

Invisible Acts:  
Performing Violence Against Women  
in Early Modern and Contemporary Drama in English

By

Kimberley Anne Solga

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Centre for Study of Drama  
University of Toronto

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## Abstract

"Invisible Acts: Performing Violence Against Women  
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PhD, 2004

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This thesis develops a theory and practice for the critical representation of violence against women in performance based on the premise that such violence – be it rape violence or what I define as non-sexual "punitive" violence – has historically been elided, translated into a matter between and about men. Taking "effacement" as the representational norm for women's violence in the drama as well as in the culture of early modern England, I posit a theory of representation that stages elision with difference. I focus on acts of violence left "offstage" or otherwise unrepresented in texts both Early Modern and contemporary, and explore in turn their potential to stage the very process and consequences of effacement itself. The "invisible act" of my title is the theatrical gesture that confronts audiences with the image of violence missed, with their failure to see; it argues that the deliberate refusal of representation is the condition of possibility of a critical, historicized performance of violence against women on the stage.

Theoretically, I build this argument in a gap within feminist performance theory. This body of scholarship has been essential in furthering our understanding of the gendered dynamics of performance, but it has curiously never turned its attention to the vexed problem of the woman's body *in violence* on stage. I break into this critical lacuna with a new reading of Freud's work on femininity, arguing that Freud's always-already castrated female implies a prior, brutal, and utterly disavowed act of sexualized physical violence against women's bodies. Because feminist performance theory is deeply indebted to – though also productively critical of – Freud's philosophy of subjectivity, it is unable fully to recognize or successfully to countermand the unseen violence at its theoretical core. I then bring Jacques Lacan's writings on vision into this equation, arguing that we may articulate on stage the philosophical and cultural problem of violence's effacement by exploring the performative value of "anamorphosis" – that

moment when we realize we operate within an incomplete visual field, when we confront the unsettling feeling that something has been missed, is missing.

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**Preface**  
**Oedipus, Freud, and the Other Primal Scene**

With even more violence than fiction, theatre, which is built according to the dictates of male fantasy, repeats and intensifies the horror of the murder scene which is at the origin of all cultural productions. It is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin. Only when she has disappeared can the curtain go up [...]  
Hélène Cixous, "Aller à la Mer" 546

Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* stands, arguably, at the apex of Western theatrical tradition, made famous (perhaps infamous) by the ocular rupture which secures its tragic hero his paramount place in dramatic history. Upon learning of the magnitude of his crimes against both family and state, sexual and social order, Oedipus – the original murderer of fathers, wedder of mothers – blinds himself with his mother-wife's brooches and performs the cathartic climax of the play which bears his name. Oedipus' self-mutilation marks the moment when his sense of himself as infallible gives way to a sense of his own radical failing, his inability to defy the edicts of the gods and to determine his destiny alone. Yet his is not a simple story of loss; Oedipus suffers a cut, but he is not cut down. His loss is both inscribed in his bleeding eyes and also covered over by their gore, by the gruesome and legendary act of his own sacrifice. Oedipus loses his eyes, but his wounds reveal his failings only in order to forge his mythic status as one whose heroism, whose moral and spiritual superiority, is finally, paradoxically, guaranteed by this violent blemish on the surface of his subjectivity, his inescapable tragic flaw.

The Oedipal stage is all over blindness. The rupture Oedipus inflicts upon himself, the rupture which permits him to fall, Adam-like, into a cultural and theatrical afterlife of extraordinary scope, happens not inappropriately under the auspices of another rupture, a structural rift in the fabric of performance. Violence in Attic tragedy is conventionally proscribed from the stage; the audience of Oedipus' suffering can never

directly bear witness to his self-mutilation. We can see and hear its after-effects, but we can never confront the actual moment of violence designed to transform Oedipus into the quintessential tragic hero beyond rather than before our eyes. We are blind to Oedipus' blinding; our eyes fail so that the brutality of his ocular failure may seem all the more convincing, all the more pitiable, all the more awe-inspiring. Oedipus' rejuvenation, his elevation to legendary status, is predicated upon our willing blindness to the messiness of the act, and to the artifice of the stage. So much may seem axiomatic. What may not be obvious, however, is the dependence of the Oedipal outcome upon a third, prior rupture, one we as audience are not only not permitted to see but are barely permitted to acknowledge – one whose paramount invisibility guarantees the shape of the scene that is finally presented to our eyes, guarantees that Oedipus' tragedy, his pain and his suffering, will command, upon his return to the stage, all of our sympathy and admiration.

When Oedipus finally realizes the truth of his history in all its nearly-unspeakable detail, he rushes wailing through the centre-stage doors. What ensues we learn from a messenger shortly after: Oedipus enters the palace “like a maddened beast” (l. 1386), calls for a sword, and “crashe[s]” (l. 1394) into Jocasta's chamber (ostensibly to kill her, as Elizabeth Bronfen argues). There he finds her hanging, already dead by her own hand; at the sight of her hanged body, he puts out his eyes, unable to face the image of absolute suffering they have met, the image of *his* absolute fallibility Jocasta's suffering body conjures.

The death of Jocasta is a monumental event not because it marks the death of Jocasta, but because it inaugurates the transmutation of Oedipus from proud and arrogant leader to the picture of humility, and thence to a figure of vast proportion, a theatrical



demi-god. The death of Jocasta is most singularly notable for being an utter non-event in every other respect: quite ironically, the messenger who relates the inner scene promises to show us in words “what that poor woman suffered” (l. 1368), but finds himself quickly side-tracked by his obsessive observation of Oedipus’ actions and reactions. He even admits that he and his men did not finally see how Jocasta died, distracted as they were by Oedipus’ raving entrance and his subsequent rash actions. “[W]e couldn’t watch her agony to the end,” he says; “our eyes were fixed on him” (l.1384-5). The messenger and his fellows may not have followed their leader’s suit and gouged out their own eyes at the sight of Jocasta’s body, but they seemed equally compelled to inflict a kind of blindness upon the scene, refusing actively to witness either her self-wounding or the violent and crushing power of sexual and social orthodoxy that wounding invokes. A hanging death is unique, comparable perhaps only to a crucifixion,<sup>1</sup> as it requires observers to confront the dead body in a strangely distended moment of its fatal violence: the dying seems to carry on to infinity, as the after-image of the body on the rope, or nailed to the cross, represents the act of perishing and all its implications even after the body itself has physically perished. Vision ruptures, in this inner sanctum which we in the auditorium can never see, at the sight of the female body – the false lover’s body, the failed mother’s body – limp under the weight of a profound transgression horrifically punished, and the eyes quickly turn away, to other matters. Oedipus cuts Jocasta down; he then immediately exchanges her “agony” for his suffering as he puts out his eyes (“you’ll see no more the pain *I* suffered” he cries at his eyes as he stabs them [l.1406, my emphasis]), and by a similar rhetorical manoeuvre his ocular sacrifice before the image of that earlier sacrifice upon which he can no longer bear to gaze suddenly becomes evidence not of his

impotence before the image but rather of his “superhuman power” (l.1466), represented not simply by his claimed kinship with Apollo (l.1467) but more critically by a peculiar, renewed sense of his own invincibility (“I did it all myself!” he declares like a proud child when asked to explain his stamina for the blinding: “the hand that struck my eyes was mine” [l.1471, 1469]). Oedipus’ empty sockets are transformed in his eleventh-hour abjection into strange proof of the very divinity he had seemingly failed to command when he fell prey to the oracle’s prediction, proof of his subjective wholeness and of the omniscience that walks hand-in-hand with the blind in Greek mythology. Meanwhile, Jocasta’s hanged body and the human fallibility it envisions literally disappear (we never see the body; aside from a throw-away reference to burial rites, it is never spoken of once Oedipus returns to the stage) in his bleeding but rejuvenated eyes.<sup>2</sup>

This loss which is actually a gain, this self-wounding which is actually evidence of power, a guarantee of identity, makes Oedipus’ climactic moment the perfect icon for what Freud would, more than two thousand years later (and during the birth of another watershed theatrical tradition, modern psychological realism), call the castration complex. For Freud, castration fear marks the psychic subject’s entry into culture, when he (always *he*) is forced to confront his vulnerability, the ruse of his invincibility, and yet is compelled by his recognition of that vulnerability to imagine himself more powerful than ever in a kind of talismanic proof to the contrary. In a (perhaps unconscious) nod to his Attic predecessor, Freud directs the castration scene around an ocular rupture of the Oedipal kind, a tear in the field of vision which is predicated upon the abrogation of female suffering, the disappearing maternal body in violence. As the story goes, the boy child, infatuated with his mother during the Oedipal phase of his development, catches a

glimpse of her genitals, realizes she is without a penis, infers that she must have once been castrated as punishment for some kind of sexual transgression (masturbation, the taboo which haunts Freud's small subject), and immediately projects the threat of genital mutilation she signifies onto his own body. Just as the sight of Jocasta's ruined body compels Oedipus to remake her suffering into his own and thence into an extraordinary cultural power, Freud's boy child, on the cusp of the dissolution of his own Oedipus complex, transforms his spectral image (however phantasmatically conceived) of a shocking act of sexual violence committed against his mother into the image of his own potential violation. Just as Jocasta's self-inflicted violation exists only to underwrite the Oedipal legend, the shadow of the female body in violence embedded insidiously within the Freudian picture is never acknowledged except as disavowed, is projected in the very moment of its recognition back onto the male body imagining it, and is immediately transformed into an acculturating process – the process by which the boy child realizes both his phallic supremacy and his potential lack, the process by which all symbolic value comes to rest in the phallic signifier, the process by which women come to be defined as culture's most potent and pervasive embodiment of a feared and hated imperfection. Freud's castration fantasy is no less an Oedipal fantasy than his incestuous dreams: it is the fantasy of a suffering female body which has always already been violated, but whose moment of violation is lost, is not in fact articulable except as something else, the spectre of violence against a man, the image of culture itself.<sup>3</sup>

*Oedipus Rex* founds the Western tragic tradition in a brutally literal rupture of the eye before the image of the mutilated female body suspended in its mythic, unseen interior. That rupture compels the hero's own suffering, institutes that suffering as

primary, and guarantees the play's dramatic legacy, its eponymous cultural production. Centuries later, Freud founds the psychic subject with a strikingly similar occlusion, a very Oedipal substitution of pain. Between these two book-ends, the history of women's bodily suffering remains very much a history of non-representation, of representation-in-abrogation, of a strange and disquieting absence at centre stage. If "[t]heatre is an Oedipal affair, the scene of the cut or wound, of the crown that burns its wearer" (Freedman 58), what kind of feminist performance theory and practice might allow us to explore, at last, not the cut that is assumed to be the condition of possibility of (male) psychic being both on and beyond the stage (Freud's castration anxiety; Oedipus' gaping sores), but rather the cut that marks the point of disappearance on which that other wound depends, the residual trace of woman's (strangely invisible) body in violence? How might we read Jocasta back into the Oedipal scene, reveal her terminal scar at the heart of his ocular rupture, halt her body's recession into his bleeding eyes? The gouged-out shells with which Oedipus is left have no iris to reflect or to return what they have refused so perfectly; finally, they can only reflect refusal itself. Into that blind moment, the vacant Oedipal eye, I direct my critical gaze.

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, important differences between these two forms of violence, not the least of which is visual impact: while a hanged body appears to close in on itself, slumped, limp, its face averted, a crucified body is visually more confrontational, its agony more apparent and its death far more extended. My thanks to Leslie Katz for pointing out this distinction to me.

<sup>2</sup> For a related and unique reading of *Oedipus Rex* see Elizabeth Bronfen's *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents* (1998). Bronfen re-reads Oedipus' story as a failed matricide, arguing that his rush offstage in search of a sword "articulates a dream other than the one about our incestual desires for the mother and our patricidal hatred and murderous wishes directed against the father [...] The phantasy [Oedipus] embarks on is that in destroying the body that was the origin both for himself and his progeny he might discharge the guilt he is suddenly burdened with. He might thus assert his potency against the curse of knowledge that Jocasta brought on him in the double gesture of giving birth to him and bearing his children" (13-14). She then speculates that a successful matricide would have cancelled the need for Oedipus' self-blinding, as it would have "reinstated his imaginary fiction of omnipotence" (14) which the acknowledgement of his crime stole away. Bronfen concludes that the sight of Jocasta's body is ultimately cathartic, forcing Oedipus to recognize "his own impotence before fate" as it becomes "a sign for the mutability and fallibility that any notion of potency would require he repress" (15). Bronfen's argument,

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which embeds my own in its revaluation of female suffering at the undisclosed heart of Sophocles' scene, also diverges from mine at a key point. Whereas Bronfen argues that Jocasta's death represents a watershed moment for Oedipus, in which he cannot but acknowledge the tyranny of his own origins and the inevitability of his own death, I am arguing that Jocasta's death functions as an elision rather than a revelation, coded as phantasmatic proof of Oedipus' *continued* potency rather than his lack thereof. Faced with the image of Jocasta's body Oedipus is, indeed, faced with the horror of his inability to conquer the curse of his origin; in the face of that horror, however, he radically averts his eyes, reasserts his power as an individual and guarantees his legendary status, covering over the image of his failure by effacing the attendant image of his mother's suffering body.

<sup>3</sup> Freud is simultaneously troubled by and yet unable to come to terms with the very possibility of violence against women in a number of different moments in his writings. In "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908), he suggests that children who may catch a glimpse of their parents having sex are likely to "adopt what may be called a *sadistic view of coition*" (220, emphasis in original) as they imagine intercourse as their father's violence against their mother. Most disturbing here is Freud's barely conscious acknowledgement, on 221-2, that for many women in his cultural moment sex within marriage was often a matter of enforcement, of spousal rape. Freud suggests the child, "pretending to be asleep," "may receive an impression from his mother which he can only interpret as meaning that she is defending herself against an act of violence" (221), but he leaves mightily ambiguous any suggestion that the child's impressions may be correct (on 221 he notes that the child's observations of sex as sadism are simultaneously accurate "up to a certain point" and yet also "in part" incorrect and "reversed").

Other feminist critics have argued that Freud's castration theory pivots on anterior disavowals of a different kind. Bronfen suggests that Freud's overvaluation of the phallus derives from "an unwillingness to directly theorize the traumatic impact of our mortality" which is, of course, not gendered (*Knotted Subject* 16); Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman*, on the other hand, posits the castration complex as a theory which erases or represses the possibility that women's sexual origins and pleasures may be other than phallic, a possibility which might invalidate the argument of phallic supremacy on which so much culture (and cultural theory) is based.

## Chapter One Violence and the Crisis of Vision

What horrid sounds are these?  
*The Changeling* 5.3.141

In the climactic scene of Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*, the duplicitous Beatrice Joanna gets her come-uppance in a closet. She has been, from the play's first moments, admired as an icon of unsullied virginity, as near divinity as that *other* paragon of Christian femininity, the Virgin Mary ("'Twas in the temple where I first beheld her" muses Alsemero in the first line of the play); like so many Jacobean stage heroines, however, Beatrice Joanna proves to be dangerously more than her initial rhetorical rendering would suggest. She is an independent thinker; she will not be bound by her father's choice of husband and quickly devises a plan to activate her subjugated desire. Failing to escape the strictures of gender, she contracts her despised servant de Flores to be her proxy in the murder of the man to whom she has been contracted, in order to make way for the man to whom she has pledged her heart. Her choices, perhaps, are unwise: the pitfalls of manslaughter aside, in de Flores she selects a poor confidant who desires her body far more than the conventional rewards of service; he rapes her and then blackmails her into an ongoing sexual liaison. She proves too clever by half in keeping her beloved – later her husband – Alsemero off the trail of her misdeeds, but she finally pays for them with her life in his private inner sanctum. As those familiar with Jacobean tragedy will immediately recognize, there is nothing particularly unusual about Beatrice Joanna; like so many of her theatrical compatriots she is an over-reacher whose unwomanly conduct threatens the broader homosocial order which structures her dramatic universe, and as a result she must be purged in the play's

climactic scene for the sake of order's tentative return. Like that to which so many other women on the Jacobean stage are subject, the violence committed against Beatrice Joanna – from de Flores' initial rape to her final-act murder, also at his hand – effects the play's long-anticipated resolution, is its structural lodestone, perhaps even its *raison d'être*. Beatrice Joanna's fate itself, then, seems hardly remarkable. What is remarkable, however, is its structure: Beatrice Joanna loses her life in a scene of stunning metatheatricality orchestrated to take place just beyond audience view but still within range of audience ears, audible yet invisible.<sup>1</sup>

When Beatrice Joanna enters to her husband at the beginning of the play's final scene he is in a rage, having discovered her adulterous liaison with de Flores. She quickly confesses her hand in the murder of Piracquo in an effort to prove her devotion to Alsemero and her innocence to the charge of infidelity. Alsemero, horrified not only by the extent of her crimes but (perhaps more significantly) by his own inability to read them in their entirety, to *see* his wife's true nature clearly, reacts to this stunning total subversion of his authority by reclaiming his patriarchal territory<sup>2</sup> in the most literal manner possible: he imprisons Beatrice Joanna in his private closet, and shortly after sends de Flores in to exact the play's long-anticipated revenge upon her. The set-up he couches in the language of the stage:

Get you into her, sir. [...]

I'll be your pander now: rehearse again

Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect

When you shall come to act it to the black audience

Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you. (5.3.113-17)

As the other principals file on, Beatrice Joanna's cries emanate from Alsemero's anti-theatre; Alsemero narrates the action none of us can see, confident that the punitive end he has stage-managed for his "opacous" (l. 196) bride is "coming" to her (l. 139). At Alsemero's direction, de Flores re-emerges carrying the now fatally wounded Beatrice Joanna in order that she may confirm the authority of Alsemero's putative all-seeing eye by confessing her grim sins, naming herself as the pollution defiling her father's citadel (and, by extension, the state for which that citadel stands as metonym), and calling for her own death. Although the audience has seen nothing of the violence to which she has been subject, we are nevertheless meant to be confident that we have seen everything of Beatrice Joanna there is to see.

*The Changeling* is ocular fantasy – the fantasy that our eyes are all-powerful, that they carry with them power to confer meaning upon all they survey (or imagine they survey) – and like all fantasies its exuberance, its excessive confidence in Alsemero's resuscitated eye requires the resisting reader to inquire to what extent its stock ending, almost pornographic in its fulfillment of patriarchal wish, might ultimately be phantasmatic. Alsemero's commentary, once coupled with Beatrice Joanna's compliant self-abnegation after she is dragged back on stage and into plain view, portends to serve where eyes (Alsemero's own; his father-in-law's; the audience's) have so dramatically failed. Yet Beatrice Joanna's own inarticulate noises, emanating from the closet during the height of her suffering, are purposefully vague, not signs to be read so much as signs to be puzzled over. They compete with Alsemero's confident narration, infecting it with the evasiveness he both fears and dreads about his wife's dealings and innermost experiences.<sup>3</sup> They infect his ears, and ours; they penetrate our bodies in a disquieting



echo of Beatrice Joanna's uncertain fate. "O, O, O!" Beatrice Joanna cries, leaving her readers and listeners to insert their preferred image into, make their own sense of, this gap in the text/on the stage: is this a cry for mercy in a moment of extraordinary brutality? A cry to God at the thought of past wrongs finally repented? The big O itself, pleasure despite the scene's perversions (see Garber)? "O" is early modern slang for the vagina, for female genitalia as nothing, as a hole that signifies erasure: we cannot forget that Alsemero means de Flores to rehearse his initial "scene of lust" with Beatrice Joanna, but nor can we forget that this "scene" was actually one of sinister coercion, sexual violence, not mutual consent. Alsemero's metatheatre erases the possibility of Beatrice Joanna's sexual pain even as he both anticipates and covers over the uncanny noise, the blank on the stage that may signal either pain or pleasure. What happens to Beatrice Joanna in the blink of our collective eye? Is this sex or violence, passion or rape, self-sacrifice or murder, or some combination of them all? We cannot know: if Beatrice Joanna's noises off seem to support Alsemero's interpretation of the unseen event (which, we might note, he imagines to be both sex and violence, and yet neither – above all, this is simply justice in his mind), they also defy sense and thus tacitly oppose his attempt to assert semiotic closure over that event.<sup>4</sup> Between these two competing voices – the all-too-confident voice that fills and the disembodied, suffering voice that fails to fill – the ocular void at the structural centre of the scene is thrust into the foreground, confronting the audience with the limits of theatrical seeing, the limits of our eyes, our words, our assumptions.

For Jacques Lacan, language and the eye – the twin poles of the Symbolic order – are the two points at which human beings are inevitably confronted with their own

incompleteness (which is also the price of entry into Symbolic order): no matter how clearly we think we have seen the objects in our line of sight, no matter how sure we feel that we have understood our interlocutor, or made ourselves understood to him or her, the gap between image and identification, sense and symbol, remains to haunt us with a residual sense of our own imperfection, our defining impleteness. When that gap becomes visible to the (momentarily) naked eye, as it does in the final scene of *The Changeling*, a certain unease develops over sight and sense missed – or, more specifically, over sight and sense made deliberately to be missed<sup>5</sup> – and we face, in Beatrice Joanna’s gaping “O!”, our own lack in seeing, the limits of our understanding: in short, we face a hole.

I begin my study with the “O” Lacan identifies as the defining moment of our being (as it is spectacularly manifested by Beatrice Joanna, consummate actress and quintessential changeling<sup>6</sup>), but am motivated by the pernicious persistence of two other holes, one in feminist performance theory, and one in the textual and performance practices of the early modern drama.<sup>7</sup> At their point of intersection lies the vexed and persistent problem of the theatrical representation of women’s bodies in violence: as it haunts the scene of Beatrice Joanna’s original sin as well as her brutal exodus from the scene of her punishment; as that which feminist performance theory has until now largely avoided and that which the early modern English stage, despite its bloody specularity, has somehow evaded. My hope is that by excavating the place where these two practices meet to produce their single gaping “O” we may discover a feminist paradigm in which a critical and interrogatory performance of violence against women may take place.

Bloody and brutal violence against women is one of the standard commodities of the English early modern (especially though not exclusively Jacobean) theatre, but curiously the idea if not also the very act of violence itself is typically absented from representation, taking as its privileged milieu a kind of “offstage” space.<sup>8</sup> This absence may be literal, as in representations of rape (Catty 23-4, 108), the violence in question taking place between acts or in otherwise secret, imaginary spaces the general spectatorship is not privileged to see; alternatively, this absence may be figurative, as is typical in representations of the punitive torture of a sexually or intellectually “unruly” woman.<sup>9</sup> In the latter case, violence inevitably disappears into the rhetoric of justice and punishment, of sacrifice and martyrdom, of holy contrition and divine redemption, despite a full-frontal representation that offers to viewers’ plain sight a woman’s domination and punishment. Whether literally absent from the stage or horrifyingly present to audience eyes, the physical violation of women in the plays of this period has a tendency to slip sideways, coded by the drama as anything but violence against a woman. Even at its most visibly spectacular, the misogynist brutality of the Jacobean stage constitutes as much hole as image, less a spectacle of violence than a spectacular elision of violence.

Over the course of the nearly three decades since its first articulation, feminist performance theory has been engaged in a similar elision of its own. Taking as its principal object the problematic representation of women and their bodies in mainstream film and theatre, feminist performance theory begins in the mid-seventies with a critique of the “male gaze” and its centrality to the representational apparatus. The early theory pivots upon the inherent violence of this gaze, but that violence remains mired in

abstraction, in the symbolism which marks the psychoanalytic project itself (to which feminist performance theory is heavily indebted): the violence of the gaze is the violence of the fetish, of the eye that models a mirror for the looking self out of the (terrorizing) image of the female other, thereby instituting a binary and hegemonized gender difference. While feminist performance theory's interrogation of the cultural violence effected by the hierarchical ocularity of the performance event (in which the spectator sees and the woman, as spectacle, functions as the quintessential given-to-be-seen) has been both necessary and worthwhile, and while the theory has since moved on to propose, in more recent years, various performance strategies and models of viewership designed to disrupt the conventionally gendered spectator-spectacle dynamic,<sup>10</sup> curiously missing from either of these undertakings has been any dedicated engagement with the fraught issue of the representation of literal moments of violence against women in performance. Despite its parallel interests in the politics of spectatorship and in the creation of new, explicitly feminist performance paradigms, feminist performance theory has effectively avoided the questions both of what it means to watch violence against women on the stage, and of what a critical feminist performance of such violence might look like.

Where the feminist performance theory of the latter part of the twentieth century and the often explicitly anti-feminist performance practice of the early seventeenth-century stage coincide, then, is in their mutual refusal to take up the question of violence against women – a gesture (or non-gesture) which echoes a mammoth global cultural history of similar refusal that continues, despite the political and legal strides we have made in recent history in the West, to infect too much of our contemporary attitude

toward and response to such violence.<sup>11</sup> In the chapters ahead, I bring a diverse collection of (primarily) Jacobean dramatic texts in which moments of violence against women are explicitly and often jarringly refused conscious representation into dialogue with a series of texts and performances drawn from the scene of contemporary theatre practice; this deliberate, cross-historical and often trans-cultural dialectic allows me to address the critical gap I have identified in the feminist performance theory by developing a theory and practice for the representation of violence against women on stage that seeks to account not only for that violence's missing bodies, but also – and most forcefully – for its pernicious cultural history of bodily and psychic elision. My decision to introduce the late- and post-modern into a study of early modern theatre is motivated by my belief that a truly provocative, truly interrogatory performance of violence against women in the present must make manifest its own textual and performance history; not until we come to terms with the ways in which women's violence has traditionally been made to disappear from the theatrical scene as from the scene of culture – the female body in violence never permitted to be, in Judith Butler's phrase, a body that matters<sup>12</sup> – can we fully achieve a feminist representation of such a body, of such violence. The work of contemporary theatre and performance artists offers me a measure against which to gauge both the retrograde representations and the nascent feminist potential of the earlier works I study, and allows me to excavate specific strategies for future feminist performances of violence against women culled from both historical and contemporary antecedents. As I explore the broad cultural history of violence's disappearance and disavowal through the lens of two specific moments in dramatic history, my argument coalesces around my belief that “elision” need not be a bad thing: while the off-staging of violent acts against

women in the early drama often signals a wider refusal to confront the manifold meanings or acknowledge the social validity of the female body in violence, it may also (as Beatrice Joanna's gaping "O" demonstrates) provoke a peculiar moment of recognition, when spectators are suddenly confronted with a hole and are forced to reckon, not with the missing image of violence, but rather with the image of violence *as missed, as missing* – with that violence's very (dramatic, theoretical, historical) disappearance.

A story about violence, especially a story about violence against women, is inevitably a story about bodies: about the ways in which they are conceived, framed and contained by discourse (be it theatrical, legal, literary, ecclesiastical, medical), and about the ways in which discourse thereby permits them to exist as material of worth and note in any given context. In *The Logic of Practice*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that bodily configuration in social space is always historically inscribed; we are physically marked by our *habitus*, a system of internalized cultural norms which include among them social and economic conditions, existing sex and gender divisions, "the embodied rituals of everydayness by which a given culture produces and sustains belief in its own 'obviousness'" (Butler 210). Our bodies wear our histories: Bourdieu insists that the *habitus* is "a product of history" which "produces [...] more history" by "ensur[ing] the active presence of past experiences [...] deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action" which "guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time" (*Logic* 54). Despite this provocative suggestion, Bourdieu's *habitus* often seems curiously out of time; its sense of the role specific kinds of histories (economic histories; class histories; sexual histories; medical histories) play

in producing and in turn being reproduced by different kinds of bodies in different social spaces is both present to his discussion and yet at some level always only latent.

Bourdieu's *habitus*, as Judith Butler points out, "might well be read as a reformulation of Althusser's notion of ideology" (210) – ideology written across the body, ideology as a sustained yet largely invisible social practice produced on individual bodies in and through gesture, expression, conscious and unconscious physical action. Butler's theoretical exploration of the performative acts by which we all unconsciously reproduce acceptable modes of sexed and gendered expression is in turn a reformulation of Bourdieu. As ideology written on and through the gendered body, her version of *habitus* explores gendered embodiment as a history of individually articulated but collectively regulated performance practices. Butler's project is based upon an argument implicit but not fully theorized in Bourdieu's work: the *habitus* is not just body-as-ideological history (the body as a map of past practices), but is also ideology as *bodily* history, comprehensible only through a careful tracing of the discourses governing embodiment in any given historical or cultural moment. As Bourdieu implies and Butler makes manifest, social history is always first and foremost a history of the body, and the continuities between and differences among bodies across space and time bear connection and investigation in any project that seeks to map social or cultural experience.

In the surviving works of the early modern period we witness the beginning of a thoroughly modern subjectivity, based in large measure upon the conflict between individual embodiment and larger social, even national expectation, whose late incarnation we live now.<sup>13</sup> My marriage of early and late, Jacobean and contemporary

traces a performance history through the ongoing story of women's bodies, through women's intimate and ever-present connection to violation even as the female body's cultural significance and affective value shifts across cultures and over time – from object of linguistic boundedness and public and private policing at the beginning of the modern period, to late modern subject able to explore and perhaps even explode that boundedness, able to articulate the physical, psychic and social effects of its historical shackling, the elliptical narrative of its long-buried suffering. The late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama's central anxiety over the female body as a paradoxically material symbol of an otherwise uncomfortably intangible patriarchal authority and control – as a mass of murky, often volatile materiality upon which both familial and state honour, not to mention culture's very evolution, depends – combined with its evident lack of interest in that body as matter that might matter to itself, or to others in and of itself, makes it the ideal vehicle for my inquiry. Early modern culture, and the theatre that both reflects and shapes it, mitigates its anxieties over the covert power of female bodies and confirms its staunchly patriarchal *habitus* by forcing those bodies to disappear in the moment of their most traumatic, and most reductive, embodiment; the ideological and psychic effects of this disappearing act continue to operate within and even openly motivate our individual and collective social actions to this day.

Barbara Freedman has written of “the reliance of theatrical desire on the fetishized spectacle of woman and the narrative of her domination and punishment” (59). Implicit here are two forms of violence against women – one sexual, another punitive – which Freedman does not ultimately consider in detail but which bear detailed consideration as individual yet related phenomena. Taking my cue from Freedman's



polemic, I use the term “violence against women” to encompass both explicitly sexual violence and violence designed as punishment – or, more accurately perhaps, as retribution – for a woman’s bodily transgression (which, under the rigidly patriarchal rubric of early modern England, defines any sexual behaviour undertaken outside of a sanctioned marriage, and continues even today to designate sexual behaviour that fails to conform to accepted norms of monogamy, and often of heterosexuality).<sup>14</sup> In thus narrowing the scope of my investigation, I seek to account for the two most common forms of gendered violence on the early modern stage (note, for example, that Beatrice Joanna suffers both in exemplary fashion) and to explore their points of intersection and divergence, both with one another and with our contemporary understanding of each. Violence is by no means a transhistorical notion, and attitudes toward what can legally, socially or medically be considered violence against women are rooted deeply in specific cultural moments. The early moderns, as I will outline below and consider in further detail in chapters two and three, considered rape violence to be a crime, though not typically a crime that had anything material to do with a woman’s body (at least until the early seventeenth century); in contrast, while spousal violence against husbands was legally defined as a form of treason, the legal status of beating one’s wife or daughter remained unclear in the period. A woman’s right to physical protection in her home jarred against the male householder’s legal right to engage in acts of “reasonable correction” against all members of the household. “Reasonable correction” was in theory not intended to be violent, but because its limits were vague and its notion of “reason” tied less to the physical state of a “corrected” woman than to reports of the seriousness of her transgressions, in practice it protected men against the likelihood that they would be

prosecuted for inappropriate violence and effectively sanctioned spousal abuse as an acceptable form of social control. As I explore the ways in which the drama of this period both mimics and interrogates the broader culture's evasive, discomfiting relationship to both sexual and non-sexual physical violence against women, I also seek to bracket those forms of violence which may more broadly be construed as "cultural" rather than literally physical. While my discussion will as a matter of course engage the more subtle or insidious forms of violence implicit in the gendered stratification of Renaissance society (such as the enclosure of the woman in both her home and her body [see Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories"]), the purpose of this study is to rethink the representational status of specifically physical acts of violence as they are manifest at the level of culture and rehearsed and redressed in the theatre.

A word about method: this study is not intended as a history of production or reception, but takes as its primary material existing dramatic texts (and, where available, some textual or visual records of performance) from both periods of its inquiry. While an investigation of specific productions, either historical or more recent, is beyond my scope, as I explore the possible physical shape each text's representation of violence against women may take in performance I focus my critical spotlight upon the implied performance practices that form part of the narrative arc of each text. Hence I consider the metatheatrical quality of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and its implication for Lavinia's and Gloriana's enforced "rehearsals" of their rapes; hence I propose that the Duchess of Malfi may be read as an early modern feminist performance artist by comparing the contours of Webster's characterization with the contemporary work of Diamanda Galas and Karen Finley; hence I discuss the ways in which a series of

texts embed models of spectatorship and invite real-life audiences to model their own viewing practices in turn. I locate my work in the imaginative possibilities of text not yet rendered image (not yet made knowledge to be absorbed through and fixed in the eye); as I tune my textual analysis to the inherently performative (and often meta-performative) nature of the objects of my inquiry, the positions of performer and spectator they embed as they structure character relations within their scenes of violence, I aim to create a map for potential future stagings, and envision the possibilities for feminist performances yet to come.

#### 1. Violence against women in contemporary feminist theatre scholarship

If feminist performance theory can be said to have a specific moment of origin, that moment may very well be the publication of Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in 1975. Mulvey reads Hollywood film through the lens of Freud's writings on sexuality and argues that the "formal beauty" of such film, organized around the eroticized bodies of women, provides the "alienated subject" of psychoanalysis, "torn in his imaginary memory by a sense of loss, by the terror of potential lack," with "a glimpse of satisfaction" (8). Within Mulvey's formulation, the logic of "narrative" cinematic representation depends upon the logic of Freud's own castration narrative, in which the little boy sees his mother's genitals, realizes she has no penis, and immediately projects that perceived lack onto his own body, imagining and fearing an immanent moment of violence against it. The memory trace of this moment will then sever his Oedipal connection with his mother and reorient his attachment to his father, thus completing his acculturation in a normalized identification with the

patriarchal authority his father represents.<sup>15</sup> But the threat to the body of the little boy, phantasmatic though it be, nevertheless remains within his psyche as always potentially destabilizing, the ruin of the very authority it paradoxically sets up. Against the memory of this threat, the image of woman is erected as a fetish (as it was indeed for Freud, in all his romantic musings about the “dark continent” of female sexuality), coded as perfection, an imagined plenitude designed to cover over the danger of lack and loss to the male body and ego which that image always already embodies. For Mulvey, the woman on screen thus becomes both object of pleasure and object of derision to the voyeuristic male eye, and the result, as it is in Freud’s castration narrative, is the institution of gender difference at the site of sight itself:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (11, emphasis in original)

Implicit in Mulvey’s reading of the cinematic scene is a violence of the eye, of the gaze of the voyeur who seeks to obliterate the residual trace of danger to his own body/self by mutating the body of the woman in his field of vision into the image and guarantee of his own plenitude – in effect, by transforming her in his eye into an inverse reflection of his own ideal image: “[w]hat the voyeur seeks [...] is not the phallus on the body of the other but its absence as the definition of the mastering presence, the security, of his position, his seeing, his phallus” (Heath 89). The violence of the male gaze is always already the

violence both of the fetish (which wards off the anxiety of not-me), and of gender difference (which guarantees the superior quality of me-ness).

Mulvey's essay, although challenged from the beginning for its own investment in binary sex difference and its seeming refusal to theorize a viable position for a female spectator,<sup>16</sup> had an enormous impact on the theory that followed in both theatre and cinema studies. Feminists working in both disciplines have since Mulvey frequently taken as axiomatic the violence inherent in the voyeuristic eye, as "the sexualization and objectification of women" in performative representation has been read to be "not simply for the purposes of eroticism; from a psychoanalytic point of view, it is designed to annihilate the threat that woman (as castrated, and possessing a sinister genital organ) poses" (Kaplan 311). Barbara Freedman has gone so far as to label the spectator-spectacle dialectic whose pleasures ostensibly "depen[d] upon and in turn develo[p] coercive identifications with a position of male antagonism toward women" (59) "a rape which has always already occurred" (73), again upholding the theory's investment in the notion that the female performer/given-to-be-seen is somehow both literally and figuratively violated *in the very process* of representation: "the gaze itself emerges as a site of sexual difference" as "[n]ot only pleasure but plot is derived from male fantasies which depend on the *scopic and narrative exploitation* of woman" (59, my emphasis).

Linda Williams, in her 1989 book on hard-core pornographic cinema, has perhaps most succinctly articulated both the predominant trope governing Mulvian performance theory and its essential blind spot. In Mulvey's influential model of "cinema as perversion" (204),

violence and abuse are understood less literally, not as real violence and aggression perpetrated on the real women depicted in films, but as perversions ‘implanted’ in cinematic discourse itself: the sadistic, masochistic, voyeuristic, and fetishizing structures that operate throughout the whole of cinema to deny female subjectivity and to render women the exhibitionist objects of male desire and aggression [...] the dominant ‘male gaze’ of cinema encodes male dominance and sadism into the very structure of looking. (189, 204)

Williams’ own work excavates the very moment Mulvian theory misses – the moment of *literal* violence (in this case, specifically sado/masochistic violence) on film – and in so doing reminds us that behind the violence of the look lie other, often more urgent, moments of violence *in* representation which are frequently ignored by feminist performance theorists over-invested in the idea of a violence *of* representation. Returning to my quotation from Freedman in the paragraph above, we might read it closely for what it forgets. Freedman notes that the “exploitation” of women in theatrical representation is both “scopic” and “narrative,” yet the former remains the ascendant term in her binary, and indeed she goes on in the remainder of her essay to propose possible strategies by which the (female) object of representation might disturb the gaze’s fetishizing operations, thus cementing its paramount authority within the structure of her argument. In other words, Freedman both acknowledges and yet drops the possibility of engaging a representational violence against women that operates alongside, or possibly even prior to, the ubiquitous violence of the gaze.<sup>17</sup> Via Mulvey, feminist performance theory has made its major critical investment in violence against women as a function of the sadism of the eye, and while that trope has not gone unquestioned (as I have already noted,

Williams is but one of many theorists who take issue with the assumptions on which “Visual Pleasure” is based), nor has it been the only critical paradigm governing the rich feminist analyses of film and theatrical performance over the course of the last few years, it has nevertheless remained feminist performance theory’s only major vehicle for understanding the ontology of violence against women on film or on the stage.<sup>18</sup>

What, specifically, is feminist performance theory missing in its top-heavy focus on the violence of the look, violence that is imagined to emanate from the eye as a function of (gendered and gendering) sight? In keeping with the position of dominance it accords Freudian (and Lacanian) psychoanalysis among its theoretical bases, the feminist theory has similarly elided the *a priori* moment of violence against women on which those schools are themselves based and which they themselves disavow. Because the founding narrative of feminist performance theory begins at the moment when the image of the (castrated) woman provokes for the (male) voyeur a spectral sense of his own repressed lack, that theory’s conception of the violence of the gaze is necessarily tied to the moment in Freudian theory when the boy child realizes, in the sight/memory of the female genitals, both a sense of his own loss and a violent need to conquer that sensation.<sup>19</sup> His first response, according to Freud, is to deny the difference his eyes show him – a response which accords to the violence of the fetish which Mulvey identifies in the institution of the (woman as) cinematic image. His second, more normative, response will be to come to terms with difference, imagining himself superior to she who lacks by identifying with his father and all others who possess the power of his own organ – in other words, by “discovering” the “reality” of gender difference, which is for feminist performance theory (and feminist theories generally) a no less significant form of

representational violence. Yet we must remember that the moment of castration fear which for Freud founds culture (and founds it by gendering it in the masculine) is based on the necessary disavowal of an assumed *prior* moment of violence against women – a moment which is no less “actual” in the psychoanalytic imaginary for being entirely symbolic or (as we might easily argue) theoretically retrograde and dangerously hegemonic. The lost act of violence against women which operates the entire Freudian apparatus establishes the girl as *always already* castrated; the theory of the castrated subject implies a moment of horrific sexual mutilation (akin in the Real, perhaps, to ritual female circumcision) which must remain other to the Freudian imagination in order for Freud to make *her* assumed misfortune entirely about a perceived threat to *his* body, and about the subsequent process of *his* normative subject-formation. In other words, the moment of castration fear is both the pre-eminent moment of the violence of the gaze (when acculturation takes place because difference is produced in the eye) and the moment when the violence of the gaze displaces an implied earlier moment of violence against women, rendering it invisible to theory (because the perceived threat of violence against the male body generated by the sight of the “missing” female phallus, not the violence imagined as having always already been committed against the female body in order to produce the image of lack, is the central psychic and theoretical object here).

Because feminist performance theory’s conception and critique of the violence of the gaze follows the Freudian staging of the castration scene, it misses – does not see – the relevance to its project of the critical relationship between violence against women and the refusal to see which tacitly operates the classical psychoanalytic paradigm. What is “lacking” from the castration scene as it is read by both Freud and Mulvey is not so



much the woman's phantasmatic member as the disavowed image of a bodily violation which establishes her notorious lack as an *a priori* phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Choosing to ignore the moment of female sexual mutilation implicit yet ignored in Freud's story, Mulvian feminist performance theory's account of violence against women in representation only commences with the violence of the cover-up, as the notorious gazing eye institutes woman as fetish and difference in its very refusal to see both the threat to its own body and the image of the woman's body in violence on which that threat depends. Like Freudian psychoanalysis, feminist performance theory unconsciously turns away from that earlier, phantasmatic moment of violence against women – a violence which is perhaps both much more literal and yet at the same time much more symbolic than the relatively abstract notion of the killing eye, and one which, significantly, can only ever exist (for the theory which invented it) in a state of non-representation. This lost, elided, forgotten, ignored, powerfully visceral yet abstractly theoretical moment of violence against women suggests that the violence of the gaze may be, for a feminist practice interested in interrogating the roots of violence against women in representation, a false start, a view of the end, not of the origin. Rather, it suggests that not seeing or not being seen may be more pertinent to a feminist understanding of the representation of women's bodies in violence than seeing or being seen has been to feminist performance theory's understanding of women's bodies in representation.

This largely-missed relationship between invisibility and violence against women has begun to be addressed – although generally not at the level of theory – by feminist critics working in other bodies of scholarship. From the medieval period to the modern period, scholars of literature, law, and cultural history are investigating the social and

artistic appropriation of women's experiences of (typically sexual) violence, and the subsequent disappearance of the gender-specific materiality of those experiences into a variety of homosocial paradigms.<sup>21</sup> One of the largest concentrations of this work focuses on the Renaissance: recent literary and historical work on violence against women on the early modern English stage and in English early modern culture has placed its emphasis upon the myriad ways in which that violence has been "effaced" in the very process of its own representation.<sup>22</sup> Over and against feminist performance theory's correlation between visibility and violence, an examination of this other body of work allows us to gain a deeper sense of the specific ways in which violence against women operates at the level of aversion or disavowal in patriarchal culture, and in so doing works to prop up the very authority on which that culture is built.

Considering the prevalence of rape violence (either completed or attempted) in the drama of the English Renaissance, there has been relatively little critical work done on the topic. What has been undertaken, however, has come to focus upon the ways in which rape is conventionally made to disappear from the scene of its own representation as it is troped or otherwise transformed into an event that holds meaning only as a crime against or an event which takes place "between men" (Kahn 54). Early work on perhaps the most likely text in the Renaissance canon for a feminist analysis of sexual violence, Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, establishes this field of inquiry first by examining the ways in which Lucrece evaporates as victim of her own rape, the poem troping it as a battle for possession of the symbolic power which her chastity may bestow upon her male owner. The criticism subsequently explores how the rape itself disappears with the transference of guilt for the crime to Lucrece herself, with her required absolution from

the resulting bodily and social pollution through death, and finally with the act's transmutation into the heroic battle which heralds a return to a stable political order as Tarquin is defeated by Lucrece's defenders. Essays by Coppélia Kahn (1976), Catharine Stimpson (1980), and Caroline Williams (1993) all consider "the violated, silenced female body" of Lucrece "as a middle term in a transaction between men" (Williams 94) which sees rape become, variously, a cipher for male honour, male heroism, and male political control, implying that the act itself as well as its significance as sexual violence committed against a woman and her body operate in the poem under total rhetorical erasure.<sup>23</sup>

In the last decade, three important studies, two of which focus explicitly on drama, have located this process of representational erasure (implied but never clearly stated in the earlier criticism) at the core of their analyses of rape in Renaissance texts. Barbara Baines' 1998 study, "Effacing Rape in Early Modern Representation," combines a reading of historical, legal and medical texts with a reading of *Lucrece* in order to clarify the relationship between the Renaissance refusal of rape violence and the problematic of women's consent. Commenting that "the reluctance to acknowledge the reality of rape' *is* the history of rape" (69, emphasis in original),<sup>24</sup> and using the seminal work of feminist historian Nazife Bashir as well as the work of several early modern legal theorists, Baines first considers the medieval notion of rape as a property crime in which "the punishment due the rapist is determined by the relationship or potential relationship of the raped woman to another man" (71), and then examines in detail the implications of the widely-held legal and medical belief (inherited from Galen) that women who conceived during forced intercourse were not in fact victims of rape (79).

Since pleasure and violence were (and continue to be) assumed by the law to be mutually exclusive, and since conception was intimately tied to women's sexual pleasure in the Galenic imagination, this "simple equation between conception, sexual pleasure, and consent [...] neatly effaces, as far as the law is concerned, the reality of rape" (80). The female body is not the site but the source of suffering in this particularly misogynist paradigm: the law's continued adherence, official or unofficial, to Galen's already-outmoded medical model demonstrates a deeply-held need to visualize female bodily interiors, to catch a glimpse of the inner secrets of female sexuality, even if only through the most imperfect theoretical lens available. To be raped is to be equated with one's body, with sex itself; to be denied the status of rape victim, under Renaissance law, is to be punished for the secrets the early modern patriarchy imagines the female body hides from the men who are supposed to control it. Baines' analysis of the role Galenic medicine played in the official discourse surrounding rape in the period suggests that the female body's unique (and uniquely powerful) ability to reproduce was used by the Renaissance legal establishment to sanction sexual violence against that body – payback, perhaps, for its inherent unruliness, its vexing uncontrollability.

Connections between the unruly female body, the problematic of consent and the institutionalized erasure of rape as a matter of women's bodily concern is the focus of Deborah Burks' 1995 essay on *The Changeling*, which prefigures Baines' work in important ways. Citing Aristotle's writings on women's "nature" (769) and its influence on the contradictory legal and social status of women in the period (who were imagined to be both agents of their own will, yet not responsible enough to manage their own affairs or control their own sexual desires), Burks frames her reading of Beatrice Joanna's

“crime” by arguing that the fear which lies behind the culture’s rape anxieties at the beginning of the seventeenth century is not simply a concern over the violation of property, but rather a concern over the “defection” (766) of women as the quintessential male property and proof of power, the worry that wife or daughter might be “seduced by the rape, that her affection and loyalty to her husband or her duty to her father may be swayed by the man who raped her” (766). The result is a widespread inclination “to blame women for their own violation” (770): rape becomes a crime women commit against their husbands, their families, themselves as the property of both, as well as the larger social fabric – paternal authority, patrilineal duty – which depends for its stability and continuity upon the sexual regulation and compliance of women within individual household units. Rape’s erasure operates on two (potentially contradictory) levels here: it is not real violence against a woman, and yet it is a very real form of social violence which a woman herself commits against the men to whom she is bound. Rape does not simply disappear; rather, it mutates perversely as the victim who is always already not a victim becomes the perpetrator of a crime that has both everything and yet nothing to do with her. Again, rape’s functional elision is intimately related to the larger problematic of the elliptical female body: the lack of easy visual confirmation of women’s pleasure or unpleasure in rape cases feeds the culture’s anxieties about women’s sexual voraciousness and drives its totalizing assumptions about women’s consent to rape, their guilt as its perpetrators (778, 766).

The most recent, and only full-length, study of the representation of rape in the English Renaissance theatre is Karen Bamford’s *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (2000). Taking as her starting point the abundance of plays which contain or pivot on

rapes during the “crisis” years surrounding the turn of the seventeenth century, she argues in the vein of the earlier *Lucrece* criticism that “a study of these plays shows the various kinds of cultural work they performed, managing patriarchal anxieties, naturalizing sexual assault and in diverse ways rationalizing it as redemptive” (24) in a climate in which women and their bodies were made both barometer of and scapegoat for prevailing concerns over social and economic disorder. Rape’s elision in Bamford’s analysis circles, once again, around the trouble generated by the opacity of these bodies, but unlike Burks, who focuses on bad-girl figure Beatrice Joanna, Bamford is interested in the virginal victim, and specifically in the politics of her chastity which rape throws into relief. In virgin martyr plays, a chaste woman’s merit increases with rape, threatened or actual; rape becomes desirable as proof of a chastity that otherwise cannot be seen or located tangibly. In political plays, “[t]he death of a sexually threatened/violated female becomes instrumental in liberating her community” (61), thereby transforming sexual assault – again via the chaste heroine’s spiritual innocence – into political regeneration. To prove their non-complicity in the crime and their devotion to the men whose honour depends upon their chastity, the chaste must always welcome death as antidote to rape (Dorothea; Lucrece; Virginia; Lavinia) (157). Only in voluntary self-abnegation can women’s sexual fidelity be seen clearly, allowing men once more to accord plain meaning to their bodies. In contrast, she who is raped and refuses to die (Bianca; Beatrice Joanna; the daughters of Bonduca) proves only her complicity, the illegitimacy of her body as organ of her father or husband’s honour, and is therefore no rape victim after all.

While Bamford and Burks are both interested in the rhetorical disappearance of rape from the scene of Renaissance drama,<sup>25</sup> neither of them takes a specific interest in

performance, and as a result neither considers the implications of rape's peculiar ocular status in the theatre of the period. Only Jocelyn Catty, whose 1999 *Writing Rape, Writing Women In Early Modern England* contains a chapter on Renaissance drama, notes that rape in the period takes place exclusively offstage, resulting in "a striking marginalisation of a dramatic event that is usually central to the plot" (108). She explains this phenomenon as a direct result of rape's unstable specular position (a largely "invisible" crime typically lacking witnesses and hard evidence [22, 108-9], compounded by the problem of the broader invisibility of female sexual desire which Baines, Burks and Bamford also chart), and goes on to argue that the conventional off-staging of rape in the theatre often necessitates that the victim return with the signs of the assault visibly marking her body. Such a return is ostensibly meant to allay anxieties about the murkiness of "a woman's sexual status" (109) by demonstrating non-consent in a whirl of gestures and cries, but Catty qualifies this reading with the intriguing comment that the strategy often undermines itself because the body's signs, though visually blatant, may be difficult to identify as evidence of "either legitimate or illegitimate sexual behaviour" (113).

Collectively, these recent analyses demonstrate how a pervasive fear of the murky interiors of women's bodies and desires contributes to the marginalization, if not the outright delegitimization, of their bodies' experiences of sexual violence in the early modern period. They also, however, imply that the routine elision of sexual violence against women in early modern legal and medical discourse is at least in part the result of the initial disappearance of the crime – as a nameable, observable and, hence, prosecutable phenomenon – into the very body of its female victim. Legal statutes,

medical treatises, and literary and theatrical representations deny women status as victims of sexual violence and even attempt to locate them as its perpetrators in part because the female body, whose depths cannot be accurately plumbed, erases any hope of obtaining conclusive proof of criminal activity (either for or against women's best interests); juridical and literary erasure is the culture's aggravated answer to the epistemological aporia that is rape violence, tied intimately to that most hated and feared of objects, female sexuality. The unstable image of woman and/as her body (of her body as the unruly figuration of male property, honour and value) undergirds early modern culture's attempt to sever her from her own scene of sexual violation, but the very instability of that image/body may also work, finally, to undermine any attempt to locate sexual violence conclusively, to bring it back into view, and thus to fix it at a remove from women's bodies, suggesting that the ubiquitous effacement of rape in the early modern period may perhaps contain the potential for its own feminist deconstruction.<sup>26</sup> Though Catty is not interested in or influenced by the idea of "effacement" current in the work of the other writers surveyed above, by marrying her consideration of the unique specular status of sexual violence in the Renaissance theatre to the larger critical discourse exploring violence's legal, social and artistic occlusion in the period, we may begin to see the potential for a productive recuperation of elision as a feminist performance strategy for representing the systemic erasure of sexual violence against women. If the disappearance of sexual violence offstage in the early modern period is ultimately a theatrically self-conscious tactic (Catty 108), one which points to invisibility as rape's condition of possibility in the theatre as in the culture at large, then perhaps its peculiar quality of not-seeing-ness may be exploited for feminist ends.



Unlike rape violence, punitive or retributive violence against women was not unequivocally a crime – was not, in fact, unequivocally violence – in early modern England, but even more than rape violence it becomes, on stage and in the non-fiction writings of and about the period, a hotly contested site at which early modern culture’s negotiations with the volatile materiality of the female body, and with women’s emergent subjectivity, is played out. Because the purity of patrilineal descent always depends upon women’s fidelity, even the mere suspicion of sexual betrayal is enough to warrant an often violent response (Sommerville 90; see also Greaves 228-36, and Frances Dolan). That violent response is frequently forthcoming in the drama, but, as in the case of rape violence, relatively few scholars have taken an interest in the significance or implications of the punitive butchery of women in the early modern theatre. The work which has emerged has tended to read punitive violence very much in light of the above paradigm, in which male violence functions as a response to the threatening quality of female power (Gohlke; Collier; Burks), realized by a woman’s fall from her status as icon of feminine submissiveness and purity (Finke; Eaton, “Defacing”).

The most comprehensive investigation of punitive or retributive violence on the Renaissance stage, and the only one that attempts a sustained argument about the elided quality of such violence, is Leonard Tennenhouse’s *Power On Display: The Politics of Shakespeare’s Genres* (1986), which contains a long chapter on the Jacobean “Theater of Punishment.”<sup>27</sup> Tennenhouse focuses his discussion around the aristocratic female body, arguing that the violence to which it is subject in the drama is “never simply violence done to [...] women. It is always violence done to one occupying a particular position in the social body as it was conceived at the time” (“Violence Done to Women” 77). He

goes on to distinguish between Elizabethan and Jacobean stage violence, arguing that on the Elizabethan stage, infused with the cultural memory of Elizabeth's elaborate public pageantry and carefully-cultivated iconographic displays, violence against an aristocratic female body is always a form of political violence against the land or state for which that body (as substitute Elizabeth) stands as emblem. In the Jacobean period, the aristocratic female body remains integral to representations of monarchical continuity and political stability, but its function reverses along with the reversal of the gender of the monarch. No longer an emblem of state vulnerability and eventual state triumph over that vulnerability, the female body is now a source of pollution to the state, pollution which is always sexual, and which therefore "threatens the aristocratic community's self-enclosure" (*Power on Display* 116). Violence against the aristocratic female body thus becomes a matter of ritual purgation in service of the orderly reinstatement of proper patriarchal authority at play's end.<sup>28</sup>

Bracketing for now the problems evident in Tennenhouse's argument – he has been criticized for his over-investment in a clear-cut distinction between the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres, one which leads him to privilege a shift in representational strategy according to the change in monarch, but at the expense of the potential impact of parallel changes in the organization of social and domestic space (Eaton, "Defacing" 191) – his discussion clearly articulates how the materiality of punitive violence, like rape violence, in Renaissance theatre is subsumed or elided by its highly politicized symbolic or iconic functioning, appearing only in order to evaporate and make way for the emergence of the authoritative patriarchal body which is dependent upon it for power, but on which it can never be seen to depend for power. Once again, violence against women

operates as the site at which, to borrow Bamford's term, "patriarchal anxieties" about the female body's elliptical role in the culture's power structures are managed, and violence is naturalized and then rationalized "as redemptive" for the household, the state, and the church.

Of course, there are some obvious, although ultimately superficial, problems with this analogy of elisions between sexual and non-sexual punitive violence as they are played out on the Renaissance stage, for quite unlike rape violence the drama of violent retribution in the Jacobean theatre is conventionally offered up to audience eyes in a spectacle of punishment which rivals the bloodiest stuff that theatre has to offer. Deborah Burks and Sara Eaton have both focused their respective analyses of the misogynist spectacle of punishment squarely upon its ocular specificity. Burks and Eaton argue that the intensely specular quality of this violence functioned cathartically to relieve the anxieties of the culture at large about the social threat posed by female insubordination precisely because it offered a fantasy of violence which was specifically designed to look like and feel like the torture of a woman. Because the courts were frequently, for lack of evidence, unable to convict women of complicity in illicit sexual behaviour, despite the widespread belief that complicity was a foregone conclusion (Burks 765-6), and because the punishment of sexually transgressive women (such as adulterers or scolds) was increasingly moving indoors, managed as a household problem by the household head rather than by community sanction,<sup>29</sup> the drama, Burks and Eaton argue, was able to provide a public forum for the punitive spectacle which the early modern legal apparatus no longer would (Burks 782-3; Eaton, "Defacing" 193).<sup>30</sup> Far from positing the drama's misogynist violence as in any way erased or elided, this argument appears to have

something in common with Mulvey's violence of the gaze as it envisions a theatre full of male voyeurs identifying with the punishing male protagonist and gawking upon the punished female body in an attempt to prove their own paternal authority (Eaton, "Defacing" 187).<sup>31</sup> Under this model, the Jacobean punitive scene becomes an ° uber-spectacle designed (however futilely) to shore up a flagging patriarchy by resuscitating, Alsemero-like, its brutalizing eye.

As it does in Mulvey's own legacy, however, the eye here fails to tell the whole story. Based on the assumption that the period's playgoers sought at the theatre what they could not reliably obtain elsewhere – a satisfying public spectacle of a guilty woman justly and violently punished – the argument exemplified by Eaton and Burks misses the deeper kinship between the stage's representation of retributive violence and the anxieties about women's bodies and violence circulating in the larger culture. It thus fails fully to appreciate the ways in which the Jacobean theatre works within (rather than against) the extratheatrical paradigm of disowning violence against women even as it produces it as spectacle. In a period in which (as many feminist scholars of the Renaissance have noted) women's subjectivity was tenuous and conflicted at best, and in which a political concern with public orderliness was paramount, social historians have demonstrated that physical violence generally, and specifically physical, punitive violence against women, adopted an evasive ontology. While widely regarded as potentially threatening to orderliness, violence was also the means by which orderliness was managed. In her recent analysis of domestic violence in early modern England, Susan Dwyer Amussen examines the scope of patriarchal authority in the household in light of the latter's status as the little commonwealth. She argues that "the analogy between family and state" current in the

period meant that the threat of “disorder from below made the wife who was out of control a serious problem, even when her actions may have been triggered by domestic abuse” (“Being Stirred” 75-6).<sup>32</sup> In practice, as several other historians have also noted,<sup>33</sup> men were free to beat their wives to the extent that “moderate correction” (Fletcher 192) required, an extent with no clearly demarcated limits which effectively gave husbands near-unlimited powers to abuse their wives under the aegis of household correction (and, by analogical extension, of state sanctity).<sup>34</sup> While Amussen strives to make a clear case for the limits on household violence imposed by the keen surveillance of one’s neighbours and the larger community, her evidence instead hints that marital violence and its consequences to the woman – unless or until patently undeniable, in, for example, the death of the wife – were always marginalized by courts, church officials, and neighbours in their attempts to preserve the household intact, along with the image of social order it reflected. The attempted management of violence deemed excessive (a distinction complicated, once again, by the vague limits placed upon “correction”) in effect gave early modern communities the right to legitimize violence against women as “normal” and even desirable in anything but its most extreme form. Rather than demonstrating early English patriarchy’s (limited) benevolence in condemning gratuitous spousal violence, Amussen’s study instead reveals its extreme dependence for the maintenance of its authority on routine violence against women which is simply disavowed as violence. My very use of the term “punitive violence” is as a matter of course – and, I would argue, provocatively so – anachronistic here, since by definition no “proper” punishment of one’s female householder, no matter how brutal, could legally be called violence under the aegis of “reasonable correction.”

I want to be clear here that I recognize that the physical correction or punishment of women did not exist as “violence” in the early modern imaginary, either as a discursive phenomenon, or as a legal matter, or even, often enough, as a matter of genuine social concern for the well-being of women. Violence and correction, simply put, were mutually exclusive phenomena. What was troubling socially and legally for the early moderns was *excessive* correction – correction that might, in fact, just be violence, after all, that threatened to reveal the elided kinship between violence and routine correction. Excessive correction, as Amussen notes, generated a troubling image of unquietness in the community, one which reflected badly upon both the parish and the state. The husband’s brutality – his failure to “correct” within the bounds of propriety – was at issue, but more problematic was the fearful or protesting voice and the black-and-blue body of the brutalized wife, the failure of patriarchal benevolence for which she stood before her neighbours, her clergyman, or the courts. Complaints of excessive correction come before the authorities often enough in the period, but they are whenever possible resolved by sending husband and wife home with promises to be quieter, sequestered because of the tales they threaten to tell about the weak links in the patriarchal chain, and because of the fundamental flaw in patriarchal order-keeping they reveal. Once again, the female body in violence generates a deep anxiety for the culture at large, and must as a matter of course be removed not only from view but from discourse, wiped – like rape violence deemed something less than rape, like the rape victim deemed perpetrator of her own sexual violation – cleanly out of existence. I insist on using the term “violence” to describe events which were labeled by their culture “corrective” not in order to impose a twenty-first century point of view on an historical

phenomenon, but because recent accounts – including Amussen’s own – increasingly suggest that all too frequently “correction” tipped over into genuine violence, into a brutality against wives that was simply not permissible even within the broadest readings of the law governing “reasonable correction.” Women, often with the support of a friend or female relative, sought legal intervention; they clearly recognized their experiences as beyond the bounds of what they were expected to endure as obedient wives, and even as the slippery line between correction and abuse shifted they took steps to protest and protect. It is this violence, this “beyond” of correction that the laws governing correction nevertheless do their best to assimilate, around which I focus my analysis of the evasive strategies of the Jacobean punitive scene in chapter three.

Eaton and Burks both suggest that the Jacobean drama stands in for what the culture at large no longer safely provides – the highly public, made-for-consumption image of the female body in violence – but I want to suggest instead that the drama’s representation of punitive violence is very much in keeping with that violence’s wider cultural representation. We need to modify our understanding of its specular quality in light of the attitudes towards spousal abuse operating beyond the theatre walls – attitudes which often elided the reality of that violence as surely as they elided the physical reality of rape. Jacobean drama showcases not the culture’s unconscious specular desires, but rather demonstrates its metaphorical management of violence that over-reaches the reasonable bounds of “reasonable correction.” The drama presents the often gratuitous abuse of women either as appropriate punishment for especially transgressive sexual or other criminal behaviour, or, where punishment borders on the excessive and therefore legally and socially unacceptable, as a means of divine redemption.<sup>35</sup> The husband, as

Martin Coyle notes, is cast in the clothes of judge or redeemer, elevated beyond reproach by a culture whose limits of reproach were flexible enough to accommodate almost any violence within the borders of social propriety and preservation (32, 38). In other words, these bloody spectacles pivot upon a rhetoric of elision in which the misogynist violence which is their *raison d'être* is denied any status *as violence* in the moment of its appearance on stage, its rendering in representation. This is the fantasy the Jacobean punitive spectacle performs: that the rhetoric of just punishment might cover a myriad of sins, that one's right to a wife's body knows no limits, despite the ostensible protection of that body under the law. Just as rape violence makes its home offstage, and loses its significance as violence against a woman in its rhetorical troping as everything from political restitution to male heroism, punitive or retributive "violence" in the Jacobean theatre also remains effectively invisible to the drama which gives it birth, even as it is presented in spectacularly, excessively violent fashion before hundreds of viewing eyes.

Taken together, feminist performance theory's reading of violence against women (as something born of the male viewing eye) and the conclusions which can be drawn from the above material about the specifically averted quality of violence against women in early modern theatrical and cultural space (as that upon which the patriarchal eye refuses to gaze, either literally, rhetorically, or otherwise) produce no less than a crisis of vision about the ocular status of women's bodies and subjectivities in violence in performative representation. Against the theory, the literary and historical material weaves a narrative in which actual moments of violence are systematically marginalized, marked less by a penetrative seeing than by a pervasive refusal to see, an anxious disavowal of the image and the experience – of the body as body that matters – of the



woman in actual moments of violence. In order to make sense of how these two conflicting conceptions of violence may work in tandem, we need once more to turn our attention to Freud. Within Freud's sexual paradigm, informed by the tricky logic of the castration scene, the female body violated may be the perfect fetish, providing in its submissiveness the image of difference tamed, male power and authority proved. The female body in violence, however, always provokes the anxiety which fellow-travels with the fetishist as it rehearses the disavowed moment of violence against women which haunts the sight of the "mutilated" female genitals, the lost act which castration fear disavows precisely because it is the violence on which Freud's program of normative acculturation depends – in other words, because it is the violence which produces and thus guarantees the subjectivity and authority of the male in patriarchal culture. Violence against women itself is not what the Freudian subject or the subjects of the drama disavow: what they disavow is their own radical dependence upon such violence for familial, political, ethical and aesthetic legitimacy. Hence the anxious need to envision acts of violence against women, but to do so only in the process of averting, diverting, effacing, remaking (fear into fetish, threat into culture).

The ocular status of such acts is unstable at best, a constant and complex negotiation between vision and the strategic failure of vision, the "fetishistic scopophilia" which marks Mulvey's violent gaze and the anxious repudiation which haunts the castration scene. Put another way, we might say that the representation of violence against women in performance is always on the verge of ocular rupture – the same ocular rupture which both plagues and saves Oedipus, "castrating" him only to birth him as the quintessential tragic hero. But how then might we catch a glimpse of Jocasta's body

hanging behind the spectacle of Oedipus' bleeding eyes? What kind of feminist performance practice might expose the program of erasure and disavowal in which representations (theatrical, theoretical, cultural) of violence against women have traditionally been grounded? Given the manifest ability (demonstrated perfectly by the Jacobean punitive scene) of such representations to transform misogynist violence into cultural product even, and perhaps especially, when confronted with the clear and uninterrupted image of a body in violence, it is not enough for a feminist theorist interested in producing a critical performance of violence against women to place her faith in vision, in the increased visibility of previously "hidden" scenes. Rather, I contend, she needs – we need – to consider instead the productive value of *invisibility*, the disruptive potential of the radical failure of sight, in this matter of women and violence. Instead of training the spectator's eyes on the moments of violence it has been missing, how might we transform those moments of violence which are palpably *not seen* into a vehicle for conveying our historically and culturally entrenched refusal to see? How might we turn the literal ocular rupture that mythologizes Oedipus as it blinds him (and us) to Jocasta's pain into a critical ocular rupture able to perform Western culture's as well as Western drama's very dependence upon both that pain and its necessary nullification?

## 2. Reversal of vision: Lacan's offstage optics

[T]hat which is gaze is always a play of light and opacity.  
Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 96

The disruptive potential of ocular rupture has a name: Lacan called it the gaze, and its value for feminist performance is mined by Peggy Phelan in her 1993 book,

*Unmarked*.<sup>36</sup> Against the current of feminist theatre theorists arguing in the late 1980s for a performance strategy which might disturb or “fracture” the violent, fetishizing gaze by returning it with difference, transforming Mulvey’s ubiquitous “to-be-looked-at-ness” into an interrogatory “looking-at-being-looked-at-ness” (Diamond, “Brechtian Theory” 89; see also Freedman 66) in a kind of excessive play of representations which Elin Diamond finally called “mimesis-mimicry,”<sup>37</sup> Phelan proposes an opposite scheme: the critical *disappearance* of the specular object from the field of representation, “an *active* vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility” (19, emphasis in original).<sup>38</sup> In disappearing, in becoming what Phelan calls “unmarked,”<sup>39</sup> the woman in representation does not simply disrupt the workings of the viewing eye, foil the violence of the gaze; she adopts the function of the gaze, and with it its radical potential to expose the “trap” by which Lacan defines all “matter of the visible” (*FFC* 93). The unmarked marks the poverty of the viewing eye, the inevitable failure of the attempt to see the (male) self through the image of the (female) other which Phelan argues motivates all forms of our cultural production (*Unmarked* 16) and which for Lacan defines the psychic subject as at odds with itself, fundamentally lacking.

This paradigm may seem on first pass contradictory: how can the gaze be both destructive and recuperative, both the pernicious source of ocular violence and evidence of ocular impotence? The answer lies in competing conceptions of “the gaze” articulated by two very different theoretical practices. The activist value which Phelan accords the unseen turns on her commitment to a different kind of gaze than the one favoured by Mulvian performance theory. Joan Copjec has argued that the gaze typically adopted by feminist film theorists has more in common with a Foucauldian historicist reading of

vision than a Lacanian psychoanalytic one. “In film theory,” she writes, “the gaze is located ‘in front of’ the image, as its signified, the point of maximal meaning or sum of all that appears in the image *and* the point that ‘gives’ meaning. The subject is, then, thought to identify with and thus, in a sense, to *coincide with* the gaze” (36, emphasis in original). The idea that the spectator is the bearer of a culturally hegemonic, all-seeing gaze is panoptic, supporting Foucault’s notion that “[v]isibility is a trap” (“Panopticism” 200) because the gaze of the unseen bearer (the prison warden, ensconced in the central pillar of the panopticon; the film- or theatre-goer enjoying the spectacle in the darkened auditorium) fixes and frames the object in representation: that object is radically and totally seen by it, and in being seen confers the whole power of commanding the field of vision upon it. In Mulvian terms, the object is violated by it: because the panoptic gaze ultimately comes to reside within its object, as an automatic and internalized form of cultural surveillance, it remains the quintessential expression, as Foucault himself well knew, of the violence of representation.

Opposing the panoptic gaze of both Foucauldian historicism and much feminist performance theory is the Lacanian gaze, which we might call, in contradistinction to Foucault, an-optic or anamorphic. For Foucault, eye and gaze are one, the bearing subject all-powerful, but in Lacan’s conception eye and gaze are radically split, the former cut off from the latter in that ubiquitous “cut” which for psychoanalysis founds the Symbolic subject as not powerful but fundamentally impotent, lacking. Lacan’s gaze “is located ‘behind’ the image, as that which fails to appear in it and thus as that which makes all its meanings suspect” (Copjec 36). It does not reassure, but rather disquiets; in place of the promise of cultural validation (among other sinister possibilities) conferred by the all-

seeing panoptic eye, this gaze will neither confirm nor validate (36): it “is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety” (Lacan, *FFC* 72-3).<sup>40</sup> Rather than an unseen agent which sees all (“[t]here is no need for us to refer to some supposition of the existence of a universal seer” [74]), the anamorphic gaze operates as an “elision” in the visual field (75) which maps the looking subject in place but which in so doing also represents to that subject its own ocular insufficiency, its inability to command the visual field, to see or be seen fully, to “imagin[e] itself as consciousness” (74) or locate itself as image without the aid of the “purloined” eye of an other (Freedman 73) which is always the principal object of its look. I want to be very clear about this: Lacan’s gaze is neither seen nor seeing. When it shows itself it appears as a kind of scar on the horizon, marking the edges of vision, and therefore the edges of loss. The anamorphic gaze shows itself to have been elided, always turning a blind eye toward its subject, refusing to mirror that subject back to itself and thereby to confirm the potency of its own seeing eye.

Both Phelan and Copjec invoke Lacan’s infamous narrative of the sardine can (*FFC* 95-6) as anecdotal evidence of the workings of his gaze: Lacan’s interlocutor, *petit Jean*, points out the can as it floats on the water near their fishing boat, and reminds Lacan with delicious irony that the can does not see him. The can then becomes, in Lacan’s analysis, emblematic of the failure of his own eye, which contains on its retina the afterimage of the can but which is also therefore quite clearly established as other than its point of origin, object within rather than source of the visual plain in which both can and Lacan are located. All images originate outside our eyes (including, crucially, our

image of ourselves),<sup>41</sup> and thus any attempt to command the visual field will always already stand as proof of our inability to generate that field, to locate ourselves autonomously within it. While the panoptic universe is the universe of the ever-open, watchful eye, the eye which we internalize in order to police ourselves in representation, surveillance *in extremis* which promises ocular self-sufficiency, in the anamorphic universe eyes fail, and subjectivity is founded in an always-doomed desire to see ourselves seeing ourselves (83). Rather than internalizing the visual field as a closed circuit, the Lacanian subject internalizes its loss, the emptiness of image. Lacan reflects the can, but the can has no eyes to reflect him: as it shows him only the limit of his own subjectivity, the can appears, in that moment in the sun, as gaze.<sup>42</sup>

Lacan's definition of the psychic subject in terms of this constitutive ocular failure is derived directly from his rereading of the Freudian castration scene. For Freud, the eye alone initiates the dissolution of the Oedipal phase and powers the boy child's subsequent subject-formation: it catches its ubiquitous glimpse of the female body, sees lack, recognizes difference, and is driven by the threat it perceives to its own body into the arms of phallic culture in an anxious over-valuation of vision (the sight of the phallus as the image of power) which seeks to paint over the image of the missing phallus and all it connotes. The Freudian castration scene establishes the moment when eyes fail as the very origin of sight; vision (like the classical tragic hero) is born in a symbolic self-blinding, both in the disavowal of the image of potential violence against the male body that is castration fear, and, more potently, in the utter repudiation of the always-spectral image of the female body in violence on which it depends and which it displaces.<sup>43</sup>

The missed moment of violence against women which I read in the Freudian castration scene is, of course, to some extent no longer at issue in Lacan's translation of the female who lacks into a universalized castrated subject defined not by gender but by the singular condition of lack-in-being. For Lacan, castration is not the moment when boy sees girl, imagines and then represses the image of potential violence; rather, it is the moment when both boy and girl discover themselves to be at a distance from their desires, and play out their attempts to bridge the gap in a flurry of looks and words. Far from eliminating the problem of implied violence plaguing Freud's conception of castration, however, I would argue that Lacan remains tacitly invested in it. Because he commits himself to a theory of sexual relations organized around the ascendancy of the male organ and continues to define woman as the principal representative of lack, his theory remains vexed by the gendered implications of that lack, even and perhaps most deeply when he articulates it only at the level of metaphor, ostensibly only in order to explain (rather than to prescribe) its role in the organization of phallic culture. When castration morphs, as it attempts to in Lacan's discourse, from material theory into pure metaphor – from a trick of the son's eye into a trick of the father's language – we move even further from being able to uncover and examine its very real, very material implications for women – the implications of being the subordinate term, and of having all of one's experiences (of pleasure as of pain) subordinated in turn.<sup>44</sup>

Mulvian performance theory, as I have suggested, intervenes in the Freudian scene at the moment when ocular failure becomes its own cover-up – when the anamorphic gaze that disrupts the pleasure of looking with an image of vision's vanishing point is anxiously replaced by a confident panoptic gaze that supplements its failure to

come to terms with the castration scene by taking the rarified image of feminine ideality as proof of its own plenitude. Lacan reads uncertainty back into this scene as he posits a gaze whose specificity resides in its ability not to cover lack over with a too-potent eye, but rather to expose our condition as subjects who lack – who fail to find the sense of psychic fullness we seek – in the very act of looking. In Lacan’s formula, to paraphrase Copjec, the gaze does not “coincide with” the subject who looks, but rather resides on the side of the object of the look, with the rarefied image itself. This image – the supreme substitute for self-seeing – Lacan calls *objet-a* (“objet petit autre”): conventionally, it is both phallus and woman, woman *as* phallus, woman represented as ocular proof of phallic power and potency (Lacan, “Phallic Phase” 120-1). Salient here is not the violence – implicit for many feminist theorists in the *objet-a* structure – of the fantasy image of woman fixed and framed by a penetrating and appropriating gaze, but rather the power available to that fantasy image to reveal her own status as mirror not of phallic plenitude but of constitutive lack. When the *objet-a* refuses to respond, to look back, even to appear, disturbing her performance as ideal cipher, she stops being a mirror and becomes elusive, screen-like, losing what Copjec calls her “belong-to-me aspect” (35) and adopting in its place the power of the anamorphic gaze. She reflects not the looking self but instead “what the given to be seen fails to show” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 32), the failure of the eye finally to find solace and selfhood in the image of the other. Against the absolutist authority of a panoptic gaze which freezes its object in the viewfinder, the disruptive power of the Lacanian gaze resides in its uncanny ability to return what Phelan calls “a negative” (27): the image of the subject not seeing itself, the limits of vision, the limits of subjectivity.



The great promise of Phelan's work for my own resides in her articulation of the political value of things that fail to appear, objects which are purposefully elided, in performative representation. In Phelan's appropriation of Lacan's vision, that woman in representation who has deliberately disappeared or otherwise disrupted "the neat substitutions of the psychic economy of seeing" (26) contains, in her non-visibility, the potential of the gaze to rupture the "reciprocity of visual exchange" (26) and demonstrate the complete dependence of phallic subjectivation upon "the image of the other which all Western representation exploits" (16). For Phelan, the "unmarked" is a representation that confronts its spectator, as does Beatrice Joanna's 'O', with "the blind spot" (3) in the visual field, a hole where an image (the image of the woman) used to/ought to be, and then forces that spectator to come to terms with its anxious need to plug the hole. But the image of Beatrice Joanna is, of course, not the only thing missing from *The Changeling's* climactic moment; also missing is the image of what is being done to Beatrice Joanna. If in classical psychoanalysis vision is born in the failure of the eye (when the recognition of lack is trumped by an anxious substitution of the sight of the other), and if, as I have been arguing, eyes always fail (for Oedipus, for Freud and his male subject, for Mulvian performance theorists, for the dramatists, doctors and lawmakers of the English Renaissance) when confronted with the image of violence against a woman, that image can be said to mark both the origin and the limit of sight (theoretical, dramatic, cultural), the point at which the phallic eye flounders most profoundly as it refuses to confront its own lack-in-being. I am suggesting, in other words, that the representations of violence against women I will be examining in the pages to come have something important in common with the anamorphic gaze, that by virtue of their elided quality they retain the

ability to disrupt the visual field from which they are excluded by acting as gaze. We cannot grasp the full feminist potential of Phelan's theory of the unmarked until we grasp the core relationship between phallic optics and its repudiation of the image of women in violence, until we realize that such images lie always already unseen and unmarked (disavowed, ignored, troped over) at the base of so much of our cultural production. If the unmarked permits us, by virtue of its representation of a female body under erasure, to catch sight of the limits of subjectivity, then the unmarked – what I will call the “in/visible” – act of violence against a woman in performance may permit us, by virtue of its constitutive invisibility, to expose and explore the many facets of our individual and collective, historical and contemporary, aesthetic and cultural dependence upon that violence's (imagistic, rhetorical) disappearance. This is not to suggest that every act of violence against women refused representation necessarily takes on a disturbing and disquieting anamorphic power; following Phelan, I draw a critical distinction between objects that “willfully [fail] to appear” and objects that are “never [...] summoned” (11), acts taking a critical position on their effacement and those that simply slip out of view. I do, however, propose that acts which self-consciously represent violence against women as absence, which thematize spectatorial blindness in the face of that violence, operate as gaze. By performing the gap in the narrative (the dramatic narrative; the cultural narrative), by performing in the gaping ‘O’ on the horizon of history, in the field of vision, they rehearse disappearance as their representational condition of possibility and thereby unsettle the putative visual plenitude of the stage.

### 3. Offstage spaces, in/visible acts

[T]he space of the offstage, I found, was inhabited  
by all the bodies barred from the stage.  
Celia Daileader, *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage 2*

In the theatre, the anamorphic gaze lies along the boundary between onstage and offstage space. Offstage space, as Celia Daileader's recent work has demonstrated, is "purely conceptual" (21)<sup>45</sup>: it marks the vanishing point beyond which performance will not (or cannot) go, and as a result its border with the onstage is seamless in illusionist or realist theatres which rely for their mimetic success upon what Roland Barthes famously called reality-effects.<sup>46</sup> I am not referring specifically here to the realist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but more broadly to all forms of theatrical representation which make their goal "the artistic creation of a reference world that is presented as a possible world that could be our own" (Pavis 178). Such theatres strive for an empathetic spectator who "believes in the story told" and makes an emotional investment in it, deploying for this purpose a series of iconic signs and a narrative "arranged in such a way that its logic and direction are clear, without the conclusion being totally predictable" (178).<sup>47</sup> The interplay between offstage and onstage space – what we are privileged to see, and what is not considered worthy of representation – is meant to be natural in such theatres, serving to reinforce rather than to question the authority of everything presented onstage, to the viewing eye. Offstage events "return" to the stage via narrative or after-image, and onstage space becomes the space of revelation and resolution, marking it as a theatrical totality, a place of privilege, the ascendant term in the binary. Such seamless interplay, of course, is less a reality than an ideal, because offstage space, far from being of little consequence or value, is actually fraught with the

perils of the repressed, all those events whose representation the drama would disavow. The offstage is the theatrical unconscious, the theatre's unmarked; as such, it is both a contained space, the integrity of its borders guaranteeing the authority of onstage representation, and a space containing the often unspoken power to menace the stage with all the stage would leave behind.

Anxieties about the power of events located “properly” offstage to disrupt the seamlessness of the stage image are everywhere in historical writings about the theatre. They begin at the very beginning of theatre theory, with Aristotle's *Poetics*, and they coalesce around the difficulties of representing violence on the stage. The theatre of the *Poetics* is structured like a psyche: Aristotle, like Freud and Lacan long after, founds his stage on the very idea of self-seeing. He writes: “the reason why men enjoy seeing a likeness is, that in contemplating it they find themselves learning or inferring, and saying perhaps, ‘Ah, that is he’” (IV).<sup>48</sup> This seemingly straightforward claim about the aesthetic pleasures of model-copy mimesis becomes rather more complicated when read in conjunction with Aristotle's accepted definition of catharsis as a purging of spectators' excess emotion via identification with a (suffering) character. The *Poetics* articulates catharsis as a form of identification through difference, a classic psychoanalytic subject-object dialectic in which the viewing self regards itself as both separate from (fear) and yet imaged in (pity) the performing other. In seeing a “likeness” on the stage, the spectator infers both similitude and difference, and says perhaps “that is me” or “that is not me; I see myself clearly as other than that.” And, as in classical psychoanalysis, Aristotle's privileged form of identification turns on the image of the body in pain both acknowledged and disavowed: for him, the “scene of suffering” (XI) is an essential tragic

ingredient which he initially defines as “a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like” (XI), but one, he later suggests, that should not properly be permitted upon the stage, rendered as spectacle. The sight of the pitiable and fearful always risks becoming “monstrous” (rather than simply “terrible”);<sup>49</sup> it overwhelms the senses and disturbs the identification process rather than aiding its smooth progress. The *Poetics* thereby establishes (certainly, in the eyes of many of Aristotle’s neoclassical interpreters) the gruesome violence that is classical tragedy’s fellow-traveler as *the* properly offstage event – it can and must exist within the tragic frame, but in order to permit its effective contemplation and internalization by the spectator it ought to exist unseen, fodder for the imagination rather than food for the eye.

Necessarily, Aristotle’s notion of suffering is tacitly gendered, for the Attic scene of suffering typically stars the tragic male, Hippolytus rather than Phaedra, Agamemnon rather than Iphigenia (or even Clytemnestra), Oedipus rather than Jocasta, the pain of the tragedies’ women waning under the weight of men’s tragic heroism. This is not to suggest that women’s suffering is not given any play in classical tragedy, but merely to qualify its status as functionally subservient to that of the male tragic hero: Antigone sacrifices herself not for her brothers’ lives, but merely for their glory in death; Medea’s and Clytemnestra’s agonies are foregrounded only to be disqualified by the supposed immorality of their vengeful actions against the men who have wronged them, actions to be rejected from the polis as “not me.”<sup>50</sup> Just as it does in Freud’s castration scene, catharsis in Attic theory pivots upon a liminal image of suffering (the after-image, the spectral trace of pain) which is effectively always already masculine, and which in practice requires the effacement of female suffering in order to function as scripted.

Aristotle theorizes the offstage as the space of violence against the male body, the space where disruptive images are repressed in an effort to smooth the way for a proper identification crafted in the reflection of a flawless mimesis; in so doing, he places the suffering *female* body virtually beyond acknowledgement, rendering it completely invisible.

The *Poetics* marks offstage space as not only a theatrical but a psychic edge, a space necessary to the proper functioning of cathartic identification and therefore to an effective spectatorial experience. It marks, in other words, offstage space as the space of disavowal, of castration fear, of that image of the male self in violence which must be mitigated within conscious representation in order to enable the process of proper phallic identification (which on Aristotle's tragic stage is always an identification with the image of heroic maleness, against that of the monstrous [m]other woman). Several theorists following Aristotle have upheld his prescription against representing violence on the stage, principally as a guarantee of theatrical effects. Writers from Horace to Dryden, Diderot and Addison have emphasized the impropriety of showing violence on the stage, specifically death scenes, because to do so, they argue, is to disrupt the sanctity of a play's reality effect. Horace claims bluntly that such representations simply are not believable, in addition to being "abhorrent" (69); Dryden goes further as he reacts against the very un-Aristotelian penchant for blood on the early modern English stage, commenting that "in all our Tragedies, the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the most Comick part of the whole play" (39). He, too, finds that those actions "which can never be imitated to a just height" (40) – dying foremost among them – must remain offstage; otherwise, they risk becoming, as Diderot warns (54),

reminiscent of the theatrical experience itself, offering spectators not an image through which to identify, an ideological and cultural correlative, but rather the image of themselves sitting in a theatre, a view of the mimetic frame rather than its contents. For these theorists, the offstage is the “proper” locus of violence and death in the theatre because, if seen, such representations threaten to implode onstage space with a mimesis that can never be anything but auto-referential, excessive to itself and disruptive to its intended effects.<sup>51</sup>

Latent in the writings of Aristotle and his neoclassical followers is the fear that offstage space is somehow leaky (“monstrous”), that all those images the stage is meant to repress will somehow return and ruin, in their excessive gruesomeness, their overt fakeness, the aesthetic and ideological power of the drama (how can a moral death be seen as such if the death itself becomes suspect?). The anxiety about violent representations manifest in these writings thus serves to articulate the extreme volatility not simply of these representations, but of offstage space itself. Sequestered scenes allow the audience the freedom to live the fantasy that their events have actually taken place, and thus that audience eyes are seeing a complete truth, Aristotle’s complete action (VII); allowed to leak across the border and into performance’s visual field, such scenes rupture the image of plenitude cultivated on stage, as spectators are forced to acknowledge the singular unreality of the representation, the hitherto unrealized edges of theatrical seeing.<sup>52</sup> In classical theatre theory, the offstage is marked as theatre’s abject, its structural, imagistic, and psychic vanishing-point, and, like all that is abject,<sup>53</sup> it functions as both partner and ghost to the stage, both haunting and reciprocally constituting it, both

guaranteeing and threatening its effects. The offstage is where the stage is *not*, where it not only will not but *must* not go; it is an architecture of absence, a poetics of denial.

The fraught relationship imagined by classical theatre theory between onstage and offstage space implies two distinct models of offstage acts of violence – those that maintain the integrity of the mimetic frame and uphold the subjectivating power of the dramatic image by remaining properly concealed, and those that disturb the frame by “returning” to the space of visual representation, marking its edge by staging, in effect, the representational apparatus itself (the process by which violence and death is “faked” on stage). But where are, specifically, acts of violence against women in theatrical representation, relative to these options? Insofar as so much violence against women in the classical and early modern theatre has been effaced from or refused representation altogether in an effort to seal the edges of a principally homosocial mimetic space, it can be said to belong to the offstage, to the space of theatrical disavowal; “offstage” acts are those moments of violence against women whose disappearance (either literal or conceptual) from the stage is naturalized within the dramatic narrative, and which work therefore to control the drama’s reality effect, blur its border with the real, and promote seamless spectatorial identification through the image of a stage made complete in its elision of the female suffering body. As I have already implied, however, to de-realize such acts requires much more than their simple return to conscious, onstage space, because the effacement of women’s violence from the scene of representation (theatrical, theoretical, cultural) is finally much more than a matter of a simple “offstaging” or turning away: it is a less a matter of disappearance than of non-appearance, of a very refusal to recognize, either in image or narrative, either on stage or off. The act of



violence against a woman must already have disappeared in order for eyes to open (or shut), for Freud's notion of male castration fear (and its attendant disavowal) to appear, for Aristotle's heroic scene of suffering to take its properly concealed place within the tragic economy. The offstage space of classical and neoclassical theatre theory both encompasses and excludes such an act – encompasses because all violence must, in its epistemology, be properly located in conceptual space, beyond the purview of the eye; excludes because women's bodies and women's suffering are rarely conceived by the theory (and if so, as in Aristotle, it is a conception only in order to subjugate, to exclude [XV]). If acts of violence against women can be said to be offstage, they are offstage *in extremis*, a nothing-to-be-seen that corresponds to what Luce Irigaray calls the “*nothing to see*” (*Speculum* 47, emphasis in original) that is Freud's image of female genitalia and of women's forgotten *jouissance*. What has never been does not, strictly speaking, possess the power to reappear: to menace this broad hegemony of elision, we need more than a “return of the repressed.” We need a strategy that doesn't so much rely on the classical offstage/onstage binary as crack it open from within.

In/visible acts of violence against women – as they show themselves to be unseen, mark the limits of the phallic eye and phallic self-projection in the image of a violence always already effaced, always already refused representation – are not simply offstage acts that leak back into scopic space. They live neither offstage nor on, but rather on the border between the two, in a limbo (the limbo space of the anamorphic gaze, always both there and gone) which lays bare the contours of the dynamic between vision and elision in the making of the classic theatrical image, in the making of patriarchal culture's self-image. They are acts which clearly mark the boundary between offstage and onstage

space, not by crossing it, but by loudly and brazenly refusing to cross it, calling direct and sustained attention to the reliance of so much of theatre's specular seductiveness, its cultural and psychic operations, upon a misogynist refusal to show. In/visible acts of violence disrupt the seamless psychic ordering of the Aristotelian stage by effecting an ocular rupture at the point where the spectating eye fails, producing in its place an image of that eye at the limit of its efficacy, its sheer, radical inability (both literal and figurative) to see. The in/visible act stages elision, with difference: it is an effaced representation which refuses to permit its effacement to go unremarked, and which remarks in turn upon the radical dependence of certain key dramatic forms and cultural processes (tragic resolution; the affirmation of "normal" political and social order) upon the necessary disappearance of the woman's body in violence. In/visible acts will not resuscitate the viewing eye by offering previously unseen images to view; rather, they make what has for too long been invisible visible as already gone, as profoundly missing from the scene of representation.

In/visible acts intervene into the mythos of sight, but they are also, significantly, not limited by it: while they derive their primary interrogatory power from the disorienting function of the gaze, they also work actively to undermine the primacy of sight within our sensory metaphysics, to shift our cultural knowledge centre. In/visible acts turn on missing images framed by disembodied sound, on the shift from an ocular episteme into modes of knowing dependent upon other, less directly Symbolic – less directly projectionist – frames of reference. In the chapters ahead, I read several "offstage" acts of violence in early modern drama through the lens of the contemporary in order to trace the possibility of a different kind of "seeing," a means of both

acknowledging the history and understanding the reality of women's bodies in pain.<sup>54</sup> In chapter two I explore rape as an ocular paradox, a crime that cannot be witnessed yet must be retrieved into social space in order that its legitimacy may be confirmed, and that it may then be transmuted into a distinctly disembodied, properly homo-social experience. The early modern drama's method of retrieval is the "metatheatrical return," a tactic drawn, I argue, in part from legal theory, and on which the rape narratives in both *Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* pivot. Against this urgent demand for return I read the work of contemporary artists Sarah Kane, Jenny Kemp, and Colleen Wagner; these playwrights and performers argue that the experience of profound disorientation and loss occasioned by sexual violence cannot be made into stable image because it exceeds the bounds of conscious apprehension for victim as for witness. The attempt to appropriate rape always, on some level, fails, because rape's unruly episteme chafes against the ordered logic of the full eye. In chapter three, I tackle the problem of the Jacobean punitive scene, and trace the disappearance of its fetishistic image of the tortured woman's body into a rhetoric of kindness, heavenly grace and companionate love. I pair my reading of Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* with an examination of several marital conduct tracts popular in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and propose that the evasiveness of the drama's representation of punitive violence stems from its attempt to mitigate the rising problem of wifely punishment that crosses far beyond the line between violence and "reasonable correction," work in which the conduct material is also heavily invested. As I examine the collusion of image and word in this chapter, I draw on the work of contemporary feminist performance artists in order to model a resisting witness to violence, a witness

unwilling to allow the image of violence he or she plainly sees to go unremarked, to become other to itself via the promises of a soothing rhetoric. This witness refuses the tyranny of both language and eye, revisioning the Symbolic isolationism they uphold through an attempt to connect viscerally to the experience of another's pain communicated in performance. In my final chapter, I take this argument to its conclusion, using Luce Irigaray's writings on imagination and belief in *Sexes and Genealogies* to discover the "beyond" of sight that will allow for the birth of a feminist witness to violence. As I explore three different versions of the in/visible act in *The Changeling*, *Love of the Nightingale* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move To Kapuskasing*, I contend that in/visibility's defiant refusal of plain sight asks audiences to engage their imaginations in order to conceive the complexity of an act not offered up to view, thereby making possible a more complete understanding of violence against women as both a history of theoretical, cultural, and aesthetic marginalization, and a reality with immediate and serious bodily consequences. Aristotle proposed long ago that we shirk optics for imagination, relegating violence to the theatrical unconscious in order to clear the way for a more "probable" stage image, a more natural stage world; I propose now that we query the very efficacy of our reliance on image, on the retrograde epistemology of the panoptic eye, in an effort to get at the radical, feminist possibilities of imagination – the possibility that a theatre of anamorphic optics might give us the tools to imagine, in their historicized specificity and their phenomenal complexity, experiences of violence against women that have so long been refused a show.

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<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the scene both parallels and diverges importantly from the intensely metatheatrical death of the Duchess in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, to which I will return in my third chapter.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase is Peter Stallybrass'; Middleton and Rowley's play actualizes many of the insidious enclosures by which Stallybrass suggests the Renaissance woman was daily imprisoned.

<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Joanna spectacularly evades Alsemero's prying eye on an earlier occasion, one which seeks intimate knowledge of her innermost self and thus makes an important precursor to the play's climactic scene. During Act Four, upon learning of a potion in Alsemero's possession designed to reveal whether or not a woman be a maid, Beatrice Joanna learns to feign the signs of virginity and cleverly passes the test when Alsemero finally administers it to her.

<sup>4</sup> Beatrice Joanna's noises may thus qualify as a textbook example of Julia Kristeva's semiotic language. See her *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

<sup>5</sup> "For beyond everything that is displayed to the subject, the question is asked, 'What is being concealed from me? What in this graphic space does not show [...]?' This point at which something appears to be invisible, this point at which something appears to be missing from representation, some meaning left unrevealed, is the point of the Lacanian gaze" (Copjec 34, emphasis in original).

<sup>6</sup> See Burks. I will consider *The Changeling* in detail in my final chapter.

<sup>7</sup> For the metaphor of the hole I am indebted to Celia Daileader, who begins her monograph on offstage sex in the Renaissance theatre in similar fashion.

<sup>8</sup> I will offer a comprehensive definition of "offstage space" a little later in this chapter. For now, note that my version of the offstage has both a literal and a figurative component, as a space beyond not only the eye, but also to an important extent beyond articulation, beyond conscious imagination.

<sup>9</sup> Among these unruly bodies rape victims must also be counted. Once raped or threatened with rape, a woman's body becomes de facto transgressive and must be eliminated. See Bamford, and below.

<sup>10</sup> On the topic of feminist performance strategy, see for example the debate in film theory over the efficacy of "returning" the gaze (Heath; Freedman; Phelan, "Feminist Theory"), and the competing theatrical approaches outlined in Diamond's "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory" (1988) and Phelan's "Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance" (1988), as well as Diamond's "Mimesis, Mimicry, and the 'True-Real'" (1989). On new models of spectatorship, see Mary Ann Doane, and Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (1984) and *The Practice of Love* (1994).

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent and often startling synopsis of the ways in which American culture has managed to marginalize violence against women even as it acknowledges it, see de Lauretis, "The Violence of Rhetoric" in *Technologies of Gender* (1987).

<sup>12</sup> The phrase appears in the title of Butler's 1993 *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* and is woven throughout the book's argument.

<sup>13</sup> Consider the period's tensions between an emergent sense of individual and household privacy and its parallel emphasis on public pageantry and spectacle; battles between inherited ideas of women's subservience and individual women's increasing refusal to be bound by those inherited ideas (elevated to the level of public discourse by the *hic mulier* pamphlet war); England's developing nationalism within a climate marked by global exploration and conflicted individual identifications across national, cultural and religious borders (with the Catholics of Scotland, for example, or with the Protestants of the low countries).

<sup>14</sup> For a similar definition, see Lesley Ferris.

<sup>15</sup> Freud revisited the castration moment countless times in his writings on human sexuality; various accounts can be found in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), "On the Sexual Theories of Children" (1908), "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925) and "Femininity" (1933).

<sup>16</sup> Critics who, in the wake of Mulvey's articulation of the male gaze, sought to theorize a position for the female spectator include Mary Ann Doane, E. Ann Kaplan, and Mulvey herself, in a follow-up essay to "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" ("Afterthoughts [...]"). Teresa de Lauretis, in a recent revisiting of the feminist film theory problematic of spectatorship, has suggested that early critics of Mulvey's position can be broadly grouped in two camps, those (like Doane and Kaplan) who remain invested in an essential sexual binarism as they seek their female spectator, and those (like Linda Williams) who seek to render sex difference irrelevant as they posit an innately fluid model of spectatorial identification, in which any subject may take up any 'gendered' position (*Practice of Love* 141). Against these earlier models, which

she finds unsatisfactory primarily because they always inevitably reinforce a heterosexual imaginary, de Lauretis poses a spectator steeped in both psychoanalytic and social theory, whose identification rests not upon the formal structuring of the cinematic apparatus, but rather upon *both* “her or his psychic and fantasmatic configuration, the places or positions that she or he may be able to assume in the structure of desire, but also the ways in which she or he is located in social relations of sexuality, race, class, gender, etc., the places she or he may be able to assume as subject in the social” (129).

<sup>17</sup> The pairing of image and narrative in discussions of the violent gaze is a commonplace in the theory post-Mulvey (Mulvey’s initial reading of the gaze turns on its function within narrative cinema, after all), but this apparent interest in plot is not to be mistaken for a focus on the representational specificities of acts of violence appearing within filmic or theatrical narrative. “Sadism demands a story” Mulvey writes (“Visual Pleasure” 14), but her interest (and that of her followers) in the story coalesces around her interest in cinematic sadism as a product of the fetishizing look. For Mulvey, narrative is the means by which the fetish is constructed and contained, and the real “narrative” of “domination and punishment” ultimately takes place beyond the realm of the story, in the hidden recesses of the spectating eye.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Elizabeth Bronfen’s “Killing Gazes, Killing in the Gaze” in which she reads Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* as an example of the literalization in narrative of the violence-of-the-gaze implicit in Freud’s castration scenario.

<sup>19</sup> Bronfen has also noted the “curious meshing” of “an urge to gaze and an urge to inflict pain” in Freud’s own writings, consistent with the “fight” response which the threat of castration is thought to provoke (“Killing Gazes” 60).

<sup>20</sup> I do not mean to suggest here that the idea of the castrated woman is absent from Mulvian theory; far from it. Rather, I mean to emphasize that, like Freud, Mulvey and her followers have chosen to take that (perceived) castration as a theoretical given against which their interrogation of the representational apparatus is poised; they ignore the potential significance of the violence implicit in it insofar as they choose not to excavate it, taking it always, like Freud, in the past tense (the castrated woman).

<sup>21</sup> See for example Gravdal and Roberts on the troping of rape in medieval literature; Joplin, whose work appears with similar texts by a variety of authors in a collection edited by Higgins and Silver, takes a long view of the problem; Smart and Estrich, meanwhile, offer a contemporary view of the way in which modern discourse still “withdraws from the scene of the violent encounter” (Rooney 1269). See also de Lauretis, “The Violence of Rhetoric.”

<sup>22</sup> Of course, feminist performance theory is not uninterested in the idea of elision or effacement: the process of modeling the woman into a mirror of the man (see Lacan’s work on femininity, Irigaray’s reading of Plato in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, and Diamond’s reading of Irigaray in “Mimesis, Mimicry, and the ‘True-Real’”) has been considered by feminist critics to be one of the premier ways in which woman herself is erased from/in representation. Investigating the elision of the woman as a kind of representational violence, however, is not quite the same as investigating the elision in representation of violence against women itself, which is where my interest here lies.

<sup>23</sup> Although my focus here is not primarily historical, several recent historical studies of early modern rape law and trial records bear brief examination in light of the new feminist focus on the elision of sexual violence from the Renaissance scene. J.B. Post has commented that the first and second statutes of Westminster (ca. 1275 and 1285) effectively enshrined rape in medieval England as a property crime committed against a family by aligning it with elopement or abduction of a marriageable woman “by an unacceptable suitor” (158); although the offence was made capital in 1285, financial reparations remained key to the successful resolution of rape cases, emphasizing the material quality of the crime and effectively eliminating the woman’s agency and interests from the appeal process. Nazife Bashar, in an influential essay published by the London Feminist History Group in 1983, examines specifically early modern rape law and concludes that, with statute changes in 1555 and 1597 which made rape and abduction separate crimes, rape finally came to be regarded as “a crime against the person, not as a crime against property” (41). Medieval laws to the contrary remained in effect, however, and the result of the statute changes was not a sudden legal interest in rape as sexual violence, but rather an awkward negotiation of old beliefs and new laws which resulted in few convictions beyond the conventionally successful prosecution of the rapes of virgins whose bride price had been damaged, suggesting an ongoing refusal to consider rape as a crime about and against women. Examining women’s testimonies culled from seventeenth-century court

documents, Garthine Walker's recent (1998) analysis of rape trial documents has made a compelling case for the way in which the prevailing lack of interest in regarding rape as specifically *sexual* violence against a woman in early modern England was based in the assumption of women's consent, and had the perverse effect of requiring the testifying woman herself to effectively negate her own experience of the crime. Locating the period's elision of sexual violence in the gendered biases and strictures of early modern rhetorical models, she comments that "[f]or women, available discourses about sex – sin and whoredom – were confessional and implicatory. Responsibility for sex, and the blame and dishonour that went with it, was feminised [...] there was no popular language of sexual non-consent upon which women could draw" (5, 8). Thus, speaking out about rape implied a woman's own loss of sexual innocence, which in turn signified a de facto complicity in the act, thus transforming violence into just plain sex. Walker's work chafes against some of the conclusions articulated by Miranda Chaytor in her 1995 study, "Husband(ry): Narratives of Rape in the Seventeenth Century," which attempts to argue that the self-effacing quality of women's rape narratives in the early modern period signal a repression of the trauma of the event. Chaytor's evidence – depositions in which women are constantly seen to deflect emphasis from their bodies onto either household goods or their own servitude within the household as the true "victim" of their assaults – does indeed support Walker's own conclusions despite Chaytor's efforts to read it psychosomatically, and suggests that the legal and social definition of rape as a property crime rather than a violent crime committed against a woman was so deeply engrained that women themselves had difficulty articulating, rather than simply coming to terms with, their trauma.

<sup>24</sup> The internal quote is from Sylvana Tomaselli, in Tomaselli and Porter, eds. Baines' study marks the first direct articulation in Renaissance feminist scholarship of the "effaced" quality of rape representation in the period, but there are precedents for her argument in feminist work on other literary periods. See especially Higgins and Silver's introduction to *Rape and Representation* (1991), which offers perhaps the best articulation in contemporary feminist criticism of the elision of sexual violence in legal, social and artistic representation as a pervasive, ongoing, and formative cultural process; Patricia Klindienst Joplin's "The Voice of the Shuttle Is Ours," which inspired the Higgins and Silver collection; Kathryn Gravdal's *Ravishing Maidens* (1991), which considers the naturalization or "diversion" (Roberts 2) of sexual violence in medieval French culture via its troping "as moral, comic, heroic, spiritual, or erotic" (Gravdal 13); and Anna Roberts' 1998 collection of essays, *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, which takes Gravdal's earlier work as its inspiration. Related work by Elizabeth Bronfen in *Over Her Dead Body* (1992) considers the ways in which the death of women (not necessarily by violent means) is transformed by the discourses of literature, science and visual art into an aesthetic signifier.

<sup>25</sup> An especially sharp contrast to this prevailing view of rape under erasure can be found in Suzanne Gossett's "'Best Men are Molded out of Faults': Marrying the Rapist in Jacobean Drama" (1984). Gossett argues that the rapes in the plays she considers are foremost about their female victims, and that the "positive political changes" which conclude them all are largely "incidental effects" (306). Gossett's analysis relies on a very contemporary paradigm of sexual assault, and breaks down as it fails to account for the explicitly economic and homosocial nature of the crime in the Jacobean period.

<sup>26</sup> I will explore this potential in detail in chapter two.

<sup>27</sup> A shorter version of the chapter appears as "Violence Done to Women on the Renaissance Stage" in *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* (1989).

<sup>28</sup> Tennenhouse suggests that the political instabilities marking the end of Elizabeth's reign, coupled with the physical degeneration of the monarch herself, worked to invalidate the image of a woman as a good or legitimate ruler, fueling the drama's anxious representation of women as political or monarchical pollution.

<sup>29</sup> Against this theory of the disappearance of women's punishment into the household "enclosure" (see Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories," and Fletcher and Stevenson 32) we need, of course, to take into account the continuing popularity of the charivari, skimmington ride, or bridling of women deemed scolds during the period. Clearly, not *all* punitive spectacles were being denied the early modern public.

<sup>30</sup> Coyle also makes this argument as a footnote to what is otherwise a more nuanced reading of the spectacle of punishment than either Eaton or Burks offer (38, n. 9).

<sup>31</sup> Eaton's argument is in fact directly indebted to Mulvey.

<sup>32</sup> As Frances Dolan points out, women who murdered their husbands were charged with petty treason and, if convicted, unlike men similarly convicted, were subject to the brutal public execution associated with high treason (13, 22). Husbands who murdered wives were not so charged; their offenses were not considered to be threatening to the social order in the same way husband-murder was (90).

<sup>33</sup> See Fletcher 192-203, and Sommerville 89-97.

<sup>34</sup> The author of “The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights” makes this very objection to the vague limits placed upon a husband’s right to beat his wife; after citing the passage of law enshrining the husband’s right to inflict “bodily damage” in the service of “lawfull and reasonable correction,” he comments cynically, “[h]ow farre that extendeth I cannot tell” (128).

<sup>35</sup> Wife-beating as either just desserts or wifely salvation is the paradigm developed by William Whately in his highly influential “A Bride-Bush: Or, a Direction for Married Persons,” already in heavy circulation by the mid-Jacobean period. I will have more to say about this and other contemporary conduct tracts in relation to the dramatic representation of spousal violence in chapter three.

<sup>36</sup> My reading of the Lacanian gaze is indebted both to Phelan and to Joan Copjec.

<sup>37</sup> “[...] in which the production of objects, shadows, and voices is excessive to the truth/illusion structure of mimesis, spilling into mimicry, multiple ‘fake offspring’” (Diamond, “Mimesis, Mimicry, and the ‘True-Real’” 65).

<sup>38</sup> Phelan first explored the feminist value of what she earlier called “aversion” in her 1988 essay, “Feminist Theory, Poststructuralism, and Performance.” The essay contains much of what would later appear in more developed form in *Unmarked*, but without the explicitly Lacanian frame.

<sup>39</sup> “As Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction have demonstrated, the epistemological, psychic, and political binaries of Western metaphysics create distinctions and evaluations across two terms. [...] [C]ultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her, rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value is left unremarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she whom he marks” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 5). As I have been arguing, of course, not only women but also the violence to which they are routinely subject is consistently re-marked (both rhetorically and imagistically) in cultural representations of various kinds (dramatic, literary, legal, medical).

<sup>40</sup> The clearest example of the anamorphic gaze in Lacanian theory is found in Lacan’s reading of Hans Holbein’s 1533 painting, *The Ambassadors*. In the painting’s foreground is a skull, twisted uncannily out of proportion with the otherwise textbook-perfect rendering of the portrait-sitters in the background. The skull seems to have dropped in from another time, another portrait tradition – it is almost Dali-esque. Lacan’s point about the painting is that the skull can never be seen, be recognized, unless one blurs the main portion of the image out of view; when I concentrate on the principal figures in the painting, the skull seems but a strange blight, a cut or tear in the fabric of the canvas. The anamorphic gaze resides in the object we always miss, in the skull itself; although the painting appears complete, it rehearses the cut that initiates the psychoanalytic subject into the Symbolic order by revealing, even in its excess of mundane detail, human vision at its vanishing point, the end-stop of its potency. No viewer can grasp the whole of the painting’s representational field in one singular viewing; our eyes just do not work that way. For Lacan’s discussion of *The Ambassadors* see *Four Fundamental Concepts* 79-90, especially 88; Phelan does an exciting re-reading in *Mourning Sex* 119-28, which includes a full illustration of the painting.

<sup>41</sup> “The eyes look out; one needs always the eye of the other to recognize (and name) oneself” (Phelan, *Unmarked* 15).

<sup>42</sup> The fact that Lacan manages to transform this moment of ocular loss into an icon of his academic authority – a recollection of loss retold with a delicious if ironic sense of his own theoretical pre-eminence – is salutary. Many scholars following Lacan have latched onto the narrative of the sardine-can, perhaps because narrative is rare in Lacan’s writing, and offers a rare moment of clarity. But Lacan offers another, perhaps even more succinct, example of the gaze at the end of his chapter on “Line and Light” in *Four Fundamental Concepts*. He tells the story of Parrhasios, who paints so fine an image of a veil upon a wall that Zeuxis asks to see the veil parted, to glimpse what lies behind. This perfect *trompe l’oeil*, Lacan concludes, represents the “triumph of the gaze over the eye” (103), for the moment Parrhasios reveals the



ruse is the moment Zeuxis discovers there is no ideal self behind the tantalizing veil, realizes that the most sought-after object in his eye-line is in fact a trick of the light.

<sup>43</sup> Hence all the anxiety in Freud's writings over literal blindness, which he reads as an unconscious manifestation of castration fear. See, for example, both "The Uncanny" and "Medusa's Head." Joplin helpfully reminds us that Medusa was a rape victim (57, n. 8); her mythic ability to blind men on sight and the anxiety Freud articulates in recounting that myth become together emblematic of the historic and cross-cultural refusal to see sexual violence, as male aggression is tellingly transformed at its origin into violence against sight itself.

<sup>44</sup> For two different views of Lacan's purported sexual bias see Grosz, *Jacques Lacan*, and Mitchell and Rose.

<sup>45</sup> Daileader conceives of the body of the woman as the quintessential offstage space in the English Renaissance theatre, that which is both never present (as a result of the exigencies of all-male Renaissance performance) and yet omnipresent, a fantasy body on which the period's quest for knowledge is most dramatically played out. I am indebted to Daileader for her nuanced reading of offstage space and its marked contrast with other contemporary work on the topic, which tends to read offstage space as purely structural, a matter of internal dramatic form rather than as a space fraught with the tensions of cultural preoccupations. See for example Brennan, Issacharoff, Mahood, and Scolnicov.

<sup>46</sup> "[W]hen the spectator has the feeling of actually witnessing the event represented, the feeling of being transported into symbolic reality and faced [with] a real event" (Pavis 304). Barthes' original coinage can be found in *Communication* 11 (1968).

<sup>47</sup> I include Renaissance theatre in this definition.

<sup>48</sup> All citations from the *Poetics* are by section-number.

<sup>49</sup> "Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way [...] the plot ought to be so constructed that, *even without the aid of the eye*, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of the *Oedipus*. [...] Those who employ spectacular means to create a sense not of the terrible but only of the monstrous, are strangers to the purpose of tragedy" (XIV, my emphasis).

<sup>50</sup> Athena makes literal this conventional disqualification of female suffering at the end of the *Oresteia* as she rules in favour of Orestes' right to vengeance upon his mother and declares her life worth less than that of Agamemnon, whom she slew. The violence which has befallen both Clytemnestra and her daughter Iphigenia – whose sacrifice at Agamemnon's hand spurs Clytemnestra to take the latter's life – becomes fodder for a patriotic ending as Athena establishes Greek justice (the Areopagos itself) in the very act of refusing that violence any real legal status.

<sup>51</sup> As Kirk Williams notes in a new essay on the antitheatrical impulse in German naturalist drama, when theatres attempt to be most true to the Real they paradoxically find themselves at their most overtly theatrical.

<sup>52</sup> Dryden succinctly articulates the contradictory place of vision in the theatrical event – a contradiction akin to that which Lacan posits in psychic operations: "When we see death represented we are convinc'd it is but Fiction; but when we hear it related, our eyes (the strongest witnesses) are wanting, which might have undeceiv'd us; and we are all willing to favour the sleight [...]" (40). Allowed to approach their limit, the eyes see only the paucity of mimesis, its failure to produce a true real, and through it their failure to witness a true real; made tacitly blind to the theatre's edges, they happily see the self seeing the self – the optical fantasy of Lacan's psychic subject caught up in the ruse of *objet-a*.

<sup>53</sup> See Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* for a detailed discussion of the protean qualities of the abject.

<sup>54</sup> I am indebted for this trajectory both to Elaine Scarry – who argues that pain's defining quality is its inability to be shared with others, to be recalled into a complete and productive social awareness – and to Peggy Phelan.

**Chapter Two**  
**The Full Eye and the Impoverished Eye:**  
**Rape's Residual Bodies**

[S]he ought to goe straight way, [...] and with Hue and Cry complaine to the good men of the next towne, shewing her wrong, her garments torne, [...] and then she ought to goe to the chiefe Constable, to the Coroner, and to the Viscount, and at the next Countie to enter her Appeale [...]  
*The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* 392-3

[R]ape cannot be visualized because the experience is, physically as well as psychologically, *inner*. Rape takes place inside. In this sense, rape is by definition imagined; it can only exist as experience and as memory, as *image* translated into signs, never adequately objectifiable. As a consequence, the signs are all we have.  
Mieke Bal, "Calling to Witness: Lucretia" 100, emphasis in original

1. The Politics of "hue and cry"

Rape poses an epistemological dilemma. Like Elaine Scarry's tortured body in pain, the body raped hides a story of suffering those beyond its flesh and bone borders cannot access. A violence that takes place not only under the cover of a proverbial darkness, but within the innermost recesses of the (most typically) female body, rape can only appear in social space as a kind of aftershock. It can only be made "real," made to matter (made a legal matter, a social matter) as it is made to register *outside* the body of the rape victim, translated into the impoverished sign of what can never be adequately known or comprehended. Perversely, only as her experience is distanced from her body (site of both crime and much of its consequence), becoming tangible to another as the symbolic residue of her violation, can the rape victim's experience be made to count in cultural space.

In the early modern period, the anxiety circulating around the defining lack of an objective, ocular proof of rape, combined with misogynist prejudices about women's sexual independence, meant that the onus fell directly upon victims to prove rape's very

occurrence by their innocence, their refusal to comply with their attackers. In the passage with which I preface this chapter, the author of *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632) describes the process by which a girl or woman who had been raped might make that rape known, in preparation for its possible prosecution. Written approximately 30 years after statute changes had begun to emphasize a woman's refusal of consent as a defining legal component of sexual violence (see Bashar), *The Lawes Resolutions* implies that a successful appeal to the authorities depended foremost upon a woman's ability to demonstrate her refusal to comply in terms both rhetorical and imagistic, by raising an outcry to those with some influence while also showing them the physical evidence of her struggle against her attacker. Making rape known, it argues, is a matter of show-and-tell, of action followed by declamation and demonstration: the victim of sexual violence is to *go* to the nearest town, *speak* of the crime, and *show* her ripped clothes and bodily wounds in the public street. Reading to a modern ear rather like a stage direction, this passage couches its advice in decidedly theatrical terms: it envisions a spectacle in which rape's revelation becomes not unlike the stuff of stage tragedy, an urgent performance in which the victim figures as a wronged heroine required to legitimize her violation in a symbolic re-enactment for the benefit of those who, in witnessing that violation vicariously, may absolve her and mobilize justice.<sup>1</sup>

The *Lawes Resolutions* passage implies, if not an equivalence between, then certainly the critical interdependence of speech and sight in the matter of actualizing rape, making it signifiable, sensible and comprehensible to the culture at large. For Michael O'Connell, the epistemological interdependence of aural and ocular modes of representation is a particularly political feature of the English Renaissance theatre. In *The*

*Idolatrous Eye*, his recent intervention into the debate over early modern iconoclasm, he argues that while the humanist poetics of the period tended to “distrust” visuals (117), claiming that only language could provide “a genuine sense of human interiority” (129) and a “reliable index of reality” (117), the theatre could not “afford” to make such a distinction between the epistemologies of eye and ear, sound and sight (118). Since its “stock in trade” (119) is neither one nor the other, but rather the dynamic between the two through which its reality-effects are created, its political messages are disseminated, and its pleasures are proffered, the theatre, O’Connell argues, is one of the chief cultural sites at which humanism’s iconoclasm is explicitly challenged in the early modern period, pitting an “affirmation of spectacle” as a legitimate “way of knowing” against its totalizing “claims for an exclusive, or near exclusive, truth in language” (144).

Like O’Connell’s theatrical anti-iconoclasts,<sup>2</sup> the author of *The Lawes Resolutions* argues that several “way[s] of knowing” converge in the making of rape’s evidence. Neither telling nor showing alone will do the trick; as in the theatre, in the town square it is the combination of the presentation of an ocular proof and the vocalization of wrong that produces the sufficient sign of sexual violence.<sup>3</sup> What I am suggesting, then, is that *The Lawes Resolutions* describes (prescribes?) the process of making rape real – of translating it from the realm of individual and internal physical and psychic suffering into an event recognizable and hence prosecutable – as a process of *theatricalization*. Only after the victim has properly performed her trauma for the (male) citizens of the nearest town can she make an appeal to the authorities. Only after she has *rehearsed* her rape can it be said to exist as a matter of social concern.

Why script such a performance? Why not send the victim straight to the authorities? Why must a public declaration, structured as a kind of one-woman side-show, precede any official statement of claim?<sup>4</sup> If rape is a kind of social “negative,” that which trumps the witness, evades certainty for all but she who has suffered, then it is more than an assault on a body: it is an assault on knowledge itself. It points to the limits of the witnessing eye, the limits of speech and language (in matters of sexual assault, to hear is emphatically, worryingly, *not* to know; the suspicion that the victim may be dissembling, “crying” rape, is omnipresent), the limits of humanist epistemology – that which a seemingly omniscient early modern patriarchy, made in the image of a ruler (still) made in the image of God, would prefer not to confront. By reproducing the traumatic event as a performance in which suffering registers as innocence before a body of citizens designated as its official witnesses, the victim mitigates the anxiety born of both their failure to have known the original trauma, and the literal impossibility of their ever adequately witnessing her refusal to comply (woman’s pleasure being a worrying intangible,<sup>5</sup> for Renaissance patriarchs as for contemporary porn barons [see Linda Williams]). Moreover, to witness in this manner is to assume knowledge, and to know is to be able to appropriate: the rape victim’s performance is necessary in order for her experience to be recast as a matter for and between men, transferring it from her darkened inner recesses to the comparative light of their square, no longer just a scar on/in her body but a blight visible on the social landscape, to be handled in courts by judges and (male) relations. The public performance of rape masks the impoverishment with which rape’s constitutive invisibility threatens to mark eyes, ears, and episteme, and in so doing exposes a paradox: the effacement of sexual violence against women in the early modern

period (its transformation into heroics, into property dispute, into violence against *men*) which I chronicled in chapter one is predicated upon its opposite. In order for rape to disappear, it must first be made into spectacle.

The evasive representation of rape in the drama of the period provides a useful parallel to the process I am describing here. As I noted earlier, rape is never staged in the Renaissance; quite apart from the logistical problems such a staging would pose, it would most likely appear to its audience as inauthentic and comic, not simply because its performative quality would surface too clearly, thus fracturing the play's reality-effect and disturbing the tragic mood, but also, I would suggest, because its audience would not understand rape as an event to be witnessed directly, and hence would be less likely to be moved by the act itself than by its familiar after-image, the rhetorical and imagistic conventions of its revelation. Consequently, rape is known to us in Elizabethan and Jacobean performance by way of a series of symbols or well-worn narratives: the victim appears as a contemporary Lucrece, Virginia or Philomela; she clutches a sword, or a prayer book, or her suggestively torn garments, as she passionately narrates her wrong according to rhetorical precedent. Rather than detracting from our sense of power and privilege as audience by emphasizing our failure to witness an original with a rendering of the act which could only ever speak its fakeness, its very *lack* of origin, the series of metonymic or metaphoric substitutes by which rape is rendered on the Renaissance stage directly invokes an audience's authority as the spectacle's prime interpreter. We read the conventional signs, determine what has happened and predict what will happen next; we congratulate ourselves on our observational prowess, and settle in to see our predictions come to fruition, ensconced in the pleasures of omniscience. The empty image of the

crucial scene missed, by means of a classic theatrical sleight-of-hand, is filled instead with an overload of image and narrative, neatly and perfectly concealing its hollow core. On the verge of becoming witnesses to the very limits of spectating (and of theatre's own representational limits) we enjoy instead a reaffirmation of our primary position as witnesses within the mimetic system.

The public performance which *The Lawes Resolutions* envisions relies for its functionality upon a well-preserved reality-effect: not only does the victim need to fill the epistemological gap left by the unseen act of violence against her, but she must also, we can infer, do so without becoming too stagey about it. In other words, when I suggest that the passage incites a performance, I do not mean to suggest that the woman who follows its script is meant to appear to be performing, as actors on stages – despite their attempts at a realistic mimesis – always inevitably do (often to the great pleasure of spectators). Rather, in the context of the town square, hers needs to be a seamless performance, one which follows the tenets of what Elin Diamond, following Luce Irigaray, calls “patriarchal mimesis” (“Mimesis” 64), the process by which woman serves as man's mirror-up-to-culture, reflecting his image of his own centrality by masking his pernicious absence from the immediate scene of representation. Patriarchal mimesis, a product of Platonic prejudices and Aristotelian teleology, demands that the mimetic copy correspond exactly to its model (which, for Plato, is an abstract idea rather than a concrete correlative), pointing thereby to the absolute truth, the irrevocability, of that model's cultural primacy. Gazing through this framework, we can see that the scene in the public street could never truly be the spectacle of a woman's suffering, for in order to signify in culture it must always already be a calculated reflection of woman's suffering as a

function of men's expectations of the nature of that suffering, men's stake in that suffering, and men's authority in choosing whether or not to believe the victim, or to prosecute the case. Alongside the ardent advice of *The Lawes Resolutions* we need to consider the findings of contemporary feminist historians whose work reveals how rape's representation in the early modern period mirrored not female experience, but rather patriarchal prejudices about the nature and significance of that experience. Recent publications by Garthine Walker and Miranda Chaytor suggest that revelation and prosecution required the crime to become increasingly alien to the body on which it was originally perpetrated (see note 23 in my previous chapter). Walker notes that the testifying victim, by the very fact that she was *speaking* about sexual matters, would have been considered unclean and hence complicit in her rape; as a result, victims typically spoke about their suffering as physical *but not specifically sexual* violence. Chaytor's evidence is perhaps more disturbing, as she examines a series of rape narratives in which victims are unwilling or unable to characterize their rape except in terms of its social or economic impact (on the household, or the husband's goods, for example). While in one important respect the hopeful mimetic practice which *The Lawes Resolutions* envisions attempts to mitigate these problems by encouraging women to take ownership of their suffering while also making it meaningful socially, in another it perpetuates the very alienation Walker and Chaytor demonstrate by requiring women to conceive of the crime first in terms of its performative afterlife, its miming via conventional gestures and rhetoric of the expectations and anxieties of the father-figure(s) in the public square, and thus to imagine it always at a distance from their bodies, site of *their personal* violation. Performing the story of rape for public witness shifts its locus of significance from bodily



interior to cultural exterior, resolves rape's constitutive invisibility by making it socially tangible, and accords it public value and meaning by translating it into men's concern. The result is a shift in emphasis away from women's suffering in the very process of rape's theatrical revelation.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the situation may not be as bleak as it sounds. Theatre, like the body raped, is a fundamentally residual space: no prop, or figure, on the stage is sufficient in itself. All theatrical representation points beyond its borders to an origin that is multiple and complex, involving dozens of people and their disparately-collected ideas and practices. It is an archive unto itself, a space of simultaneous history and invention.<sup>7</sup> Predicated upon an economy of perennial substitutions, theatrical events (and I am considering the public declaration/performance of rape to be a theatrical event in this context) always contain both more and less than the traditional mimetic model can account for (what does theatre mime? A truth it has conjured). What happens when the system breaks down? When the symbols by which we know rape as distinct from, say, a highway robbery, lose their specificity, appear as somehow alienated from their conventional referent? When the body performing "rape" becomes excessive to the truth-model to which it is pegged? The question is more than theoretical: to fail to make rape known has obvious consequences both for the victim and for the men of the town to whom the story of rape is directed, and who may have a personal or professional stake in the revelation of the crime.

To crack and fray the edges of "patriarchal mimesis" is to perform what Diamond calls an act of "mimesis-mimicry" (65), which signs the instability of the Father's truth by refusing to reproduce its expectations. Diamond derives her notion of mimicry from

Luce Irigaray's critique of Plato in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, a rhetorical tour-de-force in which Irigaray simultaneously deconstructs the assumptions underpinning his cave narrative in Book X of the *Republic* while also performing (at) the limits of the knowledge it attempts to encompass. In Irigaray's hands, the proverbial cave becomes a womb, and the womb then becomes a theatre, a hall of mirrors in which are trapped those men great and small, plebians and philosopher-kings, who are unable to conceive of an Ideal that accounts for women, for an experience that extends beyond the limits of the phallic. Diamond mines Irigaray's womb/theatre, positing her "feminist mimesis" (58) as a performance which disorients, severing signifiers from referents and producing not truths but a simulacrum of illusions, "fake offspring" (65). For a feminist performance practice attempting to articulate the experience of sexual violence, the womb/theatre holds particular potential. It is, after all, the womb that is the hidden (and so often elided) site of suffering during rape, and it is from the womb that the victim imagined by *The Lawes Resolutions* is to tear her suffering in a performance structured to be both a symbolic re-creation and a perverse transfer of that trauma. What would it mean to re-imagine Irigaray's womb-theatre as the site of a feminist performance of sexual violence? To cast as Diamond's mimic the woman who refuses to give rape its requisite performative echo (to make sexual violence into theatre for the edification of those not present at the original event), who instead foregrounds the residue (lamenting voice, torn clothes, bruised body) that is rape's only means of broader signification, but without organizing it into a coherent mimetic structure? What would it mean to stage rape, simply, *as loss* – woman's bodily and psychic trauma; the impoverishment of the witnessing eye – rather than as its cover-up?

Rape representations in early modern dramatic space function one of two ways: either as ideally-metaphorized after-images that appear on the viewing retina as near-perfect substitutes for the missed original, or as mimetically-unstable after-images that appear instead as a negative, as the trace of loss not quite articulable, of critical sights and sounds missed, invoking the anxious ambivalences that ghost all rape narratives – be they personal, legal, or fictional – in the period, pointing to rather than painting over the epistemological limits at which all rape acts operate. My focus in the first part of this chapter is on two examples of the latter: William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (circa 1594), and Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (circa 1607).<sup>8</sup> In both plays, sexual violence occurs beyond our witnessing eyes and ears, yet in both our attention is repeatedly drawn to the fact of our having missed the seminal event in question. That violence returns to the stage *on* the body of its victims, as per convention, but this time with difference. Lavinia and Gloriana wear the palpable residue not just of violation, but of *loss itself*: their bodies, missing parts, sign *missing-ness*, represent physically a space impoverished, their own impoverishment both as victims and as performers. Their frames keep their stories awkwardly to themselves, as they lack those critical appendages which define an actor, which permit a flawless mimesis. Where once were Lavinia's tongue and hands, and Gloriana's lips, tongue, and eyes, now there are only holes. These gaping spaces cover nothing; rather, they point starkly to that which none see, yet so many fear: the hole that is exclusively feminine, that is the proverbial site of both power and horror to the Renaissance imagination, and that is now the site of an untold, un-transferred, and hence unrevenged violation. Referencing not the plenitude of representation, but rather

the site of unmediated loss, these metonymic fissures articulate the limit of what can be seen, heard, known – or appropriated – of the experience of rape trauma.

In classical revenge tragedy, acting and violence intertwine as a matter of convention. Examining these two plays from the perspective of female violence, however, we can see that the revenge tradition's proverbial fifth-act spectacle of death-by-theatre has a sinister third-act counterpart, one in which the male protagonists attempt to organize the volatile residue of rape metatheatrically in an effort to return the wayward violated body (unruly in its incompleteness, its physical incoherence) to its proper functioning within their patriarchal mimesis. Their attempts to re-cover the missing violation take the form of carefully-orchestrated rehearsals of the unseen act that both presage the plays' stagy final-act bloodbaths and necessarily precede them: without these third-act performances, the final-act shenanigans that make these plays infamous for violence could not follow. Chafing against the omnipresent images of absence, incoherence and loss worn on the body of the rape victims, however, these attempts meet with mixed results, never quite restoring our faith in our power to witness and to know.

In response to the early modern compulsion to re-stage and re-view, I move on in the second half of the chapter to examine four recent texts by three contemporary playwrights whose work speaks directly and unequivocally to the futility of such a project. Together, Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and *Crave*, Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*, and Jenny Kemp's *Remember* stage the displaced, displacing quality of the experience of sexual violence. These plays reject simple metatheatre and metonymy for a much more complex structure of sublimation, substitution, and displacement which suggests that making rape's aftermath signify in representational space may be more a matter of

“hysterical” association than the conventional model-copy mimesis which the earlier texts privilege. Foregrounding above all the instability of the theatrical image, they offer spectators rehearsals with difference, politicized re-enactments which argue forcefully the limits of how much of the experience of sexual violence any of us can access.

## 2. Page to stage: recasting *Titus Andronicus*

The explosion of scholarly interest in *Titus Andronicus* since its rescue from the literary dung-heap by Laurence Olivier in the 1950s has culminated, over the past two decades, in a body of criticism obsessed with the play’s metatextual elements.<sup>9</sup> Coinciding with the heyday of deconstruction’s influence in North American English departments, this criticism has focused principally upon language and the body in *Titus*, and upon Lavinia as author of her tale of woe in 4.1 – arguably the play’s central scene, in which its chaotic troping of wayward letters and severed limbs is finally organized into some kind of recognizable semiotic system, affording the characters a means of linguistic and psychic control over the excessive suffering that comprises much of the action.

Feminist criticism on the play has, not surprisingly, taken the rape of Lavinia as its principal subject, its central debate coalescing around the question of Lavinia as agent and author, site of the play’s problematization of conventional signifying processes. Critics in sympathy with poststructuralist philosophy tend to organize their arguments around Lavinia’s vexing indecipherability throughout Act Three, as her male relatives try in vain to crack the alien code her body has become and discover the source of her mutilation. Mary Laughlin Fawcett begins the trend of reading Lavinia as a provocative agent of semiotic confusion, suggesting that her truncated cries and movements post-rape

“[enact] a kind of charade of the interpretive process” by offering “two possible meanings” for each of her wordless actions (274). Fawcett’s textual bias – she calls Lavinia “the text for [the other characters’] and our interpretation” (265) – trickles down to later writing on the play, which as a result also tends to privilege Lavinia’s enforced silence as the means by which her “polysemic and disruptive” semiotic status is maintained (Green 325). Karen Cunningham strays from the immediate model but not the broader conclusion in a compelling Foucauldian reading of Lavinia’s experience as a trial-by-ordeal which deconstructs itself as it produces a “phenomenal presence that will not yield to words” (149) the kind of plain truth the ordeal body is designed to make visible on its tortured flesh. Despite her debt to Foucault’s reading of the “spectacle of the scaffold,” Cunningham nevertheless slides back into text as she makes her argument for Lavinia as a body that “remains beyond the taming power of *linguistic tropes*” (149, my emphasis). At the extreme of this argument, Gillian Kendall concludes that Lavinia’s “disfigured body [...] resists all metaphor” (315), coming to stand ultimately not for “Rome’s political fragmentation” so much as for “the mysteries of language” (314). To argue as Kendall does that Lavinia somehow trumps the typical process of appropriation by which rape becomes a homosocial matter in early modern culture is also, however, to disregard the fact that, finally, her signs *are* read, and her experience is slotted quite easily into the larger revenge drama organized as a direct result of its deciphering in 4.1. That Lavinia’s body is never read for its own miseries is not an aporia specific to the play, but part of a wider cultural elision within which *Titus*’ narrative circulates.

Lavinia’s position as accidental agent has lately morphed into a much more active, specifically authorial role. Scholars from Marion Wynne-Davies and Katharine

Rowe in the early 1990s to Karen Robertson more recently have argued that Lavinia's appropriation of Ovid and her taking up of Marcus' staff as pen in 4.1 mark "the painful movement of individual women into authorship" (Robertson, "Rape" 229) as "[s]he takes in her mouth [...] the means of self-expression, thus encompassing what has been a masculine prerogative of subjectivity, and transmutes it into a feminine rhetorical practice" (Wynne-Davies 147).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most sophisticated and historically sensitive reading of Lavinia's authorial position to date, however, resides in Emily Detmer-Goebel's argument that the play is structured to reflect anxieties about the telling of rape in late Elizabethan culture as the latter attempted to negotiate the implications of new changes to rape law which granted more weight to matters of consent, and hence by implication to the woman's voice as a means of exposing the crime. Noting that "the play explores the limitations of the power of a woman's voice" (80), both truncating it literally and yet obsessing over that truncation, Detmer-Goebel suggests that Lavinia is not a transgressive author but a reluctantly necessary one, whose narrative is essential to the proper completion of the revenge plot, but whose writing, far from empowering her voice, serves to bury her experience as it "enabl[es] men's revenge" (87).

Whether they characterize Lavinia as a proto-feminist who seizes and re-writes Ovid, as a pawn in a phallic semiosis that thrusts pen into mouth and forces her to produce the narrative her male relatives are near-mad to hear, or as a more nuanced combination of the two, these later forays into *Titus* criticism repeat the textual bias of the earlier, more overtly poststructuralist readings, emphasizing the play's focus on speech, silence, and the tribulations of the linguistic sign at the expense of its equally compelling focus on *performance*. In its latter half, the play is self-consciously theatrical, mixing

madness with acting in an often uncertain melange that prefigures the more carefully-wrought machinations of that most metatheatrical of Shakespeare revenge tragedies, *Hamlet*. Through its middle, as I will argue, *Titus* prefigures these later developments in a central act that offers us a glimpse backstage at Titus' private (meta)theatre, as he and his male kin seek a way to cast Lavinia in the revenge drama they are meant to be enacting. *Titus Andronicus* has until now been largely the purview of literary scholars, whose drive toward text is both expected and vital. Nevertheless, a complete picture of the play as a whole and Lavinia's specific workings within it cannot emerge without recourse to theories of performance alongside textual analysis and theories of deconstruction.

To a scholar of performance theory, Lavinia is not an author, but an actor in a show that goes awry when she loses her hands and tongue, the means by which all performers participate in the uniquely aural-gestural economy that is the theatre. Similarly, her central scene – during which she inscribes Demetrius' and Chiron's names in the dirt, alongside the word “stuprum”<sup>11</sup> – is not just a matter of reading and writing. It is literally a performance of writing, an active, whole-body gesture which rehearses in its requisite contortions and oral invasiveness (the actor playing Lavinia must bend awkwardly as s/he moves the staff; Marcus shows Lavinia how to guide the staff with the mouth) that other, equally central scene to which no one has been privy.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, Lavinia marshals the clarity of the written word<sup>13</sup> and replaces the “map of woe” (3.2.12) she had become with the *image* of the signifier – two names plus a deed – which neatly and unequivocally sums up her suffering, but does so, crucially, at a staff's length from her body. In other words, Lavinia's “telling of rape” (Detmer-Goebel) is not just a matter of writing or speaking<sup>14</sup>: a combination of word, image, and gesture



(the production of meaning as a *function of gesture* – one of theatre’s trans-historical specificities), it represents the performative collision of *both showing and telling* as Lavinia at last ejects her secret from the confines of her body in a theatrical display scripted by Marcus (via Shakespeare) which prefigures the prescriptions of *The Lawes Resolutions* nearly 40 years later. As Lavinia externalizes her trauma by acting out a version of the undisclosed scene of her suffering, she does so in a manner that provides her male relatives with the certainty, the specifics about that scene – who, what – the lack of which has so vexed their claims to knowledge (of her, themselves, their honour and their name). This traumatic rehearsal safely returns Lavinia to her father’s mimetic fold, and dissolves her hysterical stage.

Lavinia’s hysterical stage is the one onto which she steps, bloodied and torn, at the end of Act Two. She is discovered by Marcus, who addresses her at length with a perverse blazon which mirrors rhetorically her all-too-literal mutilation, and we in the audience may be forgiven for expecting that her ordeal (the exact details of which we do, of course, already know, despite having missed the main event) will shortly come to light. Marcus, after all, invokes the story of Philomela and Tereus at line 26, and in such a manner that we should be certain he has already guessed the source of Lavinia’s suffering.<sup>15</sup> But our expectations are quickly thwarted; no sooner does Lucius ask Marcus to explain the sight of her then Marcus seems unable to comply (3.1.89-91). This peculiar confusion over Lavinia’s ravished body has caused a fair amount of speculation among critics, and indeed the third act, spent largely on trying to “figure” Lavinia, does pose several significant questions. Why does Marcus speak of Philomela at the end of Act Two and then promptly forget the connection he makes between her and Lavinia? Why

doesn't Lavinia's body – troped to the point of comedic overdeterminacy – function according to convention? Against those scholars who feel the delay in revelation is just an excuse for the play to revel in the spectacle of Lavinia's suffering (see Bott 202-4, for example), and as an extension of Detmer's argument that it serves to emphasize the importance of Lavinia's own testimony, I propose that the problem is not that the Andronicii do not understand that Lavinia has been raped, but rather that, because they do not yet know *who* is responsible for the violation and subsequent mutilation, they are unable to conceive of the rape as an assault on their own (or their family's) bodies, and hence they are figuratively unable to conceive of the rape *as rape* at all.<sup>16</sup> The confusion and anxiety Lavinia's body incites has less to do with what it symbolically reveals (it is, as I have already noted, tropologically excessive in its classical and conventional references) than with its *physical* limits, which in turn mark the limits of its symbolic power: the bloody stumps where Lavinia's hands and tongue used to be speak of her as Philomela *in extremis*, but they also *prevent* her from accusing her attackers, and thus as indices of her experience for her family's purposes they are incomplete. Her audience (and I would include the Andronicii, as well as the better-informed spectators in the auditorium, in this group) can only watch in distress as an otherwise clear picture of her experience dissolves into metonyms of loss, leaving only holes where once a surfeit of symbol could be found.

Hysteria is, for Julia Kristeva (following Lacan following Freud), a matter of signifiers and signifieds.<sup>17</sup> The hysteric cannot make meaning according to normal Symbolic processes: her words collide with the literal, abrogating the distance between the two necessary for conventional semiosis, dissolving one into the other, and turning

the referent into an obscure (and potentially terrorizing) memory. An hysteric's experience literally does not signify: it lacks sense because sense, for the hysteric, is not made within the confines of the Symbolic order. It is otherworldly, perhaps beyond imagining; certainly, it often seems beyond the analyst's imagining. In its potent and sometimes threatening semiotic "beyond," the hysteric's expression contains the kernel of a transgressive feminist expression. For Elin Diamond (following Kristeva), hysteria is a kind of mimicry, a logical extension of the transgressive mimetic pattern articulated by Irigaray in which copy and model detach from one another. On an hysterical stage, the distance necessary for conventional mimesis (the copy must ape the model, in order to demonstrate the reverence due the model, but the copy cannot *become* the model, lest the absolute and unassailable "truth" of the model be called into question) collapses, leaving a copy that is its own model, a proof, to draw Butler into the equation, that all human truth is at its most basic level performative rather than essential. The hysterical actor does not act: she does not make motions that correspond to *a priori* meanings. Instead, she thwarts both word and gesture, leaving her interpreters in utter confusion. Act Three of *Titus Andronicus* – what I am calling Lavinia's hysterical stage – sets a scene in which Lavinia's trauma can be recognized, but cannot, for lack of an accused, for lack of the means to *express* accusation, yet be assimilated into the men's experience: into violence against them, their honour and their name, into the revenge plot that would ensue from such violence, into a crime in a period in which the violation of a woman must amount to much more than just the violent and violating experience of a woman alone. Arrested in the moment when it is *meant* to become men's concern – the moment of show and tell – but cannot because Lavinia cannot act, cannot complete the performative transfer to

homosocial space, Lavinia's trauma can only, in this hiatus space, be *about her, within her*. Although her mutilated appearance before him causes Titus to insist "this object kills me" (3.1.65) in typically appropriative fashion, in her not-quite-fallen state Lavinia cannot be co-opted. She is less an emblem of his castration than she is a fearful literalization of the castrated woman's body suspended in the lost moment of her own violation, before her trauma becomes a mirror of his authority, that untheorizable instant hidden deep at the heart of the Freudian narrative on which castration fantasies (and the simultaneous recognition and disavowal of women's suffering they permit) are founded, but which, Medusa-like, cannot directly be looked upon. On the hysterical stage, Lavinia's violation is the ultimate castration terror, both perfectly palpable and yet literally *meaningless* to the men around her: like a sign collapsed in on itself, it cannot traverse the distance between her experience and their own, cannot signify within the limits of their imagining. Hence young Lucius' terrorized cry: "I know not what you mean" (4.1.4), and Titus' fraught, anxious reply: "Fear her not, Lucius – *somewhat* doth she mean" (l. 9, my emphasis).

A body in violence to which no stable homosocial assignation can yet be made, Lavinia throws the stage into mimetic disarray. The men around her respond not only by seeking a means by which to obtain the information she is inadvertently concealing,<sup>18</sup> but by literally struggling to recuperate their damaged mimetic frame. They compete for the privilege of echoing her trauma on their own bodies: when Aaron appears (3.1.151) to proclaim that Titus might ransom his incarcerated sons by producing a severed hand, he, Marcus and Lucius tussle almost comically to determine who the lucky sufferer will be. Critics have long noted that Titus' speeches at the sight of Lavinia tend to name her

experience as his own, but again the emphasis on text obscures another focus: “shall we cut away our hands like thine? / Or shall we bite our tongues and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hateful days?” (3.1.131-3) asks Titus, slipping a theatrical reference into his eulogy. Lavinia’s performance has become a dumbshow followed by no main action: a spectacle unresolved. Titus now perceives it as his task to create that action, and thus complete the mimetic contract. Hence his linguistic appropriation of her pain is followed by the direct action of the macabre hand comedy, a much more gestural and literally imagistic articulation of his need to make her mutilation his own. Hence also the intensely metatheatrical quality of 3.2, in which Titus abandons the part of warrior and adopts not the cloak of the madman, but the hitherto vacant post of *director*.

Clark Hulse argues that “[t]he climax of the play [...] comes in a series of scenes in Act III in which Titus completes his movement from the inner reference of speech to the outer reference of signs” (113); to take this argument one step further, we might say that Act Three produces a seminal movement from oratory (which proves mightily useless in the play, as Lavinia’s plight suggests) to acting as the play’s *modus operandi*. Faced with Lavinia’s systemic failure to act her role according to script – that is, to both show and tell, to complete the familiar performance of the classical rape victim her troped body initiates – Titus takes the show into his own hands and lectures the company assembled at dinner “on the proper theatrical gestures to express outwardly their passion – folding the arms, standing and sitting, beating the breast” (Hulse 114). Significantly, he now casts Lavinia’s continued suffering directly in terms of her inability to *act it out*: “Thou map of woe, that thus dost talk in signs, / When thy poor heart beats with outrageous beating, / Thou canst not strike it thus to make it still” (3.2.12-14) he

proclaims, no doubt following the embedded stage direction at the end of line 14 by thumping his breast in reference to the prototypical performance of lament in a (perhaps not especially sophisticated) stage tragedy. To the heels of this instruction Titus attaches another, much more sinister: “Wound it with sighing, girl, kill it with groans, / Or get some little knife between thy teeth / And just against thy heart make thou a hole [...]” (l.15-17). Contemporary audiences may be compelled to side with Marcus when he charges “Fie, brother, Fie! Teach her not thus to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life” (l. 21-2), but Marcus’ protests, though they may echo early modern England’s own discomfort with suicide, including the self-immolation of violated women, do not grasp the essence of Titus’ instruction. He is less teaching Lavinia about suicide than he is trying to teach her how she might, despite her physical limitations, act her part after all, play Lucrece, bring her performance of the ravished heroine to its inevitable conclusion in which her death would prove her innocent of any wrongdoing (Bamford; Carolyn Williams), complete the transfer of suffering from her body, moved beyond misery, to his (left to the predictable exigencies of conventional mourning), and then bring that suffering to a final resolution: dead, as Saturninus concedes late in the play, a raped victim can no longer haunt her father or husband with the spectre of dishonour). This “backstage” direction in the specificities of miming rape trauma culminates in 4.1 as Marcus, adopting the role of director from Titus but tempering it pragmatically, shows his niece not how to play Lucrece, but rather how to perform Philomela. His suggestion that she take his staff in her mouth while guiding it with her severed limbs (Marcus uses his feet, but subsequent stage directions indicate she copies him by using her stumps as a guide) is notable not only because it initiates a rehearsal of her violation in the manner

and to the ends that I describe above, but also because it is designed to fill her empty mouth, replace her missing hands – to provide her, in other words, with the prosthetics of performance. As Lavinia both shows and tells her tale of woe at last, she becomes once more a fully functioning actor within her family's mimetic system, one who can finally take up her (appropriately subordinated) role within Titus' revenge meta-drama which may now, with the identification of its objects, at last be scripted.

The rehearsal of Lavinia's rape which the staff-in-mouth scene effects works to resuscitate Titus' wounded mimesis, the victim of Demetrius' and Chiron's scheme to rob Lavinia (and by implied extension her father) of all representational power. But does it succeed? Certainly, relief floods the stage as Lavinia is able finally to fulfil the metatheatrical contract of the raped heroine. Titus goes on to plan an elaborate dinner theatre which will give revenge tragedy's death-by-drama convention its due; Lavinia becomes both puppet<sup>19</sup> and demonstration object as she plays Virginia to Titus' Virginius in one, final performance which proves her damaged body has indeed been sutured, its unruly gaps filled with the familiar pleasures of well-worn narratives. Yet the moment of rehearsal itself remains problematic. Unlike the metonymic frame which governs rape's revelation in the *The Lawes Resolutions* – garments and cries stand as associative substitutes for the missing act, parts which seamlessly stand in for the whole story – *Titus Andronicus* scripts its show-and-tell around a much more palpable process of substitution in which staff becomes phallus, mouth a *vagina dentata*, and Lavinia her own ravisher (the sinister subtext of so many early modern rape narratives [see Burks]). The risk assumed by staging such a scene is exactly the risk posed by staging rape itself, unmediated by figuration: that it may draw undue attention to the substitutive quality of

all theatre, to the fact that the “original” act to which Lavinia’s 4.1 rehearsal refers is in fact no act at all, but a gap in the iconography of the piece which has no stopper. Lavinia is not simply *re-enacting* her rape: the boy playing Lavinia<sup>20</sup> is acting it *for the first time*, creating it as a function of its very absence in the script, as a function of theatre itself. His performance has no precedent, and the substitutes he employs collapse into their referents: his mouth *is* his vagina.<sup>21</sup> The subtext of 4.1 is that rape is an essentially theatrical matter which can only be made to exist in substitution – that Lavinia’s representation has no model, is a copy of Marcus’ copy of nothing but the blank space between scenes. In this sense, the macabre rehearsal may not dissolve Lavinia’s hysterical stage at all – it may in fact represent its apotheosis.

I am not suggesting here that *Titus Andronicus* teaches us that rape is representational rather than “real”: to argue such a position would be to disregard the suffering experienced by millions of named and unnamed women across nations and histories in the name of a purely theoretical gain. Rather, I want to suggest that *Titus* teaches us about the ways, on account of what Bal calls its essential “inner”ness, in which rape’s representation (legal, fictional, theatrical) has *become* its reality, to the likely detriment of those very millions, and hints at other, less immediately visible pitfalls of such a paradigm. *Titus* stages many of the anxieties about rape epistemology and ocular proof circulating in early modern cultural space – by foregrounding not only anxiety over Lavinia’s voice, as Detmer argues, but also anxiety about her status as *performer*, as one meant to reproduce her experience for her male protectors in all its detail, about the images she cannot offer as well as the words she cannot say – and in so doing reveals what the 4.1 rehearsal is designed to mask: that ocular proof is a ruse, that rape simply



cannot be seen, that, observing from the vantage of the social, we will *never* be able adequately to witness sexual violence, know all its detail, the extent of its consequences. This play is not finally about either rape or acting: it is about how *acting rape* reveals the specular paradox of both rape and acting, the impoverishment lurking just beyond the assumed plenitude of representation.

Lavinia's rape is *literally* a violence made by and for men, produced for the first time in performance, which is also the moment it is taken into custody by the revenge through-line of the play. A rape-by-proxy, it is also, then, an early modern in/visible act, performing the process of theatricalization, appropriation and effacement governing the coming-into-being of rape in the early modern period. (For those for whom rape counted – and continued to count most, despite minor modifications to the law – rape was, indeed, a matter not of inner hurt, but outward show, including the show of justice.) Perhaps, then, a feminist performance of this play – one which takes up its provocative potential to sign rape's very disappearance into theatre (into the substitute act as well as the intensely stagy revenge drama it occasions) – would not look like Deborah Warner's groundbreaking 1987 feminist staging, which emphasized Lavinia's experience as one of profound personal trauma (see Dessen 51-69, Bate 62-9, and reviews by Morley, Tinker, and Spencer), but more like Julie Taymor's film of the play, or the shortened, experimental adaptation produced by the Battersea Art Centre's Development Company in 2000, both of which chose to emphasize the performative rather than the authentic in their representations of Lavinia. Taymor's film jumps between periods, makes use of tableaux in place of much of the play's violence,<sup>22</sup> and fast-forwards while Lavinia enacts her trauma in the sand, overlaying the sped-up action with a violent soundtrack evocative

of a rock concert. The BAC-DC production cast three dancers as Lavinia, whose return to the stage post-rape was marked with a set dance number. Split-casting has the general effect of emphasizing a role *as* role; in this case, the three Lavinias are not only suggestively tripartite, but appear throughout as performers. Together, they suggest the rape of Lavinia to be always already a matter of performance. The extreme staginess of these productions might be accused of minimizing the trauma of rape,<sup>23</sup> but I would argue in turn that showing rape to be traumatic does not exhaust its feminist potential. Rather, emphasizing *performance* opens the door to a representation which can confront directly the compulsion I have been tracing to make rape's residue sign as a theatricalized substitute for an ominous absence.

### 3. Glorianamorphosis

As long as the gaze supports the place of the Other everything in the world is seamless and logical. The distinction between phallic and castrated is in place; the distinction between the inside and outside is fixed. But at a certain moment, the anamorphic moment, the gaze detaches from the Other. Suddenly all these distinctions and their framework collapse.  
Parveen Adams, *Emptiness of the Image* 153

Death is what we cannot know: the end point that we can never see. We make up "knowledge" because we cannot see that skull, cannot see what we know we must absorb without our eyes, our I/s. [...] To look at the men, we must overlook the skull. To look at the skull, we must lose the men.  
Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* 123

Peggy Phelan sees in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* a confluence of personal and public tragedy: the parallels Rodney King's story makes with a once-mundane but now shattered family narrative; the unexpected reverberations of unexpected loss, not always visible, but always palpable, alive beneath the surface of everyday sensation.

Decades earlier, Jacques Lacan looks through the same frame and encounters anamorphosis, the obscure gaze of psychoanalysis which he describes in *Four Fundamental Concepts* [79-90]. Their readings collide in the near-miss both articulate, the uncanny sense of powerlessness the painting conveys to the viewer just discovering the massive perceptual hole at its core – not in the middle of the image, where the skewed skull lies, but the hole the image carves in perception itself. Just such a hole, represented by no less a skull, haunts the narrative heart of Cyril Tourneur’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*. Gloriana’s smooth skull might appear transparent in its symbolism after the tremulous opacity of Lavinia, but it carries its own dualities, is less smooth than slippery. The skull comes from the *memento mori* tradition, but what does it commemorate? A death’s head conventionally projects its macabre promise onto its viewer, suggesting the inevitability of mortal demise. Though gruesome, such an image is at least not vague: it is a guarantee of human end, and thus (for the believer) of the power of God. But beyond the certainty of death, as Phelan’s words remind us, lies the end of our episteme: the “beyond” which the memento signifies is the vanishing point of all knowledge and power of which we might flatter ourselves possessors. Death – somewhat like rape – is an experience beyond our ability to witness and to know, a truth we simultaneously acknowledge and deny as we turn death into art (as rape into theatre) by way of the *memento mori*, transforming our anxiety into the glib rhetorical tool of poet and playwright, proof of a prowess with which we are not yet ready to part.

But Gloriana’s skull is more than *memento mori*; its cavernous hollows gesture with ominous silence at the unknown beyond death, but they also index a much more immediate epistemological limit. The skull is not just an emblem; it is also the physical

trace of a body lost to violence, the hardened memory of a brutal act against a woman, one which I will argue must be understood within the context of Renaissance notions of sexual violence and which, nine years' distant, has yet to be assimilated or revenged. The time-warp at the heart of this play begs the question: why has Vindice so long delayed revenge for his mistress' murder? The blithe answer that he is a foolish figure in a mocking play, his dithering a send-up of Hamlet's own, is incomplete. Vindice's comic over-confidence recoils against his underlying ambivalence in matters concerning his mistress. True to the emblem's tradition, Gloriana's death's-head projects the definitiveness of a final action – her murder – but beyond that is wholly ambiguous. The skull, like Lavinia's mutilated body, reflects not the clarity of an event available to be read and easily appropriated by male authority, transformed Hamlet-like into poetry and thence into an identification projected against the muted or absent other, but rather refracts the knowledge-seeking gaze, its ominous black fissures swallowing any attempt to stamp Gloriana's demise with a complete narrative. *The Revenger's Tragedy* presents what seems on the surface to be a straightforward case of a too-chaste woman's death for sexual non-compliance, but turns out to conceal deeper anxieties about sexual violence and the inevitability of women's complicity as it both registers and parodies similar anxieties circulating in Jacobean culture. Once again, theatre provides the means by which these anxieties are finally reconciled so the revenge plot may speed toward its conclusion. Only when Vindice realizes the skull's ability to sign not just the ambiguities of an obscure act of violence but also the trickeries of the theatre<sup>24</sup> can he assimilate his ambivalence and concoct his revenge meta-drama, appropriating and containing

Gloriana's ambiguous suffering within the frame of a tour-de-force performance of his own.

Gloriana's death by poisoning at the lecherous Duke's hand is not typically called an act of sexual violence, but the text itself makes the connection in subtle ways.

Vindice's opening elegy to the skull tells us that the Duke's murder of his beloved was provoked by his seduction and her refusal, implying that Gloriana's death was preceded by an attempted rape (in the older, medieval definition of the term which equated rape and seduction). Vindice then goes on to suggest that murder might have, in fact, been rape had the old man only been able to follow through on his original intentions: "for old men lustful / Do show like young men, angry, eager, violent, / Outbid like their limited performances" (l. 34-6). Vindice, always digging at his enemies and often groaningly parodic in his tone,<sup>25</sup> is calling the Duke impotent (I read "performances" here to be an intentional *double-entendre*, connoting both a failed love suit and a flaccid penis), implying that he was unable to summon the prowess to rape Gloriana, and as a result chose to kill her instead. In the play's opening moments Gloriana's murder is classified as an extreme substitute for an act of sexual violence which has not simply *not* been witnessed, but which has (comically, morbidly) been missed in its entirety. It may or may not have happened at all (depending upon how you look at it).<sup>26</sup> Gloriana's trauma thus always already embodies the sinisterly anamorphic quality of sexual violence (was it or was it not rape?), as well the dualism of all stage events and images (are they real or fakes?), and its residue – the skull, stage prop *par excellence* – hints early toward the way in which sexual violence becomes meaningful to culture only as a matter of theatrical effect, while also functioning as a perpetual reminder of Jacobean England's quarrelsome

relationship with the victim of such violence, its anxious ambivalence toward her unresolved and unresolvable status, the never quite eradicated possibility of her complicity in a crime which, as a result, in legal terms may not have happened at all.

One might argue that Gloriana's death is all the proof we need of the Duke's violent sexual predation and her obstinate refusal; if to die for honour rather than to live with the shame of even an attempted rape is an indelible mark of non-complicity, Gloriana appears to have long since taken her place among the chaste heroines of classical legend. Certainly, her story has become legendary around Vindice's house, if only because, as his brother remarks, he cannot seem to stop harping on "death's vizard" (1.1.49). Vindice's legendary long-windedness is of course a key component of the play's parody, but in his wit's relation to the skull more is going on than a sly reference to *Hamlet*, a send-up of the eroticization of dead bodies current in the "culture of dissection" of early modern England (Sawday 3; see also Coddon, "For Show"), or a parody of conventional laments for wronged virgins. Vindice has been rehearsing his excessive praise of his dead love for nine years, as though by repetition he might, at last, mitigate some nagging doubt about her very praiseworthiness. That Gloriana's skull comes to stand for similarly overdetermined flagellations about the vanity and sexual promiscuity of women at other points in the play, most notably during the bower scene<sup>27</sup> (in which Vindice dresses her as a whore, eulogizing her with such incongruous statements as "[a]nd now methinks I could e'en chide myself / For doting on her beauty" [3.5.69-70]), simply reinforces Vindice's overarching ambivalence toward her memory.<sup>28</sup>

If we cut through Vindice's often contradictory sermonizing about his lost love, we might observe that the only thing we really know about Gloriana is that we do not

know much about Gloriana at all, or what may have befallen her. Apart from the fact that she was poisoned, a means of death so typical to the play as a whole that we would likely be surprised had she died by some other means, we have no empirical evidence of a past life or details about her death – which merits barely two lines in Vindice’s opening forty-eight-line soliloquy, an eclipse that begs questioning. Into the void we can insert only Vindice’s slightly unreliable (for their excess as much as for their contradiction) elocutions about her womanly perfection. Karin Coddon notes that the skull is bodied and gendered only by Vindice’s machinations, and that “its referentiality is problematised by the visual absence of anything distinctively ‘Gloriana’ about it” (“For Show” 126, 128). Unlike Lavinia, who is thrust into bodily, semiotic and mimetic incoherence for only one act’s duration, Gloriana takes her place in the drama only as a fragment of a body decayed; she mimes bodily incoherence throughout, echo of a frame long gone whose “true” nature in life and fate in death lies now unrecognizable.

The skull is, then, perhaps most vexing because it represents the thwarted quest to see into Gloriana’s soul, know her innermost recesses – the project of both those who sought performative proof of rape and those who sought scientific evidence of human essence. Scholars of Renaissance dissection practice such as Valerie Traub and Jonathan Sawday have suggested that a kind of “frenzy of the visible” akin to that which Linda Williams identifies in relation to pornography production governed the Renaissance anatomy theatre (the terminology is telling); the anatomist sought to overcome the limitations of human vision by laying the hitherto hidden centre of human life, “the parts denied unto the eye,” on display (Sawday 211).<sup>29</sup> Such scholars also tend to agree that unfettered access to the “the secret place, the core of bodily pleasure or knowledge” (12)

was not forthcoming, and hence all dissection represented, on some level, the very limits of sight, and of our knowledge of human being. As in the theatre proper, on the anatomist's stage access to the space-off can only ever reveal that the "core" is a blank, empty of originary events and essential meanings. Coddon has argued that *The Revenger's Tragedy* uses the skull to satirize the scientized corpse and attendant scientific claims that it could serve as a stable body of knowledge about the body. While certainly not disagreeing with her complex and insightful analysis, I would like to expand it by reading Gloriana's residual body specifically in terms of its failure to produce the kind of interiorized readings required of, and provided by, the dead bodies of the raped heroines of classical legend to which I suggested its unproblematized relation above. These bodies are offered to the reader or spectator lily-white, cogent and whole, morally because physically pure, proof both of violation and of non-complicity in that violation. Far from slipping off the Father's representational trajectory, the chaste corpse retains its mimetic power as it shows its chastity, its innocence, beyond literary and theatrical doubt. At the other end of the symbolic spectrum, Gloriana's skull connotes the epistemological uncertainty of an end-point beyond decay, rather than the moral absolutes of the carefully-coded Lucretian or Virginian corpse, inviting a multiplicity of readings (hence the *memento mori*'s value as poetic muse, theatrical prop – it is an *interpretive* tool) articulating a range of contradictory prejudices about women's "true" nature. The skull warns of mortal decadence, but is not designed to be specific in its judgement of the decadent or their deeds. It can neither show nor tell a definitive experience of violation (be it rape, murder, or murder as rape-by-proxy), nor can it assign blame. Although we know the Duke to be responsible for Gloriana's death, other questions remain: the lack of



a violated body in which to wrap a reflection of Gloriana's supposedly pure soul calls the text's claims of that very purity into question.

Questions about the possible nature of Gloriana's soul grow murkier still in 1.4 when we are introduced to the play's own Lucretian corpse in the body of Antonio's wife, who has been raped by the Duchess' youngest son. The scene in which her body is "discover[ed]" (1.4) by Antonio to his friends is structured as a theatrical show-and-tell, what we can now identify as the stock process of rehearsing a rape so that it may be translated into something meaningful to the assembled men (in this case, as in *Titus*, that something is revenge). Antonio calls on his friends to be "sad witnesses" (1.1, my emphasis) to his wife's demise, reading the highly conventional symbols she has left behind (not one but two prayer books,<sup>30</sup> strategically opened to reveal a posthumous message of moral purity) through the lens of his testimonial. Telling here is the cause of death: in direct contrast to Gloriana, who was poisoned by the Duke, Antonio's wife has poisoned *herself* (l. 10) rather than suffer her indignity. Within the literary legends and dramatic conventions surrounding sexual violence, suicide proves a rape victim's innocence.<sup>31</sup> Death by another's hand, however, lacks that stable foundation (Virginia's legend is the exception), especially if that hand is antagonistic. Chaste maids kill themselves; bad girls are killed when they cross their angry fathers, husbands or lovers. *The Revenger's Tragedy* sets up a deliberate parallel here, asking us to examine Gloriana's fate in light of the clear-cut case the corpse presents and throwing iconographical doubt upon the story Vindice spins in 1.1. Could the skull be evidence not of chastity after all, but of a secret sexual liaison with the Duke, and thus of her complicity, in the terms of the day, in his crime of passion?<sup>32</sup> Or is the skull perhaps a

harbinger of that which the chaste maid's body will *become* when the poem ends and the audience disperses – cracked, decayed to dust, no more proof of unassailable chastity, unquestionable innocence than the dissected corpse is proof of human essence? Both of these anxieties about women's betrayal, current in the culture at large, are, I would argue, built into the play's ambivalent representation of the skull. In spite of Vindice's ridiculous (and ridicule-inducing) attempts to produce it rhetorically as either proof positive of Gloriana's chastity and goodness, or proof positive of women's (and by extension Gloriana's) innate corruption, the skull continues to leave him (and us all) at a loss. Icon of Gloriana's missing past, lingering reminder of the absence of a tell-tale body to display as performative evidence of wrongs suffered, the skull's hollows no less than Lavinia's lopped limbs bend mimesis sideways, reflecting a muddled episteme, suggesting the possibility that issues of complicity and consent are far more complex than the law (or the literature) would have them be. Vindice's early comment on the Duke's sexual prowess marks his refusal to classify his mistress' violence as overtly sexual; the homosocial arrogance of such a rhetorical turn turns out to be prescient, as the Duke's imagined phallic failure shifts to compass the play's lingering worry (implicit in its governing trope of the innate corruption of women) over how a Jacobean gentleman or householder might ever gauge his wife or daughter's complicity, or lack thereof, in such a matter.

Vindice's act three revenge upon the Duke performs his attempt, at last, fully to exorcise the ghost of Gloriana's trauma by incorporating it, uncertainties and all, into his larger revenge scheme. To gain control over her unruly episteme, Vindice will rehearse the fatal encounter between the Duke and Gloriana but adopt for himself the role of both

victim and attacker, transforming the alienating ambiguity of the scene into a more familiar and accommodating mode: theatricality.<sup>33</sup> If Gloriana's role in the lost event is somewhat uncertain, Vindice's staging makes room for two possibilities. His performance implicates Gloriana in her own suffering (dressed as a harlot, the skull represents a woman who is thought to be always complicit, who deserves what she gets) and yet also vindicates her by proving the unrepentant lechery of her seducer and murderer (as the Duke dies the agonizing death of "the bad" [3.5.205], he demonstrates his guilt ordeal-style). Vindice casts the skull not as co-revenger,<sup>34</sup> his authorial and directorial equal, but rather as *both* ravisher and ravished in a scene he alone orchestrates. The skull becomes the agent of a sexualized death which mirrors Gloriana's prior fate exactly, but, as the bait in the scheme, the skull's mouth must also be penetrated in order for the poison it carries to work. Only by raping the skull (yet Vindice makes the skull seem willing; is it rape?) can the Duke suffer as Gloriana has and vengeance be complete. Taking control of the scene also means guaranteeing at last Gloriana's mimetic allegiance; since the skull can neither walk nor act on its own, Vindice, already in disguise as Piato, casts himself as director in his own performance and substitutes himself for both victim and attacker as he manipulates his lady puppet-like. In the process he both literalizes and ironizes sexual violence as a homosocial transaction by raping the Duke (invading his body, his mouth, with the poison) using the skull of a dead woman as the middle-term. Simultaneously, he makes such violence intimately, and self-consciously, theatrical. Far from establishing facts and determining unequivocality, the scene seems to rehearse the play's very anxieties as it works to proliferate identities and confuse the innocent and guilty, pleasure, rape and murder. While unquestionably misogynist as it

implicates Gloriana in her own scene of suffering, the setup Vindice arranges also suggests provocatively that a woman's experience of sexual(ized) violence cannot be distilled to an either-chaste-or-complicit zero-sum game. Yet this proliferation is not in itself transgressive of Vindice's larger reclamation project here. Operating in a self-consciously metatheatrical mode rather than on a strict model-copy structure, Vindice's mimetic system can accommodate flux. What it cannot accommodate – and I will return to this in a moment – is a vacuum.

Salient here, even more than in the similar scene at the heart of *Titus Andronicus*, is the *overtly* performative nature of the setup: Vindice takes the place of both good and bad, revenger and rapist, while Gloriana's skull – which is, of course, always already a prop, by its very nature substitutive, and which always already stands in for the missing body of Gloriana – acts as both victim and accomplice. The scene opens with Vindice reveling in his ingenuity, taking pleasure in showing Hippolito the disguise he has procured for the skull. Like Titus, Vindice is an obsessive director; unlike Titus, however, who is obsessed with creating a stable reality-effect through which to see his world and funnel his revenge, Vindice plays up the palimpsestic quality of his play-within. Layering costume and mask (another *de facto* sign of the specifically substitutive quality of the theatrical event [Fischer-Lichte 75]) onto the property skull, Vindice loads this already-theatricalized figure with an ever more reflexive theatricality. While *Titus Andronicus* inadvertently reveals rape to be a matter of performance as it recreates Lavinia's trauma within the economy of substitution that governs the stage, *The Revenger's Tragedy* takes the theatre itself – via the synecdochal skull, residue both of an unseen act of sexualized<sup>35</sup> violence, and of countless prior performances – to be

violence's origin and endgame. As he both ardently seeks and simultaneously sends up the quest for the full eye, the return of the missed event and its attendant certainty, which governs *Titus*, public rape declarations, as well as so much theatrical viewing, Vindice mitigates his ambivalence over the origins of Gloriana's experience by staging an act, or a series of acts-within-an-act, whose very origin lies in theatrical substitution, and which, despite its seeming chaos and its identificatory fluctuations, remains of his own making and (in this scene, anyway) firmly in his grasp. Vindice's "rape" of the Duke via the skull successfully eliminates not only the woman, but the boy actor, from the representation equation, deftly erasing one of the pragmatic hindrances to staging rape, while also turning the act of violence itself into a matter of prop manipulation. In other words, I propose that by rehearsing Gloriana's vexing encounter with the Duke as self-consciously as possible, turning it into a matter of theatre which practically trumpets its theatrical status, Vindice at last resolves his anxiety over his failure to know the "real" Gloriana, her woman's nature, or the true nature of her suffering. By replacing his uncertainty over the latter with his own, manufactured version able to encompass all possibilities, in which identifications remain multiple but he gets to be the puppet-master, Vindice, no less than Titus, papers over his loss with theatre.

For Vindice, the purpose of 3.5 is to transform the skull materially, from that which, bare-boned, lacks eyes to reflect and affirm Vindice to himself, into a fully-functioning *memento theatri*, evidence of his prowess as performer and master of the revels. The process of costuming the skull parallels the process by which Lavinia is outfitted with her prosthetics in 4.1: both are designed to fill the gaps marring these bodies and return them to their proper mimesis. In Lavinia's case, the substitution of staff

for missing limbs and tongue (on one hand) and violating phallus (on the other) threatens to disrupt Titus' carefully-hewn reality effect. In Gloriana's case, where reality effects give way to a glorified *theatrum mundi*, the covering up of empty eye sockets and bare cranium with a harlot's wig and mask proves not enough to contain the skull's anamorphic shiftiness, its relentless chafing at the edges of Vindice's binary worldview. *The Revenger's Tragedy* turns on the skull's comic failure to reflect those absolutes about women (and hence about himself in relation to those women) which Vindice seeks so anxiously from his mother and sister. At turns blazoned and berated for the ills of all femininity, proverbially figured as (a feminized) mortality yet so alive in Vindice's morbid imagination, decked out as whore yet seemingly pure underneath, Gloriana promises a surfeit of representation but turns out to be unable to deliver. Like the distorted skull in Holbein's painting, hers catches you unaware, empty. The definitive *trompe l'oeil*, Gloriana's skull, bedecked in theatrical finery, acts the part of the Lacanian gaze, which shows you how much your eager eyes miss as they take signs for wonders. As the Duke discovers the "quaintness" of Vindice's "malice" (3.5.109), Vindice calls for light, that the old lecher "[m]ay start into those hollows" (l. 149), gaping wounds no less fathomless than the hollow Lavinia's tongueless mouth makes, than the hole in the ground into which the hapless Bassanius tumbles while his wife is dragged away by Demetrius and Chiron. In Freud's paradigm, to which Vindice anachronistically subscribes, the hole is a tease: it promises to reflect inversely the special endowment of half a species but ends up ensnaring it instead.<sup>36</sup> In Lacan's paradigm, which Vindice does not fully grasp, the hole becomes a blank in which the whole of us discover that we have somehow failed to see what we imagined we could always see. Instead of a

reflection of our wholeness, the hole returns no image at all – no eyes reflected in the iris of the other, only empty sockets lodging the limits of self-sight. Now you see Gloriana, Vindice charges the Duke, but now no-one sees you: as he unmaskes both himself and the skull to reveal his ruse, he presents the Duke with the image of his Duchess secretly cavorting with his son, compounding proof of the radical impotence of the wandering ducal eye which also confirms, as the Duke prepares to slip into the “beyond,” that he has always already been missing from the *real* scene of power. Vindice’s mistake, however, is to imagine himself master of Gloriana’s anamorphic gaze, commanding but somehow immune to the uncanny power of her absent eyes. While the Duke’s lascivious tongue is eaten away by the poison he has gobbled from Gloriana’s lips, Vindice emphatically declares his name (l. 168), his authorship of the revenge scheme, his ownership of the scene and its motley bag of tricks. Just such an arrogant claim to ownership is, of course, the comic source of Vindice’s own final fate as he confesses smugly to the Duke’s murder on 5.3.96-8. The lesson of Gloriana’s “hollows” is not that Vindice is all-seeing, but rather that he is more kin to the Duke than either man may ever have imagined. As the Duke is brought low by his love of lust, his discerning eye paralyzed by his hungry lips, so Vindice is conquered by his passion for performance, unable to discern the endgame of his own authority.

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*Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger’s Tragedy* operate on the principle that it is possible to know, and thereby possess, woman’s intimate suffering (although *woman’s* suffering is a somewhat anachronistic label), and that such appropriative knowledge is the promise of performance. Recent dramatic work by a trio of female playwrights<sup>37</sup>

upends this formula, charging that such knowledge is not only unavailable to a public gaze, but also elides the conscious grasp of violence's victim, and further that the theatre is the ideal site at which to rehearse this very epistemological slippage. I suggested in my introductory chapter that the theatre is structured like a psyche, with a space of conscious representation (onstage) and an attendant space behind which enables the action but also contains the kernels of that which so much theatre represses in order to create seamless reality-effects. Early modern playwrights, actors and audiences may not have understood offstage space as a theatrical unconscious, but they were nevertheless occasionally as zealous as Freud in their attempts to retrieve some of what lay hidden there. For Sarah Kane, Jenny Kemp and Colleen Wagner, literally transforming stage into psyche allows them not only to disclose acts previously hidden from view, but more critically to interrogate the very politics of that disclosure.

Kane's *Blasted* (1995) and *Crave* (1998), Wagner's *The Monument* (1995), and Kemp's *Remember* (1993), though written on separate continents and from within separate traditions,<sup>38</sup> share an important commonality: all stage rape not as recuperation but as loss, memorializing the impossibility of retrieving a story which may then be co-opted for another's ends. The acts which drive these narratives are pointedly refused a stable staging, and the plays become defiant rebuttals to the knowledge-seeking gaze. What the self-conscious stage of the early moderns discovers as it rehearses sexual violence – that the transformation of that violence into theatre is a risky project, fraught with the pitfalls of a medium which maintains an uneasy relationship to origin and essence – these playwrights relish and make central to their representation as they blow their stages apart, compulsively repeating the lost act of violence again and again as a



kind of watermark on the floorboards, in homage to the scar it has left on the private unconscious. In the plays above, holes are to be feared, to be filled, bodies are to be made whole again lest they miss their mimetic purpose, fail to mirror the Father's law; in the plays below, holes are cultivated and celebrated, performative echoes of a psychic schism, a tear in the fabric of the Father's episteme which no spectator can measure and no director can fill.

#### 4. Kane: Performing (at) the edge of the eye

When *Blasted* premiered at the Royal Court Upstairs in 1995, Sarah Kane became instantly infamous as a playwright who staged unrepentantly and without restraint the most extreme acts of violence imaginable. The play features, among other horrors, the rape of one man by another and the eating of a baby, all performed in a full-frontal assault on audience eyes. Kane prided herself on her refusal to pull punches and cleanse her stage of the graphic and gruesome (Kane, Interview 132-3), and her critics have spilled a great deal of ink examining the validity of this choice.<sup>39</sup> In the process, however, one important detail is routinely overlooked: *Blasted* features not one rape but two, and the first – an assault on the central female character, Cate, by the central male character, Ian – is not staged.

Given the obsessive critical reading of Kane as a playwright who represents violence in all its brutality on stage, and her own thinking on the subject, this elision is of major significance.<sup>40</sup> Much critical effort has been expended on the value of Kane's graphic violence, but what is the value of *not* representing Cate's rape directly? The answer lies in what we are shown in place of that rape; Kane directs our eyes away from

the act proper, and toward its psychic and social aftermath. Both *Blasted* and the later *Crave* stage sexual violence as a series of displacements in which the much more straightforward metatheatricality of the early modern plays I considered above meets the repetitive, substitutive structure of the psychic theatre of trauma.<sup>41</sup> Kane's work, following thinkers from T.E. to Bal, contends that rape can only be known as aftermath, but aftermath which is not coherent, which cannot be easily contained within the framework of a readily-comprehensible show-and-tell narrative, which cannot be metonymized nor organized into a chronology complete with a clear sense of who did what to whom, when, and where.

In *Blasted*, Cate's rape (which is never explicitly named) falls between scenes one and two, hard on the heels of a terse and coercive exchange during which Ian tries to convince Cate to make love, while Cate insistently refuses (23-4). Cate and Ian have long been acquainted, and have been lovers; they are now together again in Ian's hotel room, after some time without contact. Ian expects sex; Cate apparently expects something less physical and more intimate. Following the scene change, the tenor of the room alters dramatically; Cate is rough, violent and angry, a critical shift from her earlier, somewhat stilted tenderness. Ian, who is dying, has grown visibly sicker. Ian attempts to renew the tenderness of the earlier scenes, but Cate is obstinate and expresses the desire to leave. He insists she still loves him, and that their recent activity proves it; Cate now, many pages after the scene change, finally makes clear that she "didn't want to do it" and that her cries were of pain (31). The two characters' difficult history resonates against the unseen scene between them, and invokes age-old prejudices about sexual violence between familiars. If Cate has a sexual history with Ian, has knowingly come to his hotel

room, and is willing at other points in the play to perform oral sex on him, how can any sex act between them be non-consensual? Kane seems almost to be daring her audience to look away, to rewrite Cate's suffering as disavowed pleasure, to fold what has clearly been a forced sexual encounter generating wounds both physical and emotional (31, 32, 34) into the normal workings of a slightly dysfunctional relationship between two misfits. Her determined elision invites our observational effacement. Can we read the signs and acknowledge the violence, or are we, like Ian, failed witnesses (Buse 185)?

Ian's rape of Cate, so palpably and frustratingly absent from their dialogue at the top of scene two (Cate cannot name the crime, though she can narrate the consequences; Ian implicitly denies all wrongdoing), wastes no time returning to the scene in several carefully-crafted echoes. Ian threatens Cate with a gun after she attacks him in revenge; she faints and he simulates sex on her unconscious body (26-7). The *simulation* is of note: in what we might call a perverting contemporary version of rape's metatheatrical return, Ian literally performs for us the scene we missed, but does so *without* any actual penetration (and so we continue, crucially, to miss, become acutely aware of representation's limits, the limits of the logic of the return).<sup>42</sup> Awake again, Cate performs fellatio, only to bite down hard on Ian's penis (31), feeding him his own medicine (we learn on 32 that he bit Cate and made her bleed genitally). Again, the missing moment returns with difference: we see it in reverse, as a negative, the absent image as ghost of itself. As the scene ends, its program of return-with-difference reaches its apotheosis: a bomb blasts the stage apart, leaving "*a large hole in one of the walls*" (39, emphasis in original) which scars the physical playing space, transforming it into an architectural trace of Cate's suffering.<sup>43</sup> Against the classical tradition of using rape to

symbolize political crisis or a tear in the social fabric, Kane makes both her stage and the social space it indexes into the wound of a woman's deep internal distress. The whole playing space (the play's whole world) becomes Cate's body, scarred at its core, blasted through, and the hole that marks the epicentre of that trauma is never plastered over. Left empty, it attracts our eyes, and becomes, ironically, our refuge as fresh brutality litters the stage.

*Blasted's* other rape – the one which has attracted all the attention – is the Soldier's violation of Ian, notable principally for its brutal and forthright representation. But, crucially, it too is structured as a series of substitutions, no single act but a palimpsest of past violence which it simultaneously invokes and displaces. The soldier uses Ian's body to re-enact the rape and torture of his own girlfriend ("Bastard pulled the trigger on Col" he remarks as he shoves his gun barrel up Ian's anus [49]), but he is also clearly trying to recreate past moments of sexual tenderness and pleasure. At the same time, he is doing unto Ian as Ian has done unto Cate (Saunders 46), rehearsing again the prior violation we were not permitted to see. This, too, is repetition with difference. The missing rape arrives now in representational space as a literal rape of one man by another, a highly symbolic as well as painfully visceral encounter which is both a negative-image of our earlier failure to witness and acknowledge (perhaps we only now, as we watch it displaced onto his own body, come to realize the full force of Ian's cruelty to Cate), as well as a thundering echo of the *history* of our failure to witness and acknowledge, of the pernicious, systemic making-over of violence against women (against Cate, against Col, against Gloriana, against Lavinia) into violence against and between men.

More central to its difference, however, is this rape/rehearsal's spectacular foulness. Unlike Lavinia and Gloriana's metatheatrics, which attract the compulsive and anxious gaze of viewers both onstage and in the auditorium, this spectacle almost seems designed to repel the eye, daring us to look, to tolerate the view for as long as possible. Anti-Aristotelian to its core, it threatens to arrest our cathartic impulse. The Soldier's excessive, unexpected brutality requires those who cannot bear the sight to create their own offstage, shutting out the image in horror: the face contorts, winces; the eye looks away, perhaps closes, or perhaps wanders safely to the middle distance, toward the massive fissure in the middle of the stage left over from the bomb blast. Kane plays on the reactions she expects to elicit with her full-frontal violence by setting up two competing centres of attention in this scene; the image of the onstage rape, simultaneously compelling and overwhelming, vies for our eyes with the safe haven of the comparatively harmless hole, residual reminder of a previous, less visually and viscerally confrontational, violence. Here is Kane showing us actively the limits of our eyes, of what we can tolerate and endure, the end-stop of our potency as witnesses. If we find ourselves unable to bear the brunt of Ian's torment, we can always look away, into nothingness, into the gaping hole upstage, and remember (perhaps nostalgically, perhaps with relief) the representational distance of the earlier act, remember violence missed in ironic counterweight to the current scene. Finished the rape, the soldier sucks out Ian's eyes (50), making manifest the Oedipal moment, announcing our failure to see.

The consumption of Ian's eyes is an inhumanly horrific act, but it is also a fantasy moment, carrying with it the fledgling promise of a return to the Imaginary where true self-seeing is no longer impeded by the exigencies of human anatomy, where the split

subject of psychoanalysis may be healed, where the Other may at last be fully incorporated into the self. Ironically, though it requires the maiming of Ian's body, this act promises the soldering back together of fragmented limbs, recalls the wishes of the Andronicii as they struggle to return Lavinia to her prelapsarian body. And, like the Andronicii, or the Renaissance anatomist, the Soldier's act seeks to bring the luminescence of human sight to bear on the darkest reaches of the body's interior, to fill the threatening and hollow caverns with light. With telling emphasis on the violence of such an impulse – violence which goes for the most part uncharted in the earlier literature, but which becomes a critical focus of playwrights like Kane, Kemp and Wagner – the Soldier's ingestion of Ian's eyes rehearses again the desire to make a spectacle of the violated bodily interior, to see and know rape's core, to affirm and own its conditions and consequences. Simultaneously, of course, this act affirms the opposite: it is a momentary fantasy, but like a circus fun-house (all mirrors and distortion) it quickly retracts its promise of plain view. The eye ingested cannot conquer the body, for the body will consume the eye first; no eye swallowed could reach the womb, examine its contours, but would be devoured by digestion en route. The Soldier leaves Ian with only sockets, a fleshy echo of Gloriana's smooth hollows, and in taking his eyes learns the same lesson Vindice ultimately does: the other cannot provide sustenance, cannot be willed to offer (self)knowledge, cannot be made to demonstrate the inexpressible, however hard (and it is hard, indeed, here) one looks.

Cate's rape marks the traumatic centre of this play; absent in its execution, it obtains in substitution, and the displacements I consider above repeatedly rehearse the very fact of its central absence as they recreate it with perennial difference in the shadow

of the telltale breach in Kane's set, the play's world. Traumatic centre, yes, but Cate's rape does not mark the play's *original* trauma. Very early we learn that Cate suffers from episodes of hysterical fainting (accompanied by laughing fits) which have returned "[s]ince Dad came back" (10) and which occur repeatedly in Ian's presence. The placement of these episodes in the script implies that fainting is Cate's response to physical or emotional abuse, and the mention of her father suggests that Ian's rape of Cate, and his rough handling of her generally, is itself a displacement of a much earlier, and by all counts completely repressed, sexual trauma or series of traumas. (Cate seems to have no idea what causes the fits; her doctor has told her she will "grow out of" them [10].) The fits suggest, against prevailing critical wisdom (Saunders 46), that *Blasted* stages Cate's, rather than Ian's, damaged psyche, and that Kane's strategy of continual displacement is designed to replicate mimetically the condition of inaccessibility which defines sexual violence, as much for victims who have buried and are doomed to repeat their trauma in some hysterical manner as for a culture which has long been frustrated with that very inaccessibility, and for which that inaccessibility has meant that women's sexual violence was for too long recognized only in its projection onto male bodies, psyches, and properties. Staging hysterical repetitions of an act (or acts) whose origins may lie buried somewhere in that fissure at centre stage, irretrievable even by she who has suffered them, *Blasted* offers audiences no theatrical recuperation, but rather a glimpse into the peripatetic world of a psychic stage marred by sexual violence.

*Crave*, a multi-logue among four characters named A, B, C and M, is similarly predicated upon the inaccessibility of the origins of sexual violence, but unlike *Blasted*, which is, at least in its first two scenes, realist in form, this play creates its effects in the

non-space of hysterical memory. C is the *de facto* centre of this essentially centre-less piece; some kind of childhood trauma, recalled at various points in the text, frames her difficult interactions with A (her lover/stalker), as well as, to a lesser extent, with the other characters. Her story appears in several incarnations: a girl is pimped by her father to her grandfather in a car (157-8, one of two direct expressions of childhood rape in the shape-shifting narrative); a girl sees her grandfather fondling her grandmother in a tender manner which may or may not be welcome (159); a girl is traumatized by her parents' violent fighting (185), and her mother's life increasingly seems at risk; a young girl is raped "on the moor" by a fourteen-year-old boy, until she comes to orgasm (178; rape's second direct expression). Each incarnation of the story displaces the last, becomes its echo in narrative, split from its moment of happening as well as from the body and consciousness of its original experience. Save the story of the rape on the moor, all the versions are told by either A or M, never C; she responds to the tellings as echo ("I feel nothing, nothing" she repeats as A narrates the story of the car [158]). Meanwhile, echoes of other kinds spill across the stage. C's relationship with sex is one of abjection; she imagines her bowels infested with maggots (175), and she throws up after making love (179). The girl whose parents fight leaves milk around the house for emergencies, her suffering surviving its immediate context as the rancid trace of past and future anguish (185). C recalls places rather than people ("A field. A basement. A bed. A car" [174]); as in *Blasted* sexual trauma becomes, residually, a representation in space, a sinister echo of the public drive to externalize it, distance it from the body. M tells the story of the fondled grandmother, then suggests perhaps this story is not hers, but her mother's (159).



Yet the story may as well be C's, or her mother's, or M's if M is C's mother, and M is here speaking in place of C.

Very early on, Kane suggests that C may be reacting to/cathartically re-enacting her mother's sexual trauma rather than her own: "don't you think a child conceived by rape would suffer?" (162) charges B after an awkward, parental exchange between C and M. On a stage which could well be the model for Irigaray's womb-theatre, C's displaced experience of her mother's trauma is continually refracted back to her piecemeal by the other bodies in the space, their collective, jumbled narrative trumping the audience's quest to know what *really* happened. The play poses unanswerable questions. Whose story is this? Who suffered what? Is anyone's suffering real? Is it imagined? Is it vicarious? Who are the perpetrators? Who are the victims? Kane presents us with the obsessive retelling of a story (or series of stories) of no fixed origin, creating a hole in her narrative which throws back at us the futility (and the dangers) of our quest for lost objects.<sup>44</sup> Kane's illusory psychic object is also an illusory theatrical object: there is no set, nor implied mimetic movement, for *Crave*; the stage image is, therefore, itself radically unstable, and the original production was designed to present, literally, nothing to see (it featured four chairs on a dias in front of four microphones). A May, 2002 student production at the University of Toronto took the implications of such a pared-down staging to a more radical conclusion: the playing space (no distinction between stage and auditorium was made) was split in half by a scrim, onto which a series of womb-like images were projected; the characters were for the most part evenly split between the two halves of the space, and even though the audience was encouraged to move around, no more than half the action could ever be visible to any one spectator at

any one time. The space became a kind of three-dimensional *trompe l'oeil*: given the kind of freedom of movement most audiences can only dream of, these audiences were made keenly aware that they were only catching, at best, a sidelong glimpse of the (w)hole story.

#### 5. Kemp: The ambiguous metatheatre

Jenny Kemp goes, theatrically speaking, one cue beyond Kane in her refusal to return sexual violence unproblematically to the stage, using a melange of overtly metatheatrical strategies in her 1993 performance piece, *Remember*. The work tells the story of Moderna, who is in hospital after having been raped by an unnamed businessman during a shady transaction, as a memory-narrative pitted with moments of magic realism and cabaret-style song and dance. The actual rape is made simultaneously central and marginal to the narrative in a pair of early scenes which rehearse it as a fragment of Moderna's shattered memory in which figures and sequences of events seem clear one moment and obscure the next. Against a history of mimetic recuperations arranged to resolve the uncertainties of sexual violence and to solve (cure?) woman's trauma by getting her to perform it in the public space of men, *Remember's* self-conscious performance(s) operate anti-mimetically to capture the circular, dream-like, a-logical functionings of Moderna's damaged psyche as she tries imperfectly to re-member her experience of sexual violence.

Like *Blasted*, *Remember* reverses earlier symbolic paradigms by marking its physical space with the tatters and scars left by intimate violence. Its set lies in ruins. (Kemp's original production, on which the published script is based, featured a design

based on the surrealist painter Paul Delvaux's *Palace in Ruins* [212].) If Moderna's mind is a similarly shattered structure whose wounds are far less plain to see than those of the banged-up house which dominates the stage, Kemp chooses to make them visible by splitting the role of her main character between two performers. The resulting doubled performance speaks of a mind divided against itself by a trauma the nature and consequences of which cannot fully be assessed even by she who has suffered directly, let alone by anyone watching (over) her. Far from seeking to externalize and thereby make comprehensible this trauma for those watchers, however, Kemp's strategy provides sustained reference to Moderna's suffering *as a performance* – a performance as much for the audience as for herself, in her struggle to suture the past – underscoring her distance from her own memory, the instability of her post-traumatic subjectivity.

One might successfully argue that all the different performance pieces contained within *Remember* (including the several songs by Minny and Ted, among others, and the many seemingly incongruous appearances by various drop-in characters, such as Ancient Woman and Minoa) constitute a displaced re-enactment of Moderna's trauma – or, at a more compelling remove, of Moderna's discontinuous attempts to re-enact and thereby re-member her trauma – but twice in the piece Kemp stages such re-enactment literally (214-16; 227-8). The central argument in *Remember* is that recalling sexual violence into conscious memory, so that it might obtain in a form coherent to friends, lovers, judges, victims themselves, is a near impossibility, that the very idea that a victim might have had a coherent experience of that trauma to relate to others, let alone herself, is dangerously retrograde. Kemp makes her case on a self-conscious stage, but unlike Titus and Vindice, who seek a metatheatrical return which will conquer the ambiguities of

Lavinia and Gloriana's traumas and thereby rejuvenate their shaken directorial authority, Kemp's is a metatheatrical performance of ambiguity, one which performs not violence's return and someone's – anyone's – ownership over it, but rather the confusion and disorientation with which that violence continues to harm its victims long after the physical suffering ends. Kemp stages the fractious memory of sexual trauma by stylizing her rehearsals of Moderna's experience, emphasizing carefully that these are re-enactments based not on fact but on the slippage of memory, that they are, in effect, theatrical events (in the same manner, perhaps, as psychoanalysis may be called a theatrical event) without stable origin or the promise of a proper Aristotelian ending. The scenes split performance of the rape between the two Moderna figures. Moderna Two stands upstage, inside the set's ruined house, pointing a gun at the audience and repeating a short loop of text which tells in barest form the story of the rape, as though to steady the unruly past in language. Meanwhile, Moderna One walks slowly downstage as she plays a short piece of dialogue with The Businessman. He follows her downstage, walking menacingly behind her, but he remains at a distance from her and his voice, in turn, remains at a distance from his body: his lines are spoken offstage and reverberate around the auditorium as they infect the sound system. The scene is singularly stagy – complete with Moderna Two as menacing director figure, her text-loop precipitating the movements and dialogue below – yet it is also clearly bereft of anything that may be considered acting in the traditionally mimetic sense. Copies do not adhere to models as performers speak their lines without supporting gestures, while bodies and sounds lose their naturalized integrity. Most critically, the central event this rehearsal ostensibly seeks to stage remains missing in action: Moderna Two's monologue loops back on itself in the moment just before

violence happens, her dress ripped open and her anxious eyes on the door. The Businessman, meanwhile, unzips his fly but does not remove his pants, claims Moderna is “going to get the fuck of [her] life” (215; 228), then yells at her to “[c]ut that out” (referencing the promise of the gun outstretched in Moderna Two’s hand) and zips up once more. The scene ends with a gunshot and his fall to the floor. Has sexual violence happened? Has it been replaced (in fact? in memory?) with the gunshot, the act of self-defense? Kemp’s rehearsal scenes, like Kane’s psychic displacements, confess no facts, nor stabilize the pitching body of memory, but perform the haze of post-traumatic psychosis. This is no show and tell; it is a response to the volatile and damaging logic of show and tell, one which enacts its limitedness, its perversity.

To an even greater degree than her rape victim, Kemp scripts her rapist as a figure of pure performance. The Businessman is a mask and suit which becomes, in the context of the scenes’ stylization and his own overt staginess, a parody of his role rather than a realistic index of character. His mask, furthermore, is transferable: the Businessman wears it, as does a fake head on a platter designed to represent him after he has suffered Moderna’s retribution, but more significantly Jack, Moderna’s partner, wears it as he dances with Moderna One during a dream sequence in scene 25. This infiltration of the skin of the lover by the mask of the assailant speaks directly to the boundary confusion rape generates as the security of love relationships and the possibility of sexual intimacy become tainted by the visceral memory of intimate violation. Moderna, who throughout *Remember* is unsure whether or not she will ever again be able to be sexual with Jack (scene 28 is called “Jack visits hospital—can’t be your lover”), echoes the experience of C in *Crave*, who finds sex literally sickening and whose implied intimacy with A has

always already been problematic, another victim of the trace of her trauma. The Businessman's theatrical trappings mark him as a composite of figures, a representation which can be reproduced with ease on the bodies of friends and foes alike. In Kemp's configuration, literally anyone can be the rapist, not because rapists are a dime a dozen and may be lurking anywhere, but because rape must be articulated as an experience whose catastrophic consequences multiply as they are displaced onto every part of a victim's body, her relationship with her body, and with the other bodies in her world.

The active verb of Kemp's title promises mnemonics, a simple, straightforward action culminating in hard-won closure, but she veers into difficult psychic terrain where the politics of remembering sexual violence are explored in obsessive rehearsals which never manage to produce and thereby excoriate an original event, and which fail to alight on a single victim (there are two Modernas here, not to mention her/their psychic/theatrical identification with Lioness, Minoa, Lucinda, and Ancient Woman), or a single attacker (Moderna is both violent and violated; the Businessman is the theatre, everyone and no-one). *Remember*, like *Blasted* and *Crave*, performs instead the vast divide between an experience of sexual violence and the assimilation of that experience by turning the unruly violated body – the fissures of bruised memory, a broken relationship, a woman divided from herself – into unruly theatre, where the awkward distance between actors and roles, bodies and voices, models and copies, may never fully be traversed.

## 6. Wagner: Monumentalizing loss

Colleen Wagner's *The Monument*, unlike *Remember*, *Crave*, or even *Blasted*, is a realist play. But like its counterparts, it too challenges the realist episteme by transforming its conventional representational strategy into a mimesis of loss. It opens with the pride of Stetko. An East European soldier who finds himself on the opposite shore of war, he has been incarcerated for the rapes of twenty-three "girls" (14) and defends his actions to the audience at the top of the play as necessities of circumstance (not to mention a matter of peer pressure). In their memory he takes pleasure but shows no remorse. His imprisonment ends when he is ransomed by Mejra, an older woman whom he does not yet know is the mother of one of his fondest memories of conquest. Mejra turns the tables on Stetko, makes him her slave, and takes revenge on his body for the cruelties he inflicted on her daughter's. In penance for his refusal to take responsibility for his violence, and to accord proper respect to the memories of those he has destroyed (Stetko murdered the women he raped), Mejra forces him to build a morbid monument to his arrogance and her loss.

Like *Blasted* and *Remember*, *The Monument* registers the fathomless anguish of sexual violence in its configuration of stage space. The world of this play has been ravaged by war; nothing grows in its fields. The stage is largely bare save for the occasional remnants of the catastrophe that has preceded the action, but by the end of scene seven it is littered with the corpses of ravaged women. As in Kane's play, the blasted terrain marks the trace of the violence *The Monument* conceals beyond its representational borders. Against this bleak backdrop, Mejra's ruthless treatment of Stetko and her persistence in remembering the women lost to his violence strikes an

appropriate chord, but Stetko's peculiar penchant for tenderness resonates awkwardly. He adopts and bonds with a rabbit meant for food, as a small child might anthropomorphize a farm animal. He worries when he accidentally destroys a small plant growing, against the odds, in the dead soil. He remembers not with sadism but with a certain sorrow the women he has taken, and as he recalls he romanticizes his encounters ("The sun was shining the whole time. / I was singing" [68]), turning each memory of violence into a memory of love, of himself with his girlfriend, over whose unknown fate he obsesses. In contrast to more conventional appropriations of rape (for political purposes, as a literary trope), Stetko's is a perverted psychic substitution. In the middle of a war, blanketed by violence, he has adopted a violent mode to replace the warmth and safety he misses from home. He tells us in the play's opening moments that he doesn't "care for orgasm like some men" who "rush through [...] just wanting to come" (11); he seeks in rape sexual intimacy, the very intimacy sexual violence destroys for its female victims. The text may coerce us gently into sympathizing with Stetko from time to time – who hasn't loved a pet, or missed a loved one? – but in allowing ourselves to be fully taken in we risk overlooking the larger message communicated by his familiar tenderness. Reading each rape as an act of displaced love-making, he co-opts horror into pleasure and neatly blots over the trauma of each of the women onto whom he imagines his girlfriend's face. This is not to say he is oblivious to their pain; in fact, he fully acknowledges the physical hurt he caused his favourite (11), the doe-eyed girl who was, we later learn, Mejra's daughter. But this acknowledgement is not a recognition of the deep, inarticulable scarring of rape: it too is a romanticization of the pleasurable pain of first penetration, part of the ritual of inauguration boyfriends share with their first loves. Stetko writes not only the act of rape



but also its cries and its blood into his personal narrative of love and loss; the unspoken anguish of his victims remains offstage to his own scene of suffering.

If Stetko speaks like a lovesick Tereus, Mejra's is the angry voice of Procne. She steadfastly prods Stetko to remember his victims as victims, their suffering as independent of (and more significant than) his losses, as *The Monument* plays out his effacement of rape in terms of her attempt to retrieve it into matter, into violence *that matters*. In the name of this retrieval, of a remembrance of which Stetko on his own seems incapable, Mejra takes him to the forest where his victims lie buried, and demands that he exhume them and build from their bodies a memorial to their suffering. For Mejra, this project is personally difficult but not representationally complex: Stetko will arrange the corpses in a circle, and he will take each one and tell its story, in terms other than his own. He will catalogue names, ages, descriptions, as though he were a policeman making a report on a missing person. Mejra designs the monument to be essentially recuperative, a quest for the full eye not dissimilar to that undertaken by the Andronicii: as the policeman's description is meant to precede the return of the missing, Stetko will add bodies to descriptions and thereby return to the specular space of the stage the buried lives of the women destroyed in the darkness of the forest, away from their families, never to be seen again. Mejra wants their stories; she wants to know what happened and to whom. She wants her daughter back; against Stetko's skepticism that he may not even remember names, she insists her daughter's "spirit will return and shriek her name" (73). She believes in essence; she believes memory is a solid, a thing we handle, nothing eroding. She expects an unproblematic return.

Mejra is, of course, not an unproblematic character – the play is, after all, predicated upon the ambiguities of the war zone – and the monument does not function exactly according to her plan. Built of bodies already in the throes of physical decay, it both visualizes the missing (in the most literal, morbid fashion) and yet marks them as lost, their experiences as irretrievable, incomprehensible, inarticulable. Opening up a corpse reveals no essence; exhuming a body cannot force it to inhabit its prior subjectivity, tell of its suffering, regardless of the ventriloquist’s powers of recollection. Like Lavinia’s stumps or Gloriana’s skull, this body built of bodies remains, despite all attempts to transform it to the contrary, a physical residue of loss, a ring of putrid flesh and bone encircling a mass grave.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have argued persuasively that all monuments function as echoes of “virtual event[s]” (*What is Philosophy?* 177) which are not actualized by their memorials, but the trace of whose experiences are given body by them: “A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle” (176-7). For a feminist theory of rape’s representation, there is much value in this formulation: Deleuze and Guattari imagine a monument that does not mime, is not designed for show-and-tell, but instead transforms wood, glass, concrete into the trace of past suffering, the echo of our collective loss, creating a response in audiences that originates in a present experience of that solidified trace rather than in a retrograde attempt to appropriate suffering by re-visioning past events.<sup>45</sup> Associative rather than appropriative, the Deleuzian monument resists specular fetishism

and traumatic co-option, privileging affect over vision, empathy over ownership. These monuments (like bodies full of holes) sign missing-ness, make absence concrete: they permit us to grieve by allowing us to revisit the sorrow of past events, but only in such a way that continually renews the sensation of suffering as a memory of (endless) loss. As bodies fill the visual plane of Wagner's stage, that stage no less than Kane's blown-out wall becomes an architecture of loss, despite the macabre plenitude the pile of corpses makes. The monument provokes a sensation more powerful than the impulse of our gaze: it is not built hollow for nothing. In the midst of the sight of so many violated and mutilated women's bodies, Wagner's stage becomes a grave, a modern-day *memento mori* which invites us to insert ourselves at last into the hole of holes, feel its very emptiness, the emptiness rape leaves in the hollow of a woman's body, the emptiness of knowing that we have reached the limits of loss's representation.

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Lavinia and Gloriana are both Deleuzian monuments to loss. Their physically imperfect suffering provokes the anxiety the image of loss generates, and demands recuperation. Titus and Vindice, desperate to see, to know what they have missed – to know that they have not missed, that their bodies, like those of their mistresses, are not really missing things – turn urgently to performance in an effort to make those bodies sign within a more familiar paradigm, to excavate evidence that will permit a coherent narrative of violation and retribution to emerge. The result is revenge tragedy: the all-too-familiar transmutation of women's suffering into men's indignation, violence, renewal. Kane, Kemp and Wagner turn with equal urgency to the theatre, but theirs is not a mimesis that looks to cover over loss. On the contrary, their work is collectively premised

on the violation of memory by acts of sexual violence, and hence the futility of forcing that wrecked memory into a narrative trajectory that can speak its suffering and offer the balm of dramatic resolution. The image of Ian simulating sex on Cate's passed-out, near corpse-like body might offer a summative emblem for this work: he fakes rape but violates psychic space itself, the space of the theatre, the scarred and broken traces of Cate's imagination. For these playwrights, meta-performances stage the distance between event and memory, the fruitless quest for a coherent after-image, for ocular proof that would give the lie to the representational complexity of sexual violation. Collectively, Kane, Kemp and Wagner argue that only in loss's unremitting visioning, only in performing the holes in the episteme that so distress their forbears, is there any hope for a meaningful renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> Several contemporary feminist critics of rape law have noted that victims often feel as though they are being forced to relive their experiences as they narrate their stories in depositions or on the stand. What I am proposing here extends this argument somewhat to examine the specifically performative component of showing-and-telling in the early modern period's conception of "telling." For an excellent recent analysis of the spectacle of the rape trial, see Smart.

<sup>2</sup> Neither O'Connell, who spends some time nuancing his argument about theatre's relationship to the prevailing humanist ethos, nor I wish to suggest that the theatre practitioners of the period are resolutely pro-visual. There are certainly enough early modern plays extant which argue thematically to the contrary, and indeed O'Connell reads the work of Ben Jonson against the later plays of Shakespeare in this light. Rather, his conclusion and my point here is that the theatre, in its very structure, affirms the authority of both eye and ear, and that its occasional polemics to the contrary (Hamlet, Vindice, among others come to mind) serve both to question the validity of visual proof and to ironize that very questioning as it is enacted on the stage, before a host of eager spectating eyes.

<sup>3</sup> We cannot forget that speaking of rape was itself a fraught gesture in the early modern period; modesty was meant to prevent women from speaking of sexual matters, including sexual assault. Telling of rape could theoretically cast doubt on a woman's modesty, and hence her innocence in the matter (see Walker, and Carolyn Williams). T.E.'s very suggestion that a rape victim speak publically of her wrong is politically charged here, and his dual focus on speech and gesture, on presentation of the image of wrong, may well be meant to mitigate the doubt that an immodest narrative might provoke.

<sup>4</sup> As I engage *The Lawes Resolutions* to serve my argument, I am aware that the advice that document provides to rape victims may well have been prescriptive only, a means of encouraging the reporting of rape at a time when sexual crime continued to suffer from under-exposure, rather than a description of actual observed behaviour. It represents an ideal response which may rarely have been made by rape sufferers (hence the need to reiterate it in print). I use the advice here as an index of attitudes and expectations in the period, assuming that like any prescription it attempts to synthesize prevailing assumptions and prejudices about rape crime into a formula that would achieve its goals.

<sup>5</sup> As I noted in my first chapter, Galenic medicine postulated a cause-effect correlation between pleasure and pregnancy, negating the rape claims of any woman found to be pregnant as a result of her encounter with an attacker. Far from solving the specular dilemma of women's sexual pleasure by rendering it comfortingly tangible, however, the pregnant belly occupies a problematic space in the early modern encounter between pleasure, violation and complicity, as it folds men's fear of the physical power of female pleasure into a larger anxiety that a crime against them (the husband's proper rights to his wife, the father's honour and name) might go unpunished as a direct result of that power.

<sup>6</sup> We might, then, revise my earlier suggestion of the paradox implicit in the spectacle of rape made to disappear: rather, the spectacle *enacts* the process of rape's effacement.

<sup>7</sup> My remarks here are influenced in part by an as-yet unpublished talk given by David Román at the University of Toronto in February 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Although I am aware of the continuing dispute over this play's authorship, I will follow R. A. Foakes, editor of the 1966 Revels edition, and cast Tourneur in the role of writer for the purposes of my discussion.

<sup>9</sup> This approach to *Titus* begins in the 1970s with articles by Palmer ("The Unspeakable in Pursuit of the Uneatable" [1972]), Tricomi ("The Aesthetics of Mutilation" [1974]), and Hulse ("Wresting the Alphabet" [1979]), but gains strength from the force of poststructuralist theory with Mary Laughlin Fawcett's "Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*" (1983) and Gillian Murray Kendall's "Lend Me Thy Hand": Metaphor and Mayhem in *Titus Andronicus*" (1989). For a more recent reading in a similar vein, but one which takes fuller measure of the play's historical moment, see Rowe's "Dismembering and Forgetting" (1994).

<sup>10</sup> For a reading that sets itself explicitly against the work of Wynne-Davies and Robertson, see Bott.

<sup>11</sup> Lavinia's use of this term (as opposed to the more typical "raptus") has not often been remarked upon by scholars of the play. Detmer-Goebel offers a sophisticated reading of the choice, suggesting that "stuprum" highlights not just the crime and Lavinia's "shame" but also "testifies to the consequence of her defilement" as it echoes the Ovidian story of Callisto (86). Accusations of whoredom are leveled at Callisto by Juno after the former is raped by Jove and becomes pregnant. Lavinia's diction thus does not simply accuse, either; it invokes the whole net of prejudices and assumptions surrounding early modern rape law, and the role the threat of an unborn child might play in the prosecution of sexual crime. It also drops the curtain on her hysterical performance (see my commentary below) with a return to the most formal of languages – the language of literature and the law – as though the play would extirpate with the linguistic force of the classical age, as well as that of its own, any competing claim to representational authority.

<sup>12</sup> A number of critics (including Bott, Marshall ["I can interpret"], and Green) have suggested that Lavinia's writing constitutes a re-creation of her violation. None, however, take this argument to its logical conclusion and consider the scene in terms of its theatrical qualities. In fact, the tendency is to cast this re-creation in distinctly contemporary terms, as a 'reliving' of trauma rather than a re-enactment of it with a specific, historical purpose.

<sup>13</sup> In contrast to *Titus*' spoken text, which is often problematic or doubled in its meaning as it propagandizes (Saturninus), lies (Aaron, Tamora), or interprets confusedly (Marcus, Titus), written text is privileged in the play as a resolution to the semiotic confusion of muddled orality (consider, for example, Lavinia's use of Ovid finally to produce certainty about the source of her violation, or Titus' written dispatches to the court in 4.2 and 4.3, which despite their cryptic qualities are readily deciphered by Aaron, and carry with them bare truths that do indeed "afflict the emperor in his pride" [4.3.63]).

<sup>14</sup> Against Titus' and Lucius' anxious calls for Lavinia to "speak" in 3.1, we might compare their equally fervent need to "look upon her" (1.66, 1.111).

<sup>15</sup> Detmer-Goebel argues that Lavinia's response to this invocation ("now thou turn'st away thy face for shame" [1. 28]) casts doubt on Marcus' reading and highlights once again the need for her direct testimony (81). While I agree that such testimony is clearly essential to the play, I would also argue that Lavinia's response here is conventional, and perfectly in keeping with the other signs of ravishment she wears. That she turns from Marcus and blushes only makes it more, not less, strange that he does not guess her trouble.

<sup>16</sup> Lucius' anxious question on 3.1.88 isn't 'what happened to Lavinia?' but rather 'who did this to Lavinia?' The 'who' supercedes the 'this': until the problem of the former is solved, the latter is of little matter to anyone.

<sup>17</sup> See Kristeva, “The True-Real,” as well as Diamond’s discussion of the “non-mimetic body” in “Mimesis” (68).

<sup>18</sup> Lavinia is as anxious as Titus, Marcus and Lucius to get her story out.

<sup>19</sup> Appropriately, in Deborah Warner’s seminal 1987 production of the play for the RSC, Brian Cox (Titus) sat Sonia Ritter (Lavinia) upon his knee, as though she might be a ventriloquist’s puppet, snapping her neck eerily on command (Dessen 94-5).

<sup>20</sup> Clearly this analysis would need to be modified, if only slightly, to accommodate contemporary female actors in the role. I address the issue of successful feminist performances of this play briefly below.

<sup>21</sup> The anus can also be imagined as an alternate vagina, of course, but my interest here is less on the specificity of the substitute than on the idea of substitution itself.

<sup>22</sup> Martius’ and Quintus’ severed heads are presented as part of a carnivalesque play-within, Taymor taking the time to film the stage set-up in all its detail, right down to the laying out of chairs for spectators.

<sup>23</sup> Taymor’s film played to wide critical acclaim, but the BAC production met with a mixed response. Unsympathetic critics found it to be in bad taste (Bassett), while those who liked it found it funny, but stopped short of calling it good theatre (Costa).

<sup>24</sup> Among the most recognizable of Renaissance stage props, the skull is also a *memento theatri*, papier-maché echo of performances past (as the scholarly emphasis on connections to *Hamlet* attests – see King, McMillin, and Felperin).

<sup>25</sup> My reference to the play’s overarching parody follows Jonathan Dollimore’s seminal reading. See his “Providence, Parody and Black Camp,” culled from *Radical Tragedy* (1984).

<sup>26</sup> I am aware that my reading here is a departure from the norm, and requires some interpretive acrobatics. It is not, however, without precedent. To look through the lens of earlier legal theory, the Duke’s ‘theft’ of Gloriana, Vindice’s property (the skull as “stage property” is almost too perfect an allusion here), alone qualifies as a rape (see Robertson, “Chastity” 228). As Detmer-Goebel argues in relation to *Titus Andronicus*, however, I am here suggesting that questions of complicity and consent posed in the late Elizabethan rape statutes constitute the bulk of this play’s fraught engagement with sexual violence and/as sexual promiscuity.

<sup>27</sup> No doubt a darkly comic version of bower scenes past, in which lovers unite rather than kill each other. Note that Vindice’s version, ripe with theatrically self-conscious effects, wreaks havoc with the conventionally elided staginess of night-time garden scenes performed in the middle of the day in a half-enclosed public London theatre.

<sup>28</sup> Claiming that *The Revenger’s Tragedy* represents women ambivalently is hardly a breakthrough; see Stallybrass’ reading of the play for a well-nuanced argument. I am speaking here specifically about Vindice’s relationship to the story of Gloriana’s demise, and the way in which the uncertainties it begs can be seen to be organizing an ambivalence specifically related to women’s experiences of sexual violence.

<sup>29</sup> The ever-growing body of scholarship on Renaissance dissection practice also speaks to the importance of ocular evidence in the construction of the early modern knowledge economy. Sawday examines the rise of Vesalius and the decline of Galen as a medical model, observing that with the former came an increased scientific bias toward the eye; Vesalius’ followers claimed their medical authority on the grounds that “they had *seen* the body with their own eyes” (26, emphasis in original).

<sup>30</sup> This scene, like virtually every other in the play, is both parodic and anxious; alongside the overdetermined display of the corpse’s moral goodness the scene also records its concern over the ineffectuality of rape law and the poor record of prosecution and punishment (1.4.50-2).

<sup>31</sup> Notwithstanding the opposite argument, leveled by St. Augustine at Lucrece. One could nevertheless encompass Augustine’s conclusion within the general rule by noting that, if Lucrece does kill herself rather than face the possible glimmer of her pleasure, her death serves as an active attempt to tame her bodily instinct and cleanse her husband’s house of all polluting thoughts as well as deeds. In other words, suicide proves the chastity of Lucrece’s *mind*, though it may speak to the ‘guilt’ of her body.

<sup>32</sup> Vindice’s transformation of skull into prostitute in preparation for 3.5 contains sinister undertones, especially as he accompanies that transformation with the cryptic command to his dead mistress, “[t]hou

mayst lie chaste now" (l. 90), as though only in Vindice's tricked-out scene can her chastity be guaranteed, and then only once her sexual corruptibility has been acknowledged.

<sup>33</sup> Since Felperin and Dollimore's seminal readings of the play in terms of its metatheatrical structure, most critics acknowledge that Vindice (insofar as he is a morality vice!) stands for theatre itself.

<sup>34</sup> See Robertson, "Chastity" 225. For an opposing view, which argues that Vindice's posthumous prostitution of Gloriana in the name of his vengeance becomes "a literal travesty of her chastity," see Mullaney (258).

<sup>35</sup> I use the term here to connote the specifically anamorphic quality of Gloriana's violence, which may be read as either sexual, or retributive, or both.

<sup>36</sup> Freud's body of work is littered with the assumption that women's 'lack' reflects a superior male condition ("Dissolution" 178; "Some Psychological Consequences" 252-3). For the anxiety that lack generates in the superior male, see for example "The Uncanny" and "Medusa's Head."

<sup>37</sup> I consciously eschew the label "feminist" here, as Kane did not see herself as a feminist playwright (Saunders 30; Kane, Interview 134).

<sup>38</sup> Kane's work classifies her as among the most infamous of Britain's new brutalists; Wagner, meanwhile, works in the Canadian realist tradition, and Kemp is largely a performance artist. In an odd coincidence, *Blasted* and *The Monument*, both plays concerning on some level the Bosnian war, opened in the same month (January 1995).

<sup>39</sup> The scandal *Blasted* created in the popular English press is now legendary, and a good overview can be had in Saunders' new book on Kane. Other scholarly work on her plays has been thin so far; see Urban, Sierz, Buse, Zimmerman, Voigts-Virchow, and Sellar for a variety of approaches. Sadly, only with Kane's suicide in February, 1999 and the subsequent revival of much of her work in a special series at the Royal Court in June 2000 has academic interest in the plays really begun to develop.

<sup>40</sup> It may also be worth noting that this elision is not restricted to the drama proper. Many critics fail to mention Cate's trauma as they obsess over the other, more graphic moments in the play; Aleks Sierz goes so far as to compile a catalogue of the play's violent moments which leaves Cate out (100). Kane herself noted with some disdain, as well as some prescience, during an interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge that the scandal over the play received more media coverage than the rape of a 15-year old girl in the English countryside, with which it coincided (130).

<sup>41</sup> The association of psychoanalysis with theatre is of course not my own invention; Freud's work depends on dramatic analysis (the *Oedipus*), and his analyst's room is designed as a kind of private realist stage, in which analyst (observer) sees analysand (performer) but the reverse is not true. Lacan expands and complicates this relationship in "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," whose opening chapter casts the analysand as performer in a theatrical cure in which trauma finds its very origin (and the promise of its eradication) in the process of re-creation.

<sup>42</sup> Though Kane's theatre, which thumbs its nose at centuries of dramatic theory arguing the contrary, is designed to make it seem as though violence is happening before audience eyes, we need to remember that no men, women or babies are physically harmed in performance.

<sup>43</sup> Both Saunders (45) and Kane herself (Interview 130) have noted a critical structural connection between the abuse of Cate and the collapse of the stage.

<sup>44</sup> If one of the play's lost objects is the sexual brutalization of a mother, then it is, of course, the story of suffering psychoanalysis denies, the one which in its disappearance gives birth to theory. *Crave* then may also be said to stage the sorrow and confusion such a seminal elision produces, as it tries and fails repeatedly to access the irretrievable moment, the "stain" on its opaque surface (179) for which Lacan's articulation of the term (*FFC* 96-7) cannot account.

<sup>45</sup> As I complete this chapter, competitions are being held in New York and Washington to find designs for memorials which can pay appropriate homage to those who died at the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Among the finalists for the latter competition are Shane Williamson and Michael Meredith, both of the University of Toronto's Faculty of Architecture and Landscape Design. Williamson's design features a block of angular fragments in each one of which a name floats. The fragments are meant to be filled in by family members, who may memorialize their loved ones in any way

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they choose. Some may choose not to, preferring the emptiness of the unadorned. Meredith's design envisions a simple mound in the midst of a grove of trees angled to mirror the path of the plane which crashed at the site. Visitors would be "required to assemble on a fairly tight platform and look directly upon the place that took the brutal attack" (Rochon). Victims' names are inscribed on the mound. Both plans interpret the memorial as architectonic shard, a mass of built materials that produce in their minimalism a sense of America's collective loss. Like the twin beams of hollow light shining skyward from Ground Zero on the six-month anniversary of the attacks, these designs argue that the best monuments perform, in their physicalization of what is missing, our grief at what can never be retrieved.



**Chapter Three**  
**The Punitive Scene and the Performance of Salvation:**  
**Violence, the Flesh, and the Word**

[T]he symbol manifests itself first of all as the murder of the thing [...]   
Lacan, "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis" 84

1. The Optics of martyrdom

Imagine two scenes:

Three young women, certain of their faith and defiant of pain, glorify the tortures visited upon their bodies by their Roman enemies as they transform into religious ecstasy what, under any other circumstance, would be an experience of extreme suffering and humiliation.<sup>1</sup> Their absolute denial of pain in the midst of terrorizing punishment is intended as liturgy for an audience of the faithful: believe, their performances beg, our exultations rather than your eyes, for the violence by which you see us gripped has already been made insubstantial by the grace of God. Even as their bodies are hacked and hewed, boiled and burned, the sisters' words demand that we revise the image of violence confronting us, discard the materiality of suffering bodies in favour of bearing witness to the immortality of soul, the unassailable power of the Lord to deliver and protect.<sup>2</sup> The virgins slip out of their skins, turn spectral as they mitigate God's essential invisibility, His material inaccessibility, becoming ciphers for His eternal presence, the benevolence of His hand. "In Lacanian terms," as Cynthia Marshall suggests, "the Imaginary and the Symbolic converge" in martyr narratives, "so that the Real (the suffering body) is effaced" (*Shattering* 97-8).<sup>3</sup> For us to insist on bodily return, on the virgins' material experience, to admit the possibility of pain would in theory brand us no better than their torturers, who are themselves defined as Pagans in their very failure to understand the Christian hierarchy of Word over image, (mortal) body trumped by (immortal) soul.

Where are the sisters' bodies, then, if not on stage despite themselves? The logic of martyr optics, an old-fashioned *trompe l'oeil*, argues that they are *both here and gone*, before us only to be denied, a necessary proof not of violence or its intended suffering, but of the power of God over both.

Fast forward several centuries, to a comfortable house in Vienna where a small boy plays with a reel of string. He tosses the string away from himself and shouts gleefully something not entirely intelligible; his grandfather, observing the scene, concurs with the boy's mother that he is trying to tell the world his string is gone. He then draws the prize back toward himself and shouts gleefully (the adults surmise) that it is "here." He repeats the game with several different objects but always employs the same structure. His grandfather continues to observe, and finally concludes that the boy is using the game to assimilate his mother's routine absences, and to anticipate the pleasure of her return to the nursery, to his sight and to his concerns. One day, when he is five years old, the boy's mother dies, but by now he has apparently gotten over his obsession with her comings and goings and seems to show no grief at her failure to reappear. He has replaced the need for her physical presence with his own mastery of this (constructed) scene of banishment and return: since he has worked out an effective symbology for coming and going, being and having, the materiality of absence and presence and the bodies in which it was originally caught up now seem to matter much less. The boy's grandfather, still fascinated by his grandson's coping mechanism, writes a book about the significance of the game in the process of normative psychic subject-formation, using it to develop his now-famous theory of repetition-compulsion and the death drive. His daughter's death becomes a footnote to the story.

How does the martyr's extreme performance of Christian worship intersect with Freud's empiricist observations in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*? Martyr violence, the quintessential punitive scene, is also the ultimate game of fort/da: punished for her unwavering belief, the virgin martyr's ecstatic body is abjected from her climactic scene so that the Word of God may be given body in her place. She is banished only so that she may return to stand as evidence of Christian patriarchy's good will, its benevolence in executing her salvation; no one minds that such good will, such salvation, is underwritten by the most extreme physical torments imaginable, precisely because those torments have not been *seen* to have any effect, have been, literally, of no matter. Martyr violence simply isn't *real* violence at all: even when bodies are torn to shreds they retain their integrity, victims calling in exultation for more pain that is not pain, is rather the pleasure of union with God. The grace of "da" erases the brutality of "fort."

Of course, there are some practical limits to this analogy. Freud's grandson does not hurt his mother, as the Romans hurt the martyrs. In fact, he does nothing to *her* at all, but merely enacts her movements in a kind of performative substitution, casting his toys in her role as he learns the art of directing and manipulating language. If, however, we dig a little deeper in just this spot – the place where body becomes symbol, where mother disappears into play, and play disappears into words – we can perhaps unearth a slightly more sinister subtext, the footnote to *this* story.

In "The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis," Lacan reads Freud's analysis of his grandson's game and reminds us that the game is a version of the mirror stage moment, when the primacy of image and body – of bodies imaged as a contiguous whole, of children who absorb the image of others' suffering as indices of their own (Phelan,

*Unmarked* 21) – gives way to the primacy of the linguistic signifier, to the coding of bodies as discrete entities differentiated by individual pronouns, “you” and “I.”<sup>4</sup> This is the moment when the image of the self in its apparent unity before the mirror gains currency over the image of the self as a communal entity, united with other bodies in a refractive, reflexive populace not unlike the one inhabiting Irigaray’s womb-theatre; it is the moment when the act of watching becomes cathartic (the “I/not I” gesture that reproduces culture’s essential schism as it affirms our insular selfhood, our comforting disavowal of the horror of the spectacle), dismantling the Imaginary’s optical structure, where watching is always embodied, always empathetic.<sup>5</sup> It is, crucially, the moment when the subject emerges as a function of his or her power to *re-order* the visual field, to remake image (the sight of a disjunctive-seeming body, of a mass of bodies bound in experiential complicity) in language’s eye/I. “Discovering oneself to be a singular bounded body within a physical frame marks the end of the Imaginary continuity between what one sees and who one is,” Peggy Phelan reminds us (21): what we see becomes, before the mirror, a matter of what we *say* we are seeing (is that me? It must be me! It is *me* that *I* am seeing), a matter of linguistic mediation, of how we represent the image of ourselves to others, and the image of others to ourselves.<sup>6</sup>

As Freud’s grandson learns to represent his mother to himself, and himself to himself, to her, and to others as master of her movement, he begins to isolate himself from her body, becomes less and less attached to the materiality of her, more and more confident of his symbolic abilities to represent her experiences in isolation from his own. He becomes, in other words, a “normal” subject, a proper “I.” He is finally less analogous to the martyr’s Pagan torturers than to her audience, her witnesses, who accept the

contract that permits her disembodying performance by agreeing to privilege symbol over sight, by agreeing to isolate and re-code the image of violence as one of salvation – of, by extension, the genuine possibility of *their* eventual salvation – instead of taking that image of violence into their own bodies as transplanted experience, a gesture that would make its subsequent disavowal nearly impossible.

The spectacle of martyrdom records the moment when the sign emerges at the expense of the acknowledged, acknowledgeable experience of the abused, mutilated female body, whose troubling fleshiness is subjected to a rigid metaphorical management that renders it miraculously whole once more, allowing it to disappear into the sign of a beneficent Christian patriarchy reflected back upon itself in its own (preferred) image. The promise of the little boy's play is always the similar safe return of the ideal mother who dotes, the mother who has devoted herself to her son "without any outside help" (*Pleasure Principle* 13). Freud is quick to point out, however, that the game is frequently played without recourse to its "pleasurable ending" (15): the gesture of abjection, more than the gesture of return, animates the fort/da dynamic, motivates its psychic effects. By the time the little boy's mother dies, he has so fully translated his experience of her into signs that her death becomes just another matter of representation, a disappearance that can be coded and rehearsed, again and again, as he strives to rehearse his own individuation. The seemingly innocuous game of fort/da is, then, another version of that *other* Freudian scene in which the unapproachable experience of a mutilated maternal body transforms, by way of clever rhetorical recombination, into a projected experience of male subject-formation, of business as usual for the Father's law. Finally, even the most loved, least threatening female body is not permitted genuine embodiment within

traditional psychoanalysis' version of the child's emerging cultural imaginary, except as the object of a profound gesture of exit.

I have written a twentieth-century psycho-social narrative into a tenth-century religious spectacle in order to return both with us to early seventeenth century England, where anxieties over women's growing independence and authority in Jacobean culture are exercised in a group of plays that indulge in spectacular punitive violence against women who exceed their prescribed roles. Reading the Jacobean punitive scene through the period's conduct literature, I will explore the ways in which the dramas play Freud's grandson's game by writing over their pernicious images of women's brutalization with the same language of redemption, grace and salvation that glosses the act of martyrdom. In contrast to rape violence, whose troubling opacity must first be clarified in/as performance in order that it may be assimilated into culture, punitive violence<sup>7</sup> – the physical torture, typically to the death, of a sexually transgressive woman (or a woman *suspected* of sexual transgression) – is extraordinarily, explicitly staged in these plays expressly so that it may disappear, may be (re)incarnated as the cipher of a powerful yet essentially benevolent patriarchy, a patriarchy that girds its authority by representing its extremes of violence against women as the gift of heavenly grace. I want to be clear that the parallels I am drawing between secular punitive and traditional Christian violence are not meant to obscure the salient differences between these two distinct forms of torture; in speaking of the Jacobean punitive scene in specifically religious terms, I am taking a cue from the conduct literature of the period and making a connection which, I argue below, is implied by and, indeed, pivotal to the insidious messaging of that literature. By exploring the several implicit and explicit intersections between violence enacted on the

body in Christian contexts and violence done to transgressive female bodies in domestic, often secular ones in the seventeenth century, I aim to discover what these intersections can tell us about the kind of complex cultural work punitive violence is expected to do for Jacobean patriarchy.

The spectacle of punishment operates very much like the spectacle of martyrdom, pivoting on the victim's complicity as she enacts a fervent performance of salvation in the face of crushing torture. As the *OED* reminds us, usefully glossing my opening comments, "martyr" is a synonym for "witness": the role of the martyr in the moment of her torture is not to suffer pain but to herald the coming of the Lord – to witness, in fact, with that very body whose materiality she is meant to efface in her act of heraldry. Yet witnessing is something of a janus-faced gesture – one may choose to follow the script, or one may choose, instead, to witness all that the script leaves unsaid. The martyr, of course, in turn relies upon the vicarious power of those poised as *her* witnesses – relies on an audience whose true belief depends on her flawlessly scripted witnessing, her seamless performance of self-effacement. The act of martyrdom, in other words, treads on dangerously uncertain ground: the stars in the eyes of its various believers must be ideally aligned in order for Godhead to appear, unquestioned and unsullied. It is in this tremulous but necessary faith in the allegiance of its witnesses that martyr violence makes its keenest connection to the Jacobean punitive scene. Just as rape's metatheatrical return relies upon its victim's successful citation of a pre-recognizable script, and in this reliance renders itself vulnerable to performative subversion, the absolute reliance of the punitive scene on the penitent transgressor's willingness, and ability, to perform salvation instead of dwelling on the materiality of her pain opens up the possibility of alternative

performances. I will focus on two such performances – in Heywood’s *A Woman Killed With Kindness* and Webster’s *Duchess of Malfi* – in the first half of the chapter, examining Anne Frankford as a failed witness and the Duchess of Malfi as a defiant, refusing one. Each in their separate fashion reveal the “Freudian” logic of salvation by which their dramas operate as they divest suffering bodies and elevate useless, placating Words. As I continue to probe the martyr-witness’s power to transform the scene of salvation into a spectacle of failed care – both God’s and our own – I will in turn consider the urgent response to the logic of salvation cried out by a group of contemporary feminist performance artists. In the work of Diamanda Galàs, Karen Finley, Marina Abramovic and Orlan, the dynamic between audience and spectacle is traumatically re-imagined, demanding a return to the embodied, empathetic, engaged witnessing that the cathartic mirror stage moment represses as it shifts the visceral experience of the image of the body in violence into the register of a dissociated and isolating language.

## 2. Correction, salvation, and the companionate negotiation

Punishing one’s wife in early modern England was a matter of what the law termed “reasonable correction.” While this characterization was in keeping with the characterization of much else of what we might, from a contemporary vantage, wish to call violence in the period (Amussen, “Being Stirred” 75), it was also purposefully vague.<sup>8</sup> In theory, no harm was permitted to be visited upon a subordinate that might endanger her life, but since routine violence was a matter of law and order, and the maintenance of an orderly household was seen as the first defense against a disorderly state, the courts were inclined to turn a blind eye in cases where one might reasonably argue that the (seemingly) clear visual evidence of a wife’s genuinely debilitating injuries



was, in fact, the product of a legitimate corrective gesture that perhaps got just a little out of control. Furthermore, since the only real recourse (other than sending husband and wife home again, with a promise to live quietly together) the courts had in situations where the line between correction and violence had honestly been crossed was to institute a bed-and-board separation, the preservation of a wife's bodily integrity could come only by dealing a blow to the household's integrity. A life was preserved, to be sure, but at serious cost to patriarchal self-fashioning, as the wife's bruised and bleeding departure scarred the image of a household smoothly run by a properly benevolent patriarch whose firm (but gentle) hand guaranteed his status as natural ruler. Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford sum up this dilemma eloquently: "because the concerns of legal and religious institutions ran counter to the woman's own interest of escape from a dangerous situation" (143), "[e]ven when a wife was thought to be at risk, officials did not always act on her behalf. Male authorities often disagreed with women as to what constituted a dangerous degree of violence, or failed to take women's fears seriously" (142).

While some feminist historians have nuanced this rather dire assessment with the provocative suggestion that one of the fringe benefits of a personal life lived as a political microcosm was the frequent intervention of neighbours, friends and even servants to protect wives who might otherwise come to life-threatening harm, others have queried the extent to which community assistance was of real material value to an endangered wife. A staunch proponent of the efficacy of local community intervention, Susan Amussen nevertheless chronicles cases in which such intervention was limited to attempts to re-order the household by encouraging husband and wife to reconcile and live quietly, sometimes despite years of systemic abuse (see "Being Stirred," esp. 78-9); we

might also profitably recall that such traumatizing ceremonies as the charivari were community performances, designed to chastise rather than to protect, and ultimately to re-order. Crawford and Mendelson, meanwhile, remind us that although sympathetic friends and neighbours could offer help to an abused woman, that help “was liable to be ineffective or too late” and may have ultimately put the witness in danger (143). Margaret Hunt, writing of domestic violence in the eighteenth century, similarly cautions that “community intervention, even by women, should not be romanticized” (24), since few early moderns discounted the logic of reasonable correction, and since gaining the sympathy and trust of her neighbours typically required a wife to represent herself as passive and submissive in the face of violence, rather than as a defender of her bodily rights. Designed to assimilate all manner of husbandly brutality into its underlying logic of order-keeping, the loose rhetoric of “reasonable correction” finally pre-empts the efficacy of much outside help, and reveals the extent to which early modern patriarchy relied for its very perpetuation upon its attempts to normalize the spousal abuse and family violence which was the “inevitable corollary” (Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline, and Power” 18) of its routine use of force in the household. In other words, insofar as the early modern household is built on a gendered hierarchy which both permits and *expects* physical correction, but which in turn insists *for the sake of its very legitimacy* that such correction shall not be abused, shall always be delivered as kindly as possible, early modern patriarchy encounters its litmus test in the very extremes of violence for which it has no justification: how can it transform those experiences which run clearly counter to the very core of its authority into the image *of that* authority, a version of benevolent rule despite every appearance to the contrary?

Though entrenched in law, “reasonable correction” is by no means an uncontested doctrine in the early modern period, and one of its staunchest critics is the body of conduct literature produced by church officials, including a gamut of Puritan preachers ranging from the liberal-minded William Perkins to the somewhat outrageous, Billy-Graham-esque William Whately. With Whately as one of its few (and guarded) exceptions, the conduct canon – compassing homilies, household governance manuals, and conduct manuals intended for husbands, wives, children and servants – refuses to sanction any form of physical correction, and openly condemns husbands who are so vulgar, unkind or un-Christian as to raise their hands to their wives. Its opposition to the legal norm on this issue, however, does not mean that the conduct literature calls for any kind of radical departure from the strict hierarchical ordering of early modern socio-political space; on the contrary, in its very opposition to the corrective norm this material works to help square the discontinuity between the routine violence that is (as it is well aware) an entrenched part of English Renaissance life, and the extremes of violence which the doctrine of “reasonable correction” can sometimes only with difficulty assimilate. In the conduct literature, violence moves from the somewhat fragile register of “correction” – where the transgression of the latter’s opaque limits may not always be granted by court officials, but can always be argued (and argued publicly, disruptively) by determined wives<sup>9</sup> – to the more cloistered register of gift and grace, the register of the martyr who exults in the very transgression of limits that is reasonable correction’s bugbear. These writers encourage wives to regard their husbands’ tyrannies as the opportunity to prove themselves meek, patient, and worthy of God’s deliverance, and

thus to avoid bringing forth any troubling suits against their husbands, and against the governing ideology for which their husbands stand as local representatives.<sup>10</sup>

Early modern conduct literature is organized around an explication of companionism, the period's pre-eminent marital ideology, which argues that husband and wife are spiritual partners but not social equals. They are one flesh, but one in *him*, the husband acting as literal head of their symbolically conjoined body (Perkins 171). To the already-proverbial construction of the husband as the *petit roi* of his little commonwealth, the doctrine of companionism adds the role of *petit dieu* in a miniature spiritual kingdom, in which one of the most important duties man and wife owe one another is the "mutual care for one another's salvation" (Gouge 238). There is, of course, an underlying contradiction here: the proponents of companionism appear to be offering the possibility of limited spousal equality, but only within the already-established frame of social hierarchization, promising wives a certain degree of household authority – even authority equal to her husband in some spiritual matters – but countermanding that promise with strict, at times confusing limits. We may be tempted to argue that this contradiction is anachronistic (Wayne 14-16), that the early moderns would have accepted the seemingly uneasy tethering of limited equality to broader subordination without question, but the anxiety the conduct material reveals as it seeks to square its spiritual and social messages paints a somewhat murkier picture. Viviana Comensoli notes that the books tend to be "riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions" (11) as they try to juggle shifting audience expectations as well as the internal pressures of the theories they voice. Not surprisingly given their clerical authorship, the books frequently place a heavy emphasis on the importance of spiritual partnership, which often chafes awkwardly against their

concomitant emphasis on rigid domestic ordering; in Comensoli's assessment, "[t]he discontinuity echoes the often ambivalent claims of contemporary attitudes towards marriage, especially with regard to male dominance and female inferiority" (59).

Catherine Belsey's recent work on the early modern family echoes a similar sentiment on a broader scale, reminding us that scholarly attempts to make divergent streams of knowledge in the period fit a cohesive narrative does the complexity of English Renaissance life an injustice (16-17). The conduct literature is not, in other words, setting forth a fully formed doctrine whose slight inconsistencies have been rendered irrelevant by communal agreement on all its terms, but is instead the site of an ongoing, and often slippery, negotiation between two competing ideologies: traditional patriarchy and a nascent egalitarianism, foregrounded (though unintentionally) by the literature's spiritual focus.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps in no tract are the difficulties of this negotiation more evident than in William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*. Gouge makes pre-eminent the spiritual partnership that obtains between husbands and wives, and as a result finds himself frequently backtracking to control that assertion's potentially volatile implications. In his second and third treatises, outlining the "common-mutual duties" of spouses (213-66) and the "particular duties" of wives (267-348) respectively, he spends some time considering the areas over which husbands and wives ought to have joint jurisdiction (including the governance of servants and children [302], as well as in matters of the soul [239]), but then quickly notes that one cannot infer general equality from these singular instances, for "[t]hough there *seem to be* never so little disparitie, yet God having so expresly appointed subjection, it ought to be acknowledged: and though husband and

wife may mutually serve one another through love: yet the Apostle suffereth not a woman to rule over the man” (272, my emphasis). Gouge repeats all the conventional arguments of the majority of popular conduct tracts – the primacy of wifely subjection, the critical importance of the household as a site of spiritual nurture and guidance – but the structure of his rhetoric reveals with special force the extent to which those tracts ground their messaging in the often unstable conflation of a potentially progressive mutualism with old-style patriarchal dominance and submission.

If we accept the conduct literature as a reflection of broader cultural preoccupations, we might surmise that as the social make-up of the countryside changes, and as England becomes increasingly urban and hints at the emergence of a middle class, maintaining traditional household hierarchies in spite of the attendant promises of (limited) authority for women held out by the companionate model becomes both more difficult and increasingly urgent. The central function of the conduct material, then, is not so much to espouse companionate doctrine as it is to reconcile the risks it takes and the threats to household order it conceals with the patriarchal tradition on which it is based by classifying all acts of husbandly dominance and wifely subordination as a matter of mutual spiritual care, proof of their commitment to partnership rather than simply evidence of his power over her, gifts one spouse gives the other as each would make offerings to the Lord in exchange for blessing and grace. The nascent egalitarianism embedded within the companionate model can then be used to *authorize* the continuation of patriarchal structures, rather than to destabilize their central tenets.

As Frances Dolan notes, household violence “reveals the contradictions that undermine marriage from within [...] expos[ing] the violence that underlies, and is even

produced by, the fiction of subsumption, of two becoming one” (99); it is the nexus at which the conduct literature’s contradictory articulations of spousal relations collide and is therefore the crucible of its attempts at their reconciliation. Violence against wives is implicit in early modern household structure; insofar as the conduct material remains invested in that structure, it must both acknowledge and seek to contain the spectre of that violence within its broader framework of mutual care. All conduct-book writers, by and large, enjoin husbands from beating their wives to any extent, reminding them that proper rulers use their wives “in all due benevolence” (Cleaver 195); several, however, go on to offer advice to wives who have been subjected to violence – whether or not it falls under the auspices of the “reasonable” – and in so doing they simultaneously acknowledge and deny its ontology, reflecting it back to its victims as spiritual nurture, in theory no less a benevolent usage than a stayed hand may have been. The standard *Homily of the State of Matrimony* urges new brides to remember that suffering “an extreme husband” will win them “a great reward therefore” (20); Robert Cleaver argues that a harsh husband is all the more worth revering, because in showing him the “subjection and obedience” due all husbands a wife proves her reverence of God (203). William Whately provides the fullest, most provocative articulation of violence-as-grace. He divides the physical harm to which a wife may be subject into two categories: that which she deserves as a result of misbehaviour (Whately is among the few conduct writers not to condemn “reasonable correction” outright), and that which proceeds unjustly from a tyrannical husband. In the former case, Whately argues that the wife “must thank herself” for the beatings, “making conscience to reform the faults that have procured them” (269); in the latter, he implies that the wife must thank the Lord for providing her with a test of her patience and

fortitude (which in times of peace, he reminds us, can never adequately be proven), an opportunity to show herself worthy of salvation (270-1). He couches her experience of tyranny in the language of martyrdom (271), and reminds her finally that her “chaste behavior united with fear” may offer her husband a spiritual model to emulate, thus guaranteeing them both divine sanction despite his indiscretions (271; see also Cleaver 199). In Whately’s first case, the wife is cast as author of her own suffering, which she nevertheless receives as a lesson in proper conduct from her husband as spiritual “guide” (Perkins 171). In his second case, the wife is enjoined to read her husband’s blows as a measure of her soul’s ultimate protection, and as an opportunity for *her* to provide the spiritual lesson. In an extraordinary and sinister rhetorical turn, Whately uses her violent subordination to accord her the very measure of spiritual authority which companionism, in its ideal form, suggests husbands and wives may enjoy in equal measure. Husband’s beating and wife’s endurance become proof of no less than their mutual care. In all cases, the divine sanction which these writers insist awaits a brutalized wife can only be accessed by the wife’s total capitulation to her husband’s violence: no calling out to neighbours, no calling on the authorities (except in the most extreme cases, and then only in the most limited fashion [Whately 271]). Labeling it variously as a moral lesson, as a gift of grace, and even, perversely, as female agency, writers such as Cleaver and Whately reconstitute violence against wives as the very sign of a benevolent patriarchy whose faultlines it threatens to expose.



### 3. The Jacobean punitive scene and the performance of salvation

‘Twas I that killed her.  
 O, the more angel she,  
 And you the blacker devil!  
*Othello* 5.2.131-2

Like the conduct literature of the period, Jacobean drama is a public, popular site at which the uneasy negotiation between competing marital models is played out (who can forget the dire consequences of attempted self-determination in marriage for Beatrice Joanna, the Duchess of Malfi, or even, for that matter, Desdemona?), and at which, despite anxious moments, patriarchal benevolence tries to assert itself. The plays test many of the same claims, and dramatize many of the same pitfalls, as the conduct material, and like the latter their anxieties coalesce around the problem of a woman abused. In light of these plays’ refusal to stage rape violence explicitly, and in light of what I have argued, via Freud and Lacan, to be the cultural trepidation produced by the image of a female body in violence, we might profitably ask why so many plays of the period choose to stage punitive violence not only explicitly but often gratuitously, fetishistically, filling our eyes with its sight. Representing violence against women *as excessive*, as punishment that would have, for a contemporary audience, far exceeded anything that could (or should) fairly have passed for reasonable correction, these plays engage two topical anxieties (also shared by the conduct literature) – that wives are fundamentally uncontrollable (and as a result that the vague limits of legal “correction” are justified), and that husbands can be and often are tyrannous rather than generous, poor rulers rather than good (and as a result must be excoriated from the patriarchal body) – only to employ the fiction of violence as grace in the final-act resolution of both. As they exorcise these central Jacobean household demons (see Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*), the

plays have it both ways. Genuinely “bad” wives are punished by husbands or guardians who are seen to be acting in God’s name: should their violence appear excessive or cruelly vengeful in this context, that excess is mitigated by the repentance it generates in its victim, as she accepts his trial of her in the “spirit” in which it was (we can choose to believe) ultimately intended (consider *Maid’s Tragedy*, *Bussy d’Ambois*, *Changeling*). Wives unjustly accused and condemned fall to misguided husbands as often as not (in, for example, *Love’s Sacrifice*, *Othello*, *Winter’s Tale*), yet the unjust death of the wife is given the texture of martyrdom, her determined stoicism providing the hoped-for spiritual lesson as her husband realizes his error, sanctifies her memory, and sacrifices himself to it. Despite its injustice, her death nevertheless guarantees spiritual renewal, reiterating the all-encompassing power of God *both* to bring the household tyrant to justice and to bring the patient wife to salvation. I am not suggesting, in other words, that Desdemona’s death or Hermione’s suffering is desirable, nor that it goes unlamented by an audience provoked to imagine it as fair, just, or pleasurable. I do suggest, however, that in spite of their manifold perversions and their often vocal condemnations of cruelty, these plays finally proffer the restorative message that *all* violence against women (whether justified and therefore not really violence, or unjust and clearly in need of retribution) can, by way of careful re-coding, finally be used to shore up the authority of the governing ideology, even as it occasionally erodes that of its fallible household representative.

No culture, of course, is a monolith, nor is any culture’s theatre. Not all punitive scenes adhere ideally to the model the conduct literature offers, and even in those that do seek seamlessly to integrate violence and grace, audiences are a wild card: there is no guarantee they will accept the play’s redemptive message without questioning its

methods, no guarantee they will accept the invitation to write over suffering with love, no guarantee they will take up the proffered role of witness to the coming of God's grace.<sup>12</sup> This is part of the risk with which both the martyr's scene and the mirror stage moment is necessarily imbued: Lacan reminds us that the Symbolic does not replace the Imaginary, but merely operates as the dominant term in a binary system which compasses both. Our skepticism over the meaning of images is part of the uncertainty that crowds the field of vision once we have agreed to represent it symbolically (do people see me as I see myself?); the *objet a* is always a tenuous though welcome substitute for that which we hope, expect, want to see, yet know somehow we do not quite see. As Foucault suggests in "The Spectacle of the Scaffold," the job of the witness is to question as much as to sanction, to check the power of ruling authorities by refusing to let them get away with egregious renovations of the visual field: when a convict is unjustly strung up, spectators to the hanging may use their power to sanction the attempted performance of justice (and, by association, of fair though absolute rule) or to denounce the authorities instead (59-65).

Foucault's reading of social violence in eighteenth-century France helpfully reminds us that, for conformist Jacobean playwrights, having one's cake and eating it too is not necessarily so easy as a few rhetorical pinches and dashes, the proclamation of a wife's murder as either well-deserved or a short-cut to heaven (or, in the case of a penitent transgressor, both). Like martyr bodies and bodies brought to public execution, the body in violence at the heart of the Jacobean punitive scene is an ordeal body: it must be made to proclaim its *own* penitence and its *own* salvation (as the raped body is forced to reproduce its own violation), and thereby to attest that its violence, like the martyr's

torture, is not simply violence but rather the attainment of heavenly sanction *through* violence – that it is, in other words, a legitimate physical trial, pain as “test” and “blessing” (Gross 171) rather than (or in addition to) an unjustifiable brutalization, violence both here and gone. The transformation of the body in violence into an ordeal body hinges on the victim’s own testimony, her ability to convince her witnesses both on and offstage that she experiences no unreasonable suffering, no violence that is not proper evidence of Christian patriarchy’s firm but fair hand. A successful performance of salvation enacts a cultural fantasy in which wives agree to accept even the most outrageous violence as beneficence (performing the hopes of the conduct material exactly), while also reproducing for their witnesses the psychic fantasy in which those witnesses’ entry into the Symbolic order guarantees their mastery over everything in sight. The promise of the punitive scene is, then, *also* the (false) promise of perfect sight, of the idealized correlation between image and our representation of image, of the absolute dominance of language over the visual field, and thus of a total disregard for the uncertainty buried within the mirror stage moment – the warning of the anamorphic gaze.

Unlike the performance of “hue and cry” which I chronicled in chapter two, and which is based on a deep suspicion of language (the belief that the victim’s word alone can never be good enough to prove the experience of sexual violence, that such violence must be made to return metonymically to the visual field in order to be granted place and matter in cultural space), the performance of salvation advocates the pre-eminence of testimonial – in which wonders are taken for signs, Word and flesh become one, praising makes the image of violence into a signifier of cultural and religious authority. The suffering victim proclaims the troubling sight of her pain a blessing; the visceral cathexis

the image of violence risks invoking in spectators becomes instead an invitation to experience catharsis, to pass over the spectacle of her suffering in favour of the promise of our own preservation which she extends by proxy. Her refusal to accord her physical experience value is a request for our complicity, but one in which we are heavily invested, on which the possibility of our own safety, our own grace, seems to rest. The promise of the wife's testimonial in theory guarantees the support of her witnesses here, just as the martyr's does, but (again, as in the martyr's case) the penitent wife's testimonial also depends fully for its transparent veracity upon that support and thus also entails considerable risk. If the performance of salvation fails fully to elide the testifier's physical experience of suffering, or if it discloses the mechanisms by which Word overwrites image and brings God into view, testimony threatens to become its own blasphemy, revealing the hidden dual power of the sufferer's witnessing body, introducing a clamorous third term into the too-neat dialectic of here-but-gone and shattering our willingness, our ability to believe that violence really is a saving grace.

This third term is *echo*: the disembodied sound that terrorizes, that makes the skin crawl, that rages against language's occupation of the suffering body. If the performance of salvation seduces viewers to colour their vision with the power of *langue*, the echo is unruly *parole*, inviting dissenting voices, the witness who questions, the symbol that provokes (rather than masks) a disquieting self-consciousness.<sup>13</sup> Like the hole, which in my second chapter opposed attempts to reclaim the raped body into image by marking the borders of that body's knowable terrain, the echo is a sound negative, a raging voice opposed to language's elision of the dynamic complexity of violence's image, suffering's image. The echo menaces the promises of testimony with a forceful, countervailing

speech; it is an anti-testimonial that will shout the logic of martyrdom, will witness its cruelty rather than its supposed care, and will call out to its own witnesses in turn for perceptive engagement rather than raw belief. In sympathy with Julia Kristeva's semiotic, the echo also marks the spectral return of the repressed which ghosts the anticipated *pleasurable* return embedded in Freud's fort/da dynamic. It refuses to forget bodies (female bodies, maternal bodies); it dismantles the logic of the mirror stage moment, positing instead the political power of a reinvigorated Imaginary body as it calls out for an empathetic witnessing, a communal experience of suffering that raises the hope of a genuinely broad, genuinely felt community response to women's physical pain. It is a noisy absence that will not gratify either by turning up or by shutting up, but instead shouts from behind the nursery door (behind the analyst's door) for our critical recognition of the very structure of presence-as-absence animating the punitive scene, the hidden politics of "fort" which it buries.

#### 4. Making a spectacle of salvation: *A Woman Killed With Kindness*

The model performance of salvation comes, not inappropriately, from a conduct book rather than a prompt book. Katherine Stubbes, the nineteen-year-old wife of Puritan writer Philip Stubbes, was not the victim of any imposed violence or correction but apparently willed her own death, generating tremendous symbolic capital for her husband. Though Stubbes' 1591 tract, *A Crystal Glass for Christian Women*, claims to be a near-exact transcription of his wife's last days (she fell ill with fever not long after her son's birth, as she had predicted), less biased details of her death (and the extent to which she did, indeed, wish death upon herself) remain inaccessible to us. Critically, in Stubbes'

account Katherine is both active agent and passive recipient of her passing: she takes upon herself the responsibility for stage-managing her self-immolation but insists that Christ acts and speaks through her, that she is *his* agent, and that her passing is *his* blessing. She prophesies her death, not morbidly but with pleasurable anticipation, to her husband and her neighbours as she might have earlier delivered news of the impending birth of her baby, then arranges a series of deathbed scenes that foreground her body only in order to deny its materiality. Friends and relations arrive to bear witness to her ecstasy while she admonishes those who would pray for her recovery, arguing that to do so is to deny union with Christ as the quintessential Christian experience (144-5). As she allows herself to be wasted in God's name, Katherine's witnesses mourn her passing but are nevertheless compelled to praise her stoicism in the face of suffering, her generosity of spirit as she shares her fervent belief with as many as can cram around her coverlets. She is held up as a singular Christian wife (the mirror for other women of Stubbes' title) while responsibility for her death is displaced from the material world (a world of care, where childbirth is a serious danger to women, the after-care of the maternal body often ill-considered) onto the ethereal heavens. The exact cause of her death, meanwhile, remains the black hole at the centre of Stubbes' narrative. Her suffering appears to have no tangible source; it is, miraculously, never anything *but* grace.

Katherine Stubbes' story is not unique; her prophecy and her reported deathbed liturgy some time after the birth of her child must be read against a growing tradition of advice books passed (posthumously) from mothers to children which includes tracts by Frances Aburgavennie (1582), Elizabeth Grymeston (1604), Elizabeth Crashawe (1620) and Elizabeth Joceline (1624). These advice books, as Wendy Wall reminds us, were

designed to be “final legacies” written in full anticipation of “the potential finality” of the “liminal period” of pregnancy and childbirth (285), and were thus – despite their heavy moral and spiritual emphasis and their predication on the mother’s own “bodily erasure” (287) – deeply indebted at their core to an understanding of the specificities of the suffering maternal body. Ironically, the material basis of these texts must be, as Wall correctly notes, discretely elided in order to lend credence and respectability to the female voice in print; the promised annihilation of the maternal body makes the acceptance of the mother as a textual authority possible. Wall’s reading of these maternal “wills” (295) within the emergent tradition of women’s publishing rests on the potential latent in their ambivalence: despite the textual gesture of bodily erasure on which they rest, she argues that tracts such as Joceline’s *Mothers Legacie to her unborn Childe* finally permit “the Renaissance woman writer [...] a chance to undertake what was considered an exceptional feat: to take control of the frighteningly precarious circumstances of her life, to articulate her beliefs and desires, to display her mastery of moral precepts and knowledge, and to claim the power to show [them] publicly” (293). In other words, the mother-to-be anticipating her end in print was afforded the unique opportunity of taking the very “spiritual and domestic control of the family” (290) that the discourse of companionate marriage claims to offer both mothers and fathers in equal measure in life.

The subtle but salient difference between these texts and the contribution to the genre which Katherine’s story makes lies in the hand that authors. Phillip Stubbes, not his wife, is the voice of prophecy here; he holds the mirror and organizes the scene’s centre of authority. Though Stubbes claims to be an accurate transcriber, a surrogate voice for Katherine’s passionate sermonizing, in his hands her text is less a testament to her



spiritual knowledge and household authority than it is evidence of the ways in which such testimony must be modified in order to suit her husband's ends. Katherine is not the author of her own story: not only is Stubbes her ventriloquist; he in turn locates (and limits) the posthumous value of her prophecy and performance in his central emphasis on Katherine's sustained deferral to the agency and authority of God. Though Katherine's self-presentation as God's agent may likely have been a strategic means of legitimizing her transgression of the code of women's silence as she attempted to take, in Wall's terms, control over the perilous circumstances of her life and death, Stubbes' appropriation of that strategy serves a slightly different end. In his twice-removed retelling, Katherine's deathbed performance becomes a posthumous lesson about the blessings that accrue to the destruction of the female body in the name of its progeny (and, by extension, in the name of the progeny of progenies, the son of Mary). The mother's advice-book tradition, in its blunt expectation of death, tacitly acknowledges the genuine bodily danger of pregnancy and labour, the extraordinary risk that was meant to be simply par for the course for early modern women, and by virtue of its subject matter implies the unfairness of the woman's situation for both her and her family. In spite of the unstable subjectivity that emerges from texts steeped in an authorial strategy of self-elision, these books consistently body forth the value of a mother's authoritative presence and thus generate considerable ambivalence around her loss. As Phillip Stubbes takes control of both Katherine's body and her voice in order to relate the story of her passing as blessed event rather than as private and public dilemma to be mediated, he forgets her physical need as well as her authoritative maternal presence and constructs in their place the fantasy image of the fallen mother as ideal Christian witness.

Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1607) has been likened to a conduct book (see, for example, Bromley and Panek), a not unreasonable assessment, especially given that it quite nearly re-stages the drama of Katherine Stubbes.<sup>14</sup> Anne Frankford is banished from her husband's household after committing adultery; chastened and eager to prove her penitence, she orchestrates her own death by fasting as a spectacle of redemption and salvation which ends in her witnesses' near-universal praise of both her Christian spirit and her husband's successful spiritual care of her. Yet *Woman Killed* is not, in fact, a simple rehearsal of the Stubbes scene, but is rather deeply critical of its underlying suppositions. The play does indeed stage an idealized performance of salvation – complete with the near-total eradication of any sign of actual, material violence in a kind of purified fetishization of Word – but does so in order to expose and engage its deepest, cruelest, most un-Christian implications.

Existing feminist scholarship on this play pivots upon the problem of the meaning of Anne's climactic deathbed scene<sup>15</sup> and the titular "kindness" with which it is imbued. Is the scene earnest or ironic? A moral or a critique? Is Anne's redemption an affirmation of her husband's true generosity of spirit, or is it a mockery of repentance, arranged to reveal the characters' failure to live up to Samaritan ideals? Persuasive arguments have come down on both sides of the debate. Several critics have suggested Frankford as a model early modern husband whose refusal to resort to violence dramatizes ideally the conduct literature's admonishment to husbands to eschew physical correction and act instead in the interests of their wives' "spiritual welfare" (Wentworth 157; see also Rossini 114; Kiefer 91). Others argue that Frankford's banishment of Anne represents him as an effective *petit roi* who places the maintenance of proper household order and

the integrity of his family's honour appropriately above all else (Bromley 266-7; Orlin 151). Flipping the coin, Paula McQuade, Lyn Bennett, Manuela Rossini, Nancy Gutierrez and Jennifer Panek argue to sometimes different ends that the play is deeply critical of early modern family structures as it exposes their conflicting social, religious and economic impulses (McQuade; Gutierrez, "Irresolution"; see also Christensen), as well as the homosocial bonds on which they rely despite their rhetorical emphasis on the centrality of the husband/wife complex (Bennett; see also Bach). For McQuade, Frankford's flawed judgement in allowing Wendoll entry into his home as a substitute patriarch suggests early in the play that we are meant to read him as a failed rather than model householder; his subsequent punishment of Anne with spiritual rather than physical "torment" (WKK 13.156) "resolves on a 'judgement' which will keep her cuckoldry private and thus preserve his reputation but nonetheless produce her death" (McQuade 248) in a self-serving bastardization of the forgiveness the contemporary conduct literature would have advocated in such a situation (246). Bennett similarly reads Frankford's pretensions to Christhood in the play's final scene ironically, a misunderstanding of the terms of forgiveness driven by his impulse to commodify kindness as he seeks to repair bonds with Sir Francis (54). Rossini, whose work on the play is at the forefront of a critical trend that reads *Woman Killed* as a dramatic negotiation between the marital models embedded within the companionate ethic (106-8), meanwhile argues in a spirit reminiscent of Francis Dolan that the play's strange conjunction of murder and kindness works to expose the violence at the very heart of "the liberal-humanist marriage," in which the viciousness of absolutism is "masked as kindness" (116). Panek, meanwhile, is most direct in making the link the play implies

between kindness and violence, arguing that Frankford's "kindness" is really just a murder that covers its own tracks (370), though she, like McQuade, imagines this profoundly cruel, narcissistic gesture to represent Heywood's critique of husbands who fail to heed the advice of the conduct literature, rather than arriving at a perhaps much more provocative conclusion: that in killing his wife and *calling* it kindness, Frankford speaks the covert message of the conduct literature *exactly*, and exposes the tyranny implicit in its promise of heavenly reward.

Most critics of *Woman Killed* read the play as a domestic tragedy, to which genre it has long been attached, and for which conduct literature serves as one didactic model (see Comensoli). But this play does not simply invest in the conduct model, as Panek, Bennett, and others have implied; it makes complex and often resisting use of it.<sup>16</sup> I do not wish to dispute the classification of this play, but I do want to suggest that we might gain no small insight into its relationship to the body of conduct texts surrounding it by reading its investment in "kindness" and the events it occasions alongside the punitive spectacle which is the special province of a different genre, revenge tragedy. Few scholars imagine Anne's scene of suffering as kin to the Jacobean punitive scene, and none have yet considered the ways in which its echoes of that scene might produce a critique of the latter's own implied "kindness," its coding of violence as a sometimes subtle, sometimes overt form of grace.<sup>17</sup> Reading *Woman Killed* through both the conduct material and that material's implementation in the revenge plays allows us to ask a refreshing question: how is this play *talking back* to revenge tragedy on the one hand, and to the conduct canon on the other? Panek and Rossini, as they make the critical link between murder and kindness, violence and ideology in this play, do not consider that in

*Woman Killed* murder is not simply cast as kindness, but is seemingly given no *material* status other than as kindness – no tangible ontology other than grace, to echo my thoughts on Katherine Stubbes. In other words, this play does not simply reveal the often palpable but unacknowledged component of violence within patriarchal absolutism, but explicitly engages and finally “outs” the recodification of violence on which the propagation of patriarchal absolutism rests. *A Woman Killed With Kindness* is not just about the politics of forgiveness, nor is it just about the violence of the patriarchal everyday; it is also about the investment the patriarchal everyday makes in the simultaneous act of violence and the eradication of its image.

In scene 13 we find the crux of the play’s unorthodox matter, its reconfiguration of the dramatic and didactic heritage. Frankford, having caught his wife and her lover in bed, has contemplated vengeful violence but has, fortunately, had his hand stayed by a sensitive maidservant (l. 69). He goes on to imagine alternative punishments, and finally passes sentence on his wife’s transgression with banishment from bed, board and consciousness:

My words are registered in heaven already;  
 With patience hear me. I’ll not martyr thee,  
 Nor mark thee for a strumpet, but with usage  
 Of more humility torment thy soul,  
 And kill thee, even with kindness. (153-7)

This short passage is chock-a-block with Frankford’s religious pretensions: he has consulted God and squared his plan with heaven; he is humble, as any good husband ought to be, and he expects the patience of a good wife in return. Superficially, it seems

Frankford has read his Cleaver and is prepared to break from the mould of the revenge tradition's raging husband, but buried only skin-deep here is proof of a different kind. Frankford has already demonstrated, with his rash and ill-considered installation of Wendoll as substitute household head, that he misunderstands the terms of his own duty as household *petit roi*; here, his destructive rather than preservative, threatening rather than caring, articulation of the penance he styles for Anne suggests that he has also radically misunderstood his duty as her *petit dieu* – or has, perhaps, not misunderstood it at all, but has chosen the *pose of petit dieu* to disguise his still-vengeful intentions toward his wife. His sentence is shrouded in ambiguity: does Frankford intend to rescue Anne's wayward spirit, as the model Christian husband is charged to do, or does he promise instead to destroy her by poisoning her spirit? Frankford's sinister phrasing implies a critical yet typically unspoken link between mutual care and desperate vengeance, marks him as more tyrant than protector. His words ("torment"; "kill") borrow from the stock revenger's bloody invocations even as his promises echo disruptively – both mirroring and distorting – the duty of "mutual care" imposed upon husbands in conduct books. The signifiers of tyranny collide with the warped image of benevolence in these short lines, exposing the representational trickery at work in the marriage of convenience between tyranny and benevolence which operates the typical punitive scene.

Frankford's loaded words reverse the logic of the punitive scene, and in the process explode the brutal, sinister force of its language. Rather than resorting to a conventional act of violence designed rhetorically as punishment or grace, Frankford chooses instead to make *the language of grace violent*, turns his violence literally into signs. His promise to visit Anne with spiritual "torment" is less blessing (the blessing of

inward contemplation, of revisiting and doing penance for one's actions) than curse: Frankford's voice sears, brutalizes, promises not revitalization but death through contemplation, promises Anne in her exile the "loss of possessions, family, health, love, honor" that is "the classic substance of a curse" (Gross 164). Rather than accept his own suffering as a kind of blessing, rather than be genuinely stoic or humble, Frankford answers the trauma of his own loss (of honour, of face, of neatly ordered household) with the promise of parallel losses for his wife, curses her to join him in his pain (165).

Frankford's curse occasions material loss, to be sure, but it also makes trouble for Anne as this play's ordeal performer. Unlike the plainly violent gestures of stock revengers, a curse is a performative, not a physical, act: it requires the complicity of its target in *generating* the missing images of violence and dispossession that are its central promises. Frankford's curse replaces the expectation that Anne will translate any material violence visited upon her body into the language of penance and grace with the demand that she become, via his sentence, the active *agent* of both her own violence and its conversion to salvation, that she make her own material suffering out of his language, fulfill the promise of his sinister performative so that she may in turn be able to perform her more conventional penitent's scene and receive the blessing of her audience. *Woman Killed* does not operate on the premise that violence becomes redemption and thence grace during the woman's performance of salvation; it operates on the prior, more troubling, more provocative premise that violence is embedded in grace, must be drawn out of the language of grace in order that a more lasting redemption may subsequently be enacted. The play, in other words, stages a performance of salvation in which the object of attempted recuperation is not the image of physical harm but the *language* of salvation

itself: Frankford's curse requires Anne to resuscitate not his actions but his speech, cloak its exposed cruelties, resolve its ambiguities, disguise the hidden subtext of the punitive scene – in which a tyranny defiant of basic Christian teachings becomes a sign of blessing in the name of the Church's own preservation – which his problematic promise of death by kindness has laid bare. Anne's task is not simply to overwrite the image of suffering with the language of goodness – a doctrinally standard, even expected, gesture – but to fight a complex utterance on its own terms, to engage in a tricky exegesis, to negate half its truth-value (the half that is more “kill” than kind) with competing testimony. The challenge is formidable, for the “kindness” which (the tract writers and church elders remind us) is supposed to follow the “kill” here collides rhetorically with it instead. Frankford's curse makes violence oral, conflates the two gestures – the violent act and the rhetorical renovation – comprising the punitive scene. Violence suddenly, startlingly, emerges from his mouth as anti-testimonial, as echo rather than either Word or image, as the threat that becomes a fast that becomes a kill, that becomes in turn a mangled blessing.

Anne is taken by surprise when Frankford announces his “mild sentence” (13.172). She had hoped for a physical punishment, one that would have “seared” her breasts and lopped her hands, seen her “racked, strappadoed, put to any torment” (of the more garden variety than her husband proposes) (13.136-7), but one which also would have left her body intact (13.91-106). She had hoped for a martyr's death, the heinous ordeal that leaves the body without mark or blemish, that proves repentance genuine, devotion true, salvation imminent. Getting no help from Frankford (“I'll not martyr thee” [13.154] he insists, surely a curse of a different order for Anne), Anne is bent upon



reaching her goal nevertheless. She chooses to fast – a standard Christian purification ritual, but also, in the context of Frankford’s curse, a striking incarnation of oral violence against her own body. As a Puritan, Anne would have known the cleansing properties of the fast (see Gutierrez, “Exorcism by Fasting”), but she should also have realized that fasting to the death is a form of suicide, worship that teeters over into despair, a first-order rejection of God’s teachings and a decadent kind of self-immolation wholly inappropriate for a Protestant woman.<sup>18</sup> Critical attitudes toward Anne’s fast are mixed, with scholars arguing variously for its interpretation as suicide (Panek) or purification (Comensoli; Gutierrez). Rather than positioning my own reading of Anne’s fast within this either/or paradigm, I propose that, as Anne takes Frankford’s curse in at her mouth, she inadvertently marries the promise of redemption through ritual cleansing to the promise of eternal damnation through suicide, enacts (rather than solves) the very ambiguity of Frankford’s words, marks her body with the radical confluence of cruelty and kindness embedded in the conduct material as well as in the doctrine from which it takes its cues. Anne’s death is not pure after all, is not at all the seamless performance of suffering she craves and Frankford foreshortens. Already contaminated with Frankford’s earlier invective, Anne’s performance of death by fasting embodies rather than elides the tyrannous marriage of grace (purification) and violence (damnation), and spoils her attempt to stage an idealized redemptive scene.

In this freighted echo-chamber of violent and violating words, where the open mouth cannot simply testify because it is *also* the site of physical devastation (the body wasted from lack of food), the locus of spiritual invasion (a curse internalized), the place where kindness kills, Anne’s by-the-book performance of salvation mocks its own

intentions. Propped up in her bed at centre stage, calling upon her witnesses to read the signs of “fault writ in [her] cheek” (17.56), Anne hopes her body will record her penance so that her soul may receive its grace. She must confront instead the material truth: hers fails as an ordeal body (as a performance body), records nothing but its own disintegration, is no longer fit to write upon (“sickness hath not left you/Blood in your face enough to make you blush,” as Sir Charles points out [17.58-9]). Neither robust nor unblemished, Anne’s ambivalently-inscribed flesh demonstrates not her purification but only the suffering that is ritual purification’s endgame, the fire that burns as well as purges. Undaunted, Anne gathers witnesses to compel and authorize Frankford as her Saviour, installing him as her bedside confessor, judge and redeemer. Unlike Katherine Stubbes, who apparently understood both the terms (destroy not yourself; that is God’s privilege) and source (Christ, not man, for the latter’s power can always be questioned) of salvation better than her dramatic counterpart, Anne risks her testimony as she invests her last energy exclusively in her husband. Her manic search for his forgiveness is an attempt to transform Frankford’s earlier curse into an eleventh-hour blessing, and it produces a certain irony as Anne elevates her failed spiritual guide into an idealized household *petit dieu*. Anne’s recuperation seems to work for the friends gathered around her, but leaves the rest of us, I suspect, somewhat less sure. Anne stages her own ordeal, but her body fails in the end to record any truth save that of bodily suffering itself; her husband, meanwhile, satisfies neither as pagan torturer (a role he refuses) nor as benevolent god (a role he adopts too late to be wholly convincing). Sir Francis sings Frankford’s praise as Anne dies, reminding him that his fair “usage” (l. 133) has taught her proper regret, but to what extent ought we to trust the praise of a character whose own “kindness” has been

questionable throughout? If the performance of salvation rests on the transparency of its speech acts, the promise of salvation crowning *A Woman Killed With Kindness* cannot seem to erase the troubling ambivalence it trails.

We can, of course, argue that an audience's reasons to doubt should be erased by the zeal with which Anne's on-stage witnesses finally authorize the veracity of her performance, responding on cue to her penitent testimonial and pronouncing, after her death, her spiritual lesson well learned at the behest of a good Christian husband (17.133-5). But this argument requires us to ignore a rather compelling aside. Not every witness to this scene is a believer: the serving man Nick, throughout the play a contrarian voice, will not at this moment fall in line. He is the witness who questions, who rejects the terms of the contract between testifier and witness and injects doubt into the flawless call-and-response structure of the scene. If the promise of the martyr's testimony is "believe I am heaven-bound and you will be, too," Nick parses its logic. While Anne's other vigil-keepers, including Frankford, swear they would die with her to prove their pity, forgiveness, devotion, Nick counters quietly, "I'll sigh and sob, but, by my faith, not die" (17.100). Nick recognizes a death wish for what it is (Bennett 55), will not solemnize Anne's performative elision of Frankford's earlier promise of torment (to which he was also privy), will not authorize her deathbed performance as a perfect example of Christian redemption, a "moral cure" (McClintock 111) for her sometimes-wayward husband and a map to heaven for herself. He will instead mourn with his body (in sighs and sobs) the loss of her body, of the joys of her earth-bound life (her lute; her children), re-focusing the scene momentarily upon what Frankford, Anne and all have so willingly forgotten.

When Frankford banishes Anne from his household, he banishes her above all from his “sight” (13.170). He invites and anticipates her “torment,” but immediately turns away, unable to admit to consciousness the image of either her transgressive body or its subsequent suffering. He approaches her deathbed only when he can be sure of her body’s absolute abrogation, when he can be sure that the return will be a pleasurable one. Only then, when *his* body is no longer at *her* risk, can he make his somewhat disingenuous promise to die with Anne. If Frankford attempts to stage Freud’s primal scene, to play fort/da with his wife, Nick will catch him out at the end, forcing Anne’s body back into Frankford’s cruel equation, asking her offstage witnesses to consider for a moment all that is lost (and all that is spiritually unjust) in Anne’s attempts to construct her death as absolute gain, to transform Frankford’s cruelty into kindness, his curse into blessing. Shifting its punitive focus from material vengeance to the violence of the signifier, *A Woman Killed With Kindness* implicates the Christian doctrine of mutual care in the legitimization of Jacobean punitive violence, and invites its witnesses to re-embody its heroine, to distrust her self-annihilating performance and to engage instead with the meanness of spirit underwriting her testimony.

##### 5. Performing despair: *The Duchess of Malfi*

Do you pray each evening out of horror or of fear  
to the savage God whose bloody hand  
commands you now to die, alone?  
LET’S NOT CHAT ABOUT DESPAIR.  
LET’S NOT CHAT ABOUT DESPAIR.  
Diamanda Galas, *The Shit of God* 20

Frankford's curse transforms the language of his care into the material of his wife's suffering; his promised torment is language given body of a kind for which scripture cannot quite account when it proclaims God's Word made flesh to be Christianity's central, authorizing miracle. The voice that curses and blasphemes is the voice that forces language to linger on the body, to linger embodied, that demands the signifier acknowledge and account for all that which it covertly signifies. Not Word made flesh, but Word made *torn* flesh, ripped and shredded as the bodies it would suture with its placating but empty promises.

To contemporary ears, Diamanda Galás is such a voice. A vocal extremist – part mourner, part rock star, part choral rebel – Galás' performance work cries out at the junction of the brutal and the divine, implicating the formal apparatus of divinity in the systemic bodily crises of those who suffer mental tortures, are dying of AIDS, are living through domestic violence. Using the staggering range and deafening force of her voice as a weapon, Galás stages aural assaults that attack the rigidity, the stoicism, the false comfort of the language of worship. Works such as 1990's *Plague Mass* shriek back to the rhetoric of salvation, brutalizing its logic and terrorizing its claim to sense. Juxtaposing proverbs, hymns and spirituals with a combination of her own lyrics and literally sense-less, ear-splitting cries borrowed from Mediterranean mourning tradition, Galás effects a Deleuzian “deterritorialization”<sup>19</sup> of the Father-tongue, “obliterat[ing] the boundary between familiar sounds, melodies, techniques, and the abject substance that is their support” (Schwarz 161), turning liturgy into a disorienting and discomfiting echo of its own buried meanings. Deathbed confessions, stripped of the Church's saccharine promise of compassion, are delivered to “dirty angels” (*Shit of God* 45). The “swing” of

the low, sweet chariot (42-3) is shredded into a series of trenchant cries, morphing into “crushed noise” (Schwarz 151) as it sheds its connotations of a peaceful end and raises in the latter’s place the spectre of a hanged body left to swing eerily on the scaffold, throat broken and voice severed. Re-mastering the salvation aesthetic, Galás subjects the tyranny of the Word to the distress of her voice, to the distress of elided sensation refracted through the echo chamber of her own constricted throat.

Galás raises her voice to extraordinary decibel levels in live performance, enough to make listening hurt. Her audiences are both her witnesses and her victims: she forces us to experience her uncanny testimonials as physical pain, to bear witness to her ecstasy *as violence*, to her stoicism as the unbearable tension of the noose about to tear, about to rip her voice from the register of normal and plunge us once more into hair-raising terror. This is a terror uncannily without body – the spectral reverberations of pure sound – and yet it possesses a plainly tangible substance: the shock of bearing witness to Diamanda Galás’ voice is the shock of recognizing that her voice has entered your listening body at its ever-vulnerable ear,<sup>20</sup> has momentarily possessed your flesh. Yet this is no demonic possession (although Galás has indeed been demonized by her detractors, including, among others, the Italian government [Flanagan 172]), but rather a reclamation of demonism, of Satan’s original identity as an “accuser” and “avenger of the oppressed” (164). Galás’ vocal invasion of the complacent witnessing body is a damning rehearsal of the oral violence Frankford delivers his wife, of what I earlier termed language’s occupation of the suffering body. Galás performs salvation *as* damnation, suffering *as* despair, in order to reclaim the critical impulse latent in both.



the rhetorical structure of the passage invites more than one interpretation. The Duchess' last reference to the stars appears prior to Bosola's intervention on line 105; set off alone as a result, the above comments, while technically a continuation of a longer sentence begun on line 102, make perfect sense as an independent clause. Heaven should cease crowning martyrs; heaven should instead punish them. This is blasphemous talk for a Catholic ruler to whom martyrdom and sainthood should be worthwhile goals, but it is hardly out of keeping for the Duchess of Act 4: she has as recently as line 75 made the link between Church-sanctioned fasting and self-starvation that eludes but nevertheless traps Anne Frankford, and has, of course, quite brazenly cursed the stars. What then might be "this" which the Duchess enjoins Bosola to "howl"? No doubt it is her rage, her anguish at the extreme psychic and physical torments her brother Ferdinand plans as punishment for her dalliance with Antonio, for her determination to control the destiny of her own body, yet it is more: it is also an avowal that she is alive to the deeper implications of her own punishment and its intended consequences, that she recognizes the hypocrisy embedded in Bosola's oft-repeated insistence that she go gently into her good night, coupled as it is with the descent into faithlessness jealous Ferdinand wishes upon her (4.1.115). Heaven should cease crowning martyrs; heaven should, instead, acknowledge that martyrdom *is* a form of punishment, that Ferdinand's cruelty is the soft underbelly of the spiritual comfort which Bosola entreats her to take, that the two are diabolical kin. Heaven should spell out its intentions, cries the Duchess, rather than "wrap" "poison'd pills/In gold and sugar" (4.1.19-20), rather than offer "comfort" (l.18) that is no more than a spent breath, a lame attempt to forget the story of her body's pleasure as well as its pain. If Ferdinand would have her despair, this canny Duchess will



transform the abandonment of faith for which he hopes into a protest against faith's hidden politics of dispossession.

Yet the Duchess' diatribe against the martyrs and the stars, it seems, is handily forgotten. Bosola's eulogy reclaims her for sainthood (4.2.349-50); contemporary readers of her death scene grudgingly concur. Much recent *Duchess* scholarship argues that the play stages competing ideologies of self-representation at a liminal moment in the late Jacobean period when ideas about selfhood as a private, interior matter are beginning to emerge and challenge older, more public forms of patriarchal self-fashioning; the play resolves this competition, critics often conclude, by martyring the Duchess to the authority she has spent the play challenging. Theodora Jankowski argues that the play pivots upon the Duchess' confusion of her public and private bodies as she is punished for failing to subsume the latter to the former; Mary Beth Rose extends this argument, reading the public-private struggle as a battle over the Protestant "heroics of marriage." For Rose, the Duchess is a kind of marital "revolutionary" (130), determined to conceive her own union and to conceive it as a union of spiritual equals, but one who is finally caught in the cross-fire between "external opposition" to the egalitarian paradigm into which she inserts her marriage and the "internal contradictions" of that very paradigm in a still broadly patriarchal universe (where a Duchess must be her husband's sovereign, even as he must be hers) (136). For Jankowski and Rose, the Duchess' body is the battlefield on which these ideological wars are fought, and her Act 4 destruction represents nothing less than the triumph of old models. The revolutionary Duchess turns "reactionary" (Rose 136), conforms to the convention of a "woman idealised through

suffering” (Jankowski 98), and becomes at last a martyr (97, 98) crowned by heaven after all.<sup>21</sup>

Jankowski and Rose represent the majority feminist perspective on the Duchess’ demise – Christy Desmet, Kathleen McLuskie, Dympna Callaghan and Lisa Jardine all concurrently characterize Act 4 as a downward spiral into “a martyr’s passive acquiescence” (Desmet 53) – but their conclusions ignore many of the most provocative details in the Duchess’ endurance of her Act 4 torture, including what I propose above to be her interrogation of the politics of martyrdom. Karin Coddon reminds us of the Duchess’ extraordinary “resilience” and “self-possession” in the face of tyranny (“Tyranny and Spectacle” 40); lest we construe both as further evidence of a martyr’s stoicism, Frank Whigham suggests an alternative reading: “[The Duchess] considers praying but instead curses the stars, calls down plagues on her tyrant lineage, and summons the ultimate and original chaos. [...] [S]he departs defiant, her own deed’s creature to the end. She sustains investment only in her children, the *bodily fruits* of the personal human love that motivated her original action” (181-2, my emphasis). If the Duchess is a martyr, she is a seriously malformed one: she has forgotten to focus on the “fruits” of heavenly reward, choosing instead to fetishize her misery, her body and her secular identity. She reminds Cariola that her particular brand of stoicism comes not from contemplating her impending union with God, but rather from much more mundane “custom” (4.2.31). She rejects Bosola’s suggestion that she “[l]eave” her “vain sorrow” (4.1.76), preferring instead to annotate his argument with the visceral suffering it will not acknowledge: “Good comfortable fellow/Persuade a wretch that’s broke upon the wheel/To have all his bones new set: entreat him live,/To be executed again” (l. 79-82).

She is Anne Frankford's evil twin, anything but the patient, put-upon wife of conduct advice: she rages against her torment, she blasphemes her intention to starve herself to death, she curses the heavens. The Duchess has long been her own woman and now would remain "Duchess of Malfi *still*" (4.2.139, my emphasis): for her, the battle of ideologies the play wages is not only fought on her body, but fought over her body, over the valuation of her body, over the *kind* of body she would like to inhabit. The structure of dominance and submission characterizing an early modern woman's relationship to her ruling lord requires her, as a matter of course, to martyr her body to his – to subsume her body to his will as the martyr subsumes her body to God's – but the mutual love and respect the Duchess shares with Antonio demands a different body, a body shared rather than sacrificed, a body made genuine gift. Far from capitulating to model martyrdom, the Duchess of Act 4 continues to insist on her shared body as she makes a spectacle of her suffering, of the inevitable consequence of ideological battle for her *material* being and for the other beings in her life.

If we choose to call the Duchess of Malfi a martyr, it is because we choose to adopt Bosola's preferred account of her endurance, to authorize his skewed testimony about her "majesty" in "adversity" without bearing questioning witness to her equally palpable "strange disdain" (4.1.6,12). The Duchess' relentless rejection of his cold "comfort," her active refusal to participate in the rhetorical elision of her own suffering, poses a serious representational challenge for the deeply conservative Bosola, who would prefer to see the Duchess swathed in "a penitential garment" and "furnish[ed]" "[w]ith beads and prayerbooks" (4.1.117-19), atoning for her sin of self-determination. Bosola's heady investment in the conventional punitive paradigm meets with yet more resistance

from the über-tyrannical Ferdinand, Webster's caricature of improper guardianship, who is equally short of faith, equally reckless with the salvation script to which the Duchess will not conform. He trades grace for despair and the clean, simple formula of violence made Word for vulgar and excessive spectacles populated with severed hands, wax bodies, madmen and tomb-makers. Ferdinand's spectacles of violence are more spectacle than violence; their self-conscious theatricality mocks any attempt to dress them up as grace. Built as *trompe l'oeil* tableaux, sinister optical tricks staged in a gruesome funhouse, they make a spectacle of the mirror stage moment, perform the failure of the word fully to master the eye. They mark themselves deliberately excessive, spiritually sadistic, making their assimilation into the language of reason difficult and salvation impossible. From Ferdinand's perspective, of course, such assimilation is not the goal; a grotesque Lord of Misrule, he would drive his sister to madness and despair, not penitence and redemption, as he openly defies the rhetoric of mutual care that underwrites the conduct literature and powers the conventional punitive scene. But if *Duchess* would parody the performance of salvation, with the Duchess as anti-martyr and Ferdinand as substitute Satan, Bosola will be the straight man. The Duchess seems profoundly uninterested in redemption and utterly distrustful of grace; meanwhile, Ferdinand is spectacularly engaged in declaring his own tyranny as anything *but* grace. Bosola, horrified by their parallel refusals to abide by the punitive script, compels himself to play the guardian Ferdinand will not be, to direct the performance of salvation the Duchess will not arrange, desperately striving to resolve his cruelty into her piety as his own conscience demands but as the principals will not permit.

Bosola, true to the figure of the malcontent, fancies himself a consummate actor, but when he tries to achieve salvation for the Duchess by proxy in Act 4 he initiates a meta-commentary on the theatrics of salvation which expose the performative underpinnings of the proverbial relationship of violence to grace. We might remember that a successful performance of salvation depends upon the correlation of testimonial and its witnessing; arguably the performance of salvation *must* be directed and performed by the same person, lest the testimonial appear coerced, disrupting belief. Katherine Stubbes' performance works because her directorial and performative functions blend seamlessly into one another, leaving her husband as supreme "witness" to record the truth of her martyrdom. Anne Frankford's performance does not work as well because her testimony chafes against the curse that is its ultimate source, tingeing the moment with discomfiting ambivalence and provoking Nick's questioning response. Bosola's performance fails not only because the Duchess, too, loves to curse – it is the language she would teach her children (3.5.115) – and would not consent to testify after the fashion he recommends, but also because, given the Duchess' and Ferdinand's defiance, Bosola must play *all* the roles conventional to the punitive scene – tyrant and guardian, witness and testifier – himself. Man bearing many hats, his props collide on his body. He brings the coffin, cord and bell that will seal the Duchess' warrant, yet he also brings a kind of last rites, sermonizing to her in vain about the "prison" (4.2.131) that is her prized body. In the process, he models priest as executioner. He hears the Duchess proclaim heaven's descent onto her head, receives her subsequent charge to inform her brothers they may "feed in quiet" (l. 233), but then shifts this uncouth iteration of violence in the expected moment of salvation into "sacred innocence" (l. 349), rewriting her contrarian testimony

and exposing in the process the central power of the witness to authorize the performance of salvation. Finally, having been accused of murder by the regretful yet unrepentant Ferdinand, he adopts the role of penitent tyrant himself (l. 359), determined to complete the punitive scene. As Bosola tries to stage-manage both Ferdinand's egregiously theatrical tortures and the Duchess' impious reception of them, bouncing back and forth between multiple roles, he reveals the nature of the negotiation in which violence and salvation are imbricated, hints at the central role solid acting plays in the conversion of one to another, in the quiet mediation between the two.

Bosola's attempts to soothe the Duchess into her own salvation, to divert her eye and mind from her brother's psychic torments (and, indeed, from his own deliverance of them), meet consistently only her voice of her despair, whether calm and rational or brash and blasphemous. This, however, is not a despair that capitulates to sorrow, but a despair that actively resists tyranny – the spectacular tyranny visited upon her mind and body by her demonic brother as well as the subtler tyranny of Bosola's proposed cure. In light of the theatrical extremes of Ferdinand's punishment, the limitations of Bosola's comforts show in stark relief as an outrageous attempt to make disappear what will not disappear, what relentlessly *reappears* in show after torturous show. Trapped as he is in conduct logic – the logic of the punitive scene, where all violence must be received patiently, must be made, if not ecstatic, then at least peaceful – Bosola can think of no alternative to Ferdinand's heretical tyranny but stoic acceptance, comfort in a life saved as it looks on God, relief as an imaginative refusal of bodily experience. For the Duchess, a more creative thinker, such a relief is no relief at all but a palpably corrupt and disingenuous solution that fails to cure because it fails to address both the injustice of Ferdinand's

violence and the material reality of her suffering in the face of that violence. The Duchess' despair is neither as Bosola fears it (4.1.74-5) nor as Ferdinand would, sadistically, welcome it, but is despair as a critical impulse, despair as a political act, despair as a refusal to forget bodily and psychic pain and in so forgetting to help mitigate the consequences of violence that is patently unjust, that makes a mockery of "reasonable correction" even as Ferdinand's heresies mock the rhetoric of mutual care. Bosola's attempts to stage-manage salvation's impossible return collide head-on with the Duchess' contrapuntal performance of despair, a politically-charged mourning ritual for her trammled body, a relentless assertion of its being, its value, in the face of all attempts to abject it from the scene.

My association of the Duchess with performance runs contrary to the prevailing critical view that *Duchess* is a profoundly antitheatrical play. In more conventional revenge tragedies, death-by-spectacle catches out the tyrants, acting as a positive and pleasurable social force; here, by contrast, Ferdinand's tyranny is simply outrageous, the death by spectacle he orchestrates a mirror of state tyranny itself (see Coddon, "Tyranny and Spectacle"), the dark underside of Foucault's spectacle of the scaffold. Karin Coddon and Andrea Henderson stake their respective arguments for the play as a representation of emergent ideas about private self-hood on the critical axiom that the Duchess represents inwardness as an antithesis to spectacle, which the events of the play show only to be a hindrance to "self-understanding" (Henderson 64) and to the expression of personal identity (Ferdinand, who makes the play's most extreme investment in performance, is ultimately unable to claim that he is Duke of Calabria "still"; spectacle makes him, literally, mad [see Coddon 31]). If coming to terms with the self in late-Jacobean England

is a matter of coming to terms with the limits of performance as an ontological tool, the Duchess appears to reject Hamlet's proposition to Claudius: through performance will we be known.

What kind of a performance, then, is the Duchess playing at? In its purest (modern) form, performance is art made on the body, identity built through the body, the self as an expression of bodily experience.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary actors working in a variety of twentieth-century performance traditions<sup>23</sup> generate the spirit of their characters by material means, working from the outside in, turning physical play into psychic identification. Freud's grandson achieves no less as he plays with his string. Through play, through performance will we be *formed*<sup>24</sup>: the self derives from actions, gestures, an aggregate of attitudes and behaviours we vigorously project into the world in an attempt to locate ourselves as part of that world. By this measure, the Duchess does not turn *away* from performance as she invents her private self; on the contrary, she modernizes performance as she projects her body as a site of deeply personal experience with lasting, material meaning.<sup>25</sup> In her visceral focus she is, however, both a modernist and a radical, less a precursor of modern realism than an ancestor of (post)modern feminist performance art. The subject of psychoanalysis quickly turns body into symbol via play; the actor working in the modern realist tradition similarly writes over his or her own bodily experience with the invented experience of another, projected into performance space as a series of contrived gestures and auditory signs. We are once again before the mirror: the realist performer subjects flesh to sign, subjects the pleasure of a body formed across contiguous identities (the play of the actor's identity alongside the invented identity) to the tightly-controlled representation of one (the invented identity must reign



supreme; the acting body must not show).<sup>26</sup> The Duchess' performance, by contrast, recalls an earlier space of play, a space where bodies (are) matter, where bodies matter intimately to one another, where the body of a Duchess can freely achieve material union with the body of a manservant. Her children occupy much of her concern; she instructs Cariola to look after them once she has gone, specifying the very manner of care she intends: syrup for the boy's illness, prayers for the girl before bed (4.2.200-2). (The details are telling: these words are not empty platitudes; they have local, material consequences.) The sight of Antonio and her eldest as though dead in 4.1 "wastes" her "more" than were she to see her own death represented (1.61-5), so deeply has she absorbed the suffering of their bodies into her own. Faced finally with her own death, her final thoughts fly not to heaven but to her women and to the mundane preparations for her laying to rest (4.2.224-5), to her own body's material afterlife, given over to their loving hands.

Ferdinand's spectacles are designed to isolate the Duchess both physically and mentally from this world of genuine, familiar comfort in order to preserve her body for his exclusive use, to drain the contaminant of other, unauthorized bodies (Antonio's low-class body) from it (4.1.119-20). Though they threaten, in their optical trickery and overt staginess, to be the ruin of the mirror, these spectacles also stage in violent relief the profound physical loneliness that is the undisclosed promise of the mirror stage moment, of the martyr's scene Bosola prefers, of the patriarchal ideal to which he and the Aragonian brothers adhere. The Duchess' rebellious embodiment is a direct challenge to such a promise: against Ferdinand's attempts to make her a private mirror for his vicious soul, against Bosola's parallel wish to preserve her faith, to train her eye away from her

body and onto God, the Duchess imagines herself bound only to other people, to the flesh and blood experiences of existing with, for and by others. She is consumed by passion for “[t]hose pleasures she’s kept from” (4.1.15), the *others* she is kept from, a passion which powers her “disdain” (l. 12) for the machinations of her brother and his minion. She will not give her body up to the Symbolic unity of one-in-Him (the promise of Christian doctrine, of companionate doctrine; the promise of perfect acting, of the mirror stage moment); instead, she will body herself forth as but one of many bodies that make the world, will represent her body as interconnected, interdependent, Imaginary. The Duchess rejects the performative “tyranny” she is “chain’d to endure” (4.2.61), but she does not reject the efficacy of spectacle per se; instead, she makes a spectacle of her flesh, *pace* Galás, by raising her *voice* to its materiality, articulating its pain, constantly remembering its contiguity with other bodies (children’s bodies, husband’s bodies, living bodies, sorrowing bodies). Contemporary feminist performance art is, among other things, an attempt to reclaim the sentient female body from the mirror’s manipulation; the Duchess’ performance art is a poetics of the imagined body that resists the stultifying optics of the body imaged in tyrannous completeness before the (Father’s) mirror. It is a counter-testimonial that articulates her own body’s profound incompleteness without others, foregrounds both the pleasure and the horror of the lived, and sets itself deliberately against the logic of negation and isolation on which the play’s other spectacles are founded.

The Duchess’ resistance to the parallel tyrannies of Ferdinand’s images and Bosola’s words reaches its climax in the final moment before her death, when she deliberately invokes the rhetoric of salvation she has been resisting in order to subject it

to a damning re-appraisal. If the performance of salvation wrangles the image of the body in violence into the language of grace, the Duchess' performance of bodily despair here wrangles Word back into flesh, makes the salvation moment literally bloody, violent, impossible to stage-manage out of sight (despite Bosola's subsequent attempts to re-cast the Duchess as a saint). "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength/Must pull down heaven upon me" (4.2.226-7) she charges her executioners as they prepare the noose. Her rhetoric, as ever, is striking, vivid, as much image as word; the Duchess' embodied language (like Galás' cries, like Frankford's curse) returns materiality, material consequence, to the abstract, ethereal register of signs. She kneels, her body molded into the conventional pose of the supplicant, but as her words crash this image she ruins the expected tableau of patient acquiescence before a benevolent heaven with her demand that heaven come and get her, that heaven reveal at last its associations with tyranny, the passive tyranny of false comfort that is in time as bad as the active tyranny she has been forced to endure. She will not rise to meet heaven, for she is tethered to the world and would not give it up for false promises; heaven must instead descend not just to meet but to crush her, to grind her into the food she will momentarily offer her brothers (4.2.233). I suggested earlier that the Duchess may well be aware of the shadow that hangs almost imperceptibly over the martyr's scene of salvation, of the crown that cannot be bestowed without burning its wearer, to paraphrase Barbara Freedman (58); here she confirms possibility as she summons the promise of violence that paves the welcome to heaven, implicates the promise of grace in her own physical annihilation, enjoins heaven to rehearse once more the brutalization of her body from which it is meant, according to Bosola, to save her. As a martyr, a willing supplicant who never questions promise, the

Duchess would have risen to be embraced at heaven's gates; as a woman and a prince, skeptical, embodied, earth-bound, her entrance to heaven becomes possible only after she has brought its weight down upon her physical being, imagined its gates as the maw of a tyrant. Her final resting place, by *her own* word and no other's, will be neither heaven nor hell, but the belly of her brothers, a consummate experience not of faith but of flesh.

The dying Duchess makes her body into food for her brothers' ungodly feast (4.2.233) in a dark parody of the Imaginary body that is her pleasure in life. If they would own her, would possess her, would absorb her into themselves, she makes literal the logic of one-in-Him as she challenges her kin to cannibalize her, transforms the supposed pleasure of her submission into a menacing abjection, the meal that kills as it asserts the omnipresence of the other deep inside the self. Her dying body becomes a perverted Eucharist, flesh made curse, a vengeful poison that will not succour as it digests, that will instead destroy Ferdinand's mind and the Cardinal's body as they would have destroyed both of hers. Her near-last words<sup>27</sup> convert her unruly body into a posthumous oral contaminant akin to Galás' cries, to the word that terrorizes rather than comforts – a fitting end to a performance of despair that has relentlessly articulated her body against attempts to sever it from its own experience and from the experience of others. The Duchess' ungodly feast mirrors Anne Frankford's troubled fast as both recall and challenge the most basic implication of the *fort/da* scene: that language alone can nourish, that Symbol may successfully supplant genuine human interaction, care, love. The woman who fasts may espouse her allegiance to the Word of God made flesh, but she may also, like the woman who makes the holy repast a blasphemy, expose the wasting rather than feeding qualities of the word. Frankford's curse enters Anne's mouth as the

poison that supplants food, provoking her fast, destroying her body, starvation dressed up as spiritual nourishment. The Duchess' body, imagined into the mouths of her hungry brothers, similarly deprives rather than replenishes; it is the comfort of food, the nourishment of the spirit, turned ugly, a posthumous echo of deprivation that ought to have been care.

#### 6. Echoing hope: the new ordeal artists

Much of the work of contemporary American “shock” artist Karen Finley is based on the uncanny possibility that comfort food just might be a kind of poison, that nourishment may have troubling associations with violence we are loathe, ravenous culture that we are, to acknowledge. Finley gained notoriety in the late 1980s<sup>28</sup> for a performance called *We Keep Our Victims Ready*, based on the experience of Tawana Brawley, a young black woman who claimed she had been raped by a gang of white police officers. Though no one (typically enough for a testimonial of sexual violence) could be certain of Tawana's claim, the fact that she had been left for dead in a garbage bag, covered in feces, could not be so readily ignored. To tell Tawana's story, Finley smeared herself with chocolate, both because it “looked like shit” and thus could stand in for the shit with which Tawana was literally smeared, and because she was compelled by its deeply-ingrained “association with love” (Finley, *Different Kind of Intimacy* 84), the pretense of which haunts many a rape scene. Layering the life-giving pleasures of chocolate – the ultimate North American comfort food and, arguably, North America's gift of choice – onto a representation of staggering brutality, then mixing it with a broader narrative of women's debasement and abuse in a commodity-obsessed culture,<sup>29</sup> Finley

exposes the intimate yet disavowed connection between physical and social violence on the one hand and pleasure, offering, and nourishment on the other. She stages on her body the relationship between violence and grace I have been tracking, stages the rhetorical elision that constructs violence as a present between lovers, a form of mutual care, by turning food – source of nourishment, symbol of love – into a visible source of violence.

*We Keep Our Victims Ready* (1987) is the most famous of Finley's culinary performances, but it is by no means her most provocative confluence of food and violence in performance. In one of her earliest shows, "Yams Up My Granny's Ass" (from *I'm an Ass Man* [1984-5]), Finley represents a drug addict who "abuses his grandmother on Thanksgiving" by sodomizing her with a can of candied yams (*Different Kind of Intimacy* 23). Thanksgiving is devoted to the spiritual power of food: food is its offering, that for which it gives thanks; the Thanksgiving meal is the means by which we confirm our deep emotional connection to our closest loved ones, and to those we do not know but whom we profess to be near in spirit. "Yams Up My Granny's Ass" radically de-realizes these visceral connections between food, love, hearth, home, and filial attachment as one of Thanksgiving's iconic foods morphs into a weapon. Finley performed the piece "by turning [her] back on the audience, bending down, pulling [her] dress up, and emptying a can of sugared cooked yams onto [her] backside, then smearing them on the cheeks and crack of [her] ass" (24), once again giving material body, visceral affect, to the connection she draws between sustenance and violence. "Refrigerator" (from *The Constant State of Desire* [1986]) begins similarly: a father places his naked daughter into the fridge, where her "feet and hands [...] get into the piccalilli, the catsup,

the mustard and mayonnaise” (*Constant State* 300). He sexually assaults her with vegetables from the crisper; she clings to “Aunt Jemima” for protection (300). Later, her mother returns home and chastises her for “playing with” the family’s dinner (301). The accusation shudders, for the father’s acts have already made “play” catastrophic, unnatural, turned Aunt Jemima into a makeshift dolly and collapsed safety and comfort into violence and fear. In both “Yams” and “Refrigerator” the image of the happy family united around the dinner table dissolves into terror as the evening meal is estranged dramatically from its domestic function, its spiritual function, its sustaining function. But food is not simply violence, in either of these pieces or in *Victims Ready*. Food is *simultaneously* an offering of nourishment and an imaging of violence, a gift of love and a threat of harm, and Finley’s body is the palimpsest that layers connotations of its familiarity and its pleasure (the can of yams I bought at the supermarket last week, the gift of chocolates I received last Valentine’s day) onto the acts of extraordinary cruelty that familiarity can mask and pleasure can excuse. Food is both violence and grace in Finley’s work – it is an embodied representation of the intimate yet disavowed connection between the two.<sup>30</sup>

Maria Pramaggiore and Rebecca Schneider have separately read Finley’s performance art as a stripping of language, a literalization of metaphor; they argue that she models on her body the ways in which language systems work to oppress and violate by turning the martyr’s trick, “trivializing, debasing or abstracting the experiential” (Pramaggiore 279), subjecting it to the rigors of the sign. “She speaks the language of victimization with her body, refusing the mollifying process of metaphors that encrypt violence” argues Pramaggiore (271); Schneider calls this practice “a politic of literality”

(115), in which, for example, babies become dildos to expose the most violent, most ridiculous implications of Freud's penis envy. Pramaggiore and Schneider are principally interested in Finley's bodily inscription of just these kinds of systemic forms of "cultural" violence – the violence implied by the structure of metaphor rather than the violence metaphor might deliberately mask – but I am proposing that Finley's performance body manifests something potentially more significant, inscribes not only a history (and a present) of violence against women but also the slippery, elusive history of that violence's representation as a disingenuous source of comfort. Finley does not literally shove yams up her ass on stage (though she was famously accused of so doing on more than one occasion), and the chocolate in which she covers herself for *Victims Ready* is designed expressly to *look like* shit but not to *be* shit – is designed, in other words, as a metaphor that calls attention to its status *as metaphor*, the love that looks like shit, the shit that looks like love. *Victims Ready* both literalizes and re-metaphorizes Tawana Brawley's experience: the chocolate-smearred woman stands in for the shit-smearred woman, materializing on her body the signifying process that allows the image of love and grace to stand in for the (lost) image of brutality.

Finley's most dramatic expression of this representational history occurs in *The Constant State of Desire*. *Constant State* revolves obliquely around the Easter rite, and again estranges the comforts of its ritual foods to expose the deepest implications of its symbology. In its traditional form, Easter is a remembrance of Christ's resurrection – the original performance of salvation, the body that is battered, bleeds for three days, and then is made miraculously whole once more, delivered, purified, to the right hand of God – but in a secular North America the battered body of Good Friday's crucifixion scene



groans under the weight of the chocolate-laden basket that Sunday morning brings. The image of Jesus' body in violence fades over the weekend, our thoughts diverted to the pleasures of his resurrection day. Finley mocks the audacity of our forgetfulness – of our impulse to disregard violence for the sake of pleasure, of our impulse to refigure violence as pleasure – in her second-act monologue, “Cut Off Balls.” Her narrator castrates every trader on Wall Street, sucks their balls (the extreme of men's sexual excitement returns, uncannily, in the guise of its greatest fear), boils them, coats them first in shit and then in melted Hershey's kisses, wraps them up in pretty paper and sells them as “Easter eggs” to “gourmet chocolate shops” for \$25 per pound (296). In this orgiastic confluence of balls, shit and chocolate Finley performs Freud's unspeakable act and feeds it back to her victims as a luxury they eagerly consume. The traders are preposterous martyrs who lose their balls in an act of violence none can acknowledge, but the loss does not matter, really, because their balls return to them on Easter morning – return to be *ingested* by them on Easter morning – in a parody of God's promise to the martyr, of the promise of the mirror: the promise that violence yields the ecstasy of cohesion, the perfect unity of self with Word. “Cut Off Balls” satirizes the fiction of unity (we can eat ourselves, become whole in ourselves) embedded in the fort/da dynamic as it replaces the promise of the pleasurable return with the horror of the return of the repressed.

Rebecca Schneider locates the centre of Karen Finley's political consequence in her audience: “I dare you to disbelieve, Finley seems to say, when I'm shoving this material squarely in your face” (101). I dare you to disbelieve *my body*: Finley's challenge to her audience is the conceptual opposite of the martyr's challenge, the opposite of the call to witness powering the performance of salvation. Forget the soothing

power of the word, she demands, and see its consequences as they are written across my naked, defiled flesh. Like Galás, Finley is a new ordeal artist, one for whom the body is not just the medium but also the message, for whom the body (flesh, voice) is a stage on which to perform the interconnectedness, the interdependence of bodies, our collective responsibility for others, and the consequences of our refusal to engage, the consequences of cathartic solipsism.

Two other contemporary female performance artists take Finley and Galás' spectatorial confrontation to a new level, making their art at the point of intervention between artist and observer. Marina Abramovic and the French artist Orlan rewrite the relationship between testifier and witness by inviting their audiences to become central participants in both the creation and the deconstruction of their art's meaning. Both subject their bodies to extremes of self-imposed violence, and both provoke their audiences to consider the importance of the observer's role in acknowledging that violence, in choosing what value to accord that violence – provoke them to think, in other words, about the *active* choice between empathy and denial, embodied and cathartic viewing, that the image of a body in violence always demands. As sources of testimony, both are unstable, unreliable; they provoke a certain amount of confusion, the question of whether or not to believe, to what extent to believe. They re-activate the position of witness from one of passive avowal to one of active interrogation; they invoke the witness who questions. If the conventional ordeal performance is based on the promise of a pleasurable return (violence that yields salvation; the traumatized body that produces the Truth), these new ordeal artists produce performance that defies the pleasurable return, arrests its possibility by disrupting the seamless transfer of meaning from testifier

to witness and back again. In place of the pleasurable return, Abramovic and Orlan (like Galás, like Finley, like the Duchess) engage their audiences at the limits of their assumptions about what it means to behold a body in violence.

### Marina Abramovic: Staging Intervention

All of Marina Abramovic's early work tests her body's limits; several early performances also test her audiences. In these, Abramovic stages a rescue scenario: she traumatizes herself, then waits for her spectators to intervene, saving her from the possibility of serious harm. The performances end when the intervention is complete. In *Rhythm 5* (1974), she sets a petrol-soaked star alight, cuts her hair, fingernails and toenails, tosses hair and nails into the flames, then lies down in the middle of the star. The flames have absorbed almost all the oxygen at the star's centre, and she loses consciousness. Eventually, several spectators realize her body is about to catch fire; they crash the flames and carry her out (*Artist Body* 62-9). In *Thomas Lips* (1975), she eats and drinks honey and wine, cuts a five-pointed star into her belly, whips herself beyond the point of pain, then lies down upon a cross made of blocks of ice and waits for the audience to interrupt. Several observers eventually remove the ice from beneath her body, wrap her in blankets and take her away (98-105). Abramovic considered audience intervention in the original performance of *Rhythm 5* to be somewhat unwelcome, evidence of her failure to prevent her body's natural limitations from interrupting her art (69); by the time of *Thomas Lips*, however, she had built the necessity of intervention into the structure of the performance. Intervention becomes a central component in her

trauma poetics: no longer do her performances simply test the limits of her body; now, they require her audience to take responsibility for recognizing those limits, for drawing the line between performance and violence, between acceptable public art and unacceptable levels of private pain. There can be no getting lost in this art; there can be no cathartic withdrawal from the image of the suffering body. To refuse the materiality of this image is to risk Abramovic's death; she will not, because she cannot (frozen; unconscious), save herself. Abramovic's rescue performances make salvation itself material, a matter of collective social responsibility rather than the purview of an absent God.

Not unlike the Duchess of Malfi, Marina Abramovic imagines performance as a confluence of interdependent bodies, makes art from the normally-disavowed connection between our separate skins. She conceives her performing body (what she calls the "Artist Body") only in terms of its union with the "Public Body," which she also characterizes as a performer, a fellow body on stage ("Towards a Pure Energy" 16-17). Her work is not only a collective responsibility; it models collective responsibility: the extreme vulnerability she stages as a function of each and every solo performance always provokes the question of what we, as observers, must do to protect her, in order thereby to protect ourselves as well. If Marina is seriously injured, who is legally responsible? We do not sign waivers as we enter her performance space; if we do not intervene, if harm comes to her as a result, might we be held guilty of assault? of manslaughter? As a group or as individuals? At what point does her self-imposed ordeal become our collectively-sanctioned violence against her? Accepting her vulnerable body into the space of our sight requires us, in other words, to form an intimate connection between its

outcome and our own. If Marina falls, like the children of Lacan's Imaginary, we must also cry.

*Rhythm 0* (1974) is Abramovic's most extreme, most provocative staging of the intimate connection between bodies. Casting spectators as its principal performers (and Abramovic as its artist-object ["Role Exchange" 31]), this piece transforms watching into doing, observation into performed engagement, forcing a critical conflation of language and image, witnessing and testimonial. Abramovic stands before a table set with 72 objects that the public can "use on [her] as desired" (*Artist Body* 80). These objects include mundane household materials, items that signal intimacy, that may be given as gifts (flowers, perfume, a rose, wine), and items that can be used as weapons (a gun and bullet; a whip; a pocket knife; an ax; a spear; a scalpel). Throughout the lengthy performance (the original lasted 6 hours) Abramovic says nothing, offers no instructions for implementation, exclaims no pleasure and no pain (although at one point during the original performance she seemed about to cry; see *Artist Body* 83). She does, however, precede and impel the performance with this disclaimer: "I take full responsibility" (80). As a form of testimony, this is powerful (believe my words rather than your acts: you can do me no harm because I have always already absolved you) yet disingenuous; though it seems to invite our complacency it also provokes disturbing questions. Can Abramovic honestly be considered responsible should one of us decide to shoot her? Where are the legal limits of her status as artist? Does my status as performer in this case negate my legal responsibility as a citizen? All questions ultimately coalesce around one: how must I define my body *relative to hers* in order to proceed? The articulation of and debate over these questions become the essence of the performance. As Josephine Anstey recalls,

“[t]owards the end of [the original performance] two factions had emerged – one wanted to use a loaded gun on Abramovic, the other wanted to protect her.” The seemingly limitless freedom to act that Abramovic offers her fellow performers shifts almost instantly into an argument about public responsibility; we become witness not to her testimony but to our own as we argue (both among and within ourselves) over how we choose to define one another’s bodies, how we choose to define *harm* to one another’s bodies, and how we choose to value one another’s bodies in different contexts (is Marina’s body any different in the studio than on the street?). The objects on Abramovic’s table tell a story: they suggest we might choose to adorn her, to bring her offerings of food or flowers; they suggest we might also abuse her, hurt her, torture or humiliate her.<sup>31</sup> *Rhythm 0* offers participants a choice between violence and grace, between hurting Marina and caring for her in her mute vulnerability. In order that we might become actors, we must first come to terms with our own awesome power as observers to articulate the *difference* between hurt and care, violence and grace – indeed, to decide whether or not there is a difference, in this context, between violence, grace and art.<sup>32</sup> The central performer speaks not a word, but in her silence our words echo as we bear witness to an extended interrogation of the limits of language as a truth-model (can we believe her disclaimer?), as a framework for personal choice (how do we define this body, these actions?), and as a measure of material consequence (for all bodies present).

### Orlan: The Witness Revolts

Despite the politically provocative results her work produces among spectators, Abramovic is not a political artist. She makes her own pain a part of her work in order to achieve a certain degree of spiritual enlightenment; in the latter goal she is perhaps more kin to the virgin martyrs of old than to the French artist Orlan, who defines her work as “carnal art.” The classical ordeal spectacle in drag, carnal art “does not seek pain as a source of purification, and does not perceive pain as Redemption,” but openly envisions the suffering body as a “venue for public debate” (“Intervention” 319). Orlan, like many of the women above, makes her art out of blasphemy (325), having adopted for herself the parodic alter-ego “Saint Orlan” in 1971 (Ince 13); in 1990, she embarked on a non-terminal performance piece called “The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan,” which has so far consisted of nine surgical procedures via which she intends to re-make her face into a pastiche of five iconic beauties pulled from the pages of art history. Orlan takes her operating theatres quite literally: each surgery is a multimedia event, during which Orlan and her surgeons are outlandishly costumed, props adorn the space, and Orlan reads from pre-chosen literary and theoretical texts. The spectacles are beamed live via satellite to galleries around the world, a spur to that public debate into which she is actively transforming her own body.

The single most salient feature of Orlan’s “Reincarnation” project, if we go by sheer volume of critical commentary alone, is her preposterous claim to feel no pain during and little pain after the operations. Her comments on the subject are wry – “the anesthetic shots are not pleasant” she concedes, but then claims it’s no worse than going to the dentist; post-surgery, she takes “analgesics” (“Intervention” 326) – and they collide

uncomfortably with the evidence our eyes confront when they witness the operations in real-time or on video. The surgeons pull her skin back; we see into the (physical, psychic) abyss behind the comforting façade of her face (see Adams). We wince; we fight the urge to turn away. We are revolted; we attempt catharsis, attempt to erect a comforting barrier between her body and ours, but are somehow thwarted. Orlan herself and several of her commentators have noted that, through a heady combination of local anaesthetic (on her end) and sophisticated technology (on both), witnesses are more inclined to feel pain than she is (“Intervention” 326; Ince 56-7; Adams 143). In addition to the usual surgical performance, Orlan’s seventh and most elaborately staged operation, “Omniprésence,” featured a companion exhibition including forty photos of her face in post-operative recovery, one for every day of the show. The photos remind viscerally of news clips of battered wives; Orlan’s face is bandaged, swollen, her bruises grotesquely coloured as they heal (“Intervention” 323). Once again we are distressed to hear her denials of discomfort counterweighted by what appears to be the residue of extreme bodily cruelty. Orlan specifically contrives her operations around what are undeniable images of physical suffering, images that not only chronicle her body’s own very local, immediate trauma, but that echo a history of violence against women, a history of trying to force female bodies physically into idealized paradigms; she then precedes to deny all suffering. To what end this ridiculous false modesty?

Tanya Augsberg and Imogen Ashby have both argued that Orlan’s denial of pain is a political act, a strategic refusal “to be associated with the figure of the sick/mentally ill woman” (Augsberg 307; see also Ashby 45). I concur with the political impulse of Orlan’s denial – her testimony is more ironic than genuine, designed to provoke



commentary (and protest) rather than to elicit unquestioning belief<sup>33</sup> – but I would also suggest that the politics of this act are more complex than critics so far have realized. Alyda Faber has argued that Orlan’s operation performances deliberately parody the conventions of martyrdom, as she “assum[es] cruciform positions on the operating table” (86); her denial of any suffering in the (literal) face of what witnesses *see clearly* as cutting, as bruising, as trauma delivered to and on her body in the most painstaking and deliberate way, is central to her critical send-up of the martyr’s performance of salvation. Orlan lies strategically about her pain because she is “playing” the martyr; her performances expose the martyr’s testimony as false, expose the preposterousness of the martyr’s claim to feel no pain, to feel pain as ecstasy, to characterize pain as redemptive and saving rather than as the extreme bodily trauma it is.<sup>34</sup> Her reliance on a multitude of image-based media is key to the efficacy of this conceit, as is the camera’s close-ups of her flayed skin, of the exact points of surgical intervention. All work to bring her pain close to her viewer, to make it immediate, to make it sear, to burn it through our eyes and into our bodies. She dares us to deny not just what we see but what we *feel*, the sensations our watching produces; she dares us to accept her testimony at its (ludicrous) face value, dares us to bear (false) witness to her words, to soothe our troubled eyes (and upset stomachs) with her reassurances. She challenges us to witness viscerally, with eyes and stomachs, and then to interrogate the politics of our witnessing: we must take from her testimony not the promise of comfort it coyly offers but rather a *discomfort* at the brashness of its elision, at the (ridiculous) ease with which the image of extraordinary pain can be made to seem comfortable.

Some of Orlan's spectators have responded to her denials of pain with howls of protest (Ince 127), demanding angrily during lectures how she can be so callous as to feel nothing. If it is true that as we watch Orlan's surgeries we absorb something of her pain into our own bodies, perhaps her denials hit home because they fail to value our proxy suffering, refuse the Imaginary connection we weave, threaded through our horrified eyes, to her body, her feeling. Against the visceral empathy, the embodied spectatorship, her work is designed to incite, Orlan's calm understatements about the anaesthetic and the analgesics model the cruelty of catharsis, the rejection of the pain of the other in the construction of the comfortable self: so glad I'm not you! she proclaims, since I'm sure you suffer more than I do.

The moment of catharsis, we remember, hides a dark secret: our abjection of Oedipus' pain is predicated upon Oedipus' radical abjection of the sight of Jocasta's hanging. Orlan's catharsis, critical rather than sincere, provocative rather than placating, makes that lost moment, too, appear. In the classical Oedipal scene, the viewing body is spared the image of woman's suffering, internalizes it instead, assumes language and erects a culture. In Orlan's "reincarnation" of the classic Oedipal scene, the viewing body is assaulted from all sides with the image of the cut it has been taught radically to disavow – the image of the woman's body in violence, the cut that *precedes* that other cut, the threat of castration that is not a cut at all but an induction into language – and finds itself unable to deny either image or suffering, even as both shape its horror and revulsion. Orlan stages the castration moment Freud will imply but never invoke, but she also simultaneously stages his denial, Oedipus' denial, the modeling of suffering into subjectivation that the lost moment enables. Even as she shoves the image of her face

under the knife in our faces she refuses its ontology, proclaims it a *trompe l'oeil*. This is the gesture that is supposed to make subject-formation possible, that is supposed to encourage our revisioning of ourselves, our bodies, as whole before the mirror, but it seems only unethical under the circumstances. Orlan's torn flesh reflects not the promise of unity but some kind of uncanny void. Her words of succour collide with her cut and bruised body and echo the story of her suffering, the history of women's bodily suffering, as a history of disavowal; the contradiction here, too palpable to seam over, produces outrage as its consequence. Unable to assimilate or deny the image of suffering she casually offers, we can only express shock at her refusal to accord it value, disturbance at her callous refusal to see. Suspended between her dubious testimony and the evidence of our eyes, we refuse to discard the latter, refuse our roles as witnesses, refuse to sanction her disavowal as we take responsibility for the suffering body she abandons. Orlan's perverse spectacle of refused pain is, then, also a remarkable model of hope: hope that we can authorize the story of the body (ours as well as others'), that we can recognize and overcome the tyranny of disavowal that has so long shaped the reception of women's violence and suffering.

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The punitive scene stages the movement from Imaginary to Symbolic, the movement away from bodily consequence and bodily community and into the isolating frame of language. Punished or martyred female bodies become signs, ciphers for other, more important bodies, as they get caught up in patriarchy's representational machine. The performance of salvation models extremes of violence into the pleasures of grace as a consolation prize: union with God substitutes for the destroyed body's lost community,

as two become one in Him. Resisting the tyranny of such remodeling is a matter of interrogating language's too-easy assimilation of the woman's body in violence, revisioning the relationship between language and the bodies it purports to represent. The work of Galás, Finley, Orlan, Abramovic – and that of the wily Duchess – challenges the sleight-of-hand optics behind the martyr's testimony, behind the promises of early modern conduct literature, behind Freud's game of disappearance and return, by throwing their spurious collusion of violence and pleasure – the violent gesture of abjection, the promise of a pleasurable return – into stark relief against the spectre and the hope of the lost Imaginary body. Contemporary theorists of psychoanalysis caution us to remember that the Imaginary is invented terrain, that it can have no ontology outside of its Symbolic representation. Conceived within the confines of language, these artists' imagined bodies revise the splendid isolationism that is language's condition of possibility by modeling compassion, by staging violence and suffering as a communal experience with communal consequences. Their performances are sometimes dark, sometimes disturbing, but no less hopeful examples of what Jill Dolan has recently called the utopian performative, communities imagined around the possibility of collective embodiment. The echo of the Imaginary body within Symbolic space is the sound of witnesses protesting rather than permitting the seamless performance of salvation, questioning the re-alignment of images of violence and horror with words of calm succour, interrogating rather than accepting the promise of catharsis, the promise of the mirror stage moment. The sound of their collective voice is the sound of possibility, the possibility that a bruised and battered female body can be re-imagined in intimate connection with, rather than at a sympathetic but safe distance from, our own.

Perhaps we would like to believe that violence against women is now, in the early twenty-first century, always an openly acknowledged experience, a matter of collective social responsibility. The fact that the plight of women under Afghanistan's Taliban received virtually no press in the progressive West until the Taliban were perceived as an active threat to the West – and to the Republican US federal government in particular – tells a different story, as does the difficulty aid organizations routinely have in raising everything from foreign government interest in ritual female circumcision to money for poorly funded battered women's shelters. We might stop to think for a moment why we call women's shelters by that name, aligning them rhetorically, though perhaps unintentionally, with homeless shelters or shelters for troubled teens. Women who have been abused continue to be isolated from our social comfort zones; they are somehow abject in our imaginations, despite our professions of empathy. Now is the time to heed the lessons of the Duchess of Malfi, to model our human connections with and our collective responsibility toward these women much more deeply, more urgently.

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<sup>1</sup> I draw this particular example from a conflation of two virgin martyr plays, *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Agapes, Chiona and Hirena* (also known as *Dulcinius*) and *The Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins Fides, Spes and Karitas* (also known as *Sapientia*), by the tenth-century German nun Hrotsvit of Gandersheim.

<sup>2</sup> In imagining this scene complete with an audience, I realize that I am being somewhat anachronistic. We have no evidence of performances of any of Hrotsvit's works, although to assume as a result that they were *never* performed strikes me as an unreasonable leap of logic. As Marla Carlson notes in a recent article, Hrotsvit's status in her convent, coupled with her status as an influential member of the ruling class, suggests that the plays may have been "fully staged" at Gandersheim or even at court, may have been read aloud in company, or may have been read in solitude (482). I would further add that since the martyr play derives much of its liturgical power from its ability to revise the potency of image, to translate, as it were, the gripping power of Pagan spectacle into the reassuring omnipotence of God's Word, it would have benefited greatly from being staged.

<sup>3</sup> Martyr bodies have been the subject of criticism for some time. For other perspectives, see Martine van Elk, who shares my reading of the martyr body as essentially insubstantial but argues in turn that the dematerialization of suffering the plays chronicle is a source of female empowerment, and Elizabeth Robertson, who suggests in counterpoint that the virgin martyr's relationship to God relies on her absolute embodiment. Marshall herself nuances her reading (as well as mine) by reminding that, were a martyr's

body “completely devalued [...] its loss could not occasion martyrdom” (91). She is clearly correct to note that “[w]ords and bodies interact in complex, multifaceted ways” in martyr narratives (her discussion deals specifically with Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*), but finally, as I want to emphasize, the underlying intention of such narratives – Hrotsvit’s as Foxe’s – is to occasion a representation of theological devotion built upon absolute physical repudiation, even active physical denigration.

<sup>4</sup> See also *FFC* 62-63, where Lacan designates the reel as *objet petit-a*, confirming its centrality to the little boy’s conception of himself within a signifying system.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan offers a useful articulation of the contiguous body’s relationship to the Symbolic order in his comments on the Freudian unconscious in *Four Fundamental Concepts*: “Remember the naïve failure of the simpleton’s delighted attempt to grasp the little fellow who declares – *I have three brothers, Paul, Ernest and me*. But it is quite natural – first the three brothers, Paul, Ernest and I are counted, and then there is I at the level at which I am to reflect the first I, that is to say, *the I who counts*” (20, second emphasis mine).

<sup>6</sup> Irigaray challenges Lacan’s privileging of this hyper-individuated understanding of the self in relation to the other in her own reading of the fort/da scene. In “Belief Itself” (from *Sexes and Genealogies*), she calls for a reinvigorated Imaginary, in which the insularity of Symbolic self-representation is replaced by a genuinely engaged, genuinely empathetic space in which self and other come together to forge a communicative bond *between* their bodies. In Irigaray’s novel imagining, selves attain their most genuinely mature state not when they are able to speak and articulate difference, but rather when they are able to articulate relations *with* rather than *in opposition to* others, are able to agree and disagree, find common ground, and forge linguistic and bodily partnerships that move both knowledge and understanding forward. In this feminist Freudian dreamscape, it is not the disappearance of the mother that finally heralds culture; rather, the possibility of a shared metaphor modeled by the string that bounces endlessly between mother and child, me and you offers the most profound image of what human communication might be. I will investigate the implications of “Belief Itself” for a feminist performance of violence more completely in my next chapter.

<sup>7</sup> As I noted in chapter one, I use the term “violence” here fully aware that much of what we would consider violence – against women as against other members of the population – was not considered violence at all in Jacobean England, but was part of the routine management of the citizenry and the preservation of order. I explore below the slippery, determinedly vague characterization of violence against women in the period; for now, note that much of the violence in which Jacobean drama’s typical punitive scene indulges is quite beyond anything that either courts or clergy would (or should) have been willing to consider a matter of routine. For more on the general limits of routine violence in the period, see Amussen, “Punishment, Discipline, and Power.”

<sup>8</sup> For contemporary assessments of the law as vague, see T.E., *Lawes Resolutions* 128, and Heale 74, 84.

<sup>9</sup> Historians generally agree that the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a rise in household disruptions, and in wives suing for separation from abusive husbands. The increasingly public nature of this unruliness threatens the efficacy of its re-coding as “reasonable”; as I will argue, the conduct material attempts to mend this representational rift by encouraging wives to imagine not only the virtue of violence, but the virtues of bearing it with quiet patience. For a slightly different take on the relationship between the law and the conduct literature, see Frances Dolan 33. For a contemporary account of a wife’s court action, see Crawford and Gowing 173-5. For women’s collective efforts to persuade the judiciary to recognize excessive violence, see Mendelson and Crawford 216.

<sup>10</sup> As I assert the intentions of this literature, I do not wish to imply that its somewhat sinister ideals were as a matter of course simply achieved; conduct writing appears in response to difficult social changes, as an attempt to wrench things back on track (Comensoli 9-10, 20-1), and represents in the process the very “conflicting forces within societies that [it] tr[ies] to regulate” (Wayne 3). As I read this material I am attempting to chart the rhetorical negotiations by which it strives to bury the bodily experience of physical violence under the sign of spiritual redemption; I am not suggesting that the consequence of such manoeuvring was a seamless adoption of its tenets. Nevertheless, we must simultaneously acknowledge that conduct literature was tremendously popular in the period, and by all accounts quite influential (not unlike contemporary self-help literature [Orlin 131]). At the very least, it would have added ammunition to the existing arsenal, making wives’ attempts to seek justice in the face of violence that much more difficult.

<sup>11</sup> Valerie Wayne traces the roots of companionate marriage back to Old Testament sources, and of course Adam and Eve offer this theory's first articulation. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that this long heritage does not guarantee the stability of the theory; if anything, its articulation within the shifting social landscape of early modern England would have rendered newly problematic what earlier eras may have taken for granted as without contradiction. For an example of a conduct text which explicitly engages egalitarianism as a possible marriage model, see Tilney.

<sup>12</sup> I am inclined to mention Tamyra's performance of martyrdom in *Bussy d'Ambois* here, which has always struck me, as a modern reader and viewer, to be almost comically overdetermined as Tamyra exults her wounds as signs of love and scrawls messages in her blood, though I am well aware that my perspective is anachronistic. I will consider another such extreme performance of martyrdom below in my discussion of the contemporary French artist Orlan.

<sup>13</sup> Cynthia Marshall provocatively suggests that just such a disquieting self-consciousness is the inevitable result of *any* experience of witnessing acts of martyrdom by proxy (she considers specifically the reading witness in making this claim), as the witness is offered the impossible choice of either masochistic identification with the martyr's suffering body, or the difficult promise of adopting the martyr's "profundity of faith" (which is ostensibly the goal but not necessarily simple in its achievement) (*Shattering* 100). The reading witness, in Marshall's formula, is an ideal witness who questions – one whose own subject position is consistently thrown into question by the act of witnessing, one who is invited by that act to contemplate the materiality, the material formation, of his or her own identity.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Gutierrez also connects Anne's and Katherine's experiences ("Exorcism by Fasting" 47-8).

<sup>15</sup> For a compelling analysis of the role the bed, with its white-sheet associations of penitence, plays in the Jacobean punitive scene, see Coyle.

<sup>16</sup> Comensoli has been careful to point out that domestic tragedy typically both incorporates and resists its didactic models (25-6); in aligning *Woman Killed* with revenge tragedy I by no means wish to imply that as a domestic tragedy it is unsuccessful in querying and exposing the hegemony of received social paradigms.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Coyle, in opposition to my argument, envisions *Woman Killed* as an ideal model of the punitive scene, taking umbrage with the argument that the play invites a critique of "its attitudes and values" (30). Coyle, like Panek and Michael McClintock, characterizes the violence in this play as "psychological cruelty" (31), part of the play's focus on inwardness, privacy, and the emergent bourgeois individual (see also Orlin). I would argue in response that this focus on the psychic forecloses the possibility that the play's violence may be responding to a much less "inward" kind.

<sup>18</sup> In her exceptionally thorough survey of Medieval women's food practices, Caroline Walker Bynum notes that, by the later Middle Ages, the traditional cyclical fasts of early Christianity had given way to a doctrine of moderation, in which leaders and thinkers as diverse as Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas argued that spiritual rather than physical abstinence was the true path to God and, moreover, that excessive asceticism was a lesser virtue than moderate eating. In their summation, fasting without temperance was more vice than virtue as it set cart before horse and prevented the efficient completion of duties (42-5). Bynum goes on to argue later in her study for the subversive value of women's extreme fasts in just this context: as she notes, fasting became a means of control for Medieval women, a way to avoid undesired marriages and household drudgery and to critique from within the domesticating practices of a liberalizing church that would fix women in a "tidy, moderate, decent, second-rate place" (243), out of range of true spiritual communion and genuine self-determination. Nancy Gutierrez ("Exorcism by Fasting") follows this trend in her reading of Anne's fast, arguing that her self-starvation is meant as a direct critique of the more moderate Anglican doctrine evident in the conduct material, and against which Puritan extremists were reacting in early seventeenth-century England. I do not wish to dispute either of these excellent studies, whose understandings of the complex position food occupied in the social life of early women seem to me to be valuable contributions to our ongoing discourse about female bodily agency. I do want to point out, though, that Anne's fast is neither moderate nor extreme in the conventional sense Bynum articulates, but thoroughly problematic in that it results in her death, and in fact in a death blessed neither by a clergyman, nor by the hand of God directly (to female mystics whose extreme asceticism claimed a power that far surpassed that posited for lay folk by the moderate church, Christ would routinely 'appear' directly. We might argue that Kate Stubbes, at least in her husband's invention, falls into this category). Anne's fast results not in power but in wasting; she is not being elevated but is rather being, quite plainly, domesticated

by the reincorporation of her body into Frankford's, by his reiteration, at her deathbed, of the doctrine of companionism, the very kind of moderate, binding marital arrangement so many ascetics strove against.

<sup>19</sup> See Deleuze and Félix Guattari's explanation of this term in "What is a Minor Literature?" (*Kafka* 16-27).

<sup>20</sup> The ear is an easy target for early modern poison-bearers, we might remember.

<sup>21</sup> All scholarly summaries must as a matter of course leave out what are often significant details, and this one is no exception. Rose nuances her argument about the meaning of the Duchess' death somewhat as she argues that the Jacobean drama is a proving ground for forward-thinking social ideologies, one which must elegize old forms deliberately in order to make way tentatively for the advent of the new (140).

<sup>22</sup> Note the difference from the early modern axiom that inward man and outward show ought, in a proper subject, to accord: I am not implying that the Duchess reverts to an earlier paradigm in which self can be read on the body; I am rather suggesting that the Duchess conceives of her inner self as a function of her *accumulated worldly experience*, an experience she will not elide as Ferdinand and Bosola both, in their separate ways, demand.

<sup>23</sup> From, for example, Stanislavski's method of physical action to the more "post-modern" body theatres of artists such as Robert Lepage.

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted here to the long critical tradition in performance studies and elsewhere that argues for the realization of self in performance.

<sup>25</sup> For Ferdinand, we might remember, bodies are parts, images – severed hands, wax figures – rather than an accumulation of sensations and experiences. He and his sister differ in their understanding of performance insofar as they differ in their understanding of embodiment.

<sup>26</sup> I am making this acting tradition exemplary here only to illustrate my point; I do not wish to imply that it is in any way more significant than parallel traditions which reject the lamination of character to acting body, as Elin Diamond once termed it (see "Brechtian Theory").

<sup>27</sup> The Duchess' final words actually come only after she has briefly revived on lines 343-7 to call for Antonio and then for mercy. Bosola interprets this gesture as her acceptance, at last, of heaven's grace, using the opportunity to sanctify her as a "sacred innocen[t]" as he regrets her death like a properly penitent tyrant (l. 349). I would prefer to read the Duchess' last words as a continuation of her body focus, as a call to those still living to have mercy on Antonio, as an extension of her dying body into the space of his still-living flesh.

<sup>28</sup> On the strength of *Victims Ready* Finley won a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, but it was subsequently denied her as the NEA was pressured to ensure no family-unfriendly artists were supported with public money. The resulting legal challenge took her and three other artists all the way to the Supreme Court, and made national headlines for several years.

<sup>29</sup> As *Victims Ready* progresses, Finley covers herself in candy hearts as a symbol of desire, bean sprouts to represent semen, and finally tinsel, "because, no matter how badly a woman has been treated, she'll still get it together to dress for dinner" (*Different Kind of Intimacy* 84).

<sup>30</sup> Lynda Goldstein guesses that Finley's unorthodox "melding" of "food imagery and problematic sexuality" is a major source of discomfort for her viewers (100), and indeed her naughty appropriation of chocolate in *Victims Ready* galvanized her opponents, who took back its pleasurable connotations by simultaneously deriding and sexualizing her as a "nude, chocolate-smearred young woman" (qtd. in Goldstein 110).

<sup>31</sup> The photos of the original performance collected in *Artist Body* show a disturbing trend toward humiliation; while Marina's body never came to physical harm, clearly many participants were intent on pushing the limits.

<sup>32</sup> *Rhythm 0* embeds the expectation that participants will employ the instruments on the table beyond their conventional functions; the rose, for example, appears to be used at one point for both adornment and humiliation (*Artist Body* 88-9).

<sup>33</sup> In "Intervention" Orlan rather glibly suggests that any pain she might experience after the surgeries is at least less than the pain of childbirth, a "tribute to Nature" she hasn't paid, and so she considers herself lucky in the former (326).



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<sup>34</sup> This is also, no doubt, something of a send-up of the claims of traditional “body art” (see “Intervention” 319).

**Chapter Four**  
**Veils That Connect:**  
**The In/visible Act and the Feminist Witness to Violence**

You grant me space, you grant me my space.  
But in so doing you have always already  
taken me away from my expanding place.  
Luce Irigaray, *Elemental Passions* 47

I began my last chapter with a retelling of one of Freud's most infamous tales – that of little Ernst, his clever grandson, and the game he concocts with his reel of string. I noted the subtle but insistent way in which Ernst's play transforms (over and over again, each time the story is told) his mother's body into sign and language, permitting him to erase her physical presence from his catalogue of need as he forges a place for himself as a functioning social subject. I want now to return to the scene of Ernst's play – or rather, to the scene of Freud's witnessing of Ernst's play, and to the acknowledgement and eventual acceptance of the final disappearance of the daughter-mother's body which that play, for the grandfather perhaps more than for the grandson, implies.<sup>1</sup> This return – no repetition, but a return with difference – aims to pull a different thread than the one Freud unravels as he plays with Ernst's reel; it slips past the spotlight he shines on his preferred interpretation of the scene and beyond the curtains that mark its offstage space, the limits of his imagining. It aims also, most critically, to push beyond the limits of my own previous interpretation of the scene, for explored at its depths this is not simply a story that narrates the forgetting of the female suffering body, that absents the damaged and dying mother; the story of Ernst's *fort/da* forgets, most forcefully, the connection *between* his mother's body and his own even as he tries ostensibly to reproduce it, breaks and discards the space of empathy and intimacy they once shared as he adopts a language based on the recognition of her only as a sign of his own self-mastery. This folding of

other into self, as I have argued, has long been a source of women's physical as well as psychic and social suffering; I will now argue that the lost space between bodies made iconic in its absence from Ernst's scene may in fact be a paradigm through which we can imagine new, more productive relations between spectators, acts of violence against women on the stage, and the history of that violence's theatrical and cultural representation.

Freud positions himself paradoxically as he narrates the story of his grandson's game. He reminds us that his examination of the boy's activity was hardly a controlled scientific experiment, for he was living in the same house as the boy and his parents at the time; in so admitting he casts himself in the role of close observer, a body intimately connected with the other bodies in the story, but yet also as someone whose interpretation may easily be adopted as a basic, objective transcription of the scene, pseudo-scientific despite itself. He is there; he sees; he knows. The ease with which Freud folds his daughter's interpretation of Ernst's game into his own lends credence to his position as reliable chronicler. Hence we rarely question the basics of the story, including Freud's focus on the reel of string as its centrepiece. But this focus on the reel – its disconcerting ability to mesmerize, to hypnotize the reader as Freud dangles it back and forth – masks other, equally central components. Jacques Derrida reminds us of two important though elided facts. First, while Ernst's reel is supposed to represent his absent mother as he plays at controlling her disappearance and return, it in fact comes to represent none other than Freud himself, the little boy's "privileged contract with the grandfather" and his work: "as if the grandson, by offering him a mirror of his writing, were in advance dictating to him what (and where) he had to set down on paper [...] as if Freud were

making a return to Freud through the connivance of a grandson who dictates from his spool” (303). The cord does not bind Sophie, not even at the distance of language. Freud usurps her place at its other end, holding his grandson in place, locking him into theory, into his own legacy, collapsing the space between them – between Freud’s family name, Derrida reminds us, and that of Ernst, which is different, is his own father’s (302) – with an assertion of mastery over their differences, a folding of both son and absent daughter into the name and the fame of the father of psychoanalysis. Second, Derrida points out that Ernst is not in his bed when he plays at throwing his string away, but is rather on the floor, throwing his string *into* the curtains that veil his bed. The game is played in and with the curtain; it – not the string, not Freud, and not Freud’s eventual readers and interpreters – is Ernst’s primary interlocutor. This detail makes Freud uneasy; he wonders why Ernst will not play at pulling the string like a carriage or train, will not play as Freud wishes him to (“the [grand]father would have played carriage,” Derrida remarks glibly [314-15]), and then quickly glosses over both his unease and the detail of the curtain, isolating his director’s spotlight on the reel of string. Derrida gets excited about this elision for a moment, remarking that of course the curtains are Sophie, are her hymen – raising the spectre of the primal scene that animates all Freud’s writing but to which Freud himself will not return – but he then refuses to elaborate, implying, in his rush to move ahead with more important matters, that such a detail requires not much more elaboration (308).

Derrida rigorously deconstructs the deceptive position of close yet impartial observer Freud constructs for himself as he relates Ernst’s game, arguing that the fort/da is a model for Freud’s own circuitous and self-evidentiary writing process throughout

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. To symbolize Freud's determined but altogether unmarked shift from curtains and veils to reel and string – his shift away from the bond of son/mother to that of grandson/grandfather, symbol of bodily intimacy to symbol of scientific authority – Derrida shifts in turn the accepted notation of fort/da, labeling it henceforth fort:da. This deliberate re-marking enacts in text the specificity Derrida ascribes to the scene of Ernst's play: "the *fort* is not any more distant than the *da* is here," he writes, positing the game as a means of mastering the other by holding it at a distinct and controlled distance from the self in the same way a colon articulates a relation between a subject and something meant to illustrate and confirm its status as subject (321). Derrida's decision to alter his notation comes at a price, however, for it is deeply revealing of his own position relative both to Freud and to the scene he constructs. As he acknowledges yet dismisses the connection to body he reads briefly into the curtains around Ernst's bed, Derrida replaces the slash (/) – mark of jointure, of space between, of the interpenetration of bodies and ideas separate yet conjoined – with the colon, mark of causal logic, of narrative (370), of things self-evident sutured together in the service of one. Though he is excellent at recalling Sophie to the scene of her father's story and her son's play, as Derrida shifts fort/da into fort:da and ascribes the latter to Freud's psychic and intellectual process he takes us further from the bodies on which the whole scene rests, and cracks into two punctuating halves the mark of connection between them. Sophie is omnipresent in Derrida's text, but she remains a hymen, a barrier or obstacle to be surmounted in the skew(er)ing of Freud's narrative; the deeper implications – and possibilities – of the curtained bed, meanwhile, remain buried.

This chapter is all about curtains and veils, thinly veiled offstage space, what it hides, and what it asks us to imagine – beyond the narrative conventionally offered, beyond the split into two the curtain occasions. It tempers the somewhat disheartening implications of chapter two – in which I suggested that sexual violence can only with difficulty, and then never fully, be witnessed – with the more hopeful message conveyed by chapter three’s witness who questions and engages – who rejects the signifier that forgets the body in violence – in order to produce a new audience model, a feminist witness to violence. My three central dramatic intertexts here – Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* (1622), Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988), and Tomson Highway’s *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* (1989) – all stage acts of violence against women as what I termed in my first chapter “in/visible acts.” The invisible act is the moment of violence veiled but not absented: the lost representation is hidden yet palpably so, because the act happens in front of us but not before our eyes, in real time yet beyond our full grasp; we hear and feel its happening yet also feel our inability to reach it, to experience and assimilate it in normal cathartic fashion. We are all Tituses for a moment, faced with a structurally central, dramatically tense scene that leaves us staring at image not quite rendered, at our failure to see, at the wall that marks the edge of the stage’s knowable terrain, the edge of representation’s conscious space. The in/visible act stages the moment when stage pictures quite blatantly, quite self-consciously, fail to materialize (or materialize somehow uncannily, jar somehow against the promise of materialization), but it also takes both its critical message and its imaginative possibility from that failure. Instead of a scene of violence against women, the in/visible act stages the act of witnessing violence against women as a creative

responsibility and an ethical choice. It captures our discomfort and our frustration at not being permitted to see easily, but in so doing offers us an invitation: to connect in other ways, via other senses and cognitive processes, to the missed moment, to assume responsibility for imagining the scene – the *whole* scene, everything it hides – ourselves.

When I speak of imagining I refer to a practice both passionate and critical, for exercising imagination is never a simple matter of conjuring an image to replace what has been lost. Imagination eschews the simplicity of image made for ocular consumption, the ruse of *objet a*. To imagine a scene is to recognize something of what *objet a* works to conceal: the stuff that gets routinely edited out of the frame; the stuff that makes the rendered image that much simpler, smoother, less honest and less interesting; the stuff that reveals the viewer in the act of looking, his or her complicity in the image's making. Because it is an activity that makes up for the avowed poverty of a singular sensory experience (the avowed poverty of the image), imagination also requires the engagement of several senses, an awareness of sound, smell, touch, and their cognitive reproduction in the spectator's mind. When I speak of imagining an act of violence against women made consciously invisible, I refer to the complex cognitive conjuring able to bring that act to life in a manner attuned both to its place in the specific history of violence's representation and to the role the spectator has played in the shaping of that history. The in/visible act is theatre as personal risk and artistic challenge: instead of heeding the comforting promises of language so adept at making pain disappear, or wishing in vain for the image made plain and seemingly comprehensible – the promise of a representation that, as we have seen, is always already a disavowal – are we willing to take up the gauntlet thrown down by the canny refusal to stage the image of violence, by

the politicized disavowal of a representation always already disavowed, strike out together and imagine *ourselves*, our witnessing practice, into the theatrical void? To take the risk, as I will argue, is to make possible a much more complex and productive engagement with the absent(ed) suffering body.

#### 1. Through the wound to the space between

Before I explore Luce Irigaray's response to Jacques Derrida's response to Freud – for it is Irigaray who comes to excavate the curtained bed, to restore the integrity and reinvigorate the meaning of the punctuation Derrida splits (at Freud's behest) in two – I want to tell a story of my own. It is, to be sure, no “children's story” like the one Irigaray tells in reply to Freud's story of child's play (*Sexes* 25), but it speaks nevertheless to Irigaray's intervention and its implications for my development of a critical, feminist witness to the performance of women's violence and suffering. This chapter marks the culmination of a study that has wondered, at bottom, what it has meant, and what it might mean, to be such a witness, for witnessing, at its best, is nothing if not imaginative: it entails a recognition of another's experience, an appreciation of one's position within it, an engagement with the multiple angles and exposures of that experience both within and beyond its linear communication to an audience, and, in many cases, an impulse to action based on that engagement. Witnessing is also a whole-body, multi-sensory activity that eschews the conventions of catharsis; it is an attempt to feel one's way into another's skin that entails no drive to possess or master, and no drive to repudiate or disavow. To witness violence against women, on the other hand, has historically too often meant to see (or not to see, anxiously, *pace* Titus Andronicus) with vicious selectivity, to reclassify



experience in an impulse to selfish action that has left aside the bodily and psychic wounds of violence's victims. The eye and the word, as I have argued in my previous two chapters, have been the failed witness's twin poles of privilege – the twin poles of Lacan's Symbolic order, the twin poles of a dichotomous psychic structure itself built on an eye blind to the horrific sexual violence implied at its mythic centre. In my story (rather unlike Freud's) the central witness fails not despite but because of his faith in his eye and his word, and from his very failure the possibility emerges that there might be a space *between* this suffocating dichotomy, a space where the control of language and the supposed omniscience of eye give way to an understanding based on alternative sensory experiences, and on the imaginative epistemologies they provoke.

'tis a heart,  
A heart, my lords, in which mine is entombed:  
Look well upon't; d'ee know't?  
*'Tis Pity She's a Whore* 5.6.27-29

This is the story of Annabella, though it is often mistaken as the story of Giovanni. Giovanni and Annabella are siblings. They are also lovers, and she is pregnant with his child. She has been married off, and though her marriage has not ended her incestuous liaison, it has driven Giovanni to jealous distraction. Meanwhile, her husband, Soranzo, is enraged at her betrayal, and has at last learned the name of his rival. Soranzo's birthday feast is now to be the scene of Giovanni's unmasking and punishment. Annabella, meanwhile, has been swept up not only in the tide of events that are partially of her own making, but also in the cruelties of love and its professions. Her husband tortures her: he promises to "rip up" her heart (4.3.53) and read there the name of her unborn baby's father. Later, she finds herself magically subject to the violence of

this oath as Giovanni, in an attempt to capture her love for all time (and to thwart Soranzo's claim to it in the bargain), murders his sister and then tears her heart from her body. He enters to the assembled dignitaries at Soranzo's party bearing Annabella's heart on his sword, proclaiming ownership over her affections in perpetuity.

The violent extreme to which Giovanni goes in order to ensure possession of Annabella sounds a bit like a fairy tale, except that it stuns the crowd, both onstage and in the auditorium, with its disturbing implications.<sup>2</sup> His act makes literal the language of love – the claims that claim ownership over another's heart – and manifests in startling fashion the violence embedded within it, the violence of courtly love narratives, of two who become one. Giovanni stages the anxieties underlying every early modern punitive scene:<sup>3</sup> he would reclaim his lover's heart, make it his own, and in order for that reclamation to be incontrovertible it needs to be physical. He needs to cut the heart out, make the internal external, the invisible visible, transparent. Only then can everyone see Annabella's true allegiance for themselves, bear witness to his act of love.

Except, of course, that no one does see Annabella's allegiance in the hunk of bleeding flesh Giovanni proffers. Vasques, the play's malcontent and keenest wit, answers Giovanni's triumphant entrance with "What strange riddle's this?" (5.6.30), summing up the confusion around the table. Giovanni fantasizes that the heart speaks for itself, *shows* its proof to assembled eyes, but he underestimates the breadth of its potential signification, the opacity of its flesh. If Annabella's heart, raised in expectation that it will body forth some kind of truth claim, finally shuts down signification, it is because the heart displays the very process of substitution on which signification relies. It exposes the poverty of language and the poverty of the eye: it is language made literal (you

belong to me; I will rip your heart out), and, as Karen Finley's work similarly demonstrates, one cannot make language literal without inviting its breakdown. Language is an economy of substitutes; we cannot see what we say, because both seeing and saying take the place of the secret heart of our desires. To see the heart ripped out is not to see that secret heart of desire – of Giovanni's desire – but rather to find oneself confronted with the endless loop of substitutes that operates desire. Annabella's heart, revealed in this shockingly physical way, stands in for symbolism itself, becomes an icon not of love but of loss, of the wound that marks the split in the subject of psychoanalysis, that initiates him or her into Lacan's Symbolic with the sinking feeling of doubt that accompanies the momentary certainty that one has got it, that one is complete, after all. The heart is no path to enlightenment but is rather that "sense of impediment" of "failure, split" "by which the subject feels himself overcome, by which he finds both more and less than he expected" (Lacan, *FFC* 25). It is a *trompe l'oeil* of the first order, a veil revealing only its most troubling secret.

Giovanni is in many ways still a child, and though their consequences are serious his actions are a kind of macabre game. Like Ernst, he seeks a simultaneous return to and repudiation of his primal home inside the female body; his sword and arm are his string and reel, and he produces Annabella's heart expressly to master that home, to transform its fleshiness into language, his language. The experiment goes awry because the heart marks the limit of what may be known by sight, and as such becomes uncanny when divorced from Annabella's body. In matters of love, the heart is known proverbially when heard or felt, ear pressed against lover's heart, heart beating in time against lover's breast. It is also the organ that initiates the deeply embedded web of connections (the

transfer of blood, food, breath, love) between pregnant mother and child *in utero* (accessible in the modern world only by a proxy eye, the ultrasound machine), and marks in turn the limit of what either Giovanni or Soranzo may see, know, or possess of Annabella's pregnant body. Like Freud, and like Derrida after, Giovanni fixates on the myths and beliefs centering around Annabella's hymen – romanticized seat of the mystery of women's sexual fidelity – only to forget to pay any serious heed to the spectre of her womb. Yet in her womb Annabella carries a body that speaks to the complexity of connections her body bears to the others in her world: her brother's flesh, the baby would be raised by her husband under his name, yet properly own the name of her father and brother, which is also her own. The fetus is more than a threat to the basic workings of patrilineage, for were it to be granted its proper patrimony it would have to be acknowledged as both its mother's and its father's namesake and heir. The baby in Annabella's belly therefore carries with it the possibility of realizing an entirely different set of social relations between male and female bodies in a culture still deeply and violently patriarchal.<sup>4</sup> Its threat and promise is nothing less than a renovation of the architecture of patriarchy, the architecture of the Symbolic order, where other is collapsed into self and no space is left between bodies to rejuvenate the old or to create something new (Irigaray, *Sexes* 46).

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In her reading of the fort/da scene,<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray picks up Freud's thread at the point where Derrida leaves it dangling – in front of Ernst's curtained bed – and makes the connection beyond hymen (space of primal terror) to womb (seat of primal comfort) that neither seem willing to articulate. Like Annabella's, Irigaray's womb is not a mythic but

a rigorously materialist space, a place inaccessible to the eye and therefore laden with the potential to overturn its epistemological privilege, its uncanny ability to gender and then hierarchize bodies and bodily experiences. Working with the figure of the veil ignored by Freud and dismissed too quickly by Derrida, Irigaray replies to their refusals by doubling it. Veils are slippery in her text. On one hand, they mark the separation of bodies that animates Freud's reading of Ernst's game, and in that partitioning capacity operate "the scene of belief and the scene of truth" (*Sexes* 27): our unquestioned faith in language and the truths it purports to report about ourselves and our proper relations to others, our unquestioned belief in certain "dogmas, rites that are in part sacrificial and repressive" (28). On the other, veils forge connections between bodies; they are a kind of second skin, the connective membrane of the womb-space ignored by those who advocate the veil of separation as a necessary entrance into culture, a necessary precursor to the veil of belief. The veil that connects moves us beyond Derrida's hymen into a space that exists "[e]ven before the hymen" (38, emphasis in original), both behind it physically, and beyond the scope of its often damaging, violent mythology. Irigaray privileges the veiled bed over the reel of string in her telling of Ernst's story only to go beyond what is left untold in the narrative of the spool and the casual dismissal of the curtain as hymen. Moving "beyond" the veil that separates – a calculated textual echo of both the title of Freud's text and Derrida's fixation with the impulse to mastery that is in his reading the "beyond" of Freud's pleasure principle – toward this second veil that connects bodies through touch rather than sight in a physical empathy not followed by the reflex action of cathartic rejection is critical to Irigaray's renovation of the space of the psychoanalytic Imaginary. Her Imaginary is the iconic space of the womb before and beyond its

oppressive representation in a distancing language, a space where a metaphysics of touch, hearing, sense and the sensual supplant the Imaginary's traditional metaphysics of sight, of the other seen as a part of the self. It is, in other words, a space not of image, but of subversive imagination.

Irigaray is specific about the function of Ernst's curtains: like the reel of string, they partition rather than connect, representing his wish to return to a safe primal space only to discard it. The curtains are his hiding place, a place where he plays "hide and seek [...] with himself alone" (34). For his game to succeed (and to satisfy Freud), "a more or less transparent veil [is] needed that ensures a certain number of passages between him and her within representation, a certain number of repetitions in which he believes he masters the mother, completely" (35). This veil is the curtain in front of which Ernst, Freud and later Derrida play a scene of mastery in which the curtain itself is more or less ignored, but as a tool of mastery the curtain is also ripe for appropriation. As in *Speculum of the Other Woman* – where she strips Plato's cave of its mimetic qualities and grants it instead the subversive power of mimicry, of the mirror that deflects and transforms<sup>6</sup> – Irigaray strips the bed of its curtains, the son of "the means or mediator of his *fort-da*," and "give[s]" them "back to the *angels*" (35, emphasis in original).

The angels are messengers from "beyond" the "ultimate veil" (35), which in Irigaray's parlance refers both to the veil of dogmatic belief that separates us (particularly women, especially women in a traditionally Catholic society) from God, and to the veil that operates beyond the visual field – the membrane of connective tissue, of skin against skin reminiscent of that space in which communication is possible between two bodies open to contact with one another on a level more primal and more equitable than that of

spoken language and cautious eye contact. The angels stand in for bodies not yet made transparent, readable, not yet sexed or gendered (35). They are not babies in the womb; Irigaray's imaginative work here is in no way literal or biologist. They are, however, representative of the unrealized symbolic potential of the placental experience, of the womb as an "expanding place" (*Elemental Passions* 47) able to accommodate the other without transforming the other into the same. Edward Casey suggests that Irigaray's notion of the elastic maternal body comes from women's long history of confinement, of being made to inhabit infinitely small enclosures, of being rendered placeless by a denigration of the transformative powers of their bodies' internal spaces (see also Grosz, "Woman"). The female body in Irigaray's configuration is no constricted vessel, *pace* Aristotle, but is rather "doubly open: open to oneself within oneself and open to the other outside oneself" (Casey 325); it is symbolic of the space between bodies so effectively collapsed by the entry into the Symbolic order and the adoption of the language of possession (this is me; you are mine). The angels are not available to be assimilated by another's identification because they do not conform to the usual pattern of interpersonal behaviour in Symbolic space. They never stand still, nor do they look at one another, though they face one another with their bodies (Irigaray, *Sexes* 45), "decod[e]" one another by marking one another's skin (36).

Irigaray's discourse on the spatial properties of the angels allows her to appropriate the over-mythologized space of the womb and return it to its proper status as a material place, a body-architecture, just as she appropriates and transforms Plato's cave into a feminist theatre in *Speculum*. Once the veil of separation is discarded, the space of the angels emerges as "time and space with no partitions" (41): "[e]ach person and all

things rest in one another, flow one into the other unconfined” (51). The dynamic energy of Irigaray’s rejuvenated Imaginary swirls around no single enclosure – no primal or first home, the space Ernst alternately yearns for and rejects, the collapsed house that is the Symbolic’s preferred dwelling place – but operates instead on the principle of “movement to and fro” (51): it is a space whose contours are defined by the constantly shifting, forming and reforming space *between* bodies, the space that allows individuals to be both distinct from yet connected to one another, empathetic yet distanced enough to be thoughtful, provocative, partners in a creative enterprise.<sup>7</sup> The space of angels is an architectonic of the body, a spatial articulation of social relations in a paradigm not exclusively nor even primarily visual: operating beyond the “veiling-unveiling activity of the gaze” (49), it is “a *fort-da* far more sophisticated than the reel” that approaches “something divine that cannot be seen *but can be felt*” (45, my emphasis).

## 2. The architecture of in/visibility: veils that connect

In my first chapter, I described the “in/visible act” as violence made conspicuously absent, a representational strategy that foregrounds our failure to see violence against women and in the process calls forth a history of similar failure. As we see ourselves not seeing, I argued, we encounter not an image missed, but rather *the very image of the miss*, the sensation of lack that (as Lacan posits) codes all seeing, the reflex gesture of refusal that typically characterizes an encounter with the sight of violence, and the specific, systemic, culturally loaded gesture of refusal that has characterized our encounter with violence against women in dramatic and other cultural representations since the Greeks. The in/visible act, in most basic terms, stages violence against women



as an audience's act of disavowal, performs our culture's freighted relationship to women's bodies in violence by funneling it through our immediate, physical inability to see. It generates what Catherine Belsey might call violence "at the level of the signifier" – a representation that makes its meaning by interrogating the assumptions underlying the very process of violence's representation, its history, and its ongoing impact on the way in which we choose to recognize violence against women for ourselves.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, a conspicuous veil, as Derrida's reaction to Freud's elision aptly demonstrates, is not in and of itself a guarantor of subversion, of "history at the level of the signifier" (Belsey 5) seamlessly communicated to readers and spectators. Irigaray's reading of the *fort/da* embeds both the veil's separating function and its connecting function, and the interplay between these functions forms the figurative basis for her argument: only once the partitioning function of the veil of language and belief (or language-as-belief) becomes apparent can we begin to apprehend the potential for remaking relations between subjects in another paradigm, represented by the space of angels, the veil that connects. At the same time, only by recognizing the validity of a mode of communication between bodies based not in language and vision, but on other sensory and imaginative perception, can we come to acknowledge fully the poverty of experience represented by the partitioning veil. Irigaray's reconfiguration of Imaginary space raises both veils in order that they may work dialectically to demonstrate the real and urgent need for the creative work possible only in the space left unencumbered between subjects; in the plays I have chosen to examine here, the critical potential of the in/visible act is realized by a similar dialectic manifest in the architectural arrangement of the stage.

Looking back at the plays and performance events I have considered in previous chapters, we might note the extent to which the configuration of space has mattered in this matter of violence against women. From the patriarchal enclosures (Stallybrass) subjugating Lavinia, Anne Frankford and the Duchess of Malfi to the tyranny of Wagner's mass grave and the sinister claustrophobia of Finley's refrigerator, architecture makes possible not only acts of violence themselves (they are implied, as I argued in chapter three, in the confining structure of the early modern English household), but more specifically their elision; remember that Freud's daughter signals her final disappearance from her son's conscious and her father's intellectual space by literally leaving the room. The seamless, normalized arrangement of space makes the encounter with violence and its patriarchal reconfiguration seem equally seamless, natural – or at the very least unworthy of critical examination.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, *The Changeling*, *Love of the Nightingale* and *Dry Lips* actively disrupt this kind of naturalization by splitting their stages in half at the crucial moment of violence: on one side of the curtain, the central violent encounter is masked; on the other, we confront an onstage audience steadfastly refusing to acknowledge the act taking place paces away, steadfastly clinging to the disingenuous safety of the veil separating them from it. This is not an act of violence against a woman experienced as something easily rationalized or dismissed (as love, revenge, punishment, grace); this is the act of violence experienced *as* its dismissal, violence in the very moment of its elision, the spectator caught in the act of disavowal because disavowal has, by an uncanny sleight of hand, become the primary focus of stage representation. The veil that separates is made manifest in these plays; what remains to be forged – by audiences faced with the undesirable option of identifying with surrogate spectators hell-

bent on seeing only what they want to see, on refusing to recognize the bond between their bodies and those under siege – is the veil that connects.

How is this other, more urgent and more subversive veil realized? The ideal in/visible act divorces the image of a woman's body in violence from the sound and sense of violence, troubling vision, emphasizing non-visual perception, and throwing responsibility for imagining both the act and the complexity of its consequences – the psychic incoherence I explored in chapter two, the distressing refusal of body I examined in chapter three – onto the viewer. The split stages of Middleton and Rowley, Wertebaker and Highway challenge the very basis of our sensorial perception in the theatre by calling into question the evidence of our eyes, the privilege of their episteme: in the moment the act disappears from view (but not from earshot or conscious perception) our eyes no longer see what we know to be true, what we know to be, in some measure of dramatic action, happening. The act enters elsewhere, at our ears, perhaps in a quickened pulse; we hear the screams of offstage victims and they position us to challenge the disavowing poses struck by those on stage who compete for our attention. The in/visible act supplants the primacy of the eye in order to awaken our perception of all that the eye conceals, building its dramatic episteme through a dual refusal to reveal the image of violence and to fully authorize the onstage audience's disavowal of that violence. In place, we are invited to question accounts and to fill in missed details using our ears, our hearts, our imaginations. The in/visible act thus carves a critical space for interrogation between our incomplete experience of the missed act and our desire to know the complete story, the back story, to act as better, more reliable witnesses than those on stage.

The space between bodies, in Irigaray's *Imaginary*, is not only a space of temporary community and communal making; it is also a space in which perspective is possible, essential, a space of critical distance in which lessons from the past (the lessons of Plato, of Freud, of Derrida) are incorporated into present understanding in order that they may help to mold the shape of future change. It is a utopic space<sup>10</sup> that holds remarkable potential as a model for the feminist spectator of violence: combining the best intentions of Aristotelian identification and Brechtian distance, it promises a critical compassion, a viewer who will resist absorbing the experiences of the watched other into the watching self but will also reject the coolness of the detached eye, who will recognize the responsibility that attaches to an audience's reciprocal relationship with spectacle and will consequently be willing to project him or herself, however temporarily, into the empty space of the absent act in order to seek details previously elided. The feminist witness to violence, like Irigaray, would prefer to plumb the depths of her connection to another where that connection is visually or linguistically severed. She is a witness willing to imagine a more profound experience of violence than a thwarted spectacle would seem on the surface to offer – to imagine the experience in terms of its bodily and psychic complexity, and in the context of its fraught and all-too-palpable history.

The slash (/) that conventionally both separates and connects *fort* and *da* is the inscription of body against body, of the space between bodies within which we might imagine one another's physical and psychic experiences and our relations to them; it is the textual mark of the veil that connects us to the body in violence forgotten, linking us both to that body's experience and, perhaps more crucially for a critical performance of violence against women, to the history of its forgetting. My second chapter staged the

hole as metaphor for the gap that lies between the experience of sexual violence and our ability to see and know it; in my third chapter, the echo, mark of the witness who questions, suggested the possibility of recalling something of another's experience of violence, of re-membering our connection to other bodies beyond the seductive promise of the distancing Word. In this final chapter, the in/visible act puts into play the veil that connects – connects an audience to the body in violence, and to an all-too-easily elided history of violence's evasion and effacement – via the ear and the imagination, all the while remembering the eye as emissary of the veil that separates, that threatens to prevent our critical engagement with both body and history.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Hot materiality

Beneath its russet wood, a wardrobe is a very white almond.  
To open it, is to experience an event of whiteness.  
Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* 81

Irigaray's articulation of space in *Sexes and Genealogies* and elsewhere has had a tremendous impact on recent feminist work in both geography and architecture (see, for example, Gillian Rose, and Grosz, "Woman"); in particular, the profound physicality of her intervention into the space of traditional psychoanalysis – her extended use of the metaphor of moving beyond the partitions set up by its theoretical conventions, for example – resonates provocatively against the work of radical feminist architecture theorists like Catherine Ingraham, Jennifer Bloomer, and Christine Hawley. For these thinkers, reimagining the conventions of classical architecture in turn allows them to transform their discipline into a truly "expanding place," in which architecture is not simply the translation of marks on blueprints into walls in space but may also encompass

writing, drawing (see Ingraham), and unconventional design work (such as Elizabeth Diller’s notorious “Bad Press” project) that play with the curves and folds the classical geometry of lines tends to ignore. Above all, this feminist practice erects its subversive scaffolding at the bend in the smooth, straight, unbroken line – harbinger of the smooth white wall – that has long been the icon of decorous, orderly, law-abiding architecture.<sup>12</sup>

The avowed goal of many feminist architects is to upend the classical reliance on the Appollonian male body as architecture’s guiding imago. The influential writings of Leon Battista Alberti in the 15<sup>th</sup> century posited buildings as “*a kind of body*” (Kruft 43, emphasis in original) whose orderly lines were the product of the mind, but whose material was “obtained from Nature” (43). The practice of drawing and building became a matter of taming this material, of organizing it in such a way that it would reveal in its physical structure the proper order of things. Calling a building a body had the useful effect of naturalizing man-made enclosure, thereby transforming the enclosure into an *a priori* effect of nature, organized by the disciplinary mind of the architect.

Ornamentation, which was considered by Alberti’s main theoretical predecessor, Vitruvius, to be intrinsic to buildings, became in Alberti’s discourse an after-market addition to an otherwise perfect frame, certainly welcome but not integral, and insofar as not integral, vaguely threatening. Ornament needed a strong hand; it was wild materiality until the architect could wrangle it to adhere to the proper purposes of its built frame (Kruft 48). Architecture thus grew, under the influence of Alberti and his followers, into a discipline that brought under organized surveillance and control the body’s excessive materiality – in other words, its *femininity*: “classical architecture theory dictates that the building should have the proportions of the body of a man, but the actual body that is

being composed, the material being shaped, is a woman” argues Mark Wigley (357). Architecture transforms the materiality it calls (conventionally enough) feminine into an icon of male strength, power, and disciplinary authority, and the resulting building becomes not a male body, but the mark of masculine control over the female body: “[t]he practices of ornamentation are regulated so that ornament represents and consolidates the order of the building it clothes, which is that of man. It is used to make that order visible. The domesticated woman is the mark of man, the material sign of an immaterial presence” (357). Diana Agrest has taken this argument further, arguing that the appropriation and re-ordering of the female body in service of the male architectural imago stretches far beyond matters of ornamentation and façade, to the very practice of building itself. Surveying a variety of classical writings on architectural practice, she explores the conventional characterization of building as a form of childbearing (365); the male architect births a building that is, in the tacit gendering of its weights and measures (so many feet, so many inches), always and only a boy. Women are denied entry even at the origin to which they can lay a supposedly undeniable claim; they are, thereby, denied entry to the creative process – the process of building, ordering, organizing – in any shape or form. Just as Freud reduces the relation between mother and child to discarded string, and Derrida falls short by stopping his excavation at the hymen, classical architecture theory abjects material female space by transforming it into the space of male creation, the bond that links son not to mother but to (grand)father.<sup>13</sup>

The rearing of classical architecture’s “proper” body depends on the integrity of the wall, its defining unit of meaning. Buildings as bodies are vulnerable to the same excesses, the same fluid overflows as actual bodies; the wall becomes a skin, its

whiteness and cleanness a container designed both to hide all undesirable matter, and to reveal, as in a *clin d'oeil*, a substitute image of pure interior surfaces (Wigley 355).

Walls, of course, not only reveal but also, principally, divide – in fact, they reveal division itself, and in this function they are essential to Alberti's architectonic. Walls protect private and public spaces from one another, the private spaces of men and women from one another, and the space of the hearth from threats to its sanctity, including threats posed by bodily waste and refuse, which Alberti argues must be sequestered at a distance from living space, “kept well away” (5: 151). The building as body functions, therefore, not only to order the body but to divide it from itself: the smooth, white wall fetishized by Alberti (6: 175) is a naturalized divider between unlike elements, functioning as both representation and reproduction of sexual difference, of the difference between body and self, of mind and (over) matter.

The wall is classical architecture's veil that separates, masking architecture's own elided materiality by purporting to offer a transparent truth about the structure of human relations in (and through) space.<sup>14</sup> No surprise, then, that radical feminist theory has advocated its own push “beyond” the wall and into the space that hermetically seals the forgotten epistemologies classical theory ignores. These theorists position their writing and practice at the point where “the image of the body [contained, enclosed, ordered] gives way to the possibilities of the body” (Bloomer 379) in its materiality, the expansive potential of inner surfaces not flattened into the two-dimensional space of the line on the blueprint or the wall it both represents and causes to appear. Catherine Ingraham, writing of the enclosed, self-satisfying logic of the blueprint, argues for a theory and practice that will investigate the very “hot materiality” embedded within the fetish of the “cool



geometric line” (267), seeking the moment when the “steril[e]” anatomy of the line gives way to “something fleshy or animal,” both “improper” yet “fertil[e]” (265). The wall becomes a curtain here, and the curtain loses its fort:da – its concealing/revealing function – in order to become potent in its folds, in the invitation it extends to follow a contour and discover a previously concealed, unimagined corridor. To break into the wall is to break through those barriers that structure the visual field as a feedback loop, guaranteeing the authority of the eye by placing a tangible yet seemingly natural limit on what can be seen. To break through the wall is, thus, to break out of out of the limited world of the eye and into the world of the imagination, where hands in fabric grope for new horizons.

How break into a wall and achieve more than just splinters? The “cool geometry” of the deceptively smooth wall is, of course, broken all the time in the modern home by closets. The closet marks the place where the wall buckles to produce a small chamber it both contains and disavows; closet doors are meant to be closed, to hide their (so often messy) contents from view. Yet closets are also spaces of extraordinary freedom: they are a safe space in which to imagine oneself differently, from which to emerge new-formed, a place where messiness and complexity – the jumble of garments and hangers – need not be a concern, a world of smell and touch and sight in which a (literally!) material record of the past collides with the potential for daily renewal.<sup>15</sup> Henry Urbach theorizes the modern closet’s threshold, a kind of antechamber he compares to the Deleuzian fold, as the epicentre of that closet’s shape-shifting potential; it is “a space that emerges, both within and against social relations, to constitute a space of self-representation at once connected to and free from social norms” (260). For Urbach, this space between closet

and room – the very place where the wall breaks up as the closet door opens, shattering its smooth line – is a “space of changing” (261), a place from which things unexpected may emerge. As Irigaray, Ingraham, and Bachelard understand, wardrobes, chests, enclosed beds, and other spaces of intimate domesticity hold the power of the poet: they are enclosures that defy the carceral logic of enclosure, bottomless spaces innocuous enough when closed, but whose depths conceal the potential to deconstruct and reimagine given relations between subject and world (Bachelard 85-9).

Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling* is a play about closets and their charged intimacy, their provocative but distressing power of change and renewal. Alsemero’s potion closet – his private space so grossly invaded by his deceitful wife in the play’s fourth act, the site of her punishment in the play’s final scene, and a space which often doubles for the madhouse of the subplot in performance – is the architectural centre of this play both in production and in most of its criticism. Yet a reading of the play that takes full account of what potential this extraordinarily slippery, malleable space might hold for Beatrice Joanna – and specifically for a more complete understanding of the violence done to her within its borders and throughout the play – has still to appear. What might it mean to reconfigure *The Changeling*’s spatial and social relations by transferring spiritual ownership of the closet (typically referred to as “Alsemero’s closet”) to Beatrice Joanna, and to assess the implications of that transfer on the central but unseen violence against her that marks the climax of the final scene? Can *The Changeling*’s closet become a place of changing – for Beatrice Joanna, for her witnesses, for the play’s critical heritage and for the violent representational history in which it participates?

Closets function doubly in the early modern architectural imaginary, as places of self-abnegation and places of self-actualization. Closets are best known as rooms for quiet reflection at the centre of early modern houses, but the term can also be applied to the receptacles to which human waste is consigned: “from sewers to toilets [...] [t]hey literally closet away the abject domain from the spatial representation of pure order” (Wigley 344).<sup>16</sup> The drive to “closet” the abject in the early modern period, as Wigley argues, derives from “the desire to establish a new sense of privacy in the house” (345), and thus reinforces the much more dominant definition of the closet as a place of private contemplation. The first private spaces in early modern homes were men’s studies, often represented only by a locked chest, cabinet or desk in a husband’s bedroom (347). Off limits to the rest of the household, this would be the secret dwelling-place of a man’s private papers, his private thoughts, and, more significantly, would come to demarcate a space of writing, a place where a man might recall himself to himself, and thereby articulate his (private) self, in the emerging genre of the memoir (348). Ironically, though women were considered to be the natural inhabitants of the house’s furthest interiors, and were likewise charged with the daily management of the surveillance the house maintained over the movements of their bodies (Alberti 5: 149), it was this private man’s study, and no woman’s space, that marked the house’s centre (Wigley 348; see also Alberti’s distinction between husbands’ and wives’ private spaces on 5: 149). Woman, whose body is the icon of unruly materiality in the period, cannot be permitted to enter the inner space of private contemplation, the space of the mind and of the imagination that the closet comes to denote; she is offered instead a private dressing-room, a space

where she may indulge her material impulses, but must end by arranging them in conformity with given standards of propriety.

Wigley's dual reading of the early modern closet implies a provocative dynamism for this space that would eschew the gross and leaky space of the body for the expansive space of the (male) mind. If it is true that the closet, as a private interior space in which a man might model his private self, his emergent interiority,<sup>17</sup> is "an intellectual space beyond [...] sexuality" (Wigley 347), it is also a space that embeds even as it denies sexuality and the physical workings of the body which have had to be "kept well away" in order that this new articulation of the closet as a sanitized interior space might emerge. The early modern closet as a space of reflection depends, in part, on all those things upon which it refuses to reflect as it establishes its borders: "distance is no longer the link between two visible objects in space but is the product of a mask whose surface is scrutinized for clues about what lies beyond it but can never simply be seen. An economy of vision founded on a certain blindness" (345). The closet is a veiled space of new imaginings erected at the expense of bodies, of the space between bodies, and of the space between body and world that is marked by fluid and secretion and is cut off by the erection of walls all around the newly privatized household. As I will argue, Beatrice Joanna enters and transforms Alsermero's private space of reflection and self-creation in order to reclaim and celebrate the closet as a space of abjected sexuality – of women's sexuality. Pushing beyond the veil that separates her body's sexual experiences from her culture's painfully limited articulation of those experiences, Beatrice Joanna makes space in the most patriarchal of territories for us to imagine a new, much more complex female sexuality than the potion bottles in Alsermero's closet can contain. The play marries both

meanings of the early modern closet – space of abjection and space of creation – when Beatrice Joanna breaks into Alsemero’s protected world and tugs at the stuff his closet refuses in order to produce and gender male the private, creative, Renaissance subject.

*The Changeling* is unique among the plays I have so far considered: it stages both a rape and a conventional scene of punishment, though its rape has long been a matter of both critical and performative controversy. Beatrice Joanna opens the play with a display of her willfulness; though Alsemero dreams that she is as pure as any maiden he has ever beheld praying in a temple, she quickly demonstrates her independent spirit as she voices her displeasure at being forced into a hasty marriage to suit her father. Having encountered love in Alsemero, she hatches a plan to dispose of Alonzo, to whom her father has committed her, so that her father may be free to select Alsemero in his place. The malcontent servant De Flores becomes her proxy in the murder; as recompense he demands sex. Beatrice Joanna refuses, but De Flores will have his way. Their subsequent exchange in 3.4 becomes a microcosmic debate about the conditions under which a woman may be free to defend her right to refuse sex – in effect, about the conditions under which forcing a woman’s hand may be considered rape. De Flores argues that her shift in allegiance from Alonzo to Alsemero has rendered her a “whore in [her] affection” (l. 142), and that, in fact, her willingness to stoop to crime in order to make her own sexual choice has made her worse than a whore: she is a monster, “the deed’s creature” (l. 137), no woman (let alone virgin) but essentially a sexual plaything. Beatrice Joanna, for her part, plays the role of the threatened virgin with a tremendous sense of the script: she refuses at first to acknowledge De Flores’ intentions, then resists, then pleads for her honour, even falling to her knees in an echo of the iconography of both the doomed

maiden and the virgin in the temple – the figure Alsemero “first beheld” (1.1.1) when he fell in love.

The rape scene’s exchange<sup>18</sup> between the (at this point) still-virginal Beatrice Joanna, who cannot believe De Flores’ demands are in earnest, and the rather more worldly De Flores, who cannot believe Beatrice Joanna’s disbelief, models a legal dilemma and offers a challenge to audiences both early modern and contemporary.<sup>19</sup> Is Beatrice Joanna, still technically chaste, about to become the victim of sexual violence, or is she, as the agent of violence in the name of her own desire’s defense, without recourse to the legal discourse of sexual assault – the kind of woman who is by “nature” sexually aggressive and therefore tacitly disqualified from the law’s consideration as a victim of sexual violence? As Garthine Walker’s study of seventeenth-century sexual assault victims reminds us, women able to articulate their own sexuality were often considered suspect, and while the law technically protected them from sexual harm, in practice they were frequently deemed consenting. Beatrice Joanna, headstrong and not yet fully cognizant of her precarious position as a woman under the law, has already in a manner consented to sex with De Flores by virtue of her willingness to commit what the law regards as an act of petty treason (see Frances Dolan), though she will only come to realize as much as the scene progresses. Yet I would suggest that her position is not, in fact, so simple: Beatrice Joanna remains materially inviolate at this point,<sup>20</sup> and insofar as her criminal actions have been undertaken in the name of love, and in defiance of a father who, unlike the more benevolent dramatic ideal, refuses to entertain her anxieties about her upcoming arranged marriage (compare Annabella’s father, for example), her behaviour at this point in the play can be seen to be rash and troubling, without doubt, but

remains within the scope of empathy for audiences both historical and contemporary. Beatrice Joanna does not, at this moment anyway, fully embody the good girl gone bad. Her position in this scene is more complex: she offers us a conundrum about the distinction between good and bad under a law that swears to protect yet prefers to assume its victims are guilty of their own suffering; in effect, she offers us the law *as* conundrum, and she asks us to imagine and engage with her position under it rather than simply to assume her guilt as De Flores does – and as Alsemero will later do, to much more striking effect.

For much of the play's critical and performance heritage, the answer to the question of Beatrice Joanna's sexual status in 3.4 has been clear. As late as 1990 the *New Mermaids* editor, Joost Daalder, insisted in his introduction to the play that feminist claims of rape in this scene are utter nonsense because Beatrice Joanna's third act encounter with De Flores is merely the enactment of her repressed sexual attraction to him (xxviii); Roberta Barker and David Nicol point out in a recent assessment of the play on the London stage that *The Changeling's* performance history follows the same "romantic" trajectory, and theatre critics tend to applaud the loudest when 3.4 is played not as rape but as rape *fantasy*, with Beatrice Joanna receiving what she finally not only deserves but deeply and unconsciously desires. This critical heritage does double damage to Beatrice Joanna: not only is her suffering refused an ontology, but her vocal attempts to claim status as a victim of violence in 3.4 are simply ignored, let alone problematized. In a sense, both her body and her word are violated, in perpetuity.

Deborah Burks, one of several feminist critics who insist that 3.4 does indeed herald what modern readers would call a rape, has convincingly argued that Beatrice

Joanna becomes, over the course of the play, the scourge and proof of Jacobean law, the kind of tricky and deceitful woman anxious Jacobean patriarchs most feared, tangible evidence that their assumptions about the dangers of women's sexuality were in earnest and to be girded against at every turn. Yet Beatrice Joanna is also the voice of that law's hypocrisies and the proof, throughout the play, of its foreshortened understanding of the nature of women's sexual desire, of the emotional complications posed by sexual violence (a crime the amended seventeenth-century law would make as simple as possible, with its onus on woman's consent and its limits on what kind of woman might qualify as non-consenting), and of the extremes to which the law drives women trapped by its coercion. Beatrice Joanna may appear at turns naïve, but she is for the most part represented as a (dangerously) smart woman. She is consistently proven to be more clever than Alsemero, she understands the strictures of the law with more sophistication than most critics give her credit for, and she comes both to realize and to demonstrate over the course of the play that the hopes and pains of a woman bound by that law will never be adequately represented by it. She knows that Alsemero is not hers to choose; she thus contrives a circumstance in which her father, according to his role, will choose Alsemero for her, though that circumstance may only be contrived by breaking the law that binds her to her father as chattel. She knows the end a woman sexually penetrated by a man other than her husband can expect to meet, and hence she works, in 4.1, to mold herself into a different kind of woman, a woman to whom the law will grant its coveted but fickle protection. Most significantly, in 3.4 we witness her realize for herself the internal contradiction on which Jacobean rape law pivots.



In a quick aside on 3.4.97, in response to De Flores' attempt to justify his sexual advantage by blaming the rape on her own transgressions, she exclaims: "He's bold, and I am blamed for't!" This line, rarely remarked upon by critics, encodes something of the complexity of Beatrice Joanna's subsequent relationship to her violation, and heralds the ultimate challenge her experiences of violence pose to her audience throughout the play. Directing her remarks to us, Beatrice Joanna offers an image of the workings of the law from the victim's point of view; it is an image of a law that doesn't, in fact, work. Two crucial pieces of information are embedded in her aside: first, that *she* feels she is about to be assaulted against her will (in effect, that she is, in the moment, not consenting), and second, that regardless of her feeling, the law has apparently already declared her consenting. In other words, in this aside Beatrice Joanna recognizes – and pleads with us in turn to recognize – the dire inadequacy of the law to account for her bodily and psychic experience, both of love (for Alsemero) and of violence (at De Flores' hands). Here she realizes once again – as she does in scene one, when she discovers her father's choice of suitor will not be swayed by debate and thus requires action more drastic – the limits the law has placed upon her freedom, upon her ability to determine and defend the contours of her own body, and, most importantly, upon her right for that body to be safe from harm. She then, scared and grudging, takes the only action that she now sees she can take. She does not give in to De Flores because she is ruled by desires for him she cannot know; rather, she gives in to De Flores reluctantly and in fear for what may come, because she now knows all too well that she is subject to a law whose books are stacked against her and which, given her circumstances, she cannot marshal to her side.<sup>21</sup> Her brief, surprised remark embeds both cruel, new wisdom and an implicit confrontation,

through us as its witnesses, with the status quo she knows she cannot alter; it is no throwaway line but a call to us to think through the law and her position within it differently. It asks us to join her in her newfound understanding of the shortcomings of a law that will both make her body available for sexual violation and refuse to offer that body status as violated; it asks that we both acknowledge and empathize with the violation she is about to endure; and, finally, it asks that we extend that empathy in order to imagine the emotional complexity of the relationship that will, out of the necessity of dire circumstance, result from it – an imagining her other witnesses are not equipped to contemplate.

Beatrice Joanna's departure with De Flores is marked by the complications her newly realized position engenders. Judith Haber has carefully documented the link between De Flores' invocation of panting turtles as he leads Beatrice Joanna offstage and the very similar Jonsonian conceit linking marital rituals and rape, a staple of the courtly love genre (79-80). Beatrice Joanna is about to suffer bodily violation, but the status her culture affords her demands it be coded as pleasure instead. But what if Beatrice Joanna's entre-acte encounter with De Flores cannot be understood exclusively in terms of either violence or pleasure? Sexual assault may easily generate moments of involuntary pleasure, moments that are perhaps more horrifying as a result of that pleasurable response; rapes committed by those already intimate with their victims leave comparable emotional minefields in their wake (remember Cate and Ian in *Blasted*). Beatrice Joanna's newly realized, though sinister, kinship with fellow outcast De Flores may also mean that she derives, out of necessity, some comfort from his company despite her ongoing discomfort with him and with the violence that establishes their intimacy –

something the play certainly implies in its final two acts (see especially 5.1.47). Does the possibility of these kinds of pleasure, the liveness of desire and the need for human attachment, negate Beatrice Joanna's experience of violence at the hands of a man who offers her, paradoxically, both pain and succour? Undoubtedly it does insofar as Renaissance law is concerned, but if the law is permitted its resident contradictions, why must the experience of violence be in its turn flawlessly consistent? Can there be room in a culture's understanding of rape violence for the nuances of its emotional roller coaster, the odd relationships it may foster? What kind of representation might hint toward the depths of Beatrice Joanna's experience, and will we be creative enough to negotiate it?

I read Beatrice Joanna as a more or less fully functioning social agent, one who operates to the best of her ability despite the extreme limitations placed upon her by gender, circumstance and legal precedent. This is by no means a universal position among feminist critics of this play, many of whom are disinclined to give Beatrice Joanna much credit for anything more than a certain plucky naivete which falls afoul of her masters in the end. Even those critics who are innovative in their readings of the play and in their appreciation of Beatrice Joanna as a subversive figure tend to give up on her in the final scene, arguing that her capitulation before the circle of men assembled in front of Alsemero's closet negates any proto-feminist gains she might have made and restores, with relief, an inviolable homosocial space.<sup>22</sup> Scholars who argue in this vein tend to agree that the elusive quality characterizing Beatrice Joanna throughout the play (she is, as Burks and Garber both point out, an actress above all else) is manifest within but ultimately stolen from her in the closet, where she enjoys the freedom to experiment and play with the privileged sources of male knowledge and power in Act 4, but has that

freedom roundly snatched from her in Act 5 when the closet becomes her prison, a sealed enclosure fortifying her death sentence.<sup>23</sup>

Beatrice Joanna's relationship to the law that circumscribes her is by no means easy, as I have argued above; her relationship to the space of its operation, the architectural correlative of its mechanisms of enclosure, is equally opaque. When Beatrice Joanna gains entry to Alsemero's closet in 4.1, she breaks through his veil of belief about the transparency of her body and her sexuality, makes the kind of incision into hermetically sealed space about which Catherine Ingraham dreams, heeds Deborah Fausch's call to expand the horizon of built space through innovative use and radical embodiment. She becomes, in fact, not just an actress (Burks; Garber) but an architect. As she discovers the means through which Alsemero would know her intimately – the glasses marked C and M, to tell whether a woman be pregnant, or virginal – she uncovers too her own ability to shift her shape, to gape when the instructions say to gape, to play the woman Alsemero's experiment craves (though perhaps not the woman it anxiously fears and anticipates), momentarily altering her body's position relative to the patriarchal space surrounding her, placing herself both within its hope and beyond its grasp. Alsemero, like the laws both natural and social to which he adheres, is too narrow in his understanding of the scope of the closet's potential as a creative, exploratory space: he would use it to gain certain knowledge, to fix things in place, to draw the lines from M to C, A to B(J).<sup>24</sup> Beatrice Joanna better captures its spirit by eschewing its claims to know for its promise of change, its transformational, self-actualizing properties. She undertakes a creative enterprise, building a stage and rehearsing a performance, taking over the closet's materials and adapting them to her own ends. Beatrice Joanna convinces

Alsemero that he has obtained the facts about her body he seeks, but of course the audience knows the ruse. In Alsemero's mind, the closet has exposed Beatrice Joanna at her most intimate; for us, Beatrice Joanna has exposed instead the greater depth of her intimate self, and the depths of field possible within an intimate space whose full imaginative potential the by-the-book Alsemero cannot fathom. The closet may belong to Alsemero, for whom it functions as a protected space of knowledge available only to men, but after 4.1 its expansive capabilities – the permission it grants to think beyond the strictures and structures of a stultifying law, toward a playful, multi-faceted embodiment which is the stuff of performance – become associated with Beatrice Joanna, her body and her desire.

In the final scene of the play Beatrice Joanna freely, almost generously, confesses her role in the murder of Alonzo – and love as her motive for the crime – to Alsemero, and is promptly locked in the closet to await her easily-guessed fate. It is a standard-issue Jacobean punitive scene: Beatrice Joanna will emerge at scene's end, having been punished by De Flores in the role of Alsemero's willing proxy (and in an eerie echo of his role as her proxy in Alonzo's murder), to declare herself abject and reassure all assembled spectators both onstage and off that her suffering has been fair and necessary, a blessing for the ground she has sullied with her unruly blood (5.3.149-53, 185-7). The scene turns on a classic, Albertian architectural fantasy: in which the folds of the closet's rumpled curtains are smoothed, whitewashed, its interior space restored to its original splendour as a privileged place of patriarchal fashioning; in which the sight of its smooth exterior captures the simplicity, the simple guess-ability, of its interior scene. Alsemero would have us all believe that he not only knows but *orchestrates* what goes on inside the

closet after he sends the rabid De Flores in to Beatrice Joanna, but, of course, Alsemero has proven himself throughout the play fundamentally ill-equipped to understand the intricacies of the relationship between Beatrice Joanna and De Flores, not to mention the complex signifying potential of the space in which he now purports to hold and direct them. He assumes that the closet's locked door hides sex followed by death – “rehearse again / Your scene of lust,” he admonishes them, “that you may be perfect” when you act it once more in hell (5.3.114-15) – but Beatrice Joanna's ambiguous, piercing cries defy his narrow insistence that she encounters simple pleasure followed by simple pain, that pain and pleasure are, in fact, simple emotions.

Several critics of this play have remarked upon the significance of Beatrice Joanna's cryptic “O”s, including Marjorie Garber, who likens the resulting ambiguity of the cry to the epistemological and sexual threat posed by the woman who fakes orgasm (364), and Bruce Bohrer, who argues that the closet space “is finally and pointedly double: both a punitive confinement and a lovers' refuge, a place to die and a corner in which to escape the shame of prying eyes” (367-8). Though they spill a fair bit of ink in the closet, these critics are not willing to speculate upon the most expansive possibilities of Beatrice Joanna's calls from within it in these final moments. Garber's reading injects the troubling opacity of the actor's voice into the space of certain, ocular knowledge, yet focuses on reading the complexities of pleasure at the expense of pain: violence is largely absent from her analysis. Bohrer senses the uncertainty of its borders when he calls the closet a doubled space, yet I am uncomfortable with his suggestion that Beatrice Joanna's inarticulate noises imply that she and De Flores are simply lovers, and simply ashamed, as though no more possibilities are offered by the play. A reading of the final scene that

genuinely troubles the weary assurances of the men on stage and the satisfying image of order's return they promise must go beyond binaries; it must make room for the possibility that the ambiguity of bodily experience implied by the cries from behind the closet door moves well beyond the pleasure/pain model on which so many of our assumptions – on which Renaissance rape law's assumptions – about the nature of (women's) sexual experience is based. The closed closet curtain or door stands as evidence of all that Alsemero, Vermandero, and De Flores have been unable to recognize as part of Beatrice Joanna's physical and emotional experience throughout the play.

The final, closeted scene is an echo of action as well as of architecture: it recalls the rape of Beatrice Joanna in Act 3 as well as her imaginative transformation of both the tools and the space of the closet in Act 4. If the closet is meant to contain, as Alsemero claims, a "rehears[al]" of the original scene of De Flores' and Beatrice Joanna's "lust," then already the scene Alsemero sets slips out of his sure grip. Alsemero cannot fathom that such a scene of lust may have been unwelcome, may have been in fact terrible, terrorizing, to the devious, deviant Beatrice Joanna. But for an audience privy to the model, the re-enactment he orchestrates carries with it the freight of Beatrice Joanna's Act 3 recognition that "his" boldness produces "her" blame and thereby ties her hands, her emergent understanding of rape's functional elision in Renaissance law, as well as the weight of her subsequent experience with De Flores, in which inevitable violence becomes a partnership forged out of isolated necessity, in which the possibility of subsequent, grudging pleasure is embedded within an experience that begins as a twofold violation of her body by man and by law. In 5.3, the closet is not only a space of incarceration, or a space of refuge, or even a space of manifest ambiguity in which

Beatrice Joanna's experience becomes, in the manner of Lavinia's gestures or Annabella's heart, beyond meaning and therefore conveniently dismissable. It is a space that declares the violence it enacts and re-enacts to have been always already dismissed, that ominously suggests that wives to be punished may be "endlessly" "undone" (4.1.1), raped with no consequences to family honour and hence no reason to acknowledge, respect, or engage with their pain. It is a space rich with the traces of Beatrice Joanna's earlier interventions into the smooth lines of Renaissance rule and order, interventions that show the law's understanding of women's bodily and psychic life to be visibly wanting, and that make Alsemero's control over a punitive scene whose contours he cannot fully comprehend seem both disturbing and painful. It is a space broad and deep enough to make room for the myriad permutations and combinations of Beatrice Joanna's encounters with love, sex and violence in the constrictive world of the play, and its drawn curtain both reminds us of the narrowness of that world's perception of Beatrice Joanna's experience, and challenges us, once more, to imagine ourselves past that narrow perception and into the hidden folds of meaning signified, at this late moment, only by her inarticulate but audibly provocative cries.

I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that the closet (where Beatrice Joanna is murdered, after all) is an unmitigated space of imagination and hope – though I will shortly explore the possibility that spaces of hope may be forged from equally ominous spaces of violation – but I am suggesting that a much more generous, much more complete understanding of Beatrice Joanna's bodily, emotional and intellectual travels through the play can be found in the closet, can be had by understanding the closet as a stifling enclosure that is also, at this moment in the play, a space of imaginative potential,



a space that makes room for the body, even as it destroys a body, by inviting our own re-reading of the layers of experience to which, as Boehrer notes, we are “conspicuously” not privy at play’s end (367). The semiotic complexity of the closet’s hidden folds is thrown into relief as it bounces between Beatrice Joanna’s disembodied voice and Alsemero’s certain narration, which appears impoverished in comparison with what we in the auditorium clearly see we are not seeing. Having been present at Beatrice Joanna’s confrontation with De Flores in 3.4, we are particularly well-poised – and, I would argue, ethically charged – to imagine an experience that is a great deal more problematic than it seems to Alsemero to be. The closet scene and the scenes it echoes finally demand a much more nuanced understanding of the relationship of sex to violence, and of women’s bodies and desires to the law, than that of which Renaissance law was capable. Read as a chain, these scenes also embed a lesson for those who glibly assume that we are so much more enlightened today: for contemporary readers and viewers, the closet cannot help but carry overtones of queer sexuality, and of the ongoing struggle facing gays and lesbians for equal recognition of their sexual identities and legal rights. Whether we position ourselves as seventeenth or twentieth-century readers, the closet invites us to imagine a new sexual paradigm, one in which a woman might not be penalized for her sexual determination, her impulse to desire and the complexity of her bodily and emotional life. Beatrice Joanna is not herself so lucky, but her hot materiality<sup>25</sup> raises the bar for representations to come.

#### 4. Spaces of hope<sup>26</sup>

Beatrice Joanna's closet is hardly a place of genuine changing; while she offers us, through its opening, the possibility of another, less narrowly misogynist view of the conflicted heart of the Renaissance daughter and wife, she is finally dealt her death blow in that space of secrets, and emerges to speak the script of the penitent wife, just as, two acts earlier, she had spoken the script of the unwilling virgin. Beatrice Joanna plays well to convention, but she is not herself entirely conventional; similarly, her closet functions (or appears to function) according to the dictates of patriarchal enclosure at play's end, but that function does not exhaust its signifying potential. To conclude, I will examine two plays that mine, and more fully realize, the potential for critical empathy nascent in *The Changeling's* architecture of the imagination.

Like Beatrice Joanna's play, *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* offer split acts of violence against women that literally stage that violence's disavowal, but they also go further, reclaiming both the space of violation and the gesture of disavowal in the name of women's artistry, their creative production. These plays are about both violence and artistry; they are about the creative potential that can be drawn from traumatic experience, if met half way by willing interlocutors. Beatrice Joanna turns actor and architect in order to survive in a hostile environment, shifts the shape of her patriarchal enclosure so she might have some small room to breathe; both Philomele and Nanabush turn actor and architect in order to tell their stories, to weave into the story of their violence that other, more deeply-embedded story of violence refused, of eyes turned away, and to model onstage a different, more productive relationship between artist/victim and spectator/witness. In *The Changeling*, acts of

violence against Beatrice Joanna are split not only physically, the closet's door or curtain cutting through our line of sight, but also temporally, the violence of Act 3 echoed in its rehearsal in 5.3. In the later plays, acts of violence are similarly split both across space and by performance convention. There is something of the metatheatrical return here, in performances proffered willingly by violence's victims, but this time it is no return designed to capture a lost moment,<sup>27</sup> nor does it mean to confess its unknowability. In the guerilla metatheatres of Philomele and Nanabush, -- ad hoc spaces of temporary, politicized performance that cut with burning urgency into the "cool geometry" of the main spectacles swirling around them -- performance is a means to confront the squeamish and unwilling, to cry out for pain's acknowledgement, to ask that we witness violence in performance as a transaction between a spectacle and a spectator, a transaction accompanied by a certain amount of responsibility on the latter's part. These performers, more forthrightly but no less earnestly than Beatrice Joanna in 3.4, on the cusp of her own violation, show us how easy it would be for us to turn away and ask us instead to connect, to imagine our witnessing practice as an act with potentially dire consequences.

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Procne sees her sister's drama, and cries out for justice.  
Rabillard, "Threads" 103

*The Love of the Nightingale* is Timberlake Wertenbaker's retelling of the Philomele/Procne myth. The play is set in its mythical moment, among ancient civilizations in Athens and Thrace. Ideologically, however, it takes place in our moment: Wertenbaker's Philomele is an independent thinker, attuned to and not ashamed of the desires of her body. When Tereus rapes her, and then refuses to offer her just cause, she

insists not only on her right to an explanation but openly accuses her attacker of cowardliness, questions his fitness as a ruler, and is punished with the loss of her tongue. Meanwhile, the male chorus who watches over the action, the nurse who watches over Philomele, and the women who watch over Procne, keep to their mantra: say nothing, do not get involved, turn a blind eye. As critics Sheila Rabillard and Jennifer Wagner have noted, *The Love of the Nightingale* centres on the difficult dynamics of community, models of listening, and the possibility of a more hopeful, “identificatory and transformative response” (Rabillard, “Threads” 103) to violence in the future, captured by Procne’s reaction to Philomele’s metatheatrical reconstruction of her rape and by the birds the women become at play’s end, the freedom to question and the hope of understanding they promise. I am fully in sympathy with these readings of the play but want to push them further, for *The Love of the Nightingale* is not just about violence against women and its response – again, as in *The Changeling*, sexual violence followed by the violence of punishment – but fully engages that violence as a function of representation, at the level of the signifier, excavating the legacy of its disavowal in an effort to unearth a witness to violence that can both overcome that disavowal and provide in its place a response that is empathetic yet reasoned, sensitive yet sensible. Wertenbaker first stages a representational history, and *then* offers a hope, employing two versions of the same act in order to model two different audiences, two different responses to violence against a woman. Neither are perfect, yet between them we are offered a choice, asked to judge their respective efficacies, and invited to fashion for ourselves a model of the kind of witnesses we might like to be.

The male chorus is the central audience surrogate in this play, as is typical of traditional Greek drama, yet here the chorus mirrors with difference. Conventional choruses are charged with elucidating the details of plot, narrating events that have taken place offstage, and offering audiences a safe harbour to locate our attention when the weight of catharsis, the anxieties of identification with the tragic hero, become too much to bear. Wertebaker's chorus, by contrast, continually reminds us of what it *didn't* hear or *didn't* see – or, more accurately, what it pretends not to hear or see. Averting their eyes – from the action to each other and to us, from the act to the rafters, from the uncomfortable to a space reserved for comfort – is the chorus members' defining gesture, their method of survival, and through it they show us the deeper implications of the conventional choric function: to act as a surrogate for spectators' own looking away.

The male chorus begins the play by reminding us that so much of war, of death, of violence, is “shrouded in silence” (292), a harbinger of silences to come, but it reserves its most steadfast and determined ignorance for the scenes during which Philomele travels with Tereus to Thrace: “We waited, without the pain of responsibility for that promised time, the good times. We asked no more questions and at night, we slept soundly, and did not see” (321). The consequences of abdicating what we might call its traditional chorus's moral responsibility – to keep watch, pay attention, note shortcomings and offer alternatives – become apparent in scene 13, which opens on the heels of the male chorus's now-ominous declaration that it “saw nothing” (326) and ends with the rape of Philomele. Rather than safe haven or second sight, this chorus offers audiences a model of ocular failure as moral failure, a history of acts unacknowledged, unrepresented – or represented, as here, by a gesture of effacement – that drags back,

literally, to the origins of Western drama. Through the chorus we see ourselves not seeing, but, what is more poignant and problematic, we also see why: the chorus members – who speak individually, and can be recognized and identified with as individuals – offer what seem in the moment to be perfectly legitimate explanations for their turning away (to protect themselves and their futures; because intervention seemed futile; because they were only doing a job), explanations we can recognize all too well, and with which we might be tempted to empathize.

Philomele's rape in scene 13 is the first of two representations of the sexual violence done to her. Tereus comes to her and tells her that he will have her, and that while her consent would be nice it is not required (329). He leads her offstage, and her place is immediately taken by Niobe, who addresses us directly as the rape begins. Niobe's talk is casual, even intimate, but her attempt to soothe is horrifying; she tells us she has anticipated the rape "for weeks," and thought perhaps of warning Philomele but then thought better about it, because "what's the point?" (330). Ultimately, she tells us calmly, there is nothing we can do. The physical structure of this scene is critical to the effect it is meant to have on the audience. Niobe *is* the representation of Philomele's rape; her pride of place on stage and her seductive attempts to first rationalize and then turn our attention away from what we know is happening just beyond our perceptive range lays bare the ways in which sexual violence has been made to disappear in representations dramatic and otherwise for centuries. Niobe makes clear, against the logic of her narrative, that such disappearances are not so much natural, or even conventional, as they are a problem of witnessing, a refusal to see that manifests itself as a willingness to give in too easily to the comforts promised by the conventions of effacement. When Philomele

screams, half way through Niobe's monologue and at a point when Niobe has shifted our attention from Philomele to memories of her own childhood, she breaks through the veil that Niobe's words have draped casually between us and her suffering. Niobe is unsettled, and tut-tuts: "Oh dear, oh dear, she shouldn't scream like that. It only makes it worse" (330). Philomele's screams, like Beatrice Joanna's inarticulate cries, summon the uncanny: incoherent sound cuts across smooth image, radically disturbing the calm space of narrative with all it would so easily foreclose. Philomele's disembodied voice bears down on the space of the stage with an urgent reminder that the sight of Niobe does not mark the site of either dramatic action or bodily experience at this moment, offers an intangible marker of the material consequences of Niobe's refusal to guard, care, and warn, and insinuates Philomele's refusal to be effaced into the closed circle of her nurse's narrative.

While Niobe is a guileless seducer, when her refusal to protect Philomele collides with the sounds of violence it becomes more and more difficult to condone the spectatorial model of willing blindness she and the chorus offer. Yet at the same time an audience finds no real alternative at hand: we cannot get up and save Philomele; we could perhaps get up and walk out, but, under the circumstances, turning our backs is no better an option than the play's status quo of willful ignorance. For all intents and purposes, we are trapped by our own inertia, stuck passively in our seats. Yet we are also made suddenly, profoundly uncomfortable with the suggestion coming from the stage that such an arrangement of bodies, of theatre space and (modern realist) theatre conventions can only result in our passivity before the spectacle. Is there really nothing we can do? Niobe's monologue reveals an audience's traditional consumer function to be

fundamentally unacceptable under this circumstance, effectively staging Philomele's rape as a call to reimagine the role of the spectator to violence.

This scene is perhaps most profoundly disturbing because it asks us *not* to identify, not to establish a surrogate, but simply to acknowledge our complicity with Niobe and the tradition of disavowal she so plainly and rudely represents. Perhaps more importantly, the scene asks us to do what Niobe cannot do, or what Niobe can do only very imperfectly, only fleetingly and against her will: to empathize with Philomele; to allow ourselves to experience something of the extraordinary discomfort her cries provoke; to share in both rage and sorrow her moment of helplessness; to know that acknowledgement and empathy are all we may offer right now, and that, right now, that amounts to something more than nothing. Despite Niobe's best efforts at distraction, the possibility of a more productive witness – of a witness willing to honour the space between her body and Philomele's – begins to emerge in this deeply disturbing scene; it will shortly find its onstage articulation as Philomele prepares to confront all those, like Niobe, who would pretend ignorance of her plight, who would forget the difficult emotional and intellectual work that must go into witnessing violence.

Niobe, true to the letter if not the spirit of her role as guardian, tries to calm Philomele when the moment passes, encourages her to accept her fate and to beg for mercy, but Philomele will not capitulate. Like her mythical ancestors, Philomele instead turns the work of hue and cry over to her hands. Rather than weaving a tapestry, she builds three life-size puppets which she will use to recreate her rape in performance during the Bacchic revels in scene 18. Philomele's re-staging has something in common with the rousal of the townspeople that T.E. calls for in the *Lawes Resolutions*, but differs



in one crucial function: while Philomele without question wishes to tell of the event, confirm the reality of her assault, she does not show the rape to the crowd assembled in the town square so much as she reflects the crowd back to itself in the rehearsed rape as mirror. Unlike the chorus, and unlike Niobe, who advocate strategic blindness to others' misfortunes, Philomele reflects the very consequences of such an advocacy; in turn, the crowd she addresses takes note, falls silent, and literally shoulders the burden of helping Philomele move on.

Philomele thrusts her guerilla metatheatre into the centre of an already-assembled crowd of spectators in scene 18; they have just been watching some acrobats, having some harmless fun at the festival. Philomele, manipulating one of the puppets, jousts with Niobe, who works behind another puppet as she tries to prevent Philomele's performance. As they chase one another around the circle of bodies they replay the rape almost as though by accident. The crowd is not prepared for serious matters, and indeed, how serious can puppet play be? They laugh and clap at the "*gross and comic way*" (342, emphasis in original) in which Philomele and Niobe stage the act. The puppets physically efface the bodies of the women who move them, at times covering them completely; they become a physical, performative incarnation of the crowd's impulse to laugh away Philomele's message and the story of her body. But then the tenor of the moment changes, as Philomele "*stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue*" (342, emphasis in original). The crowd is unexpectedly moved. The gesture provokes a small seismic disturbance among the spectators, a brief recognition of the consequences of laughter, of the failure to acknowledge or accept the gravity of the dolls' dance. Their refusal to recognize the rape, to bear witness compassionately has resulted

in their shock at this unexpected, brutal cut. Niobe's question – what's the point? – has been replaced by a quiet consideration of how this happened, how this could be permitted to happen. Silence is followed by blood. The crowd's laughter falls away, into a profound quietness, but this quietness is not the same as that hushing silence advocated by the chorus or Niobe. This is a silent empathy, the sound of no words filling the void; it is a silence born of the shock of the realization to which the crowd has finally been brought, the silence that results from its acknowledgement not just of the pain of the doll and its handler, but also of its earlier failure to witness effectively. The crowd assembled in Philomele's metatheatre sees, at last, all that it did not see, and what not seeing, not being willing to see, might mean to a young, vulnerable woman in danger. Philomele's servant brings a third doll into the circle, to represent a queen, and at that moment Procne arrives. Procne has formed part of the crowd, and she now breaks out of it in order to weep with Philomele and offer her succour. She is one spectator willing to make a gesture that moves her beyond the proprietary borders of spectatorship, from watching into action. The crowd, meanwhile, moves away, gathering the discarded dolls in its collective arms as it goes, echoing the gesture of protection and care Procne offers her sister.<sup>28</sup>

Philomele's ad hoc auditorium stages something of Irigaray's space of angels, raises the veil that connects: from the eyes Niobe closes to the screams that disrupt the void, we now arrive in Philomele's sacred circle, in which touch – the arms of Procne around Philomele, the arms of the on-stage crowd around the dolls, caring hands against battered skin – emerges to represent the most intimate and hopeful cathexis between performing and witnessing bodies. This is nothing akin to Niobe's earlier but too-late gesture of care for the violated Philomele: Niobe tells us she will comfort her with a cool

cloth when the rape is “finished” (330), but that cloth is only a substitute for the care she ought to have offered, and comes with no recognition of its comparative inadequacy. By contrast, the spectators to Philomele’s metatheatre gather her dolls as a gesture of genuine reaching out, in an acknowledgement of the part their willing effacement of the seriousness of her drama played in the brutality of its ending. Philomele seizes the spotlight, but the witnessing bodies surrounding her build her stage as they come together to designate the space of performance, a temporary space between where some kind of intimacy is finally shared, and a new connection is forged among strangers. This is performance as embodied architecture, architecture as both compassion and critique: Philomele’s metatheatre is a structure whose meaning is completed by the bodies it engages as it pushes through the proverbial fourth wall and makes a place of advocacy and action for spectators on the stage. It envisions an alternative to the mass grave of exhumed bodies that ring the stage of Wagner’s *Monument*, their putrid flesh reminding us of the impossibility of retrieving their pasts, their selves, their experiences of violence. Philomele’s circle offers a different kind of coming together, a cautious hope that, while we can perhaps not fully know her experience of violence, we can broaden our understanding of it by imagining the impact made by *our own* experience of it, by our impulse to turn away coupled with our morbid eagerness to know. The circle argues compellingly that we can appreciate the broader implications of violence against women, and perhaps motivate better justice, by working first to parse our own reactions to its representation, examine our own veils of belief.

Witnessing, as both Niobe and Philomele in their diverse ways show us, means watching ourselves watching, looking inward, subjecting what and how we see to

investigation. Rabillard argues that Procne represents Wertebaker's model feminist witness in this play, but I disagree. Wertebaker's interrogation of spectatorship depends in no small measure upon her initial staging of the history of rape's disavowal, its cover-up and the failed witness's complicity therein; Procne's call for and act of revenge against her husband and son echoes too loudly Titus, Vindice, the revenge tradition that buries sexual violence under the battle between families that inevitably follows. Though Procne ostensibly takes revenge on her sister's behalf, she shows herself a slave to passion, quite willing to sacrifice her son, to fight and die in what would be, save the magical transformation of aggressors into birds, a never-ending cycle of pain and suffering. She does not watch herself. The response of the crowd assembled at Philomele's puppet show implies a much more productive model: its initial reaction (laughter), is visceral, but its second (silence) is engaged, and promises an awareness, an acknowledgement of and coming to terms with its prior reaction. It does not seek wildly and carelessly for rogue justice, yet in taking up the bodies of the puppets it imagines itself into their world, signals its intentions to care for them and to act on their behalf – to become their arms, legs, even voices, in the same way that Philomele is their advocate during her performance. Her puppet show models a feminist witness to violence that embeds a standard of care for the shattered victim: her puppet, like her, needs a body to stand behind it, to hold it up, to give it strength and, when necessary, to speak for it, to articulate its body through an empathetic engagement with its pain that is forcefully accompanied by a self-conscious understanding of how others perceive that pain, and of how those perceptions impact the status we accord it, and our attendant will to justice.

As the crowd moves offstage with the puppets and makes way for Procne's revenge drama, its anticipated gestures of care are left to our imaginations; my imaginings are recorded in the lines above. In the end, Wertebaker leaves the task of molding Philomele's witness to her audiences, never once over the course of the play offering them a completed ideal. Niobe's reaction to Philomele's violation represents one extreme; Procne's represents another. To reach a better alternative we must imagine ourselves into Philomele's performance circle, into the hearts and minds of the spectators who fashion it, just as some time ago I called for us to insert ourselves into the ominous hole Wagner digs as she transforms stage into memorial. Only this time, the hole need not be empty, need not speak to the distance between violence and our knowing of it, the futility of trying to know; this time, the circle may be flooded with the possibility of bridging the space between violence and knowledge, victim and witness, with a membrane through which travels a physical empathy as well as query and critique – in the spirit of the questions the birds ask each other as the play ends. It is axiomatic among feminist critics of this play to suggest that the final scene of *The Love of the Nightingale*, with its abandonment of violence, refusal and recrimination for an attempt at mutual understanding, represents the play's truest space of hope; that space, however, is not for the birds but for the audience. It is a place for us to assess the various spectatorial models Wertebaker offers us throughout the play, to query the ideal characteristics of the feminist witness to violence, and to create, from that work, our own model.

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Like *The Love of the Nightingale*, Tomson Highway's *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* stages the challenge of (self) recognition alongside the impossibility of

denial. While Wertebaker's play is mythic, a Greek story adopted into the mainstream of Western culture, Highway's is part of a relatively new tradition of playwriting about life among Native Canadians, and though it embeds echoes of Greek mythology its cultural scope is in many ways deliberately much more narrow. *Dry Lips* is the second of two plays about the inhabitants of a fictional reservation on Ontario's Manitoulin Island. In the first play, *The Rez Sisters*, all seven human characters are women; in *Dry Lips*, all seven human characters are men. An eighth character in both plays, Nanabush, represents the Ojibway Trickster figure and is of fluid gender. In *Rez Sisters* Nanabush is played by a man, and spends the majority of the play as a bird; in *Dry Lips*, Nanabush is played by a woman, and represents the men's fantasy incarnations of three of the actual women on the reserve: Gazelle Nataways, Patsy Pegahmagahbow, and Black Lady Halked. To signal her status as fiction and fantasy, Nanabush wears prosthetics in order to exaggerate the loved/loathed characteristics of each of these women. Gazelle wears huge breasts; Black Lady wears a pregnant belly; Patsy wears a huge ass. In the latter incarnation, late in the play, she is brutally raped with a crucifix.

The cultural work this play does in an effort to elucidate and to heal the wounds of colonization has been the focus of virtually all of its criticism to date, and while I am not prepared to argue that the play can be understood sufficiently outside its cultural paradigm, I am concerned that the narrowness of this focus may be obscuring other, equally productive forms of critique which may bring it into dialogue with larger theatrical and social concerns. The rape of Patsy is a case in point. Because Patsy is bodied forth by Nanabush, because she is raped by Dickie Bird using Spooky Lacroix's crucifix, and because the rape moves, over the course of its representation, from a realist

to an almost surreal, highly stylized register, critics have tended to read it as exclusively symbolic, as the rape of Native land, spiritual traditions and beliefs by Western culture, specifically the culture of Christian missionaries. Given the overwhelming cultural significance of Nanabush's role, it has been easy for critics both popular and academic, as well as viewers, to elide the rape as rape, and to call it cultural rather than physical violence.<sup>29</sup> But Nanabush, in her various guises, is meant to embody the spirit not just of her culture, but also, and just as forcefully, of the individual women whom she represents. When she is raped as Patsy, Patsy is raped alongside the culture to which she, as a character, is determinedly committed. Nanabush as Patsy is both symbol *and* woman, and just as the act of her rape inevitably makes a statement about the history of Native cultural violation in Canada, her performance of it makes a statement about the representational history of violence against women in the larger canons of Western drama and psychoanalytic thought.

The rape of Patsy differs in its structural configuration from the violence experienced by both Philomele and Beatrice Joanna. It is the only act of the three that does not take place behind a door, curtain, or other physical barrier to sight; on the contrary, it takes place front and centre stage. Though our seeing the rape is a given in this respect, the *way* in which we see it comes under intense scrutiny as a result of the rape's configuration within the play's larger stage architecture. Its physical positioning is what gives it critical edge, and what qualifies it as an in/visible act.

*Dry Lips'* stage is divided into two levels. The lower stage is broadly realist, with an area representing Big Joey's living room, complete with TV set, another area representing Spooky's kitchen, and a third, forested area representing the wilderness

between the houses on the reserve. In front of this playing space is a large area representing a skating rink, where the (never seen) women of the reserve play hockey while the men cheer and get otherwise rowdy in the bleachers. The bleachers are located at the extreme front of the upper stage, which is otherwise given over to Nanabush's perch. The perch is a magical, pleasurably performative space; here Nanabush transforms herself, in full audience view, into a woman, from one woman into another, and into otherworldly creatures (including, in one memorable scene, God). Like Beatrice Joanna's closet and Philomele's circle, Nanabush's perch is her space of play, a robustly creative space that is as physically and temporally expansive as her various performances – of the long-ago gig Gazelle had as a stripper, of Black Lady's labour to birth Dickie Bird in a bar seventeen years before, of an outlandish God in drag on the toilet in some netherworld – need it to be. It exists not to enclose her, but is literally defined by the contours of her work and play – it is in this sense the ideal feminist architecture. From here she watches the men below; from here she entices them as Gazelle, terrorizes them as the pregnant Black Lady, and becomes vulnerable to them as Patsy. From here Nanabush launches her own guerilla theatrics, traversing both stages in her outlandish prosthetics, alternately threatening and titillating the men with performances of the fantasies they project onto her, staging as though by magic the products of their violent imaginings.

As I have argued elsewhere, Nanabush's performance space operates as “a site of resistance” (Solga 77), chafing against and critiquing the goings-on in the playing space down below. While Nanabush is by no means sequestered on her perch, the perch is the departure point for all of her “drag” performances (74), and is the space to which she returns from her guerilla outings. As her political home base, it functions consistently



throughout the play as a space both in league with, and yet critical of, the work accomplished on the play's realist stage. *Dry Lips'* split stage can be roughly divided into the realist space which the men inhabit, and the space of teasing interrogation Nanabush haunts above; the playing space as a whole therefore simultaneously invites the empathy and identification of the audience of psychological realist theatre, and the critical engagement of a somewhat more Brechtian spectator who watches Nanabush moving, as spirit and woman but always foremost as actor, around the peripheries of the stage. As Nanabush darts between levels and between roles, engaging and disengaging from brief meta-performances with the men, attracting their eye one moment and spying on them incognito the next, she makes herself available for empathetic attachment while performing rogue acts of critical appraisal, modeling on her body an imaginative space between. Nanabush may be no angel, but she is nevertheless a creature of Irigaray's revitalized Imaginary: she is not prepared to settle down just yet, she will not be collapsed into a single identification, and she is determined to keep the space between her and her spectators open, for laughter and pleasure as well as for anger and argument.

The rape of Patsy Pegahmagahbow, like the rape of Philomele, is violence against a woman staged as a metatheatrical interrogation of the culpability of the witness. Unlike the rape of Philomele, however, Patsy's rape is *simultaneously* violence and its performance. In character as Patsy, Nanabush is already on stage; in keeping with her guerilla performance persona, she will transform the horror of her suffering into a confrontation with audience, with sexual violation's representational history and our place in it, in the ongoing moment of its happening. The rape begins on the lower stage, in the forest space; Nanabush/Patsy comes upon Dickie Bird, and invites him home with

her for some food. Dickie Bird, who suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome, behaves more erratically than usual, and, resisting her efforts to make a connection with him, “*throws her violently to the ground, [...] lifts her skirt and shoves the crucifix up against her*” (99, emphasis in original). As the rape continues to the sound of a blues tango, Nanabush/Patsy moves back, away from Dickie Bird, and up onto her perch. She then lifts her skirt again, in an ominous echo of Dickie Bird’s violent gesture moments before, and gathers it above her waist to reveal a blood stain that “*slowly spreads across her panties and flows down her leg*” (100, emphasis in original). Her movements are agonizing, but they are also accomplished while she squarely faces the audience, directing her blood, her agony, at us. Meanwhile, Dickie Bird continues to pound the crucifix into the ground. Physically split between the mimetic space of the lower stage and the space above, associated with Nanabush’s acts of self-conscious performative critique, the rape asks to be experienced as “both catharsis and analysis, a body in performance which begins to expose the terms of its violation while still recognizing the very real suffering such violation produces” (Solga 80).

The terms of Nanabush/Patsy’s violation are hiding in the bushes while Dickie Bird hammers his crucifix into the earth. Big Joey and Creature Nataways notice Patsy and Dickie Bird in the forest clearing just before the rape begins; Joey resists Creature’s suggestion that they intervene, and simply watches, “*paralyzed*” (*Dry Lips* 100, emphasis in original). Like Niobe, Big Joey is the witness who lacks the presence of mind and spirit of imagination to project himself beyond his own flesh and bone borders into the needs of another’s, to think through and past his own gut reaction to its tangible consequences. Big Joey, we learn elsewhere in the play, has a painfully conventional fear

of women's blood, which he associates mythically with the possibility of his own castration (119-20). Patsy's violation becomes, in his mind, a violation of his own body, which he then projects backwards onto his experience at Wounded Knee in 1973, when he and his fellow Native protestors were beaten by FBI authorities. In all-too-Freudian fashion, Patsy's rape becomes Joey's symbolic castration, becomes a culture's castration, becomes anything but her own material violation. Except, of course, in this version of the origin story, Nanabush/Patsy's body does not conveniently disappear into myth, efface itself willingly in turn: Joey's paralysis, his refusal to empathize or engage with Patsy's suffering on its own terms, is counterpoised against her own bloody, defiant confrontation with her viewers. Big Joey invokes the horror that lies at the heart of Freud's castration scene – the blood spilling from the groin of the punished little boy – but Nanabush/Patsy will not let him get away with this attempted re-writing of her pain. In place of the image of the bleeding groin which Joey will later invoke to excuse his actions, Nanabush/Patsy offers us the image we miss when we buy into Freud's castration narrative: the horror of the bleeding cunt that cannot be acknowledged even as the castration story pivots on the echo of the mother who has always already been violated, whose long-disavowed violation makes her son's mythic fear possible. Nanabush/Patsy's rape is simultaneously seen and not seen by us, its tricky staging echoing the gesture of disavowal Joey performs on the sidelines. We watch the horror of its beginning, and then we watch it begin to traverse the playing space, become detached from its initial immediacy, become other to itself, stylized and symbolic. There is ample room here to make the rape disappear, until Nanabush/Patsy arrives on her perch and arrests her witnesses with the abject origins of elision, asks us to acknowledge the one violation

always refused, calls upon us to witness rape as disavowal, and disavowal as a mythic matter with brutally material consequences.

As in *The Changeling* and *Love of the Nightingale*, the arrangement of onstage witnesses in this pivotal scene creates a genuine challenge for audiences. Unlike in *Blasted*, in which the crater left in the middle of the set offers the illusion of a space of reprieve to rest exhausted eyes, in *Dry Lips* there is no place to turn. Keeping focus on Dickie Bird's now-symbolic pounding action offers an alternative to the grim sight of Nanabush/Patsy's blood, but to watch Dickie Bird is to mimic Joey, whose eyes never leave the spot where the crucifix enters the ground. Joey, like Niobe, like Alsemero, is an unattractive surrogate; his flaws are too plain, his refusal of either compassion or understanding in this scene too overt, too cynical. Meanwhile, Creature's attempt to get Big Joey to intervene and save Patsy is ineffectual, motivated in part by his own homosexual attraction to Joey, and he quickly runs away when Joey accuses him crudely of being gay.<sup>30</sup> Nanabush's aggressive spectacle clearly courts our eyes, our empathy and, as it takes final shape within the interrogative mood of her playing space, our critical examination, but elsewhere in the play our gaze has been aligned primarily with the shameless voyeurism and the uncomfortable denial of the men's. During the two invisible (or what might be more properly called imaginary) hockey games, the men sit in the bleachers and look out upon the skating surface and into the auditorium beyond; their eyes meet ours, and we watch each other watching. Big Joey offers the play-by-play in English and Ojibway; he narrates the missing scene and we imagine together the sight of the women recklessly attacking one another on the ice, imagine the scene of Black Lady's attack on Gazelle as it morphs into the men's repressed memory of Black Lady's

graceless, drunken delivery of her son, another occasion when Big Joey refused his aid (74-5). If these earlier scenes stage spectatorship as a self-reflexive activity, imagination made a little too easy by a commentary designed to compel our belief, Nanabush/Patsy's rape provokes self-reflection, and stages the challenges of imagining ourselves with more compassion and complexity into the scene of violence. We can choose to see through Joey's eyes, as we willingly did during the Act 1 hockey game, or we can choose to see the entire scene: Joey's perversely motivated tunnel vision, Nanabush/Patsy's extreme agony, and the psychic and theatrical gaps between the two – the veil of separation (the veil of all-too-Freudian belief) that prevents Joey from connecting with Patsy and establishing a heartfelt space between their bodies, a veil mirrored in the gulf that opens up physically between the two on stage as the rape progresses from event to interrogation, from action to consequence.

Beatrice Joanna's appropriation of closet space challenges her audiences to forge, against the logic of the laws that cage her, a space between her violence and the limits of its representation where her experience of that violence may be imagined more completely; Philomele's circle in turn models that space between as the real potential for change opened up by the pragmatic work of the witness who imagines, who casts herself into the experience of violence by taking stock of the very real effects her position as witness may have on that experience. Nanabush, by contrast, demonstrates the material danger of failing to establish such a space between, of giving in to the logic of psychic enclosure, born of the logic of necessary bodily partition. Nanabush may be, as I suggested earlier, a physical incarnation – a living performance – of Irigaray's space of angels, but as the rape brings her body low, literally collapses that body in on itself, the

only “space between” remaining in the play’s architectural imaginary is the space between upper and lower stage, the gulf between Dickie Bird’s action and Joey’s failed understanding of its implications. Nanabush/Patsy’s representationally complex yet viscerally charged spectacle of suffering, coupled with the image of Joey’s inertia, compels us to revisit our earlier allegiance to his gaze and to make an urgent choice about what and how we are willing to see. That choice comes with its own particular challenge, however: because Nanabush/Patsy’s rape is staged to be visibly affecting in a way that neither Beatrice Joanna’s nor Philomele’s hidden scenes of violence are, in order for us to move past Big Joey’s bankrupt model we need to be willing to be affected by the sight of Nanabush/Patsy’s pain, but we also need to be willing, unlike Joey, to get over it, to reach a state of critical cathexis that will allow us to acknowledge both the force of wrong in Joey’s refusal, and the extreme, the brutal, the bodily difficulty of forging a productive connection with another through such a disturbing image of suffering. We need, in other words, to reach through affect, through the separating impulse of the eye, to a space where we can engage Nanabush’s confrontational staging of her own violence on the critical terms it demands, but without losing the provocative power of affect, the sense of urgency it imparts to the message about violence’s witnessing Nanabush is attempting to stage.

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Perhaps [plays] only show us  
the uncomfortable folds of the human heart.  
*Love of the Nightingale* 303

The scenes I explore above require that we incorporate but also move beyond the forms of witnessing I investigated and advocated in my previous chapters in order to

formulate a more complete feminist witness to violence – a witness who recognizes a history in place of a spectacle, who realizes her own position in the narrative, and who imagines herself into the awkward, unseen corners of the stage by taking up the challenge of forging a space between herself and the missing act, the absent suffering body, buoyed by an understanding of the ongoing, material impact of absence as its traditional condition of possibility. The in/visible acts I have considered do not simply chastise the subject of the gaze for its shortcomings, teasing and taunting it with all it is not permitted to see, with the technicolour negative of all it has not seen, has failed before to see. The specific structure of the in/visible act bars us from the pains and pleasures of simple sight but in so doing opens gateways into other spaces – the “hot materiality” of Irigaray’s reinvigorated imaginary, of Ingraham’s expansive mental architectures. The ideal feminist architecture turns out to be, in the end, a space of witnessing: it is a place in which to observe the limitations of classical paradigms, the pitfalls of old systems of belief and the stories they hide, but it is also a space made possible, made valuable, made critically provocative, by the act of watching ourselves, and others, watching. To be able to forge the kind of connections between bodies Irigaray seeks, to be able to build the kind of structure about which the feminist architects dream, two things need to happen: we need to be able to reach through space, to touch those others in our world who make three dimensions possible, and we need to be able to take stock of our own position in space, our place relative to our others. The in/visible act of violence against women is just such a feminist architecture: it absents the act that is the ostensible source of all of our attention and, in its place, concentrates its spotlight on our relationships with one another, on the development of spatial and imaginative connections between act and

audience. In order to generate meaning from this representation, we need to find a way to reach out and connect to the experience from which we have been intentionally alienated, but in such a way that respects, that indeed theorizes, the consequences of our very distance from it.

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been made of the impact Sophie's death had on Freud's finishing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and it is hard to read Freud's description of Ernst's game without hearing the echo of the grandfather's own symbolic management, via the very text in hand, of a loss he, by his own account, found extremely difficult to assimilate. Derrida's reading of the scene in *The Postcard*, which I engage below, includes an extended commentary on the connection between fort/da, Sophie's death, and Freud's textual practice in *BPP*.

<sup>2</sup> At a March, 2003 production of *'Tis Pity* staged by Theatre Erindale in Mississauga, Ontario, an audible gasp followed Giovanni's entrance with the heart in the final scene. My companion later professed that he felt faint at the sight of the heart; from what I could tell glancing around the intimate auditorium, he wasn't alone.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it's worth noting that Soranzo's threat to Annabella is proverbial; Giovanni makes literal the language of the typical dramatic household tyrant.

<sup>4</sup> In an exciting new essay, Susannah Mintz offers a similar but much more complex reading of this play, shifting the critical focus from Giovanni to Annabella, and arguing that Annabella's commitment to her incestuous relationship with her brother symbolizes "the potential for a different kind of intimacy" based on the "parity" Protestant radicals ascribed to the ideal marriage of equals in Jacobean and Caroline England (290). Against the critical grain, Mintz argues that Giovanni is not so rebellious as he might at first seem, that he is in fact truly conservative in his patriarchal attitude toward ownership of his love. By contrast, Annabella's free and autonomous desire, put daringly into action, signals the potential for genuine social change, for a love that needn't lead inevitably to hierarchy, resentment, destruction and loss. In Mintz's reading, Annabella's heart is not an undifferentiated, confusing mass of meat, iconographically charged yet finally meaningless in its semiotic supersaturation (see Neill; Wiseman; Amtower); it is a space of hope, a space where new ways of being together in a difficult historical moment may be imagined

<sup>5</sup> This reading can be found in "Belief Itself," 23-53 in *Sexes and Genealogies*.

<sup>6</sup> See my comments on this text in chapter two; see also Diamond's introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis*.

<sup>7</sup> Gillian Rose articulates the program and its goal: "Irigaray insists that I remain distinct from her – she wants to make a 'between' between us, an around, a space, in order to initiate a dialogue. She gives me an invitation to speech through this assertion of a kind of connective space between us" (61).

<sup>8</sup> In *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden*, Belsey calls her project "history at the level of the signifier," which she describes as "a history of representation" (5): "Representational priorities change as values change, and history at the level of the signifier records these shifts of value. A textual history [...] is not to be conflated or confused with its social history" (6). In other words, Belsey is not investigating what *was* or *is* but how the past was made to mean, and what the terms of meaning selected to represent events say about the complexity of the culture doing the signifying. I am similarly interested in violence against women as a represented phenomenon – not as bare fact, or as something to be recuperated with bigger, better representation, but as a phenomenon whose history is written in its failed representation. We cannot begin to understand violence against women in the present without taking stock of its sinister past, and the marks that past continue to make on our contemporary representations.

<sup>9</sup> In "Woman, *Chora*, Dwelling," Elizabeth Grosz argues that the systemic erasure of the feminine in Western metaphysical thought has been marked over and over again in spatial terms, especially in the rejection of "the maternal space from which all subjects emerge, and which they ceaselessly attempt to usurp" (218).



<sup>10</sup> While Jill Dolan is not interested in the work of Irigaray, I derive the spirit of my spectatorial model here from her thoughts on performative utopias.

<sup>11</sup> In her examination of the female voice in classic Hollywood cinema, Kaja Silverman argues that the disembodied female voice has the power to “disrupt the specular regime upon which dominant cinema relies,” putting the female character/subject with which it is associated “beyond the reach of the male gaze,” “releas[ing] her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze enforces” and disobliging her from existing as pure body (164). The disembodied female voices I will touch upon below have the same power to disrupt conventionally gendered optics, but in this case those optics are part of the specific specular regime governing the refusal to image the woman’s body in violence except as a veiled reflection of the male body; the disruption effected by these voices thus does not separate voice from body (and the gaze in and through which it is made meaningful in classic cinema) but rather forcefully and uncannily returns spectators to the forgotten scene of bodies – of the body in the Real, beyond the bounds of Symbolic imagining.

<sup>12</sup> A number of superlative edited collections have appeared in recent years gathering the seminal writings of feminist architects. See Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space*; Agrest et al, eds., *The Sex of Architecture*; Coleman et al, eds., *Architecture and Feminism*; Rüedi et al, eds., *Desiring Practices*; Rendell et al, eds., *Gender Space Architecture*; Durning and Wrigley, eds., *Gender and Architecture*; and Hughes, ed., *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*.

<sup>13</sup> In contrast, many feminist architects and theorists seek to reclaim the abjected body into their practice by arguing that architecture is unique as an art form that must be touched, felt, experienced in its physicality. The body as a material user in space, and more centrally the relation between bodies in the creative enterprise, is also foremost in this theory’s articulation of building practice. McLeod advocates an architecture that regards “occupants no longer simply as passive consumers or victims but also as vital actors contributing a multiplicity of new images and modes of occupation” (25). Fausch argues for the “imaginal projection” of built space (53), in which the body becomes “an essential organ of comprehension,” its actions necessary “to complete the intellectual content” of the project (51, 49). Agrest describes the building process as an encounter between creative bodies through whose joint work space becomes malleable, expandable, attuned to the specific needs of the occupant: “To design is not to reclose but to affect the openings and be affected by them, to play an intersection between the two subjects, that of the reader and that of the writer” (367, my emphasis). While classical theory steals the creative potential of the female body only to render it static and sculptural, Fausch, McLeod and Agrest advocate an expansive architecture that is defined by users and is developed in the space of imaginative encounter and shared experience between artist and user.

<sup>14</sup> “[T]he wall is not simply looked at, inspected by a detached eye. Its white surface actively assists the eye by erasing its own materiality, its texture, its color, its sensuality, as necessarily distracting forms of dirt. [...] Neither material nor immaterial, it is meant to be seen through. By effacing itself before the eye it makes possible, it produces the effect of an eye detached from what it sees” (Wigley 360).

<sup>15</sup> The closet has changed considerably over the centuries (see Boehrer; Urbach; Wigley; Hopkins), and its function as a small private chamber in the early modern period differs somewhat from its function as a wardrobe in modern Western homes, as of course its symbolic function as a space of queer sexuality in the modern period contrasts somewhat with its earlier function as a space of self-fashioning borne of a new emphasis on privacy and inwardness. Although I will not deal in any detail with the (post)modern closet’s queer episteme, its shadow will haunt my reading of the early modern closet’s potential to articulate a new, much more complex female sexuality.

<sup>16</sup> The *OED* lists 1533 as the first instance of this usage for the term “closet.”

<sup>17</sup> See also Orlin’s reading of Frankford’s study in her commentary on *Woman Killed With Kindness* (*Private Matters* 187-9).

<sup>18</sup> The rape itself, of course, takes place off stage, between acts, in a manner conventional to the period. I call 3.4 the “rape scene” in order to underscore my argument that this scene stages the *matter* of rape and its evasive status in Renaissance England, offering audiences a choice of allegiances: the choice to follow De Flores’ argument and believe Beatrice Joanna both secretly wants sex and is not deserving of resistance,

or the choice to regard Beatrice Joanna's experience as a form of violence much more complex, but no less legitimate, than the violence typical of more straightforwardly innocent heroines.

<sup>19</sup> Deborah Burks argues that this, among other scenes, is designed to demonstrate Beatrice Joanna's shocking naivete about the law and her responsibility to it, and hence her extreme threat to the patriarchs who would maintain law and order at Fortress Vermandero. I am in sympathy with Burks' reading of the play as a kind of dark morality tale for anxious fathers, but I depart from it in my understanding of how Beatrice Joanna functions relative to the law. As I will argue, her naivete can be seen to give way to a grave understanding of the law that offers, at play's end, not only a harsh lesson about women's transgressive tendencies, but also an image of the extent to which the law fails to protect, and account for, their bodily and social experiences.

<sup>20</sup> Bamford concludes her study on Jacobean rape representations by underlining "the material nature of chastity: It is a state of physical, not spiritual, purity" (155).

<sup>21</sup> Beatrice Joanna's last lines before leaving with De Flores in 3.4 are telling: "Murder I see is followed by more sins. / Was my creation in the womb so curst / It must engender with a viper first?" (163-5). Perhaps De Flores is the viper; perhaps she is cursed because she is a wicked, criminally-minded woman. Or perhaps the viper is the law itself, and she is cursed because, as a woman, she is born always already subject to the cruelties of its deeply ingrained sexual biases.

<sup>22</sup> See Haber 92; Hopkins 156-8; Burks 782; Malcolmson; Eaton, "Beatrice Joanna." For two notable exceptions see Bohrer 367-8 and Garber 364-5.

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Hopkins makes the "closet argument" with greatest depth and care: she envisions the alchemical materials stocking the closet shelves as both mobile and non-exclusive, available for Beatrice Joanna's appropriation in Act 4 as she realizes that the tools of patriarchal empowerment are easily transferable. Her suggestion that Beatrice Joanna loses control of these tools at play's end is made with considerable historical aplomb as she argues convincingly that Middleton uses the play to get his own writerly revenge upon Frances' Howard's evasion of punishment for her role in the murder of her husband, on which the play is in part based. I find, however, her reading flawed on one particular account: she expresses surprise that Beatrice Joanna should capitulate so much more easily than most Renaissance female stage villains. Viewing Beatrice Joanna within a tradition not of villainy but of wifely transgression, however, her eleventh-hour confession is of course an obvious iteration of Jacobean male fantasy (see Burks).

<sup>24</sup> In his enjoyable historicization of Alsemero's chastity test, Dale Randall notes that Mizaldus, the authority to whom Alsemero's test is attributed in the play, was out of favour by the seventeenth century (359). As soon as Beatrice Joanna notes the name on 4.1.45, we know the implication: Alsemero's science is, if not yet fully outmoded, hardly *au courant*.

<sup>25</sup> I use the term as a specific echo of Ingraham; I do not mean to imply a connection to early modern medical discourse, which typically characterizes the material as "cold."

<sup>26</sup> I borrow the term from David Harvey's 2000 book of the same name.

<sup>27</sup> Alsemero's orchestration of lust's rehearsal does share some commonalities with the metatheatrical return I charted in *Titus Andronicus* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, but it also differs importantly. Unlike both Titus and Vindice, Alsemero is, by the point of the rehearsal, not seeking knowledge or confirmation; he is in no doubt about what is happening in the closet, though his surety is misplaced. He is not looking for proof of what happened, and he certainly isn't seeking proof of rape; as far as he is concerned, this is not a rehearsal bent on knowledge, but one bent on punishing Beatrice Joanna for daring to play the scene – any scene – without him, for daring to be a performer in the first place.

<sup>28</sup> I am in disagreement here with Jennifer Wagner, who feels that the crowd represents just another group of failed witnesses who read rape as comedy, cannot handle the brutality that results, and simply move off. Although Wagner's reading is elsewhere sensitive to the problems of communal witnessing that Wertebaker's drama throws up for debate, I feel that she misreads the motives of this crowd. In particular, I believe its gesture of care for the dolls, as the last action it takes, must be appreciated within the spirit of the puppet drama as an attempt to enact a new, more productive relationship to the spectacle of violence than that with which the crowd began. One of the points – perhaps Wertebaker's main point – of Philomele's drama is the instruction of her witnesses, and they learn.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Rabillard, "Absorption" 21-2. In his analysis of the controversy that surrounded the rape during the play's commercial revival in Toronto in 1991, Alan Filewod argues that protests erupted because, on the large and formal stage of the Royal Alex theatre, the intimacy of the original production was lost and, with it, the impulse to read the rape as exclusively symbolic, as cultural violence rather than a woman's horrific violation (373). Even those critics who are willing to recognize the material dimension of Patsy's violence do so tentatively, and without relinquishing the priority of its symbolism (Lundy 115).

<sup>30</sup> Against a critical heritage that has canonically read both Rez plays as positive problematizations of gender binarism, a forthcoming essay by Susan Billingham does a wonderful job of exploring the limits of Highway's representations of alternative gender and sexual paradigms in this play by critiquing his representation of Creature's relationship to Joey and to his own nascent sexuality.

**Conclusion**  
**Escape from the Oedipal Eye**

That eager girl who waited, hot with fear,  
To be made woman, wife and queen,  
Where is she? [...]  
Can love still be? [...]  
But daylight calls and stirs the queen.  
Ned Dickens, *Jocasta*

I began my prefatory remarks by invoking Oedipus, theatre's king of kings, and concluded them by plunging down the rabbit-hole his empty eye sockets have left us. Having introduced Oedipus in the context of theory, I return to him now in another context, to chart how far we've come.

In the Fall of 2002, I attended a revival production of the Canadian Opera Company's 1997 staging of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, directed by François Girard. The performance, staged in tandem with *Symphony of Psalms*, intends an eloquent, disturbing commentary on the contemporary AIDS crisis, but for me it resonates on a different plane. The central feature of Girard's staging is a pyramid-shaped mound of writhing, naked, plague-ridden Theban bodies. Atop their suffering Oedipus' throne stands. As his story unravels, he loses his place, is forced to descend into the mass of humanity lying wasted at his feet. The image shocks from the moment the curtain rises, unnerves at every turn, but as the story reaches denouement the performance's point of emphasis shifts, slips sideways ever so slightly, and offers a revelation that may be no more than an afterthought.

Oedipus is blind, is gone; Jocasta has been, of course, written out of the story. The mass of bodies continue their slow, painful mourning ritual, reaching now upward, toward the harsh light coming from a single pendant lamp that has been dangling

throughout over Oedipus' throne. The mass moves as one, in the hope of a long-anticipated freedom that may, or perhaps may never, come (the resolution of AIDS, Girard's staging reminds us, will not be so simple as riddle solved, sexual crimes excised). Then a body breaks away: a young woman, naked like her fellows, rises up and grasps hold of the lamp, begins to swing back and forth from it. Her limp and dangling body is the opera's final tableau.

This final tableau generates a startling echo, a spectral mirage, and a potential feminist performance: Girard's telling of Oedipus' story ends with a woman hanged, brightly down-lit by the antiseptic, hospital-issue pendant lamp, a queer displacement of that other hanging body no *Oedipus* may reveal. To see Jocasta in this final moment, of course, would be to see nothing more than a body always already appropriated, always already acculturated, a body (conceived as character, conceived as companion character to Oedipus) without matter, without the liberty to matter. What Girard gives us in lieu of this body that can never truly be imaged in its suffering is the ghost, the shadow of body's suffering, the shadow of suffering so long denied. Jocasta is gone; she does not swing from the lamp as the stage lights fall. In the body that swings, however, is the negative image of Jocasta's own body, the memory of her final reaching upward, the ghost of her earlier unmarked passing. The lights fade and I remember her missing body, recall her to my bodily memory, the after-image of her swinging spectre burning itself slowly onto my retina.

I have spent the past four chapters charting the after-image, the sight, sound and sense of something missed, the female body spectral to the story of its own suffering. The elision of violence against women, as we have discovered, is part of a much broader and

more troubling cultural elision of women's bodily experience, and of women's bodies experienced in intimate and comforting (rather than violent and violating) connection to other bodies. Exploring the logic of the metatheatrical return, in which rape victims are forced to give their disturbingly intangible traumas public form and meaning, I noted that the physical and psychic effects of sexual violence – its spectral, haunting quality, both impossible to pin down and yet seemingly everywhere at once – are marginalized by culture's drive to show and to know, to expose the players and punish the truants with no confusion, no potential mistakes. My investigation of punitive violence turns up a separate yet related problem: as violence becomes gift and grace in the logic and rhetoric of early modern conduct theory, once again the bodily ontology of violence takes a distant second place to the drive to rewrite visuals, to show something other than what every spectator ought to know simply by looking. The pre-eminence of language and eye – of show and tell, hue and cry – in these narratives reminds us that the gaps within both language and eye, as they are rendered Symbolic by Lacan, rendered emissaries of the cut that wounds the subject into individuality, contain the bodies whose experiences they have failed to capture, to envision, to articulate. Girard's naked mound of human detritus is the architectural inverse of Colleen Wagner's monumental hole ringed by exhumed bodies, but the empty core of the latter and the spectral apex of the former are the same: they both echo a transhistorical, transcultural failure to regard, to take up, to make genuine matter out of women's bodily and psychic experiences of brutally inflicted pain.

The other side of the story of the missing body in violence is the story of the embodied witness who remembers on his body the suffering that has been forgotten by image and narrative (the witness who carries the negative image of spectral violence on

her retina) and who makes an engagement with history – with the history of representation as well as the history of reception of women’s bodies in violence – a central part of his or her imaginative process in the theatre. The witness who senses, engages and imagines both a body and a history in the presence of a performance that actively takes bodies away has been the focus of my discussion since the latter half of chapter three; the shift from bodies and violence elided to the centrality of the feminist witness to violence marks, for me, the hope that a pervasive history of elision need not be an end-stop in itself, that my excavation and critique of that history might bring with it the possibility of witnessing differently, of seeing through the onstage/offstage dynamic I first articulated in chapter one to the mechanisms of repression which operate that dichotomy and through it the representational biases of patriarchy’s perspectival stage. The forced disappearance or active manipulation of image characteristic of disavowal demands that spectators alive to the machinations of psychic, theatrical, and cultural repression explore different ways of knowing, different means of completing the story. When I first began my research for this study, I was sure that in/visible acts of violence against women were centred on image – its active, feminist manipulation, but image nevertheless, a tacit though negative reinforcement of the centrality of the eye. As I proceeded the terrain began to shift, and I began to realize that the true strength of in/visibility lies in its ability to remark not just upon the emptiness of the eye, but also upon the strength of other perceptual faculties – especially the strength of imaginative engagement, the only way in which we might, from within separate bodies and from within a separating and often limiting language, recreate our connections to other human bodies. I have come to realize that the true beneficiaries of a critical feminist in/visibility

are not those bodies marginalized, excluded from the scenes of their own violence and suffering, but the witnesses left to decipher their stories, to reconnect with those bodies on the margins by connecting the dots between the visceral experience of violence, a history of covering over and converting that experience into another's matter, and a theatrical fetish for both representing and rewriting the female body in violence.

The in/visible act, as it stages violence against women in its historical, cultural and theatrical condition of possibility, in its missing-ness but with difference, has been my model for a feminist performance of violence against women on stage. But a critical feminist performance practice engaged in the project of representing such violence in its historical and cultural specificity must also, as my fourth chapter argues, make pride of place for its spectator in the performance equation, as a figure central both to critical representation and to the critical work of mending that must accompany it, that must take place, as in Philomele's performance circle, in the community on behalf of violence's victims. Violence is always a severing experience, designed principally and brutally to reinforce the you = not me of proper catharsis, proprietary subjectivity – hence its central yet elided place at the heart of Freud's foundation narrative. The Duchess' experience is clear about the wide net of effects violence casts around its victims, working its cruelest havoc on the tenuous borders of her body: the torture to which she is subjected tears her from those she loves, ruins not just her body but her body in its social interconnectedness. In/visible acts ask spectators to suture the wound inflicted upon connectivity, to resist you = not me, to remodel catharsis, to jump inside the hidden spaces of the stage darkly hinted at rather than simply to take them for abject and accept their role as guarantors of the real and the true of onstage representation.



Missed experiences, as they evoke the primal cut, provoke curiosity as surely as they provoke discomfort: Lacan's subject of psychoanalysis is forever seeking the lost Imaginary because he or she believes something worth finding lies there. In/visible acts provoke discomfort – never more than in the blood-curdling cries of Beatrice Joanna or Philomele, the long wails of Nanabush in the moment of her rape as Patsy – but they also provoke the curiosity and buried empathy of the subject that seeks the imaginary connection to other bodies so aptly modeled by the Duchess of Malfi. In/visible acts play not upon old-fashioned pity and fear, but rather upon our always simultaneous critical and visceral engagement as spectators, upon the residual threads of our interconnectedness and our tacit awareness of them; the best potential of in/visibility as a feminist performance strategy lies in the thoroughly human connection it models between striving spectator and (momentarily failed) spectacle even as (perhaps because) it engages our interrogatory faculties. As Lavinia and Moderna look for their bodies amidst the psychic debris of rape, as the Duchess and Diamanda make a politically charged home in the dark hinterland of threatened hells, as Beatrice Joanna and Philomele struggle out of their prisons and back toward us – Jocasta-like, toward the light hanging over Oedipus' now-vacant throne – we struggle toward them, toward a more imaginatively complex and intellectually complete understanding of their violence in its evasive historicity and its visceral and psychic effects, its destruction not just of bodies but of the bonds between bodies, of the bonds between us in the auditorium and them on stage. In the space between these two groups of bodies struggling not upward but forward, *toward*, feminist performance theory finds its ideal response to the problem of

women's bodies in violence on stage, finds the gesture that both articulates and bridges the gap that is the mark of the violated female body in culture.

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