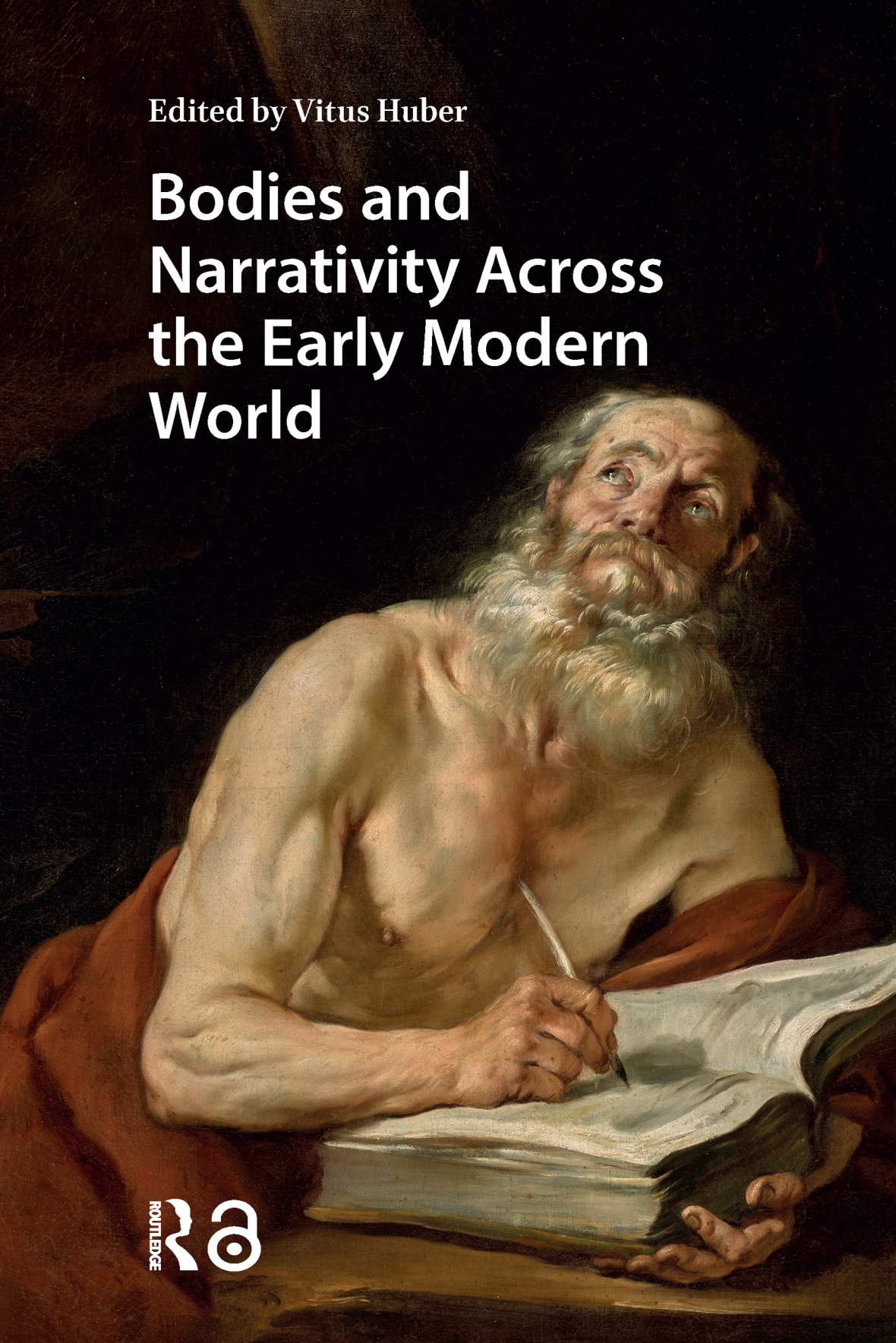
Edited by Vitus Huber

Bodies and Narrativity Across the Early Modern World



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On Influences and Interdependences of Corporeality and Narrativity

Vitus Huber

Abstract: This chapter introduces the theme of the volume, discusses the state of the art, and presents different methodological approaches to analyzing how bodily aspects shaped the creation of stories and vice versa. It also highlights the transformative shifts in conceptions of the human body and narrative practices in the early modern era. Finally, it summarizes the central arguments of the contributions to the edited volume, which include embodied writing practices, corporeal self-representation, and the use of the body as a narrative medium. The essay challenges essentialist and constructivist dichotomies and pleads for interdisciplinary perspectives from history and literary studies to examine how bodies and stories co-constituted each other in the early modern world.

Keywords: embodiment; narratology; body; writing; self; early modern period

In late March 1626, Francis Bacon had fallen ill on a journey between London and Highgate. Owing to this emergency, he had taken refuge in the nearby house of the Earl of Arundel. In a letter to the absent earl, Bacon explained his dire situation, asked for understanding for the unauthorized hospitality the earl's servants had granted him, and, at the end, apologized for not having written the letter himself: "I know how unfit it is for me to write to your Lordship with any other hand than my own; but by my troth [sic] my fingers are so disjointed with this fit of sickness, that I cannot steadily hold a pen."[1] This quotation reveals several things at once: First, that writing was

1 Francis Bacon to the Earl of Arundel and Surrey, edited in *The Works of Francis Bacon, Baron of Verulam, Viscount St. Alban, Lord High Chancellor of England* … London: A. Millar, 1740, 740.

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an inextricably bodily practice. Secondly, precisely who was expected to write in their own hand was a highly socially and historically contingent issue. Depending on the context, writing in one's own hand could manifest the author's degree of commitment to the matter being dealt with. Inferring from this example, writing oneself instead of dictating to a scribe seemed to have highlighted the personal dedication. Thirdly, Bacon's deliberate emphasis on his incapacity to write corroborated his message of finding himself in a precarious condition. The absence of the author's personal hand supposedly substantiated the lack of the physical capacity to write.[2] Bacon thus used his and his scribe's bodies both materially and discursively to forge a plausible story about his situation.

This book is about the multifaceted connections between the body and the narrative across the early modern world. In this period of far-reaching transformations of conceptualizations of the human body and of ways of communication, it examines how bodily aspects shaped the creation of stories and vice versa. The writing, telling, or interpreting of a story is inextricably linked to a corporeal act and, to a variable degree, influenced by that act. Conversely, narrativity, understood here as the narrative form, referring to the framing and structuring factors that define the meaning(s) of a story, may influence the experience, interpretation, and valuation of the body, too. This volume challenges approaches that consider the corporeal merely as a discursive construction, as promoted in the wake of the linguistic turn.[3] On the other hand, we refute essentialist positions as well. Indeed, we consider narrating itself to be intrinsically an expression of bodily action. Therefore, this volume claims the physicality on a material level, independent of discourse. We take the discussion beyond the dichotomic debate between constructivists and essentialists, however, by viewing it from the perspective of the interplay of body and narrative. Doing so allows us to take stock of the body as a heuristic instrument and render the intersections of corporeality and narrativity more palpable.

1. Histories of Bodies and Narrativity

Scholars have generated abundant literature trying to define both early modern "bodies" and "narrativity," as well as how the somatic and the

2 Bacon's condition was serious indeed. He died a couple of days later, in April 1626, at the age of 65. Peltonen, *Bacon*.

3 See Scott, "Evidence."

discursive relate to each other.[4] In the early modern period, there were a rich variety of ways of conceiving the body. Additionally, these concepts changed over time and depended on milieu.[5] This underpins Barbara Duden, who in her pioneering work of 1987 demonstrated the necessity to historicize the body according to its context.[6] While the Hippocratic-Galenic doctrine of the humors persisted in Europe until the eighteenth century, many anatomical discoveries, such as blood circulation or the nerves, and natural philosophical innovations, such as the Cartesian dualism of body and soul, offered new and alternative concepts. Such notions of emergent, open, and fluid bodies share an unexpected amount with recent transhuman theories. The latter have emphasized the indeterminacy, multiplicity, and processualism of bodies.[7] Here, bodies have been considered as "becoming" or "emergent," as "permeable," as "queer," or as "fleshy."[8]

The definition of the body as an unbounded entity in a constant state of evolvement may, in some cases, be helpful in approaching early modern concepts of the body. In other cases, however, for example comparative analyses, such a definition is of rather limited use. Instead, we suggest using "body" or "corporeality" as umbrella terms for everything that belongs to a human body according to the sources. This idea and a deliberately broad definition of the body will serve as the vantage point for examining early modern ways of conceptualizing the corporeal. This inclusive approach aims to avoid preconfiguring the interpretation by imposing an anachronistic or too-narrow hermeneutic framework.

As regards narrativity, the importance of the material body has been acknowledged particularly, though not exclusively and mostly only implicitly, in theories of autobiographical texts. Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" assumes a coherence between the author and the "I" in the text.[9] Thus this homodiegetic narrator's voice needs to be rooted in the material

4 Burke and Porter, *Language*; Kiening, *Körper*; Detsi-Diamanti, Kitsē-Mitakou, and Yiannopoulou, *Flesh*; Corbin, Courtine, and Vigarello, *Corps*; Nyffenegger and Rupp, *Things*; Dauven-van Knippenberg et al., *Text*; Béreiziat-Lang, Folger, and Palacios Larrosa, *Escritura*, 8.

5 See, for example, Scholz, *Body*; or Scott and Barbezat, *Bodies*.

6 See Duden, *Geschichte*.

7 For a recent overview, see Waterton and Yusoff, *Indeterminate Bodies*. The idea of multiple bodies has been conceptualized already before in various ways. See Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*; Douglas, *Symbols*; Scheper-Huges and Lock, *Body*.

8 Waterton and Yusoff, *Indeterminate Bodies*, 4; Harding, Gilmore, and Ford suggested the neologism "body/flesh" to capture the body as "corporeal seat of the ego," onto which is inscribed cultural meaning (Butler, 2015) and "flesh" refers to the matter that materializes as "my body" (Barad, 2007). Harding, Gilmore, and Ford, *Matter*, 651.

9 See Lejeune, *Pacte*.

world as a criterion that distinguishes it from fictional texts, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson.[10] In post-structuralist narratology, the narrative not only represents but also *constitutes* stories. Paul John Eakin has stressed the central role of narrative in the construction of identity.[11] For Eakin, autobiographical writing not only tells—a subjective story of—the author's life but also helps to form the author's self. Building on this notion and aiming beyond the questions of the author's authority or (self-)consciousness, we may furthermore ask about the specific part that *corporeality* plays in this process—as do, for instance, Effie Botonaki, Stanis Perez, and Andreas Würgler in their respective contributions to this volume. More basically, Maurice Merlau-Ponty saw the body as the starting point of the phenomenological process of perceiving, which Thomas Csordas later called "the mode of presence and engagement in the world."[12] Kathleen Canning promoted the concept of embodiment, since it interrogated embodied practices in their context of class, race, culture, gender, and age.[13] Both historians and literary scholars have grappled with theorizing perception, experience, and the role language and narrative play within these activities.[14] Building on this vast scholarship, we think scrutinizing the importance of corporeality can further amplify such reflections. To do so we take up Lyndal Roper's plea for a history that considers the materiality of the body and not just the discourse about it.[15] The following contributions thus include this consideration in their analyses, whether im- or explicitly. Their approaches can be categorized in three distinct ways to examine the intersections of corporeality and narrativity in the early modern era.

2. Writing With, About, and on Early Modern Bodies

The early modern period is an especially apt epoch in which to analyze the intersections of the corporeal and narrativity. This period saw fundamental processes of transformation that affected both corporeality and the collecting, processing, and presenting of information as a story. Medical knowledge

10 See Smith and Watson, *Trouble*. Lately, the factuality of autobiography has been questioned by the concept of autofiction. Wagner-Egelhaaf, "Introduction," 1–5.

11 Eakin, *Living*, 2.

12 See Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie*; Csordas, *Modes*, 135.

13 Canning, *Body*, 505–506.

14 See, for example, Scarry, *Body in Pain*; Schings, *Mensch*; Lorenz, *Narrativism*; Stolberg, *Woman*; Duden, "Somatisches Wissen"; Tracey and Mantyh, *Signature*.

15 Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 21.

about physiology and the functioning of the human body changed—albeit slowly and contingently—thanks to dissections, empirical methods, and new instruments such as the microscope.[16] A similar instrument, the telescope, along with the so-called Copernican Revolution, helped people reconsider the construction of the universe and the position of the earth and humankind within it. Encounters with the native people of the Americas resulted in practices of and debates about enslavement, as well as discussions regarding world orders and, later, the so-called Noble Savage in the Christian world.[17] The Reformation vulgarized the individual's communication with God, which materialized in the keeping of diaries in Protestant circles, as Philippe Lejeune's work has shown most prominently.[18] Processes of secularization, state formation, and codifications of laws created new perceptions on subjectivity and human rights. Furthermore, the printing press sped up the diffusion of texts and images about different bodies. The proliferation of paper changed writing habits, and additionally, the copying of texts no longer required painstaking hours of work by diligent monks replicating a manuscript. Even the reproduction of texts with a printing press included the involvement of a human body, but not every text contained as much somatic effort as manuscripts had done, and the factor of singularity thus declined.[19]

Then again, these schematically summarized transformations did not evolve everywhere in a linear way or synchronically, but rather contingently. For instance, a lot of texts were still written by hand—be it by the author's own hand or by that of a scribe, as in the case of Francis Bacon mentioned above. The framework of the years 1500 to 1800 is artificial and some of the processes crossed these temporal boundaries. Without ignoring this, the early modern period with all these fundamental changes lends itself perfectly to the study of the connections between corporeality and narrativity. To phrase it differently, analyzing these interrelations deepens our understanding of the early modern period, which saw particularly powerful transformations touching on the realms of the body.

The approaches to examining corporeality in relation to narrativity can be divided into three analytical types of inquiry. The first concerns

16 See Vigarello, *Corps*.

17 See, for example, Marcocci, *Globe*.

18 See Lejeune, *Origines*.

19 For the transformations connected to the printing press, see Eisenstein, *Printing Press*; and Giesecke, *Buchdruck*.

the corporeality of writing and narrating; in other words, the aspects of writing *with* the body. The main questions here concern the role bodies played when writing, and the ways in which this materialized. This may refer to physical and psychological processes and capabilities regarding, for example, concentration, imagination, reason, or tacit knowledge, as well as agility, sight, or different types of dis/ability.[20] In the diary of the Welsh gentleman Walter Powell (1581–1656), we can observe the fundamental role of the body in writing. After having recorded "sundry affaires" since 1603 based on notes in his almanacs, in winter 1651 he wrote: "December 1, my right eye began to faile & I fell sick shortly after and was like to dye at Christmas."[21] While the preceding two years have roughly 45 entries each, for the next eighteen months Powell noted barely anything other than that he was ill: "January, I was sick all the while. / ffebruary, I was sick. / March, Still sick."[22] Then he underwent two cataract operations, which both failed. For the following three months he only recalled that "nothing" happened, and omitted to mention the month of August at all. From September onward, he took up his more eloquent style again. It is clear that the ailing eye had dramatically limited his keeping of notes. His inability to write is visible in the reduced quantity of text.[23] An even more drastic example is the English diarist Samuel Pepys (1633–1703). After having kept a diary almost every day for nine years and five months, he stopped it because his eyesight had deteriorated too much: "And thus ends all that I doubt I shall ever be able to do with my own eyes in the keeping of my journal, I being not able to do it any longer, having done now so long as to undo my eyes almost every time that I take a pen in my hand."[24]

In these examples, the "defective" body impeded or even prevented the act of writing. It materialized by *not* materializing into text or by even putting an end to an almost decade-long production of text by Pepys. Nevertheless, not only the end of the text—and hence its material extension—were determined by Pepys' body. Both diarists wrote about their ailing eyes and

20 G. Thomas Couser has reflected thoroughly on the connections of (disabled) bodies and (life) writing. While he has concentrated on contemporary history, his methodological and theoretical reflections are often helpful in studying the early modern period, too. Cf. Couser, *Recovering Bodies*; and Couser, *Signifying Bodies*.

21 Powell, *Diary*, 44.

22 "1652 / April, the cataract in my eye appeared ripe. / May, the same. / June, nothing, John died before I had the cataract. / July, nothing. / August, nothing. / September, I was sick. / December, I was sick. / January and ffebruary, my great scouring cover fell. / March, nothing." Ibid., 44–45.

23 Ibid., 45–46.

24 May 31, 1669; Pepys, *Diary*, vol. 9, 564–565. Quote: 564.

general physical condition regularly. Therefore, their bodies also influenced the *content* of the text and their writing practice.

The second type of inquiry, which could be termed "corporeal narratives" or "narrated bodies," relates to writing *about* the body. The central questions here include when, how, and why people mentioned the body (or conspicuously omitted to do so), whether in a material and factual or figurative or metaphorical way. Also, how did corporeality influence the narrative? To what extent did this vary according to gender, race, age, health, or socio-economic, confessional, and other cultural factors, such as level of education, language, or environmental impacts? Which tropes about the body were typical for the early modern period, albeit less common or less conceptualized than those of melancholics, the Noble Savage, and so forth?

For corporeal narratives we determine two categories: a) narratives about one's own body; and b) narratives about someone else's body. In both cases, the narratives about the body are formed by the author or authors, whether intentionally or not. When it refers to the author's *own* body, we should ask about the degree of bodily self-fashioning, by expanding Stephen Greenblatt's concept to the corporeal and jettisoning its linear and determinist ballast.[25] This helps elucidate the role of corporeality in processes of subjectivation and the construction of identity.[26] In general, as historians such as Gudrun Piller noted and literary scholars such as Effie Botonaki have confirmed, authors of ego documents addressed the body predominantly when it was in danger.[27] The vulnerable body of an injured, ill, or dying person was mentioned explicitly.[28] Talking about one's own body in a more positive way was often linked with vanity. All of the above examples wrote about their deficient body parts, in Bacon's case his "disjointed fingers" and in Powell's and Pepys' cases their ailing eyes. Bacon and Pepys both used their impaired body parts as an excuse for not writing themselves or not writing anymore.

Statements about someone else's body can be divided into direct and indirect references. Specialized genres, such as medical texts, refer to the human body directly, although more often than not such texts refer to a person's body only indirectly, mentioning physical activities or conditions

25 See Greenblatt, *Renaissance*. For the concept's limitations, see Ulbrich and Wittmann, "Fashioning the Self," 13–14; and Crane, *Performance*, 177.

26 For a discussion of the connections of corporeality, subjectivation, and egodocuments, see Huber, "Blick," 416–419.

27 Piller, *Körper*, 16–17; and Botonaki's contribution to this volume.

28 For a study on how patients wrote about their ailing body and used it to construct their citizenship, see the studies on the letters to the physician Samuel Auguste Tissot: Louis-Courvoisier, "Malade"; and Boon, *Telling the Flesh*.

that provide information about bodies. In diaries, entries about meals, promenades, sex, pregnancy, birth, illnesses and death, recreational activities, such as singing and dancing, emotions, and going to church or to bed give hints about a person's body. Gestures and facial expressions occupy a liminal position because they involve a specific part of the body, but only in as far as they describe an action carried out by that part, such as shaking one's head or waving a hand.[29] Both direct and indirect references to someone's body can have serious consequences. Sociologists of the 1960s such as Erving Goffman and, more recently, the dis/ability studies have shown that this is especially the case when it comes to categorizing people.[30] Judging someone on the basis of bodily qualities as disabled/able, mentally ill/healthy, un-/fit for service and so forth could determine—along with other intersectional factors—whether or not that person was, for example, privileged, stigmatized, marginalized, or sent to war.[31] Thus, narratives about the body were a question not only of authorship but also of perception and interpretation.[32]

The third type of inquiry may be called "narrative bodies" and is about writing *on* the body. Here, we examine the ways in which people wrote on their bodies. Furthermore, how did such signs on the body alter the ways in which that body was read? The forms of such signs range from tattoos and scarifications to beauty spots, war paint, and other temporary designs. With cosmetics, piercings, and other jewelry, they reach beyond textuality. Nonetheless, both letter-based and other semiotic systems, such as facial and further adornment according to age, social rank, etc., could inscribe something on the body or the skin.[33] In any case, such practices indicate that human bodies and skins were considered as inscribable both materially and figuratively.[34] The reading of such narrative bodies depended on the context, however. In the Christian world, extraordinary natural body marks were often read as signs of divine grace or condemnation. For example,

29 See Schmitt, *raison*; and Bolens, *Cognition*, s.p.

30 See Goffman, *Ayslums*; and Goffman, *Stigma*; on the connection of discourse and dis-/ability, see the works of David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, for example, Mitchell and Snyder, *Body*.

31 On the flexibility of such categorizations of the bodies of clerics in the early modern Catholic Church, see Röder, *Körper*.

32 On the beginning of interpreting signs on corpses for what later came to be called forensic ends, see Paolo de Ceglie, *Body*.

33 For anthropological approaches to inscribed bodies, see Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body." For a more recent historical study, see Dauge-Roth, *Signing the Body*. On the distinction between body and skin, see Dauge-Roth and Koslofsky, *Stigma*.

34 Nyffenegger and Rupp, *Writing on Skin*, 2.

from the Middle Ages, marks of leprosy were interpreted as signs of sin.[35] In extra-European and intercultural encounters, the fascination with and/or rejection of the foreign culture of bodily markings and adorning can be seen in both textual and visual sources. They led to sometimes peculiar interpretations and misinterpretations.[36]

We can summarize these three types of inquiry by differentiating further on a theoretical level. In the first, *writing with the body*, the body comprises both the instrument and the active subject that writes.[37] In the second, *writing about the body*, the body forms the object, the theme written about. In this case it functions as signifier and as metaphorical or allegorical emblem.[38] In the third, *writing on the body*, the body encompasses both the medium and the agent, since it provides the site onto which something is written or into which something is inscribed, but is simultaneously the signifier, the performing body that expresses a message through the inscribed markings.[39]

For all three types, questions arise on a methodological level. First of all, how can we trace corporeality in the sources? If the physical is not mentioned explicitly in the discourse, manuscript sources offer further clues that a printed text omits, namely calligraphic traces. Analyzing the handwriting might give valuable hints, though the interpretations quickly reach the sphere of speculation. Sloppiness, for example, indicates a modification of the usual writing routine. Nevertheless, one cannot deduce from this whether this change means that the author was drunk, rushing, or traveling in a carriage or on a boat, or whether he or she suffered a physical illness that led to shaky handwriting. Another clue might come from the size of the writing and how sophisticated the hand was. Large letters could indicate myopia, shortsightedness. Clumsy hands could hint at someone not used to writing a lot or at someone learning how to write, as for example in children's diaries.[40] Overall, we seek to discuss what approaches are most apt for grasping the ways in which the (author's) body

35 Ibid.

36 See, for example, Theodore de Bry's engravings after John White in Thomas Hariot's *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*. Frankfurt: Ioannis Wecheli, 1590.

37 See, in particular, the contributions by Effie Botonaki, Stanis Perez, and Andreas Würgler in this volume.

38 See, especially, the contributions by Nadine Amsler, Stanis Perez, and Sarah Toulalan in this volume.

39 See, in particular, the contributions by Robert Folger, Nicole Nyffenegger, Aldair Rodrigues, and Benjamin Steiner in this volume.

40 See, for example, Berner Burgerbibliothek, FA-Stettler 12, vol. 1, Henriette Stettler (née Herport), *Journal de mes actions, 1746–1747*.

forms the narrative and how the latter shapes the author's body and/or the image it draws thereof.

3. An Interdisciplinary Multilogue

In order to find answers to these questions, the volume unites scholars from different countries (Brazil, France, Germany, Greece, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) and different fields, particularly historians and literary scholars. It consists of a selection of papers presented and discussed at the symposium "Narrating the Body: New Perspectives on the Connection of Corporeality and Narrativity (ca. 1500–1800)" held at the University of Geneva in the summer of 2023. The authors include specialists in body history, sex studies, gender studies, medical history, cultural, social, and political history, Renaissance literature and theatre, autobiography, and colonial literature as well as colonial history. According to their fields of expertise, their contributions span from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century and across several continents, including Africa, America, and Europe. The goal of this interdisciplinary multilogue is to reflect on, and improve our skills in analyzing, the influence of the body and its intersections with narrativity on several levels, ranging from content and materiality to writing practices and subjectivation processes.

The volume is divided into four sections, comprising ten essays in total. In the first part, which is entitled "Body, Skin, and Colonial Narratives," two chapters deal with the complicated and conflictive reading and writing of the body in colonial and intercultural settings. First, Aldair Rodrigues analyzes how the corporeality of Black Africans or African descendants was constructed in colonial Brazil. He studies the ways in which Portuguese crown officials, merchants, and Africans or their descendants interpreted and shaped the latter's physical traits and marks. Whether forcefully or voluntarily written on the bodies, scarifications, tattoos, or slave brandings constituted different visual systems of signs that interacted in an intricate way and formed a racialized category, however fluid, of black corporeality.

Robert Folger presents and revises Walter Mignolo's concept of "colonial semiosis," which defines the interactions between the European and indigenous sign systems as that of an alphabetic and supposedly immaterial writing system vis-à-vis a bodily one. Using as examples the famous clash of Atahualpa with the Spaniards at Cajamarca and Diego de Landa's auto-da-fé in Yucatán, Folger argues that in the colonial Ibero-American context the European writing system was in fact both material and physical. Moreover,

if one considers epidermal writing, such as tattooing, the Mayan sign system was an alphabetical one, too. What is more, De Landa interpreted these signs within the narrative of the Apocalypse.

The section on the link between "Corporeal Narratives and Political Power" opens with Nadine Amsler's analysis of Maria Theresa's letters to her daughter-in-law Maria Beatrice d'Este. Based on this correspondence from the late eighteenth century, Amsler carves out how the Habsburg empress used her epistolary interaction to monitor the archduchess' body, in particular, her physical condition regarding potential or real pregnancies. Moreover, as Amsler demonstrates, Maria Theresa forged the narratives considering the corporeal experience of a princely woman's pregnancy in a wider context of dynastic reproduction—linking body and writing practices with political concerns.

Continuing with this link, Benjamin Steiner explores in his chapter the connections between a ruler's natural body and his or her political power. Based on a plethora of empirical examples, Steiner compares not only European monarchs but also rulers from Africa and Southeast Asia. He investigates the ways in which modifying or inscribing the body of a ruler affected that person's public image, demonstrating how widely dispersed such practices of political body narratives were in Europe and beyond. The high level of attention given to a ruler's physical appearance and abilities led to a culture of increased corporeal care in early modern political contexts.

In the section about the connection of "Bodies and Autobiographical Writing," Stanis Perez tackles Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (published 1580) from a new perspective. Perez considers the famous text and its production as something that goes beyond autobiographical writing. He suggests that in the *Essays*, one can observe not only how Montaigne examined and described his own body, but that the author constructed his body in the process of writing. By exploring his body and his ailments, Montaigne tried to overcome his fear of pain and death, but less through stoic meditation than through prolific elaboration of a textual corpus that concentrates on the author's corporeality.

Effie Botonaki turns to English diaries from the seventeenth century to analyze the role of the individual body and its relation to these autobiographical texts. Her—mainly female—authors used their diaries to document their pious behavior, which included regular self-examination and mentioned corporeal aspects such as emotions and tears, etc. Botonaki notes that the diarists wrote more about the body, be it their own or that of a close relative, when the body was in a state of increased peril, i.e., during an illness or when dying.

Andreas Würgler unveils the captivating story of a Bernese patrician woman, Katharina von Wattenwyl, who was accused of spying for the French crown and therefore severely tortured by the authorities in Bern. Würgler demonstrates how von Wattenwyl constructed her narrative and identity in her memoirs from 1714, which simultaneously functioned as a petition for a pension. She emphasized her breaking of gender norms and her bodily ordeals suffered during the trial to fashion herself as an Amazon and an almost-holy heroine in her autobiographical testimony.

In the final part, "Corporeality in Literature and Theatre," Sarah Toulalan looks at a literary text to show how corporeality influenced its narrative regarding sexuality. Nicolas Chorier's libertine book *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* (1659/60) contains in its fifth dialogue a controversial section called "Pleasures," in which the author recounts early sexual experiences of girls—in a somewhat disturbing way. Toulalan cautiously scrutinizes how Chorier used corporeal details about the anatomical and sexual (under-) development of these children to construct the narrative. She argues that the author represented the sexual experiences as "childish" games in order to distance them from rape.

Closing out this final section, Nicole Nyffenegger advocates reading texts *literally* before interpreting them *metaphorically* and reading between the lines. Using the example of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, she reveals the important role played by the skin, i.e., the surface of the body and the projection surface for its interpretations. The various characters tried to shape the narrative and assert their agency by labeling the protagonist's war injuries differently, either as wounds or as scars. To examine such "skin-narratives," as Nyffenegger calls them, she recommends starting with a surface reading as the most adequate methodological approach.

To sum up, this volume explores the connections between corporeality and narrativities in a whole range of fields of historiographical and literary study. It unites contributions from the political, cultural, religious, juridical, medical, and economic/colonial realms. The chapters take class, race, gender, dis-/ability, and their intersections into account. They map early modern bodies from skin to organs and from public appearance to the most intimate and delicate matters such as menstruation and child sex/rape. The authors thus add historical perspectives and analytical approaches to questions relevant to society touching on gender, ethnicity, and body diversity, among others. Stressing the interdependence of material corporeality and narratives constructed with, about, and/or on the body, the volume is intended to stimulate further examination of the multifarious hermeneutics of this interplay.

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I.

Body, Skin, and Colonial Narratives

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1. Conflicting Narratives of African Body Markings and Black Corporeality in Eighteenth-Century Brazil[1]

Aldair Rodrigues

Abstract: This chapter examines the practices of describing African body markings in Colonial Brazil and the use of slave trade brandings, shedding light on the complex and unstable process of constructing black corporeality within this context. It explores the role of African scarifications in social control practices employed by colonial agents in the mining regions, the accounting methods used in the slave trade, and the incorporation of the body into a paper trail. The chapter concludes by analyzing first-person narrative fragments left by both freed and enslaved individuals, offering insights into the meanings of body modifications and illustrating how these narratives contested the reductionist colonial gaze on their bodies.

Keywords: African diaspora; scarifications; branding practices; slave trade; Portuguese empire

1. Introduction

This chapter examines the construction of black corporeality in colonial Brazil through fragments of textual narratives that document various perspectives on the observation and description of Africans' bodies and

1 This research was supported by CNPq (Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico) Productivity Grant, Process 309752/2021–3; and FAEPEX (Fundo de Apoio ao Ensino, à Pesquisa e à Extensão) at Unicamp, Grant 87/23. I am also grateful for the Andrew Mellon Foundation Fellowship at the Newberry Library, which allowed me to conduct this research in Chicago in 2023.

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their markings. I explore how these interpretations converge, interact, overlap, and diverge depending on the social position of both the observer and the observed. To unravel these dynamics, the study considers a diverse range of social actors, including Portuguese crown officials, traders, and, notably, Africans and their descendants, who offered insights into the meanings attributed to both voluntary and involuntary marks. The goal is to provide a new perspective on the complex process of racialization in the eighteenth century, emphasizing that the corporeal aspect of blackness cannot be rigidly defined by skin color alone. The study of various modes of visual observation of and narrative construction around body symbols in colonial documents complicates the common understanding of the body as the primary site of human difference.

The geographical focus of the research is on the mining region of southeastern Portuguese America, known as Minas Gerais. The discovery of substantial deposits of metals and gemstones transformed this inland area into a primary concern for the Portuguese crown. The resulting demand for enslaved labor fueled a vigorous transatlantic slave trade, creating one of the largest concentrations of enslaved people during this period.

The analysis is divided into three sections. First, using slave registers, I examine how the Portuguese interpreted and exploited African body adornments as part of their strategies for social control, reducing their complex meanings to simple markers of origin. Next, I explore the imposition of slave trade branding to investigate the relationship between the body and the paper trail in the commodification process, drawing on commercial records produced by the Portuguese at the port of Ouidah in West Africa. Finally, I contrast this accumulated information on how body markings were perceived with fragments of African narratives, which, though filtered through power dynamics and colonial scribes, reveal in their own voices the nuances behind the intricate designs inscribed on their skin.

2. Body Adornment and the Construction of Ideas about Homeland[2]

Brazil emerged as the primary destination in the Atlantic slave trade, receiving around 4.5 million of the 10 million Africans who survived the

2 This section has been adapted from a portion of the article: Rodrigues, "African Body."

Middle Passage between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.[3] In this historical context, it is important to note that the Portuguese rulers and colonial society did not view the enslaved population as a homogeneous demographic defined solely by the color of their skin. As in other regions of the Americas and the Caribbean, the diverse origins of these individuals were acknowledged and classified using the polysemic term *nation*.[4] In their efforts to deal with the immense array of backgrounds among the enslaved population, merchants and slave owners utilized heuristics and interpretative shortcuts to try to predict their behavior and origin. One strategy involved associating a person's nation to stereotypes linked to their provenance, thereby facilitating categorization. This approach was employed not only for the purpose of understanding but also as a means of implementing social control strategies.[5]

In the process of acquiring knowledge about the origins of the enslaved Africans, visual elements played a crucial role in translating and conveying the accumulated information. Among these visual elements, body markings became prominent features upon which merchants and slave owners relied. In Minas Gerais, the Brazilian mining zone, the Portuguese crown placed the category of *nação* (nation) and its accompanying visual markers at the center of its social control measures and fiscal policies. The *capitação* (capitation) tax edict issued in 1735 emphasized the importance of *pátrias* (homelands), *alcunhas* (nicknames), and *sinais distintivos* (distinguishing signs) as means of differentiating between individual slaves in official documentation.[6] In the diamond district of northern Minas Gerais, surveillance strategies were particularly rigorous owing to the establishment by the crown of a monopolistic diamond-mining regime that limited the number of slaves allowed to work within the area demarcated by the colonial administration.[7] In 1743, the Overseas Council (Conselho Ultramarino)

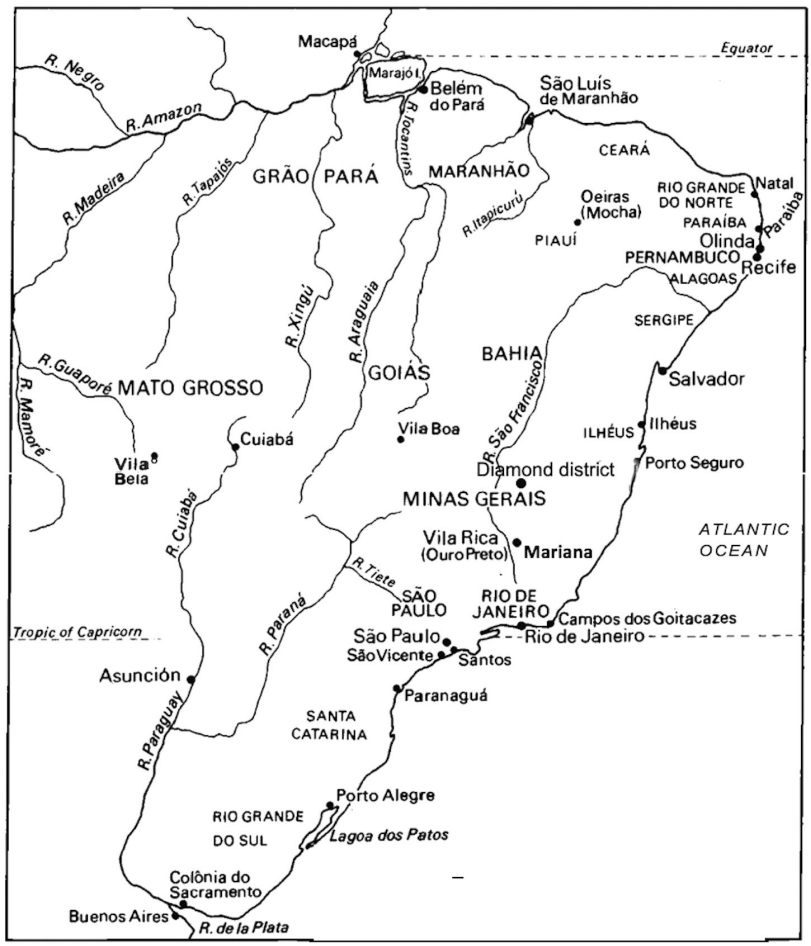
3 www.slavevoyages.org, accessed on September 11, 2023; Eltis and Richardson, *Atlas*.

4 Their origins were classified in the Atlantic on the basis of the category "nation," which was malleable and had a wide range of meanings. Depending on the context and on the point in an individual's life course, "nation" could designate toponyms in macro areas of the slave trade, slave shipping ports, kingdoms and empires, micro-political affiliations, linguistic classifications at various levels, ethnonyms closer to specific ethnic identities, and even self-ascription. Classifications of origin could shift from a subgroup to a broader generic descriptor, and vice versa. This synthesis is based on: Soares, "A 'Nação'"; Parés, *A Formação*, 13–100; Chambers, "Ethnicity."

5 Wax, "Preferences"; Lara, *Fragmentos*; Silva Jr., *Identidades*; Curran, *Anatomy*, 29–73; Rodrigues, "African Body."

6 Figueiredo and Campos, *Códice*, 303.

7 Ibid., 848.



Map 1.1 Map of eighteenth-century Brazil. Adapted from: Leslie Bethel, *Colonial Brazil*, p. 68.

determined that this information should be recorded on printed forms dispatched from Lisbon, and the documents were to be registered and carried by enslaved people for inspection in case of suspected contractual fraud, tax evasion, or the need for permission to substitute a slave owing to illness, death, or escape. Scarification or other body markings served as a means of validating whether the inspected person had been properly registered.[8] Enslavement, therefore, required the entanglement of Africans in a complex web of paperwork. The visual elements seen on their bodies

8 Ibid., 650.

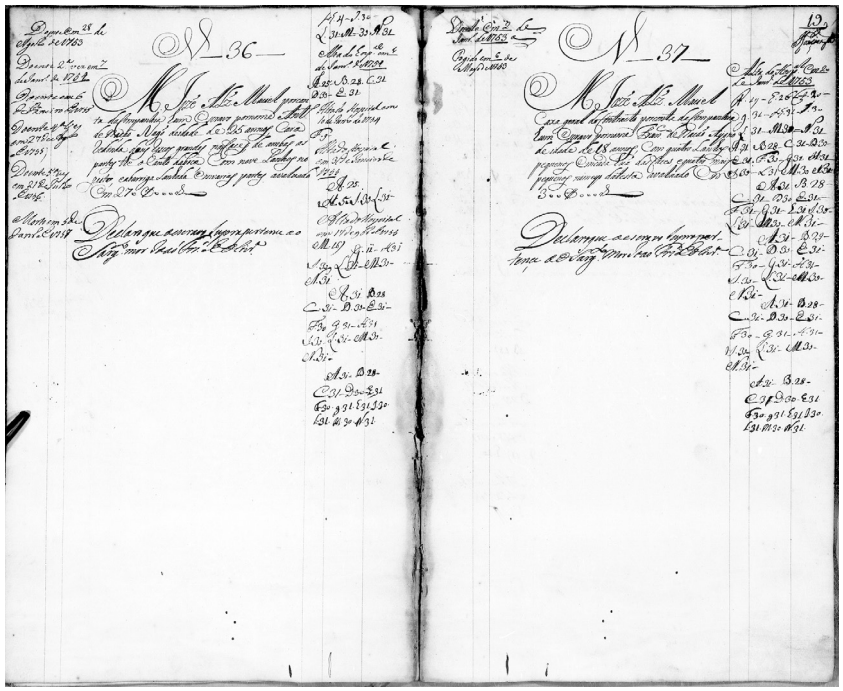


Figure 1.1 Antônio Nagô Markings. Arquivo Público Mineiro (henceforth APM), CC2048-024, 1753, n. 36, f. 18v.

were utilized to incorporate them into the broader system of colonial bureaucracy.[9]

To understand these dynamics, I examine the *códice* that recorded tax collection in 1753, which is the only remaining register pertaining to the Minas Gerais captaincy. The document was authored by officials of the diamond administration, with the principal scribe being a Portuguese individual named Luís Mendonça Cabral. At this point, he had been employed on the royal estate for over a decade, fulfilling various fiscal roles in different regions of the captaincy.[10] The initial list of 1753 *matrículas* comprised 396 enslaved individuals, and there were 48 substitutions of those who had died or run away, so that 444 individuals'

9 This discussion of the relationships between colonial archives, knowledge production and the construction of racial differences is inspired in part by the work of: Stoler, "Colonial"; Bryant, *Rivers*.

10 Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (henceforth ANTT), Habilitações da Ordem de Cristo, letra L, mç. 6, n. 5, 1764–1765.

features are described in all.[11] Each entry contained important details such as registration number, Christian name, nation, age, body marks, and assigned value.

The individuals listed in the 1753 códice were all men, and most of them were born in Africa; only six were born in Brazil. Groups from West Africa accounted for three-quarters of the total, pointing to a significant proportion of Gbe-speaking peoples from the Vodun area. This concentration explains why generic origin labels such as "Mina nation" (*nação Mina*), designating peoples from the Bight of Benin in the Portuguese Atlantic, would have been insufficient to distinguish between one person and another: the term "Mina" was applied to only 11 out of 330 West Africans. The scribe preferred more specific terminology, some of which was in current use in Africa (for example, Fon or Sabaru). This preponderance of West Africans in Minas Gerais was connected to the enslavement processes that occurred in the conflicts relating to the expansion of the Kingdom of Dahomey from Abomey to the coast of the Bight of Benin and involving the conquest of the Kingdoms of Allada (1724) and Ouidah (1727).[12]

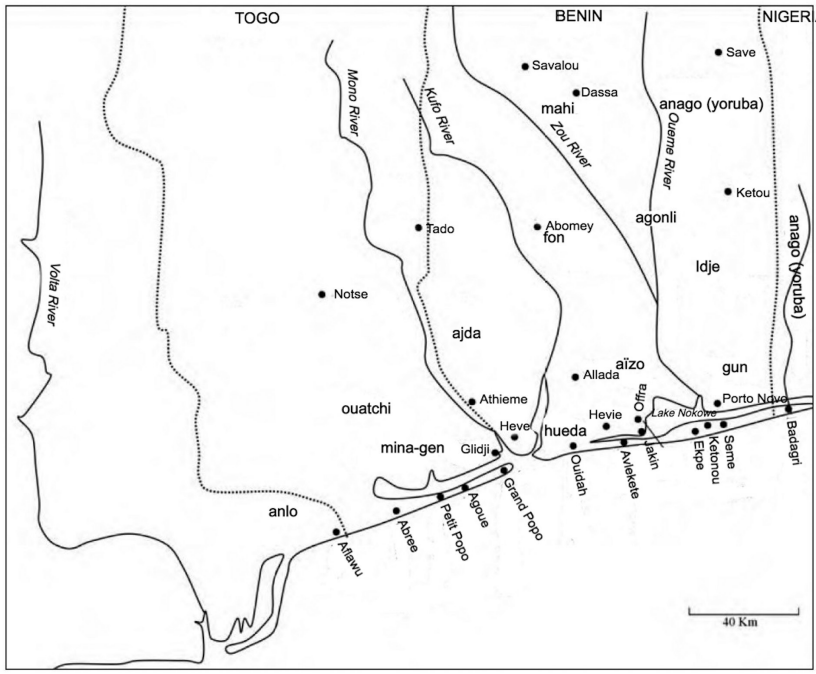
Table 1.1 Origins of registered slave population (1753–1754). APM, CC 2048 (1753–1754).

MACRO REGION	NUMBER	%
West Africa	330	74.3
West Central Africa	103	23.2
East Africa (Mozambique)	1	0.2
Unknown Africa	4	0.9
Brazil	6	1.4
Total	**444**	**100.0**

When inspecting and describing the Africans' bodies, Cabral used a wide variety of terms to refer to body markings, such as *lanho* (welt), *sinal* (sign), *risco* (line), *grelha* (grid), *malha* (mesh), and *geja.* "Geja" as used here is a term of African origin that emerged within the diaspora, being assigned to patterns of skin decoration associated with people from the Bight of Benin

11 In these cases the entry number was not altered. The substitute's details were written down in the same entry as those of the replaced slave. APM, CC2048 (1753–1754), n. 28, f. 14v.

12 Law, *Slave*, 26–27.



Map 1.2 Map of the Gbe-speaking area and its main ethnic groups. Adapted from: Parés, *Formation*, 8. Copyright © 2013 by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher, www.uncpress.org.

who spoke Gbe languages.[13] He gave further details about the visual effect of the patterns by using such adjectives as *lavrado* (gouged), *riscado* (cut), *picado* (dotted), *retalhado* (dashed), or *levantado* (raised), as well as by mentioning their length and number, and whether they were symmetrically or asymmetrically placed with regard to the two sides of the body. He sometimes interpreted the markings by building analogies with plants, flowers, and animals (for example, snakes), objects seen in the sky (stars, moon, half-moon), geometric shapes (circles, grids), Christian symbols (crosses), and weapons, among others. For instance, Diogo Fon, aged 30, displayed "three grids on the right cheek and a cross on the left, and six lines over the left eyebrow, and two dotted circles over the right."[14] Miguel Sabaru, aged 30, was "dotted on both temples, with a grid between the eyebrows, a cross on the left cheek and two snakes, one on each cheek."[15]

13 Rodrigues, "Com Duas Gejas."
14 APM, CC 2048 (1753–1754), n. 306, f. 153v.
15 Ibid., n. 114, f. 57v.

Skin adornments were recorded alongside other distinguishing marks, including warts or general scars. Occasionally, smallpox scars were used as distinguishing marks for *crioulos*, enslaved Black people born in Brazil. As highlighted by Paul Lovejoy, scarification practices among individuals of African descent in the Americas were discontinued owing to their association with social control and the disruption of the original meaning behind such practices, such as African lineage or social hierarchies. This was exemplified in the case of José Crioulo, who was identified by being "full of pockmarks and stubble."[16]

The tax officials also made a note of marks on the stomach, chest, and back, indicating that the Africans were bare above the waist during the registration process. For instance, in the case of Matias from the Oheme valley, the scribe first examined the face, highlighting patterns on the temples, and then proceeded to document a "scar below the right breast."[17] A cartographic description was also provided for Manoel's chest and stomach, depicting "two long spears criss-crossed on the chest, and above them, three closely spaced lines, with a large cross above the navel."[18] In matrícula 359, the clerk initially focused on examining Luís Mina's chest and then expanded his observations by turning him to the right to include markings on his back, noting his features: "two large scars on his belly, continuing around to his back by the right side."[19]

A careful examination of the tax register entries reveals the colonial imperative to grapple with the continuous arrival of Africans by collecting elements that could be utilized to categorize them on the basis of visually observable similarities and differences. The Portuguese officials, in their eagerness to document, stabilize, and establish connections among the patterns that adorned the Africans' bodies, provide us with insights into the gradual process through which they familiarized themselves with the most common bodily modifications. They developed a system of *sinais de nação* (marks of nation) and *sinais da sua terra* (marks of their homeland), ethnicizing Africans as part of the colonial endeavor to decipher and classify them. This aspect is evident in the entry for Manoel Sabaru, a 22-year-old individual described as having "two lines on each temple from ear to eye corner, two gejas resembling large smallpox scars on the right cheek, and all other marks of Sabaru." Domingos Sabaru, for his part, had "a spear on the

16 Ibid., n. 137, f. 69.
17 Ibid., n. 234, f. 117v.
18 Ibid., n. 31, f. 16.
19 Ibid., n. 359, f. 180.

neck all the way up to the roots of the hair on the left side, two gapped upper teeth, and more marks of Sabaru on his face."[20] The lack of a detailed design of his skin drawings, mentioning only "more marks of Sabaru," suggests that there were some widely accepted assumptions that the patterns associated with the Sabaru group would be easily recognizable, indicating a level of familiarity and shared understanding regarding the visual markers that were being attached to Savalou people.[21]

By categorizing scarification as "marks of nation" and creating a discourse that linked specific designs or patterns to someone's origin, Portuguese officials oversimplified the complex meanings associated with African body modifications. The semantics of body adornments in Africa do not neatly align with the ideas and expectations of these marks as straightforward emblems of origin or homeland. A careful examination of the entries in the tax records reveals significant variation in skin cultural practices even within the same nation. For instance, let's consider the specific shape of a "cross on the cheek." Among the 444 enslaved individuals listed, 24 were specifically documented as having this particular mark, and it is attributed to eight different nations (Cobu, Fon, Ladá, Malê, Nagô, Oheme, Sabaru, and Tapa). If we narrow our focus to only those with the mark on the left cheek, however, the number decreases to ten individuals, but it still belongs to five distinct groups (Cobu, Fon, Nagô, Sabaru, and Tapa).[22]

When examining a specific group such as the Fon from the Kingdom of Dahomey, we discover a high degree of heterogeneity in their patterns. The designs, locations, and number of incisions varied significantly among individuals within the group. It is important to note that not all individuals from the Fon group had patterns on their cheeks; some had marks on their temples, while others had markings exclusively on their chest or no marks at all. This diversity within the Fon group challenges any notion of a uniform or standardized set of markings associated with a particular group.

Several tendencies can be seen amid all this diversity and variation, but I do not believe they alone suffice to define an origin. The most important element in the definition of nation may have been language. African interpreters could have been assisting the clerks and asking the Africans

20 Ibid., n. 30, f. 15v.

21 It might be assumed that the "marks of Sabaru" were the spears, but they do not appear in ten members of the group and are present in the Nagô and Fon.

22 APM, CC 2048 (1753–1754), n. 1, f. 1; n. 110, f. 55v; n. 283, f. 142; n. 341, f. 171; n. 35, f. 18; n. 48, f. 24v; n. 62, f. 31v; n. 63, f. 32; n. 257, f. 129; n. 352, f. 176v; n. 173, f. 87; n. 264, f. 132v; n. 34, f. 17v; n. 114, f. 57v; n. 124, f. 64v; n. 139, f. 70; n. 168, f. 84v; n. 227, f. 114; n. 235, f. 118; n. 280, f. 140v; n. 282, f. 141v; n. 311, f. 156; n. 6, f. 3v; n. 187, f. 94.

Table 1.2 Marks of Fon nation. APM, CC 2048 (1753–1754).

Mateus	Dotted lines on temples up to eye corners and over left eyebrow (*picado das fontes até o canto dos olhos e um sinal picado e comido em a sobrancelha esquerda*)
Paulino	Wart on right cheek (*com uma barruga na face direita*)
Caetano	Spear on left cheek (*com uma lança na face esquerda*)
José	Four gejas on right temple and two large ones and two small ones and the same on the left (*com quatro gejas na fonte direita e duas grandes e duas mais pequenas e o mesmo da esquerda*)
Cristóvão	Smallpox scars, mark on left of belly, short stature (*picado de bexigas com um sinal na barriga da parte esquerda e de estatura curto*)
José	Pockmarked cheeks, left earlobe missing (*picado nas faces e a ponta da orelha esquerda comida*)
Luis	Large scar on right cheek, right arm full of small gashes (*com uma cicatriz grande na face direita e o braço direito cheio de lanhos pequenos*)
Miguel	Four lines over right eyebrow, right arm patterned (*com quatro riscos em cima da sobrancelha direita e o braço direito lavrado*)
Luiz	Lumps under beard and chin, also on chest (*embarrugado por baixo da barba e queixo e da mesma sorte no meio do peito*)
Francisco	Plain faced with small scar on right breast (*liso da cara com uma cicatriz pequena no peito direito*)
Pedro	Part of right ear missing, patterned face (*com um pedaço da orelha direita comida e lavrado na cara*)
Miguel	Plain faced, thick lips, large pockmark from smallpox in middle of forehead to hairline (*um sinal grande de bexiga no meio da testa ao pé do cabelo*)
João	Plain faced with gejas on temples, thick lips and two wide upper teeth (*liso da cara com gejas nas fontes, beiços grossos e dois dentes de cima largos*)
José	Two gejas on both temples, plain-faced, tall stature (*com duas gejas em ambas as fontes, liso da cara, estatura comprido*)
João	Three dotted lines on each temple and a star over right eyebrow (*com três riscos picados em cada uma das fontes e uma estrela em cima da sobrancelha direita*)
Antonio José	Plain faced with small wart on right eyelid and mark on right side of chin (*liso da cara com uma berruga pequena na capela do olho direito e um sinal no queixo da parte direita*)
Tomé	Plain long face and high forehead with receding corners (*liso da cara comprida e testa alta com cantos*)
Antonio	Both cheeks pocked and small scar on left side of neck and two large raised gejas on chest (*com as faces ambas picadas e uma cicatriz pequena no pescoço da parte esquerda e duas gejas grandes levantadas no peito*)
José	Plain faced with large lump on top of left ear (*liso da cara com um calombo grande na ponta da orelha esquerda*)
Miguel	Two small lines at right eye corner and three at left, three on forehead and two on each cheek (*com dois riscos pequenos no canto do olho direito e três no esquerdo, três na testa e dois em cada uma das faces*)
Diogo	Three grids on right cheek and cross on left cheek and six lines above left eyebrow and two dotted circles over right eyebrow (*com três grelhas na face direita e uma cruz na esquerda e seis riscos por cima da sobrancelha esquerda e sobre a direita dois circulos picados*)

Caetano	Dots on temples, grid on forehead, round smallpox scar at right corner of mouth (*picado nas fontes, uma grelha na testa e um sinal redondo de bexiga no canto da boca da parte direita*)
Pedro Mina	Plain faced with large wart in middle of right eyebrow (*liso da cara com uma barruga grande no meio da sobrancelha direita*)
Rafael	Plain faced with scar under left eye and small wart above right eyebrow (*liso da cara com uma cicatriz por baixo do olho esquerdo e uma berruga pequena em cima da sobrancelha direita*)
Bernardo	Plain faced with small gejas on both temples (*Liso da cara com gejas pequenas em ambas as fontes*)
Antonio	Three dotted lines on both temples, smallpox pockmarks and large scar under right breast (*com três riscos picados em ambas as fontes, picado de bexigas e uma cicatriz grande por baixo do peito direito*)
Francisco	Three small lines above left eyebrow, dotted circle above right eyebrow, three gejas on right cheek and one on left cheek (*com três riscos pequenos por cima da sobrancelha esquerda e um círculo picado por cima da direita, três grelhas na face direita e uma na esquerda*)
Gaspar	Two small welts on each cheek and scar in corner of left temple (*Com dois lanhos pequenos em cada uma das faces e uma cicatriz no canto da testa da parte esquerda*)
Antonio	Right cheek with dotted lines resembling straw mat, left cheek plain (*com a face direita picada do feitio de esteira e a esquerda lisa*)
Antonio	Smallpox pockmarks, marks on both temples, gejas above right and left eyebrows, two dotted circles above right breast, snake above left breast (*picado de bexigas, com sinais em ambas as fontes, com uma geja em cima da sobrancelha da parte da fonte direita e outra da esquerda, com dois circulos picados por cima do peito direito e por cima do esquerdo uma cobra*)
Francisco	Three small lines on each cheek, dotted line from ears to eye corners (*com três riscos pequenos em cada uma das faces, picado das orelhas até o canto dos olhos*)
Ventura	Pockmarked cheeks and temples, scar above left eyebrow, belly full of large gejas, wide lower teeth (*com as faces e fontes picadas, cicatriz na sobrancelha esquerda, com a barriga cheia de gejas grandes e os dentes da parte de baixo largos*)
Gaspar	Grid on right temple, dots on left temple, dotted circle above right eyebrow, snake above left eyebrow, large mark in middle of forehead, cross on left cheek, large mark on right cheek (*com uma grelha na fonte direita e picado na esquerda com circulo picado sobre a sobrancelha direita e na esquerda uma cobra com uma marca grande no meio da testa, uma cruz na face esquerda e na direita um sinal grande*)
Sebastião	Round face, dots on temples, two gapped upper teeth (*cara redonda, picado nas fontes e os dois dentes de cima abertos*)

themselves or traders where they were from. Marks were then instrumentalized in an attempt to inscribe these in the tax records and visually translate possible knowledge about origins based on the most frequent designs and patterns in each group.

The discrepancy between the colonial interpretation of body markings and their actual meaning to the enslaved individuals becomes more apparent when we delve into the polysemy of ritual scarification in Africa.

While specific literature on body modifications in eighteenth-century West Africa is lacking, interdisciplinary research on subsequent centuries, particularly focusing on the Yoruba region, provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of skin modification practices. In Africa, scarification was a deliberate and intricate process carried out by skilled scarifiers. They employed various sharp tools to create meticulous incisions in the skin, aiming to achieve the desired visual effect. To ensure controlled scarification, body artists utilized hemostatic substances derived from plants and charcoal, which aided in the healing and formation of the scars, according to choices of visual effect and tactile expectations.[23]

Skin modifications also conveyed identity and belonging on various levels. They reflected lineage affiliations and social, political, and gender-related positions, and indicated age distinctions, as different generations might have distinct scarification features. Healing practices were also intertwined with scarification, as substances from medicinal herbs could be introduced into the body through scarification marks, allowing the projection of someone's health history. Additionally, scarification served as a form of expressing personal achievements; acquiring protection against metaphysical forces from the unseen realm; marking personal relationships and memorializing lost family members and loved ones; and denoting religious affiliation, aligning individuals with specific deities in the Vodun pantheon among Gbe-speaking communities or the Orisha pantheon in the Yoruba region. It also provided individuals with a means of personal agency, allowing for innovative choices in design for beautification purposes.[24] Body markings tended to be located according to these multiple meanings. This complexity was reflected in the highly varied terminology for the different types of incision and symbol, depending on the moment in the individual's life course, their gender, the line symmetry and direction, and the number and combination of shapes and patterns. In short, scarification served as a means of inscribing the multifaceted aspects of human experience onto the skin. As Sherwin Bryant aptly states, it "encodes a person's history on the body."[25]

The permanent designs and patterns created in the skin were not static or uniform, and it was an ongoing process, with fresh markings being added gradually throughout an individual's life. The descriptions found in colonial

23 Adepegba, *Survey*.

24 This brief synthesis is based on: Ojo, "Beyond"; Keefer, "Scarification"; Drewal, "Beauty"; Keefer, "Group"; Lovejoy, "Scarification."

25 Bryant, *Rivers*, 73.

registers, therefore, provide only a snapshot of the stage of scarification reached by Africans at the time of their transportation to Brazil.

In Brazil, within groups from the same region, such as the Gbe-speaking people, it is plausible to assume that scarifications retained meanings that were relatively similar to the original intentions behind their production. The shared cultural background would have facilitated a greater degree of coherence and recognition. For example, they could easily identify a Vodun priest or priestess and recognize the specific deity they were associated with. In the case of the Dan Voduns worshiped in the coastal area of the Bight of Benin, there is evidence in the Inquisition archives that its cult was practised in the mining region of Brazil.[26] Initiation into this cult entailed the carving of multiple python figures into the skin.

Given the diverse semantics of body modifications across different regions of Africa, zones of incomprehension and shifts in interpretation likely emerged within the diaspora. These variations in understanding may have contributed to the construction of notions of otherness from African perspectives—nuances that cannot be easily quantified or measured here owing to the opacity of primary sources. Regarding gender, we can speculate that the meanings associated with body markings denoting gender roles were strained and destabilized by the demands of the slave trade and slavery, in which the mining workforce in Brazil was primarily male. The predominant presence of men (100 percent of the records analyzed) suggests that gender relations mediated by skin modifications were misaligned with the original contexts where such markings held significance. This hypothetical discrepancy may have arisen because the meanings attributed to these markings were deeply intertwined with the coexistence and interaction of both men and women.

The common element in the classification grid for nations and body marks that could facilitate the extraction of racialized knowledge regarding the multiplicity of African origins was the division between blacks and whites, rooted in the ideology of slavery. This ideology aimed to legitimize the power and freedom of whites while relegating blacks to the position of enslaved individuals. The racialization process is the search for and reaffirmation of these common denominators. If the colonial reading of marks embodies a search for the specificity of each person and each group, the deployment of phenotypes can be said to pursue similarities among them. The same scribe who recorded the marks insisted on demarcating anatomical details of noses and lips, whereas other traits such as stature or the shape of the

26 Rodrigues, "Militarization," 152–157.

face, head, and forehead were mentioned only occasionally. Through the frequent use of two adjectives, he constructed a discourse legitimized by visual frameworks, normalizing the nose as *chato* (flat) and the lips as *beiço grosso* (thick). One of many examples is Antonio Angola, who had no facial marks but had "some smallpox marks, a flat nose and thick lips."[27] Joaquim Cobu had four marks on his temples and "thick lips."[28] João Fon also had "thick lips,"[29] while Ventura Benguela had a "broad flat nose,"[30] and Felix Cobu was "plain faced with thick lips and a flat nose."[31]

African anatomical features could be contrasted with European characteristics, highlighting the significance of this parameter. This becomes particularly evident when African individuals deviated from the expected norms of black physicality, as observed when Cabral notes that Antonio Sabaru (Savalou), possesses a nose that is "straight like a white man's nose" (*nariz direito como de branco*). In other words, the shape of his nose does not conform to the predetermined definition of a black nose, thus exposing an important aspect of how blackness is constructed. Conversely, in the case of José Guido, a 36-year-old individual described as Monjolo, the anatomy of his nose is interpreted as connecting black physicality and simian animality, as he is said to have a *nariz amacacado* (monkeyish nose). These observations made in the interior of South America may have been influenced by and in dialogue with classificatory stereotypes emerging and circulating in Europe and the Atlantic world during the eighteenth century.[32] According to Noémie Ndiaye and Lia Markey, "[t]he derogatory association of Black men with apes and monkeys was pervasive in early modern European culture."[33]

When examining the textual description of body decorations, it can be argued that the categorization of Africans into the white-black dichotomy did not involve disregarding their origins, languages, and cultural traditions. The gaze that classifies body markings expresses colonial forms of visually translating the production of knowledge regarding their origins. At the same time, it was through the body that hierarchies between whites and blacks were visually reinforced, employing the appropriation of phenotypes that could stabilize differences in each of the cleavages that organized the social and political order. These dimensions were not sequentially linear,

27 APM, CC 2048 (1753–1754), n. 76, f. 38v.
28 Ibid., n. 276, f. 138v.
29 Ibid., n. 237, f. 119.
30 Ibid., n. 156, f. 78v.
31 Ibid., n. 299, f. 150.
32 Bindman, *Ape*, 175–176; Schaub, *Race*, 100.
33 Ndiaye and Markey, *Race*, xiii–xiv.

but rather intertwined and constructed through the social technologies that were heightened by the institution of slavery. This process was continuously reinforced and influenced by the significant influx of enslaved persons from Africa.

3. Commodification, African Agency, and Counter-Commodification in Interpretations of Brands

In the previous section, I examined the colonial interpretation of voluntary symbols worn by Africans on their bodies. Now, the focus shifts to the layers of involuntary symbols forcibly imposed on their skin during the process of commodification, encompassing their experience in the transatlantic slave trade and the daily realities of slavery in Brazil.[34] Accounting, commercial, and fiscal techniques were developed, which included the use of skin as a medium for applying royal emblems, geometric shapes, and monograms. These insignias, created by branding instruments, were designed to incorporate the body into a broader framework of textual information, serving as variables in crown codices or accounting ledgers. This practice was so pervasive in the Lusophone world that the current Portuguese verb *carimbar* (to stamp) and the noun *carimbo* (stamp) originated from the Kimbundu term *kirimbu* (stamp or mark), used in the Luanda region, which served as a primary departure point for enslaved individuals in the South Atlantic.[35]

The use of branding in the slave trade varied significantly depending on the circumstances. Those who were transported from Angola received these stamps as evidence of their baptism and the payment of taxes for each person. According to Roquinaldo Ferreira, Africans could receive these marks four times, with various control authorities applying them from their inland journey to their embarkation on the ships. They received the merchant's symbol from the hinterland, where a crown official held the title of *capitão das marcas* (Captain of Marks); the cross as a baptismal sign; the royal stamp on the right chest, and the owner's mark.[36]

In the ports of the Bight of Benin, controlled by African elites where the Portuguese lacked territorial control beyond their factory, we do not observe a standardized process for marking each person's affiliation with

34 For a rich analysis of the use of branding by slave traders, see Keefer, "Marked."

35 Alencastro, *Trato*, 180–184.

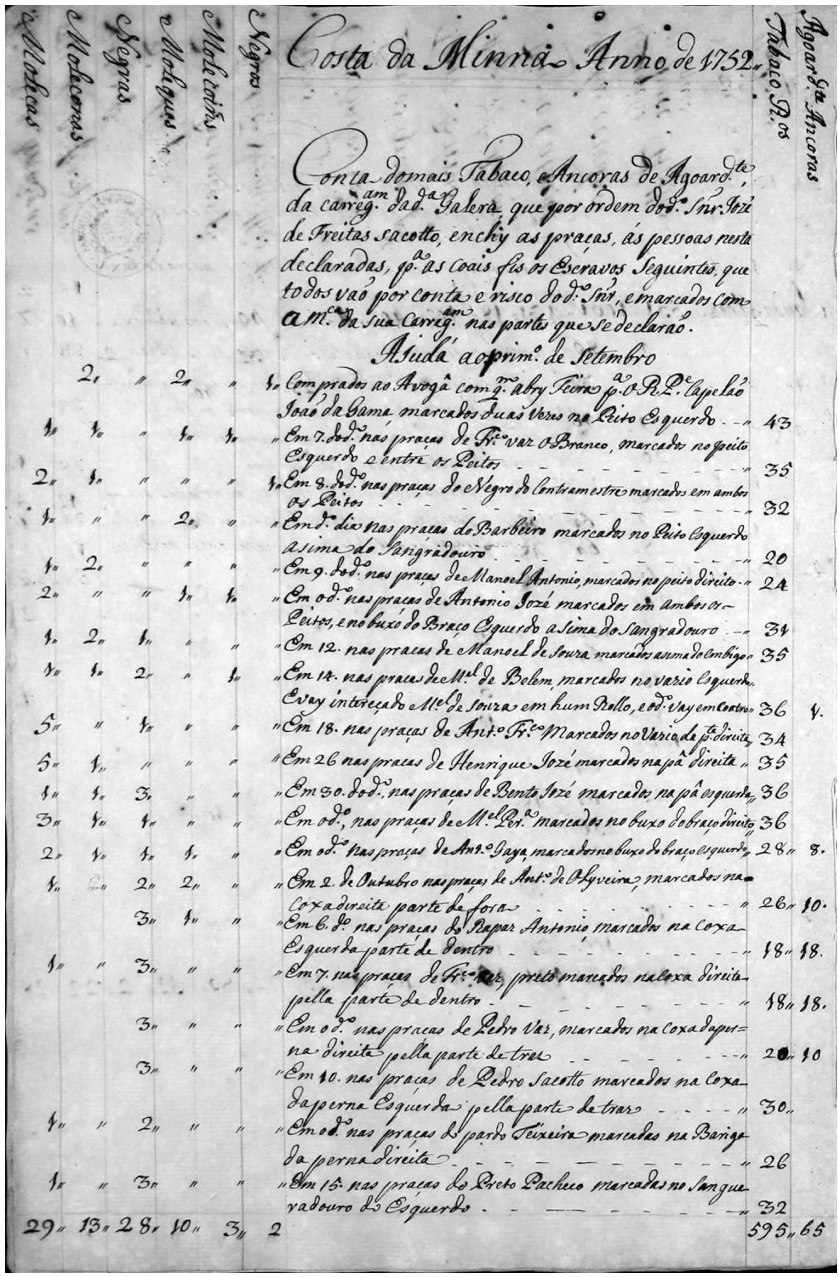
36 Ferreira, *Cross-cultural*, 122. See also: Alencastro, *Trato*, 180–184; Candido, *African Slaving*, 450–454.

the cargo. An accounting book from 1752, associated with a Luso-Brazilian vessel owned by José de Freitas Sacoto, engaged in the Costa da Mina-Pernambuco route, provides valuable insights into the daily procedures of this practice.[37] The scribe meticulously records the numerous local agents with whom negotiations took place at each port, the duration of the ship's stay, the number of individuals embarked at each location, their sex and age profiles, commodities involved in commercial exchanges, investors, and purchasers of the human cargo. During the month of September, the ship remained anchored in Ajudá (Ouidah), where 110 individuals were embarked, categorized into five groups based on sex and age range as defined by the slave trade: *molecas* (girls), *moleconas* (adolescent girls), *negras* (adult women), *moleques* (boys), and *molecões* (adolescent boys), and *negros* (adult men). A new line in the ledger was dedicated to each transaction, and the placement of the brands on the body varied for each new entry, indicating a close connection between a new record and a fresh combination of marks. The scribe does not specify the monogram or symbol inscribed on the skin; he simply notes that they were branded "with the mark of their cargo."[38]

Within this accounting framework, the most crucial information for identifying each transaction appears to be the precise location of the brands on the bodies of the enslaved individuals, including details about the limb where the marks were inflicted and their position in relation to the left or right side. The objective, seemingly, was to expand the range of possible combinations to eliminate ambiguity when identifying the owner and transactions, particularly as these individuals had not yet received Christian names. In descending order, the brands were placed on the chest, thigh, hollow (below the ribs), shoulder blades, armpits (triceps region), legs, inner part of the arm opposite the elbow, and navel. For instance, on the first day of September, in accordance with the protocol mandated by the king of Dahomey, the scribe documents the initial acquisition at the port of Ouidah through his representative, Avogá. From Avogá, two "moleconas," two "moleques," and one "negro" were obtained in exchange for 43 rolls of tobacco. This group received dual marks on the left chest, noted as "purchased from Avogá, with whom I opened a fair for the Reverend Father Chaplain João da Gama, marked twice on the left chest." As is evident, to enhance disambiguation strategies using these eight body parts, the

37 Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (henceforth AHU), Cx 09, doc 944, São Tomé, Conta da Carregação, ff. 15v–16r, 1752. For further contextualization regarding the trade network responsible for this vessel, please refer to: Almeida, "Rotas."

38 AHU, Cx 09, doc 944, São Tomé, Conta da Carregação, ff. 15v–16r, 1752.



Costa da Minna Anno de 1752.

Figure 1.2 Slave Trade Branding—Costa da Mina, 1752. AHU, Cx 09, doc. 944, São Tomé, Conta da Carregação, f. 15v–16r, 1752. Image granted by: Portugal, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino.

practice allowed for duplication or even triplication of symbols in the same location. Six days later, "in the squares of Francisco Vaz, o Branco," one "moleca," one "molecona," one "moleque," and one "molecão" were acquired and branded on the left chest and between the breasts, exchanged for 35 rolls of tobacco.[39]

The commercial symbol inscribed on the skin connected the physicality of enslaved bodies and the paper trail of accounting information inscribed in the materiality of commercial ledgers, amalgamating the paper medium and the use of skin as a medium to construct data retrieval strategies. The objective was to establish a comprehensive chain of information encompassing details about the seller, the trading location, the date of acquisition, the transaction amount, the cargo's proprietor, and its intended destination. In the initial example, the dual marks on the left side of the chests of the three individuals, who were yet to be christened, emerged as crucial variables within the spreadsheet that orchestrated logistical operations.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the analysis of the commodification process, which involved both the appropriation of scarifications for surveillance and the imposition of trade stamps, should not overshadow the agency of Africans. To address this aspect, I draw upon insights from literature that examines the subordination and surveillance of various social groups, highlighting the conflicting nature of constructing meanings around their bodies within each specific reality.[40] In the context of the Atlantic world, for instance, Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, in their analysis of eighteenth-century Anglophone newspaper advertisements describing people's bodies, argue that the language of the body "offers contradictory meanings and possibilities—there are always struggles over meanings."[41] They conclude that "[p]eople were identified by their bodies, but crucially, they also identified themselves through the bodies they presented to others."[42] Consequently, the body can also be viewed as a site of resistance. Antonio Bly has recently underscored the importance of examining the intentions of enslaved individuals in the silence that lies between the lines of runaway advertisements in eighteenth-century New England. These individuals revealed the strength of their resistance strategies in adverse circumstances.[43]

39 Ibid., ff. 15v–16r, 1752.

40 Waldstreicher, "Reading"; Johnston, "Resisting Bodies"; Block, *Colonial Complexions*, 84–109; Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*.

41 Morgan and Rushton, "Visible Bodies," 55.

42 Ibid.

43 Bly, "Indubitable Signs."

In the realm of written primary sources, Latin American studies have been proposing innovative approaches to reading colonial texts that challenge the notion of univocality and seek to capture nuances of subjectivities and discourses among subaltern groups, both in the explicit content of these texts and within the subtext.[44] I draw inspiration from the work of Margaret Olsen, who conducts an analysis of the classic Jesuit text by Alonso de Sandoval, *De Instauranda Æthiopum Salute*, from 1627. Her research reveals the defying participation of Africans in the European discourse of conquest and domination, arguing that "verbal and physical acts by slaves in rejection of colonial imposition find expression as a discursive counterposition within certain contexts of writing, such as Sandoval's treatise."[45]

These analytical perspectives offer valuable insights that prompt us to contemplate the role of African agency in the complex and contentious construction of meanings related to their bodies in the diaspora. The actions taken by the enslaved individuals represent a form of counter-commodification, even within the framework of profoundly unequal power relations. In the specific context of the diamond district, the registration records from 1753 include concise annotations that were added to document instances of individuals escaping their captivity. These records reveal that a total of 117 people managed to break free from their status as enslaved individuals. These kinds of succinct commentaries—or "ephemeral archival presences," as Marisa Fuentes suggests[46]—serve as a testament within the colonial archive to the actions of Africans who defied attempts to reduce them to mere property. For example, Manoel Sabaru, hailing from the interior of the Bight of Benin, was described when he was 18 years old, "with six marks on each of the temples, a small snake above the right eyebrow, two small snakes running from the ear to the lower part of the eye and a flat nose, valued at 280$000 réis." Remarkably, despite the extensive surveillance apparatus implemented by the crown, Manoel Sabaru managed to escape from captivity just over a year after his arrival in Brazil. The radical nature of his achievement was thus documented within the very apparatus that had been designed to streamline his commodification for fiscal purposes: "escaped on June 26, 1754."[47]

We can approach black agency also at a more collective level by considering the actions of people who reacted to commodification through the formation of *quilombos* (maroon communities). The dismantling of these

44 Boone and Mignolo, *Writing*.

45 Olsen, *Slavery,* 4.

46 Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*, 1; ibid., 138.

47 APM, CC 2048-024 n. 43, f. 22.

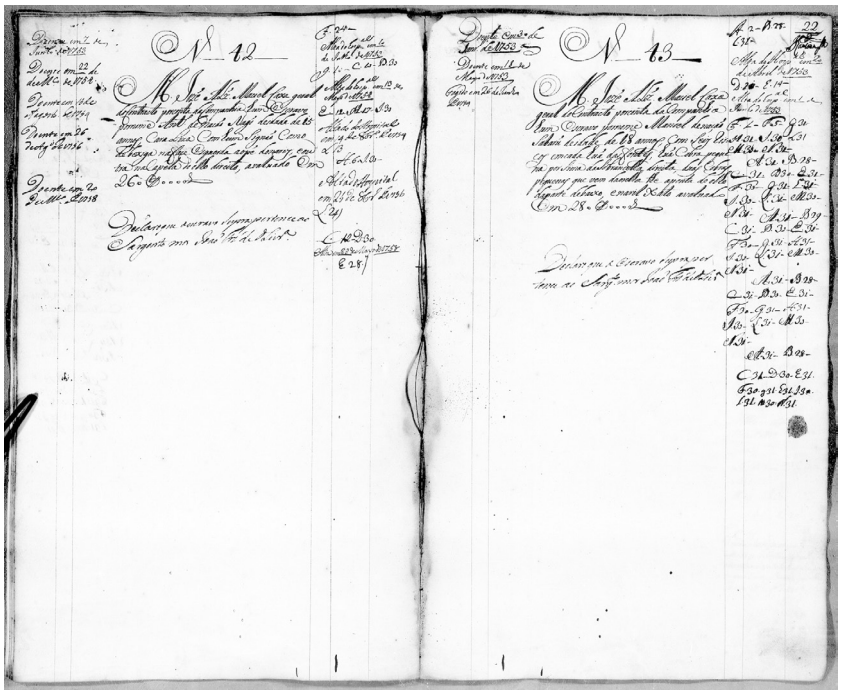


Figure 1.3 Commentary on Manoel's Escape. APM, CC 2048-024, 1753, n. 43, f. 22r.

communities in the mining district was a crucial political issue for the Portuguese because the main economic activity in that region was structured around African labor, and their commercial value made up a significant percentage of properties. These concerns generated debates and shaped colonial administrative practices aimed at combating them, which involved branding runaway individuals with hot irons. Nonetheless, even in seemingly one-sided discussions such as these, it is conceivable to speculate about the role of black agency in shaping the significance of their bodies and its impact on the political calculations of colonial governance. On March 3, 1741, the crown issued a decree mandating that "all the blacks found in quilombos, who are there voluntarily, shall be marked with the letter 'F' using a hot branding iron on one shoulder."[48] The intention was to stigmatize them and intensify surveillance upon their capture in towns, settlements, and along roads. When viewed within a broader context, we could argue that if involuntary marks on the skin of Africans, made with hot irons in African ports, represented a significant stage in the commodification process, the act

48 Lara, *Legislação*, 297.

of escaping to quilombos represented a form of counter-commodification. In other words, the process of commodification implies and inherently encompasses its own negation because we are discussing individuals with subjectivity and political agendas. On this side of the Atlantic, the "F" mark on the back could be interpreted as an index encapsulating and translating an act and a narrative of resistance to commodification, countering the crown's discourse that sought to impose exemplary punishment, with the "F" monogram signifying *fuga* (escape). Anyone encountering this mark on an enslaved individual's body would recognize that this person had liberated themselves and contested their enslaved status. The letter "F" thus acquired the meaning of a statement of non-conformity and could signal to the enslaved community that the marked individual had escaped before and possessed the knowledge of paths and methods to do so again. In this speculation, the "F" mark could facilitate social interactions, conversations, and aspirations of breaking free from captivity.

An anonymous document from 1751, authored by a member of the elite in Minas Gerais during the enforcement of this decree, provides crucial insights into the issue and contextualizes the letter "F" in relation to African interpretations of ritual scarifications. The author, a man connected to the town council of Sabará, presented an alternative solution to the royal decree aimed at combating quilombos, expressing concerns about the economic losses resulting from escaped enslaved individuals. His suggestion was for the crown to facilitate the creation of insurance for enslaved individuals and to employ Christianized indigenous people to enhance security in the region and capture fleeing black individuals. The proposal is situated within a broader historical context of recommendations put forth by their contemporaries, engaging in a dialogue with the governor and the crown.[49] The author mentioned that in 1735, Governor Conde das Galveias (1732–1735) had solicited opinions from local authorities and gathered them at the government secretariat to be sent to Lisbon. At that time, however, no consensus was reached owing to the divergence in proposals, which ranged from severing one of the fugitives' hands to cutting off an ear or beheading. It was only when a new governor, Martinho de Mendonça e Proença, assumed office in 1736 that these opinions were finally dispatched to Portugal. The crown then decreed that every black person found in quilombos should be punished as follows: first, they would be marked on the back; second, one ear would be severed; and third, they would face a lifetime of hard labor.[50]

49 Figueiredo and Campos, *Códice*, 263–264.

50 Ibid.

In the author's view, the royal provision to inscribe the monogram on the back of the shoulders would be ineffective because "the councilors and His Majesty do not comprehend the rustic customs and lives of the blacks, as they are all marked on their faces in their homelands."[51] The author emphasized aspects of scarifications tied to prestige and social hierarchies, noting that "the more intricate the scarifications, the higher the distinction and nobility among these blacks."[52] He argued that in Minas Gerais, considering this African perspective on bodily adornments, "there is no longer any justification for marking calluses on the backs [of the slaves], as prescribed in the said provision, as it sets no meaningful example whatsoever."[53]

Reading this document against the grain reveals the enduring influence of an African synthesis concerning the significance of their bodily modifications in the diaspora. Residing amid a sizable African population, the author must have been exposed to fragmented narratives emphasizing that adornments were a source of pride, indicating hierarchy and social prestige for Africans ("the more elaborate, the greater the distinction and nobility"[54]). While this perspective may oversimplify the complexity of marks within African visual sign systems, it indirectly attested to the fact that the enslaved individuals themselves engaged in discussions about their bodily modifications within Luso-Brazilian everyday life. In this context, more intricate marks signified higher prestige. On the skin, voluntary marks contested the crown's project of imposing involuntary marks for the sake of exemplary degradation. Therefore, African viewpoints on the symbols brought from Africa on their bodies circulated orally, challenging and interacting with Portuguese interpretations and the utilization of their skin in the formulation of social surveillance strategies. It prevented their skins from being perceived as blank canvases awaiting the imposition of alphabetic symbols by the colonial administration's social control practices.

4. Fragments of African Narratives on Body Markings

To further analyze the meaning behind bodily adornments, it is crucial to seek the voices of the enslaved individuals themselves in historical archives, even though there are very few instances in which they speak

51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.

in the first person about bodily modifications. In the Lusophone world, two fragments from the eighteenth century allow us to move beyond the descriptive frameworks created by slave traders and owners, providing insight into the nuances of epidermal decorations.

The first fragment emerges from the Inquisition trial of Luzia da Silva Soares, who lived in the region of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century.[55] She was born in Brazil to Central African parents, and her case provides an opportunity to understand how the presence or absence of scarifications served to distinguish the Creole population from the African one. Furthermore, her testimony reveals the knowledge and discourses that circulated among the black population regarding bodily modifications. She was originally from the sugarcane region of Pernambuco and was taken to the mining region as a child, where she served a local elite family in Mariana. When she was about 40 years old, in 1738, she was accused by her owners in the ecclesiastical court of practicing superstitious rituals involving pacts with the devil, including allegations of causing illness in her enslaver's daughter, Maria José, and killing a child. These suspicions were supposedly confirmed by Francisco Ferreira, an African practitioner of *feitiços* (spells) who was trusted by the family. Soares then underwent several torture sessions to make her confess to the alleged crimes. This violence left numerous scars on her body, especially on her back and arms, inflicted with hot irons and rods. After providing the confession that her enslavers wanted to hear, she was handed over to the local episcopal judge, who collected testimonies about the case and transmitted the process and the defendant to the Inquisition tribunal in Lisbon.

In Portugal, during her deposition, Luzia Soares explained to the inquisitors that the content of her testimony in Brazil was false; it was made only with the purpose of escaping torture. At this point, she drew the inquisitors' attention to the various scars on her body as evidence of what she had endured, denouncing the violence she had suffered and constructing a strategy to nullify the accusations or reduce her potential punishment by the Inquisition (which, paradoxically, also obtained confessions under torture). She emphasized that "from all that, one can see and examine the signs that she carries all over her body, especially on her back and arms, where she bore the brunt of the beatings."[56] Unlike what we saw in the analysis of

55 ANTT, Processo n. 11.163, Inquisição de Lisboa. This trial was pioneeringly studied by Souza, *Diabo*, 345–352. An analysis of Soares's case alongside other Black women was recently conducted by Pereira, "Em todas."

56 ANTT, Processo n. 11.163, ff. 75r–75v, IL.

the colonial gaze, which extracted information about scarifications in the diamond district, Soares was the one summoning the gaze of the inquisitors to have her marks examined. This contrast in perspectives is notable when working with documents more permeable to African agency, as is the case in this process.

After observing her, the inquisitors quickly positioned Luzia's body within the collective dimension of the black body, questioning whether those marks could be bodily adornments that blacks customarily made in those lands. To this, she responded emphatically and negatively, asserting her Creole identity in contrast to blacks born in Africa. She used scarifications as a distinguishing sign: "She said that only the blacks from the interior of the Costa da Mina used to make these signs, but the Creole blacks never did and still do not make such signs."[57] She sought to distance herself from Africa, asserting that it would be degrading for a Creole to be adorned with ritual scars, "as she was born and raised in the same manner and at the same time as the whites, for whom it would be injurious to make or bear such signs."[58] Paradoxically, at the same time, she demonstrated a detailed knowledge of African body modification techniques. She commented on the subtleties of the instruments used in the incisions, dimensions, texture, depth, and visual effects of the marks: the *sinais* (signs) carried by the "*boçais* [saltwater] and *gentios* [gentiles] blacks are brief cuts on the faces and arms made with a needle, thorns from the bushes, or another delicate instrument, and they also pierce their ears and noses, to which they hang rings and threads of various things to adorn themselves."[59] The semantics of voluntary markings, therefore, were very different from the "signs like those that this declarant can be seen with, missing pieces of flesh throughout her body, which clearly shows that they were all caused by the aforementioned punishments and torments."[60] It's also important to remember that her parents, Damiana Soares and João Massangano, were both from Angola, a region that had long been exposed to Christianity and Portuguese colonialism, marked by the persistence of African belief systems.[61] Perhaps this is why she located the center of the geography of African alterity in the hinterlands of the Costa da Mina, where the people had no significant contact with the Portuguese language or Christianity.

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., ff. 76r–76v, IL.
60 Ibid.
61 Souza, *Reis*; Fromont, "Dancing"; Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*.

In this way, she proved to the inquisitors that the black community was not monolithic, and her Creole body represented an important identity and political distinction that socially organized both the enslaved and the freed. There was a significant difference between the subtlety of the patterns of scarification designs ("cuts on the faces and arms" for ornamentation) and the scars from the torments she had suffered. In Luzia's defense, the discrepancy between the absence and presence of scarifications was mobilized to align her with the Christian culture, expressing a notion of civilization, whose most important index would be Catholicism, in opposition to the barbarism attributed to the practices of the heathens. Her skin became the locus where markers of these conflicts were projected, claiming the inclusion of her Creole body, devoid of voluntary scars, within the scope of the Catholic colonial empire. At the same time, her skin served as the locus where the involuntary marks of the barbarity of slave relations, whose power system allowed the violent access of her owners to the black body, were recorded.

Finally, in her defense, Soares added that one of the witnesses who had testified in the ecclesiastical trial conducted in Brazil was related to the lady who had accused her, which constituted a conflict of interest. Taken together, Luzia's allegations had a positive effect, and she was released from Inquisition custody in 1745.[62]

The second archival fragment that documents the voices of black individuals regarding skin modifications is a brief mention of scarification made by Francisco Alves de Souza in an extraordinary manuscript dating back to the 1780s. He was from the Costa da Mina, more specifically from the Mahi territory, which he described as "one of the most excellent and potent regions along that original coast."[63] The Mahi region comprised small political units situated within the Bight of Benin, to the north of Dahomey. Souza was forcibly brought to Brazil at the age of 12, initially arriving in Bahia and later being transported to Rio de Janeiro in 1748. Enslaved and freed Africans often organized themselves into Catholic brotherhoods, which facilitated festivities, took care of the souls of the deceased, conducted burials, and provided charity among their members.[64] In Rio, as Mariza Soares shows, people from West Africa typically affiliated with the Brotherhood of Santa

62 ANTT, Processo n. 11.163, f. 64v.

63 Souza, *Dialogos*, 57. The crown prevented the existence of a printing press in Brazil, which is why his work survives in manuscript format, expressing yet another aspect of the colonial conditions of text production.

64 Mulvey, *Black*; Reginaldo, *Rosários*; Reis, "Identidade."

Efigênia and Santo Elesbão, founded in 1740. Over time, this brotherhood began crowning kings for each nation of the Costa da Mina, along with an emperor, to accommodate the ethnic diversity within the institution. Subsequently, in the 1760s, groups from the Mahi region established their congregation within the same church. Between 1786 and 1788, they officially founded a brotherhood dedicated to Our Lady of Remedies and developed a devotion to the souls.[65]

Souza, who was elected as the regent of the congregation in 1786, had learned Portuguese and was able to write about his experiences in the diaspora. He left a manuscript document divided into two parts, comprising a dialogue and the statutes of his congregation. It was written in a context of intense succession conflict within the institution, triggered by the death of the reigning king, Inácio Monte, in 1783. On the opposing side of the dispute for the position of regent was Monte's widow, Victoria Correia, who had control over the treasury and archives of the brotherhood.[66]

Despite its richness, this narrative should not be regarded from the perspective of "authenticity" or "transparent testimony." Mariza Soares suggests that Souza's manuscript demonstrates rich intertextuality, combining his own recollections with oral narratives from seafarers who traversed the routes to and from the Costa da Mina. Additionally, it incorporates elements of Portuguese literary culture, including treaties, navigation guides, and geographical descriptions of West Africa, which were available in the libraries of Rio.[67]

Souza utilized his command of the Portuguese language as a strategy to legitimize his role as a black leader. He recognized the influence that the written word held in the colonial world compared with African oral traditions. Consequently, having a written statute for the Mahi congregation was essential. Previously, if statutes existed, they were "spoken verbally and mixed with our language, which seems to me to be something done hastily and with little consideration, lacking strength."[68] To defend the political legitimacy of his claim to the highest position in the congregation, he chose the discursive genre of a dialogue. This genre had classical roots and had reached him through Portuguese works circulating in the colony. In the dialogue, Souza's interlocutor is Lieutenant Gonçalo Cordeiro, his secretary, who assumes the role of the individual to whom Souza will express

65 Soares, *Devotos*, 199–230.
66 Ibid., 20–21.
67 Ibid., 3.
68 Ibid., 46.

his qualifications for the position of regent. Souza presents his repertoire of knowledge, his Catholic faith, his connections with the former king of the congregation, and simultaneously attempts to discredit Victoria by invoking gender stereotypes.[69]

The discussion of bodily modifications enters the dialogue when Souza starts to elaborate on the geography of the Kingdom of Benin (now part of Edo State, Southern Nigeria). He describes ports, distances, latitudes, longitudes, currents, navigation conditions, forms of governance, and customs of the people inhabiting the region, portraying them with a degree of exoticism while emphasizing the greatness of the kingdoms. Souza associates the process of creating bodily marks, such as "a scar or marks and blows," with the political relationships that bound subjects to the powerful African monarch who held authority in that region within the context of transatlantic trade. Initially, he states:

> Benin is a great kingdom, and its capital is a beautiful and grand city of the same name, located in Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea. Its king is very powerful, known by the natives as Bá Benin, and the current ruler, as recognized by the same natives, is Dallicá. He can assemble an army of 100,000 men in a short period.[70]

Souza then positions the king in relation to trade and its economic dynamics: "The kingdom is engaged in continuous warfare with neighboring kingdoms and captures many slaves, whom they sell in exchange for manillas and other items."[71] Finally, he places the body within social and political contexts: "The locals are bold and generous. They all serve their king, and to demonstrate their servitude, they create scars or marks and wounds on their bodies. Men dare not wear clothing unless it is provided to them by their king."[72] Thus, by describing the role of the body in the rituals and practices that bound subjects and the ruler, he reveals meanings for the marks on the skin that transcend ethnic identity, indicating their significance in the construction of political identities.

The choice to emphasize the importance of scarifications in explaining the Kingdom of Benin was likely connected to his historical experiences in Africa, where he had lived with political interpretations mediated by

69 Ibid., 20–21.
70 Ibid., 72.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.

visual symbols inscribed on the skin. Finally, we note the use of the plural in defining the vocabulary used to describe scarifications in Portuguese, "cicatriz, marcas ou golpes"[73] (scar, marks, or blows), indicating an understanding of the potential diversity in ways of inscribing them on the skin, with *golpe* possibly referring to the method used in their creation and their visual effect.

5. Conclusions

The colonial archive preserves traces within its codices that document the violent appropriation of African bodies, validated by the power dynamics established through slavery. These records served as tools within a theater of inventing social differences, determining the roles of those who described and those who were described, those who possessed paper and ink, and those whose naked bodies were subjected to thorough examination, enabling their details to be appropriated in written form. Colonial agents aimed to transform African bodies into texts, thereby textualizing the position of the gaze that visually scrutinized their secrets and the gestures required to extract those details. The conceptions and meanings embedded in this mode of visual observation influenced the selection and erasure of information in the social construction of similarities and differences across various levels. The extracted information, derived from the examining of body markings, encapsulated the violence inherent in the gestures that produced it.

The documents reveal that black corporeality was never stable or defined solely by skin color, but was taken as the element of stability in this process, a phenotypic emblem of African difference, equating blackness with the status of slavery.[74] The racialized body is socially constituted in the confrontation between two visual systems of signs, which interact in a non-dichotomous manner. On one side, there were multiple systems of body markings that Africans brought from their homelands, with various layers of voluntary marks opaque to the Portuguese but instrumentalized based on reading recurring patterns within each group for social control. On the other side,

73 Ibid.

74 The term "nègre," Curran explains, was semantically transformed in European thought from a geographical marker (Africa) into a signifier for a chattel slave and hence a political, social, and economic marker of the status of the slave in moral and phenotypic terms. Curran, *Anatomy*, 155–156.

there were various layers of signs belonging to an alphabetical writing system, including the monograms of trading companies, individual traders, Brazilian resident owners, and, finally, the letter "F" planned by the Overseas Council and governors. European alphabetical symbols, however, did not eliminate other symbols that remained mostly obscure to Europeans and continued to have African meanings, particularly in communities formed by people from the same region.

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2. Epidermal Writing, Colonial Semiosis, and Apocalypticism in Colonial Latin America: The Case of Diego de Landa (1524–1579)

Robert Folger

Abstract: Colonial semiosis (Mignolo), the interaction of "Western" alphabetic writing and indigenous sign systems, implies a process of epistemic subjugation. In colonial Latin America it was framed as a confrontation between the supposedly bodily sign systems of indigenous people and the immaterial, alphabetic writing of the colonizers. I argue that colonial semiosis must be seen in the light of the correspondence between alphabetic writing and tattooing established by Ulrike Landfester and the marking of bodies in an eschatological perspective. The example of Diego de Landa's infamous auto-da-fé in sixteenth-century Yucatán illustrates that colonial semiosis and epidermal writing (in its two aspects of alphabetic writing and writing on bodies) are emplotted into the grandest of grand narratives: the Apocalypse.

Keywords: tattoo; apocalypse; indigenous writing; colonialism; Franciscans

1. Introduction

In a historical perspective, colonialism as a regime of extraction and physical domination not only relies on a process of the necessarily precarious establishment of military superiority, it also implies the coloniality of knowledge related to the inculcation of complementary forms of subjectivity (on both sides, colonized and colonizers). It further depends on dispositifs of interpellation that inscribe an embodied subject into a fixed and immutable location

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within existing power structures.[1] It is well known that alphabetic writing was of crucial importance to this process,[2] not only as an actual technique or technology with very real consequences (for instance in drafting laws, titles, and generally in the establishment of colonial bureaucracy), but also as a medium and practice of interpellation.[3]

In my contribution to this volume, I explore an aspect that has rarely been taken into account in the history of colonial writing regimes and practices, namely the bodily or epidermal dimension and nature of writing.[4] My starting point is Ulrike Landfester's study on the relation between "Western" notions of writing and tattooing.[5] According to Landfester, there is a complex interplay between alphabetic writing and tattooing that is grounded in the biblical account of the creation of man in the image of God, which endows, to paraphrase Landfester, the human body with the power to signify, that is, to make itself into a sign of the presence of God.[6] Since the semiotic nature of the human body depends essentially on the visible exterior of the bodily surface, the skin, it can be modified or marked only by God.

> From the moment when the divine deixis is once and for all fulfilled in the physical shaping of Christ's body, human beings themselves can and must not express their allegiance to the Christian faith through markings.[7]

Landfester argues that alphabetic writing on the bodily surface is of particular importance for the inscription of divine markings. Tattooing makes

1 Regarding the coloniality of knowledge, see Quijano, "Coloniality." Bhabha, "Question" shows the importance of stereotypes in colonial discourse.

2 See Boone and Mignolo, *Writing*.

3 Folger, *Writing*. See also Aldair Rodrigues' chapter in this volume.

4 Regarding the somatic aspects of premodern and early modern writing see the contributions to Béreiziat-Lang, Folger, and Palacios Larrosa, *Escritura*. Regarding inscriptions on skin and clothing in literary texts, see Béreiziat-Lang, *Inscriptions*.

5 Landfester, *Stichworte*. Similarly to Landfester, I am primarily interested in the theoretical implications of tattooing and writing rather than the material and cultural history of body markings. See Oettermann, *Zeichen*; Caplan, *Body*; Deter-Wolf and Diaz-Granados, *Needles*; Béreiziat-Lang and Ott, "Tattoo"; Dauge-Roth, *Signing*; Dauge-Roth and Koslofsky, *Stigma*; and, particularly on the Spanish reactions to indigenous tattoos in the early modern period, Kroupa, "Reading."

6 Landfester, *Stichworte*, 33.

7 "Ab dem Moment, in dem die göttliche Deixis sich in der physischen Zurichtung von Christi Körper einmalig vollendet hat, kann und darf der Mensch selbst seiner Zugehörigkeit zum christlichen Glauben keinen Ausdruck durch die Zeichnung seines Körpers mehr geben." Ibid., 90. If not otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

it possible to think about "Occidental" writing, and establishes historically variable metaphorical transferences and counter-transferences between bodily and alphabetic writing. Landfester argues:

> Alphabetic writing is essentially ostentatious, proclaiming a cultural superiority which must be demonstrated rather than presenting human integrity as physical integrity; in its effects on the body that writes, as well as the body that is written upon, it is materially discrete, while it also makes it possible to establish highly complex connections within processes of ascription, which integrate the human body in the fabric of the norms of social existence, making this existence possible in the first place; furthermore, it is a cultural technique that conceives of these effects as inerasable and, moreover, understands this inerasability as an incitement and medium of a form of humanity that discovers itself only through writing.[8]

What writing and tattooing have in common is that they are ostentatious. Since alphabetic writing can be framed as a visible token of cultural superiority, it is prone to justify and effect the colonial subjugation of bodies. Both writing and tattooing do not visibly scar, neither the writing subject nor the surface, producing an exclusively "visual effect."[9] Thus they efface the materiality of the writing process and the violence it involves.[10] At the same time, both are capable, through their versatility and creative potential, of inscribing the human body into a complex social order and thereby "fixing" it. In other words, writing and tattooing are paradigmatic tools of biopolitical interpellation, as well as of the reproduction of social orders and power structures.[11] Writing and tattooing can be stigmatizing and excluding, as indicated by the ancient practice of slave marking and

8 "Alphabetisches Schreiben ist seinem Wesen nach ostentativ; proklamiert also eine Kulturhoheit, die auszustellen wichtiger ist als die Darstellung humaner als physischer Integrität; es ist in seinen Auswirkungen auf den schreibenden wie auf den beschriebenen Körper materiell diskret, dabei aber zu höchster Komplexität in der Zusammenhangsbildung fähig—in den Zuschreibungsprozessen nämlich, die den menschlichen Körper in das Normengefüge sozialer Existenz integrieren und ihm diese Existenz erst ermöglichen—; es ist weiter eine Kulturtechnik, die diese Auswirkungen als unlöschbar und, mehr noch, diese Unlöschbarkeit als Inzitament und Medium einer Humanität begreift, die erst schreibend zu sich selbst findet." Ibid., 22.

9 According to Landfester, *Stichworte*, 22, the perceived immateriality of tattooing distinguishes it from other forms of somatic writing such as piercing or scar markings.

10 Regarding the materiality of writing in premodern writing regimes, see Dietrich, Lieb and Schneidereit, *Theorie*.

11 I use "interpellation" in the sense given to the term by Althusser, "Idéologie."

punitive tattooing,[12] or, if they do not correspond to "Western" norms of licit epidermal writing, they disregard the other as a savage. They can also be used, as happened in the European Middle Ages, as a sign of election, first, in the form of stigmatization as part and parcel of the *imitatio Christi*, then as an interiorized marking (the heart, the soul) which shapes and ennobles the writing subject as elected and saved by God.[13]

Landfester's study is not an exhaustive history of tattooing because she is mainly interested in tracing the interplay between tattooing and writing in relation to the emergence of modern subjectivity in Europe and the modern "économie scripturaire" ["scriptural economy"], as Michel de Certeau has called it.[14] Landfester does this in line with the canonic genealogy of the Western World, from the times of the Old Testament, to Greco-Roman Antiquity, early Christianity, the Christian Late Middle Ages to Early Modernity. In this narrative, the encounter with the "New World" necessarily has an important place. Landfester seems to do justice to this fact in a chapter dedicated to the descriptions of tattooed indigenous people in Theodore de Bry's editorial project of New World travel accounts.[15] Her move from the Late Middle Ages to late sixteenth-century Central Europe is somewhat puzzling: it eclipses the Iberian contribution to modernity.[16] This narrative also has a Eurocentrist bent owing to the second-hand nature of her reflections on new-worldly matters, which frame the encounter between Europeans and Amerindians as a predominantly discursive representation, ignoring actual colonial experiences and the complications that arose from the encounter between Amerindian cultures and highly developed writing systems in Mesoamerica.[17]

I will first sketch the process of colonial semiosis as a violent clash of two epistemic regimes, framed, in the written accounts of Europeans, as the confrontation of the supposedly bodily sign systems of indigenous people with the supposedly immaterial alphabetic writing of colonizers, drawing primarily on the example of the fateful encounter between Francisco Pizarro and his men and the Inca Atahualpa at Cajamarca in 1532. I then look at a

12 Landfester, *Stichworte*, 53–89.

13 Ibid., 115–148.

14 Certeau, "Économie."

15 Landfester, *Stichworte*, 149–188.

16 Regarding the modernity of Spanish science in the early colonial period see Cañizares-Esquerra, "Iberian"; and Brendecke, *Imperium* on empiricism in particular; regarding modern governmentality and modern forms of subjectivity in relation to Spanish bureaucracy see Folger, *Writing*.

17 Boone and Mignolo, *Writing*; Mignolo, *Side*.

fascinating and appalling case of colonial semiosis and rival writing systems, namely, Diego de Landa's infamous auto-da-fé in sixteenth-century Yucatán. I will use this case to highlight the imbrication between writing and tattooing as suggested by Landfester's study, and tease out the complications that arose from this confrontation with the supposedly alphabetic writing system of Mayan civilization, which the missionaries tried to bring into the fold of Christianity as "lost Jews." Diego de Landa's actions as inquisitor and his writings show that colonial semiosis and epidermal writing (in its two aspects of alphabetic writing and writing on bodies) are emplotted into the greatest of grand narratives: the Apocalypse.[18]

2. Cajamarca and the Book That Does Not Speak

Walter Mignolo has emphasized the importance of the materiality of writing in what he calls "colonial semiosis," that is, interactions by way of different sign systems, emphasizing that colonization is not sufficiently described as a process of physical and cultural oppression, but also implies epistemic subjugation. Mignolo characterizes the conquistadors' culture as based on the "idea" of the divine book:

> The idea that the Holy Book was the expression of the Divine Word and the human book a container of knowledge and the inscription of the human voice in alphabetic writing was taken for granted during the sixteenth century [...]. In the sixteenth century, what missionaries perceived in Amerindian sign carriers was molded by an image of the book.[19]

That is why "writing was naturally conceived in terms of papers and books, and books in terms of the medieval manuscript and the printing press."[20] The technological differences between European and indigenous writing systems were overdetermined by the eschatological framing of writing, the instrumentality of divinely sanctioned writing for the final triumph over the evils of the material world.

18 A grand narration or metanarrative "is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience," Stephens and McCallum, *Stories*, 6, capable of framing and ordering smaller stories, in our case: "Western" expansion and colonialism. I use the term "emplottment" in the sense of Paul Ricœur, *Time*, 31–51, as the assembly and ordering of events into a narration.

19 Mignolo, *Signs*, 220–221. The idea of colonial semiosis is further elaborated in Mignolo, *Side*.

20 Mignolo, *Signs*, 225.

> The material differences in writing practices, in the storage and transmission of information, and the construction of knowledge became—in the Spanish conceptualization—a process of analogizing by which the material aspects of reading and writing practices across cultures was erased in the name of God and His fight with the Devil.[21]

According to Mignolo, writing on materials such as clay, skins, or cloth "was beyond the cultural horizon of the time,"[22] as well as the bodily nature of indigenous sign systems, for instance, in song and dance. Although his observation that the erasure of the writing practices of the indigenous others was framed in terms of good and evil is essentially correct, the premise that European writing is separated from bodily practices and bodies must be revised in the light of Landfester's argument that alphabetic writing is epistemologically conceived of as epidermal writing. The reason for the erasure of Amerindian writing practices was that they were understood as forms of "demonic," externalized writing that marked the other's body as an object of domination and, if they failed to embrace the Christian God, as targets of divine punishment in this world, or, at the end of time, as opposed to sanctioned European alphabetic writing that was capable of constituting the subject as a writing subject, as the subject of salvation.

Taking a look at one of the primal scenes of colonial semiosis is instructive here: the fatal encounter between Francisco Pizarro and the Inca Atahualpa in Cajamarca in Peru in the year 1532. From the eyewitnesses' accounts and accounts written shortly after the events, 11 in total, according to Wulf Oesterreicher,[23] we can establish a narrative that is probably fairly true to the events: Pizarro and his roughly 200 men arrange a meeting with the Inca Atahualpa, who heads south back to Cusco with his army after defeating his brother Huáscar. Pizarro invites the Inca to talk to him and the Dominican Friar Vicente de Valverde. The friar brings a book about the "cosas de Dios" [the things of God] from which he reads to the Inca.[24] Atahualpa demands that the Spaniards return what they have stolen from him, throws the book to the ground, and threatens the Spaniards. This is the starting point of the massacre of Cajamarca, the arrest of the Inca, the extorsion of a huge ransom, and ultimately his execution, with their well-known sinister consequences.

21 Ibid., 226.
22 Ibid., 227.
23 Oesterreicher, "1532."
24 Ibid., 231. The quote is taken from chronicler Cristóbal de Mena.

Oesterreicher's study shows that the text read by Valverde was, in all likelihood, the infamous *requerimiento*,[25] a formulaic juridical text that demanded the peaceful submission of the indigenous people to the Christian faith and the rule of the Spanish king, threatening them with total war and enslavement if they failed to do so. The *requerimiento*, a text in alphabetic writing, is an example of a kind of cultural semiosis that branded indigenous bodies as slaves and condemned sinners, if they failed to understand and accept the interior marking by the faith and divinely sanctioned writing practices and techniques. The Spanish eyewitnesses' or chroniclers' substitution of the *requerimiento* by a breviary, or the gist of Christian doctrine and practice, indicates that colonial "legalized" violence and evangelization was justified in relation to an eschatological horizon: the conversion of the heathens by all means is necessary to hasten the second coming of Christ.[26]

Moreover, the event at Cajamarca was used to stage the presumed epistemic inferiority of the Amerindians. In his *Historia general de las Indias* (also known as *Hispania Victrix*), the famous humanist and chaplain of Hernán Cortés, Francisco López de Gómara, inserts a significant detail that is missing in all other versions.[27] In the dialogue with Atahualpa, narrated in indirect form, Valverde expounds the principles of the Christian faith mixed with the fundamental tenets of the *requerimiento*. Atahualpa is enraged:

> How would the friar know that the God of the Christians created the world? Friar Vicente answered that the book said it, and gave him his breviary. Atahualpa opened it, looked, leafed through it, and saying that it was telling him nothing about this threw it to the ground.[28]

Since none of the witnesses confirms that Atahualpa expected to hear the book's voice, it is a figment of Gómara's imagination, that is, his interpretation of how the encounter should have happened. On the one hand, his ventriloquism seems to confirm Mignolo's argument: for the Spanish humanist, writing is equivalent to voice, and it is a vehicle for a truth otherwise inaccessible to the indigenous people. His projection attributes a vague

25 Ibid., 234–236; see also Seed, *Ceremonies*, 69–99.

26 The messianic and eschatological impulse of colonialism, particularly regarding the "discovery of the New World," is epitomized in the figure of Christopher Columbus; see Milhou, *Colón*.

27 See Oesterreicher, "1532," 232–236.

28 "¿cómo sabía el fraile que el Dios de los cristianos creara el mundo? Fray Vicente respondió que lo decía aquel libro, y le dio su breviario. Atabaliba lo abrió, miró, hojeó, y diciendo que a él no le decía nada de aquello, lo arrojó al suelo." López de Gómara, *Historia*, 18.

or primitive idea of logocentrism in European terms to the Amerindians, emphasizing, at the same time, their supposedly primitive ignorance.

Although Gómara's account seems to support the thesis that the Europeans had a notion of immaterial, and reified, objective writing, the other testimonies complicate this analysis. The majority of authors do not even mention what Valverde read out loud, and Gómara is the only one who gives it a particular religious spin because of his explanation for Atahualpa's violent profanation of the holy text, that is, his ignorance of the nature of "Western" writing, in order to justify the ensuing massacre. This justification does not hinge on the idea of the book as a mere physical object or vehicle but, on the contrary, on the indigenous peoples' presumed "failure" to recognize the somatic quality of alphabetic writing: since the breviary is incarnated writing, testimony, and real representation of the bodily sacrifice of Christ, tossing down an object made of paper and ink is likened to a bodily assault that justifies, or even requires, retribution in the form of genocidal violence. At the same time, the scene of Cajamarca stages the indigenous peoples' ignorance of "true" epidermal writing which means the collective slave marking of the Amerindians through writing, that is, the *requerimiento*.

In Gómara's account, Cajamarca is less a case of cultural semiosis than a mise-en-scène of alphabetic writing as an "anthropological machine," as Giorgio Agamben has called it[29]—a machine that divides good and evil, civilization and barbarism, master and slave along the lines of the understanding or misunderstanding of the true nature and use of writing. In the Andean events this staging is made possible by presupposing an indigenous sign system that is exclusively based on orality.[30] The working of the colonial anthropological writing machine was much more complicated where the Europeans encountered writing systems that resembled alphabetic writing, and cultures that practiced tattoos.

3. Diego de Landa and Epidermal Indigenous Writing

While the Incas used cotton or fiber strings with knots, *quipus*, as recording devices, they did not have a writing system the European could recognize

29 Agamben, *Abierto*, 52.

30 In the Andes, Europeans "eschew[ed] forms and representational concepts employed by the Peruvians themselves"; Cummins, "Representation," 190. Including the *quipus*, record-keeping devices based on knots on strings.

and value as such. Mayan writing, however, could not be so easily dismissed by the colonizers and missionaries in what is now Mexico. The protagonist of one of the most sinister scenes of colonial semiosis was the Franciscan Friar Diego de Landa. Born in Cifuentes, Guadalajara, Spain in 1524, he arrived in New Spain, in Yucatán to be precise, in 1549, where he took over the position of provincial guardian in Izamal.[31] Within a short period of time, he learned the Mayan language, becoming the prime Spanish authority on Mayan languages and culture. In 1562, Landa learned that some of the indigenous "converts" had returned to their old beliefs and customs—"there were even reports that some Maya had sacrificed children after renaming them 'Jesus Christ' and nailing them to crosses before removing their hearts, or killing them by other means."[32] Since in Landa's apocalyptic perspective the Mayas were of Hebrew descent, he "responded exactly as he might have to Spanish Judaizers" and assumed the prerogatives of an inquisitor:[33] thousands of Mayas were interrogated and tortured in order to find the culprits of the alleged crimes and trace their idols. Landa organized a terrifying auto-da-fé in Maní. Many indigenous people were mutilated and killed in the interrogations and punishments, or committed suicide. The physical violence unleashed on Mayan bodies was part and parcel of an effort to destroy the world as they knew it: "The Maya watched as the provincial ordered more than 20,000 idols and other ritual paraphernalia tossed into the fire. Along with the idols went forty Maya codices, or books […]. With one single bonfire, centuries of Maya culture and religion perished forever."[34]

Landa, who knew the Mayan culture better than any other European, became their inquisitor and executioner, and he was responsible for destroying their cultural heritage. The "guardian's" actions necessarily raise questions about the reasons for this excessive violence. Inga Clendinnen has interpreted Landa's wrath as the result of paternal frustration on the part of a "father" who felt deceived by his indigenous "children."[35] Even his contemporaries criticized him for his cruelty and excessive zeal. In 1563, the Franciscan had to return to Spain to justify his actions.[36] During his

31 Rivera Dorado, "Introducción," 63–77.

32 Davis, "Prophecies," 96.

33 Ibid., 97.

34 Chuchiak IV, *Servitio*, 614–615. See also Rivera Dorado, "Introducción," 70–71. The inquisitorial procedure at Maní was the most spectacular event in a vast campaign to extirpate Mayan writings; Chuchiak IV, *Servitio*, 615, note 9.

35 Clendinnen, *Conquests*, 72–111. See also Davis, "Prophecies," 89.

36 Rivera Dorado, "Introducción," 63–77.

stay in the metropolis in Spain, Landa authored, in 1565, a text known as the *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (*Account of the Things of Yucatan*). The original manuscript is lost, but we have 66 folios copied by several hands in 1616, which give an accurate impression of Landa's original.[37] Although some scholars have interpreted Landa's writing project as a justification of his actions, or as a form of penitence, the text does not, in spite of its title, belong to the genre of eyewitness accounts of specific matters required by a great number of legal proceedings during the colonial period.[38]

Initially sketching the history of the conquest of Yucatán, Landa frames his account in terms of Divine Providence. The core of his text is a *historia naturalis* and *moralis* in miniature: the Franciscan describes the geography, the nature, and the climate of Yucatán as well as the customs, rites, and religious and philosophical ideas of the indigenous people. In the ethnographic section, he writes in detail about their religious practices, their moral principles, their calendar, and their writings. Although not as vast in scale, Landa's account has the same purpose as the gigantic, yet unfinished, project of his Franciscan brother Bernardino de Sahagún. Together with a team of native assistants, Sahagún produced an encyclopedia of the cultures of the Nahua.[39] The main objective of both authors was clearly not ethnographic but inquisitorial, however: the Franciscans had realized that it was necessary to understand the indigenous cultures in all their details in order to extinguish clandestine idolatry, which persisted in spite of all the mass conversions of the previous decades.

Unlike in Peru, the Spaniards found in Mesoamerica among the Maya a sign system they recognized as writing. While the Nahua ("Aztecs") used ideographic writing (glyphs), the Maya had developed a complex logosyllabic writing system. Landa tells us that the missionaries "learned to read and write the language of the Indians which was reduced to an art, which was studied like Latin, and it was found that they did not use six of our letters."[40]

Consequently, we find in his *relación* an extended section that establishes these equivalences. It is obvious that he was wrong in attributing to the Maya an alphabet similar to the European one;[41] scholars would need hundreds more years to understand the indigenous writings. According to Mark

37 Ibid., 27.

38 Folger, *Writing*.

39 Folger, "Autor."

40 "aprendieron a leer y escribir en la lengua de los indios la cual se redujo a un arte que se estudiaba como la latina, y que se halló que no usaban de seis letras nuestras." Landa, *Relación*, 148.

41 Houston, "Literacy," 27–32.

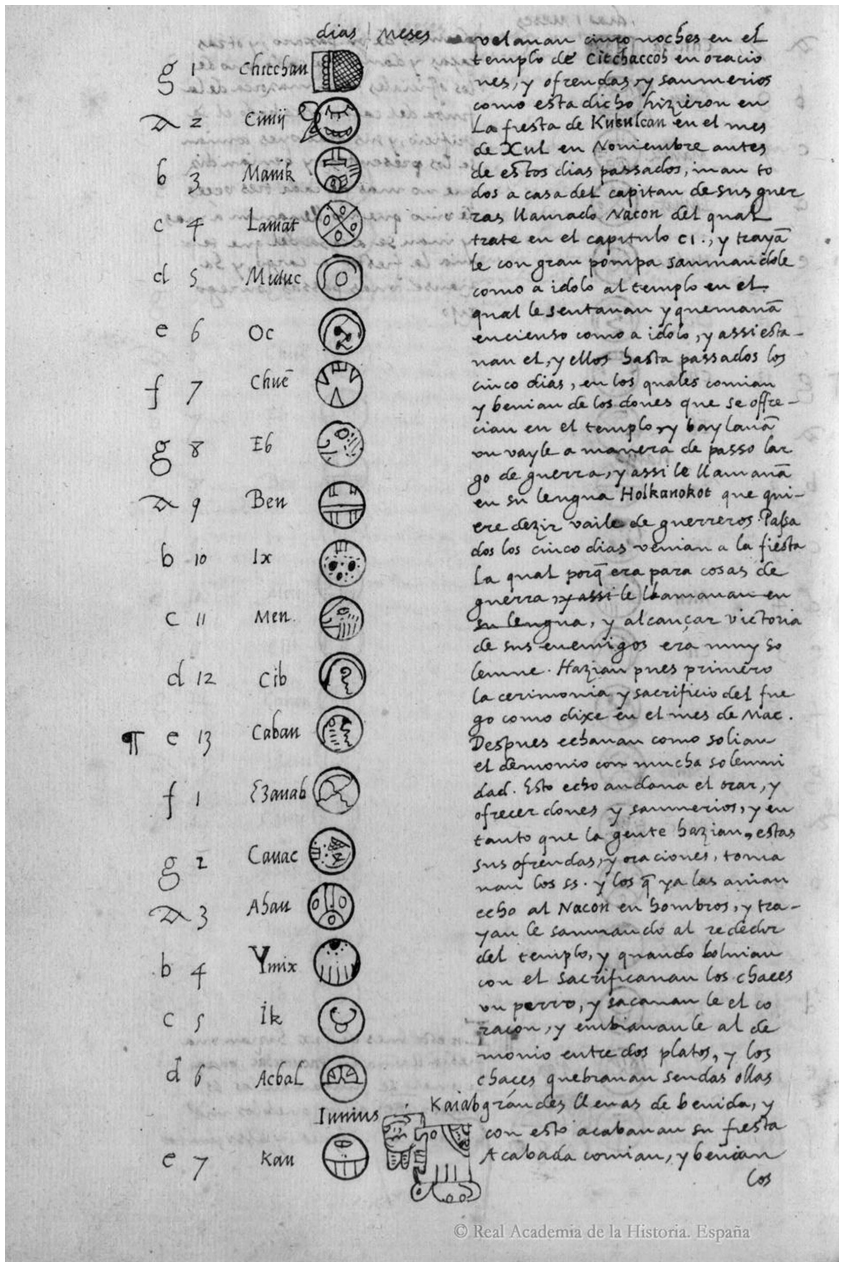

Figure 2.1 Mayan "alphabet." Diego de Landa, *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, Madrid, Real Academia de Historia (public domain).

Even Davis, Landa's misunderstanding is related to his conviction that the Amerindians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, and, therefore, had a kind of Hebrew alphabet.[42] At any rate, his knowledge of Mayan writing was sufficient for him to understand their calendar, which was essential to reveal forbidden religious practices. Landa did not have a genuine interest in the indigenous knowledge recorded in Mayan writing. The missionaries "reduced" the writing to an "art" similar to Latin. They saw it as a form of writing similar to European writing, but deficient (they "miss" letters). This process of assimilation and cultural devaluation can also be seen in relation to the materiality of Mayan writing.

In the section on the "antiguos pobladores," the old settlers of Yucatán, Landa describes their codices:

> They wrote their books on a large folded leaf which was closed between two boards, that were made very elegantly, and they wrote from one part to the other in columns, following the folds; and they made this paper from the roots of a tree, and then they gave it a white polish on which one could write very well; and some of their important men acquired this knowledge out of curiosity, and for this they were very much honored although they did not use it in public.[43]

Mignolo cites this passage to support his thesis that the Spaniards conceived of writing in terms of the European book.[44] This observation is correct, although the epidermal nature of this writing must be taken into account. Landa describes the material aspects of the *códices*, assimilating them in terms of paper, pages, and cover, and thus grants them the status of knowledge. Yet their "ciencias" are not only devalued, as was the case with the supposedly ignorant and primitive Andean people at Cajamarca. They are cast as evil and dangerous,[45] as we can see in the section referring to the Mayan calendar, rites, and writing:

42 Davis, "Prophecies."

43 "Que escribían sus libros en una hoja larga doblada con pliegues que se venía a cerrar entre dos tablas que hacían muy galanas, y que escribían de una parte de otras a columnas, según eran los pliegues; y que este papel lo hacían de las raíces de un árbol y que le daban un lustre blanco en que se podía escribir bien, y que algunos señores principales sabían de estas ciencias por curiosidad, y que por esto eran más estimados aunque no las usaban en público." Landa, *Relación*, 120.

44 Mignolo, "Signs," 223.

45 "Another characteristic the Maya shared with the Jews," observes Davis, "Prophecies," 96, "was their deep devotion to books that Christians regarded as diabolical."

> These people also used certain characters or letters to write their antiquities and knowledge in their books, and with them drawings and some signs in the form of figures, they understood their things and expressed them and taught them. We found a great number of those books with their letters, and because they contained only superstitions and lies of the devil, we burnt them all, which gave them marvelous sorrow and pain.[46]

Landa refers here to the auto-da-fé and book burning in Maní; the "marvelous" pain evokes the tortures, mutilation, and killing of the indigenous people. As in Cajamarca, an "abuse" of writing, understood in European terms, unleashes violence that takes the form of an inscription of the law, divine and imperial, onto the indigenous body, with the ultimate consequence of bodily destruction and eternal condemnation.

4. Body—Writing

As we have seen, Landa recognizes Mayan script as a form of writing, although with limited epistemological value. His account both erases and preserves Mayan writing, in written alphabetical form but also in the form of drawings and illustrations. This observation is not trivial, because not only does Landa frame Mayan writing as a neutral vehicle of communication, but he associates it with bodily practices, and the violence unleashed onto bodies.

The nexus between bodily practices, epidermal writing, and religious beliefs that Landa condemns is apparent in an episode he recounts. Two Spaniards ultimately survived the shipwreck of one of the ships of Juan de Valdivia in 1511, to become prisoners of the Maya: Gerónimo de Aguilar, a Franciscan friar, and a sailor named Gonzalo Guerrero.[47] While Aguilar, after a few years among the Maya, united with the men of conquistador Hernán Cortés and played a crucial role as a translator, Gonzalo Guerrero "went native," becoming an esteemed member of the indigenous group. Landa says about him:

46 "Usaba también esta gente de ciertos caracteres o letras con las cuales escribían en sus libros sus cosas antiguas y sus ciencias, y con ellas y figuras y algunas señales en las figuras, entendían sus cosas y las daban a entender y enseñaban. Hallámosles gran número de libros de estas sus letras, y porque no tenían cosa en que no hubiese superstición y falsedades del demonio, se los quemamos todos, lo cual sentían a maravilla y les daba pena." Landa, *Relación*, 250.

47 Calder, *Hero*.

> He never tried to save himself as Aguilar did; he rather tattooed his body, grew his hair long, and pierced his ears to carry earrings like the Indians, and it can be believed that he was an idolator like them.[48]

Landa's statement that Guerrero failed to save himself refers to spiritual condemnation rather than corporeal liberty. In the Franciscan's eyes, acts of corporeal inscription, such as piercings and specifically tattoos, are essentially related to Guerrero's apostasy and idolatry, which he associates, in turn, with Mayan books and writings. Tattooing is for Landa one of the defining features of indigenous culture.

> They tattooed their bodies, the more, the more valiant and braver they were seen, because tattooing was a great torture, which was like this: the craftsmen pierced the part they wanted with ink, and afterwards they delicately scratched the paintings, and this way, with blood and ink, signs stayed on the body; and they tattooed themselves little by little because it was a great torture.[49]

Although Landa speaks of "paintings," he casts them as writing acts accomplished with ink and blood, and understands them as signs: *señales*. This form of undeletable bodily inscription interpellates the "signed" subjects into the indigenous social order, and marks them, as in Antiquity, as slaves in the eyes of the European bearers of divinely sanctioned writing. Landa's writing is not an act of justification of his actions, and even less of contrition or redemption, but rather a writing exercise that constitutes his own body as saved within the fold of Christian scriptural culture, and explains why indigenous "demonic" writing requires a form of exorcism. This exorcism is accomplished by emptying out Mayan script—preserving the writing system and destroying the containers of sinful idolatry. It also requires acts of violence that erase or overwrite the sinful bodily inscriptions. The pain and tortures that the idolators suffer in their tattooing practice resonates with the pain they feel when their "books" are burned, and necessitate

48 "nunca procuró salvarse como hizo Aguilar, antes bien labraba su cuerpo, criaba cabello y harpaba las orejas para traer zarcillos como los indios y es creíble que fuese idólatra como ellos." Landa, *Relación*, 106.

49 "Labrábanse los cuerpos, y cuanto más, tanto más valientes y bravos se tenían, porque el labrarse era gran tormento, que era de esta manera: los oficiales de ello labraban la parte que querían con tinta y después sajábanle delicadamente las pinturas, y así, con la sangre y tinta, quedaban en el cuerpo las señales; y que se labraban poco a poco por el grande tormento que era." Ibid., 156–157.

the pain and torture inflicted on the sinful body, as an anticipation of the eternal pain of those condemned on Judgment Day.

The events at Cajamarca demonstrate how the process of colonial semiosis and epistemic overwriting were instrumental in justifying and establishing the colonial system. This was not based on a juxtaposition of the indigenous peoples' corporeal writing systems with the supposedly immaterial writing of the conquerors, but rather on a distinction between an epidermal writing of condemnation, as practiced by the indigenous, and a marking of "saved bodies" through the Holy Scriptures on the part of the Christians. Landa's actions in Yucatán illustrate, on the one hand, that this distinction continued to have fatal consequences even after the so-called *Conquista*, which cannot be explained solely by the economic and political interests of the Spaniards, and, on the other, that epidermal writing points to the eschatological horizon of the colonial enterprise as a whole.

5. Stigmatized Bodies and Franciscan Millenarianism

Unlike the rather smooth process of Europeans' dealing with bodily inscriptions in other parts of the world and the self-assertion of their writing economy described by Landfester in her analysis of de Bry's recording of tattoos, the example of the Franciscan's auto-da-fé in Yucatán shows that indigenous epidermal writing (actual tattoos and their "alphabetic" writing) required drastic measures and extreme violence, evoking an apocalyptic scenario. I do not use the term "apocalyptic" as a figure of speech, because the events in early colonial Mexico are inseparable from European apocalypticism.

Christopher Columbus' enterprise was, as his late *Book of Prophecies* documents,[50] driven by apocalyptic ideas that explain the sense of urgency to convert the Amerindians, extract the treasures of the Indies to finance the final crusade to conquer Mount Sion, and cross off other items on the apocalyptic list that had to be accomplished before the Final Judgment, which he calculated would happen in the year 1655. Although Columbus was in many aspects a peculiar figure, apocalypticism played a crucial role in early colonialism and the dawn of modernity.

This was particularly the case in what is today Mexico, where the Nahua and Maya held strong apocalyptic beliefs in the cyclical destruction and

50 Milhou, *Colón*.

creations of worlds or "suns,"[51] where an earthly cataclysm of apocalyptic dimensions happened, and where the Franciscans played a decisive role in the shaping of the cultural identity of Mexico after the so-called *Conquista*. David E. Timmer has associated the extirpation of idolatry in New Spain with the millennial ideology of the Franciscans, inspired by the teachings of Joachim of Fiore and based on their conviction that the "the conversion of the Indian and the creation of the new *Iglesia indiana* represented a pivotal moment in the drama of the end times."[52] John Phelan Leddy has coined the term *the Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World*.[53] The Franciscan friars were driven by the belief that New Spain (Mexico) was the New Jerusalem, compensating for the loss of Jerusalem and bringing about the Apocalypse, preceded by an earthly kingdom of peace. In his writings, Landa does not reflect explicitly on the Apocalypse, but he clearly believed in the Millennial Kingdom. "Inside the massive structure that Landa helped construct [sc. The monastery of Izamal] in the 1560s is a series of Maya-painted murals appearing shortly after the church was finished. The murals include a representation of the Virgin Mary dressed in a red and blue robe in front of a yellow orb. She was the Virgin of the Apocalypse as recorded in Revelation 12:1."[54] While some see in Landa "an especially fervent adherent to the millenarian Joachimist worldview,"[55] others caution against overestimating the role of "Joachimist expectations" in colonial Mexico.[56] At any rate, we are "dealing with a more or less general sense of historical fulfillment of God's divine plan, in which the Spanish kings and their missionary taskforces were presented as instruments in spreading the word of God in *finibus terrae*."[57]

Millennial thought has its own temporality: messianic time; that is, the realization that we are living in the "time that remains," as Giorgio Agamben has called it, the time that time needs to end, and for things to fall into place. In messianic time all events and actions have an eschatological horizon.[58] This realization of the imminent end of the world explains the urgency of the Franciscans' mission in general, and Landa's zeal in particular. "Western" writing in Landfester's sense had a crucial role in this drama. The Apocalypse is an event *in* but also *at the end of* history. It is also a text

51 Christensen, "Predictions"; Christensen, *Aztec*, 7–11.
52 Timmer, "Providence," 481.
53 Phelan, *Reino*. See also Weckmann, "Esperanzas"; West, "Ideas"; Christensen, *Aztec*.
54 Christensen, *Aztec*, 30.
55 Davis, "Prophecies," 87.
56 Roest, "Mendicant," 204. See also Christensen, *Aztec*.
57 Roest, "Mendicant," 204.
58 Agamben, *Time*, 5.

and a form of writing and narrating of a peculiar and, at the same time, paradigmatic nature. In one way it is, as Frank Kermode has argued, the fundamental form of storytelling, which always generates meaning with an end in mind at the moment of narration.[59] It is also characterized by the "poetological" interconnection between tattooing and alphabetic writing,[60] owing to the apocalyptic aesthetic of *integumenta*. *Integumenta* means coverings, clothing, or skin, and constitutes an "allegorical narrative, based on moral interpretation, for the purpose of expounding the Truth."[61] While the final truth, the revelation of who is redeemed and who is condemned, is reserved to God in the Final Judgment,[62] the truth of apocalyptic writing in the actual Book of Revelation, and in the worldly history unfolding in the time that remains, must be revealed in a violent hermeneutic process of uncovering: a form of inquisition.

Landfester argues that John's *Apocalypse* is not a revelation of explicit truth but the revelation of the process of revelation of *integumenta*. In John's *Apocalypse*, bodies marked with writing play a particular role. The agents of Good and God, and the agents of Evil and the Devil, are marked by writing.

> On the basis of this "little" book [sc. the book of Revelation] he now records an event that is, at the level of the relation between body and sign, a war of authority of marking: While figures, who are marked by evil powers, are, at the end, condemned to eternal damnation, those who carry the sign of the truly good, God and his Son Christ, on their foreheads, are redeemed to eternal life in the Heavenly Jerusalem.[63]

In messianic time, past, present, and future complete and fulfill each other. In the Mexican New Jerusalem,[64] the primordial nature of the human

59 Kermode, *Sense*.

60 Landfester, *Stichworte*, 10.

61 Born, "Manuscripts," 181. "In Biology, an integument is the tissue surrounding an organism's body or an organ within, such as skin," Wikipedia, s.v. "Integument," accessed October 10, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integument.

62 Christensen, *Aztec*, 35–41. According to Christian theology, there is a "personal apocalypse" or judgment at the moment of death that is revealed by God at the end of time.

63 "Auf der Grundlage dieses ‚kleinen' Buchs protokolliert er nunmehr ein Geschehen, das sich auf der Ebene der Beziehung zwischen Körper und Zeichen als Krieg der Siglierungshoheiten darstellt: Während die Figuren, die von den bösen Mächten sigliert worden sind, am Ende dem Urteil ewiger Verdammnis verfallen, werden diejenigen zum ewigen Leben im himmlischen Jerusalem erlöst, die das Zeichen des schlechthin Guten, Gottes und seines Sohns Christus, auf ihrer Stirn tragen." Landfester, *Stichworte*, 90.

64 Folger, *Parayso*.

body as a sign (man as an image of God), the marking of the selected and the condemned in the present, and the Final Judgment coincide according to these markings. The confrontation between the supposedly demonical writing on the indigenous body, equivalent to the marking of the soul as condemned, and the Christian interior marking of the saved and the right use of writing must have been the plot unraveling before the eyes of the millennialist Franciscans who believed that the Amerindians were the lost tribes of Israel,[65] and that bringing the Jews into the fold of the true faith was instrumental in the second coming of Christ and the Apocalypse, as was maintained by Joachim of Fiore, who strongly influenced the Franciscans.

Since the discovery that the baptism of the friars' "children" had not marked them as saved and that indigenous writing on the body and their sinful idolatrous writing on the soul anticipated the marking on Judgment Day—let us not forget that the stigmatized human body is resurrected as marked, one way or another—the cases of idolatry and relapse were played out as the anticipation of the final struggle between the forces of good and evil and between divine and diabolic writing. Diego de Landa staged the persecution of idolatry, the punishment of sinful bodies, their violent marking in the inquisitorial process, and the destruction of indigenous writing as a form of Armageddon, the final apocalyptic confrontation in this world, in which "signed" bodies complete the grandest of grand narratives: the redemption of fallen mankind in the Apocalypse. Landa's apocalyptically inspired actions were meant to destroy the American world as the Maya knew it. As history shows, the conquistadors and missionaries failed, not least because indigenous communities subverted Christian apocalyptic thinking by means of alphabetic writing,[66] outliving the millennial kingdom of their inquisitors.

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II.

Corporeal Narratives and Political Power

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3. Pregnant Bodies and Their Narratives: The Letters of Empress Maria Theresa to Maria Beatrice d'Este

Nadine Amsler

Abstract: This article analyzes the letters that Empress Maria Theresa of Austria wrote her daughter-in-law Maria Beatrice d'Este between 1772 and 1780. Hardly a week went by in which the aged Habsburg matriarch's letters did not address the topics of pregnancy and childbirth. Placing these epistles at the crossroads of the history of the female body and pregnancy on the one hand and dynastic history in this very period on the other, the article sheds light on Maria Theresa's attempts to exert control over and create narratives around Maria Beatrice's experience of her pregnant body. It shows that the letters point to both the great importance of pregnancy for dynastic reproduction and the empress' attempt to establish a close emotional relationship with her daughter-in-law.

Keywords: princely pregnancy; princely women's letter writing; body history; dynastic reproduction

In May 1772, the Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780) received a letter from her daughter-in-law Maria Beatrice d'Este (1750–1829). By this time, Maria Theresa was an aged, widowed matriarch of a large family, with her ten surviving children spread across half of Europe, where they held important secular and ecclesiastical posts or were married to members of powerful ruling houses.[1] Maria Beatrice, on the other hand, was a young

1 The authoritative biography of Empress Maria Theresa has been written by Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*. Other recent studies include Telesko, Hertel, and Linsboth, *Die*

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woman of 22.[2] She had been married to Maria Theresa's fourth son, Archduke Ferdinand Karl (1754–1806), for just seven months. The young couple resided in Milan, where Ferdinand Karl acted as governor of Lombardy. In her letter, Maria Beatrice conveyed important news to her mother-in-law: She thought that she was pregnant. The empress answered immediately. On 28 May, she wrote that she did not yet dare to feel happy about the still-too-uncertain news. Nevertheless, she admonished the archduchess to be careful in case her conjecture proved right:

> [A]partment, theater, and late returns: I will not approve this. Carriage rides and even walks are not indifferent before you have completed thirteen weeks. My dear daughter, it is important not to spoil it, and after a miscarriage, *adieu la santé*—even if you still have children, their health will suffer from it.[3]

This was the first of many letters in which the empress gave her daughter-in-law advice on pregnancy. These letters and the ways in which they created narratives around the bodily experience of pregnancy will be the focus of this paper.

Repräsentation; Lau, *Maria Theresia*; Braun, *Eine Kaiserin*; Badinter, *Le pouvoir au féminin*. Elisabeth Badinter has also worked on Maria Theresa's relations with her children: See Badinter, *Les conflits d'une mère*. I started to work on the correspondence between Empress Maria Theresa and Archduchess Maria Beatrice during my stay at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and continued to work on it during my positions at the Universities of Fribourg and Basel in the scope of the research project "Early Childhood and Dynastic Reproduction at Princely Courts, 1600–1800," financed by a PRIMA grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation. I would like to thank Laurie Rudaz for helping with processing the correspondence between Empress Maria Theresa and Archduke Ferdinand Karl.

2 Much less literature exists on Maria Beatrice d'Este. Her role as a cultural broker between Milan and Vienna has been highlighted (see, for instance, Boaglio, "Maria Beatrice d'Este"; Mayer, "Maria Beatrice d'Este"); furthermore, her reign as duchess of Massa and Carrara (1790–1796 and 1814–1829) has been studied (see *Massa e Carrara*). Her marriage to Archduke Ferdinand Karl and her pregnancies and births are discussed by Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 772–777 and 303–306 respectively. However, Stollberg-Rilinger only explores the letters written by the empress to her son, leaving aside those addressed to Maria Beatrice.

3 "appartement, théâtre, et retourner la nuit; je ne saurais approuver cela. Les courses en voiture ne sont pas indifférentes, même à pied, avant treize semaines. Ma chère fille, il ne faut rien gâter, et une fois une fausse-couche, adieu la santé, et si vous portiez même des enfants, leurs santés s'en ressentiraient." Letter to Maria Beatrice, May 28, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe der Kaiserin*, 3:137. Pregnant women were often advised not to ride in carriages: See Pollock, "Embarking on a Rough Passage," 51. Six years later, on May 2, 1778, the empress wrote a conspicuously similar letter to her daughter Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France, who thought that she might be pregnant: See Lever, *Marie Antoinette*, 119.

The empress' letters to Maria Beatrice were all written during the last eight years of Maria Theresa's life. During this time, she wrote to her Milanese relatives every week.[4] No fewer than 410 letters addressed to the archduchess are extant today, many of which discuss aspects of pregnancy and childbirth. Simultaneously, the empress also maintained a correspondence with Archduke Ferdinand Karl, of which 504 letters are preserved. Both collections were edited in the late nineteenth century.[5] Unfortunately, neither Ferdinand Karl's nor Maria Beatrice's letters to the empress have been preserved. While the correspondence with Ferdinand Karl has been examined by several studies on Maria Theresa's family, the correspondence with the Archduchess Maria Beatrice has been largely ignored by historians.[6]

The empress' letters inscribe themselves into a long tradition of princely women's letter writing.[7] At the same time, by her adoption of a colloquial and often highly emotional style, they place themselves within the broader culture of eighteenth-century letters in which writers increasingly started to intentionally transgress traditional patterns of letter writing.[8] As a dense documentation of the empress' inquiring into and interpreting of her daughter-in-law's pregnant body, they allow for a close study of the ways in which the empress created narratives around the bodily experience of a princely woman's pregnancy in the wider context of dynastic reproduction.

4 With a weekly rhythm, the empress' correspondence with Maria Beatrice was much denser than the better-researched correspondence with Marie Antoinette, with whom she exchanged letters on a monthly basis: See Lever, *Marie Antoinette*.

5 The letters to Archduke Ferdinand Karl fill one and a half volumes in Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, vol. 1 and vol. 2, 1–314. The letters to Maria Beatrice have been printed in Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, vol. 3. The original manuscripts are preserved in Vienna, where the archive of the Este family is part of the Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv: AT-OeStA/HHStA Este.

6 The letters to Maria Beatrice were deemed "uninteresting for political history" by Maria Theresa's nineteenth-century biographer Alfred von Arneth (Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 1:XVI). For a study exploring the letters written by the empress to Archduke Ferdinand Karl, see Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, especially 293–306.

7 For case studies of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century German princely women's correspondence, see Arenfeldt, "Political Role" (on Anna of Saxony); Maritz, "Gender as a Resource" (on Sibylla von Anhalt); and Antenhofer, "Letters Across the Borders" (on Barbara of Brandenburg). For a study of Empress Maria Theresa's letters to her daughter Maria Antoinette, see Schulte, "Madame, ma chère fille" and Wolff, "Hapsburg Letters."

8 For an overview on the eighteenth-century culture of letter writing, see Vellusig and Beyrer, "Brief." On early modern noble women's practices of letter writing see Ruppel, "Das stillose Zeitalter." For a study of a princely woman's correspondence that inscribes itself into this culture, see Böth, *Erzählweisen des Selbst*.

1. Princely Pregnancies in Eighteenth-Century Europe

In spring 1772, this wider context of dynastic reproduction seemed promising for the Austrian Habsburgs. Corresponding with Empress Maria Theresa's plan to reinforce Habsburg influence on the Italian peninsula, four of her children lived in Italy. The daughters Maria Amalia and Maria Carolina had been married to the Duke of Parma and the King of Naples and Sicily respectively. Their brothers Leopold and Ferdinand Karl served as Grand Duke of Tuscany and Governor of Lombardy in Florence and Milan. The latter's marriage to Maria Beatrice d'Este had far-reaching political implications. Maria Beatrice was the rightful heiress to the Duchy of Modena and Reggio. If she bore Ferdinand Karl a son, Maria Beatrice would become a decisive jigsaw piece in the dynastic puzzle of Habsburg Italy. She would not only help to turn Modena into Habsburg territory, but in doing so, she would also establish a connection between the two existing Habsburg territories on the Italian peninsula, Lombardy and Tuscany.[9] No wonder, then, that her pregnancies were a matter of state in the eyes of her powerful mother-in-law.

In recent years, studies focusing on women's roles in early modern dynastic history have underlined the fact that princely women were by no means mere "birthing machines," a role often assigned to them in more dated works on dynastic history. Instead, scholars have started to paint a much more nuanced picture of princely women's roles. On the one hand, they have pointed out that motherhood indeed was a resource for princely women that enabled them to consolidate their position at court, to exert influence on reigning sons, or to create networks.[10] On the other hand, they have also pointed out that princely women can by no means be reduced to their role as mother, but often wielded considerable political power that stemmed from a number of different roles they assumed in dynastic and court settings.[11] In fact, "mothering," understood as women's care for their young children, was decidedly not among the core tasks of princely women, this task being fulfilled by the staff of the princely nursery.[12] As I will argue in this paper,

9 See Lau, *Maria Theresia*, 318–319; and Krauß, "Habsburgische Linie."

10 See Woodacre and Fleiner, *Royal Mothers*; Heinemann, *Verwandtsein*; and Mitchell, "Habsburg Motherhood."

11 A vast literature on princely women's roles at court exists, of which only a few examples can be mentioned here. For the studies of princely consorts, see Arenfeldt, "The Political Role"; Maritz, "Gender as a Resource"; and Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Queens Consort*. On queens, see Cosandey, *La reine*; Campbell Orr, *Queenship*.

12 See Amsler, "Work of Many Bodies."

early modern dynastic elites viewed pregnancy with a potential dynastic heir and the care of this child after birth as two distinctly different tasks. While the care of young children was a task that could be easily delegated to subaltern personnel, pregnancy was one of the most central obligations that a newlywed princess owed to her husband's dynasty. This is the dynastic context in which we have to situate Empress Maria Theresa's vivid interest in her daughter-in-law's pregnancies as expressed in her letters.

In addition to this dynastic context, representations of Maria Beatrice's pregnancies are also situated in the context of the shifting conceptions of pregnancy and pregnant female bodies in her time. In the early modern period, pregnant women and people around them often felt uncertain about what was actually happening within their bellies.[13] This slowly started to change when physicians began to study fetal development from the 1740s onwards. According to Nadia Maria Filippini, the new interest taken by physicians in the interior of pregnant women's bellies resulted in a new conception of unborn life: While the metaphor of the unborn child as a "fruit" dependent on the motherly "tree" had prevailed in earlier centuries, the unborn was now increasingly conceptualized as an independent "plant," and, indeed, as a "child."[14] Empress Maria Theresa's writings testify to this situation of shifting conceptions. In her letters to Maria Beatrice and Ferdinand Karl, unborn children are interchangeably referred to as "fruit" and as "children" or "creatures."[15] In addition to these new ideas about pregnancy, eighteenth-century concepts of female bodies also underwent significant change. An emerging discourse on sensibility specifically emphasized the great sensitiveness of female bodies.[16] This motif of the special irritability of female bodies is also present in Empress Maria Theresa's letters, which often contain advice not to "agitate" pregnant bodies by physical or emotional efforts.[17]

Placing Maria Beatrice's pregnant body at the crossroads of the history of the female body and pregnancy in eighteenth-century Europe on the one hand, and dynastic history in this period on the other, this article shows that

13 See McClive, "Hidden Truths"; ibid., *Menstruation and Procreation*. See also Duden, "Zwischen 'wahrem Wissen' und Prophetie"; Labouvie, "Leib als Medium"; Lorenz, "Stein." For overviews on the history of pregnancy in early modern Germany, see Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*; and Rublack, "Pregnancy."

14 See Filippini, "Erste Geburt," 108; and Enke, "Schönheit der Embryonen."

15 Letter to Ferdinand Karl, July 1, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe der Kaiserin*, 1:214.

16 See Hanafi, *Le frisson.*

17 See, for example, her letter to Ferdinand Karl of March 11, 1773 that warns against the dangers of "agitation": Arneth, *Briefe der Kaiserin*, 1:188.

Maria Theresa's attempts to exert control over and create narratives around Maria Beatrice's bodily experience of pregnancy point to both the great importance of pregnancy for dynastic calculation and the empress' attempts to establish a close emotional relationship with her daughter-in-law—two different motives that eventually proved impossible for Maria Theresa to align. The article also points out that both Maria Theresa and Maria Beatrice were eager to accept even the most subtle bodily indications, such as a slight delay of the younger woman's menses, as signs of a possible pregnancy, showing that, in spite of the radical insecurity of bodily knowledge about pregnancy in early modern times, elite women situated in dynastic contexts seem to have been especially inclined to pay attention to and believe in early signs of pregnancy.[18] In the following, we will first analyze how Maria Theresa tried to interpret and control this body from afar by means of letter writing. We will then explore how writing and reading became meaningful as bodily practices in the context of childbearing, and how the body was present in her written attempts to manage her relationship with her daughter-in-law.

2. Controlling Generative Efforts by Correspondence

During her married life, Maria Beatrice gave birth to no fewer than nine children. Her mother-in-law lived to witness the birth of only four of them, however: Maria Theresa died in spring 1780, when her daughter-in-law was still in the middle of her procreative years. The empress' letters reveal to what extent these four births between 1773 and 1780 were in fact only the proverbial tip of a much larger iceberg in the record of Maria Beatrice's pregnancies. During the eight years of their correspondence, Maria Beatrice announced seven pregnancies to her mother-in-law. One proved to be a false indication, two ended prematurely in miscarriage.[19] All of these

18 Already in 2003, Laura Gowing proposed to research the variability of women's experience of pregnancy according to social and economic backgrounds (Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 111–148, esp. 113). More recently, Cathy McClive (*Menstruation and Procreation*, 17, 138) has underlined that perceptions of pregnancy remained radically insecure throughout the early modern era, regardless of women's social and economic backgrounds. Nevertheless, even McClive concedes that "[i]t was perhaps easier to believe in a possible pregnancy when this was desired than when this would bring severe social and economic problems with it." McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation*, 164.

19 The miscarriages occurred in 1772 and 1778, the false indication in 1776. See Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:142–143, 319, 211.

events—the conjectures of pregnancies, the miscarriages, and, of course, the deliveries—were intensely discussed in Maria Theresa's letters. The theme of procreation was omnipresent in her correspondence with Maria Beatrice.

It is striking how early Maria Theresa received the news of suspected pregnancies from her daughter-in-law. It seems that Maria Beatrice's physicians carefully observed her menses and began to make assumptions as soon as bleeding did not start at the expected time. Consequently, the empress usually received the "uncertain news" (*nouvelle en doute*) when Maria Beatrice had barely completed the first month of pregnancy. Maria Theresa insisted on receiving news as early as possible. She was extremely upset when she learned in spring 1779 that Maria Beatrice, after two miscarriages and one false indication, had decided not to share the news about a pregnancy immediately. "It will take some time to cure this wound," the empress wrote to Maria Beatrice on April 5, 1779.[20] Two weeks later, she still felt hurt, writing of the concealed pregnancy as a breach of trust.[21]

It is understandable that Maria Beatrice, for her part, was reluctant to share information on uncertain bodily signs too early with her mother-in-law. Maria Theresa exerted considerable pressure on the couple by underlining the importance of their generative success.[22] This had started during the first pregnancy in 1772. During its first weeks, the empress wrote that she was thinking about her daughter-in-law's pregnancy all the time—"but not without worries, for before four months completed, a first [pregnancy] cannot be taken for granted, and it is something that I wish for so much that it is natural to be concerned."[23] Later, the empress became even more explicit. When Maria Beatrice lost her only son, the two-year-old Joseph Franz, in summer 1776 and gave birth to another daughter some months later, the empress did not conceal her indignation. Two weeks after the

20 "Il faudra un peu de temps pour guérir cette plaie." Letter to Maria Beatrice, April 5, 1779. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:352.

21 Letter to Maria Beatrice, April 15, 1779. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:355.

22 For similar patterns of discipline and control in the empress' letters to her daughter Marie Antoinette, see Wolff, "Hapsburg Letters."

23 "J'en suis continuellement occupée [de votre grossesse, N.A.], non sans en appréhender encore un peu, car avant quatre mois on ne saurait l'assurer à une première, et c'est une chose que je souhaite tant, qu'il est naturel que j'en suis occupée." Letter to Maria Beatrice, June 23, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:140. The completion of four months is also mentioned as an important milestone in a letter to Ferdinand Karl dated February 18, 1773; see ibid., 1:183. However, a letter to the same addressee dated one year later mentions three months as an important milestone to pass; see ibid., 1:300.

birth, she wrote that "this time I will not be as discreet as before. The year 1777 has to bring us a prince."[24]

For the empress, it had always been crystal clear that the generative success of the Milanese couple hinged on her daughter-in-law—and specifically on her care for her body and mind. The reason for this was that, according to her, "the little has [not yet] taken a real consistence" during the first months of pregnancy and was therefore prone to suffer abortion if the mother's body was overly agitated.[25] In her view, Maria Beatrice's bodily condition was not too promising. In her letters to her son, she revealed that his wife reminded her of Isabella of Bourbon-Parma (1741–1763), the wife of her eldest son Emperor Joseph II, who had died in November 1763 after having suffered two miscarriages: "It seems to me that [Maria Beatrice] resembles our deceased dear Archduchess, the first wife of the Emperor. Her mind is always working, thus using up her bodily forces."[26] In July 1772, during the archduchess' first pregnancy, the empress therefore wrote: "I am not as sure as you are, my dear daughter, that you do not have an inclination to miscarriages. May it be God's will, delicate and sanguine as you are, more spirit, more soul than body—there is reason to be fearful."[27] Unluckily for Maria Beatrice, the empress' prophecy came true all too quickly. The archduchess suffered her first miscarriage the very month Maria Theresa wrote this letter.

3. Interpreting the Pregnant Body from Afar

But Maria Theresa did not only use her correspondence to exert pressure on Maria Beatrice. The letters also testify to the empress' vivid interest in even the most minuscule details of Maria Beatrice's pregnancies. As an

24 "Je vous avoue, cette fois-ci je ne serai pas si discrète que les autres fois, et l'année 1777 nous doit encore procurer un prince; notre cher duc et moi n'avons pas beaucoup à attendre." Letter to Maria Beatrice, December 23, 1776. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:259.

25 "le petit [n']a [pas encore] pris une vraie consistence," letter to Ferdinand Karl, February 18, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 1:183.

26 "il me paraît qu'elle a bien de la ressemblance avec feue notre chère archiduchesse, première femme de l'empereur. L'esprit travaille toujours et use les forces du corps," letter to Ferdinand Karl, December 26, 1771. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 1:95. The perceived resemblance is also mentioned in a letter to Ferdinand Karl dated May 7, 1772; ibid., 1:128.

27 "Je ne suis pas si rassurée que vous, ma chère fille, que vous n'incliniez pas à des fausses-couches. Dieu le veuille, délicate comme vous êtes, en même temps sanguine, plus d'esprit, plus d'âme que de corps; alors il y a tout à craindre." Letter to Maria Beatrice, July 2, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:141.

experienced mother of 16 children, Maria Theresa had obviously accumulated a fair amount of knowledge about pregnancy, and she was eager to share it with her daughter-in-law, especially during her first few pregnancies. Thus, when the archduchess' second pregnancy had lasted for somewhat more than three months, Maria Theresa explained to her that she would soon be able to feel her "dear fruit of womb": "It is so unperceivable that you will not dare to believe it at the beginning. Small as the movement may be, if you feel it three of four days in a row, you can be sure, and I beg you to tell me."[28] Even if such lessons in bodily awareness served only the goal of gaining access to knowledge about her daughter-in-law's pregnant body, they are nevertheless a striking example of how the empress passed on embodied knowledge to her daughter-in-law through writing.[29]

The empress became wary as soon as things started to diverge from what she perceived as a "normal" pregnancy. When, in summer 1773, Maria Beatrice was plagued by persistent nausea that lasted well into the seventh month, Maria Theresa expressed her concern: "I have to confess that I am not at all happy that the vomiting continues and even increases. Where will this poor invisible take its nourishment from, and its mother her strength? I begin to doubt my abilities to predict if this continues."[30]

Maria Theresa's interest in the interpretation of bodily signs seems, at first sight, to contradict her self-fashioning as a person without claims to medical expertise. As her biographer Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has noted, Maria Theresa firmly believed that patients should leave medical expertise to physicians.[31] This attitude can also be found in the empress' letters to Maria Beatrice. Shortly before the latter's second pregnancy came to term in 1773, Maria Theresa explained to her that

28 "C'est si imperceptible, qu'au commencement on n'ose le croire. Quel petit que soit le mouvement, si vous le sentez trois ou quatre jours de suite, vous pouvez compter là-dessus, et je vous prie de me le marquer." Letter to Maria Beatrice, May 24, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:158. Early modern European societies perceived "quickening," that is, the moment when a fetus' movement was felt for the first time by his or her mother, as an important moment: See McClive, "Hidden Truths," 212.

29 For a comparable, if much earlier, example of a princely mother passing on advice on pregnancy to her daughter by letter, see Pernille Arenfeldt's study of Anna of Saxony: Arenfeldt, "The Political Role," 202–223.

30 "j'avoue que je ne suis nullement contente que ces vomissements continuent et augmentent même. D'où ce pauvre invisible prendra-t-il de la nourriture, et sa vénérable maman des forces ? Bientôt je commencerai à douter de mon art de prédire, si cela continue." Letter to Maria Beatrice, August 18, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:160.

31 See Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 305.

> in spite of sixteen children I do not know anything [about delivery], I do not even have a counsel to give. This will give you a bad impression of my capacities, but I admit that, in matters of delivery and everything connected to medicine I wanted to remain ignorant in order to be more obedient.[32]

This voluntary ignorance did not apparently extend to pregnancy. Indeed, it is interesting that Maria Theresa's interpretation of her daughter-in-law's bodily signs parallels to a certain extent the contemporary practice of medical consultation by letter as introduced by famous contemporary physicians such as the Lausanne-based Samuel Auguste Tissot.[33] Of course, Maria Theresa's way of looking at Maria Beatrice's bodily signs differs from physicians' reading of their patients' letters with regard to the framework of interpretation. While physicians analyzed these letters within the theoretical framework of the emerging medical profession, the empress claimed to base hers on personal experience and embodied knowledge. However, she shared these physicians' idea that an interpretation of bodily signs mediated through letters was possible—that, indeed, a body could be "read" through letters.

In the formation of Maria Theresa's personal, embodied knowledge, contemporary medical ideas also played their part. Thus, the empress was convinced that it was possible to find out the sex of an unborn child by reading the signs of its mother's pregnant body, an idea that was rejected by some contemporary medical authors, but was prevalent in all ancient medical texts.[34] For Maria Theresa, the question came to the fore in 1776,

32 "nonobstant seize enfants je ne sais rien, pas même un conseil à donner. Cela vous donnera mauvaise idée de ma capacité; je l'avoue, en fait d'accouchement, et de tout ce qui a touché la médecine, j'ai voulu être ignorante, pour être plus obéissante." Letter to Maria Beatrice, August 23, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:161.

33 On medical consultation by letter, see Pilloud, Hächler, and Barras, "Consulter par lettre"; and Pilloud, *Mots du corps*. Another letter that shows how the empress draws on embodied knowledge is dated July 7, 1777. In this letter, the empress writes to Maria Beatrice that "[l]a fluxion dont vous avez encore souffert, me fait d'autant plus de peine, que je connais cela; ces vilaines fluxions reviennent plus souvent, surtout étant venues à la suite de la couche." Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:284.

34 For an author who was less convinced about this idea, see the French royal physician François Mauriceau, who claimed in the mid-seventeenth century that it was "absolutely impossible" to know the sex of an unborn child: François Mauriceau, *Les Maladies des Femmes grosses et accouchées. Avec la bonne et véritable Méthode de les bien aider en leurs accouchemens naturels, & les moyens de remédier à tous ceux qui sont contre-nature, & aux indispositions des enfans nouveau-nés…* Paris: Henault/d'Houry/de Ninville/Coignard, 1694 [1668], 98.

when the unfortunate Maria Beatrice had lost her only son while already carrying the next child in her womb. Maria Theresa was eager to know whether a new heir was on its way and was pleased to learn that Maria Beatrice felt agile and light-footed, something that, according to humoral medicine, pointed to the male sex of the unborn child.[35] Unfortunately for Maria Beatrice and the *Maison d'Autriche*, the empress was wrong. In December 1776, the archduchess gave birth to her second daughter, Maria Leopoldine.

4. Writing and Reading as Bodily Practices

If Maria Theresa used written correspondence to observe and steer Maria Beatrice's pregnant body, another function of writing is tangible in the letters that the empress addressed to her daughter-in-law when she lay in childbed. After the crucial moment of giving birth, Maria Beatrice's handwritten letters themselves became a subject of discussion. They were a source of information that the empress exploited in order to learn about Maria Beatrice's bodily condition. Thus, after the birth of the archduchess' first child, a daughter named Maria Theresa, the empress wrote about the consolation she felt when seeing Maria Beatrice's handwriting again. Then she observed that she had found it "a bit changed." She inquired whether the letter was written in bed, and whether the archduchess still felt weak when getting up.[36] After the birth of Maria Leopoldine, Maria Theresa wrote to Ferdinand Karl about her satisfaction at seeing "the handwriting of your dear wife, and without detecting the slightest weakness."[37] Clearly, the empress viewed Maria Beatrice's state of health as having a direct impact on the woman's handwriting, and therefore carefully examined its appearance as a source of information about the latter's physical condition. The view that handwriting was a possible source of information on the physical condition of the writer was established in early modern Europe. As early as 1622, the Italian Giuseppe Baldi had claimed that handwriting provided information

35 Letter to Maria Beatrice, November 18, 1776. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:256.

36 "Madame ma chère fille. Quelle consolation n'ai-je pas eue en revoyant les chers caractères ! […] J'ai trouvé au commencement le caractère un peu changé et vous prie de me marquer, si vous l'avez écrite au lit ou levée, et si vous vous trouvez faible." Letter to Maria Beatrice, November 19, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:165.

37 "Vous pouvez vous imaginer la joie que j'ai eue, de revoir le caractère de votre chère épouse, et sans y remarquer la moindre faiblesse." Letter to Ferdinand Karl, December 26, 1776. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 2:60.

on the "body and soul" of the writer.[38] In contrast to Baldi, however, Maria Theresa was not interested in analyzing handwriting in order to learn about the presumably unchanging nature of the writer. Instead, her intention was to detect changes in one person's handwriting in order to learn about changes in that person's bodily condition.

That the empress always had the bodily practice of writing in mind when reading letters also becomes clear when we read the letters she sent to her daughter-in-law during the critical days just before and after giving birth. According to Maria Theresa, the physical effort of letter writing could harm lying-in women. Therefore, after the birth of Maria Beatrice's second child, the long-expected heir Joseph Franz, the empress urged the archduchess not to answer her letter:

> I do not want to strain your strength, and I cannot preach enough how important it is that you take care, even asking you not to answer, as much as I would be charmed to see your beloved handwriting again.[39]

Because she understood reading and writing as physical effort, the empress even claimed to have adapted her own writing practice to the circumstances by keeping her letter short: "I do not want to tire your eyes too much, I embrace you tenderly."[40] In 1779, she even decided to stop writing directly to Maria Beatrice when her due date was approaching: "From now on, you will read my letters to your dear little mother," she wrote to Ferdinand Karl on October 4—two days before his wife gave birth to her second son, Francis Karl.[41]

5. Body, Emotion, and Letter Writing

Observing, controlling, and counseling were certainly part of the aims of Maria Theresa's letters to her daughter-in-law, but not the only ones. In

38 See Giuseppe Baldi, *Trattato come da una lettera missiva si conoscano la natura, e qualità dello scrittore*. Carpi: Girolamo Vaschieri, 1622, chapter 3.

39 "Ne voulant abuser de vos forces, ne pouvant assez vous prêcher ménagement, vous priant même de ne pas me répondre, autant que je serais charmée de revoir vos chers caractères, je vous prie de m'en priver et de me croire toujours votre fidèle mère Marie Thérèse." Letter to Maria Beatrice, May 25, 1775. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:190.

40 "ne voulant trop fatiguer vos yeux, je vous embrasse tendrement." Letter to Maria Beatrice, May 18, 1775. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:189.

41 "Vous lirez à l'avenir mes lettres à votre chère *Mütterl*." Letter to Ferdinand Karl, October 4, 1779. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 2:216–217.

fact, it is striking how the empress used the correspondence as a vehicle to convey and steer emotions and thereby fashioned and managed her personal relationship with her daughter-in-law. Dynastic reproduction being the actual core subject of her letters, many of these emotions were stirred by Maria Beatrice's body—by its condition and its performance, and by the ways in which it was managed. In this sense, the empress wanted her curiosity to be understood as an expression of affection. Thus, when the empress sent her Austrian midwives to Milan for Maria Beatrice's first delivery, Maria Theresa exclaimed in her letter:

> If I only could go with them! [...] No one tells me anything, whether you are corpulent or not, whether you sleep well, and so on—these are significant and interesting pieces of information [*circonstances*] about someone that one loves; these worries [*sentiments*] will only come to an end with my life accomplished.[42]

Personal affection for the archduchess was not the only thing that explained her curiosity, however. In fact, it was driven by two distinct concerns: concern for the archduchess' bodily well-being on the one hand, and concern for the dynastic body's prosperity on the other. Even if the empress depicted these two concerns as partly overlapping, they were more often than not in competition with each other.

As long as Maria Beatrice's generative behavior and success were in line with or did not deviate too much from the empress' expectations, it was easy to stress the overlap between the two concerns. When the archduchess' first pregnancy ended abruptly with an abortion in July 1772, the empress thus offered consolation and tried to take pressure off her young relative. "It is no problem for me to wait another year," she wrote, and: "what is important is that the respectable and beloved mother [Maria Beatrice] will be preserved."[43] However, the empress' moods could change quickly. Just five months later, the empress wrote a remarkable letter in which Maria

42 "Les femmes et la sage-femme partent le 25; que ne puis-je aller avec elles ! ... Personne ne mande rien, si vous êtes grosse ou non, si le sommeil est bon etc., tout [sic] des circonstances très-significatives, intéressantes pour quelqu'un qu'on aime bien; ces sentiments ne finiront qu'avec ma vie. Votre fidèle mère Marie Thérèse." Letter to Maria Beatrice, August 19, 1773. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:161. In some letters, the empress also refers to her "curiosity." Thus, on December 27, 1773 she writes to Maria Beatrice: "Je suis curieuse si vous pourrez mettre les corps que vous avez portés ci-devant." Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:167.

43 "Je peux bien attendre une année encore, et tout m'importe que la maman respectable et si chère soit conservée." Letter to Maria Beatrice, July 20, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:143.

Beatrice's individual body was downgraded to a mere birthing machine in the Habsburg family enterprise:

> In this moment, I have received the consoling news that the queen [her daughter Maria Carolina] thinks that she is pregnant, the same is true for the grand duchess [her daughter-in-law Maria Ludovica] and the unlucky one in Parma [her daughter Maria Amalia]. I hope today that I can soon add a fourth pregnancy to this list. I will say prayers for this purpose. You should avoid physical effort and walks. It is detrimental for people with delicate nerves.[44]

It is difficult to imagine a more cruel way for a woman to signal to her daughter-in-law that it was expected that she should bear a son before long. During the eight years of their correspondence, Maria Theresa's letters always oscillated between these two poles—consideration for Maria Beatrice's personal bodily well-being and concern for the well-being of the dynastic body.

How did Maria Beatrice cope with this situation? In the absence of her letters, it is difficult to find out to what extent she shared the empress' concern for the Habsburg dynastic body. From Maria Theresa's letters we can extrapolate that she embraced her mother-in-law's goal of generating Habsburg heirs. But we will probably never know whether she did so willy-nilly or wholeheartedly. It is difficult to imagine that letters such as the one alluding to her allegedly weak nerves would not have disconcerted the young heiress of the House of Modena and Reggio. Simultaneously, it is possible that the empress' opinionated letters and her pointed pen were bearable for Maria Beatrice thanks to Maria Theresa's writing skills, which often successfully created a feeling of physical closeness. The empress writes about the tears she shed after receiving the news of Maria Beatrice's first miscarriage, and about the smile that spread over her face when she read a letter from the new bride who was eager to become pregnant. The empress demonstrated emotional attachment by referring to the physical expressions of her feelings. She thus created

44 "Je viens de recevoir dans cet instant la bien consolante nouvelle que la reine [Maria Karolina] a des soupçons de grossesse, de même la grande-duchesse et la malheureuse à Parme [Maria Amalia]. J'espère et souhaite à cette heure d'y mettre bientôt une quatrième. Je vais faire des prières à ce sujet. Pas trop de fatigues ou promenades à pied; pour des gens délicats des nerfs cela est nuisible." Letter to Maria Beatrice, December 28, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:153.

a sense of face-to-face interaction in her written correspondence with Maria Beatrice.[45]

6. Conclusion

What did Maria Beatrice's pregnant body mean to her mother-in-law, and how was this meaning shaped and created by the two women's writing practices? I would like to highlight two observations. The first concerns the ways in which letters were used as tools to exchange observations about Maria Beatrice's pregnant body. Scholars such as Cathy McClive, Eva Labouvie, and Barbara Duden have shown that early modern women's knowledge about pregnancy was fundamentally insecure. In her history of pregnancy and birth, Eva Labouvie compared an early modern woman's realization that she was pregnant with the process of slowly completing a puzzle, with signs becoming increasingly unambiguous.[46] Similarly, Cathy McClive states that both in legal and medical contexts, "[m]enstruation was an uncertain barometer of the mysteries of procreation, and the situation was no clearer in the later eighteenth century."[47] Maria Theresa's letters largely fit into this picture, but they also allow for nuances. Thus, the village women that Labouvie focused on in her study considered delayed menses as an unreliable and in fact almost negligible sign.[48] In contrast, overdue menses figure prominently in Maria Theresa's speculations about pregnancies. It seems, therefore, that early modern perceptions of pregnancy have varied in different social contexts, with the dynastic context showing an especially high awareness of even the faintest signs of pregnancy.[49] It is probable that this awareness was created not least by the habit of putting observations down in writing.

45 Tears about the miscarriage: Letter to Maria Beatrice, July 9, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:142. Smile about the young woman's haste to become pregnant: Letter to Maria Beatrice, April 13, 1772. Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:135. One especially striking example for this can be found in a letter that the empress wrote to Maria Beatrice in 1772. Praising Maria Beatrice's capacities as an eloquent letter writer, the empress wrote: "J'ai fait l'exclamation en le lisant: je voudrais la prendre par la tête et l'embrasser, comme elle rend cela finement et joliment! Vous êtes peintre et tout ce que vous voulez. Ma chère fille, que nous sommes heureux de vous posséder!" Arneth, *Briefe an die Kinder*, 3:141.

46 See Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 14. See also Duden, *Geschichte*.

47 McClive, *Menstruation and Procreation*, 139.

48 See Labouvie, *Andere Umstände*, 15.

49 See also Crawford, "Attitudes to Pregnancy"; Sánchez, "'I would not feel'" for similar conclusions.

The second point concerns the ways Maria Theresa remained ambiguous when writing about Maria Beatrice's pregnancies, regarding them at the same time as very personal and yet decidedly dynastic events. The tension thus created could be aptly described as resulting from "the princess' two bodies," in allusion to Ernst Kantorowicz's famous study.[50] What exacerbated this tension was the empress' style of writing, which incorporated a vocabulary that researchers commonly refer to as "bourgeois." It is conspicuous how the empress actively used her letters to articulate her emotions and to create affectionate family ties in an almost sentimentalist manner. In the end, this resulted in an aporia: For, if dynastic and personal perspectives on womanhood and pregnancy had never been fully congruent, sentimentalist and dynastic languages were even less so.[51]

In Maria Theresa's writing we might therefore already sense some of the challenges that the great societal changes at the end of the eighteenth century represented for European dynasticism. Nevertheless, it still took nearly another hundred years for the empress' dream of Habsburg expansion in Italy to come to an end. The French Revolution only temporarily hampered the realization of Maria Theresa's master plan. Once the revolutionary years had passed, Maria Beatrice's son Francis became the first Habsburg ruler of Modena and Reggio in 1814. Thereafter, the duchy remained in the hands of the House of Habsburg-Este for almost half a century. It was only in 1859 that the Habsburg-Este family were driven out of Modena and the events of the Risorgimento drew the definitive line under a story that had started with Maria Beatrice's perception of almost "unperceivable movements" in her womb.

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50 Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*. On this classic's reception, see Jussen, "King's Two Bodies Today." For a study that tries to use the concept for a gendered approach to the history of early modern monarchy, see Schulte, *Körper der Königin*.

51 For an analysis of sentimentalism and its political implications from the perspective of a historian of emotions, see Reddy, *Navigation of Feeling*, 141–210.

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4. Body and Power: Narratives of the Body in Early Modern Political History

Benjamin Steiner

Abstract: This article explores the role of the bodies of monarchs in legitimizing their claim to be sole ruler. Departing from anthropological studies that identify the body as an important part of narratives of power, for instance in modifying or inscribing the body of a ruler, it will provide historical examples that show a widely dispersed European practice of political body narratives. Reacting to certain bodily ideals in political and court literature, rulers adapted their physical appearance in order to conform to these ideals. Yet the body of a ruler was under constant observation, as its ability to conform was limited in most cases. This resulted in a culture of vigilance and care towards the body that characterized the early modern monarchical system.

Keywords: body politic; court; political culture; medicine; government; body techniques

1. Introduction: Narratives of Somatic Power

Is power inscribed in bodies? Do they tell stories of the hardships of rule and government? Or are they mere carriers of signs and symbols of power, remaining as unwritten as empty canvasses? The question of narrativity and corporeality has a profound political dimension.[1] Either narrative

1 Narrativity here is understood as a general concept that covers techniques of representation, such as writing or painting, but also notions of discourse, plot, *récit*, and emplotment. For the latter, see Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*; and the adaptation of Frye's archetypical model for historiography by White, *Metahistory*, 7–11; also, with a special regard to writing, see Derrida, *Grammatology*; and ibid., *Writing and Difference*.

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representations signify an individual body as powerful, or the body serves as its own signifier to claiming power.[2]

Regarding the latter option that the body itself marked an individual as powerful, there are several examples of individuals *outside* of Europe that were described by early modern travelers as "painted" or "imprinted" princes. The sketches of John White, for example, depict indigenous rulers as tattooed.[3] An etching by John Savage, who accompanied William Dampier on his voyage to the Philippines, shows the "Prince Giolo" (ca. 1692), "Son to ye King of Moangis or Gililo," but actually a slave from Mindanao: "his whole body (except Face Hands and Feet) is curiously and most exquisitely Painted or stained full of Variety and Invention with prodigious Art and Skill perform'd In so much, yet the ancient and noble Mistery of Painting or Staining upon Humane Bodies seems to be comprised in this one statily Piece."[4] In Maori custom in New Zealand, chiefs were also tattooed with distinct markings (*tā moko*) to indicate their social status, while after death having their head removed from their body and preserved as *mokomakai*. During the first voyage of James Cook's expedition to the South Seas, Sydney Parkinson (ca. 1745–1771), who accompanied Joseph Banks as an illustrator, drew images of "The Head of a Chief of New Zealand, the face curiously tattaowed, or mark'd, according to the manner," thus helping to introduce the Samoan word "tatau," "tattow," or "tattoo," as well as the custom, to European culture.[5]

In anthropological research, starting with Arnold van Gennep, bodily transformations including inscribing, tattooing, scarification, or painting played important roles in so-called *rites de passage*. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the purpose of Maori tattooing was to imprint certain cultural

2 For an overview of the recent anthropological literature on the body and representational techniques such as body inscriptions, see Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body"; also for an interesting sociological perspective with reference to the work of Norbert Elias see Rees, "From Outsider to Established."

3 These images were reproduced by Theodore de Bry and Thomas Harriot in the first volume of *America*. Frankfurt, 1590–1602, 1:1600 under the heading "Der Fuersten und Herrn in Virginia Abcontrafeytung" (plate 2). On John White see Sloane et al., *A New World*.

4 John Savage, *Prince Giolo*, engraving, ca. 1692, Sydney, State Library of New South Wales. Giolo was purchased by Dampier in Mindanao, Philippines, in 1690, and took him to England in late 1691, where he was sold and exhibited in London as a curiosity. See William Dampier, *New Voyage round the World*. London, 1697, 549. Later Giolo was sold to Oxford, where again he was exhibited, and died of smallpox. See also Barnes, "Curiosity," 31–50.

5 Sydney Parkinson, *A Journal of the Voyage to the South Seas, in His Majesty's Ship, the Endeavour*. London: Stanfield Parkinson, 1773. Engraving by Thomas Chambers of the Maori man with *moko* based on the drawing by Sydney Parkinson in 1769 (plate 16).

traditions and the philosophy of the group on the mind, and, according to Mary Douglas, the body could be used metaphorically to describe socially significant classificatory systems. Transforming the body, altering the appearance of the skin, thus had social and also political consequences, making a "socially informed body" (Pierre Bourdieu) part of a process of social construction that manages the relationship between an individual and the world they live in.[6] Early modern observers viewed tattoos, among other bodily attributes, mostly from an aesthetic perspective, associating indigenous bodies with Herculean strength and sometimes even adopting their outward appearance.[7] In the course of the eighteenth century, however, body modifications such as tattooing were mostly coupled with the image of the Noble Savage.[8] Despite the exceptions of the odd nobleman with a tattoo, the custom lost its socially elevated meaning and, as a result of cultural appropriation by sailors and merchants returning from the Pacific, became a symbol generally associated with the lower-class population until the mid-twentieth century.[9]

It thus comes as no surprise that there are very few (if any) examples of princely bodies in European history that were incised, painted, manipulated, or altered in some way in order to designate them as ruling bodies.[10] It is therefore plausible, at first sight, to assume that power was not expressed with a particularly strong physique or different means that affected the body directly. A ruler wore special ceremonial attire, held certain objects, and surrounded himself with a material setting that revealed his high

6 Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*; Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*; Turner, "Social Skin"; Bourdieu, *Outline*; see also Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body," 321.

7 See, for example, the portrayal of male rulers in the sixteenth century with Herculean physique and 'Barbarian' imagery, illustrated for the case of the king of France by Wintroub, "Civilizing the Savage."

8 Fließ, "Die europäische Kultivierung"; Kohl, *Entzauberter Blick*.

9 Schildkrout, "Inscribing the Body," 326. See also the entry for "Brandmale" in Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon* (1706–1751, vol. 4, col. 1070–1071), where body markings are connected with criminal punishment, serfdom, and slavery. Bodily punishment and the marking of the body have been considered as a verdict on social exclusion, see Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*. See also the contribution by Aldair Rodrigues in this volume.

10 There exist accounts of several early modern European rulers bearing tattoos, for example, the tsars Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, which prove apocryphal. Only in modern times have there been kings who had tattooed bodies, such as Denmark's king Frederick IX (1899–1972); claims persist that the Swedish king Bernadotte, known as Charles XIV John (1763–1844) had, ironically, the words *La Mort aux rois* tattooed on his body, although these are often cited uncritically in literature and are of speculative nature. See, e.g., Kunter, "Zur Geschichte der Tatauierung," 1; Luschan, "Das Tatauieren," 217.

position to everybody else, but not through his physical corporeality.[11] Thus, the body itself seems to have received less attention within the political culture in Europe.

But recently this restriction to outer signs and symbols in relation to establishing or holding on to power has been repeatedly questioned, particularly by those scholars who have focused on political structures outside Europe. In Africa, for example, ethnographers have noticed that from as early as the time of Ancient Egypt and its death cult surrounding the pharaohs, the physical body of a ruler seems to have been credited with special qualities, perhaps even supernatural capacities, and has therefore been revered by their subjects. The king of Benin, for instance, was described as having no physical needs: he did not eat and drink, did not sleep and wash himself, and, also, did not die. Those who did not believe this or even talked about those things without euphemizing them were killed. In Central Africa, bodily fluids and body parts of dead kings, such as jaw bones and genitals, were used by their successors as oracles in ceremonies.[12]

Examples of such forms of sacred kingship famously led earlier in the twentieth century to James Frazer's hypothesis in his popular book *The Golden Bough* that political power has been justified by creating belief in divine kingship and created, among other things, a ritual of sacrifice of the royal body.[13] This hypothesis has been refuted, in particular for Africa, since there are only a few cases and Frazer himself tended to read a meaning into African rituals that fitted his grand narrative of a continuity of divine kingship. More recently, historians of Africa have criticized the concept of sacred or divine kingship not only because of the lack of evidence. Rituals and theatrics surrounding the body of a ruler were important for legitimizing the exercise of power by one person, but they could also, as Adam Jones remarks, coerce the ruler to leave important parts of the decision-making process to others.[14] Thus, the individual ruler was, to paraphrase Jan Vansina, "ritualized into political impotence."[15]

In this essay I would like to address how a ruler might be able to escape from this ritualizing trap. The question makes us turn again towards the body of the ruler, not so much in its supposedly sacred capacity, but rather in its physical, one might say somatic, resilience against the power of the

11 Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider*; Stollberg-Rilinger, *Rituale*.

12 Jones, *Afrika*, 248–254. For further case studies, see Cannadine, *Rituals of Royalty*.

13 Frazer, *The Golden Bough*.

14 Jones, *Afrika*, 254.

15 Vansina, "Equatorial Africa," 235.

ritual that binds the ruler. This does not mean to question the important role of rituals and narratives of divine and sacred kingship. It is, as I argue, now time to bring the natural body back into political history.

This contribution aims to point out that what seems to be true of African kingship might also be true for European rulers (or even rulers in general): rituals are important narratives of justification of rule, but there are limits to the constant ritualization of power, and these limits are most of the time imposed by the physical capacities of a ruler's body to endure this restraint. It is important to underline this, as in recent years historians have tended to downplay the somatic aspects of rulership. In a sense it is perhaps the binary picture one tends to apply to medieval and early modern politics, according to the model Ernst Kantorowicz proposed of dividing a ruler's body in half and making two bodies out of one.[16] Of course, this was directing attention to a neglected or forgotten part of a narrative that politics was closely linked to religion and rituals that surrounded political persons with a sacred and divine aura. This is understood and accepted today by almost all historians. But dividing religion and politics creates problems of *not* seeing the interdependence, interaction, and perhaps union between the two entities. Instead, it is necessary to reflect on the consequences of the Two-Body-Narrative that distinguishes the body politic and the body natural, sacred and profane rule, symbolic and "real" meaning of signs, while, in fact, all of these seem combined and as one and the same in most government practices.

In the following I would like, therefore, to propose alternative readings of the narrative of the ruler's body that constitute an analytical theme I call *somatic power*. There are numerous examples, too many to recall in one instance, that suggest that bodies were indeed the carriers of certain aspects of power. This was not necessarily related to physical strength, although I would refrain from ruling that out categorically, but rather to a practice of writing and narrating power with one's own body: narratives of health, for example, figure prominently in the constant care for the ruler's body, especially by doctors, but also by the rulers themselves, as, for example, with female rulers, queens in particular, who resorted to original discourses of weakness, admitting bodily faults in order to turn them into even more powerful signs of their sovereignty. The first section discusses some of these body narratives of political justifications. Second, I address some challenges and limits to these justifications that resulted from everyday government life, the necessary duties of an acting ruler: attending audiences, reading

16 Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*.

memoranda, and sitting in council meetings—something that has been known to be an important part of the self-fabrication of early modern rulers. I investigate the tools of correcting bodily deficits or disabilities such as, for example, simple prosthetics like glasses. A third section then focuses on those instances when rulers' bodies seemed particularly frail, ill, or deficient in a way that seriously challenged the legitimacy of their rule. These cases of crisis become political in a way that accentuates that the body was indeed an important part of any justification narrative of political power.

2. Readings of Bodies of Queens and Kings: Narratives of Political Justification

There are several types of body narratives in relation to political rulers. I concentrate on the bodies of queens and kings. One could of course focus on other political personalities as well, but monarchs were particularly dependent on their body. Recently, this has been underlined by a resurgence of biographical studies that have brought aspects such as health to the center of attention. Geoffrey Parker, for instance, dedicates a major part of his biography on Charles V to the emperor's problematic health, strongly linking it to his political persona.[17] He portrays him as a man whose physical frailty permeates most of his time as ruler. Some studies have even focused solely on princely bodies, for example, Valeria Finucci's book on Vincenzo II Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, which demonstrates the constant worry directed towards possible physical defects, especially regarding his ability to procreate.[18] And Stanis Perez provided ground-laying work with his meticulous research on the health of Louis XIV from the perspective of his doctors.[19]

To grasp an idea of how bodies were read by contemporaries, it makes sense to concentrate on all sorts of sources. Anecdotal evidence is particularly pertinent and serves as an important starting point for any study of the political role of bodies. But it is limited when it comes to reconstructing individuals' intentions of actively pursuing political strategies by harnessing the natural body. Therefore, sources that indicate a seriality in the practice of recording and observing the body are also very helpful when it comes to finding evidence for an

17 Parker, *Emperor*.
18 Finucci, *Prince's Body*.
19 Perez, *La santé de Louis XIV*; Vallot, d'Aquin, and Fagon, *Journal de la santé*.

underlying pattern of bodily practices in the upkeep of power. Journals, especially doctors' casebooks, that exhibit a day-to-day recording ritual were important tools of body control for contemporaries and also serve as sources that show how the epistemic practice of complete information helped to form new ideas of the body in power, ideas that differed from the traditional metaphorical use in many ways.[20] Ego documents by high-status individuals are rare, but if one includes correspondence, especially with family members or close friends, it becomes apparent that questions of health and infirmity rank among the most prominent topics. In letters, the body occurs as a theme comparable to the weather, often alluded to in passing, but having a crucial importance for matters of family politics.[21]

The family correspondence of Catherine de' Medici (1519–1589) is a case in point.[22] Catherine's right to rule France as widowed queen and queen mother of four sons who could (and eventually all did) become kings was rather precarious. Her letters, as Julia Heinemann points out, contain a language of the royal bloodlines; in particular, signs of the relationship between herself and her sons and further male kin.[23] Catherine sometimes referred to remote male relatives as "mon sang," that were called the *princes du sang*; for example, she referred to Henri de Navarre, who was actually only a nephew twice removed, as "mon fils," too.[24] Blood in this regard was not meant merely as a biological feature of descendance, but could, in fact, be represented by outward signs.[25] Jean du Tillet, for example, a *greffier* in the Parlement de Paris who during the wars of religion wrote in favor of the monarchy, considered the long hair of the Merovingian kings a mark of their royal blood, which they let grow from childhood on as a sign of

20 The body metaphor for political systems underwent changes itself, too. William Harvey's discovery of blood circulation, for example, had ramifications for the organic understanding of the state in comparison to earlier Hippocratic and Galenic theories. See Cohen, "Harrington and Harvey"; Hill, "William Harvey." The most comprehensive overview for a general history of the body metaphor in politics remains Struve, *Die Entwicklung*.

21 See, for example, Nadine Amsler's contribution in this volume.

22 On Catherine and, in particular, the role of her body, see Knecht, *Catherine de' Medici*; Pigaillem, *Catherine de Médici*; Poirier, *Catherine de Médicis*; Sichel, *The Later Years*.

23 Heinemann, *Verwandtsein*.

24 Ibid., 204, 210.

25 Royal blood (*sang royal*) as a factor for legitimacy of rule has not been studied extensively for the early modern period. For medieval conceptions, see Johnson et al., *Blood and Kinship*; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*. According to Giesey, "Juristic Basic," 39, in medieval France, hereditary right by blood was not understood in the sense that royal blood had inherent physiological characteristics.

domination over their subjects.[26] But even in the sixteenth century, outer signs of royalty already belonged to the realm of myths and legends. The blood relationship was only a necessary condition, not a sufficient one to claim royal authority.

More explicitly relating to the body are the letters of Catherine to her nephew Charles Emmanuel of Savoy (1562–1630). She also addressed the duke affectionately as "mon fils," since she felt related to him through his mother, Marguerite of Valois, sister of her husband and daughter of Francis I, to whom Catherine felt very close. The queen mother told him he should love her "as if you had been carried in my stomach."[27] For Catherine, these commitments were intended to strengthen an emotional as well as a physical bond within her family and confirm her central position as a mother of kings and queens in the whole of Europe.[28]

A different case of the effective use of the body for political purposes is Catherine's contemporary Elizabeth of England (1533–1603).[29] Her body narrative was a very different one from that of the queen of France. While Catherine promoted her role as mother of more than her proper share of sons, Elizabeth took a path of declaring her body that of a virgin.[30] In front of her parliament in 1563 she used her body, which had just recovered from a serious smallpox infection, as an argument to convince her people that she pursued a reign without marriage and children. It is quite probable that her outward appearance was affected by this grave sickness, which had led to pockmarks on her face, prompting a mask of heavy makeup to cover the lesions.[31] Elizabeth, however, turned these defects into advantages by utilizing a rhetoric of self-sacrifice: when ill, she told the parliamentarians, her first worry was not for her body, but for her people: "yet desired I not then life […] so much for myne owne safety, as for yours. For I knew that in exchanging of this reigne, I shuld have enioyed a better reigne, where

26 Jean du Tillet, *Recueil des rois de France, leur couronne et maison*. Paris: Jacques de Puys, 1580, 218.

27 "comme celle qui ne vous ayme rien moins que si vous avois porté dans mon ventre." Catherine to Charles Emmanuel, [Oct. 1579]. La Ferrière-Percy, Baguenault de Puchess, Lesort, *Lettres,* 7:189.

28 Heinemann, *Verwandtsein*, 220.

29 For accounts of Elizabeth's rule with emphasis on her body, see Castor, *Elizabeth I*; Erickson, *First Elizabeth*; Levin, *Heart and Stomach*; Hibbert, *Virgin Queen*; Bassnett, *Elizabeth I*; Axton, *Queen's Two Bodies*.

30 On the supposed reasons for Elizabeth's decision to remain childless, about the rumors of her physical incapacities see Erickson, *First Elizabeth*, 252.

31 Bassnett, *Elizabeth I*, 102.

residence is perpetuall."[32] Thus she declared her illness not a problem, but rather proof of her special relationship with the English people that she kept in mind during her personal crisis. This close bond was the key to her argument in the debate for why she could renounce marriage and motherhood in favor of her love affair with her subjects, ultimately "all my husbands, my good people."[33]

Behind this narrative of the virgin body, however, hid a possible medical condition. Unseen by most, the pathology of the queen provoked speculations about a physical defect of her reproductive organs. In 1619, Ben Jonson claimed "she had a membrana on her which made her uncapable of a man, though for her delight she tried many, at the coming over of Monsieur [i.e., the duke of Alençon, youngest son of Henri II and Catherine de' Medici, who courted Elizabeth in 1581], there was a French surgeon who took in hand to cut, yet fear stayed her and his death."[34] That Elizabeth might not freely have chosen her childlessness owing to a physical defect of her pudenda is not without precedent in Europe. A similar case that unfolded in the same year is that of Margherita Farnese, who was unable to procreate with her husband, the duke of Mantua, which led to the dissolution of their marriage.[35] Surgical remedies were already available at this time, but were highly dangerous, and neither woman undertook the procedure in order not to risk her life.[36]

Nonetheless, these examples show how the body served as a canvas for political justification narratives. Either their authors chose to paint the picture of an intact body that, in the first place, served as a means to procreate and, as was the case with Catherine, as center for a political family. But the body could also be a rhetorical instrument if it was damaged, deformed, or dysfunctional for immediate political purposes. It is not unusual, as will be further explored, to find particularly this variant of a deficient body reappearing in political narratives in the early modern period.

32 National Archives, SP 12/27 ff. 143r–144v. Answer of the Queen to the addresses of both Houses of Parliament delivered to Mr. Speaker Thomas Williams, January 28, 1563.

33 Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 24.

34 Jonson, *Man and his Work*, 1:142. On that, see Peterson, "Elizabeth I's Virginity."

35 Finucci, *Prince's Body*, 28–61.

36 Ibid., 43; for a general account of the possibilities of controlling the female body by means of physical examination and surgical alteration, see Park, *Secrets of Women*.

3. The Challenges of Ruling: Bodily Requirements and Means of Government

In everyday life, the body was an important part of the *métier* of kings and queens. Authors of tracts pointed out many physical requirements for performing successfully as a ruler. In his treatise *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Baldassare Castiglione insisted that the model prince should engage in daily exercise, both physical and intellectual. The prince, however, conformed more or less to the rules that applied to courtiers in general. The body ideal was that of classical proportions, "neither too small nor too big," since one could be conceived as monstrous, with a preference for being on the small side rather than unduly tall.[37] He should be well built, with finely proportioned members, all in all "befitting a warrior," since his first duty was to handle every kind of weapon. A courtier after all stood in this bellicose and agonal tradition, so it was "of the highest importance to know how to wrestle," performing well on the battlefield as well as on the tourney ground. Sporting activity, especially hunting, "since in many ways it resembles warfare," was among the most important of these manly requirements: "the courtier should know how to swim, jump, run and cast the stone," not only because of its usefulness in war, but also to build up a good reputation. All this should be performed without affectation but with *sprezzatura*: "to practice in all things a certain nonchalance which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless."[38]

Under these courtly circumstances, a king had to adapt to these ideals and was viewed at the same time by other courtiers as an ideal model. Castiglione provides the example of Ferdinand of Aragon, who was imitated by other noblemen in his habit of raising his head in a peculiar way while twisting a corner of his mouth.[39] This was, in fact, a physical defect resulting from an illness that the king handled with such grace that it became a characteristic trait.[40] It was therefore not easy to imitate and acquire a similar grace by doing so. This example of fine distinction between original and adapted behavior highlights the importance of the body as a bearer of social value, and, as indicated by Norbert Elias in his book *The Court Society*,

37 Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 61.

38 Ibid., 66–67.

39 Ibid., 67. In 1504, Ferdinand II of Aragon conquered most of the Kingdom of Naples and was therefore well known to the author and courtiers in Italy.

40 Castiglione is not clear about the nature of Ferdinand's illness. Modern examinations of remaining hair from his embalmed corpse buried in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples suggest that the king was affected by pediculosis. See Fornaciari et al., "Use of Mercury."

as a central resource upon which identity is founded.[41] Ideals of the body and physical characteristics in early modern politics were not merely aligned with concepts of aesthetics or perfectibility, but also included memorable traits, slight imperfections, and distinctive features. In Italy, for example, Federico da Montefeltro was known and prominently portrayed with a damaged eye and a bump on his nose, which were seen as examples of his heroism in battle and revered as an aquiline appearance.[42]

The importance of bodily capabilities for government often became apparent when they were lacking. Although there is no portrait of Philip II of Spain showing the king with glasses, he needed to wear them for his work.[43] That this ruler needed eyewear is significant, since eyes were considered essential for his image as an all-knowing king, a *rey sabio*, *rey prudente*, or *roi sage*.[44] According to Leopold von Ranke's description of an otherwise motionless ruler, Philip was a king who "sat and read" all the reports written by his advisers, who therefore needed his eyes and ears as essential means of government.[45] A contemporary Spanish prince's mirror by the Jesuit Andrés Mendo opined that the most noble sense of the head is the gaze: "a prince must be all eyes, sleepless for the benefit of his subjects; nothing shall escape his gaze, as the king-eagle [*águila real*], who from high above sees all the fish in the depth of water."[46] The ideal was that "a prince is like the sun, and if he, like our king of Spain, embraces all four parts of the world, he must be the OCULUS MUNDI. He sees everything with the eye of perception [*noticia*]."[47] So if a king should be able to see like an eagle, how could he be using glasses?

In Spanish scholastic discourse the problem of the king's cognitive limits was already well known. The king has an excellent understanding of his government, but he is also blind, as Jerónimo de Mendieta wrote to Philip II regarding his administration of the American colonies in 1565, since he sees

41 Elias, *The Court Society*. See also Rees, "From Outsider to Established," 159.

42 Roeck and Tönnesmann, *Nase Italiens*; another example from that period is emperor Maximilian's I nose, presented in all kinds of depictions as a heraldic and thus recognizable feature of his appearance, see Bellin, "Heraldische Individualität." These cases must be seen individually, however, as there are different cases—one of which will be discussed below—where deficient noses could be seen as less honorable and heroic.

43 Parker, *Imprudent King*, 114. See further on Philip regarding his health and body, Kamen, *Philip of Spain*; Pfandl, *Philipp II*.

44 Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*, 37–42.

45 Ranke, *Fürsten und Völker*, 1:21.

46 Andrés Mendo, *Principe perfecto y ministros avisados. Documentos politicos y morales*. Salamanca: Diego de Cosio, 1657, 48–49. Translation by Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*, 24.

47 Mendo, *Principe perfecto*, 49–50. Translation by Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*, 24.

only through the eyes of those that describe the world to him.[48] Since he is blind, Juan de Mariana added in his quasi-anti-monarchical tract *De rege et regis institutionis* (1599), the prince is also unknowing. The blindness and ignorance of a single ruler, confined to his palace as if in a cage, make him unable to consider every detail with his own eyes. Instead, he is surrounded by fawning courtiers, among the lies and frauds of the domestics, all jostling for their own advantage. Who would like, he asked provocatively, to place a man without light, without ears and eyes at the head of the state?[49]

Discourses of blindness such as these mostly resulted from critique about favoritism. They are indications of a structural problem of governance resulting from an information overload: a ruler is theoretically able to see everything, but the sheer mass of information and the limits imposed by time make it practically impossible to be aware of everything.[50] Louis XIV of France (1638–1715) encountered similar problems in his government, which he tried to sidestep by considering his councilors as able substitutes since it was beneath his dignity to care for every minor detail himself.[51] To ensure their vigilance he proposed to perform random inspections of their offices, to ask them questions on details when they least expected it.[52] The Sun King, however, not so much read papers and documents as he was *sitting* in his councils. Sitting itself was considered a relevant physical ability, at the French court at least.

A medal struck in 1661 celebrated the marvelous rise to sole rulership of young Louis, who promised from then on that nothing should be signed, not even a copy or a passport, without his express order.[53] Under the heading "GALLIA FELIX," the medal shows a subheading "ASSIDUA REGIS IN CONSILIIS PRAESENTIA 1661," which translates as signifying "fortunate France by the assiduous presence of the king in his councils."[54] "Assiduité" here may be translated as "industriousness," "effort," but also "sedulity,"

48 Mendieta, "Carta al Rey," 1:38.

49 Juan de Mariana, *De rege et regis institutione libri III*. Toledo: Rodericum, 1599, 28 a–b.

50 King, *Science and Rationalism*; Soll, *The Information Master*. Both authors tend to overstate the rationality of the government of Louis XIV and his minister Colbert. In fact, their capacity to be informed and aware of everything was limited as well. See Brendecke, *Empirical Empire*, 24; Brendecke and Steiner, "Governance."

51 On Louis, see Bély, *Louis XIV*; Chaline, *La règne*; on the practices of his government, see Sarmant and Stoll, *Régner et gouverner*.

52 Louis XIV, *Mémoires*, 43–44.

53 Loménie de Brienne, *Mémoires inédits*, 2:155–158.

54 "la France hereuse par la presence assiduë du Roy dans ses Conseils." *Médailles sur les principaux événements du regne de Louis le Grand, avec des explications historiques. Par l'Académie Royale des Médailles et des Incriptions*. Paris: Imprimérie royale, 1702, 61r.

deriving from the Latin "sedulitas," from "sedere," "to sit." The Sun King is indeed sitting as Apollon-Helios in his chariot, guiding the horses on the path of the sun through the sky over the clouds and under the stars. To be able to endure long sessions in council, therefore, was considered a key quality of this ruler, as the explanation points out:

> Among the great qualities of the King, one of the foremost is his constant assiduity in keeping his councils at all times and in all places. The victories which have extended the boundaries of the Kingdom so far, these fortified places which have closed the entrance to the Enemies, so many salutary laws, the order and discipline which prevail in the towns and even in the armies, finally so many fine establishments, which are the happiness of France and the glory of our century, are the effects of this application which is always equal in Peace and in War, and which the multiplicity of affairs, pleasures, and even illnesses have never been able to interrupt or tire of.[55]

The king, therefore, was fortunate to possess a body that could sit for a very long time, even though he was confined to a special wheelchair ("la roulette") after the painful surgical operation on his anal fistula in 1686.[56] Sitting, certainly, was not intended to be a physical quality that Castiglione considered essential. In the decades that passed from the publication of *Il cortegiano* in 1528, to the beginning of Philip's reign in 1558, to Louis' ascendance to his sole reign in 1661, a transformation of the physical challenges facing the ruler certainly took place. But the regiment of the state still called for a *regime* of the body.

4. Frail and Sick Bodies: Justification Narratives in Question

Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs.
William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act III, Scene 2

The well-known quote from Shakespeare's *Richard II* (ca. 1595) opens up the king's monologue about the temporality of monarchs.[57] In Richard's paranoid

55 *Médailles sur les principaux événements*, 61r, (my own translation).

56 See Perez, *La santé de Louis XIV*, 109–110; Perez, "La fistule anale du Roi-Soleil"; Jørum, "Sun King's Anal Fistula"; see also Guffey, *Designing Disability*, 24–25.

57 See the famous chapter on Shakespeare's *Richard II* in Kantorowicz, *King's Two Bodies*, 24–41. See also Norbrook, "Emperor's New Body."

mind, kings are "all murder'd: for within the hollow crown that rounds the mortal temples of king keeps Death court." Yes, some rulers have been disposed of or killed in their sleep, but mostly they have withered away, by age or sickness—natural causes, one might say. It is this human condition of power that interests me in this last line of thought that throws a light on the actual importance of the physical body in order to justify claims to power. In times of medical crisis, the political crisis is not far away.

Narratives of justification of power came into question when, for example, royal duties such as procreation for maintaining dynastic continuity were not performed. I have mentioned some examples of female rulers above. But it became critical for men, too, when their physical capacity became questionable in this regard. In her book Valeria Finucci describes the fate of Vincenzo II Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, the not-to-be husband of Margherita Farnese, whose reputation also suffered from this unconsummated marriage.[58] The duke struggled with several health problems: facial erysipelas, arthritis, acute nasal catarrh. He feared that these afflictions had an effect on his political standing, especially those resulting from his nose being damaged by the skin disease. Noses, Finucci explains, were cut off in battle or in duels to humiliate an opponent, leaving him visibly scarred for life.[59] Vincenzo consulted a famous surgeon from Bologna, Gaspare Tagliacozzi (1545–1599), a pioneer in the field of facial plastic surgery.[60] Tagliacozzi treated the nose, though it is not known if he in fact performed rhinoplasty on the duke; it is more probable that he prescribed some ointment and thermal waters at Bagni di Lucca.[61] What we do know, however, is that the surgeon dedicated his book on plastic surgery, *De curtorum chirurgia per insitionem* (1597), to the duke since "the house of Gonzaga has always been known for its prowess with swords." And "because camp followers and those who deal with arms often incur this type of injury [i.e., cut-off noses, B.S.], I thought it fitting to dedicate a book dealing with martial injuries to military men."[62] Even though some of the duke's medical history remains conjectural, the point to be made from this link between bodily deficiency in a prince and the then most up-to-date surgical method shows that care for the body of a prince was not merely an ideal, like that sketched out by Castiglione. Body aesthetics

58 Finucci, *Prince's Body*, 28–61.
59 Ibid., 68.
60 Savoia, *Gaspare Tagliacozzi*, 62–95.
61 Finucci, *Prince's Body*, 65.
62 Tagliacozzi, *De curtorum chirurgia*, vii–viii.

and the outer appearance of certain body parts could become politically important, for example when they were either missing, deformed, or severely damaged.[63]

Another eminent case in this regard is the body of emperor Charles V.[64] Even though this prince inherited rule of the largest realm in history, he was not by nature endowed with physical strength. Throughout his life he suffered from several illnesses, catarrh, gout, and the notorious mandibular protrusion for which so many Habsburg emperors were famous. Doctors were skeptical that he would survive his youth. Charles regularly complained about his poor health, which incapacitated him for days, sometimes for weeks, and even months. Anecdotal evidence of his many defects is legion and was painstakingly collected by his recent biographer Geoffrey Parker. One example of his appearance as a decrepit ruler is the description by a French ambassador who was an eyewitness when the emperor "whole on his knees, during High Mass, fell to the floor and lay there for more than two hours, without moving and with his face contorted, as if he were dead."[65] Other testimonies of the event—of which there were many: according to the ambassador, "everyone here is talking about this"—downplayed the meaning of this fit in relating it to his having had a huge meal or excessive sex, both rather unlikely explanations.

All in all, however, the extremely frail body of Charles did not become a crucial political problem, although there are indications that it played a role in his decision to abdicate the throne in favor of his son and brother.[66] This may be owing to the fact that many professional observers took an obsessive interest in the emperor's physical health, noting anything unusual, resulting in a series of health bulletins by the imperial physician Cornelis van Baersdorp and others.[67] In public, however, the problem was suggested by the many absences of the emperor when he was ill. But this did not necessarily mean political disadvantage: *absentia* was something inherent in early modern political culture and society, as Rudolf Schlögl points out.[68] It

63 Not only members of the nobility were affected by such deficiencies of the body. For example, priests who had a body part, such as a finger, missing, attracted attention and sometimes distrust in their ability to perform liturgical rites. See Röder, *Körper*.

64 For an extensive account of Charles' health issues see Parker, *Emperor*; on the Habsburg family and their illnesses in general see Sutter Fichtner, "Community of Illness"; Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs*.

65 Parker, *Emperor*, 67.

66 Parker, *Emperor*, 462–470; especially the quotes where Charles himself mentions his ill health and age as reasons for his abdication.

67 Parker, *Emperor*, 388–392.

68 Schlögl, *Anwesende und Abwesende*.

could be used as a tool of power, as, for example, Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (1416–1469), Gonfaloniere of Florence, nicknamed "the Gouty" (*il Gottoso*), did when his illness became acute: he then held government meetings or receptions of ambassadors at home, bypassing the Republican institutions of the city-state. The Medici Palace thus became the center of politics and diplomacy in Florence, to the detriment of the Palazzo della Signoria, the institutional seat in the city.[69]

The practice of ruling *in absentia* relieved one of the necessity to have a functioning body. But it did not suffice when the body became part of a political system that needed the monarch as gravitational center. At Versailles—from a sociological point of view, one of the most interesting political dynamics created by the monarchical system—the physical body of the king played a crucial role.[70] Again, this becomes apparent when looking at its demise. Louis XV (1710–1774) contracted smallpox in 1774.[71] After ten days of agony, the king died in the Palace of Versailles, in the main bedroom, surrounded by members of his family and most members of the court. One of them, the duke of Croÿ, in a testimony of the event, reports excruciating details of the suffering king, completely disfigured by swellings, pustules, and ulcerous wounds.[72] Shortly before he died, the king's head had swollen to twice its size, and turned red like copper, leaving him unable to utter comprehensible words.[73] Even more pitiful is the fact that Louis remained ignorant about his condition for the first four days—nobody dared to tell him, or intentionally hid, the fact that the king actually had smallpox.[74] The two factions at court continued to play their game of securing influence—the details are too intricate to relate here—by controlling access to the king, who therefore did not receive proper treatment. Louis XV, one of the best cared-for patients in Europe, at the end of his life had nobody to care for him.

The story of Louis' last illness illustrates how all attention was directed to the physical body of the ruler, trying to figure out how serious an illness was, if it would be terminal or only temporary. As long as the king lived, he

69 Brown, "Piero's Infirmity."

70 See Elias, *The Court Society*, 70–71. Elias' description of the king's social surroundings as a "freewheeling machine" led scholars to accuse Elias, somewhat prematurely, of supporting an obsolete "absolutist" model of monarchy. For a discussion of the problem, see Duindam, *Myths of Power*; in defense of Elias, see Carroll, *Blood and Violence*. The importance of the king's body, however, supports the claim that the king's presence was indeed crucial for upholding a stable system of rule.

71 Rouëssé, *Le Bien-Aimé*; Seth, *Les rois*; Darmon, *La variole*.

72 Croÿ, *Journal*, 3:82–113.

73 Ibid., 3:104.

74 Ibid., 3:91.

Figure 4.1 Alexandre Lenoir, Les restes de Louis XV, exhumés de son tombeau en 1793, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts graphiques, Cabinet des dessins, Fonds des dessins et miniatures, Inventory number RF 5282.16, Recto. (Photographic credit: Michel Urtado, URL: https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl020020010, September 26, 2024).

was the most important body in the realm; the moment he ceased to breathe, his political status became nil. The "first body" of the ruler indeed played a central role, and no decorum or ritual could help the finality of his death.

In 1793, the corpse of Louis XV, somewhat surprisingly, again became an object of interest in revolutionary policymaking. Following the act of profanation by the National Assembly, the royal tombs of Saint-Denis Cathedral were opened and "desacralized." A curious sketch by Alexandre Lenoir (1761–1839), who became the first director of the Musée national des Monuments, depicts Louis' body in an undecayed, nearly complete state, despite his being dead for 19 years. It appears unrealistic that the body was intact, as he was not embalmed after his death, but at least the artist makes the dead king appear in flesh "d'après nature," as if he had died just moments ago. With his last illness in mind, the lead coffin was opened, as a precaution, in a cemetery outside the church. There the body appeared "intact as whole, fresh, and well preserved; the skin white, the nose violet, and his cheeks red as if of a new-born child, swimming in a pool of water created by the salt with which he was coated."[75] After disinterment, the

75 "On ne l'ouvrit, par precaution, que dans le cimitière [sic?], sur le bord de la fosse; ce corps, retiré du cercueil de plomb, bien enveloppé des langes et de bandelettes, était tout entire [sic?],

body was thrown in a ditch, euphemistically described as a bed of burned lime, blanketed by the same lime and covered with earth.[76]

The revolutionaries' belief in disrupting the narrative of the mystical body of the kings of France by physically uncovering their dead corpses, relieving them of their resting places, demonstrates a contradictory aspect in the politics of the body. While the Jacobin furor against the royal tombs seems to have been driven by rational motive, they were in fact confirming the function of the princely bodies as a public reminder of their enduring transcendental power. Their material remains had to be destroyed in order to abolish the Ancien Régime once and for all.[77] For someone like Lenoir, however, who still had an interest in preserving the historical memory of the material culture of the monarchy, the bodies also meant something more than that. He linked the royal bodies to a miracle withstanding the decay of time, thus overcoming natural processes and reaching beyond the limits posed by "graves, worms, and epitaphs."

5. Resumé: Narrativity, Body, and Power

Returning to the question of whether power could be inscribed in early modern European bodies, we can assume that even if they were not written upon in a literal sense, bodies did indeed function as message-carriers in a wider sense. Corporeality and political power form essential parts of a different narrative of the ruler's body. Kings and queens, indeed, gave quite a lot of attention to their physical body, not only regarding its gender, but to its entirety. Narratives of somatic power did not rest merely on a conception of sacrality, a two-body mythology that overrode the deficient physical body with a more perfect sacred ceremonial body. Narrating the body functioned more on a practical level, considering the necessities and duties that a ruler had to perform at his or her "job."

Since their bodies were center stage, closely observed and "read" by an attentive audience, female rulers had to consider the perceived structural

frais et bien conservé; la peau était blanche, le nez violet et les fesses rouges comme celles d'un enfant nouveau-né, et nageant dans une eau abondante formée par la dissolution du sel marin dont on l'avait enduit, n'ayant pas été embaumé suivant l'usage ordinaire." D'Heylli, *Les tombes royales*, 106–107.

76 "On jeta de suite le corps dans la fosse, où l'on venait de préparer un lit de chaux vive, puis on le couvrit d'une couche de la même chaux et de terre par-dessus." Ibid., 107.

77 See also Robert Folger's chapter in this volume on the violence against Mayan bodies and objects.

weakness of their body in order to turn it into a strength, as Elizabeth did, or to overemphasize bodily capacities such as, for example, the ability to bear many and healthy children by the use of maternal rhetoric, as Catherine did. Male rulers had to face challenges as well, even though sitting and reading are barely comparable feats as to giving birth. But these qualities were addressed by monarchical propaganda, nonetheless, as the examples of medals struck during Louis XIV's reign demonstrate. It was essential for kings to show the capacity to perform basic bodily functions for government even if this meant participating only passively within the increasingly bureaucratic state. Finally, the body always posed a risk for a monarchical system. So much depended on its presence that in practice a lot of attention was paid to observing, controlling, and maintaining the good health of a ruler. Even surgical alterations of the body were in the realm of the possible after advances were made in this field. But even the most elaborate and costly maintenance of royal bodies could not prevent the categorical finality of death.

With death, the body constitutes an element in history that is, to quote Lyndal Roper, "not merely the creation of discourse."[78] Narratives of the body sometimes managed to overcome the role of death in early modern European monarchies: they devised the conception of dynastic continuity, and ritualized funerals in order to ease the transition of power to a new body, but they rarely went as far as creating a death cult, as in Ancient Egypt or other parts in Africa, where the passing of the physical body into the afterlife is indeed considered possible. Western traditions shared some transcendental elements in their rituals of power, but they never went as far as finding the body to be real in a sense that it could be returned to life after it had died. Therefore, it was essentially the living body that had a nodal function for transforming narratives of power into actual power in a political sense.

In conclusion, I would like to support and at the same time challenge the proposition of this volume that it is important to look at the intersections of narrativity and corporeality. It is indeed impossible to explain the one without the other. In early modern political history, both elements were important for obtaining a sense of stability. The monarch—female or male—needed a story to legitimize their power, but also required a body, even if it did not always perform as he or she might have wished. Such limitations of corporeality, however, could not be compensated for

78 Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 21.

by narration. Thus, the physical body constitutes the condition sine qua non for political power.

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III.

Bodies and Autobiographical Writing

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5. "My soul takes no other alarm than the sensible and corporeal": Montaigne's Essays as Bodily Autobiography

Stanis Perez[1]

Abstract: Montaigne's *Essays* are more than just a spiritual and physical autobiography. In examining the text, we discover Montaigne's body in the process of expressing itself, as if the work of writing accompanied the elaboration of the body itself: a speaking body, a suffering body. In many ways, a linear and critical reading of the *Essays* reveals a body under construction, between skepticism and classical humanism, between Baroque melancholy and self-assertion. But perhaps the outcome is a failure, for in truth the only thing that counts is the real, living body, the one that so often resists thought.

Keywords: Montaigne; body; health

To say that Montaigne was at one with his work is self-evident. He seems to have given a more prominent place than other thinkers to his own physical presence. And, from there, he seems to have brought about a transformation in the way he approached the body, and everything associated with it. By recounting his physiological and sometimes pathological setbacks, he seems to have invented a hitherto unheard-of form of narrative about the body. Why talk about yourself? Why talk about your body? For what audience? With what ulterior motive? For the benefit of what imperative?

Let us not get ahead of ourselves: these observations are simplistic. They are flawed in at least one respect: the notion of "body." This is neither clear, nor obvious, nor transposable, if we stick to the contemporary definition

1 Translated from French by Vitus Huber.

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from the sixteenth century. "Body" is undoubtedly a trap word, a term we think we have mastered and become acquainted with, and whose use hardly raises any awkward questions. The reality is quite different: when we say that Montaigne speaks of his "body," we do not necessarily know what that means. The classical body is first and foremost a *corpus*, an ensemble, a grouping of more or less articulated elements living together. Jean Nicot rightly speaks of "company."[2] The body is a composition of limbs and organs. We must therefore be careful not to impose a bourgeois, postmodern conception of the individual on the language of the Renaissance. This is an important precaution, as it will help us avoid anachronisms concerning the notion of the "body."[3] If anything, it is closer to that of the Ancients who served as Montaigne's models. The body is not desacralized, but strangely secular. An inscrutable body, a mysterious body. A heavy body, a fragile body. The spectrum is broad, but all the more so since classical conceptions assign it the role of a resonating chamber for the soul, a highly reactive envelope for a spirit that is sometimes confused with the subtlety of the sensible. Among many examples, Lactantius is one translated into French in 1543, which the author in question may have read:

> How can we know that a soul feels separated or released from the body, when the tongue in the instant that the soul is strong is mute: For when man feels & can speak, the soul is not yet separated from the body: but when the division or separation is made, the body no longer has any feeling, & cannot speak at all, & therefore it certainly cannot complain of the separation before it has occurred, & after it has occurred, it similarly cannot complain of it.[4]

First pitfall: where to place the subject? Montaigne talks about himself, his anatomy, his embarrassing faults, his little foibles. He famously proclaimed: "I am the subject of my book."[5] And all the commentators thought that

2 "Corps, m. Corpus, *Duquel il est fait par syncope. L'Italien dit* Corpo, *et l'Espagnol* Cuerpo, *De la mesmes source, et se prend pour la totale contexture mortelle, de ce qui est animé, le corps de l'homme, le corps du cheval. Et par traduction, pour le total d'une communauté, le corps d'une ville, de la Cour de parlement,* Ciuium omnium ordinum collectio, Praesidum, assessorum, scribarum, apparitorum omnium conuentus. *Selon ce on dit la Cour marcher en corps, quand tous les officiers d'icelle marchent de compagnie, ou la plus part representant le tout.* Curiae corpus procedit." Jean Nicot, *Thresor de la langue françoyse*. Paris: David Douceur, 1606, 152.

3 On this point, see Park, "Renaissance Body," 321–335.

4 All citations originally in other languages have been translated by Vitus Huber. For the French version, see Lactance, *Des divines institutions*. Paris: Galliot Du Pré, 1543, f. 164v.

5 Montaigne, *Essais*, 1952 (henceforth *EMM*), I, "Au lecteur," 1.

matter was synonymous with subject, with the main theme.[6] In this article, I will try to take the author at his word. Matter is material. This perspective reverses the terms of the equation, because it means that Montaigne does not confess himself in the *Essays*, a vulgarly Augustinian conception; he *is* his book as a process of construction of a living identity.[7] The corpus of his ideas is his real body, not just a representation of it. In other words, he does not paint the banal *picture* of his physical existence, but constructs, through the text, a body that lives, suffers, and evolves: the book is not about Montaigne; no, rather it should be conceived as a personal achievement, as Montaigne in the process of constructing a sensitive and intellectual life for himself. This surprising relationship between the author and his text, both disconcerting and unexpected, inevitably blurs the lines, as the classic categories (autobiography, personal epic, historical gesture, panegyric, etc.) are clearly outdated. Montaigne does not write his book by talking about himself; rather, it is the book that has shaped him, attributing to him, essay after essay, a *body* he probably did not have at the outset, because he was unaware of its mechanisms, affects, and links with the soul.

Thus, any thematic reading devoted to a single facet seems doomed to failure or paraphrase. In this respect, there is no point in tracking down occurrences or redundancies between the tightly packed pages of the *Essays*. The structure of the work should be seen as a *body* that contains Montaigne himself, rather like Hobbes' image of Leviathan.[8] A linear rereading is therefore sufficient, even if it seems rudimentary at first glance. It is not a question of observing how an individual has given substance to his thought through writing, but rather how his thought and his writing have enabled him to access the truth of his body.

1. From Pain to Death

For Montaigne, death is above all the pain that announces it and makes one fear it. The absolute criterion is sensitivity, since we cannot deny that

6 Hence Donald M. Frame's phrase: "The book is the man." Frame, *The Complete Essays*, I, p. V.

7 Despite his excellent insights, in my view, Charalampous has not gone far enough: Charalampous, *Rethinking*, 25–42. "Montaigne's Corpo*real* self: a dialectics of bisubjectivity and its medicinal virtues."

8 See Bredekamp, *Stratégies*. The famous image on the frontispiece of *Leviathan* allows us to think, not of the duality of the body of the State, but of the Plotinian junction of the One and the Many.

what hurts us makes us indisposed, and that what is disgusting revolts us. This immediacy of feeling is not enough to explain everything, however: pain deemed non-mortal will always be more bearable because it is not accompanied by the anguish of death:

> All ailments that have no other danger than harm, we say are hazard-free; that of teeth or gout, however grievous it may be, insofar as it is not homicidal, who can call it a disease? But let's presuppose that, in death, we mainly look at pain.[9]

So suffering would be worse than death itself. Montaigne explains this by referring to the tendency of all human beings to attach too much importance to the body, with the result that our distress in the face of physical discomfort increases proportionately. Is the old recipe of stoicism enough? The author doubts it when he speaks of "people with weak kidneys, like me,"[10] an ambiguous allusion to his lack of courage or, to remain in the bodily dimension, to the nephritic colic that tormented him so much.[11] Does this mean that he is making a psychological self-diagnosis? That is quite obvious, but this method of writing "in mirror" is part of his desire to be at one with his work. He confesses as much, quite honestly, when he says: "I grasp the evil I am studying, and lay it down on my own."[12] This formula, taken from a later addition, is very important. It underlines the continuity of sensations and beings, as if by contagion—a new notion at the time—physical impressions could communicate with each other: "A continual cough irritates my lung and gullet."[13] This contagion of ideas and sensations transformed Montaigne's body into a receptacle, just as his *Essays* were supposed to recapitulate the whole *body* of his existence, thought, and biological life. In other words, not only does classical dualism seem totally obsolete here, but the thinker proposes an interesting alternative: our body is, beyond its anatomical reality, the result of an aggregate of impressions and external influences that need to be more or less organized. It is in interaction, and it is this, along with imagination and received ideas, that destabilizes us so much.

9 *EMM*, I, ch. 14, p. 57.

10 Ibid., p. 59.

11 The expression refers, in fact, to a lack of strength of character and daring: Nicolas Vignier, *La Bibliotheque historiale*. Paris: Abel L'Angelier, 1587, 2:15; Cicero, *Les Offices*. Paris: Claude Micard, 1583, 483.

12 *EMM*, I, ch. 21, p. 101.

13 Ibid.

One incident, and our best-founded moral values waver inexorably. An accident, and our perception of life changes completely, as we realize that it is the body that decides for the soul. This is the first lesson to be learned from the fall from the horse that brought Montaigne and his mount, "the little man and little horse,"[14] to the brink of death. Seriously injured and bleeding, the unlucky rider lost consciousness. Rescued shortly afterwards, he regained his senses, but remained in a state of unconsciousness for a few minutes. When he regained consciousness, he noticed that his limbs did not obey him and that he could not express himself. In retrospect, this state of relative somnolence, devoid of any clear sensation, seemed to him a good way to end his life:

> I was presented with a number of remedies, none of which I received, taking it for granted that I was mortally wounded in the head. Without a lie, it would have been a very happy death, for the weakness of my discourse prevented me from judging anything, and the weakness of my body from feeling anything.[15]

What if, for Montaigne, happiness meant dying without feeling anything? But, on reflection, would this not also be true in the course of life? For, a few hours after his fall, as he regains full consciousness and his muscles react to the shock of the past, he is overcome by intense pain:

> I was suddenly filled with pain again, my limbs all ground and bruised from my fall. I was so sick two or three nights later, that I thought to die again, but of a livelier death; and I still feel the jolt of this crumpling.[16]

Clearly, pain is worse than death. But is not admitting this tantamount to assuming the failure of stoicism? Although Montaigne continues his analysis by invoking the taming of death—emphasizing the process of becoming accustomed to it to alleviate one's anguish—the text appears to reassure and console the author, almost despite himself. It is as if the story of this fall served as much to exorcise the death that might have resulted as to pretend to transform a total failure into a success. For, by dint of proclaiming his sincerity, the author becomes suspicious, and a few

14 Ibid., II, ch. 6, p. 406.
15 Ibid., p. 410.
16 Ibid.

lines after testifying to his panic, he moves on and becomes a philosopher once again:

> This tale of such a minor event is vain enough, were it not for the instruction I drew from it for myself; for, to tell the truth, in order to prepare for death, I find that there is only one way to do so. Now, as Pliny says, everyone is a very good discipline for themselves, provided they are sufficiently observant. This is not my doctrine, it is my study; and it is not the lesson of others, it is my own.[17]

Who can believe this? There is nothing in his testimony about the stoicism he claims. He was frightened, he suffered, he thought he was dying, and he still suffered a lot afterwards. The lesson one could draw from it is not that which states that the posture of the wise man can solve all the problems surrounding the imminence of death. By way of remedy, only the absence of sensation could reassure Montaigne. That is what made him think of a gentle death, i.e., a peaceful and comfortable extinction of the senses, rather than a terrible battle between soul and body to overcome the latter's setbacks. Invoking Pliny (XXII, 24) is an artificial posture, not to say a diversion. For the author of the *Essays*, there is no contempt for the body but, on the contrary, the hope of maintaining it in a state of normal integrity or moderate insensitivity, which amounts to the same thing. The less extreme the sensations, the happier one is. This is a far cry from Antonio de Guevara's severe yet enlightening lessons:

> You others do not know, that our nature is corruption of our bodies, & our bodies is rottenness of our senses, & our senses are guide of our soul, & our soul mother of our desires & our desires an executioner of our youth, & our youth teaches of our old age, & our old age spies of our death, & death house of our life in which the youth goes on foot, & the old age cannot flee on horseback.[18]

In this case, the body warns us of the final end. It does so through the senses, which are themselves direct witnesses of its ephemeral and perverse functioning, and therefore of its corruption. Pibrac expressed the same idea:

17 Ibid., p. 411.

18 Antonio de Guevara, *Le Livre doré de Marc Aurele*. Paris: J. Richard, 1561, 351.

> This mortal body, where the rapt eye contemplates
> Muscles and nerves, flesh, blood, skin,
> It is not the man, he is much more handsome,
> Also God has reserved it for his temple.[19]

In short, these judgments were fully in line with the warnings of theologians.[20]

Montaigne, it goes without saying, did not share this opinion at all: according to him, the carnal envelope is not a guilt-inducing sign of the Fall, but a means of enjoying life while managing its ups and downs:

> The soul must not be ordered to draw quarter, to maintain itself apart, to despise and abandon the body (as it could only do so by some counterfeit antics), but to ally itself with it, to embrace it, to cherish it, to assist it, to counter it, to advise it, to straighten it out and bring it back when it goes astray, to espouse it all in all and to serve it as a husband.[21]

In short, the *Essays* have long been associated with a stoicism that was never as present as one might think, at least from the point of view of the body. Instead, the idea of mastering the body and its misguided ways is replaced by the quest for a harmony that enables the right articulation between idea and matter, without one completely taking over from the other.

2. From Vulnerability to Powerlessness

The influence of the Ancients, and Plutarch in particular, seems to have given this impression. But is it really self-sacrifice when the man likes to paint himself as a vulnerable, weak, and handicapped creature? Montaigne's self-portrait does not seem flattering, it is true:

> I hardly dare say what vanity and weakness I find in myself. My foot is so unstable and unsteady, I find it so easy to crouch and so ready to wobble, and my eyesight so disordered, that when I am fasting I feel different from

19 *Quatrains de Pibrac*. Paris: Fuchs, 1802, 11, quatrain 12.

20 A comparison can be made with *l'Internelle consolation*, a model of a self-blame manual: "C'est plus grant labeur et travail de resister aux vices et passions que de labourer corporellement en grant sueur et peine de son corps." Paris: N. Hygman, 1554, f. 157v. It is easy to see why the *Essays* were so poorly received by clerics: Giacone, "Essays," 14–16.

21 *EMM*, II, ch. 17, p. 695.

> how I do after a meal; if my health is good and in the brightness of a fine day, I am a good man; if I have a horn pressing on my toe, I am frowny, unpleasant, and unapproachable.[22]

This passage on the randomness of judgment is classic. As is the allusion to mood variation: Montaigne describes himself as sometimes melancholic, sometimes choleric. It is more interesting, however, to note that, without transition, he moves from his moods to the contents of his library: "When I take books, I will have found in this or that passage excellent graces which will have excited my soul; but when I come across it at another time, I may turn it and turn it, I may bend it and handle it, it is to me an unknown and formless mass."[23] The preceding quotation is a magnificent mise en abyme of the *Essays* and the link that binds its author to his corpus of thoughts. The corpus functions like a body: sometimes balanced, docile, and pleasant; sometimes shapeless, cumbersome, and painful. The humoral determinism that is so scholastically displayed is of little interest; on the other hand, it is far more interesting to observe how Montaigne transposes the content of his books into a properly corporeal and medical dimension. The back-and-forth between the body and the book, both reservoirs and receptacles of thought, provides the key to interpreting the architecture of the *Essays*. He writes, a few sentences later, that emotion settles in our bodies and that we "imprint it in ourselves,"[24] a clever metaphor referring as much to impressions as to the printing press. Thought is imprinted on the body in the same way that characters compose words, sentences, and then a whole book.

It was at this point that the *Essays* became a veritable mirror: barely freed from his bibliographic obsessions, Montaigne began to describe himself in minute detail and going back in time: "I remember that, from my earliest childhood, one noted that I do not know what body carriage and gestures testified to some vain and foolish pride."[25] Childhood banter was followed by more serious problems, however: "I am a little below average height. This defect is not only ugly, but also inconvenient, especially for those who have commands and offices: for the authority given by a beautiful presence and bodily majesty is telling."[26] Inspired by Aristotle, Plutarch, and Renaissance

22 Ibid., ch. 12, p. 614.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 615.
25 Ibid., ch. 17, p. 687.
26 Ibid., p. 695.

clichés, notably Baldassare Castiglione's model of the courtier, Montaigne associates beauty with majesty, only to emphasize that he lacks both.[27] And the unflattering self-portrait continues:

> My stature is strong and compact; my face, not fat, but full; my complexion, between jovial and melancholic, half sanguine and hot, *Unde rigent setis mihi crura, et pectora villis*; my health strong and cheerful, until well into my age rarely troubled by illness. I was like that, for I do not consider myself at this time, that I am engaged in the avenues of old age, before I have passed the age of forty:
>
> *Minutatim vires et robur adultum*
> *Frangit, et in partem pejorem liquitur aetas.*
> What I will be from now on will no longer be half a being, it will no longer be me. Every day I am slipping away from me and losing myself,
> *Singula de nobis anni praedantur euntes.*[28]

This art of lament, rooted in the tradition of Lucretius, Martial, and Horace, is no illusion.[29] The same is true when Montaigne evokes, in the same elegiac tone, his lack of skill, his clumsiness when it comes to physical activities. And when he talks about his hands, it is exactly the same: "My hands are so clumsy that I do not know how to write just for myself: so that, what I have daubed, I would rather redo than take the trouble to unclutter and reread."[30] Yet one might counter this with his handwritten letters, which show, if proof were needed, that he wrote normally for his time, and even rather well in the eyes of an adept paleographer.[31] Why, then, should he devalue himself so much?

There is no need to indulge in vulgar psychology and decree that Montaigne was a complex personality consumed by anxiety. He says it too often for it not to be believable, at least to some extent. Nonetheless,

27 Castiglione, *Le livre du courtisan*, vol. 1, ch. 20. I thank Vitus Huber for pointing this similarity out to me.

28 "So my legs and chest are bristling with hair" (Martial), "Little by little, the strength and vigor of adolescence are broken and age slips into decrepitude" (Lucretius), "One by one, the passing years take away our possessions" (Horace). *EMM*, II, ch. 17, p. 697.

29 Mathieu-Castellani, "Lucretius," 115–132.

30 *EMM*, II, ch. 17, p. 697.

31 The facsimiles of letters published in Jean-François Payen, *Documents*. n.p., 1855; and, above all, the many original documents made available online as part of the research project MONLOE MONtaigne à L'Œuvre, https://montaigne.univ-tours.fr/.

by virtue of the Freudian principle that you are what you hide, it is worth asking, not about the author's sincerity—it does not come out into the open—but about the real content of his inferiority complex. A passage from book II, chapter 17, may provide the answer: "In the body itself, the members which have some more particular freedom and jurisdiction over themselves sometimes refuse me their obeisance, when I designate them to a necessary service at a certain point and time."[32] Which member was it? It seems that the punctual use of the latter provides the answer. Was Montaigne impotent?[33] Did the renal colic from which he suffered for a long time have anything to do with this weakness of the kidneys (*foiblesse de reins*), which, as we have seen, may have referred to a lack of self-confidence but also to a lack of strength when achieving an erection? He admits as much himself, and speaks, albeit modestly, of this "accident which is not unknown to me"[34] as early as the second chapter of the first book; but the phrase was to be removed from editions subsequent to that of 1588.

In any case, the theme of the disobedient body resurfaces in the meditation on Spurina's story. An entire chapter is devoted to it, demonstrating the importance of the subject.[35] Xenocrates, determined to maintain absolute control over his emotions, was put to the test by his disciples. A pretty young woman presented herself naked in his bed and "feeling that in spite of his speeches and rules, the body was beginning to mutiny, he had the members which had lent an ear to this rebellion burnt."[36] A rebellion, certainly, but one that does not relieve him from impotence. Failure is what both situations have in common: the failure to control, the failure to enjoy. And when Montaigne pretends to see it as a lamentable consequence of the power of the imagination, it is hard not to unmask him, as Arthur Armaingaud did in his 1924 edition, under the identity of the mysterious friend who would have been its victim.[37] Victim, yes, of a real fire that rubs shoulders with the ice of a part extinguished by anatomy. The author of the *Essays* bears witness to this again, this time with greater transparency, in a passage that secretly echoes the parable of Xenocrates:

32 *EMM*, II, ch. 17, p. 705–706.
33 Entin-Bates, "Montaigne's Remarks."
34 Montaigne, *Essais*, 1825, I, p. 78, note A.
35 *EMM*, II, ch. 37.
36 Ibid., ch. 33, p. 791.
37 Armaingaud, *Oeuvres completes*, 215, note.

> Nature had to be content with making this age miserable, without making it ridiculous. I hate to see him, for a pulse of puny vigor that heats up three times a week, hastening and guarding against such asperity, as if it had some great and legitimate day in the belly; a real fire of oakum; and admire its cooking, so lively and fidgeting, in a moment so heavily congealed and extinguished.[38]

Impotence is, indeed, the impotence of impotencies. It undermines the whole edifice because it strikes at the person's virility and underscores the vanity of stoicism and all the pompous talk about mastering the body. For this control is a one-way street: it functions, to a certain extent, as a censor of movements and gestures, but it cannot command dead limbs, inactive functions, or long-dormant mechanisms. As for the wild performances of certain histrionics, their derisory nature serves only to demonstrate the true extent of our sovereignty over our organs—which is limited.[39] Aware of this failure, Montaigne cannot subscribe to theories that make the body the mere slave of the soul, and if he speaks of rebellion, of disobedience, it is above all to observe a state of affairs, not an anomaly. The body lives its life in the presence of the soul, but the soul is not its absolute master. And it is at this point that Montaigne begins to have doubts. Is spirituality just an illusion? Is our truth to be found in our soul, or in what surrounds it and manifests it carnally? While the whole of classical culture is built on the principle of the superiority of the soul over the body, the homebody scholar discovers that his attempt to solve his bodily problems is a failure. Seneca is not enough, nor is Horace. Neither is multiplying quotations. Digression, which rhymes with diversion, is itself a further symptom of denial. Montaigne does not write to fathom his soul or find the right way of life. He hopes to tell and hush up at the same time the story of his body, the only one that really matters to him, but which he must strive to minimize. Of his own living matter, the essayist is ashamed; of his *Essays,* a little less so.

38 *EMM*, III, ch. 5, p. 964.

39 "And what, to authorize the omnipotence of our will, Saint Augustine alleges to have seen someone who ordered from his derriere as many farts as he wanted, and what Vives, his glossator, overbid by another example of his time, of farts organized according to the tone of the verses that one pronounced to them, does not suppose neither pure obeisance of this member; because it is ordinarily more indiscreet and tumultuous." *EMM*, I, ch. 21, p. 106. Allusion to Saint Augustine, *Cité de Dieu*, XIV, 24; and Luis Vives' commentary: Luis Vives, ed., *D. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi Operum*, vol. 5. Geneva: Iacobus Stoer, 1596, ch. 2, p. 99, note E.

3. From Self-Diagnosis to Trial Failure

The classic interpretation of the *Essays* is that of a long meditation leading up to the assumption of responsibility for death and suffering.[40] On closer examination, however, by changing the usual perspective, it seems that the opposite is actually the case. Montaigne took his learned ruminations on suffering and death and turned them into a prolific but compensatory—not to say *entertaining*—body of work. He writes no longer simply to endure physical pain, but to give it a philosophical meaning that makes it more bearable or, better still, more tolerable from an intellectual point of view. This is visible in the whole series of litanies on his renal colic, a particularly painful and disabling chronic ailment.

He speaks a lot about this: "I have had the colic for many years,"[41] or "I am already getting to grips with the composition of this colicky life; it gives me something to console me and something to hope for."[42] Autosuggestion is apparently not enough, since "the truly essential and bodily sufferings, I gust them very keenly."[43] Furthermore, in sentence after sentence, Montaigne expresses an increasingly distressful feeling:

> I am struggling with the worst of all illnesses, the most sudden, the most painful, the most fatal, and the most irreversible. I have already tried five or six very long and painful entries; all the time, either I am flattering myself, or there is still something to fall back on in this state, for those whose souls have been relieved of the fear of death, and relieved of the threats, conclusions, and consequences to which medicine leads us. But the very effect of pain is not so bitter and so poignant that a level-headed man would have to go into a rage and a despair.[44]

Could this confession, in the form of a self-diagnosis, not be related to the distant testimony of Marcus Aurelius? We know that this emperor suffered from what appears to have been a gastric ulcer and that, in his *Meditations* and his correspondence with Fronton, he often evoked his malaise, a mixture of melancholy and pain.[45] While Pierre Hadot refused to explain the emperor's philosophical conceptions in terms of his state of health, the same

40 Synthesis of previous readings in Villey, *Essais,* 119–128.
41 *EMM*, II, ch. 37, p. 825.
42 Ibid., p. 826.
43 Ibid., p. 827.
44 Ibid.
45 The reference remains: Dailly and Effenterre, "Le cas Marc-Aurèle," 347–365.

question can be asked for Montaigne, who never quotes Marcus Aurelius, apart from an allusion to his father's readings.[46] Strange censorship—an "oversight" is impossible—of a major author who, in many respects, could have served as a model for the Bordeaux lawyer. His progenitor was said to have appreciated what Antonio de Guevara had drawn from him for his *Dial of Princes* (*Reloj de principes*, 1529; translated into French as early as 1531).[47]

Montaigne's self-portrait as a sick man continues and expands over the pages.[48] And it is above all the theme of justification that expresses itself: "If the body relieves itself by complaining, let it do it."[49] And it is at this precise moment that he declares: "my soul takes no other alarm than the sensible and corporeal."[50] This is a brilliant formula that overturns the classical hierarchy in an explicit admission of weakness. The author of the *Essays* expresses his suffering crudely, yes, but he remains trapped in a labyrinth of references and classical clichés that, in the end, prove useless. Writing, externalizing, and confessing a life of pain and suffering helps a little. And this is where Sergio Solmi's old essay comes into its own. Written in 1933 and published in 1942, the few pages of *La Santé de Montaigne* (*Montaigne's Health*) deliver a lesson as brief as it is masterful.[51] Montaigne's text says little about the colic suffered by the man who spent several months indulging in spa treatments in the Pyrenees and then in Italy. Solmi understood something simple and complex: the *Essays* are less a collection of philosophical, historical, and literary thoughts than a vade mecum for a sick man intent on curing himself through self-description. The work is its author's health, his remedy, and the balance he seeks within himself. This organic rereading of the *Essays* would deserve further development, indeed, but we can only acknowledge this therapeutic interpretation. Writing and thinking to free oneself from the body, but returning to it all the same, because diversion is ephemeral.

Everything brought Montaigne back to his condition as a sick man, not least the memory of his father, who died of a large calculus, the effects of which were felt from the age of 67 until his death at 74. Montaigne then

46 *EMM*, II, ch. 2, p. 377; see Hadot, "Marcus Aurelius," 95–114, in response to Africa, "Opium Addiction," 97–102.

47 Karl, "Note," 32–50. From what remains of Montaigne's library (identified by bookplates and other autograph marks), we note another work by Antonio de Guevara, *Decade contenant les vies des empereurs*. Paris: Michel Vascosan, 1567.

48 As early as the nineteenth century, many doctors drew on the *Essays* to establish retrospective diagnoses based on the author's descriptions. Edmond Spalikowski even went so far as to publish a small *Medical Dictionary of Montaigne's Essays*.

49 *EMM*, II, 37, p. 829.

50 Ibid., p. 830.

51 Solmi, "Salute"; Solmi, *Santé*.

evokes his uncles and his doubts about medicine. Nonetheless, he comes to this scarcely predictable conclusion: "Health is a precious thing, and the only thing that truly deserves not only time, sweat, pain, and goods to be spent on it, but also life in its pursuit; all the more so because without it, life becomes painful and libelous."[52]

A praise of health, but not of doctors; a praise forced by an ailment that prepares one for death; an edifying discourse on suffering that no edifying discourse can really alleviate. Therein lies the problem with the oeuvre as a whole: the *Essays* are a failure. Pascal's critics have not focused sufficiently on the crucial point. It is not Montaigne's pyrrhonism or narcissism that is most important, but rather the balance sheet of an immense work that, not without pomp, refuses to admit that it was in vain. Not for the history of thought or literature, but for the author himself.

Chronicle of a foretold failure? By making his body the sensitive content of a project and an oeuvre as vast as it is compact, and by giving it a very personal anatomy, has not he condemned himself to an intellectual and physical impasse? He made the effort of staging his work, and thus of accepting vulnerability. He made this explicit: "I present myself standing and lying down, front and back, right and left, and in all my natural folds."[53] The diary of his Italian journey does indeed serve as a sequel or preamble to the post-1581 additions. It is clear what obsessed the man: his health and the recurrence of those little "stones" or "coarse sand" that he so strongly rejected.[54] Thus, he even goes as far as to blame himself for omitting to give specific details of his previous baths: "Since on other occasions I have regretted not having written more on the subject of the other baths, in order to take rule and example for the following ones, this time I will elaborate."[55] Montaigne paid close attention to the slightest sensation, whether heat or tingling, flatulence or sight, and scrutinized the quantity, content, and color of his urine, in search of a satisfactory self-diagnosis and effective therapy.[56] His health diary is extremely precise. Apart from any conventions that may exist, its content seems far removed from the style of the *Essays*.

52 *EMM*, II, ch. 37, p. 833.

53 Ibid., III, ch. 8, p. 1025.

54 Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, 241. Determined to purge himself—is this not the point of the book?—he likes to refer to the symptoms of the lithiasis from which he suffered as "excrements." Pot, *L'inquiétante étrangeté*, 53.

55 "Perchè mi son altre volte pentito di non aver piu minutamente scritto sul oggetto delli altri bagni, per pigliar regola ed essempio ai seguenti, questa volta mi voglio stendere e slargare." Montaigne, *Journal de voyage*, 313.

56 Ibid., 292, 432.

Here, the author is an itinerant patient who talks about what matters most to him—his body, once again—but with a doctor's vocabulary and, more surprisingly, with the sensitivity of a Christian:

> And thus, it will be wise to cheerfully accept the good that God is pleased to send us. There is no other remedy, no other rule nor science, to avert the evils that overtake man on every side and at every hour, than to resolve to suffer them humanly, or audaciously and hopelessly end them.[57]

Was Montaigne a fatalist? Here he is, resolved to accept the sufferings God sends him, which serve to prepare him for the most difficult of trials. But in that case, would the *Essays* have been useless?

4. Conclusion

"Those who do not know themselves can gloat over false approvals; not I, who see and seek myself to my very core [entrails], who know well what belongs to me. It pleases me to be less praised if I am better understood."[58] In his *Essays*, Montaigne set out in search of the soul, and along the way found the body, *his body*. A body prolonged by other means, in particular by writing, like a painful yet pleasurable childbirth. He admits this himself in a striking parallel between writing and procreation: "And I do not know if I would not much rather have produced one [=a child], perfectly well formed by the acquaintance of the muses rather than of my wife."[59] For in procreating, we necessarily prolong our own being, our own body, in a form both familiar and new. Unless you give birth to a monster.

Hence this quasi-surgical introspection, which is not satisfied with the obscure recesses of the soul, but pushes the examination to the side of organs that may not be metaphorical at all. We are talking about a contemporary of Charles Estienne, Michael Servetus, and Andreas Vesalius, in other words,

57 "Et in questo mezzo fia senno in pigliarsi allegramente il bene ch'a Dio piacerà di mandarci. Non c'è altra medicina, altra regola, o scienzia a schifare gli mali chenti e quali d'ogni canto, e ad ogni ora soprastanno l'uomo, che risolversi a umanamente sofferirgli, o animosamente e spacciatamente finirgli." Ibid., 385. As early as the nineteenth century, scholars had noted the proximity of some of Montaigne's formulas to the Old Testament, which he was careful not to quote explicitly: see Payen, *Nouveaux documents*, 56–57. His thinking, it goes without saying, was not entirely secular.

58 *EMM*, III, ch. 5, p. 923.

59 Ibid., II, ch. 8, p. 438.

three physicians who saw fit to open up the great internal theater of our bodies. With a scalpel for some, with feathers for others: Jules Michelet had already pointed this out, but the parallel is perhaps too bold.[60]

Invoking melancholy and establishing a link with Robert Burton's "anatomical," but above all satirical, expression is not enough: who would seriously believe it?[61] The process is different, and Montaigne describes it himself in the final chapter, a text that is enough to sum it all up:

> For lack of natural memory, I forge paper, and as some new symptom occurs to my ailment, I write it down. Hence it happens that at this hour, having almost passed through every kind of example, if any astonishment threatens me, leafing through these little unsewed booklets like sibyllic leaves, I no longer fail to find where to console myself with some favorable prognostic in my past experience.[62]

Could this be one of the reasons for the disorganized character of the *Essays*? In the following century, Guez de Balzac showed how much Montaigne had said to dislike his text:

> His discourse is not a whole body, it is a body in pieces; it is severed limbs; and although the parts are close to each other, they do not let themselves be separated. Not only is there no nerve to join them, but there are also no cords nor needles to bind them together.[63]

This critic, a devotee of classicism, was dismayed by Montaigne's free style. But above all, Guez de Balzac remained a prisoner of simple definitions, which the *Essays* absolutely forbid. Montaigne's body, like his masterwork, cannot be defined adequately by the academic and wise anatomy we imagine.[64] It is precisely the collection of impressions, feelings, memories, and sensations that make up an edifice that is "baroque" only for minds that are too classical.[65] To the labyrinth of the soul, the architecture of the body, a mortal monument, it responds only imperfectly: in conclusion, we can say that the *Essays*, by speaking of the one and making the other speak, have

60 Michelet, *Histoire*, 162; Sayce, "Renaissance," 145–146.

61 Murphy, "Montaigne."

62 *EMM*, III, ch. 13, p. 1182.

63 Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac, *Les Entretiens de feu Monsieur de Balzac*. Paris: A. Courbé, 1657, 209. On Montaigne's reception in the Grand Siècle, see Volpilhac, "Usage."

64 Panichi, "Montaigne"; and especially Kirby, "Corps."

65 Starobinski, *Montaigne*, 162.

attempted—with what success?—to better understand the link between the subtle and the coarse. Yet the alchemy of the body undoubtedly escapes our understanding.

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About the Author

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6. Early Modern Personal Narratives and "Fraile" Bodies

Effie Botonaki

Abstract: When devout Protestants and, especially, Puritans, fell ill in early modern England, they found themselves torn between opposing needs: on the one hand, they tried to belittle the importance of their "bodyly Helth," and focus rather on the importance of a "helthfull Soul," but, on the other, they could not suppress their anguish when in pain and in fear of death. The personal writings and, particularly, the diaries we have from this period illustrate this conflict—and in a material form too: when the authors are sick, their daily routine is disrupted, their devotional duties are neglected, their entries become less frequent, and their accounts are fraught with their distress about their ailing body, along with their intense concern for their "pretious soule."

Keywords: sickness; early modern England; diaries; Protestantism

The study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century autobiographical writings offers us valuable insight into the early modern body and its afflictions.[1] Private diaries, in particular, describe in detail the authors' health problems, the medical treatments they followed, their agony about their poor health and possible demise, and their supplications to God for recovery. The earliest English personal diaries from this period were not supposed to focus on worldly affairs or the needs of the flesh, as they were the kind of diaries we today call "spiritual" and were kept by pious people who wished to evaluate their Christian conduct. When ill, however, early modern diarists

1 On the experience and treatment of sickness in the early modern period, see, for example, Beier, *Sufferers and Healers*; Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness*; Weisser, *Ill Composed*; on the discussion of illness in three autobiographical texts, see Lund, "Sickness and Writing."

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described their bodily ailments in detail, despite their conviction that their bodies were inherently sinful and therefore unworthy of excessive care. The "improper" concern for the flesh caused feelings of guilt, and the ensuing internal conflict is vividly demonstrated in these people's personal records. As we shall see, sickness disrupted the content and focus spiritual diaries were expected to have, and this disruption illustrates the rise of a new attitude towards the body: one that does not negate its corporeality, its needs, and its value.

I will begin my essay by briefly explaining the claim that the first personal English diaries were almost exclusively spiritual. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the emergence of diary writing in England is closely connected to religious matters and, more specifically, to the Protestant duty of self-examination.[2] This practice was urged by many prayer manuals and sermons that sought to guide pious Protestants in the performance of their devotional duties. One of the earliest books on this topic is the Puritan Richard Rogers's *Seven Treatises*, published in 1603. Rogers advises believers to examine themselves daily before going to bed; this practice, he writes, will enable them to "looke backe to the workes of the day [...] that where [they...] haue blessings, [they...] may be thankfull [...] where [they...] haue faulted and failed, [they...] may reconcile [themselves...] to God, and so lye downe in peace."[3] Some devotion manuals even suggested the questions that believers should answer during their self-examination.[4] These questions focus on the believers' spiritual state, and secular affairs are to be considered only in relation to their conduct as Christians. The diaries we have from this period do follow the relevant guidelines and place emphasis on the authors' devotional routine and spiritual condition. Such were most of the entries the Puritan Margaret Hoby (1571–1633) recorded in a diary that was produced before the appearance of prayer manuals that urged self-examination. On the evening of August 23, 1600 Hoby wrote:

> when I had praied I wrett notes in my testement, and, after, I went about the house, wrett :2: letters, praied, and then dined: after, I wrough, and talked with my maides of good thinges &, at praier time, I returned to priuat examenation and praier: after, I supped, then I went to publeck praers, and, when I had talked a whill, I went to priuat praers and so to bed.[5]

2 See Botonaki, "Spiritual Diaries."

3 Richard Rogers, *Seven Treatises*. London, 1603, 335.

4 See John Featley, *A Fountaine of Tears*. London, 1646, 89–91.

5 Hoby, *Diary*, 140.

Lady Hoby was an unlicensed general practitioner and surgeon and was often asked to treat various conditions, but she was apparently not troubled by any serious health problems herself, as there are no such references in her regular entries between 1599 and 1605. In other spiritual diaries, however, the authors' health problems sometimes became a central theme. This is the case with the anonymous diary kept by a female relative of Oliver Cromwell, who was born in 1654 and probably died around 1702. The original diary is lost and what we have is a late eighteenth-century manuscript transcription of it, now kept in the British Library.[6] The manuscript begins with a brief autobiographical sketch about the author's family and upbringing, continues with summaries for specific years, and concludes with diary entries, the first of which is that of June 22, 1690. This first entry is followed by occasional ones until September 1702. The absence of later entries and the health problems recorded at the end of the diary made the transcriber assume that this woman probably died around that time.

This relative of Cromwell was a devout Puritan who tried to see everything that happened to her and her family as an instance of God's providence, and this of course included health issues. In fact, what proves God's love and mercy to her is that He repeatedly "rais[es]" her "from [...a] Bed of languishing."[7] Interestingly, her first diary entries concern health problems such as "a Distemper that [...] might have ended in Death," a "soare & dreadfull Pain of the Collicke," "great Indisposition of Body," and "exquesitt Pain," which she prays for and is relieved from.[8] The author of this diary was convinced that it was up to God, "the great Phesitian of Soule & Body," to cure her;[9] she also believed that, for this to happen, she had to pray when sick, and show her thankfulness after her recovery, in both her prayers and her deeds. The entry on June 7, 1700 demonstrates this woman's attitude to disease in very interesting terms:

> The Lord has bene pleased to honnor me with a fresh Instance of his Grace & Mersy, in that he hath strengthened my fraile Body, & rebuked a grievous malladye, which I desire to looke on as an Answer of Prayer, & to have my Hart sutably afected, & that if ever the Lord should give me

6 Anonymous diary of a female relative of Cromwell, British Library (henceforth BL) Add MSS 5858, ff. 213r–221r.

7 Ibid., f. 220r.

8 Ibid., f. 215v.

9 Ibid., f. 220v.

> a helthfull Frame of Body, tis my Desire & humbly beg a helthfull Frame of soule, & that my bodyly Helth may be improved to the Glory of the blessed God, & the advantage of my pretious Soule.[10]

According to the above excerpt, the body deserves to be healthy only if its well-being is to lead to an equally healthy soul; it is thus treated as the inferior half, its sickness or health being important only in relation to the other half, the precious soul it contains. The same approach to the value of good health, phrased in very similar terms, is found in the diary of another devout woman, Mary Woodforde (d. 1730), wife of the Reverend Samuel Woodforde. On August 28, 1685, Mary Woodforde wrote: "I was let blood by Mr. Helsy of Farnham, by Doctor Speed's order. God grant it may help my Body as to make it more serviceable to my Soul."[11] The afore-mentioned excerpts suggest that in early modern England people were ideologically conditioned to see their body and soul as polar and unequal opposites. Pious Protestants, in particular, felt that they had the right to ask for physical health *on condition that* they were willing to "improve so great a mersy to [… God's] glory."[12] If this condition was not met, they thought that their bodies deserved to be ill, to ache, and to perish as they had no value of their own, independent of the spiritual use they should be put to.[13]

The Protestant theologians encouraged early modern people to believe that their bodies were sinful and that only their souls deserved their attention. A funeral sermon written by the Presbyterian minister Edmund Calamy and published in 1654 made this position its title: *The doctrine of the bodies fragility: With a divine project, discovering how to make these vile bodies of ours glorious by getting gracious souls*. In his epistle "To the Christian Reader," Calamy claims that he wishes "to put a stop to the folly and madnesse of such people" as those who spend their lives "providing for their frail bodies, subject to diseases, infirmities, and corruptions; and which ere long must be laid down in the dust: and in the mean time neglecting the concernments of their precious and never dying souls."[14] The main quality Calamy attributes to the body is vileness and he "beseech[es] his readers to

10 Ibid., ff. 219v–220r.

11 Woodforde, "Diary," 13.

12 BL Add MSS 5858, f. 215v.

13 On the influence of religious beliefs on the experience and interpretation of sickness, see Harley, "Theology of Affliction"; Hinnells and Porter, *Religion, Health*; Mayhew, "Godly Beds"; Van Dijkhuizen, "Partakers of Pain"; and Wear, "Puritan Perceptions" and "Religious Beliefs."

14 Edmund Calamy, *The doctrine of the bodies fragility: With a divine project, discovering how to make these vile bodies of ours glorious by getting gracious souls*. London, 1654, p. A2.

meditate upon [...the] epithet" he has given to it. As he explains, bodies "are called *vile*... when separated from the soul, vile when united to the soul, vile before the fall of man, but especially vile since the fall of man; subject to vile diseases and abominations."[15] Calamy argues that "the body [...] is but the worst half of the soul"[16] and that even "in the best of the Saints, their bodies are impediments to their nobler souls" and "hinder" their souls "from, and in heavenly operations."[17] Another Protestant minister and physician similarly claims, in accordance with the Socratic and Platonic tradition, that the body is the prison of the soul and it is only when death comes that the soul is finally able to "shak[e]" its "Fetters" and happily join its Creator.[18]

While most Protestant divines belittled the value of the body in their writings, the Humanists chose to focus on its merits and potential rather than its flaws and limitations, and argued that it deserved attention and care. For the famous Humanist schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster, "the soule and bodie" were "coparteners in good and evil" and as such they were inseparable while on earth.[19] Mulcaster wrote a book to prove how "necessarie a thing exercise is"[20] for the bodily health of children, and suggested various types of physical exercise for specific purposes. In this book he argues that the body and the soul should receive equal attention and treatment, as they have "a common sympathie, & a mutuall feeling in all passions: how can they be, or rather why should they be seuered in train[ing]? the one made stronge, and well qualified, the other left feeble, and a praye to infirmitie?"[21] In Mulcaster's view, if the body is feeble, its problems will eventually affect aspects of one's life that are related to the soul, so the latter will inevitably suffer too.

It took time, however, for Humanist views about the body to moderate those found in most of the Protestant guidebooks. Taken to extremes, the body/soul conflict promoted by these manuals could lead to an underestimation of the value of good health, the incrimination of the feeling of agony in

15 Ibid., 4.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 3–4.

18 Timothy Manlove, *The immortality of the soul asserted, and practically improved shewing by scripture, reason, and the testimony of the ancient philosophers, that the soul of man is capable of subsisting and acting in a state of separation from the body, and how much it concerns us all to prepare for that state*. London, 1697, 29.

19 Richard Mulcaster, *Positions wherin those primitiue circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training vp of children, either for skill in their booke, or health in their bodie*. London, 1581, 40.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

the face of sickness, and even the denial of physical pain. Richard Rogers, for instance, wrote in his diary that he did not wish "to be caryed away with any inordinate passion, and so to be made subiect to it, as tak over much sweetnes in diet, in liveinge, health."[22] According to Rogers, material and corporeal pleasures and even the benefit of bodily health were dangerous because their pursuit and enjoyment could "dimme spir[itual] things" and accustom believers to "sottishness."[23] Elizabeth Egerton's frame of mind was similar, as she thought it improper, almost sinful, to worry excessively about the excruciating pains of childbirth she was likely to experience. As a woman who gave birth to nine children, Egerton (1626–1663) was well aware of the physical ordeal of childbirth and often expressed her fear of it in her written prayers and meditations, many of which were titled accordingly: "A Prayer when I was with Child," "A Prayer in Time of Labour," "A Prayer after I was brought to Bed."[24] In one of these prayers, titled "A Prayer when I continued with Child, after I thought I should have fallen in Labour," Egerton asks God's pardon for worrying too much about the pain she expected to suffer:

> My Christ and my Jesus, I beseech thee give me a sure confidence in thee […] I confesse Lord […] my most grievous fault, that when I thought I should have fallen into the great paine of Childbirth, I was fearfull, not of thy mercyes, but of paine; for when I consider thee I know thou art full of goodnesse, and loving kindnesse; give me, my God a heart full of comfort, that when my paine comes, I may goe through it with acknowledge [sic] that thou wilt not leave me, nor forsake me, and that I may endure this height of torture, without grudging at thy holy will; and o Lord, give me patience and that I may believe that what I endure is to receive another blessing from thee my God;[25]

Egerton, who was to die in her final childbirth, tried to downplay the much-dreaded labor pains not because she wanted to take courage but because she saw this fear as the result of excessive and therefore unchristian attention to her body. In confessing this fear in her private papers and asking God's forgiveness for it, Egerton tried to convince herself to be more worried

22 Excerpts from Richard Rogers' diary are included in Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, 89.

23 Ibid.

24 Elizabeth Egerton, *True Copies of Certaine Loose Papers left by the Right noble Elizabeth Countesse of Bridgewater*, collected and transcribed by Samuel Egerton Brydges, BL MS Egerton 607, ff. 22v, 28r, 30v.

25 Ibid., ff. 35v–37r.

about her spiritual than her bodily health and ease. Within the ideological framework described above, bodily suffering was to be underrated and even denied by the sufferers, as the acknowledgement of its existence and physical impact was deemed inappropriate. Recent critical studies on the body have focused on pain, with scholars such as Elaine Scarry stressing its inexpressibility—the failure of language to adequately articulate its intensity.[26] But the early modern English Protestants were faced with an even more fundamental problem: they were not "allowed" to focus on their bodily pain, being pressured to treat it not only as unworthy of concern but as unworthy even of mention.

Bodily suffering was a source of additional emotional discomfort for devout English Protestants because it often prevented them from the successful performance of their devotional duties. When the anonymous relative of Cromwell was seriously ill, she was unable either to follow her devotional routine or to record and evaluate her conduct. For example, there is a long gap in her diary between September 1700 and June 1701, most probably owing to health problems. In June 1701 she refers to "a sevear Fit of the Stone which was [...so] grevious to bare" that she "was therby hindred from waiting on the Lord [...] not being able, from Eilness, to attend the sollome Asembly for 5 months before."[27] The diarist was afraid that God would be angry with her, and that He would punish her by denying her bodily relief, so she is grateful that, despite her "many misspent Sabaths, & trifling with the Day of Grase," God "hath not turned away his Compations from his poore Creature" and has eased her pain.[28] For this diarist, her bodily infirmity was not an adequate excuse for the neglect of her duties to God, and this attitude is a result of the Puritan ideas about the inferior position of the body and the unimportance of its needs. Interestingly, in cases like the above the diary becomes a material transcription of the author's bodily sickness as well as proof of her moral weakness. The absence of diary entries during this woman's long illness was both a result and a manifestation of her physical problems, but it was also a manifestation of her inability to follow her devotional routine, which included not only going to church, but also keeping a spiritual diary. Thus, at times of sickness, diaries illustrate how disruptive bodily afflictions could be and what forms this disruption could take—how many aspects of one's corporeal and spiritual existence ill health could affect. But in such cases the function of spiritual diaries could

26 See Scarry, *Body in Pain*.

27 BL Add MSS 5858, f. 220v.

28 Ibid.

be even more complex, as by recording the authors' prayers and remorse for their failure to transcend their bodily needs, these texts could also facilitate the transgressors' reconciliation with God.

The anonymous diarist's reliance primarily upon God for her recovery, common in almost all the personal diaries of the period, reflects the instructions given by many religious treatises and sermons on the subject. There seems to have been a consensus regarding the approach the sick ought to adopt, with most of the spiritual guidebooks arguing that, when troubled by ill health, people should rely, first and foremost, upon God. He would decide whether one would recover or languish and die, and no doctor or treatment would be able to alter His decision. A sixteenth-century book on this topic addresses the question of "Whether the sick may lawfully seeke the phisitions help, and vse phisick, or no."[29] The answer given to this question is that "The sick body shall neyther despise y^{e} phisition his help, nor haue it in admiration. Let his chéefe hope be stedfastly fastined vppon God, which as he alone did put the soule into the body: So he onely taketh it awaye, when it pleaseth him."[30] Recourse to doctors is not forbidden, provided they are proper medical practitioners and not "Tellers of destinies [...] wicked coniurers [...] deceyvers [...or] witches."[31] In another book on the subject, published six decades later (1626) and titled "*A pathway to patience in all manner of crosses*," the advice offered is basically the same, as it encourages the sick to seek the help of a medical practitioner but only after they have turned to God. If God wishes to spare their life, He will enable the doctor and his drugs to cure them:

> As for thy [...] sick estate, thou must not be carelesse of it, but after prayer for pardō[n] of thy sinnes, thou mayest craue restitution of thy bodily health; [...] and thou art not only not forbidden, but commaunded, to seeke the lawfull helpe of the Physician; prouided that thou depend not so vpon the Art of the Phisician, as to exempt and neglect thy prayer to God for a blessing vpon it; for, if God giue not a Diuine working vnto the physick (howsoeuer it may seeme to worke) it may helpe one part and hurt another.[32]

29 *Phisicke for the Soule, verye necessarie to be vsed in the Agonie of death, and in those extreme, and moste perillous seasons, aswell for those, which are in good health, as those, which are endewed with bodily sicknesse, translated out of Latine into Englishe, by H. Thorne*. London, 1567, 18.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 John Norden, *A pathway to patience in all manner of crosses, tryals, troubles, and afflictions*. London, 1626, 88–89.

In the above excerpt medical practitioners are presented as God's helpers, but patients are warned that nothing the doctors might do will be effective unless God makes it so. Furthermore, believers are encouraged to seek God's help only after they have asked His pardon for their sins. This leads us to another belief about sickness that was widespread at the time: that it is the result of sin and a divine means of punishment and correction for evil deeds. The Protestant divine Edward Heron wrote a sermon on the subject, published in 1621, under the revealing title, *Physicke for body and soule shewing that the maladies of the one, proceede from the sinnes of the other*. Heron explains in the subtitle that the "*remedie against both, prescribed by our heauenly physitian iesus christ*," is the believers' acknowledgement of and thankfulness for God's mercies and their "*sinning no more*."[33] The belief that one's misfortunes and bodily sufferings are sent from God was apparently very common at the time, as in many ego documents the authors tried to identify these "punishments" and, especially, the sins that had provoked them. When, for example, the diarist Mary Rich (1624–1678) lost her adult son, she felt responsible for his death. On May 16, 1667, three years to the day since her son died, she "kept a private fast" and meditated upon his final and—to her relief—godly moments but ended up blaming herself: "I began to consider what sins I had committed, that should cause God to call them to remembrance, and slay my son."[34] Elizabeth Egerton's response to the death of her two-year-old daughter from smallpox was very similar. When she discussed this loss in her private writings, Egerton attributed her child's death to her own sins and was tormented by self-blame: "and [I] know it was gods punishmt: for my sinnes, to separate so soone yt deare body and soule of my sweet Babe."[35]

Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick, was a pious Presbyterian whose religious instruction had taught her to treat all of life's afflictions as sent by God: either as punishment for her sins and a means of moral reformation, or as opportunities to prove her faith by bearing her cross without grudging. Her diary, which covers the years 1666 to 1677, offers us a vivid account of the emotional and physical impact poor health could have on people. In Rich's case, the sufferer was not herself but her husband, so her emotional burden was double: she had to evaluate both her own and her husband's spiritual state during this trial and find satisfactory answers to

33 Edward Heron, *Physicke for body and soule shevving that the maladies of the one, proceede from the sinnes of the other*. London, 1621, 47.

34 Rich, *Memoir*, 111.

35 Egerton, *True Copies*, BL MS Egerton 607, f. 122v.

why both of them were subjected to the particular ordeal. Rich records in her diary her husband's chronic health problems and how much his ill health disrupted their lives. She describes in detail her daily routine when she is obliged to spend days and nights by his side, and she expresses the distress his sad condition causes her. She also regrets that by looking after him, she is forced to neglect her own devotional routine, which typically includes several hours of reading, meditation and prayer either in her closet or in an open-air yet secluded place she calls "the wilderness."[36] It is during these private hours and in these private places that Rich keeps her diary to record her daily employments and, especially, her prayers and meditations on various subjects, quotations from the Bible, sermons she has read or attended, etc.[37] During her husband's sickness, the focus of her diary changes: the emphasis now falls not only on her own spiritual concerns but on the bodily and emotional needs of her husband as well as her own frustration at her inability either to relieve his physical suffering or to make him adopt a more pious attitude towards it.[38]

Charles Rich often got impatient when his wife left his side to meditate and pray, and he was infuriated when she pressured him to ignore his bodily pain and his despair to focus on the salvation of his soul. When Charles Rich was upset with his wife or when he was in severe pain, he would also resort to curses and profane language, which were sometimes directed at his spouse.[39] Mary Rich was profoundly upset by her husband's verbal abuse of her and, especially, his "blasphemous" conduct, so she took every opportunity to reform him, usually with little or no success. The frequency and intensity of her efforts, however, as well as the occasions when she sometimes chose to urge her husband to bear his bodily afflictions with Christian patience, make him too the victim of emotional and even physical abuse. On one such occasion, a few days before her husband's demise, Mary Rich records:

> My poor husband, about noon […] without giving us the least warning, fell into a sad fit again of convulsions, wherein his face was so drawn that it was very terrible to me to behold it. He continued long in it, though all things the doctor directed were done to bring him to life again, in which I assisted, but seeing him not come round in so long time, I was more

36 Rich, *Memoir*, 248.

37 See, for example, Rich's *Memoir*, 74–76, 79–81, 83, 92–93.

38 Ibid., 77, 121–122, 137, 138, 142–143, 152–153, 176–177, 182, 185–186, 204–205, 242, 248.

39 Ibid., 74, 95, 97–98, 131, 136, 154, 215–217, 256.

> frighted and troubled than I remember ever to have been in my life […]. I was all day constant in my attendance upon him, and often as I could get an opportunity, called upon him and minded him of looking to make his peace with God, till he forbad my doing so, which was a trouble to me. But Dr. Walker coming (which I had purposely sent for to assist him in his soul concernments), I spake to him, giving him much good counsel, which he could not, neither with patience, bear. The hearing that it made him break out again with great violence by c[ursing] and s[wearing] did to a very high degree afflict me, and made me in an extraordinary awakened manner wrestle with God with many tears again for him.[40]

The above entry describes eloquently how tormenting Charles Rich's ill health was for both him and his spouse, and illustrates that the foundation of their emotional and spiritual suffering was the dominant view of the body as sinful and unworthy of excessive attention even at the hour of death or, rather, particularly at the hour of death. While in pain, in fear for his life and having suffered what looks like a stroke, Charles was subjected by his wife to relentless verbal and psychological pressure to ignore his ailing body and focus exclusively on his soul. On the other hand, for believers who were as devout as Mary, her husband's eternal damnation was an unbearable prospect that had to be prevented at all costs. Thus, two years before her husband's death, when his health temporarily improved, she recorded being thankful to God, not for her husband's relief from pain but because his brief recovery was "giving him a longer space to repent in."[41] When people managed to die as good Christians were expected to, their godly death was a source of consolation for their mourning relatives. When, for example, on September 29, 1671, Mary Rich learned of the death of one of her nieces, she found relief in the news that she had died well and wrote in her diary: "I was much troubled for her loss; but hearing that she made a very sober and pious end, I was comforted with that."[42] Diaries like Rich's vividly illustrate that when early modern people were faced with death, they experienced a torturous emotional ordeal as the widespread admonition to pious Christians to die "well" pressured them to shift their attention from their aching flesh in order to place it on their soul. Therefore, in their most agonizing and fragile moments, these people had to struggle for a peaceful compromise between their corporeal and their spiritual needs and, ideally,

40 Quoted in Fell-Smith, *Mary Rich*, 266–267.

41 Rich, *Memoir*, 243.

42 Ibid., 247.

completely disregard their dying bodies. However, the aching body could not, as we have seen, be easily ignored and, at times of sickness, even devout people like Mary Rich would readily resort to all the remedies and the best medical advice that were available.

The limited early modern medical knowledge, which confused doctors and tormented patients, was no doubt one of the reasons that even common people had a vivid interest in their bodies. Many tried to educate themselves when books on human anatomy and herbal or other practical remedies became available, wishing to gain better understanding of their bodies, especially at times of sickness. Many women had their own stock of herbal remedies and handwritten books of medical recipes they could prepare at home. Those of them who kept diaries record the employment of such remedies to treat themselves and members of their family or community.[43] But, although most early modern English people hoped to benefit from whatever help they could get from those who had medical expertise, they often treated doctors and their remedies with distrust. The surly Elizabeth Freke (1641–1714), for example, consulted many medical practitioners during her husband's final illness, and spent a lot of money on their services, but at the same time she did not seem to have much faith in them; seeing the steady deterioration of her husband's health, she wrote with bitter sarcasm in her diary: "I found him In A most sad Condition [...which] forced my stay there, to see my deer Husband Murdered by Five Docters, two Surgions, & three Apothycarys."[44]

The diarist Ralph Josselin (1617–1683), being a Puritan minister, was ready to attribute his good or bad health to God's will. At the same time, however, when he was ill, he made every effort to get the best available medical advice and was willing to experiment with various treatments. He also recorded within his diary all his medical appointments, and the remedies he tried and their effect, along with his prayers to God for a speedy and painless recovery. On June 27, 1679 he writes: "Legg much swelled; we laid burdock leaves to leg & foot; God preserve mee."[45] On July 25, he records: "Legge something asswaged by the use of clote leaves"; and on September 19: "Leg rund much; use[d] green tobacco leaves, much asswaged: God cure."[46] Four years later, and a few months before he died, he writes: "I was very ill, and concluded by

43 On women's medical knowledge and role as healers, see Pollock, *With Faith and Physic*; Laroche, *Medical Authority*; Leong, *Recipes*; Ritchey and Strocchia, *Gender, Health, and Healing*; and Whaley, *Women*.

44 Freke, *Diary*, 60.

45 Josselin, *Diary*, 178.

46 Ibid.

ye swelling of my thighs & belly it was the dropsy […]. [I went to] London to Dr Cox about it; God blesse the means I shall use."[47] And, despite his good financial position, the frugal minister complains some weeks later: "the apothecary made mee pay deare."[48] Josselin's diary resembles the medical records modern doctors keep to monitor their patients' health, and decide what treatment is likely to be the most successful. In some ways, this is exactly what Josselin himself tried to do by keeping track of his condition in association with the remedies he tried. And, although he was a clergyman, if we compare his diary with the spiritual diaries of lay people, we sense that he was sometimes less inclined than some of them to attribute his sickness and health to God's will.

Josselin's attitude has its roots in the time in which he lived. At the end of the seventeenth century, the scientific revolution, the advancement of medical knowledge, and the increasing faith in Reason made many people seek rational explanations for what was ailing them, while retaining their strong faith in God. The diaries of this period illustrate the emergence of this new approach to life's problems: that the latter could be solved by a combination of human knowledge and divine intervention. The next, inevitable, stage of this approach was the gradual and painful acceptance that the good or bad health of the human body was a result of the laws of nature rather than the laws of God. The subtle questioning of the extent to which God intervened and cured pious believers is illustrated in the writings of the clergyman Richard Kilby. This time, though, we are dealing not with a diary but with a spiritual guidebook, which was written at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In his popular *Hallelu-Iah* (1618), Kilby used, among other things, autobiographical information to prove God's power over people's lives, and referred to his own ill health. As was to be expected from a minister, Kilby associated his bodily afflictions with his Christian conduct and God's response to it, and repeatedly recorded that he was relieved from pain after praying fervently and promising to keep on the right path. His long-lasting and apparently serious health problems, however, made him consult several physicians, try many remedies, and often lose hope of recovery. On one such occasion he wrote: "It pleased God, that afterward I had some quiet rest: but towards morning the cruel stranguary came upon me. Alas, that there is no remedy for such a filthy tormenting disease! a Physitian writing vnto me, among other words, said thus; Know

47 Ibid., 182.
48 Ibid.

that your disease is incurable."[49] So, despite his faith, and within a guidebook aiming to make other believers put all their trust in God, this clergyman unwittingly concluded that, sometimes, God's help was simply not enough.

Early modern English people were influenced by the prevailing Protestant views concerning the body, and the most pious of them tried to treat the latter as unimportant. The personal writings we have from this period illustrate how widespread these ideas were, how pressured people felt to belittle their bodily needs, and how often they failed to do so, especially when faced with the death of loved ones. Elizabeth Egerton tried to console herself on the death of her daughter by focusing on the ascension of her child's soul to Heaven; at the same time, she was devastated by the thought of the gruesome fate awaiting the body of her "sweet Babe" on earth: "though her soule is singing Alelujahs, yet it is her sweet body here, seized on by wormes, and turned to dust, till the great day shall come when all appear united."[50]

In concluding this essay, I will return to the diary of the anonymous relative of Cromwell with which I began my discussion. There are indications that a large portion of the diary transcribed in 1782 was not the original diary this woman had kept, but a collection of entries that proved God's mercy, carefully selected from an earlier, more regularly kept, and more detailed record. If my assumption is right, the selection by the diarist of entries that focus on her health problems supports the view that many early modern English people—including the extremely pious ones—were beginning to feel less guilty when they were concerned about their bodies. If, on the other hand, the transcription we have is based on the *only* diary this lady produced, her preoccupation with her physical problems seems even more intense, and freer of guilt, as her sickness or health is one of the central themes of her diary. Contrary to what was expected from spiritual diaries, most of the later entries in this one do not focus on when the author prayed, how she prayed, or what prayers she said, but what sickness she suffered from, how long it lasted, how much it tormented her, and how merciful God was to relieve her from it. The diarist almost always concludes such entries by affirming her wish to put her "bodyly Helth" to the service of God and her "pretious Soule," but the overall emphasis falls more on her getting better and glorifying God in return, than on her suffering her

49 Richard Kilby, *Hallelu-Iah: Praise Yee the Lord, for the Vnburthening of a Loaden Conscience by His Grace is Iesus Christ Vouchsafed Vnto the Worst Sinner of all the Whole World*. Cambridge, 1618, 107.

50 Egerton, *True Copies*, BL MS Egerton 607, ff. 122v–123r.

bodily afflictions patiently, and preparing for a godly death on earth and an eternal life in Heaven.

If we focused only on the advice offered to the sick by the early modern Protestant manuals, we would get the impression that many Englishmen and Englishwomen were probably convinced of their bodies' sinfulness and unworthiness, and that they were therefore willing to disregard their bodily needs. The ego documents from this period, however, tell a different story when they refer to their authors' health problems: although they illustrate that sickness was indeed "largely a spiritual experience," as Hannah Newton has convincingly argued,[51] they also indicate that those people were more anxious about their physical health than they were ready to admit. The sick may claim in their personal writings that they are not afraid to die and that they worry only about being prepared for it—i.e., having gained God's approval of their life choices and His forgiveness for their sins; on the other hand, their entries reveal their intense concern about their bodily health, their occasional inability to rise above physical suffering, and their agony in the face of death, all of which underscore the importance they attributed to their bodies and their deeply felt need to look after them.

In the texts examined here we have seen that the sick body writes about its ailments with a trembling hand and a deeply troubled mind. Apart from offering their authors the benefits of a detailed medical record—helping them understand and treat their illness—these writings could also offer them emotional relief: firstly, they served as outlets for powerful feelings such as despair and hope that the sick might have not wished to express to others; secondly, they enabled their authors to "perform" their Christian duties by recording their reliance upon God, their thankfulness, and their uncomplaining surrender to His will; and, finally, by being testimonies of godliness in times of trial, these documents served as visible and tangible proof that the people who kept them deserved to be rewarded by God, both while they were alive and also after death. The autobiographical records of the sick were extensions of their ailing bodies, material manifestations of their troubled corporeal, emotional, and spiritual state, but also means of healing for both their bodies and their souls. When sick, early modern English people were torn between the needs of their weak but fallen bodies and the needs of their infinitely more important souls. Their personal writings illustrate this conflict and show that it led to a continuous and unresolved struggle: while the sufferers argued, and tried to convince themselves, that

51 Newton, *Sick Child*, 6.

their bodies were mortal, inferior to their souls, and therefore valueless, they treated them as worthy of careful observation, systematic medical attention, and comforting care.

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7. Narrating Her Life as an Amazon: Katharina Franziska von Wattenwyl's *Mémoires* (1714)

Andreas Würgler

Abstract: This article focuses on an extraordinary female ego document from the early eighteenth century. During a trial for espionage in 1689/1690, the Bernese patrician Katharina Franziska von Wattenwyl (1645–1714) was so severely tortured that, 24 years later, she was unable to write and had to dictate her life story, conceived to a certain extent as a petition to the French ambassador. The text arranges various biographical episodes to express her personal rebellion against the ascription of gender roles in family, society, and politics, styling herself as an Amazon. The article discusses how the writing situation and the addressee(s), in addition to narrative conventions, shaped the form and content of her *mémoires* and what role the body played in constructing the narrative identity.

Keywords: autobiography; gender; torture; espionage; Switzerland; France

"Amazon," "heroine," "martyr," or "insane," "traitor," "state criminal"—this is what Katharina Franziska von Wattenwyl (1645–1714) was variously called in her day. These highly controversial judgements by her contemporaries around 1700 spark interest in an extraordinary life. If she is still of historical interest more than 300 years after her death, it is mainly for two reasons. On the one hand, she caused a political scandal that was widely reported in the contemporary press, because she was sentenced to death as a "state criminal" for spying on her country, the Swiss City-Republic of

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Bern, in the service of the king of France.[1] On the other hand, she left her memoirs, which bear witness not only to this diplomatic affair, but also to her biography, which she described as "a continuous web of misfortunes."[2] Many of the misfortunes she faced were linked to her status as a woman in a male-dominated society against which she repeatedly rebelled. In her personal account of her life, she emphasizes both her feminine courage and her loyalty to the French crown. When she wanted to record her memories shortly before her death at the age of 69 on November 21, 1714, she was unable to write them down herself, as she was still suffering from the long-term consequences of the torture she had endured 25 years earlier. Her physical condition determined her ability to bear witness to her life. The customary corporal punishments forced her to dictate her life narrative to her second husband (then aged 72). She addressed the text to her family and to the French king's ambassador to Switzerland, Comte du Luc (1653–1740),[3] with the declared aim of maintaining—after her imminent death—her French royal pension for her only son.[4]

Katharina von Wattenwyl, so she tells us, earned the attribute "Amazon" by being able to ride a wild horse that had so far thrown everyone off: "All these other gentlemen showered me with politeness and since then have usually called me the Amazon or heroine de Watteville."[5] In its first edition of 1694, the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* referred to an "amazon" as "woman with masculine and warlike courage"[6] and Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* of 1690 specified: "Amazon, also said of a courageous woman capable of some bold undertaking."[7]

1 This text is dedicated to the memory of Brigitte Schnegg (1953–2014). Quotes from this *Mémoire* are translated into English by deepL and the author. The French text is given in the footnotes. Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 72. Katharina Franziska von Wattenwyl or, in French, Catherine Françoise de Watteville, was sometimes called Catherine Perregaux after her second husband's name.

2 "Un tissu continue de malheurs." Ibid., 73.

3 Schluchter, "Charles-François de Vintimille."

4 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 72.

5 "Tous ces autres Messieurs me comblèrent de politesse et depuis m'appelèrent ordinairement l'Amazone ou l'héroïne de Watteville." Ibid., 85.

6 "femme de courage masle & Guerrier." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1st ed. (1694), s.v. "Amazone," accessed August 8, 2023, https://artfl.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=amazone&dicoid=ACAD1694&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1694.

7 "Amazone, se dit aussi d'une femme courageuse capable de quelque hardie entreprise." Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois tant vieux que modernes, et les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts …*, 3 vols. La Haye: A. et R. Leers, 1690, 1: s.p. Cf. Schlumbohm, "Typus der Amazone," 77.

Katharina von Wattenwyl's text can be considered an ego document, defined by Winfried Schulze as "all those sources [...] in which a person gives information about him- or herself—voluntarily or not."[8] It contains two parts, a two-page cover letter addressed to the French ambassador Comte du Luc and a first-person account of her life. The latter comprises 56 pages in the edited edition, almost half of which are dedicated to the espionage affair. It is divided into three sections: first, her life from birth to her recruitment by the French crown (19 pages for the 44 years from 1645 to 1689); second, her arrest, interrogation, and torture during the espionage trial (25 pages for about six months); and third, her life after the pardon (12 pages for 24 years). A signed original—used by the historian Pierre Grellet in the 1920s—is in unknown private possession; the anonymous edition dating from 1867 is probably based on two copies from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, respectively.[9] Whether the ego document reached the ambassador is unknown—but the pension paid to Katharina von Wattenwyl (as can be seen in the accounts of the French ambassador Marquis de Puyzieulx for the year 1707[10]) was indeed signed over to her son, Théophile, albeit in a smaller amount, after her death.[11]

The text will be read and discussed in the historian's perspective informed by literary expertise about autobiography and genre.[12] The first section briefly summarizes Katharina von Wattenwyl's life based mainly on her own narrative. The second analyzes the attention she pays in her account to gender issues, and the third explores the role she ascribes to her body and her physical experiences. The narrative styles and strategies she used are discussed in the fourth section to show how she mixed different literary genres to create an autobiography in which she was given the role she felt she deserved in "real" life.

1. Life

According to her *Mémoire*, Katharina von Wattenwyl was born in 1645 as the eleventh child of the governor Gabriel von Wattenwyl (1611–1657) and

8 Schulze, "Ego-Dokumente," 21 (quote), 21–28 (discussion); for a—skeptical—history of the uses of the term, cf. Greyerz, "Ego-Documents," 273–281.

9 Grellet, *La vie cavaliere*, 10–11.

10 Puyzieulx, "État de la Recette," 190.

11 Affolter, *Verhandeln mit Republiken*, 117, footnote 59.

12 Depkat, "History," 73–80.

Barbara von Wattenwyl (–1659), who came from another branch of a leading Protestant patrician family in the Republic of Bern. She spent her childhood in the French-speaking part of the Republic (Beaumont, Oron) and in Bern, the capital, a modest town with under 10,000 inhabitants. Orphaned at the age of 14, she was boarded out by her guardian and lodged with various host families for about ten years. She refused the marriages demanded or arranged by relatives wanting to provide for her. On the other hand, the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of Bern prevented her love marriage with a Catholic patrician from Fribourg, Charles de Diesbach de Torny (1635–?), a captain in the Royal Swiss Guards in France. Pushed by her relatives, she finally married in 1669—at the age of 24—the pastor Abraham le Clerc (ca. 1642–1679), who died ten years later. At the age of 34 she then married the 38-year-old Neuchâtel local official Samuel Perregaux (1641–1715). Her only child, Théophile (1681–1737), was born two years later. During a period of great tension between France and Bern in the late 1680s (caused partly by the expulsion of the Huguenots), she entered the service of the French ambassador Michel-Jean Amelot, Marquis de Gournay (1655–1724), as a secret agent.[13] When the Bernese government discovered this connection on December 9, 1689, Katharina von Wattenwyl was arrested, interrogated, tortured, and finally sentenced to death by the sword. After repeated urgent supplications from her numerous and influential relatives, her sentence was commuted to banishment for life, and she was bound over to pay the legal costs and to keep quiet about the matter. She spent the remaining 24 years until her death in difficult conditions in the principality of Neuchâtel with her husband and son.[14]

2. Gender

At various points, Katharina von Wattenwyl shapes her narrative with statements concerning her body. This becomes particularly noticeable in the descriptions of her tortures and in the allusions to her memory. Moreover, she relates indirectly to the body when she questions socially ascribed gender roles by means of her activities and behavior. At the age of almost 69, she remembers that—as a girl—she preferred to play with her brothers than with her sisters.

13 For the political context, see Würgler, "Frau in Bern"; Lau, *Stiefbrüder*.

14 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 123–128; cf. Grellet, *La vie cavalière*.

> They tried to amuse me as a child with dolls and other trinkets, but I began by throwing them away. […] I never had any inclination for coquetry or games, which I have always hated, but for great and lofty things; so, my father used to say that I had never been a child, and he deplored my sex several times, foreseeing that if I had been a boy, I would have pushed my fortune a long way.[15]

She presents herself as a precocious child who, although she does not reject traditional women's duties, leaves the circle of sisters as soon as possible to hang out with her brothers outside the castle, riding and shooting with pistols. The scope for development allotted to girls is apparently too small for her; she breaks role expectations, especially through her physical activities.

This pattern runs through the entire text: she learns to ride dressage, succeeds in taming a fiery horse like an Amazon, and evades being arrested by border guards with a daring ride. Pistols often play an important role, for example, in her release from an arrest, as a gift from the imperial envoy, or in her defense against a pushy lover.[16] During a hunting party in the forest, she rejected the advances of a German general: "There he spared nothing to touch me, but having found me inflexible, he finally wanted to come to blows. In this extremity I shot through his body with one of my pistols, which wounded him dangerously, giving me time to rejoin my company."[17] Her self-defense with a pistol did not surprise just the general; she also mentions several times that others perceived her and her behavior as not typically female: her father had already predicted a great career for her, if she had been a man; a host recognized "a male mood in me";[18] the imperial envoy Count Hollstein commented on her ride on the untamed horse "that I had surpassed in courage all the people of my sex";[19] and the French ambassador's secretary was "surprise[d]

15 "On voulut amuser mon enfance par des poupées et d'autres babioles, mais je débutai par les jetter." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 76. "Je n'ai jamais eu de penchant pour la coquetterie ni pour le jeu que j'ai toujours haï, mais pour des choses grandes et relevées; aussi mon père disait-il que je n'avais jamais été enfant, et il déplora plusieurs fois mon sexe, prévoyant que si j'étais un garçon, j'aurais poussé bien loin ma fortune." Ibid., 77.

16 Cf. Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 78, 122, 121, 85.

17 "Là il n'épargna rien pour me toucher, mais m'ayant trouvé inflexible, il voulut enfin en venir avec violence. Dans cette extrêmité je lui lâchai un de mes pistolets à travers le corps, qui le blessa dangereusement, ce qui me donna le temps de rejoindre ma compagnie, à laquelle je me plaignis amèrement, de ce qu'on m'avait laissé seule avec le general." Ibid., 86.

18 "en moi une humeur mâle." Ibid., 78.

19 "que j'avais surpassé en courage toutes les personnes de mon sexe." Ibid., 84.

that someone, especially of my sex, had formed such a vast project"[20] concerning diplomacy.

She also dislikes the female dress code: she prefers life in the village with a personally chosen wardrobe to life in the city, squeezed into the dreary garb of a pastor's wife. For these clothes "disfigured my face and my waist."[21] But rather than gender order, her rebellion against the dress code targets class and social rules, when she feels herself patronized by them. The 2022 German and Swiss book prizes awarded to Kim de l'Horizon and a well-known painted portrait of Katharina von Wattenwyl, dated 1674, might lead us to read this text in the light of gender fluidity.[22] Art historians and historians have interpreted the portrait as confirmation of the rather "male" self-presentation in her *mémoires*: it shows a proud young adult with long fair hair and a knight's armor. The art historian Matthias Oberli convincingly argues, however, that this oil painting is very unlikely to represent Katharina von Wattenwyl, as she had not met the German artist Theodor Roos (1638–1698) at that time. According to Oberli, the person represented is not a woman, but rather the male artist himself.[23] Furthermore, Katharina von Wattenwyl mentions no cross-dressing episode and rather underlines that she was riding sidesaddle. It is therefore difficult to understand whether these partly transgressive elements could be interpreted in the sense that she felt uncomfortable in her body. It seems as if she wants to break down gender roles by doing and by telling in order to expand her scope of action, rather than socially constructing her position on the scale of gender fluidity.[24]

In her text, she does indeed know how to mobilize gender stereotypes in her favor when necessary. Thus, during the interrogation, she denies her connection with the French ambassador with the argument that the leading politicians of the Republic hardly confided in a woman "given the lightness attributed to our sex" and considering that "it is not affairs of state that gentlemen discuss with ladies."[25] Later on, she accuses her interrogators: "There is no glory or honor in proceeding against an innocent woman, unsupported and unprotected, exposed to the rage and fury of her cruellest

20 "sa surprise de ce qu'une personne, de mon sexe surtout, eut formé un aussi vaste projet." Ibid., 92–93.

21 "défiguraient mon visage et ma taille." Ibid., 87; cf. Harris, "What Butler Saw."

22 Cf. L'Horizon, *Blutbuch*.

23 Oberli, *Barocke Malerei*, 112–113, 139, with bibliography.

24 Cf. Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

25 "vu la légèreté qu'on attribue à notre sexe." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 102. "ce n'est pas d'affaires d'état que les gentilshommes s'entretiennent avec les dames," Ibid., 105.

and most implacable enemies."[26] Then she opposes the swearing-in with the argument that as a woman she is not allowed to take an oath. And finally, she mocks the public defender for having delivered a "very pathetic speech on the weakness of our sex."[27]

The external perception gained through the (fragmentary) court files conveys an image of Katharina von Wattenwyl that in some ways confirms her self-description as well as the stereotypes of the male judges. The court in Bern speculates that her husband must have drafted most of the secret letters to the French ambassador. And it was also "known to the court that this female person was not of sound mind, but from her youth had been considered by everyone to be a madwoman or half-fool."[28] Finally, the court judgement accuses her of "not being aware of the position in which God has placed her […], but—instead of remaining in her household and leading a quiet and godly life—[…], had engaged in dangerous correspondence with the French ambassador."[29] It was against precisely such a life plan that Katharina von Wattenwyl rebelled throughout her life and through her memoirs. Thus, she refused, at the age of around 16, a "good" match forced on her by an uncle on the grounds that the "gentleman from Neuchâtel […] was very rich but rather badly made, and […] did not please me at all."[30] She had also received different propositions of marriage, all of which she refused. And in both her marriages, according to her testimony, she acted out of freedom and independence.

3. Body

The body in its physical vulnerability is the subject of the crucial scenes in which she describes her experience of torture. Her arrest and interrogation,

26 "Il n'y a ni gloire ni honneur à procéder contre une femme innocente, sans appui et sans protection, exposé à la rage et la fureur de ses plus cruels et implacables ennemis." Ibid., 107.

27 Serment (oath): Ibid., 109–110. "discours fort pathètique sur la faiblesse de notre sexe." Ibid., 115.

28 Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern: BIX 485, p. 261 (Thurnbuch [!] 1684–90); "weil ihnen bekannt, dass diese Weibsperson nit bei vollkommener gesunder Vernunft, sondern von Jugend auf von Jedermänniglich für eine Aberwitzige oder Halbnärrin gehalten worden." "Aus dem Thurmbuch," 164.

29 "Samuel Perregaux von Valendis Ehefrauen […], welche des Standes, in den Gott sie gesetzt, sich nicht vernüget, sondern anstatt ihrer Haushaltung obzuliegen und in derselben ein stilliges und gottseliges Leben zu führen, […] mit dem französischen, zu Solothurn residirenden Ambassadoren nachdenkliche Correspondenzen angestellt." "Aus dem Thurmbuch," 160–161.

30 "gentilhomme de Neuchâtel […] était fort riche mais assez mal fait, et […] ne me plaisait pas du tout." Ibid., 78; cf. Ibid., 88.

her sentencing and pardon are the focus of the text in terms of scope and content.[31] After she was arrested on her sickbed, her hands and feet were shackled to a wooden beam in prison by long iron chains. Her eight-year-old son, who was present, fainted at the sight. She describes the interrogations as follows:

> They began my torments by joining my two thumbs together, and using an iron instrument with screws, they squeezed them so hard that blood flowed from them at first. They left me in this state for a long time, and when they took the instrument away, my thumbs were so bruised that both my thumbnails fell off and I felt inexpressible pain. [After a while] my wounds were somewhat healed [.... They made me] tie a rope to my wrists, and lifting me up with a pulley, with my arms overturned, which I endured with the same firmness.[32]

And she continues:

> I was left in this position for a long time, suffering mortal pain and anguish, my blood flowing from my arms and legs through the deep scars made by these ropes and metal wire, to the point of almost falling apart. Finally, I was taken down so that I would not die in the torture; but my arms were so dislocated that for nearly a month a woman had to feed me as if I were a child, and the terrible extension of my body has resulted in accidents and ailments that the best doctors have not been able to treat, which cause me almost continuous pain and from which I will never recover.[33]

31 Ibid., 97–117.

32 "Ils commencèrent mes tourments par me joindre ensemble les deux pouces, et avec un instrument de fer et à vis on les serra si fort, que le sang en coula d'abord. On me laissa longtemps dans cet état, et quand on m'ôta cet instrument, mes pouces se trouvèrent tellement meurtris, que les deux onglets tombèrent et que j'en ressentis une douleur inexprimable. [... Après un temps] mes plaies furent un peu consolidées [ils me firent] attacher la corde de la question aux poignets, et m'élevant avec une poulie, les bras renversés, ce que je supportais avec la même fermeté." Ibid., 110.

33 "On me laissa longtemps dans celle position, souffrant des douleurs et angoisses mortelles, mon sang coulant de mes bras et de mes jambes par les profondes cicatrices qu'avaient faites ces cordes et ce fil d'archal, au point de tomber presqu'en faiblesse. Enfin on me descendit pour ne pas me voir mourir à la torture; mais mes bras furent tellement démis, que pendant près d'un mois il fallut qu'une femme me donnât à manger comme à un enfant, et il est résulté de la terrible extension de mon corps des accidents et des maux, que les meilleurs médecins n'ont pu traiter, qui me font éprouver des douleurs presque continuelles et dont je ne guérirai jamais." Ibid., 111–112.

However, this was not the end yet. Later on,

> two women, after taking off my dressing gown and my shirt, put [a shirt made from metal wire and cords woven together] on my naked body and swaddled me like a little child, but with such force and violence that it penetrated my body and made it bleed. The pain forced me into such contortions that I became as hideous as I was unrecognizable.[34]

Two of these three methods of torture—the thumbscrews and the "strappado" (estrapade), being suspended by the arms and having weights hung on the feet—are attested to by other sources in this particular case as well as being a regular part of the punitive procedure: 21 percent of accused women in seventeenth-century Bern had been stretched with a rope in a similar way.[35] For the third one—the shirt of metal wire made exclusively for her—there is no other evidence.[36]

Katharina von Wattenwyl's trial and torture became a media event.[37] In this context, the only—as yet known—illustration of the espionage affair was published (see figure 7.1). It shows a woman being pulled up by the executioner by her bound arms and with weights on her feet. Two councilors, who are conducting the interrogation, and a secretary taking notes are sitting around a table in the cellar vault. This image in the *Europaeischen Mercurius oder Götter-Both* is all the more remarkable when compared with the journal's usual practice of illustrating the text.[38] Four of the five copper engravings that adorn the 88-page January number of this news journal are portraits. Two of them display members of the imperial Habsburg family who had just been crowned, the third a known scholar. The February edition actually contains only one illustration: a sea battle. As the production of copper engravings was time-consuming and expensive, and meant more effort in terms of

34 "On fit faire une chemise de fil d'archal et de cordelettes tissés ensemble; [...] deux femmes, après m'avoir ôté ma robe de chambre et ma chemise, la mirent sur mon corps nu, et m'emmaillotèrent comme un petit enfant, mais avec tant de force et de violence qu'elle pénétra dans mon corps et le mit en sang. Les douleurs m'obligèrent à de telles contorsions que j'en devins aussi hideuse que méconnaissable." Ibid., 112.

35 Adam, "Keeping Order," 56–58.

36 Years later (1699?), she still lamented that she had been almost constantly ill after the torture. Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 127. The ambassador Amelot confirmed in a report to Versailles that her arm was paralyzed, and her health shattered, quoted in "Aus dem Thurmbuch," 168.

37 See below and Würgler, "Frau in Bern."

38 *Europaeischer Mercurius oder Götter-Both*. Nürnberg: Johann Hoffmann, 1690, Januarius, after p. 26.

Figure 7.1 "Tortur der Madame de Watteville Frantzösischer Conspirantin und Bernischer Verrätherin" [Torture of Madame de Watteville, French Conspirator and Bernese Traitor]. *Europaeischer Mercurius oder Götter-Both*, [Nürnberg]: [Johann Hoffmann], 1690, Januarius, after p. 26 (public domain). [München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/4 Eur. 384,13, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11130004-5]. ⏎

printing, the illustrations in political journals were rather sparse. All the more striking is the torture scene with Katharina von Wattenwyl in the gallery of crowned or at least learned heads. The pictorial motif is, on the one hand, reminiscent of witch trials. This allusion was made only in anonymous private correspondence, however, and not, as far as

is known, in the court proceedings or in the printed press.[39] On the other hand, it accords with the public's interest in executions and illustrations representing them—a favorite theme in popular iconography.[40] The affair was also the subject of an academic series of 14 oil-on-canvas paintings by Joseph Werner (1637–1710), who was staying in Bern during this period after having passed some time at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles. The painted cycle "tells" the whole story as an affair of disguise and revealing, honor and treason, guilt and innocence in a highly allegorical way that is difficult to interpret.[41]

Katharina von Wattenwyl suffered the consequences of her torture all her remaining life. A few days before her death in November 1714, she dictated to her second husband: "My ailments leave me no break; […]. For the past six months, I have not been able to eat bread, and I abhor all kinds of meat, supporting myself only with a few spoonsful of broth and a little old wine. So, my body is like a skeleton, for I have nothing left but skin and bones."[42] Owing to the physical consequences of the torture, the spying episode remains omnipresent in the life of Katharina von Wattenwyl—today, one would call it a torture trauma. Narratively, the emphasis on suffering—addressed to the French ambassador—serves to legitimize her request to transfer her pension to her son. For she holds out the torture in sacrificial service for France. Consequently, she follows up the quoted passage on the long-term consequences with a renewed commitment to France:

> while awaiting God's will […] I retain and will retain until my last breath a pure, ardent, and inviolable love for the crown of France, and a profound veneration for the magnanimous hero, who upholds its dignity with such brilliance, and a glory that will immortalize his illustrious name to the most distant posterity.[43]

39 Burgerbibliothek Bern (henceforth BBB), Mss hh X 222 (16), f. 6r. First anonymous letter dated January 11, 1690. For the witch-motif, cf. Lau, *Stiefbrüder,* 357.

40 Härter, "Criminalbildergeschichten" (richly illustrated).

41 The discussions among art historians summarized by Oberlin, *Barocke Malerei*, 269–275.

42 "Mes maux ne me laissent aucune trêve, ils m'ont continuellement rendue la tribulation des médecins, des apothicaires et des opérateurs. Enfin tous m'ont abandonnée, jugeant mes maux incurables […]. Depuis passé six mois je n'ai pas pu manger du pain et j'abhorre toute espèce de viande, ne me soutenant que par quelques cuillerées de bouillon et un peu de vin vieux. Aussi mon corps est-il comme un squelette, car je n'ai plus que la peau et les os." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 128.

43 "[en] attendant la volonté de Dieu […] je conserve et je conserverai jusqu'à mon dernier soupir un amour pur, ardent et inviolable pour la couronne de France, et une profonde vénération pour

Apart from the torture scenes and the disorders associated with them, Katharina von Wattenwyl does not talk about her physical state. Experiences in connection with pregnancy and birth, for example, are not a topic—despite all her joy and pride in having a son. Right at the beginning of her "journal abrégé de ma vie" she refers, however, to the problems of memory, which diminishes with age:

> Many important facts and circumstances are no longer present to my mind, and especially to my memory, altered by a continual web of misfortunes. The ones I will detail here will nevertheless be sufficient to serve as instruction for my only son and mine in the different states of life in which Divine Providence will wish to place them, praying God to make them effective.[44]

This forewarning, however, does not seem to concern the central experience of the high-treason trial. For the text reproduces page-long passages from the interrogation, which in their dialogue-like arrangement give the appearance of verbatim transcripts.[45] On the other hand, several details of her narrative are obviously no longer clear in her memory. For example, she tends to identify people by the highest title they ever achieved, even if that person had not yet reached that career level at the time of her meeting with the narrator.[46] Besides the general problematic of memory, her individual difficulties in memorizing past events might be responsible for some of the many incorrect or incoherent details in her memoirs. Nevertheless, instead of examining all the details for their "empirical accuracy," or "reliability,"[47] these observations should lead to questions about the type of text and the narrative strategies realized in this source.

le magnanime héros, qui en soutient la dignité avec autant d'éclat, et une gloire qui immortalisera son illustre nom jusqu'à la postérité la plus éloignée." Ibid.

44 "Plusieurs faits et circonstances importantes ne sont plus présentes à mon esprit et surtout à ma mémoire altérée par un tissu continuel de malheurs. Celles que je détaillerai ici seront cependant suffisantes pour servir d'instruction à mon fils unique et aux miens dans les différens états de la vie où la divine Providence voudra les placer, priant Dieu de les leur rendre efficaces." Ibid., 73.

45 Ibid., 104–107.

46 E.g., Ibid., 84. According to the (anonymous) editor of the memoirs, her genealogical information about her family in Bern and Franche-Comté is full of errors (p. 74). Also, the external perception (fragmentary trial records and periodical press) deviates in many details from her descriptions. Würgler, "Frau in Bern."

47 Tosato-Rigo, "Avant-propos," 7–8; Depkat, "History," 76–77.

4. Narratives

In the letter to Ambassador du Luc, Katharina von Wattenwyl herself refers to her dictated text as "mémoires" (in the plural). In the "mémoires" themselves, addressed to her son and family as well as to the ambassador, she uses the term "journal abrégé de ma vie" (short diary of my life).[48] From the point of view of the reason for writing or dictating, it is actually a supplication or petition by means of which Katharina von Wattenwyl would like her son to enjoy the French pension. The text contains many formal and substantive elements of a supplication: the submissive, devoted, and deferential style; the description of one's own situation with the intention of appealing to the compassion, generosity, and justice of the addressee in the hope of receiving the requested favor; the cover letter is supplemented with biographical elements. Life stories in the context of supplications, as has been known at least since Natalie Zemon Davis' book *Fiction in the Archives*, are more or less ingeniously stylized, often fictionalized, and oriented towards the presumed decision-making criteria of the instance of grace.[49] They aim to gain the hoped-for favor by means of the writer's own merits, innocence, and devotion. Yet there are also passages in her text that counteract this purpose—at least when read today. For example, she presented herself as a steadfast Protestant throughout.[50] Even in her precarious situation in exile in Franche-Comté after the espionage trial, she resisted the tempting offers of her distant Catholic relations, namely, a very high pension if she converted, and a place for her son with the dauphin at the Versailles court.[51] A consistently purposeful supplication would probably have omitted this episode. Conversely, it is striking that she did not mention an element of the family biography that might have been a strong argument for the transfer of the pension: her son, Théophile, had married the Bernese patrician Dorothea von Wattenwyl (1684–1769) in 1710. By marrying in this way into the leading circles in Bern, Théophile was able to gain access to internal information

48 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 72–73. In 1867, the anonymous editor chose the term "mémoire" in the singular, i.e., "memorandum" rather than memoirs. The anonymous manuscript copy of the text dating from the eighteenth century (BBB, Muel 27. "Mémoires de C. F. Perregaux née de Watteville, écrits par elle-même en novembre 1714," copied by an anonymous) uses "mémoires" (in the plural), another manuscript copy from the nineteenth century spells "mémoire" (in the singular). BBB, Mss hh X 111. "Mémoire de Madame Perregaux née de Watteville, [...] novembre 1714, à Monsieur le Comte du Luc, ambassadeur de France en Suisse," copied by Johann Anton von Tillier (1792–1854); cf Bentley, *Grenzgängerinnen,* 123–173.

49 Zemon Davis, *Fiction*; Würgler, "Suppliken," 25, 41–43.

50 Cf. Bentley, "Liminal Self-Fashioning"; and Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," passim.

51 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 91.

on Bernese politics, which made him of interest to the French embassy: the Perregaux family became one of France's most important sources of intelligence in the principality of Neuchâtel, under Prussian rule since 1707, and were able to maintain this role throughout the century—on the basis of Katharina von Wattenwyl's sacrifice.[52]

The length of the petition (56 pages in the edited edition) far exceeds the usual measure, however. The biographical information necessary in such contexts grows into an entire autobiography. In keeping with Philippe Lejeune's concept of the "autobiographical pact," Katharina von Wattenwyl promises her addressees (very true) facts. With the chronological arrangement of the narrative, the embedding in the family genealogy, and the consistent use of the first-person singular, the "short diary of my life"[53] corresponds to genre-typical characteristics of autobiographical self-testimonies. The use of the expression "très veritable" (very true) is reminiscent of the early modern leaflets and pamphlets that called their miracle stories "nouvelles très véritables" (very true news) precisely because they sounded improbable.[54] Katharina von Wattenwyl's life story is also full of episodes with fabulous and miraculous features. She says, for example, that the city of Geneva had taken on the role of godparent for her in December 1645 and had put on a magnificent fireworks display over the lake to celebrate her baptism. The duel with the Lady Ambassador de Créqui's maid of honor, the invitation to Rome from (ex-)Queen Kristina of Sweden, Gustav Adolf's daughter, the taming of a horse in a side saddle, long journeys on horseback relatively shortly after the tortures, and other incidents also belong in this category.[55]

These episodes seem to incorporate elements of the adventure or picaresque novel. This genre, still very popular around 1700, typically contains experiences of a—somewhat different—hero on the border between the truthful and the fabulous.[56] Although she does not tell us much about her reading—except that she consulted medical and botanical guides in the 1670s[57]—the reception of such reading material seems possible. Beyond

52 Weber, *Lokale Interessen*, 160–165; Affolter, *Verhandeln mit Republiken*, 115–117; *Historisches Familienlexikon*, accessed September 1, 2023, http://www.hfls.ch/humo-gen/family/1/F20275?main_person=I60582.

53 "journal abrégé de ma vie." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 72–73; Lejeune, "Pacte autobiographique."

54 Münch, "Newe Zeitung," col. 181–183.

55 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 76, 79, 82, 84, 118.

56 *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. by Klaus Weimar. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007, s.vv. "Abenteuerroman," "Schelmenroman," accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110914672/html?lang=de#contents.

57 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 86.

the literary, she may also have consumed pamphlets and books that often polemically exploited life stories sold as true in the media, such as those about Queen Kristina of Sweden.[58] The latter had emphasized her masculine education, characteristics, and ambitions, as Katharina von Wattenwyl did for herself. The Protestant Kristina became a queen at the age of 18, refused the gender role assigned to her as queen including marriage, laid down the crown at the age of 28 (in 1654), converted to Catholicism, and moved to Rome.[59] This kind of unconventional yet somehow glamorous and widely mediated biography seems to have been admired by Katharina von Wattenwyl; it corresponded to her self-image as "independent character"[60] who was "destined for adventure."[61] Kristina of Sweden is one of the protagonists whom literary studies and art history are discussing under the label of "Amazonomanie."[62]

Katharina may also have drawn inspiration for her self-portrayal from other media, especially the periodical press. The life, travels, and activities of Kristina of Sweden, for example, were closely followed by contemporary newspapers.[63] Katharina may have been informed in this way and may have expressed her affection and yearning narratively through the (most likely fantasized) invitation from the queen. The episode that culminated in the duel could have been inspired by newspaper readings as well. Duels were not infrequent parts of both the news and her personal life: one of her brothers, Salomon (1641–1672), was shot in a duel.[64] And the journey of the French ambassador in Rome, Duc de Créqui and his wife, could be followed in stages and in real time, for example, in the weekly *La Gazette* from Paris, which, among many other details, reported the ambassador's visit to Queen Kristina of Sweden in Rome.[65]

As a result of the high-treason trial, Katharina herself became a media personality. European newspapers from Hamburg to Bologna, from London to Vienna, from Rotterdam to Gdansk, from Haarlem to Munich reported on this sensational affair in more than 80 articles—although not with quite the same level of detail that Katharina presented in her memoirs. Quite a

58 Cf. Wåghäll Nivre, "Königin," 306: published from 1656–1709; Harris, "What Butler Saw," 62–67.

59 About confession: Bentley, "Liminal Self-Fashioning"; about cross-dressing: Watanabe-O'Kelly, "Mann," 359 ("Grandes Dames"), and ibid., 367 (women in men's clothes); Harris, "What Butler Saw."

60 "caractère indépendant." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 117.

61 "destinée aux aventures." Ibid., 120.

62 The term used by Kroll, "Amazone," 521.

63 Cf. Wåghäll Nivre, "Königin," 309–311.

64 According to *Historisches Familienlexikon der Schweiz*, accessed June 6, 2023, http://www.hfls.ch/humo-gen/family/1/F18369?main_person=I55537.

65 *La Gazette*. Paris: Renaudot, 1662, no. 109 of September 16, 1662; cf. many nos. from 80 to 155.

few newspaper articles portrayed her as a courageous heroine and steadfast martyr who faced death calmly. Others, however, qualified her as "insane."[66] These, arguably fictional, elements, inspired by literature and the press, shift autobiography far more in the direction of "autofiction."[67] This denotes the to a certain extent unavoidable mixing of "genuinely experienced" and "only heard, read about" in any autobiographical writing.[68]

An essential characteristic of the text is her crying for attention. Wherever she appears—according to her memory—she suddenly takes center stage and is yet grossly underestimated. This lack of attention in life, it seems, is countered by her central role in the text. With this "self-fashioning"[69] she positions herself textually where she would have wanted to be in life, or where, from her point of view, she would have belonged to according to Providence. And indeed, a thread of Providence runs through her life narrative. At the very beginning of her autobiography, she states:

> I am speaking especially of people who, having to support their own glory, honour, and qualities, need special assistance from heaven and all the help of their virtue, so as not to stumble in the dangerous course of this corrupt world. This can only be achieved by a continual endeavour to make God favourable to oneself by his assistance and by conduct free from all reproach.[70]

In this sense, she saw herself as suited to "great and exalted things."[71] And so, according to the diary, her second marriage was arranged by "God, who from the beginning had destined us for each other and permitted that by a secret destiny of Providence, we should first conceive affection for each other."[72] She was successfully persuaded to serve the French crown thanks to

66 For details and quotes: Würgler, "Frau in Bern."

67 A term coined by the literary Serge Doubrovsky in 1977; cf. Groneman, "Auto-Fiction," 241; Wagner-Egelhaaf, "Introduction," 1–7.

68 Huber, "Blick," 421–423.

69 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1–9, 256.

70 "Je parle spécialement des personnes qui, devant soutenir elles-mêmes leur gloire, leur honneur et leurs qualités, ont besoin d'une assistance toute particulière du ciel et de tout le secours de leur vertu, pour ne pas broncher dans la carrière dangereuse de ce monde corrompu. C'est ce qu'on ne peut acquérir que par une application continuelle à se rendre Dieu favorable par son assistance et par une conduite exempte de tout reproche." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 73.

71 "des choses grandes et relevées." Ibid., 77; Cf. Bentley, "Liminal Self-Fashioning."

72 "Dieu qui de tout temps nous avait destiné l'un pour l'autre permit que par un secret destin de la Providence, nous conçumes d'abord de l'affection l'un pour l'autre." Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 89.

God's assistance,[73] and about the beginning of the interrogations and torture in Bern she records: "I was in poor health, but however unfortunate my condition, I never sent [my judges] away, relying on the help and assistance of God, who indeed supported me miraculously."[74]

Katharina von Wattenwyl's narrative strategy includes not only the integration of congenial foreign elements, but also the method of portraying herself in statements by others. How contemporaries reacted to her account is shown by the example of her Catholic relatives in Franche-Comté. They allegedly commented on her report about the torture with the remark, "I would deserve to be canonized for my extreme steadfastness in resisting the implacable enemies of France, even to the point of wanting to suffer death rather than expose any of her supporters; that posterity would eternally praise my unexampled courage."[75] Her life report gets close to a saint's vita, which retrospectively stages the extraordinary, outstanding, and miraculous elements teleologically with a view to canonization. In the same way, she reports having been called an "Amazon" by the gentlemen assisting her impressive ride on the untamed horse. She affirmatively adopts this label as a quotation to achieve more credibility with her readers.

5. Conclusion

At the very end of her self-narrative, after reaffirming her unconditional devotion to the French crown, she lists the fates of her judges in the espionage trial. All of them had suffered badly: some had become melancholic, mute, or demented; the others had already died, whether of kidney colic or *miserere* (*copremesis*, fecal vomiting), whether drowned in a river or beaten to death on a country road. Katharina von Wattenwyl sees in these unhappy biographies "a visible judgement of God."[76]

73 "avec l'assistance de mon Dieu" and "son divin secours et celui de mes parents et amis." Ibid., 93.

74 "j'avais peu de santé; mais quelque fâcheux que fut mon état, ne les renvoyais jamais [mes juges], me reposant sur le secours et l'assistance de Dieu, qui en effet me soutint miraculeusement." Ibid., 100. For further examples, see ibid., 122.

75 "je mériterais d'être canonisé par mon extrême fermeté à résister aux implacables ennemis de la France jusqu'à vouloir subir la mort plutôt que d'exposer aucun de ses partisans; que la postérité prônerait éternellement mon courage sans exemple." Ibid., 119.

76 "un visible jugement de Dieu." Ibid., 129.

In this final passage, another writing motif appears: indirect revenge against her tormentors. She had—apparently—kept to one condition of the pardon all her life, namely, not to speak out publicly about the trial. Now, with her self-testimony, she made up for this for herself, so to speak. In this way, she did not just achieve the perpetuation of the French pension for her descendants; her narrative also provided her with the opportunity to raise her long-silenced voice and tell history as "her-story," with the opportunity of active "self-fashioning [...] between literature and social life" getting quite close to the "*imitatio Christi.*"[77] At the same time, conceiving her life narrative as a petition was an element of sociopolitical practice for her identity construction.[78]

In her ego document, she seems to enrich what she has experienced with what she has heard and read. Her life story resembles set pieces from adventure novels, sensational celebrity biographies, and newspaper reports. By appropriating elements of foreign characters and biographies, she achieves the desired "self-fashioning" that bears witness to her confessional steadfastness, her loyalty to France, and her social, political, and diplomatic ambitions despite her "false" sex. Her text, oscillating between autobiography and autofiction, is her response to the *damnatio memoriae* imposed by the Bernese court.

For the Bernese authorities had already destroyed her personal documents at two opportunities: first, in the 1660s, the love letters and bills she had exchanged with the Catholic officer from Fribourg were seized.[79] Then in 1690 on her arrest in Bern, all her papers were confiscated. In addition, the protocols of the interrogations conducted with her are missing from the archives (but probably only since the nineteenth century). And even in the Bernese archive files that still exist, Katharina von Wattenwyl is never referred to by her full first and last name, but only as a "Weibs-person" (female person) and a "person" or also as "Mrs. Perregaux" or "Pergottin," i.e., the Germanized, grammatically female form of "Perregaux." Significantly, the death sentence speaks of her as "Samuel Perregaux from Valendis wife." The male protagonist, Michel-Jean Amelot, is also not mentioned in the Bernese records by his name, but only as the "Ambassador." In this way, the Republic of Bern conceals the name of one of its most important families and that of the representative of a powerful neighbor.[80] Katharina counters all this with an autofictional

77 Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 2–3.

78 Gabriele Jancke quoted by Huber, "Blick," 426.

79 Von Wattenwyl, "Mémoire," 81.

80 For quotes and context, cf. Würgler, "Frau in Bern."

first-person document to protect herself and her life from oblivion and at the same time to make known her interpretation of the high-treason trial. Katharina von Wattenwyl dictated her *diary* against the officially imposed *damnatio memoriae*.[81] She might have called her text *mémoires* (in the plural form), that is, according to the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* from 1694, "account of particular facts or events for historical purposes. *Memoirs of Queen Marguerite*"[82] in order to underline her pretended role in public life and to inscribe her individual lifetime into the social time of history.[83]

The divine punishment for her judges, as she sees it, reinforces the features of her biography, or at least her self-narrative, which tend towards the miraculous and the sacred. Bodily experiences remain central in her life, especially the extreme physical strain of torture and her heroic behavior in this situation. Thus, in the perspective of her Catholic relatives, she gets caught up in the semblance of holiness; in her own Protestant worldview, she constructs herself as a female hero chosen by Providence, as a "courageous woman capable of some bold undertaking," or in short, as an Amazon. The physical experience of violence left its mark on her body and defined the way she could document her narrative: as she was no longer able to write, she had to dictate her memories and thus to speak out loud the traumatic moments of which her painful corporeality reminded her again and again.

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81 Considering the success of the last novel about Katherina von Wattenwyl (Bigler, *Catherine von Wattenwyl.* Four editions 2004–2018, translation in French 2013), she might be much more widely known today than her judges and torturers.

82 "Relations de faits, ou d'evenements particuliers pour servir à l'Histoire. *Memoires de la Reine Marguerite*." *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1st ed. (1694), s.v. "Memoire," accessed August 9, 2023, https://artfl.atilf.fr/cgibin/dico1look.pl?strippedhw=memoire&dicoid=ACAD1694&headword=&dicoid=ACAD1694.

83 Cf. the reflections about time by Depkat, "History," 72–73. On the meanings of "memoires": Lahusen, "Memoirs," 626–627.

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IV.

Corporeality in Literature and Theatre

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8. "Childish folly": Narrating Sexual Acts Among Children in Nicolas Chorier's *Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* (1659/60)

Sarah Toulalan

Abstract: This chapter examines a highly problematic narrative in Nicolas Chorier's seventeenth-century pornographic book *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* (1659/60) as it describes sex among children as sexual "play" or "childish folly." It argues that by constructing the narrative in this way Chorier distanced it from the context of sexual abuse and rape, which were regarded with disgust and treated harshly in early modern European societies. Nevertheless, the narrative included several aspects that transgress both contemporary morals and the boundaries of legitimate sexual behavior, and through which the author demonstrates awareness of contemporary medical understandings about the nature of children's bodies and their sexual development, and about the bodily evidence required to prove sexual assault and rape in court.

Keywords: childhood; sexual development; sexual abuse; rape; England

This chapter addresses a very difficult and highly contentious subject: the description of sexual acts involving children in a work of pornography from the seventeenth century. It is important to respect the sensitivity of such a discussion, particularly in the light of ongoing concerns about child sexual abuse and pedophilia today—and which are made especially apparent in current news reporting of how the Church of England has dealt with abuse cases.[1] In considering representations of children in early pornography, we

1 See, for example, Jamie Grierson, "Justin Welby Urged to Resign in Solidarity with C of E Abuse victims," *The Guardian*, November 12, 2024; Harriet Sherwood, "Justin Welby's

Huber, Vitus, ed. *Bodies and Narrativity Across the Early Modern World*.
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must be mindful of the dangers of reproducing material that is pornographic and, in the case of this subject matter, also offensive and disturbing, or, potentially, enabling the opposite response; explicit examples from the text consequently have been either summarized or kept to the minimum necessary for the discussion. We must also comprehend the contemporary contexts that shaped such representations, particularly to do with the age of consent and understandings about the nature and timing of sexual development. Keeping these considerations in mind, investigation of such past representations is essential if we are to understand mentalities regarding sexual abuse in the past, as well as how past societies thought about sexual development and the regulation of sexual behaviors.

Early modern written pornography as a genre is one where the connection between bodies and narrative is perhaps most obviously entwined. It presents scenarios in which people engage in sexual behavior, and describes bodies, body parts, and what they do, as they participate in—or watch others participating in—sexual acts. Whatever the author's specific intention might be in writing about bodies and sex—whether explicitly stated by the author or implied through the shaping of the narrative and the nature of the language deployed—the genre of pornography nevertheless raises the expectation that the reader has the possibility of experiencing sexual pleasure or arousal as a consequence of reading (or having read to them) what is on the page.[2] The apparent simplicity of this intention is, however, complicated by the context of how early modern people thought about sex and the sexual parts of the body, and the contemporary religious, legal, social, and moral landscape that shaped their attitudes towards sexual behavior, and which consequently influenced how sex was represented.

Most representations or discussions of sex that involve children in the early modern world are to be found in legal records or published reports of trials for rape and sexual assault where the victim is a child, or the perpetrator is a boy in his teens. In Britain, there are also newspaper reports of such prosecutions, which are mostly very brief or, if more expansive, usually (but not always) omit sexual details, and some printed pamphlets that might contain more detailed information about what happened. There are also references in medical books, usually in relation to discussions of

Personal Link to Child abuser Adds Fuel to Resignation Calls," *The Guardian*, November 11, 2024.

2 For discussion of pornography/erotica and authorial intention, see: Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, 3–6. On anticipated responses, see Darnton, *Forbidden Best-Sellers*, 222.

sexual developments at puberty and how these prepare the child's body for reproduction and future sexual activity, invariably envisaged as within the context of marriage.[3] The case has been well made, at least for the eighteenth century, that the published reports of trials involving sexual crimes can be read as a variety of pornography, and that medical books could also be regarded as containing obscene descriptions of the sexual parts of the body and the nature and purpose of the act of sex.[4] While accepting such readings, this discussion draws on legal and medical sources not as examples of early pornography, but to contextualize and (attempt to) explain how one late seventeenth-century literary fictional representation of sex between children may have been understood. It thus aims to shed further light on seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century ideas about, and attitudes towards, children and their sexual development and acquisition of sexual knowledge. By drawing on some key aspects of the medical advice about what should be looked for as evidence of rape, and the evidence that *was* presented as proof of rape in court and which was mentioned in more detailed published trial reports (at least in England), it also seeks to show how one author may have crafted their narrative to differentiate it from reports of criminal trials for child rape and sexual assault in a number of significant ways.

It is impossible to know authorial intention, but despite the inclusion in the book of descriptions of other sexual acts also judged unacceptable at this time, it is possible that this narrative was crafted in this way because social attitudes towards—and legal penalties for—child rape and sexual assault meant that representation of such an act was likely to incite disgust in the reader. This is not to say that the acts represented are therefore made acceptable—there are a number of aspects of this representation that transgress both contemporary morals and the boundaries of legitimate sexual behavior (not least because they involve children), and which are consequently problematic, especially because they are presented in the context of a work that is explicitly pornographic in its intention and content. While explicit representations of children in a sexual context (including descriptions of injuries to the sexual parts) in trial reports and medical books could be read also as obscene and as pornographic, as noted above, it can be

3 See my discussion about establishing the contested boundaries of childhood and transition to adulthood in Toulalan, "Unripe Bodies," 133–134.

4 On trial reports as pornography, see Wagner, "Pornographer in the Courtroom"; and Wagner, *Eros Revived*, chapter 4. On medical texts as pornography, see Wagner, *Eros Revived*, chapter 1; and Toulalan, "Pornography," 105–122.

argued that their primary intentions were different: to educate in the case of medical works, and to incite disgust—and hence serve as a deterrent to such abhorrent criminal behavior—in the case of trial reports. Nevertheless, there is evidence that some readers did perceive such representations as obscene and that medical writers, at least, were aware that their works may have been perceived—and read—in such a way.[5]

The fictional narrative discussed here appears in a book by French lawyer and author Nicolas Chorier (1612–1692), which has been described as "the most 'pornographic' text of the seventeenth century."[6] The book was originally written in Latin dialogues and first printed in either Lyon or Grenoble in 1659 or 1660, entitled *Aloisiæ Sigæae Toletanæ Satyra Sotadica de arcanis Amoris, et Veneris. Aloisia Hispanicè scripsit. Latinitate donavit Joannes Meursius*.[7] This title falsely represents the book as a translation by a Dutch scholar of a work by the Spanish Aloisia Sigea of Toledo in Spain (1522–1560), who was known as an accomplished linguist and poet and the author of a dialogue between two women composed in Latin, albeit about court rather than sexual life.[8] Chorier's text circulated initially among an elite, educated readership who could both afford such an expensive book and understand the Latin in which it was written.[9] It was quickly translated into other languages: into French as *L'Académie des Dames* (1680), and referred to in English as "the beastly, bawdy translated book called *The Schoole of Women*" in a play by Edward Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds*, in 1682.[10] It was known to English readers by the 1670s as the earliest extant English copy of part of the book, a manuscript translation of the fourth dialogue entitled "The Duell," is dated 1676, and a bookseller in London was shut down for several hours in January 1677 for selling copies of "*Aloyisiae Zigaeae Amores &c.*"[11] There is a reference to "*Aloysia sigea*" in *The Parliament of Women* (1684) as "a Book so ravishing—I lost my Virginity with only hearing it read."[12] An abbreviated English version was published as *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid, Tullia and Octavia* by around 1684,

5 See, for example, my discussion in "Pornography."

6 Turner, *Libertines*, 6.

7 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 38. Foxon provides a bibliographic history of the book, 38–43.

8 Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 167.

9 Burke, *Art of Conversation*, 34–65.

10 Edward Ravenscroft, *The London Cuckolds: A Comedy*. London: Jos. Hindmarsh, 1682, 2; Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 41.

11 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 9.

12 Anon., *The Parliament of Women: Or, A Compleat History Of the Proceedings and Debates, Of a particular Junto, of Ladies and Gentlewomen, With a design to alter the Government of the World*. London: John Holford, 1684, 30–32.

identified by James Grantham Turner as the source for the extant 1740 version of the same title, which omits much of the original book, including the episode discussed here.[13] In 1688, this English version of the book was also explicitly mentioned in a document relating to the prosecution of Joseph Streater for printing "divers obscene & lascivious books," and was likely included in the prosecution of Benjamin Crayle "for selling several obscene and lascivious books."[14] Another version or adaptation entitled *The School of Love containing severall dialogues between Tullia and Octavia* appeared in 1707, and what seems to be "a straight translation from the French version" in 1745 as *Aretinus Redivivus, or the Ladies Academy*.[15] The version of the book used in the following discussion is a late nineteenth-century English translation of all seven dialogues, entitled *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea*, as a likely accurate English rendition of the original.[16] The book circulated widely throughout Europe, despite prohibitions and censorship, as well as crossing the channel to England and the Atlantic Ocean to North America.[17] This discussion considers how this brief part of the narrative may have been understood in an English cultural context particularly, but also more broadly within European legal and medical contexts.

The book was organized initially into six, later seven, dialogues in which a young woman, Tullia, instructs her younger cousin Ottavia in sexual matters before Ottavia marries and is initiated into the pleasures of the marital bed. Tullia also recounts episodes from her own sexual life as part of this instruction. The scene discussed here is part of the fifth dialogue, entitled "Pleasures," in which Tullia recollects her first experience of sexual intercourse aged about ten with a boy, Giocondo, aged around 14, together with her older cousin, Sempronia (Ottavia's mother), who was "going on her twelfth year," and Vittoria, nine.[18] This part of the book has received very little attention in scholarship on early modern pornography and erotica, including my own book on seventeenth-century pornography and bodies,

13 Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 337; Nicolas Chorier, *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid*. London: 1740, British Library, P.C.16.h.1.

14 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 11.

15 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 42; Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 337–343.

16 See Turner's discussion of versions of the text, their accuracy and provenance in *Schooling Sex*, xxiv–xxv. Turner identifies this 1890 English translation as "after Bonneau's French" translation, *Les Dialogues de Luisa Sigea*. Paris, 1882, which he describes as "translated accurately into French." My interpretations may be affected by the accuracy of the translation.

17 For publishing history, see Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, chapter 3.

18 Nicolas Chorier, *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* (*Aloisiae Sigeae Satyra Sotadica de arcanis Amoris et Veneris*) *Literally Translated from the Latin of Nicolas Chorier*. Paris: Isidore Liseux, 1890, Fifth Dialogue, 43.

possibly owing to the difficulties of the subject matter.[19] David Foxon seems to allude to it when listing as present in this book what he identifies as "all the themes of later pornography," including "Lesbian love, sodomy, seduction of the young and innocent, multiple copulation, flagellation and more subtle forms of sadism."[20] Peter Wagner refers to the book as "the most advanced piece of pornographic fiction written in the seventeenth century," but mentions only "confessions about sexual experiences, that include flagellation, homosexuality, orgies, and sadism."[21] Turner mentions it in passing in *Schooling Sex* in the following summary and a later paragraph: "In anecdote after anecdote, the formidable mother is revealed as a past mistress of perversity. Living up to the bad reputation of the historical Sempronia, she features as the original seducer of Tullia, a connoisseur of ephebes and 9-year-old girls, dissolving in hot embraces with her own daughter."[22] This scene has thus not been paid any particular attention and has been referred to just as yet another scene of sexual deviance and libertinage that is characteristic of both this particular book and the genre of pornography more generally.

Other scholars have argued that an element of transgression is an essential component of pornography. Wagner has defined eighteenth-century pornography as "the written or visual presentation in a realistic form of any genital or sexual behavior with a deliberate violation of existing and widely accepted moral and social taboos."[23] In her discussion of French erotic fiction between 1750 and 1840, Dorelies Kraakman observed that "transgression can only exist with respect to established norms and values."[24] In representing sex between children in *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* there are clearly several elements of transgression with respect to the "norms and values" of late seventeenth-century European society. However, the extent of this scene's transgression of European legal, medical, and moral discourses about children and sex is—as I will show—limited by constructing it as a story of sexual play and exploration between children, rather than as one of illegal—criminal and abhorrent—sex between adults and children. This raises the question of why the author might seek to make this narrative less transgressive, especially as he has not avoided other highly transgressive (and felonious) acts in the book, such as sodomy, which also carried the death

19 Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*.
20 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 48.
21 Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 227–229, 229.
22 Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 181.
23 Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 7.
24 Kraakman, "Reading Pornography Anew," 520–521.

penalty in most European societies at this time. The discussion below seeks to suggest some possible answers to this question through exploring the representations of children's bodies and the construction of the narrative.

This scene seems to be unique in early modern fictional printed works of pornography. It was more usual to represent young men and women who had reached or were older than the ages of sexual consent to marriage and of pubertal development. In my analysis of printed pornographic publications in seventeenth-century England I found that there was no "discussion or representation of sexual acts between adults and children," where children were understood as those who were not yet sexually developed.[25] The exception are trial reports for sexual crimes and the parts of medical books that dealt with the sexual and reproductive body, if these are read as pornography.[26] Those who were of an age at which they might be married, and hence embark on sexual and reproductive life, could be represented as eager to acquire, or curious about, sexual knowledge and experience, even if only just at the age of consent. They might be shown, therefore, as receptive to sexual conversation and physical advances, but also as needing persuasion or coercion to overcome modesty, initial unwillingness, or trepidation, whether on the wedding night or as extra-marital sexual activity. Force and trickery to overcome these obstacles, as well as the physical barrier of an intact hymen indicating virginity, were characteristic of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pornographic and erotic texts, where submission to male sexual dominance was depicted as leading to female sexual pleasure.[27] In works about prostitution, a girl's trajectory into the sex trade might be described as beginning in the early teens, such as in *The Character of a Town Misse* (1675), where "She was scarce thirteen when her Masters Plow Man and the Squire their Land lord [...] were Joint Tenants to her Coppy-Hold."[28] It was, however, unusual to represent sex with girls who were so young as to be unlikely to have developed sexually, even if early modern medical theory, based on the classical model of the four humors, allowed that girls as young as eight in hotter climates might develop sooner.[29] The following

25 Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, 36, and ch. 2.

26 See Wagner, "Pornographer in the Courtroom"; and Wagner, *Eros Revived*, ch. 1; Toulalan, "Pornography."

27 Mourão, "Female Desire," 589; Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 167, 192–197.

28 Anon., *The Character of a Town Misse*. London: W.L., 1675, 4.

29 Ideas about humoral constitution and bodily development continued into the late eighteenth century. See John Aitken, *Principles of Midwifery, or Puerperal Medicine*, 3rd ed. London: J. Murray, 1786, 41–42; Jean-Louis Baudelocque, *A System of Midwifery*, 3 vols., trans. John Heath. London: 1790 [1775], 204.

discussion investigates how far this scene conflicted with contemporary ideas about children and sex, and their sexual development, adding yet another layer of transgression to a book that scholars have consistently identified as libertine and transgressive.

The representation of sexual acts involving children, especially prepubescent girls, would have been understood in relation to the relevant legal contexts: the age of consent to marriage and rape law. Following Roman and Canon Law, in Europe the legal age for marriage, and hence consent to sex, was 12 for girls and 14 for boys. These ages corresponded with those at which sexual development was understood as likely to begin, although in practice it could be much later, with boys thought not to reach full reproductive potential and some girls' menarche delayed until the late teens or early twenties.[30] In some countries, sexual intercourse with a girl below the age of consent was treated as rape, whether or not she consented.[31] The author of *The Dialogues of Luisa Sigea* was a French lawyer, so probably familiar with rape law in his own country through legal education, if not subsequently through personal legal practice, and consequently aware of the kinds of physical evidence required to prove rape as well as of the severity with which the law treated it.[32] French jurisprudence constructed the rape of a virgin as more serious because virginity was "a precondition for marriage" and "To publicly breach it was to compromise honor, rank, even life."[33] The crime was regarded as even more heinous if the child was prepubescent. The setting for the events narrated in the book, though, was not France but Rome, so distanced geographically and concerning non-French "others" who might be represented as different. Nevertheless, the legal attitude to rape and virginity was similar: historians of rape have shown that "the *only* form of rape routinely sued in Rome's main criminal court was *defloratio* (the rape of virgins)," which included child rapes.[34] In English law, since 1576, sex with a girl aged below ten, with or without her consent, was prosecuted as the felony of rape and punished by execution if a conviction was secured. Criminal codes characterized rape as a heinous crime, usually incurring the death penalty, and sometimes forms of judicial torture, such as in France being broken on the wheel.[35] As Garthine Walker has concluded, "The rape of

30 Toulalan, "Unripe Bodies," 136–139.
31 Walker, "Sexual Violence and Rape," 431–434.
32 Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens*, 33.
33 Vigarello, *Rape*, 14; Burgess-Jackson, "Rape Law," 16–18.
34 Walker, "Sexual Violence and Rape," 432.
35 Brundage, *Law*, 531; Vigarello, *Rape*, 13.

children was everywhere viewed as especially shocking."[36] A scene depicting sex involving children just at and below the age of consent was therefore likely to be regarded as shocking and transgressive.

Reception of this book in England in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have been colored by these ideas and attitudes as well as by the published accounts of trials at the Old Bailey in London for rape and sexual assault involving children. Reports of trial proceedings were published following each of the eight sessions held every year and survive from 1674, although they are incomplete and much abbreviated until the eighteenth century.[37] Comments recorded in these published reports indicate considerable revulsion towards those who were prosecuted. In 1678 William Rowlandson's rape of a nine-year-old girl was described as "a filthy bruitish offence" and the report of Stephen Arrowsmith's trial for the rape of Elizabeth Hopkins, aged eight, noted that "the Court with great detestation and abhorrence of so Horrid and Vile an Offence, told him the Matter was so plain against him, that he must have as great impudence to deny it, as he had wickedness to Commit it."[38] English courts clearly did not take these offenses lightly and their determination to punish offenders can be seen when failure to convict on a charge of rape due to insufficient evidence was followed by reindictment on the lesser charge of assault to secure a conviction.[39] There is also some indication that a jury might find it difficult to accept that a girl only just over the age of ten could be capable of giving her consent to sex, despite what the law said.[40]

This context raises the question of authorial intention: did Chorier intend the scene to be deliberately transgressive by violating contemporary laws and morals and because "all perversions are welcome if they gratify the senses," however abhorrent they may be considered by readers?[41] Authorial

36 Walker, "Sexual Violence and Rape," 431.

37 A succinct summary of the publishing history of the *Old Bailey Proceedings* (henceforth *OBP*) can be found online: "Publishing History of the Proceedings," The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, accessed January 21, 2024, http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Publishinghistory.jsp#a1678-1729. See also Beattie, *Policing and Punishment*, 2–4.

38 Tim Hitchcock et al., *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, 1674–1913 (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 9.0, Autumn 2023), July 1678, trial of young fellow (t16780703–3) and Anon., *A Narrative of the Proceedings at the Session for London and Middlesex, Holden at the Old Bailey, on the Third and Fourth Days of July, 1678* (London: D.M., 1678), 1. Reported only as "a young fellow," Rowlandson is named in the indictment, LMA CLA-0267; *OBP*, December 1678, trial of Stephen Arrowsmith (t16781211e–2).

39 See my discussion in Toulalan, "Constructing the Child Rapist," 38–40. See *OBP*, January 1675, trial of Edward Coker (t16750115–3) and August 1694, trial of Thomas Mercer (t16940830–9).

40 See *OBP*, April 1747, trial of John Hunter (t17470429–28); Toulalan, "Constructing the Child Rapist," 31.

41 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 48.

intention is unknown; so what does the scene itself tell us about how sex among children was conceptualized at this time and whether it seems to be deliberately transgressive? The children in this story are prepubescent, or on the cusp of puberty, having some, but not all, of the physical developments that were associated with it at this time (the "traces" of breast development, for example), and are unmarried and virginal.[42] The sex depicted thus violates contemporary law and morals in several ways: it is extra-marital, and it involves children below the age of consent, prepubescent girls, and virgins. Despite these transgressive elements, however, the scene—as I argue—is nevertheless constructed so that what it describes could be distanced from contemporary ideas about and responses to child sexual assault and rape, particularly because it is an episode of sex between children and not between children and adults. Although this was a period before the categorization of sexual perversions, including pedophilia, there was nevertheless a strong sense that sex with a child was abuse of a child's body because it caused physical harm through forced penetration and potential infection with venereal disease.[43] The scene in this book, however, is constructed as childish sexual play and experimentation that does not damage the child's body, and thus distances and differentiates it both from the context of prosecutable rape or sexual assault and from the descriptions of the impact of sexual violence on children's bodies found in the reports of trials that were accessible to a wider range of readers.

The construction of the scene as childish sexual exploration and imitation of adult behavior as preparation for marriage is thus a significant way of differentiating it from a criminal narrative of child rape. As Kraakman has observed of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century erotic fiction, "Their narrative is the sexual initiation of a girl at the onset of puberty."[44] The necessity for "erotic learning" underpins the narratives in this book as well as other similar works such as *L'Escole des Filles* (1655), in which girls are initiated into the pleasures of sex by an older girl or woman to prepare them for marriage.[45] Chorier's narrative of sex between children conforms to this trope with several references to the girls' future marriages ("We have done [...] what the husbands, into whose arms you will one day go, will do").[46] Tullia concludes her story by observing that "Giocondo had already partly

42 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 49.
43 Toulalan, "Constructing the Child Rapist," 41–45.
44 Kraakman, "Reading Pornography Anew," 519.
45 Turner, *Schooling Sex*, 32.
46 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 48.

opened in us a path of pleasure for our husbands."[47] The qualification, "partly," implies that this sexual experience was incomplete and did not amount to the sex that they would experience once married.

From the beginning of Tullia's description of events, she emphasizes that, although sexual, these were the acts of children playing. At first the sexual play was between the girls only, instigated by the eldest, Sempronia, who is physically more developed than her playmates (her breasts have grown, while theirs bear only the "traces") and has begun to be interested in sex and have sexual feelings (while the other girls "felt no amorous sensation").[48] That these are childish games is indicated by the inclusion of make-believe and role-playing, as she pretends to be a boy and makes her playmates, Vittoria, Lucrezia, and Tullia, also pretend to be boys:

> She pretended to Vittoria, with whom she was mad in love at so tender an age, that she and I were boys; she used to address Lucrezia and Vittoria, as a lover his mistress, using amorous expressions and exciting them unto love. And complaining of being on fire, she used to beg us to allay the flames with kisses and hugs.[49]

These feelings are at first limited in their expression, involving only "kisses and hugs." Sempronia clearly desires to experience more, however, and also has some idea about the nature of sexual intercourse, as she not only looks at their naked bodies and touches them under their petticoats as part of this sexual play, but also "she would next jump upon us, riding us as a man would do."[50] The author signals that this was only the first stage of their initiation into sexual knowledge and awareness through play, as Tullia instructs Ottavia to "listen to what excesses that childish folly went."[51] Chorier thus constructs what they do as "childish" games, even if they went beyond acceptable limits. Describing what they then did as "childish folly" also reinforces the idea that they are children who have developed neither the adult rational faculty of self-control, nor the good sense to know when their play goes too far.

Tullia and Vittoria visit Sempronia one afternoon and find her in the company of "a charming and merry Cupid, a lad of about fourteen" named

47 Ibid., 54.

48 Ibid., 44, 49. Eighteenth-century erotica, too, could represent girls as young as 11 developing sexual feelings: see Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 187.

49 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 43.

50 Ibid., 44.

51 Ibid.

Giocondo. The reference to Cupid suggests a very young boy, as he was represented in classical sculpture as a winged youth, or, increasingly in the Renaissance and into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as a small chubby child.[52] His name similarly suggests the light-hearted, exuberant, and carefree nature of childhood before adult duties and responsibilities demand a more sober and careful approach to life. The imprecision about his age implies that he may not yet be 14; this is a significant detail with respect to the age of consent and boys' sexual development. Fourteen was the age of consent for boys to marriage and hence to sexual relations.[53] Medical writers usually stated that boys' sexual development began around 14 or 15, but would not be completed until the late teens, or even older.[54] *The Problems of Aristotle*, first printed in English at the end of the sixteenth century and reprinted many times into the late eighteenth century, said that from the age of 14, boys' voices would deepen, the pubic hair, beard, and other body hair would grow, their shoulders would broaden, the testicles, "in which the seed may increase and abide," would become larger, as would the "privie member, to let out the seede with ease."[55] Although medical texts throughout these three centuries noted that boys might begin to produce seed at 14, it might not be "Prolifick or Fruitful" or capable of reproduction until the age of 18, or even 20. Dutch physician Isbrand de Diemerbroeck wrote in his *Anatomy of Human Bodies*, translated into English in 1689, that "because the Body attains that strength and firmness between the fourteenth and twentieth year, that then the Seed begins to be generated, and acquires every day so much the greater perfection, by how much the Body grows stronger, and needs less growth."[56] The "perfection" of the seed, slowly achieved as a youth developed during these years, meant not only that eventually he was able to engage

52 Morford, Lenardon, and Sham, "Representations in Art."

53 Anon., *The Infants Lawyer: Or, The Law* (*Both Ancient and Modern*) *Relating to Infants*. London: R. and E. Atkyns, Esquires, for Robert Battersby, 1697, 30.

54 See Levinus Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature: In Four Books. Learnedly and Moderately treating of Generation, and the Parts thereof …* London: Jo Streeter, 1658 [Latin original, Antwerp 1559], 309. John Marten repeated this much earlier sixteenth-century conceptualization of male sexual development in the early eighteenth century in *Gonosologium Novum: Or, A New System Of all the Secret Infirmities and Diseases, Natural, Accidental, and Venereal in Men and Women*. London: 1709.

55 Anon., *The Problemes of Aristotle, with other Philosophers and Phisitions*. Edenborough: Robert Waldgrave, 1595, ff. M8v–Nr. Aristotle's Problems were composed in manuscript in the thirteenth or fourteenth century and circulated widely in print into the late eighteenth century: see Blair, "Authorship," esp. 190–191, 212–225.

56 Isbrand de Diemerbroeck, *The Anatomy of Human Bodies, Comprehending the most Modern Discoveries and Curiosities in that Art*, trans. William Salmon. London: Edward Brewster, 1689 [1672], 206. See also Marten, *Gonosologium*, 94.

in sexual intercourse, but that such intercourse would be procreative: from this time "Man may be capable of caressing a Woman so as to get Children; he at that time being fired with the heat of Love's Passion."[57] Significantly, Giocondo is not described as having pubic hair, implying therefore that he is only at the very beginning of his sexual development and that, although able to emit seed, it is not yet "perfected" and capable of generation. The text thus intimates that although in his fourteenth year, he is possibly not yet 14, nor yet fully mature in mind or body.

There were various significant age milestones in law that governed when a child gained certain rights and became liable for prosecution and punishment if committing a criminal act. At 18 a young man could make a will for "Goods and Chattels," but not to bequeath lands until 21, although he could act as an executor of a will at 17.[58] Fourteen, as well as being the age of consent to matrimony and hence to sex for a boy, was also the "Age of Discretion," before which a child was considered to need the law's care and protection:

> Our Common Law looks upon Infancy as an Age of Impotence, Weakness and Disability, not capable of managing their Concerns with Discretion, and for their better profit and advantage; and therefore is very favourable to them in preserving their Rights and Estates, inabling them in their Suits, assisting them in their Pleadings, [...] and in protecting their Persons.[59]

When he reached 14 a boy did not have full rights in law, but could be held accountable for criminal acts: "At Fourteen years in our Law is accounted the Age of Discretion, and in several cases at that age an Infant shall be priviledged, punished or chargable." With respect to being held accountable for sexual crimes, in English law a boy was "not guilty of Felony till the Age of Discretion."[60] This meant that a boy under the age of 14 was legally considered neither able to consent to sexual relations (and hence could not be prosecuted as a co-defendant in a trial for sodomy), nor to be found guilty of the felony of rape.[61]

57 Marten, *Gonosologium*, 91.

58 Anon., *Infants Lawyer*, 30, 33; William Vaughan, *Approved Directions for Health, both Naturall and Artificiall*, 4th edn. London: T.S. for Roger Jackson, 1612, 112–113; Giovanopoulos, "Legal Status of Children," 46–47; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, 17.

59 Anon., *Infants Lawyer*, 12–13, 15.

60 Ibid., 30.

61 There is one trial of a boy aged 12 at the Old Bailey but he is acquitted. *OBP*, September 1774, trial of EDWARD CROTHER (t17740907–63).

The age of the boy introduced into the girls' sexual play is unclear; consequently, his legal status is also unclear with respect to committing a felony. He is also, like Sempronia, developing sexually but not yet fully grown, and retains some of the characteristics of childhood such as a desire and willingness to play. This continuing connection to childhood is emphasized as Sempronia "allowed the little boy to join in our childish fun, and [...] much running, jumping and all kind of amusement."[62] He is also sexually inexperienced, as he tells them that he has "never tried it" because "I am too young."[63] Similarly, his sexual knowledge is limited as he describes his climax as "I am making my water," suggesting that he does not yet understand the difference between seminal emission and urination, as is also shown in trials for rape at the Old Bailey where girls describe male ejaculation in the same way.[64] Some ambiguity as to his precise age and descriptions of him as a not yet fully grown, inexperienced, "little boy" or "cupid" thus allow the author to present Giocondo as a young boy-child with some sexual knowledge and capability but who, potentially, would not be held responsible in criminal law for his sexual behavior.

Giocondo's ambiguous status is also further emphasized after the description of his defloration of the girls when Tullia explicitly tells us that he was not yet fully sexually developed at the time these acts took place. His virility in completing at least three acts of sexual intercourse within a short space of time is tempered by the assurance that he did not yet have the penis of a fully grown youth or man as, "at his age," it was "no longer than my forefinger, and no thicker than my thumb."[65] Tullia immediately confirms that this is much smaller than a fully grown man's penis, or even that of a youth, as she instructs that it is usual for an erect penis to be much bigger: "Doctors pretend that those whose mentules surpass seven or eight inches, in a state of erection, exceed the ordinary bounds of nature: it is the usual measure, whenever there is question of length."[66] Evidence from the trial of a 15-year-old boy, Richard Freelove, held at the Old Bailey in July 1774 for the rape of Ann Radford, aged two or three, the daughter of his master, indicates that a boy a year or two older than Giocondo might still be not fully sexually developed, although nevertheless capable of

62 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 44–45.
63 Ibid., 46.
64 Ibid., 47; Toulalan, "They 'Know as Much at Thirteen,'" 212–213.
65 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 54.
66 Ibid.

penetration.[67] Surgeon James Samuel Oldham, giving evidence at the trial, was asked whether he thought that "a boy of his age could enter such a child as that." He replied, "No doubt of it." Freelove was acquitted of the charge of rape, however, because Oldham also testified that Freelove's "finger would have produced all that I observed: the prisoner is very small in his private parts; his finger is larger than his parts."[68] Although Giocondo is described as achieving ejaculation at least three times, the description of his penis as no bigger than a finger, together with no mention of bodily hair, places him as not fully developed. Giocondo is thus distanced from adulthood by engaging in play and by having a child's rather than a man's body, maintaining the construction of both his and the girls' behavior as childish play, albeit sexual in nature.

The acts of sex are also distanced from rape or sexual assault by indicating that the girls were willing, even if in law consent was irrelevant if under the age of consent. Sempronia is described as laying "herself down of her own free will upon one of the cushions" and Tullia as displaying some "sham resistance."[69] Even the youngest girl, Vittoria, aged nine, who is shown as submitting under coercion, as "Sempronia dragged her to him against her will," nevertheless is described as indicating that she is willing to be initiated into the secrets of the marital bed.[70] When Giocondo replies to Sempronia's question about whether he knows what to do with his "apparatus," he says that, although he has never tried it, he nevertheless knows "its use." Vittoria prompts him, "Let us hear it then."[71] She thus signals her willingness to be instructed in a lesson that will be delivered both verbally and through demonstration, as Giocondo tells her, "I shall teach all of you, but one by one," and more specifically, that he will "soon show you the use of your own spot and this member."[72] Each of the girls is thus shown as consenting in different ways, and any reluctance or unwillingness as feigned or easily overcome. His assertion that he will "show" the girls "the use" of the sexual parts also places the narration within the contemporary trope of the genre as (sexually) educational.

Chorier further distances his representation of sex with prepubescent girls from the reality of child rape and how it was understood at this time

67 The indictment states she is two years old, but her father says she is "About three years." *OBP*, July 1774, trial of Richard Freelove (t17740706–57).

68 *OBP*, July 1774, trial of Richard Freelove (t17740706–57).

69 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 46.

70 Ibid., 49.

71 Ibid., 46.

72 Ibid.

through the description of the girls' sexual parts and the impact of sex on their bodies. Medical writing about girls' sexual development asserted that, before the physical changes of puberty, their bodies were unready for sex, nor would they experience sexual feelings or desire. These developments brought the ability to reproduce and, in order to do so, "ripened" the body to make it ready for sexual intercourse.[73] Dutch physician Levinus Lemnius in the late sixteenth century summed up these changes, and what they meant, in a text subsequently drawn upon by many authors into the eighteenth century:

> when their body grows hairy about the secrets, and their terms flow at the time appointed, as it useth to be in the 14 or 15 years of their age, their seed increaseth, in some sooner, in some later, according to their habits and constitutions, and the blood which is no longer taken to augment their bodies, abounding, makes their minds fasten upon venereous imaginations.[74]

This description alludes to the idea that both men and women contributed "seed" for conception, although female seed was considered "a more imperfect seed" than men's, being colder, thinner, and more watery owing to their colder constitutions in the humoral model.[75] The growth of the pubic hair and menstrual flow were signs that a girl might now be producing seed for conception while the onset of menstruation also prepared her body for penetrative sexual intercourse: "by reason of their courses that have often flowed, the moisture is more and the pain less, by reason of the wetness and looseness of the Hymen."[76] Before this, girls were unready for sex, as the vagina was "smoother and narrower" and "straiter, that it will scarce admit a finger to go in."[77] Consequently, sex with a prepubescent girl would be difficult, and penetration would require force, causing pain and visible injury to the girl's body.

Evidence from prosecutions for the rape of young girls shows that these ideas were expressed in practice in the nature of the evidence provided by medical practitioners at trial. Rape could be proved through the signs

73 See my discussion in Toulalan, "'Unripe Bodies.'"

74 Lemnius, *Secret Miracles of Nature*, 308.

75 Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man*. London: William Jaggard, 1615, 162.

76 Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book: Or The Whole Art of Midwifry Discover'd*. London: Simon Miller, 1671, 50.

77 Ibid., 54.

of injury to the child's body. At the trial of Samuel Eales for the rape of nine-year-old Martha Warner in 1694, evidence was presented that her "Secret Parts were much lacerated and torn, which was done by Force, and no other way."[78] Penetration would require force and would not only result in visible injury to the genital area but would also leave lasting signs on the body. As a child's vagina was "straiter," more narrow, than that of a fully developed female body, it would be altered by penetration in a way understood as unnatural for a child's body: the surgeon who gave medical evidence at the trial of William Picket in 1718 testified that he "found the Passage had been widened, and did believe her Body had been entred."[79] This alteration to a girl's sexual parts could be detected on examination, not only immediately following the rape, but also afterwards, as a permanent change to the girl's body; it was therefore a sign of rape that was specifically looked for by midwives and surgeons at this time.[80] Although the trial evidence presented here is from English trials held at the Old Bailey in London, the medical evidence does not differ from that provided in cases of child rape on the continent.[81]

There are three significant ways in which sexual intercourse with this group of young girls is described to differentiate it from what were understood to be the effects of forcible sex on a prepubescent girl's body, even though it is apparent that none of the girls, including the eldest, Sempronia, is fully sexually developed (although she declares that she too, like Giocondo, makes "water" and that he has "pissed," indicating orgasm and emission).[82] None of the girls are described as having yet begun menstruating, nor as having pubic hair: Tullia explicitly states that her sexual parts are "not yet veiled with down."[83] Firstly, as we have seen, Giocondo is described as having very small sexual parts, which might more easily allow penetration without force. Secondly, the sex is represented in the same way as the other narratives of defloration in the book—and in the genres of pornography and erotica more widely—where the pain on first penetration is described

78 *OBP*, July 1694, trial of Samuel Eales (t16940711–37).

79 *OBP*, September 1718, trial of William Picket (t17180910–78).

80 Nicolas Venette, *Conjugal Love Reveal'd*, 7th edn. London: 1720, 20; first published in 1686 as *La Génération de l'homme, ou tableau de l'amour conjugal considéré dans l'état du mariage*: "This is what the Matrons would signify in making their Report to the Magistrate of a Rape." In the original French edition Venette specifies rape of a virgin: "c'est ce que les Matrones veulent dire lors qu'en faisant leur rapport du violement d'une vierge."

81 Radica, "Courts and Sexual Violence."

82 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 47.

83 Ibid., 50.

as the transitory but unavoidable precursor to the greater pleasure to come.[84] Finally, Tullia, who is narrating the story, denies that as small, prepubescent girls, they have small and narrow sexual parts that will be injured by penetrative sex.

Rather than dwelling on the pain of penetration, emphasis is placed on the pleasure it will bring: Giocondo tells them that they will "acknowlege that nothing sweeter exists."[85] Initial exclamations that it hurts are very swiftly followed by cries of pleasure. When Giocondo penetrates Sempronia she cries, "it is hurting me, Giocondo, but it is hurting me agreeably."[86] Afterwards, she exclaims, "delightful!" and "O the marvellous sport!"[87] Tullia and Vittoria are now described as "awaiting similar delights from him."[88] Tullia then concludes it is "the supreme pleasure" with no mention of any initial pain at all.[89] The representation of Vittoria's experience, as the youngest girl, is different, acknowledging both that penetration is unlikely to be easy, as would be expected for a prepubescent child of nine, and also that she does not experience pleasure. Giocondo remarks that "There is less difficulty in a girl of ripe age, nor is the work so stubborn."[90] Nevertheless, even here there is no such "difficulty" as he is able to enter with "so slight an effort into the inner-most regions."[91] Afterwards she is described as "dead to every sense of the achieved pleasure."[92] Although the description of the sexual act mentions that she experiences some pain (but no ensuing pleasure), this is only very briefly noted before moving on to a discussion that places it within the context of the expected pain of defloration that is regarded as a precursor to the pleasure that will follow, and concludes with the assertion that "Pain heightens the relish of pleasure."[93] When Giocondo penetrates her, she cries out, "I am unable to bear it," but nevertheless very soon after this "by a complete coition, she was initiated in the art of Venus."[94] Only Vittoria is described as bleeding afterwards and there follows a short discussion of this blood being clear evidence of the loss of her virginity.[95] The focus here

84 Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 194–196; Toulalan, *Imagining Sex*, ch. 3.
85 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 46.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 47.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 53.
90 Ibid., 48.
91 Ibid., 50.
92 Ibid., 51.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 50.
95 Ibid., 51.

is on the loss of virginity more generally, and the small loss of blood and brief pain it might cause, rather than the specific injury of "laceration" or tearing that would be caused by penetration of a prepubescent child. The repeated references to "pleasure" further function to place her experience within this context, conforming to the way that first sex is represented in this male-authored genre, rather than to the descriptions of the physical trauma of rape as described in reports of such trials. As Karen Harvey observes, women in court sought through language "to differentiate acts of violence from acts of sex," but authors of erotica "presented acts of violence as acts of sex."[96]

Finally, Chorier distances these acts from the reality of child rape by having Tullia deny that, as prepubescent girls, they have small and narrow sexual parts that will be injured by penetrative sex. Contrary to what might be expected for a nine-year-old girl, and despite describing Vittoria as a "little girl," it only takes "so slight an effort" for Giocondo to enter her body, perhaps because he is described as having small sexual parts but also because, in contrast, she is described as not as "strait" as might be expected for a girl that age.[97] Sempronia did not bleed on penetration because, being a little older, she was "somewhat wider."[98] Tullia, although aged ten, does not mention any difficulty or pain on penetration. When Ottavia comments that Giocondo had "found an easy entrance" when he penetrated Tullia, Tullia responds by asking, "Art thou not aware that we, Italians, are nearly all of us very wide during our early years?" Her narrative thus further distances these acts of sex among children from acts of child rape as prosecuted in the courts and when perpetrated by adult men or older youths.

This narrative of sexual activity among children is thus crafted in a number of significant ways to differentiate it from the rape of a child by an adult, and hence a violent, painful, and distressing experience. It is represented as an episode of sexual experimentation and play among children who are not yet fully sexually developed, or with only the very early signs of puberty. It is also, for the most part, constructed as consensual play, with any resistance presented as part of their "childish" games. The author further distances the scene from child rape, and the pain and injury that would be caused by forcible penetration, by describing the boy as sexually undeveloped and representing the girls' sexual parts as different from those of other prepubescent girls, and therefore less susceptible to injury, particularly as

96 Harvey, *Reading Sex*, 193–194.
97 Chorier, *Dialogues*, 51.
98 Ibid.

the boy's penis is not yet fully grown. The author also crafts the narrative within the central trope of this genre of literature as sexual education in preparation for marriage (which at this time could be at the age of 12), and through which the process of girls "at the onset of puberty" acquiring sexual knowledge and experience was eroticized.[99] We might then ask why, if child rape was anathema in early modern societies, the author included a scene involving children at all (albeit not one of children with adults), and it is difficult to avoid the suggestion that the genre invites the inclusion of "all perversions" and deliberate transgression of social "norms and values."[100] While we can only speculate about why Chorier crafted the narrative in such a way as to seem to limit its transgression (and let me be clear that I am *not* arguing that this makes it acceptable; I have speculated here that it was because child rape was anathema and likely to generate disgust), we can see that contemporary understandings about the nature of children's bodies and their sexual development, in addition to familiarity with the nature of the physical evidence that was required to prove a charge of rape, informed and shaped the narrative of this episode in the book. In doing so, it shows that the conceptualization of sexual development that can be discerned in contemporary medical literature was not limited to the milieu of medicine and its role in providing expert evidence for the prosecution of sexual crime, but also filtered into the wider public domain both through elite literature such as this and through published records of criminal trials.

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99 Kraakman, "Reading Pornography Anew," 519.

100 Foxon, *Libertine Literature*, 48; Kraakman, "Reading Pornography Anew," 520–521.

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About the Author

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9. Reading on the Surface: Skin as Methodological Framework for Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*

Nicole Nyffenegger

Abstract: Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* invites a surface reading; a reading that prioritizes the literal, the concrete, the material, the corporeal. Exploring the workings of the dichotomy of surface and depth in the play's text, in literary criticism, and on the stage, I propose that there are several leads for critics to follow in their reading of the play, the main one being that the protagonist counters the Romans' talk of wounds with his own of scars, insisting on his skin as an intact surface. I argue here that there are wider methodological implications in these "skin narratives." Just as we see skin first when we approach a body, a reading on the surface should be our initial point of contact with a text.

Keywords: early modern theatre; surface reading; skin narratives; materiality; wounds

Coriolanus, the protagonist of the eponymous late tragedy by Shakespeare, is a character that is difficult to like and empathize with. Unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, he does not soliloquize extensively and let the audience in on his thoughts and feelings. In his ancient Rome, too, nobody seems to really understand him, because he is just as reluctant to reveal himself to the other characters as the play is to reveal him to the readers.[1] Consequently, both the characters in the play and the reading and watching audiences take recourse to what they *can* see: his body, or more concretely still, his skin.

1 See Holland, "Introduction," 1, 47. All references to the play are to Holland, *Coriolanus*.

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As a war hero, Coriolanus returns home wounded, and the Romans project their hopes and fears onto his wounded skin. They constantly talk about the wounds and hence narratively construct, deconstruct, and appropriate them, a process for which I have proposed the term "skin narratives."[2] While the Romans persistently refer to Coriolanus's battle marks as wounds (even those received in the first of 17 battles that, by conventional logic, would in the meantime have healed), he is the only one ever to refer to them as scars. He does this twice in the play, and these are the only occurrences of the term. In addition, while he occasionally uses the term "wound" himself, he otherwise generally constructs his skin as an intact surface. This is the case, for example, when he refers to his blood-covered face as a mask or a painting, or when he protests that the blood on his skin is not his but that of his enemies. Thus, he counters the wound-narratives, by which the Romans seek to explore a depth that he refuses to let them see, with his own scar-narratives. The social conflicts and the shifting power dynamics of ancient Rome in the play, I have argued, are fought out via these contradictory skin narratives. Here, I further explore the workings of the dichotomy of surface and depth in the play, in literary criticism, and on the stage, to propose ways in which skin can serve as a methodological framework for our readings of *Coriolanus* and possibly for our explorations of bodies in literary texts more generally.

Two of the most recent London productions of the play illustrate this dichotomy of surface and depth, because they each made a different choice in their presentation of the hero's body. The 2012 Donmar production directed by Josie Rourke and starring Tom Hiddleston famously featured a shower scene.[3] After his triumph at Corioles, for which he receives his honorary byname, Coriolanus, he and his general Cominius announce that he will retire to wash and have his wounds tended to (1.9.66–93). In the text, they then exit the stage to make room for, first, the Volscian leader Tullus Aufidius, then, the Roman tribunes, and, finally, Coriolanus's inner circle, who discuss his qualities as an enemy, an aspiring politician, and a war hero respectively. In the Donmar production, however, Hiddleston's

2 Nyffenegger, "Skin Narratives." My concept of the "skin narrative" is based on "tattoo narratives" proposed by Margo DeMello. She claims that the narratives people tell about tattoos shape them: DeMello, *Bodies of Inscription*, 12. I have expanded her claim to say that it is just this shaping that makes a tattoo, and in fact any mark on skin, prone to constant transformation: every new narrative about the same mark will reshape it differently. Skin narrative can be understood as a generic term that, while originally derived from it, now also includes DeMello's tattoo narrative.

3 *Coriolanus*, dir. Josie Rourke, filmed for National Theatre Live in 2012, accessible on www.dramaonlinelibrary.com. See also Blackwell, "Adapting" and Blackwell, *Shakespearean Celebrity*.

Coriolanus was left alone on the stage, where he took off his bloodstained shirt to reveal the gaping wounds that had been modeled onto the actor's shoulders and arm. Coriolanus was then shown writhing in pain under streams of water, accompanied by metallic sounds suggestive of slashing swords. This scene, I have argued, worked across communicative levels in the same way a soliloquy does.[4] In what was clearly staged as a private moment, the audience was let in on the pain and vulnerability of the protagonist that he himself does not reveal to the Romans. While this was certainly effective in creating audience empathy, it may just be what Shakespeare sought to avoid. The Donmar production, in other words, was looking to explore depths hidden beneath the surface. In so doing, it undermined both Coriolanus's defiant scar-narratives, with which he pushes back against the Romans' desire for more insight, and his self-presentation as a surface creature that I explore below.

The 2017 Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Angus Jackson, in contrast, resisted this temptation to seek out depth.[5] While actor Sope Dirisu was drenched in buckets of artificial blood, his Coriolanus never showed signs of pain, either during battle or in single combat or when he was, in a later scene, manhandled onto a podium. It became clear in this way that the blood was always that of others, never his own, as Coriolanus claims during his fight with Aufidius: "Tis not my blood, / Wherein thou seest me masked" (1.8.10–11). Unlike the Donmar production, the RSC production chose not to show the wounds with the help of makeup either. Once this production's Coriolanus had washed off the blood, off-stage, his skin was the unbroken and whole surface that the text's Coriolanus repeatedly claims it is.

I argue that *Coriolanus* invites a reading that focuses on surfaces: a reading that prioritizes the literal over the figural, the concrete over the abstract, the material over the symbolical, along the lines of a "Surface Reading" as proposed by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus:

> we take surface to mean what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts; what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth. A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*.[6]

4 Nyffenegger, "Skin Narratives," 210–211.

5 *Coriolanus*, dir. Angus Jackson. Royal Shakespeare Company. Filmed live in October 2017 (Released by Opus Arte, 2018), DVD, 170 min.

6 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 9, emphasis theirs.

I want to suggest, too, that there are wider methodological implications when we connect human skin to such a reading, as several critics have done. Karmen MacKendrick calls for a surface reading (although she does not use the term) in her *Word Made Skin: Figuring Language at the Surface of Flesh*: "To think, not in the depths, but at the edges, on the skin, at the surface of the page on which we write."[7] In his afterword to Katie Walter's edited collection *Reading Skin in Medieval Literature and Culture*, Karl Steel likewise states that he resists

> the models of surface and depth promoted by metaphors of, for example [skin as] the "mystic writing pad" [...] not because [he believes] that nothing worth noting lies beneath the surface but rather to promote a materialist attentiveness to the *stuff* of skin.[8]

The materiality of skin is central to both Steel's and MacKendrick's connection of skin to surface reading. Just like the "page on which we write," MacKendrick posits in the chapter headings of her book, skin can be touched, folded, and cut; and Steel suggests that the skin's materiality is best explored by focusing on the surface. This ties in with a more general shift of critical attention, in the wake of the material turn, towards bodies as material, living, and breathing entities, rather than as symbols for something else.[9] If the materiality of skin links to surface reading, then our studies of the skins represented in literature may be especially well suited to enabling further thinking about the concept. I am not proposing that skin is only a surface. Cultural Skin Studies has underscored that skin is in fact more than the proverbial "skin deep":[10] it is multifaceted, layered, complex, and subject to shifting meanings.[11] Like Steel and MacKendrick, I acknowledge that matters worth exploring lie beneath the surface; however, I propose to think of the skin as what we see *first* when we approach a body, a surface as our initial point of engagement. This does not preclude deeper exploration, of skin and of body, at a later stage. And this is how we should approach an analysis of a text, too: by focusing on what is visible on the page first, without yet thinking of what may be read between the lines.

7 MacKendrick, *Word Made Skin*, 24.

8 Steel, "Touching Back," 184; the emphasis is his.

9 E.g., Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*; Rice et al., "What a Body Can Do"; Crocker, "In the Flesh," 393.

10 *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press), s.v. "skin-deep, adj., sense 2," accessed September 1, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7254640795.

11 For the early modern period e.g., Dauge-Roth and Koslovsky, *Stigma*.

Following a short summary of the play I discuss, in three steps, the methodical implications of the connection of skin and surface reading. First, I investigate how skin is evoked as physical matter, as the surface of a lived body, rather than as a metaphor. Second, I explore the diverse ways in which skin is connected to narrative throughout the play. And third, I turn to the text's own preference for surface over depth. All these points, I argue, are leads for modern readers to follow, particularly in their readings of this play, but perhaps of other texts, too: to read them literally, closely, and with a focus on surface when first approaching it.

Shakespeare's hero Caius Martius Coriolanus is today regarded as legendary, but to early modern English readers he was known as a historical war leader of roughly 500 BC Rome through Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* (1579–1603), which Shakespeare used as the main source for his tragedy.[12] The play starts out by presenting the internal and external strives of Rome: there is a grain shortage and, in its wake, civil unrest. It results in the common people[13] being granted tribunes to represent them in the senate. In front of the city gates there is the threat of an enemy people, the Volscians, led by Aufidius. In the first act, the protagonist Martius[14] is shown leading an attack against the Volscian town of Corioles, and, when his army seems beaten, storming the town all by himself. He defeats it single-handedly and hence receives his honorary byname, Coriolanus, from his generals. When he returns to Rome, he is expected, primarily by his mother, Volumnia, to stand for consul. She hopes that his wounds especially will commend him for this high office. The importance of the historically attested rite of a public wound-showing is underlined by a dialogue between Volumnia and the family confidant Menenius in which they excitedly take stock of all the previous wounds

12 Thomas North, transl. *The Lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes, compared…* London: T. Vautroullier and J. Wright, 1579, accessed September 1, 2023, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/norths-translation-of-plutarchs-lives.

13 The stage directions in the first Folio have both terms for the common people of Rome, the more respectful "citizens" and the derogatory "plebeians." Smith points out that Coriolanus and the aristocrats generally use "plebeians" and that, when the stage directions adopt this usage, "the play is thus progressively focalized through patrician views in the partisan vocabulary of the stage directions." Smith, "Stage Directions," 105. I use the term "common people" here unless the stage directions or character designations immediately preceding a quoted passage suggest the use of either "citizens" or "plebeians."

14 I here follow the established editorial practice of calling the protagonist "Martius" up to the moment in the play when he is given his honorary byname, Coriolanus, by the Roman general Cominius (1.9.64), while the references for all passages after that moment are consequently to "Coriolanus."

and add the new ones to the total count of battle marks on the hero's body (3.1.141–156).[15] But Coriolanus proves to be arrogantly uninterested in the newly empowered common people and inept at the necessary diplomacy. In Shakespeare's version, the pivotal moment comes when Coriolanus refuses to comply with the rite and asks the common people to give him their voices nevertheless. Goaded on by their tribunes to insist on both the ancient rite and their newly acquired privileges, they revolt and banish Coriolanus from Rome. Coriolanus joins his former enemies, the Volscians, and leads them in their attack on Rome. Before the city gates, Volumnia coerces Coriolanus into making peace with Rome, thereby betraying his new allies. The play ends with Aufidius and the Volscians killing Coriolanus.

1. How Material Skin is Evoked in the Textual Medium: An Invitation to Read Literally

Even when literary critics are interested in material, living, and breathing bodies, what they encounter first, of course, are words on a page. In a literary context, bodies emerge only through the words used to convey the thoughts and utterances of narrators and characters. In a piece of absolute drama such as *Coriolanus*, the level of narrative mediation is nearly absent; there is no narrator and Shakespeare's stage directions are notoriously scarce. In the play's text, consequently, the hero's wounded skin is almost exclusively evoked in the utterances of the diverse characters. Volumnia and Menenius discuss the wounds as marks of merit, the common people discuss the rite of wound-showing as part of their newly gained power, and the antagonistic tribunes finally employ Coriolanus's refusal to show his wounds to goad the Romans into banishing him. As a result of this constant discourse, *Coriolanus* is the play with the most mentions of the word "wound" in all of Shakespeare's works: there are 21 uses of the word, more than double the amount in the runner-up, *Henry IV, Part One*.[16] *Coriolanus* abounds in skin narratives that engage with these wounds. When the play is brought to the stage, too, these narratives considerably enhance what can be visually conveyed through makeup and physical movement. The connection of body and narrative that we are asked to

15 For the rite of wound-showing, see Evans, "Displaying Honourable Scars."

16 Holland, "Introduction," 47, counts 16, with the runner-up *Henry IV, Part One* at seven. Since I also count "wounded" as a reference to wounds, my total is 21 for *Coriolanus* and 10 for *Henry IV, Part One*.

explore in this volume, in other words, is indispensable for the study of bodies in literature.

If we are seeking to explore the material bodies in literary texts, then, it seems coherent to me that we begin our engagement by reading the words that are on the page, and by reading those words literally. I am building on Best and Marcus's concept of "surface as literal meaning" here, a way of reading for which Marcus has coined the term "just reading," and which echoes earlier calls by critics to engage with what is there in the text.[17] As Marcus claims, it means not focusing "on what texts do not or cannot say" and instead attending to "what texts make manifest on their surface."[18] The question for my project consequently is: which words are used, and how are they used to convey the material body? The "materialist attentiveness" called for by Steel[19] leads me to focus on the protagonist's wounded skin as simply the material that is evoked in those words, as skin, tissue, and blood. In doing so, I am proposing an alternative to metaphorical readings of the play that have, among other interpretations, understood the hero's wounds as displaced vaginas or mouths,[20] and the blood as menstrual or postpartum blood,[21] and which have suggested that the hero is emasculated either by his wounds or by the discourse about them.[22] I propose that the first step should be a literal reading: There is a laceration in the hero's skin. From there, both the characters in the play and the audience in the theater may interpret the wounds as symbolically denoting weakness and vulnerability. These, however, are still physical effects of wounds.

The connections of surface to materiality go beyond the rather limiting definition put forward by Best and Marcus, as entailing the production and consumption of books as material objects and the "material workings of the brain during the reading process."[23] Since the words on the page are what evokes the material body in a literary text, I propose to think of the connection of surface to material body as a more immediate one than that to body as a figure for, e.g., the body politic.[24] The latter requires interpretative

17 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 10–13.

18 Marcus, *Between Women*, 3.

19 Steel, "Touching Back," 184.

20 E.g., Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 149.

21 Compagnoni, "Blending Motherhoods," 50.

22 E.g., Fouassier, "Thou Art My Warrior"; Starks-Estes, *Violence*.

23 They reference Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*.

24 For *Coriolanus*, e.g., Jagendorf, "Body Politic and Private Parts"; Gurr, "Body Politic"; Benson, "Even to the Gates"; Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, 152. For an exploration of the body politic and narrativity, see Benjamin Steiner's contribution to this volume, and especially his call to "bring back the natural body into political history", 109.

steps that reach beyond the surface, search for depth, and draw in theory and critical scholarship, as well as cultural and historical context. Furthermore, my understanding of surface as materiality is inherently connected to a call to read texts closely before moving on to more metaphorical readings or explorations of context.

2. How Skin is Narratively Constructed in the Play: An Invitation to Read Closely

Approaching *Coriolanus* with a focus on the surface first, that is, on the exact words used to evoke the skin of the hero, I have been able to pinpoint that the Romans speak about Coriolanus's battle marks differently from the way he does. The Romans refer to them exclusively as wounds, and he is the only one ever to refer to them by the term "scar."[25] While wounds and scars in the play have been discussed extensively, most scholars have used the terms interchangeably. Pascale Drouet, for example, writes "the demagogic performance imposed upon [Coriolanus] might reduce the wounds to properties and postiche (sic), especially since they are 'unaching.'"[26] The word "unaching," however, appears only once in the play, and it is precisely in one of the two instances where Coriolanus calls his battle marks scars: "unaching scars" (2.2.145). In another example, Zvi Jagendorf summarizes the wound-showing ritual as follows: "The physicality of the encounter is insisted on by the language of tongue, mouth, teeth, and scar."[27] In the case of the rite, however, the term "wound" would be more accurate to describe what is expected of Coriolanus. It is only in reaction to these expectations that he, and only he, uses the term "scar."

What we see at work in the characters' usage of the terms "wound" and "scar" in the play is not just the narrative construction of skin, but also the susceptibility of such constructions to deconstruction and appropriation. A skin narrative can be met with a defiant counternarrative, as is the case when Menenius tries to placate the enraged Romans who are about to banish Coriolanus by reminding them of his wounds: "The warlike service he has

25 Volumnia does call the marks "cicatrices" (2.1.143) and connects the Latinate term directly to the custom of wound-showing. This is the only reference to the battle marks in the play, except for the "scar" references of the protagonist, that is not to "wounds." While also working on surfaces, skin, and narrative, Seneviratne has not made that distinction. Seneviratne, "Bodily Surfaces."

26 Drouet, "Resisting," 86.

27 Jagendorf, "Body Politic and Private Parts," 466.

done, consider. Think / Upon the wounds his body bears […].” Interrupting him, Coriolanus retorts: “Scratches with briars / Scars to move laughter only” (3.3.48–51). A skin narrative can also be an act of appropriation. Before meeting Coriolanus in the marketplace, the common people discuss their role in the rite of wound-showing. When the third citizen says: “[I]f he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them” (2.3.5–7), he envisages two narratives, one by the hero and one by the citizens. By adding their own, possibly contradictory, narrative to the one provided by Coriolanus, they appropriate his wounds and make his story of heroism their own.

The image of the common people’s tongues in the hero’s wounds has inspired a range of metaphorical readings along the lines mentioned above. Feminist psychoanalyst readings, for example, have seen the tongues as sexually penetrating the bodily orifices of Coriolanus, thereby objectifying him.[28] Others have suggested that the passage references Christ’s side wound and/or doubting Thomas.[29] I have suggested a more materialist reading of this passage elsewhere.[30] Here, I want to reiterate that in our engagement with the text, the first step should be to read the wounds literally. Doing so, and paying close attention to the exact wording of the passage, we see what some of the metaphorical readings have not commented on, namely that the wounds are closely connected to narrative:

> 1 CITIZEN Once, if he do require our voices, we ought not to deny him.
> 2 CITIZEN We may, sir, if we will.
> 3 CITIZEN We have power in ourselves to do it, but it is a power that we have no power to do. For, if he show us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our tongues into those wounds and speak for them. So, if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them.
> (2.3.1–9)

The spectacle that the citizens anticipate involves both seeing the wounds and speaking about them. Coriolanus is expected to show his wounds and link them to the actions (“noble deeds”) during which he got them. But the third citizen does not intend to let this skin narrative stand by itself.

28 E.g., Fouassier, “Thou Art My Warrior”; Starks-Estes, *Violence*.
29 Sanders, “The Body,” 390; see also Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 157–167.
30 Nyffenegger, “Skin Narratives,” 202–205.

Instead, he imagines they will also speak "for" the wounds, possibly in a counternarrative to the one produced by Coriolanus, but certainly in one that is their own version, hence making the wounds theirs. While this passage shows that the citizen envisages a repeated back-and forth between the aristocrat and the common people ("if he tell us his noble deeds, we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them"), it also shows that the common people are keenly aware of the fragility of their power to reject or accept Coriolanus as consul: "it is a power that we have no power to do." My reading here roughly corresponds with Best and Marcus's understanding of surface as "the intricate verbal structure of literary language," by which they mean that close readings should not seek hidden meanings and instead (they argue with Samuel Otter) focus on the "linguistic density" and "verbal complexity" of a text.[31]

What, then, should we make of the tongues in the wounds? We can hardly imagine that the citizens literally want to put their tongues into the wounds. A surface reading that focuses on "what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in texts"[32] should not ignore metaphors when they are in the text. The metaphor of tongues in wounds is one that Shakespeare also uses in *Julius Caesar* ("thy wounds [...] which like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips," 3.1.259–260)[33] and in *Henry IV, Part One* ("To prove that true / Needs no more but one tongue for all those wounds / Those mouthed wounds," 1.3.95–97),[34] but the insertion of tongues into the wounds of another, as Peter Holland comments, "seems more deliberately grotesque."[35] The metaphor here serves to underline how grotesque the common people's will to transgress class boundaries is in view of their own realization that their newly gained power does not actually empower them.

Another instance in which close attention to the text as a first step is helpful is a conundrum of *Coriolanus* criticism: the refusal of Coriolanus to show his wounds in public that is Shakespeare's own invention. While other additions to the version he found in North's *Lives*, such as the wound-counting dialogue between Volumnia and Menenius mentioned above, can be attributed to Shakespeare's transformation of a prose narrative into a play,

31 Otter, "Aesthetics," 119.
32 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 9.
33 Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*.
34 Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part One*.
35 Holland, *Coriolanus*, 250, n. 6–7.

this change represents a complete reversal of content. In North's account, Coriolanus does show his wounds:

> Now Martius following this custome, shewed many woundes and cuttes apon his bodie, which he had receyued in seuenteene yeres seruice at the warres, and in many sundrie battells, being euer the formest man that dyd set out feete to fight. So that there was not a man emong the people, but was ashamed of him selfe, to refuse so valliant a man: and one of them sayed to another, we must needes chuse him Consul, there is no remedie.[36]

In doing so, he shames those who were considering denying him the high office. Their words, which closely resemble the citizens' conversation quoted above, are even rendered in direct speech ("we must needes chuse him Consul, there is no remedie"). Coriolanus, on the other hand, is presented as showing his wounds without speaking about them. As Holland remarks, the voluntary wound-showing is "something that never could have been done by Shakespeare's character."[37] Shakespeare's Coriolanus refuses to show his wounds, as becomes clear in the following passage, in which he tries to convince his supporters (whose short contradictory interjections I omit here) to let him evade the custom:

> CORIOLANUS:
> I do beseech you,
> Let me o'erleap that custom, for I cannot
> Put on the gown, stand naked and entreat them,
> for my wounds' sake, to give their suffrage.
> […]
> It is a part I shall blush in acting
> […]
> To brag onto them 'Thus I did, and thus',
> Show them th'unaching scars which I should hide,
> As if I had received them for the hire
> Of their breath only
> (2.2.134–148)

Coriolanus is loath to play the role he is expected to play, which is one simultaneously of bragging by showing his wounds and of humility vis-à-vis the

36 North, *Lives*, 244.
37 Holland, "Longer Notes," 423.

common people he despises. He is asked to debase himself by wearing a simple gown that in his eyes equals nakedness, and he fears he will have to pretend he got the wounds in the plebeians' service ("for the hire of their breath only").

Coriolanus's refusal is not only a drastic change from the version provided by Shakespeare's main source, it also presents the hero's wounded skin as the object over which the social conflict between the common people and the aristocrats is narratively fought out. Holland points out that the social tensions in the wake of grain shortages in England in 1607 and 1608 may well be the reason that this social conflict is so central in Shakespeare's play.[38] As to why he chose to present the wound-showing and Coriolanus's refusal of it as crucial in this conflict, critics' suggestions revolve around ideals of masculinity, either of Jacobean England or of the fictionalized Rome,[39] or the religious motif of Christ's side wound.[40] I agree that their religious schooling might have led early modern theatergoers to associate willing wound-showing with Christ and hence to draw parallels between Christ and Coriolanus that Shakespeare may not have wanted them to draw. I do not think that this is the main reason for the alteration, however.

The alteration, in fact, has a central function for the plot: here is a person of higher social standing who refuses to give in to the demands of the lower classes. That their demands involve seeing him half naked ties in with the importance of dress in the performance of status, both on and off the early modern stage.[41] That they also include seeing the wounds on his skin makes this a conflict between community and individual in which the boundaries between public and private spheres are breached. What seems important here is that such conflicts are fought out both in deeds and in words. Coriolanus's reluctance to "show them the unaching scars" in the passage quoted above is preceded by his envisaging the words he might speak at the same time, "thus I did, and thus." In turn, we can imagine the words to be accompanied by performative gestures that evoke a fight. Performative gestures like this one, but more importantly still the central one of wound-showing, are connected to narrative in similar ways throughout the play. The rite is not just one of wound-showing but also one of tale-telling. This new emphasis on the impact of words is not just owing to Shakespeare translating narrative prose into dialogue either. As the passage from North quoted above shows, characters

38 Holland, "Introduction," 23, 56–71, esp. 67.

39 Starks-Estes, *Violence*; Marshall, "Wound-Man"; Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin*; see also Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, 26.

40 Sanders, "Body of the Actor," 390; see also Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 157–167.

41 E.g., Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*.

are indeed represented as speaking about the wounds in the source text, too. But in Shakespeare's version, Coriolanus speaks back.

To be sure, I do not mean to suggest that the social and historical contexts should be ignored; New Historicist criticism has successfully brought them back as co-texts to be read alongside literary works for a deeper understanding not just of the literary texts, but crucially also of the world and times that made them. Neither do I mean to devalue the more metaphorical readings of *Coriolanus* mentioned above. What I do want to suggest is that it may be a good moment, in the wake of the material turn, to return to reading closely and thinking about the textual features first, and exploring the contexts afterwards. My comparison of North's version with that of Shakespeare is of course a contextualization as well. It is one, however, that helps refocus the attention on the text, instead of attempting to explain away the yet-unsolved problem of why Shakespeare may have chosen to make that change.

3. The Play's Own Preference for Surface over Depth: A Lead to Follow in our Reading

My third and final point reiterates what I have argued above: our methods should be guided by our texts. As Best and Marcus suggest, texts "can reveal their own truths because texts mediate themselves; what we think theory brings to texts (form, structure, meaning) is already present in them."[42] For a reading of *Coriolanus* this means taking seriously the fact that the protagonist is styled and styles himself as a surface creature. On the one hand, he is not given extensive soliloquies that would provide the readers and theater audiences with insights into his feelings. On the other, he is also shown as persistently styling himself as a surface creature when he repeatedly refers to his skin as a closed surface. Of course, references to wounds received in the past, such as "[y]ou have received many wounds for your country" (2.3.104–105), may imply that they are now scars. It is in the contrast with Coriolanus's use of the term "scar," however, that the usage of the Romans gains poignancy.

Twice in the play, Coriolanus counters the Romans' wording with his own, telling a scar-narrative in reaction to their wound-narratives. I have mentioned both the relevant passages above. The first instance is when he tries to escape the rite of wound-showing and calls his battle marks "unaching scars" (2.2.145, quoted above), implying that the scars are indeed

42 Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 11.

former wounds that did ache then, and now do not because they are healed. The respective OED entries confirm that the differentiation between "wound" ("hurt caused by the laceration or separation of the tissues of the body by a hard or sharp instrument") and "scar" ("trace of a healed wound, sore, or burn")[43] was the same in Shakespeare's time as it is today. In the second instance, Menenius tells the enraged Romans to view the wounds on Coriolanus's body as marks of his valor. I here present the full passage because it speaks to the dichotomy of surface and depth.

> MENENIUS:
> Lo, citizens, he says he is content.
> The warlike service he has done, consider. Think
> Upon the wounds his body bears, which show
> Like graves i'th' holy churchyard.
>
> CORIOLANUS:
> Scratches with briars,
> Scars to move laughter only.
> (3.3.47–51)

Menenius underlines the importance of the wounds with a metaphor of depth: he likens the wounds to graves. Additionally picturing them as located in the "holy churchyard," he enhances their significance with a numinous aspect. Menenius, in other words, digs deep to impress the Romans. Coriolanus, however, counters this with a narrative of surface. Not only does he correct "wounds" to "scars," he also employs a metaphor that contrasts starkly with the one used by Menenius. "Scratches with briars" evokes horizontal movement and a fleeting moment of scratched skin in place of eternal rest in the depths of a grave.

The resistance of the protagonist, in this passage, to having others think about him in depth aligns with the fact that Shakespeare never uses the term "wound" metaphorically in this play. He does use it metaphorically in other plays, for example to express emotional hurt in *Antony and Cleopatra* ("it wounds thy honour," 1.4.70)[44] or material damage in *Henry*

43 *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press), s.vv. "wound, n. 1a," "scar, n.2 1a," accessed January 31, 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/230431, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/171985.

44 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

IV, Part Two ("I speak of peace while covert enmity / under the smile of safety wounds the world," Ind. 9–10).[45] The fact that he chose not to use it metaphorically in *Coriolanus*, then, must be more than just a coincidence. The only exception here, the tongues-in-wounds passage, is not in fact an exception. Even though the wounds are part of a metaphor whose tenor is narrative appropriation, the wounds are not the vehicle of this metaphor; the tongues are. The wounds can still be read as literal wounds. The same is the case with the passage above. Menenius does align the wounds with graves, but the wounds are literal wounds rather than a vehicle for the grave metaphor. Hence, if Shakespeare uses wounds to denote physical lacerations exclusively throughout his play, this seems to me a lead for scholars to follow in their readings, and consequently start with a literal understanding of the wounds.

Apart from the two instances when Coriolanus counters the Romans' wound-narratives with his own scar-narratives, there are further moments when he refers to his skin as a closed surface. This is the case, notably, in two scenes in which Martius, as he is still called at that moment, is covered in blood. When he returns to his troops after fighting alone behind the walls of Corioles, he is so covered in blood that he appears to have been flayed; as Cominius says: "Who's yonder / That does appear as he were flayed? O gods, / He has the stamp of Martius" (1.6.21–23). Martius is quick to correct the impression that he is himself bleeding. Appealing to his troops to follow him into battle once more, he says: "If any such be here / (As it were sin to doubt) that love this painting / Wherein you see me smeared" (1.6.67–69). His skin is not absent and revealing his own bleeding flesh, as would be the case with a flayed man; quite the contrary: his skin is but a canvas, painted and smeared in the blood of others. Martius repeats this claim when he encounters Aufidius in single combat just moments later. Seeking to irritate his enemy, he reminds him that he is covered in the blood of the inhabitants of Corioles rather than in his own: "'Tis not my blood / Wherein thou seest me masked" (1.8.10–11). Here again he styles his skin as a surface that is whole and sound below a mask. The fact that the protagonist presents himself as a surface creature in this way is yet another hint that a reading at the surface level may be the appropriate approach.

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45 Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*.

By way of conclusion, I return to the two London productions of *Coriolanus*. The dichotomy of surface and depth can be seen in the different choices the productions made for the presentation of the protagonist's body. The RSC production, I have argued, was truer to the play's text in refusing to create a depth for the hero that is not in the text. The play itself resists the creation of depth on two levels: in the play's ancient Rome, the hero counters the wound-narratives of the Romans with his own scar-narratives, and he styles himself as a creature of surface when he refers to his skin as a painting or a mask. The text, too, resists investing the protagonist with psychological depth that other plays transmit in the soliloquies of their tragic heroes. These are leads that we may want to follow in our readings. Surface reading, it seems to me, is especially well suited for Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, and even more so for the investigation of human skin in the play. Our materialist interest in the physicality of bodies ties in with the call to read our texts literally and treat them with the affection that encourages us to take them at face value. The acknowledgment that the bodies, and skins, we want to study in a literary work are evoked in words on the page may help us refocus our attention on what is on the surface of the texts we encounter.

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