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The Destabilization of Gender Identity in the *Gran flos sanctorum*

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Introduction

This dissertation focuses on the analysis of gender identity, and more specifically, the ways in which corporeal and other external transformations serve as mechanisms for destabilization within the context of medieval Spanish hagiography. Since the gaze is a vital component in the reception and formation of identity, and has a powerful ability to affirm, violate, project, and transform, it is discussed in conjunction with both the body and the broader signifying potential of human appearance, which, as external markers, can be changed in a series of overlapping and at times mutually reinforcing ways. The *Gran flos sanctorum*, which is the most authoritative and accomplished of the various medieval Spanish hagiographic compendia, offers the most suitable answer to these questions, and as such it is the primary source used in the dissertation.

Judith Butler argues that 'gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (1988: 519). People are not born with a gender identity and do not behave according to gendered conventions until they are taught certain behaviours, or they observe, replicate, and subsequently assimilate them. The power of the gaze impacts on the way in which gender is performed and understood. It can project societal conventions onto an individual as it is linked to the viewer's individual experience of the world. It is therefore vital in the construction and representation of gender. This dissertation will discuss its power on an intra and extra-diegetic level through the texts themselves, and in related contemporary works of art, which offer complementary perspectives on the events described. The intra-diegetic gaze is relevant to

understanding the points the text is aiming to transmit to the audience, as well as building a well-rounded image of the scene being described. A consideration of the extra-diegetic gaze is vital because it is important to consider the way in which these legends would have been perceived by different audiences at the time and how this has changed throughout the ages, creating a contrast with the way in which a modern audience might perceive the same scene.

The *Gran flos sanctorum* is a religious text compiling the legends of a myriad of saints, spread over five manuscripts.[1] Some of the original has been lost, but what remains nevertheless makes up an almost complete exploration of the liturgical-sanctoral cycle. The term *hagiography* designates that which narrates and celebrates the lives of saints. Hippolyte Delehaye explains that it is important to differentiate between history and hagiography: 'The work of the hagiographer may be historical, but it is not necessarily so. It may take any literary form suited to honouring the saints, from an official record adapted to the needs of the faithful to a highly exuberant poem that has nothing whatever to do with factual reality' (1962: 4). However, despite being extraordinary in nature and sometimes unbelievable, the legends of the *Gran flos sanctorum* were not considered fictitious. Vanesa Hernández Amez (2008: 12) explains that these legends were considered as serious and edifying. Written material was thought to be history; Delehaye asserts that 'history meant everything that was told, everything that was read in books' (1962: 53). A comparable point is made by Alison Goddard Elliott (1987: 5–6), who argues that we should distinguish between

[1] Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 780 (1425–50), Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 12688 (1440–77?), Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional MS 12689 (1412–73), Escorial MS h–III–22 (1442–82), and Escorial MS h–II–18 (1490–1500).

that which is *factually* and *spiritually* true, embracing the legends of the saints as histories that can impact didactically on the lives of the devout.

The *Gran flos sanctorum* was produced by Hieronymite monks and is most likely to have been assembled by Gonzalo de Ocaña, a figure about whom almost nothing is known. Since the Hieronymites adopted Saint Jerome as their figurehead, the *Gran flos sanctorum* offers a particularly pro-ascetic reading of the original source text with emphasis on the corporeal element of the legends. The text is not a direct translation of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, but a significant expansion, and as such, there are some notable differences in content and styling. Billy Bussell Thompson and John K. Walsh (1986–87: 17) explain that most of the legends in the *Gran flos sanctorum* are based on those found in Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, but that some have been omitted, and others have been added. These would have been read during Church services, making them available to a broad audience, including those who were illiterate, and they were also probably used as prompts for preachers operating in the community. Despite assuming written form, most audiences would have accessed them through oral transmission. Their purpose was to inspire devotion and to preach Christian morality to the masses. They were therefore widely circulated and had significant outreach. The text was culturally and religiously significant to the extent that, as José Amador de los Ríos (1864: 54) first pointed out, Isabel of Castile owned a copy of the *Gran flos sanctorum* (Escorial MS h–II–18), suggesting that she saw the text's didactic value in modelling her own attitudes and behaviours.

As explained by Hernández Amez (2008: 8), medieval hagiography presents a diametrically opposed world divided schematically by good and bad people. This type of literature clearly indicates who is good and to be emulated (the saints) and who is evil and the antithesis of sanctity (their oppressors). Fernando Baños Vallejo (2003: 109) points out that medieval hagiography follows a strict tripart pattern that is as follows: desire for sanctity, process of achieving perfection, and success in achieving sanctity. In general, the legends of the saints of the *Gran flos sanctorum* follow this structure, regardless of whether they are martyrs or ascetics. As it is such a long text, any approach to questions of corporeality and identity must inevitably be selective.

In appreciation of the complexities surrounding the destabilization of gender, this dissertation begins with a consideration of femininity. When a woman's gender identity is attacked by external forces, the perpetrators (of what is usually a violent assault on the female body) attempt to defeminize her by removing external markers of her femininity, such as the breast or the hair. The loss of certain corporeal markers of femininity does not render her masculine; instead, it makes her abject and monstruous. Any masculinization that takes place in such legends is something that these women bring about themselves, as masculinity affords a type of systemic power (and is therefore not something that their oppressors would grant them). Words such as *varonil* or *varonilmente* are often used to describe female saints as they assimilate certain traits that would have been considered masculine at the time, such as oratorical skill. The abandonment of aspects that are traditionally associated with a feminine identity is an integral part of the sanctification of these women. It is vital to remember that despite becoming *varonil*, they are nonetheless venerated posthumously as women, and almost always as *sponsae Christi* or brides of Christ.

Chapter One discusses the way in which feminine identity is destabilized, using the breast as a focal point. The chapter will consider the cultural significance of the breast and the function that it holds in society. The breast will be analysed as a food source as well as an object of sexual desire. The first section of the chapter will deal with the Virgin Mary as the paradigm of Christian feminine perfection and a model for other women. It will discuss the importance of her breast and its milk not only as a food source for the infant Christ, but as universal nourishment for all Christians. The second section will provide a literary analysis of Saint Agatha's legend, supplemented by artistic representations of her torture as well as a posthumous image of her saintly body. These tortures culminate in her forced mastectomy, and so the chapter will therefore consider its effects as well as those of its restoration. The final section analyses the legend of Saint Christina, comparing it to that of Agatha, showing that whilst they both suffer a forced mastectomy, it is presented in a starkly different way on a literary level in each text, and consequently, the destabilization of their feminine identity differs. It discusses the literary representations of their torture in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, supplementing the analysis with art. This chapter demonstrates that whilst femininity is central to the sanctity of these three saints, they must masculinize themselves to a degree in order to be revered posthumously as models of exemplary devotion.

When masculinity is destabilized by external forces through torture, the subject in question is often feminized as well as rendered abject; he is forced to adopt a submissive role, traditionally associated with the feminine, and is sometimes penetrated with objects that are phallically symbolic, once again metaphorically feminizing him by means of a sexual allusion. Therefore, emasculation causes the subjects to be feminized, thus, in some way resembling women; the first subjects of abjection. When masculinity is destabilized by asceticism, which, by nature, is self-

inflicted, it causes the body to become monstruous and therefore an exemplary object, thus becoming a source of narcissistic scopophilia in the eyes of other Christians. Chapter Two discusses the ways in which masculinity is destabilized in the *Gran flos sanctorum* by analysing the legends of Saint Vincent and Saint Paul of Thebes. The former is a martyr and the latter an ascetic, therefore, together, they provide a well-rounded hagiographic perspective of the destabilization of masculinity. The first section discusses Saint Vincent, offering a literary analysis supplemented by works of art depicting his torture. Of all the legends of the martyrs in this dissertation, this one offers the most extensive and detailed description of torture and its corporeal effects, making it a particularly gruesome tale. In the second section, Saint Paul of Thebes's asceticism will be compared to Saint Vincent's martyrdom. The primary difference between these two is that Vincent undergoes public torture, whereas Paul's suffering is self-inflicted and carried out privately, in the solitude of the desert. This section begins by discussing the events that catalyse his decision to become an ascetic; Paul witnesses two young men being martyred, both of whom suffer a destabilization of masculinity. It then considers the way in which he carries out his ascetic practice alone and will end with an analysis of his interactions with Saint Antony. The chapter demonstrates the fact that expressions of masculinity are dependent on interactions with others and that it is the power that is synonymous with masculinity that, in part, causes it to be a target for destabilization because it can be perceived as a threat.

Whilst gender destabilization can be a by-product of martyrdom or asceticism, it can also be the starting point for ascetic practice. The final chapter considers gender-fluid saints, thus further problematizing the idea of a binary vision of gender. The chapter discusses the legends of Saints Margaret, Marina, and Pelagia, providing a discrete literary analysis of each. The first section

analyses Saint Margaret who functions as a blueprint for other of female monk saints. However, she is unique in that she is the only one of the three saints discussed in the chapter whose body remains hidden from the male gaze, even at the time of her death. The second section discusses Saint Marina's legend, which shares many similarities at both a conceptual as well as a structural level. One of the most important differences is that whilst Margaret's change in gender is entirely self-motivated, Marina follows her father's wishes. This distinction is significant when it comes to considering the notion of gender destabilization and identity. The final section analyses Saint Pelagia's legend. Her tale is unlike the former two as she is a reformed prostitute, and her gender fluidity is a tool for repentance. These three saints share several similarities, suggesting common origins. Of all the saints discussed in this dissertation, the female monks take the most active role in the destabilization of gender, doing so intentionally in order to achieve sanctity. The chapter will demonstrate that their gender fluidity is essential to their sanctity, and in the case of Pelagia, it is redemptive.

Chapter One:

From the Virgin Mary to the Virgin Martyrs: The Breast as a Signifier of Identity

Introduction

As a life-sustaining organ, an external signifier of femininity, or as a sexually charged body part, the breast has great significance in the human experience. It is often shrouded in a level of mystery and inaccessibility, as it is generally hidden from the public gaze. It is not merely an object of fascination in the secular context; it is also prevalent in medieval Catholicism. 'For centuries, women have been the objects of male theorizing, male desires, male fears, male representations' (Suleiman 1986: 7). The breast, like much of the female body, has been represented through the male gaze, and consequently, male desires and experiences often shape the way in which it has been portrayed throughout history. Hagiography is no exception, and this chapter will explore the way in which it deals with the breast and the forced mastectomy.

The breast is significant to human life on many levels, therefore, before discussing it within the context of the holy mastectomy, it is vital to consider its human function. On a purely biological level, the breast develops during puberty and can produce milk after childbirth to feed a baby; it is the baby's primary source of nourishment. Aside from anything else, as argued by Monica Campo, 'it also involves women using their bodies in a mammalian and inescapably biological manner'

(2010: 51). Since the dawn of time, the breast has served this biological purpose, which is unique to this body part. As explained by Mary M. McLaughlin (1975: 115), in the medieval era, once an infant had survived the journey from the womb into the world, its survival depended upon having access to a mother's milk. Childbirth was a perilous time for both mothers and babies at this time, with no guarantee that either would survive. However, once a child was born safely, its survival depended on its mother's body, as there was little access to anything but a mother's milk for nourishment. Maaike van der Lugt (2019: 564) explains that lactation cannot be considered as a merely physiological function. As is the case today, medieval discussions surrounding breastfeeding were centred around moral and social questions regarding how a breastfeeding mother ought to behave, and even who should breastfeed. These questions were of such relevance in the Middle Ages because, as pointed out by van der Lugt (2019: 565), medieval physicians believed that breastmilk was transmuted blood that was used to nourish the foetus, and that therefore lactation was perceived as the final stage of generation.

Not only was milk the primary source of nourishment for infants, but it also held symbolic value. According to Samuel X. Radbill (1976: 22), in addition to being a symbol of whiteness and purity, milk also represented abundance. This is mirrored in views surrounding mothers who were able to breastfeed their children; they were perceived as better mothers than those who struggled. Marilyn Yalom explains that 'The arid breast, like the barren womb, was seen as a curse. The God of Israel held sway over both eventualities, determining whether one deserved the "fruitful womb" or the "womb that miscarries and dry breasts" (Hosea 9:11, 14). The curse of dry or shrivelled breasts, hurled at those who defied the will of God, became particularly vehement on the tongues of the prophets' (1997: 28). Not all women who give birth are able to breastfeed, and so, at the time, wet

nursing was sometimes the only available alternative. However, they were not only used in cases where the mother could not breastfeed. Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (1995: 40) explains that by the second century, wet nursing had become a widely commercialized activity in Europe, and that by the medieval period, wet nurses could be found easily. There were various reasons for the growing popularity of wet nursing. In an age in which the parturient death rate was high, wet nurses were a necessity (for those who could afford one) and were therefore hired by fathers of maternal orphans. Some women needed wet nurses to feed their infants so that they might return to work, and according to Hrdy, others desired to be 'Freed from the "drudgery"—and contraceptive effects—of nursing' (1995: 40), so that they might ovulate again. The prospect of ovulation, and thus becoming fertile once again, would have appealed to couples who were hoping to expand their families.[1] Additionally, nursing was believed to stretch and deform the breast, rendering it less aesthetically pleasing. By foregoing breastfeeding, a woman would have been able to maintain the appearance of her pre-pregnancy breasts. As has been pointed out by Heath Dillard (1984: 156), families who could afford wet nurses would bring one into their home to live with the family, which allowed the parents to oversee the woman who had become responsible for the survival of their child. As the first few years of an infant's life were particularly hazardous, the period of breastfeeding (and thus the role of the wet nurse) was significant. McLaughlin (1975: 115) points out that the elite classes were able to access wet nurses, but for the majority of people, it was the mother's role to provide the life-sustaining breast. Despite the availability of wet nurses, the Church's position was clear: van der Lugt (2019: 564–5) explains that the Church projected a very

[1] Within the historical context, this might have arisen from a desire to produce a male heir to continue a family line, or to take over a business, for example.

positive image of mothers breastfeeding their own children and condemned those who did not as bad mothers. In paintings depicting the Virgin Mary, she is often seen breastfeeding the infant Christ. As she is the culmination of feminine perfection, it is noteworthy that there is a great deal of emphasis placed upon the fact that she nourished Christ. This will be discussed in greater detail at a later point in this chapter.

Whilst animal milk might appear to be an alternative to breast milk, Margaret Miles (1986: 198) points out that since children were thought to display characteristics that reflected both the personality and physical appearance of their milk source, it would not have been acceptable for babies to drink milk from other animals.[2] Despite the fact that using animal milk was frowned upon, it was an option to which some people resorted. Radbill (1976: 24) explains that at the time, as milk did not keep well for long once it had been taken from the animal, and because suckling was thought to aid digestion in infants, children were sometimes nursed directly from the teat of the animal.[3] Therefore, within the context of the texts that this dissertation will explore, the breast was a biological necessity for survival.

[2] For further information, see Van der Lugt (2019: 567).

[3] There are visual representations of this practice, for example, *The Infant Bartholomew Nursed by a Hind in the Wilderness*, from the *Retaule de Sant Bartomeu*, late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. For an in-depth analysis of this panel, see Beresford (2020: 66–72), and for more information on the painting, see Gudiol Ricart (1944), Post (1938), Sureda (1986), and Coll Mirabent (2012).

However, society has coded the breast as much more than a secondary sexual characteristic and food source; it also has cultural and sociological significance. The way in which the breast is coded varies from culture to culture. As noted by Yalom (1997: 3), the sexualized view of the breast that is held in western culture is by no means universal. She asserts that in certain African and South Pacific cultures, women have existed and continue to exist with exposed breasts, without the erotic connotations that this would have in the West. This shows that the breast is not inherently erotic as it is often represented in western culture, but that instead is has become erotic because it is veiled and therefore rendered inaccessible to the common gaze.[4]

Yalom (1997: 3–4) questions the ownership of the breast. She posits that the breast has become something over which many people appear to have a claim, such as the suckling child, whose survival is dependent upon it, the person who fondles it sexually, religious and moral authorities who demand its covering, or the woman herself, for whom it is a part of her body.[5] Yalom is suggesting that the breast has been appropriated by a plethora of institutions and has been objectified by the male scopophilic gaze to such an extent that sometimes, the woman's ownership over this part of her body is forgotten or ignored.

[4] This idea is exemplified in the popular lyric: 'No me las enseñes más, / que me matarás. / Estávase la monja / en el monesterio, / sus teticas blancas / de so el velo negro. / Más, / que me matarás' (Gornall 2001: 127). For an in-depth analysis, see Gornall (2001: 127).

[5] Yalom also mentions the plastic surgeon who enhances it to make it more aesthetically pleasing.

James Astor engages in a thought-provoking analysis surrounding the breast ‘as part of the whole’ (1989: 118), discussing it as synecdoche, considering the way in which it is part of the body and the instances in which it appears in isolation. He argues that after birth, and in the first few weeks of life, the breast is the baby’s whole world; not part of the mother’s body, but the whole of it. He claims that it is only later in the infant’s life, after exploring both their own and their mother’s body that they are able to experience the breast as part of the whole. In this sense, the breast is reduced to its life-sustaining purpose. It has no sexual connotations and is disconnected from the woman to whom it belongs, yet it cannot exist without the person to whom it is attached.

There is no true parallel in the male body of an organ that sustains life, or of which others seek ownership. The breast cannot be compared to the phallus, despite them both being potential external markers of a gendered identity because, as pointed out by Andrew M. Beresford (2010a: 140), they are not anatomically equivalent; the breast is a life-sustaining organ, whereas the phallus is a reproductive one. The phallus and vagina can be compared, but the phallus and breast cannot. It is a powerful organ and one that cannot be replicated as there is no other body part that is able to sustain life in the same way. It is therefore intrinsic to the identity of many women, and consequently, an attack on the breast is an attack on a woman’s identity in a way that an attack on other body parts is not.

The removal of the breast, the reasons for so doing, and its subsequent effects are important when considering the holy mastectomy. This torture is, at its most basic level, an attack on a woman’s

identity. One must acknowledge that the breast is, in many cases, part of the construct of a feminine identity. Many women feel that their breasts are intrinsic to their gendered identity, which would explain why some women suffer identity crises when they are compelled to undergo a medical mastectomy. This can be difficult to adjust to because it has implications that go beyond a gendered identity. Some women also struggle with a loss of their sense of being sexually appealing, regardless of their sexual orientation. In addition, a mastectomy can affect a woman's ability to breastfeed, which can be an important part of developing a bond between herself and the child, impacting her identity as a mother.

In medieval Catholic hagiography, female virgin martyr saints such as Agatha and Christina undergo torture on one or both of their breasts and are subjected to a forced mastectomy. In the context of religious martyrdom, the removal of the breast is a violent and invasive act, performed with the intention of causing physiological and psychological suffering. This chapter will discuss the violent removal of the breast, and the biological, religious, and sexual implications of so doing. First, it will discuss the importance of the Virgin Mary as the pinnacle of female perfection within Christianity and the significance of her breasts in their function of nourishing Christ, and therefore all Christians, with her milk. It is impossible to consider the breasts of the virgin martyrs without first considering those of the Virgin Mary, the ultimate maternal figure, the *Theotokos*, and the woman all Christian women aspire to emulate.[6] Second, Saint Agatha's martyrdom will be

[6] The term *Theotokos* is one of the Virgin Mary's titles. It comes from the Greek *Θεός*, meaning God, and *τόκος*, meaning childbirth. The term literally means *God-bearer* or *the one who gives birth to God*.

discussed, with a focus on the ways in which her gendered identity is destabilized, specifically, the type of femininity that she has chosen to express. Finally, the chapter will consider Saint Christina's legend and will analyse the ways in which her identity is destabilized, not only focusing on the forced mastectomy that she undergoes, but also the other tortures that serve to undermine her femininity. These two saints have been chosen to exemplify the destabilization of feminine identity in the *Gran flos sanctorum* because their femininity is central to their legends and it is precisely this aspect of their identity that is attacked by their oppressors, through tortures that specifically target external signifiers and markers of their femininity.

The Virgin Mary's Breast

The Virgin Mary is the most important woman in Christian doctrine; therefore, it is vital to consider her breast before commencing a discussion of the breasts of the virgin martyrs. However, prior to delving into an analysis of her breast, it is crucial to consider the notion of access to the Virgin Mary's body. Julia Kristeva explains that 'Of the virginal body we are entitled only to the ear, the tears, and the breasts' (1985: 142). As previously discussed, ownership is often sought over the female body. Yet, in the case of the Virgin Mary, there are clearly defined limits around parts of her body to which we are permitted access.

There is a duality of Mary as mother breastfeeding her child and Mary as *Ecclesia* nourishing all of humanity. The Virgin Mary is the ultimate mother, the *mater Dei,* and therefore the mother of all. The religious iconography depicting the lactation of the Virgin Mary offers an insight into the perception of the breast in a religious context. The Virgin Mary is of course an isolated example

because she is totally pure and free from sin, as well as being the mother of Christ. Yalom argues that the Virgin Mary symbolizes 'female nurturance on a supernatural scale' (1997: 48), which would suggest that she is, to some degree, hyper-feminine, with the utmost maternal powers. Yalom further discusses some of the complexities surrounding the status of the Virgin Mary's breast, arguing that it only has value because it nourished Christ, and that her importance ultimately always depends on a male figure who is more powerful than she is. However, without Mary, Christianity would lack a universal feminine presence with whom all could identify. Her breast provides a symbol of femininity relevant to all genders, since they all suckled at a breast as infants. Yalom's argument is pertinent and succeeds in contextualizing the significance of the Virgin's breast.

Fig. 1. *Nursing Madonna*, Bartolomé Bermejo, c. 1465–70. Museu de Belles Arts València.

In Bermejo's painting (pictured above), the Virgin Mary can be seen breastfeeding the infant Christ. She is holding her nursing child in her arms while looking down at him tenderly.[7] The infant Christ does not return her loving gaze, but instead looks out at the viewer. The Virgin Mary's breast is in the centre of the painting, denoting its importance. It is further highlighted by Mary's hand placement; she is holding her breast to allow Jesus to suckle more easily, but her index finger

[7] For more information on Bermejo and this painting, see Company & Tolosa (1999: 264).

is pointing directly at her nipple and the stream of milk squirting from it. Conversely, her other breast is barely visible, and has been given no importance in this work of art. Perhaps the implication is that the Virgin's breast is only significant insofar as it has the ability to nourish and sustain. The milk is visible, making a line from her nipple into Jesus' mouth, and beyond. The eye is drawn to the movement this creates, and whilst, on a literal level, the milk is nourishing Jesus, it also goes beyond his mouth and continues its course outside the frame of the painting, suggesting that her milk not only provided sustenance for the infant Christ, but that it nourishes all other Christians who gaze upon this painting. Miles (1986: 193) argues that the visual emphasis on Mary's breast nourishing the Messiah, and by extension, all Christians, is striking. It is an image that has been represented in religious art countless times. A similar notion can be observed in Fig. 2—see below.

Fig. 2 *The Miraculous Lactation of Saint Bernard*, Alonso Cano, c. 1650. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

This painting was produced two hundred years after the *Gran flos sanctorum*, but it is nonetheless a particularly striking image of the Virgin Mary as *Ecclesia* in which she is represented as nourishing all Christians.[8] The painting is a depiction of the scene in which Saint Bernard was praying to a statue of the Virgin Mary holding the infant Christ, which subsequently comes to life. In her left arm, she is holding Christ, her biological child, and is using her right hand to squirt her

[8] For an exploration of the presence of the Virgin Mary in different versions of the legend of Saint Bernard and in Bernardine images, see France (2011: 329–35).

breast milk into the open mouth of Saint Bernard, who is kneeling before her with open hands, receiving her physical and spiritual nourishment. In this sense, it is not only her own son, Jesus, who receives Mary's breast milk, but also other human beings. Viewers might identify themselves more closely with Saint Bernard and contemplate the possibility of receiving nourishment from Mary's breast in the same manner. Richard B. Lyman points out that it is striking that early Christian writings appear to be so concerned with maternity and the idea of flowing breasts. He claims that the vivid images of mothers feeding their babies cannot be merely rhetorical. However, instead of crediting this as a sexual obsession, he instead argues: 'What anxieties about parental love are so lightly veiled herein? How many babies failed to receive sufficient nourishment from their own mothers' breasts? Is not the obsession with the pains and dangers of childbirth a mirror to widely held concern?' (1975: 84–85).

With regard to the possible sexualization of the breast within a religious context, it is important to note that in this painting the focus is on the stream of milk and not on the breast. The milk has a long trajectory and traverses the centre of the painting. It is full of life and movement. The eye follows the trajectory of the glimmering silvery milk towards St Bernard's face. The breast (and, in fact, Mary) is barely visible, as it is in the background of the image and almost completely covered by the Virgin's hand. As is the case with many other depictions of the Virgin's breast, it looks unnatural and misplaced, and as pointed out by Miles (1986: 204) with reference to other paintings, when the Virgin Mary has one of her breasts exposed and the other is often portrayed as completely flat underneath her clothing. This could point towards a desexualized vision of the Virgin Mary in the sense that in this image her presence is one of maternal nurturing. Here, Mary is holding Christ, her biological child, and feeding Saint Bernard, her symbolic child, as the

ultimate maternal figure. Perhaps the Virgin Mary's sanctity elevates her above any type of sexualization thrust upon her by the scopophilic gaze, even when her breast is exposed.

The Virgin Mary is presented as the paragon of femininity within the Christian context; however, this ideal eludes mortal women. Her divine perfection lies in the contradiction of her motherhood and her virginity. This image of feminine perfection is a systemic mechanism for keeping women in their place, by forcing them to acknowledge that they will never achieve that which is required of them. However, Miles (1986: 205) argues that images of the nursing Virgin Mary display her power to nourish Christ, a power that other women in medieval times also possessed. This is significant because at a time when plague and famine affected people's access to good food and clean water, the mother was in fact the only source of reliable nourishment. Despite Mary gaining 'cosmic power' (Miles 1986: 205) from nursing the infant Christ, the human breast could not wield the same power. In a society where religion demonized femininity, the mortal woman could never fully emulate the Virgin Mary. Yalom (1997: 31) points out that the flesh, particularly the female flesh, was considered a threat to reaching spiritual perfection. Early Christian doctrine regarded women as intrinsically sinful, in a way that it did not view men. This misogynistic view contributed to the way in which feminine identity was dichotomized. Jane T. Schulenburg argues that 'Since celibate churchmen held a monopoly over the education and writing of the period, what we know about women of this time is often necessarily slanted. Those few women who were deemed important enough to be included in their writings were painted in moralistic tones: as either wicked women or saints. As dichotomized beings, they were constantly oscillating from pit to pedestal; from daughters of Eve, sisters of perdition, to paragons of virtue, compared to the ultimate model of perfection, the Virgin Mary' (1978: 117).

The importance of the Virgin Mary's breast is something that one must consider in an exploration of the breasts of the virgin martyrs. Mary is of course in a sphere of her own; she is a meta-woman who cannot truly be compared to other women, because no woman can reach her divine feminine perfection. However, she epitomizes that to which all other Christian women ought to aspire. She encompasses the essence of Christian femininity and is a starting point for the analysis of all other women.

Saint Agatha

Saint Agatha of Sicily is most renowned as a martyr who underwent a forced mastectomy as part of her tortures.[9] She is particularly pertinent in discussions of destabilization because many of her tortures target her femininity, and specifically the way in which she has chosen to express it. She undermines some feminine stereotypes in a manner that empowers her, enabling her to gain the upper hand against her oppressors, however, these opponents attempt to destabilize external signifiers of her gendered identity as well as attacking her chosen model of femininity.

In the *Gran flos sanctorum*, Saint Agatha's virginity is emphasized from the outset, and she is characterized as the perfect Christian woman. The phrase 'aquesta santa virgen' is repeated several

[9] For an in-depth analysis of Saint Agatha's legend, see Carrasco (1985), Easton (1994), De Girolami (1996), Farmer (2003: 51), and Beresford (2010a).

times throughout the text (lines 14, 16, and 182).[10] The use of repetition highlights the significance of her virginity, intrinsically linking it to her sainthood, as even the words ‘santa’ and ‘virgen’ are adjacent. The emphasis upon her virginity demonstrates the centrality of this state to her identity as a holy woman. Elizabeth A. Robertson (1990: 40) explains that for women who had followed a spiritual path, virginity was not a rejection or a means of escape from their femininity, but instead a fulfilment of it. To a certain extent, it is the closest that women can come to being akin to the Virgin Mary because it is impossible for them to bear children while remaining virgins, but if they lead chaste lives and are then martyred, they are then able to become brides of Christ, thus achieving a state of sanctified femininity.

Saint Agatha is depicted as the embodiment of holiness from the beginning of the legend, and it is clear that she has chosen both a specific way of life and a particular expression of femininity. She is described as:

> noble e fermosa por linaje e por cuerpo, mas mucho más noble e fermosa por alma. E aquesta santa virgen sirvió sienpre al Salvador en toda santidat. (lines 11–13)

Here, Agatha is described as having both a beautiful external appearance and soul. This common literary trope uses her external beauty as a reflection of her inner beauty and purity of spirit. She has chosen a pious and chaste expression of femininity, which empowers her as she is able to

[10] All quotations from the legend of Saint Agatha are taken from Beresford (2010a: 185–92).

escape mortal marriage and therefore, in the secular sense, her body does not belong to a husband.[11] However, despite escaping this fate, she nevertheless finds herself in a godly marriage. Although no earthly man has dominion over her, Christ does, and she is therefore still controlled by patriarchal structures that demand that she be a servant of God. Despite her marriage to Christ as a *sponsa Christi* being a sexless one, she is nonetheless entrapped in a union with a celestial male figure.

Saint Agatha's rejection of earthly marriage and sexual relations becomes particularly problematic when Quintianus, the Prefect, becomes infatuated with her and demands that she be brought to him. Agatha rejects his advances, which results in her being sent to a brothel and handed over to Aphrodisia, the brothel-keeper, and her nine daughters to break her resolve:

> diola a guardar a una mala muger que avía nonbre Afrodisan, que tenía nueve fijas que eran todas malas mugeres, por que mudase el su coraçón de la entinción de la christiandat e la ynclinase a aver ayuntamiento con él. (lines 24–27)

The term *mala muger* was a common way of referring to women of questionable morals, most commonly prostitutes or women who acted upon sexual desires outside marriage. It is important to note the name of the brothel-keeper: Aphrodisia, as it comes from the Greek *aphrodisiakos* (inducing sexual desire), which, in turn, hails from the goddess of love, Aphrodite. Aphrodisia is clearly defined by her active sexuality, in the same way that Agatha is defined by her abstinence.

[11] At the time, when a woman married a man, she became akin to being his property. He would have had the right to her body whenever he pleased.

This highlights the virgin/whore dichotomy that pervades hagiographic literature (as well as on a far greater societal level) and creates an antithesis between the two women; they are at opposite ends of the spectrum of sexual morality dictated by the Catholic Church. Agatha is presented as the young and beautiful maiden who remains chaste, even when faced with horrific tortures, while Aphrodisia is the brothel-keeper who is tasked with breaking Agatha's resolve. Furthermore, it is important that Aphrodisia has nine daughters as the number nine bears significance in the Bible as it carries a sense of looming finality because Christ died on the ninth hour after having been tortured by the Romans. In this sense, a parallel can be drawn between Christ who suffered and subsequently died at the ninth hour and Agatha who will also suffer and die after having endured her time in the brothel with the nine daughters of Aphrodisia.

In this section, both Agatha and Aphrodisia demonstrate a level of feminine power. Agatha's power lies in her decision to remain chaste—a choice that she made independently—and Aphrodisia's through her more liberated sexuality and financial independence.[12] To an extent, Aphrodisia is masculinized through her ability to provide for herself; she would not have needed a husband or a father to care for her. There is irony in the fact that she is able to achieve this masculine independence by using her feminine sexuality. Before discussing the ways in which

[12] A financially independent woman would have been rare in this historical context. For further examples of women who were able to become financially independent by means of prostitution, see the legends of Thaïs and Pelagia in the *Gran flos sanctorum.* However, unlike Aphrodisia, these two women fall under the category of prostitute saints, who renounce their life of sexual sin and become ascetics. The legend of Pelagia will be analysed in depth in Chapter Three.

Aphrodisia would have been able to exert power in this way, it is important to nuance this notion of self-determination. Whilst Aphrodisia is able to express her sexuality, it cannot be assumed that this would always have been a free choice and not born of necessity depending upon her personal circumstances. Yet, within the social structure of women who are subordinate to her in her brothel, she is in a position of power. She would have managed the daily running of her establishment and the girls working there would have answered to her. Alan Deyermond (1993: 2) explains that within the male macro-society, there are often fewer autonomous female micro-societies, which can be categorized into one of four groups: the brothel, the convent, the widow's household, and the court or household temporarily run by a woman because of her husband's absence. He argues that the convent would have been the most independent female micro-society despite ultimately being under the control of a bishop. Brothels depended economically upon their clientele and were often under the control of a male brothel-keeper. However, in the case of the micro-society created by Aphrodisia and her nine daughters, despite their economic dependency on the patriarchy, Aphrodisia was in control of this community of women. Although this female micro-community appears to be self-contained and totally reliant on women who are overseen by Aphrodisia, she, like Agatha, cannot escape the shackles of patriarchy as she must ultimately answer to the (male) Prefect, Quintianus. Although this community is governed by a female presence, it cannot function independently from the patriarchal structures of the male macro-society which maintain power over it and allow it to exist.

The female micro-community of Aphrodisia's brothel is ironically reminiscent of the structure of a convent, which is also an enclosed space of women who are governed by a more powerful woman such as an Abbess, Prioress, or Mother Superior. Once again, the woman managing the convent,

much like Aphrodisia, must answer to a higher male authority such as a bishop. This parallel demonstrates that regardless of the type of lifestyle that women led, the structures surrounding them were often similar. Whilst men could access starkly different walks of life, and could potentially progress to higher positions, where the limiting factor was usually class, women were prevented from doing the same because of their gender. Regardless of their walk of life, they were always, in one way or another, subordinate to masculine authority.

It is significant that Quintianus sends Saint Agatha to a brothel in the hope of breaking her resolve to remain chaste instead of attempting to possess her sexually himself through rape. Quintianus's actions are therefore about more than simple sexual desire. He not only wants to possess Agatha's body, but also her mind. It is not enough for him to have sexual intercourse with her, he also wants her to desire him and to abandon her Christian ideals and identity. This raises questions as to the extent to which the tortures to which Agatha is submitted are sexual because, as pointed out by Beresford (2010a: 141), rape is threatened (in Agatha's case by being sent to a brothel) but never actualized. Quintianus's desire to exert power over Agatha is significant within the context of the destabilization of a gendered identity because he is intent not only on exercising a physical form of masculinity over her (through penetrative intercourse) but also a cerebral form of masculinity through his yearning for her to conform to his religion and way of thinking.

In a discussion surrounding Saint Barbara (another virgin martyr whose breasts were severed), Robert Mills explains that 'The saint's body is imagined in the throes of extreme sexualized violence — her breasts, too, are removed — while she simultaneously remains inviolate and

sexually pure. This conveys an essential and ubiquitous hagiographic paradox: the juxtaposition of violence and virginal impermeability' (2006: 117). The threat of rape, as discussed by Beresford (2010a: 141), can therefore be analysed in contrast to the virgin martyrs' 'virginal impermeability'. No matter how many times rape is threatened, or sexual relations suggested (in the case of Saint Agatha, who gets sent to a brothel, this threat would have been particularly tangible), the virgin martyrs' virginity remains intact.

The rape narrative is an important one to discuss with regard to Saint Agatha. Quintianus' decision not to rape her points towards a reading of his actions being about control. In fact, her resolve and convictions are the only part of her that he is unable to control. Although she is not raped, the allusion to a phallic penetration is present throughout the legend, including a section at the end when Quintianus orders that she be rolled over potshards, an action that reflects the beginning of the narrative: 'E mandó derramar tejas agudas e menudas, e traer brasas encendidas e bolcarla sobre ellas' (lines 106–07). This torture would have torn at her skin causing multiple wounds over the entire surface area of her body. This section occurs at the end of the legend, but it symbolically mirrors the attempted violations when Agatha was sent to the brothel, at the start. Quintianus wants to possess her but cannot. Therefore, he desires to destroy that which he cannot possess. On a metaphorical level, it is a 'symbolic representation of the multiple phallic violations that she has managed so diligently to avoid' (Beresford 2010a: 144). The metaphor of penetration is one that is frequently apparent in hagiography in the case of both male and female saints and will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter. However, in the case of Saint Agatha, it could be construed as a symbolic act of rape. Each cut represents the penetrations that she resisted when she was sent to the brothel.

Having resisted the attempted penetrations in the brothel, and remained sexually intact, Agatha is presented with the ultimatum of renouncing her faith and worshiping pagan Gods or undergoing torture.[13] As a result of her refusal to comply with his demands, Quintianus orders that Agatha's breast be tortured and severed. The severing of Saint Agatha's breast is the torture with which she is most commonly associated. However, in the legend in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, it is described in only two lines:

> E oyendo esto, Quinciano mandóla atormentar cruelmente en la una teta; e después, mandógela cortar. (lines 69–70)

There is a differentiation between the torture of the breast and the actual severing of it. The text is not particularly specific; it only says that her breast was tortured cruelly. Therefore, because of the lack of detail found in the text, it is necessary to rely upon visual representations of Saint Agatha's martyrdom.

[13] See lines 40–42.

Fig. 3. *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, Gaspar de Palencia, c. 1578. Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao.

Gaspar de Palencia's portrayal of Saint Agatha's mastectomy is important with regard to the study of her martyrdom because it is one of the few works of art that depicts the torture as opposed to a

representation of her celestially reconstituted posthumous self.[14] In this painting, Agatha is sitting down whilst two men cut her breasts with what appear to be Turkish clip points. The weapons that Gaspar de Palencia has chosen to facilitate Agatha's mastectomy are an important part of the characterization of the torturers as the orientalized other, thus demonizing Muslims and pointing towards Ottoman alterity.[15] The pale, saintly, and Christian body of Saint Agatha is being cut by two men whose features are grotesque and distorted. Their features appear unnatural and exaggerated. Both men are wearing orientalizing headgear; the man on the right is wearing a turban, and the man on her left is wearing a cloth headpiece. In contrast, Agatha, who is naked from the waist up except for a veil that covers most of her hair, is represented as a beautiful woman; it is only her breasts that appear to have been cut—the rest of her body is completely intact. Perhaps this is reminiscent of the fact that her spirit and her body are (sexually) pure, despite attempts to undermine her chastity. At first sight, Agatha is a clear focal point: visually, she stands out from her surroundings, which are quite dark. She, on the other hand is very pale, connoting her purity and virginity. Her breasts are approximately in the centre of the composition, and the eye is therefore drawn to them. They are perfectly round and in line with the beauty standards of the

[14] For an in-depth study of different depictions of Saint Agatha's martyrdom in art, see Lewison (1950).

[15] This painting was produced seven years after the battle of Lepanto in which a fleet of the Holy League defeated a fleet of the Ottoman Empire. This victory had a significant impact on morale in Europe. The news of the battle of Lepanto would have heightened or renewed anti-Ottoman sentiment, which is reflected in Gaspar de Palencia's painting. For further information on the battle of Lepanto, see Capponi (2007).

sixteenth century. The torturers do not seem to be exerting much force to keep Agatha in place; she offers no resistance, and instead calmly accepts her fate, which is a common trope in the legends of the martyrs.

Liana de Girolami Cheney uses the phrase 'porno-violent hagiography' (1996: 5) to describe the depiction of the martyrdom of Saint Agatha. This choice of words is indicative of the ways in which female virgin martyrs are often portrayed in works of art. Despite the religious nature of the paintings, there are often sexually sadistic undertones where it is not only the torturers who appear to be enjoying the scene that they are not merely witnessing but also perpetrating, but the external viewer is also invited to take a form of sexual pleasure in the image in front of them. In Gaspar de Palencia's painting, the four men who are watching the scene unfold become perpetrators of the male gaze upon Agatha's tortured body. In turn, the extra-diegetic viewer of the painting also takes on this role. Not only is Agatha's body a locus of torture, but it is also a locus of fetishistic scopophilia. Her body and face are beautiful, and her breasts are perfect other than the incision visible in each one.

In this artistic representation of Saint Agatha's martyrdom, it is the severing of the breast that is highlighted as opposed to the unspecified cruel torture mentioned in the text. However, as pointed out by Kirstin Wolf 'In a great number of scenes of physical mutilation in the legends of female virgin saints, the focus of torture is on the saint's breasts. The statement that the virgin's breasts were battered, burned, pierced, cut, or severed entirely occurs so regularly in the legends that it is nearly formulaic' (1997: 103). The emphasis on the breasts of these female virgin martyrs is

significant because it would support the idea that there is a latent sexual sadism present in the legends. In Agatha's case, the lack of specificity causes the audience to imagine what these tortures might have been. In some depictions of mammary tortures of other female saints, their breasts are bound by ropes which are tightened. In others, the breast is tortured with pincers or burned with fire. The word 'cruelmente' in the original text is the only descriptor of the way in which Agatha's breasts were tortured, and it is the imaginations of audiences that have subsequently created narratives including ropes, fire, and pincers.

In Saint Agatha's legend there is a temporal dimension that accounts of martyrdoms sometimes lack. Here, it is clear that her breast was not cut off immediately; instead, Agatha was forced to endure unspecified tortures to her breast before it was forcibly removed.[16] Whilst the legends of the *Gran flos sanctorum* are primarily catalysts to expressions of piety, their purpose being to recount the lives of martyrs, making them accessible to the average person, this text also invites audiences to imagine various possibilities regarding the exact nature of the tortures to which Agatha was subjected.[17]

[16] Many works of art depicting the severing of Saint Agatha's breast interpret this torture as using pliers to pull on her nipples or even her entire breasts.

[17] Texts such as the *Gran flos sanctorum* would have been read to the congregation in Church services, thus making them accessible to all, even those who were illiterate.

In western society, the breast is a sexually charged body part, however, biologically, it is not a sexual organ, but merely a secondary sexual characteristic. It has been eroticized by men, which would suggest that the decision to torture it comes from a sadomasochistic sexual desire. Thomas J. Heffernan argues that 'In the overwhelming majority of scenes of physical abuse in the lives of virgin saints, the focus of the torture is the symbol of woman's maternity and sexuality, the breasts' (1988: 283). This is accurate to a great extent in that many of the virgin martyrs are subjected to torture upon their breasts. Furthermore, both in literature and artistic representations of the martyrdoms of the virgin saints whose breasts are tortured, it is this torment that is highlighted. This would explain why the breast is tortured instead of what could be called a torture of the genitals (or rape). The torture of the virgin martyrs is not about sex or sexual gratification, but about power (much like rape itself). However, the breast is a symbol of femininity, it is a sensitive area of the body, and it is something that society dictates ought to hidden from the public gaze. The breast is chosen for torture as a violation of femininity and chastity, with an added shock factor that would not necessarily occur with the torture of different body parts.

It could be argued that one of the reasons for Saint Agatha's breasts being tortured and forcibly removed is that it is an attack on a feminine identity as well as an attempt to spoil her; up until this point, her virginal body is intact and beautiful to the male scopophilic gaze. However, by mutilating her breasts, Quintianus attempts to disfigure her and render her ugly. Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection could be applied to this torture because the breast, that was once whole and intact, has been removed from its place on the body, and having been severed, it revealed that which ought to be firmly in place within the body. It would have exposed bodily matter including fat, tissue, and ligaments. This is one aspect of abjection; that which ought to be inside the body is

now outside and visible. The result of this matter no longer being contained in the body is a feeling of disgust and abjection. As a consequence of being severed, the breast is neither subject nor object. It is disassociated from the body whilst remaining part of it, and so has lost its cultural and biological significance.

Martha Easton suggests that Quintianus ordered that her breasts be tortured because it is perhaps 'sadistically titillating to him' (1994: 97). Agatha sexually rejected him, and in response, he focuses his tortures on her most visible outward symbol of sexuality. John Anson argues that the torture of the breasts 'bring[s] to the surface a latent sexual sadism of great psychological interest' (1974: 27). This would suggest that the torture of the breast is indeed a sexual one, which is plausible from the perspective of Quintianus who not only wanted to convert Agatha from Christianity, but also wanted to possess her sexually. Anson (1974: 27 n. 69) also notes that the severing of the breast could represent the pre-execution defloration of virgins that was practised in order to meet the Roman law that forbade the execution of virgins. However, should this explanation be correct, it does not render impossible a psychological interest in sexual sadism. Therefore, it might be more judicious to consider the torture of her breast in a similar way to rape; as an act of power instead of one that is inherently sexual. However, it may not be necessary to categorize the torture and severing of the breast as merely one thing; perhaps it is more judicious to understand Agatha and the tortures to which she submitted as a combination of sex and suffering: she 'becomes a conflation of sacrificial victim and sexual woman' (Beresford 2010: 116).

After Quintianus has ordered that her breasts be tortured and severed, she berates him and describes her spiritual breasts:

> Tirano cruel e malo, ¿cómo non as vergueña de cortar en la fenbra lo que mamaste en tu madre mesma? Yo he otras tetas entregas en la mi alma que consagré al Señor desde la mi niñez, e con ellas dó yo a los mis sesos fartura de leche. (lines 70–73)

Agatha describes her spiritual breasts as existing independently of her earthly breasts. The version of her that will be a *sponsa Christi* is therefore whole, complete, and untainted by the tortures and scopophilic gaze of Quintianus. Her earthly breasts are of little consequence because her spiritual breasts remain untouched. Perhaps her heavenly breasts symbolize her chastity and the fact that she is returning to God pure and intact despite all that has happened to her. To an extent, it is also a way of undoing and remedying the torments that she suffered on Earth in order to gain her sanctity.

Agatha puts the breast on a symbolic pedestal, as if it were something sacred in itself, in its function as a life-sustaining organ. She compares herself to Quintianus's own mother at whose breast he suckled as a baby, which likens her to the Virgin Mary as the universal mother. Furthermore, Agatha refers to the fact that she has other breasts that are intended for Christ, the ultimate celestial bridegroom. Not only are they reserved for God, but they also feed her brain with spiritual milk. The idea that milk has the power to nourish spiritually as well as physically is a Marian one, as the Virgin not only fed Christ with the milk from her breasts, but also feeds all Christians a spiritual milk. Agatha is thus represented as a Marian surrogate figure, who, despite her virginity, has breasts that can produce spiritual milk. The paradox here is twofold; not only is there the

contradiction of the lactating virgin, but also that of a spiritual food source. Such contradictions and paradoxes are intrinsic to Christian doctrine and are exemplified through figures such as the Virgin Mary who encompasses virginity and motherhood.

Despite the horrific tortures that Agatha has undergone, she remains sharp-witted and always has a response for Quintianus. This is ironic because he is her senior, but she takes on the role of the reprimanding mother. In fact, Agatha becomes three persons in one: the virgin, the lactating mother, and the celestial bride. She emulates the Virgin Mary by being the pure virgin who rejects Quintianus's advances and who was able to leave the brothel unscathed and untouched. She becomes the lactating mother because of the way in which she interacts with Quintianus in this section: she speaks to him as one would a small child who has misbehaved. This is jarring considering the context: her life is in his hands, and he has made his intentions to cause her pain very clear. However, she scolds him, as a mother would. Quintianus is a Prefect, and she is merely a young girl, but despite this she is able to best him. It could therefore be argued that she derives a certain power from the characteristics that she has adopted, namely, that of the virgin and the mother. She reprimands him without fear, inverting power dynamics and demonstrating the fact that she fears neither the man who is threatening her, nor the corporeal pain of martyrdom. By means of her reprimand, she infantilizes Quintianus by speaking to him as though he were a child and doing so in the presence of people over whom he would have had power, which would also have caused him embarrassment. Finally, Agatha is the celestial bride in the sense that she has saved her spiritual and physical body for the celestial bridegroom. By encompassing these three roles, Agatha becomes a trinitarian being, reflecting the Holy Trinity that lies at the heart of Christian doctrine.

Saint Peter visits Agatha when she is in prison, and she is unashamed by his gaze:

> Yo non he por qué aver vergueña, como tú seas viejo e de grant hedat, e yo esté llagada de tan grant crueldat, que non avría onbre que me pudiese en este estado cobdiciar. (lines 84–86)

From this section of the text, one must assume that when Saint Peter comes to visit her, he is able to see her body, specifically where her breast ought to have been. Her lack of shame is noteworthy because it signifies that she perceives herself as being desexualized or too ugly to be found sexually attractive and thus her purity is not at stake. Having been rendered abject, the gaze cannot derive scopophilic pleasure from her form, but can only recoil in horror. Notions of shame and nudity point to the Garden of Eden and the Fall. Agatha's lack of shame evokes a return to a state of prelapsarian grace, and she is presented as being untouched by the Fall. However, as a morally and physically pure being, Agatha is presented as a Marian antithesis of Eve, and therefore, separate from this sense of shame. The question of whether Quintianus attempted to defeminize or desexualize her ought to be discussed. To a great extent, both are true; he has attacked her feminine life-sustaining organ, and by the same token, that which many find sexually attractive in women: the breast. Easton (2002: 57) discusses the complexities that lie in the nudity of female virgin martyrs because nakedness can connote virginity as well as fallen virginity, purity as well as shame. Some of the virgin martyrs (like Agatha) claim that they are unashamed, whilst others grow hair to cover themselves.[18]

[18] In the legend of Saint Agnes, when she is stripped, her hair suddenly grows long enough to cover her entire body. For the full text, see Beresford (2007a: 71–80).

Finally, a third pair of breasts come into being— those that Saint Peter restores to her while she is in prison:

> el viejo sonrrióse e dixo: 'E yo, fija, el su apóstol só, e él me enbió a ty. E sepas que en el su nonbre eres sana.' E luego desaparesció el apóstol Sant Pedro. E catándose Santa Ágata, fallóse toda sana e tornada la teta a los pechos. (lines 90–93)

Here, Agatha's breasts are restored to their original state, and it is as if the torture to which they were submitted has been washed away. This miracle represents the power of God over the pagan forces that Quintianus embodies. On the one hand, if Agatha has devoted herself to God and therefore has decided to lead a virginal life, one might question her need for the breast that has been severed, and why Saint Peter restored it in the name of God. She would have no need of it to fulfil its life-sustaining function of nourishing a child, and she has chosen not to use it or allow it to be used as an object of fetishistic scopophilia. It could be argued that Saint Peter healed her to prove God's omnipotence, thus assisting Agatha in her rhetoric when she would next face Quintianus, or that he was merely healing her for her own benefit. However, this does not necessarily comply with the usual pattern of martyrdom. Suffering was essential to martyrdom; it was a prerequisite for salvation. Whilst the healing of her breast does not negate her previous suffering, it does alleviate it, even if it does so after the event. While both options are likely, another option ought to be considered: that Saint Peter restored her breast so that she may truly become a *sponsa Christi*. Heffernan (1988: 277) argues that a wealthy young maiden such as Agatha must renounce her privilege and undergo physical suffering to become a *sponsa Dei*. Once the maiden has become the bride, she can then begin her transformation into *mater Dei*. The three states represent three different aspects of medieval womanhood: the sexually attractive yet unattainable

nymph/goddess, her emergence into complete sexual maturity as the *sponsa Dei*, and finally, the mother. Saint Peter heals Agatha's breast, not in an act of re-sexualization, because the celestial bridegroom would not want to enjoy Agatha and her body sexually, but instead it is a reward for her heroic sacrifice and allegiance to Christ. It is significant to note that Agatha has never been to a doctor nor used medicine because she believes Christ to be the divine doctor and the one who will heal her should he deem her worthy:

> Yo he por físico al mi señor Jhesu Christo, e quando a él plaze, él sana todas las enfermedades e llagas por sola su palabra. E si quisiere, él me puede sanar. (lines 88–90)

Irmo Marini (2011: 5) explains that this logic was prevalent in medieval Europe, where there was the widely held belief from the Old Testament that chronic illness and disability were intrinsically linked to sin against God and that they were divine punishments. God alone had the power to heal people from these afflictions, as Agatha points out to Saint Peter. Larissa Tracy points out that Agatha's 'body heals sufficiently each time so that she maintains her virginal aspect and her feminine beauty is preserved' (2012: 58). This is significant with regard to the notion of a destabilization of femininity because despite Quintianus's attempts to defeminize her, he is not able to do so. In fact, she becomes almost hyper-feminine because she appears to have the ability to regenerate her breasts, reproducing female life-sustaining organs.

Fig. 4. *Saint Agatha,* Rafael Vergós, c. 1500. Art Institute, Chicago.

This painting is a posthumous representation of Saint Agatha in which she is standing in regal clothing made of red, blue, and gold material. In one hand she is holding a palm leaf, and in the

other, a small platter with her breasts on it.[19] However, she is also anatomically complete and beautiful.

Upon a close observation of the breasts that Saint Agatha is holding on the platter, it is possible to see a ring of blood surrounding their base. This is an allusion to the actual severing of her breasts. This subtle detail creates a contrast with the rest of the painting as Agatha is represented as perfect and unscathed. It is important to note that although there is a ring of blood around them, the breasts themselves do not appear to have been in any way mutilated or mangled, as they ought to have been following the tortures to which they would have been subjected. In fact, they are round and perfect. This could point towards the fact that Agatha herself has emerged from these tortures

[19] Saint Agatha is often depicted holding her breasts on a little tray, and as such has not only become the patron saint of breast cancer (and other diseases of the breast) but also of bakers because her breasts have often been mistaken for buns. On the saint's feast day, special buns are made and eaten in honour of Agatha. For more information on the celebration of the feast of Saint Agatha and the idea of eating the saintly body, see Lewis (2020: 287–305).

spiritually uncorrupted and with her virginity intact, despite the many attempts to break her resolve and to violate her sexually. This painting is immediately recognisable as depicting Saint Agatha because of the association of the severed breast with her tale. There is no reference to any of the other tortures she endured. This is typical, and typically reductive, of iconographic trends.[20]

The blue dress that she is wearing is similar to that in which the Virgin Mary is often portrayed, thus comparing the two women. The palm leaf is the archetypal emblem of the virgin martyrs and represents victory, which Agatha has achieved over her pagan oppressors. It serves as a reminder of Christ's entrance into Jerusalem, marking the beginning of his journey towards the Crucifixion. Agatha's face is strikingly beautiful and perfectly formed. Her outer beauty reflects her spiritual purity. There are pearls on the brooch that holds her cloak in place. Pearls are a symbol of purity and virginity and are often associated with the Virgin Mary. Despite Quintianus's torments, Agatha has maintained a Marian chastity and has remained anatomically and sexually intact. They also symbolize salvation, which is particularly appropriate for a posthumous depiction of Saint Agatha because she has reached salvation and sanctity through her toils.

Posthumous representations of Saint Agatha are particularly important when trying to reach an understanding of her legend as it is written in the *Gran flos sanctorum* because they provide an insight into the way in which she was perceived by medieval Castilian people. The question of whether the severing of the breast could be perceived as a process of ungendering has been

[20] It is common for saints to become their emblems through a process of essentialization.

discussed by various critics. Wolf (1997: 110) claims that the amputation of the breasts presents the defeminization of the saint, arguing that this is essential for her salvation. However, this argument is seriously flawed because in visual representations of Saint Agatha, such as Fig. 4, she is portrayed as anatomically complete and undeniably female. She is celebrated as a female saint, and her femininity is part of her sanctity. She takes on Marian qualities, which are necessarily feminine. In posthumous representations, she is portrayed as anatomically complete and perfect, and therefore the quintessentially feminine bride of Christ, having embodied the feminine ideals of virginity and (symbolic) motherhood, becoming a *sponsa Christi*. Beresford (2010a: 142) poses the question of whether Saint Agatha is ungendered when her breasts are cut off and then re-feminized when Saint Peter restores them while she is in prison and comes to the conclusion that this is not in fact the case, but it is important to contemplate this as a possibility. While Agatha is often defined in her popular portrayal through her breasts or lack thereof, her identity as a *sponsa Christi* does not depend upon this part of her anatomy. Beresford (2010a: 143) explores this notion further when he claims that when Agatha speaks to Saint Peter, she is not speaking as an ungendered person, but as a daughter of the Church. She does not renounce her feminine identity after her forced mastectomy and her personal sense of identity does not change as a result. When Saint Peter visits her in prison, she is unashamed, not because she has been defeminized or masculinized by the forced mastectomy, but instead, because she believes that she can no longer be an object of fetishistic scopophilia and is no longer sexually pleasing to the gaze. Agatha's forced mastectomy does not undermine her femininity; it merely temporarily (because her breast is restored) removes an external marker of her femininity.

Saint Christina

Saint Christina's legend is often associated with Saint Agatha's because she also underwent a forced mastectomy. However, her tortures were more varied and extensive, attacking different facets of her identity.[21] Christina was brought up in a pagan household but secretly converted to Christianity. Despite the proposals that she received from eligible bachelors, her parents did not accept any of them because they wanted her to remain a virgin in order to devote her life to serving the pagan gods. In contrast to Saint Agatha, whose decision to remain a virgin was hers alone, Christina's virginity is, at first, enforced by her parents. However, once she converts to Christianity, she is able to take ownership of her chastity and become a *sponsa Christi*. Whilst she exerts autonomy in her choice to devote her body to Christ, it nevertheless belongs to a patriarchal structure. In this sense, she has progressed from belonging to her father as a child, to belonging to the pagan gods, and finally to belonging to Christ.

The notion of power is prevalent in Saint Christina's legend in a similar way to that of Saint Agatha. Christina also has responses to everything that her opponents say to her. She demonstrates her intelligence not only through her eloquence, but also in her ability to grasp complex theological concepts such as the Holy Trinity. After her father expresses his confusión regarding her religious convictions 'Si tú adoras tres dioses, ¿por qué non adoras a los otros dioses?' (line 21), clearly failing to grasp the concept of the Holy Trinity, Christina replies 'El Dios a quien yo adoro es tres

[21] For studies and further references on Saint Christina, see Heffernan (1988), Farmer (2003: 238), Crachiolo (2004), and Tracy (2012).

personas e una divinidat' (lines 22–23).[22] She reduces the trinitarian concept to a simple line, yet her father still fails to understand. Once again, the power of female rhetoric trumps the arguments of pagan men, revealing Christina's strength and intellectual prowess as well as the concomitant absence of them in other religions. Christina gains the upper hand over not just one, but three men, who all torture her with the intention of breaking her resolve. First, she is tortured by her father, who demands that she worships the pagan gods. When she refuses to comply, he orders that she endure a myriad of tortures, including beatings (lines 28–29), a torment in which she is tied to a wheel, doused with oil, and burned with fire (lines 46–48), and that she be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied to her neck (lines 49–50). Christina remains unphased by these atrocities and one night, her father dies. The Prefect, Dion, subsequently replaces her father, and after forcing Christina to endure various other tortures, he too, dies. Julianus takes over from Dion, but despite his best efforts to make Christina bend to his will, she also bests him.

The destabilization of identity is prevalent in the tortures that Christina endures in an attempt to make her renounce her faith:

> E Dión fizo fazer una cuna de fierro, e fízola fenchir de azeyte e resina e pez, e mandóla encender, e mandó echar dentro a Santa Christina, e que mesciesen quatro omnes la cuna por que se quemase más aýna Santa Christina. E Santa Christina veyendo aquesto, començó a dar grandes loores al Señor porque la quería fazer poner en la cuna, asý como a niña que fuera engendrada por el baptismo poco avía. (lines 61–65)

[22] All quotations from the legend of Saint Christina are taken from Beresford (in press a).

Dion orders that oil, resin, and pitch be poured onto Christina.[23] This would have coated her in this sticky mixture which would have clung to her skin, transforming her appearance. This is symbolically significant because she would have appeared to have undergone a dermal transformation from white to black. Postcolonial theory can be implemented in this analysis, particularly the work of Edward Said where he explains that 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus, the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal".' (2003: 40). This creates a clear distinction, not only visually, but also in character between those with dark skin and those with light skin. If this is applied to Christina, her once white skin is covered by a thick layer of a black, sticky substance, creating a visual dermal transformation (albeit artificially and temporarily). Therefore, according to postcolonial theory, she becomes an object of repudiation; the self becomes other. It is important to remember that from the perspective of those who would have listened to this legend in an ecclesiastical setting, it is the Romans who were torturing her who would have been considered as other. Therefore, the notion of the intradiegetic and extradiegetic audience is of vital importance when considering this section of Christina's legend. In the eyes of the intradiegetic audience (the Romans witnessing Christina's torture) the mixture that is being poured onto her is turning her into an object of repudiation, whereas for the medieval extradiegetic audience (the Christians listening to the legend during Church services) Christina's temporary dermal transformation is ironic because it is the pagan Romans who are other, not Christina. Therefore, different meanings and characterizations can be

[23] Pitch is a sticky substance that is usually black or dark brown in colour. It is liquid when hot, but as it cools, it becomes hard. It is used for waterproofing.

applied to this section of the legend depending on whether one is witnessing the scene from an intradiegetic or an extradiegetic perspective.

Having coated Saint Christina's skin in a dark substance and set her alight, the mixture of oil, resin, and pitch would have constituted a vehicle for burns to her skin as it would have caused the mixture to reach very high temperatures. Oil is used for a variety of purposes, but those that are most symbolically pertinent are that it is used for anointing and cooking. It is often used in Christian rites, such as baptism. During a baptism, the head is anointed with oil. Christina has just been baptized (see lines 50–53) and the oil that is used to torture her is symbolically anointing her as she undergoes this torture that provides an example of *imitatio Christi*. However, the oil that is often used for anointing within Christian rites is here being used to cook Christina. The cradle becomes a cooking pot, in which Christina is therefore fried. She is cooked as one would a piece of meat. In this sense, she is animalized. Her body has become a symbolic article of consumption as it is treated like meat to be eaten by humans, which raises issues surrounding the perpetrators of this torture. If Christina is being treated like meat to be consumed, they must be the consumers, which points towards cannibalism. The notion of cannibalism is significant because it is a means of othering those who are torturing her. They dehumanize themselves through that which is considered savage and barbaric behaviour.[24] This issue remains in the symbolic realm, but it represents a boundary sign. Everything on one side of it is acceptable in what Western powers

[24] Issues surrounding cannibalism will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter. For further information, see Hulme (1998) and Irwin (2001).

have described as a civilized society, and everything on the other side of it is barbaric and immoral. Beresford (in press b 38–39) explains that the boundary sign represented by anthropophagy is that which renders it taboo. Boundary signs create clear distinctions between self and other. As soon as a boundary such as cannibalism is crossed, the subject immediately transitions from being part of the self to becoming other. Therefore, in the context of the legend of Saint Christina, the metaphorical cannibalism alluded to through the cooking motif pushes the Roman other further from the self.

It is significant that Christina is placed in a cradle. A cradle is an object that is used to rock babies and small children to sleep. She is therefore infantilized by being laid in it. Christina would have been rather young in this legend, but nevertheless of marriageable age (as she was receiving offers from various suitors), and thus too old to sleep in a cradle. By infantilizing her, Dion attempts to render her helpless and dependent. Ironically, Christina finds spiritual satisfaction in this infantilization as she claims that her experiences are reminiscent of those a baby being baptized. That which Dion might have perceived as a torment is a symbolic rebirth. Having just been baptized, Christina is now placed in a cradle, thus marking the beginning of her new life devoted to Christ.[25] Moreover, the crib is a bed (albeit a child's one), and so the fact that she is put in a type of bed is equally suggestive of sexual activity. This is particularly significant in this text because of the emphasis on the relationship between identity and virginity; Christina is one of the virgin martyrs, and it is her virginal state that enables her to become a bride of Christ, thereby aiding her passage to sainthood. The allusion to sexual acts is uncomfortable about as it brings to

[25] For Christina's baptism, see lines 50–53.

mind notions of paedophilia as well as ritual child sacrifice, which causes the audience to feel uneasy.

Furthermore, the cradle represents an inversion of roles; cradles have a maternal and feminine association, as childcare is something that is traditionally carried out by women. However, this maternal, feminine symbol has been turned into something used for violent purposes, suddenly giving it masculine connotations because violence has traditionally been associated with the masculine. The use of the cradle as an instrument of torture creates discomfort and unsettlement because it is an enclosed space that represents safety and nurture, but here, it has been turned into a locus of pain and torment. There is an element of perversion in the use of something intended for children for Christina's torture. The henchmen tasked with her torture also undergo a destabilization of gender. They are ordered to rock the cradle in order for the liquid to burn Christina more thoroughly, mimicking the action of a mother who might be rocking her child to sleep. This destabilizes their hyper-masculine identities that have been created through their use of violence as a means of subjugating others. However, if this torture is considered as a symbolic rebirth for Christina after her recent baptism, like a mother who rocks her baby and leads it into new stages of life, these four henchmen also rock Christina in her cradle of torture signifying the start of her life as a *sponsa Christi*.

Christina's skin is the focal point of the torture discussed above: it is covered in a sticky, black substance, and then it is burned. It becomes a significant external marker of identity, and as such, these tortures would have been visually shocking to onlookers. In a similar manner to the skin,

hair can also be an important marker of identity.[26] Anthony Synnott explains that 'Hair is perhaps our most powerful symbol of individual and group identity—powerful first because it is physical and therefore extremely personal, and second because, although personal, it is also public rather than private' (1987: 381). An obvious exception would be someone who chooses to cover their hair, for example a nun. However, even the choice to cover one's hair is public, and as such is a symbol of both an individual identity, but also a group identity, as Synnott explains. Vicente Beltrán Pepió (1976: 53) asserts that long, flowing hair was a symbol of virginity in the medieval period, and that this symbolism can extend to combing, losing, and washing hair.[27] Hair, and especially a woman's hair, was thus perceived as having great significance. Margaret Sleeman (1981: 324) explains that the *fueros*, which were legal documents that incorporated local codes and customs, listed various penalties for grabbing a woman by the hair, thus implying that somehow violating a woman's hair was in turn a violation of her honour.[28] This would further

[26] Frenk argues that hair, and its symbolism is prevalent in many medieval Hispanic lyrics, and often connotes virginity but can also accompany the wind to connote sexuality: 'Estos mis cabellitos, madre, / dos a dos se los lleva el aire' (1993: 11).

[27] Hair symbolism is often apparent in traditional Hispanic poetry, and it is sometimes coupled with other types of symbolism. For example, Morales Blouin (1981: 205) discusses the significance of hair as a symbol of virginity, but that when it is washed, it is exposed to the fertile nature of flowing water, thus symbolizing the loss of virginity.

[28] This notion can be observed in the *Romanz del infant García*, when Fernán Laínez drags Sancha away from García's corpse by her hair and throws her down a flight of stairs. The connotations associated with hair suggest a form of symbolic rape or violation. See Alvar & Alvar (1991: 338).

support the claims that hair is a symbol of sexuality, and specifically a woman's sexual state (for example her virginity). The shaving of hair is often represented as a dramatic and significant change in a person's life, as is the case for Christina:

> E oyendo aquesto el adelantado, fue muy yrado, e fízole raer la cabeça e levar asý por la cibdat descubierta fasta el tenplo de Apolo. (lines 65–66)

Here, her hair is forcibly shaved, and she is paraded around the city naked. Anthony Beevor (2009) explains that the shaving of women's hair in the medieval era was a mark of shame designed to take away her most seductive feature: her hair. This was a common punishment for adultery and is a form of scopic humiliation, as the woman in question would have been singled out and noticed by onlookers who would then know of her transgressions. A shaved head is a punishment that lasts beyond the moment in which the shaving occurs because the shame that it would have incurred would have lasted until the hair grew back. By robbing Christina of an element of her beauty, her tormentors attempt to make ugly that which they cannot seem to control. Thus far in the legend, Christina has not bent to the will of her pagan opponents. They have been unable to control her will and her mind, and as such they try to assert power over her in the only way they are able: by controlling her physical body through torture.

The shaving of a woman's hair is a symbolically complex issue because on the one hand, hair can signify femininity and the embodiment of feminine beauty. However, on the other hand, as pointed out by Lynda Coon (2010: 34), short hair empowers women. The rejection of prescribed standards of femininity is a form of female empowerment; by taking on what society has deemed to be a masculine physical characteristic, women can subvert preconceived notions about what it means

to be a woman and indeed how femininity can be defined. The notion of empowerment is particularly pertinent in relation to Christina because whilst she did not choose to shave her hair, it has succeeded in making her less desirable to the heterosexual male gaze, which is important because she was saving herself for the eternal bridegroom and therefore did not want to attract the attention of other men.

In this section, Christina is stripped and taken to the Temple of Apollo. By making her walk through the streets naked, she is transformed into an object of fetishistic scopophilia because amongst those who would have been looking at her, many might have found sexual pleasure in her naked form. Nudity is a significant aspect of torture; usually, in order for torture to occur, the subject must be naked, or at least partially naked. The act of being stripped already generates a feeling of shame for the victim, especially in a society in which the body remained, to a great extent, covered in public. The breast would not have been exposed, therefore, to strip the subject of their clothes could be in itself considered to be a form of psychological torture. Heffernan explains that 'Although her nudity ought to suggest her vulnerable maidenly innocence, and hence parallels the figure of Christ stripped in preparation for his death on the cross, in this instance her nakedness does not present an icon of maidenly innocence, of human vulnerability, but rather serves to arouse the passions, to whet the bloody appetite of her aggressors' (1988: 280). This adds to the sexual nature of what is taking place because it is already implicit that the victim would be stripped. The description of the act itself highlights Christina's nudity, further sexualizing the torture because it forces the audience to imagine her being stripped and to visualize her naked form.

Laura Mulvey (1975: 9) argues that scopophilia is, by its very nature, active. In this legend, Christina is presented as an object of scopophilia, and by parading her through the streets naked, her tormentors are inviting onlookers to gaze at her naked body in an active and controlling way. Furthermore, Mulvey argues that 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female' (1975: 11). This is reflected in this scene because Christina is forced to adopt the passive role. However, despite the various tortures to which she is subjected (this one included) it is in fact Christina who, despite being passive, weilds power. She allows these tortures to happen without protesting, but it is because she wishes to suffer in the name of God, and in the end, she is proved to be more powerful than her aggressors.

Towards the end of Saint Christina's legend, she undergoes a forced mastectomy, ordered by the governor, Julianus:

> E el adelandato Juliano veyendo aquesto, mandóle cortar las tetas, e en lugar de sangre salió leche dellas. (lines 80–81)

Although this is the torture with which Saint Christina is most commonly associated, it is mentioned in passing, as is the case with Agatha, almost as a casual detail. The lack of narrative elaboration is breathtaking given the severity of the act. The audience becomes desensitized to the atrocities to which Christina is submitted because there is an endless list of them. Yet to maintain interest, this list must continue. There is no dramatization of her mastectomy, and it is recounted in a matter-of-fact manner. Whilst Agatha's legend alludes to the torture of the breast before its removal, Christina's does not. The text does not even describe the removal of Christina's breasts; only the order given. Easton (2002: 57) points out that the tortures that many of the female virgin

martyrs undergo are forms of sexual molestation. Although these punishments always fall short of rape, there is a clear attack on their female sexual and gendered identity. The removal of Christina's breast is another facet of the attack upon her feminine identity and her beauty; her hair is cut off followed by her breast. The shaving of her hair can thus be seen as a precursor to the mastectomy.

It is significant that it is milk that comes out of her wounds instead of blood. This would have shocked the intradiegetic audience who witnessed the severing of Christina's breast, as well the extra-diegetic audience who would have heard this legend in Church. From a biological perspective, it is impossible that there would have been milk in her breasts. This is thus a paradox of nature, creating a link between Christina and the Virgin Mary, suggesting that Christina possesses Marian purity. In the medieval period, milk and blood were linked in a crucial way. According to Yalom (1997: 44), they were understood to be, in essence, the same substance, and that a mother's milk came from her blood to nourish children. McLaughlin (1975: 115) highlights the importance of a child's access to its mother's milk within this context as it was its best chance of surviving an era with an alarmingly high infant mortality rate. It was a widely held belief that the foetus was nourished by blood while it was in the womb, but that upon the child's birth, this blood would be transferred to the breast and subsequently transformed into milk for the baby. This is significant when one considers the fact that when Christina's breasts are cut off, milk, not blood, flows from them. This could symbolize the transition put forward by Heffernan (1988: 277) of the maiden to the *sponsa Christi* to the *mater Dei*. Although Christina is not technically lactating, she offers a clear visual allusion to the *virgo lactans* whose identity as a virgin is destabilized as the phrase is oxymoronic. Having taken on the Marian role of *mater Dei*, Christina is therefore a mother to all. Consequently, when milk pours out of the wounds of her mastectomy, it could

spiritually nourish all who are present. Her milk is an opportunity for her pagan oppressors to achieve redemption and a religious *metanoia*.[29] They would benefit from this milk if they became Christian. This topos can also be observed with regard to the Virgin Mary. As *Ecclesia*, Mary provides spiritual nourishment to all of humanity, which is often represented as her giving her breast milk to others, for example in Fig. 2, and less literally, in Fig. 1:

[29] The term *metanoia* is used to describe a change of opinion or a change of heart. Within the religious context it is used to mean a spiritual conversion. For an example of religious metanoia, see the conversion of Saul in Acts 9.

Fig. 5. *Altarpiece of Santa Cristina*, Miquel Torell (attributed), last quarter of the fifteenth century. Girona, Museu d'Art.

Saint Christina's torture has been depicted through works of art such as Miquel Torell's altarpiece (Fig. 5). The panel pictured above provides a visual representation of the torture and severing of her breasts. She is tied by her wrists and ankles to a Saint Andrew's cross while two men rake her breasts with *ungulae* and Julianus oversees the torture.[30] Meanwhile, Christina's face remains

[30] *Ungulae* are rods with metal hooks that were used as a means of torture. They would be used to rake and individual's skin, causing painful wounds.

ostensibly impassable despite the gruesome tortures to which she is being submitted. The *ungulae* are ripping her flesh, drawing blood that trickles down her torso. These hooks must penetrate her skin to cause their intended damage. This is reminiscent of the penetration of a phallic violation, which is significant because of Christina's resolve to remain a virgin. The wounds caused by the *ungulae* act as symbolic phallic violations to Christina's body.

In addition, Saint Christina has been painted in such a way as to resemble Christ physically. At a swift glance, she could easily be mistaken for him. The wounds on her breasts are reminiscent of the wounds Christ received from the lance that pierced his side during the Crucifixion. This visual allusion to Christ suggests that Christina's body has been mapped onto his, and that she has become a surrogate Christ-like figure through her torments and subsequent *imitatio Christi*. Christina is wearing a loincloth that is remarkably similar to one that Christ often wears in representations of the Crucifixion. However, when Christ wears nothing but a loincloth, the viewer is not shocked, whereas in the case of Saint Christina, she is exposing an intimate part of her body that would otherwise have remained covered. This further points to the fact that Christina's body is being mapped onto that of Christ. She symbolically becomes a female Christ. This presents viewers with the issue of gender fluidity regarding the Messiah as in this painting, Christina appears as Christ with breasts—an idea that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

The notion of identity can be discussed further on consideration of the three men present in this painting. Julianus is overseeing Saint Christina's torture. He is pointing at her breast in a motion that suggests that he is telling his henchmen how to torture her. In his other hand, he is holding a

baton of office. This item, coupled with his beard, ought to connote authority, yet this is ironic because he has failed to control her. The man on the left-hand-side of the painting is portrayed as a classic fifteenth-century courtier. However, his legs are bare which suggests that he is less than civilized. This is a means of formulating him as an other to the viewer of this painting. Since he is one of the men torturing Christina, he is represented in opposition to her inherent goodness. This notion of othering is yet more apparent upon examination of the other torturer, on the right-hand-side of the image.

One of the most obvious ways in which the torturer on the right-hand side has been formulated as a figure of alterity is that he has been painted with dark skin. He has therefore been racially othered to the fifteenth-century Castilian viewer. Dermally, there is a significant contrast between him and Saint Christina, whose white skin connotes purity and innocence. The text has been modernized in this image for a fifteenth-century audience. The fear and dislike of the dark-skinned other, in this context, would have designated either the black or the Muslim man.[31] This type of image is a catalyst to prejudicial attitudes towards the dermal other as it maps Saint Christina's body onto the bodies of all the daughters of Spain and that of the dark-skinned torturer onto the bodies of Muslim men. The Romans who would have been torturing Saint Christina in this scene become black; one type of alterity morphs into another for a modernized audience. In this painting, there is a creation of an *us* and a *them*. Said explains that 'The boundary notion of East and West, the varying degrees

[31] It is vital to remember that in the context of Reconquest Iberia, the dark-skinned Muslim posed a perceived threat to white Spaniards. For an in-depth explanation of the historical background, see O'Callaghan (2003) and Moosa (2008).

of projected inferiority and strength […] the kinds of characteristic features ascribed to the Orient: all these testify to a willed imaginative and geographic division made between East and West' (2003: 201). Torell's altarpiece demonstrates a boundary that has been created between self and other, white and black, East and West. Saint Christina is a representation of all that is good from the West: she is a virgin martyr, a *sponsa Christi*, and she has stood up to pagan authorities, whereas the black man torturing her is an embodiment of that which was perceived as being the evil East; he is dark-skinned, violent, and there is an allusion to his baseness and hypersexuality.

Not only is this man dark-skinned, and therefore a dermal other, but he is also represented as being base and almost animalistic. His breeches are parted to reveal his backside and his underwear which seems to have been put on backwards, consequently exhibiting an allusion to a phallic bulge. The bulge (which would in fact have been empty since his underwear is on backwards) suggests that he is experiencing sexual arousal through his torture of Saint Christina which adds a perverse element to the scene. The baseness of a character is often represented by references to their lower bodily functions. In this case, the artist has used this somewhat grotesque portrayal to convey ideas surrounding the torturer's morals; the assumption is that if he appears to be animalistic and incapable even of dressing himself in a civilized way, then he must be immoral and incapable of identifying right from wrong. This is a stereotype that is prevalent in racist discourse whereby it is assumed that someone who is racially other is unable to understand basic moral notions.

The representation of women in religious imagery is sexualized to a significant extent. Ruth M. Karras considers the way in which women are sexualized and questions whether visual

representations of Saint Christina or Agatha having their breasts removed are 'about pain as a road to transcendence and salvation, or about misogyny? Are they "icons of invincibility," or are they pornography?' (2012: 69). The notion of pornography is intrinsic to this argument; it is a difficult term to define, and the boundaries around it are blurred. Andrea Dworkin (1981: 199) explains that the word pornography is derived from the ancient Greek *pornē* and *graphos*, which means *writing about whores*. She further explains that 'the word *pornography* does not mean "writing about sex" or "depictions of the erotic" or "depictions of sexual acts" or "depictions of nude bodies" or "sexual representations" or any other such euphemism. It means the graphic depiction of women as vile whores' (1981: 200). Whether or not the women depicted in religious imagery are 'icons of invincibility' or 'pornography' (Karras 2012: 69), they were portrayed by men. There is therefore an element of scopophilic power regardless of which description is chosen. These questions are pertinent, and to a certain extent, both cases could be argued. Although the images and literature surrounding the female virgin martyrs focus on the torture and mutilation of the breast, it was not the only torment they suffered. However, it is the one that is most often depicted and focused upon in art and literature. Easton (1994: 85) points out that despite Saint Agatha's torture taking on more than one form, practically all artistic representations of her martyrdom depict the moment when her breasts are removed with pincers. This begs the question of why the torture of the breast is so prevalent in artistic and literary depictions of the lives of these saints. Mills argues that 'The saint's body is imagined in the throes of extreme sexualized violence–her breasts, too, are removed–while she simultaneously remains inviolate and sexually pure. This conveys an essential and ubiquitous hagiographic paradox: the juxtaposition of violence and virginal impermeability' (2006: 117). The paradox that he describes causes a tension that is present throughout the legends of female virgin martyrs such as Agatha and Christina. The torturers go to

great lengths to violate their bodies, whether this be through attempted phallic violations or other bodily torments (often sexual in nature), yet the women always prevail, remaining intact. Karras develops her argument further; she points out that 'structural similarities between pornography and hagiography cannot be ignored: both are intended to call forth further action in the imaginations of viewers and readers' (2012: 69). This argument is particularly pertinent regarding female saints like Agatha and Christina, and a parallel can be drawn with the fact that both constitute a starting point intended to provoke further action from the viewer. There is also the possibility that some hagiography perhaps intends to arouse feelings other than those of devotion. It could be argued that the mutilation of the breast is the most defining feature of their martyrdoms and that portraying or emphasizing it in artistic representations makes saints such as Agatha and Christina easily recognisable. Whilst this is true, the fact that the scenes produce elements of sexual excitement because of the taboo nature of their appeal ought not to be disregarded.

In Saint Christina's legend, it is not merely her breast that is severed as an attack on her identity; her tongue is also cut off: 'E después mandóle cortar la lengua' (line 81). This is the final attempt to control her. Perhaps the cutting out of her tongue is an attempt to regain a power that has been lost to Christina's sharp mind and clear resolve. Despite their attempts to control the feisty virgin martyrs, the pagan men never prevail. These women always remain faithful to God, preserve their chastity, and ultimately have the upper hand in all the interactions they have with these men who are ridiculed and rendered powerless by these young girls. Tracy comments upon the fact that Christina's 'role as a woman is traditionally one of silence, her speech elevates her above the societal constraints of her gender' (2012: 43). Therefore, the severing of her tongue takes away the power that she had to surmount societal restrictions, thus disempowering her. Tracy points out that

the cutting out of the tongue 'for women represents the prohibition on female speech often expounded by Church authorities, derived from Pauline doctrine' (2012: 55).[32] Without a tongue, Christina cannot vocally articulate anything, thus being denied subjectivity to express who and what she is. Without a tongue, she cannot express her identity, and is therefore denied the ability to define this through speech—which she does particularly eloquently throughout the legend, to the embarrassment of her persecutors.

The severing of Saint Christina's tongue also carries symbolic significance. The tongue is not only a mechanism for speech, but it also partially resembles a phallus in shape. The severed tongue used as a weapon is reminiscent of the legend of Saint Paul of Thebes, in which a young Christian martyr is tied up in a garden and bites off his own tongue to spit into a prostitute's face who is attempting to rape him—a point discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. Beth Crachiolo argues that 'Christina's ability to see the narrative's truth of Christianity and pagan error, as well as her own future identity as a Christian martyr, is juxtaposed with pagan literal and spiritual blindness, and all of these issues have Christina's body as their locus' (2004: 159). Christina's body is therefore not only the locus of her own martyrdom, and the possibility of spiritual nourishment,

[32] In medieval times, women were discouraged from speaking, and could be punished for so doing by means of a torture device named the Scold's Bridle, which was a metal mask-like muzzle with a bridal-bit that would push the tongue down, inhibiting any movement and therefore speech, often with a metal spike. For further information, see Wayne (1985: 159–61).

but also that of a juxtaposition of spiritual sight/blindness.[33] The removal of her tongue takes away the masculine power of rhetoric that she possessed.[34] At this point, her most masculine attribute (her tongue) and her most feminine (her hair and breasts) have been severed and she is left with neither.[35] The gender identity Christina has created for herself by taking on the masculine power of speech but remaining quintessentially feminine and becoming a *sponsa Christi*, has been physically altered by Julianus.

In addition to the tongue representing Christina's ability to harness traditionally masculine characteristics and to use them to her advantage, it can also be regarded as quintessentially feminine; Sarah Schäfer-Althaus (2014: 156) explains that the mouth was linked to the female genitalia and that the tongue was often used as a parallel with the clitoris. The severing of Christina's tongue is a symbolic severing of another aspect of her feminine identity. Whilst the clitoris is not an obvious external marker of a gendered identity in the way that the breast is (as it can only be seen upon close examination of the female anatomy), it is nonetheless a body part that, like the breast, has no true parallel in the male body. The tongue therefore becomes a malleable signifier of identity. It is not an inherently gendered body part, and it is universal, much like the

[33] The notion of spiritual blindness is prevalent in the Bible, for example during Saul's *metanoia*, he becomes blind, but in finding his faith, he is healed.

[34] The art of rhetoric masculinises her as it was only taught to men. Through this masculinization and acquisition of this skill, she gains power that she would not have had otherwise.

[35] The hair and breasts are the most visible physical attributes linked to femininity. See Beresford (2010a: 121).

skin. However, whilst skin is used to differentiate between identities (as its colour can designate a racial identity), the tongue is not. Perhaps due to its universal nature, in Christina's case, the tongue represents both masculinity and femininity in the same way that Christina is able to harness and utilize aspects of both of these gender identities simultaneously.

Throughout Saint Christina's legend, her body is subjected to a plethora of tortures, none of which break her resolve. Maureen A. Tilley (1991: 467) describes the bodies of the martyrs as fields of combat where the perpetrators of torture and the martyrs duel. Christina's body is used as a locus for battle between herself and her father, Dion, and Julianus. However, symbolically, it represents the locus of battle between the unholy pagans and God. Despite all of the gruesome tortures that the pagans force her to endure, her will remains unchanged, and it is the God of Christianity who prevails. Not only is her body the locus of battle, but it is also a means of demonstrating God's religious power over secular exhibitions of authority.

Conclusion

The holy mastectomy affects the identity of its victim, provoking a type of change. It exemplifies the importance of the breast in both a religious and secular cultural context. When considering issues surrounding the breast, it is important to consider the wider social implications such as the way in which it is coded in different societies, and the way this can impact the perception of the breast. While the removal of the breast does not in itself provoke a change in gender identity; it does not ungender or masculinize a woman, it can have a different impact on the identity of the subject. The removal of the breast renders the subject abject as opposed to masculine. The forced

mastectomy has become the defining feature of certain virgin martyr saints who have become primarily associated with this element of their torture. In some cases, it is also a step towards achieving sainthood as physical suffering was necessary to be free from sin and to achieve sanctity through martyrdom and death in the name of Christ. Martyrdom was a blessing bestowed upon individuals chosen by God who would suffer in his name, and subsequently receive salvation.

When the breast is completely severed from the body and disassociated from the individual to whom it is attached, it loses sexual and maternal connotations. It thus becomes abject, being neither subject nor object, and ceasing to belong to the body. That which ought to be contained inside the body becomes visible, and a boundary line between inside and outside is blurred, which causes great unease. That which should belong to and be a part of the self becomes abject and other.

Both saints discussed in this chapter undergo a destabilization of femininity. However, the removal of one of the most visible markers of their feminine identity (the breast) is not the sole driving force behind this. They willingly adopt certain masculine traits in a way that empowers them, all the while remaining quintessentially female. Saint Agatha and Christina are celebrated and venerated as women and are regarded as icons of Christian femininity. They lived their lives as virgins and consequently became brides of Christ, fulfilling two aspects of the Marian triad of virgin, bride, and mother.

Chapter Two:

From Martyrdom to Asceticism: The Destabilization of Masculinity in the Legends of Saint Vincent and Saint Paul of Thebes

Introduction

Masculinity is more prone to destabilization than femininity because it is predicated upon power, which is constantly coveted. In many traditional societies, women are marginalized and oppressed, therefore the manifestation of the destabilization of femininity is starkly different to the way in which masculinity is destabilized. Whilst the violent destabilization of femininity results in abjection, the destabilization of masculinity results in feminization. This is because masculinity intrinsically holds power. The link between masculinity and power causes anxiety to maintain a prescriptive form of this identity. Raewyn Connell claims that 'Hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities [...] The interplay between different forms of masculinity is an important part of how a patriarchal social order works' (1987: 102). It is through these interactions that masculinity is affirmed or destabilized. Masculinity might be destabilized by an event, another person, or their own actions.

In order to discuss the destabilization of masculinity in the *Gran flos sanctorum,* it is essential to understand what is meant by medieval masculinity. Ruth Mazo Karras (2003: 2) describes it as the opposite of femininity, and Vern L. Bullough describes it as a threefold model of 'impregnating

women, protecting dependants, and serving as provider to one's family' (1994: 34). This description only encompasses the secular notion of medieval masculinity and, by nature, excludes the non-secular. This vision of medieval masculinity is one which is dependent on the interactions of men with other people, which suggests that masculinity cannot be asserted independently, but that it relies on its impact upon others. As pointed out by Mazo Karras, medieval masculinity was, to a great extent, about 'proving oneself superior to other men' (2003: 10). In many ways, this remains true in expressions of certain types of masculinity today.

Robert N. Swanson (1999: 161) poses a challenge to Bullough's statement by questioning where the clergy fit into this model. He claims that if Bullough's statement is accurate, then the clergy were not meant to be masculine, and therefore questions what their gender might be. Swanson argues that the clergy therefore belonged to a third gender, being neither masculine nor feminine, which he calls *emasculinity*. This would suggest that it is impossible for the clergy to be masculine, instead of accepting that they are able to be chaste and masculine. Whilst the critique of Bullough's definition is judicious, the notion of a third gender ought to be questioned because it does not allow scope for different types of masculinities. This argument assumes that masculinity can only be performed in a certain way, when, even in the medieval period, as evidenced in Mazo Karras's book *From Boys to Men* (2003), there existed various subcultures of masculinity. Mazo Karras (2003: 1) explains that different walks of life dictated different expectations of the way in which men ought to perform masculinity. Patricia H. Cullum states that 'priesthood was something to which only men could aspire; women were by their nature excluded from it. In this sense the priesthood was specifically male […] The authority which priests exercised was therefore quintessentially masculine' (1999: 184). Whilst women were embraced into the Church, they were

not given much power or responsibility within the greater hierarchical structure—certain women were able to ascend to roles of power such as prioresses or abbesses, but their power was limited to the control of other women, and ultimately, they answered to men. Women were also regarded by the Church as being impure and unclean by nature. Their religious status was a reflection of their position within society as a whole: subordinate to men. Whilst members of the clergy did not fit Bullough's definition of medieval masculinity, they remained quintessentially masculine through their walk of life.

Swanson argues that members of the clergy searching for a new gender could leave them 'in a state of gender limbo' (1999: 174). This becomes problematic because although priests were expected to renounce certain aspects of masculinity, they were required to be AMAB subjects.[1] The early Church was particularly strict on this principle and, as pointed out by Arnaud Fossier (2020: 36), it certainly did not accept men who had mutilated their genitals in an attempt to abstain from sexual activity. Matthew Kuefler (2001: 245) points out that the practice of castration was

[1] The term AMAB is used to designate an individual who is assigned male at birth, while AFAB designates a person assigned female at birth. These refer solely to their anatomy and do not necessarily have a bearing upon their gender identity. For a more in-depth explanation, see Spencer-Hall & Gutt (2021: 286–87).

perceived by the early Church as pagan and effeminate.[2] This shows the importance placed upon priests retaining certain elements of their masculinity but not others. Castration was not taken lightly in and was seen as a loss of something that went beyond the physical aspect of a man and altered his character and male essence.[3]

As pointed out by Vern L. Bullough, medieval notions of masculinity were predicated upon classical thinking. Aristotle (trans D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson 2014: 948–49) held that men were not only physically superior to women, but also morally superior. To support these claims, he looked to the animal kingdom:

> the female is softer in disposition, is more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive, and more attentive to the nurture of the young; the male, on the other hand, is more spirited, more savage, more simple and less cunning. The traces of these characteristics are more or less visible everywhere, but they are especially visible where character is the more developed, and most of all in man. (Bullough 1994: 31)

The classical thinking regarding the construction of masculinity heavily influenced medieval notions of masculinity. Masculinity was a manifestation of the opposing qualities to faults of

[2] According to Irvine, at the time, there were also examples of what he describes as 'judicial castration' (1997: 89) where a man might undergo this punishment as a result of a (usually) sexual transgression. This was also sometimes coupled with blinding.

[3] For a better understanding of attitudes surrounding castration, see De Meung trans. Kline (2019: 629–30).

character that were considered feminine. Therefore, as pointed out by Karras (2003: 2), if women were weak, men were strong; if women were foolish, men were wise; if women were fearful, men were brave. This process of defining masculinity is similar to the process of defining the self, as described by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) in a postcolonial context, by first rejecting attributes of the other. The self is that which the other is not. Bhabha's vision of this self/other dichotomy is that of complete opposition. The self feels comfortable with this because by putting the greatest distance possible between the self and other, the self can better assert its own identity as being good. Whilst this is most commonly applied to questions of dermal stereotyping and, specifically, colonial discourse, the theory can also be applied to the medieval construction of masculinity as an opposite of femininity.

Bhabha (1994: 95) argues that in addition to being previously established, stereotypes must be repeated anxiously. They are often repeated for them to become ingrained within society. This is evident in the depiction of the feminine otherness from which cis-heteronormative masculinity strives to differentiate itself. According to Bullough (1994: 34), male superiority must be asserted constantly for this sense of masculinity not to be lost. This shows that the performance of a masculine identity is necessarily active, thus achieving the 'anxious repetition' of the gendered stereotypes. This is predicated upon a narcissistic insecurity; to feel more confident in an expression of a masculine identity one must actively and consistently perform masculinely coded behaviour. The performance of gender described by Judith Butler (1988) manifests itself as Bhabha's anxious repetition of stereotypes.

First, this chapter will discuss the destabilization of masculinity in relation to the legend of Saint Vincent and subsequently that of Saint Paul of Thebes, the former being a martyr and the latter an ascetic.[4] These legends have been chosen as they both provide multiple examples of the destabilization of masculinity, including the religious and secular. Charles F. Altman proposes dividing hagiographical accounts into two groups: first, the *passiones*, which are the legends of the martyr saints. Much like the medieval epic, their narrative 'operates according to the principles of diametrical opposition' (1975: 1). The *vitae* form the second group. These are the biographies of confessor saints, which do not follow the trend of the diametrical opposition found in the *passiones*, but instead, adopt the 'gradational form of romance' (1975: 1). Therefore, not only are the two groups different in content, but also in style. This chapter will make the logical historical progression from the martyr, Saint Vincent, to the ascetic, Saint Paul of Thebes. The movement from one group to another is in part due to the result of Constantine's conversion to Christianity, and the subsequent tolerance of the religion, which eliminated the need for martyrdom as it was no longer a criminal offence. Therefore, before Constantine's conversion, there were a great number of martyrs who were persecuted and tortured for their faith, but once Christianity became

[4] Saint Vincent is the protomartyr of Spain. His cult has become particularly important not only in Spain, but also in many other European countries, and his relics have been claimed by Valencia, Saragossa, Lisbon, Paris, and Le Mans. For more information, see Fité Llevot (2008) and Beresford (in press). Saint Paul of Thebes was the first of the Desert Fathers and the first Christian hermit. For more information, see Waddell (1998), Beresford (2010b), and Burrus (2004).

acceptable, martyrdom was no longer possible, and it was therefore up to the individual to embark on a journey of asceticism to achieve sanctity.

The section analysing Vincent's legend will focus on three parts of the legend where the notion of masculinity is destabilized: first, his torture by means of the *ungulae*, second, the section where he is roasted and becomes both a scopophilic and a literal article for consumption through a cannibalistic literary motif, and finally, the chapter will analyse Dacian's attempts to mutilate Vincent's corpse by feeding it to wild animals. The literary analysis of the text will be supplemented by works of art depicting the torments to which he is subjected, and the importance of the intra and extra-diegetic gaze will be considered as part of the analysis. The second section of the chapter will consider the destabilization of masculinity in the legend of Saint Paul of Thebes, first discussing the case of the two martyrdoms he witnesses and conducting an individual analysis of each of the two men and the ways in which they are emasculated by their torments. Finally, the chapter will consider the interaction between Paul of Thebes and Saint Antony, considering the ways in which their masculinity is destabilized. The analysis of the martyr, followed by an ascetic will provide a rounded vision of the issue demonstrating the ways in which masculinity is destabilized.

Saint Vincent

In almost all *passiones*, the Christian protagonists are ordered to renounce their faith. Their refusal to comply leads to their torture. The torments inflicted upon individuals in these situations served multiple purposes. First, and perhaps the most obvious motive, was to force the person to bend to

the will of the torturer. Kathleen M. Coleman (1990: 46) argues that humiliation was also a significant factor in Roman punishment. There was such importance placed on a person's *existimatio* (reputation) that public torture would have damaged it irreparably. Torture was also intended to deter others. Coleman explains that for something to be an effective deterrent, 'a penalty should arouse horror and aversion' (1990: 49), which is evidenced in the types of tortures to which martyrs were subjected. They would have been stripped, which would have served a practical purpose, as it is easier to inflict torture and to assess its extent on a naked body. However, it would also have served as public humiliation, as their naked forms were visible to anyone who desired to watch the scene unfold.

Having first been interrogated by Dacian, Saint Vincent is subjected to torture on the rack, to which he is tied, and his flesh torn with *ungulae*:[5]

> E oyendo esto los verdugos, començáronle a rasgar todas las carnes fasta las costillas con peynes de fierro, en manera que le salía sangre de todas las partes del cuerpo e se le apartavan las costillas unas de otras e se le parescían las entrañas. (lines 42–44)

This gruesome and vivid description of Vincent's torture is particularly significant in the destabilization of his masculinity. Having been tied to the rack, Vincent's skin is flayed with metal rods, known in Latin as *ungulae*.[6] The *ungulae* would have been used to tear Vincent's skin and

[5] All quotations from the legend of Saint Vincent are taken from Beresford (in press b)

[6] The *ungulae* were rods that sometimes had hooks, which were used to tear at the skin of the person being tortured.

flesh, causing great physical pain, and exposing his insides. Vincent's body would already have been naked in order for the torture to take place and to be effective, which would have been part of a deliberate form of public humiliation to which Vincent is subjected.

The removal of the skin is important because it is a signifier of identity; it is one of the first things that is perceived; it is part of who someone is and encloses all that they are. This torture is therefore not only painful and gruesome, but it also carries different layers of symbolism which point towards a destabilization of identity. This description is somewhat reminiscent of the torture of Saint Bartholomew and shares some of its connotations.[7] Andrew M. Beresford discusses the flaying of Saint Bartholomew and the significance of his skin; an argument which can also be applied to Saint Vincent: 'The exposed flesh beneath, revealed like the layers of an onion, functions in part as a mechanism for identifying the individual, and in part as a sensory transmitter capable of mediating contact with the world beyond' (2020: 150).

The removal of Saint Vincent's skin creates a visual allusion to the removal of clothing, as the skin is the final layer that protects the internal parts of the body from being exposed. It could be likened to the way in which clothing might be removed prior to sexual relations. If the assumption is made

[7] Saint Bartholomew's martyrdom consisted of being tied to a tree and skinned alive. There have been numerous artistic representations of his torture, one of the most notable being *The Martyrdom of St Bartholomew*, Jusepe de Ribera, 1641. Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. For further information, see Beresford (2020: 231–38).

that it is the woman who assumes the submissive role in such relations (which is what has been historically prescribed, despite not reflecting gendered sexual roles in today's society), Vincent is thus feminized by association. Cristian Berco (2008: 361) argues that sexual passivity was equated to femininity. In sexual relations as well as in other aspects of life, the male role is traditionally regarded as being the active one, whilst the female role is traditionally passive. This binary view is no longer applicable to today's society, yet it was widely held in medieval society. If this is applied to the torture of Saint Vincent, it could be argued that he is emasculated by a metaphorical sexual feminization. The *unglulae* are also significant in his feminization. Their phallic shape and the fact that they penetrate his skin alludes to a form of symbolic sodomitic rape. Berco (2008: 358) argues that in many historical societies, penetrative masculinity was not only a means of men dominating women, but also of metaphorically and literally imposing their will on other men.[8] This is significant because it suggests that sodomy was only considered to feminize the man being penetrated whereas it masculinized the man who was penetrating the other. William E. Burgwinkle (2004: 2) points out that it is difficult to discuss sodomy without also considering gender. Traditionally, sodomy posed a threat to pre-established gender roles and ideals. The recipient of sodomy is historically attributed a derisive femininity, which is intended to be humiliating and belittling. Burgwinkle (2004: 57) also discusses widely held Christian beliefs surrounding sodomy at the time and points out that Peter Damian (a Benedictine monk and cardinal under Pope Leo

[8] Burgwinkle (2004: 26) explains that in other societies, such as tripartite Indo-European societies, there were initiation ceremonies that included acts of sodomy between older and younger men. These rituals were not only intended to make men out of boys, but also to reinforce male power by feminizing rivals. For more information, see Creed (1984).

IX) wrote widely on the topic, often utilizing the semantic field of disease and contagion to describe the sexual act as well as claiming that it would pollute the Church as a whole. Burgwinkle expounds that 'in violating the body of the Church, the sodomite violates the collective body, the identity from which he has now been banished, his former self' (2004: 57). If this is to be applied metaphorically to the penetration of Vincent with the *ungulae,* Vincent is feminized, whereas the men penetrating him are masculinized. It is important to note that in Vincent's legend, it is not Dacian who is penetrating Vincent directly, and so this raises the question of whether Dacian is empowered through the metaphorical connotations of this torture.

In the description of Saint Vincent's tortured body, emphasis is placed on the blood that pours from his wounds, which is reminiscent of the blood of Christ. By means of the tortures to which he is subjected, Vincent becomes a Christ-like figure, particularly on the level of visual association. Martyrs wanted to emulate Christ and his suffering, but in the case of Saint Vincent, there are physical aspects that allude to Christ's torments. A pertinent example is the fact that the *ungulae* are primarily used on the area surrounding his ribs, which would have created wounds that were similar to that in Christ's side. Kirstin Wolf states that 'The tortures, taken as a whole, in the legends of male and female martyr saints are naturally to be viewed as a ritualized re-enactment of the *imitatio Christi*; as such, their sufferings serve the same purpose' (1997: 107).

The blood that would have poured out of Vincent's wounds is a symbolically loaded bodily substance. In paintings such as Jaume Huguet's *Saint Vincent on the Rack* (Fig. 6) and the Master of Castelsardo's *St Vincent Roasted on a Gridiron* (Fig. 7), some of Dacian's henchmen are coded

as Jewish. For many years, blood has been used by Christians as a means of othering their Jewish counterparts. As pointed out by David Biale (2007: 2), the Jews have been accused by Christians of blood theft. The Jews were thought to suck the blood of the living to bring themselves back from the dead. Therefore, Christians perceived the Jewish population was seen as a threat.[9] Vincent's torturers are othered through the text as well as its visual representations. The blood that pours out of the wounds caused by Dacian and his men is perhaps an allusion to the Jewish other who was thought to want to drink Christian blood. Alan Dundes (1989: 18–9) points out the irony in this accusation because through the Eucharist—the most important Christian ritual—Jesus' blood and body are consumed by his followers through the process of transubstantiation, which is the act of cannibalism of which the Jewish community is accused (a more in-depth discussion of cannibalism will be offered later in this chapter). Biale (2007: 83) explains that the blood of God was believed to be found in the bodies of Christians who had taken Communion (which is why Jews might want to take this blood for themselves), suggesting that when Christian blood is spilled, it is not only the individual's blood that is shed, but also that of God.

According to Leviticus 'the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life' (17:11). A person's blood was thought to be sacred and mystical, containing an intrinsic part of their being. Vincent's skin has been removed, which Beresford (2020: 150) explains is a signifier of identity, and his blood, which, according to Leviticus, also contains the essence of an individual. Therefore, through the tortures that he has undergone, Vincent has been robbed of a part of himself. Despite

[9] For further information, see Dundes (1989).

the biblical characterization of blood as an intrinsic part of a person, some blood was also perceived as unclean and impure, namely menstrual blood. From a perspective of possible feminization, the blood that Vincent sheds through his torture could symbolically allude to the blood that a woman would lose through menstruation or even childbirth. This type of blood was (and sometimes still is today) perceived as a taboo subject. Despite it being natural, it is considered abject, stemming from the first abject other: woman. Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject is therefore particularly relevant. In the description of Saint Vincent's body, blood is pouring out of his wounds and his entrails are visible. Therefore, that which ought to be contained within the body has surfaced and left the confines of the body, for all to see. Kristeva argues that:

> refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (1982: 3)

The notion of liminality is significant because it is that which distinguishes the living from the dead, and the self from the other. Vincent's blood and entrails ought to have been contained within his body but are now visible. Once they have left his body, they are no longer part of him, yet somehow they still pertain to him. Repugnance occurs when something such as blood or entrails, which should be inside the body and invisible to the naked eye, are no longer enclosed within the it. Thus, issues of liminality and borders come into focus. A parallel can be drawn between the border between the inside of the body and the outside, and that which exists between the self and the other. In the same way that repugnance might be felt towards body parts which have escaped

the confines of the body, one might repudiate the other, defined by attributes which might exist in the self, but which are undesirable and therefore repugnant. These borders must be well defined to identify the self. Without a clear border between the self and the other, the self loses certainty in its own identity, resulting in anxiety surrounding self-identification. These broad ideas concerning self-identification can be applied to the destabilization of gender identity. The borders that are essential for the construction and preservation of masculinity reject that which is feminine. Everything on one side of the border is masculine and therefore that which ought to be emulated, and everything on the other side of the border is feminine and other.

The power of the gaze is crucial in the analysis of Saint Vincent's torture on the rack. His naked body would have been visible to many people: Dacian and his henchmen, onlookers and passers-by, and the extra-diegetic audience—either those who would have read, or (more likely) listened to readings of the text—who are prompted to imagine Vincent's naked form, or those viewing paintings, such as Jaume Huguet's (Fig. 6), depicting the scene. The gaze has a twofold function; it is an attempt to humiliate Vincent and turn his body into the locus of fetishistic scopophilia. From an intra-diegetic perspective, the torture would have been a public spectacle, conducted in an area in which onlookers might have gathered to watch the scene unfold. Not only was this method of torture designed to inflict pain upon Vincent to make him renounce his faith, but it would also have been a deterrent to other Christians from behaving in the same way: 'se espantasen los otros christianos por el enxiemplo del su tormento' (lines 26–27). This highlights the importance of the intra-diegetic gaze because the onlookers were essential for the torture to achieve deterrence. The humiliation imparted by the torture is heighted by the presence of an audience. Kathleen M. Coleman argues that 'The humiliation of the offender further validates the processes

of the law by distancing the onlooker from the criminal and reducing the possibility of a sympathetic attitude towards him on the part of the spectators' (1990: 47). Punishment was therefore a means of othering; humiliation was that which drove this process. The othering of the subject of torture would have reinforced the idea that this person was completely unlike the self and the punishments to which the other was subject would have caused the self to repudiate the other further as well as wishing to avoid the same punishments. Onlookers of the scene would have gazed upon the naked body of the subject of torture and perceived the humiliation with which they were faced, thus distancing themselves from him.

It is important to consider the way in which characters wish to portray themselves and how they are characterized by the text. Dacian attempts to present himself as strong and authoritative—qualities often associated with masculinity. He exerts power over Vincent through torture and over his men through his orders. Through the torture of the *ungulae*, he is not directly exerting his masculine power of penetration over Vincent, but he is nevertheless the indirect cause of it. Despite his attempts to perform the masculine ideal, Dacian is feminized by his attitude towards Vincent's torture. The words *yra*, and *yrado* are often used to describe Dacian when he is not satisfied by the completion of his orders.[10] Outbursts of anger were often perceived as being displays of hysteria,

[10] 'e veyéndolos sanos e alegres e esforçados, fue muy yrado...' (line 13); 'E oyendo esto el adelantado Daciano, fue muy yrado' (line 24); 'E el adelantado oyendo esto, fue lleno de yra...' (line 39);

'E tanto más me alegro yo quanto más te veo lleno de yra' (line 49).

a quintessentially feminine condition.[11] Anger represents a total loss of control, which is ironic because Dacian ought to have had control over what happened to Vincent's body, but throughout the course of the legend, that control is lost. It is through his own actions and displays of anger that he loses credibility, allowing Vincent to take ownership of the torture, giving him the upper hand. There is a stark distinction between Vincent and Dacian, the latter being angry and incapable of managing his emotions, resulting in outbursts of anger. Conversely, Vincent is calm in the face of the horrors he is forced to endure. A significant diametrical opposition is presented: that of secular and religious power. Dacian's secular power is presented as weak and feminine, whereas Vincent's religious power is measured, masculine, and ultimately more powerful than any secular authority that Dacian might wield.

[11] The etymology of the word *hysteria* significant as it comes from the Greek word *ὑστέρα* (hystera), meaning *uterus*. Beyond being socially associated with women, the notion of hysteria is therefore also linguistically linked to the female body and condition.

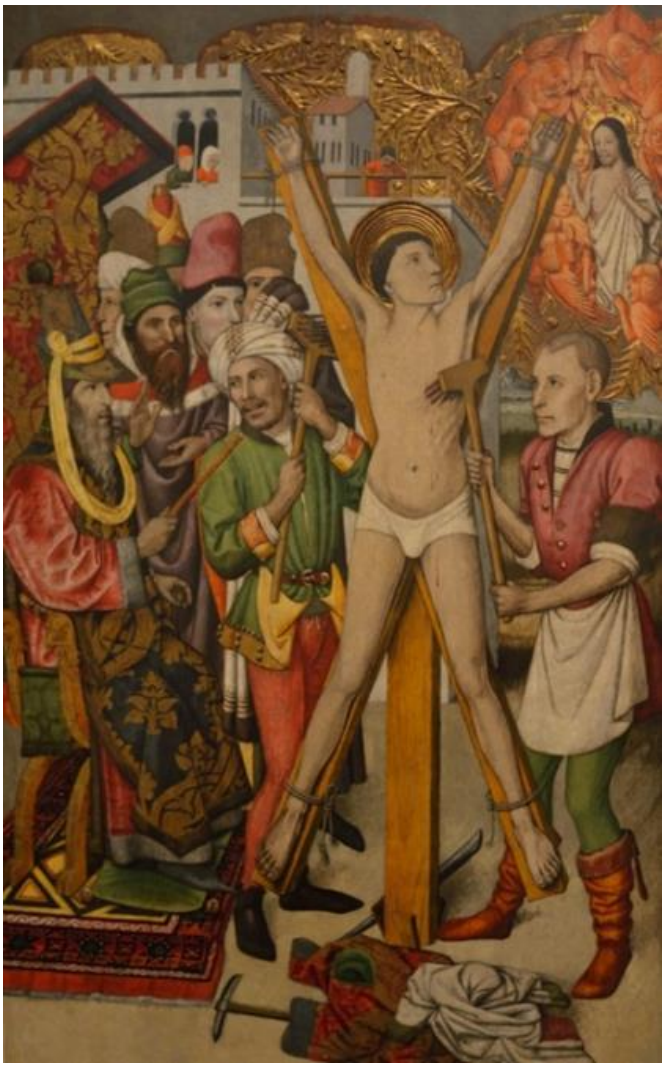

Fig. 6. *Saint Vincent on the Rack*, Jaume Huguet, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

This painting by Jaume Huguet depicts the first part of Saint Vincent's torture.[12] He is at the front and centre of the composition, where he has already been stripped and tied to a rack. Dacian is seated on an ornate throne on the left-hand-side of the painting and is presiding over Vincent's

[12] For a more in-depth analysis of the painting, see Jardí & Alcoy (1993: 154–59) and Beresford (in press). For the complete altarpiece, see Jardí & Alcoy (1993: 127).

torture. He is dressed in elaborate clothing, which contrasts with Vincent's simple loincloth. Dacian is giving orders to his henchmen while holding his baton of office, symbolizing his hierarchical power. The henchmen are raking Vincent, tearing at his skin. They are dressed in simpler clothes, denoting their lower status. Yet they are wearing similar colours to Dacian, differentiating them (and Dacian) from Vincent and Christ (in the top, right-hand corner), who are wearing ordinary, white garments. The scene is observed by a multitude of onlookers who are either crowded around Dacian or looking downwards from balconies. Christ is also presiding over Vincent's torture and can be observed in the upper right-hand corner of the composition. He is positioned in opposition to Dacian, creating an allusion to the opposing powers that they symbolize; Dacian represents the earthly and pagan, whereas Christ represents the heavenly and religious. Vincent's head is turned up to Christ and away from Dacian.

The context in which a work of art is displayed must be considered in an analysis of the piece because it impacts on questions of interpretation. If a piece of art is found in a religious context, its interpretation will inevitably be biased towards a religious significance. Many medieval Churches were adorned with artworks depicting hagiographic legends. People who would have attended Mass would have seen these works of art, providing them with a visual representation of that which they heard from the pulpit. This type of art conveys a spiritual message that is rendered accessible to everyone and encourages ordinary people to emulate the saints. Such works of art also perpetuate certain stereotypes, particularly surrounding the relationship between the self and the other. Whilst this might not be the primary aim of such paintings, it is nevertheless a feature.

The corporeal emphasis of this painting is significant because, as noted by Beresford 'The body, appraised thus as an ambiguous signifier of identity, becomes the subject of equal and opposing points of view, inviting its audiences—both internal and external—to consider how the torture will progress' (in press b 31). The corporeality of the painting invites the scopophilic gaze and causes both the intra and extra-diegetic viewers to seek to discover how his gruesome torture will unfold. At the top of the painting, three people are leaning out of windows or over a balcony, gazing upon the scene unfolding below them, exerting their morbid fascination from the distance and safety of their balcony. The scene becomes the locus of fetishistic scopophilia on multiple levels. First, the people who are depicted as looking upon this scene are observing Saint Vincent are watching his body being mutilated. This is echoed on an extra-diegetic level because the viewer of the painting is also looking at the artistic representation of Vincent's torture. Beresford argues that the painting causes both the external and internal viewers to feel guilty for revelling in the 'disturbing anatomical reality of a body opened outwards and transformed into a living, breathing wound' (in press b 31). There is thus a tension within the viewer of an intense desire to look away from the scene but a need to watch it unfold (or, in the case of the extra-diegetic viewer, to imagine it unfolding).

Saint Vincent is the focal point; the eye is immediately drawn to him due to his position and the colour palette. Vincent appears very pale; he is naked except for a small loincloth, generating a contrast to his colourful surroundings. He resembles the apparition of the resurrected Christ in the upper right corner, which creates a visual link between the two men, differentiating them from the other figures, which, by implication, creates the notion of self and other. In this case, self and other are representative of a dermal difference as well as a difference in expressions of masculinity,

which, in this painting, are coherent with each other. There is an abundance of green and red in the clothing of Dacian and his henchmen, which are the colours often associated with Islam.[13] After looking at the pale form of Saint Vincent and subsequently the pale form of the resurrected Christ, the eye is drawn to the figure on the left, carrying out the torture, who is wearing a turban and whose skin is darker than Vincent's. There is a suggestion that he is part of the Arab community. He is dermally different from Vincent and Christ and clearly culturally and religiously different. Dacian is wearing orientalizing garments and is sitting on a seat that is placed on a Persian or Turkish rug, once again implying that Vincent's oppressors are of Arabic origin.

An overarching argument that is prevalent in the work of Bhabha is that in order to identify what the self is, one must first decide that which the self is not. He argues that the purpose of colonial discourse is to 'construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction' (1994: 101). In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains how the West has Orientalized the East, and the effects this had on both cultures.[14] He writes about Orientalism from the perspective of post-colonialism, but much like Bhabha's work, it can be applied to earlier issues. Said (2003: 39) argues that people have always divided the world into regions, predicated upon either real or imagined differences. He explains that 'the essential relationship, on political, cultural, and even religious grounds, was seen—in the West, which is what concerns us here—to be one between a

[13] For a more in-depth explanation of the symbolism and meaning of colours in early Islam, see Hirsch (2020).

[14] For further information, see Said (2003).

strong and a weak partner' (2003: 40). There is a diametrical opposition between the West, which functions as the self, and the East, which is portrayed as other. Although Said's ideas were not formally introduced until he published his book in 1978, there is evidence in earlier art, such as Fig. 6, of a sense of Orientalism that is apparent through the exoticized depiction of the other as ambiguously Arab.

To understand the implications of portraying the torturers and Dacian in an Orientalist manner, it is crucial to comprehend the connotations that the exoticized Arab carried at the time (and even in some cases today). The Orientalized subject was stereotyped as deceitful, dangerous, cruel, and barbaric. It is easy to categorize the dermal other in this way, thus creating an identity for the self which is that which the other is not. If the other was deceitful, the self was honest, if the other was barbaric, the self was civilized. In visual representations of Saint Vincent's martyrdom, this distinction is highlighted by depicting Dacian and his consorts as dermally other.

It is important to remember that Vincent was tortured by Romans, not Arabs. Therefore, the artistic representation of Dacian and his men as dark skinned gives the scene a contemporary relevance through the introduction of dermal othering. This would have been relevant to viewers of the time with whom the notion of dark-skinned alterity would have resonated. In Huguet's painting, alterity is not exclusive to the Orientalized image of the Arab man; there is also a figure with a red beard on the left-hand side, stereotyped as Jewish. His otherness would have been perceived as both racial and religious. In addition, Dacian and one of the onlookers are both wearing headgear that

is often associated with Judaism.[15] This shows that the construction of the other does not need to be one specific thing; it does not have to be of a particular race or religion. It does not matter what the other looks like or is, as long as it is a representation of that which the self rejects. Thus, the other becomes a means of constructing an identity of the self.

In this painting, Vincent is being raked by two men. Whilst this is a representation of a gruesome form of torture, it also has symbolic value. The two henchmen are using long, phallic tools to pierce Vincent's skin, penetrating his body while he is tied up. This is suggestive of symbolic sodomitic rape. There is consequently a characterization of Dacian and his henchmen as other, not only as dermally different to Saint Vincent, but also as sodomites. There is a malleability in the presentation of alterity, because it does not matter what the other is, as long as it is unlike the self. William E. Burgwinkle (2004: 22) explains that sodomites represent a collective threat leading to entire ethnic groups being branded as sodomitic. This is true in the case of Dacian and his men because their dermal alterity and suggested sodomitic tendencies are represented as going hand in hand.

At the foot of the rack there is a discarded garment, painted in the same reds and greens as the clothing worn by Dacian and his entourage; therefore, it can be assumed that it belongs to one of them. It looks as though it has been roughly thrown onto the floor. In the altarpiece of which this painting is a part, in the previous chronological painting of Vincent's legend, he is wearing the

[15] See Mellinkoff (1993: 68–69) and Lubrich (2015).

garment that lies at his feet.[16] It is reminiscent of when Jesus was dressed in purple robes prior to his crucifixion to mock him. Perhaps Vincent was dressed in this lavish coat by Dacian or one of his henchmen and that it was forcibly removed before the racking. Upon a close inspection of the garment, an aperture resembling a wound can be observed. The visual allusion to a wound is significant because due to the torture of the *ungulae* that Vincent is enduring, he will become a full body wound as his skin will have been removed. The aperture is also visually reminiscent of a vagina and could be an allusion to this body part. The other end of the sleeve has been penetrated with a pick axe; an undoubtably phallic object, which, in the context of public torture, can only be used towards a violent end. This suggests a phallic penetration, of which Vincent could be the object.[17] This notion of metaphorical violent and dominant sexuality exerted over Saint Vincent feminizes him and, in accordance with medieval constructs of gender, strips him of his masculinity. The pick axe is not the only phallic object associated with the metaphorical feminization of Saint Vincent; Dacian himself, is holding a phallically charged baton of office, raised to a forty-five-degree angle as he gazes upon Vincent's naked, tortured body. This allusion to Dacian's reaction to the Vincent's sexualized torture, yet again forces Vincent to assume the role of the object of Dacian's fetishistic scopophilia and a possible homosexual desire.

[16] For the full altarpiece, see *Huguet* (1993).

[17] In the *Crónica de 1344* (Alvar & Alvar 1991) version of the *Siete infantes de Lara*, the literary topos of the sleeve as the vaginal opening is also present. Mudarra is adopted by Sancha, and he is passed through one end of her sleeve to the other, suggesting a rebirth with her as his mother. She symbolically gives birth to him, through her sleeve (see 1991: 235).

Despite the brutality, there is a lack of gore in this painting, subsequently inviting the viewer to imagine a more realistic scene. Not all viewers would react in the same way; some of the variables might include gender, sexual orientation, and religion. One of the notions on which this distinction is predicated is a chiasmus in that the Christian viewer would recognize Vincent's beauty as a refraction of his beautiful soul, whereas the pagan is simply regarded by implication as a sodomite.[18] This thinking enforces the notion that the other embodies the negative attributes that are rejected by the self.

Despite enduring torture on the rack, Saint Vincent's resolve does not change. Therefore, Dacian employs a different method to force Vincent to bend to his will and has him roasted on a gridiron.

> Entonce Daciano mandólo quitar del tormento del ecúleo e levar a quemar. E como tardasen los verdugos en lo levar e lo reprehendiese Daciano duramente, yva Sant Vicente a la pena alegremente e subió en las parrillas de su voluntad, e començáronlo a asar e a dar con los garavatos de fierro con que atizavan el fuego por la llagas que tenía en todos los mienbros. E echaron de la sal en el fuego por que saltase la llama e le diese en las llagas e lo atormentase mucho más. (lines 52–57)

This section demonstrates Vincent's keenness for martyrdom with a touch of humour. As Dacian's henchmen are too incompetent and slow to put Vincent on the gridiron, he lies down on the torture

[18] In early Christian art and thinking, external beauty was often associated with the beauty of the soul. Therefore, in works of art depicting saints, they were portrayed as conventionally attractive to represent their sanctity. The literary convention of the *meollo* (inner core) and *corteza* (outer crust/exterior) is particularly relevant here, as the exterior can be a mirror of the interior.

device himself. The henchmen are emasculated in the eyes of the audience as they become sources of mockery for their inability to carry out a task in which they could have exerted masculinity through a show of strength and power. Instead, they are ridiculed by the fact that Vincent must do part of their job for them, becoming proactive in his own martyrdom.[19] His calm and measured demeanour and his religious conviction have given him power over his aggressive, pagan counterparts.

Despite Vincent's masculine composure, he is subsequently feminized through an act of penetration. As part of the torment of being roasted on the gridiron, Dacian's henchmen also pierce his skin with red hot irons. Once again, he is penetrated by other men, inviting a queer reading to this section of the legend. Berco's argument that was previously discussed in relation to the *ungulae* torture is once again relevant in this section. He explains that in a sodomitic act, the penetrator represented the dominator and therefore the one who imposed his 'masculine will on an emasculated object of desire' (2008: 358). This can be applied to the metaphorical sodomy that is represented in Saint Vincent's legend, as the men penetrating Vincent were exerting their masculinity over him, whilst he, as the passive (yet, in this case, willing) recipient of this act is emasculated by this act of penetration. This scene is particularly well represented in a painting

[19] A parallel can be drawn between Saint Vincent and Saint Lawrence, who was similarly roasted on a gridiron. In the legend of Saint Lawrence, there is also a display of humour as he is said to have declared '¡Mesquino, ya es asada la una parte, fazme bolver, e come, e farta tu fanbre!' Beresford (in press a 200–01).

produced by the Master of Castelsardo (fig. 7), of which a more comprehensive analysis will be carried out later in this chapter.

It is not merely Dacian's men who penetrate Saint Vincent's body; this section of the legend also depicts the flames of the fire penetrating the saint's body: 'E asý estava todo abierto que entrava la llama por las entrañas e aun se le salían del cuerpo por los logares de las llagas' (lines 57–58). The movement of the flames entering and exiting Vincent's body is reminiscent of the motion of penetrative sexual intercourse. By means of this metaphorical reading of his tortures, Vincent is further feminized in this act of metaphorical sodomy as the passive party. The description of the way in which the flames interact with Vincent's body can be interpreted symbolically. A homoerotic reading becomes possible, as the flames are reminiscent of the burning fire of passion and desire.[20] This theme is also explored at the end of the text:

> Fue atormentado Sant Vincente e ferido e açotado e quemado, mas non fue vencido nin movido, e guardó la propriedat del su santo nonbre, ardiendo más por amor del cielo que por el ardor del fierro. (lines 99–101)

In this section, Vincent is described as having a burning love for heaven that exceeded the physical burns that he endured as part of his torture.

[20] Flames are often used to symbolize a raging sexual passion for another person. However, in this case, his body is being penetrated by flames. It is also important to note that the Holy Spirit is often visually represented as a flame or fire, as in the accounts of Pentecost. For an example, see Acts 2:1–4.

Vincent is not merely feminized in this section, but also animalized. It is significant to note that salt is added to the fire beneath Saint Vincent. The textual explanation is that this would have made the flames scorch him to a greater extent, but it also alludes to meat being seasoned for cooking. This reminiscent of the legend of Saint Lawrence, who, in his martyrdom, was also roasted. Like Vincent, Lawrence is treated like an animal that has been slaughtered and is being roasted and seasoned to perfection for the enjoyment of others. He is therefore animalized as his body is being treated like meat to be cooked and consumed. The motif of cannibalism must therefore be analysed because if he is roasted like an article for consumption, his tormentors must be consuming him, resulting in cannibalism.

Beresford (in press 38–39) argues that cannibalism is considered to be taboo because it represents a boundary sign, much like issues such as idolatry and incest. This boundary sign is 'a mechanism for constructing and maintaining perceptions of inviolable moral and spiritual difference' (in press 39). The motif of cannibalism creates a clear differentiation or boundary between the self and the other. The boundary sign is of such significance because everything on the other side of the boundary is *not I*. It does not matter what is on the other side of this boundary, be it cannibalism, sodomy, or idolatry. This is because alterity is a polymorphous concept that attaches itself to any type of distinction. Once the notion of alterity has been introduced it does not matter how it is represented. What does matter is that it represents that which is *not I*. That is to say that someone who is not a sodomite might be represented as one because they were already considered as other. In hagiography, it is common that the other is idolatrous but is also represented as being a sodomite or cannibal (or perhaps both). Everything that is on the other side of this boundary is that which *I*

am not. This idea of a boundary explains why the other is often represented as an array of elements that are removed from the self. The motif of cannibalism is so striking because it is so often associated with barbaric practices and the dark-skinned other. Peter Hulme argues that 'Cannibalism was an active cultural sign of tyranny, brutality, and excess in the mainstream tradition of the early travellers. Cannibalism remains a sign of evil to be defeated and undone; much of the ancient and medieval imagery of devouring is recycled to portray new world cannibals when they begin to appear' (1998: 33). This idea is most strikingly represented in visual representations of the torture of Saint Vincent, for example Fig. 7, in which the torturers are the very embodiment of alterity: violent, dark-skinned, sodomites, and cannibals.

However, the motif of cannibalism is rendered yet more taboo when one considers some of the metaphorical implications associated with it. Cannibalism means turning a person into an article of consumption, which is also the way in which women are sometimes described sexually, as articles of consumption for men. Hulme argues that 'erotic desire is a notoriously "consuming passion" which threatens to dissolve the boundary between ego and object in a way that has often led poets to use cannibalistic imagery to describe the actions of lovers' (1998: 10). His argument therefore neatly links the notion of cannibalism to sexuality through the idea of consumption, in this case the way in which passion consumes a person, which, in turn, causes them to consume another person sexually. Through the motif of cannibalism, Saint Vincent is feminized because he becomes an article of consumption for Dacian and his men. Combined with the sexual undertones of the legend, and the sexualized visual depictions, he is further feminized to the extra-diegetic audience who not only consume the art or literature depicting him, but also experience him as an article of consumption second-hand.

The use of the gridiron is significant in the analysis of Saint Vincent's feminization. This torture would have burned him alive, essentially cooking him. On a symbolic level, the gridiron upon which he is lying whilst being tortured is visually similar to a bed. Beresford argues that 'Doubled as a thalamus or nuptial bed, the gridiron on which the saint's body rests evokes connotations of libidinal yearning and marital consummation, presenting Vincent simultaneously both as a sacrificial victim and as a prize to be claimed, and ultimately, consumed' (in press 46). This nuptial bed could be perceived to symbolize the union into which he is entering with Christ through his martyrdom. This in itself is feminizing because Vincent almost becomes a bride of Christ, much like Agatha and Christina. If Vincent has become an article of consumption for Dacian and his men, he now also becomes a different type of article of consumption for Christ. The sexless, holy union between Christ and Vincent is contrasted with its metaphorical sodomitic (and therefore sinful) equivalent between Dacian and Vincent.

Fig. 7. *St Vincent Roasted on a Gridiron,* Master of Castelsardo, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.

This representation of Saint Vincent depicts the scene in which he is roasted on the gridiron.[21] Vincent is at the centre of the composition; he is wearing a simple loincloth, as he is in the Huguet painting discussed above, creating a contrast between him and the men torturing him or spectating, who are wearing red and green. He is lying on a gridiron with flames burning underneath it, designed to roast him alive. Two of the torturers are prodding him with tools that they may have used to stir the fire, while the other is using a pair of bellows to blow air into the fire. Much like the Huguet painting, there is a plethora of onlookers, but half of them (on the left-hand-side of the composition) are looking upwards to the sky, at something that has not been included in the painting.

Dacian's men can be observed penetrating Vincent's body with their sharp metallic implements. Vincent appears unscathed by tortures that he has undergone, and instead, his body is aesthetically perfect, uninjured, and muscular. There is no evidence of the blood and entrails that are mentioned in the *Gran flos sanctorum*. Of course, works of art of are designed to be looked at, introducing the notion of the fetishistic scopophilic gaze, and here, his body is pleasurable for the viewer to behold, when in reality, he would have been mangled, possibly even beyond recognition.

Beresford (in press 46) comments upon the fact that this painting treads the boundary between the literal and the symbolic. This allows for various interpretations of the scene, one of which is a

[21] For a more in-depth analysis of the painting, see Jardí & Alcoy (1993: 154–59) and Beresford (in press b). For the complete altarpiece, see Jardí & Alcoy (1993: 127).

potential queer reading. First, there is the extra-diegetic gaze that would fall upon Saint Vincent's body. This piece of art was painted by a man and would have been accessible to a mixed audience. However, the beauty of Saint Vincent's body cannot go unnoticed. It invites a fetishistic scopophilic gaze, be it male or female. What ought to have been a mangled body has been portrayed as beautiful. In accordance with medieval literary and artistic tropes, his physical beauty is a reflection of his inner beauty and purity of spirit.

Furthermore, the men torturing Vincent are using tools that are phallic in shape and are being used to penetrate him. Another of Dacian's henchmen is holding bellows that he is using to blow air into the fire that is roasting Saint Vincent. The way in which he is holding the bellows and the fact that they appear to be drawing a line between his genitalia and that of Saint Vincent is particularly suggestive. This also brings to mind the topos of the wind, which, in the traditional Hispanic lyric, is a force of elemental passion.[22] Margit Frenk (1993: 9) explains that the wind is an erotic symbol that represents the power of love experienced by women. The wind can sometimes represent the male sexual drive, but usually from the female perspective. Perhaps this allusion further feminizes Vincent. The bellows also draw the eye to gaze upon Saint Vincent's rather small loincloth, through which one can see the outline of his genitals. The henchman's eyeline is also following the line created by the bellows he is using and pointing, once again, to Saint Vincent's genital area.

[22] For example: 'La zarzuela, madre, / ¡cómo la menea el aire!' (Frenk 1993: 9).

The man on the far left of the painting, who is penetrating Vincent's body with an imposing implement of torture is particularly well endowed and is clearly sexually aroused, to a point that is almost grotesque. This raises the question of why he was depicted with such a large phallic bulge (which is mirrored by his large instrument of torture). Whilst there is no certain answer to this question, the concept of Orientalism could be used to understand this phenomenon. He has a swarthy complexion, suggesting that he might be Arabic or of Arabic descent. The hypersexualized dark-skinned, dermal other is a prevalent trope in both art and literature, and in the context of medieval Spain, there was a fear of the sexuality of the Arab man, which manifested itself in concern that he would take daughters and wives of Spanish men for his own pleasure. There was perhaps also a more subconscious fear that these hypersexualized men would be better able to seduce Spanish women because of the stereotype that they were very well endowed—possibly more so than their European counterparts. This, in turn, becomes a source of anxiety for the self, who is emasculated by the presence of the other's sexual prowess. Gail Dines discusses the white man's anxiety when faced with the idea of the black man's penis and sexuality. Her article analyses the somewhat more modern issue of the consumption of interracial pornography, but much of that upon which she comments is pertinent to the medieval world. Dines (2006: 291) argues that there exists a trope in which the white man becomes a cuckhold to a black man causing the white man's white, female partner to realize that he is no longer enough to satisfy her sexually. The obsession with the dermal other's sexuality and the portrayal of the dermal other as hypersexual is particularly revelatory of the white man's insecurity surrounding his own sexual prowess. The white man feels metaphorically emasculated by his sexual inadequacy compared with the man who he has labelled as other, but who is able to outperform him in sexual relations.

The painting above (fig. 7) was painted by a white man for a white audience, of which at least fifty percent (if not more) would have been male. Dines (2006: 289) points out that the audience for interracial pornography is mostly white, which would suggest that the white subject wishes to gaze upon the black penis. At this point, the painting must also be queered because there is blatant homoeroticism in the visual emphasis placed on the genitalia of the man in question. In her article, Dines poses the question: 'why do white men want to gaze at, and masturbate to, black penises penetrating white women's vaginas, mouths, and anuses, given the historical coding of the black penis as defiler of white womanhood and emasculator of white masculinity?' (2006: 290). Whilst this argument is made with reference to a heterosexual setting, it nevertheless can be applied to Master of Castelsardo's work as the notion of the white man's obsession with the black man's penis must be considred. The idea of fetishistic scopophilia is a possible explanation for this phenomenon coupled with the fact that the relationship between the self and the other is predicated upon the idea of borders and liminality and also on attraction and repulsion. As previously discussed, the other becomes an abject form and an expression of that which the self cannot possibly be. Bhabha neatly summarizes this notion: 'The fetish or stereotypes gives access to an 'identity' which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it' (1994: 106). Saint Vincent is therefore feminized by the juxtaposition between him and the hypersexualized man to the left of the image who is penetrating him with the long phallic tool that he is holding but also metaphorically penetrating him with his large appendage. It is furthermore important to note that there is another figure in the background of the painting, who also appears to be sexually excited and rather dandified. Despite not having the same dark complexion as the

torturer to the left of Saint Vincent, this man is visibly darker than Vincent and has a slightly hooked nose, suggesting not only a sexual, but also racial alterity.

During the roasting process, Dacian is not present to oversee Vincent's torture: 'E como fuese esto dicho a Daciano' (line 60). This is important because it raises questions regarding the reasons for his absence. On the one hand, it is possible that he had other, more pressing matters that would have required his presence, to oversee. However, the very public torture of a Christian would have been an excellent opportunity for him to showcase his power and dominance as a leader. Perhaps the tortures that he was inflicting were so gruesome and horrific that he could not bear watching them; the notion of the abject that would have been ubiquitous in Vincent's torture might have been too repulsive for him to bear witness to the scene. Kristeva argues that the abject is that which belongs to the self that the self rejects: 'I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*' (1982: 3). This theory could be used on a purely literal level, in the sense that Vincent's mangled body would have been horrific to behold, and Dacian would have been disgusted to see organs that he too would have had, spilling out of Vincent's body. At this point, the abject body ceases to be other and morphs into the self at the level of basic homeomorphic correspondence. Dacian can map Vincent's wounds onto his own body, which is distressing. This blurs the line between the self and the abject (from Dacian's perspective) and causes him to relate to Vincent's mangled body. Kristeva's theory of the abject can be applied on a more metaphorical level to this situation; perhaps Dacian is so repulsed by his own cruelty that he cannot bear to watch what he has ordered to be inflicted upon Vincent, thus rejecting his own behaviour. Dacian's attempts to other Vincent through torture, pushing him

towards a state of abjection, have the opposite effect as Dacian sees himself in the saint. Through his own actions, Dacian has othered himself and is defeated by his own doing.

Saint Vincent's death following the gruesome tortures to which he was subjected by Dacian marks an end to his physical suffering, however, even in death, Dacian nevertheless continued to torment his lifeless body. This in itself is particularly significant because at the time, in Roman society, rites and rituals were of great consequence, and it was important for a person to be able to perform or receive them. Death rites were therefore primordial in the safe passage to the afterlife. Eric R. Varner (2001: 47) explains that corpse abuse was considered to be an extreme form of punishment. This would be because a mutilated corpse would not have been in a state to receive the appropriate funeral rites, which would have meant that the person would not have been able to access the afterlife. The notion of the afterlife was important in Roman culture and to deny someone this opportunity was one of the harshest of punishments. Therefore, the posthumous punishments that Dacian orders are particularly ignoble:

> E oyendo esto el adelantado Daciano, e aviendo grant dolor porque era asý vencido, dixo: '¡Si non lo he podido vencer bivo, vencerlo he si ál non muerto!'
>
> E mandó echar su cuerpo a los canes e a las aves, mas fue guardado de los ángeles, e non pudieron llegar a lo comer las bestias salvajes. E vino un cuervo a guardar el cuerpo e arremetíase abierto el pico e las alas a las animalias. E vyniendo un lobo al cuerpo, fuese para él el cuervo, abierto el pico, e dando grandes graznidos, fízolo foyr. E tornóse el cuervo a guardar el cuerpo, e ynclinó la cabeça e tendió el cuello a lo acatar, asý como maravillándose de los ángeles que allí estavan. (lines 77–84)

In the first line of this section, it becomes clear that Dacian is frustrated by the fact that he was not able to defeat Saint Vincent, despite the tortures he ordered. The use of direct speech highlights this phrase and demonstrates Dacian's desire to vanquish Vincent even in death. This makes Dacian appear to be foolish because regardless of what he does to Vincent's earthly corpse, his place in the kingdom of heaven will be secured according to Christian doctrine. This adds a certain level of irony because despite all of his efforts, the Christian audience of the time would have believed that Dacian could never truly vanquish Saint Vincent by mutilating his earthly body.

In this section, the idea of Saint Vincent becoming an article of consumption is once again relevant. Dacian orders that Vincent's corpse be thrown to wild beasts so that they might devour him, however, he is protected by a raven. Vincent first became an article of consumption through the motif of cannibalism as previously discussed. However, here, it is not humans who are to consume him, but beasts. The echoing of this motif creates a further taboo, which is that of giving human flesh to wild animals for their consumption. This is a demonstration of gross disrespect for his corpse, but also a way not only of metaphorically feminizing him by rendering him an article of consumption, but going a step further and animalizing him, stripping him of his humanity.

The protection of the raven is significant because ravens feed on carrion and therefore, the raven that protects Vincent, in the natural order of the wild, would have eaten the flesh on his corpse. This demonstrates the mastery of God over the world and makes manifest his power: the raven's nature is completely changed as it watches over the corpse. This could imply that if it is possible for beasts to behave in such a way that counteracts their nature, humans can do the same, and

similarly, bow down to God. This could also represent the human ability to change, and what could have been a parallel with Dacian had he repented and converted to Christianity. The fact that the raven bends to Vincent's holiness shifts the audience's perception of Vincent's power. His mere corpse has power over the animal kingdom, and they bow to him. Beresford (in press 55) points out that this episode reiterates the weakness of Roman power in the face of the strength of Christianity and the inevitability of its triumph. This recalls the discrepancy between secular and religious masculinities in this legend. Dacian represents a weak, secular masculinity, whilst Vincent represents a calm and controlled religious masculinity.

Dacian remains obstinate in his ways and orders that Vincent's body be cast into the sea with a millstone around his neck:

> E mandó traer una grant muela e atarla al cuerpo e lançarlo en el mar, por que si ál non lo comiesen los peces en el mar, pues que non lo osavan comer las bestias en la tierra. E tomaron el cuerpo los marineros e metiéronlo grant espacio en el mar e echáronlo bien dentro, mas antes tornó a tierra que los marineros. (lines 87–90)

Since the beasts of the land did not eat Vincent's corpse, Dacian hopes that the beasts of the sea will do so instead. The topos of Vincent becoming an article for consumption is once again pertinent in this section, highlighted by the repetition *comiesen* and *comer*, albeit in a more symbolic and metaphorical manner. The fact that it is a millstone that is tied around his neck is an allusion to the separation of the wheat from the chaff, which is not only a direct reference to food, but also to Matthew 3:12 where John the Baptist uses the metaphor of separating the wheat from the chaff to designate God's judgement of his people. In addition, Beresford (in press 62) points

out that it is a reminder of Vincent's status as a surrogate of Christ, as it points to the separation of the wheat form the chaff, the baking of the bread, and therefore, the Eucharist, which is the physical manifestation of Christ's body which is consumed by his followers. Through these allusions, Vincent's masculinity is challenged through the motifs relating to food and therefore his consumption.

Despite the millstone tied around his neck, Vincent's body returns to shore before the sailors who threw him into the sea. There is a divine protection over Vincent's corpse, preventing Dacian from mutilating it as he did when Vincent was alive. Dacian would have wanted to dispose of the saint's body to deny other Christians their martyr and to prevent them from burying it or creating a shrine around it, thus preventing them from gaining another martyr. However, Dacian's efforts came to no avail, having failed not only to make Vincent worship the Roman gods through torture, but also failing to mutilate his corpse, thus undermining his power and associated masculinity. Throughout this legend, Dacian has never successfully exerted masculine authority, having been consistently undermined by Vincent (despite him accepting his tortures with no resistance) in life and in death. This would have reflected very poorly upon Dacian's competence and authority over the men who were supposedly under his command. Their incompetence, in turn, discredits him as a leader, and undermines the masculinity he had attempted to assert through violence.

The various tortures to which Saint Vincent is subjected play a significant role in the way in which he is feminized; from the hooks that tear and penetrate his skin, to the roasting, which creates a cannibalistic motif, implying that he becomes an article of consumption, to the piercing of his skin

with spears. However, this legend not only challenges Vincent's religious masculinity, but also Dacian's secular enactment of masculinity. Dacian's masculinity is undermined by his outbursts of anger and ultimate incompetence. This culminates in both the perpetrator and recipient of violence undergoing emasculation.

Saint Paul of Thebes

Saint Paul of Thebes's *vita* was originally written by Saint Jerome before being incorporated into the *Gran flos sanctorum*, and it explores his ascetic life. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, this section marks a shift from a discussion of martyrs to one of ascetics. If one is to observe the historical context of asceticism, the shift from the legends of the martyrs towards those of ascetics occurs after Constantine's conversion to Christianity. This meant that Christianity had been adopted as the official religion of the Empire and therefore there were fewer martyrs.[23] In order to understand the legend of Saint Paul of Thebes, it is important to consider it as part of the literary genre that is the *vitae*, which differs significantly from that of the *passiones* (the legends of the martyrs). Altman (1975: 8) explains that the *vitae* usually have a tripartite structure:

1. The actions of the saint are inspired by a story—that of Christ or a previous saint—and end with a story—that of the new saint, who was led to sanctity by their desire to imitate a particularly holy individual.

[23] In February 313 Constantine and Licinius jointly issued the Edict of Milan, giving full religious freedom to Christians. For more information and a translation of the document, see Betten (1922).

2. The saint is defined as an exception to the norm and their group; they come to represent the new norm, which is opposed to the old norm gradationally instead of diametrically.
3. The saint returns to the group and represents a redefinition of the group according to their new norm.

This structure marks a significant difference between the *vitae* and the *passiones* as there is the desire for the saint in question to remove themselves from society and its norms as far as is possible. Altman describes this phenomenon as the 'identification and glorification of the individual who stands out from the crowd' (1975: 4), and someone of an exceptional spirituality who is able to be an example to others. He explains that the 'hermit's progress is thus constantly measured in terms of distance from the human norm' (1975: 4). Thus, there is a clear desire to diverge from the usual path that a person may follow. With this in mind, the life of a hermit such as Saint Paul of Thebes becomes logical.

Asceticism presents a contradiction in Christian teaching because there is on the one hand the knowledge that humankind is God's creation and consequently humans ought not to try to destroy or harm themselves, yet there is also the desire to punish and mutilate the body in an attempt to reach higher levels of sanctity. Virginia Burrus discusses the notion of somatophobia that results in pleasure that can be derived from self-denial, in her analysis of ascetic eros (a yearning for God), which she describes as the 'residue of an imperfectly sublimated sexuality' (2004: 1). This yearning for God is materialized in the desire of ascetics to reach salvation more quickly, which they do by engaging in a torment of their own body.

The destabilization of masculinity is a prominent theme and will be discussed in relation to various men who feature in the legend of Saint Paul of Thebes, namely, two Christian men whose martyrdom Paul witnesses, Paul himself, and Saint Antony, who seeks Paul out to emulate his way of life. The martyrdom of the two Christian men is that which, according to Beresford (2010b: 4) catalyses Paul's decision to embark upon a journey of asceticism. He witnesses the martyrdoms of the two men prior to the Edict of Milan (therefore Christians were still being persecuted at this point) and decides upon a different course of action for himself, which leads him to live an ascetic life in the desert: [24]

> Como un santo mártir perseverase en la fee e fuese vencedor entre los tormentos que le mandava dar el juez, mandólo el juez enmelar e poner al fervor del sol, la cara al cielo, atadas las manos atrás, por que fuese vencido de las mordeduras de las moscas el que non pudiera ser vencido por las sartenes ardiendo e por otras cosas penosas. (lines 3–41)

In this section, the first martyr is forced to lie face up in the heat of the Egyptian sun, which would have been an unbearable torment, scorching his skin. This is reminiscent of the martyrdom of Saint Vincent when he is cooked upon a gridiron. Once again, the topos of cannibalism becomes relevant as he has effectively been cooked, and thus becomes akin to an article of consumption. A parallel can be drawn between this torture and the posthumous torment inflicted on Vincent in which his corpse was left to be consumed by animals. As previously discussed in relation to Vincent, there is a link between sexual desire and cannibalism. Alec Irwin argues that 'the essence of hunger is the "inability to resist." Hunger brings the daily demonstration that our will is not free, that our bodies are inhabited—constituted—by forces over which we can exert only the most limited and

[24] All quotations are taken from Beresford (2010b: 29–37).

fleeting control' (2001: 260). If the 'inability to resist' that Irwin ascribes to the feeling of hunger is taken a step further and applied to cannibalism, the link to a sexual appetite is all the more obvious. There is an element of voyeuristic scopophilia on an extra-diegetic level in the sense that people listening to the text being read to them are invited to imagine his naked body, covered in honey, being penetrated again and again, turning the man into an object of fetishistic scopophilia, despite their being no description of his appearance.

In addition to the cannibalistic motif, the man is bitten by flies 'por que fuese vencido de las mordeduras de las moscas' (lines 39–40). Here, the flies are feasting on his flesh and blood. A parallel can be drawn between this man and Saint Vincent: in Vincent's legend, his corpse is offered divine protection from animal consumption, but in the case of the man in this legend, his body is consumed by animals. In order to bite humans, flies must pierce the skin and inject their saliva. This is reminiscent of the sexual act, rendering the young man in question the recipient of pinprick violations and foreign bodily fluids. On a literal level, this would have been painful. However, on a metaphorical level, he is being penetrated and becomes the passive party in a symbolic sodomitic act.

In addition to the above martyrdom, Saint Paul witnesses another man undergo a terrible form of torture:

> E otro mancebo que aún floresció en la hedat de la mancebía fue levado a un huerto muy delectable, e fue puesto en una cama mucho mollida e blanda entre la blancura de los lilios e la bermejura de las rosas, a la orilla de un río que corría con muy suave sonido e adó avía

> muchos árboles e fería muy manso ayre que movía las fojas de los árboles; e fue atado de pies e de manos con vergas verdes e floridas e blandas. E como se partiesen de allí los que lo ataran, vino a él una muger pública muy fermosa e començólo a abraçar muy dulcemente e a lo tractar con las manos los mienbros varoniles turpemente por que, despertados los mienbros al deseo de la delectación carnal, se echase sobre él aquella muger, obradora de maldat. E veyéndose atado el cavallero de Jhesu Christo, e non se poder ayudar e ser vencido de la delectación, amonestado divynalmente en el coraçón, cortóse la lengua con los dientes e escupióla en la cara de aquella muger mala. (lines 41–54).

Before delving into an analysis of the encounter the young man has with the woman, it is essential to consider the description of his surroundings. As noted by Beresford (2010b: 9), the youth is lying tied up in what is in effect, a *locus amoenus*. This recalls tales of love, which creates a level of irony because this is the scene of a martyrdom, not one of two lovers meeting illicitly. The emphasis upon his surroundings is therefore significant because of the juxtaposition it creates between that which the audience might expect and the reality of that which is about to transpire.

The young man is on a soft bed in the midst of this *locus amoenus*, which gives rise to sexual symbolism. The notion of a bed might allude to the marital bed, which, in the case of a martyr is particularly significant. Martyrdom was a means of drawing oneself nearer to God. In the case of the female virgin martyrs, they were often described as *sponsae Christi*. In this case one might think that the symbolism of the marital bed would be pertinent because despite the fact that a union between Christ and a *sponsa Christi* is unlike any earthly marriage, and importantly, sexless, the notion of consummating the union comes to mind. Through comparison, the young man is feminized as he is likened to a bride of Christ.

Interpersonal relationships are vital in the construction of gendered identities and the enactment of gender roles. The interaction between the young Christian man and the harlot causes these roles to be challenged and destabilized. The gender roles are inverted, and the woman takes on the active, traditionally masculine role in the seduction and is therefore masculinized, whereas the young man, who is tied up and therefore immobile, is forced into a role of passivity, which consequently feminizes him. Due to the heteronormative bias upon which much of the world is predicated, which was prevalent in the medieval period, in a sexual relationship involving two people, it is assumed that one person must assume the active, masculine role and that the other must assume the passive, feminine role.

Whilst the first man undergoes metaphorical acts of a sexual nature, the young man in the above section is subject to a literal sexual act. It is important to consider the discrepancy between these two individuals: the first man is bitten by flies, which could allude to a symbolic sodomitic rape, and the second is seduced and raped by a woman and is therefore the one to penetrate her. The woman is particularly forthcoming and caresses his member until it is erect and proceeds to mount him. In addition to having his masculinity challenged by this woman, the young man metaphorically emasculates himself by undergoing a symbolic act of self-castration, in which he bites off his own tongue and spits it in her face. Beresford points out that 'male corporeality, somewhat paradoxically, functions both as problem and solution' (2010: 9). By physically destabilizing his masculinity, in the symbolic severing of his signifier of a masculine identity, he is able to fight off the woman who was posing a threat to his chastity. In a similar vein as that which was discussed in the previous chapter, the penis, like the breast does not make one male or

female, but it can be a visual signifier of a gendered identity. The tongue is a body part that can be loaded with gendered connotations because it functions as part of the mechanism that allows humans to speak. Cullum (1999: 182) points out that for priests and the clergy in general, speech was central to their profession; they spoke mass, sang, and listened to confessions, all of which require speech. However, speech was perceived as feminine, especially its overuse, in contrast to the written word, which was coded as masculine. Burrus argues that the biting of the young man's tongue is, in addition to the perhaps more obvious reading of a euphemism of self-castration, an act of gender switching. She argues that women were thought of as having loose tongues in contrast to men who were more mindful with regard to the way in which they spoke and that it was considered that the only way for a woman to control her tongue was by destroying it, thus achieving 'an almost absolute eloquence in perfect silence' (2004: 27). This, alongside the supposed role reversal in the way in which the attempted rape is carried out, strips the young man of his masculinity.[25]

Saint Paul bears witness to these martyrdoms and subsequently decides to become an ascetic. There are no details to follow up what happened to either of these martyrs, but, as pointed out by Burrus (2004: 25) neither of the martyrs has managed to die, which would have been that to which they were aspiring. In fact, the narrative moves along swiftly to the next section. Perhaps this is an

[25] This is reminiscent of Saint Christina, who, like the young man in the garden, bites off her own tongue and spits it in the face of her torturer, Julian, subsequently blinding him. The topos of a metaphorical self-castration as a means of defending oneself is thus apparent in the legends of both male and female martyrs.

invitation for the audience to engage in a form of voyeuristic scopophilia and to imagine what happened to the bodies of the two martyrs. Or, as argued by Beresford, the positioning of this section at the beginning of the narrative requires the reader to consider it seriously and consider the following tensions that it creates: 'public against private, martyr against ascetic, saint against author, and most importantly, Christian Egypt against pagan Rome' (2010: 9).[26] The fact that these tensions are made so prominent by the placement of this section subsequently highlights the structure of the *vita* as posited by Altman (1975: 8) and Saint Paul's difference and exceptionality is underlined.

Saint Paul leaves the city to live in the desert as a hermit. He lives in a cave and survives on very little sustenance: 'E comía del fruto de aquella palma vieja e vestíase de las fojas della' (line 83). He lives a secluded life, relying only on that which nature provides. This would have been a lonely and difficult existence, perfect for asceticism. This is reminiscent of Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden, as they were able to survive on what God provided for them. However, Paul is living a life of asceticism, not of bliss, as Adam and Eve did. The leaves that he uses to cover himself are a reminder that Paul is living a world of sin, as once Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they became aware and ashamed of their own nudity, and covered themselves. Paul engages in asceticism in order to suffer corporeally to quicken his journey to holiness, thus escaping from the sinful world.

[26] At this point, Rome was pagan, whereas Egypt was the most Christian country in the world and was where most of the desert ascetics dwelled.

Paul is considered to be one of the first desert ascetics, along with Antony of Egypt. The type of asceticism in which they engaged is eremitic monasticism, which, according to Geoffrey Galt Harpham, is the 'heroic fanaticism of the early desert solitaries such as Antony, who lived essentially alone in remote settings in Egypt or Syria, torturing themselves and confronting demons in an improvisational, unregulated, and ecstatic warfare' (1987: 20). According to Gavin D. Flood (2004: 145), the Platonic notion of mind/soul and body dualism is one upon which eremitic desert asceticism is predicated. However, 'seeing the body as an evil that prevents the soul from ascending to God, a clear mind/soul and body dualism is too simple a model by which to understand Christian asceticism' (2004: 145). He argues that instead, there ought to be a distinction between a pre-Fall and post-Fall state, with the ultimate objective of asceticism being the reconstruction of the former. Therefore, the goal of the desert ascetic was to return to a pre-Fall state though a dualistic separation of body and soul, engaging in ascetic practices to mortify the flesh in an attempt to achieve sanctity. Flood (2004: 213) explains that asceticism often weakens the body through practices such as hunger, sleep deprivation, and mortification in order to gain some sort of power. This could be religious power or dominion over the flesh and its basic desires. It is through his eremitic lifestyle that Paul is able to gain the power of sanctity.

The final section in which the destabilization of masculinity will be discussed is the interaction between Paul and Antony. The relationship between the two men is significant because it plays on gendered literary and social conventions:

> E oyéndolo, el bienaventurado Sant Paulo cerró la puerta. E veyendo esto, Sant Antón echóse a la puerta de fuera e rogava al varón santo con grant afinco que le pluguiese de le abrir. E estóvole rogando fasta la ora de sesta o más e dezía: 'Tú sabes quién só yo e de dónde vengo e por qué. Sé que non meresco ver la tu cara, mas enpero non me partiré de aquí fasta que la vea. Tú, que rescibes las bestias, ¿por qué desechas al onbre? Busquéte e falléte e llamo por que me abras. E si non lo meresciere alcançar de ty, aquí moriré delante de aquesta tu puerta; e sy ál non, enterrarás la mi carrne desque fuere muerta.' (lines 153–161)

In this extract, Antony begs Paul to allow him to enter to see him. Solitude was a significant aspect of desert asceticism, and as pointed out by Harpham, 'eremitism seeks an unworldly mode of being, a radical dissociation from social customs, norms, habits' (1987: 21). In order to be dissociated completely from society, solitude is essential. Therefore, the interaction with another human being (Antony) would have conflicted with Paul's convictions and desire to engage in the eremitic lifestyle. He therefore behaves coyly, putting up a fight against the intruder. This is somewhat reminiscent of the poetry of courtly love and invites a queer reading of their exchange. Beresford (2010b: 19) comments on the fact that Antony declares that he will die if he is not able to see Paul, with a rhetoric that echoes that of courtly love. In fact, Antony mentions death twice in his speech ('aquí moriré […] la mi carne desque fuere muerta'). His outburst is similar to the declarations of love and affection when a man is trying to woo a lady. There is a heightened sense of drama in this encounter between the two men, in which Saint Paul is metaphorically emasculated by assuming the role of the shy and demure lady of one of these such poems. Saint Paul's feminization or indeed emasculation reaches a climax when, as claimed by Beresford (2010b: 20) the symbolic connotations of the door separating the two men could be mapped onto the

anatomical, playing upon the tradition of the *hortus conclusus* and with Antony's entrance alluding to a symbolic violation of Saint Paul's protected, virginal space.

Until this point Saint Antony and Saint Paul merely speak to each other through a door. However, once Paul allows Antony to cross the threshold, they are subsequently able to share the same space and gaze upon each other. Paul allows Antony to enter his *hortus conclusus*, and therefore his protected virginal locus. This is particularly important because it introduces an element of tangible corporeality that has not been expressed between two people until this point of the legend. Neither of the two youths were described physically, yet the audience must assume that they were seen by onlookers and the harlot in the case of the second youth, and Paul and Antony are described as emaciated prior to this section, but no human sees their ascetic bodies. However, when Antony enters Paul's *hortus conclusus*, Paul invites his scopophilic gaze:

> E asentáronse después que se ovieron abraçado e dixo Sant Paulo: '¡Cata aquí aquél que buscaste con tan grant trabajo! ¡Cata aquí los mienbros podridos con vejez e cobiertos de mucha canez! ¡Cata aquí el onbre que se tornará en polvo muy en breve!' (lines 167–70)

Not only does he invite Antony to gaze upon his decrepit body, but he also marvels at it himself. Great emphasis is placed on Paul's corporeality, both on an intra-diegetic level—in that he invites Antony's gaze—and on an extra-diegetic level—the audience is also invited to imagine his emaciated body. The disintegration of his physical form, and the suffering that this would have caused, would have been excellent ascetic practice. Paul invites Antony to engage in a form of fetishistic scopophilia, which could be interpreted through a queer reading. Having been somewhat coy when Antony was begging to be allowed to enter the *hortus conclusus*, Paul is now almost

brazen in his desire to be looked at; he is asking Antony to take delight in his abject body. This is a form of perverse narcissistic scopophilia as he wants to be gazed upon as a sight of horror. There is a sense of liminality here wherein Paul's body is teetering somewhere on the border between life and death. As an ascetic himself, Antony would have looked upon Paul's body in awe and admiration, marvelling at his achievements. Whilst this scene could be perceived as having an underlying sense of homoeroticism, it is important to remember what Beresford (2010b: 20) calls its 'monastic orientation'. The purpose of this text is to inspire devotion and celebrate the life of the revered ascetic saint, Paul of Thebes. Therefore, ultimately, Antony is filled with a desexualized admiration for Paul and believes that he ought to aspire to emulate him.

Masculinity is predicated upon interactions that men have with other men, and its expression can create a boundary between the self and the other. As has been demonstrated in both legends and visual representations of the martyrdom of Saint Vincent, alterity is a notion that can be simplified into anything or anyone that is repudiated by, and unlike the self. It does not matter whether the other is Muslim, Jewish, dark-skinned, a cannibal, a sodomite or a woman. Masculinity is asserted in a public way, in an attempt to achieve domination over women and other men. Medieval masculinity is therefore not an independent identity, but something which must be proven time and time again.

Chapter Three:

Female Monks and Prostitute Saints: Gender Fluidity in the Legends of Saints Margaret, Marina, and Pelagia

Introduction

According to Genesis 1:27, once God had created the flora and fauna, he created man and woman, producing a clear binary related to questions of anatomy. This is reinforced in Deuteronomy 22:5, which considers cross-dressing to be sinful, raising moral implications that extend beyond mere expressions of identity. The medieval Church largely adhered to this. Cross-dressing therefore creates a problem regarding its teachings as it blurs the line created by a male/female binary. Vern L. Bullough (1974: 1392) claims that despite the medieval Church theoretically prohibiting cross-dressing, in practice, it remained unconcerned about the matter, providing it remained within certain limits. It was largely ignored unless it posed a threat to the status quo, for example in the case of Joan of Arc, or if it became too erotically appealing.[1] The notion of eroticism and cross-dressing was considered problematic in the case of men disguising themselves as women in order to enter a convent. This was viewed as one of the only reasons that men would desire to appear as female. Maleness was considered to be aspirational, and the traditionally masculine attributes such as bravery and strength were praised, whereas femaleness connoted a weakness of the body, soul, and mind. Many female saints give up elements of their femininity, thus masculinizing themselves to some degree, which enables them to achieve sanctity. As Bullough (1974: 1381) recognizes,

[1] For further information on Joan of Arc, see Campo & Infantes (2006).

cross-dressing can also be examined in terms of the gain or the loss of status, with men who dress as women experiencing a form of social descent, but women who don male apparel experiencing a corresponding diminution in status.

Despite these Biblical teachings, there are some saints who problematize the clarity of the distinction of the binary concept of gender upheld by the Church. They are revered and their cross-dressing or gender fluidity is not condemned; in fact, their exploits are praised. Whilst there are examples of female saints who lived a portion of their lives as men, and who achieved sanctity through this practice, there is little evidence of male saints who dressed as women, and in those rare occasions where this transpires, it is usually a product of trickery or punishment intended to humiliate.[2] Bullough (1974: 1383) explains this phenomenon by pointing out that if a man were to cross-dress as a woman, he would have not only lost status, but also been associated with eroticism. This raises the question of why there was this apparent obsession with tales about women dressing as men and becoming monks. Benedicta Ward (1987: 102–03) explains that it was neither a repression that led to sexual fantasy of this type of situation occurring within monasteries, nor a rejection of sexuality. Instead, she claims that these legends were a recognition of a real and powerful sexual desire experienced by humans and demonstrated the fact that desire was not

[2] This is the case in the legend of Saint Jerome, where his enemies left a woman's gown by his bedside, which he put on, thinking it was his and proceeded to Church, making it appear that he had spent the night with a woman. The *Gran flos sanctorum* version of the legend remains unedited but is included in Escorial MS h–II–18 fols 158^{vb}–65^{va} and BNM MS 12689 fols 165^{va}–68^{vb}.

inherently negative. She claims that these legends show that desire is central to the human experience as yearning for God. The saints discussed in this chapter problematize the Church's binary vision of gender but are nevertheless celebrated by this same institution. This calls into question the validity of a binary vision of gender, as hagiographical literature itself accepts it as being more fluid.

The saints that will be discussed in this chapter share many similarities, as they are all subjects who are assigned female at birth, and throughout their lifetimes self-identify as men and present themselves as male in order to achieve a specific end. According to John Anson 'In its simplest form the legend of the female monk has a three-part structure consisting of (1) flight from the world, (2) disguise and seclusion, and (3) discovery and recognition' (1974: 13). As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the three women fall into this formulaic pattern that is deemed acceptable. The notion of disguise, as described by Anson, invalidates a gender-fluid perception of these saints and their lives. Scholarly approaches to gender instability have changed, which is evidenced in Judith Butler's more recent work. Butler analyses gender as being purely a social construction and as such is susceptible to change. She describes it as something that is performative, which is particularly relevant to a discussion of gender fluidity. Butler's work has been informed by that of Simone de Beauvoir, who argued that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, woman' (2014: 146). This line of thinking would suggest that gender is not something that a person acquires at birth or in the womb, but rather, is something that is assimilated throughout a lifetime, and therefore is not fixed. Butler argues that 'gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*' (1988: 519). This

argument suggests that gender is not something that ought to be viewed as rigid or prescriptive but is instead created through the actions of people who identify as and perform a given gender. Butler (1988: 522) further develops her argument by making an explicit distinction between being an AFAB subject and being a woman. Womanhood is something that Butler argues entails conforming to that which society has constructed as womanhood.

It is important to consider that some of the words used to describe modern experiences of gender cannot be applied to the past. When discussing issues of gender identity and expression with regard to historical subjects, it is vital to be cautious with the use of language. María Elena Martínez explains this phenomenon:

> The act of mapping a category onto subjects who may not have recognized the practices, lifestyles, notions of body and self, and so forth that it references, for example, aligns itself with a genealogy of power—one that imposes, distorts, or forecloses certain desires, identifications, and experiences. It can also entail missing an opportunity to discover in the past human possibilities and imaginings that were suppressed or left unfulfilled but that can provide guidance in the present for creating better worlds in the future. (2014: 174)

Whilst modern terms can be used to understand these figures within the realm of today's reality, it is necessary to remember that this language ought not to be treated as an absolute description of historical figures because certain terms carry meaning that is entrenched in a modern experience of the world that might not have applied (or applied in the same way) in other periods.

Gender instability is a recurring theme in some legends in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, particularly in the tales of the female monk saints. These were women who disguised themselves as men to enter holy orders as monks or to become hermits (who were almost always male). This chapter will analyse the destabilization of gender with regard to Saints Margaret, Marina, and Pelagia, considering the ways in which gender fluidity can be used as a tool or as a means to an end.[3] It will also discuss the relationship between gender and power, the dynamic of gendered relationships, and how those are altered when gender is destabilized. First, the chapter will offer a discrete literary analysis of the legend of Saint Margaret, discussing agency, as well as how the destabilization of gender was a means to achieving sanctity. Saint Marina's legend, which, despite sharing similarities, contains a number of significant differences that alter the way in which the fluidity of gender could be perceived, will subsequently be compared to Margaret's. Finally, the chapter will analyse the legend of Saint Pelagia, who not is not only categorized as a female monk saint, but also as a prostitute saint. Her legend differs significantly from the former two and offers a different perspective linking gender fluidity with redemption. The legends of the three saints will be compared to each other, considering possible shared origins as well as differences between them. The notion of the male fetishistic scopophilic gaze will be analysed in all three legends, considering the ways in which the three saints attempt to (and in some cases successfully manage to) escape it. The analysis of these three legends will demonstrate the fact that it is through gender

[3] Some earlier scholarship refers to these saints as being *transvestites*. However, this term will not be used as it is inaccurate and can be offensive. The term *transgender* will not be used either to designate the saints in this chapter as it inaccurate considering the motives behind the gender transformations discussed.

fluidity and the embodiment of both masculinity and femininity that Margaret, Marina, and Pelagia are able to achieve sanctity.

Of the three saints discussed in this chapter, Saint Margaret and Saint Marina are the most similar: they are noble virgins, whilst Saint Pelagia is a reformed prostitute who becomes a hermit. The legends of the three saints are remarkably similar, which would suggest shared origins. Saint Pelagia and Saint Margaret share a feast day (8 October), which points to their common provenance and explains why their individual cults overlap. The names of the three saints also share the same etymological origins. The names Marina, Margaret, and Pelagia all come from words meaning *sea*; in Latin, the word for sea is *mare*, and in Greek, it is *πέλαγος* (pélagos). In literature, the sea often symbolizes change and unrest, which is reflected in the way in which they undergo changes in identity throughout their lives.

Saint Margaret

Saint Margaret offers the most comprehensive insight into gender roles and the ways in which they can be challenged.[4] The other legends are a derivation from her narrative, and therefore Margaret's tale functions as a blueprint and a starting point for the analysis of gender fluidity as a means to sanctity.

[4] For further information on Saint Margaret, see Anson (1974).

At the beginning of the legend, Saint Margaret is presented not only as feminine, but as having many of the ideal qualities of a Christian woman of the time:

> Santa Margarita fue virgen muy fermosa e noble e rica, e con grand diligencia era guardada de sus padres, e assý era enformada en costunbres loables (lines 2–3)

Margaret's virginity is immediately emphasized, and it becomes her defining attribute, like saints such as Agatha and Christina (whose legends are analysed in Chapter One), who are noble virgins who die in the name of Christ.[5] Virginity was often a pre-requisite for a woman to become a saint. There are of course, examples of mothers who became saints or even reformed prostitutes (as we shall see in the case of Pelagia). Virginity is an important aspect of Christian virtue that characterizes a great majority of male and female saints, but in hagiography, it is more often highlighted in the case of female saints. It was commonly understood to be not only a physical state, but also a frame of mind. It was not merely perceived as an abstinence of sexual activity, but also a 'chastity of mind and body, denoted by asexual behaviour' (Hunt 2019: 8).

From the beginning of Margaret's tale, she is characterized as the typically feminine virgin martyr who would subsequently become a *sponsa Christi*. This idea becomes more evident in the emphasis on her desire to remain chaste, and therefore never marry:

> e tan grande era la honestidad de la su castidad, que non quería ser vista de honbre alguno de aquesta vida. (lines 3–4)

[5] All quotations from Saint Margaret's legend are taken from Beresford (in preparation).

From this early point in her legend, she is portrayed as an aspiring *sponsa Christi*, by rejecting earthly unions with men but with the suggestion that she would enter a union with Christ. Her physicality, and its potential to be objectified through the controlling nature of the gaze becomes central to her construction of self-identity. Despite her total rejection of men, Margaret is betrothed to an eligible bachelor, approved of by her parents. Her pain and distress at having to marry against her will becomes evident:

> despreció todas las alegrías de aquesta vida assý como si fueran estiércol e cosa perdida. (lines 11–12)

The imagery used in these lines expresses Margaret's complete rejection of worldly pleasures as she compares them to *estiércol* (manure). The imagery is that of abject repudiation; she compares marriage to lower bodily functions—one of the most base and taboo human needs—using scatology to express her disgust.[6] Her disdain for marriage could also be analysed as a desire to escape the ownership that a husband would have had over her and her body. Virginity was a means of asserting physical autonomy and not giving a man the right to her body. Elizabeth Castelli argues that 'The notion of virginity as liberation from the exigencies of earthly marriage leads into the theme of celestial marriage with Christ' (1986: 71). Whilst the female monk saints such as Margaret are rarely referred to as brides of Christ, they reject earthly marriage in order to devote themselves to Christ completely.

[6] For further information on the notion of abject repudiation, see Kristeva (1982).

A turning point in Margaret's gender identity occurs when she cuts off her hair. Whilst shaving her head was an act of necessity to disguise herself as a man, there is nonetheless value in the spiritually symbolic nature of the act.[7] It marks the beginning of her rupture with her previous life and in a sense, she is liberated from her hair, which is a marker of her female identity, thus enabling her to pursue the life that she desires.[8] The word choice is also important: 'trasquilóse sus cabellos' (line 14), which literally translates as 'she sheared her hair'. This animalizes her because it is a verb used to describe the shearing of animals such as sheep. She is othered by this comparison as it is not only symbolic of her ceasing to be a woman, but it also indicates a rejection of human societal conventions. The reference to shearing could also potentially be interpreted as a reference to Jesus as the lamb of God.[9] This could foreshadow Margaret becoming a surrogate female Christ figure when, later in the legend, she takes on the sins of another and suffers for them, in the same way that Christ suffered and died for the sins of humanity. This idea will be explored further at a later point in this chapter.

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[7] Lynda L. Coon (2010: 33) explains that according to the Old Testament, the shaving of the head can be used to various ends: making an unclean person clean (Leviticus 14:8), taking away power (Judges 16:19), and an outward sign of spiritual repentance (Isaiah 3:24).

[8] As discussed in relation to Saint Christina, Synnott (1987: 381) claims that whilst hair is something that is deeply personal, it is public as opposed to private. In the case of Saint Margaret, the cutting of her hair is a publicly visible manifestation of a deeply personal choice that she made. For further information, see Beltrán Pepió (1976: 53), Blouin (1981: 205), and Bartlett (1994).

[9] A visual example of the notion of Jesus as the lamb of God is Francisco de Zurbarán's *Agnus Dei*, c. 1635–40, Museo Nacional de Prado, Madrid.

Once Margaret has cut off her hair and donned masculine clothing, she enters a monastery where the Abbot receives her as a monk: 'E el abad rescibiólo e dióle el hábito' (lines 15–16). It is important to note that this is the first instance of masculine pronouns being used in reference to Margaret, who from this point onwards identifies as Pelagius. He is referred to as a man on an intra-diegetic level by the Abbot and by the other monks. On an extra-diegetic level, he is also referred to in the text as male, suggesting a hagiographic and therefore religious acceptance of his new gender identity. It is significant that Pelagius is not presented as a woman cross-dressing, but as a man. Judith Butler (1988: 526) considers gender to be performative. A performance must have an audience, and the audience will react to that which is presented. Therefore, gender is not only as a form of self-expression but also as a means of communication, both in terms of the perceptions of others, but also the type of interactions this person might welcome.

Having entered the monastic life, Pelagius would have engaged in coenobitic monasticism, which, according to Harpham, 'represented a more corporate and stable form of asceticism, an institutionalization of the primary charisma of the eremite' (1987: 21). This form of asceticism was rooted in community and was more public and structured than the private ascetic practices of the eremitic ascetics. Life in medieval monasteries would have been difficult, and highly regulated. The monks 'submitted themselves to extraordinary regulation, discipline, and obedience, living under a Superior in strict adherence to a Rule which prescribed their conduct, their attitudes, their food, and even their thoughts' (Harpham 1987: 21).

The idea of gender fluidity is not only present through the physical aspect of Pelagius's appearance, but also through his undertaking of tasks that have traditionally been coded as masculine:

> E tan religiosamente se esforçó a conversar, que muerto el procurador de las monjas, lo enbió el abad de consejo de los viejos a tomar el regimiento de aquellas religiosas. (lines 16–17)

Pelagius is promoted to a role of superintending the nuns after the death of his predecessor. In the case of both Pelagius and his predecessor, it was a man who oversaw this group of women, reflecting the patriarchal nature of the Church as an institution. As explained by Harpham, in coenobitism, great importance was placed upon 'hierarchy, written laws, conformity and routine' (1987: 21). Therefore, Pelagius's promotion would have afforded him not only more responsibility, but also a greater importance within the monastic hierarchy that had to be respected. This creates dramatic irony because the audience knows that Pelagius is an AFAB subject, but the monks and nuns do not. Pelagius proves that he is more capable of traditionally masculine managerial tasks than his AMAB counterparts. In some respects, he is performing masculinity better than they are:

> E como las proveyesse de las cosas necessarias e las visitasse con la vianda de las almas, e las rigiesse loable e santamente. (lines 18–19)

The three-part structure highlights Pelagius's success in performing the tasks assigned to him. The text does not suggest that another monk would have been better qualified or that Pelagius struggled with the intellectual demands or the responsibility of the role. Socially, this structure is reminiscent of the female micro-communities discussed in Chapter One. However, in this case it is an AFAB

man who is taking charge of a community of other women.[10] He cares for the nuns holistically; providing for their needs, looking after them spiritually, and governing them well and in a holy manner. He also nourishes their souls, which is significant because women were not allowed to preach or explicate dogma—this was an activity reserved for men. There is an element of dramatic irony because the extra-diegetic audience knows that Pelagius is an AFAB subject and therefore ought not to have been preaching. This can be compared to the legend of Saint Agatha when she talks about her spiritual milk.[11] A parallel can thus be drawn between Agatha and Pelagius who both offer spiritual nourishment to others, albeit in different ways.

Pelagius becomes a surrogate paternal figure for the nuns in that he becomes responsible for their welfare. Women would not have been trusted to govern themselves as they would have been considered too chaotic and incapable of undertaking such responsibility. Men, on the other hand, were perceived as natural rulers and leaders; there was authority associated with the phallus (and to an extent, there still is), which creates dramatic irony because the extra-diegetic viewer is aware of the absence of a phallus in this paternal leader, but the intra-diegetic audience is not, thus undermining binary gender stereotypes and challenging preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity.

[10] For further information, see Chapter One and Deyermond (1993: 2).

[11] 'e con ellas dó yo a los mis sesos fartura de leche' (lines 72–73).

Pelagius successfully carries out his duties but encounters problems when he is accused of fornication and impregnating one of the nuns:

> aviendo inbidia el diablo de la su virtud, trabajó por enfamar e enbargar el estado de la su salud e fizo a una virgen que guardava la puerta caer en error de fornicación. (lines 19–21)

Being the only man in an all-female environment, Pelagius is the obvious culprit. There is a tension between the intra and extra-diegetic dimensions. The audience is aware of his innocence, whereas the monks and nuns would have believed him to be the only legitimate culprit. This section is symbolically significant as the nun who becomes pregnant is the one whose role it was to guard the door. By so doing, she was preventing the nuns from leaving the convent and venturing to where they might be exposed to dangers and temptation, as well as preventing intruders from entering. The convent is enclosed by walls, which is reminiscent of the idea of the *hortus conclusus* analysed in the previous chapter. Whilst the convent is not a garden, it shares some of the connotations of the *hortus conclusus*. It is a locus often associated with the Virgin Mary and is a virginal space. That which is contained within it is juxtaposed with the outside world. The door represents a liminal threshold between inside and outside, good and evil, safety and danger. The architectural can be mapped onto the anatomical as the door represents the female sexual organ, and as is the case in many medieval lyric poetry and ballads, he who penetrates the door penetrates the lady. It is reminiscent of the door to the cave in the legend of Paul of Thebes, which is also symbolic of a threshold that separates him from the outside world, protecting his sanctity. It is because of her vulnerable position in this liminal threshold that she falls into sexual temptation. The door (threshold of the convent) represents the female sexual organ, which in turn is the threshold of the woman, and the convent beyond the door is symbolic of the womb. The womb provides safety for the baby within it, the convent provides safety for the nuns.

As a consequence of the nun's sin, Pelagius is accused: 'echaron toda la culpa a solo Pelagio, assí como a aquel que era su familiar e perlado' (lines 22–23). It would be plausible that Pelagius, who was her Prelate, could have engaged in sexual relations with her. It would have been outrageous that a holy man would have broken his vow of chastity and in doing so caused a nun (who would also have taken such a vow) to do the same. Having been accused of a sin that he did not commit, Pelagius is sentenced: 'E condemnáronlo sin lo examinar e oýr' (line 23). He is accused without trial or an opportunity to defend himself. The word 'examinar' is significant not only because it refers to the start of the legend, when Margaret was determined not to be seen by any man, and it also foreshadows the letter that she will write on her death bed asking that her corpse should not be examined or prepared for burial by men. This will be discussed in greater depth at a later point in this chapter.

Pelagius's ascetic lifestyle begins at this point of his tale. It is essential to situate his asceticism in its historical and religious context. As discussed in the previous chapter, Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity marked the end of martyrdom as the dominant mode of saintly experience. Like Paul of Thebes, Margaret lived after the Edict of Milan, which de-criminalized Christianity.[12] She therefore falls into the category of ascetic saints, meaning that her suffering was self-inflicted (or at the very least, could have been avoided). Asceticism is a self-determined act in a way that martyrdom is not. Whilst it is true that in many cases the martyrs could have complied with the wishes of their persecutors (for example, Saint Agatha could have accepted the

[12] For more information, see Chapter Two.

advances of the Prefect, and Saint Vincent could have renounced God), asceticism is more dependent on a person's own will.[13] Gillian Clark (2002: 33) remarks that asceticism was the mark of a truly committed Christian in an age when faith and a person's devotion to their religion were no longer tested by martyrdom. There was a shift from the trend of martyrdom to asceticism when Christians were no longer persecuted, and the external source of suffering was therefore removed. Since Christians were no longer tortured and executed for their beliefs, this type of suffering, which they believed would accelerate and secure their place in heaven, was no longer accessible. Therefore, asceticism became more popular, and instead of the source of suffering being an external one, it became an internal one; the ascetics became their own cause of suffering as they inflicted physical torment upon themselves.

It is notable that in the description of the nun's sexual transgression there is no mention of, or even reference to the man with whom she had sexual relations. He is able to disappear whereas the nun is forced to live with the physical consequences of being pregnant, going through childbirth, and raising a child, as well as the moral and social repercussions, which would have been significant. This is indicative of the way in which society perceives and treats women. There is no further description of the nun in question; in the same way that she was discarded by the man who impregnated her and left, she is abandoned by the narrative.

[13] For further information and a more in-depth explanation about the origins of asceticism, see Brock (1973).

Despite the nun's sin, she does not appear to receive further punishment. Perhaps the shame and the difficulties that she would face bringing up a child alone were considered as adequate punishment, or perhaps Pelagius takes on her punishment by being chastised. He thus becomes a surrogate Christ figure; in the same way that Jesus suffered for the sins of the world, Pelagius suffers for the sins of the nun and the man who impregnated her. His gender fluidity raises important questions concerning his Christ-like acceptance of another's sins. Whilst he is not a female Christ figure, he is certainly a less conventional Christ-like surrogate, embodying aspects of masculinity and femininity. This further re-enforces the notion that in order for a woman (such as Margaret) to be holy or achieve sanctity, she must adopt male attributes and masculinize herself. Margaret/Pelagius presents the ultimate challenge to the Church's prescriptive notions of gender, whilst being upheld as a paragon of female sanctity.

Caroline Walker Bynum (1982: 125) argues that there is evidence of a feminized reading of God and Christ. For example, she points out that in the Old Testament, God often speaks of himself as a mother, nurturing the Israelites, and that in Matthew 23:37, Christ is described as a mother hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. Therefore, when considering notions of gender fluidity in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, such as Margaret/Pelagius, it is vital to situate them within a wider context of gender fluidity within Christianity. Regarding Christ, Bynum (1982: 133) points out that in medieval imagery, the mother is presented as being loving and tender with her children, sometimes dying in childbirth to give her children life. This can be compared with Jesus's maternal love for his people; he died to grant all of humanity eternal life. His suffering can therefore be mapped onto the body of Pelagius, who is punished and suffers for sins that he did not commit.

Pelagius thus becomes a gender-fluid Christ figure and takes on the punishments of others, serving to liberate them from enduring suffering as well as fulfilling his own desire to suffer.

Whilst Pelagius is innocent of impregnating the nun, he commits a religious transgression by what would have been perceived as cross-dressing.[14] The Bible is explicit in its condemnation which leads to the question of whether Pelagius's chastisement constituted divine punishment. Yet Margaret has been lauded as a saint and venerated by the Catholic Church as an example of virtue and piety. This is an example of the way in which, as observed by Bullough (1974: 1392), the Catholic Church was unconcerned in practice with issues such as cross-dressing, provided that it did not pose a threat to the status quo, despite the Biblical teaching against it.

Pelagius's punishment involves him being locked in a cave:

> e echáronlo del monesterio desonrradamente e encerráronlo en una cueva que estava en una peña. E encomendáronlo a un monje muy áspero que oviesse cuydado dél, e le diesse algund poco de pan de cevada a comer e algund poco de agua a bever. (lines 23–26)

It is at this point in the legend that there is a transition from a coenobitic form of asceticism to something that resembles the model of eremitic asceticism. Pelagius transitions to a more private

[14] Whilst today, Saint Margaret's legend can be theorized according to gender studies, and terms such as gender fluidity can be applied, at the time this would have been perceived as cross-dressing. Therefore, the analysis that follows considers the way in which this type of lifestyle may have been viewed by a medieval Christian audience.

form of asceticism as opposed to the regulated and institutionalized coenobitic asceticism. The cave holds powerful symbolism in this legend, for a variety of reasons. First, it becomes a prison for Pelagius. It represents an enclosed area in which he is held captive. He is always physically enclosed: first in the family home, then in the monastery, in the cave in which he is punished, and finally in his grave. The only time Margaret/Pelagius is not constrained by a physical space is after fleeing the wedding in order to become a monk. This transformation occurs at the only time in the legend when Margaret/Pelagius is not contained within a physical space. The cave is also evocative of Christ's tomb. Margaret's legend creates a parallel with this as the cave is where Pelagius will die and subsequently be resurrected to the afterlife as a saint. The cave becomes the tomb of Pelagius's worldly self. Furthermore, the cave is often used to symbolize a womb. This is particularly pertinent because the cave is that which symbolically gives birth to Margaret's new self. It is from the womb of the cave that she is reborn into sanctity, becoming a locus of transformation. The cave is reminiscent of that of Saint Paul of Thebes (discussed in the previous chapter). Like Paul, Pelagius is enclosed in a place within which he is able to live a life of asceticism. The cave becomes a locus of sanctity and is akin to a *hortus conclusus*, like the convent discussed earlier. Whilst the convent was a locus of supposed virginity but was penetrated by a man who introduced the sin of fornication, Pelagius's cave is a *hortus conclusus* that acts as a container for his ascetic practices. Unlike the convent, the cave will not be penetrated, and the integrity of the holy locus will remain intact. Whilst his physical freedom is constrained within the cave, it is where he is perhaps the freest to carry out his chosen ascetic lifestyle.

The monk who looks after Pelagius whilst he is locked away is described as particularly harsh. There is a stark contrast between the way in which Pelagius is treated by the monk and the way in

which he cared for the nuns. Pelagius is given very little food, that was clearly not meant to be enjoyed: 'algund poco de pan de cevada a comer e algund poco de agua a bever' (line 26). This is yet another way in which Pelagius suffered and engaged in asceticism. Surviving on limited nutrition is a common practice and one that can often be observed in the desert ascetics. In Pelagius's case, although his suffering is caused by others, he is the driving force behind it as he has refused to reveal his identity which would have absolved him of any guilt and would have ended his unjust torment. However, he relishes the opportunity for suffering and chooses to remain silent.

Pelagius suffers for the sins of others, but does so with patience, maintaining his faith:

> E Pelagio, sufriendo todo aquesto en paciencia e sin turbación, fazía muchas gracias a Dios, e esforçava por enxenplo de los santos el su coraçón. (lines 27–28)

Life imitates literature as Pelagius maps the coordinates of his own identity onto models of sacred history. Not only is he suffering in the model of *imitatio Christi*, but he is also imitating the other saints who engaged in asceticism that he would have read about such as Antony or Paul. Pelagius uses the figures about whom he has read to inform who he wants to be. By suffering as they did, he can become one of them. Many ascetic practices are predicated upon tradition. Flood explains that 'through an act of will the self internalizes the tradition and performs the memory of tradition in recalling the tradition and bringing to mind the tradition's telos' (2004: 212). Pelagius is able to map the lives of other ascetics onto his own life and body, thus perpetuating the ritual of asceticism.

As Pelagius reaches the end of his life, he decides to reveal the secret of his identity in a letter intended for the Abbot and other monks:

> Yo só muger e de noble linaje, segund el estado de los seglares, e fuy llamada Margarita; e llaméme Pelagio por escapar del piélago de las tentaciones de aquesta vida; e díxeme ser varón, non por engañar, mas por aprovechar. (lines 30–32)

The first line of the letter echoes the beginning of the legend, where the reader is informed that Margaret is of noble lineage, and that she did not want to be seen by any man. This creates a cyclical structure.[15] It is significant to note that in this letter, Margaret says that she is a woman. This, once again, marks a change in her gender identity, as she refers to herself as female, and from this point onwards, the text also uses feminine pronouns and adjective agreements to describe her. She has progressed from being Margaret the noble virgin, to Pelagius the monk and ascetic, to Margaret the saint. Her gender fluidity has punctuated these different stages of her life, each of which has been instrumental in her ascension to sanctity.

Within Christian doctrine, there is the belief that earthly suffering will be rewarded in heaven, and that it could reduce the amount of time spent in purgatory. This section has significance both on an intra and extra-diegetic level: on an intra-diegetic level, it explains who she really is and provides the monks with information relevant to her past, before she joined the religious life. On an extra-diegetic level, it reminds the reader, who is already aware of her identity, that Margaret

[15] ‘e tan grande era la honestidad de la su castidad, que non quería ser vista de honbre alguno de aquesta vida’ (lines 3–4).

came from wealth and nobility. This creates a contrast between the life that she had prior to entering the monastery and where she finds herself now. Margaret abandoned a life of luxury to devote herself to God. The extra-diegetic audience is aware that she would have been literate as she is described as being of noble birth, from which a high level of literacy could be inferred. On an intra-diegetic level, the monks would not have known of her noble origins and once it was revealed to them that she was an AFAB subject, it might have come as a surprise to them that she was not only literate, but possibly more so than they were. In addition to her erudition, she appears to have divine foreknowledge of her death. Much like other saints, Margaret is divinely rewarded for her suffering, and is therefore able to get her affairs in order before dying, including making the secret miracle of her suffering public.[16]

Furthermore, Margaret explains that the reason she disguised herself was to escape worldly temptations, creating a contrast between her and the nun. The nun's sin of the flesh is what Margaret wanted to avoid (Margaret was to be married, and therefore consummation would not have been sinful). It bears considering why, in order to escape worldly temptations, Margaret decided to join a monastery, where she would be surrounded by men. Perhaps the only way she thought she would escape the fetishistic scopophilic gaze of men was by disguising herself as one and living among them. Whilst the gaze is not necessarily heterosexual, it is that which she seeks to escape. Perhaps Margaret considered herself to be safer from male sexual desire living as a

[16] Foreknowledge of death is often a mark of sanctity or divine recompense, as can be seen in the legend of Saint Alexis. The *Gran flos sanctorum* reading has been lost but for an English translation, see Granger Ryan (2012: 371–74).

monk instead of as a nun.[17] It is also important to consider Margaret's choice of words when explaining her motives. She claims that her decision was not one designed for trickery, but instead to take advantage of certain privileges granted by a male appearance. This directly supports the argument made by Bullough (1974: 1383) in which he states that cross-dressing is directly linked to status. Margaret could not have lived as she wanted whilst presenting herself as a woman.

Even in death, Margaret is able to shield herself from the male gaze:

> Yo vos ruego que me entierren las hermanas honestas pues que non me conoscieron los varones por fenbra. (lines 33–35)

Margaret asks that the nuns bury her so that her naked body would not be seen by men, thus controlling the male gaze over her own body, even in death. She is the only one of the three saints discussed in this chapter whose body is not seen by a man at her time of death. She used her masculinity as a source of power in her lifetime, but in death, it is her femininity that gives her the most power and is that which enables her to become a saint. It is important to remember that she lived as a man, which granted her access to the monastery and protected her from the male

[17] The notion of men lusting after nuns has been documented in literature, for example in the untitled *exemplum* in MS 77 of the Biblioteca Menéndez Pelayo, known as the *Monja que se arrancó los ojos*, which tells of a young nun after whom the king lusts. In order to deter him, she gouges out her eyes and sends them to him on a platter (as this was that which he had complimented). For an in-depth analysis, see Beresford (2016).

scopophilic gaze, yet, in death, she is celebrated as a female saint. Her sanctity is intrinsically linked to her femininity despite living as a man.

It is not only important to consider Margaret's letter, but also the reaction it received. This is significant because of the performative nature of gender.[18] Her masculinity was performed to the monks who surrounded her, and it was not until reading her letter that they discovered her anatomy:

> E oyendo aquesto, los monjes e las monjas fueron a grand priessa a la cueva e fallaron las fenbras que Pelagio era virgen e fenbra; e faziendo todos penitencia, fue enterrada en el monesterio de las vírgenes con grand reverencia. (lines 37–39)

On reading the letter, the monks and the nuns hurry to the cave in which Margaret had been forced to live, and the nuns examine the corpse in order to verify her anatomy and virginity. The process of determining her virginity would have been physically invasive. Virginity was assessed by ascertaining the integrity of the hymen. Therefore, an internal pelvic examination would have probably been carried out to check whether the hymen was intact.[19] A ruptured hymen signified that the woman in question was not a virgin.[20] The emphasis on Margaret's virginity raises

[18] For further information, see Butler (1988).

[19] For further information on virginity testing, see Rosenberg (2018).

[20] This issue was prevalent at this time, to the extent that there was a market for people who claimed to be able to restore a ruptured hymen. One of the most notable cases in medieval Spanish literature is Celestina, who according to the eponymous novel, amongst other services, also sews up torn

questions as to why this was deemed to be necessary. The desire to establish her sexual status clearly links sanctity and virginity. This has been explored at length in Chapter One with regard to the Virgin Mary, Saint Agatha, and Saint Christina. In the same way that their virginal status is intrinsic to their sainthood, Margaret's virginity appears to be of equal significance. Her sexual status is irrelevant to the accusation of impregnating a nun, as her anatomy confirms this as impossible. This raises the question of what would have happened had Margaret not been a virgin. Perhaps this would have had bearing upon the way in which she would have been perceived by posterity. Once her virginal status has been confirmed, she is able to ascend to sainthood and the monks and nuns do penance.

Having undergone a process of expulsion earlier in the legend, Margaret has been re-admitted to the holy space, but only in death as she is buried on consecrated ground, in the nuns' monastery. She re-enters this space as a woman, having been stripped of the identity that she donned throughout her life. The relationship between the container and the contained is once again relevant. Having been contained by the family home, the convent, and the cave, she is finally contained within her grave. Margaret has lived her entire life being confined by physical spaces, and whilst these were catalysts to a certain freedom (being shielded from the male gaze), she is certainly not completely free, as she feels forced to leave her family home to escape a marriage her parents arranged for her and is subsequently bound to total obedience within the monastery where she is compelled to conceal part of her identity. Therefore, the nature of her freedom and

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hymens. For the full text, see Rojas et al. (2019). For further information on virginity restoration in *La Celestina*, see Montero & Herrero (2012).

how illusory it was ought to be questioned. Perhaps her greatest act of freedom was the perceived deception undertaken in order to live the lifestyle that she truly desired, as an ascetic monk.

Saint Marina

Saint Marina's legend is very similar to that of Margaret, pointing towards common origins. Both are assigned female at birth, and subsequently don a male attire and become monks. They are both accused of impregnating a woman and consequently receive punishment from their respective Abbots, which they bear with patience until they die, and their true identity is revealed. Marina's legend therefore appears to be a derivation of Margaret's.[21] However, there are some key differences between the two legends, which will be explored in this section.

One of the most important differences between Saints Margaret and Marina is that unlike Margaret, whose change in identity was self-motivated and therefore a demonstration of autonomy, Marina is asked to disguise herself as a man by her father:

> El padre de Sancta Marina, virgen, non avié más desta fija. E el padre, entrando en un monesterio, mudó el hábito de su fija en omne, en tal que non semejase muger mas varón. E rogó al abbat e a los frayres que le rescibiesen este su fijo que non avié más de aquél. (lines 1–4)

[21] For further information on Saint Marina, see Delcourt (1961: 84–102) and Bychowski (2021: 245–66).

Much like Margaret (and the saints discussed in Chapter One), Marina's virginity is emphasized from the outset.[22] Her sexual status defines her identity. Marina's legend begins with the words 'El padre', quickly establishing a power dynamic favouring the father, which, accurately reflects the reality of women's life at the time. They were first obliged to be obedient to their fathers and then to their husbands. In a discussion of a different version of this legend, Stephen J. Davis argues that this legend 'in many ways typifies the ambivalent attitude of the Early Church towards women' (2002: 3) and that at the start of the legend, her father condemns the female sex as an instrument of the Devil. Although this detail does not appear in the version of the legend in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, Marina's father is nevertheless determined that his daughter disguise herself as a monk and that she enter a monastery. Marina is immediately stripped of all autonomy. This ought to be problematized because the motivation for her change in identity is not self-determined, raising the question of whether she truly undergoes a change of identity, or whether she merely dons a disguise because she has been ordered to do so. This is significant when considering issues of gender identity and gender fluidity.

The question of bodily autonomy is particularly noticeable in this section. Marina's father decides that she ought to undergo this transformation, but his reasoning should be questioned.[23] He is intent

[22] All quotations from the legend of Saint Marina are taken from Beresford (in preparation).

[23] There are other versions of this legend in which Marina makes her own decision to become a monk (see Hirschfeld 1991), however, this is not the version that exists in the *Gran flos sanctorum*, where it is the father who catalyses Marina's transformation. Therefore, the essay by Bychowski

upon Marina remaining chaste and therefore wants her to enter a religious order so that she may be protected from male desire. If this is considered from a cis-heteronormative perspective, this might appear counterintuitive because in the monastery she would be surrounded by men whereas had she been sent to a convent, she would have been shielded from masculine presence. As discussed with regard to Margaret's legend, perhaps the only way of truly being free from the heterosexual male gaze is to abandon a female identity and become male.

The first section of the legend is stylistically significant, as the repetition creates an enclosed cyclical structure. The father asks the monks to receive his son because 'non avié más de aquél' (line 4). This phrase echoes the first line 'non avié más desta fija', creating a structure in which the shift in gender identity is neatly enclosed. From this point onwards in the legend, the protagonist is referred to as Marinus and the text uses male pronouns and adjective agreements when describing him, until the corpse is examined.

However, there is an exception to this, and it occurs when the father dies. The text says 'llamó a su fija' (line 6). He still therefore perceived Marinus as female, and the masculine identity as a means to an end. He subsequently asks that Marinus never reveal his identity to anyone: 'E mandóle que non se descubriese a ninguno en ningunt tienpo del mundo que era muger' (lines 7–8). After her father's death, Marina could have revealed what had transpired, but she chooses not

(2021), whilst interesting, is not academically relevant to this version as it is predicated on Marina's self-determination.

to, perhaps out of a sense of daughterly duty in obeying her father's dying wishes, or perhaps because she is aware that she is not only committing the sin of deceit, but also that of cross-dressing, which, as has already been discussed, is explicitly condemned in the Bible.

Having been integrated into the monastery, Marinus is able to prove his worth and capabilities in this masculine environment: 'E yva muy a menudo con el carro e con los bueyes e trayé leña al monesterio' (lines 9–10). This type of labour would have been very physical and typically reserved for men due to its strenuous nature. Despite being an AFAB subject and having no previous experience in manual labour, Marinus carries out these tasks. His past life would not have equipped him to thrive in this monastic environment, therefore his ability to adapt to such a different lifestyle is impressive. The reference to wood ('leña') is significant because it is reminiscent of the cross on which Jesus died, connecting the two figures, as we shall see at a later point in this chapter. The wood also links Marinus to Saint Joseph who was a carpenter. The connection between these two figures is important because Joseph became a father figure to Jesus, despite not being his biological father, in a similar way that Marinus will become a father (or mother) figure to the child that he is falsely accused of fathering, as we shall see. Both Marinus and Joseph take on parental responsibilities of children who do not belong to them biologically.

Pelagius and Marinus represent different facets of masculinity: Pelagius represents that which is intellectual; he is promoted ahead of his peers and offered a leadership and managerial role in which he is expected to make executive decisions. Marinus represents the physical; his life in the monastery involves physical toil. Both Pelagius and Marinus, albeit in different ways, subvert

gender stereotypes and expectations because despite being AFAB subjects, they are both capable of carrying out tasks that were reserved for men. The notion of gender fluidity is thus apparent in both cases, through their work where they prove to be just as capable as their male counterparts. Of course, this would only have been recognized by the monks after their death.

As is the case with Saint Margaret's tale, a false accusation marks a pivotal point in the legend:

> E solié posar en casa de un omne, cuya fija de aquel omne concibió de un cavallero. E dixo que concibiera deste monge que llamavan Marín […]. E preguntaron a este Marín que por qué fiziera tan grant peccado, e él respondió que peccara e que demandava perdón. (lines 10–14)

A young woman engages in sexual relations with a man and subsequently becomes pregnant. In the same way that Pelagius is accused, so is Marinus. Once again, the audience knows that Marinus is innocent. However, on an intra-diegetic level, Marinus would have been a plausible culprit as he used to visit the girl's father's house regularly. As in Margaret's legend, there is no mention of any kind of punishment for the pregnant woman. All of the responsibility falls upon Marinus, who not only admits to a sin that he did not commit but also asks to be forgiven for it. The repetition of *peccado/peccara* highlights societal issues with regard to extra-marital sexual relations and the moral and religious implications of this type of behaviour. The only way for Marinus to prove his innocence would have been for him to reveal his anatomy, which he would have had to prove by undressing in front of witnesses who could have vouched for him. This would have involved not only defying his father's dying wish but would also have resulted in people gazing upon his naked

body, resulting in possible scopophilic objectification. Therefore, Marinus's admission of guilt is a means of protecting his identity as a monk as well as shielding his body from the male gaze.

Like Pelagius, Marinus becomes a Christ-like figure as he is atoning for the sins of others. However, unlike Christ, he lies about his culpability. Whilst Jesus suffered and died for the sins of all of humanity, he never claimed that he was responsible for them. Nonetheless, Marinus becomes a surrogate Christ figure, and as discussed in relation to Pelagius, this leads to complications regarding the notion of gender fluidity, thus problematizing the gender constructions put forward by Church teachings and creating an option that goes beyond the male and female binary.

The man who impregnated the village girl is only described in terms of his social rank, which highlights the impossibility of their relationship. This demonstrates the strict class divisions in which medieval society was entrenched. In many cases, the *caballeros* were not pining for happy marriages with village girls (in the way in which the girls might have fantasized about marrying a *caballero*) but instead wanted to possess them sexually. The relationships that occurred between these groups of people were often predicated on power imbalances, specifically of gender and status. The trope of the *caballero* who seduces a young peasant woman is frequent in medieval Hispanic poetry, and usually depicts a predatory man of a higher social status pursuing a young and often naïve woman who falls prey to his promises and is left pregnant and alone.[24] At the time,

[24] This is a common theme in medieval Hispanic poetry. For example: 'No me habléis, conde, / d'amor en la calle, / catá que os dirá male, conde, la mi madre...' Frenk (1952: 37).

paternity testing was not available, therefore these young women had no way of proving who the father of their child was. This meant that the men were able to be sexually promiscuous, but the women were often left pregnant and labelled as unclean and loose, which then made it difficult for them to find a husband.

As a punishment for his sins, Marinus is exiled from the monastery:

> E echáronle del monesterio, e él fincó a la puerta. E fincando ý tres años, non comié más de un poco de pan cada día. (lines 14–15)

He remained outside the gate of the monastery for three years, surviving on scarce rations of food, and without shelter, completely alone. This type of asceticism is reminiscent of the desert ascetics, in the sense that they lived in inhospitable conditions, in complete solitude, and eating barely enough to stay alive. Whilst the locations are different, the fact that Marinus admitted to a sin that he did not commit, is evidence of a private type of suffering, reminiscent of eremitic asceticism. Like Pelagius, he extends his suffering beyond the institutionalized coenobitic asceticism of the monastery. It is important to consider the fact that Marinus is existing in a liminal space. He lives on the border between the monastery and the outside world, but he is just outside the warmth and safety that the religious establishment would have provided. The separation between Marinus and the other monks is not only physical, but also spiritual; Marinus is living in a different physical locus to them, but he is also embarking upon a different type of religious life. He has chosen to take his religious devotion to an extreme degree by willingly enduring physical and mental torment. The three years of suffering are important because the number three is evocative of the Holy Trinity and the three days between Jesus's death and resurrection, further reinforcing the

symbolic connection between Marinus and Christ. In addition, his expulsion from the monastery recalls Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden. This is spatially significant because monasteries were perceived as a point connecting heaven and Earth, where the monks (as the most holy people) acted as intermediaries between people and God. Therefore, the monastery represents a piece of heaven on Earth. In the Garden of Eden, Eve was tempted by the serpent to try the forbidden fruit, and once both she and Adam had eaten it, they became aware of their nudity and felt shame. The parallel between Marinus's expulsion and that of Adam and Eve is ironic because Marinus did not succumb to temptation leading to sexual shame, but the young girl who became pregnant did, and that this sin for which he is punished.

In addition to becoming Christ-like, Marinus can be compared to Saint Joseph:

> E después que el niño fue criado, el que concibiera la fija de aquel omne, enbiáronle al abbat. E el abbat dióle a Marín a criar, e aún bivió ý dos años con el niño, e sufriólo todo en paciencia e gradesciólo mucho a Dios. (lines 15–18)

Once the baby who was conceived by the village girl and the *caballero* had been weaned, it is sent to the Abbot, who in turn, sends the child to Marinus to look after. Like Saint Joseph, he raises a child that was not his without protesting. The child that Marinus was accused of fathering is placed in his care, and he therefore becomes its sole caregiver. In this way, Marinus adopts what, at the time, would have been considered to be a feminine role and looks after the child as a mother would. He takes on the duties of the child's biological mother, for whose sins he is already being punished, and now also cares for the child she brought into the world through her illicit sexual relations. Marinus could therefore also be compared to the Virgin Mary as he becomes a maternal figure

whilst remaining a virgin. There is irony in the fact that Marinus could not have possibly played a part in this pregnancy but is accused of so doing and consequently is forced to take on a maternal role, which, from an intra-diegetic perspective, would have been perceived as going against nature. However, the extra-diegetic reader can appreciate the fact that Marinus might have been able to draw on a natural maternal instinct.

Marinus is described as suffering through his trials with patience whilst giving thanks to God, which is a truly ascetic approach to suffering. He relishes the opportunity to engage in asceticism in the knowledge that this suffering will bring him closer to God and will allow for a faster ascension to heaven. His attitude is similar to that of Pelagius, who also expresses gratitude for the opportunity to suffer. Having suffered for the sins of another, Marinus is now forced to undertake the responsibility of caring for a child he did not father. He would have had no resources to look after such a young child and would have had to share the little that he had to ensure that the child was able to survive. The child being passed onto Marinus for him to care for is a physical manifestation of the blame that has been assigned to him. The child is a physical embodiment of Marinus's decision to engage in asceticism.

Having suffered on the liminal border between the monastery and the outside world for five years, he is allowed to re-enter the holy locus where he lives until he dies:

> E el abbat, queriendo levar el su cuerpo, e aviendo ordenado que le enterrasen en vil lugar, fallaron que era muger. (lines 23–24)

It is important to note that the Abbot and other monks intended to bury Marinus in un-consecrated ground (*vil lugar*), because of the sin that he allegedly committed. This is quickly remedied upon their realization that Marinus was innocent. It is at this point that they discover that Marinus was in fact an AFAB subject. The fact Marina's naked body is gazed upon by men is a reminder that she was, in many ways, powerless. During her lifetime, she was under the power of her father and his wishes, and in death, despite all of her efforts to conceal her identity and shield herself from the male gaze, her body is nonetheless violated by it. She only has power over her own body when she is Marinus the monk. Once she is perceived as a woman in death, she once again loses the power that her male identity afforded her over her own body.

Throughout her lifetime, Marina keeps the promise made to her father, and it is only in death that her identity is discovered by the other monks. This is a significant difference between this legend and that of Saint Margaret. Whilst Margaret's naked body was not gazed upon by men in her lifetime or in death, Marina's is. The monks discover her female anatomy when they prepare the body for burial. Much like in the tale of Saint Margaret, the relationship between the container and that which it contains is once again relevant. Marina was once contained within the monastery which protected her identity and shielded her from the male scopophilic gaze. When she is accused, she is banished and is not contained by anything—she is left to fend for herself. Like Margaret, Marina is only truly free when she is not contained by the locus that is meant to protect her and her identity; it is when she is on the threshold between the monastery and the outside world that she is able to engage fully in asceticism. On being re-admitted to the monastery, she is once again contained, and when she dies, she is finally contained in her grave.

As discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Saint Paul of Thebes, Charles F. Altman (1975: 6) explains that in the case of many of the *vitae*, at the start, the saint is part of a group, but that throughout the course of the text, they separate themselves from that group until, through their actions, are proven to be exceptional. They subsequently return to the group, but instead of re-joining it, the group changes; it redefines itself according to the saint. Saint Marina's legend follows this pattern to a great extent as after five years of suffering at the gates of the monastery she is re-admitted to the holy locus.[25] Yet she has not re-joined the group as she is treated poorly and given the most difficult and unpleasant tasks and is still punished for a sin she did not commit. The real change occurs on her deathbed, when the Abbot and the other monks examine her corpse and realize that she was innocent, and they are all changed as a result of Marina's asceticism.

Saint Marina's gender fluidity not only serves her in terms of allowing her to become an ascetic, thus awarding her a place in heaven, but it also provides salvation for the young woman who committed the sin of fornication.

> E aquella muger que la disfamara tomóle el diablo, e ella, confesando su peccado e viniendo al sepulcro de la virgen, fue librada del diablo. (lines 27–29)

Here, the text explains that the young woman was forgiven for her sin. There are two sins for which the woman could be forgiven: the sin of fornication, or the sin of falsely accusing Marinus. The text is unclear as to whether she is forgiven for one or both of these sins. However, what is certain is that Marinus's suffering was a means not only to his own salvation, but it was also the

[25] See lines 18–21.

mechanism for ensuring the forgiveness of another sinner, further supporting the notion that Saint Marina became a surrogate Christ-like figure. The parallel with Christ could be extended to a comparison of the young woman to a Mary Magdalene equivalent, who was a promiscuous woman who had committed sins of the flesh but was saved through Christ, in the same way that this young woman is saved through Marina's sacrifice.

Saint Pelagia

Whilst Margaret and Marina have very similar stories, Pelagia's legend is significantly different.[26] She can be classified into two categories of sanctity: that of the female monk saint and the prostitute saint. Whilst Margaret and Marina chose chastity and devotion to God from a young age, Pelagia is a reformed prostitute. In this sense, she is a Mary Magdalene-esque figure.[27] At the beginning of her legend, she leads a life of luxury and sin that she subsequently abandons in favour of an ascetic lifestyle as a hermit in the desert. She follows the models of other famous desert ascetics such as Saint Paul of Thebes, who is discussed in Chapter Two. It is the notion of gender

[26] For further information, see Farmer (2003: 830–31), Miller (2003), Beresford (2007b), Beresford (2011), and Beresford (2013).

[27] Mary Magdalene is an important figure in Christian doctrine as she is the embodiment of repentance and redemption. She is an example of a figure who had led an impious life (having been a prostitute) but who was able to repent and be forgiven by Jesus. She is a prominent figure in the New Testament and was one of the few who stayed with Jesus even after his crucifixion and was the first person he appeared to after his resurrection. For further information, see Maisch (1998), Schaberg & Johnson-DeBaufre (2006), and Bourgeault (2010).

fluidity that allows Pelagia to redeem herself, and ultimately, similarly to Margaret and Marina, it allows her to be sanctified. This section of the chapter will discuss Saint Pelagia's legend, exploring the way in which her change in gender marks a new life. Unlike Margaret and Marina, who were already living holy lives before their change in identity, Pelagia changes her ways and her gender almost simultaneously.

In order to comprehend Pelagia's transformation, it is first necessary to understand her place in society prior to her journey of asceticism. The notion of prostitution was particularly important at the time because, according to Vern Bullough, most medieval writers agreed with Saint Augustine that should prostitution cease to exist, 'established patterns of sexual relationships would be endangered, and even worse sins might result. They concluded it was better to tolerate prostitution with all its associated evils than to risk the perils which would follow the successful elimination of the harlot from society' (1977: 191). Prostitution was perceived as a necessity for the smooth functioning of society, but that the prostitutes themselves (the women who could benefit financially from this system) were sinful. It is a notion that has remained relevant throughout history, and even today, whilst many people make use of the services of sex workers, it is those (often women) who make economic gains from this line of work who are demonized and declared to be immoral. This is another means of controlling women and their sexuality, while still satisfying the heterosexual male population, allowing them to have a wife who would bear their children whilst enjoying extra-marital and taboo sex with women who were nevertheless subordinate to them and controlled by them financially as well as morally.

When Pelagia is first introduced to the audience, there are ways in which she can be linked to saints like Margaret and Marina, but also notable differences:

> Santa Pelagia fue de noble linaje e natural de la cibdad de Antiochía, e muger muy rica e fermosa. E vestíase vanamente de ropas preciosas e era muger pública e luxuriosa. E una vez yva por medio de la cibdad cubierta de oro e de plata e de piedras preciosas con mucha vanidad. E finchía el ayre de olores de grand suavidad. E yvan con ella muchos escuderos e muchas donzellas, todos vestidos de ropas muy buenas. (lines 1–6)

Like Margaret and Marina, Pelagia is said to be of noble lineage.[28] This is significant because in the case of most other female saints who are described as *noble* or *de noble linaje*, they are also virgins. However, Pelagia's tale poses a challenge to this established hagiographic convention as she is not a meek, chaste, young lady, shying from the male scopophilic gaze. Instead, she is bold and parades through the city, engaging in an a flamboyant act of narcicisstic scopophilia. She leads an ostentatious procession, in which young boys and girls are following her, suggesting that she is corrupting the youth. She shamelessly mocks proper society, walking past onlookers and flaunting her life of excess. There is power in the way in which she is able to control the gaze. This is an important notion because throughout the course of this legend, Pelagia controls the gaze, albeit in different ways. The male fetishistic scopophilic gaze is central to this section because the descriptions of Pelagia would perhaps have triggered a certain sexual titillation, both on an intra and extra-diegetic level. This fascination with her appearance and the resulting fetishistic scopophilic gaze that is brought upon her, allows her to make a living and finance her lavish lifestyle. It could be argued that she is trapped in a cycle of selling her body in order to afford these

[28] All quotations from Saint Pelagia's legend are taken from Beresford (2007b: 137–38).

luxuries and in turn make herself more appealing to the male gaze in order to attract more customers, but the text does not suggest that she dislikes this lifestyle. She is not a destitute woman who has no other option, but someone who enjoys the life that this line of work offers her and perhaps also enjoys expressing her sexuality. Any form of extra-marital sexuality would not have been appropriate for proper women, evidenced by the damnation brought about by the transgressions of the young women in the legends of Margaret and Marina. Patricia Cox Miller argues that the literature written about women who follow the Magdalene-esque formula

> are thus constructed as depraved, licentiously sexual women who atone for humanity's primordial fall. According to this perspective, holy harlots are images of repentance whose basic function is symbolic: either they are construed as images of human salvation, or they are seen as a product of the male monastic imaginary that uses the figure of a courtesan to bring home to the monk his state as a sinner. (2003: 422)

It is therefore necessary to consider the fact that the literature surrounding these figures was created and subsequently used and circulated by men.

There is a sense of opulence and excess created in this description of Pelagia. She is described as wearing gold and silver, jewels, and smelling sweet. Her presence therefore becomes a full sensory experience: onlookers would have admired her beauty and the luxurious items she was wearing, they would have heard the clamour of the boys and girls surrounding her, and they would have smelled her perfume. Her presence is all-consuming to those around her; she is aware of this and appears to revel in it. Coon (2010: 83) argues that this description of Pelagia portrays her as the whore of Babylon from the Book of Revelation 17:4. The adornments that she wears are symbolic

of her lifestyle and it is only when she discards these that she is able to embark on her journey of asceticism towards sanctity. Her jewels and luxurious garments are an external identity marker of feminine secularism. Whilst the items with which she adorns herself are not inherently evil, it is their excess and her ostentatious obsession with her looks that connote depravity. When she begins her new life of asceticism, her clothing will once again denote an identity, but this time of male austere holiness.

In her legend, Pelagia states her given name, but explains that she is often called Margarita because it means pearl:

> A mí llaman Pelagia desde mi nascimiento, mas todos me llaman Margarita por la ufana de las vestiduras vanas (lines 44–46)

This was because she adorned herself with luxurious items, something that became part of her identity. Pelagia's sobriquet, Margarita is the Latin for pearl which comes from the Greek word *μαργαρίτης* (margarites), also meaning *pearl*. Pearls are symbolic in literature, often connoting purity and virginity, and are often associated with the Virgin Mary, which is ironic because these are qualities which stand in stark contrast to Pelagia's lifestyle.[29] They are also symbolic of salvation, which is particularly relevant to Pelagia's legend, as despite her sinful beginnings, she

[29] According to Domínguez Torres 'Much like Venus, pearls were thought to descend from heaven and reach their perfect forms in the sea, and they were therefore emblematic of maidenly purity and love' (2020: 56–57).

does achieve salvation through her ascetic practices.[30] It is significant that once she decides to join the Church, she no longer refers to herself as Margarita, but instead opts for the name she was given at birth. In her case, this could signify a new beginning (as this is something that pearls often symbolize) as well as a newfound purity. Pearls are formed from an impurity in the shell, that is subsequently transformed into a beautiful object and a symbol of purity and perfection. This is symbolic of the transformation that Pelagia undergoes, from being impure and sinful, to being sanctified and made holy.

Despite appearing to enjoy her luxurious lifestyle of excess, Pelagia expresses a desire to change her ways. She hears Bishop Nonnus preaching, which catalyses the letter that she writes to him:

> E vino Pelagia a oýr la su predicación, e en tal manera fue llena de conpunción, que le enbió una carta con un mensajero, diziendo: 'Yo, Pelagia, discípula del spíritu maligno, me encomiendo a ti, santo obispo, discípulo de Jhesu Christo. Si eres discípulo verdadero de aquél que descendió por los pecadores del cielo, non desprecies a mí, pecadora, que fago penitencia e me arrepiento.' (lines 29–34)

Pelagia begs to be received into the Church and forgiven for her sins. She claims that she is a disciple of the Devil, which is a reference not only to her sexual transgressions, but also her love of riches. This is the turning point in Pelagia's legend because she has decided to change her ways and lead a holy life. In this sense, she is following in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene, who was

[30] Pearls as a symbol of salvation can be observed in the Middle English poem *Pearl*. For a modernized version of the original, see Watts et al. (2005).

also traditionally regarded as a reformed prostitute. The comparison of Pelagia to Mary Magdalene provides a strong contrast between her and the other saints discussed in this chapter, who are more comparable to the Virgin Mary in part due to their virginity (which is heavily emphasized in their respective hagiographic accounts) and in their taking on of maternal roles (Saint Margaret who undertakes the responsibility of the wellbeing of the nuns, and Saint Margaret who becomes the sole caregiver to the child she was accused of fathering).

At this point, Pelagia is able to begin her journey as a Christian as she is given the baptismal rites 'E diole el santo baptismo del Salvador' (lines 47–48). This is a significant moment in her journey to sanctity as it is when she is accepted into the Church despite her past. The notion of gender fluidity becomes important, and Pelagia the whore becomes Brother Pelagius:

> E al tercero día ayuntó todas las cosas que avía e diolas a los pobres por amor del fazedor de la vida. E después de algunos días fuésse ascondidamente de noche de la cibdad de Antiochía al monte de Olivete. E tomó hábito de hermitaño e encerróse en una cela pequeña. E sirvió allí a Dios en mucha abstinencia e era avido de todos en grand reverencia. E llamávase Pelagio. (lines 59–64)

Pelagia rids herself of her worldly possessions, donating them to the poor, replicating the commandment that Jesus gave when he said: 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me' (Matthew 19:21). She does this on the third day; as has been discussed in relation to Marina, the number three is evocative of the Holy Trinity as well as the three days between Jesus's death and

resurrection. Pelagia's old identity has died, allowing the birth of a new identity: that of Pelagius, the ascetic.

The final stage of Pelagius's transformation occurs when he dons male clothing: 'E tomó hábito de hermitaño e encerróse en una cela pequeña' (lines 61–62). Not only is he now dressing as a man, but he is also dressing as a hermit. This signifies a total spiritual and physical transformation as he appears to morph into a completely different person. There is a stark difference between a hermit's habit and that which Pelagia the harlot would have worn. It is precisely the extreme change in appearance that symbolizes his spiritual transformation and allows him to begin his path towards sanctity. Pelagius also locks himself in a small cell. This is reminiscent of the legend of Saint Margaret. The cell becomes Pelagius's locus of suffering, and it would have been uncomfortable, lacking in basic necessities. He would have been completely alone and would not have had easy access to food, thus exacerbating his suffering. The cave also has symbolic value. Much like the legends of Margaret and Marina, the relationship between the container and the contained is relevant as Pelagius is contained within this cell that will become a holy locus in which he can engage in asceticism. His confinement within the cave is a free choice, which is important because it impacts on the container/contained relationship as he willingly removes himself from temptations of the outside world. As previously discussed, a cave often symbolizes the womb. It is where Pelagius is spiritually reborn through asceticism, and it is only when his corpse will be removed from the cave that he is transported, not back to the outside world, but to heaven, as he will have been sanctified.

Marie Delcourt (1961: 90) argues that when female heroines adopted a male disguise, it symbolized a rupture with their past life. This is particularly relevant to Pelagia's legend in a way that it is not to the other two because the moment that Pelagia decides to become Brother Pelagius is when she breaks all ties with her previous mode of existence and begins a new life as a completely different person. Delcourt (1961: 90–91) explains that in the lives of a number of saints a change of clothing is of symbolic value; it is often the point at which a change of identity occurs. Much like the legend of both Marina and Margaret, the change in identity is also a means to an end. From a purely historical context, it would have been impossible for a woman to be a hermit because a lone woman in the desert would have been an easy target for rape or being sold into slavery. By adopting the identity of Pelagius the hermit, Pelagia the whore was able to cleanse herself of her sins of the flesh.

Many hermits carried out their asceticism in the desert, which is the case for Pelagius, who, like Paul of Thebes, became an eremitic ascetic. Lynda L. Coon argues that 'Hagiographers recast the desert as a sacred terrain, where emaciated hermits recreate Christ's passion through ascetic practices' (2010: 71). The suffering not only replicates that of Christ's Passion, but also the forty days and forty nights he spent in the desert during which he fasted and was tormented by the Devil.[31] The desert subsequently becomes a locus of battle with the self. It is the use of this battleground that progresses the individual's journey towards sanctity as they suffer according to a model that is referred to as *imitatio Christi*. The desert as an arid and difficult locus becomes a parallel to the body that is inhabited by the soul, which, in turn (due to the conditions of the desert)

[31] See Matthew 4:1–11.

also withers away and becomes dried out. Pelagius's asceticism turns his body into a locus of battle, which is significant, because he endeavours to repent for his sins of the flesh.

The description of Pelagius's asceticism is brief, but nonetheless provides a clear image of him as a desert ascetic. He is described as living a life of abstinence, which is a term that is as vague as it is all-encompassing: 'E sirvió allí a Dios en mucha abstinencia e era avido de todos en grand reverencia' (lines 62–63). It suggests that he survived on very little food and was forced to endure the harsh climate of the desert with no comforts. It is also an allusion to the sexual abstinence in which ascetics participated. Clark (2002: 39) explains that there was thought to be a connection between the intake of food and feelings of a sexual nature, which was further re-enforced by the fact that in the Fall, it was Eve's desire for the fruit that led to humankind's sexual awareness. Once again, this serves as a reminder that it was woman who sinned and who must consequently be blamed for the downfall of humankind. By becoming Brother Pelagius, Pelagia has distanced herself not only from her sinful past, but also from the sinful nature of other women. In addition to donning male clothing, the ascetic lifestyle would have had other impacts on Pelagius's body. Clark explains that 'Extreme fasting made the female body less female in appearance and probably, though this point is not made explicit, caused amenorrhea, so that the woman was not tied to a reminder of fertility and desire' (2002: 39).[32] In the case of Pelagius, and indeed the other two saints discussed in this chapter, the harsh ascetic regime may have caused him to cease to be fertile. This has some implications in terms of a gendered identity. Of course, fertility is by no means a

[32] Amenorrhea is an absence of periods in someone who ought to have them. This can be due to various factors including very low body weight, stress, and generally poor health.

determining factor of gender identity, but for some adult women, the ability to menstruate and to conceive can be a means to motherhood, which can be an important part of a feminine identity. Much like the discussion of the severed breast in Chapter One, amenorrhea is not something that ungenders a woman, but it can have an impact on the self-perception of identity. Pelagius's body would have wasted away, becoming less attractive, and therefore diametrically opposed to Pelagia's appearance at the start of the legend.

Pelagius' physicality creates a stark contrast to the way in which Pelagia the prostitute was described: 'mas él non conosció a ella por la grand magreza' (lines 70–71).[33] Her years of being a hermit in the desert appear to have aged her and caused her once beautiful body and face to become decrepit and not something to be gazed upon for pleasure. Hunt (2019: 2) describes ascetic practice as remaking oneself into the image of the maker. She therefore questions how women can be made into the likeness of a male God. The notion of cross-dressing and gender fluidity offers a solution to this problem, as through the process of masculinization, women such as Pelagia, Margaret, and Marina, embody a masculine identity, leaving behind their femininity and becoming surrogate Christ-like figures. She further explains that 'Women who dressed as men in order to lead ascetic lives effectively acquire the status not so much of honorary men but of virgin, regardless of their physical intactness. The word "virgin" implies, indeed contain, the word "vir" (man); female virgins were thus effectively men, argued Jerome (347–420), a promoter of female asceticism' (2019: 7–8).

[33] 'él' refers to a Deacon, known in other versions as James, who goes to visit Pelagius, at Nonus's request.

The life of a hermit was difficult and was therefore perfect for asceticism. Patricia Cox Miller argues that the manly woman and cross-dressing saint 'displace the legacy of the sinfully sexual Eve by setting the virtuous woman apart from her sexuality altogether' (2003: 425). This is particularly relevant to Pelagia because through becoming a hermit, the once-prostitute is forced to abstain from sexual activity. The trope of the cross-dressing saint or manly woman therefore removes women from their inherently sinful nature, brought about by the fall of Eve, and allows them to become closer to the Virgin Mary, who encapsulates all that is good in women.

Pelagia's body is instrumental throughout her legend. At the start, it is that which leads her into sin: she commits sins of the flesh and engages in extra-marital sex, as well as adorning her body with riches both for her own pleasure and for the pleasure of others. In contrast, when she becomes a hermit, her body is her means of asceticism: she deprives herself of the luxuries she to which had been accustomed, she eats very little, and uses the same body that she once used for pleasure, for pain. It is her bodily suffering that allows her to redeem herself and achieve not only salvation, but also sanctity.

After spending a significant length of time in the desert, living as a hermit, and dedicating his life to asceticism, Pelagius dies:

> E el diácono despidióse de Pelagio. E tornó al tercero día a lo ver e llamó a la portezuela de la finiestra de la cela. E como non le respondiesse, abrióla, e vídolo yazer muerto en tierra. (lines 73–76)

He is found dead by the Deacon in his cell on the third day. Once again, the number three is symbolically significant. It must be assumed that after years of asceticism and repentance, he, like Christ, also rose to heaven. It is at this point, as is the case in the legends of Margaret and Marina, that it is discovered that he was assigned female at birth:

> E como sacassen el cuerpo santo de la cela, fallaron que era muger. E maravillándose mucho dello, fizieron muchas gracias al rey del cielo, e enterráronla muy honrradamente. (lines 78–81)

Here, the other monks have found his corpse and as they have prepared it for the appropriate burial rites, have discovered Pelagius's anatomy. From this point onwards, the text refers to Pelagia in the feminine, which corresponds to the fact that she is venerated by the Catholic Church as a female saint. Her naked body is seen by men which provides a cyclical element to the legend, where once again, her body is the focal point of the male gaze. It is important to make a distinction between these two occurrences of the gaze. At the start, her body was the object of male fetishistic scopophilia, to which she consented, whereas at the end, her body is emaciated and not aesthetically pleasing to behold, but she has not consented to it being seen. Whilst Pelagia seemed to wield power over the townsfolk at the beginning, here, at the end, she is impotent and is unable to choose who sees her naked form. In this sense, she can be compared to Marina, whose identity was also only discovered when her body was prepared for burial. She too was powerless in the way in which her corpse was treated. However, as previously discussed, Margaret wrote a letter to the Abbot before her death, revealing her identity and asking that only the nuns see her naked body because she did not want to be looked upon by men. In this sense, Margaret maintained the greatest level of autonomy of the three saints. The issue of being gazed upon in death by men unites all

three saints and whilst it manifests differently in each legend, certainly unites them and further points towards common origins.

The irony in the trope of the sanctified prostitute cannot be ignored. Ruth Mazo Karras (1990: 3) points out this paradox by stating that Christianity rejects all positive aspects of sexual pleasure, even within the confines of marriage, in which sexual relations were permissible. It is worth noting that Pelagia is not an isolated case; there are other examples of fallen women being forgiven and even becoming saints. Despite the emphasis that the Church places on the sins of the flesh and the importance of virginity, it is nonetheless possible for fallen women not only to be forgiven, but also to achieve sainthood. In Pelagia's case, this was achieved by means of gender fluidity, but in other cases, such as that of Mary Magdalene, the women did not have to divorce themselves from their feminine identity in order to do so. Whilst gender fluidity is a means of escaping from marriage for Margaret and a means to maintaining her chastity for Marina, it is perhaps even more significant for Pelagia. All three women use their male identity to engage in different forms of asceticism, but in Pelagia's case, she is suffering, not with the intention of taking on the sins of others, as Margaret and Marina do, but in order to atone for her own sins. One could argue that Pelagia has a greater need for asceticism to redeem herself, than Margaret and Marina do, who are already chaste and pious at the start of their respective legends.

Conclusion

The three legends discussed in this chapter exemplify the importance of gender fluidity within the *Gran flos sanctorum* and Christianity as a whole. It is vital to consider these saints, not as

individual examples of a destabilized gendered identity, but as part of a wider context within Christianity. As has been noted, figures such as God and Jesus embody both masculine and feminine qualities, suggesting that a strict binary view of gender is irrelevant and inaccurate. It is by disrupting the notion of a binary that these three saints have been venerated by posterity and their endeavours praised by the Church. The three saints' gender fluid embodiment of Christ offers a more universal vision of sanctity. Gender fluidity is therefore of vital importance not only in the lives of these saints, but within Christianity as a whole.

Gillian Clark argues that 'Women's asceticism, as practised in late antiquity, is startling now because it is so extreme a rejection of family ties and female identity; and it was startling then simply because women did it' (2002: 34).[34] At the time, as woman's place was in the home; she would transition from living in her father's home to living in her husband's home. This not only offered security for these women, who usually needed the protection of a man, but also provided a means of controlling them. However, female ascetics demonstrate a complete rejection of this established path that they were expected to take, and by so doing, also rejected the control that a father or husband would have had over them. This is not to say that they were not constrained by other male figures; Margaret remains under the subjugation of the Abbot, but the secret of her true identity undermines any power that any man had over her. In all three texts, there is an abandonment of feminine identity because not only do they reject traditional female roles within the nuclear family home, such as being a wife and a mother, but they also go so far as to disguise

[34] Whilst this scholarship is being applied to saints who self-identify as male during their ascetic practice, they are all celebrated posthumously as female ascetic saints.

themselves as men, completely disassociating themselves from a feminine identity, even on a visual level. To a great extent, this is precisely what progresses their journey towards sanctity and is a reason for their posthumous veneration.

Conclusion

Chapter One discussed the notion of the breast as a signifier of identity in relation to the Virgin Mary, who, as a nursing mother, establishes the basic paradigm of female purity, and Saints Agatha and Christina, who suffer the ignominy of a forced mastectomy. It demonstrates that although the severed breast functions as a mechanism for destabilization, the saints are not permanently ungendered but nonetheless continue to be revered as women—a point that is most noticeable in their depiction as *sponsae Christi*. Chapter Two analysed the male body as a locus of subversion, focusing on the legends of Saints Vincent and Paul of Thebes. Although the former is a martyr, and the latter, an ascetic, they nonetheless share a series of common points of contact, mediating their connection to the divine by transcending questions of corporeality to focus on the fate of the soul. Finally, Chapter Three discussed gender fluidity in relation to Saints Margaret, Marina, and Pelagia, demonstrating that their changes in gender identity are a means of achieving sanctity, thus destabilizing notions of both masculinity and femininity. A notable distinction is that in contrast to the saints discussed in Chapters One and Two, where gender is more often destabilized by external parties, Margaret and Pelagia affect their own transformations while Marina becomes complicit in the process of destabilization by respecting the wishes of her father and living out her life as a man. The binary notion of gender presented by Catholic doctrine cannot therefore be applied easily to hagiography because the saints in this dissertation all undergo some form of destabilization and can thus no longer adhere in their totality to a strict and prescriptive vision of gender.

As a pivotal factor in the construction of identity, the gaze has the power to affirm, to transform, and to violate. It is therefore central to the discussion of gender and its destabilization as it is always an active participant in the representation and reception of identity. All three chapters analyse the importance of the gaze from the perspective of both intra and extra-diegetic audiences, demonstrating how the act of looking is affected by external factors such as gender, sexuality, and social class. Since different gazes can affect objects of scopophilia in distinct ways, the dissertation examines how saints become subject to the power of fetishistic scrutiny, notably in the case of the gender-fluid subjects of Chapter Three, where the gaze affirms perceptions of gendered identity. A crucial common denominator is that the saints undergo bodily transformations that are emblematic of their sainthood. They therefore constitute both the focal point of their written legends, as is the case of the *Gran flos sanctorum*, as well as of posthumous artistic representations. As an external marker of identity, the body is perceived by others as a tangible locus of the expression of identity, and it is through corporeal changes that the saints discussed achieve sanctity and are regarded as figures to emulate—aspirational role models to be lauded and cherished by all those who look upon them.

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