

Georgina Dopico Black. *Perfect Wives, Other Women. Adultery & Inquisition in Early Modern Spain*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001. xx + 307 pp.

This book is about reading, of both words and bodies. Georgina Dopico Black's analyses of three texts, Fray Luis de Leon's *La perfecta casada*, Calderón's *El médico de su honra*, and Sor Juana's *Los empeños de una casa*, are approached from elegant theoretical and historical perspectives. They lead her, and us, to reevaluate these texts (and others) in light of the cultural contexts and anxieties they reveal. Her discussions begin with broad readings of Body and Soul—"a site subject to the scrutiny of a remarkable array of gazes: inquisitors, theologians, religious reformers, confessors, poets, playwrights and, not least among them, husbands" (xiii-xiv), in order to discover the intersections of these readings of Self and Other, of body as text, and the legibility or illegibility of signs, moving from somatic to semiotic. For Dopico, the enormous volume of conduct manuals in sixteenth-century Spain and of adultery-honor plays in the seventeenth century must signify more than a popularity of the genres. Rather, their prevalence points to a way of seeing, a way of reading signs in the world, and are connected to it in a more complex and closer way than one might have supposed before reading this extraordinary book. The anxieties that the texts reveal about women's bodies point to "larger cultural and political questions, to the difficulties and the dangers of reading, to the tenacious interconnectedness of gender, religion, race, nation, and interpretation" (xiv).

In Chapter 1 ("Visible Signs: Reading the Wife's Body in Early Modern Spain") Dopico sets forth her principal premises, theories, and methods of inquiry. She discusses the central role of three sacraments of transformation and their importance to Counter-Reformation theology, politics, and aesthetics: the one-flesh doctrine of matrimony, the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic host, and the Jewish or Moslem conversion to Christianity, all three of which are subject to inquisitorial surveillance and discipline. The problem in each of these three transformations is that they either do or could conceivably retain vestiges of their former self. The married woman loses the identifier of virtue—her virginity—and therefore any infidelity cannot be immediately detected via her body. Although she has become "one" with her husband and through marriage to him has acquired a status of virtue and honor, she also acquires the capacity for "adulterous agency" because of the illegibility of her body in this regard. In a similar way, although the host is transformed from bread to the body of Christ in the sacrament of the mass, it still retains a "breadlike" appear-

ance that can cast doubt on its essence. Similarly, the religious convert could possibly retain an essence of his former religious self even after he has converted, although appearances might indicate that his conversion has been complete and sincere. In each of these cases—wife, host, *converso*—what were particularly threatening were “the doubts these violations cast on the efficacy of the sacrament” (adulterous agency, breadlike properties, impure blood) as vestigial traces of an Otherness. Throughout her study, Dopico Black traces and analyzes shifts in reading, which go from the somatic (the body of the wife) to the semiotic (the illegibility or indeterminacy of signs and what is concealed beneath the surface), to an intersection of the two in the politico-cultural sphere (a substitutability between the wife’s body and the *converso*/morisco body). If the body is treated as a text or an institution, then concerns over the excesses of interpretation and the impossibility of really knowing a body or a text must arise, especially in the body of a wife. Although it adapted to changing circumstances, the Inquisition served as the instrument of national centralization, and maintained certain basic constants: “a preoccupation with uncovering hidden truths, often achieved through reading and/or disciplining the body, the use of informants, secret proceedings, appeals to rhetoric of contamination and cleansing, confessional imperative, and, above all, a compulsion towards surveillance as most reliable means to contain Otherness” (4).

In Chapter 2, “Pasos de un peregrino’: Luis de León Reads the Perfect Wife,” Dopico discusses *La perfecta casada* as a paradigm of the conduct manual, but situated within the context of newly emerging cultural identities, and centered in the concept of the early modern subject/agent. If a conduct manual is to help a woman refashion herself, this perfectibility presupposes an agency which is in itself troublesome. By emphasizing the artificiality of makeup, for example, Fray Luis warns that it makes a woman into something “other” than what she is in essence. His preoccupation “betrays his critical anxieties over reading and misreading... Charges of adultery, whorishness, and monstrosity imputed against the made-up, wandering *casada*—changes that can readily be applied to the text itself—are all reducible, at some level, to charges of illegibility” (58). However, Dopico proposes to read *La perfecta casada* as a “meditation about interpretation and its mirages...and what is more, a reflection on interpretation vehemently grounded in a historical moment in which the stakes of reading were remarkably high” (52), as Fray Luis himself well knew. Dopico points out inconsistencies in Fray Luis’s ordering of sources and, especially, in his problematic use of similitudes and analogies, which involve “a precarious crossing...of the tenuous line that separates essence from appearance.” (78) In other words, by linking “parecer” and “ser” in an intent to “facilitate

legibility," "the conflation of the two terms...instead mask[s] a prioritization of appearance (or even accident) over essence that could be extremely disruptive for the treatise as a whole." This of course has grave consequences when translated to the body of the wife, since "el ser honesta/perfecta" can be confused with the appearance of being so, or vice versa. Dopico points out that in giving instructions on how to become *like* a perfect wife, Fray Luis provides "instructions for succeeding at just this type of deception." (81). The chapter is rich in suggestive mis/readings and comments on Fray Luis's analogies and tropes, culminating in a compelling commentary on the manual's final exemplary figure, Judith, as exemplary agent, "mujer varonil", and "castradora" (105-07). Dopico Black summarizes her own reading of *La perfecta casada* as a "defiant test in its advocacy of interpretive plurality and in its challenge to inquisitorial norms of reading" (107), while at the same time maintaining an appearance of orthodox adherence.

In Chapter 3, "The Perfected Wife: Signs of Adultery and the Adultery of Signs in Calderón's *El médico de su honra*," Dopico examines the aforementioned play as a paradigm of the adultery/honor drama "genre," and brilliantly applies her arguments along two lines. In the first, she follows earlier work that applies to the husband a role of inquisitor, whose attention is focused on the "diseased" body of the wife, who "enacts the role of inquisitor reading for *limpieza de sangre*" in "a three-stage trajectory (containment, inquisition, textualization)" (116). Then Dopico takes on the problem of il/legibility of the signs that the husband mis/reads, and in so doing underscores the inherent problems of any inquisitorial undertaking. She argues that Calderón's theater did not reinforce or support the dominant social ideologies of *limpieza de sangre*, inquisitorial tactics, and honor, but rather contested them.

In Chapter 4, "Sor Juana's *Empeño*: The Imperfect Wife," Dopico turns to Sor Juana's play for an "Americanist" rereading of the problems of marital and racial purity, of honor, of desire, and of the legibility or illegibility of the Other's body. This chapter was less compelling than the previous, perhaps because she seemed more to suggest than to argue her points. Dopico offers readings of *Los empeños* that uncover strategies of resistance through "gender illegibility" (174), exemplified by the cross-dressing Castaño in *Los empeños de una casa*. Dopico suggests that anxieties over boys playing women on the early modern Spanish (and by extension Colonial) stage points to a same-sex desire between Pedro and Castaño that is "almost impossible to overlook." The point is less convincingly presented than others, especially in terms of the contemporary context of the play, which would convey more comicity than desire, not necessarily "threatening, at some level, to the stability of a heterosexual code of desire and

binary signification" or even suggesting that "not only gender but also sex" is a "superficial inscription that does not go beyond its performance or remit to an unconstructed natural given" (197). Dopico suggests that "the title of Sor Juana's play can already be read as a kind of transvestism of the title of Calderón's 1650 *comedia*, *Empeños de un acaso*," and is more than a "seemingly insignificant linguistic shift" but rather "exploits the dramatic possibilities of the early modern analogy between the female body and the house that contains her" (183); the concept is intriguing, but one wonders if a contemporary of Sor Juana would have read it so. The many questions Dopico raises suggest future revisions of literary categories and periods, not to mention mechanisms of interpretation and reading, in particular, for reading the bodies of wives and Others in both European and American contexts.

Dopico began Chapter 1 with a lengthy quote from *Don Quijote I*, 33, a fragment of Lotario's attempt to persuade Anselmo of the power of the sacrament of marriage to unite two different persons into one single flesh, two souls into one will: "Aunque Dios creó a nuestro primer padre en el Paraíso Terrenal... así el marido es participante de la deshonra de la mujer por ser una misma cosa con ella." Although Dopico's study does not deal with any Cervantine text in detail, it nonetheless suggests new perspectives on the themes of marriage, the female body, and the legibility of somatic, semiotic, and cultural signs that will prove illuminating and highly pertinent to many of Cervantes' works, such as the "Curioso impertinente," "El celoso extremeño," and others.

Throughout this fascinating book, Georgina Dopico Black elegantly articulates and outlines the complicated questions, connections, cruxes, and cross-sections involved in proving her theses. The intricacy of the critical apparatus and the necessary terms pertinent to her arguments do not obfuscate her insights. The book is clearly written, the result of clear thinking. The author's reiterations and clarifications guide the reader through her arguments, highlighting connections between her points, and clarifying the premises that serve as the basis of her discussion, so that readers who do not enjoy complete familiarity with the texts or the contexts should be able to make good use of this book, one which should be on everyone's "must read" list.

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