



Perfect Wives, Other Women



ADULTERY AND INQUISITION IN

EARLY MODERN SPAIN



GEORGINA DOPICO BLACK



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FOR JOSÉ AND LEONOR DOPICO

AND MARÍA PINTOS DEL VALLE

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Preface

“Muger,” writes Sebastián de Covarrubias in his 1611 *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, “del nombre latino *mulier* a *mollitie* (*ut inquit Varro*) *immutata et detracta litera, quasi mollier, et proprie mulier dicitur quae virgo non est*. Muchas cosas se pudieran dezir en esta palabra; pero otros las dizen y con más libertad de lo que sería razón.” [Woman. From the latin *mulier*, from *mollitie* (as Varro says) changing and taking away a letter, almost *mollier*, and properly *mulier* is said of (a woman) who is not a virgin. Many things could be said at this word; but others say them and with more liberty than is reasonable.]¹ In an unusual moment of verbal reticence, the prolix lexicographer-canon of Cuenca, adviser to the Inquisition and chaplain of the king, defines “woman” in only the scantest terms: as a word properly applied to nonvirgins and as a subject that might elicit so many words that he will leave the task of defining it to others, others destined, by definition, to overstep the bounds of reason and propriety. *Perfect Wives, Other Women* opens in the space of Covarrubias’s uncomfortable silence. It seeks not to define *muger*—suggestively both “woman” and “wife” in Spanish—but to tell some of those “muchas cosas” that the term embodies, or that the bodies behind the term might somehow tell.

Throughout this book I argue that readings of the body—specifically, of the body of the wife in early modern Spain and America—are often entangled with questions of signification and interpretation and that these, in turn, are haunted by the body of an excluded Other that is an intrinsic part of the formation of a cultural Self. In Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the body and soul of the married woman became the site of an enormous amount of anxious inquiry, a site subject to the scrutiny of a remarkable array of gazes: inquisitors, theologians, religious reformers, confessors, poets, playwrights, and, not least among them, hus-

bands. At one level, this book is about that inquiry, about the diverse readings that the bodies of perfect and imperfect wives (the “other women” of the book’s title) elicited. But this book is also about the broader tensions that underwrite those readings. Throughout I suggest that the anxieties that attach to the body of the married woman in early modern Spain point beyond themselves: to larger cultural and political questions, to the difficulties and the dangers of reading, to the tenacious interconnectedness of gender, religion, race, nation, and interpretation.

The first chapter, “Visible Signs,” concerns itself with the various tensions that animate readings of the wife’s body and in a sense make possible its use as this sort of “transcoder” of other discourses and anxieties. In the pages that follow I trace a relation between the body of the married woman and two other bodies that were likewise sites of intense social, political, and religious debate and inquiry in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe: the body of Christ in the eucharistic host, and the body — and soul — of the cultural Other. Each of these sites — these bodies — plays a central role in a particular sacrament of transformation: the marital sacrament that converts the body of the wife into “one flesh” with her husband’s, the eucharistic sacrament that via transubstantiation converts bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, and the baptismal sacrament that through the operation of words and water converts infidels — synonymous in early modern Spain with Muslims and Jews — or innocents — young children or Amerindians, to the extent that New World converts were considered “children in the faith” — into Christians, specifically Catholics. It is no coincidence that these three sacraments stood at the core of Counter Reformation debates (theologic, political, aesthetic) or that the violations associated with each of them fell under inquisitorial jurisdiction since all were, in one form or another, violations of Otherness: the adultery of the wife’s body, the “real presence” of the body of Christ in the eucharistic host (the heart of the Protestant heresy), and false or ungentuine conversion — crypto-Judaism or crypto-Islam in the Old World, the “idolatrous” preservation of native beliefs and practices (idolatry being a biblical cognate for adultery) in the New.

I argue that the anxious inquiry that these bodies occasioned was largely the result of their status as sacramentally converted Others

and of the fact that the transformations they ostensibly suffered were conceived as conversions in and of the flesh and thus subject to at times extreme literalization. What was at issue, precisely, was the efficacy of the sacrament; the mere suspicion (or worse, the realization) that these bodies might retain a vestigial trace—a lingering, inextirpable memory—of their former Otherness was potentially devastating. This, I suggest, helps explain the tremendous threat these traces represented: the irksome breadness of the consecrated host, the “tainted” blood of a *converso* or Morisco Other (at a moment when exclusion becomes overtly racialized through the institution of purity of blood statutes), or, finally, the will of the wife, manifested in the desires of her body. These remnants—all signed, moreover, by a problematic legibility—were deemed so threatening precisely because they could give the lie to the efficacy of the sacrament. Anxiety, however, is seldom far from desire: in this case, a kind of cultural desire to discover such traces of recidivism, insofar as the construction of a cultural or (proto) national identity is always dependent on the demarcation of Otherness. In some respects, then, this book is about the efficacy of different types of signs in early modern Spain, about the dangerous instabilities with which they are fraught, and about the relation between those signs vested with power and the disciplining and containment of different kinds of bodies, bodies that were marked by (or for) difference.

But if sacraments provide *Perfect Wives* a privileged point of entry into the relation between interpretation (the reading of signs) and authority (the control of bodies), there is, of course, quite a bit more to the story. Here we return to the question of the wife’s will, to the thorny matter of her subjectivity. I argue that the extramarital anxieties that attach to the body of the married woman can also be explained in part by the particular form of the relation between “woman” and “wife” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by the ways in which the discursive category “wife” at once exceeds and is exceeded by that of “woman” (a geometry not so different perhaps from the overlap but noncoincidence between the two meanings of the Spanish term *mu-ger*). I suggest that by and large—and there are important exceptions to be noted—marriage represented the most common means through which women were constituted as subjects in early modern Spain, so

two early modern Spanish texts consistently held up as paradigmatic examples of the conduct manual and adultery-honor drama “genre,” respectively: Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* (1583) and Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *El médico de su honra* (1629). In the final chapter, I explore Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s *Los empeños de una casa* (1683) as an Americanist rereading — or, better, rewriting — of the problems of marital and racial purity, of honor, of desire, and of the legibility or illegibility of the Other’s body. Reading the anxieties produced by the wife’s body in relation to broader interpretive and cultural questions allows entirely new readings of these three works. Works that have traditionally been considered marginal (*La perfecta casada*), complicitous with power (*El médico de su honra*), or derivative (*Los empeños de una casa*) emerge as far more important and more defiant works than has previously been imagined. Not only do these texts offer radical challenges to inquisitorial reading practices, but they do so, precisely, through or on the body of the wife.

Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* unquestionably forms part of the conduct manual genre that proliferated throughout Europe in the sixteenth century; to the extent that it prescribes appropriate behaviors and proscribes inappropriate desires for would-be perfect wives, the treatise is a remarkable index of early modern conceptions of the proper place of married women. But if *La perfecta casada* is, as some would argue, a textbook example of prescriptive literature for women, it is also much more: I argue here that it can also be read as a manual *about* interpretation (a text in the tradition of Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*) and, what is more, as a text of resistance that responds, almost point by point, to the accusations that kept Fray Luis imprisoned in the Inquisition’s secret jails for five years. Fray Luis’s diatribes against makeup (which he likens to adultery) and against woman’s wandering (her noncontainment) are largely a function of the threats these pose to a reading strategy based on similitude. I am particularly interested in the troubled status of analogy throughout the text: a figure that *La perfecta casada* at once depends on and consistently compromises. I am intrigued too by the complex relation between categories of “seeming” and “being,” between the accidental and the essential. If on one hand the treatise privileges the latter, condemning makeup in part because it is mere accident — because it clouds legi-

bility — on the other, *La perfecta casada* advises women that they must seem to be perfect wives at least as much as they must actually be so. This is related to the prescriptive nature of the text and to the paradoxes inherent in conduct literature for women: the (subjective) possibilities for self-fashioning associated with texts like *La perfecta casada* are, in the hands of women, nonetheless condemned as a challenge to a divinely ordained telos.

Calderón de la Barca has traditionally been read by both his apologists and his detractors as a playwright fully aligned with Counter Reformation dogma and Philippine politics, a writer whose dense, metaphoric drama reinforced, in good baroque fashion, the dominant ideology of seventeenth-century Spain. Calderonian theater has been held up as a complex but solid example of the conservative, almost propagandistic function that José Antonio Maravall ascribed to early modern Spanish drama. My reading of *El médico de su honra* suggests otherwise; I argue that the drama represents a scathing indictment not only of the honor code per se (in both its sexual and its social dimensions) but of the sort of inquisitorial hermeneutics that was put at its service, particularly in the enforcement of *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) statutes. Calderón writes *El médico de su honra* at a moment in which limpieza statutes were the subject of fierce debates: between proponents of a softening or *relajamiento* (relaxation) of those statutes (a position linked to Olivarista politics and to the Crown's economic interests) on one hand, and those who (like Francisco de Quevedo) not only called for stricter application of the purity of blood statutes but argued for a second, more rigorous Jewish expulsion on the other. I suggest that by exposing the illegitimacy — and the ultimate tragedy — of inquisitorial reading strategies such as those practiced by Gutierre on Mencía's body (a body considered so impure that it must be bled in order to purge it of its suspected Otherness,) Calderón carries out a powerful critique of limpieza de sangre ideology and the institution charged with preserving it in early modern Spain.²

I turn to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *Los empeños de una casa* in order to outline the form that an Americanist version of the intersection between the discourses of race, gender, power, and interpretation might assume. As a rewriting produced from the margins of empire and gen-

der hierarchy — Sor Juana writes her play within the walls of a convent in the Vice Royalty of New Spain — *Empeños* effects a critical rereading of literary and social codes. I argue that the transvestite “passing” of the American *gracioso* Castaño (would-be perfect wife) radically destabilizes legibility, exposing the degree to which, for Sor Juana, gender, race, and class roles are performative in nature — little more than surface inscriptions that can be put on or taken off as easily as a change of clothes. But what is most original about *Los empeños de una casa* is the way in which the space of illegibility — a space occupied by the cross-dressed Castaño within the text, and his double Sor Juana outside the text — is emptied of its punitive inquisitorial charge and appropriated as a productive site of negotiation and resistance. Rather than closing *Perfect Wives*, this final chapter is intended to open up an American terrain for reading the bodies of wives and Others and the provocative ways in which they are wed.

A few words are perhaps in order here concerning my understanding of the discursive and material constitution of the early modern wives’ bodies that inhabit the pages of this book. In reading the wife’s body as a transcoder for interpretive anxieties, on one hand, and for cultural and political anxieties, on the other, I cast the body as somehow inseparable from its reading or, in Thomas Laqueur’s apt phrase, from the “myriad discourses” that echo through it.³ The bodies that I attend to throughout *Perfect Wives*, *Other Women*, then, cannot be divorced from their sociocultural context or from their own symbolic, material, and discursive constitution. If the wife’s body (and this holds true for other bodies as well) is not merely a metaphor or discursive construction, neither is it some sort of essence or matter “in itself,” which exists prior to or independent from the cultural mechanisms and discourses that produce, interpret, and even repress it. There is, in other words, no degree zero of materiality that grounds the body absolutely. I follow Judith Butler in understanding materiality itself to be “an effect of power,” in turn understanding by this the peculiar and radically historical transcoding of discourse and “body” at work in the determining texts of early modern European culture.⁴ The body I read throughout this book works, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White contend, as “a privileged operator for the transcoding of other areas,”

that it was often through the body of the “wife” (defined in legal, religious, and economic discourses) that “woman” (defined primarily in biological or anatomical terms) acquired a kind of subjectivity and, at the same time, became the object of a very specific kind of subjection. This passage, or this position—one that potentially places the wife alongside the husband—helps account for the inquisitorial hermeneutics deployed in the reading of her body (and by inquisitorial hermeneutics I refer not only to the specific reading practices of the Inquisition, practices that were very often exercised on bodies, but, more generally, to the strategies of surveillance and containment associated with the institutional presence of the Holy Office in early modern Spain).

If marriage, then, placed women’s bodies at an uneasy juncture between subjectivity and surveillance, so too did two important textual phenomena of early modern Spain, each centrally preoccupied with reading and perfecting wives’ bodies but never considered together: the explosion of conduct literature for married women in the sixteenth century (a phenomenon connected with the subjective possibility of “Renaissance self-fashioning”) and of adultery–wife–murder plays in the seventeenth (dramas in which wives’ bodies and desires become the subject of a kind of self-fulfilling inquisitorial surveillance). Beyond noting the complex web that entangles the perfect wives of the former with the imperfect ones of the latter (and the literary–historical–epistemological conditions within which these two types of works flourished), *Perfect Wives* proposes a relation between the “shift” in modes of perfecting wives that the transition from conduct literature to honor plays might suggest—a shift from what we might term a revisionist model that seeks to convert an imperfect wife into a perfect one through various forms of discipline to an exclusionary model that seeks to excise the imperfect wife’s body from being a determinant of her husband’s honor by the most radical means imaginable—and a similar (though by no means analogous) “shift” in modes of perfecting Others’ bodies in relation to that of the nation (a shift punctuated by the 1609 Morisco expulsion).

In one sense (the most concrete, perhaps), this study endeavors to read these two textual traditions—these two wifely bodies—side by side. The central chapters of this book are, in fact, close readings of the

other areas that can profitably be read, I would add, as transcoders of the body.⁵ The knot of problems and questions that arise from reading the wife's body as this sort of privileged operator in three determining texts of early modern Spain and America is the subject of *Perfect Wives, Other Women*.

Visible Signs

Reading the Wife's Body in Early Modern Spain

Cuando Dios creó a nuestro primer padre en el Paraíso Terrenal, dice la Divina Escritura que infundió Dios sueño en Adán, y que, estando durmiendo, le sacó una costilla del lado siniestro, de la cual formó a nuestra madre Eva; y así como Adán despertó y la miró, dijo: “Esta es carne de mi carne y hueso de mis huesos.” Y Dios dijo: “Por ésta dejará el hombre a su padre y a su madre, y serán dos en una carne misma.” Y entonces fue instituido el divino sacramento del matrimonio, con tales lazos que sólo la muerte puede desatarlos. Y tiene tanta fuerza y virtud este milagroso sacramento que hace que dos diferentes personas sean una misma carne; y aún hace más en los buenos casados, que, aunque tienen dos almas, no tienen más de una voluntad. Y de aquí viene que, como la carne de la esposa sea una misma con la del esposo, las manchas que en ella caen, o los defectos que se procura, redundan en la carne del marido, aunque él no haya dado, como queda dicho, ocasión para aquel daño. Porque así como el dolor del pie, o de cualquier miembro del cuerpo humano, le siente todo el cuerpo, por ser todo de una carne misma, y la cabeza siente el daño del tobillo, sin que ella se le haya causado, así el marido es participante de la deshonra de la mujer por ser una misma cosa con ella.

[When God created our first father in the earthly paradise, Holy Scripture tells us that He caused a deep sleep to fall on him, and in

his sleep took one of the ribs of his left side and created our mother Eve; and when Adam awoke and looked on her, he said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." And God said: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and they shall be one flesh." Then was instituted the divine sacrament of marriage, whose bonds are soluble only by death. This miraculous sacrament has such strength and virtue that it makes two different persons one single flesh; and with happily married couples it does more, for though they have two souls they have only a single will. Hence it arises that, as the flesh of the wife is one with the flesh of the husband, the blemishes which fall on her or the defects she incurs recoil upon the flesh of the husband, although, as I have said, he may be in no respect the cause of the trouble. For, just as the whole body feels the pain of the foot or of any other limb, since they are all one flesh; and the head feels the ankle's pain, although it is not the cause of it; so the husband shares his wife's dishonour, being one with her.]

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, bk. I, chap. 33

"Señales ocultas"

In the early months of 1632, Juan de Quiñones, an official in the court of Philip IV, addressed a memorandum to the king's confessor, Inquisitor General Fray Antonio de Sotomayor, citing what he presented as incontrovertible "means for knowing and persecuting the Jewish race":

entre otras maldiciones que padece [la raza judía] corporeal y espiritualmente, dentro y fuera de su cuerpo, por aver perseguido el verdadero Mesías Christo nuestro redentor, hasta ponerlo en una cruz, que todos los meses muchos dellos padecen flujo de sangre por las partes posteriores, en señal perpetua de ignominia y oprobio. . . . Dicen pues muchos autores que todos aquellos judíos que cuando Pilatos dijo,

como refiere San Mateo, que estaba inocente de la sangre del Justo, clamaron y dijeron que la sangre dél fuese sobre ellos y sobre sus hijos, quedaron con esta mácula, plaga, y señal perpetua y todos sus descendientes afectos a ella que cada mes padeciessen flujo de sangre como las mujeres. . . . La señal no es otra cosa que poner algo para que aya diferencia entre las otras, que no se confunda con ellas . . . y quando el reconocimiento es difícil por el aspecto del rostro, se ha de recurrir a ver las señales ocultas que ay en el cuerpo.

[among other curses which they (the Jews) suffer, bodily and spiritually, inside and outside the body, for having persecuted the true Messiah, Christ our redeemer, to the point of placing him on a Cross, is that every month many of them suffer a flowing of blood from their posterior parts, as a perpetual sign of infamy and shame. . . . Many authors say therefore that when Pilate said, as Saint Matthew relates, that he was innocent of the Just One's blood, all those Jews who shouted and said let his blood be on them and their children, they and all their descendants remained with this blemish, plague, and perpetual sign so that every month they suffer a flow of blood like women. . . . The sign is nothing more than making a mark (on something) so that it is different from others, so that it is not confused with them . . . and when recognition is difficult from the look of the face, one should resort to the hidden signs that are on the body.]¹

Disturbing as it is, Quiñones's claim that the most effective sign for identifying Jewish men is a monthly bleeding—perhaps best described as a form of male menstruation—was not especially far-fetched in seventeenth-century Spain. The suggestion that crypto-Jews could be identified by any one of a series of “señales de oprobio” [signs of infamy] written in secret, if scarlet, letters on a bodily text was neither new nor particularly uncommon.² What is perhaps most striking, if not most problematic, about this type of reading is the strategy it invokes in order to make the body legible, specifically, legible as that of a culpable Other, by investing it with an explicitly female physiology.

Gutierre Alfonso Solís, the hypochondriac husband of Calderón's *El médico de su honra* (first performed in 1629 and published in 1637), who murders his innocent wife on the mere suspicion that she has stained

his honor by committing adultery, would almost certainly have concurred with Quiñones's method of inquiry. Albeit on a different register, his own diagnostic technique is not, after all, so far removed from the courtier's symptomatologic approach. Whereas Quiñones feminizes the inquired body of the cultural Other, Gutierre reads his wife's body as polluted by the radically Other. Although they approach the honor question from different sides, as it were, both men take up issues of contamination, containment, and an economy of blood purity. More importantly, perhaps, in practicing a reading strategy that seeks to connect meaning with truth as punishment, both are guilty of a profound misreading of bodies that inevitably participates in what I shall call an inquisitorial hermeneutics.

The anxieties over somatic legibility shared by the historical Juan de Quiñones and the fictional Gutierre Alfonso Solís are neither coincidental nor unimportant. Throughout this book I argue that in early modern Spain the wife's body served as a kind of transcoder of and for various types of cultural anxieties, a site on which concerns over the interpretation and misinterpretation of signs and especially signs of Otherness—racial, religious, cultural—were at different times projected, materialized, codified, negotiated, and even contested. On one hand, it should perhaps not surprise us to find that the relation between husband and wife, more specifically, competing readings of the wife's body—or of the wife *as* body—should have been used, deliberately or not, to address or even encode other areas. As Natalie Zemon Davis has compellingly argued, sociopolitical concerns in early modern Europe—particularly the relation between groups constituted as unequal—found ready symbolization within the domestic sphere.³ On the other hand, the specific historical context of Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—its heavy-handed implementation of Tridentine doctrine, the imperial enterprise, the institutional presence of the Inquisition, severe inflation and economic decline, monarchic centralization, and so on—helps account for the particular form that the resonances between the wife's body and the racial or religious Other's body assumed.

The wife's is not, of course, the only body in which such an intersection between various discourses of exclusion can be found. What makes hers such a rich and at the same time economical one on which

to read the sorts of transcodifications I suspect are at work in the period is the way in which the category of “wife” marks a point of intersection between two sets of discursive attributes or positions: what we might provisionally set forth as a biologic or anatomic one that distinguishes — or purports to distinguish — male from female and that is generally used to define the category “woman,” and one determined by a legal, religious-theologic, or economic discourse — or, more likely, some combination of the three — that under the rubric of “wife” invests “woman” with a subject position, albeit a secondary one, that she is not for the most part otherwise afforded.⁴ I do not mean to imply by this that there is such a thing as an essential relation to anatomy in the case of “woman” or to the law/religion/economy in the case of “wife,” but simply to note that the terms “woman” and “wife” function practically at different levels. A curious kind of geometry is at work here, one that suggests that the category “wife” is more than merely a particular instance of the category “woman.” If, one might argue, all wives are perforce women (something about which Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz has a thing or two to say), one might also argue that in respect to the languages of the law, economics, and theology, most women are (potential if not actual) wives, or they are not (yet) women (about which Sor Juana *also* has something to say). That the Spanish term *mujer* translates as both woman and wife suggests not only the pervasiveness of this conception (in which being a woman all but implies being somebody’s wife) but its naturalization within language.

One must be careful not to overstate the “wife” case here, for there are clear exceptions to be noted: the category “woman” intersected legal, religious, economic, and even medical discourses at a number of other sites or positions in early modern Spain, from the body of the prostitute to the queen’s to that of the nun. But for many women, marriage represented the most accessible passage to a *kind* of subjectivity, if also to a kind of subjection markedly different from the form that generally preceded it, that of daughter to father. It was the moment when a woman became a subject in the eyes of church and state — acting for the first time as her (legal) self, giving a word (a word with specific legal, economic, and religious repercussions) to her husband before the presence of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and, in

so doing, performatively constituting herself as an entity who could eventually own her husband's property, give birth to legitimate children and be held at least partly responsible for them, be subject to punishment for adultery or bigamy, and so forth. It was, for most women, the moment at which they entered a public discursive sphere, even as that entry signaled their enclosure within a private domestic space as their husbands' private property.

The "wife" represents, then, the primary (although not the only) site on which "woman" was legally and religiously constituted as a subject in early modern Spain, and, at the same time, immediately subjected to certain forms of control. If guilds, colleges, brotherhoods, municipalities, and other ensembles functioned — as George Mariscal, drawing on Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, argues — as sites on which subjectivities were constituted in the sixteenth century, women were, with rare exception, categorically excluded from these various groups.⁵ My point here is not that marriage represented for women the equivalent of one of the groups that Domínguez Ortiz cites as bestowing on its members certain privileges (and imposing certain restraints) and that Mariscal implicates in the constitution of a male, aristocratic subject.⁶ It is, rather, that for many women the position of "wife" — and the privileges and restraints that accompanied marriage — were to some degree the next closest thing.

The anxieties that attach to the legibility or illegibility of the wife's body can consequently be seen as at least partly the result of her body's attachment to (or its definition in terms of) categories that exceed anatomy, and that potentially class the "wife" — as subject — alongside the "husband." This is not to say that these anxieties can be subsumed in a sort of general early modern discovery that subjectivity and anatomy — or subjectivity and position — are not isomorphous. Rather, the wife's overdetermined subject position in emerging institutional discourses (*vis-à-vis* the more static — if less defined — position set for "woman") helps explain why a kind of inquisitorial hermeneutic is employed in the surveillance of her body. In other words, if there is some sort of collusion between an inquisitorial hermeneutic and the question of the legibility/illegibility of the wife's body, it is not irrelevant that the state, church, *and* Inquisition (a hybrid politico-religious institution) emerged at this time as central institutions for the

production and regulation of anxieties in the various arenas to which the wife's body is connected.

In identifying and exploring this uneasy marriage between the anxieties generated by the wife's body and those provoked by the body of the cultural Other in early modern Spain, I attend to a triple displacement. The first of these involves a shift from bodily instabilities to interpretive ones. I argue that the threats posed by the excesses and desires of wives' bodies in a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish and Spanish American texts coincide with broader concerns over the excesses of interpretation and the threats of illegibility, that is, the difficulties of reading, the impossibility of knowing a body, a text, in itself. The stakes of this initial gesture seem clear: the body is used as a figure or screen for semiotic and epistemic questions at a historical moment (in the wake of Trent) when the status of the sign — more specifically, the status *as* sign of the eucharistic host, the body of Christ — was under heavy debate. But there is a second movement that in some sense mirrors — even as it distorts — the first. If anxieties concerning the wife's body and its pleasures betray anxieties over reading or knowing, quite often questions over the illegibility and indeterminacy of signs in turn remit back to the body, albeit on different terms. Concerns over the interpretation and misinterpretation might be seen as either symptoms or projections of the anxieties provoked by the body of the racial or religious Other, specifically, the insecurities generated by the interpretive depth of the converso's or Morisco's body: how to know what was concealed beneath the surface, or if an orthodox appearance might mask a crypto-Jew or a crypto-Muslim. If a kind of epistemology is prioritized (even as it is threatened) in the first displacement, then the body is reprioritized in the second, raising the stakes of reading and more radically historicizing the relation that obtains between the somatic and the semiotic. There is, finally, what can be imagined as a third movement already anticipated by the other two: a kind of fluidity (and, at times, a substitutability) between the wife's body and the converso's or Morisco's body. Not only does this third shift destabilize any sense of specular linearity or binarism that might be suggested by the other alignments, but it renders explicit the pervasive and provocative intersection (of which Quiñones's letter is such a good example) of the discourses of race and gender.

If in describing the relations between these various fields, I invoke a language of movement from a first moment (the shift from body to sign) to a second one (the shift from sign back to body) and the implicit inscription of a third (the intersections between the wife's body and the Other's body), I do not mean to imply that those relations are governed by either temporality or causality. On the contrary, what is so suggestive about them is precisely the absence of a causal narrative or temporal prioritization among what I have provisionally set forth as first, second, and third instances. One gesture does not necessarily follow on the other; the three fields they connect (somatic, semiotic, and politico-cultural) are, rather, much more ambiguously and even indiscernibly related than my rendering suggests. Neither is it my intention to propose that the connections between these fields are always explicit or even viable. There are instances where some, but not all, of these intersections may obtain, as well as those in which none do, in which the wife's body (or the sign's, or the Other's) may invoke other areas altogether, or none at all.

Perhaps what best accounts for the rich but problematic relation that links the respective bodies of wife, sign (condensed in the body of Christ in the Eucharist), and Other is the central role each of these bodies plays in three different sacraments of transformation, all heatedly (and at times bloodily) debated in early modern Europe and America and, given their importance to Counter Reformation theology, politics, and even aesthetics, the subject of long sessions at Trent: the one-flesh doctrine of matrimony (which putatively renders the wife of the same flesh as her husband), the transubstantial conversion of the *hoc est corpus meum* (that converts the bread of Communion to the body of Christ), and the baptismal conversion of the Jewish or Islamic or Amerindian Other into a Christian, specifically, a Catholic "self." Each of these sacraments was in turn associated with a particular transgression of Otherness, subject to inquisitorial surveillance and discipline; particularly threatening in each case were the doubts these violations cast on the efficacy of the sacrament. The wife's will, materialized in her adulterous agency, or the leftover breadlike properties of the Host used to deny "real presence", or the "impure" blood of a *cristiano nuevo* might be understood, then, as the vestigial traces of an Otherness that was thought to have been left behind, a mark of

recidivism and contamination that was at once feared and desired. The argument to be made from these various alignments is not that the questions raised by early modern readings of wives' bodies are in some exclusive or indissoluble way (to borrow a Tridentine language on matrimony) about interpretation or cultural anxieties, however, but rather that race and gender discourses are often inextricably linked with questions of interpretation and signification, particularly when the body is invoked as cultural category or as object of reading.

Although this study clearly draws on recent work about the Inquisition, and the Holy Office is very much present at its discursive horizons, my purpose here is neither to trace a cohesive narrative of the Inquisition in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spain nor to survey in any systematic way the specific roles it played in the lives of early modern Spanish women.⁷ The former has been amply done (particularly over the past two decades, which have seen renewed interest in inquisitorial scholarship both in and out of Spain), producing rich, polemical, and often contradictory results; the latter, undertaken only in part (less with respect to married women, for example, than to religious women), represents a valuable but very different approach to the question of reading wives' bodies in an inquisitorial context from the one I follow here. Nevertheless, because the institutional presence of the Inquisition—a presence that extends beyond the specific fields in and on which the Inquisition concretely acted—is crucial to the arguments I sustain throughout this book, it may be helpful to briefly lay out what I understand to be the primary functions fulfilled by the Inquisition in early modern Spain.

Perhaps the place to begin such an outline is not in Spain, as one might expect, but rather in Rome, shortly after the day in 1478 on which Pope Sixtus IV granted Ferdinand and Isabel the papal bull that allowed them to introduce the Inquisition to the territories and dioceses of their combined Crowns. (The Inquisition had existed nominally in the Crown of Aragon since the thirteenth century, but was, for all intents and purposes, a dormant institution.) The manifest purpose of the Holy Office was to maintain religious orthodoxy, defending the newly minted Catholic nation from the threats of heterodoxy in its many faces, especially its Jewish and Muslim ones. But the Inquisi-

tion's role in Spain was to be at least as much political — and, arguably, economic — as it was religious. Sixtus realized too late the tremendous power he had placed at the hands of the Spanish Crown by providing it with an institution whose proceedings were not only secret but that, because it was constituted as a royal and not a papal court, denied Rome any voice in appointments or appeals. In calling on this particular version or moment of an inquisitorial fable of origins, I do not mean to suggest that the Holy Office was exclusively or even principally a secular organ at the disposal of the Hapsburg monarchy, although that argument can be — and indeed has been — made. My point, rather, is that among other things (and, in some instances, primarily) the Spanish Inquisition served as an instrument of national centralization. It is no coincidence that the Supreme Council of the Inquisition (the *Suprema*), charged with the administration of the vast and complex bureaucratic machinery that the Inquisition would become in its Spanish incarnation, was the first — and, during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, the only — formal institution with jurisdiction over all the kingdoms of Spain and, later, her New World possessions.

If the Holy Office's usefulness as an instrument of centralization was partly a function of its successful institutionalization, institutionalization did not imply immutability. Quite the contrary: not only was the Spanish Inquisition many things to many people, but its spheres of concern and activity fluctuated tremendously over the course of its 359-year history. This adaptability derives in part from its founding mandate, "*Exigit sincerae devotionis affectus*" [examines the dispositions of genuine religious observance],⁸ which, by defining the mission of the Holy Office in Spain as the defense of the Catholic faith, allowed tremendous room for interpretation of where its jurisdiction began and ended, since offenses against the faith could easily accommodate a broad range of transgressions. As Jesús de Bujanda postulates, "The coercive power received by the Holy Office from the Church and the state varies according to how Catholic faith is understood. . . . The Inquisition, acting as an instrument of religious and social control throughout its entire existence, modifies the object of its activities and its field of action, adapting itself to changing circumstances."⁹ By examining both the number and the nature of the crimes tried by the Inquisition at different moments and at different locations, scholar-

ship undertaken in the last decade—by Solange Alberro, Bartolomé Bennassar, Jaime Contreras, Jean-Pierre Dedieu, Ricardo García Cárcel, Gustav Henningsen, Henry Kamen, Bernard Vincent, and many others—has gone a long way toward demythologizing the extents and limitations of the Inquisition’s power in early modern Spain and her overseas empire. Among the many suggestive findings of these investigations, three are particularly relevant to the arguments posed in this book: (1) According to the classification system used by inquisitors, crimes of Otherness—those related to the categories of “Jews,” “Moors,” and “Lutherans”—were considered capital offenses and accounted for more than forty percent of all cases between 1540 and 1700. (The category of “Illuminati” also fits in this group but constitutes only 0.03 percent of the total.) (2) In the years following the closing of the Council of Trent, the Inquisition actively participated in campaigns to impose or enforce Tridentine dogma. The category “heresy” was broadened to explicitly include marital transgressions since crimes such as adultery and bigamy violated the indissolubility of holy matrimony that had been reaffirmed at Trent. Moreover, because Tridentine legislation covered everything from coital questions to the nakedness of the human body in religious paintings, sexuality itself became an area of inquiry for the Holy Office. (3) The Inquisition’s activities declined markedly after the 1620s; by the mid to late seventeenth century, the Spanish Holy Office had lost much of its earlier power and prestige. (This will be of some importance for the argument I present in chapter three.)

But even taking into account the significant variations in both the intensity of prosecutions and the nature of offenses tried by the Inquisition, certain constants—more formal than material, in some cases—remain. These include a preoccupation with uncovering hidden truths, often achieved through the reading and/or disciplining of the body (two operations that become, at times, inseparable), the use of informants, secret proceedings, appeals to a rhetoric of contamination and cleansing (consonant with the operative politico-theological model of a corporate state, on one hand, with the implementation of *limpieza de sangre* statutes, on the other), a confessional imperative, and, above all, a compulsion toward surveillance as the most reliable means to a consistent end: the containment of Otherness, broadly and variously

defined. These last two in particular — surveillance and the containment of Otherness — and the anxieties they produce and reproduce, at least as much as the direct impact that inquisitorial legislation on sexuality may have had on the lives of early modern wives, I invoke throughout this study when I link questions concerning the illegibility of the wife's body to an inquisitorial hermeneutics. It is worth repeating that what I qualify as inquisitorial here and in the chapters ahead is not necessarily identical with or limited to the specific actions or mandates of the Inquisition, but is at once more and less than these. A good example of this noncoincidence is the passage from Quiñones that I cite at the opening of this chapter, which I take as an explicit instance of an inquisitorial hermeneutic at work, despite the fact that Quiñones himself was not affiliated with the Inquisition proper (although his addressee certainly is) and despite the further fact that his letter dates from a period not only of relative inactivity on the part of the Holy Office, but in which exposing crypto-Jews (the substance of his recommendations) was not the main order of business. What I refer to as an inquisitorial hermeneutic can be read as shorthand, then, for the sorts of reading practices employed by the Inquisition but also, more broadly, for the sorts of ideas (both *mentalités* and in a more traditional sense), anxieties, and even epistemology either fostered or reflected by its institutional presence in early modern Spain.¹⁰

Caminos de perfección: *Conduct Literature and Honor Plays*

My choice of wives as a starting point for the sort of analysis I carry out in the pages that follow has to do largely with two distinct and distinctly important textual phenomena of early modern Spain rarely, if ever, considered alongside one another: the proliferation in fifteenth- and particularly sixteenth-century Spain of conduct manuals prescribing duties and proscribing desires for perfect wives, and the vast popularity in sixteenth- and especially seventeenth-century Spain of honor-vengeance dramas, plays in which wives, defined as radically imperfect on the mere suspicion of adulterous desire, were routinely and graphically murdered by their husbands onstage. One of the ob-