

Erotic Persuasion and Characterization in Late Antique Hagiography: the *Passio Caeciliae* and the *Passio Susannae*.

Between the fourth and the sixth centuries an impressive number of Latin passions of the martyrs were produced which have received little or no attention from literary scholars. They were and still are studied mainly by Church historians and specialists of the cult of the saints and continue to suffer from a bad reputation. Classicists generally know little about this important corpus of sources and/or think of them as repetitive, badly written texts with stock characters: interesting documents for the religious history of Late Antiquity perhaps but totally lacking in literary quality and originality. For an extensive study of the literary aspects of the late antique *acta martyrum* and *passiones*, one has to go as far back in time as the Belgian Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye¹; and significantly, his verdict was that “one has the impression of constantly turning the pages of the same book”². In line with this focus on monotony, scholars have argued that some passions are mere copies of others. In this paper, we will discuss one such purported couple of model and copy: the *passio Caeciliae* and the *passio Susannae*. We hope to demonstrate that things are more complex and more interesting from a literary point of view than is usually assumed.

Previous Research on the Passio Caeciliae and Passio Susannae

The summaries of these two passions will perhaps not inspire much confidence in their literary qualities. In fact, parallels between them have been put forward to argue that the passion of Susanna was a copy of that of Caecilia. The latter passion (BHL 1495 - 1495a - 1496³) recounts the vicissitudes of the Christian virgin Caecilia who is pressured by her father in marrying the pagan Valerianus. On their wedding night, she converts Valerianus to Christianity and persuades him not to consume their marriage. Subsequently, Valerianus' brother Tiburtius is converted as well. The brothers come into conflict with the prefect of Rome and are beheaded. A few months

¹ W. BERSCHIN, *Biographie und Epochenstil im lateinischen Mittelalter, I: Von der Passio Perpetuae zu den Dialogi Gregors der Grossen*, Stuttgart, 1986, p. 66-87 also analyzed a number of late antique passions as literary documents.

² H. DELEHAYE, *Étude sur le légendier romain. Les saints de novembre et de décembre*. Brussels, 1936, p. 18-19. Cf. also H. DELEHAYE, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, Brussels, 1966², p. 171-226. Similar thoughts are formulated by M. STELLADORO, *Agata, la martire*, Milan, 2005, p. 66-67; V. MILAZZO, *La Sicilia: Agata e Lucia* in: A. TILATTI and G. B. F. TROLESE (eds.) *Giustina e le altre. Sante e culti femminili in Italia settentrionale dalla prima età cristiana al secolo XII*, Rome, 2009, p. 243-270, and many others.

³ The differences between BHL 1495 en BHL 1495a are minimal: in BHL 1495a, a part of the prologue is missing. BHL 1496 is a shorter version of BHL 1495. We will use the edition of BHL 1495 by Delehaye (DELEHAYE, *Étude* [n. 2], p. 194-220), considered standard (cf. C. LANERY, *Nouvelles recherches d'hagiographie arnobienne: la passion de Cécile* in: M. GOULLET (ed.) *Parva pro magnis munera: études de littérature tardo-antique et médiévale offerts à François Dolbeau par ses élèves*, Turnhout, 2009, p. 533-559, note 11). The text of the most recent edition (R. K. UPCHURCH, *Aelfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses*, Exeter, 2007 (with English translation)) displays only minor differences, which are insignificant for our purposes.

later, Caecilia too is brought before the prefect and also dies a martyr's death. The *passio Susannae* (BHL 7937 – 7937b⁴) recounts the vicissitudes of the Christian virgin Susanna who refuses to marry the son of the emperor Diocletian. Diocletian sends two brothers, Claudius and Maximus, relatives of Susanna, to talk her and her father Gabinius into the marriage. But Claudius and Maximus are not successful and are converted to Christianity instead. In the end Claudius, Maximus and Susanna all die as martyrs.

As early as 1925, Francesco Lanzoni called Susanna an “evident copy” of Caecilia⁵. The position that the *passio Caeciliae* functioned as a model for the *passio Susannae* is still held: in the recent international history of Latin and vernacular hagiographical literature, published as a part of the *Corpus Christianorum* project, Cécile Lanéry refers to Lanzoni's view and identifies the *passio Caeciliae* as the “illustrious model” and “guideline” for the author of the *passio Susannae*⁶. She also sets out to explain why the hagiographer of the *passio Susannae* turned to the *passio Caeciliae* for inspiration⁷. To underpin their thesis - which is plausible both from a chronological⁸ and a geographical⁹ point of view - Lanzoni and Lanéry provide a list of thematic parallels between the two passions. However, none of these parallels necessarily indicates a one-to-one relationship between the two texts. Rather, they consist of common hagiographical themes. Both Lanzoni and Lanéry identify the element of the *martyrium* in one's own home, for instance, as an element shared by both the *passio Caeciliae* and the *passio Susannae* and indicating direct influence. But as Delehaye has argued, the *passio Caeciliae* contains a lot of *loci communes* and the house theme also occurs in the *passio Eugeniae* and the *passio Gallicani, Johannis et Pauli*¹⁰.

⁴ The differences between BHL 7937 en 7937b are minimal and BHL 7937b has not been edited. We will use the edition of BHL 7937 by Mombritius (B. MOMBRIUS, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum* (1480), monachi Solesmenses (eds.), Paris, 1910², vol. I, p. 553-59), as Lanéry considers this the oldest and most widespread edition (C. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie (300-550): les passions*, in G. PHILIPPART (ed.), *Corpus Christianorum: Hagiographies V*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 1-369, esp. 150-151). When relevant, we will also include references to the edition of the *Acta Sanctorum*: J. BOLLANDUS and G. HENSCHENIUS (eds.), *Acta Sanctorum Februarii*, Antwerp, 1658, volume III, p. 61-64 (first part of the *passio*) and J.-B. DU SOLIER, J. PIEN, G. CUYERS and P. VAN DEN BOSSCHE (eds.), *Acta Sanctorum Augusti*, Antwerp, 1735, volume II, p. 631-632 (second part of the *passio*). Susanna's passion is divided into two parts in the ASS edition, since her fellow martyrs died earlier according to the *passio*.

⁵ “copia evidente”, cf. F. LANZONI, *I titoli presbiterali di Roma antica nella storia e nella leggenda* in *RAC* 2, 1925, p. 195-257, esp. 231.

⁶ “illustre modèle”, “fil conducteur”, cf. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 151.

⁷ LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 152. She suggests that Susanna's hagiographer may have been inspired by the erroneous inclusion of Caecilia in the *Martyrologium Hiëronymianum* (ca. 450) on the same date as Susanna.

⁸ The *passio Caeciliae* is dated to the fifth century AD (cf. LANÉRY, *Nouvelles recherches* [n. 3]); the *passio Susannae* is dated between 450 and 550 AD, with the *Martyrologium Hiëronymianum* (ca. 450) acting as a *terminus post quem* (cf. L. DUCHESNE, *Les légendes d'Alta Semita* in: *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 36, 1916, p. 27-56, esp. 36-39) and the second version of the *Liber Pontificalis* (ca. 550) as a *terminus ante quem* (cf. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 153).

⁹ Both passions contain clear references to Roman topography and are considered to be written in Rome.

¹⁰ Cf. DELEHAYE, *Étude* [n. 2], p. 78-80, esp. 79. The *passio Eugeniae* (BHL 2666) can be dated to the 5th century (cf. R. GRAYSON and H. FREDE, *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques latins de l'Antiquité*

The two passions have many more details in common (virginity, dabbing of blood, a character called Maximus, the pope, the conversion of two brothers) which we will discuss presently. As we will see, none of these parallels individually constitutes irrefutable evidence for a direct dependence of the *passio Susannae* on the *passio Caeciliae*. Rather, it is the combination of so many common themes in a similar structure which is remarkable. We argue that, even if it seems probable that the author of the *passio Susannae* indeed knew and used the *passio Caeciliae*, this does not imply that he turned his text into an exact copy of Caecilia's passion. Although he was probably inspired not just by the hagiographical tradition generally but also by Caecilia's hagiographer in particular, he created his own literary text, thereby rehearsing the traditional, literary practice of imitation as creative rewriting¹¹. In what follows, we will discuss the common themes put forward by Lanzoni and Lanéry and elucidate how the author of the *passio Susannae* – to a greater or lesser extent – transforms them into elements of his own literary creation.

Firstly, Lanzoni mentions the dedication to virginity, which is a recurrent theme in the late antique passions¹². Indeed, both Caecilia and Susanna display such dedication, but there are crucial differences: the virgin Susanna declines a marriage proposal from the pagan emperor, whereas Caecilia accepts to marry her pagan fiancé Valerianus, albeit with the intent to convert him to Christianity and never to consummate the marriage. Secondly, Lanzoni and Lanéry draw attention to the fact that in both the *passio Caeciliae* and the *passio Susannae* the blood of the heroine is dabbed with cloth by devoted disciples. Yet once again, there is a difference: the hagiographer of the *passio Caeciliae* does not mention to what end the people use the bloodstained cloth, whereas the *passio Susannae* relates that Serena puts it in a silver box and prays next to it day and night. The dabbing of blood is not a very common theme in the late antique passions¹³, but in an article that upholds the existence of a cult of martyr blood in

et du Haut Moyen Âge, Freiburg, 2007, p. 62; LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 134-35). Basilla is martyred in her own house in this *passio*. The *passio Gallicani, Johannis et Pauli* (BHL 3237b) can be dated to the 5th or 6th century (GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 67 state 5th or 6th (?) century, LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 212-214 states between 514 and 550). Johannes and Paulus are martyred in their own house in this *passio*.

¹¹ On imitation as a literary practice, see A. CIZEK, *Imitatio et tractatio. Die literarisch-rhetorischen Grundlagen der Nachahmung in Antike und Mittelalter*, Tübingen, 1994; and on literary imitation in a hagiographical context in particular, K. JAZDZEWSKA, *Hagiographic Invention and Imitation: Niketas' Life of Theoktiste and Its Literary Models*, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 49, 2009, p. 257–279.

¹² See e.g. DELEHAYE, *Étude* [n. 2], p. 80. The theme can also be found, for instance, in the *passio Chrysanthi et Dariae*, which is mentioned in the *Martyrologium Hiëronymianum* on the same date as both Caecilia and Susanna. From the 4th century onwards, sexual abstinence, as a bloodless martyrdom or *martyrium sine cruore*, becomes an important theme in the late antique 'bloody' passions, cf. F. E. CONSOLINO, *Modelli di santità femminile nelle più antiche passioni romane* in *Augustinianum* 24, 1984, p. 83-113.

¹³ Interest for the blood of the martyr as a relic is, however, mentioned in the 6th century passion of Genesisius of Arles (BHL 3304, cf. GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 68): one city keeps the remains of Genesisius' blood (§5 *consecrati cruoris uestigia*, cf. S. CAVALLIN, *Saint Genès le notaire* in *Eranos* 43, 1945, p. 160-164, esp. 164) whereas another city receives his body. In the 7th century passion of Felix of Girona (BHL 2864, cf. GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 65) the blood of the martyr

different regions of the early Christian world, Fasola¹⁴ mentions several passages from other texts that attest the custom of collecting and venerating the blood of martyrs¹⁵. While Fasola adduces several instances that illustrate the preservation and veneration of blood¹⁶, of special interest for our purposes are those passages that treat the way in which the blood is obtained. Fasola lists three passages which contain, or might contain, a reference to the collection of martyr blood with cloth¹⁷: a passage from the acts of Cyprian¹⁸ and two passages from Prudentius' *Peristephanon Liber*. Prudentius' first passage concerns the martyr Vincent of Saragossa (BHL 8627-8655)¹⁹, the second the martyr Hippolytus (BHL 3960-3963)²⁰. The passage with regard to Vincent of Saragossa is particularly interesting for our purposes, as it mentions the veneration of the martyr's blood after it has been dabbed up with cloth. The fact that the *passio Susannae* explicitly relates the veneration of Susanna's blood, then, puts the text on a par not with the *passio Caeciliae* but with Prudentius' account of Vincent of Saragossa's *passio*. As a third parallel

is also considered a relic (§22: *de eius cruore ... reliquias nobiscum detulimus* cf. A. FÁBREGA GRAU, *Pasionario hispánico, siglos VII-XI*, volume II, Madrid, 1955, p. 327-328).

¹⁴ U. M. FASOLA, *Il culto del sangue dei martiri nella chiesa primitiva e deviazioni devozionistiche nell'epoca della riscoperta delle catacombe* in F. VATTIONI (ed.), *Sangue e antropologia nella letteratura cristiana*, vol. III, Rome, 1983, p. 1473-1489.

¹⁵ Next to these passages, of which he nuances the evidential value, Fasola also adduces archeological proof to underpin the existence of a cult of martyr blood. This archeological proof consists of three inscriptions (4th-6th centuries) and several ampoules. Cf. FASOLA, *Il culto del sangue* [n. 14], p. 1486-1489.

¹⁶ The passages adduced by Fasola that attest the preservation and veneration of martyr blood are the following (cf. FASOLA, *Il culto del sangue* [n. 14], 1478, p. 1480-1486): GAUDENTIUS, *Tractatus XVII*, 12; *De miraculis Sancti Stephani protomartyris*, 1, 1; GREGORY OF TOURS, *Liber in Gloria martyrum*, I, 33; *Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum aliorum inde ab A. CCCLXVII usque ad A. DLIII datae, epistula II*, cf. O. GÜNTHER (ed.), *Epistulae Imperatorum Pontificum aliorum*, volume I, Berlin, 1895 (*Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum*, 35), p. 13; *Liber Pontificalis* cf. L. DUCHESNE, *Liber Pontificalis*, volume II, Paris, 1892, p. 56.

¹⁷ Other passages which refer to the collection of martyr blood, yet not by means of cloth, include the *passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis* (dated between 202 and 210, cf. GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 81) and Gregory of Tours' *Liber miraculorum in gloria martyrum*, I, 11.

¹⁸ Edition MUSURILLO, *The acts of the Christian martyrs*, Oxford, 1972, p. 174. When Cyprian was about to be beheaded, his followers spread many cloths and napkins (*lintheamina et manualia*) in front of him. It is not explicitly mentioned, however, that they mean to dab up the blood. The acts of Cyprian can be dated to 258, cf. GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 60.

¹⁹ PRUDENTIUS, *Peristephanon Liber*, V, 341-344: *plerique uestem lintheam stillante tingunt sanguine, tutamen ut sacrum suis domi reseruent posteris*. (edition T. E. PAGE, E. CAPPS, W. H. D ROUSE, L. A. POST, E. H. WARMINGTON and H. J. THOMSON, *Prudentius*. Volume I. Text established by T. P., E. C., W. R., L. P., E. W. and translated by H. T., London, Cambridge (MA), Loeb Classical Library, 1961). The passion of Vincent also exists in an anonymous version (cf. J. BOLLANDUS and G. HENSCHENIUS, (eds.) *Acta Sanctorum Ianuarii*, Antwerp, 1643, volume II, p. 394-97 (BHL 8630)), which also mentions the act of dabbing up the martyr's blood with cloth: *uideres circumstantium frequentiam... sanguinem lintheis excipere, sacra ueneratione posteris profuturum*. The anonymous passion can be dated to the 5th - 7th century (cf. GRYSON and FREDE, *Répertoire* [n. 10], p. 90-91).

²⁰ PRUDENTIUS *Peristephanon Liber*, XI, 141-144: *palliolis etiam bibulae siccantur harenae, ne quis in infecto puluere ros maneat. Si quis et in sudibus recalenti aspergine sanguis insidet, hunc omnem spongia pressa rapit*. (PAGE, CAPPS, ROUSE, POST, WARMINGTON and THOMSON, *Prudentius*. [n. 19]).

between both passions, Lanéry indicates that both the *passio Caeciliae* and the *passio Susannae* stage a character with the common name of Maximus²¹. However, the two Maximi do not play the same role in the two *martyria*: in the *passio Caeciliae*, Maximus is the *cornicularius* who is converted by the brothers Valerianus and Tiburtius, whereas in the *passio Susannae*, he is one of the brothers. Fourthly, Lanéry also argues that the role of Pope Gaius in Susanna's passion echoes that of Pope Urbanus in Caecilia's. Yet Gaius occupies a more important position in Susanna's passion than does Urbanus in Caecilia's. It is Gaius, for example, who converts one of the two brothers, Maximus, with only limited help from Susanna, whereas in the other passion the driving force for the conversion of each of the two brothers is none other than Caecilia herself. As a last parallel between both passions²², Lanéry points to the consecutive conversions of two brothers (Valerianus and Tiburtius, and Claudius and Maximus respectively)²³. Again, the hagiographer of the *passio Susannae* transformed the theme: in his *passio*, Susanna's contribution to the second conversion is much more limited than Caecilia's.

This overview illustrates, then, that the author of the *passio Susannae* did not simply copy several themes from the *passio Caeciliae*, but revised and adjusted them to suit his own literary purposes. Yet the clearest indication of the creative input of Susanna's hagiographer, we argue, can be found in an aspect which is fundamental to the narrative architecture of his text, but insufficiently studied by hagiography scholars: characterization. The rhetorical and literary characterization of the martyrs in the conversion scenes, we contend, differs remarkably. The historical and cultural background of the conversions may run parallel in both texts, but the ways in which Caecilia and Susanna secure the conversion of others betray striking dissimilarities. More specifically, Caecilia is characterized both as a speaker with astute and manipulative rhetorical skills and as a teacher; Susanna is neither: as we will see, she is characterized by her actions rather than by speech²⁴. They both manage to convert the men in their environment but, as our analysis will show, the author of the *passio Susannae* does not turn his heroine and her companions into mere copies of their counterparts in the *passio Caeciliae*.

²¹ The BHL mentions ten 'Maximi', martyrs as well as clergy, and the *Prosopographia imperii romani saec. I, II, III* (Pars V, L. PETERSEN, (ed.), Berlin 1983) lists more than 200.

²² The last parallel with the *passio Caeciliae*, that is, as Lanéry does not only see the *passio Caeciliae* as the model and guideline of the *passio Susannae*, but also argues that Susanna's hagiographer knew the *passio Sebastiani* (BHL 7543), which depicts Pope Gaius as contemporary to the persecution under Diocletian, cf. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 151. It is doubtful, however, that the hagiographer of the *passio Susannae* adopted this element from the *passio Sebastiani*: firstly, it is well known that chronological accuracy is not a characteristic of the late antique passions, and secondly, as Lanéry herself suggests, the location of Susanna's titulus next to Diocletian's baths (as indicated in one manuscript of the *Martyrologium Hiëronymianum*) might have inspired the hagiographer of Susanna's passion to make Gaius and the others relatives of Diocletian, cf. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 152.

²³ This theme goes back at least as far as the Gospels, as Christ called pairs of brothers: Simon and Andrew, James and John, cf. Mt. 4, 18-22; Mt. 10, 1-4; Mc. 3, 13-19; Lc. 6, 12-16; Joh. 1, 40.

²⁴ On speech and action as two techniques of characterization in ancient narrative, see K. DE TEMMERMAN, *Ancient Rhetoric as a Hermeneutical Tool for the Analysis of Characterization in Narrative Literature in Rhetorica* 28, 2010 (1), 23-51, specifically 33-38, and K. DE TEMMERMAN, *Crafting Characters. Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel*, Oxford, 2014, 37-39.

Rhetorical Manipulation and Characterization in the Passio Caeciliae

The main theme of both the *passio Caeciliae* and the *passio Susannae* is Christian, spiritual love (*caritas*, ἀγάπη). More specifically, the two texts address the tension between such love and pagan, worldly love (*amor*, ἔρως)²⁵. Both Caecilia and Susanna prefer a spiritual marriage with Christ to a sexual marriage with a mortal man. Caecilia, who loves only Christ (*solum Christum diligeret*, §3) and commends her chastity to him (*suam Domino pudicitiam commendabat*), refuses to consummate her marriage, whereas Susanna, who likewise commends her chastity to Christ (*pudicitiam domino Iesu Christo exhiberem*, p. 553, line 54), even declines the imperial marriage proposal altogether²⁶.

The tension between worldly and spiritual love functions as the framework for the first conversion in both passions: that of Valerianus in the *passio Caeciliae* and that of Claudius in the *passio Susannae*. In the *passio Caeciliae*, Caecilia's proselytic abilities are repeatedly connected with her rhetorical achievements²⁷; the conversion of her husband Valerianus (§§4-5) clearly indicates why. Valerianus, newlywed, wants to consummate his marriage. As a pagan, he is oriented towards worldly love. The Christian virgin Caecilia, however, uses his worldly desire against himself in order to lure him, step by step, into conversion to Christianity. This religious persuasion is based upon an elaborate rhetorical strategy that casts Caecilia as somewhat manipulative. She first seems to respond to her husband's (and the readers') expectations about what might take place in their bedroom on their wedding night by addressing him with sweet, amorous words²⁸. Subsequently, and still in line with such expectations about erotic interaction

²⁵ For an extensive discussion of both pagan and Christian love, we refer to the recent lemma in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*: R. KANY, art. *Nächstenliebe und Gottesliebe* in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Lfg. 194/201, 2013, col. 652-720.

²⁶ A marriage without sexual intercourse as in the case of Caecilia is not common and had heretical connotations. For the origin, evolution and consequences of the phenomenon of such as 'spiritual marriage', as well as its heretical connotations, we refer to H. ACHELIS, *Virgines subintroductae. Ein Beitrag zum 7. Kapitel des 1. Korintherbriefs*, Leipzig, 1902; P. BROWN, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, New York, 1988, p. 83-102; D. ELLIOTT, *Spiritual Marriage. Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, Princeton, 1993, p. 16-93 and A. ALWIS, *Celibate Marriages in Late-Antique and Byzantine Hagiography: The Lives of Saints Julian and Basilissa, Saints Andronikos and Athanasia and Saints Galaktion and Episteme*, London, 2011. For the focus on virginity in late antique passions, cf. CONSOLINO, *Modelli di santità femminile* [n. 11], and K. COOPER, *The Virgin and the Bride. Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, 1996, p. 116-143. For the spiritual love of God in terms of traditional worldly love, cf. K. THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, XXII, 2008, col.545-576, esp. 569-573 (Liebesmystik).

²⁷ Cf. §6: Urbanus characterizes her as an *ouis argumentosa* who transforms her husband from a wild lion into a gentle lamb. *Argumentosa* is of course a conspicuously rhetorical term that denotes wealth of rhetorical proof or *argumentum* (Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* V, 10, 10, for example, uses the adjective in a discussion of different kinds of arguments); §8: an angel specifies that Christ has won Valerianus over (*lucratus est*) thanks to his servant Caecilia. For a more detailed analysis of Caecilia's rhetorical skills, see A. BOSSU, K. DE TEMMERMAN, D. PRAET, *The Saint as an Astute Heroine: Rhetoric and Characterization in the passio Caeciliae*, Mnemosyne, forthcoming.

²⁸ *O dulcissime atque amantissime iuvenis...* (§4).

between newlyweds, she makes her husband swear an oath of secrecy about a mystery (*mysterium*, §4) that she will reveal to him²⁹. It is only when Valerianus has taken this oath that Caecilia questions such expectations by revealing that there is an angel (*angelus*) who watches over her as a lover (*amatorem*). The whole honeymoon setting and her sweet words trigger an emotional response from Valerianus: he naturally interprets the word *amator* in the worldly sense as an erotic rival. Caecilia's ambivalent disclosure of unfaithfulness is part of a rhetorical strategy that aims to use his amorous emotions as motivational steps in his initiation into Christianity and a chaste marriage. He demands to see this angel but, since he has sworn the oath, he first has to obey her instructions. Caecilia is very selective in the information that she discloses. She sends Valerianus to pope Urbanus in order to be baptized but carefully avoids mentioning his name or ecclesiastical function. Instead, she uses an *antonomasia* and refers to Urbanus as a senior "who knows how to purify people so that they deserve to see the angel"³⁰. The use of this *antonomasia* underlines her astuteness in two ways. First, its craftiness becomes clear in §11, where Tiburtius nearly abandons his baptism out of fear because he even so much as hears the name of Urbanus when it is mentioned by his brother. Caecilia's *antonomasia* avoids such a reaction of Valerianus. And second, her words also appeal to Valerianus' own merits (*mereantur*) and are psychologically efficient: he is immediately interested in finding the man and is sent on his way with the promise that, upon his return in the bedroom, he will see the angle and will obtain 'all that he asks from him' (*omnia quae ab eo poposceris impetrabis*) – a promise again easily understood ambiguously by the reader given Valerianus' obvious expectation of sexual contact at their wedding night.

Eventually, Valerianus heads off to Urbanus, becomes initiated into the Christian faith, is baptized and then sees the true nature of the *amator*. Only then, the contemplation of heavenly love makes him accept a spiritual marriage as he embraces Christian *caritas*. In this conversion scene, then, Valerianus' carnal desire to consummate his marriage, motivated as it is by worldly *amor*, is turned by Caecilia to her own advantage through her rhetorical astuteness: *caritas* has made a good female sophist. Not only does this characterization of Caecilia align her with a number of other late antique hagiographic heroines, all known for their rhetorical versatility³¹; but it also recycles, and christianizes, a trope well-known in ancient narrative that fuses erotic

²⁹ An example of a similar scene (a heroine makes a man swear a love oath in a marriage context) can be found in Chariton's novel *Callirhoe* III, 2, 5. And, of course, the concept of mystery is a well-known metaphor for sex and sexual initiation in ancient narrative (see, for example, Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* I, 10, 5; I, 18, 3; V, 15, 6, etc.).

³⁰ Cf. §5: *Est senior qui nouit purificare homines ut mereantur uidere angelum.*

³¹ Other examples are the female saints documented in the passion of Chrysanthus and Daria and the Life of Saint Helia. On the latter text, see V. BURRUS and M. CONTI, *The Life of Saint Helia. Critical Edition, Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, Oxford, 2013, esp. p. 1-2.

desire and rhetorical performance³². In the *passio Caeciliae*, not profane love, or ἔρως, but Christian *caritas* becomes the power through which rhetorical performance is delivered.

Caecilia's rhetorical ability not only manifests itself in her astuteness. She also appears authoritatively as a teacher, who masters the skill of adapting her speech to her addressees. In order to convert Tiburtius, for example, she gives extensive expositions about different aspects of Christianity and makes use of a whole set of rhetorical techniques³³. Moreover, she adopts accessible images and language so that he easily understands her message. At the end of her long conversation with Tiburtius, which takes up five paragraphs of the *passio*³⁴, she clearly refers to her own position as a teacher: "I have explained (*explicauī*) things to you in a nutshell. If you have a need for more clarification, please ask (*quaere*)"³⁵.

The Christian Kiss and Conversion in the Passio Susannae

Although Susanna is said to be schooled in rhetoric³⁶, the *passio Susannae* centers on actions rather than words. In the *passio Susannae*, not conjugal love but *caritas* between family members constitutes the background of the first conversion scene. Just as in the *passio Caeciliae*, in the *passio Susannae* the interest of a pagan man in worldly love is turned against him by a Christian woman who converts him.

Susanna's relative Claudius, probably her uncle³⁷, has been sent by Diocletian to talk both Susanna and her father Gabinius into the proposed marriage. When Claudius sees his niece, he intends to hug and kiss her (*amplecti et osculari*, p. 554, lines 30-31). In itself, this intention is not at all odd: the combination of the verbs *amplecti* and *osculari* was widespread in Rome in the context of a greeting³⁸, and the Greco-Roman world often associated kissing with familial

³² See, for example, R. WEBB, *Rhetoric and the Novel: Sex, Lies and Sophistic*, in I. Worthington (ed.) *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*. Malden, MA - Oxford – Carlton, 2007, p. 526-41; and G. ANDERSON, *Eros Sophistes - Ancient Novelists at Play*, Chico, CA, 1982.

³³ She uses an enthymeme, an *in minore ad maius* argument, an exemplum, different comparisons, a *captatio benevolentiae* and rhetorical questions (§§ 9-16). See BOSSU, DE TEMMERMAN, PRAET [n.27] for a more detailed discussion.

³⁴ Cf. *passio Caeciliae*, §§ 10-15.

³⁵ Other references to Caecilia's position as a teacher include §28: ... *tu ignoras cuius potestatis sis. Nam ego si me interrogas de tua potestate, ueris tibi assertionibus manifestem* (Caecilia to the prefect Almachius) §30 ... *iterum docebo te falsissime nunc locutum* and ... *disce saxum hoc esse, si uidendo non nosti* and *ex quo os aperuisti, non fuit sermo quem non probarem iniustum, stultum et uanum* (Caecilia to the prefect Almachius); §30 *Doce* (the prefect Almachius to Caecilia); §31 ... *non cessauit omnes quos nutrierat et quos docuerat in fide dominica confortare* (narrator about Caecilia).

³⁶ The *passio* mentions that Susanna is schooled in the worldly *artes* (p. 553, lines 14-15).

³⁷ In both editions of the *passio Susannae*, it is unclear if Claudius is Susanna's uncle, or her cousin, due to the obscured use of terms as *consobrinus* and *germanus* throughout the passion. Lanéry (cf. LANÉRY, *Hagiographie d'Italie* [n. 4], p. 148) considers Claudius Gabinius' brother and thus Susanna's uncle. Since Claudius calls Susanna his niece (*neptis mea*, cf. infra), this is indeed plausible. Yet one cannot be sure; in his article Duchesne (cf. DUCHESNE, *Les légendes d'Alta Semita* [n. 8], p. 33) keeps more options open.

³⁸ Cf. THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 548.

relations³⁹. Moreover, relatives were even expected to kiss each other, a right referred to as the *ius osculi*⁴⁰. This kiss between family members, which most often was a kiss on the lips⁴¹, was a sign of familial unity and was assumed to have no erotic connotations⁴². However, Roman history offers at least one famous example that shows the ideological slipperiness of the concept. In his *Life of Claudius*, Suetonius recounts how Agrippina seduces through the *ius osculi* her uncle Claudius, the brother of her father Germanicus, to enter into an incestuous relationship with her⁴³. The story is confirmed by Tacitus in his *Annals*, although he does not explicitly mention the *ius osculi* and only states that Agrippina seduces Claudius under the cloak of their close relationship (*necessitudo*)⁴⁴. Although in the passio Claudius probably is the brother of Susanna's father⁴⁵ and thus stands in the same relationship to her as the emperor to Agrippina, the name is too common to think of an inversion of the historical relationship; but nevertheless the episode does thematize the erotic and transgressive potential of such a kiss⁴⁶.

In Susanna's passion, the hagiographer specifies that Claudius wants to hug and kiss Susanna because of his love (*caritas*) for her as a relative (*proximus*). Susanna, however, tells him not to foul (*contaminare*) her mouth (*os*). She continues that her Lord Jesus Christ knows that no man has ever touched her mouth. Even when Claudius explicitly states that he wants to kiss her because of his feeling of love for her (*secundum caritatis affectus*) as his niece (*neptem meam*)⁴⁷, Susanna does not yield. She answers that she rejects⁴⁸ his kiss because his mouth is soiled (*pollutum est*) by the sacrifices to idols. One would be inclined to straightforwardly connect Susanna's refusal to be kissed by Claudius to her Christian background. But in our view, her motivations are more subtle.

In Christian communities, kisses, given mostly on the lips⁴⁹, underlined one's position within the community as a new kind of family member⁵⁰ and were only allowed between those who had been baptized⁵¹. One could therefore think that Susanna rejects the secular *ius osculi* for the

³⁹ Cf. THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 549; M. PENN, *Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian Kinship* in *J ECS* 10, 2002 (2), p. 151-174, esp. 159.

⁴⁰ PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 159, lists ancient references to the *ius osculi*.

⁴¹ PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 159.

⁴² THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], 553-554.

⁴³ SÜETONIUS, *De vita caesarum* V, 26, 3, 5.

⁴⁴ TACITUS, *Annals* XII, 3, 1.

⁴⁵ Cf. supra note 37.

⁴⁶ See THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 554 and PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 159 for other attestations of incestuous relationships.

⁴⁷ The fact that Claudius here calls Susanna his niece, is in favour of the scenario that considers Claudius Susanna's uncle. Cf. supra note 37.

⁴⁸ The ASS edition has *recusabo* instead of *recuso*.

⁴⁹ Cf. PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 157.

⁵⁰ Cf. PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 161-166: Creating a Christian Family.

⁵¹ Cf. THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 563-564. For an overview of references to the Christian kiss from the New Testament to Ambrose, we refer to THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 557-574.

benefit of a Christian one⁵²; that she has replaced her former, secular family ties and the *ius osculi* of relatives by a Christian family and a love kiss that is exchanged only between spiritual brothers and sisters. But the scene is more complex. Susanna's claim that her mouth has never been polluted is ambiguous: it can mean either that no idolater has ever kissed her (the implicit assumption being that only an idolater's kiss pollutes one's mouth), or that no one, whether pagan or Christian, has ever kissed her. The religious divide is immediately destabilized by a sexual one: Susanna is explicit that no *man (uir)*⁵³ has ever touched her mouth and does not even mention any female idolaters (as if no such idolaters exist), the implication being that no male pagan or Christian has ever kissed her. It turns out, then, that the criterion that Susanna adopts to decide who can kiss her and who cannot is not religion or family (both worldly and spiritual families) but biological sex. Susanna simply refuses any kiss from any man, however innocent, be it from a pagan relative or from a fellow Christian⁵⁴. She thus adopts an attitude which in fact, and paradoxically, eroticizes every physical contact between herself and a man. When Susanna claims that she does not want the idolater Claudius to foul her mouth since Christ knows that no man has ever touched it, she subtly blends, like Caecilia, Christianity, as the rejection of paganism (i.e. of kisses by pagans), with the rejection of any bodily contact whatsoever. Her refusal of any kiss fuses Christianity with anti-bodily virginity.

This reading of Susanna's eroticizing refusal of Claudius' kiss, now, is the only way in which we can understand his subsequent reaction. Previous scholarship, as early as Le Nain de Tillemont (1637-1698), has been puzzled by this reaction as well as by the motivation for his sudden conversion⁵⁵. Claudius wants to kiss his relative so badly that he is prepared to do anything in return: when he asks what he should do in order to purify his mouth (*immundicia*, p. 554, line 37), Susanna answers that he has to repent and needs to be baptized. Claudius immediately agrees and asks Pope Gaius to purify him 'if a pure man, who rather believes in Christ than in the gods,

⁵² Similar attestations of the violation of the worldly *ius osculi* for the benefit of a Christian one, and the resulting creation of a new in- and out-group, can be found elsewhere as well: PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 166-169 mentions Gregory of Nazianz' reference to his mother Nonna who refuses to kiss pagan relatives (GREGORY OF NAZIANZ, *Orations* 18.10), and Maximilla's refusal to be kissed by her husband Aegeates in the *Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*. Cf. also THRAEDE, art. *Kuss* [n. 26], col. 573-574. In the *passio Caeciliae*, the fact that Caecilia's brother-in-law Tiburtius kisses Caecilia before he is converted (§9), whereas Caecilia herself kisses him afterwards (§10), can probably be seen in the same light.

⁵³ *Noli contaminare os meum quia Dominus meus Iesus Christus nouit quia numquam os ancillae suae tetigit uir* (p. 554, lines 32-33).

⁵⁴ From the third century onwards, sources mention attempts to prohibit the exchange of kisses between Christian men and women (cf. PENN, *Performing Family* [n. 39], p. 157-158).

⁵⁵ L.-S, LE NAIN DE TILLEMONT, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles, justifiés par les citations des auteurs originaux avec une chronologie où l'on fait un abrégé de l'histoire ecclésiastique et avec notes pour éclaircir les difficultés des faits et de la chronologie*, IV, Paris, 1701², p. 761. Daniel Farlatus, who also published a commentary on the passion half a century later (*Illyricum Sacrum*, II, Venice, 1753, p. 574-617), takes great pains to negate de Tillemont's thesis and feverishly tries to underline the plausibility of the abrupt conversion.

is better'⁵⁶. The conversion of Claudius, then, is caused by no more than the refusal of a simple kiss from a family member. This refusal motivates him in such a way that one wonders whether his longing for a kiss is perhaps motivated by something more than mere *caritas* between family members. Just as Susanna's refusal eroticizes any kiss from any man, his motivation to be in contact with the young woman seems to be based on a longing with erotic undertones. Whatever his initial motivation to kiss Susanna may have been, it is transformed into the urge to belong to her spiritual family.

The *passio* nowhere mentions whether they eventually kiss after Claudius' baptism. Probably they do not, however paradoxical this might seem, since Susanna rejects kisses categorically. For Claudius, his desire to kiss her is so strong that it motivates him, again paradoxically, to enter a spiritual family where even an innocent kiss has become taboo, and to sublimate his desire. The rejection of secular charity between family members eroticizes innocent physical contact such as a kiss between relatives; the virgin Susanna uses such a rejection as a tool to convert a family member to Christianity, i.e. to make him part of a spiritual family in which every type of physical contact is rejected because it has been pan-eroticized.

Just like Caecilia, then, Susanna displays astuteness that is fleshed out through her rejection of erotically charged assumptions. She is the one who brings about the conversion of Claudius, as is repeated many times throughout the *passio*⁵⁷. Yet the approaches adopted by both women differ. Caecilia manipulates Valerianus by means of rhetoric; Susanna manipulates Claudius by means of her action. A similar manipulation through action can also be seen in the second kissing scene in the *passio Susannae*. In this scene, the pagan Maximus, Claudius' brother, kisses Susanna's hand (*osculatus est manus eius*, p. 556, line 28). Although Susanna frowns on this action (*contemnebat hoc fieri*), she still lets it happen. Apparently, a kiss on the hand is less harmful than one on the lips, which would proclaim Maximus her relative in the faith⁵⁸ and at the same time would have erotic connotations. Yet after Maximus in all probability perceives Susanna's disdain when he kisses her hand, he is easily converted by Pope Gaius. One could hypothesize that Maximus' desire to turn Susanna's disdain into approval made him more susceptible to Gaius' conversion efforts.

⁵⁶ *Si melius est homo mundus qui credit in Christo quam in deos quos colui* (p. 554, lines 40-41).

⁵⁷ In a speech after Susanna's conversation with Claudius, Gaius says that the Lord wants to deliver Claudius *per puellae* (i.e. Susanna) *petitionem* (p. 554, line 43-44). Susanna's contribution to the conversion is hinted at three more times throughout the *passio*: Claudius relates to his wife how he has reached the grace of the Lord through the request of his niece (*per petitionem puellae neptis suae*, p. 555, line 16); he repeats it when his wife asks who has given him this advice (*puella virgo praecipua in omnibus*, p. 555, lines 19-20); and to his brother Maximus, Claudius reaffirms that his sins have been forgiven thanks to Susanna (*per quam redemptus sum a peccatis meis*, p. 556, lines 8-9).

⁵⁸ A similar situation is to be found in the *Apocryphal Acts of Andrew* (cf. n.52), where Maximilla lets her husband kiss her hand, but prevents him from kissing her mouth.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that Caecilia's ability to proselytize converge on her rhetorical abilities, which manifest themselves both in her astuteness and (self-)presentation as a teacher. This characterization contrasts sharply with Susanna's, whose speeches in the *passio* are very concise and without rhetorical techniques. Unlike Caecilia, Susanna nowhere gives any explanation about the faith. Moreover, she quite brusquely interrupts the conversation between Claudius and Gaius (p. 555, lines 5-6), who does in fact inform Claudius about some essential elements of Christianity when he baptizes him⁵⁹. When Gaius has just ensured Claudius that all his sins will be forgiven if he proves a loyal servant, Susanna throws herself at Gaius' feet and implores him, for the love of Christ, not to dawdle over Claudius' baptism, but to deliver him.

Consequently, the purported role of the *passio Caeciliae* as an evident model for the *passio Susannae* should be nuanced. It is probable that Susanna's hagiographer, working in Rome, was inspired by the *passio Caeciliae*: the combination of so many thematic parallels in a similarly structured story makes it hard to reject this scenario with certainty. Even if we accept that the author of the *passio Susannae* knew and used the *passio Caeciliae*, this does not mean that he turned his own *passio* into an exact copy of Caecilia's. Although it is impossible to identify the authors and the social and intellectual milieus they worked in, the two authors clearly differ, for instance, in their views on the position of women in Christianity, as is clear from Caecilia's level of intellectual independence compared to Susanna's. The author of the *passio Susannae* adjusted and revised well-known hagiographical themes to suit his own literary creation. When one considers the characterization of the martyrs in both *passiones*, the creative input of Susanna's hagiographer really becomes evident. Both Caecilia and Susanna make use of a topical subject as the tension between secular and Christian love in order to astutely convert pagans in both texts. But although both women bend male desire to obtain their goals, the way in which this is elaborated in the two *passiones* differs remarkably. Caecilia manipulates with words, Susanna with action. This difference in characterization clearly reveals that Susanna's hagiographer gave an individual touch to his creation. At the same time, he inscribes himself in the classical tradition of *imitatio* and proves that this remains an important concept in the literature of Late Antiquity. Rather than time and again emphasizing the seriality and lack of creativity of the late antique *passiones*, then, we believe that it is time to acknowledge and start exploring their originality and creativity.

⁵⁹ Gaius says: *Frater Claudi, audi me. Bonum est quod te admoueo*†.... He then underlines the seriousness of the crime of idolatry, and gives some information on the life of Christ. He also includes quotes from the Gospels (p. 554, lines 42-58; p. 555, lines 1-5).