



The Renaissance Tattoo

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Figure 5. Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, "A Young Daughter of the Picts," 1585–1588. Watercolor and gouache on vellum, 10 1/8 x 7 1/4 cm. Yale Center for British Art. Photo: Courtesy of the Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

The Renaissance tattoo

JULIET FLEMING

I

It is the oddness of a structure that is at issue.

Lacan

For the past quarter-century, the West has been enjoying a “tattoo renaissance,” according to Arnold Rubin, tattoo artist and theorist who popularized the term (1988:233–264; Sanders 1989a:232–241). It is a movement characterized both by refinements of conception (such as the influence of Abstract Expressionism and the introduction of the “photorealistic” tattoo, black graphic “tribal” styles, Japanese designs, and imagery adopted from the mass media) and by technical developments (single-needle techniques, an extended palette, and the refinement of procedure and equipment facilitated by the rise of mail-order suppliers, newsletters, and conventions; Tucker 1981). Unlike earlier or less elite tattooists, artists of the tattoo renaissance usually have professional art training and some association with the larger art world. They increasingly specialize in large-scale, custom designs and recognize and value each others’ work (Rubin 1988:235). “Being a tattoo artist,” they say, “is different from being a good tattooist” (Tucker 1981:44).

The tattoo renaissance comprises not the rebirth of a technique, but the social relocation of a practice; it is as tattooing becomes gentrified that it is elevated into a socially elaborated art form. As a consequence, western tattooing is now divided against itself in terms of class. On the one hand, it advances serious claims to be considered high art: an art whose products are commissioned, governed by canons of “taste” and knowledge, and shown in galleries and museums. On the other hand, tattooing remains, in theory and in fact, a demotic practice whose products include prison-made and homemade tattoos, as well as those done in commercial studios to more or less standard designs. The difference between “art” tattooing and the “rough neck, silly aspects” of the commercial trade is one on

which tattoo artists insist (Rubin 1988:258), but they also acknowledge that the barrier separating the two modes is permeable. For tattoo art must not only redeploy the codified motifs of commercial practice (the “international style”); the perceived importance of tattoo as an artistic medium derives in part from its articulated deracination vis-a-vis middle-class values. Tattoo art understands itself to be, at some level, *outré*; like similar movements before it, its renaissance is predicated on a culture clash of which it is the reified effect.

The re-engrossing of the scandalous affect that the middle class projects onto its “outlaws” has been a standard high cultural practice and in the case of tattooing, its results are predictable. To its middle-class practitioners and clients, tattoo art now figures the domain of authenticity, the properly expressive, and (as the precipitate of “opposition”) the individual. So Rubin considers tattoo the repository and expression of “unconventional, individualistic” values (1988:260); while for Michael Bakatý and others, it is “the only form of human expression we have left that has magic to it. Everything else is academic” (Tucker 1981:47). Tattoo artists sometimes dismiss commercial tattoos on the grounds that they are the derivative products of procedures inimical to the work of art—reproduction and commodification.¹ The desire to class tattooing among the arts drives some of its theorists to read ritual, supernatural, and therapeutic elements into their own practices with the same “striking lack of discretion” that Walter Benjamin attributed to the early theorists of film (1985:227). But lack of discretion is easy to identify within critical discourses surrounding new art forms. The therapeutic effect that often accompanies the acquisition of a tattoo within our culture is explained by tattoo artists and their clients according to the intellectual protocols of a magical thinking whose excesses have, in fact, been borrowed from more established accounts of the ethical and therapeutic functions of art.

Within tattoo’s new representational economy, its traditionally marginal social status and its association

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1. For example, see Don Ed Hardy (1992:15): “Nonexclusionary and defiantly beyond the commodification inherent in all other mediums, tattooing is a universal body language bridging cultural differences with direct expression.”

with ancient or primitive cultures only enhance its paradoxical value as a form of expression whose "low" or atavistic character allows it to function as a conduit for unconscious or instinctive forces. Here the archaic, preindividual drives of the Freudian unconscious are reinterpreted and given new valence as the creative "drives" of individuals alienated from contemporary "mass society." Witness Governor Jerry Brown, testifying at the opening of California's Tattoo Expo in 1982: "Once the power of the tattoo [was] intertwined with those who chose to live beyond the norms of society. . . . Today the realm of the outlaw has been redefined: the wild places which excite the most profound thinkers are conceptual" (Rubin 1981:255). Under the aegis of the California Expo, tattoo put its "wildness" (here troping a middle-class erotics) to work in support of the liberal-libertarian coalition represented by Governor Brown.

Even among tattoo artists and their customers, the tattoo retains its uncanny power to affront the liberal subject: a power of horror that is crucially coincident with the special effect identified by Julia Kristeva under the name of "abjection" (1982). To the person without tattoos, this horror articulates itself in the first instance around the question of permanency. The "problem" with tattoos, we say (as if we were all being forced to get one, this minute) is that they are indelible—"You can never get a tattoo off." The striking persistence of this complaint indicates its support within the social unconscious. The fantasy (since, even before ruby laser technology allowed their removal, it was always possible to write over, and so change, tattoos) is one that admits in the first instance to the negative possibility that the subject is named on the body. (The debate about tattooing is thus in part a debate about whether "individuality" can survive certain modes of representation.) The suggestion that identity is constituted not in the depths but at the outer surface of the subject is experienced by the Cartesian *cogito* as a type of claustrophobia: *nominor ergo sum*.² So the

2. Describing the Cartesian *cogito* as "the presence, inside man, of the celebrated little fellow who governs him, who is the driver," a notion "already denounced by pre-Socratic thought," Lacan offers instead his own formulation of the subject, a subject properly symbolized by the barred S (\$) "in so far as it is constituted as secondary in relation to the signifier." The bar may be thought of as the stroke or notch of the signifier that, marking the subject off, situates him as such. The difference between Lacanian and Cartesian models of the self, the one "marked" and the other not, may be grasped by considering that the Lacanian subject is instantiated as a *tattoo*: "The subject himself is marked off by a single stroke, and first he marks himself as a tattoo, the first of the signifiers" (Lacan 1981:141).

thought of something sticking to the skin is ever a deep affront; even within a comic register it evokes Hercules trapped inside the poisoned shirt of Nessus. A protective covering that displaces and so destroys that which it should protect, the tattoo can be thought of as a poisoned (that is, poisoning) name. That this name is also a wound without depth—a wound from which, consequently, there can be no recovery—is a proposition with far-reaching implications.

Tattoo artists and practitioners, on the contrary, understand their art as being "antirepressive." Tattooing in prison is felt to be an affirmation that (at least) this body is yours; while artists such as Don Ed Hardy differentiate their practice from that of earlier American tattooists by invoking their own departure from the use of "flash" or pattern sheets. Where once customers chose tattoos from such sheets and so "had to fit their individual psyche into pre-congealed images that were often very out-of-date," today's tattoo artist functions as "a kind of therapist: a vehicle to help people channel their unconscious urges to the surface" (Juno and Vale 1991:52). British tattooist Chinchilla argues that she can see, as her clients cannot, what "crawls beneath their skin . . . everything I ink on people is already inside them, their history, sleeping creatures or saints, I only open up the skin and let it out, succubus, cherub, bike, snake, Betty Boop with a dildo" (*Tattoo International* 155, November 1994:11). It is at this moment in the tattoo renaissance—when tattooing comes to see itself, in Kristeva's terms, as a form of semiotic writing—that women enter the field, "probing tattooing's intuitive roots" as its practitioners and customers (Hardy 1992:13).³ Arguing from an identity position predicated on the assumption that women have privileged access to the semiotic (that mode in which the drives of the pre-Oedipal phase manifest themselves through, but against the grain of, language), female tattoo artist Jamie Summers was able to pull rank on the pro-feminist Hardy in the 1980s by complaining that, in spite of his own claims, his "mastery of technique and tendency towards intellectualization" produced only "highly accomplished surface decoration, rather than the revelation of interior states," which had come to be her own sole objective (Rubin 1988:257–258).

In Chinchilla's formulation of the tattoo as an inner demon at once expelled and held at the border of the

3. One female customer described the acquisition of a tattoo as follows: "the unspeakable of the experience has been turned into an image on my arm" (*Tattoo International* 158, June 1995:12).

subject, lies not only an explanation for the overt content of many tattoos (devils, death's heads, monsters, birds of prey, statements such as "Born Criminal" or "*je finirai mal*"), but also a usefully precise figure for abjection. In Kristeva's work, the abject is a boundary phenomenon. Neither inside nor outside, at once "an excluded ground" and "a border that has encroached upon everything," the abject is "something rejected from which one does not part" (Kristeva 1982:3–4). A tattoo is caught in the same impossible situation, both conceptually and in fact. For in tattooing, as in fresco technique, molecules of dye or pigment form a surface beneath a surface. According to the deft formulation of Alfred Gell, "the defining feature of tattooing is that it is the making of indelible pigmented traces which are inside or underneath the skin . . . behind what seems like a transparent layer. . . . The basic schema of tattooing is thus definable as the exteriorization of the interior which is simultaneously the interiorization of the exterior" (1993:38–39). On the border between inside and outside, a tattoo is lodged in the no-place of abjection.

Abjection can also be thought of as a boundary effect within the functioning of the psychic apparatus itself, as something midway between the procedures of symptom-formation (understood as the somatic expression of something repressed) and sublimation (the deflection, without repression, of a drive) (Freud 1953:14:69; Kristeva 1982:4–11). The interim position between symptom production and sublimation is one that is often assumed for tattooing; understood as a self-inflicted wound, tattoo is seen as being both a mark that abjects the bearer and an assertion of control over abjection.⁴

4. Gell suggests a sociohistorical explanation for the radical bifurcation in the meaning of tattoos: "whereas in non-hierarchical societies body-markings reveal an immanent self which is inside the body, and can be made to appear on the skin, in hierarchical societies body markings are brands imposed from without, and signify the suppression of the devalued body" (1993:26). In today's western cultures, where a significant proportion of the population is tattooed, the case is less clear-cut, and the tattoo is understood as being *simultaneously* a symptom and the effect of sublimation. Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso touched on the strange double nature of the tattoo in his analysis of the signs of criminality. Arguing that a disposition to criminality was inborn, the result of an ontogenetic deficit, Lombroso included among the signs of criminal tendencies large jaws, high cheek bones, handle-shaped ears, "insensibility to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresistible craving for evil for its own sake" (Lombroso 1911:xv). In Lombroso's list, tattooing occupies the place of a hinge between physical symptoms and social characteristics; actively chosen by those who bear them, the tattoo is the product of an irresistible, biological disposition to become tattooed (Gell 1993:12). Lombroso's

As one of Chinchilla's tattooed clients reports, "I feel that what one does is ritualistically abrade the skin over the spot where a mark already existed. This, that rose through my muscle and psyche had always been there" (*Tattoo International* 153, June 1994:10–11). Here tattooing exemplifies Kristeva's definition of the artistic experience as something "rooted in the abject which it utters and by the same token purifies" (1982:17). At the frontier of what is "assimilable, thinkable," functioning to collapse the boundary between subject and object, tattooing is an act of catharsis par excellence.

However constructed, tattoo's claim to effectively represent the interior of the psyche is one of the things that permits its elevation to an art form in the West. Another is the irreducible authenticity—the aura—that a tattoo carries as a result of its "unique existence at the place where it happens to be," the simple fact that because its medium is the living body, a tattoo cannot be reproduced (Benjamin 1985:220). But the special consequence of tattooing as an art medium—perhaps the radical principle of its function as art—may finally depend on its evocation of the geometrical concern that structures Kristeva's formulation of abjection and may be said to comprise the simple proposition that it is a figure in two dimensions. This figure may be variously thought of as one that is all surface, or one whose inside is also its outside (an instance of "the intimate exteriority or 'extimacy' that is the Thing" in Lacan's important discussion of the wall paintings in the caves of Altamira [1992:139]). As a creature of the surface, a tattoo is an example of the first; as a disturbance to that surface, it is an instance of the second. Even where it is not deliberately recursive—a woman with a tattoo of a woman (with the tattoo of a woman) embracing death—the tattoo is an image of regression without recession, a geometrical paradox that marks the impossible profundity of the surface on which it is inscribed.⁵

conclusion, and the deductive method that produced and reproduced it, were taken to their logical conclusion by his contemporary, Adolf Loos: "If someone who is tattooed dies in freedom, then he does so a few years before he would have committed murder" (Loos 1966:226: cf. Gell 1993; Gould 1984).

5. Describing the "propensity for interpreters to regard tattooing as a kind of writing, legible if one just knew how to read it," Nicholas Thomas notes that apprehension of the curvilinear forms characteristic of Maori *moko* as "scrolls" constitutes "an effort to read the visual for what it [is] not. . . . Interpretative desire is defeated from the start if designs take the form of an archaic bearer of writing, a scroll which appears as such only in profile, its text surely there but unnecessarily seen. If only it could be looked at from a different angle, pleads the reader" (Thomas 1995:93–94). The skin is a two-dimensional surface that at once provokes and defeats a desire for depth.

In *The Skin Ego*, Didier Anzieu tests two dependent hypotheses: "what if thought were as much an affair of the skin as of the brain? And what if the Ego—now defined as a Skin Ego—had the structure of an envelope?" (1989:9). Anzieu begins his argument (one he sustains through the display of an astonishing and convincing array of cutaneous fantasies) with the observation that the organ of consciousness, the cortex (Latin: "bark," "shell," or "rind"), not only sits as "a sort of cap" on the white matter of the brain, but is embryonically a development of the surface of the early fetus, an introverted and reticulated "skin." "We are faced then, with a paradox: the centre is situated at the periphery" (ibid.). Anzieu notes this paradox is replicated in Freud's model of the psychic apparatus, according to which the ego "is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" (Freud 1953:19:26; Anzieu 1989:85). To cite, as Anzieu does, Paul Valéry, "We burrow down in vain, doctor, we are . . . ectoderm!" (ibid., 60).

The figure whose depth is a feature of its surface, or the figure whose surface is, like that of a manifold, without edge, is a recurrent motif in contemporary French theory. It is encountered in the Möbius strip that Lacan chose as an emblem for the journal *Scilicet*; in his figure of the mitre (a self-intersecting surface projected into three-dimensional space) in the seminar on *Identification*; and in the other "fundamental" topological objects (such as the Klein bottle and the Borromean rings) that organize his late work. Lacan cautions that, in everything concerning topology, "one must always be very careful to avoid attributing it with any kind of *Gestalt* function." But he goes on to demonstrate the pleasure to be gained from imagining biological life's "touching strivings after topological configurations" (especially when that life form is the erect, uncircumcised penis), and finally insists that only topological considerations can provide us with appropriate images to organize our thought "when it is a question of something inside that is also outside" (Lacan 1981:147).⁶

Valéry's proposition, "*C'est qu'il y a de plus profond dans l'homme, c'est la peau*" (Anzieu 1989:60), has important resonance within the work of reconception

that constitutes modernism and postmodernism. It is a proposition illustrated by the recurrence of the figures of fold, veil, and fan of Derrida's Mallarmé; in Derrida's own important concept of the hymen ("the fold in a lining by which it is, out of itself, in itself, at once its own outside and its own inside; between the outside and the inside, making the outside enter the inside and turning back the antre or the other upon its surface"); in the rhizome and fold of Deleuze and Guattari; and in Lyotard's work on discourse and figure (Derrida 1981:229; Deleuze 1993; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Lyotard 1971).⁷ But the uncanniness of the profound surface whose primary figure is the skin is not new in

experience as analysts, which may be taken in a metaphysical perspective" (1981:90). In Lacan's writing, the fact that the Ego "has" (or may be thought to have) the structure of the Möbius strip goes some way towards accounting for its perversion and alienation. Anzieu's more complaisant conception of the Ego leads him to consider the Möbius strip configuration as being specific only to borderline states (Anzieu 1989:124). But both theorists link psychic disturbance, pathological or not, to what they understand as geometrical disturbance, as does Kristeva when she describes *jouissance* as "a 'structure' that is skewed, a topology of catastrophe" (1982:9). It is here that the question of the appropriateness of using topological figures to represent psychic phenomena may be raised—a question that, for the mathematician, marks a border dispute between the hard science of mathematics and a humanistic discourse that takes mathematical truths either for metaphors, or as models for psychic entities and effects. At issue is the fact that in mathematics, topological figures carry no affect: the Jordan curve theorem, for example, demonstrates the difficulty, but not the trauma, of proving that there are such concepts as inside and outside. Viewed from the perspective of mathematics, the purchase that topological paradoxes have on the humanities, their capacity to provoke and model intellectual anxieties, would dissolve as soon as those figures were properly, that is mathematically, understood. But such a view is motivated by suspicion of the productive conflation in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis between bodily organ and image; between causal explanation and hermeneutics. It is consequently a suspicion that disables from the start any attempt to understand Lacan's account of the Cause at work in the midst of the field of hermeneutics (see Žižek 1994:29–54).

7. For Derrida, Mallarmé's fold marks the place at which conventional literary criticism fails and the work of deconstruction begins: "Now, if we can begin to see that the 'blank' and the 'fold' cannot in fact be mastered as themes or as meanings [in Mallarmé], if it is within the folds and blankness of a certain hymen that the very textuality of the text is re-marked, then we will precisely have determined the limits of thematic criticism itself" (Derrida 1981:245–246). Lacan's use of topological figures to describe the problematic relation of inside and outside is illuminated by Derrida's discussion of that relation as "the matrix of all possible opposition," and of writing as the term or practice that "opens up" the "very possibility" of these oppositions "without letting itself be comprehended by them." See Derrida 1981:103–104.

6. Pressed on his use of topological figures—"Is topology for you a method of discovery or of exposition?"—Lacan replied with enigmatic caution, "It is the mapping of the topology proper to our

modernism; indeed, one might consider it to be one result of the replacement of the “flat” plane of medieval representation with the perspectival space of the Renaissance. Within this new, Euclidean space, the skin functions as a Derridean supplement, the material remainder that haunts the objective spatial depth within which the Cartesian subject is driven to locate itself.

So Michelangelo’s famous portrait of the artist as a flayed skin on the wall of the Sistine Chapel (1535) and Juan de Valverde’s drawing of an anatomized figure carrying his own pelt (1560) seem freighted with surplus violence, one that resides in the revelation of two specific facts. The first, revealed by the successive removal of surfaces that comprises the art of anatomy, is that the body is nothing *but* surface.⁸ The second is that while death happens in three dimensions, the skin, in two, can survive. The uncanny aspect of the undead skin may be confronted in the true story of Alfred Corder, sentenced to be hanged and dissected for his notorious murder of Maria Marten. After death, Corder’s body was skinned, tanned, and used to bind a presentation copy of the printed account of his life and crime.⁹ So treated, the skin becomes that impossible object, the material embodiment of abjection. When, in tattoo, the skin gives its own strange half-life over to a newly “living” image, it similarly asks and complicates the question of what becomes of our mortal envelope, either at the Resurrection or at the morgue.

But there is another dimension to the intellectual distress for which tattoo stands as a figure. For although we say, with horror, “a tattoo lasts forever”—as if, within our cultural or psychic economy, permanence were a recognized evil—most tattoos last only as long as the body endures, which is to say, not as long as ink on paper. Disapprobation of tattoo’s permanence has a political, as well as a psychic, dimension. For where classical economic theory recognizes three types of property—the intellectual, the real or “immobile” (land), and the moveable (chattels)—tattoo announces itself as a fourth type: a property that is at once mobile *and*

inalienable. And here inalienability shows itself to be a disconcerting quality in property, as if not only the value but the *propriety* of property depended on its capacity to be exchanged. As is suggested by the popular narrative of the tattooed man who ends up on the wall of an unscrupulous art dealer, a tattoo is a property that, for a variety of ethical and practical reasons, cannot be sold.¹⁰ Tattoo thus readily connotes a blockage in the free circulation of commodities that is understood to constitute economic health in the West; it is partly in this capacity that it has always been used to figure both the improvidence of the class that does not possess, and the culpable economic naiveté of native peoples.

II

Pain and history seem tied together.

Tattoo International

According to popular tradition, sanctioned by the Oxford English Dictionary, the word tattoo, adapted from the Tahitian “tatau,” made its first English appearance in James Cook’s account of his voyages to the Polynesian basin, published in London in 1769. Historians locate the origins of European tattooing in Cook’s return from his South Sea Islands voyage of 1774 with the tattooed Tahitian known to the British as Omai: the “noble savage” whose appearance sparked a tattooing vogue among the English aristocracy.¹¹ It is one of the many weaknesses in the history of western tattooing as it stands that the definitive movement of tattoo from the center to the margins of British culture has been assumed (as a “trickle-down” effect) rather than documented or accounted for. Equally mysterious within this history is the alacrity with which certain groups of eighteenth-century Europeans, from ships’ crews to the monarchy,

8. For a discussion of the difficult conditions under which Michelangelo worked on “The Last Judgment” and the real and fantasized cutaneous discomfort such conditions provoked, see Leibert 1983:331–360. For a discussion of anatomy as a method for revealing order that causes decay, see Hodges 1985.

9. *An Authentic and Faithful History of the Mysterious Murder of Maria Marten* (London: Thomas Kelly, 1828), is now in Moyses Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmunds, England.

10. In the course of his discussion of primitive accumulation, Marx offers a parodic, “nursery tale” account of the genesis of capitalism, one predicated on a division between the “frugal élite” and the “lazy rascals”—“Thus it came to pass, that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter finally had nothing to sell except their own skins” (Marx 1977:872). The bottom line that presents itself to Marx and, he imagines, to even the most irresponsible theorists of capitalism is the human skin—the commodity in which no one, even the person who owns it, has the right to trade. In actuality the tattooed skin can be bought and sold—but not without raising profound questions concerning human and property rights.

11. For description of the reception of Omai in Britain, see Guest 1992. For an extended discussion of the impact of European exploration on Polynesian tattooing, see Gell 1993.

adopted the practice. The seduction of Polynesian tattooing, both to those who saw it in situ, and to those who copied it from returning travelers, is rendered more surprising by the fact that the Europeans had already encountered and documented tattooing in the Americas, Asia, and Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—in these earlier instances without being tempted to try it for themselves.¹²

The most useful recent account of the history of tattooing in Europe is Alfred Gell's brilliant analysis of tattooing as an encounter phenomenon (1993). Gell argues that western notions about tattooing derive from the overlay of perceptions of tattooing as a "stigma of the class Other" (the tattooed sailor or criminal) with "perceptions of the practice as characteristic of the ethnic Other—the tattooed native." But Gell is concerned with western tattooing only insofar as its practices and assumptions inform surviving European descriptions of tattooing in Polynesia; and he follows standard accounts of western tattooing when he begins his own with the heuristic assumption that "tattooing, as it is now practiced in western countries, originated as a consequence of European expansion into the Pacific" (Gell 1993:10). I propose to adopt a different assumption: that tattooing was occurring in Europe at the same time that European travelers documented its presence in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and later in the Pacific. The possibility that Polynesian tattooing reinflected, rather than began, an indigenous practice of European tattooing will not in itself explain the particular social patterns that it has subsequently assumed in the West. But it may enable us to see tattooing more clearly, both as the symptom of a colonial encounter and as an instance of a cultural practice that is typically overlooked by the societies in which it occurs.

In a recent interview, performance artist Genesis P-Orridge outlined a self-consciously "alternative" history for British tattooing: "The Romans found the Britons covered in . . . tattoos. The heritage of the pagan Britons was to be heavily tattooed, but of course we're not told of our tribal, integrated, celebratory culture in school. The history has been stolen and turned into a perversion called Christianity." Like Jamie Summers, P-Orridge

understands tattooing as an instance of the elevation of the semiotic into a principle of signification; the tattoo or cut is a "symbolic key" that "makes you open to your own unconscious." P-Orridge goes on to argue that societies that practice tattooing and scarification have been and will be characterized by a benign relational ethics and suggests that before the coming of the Romans, the Britons maintained a balanced relationship with the environment, understanding that "every being . . . should relate to [every] other as mortal and vulnerable" (Juno and Vale 1991:180). According to P-Orridge, for Britons both Ancient and New Age tattooing evidences man's proper and ethical acknowledgment of the semiotic processes of life and death.

This "alternative" history of British tattooing is not in serious conflict with the more standard accounts that locate its genesis in the eighteenth-century contact with Polynesia; in a history of Britain there is room for both. But it does bring into view an important set of meanings that structure demotic tattooing in Britain today, where "Celtic" designs may be used to articulate engagement with, for example, the concerns of Scottish nationalism or with the particular type of environmentalism associated with Wicca. Besides, as it happens, tattoo's alternative history is largely correct. In the years leading to the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne, the antiquary William Camden (newly interested in arguing for the tribal unity of the British people) marshaled evidence from classical and other sources (including Bede, Caesar, Herodian, Solinus, Tacitus, Tertullian, and Isidore of Seville) to prove that both the Picts and the insular Celts had been "painted peoples," set apart from later invaders by "their staining and colouring of their whole bodies" with woad and "their *cutting, pinking, and pouncing* of their flesh" (Camden 1610:115).¹³

"Listing," "rasing," "pricking," "pinking," and "pouncing" are the interlinked English terms for

12. In *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, Samuel Purchas reproduces many descriptions of tattooing from the accounts of earlier and contemporary European travelers (see, for example, Purchas 1617:487, 571, 743, 813, 853, 876, 955, 958).

13. In discussing the history of the Scots, Camden underlines his purpose in arguing for the racial unity of the ancient peoples of Britain and incidentally demonstrates the difficulty of producing a tactful account of Britain's barbarian past: "So far am I from working any discredit unto them, that I have rather respectively loved them alwaies, as of the same bloud and stoke, yes, and honoured them too, even when the kingdomes were divided: but now much more, since it hath pleased our almightie, and most mercifull God, that wee growe united in one Bodie, under one most Sacred head of the Empire, to the joy, happinesse, welfare, and safetie, of both Nations" (Camden 1610:119).

tattooing before the middle of the eighteenth century; Samuel Purchas says of the Algonquian Indians, "the women . . . with an Yron, pounce and raze their bodies, legs, thighes, and armes, in curious knots and portraytures of folwes, fishes, beasts, and rub a painting into the same, which will never out" (1617:955). The English term "pounce" was associated with writing as well as with face-painting; pounce is a powder used to dust cheeks, to prepare parchment to receive writing, or to transfer embroidery designs through a perforated pattern. "To pounce" is to tattoo, bruise, puncture, emboss, or engrave, to polish or erase, and to slash or jag the edges of a cloth for ornament, while "a pounce" may be a tattoo, an engraving instrument, or a "pink." Pinking (the cutting out of holes, figures, or letters to display skin, undergarment, or lining of a different colour) is a mode of ornament readily associated with excess; its depravity (which consists in the interesting proposition that it is a *superfluous taking away*) is regularly adduced in late-sixteenth-century attacks on fashion. Finally a "list" or "race" is a slit or scratch, a cut that marks. But to raze is also to remove by scraping or rasping, to erase. Remarkable in this early modern constellation of terms for tattoo is the fact that they each propose a logic of the mark whereby one can mark by detraction, detract by addition. In this they register one of the formal paradoxes that structures today's aversion to tattooing.

In his *Historie of Great Britaine*, a book whose frontispiece depicts a tattooed ancient Briton, John Speed echoed Camden's account of ancient British tattooing:

Solinus likewise speaking of the *Britaines* saith, their Country is peopled by *Barbarians*, who by means of artificial incisions of sundry formes, have from their childhood divers shapes of beasts incorporate upon them; and having their markes deeply imprinted within their bodies, looke how their growth for stature, so doe those pictured characters likewise increase. . . . These skarres by Tertullian are tearmed *Britannorum stigmata*, *The Britaines markes* . . . and of this use of painting both the *Britaines* had their primitive derivation, and the *Picts* (a branch of British race) a long time after, for that their accustomed manner, were called *Picti* by the *Romanes*, that is, the *painted people*.

Speed 1627:167; Camden 1610:31

Like Solinus and Camden before him, and many after him, Speed is arrested by the paradox of the tattoo as an

image fixed on a moving, in this case expanding, surface.¹⁴ Later in his account he reproduces and glosses Claudian's description of Caesar's military triumph over the Picts—"Perlegit exanimis Picto moriente figuras: On dying Picts he reads the breathless shapes, as if the Beasts so lively portraited on them, seemed to lie dead together with the murdered bodies of the Picts" (Speed 1627:182; Camden 1610:115). Redolent of sympathy for the Picts, Claudian's proposition, underlined by Speed, is that as the tattooed image "lived" on the skin, so it should "die" in a gesture of respect for the body that supported it. The wit of the proposal depends on its acknowledged impossibility—an impossibility borrowed wholesale from the strange object (one that may be equally thought of as a dead image on a live skin, or as a live image on a dead skin) that is a tattoo. The larger question of a tattoo changing as the body changes, expanding or contracting in all its parts without entirely altering their relation to one another, is a formal proposition of some consequence. It is dealt with in the field of geometric topology under the rubrics of diffeomorphism and homeomorphism; and Lacan uses it in his discussion of anamorphosis to illustrate his formulation of the gaze as something excessive to perspectival optics.¹⁵ In the work of Speed and his contemporaries, the formal proposition of an object that moves and grows, but can never change, takes on a primarily political dimension—one within which the

14. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, D. B. Murphy bears three tattoos, one "a young man's side face looking frowningly rather. . . . See here, he said, showing Antonio. There he is cursing the mate. And there he is now, he added, the same fellow, pulling the skin with his fingers, some special knack evidently, and he laughing at a yarn" (Joyce 1986:156; Levine 1994:277–300).

15. Lacan introduces a tattoo to illustrate "a dimension in the field of the gaze that has nothing to do with the vision as such," a dimension that may be apprehended operating within "all the paranoid ambiguities" to which distortion may lend itself. "How is it," he continues, "that nobody has ever thought of connecting this with . . . the effect of an erection? Imagine a tattoo traced on the sexual organ *ad hoc* in the state of repose and assuming its, if I may say so, developed form in another state" (Lacan 1981:88). Lacan's imaginary organ is, in his own argument, something of a chimera: one that is briefly standing in for the "gaze as such," that is, for the desire that articulates itself through optical distortion. But it is worth remaining with the tattooed penis long enough to note that in the stretching of the tattoo image we confront the propositions that semblance is subject to physical laws and that the image has an internal structure having nothing to do with appearance.

tattoo comes to stand as the sign of the irreducible difference between Europe and its others.

For the antiquaries and their sources, tattooing and body painting among the ancient Britons went hand in hand with the further distinguishing tribal practices of gynarchy and nakedness. The fact that the Picts were, as Tacitus puts it, "subject to the government of women" was fodder to the antiquarian argument that the Picts were descended from the ancient Britons: "neither [tribe] ma[king] any distinction of sex for government, or exclud[ing] women from bearing sceptre" (Camden 1610:30). Speed goes so far as to compare Queen Elizabeth to Bodicea, "another Great Lady of British race . . . whose juste, wise, and resolute kinde of Government hath justified that Custome of our old *Britaines* and *Picts* . . . that they made no difference for the Sovereigne command, yea, and used to warre under the conduct of women" (1627:183). Writing at the end of Elizabeth I's long reign, Camden and Speed felt there was nothing especially barbaric in the ancient British tolerance for female monarchy.¹⁶ But when he addresses himself to the legendary nakedness of the Picts and Britons, Speed follows his sources in concluding that his barbarian ancestors went naked through their ignorance of cloth manufacture and other rudimentary arts of civilization. As Diodorus Siculus puts it in Camden's account, "The Britans live after the manner of the old world" (Camden 1610:29).

Even now, little is known about Pictish civilization and culture; a few inscrutable inscriptions aside, written sources are more or less limited to classical accounts of the Picts as primitive barbarians, and (for the period after the conversion) the sparse comments of Adoman and Bede.¹⁷ Since these sources are almost unanimous

in their claims that both the Picts and other ancient British tribes tattooed, little more may be served in doubting the record than the satisfaction of a national pride that sets itself against the practice. The recent discovery by archaeologists of Scythian and Pazyrak bodies with extensive tattoo work may indicate that the element of fantasy in classical accounts of British tattooing resides less in the assertion that the barbarians tattooed, than in the implication that the Roman soldiers did not. The accuracy of the record aside, Speed's apparent purpose in invoking ancient British tattooing ("to propose unto the eyes of our now glorious and gorgeous *Britaines*, some generall draughts of our poor and rude progenitors") is to demonstrate the ancient (but new) identity of the British "race": a national group marked and set aside by its use of tattoo and body painting (Speed 1627:179). But the tattoo also marks a different, and conflicting, national concern. Housed in tents, dressed in skins, and eating sparsely, ignorant of God, agriculture, and the value of gold, the Picts of the antiquarian account bear striking resemblance to the New World inhabitants whose existence was fast becoming a focus of British attention at the end of the sixteenth century. Under the pressure of this moment of encounter, the figure of the tattooed Briton finds itself pressed into the service of the newly emergent discourse of comparative ethnography.

The first volume of Theodore de Bry's famous work *America I* (1590a, 1590b, published simultaneously in Latin, English, French, and German) contains Thomas Harriot's account (1588) of the English expedition to Roanoke of 1585, together with thirteen engravings, "The True Pictures and Fashions of the People in that Part of America now called Virginia." Largely based on paintings of the Southeastern Algonquians made by John White, artist recorder to the first Roanoke expedition, the series also includes two engravings based on the work of Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, artist to the earlier French expeditions to Florida of 1562–1565. A fuller set of Le Moyne's images of the Timucua people, with his written commentary on them, appeared in the second volume of *America* (de Bry 1591), together with Le Moyne's map of Florida and his own account of the attempted French colony.¹⁸

Speed, and others point out, is comprised by the Roman name *Picti* (the painted men) and the ancient British name *Priteni* (people of the designs); see MacQuarrie 1996:7–10.

18. The first Roanoke expedition (June 1585–June 1586), for which John White acted as official recorder, was led by Sir Richard Greville

16. The association of tattooing with the rule of women reaches beyond its historical justification; where it emerges in the discourse of modern anthropology it is often used to mark the double abjection of native cultures. So Joseph Dowd suggested tattooing was a practice "which probably originated at a time when the matriarchate was universal and before children came to have individual names. Instead of giving a special name to each member of the family or tribe, all of the same blood on the mother's side were designated by a common tattoo mark" (Dowd 1907:42). In his 1898 essay "Matriarchy among the Picts" Heinrich Zimmer also linked the two practices when he insisted that tattooing, like matrilineal descent, was a savage custom not properly associated with the Aryan community (cited in MacQuarrie 1996:2).

17. The question of whether or not the Picts tattooed themselves has not been fully addressed; see MacQuarrie 1996:2–3. Part of the evidence for ancient British tattooing, as Claudian, Solinus, Camden,



Figure 1. Theodore de Bry (after Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues), *In cerui exuvio Soli consecrando solennes ritus*, or "The offering of a stag to the sun" (detail). Engraving from *America II* (1591:pl. 35). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

White and Le Moyne both recorded the practice of tattooing in their paintings of the native Americans. At least as engraved by de Bry, Le Moyne used tattooing in his paintings to posit an unexpected similarity between the body decoration of the Timucua and the slashed, pinked, and rased clothing of the French (fig. 1). Le

under the patronage of Raleigh. In July 1587, White returned to Roanoke as governor of "the city of Raleigh in Virginia." Shortly after his arrival there he was persuaded by the other settlers to seek further provisions and assistance back in England; returning to Roanoke in August 1590, he found the settlement (hereafter "The Lost Colony") deserted (see Hulton 1984).

Jacques Le Moyne accompanied René de Laudonniere on his expedition to Floria in 1563 and 1565. Laudonniere's expedition journal was published by Hakluyt in France in 1586, and in London in English in 1587 and 1589. Le Moyne's Latin account of the French expedition "Brevis narratio eorum quae in Florida etc," together with etchings of his paintings of Florida, was published by de Bry as



Figure 2. Theodore de Bry (after Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues), *Excubitorum socordia ut punitur*, or "The execution of negligent sentries" (detail). Engraving from *America II* (1591:pl. 32). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Moyne's account of Laudonniere's attempt to establish a Huguenot foothold in Florida is unusually sensitive to the impact made on Timucua by the arrival of the French. While he advises his reader to remember that "*istos Regulos, eorumque uxores, corporiscutem puncturis quibusdam varia picturas imitantibus ornare*" (de Bry 1591:pl. 39) or "All these rulers and their wives

America II (1591). Le Moyne left France as a Huguenot refugee sometime after 1573; settled in Blackfriars as a painter and engraver under the patronage of Mary Sidney and Walter Raleigh; and died in 1588; see Hulton 1977. Theodore de Bry was a Flemish goldsmith, engraver, and publisher with strong Protestant sympathies. In 1587 he was commissioned to engrave Thomas Lant's drawings of Philip Sidney's funeral procession; on a return visit to London the following year he purchased Le Moyne's paintings from his widow. Two of Le Moyne's Florida paintings are used to illustrate *America I* (de Bry 1590), which is dedicated to Walter Raleigh; the rest appeared in *America II* (de Bry 1591); see Hulton 1984.

decorate the skin of their bodies with a kind of tattooing, in imitation of various painted designs" (Hulton 1977:151), Le Moyne also records that the Timucua were "somewhat astonished when they noticed the difference between the smoothness and softness of our bodies and theirs, and the unfamiliar clothing we wore" (Hulton 1977:120).

In Le Moyne's work, the difference between the Europeans and the Native Americans is produced through the proposition of an underlying similarity; European and American figures are often represented in very close juxtaposition or in poses that reflect each other (fig. 2). The paintings are vulnerable to the charge that they "idealized" (that is, "Europeanized") their American subjects; the majority of them were probably reconstructed from memory following Le Moyne's dramatic escape from the colony, and they are not held to be of the same ethnographical value as the work of his contemporary John White (Hulton 1977:70). But Le Moyne, whose characteristic style is that of a gentle but sustained mannerism, idealizes European as well as Native American figures and does so as part of a deliberative inquiry into the question of what it means to be civilized. So he advises readers that Christians have much to learn from the Timucua in terms of temperance and "deserve to be handed over to these base uncivilized people and brutish creatures to learn restraint" (Hulton 1977:148). The proposition that civilized peoples may learn civility from the uncivilized is a conventional piece of social criticism; it is nevertheless part of a serious attempt to theorize the ethical consequences of a colonial encounter.

John White did not include the arrival of the Europeans in his record of Roanoke; only two surviving paintings show scenes of the colonists, and those are of Puerto Rico (Hulton 1984:9). Thomas Harriot, with whom White worked closely to compile a full account of the area of the Roanoke landings, took a markedly functionalist view of Algonquian culture. The first version of his "Briefe and true report of the newfoundland of Virginia" was addressed to the "Adventurers, Favourers, and Welwillers of the action," and assures them that "in respect of troubling our inhabiting and planting, [the Algonquians] are not to be feared; but . . . shall have cause both to feare and love us, that shall inhabite with them" (Harriot 1588:E1v). Arguably, it was precisely Harriot's and White's refusal to concern themselves with their own relationship to the Algonquians that renders their account of Native

American culture more ethnographically accurate than that of Le Moyne.

White's illustrations corroborate Harriot's account of body painting and tattooing among the Carolina Algonquians: "the Princes of Virginia . . . ether pownes, or paynt their forehead, cheeks, chynne, bodye, armes, and legges." Secotoan women of rank are similarly "pownced," with the addition of a "chaine" around their necks, "either pricked or paynted" (de Bry 1590a:Sig A1v, Sig A2). Harriot's apparent uncertainty as to whether the body markings of the various Algonquian tribes were "pricked" and "pownced" or "painted" has led Paul Hulton to argue that "tattooing was probably confined to the women, while painting was used widely by both sexes" (1984:28). In fact, Harriot's hesitation concerns the distribution rather than the incidence of tattooing among the men and women of the different Algonquian groups; he argues further that the Algonquian warriors had "marks rased on their backs" for purposes of identification. An engraving of these marks, together with a key linking them to the names of different chiefs, is the final image in the series illustrating "the fashions of the people of America" (fig. 3; de Bry 1590a:Sig D4v). In order, as he says, "to shew that the Inhabitants of great Britain have bin in times past as savage as those of Virginia," de Bry then concludes *America I* with "Some Picture of the Pictes which in the olde tyme did habite one part of great Bretainne" (Sig E1).

In his introductory remarks to these engravings, which show three heavily tattooed Picts and two untattooed Ancient Britons "from neighbouring tribes," de Bry implies the images were copied by John White from "a oolld English cronicle" (Sig E1). The engravings are accompanied by a commentary, which details the weapons, ornaments, hairstyles, and body decorations of the Picts, and explains, in accordance with the engravings, that the Picts "did paint all their bodye"; the men affecting suns, monsters, and snakes (Sig E1v), while the women wore moon and stars, figures of animals, and abstract designs (Sig E2v). But the image that was to prove the most memorable to his contemporaries was de Bry's "Truue picture of a yonge dowgter of the Pictes," an engraving that shows a female nude wearing a sword, holding a spear, and "painted over all the body . . . of sondrye kinds of flours, and of the fairest that they cowlde feynde" (fig. 4).¹⁹ Pace de Bry,

19. White is known to have made direct copies of Le Moyne's work, and it is possible that de Bry was working from such a copy when he engraved "The Truue picture of a yonge dowgter of the

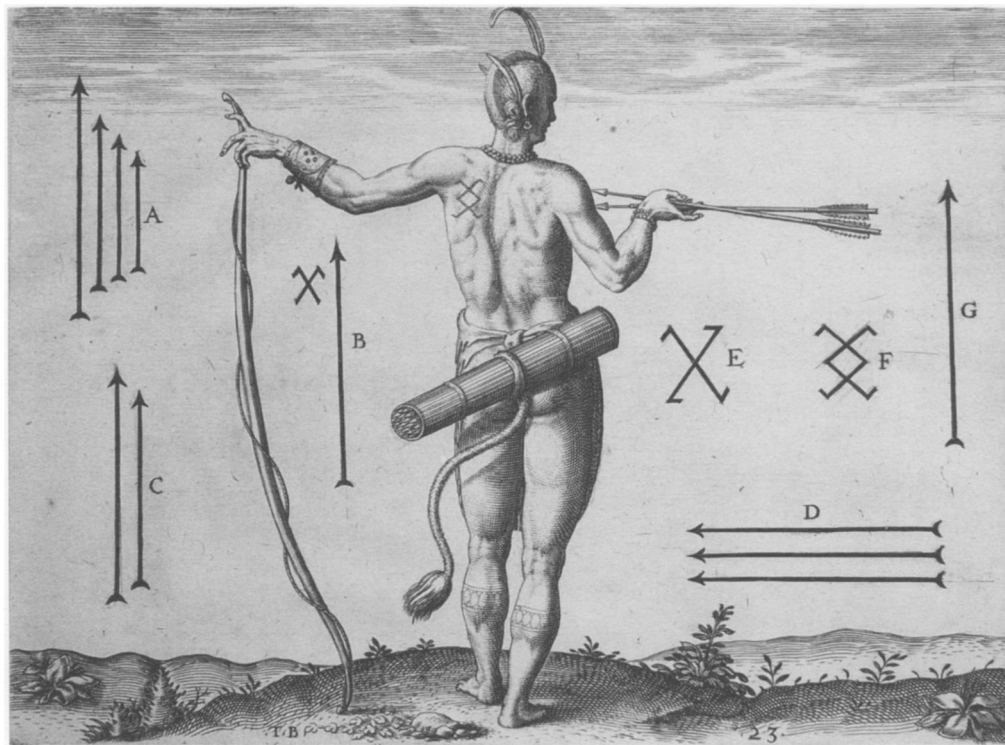


Figure 3. Theodore de Bry (after John White), *Aliquot Heroum Virginiae Notae* or "The Marks of sundrye of the Cheif mene of Virginia." Engraving from *America I* (1590:pl. 23). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

this image at least is based on the work not of John White, but of Jacques Le Moyne, whose painting, "A Young Daughter of the Picts" (fig. 5) is now in the Yale Center for British Art (Hulton 1984:18). Le Moyne's Pict stands to the front of a landscape, in the mid-distance of which can be seen the people and buildings of a small but prosperous town. She stands in a relaxed but artificial pose, her face turned half right, her body half left; her right hand on her hip, she carries a slim spear in the left. Her carefully tended hair falls in virgin profusion down her back; except for an elegant iron necklet and a girdle, from which a curving sword depends from the impossible support of a golden chain, she is naked.

Most striking, of course, is that the young Pict's body is painted or tattooed from neck to ankle with a variety

Pictes." For an account of the complicated relationship between the work of Le Moyne, White, and de Bry, see Hulton (1984:17–18).

of flowers, among which Paul Hulton has identified the single and double peony, delphinium, hollyhock, heartsease, double columbine, orange lily, tazetta narcissus, cornflower, rose campion, yellow-horned poppy, mourning iris, tulip, and marvel-of-Peru (1977:2:164). Hulton points out that the last three varieties had only recently been introduced to western Europe from America and the Balkan peninsula and concludes "it was anachronistic indeed of Le Moyne to adorn a Pictish maiden with such newly arrived flowers" (Hulton 1977:1:57). But Le Moyne, author of a volume of woodcuts of beasts, birds, and plants intended for decorative patterns and responsible for a large group of exquisite watercolor drawings of plants (now in the Victoria and Albert Museum), would certainly have known what he was doing in decorating the body of an Ancient Briton with the marvel-of-Peru. The deliberate anachronism is the first in a series of gestures designed to mark the wit of this thoroughly mannerist painting.

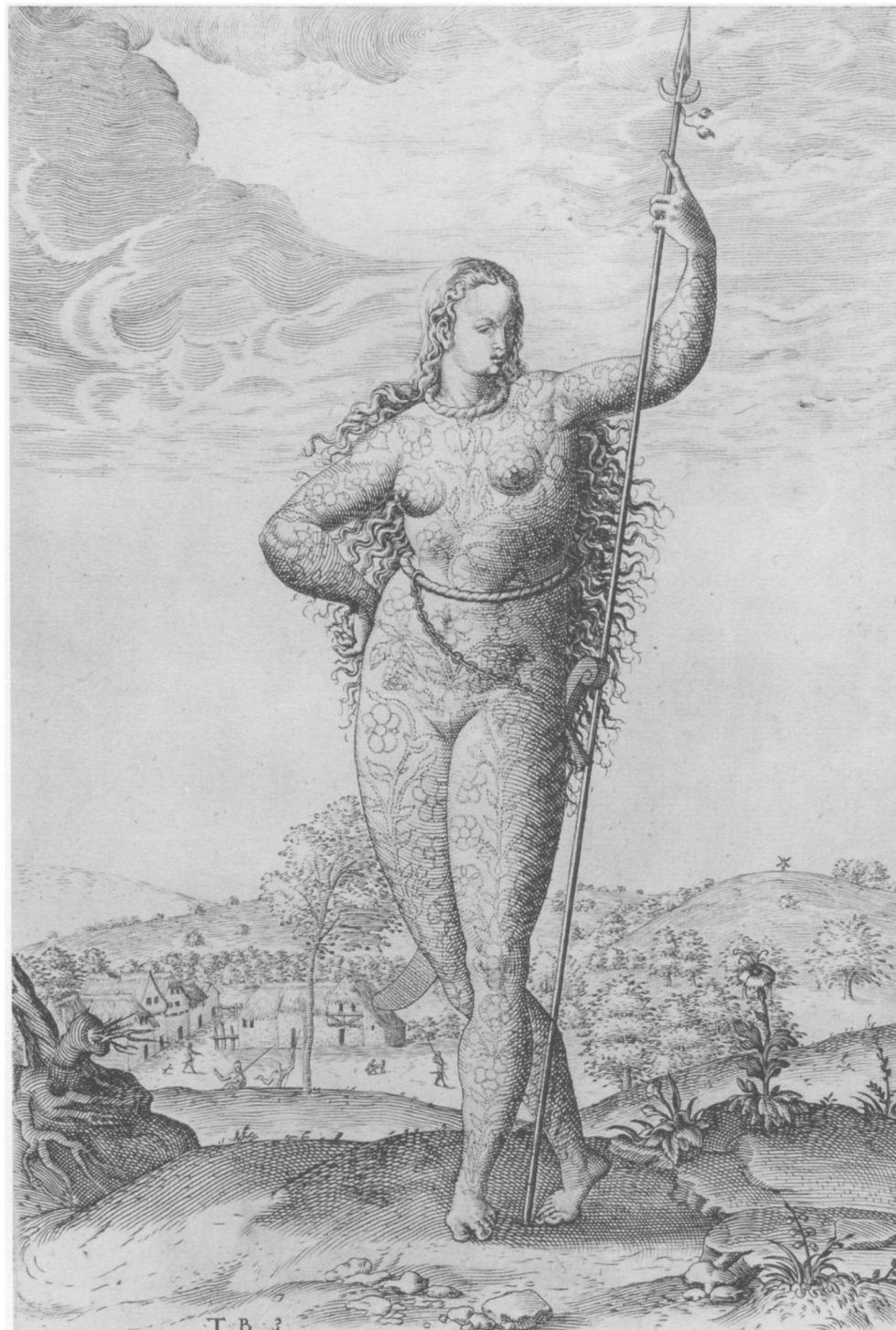


Figure 4. Theodore de Bry (after Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues), *Virginis Pictae icon III* or "True picture of a yonge dowgter of the Pictes." Engraving from *America I* (1590). Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

In its entirety, Le Moyne's painting constitutes a series of visual and verbal puns, ranging from a joke concerning the impropriety of "painting" a nude to a meditation on the sixteenth-century English word "pink," which signifies not only a tattoo, beauty, or excellence, but also a flower. (The sixteenth-century French word *fleurdeliser* carries some of the same determinants; it is defined in Randall Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* [1611] as "to set a flowerdeluce between the shoulders with a hot yron [the mark of a rogue]; also, to flourish, beautify, sticke, set thicke, with Flowerdeluces.") As a "pink," the young Pict is herself an instance of the *flors florum*, the "flower of flowers," which is the conventional floral trope for heavenly and/or earthly love (Peterson 1994:24). In its insistent proposition that woman is like a flower—a proposition that involves both a reversal between form and content and a self-conscious refusal to distinguish between the real and the figural—Le Moyne's painting reveals itself as the painting not of a woman, but of metaphor itself. Its purpose, in brief, is to evoke admiration for the impossible achievements of art.

"A Young Daughter of the Picts" was probably painted in London about 1585–1588, while Le Moyne was living in Blackfriars as a Huguenot refugee. Although he seems, like de Bry, to have enjoyed the patronage of Raleigh and the Sidney Family, Le Moyne was still in possession of the painting at his death. He had, on an earlier occasion, refused to sell his work to de Bry, and it is tempting to conclude that "A Young Daughter" was painted for no occasion other than the exercise of his own virtuosity. While the painting may, as Paul Hulton suggests, owe something in style to the miniatures of Hilliard and Oliver, in conception there is nothing like it among contemporary English paintings (Hulton 1977:78). Certainly Le Moyne's wit was lost on his peers or at least hidden from them by de Bry, who bought the painting from Le Moyne's widow and engraved it as an illustration of the historical appearance and manners of the Picts. De Bry's elliptical comment on the engraving may indicate his own reservations about this use of Le Moyne's image. According to him, the daughters of the Pict were "painted over all the body, so much that noe men could not faynde any different, yf they had not use of another fashion of paintinge, for they did paint themselves of sondrye kinds of flours, and of the fairest that they could fende" (de Bry 1590a:Pictae Icon III). Like Harriot and like Le Moyne, who had suggested that Timucuan tattooing was done "in imitation of various

painted designs," de Bry is uncertain how to distinguish between tattooing and the use of body paint. But the problem he is facing here is that, according to his own evidence, girls are tattooed with flowers, women with animals and planets.

The paradox was given sharper formulation by Speed, who, in reproducing four of de Bry's engravings, two of the Picts and two of neighbouring British tribes, added tattoo work to the female ancient Briton:

By these varieties of picturing (if some have not misinformed us out of their alleged ancient *Authors*) those people so distinguished themselves, that their *married women* were knowne by having pictured on their shoulders, *elbowes*, and *knees*, the heads of some four beasts, as Lions, Gryphons, etc. On their belly, the Sunne spreading his beames: on their *Pappes*, Moones and Starres etc. On their *Armes*, *thighes*, and *legges*, some other fancies of their owne Choice. But for their *Virgines*, their whole body was garnished over with the shapes of all the fairest kinds of flowers and herbes; which (to speak indifferently) could but yield, though a strange, yet no unpleasing aspect . . . yet, this scruple will not easily be removed (if it be true, *that from their childhood their prints increased with their bodies*) how those, who being *Virgins*, had no prints but of hearbes and flowers, becoming *Wives*, were so easily transformed into Beasts or heavenly creatures.
Speed 1627:180–182

A marginal note identifies the source of possible "misinformation" as "the Appendix to Harriot's Virginia"; all the same, Speed is happy enough to reproduce and further disseminate the error, which now takes the form of a conundrum. A tattoo is forever, a virgin is not; a tattooed flower may grow with the body, but it cannot grow into an animal or star. Standing in the place that Derrida calls the hymen ("Neither future nor present, but between the two"—that is, as the figure of surface in the dimension of historical time) within Speed's account the daughter of the Pict suggests not so much the developmental trajectory of ancient or primitive peoples, but their irrevocably barbarian status. Looking back over Britain's hybrid past, Camden had been moved to take stock of his present moment: "Since that for so many ages successively ensuing, we are all now by a certain ingraffing or commixtion become one nation, molified and civilised with Religion, and good Arts, let us mediate and consider, both what they were, and also what we should be" (1610:110). But in his comments on the figure of the young female Pict, Speed introduces a wrinkle into Camden's account of the progress of British

civilization, using the isotopic property of the tattoo (which may grow, but cannot change) to illustrate the impossibility of getting from past to present, or from America to Europe, while remaining the same. In so doing, he raises the specter of an incommensurability that is no longer confined, as Le Moyne confined it, to the structure of the signifier, but has become instead a question of cultural codes.

Within the terms of the uneven cultural grammar that is the ground on which the early modern antiquarians began to work out a discourse of British national sentiment, the tattooed ancestor stands for a barbarian past that is at once acknowledged and disavowed. That tattooing, the *Britannorum stigmata* as Camden calls it, is the fetish permitting this avowal-that-is-not-one explains, I think, the curious combination of levity and anxiety with which tattoos are treated in the antiquarian account and as they have been treated ever since. But the fact that the early modern English described tattooing in other times and places as a foreign practice, one whose technologies and functions were unknown within their own culture, should not be taken as evidence that they did not tattoo themselves. For pace Camden and others after him, tattooing is not incompatible with Christianity in any simple sense and survived the coming both of Christianity and the Romans to Britain.

Famously, tattooing is prohibited in Leviticus 19:28 ("You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you"). But in his letter to the Galatians 6:17, St. Paul seems to suggest that tattooing is an acceptable sign of Christian commitment, one that may, indeed, be preferable to circumcision: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision. . . . From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." The practice of branding or tattooing for Jesus was recorded by the fifth-century Greek historian Procopius of Gaza, by the seventeenth-century traveler Fynes Moryson, and by Emile Durkheim and others as being a practice still extant within the Eastern Church in the twentieth century (Durkheim 1976 [1915]:232; Moryson 1617:1:233–234; see also Carswell 1956; Keimer 1948). Reviewing the evidence for tattooing in medieval Irish and Hiberno-Latin literature, Charles MacQuarrie concludes that tattooing in medieval Europe had a bifurcated set of associations. On the one hand, it was associated with the wounds of Christ (with what, after St. Francis, came to be known as the stigmata) and

with the writing that appears on Christ's thigh in Revelations 19:16; on the other hand, it was associated with paganism and outlawry (MacQuarrie 1996:28–29).

In 786 C.E., Hadrian's Papal Legates reported tattooing among members of the church in Northumbria; an "injury of staining" (*tincturae injuriam*) they condemned if done for purposes of pagan superstition but were prepared to allow if undergone for the sake of Christ (MacQuarrie 1996:12–13; Sinclair 1908:369). William of Malmesbury stressed the second meaning of tattoo when he described the English at the time of the Norman conquest "laden with golden bracelets, their skin tattooed with colored designs" (*armillis aureis brachia onerati, picturatis stigmatibus cutem insigniti*); he went on to suggest that they imparted the barbaric practice to the invaders (Stubbs 1887:2:305). But throughout the medieval period it was common practice for pilgrims to have themselves tattooed in Jerusalem, returning home bearing indelible marks as evidence both of their journey and of their commitment to the service of God. The Jerusalem tattoo was a common sight in fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and even seventeenth-century Europe. As the English traveler George Sandys recorded in his eyewitness account, "They use to mark the Arms of Pilgrims, with the names of Jesus, Maria, Ierusalem, Bethlehem, the Ierusalem Crosse, and sundry other characters" (Sandys 1615:56).²⁰

Although the Reformation technically put an end to pilgrimages from Protestant countries, travelers continued to make the difficult journey to Jerusalem from Scotland and England. Protestants though they were, the majority went on to receive tattoos, either at the site of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or in Bethlehem, which seems to have been something of a

20. See also Henry Maundrell's (1707) laconic but detailed account: "March 27 [1697]—The next morning nothing extraordinary passed, which gave many of the pilgrims leisure to have their arms marked with the usual ensigns of Jerusalem. The artists who undertake the operation do it in this manner. They have stamps in wood of any figure you desire, which they first print off upon your arm with powder of charcoal; then, taking two very fine needles tied close together, and dipping them often, like a pen, in certain ink, compounded, as I was informed, of gunpowder and ox-gall, they make with them small punctures all along the lines of the figure which they have printed, and then, washing the part in wine, conclude the work. These punctures they make with great quickness and dexterity, and with scarce any smart, seldom piercing so deep as to draw blood" (Maundrell 1707:445–446). For a set of traditional tattoo patterns, and a careful description of the history of the practice in Jerusalem, see Carswell 1956.

tattoo center.²¹ Thomas Coryat had a Jerusalem cross put on his left wrist and a cross, three nails, and the inscription *Via, Veritas, Vita* on the right while in Jerusalem, according to Edward Terry, who was with him when he died in India. Coryat evidently wore his tattoos with pride, understanding them as a type of stigmata, as Terry recounts:

All these impressions were made by sharp *Needles* bound together, that pierced only the skin, and then a black Powder put into the places so pierced, which became presently indelible *Characters*, to continue with him so long as his flesh should be covered with *skin*: And they were done upon his Arms so artificially, as if they had been drawn by some accurate Pencil upon Parchment. This poor man would pride himself very much in beholding of those characters, and seeing them would often speak those words of St. Paul, written to the Galatians, Gal 6. 17 (though far besides the Apostles meaning) *I bear in my body the marks of Lord Jesus*.
Terry 1655:sig E8v-r

Fynes Moryson and his brother, who visited Bethlehem in the company of some French pilgrims, took pains to avoid getting tattooed, since it was a procedure they associated with the Roman church: "And when our *consorts* at Bethlehem printed the signe of the Crosse with inke and a pen-knife upon their armes, so as the print was never to bee taken out, wee would not folow them in this small matter, but excused our selves, that being to passe home through many kngdomes, we durst not beare any such marke upon our bodie, whereby wee might bee knowne" (Moryson 1617:1:237). But another Scotsman, William Lithgow, one of James I's courtiers, had no such qualms, receiving extensive tattoo-work in Jerusalem. There he elaborated a standard pattern (a Jerusalem cross) with some devices of his own:

In the last night of my staying at Jerusalem, which was at the holy grave, I remembring that bounden duty, and loving zeale, which I own unto my native Prince; whom I in all humility (next and immediate to Christ Jesus) acknowledge, to be the supreme head, and Governour of the true

Christian and Catholicke Church; by the remembrance of this obligation, I say, I caused one *Elias Bethleete*, a Christian inhabitour of *Bethleem*, to ingrave on the flesh of my right arme, *The never-conquered Crowne of Scotland*, and *the nowe unconquerable Crowne of England*, joyned also to it; with this inscription, painefully carved in letters, within the circle of the Crowne, *Vivat Iacobus Rex*.

Lithgow 1614:R3–R3v

In the 1640 edition of his text, which he dedicated to Charles I, Lithgow included a woodcut illustration of his tattooed cross and crown (fig. 6) and described a third tattoo, which he now claimed to have had added beneath them: "Returning to the fellow two piasters for his reward, I fixed these lines for King James. "Long may he live, and long may God above / Confirm, reward, increase his Christian love / That he (bless'd king of men) may never cease / To keep this badge, the sacred prince of peace/ And there's the motto of his maiden crown / *Haec nobis invicta miserunt*, ne'er won" (Lithgow 1640:269). Lithgow's tattoo is particularly interesting in that it is partially detached from its religious context as it matches the Cross with the Crown, and the name of Christ with that of James I ("Prince of Peace"). By Lithgow's own account, the Jerusalem official who saw the tattoo was "greatly offended with me, that I should have polluted that holy place with the name of such an arch-enemy to the Roman church" (ibid., 269).

In the figure of William Lithgow, returning tattooed to the English court, we can no longer refuse to recognize the Renaissance tattoo. Our certainty that the British did not tattoo themselves during the early modern period marks us as the descendants of Camden and Speed, British men and women for whom tattoo is visible as the mark of an ethnic status that we have long claimed, as a nation, to have outgrown. But if tattoo has a generalizable function across different cultures, it is precisely to stand as the mark of "foreignness." So Gell notes that at the moment of encounter, the Polynesians, like the British today, thought of tattooing as a foreign practice—as one adopted, for example, from a different island in the archipelago, or from the European sailors who, increasingly tattooed, moved among them (Gell 1993:10). To the early modern Europeans, tattooing may have appeared as a sign of ethnic difference simply because it was available to perform the work of such a sign. In this case, it would have been the attempt to assert their own difference from other native peoples that drove the Europeans to identify tattooing as a cultural practice that they were prepared, newly, to disavow.

21. In his seventeenth-century account, Thevenot suggests that tattooing is the characteristic practice of both pilgrims and a Christian sect living in Bethlehem: "Nous employâmes tout le Mardi 29 Avril à nous faire marquer les bras, comme sont ordinairement tous les Pèlerins, ce sont des Chrétiens de Bethlehem suivant le rit Latin qui font cela. . . . Ils ont une petite canne où sont deux aiguilles, qu'ils trempent de tems en tems dans l'ancre mêlée avec du fiel de boeuf, et vous en piquent suivant les lignes marquées par le moule de bois . . . les marques restent bleuës, et ne s'effacent jamais, parce que le sang se mêlant avec cette teinture d'ancre et de fiel de boeuf, se marquer encor dedans sous la peau" (Thevenot 1689:638–639).



Figure 6. William Lithgow's tattoos: a Jerusalem cross and the united crowns of Scotland and England (detail). From William Lithgow, *The Totall discourse* (1640), p. 285. Reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

Caused by the introduction of a foreign body under the skin, under certain circumstances (such as those under which we encounter it today), the tattoo marks the self as foreign. It consequently stands as a ready figure for the border skirmishing that defines conceptual relations not only between the inside and the outside of the body, but also between the inside and the outside of social groups. Harriot and Speed themselves understood tribal tattooing as a system of identification; Speed describes Pictish tattoos as "badges of their Noblenes, thus endamasked," while Harriot argued the Algonquian warriors wore tattoos "whereby it may be known what Princes subjects they bee" (Speed 1611:182; de Bry 1590a:pl. 23). Like all naming practices, tattooing accords an individual an identity predicated on the partial dispossession of the self. It is as such, I propose, that it attracts the fetishized recognition of both the native and the colonial gaze.

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