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Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009640712000601

How to cite this article:
Ellen Muehlberger (2012). Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural
Reclamation. Church History,81, pp 273-297 doi:10.1017/S0009640712000601

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Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation

ELLEN MUEHLBERGER

While many have seen the equation between Macrina and Socrates drawn in the Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection *as Gregory of Nyssa's attempt to honor his sister, a closer look at Gregory's attitude about the relative power of Christianity at the end of the fourth century suggests the opposite: that the character of Macrina lends validity to Socrates and, by extension, to non-Christian intellectual traditions. In this article, I argue that the* Treatise *is part of a larger project of cultural reclamation enacted by some Christians near the end of the fourth century. The educational reforms of the emperor Julian had instituted a public discourse of evaluation by which one's reading material indicated one's religious identity; after Julian, some Christians adopted this idea, yet in reverse, arguing that reading traditional literature was out of the question for Christians, as it would signal a non-Christian religious commitment. Gregory's* Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection *was an effort to walk back the effects of that discourse and to return Christian pedagogy, philosophy, and cultural evaluation to a stance of ambivalence regarding Greek literature.*

I N a letter written to a certain John but likely meant for wider circulation, Gregory of Nyssa narrated the events that led to him being elected briefly (and perhaps illegally) bishop of Sebasteia in 380 C.E. Gregory had been called to the troubled town in order to lend his authority to the election of a new, orthodox leader, and he had gotten ambushed. Instead of being there to validate the election, Gregory was the target of it: when the time came to vote, Gregory tells us, "the vote was for me. Poor me, so

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ignorant—I was taken by my own feathers!"[1] The idiom is one familiar among ancient authors, an allusion to Aeschylus's play *Myrmidons*, in which an eagle shot with an arrow ruefully notes his own feathers in the fletching. This is just one of several instances of classical coloration in the letter: Gregory also cites phrases from Euripedes and the *Phaedrus*, while mentioning characters like Archimedes, Sisyphus, Cercyon and Sceiron, and offering more implicit references to the Odyssey, Plato's *Apology*, and the oracle at Delphi.[2] It is tempting to read Gregory's classical touches by the light of advice he had given John at the start of the letter:

> I know of some painters who give a worthless honor to even the ugliest of friends when they transform their form into an image. They are doing the opposite of what they want, for when by imitation they correct nature, concealing the ugliness of the form under the brightest of colors upon the canvas, they transform the character, so that their intent to honor their friend by means of this better imitation results in something formless, and the friend cannot even be recognized in the image.[3]

Those who paint portraits are tempted to offer details and highlights—a raven eyebrow here, a sparkling eye there—that do not accurately reflect their friends, and painters would do better to forgo the embellishment and try instead to represent accurately the nature of their subjects, whether flatteringly or not. This is a revealing frame with which to read Gregory's use of literary allusions to non-Christian texts in *Letter* 19: are these pieces of adornment a way to put Gregory's cultural knowledge on display for his audience, or are they indicative of a deeper commitment to an old friend, philosophy?

I place Gregory's many classical allusions and his theory of portraiture side-by-side because together they reflect on a third part of the letter, one with much larger historical significance for early Christian studies. *Letter* 19 also contains the opening strokes of a portrait that Gregory would continue to work on during the following five years: that of his dead sister, Macrina. The information about Macrina in *Letter* 19 is brief; Gregory mentions he has a sister who leads a large group of pious women and whose body registers her piety, so striking that it "surpasses words."[4] Gregory tells how he heard that Macrina was deathly ill, and how he scarcely made it home to see her before she died.[5] Some time later, between his letter to John and 383 C.E., Gregory constructed a *Life of*

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[1]Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 19.15 in *Grégoire de Nysse: Lettres*, Sources chrétiennes 363, Pierre Maraval, ed. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990), 252–54.

[2]These are only those allusions identified by Anna M. Silvas, trans., *Macrina the Younger, Philosopher of God*, Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 91; there may be more.

[3]Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 19.1 (SC 363:242).

[4]Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 19.9 (SC 363:250).

[5]Gregory of Nyssa, *ep.* 19.10 (SC 363:250).

Macrina, a much longer version of the events he had narrated in *Letter* 19. In it, Gregory offered an extended account of Macrina's birth, adolescence, and the fates of her family members; a detailed portrait of the community of women that Macrina led; and a description of the grief Gregory and this community felt at her death. This last episode—Macrina's death—provided the basis for yet a third text Gregory created featuring her as the central character, the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, which appeared between 384 and 385 C.E., a few years after the *Life of Macrina*.[6] Gregory based this last portrait of Macrina around a lengthy dialogue structured to echo the *Phaedo*, a classical discourse in which the famous philosopher Socrates waits for his execution. Like *Letter* 19 and the *Life of Macrina*, the *Treatise* was densely packed with classical allusions, but the most carefully wrought of these allusions was Gregory's presentation of Macrina as a type of Socrates.[7]

Some champion Gregory's three descriptions of Macrina as precious evidence about a real woman, the rare bird in early Christian sources. Increasing scholarly suspicion about texts and their role as rhetorical objects, and especially the role of female subjects in such rhetorical constructions, however, has led others to see Macrina as proof of nothing but Gregory's attempt to create intellectual coherence; this is especially the case with the third text, the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*. For example, Virginia Burrus explains that in the *Treatise*, Macrina appears as a female version of the philosopher "because Gregory's philosophy must borrow her femininity in order to seem to leave nothing out and thus to ensure the success of its own procreative enterprise."[8] Elizabeth Clark is even more specific about his purpose: in the *Treatise*, Macrina the character gives Gregory the author cover to include in his work theological positions too speculative to be safe in the late fourth century. He uses her to explore the "acceptability of a modified Origenism that skirts 'dangerous' theological points . . . she is clearly made to voice Gregory's own attempt to tame Origen into Christian respectability."[9] Even beyond the particular rhetorical

[6]Pierre Maraval, *Grégoire de Nysse: Vie de Sainte Macrine*, Sources chrétiennes 178 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 67.

[7]On the use and purpose of Gregory's classical allusions, see Arnaldo Momigliano, "The Life of St. Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa" in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 206–21; Catharine P. Roth, "Platonic and Pauline Elements in the Ascent of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa's Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection," *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 20–30; Georgia Frank, "Macrina's Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8 (2000): 511–30.

[8]Virginia Burrus, *"Begotten, Not Made": Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity*, Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 120.

[9]Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History* 67 (1998): 27; cf. "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 427.

functions that Macrina's representation in the *Treatise* may serve, there is the possibility that her existence as a tangle of references—nested in allusions to the *Phaedo*, to the *Odyssey*, to the *Phaedrus*—is a tool for cultivating attention to the craft of character itself. "It is not just interesting that Gregory echoes various pagan literary characters and themes," Morwenna Ludlow recently explained. "It is that by basing Macrina on different models, he is deliberately drawing attention to the artifice of his creation and forcing us to think hard about his intentions."[10] Macrina, an image viewed through a kaleidoscope of shifting classical allusions, is a token of Gregory's talent with language and his intentions for language.

That talent is on display in all his depictions of Macrina, but in the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, Gregory shows remarkable dexterity in his textual use of two canons of sometimes competing, sometimes indistinguishable literary culture: Christian scripture and Hellenic philosophical traditions. Because of Gregory's facility with and reliance upon both philosophical culture and philosophical methods of reasoning in the *Treatise*, some historians have used the text as a basis to wonder about Gregory's Christian identity in confrontation with his identity and training as a philosopher or rhetor.[11] Assessments of Gregory's identity in this vein have varied in their answers regarding which thing he "really" was; readings of the *Treatise* often discuss how successfully (or not) Gregory had reconciled the "sharply contrasting forces" of Hellenism and Christianity for himself. Scholars who wonder about Gregory's religious allegiance because of his literary influences have offered a range of permutations —Gregory is a reluctant Christian, dragged to the church by his pious siblings; Gregory is a Platonist who has learned to use Christian terms in order to pass muster as a Christian; Gregory is himself confused—but no one solution fully explains his display of knowledge and his weaving together of philosophical and scriptural threads, especially in the *Treatise*.[12] The swirl of scholarly

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Clark finds other "Macrina-functions," including Macrina being a bodily representative of a human being living in the image of God and Macrina, as a particularly composed female philosopher, acting as a shaming device to less-high-minded men.

[10]Morwenna Ludlow, *Gregory of Nyssa, Ancient and (Post)modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 214.

[11]For example, see Charalambos Apostolopoulos, *Phaedo Christianus: Studien zur Verbindung und Abwägung des Verhältnisses zwischen dem platonischen "Phaidon" und dem Dialog Gregors von Nyssa "Über die Seele und die Auferstehung"* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1986). Speaking of Gregory, he writes, "the nature of this lonely man was not to become a bishop. Gregory of Nyssa was, above all else, a thinker and a philosopher. Despite his frequent and emphatic assurances and concessions about the Bible as the sole 'law and power,' he is in reality quite far from the biblicism of someone like Basil" (110). Here, bishops read the Bible; thinkers read other literature.

[12]Roth ("Platonic and Pauline Elements," 20–21) offers a list of previous interpretations of Gregory's identity, including that of Apostolopoulos, Daniélou, and others, before she also adds her own: Gregory begins with a classical foundation, yet surpasses it in his presentation of scripture.

interpretations of Gregory and his religious identity which encircle the *Treatise* have not resolved into a single answer, and will not resolve to a single answer, for a simple reason. The *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* confounds those who would draw a link between the reading influences it displays and its author's religious identity because it was written precisely to draw the validity of such assessments into question.

This essay argues that the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* is part of a late fourth-century campaign waged by some Christian intellectuals to salvage a liberal reading program for Christians—not simply to reclaim "pagan" materials as such for Christian use, but to relinquish the categories of "Christian" and "pagan" altogether in reference to materials for intellectual consumption. Gregory of Nyssa's contribution to that campaign took the form of the character of Macrina in the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, a portrait of his sister quite different from what he had created in the *Life of Macrina* a few years earlier. To make this argument, I offer two lines of analysis. In the first part of the essay, I discuss how the *Treatise* uses multiple allusions to the *Phaedo* to equate Macrina with Socrates. While readers have often taken this equation to be a way of validating Christian discourse, or of honoring Gregory's sister Macrina, I demonstrate that Gregory's conviction about the superiority of Christianity, and about his sister's piety, make it clear that the equation is better read as a validation of Socrates and, by extension, philosophical tradition. In the second part of the essay, I explain the political and social situation in which a famous Greek philosopher like Socrates would seem to need validation from a Christian writer like Gregory. Following on a discourse established by the emperor Julian, several late-fourth-century Christians linked reading material to religious identity and advocated a reading program for Christians that excluded non-Christian authors. Some Christian intellectuals responded to this position explicitly, by writing with optimism about Christian readers choosing for themselves what was virtuous to read or by defining Greekness itself as the ability to read all kinds of literature, but Gregory of Nyssa's response was far more subtle. The details of Macrina's character in the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*—what she says and what she does—offer a critique of the discourse that limits Christians to reading only literature produced within Christian tradition. In his creation of this portrait of Macrina, Gregory attempted to undo the categorical distinctions others had made between those who read the classics and those who read scripture.

I. The New Martyrdom

As others have long observed, Gregory of Nyssa's *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* was modeled on the *Phaedo*, a Platonic dialogue well-known in

the ancient world, which recounts how the famous philosopher Socrates spent his time waiting for his execution. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates displays brave composure in the face of his sentence; instead of worrying about his own death, he speaks at length with friends and students about the nature of the soul and the arguments for its survival after death. The grief that Socrates's interlocutors experience in the dialogue only points out more forcefully Socrates's own equanimity in these conversations. Ever the philosopher, he meets death calmly, keeping his perspective on the wider truth of his existence. Many early Christians reflected on the injustice of Socrates's death, which had been ordered because he was suspected of advocating a new religion to oppose the religion of the state, a story resonant for Christians bristling at Roman dominance.[13] Some Christians, however, also reflected on Socrates's attitude toward his death, seeing not just his situation, but his emotions, especially his fearlessness, as a model for Christians facing public scorn.[14] The deathwatch for Socrates recounted in the *Phaedo* had offered many fruitful readings for Christians who saw in Roman persecution of Christians an injustice similar to the Athenian sentence and who understood Socrates's equanimity as a sign of his assurance of continued life after death, something of which Christians, too, could be assured.

Before Gregory of Nyssa, however, no Christian had attempted to reproduce the *Phaedo*, to imitate its form and its narrative setting. Gregory's *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* adopts almost every possible method for making allusion to the *Phaedo*.[15] First, the narrative setting is similar. Gregory had in his *Letter* 19 suggested that Macrina had been sick for some time before dying, but in the *Treatise*, her deathwatch forms the entire text: Macrina remains a prisoner of her deathbed during the last week of her life, surrounded by

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[13]Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and The Acts of Andrew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 249. For a discussion of Socrates as a figure in some early Christian martyr acts and in Justin's *Apology*, see Klaus Döring, *Exemplum Socratis: Studien zur Sokratesnachwirkung in der kynisch-stoischen Popularphilosophie der frühen Kaiserzeit und im frühen Christentum*, Hermes 42 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1979), esp. chapter 7, "Das Beispiel des Sokrates bei den frühchristlichen Märtyrern," 143–61; cf. Geert Roksam, "The Figure of Socrates in the Early Christian Acta Martyrum" in *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Ancient Christianity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 241–56, which treats the three early Christian acta mentioned by Döring: the *Acts of Apollonius*, *Acts of Pionius*, and the *Acts of Phileas*. While all three of these texts mention Socrates, I have found it difficult to put them in confrontation with Gregory's depiction of Macrina because of the difficulty of dating the texts: the dates of their narrative settings are clear, but less clear are their dates of composition. Socrates has long played a role in martyrology; see also Tessa Rajak, "Dying for the Law: The Martyr's Portrait in Jewish-Greek Literature," in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, eds. M. J. Edwards and Simon Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39–67, esp. 58–60.

[14]See in particular MacDonald's discussion of Origen in *Christianizing Homer*, 251.

[15]Roth, "Platonic and Pauline Elements," 20, references the previous studies of the parallels between this piece and the *Phaedo*.

grieving friends and family, including Gregory. Second, the form of the text is the same: Macrina's calm conversation with the character of her brother Gregory is in its structure an echo of the dialogue between Socrates and his friends. Even the specific topics of the dialogue—beliefs about the soul and its fate—recall the topics of Socrates's own discourse. All of these elements combined make it clear: "it is undoubtedly true to say that Gregory meant the dialogue to be read as a kind of Christian *Phaedo*."[16]

But to what end? While the parallels between the two texts are quite obvious, the effect Gregory was trying to produce by those parallels is far more debatable. Many have seen Gregory's *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* as a text meant to elevate the status of his sister, Macrina, by portraying her as a philosophically astute teacher. Presenting Macrina in a narrative scene readers would recognize as an allusion to Socrates was Gregory's way to pay honor to her, to lend her credibility, to validate her as a Christian who is the equal of philosophers and of men. Or, thinking toward the broader cultural implications of the text, readers have suggested that Gregory adopted the form of the *Phaedo* for his *Treatise* because he wanted to lend credibility to Christian literature by appropriating a classical form. Such readings assume an imbalance of value between the honor accorded in Gregory's time to Hellenic philosophical discourse on the one hand and Christian culture on the other. In other words, arguing that Gregory depicts his sister in the mold of Socrates in order to authenticate her learning and her message entails the assumption that Macrina is the one who needs authenticating, and furthermore, the assumption that late ancient Christians saw Christian intellectual culture as relatively inferior to the classical culture from which it had to adopt authenticating forms.

Based on the evidence we have from the late fourth century, those assumptions are false. In reality, Christians like Gregory thought Christian culture to be formidable and Christianity triumphant. A Christian living in Asia Minor in 380 C.E. could be forgiven for assuming that Christianity's triumphant moment in history, long expected, had finally arrived. Even without the re-appearance of the messiah, there had been a palpable shift in public culture during the fourth century, and by the time Gregory of Nyssa was writing his works about Macrina, Christians had received imperial support, in varying forms, for much of the previous six decades. Though that support was fickle—different emperors had championed one or another faction of Christians, to the disdain of the disfavored, and there was a severe interruption in that support during the reign of Julian, about which more later—the fact that emperors were aligning themselves and their resources with any Christians at all was a significant change in policy. Of course, a

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[16]Roth, "Platonic and Pauline Elements," 21.

Christian living in the 380s and experiencing these changes would have had an entire range of expectations about the prospects of Christianity, and it would be a mistake to merge our horizons, as modern historians, with the horizons imagined by those in the ancient world. That is to say, someone like Gregory of Nyssa could not have known that after the emperor Julian, there would not be another non-Christian emperor; he could not have predicted that the decade of the 380s would mark an expansion in the power of urban bishops like Ambrose to articulate their causes to those Christian emperors; or, looking further ahead, he could not have foreseen the impunity with which some late ancient Christians, alone or in groups, could threaten and kill those they deemed religiously deviant. Historians must remember that, although such events are part of Christian history to us, they remain in the future for the Christian we have been imagining, regardless of how confident he is in the coming triumph of Christianity.[17] Our historical certainty regarding outcomes and the congratulatory self-assurance of ancient Christians just arriving on the brink of promised success are two different things.

Fortunately, Gregory of Nyssa's own perspective on the success of Christianity remains available to us, preserved in several texts surviving from the decade in which he created his portrait of Macrina. None were so pointedly worded as the homilies he delivered at martyr festivals between 376 and 380.[18] In these, Gregory extolled the powerless but confident Christians who were martyred in the past, yet he also did something unexpected, using the homilies to call attention to the trappings of the real, material triumph of his Christian community. In Gregory's homily on Theodore the Recruit, for example, Gregory suggests that what Christians have come to see, and to celebrate, is not weakness but power.[19] The

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[17]For a more detailed rendering of the future that was to come, see Fergus Millar's discussion of "the Empire, the Church, and Paganism," in *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408–450)*, Sather Classical Lectures 64 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 116–23. Readers will recognize in my caution about the historian's vantage point the concern expressed by, among others, Michael André Bernstein in *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*, Contraversions: Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[18]Several of these have been collected in *"Let Us Die That We May Live": Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350–AD 450)*, ed. Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen, and Boudewijn Dehandschutter (London: Routledge, 2003).

[19]Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on Theodore the Recruit*, trans. Leemans, *"Let Us Die,"* 85: "Somebody coming to a place like this one, where we are gathering today, where the memory of the just is kept alive and his holy remains preserved, is *in the first place* attracted by the magnificence of what they see. They see a house that, like a temple of God, is splendidly adorned by the size of the building and the beauty of its ornamentation" (emphasis added). Leemans has linked the themes in this sermon to Gregory's response to Julian's reign; see "A Preacher-Audience Analysis of Gregory of Nyssa's Homily on Theodore the Recruit," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001): 140–47.

physical evidence of the martyr's shrine, the effort and thus the wealth that went into building it, and the number of people who gather at it all suggest a level of success on the part of Christianity that no tale of a courageous martyr could outshine. His homilies praise martyrs, but they also reveal the distance between the experience of persecution in the narratives about martyrs and the experiences of those crowds who have "streamed together from everywhere" to gather in a public Christian festival.[20]

   This is the central paradox of late ancient Christianity: long after the conditions that first created the concept of a Christian martyr had disappeared, Christians persisted in thinking about themselves, their positions in culture, and the futures that awaited them through the lens of martyrdom. As one can imagine, maintaining cultural coherence in a politically accepted, but martyrologically focused, tradition can be difficult, and Christians employed several methods to overcome the resulting dissonance. Many, like Gregory of Nyssa, pointed to a family history of persecution, however distant in time, and included themselves in the genealogy of victims.[21] Others reduced the dissonance by framing political events and actions in ways that did not challenge the narrative of martyrdom. Examining Christian efforts at reconciling past powerlessness with newly-acquired power, Michael Gaddis has argued that Christian "ideologies of martyrdom and resistance" provided "continuity between the suffering of violence" by Christians on the one hand and "violent action" perpetrated by Christians on the other.[22] Similarly, Christian identity formation after the turn to majority, Thomas Sizgorich had noted, was enabled by "core narratives" which traced "stories of persecution by, resistance to, and in the post-Constantine era, eventual triumph over the coercive power of the Roman imperial state."[23] Christians adapted the flexible narrative form of martyrology to align themselves with even those positions of character that did not match their positions in society. Even more strikingly, there were

[20]Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on Theodore the Recruit*, trans. Leemans, *"Let Us Die,"* 83. The sermon was given between 379 and 381; cf. *"Let Us Die,"* 82; and Jean Daniélou, "La chronologie des sermons de Grégoire de Nysse," *Revue des sciences religieuses* 29 (1955): 346–72. Elsewhere, Gregory had begun other martyr homilies by observing the impressive numbers of Christians present in metaphors of overflowing streams and rushing rivers, natural figures that imply irresistible forces. See, for example, the interrupted sermon on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in *"Let Us Die,"* 97–98.

[21]See, for example, *Life of Macrina* 20 (SC 178:206), where Gregory wrote that his sister proudly recounted their ancestors' ability to withstand pressure and remain faithful as a family trait, implicitly making past persecution an ongoing experience.

[22]Michael Gaddis, *"There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ": Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 39 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), x–xi.

[23]Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 7.

Christians willing to place themselves in the role of brave martyr, precisely at the moment when they were threatening or executing violence upon others less powerful than they.

In his creation of a *Life of Macrina*, Gregory adopted yet a third method of reducing the dissonance experienced by Christians using the concept of martyrdom after the turn to majority: he simply changed what it meant to be a "martyr." Rather than define a martyr as such because of her witness to the faith and her unjust death at the hands of the enemies of the faith, Christians like Gregory pivoted to make brave struggle the key component of "martyrdom," newly defined.[24] This process of redefinition was particularly visible in Gregory's corner of the world because of the popularity of the cult of the "martyr" Thecla. A second-century text tells the story of Thecla being persecuted and almost killed by hostile authorities; by the fourth century, she had become an object of devotion in much of Asia Minor, with a cult center that drew both local and international visitors.[25] The *Vita* for Thecla, which was written in the fifth century, makes explicit the assumption that the cult depended on, calling Thecla a "martyr."[26] But what sort of "martyr" could Thecla be, whose own *Acts* tell us that she did not die as a public witness to Christian faith, but survived her trial to go off to a "beautiful sleep" at the end of a long life? If the portraits of Thecla on pilgrimage souvenirs are evidence, the most salient part of Thecla's story for late ancient Christians was its ambiguity. Many of the ampullae freeze Thecla in the moment of drama: she is bound, surrounded by the lions sent to kill her in the arena. Will she be killed or won't she? The ampullae call out for users to provide the rest of the story, rewarding narration by observers who already know the outcome.[27] What appears to be the moment of Thecla's defeat is in reality a moment of triumph: Thecla is ultimately *not* killed by the

[24]Another example of this redefinition is Athanasius's casting of Antony as a martyr in the *Life of Antony* and the effect that text had on subsequent depictions of asceticism as "living martyrdom."

[25]Gregory of Nazianzus and Egeria the pilgrim both write of having visited the center. Underground frescoes at Thessaloniki demonstrate the regard in which she was held: the character of Thecla stands among a number of biblical figures, "implicitly elevating the importance of her story by association." Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, Gender, Theory, and Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 160; for the resources for viewing the frescoes see, 266–67n115. Evidence of the site's popularity survives even now in the dozens of pilgrimage souvenirs, generally ampullae, which survive. See Stephen Davis, *The Cult of St. Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Appendix A.

[26]Davis, *Cult of St. Thecla*, 5. Castelli notes how the *Vita* outstrips the facts of the Acts of Paul and Thecla, saying "this occlusion of the figure of Paul may contribute to the process by which Thecla's figuration as a 'martyr' intensifies in textual and artistic representations and evocations of her." *Martyrdom and Memory*, 144.

[27]Castelli makes a parallel point about the images of Thecla at Thessaloniki. *Martyrdom and Memory*, 160–61.

beasts.[28] In other words, these portraits function by leveraging the distance between past and present audiences that Gregory had also depended on in his homily on Theodore the Recruit. To one who does not know the story, Thecla appears a helpless prisoner; to one who knows the story, she is the victor.

Though we do not know whether Gregory of Nyssa ever visited Thecla's cult center, the new kind of martyr that Thecla embodied certainly inflected Gregory's writing, particularly his characterization of his sister Macrina as a pious woman in the *Life of Macrina*. The framing of Macrina's story in the *Life* is constructed to raise the idea of martyrhood in the mind of the reader. As Gregory travels to visit Macrina, he has a dream in which he can see "the fearful things that were to come"; during the dream, he bears the "remains of the martyrs" in his hands, remains that shine brilliantly.[29] Later, as Macrina is dying of her illness, Gregory understands that his dream signaled the end of Macrina's life: she is the martyr whose remains he will have to bear.[30] Indeed, as Macrina's body was prepared for burial, it was wrapped in a dusky gray cloak, but nevertheless "emitted light, just like the vision in the dream."[31] Even if, after all of this, the reader remains unsure how to classify Macrina, Gregory's account of her funeral makes the appropriate response to her life quite clear: when Macrina died, Gregory and her friends hold a special vigil, "passing the entire night in hymns around her, just as one would do to fulfill the panegyric of the martyrs."[32] Gregory never explicitly called Macrina a martyr in the *Life of Macrina*, though that is the clear implication of the general details of his account.

What is even clearer is that he wanted to present Macrina in the *Life* as a specific kind of martyr, one like Thecla, the "martyr" who had not died at the end of a public trial, but who had simply suffered bravely and beautifully. The *Life of Macrina* explains that when Macrina had not yet been born, her mother experienced in a dream three manifestations of the same inhuman figure, which insisted the child she carried was called Thecla. When she woke, she decided that Macrina should bear "Thecla" as a "secret name" (τὸ…ὄνομα τὸ κεκρυμμένον). As Gregory explains, "it seemed to me that the apparition said this not to guide the mother toward choosing the name, but to predict the life of the child and to indicate through the likeness in name that Macrina would choose a similar life [to Thecla's]."[33] In his

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[28]"Representations of this sort may be understood to function as a kind of visual or material quotation, a condensed snapshot that refers back to another text and that sparks the viewer's memory of a familiar story." Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 162.

[29]*Life of Macrina* 15 (SC 178:192): λείψανα μαρτύρων.

[30]*Life of Macrina* 19 (SC 178:202).

[31]*Life of Macrina* 32 (SC 178:246).

[32]*Life of Macrina* 33 (SC 178:248).

[33]*Life of Macrina* 2 (SC 178:148).

creation of what was essentially a saint's life for Macrina, in his narrative framing of that life, and, for the slowest of readers, in his explicit doubling of her name, Gregory's presentation of Macrina depended upon widespread cultural knowledge of the revered figure to whom he likened Macrina: Thecla.[34] Gregory made his sister as a copy of the strongest type of woman available—the woman whose extensive cult in Asia Minor celebrated her in the new style of martyrdom. It was only a few years later that Gregory wrote the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, in which he grants Macrina a second secret name, alongside "Thecla," one he never speaks aloud but which is obvious to the reader: Socrates.

As we have seen, Gregory had a keen awareness of the ways that Christianity had become dominant and clearly thought of himself as speaking from a position of strength with respect to Hellenic culture and literature. Therefore, our knowledge of his estimation of Christianity should influence our reading of his work and its effects. The *Life of Macrina* was Gregory's first full portrait of her, and he chose the most powerful form he could find for casting the events of her life into a story: he used the model of Thecla to inaugurate Macrina as a new martyr, one whose identifying mark was not the special death garnered by Christian witness in coercive legal proceedings and the subsequent unjust execution, but rather simple courage in the face of death—any death at all, including a natural one. An observant reader may object that Gregory then chose to write a second work, the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, about Macrina because he found the first portrait of her was not convincing enough; for that reason Gregory turned to the stronger, more culturally relevant model of Socrates in order to solidify his portrait of his sister. But if the *Life of Macrina* was meant to transform Macrina into a martyr like Thecla, yet had done so unsuccessfully, so that Macrina's memory was still frail and in need of shoring up, turning to redefine her, yet again, as something akin to Socrates would be exactly the wrong move. Doing this would have highlighted the quality that Macrina and Socrates share, brave composure in the time before their death, while at the same time bringing to the fore the thing they do not share: Socrates was killed by others, but Macrina died a natural, if early, death. Comparing the two this way would undermine Gregory's careful construction of Macrina as a woman who is a martyr like Thecla. Unless we are willing to think of Gregory as an author who flailed about for a way to honor his sister—first as a martyr like Thecla, then abandoning the idea of Macrina's martyrhood

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[34]Ruth Albrecht offers a more detailed discussion of Gregory of Nazianzus's use of Thecla as an exemplum in *Das Leben der heiligen Makrina auf dem Hintergrund der Thekla-Traditionen: Studien zu den Ursprüngen des weiblichen Mönchtums im 4. Jahrhundert in Kleinasien*, Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 38 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 240–43.

to liken her to someone else, a philosopher—we need to examine other
possibilities for the effects of his presentation of Macrina in the *Treatise.*

Narrative logic suggests that the equation of Macrina and Socrates in the
Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection was not made to benefit the
memory of Macrina. Furthermore, Gregory's triumphalism regarding
Christianity allows only one reading of the character of Macrina in the
Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection: she is the stronger of the two
characters, whose honor as a pious martyr reflects well on the old
philosopher. Put another way, Gregory was less interested in lending the
weight of the philosopher's mantle to his sister than he was in lending the
weight of the martyr's crown to the philosopher. In the *Treatise on the Soul
and the Resurrection*, Gregory was not bringing Socrates forward out of the
past to authorize Macrina. Instead, he was reaching back into the past to
claim Socrates as a example of this new conception of martyrdom: a martyr
in the era of political majority. Doing so habilitated Socrates, and
philosophical tradition, as entities participating in the new Christian culture
of power and legitimacy at the end of the fourth century.

II. THE CHRISTIAN CULTURAL SALVAGE PROJECT

In the previous section I argued that the *Treatise on the Soul and the
Resurrection* equated Gregory's sister Macrina, a devout Christian whom
Gregory had previously presented as a martyr of brave composure, to
Socrates, the Athenian philosopher, in order to authorize Socrates. The
foundational context in which to understand this aspect of the *Treatise on the
Soul and the Resurrection* lies in the changes in governance and public
culture that took place after the middle of the fourth century. The reign of
Constantius, emperor from 337 to 361 C.E., was marked by imperial
intervention in religious and civic affairs that was of a different character
than what had come before. While Constantine, Constantius's father, had
sought a lowest common denominator for public culture in versions of
monotheism, Constantius as emperor "had a deep interest in shaping the
discourse of the church" and found the "terms of the Nicene Creed were too
imprecise to create the order that he sought."[35] Constantius's subsequent
involvement in detailed debates regarding religious belief and practice was
more interventionist than his predecessors' and his energetic umpirage
served as a model for his successor, Julian, who employed such intervention

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[35]David S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180–395* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 486.
For an argument that Constantine was interested in the broadest of monotheisms, see Elizabeth
DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (Ithaca, N.Y.:
Cornell University Press, 2000).

to opposite effect. When Julian became emperor in 361, he continued Constantius's tightly controlling style of governance, but moved in an anti-Christian direction, dedicating himself to increasing the public celebration of traditional sacrifices.[36] For a year and a half, while Julian was emperor, the Christian triumphalism that had grown over the first part of the fourth century experienced a disruption whose influence far outweighed its actual duration.

One aspect of that disruption cast a large shadow, even during late antiquity. Julian's commitment to a particular style of traditional religion was the frame for a set of more directed reforms aimed at intellectual training and culture in the empire. Our understanding of these reforms is based on two documents surviving from antiquity, one a piece of legislation that dates to June 362 and the other a slightly damaged letter that can be dated no later than September of the same year.[37] The legislation, extant in the Theodosian Code, establishes a registry of teachers, asking that all teachers must first and foremost be excellent in "virtue" and should, on that basis, be approved for teaching by local officials acting in the place of Julian himself.[38] In one stroke, Julian created a system for surveillance of teachers, one which linked their fitness for teaching with an external estimation of their moral character.[39] In the second document, the letter, Julian reveals what he means by "virtue" and moral character: alignment of one's public religious practices with the contents of the texts one reads. Teachers who think one thing about the gods while instructing others in the interpretation of texts whose presentation of the gods they do not think true are engaging in deception, or something worse; at one point in the letter, Julian complains that teachers "will do just about anything" for money, not so subtly calling to mind prostitution.[40] In Julian's view of education, the primary evaluation of the teacher centered on his relationship to the texts he used with students, and the standard to match was not the utility of the text he used as a teaching

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[36]The literature on Julian and the character of his reign is immense. As a start, see still Glenn Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), but also the update of Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 485–513, esp. 508 and following.

[37]Thomas Banchich dates the letter, which survives in a slightly jumbled form, to 362, the second year of Julian's reign. See "Julian's School Laws: *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.5 and *Ep.* 42," *The Ancient World* 24 (1993): 5–14.

[38]*C. Th.* 13.3.5. See Joseph Bidez, ed. and trans., *L'empereur Julien: Oeuvres completes I.2* (Paris: "Belles Lettres," 2003), 72.

[39]Edward J. Watts places this in the context of a larger move toward administrative oversight and Julian's attempt to control the informal networks of power afforded to those with intellectual positions. See *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, Transformations of the Classical Heritage 41 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 68–69.

[40]Those who teach the texts of Homer or Hesiod but say these authors are wrong about the honor to be given to the gods "confess themselves to be entirely shameless, and that for a few coins, they are willing to do just about anything." *Ep.* 42; 423b, ed. Bidez, 74.

tool, but rather the teacher's conviction of its truth value. In this way, Julian's program of reform was an attempt at systematically redefining teaching as the promotion and use of texts that one believed.[41]

This combination of belief in and use of literature, alongside Julian's later acerbic comments about Christians, have led some to think that Julian was specifically targeting Christians with this letter and perhaps another law, the text of which is missing but which several later Christian authors complain about. The extant letter, however, appears to apply more universally to all teachers and not only to Christians. In fact, the letter's only mention of Christians, or, in Julian's parlance, "Galileans," appears as an example of those people who *do* teach the texts they believe. Specifically, Julian rails against some teachers who are not interested in participating in temple services for the gods, the same gods whose stories these teachers use to instruct their students. Julian says, somewhat rhetorically, "If they are so deceived about the things of highest honor, let them go off into the churches of the Galileans, interpreting Matthew and Luke!"[42] This tirade is often read as if it applies to Christian teachers, and of course it could have applied to Christian teachers: Christians had no interest in temple services for the gods and would not think the gods excellent, but might still teach traditional Greek texts.[43] It is equally plausible, however, that Julian aimed this comment at non-Christian teachers insufficiently dedicated to the public celebration of the religious identity Julian felt their curricula required. Thus the force of the comment would be that such teachers *might as well* "go off to the churches of the Galileans," because they are the ones who teach books they actually hold true. Or, better, "why teach the classics if you do not demonstrate classical values by sacrificing?" Although this text does not clarify that Christians were the target of the law, and no document survives demonstrating that Julian outlawed Christian teachers specifically, later writers certainly understood the reform in that frame, taking Julian's purpose to be denying Christian teachers their livelihood.[44]

Those who were living at the time of the reforms, however, understood their impact in a more complex way. In a remarkable letter written during the latter part of Julian's reign, a close Christian friend takes Gregory of Nyssa to task for the way he has been presenting himself in public. "Why should you not hear from me what everyone whispers?"[45] What everyone seems to have been

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[41]It is possible to see here the reflection of a growing Christian insistence on the truth value of texts, too.

[42]*Ep.* 42; 423d, ed. Bidez, 75.

[43]This is how both Bidez and Watts read it. See *City and School*, 71; Bidez's note links this to Julian's *Against the Galileans*.

[44]See, for example, Ammianus Marcellinus's characterization of the law (22.10.7; 25.4.20).

[45]Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letter* 11.2. I am grateful to Bradley Storin for sharing his translation of this letter and for discussing with me its implications; his translations of Gregory of Nazianzus's letters and a study about the Gregory's self-representation appear in "Late Antique Epistolary

gossiping about is the fact that Gregory of Nyssa "cast away the sacred and palatable books that [he] used to read line by line with the people" and exchanged them for the "bitter and unpalatable books," wanting "to hear [people call him] 'rhetor' rather than 'Christian.'"[46] The public estimates Gregory of Nyssa's religious and social identity based on the books that he is reading, and it seems clear from the first part of the letter that the author of the letter, the public, *and* Gregory of Nyssa all saw "rhetor" and "Christian" as mutually exclusive choices linked to mutually exclusive reading curricula. From the anxiety that Gregory of Nyssa's friend displays here, it is also clear that the impact of Julian's program of reform was to link texts read to one's religious and civic identity in a way that all could evaluate—after all, people were whispering! Under this quite public system of reckoning one's allegiances, Gregory of Nyssa's interest in non-Christian literature puts him in the category of non-Christian, and this state of affairs led his friend to upbraid him.

The second half of the letter is more nuanced, revealing that the author of the letter is acutely aware of the delicate requirements of public display that Julian's reforms created for teachers. He is less concerned that Gregory of Nyssa is truly not a Christian than he is that Gregory of Nyssa will be *seen* as not being Christian. Consider the response the letter writer imagines that Gregory of Nyssa might offer to his rebuke:

> And do not put these words, refined and rhetorical, to me: "What are you talking about? Was I not Christian while practicing rhetoric? Was I not faithful while hanging out among the young men?" Perhaps you will even adduce God as a witness. If I also were to give part of a response, it would be, "O Admirable Man, no, you were not—not to the extent that befits you." Who do you think you are, striking others who are naturally disposed toward vice by your current actions and giving them a chance to suspect and say the worst about you? A lie, no doubt—but what is the need [for it]? One lives not only for oneself, but also for one's neighbor. Convincing yourself is not enough, unless [you convince] others as well.[47]

Here, the author of the letter makes a nuanced distinction between what a person actually identifies as his religious tradition and what his religious

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Culture and the Letters of Gregory of Nazianzus," (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2012). The Greek of *Letter* 11 is available in Paul Gallay, ed. and trans., *Grégoire de Nazianze: Lettres, tome I* (Paris: "Belles Lettres," 1964), 16–18.

    [46]*Letter* 11.4, *Lettres*, ed. Gallay, trans. Storin, 17. Interestingly, Gregory also asks: "have you placed [the old books] over the smoke, like oars and shovels in winter?" (trans. Storin). As Storin identifies, this refers to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, but it also conjures the image of books over smoke—a veiled reference to Julian's demand for public sacrifices?

    [47]*Letter* 11.6–7, *Lettres*, ed. Gallay, trans. Storin, 17–18.

tradition appears to others to be. In this imagined exchange, Gregory's friend wishes that Gregory would no longer do those things in public that have been publicly defined as the opposite of Christian—regardless of what he himself actually feels. The author of the letter is invested in distinguishing between one's public persona and one's internal allegiance, but it is certainly not the case that he thinks this kind of public estimation of one's religious commitment yields accurate information. Indeed, if this friend of Gregory's were trying to make a case that Christian identity did, in reality, coincide with Christian reading material, and a non-Christian reading program likewise meant a non-Christian identity, his letter was the worst possible way to do it: the letter quotes twice from Euripedes's *Phoenician Women*, once from Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and borrows the ending from a letter of Pythagoras.[48] Instead, the second part of the letter reveals both the pervasive redefinition of vocation, religious identity, and status that Julian's reforms effected in public discourse as well as the multi-layer negotiations of self-presentation imagined and undertaken by those living "dual" lives in this new regime.

While this letter was written during Julian's reign, the effects of Julian's educational reform continued to determine public discourse about religious identity long after his death, lasting even after the repeal of many of the specific precepts of the reform by Jovian, a subsequent emperor. With the death of Julian and the succession of Christian emperors, many Christians acceded to the same evaluative standards that had resulted from Julian's reform, only to reverse them. The suggestion that anyone might evaluate another's religious identity based on cultural influences and especially reading material persisted, as "pagan" and "Christian" were vociferously adopted by Christians as meaningful cultural categories in an elaborate project of social description in the latter part of the fourth century.[49] Within that discourse, identity markers were linked to cultural influences so that reading "pagan" literature and supporting "pagan" cultural traditions could qualify a person as a pagan and disqualify him as a Christian. Some Christians applied this discourse even more broadly, not just in evaluating pedagogical materials, but instead seeing religious identity as an operative category in situations where others did not. As evidence of this development, consider the ways that the bishop Ambrose activated religious identity in

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[48]These are identified by Bradley Storin.

[49]Even those authors who resign themselves to using "pagan" to describe their subjects note its emergence primarily as a Christian term of disparagement and containment. See Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede, *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 4–7. The fact that "paganus" became a legal reality in the *C. Th.* only demonstrates the power of categorization by the powerful. For a treatment of both Christian and non-Christian intellectuals in a way that surpasses these debates, see Watts, *City and School*.

conversations with the emperor Valentinian II about changing furniture in the Roman senate, or how Ambrose interpreted a political coup as a religiously motivated contest and led others to view it in the same way, Rufinus, Augustine, and later historians like Sozomen and Theodoret among them.[50] While scholars have questioned the traditional narration of intense pagan-Christian conflict at the end of the fourth century, it remains clear that some Christians saw events through that very lens. I see this stance as a reactionary one, adopted by a small but vocal group of Christians, a direct inheritance of Julian's discourse linking reading material and religious identity.[51]

At the same time that this starker public discourse regarding Christianity and its "pagan" others was taking hold, several Christian intellectuals fought to blur the dichotomous scheme of Julian and his subsequent discontents. For example, Basil of Caesarea's pamphlet *To Young Men on Making Use of Greek Literature* makes the most contextual sense when placed in the years at the end of the 370s and when read as a response to the discursive redefinition of readership and teaching accomplished by Julian's educational reforms and adopted by some Christians.[52] The treatise focuses on the "usefulness" (χρῆσις) of literature and explains that readers are able to discriminate, like bees choosing the right flowers or a gardener gathering roses amidst thorns, among the various types of literature available, whether that literature is Christian or not.[53] While Julian's reforms connected the truth value of a text to its utility for a reader and made that relationship public, manifest for anyone—an emperor or a well-meaning friend—to judge, Basil's work amends that relationship to be subject to private eyes

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[50]Michele Salzman, "Ambrose and the Usurpation of Arbogastes and Eugenius: Reflections on Pagan-Christian Conflict Narratives," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18 (2010): 191–223, esp. 191–92 and 206.

[51]As Salzman points out, the most salient example of this approach is Ambrose, and even his view is difficult to grasp; there is not a figure in the Greek-speaking portions of Christianity who matches Ambrose's explicit resolution. Young Kim has indicated to me that Epiphanius may represent a Greek intellectual who embraces the stark divide (see, for example, his discussion of Origen's educational background in *Panarion* 64). There is also evidence of this attitude among Greek writers, but in relief, in the form of a significant project on the part of several writers to defeat it.

[52]This despite recent attempts to make the tractate coincide with Basil's early career in the 350s. See Robert E. Winn, "Revisiting the Date of Authorship of Basil of Caesarea's *Ad Adolescentes*," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999): 291–307. I agree with Winn that it belongs to the period of the 370s, in part because of Basil's own reference to his advanced age, but also for the ways it responds to the discourse established by Julian's reform. See also Philip Rousseau's more ambivalent discussion of the context of the work in *Basil of Caesarea*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 20 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 49.

[53]Basil, *To Young Men* 4, ed. Fernand Boulenger, *Saint Basile: Aux jeunes gens sur la manière de tirer profit des lettres helléniques* (Paris: "Belles Lettres," 2002), 46. On the wider topic of utility, see Christian Gnilka, *Der Begriff des "rechten Gebrauchs,"* Chrēsis: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur 1 (Basel: Schwabe, 1984), esp. 67–76.

only. Christians, even young Christians, can judge for themselves the value of a work and can decide to read it without any insinuations about their religious identity following. Although Basil did urge the presence of "virtue" in a text as a criterion for judging good literature, it was hardly meant to be selective, as he notes that "all of Homer's poetry is an exhortation to virtue."[54] If all of Homer—gods, goddesses, sex, war, betrayal—can lead to virtue, then so can all of Greek literature. The upshot of this sentiment is a liberal reading program, for if Christian readers can trust themselves to recognize "virtue," they should read widely, making use of all the literature available to them. Basil's efforts to mitigate the link of reading material to religious identity are their own particular kind of evidence of the durability and pervasiveness of Julian's redefinition of readership, education, and religion.[55] Julian's work and Christian reactions to it defined one way of thinking about the relationship of reader to text, but Basil offered a different way of thinking, one that allowed especially the young reader to select literature without implications for his religious identity.

   Other Christians after Julian's death used ethnic categories to dismantle the link in public discourse between one's reading material and one's identity. The friend who had written to Gregory of Nyssa, urging him to adopt an intellectual curriculum which represented to others a particular religious identity, was Gregory of Nazianzus. We saw, in the second part of his letter, how delicately he had advised Gregory of Nyssa to act in order to appear a certain way in the public eye. Later, after Julian had died, Gregory of Nazianzus contended against the hardening public agreement about religious identity and reading, writing far more freely than he had in his letter to his friend. In his *Orations against Julian*, Gregory sought nothing less than to redefine the category of "Greekness," a direct challenge to the continuing dominance of the categories introduced by the long-dead Julian.[56] Making the boldest possible claim, Gregory charged that Julian had debased the value of "Greekness" itself with his move toward linking the language and literature of Greek to belief in traditional Greek gods. Part of Gregory's argument was specifically aimed at restoring to Christian intellectuals the use

[54]Basil, *To Young Men* 5, ed. Boulenger, *Aux jeunes gens*, 47.
    [55]This means there is less distance between Basil and Gregory's approach to "culture" than is traditionally rendered. I see the two in continuity. Cf. Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (London: Routledge, 1999) 5, in which he writes of Basil's hostility toward "culture"—that is "contemporary science and philosophy"—and compares it to Gregory's sympathy.
    [56]Susanna Elm has detailed the way that Julian's "thoughts and actions significantly influenced Gregory's response," not just immediately, but in his entire career of skillfully weaving both Christian and Hellenic literary culture: "Gregory's oeuvre and the central themes he addressed and developed in all the literary genres of the time was a direct response to Julian and the characteristics of his reign." See "Hellenism and Historiography: Gregory of Nazianzus and Julian in Dialogue," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 493–515, at 494.

of Greek literature, but more widely the point was to disengage the category of belief in the truth of gods—that is to say, religion—from the literature one reads. As Gregory put it, "the fact that the same people use the Greek language, who also profess Greek religion, does not mean that the words belong therefore to the religion, and that we are then naturally excluded from using them."[57] Susanna Elm has argued that Gregory's aim in these orations was quite ambitious: not only was there no special claim on the Greek language for those who practiced "Greek religion," those who practiced "Greek religion" did not themselves even properly inhabit "Greekness." Instead, *Christians* actually represented the best of Greekness, because in their liberal yet judicious adoption of all literature, regardless of their religion, they represented the true and universalistic spirit of being Greek.[58] In this way, Gregory of Nazianzus was advocating a return to an understanding of reading material which was far more ambivalent than what Julian had demanded and what prevailed among reactionary Christians after Julian. The glory of being Greek belonged to those who read widely and without prejudice.

Gregory of Nyssa's portrayal of Macrina in his *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* should be read in the same vein as these works: as an effort to walk back the effects of the Julian's linking of reading material to religious identity, and as an effort to return Christian pedagogy, philosophy, and cultural evaluation to a stance of ambivalence regarding Greek literature. Earlier I argued that we should see the *Treatise* as the manifestation of Gregory's conviction that Christianity was indeed triumphant and powerful. His equation of the character of his sister Macrina to the figure of Socrates was, in that context, a move made to legitimate Socrates. My claim extends even further, in the context of Christian negotiation of public discourses about reading and religious identity: Gregory's portrayal of Macrina in the *Treatise* is also an argument against continuing Christian disparagement of non-Christian literature, especially in the discipline of philosophy. To offer Socrates as a silent shadow of Macrina, to liken him to an example of the new style of martyr who suffers bravely, is to suggest that Hellenic heroes signify on the same register and with the same signs as Christian heroes, or more precisely, heroines. The ligature of these two figures undermines the stark divide that some would have drawn between Christian and non-Christian cultures.

Even more specifically, the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* calls the linking of religious identity and reading material into question by means of the

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[57]Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 4.103-5, cited by Elm, 506.

[58]"Whoever equated Greekness and Greek learning—that is, philosophy—exclusively with belief in the Greek gods denied the universality of Greekness, itself the perfect mixture of the best of all peoples within the Roman *oikumene* . . . In short, for Gregory, Greekness and Greek learning, once properly guided toward the correct divinity, were integral to being Christian, and the demonstration of that fact became his life-long pursuit." Elm, 506.

narrative situations in which it places Macrina. On the one hand, Macrina can be dismissive of non-Christian literature. When Gregory praises the ideas of "some Greeks who have not a small amount of glory on account of philosophy," Macrina scoffs. "Leave aside the stupidities of those on the outside, among whom the inventor of falsehood introduces credible deceptions for the purpose of damaging the truth."[59] This is precisely what Macrina could be expected to say as a participant in the discourse that linked consumption of cultural materials to one's religious allegiance: of course Christians should not read and could not benefit from knowledge of "outside" literature. On the other hand, however, the character Macrina acts in ways to suggest that she does, indeed, read the "stupidities of those on the outside." She acknowledges multiple ideas about resurrection voiced by "those outside our philosophy," and the character of Gregory expresses concern that, once Macrina dies, there will be no one left who is knowledgeable to answer the objections of those outsiders to Christian ideas about resurrection—meaning that Macrina is especially skilled in such conversations.[60] The small details of Macrina's character allow readers to imagine a biography for her, one in which she displays a commitment to Christianity and to scripture as well as a deep knowledge of "those on the outside" and their ideas. Her educational background belies the idea that one, by reading the Greeks, is not a Christian, *even as she voices precisely that idea*. That is to say, in Macrina, Gregory has made a complex character whose actions, training, and statements are contradictory and point up the contorted positions in which late fourth-century Christian intellectuals may have found themselves as a result of the Julian's discourse of belief and its adoption among Christians.

Furthermore, the intellectual guidance that Macrina gives Gregory suggests that, as a character, she is an exploration of the constraints created by the more reactionary parts of late-fourth-century Christian culture. Never in the *Treatise* does Macrina claim that she reads only Christian scripture and argues only from Christian scripture. Instead, she discusses several ideas with Gregory in terms set by philosophers "from the outside" and subsequently urges *Gregory* to find scriptural resonances for such ideas. Here is how Macrina describes the process of interacting with ideas from non-Christian literature:

> If outside philosophy which skillfully treats these matters were sufficient to demonstrate the truth, it would be superfluous for us to put forward our own discussion on the soul. For them the theory of the soul advances based on the authority of the thinker, while for us we have no authority of our own to say

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[59]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 17, ed. Ilaria Ramelli, *Gregorio di Nissa: Sull'anima e la resurrezione* (Milan: Bompiani, 2007), 350–52.

[60]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 108, 129, ed. Ramelli, *Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, 456, 482.

whatever we wish, but we have the holy Scripture as the rule and law of every concept. It is for this reason that we accept only as much as resonates with the purpose of the Scriptures.[61]

This appears to be a hard line: only if an idea "resonates" (σύμφωνον) with scripture can it be discussed. As one considers the practical implications of "resonance," however, Macrina's more detailed advice demonstrates the flexibility of her approach. "The Word," she offers, "has scattered here and there resources through which the skilled interpreter is called to a more refined understanding" of ideas expressed by others.[62] Macrina the character trusts those who read to find points of scripture that harmonize with "outside ideas," a stance that assumes readers could understand outside literature well enough to judge its worth and coherence with scripture. Her assurance regarding the role of the "skilled interpreter" is parallel to the trust that Basil placed in young readers, to determine what kinds of literature could be "virtuous" and edifying.

    In the dialogue presented in the *Treatise*, this principle works out to mean that a philosophical discussion must, in the end, be tied to something scriptural, even if only loosely so. It is Gregory, the character, who often reminds Macrina of this final requirement. For example, after a long monologue in which Macrina describes the nature and location of the desires, Gregory observes that while her exploration would be clear to any sensible person, he still must urge her to remember that they are seeking something "more worthy of faith" (ἀξιοπιστότερον) on which to base their ideas. "So," he explains, "I wish to know whether the divinely inspired teaching accords with what we have said so far."[63] Macrina's response is to introduce, rather clumsily, the parable of the wheat and the weeds and to search out briefly themes in it that support her earlier, more complex discourse. Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, Gregory presses Macrina to explain the resurrection; she notes that she has already treated it at length, but will now add the "sporadic occurrences" of the topic in scripture, almost an afterthought.[64] Despite the extended discussions Macrina has offered, Gregory the character is not satisfied until the ideas have been made parallel to something in scripture, even in ways that quite depart from the philosophical style of argument that dominates the *Treatise*. Gregory's character registers the protest of the Christian version of Julian's insistence on a reading program

    [61]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 49, ed. Ramelli, *Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, 390.
    [62]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 80, ed. Ramelli, *Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, 424.
    [63]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 64, ed. Ramelli, *Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, 404.
    [64]Gregory of Nyssa, *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, 129, ed. Ramelli, *Sull'anima e la resurrezione*, 484.

linked to a religious tradition—if it is ours, find it in scripture!—but this narrative technique allows for an extensive meditation on ideas voiced and developed by those on the "outside."

We should take these details of character as evidence of Gregory's experimentation with role of the Christian intellectual in using and evaluating multiple kinds of literature. Macrina, and especially Gregory, as characters have a clear idea about what ought to be done: their topics and questions should have a foundation in Christian texts. Yet the example of "skilled interpretation" performed in the *Treatise* allows those Christian readers who accept the *Treatise* as a model much latitude in their adoption of ideas. Even the contradictions in Macrina's character—she who structures her discussion in the terms of "outside" literature, even as she seems to reject Christians who do so—challenge the idea that one's religious identity is determined by one's reading material. Extended to its political and practical ends, her character validates the accommodation and use of non-Christian literature, ideas, and intellectual practices. In the light of the other, more obvious attempts at salvaging Greek intellectual culture for Christians, Gregory's work in the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* stands out as a rhetorically sublimated but dramatic blurring of the lines.

III. Conclusion: Adjusting to Majority

Christians at the end of the fourth century were involved in the kinds of cultural negotiation incumbent upon those newly in power. In varying degrees, Christians could experience a certain triumphalism regarding their legal status and the increase in the number and power of Christians; they could continue to narrate Christian identity with stories of the persecuted and the martyred, reading and inhabiting narratives that no longer aligned with their political reality; they could co-opt and assimilate literary forms of the wider culture as integral parts of Christian tradition. These operations, common to groups that make the transition from powerless to powerful, were inflected by the style of governance adopted by emperors in the mid-fourth century and especially by Julian. Julian's educational reforms in particular linked reading material to religious identity in a way that encouraged public evaluation of that identity, particularly with respect to teachers and intellectuals. This discourse was taken up by some Christians at the end of the fourth century, but reversed to disqualify from Christianity those who read Greek literature, sharpening the line between "pagan" and "Christian." Indeed, one of the ways that Christians responded to their increasing political and social power was to extend a frame of dualism over late ancient culture, filtering out for Christian readers the source materials that did not

immediately originate with Christian authors. Other Christians, however, sought to invalidate the discourse linking reading material to religious identity and to allow, even encourage, a wide view of what culture could be theirs. Gregory of Nyssa's *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* reveals that he was one of many Christians who sought the broadest possible point of view.

His portrayal of his sister Macrina, surviving in the *Treatise* and two other texts, was at heart a family story. While historians have, at times, been tempted to overlook the way that representations of family can reflect developments taking place in the cultural and political arena, treating such texts as texts on the same level as any other offers great rewards. The historian Carolyn Kay Steedman, for example, used the stories and recollections of her family to make visible and to analyze the sexual and emotional tensions of the British working class. Steedman's work, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, accessed affective knowledge that had remained unseen in more traditional historiography, in part because she parsed family stories as representative of more than simple memories of personal relationships and interactions. In particular, her mother's experiences, both economic and emotive, were historical texts that yielded information about the ways that mill workers and their families adjusted to new realities as mill towns died and families moved on. As Steedman observed about the function of family stories, "Once a story is told, it ceases to be a story: it becomes a piece of history, an interpretative device."[65] The characters called to life in story do not remain within the bounds of the story, or even the bounds of the past, but become models, entering the politics of those who hear the story and those who tell it.

Once completed, Macrina's portrait in the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection* was a piece of history that had a particular place in the intellectual culture of the late fourth century. By equating Macrina, the martyr and heroine, to Socrates, the *Treatise* validated Socrates and with him philosophical discourse as appropriate parts of Christian culture. Macrina, by her actions in the *Treatise*, also modeled ambivalence among devout Christians toward the place of Greek literature and its implications for religious identity. Though such an open cultural position could be seen as the manifestation of weakness, an orientation that allows one to appropriate what one cannot produce, the equanimity of those looking for a more liberal reading program for Christians and a more liberal approach to non-Christian culture did not arise from a position of inferiority. Instead, it was founded on the conviction that Christianity had gained a powerful position within

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[65]Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 143.

society. Gregory of Nyssa could, because of his security in the material dominance of Christianity, afford to reach out, to conduct a salvage operation that dismantled the stark binary of "pagan" and "Christian" in order to reincorporate into the newly dominant culture texts and traditions that other Christians had ruled out. His work, and particularly the *Treatise on the Soul and the Resurrection*, is one part of the process by which the former minority managed the turn to majority.