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## Introduction

### Textual Bodies: Changing Boundaries of Literary Representation

The body's history in Western discourse intersects, of course, with the history of many artifacts and phenomena, but in compiling the essays for this collection, I have been impressed with the recurrence of a particular set of connections: The body's history in literature is also the history of bodily violation; as the body acquires new definition, what it means to transgress its boundaries changes accordingly. In one way or another, each of the contributions here illustrates the connection between the body and transgression. In our culture, the body alternately insists on its own integrity or relinquishes that integrity to intimacy, duty, or violation (for example, in the forms of sex acts, pregnancy, self-sacrifice, or various expressions of asceticism); the body is alternately inviolate, vulnerable, and violated, a construct never fully itself.

The eleven essays in this collection are deliberately rereadings of major texts in the Western canon, and as such, they collectively demonstrate both how interpretations change when read for a particular theme—in this case, the body—and how the body, as read through literature over time and in light of recent theory, has itself changed. The essays contained here share an emphasis on the situation and treatment of the human body in particular texts. Each is a work of practical criticism informed by recent efforts to theorize the body and construct its social history, and each illuminates literature through the figure of the body. The essays are

arranged chronologically according to the texts that are interpreted, though sets of recurrent themes suggested other organizational possibilities: Fragmentation of the body, metamorphosis, illness and bodily negation, and male rendering of female bodies are among the echoing concerns. The essays range in subject matter from Page duBois' analysis of the fragmented body of Sappho's poetry as analogous to the fragmented body within the Greek classical tradition through themes of mutilation as analyzed first by Richard Rambuss in his reading of Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale*, then by Sheila Delany in her reading of a medieval hagiography, and finally by Martina Sciolino in her reading of Kathy Acker's relatively recent novel *Great Expectations*; we also find cross-dressing as metamorphosis in medieval literature treated in Roberta Davidson's reading of romance, a subject itself transformed in Deborah Laycock's reading of shape-shifting and fashion in eighteenth-century literature; Robert Con Davis demonstrates how woman's body, figured as illness in ancient gynecological literature, structures the gendering of the human subject in Aristotelian doctrine, and woman's ill body recurs in Miriam Bailin's reading of the body ironically negated in that famous medical woman's, Florence Nightingale's, work; the negation of body as Victorian phenomenon finds further resonance in Donald Rackin's new reading of Lewis Carroll's *Alices*. Freddie Rokem's "Slapping Women," an analysis of female characters who enact a scene with a slap that throws bodies off balance in comparable "dramas" by Ibsen, Strindberg, and Freud, raises among its questions the articulation of the female body by the male voice, and cross-gendered ventriloquism is a question also fundamental to Gita Rajan's reading of Walter Pater and Antoine Watteau.

DuBois on Sappho and Sciolino on Kathy Acker's novel *Great Expectations* frame the collection and share a concern with the incomplete body, asking us to recognize its importance in our personal and historical memories. DuBois poses a startling question: Why do we pursue a dream of wholeness? Like much ancient Greek sculpture, the body of Sappho's poetry, Sappho's individual poems, and the body represented in Sappho's poems are necessarily fragments, and we have relentlessly re-membered this fragmented past by refusing the disturbances of dismemberment. DuBois argues that this impulse, a problem of historiography, has consequences

for bodies of poetry, bodies in poetry, and bodies in the world. This terror of incoherence recalls for duBois the imaginary time of bodily dis-integration that precedes, in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the child's jubilant self-recognition of wholeness in the mirror phase. Might we forego "a dream of wholeness" and accept partiality, recognizing the possibility for ecstasy in the recollection of disorder? Ultimately what is at stake for duBois is the position of women; she favors a dialectic materialist theory of history that is important for facilitating the questioning of longstanding assumptions about the natural body.

In her reading of Acker's novel, Sciolino also invokes "the imaginary maternal body" as the "site of longing." Maternal absence leads to the desire for what Sciolino calls "full-fill-ment," a desire that decomposes Acker's text of ambiguous genre. For both duBois and Sciolino, fragmentation and de-composition—ancient and postmodern, historical and personal, in textual bodies and human bodies—provokes a culturally-imposed urge to reconstitute the self, circling around the unnameable lack that is the maternal body. But identity, Sciolino reminds us, is a "work in progress." DuBois makes a similar claim when she asks us to acknowledge that "our own relationship to antiquity" (as to our own past) will always be partial and interested, and that postmodern existence is "provisional" and "split," based on a fiction of a coherent ego.

As the culminating essay, Sciolino's reading of Acker's collage echoes the vocabulary of the essays that precede it, surprising us with how the body's treatments in the past are present and transformed in twentieth-century fiction. For example, Sciolino, like Laycock, looks closely at authority and textual bodies while paying particular attention to the economy of plagiarism. Acker's transgressive thefts from, among others, Dickens's novel of the same name and the erotic *Story of O* represent attempts to resist the entrapment of inherited conventions, challenging the distinctions between originality and difference, autobiography and fiction, and canonical and smut as "pornography perversely grants Acker a way of representing woman's psycho-social being."

For Laycock, the plagiarism common in eighteenth-century England, where authors and booksellers shamelessly copied not only the work of others but also stole the names and identities of successful writers, is directly related to changes in the new credit

economy. In her richly textured analysis, Laycock shows how the development of public credit and the fashion industry (stimulated by credit) “seemed to contemporaries to threaten the bases of a stable identity or personality, an identity generally conceived to reside in the body of a propertied gentleman.” By analyzing how the discourse in the debates about credit overlaps with the discourses about women and fashion, Laycock exposes the misogyny in the current descriptions of a feminized economy that is mutable and without substance, an economy driven by women’s criminal desires for a peculiarly eighteenth-century version of Ovidian self-transformation. Value depends not on substance but fashion, which in Baudrillard’s words “disqualifies body.” In this way the “natural body was thought to disappear” (emblemized in the way a fashionable hoop skirt could easily conceal pregnancy); self-transformation leads to self-alienation, a substitution of fantasy for the real, where reputation (by analogy to credit) is the fashionable version of the self.

Laycock goes on, in another turn, to make the connection between paper money and paper books, the circulation of the insubstantial that justified plagiarism for money and that led to the danger that “people will become paper.” She wonderfully shows how the developing economy of the eighteenth century, the critique of Lady Credit, the literature of imitation (particularly false John Gays) and of mock rape (Pope), is rhetorically dependent upon a pre-existing understanding of women’s physical insubstantiality, a body thought to be subject to vapors and hysteria. (This medical legacy is the subject of Davis’s essay on Aristotelian gynecology and finds further resonance throughout the volume.) Laycock comes full circle by closing with a brief discussion of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s defense of fashion and a credit economy that apparently resisted her own commodification. When Lady Mary’s work as a stockbroker led to her being blackmailed, however, anxieties about the loss of her credit (reputation) affected her physical body, and this sickness brings back to the physical body the consequences of the body’s constructions in discourse.

Just as Laycock shows our economy to be built on the foundation of woman’s insubstantial body, Davis shows how the contemporary knowing subject of modern philosophy and cultural studies is also based on classical gynecology’s “knowledge” of the female body.

Reminding us of the scientific wisdom that the female body is sickly because it is not warm enough, and that woman's blood and semen (yes!) are not pure, as well as of the characterization of the uterus and its behavior in classical medical discourse, Davis supports both Laycock's and Davidson's arguments about how the inherited characterization of women's bodies had material consequences for many centuries to come.

Davis describes how a variety of women's ailments depend upon where the mobile uterus wanders (a woman might drown in menstrual blood, for example, if the uterus wandered between her lungs), to the purpose of proving that the uterus is characterized as willfully perverse, having a perverse intent to go astray. To the point is the second-century Greco-Roman author Arataeus who writes of the womb that it "is like an animal within an animal." Davis shows how the female body, independent and rebellious, takes "a kind of animal pleasure in violating its own order of health." Women cannot control the uterus that becomes a metonym for woman, and the male doctor, who uses remedies such as sweet suppositories, bitter herbs, and massage to trick the errant organ, becomes the master of the female as body and of the female as a body of knowledge.

This triple pun—textual corpus, represented body, and material body—reiterated often in this introduction and in the essays themselves is significant. Davis demonstrates that the Aristotelian concept of the subject of knowledge (passive, a body available for study) is based on a logic of the difference between men and women; the male body becomes the knowing subject (active), "the embodiment of scientific and cultural authority," and the female body is suppressed as the feminized subject of knowledge. This subject (available for study) is defined according to a doctrine of flux that understands the substance of a scientific subject as "the structural pattern of its form always expressed as a contradiction."

Just as duBois brings psychoanalytic theory to ancient attitudes to argue for a particular way of doing history today, Davis brings this slippage in the definition of "the subject" (knower/that which is known) back to contemporary philosophy and cultural studies, asking us to see that these two subjects remain in gendered relationship according to inherited ancient constructions of the sexed body. He shows that Zeus, the cosmic monarch, replicates the function of the human doctor, treating a world that is imagined to be

female, orienting it from a fixed position as the male doctor orients the wayward womb. The speaking subject of contemporary critical theory holds this male position in what turns out to be an ancient paradigm.

Bridging Davis on Aristotle and gynecology and Laycock on eighteenth-century shape-shifting is Davidson's essay on cross-dressing in medieval Romance. The Aristotelian tradition persists in medieval thought, categorizing women as more material than spiritual and also, as we have amply seen, as more pliant and subject to the forces of artistic and cultural will. In her engaging reading of several medieval Romances, Davidson shows how women's vulnerability to change makes them particularly responsive to their clothes when they are disguised as men or boys. Davidson's readings illustrate how, in a system consistent with Galenic medical wisdom that females can be literally transformed into males, cross-dressing produced more than superficial gender reversals. When the woman in these romances sports masculine garb, she acquires virility and body powers that once more challenge the boundary between metaphor and literal, between signifier and signified. Davidson provides compelling evidence that straddling the line between active/passive and male/female in the gendered grammar available in Davis's reading of "the subject" is a medieval woman wearing a sword.

The Virgin Mary, exemplary virgin and mother, is the woman on the threshold in Rambuss's contextualization and analysis of Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*. By contrast with readings of this tale that divorce its devotional character from the gross body, from patterns of abjection, violence, and sexuality, Rambuss convincingly demonstrates that these features of the tale are integral to the genre of Marian devotion precisely because of how the body of Mary was understood in medieval discourses of medical science and theology.

Stories of miracles of the Virgin often feature bodies on the threshold, in particular bodies neither dead nor fully alive, such as that of the "murdered" child who continues to sing the Virgin's praises. Presiding over this threshold is Mary, whose own "perfect virginal/maternal body is made to incorporate a productive liminality between the mysterial and the material, between corporeal abjection and redemption." Rambuss argues that Mary's corporeal status and the processes of pregnancy, lactation, and menstruation illuminate

the “choreography between contrary, even impossible modes of existence” in miracle stories such as that recounted by Chaucer’s Prioress.

For example, the virgin who conceived without defloration, the paradoxical body, embodies more than a single conundrum: herself conceived without original sin, theologians reasoned that, on the one hand, she surely had to have been spared the defilement and curse of menstruation, a sign of sin, just as she was spared Eve’s other curse, pain in childbirth (with a son who would later walk through walls, her hymen remained intact, and she remained “a maid”). On the other hand, medieval medical science taught that menstrual blood was required both for conception and lactation, and the humanity of Jesus therefore depended entirely on the humanity of a mother who, to be fully human herself and more importantly, to endow Christ with humanity, had to have menstruated, had to have been more than a mere vessel.

Rambuss’s lively analysis restores medieval constructions of the body to this text and leads to an original and persuasive reading of this tale, reintroducing appropriate complexity to such concepts as youth, purity, and virginity. Figures for bodily orifices and excrement, a “defiling anality” associated here with the Jews and bound up with the tale’s anti-semitism, Rambuss shows to be not antithetical to the Virgin and her miracles but rather consistent with the multivalent representations of her miraculous body in the Middle Ages. And in an important final twist, Rambuss exposes an Oedipal drama that positions the innocent child (neither dead nor alive) between two mothers (the Virgin and the biological) and two fathers (the abbot and the Jewish patriarchy), wedding sexuality to violence in Marian devotional literature, in Chaucer’s tale, in Mary’s body, and, we are left to wonder, perhaps in nature too.

Just as Rambuss’s reading, like that of Davis, depends on an appreciation of contemporary medical understandings of the female reproductive body, so too the links of love to violence and Eros to Thanatos find repeated expression in the essays that follow. Sciolino records a confusion of love and violence, and of talking and hurting, in Acker’s *Great Expectations*, and Rokem makes a similar connection in his reading of Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*. What most strikes me about this repetition is less the association of love and death that Freud popularized than the repetition of the more inge-

nious grounding of this connection in a longing for the absent maternal body.

Eruditely exposing the multiple metaphorical meanings of the body and its parts in Roman, Arabic, and medieval culture and once more in medical lore, Delany enables us to appreciate the metaphorical associations that give the body, and importantly, particular female body parts, their own valences and connotations. She deepens a background for Rambuss's discussion of decapitation by elaborating on the meaning of the head in medieval culture and literature. The anatomy/architecture metaphor, with body represented as temple, mansion, dwelling, fortress, or tower, is traced through multiple permutations leading to the body of the Virgin Mary as an exemplary Tower in a way that further complements Rambuss's analysis of Mary's body.

Delany also draws our attention to repetitive sadism in medieval hagiography, to "the hyperbolized quality of these zealous adolescents who are flayed, burnt, drowned, maimed, shaved, insulted, raped, disembowelled," etc., who, like the "litel clergeon" in *The Prioress's Tale*, "do not die easily," and persist in defiant devotion. Like Rambuss, Delany describes an endurance that is surreal and often repulsive to modern readers. She then reads Osbern Bokenham's fifteenth-century collection of female saints' lives as a radical moment in the history of the genre, in which the sophisticated author responds "to the great national events of his age" through a literary representation of the suffering but triumphant female body. She shows that Bokenham's array of female saints constitutes a "collective anatomy" with both political and theological implications.

Dividing her essay into body parts just as Bokenham himself fragments and recounts the fragmentation of the female body in his hagiography, Delany sees the body's fragmentation as a metaphor for a series of things from the family (which in a number of these saints' lives proves to be as "fragile and fragmented as the physical body") to the body politic, and ultimately to the body of Christ. Again we see the rhetorical interdependence of literature and medicine, for example in an upward displacement of sex organ to tongue prevalent both in saints' lives and in medical lore.

Delany writes about the separation and fetishization of body parts in the genre of the saint's life, and then makes a rhetorical



move that both renders suspect modern revulsion at this practice and foreshadows moments in several of the essays on Victorian and modern literature: She offers us the parallel between the sadist and lover, both of whom practice separation and fetishization of female body parts, exemplified for Delany in a passage from D. H. Lawrence.

Delany's purpose is less to question the lover's discourse than to recognize in Bokenham a rhetorical strategy that rehabilitates "femininity for theological and political purposes." We see the tormented body as central to medieval religious consciousness, and Christ's body is dramatically resituated in a culture in which amputation ceremonies were ritual public events, legal punishments. Bokenham's work demystifies the female body, and Delany's reading of one instance of that demystification in the elaborate medical description of Lucy's mother's dysentery echoes Rambuss's reading of the *Prioress's Tale* with its several examples of the body "open at both ends."

Delany situates the body balanced delicately, for the sake of the soul, between depreciation and appreciation. She sees Bokenham's contribution as a "collective anatomy of inspired women" articulated "from head to foot" and "including face, mouth, tongue, breasts, flesh, guts, womb, and genitals." Like duBois, Delany also tells a story of re-memberment as the author of whom she writes at once reconstitutes woman and reconstitutes the body politic in the remembering of the body through the parts of his thirteen female saints. This literary re-membering is finally interpreted as a theological statement about death and bodily resurrection; it is a corporeal text about collective membership and ultimate reassembly in the Christian body politic.

The three essays on Victorian literature—Rackin on Carroll, Bailin on Nightingale, and Rajan on Pater—challenge another set of body-defining boundaries. If Davis recognizes the doctor as the knowing subject and the patient as the feminized body of knowledge, Bailin shows how the emergence of the female nurse in Victorian England allows for a lower servant to have a particular kind of authority and a woman to have power over men's bodies. In a wonderfully original analysis, Bailin looks to the life and writing of Nightingale to challenge the opposition of nurse and patient, with the sick body as the mediating term. Nightingale herself went from

being a nurse to being a patient, and what Bailin shows is that this move is not ironic; just as nursing “locates ambition in self-sacrifice” so too can illness be used by women “to negate the social body and its cultural ambitions.” Bailin reads fictions in which a heroine is transformed from nurse to patient and sees here the ability to “construct a self that can simultaneously command others and submit to them,” “authorize self-indulgence and yet exact self-denial, and all within the sphere deemed suitable to women.” For Nightingale in particular, “both the interminable work and the terminal illness were expressive of a supervening desire for absolute control over the disposition of her own time and body.” At the same time, Nightingale’s writings about the body, defilement, and invasiveness theorized a body that, in effect, declared her own “body to be no body.” Bailin demonstrates that Nightingale ultimately enacted a different but “familiar narrative of subjection.”

Rackin’s focus is on the vexed split in the *Alice* books between the cerebral and the erotic and between the author’s textualization of body denial and carnal urges. Bowing in the direction of critics who see here narratives ripe for Freudian analyses and submerged autobiography, Rackin reads the “ideal of detached intelligence” that finds one expression in the autobiographical White Knight’s question: “What does it matter where my body happens to be? ... My mind goes on working all the same?” as the serious motivating question of these stories. But work for Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson) and his characters serves merely as a vain attempt to control the “unholy” inescapable erotic. Positioning us on the boundaries between reality and dream, things and words, and body and mind, Rackin reads the recurrent figures of detachment, mutilation, paralysis, and death through such puns as that on “gravity” (force, seriousness, and pull towards the ultimate grave) and such images of decapitation as the Queen’s “off with their heads” and the Cheshire Cat’s disembodied grin; the brilliance of the *Alice* books, we discover, comes in large measure from the text’s effort and failure to contain an embodied Alice (character, real little girl, and photographic image) in a dream world vexed by Carroll’s own conflation of the garden bed, the marriage bed, and the death bed. Moving us between the mind/body problems of the author and those of his characters, Rackin reinterprets the ambivalence of a man at once reluctant and eager to go to bed, a dream lover who worried

hard over his mathematical bedtime “problems.” Ultimately, Rackin leads us to Alice’s triumph over her author in the child’s and character’s refusals to be a prisoner in someone else’s dream.

Rajan also writes about straining limits and challenging body and gender boundaries in Victorian literature, and she sees a “history of misreading” of Walter Pater’s text, efforts to “dematerialize” the body of his work in order to make it “safer.” Like Sciolino, who makes much of the multiple male and female narrators in Acker’s fiction, Rajan attends to Pater’s cross-gendered ventriloquism and explains the work of desire in literature. Rajan shows Pater deliberately situating himself on another boundary, the boundary between fiction and history. Just as Pater, as an artist, extended the frame of the canvas, his representation of narrative desire extends beyond the limits that have been imposed on his work.

Rajan’s revisionary reading of “A Prince of Court Painters,” a portrayal of Antoine Watteau, finds Pater writing a female narrator who attempts to control a desire that her author, Pater, reveals. In so doing, Pater shows how Victorian culture policed the body. Rajan’s own analysis layers the effect of policing the body as she suggests that Pater’s corpus has been policed by the history of Pater criticism in ways analogous to the policing of women’s bodies—a game of desire playing hide and seek—in Victorian England.

Rokem extends to the early twentieth century Davis’s and Rajan’s analysis of the motives and effects of male authority over and authoring of the female body. Like Rajan, Rokem attends to the work of desire in textual bodies, and like Sciolino, he discusses specular reality in a patriarchal economy. He reads three “scenes,” authored by Ibsen, Strindberg, and Freud, in which a woman slaps a man, and he brilliantly develops an analogy between theater and psychoanalysis that, like Rajan, challenges the boundary between fiction and psychic truth.

Theater itself, Rokem explains, is a text translated back to the bodies of actors in which the human “body is a sign,” and every production, indeed every performance, “is a concrete bodily realization of the presence of the human body in the dramatic text that draws our attention to the cultural and aesthetic codes of bodily behavior.” Structurally and functionally similar, Nora’s (*A Doll’s House*), Julie’s (*Miss Julie*), and Dora’s (Freud’s case history) multiple slaps are female gestures that attack the face, the scopic

center and source of the unwelcome male gaze, a gesture that throws a body off balance and both punishes and links (violently) two bodies. Like the sword worn by the Romance heroines analyzed by Davidson, the slap is both female and phallic, a phallic gesture because it thrusts and extends the body of the self onto the body of another.

Rokem shows how in both theater and psychoanalysis one speaks a text that involves the speaker's body, and body signs are overdetermined. Again we are situated on boundaries between sex and violence, history and fiction, and masculinity and femininity as Rokem demonstrates how the slapping women create scenes that are, in each case, related fantastically and convincingly to mother loss, a loss that returns *us*, equally fantastically, to duBois's reading of Sappho and Sciolino's concluding analysis of Acker.

Each essay uses its focus on the body to reinterpret well-known authors and works, but together, and read from first to last, these essays illustrate changing cultural definitions of bodily limits, integrity, transgressions, sexuality, and violation in the history of the Western literary canon. The volume emerges out of the current interest in the body and its history, as well as the related interest in boundaries and transgression. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White attend principally to somatic symbolism and understand transgression as a challenge to a high/low hierarchy mapped, in complex interrelated ways, on the body, social classes, psychic forms, and geographical space. Attention to "boundaries"—physical, geographical, national, disciplinary (as in Stephen Greenblatt's and Giles Gunn's collection *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*)—seems to me also connected to research on the human body. One effect of this work is the further problematizing of the concept of identity, whether national, ethnic, racial, or sexual. For example, Sander Gilman's work on stereotypes and his book *The Jew's Body* clarify the association of ideology and image, as he establishes other connections between the history of the body's representation and the themes of identity, boundaries, and the articulation of difference. This collection, *Textual Bodies*, exemplifies how the recent developments in literary theory and history associated with feminism, new historicism, and

cultural materialism have been productive of new readings of familiar literary texts; because of these new emphases, we find here a criticism that radically transforms our sense of what is meaningful in the Western canon.

Michel Foucault's work, especially his volumes on the *History of Sexuality*, has taught us to understand that what we have long taken for granted as "natural"—the human body most obviously—has a history. And in recognizing that history, we recognize that the body, real as it seems and experienced at every moment in lived reality, is a construct. Histories of the body have, as a result, proliferated; most recently, Thomas Laqueur's *The Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, and his collection edited with Catherine Gallagher, *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* contribute to a growing bibliography that includes the three large volumes of *Zone*, entitled *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, Edward Muir's and Guido Ruggiero's edition, *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, and Elaine Scarry's important book, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub collect essays in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* that discover and discuss gender ambiguity, textual bodies that affirm the idea of body as construct by challenging assumptions about the sexed body *per se*, a challenge posed by much recent work, including Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. The philosophical problem of at once regarding the body as a construct and honoring its material existence in the world is then the subject of Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* The number of these works testifies to our collective fascination with the body and its importance as a site of investigation. At the same time, this confluence of work, like the confluences around the topics of "identity" and "transgression," testifies to a return to thematic criticism, as particular subjects have proven themselves ripe, at this moment, for interesting, sustained conversations.

Theories of the body have material and ethical implications, which is one reason for this subject's continuing attraction to literary critics. The work of French feminists was early to bring theories of the body to practical criticism, Luce Irigaray's voice remaining an

important one in that area. This focus on the female body has found a central place too in cultural studies, many with sociological bases; among several, is Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body: A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*. Susan Suleiman gathered, in *The Female Body in Western Civilization: Contemporary Perspectives*, essays about the representation of the female body.

Critical theory turned its attention to the body, and we have seen much work in the theory and history of the body. Informed by that work, literary critics have been bringing these theories and histories of the body back to literature. The essays in this collection are among the fruits of that endeavor. The journals and conference section topics in literary studies in recent years show the extent to which the body in literature has engaged people's most serious attention. This book collects some of those efforts, and it distinguishes itself as criticism about the body that is wide-ranging and text specific, practical criticism that is provocative, readable, and exemplary of contemporary critical studies.

### **Postscript: Scriptures**

Hebrew Scriptures, as one important foundation document of the Western tradition, presents us with a useful point of departure for further applying the issues raised by this volume. As in the Greek literature addressed by the first two essays in this collection, Biblical narrative represents the body as a locus of meaning upon which later literature depends for its metaphors and tropes. I want to close these introductory remarks by looking at several biblical body stories, both to represent that text in this volume and to suggest preliminarily what happens when a canonical literature is reviewed through the lens of the body.

In the penultimate chapters of the biblical book of *Judges* (17–21), an anonymous Levite—the last Judge figure—travels through the whole of Israel to recover his woman who has, for reasons not told to us in the story, gone back to her father. The man lingers there day after day, and the reader becomes anxious, suspicious of the apparently excessive hospitality that detains our journey. Finally, he starts home late on the third day with his belongings and his woman. In spite of approaching night, the man and his entou-

rage choose not to stay among strangers, and they travel on to an Israelite tribe, the Benjamites, where they are taken in by the only good man in the town. The townspeople, in a story that echoes the crimes of Sodom and Gomorrah, wish to rape the guest, and they bang on the door so that he might be sodomized. The host is appropriately outraged and offers to send out his virgin daughter instead. But it is the Levite's woman, the one whom he had travelled so far to retrieve, who is thrown out to the men; she is multiply raped, and in the morning, the Levite, the man, finds her lying across the threshold. The Levite says, "get up; let us go," but she cannot; she is dead. The Levite travels home to Ephraim, having now traversed all Israel, all twelve tribes twice, this last part of the journey with the corpse. Once home, he cuts her body into twelve pieces, and parodically repeating the original journey in fragmented form, he mails a piece of the corpse to each tribe in Israel. Each part thereby becomes a mobile and multiple signifier: it signifies brutality (but the text is ambiguous about the agent of the brutality: the Levite? the Benjamites? all Israel?); it is a call for vengeance against the Benjamites, and (for the reader) the parts are metaphors for the fragmented body politic, the land itself.

In this gruesome story, it is possible not to feel much for the murdered woman; we recognize allegory when we are in its presence. This story is about reversals: night and day; family and strangers; hospitality and violation; masculinity and femininity are among the oppositions that are rendered unstable in these unstable times. It is a story about thresholds and transgressions, and they are geographic and political. This Judge has no name because he is everyman, and the unruly body wishes to violate him because it is lawless; the system has failed. As Mieke Bal has shown in *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, it is possible to read the shaping forces of this story, and of *Judges* itself, as domestic rather than political. To read this story allegorically, as I am suggesting, requires but one transformation: the individual, carnal, sexual body stands for the body politic. But notice that the text forces a substitution; the woman's body replaces the man's body; her body is thrown out to the rapists instead of that of either the anonymous man or the host himself or even the host's virgin daughter, and her corpse is fragmented to symbolize the fragmented polity. The scandal of this story for me is less

the threats and transgressions on the surface of the plot—disruption of the family order, violation of hospitality, threats of sodomy, rape, and murder—than the quiet transformation through which the woman's body replaces the man's body as the site of violent representation. The land is intact, but not so the social order; by analogy, the man's body remains whole, while the woman's body is mutilated.

Often, bodies stand in for one another in the Bible: like the body of Jesus sacrificed for the sake of the body politic, in earlier texts, the scapegoat is annually sent into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people; in the book of *Genesis*, Isaac is nearly sacrificed when, at the last moment, he is replaced by a ram; Jacob deceives his blind father Isaac by pretending to be Esau, putting hair on his arms; Leah replaces Rachel at the marriage altar and in Jacob's nuptial bed; later in the story, Leah "buys" Jacob from Rachel for one night for the price of some mandrakes (a phallic medicinal root) which Rachel hopes will make her fertile. The text barely questions the right of one body to claim another's place: the father—whether divine or human—lays claim to the body of the son; we do not know what one sister thinks as she stands at the altar in her sister's place. While it may be a commonplace of our culture that our bodies are our own property, the literature that reflects and informs our culture suggests instead that bodies are iterative, symbolic, and like the discursive subject itself, the body is figured as both independent subject and subject to subjection, a subject to controlling bodies.

A final biblical example: in the book of *Numbers*, God responds with anger to Miriam and Aaron's having slandered their brother Moses, and while Aaron reacts with a cry of remorse, Miriam is instantly stricken with leprosy. As in the case of the anonymous woman in *Judges*, a woman's body is again, is habitually, the site of representation. When Moses pleads on behalf of his injured sister, God replies, "If her father had but spit in her face, should she not hide in shame for seven days?" And like the scapegoat—a punished body that stands for other bodies—Miriam is, at God's command, shut up outside the camp for seven days, by which time she is cured. Miriam's leprosy is here figured as a divine version of paternal spit, an extension of God's own body to the human body: leprosy is the divine spit that punishes Miriam for her moral crime. Among the meanings suggested by this episode is a consequential connection between impiety and bodily illness, a pervasive rela-



tionship in Western religious traditions. As Scarry observes in *The Body in Pain*, the Hebrew God's power is often exerted vertically; He is pictured above wielding a weapon, connected to His people by the stick that might beat them, the thunderbolt of Zeus.

The power of the gods over the bodies of people is only one of many places where the Greek and the biblical representations of the body are analogous. But the representation and treatment of the body in these two founding traditions are also disanalogous. By focusing on particular texts, the essays that follow allow us to trace moments of continuity and discontinuity in the Western tradition's representation of the body. Looking at familiar texts through the lens of the body changes our perspective; we choose different textual moments, shift the accent, draw other conclusions. Just as developments in critical theory, history, and cultural studies enliven literary criticism by enabling radically new work, such as the essays that follow, this criticism reciprocates by providing new matter for historical and theoretical reflection, as the ever-reshaping corpus develops.

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