



38. James Sayers, "The Mask", May 21, 1783

the remarkably quick end – of the particular set of eighteenth-century pre-suppositions and expectations that I have labeled the *ancien régime* of identity. Even if not quite what Somerville intended, this is one way to understand his recollection that the American war resulted in the loss of "all sense of personal identity": for which, read personal identity in its very specific eighteenth-century sense. In place of the *ancien régime* of identity, the pressures of these events ushered in the swift re-anchoring of notions of personal identity in what may be seen as more "modern", essentializing foundations. A new regime of identity was on the horizon.

## 7

*The Modern Regime of Selfhood*

## Soundings of a New Order: Twelve Fragments

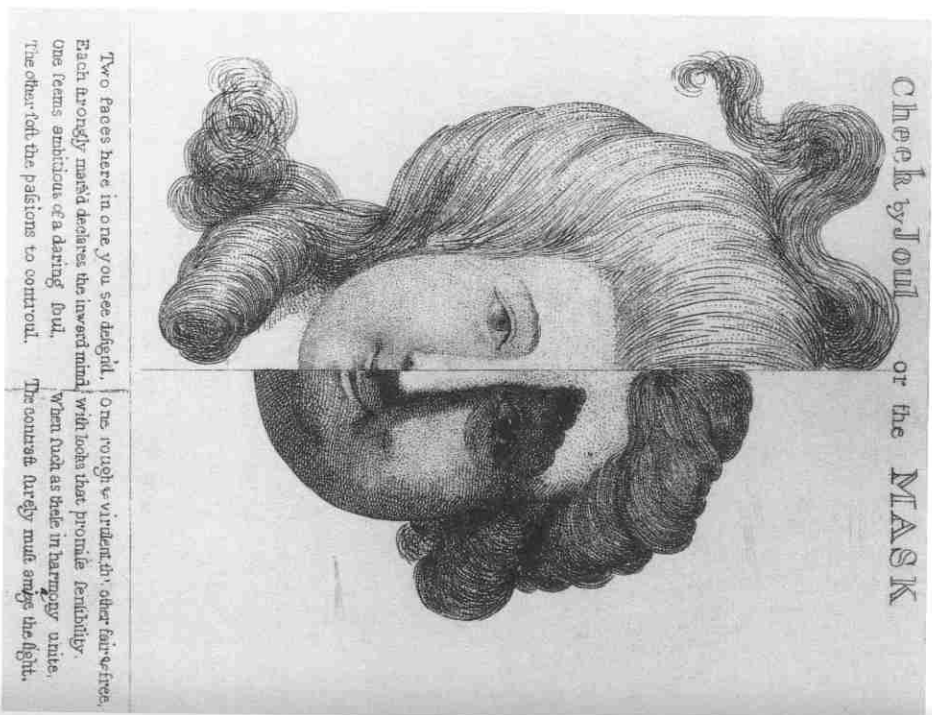
*New regime fragment 1*

In May 1783 James Sayers published the print "The Mask", which I offered at the end of the previous chapter as an example of the continuing resonance of the language of disguise and masquerade immediately after the American war (fig. 38). And so it was. But on second glance it becomes clear that what this print called a "mask" was in truth the antithesis of one: it revealed duplicity rather than hid it, and represented an identity transformation or doubling that was grotesque rather than successful. This print was as much about the conspicuous failure of masquerading as about duplicity. (Recall fig. 37, p. 257 which presents the same theme under the same apothegm, *fronti nulla fides*: in 1776, more in line with the logic of this motto, it took a supernatural "mirror of truth" to reveal what hid behind a façade.) Coincidence? Compare a print attacking Charles James Fox and the Duchess of Devonshire in May 1784, "Cheek by Jowl or the Mask" (fig. 39). In this identical composition, lest the incompatibility of the attempted fusion of identities fail to strike the viewer powerfully enough, the accompanying text drove the point home: "Two faces here in one you see design'd, / Each strongly mark'd declares the inward mind." The inward mind (note this phrase) irrepressibly and ineradicably marked the face. Both prints, ultimately, suggested that masquerading and identity-doubling were impossible. *Fronti tota fides*.

*New regime fragment 2*

In 1780, a couple of years after the French joined in the American war, an anonymous author published a forgettable novel called *Masquerades; or,*

39. "Check by Jowl or the Mask", possibly by John Boyne, 3 May 1784



*What You Will*. Its appearance coincided with the increased interest in masquerading during these years. Its title seemed to reproduce that sense of agency in the fashioning of identities, central to the *ancien régime* of identity, that the masquerade had encapsulated so well. And yet its representation of an actual masquerade, working to fulfill the promise of the title, took the reader in a somewhat different direction. This scene required one character to seek another who would impersonate him at the masquerade. Far from being a matter of simple disguise, however, the person who was singled out as able to succeed in this impersonation was chosen because of a similar body type, and was then equipped with "a domino wrapt close about him, which could I thought conceal the difference in person".<sup>1</sup> Disguise here – a domino was a generic, characterless masquerade cloak – did not make the man, as we have

come to expect, but was rather a means for hiding him: there was a difference in persons that the masquerade could not erase, but merely obscure through a closely wrapped domino. In this case, identity – even during a masquerade – was all about "seeing through clothes".

#### *New regime fragment 3*

The same year, 1780, saw the publication of a travelogue by an officer of the East India Company, whose experiences while traveling up the Red Sea in Arab garments led him to make the following observation:

there is a peculiar characteristic in the individuals of every nation, that will distinguish them through the disguise of dress and language. This is exemplified daily amid the neighbouring states of Europe, whose habits and manners are nearly the same, and cannot so much excite wonder in our case [in Arabia], where the whole temperature of our minds and bodies was so contrary to that of the people, whom we endeavored to personate.<sup>2</sup>

Not only did disguise not make the man, it could not really hide him either. Even the distinctions among Europeans – let alone those between Europeans and Arabs, whose minds and bodies were so very different – inevitably prevented effective impersonation.

#### *New regime fragment 4*

Shortly after the end of the war, several publications, undoubtedly hoping to recapture the success of the Rudd–Perreraus case as a popular media event, brought to the public's attention the exploits of two other extraordinary forgers-cum-impostors. One has already been mentioned – the chameleon-like Charles Price, with his endless repertory of borrowed identities. What I have not yet said about this case is that when Price's mid-eighteenth-century story of successful serial imposture was told in 1786, its teller could not refrain from indulging in a dose of incredulous skepticism: "incredible as it may appear, his master did not know him", etc. In the other case, the true identity of the impostor in disguise was supposedly exposed, despite himself, "when a bye-stander took notice of his thumb-nail, which he recollected . . . to be of the shape of a parrot's bill".<sup>3</sup> This particular charade, then, was brought to an end through an irrepressible physical trait that penetrated willy-nilly through the most skillful masquerade. (The analogous retelling of the stories of the Chevalier D'Éon or the latter-day female warriors, failing in their masquerades through irrepressible signs of their real identity, immediately comes to mind.) In both cases,

therefore, the mid-1780s verdict was that a full identity-alteration through disguise was well-nigh impossible.

*New regime fragment 5*

In 1787 Quobna Ottobah Cugoana, an African ex-slave now living in London, published a radical attack on “the evil and wicked traffic” in slaves (recommending, unusually, the immediate abolition of the institution of slavery, not merely of the slave trade). For Cugoana the fact that by God’s design blacks “cannot alter or change” their skin color – he was certainly no believer in racial mutability – was in itself an argument against turning it into a basis for their subjugation. Cugoana continued:

It does not alter the nature and quality of a man, whether he wears a black or a white coat, whether he puts it on or strips it off, he is still the same man. And so likewise, when a man comes to die, it makes no difference whether he was black or white, whether he was male or female, whether he was great or small, or whether he was old or young; none of these differences alter the essentiality of the man, any more than [if] he had wore a black or a white coat and thrown it off for ever.<sup>4</sup>

Even as Cugoana was keen on erasing the significance of racial difference, however immutable, he found himself insisting – note his choice of words – on man’s “essentiality”. Far from dress making the man, its meaningless superficiality was precisely the opposite of the true essentiality of man.

*New regime fragment 6*

In the mid-1780s, the newly formed *Artist’s Repository and Drawing Magazine* offered its readers this advice on the subject of portraiture: “as the intention of a portrait is to preserve to posterity the likeness of a person, it appears to me, to be the effect of a vicious taste, when any one is painted as it were in masquerade.” It was almost as if the author of these words penned them while frowning disapprovingly at George Knapton’s mid-century portraits of the honourable members of the Society of Dilettanti (fig. 31, pp. 180–1). These earlier portraits, as we recall, had been precisely the opposite: they appeared less interested in preserving the individualized likenesses of sitters, and more in particularizing their dress and accessories, especially if they were those donned at a masquerade. Moreover, given this difference – the mid-century Dilettanti themselves, one supposes, had not found their valued portraits, commissioned from one of their own members, “vicious” – it is suggestive to compare these earlier portraits to those of the Dilettanti painted by another



40. Sir Joshua Reynolds, group portrait of members of the Society of Dilettanti, 1777–9

insider, Sir Joshua Reynolds, a generation later, precisely in the middle of the American war (fig. 40).<sup>5</sup> Rather than representing individual members separately, generically, and indistinctly, as Knapton had done, Reynolds chose to make a group portrait: the collective composition ensured that the immediately recognizable differences between the individualized likenesses of the members could not be overlooked. (Also note in passing the lady’s garter clutched by John Taylor at the back left: what a different message regarding the performance of sexual identity this offered than the lady’s masquerade dress on Samuel Savage’s shoulder in his portrait of 1744!)

*New regime fragment 7*

In 1786 Reynolds, lecturing to the students of the Royal Academy on art’s aspiration to a higher aim than mere imitation, made a telling retrospective observation.

Our late great actor, Garrick, has been as ignorantly praised by his friend Fielding; who doubtless imagined he had hit upon an ingenious device, by introducing in one of his novels, (otherwise a work of the highest merit), an ignorant man, mistaking Garrick's representation of a scene in Hamlet, for reality . . . [and] what adds to the falsity of this intended compliment, is, that the best stage-representation appears even more unnatural to the person of such a character, who is supposed never to have seen a play before, than it does to those who have had a habit of allowing for those necessary deviations from nature which the Art requires.

The scene that drew Reynolds's censure of Fielding's lack of discernment – Erasmus Darwin was soon to refer to it as Fielding's "bad judgment" – was of course the scene in *Tom Jones* in which Partridge, upon his first visit to the theater, dismisses Garrick's performance since he believes that Garrick *is* the character he is representing on stage. It was a scene, as we have seen, that was very much in tune with eighteenth-century understandings of acting in general, and with Garrick's reputation in particular. For Reynolds in 1786, however, this scene was puzzling, even irritating: surely acting must have had, on an uninitiated spectator, precisely the opposite effect? How could Fielding, otherwise an author of "the highest merit", have made such an ignorant error? And how could he possibly have imagined it to be an ingenious tribute to a great friend? (The gulf of impatient incomprehension separating Reynolds from Fielding – or Garrick, for that matter – brings to mind those late-eighteenth-century assessments of breeches parts, so popular earlier in the century, that dismissed them now with precisely the same puzzled irritation.)

#### *New regime fragment 8*

Also in 1786, a "Lady of Distinction" published a tribute to Sarah Siddons, the actress who in the previous four years had blazed a meteoric career path across the London stage. The Lady's praise was interrupted, however, by her account of one of Siddons's roles, that of Jane Shore in the tragedy by that name, that she found less pleasing: "her representation [was] so near real life, that, under that persuasion, when she appeared tottering under the weight of an apparently emaciated frame, I absolutely thought her the creature perishing through want . . . shocked at the sight, I could not avoid turning away from the suffering object; I was disgusted at the idea." (Note the use of that himus-paper of change again, "disgust") What Reynolds could not understand, the Lady of Distinction could not stand. Nor did she have to: Jane Shore notwithstanding, Sarah Siddons, together with her brother, the celebrated actor John Philip Kemble, inaugurated a new style of acting focused on internal character devel-

opment which they advanced explicitly against that associated with the late Garrick. As an account of Kemble's career put it, this new acting style took for granted the impossibility – and undesirability – of "representing characters literally as they would be in nature, that is in reality, with all the peculiarities of both mind and person". "Playing, after all, is an art"; and thus "the charm lies in seeing a man . . . adapting his mind and features to such a personation; and the more distant we know his real character to be from that he is assuming, the greater is his merit." James Boaden, a friend of Kemble's and a partisan of his style, provided sound reasoning for his disbelief in Garrick-like transformations: "though we are as men all liable to the same influences, they are greatly modified by our personal qualities and individual habits."<sup>7</sup> Every actor – *pace* Garrick – is constrained by his own inescapable individual identity, "his real character".

#### *New regime fragment 9*

One more theatrical fragment: in June 1798 Thomas Rees, a professional mimic, was hired by Covent Garden Theatre to play the part of Dromio in *The Comedy of Errors* opposite Joseph Munden. Rees was not a regular actor on this stage; he was brought in specifically for his mimicking abilities, so that he could act his Dromio – as the playbill explained – "in imitations of Mr. Munden's voice, manner &c." This is the earliest recorded attempt to cast the twin characters on the basis of resemblance, after decades of achieving twinning – among whatever actors happened to be available, and often switching partners – through identical costuming. In actuality, Rees failed: critics noted that his imitation did not really resemble Munden at all. But it was this new expectation on the part of audiences and critics that was so telling. Thirteen years later, when Munden tried the Dromio role again against William Blanchard, it was quickly pointed out that he "was considerably shorter than Blanchard and could not be well mistaken for him"; this in contrast to the two Antipholuses of that production, who reportedly "were very well suited". A few years subsequently Leigh Hunt dismissed two other Dromios as "persons no more resembling each other than moisture to drought, or a bowl of cream and a tobacco pipe, or a plum pudding and a pepper-box". The fragments of information we have about the casting of twins suggest that by the early nineteenth century dress could no longer generate identity, and guarantee identicality, as it had done before: no effort of masquerading could now turn plum pudding into a pepper-box. Indeed, for one critic – Sarah Siddons's son Henry – it was folly even to try: "We have never seen two men so exactly conformable in their physical appearances as to be enabled to represent the Dromios of Shakespeare in a way that could mislead our senses or bewilder our imaginations even for a moment." Elizabeth

Inchbald also agreed, but argued that far from attempting to mislead, the Bard had actually counted precisely on the “improbability” of casting two identical twins, since telling them apart was necessary for the success of the play.<sup>8</sup> Given the unmaskable uniqueness of every individual, Siddons and Inchbald were insisting, each person is necessarily a plum pudding to another’s pepper-box.

*New regime fragment 10*

In 1790, shortly before his death, Adam Smith published a new edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, significantly revising and altering the original text of 1759–61. One particularly long addition elaborated Smith’s notion of the impartial spectator. We have seen how Smith’s mid-century discussion of the impartial spectator posited a doubleness of identity, and how this account was likely at the time to have been read – and written – more literally than simply figuratively. In the later edition, however, we can see Smith moving – hesitantly but unmistakably – away from the literal and further to the figurative. The highest authority to which men can appeal the public sentence on their conduct, Smith now wrote, was “to the tribunal of their own consciences, to that of the *supposed* impartial and well-informed spectator, to that of the man within the breast”. “The jurisdiction of the man within”, he continued, “is founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness, and in the aversion to blame-worthiness”; but in the next sentence we find Smith sliding seamlessly into talking about “*our natural sense* of praise-worthiness and blame-worthiness”. Ours or his? The man within pronouncing judgement, whom Smith’s earlier text of 1759–61 had described as “a man in general”, who could not possibly “be the same with the person judged of”, was in this new passage elided with our “own consciences” and “natural sense”. Small wonder that the impartial spectator was now merely “supposed”, a qualification that Smith meaningfully repeated twice in this passage. Smith’s 1790 revisions pushed the impartial spectator, however subtly, from being an actual, distinct character, involving the splitting of one’s identity, toward becoming a metaphorical reference to one’s natural internal conscience (which is moreover how critics ever since have preferred to understand him). In a similar manner, when Isaac D’Israeli in 1796 invoked Shaftesbury’s earlier notion of the divided self, on which Smith had relied, he left little doubt that such formulations were “only a metaphorical expression”.<sup>9</sup>

*New regime fragment 11*

In 1805 the young William Hazlitt published his first work, a foray into metaphysics that critics for the most part have happily ignored. *The Essay on*

*the Principles of Human Action* was in many ways the culmination of the eighteenth-century debate on personal identity launched by Locke; in other respects, however, it differed substantially from its predecessors. On the one hand, Hazlitt accepted Hume’s basic contention that the self was a fictional construct. On the other, he went to great lengths to explain how development from early childhood entrenches personal identity as if it had an essential, natural existence after all. Once a sense of their own personal identity is formed in young children, Hazlitt explained, “the mind makes use of it to strengthen its habitual propensity, by giving to personal motives a reality and absolute truth which they can never have”. Here was Hazlitt’s main innovation – in his emphasis on developmental psychology, and especially in his account of the development and importance of self-conceptions. Raymond Martin and John Barresi, having recently rescued Hazlitt’s work from the oversight of posterity, describe his approach as a “psychogenetic” understanding of self.<sup>10</sup> It can also be described as another instance of what I have called “weak transmutationism”: namely, the positing of a notion of identity, or self, that is still taken to be conditioned by external forces but that is now also seen as becoming gradually innate and “genetic”. So Hazlitt’s work was a turning point in this high-philosophical debate: first, in its decisive moves toward a more essentialized notion of self; but second and even more significantly, in its very airing of such eighteenth-century questions – especially those of the divisibility of identity and consciousness that went back to Locke’s Day-man and Night-man. Hazlitt was the last to discuss them for a long time: after him, our expert witnesses attest, nobody else was again to raise these philosophical possibilities until the 1960s. Hazlitt’s 1805 work, even as it shifted the ground of the earlier exchange on personal identity, was also the final terminus of this exchange.

*New regime fragment 12*

Around the late 1780s, the juvenile Mary Anne Galton (later Schimmelpenninck), born in the middle of the American war, had a collection of human profiles which she used to dress up “with every variety of costume”. Recalling this playful experience years later, as an adult art critic, she wrote:

The different effect of these costumes was very apparent. It could not fail to strike the most inattentive eye, that whilst some of them only travestied the individual, so as completely to disguise him, and others produced a burlesque incongruity of appearance; some of them, on the other hand, imparted a new and bold relief to the expression; and, as with the touch of Ithuriel’s spear, bid the original character start up to light, in all its native magnitude.<sup>11</sup>

This striking statement can be seen as nothing short of an epitaph to the

malleability of identity, a theorized eulogy for the end of “passing”. We are back where we began, only more so: not only did disguise not make the man (but could only hide him, sometimes, if not too incongruous), it was in fact the man who made the disguise. A disguise, Schimmelpenninck told her readers a generation after the American war, could only reinforce an “original”, “native”, ingrained character. Even “the most inattentive” observer – even a playful child – must surely have realized that disguise could not make one pass (unless burlesqued) for something one was not already.<sup>12</sup> What an apt conclusion for our assemblage of post-war fragments of a new order: surely it is hard to imagine any assertion more diametrically opposed to the understandings of disguise that had been such a fundamental feature of the *ancien régime* of identity throughout most of the preceding century.

### Identity as Self

Why twelve fragments? Twelve, because a round dozen seems a reasonable compromise in the delicate balancing act between the eagerness of the writer and the resilience of the reader. Fragments, to signal the incompleteness of this compromise – i.e. that the writer *did* have more up his sleeve – and because the reader is by now familiar enough with the eighteenth-century cultural landscape to situate each fragment in its proper place among the interconnected indicators of contemporary notions of identity and self.

Moreover, these twelve fragments, originating for the most part in the decade following the American war, readily fall into place within the broader jigsaw that we have been slowly piecing together. As has been suggested before, this observation in itself – that the transformations of specific categories of identity that we followed in part I coincided with, and paralleled so closely, those that I am about to unfold in the present chapter – will prove to be a significant aspect of this late-eighteenth-century moment, one that explains both its comprehensive outcome and some of its internal contradictions.

The remainder of this chapter will thus do two things. It will sum up the main characteristics of this new identity regime, echoing in its juxtaposition with the earlier eighteenth-century configuration the many “before-and-after” contrasts we have already encountered. At the same time, while one eye will be looking backward to differentiate the late eighteenth century from what had preceded it, the other will be casting a more speculative glance forward, to new departures leading into the nineteenth century. I will ask to what extent these new departures – departures that are often posited as quintessential to the culture and practice of modernity, in domains ranging from pedagogy through literary and artistic theory and practice to science and politics – relied as a necessary precondition on the epistemological transformation from one identity regime to another.

Beginning the final rounding-up of this late-eighteenth-century “cultural revolution” by contrasting it once more with earlier decades, we are again struck by the sharp retreat or reversal of formerly central aspects of the *ancien régime* of identity. It suddenly became much harder for people to imagine identities as mutable, assumable, divisible, or actively malleable – be it through the donning of disguise, the transformative abilities of the actor, or the workings of conscience as the philosopher envisioned them. Nothing illustrated the difficulty in imagining all these better than the rapidly narrowing range of reactions with which contemporaries, as we have seen so often, now greeted such possibilities: impatience, irritation, incomprehension, dismissiveness, incredulity, laughter, and disgust. Instead, in parallel to categories of identity such as gender, race, class, and the human/animal divide, the more fundamental and anterior notion of personal identity also came to be seen in the late eighteenth century as an innate, fixed, determined core: that “essentiality of man” posited by Cugnano, or the “real character” heralded by the account of Kemble’s career.

Consider the early-nineteenth-century observations of Thomas Carlyle and Sir Walter Scott on the writing of fiction in previous generations. Carlyle was commenting on Goethe, whose characters, he maintained, had “a verisimilitude, and life that separates them from all other fictions of late ages. All others, in comparison, have more or less the nature of hollow vizards, constructed from without inwards, painted *like*, and deceptively put in motion.” And here is Walter Scott, making precisely the same observation about a 1777 novel by Clara Reeve: “The general defect in novels of [Reeve’s] period” had been the “total absence of peculiar character”; “every person [was] described [as] one of a genus [father] than as an original, discriminated, and individual person”. Our picture of the *ancien régime* of identity has confirmed that both observations were close to the mark. The key point to note now, of course, is that these early-nineteenth-century critics knew it. By this point they were self-consciously expressing a very different understanding of the novel, one that actively sought characters that were “original” and “individual” and projected out from their “inwards”. The Romantic understanding of the novel has arrived, based on a new emphasis on inner psychological depths.<sup>13</sup>

Deirdre Lynch, who cites Carlyle and Scott in her account of the origins of this Romantic understanding, dates its first appearance quite precisely to a series of Shakespearean critical interventions running from the middle of the American war to the late 1780s. In this she follows Margreta de Grazia, who has drawn attention to these interventions as having endowed Shakespeare’s characters with “inner regions of [the] psyche” for the first time. Simultaneously, de Grazia shows further, Shakespeare himself was also endowed with an autonomous well-defined self expressed in his authentic oeuvre, now claimed to be faithfully reconstituted for the first time in Edmond Malone’s edition of 1790. It was the same “inner regions” or depths that were now contrasted with,

and sometimes seen as expressed by, the superficial veneer of clothing, masks – Carlyle’s “hollow vizards” – and disguise. Unsurprisingly, it was also during the same decades that the epistolary novel, as a form privileging social performance over expressions of interiority (later-day critics’ assumptions to the contrary notwithstanding), went out of fashion.<sup>14</sup> These new departures in the novel and in literary criticism – to which we can add the meaning now assigned to reading as a way for individuals to expand their own interior resources – all revolved around the broader transformation in the understanding of identity that is of interest to us here: identity became personal, interiorized, essential, even innate. It was made synonymous with self.<sup>15</sup>

Together with these interiorizing and essentializing transformations, late-eighteenth-century identity became synonymous with self – that is, self in the specific meaning I assigned it at the beginning of this book – in one other important sense. Both Scott and Carlyle, in critiquing their forebears, made the point that eighteenth-century characters had been “painted *like*”, as “one of a genus”, rather than as “original” individuals. The mid-eighteenth-century portraits of the Society of Dilettanti again come to mind as exemplifying this type of generic characterization, in contrast to Reynolds’s subsequent representation of the Society’s members as individuated personalities. Here was the crucial shift from identity as “identicality” – or the collective grouping highlighting whatever a person has in common with others – to identity as that quintessential uniqueness that separates a person from all others. (It seems hardly a coincidence that the OED’s earliest recorded use of “personality” in the sense of “that quality or assemblage of qualities which makes a person what he is, as distinct from other persons” dates to 1795.)

Assertions of individual uniqueness now followed fast on the heels of one another. “Our souls,” Isaac D’Israeli insisted in 1796, “like our faces, bear the general resemblance of the species, but retain the particular form which is peculiar to the individual.” “In the original frame or texture of every man’s body” – thus Jeremy Bentham in 1789 – which is a circumstance “coeval to his birth”, “there is something which, independently of all subsequently intervening circumstances” guarantees his development “in a manner different from that in which another man would be affected by the same causes”. There is “such an infinite variety in nature”, a contributor to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* wrote in 1786, “that no two things, however in appearance they may seem so, are found, on a strict enquiry, to be exactly alike. Thus two brothers have been seen so alike as hardly to be distinguished, but have often been taken one for another, and yet, when they have appeared together, the differences, the variation, has been very visible.” (Forget then what everyone had said about the indistinguishable Perreau brothers only a decade earlier.) Or listen to James Ramsay in 1784: “Now, in the eye of true philosophy, the distinguishing

attributes of the individual, an hair more or less of this or that colour, a particular feature predominant, have as certain a distinct cause in nature, as what makes the difference between the fairest European and most jettest African.” Admittedly, the force of this analogy is somewhat attenuated when we recall that Ramsay, writing for the abolitionist cause, could not ultimately decide whether the difference between the fairest European and the jettest African was “fixed by the Author of nature” or “caused by climate”. But when push came to shove, Ramsay too lined up with “true philosophy” in asserting the ultimate uniqueness of the individual as guaranteed by nature. In this insistence Ramsay was joined by the aging actor Charles Macklin, who takes the prize for the most pithy assertion of individual uniqueness: “What is character? The alphabet will tell you. It is that which is distinguished by its own marks from every other thing of its kind.”<sup>16</sup> And for the bizarrist practical conclusion derived from this new emphasis, the prize undoubtedly goes to Bentham, who proposed that a new centralized system of personal nomenclature be “so arranged, that, in a whole nation, every individual should have a proper name which should belong to him alone”, and – to top this literal enactment of individual uniqueness with an equally literal enactment of ingrained identity – that this unique name should be tattooed on the wrist of every individual.<sup>17</sup>

Surely, however, such an emphasis on unique individuality was something quite different from the insistence on rigid categories such as race, class, or gender? Yes and no. On the one hand, listen to the turn-of-the-century words of the playwright and dramatic theorist Joanna Baillie when she self-consciously advocated a shift to uniqueness. “Above all,” Baillie insisted, “it is to be regretted that those adventitious distinctions amongst men, of age, fortune, rank, profession, and country, are so often brought forward in preference to the *great original distinctions of nature*.” The contingent collective categories must pale in comparison to those original natural distinctions that differentiate one individual from another: distinctions, in Baillie’s words, that “give a certain individuality to such an infinite variety of similar beings”. What Baillie said about drama, *The Artist’s Repository* repeated about art. The magazine insisted that “every person is not exactly alike”, and that collective categorizations of people were therefore insufficient to account for “the almost infinite diversity of character, which we remark in the human countenance”.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, in practice we often find the emphases on individuality and on essentialized identity categories seamlessly braided together. *The Artist’s Repository* itself, for one, readily joined its concern for the undistinguishable uniqueness of every person with a gratuitous injunction against cross-dressing as “contradict[ing] the course of nature”, describing “a woman [who] acts the hero, or becomes a good fellow” as having “*forgotten her very self*”. What

allowed such a text to insist simultaneously on rigid identity categories and on individual uniqueness was that in the new regime of the late eighteenth century, gender, race, and class were not understood primarily as collective categories, but as individual traits stamped on every person. In the *ancien régime* of identity, by contrast, the preference for generic categorization had meant that collective categories that identified groups had primacy over categories that identified individuals. It was for this reason that the mid-eighteenth-century speakers whom we have heard contemplating the undeniable variety of individual differences had dismissed these differences as random, arbitrary, and meaningless.<sup>19</sup> And it was this primacy of the collective categories that had accounted for the relative ease with which the conceptual edifice of this *ancien régime* could absorb the shock of individuals who had slipped between its cracks. But in the new configuration of the late eighteenth century such categories contributed to the generation of unique identity before they generated the identicality of a collective group, and were thus closer to the new understandings of self.

Consequently, just as it became harder to imagine a person's gender roaming away from his or her sex (without severe consequences), or civilization from race, or political behavior from class, so it became harder to imagine – to revert to Locke's formulation – that personhood, or the self, could roam away from the man. Once again the stakes increased in denying, or ignoring, or explaining away any evidence to the contrary. (Or in medicalizing it: was it a coincidence that the first three recorded cases of that specifically Western modern condition that we call multiple or split personality, including a German woman who reportedly “exchanged her personality” and an American man who “seemed to have two distinct minds” – a state, mind you, in which Garrick was reputed to have found himself regularly; and that Adam Smith had attributed to every moral person! – came from the two decades on either side of 1800?)<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the century, in short, identity-as-self, innate and even congenial, was supposedly stamped on each and every individual. In this, the anchoring of self in the person mirrored that of the identity categories we discussed earlier. And yet it remains true that the tension between the uniqueness of each individual thus constituted and the essentializing categories of this new regime – a tension that will surface again in the following pages – was to become an inescapable aspect of modern notions of identity, and one that in the eyes of some bedevils identity politics to this day.

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I have been putting off offering an important qualification to these arguments that the last statements make impossible to postpone any further. My account

in this book revolves around the parallel and simultaneous transformations of several key categories of identity – gender, class, race – and of understandings of identity and self (while always keeping in mind the important caveats about their differences). Given that there is no a priori reason to expect all these developments to occur in tandem, I have suggested that the fact that they did is in itself of considerable significance. But in that case, what about other categories of identity that do *not* fit into this framework? It is easy to see that for some identity categories the story told here is inadequate. This is especially true for two categories that were central, in different ways, to the shake-up of the American war: religion and nation. What can we make of this observation?

First, we should note that one can indeed find some attempts toward the end of the century to essentialize both categories of nation and religion as innate and ingrained in the individual, in a similar vein to what we have already seen. Thus, one could cite Hugh Blair's Herderian claim that “instincts implanted in our nature” extend “the ties of natural affection” from family to nation, “our native land”; or William Wilberforce's urge to stand up to those increasing numbers who chose to see Christianity as a “hereditary religion” fully formed upon a “child's coming out into the world.”<sup>21</sup> Yet it is also obvious that such moves did not really carry the day: that ultimately national identity did not come to be seen as being as innate as racial identity, or religious identity as being as much of a burden of birth as class.

Put differently, it is certainly true that within these particular identity categories it remained possible to continue to imagine individuals crossing boundaries. Thus, in the case of religion, boundary-crossing was commensurate with the thrust of Evangelicalism, the important late-eighteenth-century religious movement, in which Wilberforce was a leading light, that gave marked precedence to “vital religion” in a Church Invisible of all true believers over sectarian divisions and denominational differences. Additionally, we can also recall the gradual, apparently seamless, drifting of figures like John Henry Newman, Henry Edward Manning, and Robert Wilberforce from Evangelicalism toward Catholicism. As for nation, perhaps the most conspicuous indication of the limits of this category in pinning down every individual was the band of cosmopolitan “citizens of the world” who were physically or at least mentally prancing around Europe and America during the “Age of Revolutions” in the hope of not missing any. Their deliberate denial of national belonging, in claiming to speak for generic “friends of humanity”, was epitomized in the famous welcome extended by the French National Assembly in 1792 to a delegation of eighteen such citizens of the world who now also became honorary Frenchmen. Comprising seven Britons (including Joseph Priestley, Jeremy Bentham, David Williams, and – who else? – Thomas Paine), four Germans, three Americans, an Italian, a Dutchman, a Swiss, and a Pole, they



demonstrated triumphantly that in the case of national identity, as Sophie Rosenfeld has recently put it, late-eighteenth-century persons could still retain a “fungible individuality”.<sup>22</sup>

So religion and nation did not follow the innatist, essentializing route of other categories toward the turn of the eighteenth century. Yet perhaps their relationship to our story here may nonetheless have been closer than it first appears. Recent scholarship has raised the intriguing possibility of an alternative path through which these categories may have arrived at the threshold of modernity, at the same historical juncture, in a different but not unrelated form.

In the case of religion, Susan Thorne has pointed to the vigorous blossoming of British missionary societies as an important new departure that began, once again, in the 1780s. Why then? Thorne asks. Not because of major innovations in theology, she answers, since evangelical (small “e”) revivalism had already been around for at least two generations. (Nor would it do, she insists, to dismiss this development, drawing as it did on considerable metropolitan resources, merely as a reflex reaction to an expansionist imperialist drive.) However, there *was* an important difference between eighteenth-century evangelicalism and turn-of-the-century Evangelicalism, in their respective understandings of sin and salvation: a difference that can help explain the sudden urge of the latter for missionary activity, and one that Thorne formulates in terms closely related to our inquiry here. For Wesley and his mid-century generation, she writes, sin and salvation were “the attributes of individuals; they did not yet mark the boundaries that separated discrete communities from one another”. Eighteenth-century Methodists did embark on missionary travels: but their efforts everywhere, far and near, were based on the belief that heathenism and Satan were present within every community, and that the missionary’s efforts had to extend “right down to the individual evangelical”. Ultimately, “sinners and saved were on the surface indistinguishable”. Evangelicals from the 1780s onward, by contrast, had a very different vision, “predicated on the assumption that heathenism resided outside the individual, that it was a characteristic feature of entire communities”. Turn-of-the-century missionary efforts — thus Thorne’s argument — could therefore be institutionalized to target such communities as a whole, be they indigenous communities across the empire or communities of the poor at home.<sup>23</sup> For our purposes here, meanwhile, the point to note is how the understanding of sin and salvation changed: not in parallel with other categories we have seen, from a collective, group identity to an internalized, individual one, but rather the other way around. Even as this new missionary activity drew on the emerging rigidities of racial or social boundaries in distinguishing the sinner and the saved — this in line with the broader imperative to fix and clarify identity boundaries — its own attribution of religious identity went in precisely the opposite direction to what the previ-

As for nation, it has been a commonplace — albeit not an unchallenged one — in the classic literature on this topic, from Hans Kohn to Benedict Anderson, that the emergence of the peculiar form of modern nationalism, with its modern sense of national identity, occurred in the West in the late eighteenth century. I find especially suggestive the recent affirmation of this basic timeline in the work of David Bell: for him, what differentiated modern nationalism from earlier sentiments of national belonging was a shift from seeing the nation as natural, innate, and a given, to seeing it as an artifice in need of active efforts of construction through political action. “The meaning of ‘nation’ itself”, Bell writes, “was changing, from a fact of nature to a product of political will.” Note that Bell’s point is not simply that nation is a construction — hardly earth-shattering news — but rather that the emergence of late-eighteenth-century nationalism involved a new active investment of contemporaries in this fact. (The term “nationalism” itself, we may add, was another neologism of the closing decade of the eighteenth century.) Bell has made his case, very persuasively, for revolutionary France. But if his logic holds for changing opinions in Britain as well, which is not unlikely — only in “the Irish revolution of 1782”, Burke once wrote, did the Irish patriots “begin] also to recollect that they had a country” — then once again we may be observing a category of identity in transformation during the same loaded decades, but in an unexpected direction. Like religion, the trajectory of the hypothesized transformation of nation was also opposite to that of other categories discussed in this book: from individual to collective (all citizens, the revolutionary Abbé Grégoire insisted, had to be “melted into the national mass”), and from innate and natural to knowingly constructed. The goal — thus another revolutionary — was “to endow the nation with its own, unique physiognomy”: an active constructionist formulation which in the context of late-eighteenth-century notions of individual identity and individual physiognomy, as we shall shortly see, was a nonsensical oxymoron.<sup>24</sup>

Now I do not know whether these preliminary speculations will survive further scrutiny. But if they do, they may lead us to see the development of nation and religion as the mirror-image of the same late-eighteenth-century transformation that is the subject of this book. It would be intriguing, in other words, to inquire further whether nation and religion also partook in the broader shake-up in the understandings of identity during this period (triggered in our Anglo-specific scenario by the identity difficulties inherent in the American revolutionary war, in which both categories played an important part); and whether their own trajectory toward the threshold of modernity was different, indeed perhaps in some key ways opposite — and thus complementary — to that followed by the categories of gender, race, and class.

Moreover, if these speculations prove not too far off the mark, then we may

find ourselves in a position to explain a peculiarity that lies at the heart of modern, and post-modern, understandings of identity and self (and indeed of this book): namely, the different status of different identity categories as attributes of modern selfhood. Why do race, class, and gender (to which we may need to add sexuality) have a different relationship to the making of the modern self from that of nation and religion? Was it the fact that gender, race, and class were those categories that were reconfigured from the late eighteenth century as essentialized and stamped on the individual that turned them into the privileged sites of modern subjectivity? Have we then stumbled upon a historically anchored rationale for the seemingly over-determined prominence of the often deified or blasphemed "holy trinity" of race, class, and gender in post-modern efforts to unravel this modern construction of selfhood?

### The Age of Innocence: Childhood in the New Regime of Identity

Afficionados of the decades around the turn of the eighteenth century have often drawn attention to another conspicuous new departure during those same years: what Norma Clarke has described as the late-eighteenth-century "cult of childhood". It was of course not the case that childhood had not been important before. Yet it is also not hard to see that a regime of identity insisting on the unique, ingrained, enduring inner self did place more weight on the child's shoulders. It turned the child – even the newborn infant – into the self-contained bud of potential that would subsequently bloom into the full adult. "The Child is father of the Man", as Wordsworth famously put it. Or as Adam Sibbit, an obscure clergyman, expressed it less famously and less succinctly: "We are endowed by our benevolent Creator, with a capability of improvement, with the seeds of talents and of virtues ready to blossom, and to produce delightful fruit, if they are fostered and cherished by a good education."<sup>25</sup>

There was nothing inevitable about this developmental vision. Earlier eighteenth-century wisdom, as we recall, had been rather different. "It is the *Education*, that makes the Man. To speak all in a few words" – words that rightfully belonged as much to Locke as to this early-eighteenth-century disciple – "*Children* are but *Blank Paper*, ready indifferently for any Impression." No child "was better than another", Dr. Johnson echoed decades later, "but by difference of instruction". The purpose of education was not to foster but to create.

A more complex perspective on the *ancien-régime* educational position was offered in 1745 by the Scottish moral philosopher David Fordyce in the form of a dialogue. Fordyce assigned one of his interlocutors the role of rehashing the standard analogy of the newborn child to "a kind of *Tabula rasa*, or like a Piece of blank Paper, that it bears no original Inscriptions". Consequently "we

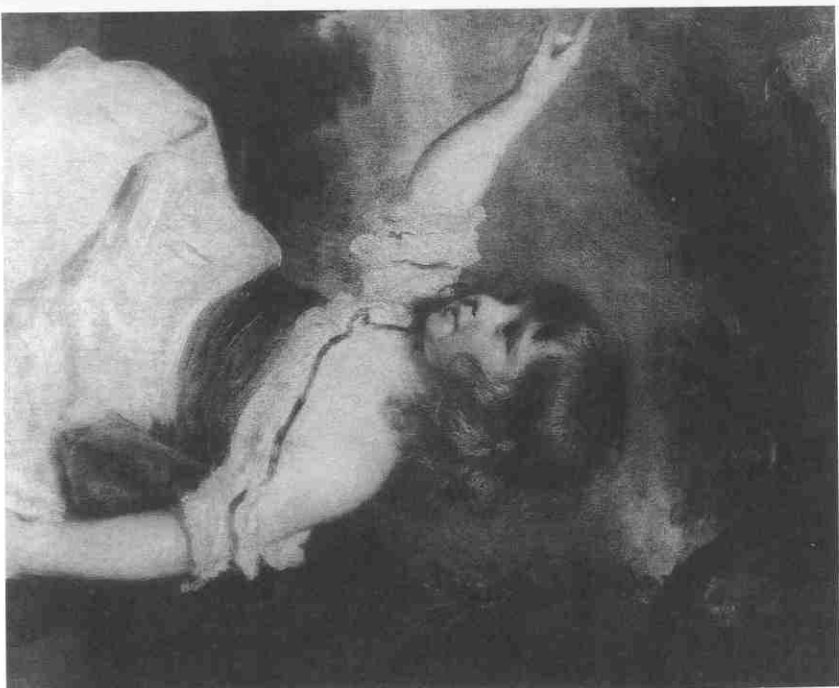
owe all the Characters afterwards drawn upon it, to the Impressions made upon our Senses; to Education, Custom, and the like". This socializing process was bound to work, Fordyce's imaginary speaker continued less predictably, because "we have an innate, and almost insuperable Propensity to Imitation, and imbibed Manners as easily as we do Opinions". The word to note here is "innate", which in proximity to Lockean ideas could be used only with deliberate intent. Fordyce's Lockean voice, counter-intuitively (but with precedents dating back to Aristotle), concluded with an innate human feature, but one that was distinctively socially turned, to go back to our earlier formulation, an innate trait directed outward rather than inward. His imaginary interlocutor, on the other hand, rejected the analogy of the child's mind to blank paper: "I would rather compare it to a Seed, which contains all the Stamina of the future Plant, and all those Principles of Perfection, to which it aspires in its After-growth, and regularly arrives by gradual Stages." But this was not the same developmental understanding that was to become prevalent at the turn of the century: for what this side of the argument took to be innate in a child's mind turned out to be not individualized talents and virtues, but rather universal platonic principles of perfection. Fordyce thus offered the mid-century reader a choice between a *tabula rasa* combined with an innate tendency for socially turned imitativeness on the one hand, and a generic congenital seed of unindividuated platonic principles on the other: either way, a far cry from the individual, differentiated, unique selfhood that was to occupy center stage for his turn-of-the-century successors.<sup>26</sup>

I cannot do justice here to the sophisticated views on childhood and education of Fordyce's contemporaries. Let me only invoke therefore one recent study of views on education of considerable importance in the short eighteenth century: those propounded by the Comte de Buffon between the 1740s and the 1770s. Actually, Buffon did not think much of the role of childhood in shaping adult identity. But, as Adriana Benzaguén has shown, if childhood for Buffon was negligible from the perspective of *individual* identity, it carried enormous significance as a *collective endowment*: delimiting nothing less than the definition, the history, and the distinctiveness of the human species. "Buffon", she writes, "made childhood indispensable to an understanding of human identity, not in an individual but in a collective sense, and not as the key to adult selfhood but as the source of a binding responsibility for the other"; the source, that is, of "sociability [as] an essential component of human nature". How familiar. We are back in *ancien-régime* territory of collective categories and of identity as socially turned – or "necessarily intersubjective", as Benzaguén prefers to put it.<sup>27</sup>

By contrast, to return to the later period, one could hardly imagine a verdict on education more different from these soundings of the short eighteenth

century than that which John Wilson Croker pronounced in the *Quarterly Review* early in the nineteenth. Since it is a fact, he began, that “the varieties of the human mind and temper are innate and indefinite”; since “they admit of no uniform law”; and since “the qualities of the mind and temper are nearly as numerous as the individuals of our species”; consequently, Croker concluded triumphantly, “we hardly can imagine a wilder scheme than the attempt to educate one child by a system of observations made upon another”.<sup>28</sup> So much for the hope of creating a better education system, a hope shattered on the rock of unique individuality. Few turn-of-the-century educationalists, for obvious reasons, would have agreed with this rather extreme conclusion. But its underlying premise, that the uniqueness of essential individual identity extended to young children, was certainly in tune with broader tendencies in the new identity regime. And thus, if in the *ancien régime* of identity the figure that had embodied ultimate malleability was a child, the feral child, by the early nineteenth century the understanding of feral children had also changed, as they now came to manifest innate reason, emotions, or virtue.<sup>29</sup>

Nowhere, perhaps, was this new perspective on childhood more evident than in contemporary visual art. As a 1990s exhibition entitled *The New Child* at the University of California, Berkeley delectably reaffirmed, the late eighteenth century witnessed a sharp rise in artistic interest in young children, focusing more emphatically than before on their individuality and character. The leader of the artistic pack, in this as in so many other things, was Sir Joshua Reynolds, who from the 1780s found himself spending increasing amounts of time on such “fancy-pictures” and their young subjects. “He used to romp and play with them”, his student and biographer James Northcote recalled, “and talk to them in their own way; and, whilst all this was going on, he actually snatched those exquisite touches of expression which make his portraits of children so captivating.” Reynolds’s “Master Hare” of 1788 (fig. 41) can stand in as an example. With its composition that placed the child at the front of the picture plane so as to dominate the landscape, with its point of view lowered to a child’s perspective rather than presenting the child through adult eyes, with its attention to the details of the boy’s uncut locks and frock that is falling off one shoulder, and with its expressive re-creation of the personality of the young sitter, this painting confirmed Lady Grantham’s judgement that “Sir Joshua is undoubtedly the best at discovering children’s characters”. Even very young children – Master Hare was only two years old – had characters to be “discovered”. Reynolds’s innovation – and there were many similar examples by him as well as by other turn-of-the-century artists – is put into relief by a comparison with a typical earlier, mid-century, depiction of children (fig. 42). Although portrayed in the midst of childish play, these two children are really small

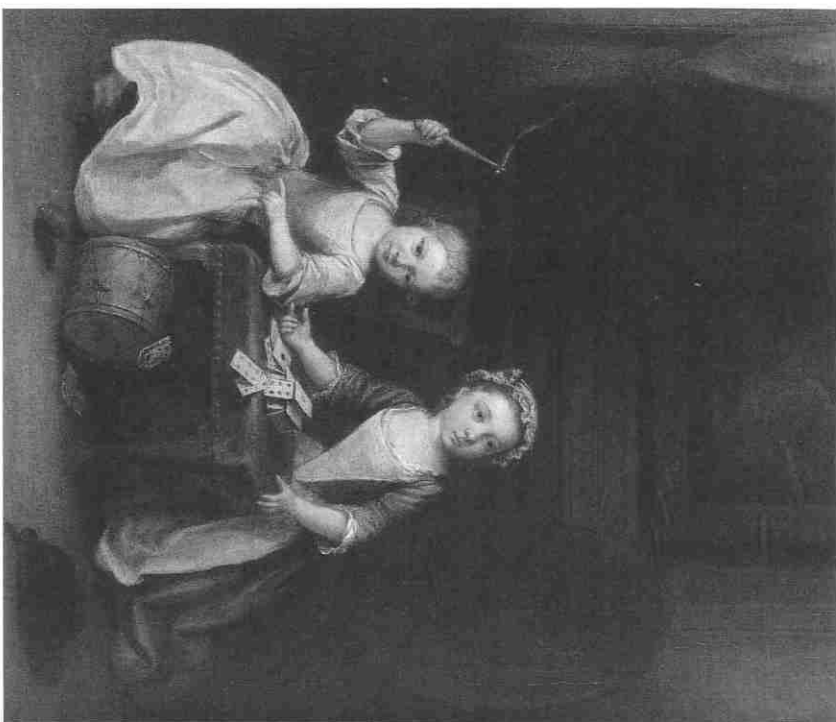


41. Sir Joshua Reynolds, “Master Hare”, 1788

adults, with adult-like clothing and postures, generic features, flat and distracted expressions. The overall effect is symbolic and emblematic rather than realistic. Such adult-focused purpose, characteristic of representations of children in the short eighteenth century, was sharply distinct from what can be found in the much greater number of child images produced at the turn of the century.<sup>30</sup>

The notion that a child had a character to be discovered raised the question of its origins: a question made uncomfortable by the continuing weight of Locke’s attack on the doctrine of innate ideas. Adam Sibbit, having declared the newborn child to contain “the seeds of talents and of virtues ready to blossom”, immediately hastened to insist that “we have no innate ideas, as that great philosopher has observed”. Recognizing that these two statements could not easily be reconciled, Sibbit tried to explain:

42. Joseph Francis Nollekens, "Children at Play", probably the artist's son Jacobus and daughter Maria Joanna Sophia, 1745



Our mind is, therefore, like a *carte-blanche*, ever ready to receive impressions and characters of every kind. . . . But there are, it may be said, some few of a happier mould, of a more delicate organization, who antecedently, and independent of all instruction, are more disposed to virtue than others; that, previous to education, 'they are more feelingly alive to each fine impulse; . . . and that Genius, with all her inspiration, glows in their breasts.

All children are born equal, but some are more equal than others. Or listen to the master of a Cambridge college who in 1788 qualified his statement that "the approbation of Good, and the dislike of Evil, will arise from the Original Constitution of human nature" with the rather unconvincing caveat: "I hope I shall not be so misunderstood as to be thought to advance the doctrine of Innate Ideas, or Innate Instincts." And again, the same quandary also tied in knots the clergyman whose 1802 tract on education opened with the familiar Lockean image of the newborn infant as "a portion of paper without any impression",

so that "the most simple of our ideas are not innate and unborrowed", but rather are all "what we owe to education". Soon, however, this author too was forced to admit "that certain individuals are endowed by nature with faculties peculiarly adapted to certain pursuits, and that a bias upon the mind often clearly points out the employment, to which those faculties are destined". Indeed, "that nature grants to different men intellectual talents in very different degrees is too obvious to require argument".<sup>31</sup>

Turn-of-the-century views on education, then, were often complex and not necessarily consistent mixtures of "environmental" and "organicist" strands.<sup>32</sup> It was another move, however, that largely circumvented the tensions between these incompatible impulses and allowed contemporaries to have their Lockean cake and eat it too. This is what Charles Taylor has identified as the late-eighteenth-century "return in force of biological models of growth, as against the mechanistic ones of association, in the account of human mental development", and what Clifford Siskin has described as "the Romantic redefinition of the self as a mind that grows". It was a focused emphasis on the developmental journey from the child to the adult or, in Thomas Reid's words of 1785, on "the gradual progress of man, from infancy to maturity". It is here that we find the distinctive contribution of this period to the consideration of childhood in relationship to selfhood. For Carolyn Steedman, indeed, this developmental view was at the very core of the making of the modern "self *within*", leading directly from the 1780s — where she too identifies its beginnings — to Freud. "The interiorised self," Steedman writes, "understood to be the product of a personal history, was most clearly expressed in the idea of 'childhood', and the idea of 'the child'."<sup>33</sup> The investment in one's personal history — recall also Hazlitt's "psycho-genetic" understanding of the childhood development of personal identity — made it possible to see the child as the seed of the subsequent adult while at the same time focusing on childhood as a distinct and passing stage. The adult was ingrained in the newborn child *in potentia*, just as the full-grown oak is already present in the acorn.<sup>34</sup>

So if late-eighteenth-century art manifested a growing investment in the distinctive character of the individual child, we can also note the complementary artistic investment in the distinctiveness of childhood itself. Art historian Anne Higonnet has singled out this new trend — she describes it as the English-led invention of the innocence of childhood — as a major cultural shift, "the last major change in ideas about childhood" before our time. The novelty — signaled by another of Reynolds's child portraits, appropriately entitled "The Age of Innocence" (c. 1788) — was the representation of "an innocent child body, a body defined by its difference from adult bodies". As *The Artist's Repostory* advised budding portrait artists in 1788: pay attention to "that kind of character which marks their years [that] is so clearly discernible in CHILDREN",



43. Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Penelope Boothby" (sometimes also known as "The Mob Cap"), 1788. Penelope, daughter of Sir Brooke Boothby, was three years old when this portrait was taken; she died three years later

children who will indeed manifest "indications of genius or stupidity" even at a very young age, lest they would appear as "men and women, differing only in stature". Unlike earlier predecessors (recall fig. 42), therefore, turn-of-the-century children were – in Higonnet's words – "endearingly miniaturized" so that "they seem to be in masquerade even when wearing adult clothing". Consider Reynolds's "Penelope Boothby" (fig. 43): the young Penelope, wearing an adult woman's dress, seems to be nestled in an oversized cocoon, her mob cap in particular striking the viewer as amusingly big and grown-up.<sup>35</sup> Children like Penelope were no longer made to pass for adults. Such representations simultaneously reinforced children's inherent unique identity together with the transient uniqueness of childhood.

It is therefore hardly surprising to discover that it was during this decade, the 1780s, that a new and unprecedented form of children's literature came into being. Led by the father-and-daughter educational duo Richard and Maria Edgeworth, whose well-known *Practical Education* was an impor-

tant contribution to the developmental model of children's maturation, the new approach was predicated on a sequence of books "geared to progressive developmental stages". "In the last two decades of the eighteenth century," continues Alan Richardson in the best-informed account of this development, "the modern children's library – with its stratification by age-groups . . . was all but fully established."<sup>36</sup> The modern child, in sum, complete with the panoply of artefacts for its understanding and support, was a key new departure of the late eighteenth century, riding on the coat-tails of the new regime of identity.

And there is more. If children were now proclaimed to have an individual identity already as infants, a core of selfhood subject to continual maturational development, why stop at the threshold of parturition? A close look at embryology – that is, at theories of generation from conception to birth – suggests an intriguing extension of this late-eighteenth-century pattern. Prior to this period, as Andrea Henderson has shown, theories of generation had been dominated by preformationist understandings of the fetus. Preformationism took fetal growth to be the mechanistic increase in size of a fully formed complex creature in miniature (like a child in adult clothing?). In the late eighteenth century, by contrast, Henderson finds an abrupt shift to epigenesis: that is, to the theory that the embryo *develops* from conception to birth, as its supra-physical inner impulses shape it into an increasingly complex and uniquely individuated being. The simultaneous turn to a developmental epigenetic perspective on the embryo before birth and to a developmental perspective on the child after birth is at the very least highly suggestive. And the fact that epigenesis as a theory had actually been available already from the late seventeenth century, but did not really catch on until the end of the eighteenth, makes the proposed link to the broader cultural context more suggestive still.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, once a putative enduring self was shored up with a developmental outlook on a personal history unfolding since early childhood, it remained but a short step to the retrospective recounting of this personal history in the form of a connected narrative. Not everyone would agree with Michael Mascuch that modern autobiography – distinct from earlier personal life stories in employing a unified, retrospective, first-person narrative to represent the development of one's unique self-identity – arrived on the cultural scene on one particular day in 1791, with the publication of the arguably unprecedented memoirs of the bookseller James Lackington. And yet other students of the genre have also affirmed the qualitative difference between late-eighteenth-century autobiographies, telling the connected stories of inner selves, and the typical self-narratives of the short eighteenth century. The short eighteenth century, Felicity Nussbaum has argued, had a specific form of self-narrative that did

not necessarily “add up to a coherent self”, and that was to disappear by the 1790s. Another scholar has characterized the eighteenth-century precursors of autobiography as showcasing the “exemplary self”, meaning a presentation of personal identity that was generic and ideal-typical rather than individual and singular. It was thus probably more than a coincidence that the word “autobiography” itself was also a neologism of the last decade of the eighteenth century, popularized further – until it no longer called attention to itself – in the opening decades of the nineteenth.<sup>38</sup> Joining the many other newly coined terms in the emerging conceptual toolbox of the new regime of identity, “autobiography” became the name for the self-reflexive genre that put “The Child is father of the Man” into personalized narrative form.

### The New Regime of Identity and the Romantics

Summoning up the figure of Wordsworth, as I have now done for the second time, begs the question of the place of the Romantics in this story. After all, many of the developments routinely associated with literary Romanticism are precisely those I have identified for the new regime of identity: the characterization of self in terms of psychological depth; the emphasis on human difference and individuality; the rekindled interest in innate, intuitive, and instinctive traits or behaviors; the developmental perspective on human growth. Thus, the following lines from Wordsworth’s 1805 *Prelude* could have served well as an epigram for the discussion of the new emphasis on interior depths:

When I began to inquire,  
To watch and question those I met, and held  
Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads  
Were schools to me in which I daily read  
With most delight the passions of mankind,  
There saw into the depths of human souls –  
Souls that appear to have no depth at all  
To vulgar eyes.

The poet’s task is to reveal “the depths of human souls” that are invisible to vulgar eyes. Likewise, another image in *The Prelude* – subtitled, after all, “Growth of a Poet’s Mind” – could have served to frame the intensified emphasis in the new regime of identity on the experience of childhood and on the innate capacities of the newborn child:

– blest the babe  
Nursed in his mother’s arms, the babe who sleeps  
Upon his mother’s breast, who, when his soul

Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,  
Doth gather passion from his mother’s eye.  
Such feelings pass into his torpid life  
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,  
Even in the first trial of its powers,  
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine  
In one appearance all the elements  
And parts of the same object, else detached  
And loth to coalesce.

The infant, the poet suggests, has an active mind that participates from the moment of its birth in the shaping of its sensations: the innatist anti-Lockean position.<sup>39</sup> For the newborn’s active mind and inborn powers we could also turn to the poet and essayist Anna Barbauld: “What powers lie folded in thy curious frame,” she addressed an embryonic child just before birth; “I launch on the living world, and spring to light!” William Blake was there too, hardly mincing his words: “Innate ideas are in Every Man, Born with him; they are truly Himself.” We could go to Blake again for the emphasis on individual uniqueness: “Man varies from Man more than Animal from Animal of Different Species.” And for the inner self as essential, enduring, and anterior, to Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking . . . I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new.” Or, once more, to Wordsworth: “I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature.”<sup>40</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that Charles Taylor places Romanticism at the center of the final turning point in his account of the rise of the modern self in Western thought. Taylor calls this Romantic turning point the “expressivist turn”, by which he means the turn to inner depths of selfhood (a phrase, he asserts, rarely encountered before the Romantic period): inner depths that are the locus of the voice of nature, and thus truth, within us. Expressivism in Taylor’s terms is thus the knowledge and articulation of this inner voice: one’s goal – a quintessential Romantic goal – is to express oneself, and thus to live one’s unique inner truth. In thus characterizing Romanticism, to be sure, Taylor chimes with conventional critical wisdom that has identified time and again the Romantic “conceptual shift” – this particular formulation is Clifford Siskin’s – as that “by which man reconstituted himself as the modern psychological subject”, sporting “a self-made mind, full of newly constructed depths.”<sup>41</sup> (For Siskin, indeed, this shift was the very condition for the invention of the discipline of literature as we know it.)

But as I approach the end of this book, it may be useful to recapitulate once more the difference between my own project and Taylor's, a difference that defined my methodological starting point several hundred pages ago. The thrust of the present inquiry is to uncover not intellectual genealogies but rather patterns of broad cultural resonance. From this perspective a well-defined intellectual movement or trend beckons us to ask whether it was part of a more general cultural pattern, of which it may have been a symptom or a particular manifestation, but not necessarily a privileged locus or driving force. So just as I have identified the eighteenth-century philosophical debate on personal identity as one instance among many of the possibilities inherent in the *ancien régime* of identity, so I now want to posit literary Romanticism as one of the many new departures suddenly made possible — and resonant — by the new identity regime that superseded it: no more, no less. Indeed, Charles Taylor himself, well aware of these methodological considerations and wary of making cultural claims that exceed his high-intellectual base, has anticipated this point. He has therefore chosen to reject the “tempting” identification of the late-eighteenth-century shift with Romanticism, in favor of a formulation that recognizes this shift as “a crucial part of the conceptual armoury in which Romanticism arose.”<sup>42</sup> Precisely.

Such a perspective may also shed light on an interesting challenge that literary critic Andrea Henderson has posed to this Romanticist consensus. Henderson has attempted to pull the rug from under the hegemony of the “depth model” of identity in Romantic studies by unearthing alternative ways of conceptualizing subjectivity that lurk within Romantic texts — with examples from Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, Scott, and even a Wordsworth play.<sup>43</sup> Now suppose we grant Henderson's case, which seems overall plausible: is it all that surprising? If there was indeed a late-eighteenth-century moment of pressing challenge to received notions of identity, surely creative minds so confronted could be expected to explore other alternative conceptualizations? It is not this, it seems to me, that needs explaining. Henderson has given us a map of roads not taken. It thus begs the question: why did these roads turn out to be dead ends? And why, even as dead ends, did they remain largely invisible, so far off the Romantic beaten track that their very existence has been so effectively occluded in the many surveys of this terrain? Arguably, the answer to this question — why certain literary moves resonated widely, while others had little echo — falls outside the rhetorical effects of Romanticism itself, pointing the finger once again at its broader cultural environment.

Alan Richardson recently set himself precisely this task of uncovering the imprint of the broader cultural environment on literary Romanticism, in relation to its understanding of selfhood. He therefore cast a comparative cross-disciplinary look at a non-literary field of knowledge: the scientific under-

standing of the brain, or neuroscience. In this rather distant and distinct field Richardson has drawn attention to significant new developments that were simultaneous with literary Romanticism and that mirrored its key concerns.<sup>44</sup>

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as historians of neuroscience and biological psychology have long recognized, witnessed the emergence of unprecedented claims about the brain and nervous system. Spearheaded by figures like Erasmus Darwin, Charles Bell, and William Lawrence in Britain, together with Franz Joseph Gall and Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis on the Continent, these claims (not always consistent with each other) focused on the biological basis of the mind, on its embodiment in the brain, and on the innate and internally active nature of some of its basic faculties. The operations of the mind were essentialized and materialized in the brain: we might say that the mind, for these biological psychologists, now collapsed into the brain — a formulation that is of course meant to bring to mind (or brain) the analogous collapse of gender into sex at the very same time. Richardson shows that these new neuroscientific theories, starting from their own distinct premises and questions, ended up reinforcing many conclusions in common with literary Romanticism: from the emphasis on the innate active mind and on individual uniqueness, through a developmental perspective on maturation since birth, to the assertion of the importance of the unconscious. (The latter was in itself an interesting reincarnation of the notion of a fragmented or split self radically different from the externalized meaning that the same image had had earlier in the eighteenth century; and one that looked forward, again, to Freud; not least, in the interpretation of dreams, now newly focused on what Erasmus Darwin described as the “internal stimuli” of “internal senses.”<sup>45</sup>) Richardson further traces the marks of the new brain science in canonical Romantic texts — from Wordsworth's unusual use of “brain” for “mind” in the 1799 *Prelude* through Coleridge's “Kubla Khan” and Keats's “Ode to Psyche” to Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, in which a knock on the head, in the plot-shaping turning point of Louisa's fall and her subsequent metamorphosis, could easily be read as a loaded intervention in the brain-science debates on the side of the essentialized, embodied mind/brain.

Without wanting to flog a dead horse too often, it bears repeating that the goal of these observations is not to claim priority for one cultural domain over another. We can summon up again the image of the orchestra, whose harmony cannot be attributed to the primacy of the woodwinds over the strings or the other way around. Rather, like the orchestra, the effect is one of *concerti*, created when the different instruments, each with its different and distinctive overtones, come together in a mutually reinforcing correspondence of tune and timing. In Richardson's words: “Such specific points of contact and intellectual debts (on both sides) bear witness to a more pervasive set of intersecting

concerns, theories, readings, and key terms common to the scientists and literary artists mutually engaged in rethinking the relations of mind, body, and environment in Romantic-era Britain.<sup>46</sup> Indeed. And yet it should be clear by now that this pervasive set of intersecting concerns, theories, readings, and key terms extended far beyond the horizons of scientists and literary writers alike: its reach extended throughout the cultural configuration that I have called the new regime of identity, which rapidly took hold in what Richardson now cautiously calls “Romantic-era” rather than “Romantic” Britain.

#### Masks and Faces

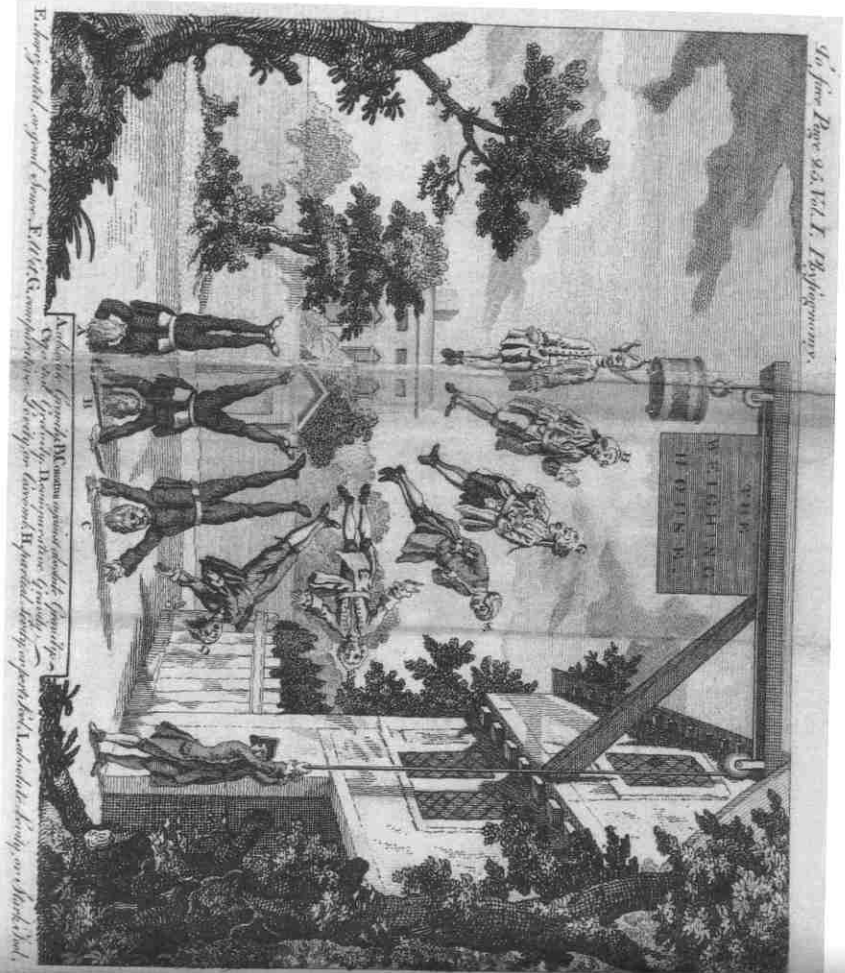
In 1792 appeared the first English translation of Johann Kaspar Lavater’s seminal *Essays on Physiognomy*. The response was astounding: The book was reprinted, abridged, pirated, parodied, imitated, and reviewed so often (between 1792 and 1810 British printers produced more than one edition or adaptation of Lavater per year) that it is difficult to imagine any literate, semi-literate, or otherwise culturally conscious person remaining unaware of its basic, and deceptively simple, claims. The impact of physiognomy was readily evident not only in directly related fields such as medical practice and physical anthropology (subsequently branching into phrenology and racial science), but also in other arenas of cultural production, such as the novel, the theater, and visual art high and low. All told, the impact of Lavater’s *Physiognomy* was extraordinary, even if we do not take too literally the 1801 journalistic assessment that it was now “thought as necessary in every family as even the Bible itself.”<sup>47</sup> Consequently, much more than the rather rarefied discourse of neuroscience, the sudden frenetic interest in physiognomy – with which it shared key assumptions about identity and self – is a good indication of how far-reaching the cultural transformation of “Romantic-era” Britain really was.

Once again, I am not trying to make a claim about origins. Far from being something new, physiognomy was a form of knowledge with roots in antiquity that had thrived in the Renaissance. From the late seventeenth century onward, however, physiognomy had begun to lose much of its cultural purchase. It increasingly declined, as Martin Porter has shown, into a form of fortune-telling, especially in relation to matrimonial or business prospects, and was often practiced as a more or less bawdy parlor game. For many eighteenth-century Britons, the only plausible response to physiognomic claims was one of dismissive scorn: recall James Macpherson’s and John Miller’s assertions that the distinctions of individual countenances were random, contingent, and meaningless – a reasonable position for those who maintained that complexion and appearance were environmentally, culturally, or self-consciously mutable. Others in the short eighteenth century nurtured instead their own alternative

hermeneutics of faces: I will quickly mention two. One such alternative was a classically inspired focus on the generic “Principles of Beauty, Relative to the Human Head”. As the painter Alexander Cozens, who wrote a book by this title, explained, such an approach to faces called for the *erasure* of physiognomic particularity in order to attain “a beautiful face unmix’d with character”. This “simple beauty” remained the ideal even if the artist then conceded to allow character to be “superinduced” with a few distinguishing physical characteristics or, equally effective, through accessories like “dresses of the hair”. (The most prominent advocate of this perspective was Sir Joshua Reynolds in his earlier *Discourses on Art*, to which we shall return in a moment.) Another alternative was to focus on pathognomy, the study of expressions, that privileged evanescent gesture over fixed features. In the words of a mid-century authority on “human physiognomy”, the only form of physiognomic knowledge with any scientific basis had nothing to do with the “general Shape of the Face, or any of its Parts”, but only with “the Actions of the Muscles” as they voluntarily correspond with “the Passions of the Mind”. Even when Henry Fielding penned what seemed like a *defense* of physiognomy, which he found at mid-century to be “of so little Use and Credit in the World”, it turned out to be all about the interpretation of “Actions of Men [which] are the surest Evidence of their Character”. Actions spoke louder, or clearer, than looks: those “Marks which Nature hath imprim’d on the Countenance” that in the end proved “liable to some Uncertainty”.<sup>48</sup>

Let us linger for another moment on the meanings of physiognomy earlier in the eighteenth century. It is easy to see that both these eighteenth-century hermeneutics of faces – the unparticularized generic and the unfix’d pathognomic – were drawing on the *ancien régime* of identity. The same was true for the 1763 work on physiognomy that gratuitously paused to describe gypsies who had transformed their complexion by smearing themselves with greasy unctons. It was also true of the 1760 writer whose admission that “there is at least some truth in physiognomy” turned out to have been intended as an admission to “every young lady to be very careful of her looks” precisely because external appearance can lead others to *wrong* conclusions about one’s character. It remained true when Burke revealingly identified the best example he knew of a protean man, one who could transform himself into other identities “as if he had been changed into the[se] very men”, as none other than “the celebrated physiognomist Campanella”. In these instances, and many others, it cannot fail to strike us that the eighteenth-century understanding of physiognomy was fully compatible with an underlying belief in the mutability of identity. Small wonder, therefore, that the clergyman-satirist John Clubbe, author of the 1763 work *Physiognomy* with the interest in face-altered gypsies, could barely contain his laughter in proposing to replace physiognomy – “a fallacious





44. "The Weighing House", after William Hogarth, frontispiece to [John Clubbe], *Physiognomy*, London, 1763. The key below the image provides the measure of gravity for every order of men variously suspended in mid-air by the fantastical weighing machine

way of judging" – with a "weighing machine" that would tell people's generic types simply from their weight (fig. 44). The artist who rendered Clubbe's weighing machine in visual form was none other than William Hogarth, whose own writing on reading faces tempered the artistic interest in their potential as an "index of the mind" with the warning that faces could metamorphose, mislead, be subject to contingencies and manipulations, or act as masks. Hogarth hastened to elaborate these caveats, he explained, "least I should be thought to lay too great a stress on outward shew, like a physiognomist". Perish the thought.<sup>49</sup>

How very different was the late-eighteenth-century science of physiognomy, reinvented by Lavater and now riding back triumphantly on the waves of a turning cultural tide. Its premises were now in tune with the new regime of identity, not the old. "Physiognomy" – thus Lavater, in the words of Holcroft's

popular translation – "is the science or knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents". Physiognomy provided "solid and fixed principles by which to settle what the Man really is". Forget Cozens, whom Lavater actually singled out for his alleged unnatural and characterless treatment of classical profiles; and forget the generic measures of Clubbe's fantastical weighing machine. Rather, more like Mary Poppin's magical tape measure, the skilled (even if hard to attain) application of Lavaterian principles was guaranteed to recover for each and every person nothing short of a unique "individual self". For Lavater, the skill of the physiognomist was in the discernment of the depths of individual character. Cozens, by contrast, had wished for a skilled penetrating elite who "will think the characted beauties imperfect" but "whose nice discernment and taste inclines them to admire the simple beauty" – that characterless, undifferentiated beauty which for him was precisely what was hidden in those underlying depths. But to go back to Lavater: "Man is free as the bird in a cage. He has a circle of activity and sensibility whose bounds he cannot pass. As the human body has lines which bound it, every mind has its peculiar sphere in which to range; but that sphere is invariably determined."<sup>50</sup> Deep and consequential, fixed and real, determined and determining: it does not take much of an imaginative leap to see Lavater's bird as the newly fixed inner core of selfhood, and the cage as those impermeable boundaries of identity, now essentially inscribed in the physicality of the body, from which the self can no longer fly away. One could hardly conjure up a more concrete, embodied image of the new regime of identity-as-self.

Lavater's physiognomic theory, furthermore, represented a new departure not only in relation to physiognomy's low point of the eighteenth century: it was also distinctly different from that which had characterized the earlier heyday of physiognomy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. When Renaissance humanists had read faces, Roy Porter has reminded us, they were reading for *types* of universal characters and emotions: the face of fear, or dignity, or nobility, or anger. And they found the signs of these generalized types not in the face as a whole, but atomistically, in this or that particular trait: a mole on a cheek, hairy eyebrows, lobeless ears. Late-eighteenth-century physiognomists, by contrast, read the integrated ensemble of the face, and they did so in the belief – in Lavater's words – that "each man is an individual self, with as little ability to become another self as to become an angel". Consequently, it was crucial for the modern physiognomist to realize that "all faces, all forms, all created beings, differ from one another, not only with respect to their class, their genus, their species, but also, with respect to their individuality."<sup>51</sup> Again, it would be hard to find enunciations summing up the new regime of identity that were more categorical and uncompromising.

Perhaps too uncompromising. For if human appearances came in an infinite

variety, corresponding to the infinite diversity of unique selves, how could they be reduced to a manageable system of generalizations reproducible in a work like Lavater's? *The Artist's Repository*, for one, was struck by this problem. It is true, the magazine happily conceded, that "the face is the index of the mind"; an oft-repeated cliché of physiognomic wisdom. But although "some great artists" have consequently taken up physiognomy, it was in truth "a science 'puzzled in mazes, and perplexed with errors'", since "the almost infinite diversity of character, which we remark in the human countenance" makes it "impossible to say, determinately, that as such and such features compose the countenance of a certain individual, therefore he is a morose, a glutton, &c."<sup>52</sup> We are back once more with the internal tension inherent in the new regime of identity, which had also struck John Wilson Croker in reviewing contemporary theories of education, between its contradictory emphases on individual uniqueness and essentializing generalizations.

Many contemporaries were likewise aware of this contradictory tension – not least Lavater himself, who warned of the hazards of proposing too formulaic a system – and tried their best to square the circle. Blake, for instance, made a note in his copy of Lavater to distinguish substantial "true character" from insubstantial accidents. "Substance", Blake commented to himself, "gives tincture to the accident, and makes it physiognomic": that is, it is the inner substance, which does yield itself to generalized categorization, that makes a feature that is in itself accidental, and thus of infinite variety, indicative of a person's true character. It hardly needs pointing out that Blake's solution was as much in tune with the presuppositions of the new identity regime as the stricter physiognomic theory on which he was commenting. The same was equally true of another move that tried to get around this difficulty by affirming that physiognomic knowledge was itself part of the innate essence of human identity. It is doubtful, one critic wrote, whether physiognomy can be theorized or taught in the manner of Lavater, since in truth it represents knowledge that "is, at best, a sort of instinct given to man, as instinct is given to the beasts". For Charles Bell too, writing in 1806, the capacity to read faces was inborn and not learned: it was therefore observable in its purest form in infants – who thus found themselves once again at the forefront of turn-of-the-century speculation.<sup>53</sup> But if the reading of faces was inborn in each and every person, then it was compatible with the infinite differences of innate selves, and did not require – or indeed allow for – generalized theorizing.

Another critic of a more fanciful bent hit the nail right on the head. In this critic's scenario set in an imaginary land, a native school of physiognomists brought "the physiognomic art" to "an incredible pitch of perfection". They did so by practicing the art not with Lavaterian drawings but rather with *real live heads*. Here was a solution for the incompatibility of generic generalization

and unique individuality: each head in this fantastical picture was taken to represent the physiognomy only of itself.<sup>54</sup> What this critic intuited through this ironic jest was that the only way to bridge the incongruous impulses to individuate and to essentialize was by circumventing altogether the mediation of representation. Lavater himself recommended eliminating the mediation of representation as much as possible through the use of silhouettes: a newly fashionable technique for the replication of heads that could supposedly retain, as John Randolph put it in a letter to his sister Fanny in 1805, "in each face the peculiarity of character it possesses". Nor did one have to stop there. The late 1780s saw the invention of the "physionotrace", a profiling machine that could reputedly replicate an exact face in an immediate and unmediated fashion. Tellingly, the physionotrace was introduced to Britain by the sons of another major personage in the pre-photographic quest for the perfect unmediated replication of human likeness: namely, Madame Tussaud, as she began touring Britain in the post-revolutionary years, making her wax figures while her sons wheeled behind her the newfangled profiling machine.<sup>55</sup>

These various developments can be interpreted, first, by placing them within the shifting history of representation. The *ancien régime* of identity, we recall, had witnessed concerns for the unprecedented preponderance of representation: did a copy presuppose an original? These late-eighteenth-century developments can therefore be seen as one reaction, admittedly extreme, through the insistence on the elimination of representation altogether, so as to annihilate, hopefully, the very distinction between copy and original. But more to our point here, we can also place the well-known vogue for wax figures and wax museums in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, together with the efforts of the profiling devices and silhouette artists, within the shifting history of identity and selfhood. They were all responses, more or less successful, to the premium that the new regime of identity now placed on embodied, unique, unmediated physiognomy.

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Physiognomy, as is often recognized, has an intimate relationship with art. I would like therefore to close this consideration of Lavaterian physiognomy, which crystallized several aspects of the new regime of identity (regardless of whether the theory itself was embraced or, as was often the case, rejected), by drawing attention to the affinities of physiognomic logic and presuppositions with late-eighteenth-century developments in the theory and practice of both (so-called) high and low visual art.

No eighteenth-century institution represented high art more authoritatively than the Royal Academy of Arts, and no figure represented this august

authority more famously than its first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who from its opening in 1769 addressed its members and students in a series of annual "Discourses on Art". Early on in his *ex cathedra* pronouncements Reynolds laid down a general "presiding principle" of art: "perfect form", art's object and purpose, "is produced by leaving out particularities". From this he then derived a clear theory of portraiture: "If a portrait-painter", went his address of 1771, "is desirous to raise and improve his subject, he has no other means than by approaching it to a general idea. He leaves out all the minute breaks and peculiarities in the face . . . if an exact resemblance of an individual be considered as the sole object to be aimed at, the portrait-painter will be apt to lose more than he gains." "Peculiar [individual] marks" — he added a couple of years later — were "defects", which, although useful for making us "cognizable and distinguished from one another", the artist should seek to avoid as much as possible. It is only by eliminating such peculiarities — by achieving, in other words, what Alexander Cozens was to recommend as "a beautiful face unmingled with character" — that the artist can approach a common form, one that is shared by all individuals and that is the grounds for social sympathy between them. Here we have again the theory of the socially turned generic representation of the *ancien régime* of identity, valorizing intersubjective identicality over individual identity.<sup>56</sup>

With this flashback to Reynolds's lectures of the early 1770s in mind, consider now the break represented by what the same distinguished audience was to hear in 1785 from the academy's recently appointed professor of painting, James Barry: John Barrell has provided us with a detailed contrast between Barry and Reynolds, which can be summarized as follows. Barry basically accepted Reynolds's account of characterless ideal beauty, but rejected outright his injunction to the artist never to deviate from this ideal. Following Reynolds's generalized ideal would not only be "tasteless and insipid" as well as "lying and contradictory", but also could not be "advantageous to morality and the interests of mankind". This was because it is only through the particular tasks that individuals perform, tasks physical or intellectual that distinguish one person from another, that man achieves his moral purpose and the highest development of his nature. For Barry, therefore, a man is — and ought to be — what he does; which in turn depends on a combination of inborn individual suitability and education. But even the external influence of education, Barry explained further (prefiguring the early Hazlitt), is then internalized as man's second nature, by which his body is entirely determined and individualized: character may be the result of development and education, but once it is fixed it cannot be changed.<sup>57</sup>

What Barry told his audience, therefore, was that variety was for an artistic work not a flaw but a virtue. His theory sought not to eliminate the range of

individual identities but, in Barrell's words, "to categorise and distribute [them] . . . into physiognomic types". Moreover, just as Reynolds's lectures had been in tune with other eighteenth-century voices in the public discussion of art, including those of Hogarth, Cozens, even Gainsborough, as well as Jonathan Richardson earlier in the century,<sup>58</sup> so Barry's physiognomic approach also chimed with others during his own moment at the close of the century. We can mention in this company Archibald Alison (who in 1790 declared the height of beauty to be found in the "expressions" of "peculiar characters or dispositions of the MIND"), Charles Bell ("The noblest aim of painting unquestionably is to reach the mind . . . [and] the emotions of the mind, as indicated by the figure, and in the countenance" [1806]), William Hazlitt ("general character" and "individual peculiarities" are "so far from being incompatible with, that they are not without some difficulty distinguishable from, each other" [1816]), and Henry Fuseli. Fuseli's belief that good characteristic portraiture was physiognomic led him to tamper even with Lavater's work: when Lavater was translated into English, Fuseli took out a generalized portrait of Brutus (after Rubens) that had graced the original German edition and replaced it with his own, still modeling his Brutus on the Rubens head but now endowing it with particularized and expressive features.<sup>59</sup> In sum, if Reynolds had lectured with both legs firmly planted in the *ancien régime* of identity, Barry was in good company in getting his feet wet in the new.

The reader may wonder at this point how Reynolds suddenly came to represent the *ancien régime* of identity, given that earlier in this chapter — in his portrait of the Dilettanti, or his paintings of children — his role was rather that of the bellwether of the new. To explain this, we need to keep in mind that Reynolds's Discourses were an ongoing endeavor, delivered annually (and later biannually) from 1769 through to his retirement in 1790. As Barrell has painstakingly shown, when read as a temporal sequence, the Discourses reveal unmistakable shifts in Reynolds's opinions. Of these, one of the most conspicuous is Reynolds's retreat in the later Discourses from the categorical preference for the general over the particular. Admitting now that individual particularities "have still their foundation, however slender, in the original fabric of our minds" — note well this last phrase — Reynolds increasingly doubted whether the portrait painter should not really be allowed considerable license in taking them into account. The later Discourses therefore repeatedly wrestled with the implications of this altered position for the practice of art in general and portraiture in particular. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Reynolds saved his most upfront admission of his change of heart to another venue, an unfinished essay on Shakespeare. There he conceded readily that this was a new age that "demand[ed] a new code of laws", one "more agreeable to the nature of man" and attentive to "those accidents" that his earlier theory had dismissed.

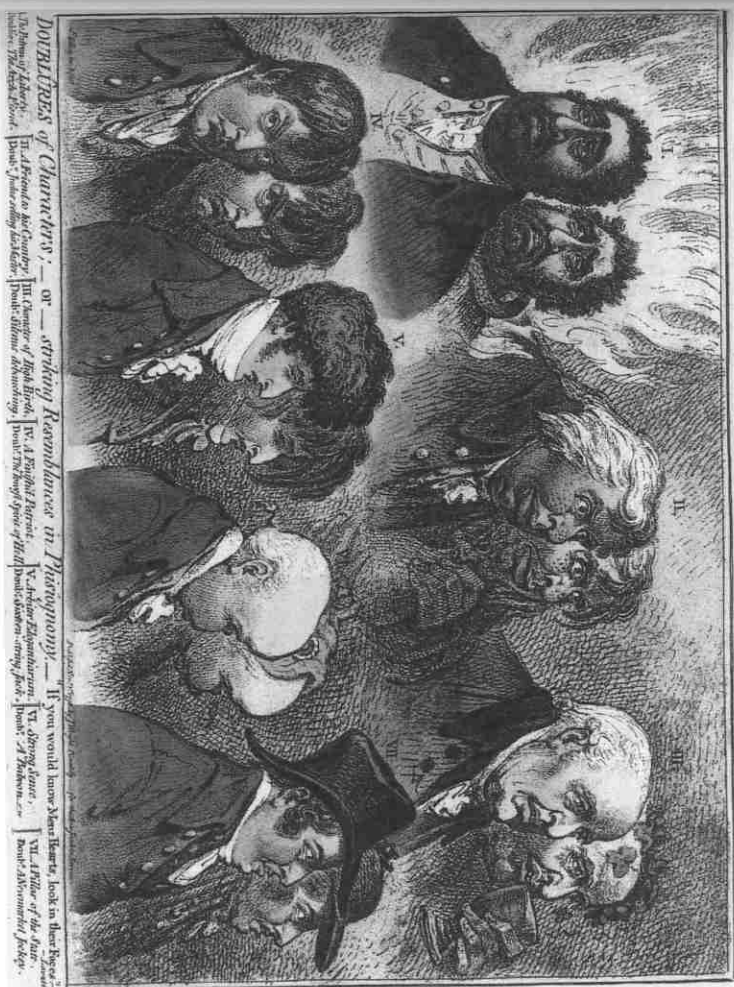
By now Reynolds had certainly traveled quite a distance from his earlier pronouncements. Finally, in view of what the previous pages have suggested regarding chronology, consider this: as it turns out, we can pinpoint with some precision the moment of Reynolds's change of heart. According to expert witness John Barrell, it first became apparent that Reynolds was changing his opinion and leaving the *ancien régime* of identity behind in his seventh Discourse, which he delivered to the Royal Academy on 10 December 1776.<sup>60</sup>

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So much for high art. But the American revolutionary war, art historian Amelia Rausser tells us, also saw the arrival in force of a new visual genre that is commonly categorized as low rather than high: the political caricature. How could it be new, you ask: was Hogarth's century not already replete with political prints? Yes, but they were not the same. Rausser, following the lead of Diana Donald, distinguishes two different representational modes in political prints. For most of the eighteenth century, political prints were conceived overwhelmingly in an emblematic mode: that is to say, using a complex visual language of signs and symbols, inherited and adapted from the popular emblem books of the seventeenth century, which typically involved a multilayered interaction of image and text and a surfeit of symbols crowding the surface of the print in cells of different time and space. Individuals were subordinated to this emblematic composition in ways that rendered their representation stereotypical and impersonal, and thus routinely required textual clarification of their identity.<sup>61</sup>

By contrast, the late eighteenth century – the age of Gillray, Rowlandson, and Cruikshank, among others – saw the heyday of the caricatural mode, a mode that was insistently subjective and individualized. In caricatural political prints the issues at hand were invested in the particularized representation of distinct and distinguishable persons. The stance of the caricatural mode toward such individuals was ironic, promising to strip away unreliable signs in order to reveal the deeper underlying truth. Consequently, this new mode was inherently physiognomic. In a mutually reinforcing relationship with the explosion of interest in physiognomy, the manipulation of individuated personal traits through a physiognomic eye – in contrast to the recycling of familiar symbols that had been typical of the emblematic mode – became the key to the new ironic purpose of the political caricature.

As a typical example, albeit one uncommonly explicit about its source of inspiration, we can take Gillray's caricature of 1798, "DOUBLURES of Characters; or Striking Resemblances in Physiognomy" (fig. 45), which revealed the true character of known political figures (like Charles James Fox, top left) with



45. James Gillray, "DOUBLURES of Characters; or Striking Resemblances in Physiognomy", 1798

the guidance of an aphorism from Lavater – "If you would know Mens Hearts, look in their Faces".<sup>62</sup> Gillray's "doubleure", a doubleness of inner self delimiting outer appearance, or outer appearance revealing inner self, could hardly be further from that vision of unfettered and roaming doubleness of identity – à la Garrick, Boswell, Woffington, Locke, or Smith – that had been commensurate with the presuppositions of the previous generations. Indeed, by this point it seems almost superfluous to spell out how closely the contrast between the late-eighteenth-century physiognomic, particularized, inner-gazing caricatural mode and the earlier generic, impersonal emblematic mode maps onto this book's broader story: both onto the contrast between the *ancien régime* of identity and the new regime that came to replace it, and onto the chronology that singles out the American revolutionary war as the caesura that marked the break.

Of course, this is not to suggest that there had not been physiognomic prints before: Hogarth's famous 1763 caricature of the squinting, cross-eyed, ugly Wilkes leaps to mind as the ultimate counter-example. But rarely has there been

an exception that proved the rule more effectively. For, as Rauser insightfully demonstrates, Hogarth's caricature spectacularly backfired: like Balaam's ass, it was intended to vilify Wilkes, but was instead picked up by his supporters (and Wilkes himself) to be recirculated with considerable enthusiasm. As Rauser continues to explain, the print missed its purpose because it used a visual language that was resolutely at odds with contemporary practice and expectations, and thus beyond the interpretive horizon of its audience. Hogarth, stung by a private feud with his erstwhile friend, released his personalized caricature in the middle of the political episode that in fact elicited the last major flourish of eighteenth-century emblematic prints (the ubiquitous and rich symbolic use of a boot for "Bute" was but one memorable example of this emblematic mode). Consequently Hogarth's offensive gambit fell flat, and became available for misappropriation by his rival's supporters. Similarly, we can point to several other instances when eighteenth-century caricatures failed to resonate, notably the witty drawings of Marquess Townshend in the late 1750s for which he was summarily reproved by his contemporaries (a "false star", says Donald).<sup>65</sup> After all, caricature was a recognized art form, having been popularized by seventeenth-century Italian fine artists from Annibale Carracci to Gianlorenzo Bernini: a tradition undoubtedly familiar to eighteenth-century Grand Touring Englishmen. That this mode of representation did not catch on for most of the century, therefore, had to do not with its unavailability but with its lack of resonance. But then, suddenly, the situation changed. If it was rare to see political caricatures before 1780, thereafter they became exceedingly common, quickly becoming the dominant mode. (So much so that when an early-nineteenth-century antiquarian encountered an earlier emblematic political print, he dismissed it as a "curious jumble of Hieroglyphics".)<sup>66</sup> Why the sudden change? Donald, somewhat unconvincingly, tries to explain the continuing resonance of the emblematic over the caricatural mode during the short eighteenth century, and then their abrupt reversal of fortunes, in terms of the exigencies of political rhetoric at these respective moments. Rauser, on the other hand, seeks to locate this shift within a broader cultural explanation: one that would also be able to account for the simultaneous and obviously pertinent rise of physiognomy. An explanation, to be sure, very much consonant with the shift proposed here from the *ancien régime* of identity to the new.

The relationship between the emergence in force of the caricatural-cum-physiognomic mode and the new regime of identity becomes even more apparent when we consider what Rauser rightly emphasizes as the key functions of caricature and physiognomy: namely, *to unmask*. One of the main indicators of change in her story is therefore a sudden and conspicuous rise in prints devoted to unmasking: a trend that, as she carefully documents, "surged around 1780" and then "increased rapidly in the early 1780s". This observation is loud

with reverberations from our earlier discussion. It takes us back to the outbreak of contemporary preoccupation with masking and disguise that was triggered just then by the American war (a connection clearly registered in Rauser's examples). It takes us back to the unexpected, precipitous decline in the cultural status of the masquerade that began precisely at this moment. Indeed, it takes us straight back to the very first "fragment" that opened this chapter, which featured two of these unmasking prints as signs of the impending change. These two prints, moreover, have allowed us to see that this 1780s preoccupation was not simply about unmasking, but about the wishful assertion of the very impossibility of successful masquerade and disguise. The same assertion was of course also dear to the hearts of the physiognomists – think again of the implication of Gillray's "Doubtless of Characters". It thus seems overdetermined that, when Mary Anne Schimmelpeninck summoned her childhood memories of playing doll dress-up in the 1780s, a pastime that had taught her the inevitable preponderance of ingrained character over disguise and masquerade (recall New regime fragment 12, pp. 273–4), she could not separate them in her mind from the recollection of being left alone as a young girl – how else? – with the heavy tomes of Lavater.<sup>65</sup>

We have thus closed one more circle. If the decline of the masquerade has served us as the lens through which to observe the late-eighteenth-century transformation in understandings of identity and self, we can now add the rise of the physiognomic mode across so many cultural forms as its complementary flip side. Masks were the opposite of faces. Contemporaries, to be sure, knew this. In the 1780 novel *Masquerades; or, What You Will*, which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter as undermining the potential for identity play at a masquerade, contrary to the implication of the novel's title, there is in fact a second masquerade scene. In this case the anonymous author seems at first glance to have allowed for the unrecognizability of individuals at a masked ball: but the novelist's real intent is made clear to the reader in the deliberate framing of this scene, before and after, with carefully placed references to a "physiognomic eye" and to the value of being "a true physiognomist". So much for the masquerade's potential for transforming or disguising identity, undone through the power of physiognomy.<sup>66</sup> Masks or faces: there was nothing like the shift in cultural investment from one to the other to epitomize the ousting of the *ancien régime* of identity by the new.

#### Coda: Self in the Age of Revolutions

In the preceding pages I have sometimes referred to the late-eighteenth-century transformation in the regime of identity and self as a "cultural revolution". This phrase is intended to draw attention to the pervasiveness of this

transformation's reach, to the abruptness of its unfolding, and to the significance of its consequences.<sup>67</sup> But it also gestures to the familiar picture of this period as the "Age of Revolutions", and thus begs the question of their relationship – the relationship, that is, between the cultural revolution proposed here and the emergence of modern democratic politics that is commonly dated to the same historical moment. Now this is a very big topic to arrive at the end of an already rather big book, and one that in truth would require a volume of its own and a whole range of new sources. *Faute de mieux*, I would like to end this discussion of the new departures riding on the coat-tails of the new regime of identity with some preliminary observations on its possible relationship with the birth of modern politics, which might serve to outline some areas for future research.

The first point to be made is a negative one. It is an all-too-common historiographical move to finger major political events as the prime movers of changes in other spheres of life, as if this causal relationship were so self-evident as not to require either logical justification or detailed demonstration. This book, by contrast, has suggested that the major political revolutions and ideologies of the Age of Revolutions were *not* the prime motor behind the story: it has been trying to tell. I am not arguing that these revolutions and ideologies had no impact – that would be foolhardy and wrong. But already on the grounds of chronology (the transformation charted here was well under way before the French Revolution and the dramatic political departures of the 1790s) and scope (it reached far and wide, crossing many social, cultural, and indeed political lines) it is impossible to defend the singling out of political developments as the cause from which all other layers of change followed. This remains true even of the American Revolution, which I have invoked less for the impact of its innovative political ideology than for the broadly diffused effects of the conflict that accompanied it, and which in any case filled in my scenario the role of trigger rather than prime mover. Instead I have pushed for a reversed perspective that asks whether the broad cultural framework was in itself a conditioning factor in political developments; or, in other words, whether there is something to be gained from treating politics as an arena of culture, rather than culture as an arena of politics. Specifically I have therefore asked, for instance, whether we should look less for how American revolutionary ideology produced the cultural anxieties accompanying the American war than for how these diffuse anxieties conditioned the reception and effects of American political ideology. Or whether we should try to see the onset of a new regime of gender as a precondition for the new political edge of late-eighteenth-century feminism, rather than assume that it was the backlash against the political feminism of the 1790s that generated a realignment of gender understandings. Or whether we should see the resort to the language of the "middle class" in the

1790s not simply as a consequence of the political configuration of this decade – as I myself once argued – but rather as a consequence of anterior cultural transformation that had made this particular interaction of politics and social language plausible.

Following a similar line of reasoning, therefore, we can ask more generally in what ways the cultural revolution proposed in this book constituted an enabling precondition for the political revolutions of the Age of Revolutions. (I realize of course that I am posing this question at the end of an inquiry focused on a country that, unlike France and America, did *not* experience a political revolution: I will return to this comparative point shortly.) Consider one of the most significant contributions of this period to modern political language: the notion of inalienable natural rights. To be sure, the idea of natural rights was not a new one: it had an important early-modern provenance. But in framing the question of natural rights in terms of continuity and change, two observations can quickly be made. First, the prevalent understanding of natural rights throughout most of the eighteenth century, derived as it was from early-modern theories of natural law, was not as open-ended claims of individuals, but always in conjunction with matching duties to others. As Knud Haakonssen has shown, natural rights, following the formulation of the influential late-seventeenth-century natural law theorist Samuel Pufendorf, entailed a package deal comprehended in the Latin term *officium*, or office, which encompassed duties and rights together. In terms we have used before, this can be described as a socially turned understanding of natural rights. Its particular intersubjective bent may have depended, in part, on a relative decline in the weight accorded to the direct and active duty to God in the conceptualization of natural rights (recall Gauchet's vision of the disenchantment of the world); but it was distinctly different – this is Haakonssen's point – from the more sharply individualistic meaning assigned to the "rights of man" during the Age of Revolutions.<sup>68</sup> A more extensive discussion, moreover, would consider these developments in political theory next to the familiar picture of political practice in the short eighteenth century, in which the primary derivation of political legitimacy relied on the communal claims of *custom*; and custom, as Nicholas Rogers and Douglas Hay have reminded us, was a collective language that "had many of the resonances that came at the end of the century to be struck by the word 'rights'."<sup>69</sup>

The second observation on continuity and change goes back to the remarkable pre-modern prefiguration of the modern notion of individual, inalienable, natural rights in the hands of certain groups of radicals, especially the Levellers, during the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. But not only were these radicals a very small group – "a minority within a minority", in David Zaret's words – their breakthrough – unprecedented and

“distinctively modern” (Zaret again) – fell flat without real historical echo, leaving the modern observer with the familiar sense of this episode as an isolated moment out of synch with its times.<sup>70</sup> It seems plausible therefore to pose the question again in terms of the specificity of the late eighteenth century: why was it this particular juncture that saw natural rights shift from a socially turned to a more individualistic understanding, and why did this political language now resonate so widely – as it had not done before – among supporters and detractors alike? For the first half of the question, the connection to the cultural transformation charted in this book requires no further commentary. But what about the ultimately more important second half: was this cultural transformation a factor in enabling the language of natural rights to become such a wide platform for popular mobilization in modern politics?

Charles Taylor, for one, has anticipated a positive answer. The novelty in modern notions of natural rights, according to Taylor, was not in their moral imperatives, largely shared by their predecessors, “but in the place of the subject” in their conceptualization, relying on an autonomous active individual able to claim these rights. Historians have only lately turned their attention to the implications of this insight. “How did ‘rights’”, Joan Scott has asked, “come to be understood as something individuals possessed?” We can get even closer to Taylor’s meaning by reversing Scott’s question: how did “individuals” come to be understood as something – or someone – that can possess rights? This is precisely the shift in focus that has recently been recommended by the doyenne of the cultural history of the Age of Revolutions. “The belief in the self-evidence of the human rights of autonomous individuals”, Lynn Hunt insists, “depended not only on alterations in the intellectual climate but also on subtle changes in the perception of bodies and selves.” And again: “the credibility of natural rights flows from new conceptions and practices of what it means to be a self as much as from previous intellectual or legal influences.”<sup>71</sup> The credibility of natural rights – what I might call here their resonance – depended on new meanings of self.

But which new meanings? Political philosopher Edward Andrew has proposed one specific change in conceptions and practices of selfhood that underlay the emergence of the language of natural rights in the late eighteenth century. Natural rights, he argues, rest on a notion of individual inner conscience: a conviction that was shared by both sides in the late-eighteenth-century debate – as represented most influentially by Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke – and picked up, among others, by the Romantics (Byron’s “small voice within”). This notion, Andrew further shows, was itself an innovation, distinctly different from the prevalent eighteenth-century conscience – recall Adam Smith’s impartial spectator – that was other-oriented and socially turned. (This eighteenth-century conscience, in turn, had been distinct from

its solipsistic but God-driven Protestant predecessor.) So while Andrew does not frame this change explicitly as a question of self, his reasoning can readily be seen to affirm Hunt’s line of thinking.<sup>72</sup> It also, obviously, dovetails with my own framework in this book. Indeed, the broader question that I would like to leave the reader with is whether those new conceptions and practices of selfhood that Hunt seeks as the missing link in our understanding of natural rights in the Age of Revolutions were not precisely the outcomes of the transformation that we have been following here. Was the new regime of identity that emerged at this very moment privileging a self that was stable, well-defined, and reliable, and thus capable of possessing inalienable individual natural rights, an enabling epistemological precondition for the bursting of this pivotal concept onto the Western political stage? The making of the modern subject, we may find, relied on the prior making of the modern self.

The reader may reasonably protest that the notion of natural rights was central to the American Revolution of 1776, and thus preceded the shift that in my *mise-en-scène* arrived subsequently. And yet American historians – Michael Zuckert, for example – have repeatedly pointed to a paradoxical discrepancy between, on the one hand, the place of the language of natural rights in the Declaration of Independence and in the statements of the nascent states and, on the other, the tendency to ignore, deny, or deprecate natural rights as irrelevant to American actions during the revolution. Yes, the language of natural rights did appear from the 1760s onward – although not too frequently – in American pronouncements during the confrontation with the metropolitan government. But no, this language did not necessarily mean yet what we now take it to mean, but rather drew on the same eighteenth-century socially turned and duty-bound understandings just noted. And when the language of natural rights suddenly seemed to open up new meanings, the revolutionaries, who – in Daniel Rodgers’s words – stumbled upon these new potentialities “hesitantly, pushed by circumstances”, did not quite know what to do with them. Constitutional historian John Phillip Reid has gone as far as to declare “the irrelevancy of natural rights” to the revolutionary moment. Taking on a powerful retrospective “mythology”, he notes that even in the Declaration of Independence natural rights made an impact only on the rhetorical preamble but not on the actual rights claimed, all of which were historical constitutional rights of Englishmen. Still more to the point, even when the Americans did invoke natural rights, they did not have (thus Haakonssen’s conclusion) “a clear idea of rights as underived, primary features of the person”. This idea, Alfred Young adds, was not really to make a difference to the American political vocabulary until the 1790s.<sup>73</sup> Overall, then, the picture that emerges is of the American revolutionaries being pushed into this new language by the power of events, broaching it in their formal statements in an experimental and

sometimes confused way, but before its full implications and mobilizing power had unfolded. The American Revolution certainly made a distinct and crucial contribution to the political career of the language of natural rights, but we can still ask whether it was only in conjunction with the emergence of a new cultural environment that this career could really take off.

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I would like to conclude these brief observations on the age of political revolutions with a counter trend. As far as I am aware, it is the most significant counter-example – or cluster of counter-examples – for my argument about the late-eighteenth-century demise of the *ancien régime* of identity. However, I want to suggest that the very nature of these exceptions demonstrates once more how different was the cultural environment in which the new political winds were blowing:

This counter trend comes from the radical Jacobin circles of the 1790s. Consider William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793, one of the most important – and most profoundly radical – interventions of this period. The basis of Godwin's arguments was a belief in the perfectibility of man. This position perforce required him to combine a developmental perspective on the progress of the mind, seemingly in tune with the new regime of identity, with an *ancien-régime* insistence on the mutable nature of one's identity and character, undetermined by inborn tendencies and wholly shapeable through external influence. "What is born into the world is an unfinished sketch," Godwin asserted, "without character or decisive feature impressed upon it." Who does not know that "in the course of a human life the character of the individual frequently undergoes two or three revolutions of its fundamental stamina?" he asked; "how often does it happen that, if we meet our best loved friend after an absence of twenty years, we look in vain in the man before us" for the person we had once known? Godwin here wheeled out the familiar, if by now dusty, eighteenth-century trope – the traveler unrecognized after twenty years of absence – in order to drive home his point; namely, that "it is impression that makes the man, and, compared with the empire of impression, the mere differences of animal structure are inexpressibly unimportant and powerless".<sup>74</sup> No mincing of words for Godwin.

So here was an intransigent vestige of the *ancien régime* of identity. But note the difference. What could have been taken for granted earlier in the century, or at least would not have been taken as particularly objectionable, now signaled in Godwin's hands an explicit and loaded radical political program. Indeed, the key point to note is that those who now shared Godwin's rearguard *ancien-régime*-of-identity position – a position that had characterized a broad spectrum

earlier in the eighteenth century – were all of his own well-defined political ilk. We can therefore find the echoes of Godwin's position in the so-called "Jacobin novels" of the 1790s, those that were staking the same political territory: like Godwin's own *Caleb Williams* of 1794, which had one character saying, "you did not make yourself; you are just what circumstances irresistibly compelled you to be"; or his friend Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* of 1796 which declared that "we are all creatures of education".<sup>75</sup> The old had become new: the same familiar eighteenth-century ideas now took on a fresh and unfamiliar meaning as the cultural world around them changed. This was the same reversal that we have seen in the transformation of the *ancien régime* of gender, when the gender-bending woman's loss of her cultural ground in the closing decades of the century was, arguably, a precondition for her emergence as a politically charged figure in the feminist debates of the 1790s. The new edge and the new challenge posed by notions that had been part and parcel of the *ancien régime* of identity were a consequence of the very transformation that had brought this *ancien régime* of identity to an end.