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# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## Faces and Figures of Fortune: Astrological Physiognomy in *Tamburlaine Part 1*

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‘Man is a little world, and beares the face / and picture of the universitie’  
George Peele, *England’s Parnassus*.<sup>1</sup>

‘Would we ever know that there is a relation of twinship or rivalry between a man and his planet, if there were no sign upon his body or among the wrinkles on his face that he is an emulator of Mars or akin to Saturn?’  
Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*.<sup>2</sup>

The planets ‘signifie, according to the places where we place them in the forehead, an abridgement of this great world’  
Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopie*.<sup>3</sup>

When articulating the relationship between man and the world around him (or her), George Peele imagines man as a canvas, a ‘picture’ of the universe, a microcosm whose makeup carries the ‘face’ or the viewable surface of the macrocosm. Peele’s statement

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Albott, *Englands Parnassus* (London: For N. Ling, C. Burby and T. Hayes, 1600), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things, An Archeology of Human Sciences*, Translator unnamed (NY: Vintage Books, 1970) p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie and chiromancie, [H]metoposcopie, the symmetrical proportions and signal moles of the body fully and accurately handled, with their natural-predictive-significations : the subject of dreams, divinative, steganographical, and Lullian sciences : whereunto is added the art of memorie* (London, 1653), p. 163.

perfectly encapsulates the early modern belief in signatures and correspondences, in which ‘Individual objects on earth...contain the signature of the heavenly bodies to which they supposedly correspond’.<sup>4</sup> By envisioning man as a ‘picture’, Peele conceives of the universe as readily legible upon the human body. In his discussion of the history of signatures and correspondences in *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault explains the ways in which this belief in signatures had implications for the early modern body. Foucault comments on one of the most familiar forms of the universe’s legibility, the astrological ‘type’, the person influenced by Mars and therefore warlike, or melancholy due to Saturn’s power. Yet Foucault likewise references a much less familiar way in which man served as the universe’s picture. According to Foucault, Mars and Saturn do not simply affect one’s humours. Rather, they leave a ‘sign upon his body’—for example, quite visibly apparent in the wrinkles upon the face—that signals the astrological connection between the person and his or her planetary influences. Upon the human face, then, resides a legible sign that, if read properly, may make someone’s disposition more immediately understandable than waiting for his or her behaviour, temperament, or other humoral indicators to become apparent.

According to Foucault, however, these signs do more than simply refer to a person’s ‘twinship’ with the planets. Indeed, Foucault suggests that these astrological signs ‘[trace] on a man’s body the tendencies, accidents, or obstacles present in the whole vast fabric of his life’.<sup>5</sup> By claiming that astrological signs reveal ‘the *whole* vast fabric’, Foucault’s remark implies that they make legible not only one’s past, but also one’s future. Such an interpretation is substantiated when he explains that for early moderns, a short line reflected a short life, a furrow an upcoming obstacle, or an upward-rising wrinkle a rise in success.<sup>6</sup> In the midst of Foucault’s discussion of signatures and correspondences, we thus find the discourse and tenets of astrological physiognomy.

Most broadly, physiognomy is the study of bodily parts in order to discern a person’s nature.<sup>7</sup> Astrological physiognomy (also at times referred to as planetary physiognomy)

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret J. Osler, *Reconfiguring the World: Nature, God, and Human Understanding from the Middle Ages to Early Modern Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2010), p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> When looking at early modern texts alone, the term ‘physiognomic’ was used capaciously. Renaissance physiognomic tracts delineate seemingly basic connections—such as the fact that a sad face indicates a person who is indeed sad—to more complicated semiotics, such as how to read the signs of the humours in another’s complexion, how a person’s phenotype signals his or her nature, and, as we will see, how lines in the forehead could uncover how long another will live or his or her fortune. However, later physiognomic practice differentiated between physiognomy (discerning a person’s character through bodily shape and

is a subset of physiognomy in which the physiognomer interprets astral characters on another's body, typically the hand (known as chiromancy) or the forehead (known as metoposcopy), in order to discern his or her fortune, and it is a practice that early modern literary scholars have left largely unexamined. In fact, historical overviews of physiognomy often overlook all physiognomic practice in the early modern period, jumping from the Greek codification of physiognomy to its popular resurgence in mid-to late eighteenth-century Europe due to Johann Lavater's famous physiognomic publications.<sup>8</sup> Yet as I will demonstrate, physiognomic practice, and specifically astrological physiognomy, was one of several occult practices that could help guide a person's interpersonal relations. However, the astrological component of this physiognomic practice, especially its use in supposedly determining a person's future, raised significant concerns, particularly about its ability to deceive.

As with many facets of early modern culture, the discourse and tenets of astrological physiognomy appeared in Renaissance drama, though not as prevalently as astrological or physiognomic concepts articulated separately. Yet while the period's drama often only limitedly addresses astrological physiognomy's concepts, they are notable and central in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part 1* (c. 1587) through an emphasis on metoposcopy. Throughout the play, Marlowe employs the language of astrology to such a degree that, as Johnston Parr observes, he references the stars' importance to Tamburlaine's rise to power 'In more than half a dozen passages'.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, Parr argues, '[Marlowe] definitely links Tamburlaine's reiterated invincibility with the

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form) and pathognomy (the study of emotions or passions through the body). For the purpose of this paper, the term 'physiognomic' will apply to the use of the body in discerning a person's nature and/or the use of the body to divine another's fortune.

<sup>8</sup> There are, however, a few early modern literary scholars who work on Renaissance physiognomy. For one of the only monographs on the topic, see Sybille Baumbach, *Shakespeare and the Art of Physiognomy* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks LLP, 2008). Cf. also Linda Woodbridge, "'He beats thee 'gainst the odds": Gambling, Risk Management, and *Antony and Cleopatra*' in *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Sara M. Deats (NY: Routledge, 2004), pp. 193-212. The topic is more often discussed in sourcebooks. See *Same-Sex Desire in the English Renaissance: A Sourcebook of Texts, 1470-1650*, ed. by Kenneth Boris (NY: Routledge, 2004); *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*, ed. by Jonathan Burton and Ania Loomba (NY: Palgrave Macmillen, 2007); and Baumbach, 'Physiognomy' in *A New Companion to English and Renaissance Literature Vol. I*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), pp. 582-97. For historical discussions of physiognomy in the Renaissance, see Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul: The Art of Physiognomy in European Culture, 1470-1780* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) and Juliana Schiesari's chapter 'Dell Porta's Face of Domestication: Physiognomy, Gender Politics, and Humanism's Other' in *Beasts and Beauties: Animals, Gender, and Domestication in the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2010), pp. 54-72.

<sup>9</sup> Johnstone Parr, *Tamburlaine's Malady: And Other Essays on Astrology in Elizabethan Drama* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1953), p. 19.

impelling power of the stars'.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite the stars' centrality in the play, scholars have found it difficult to explain their presence or exact function, for they, Parr included, have not applied the context of astrological physiognomy in their readings.<sup>11</sup> Astrological physiognomy, however, provides a crucial tool for understanding and clarifying Tamburlaine's at times seemingly contradictory rhetoric addressing a variety of supernatural forces, such as the stars, God, and fortune. Specifically, I contend that this largely overlooked practice and its discourse help us understand why the characters obsessively invoke and address the stars since astrological physiognomy makes the stars and the astral signs they leave upon the face instrumental to the delicate process of negotiating interpersonal relationships.

The purpose of this article is thus twofold. First, it provides an introduction to the practice of and varying attitudes toward astrological physiognomy in early modernity. Physiognomy in general, and the subset of astrological physiognomy specifically, gives us a language of the mind for early moderns—a means of understanding the nuanced and varied ways they thought about themselves and each other. As such, this article illuminates an occult practice that can contribute to current discussions about how early moderns approached and shaped social interactions.<sup>12</sup> Humoural theory has been the predominant lens through which we have considered the body's role in these negotiations, but astrological physiognomic discourse provides a distinct yet complementary means of understanding the body's importance to interpersonal relations. Second, it employs *Tamburlaine Part I* as a case study for the way that astrological physiognomy provides an important context for understanding how occult practices shaped interpersonal engagements, and how, in turn, those engagements were represented in early modern drama. I begin this examination of astrological physiognomy by turning to physiognomic texts that substantiate Foucault's claims and that illuminate the nuances of the practice, as well as those that communicate competing attitudes toward it. These texts help us contextualize metoposcopy's contradictory physiognomic function in *Tamburlaine Part I*, which we can discern by carefully considering the network of references that point to the play's engagement with an astrological physiognomic context. *Tamburlaine Part I*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> For further discussion of astrology in both Renaissance drama and the *Tamburlaine* plays, see Don Cameron Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance: the Quarrel About Astrology and its Influence in England* (Durham: Duke UP, 1941).

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Selleck's *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) is an helpful example of the type of criticism exploring how interpersonal interactions shaped subjectivity—early moderns' understandings of themselves and others, which she argues occurred predominantly through interactions between self and other rather than being shaped by an individual alone, as evidenced by the language used to comprehend the self in early modernity.

presents astrological physiognomy as a potentially important practice that all individuals, regardless of social status, can use in order to prognosticate the future. As such, this seemingly deterministic practice proves surprising and counterintuitive because, I argue, the prognostication it allows provides individual characters knowledge that can help them make smart, self-interested decisions, thereby granting them a valuable degree of agency. In doing so, I contend, astrological physiognomy also presents a unique relationship between the individual and fortune that differs significantly from the typical conception of Fortune's wheel and thus presents astrological physiognomy in a seemingly less vexed way than it is often approached in early modern culture at large.

Yet even as it extends the possibility of increased agency, the tenets of astrological physiognomy limit this potential through the very specific relationship it posits between the divine, the stars, fortune, and the individual. It is, above all, a relationship that rests upon divine favour and privilege, thereby circumscribing the seemingly egalitarian nature of astrological physiognomic practice. In these competing and contradictory engagements with physiognomy, then, we discover its crucial yet contrary role in challenging, achieving, and ultimately maintaining a privileged social standing.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the status of astrological physiognomy within *Tamburlaine Part 1* proves ambivalent, suggesting that even as Marlowe tests the practice's validity, the play signals the scepticism various early moderns expressed concerning astrological physiognomy. Even as these opposing positions unfold, however, astrological physiognomy sheds light on interpretive cruxes regarding *Tamburlaine's* seemingly overconfident relationship to Fortune and the rhetorical contradictions created by his references to astrology and the divine.

### **‘[T]errestrial and celestial bodies’: An Introduction to Astrological Physiognomy**

Astrological physiognomy developed from Eastern approaches toward physiognomic practice, which unlike the Western Greco-Roman tradition joined bodily reading with prognostication. Astrological physiognomy is based on the belief that the stars' alignment at birth determines a person's physical makeup, or more commonly, that they inscribe astrological figures upon a person's hand and especially face. In turn, these physical characteristics and astral signs can be read not only to discern one's character but also,

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<sup>13</sup> Though critics often examine both parts of the *Tamburlaine* plays, I am not discussing *Tamburlaine Part 2* given that physiognomic interpretation is not commonly represented in that play, a point which I will address further in this piece's conclusion.

and perhaps more importantly, to divine one's future.<sup>14</sup> This form of physiognomy made its way into English thought through medieval manuscript translations of Arabic treatises, and later, through published physiognomic tracts.<sup>15</sup>

Many early modern physiognomic tracts follow the Western physiognomic tradition and as such do not combine physiognomy with astrology. Others, however, do make a connection between the art of physiognomy and astrology, or physiognomy and prognostication, respectively, without unpacking those relationships. One such text is the *Secretum Secretorum* (also known as *The Secret of Secrets*), supposedly written by Aristotle as a means of providing counsel to Alexander the Great. *Secretum Secretorum* circulated widely in the medieval and early modern periods and includes an explicit section on how to execute physiognomic interpretation. Varying translations of the treatise expressly discuss the value of astrology for prognostication but do not make a strong connection between astrology and physiognomy. Most relevant for the early modern period is Robert Copeland's *The Secrete of Secretes of Arystotle* (1528). In this version, Aristotle stresses the value of physiognomic reading, affirming that 'AMonge all other thynges of this worlde I wyll that thou knowe a noble and mervaylous science that is called physonomy by the which thou shalt knowe the nature and condycyon of people'.<sup>16</sup> Yet he does not expressly state the value of physiognomy. The aphorisms he includes, however, indicate that Alexander should employ physiognomy as a means of discerning the most advantageous connections to make, or vice versa, as suggested by the claim, 'Beware of hym as thy enmy that is tokened in his face / and of hym also that is mysshapen'.<sup>17</sup> The aphorisms tend to follow the Western physiognomic tradition by not discussing astrological physiognomy. Yet in a section entitled 'Of the dyfference of astronomy', Aristotle tells Alexander, 'I praye the beleve not such fooles which say that the scyence of the planettes is so hard to be knowen / & that none may come therto. Surely they be fooles and wote not what they say. / It is a noble thyng to knowe thynges whiche

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<sup>14</sup> On the history of astrological physiognomy, see Martin Porter, *Windows of the Soul*; Mikael C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); and Christopher Rivers, *Face Value: Physiognomical Thought and the Legible Body in Marivaux, Lavatar, Balzac, Gautier, and Zola* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Comprehending astrological physiognomy enlarges our understanding of the material body, which has been predominantly and fruitfully explored through humouralism. Humouralism, however, only gives us a partial understanding of how early moderns understood the material body given that humoral work has not emphasized occult properties of the body. This study does so and thus allows us to see alternative approaches through which early moderns considered their materiality.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Copeland, 'The Secrete of Secretes of Arystotle', *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, Volume I, ed. by M.A. Manzalaoui (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), p. 377.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.

be to come’, thereby joining astrological predication and physiognomy in the same text, if not in the same practice.<sup>18</sup>

Conversely, the influential treatise by Cocles entitled *A brief and most pleasaunt epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie* (1556), and ‘englished’ by Thomas Hill, likewise articulates physiognomy’s purpose as an interpersonal one, for in the ‘Preface to the Reader’ Hill explains that physiognomy ‘teacheth the thyrde parte of wysdom, and the first of prudence, that is: how to discerne the disposicions of al men by their fourme and shape, wherby we maye knowe whom to make oure frendes and familiers, whom to preserve from beyng our foes, & whom to avoyde as daungerous to have to doe with all’.<sup>19</sup> Yet the texts differ in that Cocles makes several claims about the ways that physiognomic signs can indicate one’s fortune. Even so, he does not connect these aphorisms to astrology, nor are they limited to the hands and forehead. According to Cocles, ‘The heare of the head very blacke’ indicates, among other things, that a man will be ‘infortunate’,<sup>20</sup> whereas a forehead with ‘a falling of the wrinkles fro the middle’ points to a ‘sharpe and cruel fortune’.<sup>21</sup> In fact, most of the references to fortune are hard, difficult, cruel, or evil, though a nose ‘greate, and sufficient long’ points to a man ‘congruently well fortunate’.<sup>22</sup> These are not explicit examples of astrological physiognomy, but they do point to physiognomy’s interconnection with prognostication, and they likewise indicate that physiognomic tracts strove to provide any information that could be beneficial in determining the best social connections to make, including another’s fortune.

More obviously discussing astrological physiognomy and metoposcopy specifically, is one of the most influential early modern physiognomic texts—Thomas Hill’s *The contemplation of mankind* (1571), which historian Davide Stimilli identifies as the first original English physiognomic work.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the metoposcopic section of the book becomes one of its selling points, for in the tract’s extended title Hill explains that ‘the phisognomer added a proper treatise of the signification of sundrie lines seene in most

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 331.

<sup>19</sup> Bartolommeo della Roca Cocles, *A brief and most pleasaunt epitomye of the whole art of phisiognomie, gathered out of Aristotle, Rasis, Formica, Loxius, Phylemon, Palemon, Consiliator, Morbeth the Cardinal and others many moe, by that learned chyrurgian Cocles: and englished by Thomas Hyll Londoner* (London, 1556), n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, J5r.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, J8r.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, B6r.

<sup>23</sup> Davide Stimilli, *The Face of Immortality: Physiognomy and Criticism* (NY: State of U of New York P, 2005), p. 74.



mens foreheads', which is why he can market the book as 'more ample' in content than any other physiognomic text 'hytherto...published'. The chapter entitled 'The judgment of certain lines seene in the forehead' discusses the practice of metoposcopy, or 'The art of judging character or telling a person's fortune from the forehead or face'. This chapter relays information passed on from a 'Phisiognomer', who stealthily cajoled the information from 'a certain skilfull Jewe' who refused to share his knowledge. Hill explains that in metoposcopic reading, one first examines three prominent lines on the forehead, which signify three ages: Mercury's line, which indicates 'childhood' (up to twenty-five years old and a time 'aptest to conceyve and attaine both learning, sciences, & handie craftes' but also known for wantonness and inconstancy),<sup>24</sup> Jupiter's line, which indicates 'youth' (twenty-five to fifty years old and known as a time of 'veneration, and wisdom', as well as one in which men are honest, stable, and show discretion), and Saturn's line, which indicates 'olde age' (fifty years to the 'ende of natural life' and a time of 'sadnesse, and covetousnesse: yea the wearing out of pleasures'). There are also two lines below these, the one on the right also attributed to 'Saturne' and ascribed to the father and the one on the left deriving from 'the Moone' and ascribed to the mother.

These lines help one to determine various facets of another. For example, they may be interpreted in order to discern how long a person may live, for 'If two lynes shall the lyke stretch a long the foreheade: doe then promise such a person to lyve unto the age of threé score and ten yeres'.<sup>25</sup> They may also communicate the status of a person's interpersonal relations, as seen when Hill asserts, 'If any two lynes of the forhead, are néere joyning together, in any part: doe then demonstrate discorde, and contention, with many persons'.<sup>26</sup> And these lines could helpfully signal a person's fortune in both general and specific terms, as seen when Hill notes, 'If the two neather lynes (next the nose) be whole, and that these, forme as it were an angle and cone above: doe then denote [...] that such persons to have a notable fortune unto the attaining and purchasing both of riches, and promotions'.<sup>27</sup> Hill must have believed in a broader cultural interest in metoposcopy, for at the end of both the chapter and the treatise he explains that one of his many forthcoming texts will be 'A pleasaunt Treatise of Metoposcopie, or a divining and judging on all the lynes séene in the foreheade, written into sundrie Aphorismes, for a readier instructions unto such as be desirous of the skill of this Art, unknowne to many'. This new work would include an addition comprised of a translation of 'singuler Mathematicane' and astronomer 'Thaddeus Nemicus Hagecius, of Hagek', who was known for his *Aphorismi*

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Hill, *The contemplation of mankind* (London, 1571), 41r.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 42r.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 43v.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 42v.

*Metoposcopic* published in 1561. Though Hill apparently did not publish this text, the exact metoposcopic assertions made in *The contemplation of mankind* reappeared under a new name in 1613 when Hill published *A pleasant history declaring the whole art of phisiognomy*. These two texts were thus crucial for communicating the methods for metoposcopic practice and delineating how these methods could be helpful in making informed, perhaps even auspicious, decisions when negotiating one's social connections.

The accuracy and usefulness of astrological physiognomy prompted debate amongst early moderns. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), for example, Robert Burton takes a cautious approach toward the practice. He firmly states that he will not 'apologize for Judiciall Astrology', and then asserts that the stars 'doe incline, but not compell'.<sup>28</sup> For those interested in attempting to use astrology to discern the future, he points to the 'signes' which can be taken from 'Phisiognomy, Metoposcopy, [and] Chiromancy'.<sup>29</sup> He then further details specific physiognomic concepts, including the fact that 'Thaddeus Haggiesius in his Metoposcofia, hath certaine Aphorismes derived from Saturnes lines in the fore-head, by which he collects a melancholy disposition'.<sup>30</sup> Here, we see a connection to Hill's text in the reference to Thaddeus Haggiesius. More importantly, however, Burton's comments suggest a continuing interest in metoposcopy, though he refuses to go as far as to fully affirm the practice.

While Burton seems ambivalent, neither rejecting nor embracing physiognomic practice, by and large, scepticism about physiognomy's prognosticating abilities abounded. In *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Francis Bacon explains that one branch of knowledge regarding the relationship between body and mind is how '*the one discloseth the other*', with physiognomy serving as a central art in this branch of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> The problem, however, is that physiognomy has 'of later time beene used to be coupled with superstitious and fantastickall arts'. But Bacon reassures the reader that 'being purged and restored to [its] true state; [it has] a solide ground in nature, and a profitable use in life'.<sup>32</sup> Though Bacon does not mention the 'superstitious and fantastickall arts' by name, he most likely means that physiognomy has been purged of its connection to fortunetelling.

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy what it is. With all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and severall cures of it. In three maine partitions with their severall sections, members, and subsections. Philosophically, medicinally, historically, opened and cut up. By Democritus Junior. With a satyricall preface, conducing to the following discourse* (Oxford, 1621), p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.

<sup>31</sup> Francis Bacon, *The twoo bookes of Francis Bacon. Of the proficience and aduancement of Learning, diuine and humane To the King* (London, 1605), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 36-7.

Negative attitudes toward physiognomy's use in this manner abounded. A poem in John Hall's *The Courte of Vertue* (1565) which attacks judicial astrology specifically mentions 'Palmestry', 'Chyromancies gaude', and 'foolysh Physiognomye' as arts used to 'Dlude the common multitude.'<sup>33</sup> In *Daemonologie* (1597), James VI and I excoriates those that 'truste so much to their [the stars'] influences, as thereby to fore-tell what common-weales shall flourish or decay: what persones shall be fortunate or unfortunate: what side shall winne in anie battell... What way, and of what age shall men die... and diverse such like incredible things'.<sup>34</sup> He identifies several branches of this type of astrological practice, including 'Cheiromancie, Geomantie, Hydromantie, Arithmantie, [and] Physiognomie', all of which he affirms 'is utterlie unlawful to be trusted in, or practized amongst christians'.<sup>35</sup> And in *The Spanish Mandevile of Miracles* (1600), Antonio de Torquemada insists that it is only through the devil's influence that 'by the lines of the hand onely, it were not possible to divine so right, though somtimes also the things simply thereby conjectured may prove true: neyther can the Phisiognomers affirme, that the same must needs be true, which by their Science appeareth likely to happen'.<sup>36</sup> What this commentary demonstrates is that while physiognomy's ability to reveal a person's nature may have been somewhat accepted (as seen with Bacon), its coupling with astrology in order to divine the future provoked the most visceral responses to the practice.

The depiction of astrological physiognomy, and specifically metoposcopy, in early modern drama is likewise vexed. Early modern drama does not reference astrological physiognomic or metoposcopic concepts as readily as it does either physiognomy or other astrological elements, though references do appear.<sup>37</sup> One example can be found in George Chapman's *Byron's Conspiracy* (1608). As the king, Henry, and his counsellor Savoy discuss Byron, Savoy remarks:

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<sup>33</sup> John Hall, *The Courte of Vertue* (London, 1565), p. 156.

<sup>34</sup> James I, King of England, *Daemonologie in forme of a dialogue, diuided into three bookes* (Edinburgh, 1597), p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Antonio de Torquemada, *The Spanish Mandevile of miracles. Or The garden of curious flowers VVherin are handled sundry points of humanity, philosophy, diuinitie, and geography, beautified with many strange and pleasant histories. First written in Spanish, by Anthonio De Torquemada, and out of that tongue translated into English. It was dedicated by the author, to the right honourable and reuerent prelate, Don Diego Sarmiento de soto Maior, Bishop of Astorga. &c. It is deuided into sixe treatises, composed in manner of a dialogue, as in the next page shall appeare* (London, 1600), Ee3r, Ee4v.

<sup>37</sup> References to astrological physiognomy may look conventional due to the way that it involves both the common language of astrology and the pervasive discourse of physiognomy. Their uniqueness lies in the way astrological physiognomy combines both of these occult practices so that it becomes a distinct practice of its own that invites divination through the body.

Your Majestie hath with the greatest life  
Describ'd a wicked man...  
And those strange Characters, writ in his face,  
which' at first sight, were hard for me to reade,  
The Doctrine of your speech, hath made so plaine,  
That I run through them like my naturall language:  
Nor do I like that mans Aspect, me thinkes,  
Of all lookes where the Beames of Starres have carv'd  
Their powrefull influences.<sup>38</sup>

Though Savoy admits to being a poor metoposcopic reader—the ‘characters’ in Byron’s ‘face’ proved ‘hard for [him] to reade’—there can be little doubt that this moment refers directly to metoposcopic practice. The ‘strange characters’ or astrological signs are found on Byron’s ‘face’ in a manner similar to the lines and angles seen on the brow in Hill’s text. Moreover, Savoy specifically refers to Byron’s ‘Aspect’, a reference to the particular ‘look’ of a face, a word which in and of itself often carried with it astrological connotations. Especially interesting is the fact that Savoy describes this supernatural interaction through the language of writing. The graphic ‘characters’ are ‘writ’ through the agency of the stars. It is also a moment of physiognomic tutelage, suggesting the ease with which one can develop the practice. Though the signs were initially ‘hard’ for Savoy to read, after King Henry makes their significance clear, Savoy declares that he quickly becomes a good metoposcopic reader, asserting that the characters on Byron’s face are now ‘made so plaine’ that they are akin to the ‘naturall language’ to which Savoy is accustomed. But Savoy is not the only one learning physiognomic reading. The moment also implies that the Savoy’s astral education works to train the audience in the same method. Through Savoy’s remarks and exposition, the signs of astrological physiognomy become their language as well.

Chapman’s depiction of astrological physiognomy differs somewhat from the Eastern tradition and Hill’s characterization of the practice. While it retains the cosmological elements, we do not find any mention of a divine source as we do in the Eastern tradition. Moreover, Savoy does not use metoposcopy for prognostication but instead for the more traditional physiognomic function of discerning an individual’s moral disposition. And finally, the practice initially seems difficult to employ without proper direction, for Savoy points to his need for astrological physiognomic training, and in doing so, teaches the audience in turn. The moment thus suggests the importance of tracts like Hill’s that explain astrological physiognomic reading. Once learned, however, the practice appears

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<sup>38</sup> George Chapman, *The conspiracie, and tragedie of Charles Duke of Byron* (London, 1608), sig B3r.

easy to enact, thus pointing to its usefulness in allowing one to navigate interpersonal relations.

One finds a briefer but more explicit reference to metoposcopy in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (c. 1601). The tellingly named Face, in an attempt to cozen the tobacco proprietor Abel, brings him to Subtle to have Abel's fortune read. After first gazing upon Abel, Subtle declares immediately that Abel is a 'fortunate fellow' and will find his way 'toward riches'. When Face remarks on the alacrity with which Subtle was able to prognosticate, Subtle explains that he could do so by using 'Metaposcopie, which I doe worke by / A certaine Starre i'the forehead, which you see not', and he then asserts metoposcopy's ability by assuring them, 'Your Ches-nut, or your Olive-colour'd face / Do's never fayle'.<sup>39</sup> In this reference, the practice is mentioned by name, and with it, we find an emphasis on both the face and forehead. Furthermore, Subtle makes the astrological connection clear when he points to the otherwise unseen 'Starre I'the forehead'. Yet Jonson's characterization of metoposcopic reading differs significantly from the depiction in *Byron's Conspiracy*. In *The Alchemist*, we find an instance in which characters use metoposcopy for its typical purpose—to prognosticate another's future. But the moment is obviously a ruse, with Subtle and Face taking advantage of a belief in its prognosticatory function. It thus suggests the disrepute and falsity of the practice, as Abel certainly does not come into a fortune. It also depicts metoposcopic reading as specialized knowledge, for while the characters on Byron's face are evident to both King Henry and Savoy, Subtle makes it clear that he is the only one who can see the star in Abel's forehead, which works to account for the fact that it is not truly there. These two very different references to astrological physiognomy not only demonstrate its presence in drama, but also the continuities and divergences in the rhetoric employed to describe the practice. They likewise convey how astrological physiognomy was tied to issues of reading and writing, the transmission of knowledge (including to the audience), the veracity of prognostication, and the stars' ability or inability to shape the individual, both materially and otherwise.

### **Fortunate Faces: Astrological Physiognomy in *Tamburlaine***

Unlike the momentary references in Chapman's and Jonson's works, the language of astrological physiognomy and its attendant concerns pervade Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part 1*, a play providing one of the earliest and most significant explorations of Eastern

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<sup>39</sup> Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist* (London, 1612), C3v-C3r.

culture in early modern drama.<sup>40</sup> Astrological physiognomic discourse governs many of the interpersonal interactions in *Tamburlaine Part 1*. In fact, through a network of references, we can trace its use across a range of characters. Theridamas's first encounter with Tamburlaine introduces the importance of general physiognomic reading in the play when he notes Tamburlaine's 'looks', which 'do menace heaven and dare the gods', as well as his 'fiery eyes' which 'are fixed upon the earth, / As if he now devised some stratagem' (1.2.157-59).<sup>41</sup> Though not astrological in nature, Theridamas's reaction can be categorized as broadly physiognomic due to his observation of Tamburlaine's 'looks' and facial features. The moment's physiognomic nature is evidenced by Theridamas's belief that Tamburlaine's features reveal his character (he menaces heaven) and thoughts (he devises stratagems).<sup>42</sup> This physical reading of Tamburlaine allows Theridamas to take his fortune into his own hands, for he almost immediately switches allegiance from Mycetes to Tamburlaine. This moment underscores the importance of attending to the signs, the 'pride and richest furniture', that nature provides as a means for navigating both social interactions and one's future or fortune (1.2.156). In other words, it points to the importance of physiognomy as a means of interpretation that allows informed action.

Tamburlaine in turn engages in physiognomic interpretation when he gazes upon Theridamas and observes, 'Noble and mild this Persian seems to be, / If outward habit judge the inward man' (1.2.162). This comment signals Tamburlaine's approval of physiognomic reading. Doubt may remain with the qualifier 'If outward habit judge the inward man', yet Tamburlaine appears to be convinced that it in fact *does* so when he asks Theridamas:

Art thou but captain of a thousand horse,  
That by characters graven in thy brows  
And by thy martial face and stout aspect  
Deserv'st to have the leading of an host? (1.2.168-71)

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<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Burton concurs concerning *Tamburlaine's* influence, stating, 'the *Tamburlaine* plays may be cited as the most influential of the early Turkish plays. They were enormously popular, frequently revived, often imitated, and occasionally parodied'. See Burton, *Traffic and Turning: Islam and English Drama, 1579-1624* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 53. Emily Bartels likewise notes that Tamburlaine was 'one of the most prominent subjects of the Renaissance's Eastern discourse, and, after Marlowe, on the Elizabethan stage'. See Bartels, 'The Double Vision of the East: Imperialist Self-Construction in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*', *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992): 3-24 (p. 5).

<sup>41</sup> All references to the play are taken from *Tamburlaine the Great, Part 1* in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 1-68.

<sup>42</sup> In fact, it is interesting to note that Theridamas's language appears to play off of the astrological physiognomic tradition in that instead of understanding the stars as influencing Tamburlaine, he sees Tamburlaine as influencing or menacing the stars or 'heavens'.

Several elements signal the astrological physiognomic context of this facial observation. As we have seen, the Eastern tradition of astrological physiognomy holds that the stars' influence shapes a person's forehead by leaving a legible imprint or character. These are the 'characters' that Tamburlaine sees 'graven' in Theridamas's brows. Though one may claim that these characters are figurative, as the *OED* does, if Tamburlaine examines Theridamas's forehead in order to look for, say, the wrinkles, angles, or cones present in his forehead, as found in Hill's text, then 'character' would in fact refer to the literal and material astral imprints apparent on Theridamas.<sup>43</sup>

Editors David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen also read the moment as astrological in their gloss of the graven characters, explaining that they are 'distinctive marks (suggesting also the astrological of the planets)' (s.v. 1.2.169). By understanding the context of astrological physiognomy, we can interpret these lines with more certainty. These characters do not 'suggest' an astrological influence; they directly indicate it. Furthermore, this influence is not merely the kind that signals astrological 'type', which could be discerned through one's humoral makeup alone. Instead, because of the direct reference to the 'characters' present, we know that what Tamburlaine sees are symbols give him even more strategic knowledge since they allow him to prognosticate Theridamas's fortune. Moreover, by positing a cause and effect through his stressing that the characters have been 'graven', Tamburlaine also clearly signals the Eastern context behind his metoposcopic readings by pointing to the agency of the divine force that has crafted these characters. Theridamas's 'brows' further point to the moment's astrological physiognomic context, for it is the very metoposcopic location identified by both astrological physiognomic tradition and Hill's text for reading astrological symbols. The invocation of key terminology and concepts of astrological physiognomy thus clearly signal that Tamburlaine performs a metoposcopic reading. In turn, this context allows us to fill in the unexplained logic behind Tamburlaine's actions. This is not a moment of mere rhetoric. By knowing that metoposcopy was encouraged as a means of discerning the most advantageous social connections to make, we can see that Tamburlaine deploys this occult practice in the very way Hill notes physiognomy was intended. In other words, while Tamburlaine certainly employs rhetoric as a strategic means of achieving his rise to power, this moment demonstrates that metoposcopy is an additional and much more material tool Tamburlaine keeps at his disposal.

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<sup>43</sup> Marlowe actually uses 'character' in a literal sense meaning 'the astrological symbol of a planet' in *Doctor Faustus* when Faustus asks for a 'booke where I might see al characters and planets of the heavens'. See 'Character', (*OED* n.5).

Tamburlaine's interest in Theridamas's 'martial face and stout aspect' further emphasizes the physiognomic importance of this moment. Tamburlaine's consideration of Theridamas's 'martial face' returns attention to the site of the body most commonly associated with physiognomic reading. 'Stout aspect' may function in the same way, for the term 'aspect' refers to the face, of which the forehead was considered a part. In fact, the *OED* cites Tamburlaine's line as the first example of this usage. But the use of 'aspect' also underscores the astrological undertones of the comment. In astrological terms, 'aspect' refers to 'The relative positions of the heavenly bodies as they appear to an observer on the earth's surface at a given time'.<sup>44</sup> Though this may not be the denotation employed by Tamburlaine, it can be seen as a connotation of 'aspect,' especially when coupled with the 'characters graven' on Theridamas's brows. Explaining the etymology of *aspect*, the *OED* states that 'The astrological sense was apparently the earliest, and often coloured the others'. Bevington and Rasmussen acknowledge this colouring, commenting that Theridimas's 'stout aspect' is a 'brave expression (suggesting also astrological influence and position)' (s.v. 1.2.170). Once again, astrological influence is not merely suggested; it is the direct cause. The discourse employed leaves little doubt that Tamburlaine uses the Eastern tradition of astrological physiognomy in order to make his first ally. This is crucial, for if we understand the significance of astrological physiognomy to Tamburlaine, and relatedly, the beliefs underpinning the practice, we can begin to grasp exactly *why* Tamburlaine obsessively invokes the stars. Certainly, Tamburlaine flatters Theridamas in order to draw him to his side by pointing to the 'folly of thy emperor' in not acknowledging his worth. Yet it would be a mistake to discount the physiognomic certainty that Tamburlaine asserts as mere flattery, for Tamburlaine uses his reading of Theridamas's face to divine his own future or fortune and build his plans for advancement, and in doing so, determines Theridamas's future as well. The point, then, is that in contrast to early modern physiognomic sceptics, and in keeping with the express purpose outlined in physiognomic texts, the play presents metoposcopic reading as a powerful means of negotiating social, and in this case political, allegiances.

Further emphasizing astrological physiognomy's significance, Cosroe engages in two such readings. Speaking to Menaphon, Cosroe comments that Tamburlaine is 'The man that in the forehead of his fortune / Bears figures of renown and miracle' (2.1.3,4). Though metaphoric, Cosroe's comment echoes Tamburlaine's observation of the 'characters graven' in Theridamas's brows. One may see characters while the other sees figures, but both interpret the markings upon another's forehead. Moreover, while emphasizing the importance of astrological physiognomy to the world that Marlowe creates for his play, the metaphor also more clearly links astrological physiognomy, the forehead, and

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<sup>44</sup> 'Aspect' (*OED*, n. 4, 10).



divination of the future. Cosroe's comment draws attention to Tamburlaine's 'fortune'. This word can mean 'Chance, hap, or luck, regarded as a cause of events and changes in men's affairs'.<sup>45</sup> Yet Cosroe's use of 'fortune' seems to indicate something other than 'chance' or 'luck.' Cosroe, in fact, reads the 'forehead' of Tamburlaine's 'fortune' and appears to divine a future for Tamburlaine filled with 'renown and miracle' due to the characters found in that very forehead. In this instance, it seems as if 'fortune' more likely means, 'That which is to befall a person in the future', a future that, due to astrological signs, Cosroe interprets will be successful for Tamburlaine.<sup>46</sup>

Yet Cosroe remains unsatisfied with his metaphoric reading. He asks Menaphon, 'But tell me, that hast seen him, Menaphon, / What stature yields he, and what personage?' (2.1.5-6). In his response, Menaphon draws an explicit connection between Tamburlaine and the stars, for they can be found in his eyes or 'his piercing instruments of sight', which encompass 'A heaven of heavenly bodies in their spheres / That guides his steps and actions to the throne / where honour sits invested royally' (2.1.14, 16-18). Connections to astrological physiognomy can be seen not only in the stars leading 'to the throne', but also in the fact that Tamburlaine's body allows for interpretation of the future since he is 'In every part proportioned like the man' that 'should'—or is 'destined to' (s.v. 2.1.30)—'make the world subdued to Tamburlaine' (2.1.29-30). Similar to both Theridamas and Tamburlaine, Cosroe accepts the physiognomic reading, claiming that Menaphon has described 'The face and personage of a wondrous man', (2.1.32), and thereby decides to side with Tamburlaine. The play is thus consistent in depicting astrological physiognomy as instrumental to negotiating precarious and high stakes social connections.

Like Theridamas and Tamburlaine, Cosroe accepts the validity of both astro-physiognomic and general physiognomic reading, claiming that Menaphon described 'The face and personage of a wondrous man' and subsequently declaring that Tamburlaine is divinely guided, for 'Nature doth strive with Fortune and his stars / To make him famous in accomplished worth' (2.1.32-34). It is only through applying the context of astrological physiognomy to these lines that the threads come together. Nature created Tamburlaine's body, which in turn physiognomically reveals his inward nature to others. And in a specifically astrological vein, Nature works in an intimate relationship with Fortune, whose favour can be read in the astral signs left upon Tamburlaine's forehead. More than anything else, it is this physiognomic 'reading' of Tamburlaine that influences Cosroe. In distinction from Theridamas, Cosroe does not even have to see Tamburlaine in person; he merely hears a description of Tamburlaine, at best seeing

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<sup>45</sup> 'Fortune', (OED n. 1a).

<sup>46</sup> 'Fortune', (OED n. 3d).

Tamburlaine's body in his mind's eye, and believes that Menaphon's report reveals Tamburlaine's character and future. Certainly, it should be acknowledged that this reading appears hyperbolic. Menaphon describes Tamburlaine as the figure of perfection, and Tamburlaine's encompassing of the cosmos makes him seem like a quasi-divine figure. Yet the hyperbole seems appropriate in a play that relishes a bombastic mode, and the hyperbole proves true when Tamburlaine actually does become the emperor of the East. It is this ultimate 'truthfulness', the correct reading of his fortune if you will, that validates the physiognomic reading, astrological and otherwise, no matter how hyperbolic.

These moments and references allow us to see that in the play, metoposcopic readings prove to be important tools for discernment. Significantly, they work across ethnic and class divides, functioning as propitiously for the Persian royal Cosroe as they do for the Persian servant Theridamas or the 'lowly' Scythian shepherd Tamburlaine. In other words, they allow these men the power of judgment, which in turn provides them with the agency to participate in shaping their futures by making decisions, choosing sides, and determining roles in what they smartly see as a divinely-ordained, inevitable war.

### **'Chiefest' Gods and 'smiling stars': Astrological Physiognomy, the Divine, and Fortune**

Theridamas's, Tamburlaine's, and Cosroe's employment of astrological physiognomy as a means of determining their future points to the play's representation of fortune that differs starkly from the common image of the fickle Fortune's wheel. An understanding of fortune as easily changeable led early modern writers to often characterize both the concept and figure as opposed to God by claiming a belief in Fortune's power as incompatible with traditional Christian beliefs about God's role in an individual's life. Take, for example, the interlocutor Aser's assertion in Pierre de La Primaudaye's *French academie* (1586) that Fortune is merely 'a fayned device of mans spirite', which in turn should lead man to 'confesse, that all things are guided & governed by the providence of God, who knoweth and ordereth casuall thinges necessarily'.<sup>47</sup> Antagonism toward Fortune's fickleness was also found in her representations, such as her personification as a woman, her wheel, and importantly, her unfixed, unreadable face. Repeated references to Fortune's face(s) develop from her roots in antiquity, where, as Italian diplomat and writer Vincenzo Cartari in *The Fountaine of ancient fiction* (1599) explains, ancients believed her to be the bearer of all evil and good, 'Whereupon she was depicted with

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<sup>47</sup> Pierre de la Primaudaye, *The French academie* (London, 1586), p. 468.

some, as having two faces, the one white and well-favoured, the other blacke and disproportioned'.<sup>48</sup> In the early modern period, interest in Fortune's two-facedness remained. Poet Humphrey Gifford, in *A posie of gilflowers* (1580), describes Fortune as one 'Who in one hoode, a double face doth beare'.<sup>49</sup> She has a 'changing countenance',<sup>50</sup> according to Jesuit priest Robert Southwell, and poet Gervase Markham describes her as a 'double faced shroe'.<sup>51</sup> These descriptions demonstrate a keen interest in and antagonism towards Fortune's unstable, unreliable, illegible face, which depict her as a figure that would completely oppose and thwart physiognomic reading and practice.

Yet Tamburlaine does not have this vexed relationship to fortune. Early modern commentators often noted Tamburlaine's privileged relationship to fortune, as seen in Aser's statement, 'Will you see a most wonderful effect of fortune? Look upon the proceedings of that great Tamburlaine....'.<sup>52</sup> In his poem 'Of the instabilitie of Fortune and worldlie prosperitie', found in *Celestiall elegies of the goddesses and the Muses* (1598), Thomas Rogers categorizes Tamburlaine as one of the individuals favoured by Fortune, claiming, 'And Tamburlaine whom Fortune so did blesse / That he a Shepheard made great kings his slaves'.<sup>53</sup> And according to *The Mahutmetane or Turkish historie* (1600), Tamburlaine's nickname Temircutlu translates into 'the Fortunate sword'.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Vincenzo Cartari, *The Fountaine of ancient fiction*, translated by Richard Linche (London, 1595), Z2v-Z3r.

<sup>49</sup> Humphrey Gifford, *A posie of gilflowers eche differing from other in colour and odour, yet all sweete. By Humfrey Gifford gent* (London, 1580), 44v.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Southwell, *Saint Peters complaynt. With other poems* (London, 1595), p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Albott, p. 98.

<sup>52</sup> Primaudaye, p. 475.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Rogers, *Celestiall elegies of the goddesses and the Muses de-deploring [sic] the death of the right honourable and vertuous ladie the Ladie Fraunces Countesse of Hertford, late wife unto the right honorable Edward Seymor Vicount Beauchamp and Earle of Hertford. Whereunto are annexed some funerall verses touching the death of Mathew Evvens Esquire, late one of the barons of her Majesties Court of Eschequer, unto whome the author hereof was allyed. By Thomas Rogers Esquire* (London, 1598), Dr-D2v.

<sup>54</sup> *The Mahumetane or Turkish historie containing three bookes: 1 Of the originall and beginning of the Turkes, and of the foure empires which are issued and proceded out of the superstitious sect of Mahumet. 2 Of their conquests and the succession of the house of Ottoman, untill the present reigning of Mahumet the third. 3 Of the warres and seege of Malta, which Solyman the great made to the great maister and brothers of that order. Heerevnto have I annexed a briefe discourse of the warres of Cypres, at what time Selimus the second, tooke from the Venetians the possession of that iland, and by reason thereof I haue adjoynded a finall discourse conteining the causes of the greatnesse of the Turkish Empire. Translated from the French & Italian tongues, by R. Carr, of the middle Temple in London, Gentleman. Dedicated to the three worthy brothers Robert Carr, William Carr and Edward Carr, in the county of Lincolne, Esquires* (London, 1600), p. 32.

Critics have also noted that Tamburlaine appears to defy Fortune's wheel. Stephen Greenblatt argues, 'he [Tamburlaine] rises to the top of the wheel of fortune and then steadfastly refuses to budge'.<sup>55</sup> I counter, however, that Tamburlaine defies the common understanding of Fortune's wheel not because he participates in and then rebels against it but instead because his understanding of fortune is, at least in part, reformulated through the precepts of astrological physiognomy.

The concept of fortune as understood through astrological physiognomy differs from the concept of fortune put forth by the *Rota Fortunae* in numerous ways. In a significant change similar to Christian understandings of providence, astrological physiognomy de-allegorizes fortune so that it no longer functions as a force with authority. In other words, fortune is no longer a mystical power with its own agency that wreaks havoc as it will. Instead, a divine power determines and controls an individual's fortune, even going so far as to inscribe that fortune on the body. As such, in astrological physiognomy, fortune and the divine are no longer opposed. Early modern English physiognomic tracts are not clear about the relationship between the divine and fortune, however. But considering physiognomy as a particular instantiation of the belief in signatures and correspondences can help us understand the underlying connections physiognomic texts leave unarticulated.

Peter Harrison explains that the body, including bodily symbols, provided knowledge about the natural world, which would in turn point to 'spiritual realities'.<sup>56</sup> Thus, physiognomy allowed people to gain spiritual truth through natural truth. As Leonard Barkan articulates it, 'If God is in the world and the world is in man, then both man's body and the world's must be exhaustively read and analyzed if man is to grasp God'.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, astrological physiognomy provides a second form of knowledge: knowledge about the future, another important truth that could be 'gleaned from the study of resemblances'.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Harrison identifies the stars or 'celestial spheres' as the source by which knowledge of the future could be ascertained. With this historical context, we can see that metoposcopic characters were directly connected to divine contemplation, thereby reconciling the concepts of fortune and the divine.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, their legibility

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005), p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>57</sup> Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1975), p. 26.

<sup>58</sup> Harrison, p. 53.

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

creates another significant difference in a person's relationship to fortune. Fortune personified does not have a readable face, yet astrological physiognomy takes this concept and twists it so that fortune becomes knowable through readable faces. The very feature that thwarts knowing fortune in early modern thought therefore becomes the feature that allows a person to know his or her fortune or that of another.

And that ability to know becomes the crucial difference: astrological physiognomy allows fortune to become much more accessible. Fortune need not be guessed at; it can be read in the characters engraved by the stars on the face or brows. Through this reading, people can decide on the most advantageous social relations, in turn empowering them to determine, at least in part, the course of their own fortunes. Thus, astrological physiognomy provides much more agency to the individual and his (or her) relation to fortune than other understandings of fortune at the time. I do not mean, however, to simplify the issue by suggesting that the individual wrests agency from fortune. The very premise of astrological physiognomy is that a divine force determines a person's fortune, the stars, and their bodily characters. But these characters allow reading, and reading invites informed action, thereby creating a much more complex, intricate, and empowered relationship between the individual and fortune than otherwise imagined.<sup>60</sup>

But the very reformulation of fortune that makes astrological physiognomy an egalitarian practice also complicates it through its emphasis on divine favour. Perhaps this complication should come as no surprise, for Tamburlaine's invocation of and relationship to the divine has proven to be one of the knottiest problems critics have observed in the play. James Robinson Howe notes that 'Tamburlaine is not consistent about the source of his power and vision'.<sup>61</sup> Mark Thornton Burnett claims that this inconsistency on Tamburlaine's part causes disorder so that 'uncertainty and theological confusion co-exist, with no clear sense either of a deity or of a divinely governed scheme'.<sup>62</sup> Simon Shepherd goes a step further, declaring, 'there is no clear God in the

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<sup>60</sup> This understanding of fortune shares similarities with Allen Cameron's discussion of the *fortunati*. Cameron argues that the *fortunati* are men that Nature has begotten to be particularly fortunate. These men do not need to follow any prescribed code of conduct, and in an important parallel to my own discussion of fortune, they are 'governed by the stars'. My own reading of Tamburlaine's relationship to fortune differs by providing a more detailed explication of the relationship between the stars and the fortunate individual and by further addressing the importance of agency in the relationship between the individual and fortune. See Cameron, 'Renaissance Remedies for Fortune: Marlowe and the "Fortunati"', *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941), 188-97 (p. 192).

<sup>61</sup> James Robinson Howe, *Marlowe, Tamburlaine, and Magic* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976), p. 56.

<sup>62</sup> 'Tamburlaine the Great Parts 1 and 2' in *The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Patrick Cheney (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), pp. 127-43 (p. 140)

play, no one is seen to “term” him—his authority is simply asserted’.<sup>63</sup> And Vitkus echoes these observations, explaining, ‘The apostrophic rhetoric deployed in so many different situations [in regards to God] is not only shown to be impotent—it is also inconsistent and contradictory....’, thereby creating ‘uncertainty and multiplicity in the text’s location of metaphysical presence’.<sup>64</sup> Clearly, Tamburlaine’s invocation of the divine, the stars, and his own fortune creates a conundrum that various scholars observe and repudiate but cannot explain entirely.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, Tamburlaine’s slippery language moves between God, Jove, Mahomet, and the gods with critically-confusing ease. Yet comprehension of the specifically Eastern formulation of astrological physiognomy begins to unravel part of the knotty perplexity of Tamburlaine’s references, at least as they appear in *Part I*, by explaining the sequential relationship between three terms critics have lumped together: the divine, fortune, and the stars. As previously mentioned, astrological physiognomy asserts that a divine force (a culture’s respective god or gods) determines a favourable fortune and related horoscope for privileged individuals, which is in turn signified by characters found on the face or forehead. Thus, Tamburlaine’s references to a divine force—whether it be God, the gods, or Jove—the stars, and fortune cannot be dismissed as imprecise elision or mere rhetorical manipulation. These references instead speak to the distinct relationship Tamburlaine sees between these three forces as explained through astrological physiognomy.

An understanding of this belief brings Tamburlaine’s seemingly conflicting claims into relief. In attempting to assure Cosroe of Mycetes’s defeat, he states, ‘For fates and oracles of heaven have sworn / To royalize the deeds of Tamburlaine, / And make them blest that share in his attempts’ (2.3.7-9). In this statement, both ‘oracles of heaven’ and ‘fates’ refer to the divine powers who have ordained Tamburlaine’s success, while ‘fates’ also invokes the concept of fortune. He later remarks to Theridamas, ‘For “will” and “shall” best fitteth Tamburlaine, / Whose smiling stars gives him assured hope / Of martial triumph ere he meet his foes’ (3.3.41-43). Through astrological physiognomy, we understand that divine ordination lies behind the assurance of the ‘smiling stars,’ which signify that favour. When Bajazeth curses Tamburlaine and hopes that poison would be poured ‘in this glorious tyrant’s throat!’ (4.2.7), Tamburlaine responds by proclaiming,

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<sup>63</sup> Simon Shepherd, *Marlowe and the Politics of Elizabethan Theater* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986), p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. also Bartels, ‘The Double Vision of the East’, especially 15-16; Lisa Hopkins, *Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 46, and Burton, *Traffic and Turning*, especially p. 69.

‘The chiefest God [...] / Will sooner burn the glorious frame of heaven / than it should so conspire my overthrow’ (4.2.8-11). Though a pompous claim, this rebuttal reflects Tamburlaine’s astrological physiognomic belief. The placement of the ‘frame of heaven’ or stars would by his logic *have* to change if God were to alter his providential plan, since in Tamburlaine’s mind the two prove intimately connected. This belief in a divine influence on his life explains why Tamburlaine repeatedly engages in metoposcopic reading and trusts astrological physiognomic symbols. They are divinely-inscribed signs legible in the sky and on one’s face that guide his way and presage his rule.

Yet Tamburlaine’s articulations also complicate the dynamics of astrological physiognomy’s representation in the play. While astrological physiognomic readings work across ethnic and class divides, Tamburlaine’s explication of his relationship to the stars and the divine rests on the concept of privilege. The influence of the stars, and in turn the characters on a person’s forehead, are only propitious if the divine force wills it so. In other words, Tamburlaine’s references to the stars, fortune, and the divine are merely a way of drawing attention to the heavenly advantage granted him. Thus, astrological physiognomy can be used to demonstrate that status does in fact matter, as Tamburlaine himself reminds those around him by continually pointing to his auspicious, divinely-granted fortune. Ultimately, then, neither the astrological physiognomic nor the *Rota Fortunae* formulation of fortune conceive an individual as having full control over his or her fate. This proves to be an ideological crux for Tamburlaine, for he declares, ‘I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains, / And with my hand turn Fortune’s wheel about’ (1.2.174-5). In this remark, Tamburlaine characterizes himself as more powerful than either view of fortune. He holds the ‘Fates’ or divine power of astrological physiognomy ‘bound fast’ while at the same time turning ‘Fortune’s wheel’ with his own hand. Neither approach works for neither allows for his total control. And the problem is only worse for those who are not as ‘obviously’ divinely favoured as Tamburlaine. Though astrological physiognomy may provide individuals with a new degree of agency through informed action, that agency over one’s fortune is also circumscribed by the fact one may not be privileged by the governing divine force.

By negotiating and thereby achieving his empery of the Near East at least partially through physiognomic means, Tamburlaine exposes the competing ways that astrological physiognomy can subvert hierarchy while also establishing it. On the one hand, it allows *all* individuals regardless of class to ‘read’ others, which provides them with the agency to help shape their fortunes through advantageous interpersonal connections. On the other hand, astrological physiognomy invests in and depends upon the idea of divine privilege. The astrological physiognomic context of the play thus reveals the empowering but also circumscribed ways in which astrological physiognomy could allow one to navigate,

question, manipulate, even defy, but simultaneously also reify issues of class, status, and power. Thus, even as the context of astrological physiognomy demystifies Tamburlaine's unique relationship to fortune and, in turn, his seemingly contradictory and supposedly manipulative rhetoric in regards to the supernatural, it muddles the actual value of using metoposcopy for negotiating interpersonal relations to one's best advantage, thereby bringing into question the very purpose purported for physiognomic reading.

### **The Science of Characters and Lines: Conclusion**

Though the value of metoposcopic reading for those who are not Tamburlaine may seem murky at best, the context of astrological physiognomy undoubtedly proves beneficial for the Scythian shepherd cum Emperor. As such, it allows us to not only clarify his rhetoric, as argued above, but also to more fully comprehend Tamburlaine and the strategic means by which he forms alliances and achieves power in *Tamburlaine Part 1*, specifically, the way he uses more than rhetoric as a tool in his social striving. Critical discussions of Tamburlaine's transformation from shepherd to ruler have largely focused on his rhetorical prowess as a means of achieving his newfound authority.<sup>66</sup> Thus, scholars tend to ignore the role of the material body in the play, and when they do attend to it, they emphasize the maimed or wounded body. Take, for example, Greenblatt's claim that 'the body [in *Tamburlaine*] is affirmed only in wounding and destroying it'.<sup>67</sup> Christopher J. Cobb similarly argues, 'In *Tamburlaine*, the materiality of the characters' bodies generally receives attention only at the moment of death'.<sup>68</sup> While these assertions may

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<sup>66</sup> Christopher J. Cobb, *The Staging of Romance in Late Shakespeare: Text and Theatrical Technique* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2007), p. 100. Cobb goes as far as to state that even the characters' bodies are 'products of visual and verbal rhetoric, as vehicles for the transmission of the heroic will' (p. 101). For notable discussions of rhetoric in *Tamburlaine*, see Harry Levin, *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953); Donald Peet, 'The Rhetoric of *Tamburlaine*', *ELH* 26.2 (1959), 137-55; Helen Watson-Williams, 'The Power of Words: A Reading of *Tamburlaine the Great Part 1*', *English* 22 (1973), 13-18; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; Jill L. Levenson, "'Working Words": The Verbal Dynamics of *Tamburlaine*', in *A Poet and a Filthy Play-Maker: New Essays on Christopher Marlowe*, ed. by Kenneth Freidenriech, Roma Gill, and Constance B. Kriyama (NY: AMS Press, 1988), pp. 99-116; David H. Thurn, 'Sights of Power in *Tamburlaine*', *English Literary Renaissance* 19.1 (1989), 3-12; Neil Rhodes, *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (NY: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992); and Sara Munson Deats, *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (Newark: U Delaware P, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Greenblatt, p. 211.

<sup>68</sup> Cobb, p. 100. In his article '*Tamburlaine* and the Body', Mark Thornton Burnett provides a notable exception to this approach, claiming that in attempting social mobility, Tamburlaine models himself as a 'classical body' in opposition to a 'grotesque body'. See '*Tamburlaine* and the Body', *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 33.1 (1991): 31-47 (p. 33). For further discussion of the maimed,



be true of the body's representation in *Tamburlaine Part 2*, as we have seen, the same cannot be said for *Tamburlaine Part 1*. The metoposcopic presence in the play leaves little doubt that the 'whole', uninjured body becomes a vital means by which Tamburlaine effects his empery of the Near East and by which Tamburlaine can envision himself as privileged in regards to fortune.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, however, astrological physiognomy disappears from the discourse of *Tamburlaine Part 2*. If Tamburlaine's at times positive attitude toward divine forces seems at odds with Marlowe's widely acknowledged unorthodoxy, then *Tamburlaine Part 2* is the response to this confusing dynamic. In it, Tamburlaine eschews physiognomic reading, mutilates the whole body valued so much in Part 1, and of course, infamously curses the gods and burns the 'Alcoran', which may all be contributing factors to his eventual fall (5.1.191). It might be that complex belief gives way to the much more common cultural scepticism concerning astrological physiognomy as evidenced in

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wounded, and penetrated body in *Tamburlaine* see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*; Burnett, *Constructing "Monsters" in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), especially pp. 33-64; Matthew Greenfield, 'Marlowe's Wound Knowledge', *PMLA* 119.2 (2004), 233-46; Cobb, *The Staging of Romance in Late Shakespeare*; Tanya Pollard, 'Enclosing the Body: Tudor Conceptions of Skin', in *A Companion to Tudor Literature*, ed. by Ken Cartwright (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 111-122, esp. pp. 118-19; Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008); and Matthew R. Martin, "'This Tragic Glass": Tragedy and Trauma in *Tamburlaine Part 1*' in *Staging Pain, 1580-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater*, ed. by James Robert Allerd and Matthew R. Martin (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 15-29.

<sup>69</sup> This article also participates in the continuing conversation about early modern subjectivity, which revisits and at times puts pressure on claims made in the 1980s and 90s about if and how early moderns perceived human subjectivity. One example of this reconsideration can be found in the *EMLS* Special Issue 9: 'Constructions of the Early Modern Subject' (2002). In an article for this issue entitled 'Critical Subjects', Douglas Bruster calls for scholars to 'read widely in a broader range of texts...learning whether, and how, the conventions accruing to representational forms affected these texts' presentation of selfhood, subjectivity, and identity' (para. 8 of 14). Exploring physiognomy, and with it, physiognomic tracts, is part of examining this wider range of texts. Most broadly, physiognomy can be defined as the practice of determining character through the form of the parts of the body, most especially the face. Astrological physiognomy differs somewhat in that it more directly reveals an individual's future or fortune. My examination of astrological physiognomic references in Renaissance physiognomic texts, however, demonstrates that astrological physiognomy could also signal a person's disposition, thus making the inward self materially manifest. These texts are also tutorial, explaining in detail how one person may 'read' and therefore interpret the astrological signs upon another. Thus, they suggest the importance of interpersonal relations to the question of subjectivity and epistemology, a dynamic to which, as mentioned above, Selleck has recently paid significant attention in *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne and Early Modern Culture*. As such, astrological physiognomy is part of a larger and ongoing discussion about how early moderns conceived of themselves and each other.

various early modern texts. After all, by and large, scholars tend to agree that by the turn of the century, investment in occult practices was undergoing significant changes. New science, with the ‘triumph of the mechanical philosophy,’ introduced a ‘general skeptical crisis’ that eventually disrupted the belief in correspondences,<sup>70</sup> the common narrative explains. Thus, ‘with the collapse of the microcosm theory went the destruction of the whole intellectual basis of astrology, chiromancy, alchemy, physiognomy, astral magic, and their associates’.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, as Harrison contends, the way individuals read nature changed once the Protestant investment in a literal reading of scripture took hold. ‘Natural objects,’ Harrison observes, were stripped ‘of all those associations from which they had derived their meanings,’ thereby reducing them to ‘that silent and unintelligible realm which was to become the subject of the modern science of nature’.<sup>72</sup> Critics, including Keith Thomas and Harrison, generally assign the predominance of these ideological changes to the seventeenth century. It is thus perhaps tempting to ignore the presence of astrological physiognomy in *Tamburlaine Part 1* in light of its absence in *Tamburlaine Part 2*, especially given that the publication and performance of these plays fits within the timeline for the paradigm shifts that scholars of the history of science identify.

Yet metoposcopy’s significance to *Tamburlaine Part 1* and to early modern culture more broadly deserves our attention, for it proved a potent fantasy. Consider the aspirational value that could have been found in the prospect that by reading astral signs on the face, a person may be able to take fortune into his or her own hands in order to strategically make social connections, and hopefully, as a result, to achieve a more preferable social position. This is the promise offered up not only to the characters within the play, but just as importantly to the audience attending the play.<sup>73</sup> They may not be as divinely privileged as Tamburlaine, but perhaps just as Tamburlaine reads Theridamas’s forehead, they too could read another’s brows in order to make a propitious interpersonal connection.

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<sup>70</sup> See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), p. 623; and Osler, p. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas, p. 643.

<sup>72</sup> Harrison, p. 107.

<sup>73</sup> Hopkins observes that the play invites the audience to view a tragic glass in which they may see either Tamburlaine or themselves. She notes, ‘If the play functions as a mirror, then what the audience will see in it is its own reflection; superimposed on the features of the barbarian Scythian will be those of the burghers and apprentices who frequented English playhouses’. Given the potentiality of identification created through this dramatic reflection, the promise of social mobility seemingly afforded to Tamburlaine by physiognomic practice would have resonated all that much more with audiences. See Hopkins, ‘“And shall I die, and this unconquered?”: Marlowe’s Inverted Colonialism’, *Early Modern Literary Studies* 2.2 (1996) 1.1-23 (para. 4 of 23).

And, despite the scholarly timeline set forth concerning the decline of occult practices, the desire for that promise's fulfilment did not disappear with the advent of the Scientific Revolution. In 1653, Richard Saunders published *Physiognomie and Chiromancie, Metoposcopiae*. In this text, he explains that metoposcopy is the 'Science of judging of things to come by the aspection of the forehead, as also of knowing the temperaments of anyone', and rather than the five lines Hill discussed, Saunders states that there are seven lines that represent seven planets.<sup>74</sup> The astrological characters serve various purposes and are given 'as marks of the Planets, and are the infallible signs of temperaments, and of mans life, that we discover, whereby we also know the duration and length thereof'.<sup>75</sup> Saunders strives to provide general principles for employing metoposcopy, such as explaining that the lines which 'are fortunate are those which are strait, or bend toward the Nose,' while those that are unfortunate are 'winding'.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, like Hill, he includes specifics that more clearly delineate the ramifications for interpersonal relations than any aphorism found in Hill, such as when he explains that 'If the line of *Mars* exceed the others, let that Captain that chooses Soldiers observe it: for those that are so are great Warriours', or, in a connection likewise echoing the metoposcopic interpretations found in *Tamburlaine Part 1*, 'The line of the *Sun* being perfect, long enough, and not interrupted or cut, signifies Honours and Riches given by Kings and Princes'.<sup>77</sup> These readings sound very similar to Tamburlaine's comments about Theridamas deserving honor and recognition through leading an army. Thus, despite the passage of over 60 years, the allure of metoposcopy, its promise of allowing one to make informed and judicious decisions when engaging with others, still held sway. It is as if the metoposcopic interest articulated in both Hill and *Tamburlaine Part 1*, respectively, fully flowers in a text like Saunders's. The continued cultural meaningfulness of astrological physiognomy thus invites us to continue probing the ways that it informed early modern thought, and in turn, how those ideologies, as fantastical as they might have been, made their way into and influenced both the page and the stage.

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<sup>74</sup> Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie, Metoposcopiae, The Symmetrical Proportions and Signal Moles of the Body, Fully and accurately handled; with their Natural-Predictive-Significations. The Subject of Dreams; Divinative Steganographical, and Lullian Sciences. Whereunto is added The Arte of Memorie* (London, 1653) p. 160.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.