a Hawkes nose.<sup>1</sup>

The painter, at this point, is growing weary of his customers and tells them to be gone for they appear more interested in making fun of his efforts than honestly seeking a painting for themselves. Nicholas, however, assures him of their worthy intentions and the trip through his shop proceeds past the Virgin Mary, Tiberius Caesar (chiromancy is invoked at this point to explicate the wrinkles in his palm) and on to the tapestries, first Philomela and Tereus, then "the Idees of Plato. . . .the Atomes of Epicurus. . .an Eccho

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the correct Pronunciation of the French language written by John Eliot (1593)." Reissued by the Fanfrolico Press (London, 1928).

<sup>1</sup>Hill reports that a long nose, sharp at the end in the manner of a bird's beak indicates a bird-like character--that is "hastie, foolish, and like stirring to and fro," Chap. XXII.

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after her nature represented" (p. 65). But the truly elaborate one the painter reveals is not unlike the tapestry to which Lucrece repairs in the poem:

Paint: . . .Behold there the life and gests of  
 Achilles in seventie and eight peeces of  
 tapistrie beginneth at the marraje of  
 Peleus and Thetis, going on with the nativ-  
 tie of Achilles, his youth written by  
 Stacius Papinius, his gests and feats of  
 armes celebrated by Homer; his death and  
 buriall pend by Ovid and Quint Calabrian,  
 ending in the apparition of his shadow and  
 the sacrifice of Polixena written by  
 Euripides.

Nich: How much? What is the price I pray you?

Paint: Ten thousand crownes.

Nich: Tis too deare for me that.

John: What's this?

Nich: Tis the shape of a man that lacks a maister.

John: He hath his face lively painted.

Paint: He is drawne truly just in all qualities,  
 fit in all gesture, behaviour, lookes, gate,  
 phislognomie and affections.

Unfortunately, Nicholas and John can neither afford the seventy-eight sections of the Achilles tapestry nor do they really care for the physiognomical justness of the portrait of a "man that lacks a maister." They have, nonetheless, afforded themselves an amusing half-hour and they have served us by bringing contemporary evidence to bear upon Shakespeare's "skillful painting" in Lucrece. I am inclined to agree with Professor Prince that the painting passage is "very literary, both in conception and execution."<sup>1</sup> But we

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<sup>1</sup>See the Arden Edition, p. 128.



should not on this count conclude that Shakespeare was naive in making so much of the artist's fidelity to physiognomical detail. It was expected of him--in Hilliard's words the "principall part of the beauty a good painter hath skill of" (p. 207).

Having certified the painter's skill by citing the physiognomical detail to be found in Ajax, Ulysses and others, Shakespeare moves to the critical portrait in the Trojan panorama. It is of Sinon, of course, for

In him the painter labour'd with his skill  
To hide deceit and give the harmless show  
An humble gait, calm looks, eyes wailing still,  
A brow unbent, that seem'd to welcome woe,  
Cheeks neither red nor pale, but mingled so  
That blushing red no guilty instance gave,  
Nor ashy pale the fear that false hearts gave.  
(1506 ff)

We are immediately reminded of the elaborate red and white mixture of Virtue and Beauty which introduced us to Lucrece herself. Sinon has been given, then, a Lucrece-like innocence of appearance, so much so that even "jealousy" could not suppose "such saint-like forms" could be "blot with hell-born sin."

Yet Lucrece, in spite of the assault which has just been made upon her, cannot easily give up the habit of judging from appearances. Indeed, she

Chid the painter for his wondrous skill,  
Saying, some shape in Sinon's was abus'd;  
So fair a form lodg'd not a mind so ill. (1528-30)



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9. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1991; 266: 1033-1036.

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The realization of how blindly she has persisted in the judgment of men by what they seem to be is conveyed in a clumsy but dramatic stanza:

"It cannot be," quoth she, "that so much guile"--  
 She would have said--"can lurk in such a look";  
 But Tarquin's shape came in her mind the while,  
 And from her tongue "can lurk" from "cannot" took.  
 "It cannot be" she in that sense forsook,  
 And turn'd it thus: "It cannot be, I find,  
 But such a face should bear a wicked mind." (1534-40)

And the painter's skill is thus tragically confirmed. Sinon and Tarquin, armed with "outward honesty but yet defil'd with inward vice," are joined together, as are Lucrece and Priam, her chastity and the city of Troy.

As Priam did him cherish,  
 So did I Tarquin,--so my Troy did perish. (1546-7)

In an important sense the poem can be said to end with this poignant recognition scene--for that is precisely what it is. Certainly, Collatinus must return and the story's retelling must issue in death and vengeance; but the poem is chiefly concerned with the death of Lucrece's innocence and this, oddly enough, does not truly take place in the dark night of the rape. After Tarquin leaves her room Lucrece still believes in the appearance of things, for all of her protestations to the contrary. Her naiveté dies only before the painting; in a way she is violated a second time, for only then is she stripped of her illusions about the nature of mankind--about its potential viciousness and the no less lamentable human capacity to hide that viciousness under the guise of kindness and courtesy.

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To register truly, her experience of evil needed the reinforcement of art: Tarquin had to be succeeded by Sinon.

And so the pseudo-science of physiognomy is made to lend its imagery to comment on its own inadequacy. The skillful painter might employ its lessons to make visible on the countenance the "vigour" of Ajax or Ulysses' subtle craft. But it lies helpless before a Sinon. It can give no account of him, save a fatally wrong one, can insist upon no unalterable correspondence between appearance and reality. In Lucrece Shakespeare discovers how useful physiognomy could be in helping him to explore this theme. And he is to return to it often as the working out of that theme deepens in Richard III, Hamlet, and Macbeth.



## CHAPTER V

### DEFORMITY AND DECEPTION: PHYSIOGNOMY AS PROPHECY

Deformed persons are commonly even with nature:  
for as nature hath done ill by them, so do they  
by nature; being for the most part (as the Scrip-  
ture saith) void of natural affection; and so they  
have their revenge of nature.

Francis Bacon "On Deformity"

When we put aside Lucrece for Richard III we move  
from narrative to dramatic verse, from Rome to England,  
from an essentially domestic tale of woe with public con-  
sequences to a public tale of woe with domestic conse-  
quences. The object of Tarquin's deceit is a Roman matron  
of singular beauty; the object of Richard's is the very  
throne of England. But the problem of the reality of evil  
masquerading as virtue, though made vastly more complicated,  
remains the same and it is worked out by a similar employ-  
ment of the rhetoric of physiognomy. If Lucrece tells the  
story of a man of noble seeming who is vile at heart and  
soul--of a man in whom there exists no correspondence  
between body and spirit--then Richard III<sup>1</sup> is the story of

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<sup>1</sup>I mean to examine the tetralogy 1, 2, and 3 Henry VI  
and Richard III.

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a man who is in essential harmony with himself and who, in spite of the glaring obviousness of his deformity, is able by sheer wit and daring to convince nearly everyone in his company of his loving, open nature. It can be said of Richard that he succeeds in masking his true nature better than anyone in Shakespeare's world and yet that no one displays his nature in a more shockingly apparent and visible way.

The irony of the play is, I think, more pervasive than in anything Shakespeare has left to us. It is inconceivable that this crooked, humped villain should waltz his way by the great men and women of England--that no one, save Old Clifford and Queen Margaret, should truly see what he is before it is too late. He leaves in his wake a long line of victims, each of whom failed to recognize the deformity of character which nature had so unmistakably signalled in a corresponding deformity of outward appearance. If a gross simplification might for a moment stand, it is as if Shakespeare decided in the Henry VI - Richard III tetralogy to amend the "anti-physiognomy" of Lucrece. He can be said to have reminded his audience that, while it is true that evil can hide behind the lovely and proportioned lines of physical beauty, it is also true and far more likely that it will be discovered in a mansion of its own misshapened design.



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It is hardly necessary to call attention to the extravagant care with which Shakespeare fashions in Richard a portrait of physical ugliness. But we should pay special attention to the significance he attaches to his hero's shape. Richard's very first appearance in the tetralogy is greeted by Old Clifford's mocking, but perceptive, derision:

Hence, heap of wrath, foul indigested lump,  
As crooked in thy manners as thy shape

(2 Henry VI, V, 1, 157-8)

To Shakespeare's audience this was not merely a rhetorical outburst; it was a statement if not of unalterable truth, of a very high order of probability. The relation of character to appearance is thus suggested to have an especial relevance in Richard's case. In the same scene Young Clifford reinforces the notion and projects it into the future by branding his adversary as a "foul stigmatic"--that is, one whose physical deformity is so monstrous as to carry nature's warning to the rest of mankind.

The prophetic nature of Richard's deformity, then, is its central characteristic.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare relies heavily upon it to reinforce the sense of inevitability with which

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth Anderson has called attention to the meaning of Richard's deformity, if not its special prophetic quality: "Evidently the dramatist had in mind the principle that the normal order of creation is to provide correspondence between body and soul; a principle so widely held that his audience must have felt a relationship between Richard's foul body and his villainy." Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays, p. 146.

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the action unfolds throughout the tetralogy. Margaret, in an unusually playful mood, sounds the theme in the first act of 3 Henry VI. Having just captured the Duke of York she tauntingly asks where his "mess of sons" are, "wanton Edward," "lusty George" and,

. . .that valiant crook-back prodigy,  
Dicky your boy, that with his grumbling voice  
Was wont to cheer his dad in mutinies. (I, IV, 73 ff)

Even exulting in victory she cannot but think of Richard's twisted frame as prodigious--as an omen of things to come.<sup>1</sup>

Margaret returns to this prophetic theme in the next act when she again turns upon him to make clear how singular and improbable he really is:

But thou art neither like thy sire nor dam,  
But like a foul misshapen stigmatic,  
Mark'd by the Destinies to be avoided,  
As venom toads, or lizards' dreadful stings (II, II, 135-38)

Later (V, v, 28) she contents herself with the thought that Richard "was born to be a plague to men" and while the phrase lacks her usual vituperative energy it is enough to put Richard on guard. He would silence her tongue if he could, for she knows what he is and what he must be. In answer to Edward's effort to stop his hand, Richard clearly betrays his concern about Margaret's prophetic reading of his deformity--"Why should she live, to fill the world with words?" (3 Henry VI, V, v, 44).

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<sup>1</sup>I am convinced that Margaret uses the term "prodigy" in the meaning cited by the O.E.D.: "1. something extraordinary from which omens are drawn; an omen, a portent, now rare."



Richard is, of course, especially sensitive about his physique--but one has the impression that this sensitivity derives not from a desire to be more attractive, but because he realizes how fundamentally revealing his appearance really is. King Henry is permitted to tell Richard about the unnatural and tempestuous night that marked his birth, during which the owl shriek'd, the night-crow cried, dogs howl'd and "chattering pies in dismal discord sung" (3 Henry VI, V, vi, 44 ff). He is even able to speak of the child born that night as an "indigested and deformed lump" and Richard does not raise his hand. It is only when he begins to draw conclusions from the deformity,

Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,  
To signify thou cam'st to bite the world;  
And, if the rest be true which I have heard,  
Thou can'st. . . . (V, vi, 53 ff)

that Richard cuts him off, even as he had hoped to silence Queen Margaret. But what is the rest which Henry was unable to tell us? Richard does not keep us wondering. No sooner is Henry dead than his murderer continues the horrible story of his nativity, and in doing so continues Henry's elaboration of what his twisted body signifies:

The midwife wonder'd, and the woman cried,  
"O Jesus bless us! He is born with teeth!  
And so I was; which plainly signified  
That I should snarl, and bite, and play the dog.  
Then, since the heavens have shap'd my body so,  
Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it.  
I have no brother, I am like no brother;  
And this word "love", which grey beards call divine,  
Be resident in men like one another,  
And not in me! I am myself alone. . . . (V, vi, 74 ff)

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Richard is a singular monster, incapable of human affection. It is love that he lacks, not sex. He is clever enough to woo and win even with an ugly body and, of course, he knows this. But he is congenitally deprived of the capacity to reach out in affection to another living soul and it is this spiritual deformity that peers out from behind the awful rise on his back. Margaret again underlines the pre-natal casting of his body and character:

Thou elvish mark'd, abortive, rooting hog!  
 Thou that was seal'd in thy nativity  
 The slave of nature and the son of hell!

(Richard III, I, iii, 228 ff)

The link between Richard and the devil in hell, a connection which he himself has insisted upon--"Let hell make crook'd my mind"--is not lightly made. He is the devil's creation and he carries the signs of his paternity for all to see. Margaret reminds us of this once again in her admonition to Buckingham:

Have not to do with him, beware of him:  
 Sin, death, and hell have set their marks on him,  
 And all their ministers attend on him

(Richard III, I, iii, 292-95)<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious, then, that Shakespeare was especially anxious to develop the theme of inevitable evil in recording the rise of Richard and that he seized upon the King's misshapened body to serve that dramatic end. Richard,

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<sup>1</sup>See also Richard III, IV, 4, 166-7 where the Duchess of York refers to the birth of Richard as unnatural--"Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell."





consequently, is not merely "lamely proportioned," he is prophetically deformed and his hunched back speaks physiognomically in every scene in which it appears.

Shakespeare may have found the suggestion for this dramatic employment of Richard's appearance in the chronicles. Sir Thomas More's account of the King dwells upon his unusual physique. He was:

little of stature, ill featured of limmes, crooke backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right. . . hard favoured of visage. . . ; he was malicious, wrathfull, envious, and from afore his birth ever froward.<sup>1</sup> (*italics added*)

While More does not explicitly interpret Richard's appearance physiognomically, he clearly associates character and appearance by juxtaposing his comments on both. Similarly, while his reference to the King's having been "ever froward . . . from afore his birth" is clearly meant to allude to the breech birth, it also suggests the determined nature of his character which Shakespeare was to emphasize time and again in the tetralogy.

Hall's account, taken over verbatim by Holinshed, is far more explicitly physiognomic:

As he was small and little of stature, so was he of bodie greatly deformed; the one shoulder higher than the other; his face was small, but his countenance cruell, and such, that at the first aspect a man would judge it to savour and smell of malice, fraud and deceit. When he stood musing, he would bite and

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<sup>1</sup>Boswell-Stone, W. G., Shakespeare's Holinshed (London, 1896), p. 422.



chaw bisilie his neither lip as who said, that  
 his fierce nature in his cruell bodie alwaies  
 chafed, stirred, and was ever onquiet. . .he  
 was of a readie, pregnant and quicke wit, wilie  
 to feine, and apt to dissemble: he had a proud  
 mind, and an arrogant stomach. . .<sup>2</sup> (italics added)

That Hall, like Plutarch, employed physiognomic interpretation of his principal character cannot be doubted from the evidence of the passage just quoted. But it is worth nothing that Hall emphasizes, not the grossness of Richard's body, but his countenance. The body at one point is called "cruell" but it is the face that savours and smells "of malice, fraud and deceit." Shakespeare pays only the most general attention to Richard's countenance. He fastens most of his attention upon the outstanding single feature of the man, his humped back, and burdens that feature with the entire weight of evil. Indeed, as we shall see, it is Richard's marvelously controlled facial expressions that permit his massive deception.

At any event, in emphasizing the humped back Shakespeare was on perfectly sound professional ground. Thomas Hill deals with this deformity in his chapter on "The shoulder pointes seene neare joyning together. . .". He cites Cocles as the expert on hunch backs, for he is recorded as seldom having seen

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by Boswell-Stone, p. 423.



. . .any person being crooke backed which were of a good nature: but that these having the like bearing out, or bunch on the shoulders were rather trayterous and very wicked in their actions. And such (sayth the Physiognomer) were known in his time to be the founders of all wicked deceites, yea wylie underminers and gropers of the people and had a deepe retching wyt and wylie fetches in wicked actions. So that it seemth impossible after nature that such deformed persons should possess in them laudable actions. . .out of an evil shaped bodie can no laudable actions proceed or be caused, as afore uttered.<sup>1</sup>

It is as if Hill (or Cocles) had Richard in mind when he drew his vivid picture of the hunch-backed "undermyner" with a "deepe retching wit."<sup>2</sup>

A more popular, and therefore more generalized, account of the significance of birth defects<sup>3</sup> can be found in Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier. Lord Octavian speaks, albeit softly, to the point in Book Four:

Therefore doth each man seeke to cover the defaultes of nature, as well in the mind, as also in the bodie: the which is to bee seene in the blinde, lame, crooked and other maimed and deformed creatures.

<sup>1</sup>John Metham's essay on physiognomy is less specific but indicates that he is no less aware of the problem: "A bak the quyche bowyth round, that yt bowyth in the schuldyrrys to the brest, yt sygnyfyith enuyusnes and malyce; and this tokyn ys most true, qwan a man goth myche stoupyng" p. 138-9.

<sup>2</sup>Savonarola also assigns great intellectual ingenuity and astuteness to hunchbacks. See Lynn Thorndike, History of Magic, IV, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup>For an extended discussion of Shakespeare's use of the concept of the "stamp of nature" see T. W. Baldwin On the Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Plays 1592-94. (Illinois, 1959), pp. 318 ff.



For although their imperfections may be laide to nature, yet doth it greeve each man to have them in himself: because it seemeth by the testimonie of the selfesame nature that a man hath that default or blemish (as it were) for a patent and token of his ill inclination. (p. 266)

Nature, then, imprints physical imperfection to testify to the warped character of the man thus marked. The imperfection is clearly prophetic and should be observed by prudent men. The question of responsibility in this determinist psychology is irrelevant.

It is beyond reasonable question that Shakespeare's contemporaries would have looked upon Richard's ugliness in precisely this way. Lamb's innocent but not unattractive account of the crooked King could not have occurred to an Elizabethan audience.<sup>1</sup> Surely Richard exults in his triumphs. But it is the exultation, not of a man who is overcoming a physical defect, but of one who is fulfilling the evil nature which that defect merely reflects. It is the prophetic defect which Oberon banishes in his closing epithalamium in A Midsummer Night's Dream.

And the blots of Nature's hand  
Shall not in their issue stand;  
Never mole, hare-lip, nor scar  
Nor mark prodigious, such as are  
Despised in nativity  
Shall upon their children be. (V, i, 416-21 ff)

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Lamb "G. F. Cooke in 'Richard the Third.'" "When Mr. Cooke makes allusions to his own form, they seem accompanied with unmixed distaste and pain, like some obtrusive and haunting idea. But surely the Richard of Shakespeare mingles in these allusions a perpetual reference to his own powers and capacities. . .and the joy of a defect





It is the prophetic defect which in King John Constance cannot discover in Arthur and which, if she could would have totally altered her view. To Arthur's plea that she be content she replies:

If thou that bidst me be content wert grim,  
Ugly, and slandrous to thy mother's womb,  
Full of unpleasing blots, and sightless stains,  
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,  
Patch'd with foul moles, and eye-offending marks,  
I would not care. . . . (III, 1, 43-48).

Richard, then, is Arthur's opposite number, precisely a slander to his mother's womb, "crooked, swart" and, above all else, truly prodigious in his deformity.<sup>1</sup>

We need not, however, seek in King John the intended antithesis to Richard's evil nature. He is to be found in young Henry, Earl of Richmond, the founder of the dynasty which it was the pleasure and duty of Elizabeth's grateful subjects to praise. And the antithesis is posed, significantly enough, in physiognomic terms. King Henry VI quite accidentally spots Richmond in a crowd and is so struck by his noble appearance as to ask Somerset who he is. Once he knows he calls young Henry to him:

Come higher, England's hope--If secret powers  
Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,  
This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.  
His looks are full of peaceful majesty,  
His head by nature fram'd to wear a crown,

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conquered or turned into an advantage, is one cause of these very allusions, and of the satisfaction with which his mind recurs to them." Works ed. T. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1924), I, p. 48.

<sup>1</sup>3 Henry VI, II, ii, 135 ff; V, vi, 42 ff.



His hand to wield a sceptre, and himself  
Likely in time to bless a regal throne.

(3 Henry VI, IV, vi, 68-74)

Nature frames the wise and kindly features of a Tudor prince-to-be as well as the distorted lineaments of a villain--and a practiced, albeit occultly trained eye can predict the future from either one.

But the Henry VI - Richard III tetralogy is distinguished primarily by the absence of this skill. King Henry can speak of his "divining thoughts" when looking upon Richmond, but he was fatally late in divining the wickedness in Richard's appearance. And with the exceptions of Margaret and Old Clifford, and with a noticeable hesitancy in the Duchess of York, everyone in the four plays is blind to Richard's deceit. They are blind to the one permanent and indelible mark which could and should put them on guard: the distorted shape of the protagonist.

That Shakespeare meant us to pay some attention to this is, I think, beyond question. The success of Richard's deceit is attributable almost entirely to his consummate skill in acting. He can play any role demanded of him and can change his facial expression, modulate his voice and sharpen his wit as the occasion demands. And his skill is never far from his mind. He speaks of it in his first major soliloquy:

Why I can smile, and murder while I smile,  
And cry "Content" to that which grieves my heart,  
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,  
And frame my face to all occasions.



i'll play the orator as well as Nestor,  
 Deceive more slyly than Ulysses could;  
 And, like a Sinon, take another Troy.  
 I can add colours to the chameleon;  
 Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,  
 And set the murtherous Machiavel to school.

(3 Henry VI, III, 11, 182 ff)

Now Richard, as usual, tells the brutal truth about himself, in this soliloquy as in all others. But clearly he overestimates his skill when he suggests that he can "change shapes with Proteus for advantages." This is the one thing he cannot do and he is painfully aware of it. And because he cannot, the parallel with Sinon is thrown slightly askew. Sinon's physical appearance was one with his seeming nature; Richard's is one with his real nature. He is "not shap'd for sportive tricks" or for honourable action either. His ultimate achievement is to be measured by the success with which he diverts attention from the permanent marks of his body to the elastic features of his face.

The Duchess of York is not, for all her suspicion and concern, immune to Richard's diverting skill. No one knows more painfully than she how foully blotted is the body of this third son who was born under the most darkly auspicious circumstances. And yet in talking to Clarence's boy about his uncle she betrays the success with which Richard has "hidden" his deformity. She is deeply suspicious of course, but not because of the lessons taught by physiognomy:



Duchess: Ah, that deceit should steel such gentle shape,  
 And with a vertuous vizor hide deep vice!  
 He is my son-ay, and therein my shame;  
 Yet from my dugs, he drew not this deceit.  
 Boy: Think you my uncle did dissemble grandam?  
 Duchess: Ay, boy.  
 Boy: I cannot think it. . . .

(Richard III, II, ii, 27 ff)

Clearly the irony of this exchange depends in no small way upon the assignment of, of all things, a "gentle shape" to Richard--and by the mother who first looked with horror upon him. No attentive member of Shakespeare's audience could have missed this outrageous evidence of human blindness.

Richard's physical deformity, then, is of some importance to an accurate reading of the play. To be most effective it must be a massively deformed Protector who, with Buckingham, greets the returning prince and heir with these lines:

Prince: I want more vncles here to welcome me.  
 Richard: Sweet Prince, the untainted virtue of your years  
 Hath not yet div'd into the world's deceit.  
 No more can you distinguish of a man,  
 Than of his outward show; which, God he knows,  
 Seldome or never jumpeth with the heart.  
 Those vncles which you want were dangerous.

(Richard III, III, i, 6 ff)

The irony in this bit of deception is not lodged solely in the spectacle of the one truly murderous uncle suggesting that the others are dangerous. It is enhanced by the audacity of a crooked hunchback who will risk calling explicit attention to his deformity by denying the





correspondence which is so perfectly realized in himself-- the correspondence between outward show and the "heart," upon which the pseudo-science of physiognomy was based. Here, clearly, the physical presence of deformity on the stage is necessary if the scene's dramatic intention is to be realized.

By the time Richard sends his princely nephew to the Tower, his confidence in his own capacity to deceive is unlimited. And justifiably so. No one speaks of his twisted body, save, of course, Margaret; no one really seems to notice it any longer, let alone draw prophetic conclusions from it. He has their gaze directed solely to the versatile mask which is his face. Indeed, Buckingham is so completely mesmerized by his master that he no longer sees him as he really is. How else can we explain the utterly laughable contention which he advances during his meeting with the Lord Mayor and the citizens of London? Here we have the spectacle of Buckingham trying to prove Edward's bastardy by noting how unlike the duke, his father, he appears. This is all right, so far as it goes, but then, as he tells Richard, he continued:

Withal I did infer your lineaments,--  
 Being the right idea of your father,  
 Both in your form and nobleness of mind; (III, vii, 12-15)

No one in his right mind would have seriously invited the good citizens to contemplate Richard's "lineaments" as

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evidence of his paternity and his nobleness. The one fact that has been consistently insisted upon throughout the tetralogy is that Richard was in no way like either his father or his mother. King Henry recalls that he was

An indigested and deformed lump,  
Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree

(3 Henry VI, V, vi, 50-51)

Queen Margaret had earlier alluded to precisely the same face, "But thou art neither like thy sire nor dam" (II, ii, 135), and if her testimony is considered prejudiced we might recall the words of the Duchess who refers to the dead Clarence and Edward as "two mirrors of his Princely semblance" with Richard the "one false Glass." Even Richard alludes to his physical uniqueness, although with specific reference only to his mother. He likens himself

. . .to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp  
That carries no impression like the dam.

(3 Henry VI, III, ii, 161-2)

Clearly Shakespeare has given Buckingham this patently false contention to advance before the citizens for some dramatic purpose. And that purpose can only have been to call attention once again to Richard's corrupted body and the extent to which its evidence of wickedness had been tragically overlooked.

Buckingham may have been the more easily deceived because of his unwillingness to give any credence to

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physiognomy's claims.<sup>1</sup> He is, in this respect, unusual in the play for he is the only person to deny any correspondence between outward appearance and inner character, save Richard, of course, who denies it in public and for his own purposes. But Buckingham has seen too much of the world, and too much of his master, to suppose that the face is an accurate index to character. In discussing the coronation of the prince, Buckingham asks the Bishop of Ely and the others if any one knows how Richard feels about the matter:

Buck.: "Who knowes the Lord Protector's mind herein?  
Who is most inward with the noble Duke?

Ely: Your Grace, we think, should soonest know  
his mind.

Buck.: We know each other's faces; for our hearts,  
He knows no more of mine, than I of yours:  
Nor I of his, my lord, than you of mine."

(Richard III, III, iv, 7-12)

And, of course, Buckingham is painfully and prophetically right. Men can disguise their emotions by the exercise of "pathognomic control," and no one on earth, including Tarquin and Sinon, exceeds Richard in the trying on of virtue's many masks.

But Hastings misses the point. His gaze too has been directed from Richard's shoulders to his face but, unlike Buckingham, he is foolish enough to trust his

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<sup>1</sup>This does not explain, of course, how he dared to assert a similarity between Richard's appearance and his father's. It is one thing to deny a relationship between the lineaments of the body and the soul; another to see similarities where they do not exist.

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judgment of what he sees. The Lucrece of the play, Hastings takes everything precisely as it, on the surface, seems to be:

Hastings: His Grace looks cheerfully and smooth  
this morning; There's some conceit or  
other likes him well, when that he bids  
good morrow with such spirit. I thinke  
there's never a man in Christendom  
Can lesser hide his love, or hate, than  
he, for by his face straight shall you  
know his heart.

Derby: What of his heart perceive you in his face,  
By any likelihood he show'd today?

Hastings: Marry, that with no man here he is offended;  
For were he, he had showne it in his looks.

(Richard III, III, iv, 48-57)

Hastings too must be shocked out of his naive trust in the appearance of things. No sooner has he expressed his confidence in Richard's benign pathognomic mask, than he finds himself condemned to die as a traitor. Once again the vocabulary of physiognomy creeps into the diction of the play. Hastings laments his fate with a rather elaborate nautical image, but the deceiving appearance of things cannot be kept out:

O momentary grace of mortal men,  
Which we more hunt for than the grace of God!  
Who builds his hope in air of your good looks  
Lives like a drunken sailor on a mast,  
Ready with every nod to tumble down,  
Into the fatal bowels of the deep

(Richard III, III, iv, 95-100)  
(italics added)

As if to pronounce a grisly physiognomic benediction over the scene, Richard himself piously refers to Hastings' head upon a pole as having belonged to one who, "So smooth





he daub 'd his vice with shew of vertue" that he mistook him for the "plainest harmless Creature."

Thus we have two main physiognomic currents running throughout the tetralogy. The first is the compelling insistence upon the prophetic nature of Richard's deformity, voiced first by Old Clifford in 2 Henry VI ("Hence, heap of wrath. . . .As crooked in thy manners as thy shape," V, 1, 157) and consistently repeated by Margaret, King Henry, the Duchess his mother and, most significantly, by Richard himself. Clearly the character of Richard and the irony which accompanies him on his deceitful path to the throne cannot be properly understood without recognition of the visible and unalterable quality of his corruption.

Obliquely related to this strain in the tetralogy, is the equally compelling theme of successful deception. And this theme, too, is developed in physiognomic terms, for it is Richard's countenance, not his body's shape, that men examine for proof of his virtue. Buckingham is wise enough to forego the attempt; his loyalty to Richard has been fashioned in other ways. But Hastings and the royal princes, and the women in the plays (Margaret and the Duchess excluded) are all drawn to the versatile mask which is Richard's face and they are all deceived. All of the features over which he exercises control are consummately modulated to complement the appearance of honesty and humility which he finds so profitable.

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Richard is not what he seems to be; he is what he is, a Sinon with the mark of hell upon his twisted frame. The magnificence of his deception and his personality must be measured by the mountainous impediment to deception which nature visited upon his body.

In Richard III, then, Shakespeare enlarges his examination of truth and falsehood and discovers not only an awful capacity for deceit in humankind but a parallel willingness to be deceived. And while the concept of "outward show" is never limited to physical appearance alone,<sup>1</sup> its potentially dissonant relationship to inner character is commonly expressed in physiognomic terms.

In Macbeth, as earlier intimated,<sup>2</sup> physiognomy is unmistakably employed to underline the conscious deception which Lady Macbeth recognizes as vital to her purposes. She literally teaches her husband to value the lessons of pathognomy:

Your face, my thane, is as a book where men  
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,  
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,  
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under't. (I, v, 64-68)

Macbeth does not really answer her until two scenes later when his resolution has been fixed:

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<sup>1</sup>Richard's deception is aided as much by his facile tongue as his flexible countenance.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter III, page 1; Theodore Spencer's Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1961) deals with the persistence of the appearance-reality theme in the plays and has been invaluable.



I am settled and bend up  
 Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
 Away, and mock the time with fairest show:  
 False face must hide what the false heart doth know.<sup>1</sup>

The imperative may be instructive. Macbeth has come to accept the inevitability of deceit. The false face must hide what the false heart knows and so, saddened, Macbeth adjusts his public countenance. It will stay in place for yet awhile.

Hamlet, of course, is full of false faces. As Theodore Spencer has suggested, the play might easily be said to be about the tragic lack of correspondence between appearance and reality.<sup>2</sup> Surely no man has had to confront human deception and hypocrisy in such an overpoweringly consecutive way as does the Danish prince. Claudius and Gertrude inflict the most telling blow to his trust in human goodness and openness but it may not be wrong to say that Hamlet is paralyzed less by this main blow and more by the less consequential deceptions which follow so fast and consistently after it. No one, except Horatio, is what he seems to be in the play. Virtually everyone, even Ophelia, must put on a mask, must play a part, must hide interior truth of character in the facile exercise of seeming virtue.

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<sup>1</sup>I, vii, 79 ff. Later, in III, ii, 32 ff, he prepares himself to enter the banquet hall and does so in these terms of lament: ". . .Unsafe the while, that we/ Must lave our honours in these flattering streams/ And make our faces vizards to our heart/Disguising what they are."

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 105.



Claudius betrays his interest in the appearance of things in his first speech. He tells us, invoking an appropriately physiognomic figure, that it was fitting for a time that King Hamlet should be mourned and

. . .our whole kingdom  
To be contracted in one brow of woe.

And it is to this pious hypocrisy that Hamlet truly responds when his mother asks why he cannot accommodate the fact of death:

Queen: Why seems it so particular with thee?  
Hamlet: Seems, madam? Nay it is; I know not "seems."  
Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,  
Nor customary suits of solemn black,  
Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,  
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,  
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,  
Together with all forms, moods, shows of grief  
That can denote me truly: these, indeed, seem,  
For they are actions that a man might play:  
But I have that within which passeth show,  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(I, ii, 75 ff)

Claudius, having tried to pawn off his "contracted brow of woe" must have been made uncomfortable indeed to discover how perceptive his step-son has become in two months' time.

Hamlet, then, has not been fooled into supposing that Claudius' grief has been as deeply real as his own or, indeed, as real as his mock-mourning should have suggested. But that is all he knows about the deception at this point. When he finally speaks to the ghost of his father he learns how vast the hypocrisy really is and how closely it touches him. He learns that his mother is a "most seeming





virtuous queen" and that lewdness may court virtue "in a shape of heaven" and that lust may be "to a radiant angel link'd," and that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." In brief, he learns that the world has been turned upside down--that appearance in no way corresponds with the reality it purports to reflect. And he knows that he cannot possibly survive long in this new world unless he too puts on a mask, becomes such that neither "th'exterior nor the inward man/resembles that it was."

From this point forward Hamlet is rarely fooled by the look of things and never, when he is, for long. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are warmly and freely welcomed as old and trusted friends but they have not moved much beyond the opening exchange of pleasantries before Hamlet pierces the show of innocence with which they have covered their royal assignment:

Hamlet: . . .were you not sent for? Is it  
Your own inclining? Is it a free visitation?  
Come deal justly with me: come, come; nay speak.  
Guild.: What should we say my lord?  
Hamlet: Why anything--but to the purpose. You were  
sent for; and there is a kind of confession in  
your looks, which your modesties have not  
craft enough to colour: I know the good King  
and Queen have sent for you.. (II, ii, 283 ff)

And so they are made to discover their true intentions.

But if his schoolmates disappoint in their deception, how much more depressing must it be to discover, and almost at once, that even Ophelia has been made to put on the

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costume of seeming. Polonius sounds the note we have come to expect in readying his daughter for her charade:

. . . .Read on this book,  
That show of such an exercise may colour  
Your loveliness--We are yet to blame in this  
'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage  
And pious action we do sugar o'er  
The devil himself. (III, 1, 44 ff)

Ophelia is patently as inept in her attempt to deceive an awakened Hamlet as were Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The courtly art of dissembling has not been, it would seem, inherited from her father. Hamlet is led by his discovery to overturn what we have come to know as an Elizabethan commonplace--the physiognomic notion of correspondence between beauty and virtue.

Ham.: Ha, ha! Are you honest?  
Oph.: My lord?  
Ham.: Are you fair?  
Oph.: What means your lordship?  
Ham.: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty  
should admit no discourse to your beauty.  
Oph.: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce  
than with honesty?  
Ham.: Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner  
transform honesty from what it is to a bawd  
than the force of honesty can translate beauty  
into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox,  
but now the time gives it proof. I did  
love you once.

(III, 1, 103 ff)

Thus Hamlet's growing experience with the bedraggled veil of appearance has conditioned him to cast his thoughts in the rhetoric of physiognomy. It can be said, indeed, that the mousetrap is set with our pseudo-science, for it is a pathognomic reaction that he proposes to catch and interpret in his uncle's face:

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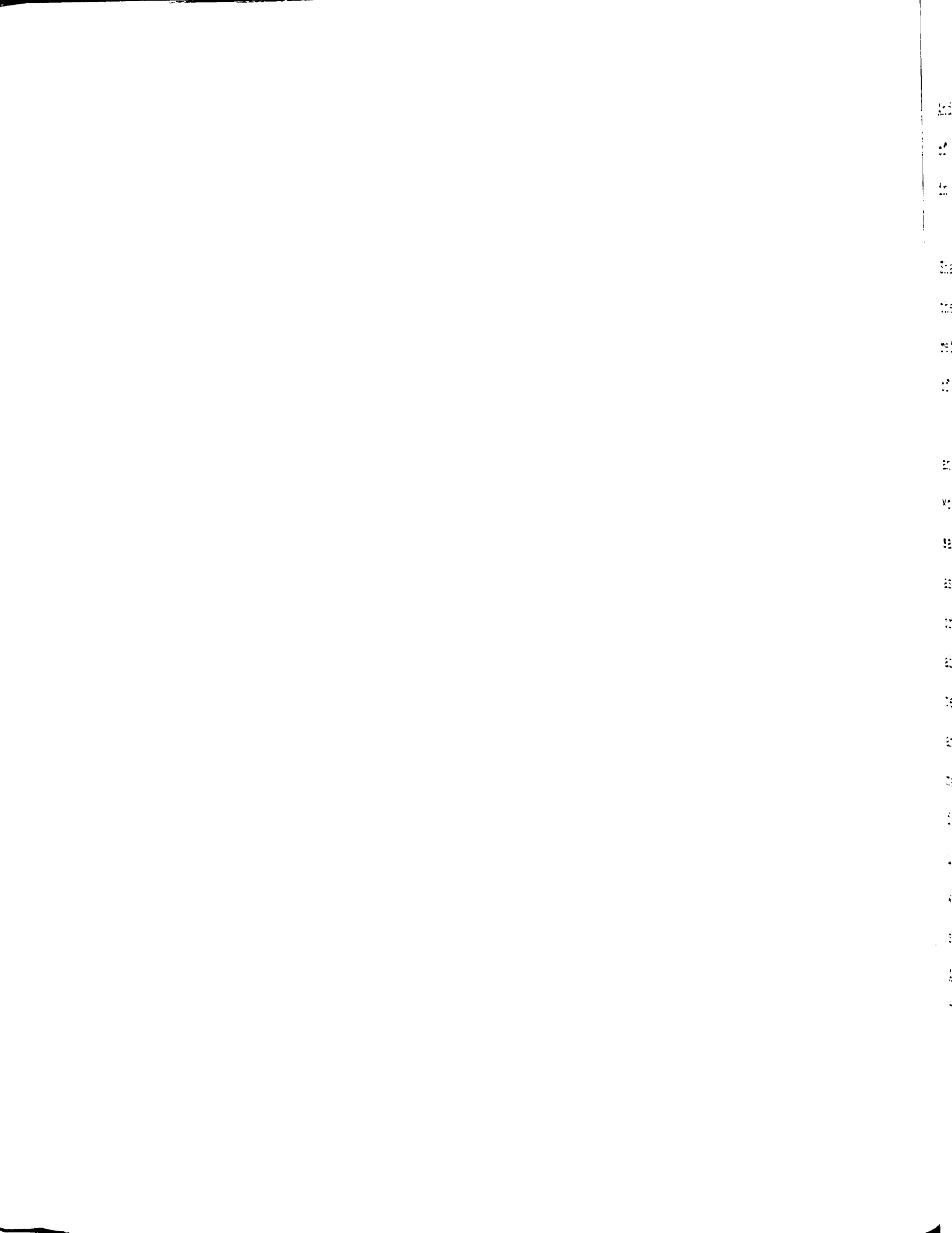
I'll observe his looks;  
 I'll tent him to the quick. If he but blench  
 I know my course. (II, 11, 624-26)

Similarly the powerful bedroom scene with Gertrude is heavily laden with imagery drawn from the science of outward appearance. In reply to his mother's attempt to call his bluff ("What have I done, etc.") Hamlet can only conceive of her sin in visual terms. It is, in fact, a disfiguring sin:

Such an act  
 That blurs the grace and blush of modesty;  
 Calls virtue hypocrite; takes off the rose  
 From the fair forehead of an innocent love,  
 And sets a blister there; makes marriage-vows  
 As false as dicers' oaths. O such a deed  
 As from the body of contraction plucks  
 The very soul, and sweet religion makes  
 A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face doth glow;  
 Yea this solidity and compound mass,  
 With tristful visage, as against the doom,  
 Is thought-sick at the act." (III, iv, 40 ff)

Less intense and concentrated, the first five lines of this speech might as easily have been uttered by Lucrece.

In the plays examined thus far we have discovered evidence not only of Shakespeare's interest in physiognomy but of his versatility in shaping its assumptions and its language to serve dramatic ends. Indeed the range of his employment of our pseudo-science is uniquely broad: it runs from the explicit and literal endorsement found in the gently satiric jealousy scene in Antony and Cleopatra to the periodic use of pathognomic imagery which illuminates the theme of appearance versus reality in Macbeth and Hamlet.



And it varies in intent from the savagely satiric attack of Menenius in Coriolanus to the revelation of character in Richard III.

We might then properly close our account of Shakespeare's use of physiognomy by looking briefly at the play in which it appears in most of its guises. I refer to Henry IV (Parts I and II) and the most probable of physiognomic specimens, Sir John Falstaff.

Given his outrageous rotundity and the additional and significant fact of his final rejection, Falstaff would appear to be a perfect target for physiognomical satire. And, of course, his "increasing belly" is given as much attention, if not the same kind, as Richard's crooked back. But there is surprisingly little detail about him which lends itself to specific physiognomic interpretation. He is a grossly corpulent, beef-eating and sack-drinking old man and he has all the physical marks that other old men with these propensities traditionally display. The Lord Chief Justice nicely catalogues these for us; he has, we learn, a moist eye, a dry hand, a yellow cheek, white beard, decreasing leg, increasing belly, broken voice, shortness of breath, a double chin and a single wit.<sup>1</sup> And only the last is patently wrong.

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<sup>1</sup>2 Henry IV, I, 11, 18 ff.



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But these are not distinctive "signs."<sup>1</sup> Falstaff is, judging from his appearance, simply a comically exaggerated example of the sanguine type growing rapidly to old age. He goes to great lengths to inform us of this himself. In the mock scene in which Falstaff plays Henry IV, to his erring son, he connects his appearance to his character in traditional terms:

- Fal.: . . . And yet there is a virtuous man  
whom I have often noted in thy company,  
but I know not his name.
- Pr. Hal: What manner of man, an it like your Majesty?
- Fal.: A goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or, by'r Lady, inclining to three-score; and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff: If that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If, then, the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff.

(1 Henry IV, II, iv, 459 ff)

Although he is winking the whole time, Falstaff's self-portrait is by no means unorthodox. We are reminded of the description of the sanguine type in the Kalendar of Shepherds as "large, plenteous attempered, amiable, abundant in nature, merry, singing, laughing, liking, ruddy and gracious. . . ." who "hath his wine of the ape, more he drinketh the merrier he is" (p. 151). But the point,

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<sup>1</sup>Actually a "dry hand" is a common physiognomic sign indicating lack of moisture i.e. lack of sexuality. See Twelfth Night (I, iii, 66-67) and Dekker's Westward Ho (III, 1, 35 ff).

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of course, is that this is one stout oak which cannot be known by his fruits. He is "lewdly given" and hasn't the slightest intention of becoming acquainted with virtue in any of its forms. Hal knows it and so does Falstaff. His "sanguine" appearance, or what there remains of it, is a living lie and Hal immediately reverses their roles to make this clear. Falstaff is not what he seems<sup>1</sup> and Hal thus refers to him as a devil in "the likeness of an old man," a "reverend vice," "gray iniquity," "father ruffian," . . . "white bearded Satan." Now this is all good fun and Hal can play at it because he can still afford good fun. But the truth of the corrected portrait, once the glorious inventiveness of its epithets is discounted, is beyond question. Falstaff may fancy that he has "a cheerful look" and "a pleasing eye" but these mask, and not very well any longer, a lewd and essentially arrogant old man.

And of course Falstaff knows this better than anyone--save Prince Hal and the Chief Justice. He tries to take full advantage of his appearance of genial portliness but he knows that debauchery has etched its signs upon him in unmistakable ways. When the Sheriff arrives on his investigation of the Gadshill robbery, Hal alerts everyone to put on expressions of innocence:

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<sup>1</sup>While the context is quite different, Hal's remark to Falstaff after he rises from the battlefield may be



. . .Now my masters, for a true  
face and good conscience"

to which Falstaff can only truthfully mumble, on his way to  
the arras,

Both which I have had; but their date is  
out and therefore I'll hide.

And it is this comic aside that follows almost immediately  
after he has made so much of the virtue that supposedly  
resides in his looks. He will fool whomever he can with  
his "confident brow" but he cannot fool Hal, the Chief  
Justice or, of course, himself.

Shakespeare permits Falstaff to comment upon his own  
physique and its "meaning" in a much more amusing way in  
the recruitment scene set in Justice Shallow's Gloucester-  
shire courtyard. The burden of the humour is carried by  
the bribery which animates Falstaff's choice of recruits,  
but the justification of his choice is exquisitely ironic:

Will you tell me, Master Shallow, how to  
choose a man? Care I for the limb, the thews,  
the stature, bulk and big assemblance of a man?  
Give me the spirit, Master Shallow.--  
O, give me the spare men, and spare me the great ones.

(2 Henry IV, III, ii, 275 ff)

So much for Falstaff's "sanguine" bulk. It is cele-  
brated in the play and in outrageous detail; while the  
detail belongs to the lexicon of abuse and not a manual of  
physiognomy, it is nonetheless true that Shakespeare misses

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instructive: "Art thou alive? or is it fantasy/that plays  
upon our eyesight? I prithee, speak:/We will not trust our  
eyes without our ears:/ Thou art not what thou seems't."  
(1 Henry IV, V, iv, 137).

no opportunity to underline our growing conception of Falstaff's essential villainy. And he does this in small but interesting measure by suggesting that the portly frame is but a monstrous veil covering corruption within.

Physiognomy figures in other ways in the play as well. Northumberland's opening scene in 2 Henry IV is quite remarkable in the extent to which it relies upon pathognomic shorthand to increase the pathos of a father who has lost a son. Morton no more than enters the room than Northumberland can see that something is dreadfully wrong:

- North: Yea, this man's brow, like to a title-leaf,  
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume.  
So looks the strond whereon the imperious  
flood hath left a witness'd usurpation.  
Say, Morton, didst thou come from Shrewsbury?
- Morton: I ran from Shrewsbury, my noble lord;  
Where hateful death put on his ugliest mask  
To fright our party.
- North: How doth my son and brother?  
Thou tremblest; and the whiteness in thy cheek  
Is apter than thy tongue to tell thy errand.  
Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless,  
So dull, so dead in look, so woe-begone,  
Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night. . . .  
(2 Henry IV, I, i, 60 ff)

The exchange continues with Morton trying to muster the strength to tell what he must tell and Northumberland keeping him at arm's length by constant interruptions, each one occasioned by the obvious pathognomic sign which Morton carries in his countenance:

He that but fears the thing he would not know  
Hath by instinct knowledge from others' eyes,  
That what he fear'd is chanced.

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But finally the "strange confession" in Morton's eye is corroborated by his report and Northumberland gives himself over to "stormy passion." Physiognomy, or pathognomy, has not lent its special tokens to the scene but it has humbly and successfully served to heighten the dramatic tension which the scene requires.

Finally, in Henry IV we can observe Shakespeare's dependence upon physiognomy as a source for metaphor and simile. Mowbray, for example, is concerned that the rebel army be advantageously arranged so as "to look with forehead bold and big enough/ Upon the power and puissance of the King." (2 Henry IV, I, 111, 8) Earlier, Hotspur angrily rehearses how Henry won the people to his support in the first place. It was, we are told, in no small measure due to his appearance.

. . .by this face  
This seeming brow of justice, did he win  
The hearts of all that he did angle for.

(1 Henry IV, IV, 111, 81-83)

Not to be outdone, King Henry himself reveals an extraordinary perceptiveness in reading the faces that come before him. Worcester's rebelliousness and station are etched in both his forehead and his eyes:

Worcester, get thee gone; for I do see  
Danger and disobedience in thine eye.  
O, sir, your presence is too bold and peremptory,  
And majesty might never yet endure  
The moody frontier of a servant brow.  
You have good leave to leave us.

(1 Henry IV, I, 111, 15-20)

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Five acts later Worcester has cause to remember this flashing dismissal. In discussing with Vernon whether the King's terms should be accepted, he cannot but suppose that there--after all of the rebels would be suspect and their "faces" searched for signs of treason:

Look how we can, or sad or merrily,  
 Interpretation will misquote our looks,  
 And we shall feed like oxen at a stall,  
 The better cherish'd, still the nearer death.

(1 Henry IV, V, 11, 12-15)

Physiognomy, then, is very much a part of Shakespeare's world--and very much a part of the several worlds he created on the stage. For him it represented no quasi-magical shortcut to the truth; rather, it was an elaborate but in many ways a flexible and highly useful resource for a working dramatist.



## CHAPTER VI

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: PHYSIOGNOMIC

### PORTRAITURE IN TAMBURLAINE

Certayne thyng hit is that the sowle whych is the fourme of the body, sueth the kynde and the complexcion and the propyrtys of the body, for oftentimes we sene openly that the coragis of men ham chaungyth after the Pascionys of the bodyes, and that apperyth in Dronknesse, in amours, in frenesy, in Dreddys, in Soroufulnesse, in desires, and in delites. For in at this Passions of the body, the Sowle and the corage ham chaungyth. And kynde is so grete a fellowe between body and Sowle, that the Passyons of body chaungyth the sowle; and the Passions of Sowle chaungyth the body. . . .

#### Secreta Secretorum

One of the truly remarkable characteristics of Elizabethan dramatic literature is the ease with which scientific and occult lore is assimilated and put to the service of dramatic purposes. The bewildering intricacies of astrology, alchemy and the several necromantic arts, Galenic medicine with its involved and flexible physiology and psychology, and of course the various and no less confusing branches of physiognomic learning, chiromancy, metoposcopy and pathognomy, all of these and others too are encountered in the surviving literature of the period and in unbelievable detail. Indeed, even after we make allowance for the obscurity conferred solely by the passing of four hundred years, the extensiveness of complex



scientific notions in the dramatic literature of the period is remarkable.

Christopher Marlowe, no less than his fellow dramatists and more than most, reveals a broad range of interest in the occult sciences and admits them freely and imaginatively into his plays. And this is true, too, of the pseudo-science of physiognomy. It becomes in his hands not only a metaphorical resource, nor simply an economical and relatively precise method by which character traits may be revealed or passions suggested; in addition to these traditional uses Marlowe discovers in physiognomy's basic assumption the key to the heightening of dramatic presence. Certainly the "science of outward appearance" is, in the ten acts of Tamburlaine,<sup>1</sup> put to the important task of helping to define the character of the hero through his dominant choleric complexion. Beyond this, however, it is made to confer upon the very physical presence of Tamburlaine an additional and greatly magnified dimension. The Scourge of God and ruler of men is given a total physical bearing, and especially a countenance, which signals his unearthly ambition and arrogance. Tamburlaine's face, in fact, is almost given, by the emphasis it receives,

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<sup>1</sup>All citations from Marlowe are from the edition of C. F. Tucker Brokke, The Works of Christopher Marlowe (Oxford, 1910).

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an independent dramatic existence; it electrifies the onlooker and with crystalline clarity shouts to the world the unmatched pride and pitiless ambition of the soul of which it is but the outward sign. The countenance is made the symbol of the god-like prowess of the vanquishing Scythian.

Marlowe begins to focus our attention on this novel use of physiognomy even before Tamburlaine makes his first appearance. In the very first scene Theridamus is selected by the vapid and soon-to-be-deposed king of the Persians, Mycetes, to engage the upstart peasant in battle. Theridamus, we are told, is "the chiefest Captaine" of the Persian army, a brave and successful commander, "the verie legges/ Whereon our state doth leane." He is, in fact, a character who will throughout the play and its sequel complement the character of the hero by his physical and spiritual likeness. And yet his commission from Mycetes strikes us as rather odd. He is to go, not riding forth but "frowning forth;" and it is not with his sword and brave heart that Mycetes predicts he will conquer Tamburlaine, but with his "lookes" and "words." He will win, Mycetes implies, by revealing himself physically--by permitting this band of shepherds to see his spiritual qualities manifested in his "lookes." It is not until Theridamus actually encounters Tamburlaine



that we recognize the importance of this early pathognomic reference to the meaning and power of physical appearance.

But before that meeting can take place Marlowe introduces the captured Zenocrate in a scene which is designed in part to call special attention to Tamburlaine's sensitivity to his rustic origin and to his consequent concern with physical appearance. Zenocrate is probably the only creature on earth who could address Tamburlaine as she first does and live to tell of it:

Ah Shepheard, pity my distressed plight,  
(As if thou seem'st, thou art so meane a man)  
And seeke not to inrich thy followers  
By lawlesse rapine from a silly maide. (I, ii, 203-206)

He lets the matter pass for a moment but quickly comes back to it when Zenocrate very tactfully refers to him next as "my lord."

I am a Lord, for so my deeds shall prooue,  
And yet a shepheard by my Parentage:

But Marlowe does not leave it to Tamburlaine's deeds alone to prove that his hero is indeed a lord. From this point forward the rhetoric of the play, and not only of the hero but of virtually every man and woman who comes in contact with him, rises in a crescendo of praise and awe before the staggering appearance of the man. At this very point he throws off the "weedes" of the shepherd and puts on "this compleat armor and this curtlee-axe" as "adjuncts more beseeming Tamburlaine." But it is his countenance which sets off the armor and makes it appear so fitting and right. Techelles immediately tells the audience what it is they should now see in the hero:

As princely Lions when they rouse themselves,  
 Stretching their pawes, and threatning heardes of Beastes.  
 So in his Armour looketh Tamburlaine:  
 Me thinks I see kings kneeling at his feet,  
 And he with frowning browes and fiery lookes,  
 Spurning their crownes from off their captive heads.

(I, 11, 248-53)

We know, then, that this is the beginning; a momentous awakening is underway, the princely lion has roused his true self and all traces of the "silly country swaine" have been left behind. Zenocrate and her troop "since they measure our deserts so meane" (he has not for a moment forgotten her opening sentence) will be forced to remain to witness the metamorphosis of a seeming shepherd.

To speak of metamorphosis, however, is to do damage to Marlowe's concept. Tamburlaine is not a shepherd boy, however bold or poetic, masquerading as a lord. Still less is he "changed" as he moves from his low station to the highest, from shepherd to lord, to king, to emperor. There is majesty in him from the beginning, partially hidden certainly by the habiliments of the country, but never absent from his countenance, the true mirror of his soul.<sup>1</sup>

That this reflects Marlowe's conception of his hero is, I think, amply demonstrated by the arrival of Theridamus

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<sup>1</sup>For an interesting account of the relationship of this characteristic of Tamburlaine to Marlowe's philosophy of history see Irving Ribner, "The Idea of History in Marlowe's Tamburlaine." ELH, XX (December, 1953), pp. 251-66.

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and the exchange which follows. The scene is almost wholly predicated upon physiognomy--it becomes, in fact, a kind of recognition scene, for each recognizes and is entirely persuaded of the nobility of character in the other solely by appearance.

Tam.: Whom seekst thou Persean? I am Tamburlaine.  
 Ther: Tamburlaine? A Sythian shepheard, so imbellished  
 With Natures pride, and richest furniture,  
 His looks do menace heaven and dare the Gods,  
 His fierie eies are fixt upon the earth,  
 As if he now devis'd some Stratageme:

(I, 11, 348-53)

Miss Katherine Lever in an interesting analysis of the play,<sup>1</sup> suggests that Theridamus in this exclamation reveals that he "is not fooled by the change. He immediately sees what we in the audience see"--which is to say, a Scythian "shepheard" pretending by costume and brave words to appear as something other than he truly is. I believe this is to be wholly wrong. Theridamus does not "see what we see;" he sees only the majestic figure of a man before him and tells us so, so that we will the more clearly see what Marlowe intends us to see. Not only is this made evident by the sequel; it is supported by the very words Theridamus chooses to register his shocked surprise. And it is shocked surprise which he betrays when Tamburlaine identifies himself. He obviously was looking for a rude and barbarous

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<sup>1</sup>"The Image of Man in Tamburlaine, Part I," PQ, (October, 1956), 421-427.



mountain thief and discovers instead a monument of a man. We should not, I think, suppose that an ironic intention informs Theridamus' diction in this speech. After all, it is nature's "pride and richest furniture" with which Tamburlaine is embellished, not the "furniture" supplied by the armory or the tailor's shop.

In any event, Tamburlaine is no less taken with the striking appearance of Theridamus--and we now understand Mycetes' earlier reference to his victorious looks. The exchange continues:

Tam: Noble and milde this Persean seemes to be,  
 If outward habit iudged the inward man.  
 Tech: His deep affections make him passionate.  
 Tam: With what a maiesty he rears his looks:  
 In thee (thou valiant man of Persea)  
 I see the folly of thy Emperour:  
 Art thou but Captaine of a thousand horse,  
 That by Characters graven in thy browes,  
 And by thy martial face and stout aspect,  
 Deserv'st to have the leading of an hoste?

(I, ii, 357-366)

After this bit of metoposcopic flattery, Tamburlaine unleashes the full force of his rhetoric and builds before Theridamus' eyes the veritable throne of gold which he is prepared to share with him. In the process, interestingly enough, he must refer one final time to his humble origin but now he is prepared to recall that Jove himself "sometime masked in a shepheard's weed" (my italics), even as Tamburlaine's true self was partially and only for a time hidden by the circumstances of his birth. Theridamus cannot withstand this double assault; looks and



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words in rare combination carry the day, even as Mycetes had predicted they would:

Won with thy words, and conquered with thy looks,  
I yeeld my selfe, my men and horse to thee:

(I, ii, 423-4)

The exchange with Theridamus, then, by its specific physiognomic content, calls full attention to the significance with which Marlowe wishes to endow the physical appearance of his hero. That a man of Theridamus' integrity and boldness could be persuaded to cut his allegiance to Persia by Tamburlaine's sheer physical presence is ample testimony to the perfect correspondence that obtains between his spirit and his countenance. We now know that Techelles' vision of Tamburlaine, "with frowning browes and fiery lookes" receiving the obeisance of conquered kings, was not court flattery of the kind one might expect from a subordinate thief. His prophecy of power and splendor is written clearly in Tamburlaine's features.

Those features are again emphasized in the scene immediately following the confrontation with Theridamus. At this point it is well to recall that Marlowe has had Tamburlaine on stage for all of the first act, either literally or, in the first scene, through the description of his activities and his ambition given by Mycetes and his counsellors. And while literally on stage his presence has been "interpreted" and enlarged by the stunned descriptions of both Techelles and the stranger Theridamus.



Act Two, then, opens with Tamburlaine again off-stage but Marlowe continues to add to his hero's stature through physiognomic portraiture.

Cosroe alerts us to the significance of the description to follow by using metoposcopic imagery in his opening speech:

Thus farre are we towards Theridamus,  
And valiant Tamburlaine, the man of fame  
The man that in the forehead of his fortune,  
Beares figures of renowne and myracle:

It is interesting to note that, at this point at least, Tamburlaine has not achieved fame in any real sense. He complains of it himself when persuading Theridamus to join him:

Ioine with me now in this my meane estate  
(I cal it meane, because being yet obscure,  
The nations far remoou'd admyre me not) (ll. 397-99)

He has not conquered anyone; on the contrary his military activity has been confined chiefly to attacking caravans. But Cosroe can speak of him as a "man of fame," even as Techelles and Theridamus see fame coming to him. The "renown," not yet earned, is figured in the "forehead of his fortune"--and his face. This is what Cosroe has heard about him, that he is destined for success and that this destiny is written indelibly in the lines of his forehead. But Cosroe has not yet seen him and so he asks Menaphon for a full description:



But tell me, that hast seene him, Menaphon,  
 What stature wiels he, and what personage?  
 Mena: Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned,  
 Like his desire, lift upwards and divine,  
 So large of lims, his ioints so strongly knit,  
 Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly beare  
 Olde Atlas' burthen, twixt his manly pitch,  
 A pearle more worth, then all the world's plaste:  
 Wherein by curious soveraintie of Art,  
 Are fixt his piercing instruments of sight:  
 Whose fiery cyrcles beare encompassed  
 A heaven of heavenly bodies in their Spheares:  
 That guides his steps and actions to the throne,  
 Where honor sits invested royally:  
 Pale of complexion: wrought in him with passion,  
 Thirsting with soverainty with love of armes.  
 His lofty browes in foldes, do figure death,  
 And in their smoothnesse, amitie and life:  
 About them hangs a knot of Amber heire  
 Wrapped in curles, as fierce Achilles was,  
 On which the breath of heaven delights to play,  
 Making it daunce with wanton maiestie:  
 His armes and fingers long and s(i)nowy,  
 Betokening valour and excesse of strength:  
 In every part proportioned like the man,  
 Should make the world subdued to Tamburlaine

(II, 1, 461-84)

This is an extraordinary passage, forming, as it so clearly does, a full-length physiognomic portrait of the hero off-stage.<sup>1</sup> Every detail lends itself to the delineation of the character which subsequently will be revealed in action. Indeed, in this description Marlowe accounts for the pride, the wrathful anger, the strength and courage, even the

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<sup>1</sup>Carroll Camden discusses the choleric content of this description in "Tamburlaine: The Choleric Man," MLN, XLIV, pp. 430-35. Professor Camden does not, however, discuss in any detail the physical characteristics emphasized in the portrait, preferring to match Tamburlaine's behavioral characteristics with those traditionally assigned to the man afflicted with an abundance of choler.

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poetry<sup>1</sup> and the lust for knowledge which so distinctly mark Tamburlaine. It is an idealized portrait, to be sure, but it is not permitted to violate the standard physiognomic prescription for the hot and dry complexion, the prescription for the choleric man. The lean, well-made body, the long arms and fingers, the curly amber hair, the fiery piercing eyes, these are signs of excessive choler and Tamburlaine exhibits them all. The pale complexion, on the other hand, must be considered an unusual note, not often associated with the hot and dry type. As pointed out in the analysis of Dekker's portrait of Jonson in Satiromastix (see below p. 222) the choleric man is most often accompanied by a ruddy or brown or citron coloring. As the Secreta Secretorum puts it, "the colericke sholde have yalowe coloure medelit with rede (cap 58). Richard Saunders, however, does cite the predominance of a "white complexion" in the choleric man who "hath Jupiter in his Nativity" (p. 171) and this type too can be expected to exhibit reddish hair and exceedingly quick anger. So too does the Kalendar of Shepherds assign choleric attributes, i.e., "cruelty, spiteful, hot, disloyal, full of ire," to the man with, amongst other signs, a "long and fair visage."

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<sup>1</sup>Lily B. Campbell cites Thomas Newton's Touchstones of Complexion for this judgment of the "hot and dry natured" man: he is right well furnished and skilful in perfect utterance, vehemence of speech, and readines of tounge;" Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 58.





In brief, Tamburlaine's pale complexion is unusual in the choleric type but is accounted for by the experts.

The passage is equally interesting as an example of the way in which Marlowe deftly handles "scientific" material. No one in the audience has to know the first thing about physiognomy or the physiology of the humours to understand the general meaning to be discovered in Tamburlaine's appearance. The pointers are provided for all of the essential signs. Tamburlaine's tall, straight stature is likened to his towering, almost superhuman pride--his desire lifting "upwards and divine." The meaning of his well-knited joints, broad shoulders and large limbs is the obvious one of strength and Marlowe makes this clear with the allusion to Atlas. Still further, the significance of the forehead, both wrinkled and smooth, and of the arms and fingers is implied or explicitly stated. Only the curly amber hair is left unexplained, and even in this instance the allusion to Achilles leaves no doubt of its general import. While it is probable that only some in the audience could be expected to know that a martialist is often endowed with just this kind and color of hair--with "haire red or sandy flaxen, and many times crisping or curling"<sup>1</sup>--most would recognize the intended parallel not only with

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<sup>1</sup>William Lilly, cited by Curry, Chaucer and Med. Sci., p. 132.

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Achilles' courage and strength but with his pride and quick temper. While not many watching the play for the first time could be expected to have read and remembered the Secreta Secretorum's account of long arms,<sup>1</sup> or the significance of slender fingers as recorded in the Kalendar of Shepherds,<sup>2</sup> no one could mistake Marlowe's main intentions in citing these features; he tells us explicitly that they betoken "valour and excesse of strength" (l. 482). And so Tamburlaine's physical presence and the attributes of character to which his physiology has assigned him are revealed in considerable fulness even in his absence. Cosroe is as impressed by Menaphone's description as we are:

Wel hast thou pourtraid in thy tearms of life,  
 The face and personage of a woondrous man:  
 Nature doth strive with Fortune and his stars  
 To make him famous in accomplisht woorth: (485-88)

And of course Cosroe is right; Tamburlaine's character has been shaped by "Fortune and his stars" working through Nature. But Cosroe then goes on to make a fatal error. He assumes that a man so endowed, so prophetically destined to rise, can also be the master of his own fortune:

<sup>1</sup>"Whan the armys bene longe and rechyng to the kneis whan they ben straght, tokenyth hardynesse, proesse and fraunchise," cap 59, "Of the Shuldres."

<sup>2</sup>"Long hands and slender fingers signifieth subtlety and a person that hath desire to know divers things," p. 154.

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And well his merits show him to be made  
His Fortunes maister, and the King of men. (489-90)

It is as if he had forgotten his own words--forgotten why it is that Menaphon can so clearly see the future in Tamburlaine's physiognomy. It is this error which leads Cosroe to suppose that there are limits to Tamburlaine's ambition, that the Scythian can control his own overweening pride, his lust for cruelty, that he can, in short, settle for a cozy partnership with his Persian overlord. And this is a fatal error. Theridamus can truthfully say that while he praises the power of royalty, he "can live without it: (1. 771). Tamburlaine cannot. The elements warring within his breast for sovereignty have been so constituted by Nature as to destine him

. . .to weare our selues and never rest,  
Vntill we reach the ripest fruit of all,  
That perfect blisse and sole felicitie,  
The sweet fruition of an earthly crowne. (877-80)

Cosroe's praise of Nature for having fashioned this supposed paragon of merit is turned to ashes in his mouth.

He dies uncomprehending:

The strangest men that ever nature made,  
I know not how to take their tyrannies. (890-1)

The irony of this total failure to comprehend Tamburlaine's character is obvious. The very men who so accurately painted his picture for the audience, the men who listened to Menaphon expressly say that the hero was "in every part proportioned like the man/ Should make the world subdued to Tamburlaine," are now reduced to wonder, in Ortygius' phrase,

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What God or Feend, or spirit of the earth,  
 Or Monster turned to a manly shape,  
 Or of what mould or mettel he be made,  
 What star or State soever governe him.

(my italics) (826-29)

Agydas, the nobleman accompanying Zenocrate and captured with her, is the next person in the play to take account of the meaning of Tamburlaine's appearance. His attempt to dissuade Zenocrate from her love of her captor is based largely upon the obviously and overpoweringly martial cast to his face. Indeed, when Tamburlaine overhears the argument of Agydas, then shows himself, no words need be spoken. In the towering wrath of Tamburlaine's countenance, in the "late felte frownes," the soul of Agydas divines its overthrow. Nor is there question about what "state" governs this ireful creature. Agydas is

. . . . . most astonished  
 To see his choller shut in secrete thoughtes,  
 And wrapt in silence of his angry soule  
 Vpon his browes was pourtraid ugly death,  
 And in his eies the fury of hie hart,  
 That shines as Comets, menacing revenge  
 And casts a pale complexion on his cheeks.

(1054-60)

It is worth noticing how many of the details of appearance so dutifully recorded by Menaphon are here repeated by Agydas. The pale complexion, the wrinkled forehead depicting death, the shining eyes, all are correctly judged by Agydas to reveal the dangerous abundance of choler which one threatens his life even as it threatened, though they were too blind to realize it, the lives of



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Cosroe and his court. Techelles and Vsumcasane are perfectly aware that Agydas has correctly interpreted the meaning of Tamburlaine's fearsome complexion--and so, too, is Tamburlaine. He sends his henchmen in to exploit the possibilities for cruelty:

Techelles: See you Agydas how the king salutes you.  
He bids you prophesie what it imports.

Agydas: I prophesied before and now I prooue,  
The killing frownes of iealousie and love.  
He needed not with words confirme my feare,  
For words are vaine when working tooles  
Present the naked action of my threatened  
End. (1075-79)

And after Agydas kills himself, to avoid the further pain and suffering he knows only too well can be expected from Tamburlaine, Techelles once again emphasizes the point which Marlowe has so consistently developed--that Tamburlaine's character is imprinted upon the features of his body:

Vsumcasane, see how right the man  
Hath hit the meaning of my Lord the king.

In this man's external appearance lies his meaning and his meaning is his character and his character is so firmly and narrowly fixed as to predict his future. This is the determined logic with which Marlowe presents Tamburlaine on the stage. His wrinkled brow and piercing eyes, while not the monstrous deformity of King Richard's humped back, are no less prophetic in nature.

The meaning of Tamburlaine's appearance, and with it the power of his physical presence, are established, then, very early in Part One. Marlowe's task in the remaining

scenes of that play and in the succeeding five acts of Part Two is to give continuing emphasis to this important aspect of his protagonist's character. This he does in part by featuring Tamburlaine's awful and commanding countenance in the brief descriptions of the hero given to others to report. Thus when the Souldan of Egypt accuses his subjects of inordinate fear before the approaching army of Tamburlaine, the messenger seeks to account for it by describing the "lookes" of the Scythian.

Nay (mightie Souldan) did your greatnes see  
The frowning lookes of fiery Tamburlaine  
That with his terrour and imperious eies  
Commandes the hearts of his associates,  
It might amaze your royall maiesty. (IV, 1, 1383-87)

So too, in Part Two the chorus of awe before the face of this conqueror commences with Techelles' paeon to "our earthly God,/ Whose lookes made this inferiour world to quake" (ll. 2707-8) and is echoed by Theridamus when he urges Olympia to come with him to look upon "a man greater than Mahomet,/ in whose high lookes is much more maiesty/ Than from the Concave superfices/ Of Iove's vast pallace. . . (III, iv, 2457-60)

The fierce, piercing gaze of the ireful choleric man has almost become impossible to look upon for long.

The dramatic emphasis given to Tamburlaine's countenance is continued in the comments of his enemies throughout

Part II.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Tamburlaine himself adds verbal support to his actual presence in the confrontation with Almeda ("Seest thou not death within my wrathfull looks?") with his friends and followers when he promises that his "sterne aspect" will bring them victory (l. 3665) and, finally when this same thought is made a part of his dying gesture:

My looks shall make them flie, and might I follow,  
 There should not one of all the villaines power  
 Live to give offer of another fight.  
 Vsum: I ioy my Lord, your highnesse is so strong,  
 That can endure so well your royall presence,  
 Which onely will dismay the enemy.  
 Tam: I know it will Casane: draw you slaves,  
 In spight of death I will goe show my face  
 (V, iii, 1500-07)

And of course his enemies fly from his very glance just as he predicted they would.

Although the martial cast of Tamburlaine's fierce brow and eyes are kept before us throughout Part Two, Marlowe does not depend entirely upon this single rhetorical device to focus attention upon his hero's physical appearance and constitution. Early in Part Two (I, iv) he develops what may well be considered an artful variation on Menaphon's elaborate description of Tamburlaine in Part One. This time our attention is ostensibly directed

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<sup>1</sup>See IV, 1, 8849-51, and V, 1, 4133-35.



to the three sons and yet, actually, Marlowe continues his development, by contrast, of the portrait of their father.

That it is a portrait we are looking upon is beyond question. Tamburlaine himself arranges the subjects with all the self-conscious care we might expect of an artist working with his models. Zenocrate is made to sit up "in pompe and maiestie" and the sons are "plac'd by her side" and made to look up into their mother's face. It is only when they are frozen in this artificial position that the disturbing thought first occurs to their father that they may not share the capacity for martial excess, for cruelty and conquest, to which his own choleric complexion so fixedly inclines him. We are made to suppose that Tamburlaine is looking scientifically upon his sons for the very first time:

But yet me thinks their looks are amorous,  
Not martiall as the sons of Tamburlaine.  
Water and ayre being simbolised in one  
Argue their want of courage and of wit,  
Their haire as white as milke and soft as Downe,  
Which should be like the quilles of Porcupines,  
As blacke as leat, and hard as iron or steel,  
Bewraies they are too dainty for the wars.  
Their fingers made to quaver on a Lute,  
Their legs to dance and caper in the aire:  
Would make me thinke them Bastards, not my sons,  
But that I know they issued from they wombe  
That never look'd on man but Tamburlaine

(I, iv, 2590-2603)

Now, certainly, this group portrait has far fewer details than Menaphon's earlier description of Tamburlaine. The boys are not even individually described, although we

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know that later the character of Calyphas will be most clearly distinguished from his brothers. One line seems to point particularly to him ("Water and ayre being symbolised in one") but then reverts to the plural and includes the brave sons Amyras and Celebinus as well. Marlowe's primary intention, in fact, seems to be to establish the contrast between the father on the one hand and the sons, collectively, on the other and with the boldest possible strokes. If Calyphas' later defection is prepared for, it by no means serves as the only justification for the descriptive passage.

The strokes are, indeed, bold for even Tamburlaine's hair color, a perfectly acceptable amber in Menaphon's description, is sacrificed for the more effectively contrasting jet black of this passage.<sup>1</sup> So, too, there is no attempt to depict the exact complexion which any one or all of the boys might have. Marlowe seems chiefly interested in establishing that their complexions are not like their father's. All we are told is that the qualities of water (cold and moist; the phlegmatic complexion) are mixed in some undefined way with the qualities of air (hot and moist; the sanguine complexion) and that the mixture scarcely suits the sons of Tamburlaine. The father's

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Saunders on hair color reports that "Black Hair proceeds from an excessive adjust choler or adjust and hot blood," p. 189.





hot and dry qualities, the martial complexion of the choleric man, are noticeably absent in all three of his sons--so clearly so as to make him wonder if they can be his.

However imprecise its details may be, the fact remains that so far as it goes the portrait of the boys is interpreted accurately by their father. Soft hair is a sure physiognomic sign for cowardice. In the Secreta Secretorum the animal analogy which is responsible for this interpretation is clearly stated:

Nesshe [soft] heere tokenyth a dredfulle, and harde heere tokenyth hardy and strong, and that apperyth in dyvers bestys. For an hare and a sheepe bene ful gastefull, and have full nesshe here. And the lyone and a boore bene full stronge and have stronge here.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Hill, without identifying the analogy, confirms soft hair as an indication of "effeminate minde and courage" and goes on to suggest that not only does such a person "lack bloude" but is probably "dull of sense and slow."<sup>2</sup> Thus Tamburlaine's fear that the physical constitution of his sons argues "their want of courage and of wit" is justified even if in two of the three cases the boys overcome their phlegmatic inclinations and follow their father into battle.<sup>3</sup> Zenocrate's reply,

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<sup>1</sup>Yonge, Sec. Sec., cap. 58.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Hill, Cont. Mankind, chapter XIII.

<sup>3</sup>White hair is one of the signs of the phlegmatic complexion. In Saunder's view it proceeds from "want of natural

My gracious Lord, they have their mother's looks  
But when they list, their conquering father's hart

(2604-5)

with its reassuring insistence that they are not destined to be what their looks suggest, is perfectly orthodox physiognomic doctrine. As Thomas Hill so carefully points out, "the bodily notes of Physiognomating by the natural conditions of men doe prouue and cause a great probableness, although no necessitie" (cap. 1). And so it is with Amyras and Celebinus if not with Calyphas and his father. For all of their differences, Tamburlaine and Calyphas have at least one thing in common: they are precisely what they appear to be.

Calyphas is, as his father acknowledges in the execution scene, an "image of sloth, and picture of a slave" and he is so framed because his soul was

Created of the massy dregges of earth,  
The scum and tartar of the Elements,  
Wherein was neither corrage, strength or wit,  
But follie, sloth and damned idlenesse:

(3797-3800)

His own incorporeal spirit is made of an entirely different "mould" which makes him "valiant, proud, ambitious" and, though he does not say so, prone to viciousness and cruelty,

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heat, or corrupted flegm" op. cit., p. 189. The phlegmatic man is traditionally associated with listlessness and cowardice. While most accounts of the phlegmatic complexion include a reference to sexual impotence, Marlowe himself apparently associated lechery with it. Calyphas talks about sleeping with the captured concubines and Wager, in Dr. Faustus, amusingly refers to himself as "by nature flegmaticke, slowe to wrath, and prone to leachery (to love I would say)". . . (1. 218)

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as well. No less than his disappointing son's, however, Tamburlaine's spirit has unfailingly etched its character upon the features of the body which contains it and those features are made to play a significant role in Marlowe's dramatic account of his rise and fall.

After Tamburlaine Marlowe never again had occasion to use physiognomy in his plays in such a pervasive way. The character of the Scythian warrior is the only one he created with such conscious conformity to the physiognomic prescriptions of the humours. And yet one characteristic of Tamburlaine--his ferocious, death-announcing frown--becomes in the later plays a Marlovian commonplace. Strictly speaking, it is a pathognomic feature--one that changes with the passing of mood and expression. In Tamburlaine, however, as we have seen, it is very nearly made a permanent metoposcopic mark, for everyone recognizes it in the wrinkles of the hero's face and everyone knows immediately what it imports. In the later plays we find nothing like the consistent development of this feature in any one character and yet it appears from time to time to heighten dramatic tension, or to enhance stature or presence. Thus in The Massacre at Paris the Duke of Guise faces death in a brief scene which seems to be ordered around the facial appearance of both murderers and victim. The Duke immediately and traditionally remarks the



"gastly" look of the first murderer when he enters, then turns aside the warning not to proceed with a line which suggests both Tamburlaine's faith in his commanding presence and the Duchess of Malfi's simple dignity:

Let mean consalts, and baser men feare death  
But they are peasants, I am Duke of Guise:  
And princes with their lookes ingender feare.

(1006-8)

The brief scene closes with the Duke again observing the countenances of his murderers and taking warning from the paleness he discovers there. It is as if the imagery of the scene were conceived to act like a solitary spotlight, now focusing upon the ashy faces of the assassins, now revealing the commanding presence of the Duke.

Earlier in the same play the Duke, in a long monologue announcing his intentions, consciously calls for the very facial appearance that in the death scene he so vainly relies upon.

Give me a look, that when I bend the browes,  
Pale death may walke in furrowes of my face:

(158-59)

This plea, it should be noted, is not hypocritical; the Duke is not calling for a mask that he might seem what he is not. The pathognomic point is that he wants inwardly and spiritually to become so resolute, bold and ruthless in his drive for the throne that that inward state must be emblazoned on his countenance. He is, then, acknowledging the basic correspondence between the body and the





soul; calling for a change of the one assumes a like change of the other.

In Edward II Marlowe again utilizes the notion of the face as mirror of the soul in the assassination scene. Here, of course, the dramatic intention is to heighten suspense and elicit our sympathy for the imprisoned King. Marlowe very carefully modulates King Edward's intimation of his impending doom with the King's pitiful and all-too-human willingness to believe that Lightborne may be other than his face reveals him so clearly to be. The moment Lightborne enters the filthy cell, Edward sees the truth in his appearance:

Edw: Whose there, what light is that, wherefore  
comes thou?  
Light: To comfort you, and bring you ioyfull newes.  
Edw. Small confort findes poore Edward in thy lookes,  
Villaine, I know thou comst to murder me.

(2490-93)

Lightborne, of course, registers shocked surprise at this immediate and accurate assessment and thereafter tries to convince the King that he has genuinely come to help him. His face is altered, as best he can alter it, and tears are feigned. Edward wants desperately to believe that Lightborne's face is now telling the truth ("Weepst thou already?") and he rushes out his tale of woe to reinforce the pity he hopes he sees there. But Lightborne can no more hide the truth than the murderers of the Duke of Guise. Edward again has to face the message he sees beneath the tear-stained mask:



These lookes of thine can harbor nought but death.  
I see my tragedie written in thy browes, (2521-22)

And yet again Lightborne is able to convince the King of what he wishes so clearly to be convinced. Edward apologizes for the suspicion-- ("Forgive my thought for having such a thought")--but he knows his man and shows us he does by moving immediately to the attempt to bribe him. The scene closes with Edward tremulously closing, then opening his eyes, trying to sleep as he is urged, yet fearful of the fate he knows awaits him and unable to look away from the countenance on which that fate is revealed.

Marlowe does not, of course, restrict the message one conveys by the countenance to murder and villainy alone. We recall that Menaphon balanced his account of Tamburlaine's forehead, death figuring only in the folds and wrinkles while "amitie and life" are conveyed by its smoothness. So, too, while Marlowe has Epernoun, the physiognomist-counsellor to King Henry in The Massacre of Paris immediately warn against the friar,

I like not this Frier's look  
Twere not amisse my Lord if he were searcht (1172-3)

he permits Edward to read trust and loyalty in the face of the Abbot who offers to hide him from his enemies: "Father, thy face should harbor no deceit (l. 1875). And both prove to have been sound judgments.



It is fitting to close this account of Marlowe's use of physiognomy by leaving the plays for a brief look at Hero and Leander for it is in this poem, both in Marlowe's two sestiams and, more elaborately and clinically, in Chapman's continuation, that we find one of the clearest non-scientific statements of the Elizabethan belief in the interrelationship of the body and the soul. In Marlowe's sestiams three instances of body-soul correspondence are to be found, each one slightly different in context from the others.<sup>1</sup> The most obviously sustained reference is pathognomic in character. Upon returning home Leander's father is able to detect in his face the "painting of the passion" which Hero has aroused:

Therefore even as an Index to a booke,  
 So to his mind was yoong Leanders looke.  
 O none but gods have power their love to hide,  
 Affection by the count'nance is descride.  
 The light of hidden fire it selfe discovers,  
 And love that is conceal'd, betraies poore lovers.  
 His secret flame apparently was seene,  
Leanders father knew where hee had beene. . .

(II, 129-36)

Marlowe does not trouble to explain or account for his index image in scientifically satisfactory terms, preferring to let us suppose, on the analogy of the sun at noon, that beauty burns most fiercely when furthest removed. In any event the relationship of the affections and the countenance

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<sup>1</sup>For still another reference to death-dealing glances and a "ghastly dreadfull countenance" see I, 381-2.

is explicitly established in this passage, and it is a passage which Chapman is to enlarge upon when dealing with what he considers to be the sinful indiscretion of Hero.

In the first sestiad two further references to the correspondence of body and soul are made. The first is slight enough and can be found in Leander's effort to convince Hero of his love and her cruelty in refusing it. The plea is enveloped in the physiognomic notion of deformity and thus permits the young lover to compliment Hero even as he pleads for her favor. The paradox is a traditional one:

Be not unkind and faire, mishapen stuffe  
Are of behaviour boisterous and ruffe (I, 203-4)

and in this fanciful scene does not remotely resemble the dramatically potent use to which it is put by Shakespeare in Richard III.

The second physiognomic reference is no more weighty, appearing as it does in Marlowe's introductory description of Leander. We are told that Leander's delicate, if not effeminate, appearance is marked by a "pleasant smiling cheeke," a "brow for love to banquet roiallye" and "a speaking eye," all of which together argue that he was "made for amorous play" (I, 83-88). One can dismiss this portrait as the imprecise description of a finely-featured, handsome young man and that, clearly, is all that it is. But the "speaking eye" has interest for us, for it, along with the

scene in which Leander's expression is interpreted by his father, informs Chapman's severe account of the effect of Hero's sinful fall from chastity.

That account comes early in Chapman's continuation (III, 235-80) and through its physiognomic content shows how consciously the later poet sought to graft his moralistic sequel to Marlowe's charmingly sensuous story. After developing an extended parallel between Essex's assault of Cadiz and Leander's ravishment of the "expunged fort" of Hero's "chast bosome," Chapman introduces the problem of dissimulation. First, of course, Hero's transgression must be established in visual terms and this he does by developing the "index of the mind hint" given by Marlowe in Leander's encounter with his father:

She mus'd how she could looke vpon her Sire,  
And not shew that without that was intire.  
For as a glasse is an inanimate eie,  
And outward formes imbraceth inwardlie:  
So is the eye an animate glasse that showes  
In-formes without vs. (III, 233-38)

The revelation of inner reality is not, of course, confined to the "speaking eye" alone. As we have come to realize, the eye is but one of the features, albeit one of the chief ones, for physiognomic analysis. It acts, however, as the portal through which the soul conveys the signs of a newly conceived "forme," even as "Phoebus throwes/His beames abroad, though he in clowdes be closde. . . ." Chapman continues the parallel in this way:

So when our fierie soule, our bodies starre  
 (That ever is in motion circulare)  
 Conceives a forme; in seeking to display it  
 Through all our clowdie parts, it doth convey it  
 Forth at the eye, as the most pregnant place  
 And that reflects it round about the face.  
 And this event vncourtly Hero thought  
 Her inward guilt would in her lookes have wrought.<sup>1</sup>

(245-52)

This is precisely the character of the concern--and it seems more than a pathognomic one--that we discover in Lucrece although, perhaps more appropriately, Shakespeare's heroine expresses that concern in the more permanently disfiguring diction of branding or engraving. The sign of Lucrece's shame is "engraven'd" upon her forehead, while we are to suppose that Hero's disfigurement emanates from the eye and slowly suffuses the entire countenance. In any event the problem of the external manifestations of spiritual defilement makes Hero, assuredly for the first time, consider the question of dissimulation. She is initially appalled by the difficulty:

Yet brazde not Heros brow with impudence;  
 And this she thought most hard to bring to pas,  
 To seeme in countenance other than she was,  
 As if she had two soules; one for the face,  
 One for the hart; and that they shifted place  
 As either list to vtter or conceale  
 What they conceiv'd: or as one soule did deale  
 With both affayres at once, keeps and elects  
 Both at an instant contrarie effects:  
 Retention and election in her powrs  
 Being acts alike: for this one vice of ours,  
 That forms the thought, and swaies the countenance,  
 Rules both our motion and our vtterance. (268-81)

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<sup>1</sup>For a more extended consideration of Chapman's view of the relation of body and soul see R. W. Battenhouse, "Chapman and the Nature of Man," ELH, XII (June, 1945), 87-107.



That the difficulty can be overcome and "counterfeit faces coyned" Hero discovers later in the poem. The nature of the difficulty is our limited concern and Chapman, taking up the physiognomic vignettes in the two sestiads left him by Marlowe, furthered his poetic intention by specifying in considerable detail how and why the face is but the mirror of the soul.

In all important ways, Chapman's continuation of Marlowe's hymn to sensual love is ill-conceived. The tone of orthodox moral judgment offends the ear accustomed to Marlowe's delighted and delightful account of young love consummated. But in his reliance upon the notion of correspondence between body and soul, Chapman is perfectly consistent, merely developing at length hints discovered in the first two sestiads. Indeed, his use of physiognomy is consistent, not only with what he found in Marlowe's poem but with the point of view so pervasively developed in Tamburlaine and more spasmodically, in Edward II and The Massacre at Paris. Conscious and manipulated deception aside, we are truly what on the surface we show ourselves to be.

## CHAPTER VII

### BEN JONSON: PHYSIOGNOMY AND THE COURTIER

So may the outward shows be least themselves;  
The world is still deceiv'd with ornament.

. . . . .  
There is no vice so simple but assumes  
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts.

#### The Merchant of Venice (III, ii, 73-82)

. . .and he! this man! so grac'd, guiled or (to  
use a more fit metaphore) so tin-foild by nature,  
as not ten house-wives pewter (again' a good time)  
shew's more bright to the world than he! . . .  
to conceale such reall ornaments as these, and  
shaddow their glorie, as a Millaners wife do's her  
wrought stomacher, with a smokie lawne, or a black  
cypress? O couss! . . . Come, wrong not the  
qualitie of your desert, with looking downward,  
couz; but hold up your head, so: and let the Idea  
of what you are be pourtray'd i' your face, that  
men may reade i' your physnomie, (Here within this  
place is to be seene the true, rare and accom-  
plish'd monster or miracle of nature, which is all  
one.)

#### Every Man in His Humour (I, iii, 113 ff)

Marlowe's vitriolic hero in Tamburlaine, precisely drawn  
to conform to the physical and psychological prescriptions  
of the choleric man, is the closest approximation of a  
"physiognomic character" that I have discovered in Eliza-  
bethan drama. Nor are Tamburlaine's features merely added  
as a tidy measure of consistency in the portrait; they  
are repeatedly insisted upon, artfully framed and



dramatically relevant. Marlowe consciously invokes the physiognomic extensions of the old physiology and as a consequence the Scythian Scourge is "an admirable portrait of a man in his own humour."<sup>1</sup>

In Ben Jonson's comedy of humours we find nothing remotely resembling the "scientific" portraiture in Tamburlaine. And this is, at first, mildly surprising for not only did Jonson think of his satiric targets in humoral terms but he brought to his plays an extraordinary knowledge of scientific lore, including, of course, a knowledge of physiognomy.<sup>2</sup> The satiric possibilities of adding a physiognomic dimension to his humoral misfits, grossly exaggerated for the stage, must have occurred to him and as certainly must have been rejected.

There may well have been several reasons for his, not the least of which is the awkwardness involved in devising characters and scenes for the specific purpose of calling audience attention to physical details. Marlowe, with only his hero to portray in this fashion, manages tolerably well, but even so Menaphon's description perceptively slows the movement in the play. Jonson's comic

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<sup>1</sup>Carroll Camden, "Tamburlaine: The Cholerick Man," MLN, XLIV, p. 435. John Bakeless refers to Tamburlaine as "pre-  
sumably an early but entirely conscious example of the 'comedy of humours' later developed by Ben Jonson:" The Tragical History of Christopher Marlowe (Harvard Univ. Press, 1942), I, 212.

<sup>2</sup>His knowledge of physiognomy is demonstrated in many plays, notably in The Alchemist, and will be discussed below.



world is abundantly populated with "humorous" types; to account for the physiognomic peculiarities of each would involve an artificial series of set pieces within the plays.

And even more important reason for Jonson's refusal to add physiognomic dimensions to his characters, most certainly resides in the tenuous connection which links excess in his characters with actual physiological maladjustment. The gulls and fops in his plays are not suffering from a superfluity of bile or phlegm; rather they reveal all too clearly a superfluity of greed of vanity or hypocrisy and they display all the unlovely but universally human characteristics which inevitable accompany these vices. In this important sense, Jonson's "comedy of humours" bears little more than a metaphorical relationship to the physiology of the humours. There is no scientific foundation upon which physiognomic detail might be imposed.

Finally, it may be that we discover no literal use of physiognomy in Jonson's plays simply because he gave no credit to the science. It is difficult, certainly, to isolate the notes of personal conviction in a work of dramatic art; one can never be certain that he has. And yet there is a much more easily discovered author in the satiric comedies of Ben Jonson than in the plays of almost

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Herford and Simpson (Vol. I, Appendix) do not record a specific physiognomic text in that part of Jonson's library known to us. He did own, however the Magia Naturalis of the eminent physiognomist Baptista della Porta and may as easily have read that author's physiognomic works.

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any of his contemporaries. It is in the nature of satire, of course, to reveal the convictions of its author and it is a nature many times reinforced by the powerful sense of outrage, the magnificent scorn of which Jonson is so capable. The people who either believed in physiognomy or used it to gull others are often the objects of his satiric contempt. If, with Shakespeare and with most in his age, he may have granted the modest claims of pathognomy, Jonson certainly felt differently about physiognomy as a prophetic science. In fact, the physiognomy of The Alchemist is the physiognomy proscribed by the Statutes of the Realm--fortune-telling and pretentious nonsense used, along with alchemical and astrological ruses, by rogues in search of gold.

If Jonson, then, made no attempt to construct a thorough-going "physiognomical character," or even to add physiognomic dimensions to his humorous types, he nonetheless found the assumptions of the pseudo-science to have a certain usefulness on the stage. Principally, physiognomy became in his hands a tool for the searching examination of what must be considered the most despised of human vices in the England of Elizabeth's last years: hypocrisy. In Shakespeare's tragic world hypocrisy is necessarily secondary in importance; it accompanies and covers a more deeply villainous evil within. King Richard III is a splendid hypocrite, but we scarcely hesitate at this venial



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way-station on our path to the mortal depths of his iniquity. And the same is true of Iago and Edmund and Claudius. They are all evil, each in different ways, and they all mask their twisted natures in the hypocrisy of outward-seeming virtue.

But in Jonson's comic world hypocrisy is no longer an ancillary vice. And his comic world admirably mirrors the real society of which he was a member--the society of a capital bursting with people and with confidence, of a court magnificently led but one seething with ambitious courtiers anxious for preferment and for the wealth it might bring. "It was an age," according to Marchette Chute, "in which everything depended on knowing the right people, and when the great Lord Burghley wrote out ten rules of conduct for his son he acknowledged the situation with perfect frankness. 'Be sure to keep some great man thy friend. . . . Compliment him often. Present him with many, yet small gifts. . . . Otherwise, in this ambitious age, thou shalt live in obscurity.'"<sup>1</sup> What Cecil is really telling his son is that he must not forget that the old hierarchical society, closed to a strict accounting of birth for hundreds of years, has been destroyed and that the new aristocracy which has taken its place is anything

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<sup>1</sup>Ben Jonson of Westminster, E. P. Dutton and Company, (New York, 1960), p. 58.

But fixed. Wealth is its chief criterion and the way to wealth and to knighthood in the England of Elizabeth and James is through the good offices of someone already in power. Alongside its magnificent achievement and the intelligence and integrity of its Queen, the courtly circle of Elizabeth's last years must also account for graft and string-pulling, cruelty, conniving and greed, a fawning regard for silken young aristocrats, an inordinate attention to finery and fashion--an overpowering urge to judge men and their worth by outward appearance rather than genuine merit. Manners, clothes, hair-style, accent, the surface evidence of sophistication, in short, appearance is everything in this dazzling court, almost the sole mark of a man's worth. Or so, clearly, it seems to the immensely learned yet poor step-son of a Westminster brick-layer. Let Macilente make the point:

Be a man he'er so vile  
In wit, in judgement, manners, or what else;  
If he can purchase but a silken cover,  
He shall not only passe, but passe regarded:  
Whereas, let him be poore, and meanely clad,  
Though he'er so richly parted; you shall have  
A fellow (that knowes nothing but his beefe,  
Or how to rince his clammy guts in beere)  
Will take him by the shoulders, or the throat,  
And kicke him downe the staires. Such is the state  
Of vertue in bad clothes!

Every Man Out (III, ix, 10-20)

Of course there is no direct or necessary connection between the Elizabethan courtier's fondness for an elaborate ruff and his knowledge of, or belief in, the pseudo-science of



physiognomy. Nor have I evidence which suggests that Queen Elizabeth made her courtiers pass a physiognomical entrance examination.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless it is true, I think, that the habit of mind which is willing to grant nobility of character to one dressed in the most current and approved fashion is in no significant way different from the habit of mind which subscribes to physiognomy's basic tenets. Both share a willingness to judge complicated matters in simple-minded ways--to judge inner qualities of character or intellect by outward appearances, whether they be physical features, language, dress or manners. Jonson, in any event, seems to have recognized this similarity between physiognomy (the judging of men by outward shape) and fashion (the judging of men by outward dress and manner) and discovered that by yoking them together he could let the distinctive foolishness of each shed satiric light upon the other. This joining together

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<sup>1</sup>This is not so improbable as it might seem. As we earlier noted, John Evelyn reports that James I used the pseudo-science to screen foreign ambassadors and Elizabeth was as attracted to occult learning as her successor. Indeed, J. E. Neale's account of Elizabeth's review of the Archduke Charles' physical properties is highly suggestive: "She was the more insistent because she apparently had an uneasy suspicion that her suitor was misshapen; which is not surprising if she saw a letter from her German agent to Cecil. 'Alexander the Great,' he wrote, 'is said to have had his neck bent towards the left side; would that our man--the Archduke--may be his imitator in magnanimity and bravery.'" Queen Elizabeth I, Doubleday Anchor Books (Garden City, 1957), 143-44.

of "face and clothes" represents the most significant and novel use of physiognomy in Jonson's plays.<sup>1</sup>

An illustration of the effortless way in which Jonson expressly brings these concepts together can be found in an interesting exchange between Fastidius Brisk, Fallace and Macilente:

Fast: O, beleeve it, sir; your good face is  
the witch, and your apparell the spells,  
that bring all the pleasures of the world  
into their circle.  
Fall: Ah, the sweet grace of a courtier!  
Mac: Well, would my father had left mee but a  
good face for my portion yet; though I had  
shar'd the unfortunate wit that goes with  
it, I had not car'd: I might have past for  
somewhat i' the world then.

(Every Man Out II, vi, 37-44)

The connection is extended in a direct way by Pennyboy Junior in The Staple of News:

I wonder, Gentlemen,  
And men of meanes will not maintaine themselves  
Fresher in wit, I meane in clothes, to the highest.  
For hee that's out o' clothes, is out o' fashion,  
And out of fashion, is out of countenance,  
And out o' countenance, is out o' Wit.

(I, ii, 123-28)

And, once again, this time in the Macilente-like tones of the "Prologue" to The New Inn:

They doe confesse a weake, sick, queasie age,  
And a shrew'd grudging too of ignorance,  
When clothes and faces 'bove the men advance: (16-18)

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<sup>1</sup>For an exceedingly interesting account of Jonson's use of clothes symbolism in the later plays, see E. B. Partridge, "Symbolism of Clothes In Jonson's Last Plays," JEGP, LVI (1957), 396-409.

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From his first play to his last Jonson habitually resorts to the images of fashion and physiognomy to emphasize the stupidity of judging the inner by the outer man.

One of the more elaborate examples of how this technique is put to dramatic use occurs in Every Man Out in the scene devoted to expelling Saviolina's haughty confidence in her own wit and judgment (V, 11). In fact, her "humour" might be characterized as an addiction to judging men by outward signs. It will be recalled that the rustic clown, Sogliardo, is introduced only after Puntarvolo and Fastidius Brisk speak of him as a most excellent gentleman, learned, widely-travelled, valiant, witty and, above all, a consummate actor capable of imitating even the most outlandish types, i.e., a rustic clown. Saviolina dutifully falls into the trap prepared for her by claiming that she can discover signs of the true gentleman regardless of how artfully they might be disguised. In spite of this confidence, even Saviolina is shocked by Sogliardo's actual appearance. When she recovers from this momentary doubt ("Beshrew me, he clownes it properly indeed"), Sogliardo begins to patch together the conversational bits and pieces which had been given to him for the occasion. It is interesting in this regard to notice the Galenic connection between complexion and temperament which figures in his opening gambit:



- Sog: How does my sweet lady? hote and moyst?  
 beautifull and lustie? ha?
- Sav: Beautifull, and it please you sir, but not  
 lustie.
- Sog: O ho, ladie, it pleases you to say so in truth:  
 and how does my sweet ladie? in health? Bona  
roba, quaeso, que nouvelles? que nouvelles?  
 Sweet creature!

Now, of course, Sogliardo has been supplied with his opening flourish with some care, for it contains at least two clues to his supposed urbanity--the Galenic compliment, salted with a touch of licentious suggestion, and the sure sign of the gentleman, a foreign language. Saviolina triumphantly seizes upon these, but you would never suppose so from her next lines:

- Sav: O excellent! why, gallants, is this hee that  
 cannot bee decipher'd? they were verie bleare-  
 witted, yfaith, that could not discern the  
 gentleman in him.
- Punt: But doe you, in earnest, ladie?
- Sav: Doe I sir? why, if you had any true court-  
 judgement in the carriage of his eye, and  
 that inward power that formes his counte-  
 nance, you might perceiue his counterfeiting  
 as cleere as the noone-day;

The amusing note Jonson sounds in this exchange is attributable partly to Saviolina's error, but partly too to the way in which she compounds her error. It would have been one thing to have her acknowledge that she detected the gentleman in Sogliardo by his speech. But it is quite another, and very much in character, for her to attempt to shift her judgment from the obvious fluff of a foreign tongue to the far more pretentious trappings of physiognomy. It is well to recall that Jonson permits her to react to

Sogliardo's "physiognomy" before the clown says a word and her reaction is one of startled disbelief ("Beshrew me,. . ." etc.). As if this were not enough, he also makes her give away the real basis for her confidence by following Sogliardo's "Italian" tags with a muffled "O excellent." But all of this is blissfully ignored as she masquerades the capacity to see the "inward power" of Sogliardo's character figured in his countenance. From this point onward, Saviolina blindly digs her own grave, ably assisted by her reliance upon the pseudo-science. It is, we are told, the "natural Carriage" of the gentleman which mars Sogliardo's attempt to imitate the clown. She confesses she is amazed that they would suppose her incapable of deciphering so obvious a case. As Fastidious reports to Macilente, "She hath gather'd most infallible signes of the gentleman in him, that's certaine." And then, at the close, Jonson brings the scene around full circle to reveal by true "outward sign" exactly who Sogliardo is. His hands are turned palms upward and there, plain for all to see, are the certain marks of the rustic, the calluses imprinted not by any inward power but by the handles of a plow. They may not reveal his character but they tell us his station. And they send Saviolina from the stage, mortified and yet freed, presumably, from her humour, a humour if not sustained, at least rationalized, by the presumptions of physiognomy.



It is not quite accurate to suppose that in this scene, Jonson is in any chief way aiming his satiric point at physiognomy. Saviolina's idiocy is his target and that idiocy resides primarily in her arrogant belief in her own capacity to judge the worth of other human beings. So far as we can tell, she is no physiognomist; she relies exclusively upon the snatches of "compliment" artificially supplied to Sogliardo for the occasion. But Saviolina at least knows enough of the pseudo-science to invoke its major premise. And she thinks well enough of it (it is a "true-court judgment") to pretend that it, not language, is the ground upon which her judgment is based. Saviolina remains the satiric target, but the rationale she uses to justify her foolishness shares in the general indictment. Physiognomy is the refuge of a fool.

In Cynthia's Revels Jonson again aims his satire at the courtier's foppish reliance upon external marks of merit, and again physiognomy (with its explicit reliance upon outward signs), is used to help expose the foolishness of this preoccupation in all of its forms. The clue to Jonson's intention in this regard is found early in the play, in the scene in which Amorphus makes his first appearance and encounters Mercury and Echo. Echo has a moment's amusement with the vapid courtier, then leaves abruptly. Amorphus is baffled by this, for he had "read" her character in her appearance and foresaw nothing of the sort:

This is somewhat above strange! a Nymph of her feature, and lineament, to be so preposterously rude! . . . .I am a Rhinoceros, if I had thought a creature of her symmetry could have dar'd so impropotionable, and abrupt a digression.

(I, iii, 12 ff)

Aside from revealing his affected diction, this interesting reaction of Amorphus tells us in no uncertain terms that he is temperamentally, at least, a physiognomist--seeking a conforming spirit to the "symmetry" of outward shape. In fact, he is a man totally accustomed to think about himself and about all others solely in terms of external signs. He makes this perfectly clear, after drinking from the Fountain of Self-Love, by the recital of his virtues which follows. We should note especially the connection of clothes and countenance with behavior:

If my behaviours had beene of a cheape or customarie garbe; my accent or phrase vulgar; my garments trite; my countenance illiterate; or unpractiz'd in the encounter of a beautiful and brave-attir'd peece; Then I might (with some change of colour) have suspected my faculties: but (knowing myselfe an essence so sublimated, and refin'd by travell; of so studied and well exercis'd a gesture; so alone in fashion; able to tender the face of any states-man living; . . .etc. (I, iii, 25 ff)

The linking of "Behaviours" with "garbe," the emphasis upon countenance and what it tells the world of literacy, the ability to "tender" faces, the studied manner of gesture and meeting, all of these reveal a totally public man, a show-room creature who cannot think of human worth in other than external and wholly artificial terms. With Amorphus, appearance is everything and he is an accomplished

and devoted student of its several art forms. Moreover, he no sooner tells us what he values in himself than Jonson presents him with an opportunity to show us what he values in others. The preposterous first meeting with Asotus follows immediately with its mutual praise of ribbons, bands, and beaver hats. In this exercise in assessing appearance, "clothes" are given primary emphasis: "face" and the ability to contort its lineaments to fit a pretended role will concern this foppish pair in Act II. In fact, that later scene in which Amorphus teaches Asotus all about faces and their meaning is, I think, anticipated artfully in this first encounter between them. Amorphus, remember, thinks of the human countenance in precisely the same way that he thinks of ribbons, bands, ersatz Italian and a high foretop--as one more external sign to impress the Saviolinas, if not the Echoes, of the world. When he encounters Asotus' mumbling about the value of the old beaver hat he has so grandly given him, Amorphus speaks of it in much the way he will later speak of the face. It is,

the hieroglyphicke of my affection; you shall alter  
to to what forme you please, it will take any blocke;  
I have receiv'd it varied (on record) to the three  
thousandth time, and not so few. . . .

(I, iv, 184 ff)

As we shall see, the face too is an "hieroglyphicke" and its most profound student, Amorphus, can make it take any block he cares to give it.



Amorphus' lecture on physiognomy is, of course, cast in an anti-physiognomic mold. He knows the pseudo-science well enough and has followed it to the point of discovering the "meaning" of various facial types. But he proposes to teach Asotus how to beat physiognomy at its own game--how to turn its lessons to advantage by shaping the face to conform to the role one wishes to play at the moment, i.e., to make the features mere accoutrements to the total "costume" that one must put on to prosper in the superficial world of the court. Of course the lesson-in-physiognomy scene is essentially comic, and Mercury and Cupid watch it with wondering laughter. But it also adds a slightly menacing dimension to Amorphus' character and, as a consequence, to the nature of hypocrisy in public and private life. Amorphus, prior to this scene, has been content to show himself as an impossibly vain fop entirely given over to fashion. We hardly take him seriously, for he is seemingly empty-headed and is prepared to play his little games with others like himself. We laugh at his pompous language, his outrageous dress, and his affected manner, and we do so because it seems obvious that he is a victim of his own ignorance. He judges the world by the appearance it puts on because, we suppose, he can see no deeper into the matter.



The lesson scene shows us, in fact, that he knows the world only too well--shows us that Amorphus is a fop, not because he knows no better, but because he knows too well that this is the way to get on in the world. It is no longer a question of his own limited vision; he sees clearly enough and what he sees is that most men do judge by appearances and that the way to take them in is to build upon this fact. But let him explain the matter himself:

Plant your selfe there, sir: and observe me. You shall now, as well be the ocular, as the eare-witnesse, how cleerly I can repell that paradox, or rather pseudodox, of those, which hold the face to be the index of the mind, which (I assure you) is not so, in any politique creature: for instance, I will now give you the particular, and distinct face of every your most noted species of persons, as your marchant, your scholer, your souldier, your lawyer, courtier, etc., and each of these so truly, as you would sweare, but that your eye shal see the variation of the lineament, if were my most proper, and genuine aspect. (II, iiii, 11-21)

Physiognomy's basic premise is not true when applied to the "politique creature," for he will, like Sinon or Tarquin, succeed in masking his true nature. He is able to do this, of course, because most people do grant the premise and are prepared to find in the face and in other external signs an index to the mind. This is the hard-headed lesson that Amorphus really shares with his pupil:

. . .it will not be altogether an ungrateful study. For, let your soule be assur'd of this (in any ranke, or profession whatever) the more generall or maior part of opinion goes with the face, and (simply) respects nothing else. Therefore, if that can be made exactly, curiously, exquisitely, thorowly, it is inough: (II, iiii, 52-57)

The rest of the scene is pure slap-stick; we are the "ocular" and "eare-witnesse" to a series of artful grimaces, accompanied by the appropriate physiognomic explanation. Amorphus' countenance becomes his beaver hat, and physiognomic interpretations of types become the blocks which bend and twist the felt of his face. Artificial means are also employed, for this is a comic game with serious consequences and all is fair. The statesman's face, for example, is,

. . . a serious, solmne, and supercilious face, full of formall and square gravitie, the eye (for the most part) deeply and artifically shadow'd: there is great judgment required in the making of this face. (II, iii, 32-36)

And so the scene comes to a close with the confident teacher admonishing his nervous pupil to practice, not the more advanced physiognomic manipulations of a courtier's face (the "pratique" and "theorique") but the more easily mastered and perfectly functional "elementarie" courtier's countenance: "Come, looke not pale, observe me, set your face, and enter." It is little wonder that Mercury includes in his verbal portrait of Amorphus a reference to his face as "another volume of essayes." It is, in fact, a whole library.

Cynthia's Revels, then, is in an exceedingly narrow sense, a comic Hamlet, for it is even more explicitly a play about false faces. If Claudius' court is filled with men and women masking their true intentions and feelings behind shows of mourning or friendship or love, then Cynthia's court is

infested with a similar hypocrisy made ludicrous only by exaggeration. This exaggeration builds to a grotesque climax in the mock-duelling scene in which Amorphus demonstrates his virtuosity in "the choice and most cunning weapons of court-compliment. . ." which turn out to be absurdly mannered exercises in bowing and flourishing and grimacing before a lady-judge. It is with perfect accord that we hear Crites' lament, when he wonders aloud how

. . .these vaine ioyes, in which their wills consume  
Such powers of wit, and soule as are of force  
To raise their beings to aeternitie,  
May be converted on workes, fitting men.  
And for the practice of a forced looke,  
An antique gesture, or a fustian phrase,  
Studie the native frame of a true heart  
An inward comelinesse of bountie, knowledge,  
And spirit, that may conforme them actually,  
To Gods high figures, which they have in power:

(V, iv, 637-646)

And so Jonson satirizes a world of foolish men and women wholly given over to the "vaine ioyes" of affecting outward appearance at the expense of inner character.

Physiognomy is allied with clothes and manner and fustian phrase to heighten the absurdity of this shallow view of human nature and in the cynical hands of Amorphus, suffers the opprobrium visited upon its "sister arts." In the courtly world of Cynthia's Revels men are "made all of clothes and face" and, as a consequence, the pseudo-science of physiognomy is shown to be little more than a



foolishly superficial doctrine put to ill-use by a band of fops and their equally unalluring ladies.<sup>1</sup>

In The Alchemist it fares no better. Indeed, physiognomy becomes another weapon in the armory of roguery available to that masterful trio of charlatans, Subtle, Face and Doll Common. These three, especially Face, are unquestionably the most versatile and boldly artful scoundrels in dramatic literature. In spite of their bickering and their ultimate falling-out, they work over their consecutive victims with a flawless sense of timing and a dazzling exhibition of occult learning. Alchemical lore is, of course, most prominently displayed but they are no less familiar with the details of astrology and physiognomy, along with the latter's sub-disciplines, metoposcopy and chiromancy. All are learnedly summoned to help convince the credulous of the miracles about to be worked.

The scientific versatility of Subtle and Face amuses and, moreover, amazes us today. But it would not have amazed Jonson's audience; the pseudo-sciences of the

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<sup>1</sup>In Act IV, i, the ladies each choose which of the courtiers is "properest man amongst them" and the lavish care with which they analyze outward appearance is clear evidence of how correct Amorphus is in supposing the importance of Asotus' lessons in physiognomy. Argurion's comments on Hedon and Asotus are typical: "Hedon's a pretty slight courtier, and he weares his clothes well and sometimes in fashion; marry his face is but indifferent, and he has no such excellent body. No, th'other is a most delicate youth, a sweet face, a streight body, a well proportion'd legge and foot, a white hand, a tender voice."



seventeenth century did not invite the specialization we have come to expect today. Once the macrocosm-microcosm relationship is established and the doctrine of signatures is filtered through astrology, there is nothing to prevent one from applying its wisdom to all parts of the human body and, indeed, to all other animate and inanimate things in nature. Subtle's areas of professional competence, if he were so bold as to list them on a bill-board outside of Lovewit's house, would read like the title page of many a pseudo-scientific tome.<sup>1</sup> This versatility is also demonstrated by Subtle's successor in dramatic quackery, Albumazar, the astrologer of Thomas Thomkis' play of the same name.<sup>2</sup> While chiefly given to horoscopic skulduggery, Albumazar can also read faces physiognomically when the occasion requires it. When Cricca the servant threatens his cozening of Pandolfo, Albumazar turns to discredit him:

Alb: What ominous face, and dismall countenance  
       Mark't for disasters, hated by all the heavens,  
       Is that that followes you?  
 Pan: He is my servant,  
       A plaine and honest speaker, but no harme in him.  
 Cri: What see you in my face?

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<sup>1</sup>Saunder's full title is typical: Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopie, The Symmetrical Proportions and Signal Moles of the Body, Fully and Accurately Explained; with their Natural-Predictive Significations both to MEN and WOMEN. Being Delightful And Profitable with the Subject of Dreams Made Plain: Whereunto is Added the Art of Memory. By Richard Saunders, Student in Astrology and Physick.

<sup>2</sup>Albumazar: A Comedey (1615). T. Tomkis, ed., by H. G. Dick, University of California Publications in English, XIII (1944).

Alb: Horror and darknesse, death and gallowses,  
 I'de sweare th'wert hang'd, stood'st thou  
 but two foote higher. But now thy starres  
 threaten a neerer death. Sir, send to toale  
 his knell. (I, v, 440-447)

And so Albumazar artfully wards off danger by nimbly calling upon the prophetic powers of celestial physiognomy.

Subtle and Face, then, are not unusual in the seeming breadth of their scientific learning. They astound us, nonetheless, by the brazen and spontaneous ways in which their erudition is used to manipulate human beings. As the line of dupes lengthens outside of Lovewit's house and the inner chambers begin to overflow with those waiting their turn, the trio is driven to the heights of comic inventiveness merely to keep ahead of the game.

Physiognomy, in fact, is used in a specific way with but two of the victims, Able Drugger and Dame Pliant. And yet Dapper's greed is whetted by the loudly whispered "scientific" opinion that he must be, on the basis of his appearance, related to the Queen of Fairies and that, as a consequence, is destined to win at every game of chance in which he participates. This judgment, which Subtle assures us is based on both art and "reason too, the ground of art," seems to be essentially physiognomic in character. After all, at this stage Subtle has little else to go on save the appearance of the dupe before him. Thus he detects a "gaming mouth" and offers the opinion that Dapper is "of





the only best complexion/ The queen of Fairy loves." But the main burden of deceit in Dapper's case is carried by the Queen and **her** familiars.

The technique used vaguely with Dapper is employed again and in sharper terms when the good tobacconist, Abel Drugger, comes to see the learned doctor. Drugger's susceptibility to "scientific" cozening is made evident by the very purpose of his visit: he has come to obtain necromantically sound directions for the building of his tobacco shop so that he may prosper in his new location. This is invitation enough for Subtle. After the usual overheard dialogue with Face about Drugger's appearance and its promise of success, Subtle is asked how he can tell so much at first glance:

By a rule, Captaine,  
In metoposcopia, which I doe worke by,  
A certaine starre i' the forehead, which you see not.  
Your chest-nut, or your olive-colour'd face  
do's never faile: and your long eare doth promise.  
I knew't, by certaine spots too, in his teeth,  
And on the naile of his mercurial finger. (I, iii, 42-48)

This intensely clustered response, bound by itself to dazzle the victim standing near-by, is followed immediately by pure astrological judgments which end in the flat prophecy that ships are even now plying their wealthy way to Drugger's door--which, of course, has to be opened on the south side.

The quoted passage is exceedingly interesting in the way it begins with a simple metoposcopic rule based, amusingly enough, on an invisible star in the forehead--and

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works its way down through certain physiognomic tokens to the fingernail analysis which in turn provides the necessary information ("You were born upon a Wednesday?") for the construction of a horoscope. The intimate relationship of the pseudo-sciences is concisely revealed in this impressive display of learning.

The scientific content of Subtle's references to Drugger's color, ear shape, teeth and nail markings, etc., is adequately explained by Herford and Simpson<sup>1</sup> and, in more detail, by Professor Johnston Parr.<sup>2</sup> The passage is, on the whole, remarkable for its accuracy and relevance. In fact, it very likely had to be, for Drugger can be supposed to have encountered some general notions of these esoteric matters, if only enough to permit him to pose his question in the first place. However, as Herford and Simpson note, Subtle does alter his astrological explanation to fit Drugger's situation the more convincingly: Mercury is substituted for Venus as lord of the horoscope so that the god of business might be permitted to preside over Subtle's prophecy of commercial success.

We may also wonder if Subtle is not having some fun, shared by Face and by many in the audience, at the expense

<sup>1</sup>Vol. X, pp. 65-66.

<sup>2</sup>"Non-Alchemical Pseudo-sciences in The Alchemist," PQ, XXIV (January, 1945), 85-89. This essay may also be found in Parr's Tamburlaine's Malady (University of Alabama, 1953).

of Drugger's "long ear." Our attention is drawn to the reference in the first place because of the ambiguity of its phrasing. Drugger's "long ear doth promise" but we are not told, except by the optimistic context, what in fact it does promise. Both Herford and Simpson and Professor Parr have satisfied themselves that the reference is straightforward--that is, that it signifies well-being and is thus another bit of evidence to lure Drugger into the net!<sup>1</sup> But benevolent or complimentary interpretations of long ears are exceedingly rare in physiognomic literature. Much more common is the conclusion reached by Bartholomaeus and supported by the donkey analogy, that ears of this kind are tokens "of dulnesse, and of slow wit and understanding" (cap. 12). Thomas Hill reports that they are "notes of foolishness. . . of babblers. . . garrulitie and imprudence" (cap. xxiii). John Metham adds "envy" to the derogatory catalogue assigned to the man with long ears and the Secreta Secretorum confirms the notion of foolishness (cap. 59). As we have seen, Pseudo-Aristotle favors medium-sized ears, castigating the owner of large ones as "asinine" (p. 127).

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<sup>1</sup>Herford and Simpson cite Paracelsus' De Natura Rerum for evidence of the benevolence of long ears: "Aures magnae indicant probum auditum, bonam memoriam, attentionem, diligentiam, sanum cerebrum & caput, etc." Johnston Parr's citation of Arcandam's judgment of low-hanging ears as indicating riches is much more relevant, of course, and may well be what Jonson had in mind.

Clearly all of these adjectives suit Drugger's character perfectly and they were, I am convinced, most commonly associated with the physical trait. And to take a chance of this kind is precisely what we would expect Subtle might try. He is rarely content with cozening alone; he must amuse himself and his colleagues along the way. And so in this instance he calls attention to Drugger's long ear--he could have refrained from mentioning it--as evidence of the garrulity of his subject, but in such an equivocal way as to support the general notion of good fortune which the cozening requires. It is a masterful, if minute, example of the nimbleness of Subtle's mind.

Subtle employs physiognomy a second time, and with no less amusement or success, when Kastril introduces his sister into the household in hopes of arranging a financially suitable marriage. Subtle again relies upon the technique of overpowering his victim with an immediate prognostication of good things to come. In this instance, of course, his own not inconsiderable lust is aroused and so he tailors his physiognomic and chiromantic reading to accommodate a kiss:

Sub: I crie this lady mercy. Shee should, first,  
Have been saluted. [kisses her]. I doe call you lady,  
Because you are to be one, ere't be long,  
My soft and buxome widdow.  
Kas: Is shee, i' faith?  
Sub: Yes, or my art is an egregious lyar.  
Kas: How know you?

Sub: By inspection, on her forehead,  
 And subtletie of her lip, which must be tasted  
 To make a judgement. [Kisses her again].

(IV, 11, 34-41)

And so the kisses, together with another invisible mark on the forehead, permit Subtle to foresee an attractive marriage for Dame Pliant. But this is too easy. As we have seen in Drugger's case, Subtle cannot enjoy his trade unless it is complicated and a little dangerous. Indeed, he appreciates the longing which gulls inevitably display for intricate explanations. And so he compromises his prophecy, for the sheer pleasure of watching two faces fall, then re-establishes it with a more elaborate and therefore more convincing display of scientific learning.

Sub: . . .here is, yet, a line,  
In rivo frontis, tells me he is no knight.  
 Dame P.: What is he then sir?  
 Sub: Let me see your hand.  
 O, your linea Fortunae makes it plaine;  
 And stella here in monte Veneris:  
 But, most of all, iunctura annularis.  
 He is a souldier, or a man of art, lady;  
 But shall have some great honour shortly.<sup>1</sup>

And so, having been made a lady, then as quickly deprived of her knight, Dame Pliant is at last delivered back to the safety of a marriage with nobility. Her relieved exclamation ("Brother,/ Hee's a rare man, beleeeve me!") is Subtle's best reward.

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<sup>1</sup>The chiromancy of this passage has been fully explained by Herford and Simpson.





In The Alchemist, then, Jonson uses physiognomy, and its subdisciplines, metoposcopy and chiromancy, as mere tools in the trade of exploiting greedy human beings. The pseudo-science does not, therefore, carry anything like the satiric weight that it is asked to bear in Cynthia's Revels. In the earlier play Jonson's dramatic intention is directly aided by the basic assumption of physiognomy, for that assumption and the object of the satire--the courtly reliance upon appearance--exactly coincide. In The Alchemist greed is Jonson's principal concern and the pseudo-science of outward appearance is necessarily relegated to a minor role, that of supplying Subtle with still another way in which to dazzle his gullible victims and amuse himself and his audience. It is a useful gambit, one which lends itself especially well to his habit of softening his victims immediately upon their entry. By reading great good fortune in their complexion or their teeth-markings, Subtle inspires the larger greed which can only be served by more elaborate hoaxes. But chiefly it is a minor source of amusement, affording a laugh at the expense of Drugger's donkey ears and earning, of all things, kisses from Dame Pliant.

This sardonic employment of physiognomy is characteristic of Jonson's technique and can be found in many of the plays. Volpone's mock-serious assessment of Mosca's character for the benefit of the victims, Corbaccio and Corvino, is a case in point:

In good faith, sir,  
 I'am heartily greev'd, a beard of your grave length  
 Should be so over-reach'd. I never brook'd  
 That parasites haire; me thought his nose should cozen:  
 There still was somewhat in his looke, did promise  
 The bane of a Clarissimo. (Volpone V, viii, 4-9)

The amusing irony of this physiognomic analysis is, of course, sharpened when we discover that Mosca does cozen, not only on orders from his master, but at the expense of his master as well. While Volpone enjoys himself, rubbing in the notion that Corbaccio and Corvino might have recognized the rogue in Mosca's appearance, he nicely prepares for his own undoing. There is, apparently, something in Mosca's hair, nose and look which promises the bane of a charlatan as well.

A similarly oblique invocation of the idea of correspondence between body and soul is sounded by, of all people, Joan Trash, the gingerbread woman of Bartholomew Fair. With Justice Overdo discreetly over-looking the scene, Lanthom Leatherhead accuses Joan of making her wares from "Stale bread, rotten eggs, musty ginger, and dead honey"--which, we can reasonably suppose, is perfectly true. But she must maintain that her pastry is as wholesome as she herself is honest and is prepared to argue the matter before Justice Overdo. In the process she reveals herself as a ridiculously minor-keyed Richard III:

I'll meet thee face to face, afore his worhip, when  
 thou dar'st: and though I be a little crooked o'  
 my body, I'll be found as upright in my dealing, as  
 any woman in Smithfield, I: (II, ii, 23 ff)



Joan, of course, may very well be right if by Smithfield she is referring chiefly to the fairground. While as upright, no doubt, as any of her business colleagues, her crooked body is still a reliable index to her character--and by extension, to the quality of her pastry.

This comic correspondence between Joan's crooked frame and her crooked dealings is about as close as Jonson ever comes to acknowledging that there may be something truthful about the pseudo-science of physiognomy. In fact, he seldom invokes the notion of correspondence in any save ironic contexts. In Poetaster (II, 11), to be sure, Ovid praises Plautia by pretending to see "gentrie and generall worthinesse" in her lookes." But this general metaphorical use of physiognomy is rare in Jonson. He can draw stunning portraits of human character but he seems purposely to avoid linking their physical appearance to character or conduct. The basic assumption of the pseudo-science--that "Nature makes the Minde/ the Body like"<sup>1</sup>--does not enter fluently into his thought or language. It is always consciously summoned and then primarily to serve ridicule upon those who entertain it seriously.

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<sup>1</sup>John Davies of Herford, "A Select Second Husband for Sir Thomas Overbury's Wife."

## CHAPTER VIII

### PHYSIOGNOMY IN THE PLAYS OF THOMAS DEKKER

It may be the forehead is not alwayes a true heralt of affections, neither the rules of Phisiognomie infallible principles: for they which smiled at the Theatre in Rome, might assoone scoffe at the rudenesse of the scaene, as give a Plaudite at the perfections of the action, and they which passe over my toyes with silence, may perhaps shrowde a mislike in such patience:

Robert Greene: Penelopes Web

In late March of 1603 Queen Elizabeth died and, almost at once, with the warmth of spring, a great seige of plague fell again upon London. Dekker's The Wonderful Year movingly records the impact of these two momentous events upon the kingdom and, especially, upon the people who lived in its capital. They were, he tells us, "transformed to wild men," for the fear of foreign invasion from Catholic Europe and the fear of civil war at home were more than matched by the growing fear of death itself. London was abandoned by those who had somewhere else to go and could afford to leave their homes. The city was left to the poor and the sick and to those who were prepared to risk their lives to give whatever help they could.



In the poetic prologue to his account, Dekker gives us an interesting sketch of the moment of truth which, in that terrible year, inevitably came to the man of means. Either he abandoned his wealth to a trusted servant or he remained with it himself and risked the visitation of robbers and plague. In the extremity of his situation Dekker's wealthy man turns to physiognomy to help him make the difficult choice:

Imagine now a mighty man of dust,  
 Stands in a doubt, what servant he may trust,  
 With plate worth thousands: jewels worth farre more,  
 If he prove false, then his rich Lord proves poore:  
 He calls forth one by one, to note theyr graces,  
 Whilst they make legs, he copies out theyr faces,  
 Examines theyr eye-browe, consters theyr beard,  
 Singles theyr nose out, still he rests afeard,  
 The first that comes, by no meanes heele allow,  
 Has spied three Hares starting between his brow,  
 Quite turnes the word, names it Celeritie,  
 For Hares do run away, and so may hee,  
 A second shewne: him he will scarce behold,  
 His beard's too red, the colour of his gold,  
 A third may please him, but tis hard to say,  
 A rich man's pleasse, when his goods part away.<sup>1</sup>

There is something unmistakably appropriate about this brief account of a man who, distraught by both danger and greed, trusts not to his own experience with his servants but to the judgments rendered by an occult science. While each man bows before him, he frantically searches for tell-tale signs of faithfulness or, in red-beard's case, the certain token of treachery.<sup>2</sup> And yet, in the end, it is all in vaine. The

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<sup>1</sup>The Plague Pamphlets of Thomas Dekker, ed. F. P. Wilson (Oxford, 1925), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Professor Curry, with regard to the Miller's red beard, cites the Secreta Secretorum: "Tho that bene red men,

third servant, whose brow is apparently free from "hares," seems to be the man who makes off with the goods.

Dekker's picture of the rich man in distress is, under the extreme circumstances in which it is set, most remarkable for its gentleness. There is a certain pathetic helplessness in the center of the satiric portrait--the helplessness of a man who is forced to turn to the pseudo-science of physiognomy in the first place, then, having done so, is destined to employ its methods in a ludicrously inappropriate and, as it turns out, unsuccessful way. The correspondences he invokes are, of course, hopelessly irrelevant and comically so. The first confusion, between the hares of the field and the hairs of one's brow, is attributable to an age fond of punning but is in its wrong-headed "animal analogy" monstrously unscientific. His second judgment, involving the servant with the red-beard, is a correct one physiognomically but it was made for the wrong reason. In this instance animal analogy should have been employed and, instead, the distracted man can only see his about-to-be-abandoned gold dancing in the servant's bright beard. And so he turns down the second servant too and finally, for unspecified but certainly equally bad

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bene Parceuyngge and trechrus, and full of qveyntise, i-likenyd to Foxis." Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences, p. 82.



reasons, clears the third who ultimately steals his money. However improbable the details of this sketch, and they make up a brilliant anti-physiognomic, satiric vignette, the total impression of a frightened man repairing to any aid his wits can summon is a true and not altogether unsympathetic one.

I have called attention to this brief passage to show that Dekker was not only well acquainted with physiognomy but that he realized how useful the pseudo-science could be in developing a concise satiric sketch. In this instance, of course, as in the messenger scene in Antony and Cleopatra and as so frequently in Jonson, physiognomy is employed indirectly. It is not the master's beard which is described. Rather, Dekker reveals a good deal about the rich man's character by having him resort to and totally confuse the pseudo-science in a moment of great personal stress. It is not unfair to say that we learn more about the master from his observations of the servants' features than ever we could learn from a description of his own.

That Dekker knew enough about physiognomy to permit him to burlesque its analytical method is clearly shown by the sketch in The Wonderful Year. But he also, and quite frequently, called upon its special tokens in a literal way. A reading of his plays, in fact, demonstrates how thoroughly the rhetoric and assumptions of physiognomy permeate his way of looking upon the world. The red beard

of the prologue, for example, enters again in Northward Ho, and here as nothing more significant than a neatly balancing turn of phrase. I am referring to Phillip's gleeful explanation of why he tricked his poet-father to come to Doll's quarters:

Ile tell you why I sent for you, for nothing but to shew you that your gravity may bee drawne in: white hairs may fall into the company of drabs as well as red beardes into the society of knaves:

(III, 1, 91-93)<sup>1</sup>

And old Bellamont, in the same play, has cause to call upon physiognomy to reassure his friend Maybery, who has been wrongly convinced that he has been made a cuckold. When Maybery storms home to confront his wife, he encounters her servant--but cannot be prevented by her absence from reinforcing his jealous suspicion:

May: Where is your mistris, villaine? When went she abroad?

Prent: Abroad sir, why as soone as she was up, Sir.

May: Vp Sir, down Sir, so sir: Maister Bellamont, I will tell you a strange secret in Nature, this boy is my wives bawd.

Bell: O fie, sir, fie, the boy he doe's not looke like a Bawde, he has no double chin. (I, iii, 1-7)

Bellamont's impatient observation is perfectly apt even though Maybery is not prepared to be reassured. The double chin is a certain token of the libidinous type. As Thomas Hill records, it is a "note of Venus," indicative of a "lascivious

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<sup>1</sup>All citations from Dekker's plays are from the edition of Professor Fredson Bowers. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, in three volumes (Cambridge, 1953-58).

nature;" those who are so blessed are "harlot hunters" (chap. 32). Its absence in Maybery's servant boy is a happy sign, if a secondary one, and Bellamont, in citing his own "strange secret of Nature," does his best to lessen his friend's unwarranted jealousy.

Another and quite unorthodox employment of physiognomy is to be found in The Whore of Babylon, that stiffly archaic morality play concerned with Rome's assault upon Elizabeth. The play is filled with dumbshows, allegorical figures and altogether wooden characters. Its success on the stage clearly had more to do with the anti-Catholic feeling of the time than to any dramatic skill Dekker brought to it.

The primary, if not only intention of the play is to paint Rome, The Whore of Babylon, in the grossest colors while drawing the most flattering contrasting portrait of Queen Elizabeth and her court. Dekker, of course, is primarily indebted to the richly symbolic account of Rome he found in the apocalyptic writings of St. John The Divine (Revelations 14:9, 17:3-5, 19:20). Here especially he found the intriguing reference to the mysterious mark upon Roma's forehead:

And upon her forehead was written a name of mystery,  
BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHERS OF HARLOTS AND ABOMI-  
NATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Rev. 17:5)

Now Dekker dispels at least part of the mystery in his play. The third King in the court of the Empress is given the unhappy task of telling her what is being said about her in Fairyland (England):

- 3 King: My tongue's already blistred sounding this,  
 Yet must I whisper to your sacred eare:  
 That on your brow (they say) is writ a name  
 In letters misticall, which they interpret  
Confusion, by great Babylon they meane  
 The Citie of Confusion.
- Emp: View our forehead!  
 Where are we printed with such characters?  
 Point out these markes: Which of you all can lay  
 A finger on that Moale that markes our face?
- 3 King: They say you can throw mists before our eyes,  
 To make us thinke you faire.
- Emp: Damnd blasphemies. (IV, iv, 53-64)

It is as if Dekker sought in this passage to convert the mysterious letters of Revelations to the more readily understood marks open to metoposcopic examination. The third King begins by talking of the "letters misticall" but the Empress herself quickly reinterprets his account as the disfiguring mark of a mole. And the mole is apparently invisible even as Abel Drugger's tell-tale mark was invisible to all save Subtle's metoposcopically trained eyes.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>There may even be in this passage and in later mention of the mark imprinted on the Empress' forehead, a reference to the 16th century practice of branding felons, including prostitutes, on the forehead. That Dekker thought in these terms is shown by Dorothy's plea to Caliste and Christeta in The Virgin Martyr:

To be heereafter registered a goddesse,  
 Owe your chast body up to the embraces  
 Of boarish lust, have it writ on your forehead,  
 This is the common whore, the prostitute,  
 This mistresse in the art of wantonnesse. . . .  
 (III, i, 134-38)

The whore carries the mark of her corruption on her forehead, in spite of the mists she is able to cast up to keep herself fair in other men's eyes. Indeed she proves the truth of the charge in this very same scene by marking her followers on the forehead:

Draw neere, wee le marke you for our chosen flocke,  
 Who buildes on heartes confirmed, buildes on a rocke:  
 The seale of heaven! Who on their foreheads weare it,  
 We choose for counsaile: (135-138)

Here, of course, the marks have become visible. The sacrament of confirmation, administered by the Roman Whore, is in reality marking a pack of traitors and assassins.<sup>1</sup>

The image of marked men, of men carrying the visible signs of their inner corruption, is associated with Rome throughout the play. Titania's charge to Plaine-dealing . . . "to looke through and through that our great Citie, and like death, to spare the lives of none, whose conscience you find sickly and going". . . is answered by a practised physiognomist. Here all indications of the biblical source of the image have disappeared. Plaine-dealing promises the Queen that in giving her a "copie of the Cities countenance, Ile not flatter the face, as painters do; but shew all the wrinkles of it" (II, 1, 125). If one is to discover the inner character of a man he must study his countenance and

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<sup>1</sup>This passage too relies heavily upon Revelations 19:20.

cipher the lines and wrinkles, the moles and marks discovered there. In this case Plaine-dealing is to discover the "wrinkles" implanted by traitorous allegiance to Rome.

So, too, does the third King betray his interest in the marks of infamy when he remains in Fairyland to tempt as many as possible of the several orders of society to allegiance to Rome. Disguised as a scholar, he first talks of marking the throats of those who are to be murdered in the uprising and of placing "tokens" on the doors where "Riflings and sweet ravishments" are to enter. Thus Rome brands her victims as well as her devotees. He then comes upon Edmund Campeius:

Campeius! vmh: Campeius? a lucky plannet  
Strikes out this houre: Campeius! Babylon,  
 His name hath in her tables: on his forehead,  
 Our Queene hath set her marke: it is a mould  
 Fit to cast mischiefe in: (II, 11, 46-50)

They are all disfigured and on the forehead; the safety of the realm depends upon the metoposcopic skill of Plain-dealing to ferret them out.

In contrast to the tokens of infamy given to the Empress and her wicked followers, Dekker provides one arresting glimpse of Titania's face. She too has signs to be deciphered but they are the beneficent and hereditary signs of virtue and can be discovered by anyone with eyes to see. Her would-be assassin, Pariden, is in fact prevented from completing his mission by a brief glimpse of her countenance:

When on your face I looke,  
 Methinkes I see those Vertues drawne alive  
 Which did in Elfilyne the seaventh survive,  
 (Your father's father, and your grandfather)

(V, 11, 94-7)

The physiognomic tokens we have thus far examined share a common definitive character. Red-beard and rogue, double-chin and bawd, the peculiar stamp of the Whore of Rome which appears on her traitorous brood, all of these begin to suggest the utopian world of the physiognomist where every man's inclinations, however secretly guarded, are discoverable in his countenance. But this is not an accurate reflection of Dekker's world. Hypocrites walk freely throughout the plays, successfully masking their vices, at least for a time, under cover of outward appearance--aided by both clothes and the courtier's "starcht faces." Even in the bifurcated world of the Whore of Babylon villainy palms itself off as something other, and in language closely reminiscent of Jonson's treatment of the same theme in Cynthia's Revels. The allegorical figure, Time, looking on the dumb-show speaks of one whose

Shape which earst shew'd reverend  
 And wore, the outward badge of sanctitie,  
 Is cloath'd in garments of hypocrisie. (IV, 1, 15-17)

And the same image is echoed later in the scene when Plain-dealing, beholding the potential assassin in the dumb show, speaks in tones of genuine surprise: "What good cloathes hee weares, and yet is a villaine?"

The theme of deception, of false faces and shapes put on to gull men who judge only in appearance, is one of Dekker's central motifs in If This Be Not A Good Play. Pluto sounds this Jonsonian note in the very first scene when he summons his lesser lights, Rufman, Shacklesoule and Lurchall, and orders them to disguise themselves for a soul-gathering trip to earth:

Fly into the world:  
As y'are in shapes transformde be so in name,  
For men are out-sides only: be you the same.

This harsh judgment is more than confirmed by Bartervile who in Act IV himself puts on a disguise. Lurchall has apparently forgotten what Pluto had told him, for he is frankly amazed to see his merchant dressed "like a Turke."

Lurch: But pray sir, what ist turnes you into a Turke?  
Bart: That for which manie their Religion,  
Most men their Faith, all chaunge their honestie,  
Profite, (that guilded god) Commoditie.  
Hee that would grow damnd-Rich, yet live secure,  
Must keepe a case of Faces, sometimes demure,  
Sometimes a grum-surly sir, now play the Iewe,  
Then the Precisian; Not a man weelee viewe,  
But varies so. My selfe (of bashfull nature)  
Am thus supplied by Arte (IV, 1, 7-15)

Clearly Bartervile has joined the courtiers Amorphus and Asotus in the fascinating study of the art of putting on false faces. And the "arte" by which he is supplied is none other than the art or science of physiognomy.

Appearances, then, can and do deceive in Dekker's world and the rhetoric of the plays reflects this fact. The irate father in Match Me in London accosts his unwanted son-in-law in typical fashion:



thou has undone me,  
 Thou are a Civile Theefe with lookes demure  
 As is thy habit, but a villaines heart. (II, 1, 56-58)

And Mistress Justiniano is equally distressed to discover that Birdlime is an old bawd, although one wonders why it occurs to her so late. In any event, should would assign Birdlime to Pluto's covey:

Thou art a very bawd: thou art a Divil  
 Cast in a reverend shape; thou stale damnation!

(Westward Ho, II, ii, 152-3)

A final and inelegant example of successful masquerading in Dekker's plays might be cited from the Virgin Martyr, where the whoremaster Hircius and his drunken friend Spungius decide how to make the best of their divided world. Spungius finally concludes:

I see no remedy fellow Hircius but that thou  
 and I must be halfe Pagans and halfe Christians--  
 no, no, I am resolved to have an Infidels heart,  
 though in shew I carry a Christians face.

(II, 1, 40-48)

Hypocrisy, if artfully covered by outward seeming, can confound the best efforts of those who would discover the index to the mind in the conformation of the face.

And yet this too confirms the soundness of the notion of correspondence between appearance and conduct, between the features and the inclinations of the mind and heart. The hypocrite, in the end, puts on the face which, he thinks, or physiognomy tells him, bears a relationship to the character he wishes others to suppose him to have. In doing

so he obviously alters the tell-tale features which belong naturally to him. But he cannot relax for a minute. Even such practiced villains as Hircius and Spungius cannot forever prevent the imprinting of their hearts' configuration upon the face. When Angelo questions the pair about the alms Dorothy gave them to deliver, Hircius mockingly acknowledges--because Angelo already knows--that his life as a whoremaster has marked him:

Hircius: Or me given so to the flesh, my cheekes  
speake my doings.

Angelo: Avant you theeves, and hollow hypocrites.  
Your hearts to me lie open like blacke bookes,  
And there I reade your doings.

(The Virgin Martyr, II, 1, 189-12)

This same perceptive eye has been given to Iacomo Gentili, the abundantly generous gentleman in The Wonder of a Kingdom. It is true that he frankly states at one point that "he regards no mans out-side, tis the lineings/Which I take care for," but the reference is to the dishevelled victime of shipwreck and slavery, i.e., to his rag-like clothes and unkempt appearance. He does in fact regard the countenance as a legitimate index to the discovery of a man's "lineings." As he tells the lying broker who requests a gift of 100 pounds to replace his feigned loss by fire,

Faces are speaking pictures. Thine's a booke  
Which if the leafe be truly printed shews  
A page of close dissembling. (IV, ii, 31-33)

And so, in almost precisely the same image does the old father of the queen, Valasco, encounter and pathognomically

"read" Don John, the King's brother in Match Me In London.

The countenance of Don John does not reveal a detailed account, but the main burden of the message is clear:

O my good Lord, be my good Lord. I read  
Harsh lectures in your face, but meet no Coment  
That can dissolve the riddle. . . . (III, 1, 75-77)

This, of course, refers to little more than a fleeting scowl and I do not wish to suggest that Valasco, or Dekker, had the entire and complex apparatus of physiognomy in mind when the speech was drawn. It does suggest, however, the habit of searching the face, of reading the passions, which physiognomy fosters and which is so characteristic of the period. Again in Act IV of Match Me In London we find a perfect example of the attentive care with which the features are scanned for any meaning they will yield. I am thinking of the scene in which the King engages Martines to take the letter to his queen (IV, iv, 54 ff). The play on faces, so similar in a way to the assassination scene in Marlowe's The Massacre at Paris, begins immediately. Martines has come from the queen to report her hope for an early reconciliation. She is

drown'd in sorrow, that your brow  
Has beene so long contracted into frownes,  
Wishing to die unlesse she see it smooth'd. . . .

Valasco cannot but add that he, too, fondly hopes that the King will send some symbol of his love to "fetch up the red blood her cheekes hath lost." Moments later our eyes, having passed from the furrowed brow of the King to the

bloodless chalk of the queen's face, are riveted upon Martines' face, this time caught in a blush which the King's recounting of the supposed plot has raised. But it too is an index and both Martines and the King know it. Almost in triumph the King exclaims: "Blushing does you staine!" and Martines unhesitatingly gives the correst reading: "It is not guilt but anger." Having completed his little charade, the brief scene closes with the King's hopeful but uneasy assessment of Martines' loyalty. Physiognomy is here corroborated by the reports of others:

There's in thy face no Traytor, I cannot tell,  
Good mouthes have given thee to mee. . . .

Dekker's characters, then, unlike so many of Jonson's, can scan the faces of others for the signs of passion, or motive, without sacrificing the sympathy of the dramatist. Pathognomic responses are commonplaces in the plays. When Antoninus turns down Artemis's marriage proposal, he cannot but notice that "in her lookes/Revenge is written" (Virgin Martyr I, 1, 376). So, too, does Mrs. Maybery, in Northward Ho suspect that Kate Greenshield has been brought to the house for her husband's illicit pleasure. As she tells Bellamont, the evidence of Kate's character is to be found in her eyes:

O I cannot beleeeve it, I know by her eies  
She is not honest, why should my husband  
Proffer them such kindness?

And Scumbroth, the cook in If This Be Not a Good Play, expresses surprise that the sub-prior cannot see in his face, the message of death which he brings to him.

Scum: Alas, wheres the sub-Prior?

Sub: Here; what ailest thou?

Scum: Can you picke nothing out of my face?  
Is there not a Deaths-head standing on my  
shoulders? (V, 111, 1-5)

The play closes with still another reference to the correspondence between character and physical appearance in the comic hell scene. The ghost of the inevitable puritan is introduced and not only is it an unghost-like black ("we were all smoakt out of our owne Countrey and sent to Rotterdam") but, indeed, it is as crooked and twisted as ever Joan Trash was:

Minos: How camst thou lame and crooked, why do'st halt?

Puritan: All the brethren and sisters for the better part are crooked, and halt: for my owne part, I never went upright.

3. Iud: And yet a puritane? hence with him.

(V, 1v, 278-81)

The double-meaning of "upright," of course, links stature and character, and the ghost wanders away wondering how he could be anything but crooked and lame, having pulled "a whole church downe upon by back. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dekker's knowledge of and delight in the cant of thieves would also have suggested to him the current cant meaning of an "Upright man" which was, of course, the name assigned to a superior kind of highwayman.

Perhaps Dekker's most interesting use of physiognomy in a single play is to be found in The Roaring Girl. Both in the main and in the sub-plot one of the problems persistently explored is that of the relation of character and appearance, and physiognomic judgments, and their subsequent refutations, help to illuminate Dekker's examination of it. The key to this motif is to be found in Sir Alexander Wengrave's self-satisfied opening speech in which he leads his dinner guests into the parlor of which he is so ostentatiously proud (I, 11). But what is it in the room that most pleases him and about which he feels compelled to talk at such length? It is, in fact, a tapestry or painting not unlike Lucrece's, cunningly filled with faces which so artfully reveal the character of their possessor:

Stories of men and women (mixt together  
 Faire ones with foule, like sun-shine in wet-wether)  
 Within one square a thousand heads are laid  
 So close, that all of heads, the roome seemes made,  
 As many faces there (fill'd with blith looks)  
 Shew like the promising titles of new bookes,  
 (Writ merily) the Readers being their owne eyes,  
 Which seeme to move and to give plaudites,  
 And here and there (whilst with obsequious eares,  
 Throng's heapes do listen) a cut purse thrusts and leeres  
 With hawkes eyes for his prey: I need not shew him,  
 By a hanging villanous looke, your selves may know him,  
 The face is drawne so rarely. (I, 11, 17-29)

Now it will not do to dwell too long on this passage or to assign it a thematic significance which was never intended for it. After all, Sir Alex's pre-occupation with the painting and with the faces in it--each one a "title" to a volume of human intention--may tell us little more about

him than that he admires the work and enjoys showing it to others. But it is fair to observe that Sir Alex fancies himself a good judge of human character and that he is inclined to base his judgments upon appearance alone. In the very scene in which the painting is talked about he meets Ralph Trapdore and we observe that he scans Ralph's face with the same care that, a moment before, he lavished upon the cut-purse in the painting. And Ralph must present something of the same appearance:

Troth honest fellow--humh-ha-let me see,  
This knave shall be the axe to hew that downe  
At which I stumble, h'as a face that promiseth  
Much of a villaine. . . . (I, ii, 193-96)

But to the worth of practically everyone in the play Sir Alex is blind. And yet he thinks he sees all too clearly. He believes, by consulting her unorthodox appearance, that he sees Mol as she truly is--and that he beholds Sebastian's "follies and untruthes,/ with two cleere glasses." Having agonized through four acts of supposing that, in fact, Sebastian is going to marry Mol and that his daughter-in-law is an outrageous whore, Sir Alex is whip-lashed from appearance to reality and back again, in the closing act, until he is finally made to realize that human nature is more complicated than surface appearances will ever reveal. While there is nothing explicitly physiognomic about the revelation scene, it implicitly informs the forcing of Sir Alex to consider the human personality under the mask worn to the world.

As this key confrontation scene opens, Sir Alex is as hopelessly addicted to the appearance of things as he was when the play began. Convinced that Sebastian is not going to marry Mol he blissfully announces, "my heart's cheer'd Gentlemen/ No face can come unfortunately to me." (italics added) Then, a moment later Mol appears with a mask on and is presented as the bride. Sir Alex falls into the trap immediately, proclaiming his daughter-in-law "a goodly personable creature/ Just of her pitch was my first wife his mother." And then Mol removes her artificial mask. Sir Alex is horror-stricken:

O my reviving shame, is't I must live,  
To be stricke blind, be it the worke of sorrow,  
Before age take't in hand.

The task remaining is to teach the old fool to see truly beneath the real mask which hides Mol's courage and integrity. When Mary FitzAllard is admitted, Sir Alex begins his un-harrowing pilgrimage to a more balanced view of human nature. He has misjudged her too:

When I relected thee, I saw thee not,  
Sorrow and wilfull rashnesse grew like filmes  
Over the eyes of judgment, now so cleere  
I see the brightnesse of thy worth appeare. (193-5)

With Mol it takes a little longer. Now that his eyes have cleared he can see enough not to "condemn" her--then he acknowledges sorrow for the "hard opinion" he had conceived of her for she is a "good wench"--finally he closes with a request for forgiveness:



Forgive mee, now I cast the worlds eyes from mee,  
And looke upon thee freely with mine owne:

He will never again condemn by "common voyce" for that is  
the "whore/ that deceives mans opinion."

Sir Alex is not the only person in the play who pays  
the closest attention to physical appearance. Mol herself  
does so and she is even prepared to base a preliminary  
judgment upon what she sees. But it is always preliminary  
in nature. Note how she greets Ralph Trapdore in Act III:

Heere comes my man that would be: 'tis his houre.  
Faith a good well set fellow, if his spirit  
Be answerable to his vmbles; he walkes stiffe,  
But whether he will stand to't stiffly, there's the point;  
He's a good calfe for't, and ye shall have many a woman  
Choose him she meanes to make her head by his calfe,  
I do not know their trickes in't; faith he seemes  
A man without; I'll try what he is within"

(III, 1, 141-48)

Mol knows enough about the pseudo-science of physiognomy to  
realize how the general scheme of correspondence is supposed  
to work. She likes the overall build of Ralph, his confi-  
dent gait and the look of his calf; and she is prepared to  
believe that these might indicate something about his  
character. But she is not learned in the science--or as  
she puts it, "I do not know their trickes in't," referring  
to the women who choose their mates by studying the curve  
of their legs.<sup>1</sup> And this is just as well. Ralph seems a

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<sup>1</sup>There is an extraordinary amount of attention, some  
of it serious, paid to masculine legs in Elizabethan liter-  
ature--no doubt much of it occasioned by the trunk hose so

man without but Mol, unlike Sir Alex, is going to reserve judgment until she can observe how he conducts himself:

"I'll try what he is within."

In the sub-plot, too, the chief concern is with the deception which often accompanies a congenial surface appearance. Our interest is focused upon the effort of Goshawke to aid his seduction of Mistress Openworke by alienating her from her husband. The deception is amusingly discussed in physiognomic terms by Mistress Gallipot and Mistress Openworke:

Mist Gal: Is then that bird of yours (Maister Goshawke) so wild?

Mist Open: A Goshawke, a Puttocke; all for prey: he angles for fish, but he loves flesh better.

Mist Gal: It's possible his smoth face should have wrinkles in't and we not see them?

Mist Open: Possible? Why have not many handsome legges in silke stockins villanous splay feete for all their great roses?

Mist Gal: Troth, sirra, thou saist true. (IV, ii, 1-8)

This incongruous picture of artificially tapered legs clothed in silk and gartered with roses issuing forth

popular at the time. Jonson satirizes Marston's pretensions by referring to the association of small calves and gentle birth (Poetaster II, 1) in only one of the more well-known references. Joseph Hall (Virgidemiarum, Lib III) and John Davis of Herford (Scourge of Folly, Epic. 196) both offer extended satiric comments on the subject--and these are but typical of others too numerous to cite. The physiognomists also pay close attention to the legs. The general analogy is based upon birds. Thus Thomas Hill cites Aristotle on "slender shankes" to the effect that they denote a "lecherous person, light and unstable in motion. And thys note here conceyved of the byrdes, having the like legges--which for that according to life are light and unstable and have but a little of the earthly gravitie yet much of the ayriall lightnesse." (cap. 50)

into monstrously flat feet recalls Jonson's satire of Anaides in Cynthia's Revels where Phantastes reports that "hee puts off the calves of his legs, with his stockings, every night"<sup>1</sup> Dekker's intention, I think, is little more than to suggest, in the sub-plot as in the main, the disparity for both good and ill that can exist between outward seeming and inner reality.

This intention is explicitly developed in the "masking scene" which so clearly parallels the revelation scene in the main plot. In this instance it is Goshawke (who is, as both ladies know, wearing a physiognomic mask), who instructs them to put on a real mask for the trip to Braimford. The phrasing of his command--"On with those false faces"--is significant. The "unmasking" of Goshawke is developed specifically in terms of the false face he habitually wears. Maister Openwork is the agent of discovery:

Maist.Open: Why maskt?  
 Mist. Open: Dose a mask grieve you Sir?  
 Maist.Open: It does.  
 Mist. Open: Then y'are best get you a mumming.  
           Gosh: S'foole, you'l spoyle all.  
 Mist. Gal: May not wee cover our bare faces  
           with maskes as well as you cover your  
           bald heads with hats?  
 Maist.Open: No maskes. Why, th'are theeves to beauty,  
           that rob of eies admiration in which true  
           love lies, why are maskes worne? Why good?  
           or why desired? Unlesse by their gay  
           collers wits are fiered to read the vildest  
           lookes; many bad faces, (Because rich gemmes  
           are treasured up in cases)  
           Passe by their priviledge currant,. . .

(IV, 11, 93-109)

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<sup>1</sup>IV, 1, 71. It also recalls with the reference to hidden "wrinkles," the assignment of Plaine-dealing in The Whore of Babylon (II, 1, 125).

Maister Openworke's monologue on masks continues for yet another nine lines during which he points out again--and to Goshawke's great discomfiture--that "Good faces maskt are Jewels kept by spirits/ Hide none but bad ones,. . . ." until finally, after reading "storms" in his wife's eyes and in her "browes" Openworke forces Goshawke to acknowledge that he is not what he has seemed to be. And this recognition is really all Openworke--or Dekker--is interested in. He readily abandons the interrogations:

No more, hee's stung;  
Who'd thinke that in one body there would dwell  
Deformitie and beauty, (heaven and hell).  
Goodnesse I see is but outside, wee all set,  
In rings of Gold, stones that be counterfet.

Having pronounced this benediction Openwork adds the final absolution:

This blemish growes in nature not in you,  
For mans creation sticke even moles in scorne  
On fairest cheeks. . . .

Maister Openwork has deftly engineered this entire confrontation with Goshawke and literally forced him and the audience to recognize that the world is full of false faces which have been put on only to deceive. But, beyond this, he acknowledges that he has long since seen beneath the mask. It was something he "read" in Goshawke's eye, oddly enough, but which, like that with Ralph Trapdore, he decided to test. And this, he tells us, is why he manufactured the story about the kept woman:

I'll tell you Maister Goshawke, in your eie  
 I have seene wanton fire, and then to try,  
 The soundnesse of my judgment, I told you,  
 I kept a whoore. . . . (IV, ii, 207-10)

"To try the soundnesse of my judgment" is precisely what Mol does in the play and precisely what Sir Alex Wengrave must learn to do.

It remains, then, to say a word about the untrussing of the poet in Satiricomic, Dekker's stunning contribution to the bitterly fought but short-lived "war of the theatres." In bringing Jonson on the stage for this final humiliation, Dekker depends in considerable measure upon profuse physical detail to make his satiric point. And where the actor playing Horace might have failed to make his features visible for all in the theatre to see, Tucca and the others permeate their comments with stinging references to the blemishes which, however exaggerated, presumably marked Ben Jonson from other men. He is, in Tucca's words, the "whooreson poore lyme and hayre-rascall," that "thin-bearded Hermaphrodite," a "low-minded Pigmei," a "poore saffron-cheeke sun-burnt Gipsie," a "scurvy Lazarus," and he has "such a terrible mouth, that thy beard's afraide to peepe out". . . his face is "puncht full of oylet-holes. . . he is, in brief, a "leane a hollow-cheekt scrag." And these are but the descriptive adjectives applied by Tucca. Asinius adds to this a well-meant reference to his "villanous broad backe," Dicache thinks of his face as ungodly--"it lookes for all the world, like a rotten russet apple when tiz bruiz'd"--and

Sir Rees ap Vaughan talks of his "hairy skin" and his face full of "pockey-holes and pimples." While Dekker does not confine his satiric attack to physical description, he clearly enjoys himself most when freeing Tucca and the others to add to the grotesque portrait of Jonson which it is the intention of the play to produce.

And this, I suppose, is the main point. To be at all effective, the descriptive barbs must bear some recognizable relationship to the real Jonson--enough so as to aid in the identification of the untrussed poet. And this places genuine limits upon the employment of physiognomy. Personal satire is not free to choose amongst the innumerable badges of shame supplied by the physiognomist; his lore can be used only to the extent that the satiric subject betrays features of physiognomic significance.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dryden faced something like the same problem in his satire of Titus Oates in Absalom and Achitophel. And his solution was remarkable similar to Dekker's: to concentrate on one or two outstanding features and to laden these with as much damaging significance as the pseudo-science will provide and they will bear. Dryden isolates Corah's long chin, sunken eyes and harsh voice and in each case he points to the physiognomic implication of the feature:

Sunk were his Eyes, his Voice was harsh and loud,  
 Sure signs he neither Cholerick was, nor Proud;  
 His long Chin prov'd his Wit; his Saintlike Grace  
 A Church Vermilion, and a Moses' Face (646-649)

As an example of the success with which Dryden chose the features he wishes to emphasize, consider the following physiognomic judgments of Corah's long chin and sunken eyes. Richard Saunders reads a long chin in a man as an indication that he can be "neither silent nor discreet--cannot keep anything secret" (p. 191). A sunken hollow eye indicates, according to the Secreta Secretorum (cap 58) "malyce;" John de Indagine finds them the mark of "a craftye man;" Thomas Hill

For all of the profusion of descriptive adjectives hurled upon Horace-Jonson in Satiromastix, Dekker nonetheless can be seen to have concentrated most of his fire upon relatively few traits: Horace is small, lean and hollow-cheeked; saffron, running to "russet-apple" red, in color; pock-marked and thin-bearded--all of the things which in fact Jonson was in 1601.

To the "pockey-holes and pimples," for all the attention they receive, we need give little space. Clearly Jonson's pimpled face was a well-known and not very attractive mark of the man and Dekker is content to use the feature chiefly as an identifying sign. Some loathsome disease, no doubt syphilis, is meant to be suggested by "pockey-holes," but we cannot make an accurate diagnosis with the details at hand. Jonson's bad complexion makes him a "scurvy Lazurus" and we are left with the vague assumption that he became one in a not very wholesome way.

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concludes that the man with hollow eyes is "worthie no commendation at all". . .they "do witnesse such a person to be mutable, deceytfull, a betrayer,. . .corrupte both with envie and disdaine." Marchette Chute judges it a malicious but accurate portrait: "The chief interest of Dekker's play is that it gives a full length portrait of what Jonson looked like in 1601. . .the Londoners who flocked to the Glove must have recognized it immediately." Ben Jonson of Westminster, E. P. Dutton & co. (1960), p. 99. Herford and Simpson agree (Vol. I, p. 422), as does R. A. Small's account in The Stage Quarrel Between Ben Jonson and the So-Called Poetasters, Breslau (1899).

Two of the other physiognomic details--his short stature and his thin beard--are accompanied by definite pointers. In the instance of the thin beard, Dekker merely underlines what almost everyone would have understood--that it is a sure sign of questionable masculine virility. Jonson is a "thin-bearded Hermaphrodite" and as Bartholomaeus Anglicus so succinctly reminds us "a man hath a berde and not a woman."<sup>1</sup> From this it follows that the man with a thin beard is "effeminate. . .fearful, delicate and unconstant."<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hill agrees with this judgment: the "heares soft and thin and exceeding small doe then declare an effeminate minde and courage,"<sup>3</sup> and then he adds, significantly enough, "that this person not onely lacking bloude, but [is] dull of sense and show." Jonson's short stature is also linked with a definite character trait for Dekker calls him a "low-minded Pigmey" thus suggesting that the quality of his moral and intellectual life conforms with his comparative shortness of body. Actually, a small body is commonly judged to be a positive physiognomic sign. As Richard Saunders reminds us, in a small body the "vital spirit. . .is united and therefore the more strong. . .thus nature supplyes in wit

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<sup>1</sup>Cited by W. C. Curry, Chaucer. Med. Sci., p. 60.

<sup>2</sup>R. Saunders, op. cit., p. 190.

<sup>3</sup>Cap. 14.



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what is wanted in body." (p. 266) Dekker thus seeks to nullify the advantage of this orthodox interpretation by supplying his own witty notion of correspondence.

The remaining details--his lean, lank form and saffron-red coloring--while no doubt Jonsonian, merely point to the choleric humour which Dekker has assigned to Horace-Jonson to account for the irascibility which made the play necessary in the first place. Tucca calls him a "leane, a hollow-cheekt Scrag" and a "Poore saffron-cheeke Sun-burnt Gipsie." According to the Kalendar of Shepherds, the choleric man "hath nature of fire, hot and dry, naturally is lean and slender, covetous, ireful, hasty, brainless, foolish, malicious, deceitful, and subtle where he applieth his wit" (p. 151). The Secreta Secretorum echoes this and adds that he is "hasty of worde and of answeere; he lovyth hasty wengeaunce" (cap. 58). In discussing the Martial man (the hot and dry complexion) Professor Curry cites William Lilly's account which highlights his "lively high colour like sunne-burnt, or like raw tanned leather."<sup>1</sup> Richard Saunders confines his description of the face color of the "cholerick or martitial complexion" to "brown or duskie;"<sup>2</sup> the Kalendar of Shepherds, however, singles out red as the predominant color when

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<sup>1</sup>Curry, Chaucer Mediaeval Sciences, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup>Saunders, p. 200.



discussing the properties of Mars (p. 143). Thomas Newton in the Touchstone of Complexions, looks for a red, brown or tawny color in men of hot complexions.<sup>1</sup> In brief, then, Dekker took some care to select precisely those physical characteristics which would not only identify the target of the satire but would contribute to it physiognomically at the same time. The composite portrait is of a quarrelsome, choleric, low-minded backbiter, impossibly proud of his own productions and viciously uncharitable to those of his colleagues. As Tucca so forcefully reminds the Horace of the play, the real Horace was generous and kind. . . "he lov'd Poets well. . .but thou lov'st none, neither wise men nor fooles, but thy selfe." And the real Horace had "a sweet visage," a "trim long-beard and a reasonable good face for a Poet," and he was a "goodly corpulent Gentleman." In these essential physiognomic qualities, as well as in the spiritual ones they suggest, Horace-Jonson is found abysmally wanting--as indeed he must be for the two orders of nature go together, body and spirit, complexion and conduct, sweetness of person and "a sweet visage." It is ironic, and not unpleasantly so, that Ben Jonson who had such savage fun with physiognomy in Every Man Out of his Humour and in Cynthia's Revels should at last be made the satiric subject of physiognomic portraiture in Satiromastix.

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<sup>3</sup>Cited by L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, p. 57.

Physiognomy in Dekker's plays never assumes the thematic importance which Shakespeare give it in Richard III, Marlowe in Tamburlaine or Jonson in Cynthia's Revels. Indeed in only one play, The Roaring Girl, does it assume a defining position--that of assisting in the unmasking of the masked and, in the process, revealing the blindness associated with the willingness to see no more than the surface appearance of human beings. But for the rest, Dekker is happy to employ the tokens of the pseudo-science either literally or metaphorically when they will assist him with a laugh or make a point clearer than it might otherwise be. Dekker is, in fact, next to Shakespeare the most versatile and flexible dramatist with regard to physiognomy of the four men considered in this study. Jonson despises the pretensions of the pseudo-science and uses it, consequently, only when it can be despicably used. Marlowe, on the other hand, seems to take it quite seriously and confines his use to those occasions when it can be employed literally. But Dekker, like his great master, approaches physiognomy with more detachment and as a consequence recognizes the full range of dramatic uses of which it is capable. He will grant its assumptions to paint a satiric portrait of Horace-Jonson and yet will as easily reverse those assumptions to develop the "anti-physiognomic" sketch in The Wonderful Year prologue or to explore the fundamental relationships which obtain or ought to obtain

between outward appearance and inner reality. He can smile at hypocrites putting on physiognomy's false faces to fool the world and he can also build whole scenes upon the principles of pathognomy.

In brief, then, physiognomy as we discover it in Dekker's plays, is as broadly conceived as it was in the larger world of 16th century England: it is an occult science, elaborately codified and given to prophecy and thus best fitted for ridicule--and, at the same time, it represents a serious view of the universe and of the relation of things.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages I have attempted to show how extensive was the interest in physiognomy in Elizabethan England and with what versatility and success the pseudo-science was employed by some at least of the leading dramatists of the period. If physiognomy occupied an ambivalent position in the larger society. . . eliciting the belief and endorsement of educated men even as it was ridiculed by others and condemned by the law of the land. . . so too was it admitted on uncertain or shifting ground in the society recreated on the great public and private stages of the period. As we have seen, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson and Dekker were all thoroughly, even intimately familiar with its claims and with the meaning it so facilely attached to particular features of the body. Even though their private attitudes toward those claims may well have been hostile, they all, nevertheless, admitted the pseudo-science into their plays with a free and inventive spirit. Thus they were instrumental in extending the range of physiognomy's literary utility which had, prior to 1590, largely been confined to literal statement.

They were not of course the only dramatists of the period to use physiognomy in their plays. Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Webster, and Marston were equally aware of its dramatic potential and its topical currency.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true of Marston who betrayed an early interest in the validity of the pseudo-science in his satire on the Juvenalian epigram "Frontis nulla fides" and who, thereafter found ways to introduce it on the stage. In the preposterous erotic boasting of Nymphador in The Fawne (III, 1) we can easily recognize the playwright who stood at Dekker's shoulder in the untrussing of the choleric Horace-Jonson in Satiromastix. Nymphador, it will be remembered, has been led by Hercules, or Fawne, to boast of how many conquests he. . .a "perfect Ovidian". . .might cope with in a given period. Hercules, thoroughly enjoying himself, proposes a further refinement, the matching of the mistress by appearance and temperament to the complexion of the lover:

. . .if he were Saturnine, or melancholie to have  
A blacke hayred, pall-fac'de, sallowe thinking  
Mistresse to clippe him: if Joviall and Merrie, a  
sanguine, light, tripping, singing, indeede a mistresse

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<sup>1</sup>Chapman's most amusing use of the pseudo-science may well be the Angelo-Lorenzo encounter in May-Day (I, 11) in which the old fool's poetic tribute to the charms of Franceschina is interpreted for the audience by the bemused Angelo. In Philaster (I, 1) Beaumont and Fletcher have Dion disclaim any correspondence ("mens hearts and faces are so far asunder that they hold no intelligence") and yet in the Knight of the Burning Pestle (III, v, 30 ff) the wife commenting on Jasper remarks, "thou art as crooked a sprig as ever grew in London. I warrant him he'll come to some naughty end or other, for



what would daunce a caranto as shee goes to embrace him, if cholericke, impatient or irefull, to have a Mistrisse with red haire, little Ferret eyes, a leane cheeke, and a sharpe nose to entertain him. And so of the rest." (III, 1,)

While Marston's employment of physiognomy was extensive<sup>1</sup> and occasionally as in the Hercules-Nymphador exchange, comically inventive, he does not significantly add to the several dramatic uses of the science developed by his greater colleagues. For it is in the plays of Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and Dekker that we find physiognomy employed in almost every conceivable way. . .to assist in character revelation, in pathognomic "painting of the passions," in satiric portraiture, as metaphoric resource, literally as the science of outward signs and finally, as a ready-made vehicle for the serious examinations of the question of appearance and reality. Indeed this last and most significant employment is important enough to justify, by itself, an examination of the pseudo-science and its role in the intellectual life of Elizabethan England. But it must not be permitted to cast into shade the several other effective and, occasionally, subtle uses that men found for physiognomy on the stage.

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his looks say no less." Webster (Dutchess of Malfi I, 1, 245 ff) has Bosco disclaim the veracity of physiognomy ("Doth he study Physiognomie?/ There's no more credit to be given to the face, then to a sick mans uryne") even as Shakespeare has Richard III deny correspondence before his young nephew.

<sup>1</sup>Other uses of physiognomy in Marston's plays can be found in the Thais-Claridiana dialogue in The Insatiate Countesse (I, 11); Eastward Ho (I, 1; IV, 1); The Fawne

### Character Delineation

A system of thought which assigns meaning to the details of physical appearance. . . granted that it is widely enough understood. . . is uniquely suited to the economic delineation of character. As Chaucer had shown, the seemingly artless physical description of a character in a poem can become, through physiognomy, an exciting shorthand; the most hidden motives and the deepest secrets of the personality may be revealed in the briefest space. . . and in the most sardonic manner.

This liberal and straightforward employment of the pseudo-science is not often found in the drama of the late 16th century no doubt in part, because of the peculiar restrictions and requirements of the theatre. It is one thing to describe the physical appearance of a character in a narrative poem, calling attention only to the details which reveal the intended meaning. It is quite another to produce that character on the stage, before hundreds of people and with all the details of his physical appearance competing one with the other for the attention of the audience.

In spite of these difficulties, however, Marlowe's conception of the character of Tamburlaine, as we have seen,

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(I, 11; II, 1; V, 1); The Dutch Curtezan (III, 1) and especially in The Malcontent (I, 11; I, 111; I, vi; III, 111, IV, 1; V, 1; V, 1v;).

is in significant measure informed by the theory of the humours and by the prescription of physical appearance which physiognomy assigned to that theory. The difficulty of isolating the particular features which reveal the abundance of choler in the hero is largely overcome by the systematic description of him given to others in the play to share with the audience. Menaphon's elaborate account of Tamburlaine's physiognomy serves the same purpose and in the same way as Chaucer's description of the miller or the reeve. And much the same could be said of Dekker's portrait of Horace in Satiromastix or, in a more complex setting, Shakespeare's use of deformity to suggest evil in the character of Richard III.

But physiognomy can also be employed in reverse. . . which is to say, to reveal less about the character subjected to physiognomic analysis and a good deal more about the person conducting that analysis. In Antony and Cleopatra Shakespeare employs this method to give us a comically illuminating picture of an abandoned, jealous but still hopeful queen. Octavia's appearance and personality. . . ostensibly the subject of the interview with the messenger. . . scarcely intrudes into a scene which is actually devoted to Cleopatra's frantic effort to find in physiognomy a reed of hope upon which to lean.

This is precisely the way Dekker uses physiognomy in his poetic vignette in the Prologue to The Wonderful Year.

And it is one of the ways, at least, that Jonson uses the pseudo-science to reveal Subtle's character in The Alchemist. Physiognomy is not employed by Jonson to tell us about the characters who came to Lovewit's house and who, in fact, are subjected to physiognomic analysis. It is Subtle, as physiognomist, who is revealed to us. The essential playfulness of his mind, the cat-like quality of his personality, is illuminated by the sheer fun he derives from the use of the science of outward appearance. Certainly physiognomy helps prepare his victims for their ultimate fleecing; but its essential role is to give Subtle the pleasure of flirting with danger.

So, too, does Jonson turn the pseudo-science inside out to show us the way Amorphus' mind works in Cynthia's Revels. In this instance, of course, the precise tokens of physiognomy are entirely set aside; Amorphus neither believes in them, as Cleopatra does or so desperately wants to, nor does he, like Subtle, feign a belief in them. Rather, he callously studies physiognomy and teaches its lessons to Asotus so that he can all the more successfully exercise his gifts for hypocrisy in a world which in fact does credit the meaning of outward appearance. When Jonson employs Amorphus to study and teach the science of faces he subtly alters the character of his courtier from a laughable fop to a hardened and thoroughly conscious hypocrite.

Pathognomy: The Painting of the Passions

Physiognomy is also abundantly employed by the dramatists of the period in its role as interpreter of the bodily changes induced by emotion. This branch of the pseudo-science was, as we have seen, devoted to momentary as opposed to permanent tokens of the face and represented, as a consequence, physiognomy's surest claim to truth. Shakespeare is especially perceptive of the alteration in color and in the cast of the face which severe emotion invariably induces and is fond of employing verbal accounts of these alterations for dramatic effect. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the poignant scene between Morton and Northumberland in 2 Henry IV in which pathognomy plays an explicit role in heightening the pathos of a father's knowledge of his son's death. Dekker's pathognomic emphasis in Match Me In London (Act IV), in the scene in which Martines is engaged by the King, though less concentrated, is not unlike Shakespeare's employment of pathognomy in the Northumberland-Morton scene. Far briefer in scope, but of a similar order, is Marlowe's play on facial expression, especially color changes, in the assassination scene of The Massacre at Paris. In each case, pathognomy is made to serve a precise dramatic end, whether it be the increase of pathos or suspense.

### Physiognomic Imagery

The extent to which physiognomy was used by Elizabethan dramatists as a resource for poetic imagery can only be suggested in a study of this length. It appears in one form or another in virtually every play of the period, from Marston's effortless citation of "a good faithful eye" in The Dutch Curtezan (III, 1) to the metaphorical attribution of "a forehead bold and big enough" to the rebel army in Shakespeare's 2 Henry IV (I, iii). Even more typical is Dion's aside when Philaster makes his first appearance in Beaumont and Fletcher's play (I, 1). The very diction employed by Dion is taken from physiognomy:

Let me be swallowed quick if I can find  
in all the Anatomy of you mans vertues, one  
sinew sound enough to promise for him,  
he shall be Constable.<sup>1</sup>

But to multiply examples of this kind would serve no useful purpose. Physiognomy's ready-made system of discovering truth could not but significantly contribute to the images through which Elizabethan dramatists looked out upon their world.

### The Appearance-Reality Theme

As we have noted, by far the most significant use of physiognomy in the plays discussed in this study is the

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<sup>1</sup>Philaster, I, 1, The Works of Beaumont and Fletcher (Cambridge, 1905), I.



utilization of the pseudo-science to sound, or echo, or examine anew, the recurring problem of appearance and reality. Physiognomy's basic assumptions, its very language and mode of thought are ideally suited to an examination of this kind, for the science unequivocally stands upon the conviction that things are what they seem to be. The caveats of the professional physiognomist notwithstanding, the science is wholly predicated upon the notion of correspondence between outward appearance and inner spiritual reality.<sup>1</sup> In Lucrece Shakespeare discovers how physiognomy can be made to lend its imagery and its point of view in commenting on its own inadequacy in the face of human guile and treachery. In Richard III that theme is sounded again but in the more intricate context of a play about a man whose essential harmony between body and soul remains undisturbed. Richard's quintessential skill at hiding his true nature behind the mask of piety which is his face, triumphs over the evidence of his corrupted body. And so in Hamlet, too, Shakespeare evokes the language and imagery of physiognomy to dissect the court of outward seeming which inwardly festers with sin and hypocrisy and death.

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Hill's warning is typical of the modesty invariably expressed in the introductory chapters of physiognomical manuals, then abused in all that follows: "Thys is also to be learned and noted, that any person (as afore uttered) to judge alone by the face, mightily to erre and be deceyved, so that necessarie it is, to gather and marke sundrie other notes of the bodye, and after to pronounce judgment, and the same not firmly, but conjecturally" (cap. i).



Jonson's comic world, no less given to outward show than the Danish court, is also exposed through the agency of physiognomy, the "science of outward show." In Every Man out of His Humour and especially in Cynthia's Revels, physiognomy is shown to be an indispensable discipline for the hypocritical and vacuous courtier and his equally empty ladies. To study faces and to master the art of "putting on" the proper one, is no less important than the other skills devoted to adorning appearance. . . proper dress, proper manners, proper accent, proper "wit," and all at the expense of inner integrity and intelligence and taste. It is Jonson who ingeniously combines the imagery of dress with physiognomy, or, as he more oftens puts it, "clothes and face," to fashion his satiric strokes. Dekker's examination of the same theme in The Roaring Girl, while less successful, is no less dependent upon the imagery of physiognomy. Neither Goshawk nor Mol is what appearance suggests they ought to be. In both the main and the sub-plots Dekker emphasizes how common and how fruitless it is to mistake the mask of the countenance for the spiritual reality which it can at best only dimly reflect.

I have not tried to argue that the pseudo-science of physiognomy deserves a central place in the intellectual history of Elizabethan England. Still less do I suggest that its study is essential to an understanding of the dramatic literature of that period. That it deserves a

small place in that intellectual history and may reward study by the student of the drama are the more modest propositions I have tried to sustain. If it is true that the Elizabethan dramatist did not consistently use physiognomy to delineate character, it is no less true that Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and Dekker knew as much about the pseudo-science as most to their countrymen and freely adapted its "truths" and its pretensions of their dramatic purposes.

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