

## FROM EGYPT TO EDEN: ARCHETYPAL NARRATIVES AND IDEALIZED VIRTUE IN HENRY FIELDING'S *JOSEPH ANDREWS*

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The title of Henry Fielding's first full-length novel, *Joseph Andrews*, published in 1742, reveals the dual foundations upon which his eponymous hero's character is constructed: "Brother to the illustrious *Pamela* [Andrews], whose Virtue is at present so famous" (17), Joseph endeavors to "copy [her] Example, and that of *Joseph*, my Name's-sake, and maintain my Virtue against all Temptations" (40). As is made clear from its opening pages, *Joseph Andrews* originates from the same satiric impulse that drove Fielding's earlier work of fiction, the brilliantly parodic *Shamela* (1741): to deconstruct Samuel Richardson's extraordinarily popular epistolary novel *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) by revealing its dangerous, rather than exemplary, qualities. If Fielding's creation of Shamela, who had "thought once of making a little Fortune by my Person" but now "intend[s] to make a great one by my Vartue" (329-30) exposes what Fielding believed to be Pamela's commodification of female chastity and the novel's celebration of female duplicity and male naivety, Fielding's creation of the chaste and virtuous Joseph attacks Richardson's novel in a different way: criticizing the "maiden in distress" convention by exposing a man, rather than a woman, to sexual dangers. By transposing the sexes and making Joseph adhere with such tenacity to a virtue not traditionally associated with men, Fielding highlights the ludicrous nature of Pamela's own adherence to virginity as the sole source of her own "illustrious" example.

Yet while originating in parody, *Joseph Andrews* also sets out to create something wholly, as it were, "novel": a new literary genre, famously described in the preface as "a comic Epic-Poem in Prose." Within that genre, the narrative structure would provide the framework for new examples of ideal virtue by eschewing the solipsism of first-person voice and creating, instead, a witty and omniscient third-person narrator. Following J. Paul Hunter in seeing Joseph's chastity as an initially ludicrous but ultimately recuperated carryover from Fielding's attack on *Pamela*<sup>1</sup>, many readers of the novel find that example in the novel's hero, who, modeled upon the biblical figure of Joseph, values his own "virtue"—here explicitly defined as virginity—no less than did his sister, Pamela; his chastity,

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<sup>1</sup> See Hunter, Chapter 5: "Some Contexts for Joseph Andrews."

like that of his sister, provides the basis for both his character and the novel's plot.<sup>2</sup> Yet because Joseph is defined by his sexual virtue, he must, like a female character, respond rather than act; he goes through the novel "in the passive voice."<sup>3</sup> The novel's plot is in many ways strikingly similar to that of Fielding's later "masterpiece," *Tom Jones* (1749): both heroes are driven out of their habitations; both go on the road, accompanied by learned yet also naive and even buffoon-like sidekicks; both are joined along the way by the women they love; both are preyed upon by lascivious aristocratic women (while their beloved women are attacked by lascivious aristocratic men); in the end, both discover a different identity for themselves and marry their respective heroines. The key differences between the two works have to do with class status and sexual behavior: Joseph, like his sister Pamela, is a domestic servant, whereas Tom is raised as an adopted son to Squire Allworthy (of Paradise Hall). Joseph is chaste, whereas Tom indulges freely in sexual adventure.

Joseph's inferior and impoverished material circumstances necessarily parallel his vulnerable position as a sexual object, and I believe that his passive sexuality and resultant vulnerability have served to lessen *Joseph Andrews*'s contemporary and critical appeal. Martin Batestin's regretful observation at the conclusion of his 1959 study of the novel, that "[a]mong students of Fielding and the novel, *Joseph Andrews* has survived as a kind of loveable curiosity, valued less for itself than for what it led to—*Tom Jones* and the tradition of Dickens and Thackeray" (154), might hold almost as well today. Thus despite Fielding's witty and entertaining play on the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, to which I shall return below, Joseph's character, and the novel's narrative, function in opposition to a developing ideology in which chastity and the concomitant capacity to reform characters and drive plot become increasingly inscribed as a feminine norm. The anxiety caused by this tension is, however, ameliorated by the appearance of Fanny, Joseph's beloved, whose presence enables Joseph to transform from desired object to desiring subject. For the second half of the novel, both Joseph and the narrative itself focus on Fanny's physical beauties and the preservation of her chastity. Fanny is in fact introduced as the victim of attempted rape, and her astonishing beauty (much like Joseph's own) seems to insure that every man who sees her will wish to respond similarly.<sup>4</sup> The multiple assaults on Joseph's chastity—at the hands of his employer, Lady Booby, her maid Slipslop, and the hotel chambermaid

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<sup>2</sup> For a reading of Fielding's broader use of biblical analogy in relation to the character of Joseph, see Harold Fisch.

<sup>3</sup> I thank Eileen McHenry for this phrase.

<sup>4</sup> For an analysis of the legal and social contexts surrounding sexual assault on women in the eighteenth century, see Susan Staves.

Betty—have all occurred before Fanny appears. By the novel's end, Joseph's considerable charms are not even mentioned: Fanny's is the body that the narrator delights in undressing on their wedding eve. Unable to sustain itself as a narrative of virginal male virtue, *Joseph Andrews* becomes instead an education into male sexual desire, as virtuous masculinity becomes reconfigured as conjugal fidelity.

Fielding locates Joseph's exemplarity, I contend, not in Joseph's chastity—whether interpreted as a satiric carryover from Fielding's attack on *Pamela* or as the more serious “standard biblical prototype of male chastity” (Battestin 32)—but rather in what the narrator describes as the “long, faithful, and mutual Passion” (174) between Joseph and his beloved, Fanny Goodwill. Joseph's example, therefore, is less that of the chaste male per se than of the man who experiences and enacts sexual desire only within the context of a monogamous attachment leading to marriage. In the course of the novel, Joseph's passive virtue—which results in his often comic refusal to engage in sexual encounters—becomes transformed into active passion: the Edenic love that he shares with Fanny. Described throughout the novel in such terms as “tender,” “chaste,” “innocent,” “delicate,” and “pure,” the love between Joseph and Fanny represents the ideal of conjugal love figured as heterosexual chastity. The novel manifests the particular qualities of their pre-lapsarian relationship in multiple ways: through comparison to other representations of desire; through allusion, most notably to Book IV of Milton's *Paradise Lost*; and through the example of the Wilsons, Joseph's unknown parents, whose idealized life in rural retreat represents a kind of heaven on earth.

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In “Biblical criticism, literature, and the eighteenth-century reader,” Thomas Preston argues that in *Joseph Andrews*, Parson Adams's passing allusion to the translation problem of whether it's a cable or a camel that passes through the eye of a needle reveals Fielding's expectation of his educated readers. This expectation presumes that they would have been familiar not only with hermeneutics, (98), but also with the practice of exemplary reading, which “incorporated Old and New Testament characters into the received interpretation of Scripture as a kind of gallery of positive and negative examples for the practical use of the reader,” noting that in such practice, “emphasis naturally fell on positive role models like Abraham and Joseph” (109). Fielding's readers, in other words, would have been fully aware of both the biblical and fictional texts underlying Joseph's character; yet it is the conflation of those two very different narratives, combined with Fielding's reworking of his biblical prototype, that make Joseph's behavior in Lady Booby's bedroom so outrageous—and so comic.

In Genesis, Joseph presents his continued (day after day) resistance to the “coax[ings]” of Potiphar’s wife as a “wicked” transgression against his master, who has, he tells her, “withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife”; moreover, succumbing to her invitation to commit adultery would be a “sin before God” (39: 7-9). Fielding maintains his own Joseph’s subservient status as a servant in the Booby household and even expands on the physical attractions of the biblical Joseph, who “was well built and handsome” (39:6), by making his hero a model of male beauty.<sup>5</sup> Yet by conveniently killing off his own Potiphar, Sir Thomas Booby, Fielding removes not just the sin of adultery but also any mention of religion whatsoever. In explicit contrast to his namesake, Fielding’s Joseph locates the source of his refusal exclusively in his own “Virtue,” which, by preserving the “Chastity of his Family,” continues the worthy example learned from the letters of his sister Pamela (35). Lady Booby’s astonished response emphasizes, through its very exaggeration, the seeming farce that is male chastity: “Did ever Mortal hear of a Man’s Virtue! Did ever the greatest, or the gravest Men pretend to any of this Kind! Will Magistrates who punish Lewdness, or Parsons, who preach against it, make any scruple of committing it? And can a Boy, a stripling, have the Confidence to talk of his Virtue? (35).

In the biblical narrative, Joseph must choose between God’s law and his duty, as a servant, to obey his mistress; Fielding’s character, although steeped in religious teaching (care of Parson Adams), faces no comparable struggle. Instead, responding to Lady Booby’s assertion that he may have misunderstood her intentions and that she was only testing him, he answers “he had only spoke out of Tenderness for his Virtue” (36). Echoing Shamela’s “vartue” and departing, in significant ways, from the more weighty repercussions faced by the biblical Joseph, Joseph Andrews’s refusal to “lie with” Lady Booby gets him thrown not into prison but rather out into the street. Although during this period, the representation of female “virtue in distress” becomes the supreme spectacle of wronged innocence (reaching its tragic apotheosis in Richardson’s second novel, *Clarissa*), male chastity seems, by contrast, necessarily comic, due largely to the fact that, as Fielding’s narrator later comments, due men’s greater physical strength means that they cannot, at least by women, be “ravished against [their] Will”: “How ought a Man to rejoice, that his Chastity is always in his own power, that if he hath sufficient Strength of Mind, he hath always a competent Strength of Body to defend himself: and cannot, like a poor weak Woman, be ravished against his Will” (75).

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of Joseph’s physical attractions as comprising components of both masculine beauty and those associated with feminine beauty, see Jill Campbell.

Viewing Joseph's virtue solely through a biblical lens can therefore be misleading, for in a later chapter, tellingly headed "Of several new matters not expected," we learn that Joseph's seemingly excessive chastity is in fact an example of (a perhaps more comprehensible) fidelity—to Fanny. I maintain, then, that Joseph's virtue has itself been largely misread, much in the way that the clergyman Barnabus, himself an object of satire, misinterprets Joseph's "dying" speech at the Inn, finding it a "Rhapsody of Nonsense" induced by fever. In that speech, an apostrophe to his "most virtuous Sister" Pamela (to whom he has previously written two letters), Joseph defines his virtue as desirable not as a quality in and of itself but rather as explicitly linked to the life he has planned to lead with the equally pure and chaste Fanny (51). Throughout the novel, Joseph and Fanny's "purest and most delicate Passion" (126) is explicitly distinguished from the lustful desire exhibited by other characters. The voracious and inconstant sexual appetite associated conventionally with aristocratic men is here attributed to both sexes and all classes. While Joseph's mistress Lady Booby, her maid Slipslop, and Betty, the chambermaid at the inn where Joseph recovers from his attack, are all overcome by Joseph's many charms, all three manage easily to transfer their desire to other men. Betty's sexual appetite was already whetted by Joseph; yet her passions "were not so whimsically capricious that one Man only could lay them, though perhaps, she would have rather preferred that one" (75). She submits instead to the advances of her master, the innkeeper Tow-ouse, who has himself displaced his own sexual desires onto Betty: "for as the Violence of his Passion had considerably abated to Mrs. *Tow-ouse*; so like Water, which is stopt from its usual Current in one Place, it naturally sought a vent in another" (74). Similarly Slipslop, whose desire for Joseph has been described by the dual—as if one were not enough—epic similes of "hungry Tygress" and "voracious Pike" (29), prudently decides, after her attentions have gone unrecognized, to look elsewhere; she is "a little inclined to the Opinion of that female Sect, who hold one lusty young Fellow to be near as good as another lusty young Fellow" (38). And while Lady Booby's passion for Joseph retains plot significance until the novel's end, the novel's penultimate paragraph (just above the description of Joseph and Fanny's wedded bliss) relates that she "returned to *London* ... where a young Captain of Dragoons, together with eternal Parties at Cards, soon obliterated the Memory of *Joseph*" (303).

Lust, as manifested in these characters, can never be truly satisfied: its fluid and endlessly exchangeable nature is continually compared to the more stable, chaste, and exclusive passion felt by Joseph and Fanny, a passion described by the narrator as meriting "the noble Name of Love" (267). In contrast to the characters described above, Joseph and Fanny are interested only in each other. While their love is certainly depicted as containing desire, their sexual feelings are purified by modesty,

n the case of Fanny, and discretion in the case of Joseph.<sup>6</sup> Most important is their constancy. Even when faced with the possibility that they might be siblings, they demonstrate their exemplary ability to sacrifice desire to love, declaring that they would choose “perpetual Celibacy” in order that they might “live together all their Days.” Although further revelations make their vow of “a *Platonick* Friendship” (295) unnecessary, the consummation they do enjoy is tempered by the supposed innocence of their desires, an innocence defined in large part by what it is not.

Early in the novel, before Fanny enters the scene, the narrator uses the term “innocent” twice to describe its opposite: “the innocent Freedoms” in which Lady Booby indulges Joseph and “which Women of Figure may permit without the least sully of their Virtue” (23) and the “innocent Amusement” that she takes in “demolishing the Reputations of others” (37). Fielding bares the device when the narrator claims that “whatever Opinion or Suspicion the scandalous Inclination of Defamers might entertain of Lady *Booby’s* innocent Freedoms, it is certain they made no Impression on young *Andrews*, who never offered to encroach beyond the Liberties which his Lady allowed him” (23). Slightly later, once the maid Slipslop has begun to discern her mistress’s desire for Joseph (which she shares), Lady Booby decides to “submit to any Insult from a Servant rather than run a Risque of losing the Title to so many great Privileges”: “Cards, making Court’sies in public Places, and, above all, the Pleasure of demolishing the Reputation of others, in which innocent Amusement she had an extraordinary Delight” (37). Lady Booby’s “Tenderness” is rather for her own “Reputation” than for Joseph, whom she has had stripped of his livery and banished from her service.

This ironic use of the term “innocent” to describe calculated and destructive behaviors is later corrected by the relationship of Fanny and Joseph, whose own delightful innocence refigures the pre-lapsarian bliss of Adam and Eve. At one point in the novel, Parson Adams falls asleep and Joseph “turned towards *Fanny*, and, taking her by the Hand, began a Dalliance, which, tho’ consistent with the purest Innocence and Decency, neither he would have attempted, nor she permitted, before any Witness” (205). In *Paradise Lost*, the “youthful dalliance” (IV: l. 338) of Adam and Eve is witnessed by Satan, but Milton’s account of the “rites/Mysterious of connubial love” (IV: ll. 742-43) similarly distinguishes “chaste love” from lustful desire, the latter figured, as in *Joseph Andrews*, as partaking in aristocratic deceit. Thus Adam and Eve’s “Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets, / Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced” (760-1) is contrasted with “the bought smiles/Of harlots, loveless,

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<sup>6</sup> Thus Fanny loves Joseph “with inexpressible Violence, though with the purest and most delicate Passion” (126), while Joseph, in his turn, merits the narrator’s praise by removing his gaze from the ravishing sight of Fanny’s “snowy ... Bosom,” exposed after her near rape: “So great was his Fear of offending her, and so truly did his Passion for her deserve the noble name of Love” (267).

joyless, unendeared” as well as with “Casual fruition, ... court amours, / Mixed dance, or wanton masque, or midnight ball” (765-8). Milton’s use of the adjective “mysterious” to describe not only the rites but also the “mysterious law” (750) of “wedded love” parallels the “inexpressible” quality of the affection between Joseph and Fanny, a passion whose sexuality, because untainted by lust, is “harmless and delightful” (205). Indeed in an earlier scene, Fielding makes the allusion to *Paradise Lost* explicit, describing how under the cover of darkness—“It was indeed, according to *Milton*, Darkness visible”—Fanny, for the first time, shows physical affection to Joseph, giving “a loose to her Passion, which she had never done before” (166-7).

The innocent, and Edenic, love of Joseph and Fanny is mirrored in, as well as explicated by, the innocent paradise on earth shared by the Wilsons. Mr. Wilson, unlike Joseph, must go through a rake’s hell in order to find heaven in the arms of his “Harriet Hearty,” the woman who possesses the heart that his previous relationships, which were born from lust or desire for gain, clearly lacked. Not only does the Wilsons’s retired life emulate the classical ideal of rural escape from what Mr. Wilson terms “a World full of Bustle, Noise, Hatred, Envy, and Ingratitude,” but the “Ease, Quiet, and Love” (194-95) that they enjoy promulgates another ideal—that of conjugal fidelity and familial bliss. What distinguishes Wilson’s earthly paradise is not only the fact that he escapes from the private evils of debauchery and disease or from the public ones of hypocrisy and deceit, but also that he combines his private and public pleasures within the confines of the conjugal unit.

Wilson’s celebration of his wife’s virtues, and of their mutual delight in each other and in their fruitful union, leads to Adams’s observation that “this was the Manner in which the People had lived in the Golden Age” (199). By the novel’s conclusion, Joseph and Fanny will join the Wilsons in their rural retreat, a retreat “stocked” with the bounty provided by Joseph’s earthly father, Mr. Wilson: “Mr. *Booby* [Pamela’s husband] hath with unprecedented Generosity given *Fanny* a Fortune of two thousand Pound, which *Joseph* hath laid out in a little Estate in the same Parish with his Father, which he now occupies (his Father having stock’d it for him)”; moreover, the long-awaited consummation of their love has already begun to bear, as it were, fruit: “*Fanny* presides, with the most excellent Management in his Dairy; where, however, she is not at present very able to bustle much, being, as Mr. *Wilson* informs me in his last Letter, extremely big with her first Child” (303).

Although the novel begins with close attention to Joseph’s highly eroticized and desirable male body, it is Fanny’s voluptuous and continually vulnerable female body that must educate Joseph from his position as the passive object of others’ desires into the active agent of his own. Like Milton’s Eve, whom “the genial angel to our sire/ Brought ... in naked beauty more adorned” (IV. ll. 712-

13), Fielding's Fanny "was soon undrest, for she had no Jewels to deposit in their Caskets, nor fine Laces to fold with the nicest Exactness. Undressing for her was properly discovering, not putting off, Ornaments: for, as all her Charms were the Gifts of Nature, she could divest herself of none" (302). Leaving "this happy Couple to enjoy the private Rewards of their Constancy; Rewards so great and sweet, that I apprehend *Joseph* neither envied the noblest Duke, nor *Fanny* the finest Duchess that Night" (303), Fielding continues his attack on aristocratic luxury and ensures that his happy couple will, along with the Wilsons, "live together in a State of Bliss scarcely ever equalled" (303). Retaining, as noted above, a similar plot structure but moving away from parody and biblical archetype to create the more complex "mixed" character of Tom Jones, Fielding begins his second novel where *Joseph Andrews* ends. Unlike the idealized Joseph, whose elevation from domestic servant to small landowner accordingly parallels his shift from virgin to husband, the far from virtuous Tom must be cast out of Paradise—or, more literally, thrown out of Paradise Hall—to begin the adventures that will lead, in turn, to his own "State of Bliss."

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## THE VEIL OF TAMAR<sup>1</sup>

Massimo Leone

Consider a woman whose first husband is killed by God for mysterious reasons; whose second husband, brother of the first, suffers the same fate because he refuses to fecundate her; whose third husband, brother of the first and the second but too young to marry, is promised to her by their father, who nevertheless plans to marry the youngster to someone else because he fears that the woman, who comes from a foreign tribe, is cursed. Consider that this woman, twice widowed and an eternal fiancée, dresses up as a harlot, lies with the father of her three husbands, who does not recognize her, and demands his seal, cord, and staff as a pledge of payment. Consider that by deceiving her father-in-law, the woman conceives twins, but is accused of adultery and sentenced to death; she is eventually acquitted when she proves, showing the seal, cord, and staff, that the father of her three husbands begot the twins. Finally, consider that one of the twins is an ancestor of David, and therefore an ancestor of Jesus, and ergo that the birth of Christianity depends on a woman who passed herself off as a prostitute in order to be fecundated by her three-time father-in-law, and you will begin to understand the reasons for which the story of Tamar, the woman, and Judah, her father-in-law, is one of the most intriguing of the entire Book of Genesis.

Interplay between identity, deception, and recognition lies at the narrative core of the biblical episode. Tamar's identity as a wife and potential mother is denied first by God, then by Onan, her Onanistic second husband, then by Judah, who deceives her by promising her to his young son to whom she will never be married. At the same time, it is through a counter-deception that Tamar's identity as a wife and mother is recognized and restored. Two symmetrical figures of dressing embody the core of the Biblical narrative — the deception and the counter-deception, the denial of Tamar's identity and its restoration. On the one hand, by dressing Tamar as a widow, Judah is able to procrastinate her marriage with Shelah, his third son; on the other hand, it is through dressing as a harlot that Tamar obtains the reinstatement of her rights.

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<sup>1</sup> A first version of this article was presented at the First Swiss Congress of Art History, Bern, 2-4 September 2010; I thank all those who offered comments and criticisms on that occasion, and in particular Pascal Griener, Henri de Riedmatten, Victor I. Stoichita, and Tristan Weddigen. A second version was read at the symposium "Re-Readings and Re-Viewings of Sacred/Archetypal Narratives in Literature and the Arts", The College of The Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts 26-28 June 2013; I thank Prof. Virginia Raguin for reading the text (due to my absence) as well as for her precious commentaries; I also thank James Welu for his suggestions.

Both the deception of Tamar and the counter-deception of Judah involve the visual dimension. The narrative crux of the story requires that when Judah comes across his daughter-in-law dressed as a harlot, he does not recognize her. If he recognized her, he would not lie with her, and therefore she would not conceive his sons: what a catastrophe for the future of Judeo-Christianity! But how can Judah not recognize her own daughter-in-law? The Bible is ambiguous to this regard. The Hebrew text that narrates the episode, as well as most of its Greek, Latin, and vernacular translations, lend themselves to different interpretations.

Painters have been attracted to the story of Judah and Tamar, especially in certain historical periods and cultural geographies of Christian art. The hypothesis of the present paper is that the abovementioned ambiguity is the most important reason for such attraction. Painters have been enticed by an episode in which the relation between identity, deception, and recognition manifests itself through the dialectics between visibility and invisibility, appearance and essence. They could interpret the story of Judah and Tamar as a meta-reflection on painting and, more specifically, as an apologue on the status of images in the Christian economy of salvation. At the same time, and consequently, painters could also complement verbal exegeses of this biblical episode through their pictorial interpretations of it.

Some of these visual exegeses will be now examined. In most of them, a single narrative and visual device plays a central role: the veil. In many paintings, it is thanks to some sort of veil that Tamar, unrecognized, passes herself off as a harlot to Judah.

The deceitful encounter between the woman and her father-in-law was early depicted in Christian art. A veiled woman sitting on a chair and stretching her right arm toward a male character standing in front of her and offering to her a staff is in the lower pictorial decoration of cubicle A of the catacomb of via Latina, although the image is so ruined that it does not allow a precise identification of the subject (Ferrua 1960: 42-3, fig. 3). Another early example of the iconography of Tamar and Judah is in a 5<sup>th</sup>-century mosaic in the vestibule of the chapel of San Aquilino at the basilica of San Lorenzo Maggiore in Milan, which focuses on the recognition of Tamar's twins through Judah's staff and is probably typologically related to the depiction of the *Traditio Legis* in the same chapel (Calderini, Chierici, and Cecchelli 1951: 234, figs 94-5).

Images of the story of Tamar and Judah multiply in the Middle Ages, when illustrated Bibles often devoted several scenes to the episode: nine in British Manuscript Cotton Clodius B. IV (fol. 55-7) and six in Amiens Biblical Manuscript 108 (fol. 24v-26), both dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, five in British Manuscript Egerton 1894 (fol. 18v-19), and eleven in the Bible of the Accademia dei Concordi in Rovigo (ms. 212 fol. 29v-31), both dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Here are six scenes of the *Pamplona*

*Bible*, commissioned by King Sancho el Fuerte of Navarra between 1194 and 1234 (The Pamplona Bible 1970; Tsuji 1972)<sup>2</sup>.

The first scene depicts Judah giving his staff as a pledge to Tamar while his third and youngest son stays behind him, in conformity with an iconographic scheme already observed in the catacomb of via Latina; the fourth scene shows Tamar captured by Judah's emissaries upon the discovery of her adultery; the fifth scene illustrates the moment of anagnorisis, when Tamar, with a *coup de théâtre*, shows the cord, seal, and staff to Judah and is therefore absolved. Tamar's headgear does not change significantly throughout the six scenes. She wears the combination of veil, circlet, and barrette typical of the female dressing code of 12<sup>th</sup>-century Western Europe. Such combination veils her hair, ears, and throat, but leaves the face uncovered.

This medieval depiction of the story of Tamar and Judah includes a puzzling feature: the first scene is supposed to represent the woman passing herself off as a harlot to her father-in-law. However, although a caption informs the viewer that Judah does not recognize Tamar, her face is as visible in this first scene as it is in the one illustrating the final moment of anagnorisis. But if Tamar is meant to be depicted while she hides her identity from Judah, why is her face visible?

The story of Tamar and Judah appealed to 16<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish painters for many reasons. Lucas Gassel, like most of his contemporaries, chose the moment of deception as the narrative peak of the story. In his 1548 painting, the curvy road that winds up and down allows Gassel not only to situate the depiction of this moment at the centre of the image and hint at other narrative elements in the background, but also to visually expose the semantic relation between identity, deception, and recognition through the interplay between city and landscape, culture and nature. In conformity with the biblical text, it is only by placing herself outside of the urban setting that Tamar manages to both lose and recuperate her identity. For Gassel and his Flemish contemporaries, the scene of Tamar's deception is fundamentally a scene of seduction: Judah gropes Tamar's body while she already holds his staff and is about to receive his seal. However, Tamar's headgear is, like in medieval biblical illustration, such that her face is no less visible than Judah's, who wears himself a veil.

A second painting by Gassel, on the same subject, is now in Vienna's *Kunsthistorisches Museum*. Here the scene of deception through seduction is downsized, whereas the contrast between the orderly space of urban culture and the wild space of extra-urban nature is magnified. Gassel

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<sup>2</sup> A version of the paper with illustrations is available at the personal website of the author: <https://unito.academia.edu/MassimoLeone>

keeps situating the couple at the intersection between these opposite worlds: it is by challenging the cultural laws of incest that Tamar succeeds in preserving her natural gift of fecundity and reproduction. However, her face still remains uncovered, perfectly visible to both Judah and the viewer.

With few exceptions, a drastic change in Tamar and Judah depictions takes place from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Unlike early Christian artists, medieval illustrators, and Gassel, almost all subsequent painters chose various forms of veil as an essential narrative device. In an anonymous Netherlandish drawing, currently in New York's Metropolitan Museum, Tamar's visage is partially covered by a peculiar band that veils her eyes but at the same time lets them both see and be seen by Judah and the viewer.

A triumphant Tamar features in the foreground of plate 6 from a set of *Celebrated Women of the Old Testament* consisting of twenty engravings (plus frontispiece) by Jan II or Adrien Collaert and Karel van Mallery, published in Antwerp by Phillip Galle between 1590 and 1595. The scene of seduction and deception is miniaturized and relegated in the background, but a veil is seen on Tamar's face as a reference to her exploit. At the same time, Tamar's military pose, with suggestion of armor, turns the veil into a feminine helmet and Judah's staff into a spear. By concealing her identity, the biblical heroine defends her rights as spouse and mother.

Contemporary or slightly later Flemish artists seem to oscillate between two types of veil: either one wrapped around the eyes or one falling over the forehead. The latter seems to gain in popularity. The more Judah's groping is aggressive, the more Tamar's face is covered. Pieter Lastman follows the anonymous Netherlandish drawing mentioned above in the choice of veil but has Judah's left hand landing straightforwardly on Tamar's breast (Müller 1911).

Aert de Gelder dedicated at least three paintings to Tamar and Judah, infusing them with various degrees of violent passion. In a 1667 painting, currently in a private collection, Judah imperiously grasps Tamar's chin, while a semi-transparent black veil covers the upper part of her face. In a 1681 version of the same subject, Judah's approach to Tamar is gentler, but she is increasingly characterized as a courtesan: not only a red rose in her hair, like in the previous painting, but even a glass in her hand. A coquettish red ribbon wraps Tamar's head and visually matches the color of her skirt. Furthermore, the woman's nose and cheeks seem to be flushed as a result of drinking alcohol. The image of Tamar as a cool deceiver is downplayed. She is depicted as an *entraîneuse* more than as a biblical heroine.

In a virtuoso exercise, Tamar's veil is made almost transparent: viewers can see her face and recognize her, but they are also encouraged to believe that Judah cannot. Viewers therefore become,

like in a theatrical *à part*, the accomplices of Tamar's deception. Other paintings, for instance, *Tamar and Judah* by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, presently in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, deny such complicity: an impenetrable veil conceals the woman's face from both Judah and the viewer. In a third painting by de Gelder, currently at the National Gallery of London, the relation between the invisibility of Tamar's face and Judah's sexual ardor is even more explicit: while a thick veil lets viewers guess only the main features of the woman's face, her father-in-law's right hand sinks between her legs. Its being concealed behind her left leg further emphasizes the eroticism of the struggle between this gesture and that of Tamar's resistance.

In this as well as in other contemporary Flemish paintings, Judah's headgear is progressively 'Orientalized' and turned into a typical Turkish Ottoman turban. What head covering, in the cultural geography of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish art, could be more appropriate in depicting the savage unleashing of luxury? In a 1644 painting by Ferdinand Bol, currently at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Judah's turban seems to visually rhyme with a giant cucumber, almost a watermelon (Blankert 1982). Such detail is so bizarre that it can hardly be insignificant. Literary sources capable of explaining the presence of a cucurbitacea in the depiction of this Biblical episode have long been searched for. The best hypothesis is that which relates the painting to Isaiah 1: 8, "And the daughter of Sion shall be left as a covert in a vineyard, and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and as a city that is laid waste." (Douay-Rheims). This passage has been quoted and commented upon extensively by Christian authors, from Tertullian to Innocent III and beyond, to mention only the Latin Fathers. Rabanus Maurus's *Expositionum in Leviticum libri septem* puts forward an exegesis that was highly influential throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern eras.

Synagoga non solum uxor, sed et filia Dei appellata in prophetis invenitur. Sed utrumque ipsa depravans, indigna donis apparuit, et propterea aliena facta est, ita ut Deus per Isaiam diceret: Relinquetur filia Sion sicut umbraculum in vinea: et sicut tugurium in cucumerario, et sicut civitas quae vastatur (Isa. 1:8). Ipsa profanata et adulterata est. (Rabanus Maurus, *Expositionum in Leviticum libri septem*, 15, 21 [PL 108, 0476c])

[One finds that prophets call the synagogue not only the wife, but also the daughter of God. But in both functions she became depraved, manifestly unworthy of such gifts, and therefore ostracized, just as God spoke through Isaiah, "And the daughter of Sion shall be left as a shelter in a vineyard, and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, and as a city that is laid waste." She is profaned and adulterated.]

Therefore, the cucumber in Bol's painting could be a visual reminder of this typological exegesis of the story of Tamar and Judah. If, according to Isaiah, as interpreted by Rabanus Maurus, the

Jewish synagogue was left alone like a “lodge in a garden of cucumbers” then the cucumber in Bol’s painting suggests that Tamar, whom Judah left alone without a husband and offspring, symbolizes the Jewish synagogue waiting for the advent of Jesus in order to be redeemed through the foundation of the Christian Church. Tamar therefore becomes a typological figure of the Virgin Mary<sup>3</sup>.

There is no clearer depiction of this typological exegesis than Jan van Hemessen’s rendition of the story of Tamar and Judah, currently in the *Gemäldegalerie* of Braunschweig (Graefe 1909). Here the woman’s attire is entirely chaste and her face uncovered; her father-in-law stares at her from respectable distance, and a little crucifix appears at her waist. A scene of seduction and deception is therefore turned into a Mariological figure of sowing.

However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Flemish depictions of Tamar as typological heroine with face uncovered are increasingly replaced by Orientalized representations of Tamar as deceitful harlot with face covered. Later on, she still appears without a veil in some paintings, but that is because the artist has chosen to represent Tamar in other circumstances, for instance, when she discloses the identity of her offspring’s father by showing Judah’s objects, like in a painting by Alessandro Tiarini currently at the Fondazione Pietro Manodori in Reggio Emilia, or when she has just received them from her father-in-law, like in a painting by Herman van der Myn, now in a private collection. Although this Tamar with fishnet stockings can hardly be interpreted as a Mariological figure, it prompts another trend of reflection about her iconography: depictions of Tamar have become an alibi, for both (mostly male) artists and their (mostly male) viewers, to fantasize about the relation between the female body, clothes, and erotic desire.

Whereas in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish paintings such relation is explored through an Orientalist *imaginaire*, in other cultural geographies, and especially in Italian and Italianate art, the face of Tamar is rather covered by a classical veil: for instance, in a painting by Jacopo da Ponte now in the Musée

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<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it is very uncertain as to the level of accuracy found in Lowlands’ artists’ depiction of oriental dress. Ferdinand Bol’s work reflects local traditions, and by most standards he would not be considered highly intellectual or interested in such complex visual and textual associations. It is unlikely that he ever saw a turban in real life. But cfr Impelluso 2004, 175: “In the sphere of iconography, the cucumber was often associated with the image of the Virgin Mary, to imply that the Mother of Christ was never touched by sin. The idea derives from a passage from the prophet Isaiah, which says: “And the daughter of Zion is like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city.” The image of the besieged city was seen as referring to the figure of the Madonna who, though surrounded by sin, remains apart from it, preserving her original purity. On the other hand, according to Rabanus Maurus, the cucumber evokes an image of perdition because when the Jews were in the desert, they preferred to eat cucumbers rather than the manna sent down from heaven.”

Fabre of Montpellier, in one by Giovanni Lanfranco currently at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Rome, in a painting by the same artist in the Villa Arrigoni-Varesi-Muti in Frascati, or in an engraving by Gerard Hoet, presently in a private collection. Nevertheless, other forms of veils are not entirely absent in the Italian iconography of Tamar, as it is evident in a delicate painting by Rutilio Manetti, now in a private collection in Madrid.

Finally, the Orientalism trend triumphs in the modern iconography of Tamar and Judah, for instance, in the famous 19<sup>th</sup>-century rendition of the episode by Émile Jean-Horace Vernet, currently in the Wallace collection in London: Judah turns into an improbable Bedouin, Tamar into an odalisque, her veil into an Arabic *niqaab*, while a camel is the only silent witness to the deceitful encounter. Judah recuperates more credible biblical attire in the Bible of Marc Chagall, where Tamar is both a passionate red body and a face covered by a sort of *burqa*, her eyes turned into two simple circlets.

To conclude, a mysterious aspect of Tamar's iconography should be examined. Why is Tamar sometimes depicted without a veil, like in medieval biblical illustrations or, later on, in a painting by Jacopo Tintoretto in the Tyssen-Borremisza, Madrid? Is the veil not an essential device of Tamar's deception? Most probably, the iconography of the unveiled Tamar is somehow influenced by the way in which the Septuagint improperly translates the Hebrew word "עֲלָפָה" ['alaph] in Gen 38: 14. Whilst such word, which has the same root as the Greek word "καλύπτο," means "to cover," "to wrap," the Septuagint translates it into "ἐκαλλώπισατο," which means "she beautified her face." In the Septuagint, then, Tamar does not "cover her face," but she "beautifies it" (Menn 1997: 153).

Nevertheless, how this improper translation affected the iconography of Tamar, and how it complicated the relation between identity, deception, and recognition, as well as that between the female body, clothes, and erotic desire, which are manifested through Tamar's iconography, is a topic that deserves further investigation<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The first Dutch version of the Bible based primarily on original sources is the Statenbijbel (States Bible), which was published in 1637 and used widely from that date forward. Before then, it appears that the Dutch relied on a number of sources, the Vulgate, Luther's translation, and, of course, the Geneva Bible, which was printed a number of times in Amsterdam during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and contributed to the spread of Calvinism throughout the northern Netherlands. In Utrecht, where 40% were Catholic, the Vulgate must have remained a standard text for many. The Vulgate translates the passage as "adsumpsit theristrum"; Douay-Rheims: "and took a veil"; Geneva Bible: "14 Then she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a veil [...] 15 When Judah saw her, he judged her to be a whore, for she had covered her face"; Luther's 1521 translation is "sie verhüllte sich" – "she covered herself". The first Dutch language Bible based primarily on original sources is the *Statenbijbel* (States Bible), published in 1637 and used widely from that date forward. The Dutch continues the concept of a veil: "Toen leide zij de klederen van haar weduwschap van zich af, en zij bedekte zich met een sluier."

At this stage of research, the present article must content itself with a general conclusion. Christian iconography shows a keen interest in the depiction of the biblical episode of Tamar. The body of the woman becomes the center of a matrix of visual readings, which attribute different meanings to the elements of the story depending on the historical epoch, the sociocultural context, the religious ideology, and the aesthetic sensibility of both the painter and his entourage. Medieval paintings concentrate on the genealogy of Christ, and the visual evidence of God's plan as impenetrable; human imperfection (greed, lust) even turns instrumental to furthering the divine ploy. Renaissance artworks revolve on a distinctively more personal and human theme. In the North, the Protestant context certainly plays a role through the personal reading of the scriptures<sup>5</sup>. Most of these paintings were not commissioned by the church, but for a merchant elite or civic spectatorship. As regards 16th-century examples from Antwerp, it must be taken into account that by then this city had become the second largest in Europe north of the Alps. Most of the analyzed 17<sup>th</sup>-century artworks focus more on the Dutch, where the Protestant population of Antwerp had fled north after the Spanish destruction of the city and the disruption of trade routes. Here a focus on personal moral issues would seem to reflect a Calvinist ethos, with its characteristic tradition of moralizing art against gambling, drunkenness, and prostitution. On the contrary, Italian examples seem to coincide with the more emotional and sensuous turn of general Baroque expression, especially in a land where the female nude had early been established as a legitimate subject of art.

However, historical contextualization of artworks can only partially explain why they represent Tamar in a certain way. The structural, semiotic, and interpretative reading of the visual text must complement the historical knowledge of its context, and show how different historical and cultural contexts can adopt a single visual device, the veil, in order to articulate the relation between the gaze of the painter, that of the spectator, the body of Tamar, and the desire of them all, in a complex network wherein the accent falls, depending on the visual representation, either on the heroic accomplishment of a sacred plan or on the sensual subservience to profane instincts.

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<sup>5</sup> Luther in German would have been accessible to a Netherlandish speaker and in 1637 the *Statenbijbel* was available

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