

DANGEROUS ORNAMENT: THE FIGURE OF THE VEIL
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 31, 2010

Dissertation directed by

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Dedication

The author wishes to dedicate this dissertation to her family for constantly reminding her that, as Christopher Robin said to Winnie the Pooh, “You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

The author also wishes to dedicate this project to her husband Mark, whose steadfast, selfless support, encouragement and love daily prove Richard Wilbur’s claim that “whatsoever love elects to bless/ Brims to a sweet excess/ That can without depletion overflow.” Thank you.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge the generous gifts of the many people who made this academic and professional endeavor possible. First and foremost, my gratitude and admiration for Jonathan Gil Harris, who helped me believe in myself and my work, who went above and beyond the call of duty as teacher, mentor, and friend. Gil, you live, move and breathe a generosity of spirit, intellectual rigor, and kindness of heart that reflect the academic life at its best. Your selfless dedication to your students and to the world around you has given me an example I hope to emulate in my own life and work. From you I have learned not only volumes about early modern culture and the craft of writing, but also how to read and respond to others' work in helpful, constructive, insightful ways. Thank you for your time, your support, your wisdom, and your encouragement; this project truly would not have come to fruition without you.

To Holly Dugan, thank you also for your generous support, both inside and outside the classroom: for our discussions at Teaism and Le Pain Quotidien about my studies, about literature, and life in general; for your thoughtful, erudite comments on my works-in-progress (I am still in awe of your brain!); and for all of the ways, large and small, that your example continues to fortify my own pursuit of the academic life.

To Jeffrey Cohen, thank you likewise for your support of my project, for your humor and kindness, and for the ways you, along with your colleagues, work so tirelessly to make GWU a place for early modern scholars to blossom and flourish. Thank you also to all of my fellow GWU early modernists for your camaraderie, your feedback, and the

intellectual stimulation your own work continues to provide: Nedda Mehdizadeh, Lowell Duckert, Jessica Frazier, Jennifer Wood, and Mike Smith. Liza Blake, thanks for being my “lizabrary” resource on everything from Thomas Nashe to Bruno Latour. To my fellow Folger Dissertation Seminararians, especially Kristina Lucenko, Niamh O’Leary, Edward Geisweidt, and Danielle Spratt: thank you for your advice and feedback on my work.

To Jonathan Hsy: like Gil, Holly, and Jeffrey, you go above and beyond the call of duty; thank you for your kindness, generosity, and support and for agreeing to be my departmental reader; you, too, have shown me what a great scholar and mentor looks like. And Madhavi Menon, thank you for taking my project on, for your support of this dissertation and the inspiration your own work continually provides me.

To the librarians and staff of the Folger Shakespeare Library, especially Georgianna Ziegler, thank you for all the assistance and advice in researching my project. To David Scott Kastan and Keith Wrightson, thank you for providing a stimulating and productive environment in your “Researching the Archives” Folger seminar. To Dan Vitkus, thank you for your support and advice both during my time at Florida State and in my work on the veil at GWU; your own work on Anglo-Islamic relations guided and continues to inspire my consideration of the veil in travel literature and Turk drama. Thank you for opening that avenue of research to me. To Melinda Knight and the George Washington University, thank you for honoring me with a Graduate Writing Preceptor Fellowship; the moral and financial support of this program helped me grow as

a teacher, a writer, and a scholar, and allowed me the freedom and time to pursue my research.

Finally and always, I wish to thank my family and my best friend, Susan. To my parents: thank you for giving me every educational opportunity I could hope for, for encouraging me in my studies for as long as I can remember, and for listening patiently as I struggled through my work. To my mom especially, I give thanks for “talking me off the ledge” on more than one occasion, when an unruly chapter refused to come together and made me question the whole project. Thank you for being a living example of perseverance, faith, strength, humor and hope. You continue to be my hero. Dixon, thank you for always encouraging my spirit of inquiry, for being proud of my every effort, and for being a fellow lover of the beauty of language. To my sisters, thank you for laughing with and loving on me when I got discouraged; to my best friend Susan, thank you for your steadfast and patient friendship, for envisioning me—and allowing me to envision myself—as an English professor all those years ago, for singing my song back to me when I forgot the words. Your love of language and learning, and your own intellectual and moral vigor daily inspire me to become a better person. And your laughter makes this world worth loving. To my sweet daughter Anne, child of my heart, thank you for giving up time with Mommy so she could pursue her passion; I hope this encourages you to follow your own. And of course, my deepest gratitude and love to my husband: Mark, I am so honored and blessed to share this journey with you and our children.

Abstract of Dissertation

Dangerous Ornament: The Figure of the Veil in Early Modern English Literature

This dissertation argues that the veil was an important tool for negotiating linguistic, religious, ethnic, and gendered identities in the early modern period; in doing so this project traces a prehistory of the veil as it continues to structure systems of knowledge, experiences of desire, and understandings of the Other in contemporary culture. Chapter 1 considers the veil as a figure for apocalypse (literally, “unveiling”) in Protestant theology and in allegory, particularly as it is employed in Book One of Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and George Herbert’s “The Church Militant” to represent the English Church and its adversaries within the long durée of Christian history. Chapter 2 also considers the veil in Christian tradition but this time with an eye to its untold (or seldom-told) story: rather than desiring to transcend the material veil, the tradition of mysticism embraces it, seeing the veil as *the* thing through which the entire narrative of Christian redemption is founded; this chapter analyzes St Teresa of Avila’s account of divine rapture alongside its reformulation by Richard Crashaw (in poems such as “The Flaming Heart”) to interrogate the ways that the veil enabled alternative experiences and understandings of the divine, and of desire itself. Chapter 3 explores anxieties about veils and veiling as they are performed onstage; I argue that Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and Thomas Middleton’s *Revenger’s Tragedy* employ the veiled discovery space at the back of the early modern stage to materialize experiences of abjection, to stage what is unstageable or, literally, *ob-scene*. Chapter 4 collects the varied uses and histories of the veil discussed in the preceding chapters and considers the ways these traditions informed

English engagements with Islam, particularly with the Muslim woman. Beginning with a consideration of the veiled Donusa in Phillip Massinger's play, *The Renegado*, and the ways her portrayal was both informed by and reflected in early modern travel narratives such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, I explore the manner in which, over the course of the seventeenth century, the veil began to shed some of its domestic and Christian valences and to solidify into a metonymy for the Orient as a space of mystery, darkness, and desire. As these varied readings show, the veil is a symbol whose "truth" is never singular or fixed; an understanding of the veil as both metaphor and object during the early modern period helps us account for its persistent allure in the Western imagination, as it continues to shape horizons of possibility in the present.

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Introduction: Taking Up the Veil

For you must know right now: to touch “that” which one calls “veil” is to touch everything. You’ll leave nothing intact, safe and sound, neither in your culture, nor in your memory, nor in your language, as soon as you take on the word “veil.” As soon as you let yourself be caught up in it, in the word..., to say nothing yet about the thing, nothing will remain, nothing will remain anymore.

~Jacques Derrida, “A Silkworm of One’s Own”

When in Book 4 of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* the reader gets her first view of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, she might be surprised to find that it is but a glimpse—fleeting, incomplete. Adam is represented wholly by his “fair large Front and Eye sublime” and his “Hyacinthin Locks/ [which] Round from his parted forelock manly hung” (299-301).¹ The reader sees even less of Eve: no description of her “Front” or “Eye,” only her waist, cloaked by her blonde hair:

Shee as a vail down to the slender waste

Her unadorned golden tresses wore

Dissheveld, but in wanton ringlets wav’d

As the Vine curls her tendrils, which impli’d

¹ *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,

And by her yielded, by him best receivd,

Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,

And sweet reluctant amorous delay. (303-310)

Adam's "Front" and his "Eye" metonymically represent his intelligence and his "Absolute rule" over Creation; Eve is metonymized by her body, but that body is veiled by beautiful hair and thus she still exceeds visual grasp (just as she will evade the reach of Adam's rule). Rather than a satisfying sight of Eve's perfect beauty, we see her only in fleeting similes, images linked one upon another and yet revealing nothing.² Whereas Adam's eye and forehead "declare" his absolute rule and his hair represents his manliness, Eve's significance belies representation; even her portrayal as a submissive figure (with her hair curling about her body as she, like a vine, curls about Adam, her "stalwart tree"³) resists visualization: the succession of conjunctions and qualifiers—as, but, and, by, with, yet—hints at a being who never actually arrives. Though Eve's hair here recalls biblical injunctions about women's head-coverings (it is "unadorned") and classical and Petrarchan images of a woman's hair as the net that snares her lover's

² Indeed, when Satan finds Eve alone in Book 9, she again appears without actually appearing. In a synesthetic moment Satan "spies" her "Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood,/ Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round/ About her glowd" (425-427). Wearing a veil, even of fragrance, divides her again into "halves" and the bushes around her, her floral accessories, are what portray her essence, as her hair did in Book 4.

³ See Marjorie Nicholson, *John Milton: A Reader's Guide to His Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Company, 1963), 240.

admiration and desire (it is golden, dishevelled, attractive, wanton), the reader is left wondering who this veiled woman really is.⁴

That the narrator describes Eve's hair as a "vail" when, as he says a few lines later, Adam's and Eve's "mysterious parts were" not yet "concealed" because "Then was not guiltie shame"—in other words, in Paradise before the Fall there was no guilt or shame and thus no need for bodily coverings—also gives the reader pause. The invocation of a veil, that which in Christian teaching represents woman's modesty and her acknowledgment of woman's first shame, seems anachronistic in prelapsarian Eden. However, it appears that both Eve and the veil are, for Milton's narrator, always already fallen, always already not-whole: both are oxymorons, representing seeming opposites or incongruity, and thus they also represent division and difference—even before "Mans First Disobedience" (l.1). Indeed, the veil's presence in a world without need for coverings aptly embodies the other oxymorons with which Eve is described, such as her "modest pride," "coy submission," and "sweet reluctant amorous delay." The veil is always already a *metonymy* for woman, too: it is both representative part and that which forms a network of associations, from hair to veil to dishabille to wanton coyness and amorous delay.⁵ For the narrator it is also already a spiritual fetish, simultaneously

⁴ See, for example, Stanley Fish, *Surprised By Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997); Petrarch's poem 52 celebrates his beloved's "pretty veil that keeps her lovely blond hair from the breeze" (*Petrarch's Lyric Poems*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling [Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976]). For the biblical injunction concerning women's hair, see, 1 Cor. 11. See also Chapter 3 of this dissertation, which discusses Shakespeare's use of the trope of golden hair as a trap, both in his sonnets and in *The Merchant of Venice*.

⁵ The delay occasioned by a veil will be integral to my discussion here as well, both in the veil of poetic language which defers interpretation and the veil a woman wears which delays visual penetration.

marking a disturbing truth (of the Fall to come) and insisting on its disavowal. It is always already a symbol of desire, of division and difference.

Indeed, in Milton's epic and in all of the texts with which this dissertation engages, the veil is a supremely overdetermined symbol, one which gestures toward similitude even as it enacts difference, and which exists always as paradox: it is an item both of concealment *and* revelation, both an affirmative symbol of modesty and a negative sign of shame. As Eve's hair demonstrates, the veil represents fetishistic desire inasmuch as it marks and memorializes the very loss it claims the potential to restore. In doing so it reveals the ways in which all desire is fetishistic in that the object of desire (such as an unveiled Eve, the Garden of Eden) stands in for something else (a plenitude, sinless woman) that never existed in the first place. The veil both recognizes and disavows this paradox: it evokes absence by covering what is imagined to have been present and it offers the hope of regaining that presence in the act of revelation. And yet, what the veil conceals is some *thing* that isn't, in fact, truly absent but merely concealed, threatening at any moment to be released. Eve's body is here a body *par excellence*, since it is *the* object of desire (even for Eve herself⁶), and it is present, in its future decrepitude, behind the veil of her lovely golden hair.

The Veil in Theory

⁶ Cf. 4.456-467.

The veil represents the hope and the promise of a restored wholeness imagined as having been lost in a prior moment. Jacques Lacan's notion of the Phallus insists that the Phallus—transcendental signified, that which orders order—must remain veiled, because the veil conceals any awareness that there was in fact no originary wholeness and thus allows the fantasy to persist. Like the Freudian fetish, the veil of the Phallus stands in for something that never existed, and yet a belief in its existence must be maintained. The veil is also in many ways that Thing which lends meaning, order, and wholeness to everything by acting as the promise of fulfillment (when the veil is stripped away to reveal the Truth); in a sense it is both the Phallus *and* that which conceals the “truth” of that Phallus—its nonexistence.⁷

What Freud called the fetish, Christian tradition called the idol.⁸ For Freud, the fetish was “endowed at will” by the fetishist with a value or allure that did not reside, “in reality,” in that object: his “most extraordinary case” was “one in which a young man had exalted a certain sort of ‘shine on the nose’ into a fetishistic precondition.” The truth of the matter, which it is Freud's mission to unveil, was that “the luminous shine” with

⁷ For an assessment of Lacan's theory of the veiled phallus, see Kaja Silverman, “The Lacanian Phallus” (*Differences* 4.1 [1992]: 84-116). Silverman argues that the veil represents “the loss of immediacy which occurs when an object is transformed into a signifier” (88).

⁸ Idolatry represents, of course, an enormous set of beliefs and teachings in the Christian tradition. William Pietz explicates its various formulations in his history of the fetish, noting that an idol was similar to a fetish in having been manufactured (*factici*) by man or in having been invested with a fraudulent value not granted by God (“The Problem of the Fetish, II” [*RES* 13 (Spring 9187): 23-45], 27). However, a wider understanding of idolatry considered it to be any (mis)direction of one's desire and attention away from God and towards the things of this world. See below and Chapter 1 of this dissertation for biblical teachings about idolatry, specifically the notion of the veil as an idol for the Jews. There is a sense in which my consideration of the veil here makes a similar argument as Pietz does about the fetish, that it has “marked a specific problem-idea,” though Pietz's focus is post-Enlightenment “social theory” and I consider the veil in its early modern context. But I will argue that the figure of the veil (and acts of veiling and unveiling) have epitomized certain “problem-ideas” in Western thought both before and after the Enlightenment—certain forms and structures of epistemology, desire, and sight, to name a few.

which the man “endowed” the nose “was not perceptible to others.”⁹ In other words, the young man had ascribed to an object a fantasmatic allure that did not naturally inhere within that object, and there was where his neurosis lay.¹⁰ In Christian teaching, ascribing value to or otherwise overvaluing a certain object meant that one was investing it with a power or significance it did not have in and of itself, or that one was directing one’s energies toward a created thing that should properly point towards its Creator. The quintessential metaphor for this idolatry, after Paul, was the veil: first, the veil that Moses donned after speaking with God on Mt Sinai and then the veil that, according to Paul, remained over the eyes of the Israelites in the present day. As Lisa Freinkel puts it, in the Pauline tradition

the veil . . . hides even God’s reflected glory from the Israelites, just as the Law in its written letters and engraved stones mediates the covenant that itself mediates a relation to God. The Israelites are at two removes from the Lord. The veil/Law keeps the children of Israel from seeing the image of God; they are blind to “the end [*telos*] of that which should be abolished”—blind, that is, both to the Law’s completion and its purpose in Christ. Instead, they take the Law *as an end in itself*, failing to see even

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Pelican Freud Library, Vol. 7: On Sexuality*, ed. Angela Richards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 351.

¹⁰ In *Capital, Vol. 1 Part 1*, Karl Marx’s commodity fetish partakes of a similar logic: “A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour...” *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd ed.*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 320.

that their vision is obscured. What the Hebrews miss is that the Law, like the veil, cannot be taken at face value.¹¹

One could become fixated on the things of this world, beautiful things which veiled the spiritual truths within, truths which originated in and should direct one back to the ultimate Truth, God. Idolatry was a common charge leveled at Jews and then, after the Reformation, at Roman Catholics, with the veil representing the epitome of spiritual and moral blindness or confusion, but even the most upright Protestant felt the temptation to idolatry, especially when faced with beautiful or exotic bodies and things.

Freud further defines the fetish as “a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up”:

What happened, therefore, was that the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ. In later life a grown man may perhaps experience a similar panic when the cry goes up that Throne and Altar are in danger, and similar illogical consequences will ensue.¹²

¹¹ *Reading Shakespeare’s Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets* (New York: Columbia UP, 2002), 254, emphasis added.

¹² 352.

What post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories have offered is a more nuanced and perceptive account of what the penis “really” is; that is, the phallic function is a far more apt figure for an imagined originary wholeness. The entry into language via the Symbolic order is dependent upon a realization of lack—not lack of an anatomical penis, but lack of an imagined, originary plenitude. In order to function, one must forget that there was no whole to begin with, that there was always lack. Slavoj Žižek’s *Sublime Object of Ideology* identifies the ideological structures enabled by this necessarily-veiled truth: the social and symbolic orders (that which “a grown man” will rise up to defend) are similarly enabled by a fetishistic disavowal that “we know very well (that this order is arbitrary) but all the same...” The symptom, in Žižek’s formulation, is like the veil over the Phallus: it is “our only substance, the only positive support of our being, the only point that gives consistency to the subject. In other words, the symptom is the way we—the subjects—‘avoid madness’, the way we ‘choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing (radical psychotic autism, the destruction of the symbolic universe)’.”¹³ This is why Lacan describes the Phallus as necessarily veiled, for the veil conceals so that sense can continue to function. And yet by veiling something or someone, we both deny access to *and* draw attention to it. In this way, the veil is doomed always to failure: in attempting to conceal it merely highlights.

Is the veil, then, *always* a fetish, a representative or a covering over of an awareness one refuses to acknowledge (I know very well, but all the same)? This would seem to be the allure of the veil as a figure in psychoanalysis. A second strand of veil

¹³ *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 75.

lore, however, can be seen in such critics as Jacques Derrida and H  l  ne Cixous: for these critics the veil—*in use*, that is, when it is put in place and when it is stripped away—represents a mode of knowing (or of not-knowing), a history of logocentrism, as a result of what Richard O. Wilson has called the veil’s “violent charisma.”¹⁴ This strand of criticism acknowledges the paradoxical awareness and disavowal of systems of meaning, but also recognizes that what has taken the place of this lost plenitude is a desire to penetrate—to unveil—the other imagined to deny one a sense of stable self-unity. As Freud says, for the fetishist, something takes the place of the woman’s penis, is “appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor.”¹⁵ That is, the veil is not only the marker and memorial of lack but simultaneously the promised tool through which to fill that void with something else—mastery of the world, of another body, of an unknown other. In this way, the veil “remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration [of lost subjecthood] and protection against it.”¹⁶ The veil is both memorial of the experience of loss or fall *and* apotropaic protection against that awareness. By positing the veil as the single obstruction to truth and light, that which defers gratification until some future moment, the logocentric traditions of Western Christianity have established a regime of repression which relies on an absolute other, lurking behind a veil.

In a text called simply *Veils*, Jacques Derrida and H  l  ne Cixous engage the figure of the veil at length. At one point in his essay, “A Silkworm of One’s Own,”

¹⁴ “Veiling an Indian Beauty: Shakespeare and the *hijab*” (*Shakespeare* 4.4: 379-396), 391.

¹⁵ 353.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Derrida considers a specific veil in Christian narrative, the one in the temple over the Holy of Holies that tore at the moment of Christ's death; meditating on the vast political, religious, and cultural significance of that veil, he wonders:

—Shall we say that in tearing thus the veil revealed at last what it ought to hide, shelter, protect? Must we understand that it tore, simply, as if the tearing finally signed the end of the veil or of veiling, a sort of truth laid bare? . . . The veil tearing down the middle, is that the end of such a separation, of that isolation, that unbelievable solitude of belief?

—I know of no other separation in the world, or what would be commensurable with that one, analogous, comparable to that one which allows us to think nonetheless every other separation, and first of all the separation that separates from the wholly other. Thanks to a veil given by God, and giving here is ordering [*donner c'est ici ordonner*]. Whether or not this unbelievable separation (belief itself, faith) came to an end with the death of Christ, will it ever be comprehended, will it ever be comprehensible in the veiled folds of a Greek *aletheia*?¹⁷ No being, no present, no presentation can here be indicated in the indicative. It was, is, shall be, shall have been, should have been for all time the sentence, the saying of God, his verdict: by God *order (is) given to give* the veil, the veil (is) the gift (that it is) ordered to give. Nothing else that is. God

¹⁷ The Greek word *aletheia* literally means “the state of not being hidden.”

would thus be the name of what gives order to give the veil, the veil
between the holy and the holy of holies.¹⁸

For Derrida the veil given by God orders all subsequent order, and “allows us to think ... every other separation, and first of all the separation that separates from the wholly other.” What is worse, the veil’s oppressive regime *disallows* us to think any other way; the narrative of Christian history insists on the veil’s presence and absence in the past, in the present, in the future: there is nothing outside the power of the veil.

Cixous’s “Savoir” precedes Derrida’s “Silkworm” in the volume *Veils*; the memoir-essay relates both her experience of myopia and its sudden cure by laser surgery late in her life. Mireille Calle-Gruber argues that Cixous’ essay “is not an unveiling,” rather, “it makes veiling visible.”¹⁹ The veil, represented for Cixous by the obstructed sight caused by myopia, is a marker of a blindness that can only be realized when that blindness is no longer present. But that blindness, when lost, is cause for mourning, since “Not seeing she could not see herself seen, that’s what had given her her blindwoman’s lightness, the great liberty of self-effacement.”²⁰ She continues, “not-seeing-oneself is a thing of peace.” For Cixous, (re)gaining full (ocular) sight means the loss of another way of being, of knowing. The veil that had been over her eyes, once removed, marks an experience of loss even as it enables entry into the visible, known world. As Brigitte

¹⁸ “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001: 17-92), 28-29.

¹⁹ Cited in Brigitte Weltman-Aron, “Veiled Voices: Fanon, Djébar, Cixous, Derrida” (*Tympanum* 4 [July 15, 2000]), n. pag. Web. 17 Feb 2010.

²⁰ Cixous, “Savoir,” *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001: 1-16), 12.

Weltman-Aron puts it, “For Cixous, the interest in the passage from blindness to vision stems from what can be learned about non-seeing as much as seeing. Her insight is that non-seeing can be known, and therefore mourned, only after vision is recovered.”²¹ In this way, the veil is both the seen and the non-seen.

If the veil is the quintessential representative of the violent regime of sight-as-knowledge in Western culture, it also appears to be the natural metaphor for encounters with the Orient, in analyses such as Alain Grosrichard’s *Sultan’s Court*, published around the same time as Edward Said’s far more well-known *Orientalism*.²² Grosrichard, as Mladen Dolar points out in his lucid introduction to the text, identifies the fetishistic disavowal undergirding European fantasies of the Oriental despot. The veil for Grosrichard would be merely “a screen, a necessary background” onto which we project “our own impasses and practices in dealing with power.”²³ Indeed, “the place of the despot is a vanishing point, evoked and veiled by the double device of the gaze and the letter.”²⁴ As Meyda Yeğenoğlu argues in *Colonial Fantasies*,

What is crucial in this process [of fantasy] is that the very act of representing the veil is never represented; the desire that represents the veil can not be represented. The subject can not represent (see) himself

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kathleen Davis’s analysis of the veil as a spatial and temporal metaphor for the backwardness of Oriental cultures reveals the persistence of this trope in contemporary Western engagements with Islam: “Time Behind the Veil: The Media, The Middle Ages, and Orientalism Now” (*The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen [New York: Palgrave, 2000]: 105-122).

²³ *The Sultan’s Court*, trans. Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1998: xix-xxvii), xiv.

²⁴ Xxi.

representing (seeing) himself. The metaphorical excess of the veil [or “woman” herself] is thus an effacement of the *process of production* of the subject. Placing desire on the side of the being rather than on that of the thing, Jacques Lacan writes: “This lack is beyond anything which can represent it. It is only ever represented as a reflection on a veil.”²⁵

Echoing Dolar, she continues, the veil “is also a metaphor of membrane, serving as a screen around which Western fantasies of penetration revolve.”²⁶ Thus, the veil is both a material item that the Muslim woman wears and it is also a metaphor for the whole construction called Orient, a dynamic I explore in more detail in the final chapter.

The Veil in Literature

Most critical engagement with the veil in the premodern and post-Enlightenment eras has considered it as a metaphor for rhetorical tropes such as allegory, as a symbol of imperialist fantasy, or as sartorial accessory. In literary criticism, scholars such as Jonathan Goldberg, Lisa Freinkel and Gordon Teskey attend to the veil in their analyses of allegory and typology. Goldberg calls allegory “the voice of the veil;”²⁷ for Freinkel the veil is “that most orthodox figure of figure itself.”²⁸ Echoing the reasoning of early

²⁵ *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 46-7.

²⁶ 47.

²⁷ *Voice Terminal Echo: Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 29.

²⁸ *Reading Shakespeare's Will* 275.

modern rhetorical manuals which imagined the veil of allegory as both protection (against the penetration of the ignorant) and risky venture of linguistic deferral, Teskey argues,

In allegory the search for meaning is cast in the form of a ritual initiation in which higher but still expressible truths lead to the inexpressible presence of absolute truth. And in the manner of a ritual initiation the work of art that leads to this goal functions as a sort of labyrinth, though in the end the work is reduced to the status of a *text*, a thing that has been woven, a veil. Metaphorically, the allegorical work functions both as a labyrinth and as a veil, these being traditional figures of deferral. In Derridean terms, allegory is the logocentric genre *par excellence*, the genre that depends more explicitly than any other on the notion of a centered structure in which differences infold into the One.²⁹

Madhavi Menon has devoted the most explicit attention to the veil itself as constitutive of allegory, and the ways that, if all desire is fetishistic, all desire is also allegorical: “it is the allegorical condition that reveals itself also to be the human condition.”³⁰ Her recognition of the inextricability of issues such as performance, gender and sexuality, and rhetoric in deployments of the veil has empowered much of my own theoretical engagement with the veil as trope and object.

²⁹ *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 3.

³⁰ *Wanton Words: Rhetoric and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 136.

This dissertation considers the two strands—rhetorical and sartorial, metaphorical and material—as intertwined, inextricable even; for as my analysis of allegory in Chapter 1 and the use of the veiled discovery space in Chapter 3 demonstrate, seemingly non-political uses of the veil (as a rhetorical trope) and onstage (as a performative convention) have material effects on physical practices. Similarly, considerations of the veil as a religious symbol either focus on Moses’s veil *or* the veil as a symbol of female materiality and/or purity; considering both in tandem underscores the multivalence and mutual imbrication of the veil in Jewish and Christian symbolism.

In many ways my project responds to Julian Yates’s appeal in his essay “What Are ‘Things’ Saying in Renaissance Studies?” that we “preserv[e] the complexity of ‘things’ as simultaneously material, semiotic, and rhetorical entities” so that, rather than “things” simply speaking back to us what we demand of them, they might speak for themselves.³¹ In considering the veil’s complexity, multivalence, and agency, I also follow the actor-network theory of Michel Serres, who invokes the veil as one metaphor for alternative modes of knowing and being, a quasi-object whose existence challenges narratives of human subjectivity and agency. For Serres, the veil is not some material obstruction of or avenue to a singular truth; rather, it represents indeterminacy, fluidity, folds, crumples, “invaginations,” efflorescence. Rather than imagining the veil as that which distinguishes, separates, and judges distances, the veil for Serres—like skin, mist, canvas, and other textiles—embodies connection, touch, complicity. Like Veronica’s

³¹ *Literature Compass* 3/5 (2006): 992-1010, 993.

cloth, it enacts an “imprinted, impressionistic” apprehension of the world;³² it “is the place where exchanges are made, the body traces the knotted, bound, folded, complex path, between the things to be known.”³³ Instead of being “what diminishes us,” then, it might be “what augments us.”³⁴ Inspired by both Serres and Yates, I hope that my analyses in this project resist any attempt toward singularity and finality but instead embrace multiplicity, possibility, contingency, if for no other reason than that the veil itself resists closure and fixity. Rather than acting as an “object lesson” which tells the subject about himself (though the veil is and was often invoked thus, as we shall see), the veil can be viewed as an *actor* within complex networks of meaning-making, identity-formation, and the production of agency. If, as Yates puts it, we make the veil “the grammatical ‘subject’ of our sentences, the motor of our histories and so the perspective we inhabit,” we might then “become” the veil, inhabiting its efflorescence, multiplicity, hybridity—its emphasis on possibility rather than some determined and final revelation of ultimate truth.³⁵ Citing Bruno Latour’s landmark performance of actor-network theory, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Yates argues that we ought to “approach a thing not in isolation, as a stable entity, but as a ‘quasi-object,’ a folding together of all the ‘persons,’ ‘things,’ times, and places that the ‘quasi-object’ occasions.”³⁶ In *The Five*

³² 37. See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for a fuller analysis of the non-normative modes of being and knowing that veils such as Veronica’s enable.

³³ 80.

³⁴ 68.

³⁵ Yates 1005; instead of “veil” Yates invokes the oranges of William Pietz’s “Afterword: How to Grow Oranges in Norway” to the volume entitled *Border Fetishisms, Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* (ed. Patricia Spyer [New York: Routledge, 1998]) in a Latourian reading of “things” as actors or actants in networks of action, meaning, and agency.

³⁶ Yates 1005.

Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies, Serres celebrates the veil's indeterminacy and multivalence, portraying it as a quasi-object or network-actor *par excellence*:

The state of things seems to me to be an intersecting multiplicity of veils, the interlacing of which bodies forth a three-dimensional figure. The state of things is creased, crumpled, folded, with flounces and panels, fringes, stitches and lacing.

Unveiling does not consist in removing an obstacle, taking away a decoration, drawing aside a blanket under which lies the naked thing, but in following patiently and with respectful diplomacy the delicate disposition of the veils, zones, neighboring spaces, the depth of pile, the talweg of their seams and in displaying them when possible, like a peacock's tail or a lace skirt.

This medium or mixture would be our model for the state of things, thinkable or intuitable, or sensible, like a heap of fabrics, a thousand possible arrangements of veils.³⁷

To follow the veil, to become veil, means to inhabit a state of being and knowing—a “state of things”—which is not one, which is never fixed; in resisting the urge to strip the veil away, in embracing the possibility of its remaining in place, we might displace and disturb ourselves—and our sense of things—in productive and provocative ways. It is this peripatetic potential of the veil which guides my analyses in the following pages.

³⁷ 82.

Following the Veil

My interest in the veil in early modern culture began with a reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost* so it is fitting that I begin this dissertation by invoking Eve's veil. If the veil is a marker and memorial of lack or absence, I wondered, why is it invoked in a poem about Eden, that utopian space where there is no lack, no division, no difference, no desire? As such inquiries suggest, and because "veil" is such a multivalent signifier, my investigation here is less concerned with what the veil *means* (or as Yates would say, what it means for human subjects) and more with what it *does* (how it inaugurates, constructs, and links those subjects in complex networks). That is, in the following chapters I explore when, where, why, and how the veil appears and is invoked: when and where do veils seem most prevalent? Why and how is the veil employed, and to what ends? When does the veil as a metaphor have material effects, and when is the veil as material object also allegorical, symbolic? What I find is that, though the veil has been taken as a self-evident or unremarkable object or trope in much literary and cultural criticism of the early modern period, it has actually been crucial in shaping horizons of possibility in the present. The discursive and ideological histories that the veil acquired in Europe during the medieval and early modern periods inform its status in contemporary culture; as much as the meaning of the veil and acts of veiling have changed since the Enlightenment, much remains the same.

Brinda Charry's essay on Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* begins the sort of critical work my dissertation aims to accomplish more fully and comprehensively. That is, Charry engages what she calls the "veil question," arguing that, while

issues surrounding it in our own time clearly cannot be imposed on the early modern era, a study of European representations of veiled Muslim women... will perhaps help comprehend the ways in which the female body and its attire have always been a site of social regulation and have also played a role in the construction of cultural difference.³⁸

Charry's analysis of two veiled women in Shakespeare, the mourning Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and the Indian beauty in *Merchant of Venice*, shows that both women represent anxious encounters with gendered and ethnic others. For example, she sees the Indian's veil in *The Merchant of Venice* as a "symbolic object onto which some of the excitement and fear of contact with the other are displaced;" Olivia's use of the veil in *Twelfth Night* she finds representative of male anxieties about female "mobility and visibility."³⁹ Her analysis of the veil is enriched and supplemented by Richard O. Wilson's essay in a subsequent edition of the same journal, "Veiling an Indian Beauty: Shakespeare and the Hijab," which considers the same material (Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and its Indian beauty) but with important differences. Wilson maintains that the veil in this play is not only a marker of cultural difference (which tends to collapse the very distinctions it is meant to establish) but that it is linked semantically to the sails of the play. Wilson

³⁸ "[T]he Beauteous Scarf": Shakespeare and the 'Veil Question'" (*Shakespeare* 4.2: 112-126), 113.

³⁹ 121,118.

invokes Derrida's "A Silkworm of One's Own" to link the two objects: both the sails of the merchants' ships which carried silks and spices from the East, and the silken veil of the Indian beauty in Bassanio's speech, hint at a dynamic of "masked desire as a means of inserting private faces in public spaces"⁴⁰ that Wilson finds symptomatic in English culture of the seventeenth century. Wilson argues:

...unveiling the Muslim woman was the aim of western males. But if their own veil should be rent, we are warned at the start of this text, that "dangerous sea" would expose these "traded merchants" to the hidden violence of the "dark lady", and reveal the treachery of their own secret desires...⁴¹

In the end, the intertwining of sails and veils, for Wilson, is emblematic of the ways that "Renaissance theatre was posing the crucial question for the private European self as it entered the global market of available identities and dangerous desires."⁴²

Charry's and Wilson's work in *Shakespeare* displays critical awareness of the ways that early modern constructions of ethnic and gendered identities relied on figures such as the veil. Charry reminds us that the veil was not an innovation of Muslim societies, that veils were prescribed for women in Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Nevertheless, the veiling practices she cites are those used for head- or hair-coverings,

⁴⁰ "Veiling an Indian Beauty" 379. The French title of the volume in which Derrida's and Cixous's essays are collected, *Les Voiles*, means both "veils" and "sails" since the pluralization of "voile" elides the gender difference between "la voile" (sail) and "le voile" (veil).

⁴¹ Ibid 380.

⁴² 383.

rather than the full-face coverings such as the one worn by Moses (whose veil, and its significance, does not enter her discussion). Indeed, Charry's account of the veil considers it to be inherently a tool for patriarchal oppression; she considers a woman's unveiling as *always* an act of surrender, arguing that an act of unveiling "in the strict sense" is an act which "deprive[s] [a woman] of power and self-sufficiency."⁴³ This dissertation puts pressure on such understandings of the veil; in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, for instance, I identify veils and acts of unveiling as empowering, transgressive, and homoerotic—that is, as outside a patriarchal, heteronormative order. In all of my analyses, I seek to collate the various meanings and uses of the veil, to refrain from limiting our understanding of it, to see what these various veils might say to and about each other, for the veil was not only or always a sign of patriarchy or religion, nor was it always gendered feminine; it was as much a rhetorical figure as a sartorial accessory, as much a sign of Christianity as it was of Islam.

Chapter 1 considers the veil as a figure for apocalypse (literally, "unveiling") in Christian theology, as this tradition was what informed much early modern understanding of the significance of the veil, not only in religious teaching but in rhetorical and philosophical treatises. Beginning with the story of Moses on Mt Sinai in the book of Exodus, the veil is used to imagine the imparting of truth or divine knowledge; it is that which prevents direct access to wisdom or the satisfaction of desire as well as that which protects truth from the irreverent, the unworthy. However, while Pauline tradition invokes the veil—particularly Moses's veil which, Paul says, remains on the hearts of the

⁴³ 120.

Israelites—as a sign of ignorance, blindness, and short-sighted focus on the material surface (the Law) rather than the spiritual truths (the New Covenant), Moses’s veiling in Exodus is in fact far more complex. Art historian Brian Britt reveals post-Pauline artistic and exegetical discomfort with Moses’s veil, remarking that there are only about six portrayals (as far as his research shows) in sculpture or in painting of Moses with his veil on, since popular belief was that the veil represented the Israelites’ idolatry, a refusal to see or hear the word of God.⁴⁴ Britt argues:

[T]he avoidance of the veil [in the visual arts] reflects a patriarchal tradition of revelation as presence in speech and writing. This metaphysics is certainly familiar enough in the post-Biblical period, but whether it underlies the notion of revelation in the Hebrew Bible is something I dispute. In fact, the veil in Exodus figures centrally in a complex episode in which speech and writing are central. The conspicuous concealment by the veil in Exodus 34 makes silence and absence part of the process of revelation. Yet in Jewish and Christian tradition, the veil of Moses usually comes to stand for sin, weakness, and absence.⁴⁵

That is, as Britt’s explication of Exodus demonstrates, Moses wears the veil only when he is *not* in his role as prophet: “the text clearly states that Moses removes the veil when he

⁴⁴ Britt contends that artists wishing to portray Moses as powerful patriarch, typological figure for Christ, feared that Moses’s wisdom and power might be diminished or undermined if he were seen to be wearing the veil, symbol of blindness and ignorance.

⁴⁵ “Concealment, Revelation, and Gender: The Veil of Moses in the Bible and in Christian Art” (*Religion and the Arts* 7.3 [2003]: 227-273), 264, 230.

speaks with YHWH or the people” and so the veil is integral to the existence of the prophet, the *theophany* of God, and the communication of divine truth. It does not obstruct but instruct.⁴⁶ And yet what persists in Christian teaching is Paul’s description in 2 Corinthians of the veil as that which Moses was forced to put over his face so as not to distract from the “glory that was being set aside”:

And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3: 13-18)

This excoriation of a people imagined to fixate on outward shows, along with an uncomfortable awareness that spiritual truths depended upon the material veil to exist and to be communicated, is what undergirds Protestant conceptions of religious others in the 16th and 17th centuries: Jews, Catholics, and pagans are those who invest material things with improper significance, or who fail to see *through* those things of this world to the

⁴⁶ This idea is echoed in the injunction 1 Corinthians 11:6, which requires a woman to cover her head *when she is prophesying*.

greater truths of the next. Such a formulation of religious difference enabled England to imagine itself the singular, true Church in the narrative of Christian history, one whose reward would not come until the final revelation of the Apocalypse. Chapter 1 considers two poems of epic aspirations, Book One of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and George Herbert's "The Church Militant," as they employ the veil, and veiled figures, to represent the English Church and its adversaries within the long durée of Christian history. As it is in Exodus and in Corinthians, the veil is a powerful but troubled figure which both enables revelatory moments (such as those of allegory) and threatens to undo the progression from old to new, hidden to revealed, past to present.

Chapter 2 again considers the veil in Christian tradition but this time with an eye to its untold (or seldom-told) story: rather than desiring to transcend the material veil, there is a second tradition that embraces it, seeing the veil as *the* thing on which the entire narrative of Christian redemption is founded. Whereas in Spenser and Herbert the material veil (of allegory, of idolatry) was to be penetrated and surpassed in the journey towards holiness, in the incarnational and mystical traditions of the Christian Church the veil of matter is the thing that allows the Word to become flesh. From the veil of flesh that Mary weaves for Christ in her womb; to the veil on which Veronica captures—and communicates—the true image of Christ after his death; to the veil donned by a nun, true, intimate experiences of the divine are seen to rely on the matter of the female body. I analyze St Teresa of Avila's account of divine rapture alongside its reformulation by Richard Crashaw (in poems such as "The Flaming Heart") to interrogate the ways that the veil enabled alternative experiences and understandings of the divine, and of desire itself. The veil in these texts, rather than dividing self from other, links the two, dissolving all

difference and distance. In many ways it seeks to embrace an alternate understanding of Pauline theology, emphasizing the universalism of Galatians over the particularism of Corinthians.

While Chapter 1 considers the veil as a dangerous—but necessary—ornament in rhetoric and allegory, Chapter 3 explores this anxious paradox as it is performed onstage. That is, fears about what the veil might conceal or how it might mislead exist alongside a desperate dependence on those very outward shows. Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Thomas Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* employ the veiled discovery space at the back of the early modern stage to materialize experiences of abjection, to stage what is unstageable or, literally, *ob-scene*. As the work by Wilson and Charry cited above attests, Bassanio's famous diatribe against a world deceived by ornament reflects the anxieties provoked by encounters with gendered and ethnic others; it also invokes Christian teachings about idolatry and the proper position of objects and the subjects that use them. Bassanio's desire for unadulterated presence and self-evidence, and his simultaneous fear and disgust at what the veil might reveal, are materialized in feminine bodies (and body parts) as they represent that triple helix—birth, sex, and death—of abjection. Whereas *The Merchant of Venice* employs the veiled discovery space to hollow out and to contain abjection, *The Revenger's Tragedy* thrusts the abject into the spectators' (and actors') faces: Gloriana's skull, for example, becomes the epitome of abjection, a discovery space in miniature, since it is both a visible sign of death and a veiled (but empty) container of the same. Scenes of unveiling in the plays, both those acted within and through the discovery space as well as those enacted through female bodies (or their representations, such as Portia's caskets), reveal the theatricality inherent

in abjection, and the ways in which the experience of watching revelations onstage can be both horrifying and palliative. The veil, like the experience of abjection, is both necessary and terrifying.

Chapter 4 collects the various uses and histories of the veil discussed in the preceding chapters and considers the ways these traditions informed English engagements with Islam, particularly with the Muslim woman. Beginning with a consideration of the veiled Donusa in Phillip Massinger's *Renegado* and the ways her portrayal was both informed by and reflected in early modern travel narratives, I explore the ways that, over the course of the seventeenth century, the veil began to shed some of its domestic and Christian valences, and to solidify into a metonymy for the Orient as a space of mystery, darkness, and desire. I conclude by considering Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's use of the veil in her *Turkish Embassy Letters*; Montagu is an interesting case because she is both a European traveler to Ottoman territory and female, and therefore allowed to inhabit the role of veiled woman, even if only for a time. Informed by Alain Grosrichard's *The Sultan's Court* and its Lacanian analysis of Orientalist fantasies, I contend that by placing the veil insistently onto the body of the Muslim, the early modern European enables a powerful disavowal of his own structures of pleasure and desire. By imagining the Orient as controlled by and directed towards an omnipotent—yet impotent—despot, to whom all Muslims submit in desire and fear, the early modern European enacts another instance of “I know very well but all the same...” Like the veiled Phallus, the veiled despot *must* remain veiled so that the European can complete his project of penetration and, it is hoped, mastery of the darkness and seduction of the

Orient. Such fantasies of visual and physical penetration anticipate and enable political and ideological domination over the succeeding centuries.

An understanding of the veil as both metaphor and object during the premodern periods helps us account for its continued power and fascination in the Western imagination. The two structures of thought erected through and around the veil—first, its use to mark difference, the sacred, the unknown and, second, the desire to strip veils away—begin to take recognizable shape during the early modern period as a result of the period’s cultural, economic, religious, and linguistic shifts reflected in the literature I consider here. For this reason, it is not inaccurate to say that a veil is never “just” a veil; it is always already implicated within and inflected by a host of assumptions and myriad cultural histories. The fact that it remains a powerful image in political discourse of both the right and the left—the desire or mission to unveil the Muslim woman, for instance—means that what may seem a flimsy or insubstantial artifact from the past actually has lasting, material effects, even to the present day. Fears and fantasies about veils—and the desire to unveil people and things—continue to trouble our understandings of the role of the enlightened individual whose responsibility it is, we imagine, to strip away veils of ignorance, to liberate the truth, both in literary criticism and in current political rhetoric surrounding the Middle East. In other words, we persist in imagining—and producing—truth as already “there” but reliant on our penetration and liberation of it. The veil continues to limit and control our understanding of the nature of truth—the “truth” of a body’s or a people’s or a text’s identity, be it gendered or racial or religious or political.

However, if we focus less on what the veil “means” and more on how it is used, what it “does” for the viewer or for the wearer, we might be freed to embrace an

alternative understanding of the veil as contingent, multiple, heterogenous, limitless, of the *veil itself* as active knowledge rather than as merely a traversable conduit to some absent, passive truth in need of violent liberation. To denaturalize and demystify the veil means that we might then encounter the possibility not of effecting some grand unveiling but of imagining an existence, as Derrida proposes, outside the veil:

Where we're going, before the verdict falls, then, at the end of this time that is like no other, nor even like the end of time, another figure perhaps upsets the whole of history from top to bottom, and upsets even the meaning of the word "history": neither a history of a veil, a veil to be lifted or torn, nor the Thing, nor the Phallus nor Death, of course, that would suddenly show itself at the last coup de théâtre, at the instant of a revelation or an unveiling, nor a theorem wrapped up in a shroud or in modesty... but another unfigurable figure, beyond any holy shroud, the secret of a face that is no longer even a face if face tells of vision and a story of the eye.⁴⁷

First, however, we must explore all the folds and turns of the veil, so that in seeing we might be seen and in knowing we might be known.

⁴⁷ "Silkworm" 31.

Apocalyptic Revelations: Allegories of English Protestantism in Spenser and Herbert

In 1615, the London preacher and writer of prose pamphlets, Thomas Adams, followed his hugely popular sermon *The White Devil* (preached at St. Paul's Cross in 1613 and reprinted five times before 1621) with a collection of three sermons entitled *The blacke devil or the apostate, Together with the wolfe worrying the lambes. And the spiritual navigator, bound for the Holy Land*. These three sermons addressed apostasy (in the figure of "the blacke devil"), false prophets (the wolf in sheep's clothing), and the book of Revelation ("THE Spirituall Nauigator BOVND For the Holy Land"). Such sermons are typical of early modern homiletics in their careful rhetorical construction, their use of allegorical figures to portray various virtues and vices, and their reliance on typological modes of interpretation which gesture toward, and claim to find their fulfillment in, the final revelation of the Apocalypse. In the process, Adams's sermons betray a characteristic reliance on religious and ethnic stereotypes that are meant to contrast with and thus cast into high relief the contours of Protestant identity. This identity is imagined through and around the veil, both the veil of allegory and veiled figures within the allegorical narratives themselves. As such, Adams's sermons are an ideal point of departure for understanding the veil as marker of religious difference in early modern Protestant writings, especially Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and George Herbert's "The Church Militant," which both attempt to place England and its Church within the long durée of Christian history by differentiating them from other peoples and faiths. In this chapter, I contend that, like Adams's sermons, Spenser's and Herbert's poems demonstrate the anxiety derived from employing—in allegorical

rhetoric—the very sorts of deceptions and obfuscations they decry in representatives of vice and sin, from the Jew and the Catholic to the hypocrite and the sorcerer. For both preacher and poet, veils very often end up undoing the systems of value they are meant to establish, for rather than operating as markers of difference and distance, they reveal proximity and complicity.

Reformation tracts resort to allegory when imagining, portraying, and describing Christian history and doctrine, not only because allegorical figures are easily recognized and decoded (as types of various virtues and vices like those in medieval morality plays and romances) but also for the end that many religious and allegorical narratives share, that is, a final revelatory event that promises fulfillment and satisfaction. Likewise, allegorical poetry employs traditional Pauline exegetical strategies—typology in particular—in its construction of narrative. The veil is the common denominator in each of these modes of meaning-making—the veil as both rhetorical device (the veil of fiction) and material artifact (the veil worn by characters or objects). It is the veil's capacity to oscillate between these two modes and between these two instantiations (as metaphor and object) that makes it such a powerful trope in religious and poetic discourse, especially because both allegory and typology proceed from the tension between the literal and the figurative, and depend on a promised apocalyptic end in which all veils (of both flesh and of ignorance) will be stripped away and the truth will be revealed. But both of these modes can be interrupted, delayed, deterred by the very same figure, for if the veil promises to disclose it also presents itself as obstruction; if the veil itself is too attractive, it can short-circuit progression toward a proper end.

Unveiling the Sinner to the Eyes of the Saints

Adams begins the first sermon of his collection, “The black devil,” by expounding on the demon within each Christian that tortures and vexes him, describing that demon as both an embodiment of sin (an “vnclean spirit”) and a Jew. Indeed, once the devil has been cast out of the sinner, he returns to the Jew from whom he originated:

3. The *Prince* of the *Ayre* thus discovered, and discomfited by the *Sunne* of *Righteousnesse*, breaking through the grosse and foggy *Clouds* of *Ignorance* and *Impiety*, wherein the *Gentile* world was wrapped: VVhat doth he? but re-salutes his former habitation. He liked the *old seat* well, and will venter a fall, but recouer it. 4. Thether he flyes; and loe, how fit he findes it for his entertaine! The *heart* of the *Iewes* is *empty* of *Faith*; *swept* with the beesome [blindness] of *Hypocrisie*, a iusticiary, imaginary, false-conceited righteousnes; and *garnished* with a few broken traditions and ceremonies; suppellectile complements in stead of substantiall graces.⁴⁸

The dark heart/body of the Jew is both the womb that engenders the devil and an empty home (“swept” and “garnished” with “a few broken” ornaments such as “traditions and ceremonies”) that welcomes the devil back.

⁴⁸ *The blacke devil or the apostate Together with the wolfe worrying the lambes. And the spiritual navigator, bound for the Holy Land. In three sermons*” (London: William Iaggard, 1615), 3-4. Each sermon in the collection is paginated separately, so future citations will note sermon title and page numbers.

Adams goes on to argue that if the Jews committed a sin by disbelieving God's servant, Moses, they committed an even greater one by "*trod[ing] vnder foote* (not the *Seruant*, but) the *Sonne* of God."⁴⁹ Thus, Adams argues, their sin is greater the second time around and the punishment they will experience even more just; his description of their sin here is typological, in that it is prefigured by the story of Moses, though it finds its culmination in the death of Christ. At this point, Adams suddenly recalls himself to his professed purpose, excusing his digression by claiming that "The Occasion was so materiall, that it hath led me further, then eyther my purpose or your patience would willingly haue allowed me."⁵⁰ Though the figure of the Jew erupts into Adams's portrayal of apostasy, its "true" representatives are actually the "Blackamoor" (the "Ethiopian" or "Cushite" from Jeremiah 13:23) and the "credulous papist."⁵¹ In this, Adams reprises a theme from his hugely popular sermon on the "white devil" of hypocrisy:

The White Deuill, the *Hypocrite* hath beene formerly discover'd, and the sky-colour'd vaile of his dissimulation pulled off, I am to present to your view and detestation a sinner of a contrary colour, swarthy rebellion, and besmeared *Profanesse*: an *Apostate* falling into the clutches of eight vncleane spirits. Needs must he be fowle, that hath so many fowle deuils in him. Mary Magdalen had but seauen, and they were cast out: this hath

⁴⁹ "Black devil" 5.

⁵⁰ "Black devil" 5. This claim of having forgotten himself is all the more interesting since these are the sermons as they are written out for publishing, not as they are recorded by a listener. The digression thus was "materiall" enough to include in the finished product.

⁵¹ "Black devil" title page and 24.

gotten one more, to make his soule the blacker, and they keepe in. If *Hypocrisie* there, were iustly called the *White Deuill*; *Apostacie* here may as iustly bee termed the *Blacke Deuill*. In the former was a white skinne of profession drawne ouer an vlcerous corps: here hyde and carcasse, hand and heart, shadow and substance, seeming and being, outward profession and inward intention, are blacke, foule, detestable. Therefore we will call him the *Apostate*, or *blacke Deuill*.⁵²

Here we can see how Adams's use of the veil is implicated in a discourse of color, one that conflates morality with ethnicity. Having revealed the truth behind the "sky-colour'd vaile" of the figure of Hypocrisy, Adams now turns his forensic eye to the apostate, whose outside at least matches his inside since each is "blacke [and] foule." Both figures, however, require Adams as preacher to unveil them to the eyes of the congregation: formerly, Adams claims, he had "discouer'd... [and] pulled off" the veil with which the hypocrite was concealed; now Adams will "present to your view" the "swarthy" apostate. Here again the focus is on those sinners against whom the good Christian can measure and identify himself. Not only the dark Jew but the black Moor is a foil for the (white, clean) Christian.

Ending the collection with a commentary on the Book of Revelation, Adams again foregrounds the importance of the task of unveiling in the project of Christian edification. Adams calls Revelation "a booke of great depth; containing tot Samenta,

⁵² "Black devil" 6.

quot verba; as many wonders as words, mysteries as sentences.” It is also a book “of great difficulty,” for

There is *Manna* in the *Arke*, but who shall open it to vs? Within the *Sanctum Sanctorum* there is the *Mercy-seate*; but who shall draw the Curtaine for vs, pull away the *veile*? Our *Sauour* lies here; (not dead, but liuing) but *who shal roll away the stone for vs*; open a passage to our vnderstanding? The impediment is not *in Obiecto percipiendo*, but *in Organo percipiendi*; not in the obiect to be seene, but in our organ or instrument of seeing it: not in the *Sunne*, but in the dimme thicknes of our sight.⁵³

The trouble is not in the object the viewer sees but in the perception of that viewer (though this is the very fault ascribed to the Jews in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians)⁵⁴. In other words, the text of Revelation is not itself confounding; rather it is the ignorance and blindness of the reader which causes interpretive difficulties. Though he has said that Revelation is full of mystery, it is also “the most Gospel-like booke, a booke of most happy consolation: deliuering those euentuall comforts, which shall successiuey and succesfully, accompany the *Church* vnto the end of the world.” It is a hopeful book because whereas the Jews

⁵³ “The spiritvall navigator, bovdnd for the *Holy Land*” 2.

⁵⁴ Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. (2 Cor. 3:12-15)

saw (*Christum velatum, we reuelatum*) *Christ* shadowed in the law, we see him manifested in the *Gospel*... They saw *per fenestram, wee sine medio*: they darkely through the windowes, we without interposition of any cloud. Great then is the difference betweene that figuratiue *molten sea of brasse*, and this bright *glassy sea* of the *Gospell*.⁵⁵

This “glassy sea,” Adams rejoices, “represents to vs our selues, and our Sauour.” The *Gospell* not only shows us ourselves and our Savior, but it also, like a crystal, skews our appearance in a more favorable light:

God beholds vs through this *Chrystall, Iesus Christ*; and sees nothing in vs leane, lame, polluted, or ill-fauour'd. What euer our owne proper, and personall inclinations and iniquations haue beene, this tralucent *Chrystall*, the merits and righteousnesse of our Sauour presents vs *pure* in the eyes of God.⁵⁶

Adams employs typology to convert the “glassy Sea” of Revelation to the “sea of this world” through which every Christian must pass: “The accordance of the *Type* and *Anti-type* stands thus. As none of the children of *Israel* entred the terrestriall *Canaan*, but by passing the *redde Sea*: so ordinarily, no *Christian* enters the celestiaall *Canaan*, but through this *glassy Sea*.”⁵⁷ In this way, the prophecy of Revelation is also the transformative water of baptism and

⁵⁵ “Spiritvall navigator” 5-6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid* 7.

the material world through which Christians must pass to reach or return to that “Celestiall” sea of Christ.

As these passages illustrate, the English Protestant Christian is increasingly defined by what he is not: not Jewish, not papist, not Moorish. Yet he is prone to the same sins of ignorance and idolatry. The English Christian, like his antitypes, is less an individual person than a personified abstraction, an embodied fantasy of unified identity, and yet these identities can only be identified as mirrors or reflections of what they are not. As Adams’s sermons above demonstrate, however, the veil (like the “glass” which divides the mortal world from the divine, or the ignorance which obstructs the view of the sinner) unsettles the very distinctions it is meant to construct. For in one moment Adams argues that although the Jew saw the truth of God only through the shadow of the Law, the Christian sees God clearly in his gospels; however, those very gospels are full of mystery and “great difficulty” because the eyes of their perceivers are obstructed by a veil:

this muddy vaile, or rather Iayle, the flesh, hath by reason of the others impotency and passibleness, a thicke cloud cast betweene it selfe and glory. *For now wee see through a glasse darkely: but then face to face. Now I know in part, then shall I know, euen as also I am knowne.* The best eye vpon earth lookes but through a glasse, a lattice, an obscuring impediment.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ This is from another hugely popular sermon series printed three years later, “The happines of the church, or, A description of those spirituall prerogatiues vvhewerwith Christ hath endowed her considered in some

Likewise, the ostensibly clear distinction between white and black, good and evil, is undone in the figures of the white and black devils, who both embody sin. The white devil of hypocrisy conceals his sin under a skin of virtue, but the black devil is also hidden until a preacher such as Adams “presents him to sight.” Thus the Christian is no different from the Jew or the “Blackamoore”: one wears a material veil, the other confounds his viewer by virtue of the viewer’s veil of ignorance or blindness.

In the first two sermons of the collection cited above, Adams promises to unveil the hypocrite and the apostate, but in the last sermon he denies having the audacity to attempt any interpretation of that hopeful gospel of Revelation:

I purpose not to plunge to the depth with the *Elephant*; but to wade with the *lambe* in the shallowes: not to be ouer-ventrous in the *Apocalypse*, as if I could reueale the *Reuelation*: but briefly to report what expositions others haue giuen of this branch: and then gather some fruite from it, for our owne instruction and comfort.⁵⁹

That the last sermon in this collection locates itself in Revelation, but a revelation that cannot actually be accomplished—even by the preacher himself—is indicative of the contradictory impulses to veil and unveil that we see throughout biblical and allegorical writings during this period. Adams’s work reveals the anxieties occasioned by attempts

contemplations vpon part of the 12. chapter of the Hebrewes : together with certain other meditations and discourses vpon other portions of Holy Scriptures, the titles wherof immediately precede the booke : being the summe of diuerse sermons preached in S. Gregories London” (London: Iohn Grisman, 1619), 301. Even here, it is important to note, the blame for Christians’ blindness is foisted onto “the others” whose “impotency” and “passibleness” are the cause of present sorrow.

⁵⁹ “The spiritvall navigator” 2-3.

to define English Christianity by defining what it was not, as well as the awareness that these distinctions so easily collapse by virtue of the very tropes meant to divide them. And the prevalence of the veil—both material and metaphorical—in Adams’s sermons speaks to its utility in managing these anxieties.

Like Adams’s works, Edmund Spenser’s and George Herbert’s poetry reflects a desire for the disclosure of truth—a desire for the fulfillment promised by apocalyptic fantasies—and a fear of what that truth might be. For rather than revelation exposing the sinners and vindicating the saints, it might reveal them to be one and the same. Veils in these two poems function as what Sara Ahmed, in *Queer Phenomenology*, calls “orientation devices”⁶⁰—objects which direct our energies and affect our apprehension of the world. Both material and figurative or allegorical veils are meant to orient the reader toward a revelatory, Christian future. However, the veil also shows itself to be what Ahmed would term a “failed object”⁶¹ because, rather than acting as marker of spatial distance and temporal difference, it conscripts the viewer/reader into idolatry and delay and thus “ceases to be a means to do something...and becomes the object that we attend to, or are concerned with.”⁶² It draws attention to itself *as* tool. And because allegory itself is endlessly circular and unfulfilling, the veil of allegory, rather than being a tool for its own exegesis, instead reveals the contours of itself as fantasy.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006), 3, *et passim*.

⁶¹ *Ibid* 48-50.

⁶² *Ibid* 48.

⁶³ Jonathan Goldberg writes, “Allegory: a full (and empty) plaited tale. Episode upon episode (mirror upon mirror), each time the same (iteration), yet in the very sameness (wound and w[h]ole) difference,

This chapter thus contends that the veil—particularly the veil as a figure for allegory but also material veils or coverings—works both to create and unravel systems of meaning by dividing self from other, truth from deception, and so on. In her seminal analysis of allegory, Maureen Quilligan argues that for medieval and early modern readers, “language [was] sensed in terms of a nearly physical presence” and “presupposed at least a potential sacralizing power.”⁶⁴ Allegorical language could transform the mundane into the sacred, the material into the spiritual. While allegory has been the subject of critical commentary and exegesis for millennia, few have considered the *veil itself* as a constitutive element of the mode. It is apprehended as a self-evident or unremarkable figure of speech, even as the veil is repeatedly invoked to describe the operation of allegory or to symbolize its structure.⁶⁵ For example, Jonathan Goldberg calls allegory “the voice of the veil”⁶⁶ and John Freccero explains it as “the translation

perplexing... You are strung along, caught in an endless replay. You can't quite find it. You are promised an end, left “to another place... to be perfected” (*FQ* IV.xii.35.9). That beyond proves to be a before, “deepe within the mynd” (*FQ* VI, proem 5.8), Spenser says, “another place” where ending is beginning. Allegory drives toward Eden, ever lost, endlessly deferred” (*Voice Terminal Echo* [New York: Methuen, 1986]), 29-30.

⁶⁴ *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979), 156.

⁶⁵ See especially Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo* (cited above) and *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); both texts expose the endless deferral upon which allegory depends. Gordon Teskey identifies the violence embodied by and enacted through allegory in *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996); he argues, “In [allegory’s] psychological work there appear to be two operations: to use meaning as a wedge to split a unity into two things and to yoke together heterogeneous things by force of meaning” (2). Both Goldberg and Teskey employ the veil as a metaphor for the allegory’s operation, but neglect to examine the *metaphor itself* much further. The essays in Stephen Greenblatt’s edited collection, *Allegory and Representation*, explore the question, posed by Paul de Man in “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion” on page 2: “Why is it that the furthest reaching truths about ourselves and the world have to be stated in such a lopsided, referentially indirect mode?” (Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-80 [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1981]). See also Joel D. Black’s review of this book and another collection of essays (*Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*), “Allegory Unveiled” (*Poetics Today* 4.1 [1982], 109-26).

⁶⁶ Goldberg *Voice* 29.

into visual terms of the interpretive act required of the reader.”⁶⁷ As I noted in the Introduction to this dissertation, I find Madhavi Menon to be an important exception, as she considers in depth the power of concealing and revealing that the material veil embodies, particularly in Renaissance drama; that is, Menon recognizes the veil as a constitutive figure within, and even as, allegory. Menon’s primary focus is sexuality and the ways in which sexuality is inherently allegorical and vice versa.⁶⁸ Although I attend here less to sexuality than she does, my examination of the veil is informed by Menon’s inasmuch as I consider the veil as a key trope for religious allegory’s constructions of identity. My focus in particular is on the congruence of poetic allegories and the tradition of biblical exegesis for the ways that they combine to establish a sense of English Protestantism and its place in Christian history. Because the veil in religious tracts and in allegorical poetry vacillates between the material and the metaphorical realms, it tends to unite them, linking sacred history with national history, linguistic signification and interpretation with ethnic identity. The veil appears again and again both in debates on the uses and misuses of rhetoric and language and in works which attempt to define the English Church’s place in sacred and secular history.

If we consider the sign and its meaning as metonymic, as does Cary Howie in *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature*—that is, as operating along a chain of association—we might note that the veil, even as it differentiates from what it conceals, links itself to its object. Or, put another way, one cannot pull back a

⁶⁷ *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (ed. Rachel Jacoff; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986), 124.

⁶⁸ *Wanton Words: Rhetoric and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

veil without touching it, without being complicit in the act of veiling that one wishes to undo. But whereas metonymy “relies so much upon spatial proximity in order to generate meaning,”⁶⁹ allegory relies for its comprehensibility on spatial and temporal distance imagined as difference. And yet it functions metonymically as well, since it cannot escape a “participative contamination.” As Howie concludes, “allegory... thus depends upon the cohesion of its contiguous components... The allegorical tenor, in fact, *touches* its vehicle.”⁷⁰ Allegorical narratives about Christian history such as Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and George Herbert’s “Church Militant” demonstrate how “every critique is bound, abjectly and erotically, to its object.”⁷¹ The trope of allegory, then, even as it intends to cut and separate in order to differentiate and exclude, collects, by virtue of its metonymic effect, a string of associations which form a line of connection and complicity between self and others, truth and deception.

The fantasy that undergirds allegory is that allegory is merely a holding space for the larger revelation to come.⁷² Since it operates in a similar manner as the typological thinking instantiated by St Paul, who directed Christians toward the Second Coming, meaning is always deferred. Thomas Adams’s sermon collection reflects this ordering of experience: first, identify virtue by identifying sin; next, portray those states of being as

⁶⁹ *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* 92.

⁷¹ *Ibid* 6.

⁷² As Michael Murrin notes, poets such as “Boccaccio always assumed that the Christian revelation took an essentially literary form, identifying scriptural *figurae* with poetic allegory. Consequently, there could be no better introduction to scriptural theology than poetry.” (*The Veil of Allegory: Some Notes Toward a Theory of Allegorical Rhetoric in the English Renaissance* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969]), 16.

embodied, recognizable figures like those from medieval romance and mystery plays; third, deflect any ultimate revelation of the truths toward which these narratives gesture by reminding the reader that true fulfillment of meaning or attainment of truth cannot be realized while one remains within “this muddy vaile, or rather Iayle, the flesh” or, as Paul put it, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). The deferral of meaning and the fulfillment of biblical history are placed in the future of Revelation.

Much has been written about apocalyptic discourse in Reformation England; however, scant attention has been paid to the semantic valences of the terms “apocalypse” and “revelation,” especially as they relate to that ubiquitous figure for allegory, the veil.⁷³ “Apocalypse” derives from the Greek *apokálypsis* for removing a cover, and “revelation” is its Latin equivalent. Embedded in these terms is the suggestion of a dual temporality, both a past state of coveredness and a future performance of removing that cover, presumably to return to an originary state. Use of the term, then, situates itself in the middle—in the multiplicity and division of the present— between the imagined singularity of the “already” of the past and the “yet to come” of the future, in

⁷³ Literary and historiographical analyses of apocalypse in early modern Europe are legion. For an overview of Protestant English articulations, see: C.A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich, eds., *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 1984). Paul Christianson surveys English apocalyptic interpretations of the reformation in sermons, pamphlets, and treatises in *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978). Andrew Escobedo explores the way that apocalyptic thought in the centuries of the Reformation and the English Revolution helped England locate its sense of origin and future in *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foxe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004).

John N. Wall's terms.⁷⁴ The apocalyptic action required of the reader of allegory partakes of this logic: the sense that Truth has been communicated, a *preexisting* truth, but subsequently has been concealed behind beautiful language, and thus must be revealed in order to release the promised fecundity within.

It is probably true that every age believes itself to be on the verge of apocalypse, but the religious and political turmoil that absorbed early modern England provided fodder for the conviction that the end was nigh, and as many scholars have shown, formative moments in early modern English history lent themselves to apocalyptic schemas, from the Act of Succession to the defeat of the Spanish Armada to the events of 5 November 1605.⁷⁵ England's sense of approaching apocalypse in the latter half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries was experienced as the threat of invasion by "past" times and peoples, such as Jews and Muslims, whose religion was seen as operating—even in the present—in an ancient and superseded form of worship, and England's own imagined past of Roman Catholicism. In this sense, the temporal orientation of this period was one like that implied in "revelation" and "apocalypse," that is, a sense of being in-between and on the cusp of radical change. This temporal orientation relied on a geographic and religious orientation, which positioned English

⁷⁴ *Transformations of the Word: Spenser, Herbert, Vaughan* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 264.

⁷⁵ These "events" and "moments" accrued their significance over time and in hindsight of course, as events often do; indeed they did not become isolatable "events" or "moments" until such apocalyptic narratives assigned them the status of temporal breaks or hinges around which England's history turned. David Cressy explores the ways that a "new" Protestant calendar helped solidify English identity in reformation England, particularly in terms of the apocalyptic narratives that arose around such "national" events as the Gunpowder Plot and the defeat of the Spanish Armada: *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Protestants in opposition to others both in time and space. When England imagined itself as coming into contact with representatives of the foreign or the past, it moved itself *away* from those by moving *toward* a sense of an imminent and radical future. Likewise, there was a sense that in order for England to move *forward* in time (and, incidentally, into the New World), it had to move *away* from its religious and ethnic others, to keep itself separate. As Sara Ahmed puts it, “The attribution of feeling toward an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) moves the subject away from the object, creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat.”⁷⁶

A key component of the progression of England’s secular and sacred histories, then, was separation from those perceived to “hold England back” either by reminding England of its putative past or by tempting England to revert to that past or to be distracted from the future. I identify three distinct but not separate ways that England saw itself as being pulled back, all of which are expressed by means of the veil: one, by the seduction of the material world, as represented by the sensuous physicality of Roman Catholic worship, including the veil worn by nuns; the luxurious sexuality of Islam and its exotic harem, embodied by a silken veil;⁷⁷ and third, the more metaphorical materiality of Judaism, or the imagined Jewish past of the Old Testament, understood as preceding the Christian epoch of unveiling or Revelation. All of these enemies, however, whether they operated in relics, icons, rosaries, silks, gold, and spices or in an ignorant fidelity to the Old Law, could divert one’s focus away from God and back to the earth.

⁷⁶ Ibid 2.

⁷⁷ On the silken veil of Islam, see also Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation.

Jews and Catholics represented England's religious past (its "former" neighbors, ancestors, and selves), those ignorant epochs in Christian history that should have been superseded by Protestantism. The Jews of the Old Testament had been guilty of idolatry in their worship of Moses instead of God. John Calvin aligns this with the Roman Catholic custom of keeping relics:

the desire to haue reliques is almost neuer without suspition, and that worse is, it is the mother of ydolatry, which is ordinarily connexed and ioyned therewith. Euery man doeth confesse that the cause that moued oure Lord to hyde the body of Moyses, was for feare least the people of Israell, should abuse it in worshippyng of it. . . let us marke what saint Paule sayeth euen of Jesus Christ himself, for he protesteth not to know him any more according to the fleshe, after his resurrection: admonishing by these wordes that all that is carnall in Jesus Christ oughte to be forgotten and set aside to the ende to applye and set our affection to seke and possesse him according to the Spirite.⁷⁸

Calvin's point here is that "after [Christ's] resurrection" the veil of matter (or, as Adams puts it above, the veil/jail of flesh) was to be disregarded and that only those "things" that could not be seen or touched were holy; all else was simply a reversion to the idolatry of the Jews. Keeping relics "breeds" or engenders idolatry (Calvin calls them "the mother

⁷⁸ Steuen Wythers, trans. *A very profitable treatise made by M. Ihon Caluyne, declarynge what great profit might come to al christendome, yf there were a regester made of all saintes bodies and other reliques, which are aswell in Italy, as in Fraunce, Dutchland, Spaine, and other kingdomes and countreys.* (London, 1561), Aiiii.

of ydolatry”) in that humans cannot be trusted with material objects, since they tend to fixate on them instead of the transcendent spirit from which they came and toward which they gesture back. Likewise, Christ’s incarnation—his becoming flesh—must be disavowed and forgotten, for if we cannot see or feel Him we are led more fervently to seek Him “according to the Spirite.”⁷⁹

God’s intervention into human time and space always occurs, at least until the resurrection, through material objects, usually the veil (of flesh or matter described as a veil⁸⁰), which highlights the veil’s suturing of the spiritual and the material, sacred time (*kairos*) and human time (*chronos*): Moses’s face was so radiant after his encounter with God on Mt Sinai that he had to veil it so that the Israelites, in their ignorance and shortsightedness, would not worship the sign instead of the sign-maker.⁸¹ Like the stone tablets for which they created the Ark, Jesus’s material body (the Word made flesh) was also subject to the idolatry of his ignorant followers, as the story of the Transfiguration attests:

And after six days Jesus took Peter, and James, and John, his brother, and led them aside into an high hill, and was transfigured into another likeness before them. And his face shone as the sun; and his clothes were made white as snow. And lo! Moses and Elias appeared to them, and spake with

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for an analysis of mysticism, that strand of Christianity which insisted upon the importance of Christ’s incarnation as that which granted physical access to and knowledge of God, and which considered the veil not as something to be transcended but to be consumed and inhabited.

⁸⁰ Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

⁸¹ The veil over the Holy of Holies was rent in two at the moment of Christ’s death, as God *exited* the human world but also as the “New Covenant” took effect.

him. And Peter answered, and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If thou wilt, make we here three tabernacles; to thee one, to Moses one, and one to Elias. Yet while he spake, lo! a bright cloud overshadowed them; and lo! a voice out of the cloud, that said, This is my dear-worthy Son, in whom I have well pleased me; hear ye him. And the disciples heard, and [fell down] on their faces, and dreaded greatly. And Jesus came, and touched them, and said to them, Rise up, and do not ye dread. And they lifted up their eyes, and saw no man, but Jesus alone. And as they came down off the hill, Jesus commanded to them, and said, Say ye to no man the vision, till man's Son rise again from death. (Matt. 17:1-9)

Like their forebears the Israelites, the disciples in this story are guilty of shortsightedness: not only do they focus too much on the brilliance (the purity, the whiteness) of Jesus's presence before them in His transfiguration, but they desire to *freeze* this moment in time, to erect temples (like new arks) to house Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, to keep them and this moment in human space and time. Here is a key to understanding idolatry, one that is often overlooked: not only is idolatry an errant focus on a physical sign instead of the transcendent signified to which it should point; it is also a *temporal* mistake, inasmuch as it attempts to fix a transcendent experience into a physical object which is limited to the here and now. In Calvin's explanation above, idolaters not only worship relics for their physical attributes, but they are transfixed in a moment that is now supposedly past: it "oughte to be forgotten and set aside to the ende"—the "ende" here meaning not only the purpose (*telos*) but the cessation of human time. The disciples in the story of the Transfiguration are, like all idolaters, "caught in the impossibility of making this

knowledge [their experience of the divine] applicable to the material world.”⁸² But Christ brings them back to the present moment by “touching” them and instructing them to look toward the future, “till man's Son rise[s] again from death.” In attempting to translate a temporal experience into a physical object, the disciples *reverse* the “proper” flow of signification. In this sense, instead of revealing, they *re-veil* the divine truth which they have witnessed.

In a similar vein, John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* accused Catholics of “backwardnesse in Religion;”⁸³ Catholicism, he maintains, “imped[es] England’s spiritual and political progress.”⁸⁴ In this sense Catholics are themselves physical obstructions, like veils, which stand in the way of Protestant subjects and their forward movement in both time and space; they are simultaneously those who remain, like Jews, - *behind* the veil of ignorance or “outdated” practice. In their idolatrous fixation on the material accoutrements of worship—vestments, relics, the Host, incense---Catholics repeat the sins of their Jewish forebears. For example, in debates about the meaning of the ritual of “churching,” the service through which a recently-delivered mother was welcomed back into public society, the veil epitomized the idolatrous materiality of Catholicism even as it echoed that of Judaism. David Cressy has explored the vicissitudes in church policy toward women’s veiling in the liturgy of churching, noting that,

⁸² Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality”, in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983): 222.

⁸³ Qtd. in Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999): 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid* 15.

In traditional Catholic practice the woman to be purified wore a white veil, carried a lighted candle, and was accompanied by two married women, but this was not formally required by any rubric. . . Protestants [however,] maintained that this was a continuation of Jewishness, a superstitious adherence to Mosaic and Levitical Law. . . .the ceremony was [seen as] filled with priestcraft and popish superstition.⁸⁵

In Catholic practice, the veil symbolized a woman's need for purification and cleansing after childbirth; Protestants, particularly Puritans, insisted that there was nothing unclean about childbirth, and that the veil should thus be discarded so that the rite of churching might be considered merely a celebration of a healthy delivery rather than a "magical" ceremony. Keith Thomas cites a Henry Barrow, who derided the practice of church-veiling around 1590; Barrow snorted that "Only after woman has been purified by 'Sir Priest' can she 'put off her veiling kerchief, and look her husband and neighbors in the face again... What can be a more apish imitation, or rather a more reviving of Jewish purification than this?'"⁸⁶ The veil in these debates represented not only "popish superstition" but Jewish idolatry, both practices which invested material objects with diabolical, "magic" powers.

Idolatry was likewise the charge leveled against Muslims, whose "pagan" luxury and licentiousness was cause for both fascination and fear. As Daniel Vitkus notes,

⁸⁵ "Purification, Thanksgiving, and the Churching of Women in Post-Reformation England" (*Past & Present* 141 [Nov 1993]: 106-146), 118.

⁸⁶ *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 60.

however, “English Protestant animosity for Spanish or Roman Catholic ‘superstition’ was usually stronger than feelings of hostility toward the more distant Ottoman Muslims,”⁸⁷ a fact to which our exploration of Spenser and Herbert will attest. The common confusion of the Spanish with their “Moorish” ancestors meant the easy conflation of (Iberian) Catholicism with Islam, both of whom were lumped together in the category of idolatrous practice. David Read argues that “there was a pronounced tendency in Spenser’s day to confuse the Spaniards with their former oppressors,” the Goths and Saracens.⁸⁸ Indeed, in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*, Spenser himself argues that there is no “pure” Spanish blood left; it has been tainted and sullied by the intermarriage of barbarians and Moors. Bishop John Bale (who employed allegorical figures in his anti-Catholic, pro-Anglican play, *Kynge Johan*) identified the Antichrist in both peoples in his commentary on the book of Revelation (1547): “The beast of the bottomless pit is the cruel, crafty, and cursed generation of antichrist, the pope with his bishops, prelates, priests, and religious in Europe, Mahomet with his doting douzepers in Africa, and so forth in Asia and India...”⁸⁹ Whether they were Muslim, Catholic, or Jewish, idolaters were those read material objects—or the Old Law—as ends in themselves rather than signs to be interpreted and then disregarded. All three sets of peoples were portrayed as blind—their inner sight veiled—by ignorant worship of the things of this world.

⁸⁷ “Travellers into the Levant” in Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh, eds., *Travel Knowledge: European “Discoveries” in the Early Modern Period* (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 39.

⁸⁸ *Temperate Conquests: Spenser and the Spanish New World* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State UP, 2000), 57.

⁸⁹ Qtd. in Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978): 17.

In fact the veil, in its dual existence as both figurative metaphor and physical barrier, reveals the ways that spiritual and physical temptation were, in Christian teaching, one and the same thing. Similarly, the Whore of Babylon was an allegorical figure with very real, material incarnations, though her name itself has received scant attention. Frances E. Dolan's analysis of anti-Catholic sentiment in Reformation England demonstrates compellingly the early modern mistrust of Catholics as strangers among us. However, Dolan focuses more on the gendered valences of the Whore's moniker, and only briefly touches on her "Babylonian" heritage, noting that the name "conjoins the familiar language of gender abuse and a reference to an exotic place. . . [and] is thus one of the usual suspects and an outlandish stranger, a person and an abstraction, from here and from there."⁹⁰ But like the terms apocalypse and revelation, "Whore of Babylon" has much to say about the temporality and materiality of Christian history, for the term "Babylon" was synonymous in many early modern minds, as it was in early Christian ones, with the seat of all sin both *in the past* (as it was employed in the New Testament to represent Rome as the city of man rather than of God), in the *present*, as a stand-in for the seat of the papacy in Rome, and *in the future* (as the mystical city of the Apocalypse). Moreover, Babylon in the (early modern) present was a term that represented the East in all of its barbarism, luxury, and exoticism as well as being the location of the Tower of Babel, the infamous site of man's hubris and the confusion of language. As Dolan notes, early modern Protestant mistrust of Catholic recusants bespoke a fear of being subsumed by the inferior minority, a minority that also represented a prior state that will suck one

⁹⁰ Dolan 6.

back in, “a former self, repudiated but not erased.”⁹¹ This fear of being pulled “backward” in time by another is also figured as a spatial decline, as one would be pulled back behind the veil of ignorance. Thus Babylon and its whore were capable of seducing one into spiritual digression or regression.

Just as the Whore of Babylon represented past times and foreign temptations, she also figured the Catholic Mass. “Spiritual fornication” was the result of the physical seduction practiced by the Roman church in all the trappings of the Mass: clerical vestments, rituals, relics and other material enchantments would not necessarily lead to corporeal sin but, just as bad, to spiritual sin. As D. Douglas Waters has argued, “the charge of witchcraft became a double-edged blade in Protestant hands, wielded now against literal and then against symbolic [Roman] practice.”⁹² For Archbishop Cranmer, the Catholic Mass—Mistress Missa—uses “subtilty and craft to bring christian people from true honoring of Christ unto the greatest idolatry that ever was in this world devised.”⁹³ The author of the tract “Against Peril of Idolatry” conjoined the materiality of the Whore of Babylon with the notion of spiritual seduction:

Doth not the word of God call idolatry, spiritual fornication? Doth it not call a gilt or painted idol, or image a strumpet with a painted face [Lev. Xvii.7; and xx.3; Num. xxv.2; Deut. Xxxi.16; Baruch vi.9]? Be not spiritual wickednesse of an idol’s enticing like the flatteries of a wanton

⁹¹ Ibid 41.

⁹² D. Douglas Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1970): 9.

⁹³ Qtd. in Waters 13.

harlot: Be not men and women prone to spiritual fornication (I mean idolatry) as to carnal fornication?⁹⁴

“Fornication” is a key word here, for like the veil it has both immaterial and physical articulations: it is both the practice of idolatry (what John Norris of Bemerton would later describe as “admit[ting] any Creature into a Partnership with [God] in our Love”) and sexual activity outside the sanctity of marriage.⁹⁵ It is important to note that in both instances idolatry *interferes in a relationship*. In physical fornication, a man or woman engages in sexual intercourse with another who is *outside* the bond of marriage and that third party thus disrupts the connection between the man and woman, and within the sacrament of marriage thus distances them from each other and from God. In the case of spiritual fornication, the believer commits a certain act of adultery, whereby he diverts his attention from God to the object or person who should be merely a sign pointing *towards* God. Thus the proper orientation of signification and of one’s gaze or soul or body is disrupted. For the author of the treatise above, the image or idol is like a whore or “strumpet” with a painted face or with “painted” (flattering) words. The veil operates in a similar manner: it places itself between viewer and object or between higher truth and the words on the page and thus interrupts and interferes with what should be an unobstructed, closed relationship.

Just as the Whore of Babylon triggers worship of false teaching or the ornaments of worldly goods, the veil of allegory has the potential to transfix the reader or misdirect

⁹⁴ Ibid 43.

⁹⁵ “Fornication,” def. 1b. *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 2 Sept. 2009.

his discernment of the truth. Because a divine or marital relationship is meant to involve two and only two figures, either a man and woman or a believer and God, it echoes the relationship between signifier and signified, which is also meant to be a singular, unidirectional liaison.⁹⁶ Such was the fragile correspondence between figure and truth, ornament and message, in theories of allegorical rhetoric. Puttenham's famous *Arte of English Poesie* articulates this anxiety:

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speach, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certain doubleness, whereby our talke is the more guilefull and abusing, for what els is your *Metaphor* but an inversion of sense by transport; your *allegorie* by a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments. . .⁹⁷

Figures such as Spenser's *Duessa* and Herbert's *Sin*, as we shall see, embody this notion of doubleness and duplicity as challenges to the stability of meaning and of interpretation. Of course this debate about the merits and the pitfalls of rhetorical ornaments was an age-old one even by the Renaissance. Spenser alludes to it many times in his works; in his letter to Raleigh, he admits "how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed," for which

⁹⁶ Even marriage is typological, in a sense, in that a woman must view and love her husband as he is a representative of God. In other words, woman is to man as man is to God; each is the signifier of what is fulfilled in God.

⁹⁷ George Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2007), 154.

reason he writes the letter “to discover unto you the general intention & meaning” of “this booke of mine, which I haue entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit.”⁹⁸ Fifty years later, Herbert’s short poem “Jordan (1)” argues as well for an unadorned sort of poesy:

Who says that fictions only and false hair

Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?

...Must all be veiled, while he that reads, divines,

Catching the sense at two removes? (ll. 1-2,9-10)⁹⁹

And yet, as many scholars and poets note, it is the very malleability and fecundity of language that enables a literary work to signify at all. Turning now to Spenser and Herbert, we will see the ways that the veil is used to manage poetic anxieties, both by freeing the poet through the promise of that ultimate revelation, the Apocalypse, and by being transferred from the body of his poetry onto the bodies of sinful figures.

“The crafty cunning traine:” Spenser’s Allegory of the One True Church

⁹⁸ *Edmund Spenser’s Poetry 3rd Edition* (ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott [New York: Norton & Co., 1993]). All future quotations of Spenser will be from this edition, and will be cited by book, canto, and stanza.

⁹⁹ *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004): 50. All future Herbert quotations will cite line numbers only.

Book One of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* imagines the story of the Protestant Church of England as the journey of St George (also called Redcrosse Knight) through error, sin, pride, despair, penance and purification, toward a revelatory end, locating this journey in Faeryland, the allegorical equivalent of England.¹⁰⁰ In this landscape, Holiness (Redcrosse) and the One True Church (Una) encounter various figures of temptation and sin, embodied by Roman Catholic and Saracen figures (the latter a stand-in for both "pagan" and Muslim). While the poem's symbols of virtue, such as Arthur's shield and Una's body, wear veils, it is the figures of vice and sin, like Duessa and Archimago, who seem to require unveiling. As we saw in Adams's sermon collection, moments of revelation tend to create more anxiety than they do fulfillment, and so the poem fluctuates between the desire to unveil error and to keep that ugly truth concealed.

Redcrosse, as St George, saves the soul of the church with the help of Prince Arthur, the future savior of England's national "body." This is made clear in the gifts that the knights exchange in Canto 9:

Prince Arthur gave a boxe of Diamond sure,

Embowd with gold and gorgeous ornament,

Wherein were closd few drops of liquor pure,

Of wondrous worth, and vertue excellent,

¹⁰⁰ Important work on Spenser's apocalyptic and nationalistic visions of English Protestantism includes: Patricia Parker, *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990); Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, eds., *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996).

That any wound could heale incontinent:

Which to requite, the Redcrosse knight him gave

A booke, wherein his Saveours testaments

Was writ with golden letters rich and brave;

A worke of wondrous grace, and able soules to save. (I.ix.19)

Richard J. DuRocher argues that while Arthur's gift is meant to heal the body, as it does for Amoret in Book 4, Redcrosse's gift is one with spiritual healing power.¹⁰¹ That it is Redcrosse who gives Arthur a copy of the New Testament indicates that Arthur's mission is more political than religious, while Redcrosse's mission is spiritual. Thus Book 1 is the story of the spiritual redemption of holiness for the sake of the English Church, but the *Faerie Queene* as a whole will conjoin England's spiritual and historical narratives in two "British" heroes.

As Redcrosse ascends from earthly matters to more heavenly ones, he also links the historical city of London with the New Jerusalem of Revelation. During his mountaintop experience with Contemplation, he describes Fairyland's capital city as Cleopolis, which Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott gloss as "the city of earthly glory; at once an ideal counterpart of Elizabeth's London and a symbolic image of the highest attainment within the reach of the fallen human race unaided by direct divine

¹⁰¹ "Arthur's Gift, Aristotle's Magnificence, and Spenser's Allegory: A Study of 'Faerie Queene' 1.9.19" (*Modern Philology* 82.2 [Nov. 1984], 185-90).

intervention”¹⁰²—the very intervention Redcrosse receives in this episode. The name of this city is worth noting, however, as its prefix, Cleo, links it to the muse of history while its suffix indicates its status as city; thus “Cleopolis” is the historical city, London, which will become the spiritual city, the New Jerusalem. In other words, Spenser’s allegorical revelation translates London into the divinely elected celestial city. John N. Wall notes that this episode is located on a mountaintop “like the one from which God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, and from which St. John the Divine had *his* vision of the New Jerusalem.” As a result, Wall argues, Spenser locates the mountain on which Redcrosse has his revelation “in the defining sequence of places and events that make up the salvation history of God’s people as he creates them in his covenant with Moses, recreates them in the events of Christ’s life, and promises them a future with him in his revelation to St. John.”¹⁰³

However, Redcrosse also exhibits the behavior of the disciples during Christ’s Transfiguration, quoted above in the discussion of idolatry, for once he has seen his destiny, the truth unveiled, Redcrosse expresses regret that he must go back “down” to earthly time and space: “‘O let me not,’ quoth he, ‘then turne againe/ Backe to the world, whose joyes so fruitlesse are;/ But let me here for aye in peace remaine” (I.x.63). Like the disciples who wished to fix the experience of a transcendent moment into human space and time, Redcrosse’s vision of salvation makes it hard for him to “turne...backe” to earth. Wall argues that Spenser’s way of managing this anxiety is to link the

¹⁰² *Edmund Spenser’s Poetry* 134, n. 5.

¹⁰³ “The English Reformation and the Recovery of Christian Community in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*” (*Studies in Philology* 80.2 [Spring 1983], 142-162), 143.

experience of divine revelation to that of the poet's creation, by associating this mountain with Mt. Parnassus: "This reference establishes a link between the mountain of Red Cross's vision, the mountains of biblical encounter with God, and the activity of poetry." In this way, "the verbal communication of God through the Bible and the creation of inspired poetry are thus joined together in Red Cross's vision, which is mediated to us through Spenser's poetry."¹⁰⁴ What Wall terms "mediation" I would call the conjunction performed by the veil (of allegorical language and of Revelation) which links tenor and vehicle since, as Howie puts it, "metonymy [is] at the heart of allegory."¹⁰⁵ By conjoining his poetic composition with divine revelation, Spenser disavows the anxiety expressed throughout the poem, that is, the fear that the poet's work can seduce and distract as much as purify and rectify.

What is also disavowed in the veil's mediation between poetry and scripture, matter and spirit, sacred and secular time—or rather, its metonymic translation between these poles—is the body of people who are excluded in this journey toward transcendence and ascension in the narrative of England as the New Jerusalem—the people whose presence is veiled in the very moment of revelation. For as Julia Reinhard Lupton points out, when "Canto 10 moves from the bloody cut of Sinai to the 'chosen people' of the 'new Hierusalem' (I.x.57) to the 'nation' of 'mery England' (I.x.61), [it enacts] a movement from the singular historical nation of the Jews, to its supersession as

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Claustrophilia* 92.

the divinely mandated modern nation of England.”¹⁰⁶ It is as if the poet senses the profundity of such an act, for at the moment he gestures toward this supersession, the poet replaces the veil of allegory: Redcrosse returns his eyes “to the ground...dazed were his eyne,/ Through passing brightnesse, which did quite confound/ his feeble sence, and to exceeding shyne./ So darke are earthly things compard to things divine” (I.xi.67). Like Thomas Adams’s claim that he will not be so audacious as to reveal Revelation, Spenser reverts to the disclaimer that mortal eyes are blind to heavenly truths, even when they are purported to be unveiled. In order for the allegorical narrative to continue, for the story of the English Church to progress, the veil must be replaced.

Spenser’s allegory thus manifests contradictory impulses toward veiling and unveiling; in fact, acts of unveiling various figures are a palliative measure against the larger anxiety occasioned by the writing of allegory itself. Even as the poem’s narrator seeks to differentiate virtuous characters from evil ones in his construction of an English Church (the One True Church), the material veils that constellate the narrative undo these very divisions. The veil of allegory slips easily into and out of its manifestation as material veil, such as those over Una, Duessa, and Arthur’s shield; likewise the veils these figures wear vacillate between being merely unremarkable pieces of material and symbols of something larger and more significant. This shiftiness in the veil’s appearance and meaning—both on the level of allegory and on individual characters

¹⁰⁶ *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 45. Gregory Kneidel notes the ways in which, especially in Canto 12, Redcrosse “assumes Moses’s role as God’s intermediary” and “the raskall many” echo the idolatrous Israelites (*Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: The Poetics of All Believers* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008]), 43 and 38-45.

within the allegory—demonstrates the fragility of allegory as a construct and of the identities it is meant to produce.

The veil of allegory is a tool which divides and multiplies, even as it also conjoins. Multiplicity, as Puttenham argued, is both generative in allowing allegorical narrative to unfold, but it is also threatening to the poet, as its endless interpretation may spin out of his control, or at the very least delay arrival at the intended meaning. The veil of beautiful language can interfere in the properly forward-looking process of interpretation and meaning-making, as it generates an excess of possibility which “passe[s] the ordinary limits” of language. The poem’s narrator ventriloquizes this anxiety of interpretation again and again in Book 1; the proem to Canto VII, for example, asks:

What man so wise, what earthly wit so ware,

As to descry the crafty cunning traine,

By which deceit doth maske in visour faire,

And cast her colours dyéd deepe in graine,

To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine,

And fitting gestures to her purpose frame,

The guiltlesse man with guile to entertaine? (vii.1)

As Adams warned his listeners to be wary of hypocrites and apostates, Spenser’s narrative cautions that false practitioners lurk all around. The evil they perpetrate is a

multiplication of signs or an interruption of the properly unidirectional progression toward meaning. The veil either confuses interpretation or it prevents perception altogether.

Error is one such character who represents the dangers of multiplicity. When Redcrosse encounters her it is dark, but “a litle glooming light, much like a shade” allows him to see “the ugly monster plaine/ [who is] Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,/ But th’other half did womans shape retaine,/ Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdain” (I.i.14). She is not one thing but many, a monstrous multiplicity. She breeds “a thousand yong ones... Of sundry shapes” (I.i.15). Compare this with the description of Duessa in her true form as related by another figure, Fradubio, who fell prey to the allure of (false) outward beauty: “Her neather partes misshapen, monstrous,/ Were hid in water, that I could not see,/ But they did seeme more foule and hideous,/ Then womans shape man would beleeve to bee.” (I.ii.41)¹⁰⁷ This multiplicity is the sign of papistry, for Error’s “vomit” is “full of bookes and papers” as well as “loathly frogs and toades” (I.i.20). As Maclean and Prescott note, these latter recall Revelation 16:13 (“I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet”), which were glossed in the 1560 Geneva Bible “as lying agents of the Pope.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In the Bower of Bliss of Book 2, these types of ladies appear again: Guyon happens upon “Two naked Damzelles” who seem not to care that they expose “their dainty parts” to any “which them eyed.” Their “snowy limbes, as through a vele,/ So through the Christall waves appeared plaine:/ Then suddainly both would themselves unhele,/ And th’amorous sweet spoiles to greedy eyes revele.” (II.xii.63-4)

¹⁰⁸ Pg 11, note 6.

Spenser's allegory establishes a system of echoes (as Duessa mirrors Error) and doubles (as Una reverses Duessa) through the veils material and figurative that characters wear (or seem *not* to wear). His reader occupies the position of such characters as Redcrosse and Fradubio, who must learn to interpret correctly people's outward shows lest they fall into a trap (the "bayed hook" of the false Una, for example). However, each of these figures (and by extension the reader, who often receives the same ambiguous clues as the knights) finds it difficult to identify evil when it comes wrapped in beautiful packaging. Thomas Adams would recognize Fradubio's plight, for Duessa confounds Fradubio just as the white devil confounds Adams's congregation: neither of these figures *seems* to be evil at first glance. Fradubio's story is a cautionary tale of one who could not tell the difference between his true love and a sorceress; in fact, his task is made more difficult in two ways: first, Duessa veils her ugliness in a beautiful exterior and, second, she veils Fradubio's sight with a mist so that, like the Jews in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he cannot see the beautiful truth (Fraelissa) that is right before him. Fradubio's experience is emblematic of the veil's power to split and to multiply, creating duplicity where there had been singularity. And of course Redcrosse's experience with Duessa is the tale retold. When presented with an appealing double, the knight or reader again and again finds himself unable to tell which is which.¹⁰⁹

Archimago is another figure of and for duplicity, linked by his name, his material objects and his sorcery to the Roman Catholic Church. Archimago creates multiplicity

¹⁰⁹ Madhavi Menon notes that in *The Second Shepheard's Play*, there is no "guarantee that the virginal Mary is not merely Uxor but with better make-up, one who has been able to disguise herself and her child more cunningly" (*Wanton Words* 129).

where there should be singularity when he creates the false Una and when he himself takes on the semblance of Redcrosse. His first creation, the “loose Leman,” uses language the way her creator, Archimago, uses “spirit”: to create distraction and obfuscation. In her attempted seduction of Redcrosse, she complains:

Shall I accuse the hidden cruell fate,
And mightie causes wrought in heaven above,
Or the blind God, that doth me thus amate,
For hopéd love to winne me certaine hate?
Yet thus perforce he bids me do, or die.
Die is my dew: yet rew my wretched state
You... (I.i.51)

Maclean and Prescott call this a “curious aural effect” that Spenser “invites the reader to take note of” in order to highlight the evil or foolishness of such figures. The Unadouble’s language verges on incomprehensible and confounds the reader, much as her seeming beauty and purity hides “her bayted hooke” (I.i.49).

This confounding of interpretation and this multiplicity of meaning are not limited to airy spirits, however, for Duessa herself employs similar tactics, as does the House of Pride to which she leads Redcrosse. Both Duessa and the house appear lovely on the outside—that is, they seem unveiled and open and yet both conceal inner decrepitude. The House is “a goodly heape for to behould,” but “all the hinder parts, that few could

spie,/ Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly” (I.iv.5).¹¹⁰ Similarly, Duessa’s showy beauty, as Fradubio learned, merely disguises an old and hideous carnality. Our first introduction to her is a sensory-rich pageant of color and sound:

A goodly Lady clad in scarlot red,

Purfled with gold and pearle of rich assay,

And like a Persian mitre on her hed

She wore, with crownes and owches garnished,

The which her lavish lovers to her gave;

Her wanton palfrey all was overspred

With tinsell trappings, woven like a wave,

Whose bridle rung with golden bells and bosses brave. (I.ii.13)¹¹¹

She is described as “goodly,” which can mean comely as well as (morally) admirable; however, the *OED* notes that “goodly” is used often ironically, as Thomas Becon’s 1553 *Reliques of Rome*: “This is y^e goodly Godlye Catholyke doctrine wherwith the vngoodly

¹¹⁰ Thomas Adams would describe such a house thus: “This *ornature* and fit furnishing of the *House* for *Satans* entertainment, is done by *Hypocrisie*: when the rotten Cabin of a foule heart is hung with gay hangings: when *putidum et putridum cadauer*, a rotten and stinking carkasse is hid in a Sepulcher painted ouer with vermillion” (“The black devil” 51).

¹¹¹ It is interesting that Duessa calls herself “the daughter of Deceit and Shame” (I.v.26), for these two figures represent the chief reasons that veils are donned—in order to mislead and to signify shame (or, to a lesser degree, modesty).

vngodly Papests infecte the mindes of such Christians.”¹¹² Her goodliness is thus itself ambiguous. Moreover, she is “clad in scarlot red” and though “scarlot” is a variant spelling of “scarlet” it rhymes visually with “harlot.” Duessa wears a red garment embroidered and edged (“purpled”) with gold and pearls “of rich assay”—she verges on excess and luxury.¹¹³ The next line is curious in its syntax, for it is not clear whether her headdress *is* a “Persian mitre” or is simply *like* a Persian mitre; alternately, she may be wearing her mitre “like a Persian” would. The mitre itself has a rich and variant history, for it is not only a “relic” of medieval dress (both male and female) but it of course represents the pope, now in turn linked to Persia. Spenser’s astute reader would thus begin to connect these allusions into a line leading to the Orient, and even to Babylon and its (in)famous Whore. In the body of Duessa, whose name of course means duplicity, are joined (linked) the Saracen Orient and the Roman Catholic Church.

When Duessa is “disaraid” in Canto 8, we find that her “royall robes, and purple pall,/ And ornaments that richly were displaid” served as a veil concealing her ugliness; in this way she anticipates the “white devil” of Catholic hypocrisy that Adams unveils. Duessa, “Such as she was,” is

A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill favoured, old,

Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told.

¹¹² “Goodly,” definition 3b. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 2 Oct 2009.

¹¹³ Revelations 17:4 describes the figure later known as the Whore of Babylon: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.”

...

Her craftie head was altogether bald,

And as in hate of honorable eld,

Was overgrowne with scurfe and filthy scald;

Her teeth out of her rotten gummes were feld,

And her sowre breath abhominably smeld... (I.viii.46-47)

The description of her ugliness continues through another stanza, as the narrator enumerates, in an ironic parody of a Petrarchan blazon, each part of the hideous sorceress. It is as if, as Slavoj Žižek notes, “when we get too close to the desired object, erotic fascination turns into disgust at the Real of the bare flesh.”¹¹⁴

A second unveiling, a few cantos later, incites similar anxiety, when we see Una face to face. Having laid aside her stole and veil, Una’s “blazing brightness” and “glorious light” are so overpowering that “To tell, were as to strive against the streame./ My ragged rimes are all too rude and bace,/ Her heavenly lineaments for to enchace.” In fact, the speaker notes, even Redcrosse, who is with her “dayly,” “Did wonder much at her celestiall sight: Oft had he seene her faire, but never so faire dight” (I.xii.23).

Whereas Duessa had covered her corpse-like body with her luxurious clothing, Una had concealed her beauty with a veil. However, though her face shines brightly now that it is revealed, she has ornamented herself with “a garment...All lilly white, withoutten spot,

¹¹⁴ *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002), 6.

or pride,/ That seemed like silke and silver woven neare,/ But neither silke nor silver therein did appeare” (I.xii.22). Whereas Duessa disgusts in her moment of revelation, Una is overpowering in a similar fashion and she must remain in a sense veiled; moreover, while Una’s veil is a more traditional garment of modesty (or like the veil Moses wore), Duessa’s is an figurative veil of false beauty and distracting ornaments. Though Spenser insists upon the difference between these two female figures, the structural homologies between the two—reflected in their acts of veiling and unveiling, concealing and revealing—points to the fragility of such distinctions as good and evil, true and false. In moments of revelation, we find that both beauty and ugliness provoke the same reactions—that femininity, like allegory, must remain veiled.¹¹⁵

Archimago is described in terms that anticipate those used for Duessa but also recalls our introduction to Una; whereas Una “Seeméd” to have “some hidden care” and thus “heavie sat upon her palfrey slow” “As one that inly mournd” (I.i.4), Archimago is

An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad...

Sober he seemde, and very sagely sad,

And to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,

Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad...(I.1.29)

If the reader is meant to recognize Una as good and Archimago as evil, their likeness is troubling. In another instance of uncanny mirroring, Archimago resembles a poet, in that

¹¹⁵ In Chapter 3 of this dissertation I engage more fully the notion of a necessarily-veiled feminine body.

“of pleasing wordes he had store,/ And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas”
 (I.i.35). He is the figure of “Hypocrisie,” as the book’s argument indicates, much like the
 “white devil” of Adams’s sermon. His name, Archimago, links him both to the sorcery
 of Mistress Missa and to the Roman Catholic images that Protestant critics called idols.
 He fashions “a Lady of that other Spright,/ And frame[s] of liquid ayre her tender partes/
 So lively, and so like in all mens sight,/ That weaker sense it could have ravish quight”
 (I.i.45). In fact, the allegorist’s anxiety, like the sorcerer’s, is that “for all his wondrous
 witt” he might be “nigh beguiled with so goodly sight” (45). His work echoes the very
 work the poet performed in his initial portrayal of Una, thus highlighting the artifice of
 the allegorical poet and linking it, through Una’s veil and the veil of allegory, to the
 sorcerer: “Her all in white he clad, and over it/ Cast a black stole, most like to seeme for
 Una fit” (45). The veil that Una wears is the same as the veil of allegory the poet uses;
 that veiled language is linked to a material veil reveals the complicity of poet with the
 very artifice he decries in his villain.

Archimago’s second attempt at foiling Redcrosse involves more multiplicity: he
 takes the false Una and places her “in a secret bed,/ Covered with darknesse and
 misdeeming night” where she cavorts with the “seeming body of...a young Squire, in
 loves and lusty-hed” (I.ii.3). He brings Redcrosse to view this enchanted scene which is
 successful in dividing the knight from Una, and each lover sets off on a wandering
 journey of travail and travel, engendering more and wider circles of narrative. Thus it
 seems that the work of the artificer, like the poet of allegory, is as Gordon Teskey puts it

“to split a unity into two things and to yoke together heterogeneous things,”¹¹⁶ for Una will be tied to the Saracen and then back to a disguised Archimago, and Redcrosse will link himself to Duessa.

In being the villains who disrupt the unity of Holiness and the Church, Duessa and the disguised Archimago are placed on the side of the Other, and it is in this position that they become even more strongly linked with the figure of the Saracen—Duessa to Sansfoy and Archimago to Sansloy (who calls Archimago “my friend” [I.iii.39]). The multiple figures of “paganism” (i.e., non-Christianity) are Sansjoy, Sansloy, and Sansfoy; the prefix to each Saracen’s name—Sans—places him in a space of perpetual lack, a state of being on the outside of the fullness of time and the sacred. Sansfoy is described thus:

A faithlesse Sarazin, all armed to point,

In whose great shield was writ with letters gay

Sans foy: full large of limbe and every joint

He was, and cared not for God or man a point. (I.ii.12)

There is no mistaking Sansfoy’s identity, for his name (and chief attribute) is written clearly upon his shield. As a Saracen, he “care[s] not for God or man” (like his brothers, Sansloy and Sansjoy); in other words, he completely disregards Christian teaching, here the sole provenance of morality. He reveals a complete lack in understanding of

¹¹⁶ See note 11, above.

Christian theology and symbolism when he reads the cross on Redcrosse's shield as a magical talisman:

“Curse on that Crosse,” quoth then the Sarazin,

“That keeps thy body from the bitter fit;

Dead long ygoe I wote thou haddest bin,

Had not that charme from thee forewarnéd it...” (I.ii.18)

The Saracen makes literal here what the Christian *should* understand figuratively, that Jesus's death on the Cross keeps one's body from death (“the bitter fit”) in terms of eternity; the mortal body may die but, in Christian teaching, the soul will remain alive. According to the New Testament logic of mercy and redemption, too, Redcrosse *would* have been dead “long ygoe” if he were judged according to his merits. Thus the Saracen here performs the role of the literalist (and the stereotypical Jew who fixates on the letter or the Catholic who fixates on the host in the Eucharist), who sees the work of the cross as being performed literally instead of figuratively, in present time and space.

Whereas the ideal Christian represents singularity and unity, the figure of Evil is portrayed by a host of characters—the pagan, the Saracen (Muslim), the Catholic, the Jew. Each is in many ways interchangeable as villain, obverse of the Christian. The pagan or Muslim in this allegorical landscape is merely an empty mirror reflecting back to the Christian his own potential for sin, inasmuch as the ease with which signs can be misread is a weakness for both the Christian and the Muslim (and the Catholic and the Jew and so on). Because Sansfoy and Redcrosse are alike in their acts of “fornication” it

becomes evident that, while the veil is meant to perform as marker of difference, it too easily becomes that which confounds and defeats *both* Christian and non-Christian. The difference Spenser hopes to communicate between Redcrosse and his Saracen opponents is that one will be saved at the last, and one will perish; one will learn how to apprehend signs correctly, and one will persist in ignorance. While the Saracen makes a spiritual idol of the Christian cross, investing it with magic powers to protect one from mortal injury, Redcrosse makes a carnal idol out of Una, and then out of Duessa once he has defeated Sansfoy: he continually misdirects his energies and desires away from God and toward women or at best, toward ideals (of feminine need and chastity) he has reified into idols (until, that is, he submits himself in penitence and learns the error of his ways).

Like the poet's allegory, whose existence depends on the multiplicity and malleability of language and signs, Redcrosse's journey as hero and his rescue of Una depend upon the interference of villains. The discomfiting result of this dependence on evil is an awareness that the same traits that orient Redcrosse's desire toward Una are those that orient him to Duessa: the knight's quest for glory necessitates a beautiful but chaste, helpless maiden. Duessa's appearance moves Redcrosse more than her tale, yet another instance of Redcrosse's ignorant lack of focus: "More busying his quicke eyes, her face to view,/ Then his dull eares, to heare what she did tell" (I.ii.26). "Fidessa"'s outward show of beauty and ornament distracts him from hearing her words, just as, according to Protestant argument, the trappings of the Roman Catholic Mass ("Mistress Missa") distracted worshippers from hearing and heeding the Word. The Roman Catholic priest, the Saracen-Muslim-pagan, and the Whore of Babylon, Duessa, thus inhabit the space of absence, of deception, emptiness, but the avatar of holiness finds that

space a mirror for his own failings and a face upon which to project his sinful desires; these are also the figures that, as we saw in Adams, instruct him in his own failings and provide him with a way to measure his own progress. The object of his journey, and the narrative journey of allegory, is to learn to pierce through outward shows to the truth within, even as those outward shows remain necessary for narrative and spiritual progression.

Sansloy's abduction of Una is likewise an act of carnal desire which leads to spiritual sin, and though it is committed by a "Paynim," it is the same sin we just witnessed Redcrosse committing on a spiritual level:

With fawning words he courted her awhile,
And looking lovely, and oft sighing sore,
Her constant hart did tempt with diverse guile:
But wordes, and lookes, and sighes she did abhore,
As rocke of Diamond stedfast evermore. (I.vi.4)

The above passage performs the multiplicity occasioned by and around the veil: the proliferation of "ands", the "diverse" ploys with which Sansloy attempts to woo Una, the guile and fawning he commits, are incited by his desire to see, know and possess what she conceals. In this way, the satisfaction of desire that Sansloy longs for is the same as that longing for apocalypse that the Christian professes. Rather than the veil inspiring patience, deference, and morality, then, it incites desire to possess. The imagined carnal

desire of the pagan foreigner is of the same nature and cause as the spiritual desire of the Christian. Rather than offering herself (as Truth), Una is cold, hard, unfeeling and unyielding like a diamond. When his rhetorical and emotional attempts fail, Sansloy attempts a physical coercion, “snatch[ing] the vele, that hong her face before” (I.vi.4). Una’s revelation here is key: rather than chastening Sansloy, satisfying his desire, the delay occasioned by her veil and the brilliance hidden underneath only serve to intensify his sense of lack. Thus apocalypse is a frightening moment; indeed, even the sun is ashamed: he “implyes” his “blushing face in foggy cloud” “And hides for shame.”

Like Una herself, Prince Arthur’s shield is veiled, and both are described in similar terms: Arthur’s shield and Una’s heart are like diamonds; in their integrity they can never be divided. However, both the shield and Una *can* be divided from their veils; both are “perfect pure and cleene” in their radiance as well, but because they are living in a material world, as it were, they are subject to attack and sullyng by monstrous others:

[Arthur’s] warlike shield all closely covered was,

Ne might of mortal eye be ever seene;

Not made of steele, nor of enduring bras,

Such earthly mettals soone consuméd bene:

But all of Diamond perfect pure and cleene

It framéd was, one massie entire mould,

Hewen out of Adamant rocke with engines keene,

That point of speare it never percen could,

Ne dint of direful sword divide the substance would. (I.vii.33)

Arthur's shield, like Una's face, echoes the radiance of Moses and of Jesus. When they are veiled, however, they are unable directly to perform their roles as signs of holiness because their radiance is disrupted, and in the presence of this disruption a multiplicity of meanings materializes. In fact, Arthur's shield must be revealed in order to bring to light any deception or enchantment in its midst; in the presence of the shield's brilliance,

No magicke arts hereof had any might,

Nor bloudie wordes of bold Enchaunters call,

But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,

Before that shield did fade, and suddeine fall:

And when him list the raskall routes appall,

Men into stones therewith he could transmew,

And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all;

And when him list the prouder lookes subdew,

He would them gazing blind, or turne to other hew. (I.vii.35)

What is striking here is that the apocalypse of Arthur's brilliant shield is blinding, such that no mortal eye can witness it and live. Arthur's shield, like the shield Paul describes in Ephesians ("Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench

all the fiery darts of the wicked”¹¹⁷), is almost a talisman here, a trifle one could accuse an evil sorcerer of having (and the sort of shield Sansfoy imagines Redcrosse’s to be), except that it works in light and brilliance, not deception; it reveals truth instead of concealing it. Whereas Una, as a feminine figure, is strong in will but not in body, Arthur as defender of the nation is both. Moreover, though his description (and his shield) may seem more magic than moral, it is the fact that he is quintessential English hero that makes him acceptable, and his shield’s having been given to him by the Faerie Queene purifies it of any questionable origin.¹¹⁸

The veil, then, is an ornament which grants special status to what it conceals. However, as the veils that populate Book 1 reveal, the very covering of truth by a veil (either of language or of clothing) makes it susceptible to misinterpretation, to penetration by the unworthy, to misuse by those who employ it to conceal depravity rather than virtue. Indeed, it is made increasingly evident that “truth” can be as ugly as it is beautiful, for the “truth” of Duessa was her hideous body even as the truth of Una was her beautiful one. Moments of revelation, far from providing a comforting fulfillment, threaten to undermine the entire system of differences on which truth depends; moreover, the delay and deferral occasioned by the veil—the very attributes on which its power depends—comes to an end when the veil is stripped away. Spenser attempts to foist his anxieties about the easy misuse and misinterpretation of allegory onto deceptive and sinful figures such as Duessa, Archimago, and the Saracen—those figures mobilized as

¹¹⁷ Eph. 6:16.

¹¹⁸ Cf. I.vii.36.

the obverse of Christian virtue—and yet these veils continually fail, since the Christians fall prey to the same vices as their enemies. As fragile as the distinctions between Christian and non-Christian are the differences between legitimate and illegitimate modes of signification, for the veil of allegory engenders multiplicity even as it gestures toward a final, singular truth. Moreover, the very traits that make the veil an ideal device for establishing and revealing truths are those that make it vulnerable to misuse by those who would employ it for devious ends. Because the veil can be used as easily for deception as it can for enlightenment (and indeed begins always as deception or obstruction even when it is meant to lead to revelation), rather than establishing absolute difference it tends to collapse upon itself, instead revealing similitude and complicity. Spenser's story of the One True (English) Church depends for its significance on absolute difference from all other faith traditions and modes of interpretation (the Jew, the Catholic, the Muslim, the pagan, all those not properly "English") and yet, as the malleability and fragility of the veil demonstrates, those differences are anything *but* absolute. However, whereas Spenser's narrative is haunted and vexed by the very veils on which it relies, we will see how George Herbert's allegory embraces the veil's instability, using it to connect and then transforms; Herbert celebrates the "past" and "present" of the Jew, the Muslim, and the Catholic as that which gives the veil its future, revelatory power.

“This mystery wrap up and fold”: Herbert's English “Church Militant”

John N. Wall notes that “Edmund Spenser and George Herbert are not frequently discussed together” as a result of our (modern) conceptualizations of history and

literature, wherein Spenser's *Faerie Queene* occupies the place of the secular, epic, allegorical poem and Herbert's *Temple* the space of the lyric, sacred and metaphorical verse. However, as Wall rightly demonstrates, both poets desire to "promote the social agenda of the Church of England. . . and...realize the Christian commonwealth."¹¹⁹ Herbert's poem attempts a similar sort of narrative as the one we explored in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, but more openly embraces the fluidity and power of the veil that caused Spenser so much anxiety. Rather than acting solely as marker of difference and distance, the veil for Herbert reflects continuity and in many ways expresses a hopeful conception of Christian temporality and identity. The veil allows Herbert to locate the sacred in the temporal by transforming objects and events into "things of higher use;" indeed his overall point in *The Temple* is that God himself employs allegory (a decidedly material trope since its "surface" is that of the veil) to intervene in moments of human history and to connect them to sacred time.

Whereas for Spenser the veil paradoxically divided and conjoined self and other, for Herbert the veil is a far more enabling trope, as it embodies a view of history as a woven fabric that can be both torn and folded by a God who "from [his] glorious throne/ Seest and rulest all things e'en as one."¹²⁰ The same holds true for the poet as God's divinely-inspired rhetorician and representative of truth on Earth, who can twist and tear the fabric of the narrative, or the veil of allegory, to make sense of human experience. As both Spenser and Herbert learn through the composition of their poems, the veil of

¹¹⁹ *Transformations of the Word* 166.

¹²⁰ "The Church Militant" ll. 1-2.

allegory can elevate English history to the level of biblical prophecy, even as that veil ties the reader ineluctably to his own space and time.

For Herbert, then, the veil is a tool by which to conjoin the human and the divine, the profane and the sacred, just as the veil of flesh that Christ wore made God and man touch, and momentarily collapsed *kairos* (sacred time) with *chronos* (human time). It is both material (temporally bound) and figural (transcendent); its duality as both object and trope means that even as it transcends its particular moment it remains in the present. In “The Church Militant” the veil is the key figure for Christian revelation, Christ’s delivery of humanity from a temporal existence grounded in difference and division into a new order based on universal community.

In *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature: The Poetics of All Believers*, Gregory Kneidel identifies what he calls “the problem of Christian universalism” both in early modern English literature and in modern criticism, a problem which both inspires and vexes Herbert’s poetry and his use of the veil:

[T]he problem of Christian universalism...[is] the enigmatic claim that the Christian church will incorporate within it all people at a moment when “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Put briefly, the problem of Christian universalism is twofold. First, its logic elides or annuls other secular markers of identity—of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, caste or class—in favor of an all-encompassing Christian identity, and this universalizing logic has over the

past two millennia been used to justify both tolerance and violence in the name of Christ. Second, Christian universalism runs counter to what are normally taken to be Christianity's central theological doctrines of grace and sin, salvation and damnation, righteousness and reprobation.

However the details of these doctrines are parsed out, they seem to individuate and distinguish what universalism would seem to aggregate indiscriminately.¹²¹

For Herbert, the veil's ability both to unite and to conjoin embodies the hope of Pauline universalism. That is, in the Incarnation and Crucifixion, the veil (both the veil of flesh worn by Christ and the veil over the Holy of Holies that was torn in two) symbolizes the apocalyptic deliverance of the world from sin, instituting a new world order in which difference is subsumed by Christian unity and tolerance. Yet even as the veil enables the unification and fulfillment of history, Herbert also employs it, like Spenser, to mark ethnic and religious others such as the Muslim and the Jew. For Herbert, even though the veil is the key figure for understanding Christian history, since it is that which ushers in the Christian narrative of redemption and gestures toward the final Apocalypse in which all difference will cease to exist, yet the veil's materiality persists, troubling the forward progression of apocalyptic narrative: even after it is torn in the Crucifixion, it does not disappear. In fact, as symbol of division and difference it remains, reflecting in many ways the *unrealized* promise of Pauline universalism, gesturing hopefully instead toward the Second Coming. As Kneidel notes, Herbert seems to be aware of "Christianity's

¹²¹ 2.

simultaneous and paradoxical emphasis on fulfillment and expectation, on having the Messiah both in front of and behind you.”¹²² The veil’s paradoxical existence as both sign of future fulfillment and that fulfillment’s very obstruction is what makes it such a powerful representative of the structure of Christian history and, as Spenser found, of allegorical narrative.

Noting Herbert’s awareness of the paradoxes of Christian history, Jonathan Gil Harris calls Herbert a “theorist of untimely matter” in that, for Herbert, Jewish matter/past is always present in the Christian spirit/present; each moment and object contains within it traces of the past:

Herbert’s Protestant treatment of typology entails more than a diachronic supersession of oriental past by occidental future. It also possesses an extra, synchronic dimension. He not only views typology as grounded in a decisive event (the Incarnation) around which all human history is organized into before and after...; he also sees it as plotting an unresolved tension in each moment, even after Christ, between matter and spirit, dead letter and living Word, sin and love, stony table and pious heart.¹²³

Indeed, this tension is what enables the trope of allegory to function since, as many have noted, allegory depends upon the friction between its two meanings, literal and figurative: “the sign points to something that is different from its literal meaning and has for its

¹²² Ibid 125.

¹²³ *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 39.

function the thematization of this difference.”¹²⁴ The veil embodies this tension inasmuch as it is both a literal, material sign and a metaphorical, immaterial figure for a higher truth. It is also that which conjoins the two and enables the action of revelation.

In her magisterial study of Protestant poetics, Barbara Kiefer Lewalski argues that the Protestant “Reformation brought in its wake both a greater emphasis upon, and a more systematic analysis of, the tropes and schemes that made biblical language radically poetic.” Lewalski argues that for Protestants,

the literal meaning of scripture is often conveyed through figurative language and so can be properly apprehended through rhetorical and poetic analysis... [, thus derives] the Protestant habit of referring to biblical figures and tropes to interpret and authenticate the signs and emblems presented by nature and our individual lives.¹²⁵

This project took on greater significance in response to accusations by Roman Catholics that the Church of England (and indeed the whole Protestant movement) was a new invention with no connection to the “original” church of Scripture. One of the most popular solutions to this problem was to argue that the One True Church, the church of believers, had been present all along but in a sort of Babylonian exile of the mind and heart. Spenser reflects this convention in *The Faerie Queene* when he portrays Una’s parents as sequestered in a castle for several years for fear of the dragon (“that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” [Rev. 12:9]).

¹²⁴ de Man 209.

¹²⁵ *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979), 72.

Herbert's "Church Militant" employs a similar strategy, portraying the chosen, exiled people as the English nation.¹²⁶ In this sense the True Church, rather than being suspended in time (imprisoned like Una's parents), has been operating in a different time and space.

Herbert employs the figure of the veil in many of the poems in *The Temple*, the collection to which "The Church Militant" was attached. In "Church-Monuments" for example, he echoes Thomas Adams, arguing that "flesh is but the glass, which holds the dust/ That measures all our time" (20-21).¹²⁷ However, the mortal body and its experiences are also what make sense of God's infinite, unknowable distance. "The Holy Scriptures (2)" presents the believer with a way to apprehend from a limited, earthly perspective the workings of God in eternity. It begins with a prayer:

O that I knew how all thy lights combine,

And the configurations of their glory!

Seeing not only how each verse doth shine,

But all the constellations of the story. (ll.1-4)

Here the speaker presents the problem that he will attempt to resolve in "The Church Militant." As John Wall explains, "Although God may be postulated as having eternal

¹²⁶ This defense was not an innovation on Spenser's or Herbert's part; many theologians and writers such as John Foxe imagined the Church of England as the New Jerusalem, fighting the good fight. See Esther Gilman Richey, "The Political Design of Herbert's *Temple*" (*SEL* 37.1 [Winter 1997]: 73-96).

¹²⁷ *George Herbert: The Complete English Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). All future Herbert quotations will cite line numbers only.

and immutable existence, all that can be known of him is from his self-revelations in linear temporality.”¹²⁸ For the speaker in the present poem, such access to the grand narrative is through his own story: “Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,/ And comments on thee: for in ev’rything/ Thy words do find me out, and parallels bring,/ And in another make me understood” (9-12). God’s “secret” purposes, his immaterial words, are materialized in the poet. However, he laments, “Stars [can be] poor books” in that, by veiling the truth they are meant to convey, readers “oftentimes do miss” their meaning (13); the Holy Scriptures are different, however, because the tropes they employ are read correctly by Protestants; as Lewalski notes, “Tropes are now perceived as God’s chosen formulations of his revealed truth.”¹²⁹ More specifically, tropes are given to man as tools with which God works to reveal himself:

O sacred Providence, who from end to end
Strongly and sweetly movest! shall I write,
And not of thee, through whom my fingers bend
To hold my quill? shall they not do thee right?
Of all creatures both in sea and land
Only to Man thou hast made known thy ways,
And put the pen alone into his hand,

¹²⁸ *Transformations* 264.

¹²⁹ Lewalski 77.

And made him Secretary of thy praise. (“Providence” 1-8)

God’s position as outside space and time requires man to make his presence known, for God is “infinite in one and all” (44).

Herbert makes use of a battery of those God-given tropes in “The Church Militant” to recount Judeo-Christian history as an apocalyptic narrative of sin and redemption. Various episodes in the poem attempt the typological supersession of old by new, past by present, Jewish or pagan by Christianity so astutely identified by Kathleen Biddick.¹³⁰ Herbert’s speaker attempts to do similar work as “Holy Macarius and great Anthony [who]/ Made Pharaoh Moses, changing th’history” (41-42). In other words, Herbert’s speaker hopes “to produce/ For things misshapen, things of highest use” (45-6): to rework the ugly parts of Christian history into Protestant beauty. He does this work by conjoining seemingly disparate times and places into allegorical signs whose value accrues in hindsight. Herbert’s speaker is like Redcrosse after his education in the House of Holinesse, reading the times and places of the earthly world as signs of God’s providence. As Scripture taught, God assumes material form at certain times and places in Jewish and Christian history, and in these moments sacred time is revealed, inasmuch as local events and people are raised “to highest use” to transmit Truth to the chosen people. In particular, God works through matter like veils, which are both rent in moments of God’s theophany (symbolizing the conjoining of the mortal world to the

¹³⁰ *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). See also David Hawkes’s analysis of Herbert’s portrayal of Jewish versus Christian systems of value and salvation in *Idols in the Marketplace: Idolatry and Commodity Fetishism in English Literature 1580-1680* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), Chapter 5.

divine) and which are the very fabric or material (such as Christ's body or the veil of allegory) that enables such movement.

The story of "The Church Militant" begins with these material moments in its history: the speaker compares the Church to a vine, an ark, and a temple, all of which "fixed" the Church in specific moments and places on its journey. Then Christ's intervention into human time "rend[s] with earthquakes the partition-wall" between Jews and gentiles; this tearing of the veil is meant to inaugurate a new era in which "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). However, due to man's continuing ignorance the body of the Church remains in material form, no longer an ark (of the Jewish Covenant) but a cross and staff of the Shepherd.

The veil that was rent at the moment of Christ's death, rather than dissolving man's connection with this world, is translated into the veil of typology, incarnating two stories where there was once one. The Church is thus in two times simultaneously: the "past" of "eastern nations" where "one foot" remains "for a time" as well as the past-present of "the western clime" (34-36). Likewise, "the ten Commandments" exist both in the "Old" Testament and in the Egypt of the Desert Fathers (39), and Plato and Aristotle are recreated in Christian terms: "And *Ergo* was transformed into *Amen*" (56). In each of these instances, a material artifact or human figure locates itself in more than one time or place, conjoining sacred and secular time. Finally the Church reaches Europe, the land of "Strength," "Arts," and "Empire", but the greatest of these is England who had the higher victory of the Church of England. As Raymond A. Anselment puts it,

“Combining the twin themes of *translatio studii* and *translatio imperii*, the poem’s second act ends with the zenith of religion. The Roman empire becomes the Holy Roman Empire, and time dates with the new Christian epoch as the metamorphic ark grows from a ‘Shepherds hook . . . to a scepter here.’”¹³¹

Like Spenser, who places the One True Church within Britain and its defenders in the British race (St. George¹³², King Arthur), Herbert’s narrator argues that it was the British who had “the higher victory [in]/ Giving the Church a crown to keep her state” which presumably refers to Henry VIII and his Protestant successors, supreme heads of both Church and State, conjoining religion and politics under the name “Church of England.” However, this action was presaged (prefigured?) by an earlier “British” hero-saint:

Constantine’s British line meant this of old,

And did this mystery wrap up and fold

Within a sheet of paper, which was rent

From time’s great Chronicle, and hither sent. (ll.93-96)

¹³¹ “The Church Militant”: George Herbert and the Metamorphoses of Christian History (*The Huntington Library Quarterly* 41.1 [August 1978]: 299-316), 310.

¹³² The legend of St George, as related in Caxton’s *Golden Legend* tells of George’s (and Christianity’s) persecution under Diocletian. Diocletian’s successor, Constantine, is another Christian hero, as we will see in “The Church Militant.” Both figures are adopted as quintessentially “English” heroes.

As Esther Gilman Richey notes, “Through ‘Constantine’s British line,’ Herbert’s speaker manages to answer the question of the Church’s status ‘before Luther.’”¹³³ Thus the “true” but invisible church of God’s chosen people has not been tainted or sullied by the physical sins of the Roman Catholic Church since the 4th century but has merely been “in holding” within the veil of secular time until the Reformation could bring it “back to the future.”

This image of the “sheet of paper” is resonant of Michel Serres’s conception of “folded time” which uses another veil-like textile metaphor to portray various temporalities:

If you take a handkerchief and spread it out in order to iron it, you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities. If you sketch a circle in one area, you can mark out nearby points and measure far-off distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by putting it in your pocket. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. If, further, you tear it in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant.¹³⁴

¹³³ “The Political Design of Herbert’s *Temple*” (*SEL* 37.1 [Winter 1997]: 73-96), 87.

¹³⁴ Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, ed. Roxanne Lapidus, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 60.

Herein lies an explanation of Herbert's most ingenious use of the figure of the veil as that which both conceals and leads one to salvation in the moment of revelation.¹³⁵ When the handkerchief is folded, it conjoins seemingly disparate times and places, just as Herbert's allegory collapses and connects various phases of Christian history in order to express continuity and a Pauline universalism in which, for example, Jews and Greeks are one and the same. At other moments, Herbert unfolds the veil again in order to insist on difference and disconnect between past and present, "former" religions (like Judaism, Islam, and paganism) and the Christian future. In so doing, Herbert undermines his utopian Pauline universalism, insisting instead on chronic particularism and difference. The veil of allegory for Herbert, then, functions precisely in the manner of Serres's handkerchief: its supple pliability enables an alternative apprehension of time and space, one not limited to a single plane, but it all too easily unfolds itself, reasserting spatial limitation, temporal fixity, and religious difference.

It is important to note, too, the material surface of this metaphor, that is, the physical properties of the handkerchief as a layer or membrane which enwraps, covers, protects. For in Herbert's formulation above, the "true" church of believers is both immaterial and material in that it takes up space and can be contained, but more importantly it has been shrouded by this handkerchief of time over the millennia, kept separate somehow, quarantined from the rabble of Rome and the trappings of Romish worship. The sheet of paper has been thus both a blessing and a curse: it has protected

¹³⁵ On the generative polychronicity of Serres's handkerchief, see Harris, *Untimely Matter* (esp. Chapter 6); Maria L. Assad, *Reading with Michel Serres: An Encounter with Time* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1999); Niran Abbas, ed. *Mapping Michel Serres* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

the “true” church from the access of the rabble and thus performs the traditional function of the veil of allegory or the virgin’s veil (such as Una’s)¹³⁶; on the other hand, the papacy “rent” the British church with a violent action, “From time’s great Chronicle,” forcing it “back” behind the veil (the Donation of Constantine), in which sense the veil has served as delaying obstruction to the proper linear path of salvation history. Herbert here imagines tangible, material effects of this spiritual persecution, with the fabric of time being torn. On the other hand, the poet’s syntax is ambiguous: arguably the “folding up” and “sending” of Constantine’s British line was providential, as the “British” church gets to skip years of sordid history and be sent, Messiah-like, in the flesh, to the present day. In this sense, the Church is actually empowered by this conjoining of Byzantine past and British present. The sinful intervention into worldly affairs by Rome has interrupted the natural flow of Christian time; fortunately, however, “Constantine’s British line” has survived its Babylonian captivity (or perhaps its resuscitative stay in Avalon) and will now carry the torch onward and upward. In this sense, the time of Constantine and the time of Herbert’s “British” present are conjoined, with the pocket of Roman Catholic history on the outside.

“The Church Militant” reveals, too, that Herbert’s construction of this history relies as much on religious others as Spenser’s; like Spenser those religious others are merely mirrors, empty placeholders of lack, for the Protestant Christian. For the narrative

¹³⁶ The veil as that which protects truth from the sully of the ignorant masses is a rhetorical commonplace by the 17th century. In *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, Boccaccio argues, “Yet not by this token is it fair to condemn [poets]; for surely it is not one of the poet’s various functions to rip up and lay bare the meaning which lies hidden in his inventions. Rather where matters truly solemn and memorable are too much exposed, it is his office by every effort to protect as well as he can and remove them from the gaze of the irreverent, that they cheapen not by too common familiarity” (Book 4, Chapter 12).

of the One True Church is not complete without its foil, the anti-church,¹³⁷ who with its veils of false teaching and idolatrous practice also conjoins disparate times and places: “Much about one and the same time and place,/ Both *where* and *when* the Church began her race” (101-2, emphasis added). “Sin” is always already conjoined with the (female) Church; both “began” in “Eastern Babylon” (103). The Whore of Babylon appears again; though this time the Whore is male, he engenders the same sort of idolatry that the Whore in *The Faerie Queene* did: he “did sow/ Gardens of gods, which ev’ry year did grow/ Fresh and fine deities” (107-9). The result of this idolatry is that “man” becomes a “thing” (by investing “things” with life); he is “severed” from God in that their relationship is disrupted by a third party, much as the Church’s progress is disrupted by Rome and its “sheet of paper.” The “Mahometan” is likened to these idolaters with his “curious arts” and “stupidities” (152-3); he is also, however, the denizen of “carnal joy” and “contagious infidelity” (149, 158). In other words, the Mahometan has the power to leak over into other places (and times) unless he is barred by “the West and Rome” (157).

The conjunction of places and times reappears in the portrayal of the pope, who is simply Sin with a Mitre on; Sin is as protean as God, it seems, and can intervene in human time as easily—and often more enticingly. The Pope is the culmination of Sin in

¹³⁷ Thomas Adams describes the devil thus: “The Deuill is no idle *spirit*, but a walker; a vagrant, runnagate walker, like *Caine*, that cannot rest in a place. I haue heard of *Trauellers*, that haue seene many parts of the world; but neuer any perpetuall *Peripateticke*, or vniuersall *walker*, but *Satan*: who hath *trauell'd* all coasts & corners of the earth; and would of heauen too, if he might bee admitted. He is not like S. *Georges* statue, euer on horsebacke, and neuer riding: but as if he were Knight Martiall of the whole world, he is euer *walking*. His motion is circular, and his vnwearied stepes know no rest: he hath a large and endlesse circuite. His *walke* is a siege, that goes about the *Fort*, to finde the weakest place, and easiest for batterry. *Hee walketh about, as a roaring Lyon, seeking whom he may deuoure*. As in other things he is a Serpent; so especially in his *walkes*; for his whole course is serpentine. All his *walkes* are after, against, about man. His *walkes* are the Circumference, and *Man* the Center. The motiue cause, and maine intention of his journey, is to win man” (“The black devil” 24).

this portion of the poem in that he embodies the “scattered jugglings...United now in one both time and sphere” (175-6). He is able to work in “divers times” in “all these places” and wears a mask to “conceal his crimes” (185-6). Finally, Sin “twist[s]” the “new and old Rome” (205), a collapsing of two temporal “points” into one fold with a face that looks both forward and backward; the term “Western Babylon” is the semantic manifestation of this conjunction of times and places.

Because sin always catches up with virtue, the situation seems hopelessly degenerative, the resolution not to arrive until “Christ’s last coming” (231); however, it might also be seen as dialectical, in that the first section of the poem has presented the Church’s story, the second section Sin’s opposing but analogous journey, such that the third term that will arise from their synthesis will be a greater Church, the Protestant one. Even as that begins to decay, there is a hope that lies in “the American strand” toward which Religion is now oriented, “ready to pass” the torch. Even in America, though, the story will continue until it leads “back” to the East, to that “time and place, where judgment shall appear” (277), when past and present, east and west, will be conjoined at the end of the story. The apocalypse, in Herbert’s view, is one folding of the fabric of the universe that triumphs over Sin’s, wherein the East meets the West like two ends of a handkerchief, and what is held inside is the British nation, around which *kairos* collects.

As in Spenser, the end of the story and the end of desire, which the poet’s allegory both promises and withholds, rests in the final revelation at the End of Days. Both poets seem all too aware of the impotence of their art to reveal any lasting truth. As Spenser ends his book by gesturing toward the “long voyage” that remains to be finished

(I.xii.42), Herbert ends with a similar metaphor of “travail” (as both travel and suffering): “So also [does] the Church by going west/ Still eastward go; because it [draws] more near/ To time and place, where judgement shall appear”(275-7); he finishes by directing the reader back to scripture, closing with the psalmist’s refrain that has divided the poem throughout: “How dear to me, O God, thy counsels are!/ Who may with thee compare?” The veil thus remains, for the time being.

Allegories such as Book One of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and George Herbert’s “The Church Militant” employ the veil—both as a metaphor and as a material object—as a marker of the difference between Protestant Christians and all others, between England and the rest of the world. However, rather than the veil acting solely as device of partition and difference on which to foist anxieties of alterity and lack, the veil often performs more as a mirror which, instead of concealing an Other, reflects the self’s own image. It is in this way that the veil fails its objective: instead of maintaining a hierarchical system of difference with Protestant English Christianity as the summit and goal, it connects self and other inescapably in an ever-shifting, never-ending fantasy of desire. The function of the veil, in Christian allegory, is to defer knowledge, to insist on difference and distance. As we will see in the following chapter, however, Christian mysticism might offer an alternative understanding of the function and value of the veil, one that revels in the very materiality and presence that allegorists fear. While Spenser and Herbert hint at the veil’s power to undo difference in the hope of a Christian universalism, their use of the veil to insist on that very difference undermines such a project. For mystical believers such as St. Teresa of Ávila and Richard Crashaw, the veil

as metaphor of bodily touch and connection, of alternative modes of existence and knowledge, more productively imagines a world where all might truly be one.

Consecrated Flesh: St Teresa of Avila, Richard Crashaw, and the Mystical Veil

Mysticism isn't everything that isn't politics. It is something serious, about which several people inform us – most often women, or bright people like Saint John of the Cross, because one is not obliged, when one is male, to situate oneself on the side of [the phallic function]. One can also situate oneself on the side of the not-whole. There are men who are just as good as women. It happens. And who also feel just fine about it.

Despite—I won't say their phallus—despite what encumbers them that goes by that name, they get the idea or sense that there must be a jouissance that is beyond. Those are the ones we call mystics.

~ Jacques Lacan¹³⁸

During the Middle Ages, various relic cults arose around the garments of the Virgin Mary, alternately envisioned as the mantle she wore about her head and shoulders at the birth of Christ (in her role as *theotokos* or God-bearer), her belt (signifying her chastity), or her veil (symbol of her ascension). Art historian Annemarie Weyl Carr identifies two prevailing trends in the artistic representation of these garments: first, Mary's veil (or the entire mantle, called the *maphorion*) was often portrayed or invoked as a martial banner or protective garment that shielded a people from invasion and conquest; second, Mary's veil symbolized her earthliness and in particular, her bestowing of flesh to God, in the form of Jesus, her child. One tradition in particular imagined

¹³⁸ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX, Encore 1972-1973 (On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 76.

“Christ’s flesh as a luxurious toga woven on the textile-loom of Mary’s womb.”¹³⁹

Hebrews 10:19-20 describes Christ’s incarnation as that which grants Christians “boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh.” Gerhard Wolf identifies two veils featured in the story of the Incarnation: “the house and the veil which Christ enters to take on the color of flesh, so that he becomes the veil of the temple.”¹⁴⁰ The veil of flesh which Christ inhabits in his incarnated state anticipates the rending—and supersession—through his death of the veil covering the Holy of Holies, an act by which believers were granted direct access to God.

Mary is both virgin and mother, saint and mortal; her body is human, mortal, and yet it is that which grants the immortal, divine God a body; because the veil, too, represents a series of paradoxes—it both conceals and reveals, it is a device for protection and yet a material object that can (and should) be removed or transcended—it seemed an apt synecdoche of Mary’s paradoxical existence. Indeed, Italian Renaissance iconography represented Mary’s duality through the imagery of her veil. For example, in Duccio’s triptych, *The Virgin and Child with Saints Dominic and Aurea* (ca. 1315), the infant Jesus pulls at Mary’s clothing, covering his lower half with her opaque, blue

¹³⁹ “Threads of Authority: The Virgin Mary’s Veil in the Middle Ages” (*Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon [New York: Palgrave, 2001: 59-93]), 64. Weyl Carr relates various stories of Mary’s veil protecting a body of believers from disaster; one example dates from 860, when “the Patriarch Photios, bearing [Mary’s] relic[s] in his hands, routed marauding Russian invaders” (61).

¹⁴⁰ “From Mandylyon to Veronica: Picturing the ‘Disembodied’ Face and Disseminating the True Image of Christ in the Latin West” (*The Holy Face and the Paradox of Representation: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the Bibilotheca Hertziana, Rome and the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1996*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf [Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1998: 153-180]), 162.

mantle and his chest with her gold-edged, white veil. Weyl Carr notes that this 14th-century image “activate[d] a new and extraordinarily provocative realm of imagery [in the cult of the Virgin], as the delicate clothing of Mary’s head and heart both cloak her child’s divinity and shroud his mortality.”¹⁴¹

Mary’s veil, and the relic cult that surrounded it, also hints at the intriguing tension within the Christian story of the Incarnation, the paradox of God made human flesh and yet retaining all of his divinity. For Mary was both mortal and immortal (since she was taken into heaven upon her death); her body was a female one in all its physicality and yet she remained a virgin even as she gave birth (her very moniker insists on her virginity for her entire life and beyond). In paintings such as Duccio’s, Mary’s veil represents both her earthly fleshliness and her virtuous holiness. It recalls her unbroken hymen, that fabric that conferred on her the status of a virgin and yet also gestured toward her corporeality and toward the physicality she bestowed upon God.

A second relic cult developed around another veil, that of Saint Veronica, who in legend offered her garment to wipe Christ’s face on his journey to Calvary, and found that his image was left imprinted on her veil. Robert S. Sturges has explored this cult as it is expressed in Chaucer’s Pardoner, who wears a representation of Veronica’s veil on his head-covering. Unlike traditional medieval metaphors of the veil as item of concealment (in sacred and secular allegory), Veronica’s “vernicle...is a veil that seems

¹⁴¹ Ibid 78. This particular triptych is on display at the National Gallery in London: <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/duccio-the-virgin-and-child-with-saints-dominic-and-aurea>

to function in a rather different way: it neither conceals nor encodes, but instead provides direct, unmediated access to the Logos, the bodily visage of Christ, God's word embodied." Sturges notes that the image on Veronica's veil was not considered a mere representation of Christ but "a true icon"; indeed, Veronica's name (*vera icon*) means "true image." In other words, "[t]his is a veil that does not perform the usual functions of veiling; the veil of Veronica actually carries the Truth, the miracle of God's presence, on its surface rather than covering it up."¹⁴² Veronica's role, then, and that of her veil, were much like those of the Virgin Mary: both women were imagined to provide *direct* access to God *within* and *through* their veils; they bore in/on their bodies "the Truth."¹⁴³

As Sturges notes, the Incarnation—God/the Word made human flesh—is always implicated in iconic moments such as Veronica's legend:

For medieval defenders of the icon, its power is the power of the Incarnation, which, as Marie-José Baudinet has suggested..., is also associated with the mother of Christ: "The first icon came into being at

¹⁴² *Chaucer's Pardoner and Gender Theory: Bodies of Discourse* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 65-66. Though Sturges does not also consider Mary's veil (as precursor to Veronica's), he does note what Mary symbolized in terms of physical embodiment: "The opposition between scriptible speech (associated with paternal grammatical law—the Symbolic order—and punishment) and bodily song (associated with the uninterrupted mother-child continuum and resistance to paternal authority)" (94). Both Sturges and Caroline Walker Bynum see in Chaucer's Pardoner a figure who reveals the fragility and contingency of gender. Sturges argues that the veil can reveal "gender ambiguity" (68) and Bynum argues that the Pardoner "suggests the necessity of moving beyond a model of hermeneutics that proceeds by the anxious covering, uncovering, and recovering of the body of meaning" (in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* [Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989]), 182. Sturges's and Dinshaw's evocation of the instability of gender—its existence as necessarily veiled—is germane to my discussion of the veil in Crashaw's poem in this chapter, and evokes Lacan's notion of the veiled Phallus, which also undergirds my conception of (gender) identity here.

¹⁴³ See Brian Britt, "Concealment, Revelation, and Gender: The Veil of Moses in the Bible and in Christian Art" (cited in the Introduction to this dissertation) for the ways that the veil in the story of Moses (and after) figures as material evidence of a mortal's congress with the divine; it is in this sense that Mary's and Veronica's veils mark them as having experienced an uncommon interaction with God.

the moment of the Annunciation, when Mary received the Word that she had been chosen as the abode of infinity.”¹⁴⁴

In particular, the veil that Veronica offers, like the veils Mary produced in her womb and wore on her body, “neither defers ultimate meaning nor encourages the enlightened reader to interpret, but displays truth itself for direct apprehension.” These veils dissolve the distance between truth and the human observer; rather than concealing this truth (a function of allegory, as I discussed in Chapter 1), they present it directly and tactically: the materiality of the veil means that it can not only be *seen* but it can be *touched*. In Christian mysticism, the focus of this chapter, touch is vital to a legitimate and intimate experience of the divine because it dissolves all distance between God and self in an echo of the Incarnation. The veil’s very existence as feminine and material offers an alternative to the wisdom of logocentrism, which represents knowledge as veiled, immaterial, removed. Moreover, though the veil is a visible artifact, in its role as object of concealment it devalues, or points to the limitations of, sight; it is a material object, one that must be touched in order to be fully engaged, and thus it highlights what Andrea Bolland has identified as “the reciprocity inherent to the sense of touch.” Where, as Bolland puts it, “sight implies space (for just as touch does not admit distance, vision fails with contact)”¹⁴⁵ the veil implies connection and similitude, reciprocity and mutual

¹⁴⁴ Sturges 67.

¹⁴⁵ “*Desiderio and Diletto: Bernini’s Apollo and Daphne*” (*Art Bulletin* 82.2 [June 2000]: 309-330), 312, 316. Bolland considers the tension between the senses, especially sight and touch, in Baroque sculpture, including Bernini’s *Ecstasy of St Teresa*, considered later in this chapter.

identification. The story of the Incarnation is one of the failure of a disembodied, removed wisdom and the celebration of physical entanglement through touch; this story is told in, on, and through the veil.

In other words, whereas in allegory the veil is a metaphor, in Incarnational theology the veil functions more as metonymy: it is contiguous with, rather than separate from, that which it signifies. It dissolves the space between and insists on linkage rather than distance. The Incarnation was in many ways the ultimate act of veiling in that God was covered in flesh, and yet that act of veiling was meant to perform the ultimate *unveiling*, to make divinity accessible through the medium of mortal, human materiality. Mary's delivery of Christ meant that, rather than experiencing God as immaterial and essentially absent, his law disseminated by male prophets at one remove, a believer might know—and even *touch*—God directly. By producing Christ as incarnated presence, both Mary and Veronica acted as mediators between God and man, their veils the material vessels for this communication. They are thus linked through the veil to Christ and his divinity. In the Incarnation, Christ became not representation or immaterial Word but physical presence. Text (Logos) became textile (woven flesh, veil). Thus even as the material is what is meant to be transcended, in Christian teaching the very narrative of the Incarnation insists on physical experience of, and interaction with, the spiritual truth of an immanent God, an act enabled and represented by feminine bodies.

The Incarnation performed the ultimate *unveiling* inasmuch as it made God accessible, offering unmediated access to divinity through the veil of Christ's flesh. George Herbert's "The Bag" literalizes this belief: in contrast to his celestial clothing of

glory, which he strips off in coming down to earth, Christ's flesh is a bag in which believers can deposit their missives to God, once it has been pierced by the Roman's spear. Christ's veil is not a device of concealment, unless it is imagined as dimming the overpowering glory of God, as in John Donne's "Good Friday 1613: Riding Westward" which describes Christ's body as "that flesh which was worn/ By God for His apparel, ragg'd and torn," a flesh that was necessary since it clothed "That spectacle of too much weight for me[:]/ Who sees Gods face, that is self-life, must die."¹⁴⁶ The notion that Christ is divinity clothed in a fleshly veil persists well into the eighteenth century and beyond: Charles Wesley's popular Christmas hymn, "Hark! the herald angels sing" (1739) celebrates Christ as the "Offspring of a virgin's womb" and invites worshippers, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see:/ Hail th'incarnate Deity,/ Pleased as man with men to appear..."¹⁴⁷ In the Incarnation, then, God was transcendent, immaterial God but also mortal human, wrapped in flesh; in making himself available to humanity he made himself vulnerable to humanity's violence, setting into motion the events of the Crucifixion. The paradox of the Incarnation was that, *through* the body of an unpenetrated Virgin, Christ became "penetrable" in all senses of the word: one could "get into or through, gain entrance or access to," or "bring light into or see through (darkness, fog, something opaque, etc.);" and yet with that access came the threat of

¹⁴⁶ *The Complete English Poems*, ed. C.A. Patrides (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), lines 27-28 and 16-17.

¹⁴⁷ *Sacred Poetry: Selected from the Works of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* (New York: James Pott, 1864), 361.

violence, since “penetrate” as to “pierce” connotes the use of “force, effort, or difficulty.”¹⁴⁸

Thus, even while the veil engenders the patriarchal order of the Christian Church, it simultaneously enables an alternative tradition, symbolized in the cult of such women as Mary and Veronica, whose own bodies (represented by their veils) undergirded the Christian Church’s Incarnational theology. In contrast to the “scriptible speech (associated with paternal grammatical law—the Symbolic order—and punishment)” of the Word is the “bodily song” of the Word-made-flesh in the body of a human mother, an act “associated with the uninterrupted mother-child continuum and resistance to paternal authority.”¹⁴⁹ The vitality of female bodies to the Christian story secured women’s place in the Church and enabled the foundation of holy women’s orders, convents in which women imitated the Virgin Mary, consecrating themselves as Brides of Heaven. As this chapter will demonstrate, nuns (such as St Teresa of Ávila), who aligned themselves with the mystical tradition in particular, found a space and vehicle for the expression of that unscriptible song of Mary in and through their own bodies.

As it is donned by both male and female figures in Christian history, then—from Moses’s veil on Mt Sinai¹⁵⁰ to Mary’s and Veronica’s, Salome’s,¹⁵¹ and Christ’s flesh,

¹⁴⁸ “Penetrate” def. 1a., *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 18 January 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Sturges 94.

¹⁵⁰ See the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this dissertation for discussions of Moses’s veil and its significance for Christian theology.

¹⁵¹ Marjorie Garber sees Salome as the epitome of Orientalism and, in modern representation, of transvestism; see *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pages 339-348.

the veil troubles conventional gender binaries, and shifts between passive, material object of concealment and active agent of spiritual revelation. The nun who dons the veil as the Bride of Christ finds that it places her outside the realm of heteronormative procreation. Indeed, though a nun's veil is usually viewed as a symbol of patriarchal oppression, it could also be a means by which she evaded marriage and the requisite expectations of childbearing.¹⁵² The veil can be seen, then, as a queering device, one which reveals the fragility and malleability of gender positions (and indeed of the whole patriarchal Christian order) and which enables one to move in and among those roles. Indeed, there is a way in which its queerness represents that "emphasis on reversal that lay at the heart of the Christian tradition [:] According to Christ and to Paul, the first shall be last and the meek shall inherit the earth."¹⁵³ For God can only be "known" (that is penetrated by the mind as well as pierced by the eyes¹⁵⁴) in the flesh; a true experience of Christ is what

¹⁵² As Theodora Jankowski notes in her study of virginity in early modern drama, even patriarchal figures of Church authority acknowledged the resistant potential in becoming a nun; Thomas Aquinas wrote that, "by taking the vow of virginity or of consecrated widowhood and thus being betrothed to Christ, [nuns] are raised to the dignity of men, through which they are freed from subordination to men and are immediately united with Christ" (*Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000]), 72. Jankowski's analysis of virginity in early modern drama identifies the ways that women might find a (tenuous) place outside the heteronormative, procreative order (even as, in many texts, they meet with persecution for that very resistance). Her acknowledgement of the queering potential (albeit limited) of virginity informs my understanding of Teresa's position, though Jankowski calls the ritual of veiling an act of "controlling" women and thus disallows any queering potential therein, or any alternate understanding of the use of the veil. She also refuses to acknowledge Roman Catholic nuns as queer since, as she says, though "[t]hey may have been threatening, resistant, and even monstrous for taking on powers generally accorded men" they still resided in a space (provided by the established church) that was "socially/culturally/theologically acceptable" (74). Perhaps because her focus is virginity in post-Reformation English drama, she ignores the tradition of mysticism; my analysis of St Teresa, as representative of female mysticism, shows that there was definite queer potential in and through a nun's body.

¹⁵³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 109.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Crashaw's "Luke X" describes "a certain Priest coming that way [past the crucified Christ],[who] looked on him, and passed by," of whom Christ demands, "Why dost thou wound my wounds, O thou that passest by,/ Handling and turning them with an unwounded eye?" (ll.1-2). *The*

brings knowledge and wisdom. And yet the paradox of reversal inheres because the Word's becoming body also was meant to make spiritual what had been corporeal, dissolving the "hardness" of the stony tablets of the law into a heart- and soul-centered faith. But there is a sense in which knowledge and experience of God insists on some sort of physical presence, and it is this presence (with all its attendant paradox) that the veil offers. By taking the veil, "Brides of Christ" make themselves fleshly vessels for God's body to inhabit, and thereby insist on God's tangibility and accessibility. Like the Virgin Mary's, a nun's veil marks her impenetrability (literally, her inviolability) even as it enables a penetrable God.

In her history of late Renaissance Venetian convents, Jutta Gisela Sperling notes the paradoxical permeability and fragility of nuns' supposedly inviolable enclosure within the convent, whose walls were anything but impenetrable: nuns left the convent frequently and visitors entered it just as often. In her discussion of the various rites and symbols of investiture liturgy, she notes the conventional belief that "the veil surrounded [a nun's] virginity like an additional hymen, protecting her body by hiding its charms, while also signifying her sacrificial widowhood. Sacrifice and enclosure, or rather enclosure as sacrifice, were the overarching themes of the entire [investiture] ceremony."¹⁵⁵ And yet, "How permeable the convent walls, grilles, and doors could

Complete Works of Richard Crashaw, Canon of Loretto, ed. William B. Turnbull (London: John Russell Smith, 1858); all future quotations cite line numbers only.

¹⁵⁵ *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 139.

become from time to time...seemed to be captured emblematically by those veils.”¹⁵⁶

For example, “[i]n 1578, Patriarch Giovanni Trevisan outlawed the Venetian nuns’ habit of wearing ‘blond and curly hair,’ as well as ‘shoes of the Roman type’ (platform shoes), ‘pleated and elaborate shirts in the fashion of secular woman, and fine handkerchiefs to hold in one’s hands.’”¹⁵⁷ The apparent need for such restrictions reveals the “instability of boundaries”¹⁵⁸ even within the convent. As Cary Howie remarks,

The dramatization of the sexual margins and enclosures of holy life may owe a great deal to Augustinian anthropology, but their form is seldom austere. Sex perpetually threatens to disclose itself together with, or in the place of, sanctity. Sainthood emergence, coming out of the (however fantasized or fantastic) enclosure, risks the traversal of this edge, risks its ambivalence.¹⁵⁹

Investiture ceremonies literalized this overlapping of the erotic and the chaste, of enclosures and the “traversal” of their boundaries, particularly in their use of the veil. For example, as Sperling tells us, in Venice the “*professio*” portion of the service of a nun’s acceptance “was staged as a love scene anticipating the novice’s promised encounter with God.” At one point, the novice “had to lie face down, entirely covered with a black veil” “[a]t the window separating the interior and exterior parts of the

¹⁵⁶ ¹⁵⁶ Ibid 141.

¹⁵⁷ 120-121.

¹⁵⁸ 141.

¹⁵⁹ *Claustrophilia* 38.

church.” She would then arise and ceremoniously greet her “spouse” with the words “Here I come to you, my sweetest Lord, whom I loved, whom I desired, whom I always wanted” at which point she removed her veil; then, having embraced the altar and spoken some more words, she “would receive a new veil from the abbess.”¹⁶⁰ Even as the veil symbolized the enclosure of the nun within the convent, it simultaneously *opened* and *exposed* her to penetration and habitation by her lord, emphasizing permeability and exchange across seemingly impassable borders—sacred and profane, material and spiritual. In this way the nun’s experience reflects Christ’s Incarnation, in which a veil shielded and enclosed even as it disclosed and enabled violation.

These paradoxes and oxymora of the Christian story, particularly the Incarnation, appealed to the imaginations of metaphysical poets such as Donne and his contemporaries, George Herbert and Richard Crashaw, whose devotional poems fixate on the violence committed to Christ’s body during his Passion and crucifixion, grappling with the weakness and vulnerability that God’s taking human form imposed upon him, often portraying Jesus as feminized and violated, and the devotional poet as in need of ravishment. As aforementioned, the same act with which God offered humans access to—and penetration of—his divine truth and presence was the one that enabled him to be seized and physically penetrated; it was this erotic tension, this troubling of identities and of ontological categories, that these poets found so generative.

This chapter will explore the ways that the veil is both that which is pierced and penetrated in the acquisition of divine truth *and* the tool that enables penetration and

¹⁶⁰ Sperling 139.

presence in the first place. More importantly, as mysticism's continued appeal for postmodern theorists will reveal, the non-normative modes of embodiment and relationality that the veil enables and reflects offers an alternative to established systems of knowledge and power, one that insists on the intimacy and mutuality of touch as a way of undoing difference. In particular, I will examine Richard Crashaw's poems celebrating St Teresa of Ávila, particularly "The Flaming Heart" (1652), for in this poem Crashaw adopts the language of his Spanish muse and the mystical tradition of divine rapture as erotically embodied, and establishes the veil as a queer symbol of divine rapture in all its paradox and transgression, both for Christ and for the nun. For Crashaw, the veil is a material object through which true knowledge and experience of divine spirit can be accessed; moreover, it is a female accessory that can be worn by a male, allowing him an alternative experience of embodiment. Crashaw's use of the veil to represent both the ravished Teresa and the ravishing God also provides insight into the complex ways that desire and erotic violence were imagined and portrayed; indeed, the vocabulary of mystical union and divine rapture echoed, in yet another uncanny paradox, the language of courtly love. The pleasure derived from union with the divine was expressed in intelligible, worldly rhetoric even as it recoded and sublimated it. Thus, just as the veil in the Christian tradition yoked material and spiritual, female and male, it sutured sacred and profane through the language of desire.

Metaphysicals, Mystics, and St Teresa's Language of Love

Metaphysical and devotional poetry derived its rhetoric, imagery, and *topoi* from the Christian mystical tradition, which portrayed divine union in erotic, corporeal terms.¹⁶¹ Indeed, as Adam Nicolson has shown, the King James translation of the Bible emphasized the “interpenetration of religion and flesh” in sequences such as the Song of Songs, where the line “Thy two breasts, *are* like yong Roes, that *are* twinnes, which feed among the lilies” is glossed “Christ setteth forth the graces of the Church.”¹⁶² What may seem paradoxical—that is, the yoking of sacred and profane, spiritual and erotic—was in fact already a commonplace in writings of the Church Fathers, who describe experiences of the divine in markedly sexual terms. St Jerome, for example, advised one young woman:

Let the secret retreat of your bedchamber ever guard you. Ever let the Bridegroom hold converse with you within. When you pray, you are speaking with your Spouse. When you read, he is talking to you, and when sleep comes upon you, He will come behind the wall and He will put his hand through the opening and will touch your body. You will arise, trembling, and will say: “*I languish with love.*”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ On the medieval mystical tradition, see, for example, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

¹⁶² *God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 133.

¹⁶³ Qtd. in Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 153. Gravdal’s excavation of the ways in which rape was represented in medieval French culture, and especially the ways that sexual violence was obscured by and recoded through the language of romance, demonstrates the ideological effects of transferring culpability for sexual violence from the perpetrator to the victim, a dynamic furthered, as I will demonstrate, in devotional poetry, where “ravishing” describes both the object of desire and the act committed on that object’s body, and becomes synonymous with both sacred and profane “rapture.”

As might be expected, this strain of religious experience was often perceived as sinful, especially when perpetrated by women—specifically laywomen—who would be accused of possession by the devil instead of rapture by God. Mysticism, a tradition in which experiences of the divine existed somehow outside the knowable and known, was one practice which seemed to evade any accusation of impropriety. Elena Carrera describes the alternative provided by mysticism in terms that echo the very theology of the Incarnation:

Instead of obeying the “intelligible,” oral words of God’s commandments, the Christian is offered [the possibility] of imitating the “sensible,” visible actions of Christ... Experience, living, and identifying with Christ’s life and love, is suggested as an alternative to the intellectual pursuit of the dead letter.¹⁶⁴

Mysticism is both a gesture toward veiled truths and it is the practice by which those truths are known. Amy M. Hollywood traces the derivation and evolution of mysticism in Christian belief:

The word “mysticism” comes from the ancient Greek μύω , to close (the eyes). It is used both as a noun, denoting things hidden or veiled, and as an adjective. Early Christian thinkers borrow the word from the Greek mystery religions in order to designate the hidden reality underlying

¹⁶⁴ “The Fertile Mystical Maze: From Derrida’s Dry Theological Gorge to Cixous’s Dialogic Disgorging” (*Trajectories of Mysticism in Theory and Literature*, ed. Philip Leonard [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000]: 94-112), 101.

scripture and liturgy, namely, Jesus Christ, believed to be the referent of even the most obscure and seemingly mundane biblical texts and the constant underlying presence in the ritual life of the Christian community.

In this sense mysticism may seem more like the practice of allegorical interpretation of scripture, but as Hollywood shows, it also comes to represent an experience that exceeds logical, verbal apprehension:

This knowledge marks a shift toward the *experiential*: the process by which one comes to know hidden things rather than the things themselves. In Origen, the primary mode of contemplation through which the hidden becomes manifest is exegetical [allegorical interpretation of Scripture]... Yet within the early Christian and medieval periods, women were generally not allowed to interpret the Bible. For those women who wished to offer religious teaching, visions and other extraordinary *experiences* of divine presence both legitimated their claims to religious authority and *became the text* on which they extended their own allegorical and exegetical skills. The experiential base of the mystical, then, widens and intensifies in the later Middle Ages, when significant numbers of women first begin to write about their religious lives.¹⁶⁵

By nature, mysticism partakes of a sense of otherness and inscrutability, and it subscribes to an experiential knowledge of God—that is, a physical encounter—rather than a merely

¹⁶⁵ *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 146 (emphasis added).

philosophical practice. Mysticism's increasing emphasis on an experiential, embodied union with divine truth, rather than one limited to some immaterial, spiritual exercise, made it particularly amenable to female divines, as Hollywood notes above, who were able to assume an authoritative, powerful role even within a patriarchal order. That is, there was something about mysticism—its emphasis on unknowability and on transgressive pleasure—which appealed to certain religious men and women, who could write their own religious texts *through* their bodies. Their spiritual life was enabled by and articulated through the material, just as it was in the Incarnation and in the veil.

St. Teresa of Ávila, the Spanish nun, was perhaps the most famous sixteenth-century mystic. She was a controversial figure in her own time;¹⁶⁶ her advocacy of personal, mental prayer challenged the teachings of the church and brought her to the attention of the Inquisition, as “[i]ntimacy with God through mental prayer was widely and increasingly seen as the gateway to rebellion against the Church’s hierarchy.”¹⁶⁷ Teresa’s *Interior Castle*, her *Vida*, and *The Way of Perfection* documented the saint’s spiritual life, expressing her mystical and ecstatic union with God in terms of physical desire, violence, and sensation. She was beatified in 1610, her autobiography was

¹⁶⁶ As Rowan Williams reminds us, St. Teresa’s milieu, “early sixteenth-century Spain[,] shared very fully in the conditions which, in Northern Europe, produced the revolt of Martin Luther; and it is important to realize, with Andrés Martín and other scholars of the period, that the spiritual ferment of Spain at this time, including the Carmelite reform, is a ‘reformation’, not a ‘counter-reformation’ phenomenon. Luther and the religious radicals of Spain shared a profound hostility to scholastic theology in and of itself; a reverence for the tradition of passive abandonment to God in ‘mystical prayer’ ...; a suspicion of externals, both the busy habits of piety and the attempt to secure God’s favour by amassing a record of virtuous deeds; and a confidence in the possibility of hidden, interior transformation by grace” (*Teresa of Avila* [London: Continuum, 1991], 37).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid* 34. It seems that Teresa’s friends and connections kept her from ever being prosecuted, however.

translated into English in 1611, and her *Vida* was translated in the 1620s upon her canonization.¹⁶⁸

One portion of her narrative—and the basis for Crashaw’s “The Flaming Heart”—describes her experience of rapture in unforgettable terms. In modern psychoanalysis this account has been labelled hallucinatory because Teresa receives “what seem to be sense impressions without the presence of publicly identifiable sense stimuli” or because her experience performs “the breakdown of the usual sense of personal identity and distinctness, a sense of the self merging with what is not the self (God, the ensemble of the cosmos, another person).”¹⁶⁹ That is, the experience cannot be identified and categorized according to the logic of science. Teresa’s narrative utilizes the language of erotic encounter in an attempt to represent what cannot be represented:

Our Lord was pleased that I should have at times a vision of this kind: I saw an angel close by me, on my left side, in bodily form. . . He was not large, but small of stature, and most beautiful—his face burning, as if he were one of the highest angels, who seem to be all of fire: they must be those whom we call Cherubim. . . I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron’s point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also, and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me

¹⁶⁸ Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1939), 139.

¹⁶⁹ Williams 186.

moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it. The soul is satisfied now with nothing less than God. The pain is not bodily, but spiritual; though the body has its share in it, even a large one. It is a caressing of love so sweet which now takes place between the soul and God, that I pray God of His goodness to make him experience it who may think that I am lying.¹⁷⁰

Teresa's description is both removed, hypothetical (the cherubim "appeared" to be stabbing her, he "seemed" to draw out her entrails) and yet fully embodied, as the effects of this vision are physical pain, caressing, heat: "the body has its share in it, even a large one." It is both "spiritual" and "bodily" and yet "not bodily." Though Teresa must use speech to convey herself here, the experience exceeds her ability to represent it.

This passage from her works, and the famous 17th-century sculpture by Bernini depicting this moment, have been the subject of much feminist and psychoanalytic criticism in the 20th-century. Bernini's sculpture, *The Ecstasy of St Teresa*, created around the time Crashaw was writing, is housed in the Santa Maria della Vittoria chapel in Rome. It portrays Teresa reclining on a cloud, her head back and eyes closed with a facial expression that evokes both sexual orgasm and a moment of fainting or death. She is covered by the voluminous folds of her garment, while the seraphim, about half her size, holds a piece of her habit and, smiling benignly, aims a small spear toward her groin. For Gilles Deleuze, Bernini's sculpture reflects the power of "the fold" to disrupt

¹⁷⁰ *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 358.

boundaries between interior and exterior, mind and body, and to problematize any secure notion of perspective or visual mastery. For Deleuze, Teresa's experience of rapture is embodied in and through her clothing:

And when the folds of clothing spill out of the painting, it is Bernini who endows them with sublime form in sculpture, when marble seizes and bares to infinity the folds that cannot be explained by the body, but by a spiritual adventure that can set the body ablaze. His is not an art of structures but of textures, as seen in the twenty marble forms he fashions. . . . In every instance folds of clothing acquire an autonomy and a fullness *that are not simply decorative effects*. They convey the intensity of a spiritual force exerted on the body, either to turn it upside down or to stand or raise it up over and over again, but in every event to turn it inside out and to mold its inner surfaces.¹⁷¹

Teresa's garments *perform* her experience of rapture; they are more full of life and heat than the body imagined to reside beneath them. In fact, art historian Andrea Bolland notes that Teresa's body is largely *absent* from the sculpture: only her hand and foot peep out from beneath her voluminous robes. Bolland argues that her garment thus "both shields and replaces Teresa's enraptured body"¹⁷²; that is, the sculpture highlights the importance of the tactile fabric as mediator between body and spirit, as medium on and

¹⁷¹ *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (trans. Tom Conley [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993]), 121.

¹⁷² 134.

through which rapturous union can occur. It is what sanctifies her experience of ravishment by symbolizing her enclosed but penetrable saintly body. And as Deleuze notes, the “intensity” of the experience, which is described as a blazing heat, is materialized in the excesses of her garments, even as those garments cannot contain or represent it.

In *Encore XX*, Jacques Lacan called Teresa’s experience an embodiment of feminine *jouissance*, that pleasure outside the realm of the phallic order, pleasure that cannot be known. He likewise refers to Bernini’s famous sculpture depicting Teresa’s ravishment by the seraphim:

[I]t’s like for Saint Teresa - you need but go to Rome and see the statue by Bernini to immediately understand that she’s coming. There’s no doubt about it. What is she getting off on? It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing of it.¹⁷³

For Lacan, as Linda Belau puts it, “Teresa’s linguistic connection with God is beyond direct understanding.”¹⁷⁴ This is precisely what makes her such a queer figure in Christian history, for though she abides in a convent, within the heavily-surveilled

¹⁷³ 76.

¹⁷⁴ “The Mystical Encounter with Extremity: Teaching Teresa through Psychoanalytic Theory” (*Approaches to Teaching: Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*, ed. Alison Weber [New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009: 95-101]), 99. In his Translator’s Foreword to Deleuze’s *The Fold* (cited above), Tom Conley argues, ““The mystical venture convinces because no language can be said to represent what it means” (xii).

Roman Catholic milieu, and makes use of patriarchal modes of discourse, yet she troubles those very conventions.

If for Lacan Teresa is the embodiment of feminine *jouissance*, for Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément she is the epitome of *écriture féminine* and the ability of repressed desire to burst forth and to challenge conservative, patriarchal structures such as the Christian Church. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous and Clément invoke Teresa as the patron saint of feminine transgression:

I was St. Teresa, that madwoman who knew a lot more than all the men.
And who knew how to become a bird on the strength of loving... I have
always practiced flight/theft... The hysterics are my sisters... I sent each
“person”/nobody back to his little calculations, each discourse to its lie,
each cowardice to its unconscious, I said nothing but made everything
known. . . It is then that writing makes love other. It is itself this love.
Other-Love is writing’s first name.¹⁷⁵

Teresa’s mystical experience and the challenge it poses to rational logos is empowering and transgressive, in that it reveals the “lie” that supports a “discourse,” and reveals the “calculations” necessary for “person[hood].” Even as she partook of and existed within the structure of the Catholic Church, then, she posed a powerful threat to its unquestioned dominance, to the paradoxes and exclusions of its (material) foundations.

¹⁷⁵ *The Newly Born Woman* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., Ltd, 1996), 99.

Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir expressed a similar fascination with St. Teresa and other female mystics, arguing that, as Hollywood puts it, “the mystics serve as a model for the possibilities and limitations of embodiment and transcendence.”¹⁷⁶ For Irigaray in particular, the female mystic’s ecstatic experience means that she shifts “from the objectifying logic of the gaze to that of touch, in which distinctions between subject and object, self and other, are more fluid...”¹⁷⁷ Touch is integral to mystical experience inasmuch as mysticism insists on an inexpressible experience of *bodily union* with the divine, one that cannot be expressed in words but that must be felt; as Teresa says, “I pray God of his goodness to make him *experience* it who may think that I am lying” (emphasis added).

Through its emphasis on touch, then, mysticism represents an alternative form of embodied relationality, one that deprivileges the regime of sight and of logos, in favor of what Cary Howie calls “a sort of body language.”¹⁷⁸ In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues, “Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold...”¹⁷⁹ Touch’s ability to “make nonsense” out of these “dualisms” is echoed in the Christian histories of the veil with which I began this chapter, for the veil literalizes and enacts the dissolution of such binaries as male/female, matter/spirit, inner/outer.

¹⁷⁶ “Beauvoir, Irigaray, and the Mystical” (*Hypatia* 9.4 [Fall 1994]: 158-185), 163.

¹⁷⁷ 170 (Hollywood’s words).

¹⁷⁸ 53.

¹⁷⁹ *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993), 14.

This dissolution of distinction through the medium of touch, particularly in the veil, is also precisely what Crashaw expresses in his poem, “The Flaming Heart,” for he transgresses the gap between viewer and painting, between poet and saint, by taking the veil off of Teresa and placing it onto the ravishing Seraphim, correcting what he argues is the ignorance and frigidity of the painter’s “cold pencil” (l. 20) with his own fervently non-visual portrayal of Teresa’s “manly flame” (l.24). Throughout the first half of the poem the narrator appropriates various images and symbols in order to redeploy them in queer ways, to transgress and dissolve binaries such as spectator and actor, ravisher and victim, active and passive, male and female. Though it begins with *ekphrasis*, reflecting on the painter’s “picture,” as the poem progresses the narrator has his own mystical experience of union with Teresa, one that cannot be apprehended through the logic of the gaze but is rather an embodied experience of ravishment whereby the poet’s “breast” is penetrated and filled by the saint’s “scatter’d shafts of light” and “large books of day” (ll. 87-89). The heat produced by such ravishing encounters (words such as “fire,” “flame,” “burning,” “flagrant” abound in the poem) reflects the power of touch to transform, consume, dissolve, in much the same way Deleuze understands the power of Bernini’s folds.

Indeed, though the poet invokes the veil variously as a sign of chastity or modesty, shame or seduction, by the end of the poem all such identifications have not only been transcended, they have been dissolved. Though the veil as visual symbol enables the saintly identity, the poet reveals it to be ultimately more powerful as a medium of touch, which in its mystical materiality disables logical apprehension even as it allows other, non-normative relations, for the final stanza of the poem resists visual

apprehension so fervently that one must *feel* the experience rather than witness it. Indeed, the point is not to view or to master Teresa or her experience of the divine in any logical sense, but to inhabit the fantasy of transcendence and unknowability. Crashaw's appropriation of St Teresa resists traditional attempts to represent and know her visually, such as through the painter's or sculptor's work, even as he finds himself limited by the vocabularies and images available. In a sense, then, Crashaw anticipates these postmodern feminists, seeing in Teresa a hopeful possibility for an alternative vocabulary of embodiment and desire.

St Teresa herself wrote about existence that was not fully conscious of itself, that resisted any and all attempts to contain it within the logic and rhetoric of the Logos. During an experience of union with God, she argues, one should relinquish all "reflective activity"¹⁸⁰:

[T]he intellect must not try to start up again, "running about...looking for many words and reflections so as to give thanks for this gift and piling up one's sins and faults in order to see that the gift is unmerited" (15.6).¹⁸¹

Her philosophy of divine wisdom thus resists patriarchal, intellectual control. As theologian Rowan Williams explains,

¹⁸⁰ "Reflective" is an interesting term here, since it connotes looking in a mirror, seeing one's own reflection; for Teresa an experience of the divine should hollow out selfhood and replace it with an inarticulate, unlocateable, nonvisual experience of being.

¹⁸¹ Qtd in Williams 79 (Teresa's words in quotation marks).

What Teresa is warning against is a particular kind of self-consciousness (in the derogatory, colloquial sense of the term): we should like to *know* that we are responding appropriately to God's gifts, and so the mind attempts to organize and examine its response ("to compose speeches and search for ideas", says Teresa at 15.7). This is a particular temptation for the learned...¹⁸²

We might see more clearly the interest Teresa poses for critics of logocentrism; that is, Teresa's experience of the divine, and the source of true wisdom, cannot be assimilated into the order of intellect, reason, language. Rather, it must be achieved as physical, embodied experience, one of touch rather than sight, of body rather than word. The intellect was less important than the body, and since the female body is the essence of corporeality, it is privileged to experience the sort of union with the divine that Mary experienced. A "learned" intellect could achieve this sort of union if he relinquished his claims to reason and intellect and surrendered to bodiliness. Divine union is an experience of "prayer in which self-awareness itself is suspended, at least to the extent that, in prayer, it becomes quite impossible to verbalize what is going on, to be in any way distanced from what is happening."¹⁸³ It is, in a sense, an experience of wholeness, an escape from the alienation that makes phallic authority possible.

Many have noted the markedly erotic language with which Teresa describes both her desires for God and her experiences of union with God. The paradoxical language of

¹⁸² Ibid 80.

¹⁸³ Ibid 87.

pleasurable pain and painful pleasure came to her through the genres of “romantic fiction and tales of chivalry” to which she admitted feeling addicted in her teenage years.¹⁸⁴ That is, the troubadour and courtly love configurations of desire, those traditions immortalized by poets like Petrarch, informed Teresa’s language, though the Petrarchan tradition of the fragmented self is precisely the opposite experience at which Teresa eventually arrives.¹⁸⁵ In many ways collections such as Crashaw’s *Sacred Poems* and *Steps to the Temple* mimic the persona and attitudes evoked in Petrarch’s *Rime Sparse*:

The persona created by the juxtaposition of dimensionless lyric moments is as illusory as the animation of a film strip, the product of the reader’s imagination as much as of the poet’s craft; yet, the resultant portrait of an eternally weeping lover remains Petrarch’s most distinctive poetic achievement. . . It remained for centuries the model of poetic self-creation, even for poets who, in matters of form, thought of themselves as anti-Petrarchan.¹⁸⁶

Rather than evoking the persona of the “eternally weeping lover” of a beautiful but cold mistress, the mystical tradition as invoked by Crashaw pictures that weeping lover *both* as Christ (in such lyrics as “Luke X” and “John XV”) *and* as the devotional poet himself

¹⁸⁴ Ibid 2.

¹⁸⁵ As Bolland notes, “the space between lover and beloved, pursuer and pursued [is], in Petrarch, that space in which poetry arises” (323); since Teresa’s experience is in fact unity with the lover/beloved her emphasis is on the dissolution of any space or distance.

¹⁸⁶ John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch’s Poetics” (*Diacritics* 5.1 [Spring 1975], 34-40), 34.

(as in “The Flaming Heart”). But whereas the veil worn by the Petrarchan lover defeats any attempt at union, the veil of flesh that Christ wore allows just that.

Courtly love language was even used to describe the Virgin Mary; St. Anselm celebrated her as “the tender Mother suckling her Child, [who] now becomes the beautiful Lady, delightful to behold and to love, the spiritual counterpart of the worldly mistress of the Knight.”¹⁸⁷ As Ayesha Ramachandran notes, there is a long “literary genealogy that begins with [Petrarch’s] Laura and fosters romance heroines such as [Ariosto’s] Angelica, with their blond hair, demurely arranged veils, and lethal capacity to precipitate the experience of erotic desire.”¹⁸⁸ Such poetry moves among and unites erotic and spiritual language; it makes use of the intriguing links in sexual experience between the pain of unfulfilled longing and the sweet release of gratification. Eleanor McCann has identified the shared rhetoric of the Spanish mystics and English metaphysicals, particularly the device of oxymoron:

Medieval mystics transmitted it to the troubadours, who helped to spread it from Provence to Portugal and Spain. In Italy and Spain the figure passed back and forth between secular and religious poetry. In Italy, Dante made it spiritual; Petrarch brought it down to earth; later interpreters of Petrarch

¹⁸⁷ Qtd. in Jankowski 71.

¹⁸⁸ “Tasso’s Petrarch: The Lyric Means to Epic Ends” (*MLN* 122.1 [2007]: 186-208), 188-9. Crashaw’s formulation of both the seraphim and Teresa echoes this imagery, as we will see.

reverted to a spiritual interpretation. . . It [also] became popular in English love poetry and was a cliché of Marinistic verse.¹⁸⁹

The vacillation between, and ultimate dissolution of, binary gender roles in these expressions of desire are embodied in the veil, both the veils of the Petrarchan and Dantean mistresses (who wound—and ravish—their admirers through their very chastity and modesty, their inscrutability)¹⁹⁰ and the nun’s veil as Bride of Christ. What makes the veil a particularly valuable focus is the way that it unites the sacred and the profane, the active and passive, that is expressed in these traditions. In Crashaw’s devotional poetry, the veil dissolves the boundaries between spiritual and temporal, just as Christ in human form does, expressing the experience of divine revelation in terms that reorient or deny any fixed structure to the experience of desire. For Crashaw, the veil is the tool by which one can inhabit varying positions and experiences of embodiment; it is that which sanctifies erotic desire, just as it eroticizes devotional longing, ultimately revealing them to be one and the same.

¹⁸⁹ “Oxymora in Spanish Mystics and English Metaphysical Writers” (*Comparative Literature* 13.1 [Winter 1961]: 16-25), 18. McCann demonstrates the pervasive influence writers of the Spanish Golden Age, particularly St Teresa and St John of the Cross, exerted on English metaphysicals like Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Beaumont, and Vaughan.

¹⁹⁰ Bolland notes the collapse of vision and touch in Petrarch: “Vision on occasion even appropriates some of the powers (albeit negative ones) of touch. If Petrarch and Laura never make physical contact, her gaze nonetheless has the power to burn (Petrarch, poems 171, lines 5-6, 320, line 10), to inflict blows (poems 95, lines 5-6, 133, line 5), and to wound (poems 87, line 5, 174, lines 5-6, 297, lines 10-11)” (326, n.44). See Crashaw’s “Luke X” (footnoted above) for an analogous formulation.

“More than a woman”: Teresa’s Ravishing History

Richard Rambuss points to the reluctance of medieval and early modern critics to allow for sexual (and specifically homoerotic) desire in representations of religious ecstasy. They argue that what to post-Freudians might seem sexual was not considered thus in the premodern period. On the other hand, as Rambuss notes, when what seems to be erotic desire *is* acknowledged, it is always and only heterosexual desire. What I want to argue, particularly in terms of the veil, is that object-specific descriptors of those desires, whether sacred or profane (and, for that matter, hetero- or homoerotic) are simply, within the imaginary of these poets, beside the point. Spiritual desire for God was erotic desire, and erotic desire, at its best, should be a conduit for spiritual growth.¹⁹¹ The ceremony in which a nun “took the veil” was a wedding ceremony, by which the woman was married to Christ, often wearing a wedding ring to symbolize the union. Desiree Koslin notes, “As *sponsae* or *paranymphae*, bridesmaids, consecrated nuns were joined with Him in Mystical Marriage and committed to a cloistered life after their profession of full vows. From then on they should no longer be seen and were considered dead to the world.”¹⁹²

Though “by taking the veil the nun would transcend, even if temporarily, her bodily needs,” she had at her disposal an entirely new way to experience pleasure.

Crashaw alludes to this pleasure, of being married to God and enjoying a sort of conjugal

¹⁹¹ Dante’s portrayal of the veiled Beatrice in *Purgatorio* partakes of this philosophy: Beatrice’s beauty and virtue are meant to lead Dante—and his attention—back to God.

¹⁹² “The Robe of Simplicity: Initiation, Robing, and Veiling of Nuns in the Middle Ages” (*Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon [New York: Palgrave, 2001]: 255-274), 257.

privilege, in his “Hymne to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa” (published in 1646).¹⁹³ This poem tells the story of her having desired martyrdom even as a child; as her autobiography recounts, she hoped to travel to an Islamic country and risk her life by converting the “Moors” but instead found herself seriously ill, an experience which led her to take the veil. Crashaw evokes the young Teresa’s desire for martyrdom and then ventriloquizes the will of her heavenly Father, who stops her:

Sweet, not so fast; lo! thy fair spouse,

Whom thou seek’st with so swift vows,

Calls thee back, and bids thee come

T’embrace a milder martyrdom....

O how oft shalt thou complain

Of a sweet and subtle pain!

Of intolerable joys!

Of a death, in which who dies

Loves his death, and dies again,

¹⁹³ Interestingly, Crashaw’s poem, “Wishes To His Supposed Mistress,” utilizes much of the same vocabulary and imagery of his poems to Teresa, and his epigram on marriage simply states, “I would be married, but I’d have no wife; I would be married to a single life.” It is tempting to suggest that Crashaw saw himself as a celibate like Teresa, if not married to her directly.

And would for ever so be slain;
And lives and dies, and knows not why
To live, but that he still may die!
How kindly will thy gentle heart
Kiss the sweetly-killing dart!
And close in his embraces keep
Those delicious wounds...(65-68, 97-108)

Crashaw imagines Teresa's ecstatic pleasure, quite fervently and vividly, in terms that echo both Teresa's own and the language of courtly love.¹⁹⁴ Here Crashaw is almost a voyeur, vicariously imagining and enjoying the intercourse between Teresa and her celestial spouse, calling Teresa's position as nun "a milder martyrdom" than dying at the hands of "the Moors." Rapture is here, as it is in "The Flaming Heart," both a painful and pleasurable experience; the ravished nun becomes ravishing to her reader and thus is both she who is ravished and she who ravishes. The dissolution of any distinction between the perpetrator and victim of erotic violence is echoed in the changing connotations of terms such as "rape" and "ravish" during the early modern period. As Kathryn Gravdal notes, during the late medieval period, "ravishment"

¹⁹⁴ See McCann, cited above, for an extensive list of the various oxymora shared by mystics and metaphysical poets, such as these "delicious wounds" and "intolerable joys."

comes to have a religious sense: the action of carrying a soul to heaven. From this religious meaning develops a more secular, affective one: the state of a soul transported by enthusiasm, joy, or extreme happiness. *Ravissement* ... in the fourteenth century refers to the state of being “carried away” emotionally, a state of exaltation. From this psychological troping comes a sexual trope: the state of sexual pleasure or rapture.¹⁹⁵

One can see the ways such rhetoric as that of the mystics reinforces the religious resonances “rape” and “ravishment” accrue, but also the ways in which the gendered positions inhabited and performed through acts of ravishment become confused, reversed, or even unidentifiable (as when she who is “ravishing” in effect leaves her rapist no choice but to violate her). As “The Flaming Heart” articulates, in “out of body” experiences of desire (which are nonetheless experienced very much in and through the body) it is not clear who is the ravished and who the ravisher, who should wear the veil and who should wield the penetrating spear.

The subtitle of the above “Hymne to St Teresa” in fact celebrates the gender ambiguity of the saint, even questioning her material substance (it being, like Christ’s, both celestial and human): “a woman for angelical height of contemplation, for masculine courage of performance, more than a woman; who, yet a child, outranne maturity, and durst plot a martyrdom.” In other editions, this subtitle is printed as the title page, and appended with the following:

¹⁹⁵ Gravdal 5.

but was reserved by God
to dy the living death of the life of his love,
of whose great impressions
as her noble heart had most high experiment,
So hath she in her life most heroically exprest them,
in her Spiritual posterity most fruitfully propagated them,
and in these her heavenly writings
most sublimely, most sweetly
taught them to the world.¹⁹⁶

Though the saint is merely a woman and thus bound to earth and to her body, the poet argues that she is able to soar beyond her physical limitations as a woman and reach “angellical” heights of contemplation; second, though she is a woman and thus must be understood as meek, timid, and passive, she is able to “perform” acts of “courage” usually limited to men. The holy woman inhabits a unique and paradoxical state of being in that, though she attempted to martyr herself as a child, God “reserved” her to “dy the living death of the life of his love” in much the same way that a Petrarchan lover lives in death as he suffers for his beloved’s sake. Finally, though she is but female and, like wax, is subject to the penetration and impression of men, and though she is a physically

¹⁹⁶ Reprinted as the frontispiece to Paul A. Parrish’s *Richard Crashaw*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.

chaste nun, the saint is able to form her own impressions, leave her own marks of penetration, in her literary offspring—her autobiographies—which the poet describes as her “fruitful. . . propagat[ions].” In many ways, then, Crashaw pictures St. Teresa as simultaneously masculine, angelic, mortal, and feminine; she repeatedly transgresses the boundaries not only of gender but of age, space, and time.

“Give Him the Veil:” Crashaw’s Mystical Encounter with St Teresa

In “The Flaming Heart” Crashaw collects the fervent imagery of passion and violence seen throughout his devotional poetry, offering a picture of divine wisdom that exceeds and undoes the very order it invokes. The poetic speaker’s vision is of that utopian community in Christ where, as Galatians 3:28 puts it, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”¹⁹⁷ This vision of “a poetics founded on the body of Christ who is God, in whom there is no lack, no division, no separation, no difference...[,] a poetics of presence, not absence, in which, finally, all difference would be obviated,”¹⁹⁸ is what the female mystical tradition offers Crashaw.

The poem calls itself a meditation on “the Book and Picture of the Seraphical Saint Teresa, as she is usually expressed with a Seraphim beside her.” The seraphim were the order of angels that, in Christian tradition, derived their name from a Hebrew

¹⁹⁷ This is the same universalist vision toward which, as we saw in Chapter 1, George Herbert gestures by invoking the veil.

¹⁹⁸ Dinshaw 182-3.

word for “burn” which “led to the view that the seraphim are specially distinguished by fervour of love (while the cherubim excel in knowledge).”¹⁹⁹ The seraphim himself, in traditional portrayals, as in the painting Crashaw references in “The Flaming Heart,” is a feminized or androgynous figure: he is beautiful, with rosy cheeks and curling hair, like a Ganymede. For Teresa to describe this sort of angel ravishing her emphasized, then, the corporeal, passionate nature of the encounter; that is, rather than receiving her wound from a cherubim, who represented a dry, immaterial knowledge, Teresa is overcome by a physical presence, one which was itself an embodiment of both masculine and feminine, aggressive and passive. Moreover, Crashaw’s focus on the seraphim’s appearance emphasizes the gender undecidability of the encounter between him and Teresa: two figures with both male and female attributes engage in an act of ravishment that is both invited and enjoyed. The poem’s insistence that Teresa is the seraphim—but better—continues this conceit, emphasizing the experiential corporeality of divine rapture.

The poem reacts to an artist’s rendering of Teresa being ravished by the seraphim (seemingly much like Bernini’s sculpture), objecting, over the course of the poem, that Teresa herself is more seraphic than the seraphim—that is, she is more angelic than an angel, she outperforms him in passionate, sacred violence, insemination, and inspiration. The speaker describes the bodies and props of both the seraphim and Teresa but then disrupts these images by undressing and redressing each figure according to the items that identify him or her (dart, veil, hair, cheeks, wings, hands), finally deciding that the

¹⁹⁹ “Seraphim” def 2. (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 10 January 2010).

seraphim can have “all the bravery of those bright things” that angels normally wear, if only he leaves Teresa “the flaming heart:”

Leave her that, and thou shalt leave her

Not one loose shaft, but Love’s whole quiver.

For in love’s field was never found

A nobler weapon than a wound.

Love’s passives are his activ’st part,

The wounded is the wounding heart. (70-5)

Rambuss notes that Crashaw wrote “a number of divine epigrams devoted chiefly to the various implements—the priest’s circumcising blade, the soldier’s whip, the thorns, nails, and the Roman lance at Calvary—which pierce or open up the body of Jesus” and that, “[n]ot unexpectedly, included by Crashaw among the implements that render the body of Christ penetrable is the poet’s own instrument, the pen.”²⁰⁰ Crashaw’s fixation on the *things* that identify someone’s role and position and which that person can then use to penetrate the body of Christ is echoed in this poem, and once again reinforces the materiality of mystical union, its emphasis on touch in addition to sight. What Rambuss does not highlight, however, is Crashaw’s use of the veil, and this item is perhaps the most important in the narrative of a penetrable divinity, because, as noted, it is the veil of flesh that Mary weaves in the loom of her womb that clothes Jesus and gives him a

²⁰⁰ “Pleasure and Devotion: The Body of Jesus and Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric” (*Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg [Durham: Duke UP, 1994]: 253-279), 254-5.

human body. Whereas the men's tools are clearly devices of penetration (spear, pen, blade, nails), Teresa's veil is a textile usually perceived as protective; though it seems to be passive, flimsy, malleable and modest, the veil actually performs a more powerful and violent penetration—it ravishes.

The veil that a nun such as Teresa takes echoes her carnal knowledge of God even as it mimics the bridal veil in her marriage to God as Bridegroom. These acts of veiling are what enable Christ to be penetrated (that is, both “known” and pierced) and which grant the nun access to physical union with him. The veil (along with the other accessories worn by the seraphim and Teresa) is also what communicates knowledge, and symbolizes an experience, of the divine. The painter, on the other hand, who does not truly understand or portray Teresa's greatness, has only a “cold pencil” which, the speaker argues, could have been empowered and caught “Fire” had it “kiss'd her pen” (20,28,20). If the painter had truly experienced Teresa by *touching* her book, experiencing it physically, he would have been ravished by her as she was by the seraphim; the heat that her textual body conveys is inescapable and is itself penetrating, changing the corporeal structure of the one who experiences it. Rather than a cold, closed, distant experience of God, the painter should aspire to the fully-embodied transformation of heat, which refuses anything less than absolute conversion.

To remedy this lack in the painter, the speaker takes it upon himself to act as stage manager and editor, reassigning roles and props and grammatical positions to the seraphim, the painter, and to Teresa. Teresa is both recipient of the seraphim's ravishing

dart and his “mother” (16) who comes before him. Because Teresa is the one who inflames desire she is the one who wields the power to ravish; thus, the speaker argues,

Do, then, as equal right requires,

Since his the blushes be, and hers the fires;

Undress thy seraphim into mine;

Redeem this injury of thy art,

Give him the veil, give her the dart. (37-42)

The veil is the marker here of the shamefaced one: “Give him the veil, that he may cover/ The red cheeks of a rivall’d lover” (43-44). It is no longer a sign of the virtuous nun, bride of Christ, but a secular sign of a blushing paramour. The seraphim has been disempowered or overshadowed by Teresa’s “happy fireworks” and is left only with shame. While the painter has given him all the traditional signs of angelic beauty, “Rosy fingers, radiant hair,/ Glowing cheek, and glist’ring wings,/ All those fair and flagrant things;/ But, before all, that fiery dart,” he has proven less inspirational than Teresa’s “bright book” (32-5, 28). Just as the seraphim and the saint have reversed their roles, Teresa as subject and her text as object are reversed, since her book has “burning cheeks” that are red not from shame but from passion, though the two states may look similar. The veil here is a sign of shame but not the shame of having a mortal body; rather, the shame derives from *lack* of physical ravishment by God. Instead of marking the virgin woman, it marks the angelic seraphim, who is ashamed because he has been transcended. Since the seraphim is no longer that extension of Christ’s body, bringing the dart of love

to Teresa—since it is Teresa who brings the very dart that ravishes, she should now wear all the trappings of the burning angel, “all/ That could be found seraphical”:

Rosy fingers, radiant hair,

Glowing cheek, and glist’ring wings,

All those fair and flagrant things;

But, before all, that fiery dart... (32-5)

If the veil is traditionally a symbol of female submission or resistance, and the dart, as weapon, a symbol of masculine aggression, here the roles are reversed, even as they (“in reality”) remain the same in the painting to which the speaker refers. The seraphim has both the veil and dart just as Teresa does. She wears the androgynous accoutrements of the seraphim, too, the hair, the fingers, the cheek, the wings. But she also employs the dart: “Give her the dart, for it is she,/ Fair youth, shoots both thy shaft and thee” (47-8). She even uses the seraphim as a weapon himself, making him an object that perpetrates violence on another rather than herself: “Say and bear witness. Sends she not/ A seraphim at every shot?” (53-4)

Rather than weaving a veil of flesh for the infant Christ (as Mary does), Teresa writes her experiences into a “bright book” which is her offspring and which engenders myriad disciples. The speaker commands her to

Live in these conquering leaves, live all the same;

And walk through all tongues one triumphant Flame;

Live here, great heart, and love, and die, and kill

And bleed, and wound, and yield, and conquer still.

Let this immortal Life, where'er it comes,

Walk in a crowd of loves and martyrdoms. (78-83)

Teresa's Life (her *Vida*), as it is translated into "all tongues" (meaning both translations of her work, which Crashaw read, and echoing the language of Pentecost, in which a flame lit up the tongues of the disciples and made them speak in many languages),²⁰¹ will convert "crowds" of Christians. Teresa's "heart" is her "Love" (ll. 71, 72, 74, 76), and it is also her "book" of "conquering leaves;" her heart is both immaterial and material. All of these images are combined to function as Christ veiled in flesh did, walking among the people, converting, dying in martyrdom, both wounding and wounded.

Indeed, it is this book by which the speaker imagines being ravished:

O, sweet incendiary! show here thy art

Upon this carcass of a hard, cold heart;

Let all thy scatter'd shafts of light, that play

Among the leaves of thy large books of day,

²⁰¹ Cf. Acts 2:1-4: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

Combined against this breast, at once break in... (86-90)

Instead of gazing, from a distance, on some cold, one-dimensional painting, the devotee must be set ablaze by the touch of a book; he must be ravished and overtaken, all distance or resistance collapsed at the point of erotic connection. Katharine A. Craik's analysis of reading as "a series of transactions between material language and the material bodies of readers and writers" reminds us that, in early modern England, books were thought capable of effecting change in and on a reader's body; to imagine oneself as being ravished by a book, then, is almost a rhetorical commonplace in the seventeenth century.²⁰² Even more, in this poem to be ravished by Teresa's book is metonymically to be ravished by the saint herself; rather than some sort of metaphorical revelation, such as one might receive in reading Scripture, the narrator here experiences a metonymic revelation of truth, one that is realized in and through the body as it is penetrated—touched—by the leaves of Teresa's book. Rather than the Word, one reads the Flesh.

Teresa's written experiences enable the speaker to "read [her] life" just as Christ's Incarnation enables him to be read and then rewritten by the poet; as Rambuss notes, "for Crashaw to display, to make 'legible,' the body of Christ [in his poetry] is to display its permeability, its openings for penetration."²⁰³ In other words, the veil of flesh that enables Christ's presence on earth, and the veil of chastity which enables the nun to unite

²⁰² Craik argues that, for early moderns, "Poems are as malleable as the young men they influence, acting like independent agents rather than passive objects... The feelings of anger, grief, pleasure and shame ignited by passionate experiences with literature inscribed themselves upon men's facial expressions, posture, carriage, gestures and general deportment, as well as the color, temperature and texture of their skin" (*Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007]), 2-3.

²⁰³ "Pleasure" 296.

with Christ, both contribute to the legibility and penetrability of Christ physically, textually, in the words of the saint and poet. Even though Crashaw laments Christ's vulnerability²⁰⁴ he knows that it is this act of incarnation that allows Christ to be known and experienced.

As the narrator commands the painter to redress his subjects, he also demands that his readers shift their focus and interpretations. As if embodying the transgressive position of Teresa herself, the speaker demands a reversal of accepted gender roles that he will then completely dissolve, and even directs the reader's sight forcibly, telling him or her what to see just as he directs the painter in a revision of his painting. In fact he begins the poem itself with this forceful, transgressive stance, by commanding his readers: "be ruled by me, and make.../ a well-placed and wise mistake" so that, in creatively misreading the painter's portrayal, they can "read it right": "You must transpose the picture quite.../ Read Him for Her, and Her for Him" (8-11).

Just as the poem vacillates between subject positions, audiences (sometimes the speaker addresses the painter, sometimes Teresa or the seraphim, sometimes his readers), and narrative voices, it also vacillates between evoking an image and evoking words, slipping in and out of clear representation; at times it seems as if the scene the poet is presenting is that of the painting or sculpture of "the Seraphical Saint Teresa, as she is usually expressed with a Seraphim beside her," and sometimes of her own writings, both her "Book and Picture" (though here "expressed" could mean merely verbally described

²⁰⁴ See, for example, "On our crucified Lord Naked, and bloody": "Th'have left thee naked Lord, O that they had;/ This Garment too I would they had deny'd./ Thee with thy selfe they have too richly clad" (1-3).

rather than visually portrayed; indeed the word “expressed” has that dual sense of something verbally represented as well as portrayed in painting or sculpture). When the speaker addresses “Painter” it is clear that there is an artistic referent, but as the poem progresses the speaker focuses more on Teresa’s words and their effect, such as in lines 53-4 which reference her writings, rather than the painting or sculpture with which the poem began: “What magazines of immortal arms there shine!/ Heav’n’s great artillery in each love-spun line” (55-56). By the end of the poem, no visuals remain, but instead a fervent experience of physical connection.

The veil, as a (re)moveable garment that is coded positively (in its status as sign of holy chastity) and negatively (as marker of shame) makes it a fluid tool much like the liquids that fill Crashaw’s poems about Jesus and Mary. Indeed, fluidity and liquescence, as many critics have noted, are generative for Crashaw.²⁰⁵ The veil in “The Flaming Heart” is worn by Teresa, then the seraphim, and then disappears altogether once the poet’s own mood reaches one of ecstasy in which he imagines Teresa as Christ, with wounds that wound, both passive and active. The veil here is a tool for, and symbol of, the transgressive and enabling practice of transvestism, in the sense that Marjorie Garber offers: the veil is both what conceals the instability of gender position and that which enables gender performance. As Garber notes, “when the veil is lifted, what is

²⁰⁵ In addition to Rambuss, see Paul A. Parrish, “The Feminizing of Power: Crashaw’s Life and Art” (*The Muses Common-Weale: Poetry and Politics in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988], 148-162). Parrish notes Crashaw’s interest in female divines, his close female friendships, and his transgressive religious politics, particularly his participation in Little Gidding, all of which may hint that Crashaw’s passionate interest in Teresa might have been in the same vein as the feminist critics cited above.

revealed is the transvestite—the deconstruction of the binary, the riddle of culture.”²⁰⁶

As this poem demonstrates, transvestism, a performance with the power to “destabilize and define,” can be enacted through the veil.

Ultimately, as Rambuss puts it, Teresa “seems not to transcend but rather to occupy all imaginable gender space.”²⁰⁷ She embodies “manly flame,” all the trappings of the male seraphim, a quiver of arrows, a flaming heart, the “eagle” and the “dove,” she is a “fair sister of the seraphim” and his “mother” (24, 95, 104, 16). She uses a veil, a dart, the leaves of her book, “shafts of light” to “break in” to the poetic speaker and to wound the hearts of all her readers (87, 89). In this way she is like the fair warrior of Petrarchan tradition as well as the wounded and wounding Christ. Because she is ravished, she *loses* her veil—she transcends the need for an earthly covering—and she then becomes the ravisher. Austin Warren claims even that she is “incomparably more vigorous than any rosy-cheeked and inexperienced seraph.”²⁰⁸ Teresa’s status as cloistered, chaste nun accords her a wisdom that elevates her to the status of an angel and beyond. She is the “undaunted daughter of desires” who performs a “gracious robbery” of the ravished soul (94, 92). By taking the veil she is able to transcend it, just as by inhabiting the role of passive victim she becomes active aggressor, and just as her body is transported with her soul.

²⁰⁶ Garber 344.

²⁰⁷ *Closet Devotions* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998), 42.

²⁰⁸ 141.

Teresa's transverberation—a term which itself denotes the violence of “strik[ing] through”²⁰⁹ —is enabled by her stance as veiled virgin nun, Bride of Christ. In the final stanza of the poem, which was added years later,²¹⁰ Crashaw changes focus from the “book and picture” of Teresa to his own desire to be ravished by the nun who was ravished by God. His appeal relies on insistent anaphora to build an erotic tension ending in a death; he repeats “by” ten times in fifteen lines, summoning all of Teresa's power and God-given possessions, her “dower of lights and fires,” “lives and deaths of love,” “thirsts of love,” “brim-fill'd bowls of fierce desire,” “the full kingdom of that final kiss/ That seiz'd [her] parting soul,” “all the heavens [she] hast in him” to break open and fill the speaker's body:

Leave nothing of myself in me:

Let me so read thy life that I

Unto all life of mine may die. (107-9)

The poem ends with a desire for physical death experienced as sexual climax, as the speaker feels himself emptied of interiority, as Teresa was, and filled with divine truth. He imagines himself uniting with the female saint as each transcends his or her physical body in space and time.

²⁰⁹ “Transverberation” def. 1, *Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 18 January 2010.

²¹⁰ According to Thomas Foy, *Richard Crashaw: “Poet and Saint”* (Philadelphia: Richard West, 1977), 57-8; see also Warren 142.

The mystical understanding of the Godhead is without gender. God is male and female and neither and both, just as the mystic is. The veil becomes secondary, belated, merely a tool to try to represent such an understanding. This is why St Teresa's writings and poetry such as Crashaw's display an unlocateable, unnarrativizable, fluid state of being: the penetration and bodily pleasure/pain are not linked to genitalia and thus are not corporeally sexualized: Christ's wounds, for Crashaw, are everywhere *but* his groin; Teresa's rape by the seraphim is in her side or heart. It could be argued that this disavowal of genital sex is exactly that, some sort of pathological denial. However, as Catherine S. Cox notes,

It is a commonplace of medieval theology that an awareness of sexual difference is a consequence of the fall; as noted, the first gesture of shame exhibited by humans is the covering up of the genitals, a veiling of sexual difference and the troubling issues it seemed to promote.²¹¹

This commonplace is not limited to medieval theology, since early modern and much modern Christian belief continues to view sexual difference as an effect of separation from God. Mysticism attempts to exist outside of the conventions of the established Church, to imagine an existence with neither gender difference nor inequality. Crashaw's "stripping" of the veil from St Teresa displays his desire to inhabit the nongendered state of the mystic nun, to dissolve the binary of male/female; rather than keeping the veil in place he fairly revels in its revelatory and transgressive power to dissolve fragile constructions of identity. For Crashaw the veil is not some device for concealment and

²¹¹ Qtd in Sturges 191.

revelation. Though Robert Sturges rightly mentions that feminists such as Irigaray might question whether such a dissolution of gender difference is nothing more than, in Sturges's words, "a typical patriarchal move in the erasure of woman," the widespread appeal of Teresa for both early modern poets and modern feminists surely points to something beyond such a simplistic deconstruction. What Crashaw's depiction of Teresa and her veil of divine rapture celebrate is a world just as much without men as without women, a world that escapes all the limitations of language and bodies and gestures toward a way of being that cannot, ultimately, be known.

“QVOD ME NVTRIT ME DESTRVIT”: Dis-Covering the Obscene Abject in *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*

Because it ... decks itself out in the sacred power of horror, literature may ... involve not an ultimate resistance to but an unveiling of the abject: an elaboration, a discharge, and a hollowing out of abjection through the Crisis of the Word.

-Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*²¹²

In his review of a recent Broadway production of *Hamlet*, Peter Marks criticizes what he calls its “lackluster staging,” remarking that overall it fails to deliver any “fresh insight.”²¹³ For example, though Marks notes one episode of dramaturgical novelty in the confrontation between Hamlet and Gertrude that occurs in Act 3, Scene 4, he finds it ultimately unsatisfying: “the interlude [director Michael] Grandage chooses for unconventional presentation is the bedroom scene between Hamlet and Gertrude, here viewed through the sheer drapes Polonius hides behind. The effect is to muddy the focus and reduce one of the play’s tensest confrontations to mere overheard agitated exchange.”²¹⁴ Instead of the conventional arrangement of this scene, in which Polonius

²¹² Tr. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), 208.

²¹³ “Jude Law in ‘Hamlet’: What a Piece of Work” (*Washington Post* 8 Oct. 2009: C2, Print).

²¹⁴ Ibid. The fact that the drapes are *sheer* is itself compelling, for like many early modern veils such as those worn by Elizabeth I in paintings such as the “Rainbow Portrait” they do not in fact hide anything. In their transparency they enhance and highlight more than they conceal.

hides behind a tapestry or arras in the discovery space at the back of the stage, Grandage's production positions the old man upstage, observing the interaction from the perspective of the theatre audience and thus highlighting the playgoers' own voyeurism. For Marks, the curtain acts as a material obfuscation which in its solidness "mudd[ies]" (or sullies, to borrow a term from Hamlet himself) what should be the audience's clear view of the encounter between Hamlet and his mother. Something about the sheer drapes "reduces," for Marks, the scene's salacious appeal: because we have been in a sense excluded, prevented from full visual penetration, the libidinous tension between Hamlet and Gertrude has been forestalled or diminished through the medium of the curtain.

Marks's distaste for the obfuscation caused by the drape is in fact emblematic of the desire for unadulterated access that playgoers imagine themselves as deserving, and the surprise and dismay they can feel at having their visual access compromised. Indeed, there is something about attending a play which incites a desire to see and to experience fully the action onstage. Because the play is a physical enactment of narrative, the action is oriented towards the audience and the actors are arranged accordingly. In traditional stagings of the confrontation between Hamlet and his mother, the audience is aware that Polonius has hidden himself behind the arras at the back of the stage and that his perspective on the action thus is limited, unlike theirs. Those who have seen the play before expect to see Hamlet throwing his mother onto her "enseamed bed" (3.2.92); those who have not are told by Polonius that until this scene Gertrude's "grace hath screen'd and stood between" Hamlet and the "heat" his behavior incites, but that now, in Gertrude's arranged confrontation with her son, some truth shall be revealed, one which the audience now hopes to witness (3.2.3-4). In Grandage's staging of the scene,

however, a veil has been substituted for the screen of Gertrude's "grace;" the curtain now acts as barrier between Hamlet's "heat" and the audience: the playgoer is denied full access to mother and son until Hamlet has stabbed Polonius who, as he falls, clutches the curtain and pulls it down.²¹⁵ In this sense, Grandage's use of the sheer curtain is indeed innovative in that it enacts the moment of revelation that Polonius has promised. By placing the audience in the position traditionally reserved only for the old man, the director draws the audience's attention to its complicit investment in the revelatory theatrical moment.

It is significant that the director of this production chose this scene to experiment with dramaturgical convention and to do so by veiling the action, at least momentarily. For there is much about Act 3 Scene 4 that is *obscene* in both its literal and figurative senses; that is, it consists of material that is "grossly indecent, lewd . . . tending to deprave and corrupt those who are likely to read, see, or hear the contents," and thus it is, in some sense "against, in opposition to" being staged as scene.²¹⁶ Hamlet's virulent fixation on his mother's sexuality reveals his obsession with the "despoiling maternal origin"²¹⁷ that Janet Adelman has identified throughout Shakespeare's dramatic corpus; the quick succession of his acts of throwing Gertrude onto her bed and stabbing Polonius

²¹⁵ In the Grandage production, Hamlet then wraps Polonius in the curtain and drags him to the side of the stage; now that Polonius is merely a dead object and no longer a subject, his peripheral relation to the action is literalized.

²¹⁶ "Obscene," def. 1 and etymology. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 9 Oct. 2009.

²¹⁷ *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

in a fit of passion demonstrates the “intersection of death and the erotic”²¹⁸ that Karin S. Coddon finds symptomatic in early modern revenge tragedy. Hamlet’s prurient, almost orgasmic obsession with the sensuality of his mother and his own material origins, coupled with his murder of Polonius, makes this a disturbing one for audiences to witness.

The triple helix of birth, sex, and death—experiences often imagined as occurring in or around the bed, as they do in this scene—constitutes much of what is “obscene” in early modern drama, that is, what is difficult to stage. This tripartite structure of an individual’s life was also expressed in the popular early modern maxim quoted in this chapter’s title, “Quod me nutrit me destruit,” which was used to describe the generative and destructive effects of a consuming romantic passion.²¹⁹ However, such paradoxical attributes were also applied to the mother, in that the maternal body is the source of life but also, in traditional teaching, the source of death, as the moment of birth simultaneously initiates the process of dying. Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject, that which the emerging subject casts off in the process of self-constitution, unites these experiences of birth, sex, and death: in Kristeva’s analysis the maternal function comes to stand in not only for the subject’s pre-Symbolic existence in its imagined wholeness but also for all that which must be cast aside continually in order for the subject to exist. What results is an erotic ambivalence, a desire and fascination for the (maternal) body as well as a fear of its power to annihilate. As Kristeva puts it, “devotees of the abject...do

²¹⁸ “For Show or Useless Property’: Necrophilia and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*” (*ELH* 61 [1994]: 71-88), 71.

²¹⁹ This was also expressed during the Renaissance as “quod me alit me extinguit” as in Shakespeare’s *Pericles* 2.2.33.

not cease looking...for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous...inside of the maternal body.”²²⁰ Janet Adelman’s study, cited above, masterfully exposes the obsession with sullied (feminine) flesh that haunts Shakespeare’s drama and thus acknowledges the experience of abjection as integral to the self’s formation. However, what remains largely unexamined in Adelman’s discussion and in other analyses of the abject is its inherent performativity, specifically its dependence on both sensory perception and on acts of veiling and unveiling, in order to for the *subject* to *abject* the feminine *object*. Thus the theatre—specifically the convention of the discovery space as the locus for staging the “obscene”—is the ideal site to explore this jettisoning of materiality, maternal origin, and all reminders of death and decay; by literally foregrounding the veil and thereby drawing the audience’s attention to the importance of the discovery space in Hamlet’s experience of abjection, director Michael Grandage reveals an awareness of this point.

Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa describe the early modern theatre’s discovery space thus:

The central opening [of the stage’s *frons*] was concealed behind a hanging or elaborate cloth woven in panels with pictures of scenes from classical myths. This cloth of “arras” which concealed the central opening, through which Hamlet stabs Polonius, was a heavy tapestry weave. The central hangings were only used by the players for special entrances. They concealed a wide alcove, sometimes now called the “discovery space”

²²⁰ *Powers of Horror* 54.

because of its use for special displays and shows that were “discovered” or revealed by drawing apart the hangings. The caskets in *The Merchant of Venice*, the gold treasure which Volpone worships at the beginning of Jonson’s play, the spectacle of the Duchess of Malfi’s murdered children, of Faustus’s study...were typical set-pieces designed to be revealed to all (except the lords sitting on the balcony over the stage) when the stage-hands drew back the hangings.²²¹

As this chapter will demonstrate, the discovery space was important not only for its inherent theatrical potential, but also for the ways that it performed and materialized the experience of abjection, providing a space to explore and to disavow experiences of death and the feminine other, or as Kristeva put it, to “hollow” out, “elaborate” and “discharge” the abject. Indeed, as Henry Turner has shown, the architecture of the early modern stage in many ways informed the architecture of the early modern mind:

As an architectonic element of the theatre building, the backstage wall formed the boundary that served as the most basic structuring principle of drama as a ‘performative form’...: the opposition between onstage and offstage space. Mimetically, however, the backstage wall, along with the

²²¹ *Staging in Shakespeare’s Theatres* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 6-7. There has been much debate over the past century about the existence, appearance, structure and uses of the discovery space on the early modern stage. Richard Hosley, for example, wrote extensively on the topic; see, for example, “The Staging of Desdemona’s Bed” (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 14.1 [Winter 1963], 57-65). For more recent reflections on particular uses of the discovery space, see John H. Astington, “The ‘Messalina’ Stage and Salisbury Court Plays” (*Theatre Journal* 43.2 [May 1991], 141-156) and Leslie Thomson, “‘With Patient Ears Attend’: ‘Romeo and Juliet’ on the Elizabethan Stage” (*Studies in Philology* 92.2 [Spring 1995]: 230-247). My interest here is not on the particular physical architecture or arrangement of the discovery space, but rather on its psychic and performative import. For the purposes of my argument here it matters only that, as scholars generally agree, some sort of “discovery space” existed onstage and was employed to striking effects.

doors, windows, balconies, and discovery spaces that constituted its primary features, also came to represent fictional ‘walls’ of various paradigmatic types: interior, exterior, private, public, commercial, and administrative walls; walls of houses, streets, shops, closets, warehouses, taverns, brothels, prisons— a diverse, but not infinite, series of topographic units.²²²

The discovery space embodied, both architecturally and figuratively, a liminal space at the edge of the action as well as an enclosed space, set off from the rest of the stage by doors or curtains. It functioned to cordon off, as it were, a scene or assemblage of bodies, in order to hint at what could not be seen or enacted onstage, or alternatively, to reveal shocking discoveries. As such, this space can be seen to have both embodied and informed the experience of abjection, which is the reappearance of that which has been cast off or disavowed in the subject’s process of self-differentiation. Moreover, because the discovery space is, at least initially, veiled by a curtain or other hanging, it reveals the theatricality inherent in the experience of abjection—its dependence on two states of being, veiled and unveiled, seen and unseen—which are continually performed.

This chapter will argue that what is revealed again and again within the discovery space is the terrifying spectacle/specter of the pre-Symbolic mother who has the power to annihilate and destroy. The “mother” in this formulation is linked to all that must be abjected in order to maintain the boundary between self and other.

²²² Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts, 1580-1630* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 196.

Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* in particular demonstrate the early modern performance of the abject (in the discovery space) but also the ways in which the abject requires veiling, and the ways that these plays fetishize the veil for its apotropaic *and* revelatory power—its powers of horror.

Abjected Rem(a)inders

The *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the term “abject” possessed similar resonances in the early modern period as it does today: “To cast off, throw off or away, cast out, exclude, reject, *lit.* and *fig.*; generally, though not always, as inferior, unworthy, or vile, and hence passing into the idea of casting down, degrading.”²²³ Some of the uses the *OED* cites from this period include, from 1563, “A gross carnal feeding, basely abjecting and binding ourselves to the elements and creatures”; Thomas Wright's 1603 *Passions of the Mind*: “The eye . . . may be grauely eleuated vp to heuen or abjected to earth;” and Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* of 1643: “I repute my self the most abjectest piece of mortality.”²²⁴ Kristeva's explication adopts these connotations of lowliness and vileness:

The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably become a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not

²²³ “Abject,” def. 1 and 2. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 10 July 2009.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

signify death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. . . There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being.²²⁵

Confrontation with the fallen human body, the cadaver, upsets the boundary between subject and object and thrusts back into view, as spectacle, what one casts off in the primal scene of psychic individuation. However, the abject is never truly escaped, for the (m)other within the subject remains, and forms the basis for individual selfhood as such. In order to disavow this awareness of the other within, the subject aligns the maternal function with nature, with materiality in all its seductiveness and depravity, and likewise attempts to align himself with the spiritual, with the Word.²²⁶ Not only the maternal body but all that is feminine or other—that which is foreign, exotic, that which seduces and thus threatens self-mastery, becomes the abject and finds its material actualization in the veiled discovery space.

Kristeva's use of the phrase "true theater" hints at another vital aspect of her theory, one which goes largely unexamined in her essay on abjection. Kristeva aligns

²²⁵ *Horror 3*.

²²⁶ As Kristeva points out in her essay "Stabat Mater," even "Christ, the Son of man, is in the end 'human' only through his mother." (*The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman [Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986: 99-118], 100. Of course, volumes of feminist and psychoanalytic criticism have been written on the history of misogyny; my focus in this chapter is the primal scene of self-realization in the abjection of the maternal, specifically the maternal *qua* body, and in turn the memory of this abjection as it persists in the reminder, "Remember, man, that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return."

“refuse and corpses” with “true theater,” that is, those sights that are not—or cannot be—concealed behind “makeup or masks” and thus are those things which thrust the abject into sight. However, Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and Middleton’s *Revenger’s Tragedy* explore and challenge this understanding of makeup and masks, for in these plays such coverings are *themselves* examples of the abject; they reveal that the abject is not only something hidden and then disclosed in moments of horror, but it is equally the very threshold between subject and abject, whose existence as reminder of connection is similarly terrifying: “[t]he vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject, a boundary and a limit...something *horrible to see* at the impossible doors of the invisible.”²²⁷ It is both that “something maternal”²²⁸ and “a boundary and... limit.” In Kristeva’s formulation, then, the abject is an object (like a corpse) that is “horrible to see” but it is also an embodiment of the threshold itself. The discovery space in particular is the material actualization of this paradoxical notion: as physical space it contains the “impossible ob-ject [that is] horrible to see” and as a veiled space which is repeatedly unveiled, it is that threshold, “boundary” and “limit” which is itself abjecting.

If early modern Protestantism intensified the traditional Christian disdain for the mortal body and professed a desire to return to a purer origin in which the veil of the flesh was stripped away, affording individual access to spiritual truths, moments of unveiling, rather than achieving atonement and restoration, often revealed emptiness or the threat of annihilation, as layers of “outward show” were the means by which identity

²²⁷ *Powers of Horror* 154-55.

²²⁸ *Ibid* 208.

was constructed and performed.²²⁹ Both Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* demonstrate this paradox. Both plays mistrust veils and want the world to be one in which everything is as it seems; however, lurking beneath this desire is a fear that without masks, one will be confronted with the abject, with what must be cast out or cast down in order to maintain one's sense of self. Thus, even as they are aggressively denounced, veils are fetishistically endowed with an apotropaic power to safeguard one against psychic dissolution. Abjection is death, the collapse of the boundary between (male) subject and (female) object, a return to a state of infancy, to connection with the maternal body, to the primal scene of identity formation that is the fall into language. Even as *The Merchant of Venice* attempts to purify the abject within the romance and fertility of comedy, the characters' troubled relationship to materiality and to the female body reveals the same anxieties that *The Revenger's Tragedy* performs more nakedly and brutally.

Like the veil over the discovery space, the veils of gold, silver, lead, linen, and flesh in these plays reveal the fragile and permeable boundaries between such foundational binaries as subject and object, living and dead, male and female. For Bassanio and Vindice, they are emblematic of the power of beautiful things—of desire itself—to seduce; they act as trap doors which entice but which lead only to a fall, to psychic dissolution and disillusion. Bassanio, Vindice, and other characters thus claim to despise acts of veiling—the make-up and masks that Kristeva mentions—but their fearful fascination with these very coverings betrays an awareness that they, like Kristeva,

²²⁹ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation for more on the desire for individual (unveiled) access to the divine; for more on the fear of what such unveilings might do, see Chapter 1.

realize the need for those borders to be maintained and reinforced. The primal scenes of self-individuation occasioned around desire of/for the female body reflect the shame and guilt of being material and mortal; it is the veil's job to contain—in both senses of the word—these threats: veils contain (embody and encapsulate) all that is tempting and dissolute, and they contain (keep in check, restrain) that subject who teeters on the verge of falling; they contain the threat that lurks beneath the surface, the abject that refuses to remain abjected. The use of the discovery space became thus the material actualization of this anxiety.

“Hiding the Grossness” in *The Merchant of Venice*

As Marjorie Garber notes, Freud's famous essay, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” isn't actually about Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*; rather, Garber argues that it “is really an essay about substitution that enacts substitution as its own methodology,” wherein Freud uses his analysis of “problems” in Shakespeare to displace his own (various and sundry) anxieties and desires.²³⁰ Freud argues that Bassanio's choice of the lead casket (and “true love”) is really, through a process of displacement, a choice of death. Freud ends his essay with a curious justification for the route by which he has arrived at this counterintuitive assertion that a man will freely choose death: “The fairest and best of women, who has taken the place of the Death-goddess, has kept certain characteristics that border on the uncanny, so that from them we have been able to guess

²³⁰ Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 79.

at what lies beneath.”²³¹ Thus, the “fairest and best” woman has not in reality “taken the place of;” rather, she acts as a fetish (at least for Freud) in that she marks and memorializes the primal scene of death, at the same time that she intends to compensate for and replace the loss entailed therein. The “uncanny” nature of the beautiful woman/goddess of death is precisely her paradoxical power to attract and repulse. For Freud, the uncanny is the speaking woman, the dark continent of female minds and bodies. Likewise, the uncanniness of the female form, its “grossness” and earthy materiality, is something the suitors in *The Merchant of Venice* both acknowledge and disavow.

Freud claims that the “ancient theme” reflected in the choice of the three caskets “requires to be interpreted, accounted for and traced back to its origin”;²³² likewise, Bassanio, Aragon, and Morocco set themselves to this very “ancient theme”, “whereof who chooses his meaning chooses” Portia (I.ii.26-7).²³³ Each man “chooses” (an activity that Garber says was—for Freud at least— “masculine, empowering, paternal”²³⁴) to interpret, to unveil the mystery posed by the female, all the while rejecting any connection to her as the occasion and foundation of his psychic formation. The “veil of interpretation” that Freud “strips”²³⁵ from the theme of the three caskets he then places

²³¹ “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” *William Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice: Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), 7-14, esp. 14.

²³² *Ibid.* 7.

²³³ All citations of *The Merchant of Venice* taken from The Folger Shakespeare Library edition, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

²³⁴ Garber 86.

²³⁵ Garber 75; Freud calls it “the astral garment” that he has “stripped”, to find “that the theme is a *human* one” (8; emphasis mine).

over other scenes that he refuses to see, such as Lear—or himself—as suitor of his own daughter. Similarly, the texts (both Portia’s body and the caskets which represent her, in Freud’s formulation) that Bassanio, Morocco and Aragon attempt to penetrate reveal them to be subject to the abjecting female body, to their own mortality and powerlessness. As a result, though they profess a desire to have all untruth stripped away, to have things “naturally” be what they seem, the scenes of unveiling in the play demonstrate that such a world would be their undoing.²³⁶ In the end, then, though Freud and the suitors in *The Merchant of Venice* claim to “remove... the veil of interpretation,”²³⁷ in their refusals to name the unnameable, to see the unseeable, or to acknowledge the obscene, they actually insist on its remaining firmly in place.

The figure who absolutely cannot be named in Freud’s analysis of himself or of Shakespeare is the mother. Indeed, as Kristeva notes, “about the complexities and difficulties of the maternal experience Freud has absolutely nothing to say, though it may interest students of his work to note that he reports his mother’s efforts to prove to him one day, in the kitchen, that his body was not immortal but would eventually crumble like pastry dough.”²³⁸ Kristeva’s phrasing here is compelling, for the “nothing” that Freud is willing—or able—to say about the mother is precisely that hole, that no-thing, of the maternal body. The maternal absences in *Merchant*, of course, are Jessica’s mother Leah

²³⁶ Invoking Derrida’s essay on veils, “A Silkworm of One’s Own,” Richard O. Wilson argues that the “sails” (*les voiles*) in *The Merchant of Venice* double and echo the “veils” of Muslim women mentioned in Bassanio’s speech: while “unveiling the Muslim woman was the aim of western males[,]... if their own veil should be rent, we are warned at the start of this text, that ‘dangerous sea’ would expose these ‘tradedful merchants’ to the hidden violence of the “‘dark lady’, and reveal the treachery of their own secret desires” (“Veiling an Indian Beauty: Shakespeare and the *hijab*” [*Shakespeare* 4.4: 379-396], 381).

²³⁷ Garber 75.

²³⁸ “Stabat” 99-118, esp. 112.

and Portia's unnamed mother, who have been displaced by the wills of two oppressive fathers. As Lynda Boose argues, "In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare gives us two versions of the daughter's solution to the repressive demands of the father. In each, the father follows the folktale motif of trying to lock up his daughter and retain her for himself."²³⁹ In each of these examples, the daughter is literally locked up—enclosed, made obscene—Portia, as counterfeit, in the leaden casket (as well as figuratively locked up through the casket test), Jessica in her father's house.

Boose points to the link between the two women: "Jessica serves as a dramatic foil to Portia; against Portia's relationship with both her wealthy father and her impoverished suitor we are implicitly invited to measure Jessica's."²⁴⁰ However, just as important but largely overlooked is the two women's association with the figure of Medea, the feminine, maternal specter who haunts the play. Not only does Bassanio compare Portia to Medea and his wooing of her to Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece, but Portia also plays the Medean role of "helper maiden" who assists her hero in winning his suit. Medea helped Jason obtain the golden fleece through her sorcery; Portia helps Bassanio and Antonio win their suit against Shylock through a similar verbal sorcery. (Some critics even argue that Portia helps Bassanio choose the correct casket through the song that plays during his deliberation.) In betraying her faith and her father, Jessica, on the other hand, echoes Medea as a "young woman who leaves her father for love, or

²³⁹ Boose, Lynda, "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare" (*PMLA* 97.3 [1982]: 325-347), esp. 335. Marjorie Garber finds Freud's desire for his daughter Anna written all in and through his essay of the three caskets.

²⁴⁰ 336.

betrays her homeland.”²⁴¹ Both Portia and Jessica are linked to Medea in that each can, like “Medea ... be portrayed ... as a victim of love or as a trophy to be won.”²⁴²

In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Euripides’s eponymous play, Medea’s tale is long and rich. In the more well-known portion, the only aspect that the merchants of Venice will acknowledge, Medea defies her father and helps Jason obtain the golden fleece on Colchis in return for his love. However, when Jason betrays her for Glauce (Creon’s daughter and heiress), Medea sends Glauce a fatal wedding gift, a poisoned shawl and tiara—sometimes referred to as a “bridal veil”—which kills both Glauce and Creon. Finally, in anger towards Jason, Medea murders their two sons. Thus, despite (or perhaps because of) all their wealth and beauty, both Portia and Jessica embody the threat of the abjecting mother—the threat of death, poison, annihilation, treachery—which lurks beneath the feminine exterior. The play’s use of the discovery space in the casket scenes is its way of performing these threats, of seeking to name and enclose them, or to discharge and hollow them out.

In the play’s very first scene, Bassanio describes Portia as a Medean prize to be won, worth even Antonio’s hazarding all he has (as the lead casket will require):

In Belmont is a lady richly left,
And she is fair, and, fairer than that word,
Of wondrous virtues. . .

²⁴¹ Emily Griffiths, *Medea* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2006): 35.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia.
Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
For the four winds blow in from every coast
Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
Hang on her temples like a golden fleece,
Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos' strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her...

(1.1.168-170,172-179)

Here is the first example of the play's discomfort with Medea, for Bassanio does not actually compare Portia to Medea herself; rather, in comparing her blonde hair to the Golden Fleece, Bassanio links Portia *metonymically* to Medea. The Jasons who "come in quest of her" are thus desirous not of her body but of the gold of her fleece, which will make them rulers of Belmont, just as the fleece made Jason king of Iolcus. In this instance, Portia's golden fleece-like hair mediates, like the veils that will appear later in the play, between what can be seen and named and what remains obscene.

After Bassanio has chosen the correct casket, and Gratiano has similarly won a lucrative spot in Portia's household as husband to her lady-in-waiting Nerissa, Gratiano exclaims that Antonio "will be glad of our success./ We are the Jasons, we have won the

Fleece” (3.2.249-50). Gratiano compares their courtship to a mercantile, seafaring adventure, with the women, like Medea, as trophies that have been won. What lurks beneath this jubilant confidence, however, is the unspoken name of the murderous wife/mother, the threat that their story could go the way Jason’s did. In fact, Salerio responds immediately with the foreboding news that indeed the story does *not* end here: Antonio has lost his own “fleece,” the ventures that made up his good name and his credit. This is a message that “steals the color from Bassanio’s cheek,” as Portia says. In fact, her response hints at Medean jealousy, as she questions what “Could turn so much the constitution/ Of any constant man” (256-7). Portia’s use of “constant” here means not only “steadfast,” as it is usually glossed, but puns on constancy as fidelity. In seeming to fear the faithfulness of the adventurer who won her, Portia hints that Bassanio might betray her as Jason did Medea. In fact, she admonishes him, “Bassanio, I am half yourself,/ And I must freely have the half of anything/ That this same paper brings you” (25-60). Portia reminds him that he must relinquish his close bond to Antonio (and his other Jasons) in favor of the marital bond, and her implicit probing of his fidelity, in her role as bearer of the golden fleece, would remind him of what happens to a man who forgets his “other half.” Already Portia is threatening to unman Bassanio and reminding him that, even as she bears the Golden Fleece, she may bear the poisoned wedding gift as well. In this way, Portia and Medea remind us that the veiled threat of the murdering mother is always already present in the young bride.

The threat of abjection is more than the threat of feminine vengeance, however: Medea’s power to annihilate comes from her ability to murder her sons, to be the undoing of her husband. She is the archetype of that which nourishes but also destroys: “The

theme of the two-faced mother is perhaps the representation of the baleful power of women to bestow mortal life.”²⁴³ For the mother gives life but she also heralds death, as in Christian teaching to be born is to begin to die, not only to decay physically, but to die into sin, into the things of this world. The awareness that one is material, mortal, and tied to this earth drives the godly man to strive toward the spiritual and away from the body, from the mother, from earthly decay. In *The Merchant of Venice*, this struggle between the beauties of this world and greater spiritual pursuits is performed in the casket test, and Portia as the Golden Fleece embodies the enlivening power of beauty and worldly wealth as well as the destruction and death one hazards in being linked to (such a) woman. As a result, though Portia’s suitors claim to strip away the veils of riddle surrounding the casket, they, like Freud, actually unveil nothing. In fact, they refuse to strip away the veils they claim to mistrust or detest because, as the references to Medea demonstrate, giving themselves up to earthly desires means acknowledging their abjected origins and ends. Further, the casket scenes demonstrate that while the Kristevan abject claims to “permanently thrust aside” “that threatening otherness”²⁴⁴ it in fact must repeatedly *perform* this abjection; the discovery space of the early modern theatre provides the site to do just that.

The caskets are veiled by a curtain and thus most likely are contained within the discovery space. Even though Portia moves and speaks freely upon the stage, she acknowledges her enclosure within “the will of a dead father” (1.2.25) whose law

²⁴³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 158.

²⁴⁴ Kristeva 3, 39.

prevents her from exercising free choice. In this scene of our introduction to Portia, Nerissa speaks of the caskets as “these three chests” (29), so that the caskets must at this point be visible to the audience. The space that is produced in this scene is therefore a female space—enclosed against the outside world but comprised of smaller enclosures, such as the women’s bodies and the three caskets. Here Portia and Nerissa speak freely, criticizing the various suitors in a way that they never would publicly, that is, in the presence of men. Once the male suitors arrive, however, the caskets have been covered, just as the women’s open conversation disappears into the formality of mistress and lady-in-waiting. When Morocco arrives Portia commands, “Go, draw aside the curtains, and discover/ The several caskets to this noble prince” (2.7.1-2), which makes it clear that the caskets must be in the discovery space at this point; further evidence of this placement is indicated in the way that each suitor deliberates in what seems to be a soliloquy, addressing the caskets themselves rather than Portia and thus revealing themselves to be in a space apart.

When the curtains are drawn, uncovering the caskets to the Prince of Morocco, we find not “the thing itself,” as Lear would say, but a riddle, or rather three riddles: the gold, silver, and lead caskets, requiring their own discovery through proper interpretation of their outward appearance. Morocco’s valuation of the caskets is by the letter of their inscriptions; reading the lead casket’s riddle, “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath,” he argues that lead’s paltry monetary exchange value makes it not worth “giving all”—a logic with which any good Venetian merchant would agree. Yet he exclaims, without preamble or explanation, “This casket threatens” (2.7.18). Something in the lead casket “threatens” his subjectivity, for as he says, “A golden mind stoops not

to shows of dross” (2.7.22). Morocco’s use of “show” is ambiguous, as it could mean simply the external appearance or, more sinisterly, a feigned performance or display. Aragon and Bassanio will use the same word in their deliberations (2.9.28 and 3.2.75), revealing their attention to the material surfaces that they claim to disregard.

What Freud would argue “threatens” Morocco is of course, death—death in female form. But Morocco does not articulate the threat posed by the lead; like Freud’s silences, Morocco’s speak volumes about what cannot be confronted. The prince stops abruptly in the middle of the line and changes course to a philosophical maxim on men’s ulterior motives. His claim that “Men that hazard all / Do it in hope of fair advantages” (19-20) is, of course, exactly the behavior and hope of both Antonio (who hazards all for the love he bears Bassanio) and Bassanio, who hazards all he has (by way of Antonio) in that very “hope of fair advantages”—Portia and her fortune. Thus in one sense Morocco reveals the ulterior motive behind the choice Bassanio will make.

Morocco chooses the gold casket, thinking therein to find not merely a single gold coin but a wealth of gold (perhaps of Portia’s golden, fleecy hair); he imagines—and tells the audience—that within the casket he will find “an angel in a golden bed” (note here the image of the bed, the scene and site of birth and death as well as sex).²⁴⁵ He unlocks the casket with the key that Portia gives him, and exclaims in anguish: “O hell! ... A carrion death” (70-1). The prince announces that what one finds when venturing

²⁴⁵ As Celia Daileader notes, “a noteworthy motif in Renaissance erotica—including what we know of the engravings called ‘Aretine’s pictures’—was the canopied bed, furnishing the artist an excuse to flaunt his skill at texture and shadow, but more importantly, providing the viewer with the thrill of penetrating a private world” (*Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998], 42). Morocco’s evocation of the bed draws on this tradition, hinting at the salacious scene the casket might be concealing.

into the inner space of the female body is not the hoped-for gold but rather, a skull, the earthly reality within the veil of beautiful flesh. The threat Morocco attributed to lead—his own undoing, the obscene abject he could neither name nor confront—lies within the golden casket. The angel in the bed is an angel of death and decay, the golden bed his own casket. The Prince of Morocco is confronted with his own mortality, the inexorability of his own eventual decay and worse, his own dissolution into the same earth inhabited by the “dross” he could not bear to “stoop to.” The death’s head that figuratively lies within Portia’s body-as-casket represents both man’s beginning and his end.

The Prince of Aragon, who represents in the early modern Protestants’ minds the Spanish papists and their investment in the trifles and idols of Catholic worship, is the next to try his hand at the casket test, occasioning another unveiling of the three chests. The audience now knows (though Aragon does not) that the golden chest yields nothing but death and decay. Even if Aragon does not choose the golden casket, the audience is informed that an incorrect choice dooms the prince “never in [his] life/ To woo a maid in marriage” (2.9.12-13), so if death isn’t the result, sterility will be. He immediately dismisses the “base lead” casket for its lack of “fairness,” then proceeds to reject the gold because its desirability makes it “common;” though he himself dismissed the lead for its outward show, he demonizes “the fool multitude, that choose by show.” He argues that he “will not choose what many men desire” (though of course Morocco already told us that Portia herself is that very thing) because, for Aragon, the worst fate would be to “rank . . . with the barbarous multitudes” (2.9.19,21,31, 25, 32)—to be indistinguishable from the rabble, a fate, as Morocco learned, that death will bring at some point, that

“stripping away of the constituent forms of social identity” that Michael Neill identifies as the shame-inducing nature of death in the Renaissance.²⁴⁶ Like Morocco, Aragon reasons that his own worth is clear and indisputable because of his wealth and social status; he too claims to desire a stripping away of outward shows, all the while disavowing his dependence on those very shows to constitute his identity.

What he finds in the silver casket should come as no surprise after his repeated diatribes on fondness and foolishness: “The portrait of a blinking idiot,” a second “fool’s head” (2.9.58, 81).²⁴⁷ The doubling of his head compensates for the castration—the sterilization—of the Prince in his incorrect choice, which assigns him the fate to which he agreed, never to woo woman in marriage. His masculine identity compromised, the “portrait of a blinking idiot” compensates for, as Garber puts it, “the loss of the original—indeed, to the loss of the certainty of the concept of origin.”²⁴⁸ Fearing he has lost the very worth and identity to which he so stringently clung in his choice of the silver casket, he consoles himself with his mirror image: “With one fool’s head I came to woo,/ But I go away with two” (81-2). Garber notes that “[t]he representation of the fear of loss through multiplication is familiar from the interpretation of dreams and myths, as for example in Freud’s essay on “Medusa’s Head” (1922), where the proliferation of

²⁴⁶ *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 67.

²⁴⁷ Kristeva: “So his laughter bursts out, facing abjection, and always originating at the same source, of which Freud had caught a glimpse: the gushing forth of the unconscious, the repressed, suppressed pleasure, be it sex or death. And yet, if there is a gushing forth, it is neither jovial, nor trustful, nor sublime, nor enraptured by preexisting harmony. It is bare, anguished, and as fascinated as it is frightened.” Though she speaks here of Céline, the apocalyptic laughter seems to fit the “fool’s head” image in this scene as well.

²⁴⁸ Garber 15.

swarming snakes compensates for and covers over the fear of castration.”²⁴⁹ Whereas Morocco found a skull, Aragon finds a fool’s head; these two heads will multiply again in the third casket, which contains Portia’s head (her portrait). All three men, even as they try to turn away, to avoid “a face-to-face confrontation with the object,”²⁵⁰ find themselves drawn back by the hope of winning that elusive prize, the golden angel whose inside matches her outside, whose body is somehow there but not there, disconnected from the face they long to see.

In the final unveiling of the caskets in Act 3, Bassanio contributes his own version of the “outward shows” sermon begun by Morocco and Aragon. He enumerates the many instances—in law, religion, war, fashion—where one sees the world “deceived with ornament” (3.2.72). Ostensibly, what troubles Bassanio is that corruption, grossness, vice, and evil are covered over with “fair ornament;” in other words, veils of language, of rhetoric, of feigned valor and false beauty conceal inner depravity. The culminating example of this sort of deception evokes an image of a woman wearing a veil: “the beauteous scarf / Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word/ The seeming truth which cunning times put on/ To entrap the wisest” (98-101). Here, the threatening maternal figure of Medea—the exotic foreign sorceress who both aided and annihilated Jason—reasserts herself. The vengeful mother becomes the seductive lover in these lines, but

²⁴⁹ Garber 15-16.

²⁵⁰ Kristeva 209.

both figures are those which lurk in the abject, concealed beneath a veil, inhabiting a discovery space that inspires both “horror and fascination.”²⁵¹

On the surface, Bassanio’s mention of the veiled “Indian beauty” would seem to contradict his earlier examples of grossness hidden underneath fair exterior, since he describes the person (woman?) hidden behind the “beauteous scarf” as a beauty and thus an object of desire (98-99). However, his use of the word “beauty” twice within six words causes some suspicion that perhaps the gentleman doth protest too much. Ania Loomba reminds us that Bassanio’s statement is “oxymoronic, since ‘Indian’ indicates a dark skin, which Portia has already called ‘repulsive’ in her encounter with her Moroccan suitor.”²⁵² Bassanio’s attraction to the Indian woman is marked by ambivalence (as Freud would say, “an ancient ambivalence”²⁵³), for he knows that he *should* read her veil as a sign of her foreignness, her disingenuousness, instead of beauty. Thus, what makes her attractive is the veil which covers over her traumatic lack of “fairness;” the veil in this way acts as a luxurious ornament to mask the threat behind it—the threat of darkness, of death, of nothingness, the other within—in much the same way that the curtain over the discovery space claims to protect the viewer from the horrors within.

The veil has aesthetic value as a “beauteous scarf” but more importantly it is valued for what it covers over, for the truth it defers. Indeed, deferral of gratification enhances an object’s or subject’s value in the logic of this play. On one level, for

²⁵¹ Kristeva 209.

²⁵² *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002): 136.

²⁵³ Freud 13.

example, the veil defers physical or sexual gratification by keeping the Indian beauty untouched and out of (visual) reach. Portia's value is the result of a similar deferral; her allure is partly due to her riches but also surely due to the economic, physical, and psychic risk and wait involved in wooing her. Bassanio describes her to Antonio by noting that men journey from the four corners of the earth "in quest of her" (1.1.174); likewise, the Prince of Morocco says,

. . . All the world desires her;

From the four corners of the earth they come

To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint.

The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds

Of wide Arabia are as thoroughfares now

For princes to come view fair Portia.

(2.7.38-43)

Anne Burnett notes that in *Medea*, Euripides gives his protagonist "an air of slightly degenerate Oriental luxury" as a sign of the "material wealth that misleads men," and that it is Glauce's greed for pretty things that makes her accept the (poisoned) wedding gift from the wife she has displaced.²⁵⁴ If Portia, like the veiled Indian, is an enticing commodity, as Morocco and Bassanio claim she is, how is she any different than

²⁵⁴ "Medea and the Tragedy of Revenge," *Classical Philology* 68.1 (January 1973): 1-24, esp. 19. In fact, there is a pervasive tradition of "orientalizing" threatening feminine (and maternal) figures, often through the figure of the veil. See Chapters 1 and 4 of this dissertation.

Euripides' Medea, and they from Glauce? All of these women are alluring but all have the potential to bring ruin; those they tempt with beautiful things may be destined to die a painful death.

Bassanio's veiled Indian also serves as the culminating emblem of the "cunning" deceptions listed in his speech. She is not just another in his list of metaphors for the risk of a pleasing exterior disguising inner iniquity; rather, she is the epitome of "The seeming truth which cunning times put on / To entrap the wisest" (3.2.100-101). Since she is covered by a veil, the Indian beauty is able to hide not only her interior but her exterior; thus, the threat she poses is double. In this sense she is rhetorically produced as an active predator bent on "entrapping" and "cunning" even the wisest man; what is ironic is that Bassanio describes Portia herself in similar terms a few moments later, as he stares at her portrait: "Here in her hairs/ The painter plays the spider and hath woven/ A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men" (3.2.120-2).

Moreover, her ornamentation reminds the male viewer of the woman who decorates or paints herself in order to be more appealing, the fear for the man, of course, being that when he gets her to bed, she will turn out to be a monster, perhaps an enchantment sent to lure him to his death. Phillip Stubbes' view of ornamented women in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583) bespeaks a similar anxiety. Women who paint themselves embody the threat of all physically alluring commodities: they could be sent by Satan to tempt one into sin and death. Stubbes claims that foreign commodities (like the beautiful scarf?), in which Londoners take sinful physical pleasure, are signs pointing not to God but to Satan. In his section on women's consumption in *The*

Anatomie, Stubbes argues that Englishwomen spend far too much time, effort, and money on arranging their hair:

Then followeth the trimming and tricking of their heades, in laying out their haire to the shewe, which of force must be curled, fristed, and crisped, laid out (a world to sée) on wreathes and borders, from one eare to an other. And least it should fall down, it is vnder propped with forks, wiers, and I cannot tell what, like grim sterne monsters, rather then chaste Christian matrones. Then, on the edges of their bouldstered hair (for it standeth crested rounde about their frontiers, and hanging ouer their faces like *pendices* or uailles, with glasse windowes on euery side) there is laid great wreathes of golde and siluer, curiously wrought, and cunningly applied to the temples of their heades.²⁵⁵

Portia's "sunny locks" also hang about her temples like these Englishwomen's do. In this way, she and they are no better than the Indian beauty, for what makes them attractive is not they themselves; rather, they attempt to improve upon nature by veiling their grossness with outward shows. The veils of hair that Stubbes's women and Portia wear are emblematic of the paradox of veiling, for they are both sinfully attractive in their own right, being made of golden materials, and thus entice the gaze, but they are also monstrous, hideous, because they veil their own origins as well as their wearers. Stubbes complains that women "are not simplie content with their own haire, but buy other haire,

²⁵⁵ *The Anatomie of Abuses...* (London, 1583), Fv-F1. *Early English Books Online*, Cambridge University Library, 2 June 2009.

either of horses, mares, or any other straunge beastes.”²⁵⁶ Such a “straunge” practice is one that Bassanio mentions in his deliberation speech:

So are those crispèd snaky golden locks,
Which maketh such wanton gambols with the wind
Upon supposèd fairness, often known
To be the dowry of a second head,
The skull that bred them in the sepulchre.

(3.2.92-6)

Beauty is only “supposèd” here, for its allure is false in that the golden hair which attracts the gaze is not germane to its wearer; rather, it has been added on, like a veil, in order to guile the viewer. Shakespeare in fact devotes an entire sonnet to this horrific practice; in sonnet 68 the speaker professes nostalgia for the days

Before the bastard signs of fair were born,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchers, were shorn away
To live a second life on second head;

²⁵⁶ Stubbes F1.

Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay...

(68.3-8)²⁵⁷

The parallels with Bassanio's diatribe *and* with his description of Portia are unmistakable here; though Bassanio in one breath celebrates Portia's sunny locks and the way they hang about her temples (suggesting their decorative function), in the next he condemns the practice of wearing others' hair. It is important to recall here that the actor playing Portia would have been wearing a wig of golden hair himself, making Bassanio's diatribe even more ironic. Though he professes a desire for women to wear only their own hair, he would not wish his own beloved to be any less sunny.

What is also notable in sonnet 68 is the metaphor of bastardy—that fairness is the child of a false mother, that what her body has produced is unnatural. Here, then, the maternal figure is not only linked to falsity and sexual depravity, but to the grave itself, to death. And of course the image of the fleece in the last line quoted is used again to describe Portia's hair as the Golden Fleece. Thus the echoes of this sonnet in *The Merchant of Venice* reinforce the specter of the deadly mother. Both demand that the excrement of the dead should be consigned to the sepulcher: it should not be allowed to escape its tomb to live a second life, to trouble the boundaries between subject and object, between living and dead: in short, to present itself as uncanny reminder of one's own mortality in the experience of the abject.

²⁵⁷ Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, eds., *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Like the monstrous hair of Stubbes' description, Bassanio's image of golden hair disturbs the male viewer as it reveals the abject. Further, this hair reeks of materialism in its resemblance to the "gaudy gold/ Hard food for Midas" (3.2.101-102) in one of Portia's caskets. The risk of "entrapment" by "supposed fairness" is not just that involved in choosing from among the gold, silver, and leaden boxes, however much Bassanio would insist. Entrapment by aesthetically pleasing materiality really means annihilation, for the root of this feigned beauty is death, the skull in the sepulcher. Base matter, represented by feminine seduction for both Stubbes and Bassanio, must remain tied firmly to the earth.

Similarly, Bassanio argues, cowards "whose hearts are all as false/ As stairs of sand" likewise wear "false" hair when they boast "beards of Hercules and frowning Mars" which turn out to be "but valor's excrement" (3.2.83-4,85,87). Bassanio's use of the word "excrement" would have signified not only "that which grows out or forth; an outgrowth; said esp. of hair, nails, feathers" but "superfluous matter thrown off [abjected?] by the bodily organs" as well.²⁵⁸ As Mary Douglas—whose theories informed Kristeva's own—argued, there is a sense in which

all margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of

²⁵⁸ "Excrement" def. 1 and 2, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. 9 Oct. 2009.

the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, fæces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat.²⁵⁹

The veil between the audience and the discovery space acts as this sort of margin, and is thus threateningly unstable, for it emphasizes the permeability of the boundary between self and other, the boundary vital to the maintenance of subjectivity. In this way, Bassanio's distaste for these permeable boundaries would heighten the drama of the curtains framing the caskets in the discovery space.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores the experience of abjection but only figuratively; the casket scenes perform revelations but these revelations are in a sense purified, the abject kept at a safe distance, for when the curtains are pulled back all the audience sees is the caskets, not "real" death or sex. Even while the figure of Medea as heroic sorceress and murderous mother lurks in the spaces where feminine bodies are kept, she never actually appears. Thus, while *The Merchant of Venice* explores what the abject is and does, it keeps the abject relatively obscene, that is, offstage and out of sight. It is represented—and disbursed—in various signs like the death's head (which remains merely a death's head, not, as we will see in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, anything "living"), the fool's head, and Portia's portrait. Like Portia's and Jessica's mothers, the maternal body in this play is kept under wraps. There are only insinuations of abjecting spectacles,

²⁵⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 121.

such as Bassanio's image of the veiled Indian, which hint at all the associations the veiled abject accrues onstage.

The Merchant of Venice uses the veil of makeup and masks to hint at the abject but to keep it out of view; however, it also complicates Kristeva's definition, inasmuch as Bassanio's speech argues that makeup and masks, rather than concealing the abject, can actually *be* the abject—the fair ornaments of flesh and golden hair are often the detritus of dead bodies, granted a second life. Similarly, the veil of ornament or of the discovery space draws attention to that which it claims to conceal: it is the means for hiding the abject but also the location for the abject's apocalypse.

“That shell of mother,” “thou shell of death”: Discovering Lack in Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy*

As I have argued, *The Merchant of Venice*'s use of the discovery space is in a sense more figurative: unveilings in this play do not reveal actual corpses or births or sex acts; rather, when the curtains of the discovery space are pulled back, they present intimations or representations of the abject at one remove, such as Bassanio's images of wanton hair and Indian beauties, or even the onstage portrayal of uncannily foreign figures such as the Muslim Morocco and the Catholic Aragon. Thus the abject remains in a sense veiled, the discovery space merely one more representation of the abject.

Middleton's *Revenger's Tragedy* more actively materializes the abject: instead of “hiding the grossness with fair ornament,” it thrusts the abject in all its physicality and foulness into the audience's faces. Three key scenes of unveiling in the play—that of

Antonio's dead wife, of the Duke and Duchess in bed together, and of Gloriana's skull—perform and explore the spectacle of the abject through the discovery space. Gloriana's skull in particular, as feminized death, comes to stand in for the abject *as it is enacted* in and through the discovery space. Whereas skulls and women's hair in *The Merchant of Venice* operated as mere representations of the abject, in *The Revenger's Tragedy* they are physical tools to prompt the experience of abjection. In this sense, the skull covered in false hair—feminized, eroticized death writ large—is an image that links the two plays' exploration of the abject. In fact, Celia R. Daileader reminds us, “when the ‘disguised’ romantic heroine [such as Portia] sheds ‘her’ masculine wig, we have no way of knowing that the long locks released from beneath are not also a wig—perhaps the same worn, in another production, by Gloriana’s skull.”²⁶⁰

Vindice's opening soliloquy employs the traditional “flesh as clothing” conceit, as he remembers Gloriana as she once was: “Thee when thou wert appareled in thy flesh” (1.1.31), and then instructs her to serve as a warning “to fat folks,/ To have their costly three-piled flesh worn off/ As bare as this” (1.1.45-7).²⁶¹ These opening lines establish the notion that flesh is impermanent, subject to decay but also merely one more item of clothing that can be put on and taken off. What is also key in the play's opening speech is Vindice's address to Gloriana's skull as “thou shell of death” and his command, “Advance thee, O thou terror”—for in this command we see the idea of the discovery-space-as-abject performed: Vindice makes the shell of death (the skull, but also the

²⁶⁰ *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage* 74.

²⁶¹ All citations taken from *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Revels Student Editions, ed. R.A. Foakes (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996).

discovery space as vessel of the abject) advance *toward* the audience, to diminish the distance between them and the abject. In this way, Vindice's use of the skull becomes an active performance of the unveiling of the discovery space that we have seen thus far. His revenge scene in Act 3 will further demonstrate the ways that Gloriana's skull *is* a discovery space containing the threat of death and nothingness, and thus the ways that the discovery space is inherently a performative actualization of abjection.

Indeed, when Hippolito enters this first scene and observes his brother he asks, "Still sighing o'er death's vizard?" (1.1.49) Hippolito's use of "vizard" here instructs us to think of Gloriana's skull as "a mask that covers as it contains mortality."²⁶² The skull acts a veil over the abject, similar to the way the curtains hanging in front of the discovery space function, in that it conceals and encloses the obscene specter of death; it is also, however, as we have seen, *part* of the abject at the same time: it is not completely separable from the abject as specter, since the abject entails revelation and thus *must* contain a veil. Thus, the skull displays the dual nature of the abject, as that which covers and that which is covered, the coexistence of seen and unseen which constitutes Kristeva's theory.

In the fourth scene of the play, the audience witnesses the entrance of Lord Antonio and other men, and their approach to the veiled discovery space. Antonio has orchestrated a scene that requires dis-covery (an act which will be repeated by Vindice in yet another scene of shocking revelation of feminine death). The stage direction is key

²⁶² Thomas P. Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co, 2006): 159.

here: “Enter the discontented Lord Antonio, whose wife the Duchess’s youngest son ravished; he discovering the body of her dead to [Piero], certain Lords, and Hippolito” (1.4.0.s.d.). Antonio acknowledges the drama of the scene he has prepared for his friends as well as the theatricality of his wife’s death: “Draw nearer, lords, and be sad witnesses/[of how]. . .Violent rape/ has played a glorious act” (1.4.1, 3-4). With these words he invites not only his companions but the audience members themselves to be spectators of a play within the play. His words will describe the action that, according to early modern stage convention, remained obscene, offstage; further, his story tells the audience what to make of the dead female form in front of them. Antonio imagines—in creative detail—what he did not himself witness, the scene of his wife’s rape, and he paints a picture straight out of the *danse macabre* tradition, of the presence of Death amidst a crowd of revelers.²⁶³ Such a scene is one Kristeva imagines to describe the meaninglessness of existence: that “throng of forsaken bodies beset with no longing but to last against all odds and for nothing.”²⁶⁴ In contrast to the lustful revelers in their masks and heat, however, Antonio describes his wife as “that dear form...who ever lived / as cold in lust as she is now in death” (1.4.34-5). Her story echoes Gloriana’s: both women died by poisoning, both women garner praise for valuing their chastity over their

²⁶³ Philippe Ariès describes a fresco in Campo Santo in Pisa from around 1350: “the whole upper or celestial half represents a battle between angels and devils over the souls of the deceased. The angels are carrying the elect off to heaven, while the devils are hurling the damned into hell. Accustomed as we are to the iconography of judgement, we feel perfectly at home. But in the lower half, we search in vain for the traditional images of resurrection. Instead a woman shrouded in long veils with her hair unbound flies over the world, ignores a crowd of cripples begging her for deliverance, and cuts down with her scythe, when they are least expecting it, some young people in a crowd of suitors paying court to a lady. She is a strange creature, who partakes of the nature of angel (for she flies and her body is anthropomorphic) and also of the devil and bestiality (for she has the wings of a bat)” (*The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver [New York: Knopf, 1981]), 112.

²⁶⁴ Powers 207.

lives, both women are described as cold, dry vessels rather than hot, leaky ones (unlike the rest of the women in the play).

Antonio's wife's virtue was that her outside truly represented her inside, that is, her "chaste presence" (1.4.8) was not an act. Indeed, as Hippolito notes, she is a sign to other women, like Gloriana's skull should be (according to Vindice), to reveal their sin and lead them to repent. Her presence now in her moment of revelation is indeed a chaste one: it is as the lifeless female form, in perfect stillness and intactness, no danger—we might think—of coming back to life. However, as the opening scene of the play and Vindice's speaking for Gloriana's skull have already hinted, corpses can return to "life" in the hands of vengeful lovers seeking to regain their manhood. Antonio might take a page from Vindice's playbook and use his wife's dead body as a prop with which to take revenge on another.

The next performance of revelation, in Act 2 Scene 3, features another female body, the sight of which is also petrifying; like the sight of Antonio's dead wife (whose corpse "strikes the man out of" him [1.4.5]), the sight of his stepmother threatens to "unman" Lussurioso. In the preceding scene, Vindice encountered Lussurioso and related to him the gossip he had learned about the Duchess's planned rendezvous with her stepson, Spurio. Vindice encourages Lussurioso's "heedless fury" at the news, urging him to "take 'em finely" in bed together (2.2.169,172); both Vindice and the audience, who saw and heard what Vindice did in the preceding scene, expect that Lussurioso will indeed discover the Duchess and Spurio in bed together. So the apocalypse—for that is what it literally is—is disconcerting.

The opening of this scene presents the audience—as well as Lussurioso and Vindice—with a “screened” bed, much as the opening of Act 1 Scene 4 did. Vindice hopes that Lussurioso will “take ’em twisted” and “kill ’em doubled, when they’re heaped” (2.3.2,4)—Vindice derives anticipatory pleasure from imagining the Duchess and Spurio in the act of copulation; the image he conjures with his words likewise increases the audience’s anticipation—we are primed to witness a scene both sexual and transgressive, but according to the conventions and limitations of the stage suspect that we won’t actually, in the end, see the kind of scene that Vindice paints for us. Thus, in these moments leading up to the unveiling of the lovers, the audience’s expectations are both aroused and confused. Like Lussurioso and Vindice, we as spectators are both horrified and attracted to the sin we imagine we will witness, but also to the abjecting reality with which we are faced when the couple is unveiled.

With the epithets “Villain! Strumpet!” (2.3.8), Lussurioso reveals the Duke and Duchess in bed instead of the Duchess and Spurio. R.A. Foakes argues that the revelation is a comic one in performance, especially in the “pause” that follows the unveiling, when the Duke “falls into a posture of penitence, perhaps kneeling to his own son” and Lussurioso is “horrified to encounter his father.”²⁶⁵ In fact, for Lussurioso the revelation is temporarily paralyzing: he stands “amazed” even “to death” (2.3.14). The sight of his father and stepmother in bed together, even if it was not what he expected, is more shocking to him than one might expect, as it is to the audience. It is a scene of *coitus interruptus*, but more importantly for Lussurioso, it is a scene reminiscent of his

²⁶⁵ Foakes 14.

father and mother and the coupling that presumably conceived him. His dead mother's absent presence thus lurks in this scene, much like the absent mothers that haunt *The Merchant of Venice*. This mother, this stand-in stepmother, however, is very much alive, full of sexual desire and deception. She represents the perversion of the idealized female figure we saw in Antonio's scene of revelation. Her presence here in the bed enacts the primal scene of abjection for Lussurioso, and his shock at seeing her—alive and desiring—has the same emasculating effect as Antonio's dead wife did. In this way, death in female form and (living) desire in female form are both performances of the same scene of abjection.

Janet Adelman's argument that *Hamlet* "is marked by the struggle to escape from this condition, to free the masculine identity of both father and son from its origin in the contaminated maternal body"²⁶⁶ is applicable here as well: Lussurioso teeters on the verge of collapse when confronted with a representation of maternal origins. In a similar scene of confrontation with one's sullied origins, Vindice loses the ability to speak. Where Lussurioso stands "amazed" at the sight of the parental bed, when Vindice allows himself to imagine his mother and father in bed together, he can only cry, "lack!" (1.2.129) Thomas P. Anderson argues that the "inability to articulate loss is a common trope in response to death during the [early modern] period"²⁶⁷; that Lussurioso and Vindice have the same reaction to parental union is telling.

²⁶⁶ Adelman 17.

²⁶⁷ *Performing Early Modern Trauma* 3.

In fact, Vindice's experience of his own living mother is annihilating to him. He tempts her to serve as pander of her own daughter, Castiza, and eventually she succumbs. Castiza, the chaste daughter, names the threat of the sullied mother when she attempts to exorcise Gratiana of the evil that possesses her in agreeing to pimp out her daughter: "Mother, come from that poisonous woman there!" Then, "Do you not see her [the poisonous woman]? She's too inward, then" (2.1.239, 241). Vindice carries Castiza's image of the abjecting mother into Act 4, when he calls Gratiana a "shell of mother" (IV.iv.10). Just as Gloriana's skull is for him (and for the audience) a shell of death, so is the maternal figure. Gratiana is likened to Gloriana not just in the similarity of their names but in being aligned as figures—and bearers—of death. In fact, Vindice's actual name, which determines his status as "revenger" like a figure from a morality play, hints at his purpose, which is not only to take vengeance on the luxurious sinners of the court but also on that "original" sin—the abjecting, obscene awareness of having originated in a woman's body.

The most abjecting revelation, of course, comes in the pivotal revenge scene, Act 3 Scene 5. The revelatory action here, like the act of revenge it accomplishes, is indicative of the horrors (this time for the Duke) that lie behind the veil. Instead of being contained within the discovery space of the stage, here the abject is more vehemently unleashed in Vindice's murderous revenge on the Duke, for rather than the skull remaining just a skull, an emblem of death, Vindice gives it a second life, like the hair that belongs, according to Bassanio, in the sepulcher. Gloriana's skull,²⁶⁸ painted with

²⁶⁸ The skull itself, and Vindice's obsession with it, has been the source of perhaps the most fascination in recent analyses of the play, much of which does consider the skull's movement between subject and object

poison, physically enacts the threats of contamination and annihilation that lurk beneath fears of the female body as site of death. Like Lussurioso and Vindice, Hippolito is struck speechless by the sight of the abject: when Vindice reveals to him the skull beneath the costume as they prepare for the Duke's arrival, Hippolito exclaims, "Why, brother, brother!" (3.5.49)

Vindice arranges a scene of seduction: having dressed the skull up as a living woman (the irony here is that beneath her clothing there is *literally* no-thing), he dims the lights (by telling his brother, "Back with the torch") and adds the enticing scent of perfumes ("raise the perfumes") (3.5.142).²⁶⁹ Here is a scene that enacts the very ornamentation that Bassanio descried in his deliberation speech. The ornamentation of the "tires," the darkness, the perfume all entice the Duke not just to sin (a fall for which he expresses no fear or remorse) but to death. For the Duke, of course, the revelation of the abject is literally lethal, and the kiss he receives from her is the kiss of death. Karin Coddon calls this scene "the play's emblematic moment: a savage literalization of the conventional love/death conjunction"²⁷⁰ and Peter Stallybrass notes that, in particular, the

and its troubling of the boundaries between living and dead, relic and fetish. For example, Andrew Sofer, in "The Skull on the Renaissance Stage: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Props" (*English Literary Renaissance* 28 [1998]: 47-74), posits the skull in *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *The Honest Whore, Part 1* as not merely a reworking of the *memento mori* tradition, but rather an anamorphic literalization of the way objects take on life onstage, vacillating between subject and object positions depending on one's point of view. For my purposes, I find Thomas P. Anderson's attention to the "death's vizard" metaphor—the skull as "a mask that covers as it contains mortality" (159) most useful, for the skull does act in some ways as a veil which conceals and marks death itself.

²⁶⁹ Phillip Massinger's Turk play, *The Renegado*, will expand this seduction scene to include another feminine other, that of the Muslim woman, who also employs these tools of seduction (veils, perfume) in order to "unman" Vitelli. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

²⁷⁰ Coddon 71.

mouth is the trope of abjection in the play, an assertion with which Janet Adelman would agree, for she notes a similar trope in *Hamlet*:

the overwhelming use of images of oral contamination and oral annihilation to register threats to the self suggests their origin in the earliest stages of emergent selfhood, when the nascent self is most fully subject to the mother's fantasied power to annihilate or contaminate.²⁷¹

The threat posed by reconnecting with the feminine—in the form of sexual union, represented in this scene by a kiss (since sex cannot be performed explicitly onstage)—is that of returning to that poisonous mother from whom one escaped. Connection to the female body dissolves the boundaries so stringently imposed between self and other in the moment of individuation. Such a move is represented in the act of unveiling, since to lift the veil one must touch it, and in the act of touching one becomes a part of that substance. The act of touching that the Duke commits in the kiss is an act of unveiling because it reveals that what lies beneath the lover's kiss is death. The Duke is similarly struck dumb by this experience of abjection: he can only cry "O!" The same orgasmic cry of pleasure is also the cry of abjection and death.

However, just when the Duke believes he has seen the worst, he witnesses a scene even more abjecting than the sight of his deadly mistress: his bastard son committing adultery with his wife. Spurio not only cuckolds the Duke by having sex with the Duke's wife, but by Spurio's having sex with his own (step)mother, Spurio in a sense forces the

²⁷¹ 29.

Duke to imagine himself in Spurio's place, having sex with *his* own mother. Such a sight further strikes the man—and the voice—out of him and he dies, once again conjoining the experience of annihilation to that of sexual desire and to the mother.

Like the male actor who must be dressed in women's clothing in order to be recognized as female, Gloriana's skull likewise requires costuming to accrue any sort of gender. Dressing her skull in women's clothing—including a veil or mask—feminizes the death's head, and theatricalizes death's connection to the feminine. Unveiling this skull, as Vindice does, first for his brother, then for the Duke, enacts the psyche's experience of apocalyptic abjection. He acknowledges the theatricality of the primal scene, too: it requires a looking subject and a horrifying object (which hovers at the very border between subject and object); that which is dead should remain dead and when it doesn't, when it asserts itself to the viewer, it unveils the fragility of the construction. Vindice even calls the skull a "property," a term Margaret Jane Radin shows has two connotations—an object one owns and "an attribute: of a thing, concept, argument, person, etc."²⁷² In this way, the abject object—the corpse, cadaver, the feminine body—is both an object one interacts with and an attribute, an object-within, that contributes to self-constitution. As such, Vindice's use of the skull-as-woman takes the convention of the discovery space one step further: whereas in *The Merchant of Venice*, the discovery space was the locus for all that must be disavowed in the interest of self-maintenance, and in the first part of *The Revenger's Tragedy* the discovery space was the cordoned-off

²⁷² Qtd. in Sofer 70. Sofer's point is that a property's being both object and attribute means that "in watching these [early modern] plays, we—as well as the characters themselves—cannot disengage the 'dead' property from the 'live' person whose property it is" (71).

space to remember one's beginning and end, here Gloriana's empty "body" behind the costume, and the empty skull behind the veil, enacts in physical form what the discovery space as stage convention only represented. The skull itself becomes an emblem or microcosm for the discovery space at large: it is "death's vizard" (1.1.49)—a shell, a container, a vessel but also "a mask that covers as it contains mortality."²⁷³ If, for Shakespeare all the world's a stage, for Middleton all the world may very well be a discovery space, that is, an empty space whose ornaments and coverings conceal not truth but emptiness. More importantly, here it is also feminine, dressed in the accoutrements—makeup, clothing, masks, veils, "fair ornaments"—which make women so alluring and threatening, as we saw in Shakespeare's work.

The deferral and the emptiness of revenge is the play's way of revealing the abjection inherent in self-fashioning, the primal rejection of the (m)other which allows a self to exist; the play also reveals, however, the unstable nature of this construction and the need for constant vigilance and self-assertion in the face of the abject, of death, of all that doesn't fit. The masculine subject, then, depends upon a differentiation from and disavowal of his maternal, bodily origins and his own mortality and corporeality. Vindice's obsession with Gloriana's skull demonstrates, too, that death represents the erotic collapse of boundary between (male) subject and (female) object; for the Duke, sex literally represents death; and both sex and death emanate from the female body.

²⁷³ Anderson 159.

In conclusion, the passage from Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* that serves as epigraph to this chapter might benefit from a slight modification in its terms: rather than "literature" as a whole, drama and in particular early modern drama *as it was performed onstage* represents an elaboration and a discharge of the abject. The ambivalence of the abject—simultaneous desire and disgust, attraction and repulsion—is both reflected and enacted onstage through the performative convention and architectural structure known as the discovery space. This space is both abjecting and abjected; the curtain or veil that conceals and creates it is like the veil of the Symbolic the subject places between himself and the maternal function in the moment(s) of psychic individuation. Cary Howie's theory of the "erotics of enclosure" illuminates this ambivalence, this dual state, as it is experienced in the theatrical:

[T]he work of art is enclosed even as it discloses itself to the viewer; there is something irresistibly resistant about the artwork's relationship to the potentially appropriative gaze. An aesthetic ambivalence—do I or do I not want to be seen?—gives way to an ethical ambivalence: is visibility always virtuous? Will we like what we see? What happens when the enclosive function of the artwork is aligned with sexuality or death? An ethics of interpretation, or even of sensory reception (before and beyond interpretation), requires an intervention into the artwork's constitutive ambivalence. It requires intensifying, not abandoning, the specificity of

the sexed body, or the dead letter, as they give themselves equivocally to sight.²⁷⁴

The early modern stage is a space of enclosure, in that it presents a tableau of symbols and messages to be perceived and interpreted. The veiled discovery space within that (permeable) enclosure of the stage emblemizes the multidimensionality of interpretation—the need for further penetration, the innerspace that promises understanding but threatens annihilation.

For “those who fear death and decay at the touch of the feminine”²⁷⁵ the discovery space onstage is a place to explore the experience of abjection at a reasonably safe distance. Vacillation between lyric idealizations and vehement demonizations of the feminine are attempts to represent what is imagined to be lost in the act of abjection. The ideal woman, the pre-Symbolic mother, however, is always already lost, so these attempts to re-present her are doomed to fail. What are left are ugly signs of that failure. As Murray Krieger puts it, “Any pretension by [words] to present reality is frustrated by the *re*, which requires that what they would represent—what has already presented itself in person—has had its presence, its presentness, elsewhere and earlier.”²⁷⁶ Early modern theatrical convention complicates this literary ambivalence further, since women onstage must be portrayed by either men or, in Vindice’s artifice, androgynous skulls. The

²⁷⁴ 4-5.

²⁷⁵ *Horror* 159.

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Laurie Finke, “Painting Women: Images of Femininity in Jacobean Tragedy,” *Theatre Journal* 36.3 (1984): 357-370, esp. 362.

discovery space is one way, then, to embody what cannot be embodied, to enact the unveiling of what can never be truly unveiled.

**(Un)Veiling the Muslim Woman: The Pleasure of Fetishistic Fantasy in Massinger's
The Renegado and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters***

In his 1588 anthropological account, *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, Thomas Harriot describes a ceremonial dance performed by the native people:

At a Certayne tyme of the yere they make a great, and solemne feaste whereunto their neighbours of the townes adioininge repayre from all parts, euery man attired in the most strange fashion they can deuise hauinge certayne marks on the backs to declare of what place they bee. The place where they meet is a broade playne, abowt the which are planted in the grownde certayne posts carued with heads like to the faces of Nonnes couered with theyr vayles. Then beeing sett in order they dance, singe, and vse the strangest gestures that they can possiblye deuise.

. . .²⁷⁷

That Harriot likens the totems' heads to nuns' faces "couered with theyr vayles" might seem to be merely one way to make sense of a "strange" custom in an image an English reader could identify. However, in Protestant England for a figure to be described as a veiled nun would be damning, since convents were reminiscent of England's Roman

²⁷⁷ *The Complete 1590 Edition with the 28 Engravings by Theodor de Bry After the Drawings of John White with Other Illustrations* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 64. The accompanying engraving by Theodor de Bry from a drawing by John White illustrates the totems clearly as nuns' heads with wimples, and these are interspersed with the "savages" dancing in a circle.

Catholic past.²⁷⁸ Indeed, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the exoticism of the New World, the mystery of the East, along with the seductive materiality of other coeval religions, was often imagined in similar terms; that is, the veil was a metonymy for that moveable signifier of the Orient—any place or person not identified as European and who was thus placed in “the past.” For Harriot, as for many others, traveling to other (non-Christian) lands meant traveling to other times—even to, England’s own, more primitive past, here embodied by the veiled nun.

What Harriot’s conflation of the Native American and the Roman Catholic reminds us is that, “While geographical boundaries of the ‘Orient’ shifted throughout history, the concept of ‘Orient’ as ‘Other’ has remained more or less unchanged.”²⁷⁹ That is, the savage Indian is as much Oriental as the East Indian, the North African, the Roman Catholic, the Jew: the Oriental is he or she who is not a European Protestant Christian. The linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or temporal other is the figure against whom the self measures himself. In his analysis of the racial construction of the Saracen in medieval literature, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that such productions of self and other persist so tenaciously because they are grounded in and propelled by an insidious interplay of pleasure and disavowal:

Fantasies of racial difference are always constructed through a structure of *enjoyment* which, even if historical in its genesis, may—once absorbed

²⁷⁸ As I discussed in Chapter 1, of course, England’s Roman Catholic “past” was very much alive and present in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

²⁷⁹ Milica Bakić-Hayden, “Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia” (*Slavic Review* 54.4 [Winter 1995], 917-931), 917.

into the deep structure of identity—function immune to subsequent transformations of cultural context. Unless the collective *jouissance* which saturates racializing images and narratives is somehow disentangled, altered, emptied of its mesmerizing power, then the fantasies which this enjoyment supports remain impervious to historical change. It is not enough simply to reveal the artificiality of race (or any other identity) in a specific case: *the fantasy which structures enjoyment and produces race* (or any other identity) must likewise be ungrounded in order for change to enter the world.²⁸⁰

Indeed, as this chapter will suggest, even in moments when the veil of the Orient is stripped away, the fantasy persists.

One very powerful way of imagining and apprehending the other was in terms of its inscrutability—an unknown that begged to be known, an unseen that begged to be seen. Both on the stage and in travelers' accounts, the act of seeing was portrayed as an act of knowing and possessing, penetrating (or attempting to penetrate) the veil of the Orient in a similar manner by which the secrecy of the veiled nuns had been exposed with the dissolution of the convents.²⁸¹ As I argued in my introduction and indeed throughout this dissertation, during the early modern period, particularly after the

²⁸⁰ “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England” (*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31.1 [2001]: 113-146), 124.

²⁸¹ As Valerie Traub notes, “the sultan’s harem generated comparisons to convents which, in anti-Catholic polemic, were reputed to be a haven for ‘unclean’ behaviors.” (*The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002]), 200. Both locations were, of course, the site of veiled women.

Reformation, the veil came to be associated with retrograde, idolatrous Catholic practice, and with the seductive material beauty of luxury goods and exterior shows. My discussion of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* alluded to what I will consider in more depth here, that is, the ways in which, during the seventeenth century, the veil sheds its multivalence and begins to solidify into a more singular symbol of and for the Orient. In this chapter I explore Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and early modern travelers' accounts to trace the veil's function in emerging Orientalist discourse. The veil in these texts inhabits a duality that we have seen to be constitutive of the veil itself; first, it signifies the seductive materiality and mystery of the East—embodied by the Muslim woman—and second, it acts as a point of access for the English observer, a threshold of knowledge and the promise of possession and mastery, a local habitation and a name for that movable and capacious signifier, the Orient. *The Renegado* performs the fantasy of the conversion and redemption of the Muslim temptress and this act is symbolized—and indeed the Muslim woman is epitomized—by the veil. When Donusa converts to Christianity and marries Vitelli, we are made to believe that she has relinquished her veil (sign of seduction, resistance and unknowability) and has been recuperated for Christendom. In early modern travel narratives—those written by male travelers, ambassadors, and traders as well as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*—the veil acts as a visible signifier for an invisible, or unspeakable, desire. For the men it is what keeps them from truly accessing the inner sanctum of the sultan's seraglio but which also enables the Orient to be imagined as in need of revelation; for Montagu the veil is the costume that allows her to move freely within—and thus, she imagines, partake of—the pleasures and spectacles of Turkish life. For both men and

women, the veil is a mobile signifier for the pleasure of the East and that which collects, presents, and then denies those pleasures for the European traveler. That these fantasies were likewise projected on the New World is evident from Harriot's account of the natives' totems, which are at once fascinating and inscrutably foreign. My discussion spans from late sixteenth-century texts, through *The Renegado* (first performed in 1624), to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Letters* (written in the second decade of the 18th century) in order to show the ways that, even before it was an empire, Britain expressed imperial fantasies of domination and mastery, even if these fantasies were not yet economically and politically realized.

As Cohen notes in the passage cited above, what propels the construction of racial (and religious) difference is fantasy, in particular the fantasy of an object other as the site of an excessive pleasure that the European Christian has virtuously renounced (but of which he might seize a glimpse as he penetrates the Oriental veil). Alain Grosrichard's *The Sultan's Court*, as well as Mladen Dolar's insightful introduction to the text, thus informs much of my thinking on this subject. That is, Grosrichard's identification of the fantasy that undergirds Orientalism—and the pleasures therein imagined and disavowed by the Western subject—is crucial to an understanding of the veil's function in early modern English literature. As Dolar puts it, what Grosrichard's theory does is to articulate the *subjective* function of Orientalist fantasy; in other words, the fantasy of the despot “provided a setting and a screen, a necessary background” for the project of European subjectivity. Indeed, the root of the word “fantasy” means “to make visible.”²⁸²

²⁸² “Fantasy, phantasy, n.” etymology, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 4 December 2009.

The always-veiled oriental despot acts as a fetish which marks and then disavows the economies of desire and subjection that sustain Western constructions of identity. Grosrichard's temporal focus is the period of the Enlightenment but the fetishistic disavowals of pleasure he identifies are very much present in early modern "Turk" drama, which inherited and reworked medieval "anti-Saracen" narratives, and thus fostered and enabled Enlightenment discourses of rational Europeans in opposition to sensual, primitive Orientals.²⁸³ Indeed, the elements of the despotic household that Grosrichard identifies in Enlightenment and modern fantasies—the eunuch, the janissaries, the harem—are present in early modern drama and in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century travelers' and merchants' accounts. These elements provide early modern Englishmen and women with a vocabulary of signs, or a cast of figures, to apprehend the perceived foreignness of the Orient. The veil, like the despot, comes to stand in for the whole economy of desire through which ethnic alterity and domestic identity are imagined. In particular, the veil represents both the perceived mystery and luxury of the Orient *and* a hopeful key to its apprehension and mastery. It is also what, paradoxically, promises to keep concealed the void at the center of the fantasy, which is

²⁸³ For a discussion of medieval fantasies of the "Saracen" see Suzanne Conklin-Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009). Jeffrey Jerome Cohen cogently articulates the functions of Orientalism not only for the medieval period but beyond; invoking Grosrichard and Dolar, he argues, "Orientalist dreams of distant, copious indulgence provide a necessary support for the West's sacrificial systems of nationhood and identity in that they maintain the fantasy that a potentially recoverable *full* enjoyment is in fact located somewhere, even if it is not possessed by 'us'" ("Saracen Enjoyment" 125). Indeed, as he demonstrates, the "enjoyment" provided by the Orientalist fantasy is what enables it to persist even after its original object or purpose disappears; his point, that "racialized representations remain tenacious even after they are literally unmasked" (124), is one Lady Montagu's accounts will quite literally perform as well.

the awareness that rather than absolute difference between self and other one might find an abjecting similitude. As Samuel Chew noted in *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England During the Renaissance*,

The interest of Europeans centered with a natural though often prurient curiosity upon the Seraglio...because in it were practiced, or were reported to be practiced, barbarous cruelties and extravagant sensualities which were none the less frequently described for being characterized as indescribable.²⁸⁴

The veil embodies this paradox inasmuch as it makes visible (by acting as material symbol) an invisible desire; yet in moments where, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen puts it, “pagan and Christian subjectivities seem close enough almost to touch,” the veil is employed to reassert the boundary between self and other. Instead of acting as a unifying medium of touch, as it does in Christian mysticism and incarnational theology, in Orientalist discourse the veil functions to distance and to differentiate. That is, when the object of desire is not God but a non-Christian other, the veil’s salvific power to conceal is more alluring than its power to reveal.

Daniel Vitkus and other scholars have done important work identifying early modern fantasies of the Orient as expressed in drama, poetry, captivity narratives, and

²⁸⁴ Cited in Vitkus “Early Modern Orientalism: Representations of Islam in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe” (*Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999]: 207-230), 223.

travelers' accounts.²⁸⁵ Even though these characterizations of Islam were wholly inaccurate they are, as Vitkus notes, nonetheless “‘real’ in the sense that any such representation has a material and ideological impact as a historical phenomenon: it is a mode of perception that shapes the way people think and therefore the way they act.”²⁸⁶ Indeed, the veil became a convenient symbol of this mode of perceiving an imagined cultural, ethnic, or religious other, whether (s)he was Jewish, Catholic or Muslim. That is, the veil lends itself as a means of apprehending, containing, and—it is hoped—undoing the very titillation and anxiety it provokes. The veil represents the seductiveness of secrecy and mystery, incites fear about what might lie behind it and a concomitant desire to penetrate its exterior; it also, as a (re)movable item, promises the explorer or viewer an opportunity to strip it away, to *see* what lies beneath and thus, it is imagined, own, possess and master it. Moreover, all of the psychological and libidinal energies invested in such revelatory projects also distract from domestic and personal anxieties. The veil is thus a screen onto which the gazer projects his own sense of lack, by imagining that the real lack lies behind the veil, not within himself.

Thus, as the veil comes in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to function as a synecdoche for Islam, it provides the Western subject with a way to understand, and position himself in opposition to, an unknowable and therefore

²⁸⁵ In addition to the sources cited in this chapter, see Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999); Gerald Maclean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); Benedict S. Robinson, *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁸⁶ “Early Modern Orientalism” 207-8.

threatening other; as the texts this chapter explores demonstrate, such a mode of knowing is thus not merely a “modern” or post-Enlightenment one. Just as it has done in the texts I considered in previous chapters, the veil here continues to exist as paradox: as ornament it is that which must be rejected, but as threshold to a foreign body it is that which offers a chance to assimilate that body by visually possessing and consuming it. Like the veil, “[t]he Islamic Orient was both beautiful and dangerous, open to assimilation and that which must be utterly rejected.”²⁸⁷

Many feminist critics have taken issue with Said’s exclusion of gender and sexuality in his theorization of Orientalism. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, for example, maintains that sexuality is not some subtopic of Orientalism but is rather constitutive of the fantasy that undergirds the entire process. Citing Homi Bhabha’s notion of fetish in colonial discourse (Bhabha argues that in Orientalist thought, the penis—that which the other lacks—is replaced by skin color or racial/cultural difference), Yeğenoğlu reminds us that “[t]he function of the fetish is to *disavow* the perception of difference.”²⁸⁸ She applauds Bhabha’s suturing of “the problematic of cultural representation with the problematic of subjectivity” and the ways that both modes display simultaneous desire and loathing, but laments his lack of any deeper analysis of sexuality in colonial

²⁸⁷ Conklin Akbari 5. For a cogent analysis of “whether and, if so, in what terms, we can speak of” Orientalism(s) before the temporal period established by Said, see also pages 6-19. Akbari cites Aijaz Ahmad’s recognition of the plurality of Said’s theory, that is, the ways in which it is identified *both* as a mode of binary thinking dating back to Antiquity and a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient.” In other words, as Akbari puts it, “Orientalism [for Said] is both the necessary precondition of imperialism and its consequence” (6).

²⁸⁸ *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 28.

discourse.²⁸⁹ What I will argue in the pages that follow is that the veil acts as the inversion of a fetish,²⁹⁰ or rather that as fetish it disavows a perception not of *difference* but a fear of *similitude* between self and other. The veil thus acts as marker of division in order to institute difference where the subject fears there is none, to mark the other as different in order to disavow a dread of similarity. Grosrichard's articulation of the fantasy of the oriental despot is useful here, for what undergirds and necessitates the fantasy is a disavowal of the systems of power and subjection within one's own society, these systems being foisted onto the orientals who submit and relinquish all pleasure and power to the despot. If it is the Orient that subscribes to such a ridiculous, tyrannous mode of subjection then the European must be somehow different. Imagining the Orient as behind the veil, then, separates it and marks it off, placing the European on the outside of that system, keeping him pure.

Yeğenoğlu in fact recognizes the function of the veil in the orientalist imaginary:

Veil is thus a multilayered signifier which refers at once to an attire which covers the Muslim woman's face, and to that which hides and conceals the Orient and Oriental woman from apprehension; it hides the real Orient and keeps its truth from Western knowledge/apprehension. It is also a metaphor of membrane, serving as a screen around which Western fantasies of penetration revolve. It is the polysemous character of the veil

²⁸⁹ Ibid 27. See especially pages 28-29.

²⁹⁰ See the Introduction to this dissertation for a fuller discussion of the fetish as well as the veil's function in psychoanalytic theories of fetishism.

which seems to play such a crucial role in the unique articulation of the sexual with cultural difference in Orientalist discourse.²⁹¹

Her characterization of the veil here accords with mine, though Yeğenoğlu's focus is modern Orientalism as defined temporally by Said. Much of what Yeğenoğlu identifies is applicable to early modern Europe, however, for as Aijaz Ahmad has noted, Orientalism is as much "a style of thought" as a material practice.²⁹² The fantasy that sustains Orientalism is precisely the fantasy that enables imperialism and colonialism, in that it promotes a way of knowing and perceiving an other as through a veil. During the early modern period, before England is in any sense an empire, the fantasy is not one of political and economic domination, at least not yet; rather, it is focused more on that process of identity formation that relies on the ethnic and religious other, one who must be identified, differentiated, and then consumed and assimilated. Thus, though the object of desire shifts in the development of Orientalism, *the motivation for that desire* remains unchanged. Indeed, the desire to *see* (to unveil, to know, to appropriate) a perceived other is not a modern phenomenon. If, in early modern England, the Islamic world is not yet the focus of *economic* and *political* imperial fantasies, it is the same space of darkness and lack that must first be apprehended before it can be conquered.

Most literary and cultural criticism that has emerged in the past ten years has focused either on identifying imperialist or proto-imperialist rhetoric and practices in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, or has argued that, because of England's

²⁹¹ Ibid 47.

²⁹² Cited in Akbari 8.

failure to establish itself as yet on the global colonial stage, that it is historically inaccurate to assign imperialist or colonialist appellations to England's encounters with the Islamic (or American) cultures.²⁹³ My study of the veil in this chapter subscribes to the notion that Orientalism, as it empowers, enables, and encourages colonial and imperial acts, is as much a mode of knowing; indeed, use of the veil to create difference and to trace the outlines of an alterity in need of revelation and mastery, as England inserted itself on the global stage, is one rhetorical construct which contributes to that very project of empire. And as critics such as Yeğenoğlu have demonstrated by highlighting the work of gender and sexuality in imperialist ideologies, such an argument avoids the risk of binary polarization that Daniel Vitkus argues makes Orientalism anachronistic when applied to the early modern period; for the veil was used, as my earlier chapters have shown, to create and mark differences not only between England and its ethnic, non-European others, but between Protestant males and their "domestic" others such as Catholics, Jews, and women. My argument here thus allows for the multiplicity of ethnic identities—Moors, Indians, North Africans, Turks, and other Islamicate cultures—because ultimately I argue that the veil is not a marker of a specific ethnic group so much as it is that screen onto which English identity can be projected. The veil covers an imagined lack that can and does include any non-English, non-Protestant group of peoples. The mode of knowing, and desiring to see, that the veil

²⁹³ For examples of the former, see Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa: The University of South Florida Press, 1991) and Emily Bartels, *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); for the latter see Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1750-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Nabil I. Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999).

symbolizes is but one thread in the fabric of what would become the British empire, but it is also a thread that stretches further back and covers more than just political and economic acts. Indeed, for the purposes of my argument the multiplicity of encounter that scholars such as Matar and Vitkus have identified almost ceases to matter, in that there is no “real” essence or individual person behind the fantasy of the veil. Domestic consumption of travelers’ accounts and Turk plays relies on an unnamed, unknowable and unknown space of lack rather than any “real” Muslim figure. Even those who traveled to the spaces imagined as the Orient experienced their encounters and then narrativized them as continuations of received or newly invented fantasies of who or what the sultan or his harem was; for writers such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and her male predecessors and contemporaries, the value of the Turk or the Moor lay less in his unique individuality and more on how he could perform for or reflect back the needs and desires of his English visitor.

Watch and Learn: Unveiling the Muslim Temptress in Massinger’s *The Renegado*

The early modern stage was one site in which an English person could experience the fantasy of the Orient, in all its sensual allure, and there was a sense in which one’s experience within the space of the theatre might have a prophylactic effect, educating or warning one against the dangers represented by the Orient. By watching the action onstage, too, one could inhabit the stance of a traveler to a foreign land who sees the mysteries of the East unveiled before him. Exiting the theater one might have the feeling

that the Orient had been seen, smelled, heard and thus mastered, without leaving the comfort and safety of London.

The Renegado is one such play which performs the fantasy of the sultan's court and the seductive Muslim princess. It intertwines these fantasies with anxieties about trade and commerce in general, and the threats they posed to a stable, pure English identity. Because the play opens in the marketplace, for example, we are invited to consider how, as Daniel Vitkus puts it, "the desire for profit leads to other lusts, and the market becomes a site of temptation and potential contamination."²⁹⁴ Indeed, the objects Gazet fondles and describes to Vitelli explicitly link object commodities and corporeal commodities:

...our wares,

Though brittle as a maidenhead at sixteen,

Are safe unladen; not a crystal cracked

Or china dish needs soldering. (1.1.2-5)²⁹⁵

Gazet's trifles, we are to understand, are not only as fragile as a maidenhead, but just as tempting and as valuable; the maidenheads of the Muslim Donusa and the Christian

²⁹⁴ Three Turk Plays 41. In "The 'Turks,' Caroline Politics, and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*," Benedict S. Robinson argues that Gazet's wares "metaphorical and literal sexiness suggest that there is something promiscuous about buying and selling, that in the marketplace commercial relations slide easily into other relations." (*Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern English Stage, 1625-1642*, ed. Adam Zucker and Alan B. Farmer [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006], 213-237), 219.

²⁹⁵ The play text is taken from Daniel Vitkus's anthology, *Three Turk Plays from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), 240-344. All subsequent citations will include Act, Scene, and line numbers only.

Paulina will prove just as desirable to both Muslim and Christian men. When Vitelli questions Gazet's morality, in that the latter admits that "Live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva:/ I'm of that country's faith" (1.1.36-7), Gazet's response gestures toward the fear of castration that haunts the Christian men throughout the play: he will not "turn Turk" (38) because then "I should lose/ A collop of that part my Doll enjoined me/ To bring home as she left it: 'tis her venture,/ Nor dare I barter that commodity/ Without her special warrant" (38-42). Here Gazet returns to the idea of bodies as commodities, this time the male anatomy being valuable to the female, instead of the reverse. This interchange presents the dynamic with which the play wrestles, that of the powerful female and the imperiled man; as Vitkus notes, Donusa's "exotic charms and social status reverse the normative dynamic of power and gender, compelling Vitelli to submit to a woman's will."²⁹⁶

In addition to its suturing of the marketplace and the body, the play conjoins a knowledge of the religious other to a knowledge of oneself. Vitelli's spiritual guide, Francisco, repeatedly cautions him to "know" or "remember" himself especially in the face of such dangers as are presented by Muslim women and by material wealth. To know oneself or to re-collect oneself in the face of dissolution and temptation is one of the key responsibilities of the Christian traveling to Muslim territory. Indeed, Francisco's first speech is a rejoinder to Vitelli's mock-heroic query, "Have we tried Fortune's malice with our sufferings?" (1.1.67) Francisco responds:

You give too much to Fortune and your passions,

²⁹⁶ Ibid 41.

O'er which a wise man, if religious, triumphs.

That name fools worship; and those tyrants, which

We arm against our better part, our reason,

May add, but never take, from our afflictions. (1.1.70-4)

Francisco's speech here ostensibly focuses on Vitelli's foolish empowerment of such a secular figure as Fortune. However, since this speech follows Gazet and Vitelli's conversation about the dangers and allures (both economic and corporeal) of the Tunisian marketplace, we are reminded as well of the link between commerce, material wealth, and the Muslim potentate, such a "tyrant" and "fool" who "worships" the wrong things, who submits to his "passions" rather than to (Christian) reason. Our first characterization of our hero, Vitelli, cautions us as to his weakness—his almost "Oriental" inability to reign in his passion, rely on reason, and maintain his purity in the face of temptations. Vitelli's experience in Tunis will be as much an exercise in self-knowledge as it is in knowledge of the Oriental other, and vice versa. Vitelli responds to his master's warning, "I am schooled, sir,/ And will hereafter, to my utmost strength,/ Study to be myself" (86-88). The Christian must "learn" how to "be himself" by learning what it means *not* to be himself; that is, his encounter with the non-Christian teaches him more about himself than it does about the non-Christian. And whereas Vitelli's journey through Tunis has spiritual consequences, Gazet's education—and his lack of understanding of Muslim culture—has (almost) bodily consequences as well. The lesson to be learned is that one

must know the foreign other so that one can avoid falling prey to that culture, spiritually and physically.²⁹⁷

In *The Renegado* we see two stand-out fetish objects which represent and canalize the energy around the commodities with which we are presented in the opening scene of the marketplace. Donusa's veil and Paulina's protective relic stand in as fetishes for feminine chastity and (w)holeness, and are also items each woman wears to "protect" herself from masculine penetration. Both, too, represent a system of belief lorded over by a despot, the veil of Islam (and its phantasmatic despot, embodied in the black box) and the quasi-magical relic of Catholicism that prevents Paulina from being violated by Asambeg. The sultan's black box and the foreskin lost in circumcision (or, in Christian misunderstanding, the testicles) are the masculine counterparts to these fetish objects: the sultan's black box represents that "black hole" toward which all desire and energy is directed in the fantasy of the despot, and the "stones" Gazet almost trades in for the promised pleasure of that fantasy memorialize and disavow the castration fear of the Christian in a "pagan" land of luxury and temptation.

Donusa's veil is the fetish object *par excellence* because it represents the seductive materiality of Islam as a whole, as well as the mystery of woman and her desire; it also provides a way to disavow, to hide, the fantasy and its pleasure by linking it to that Muslim other, thereby "renouncing enjoyment."²⁹⁸ Since "fantasy" "makes

²⁹⁷ Other speeches and scenes in which Francisco as voice of (Christian) virtue and reason warns Vitelli to "know" or "master" himself include 1.1.140-158, as well as 3.2.1-26; Vitelli's speech to Donusa in Act 3 Scene 5 contrasts reason and religion with the irrationality and frailty he "took from my mother" and "That still pursues me" (now in the form of ultimate feminine seduction, the Muslim temptress).

²⁹⁸ Dolar xviii.

visible,” the veil can be considered a material representation, a blank screen that hides the desired object and thus presents itself as open to the viewer to project his fantasies. Because the despot can never truly be seen (“the place of the despot is a vanishing point, evoked and veiled by the double device of the gaze and the letter”²⁹⁹), and particularly in *The Renegado* he is only “seen” through his representatives and through the letter of judgement that the black box brings, the veil operates as a making visible of the luxury and pleasure he is imagined to enjoy. For the English theatre-goer, Donusa’s veil is a convenient vanishing point for the fantasy of the Orient. As Mladen Dolar notes, “There is a strange loop, a circularity of fantasy: it itself fills the lack which it itself opens up and perpetuates. It opens it by filling it, and can fill it only by constantly evoking it.”³⁰⁰ Importantly, too, the wearer of the veil is the one who can remove it—the gazing English subject is powerless to effect its removal, so that this subject keeps watching, keeps hoping for (and fearing) the moment Donusa will reveal herself. I say he *fears* the removal of the veil because its removal threatens total annihilation of the fantasy, since “fantasy can procure enjoyment only by keeping at a distance, by providing the screen against the impossible Real, thus keeping the subject and his or her desire in an ambiguous in-between state.”³⁰¹ This is why, even when the audience and Vitelli are granted access to Donusa’s private chamber, the consummation of her seduction must take place even further within; the enjoyment of pleasure can be hinted at but not visually accessed.

²⁹⁹ Ibid xxi.

³⁰⁰ xxii.

³⁰¹ xxii.

Vitkus argues that Donusa “resembles a conventional figure from the romance tradition—the virtuous Saracen maiden...who is converted to Christianity after falling in love with a virtuous Christian knight.”³⁰² However Donusa might recall such a stock figure, it is important to note that she seduces—purposefully—her object of affection, losing her virginity and thus any mark of (Christian) virtue. She herself voices the stereotype of the Muslim woman in her first appearance in Act 1, Scene 2:

...I have heard

That Christian ladies live with much more freedom

Than such as are born here. Our jealous Turks

Never permit their wives to be seen

But at the public bagnios or the mosques,

And even then, veiled and guarded.³⁰³ (1.2.16-21)

She herself decides to enter the marketplace, out of curiosity and boredom: “I feel a virgin’s longing to descend/ So far from my own greatness as to be,/ Though not a buyer, yet a looker on/ Their strange commodities” (1.2.114-117). Benedict S. Robinson notes that “we easily translate her desire to windowshop into a kind of voyeurism.”³⁰⁴ The veiled and guarded Muslim woman looking out from beneath her veil is as much a

³⁰² *Three Turk Plays* 42.

³⁰³ Her fantasy is an interesting counterpoint to the received maxim, articulated by Robert Burton, that a “good woman ...should go out of her house three times in her life: for her baptism, her marriage, and her funeral” (cited by Gaia Servadio, *Renaissance Woman* [London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2005], 8).

³⁰⁴ *Islam and Early Modern English Literature: The Politics of Romance from Spenser to Milton* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), 219.

desiring voyeur as those who behold her. Donusa is thus expected to represent all the luxurious vice of Islam but she also embodies the emptiness of the despot, who has access to all pleasure and yet is impotent. Right before she approaches Vitelli's stand, Francisco warns Vitelli to beware such

... Turkish dames

(Like English mastiffs that increase their fierceness

By being chained up), from the restraint of freedom,

If lust once fire their blood from a fair object,

Will run a course the fiends themselves would shake at

To enjoy their wanton ends. (1.3. 8-13)

The fantasy of the overly sexual, repressed Muslim woman echoes uncannily the fantasy that Englishwomen (like their bestial counterparts, the mastiffs), though they may seem cold and free from desire, are aching to run wild on a sexually debauched spree, to make cuckolds of their husbands if given the chance. This anxiety is reflected in Carazie's satiric description of Englishwomen who "give free entertainment to all comers" (1.2.30). But here that fantasy is displaced onto the Turkish woman, who says, "We enjoy no more/ That are of the Ottoman race, though *our religion/ Allows all pleasure*" (1.2.48-50, emphasis added).

The fear of letting the (Muslim or English) woman move freely in the public sphere is that she will make iniquitous use of the trifles and objects she finds there. Gazet

offers among his wares everything from “the mirror of the madam to the private utensil of her chambermaid” (1.3.2-3), the latter ambiguous enough that he might, in performance, hold up something shaped like a cucumber. Michel de Baudier’s *Histoire generale du serrail et de la cour du Grand Seigneur, Empereur des Turcs*, written around the same time as *The Renegado*, featured an account of the harem’s uncontrolled lechery:

Fruits are sent unto them with circumspection: If their appetites demand any pompeons which are somewhat long, or cowcumbers, and such other fruits, they cut them at the Gate in slices, not suffering to passe among them any slight occasion of doing evil, so bad an opinion do they have of their continencie.³⁰⁵

Indeed, Gazet’s sales pitch is immediately followed by Francisco’s admonition that these Turkish women might become inflamed by such “a fair object.” Even if the Englishwoman would not make use of such a utensil, she might abuse other material goods she sees in the marketplace and thus might unleash her desire in inappropriate ways.

Donusa has donned her veil before entering the marketplace, such that when she approaches the Venetians’ stall she is covered. After being presented with Vitelli’s ornamented language and ornamental goods, which are presumably held up to the audience’s view, she presents herself as a similar commodity which she believes cannot

³⁰⁵ Cited in Vitkus “Turning” 116.

be “matched” and takes off her veil, presenting herself to view. The sight of her makes Vitelli “amazed,” the same word to used to describe him when he first sees her within her own chambers the next day, in the seduction scene she has so carefully orchestrated with jewels and perfumes and music. The excess she represents both in her beauty (the first time Vitelli sees her) and in her wealth (the second time) contribute to that despotism fantasy of limitless pleasure.

Donusa’s seduction of Vitelli enacts a similar fantasy of excess which the audience may now see unveiled, just like Vitelli sees Donusa: the copious material goods such as the table laden with bags and jewels, (“these bounties,/ Which all our Eastern kings have kneeled in vain for” [2.4.48-9]), the “loud music” (2.4.s.d.) and the perfumed inner chambers to which the Christian man is finally granted access, “this forbidden place/ Where Christian yet ne’er trode” (2.4.32-33). Donusa’s ability to give is as “unbounded as the sultan’s power” (l. 89). Her seduction culminates with Donusa leading Vitelli into

Some private room the sunbeams never enter,

Provoking dishes passing by to heighten

Declined appetite, active music ushering

Your fainting steps, the waiters, too, as born dumb,

Not daring to look on you. (130-4)

At the moment when the audience imagines it will finally *see* desire satisfied, it is made clear that, once again, these things are unspeakable and unseeable: Donusa leads Vitelli farther back and deeper within, concealing the moment of consummation from the desiring voyeur.³⁰⁶

By going with Vitelli to Donusa's inner sanctum, "The audience is also allowed a vision of the forbidden palace. The spectators in the theater are permitted to peep into the seraglio and witness a scene of wealth, sensual pleasure, sex, and danger."³⁰⁷ It is important to note again, however, that this stage-version of the seraglio is truly a *fantasy*, a making visible of what cannot truly be seen, the invisible desire to know and understand truly, as well as the desire to experience pleasures presumably denied to the theater audience in their daily lives but that they imagine are enjoyed daily in the sultan's court. As Grosrichard puts it, "Everything converges on this blind point, this imaginary focus of *jouissance*, which is the *harem*the word evokes both the idea of something sacred, and that of something 'illicit, forbidden, prohibited and abominable.'"³⁰⁸ In addition, in being able to watch this play, to witness the luxury of the Islamic world, the spectator imagines himself as having learned what it means to be Muslim, to have experienced, from a safe distance, the pleasures promised by the Orient, and then to have purged these desires from his heart, imagining in fact that they exist only behind the veil or only in the hearts of the religious other (whether the fallible Catholic merchant or the

³⁰⁶ Presumably, the exit of the lovers is performed through the discovery space (see Chapter 3); perhaps Donusa lifts the veil covering the space and leads Vitelli into the darkness within.

³⁰⁷ Vitkus "Turning" 159.

³⁰⁸ 127.

evil Ottoman despot). Indeed, watching Vitelli “fall” under the temptation posed by Donusa, and laughing at Gazet’s close escape from being circumcised/castrated, the spectator learns what *not* to do: that is, a man must not “forget” himself in the face of all this seduction, and yet he must continue to learn about Muslim culture lest he become an accidental eunuch. Gazet’s dangerous misunderstanding of Muslim culture and language is a cautionary tale of what might happen unless these truths are unveiled and known. His comic misprision of Turkish language and customs and his susceptibility to being duped by Carazie point to the dangers of approaching the Orient without the wisdom provided by such experiences as, perhaps, viewing a Turk play. Similarly, Vitelli’s temporary fall from grace, along with his (and Grimaldi’s) ultimate redemption, offers a consoling fantasy that one has seen and avoided a similar fate.

Donusa’s veil acts as metonymy for Islam, both in its physicality and power of seduction and in its frightening unknowability; at the end of the play both have been mastered and redeemed for Christianity’s sake, even if the audience remains uncertain what *really* goes on in the temptress’ innermost recesses. Once she converts to Christianity Donusa claims that “the films of error [have been]/ Ta’en from my soul’s eyes” and presumably she no longer wears or carries her veil, having relinquished it, as symbol of Islam, in her conversion to Christianity. She exclaims that Vitelli has “freed me from the cruelest of prisons” which echoes her earlier speech of being “mewed up” but also represents a spiritual prison of “Blind ignorance and misbelief” for which she curses that “False prophet!/ Impostor Mahomet!” (5.3.131-3) The success of the Christian merchants in this play is two-fold: first, they come to a greater spiritual awareness, both of their failings and of their “true” identities, through their encounters

with the promised wealth and pleasure (which, however, ultimately proves unsatisfying) of Muslim culture; second, they redeem and thus claim the bodies of females formerly tainted by association with Islam, either Donusa as native princess or Paulina as victim of despotic imprisonment.³⁰⁹ In many ways, then, the play enacts—without unveiling—the fantasy of the Oriental other as a figure of excessive pleasure who requires the salvific restraint of European Christianity; the Muslim seductress is tamed, the despot is punished by having his women stolen away, and the virtuous Christian returns home a wiser man. The sort of redemptive self-knowledge gained by Vitelli, Gazet, and Grimaldi (the play's *renegado*) in their encounters with Oriental others is precisely the project of unveiling toward which early modern travel accounts aspired.

Where No Man Has Gone Before: The Veil in Early Modern Travelers' Narratives

To unveil is thus to imagine that one is taking over or taking control of whatever lies behind the veil, as well as abandoning the posture of one who is confounded or made powerless by that veil. Early modern travel writers and their audiences imagined narratives of encounter as moments of trial and temptation through which one could identify and then repudiate sin, as was the case with Turk plays such as *The Renegado*; these narratives also attempted to assume a stance of power even in situations where the power lay completely with the other. As Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh have noted,

³⁰⁹ It is important to note that, just as Donusa's veil falls out of the story, so does Paulina's talisman, though more quietly: while Donusa's veil is an easy visual symbol of her Islamic nature and then its relinquishment, Paulina's talisman in a sense must not be regarded too closely, for such a magical object reminds us that, though she is a Christian she is a Catholic one, a difference that must remain less important to the narrative than the Muslim-Christian divide.

the *gaze* or simply the *act of seeing* functions as an important structural device, whereby our travelers interpret and record European cultural encounters. In fact, seeing, with its assumptions of *knowing* and *possessing*, becomes an act fraught with meaning and power. Repeatedly, the travelers remind their readers that they are “eyewitnesses” giving us an empirical rendition of unfolding events; but this process is more complicated since, as recent critics remind us, “the European dream of possession rests on witnessing understood as a form of significant and representative seeing,” and frequently in travel accounts, the early modern European (male) traveler functions as a “seeing-man,” the “landscanning” producer of information whose “imperial eyes actively look out and possess.”³¹⁰

Because much of Islamic culture—or at least the more salacious parts such as the seraglio—was imagined to reside in secret chambers containing veiled beauties, the veil was an apt metaphor for the secrecy and seduction of Islam. As Grosrichard has demonstrated, too, the sultan himself was imagined as veiled in that he remained always, tantalizingly, out of sight, represented and his power disbursed through his eunuchs, viziers, and janissaries, or “the letter” (the black box, as in *The Renegado*). Indeed, as Mladen Dolar reminds us, the sultan *must remain veiled* in order for the fantasy to sustain, because

³¹⁰ *Travel Knowledge: European “Discoveries” in the Early Modern Period* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 3-4.

[a]t the centre of the fantasy there is a hole; the place of the despot is a vanishing point, evoked and veiled by the double device of the gaze and the letter—the supposedly omnipresent and terrible despotic gaze, which nobody can see, and the senseless signifier (the name, the seal) endowed with a formidable mysterious power... The horrendous despotic mechanism conceals a void at its core. Even the seraglio, this much-envied place of unalloyed enjoyment, ultimately reveals the contrary...Everything in the seraglio is designed to evoke the full enjoyment at its centre, as by a negative image (the mutes, the dwarves, the eunuchs, etc.), but all this only points to a central void...³¹¹

There are two ways the veil functions to sustain the fantasy: first, the veil is a “negative image” inasmuch as it reflects denial of access or penetrative enjoyment and thus contributes, like the figure of the eunuch, to the pleasurable fantasy that the despot is the only one who is allowed behind the veil. Second, the veil evokes that sense of mystery and disguises the “impossible Real,” thereby reflecting back to the viewer his position as (virtuous) outsider, external to the disturbing despotic system.

The traveler or adventurer who wishes to unveil the mysteries and depravities of the sultan’s court finds himself again and again confounded, but this of course contributes to the fantasy’s persistence. Part of the fantasy, too, is that all of Islamicate society subscribes to the despotic machine, such that even common women on the street who are veiled somehow belong wholly to the despot, not to their husbands. In a sense all of the

³¹¹ xxi.

women are anonymous and innumerable. In *A Relation of a Journey begun An. Dom. 1610* George Sandys portrays Islamic womanhood this way:

Not much in habite do the women of the Serraglio differ from other, but that the Favorite weares the ornament of her head more high, and of a particular fashion, of beaten gold, and inchaced with gems; from the top whereof there hangeth a veile that reacheth to her ankles, the rest have their bonnets more depressed, yet rich; with their haire disheveled.³¹²

In this fantasy, *every* woman is within the seraglio of the sultan's power; Sandys's relation of how the sultan would give his "daughters, sisters, and aunts... Bassas... for their husbands" with the stipulation that "if he please thee not thou maist kill him" as well as the convention of communicating to one's lover through the positioning of one's shoes, are all conventions Massinger invokes in the encounters between Donusa and Asambeg in *The Renegado*.

Thomas Dallam's story of delivering the "elaborate mechanical organ" he made for the Grand Signior in Constantinople offers another voyeuristic account of the seraglio. He writes of peeking through a grate in the wall of the courtyard within which are hidden "thirtie of the Grand Sinyors' Concobines that weare playinge with a bale":

At the first sighte of them I thought they had bene yonge men, but when I saw the hare of their heads hange done on their backes, platted together

³¹² In *Travel Knowledge: European "Discoveries" in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna Singh (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 26.

with a tasle of smale pearle hanginge in the lower end of it, and by other plaine tokens, I did know them to be women, and verrie prettie ones in deede.³¹³

Dallam's first glimpse of these wonders, which follows a tour of "many other thinges which I wondered at" in the courte, dazzles his sight such that at first he cannot tell that the concubines are women until he sees their long hair and "other plaine" signs of femaleness:

Theie wore upon their heades nothingse bute a litle capp of clothe of goulde, which did but cover the crowne of her heade; no bandes a boutte their neckes, nor anythings but faire cheans of pearle and a juell hanginge on their breste, and juels in their ears; their coats weare like souldier's mandilyon... they wore britchis of scamatie, a fine clothe made of coton woll, as whyte as snow and as fine as lane; for I could desarne the skin of their thies throughe it. These britchis cam doone to their mydlege; som of them did weare fine cordovan buskins, and som had their leges naked, with a goulde ringe on the smale of her legg; on her foute a velvet panttoble 4 or 5 inches hie. I stood so longe loukinge upon them that he which had showed me all this kindnes, began to be verrie angrie with me. He made a wrye mouthe, and stamped with his foute to make me give over

³¹³ Cited in Kamps and Singh 57.

looking; the which I was verrie lothe to dow, for that sighte did please me wondrous well.³¹⁴

Dallam is meticulous both in his description of their clothes and the body parts he can “desarne” beneath, unveiling them piece by piece from the first impression of their androgyny to a final and full outlining of their femininity. Dallam admits to his fascination with the sight; he is reluctant to pull his eyes away. Immediately after, he tells his interpreter what he has seen and is told never to tell another, since “if it weare knowne to som Turks, it would presente deathe to him that showed me them.” Here it is not the sultan himself who enforces his sexual order, but “some Turks,” presumably irrationally violent, jealous men who operate on the sultan’s behalf. Dallam’s fear is representative of early modern European fascination with the imagined power of the sultan, whose mode of surveillance anticipates Bentham’s panopticon: the European senses that he—and everyone in the sultan’s court—is always being watched and yet it is not clear *who* is watching. Perhaps it is the veiled concubine, since she is able to see without being seen.

Indeed, Dallam ends his voyeuristic story by imagining what would have happened had *he* been the object of the *women’s* gaze:

Although I louked so longe upon them, theie saw not me, nether all that whyle louked towards that place. Yf they had sene me they would have

³¹⁴ Ibid.

come presently thether to louke upon me, and have wondred as moche at me, or how I cam thether, as I did to se them.³¹⁵

In a telling moment, Dallam imagines himself in their place, or rather he imagines them in his place, as the object of the gaze, as on the inside. Dallam seems to have felt so penetrated by what he saw that he is now behind the veil himself.

Daniel Vitkus argues that

Dallam's story is typical of Western representations in the way that the threat of death frames the fantasmic vision of the harem. In European accounts of the seraglio, the libidinal regime at the center of Ottoman power is imagined as the secret core from which the merciless, masculine aggression of Turkish military power emanates. To peep into the seraglio is to penetrate with an intruder's gaze the hidden mechanisms of confinement and slavery that sustain and explain both the private and political success of the empire.³¹⁶

Vitkus's argument here points to the power relations that so fascinated English travelers; however, it is important to recall Grosrichard here as well, for what is disavowed in this portrayal of Muslim society as centered around an all-powerful despot is England's own political and social structure, in which a system of underlings enforce the ultimate power of the despot-king. In his introduction to Grosrichard's book, Mladen Dolar argues that

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ *Turning Turk* 117.

the fantasy of Enlightenment reason as the opposite of the sensual and irrational despotic system “lays bare – unguardedly, in a sort of ‘naïve’, immediate and outspoken way which has subsequently become obfuscated—the economy of enjoyment that necessarily accompanies modern structures of the social and the status of the subject; it sticks to them as their reverse side.”³¹⁷ I would argue that this sort of fantasy is not limited to post-Enlightenment revelation, for as plays such as *The Renegado* show, anxieties about England’s own social and political and gender systems are easily displaced even in the early seventeenth century onto sites such as Ottoman Tunis, and the dichotomy of reasonable Christian and irrationally violent and sensual Muslim is already in place. The fantasy is that this sort of submission to power only occurs in the sultan’s—not the king’s—court, and thus it is absolutely foolish and foreign. As Vitkus notes, “in contrast to a divided Christendom, crisscrossed with borders” the “Ottoman empire is a super-civilization, a frighteningly all-inclusive and all-absorbing system.”³¹⁸ In this sense there is a simultaneous need to diminish the power and imagined solidity of Islamic culture, especially as it reveals the fragile contours of Christendom.

Other English writers who did not journey abroad claimed to rely on accounts such as Dallam’s and Sandys’s to unveil the mysteries of the Orient *for* them. Bishop Henry King wrote a poem in praise of Henry Blount, celebrating the latter’s informative reports which satisfy, by proxy, King’s “human curiosity/ Of seeing all that might the

³¹⁷ xi.

³¹⁸ *Turning* 119.

sense invite” (lines 2-3; emphasis added).³¹⁹ For King, Blount’s account provides the *sensory* stimulation that the bishop could not experience firsthand. For example, King claims that by reading travel narratives he can, “all wrapp’d in pity and amaze...upon the Sultan *gaze*” (41-2; emphasis added). King can “think” from his armchair

How [the Sultan] achiev’d, and kept, and by what arts

He did concentrate those divided parts [of “So vast a territory”];

And how he holds that monstrous bulk in awe,

By settled rules of tyranny, not Law... (43, 47-50)

King thanks Blount that “By your eyes/ I here have made my full discoveries” and thus “I am at once inform’d and cur’d by you” (105-6, 98). For armchair adventurers like King, then, the brave traveler such as Henry Blount can penetrate the East, catalog and portray its customs, and cure the domestic Englishman of any desire to leave his home. Thus the Orient is made sensuously available to the imagination and simultaneously kept at a safe distance, perhaps to avoid the fate that Massinger’s Venetians experienced.

Michel de Baudier’s *Histoire generale du serrail et de la cour du Grand Seigneur, Empereur des Turcs* (cited earlier) emphasizes the value of seeing and knowing the strange and seductive so that one can identify evil, as well as the idea that this evil is located and concentrated in the Muslim woman, embodied by and in the seraglio as a (w)hole:

³¹⁹ Kamps and Singh 75-79; all other quotes will cite line numbers only.

I have conceived, that having given you the History of the Turkish Empire, from its beginning unto our times, it would not be unprofitable to let you see what their manners are, their kind of living, their conversation, and the order of their government, which so powerfull and redoubted a Conquerour doth observe. To do it safely wee must enter into the serrail, where the secret of all these things is carefully shut up.³²⁰

The paradoxically prophylactic move of “entering” the seraglio (as a “we,” perhaps for safety in numbers) to expose and release its secrets is imagined as a purely educative and instructive operation.

King’s paean to Blount is in direct opposition, however, to the latter’s belief that “*experience* advances best.”³²¹ For Blount, one must obtain “ocular view” in order to understand:

for above all other senses, the eye having the most immediate, and quicke commerce with the soule, gives it a more smart touch then the rest, leaving in the *fancy* somewhat unutterable; so that an eye witness of things conceives them with an *imagination* more compleat, strong, and intuitive, then he can either apprehend, or deliver by way of relation.

As a result, Blount resolved that he

³²⁰ Cited in Vitkus *Turning* 115-16.

³²¹ Kamps and Singh 79; emphasis in the original.

would not sit downe with a booke knowledge of [the *Turkish* nation], but rather (through all the hazard and endurance of travell), receive it from mine owne eye not dazled with any affection, prejudicacy, or mist of education, which preoccupate the mind, and delude it with partiall *ideas*, as with a false glasse...

Whereas King feels he can know and understand the Orient from the relations of other travelers, and indeed conjure up images (literally, make them visible as fantasies)—as King puts it, “all your countries so exactly seen,/ As in the voyage I had sharer been” — Blount argues that one must see with one’s own clear and undeluded eyes. Blount’s reasoning here anticipates a sort of Wordsworthian idea of perception, for while he says that one’s eyes are the only trustworthy tools, he also acknowledges that they do the work of perception and translation (“imagination” is the word he uses above), “digest[ing] them into an experience.” Blount wishes to remove both the veils of ignorance (or “false glasse,” recalling Thomas Adams’s sermons discussed in Chapter 2) from his own eyes so that he can then unveil the mysteries of those foreign peoples, “the *Turkes...Greekes, Armenians, Freinks, and Zinganaes*, but especially the *Jewes*.”³²² Travel, and particularly *seeing*, is key to understanding and, by extension, claiming mastery over, whether it is mastery of military innovation, or the ability to dismiss an outmoded or sinful religion.

The Pleasure of the Veil in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *Turkish Embassy Letters*

³²² Ibid 80.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was an unconventional woman in her own time, often the subject of scandal and the censure of conservative elites as a result of her progressive ideas, her unabashed manner of speaking and writing, and her purported extramarital affairs (or questionable relationships) with both men and women. Travelling through the Ottoman Empire was for Montagu, like it was for Blount, an eye-opening experience through which she was able to see and inhabit Turkish culture. Montagu's letters are similar to Blount's in their overall tolerance (though like Blount she makes anti-Semitic remarks and tends at times to disallow any coevalness to Muslims), but whereas Blount is astonished and humbled by the military and economic prowess of the Ottomans, Montagu finds herself in awe of cultural practices, particularly the perceived freedom of (upper class) women. Overall, Montagu's *Letters* bespeak a romanticized fantasy of feminine freedom and power. Like Blount Montagu sees the Orient through a self-reflexive lens, determining its value by what it contributes to her and what it can do for English culture. Particularly, Montagu appropriates the veil as a tool for her own empowerment, an object which allows her greater freedom of movement and experience than, she claims, she would ever have anywhere in Christendom. Rather than the veil being a symbol of the oppressive Oriental despot's control over feminine bodies, it is that which allows eastern women, and Montagu herself, to pursue their own pleasures. It then comes to stand in for Turkish society as a whole, as a symbol for a more utopian (read: sexually liberal) European society, one less invested in philosophy and reason and more invested in, as she puts it, "present pleasure."

Recent readings of the *Letters* grapple with Montagu's position as European and as female, alternately positioning her as a product and purveyor of masculine, proto-

Orientalist rhetoric, or as a feminist enabled by a more modern cultural relativism. Meyda Yeğenoğlu, for example, argues that Montagu takes a masculine, aggressive, penetrative stance toward the East, invested in exposing the mystery of the Orient by revealing its ultimate symbol, the veiled woman. She argues that Montagu's investment in this project is in service of her own identity, "[m]uch like her male predecessors."³²³ Others, such as Billie Melman, allow Montagu a greater sensitivity, arguing that she finds similarity in difference and thus challenges the emerging East/West divide of Orientalism.³²⁴ Because Montagu's life and letters are located in the period considered "post-Renaissance" and "early Enlightenment" most critics feel comfortable in trying to place Montagu somewhere within the narrative of Orientalism's genesis and development.³²⁵ However, what I will argue in the pages that follow is that, if Montagu's letters exhibit a more enlightened, post-humanist relativism and proto-feminism, they also recall and extend many of the religious and gender identity struggles I have discussed throughout this dissertation; that is, though Montagu's encounter with the veiled Turkish woman partakes of emerging Orientalist discourse, her understanding of the veil finds its foundations in the religious and sexual fetishization of veils (and scenes of unveiling) that I have identified in earlier chapters. The veil is simultaneously a sign of eastern mystery and seduction and an empowering tool Montagu "resurrects" from

³²³ *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 93.

³²⁴ *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992). See also Bernadette Andrea, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); and Teresa Heffernan, "Feminism Against the East/West Divide: Lady Mary's Turkish Embassy Letters (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.2 [2000], 201-215).

³²⁵ See, for example, Joyce Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave: Feminist Orientalism and the Structure of *Jane Eyre*," (*Signs: The Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18 [1993], 592-617).

classical past in order to appropriate it for Englishwomen's rights and use. Ultimately, Montagu's understanding of the veil operates in a manner no different than her male predecessors and contemporaries: the veil is a screen on which to project a fantasy of her own identity, and the woman behind the veil is a faceless embodiment of European desire.

Montagu begins by disdaining the (largely male) body of travel writers who preceded her, dismissing their accounts of "voyages to the Levant" because they

are generally so far removed from the truth and so full of absurdities I am very well diverted with them. They never fail to give you an account of the women, which 'tis certain they never saw, and talking very wisely of the genius of men, into whose company they are never admitted, and very often describe mosques which they dare not peep into.³²⁶

Because Montagu is a woman, she is afforded access into these inner sancta; Montagu subscribes here to the fantasy of the volatile despot who strikes fear in the heart not only of his subjects but of his European guests *unless* they are women and therefore pose no sexual threat. Montagu uses her position as female to resist masculine, hegemonic narratives of the East as laughable and pathetic and thus to insert herself as privileged possessor of knowledge.³²⁷

³²⁶ *Turkish Embassy Letters*, ed. Malcolm Jack (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 104.

³²⁷ In her analysis of the construction of the "Other woman" in eighteenth-century English narratives, Felicity Nussbaum argues, "European women travelers, disempowered by their gendered identification with the women confined, were empowered in their ability to describe a part of the world that could be conquered only by a woman's eye. The seraglio invited the description of women by women as did few

However, in a letter to her friend Alexander Pope, Montagu echoes the conventional belief that Islam is in many ways a relic of the past, similar to Catholicism in having been a fall from the proper church of God; having just read Pope's translation of Homer, Montagu views the Orient as representing a similarly epic and heroic narrative. She describes her surprise at finding how "many of the customs and much of the dress then in fashion [in Homer's time] [are] yet retained" adding, "I don't wonder to find more remains here of an age so distant than it is to be found in any other country." For example, she writes,

the princesses and great ladies pass their time at their looms embroidering veils and robes, surrounded by their maids, which are always very numerous, in the same manner as we find Andromache and Helen described. The description of the belt of Menelaus [in Pope's translation of the *Iliad*] exactly resembles those that are now worn by the great men, fastened before with broad golden clasps, and embroidered round with rich work. The snowy veil that Helen throws over her face is still fashionable, and I never see half a dozen old bashaws (as I do very often) with their reverend beards sitting basking in the sun but I recollect good King Priam and his counselors.³²⁸

other sites" (*Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995]), 90-91.

³²⁸ Ibid 75.

Srinivas Aravamudan argues that “Antiquarian classicism comes to Montagu's rescue as a compromise ideological formation that converts the focus from current identities to past ones, and displaces politics back into history.”³²⁹ This fantasy not only redirects focus but deposits Islamic culture in the past, denying its coeval existence within the narrative of Europe. Moreover, Montagu’s romanticization of Islamicate culture, or rather her translation of it into “classical” images, allows her the fantasy of being present in such an epic tale as the *Iliad*. The veil is one object here that links classical past and oriental present; it is a symbol for the connection between the two eras as well as the difference between such a quaint, storybook culture and the more enlightened European one.

Other letters fetishize various aspects of Turkish culture, allowing them not only to exist in the present but to overshadow the pedestrian offerings of domestic England, the sights and experiences they offer being far more pleasurable than the humdrum ones afforded women in England. Wearing the veil grants access to greater pleasures than could possibly be experienced back home:

The yaşmak, or Turkish veil, is become not only very easy but agreeable to me, and if it was not, I would be content to endure some inconvenience to content a passion so powerful to me as curiosity; and indeed the pleasure of going in a barge to Chelsea is not comparable to that of rowing

³²⁹ “Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Hamam*: Masquerade, Womanliness, and Levantinization” (*ELH* 62.1 (1995): 69-104), 71.

upon the canal of the sea here, where for twenty miles together down the Bosphorus the most Beautiful variety of prospects present themselves.³³⁰

The veil is not only a convenient tool for empowering exploration, granting one power to see and to satisfy passions, it is “easy” and “agreeable”: that is, there is some pleasure in wearing it that exceeds its utility; the kinds of “pleasure” one experiences in Chelsea pale in comparison to the sights one experiences along the Bosphorus, though what exactly these “prospects” are remains unclear.

Through the course of her epistolary journey, Montagu comes to understand the veil as the key, for Turkish women, to all freedom and power:

the Turkish ladies...have more liberty than we have, no woman, of what rank so ever being permitted to go in the streets without two muslins, one that covers her face all but her eyes and another that hides the whole dress of her head, and hangs half way down her back and their shapes are also wholly concealed by a thing they call a *ferace* which no woman of any sort appears without. This has straight sleeves that reaches to their fingers ends and it laps all round them, not unlike a riding hood. In winter 'tis of cloth and in summer plain stuff or silk. You may guess then how effectually this disguises them, that there is no distinguishing the great lady from her slave and 'tis impossible for the most jealous husband to

³³⁰ 126-7.

know his wife when he meets her, and no man dare either touch or follow a woman in the street.³³¹

What is notable in this description is that it begins by stating the amazing freedom that “Turkish ladies” have, immediately following it with what sounds like a limitation, the prescription that “no woman” is “permitted to go in the streets” without two veils.

However, it turns out that would seem to be an oppressive requirement is in fact the opposite, for these veils protect the women from the gaze and touch of men as well as allowing them sexual anonymity. Indeed, Montagu notes with admiration that

This perpetual masquerade gives them entire liberty of following their inclinations without danger of discovery. The most usual method of intrigue is to send an appointment to the lover to meet the lady at a Jew’s shop, which are as notoriously convenient as our Indian houses, and yet, even those that don’t make use of them do not scruple to go buy pennyworths and tumble over rich goods, which are chiefly to be found amongst that sort of people.³³²

Not only do the Turkish women have sexual license, but they possess greater economic freedom, to “tumble over rich goods” as they would with a lover in a merchant’s shop.

³³¹ 71.

³³² Ibid. Note how Montagu understands that Jews perform, for Muslims, the role that “Indians” play for Europeans; sites of exotics goods (which are imagined to incite illicit acts, as we saw also in *The Renegado*) are twice-displaced here, from the European onto the Turk and then onto the Jew. An “Indian house” was, in England, “a shop selling goods made in or imported from South Asia” (“Indian house” def. 2, *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. 4 March 2010); for Montagu, Jews are to Turks what Indians are to the English, that is, providers of foreign goods, go-betweens, panders.

Even if they are caught in acts of infidelity, they do not have “much to apprehend from the resentment of their husbands [because] those ladies that are rich hav[e] all their money in their own hands, which they take with them upon a divorce with an addition which he is obliged to give them.” As a result, she concludes, “Upon the whole, I look upon the Turkish women as the only free people in the empire.”³³³ That she employs the word “people” instead of “women” may hint towards her perception of what might be acceptable to her reader, but it also gestures toward Montagu’s utopian vision of a society based on unlimited freedom and (sexual) anonymity.

Montagu admires and celebrates Turkish women’s freedom again and again in her letters, and she finds that by wearing the veil she is able to share in that liberty. As Aravamudan notes, “The compulsory ‘disguise’ that women wear in the primary public sphere, a restriction that keeps their participation within it to an unindividuated minimum, paradoxically enhances their unfettered psychological agency.”³³⁴ Montagu differs from such explorers as Blount and readers such as King in that, rather than wishing to unveil the mystery of the seraglio (though she does claim to do that as well), she wants only to enjoy its privileges. Like Richard Crashaw, Montagu employs the veil in an empowering and transgressive act of transvestism, only for Montagu the “trans” slips between Christian and Muslim, rather than male and female.

Her descriptions of experiences in the inner sanctums of noble Muslim women iterate the received fantasy of excess pleasure; in particular, Montagu expresses strong

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ 80.

attraction to the wife of the “kabya” (second in command to the Grand Vizier), who is named Fatima: “so much her beauty effaced everything I have seen all that has been called lovely either in England or Germany and [I] must own that I never saw anything so gloriously beautiful.”³³⁵ Montagu describes with relish the sensual pleasures she experiences in this lady’s chambers, most particularly the gratification she feels merely *looking* upon Fatima unveiled. Fatima’s female attendants perform a dance for Montagu, which she describes thus:

Nothing could be more artful or more proper to raise certain ideas; the tunes so soft, the motions so languishing, accompanied with pauses and dying eyes, half falling back and then recovering themselves in so artful a manner that I am very positive the coldest and most rigid prude upon earth could not have looked upon them without thinking of something not to be spoke of.³³⁶

What can “not be spoke of” is precisely that homoerotic desire, “certain ideas” of pleasure and scenes of sexual freedom that male Europeans imagined occurring within

³³⁵ Ibid 89. Though Aravamudan makes the curious claim, “‘Fatima’ may well be a composite fiction idealizing Turkish femininity, created with the explicit purpose of seducing the reader with levantinized accounts of Turkish womanhood and the fascination its costumes held for Montagu” (80-1), he fails to explain why he singles out Fatima in particular as a composite fiction, rather than any other woman Montagu claims to have met.

³³⁶ Ibid 90. Grosrichard notes the fantasy that the women of the seraglio were unbridled lesbians, citing Michel Baudier’s 1626 *Histoire générale du sérail et de la cour du grand Turc* which “devotes an entire chapter, entitled ‘Of the Loves of the Great Ladies of the Turkish Court, and the Ardent Affections Between Them, to describing the effects of [the women’s] depraved appetite’ which ‘dominates them so tyrannically that it stifles in them the desire for a natural and legitimate love,’ and imagining the talk he will provoke by referring to the crazed lover who, ‘burning with a flame which she cannot extinguish, embraces her lover, kisses her, and does with her, albeit to no avail, what here we must not speak of’” (169-70). One wonders if Montagu had read a translation of this text, or if her male readers had.

the seraglio and behind the veil. Montagu's description here seems to support such suspicions and to affirm that what the veil conceals is illicit sexuality. Even as she participates in this conventional view of Orient, her refusal to speak directly about the thoughts her encounter incites simultaneously resists the project of visual and linguistic penetration and mastery. Montagu's relation of her experience emphasizes the unknowability and indescribability of female (especially homoerotic) contact: when Montagu penetrates behind the veil, words and language fall away; instead desire is experienced and portrayed through the female body; Fatima's attendants dance—that is, they communicate without words but with their bodies—and the desire they elicit exceeds representation. In much the same way as we saw women's bodies functioning in Chapter 2, the Muslim women speak and act nonverbally. Within the seraglio, men's absence is emphasized and echoed by the absence of discursive representation or control. Any attempt to portray what goes on within the seraglio, behind the veil and in the absence of men, fails, since such a world resists the phallic authority of language.³³⁷ Just as she begins to portray the experience, to make visible the fantasy, she drops a veil again in this prohibition of speaking, tantalizing her readers as the dancers titillated her. The center of the fantasy remains, then, a vanishing point of unspeakable or inarticulate, invisible desire. Even within the seraglio, behind the veil, there remains that which cannot be portrayed.

³³⁷ Montagu's account further challenges the myth of lesbian invisibility, identified by queer theorists such as Valerie Traub, for female-female eroticism here is supremely "visible" but it is, Montagu emphasizes, in many ways illegible (except, as Traub notes, when one envisions a woman penetrating another woman with an enlarged clitoris); see in particular Chapter 5 of *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

Montagu's experiences in Turkey lead her to conclude that "the Turkish ladies...are, perhaps, freer than any ladies in the universe, and are the only women in the world that lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure, exempt from cares, their whole time being spent in visiting, bathing or the agreeable amusement of spending money and inventing new fashions."³³⁸ She extends this sort of freedom to *both* male and female Turks, as she did in the letter above, contrasting them with her understanding of the lifestyle of Europeans:

I am almost of the notion that they have the right way of life; while they consume it in music, gardens, wine and delicate eating, while we are tormenting our brains with some scheme of politics or studying some science to which we can never attain... Considering what short lived, weak animals men are, is there any study so beneficial as the study of present pleasure?³³⁹

The sorts of experiences Montagu has been able to enjoy by wearing the veil (she says, "I ramble every day, wrapped up in my ferace and yaşmak about Constantinople and amuse myself with seeing all that is curious in it"³⁴⁰) or, by virtue of her gender, to witness within the private chambers of such women as Fatima, provide Montagu with an alternative form of existence in which she is promised greater freedom and anonymity to pursue "present pleasure." The veil that the women wear, and which allows them such

³³⁸ 134.

³³⁹ 142.

³⁴⁰ 133.

freedom, is thus merely a metonymy for the license and luxury of all Turkish culture, and rather than this sensuality being condemned it is celebrated, as a sort of Hobbesian or Lockean native innocence. For Montagu, pleasure is the opposite of wisdom: “I had rather be a rich effendi with all his ignorance than Sir Isaac Newton with all his knowledge.”³⁴¹ What appeals to Montagu about her fantasy of Turkish culture is precisely its *difference* from her conception of European culture. If Europe is patriarchally oppressive and sexually repressive, in Montagu’s fantasy the Orient is a space of lack in a *positive* sense: lack of restriction but also, it must be acknowledged, in her fantasy lack of “conventional” or masculine (that is, reasoned) wisdom. While the veil enables her to identify with the Muslim woman *as* woman and to hint at desires unspeakable in England, it also represents an alterity that, while in many ways enlightening for her, insists on difference.

The veil allows Montagu to alternate between “the positions of actress and spectator”³⁴² but it is also a powerful fetish in much the same way as it is for her male predecessors and contemporaries, both Renaissance and Enlightenment: the veil is the sign of difference, dividing the moral, reasonable West (Europe) from the irrational, barbaric, sinful East, but because it is in place it can be stripped away to achieve various ends, from fantasies of visual (or sexual) penetration and mastery to the advent of a more “enlightened” cultural relativism.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Kader Konuk, “Ethnomasquerade in Ottoman-European Encounters: Reenacting Lady Mary Wortley Montagu” (*Criticism* 46.3 [2004]: 393-414), 399.

Conclusion

As the veil comes to stand as metonymy for the East, it enables a powerful fantasy of absolute difference, of a need for the rational, virtuous European to reveal the sordid, enticing mysteries of the Orient, thus mastering and assimilating the threat embodied therein. The veil makes visible the fantasy of the Orient, and provides a way for Europeans to imagine that they might access and overcome this fantasy by removing that veil, even as they rely on its existence in order to establish difference. Indeed, as we witnessed in both *The Renegado* and in Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters*, even in those titillating moments when the veil seems to have been stripped away, when we have penetrated the despot's inner sanctum, seen inside the seraglio or gazed upon the Muslim woman's body, the truth of the Orient remains just out of sight. And yet this tenacious invisibility is precisely what enables the fantasy of absolutely inscrutable otherness and impassable distance to exist. Even when Montagu most celebrates Turkish culture she insists on its difference; when she most identifies with the Muslim woman she also most desires her. As a moveable (and removable) figure, the veil embodies the fluidity and transferability of fantasy itself, whose pleasure persists even in its unveiling.

The veil marks the divide between self and other; its secrecy threatens and frightens the beholder, and yet it allows the beholder to imagine himself or herself as the one who will reveal its mysteries, inciting in him both a feeling of powerless insecurity and, paradoxically, an empowering fantasy of penetration and satisfaction. Acting as a screen onto which the European can project his own fears and desires, the veil of the Orient tells us more about the one who gazes on it than the one upon whom he or she

gazes. What lies behind the veil—since, as we have seen, *nothing* actually does—is in many ways less important than the veil itself: the veil as object of desire, always enticing, always forbidding, always reflecting back what we most greatly fear and desire.

Afterword: Between Two Worlds

“We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.”

~ Maya Angelou

The veil is never “just” a veil. It is never invoked lightly; it is always weighted by its long history of fascination and fear, secrecy and exposure. It is never self-evident, for in its very existence it insists on unknowability. One cannot engage with the veil without wanting to remove it, to see behind it. In cultures where visibility is key, or where knowing (controlling) someone means knowing her face, gazing upon her, having access to her, the veil represents resistance, foreignness, exclusivity; it incites and excites all the fear of and desire for the other, just as it reminds one that the other can never truly and completely be known. In closing, I would like to relate two decrees against veiling separated by 500 years, whose similarities betray a continued and continuing fear of hiddenness and secrecy, a persistent project to penetrate the unknown, the violence imagined always to reside behind the veil.

In 1511, in the third year of the reign of England’s King Henry VIII, a statute was passed prohibiting the use of face-coverings in both public and private spaces:

Forasmuch as lately within this realme dyvers persones have disgysed and appareld them in a Company togeder naming them selfe Mummers have comyn to the dwellying place of divers men of honor and other substanciall persones; and so dep[ar]ted unknowen; Whereuppon Murthers felonye Rape & oder greate hurtes & inconveniences have afore tyme growen and hereafter be lyke to come by the colour therof, yf the seid disorder shulde continue not reformed: Wherefore it be ordeyned and enacted by the Kyng oure Souvaign Lorde, & by the Lordes s[pirit]uall & temporall & the Comens in this p[re]sent p[ar]liament assembled and by the auctoritie of the same, That ef eny persone herafter dysgyse or apparell them with Vysoures or other wyse uppon theyre faces, and so disgysed or appareld enter into the house of any person or persons, or assault or affrayes make upon any person or persons in the Kings high-way, or any other place in forme afore disguised, that then the said Mummers, or disguised persons, and every of them shall be arrested by any of the Kings leige people as suspects or Vacabundes, and be committed to the Kings Gaole, Ther to be imprisoned by the space of thre monthes wythowte bayle or maymprys, and then to make fyne to the Kyng by the discrecion of the Justices by whome they shalbe delyverd owte of prisone. And also it is ordined and enacted by the seid auctoritie that yf eny person or persons sell or kepe eny Vysoures or Vysoure in his house or in eny other place wythin this realme after the feast of Easter nexte comyng, and after this acte p[ro]claymed, That the seid person that kepyth the seid Vysoure or

Vysoures) shall forfeyte to the King our Sovereigne Lorde for evry Visour xx^{ti} shillings, ; and ferther shall suffer imprisonment and make fine after the discrecion of the Justices afore whome he ys therof convicted, by examynacion or by inquisicion after the course of comen lawe.³⁴³

The fear that people with their faces covered might perpetrate violence on “men of honor” or even the King, might gain access under the guise of play or performance to an important person’s body, is the ostensible impetus for such a statute. William Prynne, however, cites the act in his 1633 *Histriomastix* as evidence of the societal deception and moral disorder enabled by the wearing of costumes—of performing a false identity—in the theatre. For Prynne the risk of veiling is not so much the threat of violence against other persons as the threat of moral collapse.³⁴⁴

Almost 500 years later, on January 6, 2010, *The Boston Globe* reported a controversial decree by the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences which banned “students, faculty, and staff from covering their faces on its three campuses” in what was termed “an effort to ensure public safety.” Michael Ratty, a spokesman for the school, defended the decision against accusations that it targeted religious groups such as Muslims, saying, “It’s no surprise that college safety has become a huge issue of importance in the past couple of years. This is another measure that public safety [officials at the college] wanted to implement to keep the campus safer.” The *Globe* notes that the “ban applies to anything that covers the entire face. In addition to

³⁴³ *Statutes of the Realme, Vol. 3 (1509-1547)*, Printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third from original records and authentic manuscripts (London, 1818), Ch. IX, page 30.

³⁴⁴ *Histrion-Mastix* (London: Michael Sparke, 1633), especially pages 493-494.

veils, that could include ski masks and scarfs drawn over the face” and that Ratty insisted that “development of the policy had no connection to the arrest last year of a 2008 graduate of the school, Tarek Mehanna, on terrorism charges.”³⁴⁵ Two days later, CNN reported that the College had modified its policy to include an exception for “religious” reasons along with the original medical exceptions clause.³⁴⁶

The furor that arose, both from students on campus and from special interest groups, as a result of the College’s decree demonstrates the ways that the veil remains an overdetermined and troubling symbol in Western culture, one that continues to evoke the dual threats of violence and of unlawful or improper penetration of one world or culture by another—either the world of “men of honor” infiltrated by “vagabonds” or the Christian world by the Muslim one, both of which encounters are imagined as violent, if not deadly. What Massachusetts College portrayed as a security measure following the tradition of the 1511 Act, others viewed as a (literally) veiled attack on the dangers of Islam. The similarities between these two decrees—despite their separation by five centuries—bespeaks a disconcerting similitude between what we consider “premodern” and “postmodern” society and culture. Once again the veil is made to bear the burden of our deepest fears of the unknown, as well as our most desperate desires to keep firm our sense of self. Is, then, the early sixteenth-century fear of masks radically different from the early 21st-century one? Can we console ourselves with Massachusetts College’s revision of its policy so as not to discriminate against religious groups? I would argue

³⁴⁵ Martin Finucane, “Pharmacy school bans covering of the face,” *Boston Globe* (Boston Globe. 6 Jan 2010. Web. 18 Feb 2010).

³⁴⁶ Cassie Spodak, Jamie Guzzardo, and Yvonne Kalawur, “Massachusetts college alters policy banning face coverings,” CNN.com (Turner Broadcasting, 8 Jan. 2010. Web. 19 Feb. 2010).

that, even though each decree reflects its own historical particularities—even as we might imagine the English statute to be as foreign and as “past” as the archaic diction with which it is written, and the Massachusetts College rule to be a necessary measure of campus security—the powerful threats embodied by the veil in each instance are more alike than they are unlike. Even as we speak of removing the veil between two worlds, two times, two peoples in our earnest efforts to recover the past and reach mutual understanding in the present, we insist on veil’s remaining in place. And yet the shared sense of threat that sparked these two decrees reveals that the veil is as much a metaphor of connection and complicity as it is of absolute difference and distance.

There is thus another kind of violence inherent within the veil, one whose presence neither decree is willing to admit. For what the veil shows again and again is that rather than marking difference—creating metaphor by highlighting separation and dissimilarity—the veil acts as metonymy, its fabric linking rather than dividing. For to lift the veil is to touch it, and to gaze on it is to know that one’s gaze is being (perhaps secretly) returned. As the veil denies the power of sight it enables the intimacy of touch, and touch can be the most frightening experience of proximity. Since, as Cary Howie reminds us, “every critique is bound, abjectly and erotically, to its object,” what we might learn in “taking up the veil” is that

[t]o touch is to experience a limit and open a connection. . . The risk of violence remains—when does it ever go away? —but it is important to stress that, if touch is in some way entry, it is thus only inasmuch as appropriation has been thoroughly relinquished. Such an entry, such a touch, requires an ecstatic reorientation of the most basic (and finally

damaging) ontological presuppositions: that this body has fundamentally nothing to do with mine; that this body cannot be touched; that this body is impenetrable or forever lost.³⁴⁷

This is what the veil's fearful fascination might teach us, then: that to engage the veil is to touch, and to touch is to acknowledge connection and interdependence. What would happen if we considered the veil not as that which we must penetrate, but that which must penetrate us? What if the violence encoded in the veil were a transformative one, denying the comfort of sight as it insisted on the risk of touch? What would happen if we relinquished the desire to strip the veil away, but instead insisted on its remaining in place—not to hide or to forget, but to force our engagement with all that seems most foreign, most hidden, within ourselves?

³⁴⁷ *Claustrophilia* 6, 7.

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