Construction and Dissolution: The Religious Body as a Product of Narrative

The Female Grotesque in Julian of Norwich’s Showings and narratives of the Salem Witch Trials

A Division III by Zoey Walls

May 2013

Chair: Mary Russo

Members: Jeffrey Wallen, Aleksandar Stević
Table of Contents

Introduction 3

Revising the Body 15

Marking the Body 42

Works Consulted 72
Revisionist histories which seek to diagnose or explain religious and spiritual experience, especially in the face of an event like the Salem Witch Trials, in which religious experience – usually described as possessed rather than mystic – led to the execution of nineteen people and accusation of over two hundred, attempt to temper the strength of experience by structuring it according to modern rational thought. However, by designating the narratives of experience “irrational” and the realm of modern medical materialism “rational,” these histories preclude the existence of 'irrational' kinds of knowledge and narrative. Ergotism does not explain the content of the visions of the afflicted girls in Salem, nor does it explain why the group of accusers was composed mainly of young women.¹ I would like to suggest that rational explanations for religious experience are impossible, but also that they are irrelevant to the events themselves – even if rational historiographies were able to explain the witch trials or the powerful visions of Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and Saint Paul, these explanations are unable to mitigate the power and influence of 'irrational' kinds of narrative and knowledge.

Rather than engaging with or dismissing these explanations in my examination of Julian of Norwich’s *Showings* and the Salem Witch Trials, I would like

¹ Nicholas P. Spanos and Jack Gottlieb “Ergotism and the Salem Village Witch Trials,” in *Science*, New Series, Vol. 194, No. 4272 (Dec. 1976): 1390. Spanos and Gottlieb use the same physiological framework to address the trials rather than invalidating it entirely, but demonstrate 1) that convulsive ergotism generally affected entire families and 2) children were only more susceptible when they were under the age of ten, and there is no evidence to indicate a high rate of convulsive symptoms in children under ten during the witch crisis.
to suggest that the historiographies which function here as explanations for both religious experience and its aftereffects are operating within what William James terms “medical materialism,” the claim that the origin of a religious or spiritual experience – that is, hysteria or ergotism in the possessed girls – can serve as a refutation of its spiritual value.² “Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It sniffs out Saint Teresa as an hysterick, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate.”³ James suggests that when we think certain states of mind superior to others, it is not because of our knowledge concerning their organic origins, but because we find their conclusions satisfactory; what constitutes mysticism is often distinguished from hysteria or eccentricity only by the cultural endorsement of the religious behavior.⁴

William James attempts to formulate an empirical test for the validity of religious experience, the final being “not its origin, but the way in which it works on the whole.”⁵ I am not concerned here with its psychological roots, but with the lived body as the site of experience and the ways in which bodies are enacted and acted upon, and how theology and ideology about bodies affects them as articulators and as the medium of the articulated – not the origin of narrative or the grotesque, but the way it works on the whole. I chose to examine this production as a result of narrative, if not as a result of narrative as an inevitable consequence of it; narratives

³  Ibid. 13.
⁴  Ibid. 15.

⁵  James 19.
about bodies and embodiment produce bodies as they are produced by them.

Though I began this project with a much broader scope, I decided to focus on two specific instances of narrative that were connected by the grotesque feminine and, specifically, of grotesque and transgressive motherhood.

The religious experiences detailed in the following chapters do not share a common country of origin or even a common religious denomination, but they both express the power of cultural myth in their articulation of experience surrounding the grotesque female body and its role in theology and religious practice. Although the Puritans professed spiritual equality between the sexes, the direction of witchcraft accusations and other aspects of Puritan religious life demonstrate that they continued to practice similar ideas about the female body and the Fall as they are articulated in Augustine, although they use different theological and ideological justifications than Julian does to subvert that same myth. In this essay, I explore anomalous and transgressive bodies from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives, in medieval England and in early modern America. Men in Christianity have bodies, of course – the central figure of Christianity is, in essence, a suffering male body. However, in the realm of religious experience, men are afforded the opportunity to transcend their bodies in ways that women are not; in both Showings and in Puritan witch belief, though they ostensibly come from different sources, women are more thoroughly rooted in their bodies, unable to escape them, in ways that men are not.

Many Salem historiographies attempt to apply a variety of different explanations for the witch trials, ranging from blatant fraud to disease, operating
under the assumption that rational explanations are desirable or even possible. One historian suggests, using a more physiological version of the characteristic story of the witch trials in which Tituba incited the afflicted girls to practice magic, that Tituba had been slowly “dosing the girls with preparations of jimson-weed,” a poisonous plant brought to New England from the West Indies in the early seventeenth century. In 1976, Linnda Caporael claimed that the afflicted girls suffered from convulsions caused by ergotism, the effect of long term ergot poisoning from contaminated rye in Salem. In the realm of the psychological rather than the physiological, Chadwick Hansen argued that “the behavior of the afflicted persons, was not fraudulent, as some have claimed, but pathological; these people were hysteric[s] in the clinical rather than the popular sense of the term.”

Similar explanations exist for other types of religious and spiritual experience, including Julian of Norwich’s vision of Christ in her Showings. Grace Jantzen states,

> The question that arises here as in any consideration of mystical visions is why they should be taken seriously as coming from God or having spiritual significance. How, for instance, would all these intense experiences differ from hallucination or indeed from drug-induced phenomena? Julian was after all extremely ill, and... it becomes plausible to suppose that she might have been susceptible to unusual hallucinations of a religious variety.

Julian of Norwich’s Showings and the narratives of the Salem Witch Trials present two kinds of knowledge and narrative excluded from the dominant order of truth, narratives which correspond to the types of bodies they articulate and are

---

7 Ibid. 23-4.
articulated by. Through a type of knowledge which constructs materiality and lived experience in terms of the mind versus the body, the binary of mind/body comes to correlate with a number of hierarchized and dichotomized pairs, in which “the body is coded in terms that are themselves traditionally devalued”: divinity/humanity, rational/irrational, spiritual/bodily (or soul/body), man/woman, Adam/Eve, chastity/sexuality, reason/desire, morality/sin.¹⁰ The first of these terms is established through the exclusion of the second; Elizabeth Grosz states that “the subordinated term is merely the negation or denial, the absence or privation of the primary term, its fall from grace,” an analogy that can be understood more literally when the mind/body dichotomy is examined in a Christian theological and ideological contexts. For excluded bodies, Judith Butler argues that the abject or unlivable body

will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, “inside” the subject as its own founding repudiation.¹¹

These irrational kinds of narrative articulate bodies that are also coded as “outside,” as excluded or abject. The white male body is conceived as the subject and often as “the” body itself, forming through this abjection excluded bodies which, as they correspond to the devalued half of the mind/body pair, are more body than the body of the subject.¹² Sexed and racialized bodies are not afforded the opportunity to transcend the body, unlike the white male body, which is “a figure of

¹² “The” body as subject is as a default a body that is white, male, young, and able-bodied.
disembodiment, but one which is nevertheless a figure of a body, a bodying forth of
masculinized rationality, the figure of a male body which is not a body.”13 Because
the coding of the white male body allows transcendence of the body, or what Grosz
terms a “purely conceptual order” which men falsely believe they inhabit, female
bodies and bodies of color are articulated and understood as more corporeal, more
embodied than men.14 Augustine’s coding of Adam as mind and Eve as body sets Eve
(and therefore also women and the body) as the excluded object, related through
the story of the Fall to sin, sexuality, childbirth, and death, while men exist as a
reason that checks and suppresses desire. Just as the texts themselves are part of an
order of truth outside of the rational, the bodies articulated within them – sexed and
racialized bodies – also function as “the repressed or disavowed condition of all
knowledges.”15

Rational structures of knowledge (objective, verifiable, causal, quantifiable)
can be and have been applied to irrational knowledge, which exists as its negative
counterpart in dichotomous thinking (as the subject is constituted through the force
of exclusion), but these narratives resist rational structure and cannot be explicated
in a way which can force them to operate entirely within the structure of modern
rational knowledge. This is not to say that spiritual experience should be accepted
uncritically, but that the irrational element of such experience destabilizes
structures of rationality. William James states that mystical experiences “break
down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon

13 Butler 21.
14 Grosz 14.
15 Grosz 20.
the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth.” Irrational narratives of spiritual experience or affliction, then, exist not only as that which is excluded from rationality, but as a different order of truth, truth that – in these two narratives – relies on a fundamental conviction that the spiritual realm surrounds, penetrates, and profoundly affects the lived material world.

The grotesque image of the body in these narratives functions as an aspect of the irrational, where the repressed ‘lower’ parts of the body transgress their boundaries, just as, in both the narratives of the Salem Witch Trials and in Julian of Norwich’s Showings, the material world of embodiment threatens to invade and overwhelm the dominant discourse of the soul.

I identify the grotesque in these narratives not as an end in and of itself, but as a way of identifying and understanding excluded bodies in medieval and early modern narrative, as an opening-up of another order of truth in which the grotesque is integral or central to what bodies are. In her preface to Bodies That Matter, Butler states that “[I] found that I could not fix bodies as simple objects of thought. Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies ’are.’” I articulate this same movement of boundary – or disregard for established boundary – through the transgressive nature of the grotesque body, which has convexities and orifices, which leaks, which consumes and is consumed, and within which “the confines between bodies and

16 James 423.
17 Butler xiii.
between the body and the world are overcome.” Bakhtin states that the grotesque image “ignores the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface of the body and retains only its excrescences... and orifices, only that which leads beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths.” Though rational narratives and impenetrable bodies resist the transgressive nature of the grotesque body, this closed body can only exist within a single ‘rational’ order of truth; as the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, the abject is inside the subject. Both terms in hierarchized binaries must mutually produce one another, so that absolute separation between mind (or soul) and body is impossible; the abjected term exists both within and without, making any kind of identification of an isolated body or materiality – one that is not grotesque, transgressive, or a continuous process or mode of production – impossible. The grotesque body functions in both bodies of text as a dynamic resistance to circumscription and exclusion. I aim to use Bakhtin’s conception of the grotesque as a way of accessing bodies theoretically, especially bodies that are markedly not conceived of as 'good' or 'neutral’ – that is, raced and sexed bodies which present challenges to dominant ideologies of “the” body and violate boundaries of demarcation and behavior.

Julian's reimagining of the grotesque body as an entrance to religious experience rather than its antithesis articulates the power of a grotesque body that affirms female religious experience even as women are denied its validity. Analyzing Julian of Norwich’s writing allows for an opening-up of the potential for a liberatory

19 Ibid. 318.
theology of the body, incorporating the grotesque of the body into theology of spirituality and the divine. Julian of Norwich's *Showings* can serve as a foundation for a feminist theology that does not seek to transcend the body or the nature of the grotesque feminine, but to utilize the fragility of the body in order to connect with the living and dying Christ as a mode of religious and spiritual experience. In *Showings*, this grotesque female body takes the form of Christ as Mother, using the grotesque – and thereby the body itself – as a mode of access to the divine rather than its limitation. Where the dominant Augustinian discourse of the body attempts to define itself against the body in order to transcend it, Julian instead incorporates the grotesque, the irrational, the body, and the material world into her intimate experience and understanding of Christ.

Although *Showings*, written as it is by an excluded body, opens up this exclusion as a potential for inclusion, the narratives of the Salem Witch Trials function as the dominant discourse itself rather than its subversion. Witches and Satan, the agents of the assaults on Salem Village, threaten the dominant order of understanding in their uncontrollable fluidity and in their transgression of their own bodies and the bodies of the afflicted. Because of the Puritan belief in the spiritual equality of the soul despite the sex of the body, the body of the witch in the Salem Witch Trials is implicitly articulated as an unacceptable female body which is produced by and co-produces the soul. Despite the apparent conceptual separation between soul and body, the female body is weaker and allows the Devil easier access to the soul; as the soul is accessed through the fallible female body, it produces an corrupted soul, which in turn is productive of the grotesque excluded
body in the monstrous growth of the witch’s teat. Even as the mind and body are conceived of as a dichotomy, the body resists dualism and total separability from the soul; “the ‘soul’ becomes a normative and normalizing ideal according to which the body is trained, shaped, cultivated... [and] under which the body is effectively materialized.”

In the narratives of the Salem Witch Trials, I identify the female grotesque in order to establish the transgressive body of the witch, one which is grotesque, threatening, and cannot be isolated from the state of the witch's soul but which allows Satan access to the soul and then acts as a signifier of its condition. The bodies of the accusers act as a point of negotiation, or the site of the struggle between the God and the Devil or the witch. The feminine, however, does not monopolize the realm of the excluded. Tituba’s body presented different challenges to the Puritans – as a woman of color, she inhabited the realm of feminine abjection as well as the irrational, transgressive grotesque by nature of her perceived relationship to the Native Americans surrounding the Puritan colonies in New England. When modern rational historiographies attempt to explain the Salem Witch Trials – not physiologically, as I have previously addressed, but economically, psychologically, socially, and otherwise – they often make a conscious effort to understand and articulate the Puritan exclusion of female bodies. However, these same histories betray a continuing fascination with Tituba in particular, as an excluded and exoticized Other whose narrative position continues to inhabit the realm of the abject. Tituba is treated as an irreducible irrationality even within

20 Butler 9.
histories that prioritize rationality as the order of truth; she is associated with magic, blamed for the start of the witch trials, and construed as the only remaining possible witch in Salem.

Julian accepts and incorporates ambivalence into her vision of Christ, whereas narratives of the Salem Witch Trials present a kind of attempted expurgation on the part of the townspeople – purging women and devilish Indians as a way of purging ambivalent, transgressive bodies and modes of being from the Salem community. Though I use the same framework to address both Showings and transcripts of the witch trials, I do not aim to manufacture identical conclusions; neither are necessarily affirmative texts, but by focusing on more often neglected parts of Showings and the operations of witchcraft in the witch trials rather than its societal circumstances, I seek to refocus and re-envision these narratives and the ways in which both open up greater possibilities for writing and revising the body.

My concern with narrative surrounding the Salem Witch Trials extends to present-day narratives about the trials in modern historiography. Modern historiography about the trials continues to produce Tituba as a woman who, because of her excluded status as racially separate from the Salem villagers and townspeople, is a) involved in the occult and b) is somehow culpable in the events that began the trials. No contemporary accounts support this claim, but it is one of the falsities most widely perpetuated in accounts of the trials. Therefore, Tituba exists in the American imagination as a woman who is mostly harmless, but not for her own lack of effort – her involvement in the occult is harmless only because of its inefficacy, but often serves to drive the girls who accused her over some sort of
psychological cliff. Even when she escapes this portrayal, she is often blamed for accusing other women, validating the purpose of the trials as well as expanding their purview. However, Tituba’s body, as a body always indicated as a body of color, presents different challenges to Puritan constructions of acceptable bodies, and modern narrative and historiography continues to construct and reaffirm Tituba as a threat to the Puritan community, as both racially excluded from the community and infiltrating it. Our modern willingness to uncritically accept these narratives of Tituba’s culpability in the Salem Witch Trials upholds her as a threatening specter of exclusion – dark, female, irrational, and grotesque. I explore abject and grotesque bodies as an attempt to examine the ways they are produced in opposition to acceptable bodies and how this production is centered around and articulated in medieval and early modern narrative.
Revising the Body: Narrative Authority, Jesus as Mother, and the Grotesque in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*

This chapter will examine Julian of Norwich’s lifelong process of rewriting her vision narrative, *Showings*, and the way in which she conceives of the human body and thereby experiences and constructs an alternate body of Christ. Because of the length and complexity of the two main texts of *Showings*, I will limit my analysis to an examination of *Showings* as three major acts of revision: first, Julian revises herself over a period of some twenty years, and her shifting self-representation between the two texts allows her writing to enter and address Augustinian discourse on the nature of sin; second, through her entrance into this dominant discourse, Julian then rewrites Genesis 1-3 through her parable of the Lord and the Servant; finally, she presents an embodied Christ who is both male and female and constructs the feminine – and therefore the human and physical – body as a legitimate conduit of the divine. Viewed in this order, *Showings* represents a process
of revision in which each act of writing allows Julian to further re-construct the position of the body and the flesh in Christianity, and to experience Christ through physicality rather than in spite of it. Through these processes of revision, she exonerates the body – and especially the female body – from the inherent sinfulness present in Augustinian conceptions of original sin, which allows her to construct an alternate and grotesque body of Christ, one that embodies dualities of male and female, human and divine, and death and life.

Julian of Norwich and Narrative Authority

In the Middle Ages, women were firmly relegated to specific and primarily domestic spaces; McAvoy argues that because the act of writing itself “constituted a type of public speech-act directed at a real or imagined audience... [it] moved the writer from the realm of the private into the public.”21 Therefore, for medieval women writers, the act of writing itself was often a transgressive outward movement into the male-dominated public space. Eileen Powers states that even in communities of women which emphasized religious education and scholarship, writing was uncommon:

The whole trend of medieval thought was against learned women, and even in Benedictine nunneries, for which a period of study was enjoined by the rule, it was evidently considered altogether outside the scope of women to concern themselves with writing.22

For such writers, the strategic use of a rhetoric of humility, which Liz Herbert McAvoy identifies as a specific topos or formula of medieval writing, “was more than

22 Eileen Powers, Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535 (New York: Biblo & Tannen, 1922), 168n.
a customary trope; it served as a type of screen behind which [Julian of Norwich] necessarily had to operate as a writer” in order to avoid violating the boundaries of the space allocated to her.23

Julian of Norwich’s Showings (sometimes translated as Revelations of Divine Love) is a set of two texts: the first is the Short Text, written shortly after her revelations first occurred, and the second is the Long Text, a heavily revised and expanded version of the Short Text, written twenty years after the publication of the Short Text. The only date the text itself provides is the day on which Julian received her visions, “the year of our Lord one thousand, three hundred and seventy-three, on the thirteenth day of May.”24 The vision itself, which Julian received after she prayed for and received a near-fatal illness, takes the form of sixteen major revelations and eighty-six chapters, which contain bodily visions of Christ and on earth and in heaven as well as teachings and understanding communicated to Julian from the Holy Trinity.

This is a revelation of love which Jesus Christ, our endless bliss, made in sixteen showings, of which the first is about his precious crowning of thorns; and in this was contained and specified the blessed Trinity, with the Incarnation and the union between God and man’s soul, with many fair revelations and teachings of endless wisdom and love, in which all the revelations which follow are founded and connected.

Due to her decades-long revision, the Long Text presents a much more developed theology; one of many notable absences from the Short Text is the parable of the Lord and the Servant, the retold version of the Fall that is central to the construction of both man and Christ in her Long Text. The shifts between the Short and Long

23 McAvoy 6.
Texts allow us to examine in detail Julian of Norwich’s deliberate narrative choices in her representation of herself, her visions, and her theology. In the Short Text, Julian’s self-representation is fraught with anxiety and exists mainly in her claims to unworthiness, but in the Long Text, she claims narrative authority by eliminating “the very identity of the body writing” – committing a kind of authorial suicide, a self-imposed death of the author. In both form and content, Showings is an unusual text; because of the extended process of revision to which Julian subjected the Short Text, the Long Text remains a part of a greater consideration of her experience rather than a single or definitive text.

Even in the greater context of the vision narrative, Julian’s representation of her visions and experiences is atypical, resisting the two patterns of other vision narratives as set out by Peter Dinzelbacher: vision narratives generally took one of two forms, following the model of either a person who receives a guided tour of hell or purgatory and returns to life, or of a saintly woman who experiences visions in which she engages in dialogue with Christ, Mary, or the saints. Even as Julian resisted the normative modes of writing and acceptable public speech, she necessarily employed the *topos* of humility in her writings, particularly in the Short Text.

This *topos* presents itself most strongly in Julian's self-representation within the Short Text; despite her deliberate engagements in Christian discourse – which I will further address in my treatment of Augustine – *Showings* is a text that refuses to

---

acknowledge itself as didactic. Even the title of *Showings* consciously lacks claim to narrative authority, positioning itself as something that is revealed rather than asserted. In the Short Text, Julian continuously displaces her own textual and discursive authority, especially in Chapter 6 of the Short Text, within which she sets out to explain how her vision applies to all Christians while simultaneously avoiding the appearance of a instructive text. Although everything she says about herself is meant “to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends” she implores the reader to “disregard the wretched worm, the sinful creature to whom it was shown.” She only identifies herself within the Short Text in order to invalidate any narrative authority, while simultaneously expressing a desire to disappear – one which is realized in the Long Text, where she writes of herself as a genderless “creature.” In the Short Text, she states, “I am sure that there are very many who never had revelations or visions, but only the common teaching of Holy Church, who love God better than I. If I pay special attention to myself, I am nothing at all.” In her desire to eliminate herself from the text or any implicit claims to textual authority, Julian repeatedly identifies herself as the “body writing” only in order to establish it as an inferior body, one that is not qualified to author *Showings*. For Julian in her Short Text, to acknowledge her own authorship must necessarily be to discount it; in order to operate within this *topos* of humility, which was particularly present in the works of women writers, she actively denies any possibility of transgressive didacticism:

27 Julian of Norwich. 133.
28 Ibid. 177.
29 Ibid. 134.
But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not and never was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail. [...] I never understood anything from [the vision] which bewilders me or keeps me from the true doctrine of the Holy Church.30

At the close of Chapter VI of the Short Text, Julian of Norwich identifies her writings as both explicitly lacking authority and strictly in accordance with and deference to the dominant teachings of the Church. Regardless of the actual theological content of her Showings, McAvoy suggests that Julian was clearly aware that “it is an imperative to at least retain an appearance of adhering to [the regimented space of religious life and] imposed physical and intellectual boundaries.”31 That she represents herself at all in the Short Text requires her constant reminders of her deference to both “the true doctrine of the Holy Church” and those “who love God better than I.”32

In the changes made between the Short and Long Texts, there are distinct shifts in Julian’s narrative approach to self-representation. Though Julian was ostensibly not the author of the introductory paragraph to the Short Text, she includes her own revision of it in her introduction to the Long Text.

SHORT TEXT: Here is a vision shown by the goodness of God to a devout woman, and her name is Julian, who is a recluse at Norwich and still alive, A.D. 1413, in which vision are very many words of comfort, greatly moving for all those who desire to be Christ’s lovers.

I desired three graces by the gift of God.33

LONG TEXT: This revelation was made to a simple, unlettered creature, living in this mortal flesh, the year of our Lord one thousand, three hundred and seventy-three, on the thirteenth day of May; and before this the creature had desired three graces by the gift of God.34

30 Ibid. 135.
31 McAvoy 8.
32 Julian of Norwich 135.
33 Ibid. 125.
34 Ibid. 177.
In the Long Text, Julian identifies herself not by gender or by station, but only as a “creature.” In the Short Text, identifying herself as author undermines the authority of her text, and she includes Chapter 6 of the Short Text as an extended apology for her authorship, claiming only that “[she] is taught that this is what our Lord intends.” The removal of her identity from the Long Text serves as a way of claiming narrative authority by eliminating herself from the text, finally becoming “nothing at all” – by becoming nothing at all, she becomes a mediator of the text rather than its author, thereby validating her text through the authority of a God mediated only by a mortal body, not an innately inferior one.

Shifts in Julian’s self-representation between the Short and the Long Text present a process of revision, along with Julian’s growing confidence in the female body as a valid conduit of the divine. This self-imposed removal of authorship imbues her text with a God-given authority which is mediated only by the “creature...in this mortal flesh” rather than the “woman, ignorant, weak, and frail.” This redemption of the female body by its omission again presents itself in her parable of the Lord and the Servant – her retelling of Genesis 1-3 – which exists only in the Long Text.

Augustine on Genesis

Although Christianity and Christian sects are so many and varied that there can be no single dominant Christian doctrine on the interpretation of Genesis,
Augustine of Hippo’s writings on Genesis were so enormously influential that Elaine Pagels argues they “became the center of western Christian tradition, displacing, or at least wholly recasting, all previous views of creation and free will.”\textsuperscript{38} I will use Augustine's extensive writings on Genesis as a single reference point which exemplifies a sin-based worldview that arises as a direct consequence of the events detailed in Genesis 1-3 and against which Julian's \textit{Showings} can be contextualized. Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and original sin acts here as a microcosm for post-Augustinian and medieval conceptions of the Fall and its consequences, thereby serving to situate Julian of Norwich's \textit{Showings} within a tradition of prior discourse concerning sin and the body. Though Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Norwich are separated by several centuries, Augustinian theology was “the common legacy of the Middle Ages,” with which Julian was undoubtedly familiar and whose text and imagery she appropriated for her own purposes throughout \textit{Showings}.\textsuperscript{39}

Augustine was born in the Africa Province of the Roman Empire in modern-day Algeria, in the middle of the fourth century CE, and became one of the most prolific and influential thinkers of early Christianity.\textsuperscript{40} Elaine Pagels argues that his writings “effectively transformed much of the teaching of the Christian faith,” especially in their treatment of the Fall and the nature of sin.\textsuperscript{41} Augustine’s reading of Genesis serves both as a theology within and against which to contextualize Julian of Norwich’s writings as well as a theory that helped to structure the world in which

\textsuperscript{38} Pagels, \textit{Adam, Eve, and the Serpent} (New York: Vintage 1988), 100.
\textsuperscript{41} Pagels 99.
she lived and wrote. In his writings, Augustine's interpretation of Genesis explicates the cause of human suffering and death, the role of the body in that suffering, and the consequences of sin as they extend into life after Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. According to Augustine, the whole of humanity is irreparably damaged by the Fall as a direct result of Eve's actions in the Garden of Eden.

For we all were in that one man, since we all were that one man who fell into sin by the woman who was made from him before the sin... and this being vitiated by sin, and bound by the chain of death, and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other state. And thus, from the bad use of free will, there originated the whole train of evil, which, with its concatenation of miseries, conveys the human race from its depraved origin, as from a corrupt root.42

For Augustine, Genesis, as the story of humanity's expulsion from Paradise, is a story of the introduction of sin, death, and lust, which then became an innate part of the bodily human condition as a result of the original sin. Augustine refers to Paul in his letter to the Romans, who writes, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”43 Augustine makes much of the phrasing of the “body of death”; in combination with sin, death is not solely mortality, but a condition brought upon humanity by sin in which the body itself is eternally implicated:

He did not say, “The body is mortal,” but The body is dead, although it was certainly also mortal... When they disobeyed God's command, their bodies contracted, as it were, the deadly disease of death, and this changed the gift by which they had ruled the body so perfectly that they would not say, I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind. For although the body before the fall was not yet spiritual, but rather natural, nevertheless it was not this body of death from which and with which we have been born.44

43 Romans 7:24, NRSV. The Latin text of the Vulgate reflects this construction: Infelix ego homo. Quis me liberabit de corpore mortis huius?
The disobedience of the members of the body – which Augustine often identifies as unwilled lust – is a consequence of sin, as is every man's inevitable death. Augustine argues that the body was not innately sinful in Paradise, but became fundamentally corruptible as a consequence of sin, as evidenced by the body's rebellion against the will.

“We do not desire to be deprived of the body, but to be clothed with its immortality. For then, also, there will be a body, but it shall no longer be a burden, being no longer corruptible. [...] For the corruption of the body, which weighs down the soul, is not the cause but the punishment of the first sin.”

The corruptibility of the body, then, is not innate to the paradisal body, but, because of the original sin, this corruptibility is imbued in the body after the Fall from the moment of conception; because we are not clothed in the body's immortality, all bodies living after and conceived by Adam and Eve are dying bodies, inscribed with sin.

Augustine’s focus on the sinfulness of the body in its current, post-Edenic state, is also an explicitly gendered one; though Adam is corrupted – as are all of his children – Eve is identified as the instigator of sin, the corrupt influence by which man was removed from God.

There is surely some special meaning in the fact that just as the command was given to the man, and through him transmitted to the woman, so the man is questioned first. For the command came from the Lord through the man to the woman, but sin came from the Devil through the woman to the man.

According to Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* – which is often far more allegorical than literal – divine contact with the female

---

45 St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*
body is mediated by the man, and evil contact with the male body is mediated through the woman. According to Augustine, God did not permit the devil “to tempt the woman except by the serpent, nor the man except by the woman.”47 In Julian of Norwich’s Short Text, she explicitly identifies herself as a woman writing in order to establish herself as an inadequate conduit of the divine. Though this is partially a precautionary measure on her part, the *topos* of humility that she employs in the Short Text is necessitated by the medieval acceptance of this Augustinian hierarchy of bodies.

Because original sin came to man *through* the woman, the sinful nature of the body and flesh was (and remains) tied up in concepts of femininity and motherhood – the nature of woman as exemplified by Eve, the identification of Eve with desire and temptation, and the association of sexual knowledge with the Fall – all of these fundamental Christian issues which arise from Genesis and which associate women with sex, the consequence of pregnancy, the pain of childbirth, and the fallibility of the flesh in sin and in death. For Augustine, the inception of any act of sin is always a reenactment of the sin of Adam and Eve, in which the woman is identified with desire and the body, the avenue through which the man can be tempted toward sin.

For first the suggestion is made, whether by thought or by the sense of the body, by seeing or touching or hearing or tasting or smelling. When this suggestion has been made, if our desire is not aroused towards sinning, the cunning of the serpent will be excluded. If, however, it is aroused, it will be as though the woman were already persuaded. At times reason checks and suppresses... even desire that has been aroused. When this happens, we do not fall into sin.48

---

47 Ibid. 159.
The suggestion is made through the body, which is the serpent; the body speaks to desire, identified with the woman; and if reason, the masculine faculty, is aroused, man sins. Augustine not only identifies the story of Genesis with specific concerns about the nature of flesh, but reifies a structure that appears repeatedly throughout his works, the “upper” and the “lower,” a necessary duality in which a holy and superior part holds dominion over an inferior lower part. The dualities that appear most frequently in his works on Genesis are God and man, man and woman, and spirit and flesh. One of the perils of Adam and Eve is the reversal of power, in which the lower half of the binary is allowed rule over the upper. The inability of the upper part of spirit to control the lower part of the body—especially as realized in the lustful appetite and its establishment alongside death in Genesis—means that Augustine understands the Fall as an often-sexualized loss, or impoverishment, of the human faculty of will. He understands Adam and Eve clothing themselves in the Garden of Eden as an expression of this loss: “Shame modestly covered that which lust disobediently moved in opposition to the will which was thus punished for its own disobedience.” Functions of the body which move without regard to human will are, for Augustine, proof of the disruption of a divine order—Augustine viewed the Fall as the ultimate loss of free will, where the lower corruptibility of the body is given the power to rule over the spirit, as evidenced in the involuntary movements of the body to lust.

Flesh, then, is put for woman, in the same manner that spirit is something put for husband. [...] Because one rules, the other is ruled; the one ought to command, the other to serve. For where the flesh commands and the spirit serves, the house is turned the wrong way. What can be worse than a house

49 St. Augustine of Hippo, City of God, 466.
where the woman has mastery over the man? But that house is rightly ordered where the man commands and the woman obeys. In like manner that man is rightly ordered where the spirit commands and the flesh serves.50

In Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis, women are placed on the side of the flesh, identified through Eve with desire, temptation, and death. It is this interpretation of Genesis within which Julian’s Showings operates – not only with the text of Genesis itself, but with the exegesis on Genesis that identified the body, and specifically the female body, with death and lust, the wages of sin.51 Though Bynum states that medieval women writers often ignored gender dichotomies that male spiritual writers were concerned with constructing and upholding, Julian does not ignore this discourse on sin and the body, but deliberately reconstructs it by retelling the story of the Fall.

Julian’s Revision of Genesis: The Parable of the Lord and the Servant

Augustine’s theology of sin and the body became “for better and worse, the heritage of all subsequent generations of western Christianity.”52 In order to displace these narratives of the sinful body, Julian’s Showings rewrites the story of Genesis as a parable, thereby appropriating and rewriting them. Her parable of the Lord and the Servant, which serves as the foundation for her subsequent conception of an alternate body of Christ and which is integral to her displacement of Augustinian discourse, is absent from her Short Text. Having removed her bodily

---

51 Romans 6:23, NRSV.
52 Pagels xxvi.
identity and its implications from the Long Text, she rewrites Genesis 1-3 in order to liberate Augustine's conception of the female body – and therefore physicality or materiality itself – from its incrimination in original sin. She explains its exclusion by saying that "at that time I could not understand it fully or be comforted," but the suppression of the parable in the original manuscript is a further obfuscation of her narrative authority and the validity of the female body as a conduit for the divine.\(^53\)

The parable of the Lord and the Servant is Julian's foundational revision of discourse about the body that stems from Genesis 1-3. It is the revision that goes on to shape her entire theology; by retelling the story of the Fall, she redefines its implications for humanity and the flesh.

The lord looks on his servant very lovingly and sweetly and mildly. He sends him to a certain place to do his will. Not only does the servant go, but he dashes off and runs at great speed, loving to do his lord's will. And soon he falls into a dell and is greatly injured; and then he groans and moans and tosses about and writhes, but he cannot rise. The greatest hurt which I saw him in was lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving lord.\(^54\)

Where Augustine's *body of death* prescribes the disease of death as a result of the Fall, so that "death is no more inevitable for the man with dropsy or consumption... than for the infant whose life has just begun," the body of Julian's servant takes "severe bruising... which gave him great pain," bruises which cause him anguish, but which do not indelibly mark his body.\(^55\)

I understood that the servant who stood before him was shown for Adam, that is to say, one man was shown at that time and his fall, so as to make it understood how God regards all men and their falling. For in the sight of God all men are one man, and one man is all men.\(^56\)

\(^{53}\) Julian of Norwich 269.
\(^{54}\) Ibid. 268.
\(^{56}\) Julian of Norwich 270.
The exclusion of Eve from her retelling of the Fall is a redemption by omission, just as Julian claims narrative authority by removing herself from her own text. By refusing to make the distinction between herself as a woman writer and any other writer, or the deception of Eve and the fall of Adam, she positions her parable of the Lord and the Servant within a growing confidence in the human body – and her own female body – as a legitimate conduit for the divine. In her exclusion of Eve from the story of the Fall, she removes gender specificity from the narrative and thereby from physicality as a whole. The Fall for Julian becomes a story of “bruising” rather than any sort of permanent bodily change, and because of the Augustinian identification of woman in particular with sin, this act has even greater implications for the female body than it does for the male, rendering them equal and, in created nature, equally godly.

By exonerating the human body from innate sinfulness, Julian depicts the body as the point of convergence between the human and the divine, as parts of a whole rather than an upper and a lower part. The clothing of Christ, “Adam’s old tunic” – that is, the human body – is rendered “new, white and bright and forever clean, wide and ample, fairer and richer than the clothing which I saw on the Father. For that clothing was blue, and Christ’s clothing is now of a fair and seemly mixture, which is so marvelous that I cannot describe it.”\textsuperscript{57} In this embodiment, Christ’s body is Adam’s body, and Adam's body is all bodies, so that all human bodies are the point within which the created and the divine are made one – and this meeting point

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. 278.
between the human and the divine is a mixture so “so marvelous” that it cannot be described. Julian, like Augustine, sees the fall of Adam not only as a single event, but as a microcosm for all man and all falling. In this fall, she directly addresses the

Augustinian idea of the human will, irreparably damaged by sin:

This man was injured in his powers and made most feeble, and in his understanding he was amazed, because he was diverted from looking on his lord, but his will was preserved in God’s sight. I saw the lord commend and approve him for his will, but he himself was blinded and hindered from knowing this will.58

For Julian, the Fall is not the loss of any part of the human will, but man losing sight of this will – not irretrievably, but temporarily. For as redemption is more important than ever Adam’s sin was harmful, the entrance of Christ into “Adam’s old tunic” supersedes any harm that Adam had done. Even the simplest movements of the body are not rebellions of the body against the will of the spirit, but part of God’s created goodness:

A man walks upright, and the food in his body is shut in as if in a well-made purse. When the time of his necessity comes, the purse is opened and then shut again, in most seemly fashion. And it is God who does this, as it is shown when he says that he comes down to us in our humblest needs. For he does not despise what he has made, nor does he disdain to serve us in the simplest natural functions of our body.59

This retelling of the Fall is the same story, but one in which redemption is infinitely more important than falling itself. Julian unites the Old Testament with the New, creating a narrative that is able to emphasize the full evolution of the human body from its temporary hindrance of knowing its free will to its acknowledgement as a “fine and seemly mixture” of soul and body, one which is not conceived of as an Augustinian upper and a lower strata, but one in which “so are we, soul and body,

58 Julian of Norwich 270.
59 Ibid. 186.
clad and enclosed in the goodness of God.” Julian directly addresses Augustine’s ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ hierarchy of bodies and the corruptibility of the body in sin, but rewrites it as “interior” and “exterior,” reforming its hierarchical structure and instead presenting soul, body, and the divine nature of each as a series of layers in which the divine nature of the interior soul is never overtaken by any sin inherent in the exterior body.

Reluctance and deliberate choice are in opposition to one another, and I experience them both at the same time; and these are two parts, one exterior, the other interior. The exterior part is our mortal flesh, which is sometimes in pain, sometimes in sorrow, and will be so during this life, and I felt it very much at this time; and it was in that part of me that I felt regret. The interior part is an exalted and blessed life which is all peace and love; and this is more secretly experienced; and it was in this part of me that I powerfully, wisely and deliberately chose Jesus for my heaven. And in this I truly saw that the interior part is the master and ruler of the exterior, attaching no importance, paying no heed to what the exterior part may will, but forever fixing its intention and will upon being united with our Lord Jesus. But it was not revealed to me that the exterior part would induce agreement in the interior part; but it was revealed that the interior part draws the exterior by grace, and both will be eternally united in bliss through the power of Christ.”

The results of Augustine’s conception of original sin are rooted in shame, so that the upper part of the person (that is, the spirit) is ashamed to be controlled by the lower, or the desires of the flesh: “Now the soul is ashamed that the body, which by nature is inferior and subject to it, should resist its authority.” Julian sets the relation of body and spirit horizontally, rather than vertically, and it is only in the exterior part that she feels regret and pain, as all bodies do. She addresses the rebellion of the body, but only in that such corruptibility “was not revealed to [her],” again representing herself as only a mediator of authority while drawing attention

60 Ibid. 186.
61 Ibid. 212.
62 St. Augustine of Hippo, City of God 471.
to God’s own omission in her vision of the Augustinian duality of body and spirit as disparate parts.

*Jesus as Mother: The grotesque body of Christ*

Just as Adam and Christ are united in one body in Julian’s parable of the Lord and the Servant, her systematic revision of discourse surrounding the body from Genesis to Augustine allows her to form a body of Christ that encompasses both the higher and lower parts of all things, a body that is shaped by the “deep ambivalence” described by Mikhail Bhaktin’s conception of the grotesque. Christ’s body – as a grotesque body – crosses the boundaries between “the body and the world and between separate bodies,” establishing an alternate body of Christ which encompasses the ambivalence of the grotesque, existing as a space between, an embodiment of the grotesque which is infinitely permeable, and which is simultaneously “living and vivid and hideous and fearful and sweet and lovely.”

Julian’s textual reconstruction of the nature of discourse on sin and the body allows her to construct the body of Christ as an ultimately grotesque body in its orifices and its continual occupation of the “boundary dividing one body from another,” inhabiting the boundaries between male and female, mother and child, and birth and death.

Because Augustine’s conception of original sin is both inherited and deeply gendered, the image of the mother and child becomes an image of sin, in which the

---

63 Julian of Norwich, 188.
Fall theologically subjugates the body. Stained by the sins of Eve, women were forever associated with that sin and bore its consequences in childbirth and motherhood. In pregnancy, women carried the physical evidence of the lust necessary to conceive a child, and in childbirth and rearing, they were the conduit through which the body of death is created and propagated – both in Eve’s temptation of Adam and in the mother’s bringing the child into being. Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis 1-3 makes it a fundamental story of human bondage – all humanity is born into sin, exemplified in Augustine’s Confessions by the image of the child at the breast:

"Who shall remind me of the sins of my infancy: for in Thy sight there is none pure from sin, not even the infant whose life is but a day upon the earth... What then were my sins at that age? [...] If I was conceived in iniquity, and in sin my mother nourished me in the womb, then where, my God, where O Lord, where or when was I, your servant, innocent?" 65

By reconstructing the human body and exonerating it from the Augustinian conception of original sin, Julian appropriates the image of the female and the mother – and specifically the image of the child at the breast – in her revision of the body of Christ as Mother, both spiritually and physically.

Medieval understandings of physiology made Christ – bodily and spiritually – much more like a mother's than a father's:

We find three basic stereotypes of the female or the mother: the female is generative (the fetus is made of her very matter) and sacrificial in her generation (birth pangs); the female is loving and tender (a mother cannot help loving her own child); the female is nurturing (she feeds the child with her own bodily fluid). [...] In medieval medical theory breast milk is processed blood. 66

Medieval images of the maternal encompassed much of what writers wished to express about the role of Christ in the Trinity and in Christianity.\textsuperscript{67} Christ is generative and made of the very matter of humanity; Christ is eternally loving; Christ is nurturing, he feeds humanity with his blood in the Eucharist, just as a mother feeds a child with herself. Caroline Walker Bynum argues that, in medieval female mystical experience that revealed itself in physical manifestation – that is, stigmata and other 'conversion phenomena' – “women’s bodies were more apt than men’s to display unusual changes, closures, openings or exudings.”\textsuperscript{68} Identifying Christ with these closures, openings, and exudings – that is, features of the grotesque body – was, for Julian, another way of aligning him with conceptions of the medieval female body. For Julian, her simultaneous identification of the body of Christ with the grotesque and with the female body reinforce one another; because the female body – and especially the maternal body – is one that exhibits unusual openings and exudings and inhabits a transgressive position in relationship to other bodies, it is a grotesque body. Julian’s depiction of the body of the maternal Christ parallels her visceral vision of the mutilated body of Christ on the cross, and this grotesque image of wounds, openings, and exudings then serves as a means of reinforcing Julian’s association of the birthing and dying body of Christ with medieval conceptions of the female body. Though Julian never ceases to refer to Christ by the male pronoun, she explicitly constructs his body as one that is female in her conception of the motherhood and the wounds of Christ: “And so Jesus is our

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid. 133.
\item \textsuperscript{68} Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}, 187.
\end{itemize}
true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his
taking our created nature.”

_Showings_ is interspersed with – perhaps even structured by – visceral and
grotesque visions of the Passion of Christ. Though she gives special attention to the
wound in Christ’s side, the body she depicts is not a closed body, or even a
conventionally wounded body, with only the traditional wounds in Christ’s hands,
feet, and side. Julian’s Christ is grotesque in his corporeality as he dies and at the
moment of death.

The blessed body was left to dry for a long time, with the wrenching
of the nails and the weight of the body; for I understood that because
of the tenderness of the sweet hands and the sweet feet, through the
great and cruel hardness of the nails the wounds grew wide, and the
body sagged because of its weight, hanging there for a long time, and
the piercing and scraping of the head and the binding of the crown, all
cotted with dry blood, with the sweet hair attaching the dry flesh to
the thorns... The sweet skin and the tender flesh with the hair and the
blood was all scraped and loosened above by the thorns and broken
into many fragments... so that the sweet skin and the flesh broke all in
pieces and the hair pulled it from the bones. It was torn in pieces like
a cloth.

Julian’s fixation on the disintegrating body of Christ on the cross centers on his
many wounds, the fragility of his humanity, and the extent of his suffering. Julian
accentuates the qualities of the grotesque in the body of Christ, both conceptually –
as a body that contains and transgresses boundaries between bodies – and
affectively, in its material and visceral fragmentation.

The wound in Christ’s side, received on the cross, functions as the gateway
into and out of Christ’s body, an orifice within which “the confines between bodies

---

69 Julian of Norwich, 296.
70 Julian of Norwich, 208.
and between the body and the world are overcome.”\textsuperscript{71} This wound is created by the penetration into the body by a spear while Christ hangs on the cross, and it is an opening that immediately spills forth: “One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.”\textsuperscript{72} This wound serves as the point of convergence between Julian’s double images of the grotesque, as a wound which is forcefully opened as Christ dies and exudes blood and water, but which then serves as the point of access to the body of the maternal Christ. The side-wound of Christ transcends the boundaries between Christ’s body and the human body; for Julian, it is both the entrance to the divine womb as well as the breast from which Christ nurses humanity: “Our mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament.”\textsuperscript{73}

The sacrament to which Julian refers, the Holy Eucharist, is the consumption of Christ’s body through bread and his blood through wine, so that the blood and water that exudes forth from Christ’s side on the cross easily becomes an image of breastfeeding. The very act of participation in the Eucharist, which Julian addresses in her sustained focus on the blood of Christ feeding humanity, is an attribute of the grotesque body, in which “the body swallows the world” – that is, holds all of humanity within it and within the state of becoming – and “is itself swallowed by the world” in the act of consumption inherent in the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{71} Bakhtin 317.
\textsuperscript{72} John 19:33-34, NRSV.
\textsuperscript{73} Julian of Norwich 298.
\textsuperscript{74} Bakhtin 317.
Through this wound and through the dissolving of limits between bodies which is the grotesque, Christ's motherhood becomes reflexive in nature. Christ performs the role of both mother and child, so that each is born from the other. Julian identifies Christ's motherhood as his creation of humanity and as his own birth through it: “And so Jesus is our true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature.” Even his incarnation and birth is an expression of motherhood: “Because he wanted altogether to become our Mother in all things, made the foundation of his work most humbly and most mildly in the maiden's womb.” True motherhood is an endless process of becoming: “our true Mother Jesus, he alone bears us for joy and for endless life.” The essence of motherhood for Julian of Norwich is an infinitely reflexive motherhood, in which humanity is born from Christ just as he is born into it, and humanity returns to the wound-entrance to the womb, reentering into the body of the Mother.

The mother can lay her child tenderly to her breast, but our tender Mother Jesus can lead us easily into his blessed breast through his sweet open side, and show us there a part of the godhead and of the joys of heaven, with inner certainty of endless bliss. And that he revealed in the tenth revelation, giving us the same understanding in these sweet words which he says: See, how I love you, looking into his blessed side, rejoicing.

Joy and endless life are here explicitly identified with the reentrance into the body of Mother Jesus, who brings humanity forth “in our first creation,” is brought forth from humanity in “his taking our created nature,” and then brings it back into

75 Julian of Norwich 296.
76 Ibid. 297.
77 Ibid. 297-8.
78 Julian of Norwich 298.
his own body, “into his blessed side.” Bakhtin states that in a canon which has
distanced itself from the grotesque body, “the duality of the body is preserved only
in one theme... of nursing a child.” This image of nursing is “a pale reflection of [the
body's] former dual nature.” Julian of Norwich’s bodily duality, presented in the
incarnation of Christ, is an image of nursing that is not a “pale reflection,” but a full
realization of the dual images of mother and child and thereby the grotesque, in
which the child is laid through the breast and into the mother. The “theme... of
nursing a child” is, in Julian of Norwich’s body of Christ, a reflexive and reciprocal
motherhood in which Christ is breastfed and breastfeeds, is born and gives birth,
and is mothered as he himself mothers.

For in the same time that God joined himself to our body in the maiden’s
womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us
all in himself, he united it to our substance. In this union he was perfect man,
for Christ, having joined in himself every man who will be saved, is perfect
man.
So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in
Christ, for she who is mother of our savior is mother of all who are saved in
our savior, and our savior is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born
and out of whom we shall never come.

The embodied Christ exists simultaneously as an image of birth and death; he is
grotesque not only in his total incorporation of a “deep ambivalence” and duality of
different bodies, but also in his existence between different states of the body,
containing both endlessly generative life and a “shriveled image of death.”

Julian's systematic rewriting of the nature of the body and the story of Christ
allows her to depict a textual Christ that embodies disparities, a multiple and ever-

79 Ibid. 296-8.
80 Bakhtin 322.
81 Ibid.
82 Julian of Norwich 292.
83 Bakhtin 304; Julian of Norwich 206.
shifting body that is always both the shadow of death and the Mother of life. Julian’s Christ then becomes a deeply ambivalent figure, a human embodiment of a series of previously binary pairs: human and divine, male and female, body and soul. “Julian envisions a God who exploits the duality of human spirit and physicality.”84 Her bodily visions of Christ are explicitly focused on the blood of Christ and often focus only on its movement:

The drops were round like pellets as the blood issued, they were round like a herring’s scales as they spread, they were like raindrops off a house’s eaves, so many that they could not be counted. This vision was living and vivid and hideous and fearful and sweet and lovely.85

This double vision of Christ, the Mother Jesus and the rotting body on the cross, are individual grotesques made one in their ambivalence; Julian depicts Christ as a single body, but one that is simultaneously rotting on the cross while endlessly giving birth and generating all mankind. Julian’s depictions of the Passion begin when she first sees Jesus on the cross, “red blood running down from under the crown,” and continue in a series of six parts dispersed throughout the text until “the sweet body was so discolored, so dry, so shriveled, so deathly and so pitiful that he might have been dead for a week, though he went on dying.”86

Just as the body of Christ does not exist as a sealed, hermetic body, Julian’s text is not a hermetic one; Showings engages in dialogue and revision with itself, with Genesis and the writings of Augustine, and with the nature of the body of Christ. Showings is so engaged in the process of revision that it is always in the process of becoming, as the grotesque body is. And as Augustine’s interpretation of

84 McEntire 18.
85 Julian of Norwich 188.
86 Julian of Norwich 207.
Genesis has very real consequences for the body – especially the female body, thereby influencing Julian’s own status as a female body writing – Julian’s narrative reconstruction of Genesis produces a different conception of the human body, one that is not inherently sinful or divided into an upper and a lower part, but one which is inherently grotesque, existing in its divine created nature in the boundaries between body and soul, between gendered bodies and within the body of Christ. Through her deliberate engagement in previous discourse on Augustine, she rearranges his bodily hierarchy, ultimately envisioning a holy human body, intimately connected with and part of the body of Christ.

Julian prayed for sickness, for she “wanted to have every kind of pain, bodily and spiritual, which [she] should have if [she] had died.” Julian’s depiction of Christ’s suffering body is a visceral and fragmented one, in which the body of Christ is not marred by only the wounds of the nails and the wound in his side, but which rots, shrivels, and disintegrates slowly throughout her visions of his Passion. The Long Text of Showings begins with Julian’s description of her own prayers for sickness, and Christ’s own suffering body begins her visions. By her own account, when Julian was thirty and a half years old, God sent her the sickness that brought her close to death:

On the third night I received all the rites of Holy Church, and did not expect to live until day. [...] By then my body was dead from the middle downwards... After this the upper part of my body began to die, until I could scarcely feel anything. My greatest pain was my shortness of breath and the ebbing of my life. Then truly I believed that I was at the point of death.88

---

87 Showings 178.
88 Showings 180.
Her own physical pain and suffering are rewarded with a vision of Christ’s grotesque body on the cross, which pervades the entirety of the Long Text. Julian’s own physicality – to which she was inherently connected by nature of her status as a woman – is the medium through which she experiences spiritual revelation. By praying for illness, she strengthens her own spiritual connection with Christ through that very materiality that Augustine viewed as distant and distinct from God, through the experience of being a body that suffers and feels pain. Her own experience of bodily pain immediately reveals Christ’s: “At this [experience of death], suddenly I saw the red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely and copiously.” The fragility of Julian’s body, its failings and its disintegration through sickness, are the qualities of physicality through which she connects with the human Christ.

The central event of Christianity is the “Word became flesh,” and this focus of incarnation and physicality makes the literal imitation of Christ in some ways more accessible. For Julian, whose humanity is intertwined with her sex and therefore her inescapable connection to physicality, it is embracing this physicality through her illness that brings her closer to the experience of Christ. “Thus women reached God not by reversing what they were but by sinking more fully into it,” experiencing Christ and divinity through this connection to physicality – and the female body – rather than in spite of it. In the same way that Julian’s physical experience brings her closer to Christ, Christ’s own physicality brings him closer to the human body – and therefore the female body – in his grotesque motherhood.

89 Showings 181
90 Bynum, “And Woman His Humanity” (274).
Marking the Body: Puritan Witchcraft Belief, the Grotesque Witch, and Tituba’s Role in the Salem Witch Trials

“Bodies are not only physical phenomena but also surfaces of inscription, loci of control, and transmitters of culture... encompassing both the physical and the symbolic, it is, therefore, fully enmeshed in the social relations of power.”

According to contemporary accounts, near the end of February 1692, young girls belonging to the minister Samuel Parris’s family began to act strangely, “by getting into Holes, and creeping under Chairs and Stools, and to use sundry odd Postures and Antick Gestures, uttering foolish, ridiculous Speeches.” One of their physicians suggested that the girls might be bewitched. Against the wishes of Samuel Parris, Mary Sibley – a neighbor – attempted a form of counter-magic by asking Parris’s slave, John Indian, to make a witch cake to identify the girls’ tormentor. The witch cake consisted of rye meal and the urine of the afflicted girls, and was fed to a dog in order to identify the source of the witchcraft. Samuel Parris held a day of prayer with neighboring ministers in his home on March 11th during

91 Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter, “‘The earthly frame, a minute fabrick, a Centre of Wonders: An Introduction to Bodies in Early America” in A Centre of Wonders (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2001), 2.
93 Ibid.
which Betty Parris (his daughter) and Abigail Williams (his niece) reacted negatively to prayers and convulsed in apparent fits. The children made three initial witchcraft accusations: Sarah Good, “who had long been counted a Melancholy or Distracted Woman,” Sarah Osborne, “an Old Bed-rid Woman,” and Tituba Indian, Samuel Parris’s slave and the wife of John Indian.94

It is necessary to establish the most basic facts of the Salem witch trials to whatever extent they can be established; many accounts begin with extensive narratives of fortune-telling and the occult which have no basis in actual events and which reflect on later American historians more than the trials themselves. In narrative accounts of the Salem Witch Trials, the female body is produced by and co-produces the soul; because their bodies were more vulnerable, women’s souls were also more susceptible to Satan; once their souls had accepted Satan’s covenant – or in the case of the afflicted girls, had been attacked by witches – their bodies then physically reproduced this grotesque transgression, in action and in flesh. Sarah Osborne and Sarah Good, two of the first three accused, were sexually and socially marked, but I will focus both on the generalized Puritan idea of the grotesque body of the witch and on Tituba’s body, which, because it was racially marked, continues to occupy a different space in both fictional and historic discourse surrounding the witch trials up to the present day.

*Puritan Belief, Sin, and Witchcraft*

Though Puritan theology “operated on the premise that all congregants were equally able to covenant with God in the privacy and immediacy of their own

94 Ibid.
consciences,” Puritan belief and practice still accepted a divine hierarchy in which the natural and fallen state of the body and sexual difference governed religious experience and the inclination toward sin. In keeping with their belief that all souls were equal before God, Puritans never explicitly articulated or confronted a belief that women were inherently more sinful than men. However, witchcraft in seventeenth-century New England remained a largely gendered crime, as it had been in continental Europe, with women comprising eighty percent of the accused. The witchcraft belief of Puritan New England was particularly preoccupied with socially, spiritually, and bodily transgressive women and grotesque and unholy maternal function. Puritan ideas about sin were closely tied to the fall of Adam, and thereby to the vulnerability of the body to assaults upon it by the Devil. Puritan beliefs about the nature of humanity, sin, and the Devil meant that despite this apparent theological equality, men and women understood and articulated themselves differently in relation to sin. These cultural constructions of difference meant that both men and women more closely related womanhood to sinfulness and believed that women were more vulnerable to the temptations of Satan.

Andrew Delbanco identifies two opposing strains in early colonial attitudes to sin and salvation. The first is the belief that sin is, at its heart, the absence of God, and that divine grace is freely given. The second “became dominant after the antinomian scare had been overcome,” and saw sin not as the absence of good – that

In addition, the majority of men accused of witchcraft were closely related to accused women, which is especially unsurprising when considered in light of Cotton Mather’s statement that “Bad Company... [is] the greatest engine the devil has.”
is, God – but the presence of evil in Satan and devils. In contemporary sermons delivered on Salem witchcraft, there is very little ambiguity in the categorization of good and evil. On March 27, 1692, Samuel Parris preached,

[Christ] knows us perfectly; and he knows those of us that are in his church, that we are either saints or devils, true believers or hypocrites and dissembling Judases that would sell Christ and his kingdom to gratify a lust... We are either saints or devils: the Scripture gives us no medium.

Because man’s nature was inherently unclean, being a saint rather than a devil required constant vigilance against Satan and his followers. Discourse about Satan’s ever-present malignity was more than theoretical – it was very real and “always close at hand.” In Cotton Mather’s *A Discourse on the Power and Malice of the Devils*, he writes that “the Devils are likewise Restleß Adversaries of our souls. They go about, they are always in Action, always in Motion, that they may undo the souls of men.” Satan had enormous power, but he could not force any person to sin, so a covenant with the Devil was always framed as an explicit act of agency.

John Cotton’s widely circulated *New England Primer* taught late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century children the catechism and the alphabet, but was heavily invested in religious education. This education was in no small part about sin, death, Heaven, and Hell; children learned early their own culpability for the sins

---


99 Adams 12.


of Adam. “A” stood for “In Adam's Fall./We sinned all,” and the catechism posed a series of questions and answers about the nature of sin:

Q. What is your birth sin?  
A. Adam’s sin imputed to me, and the corrupt nature.

Q. What is your corrupt nature?  
A. My corrupt nature is empty of grace, bent unto sin, only unto sin, and that continually.  

_The Day of Doom, or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment, with a Short Discourse on Eternity_, first published in 1665, was “one of the few books to be found in ordinary Puritan households, along with the Bible and a catechism.”

Stanzas 166-181, which detail an imagined conversation between Christ and unbaptized infants, address the nature of original sin and its affects on the body in Puritan belief. The infants, beseeching Christ, do not understand why they are implicated in sin:

O great Creator, why was our nature depraved and forlorn?  
Why so defiled, and made so viled whilst we were yet unborn?

Christ responds,

What you call old Adam's fall  
and only his trespass  
You call amiss to call it his  
both his and yours it was. [...]  
He stood and fell, did ill or well,  
not for himself alone,  
but for you all, who now his fall,

---

102 Reis 32.  
and trespass would disown. [...]  
Had you been made in Adam’s stead,  
you would like things have wrought,  
And so into the self same woe,  
yourselves and yours have brought.  

Even those unbaptized infants who never lived lives or were given the opportunity to sin are implicated in the sins of Adam, for, as the poem explains, Adam stood and fell for all those who would have done so in his stead.  

Due to the sins of Adam, the human condition is a naturally debauched one, so that all mankind was “born in state forlorn, / with natures so depraved.” Puritan lessons, for both children and adults, consistently emphasized each individual’s culpability in Adam’s Fall, the inherently impure soul, and the imminent reality of Hell.

For the Puritans of seventeenth-century Massachusetts, the presence of Satan meant the active displeasure of God; Satan was not a free agent, but one who was permitted to do great evil – even within the godliest communities – as part of God’s Judgment. In Cotton Mather’s *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, he writes, “The Secrets also God’s Providence, in permitting Satan and his Instruments to molest His children, not in their Estates only, but in their Persons and their Posterity too, are part of His Judgments that are unsearchable, and His Wayes that are past finding out.” For Mather, the presence of witchcraft in the New World may have been frightening evidence not only of God’s displeasure, but of the inadequate spiritual state of the Puritan colonists which caused this displeasure and set forth the workings of Satan. “Go tell Mankind, that there are

---

104 Kenneth B. Murdock and Michael Wigglesworth 31-2.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
Devils & Witches; & that tho those night-birds lest appear where the Day-light of the Gospel comes, yet New-Engl. has had Exemples of their Existence & Operation."\textsuperscript{108}

Cotton Mather stated in one of his many discourses against anti-witchcraft beliefs,

> It has also been made a doubt by some, whether there are any such things as Witches, i.e. Such as by Contract or Explicit Covenant with the Devil, improve, or rather are improved by him to the doing of things strange in themselves, and besides their natural Course. But (besides that the Word of God assures us that there have been such, and gives order about them) no Age passes without some apparent Demonstration of it.\textsuperscript{109}

Cotton Mather and other Puritan ministers “used Christian theology to argue that a belief in God implied a belief in devils and witches”; if belief in God necessitated belief in devils, doubting the existence of devils and witches threatened to weaken belief in God.\textsuperscript{110} Witchcraft and the constant action of devils was a salient part of Puritan belief in its Biblical basis as well as its historical relevance, and despite their separatist tendencies, the colonists' witchcraft beliefs mirrored many of those in Europe.\textsuperscript{111}

Though Puritan belief often emphasized the equality of all souls in their ability to access God, the Puritans of seventeenth-century New England conceived of witchcraft in gendered terms, as evidenced by the patterns of witchcraft accusations in Salem and in the whole of New England.\textsuperscript{112} Even during periods when men were accused of witchcraft more frequently than usual, women still made up 76 percent

\textsuperscript{108} Mather, introduction to Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions in American Puritan Writings, 2.
\textsuperscript{109} Mather, “To the Reader,” 4.
\textsuperscript{110} Reis 64.
\textsuperscript{111} However, witch hunts peaked in Europe between 1580 and 1630, and the Salem Witch Trials occurred much later than most other witch hunts. This comparative delay goes some way towards explaining why almost all those involved recanted their actions almost immediately after the trials ended – there was a general feeling in Salem after the trials that the witch craze itself, rather than witchcraft, was a deception of Satan.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. 92.
of witchcraft accusations. Reis argues that although Puritan spirituality was theoretically equal, men and women internalized and expressed their beliefs about sin and themselves differently:

Men seemed to differentiate what or who they were from what they did... Conversion narratives suggest that Puritan men could distinguish between their inner selves (their souls) and the rest of themselves (mind and body) and thus could repent for particular sins without perceiving themselves as worthless.

Men and women articulated their beliefs about their natures differently; where men repented for particular sins, separating specific acts from the overall human inclination toward sin, women identified themselves with their inherently corrupt souls. Though this difference in attitude is by no means absolute, Puritan writings often suggest that women identify themselves with the worst of the soul and the greatest consequences of the soul: the nature that is inclined to sin, and only to sin.

Women's souls were never explicitly more evil than men's, but Puritans believed that Satan accessed the soul by attacking the body. Because women's bodies were weaker than men's, their souls were more vulnerable to the Devil's persuasion. Both men and women passively waited to receive grace from God, but this passivity became more dangerous in the female body: “A woman's feminine soul, jeopardized in a woman's feminine body, was frail, submissive, and passive – qualities that most New Englanders thought would allow her to become either a wife to Christ or a drudge to Satan.” Samuel Parris cites the succumbing of men to the temptations of the Devil as evidence of Satan’s strength: “Heretofore some silly

\begin{footnotes}
113 Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 48
114 Ibid. 39-41.
115 Ibid. 39.
116 Reis 94.
\end{footnotes}
ignorant old woman, etc. but now we have known those of both sexes... drawn into this damnable practice.”¹¹⁷ For Parris, it is not unexpected that ungodly old women are especially susceptible to witchcraft, but the potentially successful assault of Satan on even male bodies demonstrated his strength in Salem.

The witch’s body is almost exclusively a female body that refuses to behave as it should, marked sexually, socially, and sometimes racially. It is a female body that operates outside of its social – and therefore theological – bounds, overstepping the boundaries of appropriate female behavior. Sarah Good fit the popular mental and physical appearance of the witch – she was a middle-aged woman of low social position often characterized as abrasive and otherwise unfeminine, where Puritan ideas of femininity revolved around passivity and submission, especially within the covenant of marriage. Her marriage did not obey theologically and socially prescribed models of husband and wife; Good’s own husband testified that

he was afraid that she either was a witch or would be one very quickly... Mr. Harthon asked him his reason why he said so of her, whether he had ever seen any thing by her, he answered no, not in this nature, but it was her bad carriage to him, and indeed said he I may say with tears that shee is an enemy to all good.¹¹⁸

Good’s behavior in her marriage predisposed her to accusations of witchcraft – even if she were not already a witch, her refusal to submit to her husband meant that she had already, in some sense, succumbed to ungodly forces. By consciously enlisting in the service of the Devil, sometimes by signing his 'Book', “the witch acted

¹¹⁷ Samuel Parris, “These Shall Make War with the Lamb” given on September 11, 1692 in Salem-Village Witchcraft ed. P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, 134.
aggressively,” instead of in accordance with female passivity and submission.119 This passivity made her simultaneously open to Christ and vulnerable to Satan, but the ultimate covenant with the Devil was seen as a deliberate choice, a monstrous reflection of the holy covenant with God.

Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that Puritan ideas of gender and sex were grounded in the divine hierarchy of God rather than in the body itself. Therefore, “metaphors of sexed bodies emphasized relations of power more than physically grounded identities.”120 This emphasis on divinely-ordained power relationships may have made the female witch all the more transgressive; by violating gender roles and relationships of power – as Sarah Good did within marriage – they were violating not only appropriate social roles, but the hierarchy ordained by God himself. Rather than passively waiting for the grace of God, witches demonstrated agency that was evil not only in its violation of sexed submission, but in its explicit choice to align oneself with Satan. Because gender roles and power relationships were divinely ordained, a woman’s choice to transgress social and sexual boundaries was a deliberate movement against the will of God.

Grotesque Bodies: Witches and the Afflicted Girls

While witchcraft accusations were intimately related to Puritan fears of the violation of divinely ordained social and gender hierarchies, the sin of witchcraft also produced the grotesque female body of the witch; the body of the witch

119 Reis 107.
120 Dillon 132.
transgresses both social and bodily divisions, existing on “the boundary dividing one body from the other and, as it were, at their points of intersection.”

The charges brought against the first three accused women at Salem were intimately related to the characteristics of the witch’s body and the boundaries of other bodies. The witch’s body and her soul mutually implicated one another; the accused witch’s body allowed her soul to fall victim to the persuasion of Satan, and “a witch’s body clearly manifested the soul’s acceptance of the diabolical covenant,” so that the bodies of both witches and the afflicted were produced by and co-produced the condition of their souls.

The bodies of both the accused and the afflicted functioned as the site of spiritual conflict as they were enacted and acted upon; the transgressions of the witch’s body outside of its confines produced grotesque behavior in the bodies of the afflicted girls and, simultaneously, extrusions of unholy maternity on her own flesh. The witch’s body is “all that seeks to go beyond the body’s confines,” both in its transgression of the boundaries between bodies and in its own corrupt flesh, which, after the soul assented to Satan, produced “excrecences (sprouts, buds) and orifices… [which lead] beyond the body’s limited space or into the body’s depths.”

The afflicted bodies of the accusers, as the site and product of the warfare between God and the Devil, are bodies whose boundaries are forcibly opened and made grotesque by the power of the witch. An assault on the body was an attempt to gain access to the soul, a testament to the strength of the Puritan belief in the ability

---


122 Reis 94.

123 Bakhtin, 317-318
of the spiritual world to profoundly affect the material world and vice versa. Sarah Good was officially charged with “feloniously Committing Sundry acts of Witchcraft at Salem Village on ye Bodys of Elizabeth Parris Eliz Hubbert Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam." In 1692, the minister Deodat Lawson wrote, “Their Motions in their Fits are Preternatural, both as to the manner, which is so strange as a well person could not Screw their Body into; and as to the violence also it is preternatural.” These preternatural fits were the performative result, expressed in the actions of the body, of both spiritual and bodily assaults upon the afflicted. Many of the assaults on the afflicted girls involve the penetration of the skin by the spectral apparition of the witch, forcing openings, exudings, bleeding, and leakages. Both Elizabeth Hubbard and Ann Putnam Jr. testified that Sarah Good pinched and pricked them “most grievously,” and Sarah Vibber reproduced a more elaborate version of the same accusation: “the Apperishtion of Sarah Good has most grievously tormented me by pinching and beating me and almost Choaking me to death and pricking me with pinnes after a most dreadful manner. The most repeated accusations in the early trials were the pricking of the body with pins and, as Vibber’s accusation demonstrates, the witch’s transgression of the afflicted person’s mouth or throat.

As Vibber’s accusation demonstrates, the attacks described by the accusers were preoccupied with the violation of the barrier of the skin and the creation of unnatural openings in the skin, but often also with the mouth and

124 Records of Salem Witchcraft 15
125 Narratives of the Salem Witchcraft Cases, 162 ed. Burr
126 Records of Salem Witchcraft 29
throat as an entrance to the depths of the body. Deodat Lawson reinforced this obsession with the mouth with his testimony that

> Sometimes, in their fits, they have had their tongues drawn out of their mouths to a fearful length... and while they had been so strained in their fits, and had their arms and legs, etc. wrested as if they were quite dislocated, the blood hath gushed plentifully out of their mouths.\textsuperscript{127}

In these assaults upon the bodies of the afflicted girls, the apparent actions of the witches then reproduced the grotesque in the accusers' bodies; with the entrance of the mouth transgressed by the witch, the mouths of the accusers then become the center of “that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines.”\textsuperscript{128}

Witchcraft accusations were highly preoccupied not only with unholy maternal power, but with the mouth as the route by which the boundaries of bodies were violated. The fixation on the extension of the witch’s body beyond its boundaries and other bodies was centered on extrusions and expulsions from the body, but also on her ability to access the orifices of the afflicted.\textsuperscript{129}

> The conception of the mouth as the route by which the boundaries of the body are transgressed was mirrored in the witch’s ability to violate the domestic body, the structure of the house itself. Robert Blair St. George argues that in popular Puritan metaphor, parts of the house corresponded to specific parts of the body, and that "house-body metaphoric play attains its most precise equivalency in witchcraft

\textsuperscript{127} Frances Hill, \textit{A Delusion of Satan} (Cambridge: Da Capo Books, 1995), 44.
\textsuperscript{128} Bakhtin 316.
\textsuperscript{129} Bakhtin, 316.
narratives.” In the documents used as evidence against Sarah Osborne in court, John Hughes testified that

on yᵉ 2ᵈ day of March yᵗ coming from Goodman Sibleys aboute Eight of ye clock in yᵉ night hee saw a Great white dogg whome he came up to but he would not stire but when he was past hee ye sd dogg followed him about 4 or 5 pole and so disapeared yᵉ same night yᵉ sd John Hughes beeing in Bed in a closed Roome and yᵉ dore being fast so yᵗ no catt nor dogg could come in yᵉ said John Saw a Great light appear in yᵉ fd Chamber and Risieing up in his bed he say a large Gray Catt at his beds foot.

In Puritan house-body metaphor, the door became the mouth of the domestic body, the orifice “that... leads beyond the body's limited space or into the body's depths.” The ability to pass through closed doors exemplifies the ability of the

---

131 Salem Witchcraft 39
132 Bakhtin 318.
transgressive fluidity of the witch to overcome other bodies’ attempts to close themselves, to create a means of domestic and physical embodiment in which “all orifices of the body are closed.” 133 Despite the house-body’s closed door – that is, closed mouth – Sarah Osborne entered it, overcoming the closed orifice in an act common to the accused witch, becoming a body which surpasses its own boundaries and infiltrates the world and other bodies. 134

The accusations brought against Sarah Good function as a microcosm for the first three witch accusations; Good was accused of leaving her own body, pricking and otherwise violating other bodies, changing shape, and consorting with the devil in her various shapes. The accusations brought against the three women demonstrate a preoccupation with the bodies of the accused – the body of the witch – and their grotesque abilities to transgress the confines of their own bodies. “The formlessness of the witch’s body is also attested by her ability to transform herself into other bodies, to shift shape... this protean fluidity was frightening because it meant that there was perpetual uncertainty about the witch’s ‘true’ identity.” 135 This anxiety surrounding the transgressive body and physicality of both the witch’s body and Satan’s manifested itself in the initial accusations and confessions of the first three accused witches: Sarah Good, Sarah Osborne, and Tituba Indian.

133 Bakhtin 320.
Spectral apparitions of the accused women were a manifestation of the witch’s body extending outward from its physical confines, as it “outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body.”\textsuperscript{136} The victims of witchcraft testified that they had been tortured, not by the accused in their material form, but primarily by specters in their likeness.\textsuperscript{137} Cotton Mather’s admonition that the judges were “not to lay more stress on spectral evidence than it would bear,” this transgressive movement outward from the body of the witch was the basis of a great number of the accusations. Although secondary accusations – those given not by the afflicted, but by other members of the community – reinforced spectral evidence, accusations and testimonials given by the afflicted were almost entirely based in “the Apperishtion.”\textsuperscript{138} Spectral evidence exists in boundaries between bodies; it is a primarily spiritual accusation, but one that has direct material consequences for the afflicted – as the extension of the witch outside of her own body.

The grotesque body of the witch surpasses the bounds of the body, and the transgressive fluidity of this body is again manifested in the witch’s ability to appear both spectrally and in a variety of physical forms. Sarah Good was accused of owning “a Catt besides the bird and a thing all over hairy,” as well as “[appearing] like a wolfe to Hubbard.”\textsuperscript{139} Neither Sarah Good nor Sarah Osborne initially confessed to any wrongdoing, but Osborne “either saw or dreamed that shee saw a thing like an indian all black which did prick her in her neck and pulled her by the

\textsuperscript{136} Bakhtin 317
\textsuperscript{137} John Andrew Doyle, \textit{The Puritan Colonies
\textsuperscript{138} Records of Salem Witchcraft 29
\textsuperscript{139} Records of Salem Witchcraft 22.
back part of her head to the dore of the house.” Tituba denied changing form either physically or spiritually, but identifies the devil in her confession as a variform body that appeared to her in several ways, sometimes shifting partway through a particular meeting.

[T] the black dog said serve me but I said I am afraid he said if I did not he would doe worse to me.
[H] what did you say to it.
[T] I will serve you no longer. Then he said he would hurt me and then he looked like a man and threatens to hurt me. [...] 
[H] what also have you seen
[T] two rats, a red rat and a black rat.
[H] what did they say to you.
[T] they said serve me.

Tituba’s apparitions – all forms of the devil and his followers – included a group of four women (in black and white hoods) and a man (a tall man in black clothes with white hair) who lay upon her, a black dog, a red rat and a black rat, a yellow dog, a wolf, a “thing with a head like a woman with 2 legges, and wings,” and “another thing, hairy it goes upright like a man it hath only 2 leggs.” Satan was a direct physical presence in Salem, a physicality grotesque and dangerous in his formlessness, as he moved fluidly into the witch’s body and outward, transgressing the bounds between human bodies as well as between the animal and the human. The witch's and the devil's body are physically coextensive, diffused through a variety of bodies and objects.

The witch’s teat and the devil’s mark also played a part in Salem witch accusations and trials. The witch's body was literally marked, both as a typically

---

140 Ibid. 37.
141 Ibid. 46.
142 Ibid. 47.
143 Purkiss 121.
female body as well as particularly in relationship to Satan and his various forms. The devil’s mark was a permanent mark left upon a witch by the devil, often made in a ‘secret place’ – under eyelids, in armpits, in body cavities, and near the genitals – and was believed to include moles, scars, birthmarks, skin tags, natural blemishes, and insensitive patches of skin.\textsuperscript{144} The witch’s teat was another mark upon the body, but one that served as the extraneous breast through which she fed her familiars with her own polluted blood in an unholy and grotesque inversion of the mother breastfeeding her child.\textsuperscript{145} The witch’s teat is a corrupt maternal extrusion, one which blurs boundaries not between the bodies of mother and child, but between human and animal, witch and familiar, a single body and a multiplicity of bodies. This extra teat functions as a perversion of maternal power, the grotesque of the mother and nursing child writ large, in which the child is inhuman and inherently evil, and the breast itself is an extraneous growth, an aberration and a mark of service to Satan. In her confession, Tituba testified that Sarah Good had a witch’s teat:

[H] what attendants hath Sarah Good.
[T] a yellow bird and hee would have given me one
[H] what meate did she give it
[T] it is suck her between her fingers.\textsuperscript{146}

Sarah’s husband confirmed the existence of a witch’s teat, but in a different location, characterizing it as an abnormal bodily growth: “William Good saith y\textsuperscript{th} y\textsuperscript{e} night before his s\textsuperscript{d} wife was Examined he saw a wart or tett a little belowe her Right

\textsuperscript{146} \textit{Records of Salem Witchcraft}, 47.

The [H] represents her questioner, Judge John Hathorne.
shoulder which he never saw before.” The witch’s body in seventeenth-century Massachusetts manifested particular concerns about fertility and grotesque – or, for the Puritans, literally Satanic – motherhood. The witch’s body is produced by and co-produces her soul; the witch’s teat is evidence of grotesque maternal function as well as the body’s physical response to the condition of the soul.

*Racially Marked Bodies: American Indians in New England, the Devil, and Tituba’s Historiographic Legacy*

Tituba’s body in particular – as a sexually, socially, and racially marked body – presented different challenges for the Puritan community; Tituba’s status as a racialized body has continued to influence and even govern her role in both historical accounts of the witch trails and in the modern American imagination. Dillon states that in early America, “under a new political order that imputes parity to all individuals as a matter of natural right, nature itself – in the form of the sexed and racialized body – begins to serve as the grounds of articulating and justifying power differentials among individuals.” The Puritans were not willing to sacrifice imparity, but its justification shifted from the condition of the soul to that of the body. In the minds of the Salem colonists, Tituba’s body was an Indian one, which served to associate her with the American Indian tribes that surrounded and threatened the borders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In the trial records, Tituba’s race is designated only as “Indian,” and her true origins (as well as her husband John’s) are unknown. John McWilliams explains the ambiguity of this label:

---

147 Ibid. 39.
148 Dillon 135.
In seventeenth-century Massachusetts, such discriminations among unregenerate peoples of color were neither usual nor considered necessary. By 1692 (exactly two centuries after first contact), Columbus’s misnaming had yielded a catchall term variously applied to the Guanahani, the Carribe, the Aztecs, and West Indies Africans, as well as to the Iroquois and the Abnaki.\footnote{John McWilliams, “Indian John and the Northern Tawnies” in The New England Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 4 (1996): 586.}

In order to form a more comprehensive account of how the Salem Puritans viewed Tituba’s racially marked body, we must first explore the social and theological relationship between the Puritans and the other widely categorized ‘Indians’ surrounding the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The original seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (shown at left) depicts a American Indian, with arrows turned downwards, saying, “Come over and help us,” a reference to Acts 16:9:

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.\footnote{Acts 16:9-10, KJV.}

Reflected in their seal was the Puritan belief that they were the chosen people of God and that their presence in the New World was divinely ordained. Their belief that they were God’s chosen people was more than metaphor; “England was their Egypt; George III their Pharaoh; and the Atlantic their Red Sea.”\footnote{Philip L. Berg, “Racism and the Puritan Mind,” in Phylon (1960--), Volume 36, No. 1 (1975): 3.} Any opposition to Puritan colonization of the New World – both physical and theological – was an
opposition to God’s will. “God had meant the savage Indians’ land for the civilized English, and, moreover, had meant the savage state itself as a sign of Satan’s power and savage warfare as a sign of earthly struggle and sin.”

Wherever American Indian tribes opposed the Puritan colonists, there Satan opposed God; “the Puritan discovered in the Indians themselves evidence of a satanic opposition to the very principle of divinity.” Optimistic reports of conversion in the early seventeenth century gave way to “the general recounting of the evil religious state of the savages.”

In much the same way that Samuel Parris testified to Satan’s strength in Salem by showing his successful movement from those who were already involved with Satan (old women) to those who were not (men), Cotton Mather gave warning to the colonists that the Devil was moving outward from his usual place of residence, which was with the American Indians of New England.

Go tell Mankind, that there are Devils & Witches; & that tho those night-birds least appear where the Day-light of the Gospel comes, yet New-Engl. has had Exemples of their Existence & Operation; and that not only the Wigwams of Indians, where the pagan Powaws often raise their masters, in the shapes of Bears & Snakes & Fires, but the Houses of Christians, where our God has had His constant Worship, have undergone the Annoyance of Evil Sprits.

With the Puritans’ precarious situation regarding the surrounding American Indian tribes and their view of American Indians as naturally associated with Satan, it is unsurprising both that Sarah Osborne testified that she “either saw or dreamed that
shee saw a thing like an indian all black which did prick her in her neck and pulled her by the back part of her head to the dore of the house,” and that Tituba was – and remains – a likely suspect in the initial witchcraft accusations.

Tituba is always a woman of color in narratives of Salem, but her race – and therefore the magic she practices – has ranged from “Indian, to half-Indian and half-Negro, to Negro.” Chadwick Hansen views Tituba’s racial identity as a slow metamorphosis from Indian to half-Indian, half-Negro, to the “Negro slave” who appears in The Crucible. I believe there is much more variation in the representation of Tituba’s origins than Hansen acknowledges and that the conception of Tituba as a American Indian or Caribbean woman did not disappear after the publication of The Crucible; however, taking into account the various shifts in Tituba’s portrayal in both modern fiction and nonfiction compellingly supports Hansen’s assertion that “there is no evidence to support these changes, but there is an instructive lesson in American historiography to be read in them.”

Elaine Breslaw, in her extensive research of slave-trading records in Barbados, argues that Tituba was most likely a captive from South America who was brought to Barbados to be sold as a slave. However, documentation is very sparse, and Tituba’s only personal narrative is her confession, which primarily mirrors Puritan witchcraft belief and therefore tells us much more about the Puritan

156 Chadwick Hansen, “The Metamorphosis of Tituba: Or, Why American Intellectuals Can't Tell an Indian Witch From a Negro,” in The New England Quarterly, Vol. 47, No. 1 (1974): 3. Although “woman of color” is something of an anachronistic term, I feel that it is the closest we can approach to historical accuracy without maintaining and reinforcing the various assumptions that have accompanied Tituba’s various racial categorizations in modern historiography.
157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
conception of the body of the witch than Tituba herself. Breslaw argues that Tituba’s confession represents a mixture of Puritan and Barbados beliefs, citing her trance at the end of her confession as “a familiar part of magico-religious healing ceremonies” and Thomas Putnam’s description of Tituba as “bewitched” as a “misunderstanding of her behavior.”\textsuperscript{160} However, this behavior was not necessarily atypical even in the context of the Salem Witch Trials; during Sarah Osborne’s examination, her accusers said that “[Sarah] said this morning that she was more like to be bewitched, than that she was a witch.”\textsuperscript{161} Thomas Putnam’s identification of Tituba as bewitched may not have been a misunderstanding, but a further expression of the familiarity with Puritan witch belief that structured Tituba’s entire confession. Breslaw’s reconstruction of Tituba’s origins and life is the most thorough that exists or can exist, for the reality of Tituba’s life is almost entirely inaccessible.

Other than the content of her confession, much of Tituba’s role in the trials is constructed from a variety of texts and narratives of the trials, both contemporary and modern. Although Tituba was a real woman, she exists almost entirely as a narrative character; there is so little accessible information about her that the reality of Tituba’s experience can never truly enter narrative accounts. However, her role in trial narratives has always been a problematic one, where her racial identification is almost without fail linked with magical practice in Salem.

Although the bodies of the other accused witches are produced much differently in contemporary accounts of Salem than they are in modern historiography, there is strikingly little difference between the way that Tituba’s

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid. 122.
\textsuperscript{161} Records of Salem Witchcraft 37.
body was constructed by contemporary witchcraft narratives and its appearance in modern historiography and fiction. As a woman of color who the Puritans identified with the surrounding American Indians, Tituba’s body was transgressive even before she was accused of witchcraft; she was both within and markedly outside the Puritan community, marked as a member of what Cotton Mather believed was the “wretched remnant of a race seduced to the Western hemisphere by the Devil.”

Just as Tituba’s position as a marginalized, sexed, racialized body shaped her experience in the Salem Witch Trials as the Puritan colonists associated her with the Satanic forces that threatened the New World, her body is continually reproduced in modern narratives as a threatening and Othered one. Our continued acceptance of Tituba’s role as guilty – as a real practitioner of occult magic in the witch trials, whether or not this magic had the intended effects – reflects and reinforces the narrative connection between Tituba’s status as a slave woman of color and the Puritan perception of Tituba as a threatening, racialized Other within the Salem community.

The prevailing narrative of the witch trials in the American imagination and modern historiography – up to the present day – places the start of the afflictions within some group fortune-telling activity, most often led by Tituba. In the 1860s, Charles W. Upham’s Salem Witchcraft popularized the idea that the young accusers of Salem were involved in some sort of occult or folk magic practices – most often divination with an egg – and most historians who followed seem to have been

---
162 A Delusion of Satan, 40.
influenced by his account and his extensive use of trial records.\textsuperscript{163} Arthur Miller’s \textit{The Crucible}, which is arguably the main source of present-day American knowledge of the witch trials, was inspired by Upham’s account and reflects his understanding in many respects.\textsuperscript{164} Where white accused witches either fade into the play’s background (Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, for instance, are a single character) or are given prominent false-accusation narratives (as in Abigail’s accusation of Elizabeth Proctor), Tituba exhibits distinctly non-English magical behaviors which, when they do not directly affect the girls in a physical sense, drive the accusers into guilt and psychological torment which is then manifested in witchcraft accusations. \textit{The Crucible} implicates Tituba not only in fortune-telling before the afflictions began, but locates her in the forest at the start of the play, teaching the girls to make love potions, inciting the girls to dance naked in the forest, speaking to and raising the dead, giving Abigail a charm to kill Goody Proctor, and screeching in the forest over a fire (sometimes a cauldron), “swaying like a dumb beast over that fire.”\textsuperscript{165} In \textit{The Crucible}, the Devil himself resides in Barbados, just as Cotton Mather believed Satan to occupy a steady place in American Indian worship: Tituba, already jailed for witchcraft, says, “Oh, it be no Hell in Barbados. Devil, him be pleasure-man in Barbados, him be singin’ and dancin’ in Barbados.”\textsuperscript{166} Though \textit{The Crucible} is a drama that is largely an allegorical treatment of McCarthyism, it is arguably also the main source of modern American understandings of the Salem Witch Trials. Miller’s

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{163} Adams 13.
\item\textsuperscript{164} Arthur Miller, “Why I Wrote \textit{The Crucible}” in \textit{The Salem Witch Trials Reader} ed. Frances Hill, 386.
\item\textsuperscript{165} Arthur Miller, \textit{The Crucible} (New York: Penguin, 1976), 10.
\item\textsuperscript{166} Ibid. 122.
\end{itemize}
dramatized Tituba continues to reflect many Puritan attitudes towards American Indians and their perceived involvement with Satan, but locates those attitudes in the body and behavior of a “Negro slave” from Barbados who is highly involved in occult magic.

Modern historians support Tituba’s innocence in the inception of the witch trials, and both Chadwick Hansen and Elaine Breslaw identify Tituba’s first involvement in the 'occult' with the baking of the witchcake, a cake made out of rye meal and the urine of the afflicted that was fed to a dog and used to identify the witch. However, both Samuel Parris’s records and his statement on the witchcraft outbreak agree that the cake was made by John, Tituba’s husband and another of Samuel Parris’s slaves. “It never brake forth to any considerable light, until diabolical means were used, by the making of a cake by my Indian man, who had his direction from this our sister, Mary Sibly.”¹⁶⁷ In Robert Calef’s More Wonders of the Invisible World, written in 1700 to attack Cotton Mather’s defense of the witch trials, he states, “Mr. Parris's Indian Man and Woman made a Cake of Rye Meal, with the Childrens' Water, and Baked it in the ashes.”¹⁶⁸ Tituba’s only 'occult' involvement was not only English in origin and requested by another member of the Puritan community, but was not hers at all. The purpose of this exploration is not to exonerate Tituba from accusations of witchcraft, rather, it is to map the processes by which Tituba was – and continues to be – implicated even in historical documents which attempt to ascertain the causes of the witch trials as objectively as possible.

¹⁶⁸ Calef 97.
Even Boyer and Nissenbaum’s accounts of the trials, which approach the witch trials through the lens of economic and factional conflict in Salem and who criticize other historians for relying uncritically on Upham’s account of the trials, seem bewitched by the idea of Tituba: “The spark which finally set off this volatile mix came with the unlikely convergence of a set of change factors in the early 1690’s: [first,] the arrival of a new minister who brought with him a slave acquainted with West Indian voodoo lore.” 169 Though there was nothing uniquely West Indian about Tituba’s role in the witch trials, historians continue to cast Tituba’s racialized body as a dangerous one – one which is often the only party who is actually guilty of occult and distinctly un-Christian magical practice. Despite the fact that almost every modern account of Salem would not acknowledge the reality of any of the magic supposedly practiced outside of its possible psychological effects, the idea of Tituba’s supposed “occult magic” and therefore her guilt is continually produced and affirmed by modern historiography. Where the white accused witches of Salem are afforded their own narratives and sympathetic roles in history, modern narratives continue to implicate – if not blame – Tituba for the start of the witch trials, producing her as a dark, grotesque, and threatening body whose danger to the Puritan colonists is a very real one. A vast majority of authors link her race with magical practice and continue to implicate her in the witch trials where the white accused witches of Salem are not. Hansen’s “instructive lesson” about Tituba may be a reflection not only on American historiography, but on continued American attitudes toward racialized fears about the invasion of the Other.

169 Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Possessed, 181.
Though I read Julian’s *Showings* as a understanding of the grotesque that is affirmative rather than negative, I am not suggesting that the narratives of the Salem Witch Trials are a celebratory moment for voodoo, modern manifestations of Wicca, or English folk magic. As I read *Showings* as an affirmative moment for the grotesque, the transgressive, and the ambivalent, it becomes obvious that Salem has no direct counterpart. The closest Tituba currently has to an affirmative moment is Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Even in its title, Condé claims narrative authority for Tituba, embracing a story of Tituba as a Caribbean woman well-versed in healing. As *Showings* opens up only one possibility for a route to a liberatory theology of the body, *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* presents only one Tituba, which Angela Davis states in her introduction to Condé’s novel is “one possible version of Tituba.”

This version, a revenge for Tituba’s erasure from history, in its writing, threatens to eclipse other Titubas; but Condé acknowledges Tituba as a person and as an ambivalent figure, which is more than historical narrative has ever given her.

This re-envisioning of Tituba’s role in the Salem Witch Trials does not require debunking and dismissing certain kinds of Titubas – for, with the paucity of factual information that exists, all are equally historically possible and impossible – but it does require accepting Tituba as a transgressive figure both in her own time and in her narrative legacy, allowing the multiplicity of Tituba and the variform women she has become in historical narratives which engage with and use her body for specific purposes. This transformation has manifested itself as a process, rather

---

than a definitive historical discovery; all of Tituba’s bodies produce each other as narrative and historical resource, but all are ultimately ambiguous. These narratives (including Condé’s) are all simultaneously Tituba’s and not-Tituba’s. Tituba, as a living woman in 1692, was denied societal or narrative agency, and this lack has created a body of narratives about the witch trials that are forced to grapple with – or choose to ignore – the absence of Tituba, both societally and in historical records. In this way, these narratives are all simultaneously Tituba’s and not-Tituba’s, so that colonial history has manifested itself in Tituba’s very physicality. Condé’s narrative leaves Tituba pregnant and at the gallows – not for the events at Salem – Condé allows her narrative agency, but this agency does not overtake her lack of societal agency. But this is only one Tituba. There are many Titubas that must exist simultaneously in order for any kind of complete picture to be formed, and she is still a historical figure that exists simultaneously within and between narratives – just as she was in the Salem community, both within and without.
Works Consulted


Detweiler, Robert. “Shifting Perspectives on the Salem Witches.” *The History


