

Rewriting the Renaissance

The Discourses of Sexual Difference
in Early Modern Europe

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contradiction between work and home.²⁶ Divorce sacrifices marriage itself (or the wife) to the higher calling of the male, when the household no longer functions efficiently as both the refuge from the discipline of masculine labor and as the locus for the disciplining of sexuality (what Freud recognizes in his phrase, "an expedient distribution of . . . libido"). The contradiction of work and home is the condition for the representation of Samson's ascetic vocation, as it is for the representation of Dalila's seduction of Samson within marriage. The central panel of *Samson Agonistes* is thus recognizably an example of that domestic drama with which we are now so familiar, not the comedy of courtship but the "tragic" social practice Milton called the discipline of divorce, a programmatic attempt to control the bodies of men and women—as a last resort—by disentangling them.

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Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed

PETER STALLYBRASS

In his essay "Techniques of the Body," Marcel Mauss uses the term *habitus* to define the acquired abilities—the motions, postures, and gestures—of the body:

These "habits" do not just vary with individuals and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them, we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties.¹

To analyze the habits of the body, then, is not only to trace the individual development of the subject but also to investigate what Pierre Bourdieu calls "the insignificant details of dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners" as the inscribed principles of "the arbitrary content of the culture."²

The social formation of the body is the more effective because it extorts the essential while seeming to demand the insignificant: in obtaining the respect for form and forms of respect which constitute the most visible and at the same time the best hidden (because most "natural") manifestation of submission to the established order, the incorporation of the arbitrary abolishes what Raymond Ruyer calls "lateral possibilities," that is, all the eccentricities and deviations which are the small change of madness.³

To examine the body's formation is to trace the connections between politeness and politics. But because these connections are never simply given, the body can itself become a site of conflict.

In *Rabelais and His World*,⁴ Bakhtin attempts to map out that site, although he concentrates on the body as *locus* of class conflict to the

exclusion of gender, a point to which I shall return. Bakhtin's interpretation of the differentiated "habits" of the Renaissance body works out from the rhetorical ploys of Rabelais's text to an opposition between the grotesque body and the classical body. The grotesque body is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (p. 27). The classical body is, on the contrary, an image of "finished, completed" man; as it is formed within the canons of the absolutist state, "the opaque surface and the body's 'valleys' acquire an essential meaning as the border of a closed individuality that does not merge with other bodies and with the world" (p. 320). The grotesque emphasizes those parts of the body "that are open to the outside world," "the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose" (p. 26). If it privileges an area, it is the anus and it celebrates dung as the fertilizer of material life, whereas the classical emphasizes the head as the seat of reason, transcending the classical bodily. The grotesque body's favored space is the marketplace where it enjoys "a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology" (p. 154); in the "liberties" of the marketplace where speak the language of festive obscenity and abuse. The language of the classical body, by contrast, is the "tongue of official literature or of the ruling classes," a language governed by the hierarchy and etiquette of "palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes" (p. 154). It is precisely these privileged places that the grotesque interrogates and subverts, since it rejects "all the forms of inhuman interrogates and the prevailing concept of the world" (p. 49).

This opposition between the grotesque and the classical defines two canons "in their pure, one might say extreme form" (p. 30). Historically, as Bakhtin notes, they were not fixed and immutable. They were indeed diacritical, each in turn formed by the redrawing of the boundaries of the other. If we can imagine a precise shape for the grotesque body in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is only in opposition to the development of new canons that distinguished the "correct" techniques of the body even as they carefully distinguished between "familiar speech and 'correct' language" (p. 320). It is the formation of these "correct" techniques that Norbert Elias examines in *The History of Manners*, the first volume of *The Civilising Process*.⁵ At first sight, this book looks like a curious collection of quotations (mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) arranged into chapters "On Behaviour at Table," "On Blowing One's Nose," "On Spitting," "On Behaviour in the Bedroom," etc. But in the context of the second volume of *The Civilising Process*, *Power and Civility*, it is

clear that Elias is actually mapping out the relation between state formation and the formation of new kinds of behavior "under the watchword of *civilité*."⁶

In particular, Elias traces the development of concepts of *civilité* following the publication of Erasmus' massively influential *De civilitate morum puerilium* (1530), a book concerned with "outward bodily propriety." Elias argues that during the sixteenth century "in conjunction with the new power relationships the social imperative not to offend others becomes more binding."⁷ But the very notion of social "offence" depended upon transformed thresholds of embarrassment and shame that marked a simultaneous process of social and bodily differentiation:

In the sixteenth century, Monteil tells us, in France as everywhere else, the common people blow their noses without a handkerchief, but among the bourgeoisie it is accepted practice to use the sleeve. As for the rich, they carry a handkerchief in their pockets; therefore, to say that a man has wealth, one says that he does not blow his nose on his sleeve.⁸

The adoption of handkerchiefs, forks, separate eating bowls in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a means of establishing social purity through bodily purity. The enclosure of the body, the "cleansing" of the orifices, emphasized the borders of a closed individuality at the same time as it separated off the social elite from the "vulgar."

During the same period, sumptuary laws were extended and enforced. In England, the Act of 1533 closely defined the relation between social status and dress, and in Elizabeth's reign the Act was reinforced through nine royal proclamations on apparel. In 1559-60, watches were appointed in London to look for people wearing "great hose and other unlawful apparel," and in May 1562 a proclamation was specifically directed against the "monstrous abuse of apparel almost in all estates, but principally in the meaner sort."⁹ The etymological connections between "decoration" and "decorum," "polite" and "police" were made into legal connections. If, as Bourdieu says, "the concessions of *politeness* always contain *political* concessions,"¹⁰ polite society still needed policing to ensure those "concessions" in "the meaner sort."

But bodily definitions were as important in the mapping out of gender as of class, although Bakhtin and Elias are largely silent on this issue, assuming an "ungendered"—i.e., implicitly male—body. In this they repeat the early Elizabethan proclamations on apparel that legislate men's dress but are silent on women's. It was not until 1574

that a proclamation regulated the details of women's apparel.¹¹ This tardiness in the statutes should be seen as a sign less of women's liberties than of the implicit assumption that women's bodies were already the object of policing by fathers and husbands. Thus Gouge, for instance, demanded that the wife submit herself to her husband as "a King to governe and aid her, a Priest to pray with her and for her, a Prophet to teach and instruct her." Even "such tokens of familiarity as are not without tokens of subjection and reverence are unbeseeching a wife."¹² And William Whately clearly defined the position of the "ideal" wife in his wedding sermon, *A Bride-Bush*: "The whole duty of the wife is referred to two heads. The first is, to acknowledge her inferiority: the next to carry her selfe as inferior."¹³ But Whately, like many writers of Renaissance conduct books, detected a problem: how could the "necessary" obedience be inscribed in what he considered the most recalcitrant of animals, woman? Only, he suggested, through a rigorous program of "education," reinforced by the implicit threat of violence. Woman is a horse to be broken in, only properly trained when "shee submits herselfe with quietness, cheerfully, even as a well-broken horse turnes at the least check of the riders bridle, readily going and standing as he wishes that sits upon his backe."¹⁴ And Snawswel listed the techniques to "tame" a wife (including beating and deliberate changes of mood) and compared them favorably to the methods used "to tame lions, bulls, and elephants."¹⁵

Gouge, Whately, and Snawswel share with Erasmus the desire to inculcate new techniques of the body. Where they differ from Erasmus is in the assumption that woman's body, unlike the prince's, is *naturally* "grotesque." It must be subjected to constant surveillance precisely because, as Bakhtin says of the grotesque body, it is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits."¹⁶ The surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house. These three areas were frequently collapsed into each other. The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books. A man who was accused of slandering a woman by calling her "whore" might defend himself by claiming that he meant "whore of her tongue," not "whore of her body."¹⁷ And Toste wrote in a marginal gloss to his translation of Varchi's *The Blazon of Jealousie*:

Maides must be scene, not heard, or selde or never,
O may I such one wed, if I wed ever.
A Maide that hath a lewd Tongue in her head,
Worse than if she were found with a Man in bed.¹⁸

Similarly, Barbaro writes in his treatise *On Wifely Duties*: "It is proper . . . that not only arms but indeed also the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs."¹⁹ Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house. Thus Vives writes that "maides should be kept at home, and not goe abroad, except it be to heare divine service," and Samuel Rowlands in a poem denouncing "Salomons Harlot" claims that, in her "brutish filthynesse," she

Is noted to be full of words,
And doth the streets frequent,
Not qualittied as Sara was,
To keepe within the tent.²⁰

The signs of the "harlot" are her linguistic "fullness" and her frequenting of public space. In contrast, the ideal wife is represented by Venus with her foot upon a tortoise, signifying in Alciati's *Emblematum liber* (1531) "that women should remain at home and be chary of speech."²¹ We are not, of course, addressing here the local mechanisms of social control, differentiated by both class and region, to which women were subject, nor women's resistances to them both collectively and individually, but the production of a normative "Woman" within the discursive practices of the ruling elite. This "Woman," like Bakhtin's classical body, is rigidly "finished": her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house.

In the process, "woman," unlike man, is produced as a *property* category. The conceptualization of woman as land or possession has, of course, a long history: The Commandments catalog wife, maid, ox, and ass side by side as a man's assets and in the Jewish code betrothal was classified as a form of masculine acquisition, related to the acquisition of slaves, cattle, and other belongings.²² In early modern England, "woman" was articulated as property not only in legal discourse ("by marriage the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended")²³ but also in economic and political discourse. Economically, she is the fenced-in enclosure of the landlord, her father, or husband. Thus Toste states:

Property or Right is a kinde of Interest or Clayme, which one challengeth to any thing as his owne, and as peculiar and proper to himselfe, and wherein no other can (truely) demand

any share or part. Yea, so peremptory are some men in this point (especially if they know that they may lawfully challenge this high pris'd commodity of love as their owne, and that they have payed for the same) as they have cast off their Wives, and Mistresses, onely upon a meere suspicion. . . .²⁴

Though Toste does not approve such "castings off," he has no doubt that men can claim "this high-pris'd commodity of love" as their property or right. But unlike most property, this property can bring dishonor to the landlord even as he possesses it. "*Covert*," the wife becomes her husband's symbolic capital; "free," she is the opening through which that capital disappears. So, Toste argues, "when this our high-pric'd Commodity chanceth to light into some other merchants hands, and that our private Inclosure proveth to be a Common for others, we care no more for it" (p. 20). By constructing the beloved entirely within the economic discourses of commodities and enclosures, Toste is able to maintain the distinction between woman as passive possession (even in adultery) and man as active agent, as merchant.

This clear-cut opposition comes under stress in Marlowe's *The Massacre at Paris*, where Guise's possession of his wife is threatened by his "tenant" Mugeron, to whom a soldier says:

you put in that which displeaseth him, and so forestall his market, and set up your standing where you should not; and whereas he is your landlord, you will take upon you to be his, and till the ground which he himself should occupy which is his own free land; if it be not too free—there's the question. . . .²⁵

The landlord (the Duke) possesses his "free land" (the Duchess) only on condition that it is safely fenced off against trespassers. But the concept of "free" property becomes radically unstable when applied to a person. The Duchess is both Guise's freehold, his commodity, and free in that, however hedged about, her will may be "liberal." She is in other words a version of the Renaissance *topos* that presents woman as that treasure which, however locked up, always escapes. She is the gaping mouth, the open window, the body that "transgresses its own limits" and negates all those boundaries without which property could not be constituted.

We find this same fear of instability when woman is mapped out within political discourse. Thus, Wye Saltonstall's "A Mayde" is

inscribed both as enclosure for fear that she will become common land and as monarchy for fear that she will become a commonwealth:

Let Maids then give to one their loves and selfe,
To be a Monarchy no Commonwealth.²⁶

But most contemporary political apologists were at pains to deny any opposition between monarchy and commonwealth. Saltonstall tries to negotiate this problem in the following lines:

Though good be better'd by community,
Yet since that love and Sovereignty do know
No partners, but consist in unity:
Maids should not let their loves too common grow.²⁷

This is scarcely a resolution. It is claimed both that good is "better'd by community" and that monarchy depends upon "unity," but this leaves the "maid" in the contradictory position mapped out in Saltonstall's preface to the poem, where she is commanded to be "modest, courteous, constant" and, at the same time, "not too coy."²⁸ "Too coy"/"too common": the maid is constituted as the inevitable object of criticism. She lacks either kindness or chastity.

When women were themselves the objects to be mapped out, virginity and marital "chastity" were pictured as fragile states to be maintained by the surveillance of wives and daughters. But paradoxically the normative "Woman" could become the emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the state. The state, like the virgin, was a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies. In the Ditchley portrait, Elizabeth I is portrayed standing upon a map of England.²⁹ As she ushers in the rule of a golden age, she is the imperial virgin, symbolizing, at the same time as she is symbolized by, the *hortus conclusus* of the state. In a Dutch engraving of 1598, Elizabeth's body encloses all Europe:³⁰ her breasts are France and the Low Countries, her left arm is England and Scotland, her right arm is Italy. Under her left arm, an island is enclosed by a fence against the Catholic navies. What the two pictures share is the conjuncture of imperial virgin and cartographic image, which together constitute the terrain of Elizabethan rule.

The meaning of that symbolic conjuncture should be located within specific developments of the state. The map on which Elizabeth stands in the Ditchley portrait is Saxton's map of 1583, and the major advances in English mapmaking during the 1570s and 1580s were

determined by the administrative needs of central government. Those "needs" were shaped both by foreign policy and by internal colonialism: for the former, maps were required to chart the coast and to prepare defensive fortifications against invasion; for the latter, they were needed in the appropriation and "redistribution" of Irish land, in depicting the locations of justices of the peace, in "determining the best-routes for the increasing volume of correspondence between the administrative centre and the periphery," and in the formation of "a more detailed knowledge of the internal topography and resources . . . of provincial society within England."³¹ Mapping was, then, an instrument in the charting of ideological, as well as geographical, boundaries.

And as the nation-state was formed according to new canons of incorporation and exclusion, so was the female body refashioned. In this refashioning, Elizabeth functioned both as emblem of national "integrity" and as embarrassing contradiction. As emblem of "integrity," she was the privileged term in a system of antithetical thinking (what Le Roy called the "comparing of contraries")³² that was central to absolutist political theory. Within one English version of this theory, Elizabeth was Una, the unity of church and state, the pure virgin who had abandoned "the cuppe of spirituall abominations";³³ she was set in opposition to Duessa, the false church, a whore who, in *The Faerie Queene*, has at "her rompe" a fox's tail "with dong all fowly dight" (1.8.48). The enclosed body is valorized by contrast to the demonized grotesque. Duessa's dirt is, as Mary Douglas says of all dirt, "the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."³⁴ Dirt is necessary to construct the concept of cleanliness, or as James I put it in his *Daemonologie*, "there can be no better way to know God, than by the contrarie."³⁵ It is as the contrary of "Bloody Mary" that the Virgin Queen could be constituted in Breton's "Elogy" as "*semper eadem*, alwaies one, zealous in one religion, believeing in one God, constant in one truth, absolute under God in her selfe, one Queene, and but one Queene," the transformer of her kingdom into "a paradise on earth" or, at least, "a garden of no smale grace."³⁶ But not only was Elizabeth the maker of that "paradise" or "garden"; her enclosed body *was* that paradise (a word derived from the Persian *pairīdāeza*, meaning a royal enclosure).³⁷ Projected onto a religious plane, her body was the garden of the Song of Songs, which was interpreted both as the body of the Virgin and as the body of a church that John King portrayed as "a several, peculiar, enclosed peece of ground," a *hortus conclusus* that "lieth within a hedge or

fense," separated off from "the *grape of Sodome* or *cluster of Gomorthe*."³⁸

We are dealing here with an ideological configuration that had real effects. The contraries or "inappropriate elements" were concepts applied to actual women, constituting them as sinners and criminals to be purified or exterminated. The godly mother is opposed to the witch who gives suck to a satanic familiar. The pelican who pecks her breast to feed her young on her own blood has as her demonized opposite the woman who kills her child. There were legal consequences to these "comparing of contraries": after 1560, "infanticide, rarely recorded in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century assize files, began to be regularly indicted, an English symptom of the 'infanticide craze' which affected much of western Europe, and which may have resulted in more executions than the famous witch craze."³⁹ The ideological formation of the family and the state was staked out across the physical bodies of "criminalized" women.

But how could a Virgin Queen be an appropriate emblem for an absolutist theory that founded state rule (*imperium*) in family rule (*dominium*)?⁴⁰ For Bodin, as for Filmer, the family is established by the enclosure of private property, and that property is under the absolute control of the father.⁴¹ The patriarchalist connection between father and monarch is clearly stated in Filmer's *Observations . . . Touching Forms of Government*, where he writes:

1. That there is no form of government, but monarchy only.
2. That there is no monarchy, but paternal.
3. That there is no paternal monarchy, but absolute, or arbitrary.⁴²

Filmer, of course, was writing in the seventeenth century under a male monarch, but the relation between Elizabeth and family rule had deeply troubled Elizabethan patriarchalists. In 1559, John Aylmer claimed that "a woman maye rule as a magistrate, yet obey as a wife."⁴³ And Edmund Tilney dedicated *A Briefe and Pleasant Discourse of Duties in Marriage* (1568) to Elizabeth I but he had no doubts in his book that "the man both by reason, and law, hath the soveraigntie over his wyfe" and he thought that equal rights for women might be appropriate for barbarians but not for Christians.⁴⁴

Spenser opened up the problematic terrain of the relation between *imperium* and *dominium* in his presentation of Britomart, an Amazonian maiden. Her overpowering of Guyon at the beginning of book 3 of

The Faerie Queene is the occasion for a digression on a golden age in which women were warriors:

But by record of antique times I find,
That women wont in warres to beare most sway,
And to all great exploits them selves inclind:
Of which they still the girldond bore away,
Till envious Men fearing their rules decay,
Can coyne streight lawes to curb their liberty. . . .

(3.2.2)

If Britomart is in part a compliment to Elizabeth I, she nonetheless threatens to subvert the basis of *dominium* even as she establishes *imperium*. But when Spenser returns to the problem of female rule in book 5, the book of justice, it is to reassert "mans well ruling hand." Radigund, a "Queene of Amazons" (5.4.33), overcomes Artegall, and makes him her vassal, clothing him "In womans weedes, that is to manhood shame" (5.5.20). Spenser does not leave the moral of the tale in any doubt:

Such is the crueltie of womenkynd,
When they have shaken off the shamefast band,
With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd,
T'obay the heasts of mans well ruling hand,
That then all rule and reason they withstand,
To purchase a licentious libertie.
But vertuous women wisely understand,
That they were borne to base humilitie,
Unless the heavens them lift to lawfull soveraintie.

(5.5.25)

Elizabeth, then, like Britomart, is the exception who proves the rule of women's "base humilitie"; the patriarchal basis of legitimate authority is restored. But female rule still looks precarious. Why was Elizabeth not subject to "the shamefast band" of "wise Nature"? Why did she not obey "mans well ruling hand"? These questions that troubled the "legitimate" discourses of patriarchy could also be inscribed within popular sedition. Thus, John Felwell, a laborer, argued that the queen was "but a woman and ruled by noblemen," and Thomas Wenden, a Colchester yeoman, claimed that the queen was "an arrant whore."⁴⁵

The elaboration of the cult of Elizabeth was partly an attempt to neutralize these contradictions. On the one hand, she was the object of

"amorous admiration," and hence the people's love was, as Harrington put it, "their choice, and not her compulsion."⁴⁶ As woman, then, she could be the idealized beloved, to whom was ascribed the devotion of amatory discourse. But, on the other hand, she belonged to an anomalous category, being both mother of her people and virgin. Thus, as Shirley Ardener argues, she could escape the category of "woman" and "take advantage of being the 'third sex,' and available for deification."⁴⁷

Within the dominant discourses of early modern England, then, woman's body could be both symbolic map of the "civilized" and the dangerous terrain that had to be colonized. These conceptualizations can be related to the contradictory formation of woman within the categories of gender and of class. To emphasize gender is to construct women-as-the-same: women are constituted as a single category, set over against the category of men. To emphasize class is to differentiate *between* women, dividing them into distinct social groups. Insofar as women are differentiated, those in the dominant social classes are allocated privileges they can confer (status, wealth). In societies where heterosexuality and marriage are prescribed, those privileges can only be conferred back on *men*, so the differentiation of women simultaneously establishes or reinforces the differentiation of men. The deployment of women into different classes, then, is in the interests of the ruling elite, because it helps to perpetuate and to naturalize class structure.

Oppressed groups, on the other hand, by denying the class differentiation of women, may attack aristocratic privilege. But when the elimination of class boundaries is produced by the collapsing of women into a single undifferentiated group, that elimination is commonly articulated within misogynistic discourse. This may help us to understand the contradictory attitudes of the malcontent on the Elizabethan stage. While he sees the social order as an arbitrary and unjust system of court corruption, his political critique leads into a disquisition on the corruption of the court lady. In the first scene of *The Duchess of Malfi*, for instance, whereas Antonio praises the French court for "seeking to reduce both State, and People / To a fix'd Order" (1.1.6-7),⁴⁸ Bosola declares that "places in the Court, are but like beds in the hospital, where this mans head lies at that mans foote, and so lower, and lower" (1.1.67-69). But in the next act, contempt for the court is displaced onto contempt for an old lady, whom Bosola abuses for the "deepe ruts" and "fowle sloughs" of her face, now concealed by her "scurvy face-physicke" (2.1.26, 24). The lady serves no function in the scene except as an emblem of corruption, but in

reviling her, Bosola displaces his own abjection onto a person even more marginal and vulnerable. However much he may despise his own "outward forme of man," he has asserted his gender status over women with their "shop of witchcraft" (2.1.47, 37). Similarly, Flaminio's language in *The White Devil* is a mine of misogynistic commonplaces ("women are like curst dogges" [1.2.188-89]; "Trust a woman? never, never" [5.6.161]). It is notable how frequently the malcontent's analysis of power and corruption reverts to a withering contempt for the artifices of the powerless.

In the process, the malcontent's own situation is effaced, for he himself is the most notable practitioner of the artifices of the powerless. For like the women he despises, he is bought by the highest bidder; like them, his only role is service. On the face of it, it is true, he stands opposed to the "feminization" of a court culture in which, as Joan Kelly-Gadol has argued, the courtier adopted "woman's ways" in his relations to the prince.⁴⁹ Certainly, the malcontent does not have the "purified" language, the fashionable clothes, or the accomplished manners of the manipulative courtier. But the abrupt "independence" of his discourse obscures the structural dependency he shares with the court lady.

So far, I have posited only two class positions, the one attempting to maintain social closure and exclusion, the other subverting class but reinforcing gender hierarchy. But we may define a third position: that of the class aspirant. Like the members of the male elite, the class aspirant has an interest in preserving social closure, since without it there would be nothing to aspire to. But, as the same time, that closure must be sufficiently flexible to incorporate *him*. His conceptualization of woman will as a result be radically unstable: she will be perceived as oscillating between the enclosed body (the purity of the elite to which he aspires) and the open body (or else how could he attain her?), between being "too coy" and "too common."

This unstable conceptualization of the woman corresponds to the instability of the class aspirant's own position. A naked interest in the acquisition of status or wealth through marriage exposes him, like Malvolio, to the contempt of dominant and subordinated classes alike. But within literary discourse, class aspiration can be displaced onto the enchanted ground of romance, where considerations of status are transformed into considerations of sexual success. In the form of desire, this success is the always-deferred moment of final incorporation; in the form of attainment, it is, paradoxically, the imminent threat of loss inscribed within the unstable conceptualization of

woman as simultaneously enclosed and open, the passive conferrer of status, and, in the act of union with the aspirant, the active transgressor of status boundaries.

This slippage between women-as-the-same (woman categorized by gender) and women-as-differentiated (woman categorized by class) is foregrounded in *Othello*. It is only if woman is differentiated by class (and race) that Othello's marriage to Desdemona is significant. The prescribed transgression of romance is the displaced condition of Othello's legitimation as Venetian. But that prescription of transgression can only be defined in relation to the prescription that it breaks. Because Desdemona is involved in that transgression, her status is necessarily made problematic. Othello interprets her first as emblem of what Coryat called "that most glorious, renowned and Virgin Citie of Venice"⁵⁰ and then as the type of female wantonness, precisely because of her marriage to him, the culturally demonized Other.

In what is still, I believe, the best account of *Othello*, Kenneth Burke wrote:

Add the privacy of Desdemona's treasure, as vicariously owned by Othello in manly miserliness (Iago represents the threat implicit in such cherishing), and you have a tragic trinity of ownership in the profoundest sense of ownership, the property in human affections, as fetishistically localised in the object of possession, while the possessor is himself possessed by his very engrossment. . . . The single mine-own-ness is thus dramatically split into the three principles of possession, possessor and estrangement (threat of loss). Hence, trust and distrust, though *living in each other*, can be shown *wrestling with each other*. . . . Property fears theft because it is theft.⁵¹

But to analyze the "conspiracy" (to use Burke's term) that the play performs, we need to add that the "possessor" (Othello) does not have a cultural entitlement to his "possession" (Desdemona) and that, consequently, Desdemona is for Othello a particular form of acquisition. As Burke puts it, "we should encounter also in Othello as lover the theme of the newly rich, the marriage above one's station."⁵² For Othello to "gain," though, there must be a mark against him that will be overcome by his marriage. That mark can be located in the construction of Othello as "black."

In an emblem entitled "Art cannot take away the vice of nature," Thynne wrote:

The healthfull bathe which daiele wee doe see
to cure the sores and fleshe of lothsome skinn,
cann never make the Negro white to bee,
or clesne the harlot from her loathed sinne.⁵³

In *Othello*, "Negro" and "harlot" are alike the objects of scrutiny: that is, the discourses of racism and misogyny are deployed and interrogated in the play. It is the mark of race (what an imperialist culture labeled "the vice of nature") that is seemingly overcome in the action of the first three scenes. Othello's "lothsome skinn" is transformed: his virtue makes him, in the Duke's words, "far more fair than black" (1.3.290).⁵⁴ But to demonstrate his virtue in dramatic terms, it is necessary to portray him not as alien transgressor but as a worthy object of affection. Accordingly, Desdemona is portrayed not as passive beloved but as "half the wooer" (1.3.176). Desdemona's active choice is the seal on Othello's incorporation as Venetian and on his repudiation of the "unhoused, free condition" (1.2.26). But if act 1 depicts the "civilizing" of the military Moor, it also depicts the "uncivilizing" of the city. Desdemona is drawn from "house affairs" (1.3.147) to tales of an undomesticated landscape "of antres vast and deserts idle, / Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven" (1.3.140-41). And her withdrawal from house affairs and the government of her father marks her out as "untamed."

There is a corresponding transition in the play from the interrogation of Othello's "witchcraft" to the interrogation of "A maiden, never bold" (1.3.94) who transgressed "Against all rules of nature" (1.3.101). The play up until act 2, scene 1 has "a perfect comic structure in miniature," as Susan Snyder has pointed out.⁵⁵ Othello triumphs over all obstacles: the *senex iratus*, Brabantio; the accusation of racial inferiority; the storm that separates him from Desdemona; even his own passions, the "light-wing'd toys / Of feather'd Cupid" (1.3.268-69). As acquirer, he is totally successful. But as possessor, he lives with the imminent threat of loss. The very fact that Desdemona was "open" to him endangers her status as his spiritual enclosure, the impermeable container of his honor. So her body must be interrogated and deciphered. But the voyeuristic gaze encounters only the opaque surfaces of the body. If Othello does indeed "grossly gape" (3.3.395), it is not because of any bodily sexuality but because of a linguistic wantonness that ceaselessly elides the cultural opposition between the woman who married him and the category of "woman" constructed within misogynistic discourse, between woman as differentiated by class (the elite maiden) and woman as unified by gender

(the daughters of Eve). Deciphering her hand he finds it "liberal" (3.4.46): that is, it is both a generous hand (it "gave away" [3.4.45] her heart to him) and a wanton one. The liberty of her marriage necessitates that she now has "A sequester from liberty" (3.4.40). The problematic within which Othello operates here is one he shares with Renaissance conduct books. Vives, for instance, objects to the maid giving any sign of affection to the man she is going to marry: "For if she love him afore she have him, what shall he think but that she will as lightly love another as she hath done him."⁵⁶ For Othello, though, even the signs of Desdemona's oppression become radically ambivalent. In act 4, scene 1 he strikes her and, as she leaves, calls her back again. But her submissive obedience to his command is seen as further evidence of her wantonness:

Sir, she can turn, and turn; and yet go on
And turn again. . . .

(4.1.253-54)

Turning becomes a figure for her inconstancy: as she can turn to him, so she can lie to him or turn to the arms of another man. In other words, even those discourses that inscribe Desdemona as his (her "liberality," her obedience) simultaneously disqualify her.

The contradictions that are, in a culturally pathological manner, staked across the body of woman are generated in *Othello* with particular acuteness around the handkerchief. It is at once emblem of Othello's exotic genealogy and hence of his family honor, and emblem of Desdemona's honor. But honor is a gendered concept. Applied to Othello, the concept includes military prowess, virility, his "name" or reputation. Applied to Desdemona, the concept means, above all, chastity. As Ruth Kelso notes in *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, "let a woman have chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she has nothing."⁵⁷ But through marriage, the woman's honor, like her property, is incorporated into her husband's. It is no coincidence that the disputed readings of 3.3.386, "Her name . . . is now begrim'd," "My name . . . is now begrim'd," make equal sense. Desdemona's "name," like her handkerchief, is Othello's.

But the handkerchief is *detachable*. Its passage from Othello to Desdemona implies the possibility of further passages:

Iago: But if I give my wife a handkerchief—
Othello: What then?

Iago: Why then 'tis hers, my Lord, and being hers,
She may, I think, bestow't on any man.
Othello: She is protectress of her honour, too;
May she give that?

(4.1.10-15)

"'Tis hers," Iago says of the handkerchief, but only a few lines later Othello calls it "my handkerchief" (4.1.22). The handkerchief, like her honor, is both hers and his. But if the handkerchief is detachable, is not her honor, and therefore his, also detachable? Hence, the anguished "May she give that?" The handkerchief is, indeed, "ocular proof" (3.3.360) of the process of exchange that Othello himself initiated. It is and is not his, just as Desdemona is and is not his:

O curse of marriage!
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites!

(3.3.268-70)

The handkerchief, indeed, has a peculiar relation to "appetites" in the geography of the body. In this context, we may note Othello's speech before his fit:

It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish!
Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible? Confess?
Handkerchief? O devil!

(4.1.41-43)

If it is "not words," it is the body ("Noses, ears and lips") that shakes him. But as I have argued, there can be no simple opposition between language and body because the body maps out the cultural terrain and is in turn mapped out by it. The connection between the handkerchief and "Noses, ears and lips" is not only metonymic; it is also metaphoric, since those parts of the body are all related to the thresholds of the enclosed body, mediating, like the handkerchief, between inner and outer, public and private. Moreover, within the body geography of the Renaissance, the nose in particular mediates between above and below, since it is a part of the head, the seat of reason, and yet it is analogous to the phallus—hence the enormous noses of carnival and the grotesque celebrations such as Hans Sachs's *Nasen-Tanz*. So Othello, observing what he imagines to be "the fleers, the gibes, and notable scorns / That dwell in every region" (4.1.82-83) of Cassio's face, says "O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw't to" (4.1.142-43). And the ears and lips point to the connection

between private betrayal and public degradation, since they are the organs both of whispered secrets and of the blabbing of which Cassio is accused (4.1.25-28). In Othello's mind, the handkerchief, metonymically associated with the operations of the body, is metaphorically substituted for the body's apertures, and its transference from hand to hand comes to imply both the secret passage of "an essence that's not seen" (4.1.16) and a ritual of public humiliation ("O thou public commoner" [4.2.73]).

The transformation of the handkerchief from *locus* of privileged meaning to commonplace is a paradigm of Iago's method. That transformation depends upon a simultaneous process of desublimation and reduction that we can observe in act 2, scene 1. The equivocal forms of words (e.g., "liberal") and of objects (e.g., the handkerchief) are presaged there in the equivocal status of gestures. The public gesture of homage ("let her have your knees" [2.1.84]) and the elaborate courtesy of Cassio constitute Desdemona as "divine," "our great captain's captain" (2.1.73, 74). But the fingers with which Cassio displays his "excellent courtesies" (2.1.175) will serve him no better than "clyster-pipes" (2.1.177) (medical syringes used for enemas), in Iago's apposite image of physical debasement. What Iago achieves is the reinterpretation of the gestures of a class elite (the gestures of patrician courtesy) as purely gendered signs, the gestures of sexual promiscuity.

This reinterpretation is possible not because Iago is superhumanly ingenious but, to the contrary, because his is the voice of "common sense," the ceaseless repetition of the always-already "known," the culturally "given." This helps us, I believe, to account for 2.1.100-166 where, in a passage that has consistently troubled editors, Iago reworks familiar misogynistic *topoi*: beauty disguises folly; the "fair" and the "foul" practice the same "foul pranks"; the "fair" are either unchaste or only fit "To suckle fools and chronicle small beer." But what are here presented as comic diversions (even Desdemona engages in the interchange) will later be revealed as the ideological "truisms" that destroy Desdemona. Thus, Othello comes to see "The fountain from the which [his] current runs" as "a cestern for foul toads / To knot and gender in" [4.2.59, 61-62]. The concept of engendering is knotted and twisted by the contradictory cultural constructions of gender.

Iago is the manipulator of these contradictions, working both upon woman-as-differentiated and woman-as-the-same, since both undermine Othello's assurance as possessor. To emphasize Desdemona's distinctiveness it is enough for Iago to remind Othello of her status.

Will not her "better judgement" (3.3.236), then, draw her back to the racial and social elite (the matches "Of her own clime, complexion, and degree" [3.3.230]) to which Othello can only vainly aspire? Equally, Iago can work on the fear that women are, as a category, impure. Hence, Othello is either the "knee-crooking knave" (1.1.45), forever despised by his lady, or the master of an insubordinate servant, who has made him an "object of contempt. In both cases, Othello's place in the social order is subverted.

But dramatically, that subversion is localized and demonized in the figure of Iago. Thus the play allows those who laughed at the misogynistic jokes of act 2, scene 1 to misrecognize in Desdemona's dead body the workings of "a devil" (5.2.287), just as Othello's final speech permits an imaginary resolution in which the "Virgin Citee of Venice" is reenclosed, as the island of Cyprus had been earlier in the play, against the demonized Other, the "turban'd Turk" (5.2.353). Thereby, the discursive contradictions that generate the text are displaced from the center to the periphery. For Iago is the projection of a social hierarchy's unease in the hypostatized form of envy. And the complicities of the dominant culture in a Desdemona "Still as the grave" (5.2.94) are reinterpreted as the marginal operations of an individual.

This is not to deny that the ideological configuration demonized in Iago may have a social location outside the discourses of the literate. The transformation of Iago's implacable negation of "the duteous and knee-crooking knave" into misogyny can be paralleled, for instance, in the winter carnival of 1580 in Romans. There, according to the magistrate Guérin, the plebeian "kingdom" of the Capons was stirred to action by the patrician carnival queen "who was so sumptuously dressed that she was all aglitter."⁵⁸ Guérin claimed that the subsequent slaughter of the peasants was retaliation for the intended rape of the patrician women. In his reports, he declared that the plebeians had planned "to begin on Mardi Gras to kill the nobility . . . and afterwards even kill their own women, and marry the wives of the said notables whom they had killed and whose property they had seized and divided up".⁵⁹ We need not accept Guérin's account at face value, since it was he who organized the attack on the peasants, but nor can we simply dismiss it, for we know that groups of apprentices practiced gang rape in the region during the same period.⁶⁰ Indeed, insofar as the "sumptuously dressed" woman was deliberately paraded as the symbol of aristocratic prestige, it is plausible that she became the focus of displaced class conflict. In Romans, as in *Othello*,

woman's body could be imagined as the passive terrain on which the inequalities of masculine power were fought out.

In reality, of course, that "passive terrain" had a voice, however much the historical records have effaced it. In *Othello*, though, the female voices are constituted *fictionally*, by a male author. It is not sufficient, then, to "recover" Desdemona's silenced voice; we must also ask how it is *constructed*. I have suggested that Othello is a function of a particular form of class aspiration through romance. And Iago can be seen as a function of the projected fears of class hierarchy and sexual possession. But Desdemona, I suggest, fulfills two different functions. The Desdemona of the first half of the play is an active agent, however much she may be conceived of as the "spiritualization" of Othello's legitimation. She is accordingly given the freedom we tend to associate generically with the comic heroine. In fact, in the first two acts it is Othello who is the primary object of scrutiny, and who is correspondingly portrayed as controlling his "appetite" (1.3.262). It is only when Desdemona becomes the object of surveillance that she is reformed within the problematic of the enclosed body. Hence, in the second half of the play, the worse Iago's insinuations, the more she is "purified." In other words, the play constructs two different Desdemonas: the first, a woman capable of "downright violence" (1.3.249); the second, "A maiden, never bold" (1.3.94). Desdemona's subservience, enforced by her death, has already been enforced by the play's structure.

If the cost of rescuing Desdemona's "honor" is her transformation into aristocratic enclosure, is it not surprising that the value of that enclosure is called in question at the end of the play? Adultery, says Emilia, is "a small vice" (4.3.69). Kenneth Burke explains Emilia's function as an embodiment of the audience's resistance to the "excessive engrossment" of a tragic plot. But

though in her role she represents a motivation strong with the audience, she is 'low' while tragedy is 'high.' Hence in effect she is suggesting that any resistance to the assumptions of the tragedy are 'low,' and that 'noble' people will choose the difficult way of Desdemona.⁶¹

If, then, Emilia "purifies" Desdemona (who, in opposition to Emilia, would not commit this "small vice" for "the whole world" [4.3.79]), she also demonstrates the connection between class and the enclosed body. But is Burke right in arguing that Emilia simply siphons off an audience's "low" thoughts, thus reinforcing the tragic engrossment?

Would it not be equally plausible to say that Emilia exposes "the universe of what is taken for granted"⁶² in the play? And this exposure is both thematic ("They are all but stomachs, and we all but food" [3.4.104]) and structural. For as the agent who unravels the plot, that is, as the agent of "truth," Emilia must open the closed mouth, the locked house. As wife, she is subject to the husband's command ("charm your tongue"; "hold your peace"; "get you home" [5.2.183, 219, 194]), but at the same time she is "bound to speak" and will "ne'er go home" [5.2.184, 197]. Emilia, then, serves contradictory functions: even as she elevates the "high" purity of her "sweet mistress" [5.2.121] she subverts the enclosed body.

I have analyzed the enclosed body mainly as a function of the antithetical thinking of the developing Renaissance state and as a target of the displaced resentment of the subordinated classes. But the subversive intervention of Emilia suggests a third possibility: the rejection of enclosure and the validation of the female grotesque. If woman was constituted as rampant sexual animal within medical discourse⁶³ and as innate heretic within religious discourse (in *Malleus Maleficarum*, *Femina* is derived from *Fe* and *Minus*, "lacking faith"),⁶⁴ her "recalcitrant" nature could become the symbol not only for "temporary release from traditional and stable hierarchy" but also "part and parcel of conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within the society."⁶⁵ The "unruly woman" presided over the destruction of literal and symbolic enclosures alike. In 1605, women accused of "hiding behind their sex" tore down enclosures; in 1629, Captain Alice Clark "headed a crowd of women and male weavers dressed as women in a grain riot near Malden in Essex"; in 1626-28, and again in 1631, enclosure riots in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire were led by a man dressed as "Lady Skimmington"; in 1637 Scottish resistance to Charles I's imposition of the English prayer book was led by "rascally serving women," who stoned the doors and windows of Saint Giles' from which they had been evicted.⁶⁶ The female grotesque could, indeed, interrogate class and gender hierarchies alike, subverting the enclosed body in the name of a body that is "unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits."⁶⁷

Part Two

The Rhetorics of Marginalization: Consequences of Patriarchy