

VIRGIN MARTYRS IN PRE-MODERN ENGLAND:  
EMULATION, APPROPRIATION, AND REFASHIONING

Natalia Khomenko

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores literary representations of virgin martyrs in England from the thirteenth century into the reign of Charles I. Previous studies have identified the social significance of the literary virgin martyrs but, viewing them as a specifically medieval phenomenon, have traced them only as far as the fifteenth century. My project takes up post-Reformation discussions and representations of virgin martyrs, from Reginald Scot's suggestion in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* that St. Cecilia's angel is a witch's familiar, to the staging of St. Dorothea as a prop of religious transition in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*. I demonstrate that the appropriation and re-fashioning of the virgin martyr merges with the post-Reformation project of repudiating the Catholic past and constructing a new national and religious identity.

Joining the scholarly movement that revises the argument of an impassable divide between the Middle Ages and Renaissance, I contend that the transformations of this popular figure point to the ongoing negotiations of literary models available to female audiences and serve as a point of access to issues of periodization and cultural self-definition. Exploring the conjunction in Renaissance texts between historiographical anxiety and the fear of the female miracle worker, I argue that the Protestant unease directed at this figure has its origins in the tension, building throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth century, between the patristic ideal of the silent and hidden holy virgin and the dynamic revision of her in the *South English Legendary*, an extensively copied thirteenth-century collection of vernacular saints' lives. This dissertation explores the

subversive conduct models offered by the virgin martyr to the female audience, with a specific focus on Margery Kempe, and the progressive revision of the female martyr model by numerous male writers. A close reading of several early modern plays, including William Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* and *Pericles*, identifies the virgin martyr as the focal point for coming to terms with the persistent influence of the Catholic past on the newly Protestant nation.

In memory of my father,  
Nikolai Khomenko

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## INTRODUCTION: THINKING WITH VIRGIN MARTYRS

Literary virgin martyrs are epistemologically irresistible. Functioning as the focal point for multiple desires of the *vitae* – the suitors’ sexual urges, the pagan officials’ longing for religious homogeneity, and the characters’ search for true God, they are, ultimately, entirely self-contained. Remaining sealed to physical penetration and retaining wholeness even throughout the most fragmenting torture, virgin martyrs inscribe a cultural space for working through the possibility of independent functioning for women, but also for engaging with the issues of religious conversion and, on the contrary, refusal to convert. As Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans put it, “the idea of the virgin is too valuable a cultural property to keep out of circulation; virgins are good to think with.”<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I explore the virgin martyr as an epistemological construct enabling writers and audience to think through a range of social, religious, and political concerns. The evolution of this figure from the thirteenth to seventeenth century offers an insight into contemporary gender negotiations and concerns. Its appropriations and uses in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century also enable the exploration of the sensitive subject of the medieval past and the issue of a woman in power.

To find my access point to the interpretations of the virgin martyrs, I begin with some comments posted on the Catholic Online forum about a year ago. A user writing under the name of Deanne commented on the Life of the virgin martyr St. Cristina of

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Salih, Anke Bernau, and Ruth Evans, “Introduction: Virginites and Virginites Studies,” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 1-13, esp. 5.

Tyre (also known as St. Cristina of Bolsena): “I cannot believe what happened to her just because of her faith, I feel pain for her. I am very glad that i chose her as my Daughters confirmation saint name.... she will always be in my thoughts. she is a true saint...”<sup>2</sup> This is a somewhat unexpected reaction, considering that this account of St. Cristina’s Life, re-posted from Wikipedia, calls her story “too fanciful to have much historical credibility” and warns that “Nothing is now known about her life.”<sup>3</sup> However, Deanne’s comment is echoed and reiterated in a variety of forms throughout the forum. Catholic girls and women are declaring their intention to take “Cristina” as their confirmation name, rejoicing at having this virgin martyr as their patron saint, and continuously affirming both their wholehearted belief that the details of her narrative are accurate and credible, and the desire to establish a sort of emotional and imaginative bond with the saint. Another user, writing in the same forum under the name Saule, exclaims, with childish delight, “Just found a new Idol! [...] It's just so inspirational to real [sic] about a women going through these things while in contrast our perceptions of torture would be getting grounded.”<sup>4</sup> Others also express their view that St. Cristina makes an excellent model for a modern Christian woman.

This dissertation is about reading the virgin martyr in English and reacting to her story. My interest lies in the study of audience response – the extent to which the virgin

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<sup>2</sup> “St. Christina,” *Catholic Online* <<http://www.catholic.org/comments/saints/148/?page=2>> Accessed on April 20, 2013. This saint’s name has a variety of forms; I will be using the Latinate variant throughout. Original grammar and punctuation retained in these comments.

<sup>3</sup> See <[http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=148](http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=148)>, from “Christina of Bolsena,” *Wikipedia* <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Christina\\_of\\_Bolsena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Christina_of_Bolsena)> Last updated Feb. 25, 2013. Accessed on April 20, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> While the word “idol” is incongruously hilarious in this context, it is clearly a very earnest reaction of admiration.

martyr may be adopted as a viable conduct model by female readers, but also the progressive re-shaping and appropriation of her narrative by male writers, with particular focus on the features that have proven useful for medieval women. I also explore the story of the virgin martyr in England in the context of the narrative of nation-building: the re-emergence of the vernacular in its post-conquest form, the shaping of the position occupied by women in the family and in the public sphere, and the complex interplay between the secular and the religious before and after the Reformation.

I begin, therefore, with some of the well-known thirteenth-century texts written in the vernacular, the Lives belonging to the Katherine Group and the verse narratives of the *South English Legendary (SEL)*, by examining the virgin martyr figure created by the early English hagiographers as part of the project of developing a strong body of hagiographical literature accessible to the unlearned. Reading these vernacular narratives against their Old English and Latin sources, I trace the changes introduced in the revision, arguing that the virgin martyr's function as the embodiment of the Christian church in England, and perhaps as an advertisement for young women contemplating a life in the holy orders, has in these versions superseded the concern with offering appropriate conduct models to women readers.

A virgin martyr is almost always a young woman who is born into a pagan family but converts to Christianity; as a rule, her parents react with chagrin to the conversion and to the fact that their daughter now refuses to marry any of the eligible local bachelors, either because she has no wish to marry a pagan or because she has decided to remain a virgin. In one way or another, local authorities become involved, expressing

their displeasure at the presence of a Christian in their town, and set about attempting to convert her back, first by blandishments, then by torture. With God's support, however, the young woman withstands all trials and tortures, generally converting bystanders through her display of fortitude and an occasional miracle, thus driving the pagan officials into a frenzy of rage and leaving them no other choice but to kill her, often by decapitation. In its general outlines, in other words, a virgin martyr's *vita* offers to its readers a model for rebelling against the demands made on them by the figures of authority, whether parental, social, or religious, without being automatically dismissed as a foolish and disobedient child sadly susceptible to the flaws of her feminine nature. These *vitae* privilege the virgin martyr's ability to argue wittily and persuasively, to withstand physical trials, and to ignore the threat to her reputation contained in the persecutors' accusations of whoredom, as well as in public exposure during physical trials. The Life of St. Cristina, with which I began, is a highly distilled example of this genre, distinguished as it is by an unusual multiplication of confrontations with authority and tortures: this virgin martyr goes through three pagan judges and blinds two by throwing pieces of her own flesh at them. Her persecutors, depending on the version, flog her, tear her flesh with hooks, empty a pan of coals onto her shaven head, burn her on a wheel, boil her in a cauldron or throw her into a furnace, try to drown her in the sea, confront her with poisonous snakes, cut off her breasts and sever her tongue (which does not force her into silence) and, finally, pierce her with arrows or a sword.

The evidence of a highly positive reaction from what is obviously a completely earnest group of young female readers stands in pointed contrast to some scholarly

evaluations of the virgin martyr Lives. Beginning in the 1990s, feminist scholars have tended to assume that the eroticized and vulnerable female body was the main attraction and the locus of entertainment and voyeuristic pleasure both for the writers and the readers. Brigitte Cazelles, one of the early scholars championing this view, draws a firm distinction between male and female saints, arguing that, while “the male characters achieve the status of holiness to the extent that they are *heard*,” the female martyrs are only *seen*.<sup>5</sup> To read a Life of a female saint, then, means participation in an erotic experience, since such a narrative emphasizes the flesh of a woman who is supposed to exist in a constant denial of the flesh and displays the virginal body that is meant to be permanently hidden.<sup>6</sup> At the heart of Cazelles’ argument lies the conflation of the virgin martyr and the heroine of courtly romance: in both texts, according to her, the woman is victimized, reduced to a helpless, unindividualized body.<sup>7</sup> The martyrdom becomes, in this light, both a sacrifice of the passive victim in order to affirm a social order and a sexually titillating spectacle for the onlookers within the narrative but also outside of it.<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, in a more recent article on the *SEL* Beth Crachiolo suggests that “the mutilation of a female body is of sufficient interest that it constitutes the major concern of the narrative” and functions as “an object of entertainment.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 57.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> See, however, Andrea Hopkins for a discussion of the connection between female saints and romance heroines that counters this argument: “Female Saints and Romance Heroines: Feminine Fiction and Faith among the Literate Elite,” in *Christianity and Romance in Medieval English*, ed. Rosalind Field, Philippa Hardman, and Michele Sweeney (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), 121-138.

<sup>8</sup> Cazelles, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Beth Crachiolo, “Seeing the Gendering of Violence: Female and Male Martyrs in the *South English Legendary*,” in *A Great Effusion of Blood’: Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), 147-63, esp. 156, 161.

My sampling of twenty-first century female readers, however, casts a shade of doubt onto this argument: if anything, the young women writing comments on the Catholic Online forum see the virgin martyr as becoming more individualized through her experience of torture. Her steadfast refusal to abandon Christianity, despite the series of extravagant trials, makes her not helpless but brave and rebellious, leaving the readers in awe of her strength and determination. Although this sample gives no concrete evidence of medieval reception, it does offer some inkling of possible reader responses to the virgin martyr Lives, the importance of which is strongly emphasized by Robert D. Hume in his how-to book on reconstructing historical context.<sup>10</sup> Even in the twenty-first century, young women are impressed by the virgin martyrs' ability to refuse the lifestyle urged on them by the local authorities and, occasionally, by their parents, even though, as Saule notes rather charmingly, the punishment is so much worse than "getting grounded." The immediate reaction of young medieval and early modern women to the virgin martyr narratives may be impossible to determine. However, the echoes and evaluations of these narratives in later texts, as well as the practice of adopting the heroine as a conduct model, are available for examination. We find them in the texts produced by or about women readers but also, much more widely, in the reproductions and revisions of these stories authored by male writers, with particular attention to the potential dangers they represent.

My analysis of the male writers' uneasy grappling with the virgin martyr is heavily informed by Clifford Geertz's seminal essay "Religion as a Cultural System,"

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<sup>10</sup> Robert D. Hume, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75-84.

which explores the two-way interaction between culture patterns and social reality, as well as by Judith Butler's theory of performativity. In particular, Geertz argues that symbolic formulations must be modelled on the existing social structures and relationships but also that they, in turn, serve as the model for subsequent reshaping and organization of physical relationships – as the model, in short, for “reality.”<sup>11</sup> The first vernacular Lives of virgin martyrs do not emerge from a social vacuum: as I show in chapter 1, their authors are revising the Church Fathers' representations of this figure with an eye to the current social concerns and, of course, to the demands of their audience.

In discussing Balinese religious performance, Geertz acknowledges that for ethnographers and anthropologists these performances might “only be presentations of a particular religious perspective, and thus aesthetically appreciated or scientifically dissected” (113). However, he points out, “for participants they are in addition enactments, materializations, realizations of it – not only models of what they believe, but also models *for* the believing of it. In these plastic dramas men attain their faith as they portray it” (114). Although I do not discuss performance as such until the last chapter of this project, much of what I examine pertains directly to Geertz's assertion. Throughout, I view late medieval and early modern texts as exercises in the construction of the forms of faith in which their audience can participate through reading or listening to, let us say, a vernacular poem presenting a saint's Life in a uniquely accessible manner. Having undergone a ritual leap (or a slip – Geertz offers both, admitting that his

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<sup>11</sup> Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125, esp. 93. All further references are to this edition.

terminology is not entirely stable here), a participant in the Balinese religious ritual or in the public, or private, reading of saints' Lives, "returns again to the common-sense world [...] changed" (122). The framework of meaning created by the experience of participation has now become linked to the everyday world and must inform the participant's future conduct. Similarly, I contend that the behavioural patterns and coping strategies of the virgin martyr *vitae* afford their female audiences an opportunity to participate in a religious experience of rebelling against social authorities without suffering a threat to reputation, and return to the real world with an authoritative model for such rebellion.

The dynamic offered by the late medieval virgin martyr texts, however, differs from Geertz's explication of Balinese performances in one important aspect: women might attain their modes of faith through reading virgin martyrs' *vitae*, but, in the majority of cases, men prepare these texts for the audience's consumption. The plasticity of the texts arises not through the double role of the actor and reviser taken on by the same person but through the distinct purposes of those who revise and those who consume and re-enact. After the vernacular versions of the thirteenth century, the virgin martyr becomes the contested site of authority construction in the sense suggested by Butler's theory of performativity.<sup>12</sup> Her significance for the female audiences is all the more explicit because the medieval community encouraged *imitatio* of appropriate models, both as a part of Christian worship and as a method of ensuring the acceptability of one's social conduct.

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 108.

As Claire Sponsler puts it, commenting on the incorporation of strategies derived from texts into one's everyday existence, medieval consumers of texts become, in turn, producers of strategies and tactics allowing them to evade disciplining forces.<sup>13</sup> Nancy F. Partner persuasively argues in an early article that a consideration of social forces alone cannot explain human social behaviour with sufficient clarity. Such an explanation requires, as she suggests, a concept of the "self" that is capable of negotiating with the rules and models provided by its world in order to generate a sustainable social identity.<sup>14</sup> The thirteenth-century virgin martyr figure, created for purposes very likely having little to do with the position and behaviour of medieval women, presented to the "self" of the medieval female audience member a rich field for inquiry and produced reverberations which the scholars of today can only access through the remaining texts. We see, both in the medieval women's use of the virgin martyr figure and of the male writers' pointed re-fashioning and re-imagining of the same figure in the later versions of the *vitae*, a set of textual performances seeking to create a lawful female subject. The goals, of course, differ: women identify in the virgin martyr a model of authorized rebellion, while men strive to mitigate – and, in some cases, erase – these aspects, arguing for the virgin martyr as a model of meek obedience to those in power, as far as it is possible within the framework of the genre.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), xiv.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy F. Partner, "No Sex, No Gender," *Speculum* 68.2 (1993): 419-443, esp. 442-43.

<sup>15</sup> Kathleen Biddick focuses on the *vitae* of the holy women whose historical existence in the late Middle Ages is persuasively documented, and thus her concern extends to physical relics and orality, but she identifies the same response to physicality produced as an effect and authorized through texts: "As this composite of communication, physicality, and value came to be gendered feminine, learned culture began to recontain and reframe the feminine textuality. The number of hagiographical texts devoted to female

St. Lucy's verse *vita* in the *SEL* vividly showcases the ways in which female rebellion may be performed. Threatened with a consignment to the local brothel and rape unless she converts, St. Lucy replies to the wicked Justice: "Nemai no woman [...] of hire maidenhood beo ido / For no dede þat me do þat bodi · bote hire hurte beo þerto / For þe more a3e mi wille · mi bodi defouled is / Þe clenner is mi maidenhood · & þe more mi mede iwis."<sup>16</sup> In a clear reference to St. Augustine's argument via Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*, the probable source for this version, that a woman cannot be made unchaste against her own will,<sup>17</sup> the saint claims unbreakable control over her identity as a virgin, arguing that external physical influences can only enhance her purity. While this postulate is not tested (and perhaps cannot be, within the genre), we do see St. Lucy undergo three other physical trials that leave her unmoved. In the first trial, her condition of being unmoved is quite literal, since the *vita* dedicates over thirty lines to the attempt to transport the saint to the brothel – the attempt that occupies in *Legenda Aurea* several short sentences. De Voragine's description traces the escalation in the Justice's effort to move the stubborn saint – employing the men at hand, bringing in a thousand more, and finally adding a team of oxen – but does not indicate any ongoing interaction with the object of this effort, as if St. Lucy is made into a silent thing through application to her of this strenuous activity.

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saints increased. Thus what textual culture produced as an effect, it also recontained"; see "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68.2 (1993): 389-418, esp. 412.

<sup>16</sup> "Sancta Lucia," in *South English Legendary*, v. 2, ed. Charlotte D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill (London: Oxford University Press, 1956, EETS, o.s. 236), 566-71, ll. 95-98. [No woman can be deprived of her maidenhood, since nothing can men do to that body unless her heart agrees with it. Therefore, the more is my body defiled against my will, the cleaner is my maidenhood and ever the more is my reward.] All further references are to this edition.

<sup>17</sup> See "Saint Lucy, Virgin," in *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints*, v.1, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 27-29.

The *SEL* version, on the other hand, presents the saint as a conscious, speaking subject, who retains her authority in the course of this pseudo-ravishment. The sense of this episode as a metaphor for sexual violence is intensified not only from the context but also when it becomes clear that in the course of her resistance the maiden “lai as stille as ston,” presumably on the ground (l. 110). In other words, although the rape itself does not take place, a parody of it is vividly present in the narrative but fails to affect the martyr, just as the attempt to “bynome hire speche . & hire holi lyf also” by running a sword through her throat only makes St. Lucy’s more talkative (“þe bet heo spac ynou3”) (ll. 150-51). Responding to the Justice’s furious queries, she mockingly invites him to bring in ten thousand more men in order to try her strength and refers to Psalm 91, which she attributes directly to King David, thus displaying her own close familiarity with the Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Rather than serving as a mere conduit for the divine message to the pagans, the virgin martyr is quite capable, in this version, of reflecting on her own situation and of making a witty connection to the central Christian texts. This reference, absent in the well-known contemporary versions of her *vita* (either in de Voragine or in the later *Gilte Legende*), seems to conduct a personal assessment of the situation in the face of persecution.

Participating in the narrative of St. Lucy as a member of the audience offers to the female reader the experiential model of a woman who, having decided to remain a virgin, calculatedly oversees the distribution of her entire patrimony as alms, so as to

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<sup>18</sup> The martyr says: “The holi vers þat seint Dauid . saip in þe sauter / Þat a þousend men scholde in mi side falle . & to gronde beo ibrou3t / & ten þoused in mi ri3t half . & me aprochi no3t” (The holy verse which St. David says in the Psalms, that a thousand men can fall at my side and be brought to the ground, and ten thousand at my right hand, and not be able to approach me) (ll. 116-9), closely paraphrasing line 7 of Psalm 91.

force her prospective, unwelcome spouse to break the betrothal. The rage of the betrothed at losing control of the maiden's wealth, which drives him to denounce his prospective wife to the pagan authorities, would likely not be surprising for many medieval women facing a marriage arranged for reasons other than considerations of personal affection. All the more pertinent is the display of fortitude from the heroine, who stubbornly resists any move in the direction of undesirable sexual activity. Neither pagan authorities, nor enchanters, nor oxen, nor a thousand (or ten thousand) men can budge her when she wants to stay still, and not even a sword through the throat can stop her when she wants to speak. These, of course, are not things that can be imitated outside of the miraculous realm. However, the details of a virgin martyr *vita* legitimize refusal and public resistance for its female readers, and offer a clear-cut model of laying claim to authoritative speech.

But, as late medieval male writers insist, this is not what the female audience is meant to gather from this narrative. The author of the *Book of the Knight of the Tower* (late fourteenth century) argues that the most distinct characteristic of St. Lucy is her distribution of alms to the poor, which young women reading his conduct treatise should emulate through charitable acts. This emphasis is echoed in the *Book to a Mother*, an English devotional text written roughly at the same time, primarily for the female reader. Having spoken of "Katerine, Cecilie, Lucie and money maidens more free in kinde and lasse strong in bodi" than wicked men who are only strong physically, the author proceeds to offer his own version of St. Lucy's *vita*, identifying the distribution of her mother's goods to the poor as its climax (94). Disposing with most of the martyr's

*passio*, he gives only a small portion of her dispute with the wicked Justice, in which this new, economically inclined Lucy prefers not to push her point and explains her actions by saying, “do þou þat þou knowest is profitable to þe, and I wol do þat I knowe is profitable to me” (96). The rest of the story is hastily summarized in the words “Lo, Lucie was not defouled in þou3t ne in bodi” (96). The virgin martyr shrinks from a disruptive social force to a very private alms-giver who does not wish to offer public resistance to her challengers, either in word or in action.<sup>19</sup> This appropriation of the virgin martyr occurs in a way that eliminates her subversive potential and highlights the aspects of her *vita*, such as alms-giving and conflict avoidance, that align neatly with the contemporary ideals of feminine conduct.

The last two decades have seen an upsurge of scholarship dedicated to the virgin martyr figure, led in the nineties by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne and Karen Winstead, and continued in the twenty-first century by many excellent scholars, including Catherine Sanok, Bernau, Salih, Katherine Coyne Kelly, Katherine Lewis, Maud Burnett McInerney, Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, Ruth Evans, and Robert Mills. At the same time, the full-length studies of this figure’s appropriations and transformations choose the end of the fifteenth century as their termination point, taking the Reformation as well as the decades directly leading up to it as a natural conclusion to the medieval negotiations of authority and authorization. My project extends the scope of these studies by tracing the evolution of the virgin martyr past the perceived boundary of the Reformation through

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<sup>19</sup> *Book to a Mother: An Edition with Commentary*, ed. Adrian James McCarthy (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1981). For comments on this text, see Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous, “1349-1412: texts,” in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 133-62, esp. 133-36.

the debates of the sixteenth century and into the early years of Charles I's reign. In examining the early modern uses and abuses of the virgin martyr, I suggest that the reformers' vitriol directed against this figure, and the English thinkers and writers' continuing fascination with it, are a direct extension of the medieval engagement with the issues of shaping female conduct through narrative modelling.

In her continuing recognizability and popularity, the virgin martyr offers an entry point not only into the medieval struggle between authority and self-construction but also into the further refashioning of conduct models in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, as well as into the way in which this refashioning merges with the post-Reformation nationalistic historiography project. My examination of this figure, then, directly contributes to the current discussions of periodization and joins the scholarly movement seeking to overturn the notion of the Reformation as a temporal barrier that disrupts any continuities in habits of thought and allows the new, glittering age of the modern period to be born like Aphrodite from the sea-foam. In this model, it is not unusual for the centuries preceding the Reformation to be dismissed as incapable of generating novel and fascinating frameworks of thinking, writing, and interacting with the world, or exerting influence on the centuries immediately following. A striking example of this method appears in Harold Bloom's introduction to his *Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (first released in 1973 but re-published in 1997 with a new preface), which casually dismisses the possibility that the Middle Ages might have exerted any pull on the minds of early modern writers with the words: "Shakespeare belongs to the giant age

before the flood, before the anxiety of influence became central to poetic consciousness.”<sup>20</sup>

We might call the assumptions of Bloom’s monograph slightly outdated, but they are still patently influential. In 2008 the early modern scholar Richard Hingley, proposing to examine the recovery of Roman Britain from the late sixteenth century onward, admits that “Before the sixteenth century, people in Britain had thought and written about the Roman past” but hastens to note, in the same sentence, that “conventional wisdom suggests that it is only from this time that a self-critical and conscious appreciation of the classical writings that addressed Britain emerged.” He adds, “It is also from this time that the value of past objects and sites began to be recognized.”<sup>21</sup> In Hingley’s vision of the early modern period, undefined “conventional wisdom” trumps both the evidence of engagement with the Roman past before the Reformation, and the Catholic tradition of relic-worship and pilgrimages, to produce the belief that the appreciation of past objects, sites, and texts is freshly minted and unprecedented at the end of the sixteenth century. This conventional wisdom, designating the late Middle Ages as a shapeless void incapable of generating self-critical and conscious engagement, is still distinct in early modern scholarship.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Hingley, *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: A Colony So Fertile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>22</sup> For detailed discussion and incisive critique of the way in which this assumption has permeated much of the early modern scholarship, see David Aers, “A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists; or, Reflections on Literary Critics Writing the ‘History of the Subject’,” in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 177-202.

Using the virgin martyr figure as its focus, my dissertation argues for the multi-faceted awareness of the Catholic Middle Ages in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and the continuous engagement with pre-Reformation ideas, figures, and literary models well into the seventeenth century. Sixteenth-century thinkers were engaged in the historiographic project of developing and disseminating an understanding of the Middle Ages as largely dull, superstitious, and permeated with all manner of ludicrous beliefs.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, they could not escape using the familiar and widely popular medieval models of resistance to inform and authorize their own rebellion against the past or their attempt to render it fully circumscribed and self-contained.<sup>24</sup> Even in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, after England had established itself, at least with some degree of certainty, as a Protestant state, the virgin martyr figure functioned as the embodiment of the feminized Middle Ages, scattered across the country, intruding rudely into the present, and demanding engagement.

In this project, then, I join the scholars who have worked to counter the idea of an impenetrable barrier between the two periods, and to show the free flow of concepts and symbols across the Reformation – to establish, in other words, a continuity of thought that was not radically disrupted either by the religious conflict or by the constraints of

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<sup>23</sup> As James Simpson puts it, “the sixteenth century formed not only the theme, but also the methods for studying the later medieval centuries” (“Diachronic History and the Shortcomings of Medieval Studies,” *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, 20). See the entire article for the discussion of how the early modern construction of the Middle Ages has influenced the medieval scholarship.

<sup>24</sup> In examining the arguments of John Leland and John Bale, two sixteenth-century historiographers, James Simpson comments on their desire to preserve a form of the past which “their present *must*, in some ways, destroy” and seal off by erecting “crystal clear epochal boundaries to distinguish the dark, superstitious past” from itself.” However, Simpson concludes, their differing approaches “reveal the historical sources of the very different traditions to which they each belong, undoing the notion of a sealed, past age as they would affirm it”; see “Ageism: Leland, Bale, and the Laborious Start of English Literary History, 1350-1550,” in *New Medieval Literatures*, v. 1, ed. Wendy Scase, Rita Copeland, and David Lawton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 213-235, esp. 234.

historiography.<sup>25</sup> The late Middle Ages, as the source and repository of these popular figures and conventions, thus serve as the ever-present background to every early modern project of self-definition. To use the term popularized by Geertz, medieval context, directly preceding and informing the Reformation, forms an important part of the “thick description” for early modern literary undertakings, whether in prose or in drama.<sup>26</sup> In tracing the virgin martyr’s trajectory of development through several centuries, across the imaginary barrier of the Reformation, I argue that the questions raised by medieval writers in relation to virgin martyrs, specifically those related to proper feminine conduct and gender performance, as well as to the choice of appropriate conduct models, form a significant component of the context that can enable meaningful

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<sup>25</sup>As early as 1993, Christopher Haigh had shown in his widely known book, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), that the Protestant Reformation did not exist as a single, decisive event and, furthermore, that it was not necessarily eagerly embraced by the majority of English population. In an article published in the same year, Robert W. Scribner pointed to the issue of popular Protestantism, urging the need to examine those who did not actively resist the new faith but, at the same time, incorporated into it various elements borrowed from Catholicism. Among those elements, Scribner lists “Protestant attitudes towards miracles, prophecy, the cult of ‘Saint Luther,’ continued belief in a sacralised, magical world, the profoundly ritualistic aspects of Protestant belief and practice, and popular Protestant ‘superstition’”; “The Reformation and the Religion of the Common People,” in *Archiv für Reformationgeschichte. Die Reformation in Deutschland und Europa: Interpretationen und Debatten*, ed. Hans R. Guggisberg, Gottfried G. Krodel, and Hans Füglistner (Heidelberg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1993), 221-41, esp. 237. Just a year earlier, in his seminal *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400-c.1580*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), Eamon Duffy has documented the robust state of Catholic practices in England on the eve of Reformation and their extension throughout the sixteenth century, while Margaret Aston has traced the variety of opinion and the vacillation of laws concerning the religious use of images in *England’s Iconoclasts: v. 1, Laws against Images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). More recently, in the collection *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe*, edited by Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), P.G. Maxwell-Stuart argues that Protestant demonology, despite the claims of the early modern treatise writers, cannot be decisively separated from Catholic (“Religious Superstition: The Writings of Protestant Demonologists,” 170-87), while Peter Marshall demonstrates the continuity of the ghost-lore, despite the contemporary effort to eradicate certain beliefs (“Deceptive Appearances: Ghosts and Reformers in Elizabethan and Jacobean England,” 189-208). In a recent book, Nancy Bradley Warren shows the continuity of female spirituality and devotion across the Reformation; see *The Embodied Word: Female Spiritualities, Contested Orthodoxies, and English Religious Cultures, 1350-1700* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” in *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 3-30.

interpretation of early modern texts (in the absence of possibility for observation or interview). In that sense, my project draws on the New Historicist tradition and the recent scholarly interest in material culture, exploring early modern literary engagement with the virgin martyr figure in terms of national and religious identity-building.

In the context of the progressive streamlining of the virgin martyr through the late Middle Ages, with the less gender-appropriate aspects silently elided and feminine virtues extolled, I argue that the range of engagement with this figure in the sixteenth century is, to a large extent, an extension of the period's concern with conduct modelling, authorization, and imitation. Accordingly, those rare post-Reformation texts that seek to defend the importance of saints as conduct models, if not as focal points of devotion and worship, extend the late medieval practice of editing out every contentious moment. Consider this very brief description of St. Lucy's *vita* from a recusant collection of verses containing, at a rough estimate, close to fifty mini-*vitae*, written by Richard Verstegan and published in 1601:

Because the Idoles to adore,  
*Lucia* did refuse:  
 Shee threatned was shee should bee thrust,  
 Into the comon stewes.  
 No no quoth shee; the mynd beeing pure,  
 The body is vnstaynd:  
 Then with the sword shee martrid was,  
 And glorie so shee gaynd.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Verstegan, "The Triumphe of Feminyne Saintes," in *Odes in Imitation of the Seaven Penitential Psalmes with Sundry Other Poemes and Ditties Tending to Devotion and Pietie (1601)*, selected and ed. D.M. Rogers (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1970, English Recusant Literature, 1558-1640, 53), E3<sup>r</sup>.

The ultimate objective of this collection clearly lies in praising the female saints displaced to the backstage (if not the cellar) by the Reformation and reviving the memory of their distinguishing features. However, in pursuing this project, the author chooses to remove some of the most recognizable moments of St. Lucy's narrative: her refusal to marry and deliberate redirection of her patrimony into alms, as well as – even more memorably – the inability of ever-increasing hostile forces to budge her from the chosen spot. Instead, Verstegan hangs the story on the crux of idol worship and, while retaining the threat of the brothel, reduces the martyr's resistance to a general maxim that when the mind is pure, the body cannot be corrupted. A model of feminine resistance is here simplified to a basic outline of the genre and blunt threat of purely sexual violence to which the martyr responds not with the expected “yes, do your worst,” but a “No no” that seems to belie the subsequent assurance of her own inviolability. This version of St. Lucy is not qualitatively different from those offered in *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* and *The Book to a Mother*, as it revises a virgin martyr's narrative to ensure that the heroine's holy feats closely correspond to the virtues desirable in a contemporary woman. The emphasis shifted onto the threat of sexual violence – much more realistic for the early modern woman reader, and only narrowly avoided due to the martyr's exceptional purity – further raises the stakes of imitating even this pallid and proper St. Lucy, seemingly distinguished only by her Christian affiliation.

This concern with directing the negotiation of identity through textually constructing acceptable models informs post-Reformation reshapings of the virgin martyr in England, producing two radically different uses for this figure. On the one

hand, the hagiographers of Elizabeth I drew on the imagery of the virgin martyr *vitae* in producing highly stylized accounts of the Virgin Queen's travails as a princess and as an eternally young queen, permanently placed on the brink of martyrdom by her vicious Catholic persecutors. While these accounts tended to privilege the independence, rebelliousness, and divinely inspired powers of their models, they also emphasized that, unlike the virgin martyrs, Elizabeth I was a singular, inimitable figure, and no female reader could aspire to model herself on the queen's successful disregard of the social norms.

On the other hand, even directly prior to the events of the English Reformation, the vociferous virgin martyr, with her ability to work miracles and sway the popular imagination, was readily transformed into a sinister emblem of the public susceptibility to cheap illusion, and an open challenge to the institution of marriage. In his famous *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Reginald Scot derides the very possibility that a woman could work miracles and resist the pressure extended by the pagan powers onto her body. Writing with incisive sarcasm, he is free to offer an accurate summary of St. Lucy's feats (unlike the writers attempting to transform her into a figure fit for a woman reader's consumption), noting the most famous moments of her *passio*: that she "could not be remooved from the place with a teeme of oxen, neither could any fier burne hir, insomuch as one was faine to cut off hir head with a sword, and yet she could speake afterwards as long as she list." However, Scot reiterates these details for his reader only to link them with the myth of the invulnerability of witches that he is proposing to debunk. The impressive detail of the virgin martyr's trials, he writes sarcastically,

“passeth all other miracles, except it be that which Bodin and *M. Mal.* recite out of *Nider*, of a witch that could not be burned, till a scroll was taken awaie from where she hid it, betwixt hir skin and flesh.”<sup>28</sup> St. Lucy and the nameless witch merge in Scot’s hostile reading of a female subject’s resistance, in an attempt to render the virgin martyr as laughably impotent as a woman who, in a desperate grasping for authority, inserts superstitious trinkets into her own body.

As Edward Said puts it, “Texts are a system of forces institutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components” and “the critic is responsible to a degree for articulating those voices dominated, displaced, or silenced by the textuality of texts.”<sup>29</sup> This dissertation thus aims, among other things, to make an attempt at recovering the models of faith and religious conduct offered by the virgin martyr *vitae* to their female audience members by focussing on the gaps and omissions appearing in the subsequent versions of these texts. Furthermore, considering the centrality of the virgin martyr in the socio-religious framework late Middle Ages, this figure becomes an important indicator during the period of change in “the reigning culture,” metamorphosing into the embodiment of the medieval cultural worldview and, as such, allowing a close look at the uneasy relationship with the representations of the past in post-Reformation England.

In my attention to the texts produced by “the reigning culture,” I am also seeking to explore the ways in which Catholic habits of thoughts necessarily permeate post-

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<sup>28</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. and intro. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 268. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>29</sup> Edward W. Said, “The World, the Text, and the Critic,” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), 31-53, esp. 53.

Reformation England, disrupting its claim to be the direct product of the “primitive” church, free from the corrupting influence of medieval superstition.<sup>30</sup> My dissertation aims to identify and address the continuing presence and influence of Catholicism in early modern England, as well the acute awareness of this presence across the social hierarchy. My project also addresses the effort if not to banish Catholic figures and ideas entirely, then to disrupt their capacity for affecting the reader (and especially the female performer) directly and enabling future performance of undesirable traits. I contend that the virgin martyr becomes in early modern England a site of the ongoing ideological competition between Protestantism and Catholicism. She serves as the focal point for the fierce Protestant struggle simultaneously to cleanse the nation of the stain of Catholic superstition and to buttress its own position by absorbing the popular figures and conventions of its opponent.

An early modern text that treats a virgin martyr is then, by definition, an evasive text, since it seeks to conceal from the reader its own sources and strategies of construction. Of course, any text is predicated on evasion. In the introduction to his *Theory and the Premodern Text*, Paul Strohm muses on the shape analysis would take

*if texts were never evasive, never silent about their own suppressions and omissions, never misleading or forgetful about their own sources and origins, always fully candid and articulate about themselves and their own prehistories and the circumstances of their composition, always able to ‘close’ themselves by specifying their own objectives and unifying principles. [...] texts are rarely candid in any of these ways. The textual*

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<sup>30</sup> Among others, Ethan Shagan comments on the pressing need for such studies, pointing out that “early modern English Catholicism [...] has become a historiographical sub-field or occasionally a ghetto, to be studied by specialists as one might study the institutional history of a department of government or the evolution of a branch of law”; see “Chapter 1: English Catholic History in Context,” in *Catholics and the ‘Protestant Nation’: Religious Politics and Identity in Early Modern England* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1-21, esp. 1.

condition is more normally one of non-transparency, of inherent and obdurate recalcitrance. I use words like ‘inherent’ because I believe texts not only to be unwilling but unable to tell us all they know – everything about their antecedence, their suppressions and evasions, the uses and appropriations to which they are, or will be, exposed.<sup>31</sup>

The assumption that texts are, by and large, secretive about the histories that produced them, and about their own histories, but especially about the push and pull of anxiety that surrounds and instigates textual production, reception, and proliferation seems to me uniquely applicable to the early modern texts having to deal with the matters of Christian history. In tracing the same figure through four centuries and dozens of texts, I inquire into the matters of which, as Strohm suggests, texts themselves do not wish to or cannot speak. The virgin martyr, and her uses, appropriations, and emulations, becomes in this study the point of entry into the “unconscious” of the text and, indeed, of the period that produced it.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, then, the evasion inherent in the early modern treatments of the virgin martyr links it forcefully to the issues of historiography – to the inescapable nostalgia of considering the past, and to the awareness of the extent to which narratives are shaped by nationalistic considerations. Early modern writers, even in the seventeenth century, recognize the virgin martyr – a genre, a plot, a relic, a heroine, a martyr *par excellence* – as a significant force that can both enable and subvert the writing of religious and secular

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<sup>31</sup> Paul Strohm, *Theory and the Premodern Text* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000, *Medieval Cultures*, 26), xii.

<sup>32</sup> I adopt Strohm’s main premises, which he gives as follows: the centrality of the text, provisional neglect of “the literary,” textual/extratextual dialogue, the textual unconscious, and shared meaning (*Theory and the Premodern Text*, xv-xvi).

history.<sup>33</sup> Consider, for example, the manner in which St. Lucy re-appears in William Sampson's *The Vow Breaker, or The Faire Maide of Clifton*, first performed at some point between 1625 and 1636 and loosely treating the events which had transpired at the end of the Siege of Leith in 1560. The moment to which I am referring occurs close to the end of the play, after the siege has been concluded to the satisfaction of the English side and to the thorough shaming of the French. In this dramatic re-imagining, the English victory is also marked by Queen Elizabeth visiting the city of Nottingham, as a sign of gratitude for the bravery of Nottinghamshire soldiers, and receiving a suit from the Mayor of the city to improve the navigation of the River Trent.<sup>34</sup> After Elizabeth's request to explain the city's reasoning for this request, the following dialogue ensues:

MAYOR: By S<sup>t</sup>. *Lucy Besse*, I am a plaine honest Tanner, my brothers here, one a Shoo-maker, to'ther a Felmonger, we are all downe right toth'hide; I ha' noe Lawyers eloquence, our Recorder cannot whistle, but by the bones of sweete St. *Lucy* welcome, on welcome.

QUEEN. I have tasted your welcome, and would faine Grant your designe, soe you give reason.

MAYOR. By S<sup>t</sup>. *Lucy*, and shall, elce i'm an asse, and my bretheren *Dotterells*; Give reason, brother Sheeps-kin, second me for I must speake Historiography, History I should say, but these hard words cloy my stomacke, like lumpes of Bacon.<sup>35</sup>

The Mayor then embarks on a lengthy description of the city's geographical history, beginning with Edward I, through the Edwards II and III, Richard II, and on to the conflict between Henry V and Percy, to which he attributes the current disruption of

<sup>33</sup> So, Jennifer Summit writes about Protestant historiographers viewing the stories of St. Ursula and St. Emerita as challenges to historiography and to the foundations of British history (*Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008], 159-64.

<sup>34</sup> See Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of the Early Modern Drama, 1620-1650* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 44, for a discussing of this dramatic moment in the broader context of concern with navigability of English canals and waterways.

<sup>35</sup> William Sampson, *The Fair Vow-Breaker, or the Faire Maide of Clifton* (London: John Norton, 1636), I4<sup>r</sup>-K<sup>v</sup>.

navigability, ending with another entreaty “To signe our pattent, an by S<sup>t</sup> *Lucy, Besse.*” Within twenty lines or so, he has referenced St. Lucy (and once, in invoking her “bones,” specifically as a relic) four times, linking the virgin martyr closely to the unsettling need “to speake Historiography” or “History.”

An expression of reluctance to refer to historical matters and to participate, through a verbal account, in the construction of history, is surely self-referential and consciously ironic in a play partially dedicated to a military conflict at most seventy years old. It is particularly so in an episode portraying what is surely a largely fictitious encounter,<sup>36</sup> - especially since the Mayor’s protestations of manual occupation and lack of eloquence are immediately belied by the fluent detail of the historical account he does give. This sudden reluctance, then, does not merely, if at all, speak to the Mayor’s unsuitability for fine speech (although, no doubt, his demurral could be hysterically funny to a lower-class audience). In this exchange, the audience witnesses centuries pleating together into a single performance in the seventeenth-century stage, with England as they know it emerging solidly through the slippery layers of medieval history and no less slippery fabric of the much more recent Elizabethan past, with the eternally young Queen Bess presiding over the action. This agglomerate of history literally turns indigestible in the speaker’s stomach, like a lump of raw meat (“these hard words cloy my stomacke, like lumpes of Bacon”), causing him palpable physical and emotional discomfort.

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<sup>36</sup> Julie Sanders notes that “The slippage between historical representation and an awareness of being “in the moment,” typical of the subgenre of household theatre, makes it difficult to draw any clear distinction between historical fact and contemporary aspiration in this scene” (44).

The liberal invocation of St. Lucy throughout the episode designates her simultaneously a symbol of this profound historiographical discomfort and the patron saint of nostalgia. Eventually, she is the force enables and drives the shaping of the past, guiding the Mayor through his difficult task of harnessing history to achieve the present-day political ends. The offhanded insertion of the virgin martyr into the text also strongly suggests that these connotations are familiar to a seventeenth-century audience and thus do not need extensive clarification. At the same time, the benevolent presence of St. Lucy in the play is possible only so far as she is closely intertwined with the miraculous figure of Elizabeth, who can beget “a spring of youth” in an elderly military man and, addressing “Proud *France*, and poysoning *Spaine*,” promises that “A virgin's arme shall quell [their] mightiness.”<sup>37</sup> For the seventeenth-century audience young Elizabeth absorbs the figure of St. Lucy and is recognizably imprinted with her image; she is forever virginal and empowered to resist the hostile forces that threaten to destabilize and ultimately destroy both the English nation and the Protestant faith. Historiography, the play argues, is the feat of arriving at tenuous clarity through the multiplication of nostalgic spectres. Writers produce the national, geographic, political, and religious unity of England through a headlong rehearsal of post-conquest history, as gross as an attempt at digesting whole lumps of meat, and through staging a forceful merging of a Catholic virgin martyr, both as a powerful patron and as a collection of bones, and Elizabeth I, the mother of England as a Protestant nation. Like St. Lucy, who cannot be budged with a thousand of men and a team of oxen, and who continues to preach through the seemingly

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<sup>37</sup> Sampson, *The Fair Vow-Breaker*, 14<sup>f</sup>-K<sup>v</sup>.

impassable breach of her own throat, history is stubborn and untidy. Like St. Lucy, the medieval past refuses to be directed along a more acceptable route, or to be prevented from speaking, insistently, to the early modern audiences.

Chapter one of the dissertation queries the history of the virgin martyr in England in the early Middle Ages and examines, in the context of the normative regulations postulated by the Church Fathers, the models offered by the virgin martyrs to their audience in the thirteenth century, as part of the newly developed vernacular body of religious texts. Focusing on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it also explores the ways in which late medieval women incorporate the performance modelled in these *vitae* into their own practices of resistance and subversion. I examine a range of engagement, from the pointed incorporation of the *vitae* into texts for the purposes of authorization, as in the case of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, to Margery Paston's re-enactment of a virgin martyr's vociferous rebellion against parental and social pressure toward an unwelcome marriage.

Chapter two of this dissertation addresses extended refashionings or brief, selective summaries of the virgin martyr narratives in the male-authored texts of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggesting that, by and large, these texts seek to evacuate the subversive potential of this figure and to transform the virgin martyr into a meek and obedient maiden. Examining the ideals of feminine conduct as established in such texts as *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* and the prescriptive poem "The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter," I argue that these ideals are also progressively inscribed

onto the figure of the virgin martyr in the more literary texts, sometimes in direct contradiction to the sources and the plot. Dealing with St. Cecilia, already one of the most private virgin martyrs, in his “The Second Nun’s Prologue and Tale,” Geoffrey Chaucer identifies her house (or, at a stretch, other chambers hidden from the public eye) as the proper location for any plot-driven rebellion against the pagan powers. The pagan officials are also uniquely understanding of St. Cecilia’s feminine need for seclusion, not only martyring her within her house, but also initially attempting to do so by enclosing her further in the bathing room. Finally, tracing the character of St. Cristina from the *SEL* in the thirteenth century, to William Paris’s version at the end of fourteenth, and to Osbern Bokenham’s refashioning in his collection of women saints’ Lives, I analyze the specific changes introduced into the same *vita* with the progressive recognition of the virgin martyr’s role in serving as a conduct model for her female audience.

Chapter three continues this trajectory into the sixteenth century, exploring the Protestant animosity against virginity (especially female virginity) alongside the contemporary project of marriage promotion. Examining a range of marital and conduct works, this chapter shows how the early modern concern with women’s social position and behaviour, accompanied by vitriolic invectives against the stories of virginal miracle-workers, emerges from the late medieval engagement with the performance models offered by the saints’ Lives to the women readers. In other words, the early modern antagonism toward the immodest visibility and active independence of the virgin martyr is not uniquely generated by the events and ideas of the Reformation held by the Protestant thinkers. Building directly on the antagonisms of the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries, early modern Catholics writing in English inherited both the late medieval distrust of holy maids and privileging of the wifely ideal, as I show through a close reading of Thomas More's *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, John Mush's *Life of Margaret Clitherow*, and the anonymous all-female legendary entitled *The Lives of Women Saints of Our Countrie of England*. Moreover, my examination of John Bale's commentary on the book of Anne Askew and John Foxe's descriptions of women in *Actes and Monuments* explores in detail the tension inherent in the reformers' need to engage with the virgin martyr *passio* as the quintessential martyrological model, while consciously privileging the woman who is married and fully obedient to her husband as the model of piety.

Chapter four looks at specific early modern uses of the virgin martyr figure as informed by the attempt to render her non-viable as a model for women readers. A range of texts dedicated to or describing the life of Elizabeth I draw extensively on hagiographic conventions, presenting the Virgin Queen, so to speak, as a martyr in progress, constantly on trial through the efforts of her adversaries and on the brink of violent death. However, while this appropriation retains the salient features of the virgin martyr, emphasizing her strength in the face of adversity, her powerful speech, and the capacity for leading others, it also highlights the inimitability of the queen. The virgin martyr is, in this manifestation, tightly contained by the unique epistemological space the queen occupies. At the same time, I explore the insistent linkage between the virgin martyr and the early modern witch in late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries texts (such as previously quoted Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, published in

1584). Analyzing the early modern discomfort with the female miracle-worker, I contend that the merging between the two figures, and the accompanying argument of sinister impotence, is intended to discourage any attempts at imitating her claim to authority and independence.

Finally, chapter five examines the appearances of the virgin martyr on the early modern stage, from the early interlude *Calisto and Melebea* (ca. 1530), to Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (licensed for performance in 1622). I contend that the early modern playwrights specifically link this figure to the problems of constructing England's national history and properly interpreting the remnants of the medieval past (whether objects, texts, or habits of thought), that permeated the contemporary cultural space. Analyzing the range of early modern dramatic engagements with the virgin martyr, this chapter highlights the seductions of the power that she offers to female audience, as well as the difficulties experienced by the Protestant thinkers in responding to female claims of divine inspiration. Finally, I explore the use of the virgin martyr as a prop for buttressing the performance of post-Reformation English identity.

## CHAPTER 1: VIRGINS TO LIVE BY: VERNACULAR VIRGIN MARTYRS' LIVES AND THEIR READERS IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

I begin with an epitomical encounter between a virgin martyr and the devil. In the Katherine Group version of St. Juliana's Life, the devil enters Juliana's prison cell and, even after he has been apprehended by the saint, speaks to her as dismissively as might any of the medieval writers who made their cases against women.<sup>38</sup> Irritated by Juliana's incessant questions, the devil calls her "seli meiden" (foolish girl)<sup>39</sup> and warns her that a failure to release him "nis nawt pin biheue" (will not be to your advantage). Incensed by the devil's tone, Juliana exclaims: "O [...] þretest tu me, wrecche?" (Oh... are you threatening me, wretch?). Her reaction to his condescending words is astonishingly personal, all the more so for the gasp of indignation with which her reply begins. Her exclamation gives an immediate logical explanation for the beating of the devil that follows (the beating by which this saint is primarily distinguished), turning it into a personal retaliation against a personal insult. More importantly, the thoroughness of the

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<sup>38</sup> For a description of medieval misogynistic arguments, see Alcuin Blamires's summary in *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, especially chapters 1 and 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); the first chapter of R. Howard Bloch's *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and his "Medieval Misogyny," in *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy*, ed. R. Howard Bloch and Frances Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 1-24. See also Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), for the description of the development of the medieval attitudes toward women.

<sup>39</sup> *De Liflade ant Te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*, ed. S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne (London: Oxford UP, 1961, EETS, os. 248), 41. I am quoting from the emended text, which is based on MSS. Bodley 34 and Royal 17A xxvii. All following quotations are from this text. Although the word "seli" may also be translated as "innocent" or "holy," the devil's general tone in this speech suggests a more derogative meaning; he is likely calling Juliana weak or foolish (especially since he goes on to argue that all her power comes from elsewhere and she is thus ill-equipped to continue holding him prisoner). See the *Middle English Dictionary* online (University of Michigan) entry for "seli," adj., 3: "(a) Wretched, unfortunate, miserable; pitiable; (b) humble, lowly; poor; (c) worthless, trifling, insignificant." Note that the *South English Legendary* gives the first recorded instance of this usage, although the Life of St. Juliana does not appear among the MED quotations. Karen Winstead translates this address as "blessed fool"; see *Chaste Passions: Medieval English Virgin Martyr Legends* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 9-26, esp. 20.

beating<sup>40</sup> constitutes a response to the challenge that Juliana registers in the devil's words – a challenge to the gender-based challenge of her competence. The devil clearly makes this connection as well and quickly changes his tune, calling Juliana “witti wummon” (wise woman) in an attempt to placate her (43).

This interaction shifts the focus of the Life to an examination of gender identity construction on a very personal level: the devil assumes that the young girl has no independent authority and can be easily frightened into submission. When the saint immediately proves her resilience by physically overpowering the opponent, the devil is forced to acknowledge the disruption of the gender dichotomy by granting Juliana independent wisdom of thought and action. However, this significant angle is completely absent from the Latin Life of St. Juliana in Jacob de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (ca. 1260), which offers no coherent reason for the beating, placing it immediately after the devil's general acknowledgement of various mischief and of his inability to harm devout Christians.<sup>41</sup> If any explanation is to be gleaned there, it must be abstract outrage of a future martyr against the evil spirit.

This comparison highlights the contrast between the two roughly contemporary versions, with de Voragine's narrative clearly more interested in the educational value of the plot details and character interactions than in how logical or comprehensible the plot sequence and conversation might appear to the broad audience. One of the results of this

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<sup>40</sup> As Winstead's colourful translation puts it, “With that, she seized her shackles and bound both his hands behind his back so hard that his fingernails ached and blackened with blood; and she flung him backwards right down on the ground, and standing on the pest, she took her own bonds and began to beat Belial out of hell” (*Chaste Passions*, 2).

<sup>41</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, “Saint Juliana,” in *The Golden Legend: Reading on the Saints*, vol. 1, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 160-1, esp. 161.

approach is that it tends to shift the focus away from the heroine and her personal concerns. In contrast, the thirteenth-century vernacular virgin martyr Lives subtly alter some details of the narrative or emphasize others to create a believable context for her. In the Katherine Group narratives and, even more so, in the *SEL* poems, the holy virgin is readily recognizable to the contemporary audience as a highly individualized character as she resists persecution and defeats her enemies within a framework of quotidian concerns – such as the desire not to be dismissed as a foolish, weak girl.

The interest in inserting contemporary concerns and content into the heavily fictionalized accounts of long-dead Roman virgins may be partly explained by a blend of the post-conquest considerations of nation-building,<sup>42</sup> by the medieval association of female authority with empirical rhetoric,<sup>43</sup> and by the general move toward a rethinking of virginity in the context of late medieval England. As Rossell Hope Robbins has suggested, the use of the vernacular in post-conquest England is in itself indicative of a desire to take issue with the established linguistic and social authority; to a certain extent, according to him, the very existence of vernacular English literature was an act of

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Gayle Margherita, *The Romance of Origins: Language and Sexual Difference in Middle English Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 44-49, on the Katherine Group *Juliana* as a nationalistic text. Jill Frederick also discusses some of the *SEL* texts from this perspective in “The *South English Legendary*: Anglo-Saxon Saints and National Identity,” in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57-73.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Dietrich offers a discussion of rhetorical strategies in the Middle Ages, suggesting that it is precisely this association that allowed women to enter more fully into public discourse. See her “Women and Authority in the Rhetorical Economy of the Late Middle Ages,” in *Rhetorical Women: Roles and Representations*, ed. Hildy Miller and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2005), 21-43. Furthermore, as Ferrante argues, the thirteenth century is the period in literary history when woman is finally perceived as completely separate from man – an independent entity that does not have to be assimilated (see *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature*),

rebellion, an indication of dissent.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, as Ruth Evans argues, women are closely linked to the use of the vernacular and thus become figureheads for this dissent.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the association between femaleness and humanity in the religious imagery of the period allowed this dissent to become more concrete and be expressed through secular concerns.<sup>46</sup> This combination of factors worked to produce female saints who functioned within a readily identifiable context, responding to issues of gender-appropriate conduct and the construction of a gendered self highly pertinent to the audience's own social functioning. In other words, whatever the original impulse for creating the new image of the virgin martyr, she offered to female audiences a powerful example of feminine self-assertion and authority, with objections to this conduct placed in the mouth of the old enemy of all mankind.

While, as scholars have noted, Middle English martyr narratives used distancing techniques in “anticipating and forestalling radical *imitatio* among increasingly broad audiences whose responses might be difficult to predict or to channel,” I argue that they also drew on the repository of social rituals, objects, and practices, thus creating the opposite effect and inviting the use of the virginal heroines as conduct models.<sup>47</sup> In speaking of tales and legends in his *Practice of Everyday Life*, Michael de Certeau

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<sup>44</sup> Rossell Hope Robbins, “Dissent in Middle English Literature: The Spirit of (Thirteen) Seventy-Six,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 9 (1979): 25-51, esp. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Ruth Evans, “Historicizing Postcolonial Criticism: Cultural Difference and the Vernacular,” *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 366-70, esp. 370.

<sup>46</sup> See Caroline Walker Bynum, “...And Woman His Humanity”: Female Imagery in the Religious Writing in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 151-179.

<sup>47</sup> Karen A. Winstead, “Fear in Late-Medieval English Martyr Legends,” in *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. Johan Leemans (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 201-220, esp. 201.

comments precisely on the capacity of tales to create, in their close engagement with the “formality of everyday practices,” a space in which the relationships of power may be reversed.<sup>48</sup> Although he is referring to fabulous tales of the kind collected by Propp, the virgin martyrs’ Lives written in thirteenth-century England come close to this model in their fascination with the quotidian. Certainly they seemed to “offer their audience a repertory of tactics for future use,”<sup>49</sup> all the more potent for being offered by the women who, while assumed to have existed, albeit in a distant past, were accessible as literary figures of edification rather than historical figures to whom the audience was linked geographically.

### **The Feverish Imagination and the Roman Virgin Martyr:**

#### **The Ends of Hagiography**

The Late Middle Ages offer a fascinating range of contemporary holy women, and England, by the fifteenth century, could boast quite a few home-grown virgin martyrs. However, this study focuses on saints whose origins are supposed to be far removed both in space and time, and whose Lives had by the thirteenth century become part of the popular culture, familiar and easily recognizable in the general outline and main features.<sup>50</sup> For a number of these saints, no historical evidence exists – and in some cases, on the contrary, existing historical evidence bespeaks their fictiveness. Because of such tenuous grounding in fact, it is only recently that their Lives have been recognized

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<sup>48</sup> Michael de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Such a feature, for example, is St. Margaret’s brief sojourn in the stomach of the demonic dragon, and St. Christina of Tyre’s ripped-out tongue which, when thrown, blinds her persecutor.

as a deserving and fruitful subject of study, not to be dismissed as merely a product of inflamed scribal imagination.

Indeed, the Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye, having dedicated his entire career to studying saints and their cults, viewed fictionalized (or fully fictional) saints' Lives and the medieval culture that consumed them with scholarly indignation. When examining hagiographic narratives, he wrote, "...we are confronted with nothing but platitudes and grotesque fancies that are frequently altogether fantastic. The feverish imagination thirsts for wonders, it is itching with ambition to outstrip extraordinary stories by others yet more extraordinary..."<sup>51</sup> This is the case, according to Delehaye, because the medieval mind was not properly equipped for distinguishing between history and fiction, and

the simple minds of these half-barbarian clerks lacked the first qualification needed for the exercise of the most elementary degree of critical faculty: they were guiltless, and never suspected that a piece of written evidence could be false, that a plausible tale is not necessarily true. It was the never-ending confusion between history and legend. In the middle ages, history meant everything that was told, everything that was read in books.

Obviously this elementary idea of history was shared by the hagiographers. Their work shows it no less than their own statements.<sup>52</sup>

Felice Lifshitz argues that, at least when applied to the early Middle Ages, this distinction – and thus the very genre of hagiography – is anachronistic, since a conception of historiography independent from writing about saints did not exist at the time.<sup>53</sup> And yet, in this collapsing of the genres Lifshitz and Delehaye are of the same

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<sup>51</sup> Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, with a memoir of the author by Paul Peeters, trans. Donald Attwater (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962), 35.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-3.

<sup>53</sup> Felice Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre: 'Hagiographical' Texts as Historical Narrative," *Viator* 25 (1994): 95-113, esp. 113. Lifshitz is speaking specifically about the west Frankish lands between the

mind: in the excerpt above, the Bollandist bewails not the shortcomings of hagiography as a genre but the failure, of the medieval writers, to produce proper historical narratives. Because true hagiography, in Delehaye's view, must be nothing other than a historical narrative, hagiography generated in the Middle Ages is necessarily flawed.

However, even a cursory examination of medieval writing will quickly establish that "these half-barbarian clerks" of whom Delehaye speaks were not so hopelessly naïve as to trust any written word and could certainly conceive of a distinction between historical fact and literary embroidery.<sup>54</sup> There is no question but that historical and hagiographical texts were composed with distinct intentions, and expected to produce very specific effects on the audience. Indeed, the epigraph Lifshitz has chosen for her article emphasizes this difference: "Historia est quae praeterita narrat, / Prophetia quae futura narrat, / Hagiographia quae aeternae vitae gaudia jubilat."<sup>55</sup> The true significance of a hagiographical narrative, in other words, lies beyond the events it is describing: its intention is, first and foremost, anagogical and was understood as such by medieval writers. In discussing the genre of hagiography, Thomas Heffernan turns to Gregory of Tours: "Gregory believed that the saint, unlike the rest of humankind, lived

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ninth and the eleventh centuries, but the title of the article and the overall argument suggest that her conclusions are meant to be applied more broadly.

<sup>54</sup> Even the most unscholarly vernacular Lives are careful to allude to their sources or to Church authorities, and, in some cases, do not shrink away from expressing doubt in the veracity of a certain event. The hagiographer of the *SEL* Life of St. Margaret, for example, readily acknowledges that the episode in which the saint bursts out of the dragon seems rather improbable and he cannot swear that it is, in fact, true: "Ac þis netelle ich no3t to soþe . for it nis no3t to soþe iwite / Ac weþer it is soþ oþer it nis . inot noman þat wite" (But this I do not say to be true, since it is not written to be true, / But whether it is true or not, there is nobody who knows) ("De Sancta Margareta," in *South English Legendary*, vol. 1, 291-302, ll. 165-6). Indeed, Delehaye himself acknowledges this elsewhere in his book, pointing to the "feigned indignation" of the hagiographers, "an indignation that betrays the man whose conscience is not wholly clear" (55).

<sup>55</sup> Honorius of Autun, quoted in Lifshitz, "Beyond Positivism and Genre," 95.

simultaneously in two worlds, the heavenly and the earthly.”<sup>56</sup> Writing a saint’s life means treating this intersection between the worlds and looking simultaneously to the past – real or constructed – and beyond time, to the eternal life.

For the purposes of this study, I will accept the existence of hagiography as a separate, independent genre, rather than an unsuccessful branch of history; as Heffernan has argued, hagiography is a genre aware of its own fictionalization.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, hagiographers introduce this fictionalization not merely to cater to the “feverish imagination” of the medieval audience but to reclaim the past hagiographical models and refashion them for present consumption, ensuring that desirable conduct features are displayed to members of the audience and can be dutifully incorporated in their everyday routines.<sup>58</sup> Sociological studies of sainthood confirm the extensive presence of fictionalization in every aspect of hagiographical writing. Pierre Delooz, even as he urges his readers to “clearly distinguish *real* saints from *constructed* saints,” must admit by the end of the same paragraph that “[a]ll saints are more or less *constructed* in that, being necessarily saints *for other people*, they are remodelled in the collective representation which is made of them.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and Their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>57</sup> See Heffernan’s *Sacred Biography*, esp. chapter 2. For additional defence of hagiography as a genre, see Katherine J. Lewis, “History, Hagiography and Re-Writing the Past,” in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 122-40, esp. 122-5.

<sup>58</sup> Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Pierre Delooz, “Towards a Sociological Study of Canonized Sainthood in the Catholic Church,” in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 189-216, esp. 195. Similarly, Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell’s study of “real” saints shows that their Lives are to a certain extent subordinated to the changing historical and religious concerns, as well as the ambitions of the hagiographers; *Saints and Society: Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Existing, so to speak, outside of human time, hagiography is an extremely flexible genre, with each new version of a saint's Life absorbing contemporary concerns and responding through an alteration of content or a shifting of emphasis. And so, the narratives of Roman virgin martyrs, not burdened, in medieval England, by the weight of familiarity, the pull of locality, or the ties of a canonization case, may serve as an epitome of this generic flexibility. These narratives lend themselves readily to being moulded by the medieval writers and to serving both contemporary interests and anxieties; not surprisingly, they have been identified as the most popular branch of hagiography.<sup>60</sup> Keeping this in mind, I will read late medieval saints' Lives as narratives that, purporting to treat matters of the past, say a great deal about the present; in discussing long-dead Roman virgin martyrs, they participate in the current debate about the social and ecclesiastical position of women.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Church Fathers and the Ideal of Virginity**

Furthermore, in describing women from times past, Middle English virgin martyr Lives appear to a certain extent liberated from the rigid conduct norms prescribed by the Church Fathers and widely recognized in the thirteenth century. Following the injunction to resist physical desire and preserve the intactness of their virginal bodies, the active, vociferous heroines of Middle English Lives offer to the audience models of existing and

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<sup>60</sup> On the predominance of virgin martyrs in late medieval legendaries, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 27.4 (1991): 314-332, esp. 314-5; Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>61</sup> There are, technically speaking, isolated cases of male virgin martyrs: see, for example, Hrotsvit of Gandersheim's account of Pelagius' martyrdom: "Pelagius," in *Hrotsvit of Gandersheim: A Florilegium of Her Works*, trans., ed., and introd. Katharina M. Wilson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 29-40. However, late medieval audiences thought of virgin martyrs as female, unless otherwise specified.

behaving as a virgin that are tremendously different from those dictated in treatises. The Church Fathers' treatises, with their idealization of a silent, passive woman, are themselves a reaction to the realization that, in late antiquity, the Christian Church was heavily dependent on the support of influential women.<sup>62</sup> Peter Brown describes such women as active and outspoken, living independently, possessing property, and frequently endowed with a gift of prophecy.<sup>63</sup> While none of the Church Fathers whom I am going to discuss go so far as to inveigh unequivocally against marriage, they also argue that virginity, when properly executed, is more exemplary. Of course, the urged demeanour of the virgins in their treatises differs drastically – and quite pointedly – from the reality of Christian women in late antiquity.<sup>64</sup>

In the writings of the Church Fathers, the virginal body is the body that is willed out of existence: the virgin is a blank space and may not see or be seen, hear or be heard. Like Schrödinger's cat, such a virgin exists only within an enclosed space of her house or her coverings, in a delicate balance that is disrupted when she comes into contact with the world. So, in his treatise on veiling (early third century), Tertullian condemns all virgins of high visibility, whether their actions are reprehensible or commendable, for "their own standing in the community itself now ought to be a source of shame. You may embarrass a virgin more by praising than by finding fault, since the appearance of the offence is more obstinate, since shamelessness has been produced from and in the

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<sup>62</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>64</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Christian women in late antiquity, as well as of the Church Fathers' views of the body, particularly virginal body, see Brown, *The Body and Society*, especially part one, chapter 3, "Martyrdom, Prophecy and Continence: Hermas to Tertullian," 65-82, and part 3, "Ambrose to Augustine: The Making of the Latin Tradition," 339-427.

offence itself.”<sup>65</sup> There is, then, no justification for public exposure: the very experience of being observed amounts to an experience of defilement and, what is more, indicates desire for such defilement. As Tertullian declares further, “In fact, the eyes that will desire a virgin once seen, are the same kind as a virgin has who will desire to be seen. The same kinds of eyes desire each other mutually. To be seen and to see is of the same passion” (144). As a blank space, the virgin cannot resist the male gaze and is inevitably inscribed by her watcher; in her openness to being seen, the virgin underwrites and participates in the other’s visual and, consequently, physical desire for her.<sup>66</sup>

Although Tertullian begins by discussing the audacious maidens who actively pursue visibility and insist on listening and even speaking to men, he then moves to a somewhat touchier subject of those pure and virtuous virgins who object strenuously to this sort of exposure and thus have no desire to be seen. It is, however, the act of exposure that seems to be in question here, not the maiden’s agreement. In this, an unveiling is not unlike rape and, in fact, is worse than rape: “to suffer physical violence is less [terrible] because it comes from a natural bodily function” (145, translator’s brackets). The gaze, in Tertullian’s argument, arises from an unnatural desire to violate a virgin’s spirit and is thus the more effective instrument of defloration; however unwillingly exposed to it, a girl must not “consider herself to be a complete virgin; she is made something else” (145). In fact, as Tertullian points out elsewhere, virginity lies less “in the integrity of the flesh and the avoidance of actual sin” than in not leading others

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<sup>65</sup> Tertullian, “On the Veiling of Virgins (*De Virginibus Velandis*),” in *Tertullian*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey D. Dunn (New York: Routledge, 2004), 135-161, esp. 144. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>66</sup> On this, see also Carly Daniel-Hughes, “‘Wear the Armor of Your Shame’: Debating Veiling and the Salvation of the Flesh in Tertullian of Carthage,” *Studies in Religion* 39.2 (2010): 179-201, esp. 193-95.

into damnation by provoking unchaste thoughts in them.<sup>67</sup> A girl seen by men is a formerly blank space in which the male desire is now inscribed: having been written on, she can no longer call herself untouched.

This model of virginity is essentially supported by Jerome and Ambrose, for whom appearance is also closely intertwined with speech; Ambrose in particular looks back at Paul's injunction against married women speaking in the church, concluding that this reference must be even more pertinent for virgins, whose "silence commends their modesty."<sup>68</sup> While Jerome, in his later and milder letter to Demetrias (CXXX), merely advises that the subject of one's speech be carefully chosen,<sup>69</sup> Ambrose forbids his virginal audience all sounds, even those expressing their love for the divine, urging them instead to "abstain from groans, cries, coughing, and laughter at the Mystery." He continues: "Let virginity be first marked by the voice, let modesty close the mouth, let religion remove weakness, and habit instruct nature" (383).

The ideal virgin of the Church Fathers, then, is able to break away from what they see as the features of flawed feminine nature: where women are naturally loquacious in their weakness, the holy virgin's strength is located in her ability to be silent, to separate herself from the rest of the world both by her veil and her permanently

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<sup>67</sup> Tertullian, "The Apparel of Women," in *Tertullian: Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works*, trans. and intro. Edwin A. Quaint (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 111-149, ed. 130.

<sup>68</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, "Three Books of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, Concerning Virgins, to Marcellina, His Sister," in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. V. 10. Ambrose*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wallace (New York: Christian Literature, 1896), 363-89, esp. 382. All further references are to this text.

<sup>69</sup> "Let your tongue know no theme but Christ, let no sound pass your lips that is not holy..." See "Letter CXXX," in *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church Series, Volume VI, trans. W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W.L. Martley (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1892), 260-272, esp. 272.

closed mouth. Naturally, even this pinnacle of womanhood – or perhaps especially this pinnacle of womanhood – needs close monitoring: Jerome writes disapprovingly of some virgins who “choose sequestered dwellings where they will not be under the eye of others, in order that they may live more freely than they otherwise could do.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, there may be no discussion, in relation to these writings, of the woman’s freedom: she is not hidden away from the male gaze under her veils, or freed from the necessity to heed her husband’s words and maintain her social status. Rather, as Jerome’s earlier letter to a mother and daughter of Gaul (CXVII) amply demonstrates, religious women are expected to live with relatives, or at least with female companions, so that no shameful rumours may be spread. While in the first half of the letter he blithely dismisses the Biblical idea that one must take care to appear honest “in the sight of all men,”<sup>71</sup> by the second half, having come to consider the possibility that a virgin might live with a male spiritual adviser, unrelated to her by blood, he advises to her to “pay more regard to appearances in harbouring him as [her] companion.”<sup>72</sup> If anything, the role of a professional virgin requires more care; so much care, in fact, that the virgin herself might not be able to adhere to every required detail and must be attentively policed by her companions, her family, and even the neighbours.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Jerome, “Letter CXXX,” 271.

<sup>71</sup> Romans 12:17.

<sup>72</sup> Jerome, “Letter CXVII,” 19.

<sup>73</sup> In fact, as Maud Burnett McInerney points out, the letter is written in response to Jerome’s conversation with the virgin’s brother, concerned about the fate of her inheritance: “[t]his virgin, in other words, is not only misbehaving with regard to her person, which would be bad enough, but with regard to her property,” which her brother clearly feels should be controlled by him; see *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 66.

While in his treatise *Holy Virginit*y St. Augustine does not concern himself specifically with the question of how virginity is formed and how it may be ascertained, he is very anxious to ensure that virgins do not become overly proud of their state. Several chapters of the treatise emphasize the need for humility, the absence of which will cancel any of the advantages that the virginal state might bestow. Rather than revelling in her undefiled state, the virgin, as the title of one chapter urges, “must consider her hidden defects.”<sup>74</sup> Virginity, then, is not so much the state of being absolutely pure and flawless as the ability to be aware of one’s flaws, whether they are visible to others or not. Although the lack of humility *per se* does not render one non-virginal, there is a great possibility that virginity may be “stolen and destroyed by pride” (102). Virginity, when combined with pride, is incongruous and problematic; it generates difficulties for its interpreters and is therefore easily lost. St. Augustine advises his female readers that they avoid this disruptive combination and bring their “way of life” into “harmony with the virginity [they] profess and preserve,” rendering themselves easily readable in every aspect, including their everyday behaviour and speech: “[t]here are no impudent looks, no wandering eyes, no unbridled tongue, no suggestive laugh, no smutty jokes, no immodest ways, no extravagant or affected walk” (103-4).

This ideal of female virginity is perfectly displayed in one of the virgin martyr narratives with which Ambrose illustrates his treatise – the story of the virgin of Antioch. Although, at least in the beginning, the general outlines of the story seem to correspond

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<sup>74</sup> Saint Augustine, *Holy Virginit*y, in *Marriage and Virginit*y: *The Excellence of Marriage, Holy Virginit*y, *the Excellence of Widowhood, Adulterous Marriages, Continence: The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, v. 9, trans. Ray Kearney, ed., intro, and notes David G. Hunter, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1999), 65-107, esp. 98. All further references are to this edition.

to what one might be led by medieval hagiography to expect, there is also an odd sense that the central figure of the narrative is missing, that she has become, as Maud Burnett McInerney puts it, “very much a store brand rather than a name brand, her identity almost entirely effaced by the function she fulfils.”<sup>75</sup> The reader knows nothing about the girl in question, other than she “avoided being seen in public,” as a good virgin should (376). And yet, paradoxically, it is this obedience to the rules that eventually leads to her martyrdom, for, as Ambrose unselfconsciously explains, “beauty which is heard of but not seen is more desired, there being two incentives to passion, love and knowledge – so long as nothing is met with which pleases less; and that which pleases is thought to be of more worth, because the eye is not in this case the judge of investigation, but the mind inflamed with love is full of longing” (376-7). Ambrose has raised the stakes: this philosophical explanation suggests to the reader that even seclusion is not effective in avoiding male desire. If the virgin cannot be defiled by men’s eyes, against which Tertullian warned, she will be desired and thus defiled by men’s minds. In this model, a virgin is an impossible creature, whose very existence rebels against the structure of the world, and because the main character is given no identity other than this improbable state of body and mind, she has no solid reality, appearing to the reader as a fully formed generic construct and one paragraph later becoming an object of persecution, seemingly through no action of her own.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> She does make known “her intention of preserving her chastity,” but, since from the beginning of the chapter she is given no name other than “virgin,” this announcement does not indicate any sort of a new decision (Ambrose 377).

This hypothetical heroine is a product of the idea, espoused and expostulated in one way or another in the writings I have discussed, that the virginal state cannot exist statically but must be constantly produced by some sort of motion: it is either engaged in laborious sustenance of itself or proceeding along the path to martyrdom. Ambrose's ideal virgin performs the latter while remaining the perfect blank space, which is uncompromised by men's intentions but also void of any desire or action. Although her movement does not appear to be in any way constrained before the day of the trial, she cannot conceive of an escape: her "heroic virtue" consists in bending to the will of the persecutors and neither acquiescing nor refusing. Even when faced with an unsolvable problem of sacrificing to the pagan gods or being sent to a brothel, she reflects on the problem, weeps, and is silent, so that the "adulterer might not even hear her speaking." Ambrose reads this lack of external reaction as a sign of impenetrable virginity and asks the reader rhetorically, "Consider whether it was possible for her to suffer her body to be unchaste, who guarded even her speech" (377). Clearly, the answer must be negative, and so the reader recognizes that what seems like a dilemma is not a dilemma at all. Because the ideal virgin of Antioch refuses to breach her bodily boundaries from the inside by speaking or acting, they cannot be breached from the outside. Furthermore, as Ambrose shows by issuing to his chaste listeners the rhetorical commands to "[c]lose your ears, ye virgins! Virgin of God is taken to a house of shame!" and "now unclosethe your ears, ye virgins! The Virgin of Christ can be exposed to shame, but cannot be contaminated," this story is subject to strict generic constraints imposed by his audience: he cannot allow that the virginal readers be compromised by a story in which a maidenly

body is penetrated (377). This command also neatly encapsulates the effect of physical impenetrability intended by the author; female readers are asked to perform a symbolic act of sealing in response to the threat of textual violence.

There can be no real danger to the virgin of Antioch because she is merely a figment produced by generic convention and seems unable to exert even a minimal influence on the plot. While the audience is invited to listen “to the miracles of the martyr,” the miracle of the narrative, such as it is, happens to the virgin rather than through her: a soldier bursts into her solitary room in the brothel and urges her to exchange outfits, so that she may walk out unnoticed. Indeed, this miraculous moment quickly turns into a didactic occasion, wherein the virgin is taught proper conduct by her male saviour. As the soldier is pressing his clothes on the maiden, he explains that the purpose of the cloak is to “preserve her modesty,” and the cap “will cover [her] hair”; in walking out of the brothel, she must avoid looking back and keep in mind Lot’s wife, “who lost her very nature because she looked back at what was unchaste, though with chaste eyes” (378). In other words, despite the dire circumstances, the girl must correspond to the ideals of the Church Fathers, vigilantly hiding herself from lustful eyes but also exerting strict control over where her eyes are directed, lest her very identity, which does not exist beyond her virginity, be shattered.

Somewhat puzzlingly, the soldier is “condemned for the virgin [...] so not only a virgin but a martyr came forth from the house of ill-fame” (even though she was not, in fact, condemned to death), and the virgin, having escaped, rushes back to the place of his execution (378). This moment, of course, forcefully emphasizes the main character’s

static nature, since there is nothing to prevent her from being re-committed to a brothel, as her protector has been taken into custody.<sup>77</sup> A non-character, the virgin of Antioch is inescapably drawn to the place of the execution. First arguing that she has come back to pay her own debt of blood, she then explains that death is the surest means to maintaining her virginity, for “her chastity is in danger with a virgin” (379). Martyrdom appears in this narrative not so much as a consequence and a demonstration of defending one’s faith and converting others,<sup>78</sup> but as a dependable method of eternally controlling one’s virginity. Howard R. Bloch calls this “a certain inescapable logic of virginity” which “leads syllogistically to the conclusion that the only real virgin – that is, the only true virgin – is a dead virgin.”<sup>79</sup> It is simply the last logical step in the regiment of self-concealment, silence, and strict curtailment of what one may see and hear.

While all of the writers I have discussed insist that they privilege spiritual virginity over the simple physical state, their advice for virgins is still primarily concerned with all things physical – the things that may be perceived and interpreted by an observer. As Kathleen Coyne Kelly puts it, “In sum, for the Church fathers, a medical or magical test of virginity is an operation performed *on* the body; such evidence can never be as legitimate as an operation performed *by* the body through prayer, dress, diet,

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<sup>77</sup> In this logical lapse, the reader is again made aware that Ambrose is telling a generic story *par excellence*, which must proceed in a straight line through events: once one tribulation has been survived, it may not be repeated again.

<sup>78</sup> Although the soldier has indeed converted, this conversion takes place completely behind the scenes, and before he and the virgin of Antioch have met.

<sup>79</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 108.

gesture, or ritual.”<sup>80</sup> Their view of virginity lends itself easily to interpretation in light of the relationship between sexed positions and authority, as it is set out by Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter*. Within the theory of performativity, authority has no continuous existence but is constituted, in each instance, through reference to an “irrecoverable” past, as well as through each individual act of producing sex.<sup>81</sup> Although Butler is here discussing primarily court cases, and thus the figure of authority is a judge, this model may just as well be applied to the Christian rules for living, voiced, in this case, by the Church Fathers, who insist that they simply function as a divinely inspired conduit for the Christian norm. However, as Butler points out, because the original grounding can never be recovered, the figure of authority essentially re-creates the law with every iteration. There is, consequently, no single, solid norm of which the individual must be reminded, no solid sexed position to which she must be returned. Rather, the figure of Christian authority calls for an endless series of performances through which the sexed position is constituted and re-constituted. By this I do not mean to agree with Salih’s assertion that pre-modern virgins belong to a separate sex category. Theoretically speaking, Christian thinkers often described “good” religious women as shedding the undesirable feminine characteristics and taking on various masculine qualities.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 35. Also see her entire first chapter, “Hymenologies: The Multiple Signs of Virginity,” 17-39.

<sup>81</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 108.

<sup>82</sup> See Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), especially chapter 2, “‘Becoming Male’: Women Martyrs and Ascetics,” 53-77; and chapter 1, “Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century,” in Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 19-45. And yet, having said that “virginity was often praised as the great equalizer that enabled a woman to rise above her sex,

However, writings on virginity are still addressed to a female audience, and the behaviour that they are promoting obviously depends on the assumption that it will be adopted by women.

What, then, are virgins being asked to perform if not a disappearing act? With the understanding that escaping their own sex is impossible, they must erase or conceal all characteristics that might announce their femaleness, for each of these characteristics, it seems, carries the threat of provoking desire in men. Time after time, they must repeat acts of physical control so rigid that, in carrying them out to perfection, the virgins would be performing absolute blankness, undefiled by contact with the outside world. While virtuous women have been traditionally compared to astronomical bodies, a perfect virgin is a kind of black hole that has created around itself such a strong boundary that even light cannot escape from it; a perfect virgin, in other words, can be neither observed nor described. However, generally incapable of such fortitude, virgins must perform their desire for it, erasing, over and over, their troubling and disruptive femininity.

One might logically wonder here whether, if sex is not fixed but is rather constantly established and re-established through performance, the performance of it must strictly adhere, in each iteration, to the authorized norm. The answer, of course, is “no.” As Butler says further, “the performative, the call by the law which seeks to produce a lawful subject, produces a set of consequences that exceed and confound what

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giving proof of a virile mind in a feminine body,” Newman is quick to add that “the literature of formation shows that the nun, ‘virile’ or not, was still viewed very much as a woman” (31).

appears to be the disciplining intention.”<sup>83</sup> Although Butler seems to be referring primarily to the direct reaction of the performing subject to the command, I would like to suggest that the textual response to the rules of virginity as outlined by the Church fathers can also be viewed as “a set of consequences.” Reacting to the “disciplining intention,” to the privileging of passive, undefiled virginity, vernacular texts in England retain this focus on virgins – but re-fashion them in a way which would surely alarm the earlier writers, and which does alarm the later ones.

### **Virgin Martyr Comes to England**

Written in the seventh century, Aldhelm’s “De Laude Virginitatis” is, undoubtedly, much indebted to the patristic virginity works: the references in his writing indicate an unusually extensive scope of learning.<sup>84</sup> It is precisely because this indebtedness must be recognized – because he clearly modelled his treatise on the earlier authorities – that the difference between his virgin martyr and the patristic model is especially striking. On the one hand, Aldhelm is far from intending to challenge this model: like the Church fathers before him, he dismisses the purely physical virginity, rebukes the proud, and praises those who live enclosed, far from the world, shunning what he calls “the pursuit of practical living, which we call the active life.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, near the end of his treatise Aldhelm quotes directly from Cyprian’s injunction against the virgins who appear in public and attract attention to themselves and goes on to reproach the women who decorate themselves with expensive cloth and jewellery. However, he is

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<sup>83</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 122.

<sup>84</sup> See Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, “Aldhelm’s Life,” in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 5-10.

<sup>85</sup> Aldhelm, “De Laude Virginitatis,” in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 51-132, esp. 71. All further references are to this text.

quick to specify that his reproach is directed at “the shameless impudence of vanity and the sleek insolence of stupidity” rather than at women’s high visibility in public (127). In fact, as he points out, his words may apply equally well to religious women and men, having, perhaps, specific reference to male ecclesiastics who occupy positions of high authority and prestige.

In other words, having acknowledged the stock sentiments of the patristic writings on women, Aldhelm makes it clear that whatever advice he may give applies to both sexes equally; his presentation and, in some cases, re-working of virgin martyrs’ Lives serves to dispel any lingering expectations of female silence and passivity. In particular, his St. Cecilia certainly exceeds any expectations the reader might have had from the better known versions of her Life. In other versions Cecilia is married to Valerian, albeit unwillingly, and during their first night together convinces him that they should live in a continent, spiritual marriage. However, Aldhelm’s “most holy virgin [...] refused the companionship of a conferred marriage and the betrothal ceremonies of her suitor on the grounds of her chastity, and scorned, despised and rejected them with laudable spiritual fervour, just as the foul excrement of the latrine” (107). Where, one might wonder, has the meek virgin of Ambrose gone, so inward that she would not even allow herself to cry at the brothel, for the fear of being heard? This virgin martyr is extremely vocal about her desires – so vocal, in fact, that she does not even agree to go through the marriage rites and to wait until she can convert her husband privately and, from all appearances, conducts her rebellion very publicly. Although she is not given any direct speech (as very few of Aldhelm’s figures are), the comparison of marriage to a

piece of shit is easily imaginable as an exclamation and placed in such a way in the sentence as to seem to refer to her “laudable spiritual fervour.” This *modus operandi*, quite literally, works wonders. The more usual, less aggressive Cecilia has to threaten her new husband with death to protect her chastity, speaking of the invisible angel standing above him with a sword. This Cecilia is so impressive in her steadfast refusal that she manages to convert the groom and his brother on the spot, simply by her own example, and then is able to bestow a revelation on them: “when they were reborn through the baptismal font she *made* them visibly enjoy an angelic presence” (107, italics mine).<sup>86</sup>

While in describing the martyrdom of Christina of Bolsena Aldhelm keeps to the original events, he presents her as struggling bravely, as if in a martial endeavour, rather than passively suffering the persecution. In fact, the tortures are only described through Aldhelm’s explanation that none of them had any effect:

Nevertheless, the (young) mind devoted to God did not shrink from the stinking filth of the dungeon; nor did it fear the rock tied to her neck and immersed in the waves of the sea; nor did it weaken when sticks were cruelly flogging her tender limbs; nor did the disfigurement of her pretty head, even though her golden hair was shaved off and she was dragged shorn in public, influence the state of her mind; nor did the girl show amazement at the torrid flames of the furnace, which equalled the ovens of the Chaldaean tyrant, or tremble with fright at the poisonous bites of asps, which sorcerers aroused with chants of incantation: rather, with Christ offering his protection, she happily overcame all these things, keeping safe the treasure of her virginity. (114)

Like a protagonist of martial poetry, Christina is fearless and dismissive of pain; she weathers every trial and remains in the possession of her treasure. Although this is very

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<sup>86</sup> This is an important detail, since usually the appearance of the angel is presented as being enabled by the very action of baptism, which is carried out by the male officials – Pope Urban or other priests.

much a male role, Christina comes to occupy it as a woman: Aldhelm points to her pretty head and golden hair, suggesting that the loss of the visible feminine attributes is potentially no less terrible to her than the rest of the tortures.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, her integrity is not in any way compromised by this – pointedly public – exposure, even as her last covering, her golden hair, is taken away.

And so, the message that Aldhelm imparts to his audience of “the most reverend virgins of Christ” at the Barking monastery is double-edged (59). On the one hand, he certainly seeks to compliment the nuns by praising their chosen style of life – virginal, contemplative, and far from worldly concerns. On the other hand, however, he compliments them perhaps even more by introducing into the Lives of Cecilia and Christina, among others, elements of a warrior story: this is again emphasized at the end of the treatise, when, bringing it to a close, Aldhelm addresses his audience as “soldiers of Christ” (131). This is perhaps a conventional enough address, but it acquires especial significance when considered in the light of the earlier stories of holy virgins. Ambrose’s virgin literally needed a soldier to burst into the scene and rescue her from her predicament; Aldhelm’s virgins, real and imaginary, are themselves soldiers, and are capable of overcoming adversity and triumphing over their enemies. Of course, it would be excessive to say that Aldhelm intended to promote the ideals of strong, liberated womanhood; his rhetoric is probably influenced, to a great extent, by the Anglo-Saxon epic, in which the protagonist is always a warrior. Cynewulf’s poem *Juliana*, for

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<sup>87</sup> This stands in interesting contrast to the early medieval much-lauded practice of self-mutilation (or self-requested mutilation) in order to avoid sexual assault or even unwanted marriage which Jane Tibbets Schulenburg described in “The Heroics of Virginité: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation,” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 29-72.

example, featured St. Juliana of Nicodemia who acts like “a brave warrior of God” (*modigne metodes cempan*)<sup>88</sup> in a struggle against an evil warrior leader (*hererinc*) (l. 189). As the wording of this version indicates, the conduct of the heroine is here partly due to the merging of the genres, with the saint’s Life filtering through the vocabulary and concerns of a warrior epic.<sup>89</sup>

On the other hand, Aldhelm’s decision to place the female saints squarely in the protagonist role throughout the treatise and view the conflict through their eyes is wholly his. As a very early predecessor of the vernacular legends of the late middle ages, Aldhelm’s treatment of the legends illustrates the changes the holy virgin figure had undergone as it travelled into England. It also establishes a precedent for portraying this figure as powerful, pugnacious, and undaunted by the perspective of high visibility. This precedent does not need to have direct influence on the thirteenth-century texts, but, through its position among the available body of pre-Conquest texts, it does offer to the late medieval hagiographers a useful model for constructing their own heroines.

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<sup>88</sup> *Juliana*, in *Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Three Fighting Saints*, ed. and trans. Marie Nelson (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 53-95, l. 383. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>89</sup> When the villains perish at the end of the poem, the author explains that they will not find themselves in Heaven in a language that might seem more suitable in heroic literature of the Germanic tradition: “They would not receive rings in that wine-hall, / be given gold over the mead-bench” (ll. 686-8). See also Jill Frederick, “Warring with Words: Cynewulf’s Juliana,” in *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, ed. David F. Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 60-74, esp. 64-70, for a more detailed discussion of the Anglo-Saxon themes and motives in Cynewulf’s *Juliana*. In the Old English version, as Rosemary Woolf, and, more recently Jill Frederick, note, the emphasis is on the overarching (“cosmic,” as Frederick puts it) battle between good and evil. See Woolf’s introduction to *Cynewulf’s Juliana* (London: Methuen, 1955), 1-19, esp. 15, and Frederick, “Warring with Words: Cynewulf’s Juliana,” 63. In the same vein, Joseph Wittig sees Cynewulf’s Juliana as a Christ figure; see “Figural Narrative in Cynewulf’s *Juliana*,” in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 147-69.

**“Maidens ssolde be[o] fol of milce and ore”: The Virgin Martyr’s Two Bodies**

Addressing a broad audience throughout England, the medieval writers of vernacular saints’ Lives drew extensively on the contemporary devotional practices, seeking to render the heroines easily recognizable to their audiences. Gail McMurray Gibson points at the “ever-growing tendency to transform the abstract and theological to the personal and concrete.”<sup>90</sup> While Gibson’s argument focuses on the fourteenth and especially fifteenth centuries, the genre of vernacular hagiography, developing throughout the thirteenth century, fully manifests this tendency, emphasizing not only abstract devotion but also the virgin martyr as a concrete, individualized female character. The virgin martyr produced in these hagiographical works, then, allows for an exploration of various modes of femininity, opening up the possibility that a woman can resist social pressure and violent persuasion while remaining fully rooted in her physical, female body.

I do not mean to argue that the authors of the thirteenth-century virginal martyr narratives specifically intended to produce a model of a strong, outspoken woman. As various scholars have pointed out, there are a plethora of other, more urgent goals medieval hagiographers were likely pursuing, and some of these goals lie in direct opposition to any sort of women-oriented debate. Karen Winstead suggests, convincingly, that “portrayals of the saints as zealous critics of the state became popular because they served the professional interests of a clerical elite which was anxious to preserve its authority over an increasingly informed lay public and which promoted the

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<sup>90</sup> Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 7.

martyrs as emblems of ecclesiastical prerogative.”<sup>91</sup> This view is supported by Robert Mills, who argues that “the martyr’s sublime body, an object taken beyond the limits of sentience, constructs a framework for the substantiation – the making alive – of an abstract institution such as the Church.”<sup>92</sup> In this model, the martyr’s “sublime body” becomes primarily an “an outstanding resource for the ideological materialisation of Christendom.”<sup>93</sup> Developing a similar line of thought, Kathleen Coyne Kelly employs a term “useful virgin” who can best act as the representation of the Church “when she is lifted out of her historical moment”<sup>94</sup> – when her individual, physical body is erased, and “only the abstract idea remains, transcending and transmuting the historical moment into a universalizing, identificatory experience.”<sup>95</sup> To a certain extent, this is a reiteration of the Church Fathers’ construction of perfect virginity as a blank space, separated from individual desire and even from the physical body and its concerns. According to Bloch, this construction makes its way wholesale into the late Middle Ages and intensely shapes the authorial depiction of virginity.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Mills, “Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief,” in *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography*, ed. Sarah Salih (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 87-103, esp. 93. He borrows the concept of the martyr’s “sublime body” from Sarah Kay’s article “The Sublime Body of the Martyr: Violence in Early Romance Saints’ Lives,” in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard W. Kaeuper (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), 3-20.

<sup>93</sup> Mills, “Violence, Community and the Materialisation of Belief,” 94. See also Ruth Evans, “The Jew, The Host and the Virgin Martyr: Fantasies of the Sentient Body,” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 166-86.

<sup>94</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, “Useful Virgins in Medieval Hagiography,” in *Constructing Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 135-164, esp. 139.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>96</sup> R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, see chapter 4, “The Poetics of Virginity,” 93-112.

It seems to me, however, that the argument concerning these “useful” or “pure Idea”<sup>97</sup> virgins in the Middle Ages may be developed further in light of the sizable body of hagiographical texts, and specifically the vernacular texts produced in the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, of which the *SEL* is one. Virgin martyrs certainly do function as the representation of the ecclesiastic struggle in the secular world, but there is no reason to limit the effect of these Lives to this particular function; surely a virgin can be “useful” in more than one way. As Winstead points out, the intention of the author need not always correspond to that of the reader and “these legends of rebellion and defiance lent themselves to interpretations that their authors probably did not anticipate or approve.”<sup>98</sup> It is possible that the ecclesiastical writers of the thirteenth-century hagiographical texts were, in fact, interested in postulating a pure, sublime, ahistorical body of the martyr. However, in practice their ideas of virginity were closely tied to the prescriptions set out, for example, in the *Ancrene Wisse*, a manual for anchorites, which conceives of virginity as a set of very physical activities in which the female reader must be continually engaged. Although no one can call the *Ancrene Wisse* a proto-feminist text, it nonetheless constitutes an important departure from the Church Fathers’ view of the feminine body, which conceived of virginal practices very vaguely, and more in terms of avoidance than participation. The *Ancrene Wisse*, on the other hand, locates virginity firmly in the physical body and in the activities and processes

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<sup>97</sup> Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 112.

<sup>98</sup> Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 14-5.

associated with it.<sup>99</sup> This interest in the worldly and the physical also more generally characterizes thirteenth-century vernacular hagiography, which emphasizes the presence, rather than the absence, of the individuated virgin martyr.<sup>100</sup>

This model may be called, by analogy with Ernst H. Kantorowicz's famous theory of medieval political theology,<sup>101</sup> "the virgin martyr's two bodies": the spiritual, unmoored from the secular world body for which she strives, and the very physical, mortal body which she will eventually shed but which is of crucial significance for the hagiographical narrative at hand. Some scholars have placed into doubt the usefulness of the heroines of the saints' Lives for the female audience, arguing that the shaping of their textual bodies forecloses the possibility of imitation. Salih argues that the virgin martyrs "evade misogynist condemnation by ceasing to be women".<sup>102</sup> As she suggests in an earlier article, they should be viewed as members of a separate gender,<sup>103</sup> always threatened with a collapse back into the category of women.<sup>104</sup> This model renders the

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<sup>99</sup> By this, I do not mean to say that the *Ancrene Wisse* sees virginity as *only* physical. However, just like *Holi Maidhead*, it takes pains to consider, in great detail, the *minutiae* of existing physically in this world.

<sup>100</sup> In *Eloquent Virgins*, Maud Burnett McInerney contrasts the vernacular texts with Jacobus de Voragine's versions, pointing to his "elimination of so many potential models for feminine sanctity" (193).

<sup>101</sup> See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

<sup>102</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 63.

<sup>103</sup> In Butler's definition of gender as something that must be continuously performed and is therefore unstable.

<sup>104</sup> Sarah Salih, "Performing Virginity: Sex and Violence in the *Katherine* Group," *Constructing Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 95-112, esp. 109. Nikki Stiller makes the same point, suggesting that the virgin martyr must imitate her father in order to hold her own against persecution; see *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980, Contributions in Women's Studies, no. 16), esp. chapter 2, "Life with Father: The Iron Dowry," 15-37. Allen J. Frantzen examines the instances of female saints temporarily gaining male appearance (for example, through transvestism) and argues that St. Agatha's loss of breasts in the course of her martyrdom is a sign of transcending her female body; see "When Women Aren't Enough," in *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, ed. Nancy F. Partner (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1993), 143-169.

saints by definition inimitable, since in emulating them, theoretically, the female audience member would cease belonging to the category of females.

It seems to me, however, that in making her argument about hagiographical texts, Salih limits her scope by drawing too extensively on theological treatises, especially those written in late antiquity. Her analysis can be extended through an exploration of texts intended for a wider, generally less sophisticated audience. While it is not unusual for exemplary women to have been praised for having exceeded the narrow boundaries of their sex, this praise is infrequently reiterated and sometimes directly counteracted in the thirteenth-century vernacular collections. So, in the *SEL* Life of St. Margaret, another abused devil bewails his downfall by specifically pointing to his captor's sex: "Alas þat a tender maide . me ssel þus ouercome" (Alas that a young/delicate maiden could overpower me in this way).<sup>105</sup> Lest this remark be misinterpreted as a reference to Margaret's virginal state alone, the devil clarifies that he would not be so devastated by the situation if the opponent were "a man of eni strengþe" (a man of any strength at all), but having been brought down by a mere maiden, he is bitterly ashamed (ll. 187-8). There is no indication that Margaret, in spite of her formidable spiritual strength, might be taken for a man. Rather, the devil is complaining, in contrasting her with the hypothetical strong man, that if that were the case, the defeat might not be so bitter. Still, even in his bitterness, the devil makes a case for his release based on the fact that St.

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<sup>105</sup> "De Sancta Margareta," in *South English Legendary*, v. 1, 291-302, l. 186. All further references are to this text.

Margaret is, in fact, a delicate maid, urging her to “þench þat maidens ssolde be[o] · fol of milce and ore” (remember that maidens should be full of mercy and pity) (l. 229).<sup>106</sup>

There is, then, no doubt that Margaret is very much a woman, albeit one who is capable of behaving in an unusual manner.<sup>107</sup> The devil’s injunction to her only serves to remind the readers that she is a virgin who refuses to follow the patristic rules of conduct. Indeed, his remark might have been lifted directly from one of the Church Fathers’ treatises and it rings oddly in the infernal mouth. In fact, it parallels an earlier exhortation from Olibrius, the unsuccessful suitor of the saint, that she “bicom[e] [...] fair & swete” (become ... agreeable/pleasing and sweet) (l. 75). The message is clear: the attempt to restrain and limit Margaret’s performance of virginity is ascribed to the villains, whose speech is driven by their personal interest rather than considerations of Christian propriety. In effect, this version of St. Margaret’s Life stages a situation that hardly could have seemed unusual to the female audience – a woman being instructed in conduct proper to her gender by masculine figures who claim to be in a position of authority. To remain a holy virgin, she must ignore their attempts at instruction and persist in her aggressive and challenging behaviour: only then is she secure in her

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<sup>106</sup> Even after her death, St. Margaret remains closely connected to the feminine gender, having begged God to aid any woman that calls her during labour and preserve both the mother and the child (ll. 283-7). Oddly enough, even some feminist critics join forces with the devil and the pagan persecutors, attempting to force the saint into rigidly defined boundaries of womanhood. So, Stiller argues that the virgin martyr must “renounce her female identity – the possibility of bearing children” (*Eve’s Orphans* 23). While she identifies a valid dilemma for a medieval woman, surely the female identity cannot be reduced to a single physical function.

<sup>107</sup> As Katherine J. Lewis notes, “Margaret does not have to negate her femininity to fight for Christ, rather she draws strength from it” in “The Life of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England: A Gendered Reading,” in *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 Meeting and the 1997 Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. R.N. Swanson (New York: The Boydell Press, 1998), 129-42. Throughout the article, Lewis traces the way in which medieval versions of St. Margaret’s *vita* promote female learning and teaching.

virginity, which, after her death, will be preserved for all eternity.<sup>108</sup> As Karen Winstead notes, by “associating ‘dangerous’ traits with indisputably ‘good’ women, these texts called into question traditional formulations about gender” and “seem to authorize dissent from patriarchal definition of acceptable conduct for women.”<sup>109</sup>

It is through such references to the patristic set of rules that the hagiographical texts of the thirteenth century produce, in a Butlerian sense, “a set of consequences that exceed and confound what appears to be the disciplining intention.”<sup>110</sup> Without directly contradicting the ideals of virginity, the *Life of St. Margaret*, in fact, reproduces them faithfully – through its pagan and demonic persecutors; and so, instead of shaping the heroine, the patristic set of rules is itself placed into question. Commanded to control herself, the virgin martyr exhibits her ability to maintain such control even in defiance of the original command. So, Margaret appears to follow the Church Fathers’ injunction to abandon all care for physical attractiveness when she ignores Olibrius’s admonition to “[h]ave reuþe of [her] faire bodi” (take pity on [her] beautiful body) (l. 132). However, as the narrative proceeds, it becomes clear that her seeming obedience is slowly transformed into open flouting of the social norm. The virgin publicly performs

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<sup>108</sup> See Maud Burnett McInerney’s “Rhetoric, Power, and Integrity in the Passion of the Virgin Martyr” on the virgin martyr’s rhetorical power as a response to the patristic fathers, in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 50-70. Although Theodora Jankowski argues that her concept of a “queer virgin” – a woman who does not participate in the patriarchal sexual economy while possessing an unusual influence on the world around her – is not useful for medieval nuns, of whom virginity is expected, it seems to me to be highly appropriate for these hagiographical virgins. For Jankowski’s entire argument, see her *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

<sup>109</sup> Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 108. At the same time, she suggests that these legends “complement the antifeminist messages of [...] popular texts, for they demonstrate that *all* women, even chaste saints, are aggressive and destructive” (107).

<sup>110</sup> Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 122.

disregard for her own physical attractiveness and even physical wholeness (endangered by the fragmentation of torture), unconcerned, unlike Ambrose's virgin of Antioch, either for her reputation or her integrity.

This dynamic between the saint and the devil strongly argues against the view, expressed by some feminist scholars, that virgin martyr *vitae* primarily aimed to produce a quasi-erotic spectacle for the male audience, with helpless young women as abject and desired objects rather than subjects negotiating, among other things, their gender identity.<sup>111</sup> In Kathryn Gravdal's argument the space for female heroism is opened up solely through resisting seduction and avoiding rape.<sup>112</sup> For this angle, Gravdal argues, we must thank the male hagiographers, for whom "[h]agiography affords a sanctioned space in which eroticism can flourish and in which male voyeurism becomes licit, if not advocated."<sup>113</sup> This concern with rape is picked up by Catherine Innes-Parker, who describes the saints' Lives of the Katherine Group as "a script for the worst kind of pornographic film" and a "degradation of female sexuality."<sup>114</sup> In order to support this description, Innes-Parker views every instance of torture or physical threat, whether it comes from a human character or a supernatural entity, as a clear example of "a sexual attack, symbolic of the rape" that cannot be attained within the context of a saint's Life

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<sup>111</sup> See, among others, Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), and Beth Crachiolo, "Seeing the Gendering of Violence: Female and Male Martyrs in the *South English Legendary*," in *'A Great Effusion of Blood': Interpreting Medieval Violence*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thierry, and Oren Falk (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004), 147-63, esp. 156, 161.

<sup>112</sup> Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>114</sup> Catherine Innes-Parker, "Sexual Violence and the Female Reader: Symbolic 'Rape' in the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group," *Women's Studies* 24.3 (1995): 205-18, esp. 205. All further references are to this article.

(207). Moreover, while Innes-Parker then moves on to argue that these Lives can, after all, be redeemed for a female reader – that they ultimately emphasize feminine authority and empowerment and “provide women with models of resistance to male authority,” this conclusion is strictly contained in the narrow terms of the anchoritic audience (214). Although Innes-Parker’s article ends with an assertion that, for the female anchoritic reader, the virgin saint affirms her choice of life, the first half of it strongly suggests that enclosed chastity is not a choice at all, made as it is in response to incessant, exhausting sexual threat from all quarters (214).

This view of female saints’ Lives is unsettling in its privileging of the torturers’ perspective. If we accept that the saints are, through much of the narrative, vulnerable to the threat of sexual violence and set on display as helpless female bodies, then our choice as readers is, as Kelly puts it, between “voyeurs or victims.”<sup>115</sup> The most the female reader can do to avoid victimhood is, as Innes-Parker’s article implies, conceal herself in an anchorite’s cell, where her chastity will be safe from the eyes and various members of the male sex. Yet even that is problematic: while these Lives “provide specifically feminine models of spiritual triumph over the devil,” they also emphasize the limitations and concerns associated with women – strong connection to the matters of the flesh, weakness, dependence, fear of isolation, and susceptibility to temptation.<sup>116</sup> From this

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<sup>115</sup> Kathleen Coyne Kelly, “Useful Virgins in Medieval Hagiography,” 156.

<sup>116</sup> Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 97-8. This argument is enabled by drastic simplification: Robertson claims that in the Lives of women saints, “sexual temptation was either the saint’s sole or her central temptation” (40). A most cursory glance at thirteenth-century hagiographical texts confirms that this is far from the truth. For an application of Robertson’s model to women readers and writers in the Middle Ages, see also her “Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian

critical position, virgin martyrs model and reinforce feminine fragility, which can be partially rectified only through union with Christ, with the caveat that such union is understood not as a choice of spiritual position – a choice that is independently made and must be protected at all costs – but as a complete surrender of all faculties, subvented by a woman’s natural dependence on masculine figures.<sup>117</sup>

And yet, such a reading of the early English virgin martyr Lives reduces the virgin martyr to her physical, female body, denying her, and thus the audience, the experience of spiritual transcendence, which, after all, is the avowed goal of hagiographical texts. As Julia Hassel puts it, “[t]he autonomy of these martyrs is inescapable.”<sup>118</sup> In deliberately ignoring such a major aspect of the narrative, the “pornographic” readings are simplistic and fail to distinguish between the conflicting discourses contained within a single narrative. Salih has shown persuasively in her analysis of the thirteenth-century Katherine Group that these texts are highly aware of genre demands and constraints. While the virgins are capable of reading easily across genres, recognizing the romance model followed by the pagans but also understanding that the true genre of the story is hagiography, the pagans fall short in their continuing attempts to treat the saint as a damsel in distress.<sup>119</sup> In reading with the virgins, the audience is, in essence, freed from the romanticized entanglement of physical desire and

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of Norwich’s *Showings*,” in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 142-67.

<sup>117</sup> Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience*, 96.

<sup>118</sup> Julie Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 53.

<sup>119</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginit*y, chapter 3, “Performing Virginity: The Katherine Group.” Hassel offers a similar reading of this Life in *Choosing Not to Marry: Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group*, 70-74. See also Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture c. 1150-1300: Virginit*y and Its Authorizations (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90-117.

enabled to resist the seduction of the pagan point of view.<sup>120</sup> Using a similar strategy, *Hali Maiðhad*, also part of the Katherine Group, encourages its female audience to read married life critically, with an eye to the greater truth offered by the role of a professional virgin.

The virgin martyrs, then, occupy the position of the perfect reader: aware of all possible interpretations, but also capable of manipulating them and defending the chosen one successfully before the pagan audience. Certainly St. Margaret indicates her ability to read two worlds at the same time, the ability that is predicated on the distinction between her physical and spiritual existence. While she acknowledges, with some irony and in words that seem to support the “pornographic” interpretation, that Olibrius has “poer of [her] body · forto do [his] wille” (power over [her] body, to carry out [his] will on it), she then goes on to say that, however he tries, he cannot do to her soul “anuye worþ a uille” (harm/annoyance of even slightest consequence) (ll. 144-46). Having asserted her spiritual invulnerability and superiority, Margaret is then able to emerge victorious, having literally burst free from a constraining draconian form, defeated the devil in physical combat, converted five thousand people into Christianity (64),<sup>121</sup> and gained the status of an influential intercessor for others. In fact, her longest speech comes at the end of the *Life* to assert her spiritual powers, on which the readers of her *vita* may draw after having vicariously participated in her martyrdom – not as pagan torturers but

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<sup>120</sup> See also Margherita on Juliana’s dominant gaze and rhetoric (*The Romance of Origins*, 49-54).

<sup>121</sup> The conversion, it seems, is predicated particularly on the stunning contrast between the two planes of Margaret’s existence, which becomes obvious to the spectators as she steps out of the boiling, seething water. Struck by wonder that “enyþing in such torment · aliue mi3te be[o]” (that anything might remain alive through such an ordeal), the spectators grasp the multiplicity of readings and promptly become involved in the saint’s experience of martyrdom: clearly, a virgin martyr’s narrative offers positions beyond the dichotomy of “voyeur/victim” suggested by Kelly (l. 254).

as astonished converts and future humble petitioners. Firmly rooted in her physical, female body, the saint must deal with all the disruptions and emerging choices that come with it, but it is also clear that these trials and choices are directed toward producing a powerful, invulnerable spiritual form.

### **The Portrait of the Martyr as a Young Woman: St. Juliana of Nicomedia**

To show the way in which a close focus on the virgin martyr's gendered, physical body works to produce a heroine endowed with spiritual strength and authority, I would like to return to St. Juliana and examine the version of her Life contained in the *SEL*. This story seems to have been of particular interest for those writing in the vernacular in the Middle Ages: it is the subject of a lengthy poem by Cynewulf and one of the three saints' Lives that compose the Katherine Group. The *Hali Maiðhad*, a text clearly directed outside of an anchoritic readership, suggests St. Juliana as the model for contemplation and emulation and mentions her on a par with such popular virgin martyrs as Sts. Katherine, Margaret, and Cecilia.<sup>122</sup> While much scholarship has been devoted to the study of the Cynewulf and the Katherine Group texts, the *SEL* Juliana remains relatively unnoticed; however, it is this version that, judging by the great number of the *SEL* manuscripts still surviving, was most widely known in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In keeping with the rest of the *Legendary*, this *vita* is solidly grounded in the concerns a contemporary maiden might encounter: Juliana is a girl of marriageable age, who must evaluate both the appropriateness of her prospective husband and the various modes of conduct open to her. In carrying out these evaluations, the heroine emerges as

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<sup>122</sup> "Holy Virginity [Hali Maiðhad]," in *Middle English Religious Prose*, ed. Norman Francis Blake (London: Edward Arnold, 1972), 35-60, esp. 59.

an assertive woman, whose opinion is sought and who is able to defend it by force: as such, she is presented as a strong model for emulation to the female reader, whether she is contemplating marriage or cloister.

Early in this chapter, I discussed a somewhat earlier Katherine Group version and noted the very personal experience of martyrdom described by that Life. As Hassel has argued, this Juliana assumes authority through her power over language: “she renders the clerical language of sacred texts into the vernacular, enabling the understanding of a wider audience, one that included women.”<sup>123</sup> The Katherine Group Juliana’s role as a translator and a preacher is well suited to her projected readership of consecrated virgins, dedicated to Christian learning and, quite possibly, to some form of teaching.<sup>124</sup> The *SEL*, on the other hand, was meant to reach – and did reach – a much broader audience: the great number of manuscripts that survive to the present day attest to the extent of its popularity.<sup>125</sup> Intended as a calendar collection of religious poems (primarily saints’ Lives), which are ordered so as to correspond to the feasts and celebrations of the Church year, this *Legendary* served the function of delivering the pertinent information to a broad audience in an accessible form. Its emphases and concerns, therefore, are largely directed by this purpose: this engagement with the everyday is, in fact, the thrust of Anne B. Thompson’s entire book *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South*

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<sup>123</sup> Hassel, *Choosing Not to Marry*, 78.

<sup>124</sup> Hassel argues that the audience of the Katherine Group texts might have been composed not only of anchorites but also of those unmarried women who have chosen to stay in their own households as consecrated virgins (32).

<sup>125</sup> Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary* (Leeds: School of English, University of Leeds, 1974), 1.

*English Legendary*.<sup>126</sup> Although Thompson deliberately excludes virgin martyrs from her analysis, seeking to distinguish sharply between the subversive potential offered by these tales and by the stories of the less “glamorous” heroines, her distinction seems to me to limit the accessibility of the virgin martyrs to the female reader, as they are banned from the realm of day-to-day routines.<sup>127</sup> As I will show, the Lives of the virgin martyrs cannot be separated from the overall purposes and tendencies of the collection: claiming to narrate the hoary past, they nonetheless are firmly situated in the present moment.

This close focus on the historical moment and the secular concerns of its English audience is partly enabled by the *SEL*'s surprising lack of external influences in its composition: as Manfred Görlach has shown throughout his studies, while the *Legenda Aurea* has been assumed, by some historians, to have been the main source for the composition of the *SEL*, its impact has been exaggerated. In fact, as Görlach concludes, the author of the *Legendary* probably did not gain access to the *Legenda Aurea* until he was halfway through the composition, or even finished with it; he then used the new source to revise and/or to finish his text.<sup>128</sup> Whatever the case might be, the Life of St. Juliana, located as it is in the first half of the *Legendary*, is most likely not based on de Voragine's text, although some borrowing of material might have occurred in the course

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<sup>126</sup> Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2003).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>128</sup> Manfred Görlach, “The *Legenda Aurea* and the Early History of the *South English Legendary*,” in *Legenda Aurea: sept siècles de diffusion. Actes du Colloque international sur la Legenda Aurea: texte et branches vernaculaires à l'Université à Montréal, 11-12 mai 1983*, ed. Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1986, Cahiers d'études médiévales, Cahier special 2), 301-313.

of a later revision.<sup>129</sup> However, the *SEL* author's treatment of his source material is far from mechanical: rather, it is strictly motivated by the considerations of accessibility and relevancy; as Klaus P. Jankofsky has put it, the processes that material undergoes as it is being adapted and incorporated into the *SEL* are, among others, concretization and acculturation.<sup>130</sup> Following along the lines of the same argument, O.S. Pickering has made a convincing case for a talented reviser, the so-called "outspoken poet," who wrote with a particular emphasis on a direct connection with his audience and "imaginative sympathy with individuals."<sup>131</sup> Pickering contends that this reviser displayed consistent disapproval toward mistreatment of women and, more likely than not, had a hand in the *Life of St. Juliana*.<sup>132</sup>

This *Life*, then, is of particular interest for this study since it is part of a collection distinguished by its investment in the vernacular refashioning of narratives for a broad audience, and has almost certainly been written or revised by a person with an interest in the position of women. Analyzing it in the context of the two earlier vernacular narratives, and de Voragine's Latin version, referenced by the later writers as the authoritative text, highlights the changes and additions introduced by the anonymous writer into his version to increase the autonomy and personal presence of the virgin

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 306. While the *SEL* author might have had access to the Latin version of *Acta Sanctorum*, which was earlier available to Cynewulf, it would not have offered him a model for any of these concerns. The Latin text is quite impersonal and ahistorical; for comparison, see *The Legend of St. Juliana: Translated from the Latin of the Acta Sanctorum and the Anglo-Saxon of Cynewulf*, ed. Charles William Kennedy (Princeton: The University Library, 1906).

<sup>130</sup> Klaus P. Jankofsky, "Legenda Aurea Materials in *The South English Legendary*: Translation, Transformation, Acculturation," in *Legenda Aurea: sept siècles de diffusion*, 317-329, esp. 320.

<sup>131</sup> O.S. Pickering, "The Outspoken *South English Legendary* Poet," in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A.I. Doyle*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 21-37, esp. 23.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 32-3.

martyr. The specific alterations in the presentation of the heroine show that she is perfectly positioned to argue that the female body and gender concerns are not in opposition to spiritual considerations but, rather, are closely interconnected.

The *SEL* Life of St. Juliana is unique in that it begins by presenting the saint as playing an important part in her own marital arrangements, whereas other versions, both Latin and vernacular, show her resisting the arrangements that have already been made. So, the Katherine Group *Liflade* shows love-struck Eleusius dealing directly with the maiden's father and concludes philosophically: "Ha wes him sone ihondsald, þah hit hire unwil were" [She was soon betrothed unto him, although it was not her will].<sup>133</sup> Jacob de Voragine simply presents the marital arrangements as preceding the action of the narrative; his Life of St. Juliana begins by stating: "Juliana was betrothed to Eulogius, the prefect of Nicomedia..."<sup>134</sup> The *SEL* version does show the suitor Elyse having a preliminary talk with Juliana's parents, in order to ensure that they have nothing against his designs: "Wiþ hure uader & moder he spak · so þat hi were at on" [He spoke with her father and mother, so that they would be of the same mind].<sup>135</sup> However, there is no sense that any sort of firm arrangement is made at that point. Not only does her father not act as an intercessor in this case, but Elyse personally sets out to make his intentions known to his prospective wife, although it is clear from the wording that he does not expect a rejection: he "wende habbe is wille anon" [set out with the intention of fulfilling his desire soon] (l. 8). Nonetheless, a space is opened up in the narrative for the heroine's

<sup>133</sup> *Þe Liflade ant Te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*, 7. Although the Old English *Juliana* does not specify an official betrothal, it explains that her father Africanus has accepted the suitor and promised his daughter in marriage.

<sup>134</sup> De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 160.

<sup>135</sup> "De Sancta Iuliana Virgine," in *South English Legendary*, l.7. All further references are to this edition.

participation in the negotiations – a space into which she moves immediately and enthusiastically, presenting her suitor with two consecutive conditions that must be fulfilled in order for her to agree to the marriage. In the best romance tradition, Juliana demands first that Elyse move to a position of more power in the political hierarchy, and then that he convert to Christianity.

This is where the *SEL* text differs drastically from the other versions with which it may have historical connections: the two conditions – and especially the second one – are not presented as impossible feats that act as a barrier between the pagan suitor and the female saint, dead set on her virginity. The two other vernacular versions both specify that Juliana is determined to remain virginal and therefore any negotiations into which she might enter are no more than a roundabout refusal. The Old English *Juliana* makes her conversion demand knowing that it will never be satisfied, as her suitor will refuse to give up his worldly acquisitions and pagan beliefs.<sup>136</sup> The Katherine Group *Juliana*, after the first condition is satisfied, sends the following message to the hapless suitor: “For nawt þu hauest iswenchet te” [you have exerted yourself for nothing].<sup>137</sup> Even though the message continues with a promise of marriage if he converts, the tone is clear, and both Eleusius and Juliana’s father understand these words as a firm refusal. In de Voragine’s truncated version, Juliana does not seem to be specifically opposed to the idea of marriage *per se* but simply insists that her suitor convert: the emphasis there is, thus, on the superiority of Christian faith and the necessity for its acceptance, rather than on the maiden’s personal dilemma.

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<sup>136</sup> *Juliana*, ed. Nelson. ll. 44-5.

<sup>137</sup> *Pe Liflade ant Te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*, 9.

The *SEL* Juliana also does not seem to be opposed to the idea of marriage; although she is described as “þis holi maide” very early in the text, this seems to be more of a conventional term, informed by the author’s knowledge of how the story ends (l. 8). There is no sense in this narrative that the conditions set for the suitor are meant merely to hinder the marital arrangements; rather, they are logically substantiated and form a comprehensive argument, in which marriage and conversion are closely tied together. In the Katherine Group version, Juliana requests specifically that her suitor be made second-in-command to the emperor, hoping, perhaps, that the exactness of this request will in itself act as a deterrent. While this is precisely the position that Elyse comes to occupy in the *SEL* text, Juliana had not specified it; instead, she told him that, in order to be of any use to her, he needs to be a “man of more poer” [a man of more power] (ll. 9-10). This condition lends itself much more readily to interpretation and thus, through the variance of interpretation, indicates very clearly the differences in Elyse’s and Juliana’s perceptions. For Elyse, fulfilling this condition means moving as high as possible on the political ladder and occupying the position where he can “do & hote wat he wolde” [to do and command whatever he wants] (l. 14), but for Juliana it is logically tied to the power inherent in the Christian faith, which, without question, supersedes Elyse’s new political authority.

The first condition, then, acts as a preamble to the real barrier to their marriage, which is the difference of beliefs and the worldviews associated with these beliefs. Rather than belittle her prospective husband’s pagan practices, Juliana explains that the disparity in religious practices might lead to future disagreements in their relationship,

“Bote we be[o] of one lawe · hou mowe we be[o] o one rede” [unless we belong to the same religion, how must we be of the same mind?] (l. 18). In other words, quite unlike the other versions of this Life, the *SEL* text does not (at least at this point) emphasize the condemnation of the suitor’s own religious beliefs but rather points to the proverbial wisdom of the husband and wife merging together. Is this possible, the narrative asks, that spouses agree if their referential systems are radically different? The answer to that is, of course, “no.” In fact, Juliana’s second condition seems designed to show to her audience that the divide is so deep that Elyse cannot even comprehend his failure to fulfil the first one: unprepared for Juliana’s Christian priorities, he is unable to think outside of the political hierarchy of Nicomedia. This narrative, then, presents Juliana as an active participant in her own marital negotiations, carefully considering the possibility of a union with Elyse. The union must not take place not because of ideological considerations (although these, of course, must be understood to be present), but because Elyse has become ineligible as a suitor – and thus as a prospective husband – in failing to satisfy, within the context of Juliana’s religious beliefs, either of the conditions.

This evaluation of Elyse as a suitor is, then, logically connected with Juliana’s encounter with the devil, during which she is evaluated as a maiden and judged problematic. Much as in the story of St. Margaret, the devil attempts to constrain the heroine by forcing unto her the traditional rules of conduct and complains, “[N]ertou corteis & hende / Pench þat maidens ssolde milde be[o] · & bring me of þis bende / War is þe kunde of þi maidenot · þat ssolde be[o] milde & stille / & þou ert a3en me so sterne” [you are not courteous and gentle; remember that maidens should be mild and

release me from captivity. Where is the nature of your virginity, which should be mild and silent/meek, while you are so fierce against me] (ll. 125-28). This imprecation has no equivalent in the other Lives: the Cynewulf and de Voragine's versions do not raise this question at all, while the Katherine Group version, seemingly expressing a similar sentiment, in fact entirely inverts it. There the devil exclaims, having been thrashed by the saint within an inch of his life, "O Ihesu, godes sune! þe hauest þin hehe seotel o meiðhades mihte, hire to mucche menske! Wa wurchest tu us þer-wið. To wel þu witest ham þe treowliche habbeð hire in heorte ihalden, 3ef ha milde ant meoke beon as meiden deh to beonne" [Oh Jesus, the son of God! You hold a high throne in the might of virginity, much to her honour! Through that, you work our woe. You protect very well the one who has truly held you in her heart, if she is mild and meek, as a maiden should be].<sup>138</sup> Although earlier in the Life the devil has engaged in a very personal conversation with Juliana, this speech seems to be subordinated to the overarching purpose of the narrative – the defence and propaganda of virginity. The saint is here commended primarily for making herself, by remaining virginal, a fitting vessel for Christ's power. Furthermore, this is an expression of the Christian reversal: in order to possess "might" on the spiritual plane, the maiden must follow the limiting social rules in her earthly existence. This plainly contradicts the plot of the narrative, and yet the reader seems to be expected to agree that Juliana's authority does indeed lie not in her famous rebelliousness and aggressiveness but in being "mild and meek," in full accordance with the patristic rules.

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<sup>138</sup> *Þe Liflade ant Te Passiun of Seinte Iulienne*, 45.

But the SEL version argues quite the opposite position for its heroine: the devil rebukes her for not behaving like a maiden should – for not being “courteis” or “milde.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, he suggests that meekness and mildness are somehow inherent in her state as a female virgin and she therefore must re-enact the social norm if she wants to be recognized as a woman.<sup>140</sup> However, this Juliana triumphs over her infernal visitor precisely because she chooses not to follow these rules and, instead, fights him fiercely, both spiritually and physically. In her disregard of the normative regulations, not only is the saint unafraid of being displayed to the crowd but she is able to redirect the public gaze even before her final martyrdom, to focus not on her as a victim but on her as a triumphant conqueror, leading her captive through the streets. It is the devil, not she, who grows afraid of being highly visible and begs the saint, “Ne make namo men [gawe] on me” [don’t make men gape at me any longer] (l. 125).

Commenting on this moment in the narrative, Jocelyn Price (now Wogan-Browne) notes wittily that “the question of whether or not one finds the saint amiable is a question for demons,” but proceeds to argue that the *SEL* falls short of the Katherine Group in being “content to show the meaning of its saint primarily by treating her opponents”: as a result, it “only reiterates rather than re-creates hagiographical meaning.”<sup>141</sup> While Price’s analysis of the *Liflade of Seinte Juliene* in this article is quite thorough, it seems to me that she does not do full justice to the *SEL* version by applying

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<sup>139</sup> The behavioural conventions he invokes eerily prefigure the early modern “chaste, silent, and obedient” dictate.

<sup>140</sup> The word “maidenot” is defined by the Middle English Dictionary as specifically female virginity; it illustrates the definition with this very excerpt from the *SEL*.

<sup>141</sup> Jocelyn Price, “The *Liflade of Seinte Iulienne* and Hagiographic Convention,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 14 (1986): 37-58, esp. 45-6.

an identical means of evaluation to it. The Katherine Group Juliana is, indeed, very much interested in her relationship with God and in her virginal wholeness, both of which she discusses in detail in her lengthy speeches. However, the *SEL* Juliana is more concerned with navigating the terrain of social rules and conventions, first as a marriageable girl and then as a girl determined to remain a virgin. Her identity, in other words, truly is “a question for demons,” since the hagiographic meaning in the *SEL* is generated by the saint’s encounters with the people (or supernatural creatures) around her, as well as by the saint’s ability to reject the disciplining definitions through which others seek to constrain her activity. In the Butlerian sense, her performance of virginity bursts its traditional boundaries and creates, so to speak, the new virgin, who, faced with the impediments of the pagan world, reacts with defiance, not acquiescence.

Furthermore, despite Price’s suggestion that Juliana’s point of view cannot be assessed, we can gather her reaction to the events with great clarity from her incisive remarks and actions, precisely because this version focuses so closely on the concrete world around her. Such an action is Juliana’s disposal of the captured devil into a pit of filth or shit, – the disposal that is left without accompanying detail in de Voragine’s and the Katherine Group versions. In the *SEL*, however, Juliana notices something that is very much a product of her social world – a “chamber foreyne” [an outside privy], which is “old and al forlete” [old and completely abandoned] but still full of “fulphede” – the term that can refer to physical excrement but also to spiritual filth (ll. 131-32). This detailed description strongly suggests to the reader that “þis foule þing” that she has captured belongs in the equally foul privy (l. 133). Juliana’s action is thus truly the act of

“reupe” [pity] she has claimed: she is simply, metaphorically speaking, returning to the devil to his natural environment (l. 130). The detailed narrative makes it clear that the city of Nicomedia is already inscribed, in its physical outlines and social customs, with spiritual significance; rather than ponder her relationship with God, as the Katherine Group heroine does, this version of Juliana draws meaning from the everyday objects and concerns. For those who might have missed the import of her action, linking tightly the physical and the spiritual, the narrator explains, “Þay þat him wolde ricchore bed . biseche oþer bidde / For it was god inou to him . wiþinne & eke aboue” [Those who want to have a richer bed must pray or supplicate, for it was good enough for him, inside and also outside] (ll. 134-35).

Inspired, most likely, by the goals of nation-building, the *SEL* author created vernacular narratives that promoted the Christian Church in England by drawing extensively on the minute detail of the thirteenth-century existence and re-imagined virgin martyrs as (almost) girls next door. While purporting to tell a tale of times long past, the *SEL* Life of St. Juliana situates its heroine firmly in the dynamics of the everyday and shows her producing hagiographical meaning from the conflicts and choices a woman might face in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The author’s goals most likely had little to do with questions of gender and social position of women. However, as Robert Mills argues, the virgin martyr must be imagined as “a multiplicity, a site of heteroglossia in which a body of contradictory discourses compete for our attention” – neither silenced nor necessarily empowered to produce personal

commentary.<sup>142</sup> The *SEL*, by depicting its heroine primarily through interaction with people, objects, and rules, brings this idea of the virgin martyr as a site of heteroglossia into high relief: she is not a vessel of personal piety but, rather, a model of dealing with the issues arising in the course of the everyday existence, whose practices may be adopted for private consumption.

### **The Uses of the Virgin Martyr: Reading and Imitation in Late Medieval England**

In the late Middle Ages, the virgin martyr Lives, with their emphasis on virginity and Christian faith displayed by girls were widely recognized as most appropriate subject matter for young women, perhaps at least partly on the assumption that members of the audience could more easily be persuaded to imitate models perceived as similar to themselves. The *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, a fourteenth-century French collection of didactic stories for young women, urges its readers to emulate the Virgin Mary and to seek examples of such emulation in the Lives of “saynt Elyzabeth / saynte Lucye / saynt Cecylle and many other holy ladyes.”<sup>143</sup> As Katherine J. Lewis demonstrates, this is one among many instances of the use of virgin martyrs in the training of young medieval women.<sup>144</sup> In the early fifteenth century, Christine de Pisan emphasizes, in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (1405), the suitability of virgin Lives as reading material for young

<sup>142</sup> Robert Mills, “Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 187-213, esp. 207.

<sup>143</sup> *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. by William Caxton, ed. M.Y. Offord (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, EETS, s.s.2), 147. Although the book is not translated into English until the end of the fifteenth century, it clearly reflects a prevalent sensibility – so prevalent, in fact, that it is of sufficient interest more than a century later. Moreover, French was a necessary part of the education for upper-class women in late medieval England.

<sup>144</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, “Model Girls? Virgin-Martyrs and the Training of Young Women in Late Medieval England,” in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 25-46. See also the same author’s *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000), esp. chapter 5, “St Katherine and Women.”

women in training: “A young girl should also especially venerate Our Lady, St. Catherine, and all virgins, and if she can read, eagerly read their biographies.”<sup>145</sup>

The available evidence shows that medieval women took this advice to heart: Winstead comments on the popularity of this hagiographical genre,<sup>146</sup> and other scholars locate the virgin martyrs (both as stories and as images) in books linked to female owners or female audiences.<sup>147</sup> These combative saints, whose repertoire in the late Middle Ages routinely involved extreme verbal aggressiveness used to defend their convictions, made highly problematic models in the project of raising women fully obedient first to their parents and then to their husbands. On the one hand, their narratives speak of extreme piety, purity, and close connection to God; on the other, as Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has consistently argued in her scholarship, they also offer the possibility of alternative reactions to coercion, verbal badgering, and physical violence – other than meek submission.<sup>148</sup> While the saints’ Lives do not offer straightforward

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<sup>145</sup> Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or the Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. and intro. Sarah Lawson (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 161.

<sup>146</sup> Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs*, 11.

<sup>147</sup> See Anne M. Dutton, “Passing the Book: Testamentary Transmission of Religious Literature to and by Women in England 1350-1500,” in *Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda’s Conference, 1993*, v. 1, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 41-54, esp. 48-9; Sandra Penketh, “Women and Books of Hours,” in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 266-280, esp. 276; Ruth Evans, “Virginites,” *Medieval Women’s Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21-39, esp. 32; D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 93. Carol M. Meale points to the frequent difficulty of making direct connections between books and their female owners or readers in her article “...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch’: Laywomen and Their Books in Late Medieval England,” in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 128-158. See also Sanok’s discussion of the connections between women and saints’ Lives in *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints’ Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 33-6.

<sup>148</sup> See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne’s treatment of this matter in several works: *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture*, chapter 7; “The Virgin’s Tale,” in *Feminist Readings in Middle English Literature*, ed. Ruth Evans and Lesley Johnson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 165-195; “‘Clerc u lai, muïne u dame’:

instructions for resisting authority (and not every technique they describe is necessarily appealing or useful), they outline a wide scope of women's nonconformity to the demands of their family or immediate social circle that can be used as basis for such resistance.<sup>149</sup>

One of the best-known instances of a medieval woman using a hagiographical narrative to address her own difficulty predates the Katherine Group and the *SEL*: the twelfth-century St Christina of Markyate and her hagiographer position her own Life in direct relationship to the stories of the virgin martyrs. Christina is harangued by her relatives, who attempt to force her into bed with her bridegroom Beorhtred: "they flattered her; they reproached her; they gave her presents; they made grand promises; they even threatened and punished her."<sup>150</sup> After Christina's prolonged and steadfast resistance, her parents secretly let Beorhtred into her bedroom at night, so that he might finally violate her chastity. However, Christina of Markyate has clearly read enough saints' Lives and is able to protect herself against the bridegroom's advances, at least temporarily, by seating him on the bed, "narrating to him in detail the story of St Cecilia and her husband Valerian," and proposing that they re-enact the chaste marriage outlined in that particular story (11-12). Later on, the text echoes the conversation between Cecilia and Valerian, as Beorhtred threatens to kill any other man whom she might want

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Women and Anglo-Norman Hagiography in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 61-85; "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader."

<sup>149</sup> See Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, "Saints' Lives as a Source for the History of Women, 500-1100," in *Medieval women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 285-319, esp. 305.

<sup>150</sup> *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, trans. C.H. Talbot, revised with intro. and notes Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9. All further references are to this text.

to marry and Christina, in turn, warns him that Christ might slay him for desiring His bride (23).

Christina's resistance to her suitor is most frequently discussed in connection with St. Cecilia,<sup>151</sup> but the author of Christina's Life also clearly draws on the generalized plot of the interaction between the virgin martyr and the unwelcome pagan suitor.<sup>152</sup> She is described as being stripped of her clothes but remaining remarkably untroubled by this instance of exposure ("Christina would have chosen to be sent out naked into the night had she been able in this way to have won her freedom to serve Christ"), beaten, accompanied by apparitions in white, and leaping tall fences (24-25; 13). Interrogated by the prior Fredebert, Christina reproduces the stock exchange of a virgin martyr with a figure of authority, when, asked whether she might be leaving her bridegroom for another, wealthier man, she replies, "A more wealthy one certainly [...] for who is richer than Christ?" (18). In mocking the prior, who seems to be unable to conceive that the girl's motives might not lie in the direction of personal enrichment, Christine is also highlighting and ridiculing the social conventions that seek to explain away her devotion.<sup>153</sup> In fact, Beorhtred's rejection of the hagiographical model is due to his utter inability to resist such conventions, particularly those that govern gender: he

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<sup>151</sup> See Douglas Gray, "Christina of Markyate: The Literary Background," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12-24, esp. 19.

<sup>152</sup> For instance, Blamires points to Christina's connection to Judith (*The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 178). This more generalized resistance produces Sanok's assertion that Christina does not enact the more public and aggressive elements of St. Cecilia's Life (*Her Life Historical*, 120-1). However, while Christina's *imitatio* becomes unmoored from one particular saint, she does not shrink from confronting the figures of authority.

<sup>153</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne points to this function of the virgin martyr in the "Saints' Lives and the Female Reader," 329.

enters Christina's bedchamber again when others call him "a spineless and useless fellow" and urge him to "remember to act the man" even though Christina is refusing to act the proper woman (12).

Despite initial resistance, both from her parents and some clerical figures, Christina of Markyate's *imitatio* was eventually authorized by the medieval Church, as the existence of an official Life (albeit an incomplete one) shows.<sup>154</sup> At the same time, the purposes for which holy virgins were used by medieval women were not always quite that orthodox. In the short version of her *Book of Showings*, Julian of Norwich makes a reference to St. Cecilia partly to underwrite the revelations she is going to make in the course of the book. She begins by recounting – or constructing – the event that introduced her to this particular saint: "I harde a man telle of halye kyrke of the storrye of saynte Cecylle, in the whilke shewynge I vnderstode that sche hadde thre wonndys with a swerde in the nekke, with the whilke sche pynede to the dede."<sup>155</sup> Having thus located her access to the hagiographical model in the physical experience of hearing St. Cecilia's story, Julian interprets the three wounds as "the wonnd(e) of *contricyoun*, the wonnde of *compassyoun* and the wonnde of wylfulle langgyng to god."<sup>156</sup> Through this interpretation, Julian positions herself within the accepted mode of drawing on the holy virgins as authorized models: however problematic, her revelations are presented to the

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<sup>154</sup> See Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 121, on the circulation of Christina's Life well into the early modern period.

<sup>155</sup> *A Book of Showings to the Anchoress Julian of Norwich: Part One. Introduction and the Short Text*, ed. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1978), I. 46-9.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 52-3.

reader as part of this humble imitation, skilfully structured by the anchoress.<sup>157</sup> Sanok takes Julian's manipulation of the source to be "a tacit demonstration that the practices defining the saint cannot be reproduced in late medieval England," but it seems to me to be, rather, a rethinking of how these defining practices might be imagined.<sup>158</sup> In Julian's narrative, Cecilia's wounds are transformed "into the inward violence of spiritual desire,"<sup>159</sup> but they also authorize the writer's own theological speech, this time carried out without the intercession of the torturers and the Pope Urban. As Laurie A. Finke points out, the question of authorization was a pressing one in the field of mystical discourse and, while this discourse "may have stood outside of official pronouncements about doctrine [...] it nonetheless was constantly scrutinized for its doctrinal correctness."<sup>160</sup> By situating her own treatise as an imitation of an official saint's Life, Julian claims authority not only through personal revelation but also through her use of the written tradition. By the time the long version of the *Showings* was completed, Julian evidently felt more confident in her own position and, finding no need to strengthen her authority through imitation, removed the reference to St. Cecilia from the book.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> On the other hand, Elizabeth Dutton argues that while there is a small possibility that this interpretation belongs to Julian herself, "it seems more probable that it is this aspect of the legend's telling for which the man of holy church is responsible"; see *Julian of Norwich: The Influence of Late-Medieval Devotional Compilations* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 66. While considering the issue of sources, however, we must still give Julian credit for choosing to reproduce this aspect in her own treatise.

<sup>158</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 5.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1999), 169. Roger Ellis and Samuel Fanous comment on "Julian's insistence on her own orthodoxy" in "1349-1412: texts," in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie, 142.

<sup>161</sup> While there is no surviving medieval complete version of the long text, the existing seventeenth-century manuscripts, according to Felicity Riddy, "seem to have been copied by English recusant nuns at Cambrai and Paris," who are unlikely agents for removing virgin martyr references; see Riddy, "Julian of Norwich and Self-Textualization," in *Editing Women: Papers Given at the Thirty-First Annual Conference on*

On the other hand, the fourteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe uses virgin martyrs and their Lives in constructing her own holy virginity – a complex and at times highly unorthodox project. It may seem, at first, that she is interested merely in leading a chaste life: certainly her white clothing and the ring she wears to indicate her marriage to Christ evoke this interpretation. In this intention, Margery's *Book* shows a strong influence of the continental models, including, mostly notably, St. Birgitta of Sweden, the mother of eight children and the bride of Christ.<sup>162</sup> However, Margery also seeks to construct an authoritative literary identity<sup>163</sup> by drawing on the figures of the virgin martyrs, alluding to them at crucial moments in her *Book* to suggest a certain level of

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*Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, 3-4 November 1995*, ed. Ann M. Hutchison (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 101-24, esp. 109. Rather, as Riddy suggests throughout the article, the removal of the virgin martyr reference points to a change in Julian's "identity and roles, and her place in the spiritual hierarchy" (105).

<sup>162</sup> For a discussion of the influence of St. Birgitta's writing on Margery Kempe, see Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 76-88; Julia Bolton Holloway, "Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England," in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 203-221; and Nanda Hopenwasser, and Signe Wegener, "Vox Matrix: The Influence of St. Birgitta's Revelations on *The Book of Margery Kempe*: St. Birgitta and Margery Kempe as Wives and Mothers," in *Crossing the Bridge: Comparative Essays on Medieval European and Heian Japanese Women Writers*, ed. Barbara Stevenson and Cynthia Ho (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 61-85.

<sup>163</sup> Scholars have persuasively argued that Margery's text pursues a range of aims beyond simply reflecting her existence in the world; in an overview of the book's history after its re-discovery in the twentieth century, Marea Mitchell explicitly cautions against the "tendency to take the book at face value, to treat it as if it were factual or a realist text"; see *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 86. In *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*, Lynn Staley suggests that the careful selection and presentation of details in the texts serve to construct a main character enabling extensive social criticism (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), while Susan Signe Morrison shows that Margery draws on the *topoi* of discussing women pilgrims in crafting her self-presentation (*Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance* [New York: Routledge, 2000], esp. chapter 5, "Performing Margery Kempe"). More recently, Katherine J. Lewis argues that *The Book of Margery Kempe* may be read as case for Margery's sainthood-in-training; see her "Margery Kempe and Saint Making in Later Medieval England," in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 195-215.

*imitatio*.<sup>164</sup> As Salih argues, Margery draws extensively both on the continental holy women and on virgin martyrs, using these “two kinds of hagiography for different purposes, and to different effects.”<sup>165</sup>

Within the genre framework of a virgin martyr *vita*, *The Book of Margery Kempe* re-defines virginity and virginal body in terms of performance concretely situated in the physical and public world of everyday activity. The thirteenth-century virgin martyr Lives argue that women can be loud, aggressive, physically active, and publicly visible – and retain their chastity. *The Book of Margery Kempe* takes this one step further and suggests that, if virginity is being imagined as an elevated, superior spiritual state, accessed through but ultimately not dependent on the vicissitudes of the body, even multiple children cannot disqualify one from the status as a virgin. As Salih points out,

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<sup>164</sup> Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa traces Margery’s usage of various depictions of virgin martyrs in her article “Veneration of Virgin Martyrs in Margery Kempe’s Meditation: Influence of the Sarum Liturgy and Hagiography,” in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, ed. Denis Renevey and Christiania Whitehead (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 177-195, and in her more recent book *Margery Kempe’s Meditations: The Context of Medieval Devotional Literature, Liturgy and Iconography* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 95. Lewis offers an extended discussion of Margery’s indebtedness to the details of St. Katherine’s *vita* in *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, 242-56. Samuel Fanous links Margery’s *Book* to the broader genre of *vita*-writing in his “Measuring the Pilgrim’s Progress: Internal Emphases in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Writing Religious Women: Female Spiritual and Textual Practices in Late Medieval England*, 157-176. For a connection between Margery’s writing and various hagiographical genres, see also Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 157-181 (but also 188-190 for a connection to virgin martyrs specifically); Jennifer R. Bray, “Concepts of Sainthood in Fourteenth-Century England,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 66 (1984): 40-77, esp. 72-5; Sarah Salih, “Staging Conversion: The Digby Saint Plays and *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 121-134, and Claire Sponsler, “Drama and Piety: Margery Kempe,” in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, 129-143. Terri L. Bays also comments on the references to liturgy in Margery’s *Book*, suggesting that it is used to make a connection between the heroine and Christ, the model of every saint: see “‘I xal excusyn þe & ledyn þe & bryngyn þe a-geyn in safte’: Liturgy and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H.A. Kelly*, ed. Donka Minkova and Theresa Tinke (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 351-67.

<sup>165</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 188. She gives a brief overview of Margery’s familiarity and engagement with these models on pages 195-201.

she is “drawing on the implications of virginity literature; that the physical loss of virginity is not insuperable, that individual efforts can remake the body.”<sup>166</sup> After all, the Church Fathers have argued that spiritual flaws can render one non-virginal. Physical violation does not need to lead to the loss of virginity, as in St. Lucy’s argument, while spiritual perfection – achieved partly by imitating the virgin martyrs – can restore virginity.

The first episode of explicit refashioning of a virgin martyr’s *vita* to serve the heroine’s individual ends appears in chapter 11, when Margery’s husband attempts to force her into a sexual congress. As Salih has pointed out, this is a creative re-working of the Life of St. Cecilia.<sup>167</sup> John Kempe, who had not had carnal relations with his wife for almost three years, asks her, in a last stab at reconciliation, “Margery, yf her come a man wyth a swerd and wold smyte of myn hed les than I schulde comown kendly wyth yow as I have do befor, whethyr wold ye suffyr myn hed to be smet of, er ellys suffyr me to medele wyth yow ayen as I dede sumtyme?”<sup>168</sup> At the first glance, this appears to be a total inversion of the dynamic in the Life of St. Cecilia, who threatened her hapless husband with death for an attempt at their purity.<sup>169</sup> However, several lines later we discover that Margery’s own husband is perfectly aware of the original point and, in fact, accepts it as the truth; having been previously warned by Margery that he “schulde be slayn sodeynly,” he is eventually “so made aferde whan he wold a towchyd hir that he

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 200. This is, of course, not the only possible reading of this episode: many factors are at play, including the element of social bargaining.

<sup>168</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Barry Windeatt (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 2000), Bk. 1, ch. 11, 712-16. All further references are to this text.

<sup>169</sup> This is the dynamic that St. Christina of Markyate reproduces in her own struggle against marriage.

durst no mor don” (Bk. 1, ch. 1, 728; 725-6). His question to his wife, then, is a desperate attempt to re-write the text, changing the genre from hagiography to an odd, fableaux-like version of a romance, where the heroine is being urged to take pity on her suitor and to submit to his desires in order to preserve his life. However, Margery remains aware of the genre she is imitating and sounds a true St. Cecilia (or Christina of Markyate) in her reply, “Forsothe I had levar se yow be slayn than we schuld turne ayen to owyr unclennesse” (Bk. 1, ch. 1, 720-1). This remark re-establishes the original roles, transforming John Kempe from a persecuted, mistreated lover to a foolish suitor in a saint’s Life, and forcing his rhetoric to fall flat. The episode ends with both participants acknowledging the threat to John’s life and thus Margery’s own position as a saint whose chastity is being protected by Christ, the jealous supernatural lover.

Furthermore, this scene links Margery’s re-fashioning of the self closely to the thirteenth-century Lives by firmly grounding her hagiographical interpretation in the quotidian. Margery has been much criticized for using contemporary detail in order to insert herself into the hagiographical tradition; however, as I have shown, this practice has clear precedent in such texts as, for example, the *SEL* Life of Juliana, who throws the Roman devil into a medieval outdoors privy. Composing her *Book* a century later, Margery imitates both the concern with the everyday and the remarkable female agency in the virgin martyrs’ Lives produced in the thirteenth century. She stages her imitation of St. Cecilia “beryng a botel wyth bere in hir hand” while her husband has “a cake in hys bosom,” and the formidable but abstract angel with a flaming sword is replaced by a man hypothetically ambushing the couple on the road toward York, “upon a Fryday on

Mydsomyr Evyn in ryght hot wedyr” (Bk 1, ch. 27, 708-10). In reproducing the emphasis on geographical locality and exhaustive worldly detail,<sup>170</sup> Margery strengthens the connection between earlier saints’ Lives written in English and her own narrative, performing the transformation of a married woman with children into a holy virgin, who must resist sexual advances and face persecution.<sup>171</sup> Just as the *SEL* Life constructed Juliana as a product of the medieval world, fully aware of the rules of conduct but choosing, while still fully situated in this world, to resist the rules, so Margery, drawing on such Lives, presents herself as a creature of the earth fifteenth century who suddenly refuses to fit into any of the available categories. It is true, as Carolyn Dinshaw points out, that Margery seeks to insert herself into the time outside of time, to become transported, ultimately, into the spiritual, eternal dimension, but at the same time she depicts herself as remaining firmly moored to contemporary reality.<sup>172</sup> She thus functions as a link and a conductor between the two worlds and is able to draw on the spiritual categories to justify her social conduct.

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<sup>170</sup> For more detail on this emphasis in Margery’s narrative, see Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, chapter 3, “St. Margery: The Book of Margery Kempe.”

<sup>171</sup> See also Liz Herbert McAvoy’s discussion of Margery’s usage of her experience of childbirth and children in order to develop a language that can articulate her privileged spiritual position in “[A]n Awngel Al Clothyd in White’: Rereading the Book of Life as *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” in *Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 103-121. This contradicts some of the accepted notions about women-authored spiritual autobiography; Kate Greenspan, for example, argues that the individual experience organized in order to emulate an earlier model is in itself “always ancillary, valuable only insofar as it [can] teach, inspire, or provide a model”; see “Autohagiography and Medieval Women’s Spiritual Autobiography,” in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. and introduction by Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 216-236, esp. 232. However, as the discussion of the virgin martyrs’ Lives in this chapter shows, the function of experience in hagiography is far from limited to instruction.

<sup>172</sup> Carolyn Dinshaw, “Margery Kempe,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women’s Writing*, 222-39, esp. 235-6.

Margery's transformation into a holy virgin is completed in the scene of her marriage to Christ, where, nonetheless, her new identity as a holy virgin is forged from the elements of the medieval world around her. Christ tells Margery:

And, for-as-mech as thu art a mayden in thi sowle, I schal take the be the on hand in hevyn and my modyr be the other hand, and so schalt thu dawnsyn in hevyn wyth other holy maydens and virgynes, for I may clepyn the dere abowte and myn owyn derworthy derlyng. (Bk. 1, Ch. 22, 1679-1686)

In this sentence, Margery's maidenhood is extended from the soul onto the body, ultimately placing her among the *other* holy maidens.<sup>173</sup> She has become a maiden in her soul through diligent emulation of the holy virgins, some of which are named by Christ in the same speech: "Seynt Kateryne, Seynt Margarete, Seynt Barbara, and Seynt Powle" (Bk. 1, ch. 22, 1668).<sup>174</sup> The marriage itself emphasizes the connection between virgin martyrs and social rituals, as "Seynt Kateryn and Seynt Margarete" among "many other seyntys and holy virgynes" come in to hear the wedding vows of Christ and Margery (Bk. 1, ch. 35, 2850-1). Not only does the spiritual wedding require witnesses or guests, but it also signifies the beginning of a very conventional (in some ways) family union, for, as Christ explains, "it is conveyent the wyf to be homly wyth hir husband [...] Ryght so mot it be twyx the and me [...] Therefore most I nedys be homly wyth the and lyn in thi bed wyth the" (Bk 1, ch. 36, 2944-50). In essence, then, even as Margery is engaging wholeheartedly in the project of constructing her own identity as a saint, she is highlighting the experientially informed dynamics of such construction, consciously

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<sup>173</sup> Salih comments, "Christ does not here deny the hierarchy of access to God; instead he moves Margery up a grade within it. Wifehood is still, on the whole, inferior to virginity, but Margery counts as a virgin, not a wife" (183).

<sup>174</sup> Note that three of these four saints are well-known virgin martyrs.

presenting herself as, first and foremost, a woman of secular experience, albeit an exceptional one.

The presence of the virgin martyrs in the text points, among other things, to the ever-present problem of being simultaneously a proper virgin and a proper woman, but also to the problem of emulating these troublesome figures in late fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century England. While these saints in Margery's meditations have been generally interpreted as figures embodying perfect virginity,<sup>175</sup> she is also clearly aware of their bombastic relationship with the world, and re-enacts much of it in her own activities. Some scholars have been disturbed by the social resistance Margery describes in her narrative. Richard Kieckhefer sees this "disquietude" as a general characteristic of fourteenth-century hagiography and explains that "the saints themselves yearned for a better life in heaven, [...] while on earth they were painfully at ease with the world and with themselves."<sup>176</sup> According to him, Margery is a poor soul who has "none of the institutional and psychological support that the cloister would have provided" and "makes an effective case for the difficulty of living an unworldly existence in a worldly society."<sup>177</sup> However, as I have shown earlier, Margery's performance is nothing if not worldly.<sup>178</sup> Competing with St. Birgitta and other continental mystics in closeness to Christ, for example, she becomes Mary's nanny, fussily providing the child "wyth good

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<sup>175</sup> Yoshikawa, "Veneration of Virgin Martyrs," 188.

<sup>176</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 201.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>178</sup> In fact, her refusal to be cloistered is a logical continuation of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century trend for religious women distancing themselves from strict enclosure and placing "more emphasis on service in the world, rather than on living in self-contained religious communities"; see Marty Newman Williams, and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1994), 129.

mete and drynke, wyth fayr whyte clothys and whyte kerchys” (Bk. 1, ch. 1, 550-1). Her “difficulties” are partially inherent in her model of the virgin martyr, who refuses to remain unseen and unheard but instead participates in the world, destabilizing various normative frameworks. Similarly, in insisting on wearing white in the world, Margery is consciously destabilizing the social norms that prescribe dress and location. Salih explains, “Had she, having got John Kempe’s agreement to a celibate marriage, retired to a nunnery or anchorhold, taken her vows and been veiled, her performance of virginity would have been neither problematic nor unusual”;<sup>179</sup> however, as a self-designated consecrated virgin roaming the world, she provokes in others reactions comparable to those of pagan persecutors toward the virgin martyrs.

Like the virgin martyrs and many other mystics, Margery represents for many of her countrymen a problem of interpretation. Some of them admit their confusion openly, such as the Steward of Leicester who tells her, “Eythyr thu art a ryth good woman er ellys a ryth wikked woman” (Bk. 1, ch. 47. 3755-6), and the worthy clerks at York, who cannot come to an agreement in their evaluation of Margery: “Sum of the pepil askyd whedyr sche wer a Cristen woman er a Jewe? Sum seyde sche was a good woman, and sum seyde ‘nay’” (Bk. 1, ch. 52, 4146-8). The wording suggests that the difficulty of interpretation for these people stems specifically from Margery’s gender; her conduct appears so odd to the onlookers that some of them are not quite sure whether any woman of Christian faith might allow herself to behave in this fashion. This is, of course, not

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<sup>179</sup> Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 185.

very far from the rebukes that Sts. Juliana and Margaret receive from their pagan and infernal interrogators.

Margery complicates the situation further by offering answers to the interrogation that obviously contradict her appearance. So, when the Archbishop of York demands, “Why gost thu in white? Art thu a mayden?”, she replies, “Nay, ser, I am no mayden; I am a wife” (Bk. 1, ch. 52, 4130-2).<sup>180</sup> In an earlier interaction at Leicester, Margery gives being “a mannys wife” as a response to a threat of rape (Bk. 1, ch. 47, 3742) and begs that she “may kepyn [her] chastite and [her] bond of wedlak to [her] husband, as [she] is bowndyn to do” (Bk. 1, ch. 46, 3705-7). These responses are clearly at odds with Margery’s outfit, and this contradiction angers the Archbishop so much as to lead him to recommend that she should be put into fetters – a measure that would effectively limit her movements, enforcing proper behaviour onto her. Although it may be argued that Margery changes her tune under pressure and abandons her identity as a virgin, this argument does not really stand in the light of her continued refusal to abandon white clothing. Rather, her responses to the interrogation are comparable to the virgin martyrs’ claims that they are already married to a very wealthy and very jealous husband; in every case, Margery avoids stating her husband’s name. She similarly sidesteps the question of whether she has a physical record of her husband’s assent, replying that he “yaf [her] leve wyth hys owyn mowthe” (Bk. 1, ch. 51, 4060-1). There is, then, a certain ambiguity as to which husband she might mean in this remark, since the conversation is taking place after the ceremony of her marriage with Christ.

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<sup>180</sup> While the word “wife” can mean simply “woman,” in this case it clearly indicates a woman who is or has been married and is certainly no longer a virgin.

At the same time, Margery's various interrogators are at least sometimes aware that she is performing her identity as a saint; in addition to complaining that she is not a good woman who cannot be placed unequivocally into the categories of either a maiden or a wife, they attempt to undermine her by arguing that she is also not a very good virgin martyr. However, every challenge to this identity, in fact, supports it, as it is immediately incorporated into the narrative of the persecution to which the virgin martyrs are subjected, and linked to the interrogations these heroines inevitably undergo. We see, for example, that the Mayor of Leicester compares Margery to St. Katherine after she has given him the information about her home town, describing at length her father and his political career, with a short addendum that she also has a good man there as her spouse. While we would expect this biographical note to prevent any potential connection to the virgin martyr stories, it does not, either for Margery herself, or for her interrogators. For the Mayor of Leicester, Margery's explanation is merely a parallel to St. Katherine's acknowledgement of her family. The identification between Margery of Kempe and St. Katherine remains so strong that the Mayor attempts to disrupt it by proclaiming that "Seynt Kateryn telde what kindred sche cam of, and yet ar ye not lyche," calling Margery "a fals strumpet" and "a fals deceyver of the pepyl," and concluding that her place is in prison (Bk. 1, ch. 46, 3689-92). Of course, the Mayor here proves himself to be as foolish as Saint Katherine's pagan persecutors, since he does not understand that his raving accusations and throwing Margery into prison only reinforce the parallel and thus work to strengthen his victim's *imitatio*.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> The choice of the virgin martyr here is not accidental; as Lewis shows, St. Katherine was not only the

The medieval woman's resistance against the restrictions that consign her either to the home or the anchorhold merges, in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, with the virgin martyr's rebellion against pagan society. The split of reactions between strongly positive and entirely negative is equivalent to the division, in the *Lives*, between the generated desire to convert immediately and the impulse to destroy the disruptive virgin martyr. The resentment that Margery encounters does not, contrary to Kieckhefer's argument, cause her difficulty, just as martyrdom does not trouble a virgin martyr; rather, it emphasizes even further how appropriate this *imitatio* is in her narrow-minded and uncharitable society. Some men's angry desire to remove her entirely from the public sphere fits neatly into the framework of a *vita*, which is inevitably concerned with attempts at physical concealment or erasure of its heroine; we need only recall the fruitless and wildly escalating struggle to drag St. Lucy to the brothel where she may be stripped of her virginity and spiritual authority. Margery's critics express the same desire to relocate her to the space where she may be safely contained. Shortly after John Kempe has agreed to a chaste marriage, a monk in Canterbury expresses the desire that Margery be "closyd in an hows of ston, that ther schuld no man speke wyth [her]" (Bk. 1, ch. 13, 870-1).<sup>182</sup> As it is clear that the enclosure will not take place, other inhabitants of Canterbury take her for a heretic and threaten murder, "Her is a cartful of thornys redy for the, and a tonne to bren the wyth!" (Bk. 1, ch. 13, 901-2). The references to the

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focus of great devotion in medieval England and a role model for English women but also particularly known for her mystical marriage to Christ; see "Pilgrimage and the Cult of St Katherine in Late Medieval England," *St Katherine of Alexandria: Texts and Contexts in Western Medieval Europe*, ed. Jacqueline Jenkins and Katherine J. Lewis (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 37-52.

<sup>182</sup> This also echoes the narratives of Sts. Cristina and Barbara, in both of which the heroines are enclosed in tall towers by their fathers.

burning echo through the *Book*: they link the contemporary concern with heresy with the tortures applied to virgin martyrs, testifying to the efficacy of Margery's *imitatio*.

Through her choice of the model, she is able to re-enact her saintly rebellion in the medieval world, questioning and challenging the behavioural norms set out for women.

Margery is an unusual case, both in terms of her conscious and deliberate engagement in hagiographical construction and of the level to which this engagement is taken, but other, more ordinary documents also offer evidence of the effect of virgin martyrs' Lives. Margery Kempe (as a saint in the making, or as her own hagiographer) consciously draws on the virgin martyr models, with her *imitatio* made transparent to the reader through recurrent allusion. Other medieval women may have deployed the same models in structuring their own disobedience against parental and religious authorities without being explicit about the sources that underwrite their rebellion. Consider, for example, the situation outlined in one of the Paston letters (part of the extensive collection of letters dating from 1422 to 1509 and associated with the Pastons, a Norfolk gentry family). Margaret Paston, the matriarch of the family, writes to her son John about the current situation with her daughter (and his sister) Margery, who has secretly contracted herself in marriage to Richard Calle, the family's head bailiff. As the previous exchanges between the family members – and one letter from Calle to his beloved – suggest, a more suitable match for Margery was being sought both before and after the engagement, and the family did their utmost to break the marriage contract by keeping the couple apart from one another and exerting pressure on Margery. Commenting on the torments Margery has had to undergo to preserve the allegiance to her betrothed, Calle

writes to her sorrowfully at some point in 1469, "I understende, lady, ye have hadde asmoche sorwe for me as any gentlewoman hath hadde in the worlde..."<sup>183</sup>

The letter from Margaret Paston to her son, also dated sometime in 1469 (probably fall), describes the encounter between the family and the Bishop, to whom they are eventually forced to bring Margery to be examined on the subject of her supposed marriage. Margaret Paston, much angered by her daughter's conduct, mostly likely had little reason to think of that episode as in any way similar to a virgin martyr's trial (although critics agree that that at least some aspects of her letters show literary influences and conscious constructedness with an eye to other genres).<sup>184</sup> However, as she is recounting the scene, it seems probable that in her daughter's eyes the examination might have well fit that model.<sup>185</sup> The points made by the Bishop during the examination, as well as the reaction of her family, are strongly reminiscent of this genre

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<sup>183</sup> Letter 861, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, v. 2, ed. Norman Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 498-500, esp. 498. All further references are to this edition. See also Laura Watson's article on the Paston family's marital plans for Margery: "The Disposal of Paston Daughters," in *Sovereign Lady: Essays on Women in Middle English Literature*, ed. Muriel Whitaker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 45-62.

<sup>184</sup> See Roger Dalrymple, "Reaction, Consolation and Redress in the Letters of the Paston Women," in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 16-28, esp. 20, on literary echoes; and Diane Watt, "'No Writing for Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 122-38, esp. 133-6, on Margaret's voice construction. In the first chapter of her book, Rebecca Krug discusses the specifics of this persona-building and points out that, following her husband's death, Margaret's son accused her of writing a stylized, highly dramatic version of events rather than producing a faithful historical record: see *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>185</sup> There is no doubt that the female members of the Paston family, whether or not they could read, had good knowledge of the virgin martyr narratives: Margaret Paston might, as Diane Watt argues, have little interest in literature ("'In the Absence of a Good Secretary': The Letters, Lives, and Loves of the Paston Women Reconsidered," in *The Paston Women: Selected Letters*, ed. and trans. Diane Watt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 134-58, esp. 146), but that does not stop her from making a joking reference to St. Margaret's patronage of pregnant women in an early letter to her husband, written while she herself was expecting her first child (Letter 21, in *The Paston Women*, 46).

as it existed in late medieval England, with its abounding references to the contemporary social framework and the choices available to girls of marriageable age. A young woman's rebellion against her relatives and the disciplining ecclesiastical framework fits neatly into the narrative of a virgin martyr: Margery Paston's response assimilates this genre to her own purpose, positioning her as a strong, outspoken woman on trial, with the heavenly lover replaced by a very earthly, socially unsuitable fiancé.

Like the pagan persecutors, the Bishop begins by re-confirming the social framework that surrounds the young woman, reminding her of the proper conduct that she has been neglecting. He puts her "in remembrawns how she was born, wat kyn *and* frenddys þat sche had, *and* xuld haue mo yf sche were rulyd *and* gydyd aftyre hem."<sup>186</sup> Obedience to family and friends, in other words, would allow Margery to remain within her original social framework and thrive therein, whereas continuing to disobey them would bring her "rebuke, *and* schame, *and* los [...] *and* cause of foresaky[n]g of here fore any good, ore helpe, ore kownfort þat sche xuld haue of hem" (Letter 203, 342). Having established the terms of the choice – the choice between being accepted back into the fold and becoming completely marginalized, the Bishop tells Margery what exactly is being expected of her, explaining that "sche loued schecheon [*such one*] þat here frend[es] were not plesyd wyth þat sche xuld haue, *and* there-fore he bad here be ryth wel a-vysyd how she ded, *and* seyð þat he woold wndyrstond þe worddys þat sche had seyð to hym, wheythere þat mad matramony ore not" (Letter 203, 342). In essence, Margery is being asked to renounce her beloved publicly, in order to please her relatives

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<sup>186</sup> Letter 203, *The Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, v.1, ed. Norman Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 341-44, esp. 342. All further references are to this edition.

and friends of the family: having been “ryth wel a-vysyd” on her situation, she is asked to describe what was said between herself and Calle, so that the Bishop might interpret the words in the way that suits the Paston family best.

The interpretative link between Margery Paston and a saint on trial emerges from the couple’s conviction that they are being unjustly persecuted by those who value social position above clear conscience and marital commitment. Calle’s earlier letter suggests that the couple took their vows quite seriously and viewed the obstacles in their way as ungodly. He writes to remind her, among other things, that “iiij tymes in the yere ar they a-cursid that lette matrymony” and that she must be cheerful, for “at the longe wey Godde woll of Hys ryghtwysnes helpe Hys *servauntys* that meane truly, and wolde leve accordyng to Hes lawys, &c” (Letter 861, 498). As his wording shows, Margery Paston and Richard Calle see themselves as acting in full accordance with God’s laws – acting, in fact, as his true servants – while Margery’s family and those assisting them are, in fact, breaking these laws and thus heading straight for divine punishment. Where in the virgin martyrs’ Lives, as well as in the *Book of Margery Kempe*, spiritual dedication was being presented through an allegory of marriage, in Calle’s letter marriage is described in terms of a spiritual choice. Renouncing her marital vows for earthly comfort and approval of relatives is, for Margery, as unthinkable as it would be for Juliana to listen to the devil and marry the pagan Elyse.

In her reply, Margery Paston takes on the role of a woman who is both fully committed to her beloved and also a sophisticated interpreter, not swayed by the power of words. Rather than allow the Bishop to misinterpret her vow, she repeats it, adding

that it is her conviction (rather than the words spoken by the two parties) that forms this bond, and she is prepared to supplement it with action, if need be: “she seyde boldly þat sche wold make it suerhere ore þan sche went thens, fore sche seyde sche thowthe in here conschens sche was bownd, wat so euere the worddys wern” (Letter 203, 342).<sup>187</sup>

Margery’s privileging of her own opinion over the accepted verbal formula points to her private relationship with God, before whom her vow has been made, and is strongly reminiscent of the virgin martyr’s disregard both of pagan rhetoric and physical influences. Just as St. Lucy claims that her mental integrity takes precedence over any sexual violence done to her body, so Margery deflects the Bishop’s attempt at interrogating and reshaping her relationship with Richard Calle by giving precedence to her own mental integrity over rhetorical manipulation. In this sense, her connection to Calle, fully sealed against violation by the earthly powers, is parallel to a virgin martyr’s relationship with Christ.

Whether or not those present at the examination are able to recognize the link, they are clearly aware of Margery’s claim to authority and interpret these “leud worddys” as open rebellion; the appalled Bishop tells Margery that no house will now receive her. Margery’s own mother, hearing of her “demeny[n]g,” closes the doors of the family home to her wayward daughter (Letter 203; 342-43). Ultimately, Margaret Paston

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<sup>187</sup> Margery is referring to the view, prevalent in England from the twelfth century, that mutual consent, when properly expressed, functioned as a marital contract in itself without the ceremony administered by a member of the clergy. However, as Michael M. Sheehan points out in his close examination of an Ely Register, although the instance of marital promise as a type of marital contract was extensively discussed in canonical treatises, it did not frequently appear in official disputes. In the course of the fourteenth century, there are only two possible instances of such cases (“The Formation and Stability of Marriage in Fourteenth-Century England: Evidence of an Ely Register,” in *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies*, ed. James K. Farge, intro. Joel T. Rosenthal [Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1996], 69).

is less unsettled by the socially problematic marriage than by the terms of her daughter's rebellion, as she writes to her son, "...fore and sche had be good, wat so euere sche had be yt xuld not a ben os jt tys, fore *and* he were ded at thys owyre sche xuld neuere be at myn hart as sche was" (Letter 203, 343). Like a virgin martyr, Margery becomes a *persona non grata* in the social world that produced her and is ultimately released to her beloved.

There is little doubt that Margery Paston knew the probable outcome of her bold outburst when she chose to speak out; however, she also had a model of behaviour available from the saints' Lives she would have read, heard being read, or learned through pictures during her training as a daughter of a moderately well-to-do family. We do not have any letters written by Margery herself, but Calle's lament about their separation, and her mother's description of the examination, point to a strong possibility that such a connection would have naturally suggested itself, especially after we have seen how naturally it had come to Margery Kempe. Margery's re-enactment of this model in the face of persecution is strongly reminiscent of the other Margery's stout resistance when questioned by hostile clerics, and offers a glimpse of how the virgin martyr model might have been used to support largely secular projects of female rebellion, such as a socially problematic marriage.

I have sought to show, in these examples, how pertinent the thirteenth-century virgin martyr narrative becomes to the lives of the late medieval women. Because of its emphasis on the social dynamic readily recognized and understood by its readers, it is unusually suited for being emulated and appropriated by real, historical women, who

seek to alter their circumstances in some manner, or to re-draw the narrow boundaries of their gender. In Butler's terms, these Lives opened up an entirely new possibility for performance, allowing women to deviate from the prescriptions outlined by the Church Fathers, and to continue gendering themselves female while becoming highly visible, as well as verbally and physically aggressive. Sanok speaks of the feminine audience as an idealistic fiction, used by male writers to comment on the flawed social order,<sup>188</sup> and it means little to speak of an overarching female community, somehow united through their ideas about women's position in the social world. At the same time, my reading of Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, and Margery Paston strongly suggests that, while these women might not have seen each other as employing the same methods of self-construction and authorization, they are strongly linked through their interpretation and appropriation of the models offered by the virgin martyr narratives. In their search for authority and a certain amount of liberty, these medieval women are made a comprehensive group by using the virgin martyr model for their own, highly individual ends.

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<sup>188</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*. This is her general argument throughout the book, but see especially chapters 2 and 3.

**CHAPTER 2: THE PARAGON OF FEMININE MILDNESS:  
VERSIONS OF THE VIRGIN MARTYR IN THE 14<sup>TH</sup> AND 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, medieval women's use of the virgin martyr figure offered the female readers an opportunity to enact social resistance while relying on an authorized model. In this capacity, however, it clearly presented a problem for writers concerned with feminine conduct. The anger at women attempting to draw on religious texts to buttress their own social standing is evident, for example, in Thomas Hoccleve's "The Remonstrance against Oldcastle" (1415). Hoccleve suggests that such women are, necessarily, flawed readers: "thogh hir wit be thynne" and "to feeble to despute of it," they persist in their desire to "arguments make in holy writ."<sup>189</sup> The phrase "holy writ" is not limited to the Bible, or theological writings, but can in fact apply to hagiographical works, as in the *SEL* Life of St. Mary of Egypt, where it is used to refer to the source text.<sup>190</sup>

Hoccleve irritably explains that God has not opened the skill of interpretation to women, rather reserving "þat aart" for "clerkes grete," and commands to his female audience, "Lewed calates, sittith down and spynne / And kakele of sumwhat elles..." (ll. 150-2; 147-8). The last line highlights the contrast, in this stanza, between the learned clerks, uniquely suited for discussing holy works by their presumed removal from the worldly things, and the "lewed calates" – ignorant, foolish, possibly sexually promiscuous women, who like to cackle, or, as *MED* puts it, "talk volubly or foolishly,

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<sup>189</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, "The Remonstrance against Oldcastle," in *Selections from Hoccleve*, ed. M.C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 61-74, ll. 145-6; 149. All further references are to this text.

<sup>190</sup> "De Sancta Maria Egipciaca," in *South English Legendary*, v. 1, 136-48, l. 314.

chatter, gossip.”<sup>191</sup> The threat is here coming from women who wish to apply their worldly interests and their limited, womanly understanding, to works that discuss spiritual things. Hoccleve’s method of circumscribing the threat is to order these women to restrain their movement by sitting down, engage in spinning, an occupation proper to their sex, and not speak of things that they, by the reason of their flawed spiritual understanding, cannot properly grasp.

Although it is not readily obvious from this stanza alone, Hoccleve’s primary focus in the poem is disobedience against the Church. He is writing to remonstrate with Oldcastle, who “dronke haast heresies galle / And [is] fro Crystes feith twynned and goon” (ll. 7-8). Directing his rebuke toward one specific – male – person, Hoccleve nonetheless chooses to personify the desire for rebellious re-interpretation as a gossiping group of women, juxtaposing them, on the one hand, with the members of the holy church (“a prelate or a preest”) and, on the other, with the Christians of the past, who “axid nat a del” about the particular wording of texts (ll. 129; 155).<sup>192</sup> Significantly, he agrees that some clerics lead vicious lives but argues that their prescriptions must be followed regardless of the practice behind the theory: “but after his techynge / Thow oghtest do, and for thyn obeyyng / Thow shalt be sauf” (ll. 132-4). And so, even as Hoccleve’s poem is urging Oldcastle to submit to the rule of the Church, as his parents did, it also insists that some women, too free with their thoughts and tongues, need to be

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<sup>191</sup> See *MED* entries for “calates” and “kakele.”

<sup>192</sup> In her discussion of Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes*, Catherine Batt calls his practice “a ‘colonization’ of ‘feminine’ space,” whereby the representations and discussions of women are used in a “broader literary and political project”; see “Hoccleve and... Feminism? Negotiating Meaning in *The Regiment of Princes*,” in *Essays on Thomas Hoccleve*, ed. Catherine Batt (Brepols: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1996), 55-84, esp. 61. However, open as they are to the consumption by female audiences, these representations nonetheless deserve close analysis.

circumscribed by male clerical authority and by tradition. According to Hoccleve, women must be obedient to the proper authorities, however problematic the official actions and advice might be, instead of presuming to derive alternative models directly from the holy texts.

With obedience to authority held paramount, especially where women were concerned, the Lives of virgin martyrs were clearly at odds with the behavioural norms as reflected, for example, in conduct books.<sup>193</sup> The prescriptive poem “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter” shows that, while these norms are not meant for professional virgins, their general outlines do not lie far from the Church Fathers’ treatises. The daughter, as the main recipient of normative instructions, is advised to be “of fair bearing and of good tongue,” as well as “of mild mood,” to “[h]ave not too many words,” and to “dwell at home,” avoiding high visibility and contact with others.<sup>194</sup> A different version of the poem further instructs its subject “litill of langage for to be. / Nocht lowd of lauchtir, na of langage crouß [...] Suet and hamly, sempill and coy.”<sup>195</sup> In both versions, the reader is urged to be not heard, when possible, since the excess of language – and of

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<sup>193</sup> See D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199, on the popularity of conduct books in late medieval England. See also Diane Borstein *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), esp. chapter 4, “Woman as Wife and Mother,” for a general overview of the texts I discuss in a broader context of courtesy literature intended for a female audience.

<sup>194</sup> “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,” in *The Babees’ Book: Medieval Manners for the Young: Done into Modern English from Dr. Furnivall’s Texts*, ed. Edith Rickert (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1966), 31-42, esp. 32-5. This poem exists in several versions, with a range of stylistic choices, although not in the overall message. This version, originally from MS. Lambeth 853, ca. 1430, was collected by Dr. Furnivall into his *Babees’ Book* in the early twentieth century and subsequently re-edited by Edith Rickert. Because her edition does not offer line numbers, my references are to the page numbers. All further references, unless otherwise specified, are to this edition.

<sup>195</sup> “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,” in *The Bruce; or, The Book of the Most Excellent and Noble Prince Robert de Broys, King of Scots*, by John Barbour, 1877, ed. W. W. Skeat (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, 1937, EETS, e.s. 29), 523-36, ll. 14-5; 19.

sound on the whole – seems to be associated with ill temper and disobedience of societal norms. The way in which the proper woman is conceived is not unlike the patristic virgins: these black holes that, ideally, are impossible to detect from the outside. As Claire Sponsler argues, the narrator teaches the female reader to exercise utmost self-discipline over her body, with especial physical control in the social sphere, suggesting that virtue can only reside in a rigidly self-contained woman.<sup>196</sup>

Furthermore, the woman at whom the poem is directed must not think that she will have an opportunity to pick and choose the ways in which to conduct her life. The narrator exhorts her: “If any man offer thee courtship, and would marry thee, / Look that thou scorn him not, whatsoever he be,” and once the wedding vows are said, the woman must “[m]eekly [...] him answer and not as an atterling [a shrew], / So [she may] slake his mood, and be his dear darling” (33). The poem positions itself as private interfamilial advice passed from one woman to another, but Felicity Riddy convincingly argues that its various versions were likely to have been the product of masculine clerical writing culture concerned with maintaining social order at local level.<sup>197</sup> If, as Riddy shows, this poem was used to train not daughters but young maidens who have moved away from their families, the threat to social order is located in the possibility that, escaping from

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<sup>196</sup> Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), see chapter 3, “Conduct Books and Good Governance.” Also see Dyan Elliott’s argument for the link between Tertullian’s rhetoric of spiritual marriage in *On the Apparel of Women* and *On the Veiling of Virgins* and the emphasis on the institution of marriage and women’s conduct as wives that developed by the end of the Middle Ages in “Tertullian, the Angelic Life, and the Bridge of Christ,” in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 16-33.

<sup>197</sup> Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71.1 (1996): 66-86.

parental control, these women might exercise greater independence. Both versions discussed here, but especially the second text (MS. G. 23), greatly emphasize the idea of the training process that must be applied to young people generally but, in this case, specifically to maidens, whose potential for rebelliousness is troubling. If one “lettis thame follow thair vantownes, / And favoyris thame in thair vikkidnes,” the poem warns, they will certainly bring the social order into complete disarray.<sup>198</sup> The suggestions in “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter” stand in sharp contrast with the saints’ Lives, also used for training purposes, not because the heroines of the latter were determined to preserve their virginity at any cost, but primarily because such texts as the Life of St. Juliana advocated careful consideration of marital proposals and adamant refusal if the suitor was not judged appropriate. Moreover, the meekness and mildness as prescribed norm are specifically mocked in these Lives, as illusions inherited by the villainous characters from an earlier, outdated tradition.

It is only to be expected, then, that this perceived contradiction between the social demands on medieval women and the models offered to them by the earlier versions exert a strong influence on the revision of virgin martyrs in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Certainly the choice of heroines points to an awareness of such a contradiction. So, St. Juliana – immensely popular earlier, and elected both by Cynewulf and the Katherine Group writer as one of the representative virgin martyrs – is not selected by later hagiographers as the subject of their texts. Even Bokenham, in his treatment of an entire group of saints, most of whom are virgin martyrs, leaves St.

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<sup>198</sup> “How the Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,” *The Bruce*, ll. 267-8.

Juliana out. At the same time, as Eamon Duffy notes, she continued to be depicted on rod screens in England,<sup>199</sup> which means that she continued to be “read” by the many illiterate laymen for whom such pictures were meant.<sup>200</sup> Juliana’s continued existence in pictorial form, which needed easily recognizable material, and her exclusion from the new, independently authored versions of saints’ Lives, points to a particular shift in hagiographical logic. This shift seems to be part of a reaction against the perceived “misuse” of holy texts by women and signifies an attempt to produce texts (sometimes, as in the case of Bokenham, meant specifically for women) that resist such misuse and generate socially desirable imitation practices.

Contemporary texts attest to an explicit effort to reconcile the virgin martyr with the proper woman of the conduct books. In the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, written to instruct the author’s daughters in being good women and translated by Caxton for the English public, the Knight of the Tower presents two virgin martyrs, St. Lucy and St. Cecilia, along with St. Elizabeth and “many other holy ladyes,” as figures of exemplary charity. He argues that, following the example of the Virgin Mary, they “were so charitable that they gaf to the poure & Indygent the most parte of theyr reuenues / As reherced is playnly in theyr legends.”<sup>201</sup> The rather odd choice of charity as the distinguishing feature uniting these saints testifies to the Knight’s overarching project of

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<sup>199</sup> Eamon Duffy, “Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century England,” in *Women in the Church: Papers Read at the 1989 Summer Meeting and the 1990 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 175-196, esp. 184.

<sup>200</sup> D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, 51-58. He also points out that pictures might have been linked especially closely to women and their practices of learning stories (57-8).

<sup>201</sup> *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. William Caxton, ed. M.Y. Offord (London: Oxford University Press, 1981, EETS, s.s. 2), 147. All further references are to this edition.

representing holiness: throughout his book, he studiously avoids mentioning events or actions that might disrupt the smooth flow of social order or, more specifically, prevent or disturb a woman's marriage. Indeed, as many of his exempla argue, losing a prospective husband or the falling out of the present husband's affections signifies the ultimate failure in a woman's life. Consequently, virgin martyrs with their anti-marital agenda are deeply problematic, and perhaps no one more than St. Cecilia as she is commonly portrayed (including the *Legenda Aurea* version), who terrorizes her perfectly good husband, refusing him sexual favours and pelting him with threats of imminent death. In suggesting that virgin martyrs should be primarily known for their charitable acts (which their earlier Lives often do not mention even in passing, let alone set in the foreground), the Knight neatly elides the more problematic aspects of these Lives and recruits the heroines as figureheads for promotion of minor household miracles. In the *Book of the Knight of the Tower*, divine intercessions are never disturbing or power-bestowing: the goal of miraculous occurrences is, invariably, to preserve a girl's virginity, sometimes against her own will, or to aid a woman in being a better citizen.

The chapter on emulating the Virgin Mary gives an example of such a miracle: on her way to the church, a pious Roman matron notices a poor woman suffering from the cold. Despite her desire to hear the mass, the matron takes the poor woman to her house and dresses her warmly; however, "whyles she was aboute this charytable dede / the preest that sayd the masse couthe speke neuer a word vnto the tyme that she was come to the Chirche ageyne [...] And sawe afterward in a vysion the cause why he had lost his speche / & hou god preysed before his angels þ<sup>e</sup> gyft gyuen of the good lady to

hym” (148). This occurrence does not confer any particular honour or reward on the pious matron. Instead, the purpose of the miracle is endearingly pragmatic: it is meant to ensure that the assistance to the poor woman does not detract from the matron’s attendance of the mass. There is also no indication that the matron may be in any way held responsible for the miraculous event. Rather than in any way elevating the recipient of the miracle – the pious matron, – the event forces the Virgin Mary into the service of the contemporary Church, using her power to ensure that the matron in question does not have to miss a single word of instruction from the priest. Interpreting this story as a revision of the Cecilia legend, Sanok further suggests that it carefully separates the matron’s house, as the place of private charity, from the public speech of the priest: it is he, not the matron, who acts as “an avatar of the saint.”<sup>202</sup> The matron, on the other hand, has lost the power of proclamation: Cynthia Ho calls the Knight’s *Book* “a conduct book for a woman’s tongue,” arguing that its author seeks to force female speech into the framework of propriety, using the woman’s ability to control her utterance as a measure of her goodness.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed, in this book following the example of female saints means not exercising any sort of mental or vocal power but simply falling into a routine of praying and fasting, ungrounded in spiritual effort. Suggesting such a routine for his readers, the Knight of the Tower writes soothingly,

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<sup>202</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 7.

<sup>203</sup> Cynthia Ho, “As Good as Her Word: Women’s Language in *The Knight of the Tour d’Landry*,” in *The Rusted Hauberk: Feudal Ideals of Order and Their Decline*, ed. Liam O. Purdon and Cyndi L. Vitto (Tampa: University Press of Florida, 1994), 99-120, esp. 100.

And I saye to yow for trouthe / that it shalle be to yow a lyght thyng / yf  
 ye acustomme yow theein / For it is but acustomance for to here the  
 masse / and the seruyce of god / for to saye your houres. and to doo al  
 other hooly werkes / as haue done these holy wymmen / lyke as it is  
 conteyned in the legendis / And in the lyues of the sayntes of heuen. (20)

In the Knight's interpretation, the works of the holy women in their legends and Lives may be summarized, more or less, by attendance of the mass and saying of the hours: everything else is dismissively grouped under the heading of "all the other holy works."

To illustrate his point, the Knight offers a story that seems to be loosely based, at least in its concerns, on the virgin martyr narrative, since its heroine must undergo a trial and emerge a victorious virgin. In this story, two daughters of a Constantinople emperor fall in love with two knights and invite them, at night, into their bedroom: the potential for disaster, considering that the Knight is writing a work of moral instruction, is obvious to any Christian reader. However, the reader also learns that the younger daughter "was of good maners and loued god / and honoured & prayd to hym alwey when she awoke / and moche deuoutely praid for the sowles of them that were dede," while her sister did little more than mock this display of piety (15).

The narrative unfolds along its generic lines, distributing rewards and punishments where they are due: the older daughter has her dalliance with the knight, becomes pregnant, and is drowned by her enraged father. However, when the second sister's paramour attempts to enter her bedchamber, he is deterred by the sight of more than a thousand dead men, crowding about the maiden. Like a virgin martyr, she possesses such potent supernatural protection against defilement that no untoward suitor can pass, which is why, when the knight explains his reluctance to his beloved the next

day, her reaction might seem stereotypical. Like any good virgin martyr, the maiden is “merueylously ioeful / and thank[s] god moche humbly / whiche had saued her fro perisshyng and dishonoure” (15). The maiden’s reaction, and the particularities of her gratitude, point directly to the genre of the virgin martyr’s *vita*, and invite the audience to rejoice along with the virgin who, with divine help, has successfully preserved her purity.

However, we are also perfectly cognizant, as readers, that the genre is already disrupted, since the heroine was saved very much against her will – not from another’s aggression but from her own imperfection. Her joy and gratitude seem curiously misplaced, since, arranging to meet her lover privately, she was surely aware of all the implications of such a meeting, and the narrative does not in any way suggest that she has, with some thought, realized her earlier mistake. Instead of being an active participant of the struggle for her virginity, the emperor’s daughter emerges in this story as little more than the site where the struggle for female purity can take place, and displays no particular interest in retaining the very virginity for which, according to the Knight, she is so grateful. The narrative, in other words, is not concerned with the maiden’s personal preference, nor is it a narrative in which the heroine strives to defend her decisions. Indeed, the absence of concern with the heroine’s personal preferences or desires is emphasized again when, in order to reward her for having preserved her virginity, the girl’s father marries her off to the King of Greece.

Seemingly contradictory, this moment is in perfect accord with the Knight’s commitment to the refashioning of female holiness. From an active agent who makes the

independent decision to remain chaste and is then granted the power to support this decision, the maiden is transformed into what Butler, reflecting on Claude Lévi-Straus's *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, calls "the site of a patronymic exchange."<sup>204</sup> She both is and is not "the patronymic sign, excluded from the signifier" and "qualifies not as an identity, but only as a relational term": as a heroine of the Knight's narrative, she is incapable, it seems, of wishing either to keep or to lose her virginity.<sup>205</sup> Virginity here represents, in Lévi-Straus's words, "an essential value in group life"<sup>206</sup> and functions as the perfect blank space, in which the interaction between members of the masculine sex – be they the amorous knight, the strict father, the future husband, or the thousand dead men – may be enacted. This is, in other words, the product of taming the virgin martyr and transforming her into a model suitable for the Knight's idea of the proper woman, an idea not very far off from that of the author of "The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter." In order to follow the maiden's example, the female reader is encouraged not to defend her chastity but, rather, to become such a blank space, accepting masculine authority in the place of her own intention.

In his conduct instruction, the Knight of the Tower outlines the shift in the presentation of the virgin martyrs taking place in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – a re-shaping of the virgin martyr into a good woman, whose virginity is preserved through tactics of concealment, and not through her own agency. This good woman can offer the correct feminine virtues to the readers but her saintliness is also highly abstract

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<sup>204</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 50.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Claude Lévi-Straus, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, trans. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer, ed. Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 43.

and conducted as a lack of active participation. As Lewis puts it, in the Knight's narrative virgin martyrs represent "the criteria of ideal femininity" and are intended to enable the author's daughters to "construct themselves as ideally suited for marriage."<sup>207</sup> The prominent qualities of the earlier women saints – preparedness for public performance, extraordinary outspokenness, and close engagement with the world around them – are gradually mitigated. This trend reaches full force with the fifteenth-century writer Bokenham, the creator of the first, strictly speaking, all-female hagiographical collection, but it is also already visible in the fourteenth-century texts based on the virgin martyrs' Lives, made manifest in the authors' suspicion of the female heroine's voice and her ability to manipulate the normative categories.

### **Chaucer's Holy Women:**

#### **Those Who Love Their Men and Those Who Stay at Home**

Chaucer considers saints' Lives throughout his career: both through including two saints' Lives into the *Canterbury Tales*, and by re-working the genre of the saintly woman's *vita* in *The Legend of Good Women*. The *Legend* is perhaps the most controversial of his *oeuvre*: scholarly interpretations of this work range from seeing it an enthusiastic pro-feminist collection to a decidedly anti-feminist satire.<sup>208</sup> However, I agree with Sanok's suggestion that such "extraordinarily disparate interpretations" sustained by the same work produce not the question as to which one is more accurate

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<sup>207</sup> Katherine J. Lewis, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England*, 238.

<sup>208</sup> See Catherine Sanok's overview in "Reading Hagiographically: The Legend of Good Women and Its Feminine Audience," *Exemplaria* 13.2 (2001): 323-354.

but, rather, curiosity about “what informs those readings.”<sup>209</sup> Further in her article Sanok identifies this informing influence as the female audience that the *Legend* seeks to construct. I argue that, in drawing on saints’ Lives, Chaucer relies on his audience’s knowledge of virgin martyr narratives and, while displaying his deep interest in the genre, at the same time expresses a no less deep uneasiness with the goals and methods of such heroines. Rather than condemn or praise an entire gender, he is using the particular hagiographical genre to construct, for the edification of his female readers, a re-shaped version of a good woman who, when the romance influences in the *Legend* are taken into account, bears a striking similarity to the model offered by the Knight of the Tower.<sup>210</sup>

In her instructions to the author, Alceste begins by describing the heroines of the *Legend* as strong, steadfast women who had preferred martyrdom to renouncing their love: the indebtedness of her speech to the earlier saints’ lives is unmistakable. She tells him,

...to hyr love were they so trewe  
That, rathere than they wolde take a newe,  
They chose to be ded in sondry wyse,  
And deaden, as the story wyl devyse;  
And some were brend, and som were cut the hals,  
And some dreynt for they wolden not be fals;

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 346.

<sup>210</sup> Lisa J. Kiser analyses hagiographical references and allusions in individual lives in “Chaucer’s Classical Legendary,” in *Chaucer’s Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Quinn (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 315-46, esp. 322-5. See also Sheila Delany’s analysis of the difference in the handling of the hagiographical theme by writers of different gender, Chaucer and Christine de Pizan: “Re-Writing Woman Good: Gender and the Anxiety of Influence in Two Late-Medieval Texts,” in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 75-92. Note that all of Delany’s articles mentioned in this chapter are collected, in slightly altered form, in her book *The Naked Text: Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

And alle keped they here maydenhede,  
Or elles wedlok, or here widewhere.<sup>211</sup>

This speech sets up the hagiographical dichotomy of truth and falsehood, which the love martyr, as opposed to her persecutors (in this case – the defamers of womankind), has fully mastered; the rejection of falsehood is underwritten by the heroine’s control of her chastity and remaining constancy. However, the next lines dispel the illusion of genre, since Alceste now makes it clear that the good women of this legend chose death not for reasons of personal conviction but because of their concern with reputation and fear of shame. They do it “al for verray vertu and clenness, / And for men schulde sette on hem no lak [blame]” (ll. 297-98). Alceste’s description of a rebellious love martyr suddenly collapses into that of a conduct manual such as “A Good Wife Taught Her Daughter,” where the female reader is instructed, once she is given to one man, to remain agreeable and true, in the hope that her devotion and obedience will be repaid.<sup>212</sup> A deviation from the model of “virtue and cleanness” results in the apportioning of blame by men – either specifically by the good women’s lovers or, more broadly, by those who hold the positions of power in her social world.

Furthermore, while gesturing at the virgin martyr Lives by describing the heroines as welcoming tortures and violent deaths rather than sacrificing their chastity to undeserving suitors, the introduction acts to problematize the dynamic by merging the true lover for whom the saint suffers and the evil suitor who eventually brings her to

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<sup>211</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 587-630, ll. 288-95. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>212</sup> Elizabeth D. Harvey, for example, supports this connection with her argument concerning the silence of women in Chaucer’s poem; see “Speaking of Tongues: The Poetics of the Feminine Voice in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” in *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays Toward a Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Edelgard E. Du Bruck (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 47-60.

death. According to the Prologue, there are only two main roles in this *Legend*: the “goode women, maydenes and wyves, / That were trewe in lovyng al here lyves” and the “false men that hem betrayen” (ll. 474-6).<sup>213</sup> The position of these good women is an unenviable one; unlike virgin martyrs, they do not have the satisfaction of a devotion rewarded.<sup>214</sup> The “true” love of which the prologue speaks invokes conflicting emotions in the readers, since it is clearly misdirected and misguided, not unlike the daughter’s nocturnal invitation in the story narrated by the Knight of the Tower. If Chaucer’s good woman happened to find herself in an earlier virgin martyr narrative, she might be scorned by the heroine for her mistaken attachments. Instead of mocking gender norms, as the *SEL* Lives of Sts. Margaret and Juliana did, Chaucer’s refashioning of the genre reinforces them, arguing, much like Hoccleve years later, that devotion and meek obedience are enough reward and commendation in themselves, even if their object is fatally flawed.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> R.N. Lumiansky has commented on this, urging greater attention to the idea of unfaithful men in the *Legend*: “Chaucer and the Idea of Unfaithful Men,” *Modern Language Notes* 62.8 (1947), 560-2.

<sup>214</sup> In their essay “The *Legend of Good Women*,” Julia Boffey and A.S.G. Edwards draw the reader’s attention to the “intermittent, but often striking lack of tonal coherence in the work,” which they see as a symptom of the *Legend*’s moral unintelligibility, an absence of connection between suffering and solace; in *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Piero Boitani and Jill Mann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 112-26, esp. 124-5. But see Jill Mann for an argument that women’s pity and their suffering are reflective of God’s pity and suffering and thus are divine; *Feminizing Chaucer*, 1991 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), esp. chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>215</sup> Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues that this model is undermined by the gap between Chaucer, the author of the poem, and its (bored) narrator, who constructs this version of womanhood “Irony and the Antifeminist Narrator in Chaucer’s ‘Legend of Good Women,’” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 82.1 (1983): 11-31. However, even though the intention might well be for the reader to perceive the problems that arise from this literary tradition, the fact remains that the poem offers no alternatives, no other path to goodness in the secular world. Certainly Lydgate’s response to it in the *Fall of Princes*, jocular as it may be, suggests that the model offered in the *Legend* can be accepted and, indeed, applied as a measure of goodness in womankind. Lydgate complains that Chaucer, having taken on this task of finding nineteenth women “That dede excelle in bounte and fairnesse,” but, despite all his effort, “Was inportable his wittis to encoumbre, / In al this world to fynde so gret a noumbre”; see *Lydgate’s Fall of Princes, part I*, ed. Henry Bergen (London, Toronto, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, EETS, e.s. 121), 333-6.

Of course, not all of Chaucer's good women are jilted by their lovers but, by and large, they are acted upon by others and not given the power to deal creatively with the situation at hand. Critics have identified other narrative goals for this legendary: for example, Ruth M. Ames sees it as a critique of pseudo-courtly sex worship,<sup>216</sup> while Florence Percival interprets it as a re-enactment courtly game, the participants of which humorously engage in the debate about women.<sup>217</sup> At the same time, however, these interpretations forcefully bring the reader back to the question of women's role in these tales of secular martyrdom, and the stark difference of this role from that observed in early vernacular renditions of virgin martyrs' Lives.<sup>218</sup>

*The Legend of Good Women* indicates the direction for analyzing Chaucer's famous refashioning of St. Cecilia's Life in "The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale" in its merging of genres, arguing that even martyrdom cannot serve as an excuse for breaking

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<sup>216</sup> Ruth M. Ames, "The Feminist Connections of Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*," in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, 57-74.

<sup>217</sup> Florence Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 16-20. H.C. Goddard has somewhat prefigured this argument, suggesting that Chaucer is engaging in something of a courtly game and that he "pays a gallant and tactful compliment to the logical sense of his fair readers" and "makes, too, a delicate and graceful tribute to the feminine sense of humor," when he chooses not to explain (but only to hint) that the entire poem is "a most unmerciful satire upon women"; see "Chaucer's Legend of Good Women," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 7.4 (1908), 87-129, esp. 94; 101. The entire poem, then, is one long joke. On the other hand, Betsy McCormick has argued that the "game" of the *Legend* lies in the omissions from and alterations to the well-known stories, and in the creation, by engaging the reader's memory, of a fluid ethical experience; see "Remembering the Game: Debating the *Legend's* Women," in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 105-31.

<sup>218</sup> See Carolyn Dinshaw for an analysis of the re-writings of the feminine by the narrator of the legendary. As she aptly points out, "There is something soothing and reassuring about the repetition of a single narrative pattern over and over, as the examples of saints' lives demonstrate; but here, the specifically gendered defensive function of that reassurance and security is apparent in the masculine associations of the totalizing gesture. Woman's story – the letter – becomes dull, a formula. The female character is reduced to a never-varying formula": "'The Naked Text in English to Declare': The *Legend of Good Women*," in *Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, 347-382, esp. 369. See also Delany, "Difference and the Difference It Makes: Sex and Gender in Chaucer's Poetry," for some additional questions about women's role in the legend (*A Wyf Ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck*, ed. Juliette Dor [Liège, Belgium: Liège Language and Literature, 1992], 103-11).

the social norm: for a female martyr, reputation and concealment continue to be imperative.<sup>219</sup> Chaucer follows his sources – the version in *Legenda Aurea* and the longer *Passio S. Caeciliae* that predates it – fairly closely:<sup>220</sup> the changes he introduces to the narrative are subtle and manifest primarily in the wording and framing of the *vita*. His choice of the virgin martyr, however, is in itself significant: St. Cecilia is unusual in that she is one of the few virgin martyrs who do agree to be married to their pagan intended. In other words, Chaucer has chosen a heroine whose martyrdom is already relatively non-provocative in terms of public display (unless we are reading the fiery version offered by Aldhelm!), and bound her even tighter to the family home. St. Cecilia preaches – but in the privacy of her own house; the pagan husband offers no resistance to her activities; even her martyrdom and death do not have to be taken outside. In its cautious plot, Chaucer’s story of Cecilia echoes the Good Wife’s advice that her daughter stay at home as much as she can, without venturing onto the street, for Cecilia’s house looms large on the horizon of this narrative.<sup>221</sup> Even the lengthy exchange with

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<sup>219</sup> Although Laurel Braswell insists that this tale represents “Chaucer’s most straightforward use of the genre,” I hope to show that, especially considering the way it is framed in the collection, it is far from being the paragon of generic writing; see “Chaucer and the Art of Hagiography,” in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, 209-21, esp. 209.

<sup>220</sup> Although see Sherry L. Reames, “The Cecilia Legend as Chaucer Inherited It and Retold It: The Disappearance of An Augustinian Ideal,” *Speculum* 55.1 (1980): 38-57, on the changes he does make. Generally, however, scholars have tended to see this text as extremely conventional; see Carolyn Collette’s summary of the critical approaches to this narrative in her article “Critical Approaches to the *Prioress’s Tale* and the *Second Nun’s Tale*,” in *Chaucer’s Religious Tales*, ed. C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 95-107, esp. 100-3.

<sup>221</sup> Reames argues that Chaucer’s version of St. Cecilia’s legend “strikes a middle ground between two extremes”: his St. Cecilia is not as “bold and transgressive” as the *SEL* heroine but not quite as meek and ladylike as the in the *North Homily Cycle* and a range of British breviaries; see “Artistry, Decorum, and Purpose in Three English Retellings of the Cecilia Legend,” in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, ed. M. Teresa Tavormina and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 177-99, esp. 178. See also her article on the range of adaptations of this legend into the British Breviaries: “*Mouvance* and Interpretation in Late-Medieval Latin: The Legend of St. Cecilia in

Almachius, her pagan interrogator, which is presumably somewhat public, does not happen on the market square, with crowds of people watching; in fact, no one but Almachius's servants is mentioned.

This Cecilia is certainly not the shrinking virgin lauded by the Church Fathers, but the narrative certainly gestures in that direction in a variety of ways, perhaps most obviously by alluding to St. Ambrose as one of the sources for the Life.<sup>222</sup> This reference has given rise to some discussion, since the nine lines of text that Chaucer attributes to St. Ambrose do not appear to have a source. This passage has been previously traced to the *prefatio* of the Ambrosian mass for St. Cecilia's Day,<sup>223</sup> as well as to St. Ambrose's general discussion of the symbolic significance of two crowns.<sup>224</sup> Still, neither of these links provides a satisfactory explanation for Chaucer's sudden attention to St. Ambrose in the middle of the narrative and for ascribing to him an expansive comment on Cecilia's highly esteemed value and moral excellence. I would like to suggest that these lines are less an indication of a source than an emphasis on the qualities that make Cecilia a "good woman" rather than a troublesome presence: St. Ambrose is called a "noble doctor deere" in this excerpt as a learned clergyman offering commentary on the events, but at the same time he is literally performing the role of the Doctor – the explicator of thorny issues in mystery plays (ll. 262-69, l. 273). His commendation of

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British Breviaries," in *Medieval Literature: Texts and Interpretations*, ed. Tim William Machan (Birmingham, New York: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), 159-89.

<sup>222</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, gen. ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), ll. 270-283. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>223</sup> Millett Henshaw, "The Preface of St. Ambrose and Chaucer's 'Second Nun's Tales,'" *Modern Philology* 26.1 (1928): 15-16. This explanation is repeated in *The Riverside Chaucer*. However, the *prefatio*, as it is given in Henshaw's article, is little more than a very terse summary of this Life and bears no resemblance to the "Ambrosian" lines in Chaucer.

<sup>224</sup> Oliver Farrar Emerson, "St. Ambrose and Chaucer's Life of St. Cecilia," *PMLA* 41.2 (1926): 252-61.

Cecilia situates her firmly within the patristic definition of holy virgins (associated with private rather than public space), and thus curbs the revolutionary potential in her spirited exchanges with Almachius.

Although Cecilia is not quite as meek as one of St. Ambrose's virgins, she certainly indicates a step in that direction. Throughout the tale of the Second Nun, she eschews visibility, sending Valerians and Tyburces to Pope Urban but waiting for them at home and coming to her group of converts "whan it was woxen nyght" (l. 379). Even the pagan persecutor is uniquely understanding of Cecilia's need for seclusion, ordering his men to lead the saint "[h]om til hir hous" and to martyr her there in a hot bath (l. 514). In an attempt to make this scene seem more like a real martyrdom, Florence H. Ridley glosses the word "bath" as "cauldron" (see note to l. 515); the scene does not preclude such an explanation, but it is not an obvious one, either in the Middle English or Roman context. *MED* defines "bath" much as we do today – a tub in which one washes, but V.A. Kolve also points out that baths in the Roman world were heated rooms,<sup>225</sup> which explains why and how the executioners were able to "faste shetten" Cecilia in a bath (l. 517). Cecilia's martyrdom, then, stands in sharp contrast with what we have seen in earlier Lives: instead of a tense, violent encounter, an opposition of good and evil performed at a market square, it is an almost leisurely affair, with the heroine relocated into the comfort of her home. On the one hand, this description echoes the earlier saints' Lives in its interest in the daily routine and the objects associated with it – a woman's

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<sup>225</sup> V.A. Kolve, "Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* and the Iconography of Saint Cecilia," in *New Perspectives in Chaucer Criticism*, ed. Donald M. Rose (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, 1981), 137-74, esp. 142; also see the entire article for the fascinating interpretation of this image's function in the text.

bath, taken in the privacy of her home, but on the other, as part of the text's overall preoccupation with the private, enclosed space, it also elides the aggressive visibility of the virgin martyr.

Representing in Chaucer's text the authority of the Church Fathers, St. Ambrose highlights this elision by commenting, approvingly, that St. Cecilia is able to give up "[t]he world and eke hire chamber" in order to become a martyr (l. 276). The word "chamber" refers to the marital bedroom which Cecilia is abandoning, and to the private sphere on the whole; describing her departure from the secular world in terms of a conscious sacrifice, St. Ambrose is suggesting that the martyr must also be sacrificing her desire to live in accordance with the social norms, keeping within the private sphere and making an exemplary wife for her husband. The bedchamber, and the house in which it is located, serves as the focus of intense attachment and the locus of St. Cecilia's entire existence. Ultimately, despite Chaucer's protestations to the contrary, the martyr can leave her chambers only in spirit, after her soul leaves the body.

Taken together, the Prologue and the Tale speak of usurpation of the virgin: St. Cecilia is confined in her private space, with her words largely emptied of the potential for making things happen. St. Cecilia's function as a virgin martyr, converting by word and example, is taken over by the male characters of the Life: the conversion of Valerians is performed by Pope Urban and the apparition in white, while Tyburces's eventual conversion is promised by an angel to his brother. More significantly, although Cecilia preaches for three days after her throat is cut, she is, quite literally, preaching to the converted, for the "Cristen folk, which that aboute hire were" (l. 535) have already

been introduced to the true faith by the brothers and baptized by priests, whom Cecilia brought at night (ll. 375-80). This is a departure from de Voragine, in whose version the martyr does convert folk through her death-bed preaching, although she must then send the converts to Pope Urban to be properly baptized.

While Cecilia remains at the centre of Chaucer's narrative, her activity is reduced to that of a spiritual travel agent, who must forever redirect people to other, more effective guides.<sup>226</sup> She has little authority over the private space in which she has spent so much time, or over her own saintliness located in this space even after her death: her house becomes a church after "Seynt Urban halwed it, as he wel myghte" (l. 551). A subtle change in wording gives the male cleric individual power over the holy virgin and her private space: in de Voragine's version Pope Urban consecrated the house with his deacons (and in Ælfric's Old English version the agent of the consecration is not specified), but now the ability to make something holy is attributed to him alone.<sup>227</sup> This emphasis on the individual male cleric is likely partly due to the ecclesiastical events of the time. As Mary Giffin notes, sometime in the early 1380s Adam Easton, an English monk, became Cardinal Priest of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, and the poem, in theory,

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<sup>226</sup> This in itself stands in contrast to the earlier versions of the story (to make this comparison, I used Robert K. Upchurch's edition that contains both Ælfric's Old English version and his Latin sources with translation; see *Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses with Modern English Parallel-Text Translations*, ed. Robert K. Upchurch (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007). In the long Latin version, Cecilia converts her brother-in-law personally in a long conversation, instructing him to ask questions of her, not his brother (187), and following the failed beheading, continues her own spiritual work and does not "cease to strengthen all the young women she had nurtured" (215). In Ælfric's Old English version, Cecilia converts her husband before he departs to be baptized ("[t]he virgin then instructed the young man for a long time until he believed in the living God") and plays an active role in the conversion of Maximus and other heathen, rather than arriving after all the talking is done (73; 81).

<sup>227</sup> Note also that, although in the long Latin version Urban does perform the consecration, St. Cecilia claims for herself a part in this process, telling him that God has delayed her death so that "hanc domum meam ecclesie nomini consecrarem" [so that I might consecrate this house of mine as a church] (*Ælfric's Lives of the Virgin Spouses with Modern English Parallel-Text Translations*, 214).

could have been intended to secure his assistance for Richard II.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, as John Hirsh points out, “even more powerful than the evident association with Cardinal Easton was that with the reigning pontiff, Pope Urban VI,” whom the English supported against the French antipope.<sup>229</sup> If this is the case, in this refashioning of the tale the virgin martyr’s own miraculous influence is subtly elided to create a verse compliment to the male clergyman, with the focus of the tale shifting from the saint to the building in which church services may be performed. In an apogee of concealment, St. Cecilia’s house stands in for her body, buried elsewhere, and is itself transformed into a relic, to which people come to worship her. The creation of this relic is attributed solely to a male Church official, which is unusual for a virgin martyr’s *vita*, and the sources attempt to circumvent this detail. After the virgin martyr’s death, the miraculous powers of St. Cecilia are not worked through her body or body parts, as is generally the case with relics. Through Pope Urban’s intervention, her saintly powers are located in the same private space that is understood as her proper sphere of influence. St. Cecilia’s authority, it seems, is fully possible only within the home, despite the demands of the plot that calls for the virgin martyr’s broad and continuing power of miraculous influence.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Mary Giffin, *Studies on Chaucer and His Audience* (Quebec: Les Éditions ‘L’Éclair,’ 1956), esp. chapter 2, “His Hous the Chirche of Seine Cecillie Highte.” It must be noted, however, that Griffin’s theory hinges on her suggestion that no other version of the *vita* ends with an emphasis on the creation of the Church of St. Cecilia and that “Chaucer seems to have been the only one who thought of it,” which, as I have shown, is not quite true (39).

<sup>229</sup> John Hirsh, *Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 98.

<sup>230</sup> In contrast, in the long Latin version contact relics are produced from Cecilia’s own body, as “[a]ll the Christians wiped her blood with pieces of linen paper” (215).

This transformation of the virgin martyr is foreshadowed, in the Prologue, by a momentary disruption of the Second Nun's voice. Even more than St. Cecilia, the Second Nun is a virgin who closely follows St. Ambrose's specifications: she is very nearly invisible, both in the "General Prologue" and in the prologue to her own tale.<sup>231</sup> It is in the latter that we see the usurpation enacted rather than described, as the Nun's voice is suddenly interrupted at line 62, with the words that refer to the speaker as "unworthy sone of Eve." The stark acknowledgement of authorship is accompanied, elsewhere in the prologue, by more casual references to the speaker's "faithful bisynesse" of translation, now being presented to the audience for the first time (ll. 24-25; 81-84). This puzzling doubling has been variously interpreted by scholars. Sanok, for example, sees the speaker as unproblematically female,<sup>232</sup> while Florence Ridley suggests in his explanatory notes that the prologue and tale might have been composed without thought of a female narrator and thus the speaker is gendered male,<sup>233</sup> and Hirsh argues that the female narrator gains authority by "claiming for herself male status."<sup>234</sup> I would like to extend these arguments by suggesting that, taking into account the preoccupation of the tale that follows, the speaker by necessity must be both: the Prologue functions as the site of a struggle between the two competing voices – the

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<sup>231</sup> See Elaine Filax, "A Female I-deal: Chaucer's Second Nun," in *Sovereign Lady: Essays on Women in Middle English Literature*, ed. Muriel Whitaker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 133-56.

<sup>232</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 166-73.

<sup>233</sup> Florence H. Ridley, ed., "The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, note to line 62, 943.

<sup>234</sup> John C. Hirsh, "The *Second Nun's Tale*," in *Chaucer's Religious Tales*, ed. C. David Benson and Elizabeth Robertson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 161-70, esp. 169. This view is in line with Hirsh's assertion that this narrative is unproblematically pro-feminist.

female character and the male author/translator.<sup>235</sup> The earlier female saints' Lives are, of course, not exempt from this competition,<sup>236</sup> but their deep engagement with everyday practices and issues, and their investment into an independent, vocal heroine, allow for the struggle to be resolved by the victory of the virgin martyr. In his exploration of the genre, however, Chaucer shows unwillingness to cede positions of authority to holy virgins; indeed, as the *Legend of Good Women* testifies, his martyr is a woman who literally cedes herself, like a city under siege, first to the militant lover, and then to the male writer who comes to collect her into his legendary. In the same way, the Second Nun's storytelling voice cracks roughly to reveal Chaucer the ventriloquist, and Cecilia's authority is deposited, at her own request, in Pope Urban, who thereby gains the power to bestow holiness onto the saint. This involvement of the Church is unusual for a popular hagiographical narrative, most of which emphasize divine authorization and an independent power for working miracles.<sup>237</sup>

It is true enough, as numerous scholars have pointed out, that Cecilia, not unlike the Second Nun, is allowed prolific speech, but the author's intrusion into the text in the Prologue shows with great clarity that these two female speakers' primary function is to serve as screens for Chaucer's own social critique.<sup>238</sup> His manipulation of the genre

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<sup>235</sup> This struggle between the author and the speaker to whom the tale is attributed remains even if we accept that the voice of the Second Nun is a later addition.

<sup>236</sup> As I have already mentioned, Mills addresses this very problem in his article "Can the Virgin Martyr Speak?" in *Medieval Virginites*.

<sup>237</sup> Note, for example, that the Little St. Hugh of Lincon, invoked at the end of "The Prioress's Tale," was never officially canonized or included into Catholic martyrology, which does not stop the Prioress from requesting a prayer on the travellers' behalf.

<sup>238</sup> Lynn Staley argues persuasively that "The Second Nun's Tale" is specifically interested in discussing the problem of possessions and corruption in the contemporary Catholic Church: see "Chaucer's Tale of the Second Nun and the Strategies of Dissent," *Studies in Philology* 89.3 (1992): 314-333. On the contrary, Joseph L. Grossi suggests that it is an expression of longing for the simple clarity of early Christianity,

marks the mid-point in the evolution of the virgin martyrs: in the fourteenth century, we still see them as possessing impressive powers of speech and influence which, at the same time, are increasingly circumscribed by the authors. Chaucer's St. Cecilia is a site of the struggle between the vernacular virgin martyr as she is popularly known and increasingly tightening normative regulations. By the mid-fifteenth century, however, the efforts to transform the virgin martyr into a good, proper woman are clearly visible, as an emphasis is placed on her piety, obedience, and attention to the social norms.<sup>239</sup>

Although the hagiographical plots remain, by and large, unaltered, and thus the various disruptive activities of the heroines are retained, they are interpreted typologically, thus effectively anticipating the problem of emulation: from socially complex characters with detailed quotidian concerns, virgin martyrs are transformed into Auerbach's *figurae*.<sup>240</sup>

### **The Climbing Saint: St. Cristina of Tyre/Bolsena<sup>241</sup>**

This transformation is easily traced through the re-fashioning of St. Cristina's Life, from the thirteenth-century *SEL* to the late fourteenth-century version by William Paris, culminating in Osborn Bokenham's fifteenth-century collection of holy virgins. St. Cristina's Life is well known for being especially rich in violent incident, even for a medieval virgin martyr: she is tortured consecutively by three different pagan judges, the

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positioned in sharp contrast to the political struggle of the medieval papal Rome: see "The Unhidden Piety of Chaucer's 'Seint Cecilie,'" *The Chaucer Review* 36.3 (2002): 298-309, esp. 299. Despite acknowledging that speaking through Cecilia affords Chaucer an "opaque screen for oftentimes telling social commentary," Staley insists that the heroine still remains "a female figure of authority" (332). However, she acknowledges that the very nature of his social commentary precludes the readers from in any way emulating the main character, since what Cecilia offers "is no longer available in a world where the Church has become the world" (332). This perspective, of course, is radically different from the views of Chaucer's contemporary Margery Kempe.

<sup>239</sup> See Winstead's *Virgin Martyrs*, ch. 3.

<sup>240</sup> See Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, foreword by Paolo Valesio (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, *Theory and History of Literature*, 9), 11-76.

<sup>241</sup> St. Cristina is variously assigned to Tyre or Bolsena; in both cases, her feast is celebrated on July 24.

first being her own father, with several attempts to put her to death. The saint responds to her trials in kind by breaking idols, collapsing a temple, and pitching the pieces of her own body at the torturers, aiming to harm. Possessing such an abundance of events, her *Life* offers to its re-writers much opportunity for intervention, which opportunity the *SEL* author, Paris, and Bokenham all use to produce very different St. Cristinas. While Paris's version often illustrates a transition between two models of the virgin martyr, there is a (social) world of difference between the physically and vocally aggressive *SEL* saint and Bokenham's mild maiden, whose every move seems to refer to Christ's intervention or, typologically, to his activity in the world.

In comparing the two latter versions, Delany remarks cursorily that "Bokenham is more subtle and probably less rigidly doctrinaire than this anonymous author [of the *SEL*]," and yet whatever Bokenham might lack in theological doctrine he amply compensates for with his strict definition of proper femininity.<sup>242</sup> Delany sees Bokenham as a writer who has invested in a "modest struggle against misogyny,"<sup>243</sup> but her argument for his positive view of women hinges on viewing his collection as a deliberate and consistent representation of the female body. However, this view has been severely compromised by the recent discovery of the Abbotsford manuscript, which shows that Bokenham did not have a particularly strong attachment to the order of the narratives.<sup>244</sup>

I do not mean to propose that he had a strong anti-feminist agenda, for of course the

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<sup>242</sup> Sheila Delany, *Impolitic Bodies: Poetry, Saints, and Society in Fifteenth-Century England: The Work of Osbern Bokenham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>243</sup> Delany, *Impolitic Bodies*, 182.

<sup>244</sup> For a description of this debate, see Alice Spencer, "Osbern Bokenham Reads the 'Prologue' to the *Legend of Good Women: The Life of St. Margaret*," in *Standing in the Shadow of the Master? Chaucerian Influences and Interpretations*, ed. Kathleen A. Bishop (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 160-203, esp. 165-7.

import of his collection depends on the assumption of his heroines' power and authority. At the same time, the legendary seems to me to display a dynamic opposite to that of the *SEL*. Although theoretically meant to symbolize the power of the Church, the virgin martyrs of the *SEL* became, in a heady tangle of the vernacular and the secular, strong models for women readers, breaking away from authorial control. Bokenham's heroines are supposedly meant to show and proclaim the power of saintly women but are ultimately fragmented (or, to use a stronger word, dismembered) by the narrator and employed for his own political and authorial ends.<sup>245</sup> In her examination of the tale of St. Margaret, Margaret Bridges has suggested that Bokenham makes a connection between hagiographical writing and relic translation; if this point is taken to its logical conclusion, the writer appears as a possible participant in *furta sacra*, who forcefully re-locates the holy bodies in exchange for money or fame.<sup>246</sup> Understandably, Bokenham portrays himself as an *authorized* translator, both of bodies and stories, but there are enough medieval accounts in which such apparent authority is problematized by the saint's post-mortem determination to orchestrate his or her own movements.<sup>247</sup> Bokenham's saints, of course, are much too well behaved as to be so disagreeable, leaving to the male hagiographer full control over their narratives.

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<sup>245</sup> See Carroll Hilles, "Gender and Politics in Osbern Bokenham's *Legendary*," in *New Medieval Literatures*, vol. 4, 1997, 189-212.

<sup>246</sup> Margaret Bridges, "Uncertain Peregrinations of the Living and the Dead: Writing (Hagiography) as Translating (Relics) in Osbern Bokenham's Legend of St. Margaret," in *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism*, 275-87. See especially 282-3 for a detailed discussion of the complicated travels of female saints' body parts.

<sup>247</sup> When St. Cuthbert decides to settle in Durham, the vehicle in which the relics are being transported refuses to move. See discussion in A.J. Piper's "The First Generations of Durham Monks and the Cult of St Cuthbert," in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, 1989, ed. Gerald Bonner, David Rollason, and Clare Stancliffe (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), 437-46.

Indeed, Bokenham's legendary functions not unlike a conduct manual in that, as Sanok has convincingly argued, it purposes to create an ideal female audience that would present "an alternative to the contentious political world of fifteenth-century England" and be united, through its sex, in a devotional experience of reading the texts and learning from them.<sup>248</sup> The active and aware virgin martyr of the thirteenth century is transformed, in Bokenham's legendary, into a saint uniquely suited for the reading pleasure and instruction of highly placed female patrons – or at least in the way the writer understands these patrons. The conflict in this narrative is consistently downplayed, and the saint is disconnected from the world and from her own body, engaging in a series of abstract, inimitable miracles, meant to be read typologically.

Bokenham's interpretation stands in sharp contrast with the *SEL* version, in which St. Cristina is not simply an abstract Christian among pagans but also participates in a highly personalized (and problematic) father-daughter relationship. Although her mother is mentioned later, in the beginning of the poem one might well assume that she is long dead, for there is no reference to her. All of the judge Urban's attention is concentrated on his young, beautiful daughter: he "oþer solas nadde none / Ne couþe non oþer wit ne lif · bote al on hure one" [he had no other solace and could not think of

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<sup>248</sup> Sanok, *Her Life Historical*, 51-2. See also Alice Spencer for an argument that Bokenham constructs his very text as feminine, which he had wrestled from the control of earlier poets and "re-sacralized," "impregnating" it with spiritual meaning ("Osbern Bokenham Reads the 'Prologue' to the *Legend of Good Women*," 182), as well as her "Etymology, Genealogy and Hagiographical *Auctoritas* in the Works of Osbern Bokenham: Redeeming the Public Voice of English Poetry," in *The Language of Public and Private Communication in a Historical Perspective*, ed. Nicholas Brownlees, Gabriella Del Lungo, and John Denton (Newcastle upon Tyre: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 323-43, for a somewhat altered version of this argument. While Spencer reads this impregnation positively, it is not unlike Harvey's and Ho's observations of male writers' ventriloquism: Bokenham completely subsumes the saint's voice in his own, making the text itself re-act the ideal femininity.

anyone else, but only of her].<sup>249</sup> In fact, he is so possessive and protective of her young beauty – the *SEL* uses the word “gelous” [jealous] – that he, afraid that normal dwellings might not suffice, builds “a noble tour [...] þat noman hure ne seie” [a lofty tower, so that no man might see her] (ll. 14-16). This fatherly obsession with one’s underage daughter is not unprecedented in medieval literature and is particularly reminiscent of the widely known story of Apollonius of Tyre,<sup>250</sup> one has to wonder whether the *SEL* author had that story in mind here, inspired by the conjunction of location. However, unlike the obedient daughter of Apollonius who gives in to her father’s incestuous love, St. Cristina has no intention of subscribing to Urban’s wishes: her entire Life is a systematic disobedience to his desire to possess her exclusively by secluding her from other men’s eyes.

In the light of this opening, St. Cristina’s subsequent disowning of her father and repeated martyrdoms, during which she is exposed to every onlooker, are not mere abstract gestures of a saint but an assertion of her independence.<sup>251</sup> Her refusal to be secluded and silenced is given vivid expression in the episode of idol destruction. Having broken the statues to pieces and tossed them out of the window, St. Cristina comes to a realization – a very logical one, considering that the tower is unlikely to have been located in the middle of the city, or in its poor quarters – that “hi mi3te bet iseo / Amidde

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<sup>249</sup> “De Sancta Cristina,” in *South English Legendary*, vol.1, 315-27, ll. 9-10. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>250</sup> Apollonius of Tyre’s infamous desire for his daughter had inspired many pre-modern authors, among whom were Gower (Book 8 of the *Confessio Amantis*) and Shakespeare (*Pericles*), to be discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>251</sup> See the overview of this narrative in Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), 41-45. See her entire first chapter for the discussions of intense locality in the *SEL*.

þe uenne hard inou” [that they might be quite hard to see in the fen] (ll. 93-94). To rectify the situation, at night she “nom a strong corde . and þere heo wende adown / And þe peces of golde nom . and bar forþ into þe toun” [took a strong rope and used it to climb down, and took the pieces of gold and carried them into town] (ll. 95-96). In this surprising addition to the narrative, St. Cristina’s resistance to pagan religion is tied inseparably to her abhorrence of seclusion; moreover, she needs no divine assistance to carry out this act of freeing herself from this temporary prison. Like Juliana’s pitching of the devil into an abandoned, overfilled privy on her way to the market square, the image of the tender maiden busily considering the likelihood that the gold pieces will be found before her father’s arrival and bravely climbing up and down a rope is thoroughly pragmatic – and irresistibly funny. Although for a moment it is the heroine who becomes the butt of the joke, it only adds poignancy and humanity to her image, allowing the audience to identify with her more easily.<sup>252</sup>

The saint’s potent independence is echoed in Paris’s version, which, however, does not reproduce the fatherly obsession or the climbing moment but shows Urban as a loving father grieved by his daughter’s attitude: upon finding out that that she is a Christian who refuses to worship his idols, he feels as if “his herte wold breke in too / For Cristyns lofe, his doughter free.”<sup>253</sup> It seems that this Urban has inherited some of his

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<sup>252</sup> Gregory M. Sadlek demonstrates that not only the *South English Legendary* generally contains more comical situations than its sources, but it also does not shy away from suggesting that saints themselves may occasionally be the targets for laughter and still retain their saintliness. See his “Laughter, Game, and Ambiguous Comedy in the *South English Legendary*,” *Studia Neophilologica* 64 (1991): 45-54.

<sup>253</sup> William Paris, “Life of St. Christina,” from British Library MS Arundel 168, fols. 2<sup>r</sup>-4<sup>v</sup>, in *Middle English Legends of Women Saints*, ed. Sherry L. Reames, with assistance of Martha G. Blalock and Wendy R. Larson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 227-48, ll. 127-8. All further references are to this edition.

perspective from the *SEL* version, since his grief and disapproval are triggered by St. Cristina's freedom from his influence: like St. Juliana, St. Cristina is permitted by the narrative to resist her father, rejecting the normative framework of daughterly obedience to which he subscribes.

In Paris, Urban relocates his daughter to the tower so that she might devote all her time to worshipping idols. However, Bokenham suggests that Urban is a caring and protective father, whose decision to seclude his daughter might, under different circumstances, have been completely prudent. He still "would not opynly she seyn shuld be," but now it is because he is "[d]redyng the peryls that myght befalle."<sup>254</sup> Moreover, he recognizes and acknowledges the fact that St. Cristina has no desire to be married, and offers the tower as an answer to her desire for virginity and worship. In other words, in Bokenham's version Urban's seclusion of St. Cristina is not at all problematized; on the contrary, the tower is presented as a safe and appropriate place for a young virgin – a view to which St. Cristina displays no resistance. This re-writing of the martyr's seclusion revives the Church Fathers' views on the conduct of virgins, but also points to the insistent and deliberate elision of conflict in this version. The consistent downplaying of argument and resistance is particularly visible in the encounter between St. Cristina and her twelve maidens, who, troubled by her refusal to worship the idols, beg her to change her attitude while "[b]eforn hir knelyng wyth grete reuerence, / All to-gedyr in full humble wyse" and claiming that they "loth were [her] for to greue" (ll. 2185; 2192).

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<sup>254</sup> Osbern Bokenham, "Vita Sanctae Christianae," in *Legendys of Hooly Wummen*, ed. Mary S. Serjeantson (London: Oxford University Press, 1938, EETS, o.s. 206), 58-85, ll. 2135-6. All further references are to this edition.

In response to their request, St. Cristina displays no distaste but bursts into tears and replies “wyth a sad cheer” and “benyngly” (ll. 2213-4), just as she will later respond to her father “demurely” (l. 2252).<sup>255</sup> The high tension of the encounters is in this Life significantly toned down, and the saint behaves as a proper damsel even when her Christian devotion is challenged by the other characters; the rebellious acts required by the plot are performed but not underwritten either by the saint’s or by Bokenham’s own word choice.

Instead, both in the *SEL* and Paris version of this Life, there is a strong sense that St. Cristina’s personal speech and physical body are closely intertwined and powerful: she has no qualms about dominating the narrative through her verbal skills. We repeatedly see the *SEL* St. Cristina manage the events through rejecting words or forbidding them to others, as she orders the twelve maidens to be silent (l. 53) and rather wittily advises the Justice Julian, after he had addressed several insults to the Christian God, Virgin Mary, and Joseph, to be silent and stop barking, before he has soiled Lord’s name with his mouth (ll. 274-80).<sup>256</sup> In Cristina’s imprecation, the question of the connection between the speech and the mouth is brought to the forefront: can words be befouled through use? St. Cristina’s answer is in the affirmative, which means that, to remain powerful, the words must be matched with a proper mouth; even though such a person as Justice Julian might refer to the holy writing, he does not produce authoritative speech but rather animal sounds.

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<sup>255</sup> Tellingly, the *SEL* Cristina’s outraged reaction to the twelve maidens is to call them “conseilers [...] þat luper beop” (vicious advisers) and command them to “be[o] stille” (be silent) (l. 53), while Paris does not include this episode at all.

<sup>256</sup> A variant reading of this line is, puzzlingly, that the Lord’s name is soiled in Cristina’s mouth, but I think it prudent to interpret this as a scribal error.

In the two earlier Lives, St. Cristina embodies the merging of speaker and speech: this is especially noticeable in the verbal exchange accompanying the last trial, during which the third Justice orders that the heroine's tongue be excised. In the *SEL*, this order is produced by his sense of impotence but also by a very real sense of injury "mest for hure speche" (most of all, for her speech). The removal of the tongue is meant both to ensure that the saint will not be able to speak further and to avenge this injury, "for hure holy word · do a feble wreche" (for her holy words, carry out a base vengeance) (ll. 329-30). In other words, the Justice foolishly thinks that St. Cristina's troublesome words are produced merely by her speech organs and that violence done to her tongue is going to remove this annoyance. However, as he soon discovers, the holy words emanate from the saint's entire body and thus the power of speech cannot be taken away from her. The full extent of the Justice's delusion is elucidated in the mock lament offered by St. Cristina after this act of mutilation: "Ich nadde bote þis wrecche of lyme · were wiþ ich mi3te / Herie oure swete Louerd ·and a3en þe deuel fi3te / And [þat] þou hast me bynome" (I had nothing but this poor limb with which I was able to praise our sweet Lord and fight against the devil, and you have taken that from me) (ll. 345-46). That this lament is indeed mocking the Justice's act is, of course, obvious from the very fact that St. Cristina is actually able to utter it. The narrative suggests that speech – and authority along with it – cannot be separated from the speaker's body. Language and body are mingled until words can have a physical impact on the world around the speaker, and the body itself is transformed into text, retaining the ability to speak even when it is physically impossible.

While the torturers believed that St. Cristina's spiritual ability to speak to God and resist the devil lay in one particular organ that could be appropriated by the opposition, the reader is here given evidence that this is a very limited understanding, as St. Cristina continues in full possession of her faculties. In fact, the cut-out tongue easily takes on a different function, acting as a tool of assault in the following lines:

Ferst he nom hure holi tonge · wiþ wel stordi mod  
 And þis Iustice harde þreu · as heo biuore him stod  
 Bis tonge sprong al abroad · al þis men iseie  
 And þis Iustice harde smot · & hutte out eiþer ei3e  
 Þer was ri3t wreche of God...

[First she took her holy tongue, in quite a fierce manner, and threw hard at this Justice, as she was standing before him. This tongue bounced all around (all this was observed by people), hit this Justice hard and struck out both of his eyes. This was the true vengeance of God...] (ll. 333-37)

In setting out to torture St. Cristina, the torturers believed that they had the power to interrogate and dismember the martyr, but these lines explain that, even after being excised, the tongue is immediately transformed into a relic and thus remains part of her saintly body.<sup>257</sup> As a "holy tongue," it gains miraculous abilities and acts as a skilfully directed hand, or even a weapon. At the same time, the wording suggests that the tongue is still linked to St. Cristina's speech, since the violence it wreaks is "the true vengeance" in response to the Justice's "base vengeance" for the heroine's "holy words." This act of vengeance is the true one because it brings the physical world in accordance with the higher truth, blinding the vicious man who has been spiritually blind throughout the

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<sup>257</sup> As Walker Bynum puts it, "Resurrection was finally not so much the triumph of martyrs over pain and humiliation as the triumph of martyrs' bodies over fragmentation, scattering, and the loss of a final resting place" (50); the holy body is able to retain wholeness despite all the efforts to the contrary. See *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

narrative. Because, unlike Cristina, the Justice never had spiritual or physical integrity, his sight resides only in his eyes and can easily be taken away. Significantly, only in the *SEL* is the Justice blinded completely, probably because other writers are not fully comfortable with the image of a bouncing holy tongue (something that seems to belong in Monty Python, really). And yet, however improbable it may be, the wicked man's loss of vision in the *SEL* brings to the foreground the wholeness of the heroine, whose body parts and words function in harmonious unity.

In the Paris version, this wholeness of the saint is reproduced in two ways: when the dismemberment is denied by the narrative, and when the torturer himself acknowledges the tongue as a still-active part of the heroine, in whom verbal and physical are inseparably intertwined. The narrative makes clear that what appears to be dismemberment is only an illusion, since it produces no effect that can be detected by the observers: "Ande whane hire tonge lay at hir too, / She spake als wele, þat maydyne brighte, / As neuer ite hade be kytte hire froo. / Thei herde ande seye, alle mene, with sighte" (ll. 461-64). These lines highlight the saint's triumph over fragmentation. Where the torturers' intent is to throw the saint's body into confusion, with the tongue found next to the toes (the poem connects the two body parts alliteratively as well), St. Cristina's insistent wholeness can be observed by "alle mene," both aurally, through her continued speech, and by sight. In short, she continues as if the tongue has never been removed from her, and her attitude remains that of a playful twelve-year-old, who, upon

taking out the Julian's eye with a piece of her own flesh, "softely smylid," even though the one-eyed Justice "for wrethe lyste nothings playe" (ll. 469-70).<sup>258</sup>

In a unique addition to the legend, Paris has the Justice addressing St. Cristina through the tongue and acknowledging that discontinuity exists between her states before and after the mutilation. When the tongue was in St. Cristina's "mouthe so wyde," it "wrought [...] woo" with its powerful, stinging words that "as wynde flyed too and froo"; now that it is out, its "strokes ar sor and evyll to byde" and cause even more grief to the Justice than before ("mo than soo") (ll. 475-80). As in the *SEL* version, the tongue is immediately treated as a relic – a part that in itself represents the whole of St. Cristina. The Justice's address to the piece of flesh conveys an understanding that it is still miraculously endowed with the power of speech and action. The episode displays the torturers' inability to affect the integrity of the saint in any significant way. In fact, attempts at fragmenting St. Cristina make her all the more dangerous, since the verbal capacity normally residing in the tongue is now amplified into the capacity for physical violence and reflected back onto the torturer, taking him apart with a much greater success.<sup>259</sup>

Although Paris has transferred this commentary from St. Cristina to the evil Justice, his indebtedness to the earlier vernacular version of this Life is clear. He shows a similar interest in inserting a humorous undertone, emphasizing the logical structure of the narrative, and endowing the heroine with a strong, sometimes aggressive personality.

<sup>258</sup> Reames aptly glosses line 470 as "for fury had no desire to joke," but the verb "playe" surely also brings to mind a child's game of ball-throwing; Cristina is gleeful over hitting her target, but the Justice obviously cannot join her in this childish glee.

<sup>259</sup> Julian's partial loss of vision weakens the point about his metaphorical blindness, made so well in the *SEL*, but conveys more strongly the idea of his fragmentation.

In what is still one of the very few studies of this narrative, Gordon Hall Gerould argues to the contrary, insisting that, having received from his medieval predecessors “a crude tale,” Paris was able to make something of it only due to the direct influence of and inspiration by Chaucer, and specifically his story of St. Cecilia.<sup>260</sup> Gerould seems to believe that there was no talent in the late fourteenth century except for that inherited from Chaucer: “[t]he trick of such verse-making must, I believe, have come from Chaucer, who was a magnificent artificer as well as a great story-teller, a wonderful humorist, and an admirable observer of life.”<sup>261</sup> Chaucer’s skill, of course, is not in question. However, the “wonderful” humour and the “admirable” attention to small detail in saints’ Lives, as we have seen, predate him by over a century. Chaucer’s *Life of St. Cecilia* represents, as I have argued, a step in a different direction, seeking to integrate the main character into the contemporary framework of proper feminine conduct. It seems to me, therefore, that Paris is interesting not only because he had been influenced by Chaucer’s rendition of St. Cecilia’s Life, but also because he had inherited from his vernacular sources the keen focus on the detail and the active personhood of the heroine.

Paris consistently presents St. Cristina as playful, witty, and capable of constructing her own interpretation of events as to generate an alternative to the pagan worldview. For example, when the Justice Dyon orders her to be boiled alive in a great

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<sup>260</sup> Gordon Hall Gerould, “The Legend of St. Christina by William Paris,” *Modern Language Notes* 29.5 (1914): 129-33, esp. 132-3. Writing almost a century ago, this scholar clearly sides with the later re-writers of virgin martyr Lives in his desire to tone down the heroine and calls the pugnacious Cristina “this rather charming waif” (133). In a much more recent study, Karen Winstead argues that Paris’s descriptions of his heroine “augment her bellicosity,” but agrees that Paris’s St. Cristina and Chaucer’s St. Cecilia are constructed along the same lines (*Virgin Martyrs*, 83-85).

<sup>261</sup> Gerould, “The Legend of St. Christina,” 133.

vessel that is being rocked to make her suffering all the more intense, the unharmed saint offers her own interpretation of this trial. With a reference to the earlier attempt to drown her in the sea, which had ended with Christ baptizing her in the salty water, the maiden thanks God that she is “[a]s twys-borne child that were right yonge, / Twys in credell rokked to be” (ll. 323-24). Using the means of torture as the building blocks, St. Cristina thus constructs the narrative of her Christian rebirth in concrete, familiar images: like a newborn, she had been dipped in water and is now placed into her cradle to be rocked to sleep. Through the saint’s own words, her martyrdom is imagined as a comfortable and pleasant spiritual experience, constructed through the quotidian references. The metaphor of infancy sets the stage for the breastfeeding imagery of the next scene, even though it is St. Cristina herself who is doing the feeding: the serpents set on her “[a]t her pappis too honge to play, / As thei wold soke that maydyn swete...” (ll. 421-22). Simultaneously, she is described as a little girl with her pets, as the serpents “[a]bowte hir nek ther playinge is” (l. 416). The image created is poignant and oddly entertaining: the pagan violence is exposed in all its impotence when the virgin martyr takes the opportunity offered by the martyrdom experience to live through a second childhood, with all the joys and pleasures attendant on it. Surely this is very far from Chaucer’s deadly serious Cecilia, whose authority needs to be supported by the male priests and references to the Church Fathers; Paris’s St. Cristina has much more in common with the *SEL* virgin martyrs, who do not hesitate to climb out of their tower windows using a rope or to throw the devil into the privy.

On the other hand, Osbern Bokenham is clearly familiar with the “Second Nun’s Tale,” which he closely follows in his own “Lyf Seynt Cycyle”;<sup>262</sup> in writing St. Christina’s *vita*, he constructs a much more decorous version of the saint. His heroine spends much of her martyrdom addressing God in fairly generalized prayers; the readers of Bokenham’s narratives are offered, instead of the detailed, active persona of a saint, an abstract model of contemplative prayer as well as proper feminine conduct. Bokenham’s St. Cristina’s reluctance to transgress social boundaries is obvious in the early interactions with her father, where her rebellion is so understated as to be almost unnoticed by Urban. So, while she does explain that she only worships one God and does not feel that pagan idols have any power, the wording of this exchange creates an image of a meek maiden seeking advice and approval from her father. “[F]ul demurely,” she asks him first, “Thynkyst thou, juge, that I trespace[?]” and then, “Heldyst þou my seruyse þan veyn & lost -- / Sey treuth, I þe beseche---“ (ll. 2252-53; 2259-60). The address “judge” indicates that St. Cristina is beginning to distance herself from her family ties, but the imploring for an answer suggests an urgent desire for her father’s opinion.

Moreover, when Urban replies that he is not opposed to her Christian beliefs, but rather to their exclusivity, their conversation ends on a peculiarly familial note, with St. Cristina making a request that would not appear surprising in a teenage daughter even today. The virgin martyr asks her father for incense – and for some new clothes. As any caring father would, he hastens to satisfy this demand and orders everything “aftyр hir

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<sup>262</sup> See Eileen S. Jankowski, “Reception of Chaucer’s “Second Nun’s Tale”: Osbern Bokenham’s “Lyf of S. Cycyle,” *The Chaucer Review* 30.3 (1996): 306-18.

entent” (l. 2299).<sup>263</sup> A conflict between the virginal girl on the cusp of adulthood and a male figure of authority, with the subsequent reversal of the power hierarchy, is the key feature of the virgin martyr’s *vita* as it is popularly known. This conflict, and the resulting power reversal, is what enables certain modes of emulation, as with Margery Kempe, who points to virgin martyrs in her fraught interactions with authorities. In his character of St. Cristina, however, Bokenham downplays the possibilities for conflict as far as possible: the understated character of her Christian worship is further emphasized when, upon arrival of the garments, she uses them to “disguise” herself (l. 2303). The verb chosen by Bokenham to describe this external transformation is surprisingly equivocal: the *Middle English Dictionary* online defines it as putting on a costume (possibly a theatrical one), wearing an elaborate or showy outfit, or concealing one’s thoughts under the outward appearance.<sup>264</sup> These definitions, whether by design or not, point to St. Cristina’s remarkable tractability in the face of pagan authority; the conflict, in fact, does not arise until she is forced by the plot to throw her father’s idols from the window – an action which, of course, cannot be ignored.

Similarly, in the episode with the excised tongue, Bokenham’s St. Cristina cannot boast any particular personal power of speech or action, nor is there a sense of continued

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<sup>263</sup> When St. Cristina later complains to God that she was given no food for the last twelve days, this comes to the reader as a great surprise, arriving immediately after the fairly peaceful familial scene and in no way specified by the father. This oddly disconnected sequence of events only serves to underline Bokenham’s lack of concern with creating fully developed characters and his conflict of interests in attempting to offer both a model of feminine conduct and a faithful retelling of the Latin narrative.

<sup>264</sup> See *MED* online, “disgisen (disguisen), v.” Even the most neutral definition 2c.a (“To transform (sth.); esp., alter (sth.) in outward appearance”) continues with negative connotations (“adulterate (a commodity); malform (sth.), disfigure”). Delany completely elides this issue in her translation, as her Cristina simply “dressed herself”: “The Life of St. Cristina,” *A Legend of Holy Women: Osbern Bokenham, Legends of Holy Women* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 43-61, esp. 46.

integrity. While in the two earlier versions the excision is performed because St. Cristina's speech is perceived as disturbing or even threatening, Bokenham presents it as a response to God's voice speaking to the saint, with St. Cristina as the physical transmitter trapped in the exchange between the two authorities. St. Cristina still blinds her torturer in one eye by spitting a remaining piece of tongue into his face, but the speech accompanying this action is severely truncated. This is partly because the removal of the martyr's tongue is here disconnected from the logical sequence of events and carries little of the symbolic complexity present in the earlier versions; St. Cristina does not have much to address beyond re-stating that she is still able to speak while Julian cannot see out of one eye. She also calls the tongue "ane instrument of [her] body," which emphasizes its subordinate function in the narrative; by suggesting a physical hierarchy and disjunction, this phrase also points to the absence of bodily integrity that was so striking in both of the earlier narratives (l. 3076).<sup>265</sup>

Finally, according to this version, Julian's order for this mutilation is motivated not by his desire to silence the problematic maiden but by his "vnkouth" wish to "etyn" (eat) a part of her body in a pseudo-Eucharistic feast; the episode is thus a repetition of the first trial, where St. Cristina has thrown a piece of her own flesh at her father, accusing him of the desire "flesh for to eet" (l. 3076). This accusation is peculiar to Bokenham's version<sup>266</sup> and serves to emphasize the typological implications of the

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<sup>265</sup> As in Chaucer, the relic formation has to come later, facilitated by a male character, a kin to the saint, who "[i]n appolloos temple [...] made a memory, / Whedyr Crystynys relikys he dyde lede / And þere hem beryid ful solemmely" (ll. 3104-6).

<sup>266</sup> The *SEL* Cristina continues the theme of madness and bestiality, suggesting that, since her father is so viciously interested in torture, he might "frete & gnawe" the flesh he had begotten (l. 162), and Paris's heroine simply comments: "Have here a morcell, teraunt – take it! - / Of the flesche was getym of thee" (ll.

narrative: this St. Cristina is, before everything else, a Christ figure and any danger that she might represent to the pagans is inherent not in her own persona but in the One who comes before her and whose actions she is re-enacting. The typological link is consistently brought to the foreground: St. Cristina raises a man from the dead in each of the three versions, but Bokenham inserts an additional Biblical reference into the scene, with the martyr addressing Christ as one who “cleppydyst lazer a-geyn from helle” (l. 2973). The author also has her walk on water during the attempted drowning, while in the two other versions she is merely lifted up by angels. Heavily typological, with the body that is both disconnected from the physical world as the readers know it and easily separated into meaningless fragments, Bokenham’s St. Cristina represents the logical culmination of the virgin martyr’s evolution through the later Middle Ages. Beginning as a figure immediately recognizable to the contemporary audience, closely concerned with the problems of existing in the world, and thus widely susceptible to imitation, by the mid-fifteenth century she is transformed into a Good Woman, who is a saint only as much as she is an abstract representation of Christ and His deeds. This is the lesson that Bokenham is offering to his female audience: not of rebellion and identity re-fashioning but of good deportment and passive prayer.<sup>267</sup>

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239-40). The focus here is also on the threat represented by the virgin martyr, since both of them narrowly miss taking out Urban’s eye with the piece of flesh.

<sup>267</sup> On this, see also Karen A. Winstead, “Fear in Late-Medieval English Martyr Legends,” 201-220.

However, Winstead’s argument that medieval writers “mute the martyrs’ radicalism, producing paradigms of sainthood suitable for lay imitation” is predicated on the view that the *SEL* virgin martyrs are both “fearless” and “remote” rather than uniquely accessible (220, 218).

### Some Conclusions

This chapter has traced the development of the virgin martyr through the late Middle Ages, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, arguing for a fine balance in the connection between the text, the writer, and the audience. As I have attempted to demonstrate, the thirteenth-century Lives of virgin martyrs have provided an opportunity for emulation and re-enactment – an opportunity that is enthusiastically taken up by at least some female readers. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that these Lives were meant, in any degree, as proto-feminist, and that their authors intended for them to be used in arguments for female empowerment, the complex interplay between the texts and the readers brings to mind such feminist theorists as Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. Irigaray and Cixous write about female writing and practice, but I would like to suggest that their theories may be usefully applied to exploring female reading and imitation, and the experience, as far as it can be accessed, of the virginal heroines. *Jouissance*, which for Irigaray is tied specifically to mystical ecstasy, is also an apt term for the dizzy spiralling of the martyr, whose body and world can never be fragmented by torture and who remains forever in joyful wholeness and unity.<sup>268</sup> The hagiographical narratives, by and large, were not authored by women, and thus, according to Cixous, must represent masculine, rational writing. However, turning yet again to Caroline Walker Bynum, we must remember the tenuous nature of medieval gender divisions, and her suggestion that for medieval thinkers the feminine, in its association with the physical, might represent the essence of humanity. Cixous urges that “woman must write

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<sup>268</sup> See Luce Irigaray, “La Mystérique,” in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 191-202.

woman,<sup>269</sup> and yet we see thirteenth-century Lives write woman and her body even as they are authored by men and attempt to speak of humankind, and the Church. The emulation of these heroines, whether in life or in writing, itself constitutes the reinsertion of woman and her body “into the text – as into the world and into history.”<sup>270</sup>

The re-fashioning of the genre is a reaction to this bursting of boundaries, this launching of the text from its moorings until it is made part of female body, in the service of her activity in the world. The boundaries are re-drawn, throughout the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, to inscribe onto the readers the image of the Good Woman, to create a virgin martyr who is demure and non-confrontational, mild and non-provocative, and is a model of proper conduct in all defiance of the plot. The text itself acts as a feminine body in the service of male desire; it is possessed by the writer, brought to the service of his experience, and impregnated with the seed of his thought. The later Lives do not speak to the quotidian, or to the physical; rather, they explore abstract constructions that can be cerebrally enjoyed but hardly emulated or re-enacted. Their heroines signal the return to the patristic values of virginity and are used to circumscribe the female audience, to enforce upon them an idealized view of proper womanhood.

By the end of the fifteenth century, then, the warlike virgin of the earlier hagiographical texts has already been transformed, in male-authored texts, into a somewhat ominous, vaguely threatening figure, setting the direction for the further

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<sup>269</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *The Portable Cixous*, ed. Marta Segarra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 27-39, esp. 29.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

Reformation-related metamorphoses. While she continues to attract popular devotion and attention of female audiences (as Bokenham's collection shows), there is already in Bokenham's narratives a tension between the figure suitable for imitation which the author wishes to create, and the demands of the hagiographical plot. The acts of public rebellion performed by the virgin martyr heroine, in stark contrast with the general avoidance of conflict and, at least initially, reinforcement of parental authority, cannot be easily incorporated into didactic texts. As a result, the virgin martyr is progressively split, on the one hand, into a strong, vocal heroine who is being actively ousted from the literary space, and, on the other, into the retiring, hushed virgin, who channels the admonishing voice of the male writer; by the end of the fifteenth century, these two figures embark on their separate but closely intertwined journeys into the future.

### CHAPTER 3: A VERY QIYCKE SAYNT:

#### WOMEN AND MARTYRDOM IN POST-REFORMATION ENGLAND

In the preface to his *Actes of Englysh Votaryes* (1560), initially meant to cover the entire history of the English church,<sup>271</sup> John Bale warns his readers to be vigilant as they are perusing the work and to remain thoroughly sceptical of the Catholic saints discussed in it. It is not, he explains, that these saints merely lack the miraculous powers attributed to them; even worse, they are utterly incapable of even rudimentary Christian goodness, either in thought or in action. Their vaunted holiness is nothing more than a disguise: the medieval church authorities have “commaunded unto us Whoremongers, baudes, bribers, Idolaters, hipocrits, traitors, and most filthy Gomorreans, as Godly men and women” and “canonised them for mooste holy saintes.” In fact, “ye shal not find one of them canonised for preching Christes verity a right, nether yet for leading a life after the perfit rules of the Gospell.”<sup>272</sup> As with Bale’s earlier works of Protestant propaganda, this treatise highlights the post-Reformation urge to separate early modern England from the centuries directly preceding it, by arguing that medieval Christianity was little more than a cunning illusion. In essence, then, *The Actes of Englysh Votaryes*, along with Bale’s earlier Protestant works, constructs a narrative of absence, since it is directly concerned with systematically erasing the very possibility that medieval Catholicism might have anything to offer to the present. Instead, Bale bases Protestant identity on the ability to break through the medieval illusion, discover the vast abyss

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<sup>271</sup> Bale completed and published only two parts of the projected four.

<sup>272</sup> John Bale, *The Actes of Englysh Votaryes* (London, 1560), 2<sup>r</sup> and v (in part one). I have made the standard spelling adjustments in the unedited early modern texts for the convenience of my readers. All further references are to this edition.

behind it, and step away from it; if precursors are to be sought, it is in the days of the late antiquity, with the “primitive church.”<sup>273</sup>

In this chapter, I examine the early modern effort to construct England as a Protestant nation in part by imagining the Catholic Middle Ages as embodied in the troublesome and ridiculously hyperbolic virgin martyr. Sixteenth-century writers, in other words, smoothly continue the trajectory of re-writing the female saints that, in the previous two chapters, I have traced through the late Middle Ages. The shift in the medieval perception of these saints, ultimately manifesting in Osbern Bokenham’s collection, continues without interruption into the next century. The social and religious events that take place in England beginning with the reign of Henry VIII do not act as an externally introduced instrument, capable of severing the flow of time, but are themselves a product and part of this flow. The concerns that stimulated the transformation of the virgin martyr figure throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were not erased by the social and political changes preceding and following the Reformation. Instead, they were actively assimilated into the social restructuring initiated by Henry VIII’s divorce.

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<sup>273</sup> This is not to downplay the importance of the early modern antiquarianism and the desire to “recover” medieval artefacts, individuals, and data. See, for example, F.J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (The Huntington Library, 1967, rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press and Renaissance Society of America, 2004), chapters 3 and 4; D.R. Woolf, “The Dawn of the Artifact: The Antiquarian Impulse in England, 1500-1730,” in *Medievalism in England*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 5-35; Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), and *ibid.*, “Leland’s *Itinerary* and the Remains of the Medieval Past,” in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 159-76; and James P. Carley’s introduction to *John Leland: De uiris illustribus. On Famous Men*, ed. and trans. James P. Carley, with assistance of Caroline Brett (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), xxi-clx. The insistent emphasis on the act of recovery suggests an absence of continuity contained in the moment of loss that must precede the beginning of the search.

In particular, the issue of marriage grew steadily more pressing as the doors of monasteries closed and the options for leading a single life became drastically diminished.<sup>274</sup> The abolition of various religious orders created in the sixteenth-century England a noticeable surplus of single women unconstrained by the walls and rules of a nunnery or an anchorage.<sup>275</sup> Thus in the sixteenth century, the position of women – their speech, manner of dress, public conduct, and private choices – became a popular topic of discussion and the subject of the so-called “pamphlet war.”<sup>276</sup> The effort invested in the project of instructing and rehabilitating early modern women, and the quantity of ink spilled in making their mistakes known to them, suggests a kind of vertigo, a consciousness of loss of control; indeed, one can sense a certain desperation in some of the contemporary works that attempt to evaluate the possibility of reforming women.

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<sup>274</sup> See Retha M. Warnicke on the plight of former nuns after the dissolution, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 69-71.

<sup>275</sup> Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent & Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1982), 122-124, and *Women According to Men: The World of Tudor-Stuart Women* (London: Altamira Press, 1996), 47. There were English nuns (going into exile and secretly living in England) who had not abandoned their vocation with the advent of the Reformation, as well as re-foundations abroad, but the balance had still noticeably shifted, especially closer to the end of the century. See, Ann M. Hutchison, “Eyes Cast Down, But Self Revealed: Letters of a Recusant Nun,” in *Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: Academia Press, 1993), 329-37, and Hutchison, ed., “The Life and Good End of Sister Marie,” *Birgittiana* 13 (2002): 33-89. See also the essays in *Syon Abbey and Its Books: Reading, Writing and Religion c. 1400-1700*, ed. E.A. Jones and Alexandra Walsham (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), and James P. Carley and Ann M. Hutchison, “1534-1550s: Culture and History,” in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Mysticism*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Vincent Gillespie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 225-58.

<sup>276</sup> Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus give an overview of this controversy and supply samples of texts from the both sides of the debate in *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). See also Linda Woodbridge’s detailed discussion in *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986) as well as her discussion in *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), esp. “Part One: The Formal Controversy,” 13-136.

So, in the preface to his version of the famous tale, *The Excellent Historye of Theseus and Ariadne* (1566), a poet and translator Thomas Underdowne carefully analyses the flaws in character and conduct that had led Ariadne to be abandoned on the strange shore and makes helpful suggestions that might have prevented this fate. Before beginning his verse narrative, he inserts a one-page poem, reminiscent of the medieval “The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter” poems. Underdowne’s version, entitled “A Rule for Women to Brynge Up Their Daughters,” runs through the usual list of feminine transgressions and suggests punishments that may be helpful in battling the feminine disorder:

If they wyll go or gad abrode,  
 their legges let broken bee:  
 Put out their eyes if they wyll looke  
 or gase vndecentlye.  
 If they their eares wyll gyue to hark  
 what other men do saye:  
 Stoppe them vp quyte, if geue or take,  
 then cut their handes awaye.  
 If they dare lyghtly vse to talke,  
 their lypes together sowe:  
 If they wyll ought lyghtly entende,  
 lette Grasse vpon them growe.  
 And at a worde, if she be yll,  
 let her yll aunswers haue:  
 And for her dower geue sharpe wordes  
 and for her house a graue.<sup>277</sup>

The prohibitions have not changed significantly from those set down by Tertullian or by the fifteenth-century moralists – the girls must not be allowed to gad

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<sup>277</sup> Thomas Underdowne, “A Rule for Women to Brynge Up Their Daughters,” in *The Excellent Historye of Theseus and Ariadne*, in *Renaissance Tales of Desire: Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Theseus and Ariadne, Ceyx and Alcione*, ed. Sophie Chiari, preface by Sarah A. Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 104, ll. 5-20. All further references are to this edition.

about town, to exchange bold glances with men or listen to their words, and of course, to speak flippantly or contrarily, or to have intentions that do not correspond to those of their parents. However, the advice to the mother is unexpectedly harsh and even, at first, appears almost comically exaggerated. Surely Underdowne cannot seriously suggest that this Old Testament retribution be applied to the daughters, that, depending on the rules broken, their legs be broken, eyes put out, ears stopped up, hands cut off, lips sewn up; surely he cannot really mean that, if the daughter prove too talkative and unyielding, the mother might as well dispose of her! The last stanza seems to suggest that this is meant ironically. If mothers follow his advice, Underdowne writes, “[d]aughters [they] shall haue none at all, / or those of Phenyx kynde” (ll. 23-24).

Does he mean, then, to make light of moralists and of their harsh injunctions? His preface to the work shows that this is not at all the case, for he bewails the grievous state of English womankind, which had been distorted far outside of the boundaries set by their gender: “their lookes be so loftie, their gate so stately, their apparel so disguised, their courage so hawtye, that you may muse to here of their manners gestures and behaviours, no lesse then they were Monsters...” (73-125; 102). In other words, Underdowne is far from championing any form of acceptance of English women’s independent ways. Rather, the combination of the preface and the introductory poem suggests that women have grown so monstrous in their non-adherence to traditional behavioural models that no rehabilitation is possible. If one tried to apply to them the traditional expectations and punishments, as Underdowne imagines them, the country of England would have no women left in it, unless some daughters were also able to rise

after death, like the mythical Phoenix. Although his instructions are obviously not entirely in earnest, the ironic presentation offers a commentary the behaviour of English women rather than on the faulty perception of English moralists.

While two centuries earlier, in the *Legende*, Chaucer had presented Ariadne as a martyr of love and a trusting victim of the traitorous Theseus, Underdowne's framing of the Ovidian tale, while sharing much detail with the earlier version, shows a shift of focus so drastic that it is nothing short of astonishing.<sup>278</sup> Underdowne very deliberately transforms a tale that sympathizes with Ariadne's plight and pities her abandonment on the island into a narrative of condemnation, presenting both the heroine and her younger sister as clear examples of the wilful, wayward girls described in the introductory verse. Ariadne is no longer a dedicated, self-sacrificing martyr of love but an idle, selfish woman, deserving most severe judgement. Curiously enough, she is not being condemned for betraying her father (as well as her country) and assisting in the slaughter

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<sup>278</sup> Although the editor Sophie Chiari initially describes the narrative as simply another Ovidian translation in Underdowne's *oeuvre* and only later, in passing, acknowledges that it "owed much to the medieval versions of the tale" (without specifying which versions these might be) (73), *The Excellent Historye* cannot be called a translation in any conventional sense of the word, since the bulk of its detail comes from sources other than Ovid. It seems to me that we may assume familiarity and, to a certain extent, reliance on Chaucer: the "Balles of Heere & Pitch" with which Theseus is furnished in his battle (l. 415) bear close similarity to Chaucer's balls "[o]f wax and tow" (l. 2004). The sticky anti-Minotaur balls are not in themselves a novelty in this tale. However, as Sanford Brown Meech remarks in his study of Chaucer's sources, in every Ovidian gloss he has encountered they are homogenous, being composed of a sticky substance alone ("Chaucer and the *Ovide Moralisé* – A Further Study," *PMLA* 46.1 [1931]: 198); in fact, we see such a homogenous ball ("[o]f pich ... a pelote") in Gower's Book V of *Confessio Amantis* (l. 5349). While *Ovide Moralisé*, probably one of Chaucer's sources, features a ball made out of pitch, glue, and straw (in Meech, 198), the question of Underdowne having access to this source is a dubious one, and in any case, the "hair" in the sixteenth-century version is much more likely to have derived from Chaucer's "tow," which in fourteenth century referred to plant fibre prepared for spinning (OED, tow n1). Furthermore, and perhaps more tellingly, texts other than Chaucer's do not appear to portray Phaedra as a significant part of the plot, although it is a general medieval convention that she is taken along as the lovers escape and then spirited away by Theseus while Ariadne is asleep (see Meech, 196, and John Livingston Lowe, "Chaucer and the *Ovide Moralisé*," *PMLA* 33.2 [1918]: 325). But in Chaucer, as later in Underdowne, Ariadne has Phaedra by her side when she first sees and hears Theseus, and immediately seeks the assistance of her sister in the rescue operation.

of her half-brother – Underdowne disposes of these events in eleven lines (ll. 413-24), offering just the barest outline – but rather for allowing herself to be taken over by desire and for presuming to arrange her own marriage. Before allowing herself also to be ruined by desire, her sister comments that Ariadne would best “remember [her] owne fame” and enjoy her “happye state” as a Cretan princess, rather than “cast away [her] selfe” in such a careless way (ll. 174; 177-79). Indeed, Phaedra continues, a marriage arranged through the woman’s will in opposition to her father’s authority cannot last, since Theseus is sure to cast Ariadne away after she is no longer of any use to him; she finishes, “Do thou therefore suche foolysse toyes, / out of thy mynde let slyde: / And neuer let suche fancies force, / thy vnconstant head to guide” (ll. 225-28).

Speaking through Phaedra, Underdowne suggests that Ariadne is far from being a martyr, since her love is not a true conviction but only a fleeting fancy, an ill-considered desire of an inconstant woman. Refusing to heed advice and consider the moral lessons of the past, which her sister is happy to supply, Ariadne becomes an abandoned woman, who is no longer suitable for marriage. While the classical versions of the myth have Bacchus rescuing her from the island and taking her as a wife,<sup>279</sup> Underdowne firmly refuses such an ending. His Ariadne is eventually placed among the stars, where she remains eternally as an illustration for the moral lesson of this tale: “Beware, be wyse, example take, / by *Ariadnes* payne: / Whiche helping hym who helpless was / she helpless doth remayne” (ll. 545-48). As this address to the reader posits, women’s independent behaviour, as well as their attempts to make their own marital choices, can

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<sup>279</sup> For a more detailed account of her encounter with Bacchus, see Rebecca Armstrong, *Cretan Women: Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Phaedra in Latin Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 221-59.

only lead to general disaster and, ultimately, to their own radical disempowerment.

Theseus is, in this account, exempt from guilt. Instead, as Underdowne points out in the preface, it is Phaedra who has committed incest and, “hauvyng no respect to honestie, fame, ire of the Goddes, nor kindred: entysed the unconstant *Theseus* to forsake her Sister, and love her,” for which she deserves “perpetuall ignomynie and everlastynge shame and dishonour” (99-100).

This is surely a far cry from the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century stories of virgin martyrs, commended precisely for their ability to resist the authority of their parents and the state, and to follow unhesitatingly their own choice of a life. It does, however, bear much similarity to Margaret Paston’s reaction to her daughter’s engagement and the vocal defence of this engagement before the bishop. To a certain extent, I suggest, this is a reaction to the history and possibility of such engagements – a reaction that seeks to replace the problematic models with more acceptable ones, and to warn women against behaving wilfully. The blame for the tragic events that take place in Underdowne’s narrative, as well as after its conclusion, is placed squarely on the uncontrollable female characters, who, wallowing in idleness, cannot restrain themselves from embracing, metaphorically and literally, all sorts of dangerous desires. In this interpretation, female sexual desire necessarily leads to its agent’s complete disempowerment and to the perversion of social norms through incest (as Theseus is enabled to switch from one sister to another) or bestiality (as Pasiphae is driven to couple with a bull). More importantly, the perverse sexual practices initiated, however indirectly, by idle and lustful women, are the direct cause of national disorder and

ruination, as represented by Pasiphae's monstrous son Minotaurus and the two sisters' betrayal of their homeland for the benefit of a handsome stranger.

That the well-being of heroines is fully extraneous to the author's reasoning is obvious from the two model wives whom he urges his female readers to emulate: Penelope, who spins for twenty years while her husband is elsewhere engaged, and, even more tellingly, Lucrece, who is praised because, according to Underdowne, she was engaged in yet more spinning when her rapist found her (102-103).<sup>280</sup> Obviously, these models are not to be emulated for the sake of a reward: good wives can still be abandoned, or raped, or required to kill themselves in order to defend their husband's honour. The act of emulation, therefore, is framed purely in terms of reputation; even worse than rape, according to Underdowne, is that a woman be known as a bad, disobedient wife. Like Ariadne, the readers are urged to think of their reputations and "happy state," and remain at home, allowing their choices to be made for them.

The fact that Underdowne is able to re-write one of Chaucer's legends of good women as a vitriolic condemnation of female behaviour in and around marriage

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<sup>280</sup> Underdowne is not unique in positioning these two women as models of flawless housewifery: about fifty years later, Patrick Hannay offers their stories in much the same vein in his long poem of marital advice, *A Happy Husband or, Directions for a Maide to choose her Mate. As also, A Wives Behaviour towards her Husband after Marriage* (London, 1619). Arguing that "its not *Womans* place / For to be busied with affaires abroad" and she is better herself "to imploy / Within doores, 'bout [her] house and huswifery" (sig. C4), he points out that Lucrece is famous for finishing all the household tasks before going to bed (so, presumably, her husband was left with a perfectly orderly house after her death), which Penelope was able to maintain her spotless reputation by being always occupied at her wheel and distaff during the day (Hannay prudently avoids mentioning the trick condition she had set for the suitors). The conclusion is much the same as Underdowne's: like these two women, the reader should be, before everything else, fully preoccupied with her household tasks. Corinne Saunders examines the changing discussions of Lucrece throughout the Middle Ages, showing that her tale was frequently used in various discussions of rape; in the light of this tradition, it is all the more surprising that, in the sixteenth century, Lucrece begins featuring in the discussion of model wifery, while the rape and her eventual suicide are delicately omitted from the narrative; see *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 152-77.

highlights the increasing unease that accompanied the re-evaluation of women's position in the English social world, further fuelled by the dissolution of convents. Even as Underdowne is despairing of the state of England and decrying the inefficacy of the traditional methods, he is, by the very act of writing, participating in a newly invigorated attempt to reform the wilful women of the island by re-emphasizing the importance of marriage and bringing to the foreground new, more tractable, examples of womanhood.<sup>281</sup> The feminine ideal these models are supposed to invoke is described in very similar ways in the texts of marital advice throughout the early modern period: it is a woman who accepts happily the "natural hierarchy" of marriage.<sup>282</sup> Early modern writers envision companionate marriage as an entirely harmonious merging into a single entity, with no possibility of difference of opinion: the husband and a wife "must have

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<sup>281</sup> Numerous texts throughout the sixteenth century seek to dissuade the reader from single life: Patrick Hannay, for example, begins *A Happy Husband* thus: "In Paradice God Marriage first ordaind, / That lawfully *kind* might be so maintaind..." (sig. B). John Bale, on numerous occasions, condemns Catholicism precisely for its custom of chastity vows and for what is perceived as its disapproval of marriage on the whole and writes, in the preface to his *Actes of Englysh Votaryes*, that "theyr vowed wivelesse and husbandless chastity is altogether of the devil" (Fol. 4-5). Even William Whately, who will in 1624 publish *A Care-Cloth: Or A Treatise of the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage* (London: Felix Kyngston), in which he acknowledges that marriage is a troublesome undertaking and is not meant for everyone, has some years earlier written his famous and lengthy *Bride-Bush: Or A Wedding Sermon* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1975), which assumes throughout that marriage is unavoidable. On the propaganda of marriage in Protestant drama, see John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 281-4. Patricia Crawford discusses various features of the Protestant family in chapter 2 of *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720. Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Various features of this ideal wife (warnings against venturing out, emphasis on silence) are already present in *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, written in 1523 by the Princess Mary's Catholic tutor Juan Luis Vives. However, this book also accepts the possibility that a woman might want to remain a virgin and live alone and advises that the childless woman should consider herself "happy and blessed" for having been chosen to escape the "great payne and weryness" of childbearing; see Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, trans. Richard Hyrde, ed. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman, Margaret Mikesell, Sheila ffolliott, and Betty S. Travitsky (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 141.

<sup>282</sup> See Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), esp. chapter 2, "Political Households and Domestic Politics: Family and Society in Early Modern Thought," pp. 34-66.

the same habitation as one bodie,” must share a voice, and views.<sup>283</sup> The voice and views, since the woman is born to obey rather than to rule, are naturally her husband’s. “The Description of a Good Wife” features a bride of such perfection that she is ashamed even to express her affection in words, and the enchanted suitor must take on the task of speaking for her: “Shame curb’d her tongue, yet fancy bad her speak, / While I suppli’d her silence with my speech [...] / While *shee* stood by and seconded the breach / With a teare-trickling eye and blushing cheek, / Where thus I woo’d my selfe, yet in her name...”<sup>284</sup> In this idyllic courtship, there is no need for the woman to speak at all, for her wishes are always already voiced by her mate, and she needs only happily to follow his initiative.

This idyll is contingent on an iron-clad assumption that, with a good woman, a matrimonial difference of opinion is impossible. Consequently, Whately’s *Bride-Bush* directs a warning to “some women” who are given “to disreverent behaviour” and “can chafe and scold with their husbands, and raile upon them, and revile them...” Such protests not only evoke disapproval from the author but also show conclusively that the speakers must be stripped of the honourable name of woman and, perhaps, of their whole position among the humankind: they are “[s]taines of woman-kinde, blemishes of their sexe, monsters in nature, botches of humane society, rude, gracelesse, impudent, next to

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<sup>283</sup> Whately, *A Bride-Bush*, 3. A short poem “The Description of a Good Wife: Or, A Rare One Among Women,” printed in the same collection as Patrick Hannay’s *A Happy Husband* and attributed to R.B., Gent. (Richard Brathwait), on the title page, advises the male reader: “Therefore *chuse* one, and that but *only one*, / *One* that may make two Bodies one-unite, / *One* that is essence-lesse if left alone / Without her second; *One* whose sole delight / Is vanisht when her second soule is gone...” (sig. B6).

<sup>284</sup> Richard Brathwait “The Description of a Good Wife,” sig. B8. See previous footnote.

harlots, if not the same with them.”<sup>285</sup> Stopping short of calling for violent removal of these monsters from the Christian world, Whately nonetheless wishes on them a forced muteness (since, presumably, this is the only way in which they may be reintegrated into the normal social world) and concludes, “let the canker eat out these tongues.”<sup>286</sup>

Furthermore, as an adjunct to her husband, the early modern wife is expected to spend most, if not all, of her time at home, like Penelope, allowing her husband to concern himself with the public things.<sup>287</sup> This is not in itself a radical change from the

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<sup>285</sup> Whately, *A Bride-Bush*, 39.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. In Sir Thomas Elyot’s *Defence of Good Women* (1540), this ideal wife appears in the person of the Queen Zenobia, who, in describing her own marital conduct, tells the reader, “But in a woman, no virtue is equall to Temperaunce, wherby in her words and dedes she always useth a just moderation, knowynge whan tyme is to speke, and whan to kepe silence, whan to be occupyed and whan to be merye. And if she measure it to the wyll of her husbände, she dothe the more wysely: except it may tourne them both to losse or dyshonestye. Yet than shuld she seme rather to give him wise counsaile, than to appere disobedient or sturdy”; see *Defence of Good Women*, ed. Edwin Johnston Howard (Oxford, Ohio: The Anchor Press, 1940), 57. Explaining her own application of these principles, Zenobia notes that, even though she was always highly learned, while her husband was alive, she “was never harde or sene, say or do any thyng, whiche mought not contente hym, or omytte any thyng, whiche shulde delite hym” (58). Furthermore, although her learning could not be openly displayed, it had the added benefit of preventing her from “any dyssolute appetyte,” thus making her the kind of a woman whom Elyot could safely defend and laud as a worthy model (59). Considering that Zenobia, as described in Boccaccio, strictly policed the sexual relationship between herself and her husband, this is rather a stretch; however, it is possible that Elyot is borrowing her as a model from Chaucer’s “Monk’s Tale.” On Chaucer’s use of Zenobia, see B. W.

Lindeboom, “Chaucer’s Monk Illuminated: Zenobia as Role Model,” *Neophilologus* 92 (2008): 339-50.

<sup>287</sup> For further description of an ideal early modern woman, and of an apprehension brought forth by the possibility of deviation from this ideal, see, for example, Lisa Jardine’s seminal work *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, rpt. 1989), especially chapters 1 and 4. David Underdown remarks on the “intense preoccupation with women who are a visible threat to the patriarchal system” in the second half of the sixteenth century and details the various punishments that could be applied to a scold or a husband-beater; see “The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England,” in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 116-36, esp. 119). See also chapter 2 of his *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), which incorporates parts of this article into its argument. Furthermore, Amussen makes a persuasive argument for the perception of women with illegitimate children as inherently disruptive of local order (*An Ordered Society*, 116-17). Elsewhere in her book, she also identifies the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century as times of great concern with female conduct, as evidenced by the contemporary laws and identifies the contradictory demands made on early modern women, who were expected to be obedient to their husbands but assertive in the marketplace (117-33).

medieval expectations<sup>288</sup> as presented in the “Good Wife Taught Her Daughter” poem, but the incessant dissuasion in early modern texts concerning venturing outside of the home is striking.<sup>289</sup> Where it was not unusual for medieval women to run a small business (we only need to remember Margery Kempe and her various ventures), there is, as Merry E. Wiesner has pointed out, a growing division between the private and public spheres after the Reformation, which gradually makes it less and less acceptable for women to occupy themselves with matters not specifically domestic.<sup>290</sup> In examining the restraints placed on female learning, Heidi Brayman Hackel discusses “three prescribed forms of female readerly silence – restraint from public reading, limitations on linguistic proficiency and abstention from vocal criticism.”<sup>291</sup> As Retha Warnicke shows, even Thomas More, an ardent humanist and educator of women around him, cautioned his daughter Margaret that she should seek no audience beyond himself and her husband.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> See, for example, Barbara A. Hanawalt’s “Medieval English Women in Rural and Urban Domestic Space,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 52 (1998): 19-26.

<sup>289</sup> In his “Description of a Good Wife,” Brathwait advises: “*Chuse thee no gadder (for a wife should bee / In this respect (I’m sure) like to a Snail,) / Who (hous-wifelike) still in her house we see*” (sig. B3).

<sup>290</sup> Merry E. Wiesner, “Women’s Defense of Their Public Role,” in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse: University of Syracuse University Press, 1986), 1-27, esp. 1-6. This issue was first raised by Joan Kelly-Gadol in her famous article, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977). 137-164, and much discussed since. So, Patricia Crawford argues that the official changes in the devotional life of laity were felt by poorer women as disempowering (*Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*), 23-5. At the same time, Judith M. Bennett cautions against the simplistic view of the Middle Ages as a “world of a kinder and gentler variety,” where women and men were equal on the labour market in “Medieval Women, Modern Women: Across the Great Divide,” in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities, and Writing*, ed. David Aers, 149. With her warning in mind, I still feel that the available evidence indicates a certain intensification in suspicion toward the independent ventures of women.

<sup>291</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackel, “‘Boasting of Silence’: Women Readers in a Patriarchal State,” in *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 101-21, esp. 101.

<sup>292</sup> See the chapter “Women and Humanism in Early Tudor England” in *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation*, 16-30.

While the abolition of pilgrimages also played its part, it is important to note that the anti-pilgrimage rhetoric was itself partly based on the association between religious travel and disorderly, uncontrollable sexuality, especially in women.<sup>293</sup> A small hint of this is already visible in the late Middle Ages, most famously with the Wife of Bath, married five times and looking for the next husband as she is proceeding on her travels, and in the accusations of illegitimate pregnancy levelled against Margery Kempe upon her return from abroad. In Thomas More's 1530 *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, the imaginary opponent voices precisely this apprehension as he insists that "many yt semeth an honest huswyfe at home / hath helpe of a bawde to brynge her to myschefe as she walketh abrode aboute her pylgrymages."<sup>294</sup> The arguments brought forth clearly represent the popular opinion and wide-spread concern; the author, significantly, does not address this particular description of religious women, except to note, vaguely, that religious custom is often open to misuse. The abolition of pilgrimages, in other words, served to circumscribe neatly women's ability to travel independently (the ability that had been viewed as disturbing for centuries before the Reformation). The Protestant version of Margery Kempe or the Wife of Bath would now have no good excuse for leaving her home town.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> While the conduct of both sexes might have been suspect during these long trips, women seem to have made a particular target for the accusations of sexual misconduct.

<sup>294</sup> Thomas More, "A Dialogue Concerning Heresies," in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 6, ed. M.C. Lawler, Germain Macr'Hadour, and Richard C. Marius (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 100. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>295</sup> For a detailed overview of women's independent pilgrimages as a commonplace practice in the Late Middle Ages and the contemporary suspicion of sexual licentiousness associated with these travels, see, for example, Susan Signe Morrison, *Women Pilgrims in Late Medieval England: Private Piety as Public Performance*, and Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons: Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009).

In other words, the changes in the attitude toward women and options available to them were not suddenly brought on by the Reformation, but are a continuation of trends already in place by the fourteenth century, if not earlier. The new models of womanhood, encapsulated in the demure, domestic Penelope and Lucrece, represent the next development, after the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries produced texts in which virgin martyrs appear as embodiments of meekness, patience, and charity. It seems, however, that re-writings of the popular virgin martyr Lives could only go so far; as I have suggested in the analysis of Bokenham's treatment of St. Christina, contemporary ideas of femininity existed in constant contradiction with the plot conventions of these Lives. Not surprisingly, then, by the beginning of the sixteenth century even Catholic works are showing a rising suspicion of holy virgins as figures uniquely susceptible to misuse and manipulation by disorderly females.

**“A Strange Wenche in to the Chyrche”: Suspecting the Virgin Martyr**

The opponent of More's *Dialogue* recounts an appearance in Lempster during the reign of King Henry VII of “a straunge wenche in to the chyrche,” who apparently displayed many traditional attributes of a saint: “yt was byleued she lyued withoute any mete or drynke / only by aungels fode.” She also seemed to cause the host to levitate from the prior's hands into her own mouth. The gullible populace “toke her for a very quycke saynt,” called her “Holy mayden Elyzabeth,” and turned out in droves to worship and bring her offerings. However, when taken into custody by the king's mother personally, the supposed saint quickly revealed the falsity of her claims “by longyng for mete with voydaunce of yt she had eten (which had no saintly sauoure)” (87). Indeed, the

storyteller claims that not only she had been having nightly intercourse with the prior all along, but after the conclusion of the story became “a comon harlot at Calyce [...] where she laughed at the matter full merely” (88).

This account is essentially a neat reversal of a harlot saint’s Life, such as St. Mary of Egypt. The harlot saint progresses from disorderly sexuality to abstinence both from intercourse and from food,<sup>296</sup> and eventual sanctity, accompanied, presumably, by absence of natural bodily processes. On the contrary, the false holy virgin of the early modern period appears to have already achieved a chaste, disembodied existence, complete with a cult, but when the illusion is stripped away, is shown to eat, defecate, smell, and engage in indiscriminate sexual activities. What is striking about this story is not simply the fact of deception but its magnitude: Elizabeth, if that is indeed her name, is revealed to be not simply an ordinary woman but a woman completely outside of social control – unmarried, wide open (the story emphasizes the passage of food through her body), rolling with laughter at the memory of fooling the devout.<sup>297</sup> She is, in short, the monster of whom Whately spoke so passionately in *A Bride-Bush*, and it takes the

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<sup>296</sup> In *Legenda Aurea*, this saint brought with her into the desert three loaves of bread which “turned hard as stone, but [...] have sufficed” as food for the entire forty-seven years of her stay (228); it is unclear whether any of the bread was actually eaten or served primarily as a symbol of food. The *SEL* version is more clear, specifying that Mary of Egypt, having brought two and a half loaves with her, “et no mannes mete · bote weod and more” (“De Sancta Maria Egipciaca,” l. 110). In both versions, however, hunger and sexual desire dwindle parallel to one another, until a harlot is transformed into a saint.

<sup>297</sup> In this description, Elizabeth is clearly linked to Mikhail Bakhtin’s grotesque body, with its open orifices, emphasis on taking in food, expelling excrement, fornication, and laughter – but also with its immeasurable potential for turning the world upside down; see *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White point out in the introduction to *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, “the grotesque physical body is invoked both defensively and offensively because it is not simply a powerful image but fundamentally constitutive of the categorical sets through which we live and make sense of the world” (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 23. In this case, the invocation is clearly defensive against the threat inherent in the powerful virgin martyr.

“proper” family woman to curtail her activities: not the immediate authorities who might be expected to address the matter but the queenly mother. The real opposition in the story, in other words, is between the truly chaste family woman, brought into the matter by her son’s power, and the creature who claims power that by no means belongs to her and is, in the end, revealed to be a monstrous impostor, who must be immediately banished.

More, of course, is far from extrapolating any sort of a trend here: the account is carefully placed into the mouth of his imaginary opponent and elicits a disapproving response from the narrator. At the same time, nowhere in his book does he present a holy female in such a way as to counteract the impact of this tale. On the contrary, the next time a female saint – St. Uncumber – is discussed in some detail, it is again by the imaginary opponent, who speaks slightlying both of her intercessory powers and of the women who sue to her. According to him,

she good soule is as they saye seryud and content with otys. Whereof I cannot perceyue the reason / but yf it be bycause she shold proyude an horse for an euyll housbonde to ryde to the deuyll upon. For that is the thyng that she is so sought for as they say. In so moch that women hath therfore chaunged her name / and in stede of saynt wylgeforte call her saynt Uncumber / bycause they reken that for a pecke of otys she wyll not fayle to uncomber theym of theyr housbondys. (227)

While More seems to be the original author of the Uncumber/disencumber pun, this saint is indeed the patroness of unhappy wives who seek to be freed from their husbands (in Italian she is known as Liberata). She is also a virgin martyr, who was so opposed to marriage that she begged God for help, grew a beard, and was then crucified by her

angry father.<sup>298</sup> St. Uncumber is thus triply problematic: she represents the belief in the powerful woman saint who is able to intercede on behalf of other women. Her *vita* and specific area of influence are resistant to the advocacy of matrimony, and her distinguishing trait – the beard – points to a blurring of gender boundaries, which allows the saint to subvert the expectations of her father and suitor and to assume the position of influence.

More's imaginary opponent, however, re-writes St. Wilgefort (the more official name of St. Uncumber) in much the same way as the pseudo-holy Elizabeth in turning her into an enabler of feminine misrule, a patron of "peuyshe women," a destroyer of families, and, simultaneously, into an object of mockery, a renamed saint with a strange offering. The narrator responds by gently rebuking his opponent and pointing out that intercessions are not always predictable; surely the wives' request may be answered without sending the problematic husband to hell on a horse. It is possible, he suggests, that husbands in question may "chaunge theyr comberous condycyons" and thus relieve their wives of worry. However, it is more likely that the family trouble does not originate with the husbands but with the wives' "comberous tongues / whiche is happily the cause of all theyr combraunce," and an adjustment to these tongues will reinstitute the peace within the family. Finally, if marital harmony cannot be achieved otherwise, the death of the wife herself will be an appropriate final liberation, "and so theyr housbondys saufe

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<sup>298</sup> More seems to expect the reader to know St. Wilgefort's *vita*, since he frequently explains the more obscure intercessory connections: so, one prays to St. Appolyne in case of toothache because "she had her tethe pulled out for Crystys sake" (232). For a summary, see Carole Levin's "St. Frideswide and St. Uncumber: Changing Images of Female Saints in Renaissance England," in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, ed. Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove, and Karen Nelson (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 223-37.

ynough” (235). This is clearly an attempt to rehabilitate saints on the whole, and not a move in defence of the popular virgin martyrs. In fact, St. Wilgefort’s complicated connection to the issue of marriage and female disobedience is never discussed. Not unlike the fake saint Elizabeth, St. Wilgefort is touched with the taint of marital discord, and possibly of sexual disorder, imparted to her by association, and ultimately fails her worshippers despite their offerings. Hoping for freedom, the wives find either silence or death. Although, generally speaking, her holy powers are never in doubt, she appears in More’s *Dialogue* as a misleading patron, whose intercession is usurped and re-directed to serve the needs of the patriarchal family structure.<sup>299</sup>

If the virgin martyr already functions as a site of such tensions relatively early in the century, in a text whose author firmly supports the worship of saints, it is not surprising that she grows even more problematic in later Protestant works. So, in the preface to the second book of his *Actes of English Votaryes*, Bale introduces, as the central figure of his disquisition, “ladye Lecherye the virginall Goddes of the Sodomiticall papistes” (preface to the second part, sig. A 3<sup>v-r</sup>). This is of course a figure of speech meant to emphasize the debauchery hidden under the hypocritical chastity vows of the Catholic church, but when this concept is personified as a virginal woman revered by the clergy, it is immediately associated with the virgin martyrs, whose appeal Bale seeks to destroy elsewhere in his writing.<sup>300</sup> In the *Actes* he primarily focuses on male historical figures, with the virginal goddess of lechery informing and animating his

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<sup>299</sup> In “St. Frideswide and St. Uncumber,” Carole Levin discusses the relationship of female worshippers with this saint and the possible repercussions of her eventual disappearance as a valid patron (228-9).

<sup>300</sup> While this striking figure might also seem to point to the Virgin Mary, such a suggestion would be much out of character for an early modern Protestant. While the reformers sought to lower the prestige and popularity of Our Lady, they did not do it by suggesting that her virginity disguised lecherous conduct.

discourse, but we do see a simultaneous challenging and condemnation of female chastity.

Time after time, Bale portrays religious women as transgressive and sexually available. He points to the mythical Pope Joan, whose disguise was destroyed only by her untimely pregnancy,<sup>301</sup> and (possibly propelled by an anti-French impulse) unearths the relatively little-known Cecilia of Normandy, William the Conqueror's daughter, who spent most of her life after the age of ten in a nunnery and died an abbess (part 1, 63<sup>r</sup>). This nun of uneventful existence Bale accuses of acting as a prostitute to the Catholic clergy: "[s]o daintye mouthed were these greasye grout heads, and so craftye in theyr generacion, that they could finde out kings doughters to serue their lustes..." (part 2, Cvi<sup>v</sup>). On the other hand, he also condemns those nuns who have successfully guarded their chastity, such as St. Frideswide, who refused to marry a prince, and exclaims derisively: "As thoughe to be a kinge were a farre viler or unworthyer office, than to be a pylde shyttten Nonne" (part 1, 61<sup>r</sup>).<sup>302</sup> This phrase identifies the unchanged cluster of issues at stake in the figure of the virgin martyr: her perceived resistance both to the woman's private role and to England's highest authority. As in More's tale of the pseudo-saint Elizabeth, Bale seeks to undermine the position of St. Frideswide by emphasizing her bodily functions and physical appearance: after all, how can a bald,

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<sup>301</sup> Incidentally, Bale chooses to relate the version in which Pope Joan dies in childbirth, thus making her death a kind of self-destruction.

<sup>302</sup> *OED* defines the contemporary meaning of "pylde" as "Bereft of hair, fur, or feathers; bald, shorn, plucked, etc." (adjective, 1a). The specific examples in the *OED* suggest that this word was specifically used to describe Catholic religious in a deprecatory fashion.

defecating woman be revered as a saint?<sup>303</sup> For these two writers, the possibility of sanctity and power becomes fatally disrupted by the saint's possession of a fallible, feminine body, cruelly exposed through the medium of text. In a twist of perception, the male early modern writer takes on the position of the interrogator, and the torturer: the virgin's physicality is revealed not to open her to being emulated, as in the *SEL*, but in order to emphasize her feminine lack of influence.

In other words, by the sixteenth century the relationship between holy virgins and the world of experience (of physicality or social position) is fully reversed, complicating the process of imitation and sometimes making it impossible. In the first chapter, I showed how the material details of the *SEL* Life of St. Juliana and the social concerns which she had to negotiate have made her one of those highly imitable virgin martyrs on whose stories Margery Kempe, for example, drew in constructing her own identity. By the sixteenth century a reverse strategy is implemented. The emphasis on physicality, and on material tasks, is used to push the holy virgin back into the private realm of the family and to deny her the ability to speak freely and to influence the world around her that she had previously enjoyed.

This is clearly seen in Martin Luther's *Magnificat* (1521), a commentary concerning the Virgin Mary, with the express purpose of circumscribing her influence, for "now we find those who come to her for help and comfort, as though she were a

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<sup>303</sup> Compare to Aldhelm's description of St. Christina of Tyre's martyrdom in the first chapter and my subsequent discussion: the saint is completely unfazed when the torturers shave off her hair and display her baldness in a public place (21). Her ability to accept this thorough exposure, in fact, contributes to her saintliness.

divine being, so that I fear there is now more idolatry in the world than ever before.”<sup>304</sup>

Although Luther, as yet, has no desire to displace Mary entirely from her esteemed position, even at this early point he is troubled by the thought that she may be seen as a powerful intercessor and reminds his readers that the mother of God began “a poor and plain citizen’s daughter [...] a simple maiden, tending the cattle and doing the housework, and doubtless esteemed no more than any poor maidservant today, who does as she is told around the house” (14).<sup>305</sup> The emphasis is laid, again and again, on the domestic nature of Mary’s work: like Lucrece or Penelope, she never seems to leave the house and “goes about her usual household duties, milking the cows, cooking the meals, washing pots and kettles, sweeping out the rooms, and performing the work of maidservant or housemother...” (46).

This description of the Virgin Mary is not completely unexpected in itself, as Luther is here obviously playing on the concept of Christian reversal, in which the meekness and poverty of this world are raised and exalted in the next. In this case, however, the sequence of events is radically altered: according to Luther, exalting Mary is a wildly problematic proposition, since the poignancy of her role lies in absence rather than presence. She is described as “the workshop in which he performs his work” and

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<sup>304</sup> Martin Luther, *The Magnificat: Luther’s Commentary*, trans. A.T.W. Steinhäuser (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1967), 40. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>305</sup> Luther’s divided view of the Virgin Mary neatly dovetails with his contradictory attitude toward the virgin martyrs: as David Bagchi shows, even in the last ten or fifteen years of his life Luther placed “little hymns to the Church’s traditional martyrs, especially to the young virgins Agnes, Agatha, Lucy, and Anastasia, in some cases straight out of James of Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*” in a variety of his writings, while at the same time evaluating their Lives “as vile and diabolical.” Bagchi suggests that this “puzzling legacy” points to a “wider problem of Protestant martyrology”; certainly the same deeply conflicted view of the virgin martyr is evident in the earlier Protestant texts; see “Luther and the Problem of Martyrdom,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies: Papers Read at the 1992 Summer Meeting and the 1993 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 217-8.

having “nothing to do with the work itself” (46). As a physical site for the event, but not a conscious participant in it, she cannot be worshipped or even admired or praised, since “in proportion as we ascribe merit and worthiness to her, we lower the grace of God...” (38). Rather, like Tertullian’s women, Mary must be relegated to the private sphere, both in this world and in the celestial realm, and viewed as the blank space within which God works great things while the male theologian makes his argument. This displacement of the Virgin Mary as an intercessor – even though, clearly, Luther still perceives her as a major figure in the Christian worldview – is a striking emblem of the disempowerment of the holy virgin. If she is to be emulated, it is in her new role as the quiet, obedient wife, who must never be assumed to possess merit or worthiness.<sup>306</sup> At the same time, the holy virgin who resists this shrinking is always eminently suspect and, upon closer inspection, might reveal a grossly monstrous female body, distorted by various appetites.

#### **The New and Better Martyr: John Bale Writing Anne Askew**

Early modern period inherits the spectre of the virgin martyr – the woman who is unconstrained by gender considerations and speaks boldly to the authorities, invading the increasingly circumscribed sphere of female activity. Both Protestant and Catholic writers, in documenting the martyrdoms of women, maintain a precarious balance, struggling against this figure even as they acknowledge (openly or indirectly) their indebtedness to the medieval virgin martyr. The ultimate goal of this balancing act is, first, to produce a woman sufficiently deserving for the account of her activities to be

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<sup>306</sup> The intent linking of the virgin martyrs with marriage is taken to the comical extreme at the end of the century, when Reginald Scot, pointing to the hagiographical descriptions of St. Margaret and St. Katherine as spouses of Christ, triumphantly accuses the Catholic legends of saints of promoting bigamy; see *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, intro. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 267.

written and circulated, as well as readily recognizable to the common reader used to stories of medieval martyrdom. Second, this balancing act is intended to render her as unthreatening as possible by emphasizing her familial ties and reassuring the reader that the early modern gender model remains untroubled and quite distinct from the figure occupying the centre of the popular virgin martyr stories.

The account of Anne Askew's interrogations offers a vivid illustration of this process, showing, as it does, the manipulation by Protestant writers of the martyr's own narrative. In recent years, with the rising interest in women writers, Askew has drawn a great deal of attention as an author who "does unfold her essential self, that is, her identity as a Christian woman" in her autobiography.<sup>307</sup> This focus on Askew's personal voice has led, in some cases, to dissatisfaction with the fact that the first editions of her two examinations (1546 and 1547) contained prefaces, conclusions, and extensive commentary by John Bale, the publisher. Indeed, quantitatively speaking, Bale's text overpowers the reader, breaking Askew's own narrative into small paragraphs, which are

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<sup>307</sup> Elaine V. Beilin, "Anne Askew's Self-Portrait in the *Examinations*," in *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works*, ed. Margaret Patterson Hannay (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1985), 76-91, esp. 79; this article is expanded in chapter 2 of Beilin's book, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 29-47. See also her "Anne Askew's Dialogue with Authority," in *Contending Kingdoms: Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France*, ed. Marie-Rose Logan and Peter L. Rudnitsky (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 313-322, and "'The Word Reproov'd': Writing Faith and History in England," in *Culture and Change: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Margaret Mikesell and Adele Seeff (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 266-80, esp. 267-72, as well as Paula McQuade, "'Except that they had offended the Lawe': Gender and Jurisprudence in *The Examinations of Anne Askew*," *Literature and History* 3 (1994): 1-14; Joan Pong Linton, "The Plural Voices of Anne Askew," in *Write or Be Written: Early Modern Women Poets and Cultural Constraints*, ed. Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 137-53; Tarez Samra Graban, "Feminine Irony and the Art of Linguistic Cooperation in Anne Askew's Sixteenth-Century *Examinacions*," *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 25.4 (2007): 285-411; Megan L. Hickerson, "'Ways of Lying': Anne Askew and the *Examinations*," *Gender and History* 18.1 (2006): 50-65; and Elizabeth Malson-Huddle, "Anne Askew and the Controversy over the Real Presence," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 50.1 (2010): 1-16.

sometimes found pages away from one another. Understandably, scholars interested in Askew's authorial voice have tended to see Bale's commentary as intrusive and have sometimes found it lacking: David Loewenstein calls it "intemperate" and "oblivious to the nuances of Askew's varied polemical strategies,"<sup>308</sup> while Patricia Pender suggests that Bale "fails to grasp" Askew's argument and "is misled into reading her rhetoric of modesty literally."<sup>309</sup> Generally speaking, these critics have tended to favour the version of Askew's *Examinations* as published in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, which has comparatively few additions and is relatively unbroken.

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<sup>308</sup> David Loewenstein, "Writing and the Persecution of Heretics in Henry VIII's England: *The Examinations of Anne Askew*," in *Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 11-39, esp. 14.

<sup>309</sup> Patricia Pender, "Rhetorics of Figuralitv in *The Examinations of Anne Askew*," in *Expanding the Canon of Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Paul Salzman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 222-33, esp. 229. It is true that, at the end of her article, Pender admits that Bale's "failure to recognize the more subversive challenges of her modesty rhetoric may very well be deliberate" and acknowledges his own manipulation of rhetoric in "trying to secure her as an appropriate figure for Protestant hagiography," but even in this concession, remarkably, she continues to see Bale's approach as a "failure" (230). Although, in what appears to be a more recent article, Pender is more receptive to Bale's rhetorical strategies, she still views the 1546/7 text as a battlefield: "[s]igns of interpretive struggle between author and editor are littered throughout the *Examinations*..." ("Reading Bale Reading Anne Askew: Contested Collaboration in *The Examinations*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73.3 [2010]: 519). For a variation of this opinion, extended to John Foxe's rendition, see Kimberly Anne Coles, "The Death of the Author (And the Appropriation of Her Text): The Case of Anne Askew's *Examinations*," *Modern Philology* 99.4 (2002): 515-539. Thomas Betteridge suggests that Bale, by definition, wins this battle, for his "additions to Askew's testimony implicitly make her words nonauthoritative, almost meaningless, without the polemical framework that his glosses provide for them"; see his "Anne Askew, John Bale, and Protestant History," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 265. On the other hand, Boyd M. Berry concludes that "Askew's writing might be said to have compelled Bale to function as Anne Askew's handmaiden. What could Bale do other than to follow along, verbosely, behind this woman's words?"; see "Of the Manner in Which Anne Askew 'Noised It'," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 96.2 (1997): 182-208, esp. 198.

The struggle to reclaim Askew's voice from this usurpation has led to some confusion as to what may be acceptable as authentically hers: for example, according to Theresa D. Kemp, Bale emphasizes the martyr's silence in order "to tame her voice ... and use it for his own purposes"; see "Translating (Anne) Askew: The Textual Remains of a Sixteenth-Century Heretic and Saint," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52.4 (1999): 1021-54, esp. 1033, but for Elizabeth Mazzola, Askew's silence is an active personal strategy that enables her to remain a secret subject; see "Expert Witnesses and Secret Subjects: Anne Askew's *Examinations* and Renaissance Self-Incrimination," in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany, USA: State University of New York Press, 1995), 157-71.

On the other hand, Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall point out that, despite some opinions to the contrary, the version in Foxe's book does not derive directly from the author either, and since no unedited text of Askew's *Examinations* exists, it is useless to attempt a decisive separation of the wheat from the chaff.<sup>310</sup> Building on their argument, I will treat Bale and Foxe not as editors, or secondary interpreters, of Askew's narrative, but rather as authors in their own right, who use an existing text in the construction of their own.<sup>311</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Anne Askew's voice is of no importance,<sup>312</sup> as she also may well be drawing on earlier models of female sanctity,<sup>313</sup> but the task of her male co-authors is a distinct, and formidable one: to resist the continuing presence of the Catholic virgin martyr, and to re-model her in the light of the early modern emphasis on female containment in and submission to

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<sup>310</sup> See Sarah E. Wall, "Editing Anne Askew's *Examinations*: John Bale, John Foxe, and Early Modern Textual Practices," in *John Foxe and His World*, ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 249-62, and Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall, "Racking the Body, Shaping the Text: The Account of Anne Askew in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.4 (2001): 1165-96.

<sup>311</sup> Megan Matchinske makes a similar point, speaking of Bale's "authorial involvement" and arguing that his "elucidations only marginally interact with Askew's initial court responses, revealing instead Bale as writer, exile, and as written subject..."; see *Writing, Gender, and State in Early Modern England: Identity Formation and the Female Subject* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39, 40.

<sup>312</sup> Unlike Oliver Wort, who believes that accepting Bale as an independent martyrologist "allows us to expose, as distracting, studies that seek to recover Askew's 'authentic' voice as something distinct from Bale's adornments"; see "The Double Life of Anne: John Bale's *Examinations* and *Diue Anne Vitam (sic)*," *The Review of English Studies* 58.237 (2007): 633-56, esp. 655. See also Thomas S. Freeman, "Publish and Perish: The Scribal Culture of the Marian Martyrs," in *The Uses of Script and Print, 1300-1700*, ed. Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 235-54, esp. 253.

<sup>313</sup> Genelle Gertz-Robinson, for example, argues for a certain continuity between Margery Kempe and Anne Askew, an argument that is ratified in David Wallace's response to her article "Stepping into the Pulpit? Women's Preaching in *The Book of Margery Kempe* and *The Examinations of Anne Askew*," in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 459-82, and Wallace, "Response to Gertz-Robinson: 'Stepping into the Pulpit?'" in the same collection, 483-91.

the private marital sphere.<sup>314</sup> Although Askew, as presented by her male hagiographers, is sometimes seen as a typical, or “timeless” Protestant martyr,<sup>315</sup> we must not forget that this martyr is only just being created, and the creators must negotiate between the conflicting requirements, producing a woman martyr whose femininity and domesticity are continuously reasserted throughout the narrative: if the martyr is to be emulated, it is in these essential characteristics.

Until his conversion in early 1530s, John Bale was a dedicated Carmelite friar, worked closely with Catholic devotional and hagiographical works, and, as his writing shows, had a special devotion to the Virgin.<sup>316</sup> Various scholars have pointed to his obvious knowledge of and indebtedness to medieval saints’ Lives in his engagement with the *Examinations*,<sup>317</sup> but not to his visible anxiety that this indebtedness might be noticed and continuities established. Accepting Jennifer Summit’s argument that “Askew is superior to these Catholic saints not because her story reverses their examples but because it does a better job fulfilling them,” I argue against her further remark that Bale “demonstrates unwittingly how grounded in their example she is.”<sup>318</sup> Rather, I contend that Bale is intensely aware of his medieval hagiographical models and, in creating the

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<sup>314</sup> In this, my argument is distinct from those scholars who assume that the woman martyr as constructed by male Protestant writers needed to be defended only against Anne Askew herself; see, for example, Susannah Brietz Monta, “The Inheritance of Anne Askew, English Protestant Martyr,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 94 (2003): 134-60.

<sup>315</sup> McQuade, “‘Except that they had offended the Lawe,’” 237.

<sup>316</sup> See Peter Happé, *John Bale* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 1-4. See also the first two chapters of Leslie Fairfield’s *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1976).

<sup>317</sup> See, for example, Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), especially 103-7; and Oliver Wort, “The Double Life.”

<sup>318</sup> Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 155.

new woman martyr, seeks to highlight her superiority through consistently evaluating her within the genre constraints inherited from the medieval *vitae*.

To enable this evaluation, Bale carefully distinguishes between the types and features of virgin martyrs, arguing forcefully that many saints popular in the Middle Ages are woefully lacking in propriety and useful example. In talking about his influences, Diane Watt does not distinguish between the models offered by such popular medieval saints as Katherine, Margaret, or Cecilia, and St. Blandina, a virgin martyr of the primitive church, who was originally described by Eusebius Pamphilius and seems to have been little known in medieval England. However, the difference between them is clear to Bale. While his commentary contains a great many saintly names, St. Cecilia is the only popular virgin martyr whose name is mentioned in a positive context (even though most virgin martyrs' Lives date back to antiquity and therefore are not directly linked to the Catholic Church). Furthermore, Bale is as careful as the Knight of the Tower in ensuring that his Cecilia teaches a very different lesson from the one learned, in her time, by Christina of Markyate. Ignoring all problematic marital relations of the saint, he presents her as a model of private devotion for Anne Askew, who, in imitating St. Cecilia, "[t]he Gospell of Christ bare .... in her harte, as ded the holye mayde Cecilia, and never after ceased from the stodye thereof, nor from godlye communycacyon and prayer."<sup>319</sup> Imitating St. Cecilia thus means turning inward, toward the scripture in one's own heart, rather than facing outward and confronting one's persecutors.

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<sup>319</sup> *The Examinations of Anne Askew*, ed. Elaine V. Beilin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9-10. All further references are to this edition.

The reluctance to address St. Cecilia's *vita*, along with the conspicuous absence in the text of all other popular Roman female martyrs, suggests that Bale is avoiding precisely the model of independent choice and unbecoming conduct that they offer to the readers. After all, his version of history makes it impossible for him to condemn the saints said to have lived in the time of the "primitive church." On the other hand, almost every medieval female saint he discusses, with the exception of one, is a virgin martyr, and each of them, for Bale, offers a subject lesson in faulty feminine conduct. Sts. Winifred and Maxentia disregard the suggestion that every proposal must be considered very seriously and "dysdaynously" refuse their suitors, while the St. Juthware behaves in such a manner, allowing all kinds of strangers into her house, that she is suspected of loose behaviour and unwed pregnancy (82-83). St. Ursula is condemned for being part of an extensive band of pilgrims and thus deserving to be "but homelye handeled at Coleyne of the hunnes and pycetes" (84). St. Ositha, the exception in this company, is exposed as, before everything else, a bad wife, who, "runnyng away from her husbnde, by the intysement of ii. monkes bycame a professed nonne" (82).

This recounting of "faulty" women saints clearly outlines, for Bale, the danger zone, the fear of collapse, for, of course, the subject of his own hagiography uncannily resembles these examples, considering Anne Askew's resistance to her husband's views, their eventual separation, her travel through England, and her various associations in London. In listing medieval women saints, Bale points to the continuity which his readers might assume, only to disrupt it immediately, claiming that Askew's martyrdom is "a great deale more notable and godly ... than ever were the confessyons, causes and

answers of the olde canonysed martyrs, whych in the popes Englysh churche have had so many solempnytees, services, and sensynges” (76). According to Bale, these “pylde popysh martyrdomes” fall far behind when compared to the events described in his work (83).<sup>320</sup> He firmly denies that Askew’s martyrdom might be in any way indebted to “lyenge legends, popysh fables, nor yet olde wyves parables,” rejecting the very idea of her connection to the authority of women (132).<sup>321</sup>

At the same time, he does not seem to be able to break completely free from the mold offered by these inferior martyrdoms: like Margery Kempe, Anne Askew – she of uncorrupted faith – is a “vyrgyne ... in that behalf, redemed from the earthe and folowyng the lambe” (61). Bale is speaking metaphorically, and yet the choice of the metaphor is telling: despite elsewhere praising marriage above virginity and condemning the Catholic vows, the highest praise he can give to Askew links her to the wildly popular medieval women saints. She is similarly linked to them by Bale’s emphasis on the physical aspect of torture, for the gruesomeness of his descriptions readily brings to mind Delehaye’s reproaches directed at medieval hagiographers. Indeed, Bale introduces details that are not found in Askew’s own text and offers a picturesque account of torture, highly reminiscent of medieval *vitae*: she is racked “tyll the synnowes of her armes were broken, and the strynges of her eys perished in her heade,” while the judges are “ronnyng to the racke, toggyng, halyng, and pullyng therat, lyke tormentours in a playe” (129; 151). Although Bale hastens to insert the numbers of appropriate Biblical

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<sup>320</sup> Notice the word “pylde,” which in the *Actes of Englysh Votaryes* had been applied to Catholic nuns.

<sup>321</sup> Bale systematically discounts women’s speech in his commentary, contemptuously sending the “oyled dyvynes” to go and “dyspute amonge olde Gossypes” (29), and on another occasions charging that they “fare lyke those drunken Gossypes, whychh tell more than all, whan their heades be full of wele gyngerdeale” (35)

verses, pointing to the New Testament as his source, he is referring, in the last excerpt, to a generalized idea of a Passion play: the indication of hectic activity in this sentence immediately brings to mind the raging Herod, raving Pilate, and gaming soldiers in the Corpus Christi cycles.<sup>322</sup> In the torture descriptions Askew is not being linked directly to Christ, as elsewhere in commentary, but rather to a medieval production of martyrdom, and to medieval models of performativity: she is presented as part of an engaging, fast-paced action narrative where she is one of the “vertuose ladyes and most noble women, whose lyves [the torturers] cruellye seke in [their] madde ragynge furye...” (122).

The medieval generic framework that covertly makes its way into Bale’s writing outlines the dynamic directly preceding what Frances E. Dolan calls “the idealization of female martyrdoms in post-Reformation English texts.”<sup>323</sup> Beginning in 1563, with the first edition of John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, Dolan argues persuasively that the descriptions of female suffering and death are increasingly occluded for the reasons of propriety: women continue to be executed, and yet the erasure of their bodies disordered by suffering ensures that their behaviour in the eye of the reader is always appropriate to their sex.<sup>324</sup> In the first edition of Foxe’s collection, the description of Askew’s travail is quietly omitted. Reintroduced in the 1570 edition, her tortures are tastefully muted: the most Foxe allows himself, in terms of description, is telling the reader that the martyr’s

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<sup>322</sup> This is, incidentally, troubled terrain when the *Examinations* are published: only a year later, in 1548, the feast of Corpus Christi is suppressed, thus removing the occasion for the performance of the mystery cycles, and the cycles themselves are edited. See King, *English Reformation Literature*, 293.

<sup>323</sup> Frances E. Dolan, “‘Gentlemen, I Have One Thing More to Say’: Women on Scaffolds in England, 1563-1680,” *Modern Philology* 92.2 (1994): 157-78, esp. 167.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

“bones and joints were *almost* plucked asunder” – but, obviously, not quite.<sup>325</sup> On the other hand, Bale is very forthcoming about the twisted and disordered body of his heroine. He asks rhetorically, reflecting on his own description, “Is it not (thynke yow) a proper frayenge [frightening] playe, whan our armes and eyes are compelled to leave their naturall holdes?” (125). Almost against their will, the readers are forcefully drawn into the disturbing spectacle of the female body that has transgressed its natural boundaries in more than one way.<sup>326</sup> Published in 1546/7, written by a former friar, Bale’s hagiography occupies still-uncharted space, shaken by the rapid social, political, and religious changes in the course of the Reformation. The character of Anne Askew in his narrative is especially susceptible to the pull of the medieval *passio* and emerges, suddenly and startlingly, as a recognizable medieval saint, virginal in her soul but also rebellious and transgressive.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 05.15.13], Book 8, 1458. All further references are to this online resource.

<sup>326</sup> I am, of course, aware of the extensive scholarship that views the descriptions of female torture as disempowering and, in some cases, voyeuristic. However, I am here continuing the argument set out in the previous two chapters, that the woman martyr’s lack of fear at being publicly displayed emphasizes her bravery and power. Moreover, I fully agree with Janel M. Mueller’s argument, according to which Elaine Scarry’s theory of torture as an act of utter disempowerment and an “unmaking” of the world is inapplicable to martyrdom (Mueller’s scope is limited to the early modern period, but, as I have shown in the previous chapters, this challenge may apply just as well to the medieval imaginings of religious torture). Instead, as Mueller suggests, not only does torture fail “to unmake a self,” but the “Catholic enactment of authority serves protestant truth – to the extent that the condemned maintain, during their torture, the integrity of self-possession that signifies the truth of their being”; see “Pain, Persecution, and the Construction of Selfhood in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*,” in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEahern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 161-87, esp. 165-6.

<sup>327</sup> This influence is clearly visible in an account of John Louthe, purportedly a witness to the martyrdom, who freely supplies entertaining detail and transforms Anne Askew, in just a few masterful strokes, into a saint who would not be out of place in the *SEL*: she has “an angel’s countenance, and a smylyng face,” makes wisecracks that have the entire council laughing at the Lord Mayor (who, incidentally, calls her “folyshe woman” three times in the space of a short dialogue) and is brought to the execution in a “dounge carte”; see “The Reminiscences of John Louth, Archdeacon of Nottingham,” in *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation*, 1859, ed. John Gough Nichols (London: AMS Press, 1968), 1-59, esp. 41, 44. Indeed, Bale’s own vicious portrayal of Askew’s interrogators would seem to be a gesture in the same direction,

At the same time, we see Bale's efforts at recovering his "Saynt canonysed in Christes bloude, though she never have other canonysacyon of pope, prest, nor Byschopp," from the pernicious influence of the Middle Ages and re-situating her within Protestant concerns (148). It is not accidental that his model of sainthood, to which he explicitly compares Askew in the introduction to the first *Examination*, is not one of the aggressive Roman saints, but rather Eusebius's Blandine, a servant girl martyred along with her mistress and other early Christians in Lyons, France. It is likely that, as a "French" saint, she would not have been associated with Catholicism of medieval England (despite still being venerated in a Catholic country). Furthermore, because she was executed as part of a group, Eusebius is able to shift focus away from her when needed, thus eliding the more controversial questions of her martyrdom.<sup>328</sup> After noting that many of the group were "a spectacle for the world throughout that day in place of the usual variety of gladiatorial combats," Eusebius continues: "*but* Blandina was hung on a stake and was offered as food for the wild beasts."<sup>329</sup> The coordinating conjunction points to an emphatic opposition of actions and firmly argues that Blandina, the illustrious saint, was *not* made a spectacle for the world. The question of how visible she might have been while hanging on the stake is neatly elided and propriety reigns: Blandina's body disappears from the text. There are only oblique references to "all the

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since, as Megan Hickerson has argued, not all interrogators were necessarily concerned with pushing for her condemnation and execution; see "Negotiating Heresy in Tudor England: Anne Askew and the Bishop of London," *Journal of British Studies* 46.4 (2007): 774-95.

<sup>328</sup> At the same time, of course, this attention to the primitive church is fairly typical for the Protestant martyrologists; see, for example, John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. chapter 2, "Heroic Suffering."

<sup>329</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History: Books 1-5*, 1953, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 282. Italics mine. All further references are to this edition.

horrors” and “the different nature and number of the tortures” that she experiences, but to a certain extent, the reader must assume her triumph rather than be told about it in vivid detail (285, 277).<sup>330</sup>

While the narrative acknowledges that the martyr’s stamina is unexpected – “the heathen themselves confessed that never had a woman among them suffered so many and such horrible tortures,” the readers are reassured early in the narrative that gender is not being problematized (286). Like Luther’s Virgin Mary, Blandina serves as a tool, a hollow space into which the divine light might shine: through her “Christ pointed out that the things among men which appear mean, obscure and contemptible with God are deemed worthy of great glory” (276-77). Indeed, Eusebius chides the interrogators for not having the proper “respect for the feminine sex,” which presumably would not involve any expectation of strong faith or resolve (285).

Unlike the virgin martyrs popular in the Late Middle Ages, who remained, emphatically, women, but defied the pagans’ efforts to force them within narrow gender boundaries, Blandina offers, for Bale, a model of perfect womanhood. She is shielded from the readers’ eyes as a thing “mean, obscure and contemptible with God,” elevated only because the boorish interrogators do not uphold the proper relations between genders, and furthermore because God chooses this opportunity to point out the error of their ways. Like Blandina, Askew cannot be assumed to be a formidable enemy, since this atypical strength would in fact pervert God’s design and obstruct him from carrying out his plans. Even though Bale gestures at the Christian paradox by describing her as

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<sup>330</sup> Compare to the torture of Sanctus, part of her group: “[a]nd his body was a witness of what happened to him, being all one wound and bruise, wrenched and torn out of human shape...” (278)

“most stronge” when appearing “most feble,” this point is quickly clarified, as the readers are told that “gladlye she rejoiced in that weaknesse, that Christes power myght strongelye dwell in her.” Askew is no more than a dwelling space, an arena in which the divine might manifest itself, and the force of this manifestation depends on the vessel. Consciously investing in her weakness, in order to deepen the contrast, Bale follows Eusebius in placing the woman martyr among “thynges despysed and thought verye vyle,” thus arguing that to emulate her would mean becoming weak and despised, rather than engaging in self-assertive behaviour (13). He emphasizes this point again elsewhere, worrying that Askew, with a woman’s inability for self-control, should put herself forward too much and fall into the interrogators’ trap: “for “[t]hys is the thirde temptacyon of thys byshopp, that the woman shuld utter, to her owne confusyon” (42).

Furthermore, not only are the readers shown Askew’s proper femininity, but they are also assured that this femininity is performed to the fullest capacity, as Bale explores her position as a good daughter, wife, and mother. The preface to the first *Examination* is curiously unconcerned with these details, focusing instead on Blandina and mentioning only that Askew “[i]n Lyncolne shyre was [...] borne of a verye auntyent and noble stocke, Sir Wyllyam Askewe a worthye knyght beyng her father” (9). However, it seems that by the second *Examination* Askew’s resistance to torture, willingness to argue with the interrogators, spreading fame, and ultimate martyrdom required a more extensive explanation on the part of her hagiographer. Reacting to Askew refusing to say anything about her husband, “master kyme,” Bale seizes this opportunity to argue away some erroneous conclusions that his readers might have made about his heroine’s past

conduct (92). He is here attempting to straddle two sides of the debate, both portraying Askew as a woman who participates obediently and exhaustively in the exalted institution of marriage and obscuring the fact that, in this case, her actions in London appear questionable and problematic.

On the one hand, Bale puts some effort into establishing Askew's womanly submission: she offers no resistance to her father and enters into a marriage with his associate's son, for which her elder, now dead sister was originally contracted. Having entered it, she "demeaned her selfe lyke a Christen wife, and had by hym (as I am infourmed) ii. chyl dren" (92). As Beilin points out in her latest article, "[n]o other contemporary sources record the existence of those two children," and the later materials that do mention Askew's family derive this idea from Bale.<sup>331</sup> She continues, "Considering the importance that Protestantism attached to marriage, we may even wonder whether Bale himself creates the children as part of the reinvention of Askew as a married female Protestant martyr who would replace the Catholic virgin saints."<sup>332</sup> And yet, having portrayed Askew in this manner, Bale encounters the problem of her unrestrained movements: if, as Bale had suggested, she is a model of domesticity, how can her single life in London, and connections to the ladies of the court, be explained?

The hagiographer resolves this problem with a certain degree of elegance, placing the entire marriage into question as soon as it has performed its function of supporting Askew's wifely virtue. Having already mentioned earlier that the martyr had been

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<sup>331</sup> Elaine V. Beilin, "A Woman for All Seasons: The Reinvention of Anne Askew," in *Strong Voices, Weak History: Early Women Writers & Canons in England, France, & Italy*, ed. Pamela Joseph Benson and Victoria Kirkham (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 341-364, esp. 349. See also note 17 on the same page.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

“compelled agaynst her wyll or fre consent to marrye,” Bale now concludes that her marriage may be considered “unlawfull” (92-93). Furthermore, he places the blame squarely on the husband and portrays him as a pagan villain, acting in cahoots with the wicked authorities. In other words, according to Bale, the separation is in no way a product of marital dispute, but rather of a conflict between the true faith, which Askew channels through her weakness, and the gullible husband, who acts as an instrument of the Catholic clergy. Askew’s departure from Catholicism “so offended the prestes” that they instigated marital discord and the husband, “at their suggestion, vyolentlye drove her oute of hys howse.”<sup>333</sup> The separation, Bale insists, has nothing at all to do with Askew, but is a natural response to her husband’s actions and, perhaps even more importantly, to his disregard of the sacred institution of marriage. Askew seeks divorce “namelye and above all, bycause he so cruellye drove her out of hys howse in despyght of Christes veryte” and because he “so spyghtfullye hated God the chefe autor of marryage” (93). The case of Askew appears before the readers in a completely new light: it is no longer a story of a wife leaving her husband but rather a tale of a true believer persecuted for her faith by an ignorant and violent counterpart.

Bale further emphasizes Askew’s propriety by setting up a contrast between the martyr and the unknown woman who supposedly testified against her – the woman to whom Askew gives the barest of mentions. Bale, however, seizes on this character to establish a dichotomy between “thys godlye woman the servaunt of Christ” and an “ignoraunt woman, yea a beast with out faythe” and reintroduces her at the end of the

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<sup>333</sup> This is, no doubt, another gesture at the supposed hatred of marriage, promoted by the Catholic Church.

first *Examination* as an obstacle to Askew's freedom (21). It seems that one of the conditions of Askew's release on bond demanded those acting as her security to be also bound for some unknown woman "whom they knewe not, nor yet what matter was layed unto her charge." Bale argues that the woman in question was, "as I am credybylye infourmed," the original witness for the prosecution, "a serten popysh queane, whych they had afore provided both to betraye her, and accuse her" (65). There seems to be no logic to this argument, since someone in the employ of the interrogators would hardly need to be bailed out of their custody, and Askew herself does not make this connection. However, the merging of the two women serves to sharpen the focus of the narrative by offering another recognizable re-appearing character in contrast with Askew's womanly conduct. The accuser is described as a "queane," a word that by the sixteenth century has become, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* online puts it, "a more specific term of disparagement," meaning "a bold or impudent woman; a hussy" or, more particularly, "a prostitute." The suspicion of impudence and sexual disorder is thus displaced from Askew onto the unnamed Catholic woman, who is unconnected to any male relatives, resides in prison for a mysterious crime, and speaks falsely against the pious housewife.

#### **"I a silly poor woman": John Foxe and the Problem of the Female Martyr**

The domestication of the female martyr is further developed in Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, four editions of which were published in Foxe's lifetime between 1563 and 1583.<sup>334</sup> Foxe manipulates the image of the early modern woman martyr as initially

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<sup>334</sup> The argument such as Catharine Randall Coats makes in *(Em)dodying the Word: Textual Resurrections in the Martyrological Narratives of Foxe, Crespin, de Bèze and d'Aubigné* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), that Foxe's accounts have no relation to hagiographical works, that they are not concerned with the body

outlined by Bale, subsuming the characteristics inherited from the problematic medieval virgin martyr into the sixteenth-century concern with good wifedom. This paradoxical merging of the two figures is explicitly set out at the end of the book, in the story of Peter Martyr's wife, who, having died during the reign of Edward VI, was buried at Oxford. As the story runs, after Queen Mary's accession, Cardinal Pole grew concerned that the dead woman was buried in dangerous proximity to the relics of St. Frideswide, one of the main attractions of Oxford, and ordered that she be disinterred and reburied in a dunghill.

According to Foxe, the dead woman had been an exemplary wife – “an honest, graue, and sober Matrone, whyle shee lyued, and of poore people alwayes a great helper” (1563 edition, Book 5, 1639). She had been, furthermore, a perfectly silent wife as far as the city of Oxford was concerned, for, according to the locals who knew her, she did not speak English and “they vnderstode not her language”; in fact, she was so verbally inaccessible that they did not even know, and were not able to gather, “what religion she was of” (1563 edition, Book 5, 1640). As well, Catherine Martyr was a former nun, who

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of the martyr, and that hagiography, on the other hand, has no interest in the embodied text, is possible only through a very selective reading. Not only has much been written on the text as body and as relic in medieval hagiography (see Wogan-Browne's article “The Apple's Message: Some Post-Conquest Hagiographic Accounts of Textual Transmission,” in *Late-Medieval Religious Texts and Their Transmission: Essays in Honour of A.I. Doyle*, ed. A.J. Minnis [Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994], 9-53), but Foxe's own accounts frequently display a fascination with the body of the martyrs and, in some cases, an interest in preserving artefacts: so, Elizabeth Folkes takes off her petticoat as she is standing at the stake and wishes to give it to her mother. However, because “the wicked there attending, would not suffer her to give it,” she simply throws it off, presumably into the crowd (1563 edition, Book 5, 1691). Of course, considering the Protestant disapproval of relics, the further history of the petticoat is unknown, but it is quite remarkable that Foxe chooses to preserve this moment, and to reproach those who prevented the transmission of the martyr's clothing at the stake. The printing history of *Actes and Monuments* is traced in exhaustive detail in Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman's monograph, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

in her later life had turned Protestant and married her learned husband; this information was widely available – to Martyr’s detractors, and surely to Foxe as well.<sup>335</sup> However, Foxe chooses not to mention this particular fact, although generally he is quite generous with the context, thus severing any links between Catherine and the Catholic past, but also between Catherine and her own virginal past. The good wife at the centre of his tale does not seem to have had an existence, or language, outside of her marriage. When, in Foxe’s tale, Catherine’s body is disinterred during the reign of Queen Mary, the martyrologist interprets it as an insult to her husband and complains that, “so well deserved of that university,” he “should wyth so vnglente a pranke of ingratitude be rewarded agayne, as to haue hys wyfe, that was a godlye woman, a straunger, good to manye poore people, and hurtfull to none [...] spightfully to be layd into a stinking dunghyll” (1563 edition, Book 5, 1640).<sup>336</sup> There is, of course, no consideration of Catherine’s possible feelings at having her corpse moved around several years after death. Instead, Foxe points out that, since she was a “good and virtuous woman,” the perfect woman of a conduct treatise, the disinterment was rather an “incurteous touch” and “yet was some reverence to be used toward her for sex and womanhood sake” (1563 edition, Book 5, 1640).

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<sup>335</sup> See Philip M.J. McNair, “Peter Martyr in England,” in *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the Italian Reform*, ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980), 85-105, esp. 96-7, on the shocked reaction of the public to Catherine’s eventual arrival in Oxford to join her husband. C.M. Dent also comments on the abuse to which the Martyr couple was subjected in *Protestant Reformers in Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 7.

<sup>336</sup> Dent argues that re-interment of Catherine was a demonstration of good intentions to Peter Martyr, who, it was hoped, might agree to return to England and take up his former chair in Oxford (25; 32). Furthermore, this action might also have symbolized “the reinstatement of the university’s link with the continental reformed churches” (Dent 32).

It is unclear how much truth there is to this story: there does not seem to be any official record of Cardinal Pole becoming personally involved in this project,<sup>337</sup> and there is a certain confusion of dates in the historical descriptions.<sup>338</sup> And yet, whatever really happened, this account is of great symbolic import, for it depicts a struggle of two bodies – the relics of St. Frideswide, held “in great reverence in that college” and perceived as possessed of great power, and the “carcase” of Catherine Martyr, the woman who had decisively rejected her vow of virginity in favour of becoming a good Protestant wife.<sup>339</sup> Which body is going to occupy the centre of attention, the locus of worship?

The authors of the story are clearly levelling an accusation at the Catholics in authority, imputing to them an eagerness to dispose viciously of Peter the Martyr’s good and meek wife in favour of a stubborn virgin martyr. However, the Protestant answer to

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<sup>337</sup> Neither the collection of Reginald Pole’s correspondence for these years, nor his recent biography, contains any reference to these events; see *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole, volume 3. A Calendar, 1555-1558: Restoring the English Church*, ed. Thomas S. Mayer (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), and Thomas S. Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince & Prophet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On the contrary, as Rex H. Pogson points out in his article “Reginald Pole and the Priorities of Government in Mary Tudor’s Church,” *The Historical Journal*, 18.1 (1975): 3-20, esp. 4, Pole’s contemporaries criticized him for indecision and inattentiveness to politics, while the cardinal acknowledged his own “preference for contemplation over action.” In the same article, Pogson indicates Pole’s respect for Martyr as a preacher, writing that the cardinal was “horror-stricken” when Martyr and Ochino fled for Geneva (19). On the other hand, it does appear that Peter Martyr’s wife had been moved twice after burial, once by Catholics and once by Protestants, as described in the pamphlet James Calphill composed for the second interment, *De Katherinae nuper uxoris D. Petri Martyris effossae exhumatione* (London: John Day, 1562). Furthermore, as Duffy points out, during Mary Tudor’s reign Pole had indeed ruled that heretic corpses should be removed from the buildings of Catholic worship and several such removals had taken place. Indeed, it was rumoured that Pole caused Henry VIII’s remains to have been exhumed and burned; Duffy, “Hampton Court, Henry VIII and Cardinal Pole,” in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Suzannah Lipscomb (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 197-213. Duffy also details Pole’s thorough involvement in all anti-Protestant proceedings throughout his recent monograph, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>338</sup> John Blair, summarizing the episode, gives the dates of re-interment as 1562, but also mentions that James Calphill’s account was published in 1561: see “Introduction,” in *Saint Frideswide: Patron of Oxford*, ed. and intro by John Blair (Oxford: The Perpetua Press, 1988), 9-23, esp. 21-22.

<sup>339</sup> Of course, even the Protestants of the 1550s would be well familiar with the legend of St. Frideswide, the nun who had been martyred precisely because she had refused to break her vows in favour of marriage.

the situation is much more curious: rather than replacing one set of remains with the other, the reformers retain both, making sure that no separation is possible. Catherine is “restored & translated to her proper place againe, yea and withall coupled her with Frideswides bones, that in case any Cardinal wil be so mad hereafter to remoue thys womans bones agayne, it shall be hard for them to discerne the bones of her from the other” (1570 edition, Book 12, 2193).<sup>340</sup> Carole Levin describes this as “an amalgam and symbol for the mix of rituals and beliefs represented in Elizabethan religion and the way its culture was reproduced,” but also points to the way in which “women have been eliminated from direct participation” and “it is men who are in control, and it is they who are packaging and manipulating the women’s bones.”<sup>341</sup>

Whatever did, in fact, happen to the bones of Catherine Martyr and Frideswide the virgin martyr, the way in which the story is “packaged” for the Protestant reader in Calphill’s pamphlet and then in *Actes and Monuments* offers a vivid metaphor for Foxe’s own construction of the martyr for the new century. He does not feel the need to dispose entirely with the Catholic virgin martyr (however angrily he might speak of her in theory), for she is the direct ancestor of many of his heroines. At the same time, her influence is restricted and eventually suppressed by the silent and obedient good wife, who is presented as the martyr for the marital cause and given the place of honour in the cathedral. In other words, Foxe’s technique through much of the *Actes and Monuments* is

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<sup>340</sup> Note that mixing of remains does not appear in the 1563 version.

<sup>341</sup> Carole Levin, “St. Frideswide and St. Uncumber: Changing Images of Female Saints in Renaissance England,” 237.

not to merge the two figures, or attempt to arrive at some sort of a balance, but rather to bring them together, using the good wife to frame and contain the martyr.

Foxe's version of Askew's martyrdom has traditionally been interpreted as more authentic and free from intrusion. So, John King sees Bale's and Foxe's techniques as diametrically opposed to one another and claims that "Bale had presented her in the stereotypical role of a weak woman who lacks the fortitude of a male, but Foxe, by stripping away Bale's hyperbolic commentary, allows the martyr to utter a more direct testimonial to her faith and personal resolve."<sup>342</sup> However, as Freeman and Wall have clearly shown, a narrative may be shaped by more than commentary, and thus Foxe's version of Askew's martyrdom is no more "authentic" in the modern sense of the word than Bale's.<sup>343</sup> Although, as King shows elsewhere, Foxe never claimed for himself the status of an author, rather identifying his own activity as that of a compiler,<sup>344</sup> and although he has been frequently treated by scholars as a traditional chronicler, attempting to record the history of the church or the state,<sup>345</sup> *Actes and Monuments* must be acknowledged to have a high degree of authorial involvement. Foxe did not simply collect materials, adding the newly found pieces along the way, but engaged with his monumental book very closely, adding, subtracting, re-writing, and re-organizing with

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<sup>342</sup> John King, "Fiction and Fact in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 1-35, esp. 16.

<sup>343</sup> See Sarah E. Wall, "Editing Anne Askew's *Examinations*," and Thomas S. Freeman and Sarah Elizabeth Wall, "Racking the Body, Shaping the Text."

<sup>344</sup> John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24-5.

<sup>345</sup> See the foundational books on Foxe, such as William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963); J.F. Mozley, *John Foxe and His Book* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), which goes to some length, in chapter 9, 223-35, to argue that the story of Guernsey martyrs could have been neither fabricated nor exaggerated); and V. Norskov Olsen, *John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

each new edition.<sup>346</sup> The issue of re-writing does not apply to Anne Askew's personal narrative, since, as Freeman has noted, Foxe has borrowed it more or less wholesale, possibly even without having to make any decisions about retaining or deleting Bale's commentary.<sup>347</sup> However, I wish to consider the manner in which Foxe framed Askew's narrative by appending to it, in the 1570 edition, the story of Katherine Parr's own trouble over her Protestant affiliations.

Pointing out that the Parr piece is a later addition, King adds that it is "difficult to imagine a verifiable route for a story that Foxe publishes nearly a generation after the alleged events had taken place"<sup>348</sup> and concludes that the story in question was written "as a coda ... long after the first publication of both the Askew and Elizabeth narratives. It provides a bridge between stories about notable women who were caught up in reigns of terror under Henry VIII and Mary I."<sup>349</sup> Thomas Freeman, however, gives a compelling argument for the historical significance of Foxe's account, with a caveat that it appears to have been edited so as to eliminate the implication of the King's divisive

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<sup>346</sup> Thomas Freeman shows extensively that Foxe's degree of participation in the construction of his book is obfuscated by the scholars who consult exclusively the Victorian eight-volume edition, without tracing the development of the particular narratives from edition to edition, and do not consider his sources; see "Texts, Lies, and Microfilm: Reading and Misreading Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30.1 (1999): 23-46, for a fascinating discussion of Foxe's continued work on the book. In a somewhat later article " 'The Good Ministrye of Godlye and Vertuose Women': The Elizabethan Martyrologists and the Female Supporters of the Marian Martyrs," *Journal of British Studies* 39.1 (2000): 8-33. Freeman explores the ways in which Elizabethan martyrologists, particularly Foxe, constructed the godly Protestant woman. See also Susan Wabuda, "Henry Bull, Miles Coverdale, and the Making of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*," *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, 245-58, for the argument that *Actes and Monuments* is, to a certain extent, a collaborative effort, and for the evaluation of Foxe's own part in it.

<sup>347</sup> Freeman suggests that the edition of Anne Askew's story most similar to Foxe's version is STC 852.5, which was printed without the commentary ("Text, Lies, and Microfilm," 34).

<sup>348</sup> King, "Fiction and Fact," 32. Indeed, Freeman openly questions the authenticity of this piece ("Text, Lies, and Microfilm," 27).

<sup>349</sup> King, "Fiction and Fact," 32.

court politics.<sup>350</sup> Still, its function in the collection remains in question, especially since, as Freeman suggests, the events described must have taken place before, not after, Askew's execution. The account of Katherine Parr's troubles cannot be limited to the function of a bridge – because nearly a hundred and fifty pages separate this account from the reign of Queen Mary, and because Queen Katherine is a notable woman herself, and this pairing of her with Anne Askew creates a striking contrast and can hardly be accidental. Indeed, the very fact of the later insertion, and the contemporary knowledge that they refer to the same political conflict, suggest that the two stories are to be read together.

The available evidence, then, is this: after allowing the Askew narrative to stand more or less alone in the 1563 edition, seven years later Foxe connected to it a lively piece recounting some conversations that supposedly took place between King Henry VIII and Katherine Parr. There are no known sources for these conversations, and for some there can hardly be any. In other words, the decision to insert this account was likely made by Foxe-as-author, constructing complex meaning out of disparate pieces. D.R. Woolf aptly proposes that one of the genres on which Foxe draws is that of romance – a prolonged, episodic narrative with numerous, often unrelated characters, whose struggles, when considered jointly, can nonetheless make a persuasive

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<sup>350</sup> Freeman, "One Survived: The Account of Katherine Parr in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'," in *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance*, 235-52. See particularly pages 238-40 on the scholarly debate concerning this account, as well as Janel Mueller's introduction to *Katherine Parr: Complete Works and Correspondence*, ed. Janel Mueller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1-33, esp. 21-24.

argument.<sup>351</sup> Although, as Patrick Collinson's defense of Foxe goes, his method was "a matter not of invention, still less of forgery, but of discrimination, interpretation, and most of all omission and deliberate exclusion," surely we can allow for some deliberate, heavily embroidered inclusion as well.<sup>352</sup>

A consideration of the stories of Anne Askew and Katherine Parr as two segments of a romance narrative can assist in addressing the long-standing question, which had been posed and variously answered about the behavioural model offered by Foxe to women readers. Herein lies another scholarly disagreement: so, Ellen Macek reproaches Foxe for being too concerned with the "early promotion of a new Protestant ethic of marriage" and seeking "to conceal the clues to a process of feminine self-actualization and spiritual maturation."<sup>353</sup> On the other hand, acknowledging Foxe's concern with female conduct within a marriage, Freeman and Hickerson argue that he actually sanctions wifely disobedience in the context of religious dissent, undermining it only by the women's devotion to male martyrs and Protestant divines,<sup>354</sup> and,

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<sup>351</sup> D.R. Woolf, "The Rhetoric of Martyrdom: Generic Contradiction and Narrative Strategy in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*," in *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe: Forms of Biography from Cassandra Fedele to Louis XIV*, ed. Thomas F. Mayer and D.R. Woolf (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 243-82, esp. 247-51. Although I have no qualms with Woolf's proposition, I must note that he relies too readily in his argument on an assumed distinction between romance and hagiography, contending that Foxe's martyrs markedly differ from the martyrs of medieval narratives because they "live in the world and play by its rules" and seem "more human, less extraordinary, and more immediate to the reader..." (249; 251). However, as I have shown in the previous chapters, when a range of vernacular *vitae* are considered closely, this ceases to be a distinguishing feature.

<sup>352</sup> Patrick Collinson, "Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs," in *Elizabethan Essays* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1994), 151-77, esp. 157.

<sup>353</sup> Ellen Macek, "The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in the Book of Martyrs," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19.1 (1988): 62-80, esp. 65.

<sup>354</sup> Freeman, "The Good Ministrye of Godlye and Vertuose Women," 16.

alternatively, the “obedience to their heavenly spouse.”<sup>355</sup> In a very early article on the subject, Carole Levin compares several accounts, including those of Anne Askew and Katherine Parr, and points to “the difficulty of too neatly categorizing the way Foxe presents women, and the message he is giving his women readers about the appropriate women’s roles.”<sup>356</sup>

The problem of contradictory accounts can be perhaps begin to be resolved if the *Actes and Monuments* is viewed as a multi-author compilation – a continuously altered book in which the figure of the Protestant martyr and, more particularly, of the female Protestant martyr is being developed. If this is accepted, then the various episodes of this giant “romance” need not be in direct contradiction with one another: rather, the import is produced by the juxtaposition and interplay of seemingly unconnected stories. In this particular case, by appending the case of Katherine Parr directly to Askew’s *Examinations*, Foxe achieves the immediate effect of framing and containing the troublesome martyr in an account of unimpeachable wifedom. Indeed, one cannot help but notice that the two stories, however different they are, address the same key issue: the problem of dealing with a husband who does not share the wife’s views – or at least

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<sup>355</sup> Megan L. Hickerson, “Gospelling Sisters ‘Goinge up and Downe’: John Foxe and Disorderly Women,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 35.4 (2004): 1035-1051, esp. 1051.

<sup>356</sup> Carole Levin, “Women in *The Book of Martyrs* as Models of Behavior in Tudor England,” *International Journal of Women’s Studies* 4.2 (1981): 196-207, esp. 205. Similarly, Marsha S. Robinson argues that Foxe, depending on the particular moment in the text, both “aggrandizes the natural infirmities of silly poor women” and portrays “conscience as a release from gender identity”; see “Doctors, Silly Poor Women, and Rebel Whores: The Gendering of Conscience in Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*,” in *John Foxe and His World*, ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 235-48, esp. 247. This confusion of models closely reflects the early modern attitude to wives acting independently of their husbands in the matters of religion; Merry E. Weisner points out that, however Protestant reformers might praise wives who have left their unreformed husbands, Protestant authorities were more suspicious of and hostile to such women than Catholics had been; see “The Reformation of the Women,” 197.

not fully – and is being actively incited against her by ill-wishers.<sup>357</sup> Askew’s drastic response (leaving her husband, moving to London, and suing for divorce) is immediately counteracted by the example of Katherine Parr, whose response is diametrically opposed: she deals with the situation by further improving as a wife, and thus restoring the marital peace.

Early in the tale, the readers are told of the queen’s exemplary conduct toward her husband. The marital bond between the two is exceedingly strong, “[f]or neuer handmayd sought with more carefull diligence to please her mistres, then she did with all paynfull endeuour apply her selfe by all vertuous meanes, in all thynges to please his humour.” At the same time, however, Foxe subtly indicates that Katherine has somewhat overstepped the boundaries in her eagerness to persuade the king into being a “thoroughly perfect” Protestant: originally “very zelous,” she grows “more bold” and begins “franckly to debate with the kyng, touchyng Religion, and therein flatlye to discover her selfe” (1570 edition, Book 8, 1461). Although the majority of the blame for the eventual discord between the couple is laid, to be sure, on such plotting clerics as the Bishop of Winchester, the readers see the first signs of marital trouble arise before the bishop ever gets his oar in. The queen, ignoring her husband’s sickness, “would not fayle to vse all occasions to moue him, according to her maner, zealously to proceede in the reformation of the Church,” while the king, his “accustomed pacience” worn thin by the pain, “began to shew some tokens of misliking.” Indeed, the bishop only feels emboldened to begin his campaign against Katherine after he hears the king say, at her

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<sup>357</sup> Foxe does not reproduce the details of Askew’s marital trouble, but it is mentioned by her every detractor and can be assumed to be public knowledge.

departure: “A good hearyng [...] it is when women become such Clerkes, & a thing much to my comfort, to come in myne old dayes to be taught by my wife” (1570 edition, Book 8, 1462).

This is, then, the royal family *before* the king is given any flawed advice about his wife. Foxe does not venture, anywhere in this account, to offer any open critique of Katherine’s behaviour, but his wording, and plot construction, are revealing: having become caught up in religious matters, the queen has broken the cardinal rules as set out in the contemporary treatises on feminine conduct. While the contemporary reader would readily recognize that the queen’s distraught reaction upon finding out the king’s displeasure stems from her awareness of Henry’s marital history, Foxe, without denying the political reasons for Katherine’s anxiety, also frames it, to a certain extent, in terms of losing her husband’s affection. She manages to regain some of her composure only after the king, acting “like a loving husband with sweete and comfortable wordes,” drops in to check on his ailing wife (1570 edition, Book 8, 1463).

To remedy the situation fully, Katherine must abandon her forward ways, recall the instructions given to early modern wives, and speak to her husband no longer boldly but “mildly, and with reverent countenance.” The speech she delivers reproduces perfectly the contemporary writing on the position of wives in marriage:

Your Maiestie (quoth she) doth right well know, neither I my self am ignoraunt, what great imperfection & weakenes by our first creation, is allotted unto us women, to be ordeyned and appoynted as inferiour and subiect unto man as our head, from whiche head all our direction ought to procede: and that, as God made man to his owne shape and lykenes, wherby he beyng endued with more speciall giftes of perfection, might rather bee stirred to the contemplation of heavenly thinges and to the earnest endeavour to obey hys commaundementes: even so also made hee

woman of man, of whom and by whom shee is to bee governed, commaunded and directed. Whose womanly weakenes and naturall imperfection, ought to be tolerated, ayded and borne withall, so that by his wisdomes such thinges as be lackyng in her, ought to be supplied. Sithence therefore that God hath appointed such a naturall difference betwene man and woman, and your Maiestie beyng so excellent in giftes and ornamentes of wisdomes, and I a seely poore woman so much inferiour in all respectes of nature unto you: how then commeth it now to passe that your Maiestie in such diffuse causes of Religion, will seme to require my Iudgement? Whiche when I haue uttered and sayd what I can, yet must I and will I referre my Iudgement in this and all other cases to your Maiesties wisdomes, as my onely anker, supreme head, and governer here in earth next under God, to leane unto. (1570 edition, Book 8, 1463)

Furthermore, when the king is not immediately persuaded, Katherine argues that, in their previous interactions, she did not mean to act as “a doctor,” but rather, as befits a good wife, was trying to alleviate the king’s discomfort by taking his mind away from his infirmity (1570 edition, Book 8, 1463). Also remarkable here are the words which Foxe uses to describe the king’s change of heart as he becomes convinced that Katherine’s earlier contentiousness tended “to no worse end” than creating comfort for himself (a worse end, presumably, would be asserting her own superior religious understanding). When Henry VIII believes his wife, his “mind [is] cleane altered” and becomes “well reformed”: Katherine Parr thus achieves a small reformation in her own household, not by insisting on her own point of view but by re-establishing the family hierarchy and submitting to her husband (1570 edition, Book 8, 1464).

Robinson interprets Katherine’s behaviour as “an ingenuity which attests to the ungendering of identity” and a “pose of a submissive wife”<sup>358</sup>; however, it seems that

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<sup>358</sup> Robinson, “Doctors, Silly Poor Women, and Rebel Whores,” 247; 248. In her article “Public Duty, Conscience, and Women in Early Modern England,” on which Robinson draws, Patricia Crawford does

this interpretation heavily depends on an assumption similar to Macek's – that these events necessarily took place in the form in which Foxe describes them. As the late addition of this episode suggests, even if it bears some relation to reality, most of the description and dialogue must surely be attributed to Foxe's authorship, and it is difficult to believe that the eminent Protestant martyrologist is openly sanctioning a sly mockery of marital norms. After all, as the title of this tale informs the readers, this is an account of the danger in which Katherine Parr found herself and of "how graciously she was preserved by her kinde & loving husband the king" (1570 edition, Book 8, 1641): a story, in other words, of how she was able to earn her husband's forgiveness and remain in his favour, not a recipe for subversion.<sup>359</sup> Placed immediately after Askew's martyrdom (the woman who had refused to accept the king's forgiveness),<sup>360</sup> this story cuts short any lingering impressions of Askew's rebellious voice and emphasizes, rather, her occasional "poor ignorant woman" pose. The grudging respect she had earned through resisting her Catholic interrogators is undermined by the emphasis placed by the

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argue that cases of conscience could further permeate the boundaries between public and private spheres, but at the same time points out that no ungendering of identity occurred in such cases, and wifely disobedience, were it to take place, needed to be justified; see *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England: Essays Presented to G.E. Aylmer*, ed. John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 57-76.

<sup>359</sup> See also Carole Levin's suggestion that this account in Foxe served as one of the inspirations for Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*: "The Taming of the Queen: Foxe's Katherine and Shakespeare's Kate," in *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barreett-Graves (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 171-86.

<sup>360</sup> While Bale vaguely suggests that Askew's martyrdom only took place because Henry had not known about it, Foxe inserts into the 1570 edition an account of Sir Anthony Knevet's breathtaking dash from Askew's rack straight to the court of Henry VIII. The outcome of this dash is unclear, since nothing seems to change in Askew's circumstances, but Knevet receives the king's pardon for himself and a general impression that the king "semed not very well to lyke of their so extreme handlyng of the woman" (Book 8, 1458). The king's pardon is also repeatedly offered to Anne Askew in exchange for recanting, but she, of course, refuses the offer (1459).

juxtaposition of stories on her essential alienation from the early modern state: the valiant king who rescues Katherine Parr cannot rescue Anne Askew.

Taking up the problem of Foxe's women martyrs in a recent book, Hickerson expands the thesis of her earlier article (see note 91 for this chapter), arguing at length that Foxe deliberately retains the disorderly elements of these martyrs' lives, thus seemingly sanctioning female independence. However, she concludes that "Foxe did not design these women to serve as models of virtuous behaviour for living female members of a godly community; rather .... they are models for disobedience to authority, whether marital, ecclesiastical, or royal."<sup>361</sup> To a certain extent, however, this conclusion does not engage with the issue of genre, since Foxe is not writing a recipe for successful religious revolution but, rather, positions himself as a historian, purporting to convey all available history. Foxe's chosen genre certainly affects his manner of dealing with texts, for he often seems reluctant to edit out widely known information.<sup>362</sup> At the same time, he certainly offers models for much more than revolt. The focus on the disruptive, verbal, often virginal women who seem to be the direct heiresses of virgin martyrs is continuously tempered by the descriptions of women who may or may not be martyrs, strictly speaking, but are certainly good, faithful wives to their earthly husbands. There is old Joan Seaman, who, hiding from authorities, heard that her husband of many years (presumably Catholic) fell sick. She then "with spede returned home to her house agayne, not regarding her life but consideryng her duety, and shewed her diligence to her

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<sup>361</sup> Megan L. Hickerson, *Making Women Martyrs in Tudor England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 160.

<sup>362</sup> Hickerson admits as much; see *Making Women Martyrs*, 87.

husband most faythfully, vntill God tooke hym away by death” (1570 edition, Book 12, 2274).

There is also the story of Elizabeth Lawson, who took “a very vnkynd man to her husband, who while she was in prison, sold away her raiment, and would not helpe her, & after she was out of prison she returnyng home vnto him, yet would he shew her no kindnes, nor helpe her neither” (1570 edition, Book 12, 2315). However, after being bailed from prison by a friend and spending some time with him, she resolutely returns home and stays there for the rest of her life. Her beliefs are clearly untroubled by a Catholic husband, and she makes no attempts to follow Askew’s example and abandon him. On the other hand, as Steven Mullaney astutely points out, Elizabeth Young, who, after her witty rejoinders, is suspected by her persecutors of being a man in drag, “occupies and articulates an ideological blindspot in Foxe’s narrative representation,” being “too much of a social paradox and conundrum.” Unable to fit Young concretely into the existing systems of representation (she is neither poor nor rich; neither a martyr nor a good wife), Foxe offers no supporting narrative for her apart from a very brief introduction to the transcript of her interrogation.<sup>363</sup>

Like Bale’s, Foxe’s book is a lesson in transformation: we see the recognizable women martyrs mixed, in the manner of St. Frideswide’s bones, with the dutiful and patient wives, and the suggestions of marital disobedience immediately tempered by the examples of extreme marital submission. As Hickerson shows, Foxe’s seventeenth-

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<sup>363</sup> Steven Mullaney, “Reforming Resistance: Class, Gender, and Legitimacy in Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*,” in *Print, Manuscript, Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 235-51, esp. 248.

century abridgers, untroubled by the historical agenda and more concerned with presenting suitable models, continued moving further in the direction indicated by Foxe and blithely transformed such subversive characters as Elizabeth Young into models of “virtuous female domesticity... patient self-deprivation... family attachment and loyalty.”<sup>364</sup> Thus we see these women martyrs progressively losing the features characteristic of medieval female saints: the transformation is not achieved by the Reformation alone but, rather, is a continuation of the evolution through the late Middle Ages, whereby the female saint is made more “appropriate” as a model, acquiring meekness, obedience, and deference to male authority. This change, furthermore, is not limited to the Protestant writers but is readily discovered in early modern Catholic hagiographers, whose idea of the female martyr is, before everything else, that of a non-threatening woman whose conduct does not contradict the instructions of the Church Fathers.

**“Their modestie, their pacience, their charite, their love”:**

### **Women Martyrs and Catholicism in Post-Reformation England**

In 1556, nearly a decade after Bale released Askew’s *Examinations*, a Catholic named Miles Huggarde published his own take on the Protestant martyrs, entitled *The displaying of the Protestantes*. In this work, he takes particular care to discuss in detail women martyrs, including Askew herself, and argues that they are completely distinct from their early Christian prototypes, despite any assertions to the contrary: “...they dare bee bolde to compare themselves to the martirs of the primative church. To whom they

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<sup>364</sup> Hickerson, *Making Women Martyrs*, 170.

be nothing like.”<sup>365</sup> Huggarde implies – and elsewhere states directly – that reformers cannot be seen as “proper” martyrs because they do not espouse the true God and die in error, but also that it is their scandalous behaviour on trial that truly exposes them as impostors. Huggarde outlines his idea of a perfect martyr by pointing to the absence of these characteristics in the Protestant descriptions: “...if oure men wil nedes be martirs, as thei pretende to be, where is their modestie, their pacience, their charite, their love, that is required in a martyr?” (42). Granted, the criticism here seems to be aimed exclusively at male martyrs, and yet no problematic Protestant men are named in or anywhere near this discussion, which follows closely after the condemnation of Joan Butcher (known also as Joan of Kent) and Anne Askew, as “arrogant and presumptuous martirs.” Askew in particular earns much condemnation from Huggarde since, instead of conducting herself mildly and quietly at the trial and perhaps even accepting the pardon gratefully when it was offered, she “defied them all, reviling the offerers thereof, with suche opprobrious names, that are not worthy rehersall, making the lyke lygnes too the preacher at her death as her [...] fellowe & syster in Christ, Joane Butcher dyd...” (40). These women, Huggarde concludes, cannot be considered true martyrs, since they lack charity and are “contrary to civile life” (40-41). This is a remarkable description of Askew’s second examination, all the more so because it is simply not true: the portions attributed to her do not mention any railing at the interrogators or Catholic priests, and do not engage in any belated name-calling. The only parts of the *Examinations* that contain “opprobrious names” and revilements belong, in fact, to Bale’s pen.

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<sup>365</sup> Miles Huggarde, *The displaying of the Protestantes, and sundry their practises...* (London: Robert Caly, 1556), 42. All further references are to this edition.

It is unlikely that Huggarde is actually confused as to which portions of the text belong to whom, since he displays detailed knowledge of Bale's involvement, discussing, for example, his comparison of Askew to Blandina (39). Rather, it seems to me, this is part of Huggarde's overall project of problematizing the independent woman martyr and presenting her to the reader as a disorderly, loud-mouthed woman, who does not possess the all-important characteristic of charity. This supposition is supported by the rest of his lengthy treatise, for in almost hundred pages Huggarde never mentions the popular medieval virgin martyrs, whose own aggressiveness and vociferousness would surely undermine his assertion that unruly women are a Protestant phenomenon. Instead, Huggarde alludes to numerous male martyrs, primitive, medieval, and contemporary, as models of constancy and propriety,<sup>366</sup> but the female models that do make it into the text have little connection to the Christian faith and seem to be chosen for the lack of information surrounding their decease. So, Huggarde briefly refers to the fifty Lacedaemonian virgins who preferred death to rape, with no evidence that they were able to maintain the required mildness and charitableness while resisting the advances of the Messenian men (72).<sup>367</sup> Similarly, he vaguely acknowledges that we may "rede of many notable women, which were worthy martyrs, for the defence of Christes moste holy name, and suffered sundry tormentes for the quarrel of his faith" but is careful not to describe these women, urging his readers "rather to spende your lives for the defence of your charitee, and the lyves of your dere husbandes..." (70).

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<sup>366</sup> See, for example, Huggarde, pp. 44-45; 48; 59; 61.

<sup>367</sup> Huggarde is likely deriving this example from Book 1 of St. Jerome's *Against Jovinianus*, which discusses chastity among pagans; see *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, 346-416, esp. 380.

Not surprisingly, Huggarde's star women martyrs, those offered to his audience for the purposes of imitation, are those who suffered numerous trials or violent deaths while defending their husbands' lives or reputations. In this list, the reader finds Lucrece, familiar to us from the Protestant marital treatises, as well as several other pagan wives, and the Biblical Michal, King David's first wife, who defied her father Saul to save David.<sup>368</sup> If early modern women must have models, Huggarde argues, let them emulate these "wives worthy of immortall fame, and vouchsafed to have their images to be erected of gold for their perpetual fame" (71-72). Despite gesturing vaguely at the general category of the notable Christian women of whom one might read, this Catholic writer insists that being a good, submissive wife is the best way in which a woman may achieve salvation. Recalling St. Paul, he reminds his readers that women "ought to be silent amonges the congregation" and urges them "to be at commandement of [their] husbandes," condemning all early modern women who do not conform to these rules, for, in a reference to the story of Eve and the apple, "the weakness of wemen is suche, that they be ever prone and redy to mischief, & to bringe men to their confusion" (70; 68).

Indeed, Huggarde is ready with a list of wives who, in ruling their husbands, destroyed them: these are Eve, Delilah, Solomon's concubines, Jeroboam's wife, Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, and many other Biblical figures who "prove the rediness of wemen in deceiving of men with their vayne persuasions" (68).<sup>369</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>368</sup> This last has an uncanny resemblance to Chaucer's Hypermnestra in the *Legend of Good Women*.

<sup>369</sup> Huggarde explains his inclusion of Jeroboam's wife by asking, rhetorically, whether she did not "deceive [her husband] in fayning her selfe to be another woman?" (68). In fact, she did not: according to

women who, whether married or not, choose to take an active role in asserting their faith, are necessarily flawed and, what is more, extremely dangerous to the men around them. They are the “simpering gossips and parottes,” “the wandrynge gillottes,” the “prancking dames” of the devil’s league, “ever busy like wasps, rather to do hurt then good” (67; 69). Indeed, their reforming zeal, the unceasing “talke [...] nothing but of religion, of Peter or Paule, & other places of Scripture” arises precisely from their identity as bad, lecherous wives, for their “Scripture mouthes are redy to allure their husbandes to die in the lordes verite, because they would fayne have new...” (69).<sup>370</sup> Although Huggarde places himself in opposition to Protestant writers, his view of religious women, in fact, runs parallel to theirs. The outspoken virgin martyrs, and those devout women who, by claiming likeness with them, were able to travel and engage in religious discourse, are firmly absent from his discussion. Askew’s failing, in this treatise, lies not so much her

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1 Kings 14:2, “Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam, and get thee to Shiloh” (King James Bible). That Huggarde misrepresents this obedient wife’s (failed) reconnaissance mission as a successful attempt to deceive her own husband highlights the tenuousness of his distinctions, for a woman who sets out on an independent trip in a disguise may well be condemned, whether or not she had acted under her husband’s explicit orders.<sup>370</sup> Huggarde soothingly prefaces this condemnation with a disclaimer: “I speake not here of matrones, whiche are modest and sobre, obedient to their husbandes, contented to applie their mindes to the government of housholde matters...” (69). Freeman offers an interesting detail that speaks toward the suspicion that hovers over the rebellious woman martyr in his description of the woodcut depicting the execution of Cicely Ormes. Ormes was a young wife who asserted her faith presumably in defiance of her husband and certainly in defiance of the male chancellor, as described by Foxe. However, Freeman points out that the very same woodcut was used, even at the height of the popularity of *Actes and Monuments*, “as the title page of a pamphlet describing the murder of one John Brewen by his wife and her lover. Now the woman standing in the flames was not the heroic Cicely Ormes, but the guilty Anne Brewen”; see “‘*Imitatio Christi* with a Vengeance’: The Politicisation of Martyrdom in Early Modern England,” in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c. 1400-170*, ed. Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 35-69, esp. 35. For Freeman, this alternative utilization of the image points to the difficulty of distinguishing, in the sixteenth century, between true martyrs and mere criminals and, therefore, to the particular aptness of *imitatio Christi* (the Messiah who is executed as a rebel and criminal). At the same time, the merging of the two women in one image is eerily reminiscent of Huggarde’s suggestion that women martyrs are wantons, merely exercising their desire for new husbands; by re-using the woodcut, the Protestant publishers are not only saving money but also postulating a troubling likeness between Cicely, who abandons her husband for Christ, and Anne, who murders her husband to appease her own adulterous sexual desires.

religious views as her refusal to conduct herself as behoves a proper woman, by remaining, silently and obediently, at home with her husband. Huggarde does not choose to comment on the thorny issue of her marriage, but he greatly exaggerates her unwomanly behaviour, ascribing to her both violence and foul language, to emphasize that she is unacceptable for any devout community.

While Robert Persons, writing nearly half a century later, is much more interested in criticizing John Foxe as a writer and a historian than in challenging the general image of the Protestant martyr, his criticism of Anne Askew, and of other contemporary women martyrs, does not greatly differ from Huggarde's. He briefly refers to the matters of Askew's faith but focuses much more closely on what are clearly her principal failings: that she "did follow the liberty of the new gospel, goinge up and downe at her pleasure" and "left the company of her husband *Maister Kyme*, to gad up & downe the countrey a ghospelling & ghossipinge where she might, & ought not."<sup>371</sup> Persons' use of the word "ghossipinge" directly points to his concern with female speech, exercised freely and outside of the woman's home. Askew, in his description, is before everything a woman who has neglected her wifely duty; instead of keeping "the company" of her husband, she chooses to follow her own inclinations and travel in a manner that is clearly prohibited to women. Furthermore, he establishes the familiar connection between the female martyr and disorder, with implications of promiscuity, in questioning Bale's use

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<sup>371</sup> Robert Persons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions: 1604*, vol. 2, ed. D.M. Rogers (London: The Scolar Press, 1976, English Recusant Literature, 1558-1640, 304-306), 491-2; 495. All further references are to this three-volume edition.

of the term “iuuencula” in relation to Askew.<sup>372</sup> The Latin word simply means a young woman, although it is possible that Bale had its zoological associations in mind and meant to suggest an idea of the martyr as a sacrificial calf – a fairly common image in virgin martyrs’ Lives. Persons, however, seizes on the secondary meaning to argue that a sacrificial calf does not a good wife make, commenting that “a yong heaffer or steere [...] abideth no yoke,” and that Bale “seemeth not to be farre amisse. For that she was a coy dame, and of very evill fame for wantonnesse” (v. 2, 495).<sup>373</sup> This challenge issued to the very image marshalled by Bale – the image that clearly derives from Bale’s own past as friar and hagiographer – is peculiar in a staunch Catholic writer, a vigorous advocate of the traditional calendar of saints. All the same, Persons appears to have erased the figure of the virgin martyr from his religious worldview to such an extent that he (unlike Bale) does not feel the need to deal with the possible link.<sup>374</sup>

This is especially noticeable in Persons’ treatment of Elizabeth Folkes, the Protestant martyr who threw a petticoat to her mother while standing at the stake<sup>375</sup> – a bold, talkative maiden, and an obvious candidate for the role of the virgin martyr.

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<sup>372</sup> This probably means that Persons, unlike Huggarde, is responding to Bale’s *Illustrium maioris Britanniae scriptorium summarium* rather than to his edition of the *Examinations*. See Beilin’s introduction to the *Examinations* on this point (xxxv). In general, it is unclear to what extent, if at all, Persons is familiar with Askew’s actual text, since he refers to it dismissively as “some 4. or 5. sheets of paper in private letters, which yow may see sett downe in Fox” (494), although it is possible that this remark is part of his overall effort to present Askew as a destructive rather than creative force.

<sup>373</sup> See King’s commentary on this part of Persons’ treatise (*Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture*, 262-3).

<sup>374</sup> In *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture*, King comments on the complete and utter absence of virgin martyrs in the calendar which Persons offers instead of Foxe’s (261). This is consistent with Victor Houlston’s argument that Persons is closely concerned “with the continuity of Catholic tradition,” as he perceives it, and “in the formation of the Catholic Christian”: see “Robert Persons’s Comfortable History of England,” in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England c. 1400-1700*, ed. Thomas S. Freeman and Thomas F. Mayer (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 180-202, esp. 186, 197. An altered version of this article is included in his *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons’s Jesuit Polemic, 1580-1610* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>375</sup> See footnote 334.

However, Persons does not make even a token attempt at undermining her convictions.<sup>376</sup> Rather, having dryly summarized Folkes' statement, he takes issue with her conduct at the interrogation, complaining that this "yong mayden" proved to be "much more malepart, then the other woemen, that were more aged, and this is proper also to heresie, that the youngest and weakest will presume most, especially in woman kynde..." (v. 3, 125). Gone are the medieval tender maidens capable of exhibiting enormous strength, endurance, and intelligence under duress, to the greater glory of God; the early modern girls showing resistance are automatically suspect and branded as peculiarly "malepart." The proper lot of these girls is clearly indicated a page later when, having written that Folkes was burned, Persons sarcastically concludes, "Thus relateth Fox of his *modest mayd* that defied the wole world, and her lawfull iudges" (v. 3, 126, italics mine). One would expect the episode to be finished with this sentence, but the writer seems so disturbed by his own suggestion of Folkes' modesty that he must revisit the details of her execution to impress on the reader the impropriety of her conduct, recounting the flinging of the petticoat (v. 3, 126). This repetition drives home Persons' insistence that the subject of this story should be perceived not as an exceptional martyr who retains the presence of mind, along with the ability and desire to express herself, even in the face of death, but as an unmarried woman, whose defiance of male authority means merely that she can be dismissed as flawed marital material. It would be best, Persons' wording implies, that Elizabeth Folkes and those like her kept their sex and lack

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<sup>376</sup> On the other hand, Huggarde repeats several times throughout his treatise that the cause, rather than the manner of dying, makes a martyr, clearly concerned that some of his readers might be misled by the martyrs' similarity to the Catholic models.

of strength in mind and occupied themselves with being unpretentious, modest, and obedient, as befits a future wife.

Persons' concern, before everything else, with the suitability of women martyrs as wives, is visible also in his decision to insert into the discussion of Anne Askew a lengthy paragraph that seeks to undermine Katherine Parr's position as a good spouse. Although obviously unable to offer any solid evidence on the matter, Persons violently challenges Foxe's assertion that the queen, by beginning to conduct herself in accordance with the suggestions of marital treatises, was able to secure the king's love and forgiveness, thus reinstating marital harmony. Instead, according to Persons, "the truth is, that the Kings sicknesse and death shortly ensuyng, was the cheefe cause of her escape," despite Katherine's abject attempts "to go and humble her selfe to the King" (v. 2, 494). The wording implies that the king in his wisdom was not taken in by Parr's pretence and would not have failed, but for his untimely death, to punish her for the disorder she has brought both to their marriage and, by keeping heretical books in her closet, to the country. Neatly inserted into Persons' treatment of Askew, this retelling destroys the neutralizing framework which Foxe had so carefully created and emphasizes the suspicion felt by early modern writers, both Protestant and Catholic, toward the very idea of a rebellious, independent woman martyr. The argument is no longer, it seems, whether the martyr had died for a worthy cause, but ultimately whether she had been conducting herself properly as a wife or as a young woman looking forward to marriage.

### “The Best Wife in the Kingdome”: The Martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow

That the new woman martyr, greatly concerned with conduct proper to her sex and with fulfilling her marital duties, has replaced the medieval model in Catholic, as well as Protestant, imagination is apparent from the Life of Margaret Clitherow, a well-known Catholic, executed for harbouring priests in 1586. In composing this Life (and a later version of it entitled *An Abstracte of the Life and Martirdome of Mistres Margaret Clitherowe*), John Mush, Clitherow’s former spiritual advisor, is very obviously aware of the problems and contradictions inherent in writing a woman martyr in the new age. He thus presents to his readers a woman who, although martyred for her beliefs, also succeeds in becoming a truly perfect wife and fulfilling her marital duties beyond any reproach; Clitherow’s defiant religious views are soothingly framed by her submission to her husband.<sup>377</sup>

Margaret Clitherow is described as a model inhabitant of her town – a dedicated housekeeper and meat-seller, beloved by those who come into daily contact with her. John Mush lays the emphasis on the lack of disruptiveness in her existence in the

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<sup>377</sup> I found chapter 2, “Framing Recusant Identity in Counter-Reformation England,” of Megan Matchinske’s *Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England*, especially helpful in thinking about Margaret Clitherow. However, due to her scholarly focus, Matchinske appears to be largely interested in Clitherow as a historical figure, whereas I am primarily interested in the choices Mush makes as a hagiographer in writing her *vita* and *passio*. I do not mean to link Mush to Clitherow’s actual martyrdom, for, as Claire Cross has convincingly shown, he “can in no way be held responsible for consciously encouraging her to seek this fate”; see “An Elizabethan Martyrologist and His Martyr: John Mush and Margaret Clitherow,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, ed. Diana Wood, 271-81, esp. 280. At the same time, he clearly embroiders the account, adding elements which, in his view, will present his subject as a better early modern martyr, even when they do not logically fit into the narrative. So, for example, after having unequivocally stated that Clitherow has no money with her (desiring to reward the messenger boy who brings her the welcome news of the close death, she can only give him a fig), the *passio* describes her handing out prodigious alms every time she is escorted through the street. Needless to say, narrating her last days in excruciating detail, the *passio* never describes a moment at which her resources might have been replenished.

community: “all her actions were tempered with all inward tranquility and comfort,” her mirth was “discreet,” and even though she was “ready of tongue, but yet her words modest, and courteous, and lowly...”<sup>378</sup> She is unceasingly charitable to others: in fact, chapter VI is entitled “Of Her Charity to Her Neighbours.” Even Clitherow’s unusual sharpness with her servants has a laudatory explanation: after the narrator wonders, in a conversation with her, “how she durst be so sharp with her servants” while expecting them to hide the secret of a priest living in her house, she refuses to “neglect [her] duty to [her] servants, or not to correct them as they deserve” (403). And so, even this momentary abandonment of outward mildness and pleasantness is cleared of suspicion, since, as this exchange explains, Margaret’s sharp words to her servants are, in fact, part of the danger she experiences as a secret Catholic and future martyr while fulfilling her duties as the strict but just mistress of the household.

Furthermore, as the lengthy paragraph dedicated to her housework makes clear, she does one better than Luther’s Virgin Mary, for while making a point of attending to “more gross matters” of the housework, “choosing rather to do them herself, and to set her maids about sweeter business,” Clitherow is never disdained by those around her for undertaking unpleasant tasks (375). The dirty housework is certainly an exercise of humility, as Mush specifies several times, but, as he is also quick to point out, “she were inferior to none of her neighbours in any honest, comely, womanly, or decent quality” (374). Indeed, this is the essential paradox in this martyr’s life – Mush’s awareness of the

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<sup>378</sup> John Morris, ed., *Mr. John Mush’s Life of Margaret Clitherow in The Troubles of Our Catholic Forefathers, Related by Themselves* (London: Burns and Oates, 1877), 360-440, esp. 388-9. All further references are to this edition.

earlier models of martyrdom, but also his desire to show that Clitherow, despite her secret life and eventual execution, must not and could not be interpreted as a rebel against her community and especially her husband. We see this, for example, in the short two-paragraph chapter “Of Her Contempt of the World, and All Pleasures Thereof,” where Mush demonstrates her complete indifference to worldly goods but also specifies that “[i]n selling and buying her wares she was very wary to have the worth of them, as both her neighbours uttered the like, as also to satisfy her duty to her husband” (399). As in the case with servants, this is another trial, since, as Mush reports, “she would say that she suffered greater and oftener conflicts in dealing in this worldly trade of buying and selling [...] than in all her other affairs besides” (399). In other words, this Catholic *vita* offers its readers a vision of trial by conformity: Clitherow is commended not for maintaining her principles in the face of adversity but, rather, for maintaining complete outward conformity, striving to blend in entirely with her neighbours, and projecting the very image of mild womanhood and concern with her home and the family business.<sup>379</sup>

Similarly, Mush grapples with the question of wifely obedience, reproducing an entire conversation between Clitherow and one of her confessors after she has been told, by a Catholic man, “that she ought not to adventure upon these things without licence of

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<sup>379</sup> At the same time, as Matchinske notes, Mush presents Clitherow’s religious life as intensely private and isolated (*Writing, Gender and State in Early Modern England*, 79), even though in a modern biography Mary Claridge argues for a female recusant community in the Christ Church parish, counting, for example, “fifteen recusant wives of tradesmen” of whom “seven were the wives of butchers, and one the wife of a ‘pennyman,’ who specialized in the dressing of meat” by 1576, and three more wives of butchers by next year; see *Margaret Clitherow (1556?-1586)*, foreword by Philip Caraman (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), 68. These women, united both by their faith and social position, would have formed a closely-knit community and spent a great deal of time in each other’s company (Claridge, 69). However, in Mush’s version of her worship, Clitherow remains a model wife, who does not go gadding about (as some pilgrim-going Catholic wives have done) but limits herself to private reverie.

her husband” (381). Although the question is eminently valid, it is undermined by its very description as “uncharitable talk” and never quite resolved. The confessor assures his spiritual daughter that, in her role before God, she is “not any whit inferior” to her husband but also, first and foremost, that by not seeking her husband’s consent she is, in fact, being a caring wife, for “it is [her] husband’s most safety not to know these things,” as he is not of the same faith (381-82). The presentation of Clitherow, in other words, balances precariously between two dangerous implications. If Mush allows, explicitly, that his heroine is in fact acting without her husband’s consent, she becomes the figure that so troubled early modern writers – the disobedient, wilful woman, who rejects her husband’s opinion in favour of her own convictions. If, however, she fulfils her wifely duty and accepts her husband as her sovereign ruler and his beliefs as her own, she must lose her status as a Catholic martyr; Clitherow’s very religious beliefs indicate a difference of opinion. Mush deals with this problem throughout the *Life*, without ever quite resolving it: in his presentation, Clitherow’s position as a martyr is always to a certain extent subsumed in her description as a very proper early modern woman and an excellent wife to the man not of her faith.<sup>380</sup>

This merging is explicitly set out in the very lively scene of a neighbour’s banquet, when Clitherow’s husband, “liberal of tongue among the pots,” begins speaking dismissively and downright slanderously of Catholics, generously peppering his speech with oaths. The heroine, shocked by this ill-tempered explosion, bursts into tears, both

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<sup>380</sup> In a later *Abstracte of the Life and Martirdome of Mistres Margaret Clitherow* (Mackline: Henry Iaey, 1619), Mush paradoxaically insists that his heroine is “truly obediente unto her spirituall, & temporall Superiorurs...” (sig. A4<sup>r</sup>).

because, as she later explains to her confessor, she is grieved by her husband's offence against God and Catholic church but also, as Mush suggests, because she knows "none to be Catholic but herself in that company" and probably interprets her husband's words as a personal condemnation. Immediately, however, the implication of the familial discord is erased when the husband reassures Clitherow that "he meant not those words by her, for, indeed, he would ever report that he could wish no better wife than she was" (407). Only after the heroine's position as an excellent – the best ever! – wife is re-established can she regain her position as a Catholic martyr existing in a hostile Protestant community; Mush piously concludes at the end of the chapter, "Such crosses as these now and then she suffered by her husband and others, yet always much grieved for the offence to God, and their harm, and nothing at all for her own injury" (407-408).

Clitherow's status as a good wife is reasserted throughout the account of her martyrdom:<sup>381</sup> when officials come to search her house, for example, they find this matron "busied with household affaires."<sup>382</sup> To her interrogators, she speaks "boldly, & yet with great modestye" (sig. B6<sup>r</sup>) and when they, perceiving her puzzling joy, think that she might be "possessed with a merry devill," Mush is quick to counteract this image of the too-expansive martyr by introducing Clitherow's husband, who is "like a man distracted, crying out, that they would murder the best wife with in the Kingdome" (sig. C1<sup>r</sup>). Indeed, the inordinate joy is one of the few details in this martyrdom that link Margaret Clitherow to medieval martyrs, but the possibility of rising

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<sup>381</sup> In discussing Clitherow's martyrdom, I will be using the *Abstracte*, which is an equivalent of a medieval *passio* and was published in 1619, primarily because, as Claridge shows, the nineteenth-century editor had been rather liberal with the wording of the full life (which has not been published at the time and is thus not available in any other edition), freely altering it to suit his tastes (*Margaret Clitherow*, 171).

<sup>382</sup> Mush, *Abstracte*, sig. A8<sup>r</sup>. All further references are to this edition.

above social demands that could be found in the stories of virgin martyrs and in the accounts of those who emulated them seems to be lost. So, Clitherow is forced to go to her execution with bare legs but, at the same time, the account specifies that “her headgeere was decently putt on” (sig. C4<sup>r</sup>).<sup>383</sup> Similarly, when ordered to strip for her execution, since “shee must die naked,” Clitherow, surrounded by women, begs the executioners “for the honour of woman kinde, that shee might not be seene naked.”

Her reluctance to strip is understandable, but also not entirely expected in a woman who joyfully looks forward to the prospect of suffering and humiliation; it suggests, again, a tense union between a martyr and an early modern wife.<sup>384</sup> This tension is emphasized in the next lines, when, instructed to unclothe Clitherow, the women take off her dress and replace it with a “long linen habite” which she had made for herself; seemingly, neither the interrogators nor Mush himself notice that the undressing does not quite take place. In a sense, I think, we must understand her as being naked and clothed simultaneously: naked in her martyr incarnation, but decently and modestly covered as Margaret, Clitherow’s wife. The text offers an uninterrupted view of this division of identities, showing the reader that the partially exposed matron is unrecognizable: “her face was covered with a handkerchief, her secret partes with the linen habite, and all the reste of her body lefte naked” (sig. C6<sup>r</sup>). In other words, in the moment of demise, when the readers are startled by the disturbing and disruptive

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<sup>383</sup> Noting that this is a later addition, Claridge suggests that the headgear is added by the “scandalized” editor of the abridged account, who feels that even the limited extent of “flouting the conventions” allowed to the martyr is excessive (172, n. 2).

<sup>384</sup> This is also possibly an allusion to Perpetua, an early Christian martyr, whose first action after being tossed by a mad heifer is to pull down her tunic, “thinking more of her modesty than of her pain” (quoted in Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* [New York: Routledge, 1997], 143).

spectacle of the martyr's broken body, in which things previously hidden away from a prying glance are now suddenly exposed,<sup>385</sup> the body which they are shown is faceless and sexless. This disruptive, too-open martyr's body seemingly does not belong to Margaret Clitherow, whose identity as a good and proper woman is forcefully re-established moments before her death, when, in her last words, she seeks to maintain the soothing vision of marital harmony: "Yf ever I have offended hin [sic] .... I doe aske him forgevenes from the bottome of my harte" (sig. C6').

### **Re-Writing the Virgin Martyr in Seventeenth-Century England:**

#### **The Case of St. Dympna**

At some point in the early seventeenth century, an anonymous Catholic writer compiled an all-female vernacular legendary, entitled *The Lives of Women Saints of Our Countrie of England*, which was not published until the nineteenth century and survives in a single manuscript (MS Stowe 949).<sup>386</sup> As Sanok shows, this legendary is not a unique representative of its genre in the early modern period; on the contrary, at least three all-female legendaries (one now lost) circulated as late as the early seventeenth century.<sup>387</sup> This collection, in other words, firmly situates itself in the continuing tradition of writing about female saints. However, as Sanok persuasively argues, the preface to the collection imagines its readers as men who can retain their religious

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<sup>385</sup> The only detail of torture Mush gives is of this startling exposure: when the weight is laid on Margaret Clitherow, it "did not only breake her ribbes, but caused them to breake through her skinne" (sig. C6-R).

<sup>386</sup> See Carl Horstmann's introduction to his edition of the manuscript, *The Lives of Women Saints of Our Countrie of England (c. 1610-1615)* (London: N. Trübner, 1886, EETS. o.s. 86), v. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>387</sup> Catherine Sanok, "The Lives of Women Saints of Our Countrie of England: Gender and Nationalism in Recusant Hagiography," in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley, and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 261-80, esp. 262.

identity through consuming the accounts of holy women who lived in the centuries past: “the monumental past is figured by female virgins and martyrs, while the present is gendered masculine through the text’s ethical address.”<sup>388</sup> She concludes, moreover, that the legendary lacked appeal to other recusant writers because it offered “a narrow, largely irrelevant, example of [national religious] identity for contemporary men to imitate” and excluded contemporary women entirely from this performance.<sup>389</sup>

I would like to modify Sanok’s argument somewhat by proposing that the exclusion of women readers from participating in the performance of religious identity is not necessarily deliberate but, more likely, the by-product of the uneasy marriage, in this legendary, of the medieval female saint and the early modern good woman. The influence of early modern ideals of femininity is readily apparent: considering that it is treating, more often than not, the struggle of early Christianity, its Lives puzzlingly lack confrontation. The heroines of this legendary enter the religious life with the consent of their male relatives or husbands, are assisted by those they encounter, and rule their abbeys comfortably. This familial concord is emphasized by the second half of the collection, which contains several Lives of exemplary women by the Church Fathers. In particular, the reader finds there St. Augustine writing of his mother St. Monica, St. Gregory of Nazareth of his mother St. Nonna and sister St. Gorgonia, and St. Gregory of Nyssa of his sister St. Macrina, emphasizing these women’s obedience and readiness to assist their sons and brothers in religious pursuits. St. Ambrose’s Life of St. Agnes, also found in the second half of the collection, shows her parents, originally agreeable to the

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 274.

idea of her marriage, inexplicably “taking no kinde of grieffe” at their daughter’s death and burying “her bodie with greate joye [...] in a little ferme of theirs” (151).

In other words, much of this legendary very pointedly ignores the possibility that women saints might face conflicting allegiances and the necessity to defy their family – male relatives or husbands in particular. In the story of St. Ursula, for example, we see the heroine’s unwillingness to be married downplayed, even though, as the author emphasizes, she was “so affected unto chastitie and the love of virginitie” (37). And yet, in this version she does not ask for a reprieve or make a pitch for a chaste marriage; instead, the narrative points urgently to the importance of marriage for nation-building.<sup>390</sup> It is no longer Ursula alone who is asked to make the journey to the so-called “French Brittanie,” where Conanus, her husband-to-be, has made his settlement. Rather, he requests that “to the rest of his souldiors, other virgins in marriage: for it was thought that this new kingdome would not be stable and firme for long continuance, unlesse they had wives of their owne nation” (37). Faced with such a persuasive argument, neither Ursula nor her eleven thousand virgins can refuse, and while the narrative acknowledges that “she was rather haled perforce than voluntarie assenting,” there is also no sense of real resistance beyond some general unwillingness (37). The journey undertaken by the

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<sup>390</sup> On the other hand, the principal source for this version, the account in *The Kalendre of the Newe Legende of Englande* (written by John of Tynemouth in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, edited by Capgrave in the 15<sup>th</sup>, and in 1516 anonymously translated into English and published by Richard Pynson – see introduction to *The Lives of Women Saints of Our Countrie of England*, 7-12), makes it abundantly clear that Ursula’s agreement to the marriage is no more than elaborate deception. An angel appears to her, commanding that she seem to accept and promising that she and the other virgins “shulde have & receyve the crowne & palme of martyrdom” in Cologne; see the edition by Manfred Görlach (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994, from Pynson’s printed edition, 1516), 179-80. The impossibility of marriage and divine promise of virginal martyrdom for all women on the journey is reiterated throughout the narrative, - and yet, the seventeenth-century revision is able to ignore this aspect of Ursula’s legend and present her as a thoroughly dutiful daughter, who is able to accept the necessity of political marriage with no great qualms.

saint and her virgins thus turns into a giant wedding party, which is interrupted only by an attack of Huns, “a barbarous nation,” whose “lecherous lust” the women must resist by slaying themselves, not unlike the good wife Lucrece, ever-present in early modern thought (38).

Certainly there is no indication in this version that Ursula attempts to subvert the marital plans in any way. So, while she does serve as the symbol of the native past, this re-writing also suggests that she is intended as a model for contemporary women but not a model of religious resistance. Rather, the preface to the collection insistently refers to its own subjects as “the weakest sex” and “fraile women,” suggesting that even the degree of independence they display in these versions is highly unusual for their sex, whose inferiority is such that it is for them “so much more admirable to excel the perfecter sex by grace” (3; 4; 9). In terms of religious resistance, the women saints of this collection are meant to inspire only men,<sup>391</sup> and only by instilling in them a sense of shame for the inadequate performance of their gender. The author urges male readers to “blush at their more than womanish weaknes” and asks, derisively, “Who may not be ashamed at the name of a man, that can not come nighe, or at least dare not endeouour to contend in strength and labour with a weake woman?” (3). However admirable female saints may be, in other words, they are also problematic in their disturbance of gender boundaries, and their devotion to God is here subtly interpreted as a challenge to every male reader to prove his superior strength, intelligence, and fortitude.<sup>392</sup> Unsurprisingly,

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<sup>391</sup> As Sanok also notes in her article, “*The Lives of Women Saints*”; see note 293.

<sup>392</sup> Paradoxically, the description of women saints in the preface differs drastically from the way in which they are actually presented in their respective legends. The author of this legendary is, likely, still driven to

women readers are firmly excluded from this call to action, since an attempt to imitate the heroines' independence, such as it is here, would make them the source of social disorder and gender confusion, without the excuse of divine grace. Instead, this collection offers to them a space in which they can be good Christian women by exercising obedience to male authority and becoming if not specifically good wives, then at least close approximations.

The *vita* of St. Dympna, one of the very few virgin martyrs in the collection, is a case in point; this author's version does not stray far from the source, but the choice of this particular saint is in itself telling. All required elements seem to be in place – the heroine rebels against the unwanted suitor, escapes parental authority, and must eventually face interrogation and martyrdom, but the author continuously adds narrative detail in such a way as to undermine Dympna's independence and ability to make her own life-affecting choices. While the reader is informed that the heroine, as the genre dictates, has been “secretlie baptized, gave her self unto Christ, and by vow of perpetuall chastitie dedicated her bodie and mynde to serve him,” it is not this vow that informs her refusal of marriage in the narrative but the suitor – her own father. Terrified by the king's “incestuous love,” Dympna explains to him “playnlie, that she would never consent to that impietie; adding that by no law nor righte, the daughter might defile her fathers beadd, nor by such shamefull wickedness staine and infame all her stocke and posteritie for ever” (43-44). Nowhere does the question of the heroine's preference enter the narrative; instead, her explanation highlights the moral and legal issues of the

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respond, in his preface, to the medieval conception of holy women even as he is revising their stories for the early modern audience.

proposed marriage and brings to the foreground the worry about the possible progeny of such a union. Anne Savage has argued that in this *Life* the king's lust for his daughter is "smoothly subsumed into the genre of the virgin martyr passion," but it seems to me that, on the contrary, the problem of incest looms large in the narrative and conveniently obscures the issue of the heroine's desire for chastity and her refusal to submit to her father's will.<sup>393</sup>

Furthermore, threatened with violence, Dympna does not persist in her refusal but pretends to look favourably at her father's advances and, not unlike Bokenham's St. Cristina, sends him shopping for clothes, requiring "new garments and ornament of iewells and other precious things wherewith to make her self more gratefull to her father, as she pretended." Dympna seems unable to mount any sort of resistance on her own and must first speak to her spiritual advisor, the priest named Gerebern, so that he might advise her. Indeed, her decision to flee the kingdom and its incestuous ruler is made only after the priest explicitly counsels her "to flie thence privilie, and in povertie to follow poore Christe into a strange contrie" (44). Because Gerebern accompanies her on this flight, after which they build a house and settle down together, Dympna herself cannot be said to have rebelled *per se* but rather to have passed from one type of authority to another, replacing her biological father with a spiritual one.<sup>394</sup> The king highlights this

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<sup>393</sup> Anne Savage, "Clothing Paternal Incest in *The Clerk's Tale*, *Émaré* and the *Life of St Dympna*," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchison, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2000), 345-61, esp. 357.

<sup>394</sup> In this, she is not unlike the female supporters of Marian martyrs described by Freeman in "The Good Ministrye of Godlye and Vertuose Women" – the women who transferred their obedience from their husbands to the spiritual advisers. Further respectability is lent to this journey by the presence of a married

substitution, specifically complaining Dympna's willingness "to forsake [her] father to adhere to this decrepit olde priest, as his daughter" (45). The narrative, in other words, neatly elides the troubling possibility of female rebellion, representing the virgin martyr as silently obedient to paternal authority (unless perverted by incestuous desire!), whatever shape it assumes.

This becomes especially clear when the lecherous king finally catches up with the fugitives and offers his daughter an abundance of riches, if only she will agree to return home with him. Although Dympna seems to be willing to speak back, the narrative explicitly eliminates this possibility, framing the encounter as a confrontation between the two fathers, in which the "real" one, Gerebern, defends his daughter and instructs her in further action. When Dympna tries to answer the king, the priest "prevented her, reproving the king verie sharplie, calling him a moste abhominable and horrible man, that would seeke to defile his owne daughter" and "also admonished the virgin, never to yield to the king in that villanie, leste she incurred the eternall kings distaste" (46). The virgin martyr's famed voice and independence are, quite literally, cut short by the father substitute, who clearly feels the necessity of instructing her in every step of the martyrdom. Even after the priest is executed, Dympna's two speeches must be understood as being informed and guided by his last instructions. The heroine of this tale thus emerges as infinitely obedient to her spiritual father, the one not moved with unnatural desires. She dismisses even the king's accusation that she is a bad daughter for

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couple – the court jester and his wife, who mysteriously disappear from the narrative as soon as the journey is completed.

daring to “contradict [her] fathers will” by pointing to his cruel and tyrannous murder of “the notable priest of god guiltie of no fault” (47).

In her study of the source text, the thirteenth-century *Life of St. Dympna* by Peter of Cambrai, Anneke Mulder-Bakker notes its “striking difference” from the typical virgin martyrs, who called up “images of propagators of the faith, militant and active.”<sup>395</sup> Her article explores this problem in detail, suggesting, in particular, that *St. Dympna* was originally created with an express intent of offering an exemplum of proper holiness for devout women, instead of the “nightmare scenario” of someone like *St. Juliana*, who terrified “responsible prelates” with the possibilities for emulation.<sup>396</sup> That the unknown seventeenth-century hagiographer had chosen this particular saint, who was included neither in the *SEL* nor the *Legenda Aurea*, to serve as the figurehead for holy virginity and martyrdom is strongly indicative of his conception of female sanctity. When *St. Dympna* is considered alongside the other saints of this collection, and in the light of the alterations to *St. Ursula*’s story, the reader is faced with the composite woman saint whose main feature is total obedience, if not to her husband, then at least to a male relative, or a spiritual father.

In other words, English Protestant and Catholic thinkers in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries face similar issues in writing accounts of religious women, and in both cases the early modern emphasis on marriage, and its importance for women, plays the key role in the evolution of such accounts. The early modern suspicion of the virgin

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<sup>395</sup> Anneke Mulder-Bakker explores this question in detail in her article “Gendering Medieval Martyrdom: Thirteenth-Century Lives of Holy Women in the Low Countries,” in *More Than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. Johan Leemans, with Jürgen Mettepenningen (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 221-39, esp. 227-8.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 226-8.

martyr, evident both in Protestant and Catholic writers, is resolved through downplaying the heroine's possible disorderliness and "unwomanly" conduct; the warrior saint is gradually replaced by the mild, devout housewife. This is, then, the final stage of the evolution of the virgin martyr, which has now come in close proximity to the ideals of the Church Fathers. The new woman martyr must constantly shape her conduct to show obedience to those men whom she understands to be figures of authority. Her famous independence and loud voice have been either muted or displaced onto other figures who cannot be imitated without severe repercussions.

## CHAPTER 4: LIVING A VIRGIN MARTYR: ELIZABETH I AND EARLY MODERN WITCHES

In the previous chapter, I discussed the gradual transformation, during the early modern period, of the highly visible and very vocal virgin martyr into the pious Protestant wife. John N. King refers to this transformation as an attempt “to appropriate the devout emotionality linked to many female saints” (as well as to the Virgin Mary) for “the images of Protestant women as embodiments of pious intellectuality and divine wisdom.”<sup>397</sup> However, this appropriation does not mean that female saints, once refashioned, remain only in the public memory as things of the past that carry no significance. In his article “Shakespeare and the Exorcists,” Stephen Greenblatt speaks of *King Lear* as being “haunted by a sense of rituals and beliefs that are no longer efficacious, that have been *emptied out*,” suggesting that the relics of Catholic worship appear to the early modern audience like so much theatrical detritus washed up on the shore.<sup>398</sup> And yet, Catholic rituals, beliefs, attributes, and figures also remain the focus of active polemic well into the seventeenth century, sometimes distorted into eerie and threatening shapes by their detractors and sometimes used, in their entirety or piecemeal, for new ends. In both cases, while the “emptying-out” of the original significance proposed by Greenblatt is to a certain extent present, this does not mean that the

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<sup>397</sup> John N. King, “The Godly Woman in Elizabethan Ideology,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 38.1 (1985): 41-84, esp. 41.

<sup>398</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Shakespeare and the Exorcists,” in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), 163-87, esp. 177. A very recent article makes the same assumption when, proposing to “think with saints” about the early modern period, it proceeds to speak exclusively of the saints produced in Catholic countries or as the result of Counter-Reformation; see Simon Ditchfield, “Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World,” in *Saints: Faith without Borders*, ed. Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 157-89.

remaining signifiers lose all cultural import and gradually decay; rather, they are reinterpreted to suit contemporary sensibilities or implemented in current cultural projects.<sup>399</sup>

The figure of the virgin retained its significance after the Reformation, to such an extent that even a serious writer like Reginald Scot devotes time and page space to ridiculing it thoroughly in his famous sceptical treatise *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). Forbidden, ominous, and possibly illusionary, in Scot's text this figure becomes associated with early modern witches, misleading and misled. At the same time, the virgin martyr and her attributes are appropriated, in the late sixteenth century, into the cult of the Virgin Queen, which continued its existence well after Elizabeth's death.<sup>400</sup> In this chapter, I will examine both of these developments, tracing the link from the virgin martyr to the most powerful woman of the realm, as well as to the (theoretically) no less powerful but despised and persecuted witches, ultimately highlighting the intricate connection between these two branches of cultural evolution. In this, I explore the ongoing labour of appropriation that continues well into the seventeenth century, which perforce acknowledges a solid indebtedness to medieval Catholicism even as early modern writers seek to construct a Protestant England that claims to privilege masculine

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<sup>399</sup> Helen L. Parish makes this case quite persuasively and with great detail in *Monks, Miracles and Magic: Reformation Representations of the Medieval Church* (New York: Routledge, 2005); see especially chapters 3 and 4. Notably, Simon Coleman has argued that the concept of sainthood retains currency even in modern branches of Protestantism; see his "Transgressing the Self: Making Charismatic Saints," in *Saints: Faith without Borders*, 73-95.

<sup>400</sup> It has also been shown that this foregrounding of the queen's virginal body did not arise spontaneously, as a result of Elizabeth's failure to marry, but is in fact a habit of thought that has never disappeared: in fact, Mary Tudor was briefly lauded as a virginal queen before her marriage. See Sarah Duncan, "The Two Virgin Queens," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 30.1 (2004): 77-88, esp. 82, and Sabine Lucia Müller, "Ageing out Catholicism: Representing Mary Tudor's Body," in *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern*, ed. Liz Oakley-Brown and Louise J. Wilkinson (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2009), 238-51, esp. 245.

rational thought and reject superstition. Analyzing nation-building in early modern England through the writers' engagement with the feminine embodiment of the Middle Ages, I contend that the project of reforming female conduct results not only in the militantly virginal heroine transformed into a dutiful wife but also in the writers' efforts to foreclose the possibilities of imitation using this figure as a model. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the virgin martyr, still broadly recognizable as a popular stock figure, becomes the space of cultural construction where the close connection between gender and nation is continuously emphasized.

Queen Elizabeth's death was followed by a multi-genre flurry of works dedicated to her. Among others, in 1605, the English audience was presented with Thomas Heywood's play, *If You Know Not Me, You Know No Bodie: Or, The Troubles of Queene Elizabeth, Part I*. This play became enormously popular, was reprinted five times in the next eight years, and within a year was followed by a sequel.<sup>401</sup> Both the time of publication and the wild success of the play suggest that, at least to a certain extent, it functioned as a collection of widely accepted ideas about the late queen and presented them in a palatable form. While the play is largely based on earlier texts, such as John Foxe's "Miraculous Preservation of the Lady Elizabeth, Now Queen of England," in his *Actes and Monuments*, there is an episode in scene XV that seems unique to this work – namely, the dumb show, staged over Elizabeth sleeping in prison. The description of the dumb show is brief: "Enter *Winchester, Constable, Barwick, and Fryars*: at the other dore 2. *Angels*: the *Fryar* steps to her, offering to kill her: the *Angel* drives them back.

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<sup>401</sup> See Madeleine Doran's introduction to Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I* (Oxford: The Malone Society Reprints, 1934/1935), v-xix. All further references are this edition.

*Exeunt*. The *Angel* opens the Bible, and puts it in her hand as she sleeps, *Exeunt Angels, she wakes*" (ll. 1049-53, E3<sup>v</sup>). This episode argues that, even before ascending to the throne, Elizabeth is identified by the heavenly powers as a future Protestant monarch and protected against the treacherous ploys of the Catholic Church.<sup>402</sup>

At the same time, the shape of the episode seems familiar in a way that is not specifically Protestant. The young, helpless girl, open to the attack by her religious enemies but protected by the power of the true God, is easily recognizable from the stories of Catholic saints. Similarly, the wicked Constable, the keeper of the Princess, is a stock figure of the vicious interrogator, hell-bent on destroying his prisoner specifically for her religious devotion. Displaying his personal hatred for the girl, the Constable complains that, if not for the strictness of his orders, he would invest his best effort into her damnation:

Ide lay her in a dungeon where her eyes,  
Should not haue light to read her prayer booke,  
So would I danger both her soule and body,  
Cause she an alyen is to us catholiques,  
Her bed should be all snakes, her rest dispayre,  
Torture should make her curse, her faithless prayer. (ll. 718-23, D2<sup>r</sup>)

Some thirty lines later, his musings evolve into bloodthirsty rage: "Oh that I could but draine her harts deare blood, / Oh it would feede me, do my soule much good" (ll. 755-6, D2<sup>r</sup>).

John Watkins suggests that the strong heroine of Heywood's play represents a new form of female martyrdom, "bolder, more commanding, and more hostile not only

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<sup>402</sup> See, for example, Gerald M. Pinciss, *Forbidden Matter: Religion in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (London: Associated University Presses, 2000). Analyzing this play in chapter 4, Pinciss focuses specifically on the Bible as a Protestant (or even Puritan prop).

to her enemies, but to the patriarchal conventions that might prevent her from defending her realm as valiantly as any man. A martyr's fortitude persists in her willingness to yield her 'virgin brest' to the Spanish sword, but the death she now anticipates is a defiant one on the battlefield rather than a submissive one on the block."<sup>403</sup> However, considered together, the dumb show and the Constable's ravings identify the heroine as very old indeed. She is a prototypical virgin martyr, whose persecutors are driven to foaming madness by her devotion to the true God and, while deterred from taking action by the demands of history, take pleasure in imagining torture and murder they might have inflicted on her. Although the evil spirits of the medieval Lives are here replaced by the Friars, the shaming of false beliefs, the divine protection extended to Elizabeth, and the divine authority with which she is invested via the Bible, are easily recognizable from the earlier genre. Moreover, Heywood has the princess herself making an explicit connection when, upon being imprisoned, she urges her supporters to rejoice instead of weeping and triumphantly rhymes, concluding her speech, "If I miscarry in this enterprise, and aske you why, / A Virgine and a Martyr both I dy" (ll. 341-2, B4<sup>r</sup> 3<sup>r</sup>v).<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>403</sup> John Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 38. Like Watkins, Michael Dobson and Nicola J. Watson see Heywood's Elizabeth as a quintessential early modern figure, "an exemplary embodiment of national prosperity, national righteousness, and national machismo"; see *England's Elizabeth: An Afterlife in Fame and Fantasy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>404</sup> This point does not appear to have been made by scholars before, although Georgianna Ziegler allows that the pattern in Heywood's presentation of Elizabeth is "almost medieval in its concepts of place and of good versus evil"; see "England's Savior: Elizabeth I in the Writings of Thomas Heywood," *Renaissance Papers* (1980): 29-37, esp. 35. Also, Dieter Mehl describes the angel's passing of the Bible to the princess as "a familiar hagiographic convention; see "The Late Queen on the Public Stage: Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, Parts I and II," in *Queen Elizabeth I: Past and Present*, ed. Christa Jahnson (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), 153-71, esp. 158. On the other hand, ten years earlier, in her *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), Theodora A. Jankowski reads "virgin" and "martyr" in separation: the first word as invoking Elizabeth's future reputation as the Virgin Queen, and the second as reinforcing the fact of religious persecution (195). In her

Decades of scholarship have addressed various conventional representations of Elizabeth I, linking her to Biblical stories, legends and texts of antiquity, and popular folklore. Frances Yates famously led this movement with her work on Elizabeth as Astraea,<sup>405</sup> while more recently scholars have explored the relationship between the Queen's textual depictions and Biblical models.<sup>406</sup> Furthermore, scholars working on royal portraiture have repeatedly commented on its associations with religious art: in an early study, Marianna Jenkins concludes that after the Reformation “ ‘Civile dicipline’ has replaced *culto divino*” and “it follows that the figure of the king could replace that of a member of the heavenly hierarchy.”<sup>407</sup> Indeed, the connection between the Marian cult

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reading, Teresa Grant ignores the angel and sees Elizabeth simply as one of the “[d]evout women, of either branch of Christianity, relying on their prayer-book or Bible [...] representative in early Jacobean drama for chastity and goodness”; see “Drama Queen: Staging Elizabeth in *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 120-142, esp. 125. The best discussion of this aspect of the play may be found in Jean E. Howard's “Staging the Absent Woman: The Theatrical Evocation of Elizabeth Tudor in Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part I*,” in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 263-80. Howard's analysis is primarily concerned with staging, and with Foxe's account as a source.

<sup>405</sup> See Elkin Calhoun Wilson's *England's Eliza* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), and Frances A. Yates, *Queen Elizabeth as Astraea*, in *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, 1975 (Boston: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), 29-87. See also Matthew Woodcock, “The Fairy Queen Figure in Elizabethan Entertainments,” in *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 97-115.

<sup>406</sup> Michele Osherow, “ ‘A Poore Shepherde and His Sling’: A Biblical Model for a Renaissance Queen,” in *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman*, 119-130, and “ ‘Give Ear O'Princes’: Deborah, Elizabeth, and the Right Word,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 30.1 (2004): 111-19; Alexandra Walsham, “A Very Deborah? The Myth of Elizabeth I as a Providential Monarch,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, 143-68.

<sup>407</sup> Marianna Jenkins, *The State Portrait: Its Origins and Evolution* (College Art Association of America, 1947), 6-7. A certain intertwining and interchangeability between the figure of religious and secular authority was clear even to those who were witnessing the Reformation: as John Phillips points out in his *Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 90-91, Bishop Gardiner protested the destruction of sacred images precisely because he felt that this lack of respect and subsequent violence could easily be redirected toward the figures of authority. Roy Strong also discusses the Elizabethan painters' concern with depicting the queen as an object of worship: see his *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 33. For a more recent discussion along the same lines, see Andrew Belsey and Catherine Belsey, “Icons of Divinity: Portraits of

and imagery and texts surrounding Elizabeth has long become something of a commonplace in the discussion of the Virgin Queen and has been thoroughly explored by scholars.<sup>408</sup>

On the other hand, the indebtedness of Elizabeth-related images and texts to such a prominent feature of the Catholic tradition as female saints, and particularly virgin martyrs, is often indicated in passing but has not attracted the attention it deserves. So, Carole Levin tentatively suggests an echo, in Elizabeth's self-fashioning, of Catholic virgin martyrs and ends by remarking: "We have no direct evidence that Elizabeth saw herself as a continuation of such saints as Uncumber and Frideswide. Not that those who thronged for her touch were consciously making such a connection."<sup>409</sup> In fact, it is very likely that the queen had little desire to associate herself with these figures, now heavily tainted by the Protestant propaganda.

In her examination of Elizabethan iconography, Susan Doran notes Elizabeth's equivocal attitude toward emphasizing her own virginity and notes that "in works where she was the patron of a portrait, she was more usually depicted as a Protestant ruler rather than a virgin queen."<sup>410</sup> At the same time, Doran points out that the queen rarely had any direct control over her own depictions and, one might reasonably infer, even less control over the ways in which she was being perceived by her subjects. After all, as

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Elizabeth I," in *Renaissance Bodies: Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*, ed. Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn (London: Reaktion, 1990), 11-35.

<sup>408</sup> See Peter McClure and Robin Headlam Wells, "Elizabeth I as a Second Virgin Mary," *Renaissance Studies* 4.1 (1990): 38-70, and Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>409</sup> Carole Levin, "*The Heart and Stomach of a King*": *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 18-21.

<sup>410</sup> Susan Doran, "Virginity, Divinity and Power: The Portraits of Elizabeth I," in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, 172.

Louis Montrose has put it so succinctly, “the iconography of the Elizabeth cult was not a unified and coherent system but rather was hybrid and improvisatory – therefore unstable and potentially contradictory – and [...] it drew upon various sources in varying combinations at different moments in the reign...”<sup>411</sup> Furthermore, according to Donald Stump’s convincing argument, 1570s texts written at court and speaking of the Queen witness a paradigm shift, abandoning their earlier use of Old Testament models and becoming less overtly Protestant.<sup>412</sup> This shift, while making use of classical Humanism and “the matter of Britain,” also facilitated, as I will argue, a greater permeation of the cult by the imagery of Catholic saints’ Lives, which would not reach its full flowering until after Elizabeth’s death.

I am suggesting, then, that the link between Elizabeth and virgin martyrs has been too easily set aside, or assumed to have been already incorporated into the discussion of Marian connections.<sup>413</sup> After all, despite her intercessory powers, the Virgin Mary is tied to the central event in the history of the Christian world – the birth of Christ. Her unique position in the Christian imagination limited the viable possibilities for emulation; as Luther argued in the *Magnificat*, she could be imitated only so far as her family-related roles (of a meek mother, wife, or daughter) were concerned, and not in

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<sup>411</sup>Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 104.

<sup>412</sup> As Stump puts it, “her public image was becoming less overtly Protestant in the vital matter of its reliance on the authority of Scripture” (“Abandoning the Old Testament: Shifting Paradigm for Elizabeth: 1578-82,” *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 30.1 [2004]: 89-109, esp. 90).

<sup>413</sup> We see this absorption and dissolution of the link in Julia M. Walker’s excellent study *The Elizabeth Icon: 1603-2003* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), the first chapter of which proposes that, in terms of “the available materials of cultural history,” “the public sphere of Christian memory offers only one woman in a position of some power and much glory.” This woman is the Virgin Mary, who is thus “a default choice, not a pattern” (47-8).

terms of independent authority. On the other hand, as I have shown in the previous chapters, those female audiences who had access to saints' lives could, and did, incorporate crucial elements of these narratives into their own conduct. Furthermore, regardless of the Protestant doubts about her wholesomeness,<sup>414</sup> the Virgin Mary did not disappear as a major figure of worship with the advent of the Reformation, nor with the ascension of the Virgin Queen. As Helen Hackett concludes in the last chapter of her detailed study, "Elizabeth was always the *second* maid; the pre-eminence of the Virgin Mary was always maintained, and, if anything, emphasized."<sup>415</sup> As a continuously potent presence, she was thus less open to fragmentation and appropriation.

Unlike the Mother of God, who could be questioned but not dismissed by early modern thinkers, Catholic saints were under siege, and virgin martyrs, as I have shown in the previous chapter, were particularly open to manipulation by Protestant writers. Heywood's play gives a particularly clear illustration of the use found for the virgin martyr by early modern writers. Some of the identifying elements of her *vita*, including the raging prison-guard with sadistic and vaguely sexual designs on her body, the divine intervention on her behalf, and her ability to resist persecution staunchly, are appropriated wholesale into the array of representations of the Virgin Queen. Elizabeth I, of course, never actually became a martyr, but early modern texts tend to suggest that

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<sup>414</sup> See, for example, Richard Topcliffe's famous letter of August 30, 1578, with which Hackett opens her discussion; Topcliffe describes the image of the Virgin Mary discovered in the home of Edward Rookwood, who "seemed a beast, raysed upon a sudden from Hell by conjewringe" (quoted in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, 1).

<sup>415</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, 217. In an earlier article, Hackett cautions against making too easy of a connection between the two figures, and argues that any continuity between the Virgin Mother and the Virgin Queen would be perceived as shocking by the Protestant public; see "Rediscovering Shock: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary," *Critical Quarterly* 35.3 (1993): 30-42.

she came very close to being one – or that, in fact, she might be martyred for her country in the near future. Throughout Elizabeth’s reign, numerous plots and near-assassinations fuelled the sense that the Queen existed on the brink of perishing. In other words, she is imagined by early modern writers as a virgin martyr in progress – a virgin martyr who may or may not arrive at her *passio* but already possesses the gifts bestowed by the genre. This sense of anticipation, of claiming the status in advance, is displayed with great clarity in *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*, Part I, when Elizabeth announces herself as “a Virgine and a Martyr” before her trials begin in earnest. Considering Elizabeth’s reputation as a wilful and strong-minded woman, who chose to remain a virgin and was perpetually threatened by her enemies, it is not surprising that the abidingly popular virgin martyr became a good fit. This is another piece of evidence to support the argument that neither the Reformation, nor the subsequent interest in antiquity and classical works was capable of fully eliminating all medieval influences. Even as sixteenth-century writers exhibited an almost obsessive anxiety in reference to these influences and their contemporary manifestations, the force of familiarity seems to have proven too great. In constructing Protestant martyrs, John Bale and John Foxe venomously undermine Catholic hagiography but, at the same time, engage in systematic borrowing and appropriation of medieval generic conventions. The Protestant hagiographers of Queen Elizabeth, for whom the contemporary model of the good woman proves all but useless, follow suit, drawing on the still-popular stories of virgin martyrs. Although no writer ever produced a coherent, unified *vita* for the Virgin Queen, its components are found scattered through other works.

This association, on the one hand, strengthens the foundation of divine support for the Protestant monarchy by incorporating into the narrative of Elizabeth's reign the familiar conventions of genre in which a woman acts as the instrument of Christian conversion. On the other hand, this association with the female monarch positioned as uniquely powerful forecloses to female audiences the avenues for self-authorization through imitation of the virgin martyr, thus severely limiting her disruptive potential. Absorbing the features of the medieval virgin martyr *vita*, the cult of the Virgin Queen interrogates, and ultimately renders sinister the possibility of female authority and independence outside of the monarch's sphere of influence. As I have argued previously, much of the revision inflicted onto the virgin martyr was a response to the potential – or actual – influence this figure could, and did, have on female readers. The texts connected to Elizabeth I then function as a safe repository for the idealized figure of the holy, virginal healer, since they anticipate and forestall any possibility of imitating the queen, positioning her as a powerful but entirely unique woman, allowed her freedoms and influence only through divine dispensation or lucky heredity.<sup>416</sup>

### **St. Elizabeth of England: The Virgin on Fire**

Consider an episode from what is effectively Heywood's *vita* of the late queen, entitled *Englands Elizabeth: Her Life and Troubles, During her Minoritie, from the Cradle to the Crowne* (1631). In this account, Heywood generally draws on Foxe but is not averse to adding episodes to liven up the narrative but also to appeal to the popular

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<sup>416</sup> See Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1998), 25-26, for a discussion of Elizabeth's self-presentation as "a special woman, never a 'mere' woman."

taste, rendering his heroine easily recognizable within the genre of a saint's life. In the section that treats the year 1547, he tells his readers,

...scarce was she yet full fourteene yeares of age when one of her Uncles, then in great office and place about the King, brought unto her a Princely Suitor, as great in means as comely in Person. A stranger richly habited and nobly attended, (whose name my Author gives not!) he after much importunitie both from himselfe and friends, yet at last crost in his purpose by modest repulses, and cold answeres, and finding her immutable disposition solely addicted to a single life, as not enduring the name of a husband, settled in his mind (though not satisfied in her denyall) retyred into his Countrey...<sup>417</sup>

It is unclear who Heywood's "Author" is here. The primary source for the episode does not appear to be Foxe, who does mention some marital negotiations taking place during Mary's reign – "a great consulting among the Bishops and Gentlemen touching a Mariage for her grace," but never develops them past hypothetical discussion.<sup>418</sup> Most likely, Heywood invents this fairy-tale courtship, embroidering on the dry paragraph in the *Book of Martyrs*. This episode has little to do with the construction of Elizabeth as a future Protestant ruler but rather seeks to explain the fact that the queen had never married by bringing in the familiar discourse of holy virginity. The overtones of this discourse are distinctly Catholic since, as Theodora Jankowski shows, while Protestant thinkers did not wage direct attacks against virginity, in their theoretical constructions they viewed it specifically and exclusively as a condition necessary for and leading to

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<sup>417</sup> Thomas Heywood, *Englands Elizabeth: Her Life and Troubles, During her Minoritie, from the Cradle to the Crowne*, 1631 (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973), 49-50. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>418</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 05.16.13], Book 12, 2119. All further references are to this online edition.

marriage rather than a state valued in itself.<sup>419</sup> On the contrary, Heywood's narrative is heavily reminiscent of John Capgrave's life of St. Katherine, the learned princess and virgin martyr, who rejected all royal suitors and eventually suffered for it. Elizabeth is here aligned with such heroines through such an intense commitment to virginity that it must be expressed in terms of physical attraction and repulsion: she is "addicted" to unmarried life and cannot "endur[e]" the idea of having a husband. In Heywood's model, the virginity project continues to govern Elizabeth's entire existence and offers a useful explanation for her non-presence at court during the reign of Edward VI: "[t]his first unwelcome motion of Marriage, was a cause why shee lived afterwards more solitary and retyred" (51-2).<sup>420</sup>

This fairly minor episode in Heywood's narrative points to a significant decision in terms of genre and suggests that Elizabeth's failure to marry and produce an heir interested English writers long after her death.<sup>421</sup> The appropriation of features commonly found in a Catholic saint alleviates the need to consider Elizabeth's tenuous position before 1558, and to evaluate her later aborted courtships. Heywood instead invites the reader to view Elizabeth's life through a prism of the miraculous, which prohibits any questioning of her single status or of her conduct during Mary's reign.

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<sup>419</sup> Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, esp. chapter 3, "The Protestant Discourse."

<sup>420</sup> One wonders whether this is a much-distorted echo of the events that took place during Wyatt's rebellion (1554/1555), when Mary Tudor suspected that Elizabeth was involved in a conspiracy against her and was planning to marry Edward Courtenay. See the description of this in Frye, *Elizabeth I*, 72-3.

<sup>421</sup> The struggle of power between Charles I and the Parliament of England might have been particularly conducive to ruminations on the Queen, now enveloped in a nostalgic glow.

Departing from Foxe's somewhat reluctant approval of Elizabeth,<sup>422</sup> Heywood expands Foxe's rather matter-of-fact mention of fire under the floor of Elizabeth's room in Woodstock into an argument that her entire existence during Mary's reign must be interpreted as a continuous experience of martyrdom. In contrast to Foxe's dry description of the "fire, which began to kindle betweene the boardes and seeling vnder the chamber where shee lay, whether by a sparke of fire, gotten into a cranye, or whether of purpose by some that meant her no good, the Lord doth knowe,"<sup>423</sup> Heywood passionately exclaims,

...she was *in medio ignis*, in the midst of a fire kindled, as it is reported, on set purpose to have consumed her; but being espyed by a worthy Knight in *Oxfordshire* to flame through the boords of her Chamber, was presently extinguished; shee was *in medio ignis*, in the midst of that fiery tryall; the whole Kingdome was then enflamed with *Bonefires* of Gods Saints, there was Fire in the Center, Fire all about the Circumference, Fire at home, Fire abroad, Fire in her private Chamber, Fire all over the whole Kingdome; what a dangerous exigent must shee needs come to, whose life was thus assaulted? [...] God, whose breath is as a flaming fire, blasted all her fiery Adversaries, suspended the violent rage of al this Fire, and snatched her as a brand out of the midst thereof, not so much as a haire of her head being sindged... (168-69)

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<sup>422</sup> Carole Levin sees Foxe's treatment of Elizabeth as ambiguous: while he does not take it upon himself to criticize the reigning queen, the text seeks to educate her in the responsibilities of queenship instead of unreservedly underwriting her current position; see "John Foxe and the Responsibilities of Queenship," in *Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Literary and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mary Beth Rose (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 113-33. John N. King later argued that the progressive editing of the narrative concerning Princess Elizabeth in Foxe's book has been directed toward "the artful construction of an image of a royal martyr," at the cost of historical detail; see "Fiction and Fact in Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*," in *John Foxe and the English Reformation*, ed. David Loades (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 1-35, esp. 26-7. However, Thomas S. Freeman had shown, reading Foxe's narrative closely and comparing editions, that, far from offering uncomplicated praise, it was meant both to chastise and instruct the queen in her future conduct, growing more aggressive as time went on; see "Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs'," in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Doran and Freeman, 27-55.

<sup>423</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 05.16.13], Book 12, 2119.

A small fire, possibly due to natural causes, in Heywood's interpretation becomes a central metaphor of the anti-Protestant persecution that envelops England. Elizabeth's private chamber is located at the centre of the realm: just as this fire symbolizes all current disorder, and all other fires lit by the Catholic persecution, so the princess embodies all Protestant martyrs and is herself viewed as a martyr *par excellence*. The fact of her not, in fact, perishing in this conflagration is elided through another recourse to the commonplaces of hagiographical genre: the heroine, having been consigned to a fiery death by her executors, is rescued at the last moment by divine intervention, completely unharmed.

Heywood further sustains the genre by showing the inglorious demise of Stephen Gardiner, the bishop of Winchester, whom he presents as one of the chief persecutors of Elizabeth, in connection with an attempt to execute her during her time in the Tower. While this is largely in accordance with Foxe, who writes that "Which if it were certaine, as it is reported, Winchester (no doubt) was deuiser of that mischieuous drift,"<sup>424</sup> Heywood improves on his source by arguing that Gardiner acted without any prior orders and against Mary's wishes. According to Heywood's interpretation, Winchester was "the onely *Daedalus* and inventor of the engine," and upon learning of the plan, the Queen "renounced the least knowledge thereof" and accused all involved of "their inhumane usage of her" (146-47). Thus described, Gardiner emerges as a raving official with a personal vendetta against the cause which the heroine embodies: he "hath had a

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<sup>424</sup> Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition), 2119.

long and tedious part in the troubles of the Lady *Elizabeth*, not one Scene of all her Tragicall Story but he hath had a share in it" (203-204).

His death is presented as a direct consequence of this villainous role. In Heywood's version of the events, Gardiner is so thrilled by the execution of Ridley and Latimer that he invites guests for a celebratory dinner, which he then delays until both martyrs are consumed by the fire. His dinner, however, immediately makes him ill; relegated to bed, "he remained full 15. days in such anguish & torments that he could not voyd, what he had received, either by urine or otherwise." When the attending doctor urges him to think upon Jesus Christ, Gardiner blasphemes outrageously until prevented from further speaking by "his tongue being so swell'd with the inflammation of his body" (205-206). This rather startling version of Gardiner's death shows him, quite literally, hermetically sealed by the divine hand, so that both the murderous feast and blasphemous words cannot be expelled and remain inside, causing his body to decay and eventually disintegrate. Needless to say, this has no basis in Foxe, who sees Gardiner as an extremely controversial character rather than a single-minded villain, and dedicates pages upon pages to detailed analyses of contradictions in his sermons and actions.<sup>425</sup> Heywood's Bishop of Winchester, on the contrary, is the direct descendant of the pagan officials who persecute virgin martyrs (recall the three judges of St. Christina!), as well as of the raging Pilate and raving Herod of the medieval mystery cycles.

Heywood's insertion of the early attempt at marital arrangements decisively rejected by Elizabeth, his vivid portrayal of the future queen as a girl enveloped in raging

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<sup>425</sup> See, for example, sections entitled "The Bishop of Winchester varying from other Papistes, and also from him selfe," and "Notes declaring how the Bishop of Winchester disagreeeth from other Papistes."

fire yet remaining unharmed, and finally the exaggerated blasphemous villainy of Winchester, all point to a virgin martyr's narrative as I have described it in the first two chapters. In borrowing the generic structure, Heywood achieves an important goal: he not only eliminates the possible criticisms of Elizabeth's conduct as a stubborn virgin but also creates a purpose-driven narrative of the early stages of the Reformation, culminating in the female heroine vanquishing her pagan enemies and performing a triumphant conversion of the country. At the same time, because at the time of Heywood's writing the Reformation is successfully completed, and Elizabeth has been long succeeded by a male monarch, she is positioned by the narrative as the last (albeit the most significant) holy virgin in Christian history, firmly closed to being used as a conduct model.<sup>426</sup>

In the course of Elizabeth's reign, the figure of the military virgin also becomes especially useful after the events of 1588, during which the queen supposedly appeared before the troops in armour, appealing to divine providence on behalf of England.<sup>427</sup> The exhilarated English did not hesitate to attribute the subsequent victory to the protective powers held by their virgin queen. That the association with the medieval holy virgin appeared rather naturally to those who witnessed the defeat of the Armada is easily

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<sup>426</sup> The wholesale appropriation of the pagan/Christian dichotomy and the related conventions and transformation of it into the Catholic/Protestant opposition seem to have become fairly ingrained into the cult of Elizabeth. Watkins recounts an episode recorded in 1627, of a strange man appearing on the English shores and refusing to reveal his identity. It is established that the man is a Spaniard when, it is discovered that "he cannot Indure to abyde the Pychter of Queane Elizabeth" (quoted in "'Old Bess in the Ruff': Remembering Elizabeth I, 1625-1660," in *The Mysteries of Elizabeth I*, ed. Kirby Farrell and Kathleen Swaim, 247). The portrait of the long-dead queen literally acts as an icon that has the power to repel the infidels.

<sup>427</sup> Susan Frye shows the progressive amplification of the queen-before-the-troops episode, arguing that these portrayals served to highlight England's military and political power, "connecting Elizabeth's person with the naval engagements and land defense"; see "The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 23.1 (1991): 95-114, esp. 108.

discernable, for example, from James Aske's poem *Elizabetha Triumphans*, published on the heels of the victory. As the title suggests, this text places the queen at the centre of the military conflict. The poem is composed in blank verse and, in its style and allusions, clearly aspires to the epic form. In this setting, filled to the brim with Greek gods, the reader naturally associates Elizabeth with Amazons. However, the re-appearing focus on religious difference persistently pushes the genre over into hagiography, to the familiar conflict between the holy virgin and vicious pagans.<sup>428</sup>

The all-enveloping context of religious persecution is already established in the lengthy subtitle, which notifies the reader of the poem *Containing The Damned Practises, that the divelish Popes of Rome have used ever sithence her Highnesse first comming to the Crowne, by moving her wicked and traiterous subjects to Rebellion and conspiracies, thereby to bereave her Majestie both of her lawfullseate, and happy life.*<sup>429</sup> In keeping with the subtitle, Aske offers a lengthy account of the wicked deeds launched by Rome in the course of Elizabeth's reign, presenting each trial undergone by the queen as a personal struggle between her and the Popes. In fact, the Popes' investment into this struggle is so intense that, having failed to orchestrate the queen's death, they literally perish from disappointment. Aske's Paul IV "mournes [...] for want of better lucke: / Thus want of luck doth make him wish to dye: / Thus with his wish his death is come at last"; Pius IV "for [his] so bad successe, / He perished as had done all the rest"; in Pius V's deeds "the devil had no little share: / But tooke great paynes, and for his paynes he

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<sup>428</sup> One of the echoes produced by the image of Elizabeth as a militant, Christian virgin, bravely resisting both pagan influences and erotic temptations, is Britomart in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* – a work too rich to discuss here in detail.

<sup>429</sup> There is also a sub-subtitle, which I am omitting here.

had / The Pope himselfe, with all his Instruments.”<sup>430</sup> This narrative connection between the Catholic scheming against Elizabeth and papal deaths argues the idea of divine protection directed specifically at the queen and establishes her enemies as intent and maddened persecutors, so typical for the genre of hagiography. In fact, the description of Pius IV is uncannily similar to that of Elizabeth’s prison guard in Heywood’s play: “He thirsts for blood, and blood h’ile have to drinke...” (8). These villains, rather comic in their hyperbolic rage, and the rapid replacement of one with another, again bring to mind St. Christina, who in the course of her martyrdom goes through three judges, all felled in their sleep by the impotent rage and timely divine intervention.

As this fast-paced and engaging description of Elizabeth’s imaginary *passio* shows, despite the poem’s self-professed classical influences, it has inevitably absorbed the genre of medieval hagiography, which closely corresponds to the necessities of this situation. The military conflict between England and Spain is thus here conceived *only* in terms of religious struggle, with the political or economical concerns entirely edited out. Tellingly, Aske imagines that the Spanish “bigge-made Barkes with huge and mightie Mastes, / Like Churches are with steeples very high”: the naval invasion is literally transformed into an attack of religious buildings, shaped to foreign specifications (28). Moreover, in accordance with the conventions of the genre, Aske insistently re-defines Catholicism as an essentially pantheistic collection of rituals that does not have Christ or God the Father as its central point of reference but, much like the imaginary medieval paganism, directs all its reverence and worship at material objects that can be easily

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<sup>430</sup> James Aske, *Elizabetha Triumphans*, 1588 (Amsterdam, New York: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, Da Capo Press, 1969), 6, 8, 9. All further references are to this edition.

abandoned. The readers see that the failure of Paul IV's perfidious plans "Makes him neglect to be at morning Masse. / He raves as mad, he curseth Bookes and Beades, / All Pater-nosters quite are laid aside: / His Images do want their wonted due / Of honor now..." (5). Lest this point goes unnoticed, Aske reiterates it in the final section of the poem, as part of his praise to the English victory. The reason for this victory is simple: while the Virgin Queen is the champion of "the God of heaven (our God)," the Catholic clergy have been praying "to their gods, / (Their wodden gods)" (34). The parentheses, of course, helpfully highlight the dichotomy, erasing even the possibility that Catholicism might have anything to do with Christianity. Instead, the poem invites its readers to cast their minds back to what has become a stock feature of saints' Lives: an explanation, to the pagans, that idols made from wood and metal are utterly devoid of influence and cannot compete with the power wielded by the adherents of Christian God.

The poem ends with another stock feature of a *passio* – the reference to conversion. While the mass conversion that frequently accompanies a saint's torture and final demise is absent here, the last lines of the poem firmly establish Elizabeth's potential for converting those members of her realm who, until now, sided with the persecutors. Aske urges "English-men Recusants" to "turne your hearts unto your sacred Queene: / And with your Queene beloved of our God, / Turne to Gods word, and shunne the divelish Pope" (35). In essence, the Spanish-English military conflict (which, strictly speaking, had little to do with Elizabeth's person) is here restructured as a virgin martyr's *passio*, complete with pagan officials armed with wooden gods and inflicting

grievous tortures on the heroine. Expectedly, the poem ends in the Queen's eventual triumph, accompanied by a theorized conversion of the realm.

Heywood reiterates the same dynamic in the 1633 version of the play *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Part II*, which contains the expanded alternative ending, wholly revolving around the Spanish Armada. The Chorus enters in scene 17 to introduce the military conflict as having been caused specifically by the queen's aversion to marriage: she

Was in her youth solicited in Marriage  
By many princely heires of Christendome,  
Especially by *Philip King of Spaine*,  
Her Sisters husband; who to atchive his ends,  
Had got a dispensation from the Pope:  
But after many Treats and Embassies,  
Finding his hopes in her quite frustrated,  
Aimes all his stratagemes, plots and designes  
Bo h [sic] to the utter ruine of our Land,  
And our Religion...<sup>431</sup>

In its emphasis on Elizabeth's desirability as a bride and the staunch need for her to resist numerous advances from foreign suitors, this chorus obviously continues the tale begun in *Englands Elizabeth* some two years earlier. Neatly paralleling the besieging of Elizabeth by her princely suitors and the attack on England by Catholic forces, Heywood imagines the realm as a virginal body, threatened with invasion by the heretical Other. The parallel between the threatened "utter ruine" of the realm and the hagiographical fragmentation of the martyr's body which arrives as a consequence of the unsuccessful wooing posits the Spanish Armada as a form of torture or even potential execution for

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<sup>431</sup> Thomas Heywood, "Appendix: Variant and Longer Version of the End of the Play from the Quarto of 1633," in *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part II*, ed. Madeleine Doran (Oxford: The Malone Society Reprints, 1934/1935), ll. 2540-2549. All further references are to this edition.

the stubborn virgin. In the scene of Spanish military council, Don Pedro resists this version of events and attempts to re-write the invasion as an altogether more romantic encounter between the masculine Spanish troops and the English queen, who “with a feminine Traine, / Of her bright Ladyes beautifull’st and best, / Will meete us in their smocks, willing to pay / Their Maiden-heads for Ransome.” However, the Duke of Medina questions this vision of happy submission. Although England might be a woman, meek willingness to be deflowered is likely not on the cards. Instead, the Duke casts his mind back to the advice given several years earlier by “the Grand Signior,” who has proposed that Spain “hire so many Pyoners, / As with their Spades and Mattocks should digge up / This wart of Earth, and cast it in the Sea” (ll. 2607-09). The Duke’s approval of the advice establishes an easy transformation, so prominent in the virgin martyr narratives, of the wooing into fragmentation and ultimate disintegration of the virginal body (“the *mayden Ile*,” as he puts it) (l. 2595). Just as in a virgin martyr narrative, however, the threat of erasure is counteracted through divine intervention, and the power of the virginal body holds true against this (almost pagan) invasion.<sup>432</sup>

The tropes of fragmentation threatening the virginal body thus allow a metaphorical merging of the Virgin Queen and the island of England, both of which are refusing pagan courtship in favour of defending true religion. Don Pedro’s suggestion, reminiscent of the story of St. Ursula, that the group of virgins may be captured and held for ransom, encounters stony resistance. The virgin martyr narrative here lends itself

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<sup>432</sup> This particular text, of course, must also stop short of fragmentation, and yet, as I have earlier suggested, the ever-present threat of it establishes Elizabeth as an almost-martyr, who embodies the characteristics of a canonized saint and deserves similar worship without actually having had to be tortured and slain.

uniquely to the construction of England as a nation whose religious and physical integrity is constantly threatened by barbaric forces but which, through its purity and resilience, has been granted divine protection against all attacks. At the same time, this parallel suggests that if fragmentation is in some fashion achieved by the Catholics, the nation will continue to retain wholeness even as it is torn into pieces and cast into the sea. Note, however, that the ladies of Elizabeth's train appear here only as imaginary props, readily willing to sacrifice virginity to preserve their lives. Incorporated into the narrative of the Queen's authority, the virgin martyr models become inaccessible to women readers, and they are effectively excluded from the nation-building process, serving only as possible currency in the event of an invasion.

Collecting the references to all the texts that establish the absolute uniqueness of Elizabeth is outside the scope of this chapter,<sup>433</sup> but some sense of how pervasive and reflexive this rhetoric has become may be gained from a laudatory poem "A Dialogue between Two Shepherds, Thenot and Piers," by Mary (Sidney) Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, written for the occasion of Elizabeth's visit to her estate at some point before 1602. The poem uses the familiar conceit of Elizabeth as Astraea and argues that to present her as the best and the greatest of all is nothing more than a lie, for she is beyond all compare. Instructing Thenot in the art of praising the queen, Piers tells him, "Compare may think where likeness holds, / Nought like to her the earth enfolds," and

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<sup>433</sup> For an exploration of this question, see my earlier article "'Between You and Her No Comparison': Witches, Healers, and Elizabeth I in John Lyly's *Endymion*," *Early Theatre* 13.1 (2010): 37-64. Although my primary focus is on the play, I examine in detail the case John Aylmer makes for the legitimacy of Elizabeth's rule.

somewhat later, “Where chiefest are, there others be, / To us none else, but only she...”<sup>434</sup>

These lines succinctly summarize the conventional sentiment: during her life Elizabeth, like Astraea, is located outside this world’s reaches, quite beyond any comparison and, consequently, quite beyond any emulation. Only some time after her death that the precedent of Elizabeth will enable women “to imagine political possibilities for themselves in the generations that followed her throughout the seventeenth century.”<sup>435</sup>

This dynamic is clearly visible in Aske’s *Elizabetha Triumphans*, which, before launching into its hagiographical narrative, specifies that the queen “be by Nature weake, / Because her sex no otherwise can be.” Having established these impassable limitations on the female sex, Aske explains that Elizabeth is alone exempt from them, since, having assumed the throne of England, she is channelling Henry VIII and “wants she not the courage of her Sire, / Whose valour wanne this Island great renowne, / So great renowne as never Island had.” The writer emphasizes Henry VIII’s successes as a way of supporting Elizabeth’s claim to an exceptional position, which will enable her not to achieve personal power or fame but to consolidate her father’s achievement, which “as yet hath not bin lost, / But farre inlarg’d through wonders passing strange” (2). This passage foregrounds and frames the miraculous story about to be offered to the readers –

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<sup>434</sup>Mary Sidney Herbert, “Dialogue between Two Shepherds, Thenot and Piers, in Praise of Astraea,” in *The Broadview Anthology of Sixteenth-Century Poetry and Prose*, ed. Marie H. Loughlin, Sandra Bell, and Patricia Brace (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2011), 749.

<sup>435</sup>Mihoko Suzuki, “Elizabeth, Gender, and the Political Imaginary of Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, ed. Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 231-53, esp. 233. See pp. 233-53 for specific examples. A 1630 poem published under the name Diana Primrose illustrates the changing function of the queen for the early modern women as it argues that Elizabeth “Admits not here the least Comparison” but simultaneously suggests that her virtues might be in some way emulable; see *A Chaine of Pearle, or a Memoriall of the Peerles Graces, and Heroick Vertues of Queene Elizabeth, of Glorious Memory* (London: Thomas Paine, 1630), A3<sup>r</sup>.

the story of the woman raised above the boundaries of her sex to continue the work of her valorous sire. Her position as the sun “Whose vertues shine as bright as Sol it self” and through which “God’s word is truly preacht, / And [...] all Popish reliques burnt” derives directly from male secular authority, and her role as the military leader, religious instructor, and general saviour prevents any other woman from following in her steps (3).

### **The Early Modern Witch and the Medieval Saint**

As I have argued, assimilated into the texts related to the life and rule of Elizabeth I, the figure of the virgin martyr became safely sealed off from the possibilities of imitation, shielded by the oft-reiterated idea of the queen’s uniqueness. At the same time, as chapter 3 had shown, this figure had remained part of popular culture, fully accessible textually and theatrically. The Protestant response to the continuing presence of the virgin martyr in English popular culture ultimately acknowledged the impossibility of eradicating the virgin martyr. Instead, Protestant writers concentrated on emphasizing this figure’s utter unsuitability as a model, initially because of the sinister uses to which her power is put, and ultimately because of the illusionary nature of this power. Beginning with the 1530s, virgin martyrs begin appearing, with some regularity, in English witchcraft-related texts, and are merged with and used to explain the figure of the early modern witch.

This merging is not entirely surprising: the problem of distinguishing between legitimate miracles and false devilish illusions, and particularly in the case of women,

had bothered Christian thinkers long before the advent of the Reformation.<sup>436</sup> As my second chapter showed, the late Middle Ages demonstrated an increasingly hostile attitude to the idea of the vocal female saint, with her unlimited freedom of movement and an absence of masculine control. Nancy Caciola concludes, "...as the discernment of spirits became a discernment of bodies, the female body increasingly was defined as a habitation for demons, rather than a locus of indwelling divinity."<sup>437</sup> Thinking along the same lines, Richard Kieckhefer and Peter Dinzelbacher consider the problem of distinguishing between sainthood and witchcraft in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.<sup>438</sup> In her book, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages*, Dyan Elliott offers a further, more nuanced explication of the complex connection between the two, arguing that "the Host-stealing witch is [...] the dark counterpart to the Host-eating saint," and "despite all the labor expended in defining these symbolic opposites and holding them apart, the image of sanctified woman was subject to recolonization by putatively banished traits. [...] Both negative and positive

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<sup>436</sup> Nancy Caciola's *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003) offers an extended examination of this problem in the Middle Ages. See especially her analysis of Jean Gerson's *On the Testing of Spirits* and *Distinguishing True Visions from False*, with their vicious critique of Brigit of Sweden and Catherine of Siena and overarching implication that female prophecy cannot be trusted (289-309), as well as Barbara Newman, "Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century," *Speculum* 73.3 (1998): 733-70, and Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *The American Historical Review* 107.1 (2002): 26-54.

<sup>437</sup> Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (2000): 268-306, esp. 296.

<sup>438</sup> Richard Kieckhefer, "The Holy and the Unholy: Sainthood, Witchcraft, and Magic in Late Medieval Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24.3 (1994): 355-85, and Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen? Schicksale auffälliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Frühneuzeit* (Zürich, London: Artemis & Winkler, 1995). Dinzelbacher offers a comprehensive discussion of the similar traits, however distorted, in female saints or mystics and witches. See also Katherine Hodgkin, "Reasoning with Unreason: Visions, Witchcraft, and Madness in Early Modern England," for a consideration of the function of the prophetess and witch in the early modern period (Hodgkin adds a third figure – that of a madwoman), in *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Macmillan Press, 2001), 217-236.

models were potential conductors of suspect currents.”<sup>439</sup> While Elliott’s period of study and textual foci differ significantly from mine (she deals primarily with Latin texts, written by and for clergy), her point stands: the female saint and the witch are closely connected, if only through vague association. As a woman who has, so to speak, found a side entrance into the world of the Church and is able to assume a position of power in its sphere, the saint (alive or dead) is always already suspected. This suspicion, of course, becomes reality in post-Reformation England, when the long-term distrust of the virgin martyr and her gradual domestication resonates with the new rejection of the Catholic saints,<sup>440</sup> as well as with the surplus of women created by the closing of the convents and the Protestant emphasis on marriage.<sup>441</sup> At the same time, England experiences, throughout the sixteenth century, a steep rise of interest in witchcraft, and sees a deluge of texts published on the subject, in a wide variety of genres.<sup>442</sup>

Several scholars have pointed to the link between sainthood and witchcraft as a possible (if admittedly only partial) explanation for the increased interest in witches and witch-hunting in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>443</sup> Gábor Klaniczay made this

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<sup>439</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 123.

<sup>440</sup> In *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Keith Thomas deals precisely with this undermining of the Catholic inheritance in post-Reformation England.

<sup>441</sup> In this case, I am referring less to the Catholic nuns left to their own devices after the closure of convents than to the women who now did not have an option of joining a religious or lay community. The dissolution of monasteries, to be sure, affected men as well, but single men were much more easily absorbed into the early modern community than women.

<sup>442</sup> Allison P. Coudert makes the connection between the early modern interest in witchcraft and the specifically Protestant view of women; see “The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of Witchcraze,” in *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989, *Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies*, 12), 61-94.

<sup>443</sup> It has been shown repeatedly and exhaustively that, despite the popular myth of witch persecution as a medieval phenomenon (as witnessed, for example, by the well-known episode in Monty Python’s *Holy*

connection as early as the 1980s in *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, and attends to it again in the more recent essay “Learned Systems and Popular Narratives of Vision and Bewitchment.”<sup>444</sup> Not much later after the publication of Klaniczay’s book, Elspeth Whitney urged the need “to compare the figure of the witch to that other transgressor against female norms, the woman saint, and look at the saint and witch as mirror images.”<sup>445</sup> Certainly the need to inquire further into this connection is especially great in the case of early modern England, considering the unique combination of historical factors at work.<sup>446</sup> While there are many excellent studies that explore communal and psychological mechanisms involved in the early modern witchcraze,<sup>447</sup> I take this

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*Grail*), it did not exist in any significant fashion until the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. For recent overviews of this topic and its misconceptions, see Christa Tuczay, “The Nineteenth Century: Medievalism and Witchcraft,” in *Palgrave Advance in Witchcraft and Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 52-68, and Anita Obermeier, “Witches and the Myth of the Medieval *Burning Times*,” in *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen J. Harris and Bryont L. Grigsby (New York: Routledge, 2008), 218-229.

<sup>444</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Singerman, ed. Karen Margolis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), and *ibid*, “Learned Systems and Popular Narratives of Vision and Bewitchment,” in *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay and Éva Pócs (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2008), 50-82. Note that Klaniczay’s timeline is affected by his focus on Hungary.

<sup>445</sup> Elspeth Whitney, “The Witch ‘She’/The Historian ‘He’: Gender and the Historiography of the European Witch-Hunts,” *Journal of Women’s History* 7.3 (1996): 77-101, esp. 91-3.

<sup>446</sup> Witchcraft accusations as a primarily post-medieval phenomenon is particularly true for England: a very recent collection of medieval documents on the subject witnesses to the conspicuous absence of references to English beliefs and trials; see P.G. Maxwell-Stuart, ed., *Witch Beliefs and Witch Trials in the Middle Ages: Documents and Readings* (London: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>447</sup> For some hypotheses, see Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1970); Norman Cohn, *Europe’s Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (New York: Meridian, 1975); Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1981); Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Longman, 1995/1987); Robin Briggs, “Women as Victims? Witches, Judges and the Community,” *French History* 4.5 (1991): 438-450, and *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); Jon Oplinger, *The Politics of Demonology: The European Witchcraze and the Mass Production of Deviance* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1990), esp. chapters 1 to 4; Deborah Willis,

discussion onto the terrain of Protestant imagination and consider the use made of the virgin martyr figure by the early modern authors of witchcraft-related texts. The literary angle of my interest in witchcraft is partly motivated by the clear disjunction between historical events, which included changes in the legal treatment of such cases and the monarch's attitude toward them, and the views perpetuated in texts that continued to be written on the subject.<sup>448</sup>

The studies I have cited here are shaped by their focus on historical women and the attempts to define their "real" ideological position.<sup>449</sup> In contrast, I am primarily interested in how the connection or merging between sainthood and witchcraft is imagined both in popular and scholarly works. Kieckhefer's point that the two concepts only mirrored each other imperfectly is fully valid, but in spite of this imperfect mirroring, the two figures, having become implicated in the early modern project of deconstructing medieval Catholicism, progressively fused together.<sup>450</sup> Just as my first two chapters did not propose to examine the historical verisimilitude of virgin martyrs' narratives, so here my project is not concerned with the truth or untruth of the early modern witchcraft accusations. I make no attempt to explain the social dynamic that has

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"Shakespeare and the English Witch-Hunts: Enclosing the Maternal Body," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 96-120, subsequently incorporated into her book, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Witchcraft*, chapters 15-17.

<sup>448</sup> Despite James I's change of heart, which James Sharpe describes in such a fetching manner in *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A Horrible and True Story of Deception, Witchcraft, Murder, and the King of England* (New York: Routledge, 2000), see chapter 8, "Anne Meets the King," Englishmen continued to produce treatises that failed to consider the possibility of deception. See, for example, Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witch-Craft: Discovering, the Truth, Nature, Occasions, Growth and Power Thereof* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1617).

<sup>449</sup> Kieckhefer begins his article "The Holy and the Unholy" with the question: "Dorothea von Montau was by any standards an extraordinary woman – but was she a saint, or was she a witch?" (355).

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

led to accusations of witchcraft and subsequent trials. Rather, I follow Stuart Clark's suggestion for "thinking with the demons" and for considering the choices and conventions involved in the construction of witchcraft-related texts.<sup>451</sup> The early modern period continues the medieval line of thought on supernaturally inspired women by arguing that such a figure could only be seen as a saint in the superstitious past, and by working to re-cast such a saint (often a virgin martyr, as the most problematic one in her lack of family ties and marital inclinations) as a witch. At the same time, the linkage of the two figures in vernacular works is a warning to the female reader and a break-down of emulation: sinister and ultimately impotent, early modern virgin martyr-cum-witch is not divinely inspired and cannot inspire in turn.

Nominally, early modern thinkers supported the idea that women could be the recipients of divine inspiration and that the workers of good might be distinguished from the workers of evil. This is, for example, the assumption made in Richard Bernard's *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men* (1627) written, as the title evidences, for secular purposes. In arguing that "Satan endevoureth to bee an imitator of God, not to please him, but rather

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<sup>451</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). See also his "Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft," *Past & Present* 87 (1980): 98-127, and "The 'Gendering' of Witchcraft in French Demonology: Misogyny or Polarity?" *French History* 5.4 (1991): 426-437. Marion Gibson also writes, specifically about witchcraft pamphlets, "Re-emphasising that they are only representations of events, such a perception suggests that witchcraft pamphlets need to be studied structurally, with traditional literary inquiries into their construction, as well as considered in a more historical way as databases of 'facts'"; see *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early Modern Witches* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7. In a more recent article, she offers an overview of the contemporary debate and makes a compelling case for reading witchcraft texts as texts: "Thinking Witchcraft: Language, Literature and Intellectual History," in *Palgrave Advance in Witchcraft Historiography*, ed. Jonathan Barry and Owen Davies (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 164-181. My thinking about witchcraft-related texts was also generally and greatly influenced by the collection *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture*, ed. Stuart Clark (London: Macmillan Press, 2001); see especially Clark's introduction (1-18), Peter Rushton, "Texts of Authority: Witchcraft Accusations and the Demonstration of Truth in Early Modern England," 21-39, Marion Gibson, "Understanding Witchcraft? Accusers' Stories in Print in Early Modern England," 41-54, and Malcolm Gaskill, "Witches and Witnesses in Old and New England," 55-80.

to crosse him, and to beguile these hellish Apostates,” and in offering to his readers a table which shows exactly how Satan’s hierarchy mimics God’s, Bernard is obviously proceeding from the assumption that the two hierarchies are not only distinct and antithetical but can, with proper effort, can be properly evaluated by an observer.<sup>452</sup> In another treatise, Alexander Roberts explains that women are not inherently evil but simply possess certain qualities that make them suitable both for witchcraft and for divine inspiration, such as extreme susceptibility to external influences: “their complexion is softer, and from hence more easily receive the impressions offered by the Diuel; as when they be instructed and governed by good Angels, they prove exceeding religious and extraordinarily devout; so consenting to the suggestions of evill spirits, become notoriously wicked, so that there is no mischief above that of a woman.”<sup>453</sup> They are also possessed of a “stronger resolution, to undergoe any torment then can be found in a man” (40-41). Although the example Roberts gives is not drawn from Christian history but from Tacitus, the reader would obviously have no trouble in thinking of more recent positive illustrations of this proposition, Anne Askew being one of many. In theory, then, select women could be divinely inspired and, moved to great spiritual feats, could offer extraordinary resistance in favour of their virtuous cause.

In reality, however, the two categories grew hopelessly muddled, as the assumption of distinction was consistently undermined by the spectre of the woman saint who threatened to destabilize both the Protestant emphasis on marriage and the emerging

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<sup>452</sup> Richard Bernard, *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men. The Second Addition* (London: Felix Kyngston for Edw. Blackmore, 1629), 258-65.

<sup>453</sup> Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft* (London: N.O. for Samuel Man, 1616), 42-3. All further references are to this edition.

identity of early modern England. Subsumed into the cult of Elizabeth I, the healer saint could remain powerful and benevolent, although inimitable, while her lower-class descendants generated strenuous debate, which broadly agreed that, however seemingly efficacious, she was in fact destructive, if not to the body then to the soul. It is impossible to collect here every instance of early modern argument, which quickly became commonplace, for the impossibility of distinguishing between a witch and a healer, but one does not have to go far for famous examples. James I instructs his readers to offer “earnest prayer to G O D” and amend their lives, instead of attempting to have their diseases cured by supernatural means, since such a cure would injure their souls while healing their bodies.<sup>454</sup> Bernard acknowledges a distinct category of “healing Witches [who] cannot doe to man, or beast any hurt” and yet, for reasons very similar to the king’s, forbids his readers to avail themselves of the service of such people.<sup>455</sup> Thomas Cooper directly connects the belief in good witches to popery and writes forcefully that the power “to worke miracles, to cast out divels, and so by a *miraculous gift*, to heale such mischiefes as do proceede from *Witches*” can only be claimed, at the present, by those seeking to delude and mislead.<sup>456</sup> George Gifford, throughout his *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* (1593), berates those gullible people who take advice on charms from village healers and argues that they become involved in witchcraft by doing so.<sup>457</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> James I, *Daemonologie* (1597) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), 48-9.

<sup>455</sup> Bernard, *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men*, 126-143

<sup>456</sup> Cooper, *The Myserie of Witch-Craft*, 297ff.

<sup>457</sup> George Gifford, *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, introd. Beatrice White (London: Oxford University Press, 1931).

Practically, then, the idea that women could be divinely inspired and given the gift of healing was ridiculed and dismissed in a variety of witchcraft-related texts; this argument, of course, applied to the wise men just as much, but it was almost invariably a woman who appeared in the accompanying anecdotes, and whose image the sceptics were attempting to erase from the public consciousness.<sup>458</sup> Gifford's *Dialogue* intends just such an erasure when, after a philosophical debate between three men, he introduces the Goodwife R. The good woman comically ignores every argument and defends the good woman of R.H., who "doth more good in one yeere then all these Scripture men will doe as long as they live," opining, "It is a gift which God hath given her, I thinke the holy spirite of God doth teach her."<sup>459</sup> Scathing and defiant, the Goodwife R. is the embodiment of the female audience exposed to the wrong models of femininity. In her

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<sup>458</sup> I am aware of the current gender debate in this field and of the persistent desire to see witch-hunting as specifically women-hunting. This is the argument put forth by many scholars, including Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* (London: Routledge, 1992); Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994), and "Witch Hunting as Woman Hunting: Persecution by Gender," in *Crossing Boundaries: Attending to Early Modern Women*, ed. Jane Donawerth and Adele Seeff (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), 129-139. These studies, however, have been repeatedly challenged for their tendency to ignore evidence. Even in the early 1980s, Christina Lerner points out that "[t]he prime interest of the authorities at the time was the pursuit of witches as such" and "[t]he thought that witch-hunting was actually *witch*-hunting [as opposed to women-hunting], however, opens out a further range of questions about the function of Christianity as a political ideology in this period, the role played by witch-hunting in law and order crises, and the legitimacy of parallels with other great, less sexually-specific persecutions and purges of past and present"; see "Witchcraft Past and Present," in *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief*, ed. Alan Mafarlane (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 79-91, esp. 87-88. Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, in *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), offer a scathing critique of this view and point to the need to re-insert male witches into the history of early modern witchcraft. My own concern here treads, in a sense, between these two arguments. On the one hand, materials from early modern England rebuff the argument of witch persecution as, specifically, war against women; on the other, textual evidence still suggests that the interest in witchcraft is informed by other issues and debates that are closely related to the woman question. I will add here a caveat that my discussion of witchcraft texts is not primarily concerned with historical accuracy but, rather, with early modern imagination and with the way in which it dealt specifically with female figures. See also Gerhild Scholz Williams, "The Woman/The Witch: Variations on a Sixteenth-Century Theme (Paracelsus, Wier, Bodin)," in *The Crannied Wall: Women, Religion, and the Arts in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Craig A. Monson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 119-37.

<sup>459</sup> Gifford, *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*, sig. N3.

belief that women can receive and rely upon the divine instruction and assistance, she not only belies her title of “Goodwife” by holding a virulent debate with the men present but also claims the right to resolve her own household problem by emulating the good woman of R.H. and practising the same charms at home.

Unlike Elizabeth I, the cunning woman is open to emulation, and the model offered by her stands, very obviously, counter to the Protestant position on marriage. The insistent rejection, by the early modern writers, of the possibility of woman-authored benevolent healing and instruction parallels the distrust of the female saint (especially of the virgin martyr) and the widely promoted suspicion of her flaws and toxic influences. The ban on female saints<sup>460</sup> and the sharply rising attention to the witch belong to the same historical moment and are united by the ongoing project of removing inappropriate models of femininity, both by incorporating elements of the former into the latter, and by suggesting a strong affinity and, to a certain extent, even identity between the two. After the Reformation, various characteristics of virgin martyrs are gradually incorporated into the figure of the early modern witch in the public consciousness, and thus are made more and more inaccessible as behavioural models. We need only to return, briefly, to Roberts’ list of traits that make women more likely to become witches than men (“by a hundred to one,” as he puts it) (40). The last item on the list is easily recognizable both from the medieval *vitae* and from the early modern discussions of troublesome maidens:

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<sup>460</sup> Protestant treatises attack all saints, indiscriminately, but at the same time, St. George was adopted as the patron saint of England. Edmond Spenser obviously sees no contradiction between his general disapproval of the saints and presenting St. George, the Knight of the Red Cross, as one of the main characters in *The Fairy Queen*.

“they are of a slippery tongue, and full of words...” (43).<sup>461</sup> The ability to speak out, often pugnaciously, that was so carefully edited down or out in the later treatments of virgin martyrs, and which so troubled early modern thinkers, is here unequivocally presented as a mark not simply of a bad Christian woman, but of a woman who stands in opposition to all things Christian and must be, if not destroyed, then at least repudiated and shunned.

In a pamphlet *A Detection of Damnable Driftes* (1579), the connection between the two figures is even more apparent, when the witch Alice Nokes acts as a defender of chastity against a forceful and ungallant suitor. A young man Thomas Spycer, “sporting, and passing away the time in play with a great number of youth, chaunced to snatche a paire of Gloves out of the pockette of this Mother Nokes Daughter being a yong woman of the age of xxviii yeres, which he protesteth to have done in jest.”<sup>462</sup> The details of this situation are to a large extent a mystery. The reader might wonder, for example, whether the young man is known to the mother and daughter, and whether they are participating, in some way, in these revels, or simply happen to be passing by at the wrong moment; however, the next sentence makes it clear that, in spite of the protestations of good fun, the two women are not at all amused by Spycer’s prank. The mother, seeing what happened, takes the initiative and “demaunded the Gloves of him,” but the man ignores the request and, “geving no greate eare to her wordes departed towards the feeldes...”

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<sup>461</sup> Note that Roberts here gives the example of Delilah, immediately personifying the loquacious woman as the famous bad wife.

<sup>462</sup> *A Detection of Damnable Driftes*, in *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*, ed. Marion Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2000), 41-9, esp. 48. All following references to this pamphlet are from this page.

Whether or not we choose to interpret the act of stealing a piece of woman's clothing as a symbolic defloration, or even symbolic rape, the description certainly positions Spycer's actions as an extreme invasion, with a recognizable erotic undertone, of the young woman's privacy. This mocking advance is compounded by his absolute refusal to return the gloves: he does not simply deflect Alice Nokes' protestations but proceeds as if she had remained silent. With the literal lack of receiving ears, the woman's words hang in a vacuum, as if they have never been uttered. While marriage is not in question here, the issues at stake remain essentially the same: the young woman's chastity is challenged by the man who, fully confident in his power, ignores female speech despite its forceful nature. However, Nokes' speech turns out to be more efficacious than Spycer had anticipated, and the verbal promise of retribution, given to her daughter, incapacitates the offender as soon as it is spoken: "Immediately upon his departure quoth the same Mother Nokes to her Daughter, lette him alone, I will bounce him well enough, at what time he being soudainely taken, and rest of his limmes fell doune." This swift visitation of supernatural judgement irresistibly recalls numerous virgin martyr stories in which those who make attempts at the heroine's virginity are physically incapacitated before they can attain their wish. For example, in one of the versions of St. Agnes's *vita*, the saint is conveyed to a brothel to be dishonoured, but every man who approaches her with unchaste intentions is blinded on the spot. Similarly, Spycer's paralysis resolves the issue of the material and emotional assault he has performed. The gloves are quickly restored, and Alice Nokes, along with her daughter,

triumphs over the masculine mockery and relentless pressure directed at women who find themselves in a public space without male protection.

Based on the relatively brief treatment of her case in the pamphlet, we cannot be sure that Alice Nokes consciously styled herself as a witch, although she seems to have had a certain reputation.<sup>463</sup> What is clear, however, is that the author of the pamphlet is not offering to his readers an indiscriminate flow of material: as Gibson puts it in her brief preface, the “informations seem to be paraphrased and reported from the trial or from gossip surrounding it.”<sup>464</sup> While Alice Nokes is on trial for killing Elizabeth Barfott,<sup>465</sup> the pamphleteer does not consider this charge sufficiently significant or interesting to merit mention in the text. Instead, he outlines what are, to his mind, the three primary offences: the defence of her daughter, as discussed above, the alleged retaliation against her husband’s infidelity by causing the mistress’ child to die, and the disease and subsequent death of a plough-horse after “this Mother Nokes going by, asked the felowe [the ploughman] a question but getting no aunswere of him she went her way.” Infanticide is a serious allegation but, sandwiched as it is between two sizeable paragraphs, it is obviously of the least importance here. Rather, Alice Nokes’ greatest crime seems to lie in refusing to be ignored by men, however minor the interaction might

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<sup>463</sup> At least if contemporary documents are to be believed, such self-styling was entirely possible and did take place. See Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (New York: Routledge, 1996), esp. chapter 6, “Self-Fashioning by Women: Choosing to be a Witch.” At the same time, it is fairly clear that Julio Caro Baroja had overstated his case when he had claimed in 1961 that most, if not all, witches believed in their own powers and were, for the most part, “people with an overdeveloped sense of their own importance.” His explanation that “a woman usual becomes a witch after the initial failure of her life as a woman; after frustrated or illegitimate love affairs have left her with a sense of impotence or disgrace” rather ignores the complex network of interaction such as described in the pamphlet I am discussing here; see Julio Caro Baroja, *The World of the Witches*, trans. Nigel Glendinning (London: Phoenix Press, 1964), 256. See also Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, chapter 16, “The Making of a Witch.”

<sup>464</sup> *A Detection of Damnable Driftes*, 41.

<sup>465</sup> See Gibson’s note on page 49.

be. The opening sequence of the pamphlet, then, while it does not reflect the actual charges made in the case, foregrounds the author's own concerns with the women's conduct. In doing so, it highlights the possible links between witch stories and virgin martyr narratives, pointing for the subversive and inappropriate characteristics both of these female figures shared.

### **St. Cecilia and Her Familiar: The Witching Saint of Protestant Fantasy**

I am primarily concerned, however, not with the historical records of witchcraft cases but with the ways in which virgin martyrs and witches are forcefully brought together in theoretical treatments of the subject. A vivid example is offered by the chapter in Book Six of Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum*, entitled "The Marvelous Tale of the Spanish Malefica Magdalena de la Cruz..."<sup>466</sup> Taking the story of a real Spanish nun, first canonized and then exposed as an impostor, Weyer recasts the heroine as a demonic collaborator, whose fraudulence did not simply mislead the Spanish Catholics but forced them to accept demonic manifestations as signs of being divinely chosen. In Weyer's narrative, the demon deliberately styles Magdalena a saint and a prophetess, "by means of whom he intended to mock all of Spain, giving her the appearance of religion and holiness" (494). What is more, the demon offers his hand in marriage to the girl, and she accepts; this quasi-marital contract obviously parodies the concept of "the bride of Christ." In addition to having the host transported directly into her mouth and levitating, Magdalena demonstrates another popular miracle: as she

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<sup>466</sup> Johann Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum*, in *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance*, ed. George Mora and Benjamin Kohl, trans. John Shea, foreword John Weber (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1991), 494. All further references are to this edition.

carries an image of Jesus as an infant, “her hair would grow all the way down to her ankles, covering her and the naked image; then the hair would instantly contract to its true original length” (495). Weyer’s description of this public performance likely stems from Magdalena’s famous assertion that, locked in her cell, she gave birth to a miraculous child (while remaining a virgin), and wrapped it in her hair, which miraculously had grown out and turned blonde for this occasion. The new hair and the child disappeared before they could be seen by anybody else.<sup>467</sup>

However, in his own account Weyer chooses to avoid the question of Magdalena’s virgin birth and her *imitatio* of the Virgin Mary. Instead, the public performance of hair growth “down to her ankles” irresistibly recalls the story of St. Agnes, who, upon being stripped for public shaming, was divinely protected by instantaneous lengthening of her hair until she was completely shielded from the male gaze. Although Weyer reserves any comments on the validity of medieval *vitae*, he reproduces this familiar miracle in an inverse form, presenting it as a demonic illusion intended to transform the service into carnival and so pervert the faith of the congregation.<sup>468</sup> The problem of interpretation focuses on Magdalena but inevitably extends back to St. Agnes and her virgin martyr sisters: if this virginal woman, who prophesizes, works miracles, and draws great attention, may be ultimately exposed as a demon-collaborator, how are we to accept her predecessors, who have exhibited similar

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<sup>467</sup> For details of Magdalena’s career as a saint, see Geraldine McKendrick and Angus MacKay, “Visionaries and Affective Spirituality during the First Half of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Cultural Encounters: The Impact of the Inquisition in Spain and the New World*, ed. Mary Elizabeth Perry and Anne J. Cruz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 93-104, esp. 94-95.

<sup>468</sup> Weyer refers to this feat as one of Magdalena’s “useless miracles” and sarcastically comments, “By other such tricks as well, she made the feast day and the ceremony itself more sacred” (495).

traits and performed similar actions?<sup>469</sup> In the early modern period, the features that originally enabled the power of the virgin martyr and allowed her privileged status earmark her as a threat to Christianity and normal social order.

The continuity between the virgin martyr and the early modern witch manifests itself in English literary works as early as 1538, the year when Bale's play *A Comedy Concerning Three Laws of Nature, Moses and Christ, Corrupted by Sodomites, Pharisees, and Papists*, a prime example of anti-Catholic propaganda, first saw the public light. In the second act of this play, three characters work to undermine the *Naturae Lex* (the Law of Nature): *Infidelitas*, who is a classic Vice character, *Sodomismus*, whose name, I think, needs no further explanation, and *Idololatria Necromantic*. The last is possibly the most detailed and individuated character in the entire work: she is described as a lower-class woman whose name points immediately to a combination of false worship and problematic magic, which for Bale is characteristic of the Middle Ages. Although the action of the play, at this point, is supposedly taking place in the distant past (Moses is not even born until the next act), both the curt suggestion in the list of characters that *Idololatria* "be decked like an old witch" and the lengthy description in the dialogue of the play firmly situates her in the sixteenth-century milieu.<sup>470</sup> In her own words, she is

...a good midwife, perde!

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<sup>469</sup> A recent study suggests that the Spanish imposture trials of the sixteenth century were specifically intended as a means "to cut a Gordian knot of bodies, demons, visions, and miracles" – in short, to resolve the unresolvable problem of discernment by brute force; see Andrew W. Keitt, *Inventing the Sacred: Imposture, Inquisition, and the Boundaries of the Supernatural in Golden Age Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 140.

<sup>470</sup> John Bale, *A Comedy Concerning Three Laws*, in *The Dramatic Writings of John Bale*, ed. John S. Farmer (London: English Drama Society, 1907, 1966), 2. All further references are to this edition.

Young children can I charm;  
 With whisperings and wishings,  
 With crossings, and with kissings,  
 With blasings, and with blessings,  
 That sprites do them no harm. (17)

Other characters supplement this description with detailed lists of Idololatria's magical abilities and further services she offers to her neighbours. In addition to being associated with midwifery and care for small children (who are thought to be especially prone to the evil influences), she can heal her clients of ague, pox, and toothache, assist with household duties, find lost things, predict the future, and order spirits around. All these features, also found in more prosaic descriptions of the local women healers, make Idololatria easily recognizable as the so-called wise woman, the goodwife with knowledge of charms, who performs everyday magic for her clients.

At the same time, Idololatria's supernatural powers, coupled with the context of her appearance, vividly bring to mind medieval saints, who, when asked properly, delivered very similar services, and could be expected to perform the feats of finding lost items (St. Anthony's speciality), healing, prophesying, and so forth.<sup>471</sup> Indeed, Bale's

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<sup>471</sup> See Valerie I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), for a very detailed discussion of the difficulty of separating pagan magic from the miraculous interventions presented as authoritative by Christian writers. Flint shows that Catholic saints took on certain functions earlier (and later) performed by wise men and women (see especially chapter 9, "Encouraged Magic: The Process of Rehabilitation"). Kurt Tetzeli Von Rosador sees Idololatria as the embodiment of the "identification of Catholicism and magic" ("The Sacralizing Sign: Religion and Magic in Bale, Greene, and the Early Shakespeare," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 23, Early Shakespeare special number [1993]: 30-45, esp. 35). On the whole, the difficulty – which sometimes becomes an impossibility – of distinguishing, with finality, between saints and the workers of magic is established in Aron Gurevich's seminal study *Problemy srednevekovoy narodnoy kul'tury* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1981), translated into English as *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*. See particularly chapter 2, "Krest'yane i svyatye" [Peasants and saints]. In his seminal *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Keith Thomas discusses precisely this historical intersection of magic, witchcraft, and sainthood, while Peter Happé offers Bale's *Three Laws* as an example of a play that responds to the idea of sainthood; see "The Protestant Adaptation of the Saint Play," in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford

lack of attention to historical or chronological accuracy – as Rainer Pineas puts it, “he fashioned anachronism into a deliberate device” – serves to collapse the medieval saint and the early modern witch together, presenting them as two manifestations of the same, timeless problem.<sup>472</sup> This parallel is further reinforced when only two pages later *Idololatria* argues for the power of saints, comparing their intercession to hers, and instructs her audience in the art of choosing the most suitable patron for every situation. The list of possible patrons is impressive in the wealth of alternatives that it offers to the beginner charm-worker, but the saint that seems to me to hold especial significance in this context is tucked inconspicuously in the middle and allotted only two lines. “If ye cannot sleep, but slumber,” says *Idololatria*, “Give oats unto Saint Uncumber” (20). Not only is Saint Uncumber the only female saint on the list, but she also seems to be the only one mentioned in conjunction with the correct traditional offering. In other cases, ailments and offerings are selected seemingly at random, with the explicit goal of mocking the entire custom: for example, Bale advises that for “the pip” one must use “a dram of a sheep’s turdle / And good Saint Francis’s girdle” (20). However, the offer of oats to St. Uncumber, as unlikely as it might seem, appears to have been a valid part of worship for this saint and has textual precedent in Thomas More’s *Dialogues*.<sup>473</sup>

This off-hand reference of the very real belief in St. Uncumber hides in doggerel verse like a radioactive sample in a landfill. Seemingly innocuous, this virgin martyr is,

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Davidson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1986, *Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series*, 8), 205-240, esp. 225-6.

<sup>472</sup> Rainer Pineas, “The Polemical Drama of John Bale,” in *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of S.F. Johnson*, ed. W.R. Elton and William B. Long (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 194-210, esp. 208.

<sup>473</sup> See the discussion of Thomas More in the previous chapter.

at closer examination, a perfect counterpart of the “old witch” – as a patron of the infertile, the sick, and the dying, but also as a gender switcher, the crucified woman with a beard. This problematic transformation of the saint is echoed in the character of Idololatria herself: at her first appearance Infidelity exclaims dubiously, “What? sometime thou wert an he?”, to which Idololatria answers: “Yea, but now Ich am a she!” (17). This peculiar emphasis on the character’s *present* femininity identifies the sixteenth-century religious trouble as embodied in a figure whose female gender, as defined by Protestant reformers, is inherently unstable and might conceal a very real, “masculine” unwillingness to be confined by the boundaries of a marriage. This view of the “old witch” is strengthened several lines later. Likening Idololatria to those Greek and Roman men, real and fictional, who “themselves oft transformed / Into a woman’s likeness, / With agility and quickness,” or, more simply, have been known to dress up as women, Bale places Hercules on the list (17).

The name of Hercules is, of course, immediately recognizable, perhaps the most so of the entire list. This hero had to dress in female clothing and spend three years acting as one; furthermore, he was forced to allow Queen Omphale to carry his weapon and wear the skin of the Nemean Lion during that time. Almost a hundred years later Hercules still remains at the forefront of this debate: in the seventeenth-century pamphlet *Haec-Vir, or the Womanish-Man*, the male character attempts to find out the name of Hic Mulier, the woman who flouts sumptuary and conduct conventions, by asking, “But what is yours, most couragious countefet of *Hercules* and his Distaffe?”<sup>474</sup> A woman in

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<sup>474</sup> J.T., *Haec-Vir, or the Womanish-Man* (London, 1620), sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.

masculine clothing acts as a mirror image of a man performing household duties: once boundaries have been destabilized, the original gender of the figure is lost. Although Hercules cannot be accused of any real passion for feminine attire and his single occasion of cross-dressing is part of a heroic quest, his participation in the reversal of household roles transforms him into an embodiment of gender confusion. As a counterfeit of Hercules who is, in turn, counterfeiting a household-bound woman, Idololatria is, in essence, stripped of social gender and her biological gender becomes, in the light of her decidedly unfeminine powers, a threat to the Protestant order.<sup>475</sup>

Bale, then, sees the Catholic past making inroads into the sixteenth century embodied in the wise woman, the new disguise of the virgin martyr.<sup>476</sup> By casting charms and deftly operating superstition, the female miracle-worker presents a direct threat to the rational Protestant order and its attempts to promote matrimony with its

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<sup>475</sup> There is a scholarly tradition of reading Idololatria, on the basis of these lines, as a man in drag and thus a signifier of homosexual desire; see Alan Stewart, "Ydolatricall Sodometrye": John Bale's Allegory," *Medieval English Theatre* 15 (1993): 3-20, and Garrett P.J. Epp, "'Into a Womanys Lyckenes': Bale's Personification of Idolatry: A Response to Alan Stewart," *Medieval English Theatre* 18 (1996): 63-73. However, as my discussion shows, there is little in the description of Idololatria to suggest that she actually remains a man, while textual allusions to cross-dressing are vastly complicated by the inclusion of Hercules.

<sup>476</sup> This, I think, is an important addition to Richard Axton's early suggestion that Idololatria is modelled on "an old anti-type of the Virgin Mary"; see "Folk Play in Tudor Interludes," in *English Drama: Forms and Development: Essays in Honour of Muriel Clara Bradbrook*, ed. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-23, esp. 21. Brian Gourley extends this suggestion to argue that, as a witch-midwife and the embodiment of grotesque femininity, Idololatria is "an inverted allegory of the Virgin Mary and Saint Anne, and perhaps other assorted female saints"; see "Feminised Idolatry and the Subversion of Religious Orthodoxy in John Bale's *Three Laws*," *eSharp* 9 (2007): 1-21, esp. 16, italics mine. As I show, Bale does not place this character in contrast to female saints but, rather, uses it to reveal the deeply problematic nature of female saints. Compare to Luke Shepherd's "The Upchering of the Messe," where the Catholic mass is at first personified as a similarly benevolent presence, who "is a leache," can heal all sorts of common diseases, "bringeth wether clere / And seasonable yere," and, finally, keeps away "the plague and pestilence, / The fever and the epilence" (in *An Edition of Luke Shepherd's Satires*, ed. Janice Devereux [Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, with Renaissance English Text Society, 2001], 15-25, ll. 152-178. At the same time, Shepherd makes it clear that, despite the popular faith and the worship according to the mass over the centuries, "Mistress Missa" is a failure and, if the critical voices are to be believed, a whore, a murderer, and a laughingstock (ll. 144-148).

strictly defined gender roles. Bale's solution to the problem of influence is to condemn this woman wholesale by emphasizing the disruptive potential of her power; Bale, I argue, is one of the first writers to outline the push toward transforming the saint into a sinister witch. The initial inkling of this appears in the very first description of Idololatria, when Sodomismus ends the summary of her talents with the assertion that she can "draw drink of a rotten post, / Without the help of the Holy Ghost - / In working she is alone" (17). This ability both emphasizes her stature and makes it deeply problematic: on the one hand, in her own sphere Idololatria is not unlike Moses, one of the most significant men in Biblical history, for she is able to bring forth liquid from inanimate matter on demand. However, she occupies this position illegally, unassisted by the divine power, and her materials are questionable: the drink that she produces comes not from solid stone but from material that is "rotten," touched by the inevitable decay of passing time. So it is with her other abilities: Idololatria proceeds to boast that, when she is displeased, her seemingly benevolent talents are easily turned inside out and she can "[m]any subtleties contrive." These subtleties are the typical *maleficia* of an early modern witch: interfering with everyday activities in the house and the field and causing the victim to "lose his labour at length," drying the wells, killing the livestock, and sending disease (18).

Not at all distinct from the punishments that could strike down someone who had angered a saint,<sup>477</sup> performed by a low-class early modern woman these feats signal, for Bale, an alarming penetration of the superstitious past into the sixteenth century: by a

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<sup>477</sup> See Gurevich, who discusses popular stories of angry and violent saints throughout his book.

general dissemination of erroneous beliefs, but also by offering deeply problematic models to sixteenth-century women.<sup>478</sup> As Bale's narrative shows, even transformed into the wicked, destructive witch, the virgin martyr remains potent and retains all her potential for destabilizing gender norms and problematizing the Protestant marriage project.<sup>479</sup> The next, expected stage of this project is to deny all power to the amalgamation of the two figures, ridiculing any possibility that a woman could be inspired, whether divinely or diabolically. Any suggestion of such a possibility is, in this argument, immediately attributable to female or Popish fraudulence and must be ignored, if not immediately punished.

Bale's engagement with the Catholic saints sets the stage for Reginald Scot, who, in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), takes the struggle with influence a step further. While retaining and further strengthening the link between the medieval saints and early modern witches, Scot works to drain the resulting female figure of power, so that she can be easily banished from the present. Scot's overall model of history is obviously dichotomous, with the Reformation drawing a deep divide between the Catholic past and the Protestant present. The difference between the two periods, according to Book 8 of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, is that the rational thinkers of the sixteenth century have come to recognize the simple fact that the time of miracles had passed. While Scot does

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<sup>478</sup> Infidelity comments, after Idololatria finishes her list of deeds, on the wide dissemination of such information, "It is a sport, I trow, / To hear how she outblow / Her witchcrafts on a row –" (21).

<sup>479</sup> As in his other works, which I have discussed in chapter 3, in this play Bale repeatedly refers to the destruction of the sacred institution of marriage by the disruptive characters of the medieval popular tales. Indeed, it seems that he sees this destruction as one of the most direct manifestations of the Catholic faith and all things related to it. See, in particular, Donald N. Mager's "John Bale and Early Tudor Sodomy Discourse," in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 141-161. Mager describes the figure of Idololatria as "proof of idolatrous perversion of the natural masculine hierarchy of the deity" and an assertion "of transgressive female power" (148-9).

not give a specific deadline for this cessation, it seems to be located sometime before St. Augustine, thus rendering the whole later Middle Ages hopelessly backward and credulous.<sup>480</sup> He acknowledges that “in times past, it pleased God, extraordinarilie to shew miracles amongst his people, for the strengthening of their faith in the Messias,” but then argues that, although God’s presence is felt through all ages, “the gift [of miracles] was but for a time.”<sup>481</sup> It is the task of the sixteenth century, then, to correct this mistake by recognizing, as the chapter titles of Book 8 urge, “That miracles are ceased,” “That the gift of prophesie is ceased,” “That Oracles are ceased,” and, finally, “...that we are not now to looke for anie more miracles.”<sup>482</sup>

This is, then, the essential problem of witchcraft beliefs: for Scot, they represent an extension of a period whose historical validity has expired. As the Middle Ages made the crucial mistake of extending and imitating the age of miracles, so do the credulous Protestants drag the Middle Ages into the new time, in a disguise: although “some affirme, that popish miracles are vanished and gone awaie: howbeit witches miracles remaine in full force” (89). And yet, Scot insists, it is false and misleading to separate, in discussion, miracles reported by medieval writers and the feats believed to have been performed by the early modern witches, for the witches and saints are merely different manifestations of the same figure. Scot drives this point home by suggesting that the belief in witches is inextricably linked to the hypothetical situation in which, as he

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<sup>480</sup> For example, Philip C. Almond discusses Scot’s re-writing of *Malleus Maleficarum* stories to transform them into explicit illustrations for foolishness and lechery of Catholic clergy; see *England’s First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and ‘The Discoverie of Witchcraft’* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 107-113, among others.

<sup>481</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 89.

<sup>482</sup> See contents – *ibid.*, x.

sarcastically puts it, “a woman of credit, or else a woman-witch should saye... that she is a true prophet of the Lord, and that he revealeth those secret mysteries unto hir, whereby she detecteth the lewd acts and imaginations of the wicked, and that by him she worketh miracles, and prophesieth, &c” and be believed (90).

This seemingly offhand example of an utterly unbelievable situation emphasizes, yet again, one of Scot’s main points in this treatise, which is that witchcraft beliefs are ridiculous not only because they are illogical and unsupported by Biblical or historical evidence,<sup>483</sup> but because they assume that women can be invested with supernatural power. This is an assumption that Scot derides throughout, noting, for example, that “in other cases the depositions of manie women at one instant are disabled, as insufficient in law; bicause of the imbecillitie and frailtie of their nature or sex” (13). Elsewhere, he is quick to remind the readers of women’s lack of formal education and urges them to dismiss the belief in witches’ powers on the grounds that “they are women that never went to schoole in their lives, nor had any teachers: and therefore without art or learning...” (124). In the light of this overarching framework, Scot’s merging, in his hypothetical example, of a “witch-woman” and a prophetess “of credit” is not puzzling at all. The description of this woman’s feats clearly identifies her as a Catholic saint or mystic, but in Scot’s argument, only the ignorance of Catholics has prevented them from understanding that no woman, by her very nature, could be capable of performing miracles or prophesying. The belief in witches represents both the extension of this

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<sup>483</sup> Scot denounces the famous example of the witch of Endor as a case of blatant fraud. See, for example, the discussion in Anthony Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil’s Tabernacle: The Pagan Oracles in Early Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 173-74.

ignorance and, simultaneously, a manifestation of the spectre of the female saint haunting the early modern period, which otherwise would be the age of masculine reason and orderly Protestantism.<sup>484</sup>

Scot is particularly troubled by the virgin martyrs and he dedicates special effort to the destruction of their reputation.<sup>485</sup> St. Cecilia, whose invocation is progressively problematized after the fourteenth century, is in this treatise turned into a sinister caricature: “indeed we read among the popish trumperie, that *S. Cicilie* had an angell to hir familiar, and that she could shew him to whom she would, and that she might aske and have what she or hir friend list” (82). A more efficient slander job is difficult to imagine. The word “trumperie” hints at excess and delusions of grandeur, the term “familiar” brings to mind English witches and the imps whom they were supposed to

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<sup>484</sup> Versions of this argument are ubiquitous in skeptically minded witchcraft literature. Arguing against the possibility of witchcraft and possession, Edward Jorden opens his famous *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (1603) with the following words, “The passive condition of womankind is subject unto more diseases and of other sortes and natures then men are...” (in *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London: Edward Jorden and the Mary Glover Case*, ed. and intro. Michael MacDonald [London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1991], sig. B”). From an object of wonder and fear, the possessed girl is transformed into an ailing victim of her own feminine body. Commenting on the case of Anne Gunter, James Sharpe makes a similar point about the potential for independence offered by possession: “Possessed young people like Anne Gunter were, therefore, with whatever degree of consciousness, rebelling or seeking attention by inverting not only the disciplines of the household but also the disciplines of godliness” (*The Bewitching of Anne Gunter*, 157).

<sup>485</sup> Scot’s indebtedness to medieval saints’ Lives (and especially those of virgin martyrs) seems obvious, but this connection has not, to my knowledge, been made. On the whole, there appears to be a certain reluctance to examine Scot’s literary models and sources, perhaps in part due to his hallowed status as the key figure in the advent of the new age of reason. Sydney Anglo, for example, offers the following thesis: “In fact, Scot presented a serious and sustained argument, and was able to construct not only a coherent and solidly planned book, but also a personal cosmology providing radical answers to a host of contemporary intellectual problems: the nature of spirits, demons, and angels; the nature of the devil; spiritual, demonic, and natural magic; and the possibility of purging Christianity of magical practices”; see “Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Scepticism and Sadduceeism,” in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, ed. Sydney Anglo (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 106-39, esp. 106. A notable exception is Cora Fox’s recent essay “Authorizing the Metamorphic Witch: Ovid in Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*,” in *Metamorphosis: The Changing Face of Ovid in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison Keith and Stephen Rupp (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 165-178, which looks back to antiquity for Scot’s literary influences.

feed with their blood, and the singular form of “friend” (which seems not specifically related to anyone in St. Cecilia’s *vita*) has immediate sexual connotations. Consciously misinterpreting the import of St. Cecilia’s *vita*, Scot mocks the very idea that a woman could wield supernatural power at will and suggests, by using the term “familiar,” that the virgin martyrs and witches cannot be separated into distinct categories; rather, the same vocabulary and mode of examination should apply to the both of them. As I pointed out in the introduction, he also comments on St. Lucy, comparing her to the witch ‘that could not be burned, till a scroll was taken awaie from where she hid it, betwixt hir skin and flesh” (268). The fantasy of invulnerability, of continued speech, is presented as a failed spell and denied to women on trial.

In addition to deceiving the public, the spectre of the virgin martyr creates the disturbing possibility of imitation and referencing to authorize individual projects, through the memorability and popularity of their stories. The presence of this spectre makes itself known at the most unexpected moments, such as in the chapter on snake charming, where, having noted that many snake charmers claim a kinship to St. Paul, Scot unexpectedly inserts half a paragraph on the imitators of St. Catherine:

Others likewise have (as they brag) a *Katharine* wheele upon their bodies, and they saie they are kin to S. *Katharine*, and that they can carrie burning coles in their bare hands, and dip their said hands in hot skalding liquor, and also go into hot ovens. Whereof though the last be but a bare jest, and to be doone by anie that will prove [...] yet there is a shew made of the other, as though it were certeine and undoubted; by anointing the hands with the juice of mallowes, mercurie, urine, &c: which for a little time are defensatives against these scalding liquors, and scorching fiers. (145)

While Scot exposes these imitators as tricksters (although one wonders to what extent urine splashed on one’s hands would stand in the way of burning coals), it is their

knowledge of St. Catherine's *vita* and paraphernalia to which he objects. Sitting in hot ovens can be ignored, for no one has re-created that, but, at least according to Scot, those claiming the ability to carry burning coals and handle scalding liquids claim affinity to St. Catherine's martyrdom and speak of displaying its signs on their own bodies. Greenblatt might have spoken of the "hollowed-out" remains of the Catholic ritual, but even at the end of the sixteenth century Scot is troubled by the opposite – by the persistent fullness of the figures that, in his opinion, should have been buried with the advent of the Reformation.

To counteract this problematic influence, Scot dedicates several chapters to showing, through the example of the wildly popular St. Margaret, that a virgin martyr *vita* is nothing but "a fable, [which] may be proved by the incredible, impossible, foolish, impious, and blasphemous matters contained therein, and by the ridiculous circumstance thereof" (266). In short, he attempts to curb the possibility of emulation by arguing that, being as logically unsound and full of internal contradiction as it is, the *vita* cannot be true; consequently, the virgin martyr figure signals an absence of action and cannot act as a model for anyone. Scot's ridicule targets precisely the miraculous aspects of the story, eliminating the very possibility that any sort of supernatural exception be granted to a woman:

She sawe the heavens open, and yet she was in a close prison. But hir sight was verie cleare, that could see a little dove sitting upon a crosse so farre off. For heaven is higher than the sunne; and the sunne, when it is neerest to us, is 3966000. miles from us. And she had a good paire of eares, that could heare a dove speake so farre off. And she had good lucke, that S. *Peter*, had such leisure as to staie the gates so long for hir. (267)

The concluding note of this recital of logical flaws is the comment on the trope of marriage to Christ in virgin martyr Lives. Pretending to take it literally, Scot triumphantly reveals the virgin martyr narratives as propaganda meant to sabotage the institution of proper marriage, counter to the very spirit of Christianity. Having identified St. Margaret as Christ's wife, he directs the reader to "looke in the life of S. *Katharine*, in the golden legend, and you shall find that he was also married to S. *Katharine*, and that our ladie made the marriage, &c. An excellent authoritie for bigamie" (267).<sup>486</sup> The bulk of Scot's argument in this vicious attack rests not in rational analysis but in re-enacting, in his text, the tremendous power of the medieval imagination and illustrating the detrimental effects that belief in virgin martyrs can have on the malleable minds of the populace. The stab at somehow "disproving" the legends of saints is no more than a token gesture; Scot's real argument lies in showing how ridiculous, how disruptive to the recipient, as well as to his morals and knowledge of the world, is the example of these legends, and the imitation of them in the early modern witchcraft narratives.

To illustrate the problem of imitation further, Scot offers a story of a young, devout man from Lombardy, who, struck by the story of St. Margaret's triumph over the devil, prays that he might be granted a similar experience. The intentions of this young man are nothing but spiritually sound: "he had no respect unto the commoditie of worldlie things, but did altogether affect the salvation of his soul" (265). However, it is

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<sup>486</sup> This point has an interesting precedent in John Foxe's brief account of Richard Grace's arrest during the reign of Henry VIII, for saying that "our blessed Lady was the Godmother to S. katherine: and therefore the legende is not true in saying, that Christ, did mary with S. katherine [...] For so Christ should liue, in adultery, for marying with his Godsister" (John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011), available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 05.15.13], Book 7, 1000).

not enough for him to achieve spiritual victories over the forces of evil in his everyday existence, and he longs for a literal re-enactment of the legend and begs that the devil be visibly manifested before him, so he might overcome him in a physical struggle.

He then encounters, outside of the town's boundary, an old woman gathering herbs, whom he takes to be the devil and beats to death. This odd story neatly pinpoints Scot's anxiety with the seemingly inevitable re-production of Catholic narratives: exposed to the story of St. Margaret, the naïve consumer of Catholic superstition transforms his encounter with an old mute woman, who makes strange sounds because she is unable to speak clearly and rationally, into a battle with a supernatural creature. The description of the hag, echoing Scot's own famous description of those believed to be witches, underlines the direness of the young Lombard's mistake: she is "an ilfavoured fowle queane, that was for age decrepit and full of wrinkles, with a long bodie, leane of face, pale of colour, with ragged cloathes ... threatening him with the hooke which she carried in hir hand" (266).<sup>487</sup> Her occupation of gathering "certain herbs" in the marginal space outside of town also points to some sort of belief in her own power, if only re-enacted through brewing potions or poisons (to which occupation points the collection of herbs). This belief is echoed by the young man himself, whose trust in the legend of St. Margaret leads him to attribute to the old woman great significance and to quake in fear, thinking that "surelie she had beene no woman, but a divell appearing unto him in the shape of a woman."

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<sup>487</sup> This is the description that has been reproduced in the majority of academic texts on witchcraft: "One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists..." (Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 4). The following references to Scot are from the same page, unless otherwise indicated.

Together, the saint and the witch lead the young man astray, causing him to engage in behaviour that is criminal but, also – perhaps even more importantly – comic in its frightening intensity:

He fell upon her lustilie, and at length threw hir downe to the ground, saieing: Art thou come thou cursed divell, art thou come? No, no, thou shalt not overthrow me in visible fight, whome thou hast often overcome in invisible temptation.  
And as he spake these words, he caught hir by the haire, and drew hir about, beating hir sometimes with his hands, sometimes with his heeles, and sometimes with the hooke...

I quote this long and rather disturbing to the modern reader excerpt to communicate the slapstick aspect of this misplaced spiritual zeal. The triumphant cries, and the physical struggle, which appear both appropriate and believable in saints' Lives, are suddenly embarrassing to the reader, when re-enacted by the hapless imitator of St. Margaret upon an old woman. Misled by the virgin martyr's and the old woman's pretensions to power, the Lombard represents for Scot the attempts, undertaken by some of his foolish contemporaries, to reproduce something that existed only as a fantasy.<sup>488</sup>

The disastrous influence of the pseudo-power wielded by the two women is curbed and contained only by the appearance of a male saint – St. Vincent, who, working

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<sup>488</sup> This odd instance of imitation-cum-parody has an interesting historical parallel in the events that, apparently, took place in 1509 in Berne, Helvetia (now part of Switzerland). In *Of Ghostes and Sprites Walking by Nyght*, translated into English in 1572, Lewes (Ludwig) Lavater recounts the attempt by four monks to mislead a simple friar by having one of them dress up first as St. Barbara and then as Catherine of Sienna – the first a famous virgin martyr and the second a virgin martyr in spirit, as well as the embodiment of female political power (ed. with intro. J. Dover Wilson and May Yardley [Oxford: University Press, 1929], 28-36). As in Scot's tale, for Lavater this is certainly a narrative of a distorted Catholic fantasy making inroads into the new age and misleading the gullible. Commenting on this occurrence, and on the general deviousness of the Catholic clergy, Rudolf Gualthier wrote (English translation published in 1556), "And I pray you, what great towne, or what monasterie shall we speake of that hath not ben advaunced by one false and lyeng token or other? [...] how often have the blackefriers made lowde lies of the blessed virgin Mary, of Barbara, Katherine, and of Christe our Lorde himself?"; see *Antichriste, that is to say, a True Reporte* (Sothwarke: Christophor Trueheall, 1556), U4<sup>v</sup>-U5<sup>r</sup>. See also Parish's note on this in *Monks, Miracles, and Magic*, 171, n. 36.

in conjunction with the local priest, is able to raise the old woman temporarily from the dead and grant her the ability to speak, in order that she might make her confession. Indeed, she pronounces “everie word as distinctlie, as though she had never beene dumbe” and, having made her confession, “she spake as long as she had anie breath in hir bodie.” The image painted in the last sentence is eerily reminiscent of several virgin martyrs: St. Christina, St. Cecilia – to a certain extent St. Margaret herself! – are famous for continuing to preach, even when it seems physically impossible. In fact, Scot’s own commentary on St. Lucy’s continued and disruptive speech indicates that he is well aware of the parallel. There is, however, a radical inversion: virgin martyrs spoke in defiance of authority and the power of their speech converted all bystanders, while the old woman in Scot’s narrative is radically disempowered by this instance of speech. Operating her like a ventriloquist’s puppet, St. Vincent shows her ultimate impotence. Earlier unable to defend herself against physical assault, now she cannot even claim the attention of law, for, after her “confession” is heard, the “young man that killed hir” is acquitted and released. What can she have possibly confessed, which would have removed the charge of murder? Scot does not give his reader even a hint of what her words might have been, but a truthful account of her story would have only implicated the young man deeper and led to his certain execution at the gallows, while any admission of her own sins should not have had an effect on the proceedings.

The only way to solve this conundrum is to admit that the specific content of the old woman’s confession is unimportant: there is nothing she could have said in the defence of her murderer because, according to the plot, she knows nothing, being a

completely random old woman. We must here rise above the plot, for of course she is not a completely random old woman but a woman who appears to have pretensions of power – she gathers “certain herbs” and attempts to scare the young man away with “threatening signs” and her hook. In this, she is an alter ego of St. Margaret (to the discussion of whom this episode is appended), the saint who burst the infernal dragon, beat the devil, and is a patroness of pregnant women and, more generally, of ill people. Whether or not this story is based on a historical precedent, it is heavily allegorical, with the old woman embodying the meeting of superstitions – a merging between a saint and a witch. As such, she is of course implicated in the events, since it is this troubling figure, sometimes saint and sometimes witch, that, in Scot’s opinion, disorders the young man’s mind. If his imprisonment is the direct result of their poisonous influence, then, by assuming control over the old woman’s body, by reviving her and making her speak, St. Vincent shows the fragility of superstition, its inability to stand up to authority, and thus frees the young man from its influence.<sup>489</sup>

St. Vincent’s performance effectively counteracts Scot’s claim that the age of miracles had long passed, but the author never challenges or ridicules this particular miracle. The permission to work miracles given to the male representative of the official authority (his Catholic affiliation ignored for the moment) brings to the forefront the

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<sup>489</sup> However utterly fantastical this story might seem, this instance of saintly male ventriloquism through the flawed female is not unique to Scot. John Swan’s description of Mary Glover’s possession – a counterpoint, so to speak, to Jorden’s sceptical treatment – shows her, at the moment of deliverance, channelling her grandfather, a famous Marian martyr and Protestant saint. As she cries out at the end of the exorcism, her father begins weeping and announces that “*this was the crye of her grandfather goeing to be burned*” (*A True and Breife Report, of Mary Glovers Vexation, in Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London*, ed. and intro. Michael MacDonald, 47).

linkage of female saints – or witches – to impotent superstition.<sup>490</sup> Unlike Bale, who emphasizes the sinister power of the saint-cum-witch, Scot denies her any power at all: the young man succumbs because he believes wrongly and attempts to act on his mistaken belief. There is, Scot suggests, nothing to be anxious about: medieval superstition, symbolized by the female figure, cannot stand up when it encounters the authoritative male examiner – St. Vincent or, as the case may be, Reginald Scot himself. Just as St. Vincent is able to perform his exorcism of influence, to extract the young man from his entanglement with the old hag and the virgin martyr, so Scot attempts to free the Protestant thought from its connections to the feminized Middle Ages, laying the belief in women working miracles to rest on the other side of the Reformation.

#### **A Case of (Dis)Possession: The Return of St. Uncumber**

Decrying the Catholic superstition that continues to infest early modern England, Samuel Harsnett sarcastically describes the imaginary nocturnal dangers, in fear of which the gullible members of the nation would not dare to cross the threshold after dark without a number of precautions: “a dosen *avemaries*, two dosen on crosses surely

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<sup>490</sup> This also suggests that the objectives Scot’s overall project cannot be simply described, as Greenblatt does, as “disenchantment” and demystification. While his “principal concern” certainly is “with the boundary between the imaginary and the real,” as well as with “distinguish[ing] the projections of troubled fantasy from the solid truths of the material world,” the solid truths can apparently include male Catholic saints temporarily raising someone from the dead and making mutes speak. “[T]he passage from inchoate emotion to figuration – from fear or impatience or desire to an identifiable, luminously visible figure” is only “the source of evil” when the figure produced as a result is female; see “Shakespeare Bewitched,” in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 108-35, esp. 115; 114; 121. In a more recent treatment of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Almond describes this moment as “clerical conjuring”; however, this interpretation is enabled by a selective and not entirely accurate reading of Scot’s narrative, with the old woman beaten “almost to death” and subsequently “cured [...] of her injuries” (161). Clive Holmes points out in his review of Almond’s monograph that this study is occasionally unfaithful to history and to the text at hand; see *English Historical Review* 128.533 (2013): 952-53.

signed, and halfe a dosen *Pater nosters*, and the commending himselfe to the tuition of *S. Uncumber* or els our blessed Lady.”<sup>491</sup> The sentiment itself is perfectly in keeping with Harsnett’s overarching project of undermining the Catholic words and objects of power and exposing them as not simply useless but as actively toxic; in this particular long paragraph, he rails at the countless beliefs and rituals that govern the everyday life of an English person in the countryside. His choice of target for mockery, however, is curious: while crossing oneself, reciting *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster*, and calling upon the Virgin Mary are all run-of-the-mill gestures of Catholic worship as modern scholarship knows them, the supplication offered to St. Uncumber is not.

In the notes to William Roye’s *Brefe Dialoge bitwene a Christen Father and His Stobborne Sonne* (1527), the editors call St. Uncumber one of “the most preposterous saints” and see fit to quote Albin Butler’s description of her in his *Lives of Saints* as “a curiosity of hagiography” that is “hardly worth including in a collection of lives of the saints but for the fact that it has the unenviable distinction of being one of the most obviously false and preposterous of the pseudo-pious romances by which simple Christians have been deceived or regaled.”<sup>492</sup> The editors clearly feel that this is an exhaustive evaluation that can be conveyed to the readers uncritically, and that Roye could have chosen to include the mention of this virgin martyr in his narrative only because the utter ridiculousness of her *vita* would have been obvious to any sane reader.

At the same time, St. John Schorne, paired with St. Uncumber in the stubborn son’s

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<sup>491</sup> Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London: James Roberts, 1603), in *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham*, ed. and intro. F.W. Brownlow (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 193-335, esp. 307. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>492</sup> William Roye, *A Breffe Dialoge bitwene a Christen Father and his Stobborne Sonne*, ed. Douglas H. Parker and Bruce Krajewski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 195, note to ll. 600-1.

naïve question as to whether he might not “wother soche wholly saynctes to make intercession” for him, is spared this dismissive treatment, even though the distinctive feature of this saint appears to have been the act of summoning the devil into a boot.<sup>493</sup> After including St. John Schorne under the general umbrella of preposterousness, the editors proceed to acknowledge his thriving cult in early modern England: no such acknowledgement is offered to St. Uncumber.

My motive for returning my attention to this saint, after a brief look in the last chapter, at her role in More’s *Dialogues*, is two-fold. I am struck, on the one hand, by the willingness of the scholars writing about this virgin martyr in the last years of the twentieth century to adopt, unquestioningly, the dismissive view of popular devotion borrowed from the Bollandists but also, less directly, from the early modern suspicion of medieval piety. Roye’s editors Douglas H. Parker and Bruce Krajewski are not alone in this. So, Ilse E. Friesen declares that in England the cult of this saint “degenerated into gross superstition” and was “used by women for self-serving, sometimes devious ends.”<sup>494</sup> This indignation and ridicule betray a sort of reflexive mistrust of the “quotidian” saints and, more specifically, of the opportunities female saints – in this case, virgin martyrs – potentially offered to their female worshippers. Their popularity

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<sup>493</sup> Roye, *A Breve Dialogue*, 116, ll. 601-2; see also the note.

<sup>494</sup> Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2001), 60; 58. Throughout her book, Friesen argues that, before being perverted by later superstition, St. Wilgefortis was the patron of health and fertility, but also the one who eased the passage into the next world for the dying. However, it is difficult to estimate how far one can believe her evidence, considering that the author references a non-academic website to prove that Bale’s couplet about this saint became “a popular verse” (61). For a more historically grounded account of St. Uncumber’s transformations, see Elizabeth Nightlinger, “The Female *Imitatio Christi* and Medieval Popular Religion: The Case of St Wilgefortis,” in *Feminea Medievalia: Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Cambridge: Academia Press, 1993), 291-328. Nightlinger concludes that St Uncumber’s “intercessory powers were tailored by the differing needs of women in different localities” (328).

and continuing presence in early modern England is taken by some scholars as an affront to rationality. In labelling St. Uncumber preposterous, these scholars invoke a sense of temporal displacement, suggesting that the engagement with the saints popular in the Middle Ages is in itself a reversal of the proper sequence of events<sup>495</sup> – a misuse of the past, so to speak.

Harsnett's text is a fascinating piece of evidence for this discussion because, engaged in a satirical treatment of very recent events, he carefully frames his narrative in theatrical terms, emphasizing, of course, the staged and fraudulent nature of the Catholic exorcism but also its – and his own! – indebtedness to various pre-Reformation genres. Harsnett's inclusion of St. Uncumber in his text on fraudulent possession and exorcism clearly attests to her abiding popularity, even in 1603. Considered in the context of the entire pamphlet, it also points to the obsessive attention to the virgin martyr as the signifier of power that is simultaneously Catholic and feminine. In linking this figure to the subjects of possession and witchcraft – real or feigned – Protestant writers strive to re-write their model into unrecognizability, to re-mould the genre conventions that accompany her, and thus eliminate the threat she represents.

In writing the *Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, Harsnett is addressing the Denham case, which involved a series of exorcisms performed by a group of priests, in 1585-86, on four girls (the servants Sara and Frideswide Williams, Anne Smith, and finally Elizabeth Calthrope, about whom little is known) and a boy (Richard

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<sup>495</sup> This is the original meaning of the word “preposterous,” and the one wide-spread in the sixteenth century; OED, 1a: “Having or placing last what should be first; inverted in position or order.”

Mainy).<sup>496</sup> As F. W. Brownlow shows in his historical introduction, the supposedly possessed group was moved from one lodging to another, and the exorcisms were frequently performed before groups of people, although the actual size of these audiences is open to debate.<sup>497</sup> The details of the case became publicly known in 1598-99, in connection with the arrest of the Catholic Robert Barnes; all members of the supposedly possessed group were questioned and submitted depositions (with the exception of Elizabeth Calthrope, who was by then dead of unrelated causes).<sup>498</sup> Seeking to undermine Catholic ritual and clergy, Harsnett positions the events of the exorcisms as a theatrical performance and, more importantly, as a failed performance. Although he points to the generic models for the various moments in his narrative, he also emphasizes that the attempt to imitate these models in the sixteenth century fails dramatically, producing a desperate confusion of characters and, ultimately, confirming the priests' position as ignorant infidels.

As early as chapter 1, he has already identified the Catholic priests as "the Actors in this holy Comedie" and referred to the exorcisms as a "play of sacred miracles" and "this mysticall play" (201-202). This initial confusion and proliferation of genre allusions grows more complicated as the book progresses and incorporates more and more references to religious texts and performances: mentions of Vice plays, mummeries, and Biblical stories (291; 321), just to name a few, as well as numerous hagiographical allusions. Harsnett's multiplicity of genre acknowledgements invites his

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<sup>496</sup> These exorcisms are prefaced by the successful exorcism of Nicholas Marwood, a servant to Anthony Babington.

<sup>497</sup> F. W. Brownlow, *Shakespeare, Harsnett, and the Devils of Denham* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 25-27.

<sup>498</sup> Harsnett's original publication contains the depositions as an appendix.

reader to evaluate the connections between this early seventeenth-century book and all possible antecedents, however unlikely they might seem, and to consider the ways in which the early modern performance of Catholic convention inevitably falls woefully short of the prototype. At the same time, the emphasis on the constructed nature of the source text or performance, and on its openness to being villainously imitated, casts a shadow of doubt on the model itself.

On the one hand, a virgin martyr *vita* seems a somewhat unlikely genre allusion for an exposé on fraudulent exorcism. On the other, its focus on the female body as the locus of spiritual struggle and physical suffering makes it perfectly suited to Harsnett's particular interest in the interaction between the Catholic exorcists and the supposedly possessed women. Indeed, he explicitly foregrounds this interest by pointing out his misgivings that "*Sara* being a seely young innocent wench of sixteen yeeres should be more devil-haunted then any of the possessed men" and asking rhetorically: "...how it comes to passe that [...] now in these novell upstart miracles from Rome still it is the ill hap of more women to be haunted then men?" (251-52). While, to be sure, the case being treated here involves possessed males as well, they seem to have no physical, gendered presence, since "there is no mention at all of common lodging and couching the devil in a peculiar part of the body, but only in the wenches" (252). Through his allusions to several well-known virgin martyrs, Harsnett forces a comparison between the heroines of that genre and the bodies of *Sara* and *Frideswide Williams*, and *Anne Smith*, supposedly possessed and undergoing the torturous rigours of the exorcism. This comparison

inevitably breaks down, further problematizing both the scenes of exorcism and the saints' *vitae* inherited by early modern England.

The presence of the virgin martyr *vita* in the text is signalled, in addition to the reference to St. Uncumber, by the mention of St. Margaret's encounter with the devil and, twice, of St. Barbara. These three names also constitute Harsnett's entire pantheon of female saints in this book (298; 333). The order of their appearance traces a very clear trajectory of development: invoked first, St. Margaret, "who with the bare signe of the Crosse affrighted a devil that was comming unto her in the forme of a great Dragon," is the very embodiment (however tongue-in-cheek) of the medieval maiden capable of a great resistance against the powers of evil (298). Some pages later, however, St. Uncumber appears as a possibly potent defender but only against imaginary dangers, while in the very end of the text the assurance that St. Barbara was *not* present in "all this feigned tragedie, as we have let you to see through the whole course of the same" acts to outline a vague expectation of presence that is never satisfied (333). And yet, hidden in the middle of the book, is a reference to "the presence of St. Barbara" at the exorcism, along with other objects of Catholic ritual (276). This dual state, the contradiction of simultaneously existing and not existing, betrays Harsnett's continuing attention to the virgin martyr as a model that, despite all protestations, exerts problematic influence and must be firmly repudiated.

Harsnett's refashioning of the genre, as in Aske's case, relies heavily on the reader's willingness to accept that the earlier dichotomy of pagans and newly converted Christians now easily translates into the dichotomy of Catholics and Protestants, in

which Catholicism is “naught els but a perfect apisme and imitation of Gentilisme and Hethenish superstition” (271). In fact, not unlike Bale, Harsnett makes a point of arguing that Catholic priests are worse than the naïve heathen worshippers, since they are fully aware, in implementing the instruments of their exorcism, “that there is neither virtue, ability, nor proportion in any of these gewgawes to move or stil the devil” (271). Rather, they deliberately adopt Christian beliefs and signs in order to commit the great sin of transforming them into heathen props; as Harsnett puts it, “[e]nters the holy Sacrament upon their stage, deformed by these hell-monsters into a most detestable Idoll of the masse.” The Catholic departure from the Biblical mode of exorcism (a concise, purely verbal one) places the audience “plainly within compasse of the heathen challenge, that we be *lignei dei cultores*, worshippers and servaunts to a wooden god” (300; 299).<sup>499</sup>

Theatrically speaking, then, the exorcists take on the role of the pagan villains of medieval drama or, more specifically, of the pagan officials striving to effect an anti-conversion in the Christian heroines. The readers witness the maidens being bound,

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<sup>499</sup> On the whole, this idea seems to have become rather commonplace in early modern England: so, Stephen Batman, in *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddes*, traces a steady trajectory of the false gods from Greco-Roman and Egyptian pantheons to Catholic saints and contemporary Anabaptists. He comments, in the last pages of his treatise, “These Hellish sortes of Errours are more preposterous & wicked, then the laws or statutes of the Pagans, as though in the respect of any commendation: bad is the best, for as the divel, auctor of all mischief beganne to infect the former Age with illusions, so now in these later dayes he hath almost poysoned the remained seeds, with al abominations”; see Batman, *The Golden Booke of the Leaden Goddes*, 1577 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1976, *The Renaissance and the Gods*, 13), 34. Curiously, this continuity seems to be generally ignored by the critics. Philippa Berry imagines Batman’s argument as a neat dichotomy between pagan beliefs of antiquity and the Christian “visual objectivity of reason”; see “Renewing the Concept of Renaissance: The Cultural Influence of Paganism Reconsidered,” in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, ed. Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 17-34, esp. 25. Note that in his *Daemonologie*, James I evolved a cunning argument along the same lines to explain why Catholic exorcisms are sometimes efficacious, suggesting that the Catholic priests and the devil work toward the same goal: following an exorcism, the devil releases the possessed purposefully, “thereby to obtaine the perpetual hurt of the soules of so many that by these false miracles may be induced or confirmed in the profession of that erroneous Religion” (71-2).

groped, and flogged,<sup>500</sup> as well as made to imbibe revolting drinks, inhale stifling fumes, and generally accept physical hardships that accompany the exorcisms (273-74). At the same time, the trials of Anne, Sara, and Frideswide are a manifest failure, for in complying with the priests' desires, the three girls undermine their own status both as good Christians and as virgins. Harsnett argues that the ritual of exorcism is quite deliberately conceived as a tool of stripping the one exorcised of her piety: "this is theyr theoreme sure and sound, that the greatest part of Protestants be possessed; and so they proceeded with *Anne, Fid,* and *Sara*. Who before they became entangled in their holy ginnes, were protestant maydes and went orderly to Church" (227). Harsnett's description of exorcism, with its stylized motions of torture, and the priests as pagan interrogators, both mimics and distorts a virgin martyr's *passio*. This description also suggests that in early modern England this genre, inherited from the Middle Ages, takes on a completely diametrical meaning. Where earlier the experience of martyrdom had served to solidify the heroines' Christianity and to position them as worthy models, here Protestant girls falling into the clutches of Catholic priests are rapidly stripped of their religious convictions and transformed into purely physical creatures, fully submissive to male control and wide open to sexual assaults.

Strong indications of erotic encounters are scattered throughout the treatise; in particular, Harsnett interprets the exorcists' chasing of the devils through the girls' bodies as, simultaneously, a rude violation of their modesty and a fiery trial that they fail in their quasi-sexual submission to the interrogator. He asks the priests rhetorically:

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<sup>500</sup> Frideswide in particular receives five lashes with the stole, and feels it "three or four dayes after, and had the marks of it uppon her armes longer to be seene" (274).

Was this a fayre chase for holy anointed priests to make [...] to bring the same holy hands piping hote from the Altar to the chayre where *Sara* sate at Masse, to seize with the same hands upon her toe, slip them up along her legge, her knee, her thigh, and so along all parts of her body till you came neere her neck, and by the way with the same holy hands to handle, pinch, and gripe where the devil in his blacke modesty did forbear, till you made her crie *oh?* [...] *Fid. Williams* doth complaine (looke in their owne confessions) that with your holy hote burning hands you did hunt the devil counter in her too, and did toe-burne, shin-burne, knee-burne her, and so forth, till you made her crie *oh...* (261-62)

In this explicit description, Harsnett shows the priests conducting a mock examination as they examine the girls minutely, inch by inch, from toes to the head. With their hands “piping hote” and “hote burning,” the priests embody both the pagan interrogators and the very fire into which virgin martyrs are traditionally thrown. However, while virgin martyrs endure the fiery trial without complaint or injury, we see both Sara and Frideswide react by crying out in a way that mingles pain and sexual excitement, as they are handled in places where even the devil is ashamed to intrude. Having brought the figure of the virgin martyr into his narrative, Harsnett consciously distorts it, showing the maidens on trial vulnerable to heat and pain but also, more importantly, easily susceptible to the erotic overtones offered by the priestly touch. In contrast to Elizabeth I, shown unharmed in the middle of a fire in Heywood’s later account, lower-class girls cannot be expected to maintain the same resolve and, thrust into a trial of their maidenhood, fail miserably in a way which, as Harsnett’s allusions suggest, is a comment on the virgin martyr model as flawed and unusable.

What is perhaps the most outrageous moment in this erotic torture, during which the relic wielded by priests is pressed against Sara’s private parts, also curiously echoes an assertion reported by Dinzelbacher, that witches inserted “Sanctissimum” –

presumably the host or holy relics – into their vaginas.<sup>501</sup> It is unlikely that either the participants in the exorcism or the author is aware of the connection; however, Harsnett’s satirical delivery of the episode performs the same function of desacralizing the most sacred possession of the church by imbuing it with erotic significance. Momentarily, the failed virgin martyr becomes a failed witch,<sup>502</sup> who participates in her own humiliation without obtaining the power she had been promised by the priests, repeatedly described as more devilish than the devils. Having accepted their offer of possession, she does not gain the freedom and prominence she had desired but, instead, is displayed to a variety of spectators as a lesson in subjection, Harsnett’s treatise being only the latest theatrical performance of this.

Julia Lupton comments on the literary afterlife of hagiographical conventions, “It is not simply that secular literature empties out inherited forms, following the negative procedures of parody and ironization, but that this tradition of Renaissance texts articulates these hagiographic motifs *as empty*, as evacuated tombs whose very immobility mobilizes the hagiographic and post-hagiographic genres they will have come to define.”<sup>503</sup> Following, to a certain extent, Greenblatt’s train of thought, her argument views this void – “an empty tomb or an unhealable wound” – as an actively induced absence that can then produce the new, secular literature.<sup>504</sup> And yet, the use of hagiographic conventions in the work of such a sceptic as Harsnett certainly leaves room

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<sup>501</sup> Dinzlacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?*, 158.

<sup>502</sup> Note also Frideswide’s account of the priests inserting needles into her flesh, which for the early modern audience would be heavily reminiscent the pricking of the witch (365-66).

<sup>503</sup> Julia Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints: Hagiography, Typology, and Renaissance Literature* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 69.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.* This argument is most forcefully articulated on pages 66 to 70.

for doubt: incorporating St. Margaret, St. Uncumber, and St. Barbara into his text, he stops just short of articulating their impotence but rather argues – unsuccessfully – for their lack of application to his narrative. The contortions of the pseudo-possessed maidens, traced by the author in great detail, speak a different kind of truth: the medieval virgin martyr is not at all immobilized, despite the ongoing efforts of the Protestant writers, but invades early modern England in various, violently mobile shapes. What we see in Harsnett is not a complacent secularized narrative carved on the hollow tomb of hagiography but rather an anxious tussle with the virgin martyrs who actively inhabit their tombs and monuments, and refuse to be silent when their tongues are cut out. His book is a construction of the virgin martyr's transformation into a pseudo-demoniac helpless in the hands of charlatans when the banishing act had failed. The virgin martyr is rendered simultaneously sinister and pathetic, but is also viewed as a figure that demands ongoing repudiation and textual warning to the readers against falling into the Catholic folly and privileging models offered by medieval Catholicism.

### **The Witch Meets the Virgin Queen: The Virgin Martyr Figure as a Uniting Force**

This chapter has shown how early modern appropriations of the virgin martyr figure are mediated by the ongoing anxiety of influence and apprehension of imitation. The virgin martyr-cum-witch is repulsive and, ultimately, impotent and must not be appropriated for individual use, while Elizabeth I, incorporating elements of the virgin martyr, is emphatically unavailable for emulation. Furthermore, these two strands of appropriation, seemingly located at an impossible distance from one another, are not quite as distinct as they may seem. Elizabeth's status as England's sacred virgin makes

her specifically vulnerable to the suspicions accorded to the Catholic virgin martyr – suspicions of deceit, wantonness, and witchcraft.<sup>505</sup> A number of scholars have noted these suggestions and sometimes direct accusations, aired by public opinion and voiced by Elizabeth’s enemies. Carole Levin offers detailed analysis in several studies and notes especially the rumours of the queen’s lovers and even illegitimate children,<sup>506</sup> while Rob Content analyzes the imagery of monstrosity and demonism in composite portraiture intended as a criticism of the queen.<sup>507</sup> As a conclusion to the chapter, I would like to examine the ways in which her identification as a holy virgin, and the genre conventions associated with this image, carry the inevitable threat of subversion and thus open her to a variety of tainting descriptions and associations.

In 1588, William Allen produced *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England*, a treatise that condemned Elizabeth I and called for liberating England from the reign of this Protestant monarch. While, on the one hand, this treatise, released on the eve of the Spanish Armada attack, clearly pursues a number of political goals, it also demonstrates marked sixteenth-century anxiety about a woman claiming the status of an

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<sup>505</sup> For a more general discussion of this, see, Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, chapter 43, “Kingcraft and Witchcraft.” See also Kirilka Stavreva, “‘There’s Magic in Thy Majesty’: Queenship and Witchspeak in Jacobean Shakespeare,” in *High and Mighty Queens” of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 151-68, for the linking of queens and witches in early modern drama.

<sup>506</sup> Carole Levin, “Power, Politics, and Sexuality: Images of Elizabeth I,” in *The Politics of Gender*, 95-110; see also her “‘We Shall Never Have a Merry World While the Queene Lyveth’: Gender, Monarchy, and the power of Seditious Words,” in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 77-95, and *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, esp. chapter 4, “Wanton and Whore.” See also Susan Doran, “Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?” in *Dissing Elizabeth*, 30-59; Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I*, 160-2; and Andrew Hadfield, “Duessa’s Trial and Elizabeth’s Error: Judging Elizabeth in Spenser’s *Fairie Queene*,” in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, 56-76, esp. 60-63.

<sup>507</sup> Rob Content, “Fair is Fowle: Interpreting Anti-Elizabethan Composite Portraiture,” in *Dissing Elizabeth*, 229-251. See also my own article “‘Between You and Her No Comparison’: Witches, Healers, and Elizabeth I in John Lyly’s *Endymion*,” in *Early Theatre* 13.1 (2010): 37-64.

exalted maiden. Allen is understandably incensed by the worship accorded to the queen, and his description of this worship is eerily reminiscent of Protestant rhetoric directed at Catholic ritual: “she hath caused the annuall daie of her coronation in all partes of the realme to be sacredly kepte and sollemnised, with ringing, singing, shewes & cerimonies...”<sup>508</sup>

Also not unlike Protestant writers critiquing Catholic saints, Allen accuses the queen of deceitfulness and of seeking, under the guise of holiness, to disrupt the institution of marriage. Having been urged to marry, “she merely and mockingly answered, that she wold die a maiden Queene,” but in fact her actions act toward “condemnation of chaste and lawfull marriage (whereunto as to a bridle of her licentiousness, she ysemie)” (B2<sup>r</sup>). The specific details of Elizabeth’s licentiousness are also quite familiar in the light of my earlier analysis of Protestant rhetoric directed at Catholic figures of worship:

she hath abused her bodie [...] by unspeakable and incredible variety of luste, which modesty suffereth not to be remembered, neyther were it to chaste eares to be uttered how shamefully she hath defiled and infamed her person and country, and made her Courte as a trappe, by this damnable and detestable arte, to intangle in sinne and overthrowe the yonger sorte of the nobilitye and gentlemen of the lande, whereby she is become notorious to the worlde, & in other cuntries a comon fable for this her turpitude... (B2<sup>v</sup>)<sup>509</sup>

Mimicking Protestant discourse directed against sacred objects and rituals of

Catholicism, Allen acknowledges Elizabeth’s status as the Protestant equivalent of the

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<sup>508</sup> William Allen, *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England and Ireland*, 1588, ed. D.M. Rogers (Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971, *English Recusant Literature, 1558-1640*, 74), B2<sup>r</sup>. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>509</sup> Levin comments on this treatise in *The Heart and Stomach of a King*: “His claim that she took lovers demonstrates how her female identity and the beliefs about appropriate womanly behavior determined the attacks on her monarchy” (81).

Catholic saint: much of his criticism could have been borrowed verbatim from Bale's *Actes of Englyshe Votaries*, including the concern with ceremony and the perceived threat to the institution of marriage. As Elizabeth's quoted desire to "die a maiden" identifies her as not only a saint but a potential virgin martyr, Allen also seeks to reinterpret certain generic traits that link the queen to this figure. For example, he focuses on her rejection of numerous suitors (which Heywood will later retell as a conscious spiritual choice made by a young girl) to suggest that this rejection in itself constitutes damnable trickery. He argues that Elizabeth "promised mariage to sum of the nobility at home, making many of them in single lyfe to the danger of their soules, and decay of their families, to attend her pleasure," and treated foreign nobles no more fairly. According to Allen, she "no lesse depelie dallied & abused by dissembly almost all the great personages of Europe, to whom [...] she proferre herself, to the mockery & finall delusion of them all" (B3<sup>v</sup>). Finally, the queen is specifically accused of offering marriage as "baite" and "deceitefull suggestion" to the French duke, who, as a result of the subsequent rejection, "was driven in to those dangerous actions and dishonourable affaires of Heretikes and rebels, to his great dishonour, and likelie shorteninge of his dayes" (B3<sup>r</sup>).

As Levin has commented, the direction of Allen's reproach reveals a set of beliefs about appropriate behaviour for women,<sup>510</sup> but it also points the early modern anxiety about the way in which a woman's commitment to virginity can enable her to subvert the desires of powerful men and to defy their marital expectations. Allen's

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<sup>510</sup> Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 81.

solution for combating this anxiety is to insist that, in Elizabeth's case, this commitment is not at all sincere and only serves as part of a complex game intended to amuse the queen and to work reverse conversion on the suitors, potentially transforming them into "Heretikes and rebels." Her claim of holiness and chastity, as in the case of Catholic saints, makes Elizabeth vulnerable to grossly overblown abuse, and accusations not simply of losing her virginity but of engaging in unmentionable acts and spreading this infection to those who come within the walls of the court.<sup>511</sup> As a "comon fable for this her turpitude," she is a drastically flawed model that is continuously disseminated through the world – a false virgin martyr, whose influence must be counteracted and contained. Not only does Allen's invective point, once again, to the extent to which the distrust of holy virginity and specific accusations against it are shared by early modern Protestants and Catholics, but it also shows that even Elizabeth I, as an appropriator and emulator of this model, is not exempt from these generic suspicions and challenges.

Moreover, the account of the queen's death by Elizabeth Southwell shows the extent to which these suspicions had become part of the queen's overall narrative. While the Southwell account is eventually used by Robert Persons to condemn Elizabeth I, it is originally written as a purportedly faithful narrative of the young maid of honour to the dying queen.<sup>512</sup> It begins with a seemingly extraneous detail:

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<sup>511</sup> In *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, Levin lists and analyzes all the sexual sins of which Allen accuses the queen (80-1).

<sup>512</sup> I will be using the text of this account, "A True Relation of what succeeded at the sickness and death of Queen Elizabeth," as reproduced in Catherine Loomis's essay "Elizabeth Southwell's Manuscript Account of the Death of Queen Elizabeth [with Text]," in *The Mysteries of Elizabeth I: Selections from English Literary Renaissance*, ed. Kirby Farrell and Kathleen Swain (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 217-244, esp. 220-222. See the rest of the article for the details of Person's appropriation of Southwell's narrative. See also a later, more detailed version of this article as chapter 3 in

Her Maj<sup>tie</sup> being in verie good health, one daie S<sup>t</sup> John Stanhope being the vice chamberlaine and secretary Cecills dependant and familiar, came and presented her maj<sup>tie</sup> with a piece of gold of the bignes of an angell full of characters which he said a old woman in Wales bequethed her on her death bed, and thereupon he discoursed how the said old woman by virtue of the same lived to the age of 120 yeares and being in that age having all her bodie wethered and consumed, and wanting nature to nourish. she died commanding the said piece of gold to be carefully sent her maj<sup>tie</sup> alleging further that as long as the said old woman wore yt upon her bodie she could not die. (ll. 1-12)

Pointing to the use of the word “familiar” to describe Stanhope – “a word usually reserved for the animal that serves a conjurer or witch,” Loomis suggests that this episode “implicates the Queen and her courtiers in superstitious practice” and several pages later sees it as the description of bewitchment, the workers of which must be penalized.<sup>513</sup> It seems to me, however, that Elizabeth is here implicated not simply as the victim of witchcraft but also as a willing participant in its rituals. While Loomis links the piece of gold with a useless piece of brass used to fool the gullible in Thomas Nashe’s *Pierce Pennilesse*, it is also explicitly compared, in the text, to a golden angel. Taking into consideration its healing powers, one might identify it as an odd, distorted replica of the golden angels handed out by the queen herself in her capacity as the healer of scrofula. It is also strongly reminiscent, of course, of the charms and amulets supposedly used by witches to defend themselves from harm: earlier, I quoted Scot’s contemptuous reference to the story of a witch who was said to keep a little scroll under her skin and so could not be burnt. The old Welsh woman, who first uses the charm and then passes it on to another old woman, the queen, has all the features of a witch, including the

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Loomis, *The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Reconstructing the Virgin Queen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83-117.

<sup>513</sup> Loomis, ““Elizabeth Southwell’s Manuscript Account,” 223, 226.

unexpected link to the Cumaean Sibyl, who, having been granted immortality, did not also receive eternal youth and had her body gradually shrink and wither. In her eager acceptance of the golden piece and its attendant story, Queen Elizabeth becomes the heir and successor of the witch, perverting her own earlier position as the sacred distributor of the coins in the course of healing others.

The narrative, in other words, begins with an episode in which a healing object is reinterpreted, in much the same way as to how Catholic paraphernalia was reinterpreted by the Protestants, and its user moves from being a figure of sacred power to being the cause of fear and unease at best. Some forty lines down, for example, we encounter an off-hand mention of Lady Guilford, who, “then wayting on the queene and leaving her asleep in her privie chamber, then met her as she thought 3 or 4 chambers off.” Hastily coming toward the queen, Lady Guilford sees her vanish and, returning to the chamber, finds her “asleep as before” (ll. 53-59). In itself, this is a disturbing moment that stages a splitting of the queen into two entities, one familiar and remaining in the appointed location – the other elusive and roaming. Furthermore, it is not very far removed from the contemporary debate as to whether witches actually leave their homes to go to the Sabbath: whether they stay at home and attend Sabbath mentally (or imagine having been there, as the sceptics suggest), or whether they are able to be present in two places at once. Whatever the answer, the queen’s sinister double presence forcefully brings this debate into Southwell’s account, placing Elizabeth under examination and even, perhaps, on trial: is this mental projection? Is the devil impersonating her, as he is sometimes said to impersonate witches so that their husbands, waking up in the night, would not notice

that they are gone? Is the queen really present in two places at once, albeit for a short while? Considering the questions suggested by Lady Guilford's sighting, the reader is shocked but not particularly surprised when, dead and sealed in her coffin, the queen literally explodes from the inside: "her bodie and head break with such a crack that spleated the wood lead and cer cloth" (ll. 87-88). Loomis suggests that such an explosion could have been possible if the queen was not disembowelled before being placed in the coffin, as other sources insist she was not,<sup>514</sup> but Southwell, specifying that the disembowelment did take place, emphasizes the supernatural aspect of the event. The queen's miraculously exploding body becomes the locus of an anti-miracle: a saint's body remains whole even when torn into pieces, but Elizabeth's body is impelled into mechanical fragmentation and disorder.

Southwell's manuscript has been continuously dismissed by scholars, following J.E. Neale's condemnation of it as "revelling in witchcraft and nightmare [...] and working to a climax of horror."<sup>515</sup> However, as many narratives I have so far discussed show, improbability, surrealism, or vivid grotesqueness do not necessarily make a story meaningless to its contemporary readers. Southwell's belief that the queen chose to wear a golden charm to stave off death, that an apparition of her was seen walking through chambers, and that her corpse mysteriously exploded, breaking the coffin, and the seeming spread of this belief through the court, represent a comprehensive set of ideas about magic and witchcraft that are, in public consciousness, not antithetical to the sacred person of Elizabeth. Having styled herself as a holy virgin, the queen is here

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid, 228-32.

<sup>515</sup> Quoted in Loomis, "Elizabeth Southwell's Manuscript Account," 241.

exposed as an old woman turning to sinister practices in an effort to preserve her life and undergoes a sort of reverse martyrdom, with her body rendered impotent through fragmentation. Imitation of holy virginity, Southwell's account suggests, is never entirely safe, for even the royal virgin can be transformed into an old witch, who is afraid to go into her bed for the fear of hellish visions (ll. 33-37).

## CHAPTER 5:

### UNTIMELY WOMEN: VIRGIN MARTYRS ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

#### Early Modern Theatre and the Question of the Past

In the previous chapter, I explored the issues of cultural consciousness and the forms assumed in it by the figure of the virgin martyr. In this chapter, however, I will focus more closely on the ways in which the early modern stage invokes virgin martyrs as complex and potent symbols of nostalgia for, repulsion against, and uneasy negotiation with the national and religious past. At the same time, even as the contemporary debates are recycled into the medium of performance, virgin martyrs and their multifaceted versions continue to participate in the early modern imagining and prescription of female conduct, functioning as a threat to proper femininity, and as a destructive temptation.

To the existing discussions of Shakespeare's engagement with the Catholic Middle Ages, and their stubborn persistence into the new, Protestant era,<sup>516</sup> I am adding a vision of the stage as the place where the writers may safely explore and contain the uncomfortable heritage of pre-Reformation times.<sup>517</sup> In a certain sense, I am here

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<sup>516</sup> See Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010); and two very recent collections, *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Performance and Adaptation of the Plays with Medieval Sources or Settings*, ed. Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (London: McFarland, 2009), esp. R.F. Yeager, "Shakespeare as Medievalist: What It Means for Performing *Pericles*," 215-213; and *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. Curtis Perry and John Watkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. Sarah Beckwith, "Shakespeare's Resurrections," 45-67. See also Michael O'Connell, "Vital Cultural Practices: Shakespeare and the Mysteries," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 149-168; Deanne Williams, "Shakespearean Medievalism and the Limits of Periodization in *Cymbeline*," *Literature Compass* 8.6 (2011): 390-403; and Beatrice Groves, *Texts and Traditions: Religion in Shakespeare 1592-1604* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), esp. chapter 2, "Shakespeare's Incarnational Aesthetic: The Mystery Plays and Catholicism."

<sup>517</sup> In other words, in focussing on a particular hagiographical genre, I am extending Julia Reinhard Lupton's proposition that in Shakespeare "The word *saint* functions more as a placeholder for a shifting set

attempting to tread the middle ground between the vision of Shakespearean theatre as a religious or pseudo-religious force, as Jeffrey Knapp does, among others, and Anthony Dawson's vision of this theatre as essentially secular or secularizing.<sup>518</sup> No doubt, theatre can, as Dawson aptly puts it, "cannibalize other discourses," but the strong tradition of Christian drama in England means that plays' "dissociation from their authoritative sources" does not necessarily indicate secularization.<sup>519</sup> As the famous story of an unscripted devil appearing in the production of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* suggests, early modern theatrical performance could easily serve as a space in which religious ideas and beliefs took on a visible shape and gained strength.<sup>520</sup> Dawson's argument that the comic aspect of martyrdom in *The Virgin Martyr* (of which more later in this chapter) "highlights the process of theatrical appropriation through irony" and turns the spectacle into mere entertainment<sup>521</sup> may be further elaborated in the light of the Passion sequence in the Towneley cycle. As Paul Whitfield White showed, at least throughout the sixteenth century, drama of the Reformation remained a valuable resource for a variety of educational projects, some of them directly related to ecclesiastical and

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of linked topics and problems – the sacred, the sacrifice, the exception – than as a character type with a specific literary history"; see *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>518</sup> Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), and Anthony B. Dawson, "The Secular Theater," in *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, ed. Kenneth J.E. Graham and Philip D. Collington (Houndmills, Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan: 2009), 238-260. See also the earlier, more Shakespeare-specific version of Dawson's article, "Shakespeare and Secular Performance," in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 83-97.

<sup>519</sup> Dawson, "The Secular Theater," 255.

<sup>520</sup> Genevieve Guenther, "Why Devils Came When Faustus Called Them," *Modern Philology* 109.1 (2011): 46-70, esp. 46-7.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

religious questions.<sup>522</sup> In other words, in addition to the view of the early modern stage as theatre for the sake of theatre, with religious conventions and figures borrowed to ensure majestic spectacle and emotional impact, I am interested in the numerous uses of drama for both Protestant and Catholic writers.

On the other hand, I am not suggesting that early modern drama, and Shakespeare in particular, pursued a hidden religious agenda, as some scholars have recently suggested.<sup>523</sup> Rather than see Shakespeare as a covert promoter of Catholicism, I take the point of Eamon Duffy, who aligns the playwright with the antiquarian movement and its “Delight in and reverence for the ruins of the old religion,” and Arthur Marotti, who sees him as drawn to “some of those emotionally powerful features of medieval Catholicism that broadened the range of religious experience and perception, preserving a sense of the mysteriousness and wondrousness of both the natural and supernatural worlds.”<sup>524</sup> As I have argued in the previous chapters, the Reformation age retains a sense of the popularity and raw power of medieval Catholicism, which gives rise not only to admiration but also, in many cases, to unease and discomfort.

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<sup>522</sup> Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage, and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). For uses of the theatre, see also Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>523</sup> Richard Wilson, “Introduction: A Torturing Hour – Shakespeare and the Martyrs,” in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-23; see also his *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion and Resistance* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004).

<sup>524</sup> Duffy, “Bare Ruined Choirs: Remembering Catholicism in Shakespeare’s England,” 40-57, esp. 53, and Marotti, “Shakespeare and Catholicism,” 218-241, esp. 230, in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*. For the argument against choosing one concrete religious denomination, and for the rich field of inquiry opened by the more nuanced view, see also Dymna Callaghan’s short piece “Turning Point: Shakespeare and Religion,” *Textual Practice* 15.1 (2001): 1-4; John D. Cox’s review essay, “Was Shakespeare a Christian, and If So, What Kind of Christian Was He?” *Christianity and Literature* 55.4 (2006): 539-566; and Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare’s Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

I propose, then, that, in the aftermath of the English Reformation, early modern drama offered a space, both to playwrights and to spectators, for revisiting recent events – conversions, iconoclasms, revisions, and discoveries – and interrogating concerns with nostalgia and cultural inheritance in an attempt to produce a stable national identity.<sup>525</sup> This process cannot be fully disentangled from questions of religion and faith: as Huston Diehl has argued, if one is to understand an act of iconoclasm fully, one must accept the potency of images or objects, however temporarily.<sup>526</sup> Similarly, to participate, through spectatorship, in a re-evaluation of objects, rituals, and figures inherited from the Catholic Middle Ages, the viewer must be able to recognize their full impact and feel the pressure of cultural anxiety that has created them. Only then an exorcism can begin.

Sarah Beckwith argues in “Shakespeare’s Resurrections” that “‘resurrected’ characters burst into the present as reminders of an ineradicable past” and their returns

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<sup>525</sup> Paul Yachnin had made an incisive argument for the Renaissance theatre as “powerless and socially degraded”; see *Stage-Wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 65. However, Steven Mullaney in *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1988), to which Yachnin is responding, and, more recently, Jean Howard in *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy: 1598-1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), have argued persuasively for the Renaissance theatre as a space of ceaseless commentary on the contemporary events. Whatever its political power might have been, its power of social reflection seems to me inarguable. As Andrew Gurr puts it, “We will probably never know with much precision how far the playhouse repertoires might have influenced social and political thinking, but it was by far the most substantial form of social intercommunication available, the only kind of popular journalism and the only occasion when large numbers of people gathered together except for sermons and executions”; see *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1987 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 142.

<sup>526</sup> Huston Diehl, *Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage: Protestantism and Popular Theater in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), esp. 20-21. See also Michael O’Connell, “God’s Body: Incarnation, Physical Embodiment, and the Fate of Biblical Theater in the Sixteenth Century,” in *Subjects on the World’s Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. David G. Allen and Robert A. White (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 62-87, and his *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. chapter 5. For a more recent assessment of the need to take religious issues into consideration, see also Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies,” *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 167-190.

“offer the opportunity for transformation, but a transformation that will take up and redeem the past.”<sup>527</sup> I argue that the reminders of the past on the early modern stage can invoke not only the urge for redeeming transformations but, just as strongly, a terror of misreading and misremembering, as well as a historiographical anxiety. After all, as Musa Gurnis-Farrell concludes, “Even in the genre of Protestant martyr plays, where we might expect a straightforward religious agenda, the multiple agents and cultural forces [...] could align to produce a range of dramatic effects with unexpected, and sometimes subversive, ideological consequences.”<sup>528</sup> No doubt, the stakes were higher when the figures brought onstage were closely associated with Catholic worship, and their very presence created an apprehension of ideological rifts. Before redemption could occur, the past had to be stabilized, undergoing a continuous process of being forced into an acceptable shape.

An early English interlude *Calisto and Melebea* (ca. 1530)<sup>529</sup> offers a convenient entry point into this discussion. This short anonymous dramatic work, composed on the eve of the Reformation, is a translation and refashioning of a Spanish text *Celestina* (1499, revised 1502) by Fernando de Rojas.<sup>530</sup> The later version of the original runs to

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<sup>527</sup> Sarah Beckwith, “Shakespeare’s Resurrections,” in *Shakespeare and the Middle Ages*, ed. Curtis Perry and John Watkins, 45-67, esp. 47 and 48.

<sup>528</sup> Musa Gurnis-Farrell, “Martyr Acts: Playing with Foxe’s Martyrs on the Public Stage,” in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 175-193, esp. 193.

<sup>529</sup> This is a variant spelling of the heroine’s name, which is “Melibea” in the Spanish original, as well as in James Mabbe’s 1631 translation. In my discussion, I will give the spelling as it is given in the version I am addressing.

<sup>530</sup> H.D. Purcell shows, convincingly, that the author of the interlude likely used the Spanish original in his work, but that he intended to produce an adaptation, not a faithful translation; see “The *Celestina* and the Interlude of *Calisto and Melebea*,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 44.1 (1967): 1-15. See also Maria Angeles Ruiz Moneva, *A Relevance Approach to Irony in La Celestina and Its Earliest English Versions* (PhD Dissertation, University of Zaragoza, 2003/2004), as well as her recent article “Main Aspects of the

twenty-one acts, but the English interlude falls just short of eleven hundred lines: having given a fairly faithful translation of the first four acts, in the last hundred lines, it veers dramatically into the alternative ending and attaches a moralistic conclusion.<sup>531</sup> As a re-working of an immensely popular text, occurring at such a pivotal moment in history, the English interlude is of great scholarly interest. The subtle alterations throughout, as well as the alternative ending, transform this tale of courtly love and desire, whose very title invokes the elderly bawd engaged to bring the lovers together,<sup>532</sup> into a moral piece on the education of young women, firmly situated in the English literary tradition.<sup>533</sup> In the conclusion, Melebea's father Danio (Pleberio in the original) specifically urges young female readers to accept the interlude as a viable conduct model: "Wherfore, ye vyrgyns and fayre maydens all, / Unto this example now take good hede..."<sup>534</sup> His lengthy speech, with which the play closes, is a paean to good upbringing and wise parenting.

The original version, without the secondary storylines, focuses on the young nobleman Calisto, passionately in love with the gentle maiden Melibea. When, mindful

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Reception and Conveyance of Irony in the Earliest English Versions of *Celestina*," *Celestinesca* 34 (2010): 99-144, for a detailed analysis of specific adaptation methods in this text.

<sup>531</sup> See Albert J. Geritz, "*Calisto and Melebea* (ca. 1530)," *Celestinesca* 4.1 (1980): 17-29, for the commentary on structure and faithfulness of the translation.

<sup>532</sup> See E. Michael Gerli, *Celestina and the Ends of Desire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

<sup>533</sup> Seth Lerer shows the indebtedness of this interlude to the English literary context, including Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida* and Skelton's *Phyllype Sparowe* and *Magnyfycence*, linking the reception of the Spanish original and the translation strategies specifically to the literary politics of the English court, in *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25-30.

Similarly, Michael A. Winkelman links the prelude and the motivations for adapting it directly to Henry's seduction of Anne Boleyn; see *Marriage Relationships in Tudor Political Drama* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 41-45.

<sup>534</sup> *Calisto and Melebea*, in *Three Rastell Plays: Four Elements, Calisto and Melebea, Gentleness and Nobility*, ed. Richard Axton (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 69-96, esp. ll. 1039-40. All further references are to this edition.

Bob Godfrey specifically comments on the instructional aspects of this text in "Feminine Singularity: The Representation of Young Women in Some Early Tudor Interludes," in *Interludes and Early Modern Society: Studies in Gender, Power, and Theatricality*, ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi B.V., 2007), 141-162.

of her good name, she rejects him, he hires Celestina, an old bawd and a witch, to assist him in his courtship. Armed with her enchantments, Celestina visits the maiden and, after a sharp rebuttal, claims that Calisto is suffering not from love but from toothache and needs assistance. Softening, Melibea sends her girdle or rope belt to the young man<sup>535</sup> and promises to write out a prayer; after Celestina leaves, she becomes inflamed with love and eventually surrenders her maidenhead to Calisto. Climbing down from her window, Calisto falls and breaks his neck; overcome with grief, Melibea commits suicide by leaping out of the window.<sup>536</sup>

Similarly, the English interlude shows Melebea surrendering the girdle and promising her assistance, but the courtly plot is terminated by the appearance of the maiden's father, who relates a recent dream in which his daughter's potential fall was allegorized. Faced with such paternal concern, Melebea immediately repents the beginning of her fall, thus prompting her father's lengthy concluding speech. In cutting out over three quarters of the Spanish original, the sixteenth-century English translator brings into focus the scene featuring Celestina and Melebea together and forces the readers to consider the dimensions and implications of the heroine's temptation, as it is portrayed in this adaptation.

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<sup>535</sup> English translations usually use the word "girdle," but Manuel da Costa Fontes suggests that "rope belt" is much more appropriate. See *The Art of Subversion in Inquisitorial Spain: Rojas and Delicado* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2005), 286, n. 11.

<sup>536</sup> On the Spanish original, see Ricardo Castells, *Fernando de Rojas and the Renaissance Vision: Phantasm, Melancholy, and Didacticism in Celestina* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000). See also Roland Greene's argument that *La Celestina* is a protocolonial text: "The Protocolonial Baroque of *La Celestina*," in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227-49. If so, it lends itself uniquely to the discussion of cultural colonization of the virgin martyr.

In the Spanish text *Celestina* explains her errand thus: “He requests a prayer, Daughter, one he was told you know. One prayed by Saint Apollonia for toothache. And also the girdle you wear clasped around your waist, for it is widely known that it has touched all the relics in Rome and Jerusalem. The caballero I told you of is suffering, longing for that blessing.”<sup>537</sup> The 1631 translation by James Mabbe, an English poet and scholar, often commended for its faithfulness to the original, re-writes this dialogue entirely to excise all traces of Catholicism. Mabbe’s *Celestina* asks the heroine for “a certaine Charme [...] which cureth the tooth-ache” and

that same admirable Girdle of yours, which is reported to have beene found and brought from Cumæ the Cave there, and was worne, ’tis thought, by the Sibilla, or Prophetesse of that place; which Girdle they say, hath such a singular and peculiar property and power, with the very tutch to abate and ease any ache or anguish whatsoever.<sup>538</sup>

Despite the significant alteration of the girdle’s provenance, in both excerpts Melibea is asked to act, so to speak, as a mediator, or a metaphorical link in the chain that connects Calisto, in the first case, with the holy locations of Rome and Jerusalem and, in the second, with the mythical Sybil of Cumae and the place where she is said to have lived.

In treating the same episode, the sixteenth-century interlude disposes of the imaginary space located beyond the bounds of the text, eliding the references to Rome, Jerusalem, or the Sybil’s cave. Instead, this version shifts the focus to Melibea herself.

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<sup>537</sup> Fernando de Rojas, *Celestina*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden, ed. Roberto González Echevarría (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 69.

<sup>538</sup> Rojas, *Celestina, or the Tragick-Comedy of Calisto and Melibea, Englished from the Spanish of Fernando de Rojas by James Mabbe, anno 1631*, intro. James Fitzmaurice Kelly (London: David Nutt, 1894), 93. Mabbe’s translation deserves a separate study in its concentrated effort of producing a domestic play from which moral and religious conflict is exorcised. Even its title, departing from the Spanish original, carries no reference to the lovers and their desires, but instead proclaims the play “necessary for the younger sort: shewing the deceits and subtilties housed in the bosomes of false servants and cunny-catching bawds” (1).

Celestina asks the maiden for “the gyrdle there thou weryst about the / So many holy relykys it hath towchyd / That thys knyght thynkyth his bote thou maist be” (90, ll. 836-8). With no link to Jerusalem, Rome, or even the mythical cave of the Sibyl, Celestina’s description of the girdle reads as elaborate flattery with sexual undertones. Since our sole knowledge about the girdle is that Melebea had been using it as an article of clothing, the “many” holy relics it had touched may as well be parts of her own body. Cleverly equivocating, Celestina combines two distinct genres in her request and presents Melebea not only as a heroine of a courtly romance who, by offering a token of acquiescence, will presumably cure Calisto from his love melancholy, but also as a saint capable of producing contact relics. This idea is confirmed by the next line, when Celestina suggests that it is Melebea herself who should be Calisto’s “bote” (deliverance, remedy, or relief).<sup>539</sup>

Richard Axton notes this appeal to the heroine’s own power but describes this imaginary power as only “saint-like,” linking it to Marian worship.<sup>540</sup> It seems to me, however, that Axton’s point may be taken further. While references to the Virgin Mary abound in the Spanish original and, by extension, in the English interlude,<sup>541</sup> there is no meaningful connection to be made, in this particular speech, between Melebea and Christ’s mother. It is much more logical to assume that, in appealing to the girl who has just decisively rejected a suitor, Celestina is invoking the familiar figure of the virgin martyr, endowed with special powers through a rigorous defence of her virginity. Her

<sup>539</sup> See OED, “boot, n.1,” esp. 6 and 7.

<sup>540</sup> Richard Axton, “Folk Play in Tudor Interludes,” in *English Drama: Forms and Development, Essays in Honour of Muriel Clara Bradbrook*, ed. Marie Axton and Raymond Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1-23, esp. 21. (italics mine)

<sup>541</sup> Axton, 20-1; Fontes, *The Art of Subversion*, ch. 4.

request represents, in other words, not simply a shifting of gears but also calculated flattery extended to Melebea's conduct and a suggestion that, by remaining virginal, the heroine's body has already achieved the status of a holy relic.

The superb irony of this moment, of course, is that as a result of accepting this flattering suggestion Melebea enters into action that might compromise her integrity, both bodily and spiritual.<sup>542</sup> In terms of action and motivation, this suggestion fills a lacuna in the English play formed by the removal of all references to the magic Celestina summons in order to change the heroine's mind on the subject of Calisto. The interlude emphasizes the power of the old woman's flattery by disposing with a long dialogue of doubt and mistrust that follows Celestina's request in the original. Instead, the English Melebea delicately brings up the possibility of deceit ("Yf this be trew that thou seyst to me now") but immediately dismisses it ("Myn hart is lyghtnyd perseyvyng the case") (91, ll. 843-4). Her next lines show enthusiastic acceptance of the idea that she might possess healing powers. Although Celestina has already clearly explained what sort of assistance Calisto requires, Melebea muses, "I wold be content well yf I wyst how / To bryng this seke knyght unto some solas" (91, ll. 845-6). Thus inclined, she readily gives up her girdle – an object that, one might speculate, symbolizes her virtuous thoughts and chaste restraint.<sup>543</sup> Later, she will complain to her father that Celestina "with her fayre wordes ay so perswadyd me, / That she had almost brought me here unto / To fulfyll the

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<sup>542</sup> Axton's understanding of this passage runs along similar lines, see 21.

<sup>543</sup> I am grateful to Ann Hutchison for suggesting a connection here to the medieval function of girdles as chastity belts.

foule lust of Calisto,” indicating that the loss of the girdle brought her to the very brink of losing her virginity as well (94, ll. 1001-3).

Axton interprets this episode as questioning “the traditional Catholic emphasis on good works and on the efficacy of relics” and promoting, instead, reformist education of children.<sup>544</sup> He takes as evidence, in particular, the insistence in the epilogue “that Melebea has been saved from deed of sin by regular morning prayer.”<sup>545</sup> His observation is true enough in that, when her father mentions the lesson on prayers, Melebea replies, with fervour: “O dere father, that lesson I have kept trew / Whych preservyd me. For though I dyd consent / In mynd, yet had he never hys intent” (94, ll. 1008-10). However, the idea that regular prayer might be of good service when one’s will to remain chaste is impaired is not a unique product of the sixteenth century and its reformist tendencies. In fact, the dynamic of this episode closely parallels the moment in the *Book of the Knight of the Tower* where a daughter of the emperor of Constantinople is saved from keeping a sinful assignation only by the fact of regular prayer.<sup>546</sup> Melebea is preserved through prayer, and through her father’s timely dream; the Knight’s maiden is saved from sinning when her suitor sees souls of dead men crowding about her. In both cases, the heroine uses her free will to choose the sin of courtly love and retains her chastity only through having faithfully re-enacted the ritual of prayer and, more importantly, through male involvement in the situation. Whether or not the author of the English interlude was familiar with the Knight’s *Book* (and he might well have been, since Caxton printed it in

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<sup>544</sup> Axton, “Folk Play in Tudor Interludes,” 21.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> See chapter 2 of this dissertation.

the late fifteenth century), he reproduces this failure of female agency in his modification of the holy virgin narrative: repeatedly tempted, the heroine falls, and her chastity can only be preserved by a male other – in this case, her father.<sup>547</sup>

In other words, while *Calisto and Melebea* is very likely a reformist work, its emphasis on regular prayer in a girl's education is a clear continuation of an earlier concern with giving appropriate examples to female readers.<sup>548</sup> Where the Knight of the Tower can offer domesticated versions of virgin martyrs, assuming that the more disturbing aspects of their stories may be ignored, the early modern re-fashioner of *Celestina* in England argues that the concept of the holy virgin may prove devastating to a young girl. Believing that her own virginity might have endowed her with special abilities, Melebea nearly allows herself to be deflowered. In this subtle revision, *Celestina*'s invocation of "St. Appolyne"<sup>549</sup> rings a sinister note: the popular virgin martyr is a spectral, uncanny presence in the interlude and must be exorcised through the reinforcement of paternal authority if the heroine is to remain a good Christian girl. The interlude exposes the power of the virgin martyr as nothing more than a clever illusion used by the elderly bawd, who, in this version, is identified as a witch but denied any

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<sup>547</sup> Although Howard B. Norland has sought to avoid this interpretation by reading allegorically and suggesting that in this version of the play the father "is reshaped into a morality-play God, or his lieutenant Reason, as he calls the sinner to account or moralizes on the example," there is still no denying that, if the plot of the play is to be accepted, it is paternal control and instruction that saves the heroine's chastity; see *Drama in Early Tudor Britain, 1458-1558* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 251.

<sup>548</sup> While Godfrey's argument that the English version of the play seeks to present, as a model to the female audience, "a young woman of singularly independent mind" stands, this mind, in the absence of proper guidance, almost leads her into damnation ("Feminine Singularity," 155). See also his earlier article, "England Making Up to Europe, 16<sup>th</sup> Century Style," in *Studi Urbinati B, Anno LXXI-LXXII*, ed. Giovanni Bogliolo (Urbino: Edizioni Quattro Venti, 2001-2002), 469-482, esp. 476-77.

<sup>549</sup> A version of the name of St. Apollonia, a virgin martyr of the early Christian Church, popularly regarded as the patroness of dentistry and those suffering from toothache.

magical ability. While Celestina casts a successful love charm in the Spanish original, here she is as impotent as Melebea in her holy virgin incarnation.

The English interlude stages a spectacular failure of feminine power: the slightest belief in such power, as the father's allegorical dream warns, will lead the maiden to "a pyt of foule stynkyng water" – to a life of shame and, eventually, into hell (93, l. 946).<sup>550</sup> Melebea must cede all pretensions to self-government and rely fully on her father's authority, who in this interlude serves as her link to the divine. It is Danio who receives the prophetic dream of his daughter's trouble, and it is he who grants Melebea forgiveness on behalf of the Lord, noting approvingly that her pleading words are "well sayd" and allowing her to "Stand up therfore" (95, ll. 1025-6). Furthermore, Danio's concluding speech reveals, with great force, the intention of this re-fashioned version: having pointed to the possibility of female individual authority, the interlude reasserts the importance of the woman's reputation in her community, and of the social hierarchy.<sup>551</sup> Overjoyed by Melebea's return to grace, her father speaks not of spiritual salvation but emphasizes that, in keeping her from "actuall dede of shame," the daily prayers "preservyd her good name" (95, ll. 1037-8). Moreover, in the last stanza of the interlude, he begs God for "mercifull grace and influens" for "all governours, that they circumspectly / May rule theyr inferiours by such prudence, / To bryng them to vertew

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<sup>550</sup> Some fifty lines later, Melebea explains to her father that the foul pit "which hath / Destroyd so many, betokeneth vyse and syn, / In whych, alas, I had almost fallyn in" (94, ll. 994-6).

<sup>551</sup> This is in contrast to Ana María Murillo Murillo, who analyzes the interlude in terms of personal feeling and insists that Melebea *chooses* to remain chaste. According to her, "in the Interlude, Melebea retorts with chastity to Calisto's desire, chastity prevails over love and its pleasures"; see "Love and Chastity in Two Early English Versions of *La Celestina*," in *Proceedings of the II Conference of the Spanish Society for the English Renaissance Studies*, ed. S.G. Fernández-Corugedo (Oviedo: Universidad of Oviedo Servicio de Publicaciones, 1992), 193-206, esp. 205.

and dew obedyens” (96, ll. 1082-5). The social framework promoted by the interlude, with its investment in “good name” and unquestioning obedience to one’s elders (especially, one might speculate, male elders, as represented by Danio), stands in sharp contrast with the plot of a virgin martyr narrative invoked, if only obscurely, in the text. This social framework, indeed, views the explosive, rebellious virgin martyr as a malicious ghost, which must be continuously discredited and exorcised.

**“Vile Fiend and Shameless Courtesan”: Reading the Virgin Martyr in *1 Henry VI***

From this early treatment, I now leap sixty years forward in time, skipping from the eve of the Reformation, with its desire to shield female audiences from the toxic influence of the virgin martyr with its pretensions to power, to the end of the sixteenth century, when the virgin martyr has come to embody the Catholic Middle Ages – both its aching familiarity and grotesqueness. More than half a century ago, Frederick S. Boas began an article on *1 Henry VI*, written for the second volume of *Shakespeare Quarterly* with an apology for his choice of topic: “...I thought it might be of some interest to show that the presentation of Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI* ... has still, though crude, its own value.”<sup>552</sup> In spite of this professed purpose, he went on to call Shakespeare’s Joan “repellent” and to make the claim that “no consistent image [of her] is presented.”<sup>553</sup> In fact, this character was for Boas clear evidence that the play was a collaborative effort and suffered from problems with cohesion.<sup>554</sup> A much more favourable (both to the

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<sup>552</sup> Frederick S. Boas, “Joan of Arc in Shakespeare, Schiller, and Shaw,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2.1 (1951): 35–45, esp. 35.

<sup>553</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; 39.

<sup>554</sup> This opinion is reiterated forty years later by Richard F. Hardin, who attributes the “inconsistencies” in the play to Joan’s status as “a literary character who is perhaps not the property of any author, who came to Shakespeare already ‘created’ by a century of chronicle writers”; he suggests that Shakespeare, whether

character and to the play on the whole) essay by Gabriele Bernhard Jackson prudently prefaces its reading with a warning that it is “typical of Shakespeare to present unexplained and suggestive discontinuities.”<sup>555</sup> Other scholars have responded by arguing absolute homogeneity for Joan’s character: Donald G. Watson, for example, claims that “[f]rom the beginning Joan is presented as an impostor” and “[n]ever is there much real tension between Pucelle and Puzzel,” leaving her early successes unexplained.<sup>556</sup> Generally speaking, those scholars who have accepted Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc as fully developed character have tended to interpret her as a manifestation of contemporary fears: the fear of witches, of unruly women, and particularly of Elizabeth I, this royal Amazon.<sup>557</sup>

I propose that Shakespeare’s Joan represents rather a post-Reformation look backwards and an attempt not simply to condemn the historical figure but rather to trace the transformation of the medieval saint into the early modern witch. Joan, of course, is the direct cause of some extremely inglorious moments in the English war against the

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alone or aided by his contemporary collaborators, “recognized” the chroniclers’ “methods of defamation and simply followed the leader” (“Chroniclers and Mythmaking in Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc,” *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production* 42 [1990]: 25-36, esp. 25; 29; 34).

<sup>555</sup> Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, “Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc,” *English Literary Renaissance* 18.1 (1988): 40-65, rpt. in *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, ed. and intro. R.J.C. Watt (New York: Longman, 2002), 22.

<sup>556</sup> Donald G. Watson, *Shakespeare’s Early History Plays: Politics at Play on the Elizabethan Stage* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 43.

<sup>557</sup> See Bernhard, “Topical Ideology”; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. chapter 2, “Elizabeth”; Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, 190-1; and somewhat more recent article by Hwa-Seon Kim, “Witches, Transvestites, and Dangerous Female Bodies: A Feminist Reading of Joan of Arc in *1 Henry VI*,” *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 6:2 (1998): 37-59. In *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England*, Deborah Willis links Joan to the fear of maternal power (177-182), while most recently, Katherine Eggert makes an argument that Joan is the focal point for the ravishing force of female sexuality in *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 57-68.

French, but this does not necessarily make her an unfit subject for ruminations on English religious history. As various scholars have pointed out, by the end of the sixteenth century the historical Joan of Arc and her escapades had long ceased to be a hot topic – if, indeed, they had ever been that.<sup>558</sup> On the other hand, the new interest in this French holy virgin is surely related to the contemporary religious conflicts in France, of which English Protestants were well aware, and suggests a continuing effort of reforming the public consciousness in England.<sup>559</sup>

An examination of sixteenth-century English chronicles readily shows that their presentation of Joan of Arc was far from unequivocal; the authors of the accounts written on the eve of the Reformation in particular display their discomfort with evaluating this figure. The task of offering a decisive interpretation of Joan's military successes and a judgement of her various claims seems to have been rather daunting. In 1516 Robert Fabyan gives the briefest possible outline. He does not delve into the questions of good and evil and, having written that "the Frenshmen prevayled by the helpe of a woman, whiche they, as before is touched, named the Mayden of God," is not particularly

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<sup>558</sup> In his study of fifteenth-century chronicles, W.T. Waugh is struck by their paucity and comes to the conclusion that "the influence of Joan on the English troops in France was far less than has commonly been supposed" ("Joan of Arc in English Sources of the Fifteenth Century," in *Historical Essays in Honour of James Tait*, ed. J.G. Edwards, V.H. Galbraith, and E.F. Jacob [Manchester: Printed for subscribers, 1933], 387-98, esp. 398). Much more recently, in a similar study Meredith Clermont-Ferrand concludes that some English chroniclers chose not to mention Joan of Arc at all, while others presented her as a secondary backdrop to the tale of Henry VI ("Joan of Arc and the English Chroniclers: Monstrous Presence and Problematic Absence in *The Chronicle of London*, *The Chronicle of William of Worcester*, and *An English Chronicle 1377-1461*," in *The Medieval Chronicle VII*, ed. Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks [Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2011], 151-65). See also Dominique Goy-Blanquet for a discussion of the Burgundian sources ("Shakespeare and Voltaire Set Fire to History," in *Joan of Arc, a Saint for All Reasons: Studies in Myth and Politics*, ed. Dominique Goy-Blanquet [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003], 2-6).

<sup>559</sup> David Womersley makes the same suggestion in passing, pointing out that the figure of Joan "is associated with recognizably Catholic language and doctrine"; see *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 245.

interested in challenging this title.<sup>560</sup> It is only much later, as Fabyan is discussing the reign of Charles VIII, that he returns to the subject and admits that the particulars of Joan's story (in this case, the discovery of her sword) appear to him "so darke and fantastycall, that therewyth me lyst not to blot my booke, but suffre it to passe by" (641). This outright refusal to engage points to an unwillingness to consider the multiple interpretations of Joan and the cluster of events surrounding her. Acknowledging that she "dyd many wonderfull featys" and "amonge Frensshemen she was worshipped for an aungell or a messynger sent from God," Fabyan evades the issue of Joan's authenticity and chooses instead to focus on the military losses of the English (642).<sup>561</sup> In the chronicle of English history published in 1534 and dedicated to King Henry VIII himself, Polydore Vergil is even less willing to commit to an outright condemnation: his Joan "was endowed both with singuler witt, and could also foreshewe thinges to come."<sup>562</sup> Acknowledging that the maid was "accused of sorcerie" and "verely accompted a witche," he openly disapproves of the sentence she had received and refers his readers to historical examples of virgins defending their country without consequent punishment.<sup>563</sup>

On the other hand, Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York*, first published in 1542, already incorporates the vicious

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<sup>560</sup> *The New Chronicles of England and France, in Two Parts; by Robert Fabyan*, ed. Henry Ellis (London: J. Johnson, 1811), 601-2. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>561</sup> He further explains that "Almyghty God [...] for a season sufferyth suche sorcery and develysshe wayes to prospere & reygne, to the coreccion of synners, hastely to shewe his power, & that good men shuld not fall into any errour" (642).

<sup>562</sup> *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, comprising the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., and Richard III, from an early translation*, 1844, ed. Henry Ellis (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 24-5.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

contemporary rhetoric directed at Catholic saints. From the first sentences of this account, Joan is described as an overly bold girl with a “foule face,” who would “do thynges, that other yong maidens, bothe abhorred & wer ashamed to do.” In Hall’s words, she was sent to the Dauphin “as a monster” and fed him with a mixture of “visions, traunces, & fables, full of blasphemye, supersticion and hypocrisy.”<sup>564</sup> This accusatory list borrows relatively little from the earlier English descriptions but is heavily indebted to the contemporary project of defaming Catholic saints. In terms similar to John Bale’s, if somewhat less crude, Hall urges his readers “to refrayne from the credite & belefe of the saiynge of suche profane prophesies, and trastie imageners, as this pevysh paynted Puzel was.”<sup>565</sup>

Hall is content with heaping ridicule onto the Orleans maid and concluding that her unwomanly behaviour readily betrays her lack of sanctity, but in Raphael Holinshed’s chronicle, published almost thirty years later, interpretative discomfort intensifies into easily recognizable discernment-related anxiety.<sup>566</sup> While the writer is careful to specify that Joan is a miracle-maker only as far “as their bookes make hir,” the question of distinguishing between true miracle-makers and devilish imitators remains throughout the entire narrative. Nervously, Holinshed lists the traits that point toward Joan’s sanctity: her “great semblance of chastity both of bodie and behaviour, the name of Jesus in hir mouth about all hir businesses, humble, obedient, and fasting diverse daies

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<sup>564</sup> Edward Halle: *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York, 1550* (Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1970), Fol. xxv<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, f. iii<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>566</sup> I use the name of Raphael Holinshed loosely, to refer to one or more collaborators who authored the Joan of Arc section of the chronicles.

in the weeke.”<sup>567</sup> This list is not immediately undermined as it might have been in Hall; rather, it signals the author’s difficulty with offering a persuasive negative reading of Joan in the light of the information he possesses. He does, of course, eventually condemn the Dauphin for “dealing in divelish practises with misbeléevers and witches,” but this conclusion is possible only after the fray is done, “sith the ending of all such miraclemongers dooth (for the most part) plainlie decipher the virtue and power that they worke.” In other words, Joan would not have been captured and executed “had she béene of any devotion or of true beléeffe, and no false miscreant, but all holie as she made it” (171).

This proposition acknowledges the virtual impossibility of recognizing the false saint before the end of the tale – and, as the brief aside “for the most part” suggests, possibly not even after. Not surprisingly, Holinshed finishes the story of Joan by reiterating the great importance of proper discernment for writers and readers – while at the same time admitting that this discernment might be entirely unmoored from general conduct and particular actions. The onus is on writers to emphasize the “difference betwéene one stirred up by mercie divine, or naturall love, and a damnable sorcerer suborned by satan” (however elusive such a difference might be) and on readers to “judge as ye list” (172).<sup>568</sup> In other words, at least by 1577, when Holinshed’s chronicle is published, the English writers’ concern lies not with Joan’s military victories against

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<sup>567</sup> *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In 6 volumes: vol. III. England* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 163. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>568</sup> Holinshed’s ruminations are not entirely theoretical since on the same page he offers a criticism of Polydore Vergil, who was not able to read Joan of Arc properly and thus thought her punishment too harsh.

their country, and even not so much with her supposed witchcraft, but rather with her troubling claims to sanctity.<sup>569</sup>

I contend that the changes Joan of Arc undergoes in Shakespeare's play point not to an inconsistency in the character but to the ongoing preoccupation of early modern English writers with the problem of Catholic saints. As I have shown in the previous chapter, throughout the sixteenth century, Catholic saints – and especially female Catholic saints – also became progressively more open to charges of witchcraft. We need only to recall Reginald Scot's sarcastic reference to St. Cecilia's angel as her "familiar," which I discussed in the last chapter. Once the thin veil of scepticism is lifted, the woman capable of summoning supernatural assistance to her side stands before the reader as a dark enigma, always already under suspicion. I argue, therefore, that *1 Henry VI*, dating only seven years after Scot's treatise, is not directly concerned with Joan the witch as a source of anxiety; instead, it is preoccupied with the problem of handling a convincing virgin martyr.<sup>570</sup> The play's Joan, in other words, is far from being an inconsistent character since she is not unexpectedly transformed from a saint into a witch or a harlot. Rather, in the light of the contemporary preoccupation with the Catholic saints and the desire to "read" them properly and destructively, Joan of Arc – the direct

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<sup>569</sup> I am here indebted to Anke Bernau, who argues that the insistent concern with Joan's virginity and/or sanctity in the sixteenth-century English chroniclers is closely related to the questions of history, historiography, and nationalism; see "'Saint, Witch, Man, Maid or Whore?' Joan of Arc and Writing History," *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 214-33.

<sup>570</sup> Theodora A. Jankowski perceptively identifies Joan's virginity as the subject of male characters' anxiety but never connects this to the contemporary religious debate; see *Women in Power in Early Modern Drama* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 78-89.

heir of two popular virgin martyrs<sup>571</sup> – must indeed be understood as a saint who, within the Protestant framework, cannot be anything other than a witch. The gradual evolution of the audience’s perception in the course of the play is thus a re-enactment, on stage, of the urge to deconstruct the medieval holy virgin, thus circumscribing the insistent threat of the Catholic past.

Certainly the initial presentation of Joan is straightforward enough. The Bastard of Orléans brings to the French king and his nobles the welcome news of divine succour:

A holy maid hither with me I bring,  
Which, by a vision sent to her from heaven,  
Ordained is to raise this tedious siege  
And drive the English forth the bounds of France.  
The spirit of deep prophecy she hath,  
Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome,  
What’s past and what’s to come she can descry.<sup>572</sup>

The dramatic action immediately supports Joan’s dramatic talents, as she is able to recognize the Dauphin unerringly in a group of men. Her story clearly invokes a tale of divine inspiration: an unpretentious virgin is “infused” with the “clear rays” of glory after the Virgin Mary appears to her and is entrusted with the task of battling for the virtuous cause (1.3.57-64). Even Joan’s former occupation of watching lambs reminds the readers of St. Margaret of Antioch, who prior to her martyrdom lived in the countryside pasturing sheep. Her sword, which she finds “at Touraine, in Saint Katherine’s churchyard,” becomes an additional link to the virgin martyr tradition (1.3.79). The story of the sword is positioned as a post-Reformation look backwards,

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<sup>571</sup> Famously, St. Katherine and St. Margaret figure prominently in her visions.

<sup>572</sup> *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, ed. William Montgomery, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2002), 1.3.30-36. All further references are to this edition.

since the sword is chosen “[o]ut of a great deal of old iron,” suggesting an early modern vision of a saint’s shrine turned into a dilapidated heap of old implements (1.3.80).<sup>573</sup> Joan’s sword is, in other words, a sample of Jonathan Gil Harris’s “untimely matter,” which I will discuss at greater length in relation to *Pericles* and *The Virgin Martyr*: an object from another time, combining in itself the conflicting signs of two distinct periods. As potentially mocking as its description is, the time-travelling sword does not lend itself to easy interpretation. It might have been pulled out of a garbage heap, but with its help Joan immediately bests the Dauphin himself in a fight, and her weapon is proclaimed “the sword of Deborah” (1.3.84).

Similarly, while multiple imprecations of the English are reminiscent of the sixteenth-century writers’ charges against female saints, they are incapable of immediately shaping the audience’s opinion of Joan. Each epithet – “[d]evil or devil’s dam,” “high-minded strumpet,” “vile fiend and shameless courtesan,” “hag of all despite,” and so on – has its close equivalent in the *vitae* of virgin martyrs, who are famously abused by male relatives, disappointed suitors, and pagan authorities (1.7.5,12; 3.5.5,12). These remarks do not necessarily identify Joan of Arc as a witch and a harlot but rather establish her as a subject of others’ rants – a subject whose successes belie these accusations. Indeed, after Joan’s first victory, even Talbot briefly admits to utter confusion, telling his soldiers, “My thoughts are whirled like a potter’s wheel. / I know not where I am nor what I do” (1.7.19-20). In the very next line he recovers and refers to

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<sup>573</sup> See Margaret Aston, “English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973): 231-255. The pairing of the virgin with an ancient, battle-battered and time-eroded weapon also points forward to the metaphorical paralleling of the rusty armour and Marina’s brothel performance in *Pericles*.

Joan as a witch yet again, but the sense of utter instability has already been reinforced, which makes it all the more difficult to resist the next scene, in which the French call Joan “[d]ivine creature, Astraea’s daughter” and imagine her as the next patron saint of France: Charles’ impassioned description of the future shrine, relics, and worship has undeniable force (1.8.4, 21-29). The echoes of Queen Elizabeth in Joan’s warlike demeanour and future position as a patron saint of a country only complicate the problem of unequivocal interpretation – as does Joan’s subsequent conversion of Burgundy by the power of her words alone (3.7.78-80).<sup>574</sup>

The scene in which Joan summons her familiar spirits onstage is thus a complex one and marks the moment that explores the audience’s fond illusions of popular saints, some of which, according to Scot, remained popular well into the sixteenth century. The formerly successful virgin martyr takes her early modern turn and is exposed as an inept witch; even her own familiars disdain her in silence. Furthermore, Joan’s offer “to feed [them] with [her] blood” acts to diminish the distance between the character and the audience, since the belief in witches nursing their familiars is peculiarly English and has its origins in the sixteenth century.<sup>575</sup> The character of Joan is thus forcibly transplanted into early modern England, where her “ancient incantations are too weak,” her sword becomes just so much old iron, and her former “glory droopeth to the dust” (5.3.27-28).

The trial scene, during which generic elements of a virgin martyr’s *vita* are reiterated and immediately undermined, points all the more strongly to the dislocation of

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<sup>574</sup> See Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, for a detailed examination of Shakespeare’s Joan’s ties to Elizabeth I, especially in the light of the queen’s recent actions in response to the threat of the Spanish Armada.

<sup>575</sup> Orna Alyagon Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 114-15.

the female saint and to her inherently suspect status. Joan's rejection of her father, peculiar to Shakespeare's version, brings to mind a number of popular virgin martyrs but is framed by the English interrogators as unblushing social climbing.<sup>576</sup> At the same time, this scene relentlessly produces differing versions of the truth which the English refuse to examine or challenge, thus failing to exorcise the ever-present spectre of the Catholic saint. Joan is "[c]haste and immaculate in very thought" but also a "holy maid with child"; her supposed pregnancy Warwick sees as a "sign she hath been liberal and free," while the Duke of York mockingly adds, "And yet forsooth she is a virgin pure!" (5.6.51; 65; 82-3). She might – or might not – be pregnant from the Dauphin, or Alençon, or the King of Naples. The English nobles – and with them the English audience – mock and unquestioningly condemn Joan but fail to exercise the final act of discernment which Holinshed so urges on them. Shakespeare's version of the trial is deliberately incomplete, and leaves out the physical examination which could either incontestably prove her virginity or locate the marks left by the feeding of her familiars.<sup>577</sup> Instead, the English construct Joan the martyr by consigning her to the fire unexamined, so that she might be "consume[d] to ashes," thus producing a new relic, of which the Dauphin spoke in Act 1 (5.6.92).

In other words, the *1 Henry VI* never conclusively resolves the problem of the Catholic saint. The play attends to the accusations made in the chronicles and uncovers

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<sup>576</sup> Among the best-known ones are St. Margaret and St. Christina.

<sup>577</sup> In contrast, in most chronicles Joan is examined and found to be a virgin; in Hall, the judges wait for nine months to obtain physical evidence of the absence of pregnancy. In a recent essay that compares Shakespeare's presentation of Joan of Arc to two earlier accounts, Philippa Sheppard notes the surprising paucity of this scene; see "The Puzzle of Pucelle or Pussel: Shakespeare's Joan of Arc Compared with Two Antecedents," in *Renaissance Medievalisms*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2009), 191-209, esp. 205-6.

the familiar witch within the distant and frightening virgin martyr; at the same time, it undercuts its own act of discernment and admits the ultimate impossibility of fully eliding this figure from the public consciousness. The saint may be revealed as a witch and a harlot, but she dominates the play and resists the final act of interpretation and banishment.

### ***Pericles and the Perils of Memory***

Almost twenty years later, *Pericles* resolves this issue much more satisfactorily, relegating the briefly invoked virgin martyr to the background of the play, where she is overshadowed by the happy family reunion and an impending marriage. In this play, written during a period of growing interest in the past,<sup>578</sup> the playwrights<sup>579</sup> question the extent to which the virgin martyr is a useful artefact of the past. A figure belonging to a medieval genre, in *Pericles* the virgin martyr becomes an equivalent of physical objects that wash up on various shores, inviting interpretation and offering – but not necessarily delivering – knowledge.

The medieval debts of *Pericles* are universally acknowledged: Ben Jonson has famously referred to it as “No doubt a mouldy Tale,” both “stale” and “nasty.”<sup>580</sup>

Considering Jonson’s own choice of subjects, such as the ancient history of *Sejanus*, we

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<sup>578</sup> As D.R. Woolf suggests, “The crises of the last years of Elizabeth’s reign and the controversies of James’s forced men to turn to the past for solace and reassurance: it was no longer sufficient to analyse vicissitude simply in terms of the rise and fall of Fortune’s will”; in *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England: Erudition, Ideology and “The Light of Truth” from the Accession of James I to the Civil War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 25. See also his more recent study on the engagement with history and and historical books, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>579</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I will assume that *Pericles* is a collaborative effort (which involved but was not limited to Shakespeare and George Wilkins) and refer to the authors in the plural.

<sup>580</sup> Ben Jonson, “Ode to Himselfe,” in *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. with intro. William B. Hunter, Jr. (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1963), 386-88, esp. lines 21-23.

can more or less confidently assume that his contempt is motivated (apart from a bad case of injured pride) by the explicit medievalism of *Pericles* rather than at the actual age of its sources. After Jonson, and with much less prejudice and bitterness, various scholars have made similar comments. Howard Felperin identifies *Pericles* as drawing on the traditions of both miracle and morality plays, while much more recently Felix C.H. Sprang makes a more general argument for the medieval world of this play.<sup>581</sup> Peter Womack also explores the various echoes in *Pericles* of sacred drama, and specifically the fifteenth-century *Mary Magdalen*.<sup>582</sup> Needless to say, the play signals its own interest in the medieval tradition by adopting Gower, whose *Confessio Amantis* served as one of its source texts, as the narrator throughout.<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>581</sup> Howard Felperin, "Shakespeare's Miracle Play," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 18.4 (1967): 363-374, and "This Great Miracle: *Pericles*," in *Pericles: Critical Essays*, ed. David Skeele (*Shakespearean Romance*, 1972, rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 114-132; as well as T.G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Felix C.H. Sprang, "Never Fortune Did Play a Subtler Game: The Creation of 'Medieval' Narratives in *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," *European Journal of English Studies* 15.2 (2011): 115-128.

<sup>582</sup> Peter Womack, "Shakespeare and the Sea of Stories," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 169-187. Andrew Welsh has commented on the play's interest in the past in a more general way in "Heritage in *Pericles*," in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: Essays in Honor of Charles Crow*, ed. Richard C. Tobias and Paul G. Zolbrod (Athens, US: Ohio University Press, 1974), 89-113; as did Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, 196-203. See also Thomas Roebuck and Laurie Maguire, "*Pericles* and the Language of National Origins," in *This England, That Shakespeare: New Angles on Englishness and the Bard*, ed. Willy Malley and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 23-48, for an argument about the play's interest in ancient British history.

<sup>583</sup> For scholarly considerations of Gower's role in *Pericles* and the associations for the early modern audience, see, among others, Richard Knowles, "'Wishes Fall Out as They're Willed': Artists, Audience and *Pericles*' Gower," *English Studies in Canada* 9.1 (1983): 14-24; Richard Hillman, "Shakespeare's Gower and Gower's Shakespeare: The Larger Debt of *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36.4 (1985): 427-437; Stephen J. Lynch, "The Role of the Author in the *Confessio Amantis* and *Pericles*," in *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Selected Sources and Plays* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998, Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, 86), 61-82; Helen Cooper, "'This Worthy Olde Writer': *Pericles* and Other Gowers," in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 99-113; Christine Dynkowski, "'Ancient [and Modern] Gower': Presenting Shakespeare's *Pericles*," in *The Narrative, the Expositor, and the Prompter in European Medieval Theatre*, ed. Philip Butterworth (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), 234-264.

While the debate on the play's authorship still continues,<sup>584</sup> I follow Deanne Williams in considering the so-called 'bad' quarto of 1609 as a "legitimate artefact" – a text that is both consistent and unified in its vision of the contemporary world.<sup>585</sup> Whatever Shakespeare's part in the play – and whatever the play's relationship to George Wilkins' novella, the existence of which has long made scholars uneasy – might be, the "pattern" of *Pericles* is far from uneven.<sup>586</sup> As Lori Humphrey Newcomb argues, the need to establish the exact relationship between the novella and the play points to a nervous concern with establishing "the singularity of Shakespearean genius" and the indisputable superiority of its product, rather than an attempt to consider the play on its own terms.<sup>587</sup>

I will therefore analyze *Pericles* not as the end product of centuries-long evolution but, rather, as yet another variation of the familiar tale, the alterations

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<sup>584</sup> For a brief summary, see David Skeele, "Pericles in Criticism and Production: A Brief History," in *Pericles: Critical Essays*, 1-33, along with some critical excerpts in the same volume, such as Henry Tyrell, "Doubtful Plays: *Pericles*," 56-58, and F.G. Fleay, "On the Play of *Pericles*," 59-62. Sidney Thomas directly cautions against treating "the reportorial mangling of style and substance in the Bad Quartos" as "the right Shakespearean stuff," as well as against praising "its puerilities and distortions" ("The Problem of *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34.4 [1983]: 448-450, esp. 450). Gary Taylor calls it "a bewilderingly corrupt text" and painstakingly analyzes the degrees of deterioration in order to hypothesize as to which boy actor might have memorized and sold it ("The Transmission of *Pericles*," *Bibliographical Society of America, Papers* 80 [1986]: 193-217, esp. 193).

<sup>585</sup> Deanne Williams, "Papa Don't Preach: The Power of Proximity in *Pericles*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 71.2 (2002): 595-622, esp. 596.

<sup>586</sup> In particular, the figure of Gower has served for many scholars as the point of entrance into discussing *Pericles* as an internally consistent work. See, for example, F. David Hoeniger, "Gower and Shakespeare in *Pericles*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33.4 (1982): 461-479; Hillman, *Intertextuality and Romance in Renaissance Drama: The Staging of Nostalgia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), esp. chapter 5, "Attribution and Tribute in *Pericles*."

<sup>587</sup> Lori Humphrey Newcomb, "The Sources of Romance, the Generation of Story, and the Pattern of Pericles Tales," in *Staging Early Modern Romance: Prose Fiction, Dramatic Romance, and Shakespeare*, ed. Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne (New York: Routledge, 2009), 21-46, esp. 21. On the existing necessity for taking different versions of a romance on their own terms, see also Newcomb's introduction to her *Reading Popular Romance in Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1-19. By contrast, Mullaney offers an extremely balanced consideration of the play alongside Lawrence Twine's *Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, commenting on their distinct preoccupations in *The Place of the Stage*, chapter 6, "'All That Monarchs Do': The Obscured Stages of Authority in *Pericles*."

signalling the preoccupation with the medieval past and its persistence on the early modern stage.<sup>588</sup> This preoccupation emerges from Shakespeare's more general interest in the past and, as I will argue, is clearly and consistently manifested throughout the play in the three arrivals of main characters onto a strange shore: Pericles's encounter with the fishermen and the court in Pentapolis, Thaisa's recovery in Ephesus, and Marina's travails in the brothel. Each of these geographical displacements is a moment of potential disconnect between the past and the present, as these characters are deposited by the sea among strangers and must negotiate their identity anew. However, the neat transition from one location to another, and from past to present, is disrupted, for Pericles and Thaisa, by the recurrence onstage of material objects – the rusty armour and the royal jewels. This “untimely matter” haunts the play and sets the stage for the resurrection of yet another untimely figure – the medieval virgin martyr, who is capable of converting to piety those with designs on her body, and who exists in tension with the female bawd unique to the seventeenth-century versions. As a play, *Pericles* stages the process of identity construction as continuously disrupted by the need to negotiate the cultural inheritance of the past.

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<sup>588</sup> As Tiffany Jo Werth comments perceptively, “the fabulous and hybrid matter of romance foregrounds the problem of reforming the English church, for what is superseded and suppressed calls into question the Reformation it is supposed to facilitate. ...the past remains, not as a specter, but as an active and continuous palimpsest to the present”; see *The Fabulous Dark Cloister: Romance in England after the Reformation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 27. Here both Werth and I differ from Steven Mullaney, who sees *Pericles* as “an effort to imagine, in fact, that popular drama could be a purely aesthetic phenomenon, free from history and from historical determination” (*The Place of the Stage*, 147).

*Pericles* offers a tightly structured conjunction of form and content: its writers use romance, a genre with distinctly medieval roots,<sup>589</sup> to re-enact a collision with the past. The “moral” Gower, this accepted vestige of the Middle Ages and, indeed, the “father” of the English Renaissance, masks deeper unrest in the play.<sup>590</sup> In a preface to *Confessio Amantis*, a sixteenth-century editor identified Gower as a safe repository of “morall doctrines,” “examples of great auctoritee, perswadyng unto virtue,” and even “all redie wordes approved and received, of the same effecte and strength [as the words that some irresponsible writers seek to borrow from other languages].”<sup>591</sup> Gower’s very book, in other words, is a treasury of authorized relics of the past which can be incorporated into the new age harmlessly, and the appearance of the author in *Pericles* lulls the early modern reader into the false sense of security.<sup>592</sup> By contrast, the great sea of time in the play regurgitates objects and concepts much less suited for easy use and incorporation. In the centre of this continuous intrusion of the past stands Marina, whose

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<sup>589</sup> In his heavily Protestant treatise *The Scolemaster*, first published in 1570, Roger Ascham (young Elizabeth’s tutor) speaks disapprovingly of the romance books “made in monasteries by idle monks or wanton canons,” giving as examples the stories of King Arthur and Sir Lancelot, King Mark and Sir Tristram, and King Lot and Sir Lamorak; see *The Scolemaster*, 1570, ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 68-69.

<sup>590</sup> Thomas Berthelette, Gower’s early modern editor, called him in the preface to the 1532 (reprinted in 1554) edition (directed to none other than Henry VIII) “that excellent clerke the morall Gower” see *Jo. Gower de Confessione Amantis*, ed. Thomas Berthelette (London, 1554), II v. In his analysis of this edition, Tim William Machan argues that Berthelette “utilizes the alleged textual history of the poem for significant rhetorical purposes. Textual corruption, that is, indexes the antiquity of the poem whose author is inscribed as traditional and conservative...” (“Thomas Berthelette and Gower’s *Confessio*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 18 (1996): 143-166, esp. 157).

<sup>591</sup> Berthelette, II v<sup>r</sup>. See also R.F. Yeager, “Ben Jonson’s *English Grammar* and John Gower’s Reception in the Seventeenth Century,” in *The Endless Knot: Essays on Old and Middle English in Honor of Marie Borroff*, 227-39, for a parallel argument concerning the reception of Gower by Ben Jonson.

<sup>592</sup> Stephen J. Lynch exposes this sense of security as indeed false when he shows that Gower, in his choric and authorial role, consistently misinterprets and misrepresents the action of the play; see his article “The Authority of Gower in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*,” *Mediaevalia: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 16 (1993 for 1990), 361-378.

name designates her as the product of the changeable sea,<sup>593</sup> and on whom the persona of a virgin martyr – this loquacious and improper symbol of the unwieldy, superstitious Middle Ages – is superimposed by the playwrights onto the original learned maiden.<sup>594</sup>

In the play *Pericles*, the main character is cast on the shore of Pentapolis by a fierce storm, which has destroyed his ship along with its crew. Bewailing his fate, Pericles encounters a group of poor fishermen, whom he asks for information and assistance – all very much along the lines of the story as it travelled through centuries. Every source text insists that the protagonist, known before the seventeenth century as Apollonius, must make his way on the unfamiliar shore without any objects that might indicate his status or tie him, materially, to his former existence. So bare of possessions is he that the fisherman is forced by compassion to share his shabby clothing with the wretched stranger: in the version contained in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, "Of suche clothes as he hadde / With gret Pite this lord he cladde."<sup>595</sup> In the early Latin text, and in Lawrence Twine's *Patterne of Painefull Adventures*, the impoverished fisherman does one better, taking off his own garment and dividing it into two, with an injunction to the

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<sup>593</sup> This interpretation of the sea in *Pericles* is distinct from the analysis, for example, in Philip Edwards, "The Rapture of the Sea," in *Shakespearean Continuities: Essays in Honour of E.A.J. Honigmann*, ed. John Batchelor, Tom Cain, and Claire Lamont (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 175-189. Focussing on "the theme of the recovery of undersea riches," Edwards argues that, ultimately, the "thing of great beauty and value which the sea has snatched, and keeps for itself, and which must be won back and restored, is essentially a person" (175-6). See also Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 70.

<sup>594</sup> Note also the existence of St. Marina of Antioch – the Eastern offshoot of St. Margaret of Antioch, sharing the same *vita*. For more information on this saint, see Wendy R. Larson, "The Role of Patronage and Audience in the Cults of Sts Margaret and Marina of Antioch," in *Gender and Holiness: Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (New York: Routledge, 2002), 23-35. It is unclear whether the seventeenth-century writers might have been aware of this saint, although it is possible, considering that she does appear in some early (ninth century) Western martyrologies (Larson 24).

<sup>595</sup> John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 1980, ed. Russell A. Peck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), Liber Octavus, ll. 651-2.

royal stranger to remember this favour.<sup>596</sup> Apollonius then travels into the city and participates in the local games so successfully that the local king is suitably impressed and invites him to dinner at the palace, where the hero offers a version of his story. He might not directly admit his royal status but certainly presents himself as a wealthy nobleman in distress. In Twine, following closely after the Latin source, “Apollonius craving licence to speake, declared his name, his birth and nobilitie, and unripped the whole tragedie of his adventures in order as is before rehearsed...”<sup>597</sup> Gower’s protagonist is a little more circumspect but still speaks of the “richesse” lost at sea and of the “lond” and “rente” that he has “left at Tyr, whan that [he] wente.”<sup>598</sup> In each of these versions, in other words, the king’s decision to marry his daughter to Apollonius is motivated both by the hero’s apparent nobility and by the sense that he has been somehow separated from his rightful possessions, lost in the city or left behind at Tyre.

Paradoxically, Apollonius’s absolute destitution upon arrival does not indicate his rebirth as a new man (as in the case of Jonah, for example) but rather moves the king to reimburse him somehow for what has been lost. In Twine, the king’s daughter Lucina urges the handsome stranger to “lay sorrowe aside, for [her] father is determined to enrich [him].”<sup>599</sup> While Gower’s king is less immediately generous with his donations, his agreement to marry the princess to Apollonius is based on a train of thought that

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<sup>596</sup> *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri (The Story of Apollonius King of Tyre)*, in *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations, Including the Text of the Historia of Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 112-179, esp. 125, and Lawrence Twine, *The Patterne of Painefull Adventures* (London: by Valentines Simmes for Widow Newman, 1594), C3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>597</sup> Twine, D1<sup>v</sup>; see also Archibald, *Historia*, 127.

<sup>598</sup> Gower, ll. 742-6.

<sup>599</sup> Twine, D1<sup>v</sup>; again, this follows the Latin version very closely, although there the princess promises to enrich him herself, with the king’s permission (129).

culminates in the impulse of restitution. The ship-wrecked stranger “lacketh noight bot worldes good,” but this is insignificant “*For* [his future wife] schal ben hire fader heir.”<sup>600</sup> By this somewhat more complicated reasoning, the king reaches the same conclusion: Apollonius deserves to be reunited with his inheritance, either directly or through his future wife.

In these stories, the past and the present link together into a smooth, unbroken line, uncomplicated by an emergence of artefacts or a persistence of drastic omissions and hauntings. The characters confidently transport personal knowledge in their sea travels, relying on its ability to alter their situation in the new location. The Latin version of the story, and the Twine revision, both show Apollonius’ daughter Tarsia as no less open about her personal history in Mytilene than her father was in Pentapolis. She tells prince Athenagoras, her first visitor in the brothel, “Restrain your shameless lust, and listen to the wretched misfortunes of a helpless woman, think of my ancestry,” repeating this recital with each successive attempt at defloration and eventually using it to provoke pity in the brothel’s overseer, who then assists in her liberation.<sup>601</sup>

Twine goes into even more detail and actually reproduces his heroine’s story; Tharsia urges,

bridle your lust, and hearken unto my unhappy estate, and consider diligently from whence I am sprung. My father was poore Apollonius prince of Tyrus, whome force constrained to forsake his owne countrey. My mother was daughter to Altistrates king of Pentapolis, who died in the birth of me, poore wretch, upon the sea. My father also is dead as was supposed, which caused Dionisiades wife to Stranguilo of Tharsus, to whom my father committed me of special trust to be brought up being but

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<sup>600</sup> Gower, ll. 944-46.

<sup>601</sup> *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, 151-5.

an infant, envying mine estate, and thirsting after my wealth, to seeke my death by the handes of a villaine, which has beene accomplished [...] I was suddenly taken away by the pyrates which solde me unto this filthie bawd.<sup>602</sup>

I quote here this lengthy excerpt (occupying nearly half a page in the original publication), in order to communicate the seamless flow of Tharsia's past into her present. This detailed recounting of all events that lead up to the moment of recital creates, if only for a moment, a dizzying sensation of *mise en abyme*, an uneasy expectation that, at the conclusion of her tale, she will have to describe herself speaking and repeat the story yet again and again. As readers, we retrace the misfortunes of the characters with each consecutive episode, as they are retold anew at every encounter and their pertinence to the present moment in the narrative is reinforced. Indeed, even secondary characters are enabled, after being privy to the stories, to make the necessary connections: when Apollonius's ship arrives to Mytilene, Twine's Athanagoras, having heard the name of the traveller, "remembered in his minde that hee heard Tharsia call her father so."<sup>603</sup> At the same time, Athanagoras is singularly unsurprised and untroubled by this sudden manifestation of Tharsia's royal identity. It seems that the locals have always assumed that Tharsia might be a king's daughter, without the need for physical manifestation. The arrival of Apollonius's ship, in other words, only conforms to the expectations of those who have already heard the virgin's story. Arriving in Mytilene as

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<sup>602</sup> Twine, C3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid, D3<sup>r</sup>.

bare as her father in Pentapolis, she brings along her provenance and her status, confidently expecting that these will be accommodated.<sup>604</sup>

This is not the case in *Pericles*, where a shade of secrecy, uncertainty, and suspicion falls across the past lives of the main characters.<sup>605</sup> Marina never ventures to speak of her origins and noble blood at all; questioned during the reunion scene, Lysimachus simply shrugs, “She would never tell / Her parentage. Being demanded that, / She would sit still and weep” (21.176-78). Questioned at the banquet scene, Pericles gives a bare minimum of information:

A gentleman of Tyre, my name Pericles,  
My education been in arts and arms,  
Who looking for adventures in the world,  
Was by the rough seas reft of ships and men,  
And after shipwreck driven upon this shore.<sup>606</sup>

However, after this very brief outline, the king Simonides reacts not by attending to the guest’s “mishaps” but by directing the attention of the gathering away from the story and explaining, deliberately dismissive, “Come gentlemen, we sit too long on trifles, / And waste the time which looks for other revels” (7.87-8). While the king claims the laudable intention of offering Pericles a distraction from “his melancholy” (7.85-6), his choice of words points to a more sinister undertone. The word “trifle” can indicate something of

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<sup>604</sup> Gower’s Thaise might not be quite so free with her personal story, but she establishes her position on the strange shore by selling other knowledge she had gained in her previous life. Having proposed that a school for girls be established, she promises, to the pimp’s servant, “I shal hire teche of thinges newe, / Which as non other woman can / In al this lond” (ll. 1444-6).

<sup>605</sup> Annette C. Flower comments on this in her article “Disguise and Identity in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26.1 (1975): 30-41, esp. 31.

<sup>606</sup> William Shakespeare and George Wilkins, *A Reconstructed Text of Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, ed. Roger Warren, based on ed. Gary Taylor and Macd. P. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Sc. 7, ll. 77-81. All quotations from *Pericles* will be to this edition, which contains the facsimile of the 1609 quarto in addition to the version emended with the help of Wilkins’ novella. I will comment on the distinction between the two where appropriate.

little significance, but the first meaning listed in the *OED* is “A false and idle tale.”<sup>607</sup>

Furthermore, as James Kearney and Elizabeth Williamson argue, it can also specifically refer to Catholic devotional objects, to emphasize the sense of them as small and carrying no intrinsic value.<sup>608</sup> In referring to Pericles’s words as “trifles,” King Simonides places in doubt both the truthfulness of his story, and its value as evidence, and reiterates this sceptical view two scenes later.

If only in acting as the devil’s advocate, the king clearly shows that a story in itself does not constitute any sort of decisive proof and could be revealed to be a mere fabrication, even in its meagreness in calling Pericles “A stragglng Theseus, born we know not where, / One that hath neither blood nor merit...” (9.73-4). Curiously enough, Thaisa does not contradict this claim, arguing instead that a virtuous life eclipses suspect origins, and even if “his birth were base [...] yet he hath virtue, / The very ground of all nobility, / Enough to make him noble” (9.77-80). Even in reassuring himself that the stranger must, in fact, have noble blood and thus be worthy of Thaisa, the king cannot fully close the gap in knowledge, and offers an uncertain “for aught I know” (9.100). The play repeatedly introduces a disruption in the smooth flow of history and specifically focuses on the distrust and anxiety this disruption provokes in other characters. While the need for evidence is obviously urgent here, the objects that can serve as evidence also emerge from the same gap in knowledge and thus resist immediate interpretation.

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<sup>607</sup> *OED*, “trifle,” 1.

<sup>608</sup> Elizabeth Williamson, “‘Useful and Fancy Articles’: Relics of the Nineteenth-Century Stage,” *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 7 (2007): 233-55, esp. 234; see also James J. Kearney, “Trinket, Idol, Fetish: Some Notes on Iconoclasm and the Language of Materiality in Reformation England,” *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000): 257-61.

In the case of Pericles himself, material evidence consists of “a rusty armour,” dragged in from the sea in poor fishermen’s nets soon after his arrival (5.158).<sup>609</sup> Two aspects of this unexpected catch immediately strain the audience’s belief. The sea presumably could not have washed Pericles “from shore to shore” if he were wearing the armour in question (one would imagine that nobody would put on a heavy steel outfit in the middle of a tempest outside of a heroic tale). Accordingly, we would expect the armour to remain with the rest of the shipwreck, on the bottom of the sea, far from the shore line (5.46). Furthermore, although it is scarcely possible that the shipwreck happened more than twelve hours ago, the armour is already thoroughly rusted. Indeed, it seems so far gone that the lords at court tournament suspect that Pericles “on set purpose let his armour rust / Until this day” (7.57-8).

Both the armour’s uncanny emergency from the sea and its appearance signalling a period of long absence identify it as a piece of what Jonathan Gil Harris calls “untimely matter” – an object originating in the past that is “allowed to assume a more dialogic relation to the present, suggesting affinity and proximity rather than difference and distance between elements of then and now.”<sup>610</sup> In summoning the armour onto the stage, the playwrights are forcefully reminding their audience of the numerous similar objects they must confront regularly, as a matter of everyday life – battered and aged,

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<sup>609</sup> Pericles also appears to have retained a jewel on his arm, probably a bracelet (see note to 5.194), but it disappears from action as soon as it is mentioned, exchanged for a horse.

<sup>610</sup> Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 4. See also Graham Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquaries of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), for a general overview of the seventeenth-century interest in ancient objects. In *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), Robert Whiting points, among other things, to the staggering multiplicity of Catholic objects locally unmoored by the Reformation; see especially chapters 12-14.

their function sometimes questionable. In discussing museum displays, Stephen Greenblatt writes of “wounded artefacts [which] may be compelling not only as witnesses to the violence of history but as signs of use, marks of the human touch, and hence links with the openness to touch that was the condition of their creation.”<sup>611</sup> The rusty armour embodies the traumatic flow of history and serves as an eloquent witness of Pericles’s travails – a witness, nonetheless, that speaks in a language foreign to those taking its deposition.

Cast up by the sea, the armour fails to serve as straightforward evidence of Pericles’ past and present status. Rather, it points to the possibility of moving backwards through the chain of cause-and-effect after, taken by “the rough seas that spares not any man,” it somehow makes its way back to the shore and finds its rightful owner (5.170-1). However, it remains opaque to outside observers. Pericles recognizes it as “mine own, part of my heritage” and locates a “mark” that proves its royal origins (5.162, 177), but the armour fails to act as an immediate proof, even to the fishermen. In response to their puzzled, “What mean you, sir?” (5.174), Pericles must dilute the story, eliding his own royal origins and explaining that “it was sometime target to a king [...] He loved me dearly, / And for his sake I wish the having of it” (5.176-8). Even more drastically, for the First Lord “the rusty outside” signals rather that the stranger might be a peasant, who “appears / To have practised more the whipstock than the lance” (6.53-4). The wise king, of course, chides his courtier for placing so much stock in “The outward habit” (6.60),

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<sup>611</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder,” in *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, 1990 (New York: Routledge Classics, 2007), 216-246, esp. 231. In fact, this article offers an unexpected parallel to the dramatic misreading of objects, whether accidental or wilful, in its own misrepresentation of a red cardinal’s hat on display in the library of Christ Church, Oxford. See John Lee, “The Man who Mistook His Hat: Stephen Greenblatt and the Anecdote,” *Essays in Criticism* 45.4 (1995): 285-300.

but the point stands. Where in the earlier versions Apollonius, sometimes wrapped in half of a fisherman's cloak, was easily recognizable as a victim of a shipwreck, now the incongruous "untimely matter," when appearing to unseasoned interpreters, gives lie to his origins. It acts, then, as evidence turned obstructive, as a troublesome spectacle with which the audience must come to terms.

We see the same problem of interpretation and integration emerge in the case of the objects in Thaisa's coffin. In Gower's narrative, the "cloth of gold" and "tresor ek" are still present and "al redy at hire wille" after she wakes up from her deadly sleep, but are never mentioned afterward (ll. 1179-80, 1233). Indeed, Cerymon seems to assume that the queen is in need of financial support when he offers to maintain the queen with his own daughter "Al only at his oghne cost," and she certainly does not contradict this assumption in gladly acquiescing (ll. 1252ff). Following his Latin source, Twine offers a logical suggestion for disposing of the treasure: since the queen has recovered, the money that was intended for the burial should now be used to reward her saviour. Accordingly, the treasure is bestowed on Cerimon's medical student Machaon, who first noticed the traces of life lingering in the woman; again, there is no further mention of it in the narrative. Not so in *Pericles*: like the protagonist's armour, the jewels disappear and re-appear, involving the audience in their non-linear motion through the plot. At first, mimicking Gower's physician, Cerimon courteously tells Thaisa that "some certain jewels" found in the casket "are all / At [her] command" (14.2-3). As in Gower, we also

then lose track of these precious objects.<sup>612</sup> However, the jewels re-emerge in the final scene of the play where, without actually appearing onstage, they still persist as an incontestable memento, waiting for the one who can unlock their secrets.

In the final scene of the play, Pericles fails to recognize Thaisa in her nun's habit and, more significantly, initially refuses to believe Cerimon's stark, "This is your wife" (22.37). Startled, he counters with a memory, "Reverend appearer, no. / I threw her overboard with these same arms" (22.38-9). This denial of familiarity, perhaps faintly reminiscent of the apostle Peter, has no parallel in the earlier versions of the text. The protagonist in Gower and Twine might not be able to recognize his wife without prompting, but once the verbal revelation is made, the reality of her physical presence entirely supersedes any memories of past death and burial. When Gower's queen identifies Apollonius as her "housebonde, / That whilom he and I were on!" his memory of the earlier events cannot impede the joyful culmination of the romance: "[t]he king with that knew hire anon, / And tok hire in his Arm and kiste."<sup>613</sup> Similarly, while Twine's Apollonius rudely pushes the queen away when she makes her first attempt at contact, she only has to name the relationship between them, calling him her "lord and deare husband." Hearing her speak, Apollonius is "sodainly astonied": "the great joy revived his spirites againe, and he cast his eies earnestly upon her, and knewe perfittly that it was shee indeede..."<sup>614</sup> These moments of epiphany are enabled by a complex interplay between physical presence and the absolute trust in autobiography which these

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<sup>612</sup> Indeed, they seem to disappear from the narrative almost instantaneously, since at the end of this short scene Thaisa mourns her inability to reward her saviour: "My recompense is thanks, that's all, / Yet my good will is great, though the gift small" (14.15-16).

<sup>613</sup> Gower, ll. 1860-3.

<sup>614</sup> Twine, L3<sup>f</sup>.

pre-seventeenth-century versions of the story promote. As with Apollonius and his daughter earlier, in these versions the queen's verbal description of the past relationship with the protagonist, coupled with her own physical presence, immediately affirms her present identity and status.

The presentation of this scene in *Pericles* differs radically from the earlier versions, since Thaisa is unable to disclose her own identity by identifying Pericles as her husband. She makes a brave attempt and calls out, "You are, you are –" but manages to utter, before fainting away, only his name, "O royal Pericles!" (22.34). In stark opposition to the seamless reconciliation of the earlier versions, this moment presents a rupture in the flow of the narrative. It postpones the recognition until the combination of authoritative speech and material evidence can convince the protagonist to abandon his personal recollections and gradually accept the idea that his version of the past is flawed and must be radically altered.

At first, as I pointed out earlier, Pericles vehemently rejects Cerimon's attempt to identify Thaisa as his lost spouse and offers "these same arms" as the evidence of his wife's death and marine burial. Cerimon then counters with his own account of events, narrating Thaisa's stormy arrival in Ephesus and the events following her arrival on the shore: "I oped the coffin, / Found there rich jewels, recovered her, and placed her, / Here in Diana's temple" (22.43-5). Remarkably, in this entire tale, potentially capable of raising many questions, Pericles' attention is initially drawn only by the mention of the "rich jewels." Clearly, neither Cerimon's witnessing nor Thaisa's physical presence is sufficient to eclipse the tactile memory, contained in his own arms, of throwing the

coffin into the sea. Only the objects, half-remembered from his past life and miraculously preserved both by the sea and by time, can and must be interpreted; thus, Pericles promptly asks, in response to Cerimon's recollections, "May we see them?" (22.45). The physician's promise that "they shall be brought you to my house" can finally begin the process of recognition and reconciliation (22.46). Still, the characters seem to agree that until evidence is actually produced and interpreted, the reconciliation is never fully final and any narration of the events remains deeply problematic. Indeed, when asked to "deliver / How this dead queen re-lives," Cerimon agrees but implores, "Beseech you, first go with me to my house, / Where shall be shown you all was found with her..." (22.85-8). Having disappeared without a trace in the early versions, here the treasure brought by the storm is of crucial significance: a material link to the past, it demands to be seen and interpreted by Pericles.

These jewels, one would think, could be easily introduced as a stage prop, so that the audience might re-establish their continued presence and the linkage they provide between parts of the narrative. However, if one is to judge from the text of the play, Thaisa's jewels never actually appear onstage: characters teasingly allude to their presence just out of view and ask for them to be delivered, but the moment of delivery is endlessly deferred. So, after his wife's death, Pericles asks that "spices, ink, and paper, / My casket and my jewels" be immediately brought to him, but then exits the stage with Thaisa's body in his arms (11.64-5). In the scene of Thaisa's pseudoresurrection,<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> See Adam Max Cohen on this term, *Wonder in Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), esp. chapters 1.2 and 1.3, for a detailed discussion of this term he has coined to describe Shakespearean characters seemingly risen from the dead.

Cerimon and his helpers pointedly avoid describing what, if any, treasures they see in the open coffin: the only “heavenly jewels / Which Pericles hath lost... The diamonds of a most praised water” are Thaisa’s eyes, which, ironically, will prove to be no proof at all in the future encounter with her husband (12.96-7, 100). Even as Cerimon discusses Thaisa’s fate with her two scenes later, the wording (“*this* letter and *some certain* jewels / Lay with you in your coffer”) suggests that he has Pericles’ note in hand but has neglected to display the treasure (14.1-2, italics mine).

I contend, then, that the significance of these jewels lies not in their continued presence but, rather, in their continued threat of presence coupled with their simultaneous elusiveness. As an absent prop,<sup>616</sup> the jewels signal the acute awareness in the play of the possibility that material evidence of the past might or might not be retained somewhere and open to interpretation. As with the rusty armour, however, the hope that the jewels might confirm one’s present status immediately and beyond any doubt is directly undermined. While the desire for such confirmation persists, the object itself either is battered by the events until it is inevitably misread by the observers, or exists only as an absent focal point of this desire. In *Pericles*, in other words, the lingering relics of the past, in their persistent resurfacing, create doubt and confusion rather than certainty and place the play itself in an uneasy relationship with its national and religious past in England.<sup>617</sup> These pieces of evidence witness forcefully against

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<sup>616</sup> I am grateful to Bernice Neal for suggesting this term, which is central to her own dissertation-in-progress.

<sup>617</sup> See Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), esp. ch. 6, “*Pericles* and the Wonder of Unburdened Proof,” for a commentary on the “intellectual preoccupation with uncertainty” in Shakespeare’s late plays (127). Platt’s consideration, however, is concerned with the aesthetics of performance rather than with historiography.

H.W. Fawkner's argument that the miraculous in *Pericles* is enabled by forgetting and by "the constant totalization of the loss of the past." According to Fawkner, miracle is defined as "the experience of an incomprehensible freshness."<sup>618</sup> However, the stage props, either physically present or imaginary, resist this explanation. Certainly, when compared to earlier versions, the play at every turn indicates a desire for such a loss, and for a miraculous freshness of a new age, and yet, the past persists and demands engagement, interpretation, and coming to terms.

Within this framework, Marina's own channelling of the medieval virgin martyr emerges as the play's attempt to grapple with the genre that, like *Pericles*' jewels, is ever-present on the margins of the early modern drama.<sup>619</sup> Numerous scholars have commented, in passing, on the indebtedness of the brothel scenes to this specific type of *vita*. However, little, if any, attention has been paid to the fact that this indebtedness is a deliberate creation of the Shakespeare-Wilkins version.<sup>620</sup> While Gower does offer at least some sense of divine protection, both he and Twine (as well as Twine's sources)

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<sup>618</sup> H.W. Fawkner, *Shakespeare's Miracle Plays: Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1992), 39. To make this reading possible, Fawkner reads the rust on *Pericles*' armour not as evidence of "wear and tear" but as a link to "the primordially and freshness of the element from which it originated," a "phenomenon rather than ... explanation" (36-37).

<sup>619</sup> That the early modern audience was capable of recognizing this genre engagement is well attested by Willem Schrickx's discovery of the play on the list of books owned by the English Jesuits in Douay. See his "'Pericles' in a Book-List of 1619 from the English Jesuit Mission and Some of the Play's Special Problems," *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976): 21-32.

<sup>620</sup> See, for example, Lorraine Helms, "The Saint in the Brothel: Or, Eloquence Rewarded," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41.3 (1990): 319-332; Peter Womack, "Shakespeare and the Sea of Stories," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29.1 (1999): 169-187, esp. 171; Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Shakespeare, Catholicism, and Romance* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 163-164; Susan Dunn-Hensley, "Return of the Sacred Virgin: Memory, Loss, and Restoration in Shakespeare's Later Plays," in *Walsingham in Literature and Culture from the Middle Ages to Modernity*, ed. Dominic James and Gary Waller (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 185-197, esp. 190-2. Karen Bamford writes most clearly about the changes introduced in the seventeenth-century version in *Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 36-41. Lorraine Helms speaks of the virgin martyr figure as relevant for the entire "tradition of the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyr*" (326), just as Peter Womack links the "Apollonius story" to the Life of St. Agnes.

place their emphasis on the heroine's ability to provoke sympathy and lenience in others, either by telling sad tales or by making lament.<sup>621</sup> Conversely, the authors of *Pericles* endow their heroine with the ability not only to dissuade but also, more importantly, to preach, to astonish, and to convert.<sup>622</sup> This ability is displayed very clearly in the beginning of Scene 19, which opens with the First Gentleman's stunned question: "Did you ever hear the like?" Driving home the singularity of Marina's performance, he asks again, "But to have divinity preached there – did you ever dream of such a thing?"<sup>623</sup> The effect of her preaching is just as singular, for the second gentleman is "for no more bawdy houses" and would rather "go hear the vestals sing." The first gentleman responds in kind: "I'll do anything now that is virtuous, but I am out of the road of rutting for ever" (19.1-9).

Obviously, this instantaneous conversion cannot fail to provoke laughter, but at the same time this is not quite parody. A startling transformation of pagan enablers and onlookers is a standard feature of virgin martyrs' Lives, as I show in the first chapter, which themselves tend toward comic sequences. However, Marina's interaction with

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<sup>621</sup> In Gower, "such a grace god hire sente, / That for the sorwe which sche made / Was non of hem which pouer hade / To don hire eny vileinie" (ll. 1428-31), while Twine's heroine recites, as I said before, the story of all her misfortunes.

<sup>622</sup> Tiffany Jo Werth argues that, in "her ability to transform those around her through dexterous verbal skills and determined refusal," Marina actually departs from the virgin martyr model since she relies on "resourceful human agency" rather than on supernatural forces, *The Fabulous Dark Closet: Romance in England after the Reformation*, 91; see also an earlier essay by her, "Great Miracle or Lying Wonder? Janus-Faced Romance in *Pericles*," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 8 (2008): 183-203. However, as I have shown in the previous chapters, verbal skills, steadfast refusal, and reliance on the available resources are all stock features of virgin martyr *vitae*. At least for several scenes, medieval virgin martyr lives again through Marina.

<sup>623</sup> There is a tendency in criticism to ignore the fact that Marina differs from her predecessors precisely by choosing divinity as subject matter. For example, Archibald links the brothel scenes directly to the pre-Renaissance Apollonius of Tyre tradition and begins her article with the words, "It is not often in real life that a liberal arts education saves a girl from rape" (" 'Deep Clerks She Dumbs': The Learned Heroine in *Apollonius of Tyre* and *Pericles*," *Comparative Drama* 22.4 (1988-89), 289-303, esp. 289).

Lysimachus shows just how deadly serious the stakes are, when, in order to preserve her chastity, she must convince him to change his entire view of honour, justice, and especially women. In the beginning of Scene 16, Mytilene is a city that views young women as disposable goods: the Bawd complains about being “so much out of creatures” and spitefully comments that three prostitutes still in the brothel’s possession “with continual action are even as good as rotten” (6, 8-9). Playing the familiar role of a pagan governor, Lysimachus supports this view, claiming that his “authority” does not need to be informed by any greater scheme of good and evil but “Can wink at blemishes, or on faults look friendly, / Or my displeasure punish at my pleasure” (19.95-7). However, much like Christ in his debate with Pilate, Marina rejects the idea that the governor has the power to change the order of things and make “blemishes” and “faults” good at his own pleasure. In presenting the potential rape as a crime that will “deface this building, / The workmanship of heaven, made up for good,” she shows to Lysimachus a greater design and intent, against which he would be acting in his unthinking concupiscence (19.119-120). The governor’s conversion at close range is touchingly poignant. Acknowledging Marina’s ability to channel moral precepts and “teach us what we should be,” he turns the evaluative gaze onto himself (19.148). Under her influence, he understands that his own former thoughts were “intemperate, / Foul and deformed,” but also that Marina’s anguish and pained pleading, her “holy words” (19.182), have wrought a change and “So well hath laved that they are now white” (19.151-3). The reference to baptism is unmistakable: the dramatic action may be unfolding in a thoroughly pantheistic world, but the transformation of Lysimachus is imagined in

solidly Christian terms. The subsequent conversation among the managers' of the brothel shows that just how great is the threat presented by Marina's propensity for conversion both to the pagan gods and the local social order, since she is "able to freeze the god Priapus and undo the whole of generation," as well as turn "swearers priests" (19.12-13, 21).<sup>624</sup>

Having begun as a prototypical romance with fairy tale elements – complete with a wicked stepmother (who has her own, less beautiful daughter), a servant with strict orders to murder the heroine, and kidnapping pirates – the play thus suddenly transforms into a no less recognizable medieval *vita*. Having gone into the sea a romance heroine, Marina washes up at Mytilene a loquacious, combative virgin martyr, who threatens customers with her "virginal fencing" (19.62). In essence, the mode of conduct assigned to her by the playwrights is, as much as the rusty armour and ever-elusive jewels, an artefact of the recent past, insistently intruding into the present and demanding engagement.<sup>625</sup> In *Pericles*, the playwrights consciously link the mouthy girl bequeathed to them by their sources to the contested figure of the virgin martyr, easily recognizable but threatening, and, in the seventeenth century, always on the brink of dismissal.<sup>626</sup> The

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<sup>624</sup> See Nona Fienberg, "Marina in *Pericles*: Exchange Values and the Art of Moral Discourse," *Iowa State Journal of Research* 57. 2 (1982): 153-161, for commentary on the moral transformation Marina works on the world of Mytilene. Theodora Jankowski identifies Marina as a "queer virgin," carrying an "aura of power that needs to be controlled"; see *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, 134.

<sup>625</sup> In Scene 19, Bolt announces to Marina that he has come "To take from you the jewel you hold so dear" (203). The metaphor is, to be sure, a bit worn out from long use, but it serves to highlight the provocative link between Marina's virginity and the jewels that will serve as the continuously absent evidence of her mother's identity.

<sup>626</sup> It is important, I think, to recognize that the figure of Marina is not a novelty to the pre-modern audience. In this, my argument stands in contrast to Amanda Piesse's assertion that "for Marina to preserve herself by speech is an inversion of the moral norm. Where silence normally betokens chatity [sic], Marina's constant assertion of an unreconstructed self is made manifest in her shining words"; see "Space

space of female resistance to commodification, in other words, is strictly limited by the status of the virgin martyr figure as a troubling and elusive relic of a less sophisticated time, and Lysimachus' awed exclamation, "I did not think thou couldst have spoke so well, / Ne'er dreamt thou couldst" (19.149-50), is immediately undercut by the understanding that he is praising a figure that has no place on the early modern social scene.

In her initial encounter with Lysimachus, Marina describes herself as "forbidden ground"; if the governor breaches the perimeter, after him "Too many enter, and [he is] guilty / Of all their evils" (19.115-17). The note to these lines in Roger Warren's edition draws a comparison to *Measure for Measure* (2.2.175-7), where Angelo speaks rhetorically about the waste of venturing "to raze the sanctuary, / And pitch our evils there." However, reading the two remarks together also brings to the foreground the distinction between them. Where Angelo cautions against destroying a sacred structure and replacing it with one's own evils, Marina seems to be suggesting that in her case the evils will be generated by the act of entering the "forbidden ground." The wording here invokes the early modern conceptions of Catholic spaces – secret enclaves that contain the props of worship, books filled with disruptive knowledge and, in some cases, even priests, but also abandoned structures of monasteries and sometimes churches.<sup>627</sup>

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for the Self: Place, Persona and Self-Projection in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*," in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580-1690*, ed. Gordon McMullan (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 151-170, esp. 167. The assumption that preservation of chastity automatically signifies an absence of voice does not take into consideration the long-standing virgin martyr tradition.

<sup>627</sup> See Richard L. Williams, "Forbidden Sacred Spaces in Reformation England," in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Andrew Spicer and Sarah Hamilton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 95-114.

The playwright creates a similar air of portentous superstition later on when, having been physically assaulted by Pericles, Marina responds that she “ne’er before invited eyes, / But have been gazed on like a comet” (21.75-6). In only two lines, she declares the ability to withstand fearlessly the public gaze, thus linking herself to the “modest maids” of the martyr stories, so sarcastically discussed, as I show in chapter three, both by Catholic and Protestant sides, and announces her own status as a thing of uneasy wonder and possible foreboder of destruction. By this comparison, she is also connected to *1 Henry VI*, which begins with an invocation of “Comets, importing change of times and states” that “Brandish [their] crystal tresses in the sky (1.1.2-3). Originally invoked by Bedford to punish the “bad revolting stars” (1.1.4) that have aligned to bring forth the king’s death, by Act 3, Scene 3, the image of a comet is firmly linked to Joan of Arc through the torch held by her on a turret of Rouen. Transfixed by this image of a girl with a torch, Charles urges it to “shine [...] like a comet of revenge, / A prophet to the fall of all our foes!” (3.3.14-15). In each case, then, Marina’s descriptions of herself as a “forbidden ground” and a “comet” signal danger to all those who come into contact with Marina and demand that this threat be defused before the narrative can wind to a close.

This threat of contagion contained in a woman’s body pervades the play: having previously offered lavish praise to Antiochus’s daughter, after solving the riddle Pericles refers to her as “this glorious casket stored with ill” and explains that “he’s no man on whom perfections wait / That knowing sin within, will touch the gate” (1.120; 122-3). While he does not attempt to remove the blame from Antiochus, his fear of being infected with sin is directly tied to the possibility of knowing her sexually and thus

unleashing a multitude of evils onto himself. This fear re-appears in a more substantial form later in the play when, in the Scene 16 (that has no precedent in the earlier versions), the brothel-keepers are bewailing the quality of the female goods they now have remaining in their collection. Not only are the prostitutes “pitifully sodden” but also “too unwholesome, o’ conscience. The poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the little baggage,” who “quickly pooped him, she made him roast meat for worms” (16.18-21). Obviously, the playwright is here referring to venereal disease, so rampant in the early modern world, but the wording of the comment presents the female body as the original breeding ground of the infection and a tool of destruction. After all, the customer is dead while the “little baggage” seems to be still alive, and Bolt’s language strongly suggests an active malicious force directed against the man by the woman whose favours he had bought.

However, while in both cases the female body generates terror in the men approaching it, the women in question are not empowered through this terror; Antiochus’s daughter and the nameless prostitute are devoured by the very danger they contain. Although, unlike her father, the princess does not make an active decision to sin and is instead enticed by her father, she is “shrivelled up” by heavenly fire just as he is (7.10), and, in a similar manner, the prostitutes become “with continual action [...] even as good as rotten,” literally disintegrating under the debilitating effects of disease (16.8-9). The play, in other words, inscribes the female body as potentially dangerous but at the same time emphasizes the ultimate impotence of this potential: the terrible force contained in the women cannot work to their own empowerment and emancipation.

Rather, it is necessarily intertwined with captivity, violence, and eventual self-destruction.

The Marina/Bawd dyad subtly revisits the raw threat of incest and venereal disease and, as such, questions the ideas of female power inherited from the medieval traditions. As I have noted earlier, a female Bawd is unique to the Shakespeare-Wilkins texts; while earlier versions generally feature more than one pander, all of these characters are male. Introducing an older woman in a position of power, and so closely linked by the narrative to the heroine, opens up the space for interrogating Marina's own status as a container of divine authority. Drawing attention to the use of the epithet "herb-woman" (19.90) by Lysimachus in relation to the Bawd, Richard Levin has recently argued that this is likely a reference "to the wise or cunning woman, which seems likely since the wise woman, along with her other alleged skills, was supposed to possess a special knowledge of the herbs that she dispensed in her medical practice."<sup>628</sup> This argument is supported by my own discussion of the early modern ideas about cunning women, or (white) witches in the previous chapter. We need only to recall Reginald Scot's mute old woman, cutting herbs with her scythe outside of the city grounds, and John Bale's *Infidelitas* with her own interest in gathering and employing herbs. Of course, we do not see the Bawd actually perform any notable acts of harming or healing, or find employment for the herbs she might have gathered, but such an exhibition is, in fact, entirely unnecessary. In the light of the ongoing early modern debate on cunning women, such a reference is always fraught, pointing simultaneously to

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<sup>628</sup> Richard Levin, "The 'Herb Woman' in *Pericles*," *The Shakespeare Newsletter* 56.1 (2006): 3 & 6, esp. 3.

pretensions of power and to their inherent failure.<sup>629</sup> In *Pericles*, furthermore, this connection gains particular significance through the presence of Marina, who, having been read as a holy virgin, is asked by Lysimachus to perform an act of miraculous healing on Pericles himself by using her “sacred physic” on him.<sup>630</sup>

The tension between the two characters points to the ongoing recovery and re-interpretation of the figure of the virgin martyr after the Reformation, and thus in itself constitutes a reflection on the question of periodization and its relationship to the woman question. In placing Marina, this temporary virgin martyr, in dialogue with a possible cunning woman, the playwrights establish rigid temporal limitations for the possibilities of emulation and embodiment. While urging the necessity of interpretation, they argue that, ultimately, the process of interpreting the symbols and ideas inherited from the Middle Ages is continuously flawed and devoid of utility. Even as the play stages its pseudo-possession and shows a romance heroine channelling a virgin martyr, the familiar plot of the narrative inexorably pushes Marina away from this performance, and from the dim memory of the untimely figure. The Bawd looms over her during the entire time in Mytilene as a distinct warning of the transformation that must be undergone by the formerly impressive virgin martyr. Despite Lysimachus’s verbal gesture toward her hypothetical abilities, the Bawd’s only control is over the enslaved prostitutes, and even in that she is sandwiched between two male characters, the Pander and Bolt. She seems

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<sup>629</sup> See Richard Levin, “Flower Maidens, Wise Women, Witches and the Gendering of Knowledge in English Renaissance Drama,” in *Shakespeare’s Universe: Essays in Honour of W.R. Elton*, ed. John M. Mucciolo with Steven J. Doloff and Edward A. Rauchut (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 95-107.

<sup>630</sup> See Marjorie Garber, “The Healer in Shakespeare,” in *Medicine and Literature*, ed. Enid Rhodes Perschel, intro. Edmund D. Pellegrino (New York: Neale Watson Academic Publications, 1980), 103-109, esp. 108, for a comment on Marina as a powerful healing figure.

to be uniquely suited to recognize supernatural powers in other women, albeit assuming in them leanings toward witchcraft, but responds only with terror and an attempt at elimination and subjugation. Hearing Marina's invocation of the gods, the Bawd quickly responds, "She conjures, away with her," and chides, "Will you not go the way of womenkind?" (19.196-98).

This curious early modern counterpart to the virgin martyr, despite presiding over the place of corrupt sexuality, quakes in fear at the very thought of a woman who can alter the world with her words, and hastens to direct her back to gender normative constraints. Her abrupt disappearance from the narrative after these words, and her absence at the final reckoning as the royal family is being reunited, suggests a loss of the playwrights' interest in her after the character's function has been abundantly highlighted.<sup>631</sup> There is no need to punish the Bawd for enslaving Marina because, more than being part of the heroine's trials, she is a woman who does not heed her own advice and follow "the way of womenkind." She is, in other words, a virgin martyr read in the new time. Her tenuous position in the narrative argues for lack of influence, either creative or destructive; in essence, she exists as Marina's shadowy, aged doppelganger – a warning to a girl about choosing to persist in the obsolete ways of a medieval saint.

The alternative to this threat of ultimate impotence and of being limited to presiding over other women's misfortune is found in a disturbingly thorough re-absorption into the family unit. As joyful as Marina's reunion with her parents is, it

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<sup>631</sup> In *Pericles*, the only later mention of this character is indirect: we are told that Marina gives everything she earns to "the cursed Bawd" (21.11). In *The Patterne of Painfull Adventures*, the male bawd is burned in a public square, with the virgin becoming the heiress to all of his money (A4<sup>r</sup>-B1<sup>v</sup>), but in the play the female version simply dissolves into the background, presumably continuing to ply her trade in Mytilene – an issue that cannot be resolved but must be ignored.

seems to have terminated her ability to speak freely and effectively. Consider the last two things we hear Marina utter in the play. Asked by Pericles to prove her identity by giving her mother's name, she kneels and exclaims, "Is it no more / To be your daughter than to say my mother's name? / Thaisa was my mother, who did end / The minute I began" (21.196-200). Having found Thaisa on Ephesus, Marina kneels yet again and pronounces, "My heart / Leaps to be gone into my mother's bosom" (21.65-66). Otherwise, she remains silent as jubilation ensues in both scenes and even as her own marriage is being arranged and Pericles promises, without consulting his daughter, that Lysimachus "shall prevail" (21.247). Her last utterances, furthermore, are curiously parallel: both pronounced from a kneeling position, they are speech-acts of loss.

In the Oxford 2004 edition, Marina's rhetorical question to Pericles is translated as follows: "is saying my mother's name the only thing I need to do to be acknowledged as your daughter" (219). However, read more directly, it is also an oddly despairing commentary on the status of a father's daughter, suggesting that this position entails but also permits no more speech than the utterance of the mother's name. Marina's next remark, which does not occur until the next scene, confirms this reading by narrating an emptying-out of her own body, in the same way as her vocal cords have been emptied out of all words that do not pertain to family matters. The preoccupation in these lines with the re-discovery of the mother revises the patriarchal father-daughter model that operates through much of the play and offers, as Williams suggests, a reaffirmation of family values without requiring "the silence of its female characters."<sup>632</sup> But the play

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<sup>632</sup> Williams, "Papa Don't Preach," 618.

does, in fact, require the silence of the former virgin martyr. Her speech and her heart are spectacularly absorbed into her mother, a woman whom she had for the first time consciously encountered in the last scene, and her sexual freedom, briefly gained at meeting Pericles, is swiftly handed to Lysimachus at his first request.

There is, in other words, no organic continuity between Marina defending her honour at the brothel and the position she comes to occupy after the family members are reunited. Rather, her speedy transformation into a quiet girl metaphorically standing behind her mother and already betrothed to be married, and the disappearance of the witchy Bawd, emphasize the incongruity of the holy virgin in this tale and exposes her as yet another piece of untimely debris thrown up by the sea of time. Like the armour and the elusive jewels, the figure of the virgin martyr presses its way into the narrative but remains resistant to interpretation. Temporarily adopted by the heroine as an empowering model, this figure links her, in various ways, to morally corrupt, sexually loose, and tragically impotent female characters. At the same time, even as Marina is safely re-inserted into her family, becoming a daughter and, at the same time, a wife, her sojourn in the role of a holy virgin remains – as a distinct reminder of the continuous pressure of the past and also of the early modern apprehension of it. After all, the adoption of this role allows the heroine to preserve herself from dishonour and thus enables her future transformation into a demure daughter and a modest wife.

A resurrection of this figure in early modern drama suggests an attempt to grapple with and to assuage the pressure of the past by revealing its inherent danger and instability; the extolled married woman of the Reformation is offered as a superior model

of contented femininity. However, just as the material evidence of the past stubbornly remains, so does the pugnacious virgin, continuously discussed in post-Reformation texts, who needs to be re-invoked and re-interpreted in an attempt to lay her to rest. As the rusted armour defies full comprehension by the lords, and the jewels remain just out of reach for the entire play, the figure of the virgin martyr, with its aura of threat, does not allow itself to be analyzed exhaustively and dismissed. It remains at the heart of *Pericles* as a distant and vaguely unsettling alternative to Marina's happy reunion with her family.

#### **The Petrified Saint: *The Virgin Martyr* and the Remnants of Worship**

Several years later, however, Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr* (1620) raises the concern with discernment to a new pitch, bringing onto the early modern stage an entire virgin martyr *vita* and postulating an even more intimate connection between religious flotsam of the past and this figure. In an argument against false idols, the main character of this play Dorothea points (among other arguments) to the dubious provenance of religious objects and to the ease with which they may be turned to other purposes once circumstances change. To illustrate her point, she recounts a tale concerning a king of Egypt who, in order to make a statue of Osiris, "Tooke from the Matrons necks the richest Jewels / And purest gold, as the materials / To finish up his worke."<sup>633</sup> However, when the statue does not perform the task for which it is made and the king suffers defeat, another use is found for the gold and the jewels: "Enrag'd against

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<sup>633</sup> Philip Massenger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr: A Tragedie. As it hath beene divers times publikely Acted with great applause by the servants of his Majesties Revels* (London: printed by B.A. and T.F. for Thomas Jones, 1631), F3<sup>r</sup>. All further references are to this edition.

his god [...] he tooke downe / The senselesse thing and melting it againe, / He made a Basing, in which Eunuches wash'd / His Concubines feete." The tale does not end with this "sordid use," as Dorothea refers to it, for the mistress proves false, but the king's rage against the god passes as his relationship with the priests improves. In yet another metamorphosis, both of faith and of matter, "of the same Basing / he made his god againe."

The moral of this tale, for the purposes of Dorothea's argument, is that the worshippers of pagan gods, including the two sisters Caliste and Christeta who are listening to her, have been deluded and forced "To put their trust in drosse" (F4<sup>r</sup>). At the same time, the choice of the story betrays a specific anxiety about the tenuous boundary between a religious object and an item deployed for household needs or for personal adornment. This is very recognizably a post-Reformation anxiety. As early as 1973, describing the plunder of the English churches and monasteries in 1530s, Margaret Aston remarked that "This ecclesiastical dismemberment put a whole mass of different materials on the market (timber, glass, furniture, lead, household goods of all descriptions) and local buyers and filchers of every kind clearly had their ears and eyes open."<sup>634</sup> In other words, despite being prudently placed in Egypt, Dorothea's tale must have immediately evoked local associations in the audience, who would be acutely aware of the presence of ruins in post-Reformation England and possibly even

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<sup>634</sup> Margaret Aston, "English Ruins and English History: The Dissolution and the Sense of the Past," 239, as well as Stephen Greenblatt's essay "Remnants of the Sacred in Early Modern England" in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Sallibrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 337-345, for a discussion of material things "left over" from religious worship. See also Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, 565-93, for the discussion of Catholic objects surviving into the reign of Elizabeth.

possessed, or personally knew someone who possessed, an item formerly employed in Catholic worship. If nothing else, as Elizabeth Williamson shows, some of these items were present in the theatre, whether or not they were actually onstage at any point during this particular play.<sup>635</sup>

The virgin's somewhat later reference to the statue of Jove that "would not hurt the thiefe that stole away / Two of his golden locks" (G<sup>r</sup>) makes this anxiety more acutely relevant by indicating the role of unpunished theft in the ongoing metamorphosis of the religious object.<sup>636</sup> It also points to the general disregard of the existing legal frameworks and hierarchies implicated in such metamorphosis. After all, the story of the Osiris statue explicitly shows how the jewellery originally intended to signify the high status and nobility of respectable matrons is, in the course of a political and religious upheaval, made abject by receiving the dirty feet of a marginal woman.

The playwrights clearly intended these two examples to ring instantly recognizable and to provoke high emotion in those who hear them, both within the play and, consequently, in the audience. The two virgins have been listening to Dorothea's arguments but easily dismissing her account of the ignoble and lawless deeds committed by the pagan gods. However, the Egyptian tale immediately forces them to bewail their ruination and wish that they had not abandoned Christianity. Dorothea's reference to

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<sup>635</sup> See Elizabeth Williamson, *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), especially the introduction, "Mere Properties: The Materiality of Religious Objects" and chapter 2, "the Trappings of Ceremony: Setting the Table and Other Theatrical Properties," for the discussion of Catholic objects and their uses in early modern theatre.

<sup>636</sup> Considering that the religious object in question is a human-shaped statue that loses some of its hair, the playwrights might also have been thinking about the frequent *furta sacra*, or relic thefts of the Middle Ages, as well as the relic relocations of the Reformation; see Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, 1978 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Jove's stolen locks also causes Theophilus to conclude that she is "past hope" (G2'). Unlike *Pericles*, where relics of the past are thrown up on the shore possibly a bit tarnished but otherwise unchanged, *The Virgin Martyr* operates under the understanding that time and circumstance may alter the material world beyond recognition. The Christian truth, to be sure, remains unchanged through any evolutions of history, but how might one read it in the tangle and confusion of physical, social, and religious developments?<sup>637</sup> The desire for readability that permeates the play is undercut throughout by the despairing recognition that complete transparency is impossible even for such an adept and dedicated reader as Dorothea.<sup>638</sup> Placed in this context, the virgin martyr herself becomes the ultimate symbol of troubled interpretation: a Catholic saint revived on the Protestant stage, she is the golden idol being appropriated to fit the new time and custom.

This reading would help explain some of the dissatisfaction expressed in mid-twentieth-century treatments of the play. In 1970, Peter F. Mullany writes indignantly, "Religion in *The Virgin Martyr* [...] gives an apparent seriousness to a dramatic action structured to exploit its materials in the manner of Fletcherian tragic-comedy rather than

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<sup>637</sup> As Catherine Richardson comments, "...the early modern theatre was a uniquely important place for the working out of the meanings of material culture. It was a place where words and things could be brought together prominently, and the meanings of each challenged publicly"; see *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35. See also the seminal collection on material culture and early modern theatre edited by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>638</sup> See Larry S. Champion, "'Disaster with My So Many Joys': Structure and Perspective in Massinger and Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984): 199-209, for the detailed analysis of the hierarchy of awareness in the play. There is no question that Dorothea occupies the very top rung of this ladder.

to use them for shaping of a meaningful statement about life.”<sup>639</sup> He then goes on to refer to “speciousness” of *The Virgin Martyr* and to describe it as “a play designed to offer the pretence of serious concerns,” concluding that “one loses the incarnational aspect of Christianity in such idealized portraits” and Dorothea “is never humanly convincing.”<sup>640</sup> Just a year before him, George R. Price comments in his biography of Thomas Dekker that the play is “sincere but shallow in its conceptions, and therefore not very moving.”<sup>641</sup> He explains,

...the trouble is that the religiosity of the play has been detached from the specific doctrines and symbols of Christian faith which arouse imagination and feeling. There is no love-feast of the faithful, no comforting of captives in prison, no visit from a missionary, no secret bringing of sacraments.

In short, there is no Church; the saints in *The Virgin Martyr* are not members of a communion on earth and in heaven; the religion has been somewhat denatured.<sup>642</sup>

Both Mullany and Price, in other words, find the play theologically unconvincing and typologically insufficient; it offers no grand spiritual conclusions and does not present a strong statement of faith.<sup>643</sup> Interestingly, the scholars defending the merits of *The Virgin Martyr* against these accusations sometimes choose to do so by arguing that it did occupy a clearly defined position in the religious controversy. So, Louise George Clubb

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<sup>639</sup> Peter F. Mullany, “Religion in Massinger and Dekker’s *The Virgin Martyr*,” *Komos 2* (1971): 89-97, esp. 90.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>641</sup> George R. Price, *Thomas Dekker* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 95.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.* Note that Ira Clark’s more recent study of Philip Massinger’s works does not consider the play in depth, mentioning it in passing a grand total of three times. The fact that, in the second of these mentions, Clark gets the heroine’s name wrong and refers to her as “Pauline” rather than “Dorothea” starkly indicates the perceived lack of significance attributed to the play; see *The Moral Art of Philip Massinger* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1993), 166.

<sup>643</sup> Less concerned with the depiction of Christianity, Bamford comments: “Massinger and Dekker thus offer their audience the subliminal satisfactions of sadomasochistic pornography sanctified by a sentimental piety” (*Sexual Violence on the Jacobean Stage*, 53).

sees it as “an imported *tragedia sacra*” and an expression of Counter-Reformation sympathies, which could only be allowed to go on stage because of the Spanish match negotiations during that period.<sup>644</sup> On the other hand, Julia Gasper, responding directly to Clubb, contends that the play is a piece of militant Protestant propaganda, intended to speak to the threat represented by the Hapsburg dynasty in Bohemia to the True Church.<sup>645</sup>

My interpretation of *The Virgin Martyr* addresses both of these strands of criticism – the view that the play fails in offering meaningful commentary on the contemporary religious debate and the counter-view that it is a pointed piece of religious propaganda – by suggesting that it is, rather, a response to the problem of discernment that had, if anything, intensified in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>646</sup> With the wave of regret that followed on the heels of the Reformation-related destruction of books and buildings, and with the antiquarian interest in collecting and preserving the artefacts of Catholic worship, the task of evaluating objects and ideas became progressively more difficult. Some twenty years later, Thomas Browne is able to argue for a wholehearted acceptance of various Catholic paraphernalia in his *Religio Medici* (1643). At the time when the play is written and performed, however, the recovery and re-use of a virgin martyr *vita* is itself a gesture of uneasy engagement and negotiation with the English

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<sup>644</sup> Louise George Clubb, “*The Virgin Martyr* and the *Tragedia Sacra*,” *Renaissance Drama* 7 (1964): 103-126, esp. 121, 119.

<sup>645</sup> Julia Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove: The Plays of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. chapter 5, “*The Virgin Martyr* and the War in Germany.”

<sup>646</sup> In this reading, I am in agreement with John Wasson’s view of *The Virgin Martyr* as a “secular saint play”; see “The Secular Saint Plays of the Elizabethan Era,” in *The Saint Play in Medieval Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 1986, Early Drama, Art, and Music Monograph Series, 8), 214-60, esp. 252-54.

past. Its inability to offer definitive statements about human existence and religion, or to portray a unified community of believers, is thus due to the acute awareness, within the world of the play, of how deeply the events of the sixteenth century, followed by the controversies of James I's reign, fragmented the English worldview. With the virgin martyr Dorothea as an embodiment of such fragmentation – functioning simultaneously as a true martyr, included by Foxe into his vast collection, and as a false idol worshipped by the Catholic Church – the play comments poignantly on the difficulty of interpretation in early modern England and on the contemporary desire for locating the ultimate piece of evidence, an object that remains stable and has the power to change the world.

My analysis of *The Virgin Martyr*, in other words, seeks to engage with Anthony Dawson's argument in "Shakespeare and Secular Performance" and "The Secular Theatre" that the early modern process of theatrical appropriation, in embracing spectacle, divorces it "from its ideological center" and reinforces the theatre's own "separateness from religious culture."<sup>647</sup> A spectacle is rarely an end in itself, and even more rarely effective unless engaging its audience in a conflict to which they are already drawn through their own experience of the past and present. My view of early modern theatre on the whole, and of *The Virgin Martyr* in particular, builds on Suzannah Brietz Monta's view, set out in her reading of *The Winter's Tale*, that early modern theatre demanded of its audience both "deep engagement and doubting distance negotiated by

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<sup>647</sup> Dawson, "Shakespeare and Secular Performance," 86.

ongoing commitment.”<sup>648</sup> Responding to Stephen Gosson’s rhetorical question (how, being of necessity “but a mixture of good and evil,” can even the best play “be then the schoolemistres of life?”),<sup>649</sup> Monta suggests that it is precisely this mixture, “of faith and doubt, commitment and distance, belief and incredulity, the terms in which pastoral theology discusses religious faith,” that enables early modern drama to create in its audience “a nuanced, mixed faith in its fictions.”<sup>650</sup> As Huston Diehl has argued in her analysis of the same play, Shakespeare (and, by extension, other early modern playwrights) may seek to acquit theatrical wonder of the charges of witchcraft or idolatry. However, this does not mean that theatrical performance stands alone, emptied of all religious significance. Rather, she suggests an explicit effort to imagine “a legitimate role for the stage in a Protestant England deeply suspicious of images and theater” and to produce, perhaps, a contemporary, very Protestant theatrical experience.<sup>651</sup>

*The Virgin Martyr* is concerned, throughout, with staging failed – or at least seriously interrupted – attempts at discernment. We cannot help but sympathize with the characters’ confusion at the opacity they encounter, and with the resulting distrust.

Above, I quoted Dorothea’s contempt directed at those who put “put their trust in

<sup>648</sup> Suzannah Brietz Monta, “‘It is requir’d you do awake your faith’: Belief in Shakespeare’s Theater,” in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage*, ed. Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 115-137, esp. 124.

<sup>649</sup> Quoted in Monta, “It is requir’d you do awake your faith,” 128. Note that Gosson here anticipates Price’s and Mullany’s dissatisfaction with the lack of poignant life lessons.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid. Monta adds that “the play *needs* to expose its theatrical trickery in order to mount its melodramatic defense” (128, italics in the original).

<sup>651</sup> Huston Diehl, “‘Strike All that Look Upon With Marvel’: Theatrical and Theological Wonder in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *Rematerializing Shakespeare: Authority and Representation on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Bryan Reynolds and William N. West (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 19-34, esp. 31.

drosse,” but even the virgin martyr mistakenly puts her own trust in Spungius and Hercius, the two servants who are feigning conversion to Christianity for their own purposes. From the very first, the pair are presented as an object lesson in reading below the surface, for, as Spungius puts it, “thou and I must be halfe Pagans and halfe Christians [...] I am resolved to have an Infidels heart, though in shew I carry a Christians face” (D<sup>v</sup>). Sent to distribute victuals to the poor, they sell the food and spend the money on drink. Entering the scene, Dorothea also enters into this lesson: we see her scrutinize the pair and, threatening them with thunderbolts, demand an answer, “doe not lye, / Were you both faithfull true distributers?” However, she fails dismally and, when they grow indignant at the accusation of lying, quickly capitulates with a meek, “I’m glad you doe not” (D2<sup>v</sup>).

Indeed, when the two are later employed as her torturers, Dorothea responds not with an expression of Christian acceptance and forgiveness of betrayal that might be expected in a saint’s play but with extreme surprise and dismay. She loses her martyr’s composure almost entirely (indeed, she needs her faithful Angelo’s warning, “Shrinke not deere Mistrese,” before their appearance on the stage), lamenting,

You two! Whom I like fostred children fed,  
 And lengthen’d out your starved life with bread:  
 You be my hangman! Whom when up the ladder  
 Death hall’d you to be strangled, I fetcht downe  
 Cloth’d you, and warm’d you, you two my tormentors. (I2<sup>v</sup>).

Similarly, at the end of the play we discover that the virgin martyr has also failed in her reading of the boy Angelo, although with less dismal results. Having also taken him in from the street, she seems obsessed with the thought of becoming part of his biological

family, so much that she insistently attempts to buy this privilege. Enchanted with Angelo's "little pretty body" and sweet face (so much so that she hastens to deny any "hot wanton fire" in her "most chast bosome"), Dorothea has

...offer'd  
 Handfuls of gold but to behold thy Parents  
 I would leave Kingdoms were I Queene of some,  
 To dwell with thy good father, for the sonne  
 Bewitching me so deeply with his presence,  
 He that begot him must do't ten times more. (D2<sup>v-r</sup>).

The frank admiration of the boy's appearance and the money offered to meet his parents would, no doubt, puzzle anyone watching the play for the first time. The situation is clarified in Act 4, when, at the end of Dorothea's martyrdom, Angelo sheds his disguise and enters onto the stage "*in the Angels habit*," confessing that he was sent to be by her side and eventually to conduct her soul to heaven (K<sup>v</sup>, stage direction). Immediately his earlier response to Dorothea, "My father is in Heaven," and his promise, "You and I shall meet my father there, / And he shall bid you welcome," take on a much greater significance (D3<sup>f</sup>). While at the time that Angelo utters these words in Act 2 we can only gather from them that the boy's father is dead, we now understand that, as an angel, he does not have a biological father but is acting as a link between the virgin martyr and God the Father, who is waiting to welcome her into His Kingdom. This revelation redeems Dorothea's conduct but also places her on the same footing as the audience. In a universe where even angels successfully conceal their nature and equivocate, saints

speak to them without fully understanding the conversation, unable to detect the divine nature in the mortal shell.<sup>652</sup>

If Dorothea herself struggles in vain with the issues of discernment, what can be expected of other characters in the play? We see the two characters primarily involved in her martyrdom take a valiant stab at separating reality from illusion, and true faith from superstition at the end of Act 4; unsurprisingly, they fail and are comical in their resounding failure. Sapritius, who had just observed his son Antoninus convert to Christianity and die, interprets this poignant event – a transformation of physical desire into spiritual love – as an act of *maleficium* inflicted upon his son by the clever witch. Accordingly, he swears to battle this evil and to defend the true gods, “Ile roote out / These superstitious fooles, and leave the World / No name of Christian.” Indeed, the audience watches these characters become hopelessly muddled even when attempting to assign significance to the evidence presented by their own senses. At hearing the melody that accompanies Dorothea’s martyrdom (a stage direction calls for “*Loud Musicke*,” ensuring that the audience shares this experience), Sapritius exclaims, “Ha, Heavenly Musicke,” but Theophilus responds, “Illusions of the Divell / Wrought by some one of her Religion, / That faine would make her death a Miracle, / It frights not me” (K2<sup>v</sup>). Even in this attempt at clarifying the situation for himself, this persecutor of Christians (as he is listed in the *dramatis personae*) inadvertently displays his inability to untangle, even mentally, a devilish illusion from a purely physical deception staged by charlatans wishing to create a new saint. Even as he is decisively rejecting fear, the audience

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<sup>652</sup> Compare this moment in the play to the popular late medieval stories of Sts. Juliana and Margaret, who are able to discern, almost immediately, the devil in an angel’s disguise.

realizes that “heavenly music” is intended to invoke joy, not terror – an aspect that escapes Theophilus so fully that he cannot begin to enter into a debate against it.

Ironically, the audience has by now also realized that Theophilus, for all his apprehension of the “Illusions of the Divell,” has spent the entire play side by side with a disguised devil by the name of Harpax. Of course, none of the characters (including, seemingly, Dorothea herself) see through the disguise until Harpax chooses to reveal his true nature in Act 5. Acting as Theophilus’s own servant, Harpax is clearly a counterpart to Angelo and even has a parallel scene of equivocating about his identity: speaking to Spungius and Hercius, he declares, “I am a Prince disguis’d,” adding that anyone who follows him “shall soone grow rich” and will not be “starv’d from pleasures” (G4<sup>r</sup>). Having gained the allegiance of the two, Harpax promises them a meeting with the devil, who, according to him, is “a wondrous good fellow, loves a cup of wine, a whore” (H<sup>v</sup>). This equivocation is perhaps somewhat more transparent to the audience than Angelo’s. Every Englishman, no doubt, has heard the maxim that the devil is the prince of our fallen world, has the power to reward his adherents both with money and luxuries, and of course is especially fond of such sinful pursuits as drinking and whoring. In promising a meeting with the devil, Harpax is both pointing to his own real identity and to the inescapable entrance into Hell of the two false Christians. Just like Dorothea earlier, however, the two rascals remain quite unaware of the underlying layers of meaning and accept Harpax’s disclosures cheerfully as a complex joke. At the beginning of the play, the audience is also led to see him merely as a powerful magician, a not-infrequent character in early modern drama. In attempting to evaluate his deeds objectively,

Theophilus comes to see his servant as a nearly omnipotent figure, commenting, “It is not possible thy powerfull art / Should meet a checke, or faile” (B<sup>v</sup>). With such an advisor, is it any surprise that the pagans are content to view Christianity as “an imagin’d faith” (B<sup>r</sup>)?

At the same time, while the play operates on several layers of meaning, the interpretative possibilities within it are not unlimited. The spectacle is not as ambiguous as Nova Myhill has suggested by writing,

In its representation of multiple readings of the same event, and how these readings can be used against each other, the play suggests that even the most apparently stable spectacle cannot compel a universal response [...] In presenting signs of spiritual authority in explicitly theatrical terms, *The Virgin Martyr* puts its audience in the position of recognizing the truth of both the pagan characters who argue that the seemingly miraculous events surrounding her torture and execution are counterfeits and the Christian characters who claim that Dorothea’s death is true martyrdom.<sup>653</sup>

Myhill’s argument anticipates the danger inherent in the concept of fully secular theatre – a spectacle for the sake of spectacle, unmoored from history. Dawson has argued that *The Virgin Martyr*’s investment in its audience or, as he puts it, in “theatrical pleasure,”<sup>654</sup> dispels the urgency of its socio-religious concerns. The martyr is tortured onstage, “*but* the scene deftly combines the sinister with the comic; the torture is carried out by her former servants, the low comedians.”<sup>655</sup> I have italicized the coordinating conjunction to point to the contrast it establishes between the possible impact of the torture scene and the effect of the low comedy performed by the torturers. Dawson

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<sup>653</sup> Nova Myhill, “Making Death a Miracle: Audience and the Genres of Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*,” *Early Theatre* 7.2 (2004): 11-31, esp. 27.

<sup>654</sup> Dawson, “The Secular Theatre,” 254.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.*, 250, italics mine.

concludes that while the play acknowledges the existing anxieties – “the violent intrusion of the state into mind and body, the wrenching of belief from one mold to another, the worrying uncertainty about the stability of the position one is forced to adopt [...] are here being transformed into theatrical memory” and “dispersed – raised, but laid to rest.”<sup>656</sup>

Comic overtones in martyrdom scenes have an extensive history of precedent in medieval hagiography and religious drama. In chapters 1 and 2 of my dissertation, I have examined some comical moments in virgin martyrs’ Lives, such as St. Juliana throwing the devil into a public toilet, or St. Christina of Tyre spitting her tongue into a judge’s eye with a witty remark. A more direct source for torture accompanied by low comedy in *The Virgin Martyr*, however, is “The Buffeting” play of the Towneley cycle. In this particular play, the two torturers crudely mock Christ in pat rhyme, suggesting that he should have “Left off [his] clatter,” and promise that “He shall learn how is played a new play for Yule.”<sup>657</sup> The overt, explicitly comical metatheatricity in this presentation of the central event of Christianity serves to heighten the affective immediacy of these mystery plays and to produce close involvement of the audience in the religious spectacle unfolding before them.

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid., 252-3.

<sup>657</sup> “The Twenty-Second Play: The Buffeting,” in *The Wakefield Mystery Plays*, ed. Martial Rose (London: Evans Brothers, 1961), 300-313, esp. 301 and 310. In “The Twenty-Fifth Play: The Crucifixion” of the same cycle, we also find a heavily comical sequence, in which the torturers (now numbering four) banter crudely and rather hilariously while having to stretch Christ to fit a cross that is too big for him (329-48). See also Larissa Tracy, *Torture and Brutality in Medieval Literature: Negotiations of National Identity* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), chapter 5, “Laughing at Pain: The Comic Uses of Torture and Brutality.”

Although *The Virgin Martyr*, as Gasper has convincingly shown, has an early-seventeenth-century text as its main source,<sup>658</sup> it not only builds on the medieval dramatic tradition but also seems to refer directly to the Passion plays.<sup>659</sup> I suggest that this play, rather than relegating the issues of belief to theatrical memory and laying them to rest, raises the stakes by situating itself firmly in the pre-Reformation tradition. The virgin martyr, acting as the focus of the performance, is the symbol of the past – dramatic, religious, and social. The play is, of course, deeply invested in theatrical pleasure. But, in borrowing the medieval instruments of enhancing such pleasures, it does not participate in transforming the contemporary confessionary anxiety and doubt into an entertaining but distant theatrical memory. Instead, the play neatly folds time, gathering together disparate temporal points and insisting on their simultaneous and urgent pertinence. When *The Virgin Martyr* was first published in 1620, nearly a century had passed since the English Reformation, at least two centuries since Towneley cycle began to be performed, and over a thousand years since Dorothea of Caesaria is supposed to have been martyred. Having been brought together as parts of the same spectacle, all of these events become caught up in the contemporary concern with readability and conversion<sup>660</sup> and, as such, present to the audience an interlinked and ever-present temporal network that must somehow be interpreted and integrated. In the

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<sup>658</sup> See Julia Gasper, "The Sources of *The Virgin Martyr*," *The Review of English Studies* 42.165 (1991): 17-31.

<sup>659</sup> See also Holly Crawford Pickett, "Dramatic Nostalgia and Spectacular Conversion in Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martyr*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 49.2 (2009): 437-462, esp. 452-455, for a more general examination of the play's debts to the medieval drama.

<sup>660</sup> Nova Myhill links the play to the early modern scaffold speeches, while Holly Crawford Pickett offers an incisive analysis of the treatment, in *The Virgin Martyr*, of the multiple and sometimes repeated conversions.

virgin martyr Dorothea, historical martyrdom merges with medieval dramatic representations of the Passion, and Catholic saint-worship is linked to Protestant martyrdom as presented in Foxe's collection (of which Dorothea herself is part). I suggest, then, that the play works, even as it is appropriating and reshaping its medieval models, to defuse the charged presence of the past and to reassure the audience that certain objects, figures, and ideas are unchangeable and therefore timeless.

As I have shown earlier, *The Virgin Martyr* foregrounds the problem of interpretation by presenting its audience with numerous flawed readers and staging one failed act of proper discernment after another. However, Dorothea's conversation with the two pagan virgins indicates that the play does not intend, ultimately, to present this multiplicity of readings as desirable and restorative. The piece of gold that can, alternatively, become a matron's jewellery, a courtesan's foot bath, and an adored statue of a god not only cannot lay claim to divine powers but also loses its original properties. Dorothea describes it contemptuously as "drosse," which *OED* defines generally as "Refuse; rubbish; worthless, impure matter," but more specifically also as "scum, recrement, or extraneous matter thrown off from metals in the process of melting."<sup>661</sup> In other words, what was "purest gold" before participating in this series of metamorphoses has now transformed, at least linguistically, into its very opposite – the substances that need to be subtracted in order to produce pure gold. Manipulating the signifier destroys the signified: a change in the shape and function has the power to alter and cheapen the material irrevocably. *The Virgin Martyr* is interested, to be sure, in the theatricality and

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<sup>661</sup> *OED* online, "dross, n." 4 and 1a.

ambiguity of performance, but it also expresses obvious unease with the possibility of multiple and consecutive versions or metamorphoses of meaning, and insists on the existence of “true” objects and figures, which are unchangeable and have the power of stripping the illusion from the world around them.

Let us briefly examine the scene of Theophilus’s conversion, which takes place in Act 5, shortly after Dorothea’s execution. In the beginning of this scene, we see Theophilus describe the physical embodiment of his persecution of Christians:

As a curious Painter  
 When he has made some honourable peece,  
 Stands off, and with a searching eye examines  
 Such colours how ‘tis sweetned, and then hugs  
 Himselfe for his rare workemanship. – So here  
 Will I my Drolleries and bloody Lantskips  
 Long past wrap’d up unfold to make me merry  
 With shadowes, now I want the substances. (K2<sup>v-r</sup>)

The stage direction preceding his monologue notifies the reader that Theophilus is entering his study, “*Bookes about him.*” The “peece” in question, then, does not exist merely in his imagination but is present onstage as a physical record of the executions in one of the books – the “Muster-booke of Hel-hounds” (K2<sup>r</sup>).<sup>662</sup> Note, however, that despite the perfection of this piece (it is “honourable” and shows “rare workemanship”), it lacks real presence, forcing Theophilus to grasp at ghostly memories. Continuing with the painting metaphor, the pagan official imagines the entries in the ledger as actual drawings – “Drolleries and bloody Lantskips.” “Lantskips” can be a variant spelling of

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<sup>662</sup> I.e., some sort of military record, presumably.

“landscapes,”<sup>663</sup> but, as the *OED* selection of quotations suggests, this combination of words has a distinct flavour of amusement or entertainment, possibly pointing to comic pictures or caricatures with Dutch associations, popular in the seventeenth century.<sup>664</sup>

Here, then, we have, yet again, a sense of time being pleated together around an object, as the drawings of a type popular at the time when the play was written make their way not simply into the dramatic action but also into Theophilus’s past. Looking backwards into the fourth century, when Dorothea’s martyrdom took place, the audience sees their own novelties displayed as aged and outdated renderings, “[l]ong past wrap’d up.” What is more, these renderings have undergone a startling transformation of purpose: originally intended, as the word “Muster-booke” implies, simply to record the proceedings,<sup>665</sup> they have now entirely changed genres, so to speak, and serve as caricatures, “to make [Theophilus] merry.” At the same time, even he recognizes that, like the mass of gold used to make the pagan idol in Dorothea’s tale, when this past is unfolded in a new fashion, it utterly lacks “the substances” and is only able to gladden his savage soul “[w]ith shadowes.” The pagan volumes, flickering in the mind’s eye of the audience from record-books, to comic sketches, or even elaborate depictions in colour, are ultimately little more than collections of ghostly images and leave their possessor profoundly dissatisfied.

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<sup>663</sup> See *OED* online, “landscape, n.,” 3: “Inland natural scenery, or its representation in painting.” See especially section ß for examples.

<sup>664</sup> *OED* online, “drollery, n.,” 2b (the entry offers two other examples of the two words appearing together). See also Clive Edwards, “Dummy Board Figures as Images of Amusement and Deception in Interiors, 1660-1800,” *Studies in the Decorative Arts* 10.1 (2002-2003): 74-97, esp. 84 and note 42 on p. 96.

<sup>665</sup> The numerical emphasis in the rest of Theophilus’s speech does indicate that he is looking at a ledger page where count of executions has been kept: “Twelve hundred / Eyes boar’d with Augurs out: oh! Eleven thousand / Torne by wild beasts: two hundred ram’d i’th earth / To th’ armepits...” (K2<sup>r</sup>).

Despite his near-worship of the ledgers, Theophilus also complains, “now I want the substances,” indicating, of course, that the events in question are long past and he misses them. Also, this complaint gives an inkling of his own profound desire for a true extemporal solidity that is not to be found in his “Drolleries and bloody Lantskips,” however much they whirl through time. This longing is undetected by Theophilus himself but becomes abundantly clear to the audience when, during Dorothea’s martyrdom, he mockingly begs her to send a present from Heaven: “And when you come to that imagin’d place [...] If there be any truth in your religion [...] pray send me some / Small pittance of that curious fruit you boast of” (I4<sup>f</sup>). This fruit, as the dialogue indicates, has the wondrous power of separating truth from illusion, the “imagin’d” from the real, and of relegating the objects of false significance to the void. In comparison with the things that grow in Heaven, the “golden fruit” of the Hesperides “Deserves not to be nam’d,” and Dorothea urges the listeners to “Forget for shame” and “bury in / Oblivion” these other pieces of fruit, previously occupying an important place in the cultural consciousness and thought abidingly valuable (I4<sup>f</sup>). The “curious fruit” of Heaven is capable of unpicking the intertwined strands of time and decisively cleansing the present, and because the golden fruit of Hesperides now belongs to the distant past, no longer exerting influence on contemporary age, its very name must evaporate from the speaker’s tongue into thin air.

The fruit of Heaven, in other words, appears in Act 5 as a manifestation of hyper-reality, in contrast to the dusty and obscure pages at which Theophilus is gazing. It is the epitome of an object that is resolutely unchangeable but, when eaten, bestows the power

to recognize falsehood and illusion. Addressing this scene, Dawson has focussed on its comic effect, which in his reading hinges on Theophilus's devouring of the fruit and the theatrical display of "Angelo's appearance and vanishing, by the magical basket and the music," by which "he is converted, even *subjected*."<sup>666</sup> A closer reading of the scene, however, shows that upon examining the basket after Angelo's departure, Theophilus is still unconverted and, insisting on his own version of events, suspects the angel in guise of a boy to be "a spirit / Sent from that Witch to mocke" him (K3<sup>v</sup>). In the illusion-driven world of the play, a theatrical display, as spectacular and even supernatural as it might be, holds little sway over the imagination of such a flawed reader as the pagan Theophilus. What *can* convert him, finally, is not the spectacle but the object whose hyper-reality draws him irresistibly despite all suspicion, and drives him to declare, "I am sure / This is essential, and how ere it growes, / Will taste it..." (K3<sup>v</sup>).

What we see unfold after Theophilus has tasted the fruit is comedy only in the blackest sense: there is a slow dissipation of a life-long illusion, which he at first tries to stave off and then eagerly hastens, in the face of all danger. This is possibly the most humanly poignant episode of the entire play. We see Theophilus, at first, grasp at his sense of self, commanding Harpax, "[G]oe drag the Caitiffe to my foote, / That I may stampe upon him" – a pitiful attempt at recovering his identity as the persecutor of Christians, to which Harpax coldly (and possibly inaudibly, since there is no answer from the others) remarks, "Fool, thou liest" (K3<sup>r</sup>). Still in denial, Theophilus suddenly realizes that the whole world around him has taken on a different hue. His persecution of

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<sup>666</sup> Dawson, "Secular Theatre," 254.

Christians now weighs heavily on him and produces guilty visions: the ground seems to him “bloudy, / And pav’d with thousands of those Christians eyes / Whom [he has] tortured, and they stare upon [him]” (K3<sup>r</sup>). However, the world has not been radically transformed; it is Theophilus himself who looks at it with different eyes, as the audience is assured when, thinking back to Angelo, he is suddenly able to recall the true shape of the visitor. Having earlier described Angelo as “the most bright cheek’d child [he] ever viewed,” “pretty sweet boy,” and “a smooth fac’d glorious Thing” (K3<sup>v</sup>), Theophilus now recollects, with growing astonishment, “...sure it had / A shape Angelicall [...] it wore / A paire of glorious wings, yes they were wings, / And hence he flew...” (K3<sup>r</sup>).

This episode portrays a painful conversion, performed, at least at first, against the convert’s wishes, convictions, and sensibilities, which tears away all illusion and reveals to Theophilus the true state of things, forcing him to repent bitterly his past deeds and to ache for further revelation. It is this repentance that causes him to devour more of the heavenly fruit, in open defiance of Harpax’s threats and insistent orders to “fetch up / What [he has] swallowed,” as well as “Spet it to th’ earth, / And tread upon it” (K4<sup>v</sup>). While Theophilus does achieve, as Dawson puts it, a “defeat of Harpax in another metatheatrical display,”<sup>667</sup> using a cross of flowers discovered in the basket, by that time the real victory has already been won when the former pagan torturer has stonily refused to vomit up the fruit, even as the devil “*in a fearefull shape,*” with “*fire flashing,*” was threatening to tear him to pieces (K4<sup>v</sup>, stage direction). This is not the triumph of secular theatre; nor is this an ambiguous ending that allows for multiple, equally valid

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<sup>667</sup> Dawson, “Secular Theatre,” 254.

interpretations. Rather, this is the celebration of the power of an object that, unlike the golden idol or Theophilus's record books, cannot be altered or re-interpreted with time, and whose provenance is perfectly knowable. In the confused and confusing world of the play, this religious object bestows the clarity of vision and thought, allowing for discarding of the noxious illusion without hesitation or error. If props, as Andrew Sofer suggests, can be objects haunted and fetishized, the heavenly fruit in *The Virgin Martyr* is undoubtedly both.<sup>668</sup> It embodies the confused and heavily nostalgic early modern longing for an authentic magical object and offers a disguised version of the host in medieval drama – open to consumption yet in itself a symbol of transformation.<sup>669</sup> As such, the heavenly fruit, and the cross of flowers that arrives in the same basket, are the fetishized remains of the past, capable of separating the wheat from the chaff.

Early on, *The Virgin Martyr* prepares its audience for the idea that characters themselves are capable of becoming religious objects. Harpax promises Hercius and Spungius that even their smallest body parts will eventually be worshipped: "...when your [sic] are dead, / Happy that man shall be, can get a nayle / The paring –, nay the durt under the nayle, / Of any of you both, to say this durt / Belong'd to *Spungius* or *Hercius*" (I<sup>r</sup>). This is, of course, a mocking reference to the Catholic worship of relics: much sixteenth-century anti-Catholic discourse emphasizes not only the dubious provenance of many relics but also the repulsive aspects of the practice. Spungius responds in kind, promising to increase the volume of the possible relics by ceasing to

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<sup>668</sup> Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 26-27.

<sup>669</sup> See Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, chapters 2 and 3 of that book for a detailed discussion of host in medieval drama and of the ways in which it reverberates through early modern plays, specifically through the various appearances of the bloody handkerchief.

attend to personal hygiene: "They shall not want dirt under my nayles, ile keepe 'em long of porpose..." (I<sup>f</sup>). This exchange, between the devil disguised as a pagan magician and two thieving rascals pretending to be Christians, is ludicrous even as it is taking place, but it is even more so when viewed in the context of the unsuccessful attempts at dismemberment and desecration of Dorothea's body. As the heavenly fruit highlights the inherent changeability and tenuous hold on signification of the other faux-religious objects, so the virgin martyr, coming into contact with the pagan bodies, causes their fragmentation while remaining whole.

The language of fragmentation permeates the play. Sick with love for Dorothea and encountering her unyielding resolve, Antoninus complains of identity loss, expressing it in terms of physical deterioration: "How can I be my selfe, when I am mangled / Into a thousand peeces, here moves my head, / But where's my heart?" (H3<sup>f</sup>). When, during an attempt at orchestrating a ravishment of Dorothea, Sapritius dies and is then raised again through the virgin's prayers, the play emphasizes that he does *not* rise whole. Theophilus remarks, witnessing the resurrection, "One cheeke is blasted," to which Sapritius responds with a furious lament, indicating an internal disintegration, "Where's the *Lamia* / That teares my intrailles?" (I<sup>v</sup>). Spungius and Hercius will complain of broken ribs as they are beaten, identifying themselves, once again, as ephemeral matter, incapable of retaining consistent significance through the ages.

At least at first, there is an anxiety that Dorothea might prove just as breakable and easily leached of meaning. Antoninus, witnessing his father drag in the virgin by the hair, assumes that she will be desecrated and wishes a similar fragmentation on the

desecrator: “One made of Iron should hew that hand in peeces / That so defaces this sweet Monument / Of my loves beauty...” (H3<sup>v</sup>).<sup>670</sup> However, in the scene of torture we discover that, while a monument to love might eventually fall apart, a monument to faith is indestructible: Dorothea is viciously beaten with staves, “yet her skin is not scar’d,” and “her face / Has more bewitching beauty than before...” Intent upon taking her apart, the impatient Theophilus inquires, “...cannot an eye start out / With these [?]” Hercius replies despondently, “No sir, nor the bridge of her nose fall, ‘tis full of iron worke” (I2<sup>f</sup>).

What we see here, then, is a revision of the Catholic saint who could remain whole even as her fragments were being worshipped separately. While the play gestures dismissively at the relic industry, it also denies, to the virgin martyr, the participation in her own martyrdom. Throughout this dissertation I have explored the male writers’ anxiety related to the possibility that the virgin martyr figure is open to emulation by the female readers. Earlier in this chapter, I examined the complex intertwining, in early modern drama, between the virgin martyr and the witch, and the vulnerability of the female reader who chooses to emulate this dubious dual figure. I also showed that this figure still occupied a significant place in the popular culture, inviting engagement. However, in this play we see the virgin martyr transformed into a religious prop, an object dense with meaning and resistant to any damage, at the same time as she is depersonalized, becoming, in Antoninus’s words, “[t]he abstract of all sweetnesse that’s

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<sup>670</sup> Later this apprehension will convert Antonio to Christianity, as he concludes, “...not can I thinke our gods / Are good, or to be serv’d, that take delight / In offerings of this kinde, that to maintaine / Their power, deface the master-peece of nature...” (I3<sup>f</sup>).

in woman” – an idealized quintessence of goodness, more monument than a woman, rather than a nuanced character (I3<sup>v</sup>).<sup>671</sup> As a thing that passes unchanged through time, Dorothea is a monument of faith: as a popular figure of medieval saints’ Lives, she is a product of the past that cannot be “defaced” by its own provenance or by the changing historical context. The problem of readability is resolved by her utter integrity and absence of change (even tortures fail to alter her shape in any way). At the same time, this petrified virgin cannot serve as a model to female audience members, as she is cold perfection personified, like Shakespeare’s Hermione, if she had remained a lifeless statue.

Instead, the spectacle of faith is more successfully performed by Theophilus, who, after his conversion, replaces the fragmentation of all Christians of the country (Dioclesius has commanded his servants to “Cut ‘em into peeces,” but they had already been spirited away) with his own, declaring himself “honour’d in [his] sufferings” and calling for “[m]ore tortures, more” (L3<sup>r</sup>, L4<sup>v</sup>). In fact, he has already pulled himself into pieces in his speech, proclaiming to the torturers: “...here armes yet and thighes, / Spare no part of me” (L4<sup>v</sup>). While he shows superhuman endurance and does not make piteous sounds, we know that torture is written on his body: when Dorothea appears to welcome him to heaven, the male martyr begs her to “witness for [him] all those wounds and scarres” (L4<sup>r</sup>). From a false Catholic idol, the virgin martyr has transformed into a prop, not unlike the heavenly fruit, which the real (male) martyred hero of the play can use to

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<sup>671</sup> Frances Teague explores the possibility of an actor turning into a prop, or a character into a statue, in chapter 7, “Actor as Object: The Petrified Woman,” 142-156, of *Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991).

display the truth of his convictions and ensure that his vulnerability to fragmentation is read properly. There is, at the end of the play, no theatrical ambiguity. After Theophilus has called on Dorothea to confirm his status as a martyr, Sapritius admits that, in his entire career as a persecutor of Christians, he “nere yet [saw] / A constancy like this”; Harpax bewails being “twice damned,” while Angelo celebrates his victory (L4<sup>f</sup>).

In this way, anxieties of instability and disruption of faith may be assuaged, as religious truth is abundantly established, but they are scarcely dispersed or laid to rest. After all, *The Virgin Martyr* does not exist in historical and geographical isolation from the audience. Twice the play makes pointed nationalistic gestures: when a British slave is brought in to ravish Dorothea, and when Theophilus fondly recalls the persecution of Christians he has mounted during his time in Great Britain. Needless to say, this recollection, since St. Dorothea is supposed to have been martyred in the early fourth century, is entirely anachronistic. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on all things Roman throughout the play, even though the events are taking place in Cappadocian Caesarea (modern-day Turkey), distinctly invites the English audience to imagine the dramatic conflict in terms of Rome wrecking religious havoc on their country – in other words, in terms of the sixteenth-century persecution of Protestants, especially during the time of Mary I. Theophilus’s impassioned speech vividly brings to mind contemporary portrayals of Catholic clergy and their murderous sympathizers; he declares himself “carryed / With violence of zeale, and streames of service” owed “to our Roman gods.” A grotesque account of persecutions that follows brings to mind certain episodes from Foxe. Additionally, in its rhetoric of cannibalism, it invokes more generally an idea of a

state thrown into disarray, its members forced to gnaw at one another under the Roman infection:

*Great Britaine, what.*  
 A thousand wives with brats sucking their breasts,  
 Had hot Irons pinch'd 'em off, and throwne to swine;  
 And then their fleshly backparts hewed with hatchets;  
 Were minc'd and bak'd in Pies to feed starv'd Christians.  
 Ha, ha.  
 Agen, agen, - *East. Angles*, - oh, East-Angles. (K2')

This stuttering, almost orgasmic meditation on the matter of Britain, hauntingly urging that the events be repeated “Agen, agen,” disrupts any possibility that the concerns of the play may be fully translated into theatrical memory. Instead, the play inscribes a cycle of religious violence that will extend far into the future, with no end in sight.<sup>672</sup> In the closing lines of the play, after the dichotomy of good and evil has been established, the Emperor Diocletian declares,

I thinke the centre of the earth be crackt,  
 Yet I still stand unmov'd, and will goe on  
 The persecution that is here begun,  
 Through all the world with violence shall run. (L4')

As the curtain falls, then, the audience is left with this stark and literal image of the globe cracking into pieces through the centre and of the emperor remaining the only still point in the world beginning to seethe with violence and fall into pieces around him. The only characters remaining onstage are the pagan persecutors – confused and disturbed, yet unconvinced and unconverted, and still imperfect readers of the world. Although for obvious reasons a Christian audience cannot identify with these characters fully, the

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<sup>672</sup> Jane Hwang Degenhardt shows how the play might also be pointing to the contemporary persecution of Christians in the Ottoman Empire; see “Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martir* and the Threat of ‘Turning Turk’,” *ELH* 73.1 (2006): 83-117.

closing image reflects and emphasizes the troubled process of producing faith in the early modern world, commenting once more on the difficulty of proper interpretation and on the constantly present longing for transparency of religious objects and figures that could help one navigate through the havoc of contemporary debate and conflict.

Raised on the early modern stage, St. Dorothea of Caesarea is a virgin martyr neutralized: she is an embodiment of all things that may be appropriated safely from the Catholic Middle Ages, the threat of contamination sealed tight under the stone surface. A fallible and failing reader, she is nonetheless impervious to change and, in her cold perfection, is without any ties to the world, supplied with no familial connections. In refusing Antoninus, she rebels against no family or social structures but only against the solitary desire of a man already promised to another woman. Once the suitor's father and the pagan officials learn of his suit, the question of marriage, and consequently of Dorothea's agreement or defiance, disappears from the narrative. Female freedom from parental prescription, a striking feature of the early virgin martyrs' Lives, is entirely displaced onto the lustful and proud princess Artemia. She recognizes the singularity of her position, commenting that usually "[t]he daughters of great Princes [...] to make up breaches in the state, / Or for some other publike ends are forc'd / To match where they affect not," but uses it merely to impair the progress of Christianity through the realm (C1<sup>f</sup>). The liberty of choice that the medieval virgin martyr modelled for her female readers has now vanished: the raw authority lent to her voice by the physical suffering has been erased. Dekker and Massinger's play is a poignant tale of laboured conversion that produces a highly nuanced faith, and of fraught religious existence in a world where

objects from one time may penetrate another or appear in disguise. The virgin martyr, however, serves in this play as evidence that some objects may be unproblematically appropriated and used to achieve individual and social transformation. In the atmosphere of ongoing religious conflict, intensely present onstage as the curtain falls, this figure is a relic of the similarly troubled past that, in its metamorphosis into a statue, awakens the audience's faith and mercifully conceals the rips in the fabric of the country.

**CONCLUSION:****ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE: THE VIRGIN MARTYR GOES ON**

In *Angela's Ashes*, a 1996 memoir that went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography, Frank McCourt, at the age of thirteen, accidentally discovers an entry point into Catholicism, which, until that time, is largely incomprehensible, impenetrable, and frequently hostile to him and to the people surrounding him. In Frank's world of an impoverished Irish child, Catholic saints are always already disembodied, in a process of permanent departure: "they're always looking up to heaven where there are clouds filled with little fat angels carrying flowers or harps giving praise. Uncle Pa Keating says he can't think of a single saint in heaven he'd want to sit down and have a pint with."<sup>673</sup> However, as Frank is waiting out the rain at the local library, the prim librarian forces onto him *Butler's Lives of the Saints*. Beginning unwillingly to read, he discovers the stories of the virgin martyrs, distinguished from the meek and mild Virgin Mary because they "are always getting into trouble" (286).

Frank is greatly impressed by St. Christina's manifold tortures, her resilient vulnerability, and the flesh flung at the judges,<sup>674</sup> and by St. Brigid's resistance to an arranged marriage. He notes the usefulness of St. Wilgefortis (also known as St. Uncumber), since she "is the one you pray to if you're an Englishwoman with a troublesome husband" (302). The boy is also constantly surprised by the marginal space

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<sup>673</sup> Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 285. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>674</sup> This is clearly St. Christina of Tyre/Bolsena; Frank refers to her as St. Christina the Astonishing, but the details of her *vita* and the description of the martyrdom belong to the earlier saint (St. Christina the Astonishing did not live in Rome, and was not put on trial or martyred).

these figures seem to occupy, and their resounding absence from the official Catholic discourse that permeates every aspect of his life. He observes that “[t]he priests never tell us about virgin martyrs like St. Agatha, February fifth,” or “about St. Ursula and her eleven thousand maiden martyrs, October twenty-first” (303). The insistent specification of the feast day for each virgin martyr performs the same function as medieval legends, inserting their martyrdoms forcefully into the flow of quotidian time and imbuing the passage of the year with greater significance, allowing the boy to remark: “February is a powerful month for virgin martyrs” (303).<sup>675</sup> The librarian attempts to wield the collection of Lives as a tool to ensure the proper conduct of this ragged child, commanding Frank to “Sit over there and behave,” but instead they provide an object lesson in authorized disobedience, inscribed into the passage of time (285). In turning the pages, he muses: “Why couldn’t [St. Ursula] say yes and save the lives of eleven thousand virgins? Why did virgin martyrs have to be so stubborn?” (303). Expecting to find meek celestial gazing and angelic song, in the virgin martyr Lives Frank encounters his first model of resistance against brutal and unjust forces of impersonal authority, whether it is social, political, or religious.

Why does Frank focus on virgin martyrs? It is partly their entertainment value, of course: their stories are “worse than any horror film at the Lyric Cinema,” and after Frank’s eventual banishment from the library he dreams “about virgin martyrs in bathing suits in the *News of the World*” (285, 305). At the same time, however, they are the saints whose stories speak most directly to his disenfranchised state. Their staunch

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<sup>675</sup> Note that no feast day is given for St. Moling (June 17, according to Butler), the only male saint mentioned by Frank.

opposition to the Roman authorities, and apparent exclusion from the hagiographical canon as understood by the local priests, offer a significant point of identification to a boy banned, by the virtue of his family's poverty and disgrace, from accessing any positions of power and authority, either secular or religious. To Frank, virgin martyrs are the welcome misfits of hagiography: "always getting into trouble," throwing pieces of flesh at their elders, promoting resistance against undesirable or abusive marriages, and at all times displaying singular wilfulness in refusing to submit to the demands of their persecutors. While McCourt does not pursue this fascination with virgin martyrs and the models they offer to his protagonist, the encounter with their Lives is clearly impressive enough to be discussed throughout two chapters. There might be no direct emulation, but even four hundred years after the Reformation, the stories of virgin martyrs have the capacity for offering the language of secular resistance and survival to those who, like Frank, are prevented from accessing the language of official authority.<sup>676</sup> Certainly they model, to Frank, a possibility for meaningful suffering and successful rebellion against the established values and social hierarchies.

Virgin martyrs' influence, in persisting beyond the Reformation and into the modern period, invites further engagement. Frank's discovery of their Lives as viable models and an alternative to what he has until then perceived as the only authorized discourse of the Catholic Church shows that the literary dialogue with these girls martyred in ancient Rome is far from over as late as mid-twentieth century. My analysis

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<sup>676</sup> In the novel, Frank has no means of obtaining higher education until he immigrates to America and puts himself through college despite the disadvantages of his limited knowledge and Irish accent, as well as jibes of the privileged classmates.

charts the trajectory of the virgin martyr figure well into the seventeenth century, showing abundantly that the Reformation not only separates but also links the periods, serving as the interpretative funnel – a bottleneck event – through which cultural knowledge is re-shaped and delivered into the early modern period, and ultimately to the modern reader.

In the last chapter, I suggested that one of the functions of the virgin martyr on the early modern stage is to speak to a cultural nostalgia and historiographical anxiety, appearing as a shade of the past that can be ultimately put to use for producing a more firm sense of the present. They can also, however, take on a more sinister guise. *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606) and Thomas Middleton's *Lady's Tragedy* (1611, formerly known as *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*), for instance, present a captivating image of the martyred virgin whose relics carry a deadly threat to all who dare approach.<sup>677</sup> In the opening speech, of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, we see Vindice reiterate, even as he is praising his beloved's former beauty, the Church Fathers' belief in damage done in women's openness to the male gaze. Such was Gloriana's beauty, "That the uprightest man – if such there be, / That sin but seven times a day – broke custom / And made up eight with looking after her."<sup>678</sup> It might seem, at first, that Vindice is simply paying her an extravagant compliment, but later scenes abundantly show that he thinks of the female body as a kind of elaborate disguise that hides the inevitability of death and final accounting, but also the internal corruption of every woman. He is now ready to "chide"

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<sup>677</sup> It is possible that both of these plays were authored by Middleton, although critical opinion is still divided on *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Its vicious streak, to me, seems entirely unlike his other writing.

<sup>678</sup> *The Revenger's Tragedy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Brian Gibbons (London: Methuen Drama, 2008), 1.1.23-5. All further references are to this edition.

himself for “doting on her beauty” and triumphantly pronounces, “[S]ee, ladies, with false forms / You deceive men but cannot deceive worms” (3.5.68-9; 96-7). This misogynistic anger appears wildly misplaced when we recall that it is addressed to the skull of a woman whom the protagonist meant to marry, and who was martyred because she refused to sacrifice her virginity to the lascivious Duke. It seems, however, that Gloriana’s virginity makes her all the more suspect since, in her chaste wholeness, she remains essentially unknowable to any man and therefore endlessly deceptive and threatening. This is, as Catherine Loomis argues, a sign of tide turning after Queen Elizabeth’s death in 1603,<sup>679</sup> but also a dramatization of the Protestant violent protest against institutionalized virginity and against glorifying virgins, and especially dead virgins.

The same concern with penetrating virginal women and throwing them open to the public gaze appears in Vindice’s very earnest effort invested into prostituting his sister Castiza to the Duke’s elder son. While he might have been forced into this service, he takes extraordinary pains in his “testing,” all the while making disparaging remarks about women’s immorality to the audience. The speeches he has addressed to Gloriana’s skull also argue that Castiza’s resistance does not, in fact, prove her honesty, but rather emphasizes her excellence at deceiving men, since underneath her seductive flesh is hidden the same “dreadful vizard” (3.5.148). As a perverse early modern relic, Gloriana’s skull generates and spurs the action of the play, ultimately causing the death of the Duke. The old lecher is tricked into kissing the concealed skull and, thinking that

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<sup>679</sup> Catherine Loomis, *The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Reconstructing the Virgin Queen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

he is approaching a bashful virgin, in fact closes his lips on the poisonous, murderous bone. To the Duke's accusing lament, Vindice triumphantly admits that three "villains" have collaborated on this murder: Vindice himself, his brother Hippolito, and, of course, the ragged bones of Gloriana.

Similarly, in *The Lady's Tragedy* we see a murdered virgin take an active part in avenging her death and desecration. There, at least, the Tyrant's soldiers appear acutely aware of this possibility. The Second Soldier staunchly refuses to break the Lady's tomb open with an axe, and the First Soldier voices an apprehension of her continuing agency even in death, responding to the order to take the body, with reverence, out of the grave with the following words:

Not only, sir, with reverence, but with fear.  
 You shall have more than your own asking once.  
 I am afraid of nothing but she'll rise  
 At the first jog, and save us all a labour.<sup>680</sup>

The same soldier describes the Tyrant's worship of the virginal body as "mere idolatry" and accepts the certainty of their joined damnation while remarking, in the next line, that he "could never know the meaning yet / Of all my Latin prayers, nor ne'er sought for't" (5.2.20-24). The reference to the incomprehensibility of Latin prayers which are presumably intended to save one's soul, compounded with "mere idolatry," remind the average Protestant theatre-goer of the accusations levelled against the superstitious aspects of the Catholic worship.<sup>681</sup> The soldiers, at least, have clearly retained all

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<sup>680</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Lady's Tragedy: Parallel Texts*, ed. Julia Briggs, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, gen. ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 833-906, 4.3.74-77. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>681</sup> Interestingly, this passage is absent from the performance script, which Briggs gives in parallel. We can only speculate on the reasons of this exclusion, but Act 5, on the whole, is heavily cut, excluding all

Catholic superstition and, knowing the purity of the Lady, expect her to become re-animated or at least to exhibit some sort of special influence. Their wording simultaneously identifies the exalted position given to the female corpse as ineffectual idolatry and suspects that the relic might, after all, lunge into action, venting its wrath on all who disturb its peace.

As in the case of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Govianus must take active part in priming the relic for revenge. At the same time, we see him also experience religious anxiety as he approaches the body and notes, in an aside, that "A religious trembling shakes [him] by the hand / And bids [him] put by such unhallowed business" (5.2.91-92). Despite his fear, he is impelled into action by the Ghost of the Lady, who, acting the director of the final murderous drama, gives him detailed instructions on penetrating the palace and gaining access to her own corpse. Moreover, she presides at the scene of the revenge as two entities, identical both in form and in clothing, one still and pale, seized by *rigor mortis*, and another, in raging motion—"enemy to firmness, / Mortality's earthquake" (5.2. 153-54). The Lady's doubling cleverly skirts what would be a highly religiously subversive image of the dead body rising from her chair, while conveying the sense of the dead virgin's overwhelming force directed at the Tyrant and eventually killing him, with Govianus's assistance, by her poisonous kiss.

While both tragedies work to normalize the presence of the dead virgin, they also open up the field of inquiry into the destabilizing distrust of the virginal body as necessarily deceptive in its impenetrability and, once pried open by death, threatening in

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passages that serve to create an overarching moral and historical framework (including Anselmus's and Tyrant's commentary on women, and Govianus's lengthy condemnation of the Tyrant).

its released and grotesque power. Even as the dead Lady is placed on the throne and crowned (with her silent twin, the watchful Spirit hovering over), and even as Govianus swears that she will be the “first and last” queen of the realm, the audience must remember that the female body worshipped by citizens, placed on the throne, and finally joined to the monarch by the vows of constancy, is highly poisonous and may only be handled with utmost care. At the end of *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, the virginal Castiza remains hermetically sealed, despite all of her brother and mother’s efforts. She hovers in the back of the viewers’ minds, reminding them that if she does not marry – and marital options at the end of the play seem rather limited – her body, when unsealed by the worms, will reveal the same horrifying and threatening deceit as Gloriana’s.

Even these two brief examples show vividly to what extent the virgin martyr pervades early modern drama, as it re-imagines earlier Lives, in an attempt to produce meaning by examining the remnants of the medieval past, and stages vicious confrontations with deadly virginal relics. All transformations and deployments of this figure ultimately inform modern ideas of femininity and the female body but also, as McCourt’s early reading habits show, the more general strategies of resisting authority and developing a meaningful, if not always amiable, relationship to the past. We cannot – and, ultimately, should not – depart from the useful habit of periodization but we can, and should, be forced to acknowledge that the present is necessarily built out of texts, body parts, conduct practices, and mental strategies bequeathed (voluntarily or not) by the past. We return to sorting through the debris of the past obsessively, whether plundering for treasure, gazing nostalgically (or fearfully), or participating in vicious

destruction and disavowal. In the end, we are always magpies, pilfering the shiniest objects to decorate our desires, allegiances, and fears.

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