SEX AND THE SINGLE SAINT: PHYSICALITY IN ANGLO-SAXON FEMALE SAINTS' LIVES

by

WINTER SUZANNE ELLIOTT

(Under the Direction of William Provost)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the treatment of the female body in several Anglo-Saxon saints' lives. Sexuality, and sex, are integral to the construction of the female saint, and virginity is not the only manifestation of that sexuality. The saint is often emphasized as the subject of others' – commonly male, though not always – desires, but she is also aware of her body and the power it can command over members of secular society. Consequently, Anglo-Saxon female hagiography suggests dual and complementary views of the female body. Most obviously, the lives of female saints suggest a practical ability to control and command that body, a faculty that simultaneously integrates the saint into patristic teachings and alters their effect upon the woman and her place in society. More subtly, the lives also suggest a reciprocal relationship between the almost entirely male hagiographic writers and their subjects and audiences. Surprisingly, the body of the female saint is almost never portrayed as intrinsically sinful or immoral; rather, it is the gaze, the action, and reaction, of the viewing public that holds the certain seed of evil.

INDEX WORDS: Anglo-Saxon, Female Saints, Physicality, Aldhelm, Ælfric, Martyrology, Body, Sex

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WINTER SUZANNE ELLIOTT

A.B. English, University of Georgia, 2000

A.B. Spanish, University of Georgia, 2000

M.A., University of Georgia, 2000

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WINTER SUZANNE ELLIOTT

Major Professor: William Provost

Committee: Jonathan Evans
Coburn Freer
Judith Shaw

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Anglo-Saxon Female Saints and Modern Feminist Scholars:

What Has Woman to Do With Christ?

In the last few years of the eighth century, Alcuin asked the famous question, "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?" (qtd. in Mayr-Harting 225). Despite Alcuin's implicit – and elsewhere explicit – scorn for Germanic pagan traditions, Ingeld's relationship with Christ in Anglo-Saxon literature, especially religious writings, is both obvious and undeniable. The heroic sagas and traditions represented by Ingeld thoroughly influenced the presentation of Christian ideals and saints. As Mayr-Harting observes, "At many a turn the world of heroic saga coloured the presentation of saints' lives, and this in its turn influenced the actions of those who aspired to sanctity" (226). In *The Dream of the Rood*, for example, Christian and Germanic traditions are simultaneously

embodied in the person of Christ (Raw 239). The Conversion begun in 597 with Augustine's arrival did not take place in a social vacuum, a fact allowing Fulk and Cain to observe that "For literary purposes the defining characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture is its fusion of two contrasting strains, the military culture of the Germanic peoples who invaded Britain in the fifth century and the Mediterranean learning introduced by Christian missionaries from the end of the sixth" (2). Ingeld's place in Anglo-Saxon literary history is thus assured[1].

A modern reader of Bede, Aldhelm, and Ælfric among others might phrase Alcuin's question quite differently, asking instead, "What has *woman* to do with Christ?" While modern scholarly movements, considerations, and interests, particularly those

[1] Although, of course, this was not Alcuin's intent – nor exactly his concern.

affiliated with feminist or queer studies, have gone a long way towards remedying previous centuries' neglect of women in general and the literary woman in particular, it is possible that, in the zeal to rectify a perceived wrong, scholars have gone too far – especially in the critique of the female presence in Medieval literature. It has become commonplace to regard the Middle Ages, and indeed all periods through the present time, as characterized by generally uncontested patriarchy and commonly accepted misogyny. In Medieval literature, it has been easy to see Eve's phantom presence shadowing the presence or absence of *all* women, and equally simple to take the frequently misogynist rhetoric of patristic and Medieval theologians and writers to heart, accepting their words and images of women without much consideration of context or audience. This is nowhere more evident than in the consideration of the religious woman in Anglo-Saxon literature.

In previous years, the Anglo-Saxon woman has historically been regarded as enjoying favorable, if not equal, status with men. In the oft-referenced words of D. M. Stenton, "The evidence which has survived from Anglo-Saxon England indicates that women were more nearly the equal companions of their husbands and brothers than at any other period before the modern age" (348). Nevertheless, more recent critics and scholars have questioned Stenton's favorable and optimistic views on the position of women in Anglo-Saxon culture. Christine Fell's (1984) *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* follows Stenton's (1957) *The English Woman in History*, and similarly observes that "in the first enthusiasm for Christianity we not only see men and women engaging as equals in the challenge of a new religion and way of life, we see also women specifically asked to take a full and controlling part" (13). However, more recent studies have often taken views dramatically opposed to Stenton and Fell's. Jane Chance's (1986) *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* views Anglo-Saxon women as essentially passive creatures, trapped by two equally rigid behavioral extremes – Eve and Mary (111). Stephanie Hollis also argues that "the literature of the early Anglo-Saxon

period points, but by no means universally, towards the exclusion and marginalization of women, defining the trajectory for the development of a specific female identity" (11). Despite recognizing the secular and religious power and agency ascribed to a number of royal women, modern scholars have readily accepted the social and religious inferiority of the Anglo-Saxon woman. As Clare Lees notes, "the 'golden age' of Anglo-Saxon women resides in the earliest centuries of Christian Anglo-Saxon England," a time synonymous with the empowered female religious figure, a figure epitomized by Abbess Hild (133). Alongside Hild, however, is the persistent ghost of Eve. Governed by classical and patristic views, "women, as followers of Eve, the weaker vessel, were thus viewed as weak, changeable, willful, irrational and lacking in control" (Robertson 37). Yet, the Church Fathers, such as Saint Jerome, and later Anglo-Saxon writers, like Aldhelm, are not uniquely responsible for perpetuating this view.

The modern scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature is at least as culpable as the early Church writer. As Olsen observes,

> Critics have tended to view the female characters in Old English secular literature from the perspective of patriarchal culture, in which relationships to men define reality for both men and women. They describe women in Anglo-Saxon England as passive figures within a world of active, heroic men. This attitude is heightened in respect to women of the religious literature. Modern readers often assume that women who adopted religious life were even more passive than secular women because they voluntarily put themselves under the governance of the male hierarchy of the Catholic church, which many modern readers believe to have been more rigidly patriarchal than secular society. (222)

Thus, the Anglo-Saxon woman is constructed equally by two temporal extremes – the secular and religious pressures of her own time, and the modern critical and theoretical perspectives that govern our interpretation of her place in society.

Feminist and gender studies have widened the interest in and knowledge of Medieval women. With the advent of women's studies programs and the developing interest in discovering and examining works written by, for, and about women, scholars have paid increasingly more attention to women in general and the Anglo-Saxon religious woman in particular. Szarmach, for example, expectantly comments, "the developing field of women's studies, bringing with it a new interest in the corpus of literature and in new themes therein, can on the other hand become the occasion for a reinvestigation of various areas in Old English literature that hitherto have received little literary attention" ("Ælfric's Women Saints" 155). Yet, other scholars have identified a problem in the application of modern desires to Medieval literature. As Riches and Salih warn, "the study of Medieval women, and Medieval women's religious practices, is now thoroughly mainstream, to the extent that some scholars argue that women are over-represented" (2). Murray also comments on the jeopardy accompanying the advances of feminist and gender studies:

> Furthermore, our contemporary feminist perspective, while highlighting how Medieval thought constructed women as Other, is nevertheless complicit in scholarship's perpetuation of women as the marked category. A cursory glance at research into Medieval gender and sexuality would, until very recently, have left the overwhelming impression that only women had gender and only women had bodies. (10)

Indeed, while modern critical advances have widened the field of literary studies, bringing previously neglected, ignored, and underappreciated groups and individuals to the fore, they have sometimes also resulted in paradoxical isolation.

Elaine Showalter's term, "gynocritics," illustrates this difficulty. Showalter contrasts what she calls the "feminist critique," which treats the female reader of male-authored and male-sponsored texts, but is still ultimately male-oriented, with gynocriticism. This new type of criticism focuses specifically on the female experience

and the female writer, and includes “research in history, anthropology, psychology, and sociology, all of which developed hypotheses of a female subculture" (1379). Gynocritics pursue specifically female traditions and literatures. While such a focus on exclusively female texts emphasizes previously ignored or misconceived texts, it also runs the dual risk of either *over*-emphasizing those texts or artificially segregating them from their native context.

Unfortunately, Medieval and Early Modern critics often focus exclusively on the female subject’s reaction against or resistance to her parent society. Elizabeth Robertson, for example, comments that "it can be argued that Medieval women gained power by accepting Medieval categories of male and female and then manipulating them to their own advantage. Perhaps these women would finally have been more powerful had they abandoned these categories altogether" (*Early English Devotional Prose* 193). Robertson’s wish illustrates a persistent desire to remove the female subject from her culture and society, to create in her an isolated individual identity separate from social pressures. Modern critics, who have internalized feminist rhetoric, frequently strive too hard to remove the female subjects they study from the taint of patriarchy, and paradoxically render those female subjects at once innocent of any active participation in patriarchal designs and powerless to affect any significant change to those designs. The role women have played in perpetuating and accepting social standards – their complicity – is frequently ignored.

The Anglo-Saxon female subject, however, cannot be considered in isolation, or as merely reacting *against* or conforming *to* patriarchal expectations. Her position is rather one of participation, interaction within the customs and limits of the Church. Anglo-Saxon religious literature presents a unique and potent opportunity for a new consideration of the female subject; religious women, as Olsen comments (222), are especially subject to the laws and governance of the Catholic Church. Women within the Church community, as Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* indicates, were more subject to

regulation than secular women, especially royal – and thus socially powerful – secular women. Monastic women, by definition, are those in closest contact with the culture and traditions of the Church, and thus those most likely to have been molded according to the Church's patriarchal designs. Stephanie Hollis, for example, while concurring with Jane Chance's Eve-Mary dichotomy, argues that the "Eve-Mary iconographical construction of women, indeed the very conception of distinctively female stereotypes, [is] a long – and slow – historical process, which was already under way in the early church and further continued in the vernacular literature of the late Anglo-Saxon period" (9). Hollis also contends that "early hagiography, Bede's in particular, also represents a form of social actualization of the view that women constitute a separate and inferior class" (8). Hagiography, dealing with saints and their lives and inevitable, though sometimes delayed, deaths, presents men and women epitomizing human Christian perfection on earth. These saints idealize religious life on earth and represent ideals of Christian belief and behavior. Female saints, thus, are the ultimate representations and realizations of cultural and religious forces directed at women, and hagiography itself presents an inimitable, prime opportunity for the study of the true cultural position of the Anglo-Saxon female subject.

There is no scarcity of hagiographic narratives in Anglo-Saxon literature; after all, the "hagiographical form was the dominant narrative kind in the Old English period" (Woolf 64). However, prose narratives – both in Latin and Old English – far exceed hagiographical poems in number. There are only five Old English poems generally accepted as saints' lives – *Elene*, *Juliana*, *Andreas*, and *Guthlac A* and *B* (Anderson 97). Some argument has been made for treating *Judith*, despite its Old Testament setting, as hagiographical in character; Marie Nelson, for example, analyzes *Judith* alongside *Elene* and *Juliana* in *Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Three Fighting Saints*. Anglo-Saxon scholars, from Aldhelm to Ælfric, also frequently consider Judith alongside more traditional female saints. Occasionally, critics have excluded one or more of the

vernacular poems; Lapidge, for example, admits only *Juliana* as a proper saint's life (259). Ultimately, however, *Elene*, *Juliana* and *Judith* may be considered the only vernacular hagiographic poems which treat women as either their subjects or, in the case of *Elene*, central to the narrative.

Prose works, both Anglo-Latin and Old English, relevant to or treating some aspect of hagiography are far more common. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*[2] may be considered in this group, as may Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* and verse *Carmen de Virginitate*. There are, of course, a variety of anonymous prose lives, as well as single lives produced by known writers, such as Rudolf of Fulda's *Life of Saint Leoba*. As the Anglo-Saxon age drew to a close, fewer and fewer Anglo-Latin lives were produced, contrasting with "the very considerable production of vernacular texts" (Andersen 92). Of the later hagiographers whose names are known, Ælfric is probably most celebrated; while his *Catholic Homilies* includes some saints' lives, his *Lives of Saints* contains the majority of his hagiographies (Andersen 93). The *Old English Martyrology* also offers a number of saints' lives in a collected form. Unsurprisingly, there are fewer lives of women than of men; Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, for example, includes only eight.

Hagiography has often been regarded as a thoroughly general and bland genre, consisting of the same repeated patterns, but interpretation of saints' lives actually depends heavily on recognition of gender differences. As Anderson aptly summarizes,

> The form in fact is entirely conventional, as lives generally conform to one of two models. One is the *vita*, which typically relates the saint's noble birth, accompanied by miraculous signs; a youth marked by portents of sanctity; in adulthood, the saint's abandonment of secular life for a holy existence marked by wonders; death-bed instructions to disciples; and

[2]Bede is also responsible for more overtly hagiographic work, such as his poetic and prose versions of the *Vita S. Cuthberti* (Andersen 89). However, *EH* provides a substantial opportunity for the study of women monastics, many of whom later became revered as saints. Additionally, references to these holy women in *EH* sometimes imply early, and lost, *vitae* (Neuman de Vegvar 51).

> posthumous miracles, particularly at the remains (perhaps based on memoranda kept at the saint's shrine). The other is the *passio*, which characteristically is set in the age of persecutions, treating of a noble Christian's refusal to renounce the faith and worship pagan gods; interrogation by authorities, followed by a series of grisly tortures; and ultimately martyrdom, usually by decollation (since that was the manner of St. Paul's death, and it is not therefore to be resisted by subsequent martyrs). (88)

Other writers have pushed the commonality of saints' lives even farther. Lapidge, for example, argues that Ælfric's saints are essentially interchangeable, "indistinguishable as such one from the other, all worthy of our veneration and all able to intercede for us with the unapproachable deity." Lapidge continues, commenting that "it did not matter whether the saint was tall short, fair or bald, fat or thin, blonde or brunette. In a sense, it probably did not matter whether he was named Cletus or Clement, Narcissus or Nicasius" (261). To a certain extent, Lapidge is correct; hagiographic writers do tend to use the same "crude and predictable features of every other saint's life" (Bjork 3). But only to an extent. It definitely matters whether the saint is male or female – and other minutiae of particular saints' lives are equally significant. While hagiographic narratives tend to use the same rough script and the extras all tend to resemble one another, hagiographic narratives are no less carefully constructed because of their essential similarities.

Indeed, in female saints' lives, it is that very difference – female form, female physicality – that often determines the progress and emphasis of the life. Most, if not all, female saints are virgins, a virtue often considered specifically female. The female saint's life is constructed around difference – not only the inevitable distinction from the male, but also a sanctity, manifested in the body, that separates the female saint from the rest of society, including secular women. But her position within religious society is equally as

important as that difference, and the very qualities that distinguish her from secular society frequently link her to a religious community.

Medievalists have slowly begun to realize and acknowledge the importance of the body, of physicality, to both male and female religious. Many of the practices and customs of the religious life are specifically aimed at constraining, controlling and conquering the necessities and desires of the physical form. Caroline Bynum, for example, in her work *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, examines the importance of food to thirteenth and fourteenth-century religious women. Early in her discussion, she indicates the conflation of food with the body, commenting that "food was flesh, and flesh was suffering and fertility. In renouncing ordinary food and directing their being toward the food that is Christ, women moved to God not merely by abandoning their flawed physicality but also by becoming the suffering and feeding humanity of the body on the cross, the food on the altar" (5).

Scholars have also noted the importance of the body to earlier religious women, but their analysis has focused on the inherent *evils* of the female form, frequently repeating the rather tired association of women's bodies with immoral sexuality. Lees, for example, comments that "consonant with early Medieval Christianity and with the social gendering of the sexes, the relation between the body and sexuality is focused on the female (the "wif") in Anglo-Saxon culture. Female saints confront and overcome the deadliness of their bodies and the deadliness of their sexuality time and again" (147). Robertson agrees, observing that "the centrality of sexual temptation in female saints' lives thus reflected the prevalent view of women as bound by their fundamentally guilty sexual natures. Unlike men who could climb an allegorical ladder to God and thereby transcend the body, women remained rooted in their bodies" (*Early English Devotional Prose* 41). Robertson also acknowledges the importance of sexuality for the Medieval woman, viewing it as a persistent negative: "Because women were viewed – and perhaps indeed viewed themselves – as trapped inescapably in a body designated and even

disparaged as female, sexuality and notions of the female body became the central issues for women in pursuit of the contemplative life" ("Medieval Medical Views" 149). Sex, therefore, is an inescapable, if initially surprising, component of female hagiography. But the female body is not as absolutely negative as scholars and, certainly, some Anglo-Saxon writers, have suggested.

Previous studies, when they have discussed Anglo-Saxon female saints and/or physicality at all, have focused on the woman's attempt to escape her body, to, as Szarmach observes of Ælfric's Eugenia ("Ælfric's Women Saints" 155), "unwoman" herself. Nevertheless, Anglo-Saxon hagiography does not reveal a consistent attempt to eradicate or deny the femininity of its saintly women. To the contrary, it often indicates a favorable conception of the female form, a recognition of its graces as well as its flaws, and an affirmation of the potential, both physical and spiritual, of the saintly women who constitute a frequent subject. Christine Fell appropriately observes that "Christianity as interpreted by the fathers of the church developed a full set of theories on the inferiority of women," but also argues that "throughout the Anglo-Saxon period they seem to have little practical effect" (13). Anglo-Saxon hagiography does not ignore these theories, these patristic complaints and mandates directed at women; early and late Anglo-Saxon hagiographic writers, such as Aldhelm and Ælfric, have decidedly not forgotten the teachings of Augustine, Jerome and their fellows. But, in the midst of recognizing and even echoing such Church doctrine, Anglo-Saxon hagiography quietly but radically transforms and changes the image of the saintly woman – and her body.

Sexuality and sex are integral to the construction of the female saint, and virginity is not the only manifestation of that sexuality. The saint is often seen as the subject of others' – commonly male, though not always – desires, but she is also aware of her body and the power it can command over members of secular society. Anglo-Saxon female hagiography suggests dual and complementary views of the female body. Most obviously, the lives of female saints suggest a practical ability to control and command

that body, a faculty that simultaneously integrates the saint into patristic teachings and alters their effect upon the woman and her place in society. More subtly, the lives also suggest a reciprocal relationship between the almost entirely male hagiographic writers and their subjects and audiences. Surprisingly, the body of the female saint is almost never portrayed as intrinsically sinful or immoral; rather, it is the gaze, the action, and reaction, of the viewing public that holds the certain seed of evil.

This study focuses on the major hagiographic texts of the pre-1066 Anglo-Saxon period: Aldhelm's Latin prose and verse *De Virginitate*, the *Old English Martyrology*, Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, and three vernacular poems, *Judith*, *Elene*, and *Juliana*. These latter three poems, *Judith* especially, are quite different from the more typical hagiography of Aldhelm and Ælfric, but they do provide vital supplemental views of religious women. And, ultimately, vernacular verse hagiography should not be separated from vernacular or Latin prose works, for they were often composed with similar purposes and audiences in mind. Rachel Andersen discusses the existence of vernacular verse hagiography:

> There survive five Old English texts that are best described as versified saints' lives: *Elene*, *Juliana*, *Andreas*, and *Guthlac A* and *B*. Why hagiographies should have been put into vernacular verse is not known for certain. Of the known or possible uses for Latin and vernacular prose lives, however, two suggest themselves in this instance: recitation at meals in the refectory and private contemplation, more likely by monastics than lay persons. That the first two of the five poems are preserved in the Vercelli Book suggests the latter explanation (97).

Additionally, hagiographers like Bede and Aldhelm demonstrate a tendency to follow the tradition of the fifth-century Caelius Sedulius, who produced "twinned" works of prose and verse, each pair known as an *opus geminatum*. As Andersen observes, "in a letter of dedication to his two lives of St. Willibrord, Alcuin explains the purpose of this practice:

'I have arranged two books, one plodding in the language of prose, which can be read publicly to the brethren in church . . . the other running on Pierian foot, which should only be contemplated among your scholars in the privacy of the cell'" (89). In any case, works of verse hagiography should not be considered that distinct from their prose kin; both ultimately have a similar purpose of edification and study – if not also entertainment. Therefore, *Judith*, *Elene* and *Juliana* should and will be examined alongside more normative works of prose hagiography.

Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* and verse *Carmen de Virginitate*[3], both virginity tracts, offer views of the elusive, indefinite definition of virginity. Chapter One utilizes Aldhelm's prose and verse versions of the *De Virginitate* to explore virginity, a virtue central to many female saints' lives and fundamental to the evolution of the Anglo-Saxon religious woman. Both the prose and verse versions of the *De Virginitate* list catalogues of male and female saints. The prose *De Virginitate* especially, with its explicit audience of the female monastics of Barking, presents virginity as a connective virtue, linking the female audience of the text to a community of sanctified men and women. Aldhelm also constructs an image of virginity as a reactive virtue, malleable to social pressures and realities. Virginity, therefore, is not simply an ideal inherited from patristic forbears and created for and applied to women by men, but an impressionable virtue, shaped as much by its audience as by its authors. Aldhelm's prose and verse *De Virginitate* indicate female participation in and appreciation of the ideal of virginity.

Chapter Two continues the discussion of virginity beyond Aldhelm's use of it as a social value to a stranger sense of virginity – social situations that prevent or deny the equation of physical integrity with female virginity. Marriage and widowhood, both of which assume an existing or past sexual relationship between a man and woman, and

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[3] Aldhelm wrote in the seventh century. Although we know very little about his life, a birth date of 639 or 640 is generally supplied, based on a dubious statement by William of Malmesbury (Lapidge and Herren 6).

virginity are not, surprisingly, mutually exclusive states. Æthelthryth's *vita*, found in varying forms in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*[4], the *Old English Martyrology*[5], and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*[6], continues Aldhelm's development of virginity as a social or communal virtue, while the poems *Judith*[7] and *Elene*[8], both of which treat women whose marriages were very real and very much past, acknowledge female sexuality and unambiguously discuss the merger of female sexuality and sanctity. Both of these examples indicate an awareness of actual, rather than ideal, women; both of these examples also suggest a surprisingly positive acceptance of the female body and sexuality. The continued evolution of virginity as a social or communal virtue also echoes a growing dissatisfaction with the earlier model of the contemplative life and an increasing emphasis upon communal Christian involvement that does not exclude women.

Chapter Three more directly explores sanctified female sexuality, investigating three areas in which that sexuality transgresses normal social boundaries. In the cases of

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[4] Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* was finished in 731 and remained well-known; Alfred, for example, "apparently had it translated into English" (Colgrave and Mynors xvii). The Venerable Bede was also himself aware of Aldhelm; in the *Ecclesiastical History*, he commends Aldhelm for his "most excellent book on virginity both in hexameter verse and in prose, producing a twofold work after the example of Sedulius" (515).

[5] The *Old English Martyrology* corresponds to a catalogue or calendar of martyrs and brief descriptions of their lives attached to successive days of the year. The *Martyrology* remains in four manuscripts, two fragments and two incomplete copies: British Museum, Addit. MS. 23211 (fragment); Brit. Mus., Cod. Cotton Julius A X (incomplete); Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, No. 196 (incomplete); and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, No. 41 (fragment). The Old English Martyrology is generally considered one of the "oldest monuments of the Mercian dialect"; although its manuscipts differ slightly in terms of age, the *Martyrology* probably dates between 850 and 900 (Herzfeldxi-xv, xix,xxxii).

[6] Skeat, editor of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, uses the British Museum Cotton Julius E. vii manuscript as the foundation for the Early English Text Society edition (vi). Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* was completed before 998, since, as Andersen observes, "the English preface is addressed to the *ealdormann* and chronicler Æthelweard [. . .] who died that year" (93).

[7] *Judith* appears in the *Beowulf* manuscript in the hand of the second scribe (Fulk and Cain 117), and is missing its beginning – although how much, exactly, is missing differs according to which commentator or critic is consulted (Nelson 31). *Judith* is generally given a relatively late, post-Alfredian date of composition (Fulk and Cain 34). Alfred reigned 871-899 (Fulk and Cain 48).

[8] Both *Elene and Juliana* are by Cynewulf (whose name is embedded in runes in the concluding passages of each poem). Cynewulf "has usually been assigned to the period 750-850, though it is possible that he wrote a century or more later" (Andersen 98).

harlots, transvestites, and rape or potential rape victims, hagiographic texts reveal a clear and persistent interest in the female body. Remarkably, however, these texts, found primarily in the *Old English Martyrology* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, do not portray an interest in eradicating, destroying, or masculinizing the female saint's body or sexuality. These texts do recognize sexual dangers, but they also focus attention – and culpability – outwards, towards the spectators in the text. Frequently, though not always, these spectators are male, and it is their rampant sexuality, not the contained but not expunged sexuality of the saint, that the tale rebukes. Additionally, the texts use the transgressively sexual situations of these saints to indicate the essential humanity of these women; their specifically female sins become representative of the imperfection of humanity in general.

Chapter Four examines the relationship between physical and spiritual pain and sanctity, discussing *Elene*, *Juliana* and several female saints from the *Old English Martyrology* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. In the hands of the female saint, pain becomes a tool, an implement to control and redesign the exterior world and the saint's own belief system. In his *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric offers a discussion of martyrs and extends martyrdom beyond the prolonged, tortured deaths of patristic saints, and this chapter identifies pain as a significant part of the female saint's experience and as an active connection between female saints and "normal" monastic and secular women. Many saints, like Juliana, *are* martyrs in the traditional sense, but others are martyrs in more unconventional and less dramatic though equally compelling ways. The anonymous *vitae* of Saint Margaret provide a foundation for the consideration of a final aspect of the physicality of the female saint – the body in pain and consequent death. This chapter also discusses one final result of the saint's death – postmortem miracles, which are often closely associated with actual physical remains and connected to the femininity of the saint's dead body.

Finally, the Conclusion offers some deductions and inferences that can be made from a broad look at Anglo-Saxon hagiographic women accomplished in the preceding chapters. It responds to the proposal that 1066 represents a central turning point in the Church's treatment of women and briefly examines some of the significant, evolving differences in the female religious experience, including an increasing desire for the isolated anchoritic life. This chapter also discusses some of the problems of audience and authorship mentioned in earlier chapters. The Anglo-Saxon period sees few texts of definite female provenance, whereas religious texts with a female voice, if filtered through an amanuensis, do occur with more regularity after 1066. The conclusion ultimately suggests a final response to the title question of this introduction, *what has woman to do with Christ?*, and proposes a mediation between the critical and theoretical pressures and developments of our own time and the relatively few extant texts of quite a different era.

Chapter 1

Virginity and the Communal Body:

Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* and *Carmen de Virginitate*

> Immo et occurrit prodigo venienti. "Yet he eorneth," hit seith, "ayein hire yein-cume ant warpeth earmes anan abuten hire swire." Hweat is mare milce? Yet her gleadfulre wunder: ne beo neaver his leof forhoret mid se monie deadliche sunnen, sone se ha kimeth to him ayein he maketh hire neowe meiden. For as Seint Austin seith, swa muchel is bitweonen Godes neoleachunge ant monnes to wummon, thet monnes neoleachunge maketh of meiden wif, ant Godd maketh of wif meiden. Restituit, inquit Job, in integrum. Gode werkes ant treowe bileave - theose twa thinges beoth meithhad i sawle.
>
> *Ancrene Wisse*, Part 7, ll. 127-35

Crucial to most hagiographic narratives, virginity is one of the most restrictive and least agreeable – at least to a modern audience – elements of the saint's life. It is also fundamental in the creation of the Anglo-Saxon female monastic and saint. While not all saints or monastic women are or remain virginal, the concept of virginity pervades religious literature and is one of the most pervasive images inherited from patristic writers. Yet virginity does not act as a restrictive or particularly misogynistic virtue, resulting not in extreme distortion or exploitation of the female body. Instead, for Anglo-Saxon writers, virginity becomes a concept crucial to the construction of a religious community.

Although shared by both male and female saints, virginity is often regarded as a particularly female virtue[9]; as Wogan-Brown comments, "In addition to its treatises, letters, and rules for living, virginity has a major narrative form in the virgin saint's life. The hagiographic genre of the virgin martyr passion extends through two millennia, in Latin and all the European vernaculars. It is a, perhaps *the*, major Western form of representing women" (3). In their introduction to *Menacing Virgins*, Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie agree, commenting upon "the degree to which depictions of virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance are gendered – or coded – as female, even when male virginity is ostensibly the subject" (16). Virginity is also typically considered both negative and emblematic of a deeper deficiency in the depiction and formation of religious women. Female virgins, saints and otherwise, are limited by both religious and social pressures governing their behavior, and virginity is variously seen as either offering women an escape from the drudgery of marriage and repetitive childbirth or forcing them into the narrow mold of the monastic life. As Miles observes, "in orthodox Christianity two roles were acceptable for women – virginity or motherhood" (67). Virginity is also seen as problematic for the hagiographic as well as the real Medieval woman, sometimes resulting in the effective isolation or marginalization of the virgin woman. Susannah Mary Chewning, for example, argues that

> Virginity existed as a paradox for Medieval religious women. It was encouraged as the ideal (for both sexes), and yet for women it was particularly problematic. Women were defined by their roles within Medieval culture, and these were decidedly sexual roles: wife, mother, whore. If a woman chose not to participate in a sexually defined

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[9] This is true of modern scholars as well as late Medieval writers, but not, perhaps, of Anglo-Saxon men and women. Bugge, for example, observes that virginity's "essence, of course, is complete sexual abstinence, which can also apply to celibacy on the part of the male. The early history of the question permits no simple distinction between male celibacy and female virginity; it is only late in the Middle Ages that virginity becomes almost exclusively something female" (4).

> relationship with a man, she stood apart from her cultural obligation and pursued a different path. Thus religious women often existed on the margins of society.
>
> (113).

Such an identification of virginity with marginalization, however, implies that virginity itself is not a culturally permitted option, but a state of reaction against, not within, a prevailing culture.

Regardless of whether virginity is seen as a refuge or a prison, female virginity has been identified as a patriarchal construction, an identity dependent upon an outside, predominantly male authorship, with male writers describing and proscribing virginity for a female audience. It is typically regarded as an abnegation of basic female sexuality, a loss of some essential freedom, an imperative imposed upon the female subject by a vaguely delineated patriarchy. Nikki Stiller, for example, contends that virgin martyrs "had to deny both biological truth and natural sexual affiliation" (14). Carrying this reasoning a number of steps further, Susannah Mary Chewning argues, in fact, that there is no such thing as a Medieval "female subject," stating that

> In fact, in Medieval terms, the feminine has no subjectivity herself; she is defined only in terms of her relationship to a man: she is a virgin, a mother, a wife, a sister, a whore. She is never a female subject defined by her own presence; rather, she is defined by how she is acted upon by phallic power. Indeed, she has no voice of her own but instead must appropriate the language and voice of patriarchy if she is to communicate within patriarchal culture.
>
> (122).

Other writers have focused on vehemently misogynistic elements, viewing the images of Western womanhood as invariably negative. Margaret Denike, for example, argues that "the personification of evil, and the correlative demonization of femininity, is deployed in

the service of the will-to-power and the jurisdictional contests that define Western patriarchy's institutions" (37). While Denike's opinion is strongly phrased, the assumption of social inferiority of women is pervasive and quite commonly accepted across the theoretical board. From Levi-Strauss's ideas of a "feminine" text functioning as exchange between male writers and readers, to Kristeva's view that a woman must always be "immasculated" in order to actively enter into social interaction, all aspects of womanhood, including virginity, have typically been seen as ensuing from patriarchal, and hence male, desires and needs. Virginity especially has been regarded as resulting from patriarchal construction of femininity, according to various needs, fears, and desires.

Kathryn Schwarz, discussing the abiding interest in the question of Queen Elizabeth I's virginity, terms virginity a "patriarchal trope" (6) and observes that "early modern virginity materializes social imperatives; both its presence and its lack are understood as imprinted on the body, and that understanding enables evaluation and disposition by men. As a socially arrogated quality, virginity almost by definition locates agency elsewhere than in the subject it describes" (7). Schwarz recognizes virginity as a social construction, but also suggests that virginity is a quality enacted upon, not by, the virgin herself. Elizabeth I, the primary subject of Schwarz's essay, stands out as the preeminent Early Modern virgin, but the Middle Ages did not lack for its own eminent virgins – some even more improbable than Elizabeth. Ælthelthryth, for example, married twice, yet according to all sources remained "mæden," a virgin.

Terming virginity a "patriarchal trope" offers a quick and easy "out" to modern critics, who generally find the idea of virginity distasteful. As Sarah Salih in her *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* observes, the modern dislike for virginity is often "based on unexamined assumptions about the nature of women and the desirability of heterosexuality" (9). Additionally, the idea of patriarchy, while a valid and useful modern construction, nevertheless frequently obscures the actual operation of

Medieval, and especially Anglo-Saxon, femininity and virginity. It should not be forgotten that Medieval women were often avid and eager *participants* in, if not authors of, such tropes as virginity. Indeed, virginity in the Anglo-Saxon period is not a one-sided construction, but one promulgated by both sexes. Important, then, to both hagiography and actual monastic women, virginity establishes a very different image of the religious woman than is suggested by the easy equivalence of patriarchal power and the virginal ideal. Instead, virginity acts primarily as a social construction, firmly establishing community and defining a communal role for monastic and hagiographic women.

As Elizabeth I and Æthelthryth indicate, virginity is not easily reduced to a simple physical state, any more than female identity can be equated to clothes or body parts. While virginity is typically associated with femininity, the concept is otherwise capricious, difficult to define, and erratic in its cultural meanings. In women, virginity is often approximated with a physical intactness, but even patristic writers had difficulty separating physical integrity from spiritual virtue; Augustine, for example, conflates the material condition of virginity with the incorporeal ethic of humility (Salisbury 51) and even suggests that, in cases of rape or assault, loss of virginity does not affect the state of the soul (Schulenburg 131; Salih 26). Modern critics have further divorced virginity from the body. Schwarz, for example, identifies virginity as "the physical location, the place of utterance, from which that articulation [of virginity] begins" (13), and as "a speech act that masquerades as a bodily state, a male fantasy that locates feminine will at the heart of heterosocial production, a licensed performance that incorporates, co-opts, and conspires with the body beneath" (15). Schwarz, therefore, sees Early Modern virginity as marking a confusion between body and speech, reality and fancy. Medieval hagiographic texts and virginity tracts, with their inevitable interplay between physicality and spirituality, further complicate the issue.

Most obviously, virginity *is* a physical condition, rooted in the body. However, the concept of virginity also represents a point of contact and difference between social bonds and religious identity. Virginity often serves as a blatant marker of religious identity. For example, classical legends or *passios*, including those translated in Old English, link virginity to martyrdom, just as patristic writers associate virginity with the fulfillment of an apocalyptic vision. Indeed, Peter Brown, in his extensive study of the workings of early Christianity, observes that "sexual abstinence [. . .] played an important role in establishing the authority of prophets in many second-century churches" (66). Brown adds that

> How the frail, mortal body might become a reliable container for the Spirit of God was the center of the concerns of Christians such as Melito and Irenaeus. The gradual waning of married sexual activity was a recognized part of this process. But the abandonment of intercourse followed the normal rhythms of life: it was usually associated with widowhood and with the onset of old age. Not every believer, however, could wait to become a widow or a widower. The call to a violent death was as much a reality for Christians of the second century as was the coming of the Spirit. It was a matter of vital importance for the believer that a body capable of bearing the Spirit of God within the Christian assemblies, in times of peace, should be enabled, also, through Christ and His Spirit, to endure the devastating negative possession associated with the torments of a martyr's fate (69).

The situation in Anglo-Saxon England differs radically. Certainly, monasteries remained under constant danger of assault and destruction, and both royal and religious individuals

did manage to martyr themselves, but a significant number of home-grown saints reached heaven the old fashioned way – death by infirmity or old age[10].

Thus, Anglo-Saxon writers were interested in two expressions of virginity, that manifested by saints, frequently of patristic origin, and that practiced by their own contemporaries. Aldhelm's prose and verse versions of the *De Virginitate*[11] best present the point of contact between these two expressions of virginity and stress three important points. First, Aldhelm indicates an important interest in "spiritual" virginity as opposed to bodily integrity – although he does not, of course, deny the traditional association of virginity with bodily integrity. Aldhelm suggests that such spiritual virginity can be performed[12], just as sins are frequently manifested by bodily actions and behaviors. On this foundation of spirituality, Aldhelm constructs virginity as a concept integral in the construction of communal ties; although the Barking nuns, for example, are physically restricted to the confines of their double monastery, Aldhelm's use of virginity firmly positions them within Christian traditions and incorporates them within a spiritual community. Finally, virginity in Aldhelm's versions of the *De Virginitate* does not abnormally constrict, destroy or neuter the female body – as critics such as Susannah Mary Chewning and Nikki Stiller have suggested. Instead, the virgin body of Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* remains active and sexual, distinctly female in appearance and behavior. Ultimately, the prose and verse versions of the *De Virginitate* reinforce, rather than deny, the humanity of female virgins and, finally, suggest a more tolerant, benevolent attitude towards the female body than has previously been recognized.

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[10] Saint Cuthbert, whose life and death is related at some length in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, is one such example.

[11] Because Aldhelm's Latin is notoriously difficult, complex, and unwieldy, all quotations from either the prose *De Virginitate* or the *Carmen de Virginitate* follow the translations provided by the editors, Lapidge and Herren and Lapidge and Rosier, respectively.

[12] Sarah Salih, in her work on late Medieval virginity, calls virginity "not a denial or rejection of sexuality, but itself a sexuality, by which I mean a culturally specific organization of desires" (10). Salih implicitly and usefully suggests that virginity is, above all, a set of behaviors. However, Anglo-Saxon virginity does not represent an accepted identity—or a sexuality—as much as it enacts a a coded link between participating members of the Church.

Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate*, produced relatively early in the Anglo-Saxon period, is particularly notable in the Anglo-Saxon dialogue of virginity. As a virginity treatise, it stands between the long tradition of earlier patristic treatises on the subject and later medieval discussions of virginity, including the *Hali Meithad* and the *Ancrene Wisse*. Like these latter examples, Aldhelm's prose treatise is addressed towards a specifically female audience – but not, crucially, a currently virginal one. The *De Virginitate* also partakes of some of Augustine's more permissive views of human sexuality. As Hollis comments,

> Whereas Bede, for instance, endorses and promotes the valorization of physiological virginity in his account of Æthelthryth, Aldhelm keeps in currency the moral and psychological conception of purity – a conception which, though formulated by Augustine, scarcely achieved the status of a mainstream view in considerations of female sanctity throughout the middle ages. Equally of interest is Aldhelm's concomitant affirmation of the freedom of the will.
>
> (81).

Aldhelm disassociates virginity from the body alone, affirming, as Hollis comments, its psychological and spiritual aspects. Writing in accordance with Augustine, Aldhelm advocates the spiritual dimension of virginity as at least, if not more, important than purely physical integrity. Significantly, Aldhelm also connects the idea of virginity to his present subjects, the female monastics who formed his audience for at least the prose *De Virginitate*.

Aldhelm's treatment of virginity and marriage differs quite radically from traditional patristic treatments of the subject (Lapidge and Herren 53). Aldhelm revises the traditional patristic categories of virginity, widowhood, and marriage established by Saint Jerome and acknowledged by other patristic writers. Crucially, Aldhelm replaces widowhood with chastity. Although widowhood was classically synonymous with

chastity – Jerome, obviously, included chaste widowhood in his hierarchy of states – Aldhelm's idea of chastity is *not* synonymous with widowhood. Instead, Aldhelm adapts the traditional hierarchy to reflect and admit the social realities of his audience. As Lapidge observes,

> This newly devised category allowed Aldhelm to praise by implication those Barking nuns such as Cuthburg who had spurned their marriages; at the same time it allowed him to praise 'pure' virginity in traditional terms. And although 'chastity' must obviously occupy an inferior position to 'virginity' itself, Aldhelm was able to pay an indirect compliment to the Barking nuns by suggesting that virginity, because of its exalted station, is susceptible of pride, whereas chastity, because it starts from a lower station, is inclined to continual striving after perfection. Thus at one stroke Aldhelm was able to flatter his audience of once-married nuns and to maintain an orthodox position on the question of marriage-versus-virginity. And, not surprisingly, perhaps, a large proportion of the female martyrs whom Aldhelm adduces in his *De Virginitate* as examples of virtuous behaviour are those who have rejected betrothal or marriage. (Lapidge and Herren 56).

Aldhelm's modification of traditional divisions of virginity and chastity indicates an initial receptivity to his audience. More importantly, however, it also reflects a transformation undergone by Aldhelm's audience, who are not, generally speaking, widows *or* virgins. Instead, these women have progressed from the lowest state – marriage – to chastity. Aldhelm is not here describing pure virginity, but he is permitting the reclamation and transformation of the female body from an inferior state to a higher one.

Indeed, Aldhelm writes to a decidedly non-virginal audience, consisting of a number of nuns who previously abandoned husbands and marriages in favor of the

monastic life, among them presumably the same Cuthburg who left her royal husband and later founded Wimborne (Lapidge and Herren 52). Lees and Overing stress the point further, commenting that "The body that haunts Aldhelm's text is decidedly unsealed; it has sexual and material presence, it is rich, married at least once, well connected, it has social if not political authority; it may labor strenuously, it may possess its own athletic grace. And it is not young" (324). In other words, Aldhelm's audience is anything *but* virgin, as Aldhelm certainly knows. As he does with his substitution of chastity for widowhood, Aldhelm modifies his goals and ideals to coincide with the realities of his audience.

He explicitly identifies the spiritual qualities of virginity towards the end of the work, stating "Let the perfection of blessed virginity be adorned, I say, not with the comely beauty of the exterior person, but by the pious chastity of the interior" (124) and more explicitly "For every privilege of pure virginity is preserved only in the fortress of the free mind rather than being contained in the restricted confines of the flesh; and it is beneficially safeguarded by the inflexible judgment of the free will, rather than being diminished out of existence by the enforced servitude of the body" (129). Aldhelm acknowledges that virginity is fundamentally a physical condition, "contained in the restricted confines of the flesh." But this idea of *integritas* is not, to Aldhelm, the most essential component of a *true* virgin. Although Aldhelm is not redefining physical virginity, which unsurprisingly equates with *integritas* or intactness, he *is* emphasizing the spiritual aspects of virginity. Indeed, Aldhelm elevates the "pious chastity of the interior" over outward appearances, and also argues that "pure virginity" is best preserved by the will, by the mind. Thus, simply to preserve bodily integrity is not, for Aldhelm, enough; instead, virginity must also be a condition adopted freely by the spirit. In this construction of virginity, Aldhelm allows for a process of "revirginization," whereby "belated virgins," women who have lost their physical *integritas*, may assume/resume at least the spiritual presentation of virginity. They are not, of course,

virgins in the purest sense of the term, but they are capable of refashioning their identities along the lines of spiritual virginity. In effect, they perform spiritual virginity, even though their bodies may not be termed virginal.

Aldhelm's discussion of this "pious chastity of the interior," represented in his discussion of clothing and behavior, confirms this emphasis upon a spiritual virginity and again suggests the possibility of a non-virginal body performing virginity. While Schwarz theorizes Early Modern virginity as a "speech act" only loosely connected to a bodily state (15), Aldhelm's performance of virginity centers, not on language, but on the conduct and social action of the body. Aldhelm spends a significant amount of time discussing and condemning physical adornment and decoration, commenting that

> It is a disgrace to mention the shameless impudence of vanity and the sleek insolence of stupidity which [vanity and insolence] are to be discerned in those of both sexes, not only those living cloistered under the discipline of the monastery but even the ecclesiastics whose clerical sphere of duty is under the control of a bishop, contrary to the decrees of canon law and of the norm of the regular life: which (*scil*, vanity and insolence) are adopted for one purpose only, that the bodily figure may be adorned with forbidden ornaments and charming decorations, and that the physical appearance may be glamorized in every part and every limb. (127).

Despite a slight tendency to rant, Aldhelm connects physical comportment to virginity, both to indicate the error of such an excess of pride and concern for outward adornment and to designate virginity as a social virtue, something apparent in the behavior of mixed groups of men and women – in other words in community.

Aldhelm's preoccupation with clothing, and with clothing's connection to virginity, reflects his patristic heritage; for example, Tertullian's famous tract "On the Veiling of Virgins" explicitly connects a virgin's outerwear to her inner purity. Aldhelm,

however, does more than just protest inappropriate clothing; he links virginity, ostensibly a private, singular virtue, to community and to communal behavior. Virginity, therefore, is not just simple physical intactness, but a selected pattern of behavior determined by a spiritual choice. Physical virginity, therefore, can not be alienated from spiritual virginity. Aldhelm's madly prolix prose usually involves hidden rhetorical logic, and Aldhelm' disclaimer of the time he has spent discussing clothing actually stresses the connection between a body's coverings and spiritual, rather than physical, virginity. Aldhelm comments,

> But as I was about to speak of the glory of intact virginity, I began to harangue unnecessarily about the covering of garments – almost superfluously, since I have decided to discourse only on the renown of chastity, insofar as the freely given grace of God assists, abandoning for a little while the occupation with other things.
> (128-29).

Aldhelm immediately continues with a distinction between mental and physical virginity, suggesting that true virginity is a mental, not physical, state. Necessarily, however, the physical form manifests that mental virginity; the actions of the mind must reflect in the behavior of the body.

Crucially, the female audience identified in the dedication of the prose *De Virginitate* is engaged in a reclamation of spiritual or mental virginity. Many of the Barking nuns have forever lost their physical virginity, but, as Aldhelm stresses, the spiritual component of pure virginity can be regained. In effect, the Barking nuns can *perform* spiritual virginity. Aldhelm dedicates the prose *De Virginitate* to "the most reverend virgins of Christ," some of whom he lists by name – "Hildelith, teacher of the regular discipline and of the monastic way of life; and likewise Justina and Cuthburg; and Osburg too, related (to me) by family bonds of kinship; Aldgith and Scholastica, Hidburg and Berngith, Eulalia and Thecla – (to all these nuns) unitedly ornamenting the Church

through the renown of their sanctity" (59). While few, if any, of these women are easily identifiable, Cuthberg, at least, was probably married and separated from her husband (Lapidge and Herren 52). Consequently, Aldhelm's directly identified audience is presumably composed of women who are not true virgins but women engaged in a process of redefining their bodies. His identification of "most reverend virgins of Christ," then, is somewhat misleading, speaking more to the women's current state of (non-widowed) chastity than to any physical purity.

Significantly, The *Carmen de Virginitate*[13], promised in the last pages of the earlier prose *De Virginitate*, lacks this explicit dedication (Lapidge and Rosier 97), although both versions include catalogues of male as well as female virgins, an innovation without precedent, for no patristic writer incorporated a list of male virgins into treatises on virginity (Lapidge and Herren 57). The two works are explicitly connected by more than just subject; the poetic version alludes to Aldhelm's earlier promise to render in verse what he wrote in prose. But, while it can be imagined that the *Carmen* was also directed at Barking, its lack of a specific dedication makes the prose dedication all the more notable.

While "virgins of Christ" can be interpreted as referring to either male or female virgins, Aldhelm's address is to *nuns*, monastic women. Aldhelm's listing of Hildelith, Justina, Cuthburg, Osburg, Aldgith, Scholastica, Hidburg, Berngith, Eulalia and Thecla is not made simply for rhetorical purposes. Significantly, Aldhelm fails to mention any of the monks at Barking, and he names no male correspondents as an intended audience. As Lees and Overing observe, "the author's dedication genders the issue of audience and reception" (319). Whether or not the text was actually received by both male and female inhabitants of the double monastery is irrelevant; all of the subsequent images and ideas

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[13] Although similar in subject, the prose *De Virginitate* and the verse *Carmen de Virginitate* "appear from the extant manuscript evidence to have circulated quite separately" (Orchard 7) and an identical audience for each work can not be presumed and may only tenuously be assumed.

depend upon the context of Aldhelm's dedication. Therefore, Aldhelm's inclusion of a catalogue of male virgins, as well as the admittedly odd addition of Old Testament patriarchs at the end of his list of female virgins, is intricately connected to his particular audience of nuns.

Initially, Aldhelm's inclusion of male virgins is surprising for two reasons. First, it is a novel approach, with no patristic predecessor (Lapidge and Herren 56). More significantly, Aldhelm's audience is ostensibly female, with no presumably obvious interest in *male* virgins. This second observation has necessitated to a tendency to argue that both the male and female halves of Barking are as Aldhelm's true audience (Lapidge and Herren 57). Hollis, for example, contends that "his treatise is in fact a rather exceptional case of a work written for a mixed audience which addresses itself primarily to women" (93). But such an approach is not only unnecessary, but derelict of the true significance of the male virgins, who reflect the actual social realities of Aldhelm's text and emphasize spiritual virginity.

Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* may be less interested in narration, integration, and coherency than in "rhetorical (and largely verse-derived) pyrotechnics" (Orchard 11), but the prose work nevertheless reveals a correlation between the episodic structure of the work and its message. Buried under the weight of incorrigible verbosity and elongated prose is the same sharp consciousness of social realities he reveals in the perhaps politically necessitated shift from widowhood to chastity[14]. Aldhelm's inclusion of male virgins is, thus, crucial to the development of his idea of virginity for two reasons. First, Aldhelm's male virgins reflect social realities roughly equivalent to those understood by his female audience – marriage, not virginity, was presented as the social norm. Second

[14] Of this alteration, Hollis rather clinically observes that Aldhelm's "treatise is of particular interest in demonstrating the manner in which the numerical weight of formerly married monastic women served to mitigate the high valuation of female bodily intactness" (81).

and perhaps more importantly, Aldhelm's male virgins advance the development of spiritual virginity, felt more by the mind than the body.

Aldhelm is not surprisingly cognizant of the Old Testament regard for marriage. William Phipps[15] discusses the historically "high value that the Hebrews placed on marriage," observing that marriage in the time period of the Old Testament was essential and abstinence or celibacy scandalous and extremely uncommon (25, 20-29). Aldhelm also comments on the preference and respect afforded Old Testament marriage, asking

> But why do we, seeking accurately the treasure of virginity like bees mending with cohesive glue (drawn) from diverse flowers of the field the framework of their golden honey-combs, link fetters of delay in (considering) men of ancient times, to whom the licence of the ancient law benignly permitted nuptial bonds of marriage for the sake of a family of offspring and for propagating the progeny of descendants? (78).

While recognizing the historical importance of marriage and legitimate children, Aldhelm also argues that there were "innumerable examples of blessed virginity" to be found "among the early and recent followers of the catholic faith" (79). Aldhelm acknowledges a society that neither condemns nor frowns upon marriage but was still capable of producing virgins, and male virgins at that. Implicitly, virginity becomes a quality which can exist independent of social norms and alongside normative definitions of both marriage and masculinity. This situation parallels that experienced by Aldhelm's non-virginal, but chaste, female audience, who have sought to retrieve their chastity in the face of previous marriages and sexual experience. Aldhelm also continually emphasizes

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[15] Phipps' book, *Was Jesus Married?*, argues that cultural and philosophical realities necessarily predicate a married – and hence not virgin – Christ. While his conclusion is unsound, his observations on the culture of the Hebrews are well-founded.

a spiritual component to virginity and the possibility of performing spiritual virginity, a process explicit in his treatment of Basil, a New Testament male virgin.

Aldhelm relates Basil's rhetorical prowess, describing his training and his various writings before moving to the heart of his argument. Aldhelm observes, "that this Basil, I say, flourished corporeally incorrupt, by virtue of his integrity, I shall understand as an interpretation of his own maxim, as follows: 'I do not know a woman, and yet I am not a virgin'" (86). Aldhelm interprets this seeming paradox by further distinguishing bodily chastity from spiritual virginity, commenting that "the stainlessness of bodily chastity– which is only external–was in no way suitable for acquiring the distinction of a vigorous integrity, unless chastity of the spirit, by whose command the untamed impulses of bodily wantonness are restrained . . . inwardly cleaves to it harmoniously with comradely solidarity" (87). Basil's denial of virginity cannot be explained by his masculinity – Aldhelm includes far too many other male virgins. Although Basil meets the most basic qualification for virginity – he has not known a woman – he is not spiritually a virgin. Aldhelm's words in Basil's mouth offer the simplest and sole definition of physical male virginity, inexperience. But inexperience, "I have not known a woman," does not virginity make. Basil's external bodily chastity is unaccompanied by a "chastity of the spirit," which, in turn, disqualifies him from a "vigorous integrity," or pure virginity. Simply, Basil is not a spiritual virgin. Thus, with Basil[16], Aldhelm reinforces the concept of a spiritual virginity, an idea dependent not upon the body but upon the spirit or will[17]. Spiritual virginity, then, advanced by patristic writers such as Ambrose, Jerome and

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[16] Interestingly, Basil also lacks one important element of female virginity – a hymen. Physical virginity is difficult to define in a male body, although it may be imprecisely located in a female. Consequently, identifying a physical marker or location of virginity in the body is almost impossible, because the location or site of that virginity does not exist in a male body, and only dubiously in a female body.

[17] As Kelly comments, "Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine each embed stories about menaced virginity in their respective exhortations to chastity, yet they use the saint's life in the service of another project: to formulate doctrine on whether or not suicide in order to preserve virginity is justified. At the same time, these writers use the near-rape narrative to affirm that it is not the body that sins, but the will – and that spiritual virginity is not only more valuable than physical, but also impervious to corruption" (142).

Augustine, is crucial and is far more important than simple physical *integritas*. This "chastity of spirit," which marks spiritual virginity, is determined by the action of the mind and will; it is an intentional choice of purity rather than a lack of opportunity or experience.

Importantly, chastity of spirit depends upon choice, a freely willed decision. While physical intactness cannot be regained, this chastity of spirit that characterizes spiritual virginity – and is, indeed, the most important component of pure virginity – can be recovered. Aldhelm's Old Testament patriarchs demonstrate this recovered spiritual chastity and represent a continuity of Christian tradition and community. Like the repentant non-virgins of Aldhelm's female audience, several of the selected Old Testament patriarchs are failed virgins who regain a spiritual purity.

Stranger than the incorporation of the catalogue of male virgins is the much shorter list of Old Testament patriarchs coming directly after Aldhelm's female virgins. These patriarchs, Joseph, David, Samson, Abel and Melchisedech, do prefigure Christ in various ways (Lapidge and Herren 57), and they also serve as warning against the loss of virginity. Speaking of David, Samson and probably Joseph as well, Aldhelm comments that "each of these patriarchs was most pleasing to the heavenly majesty for as long as he consumed the air of the atmosphere and the breath of life, nonetheless, after their joining in carnal union the glory of their virtues slackened and became less" (123). Aldhelm recognizes both the loss of physical integrity and the accompanying reduction of virtue. However, these four patriarchs also serve a larger purpose in the scheme of the *De Virginitate*. In a sense, David and Samson are explicitly failed virgins, both indicative of the Old Testament fallen man and the New Testament coming of the savior. Each embodies opposing states – married and virgin, sinning and redeemed. Aldhelm notes that David's loss of virginity especially leaves him vulnerable to sin – the death of Uriah and the wrongful marriage to Bathsheba; Samson, of course, falls prey to Dalila's machinations. More importantly, however, is the placement of these patriarchs in the

overall structure of the *De Virginitate* – they follow the male and female virgin catalogues and they antecede a description of properly virginal conduct. It has been said that Aldhelm placed the patriarchs in the text "for no apparent reason" (Lapidge and Herren 57), but the patriarchs do serve a purpose in the context of the entire *De Virginitate*.

As Aldhelm notes, David, Joseph, and Samson prefigure the "future virginity of the incarnate Word," and Abel and Mechisedech prefigure "gentle innocence and suffering" and the "episcopal authority of heavenly power and the sacerdotal office of the divine priesthood" (123). These Old Testament figures imperfectly express the coming perfection of Christ. Their temporary physical virginity antecedes his perfect combination of physical and spiritual chastity. Yet, Aldhelm also identifies them as precursors to the "incarnate Word." Aldhelm's reference to Christ as embodied spirit, while hardly surprising, also suggests this combination of spirit and body that perfect virginity must also achieve. Unlike Christ, however, each of these patriarchs is imperfectly human; only partially do they achieve the purity that He completely represents. As such, these patriarchs also betoken the audience of the *De Virginitate* itself. Aldhelm's denoted audience for the prose *De Virginitate* is engaged in a process of reclamation; despite having lost their physical virginity, spiritual chastity is still available to them. The Old Testament patriarchs of the *De Virginitate* successfully accomplish a similar process of "revirginization."

Aldhelm selects his patriarchs from the Old Testament not simply because they represent a historical foundation for the virgins he has already listed, but also because they combine dual identities of fallen and redeemed man. Two of them at least, David and Samson, are virgins who have effectively lost that virginity and who have experienced a diminution in virtue – but, as Aldhelm carefully notes, remain beloved of God and pleasing to Him. These patriarchs represent the entirety of the human condition, both the spiritual heights to which man can aspire and the immoral depths to which he

can fall. They prefigure Christ and the Church and they embody fallen, imperfect man. Similarly, the monastic women of Aldhelm's audience have lost their virginity and, yet, aspire to reclaim spiritual purity. Like David and Samson, many of the Barking nuns have lost their virginity and have, according to the hierarchy of states established by Jerome and modified only slightly by Aldhelm, diminished in virtue. Nevertheless, as David and Samson remain beloved of God, the Barking nuns can retrieve a value more important than physical *integritas* – spiritual chastity, which indeed comprises the most essential part of pure virginity. While these women obviously do not prefigure Christ, they nevertheless share this mix of mortal sin and promised salvation. Their path, like that of David and Samson, is one of physical failure and spiritual redemption.

Significantly, too, Aldhelm constructs these patriarchs as representative of human history. They stand at the earliest limits of Church tradition; as Old Testament patriarchs, they cannot espouse perfectly Christian values. Yet, they do *prefigure* the coming perfection of Christ and the achievement of His Church. As the earliest representatives of a Christian tradition, their virginity – failed though it is – offers a precursor and an example for both the later virgins identified by Aldhelm and the female audience of the *De Virginitate*. These patriarchs indicate a consistency in human attainment and progression as, despite their Old Testament vintage, their goals, failures, and redemption represent the same process experienced by the Barking nuns. But these patriarchs also indicate a fusion of mortal flaws and failures and divine hope and redemption central to the human character. These patriarchs provide a foundation for the establishment of a Christian tradition reaching from the Old Testament to the New to the years contemporary with Aldhelm's writing.

While virginity is composed of both physical integrity and spiritual chastity or purity, it is the latter element that touches the Barking nuns and permits the establishment of a Christian community. If spiritual virginity is governed by the mind and the will, then it can be performed in a social setting – even though actual, physical integrity has been

lost. Aldhelm's discussion of clothing allows him to both describe one type of social performance *and* to construct an opposition between members of a Christian community and the Other. Clothing effectively represents a primary basis for interaction with others, and Aldhelm uses his discussion of improper clothing to construct a shared identity with his audience and an intentional conflict with those who misuse/miswear clothing.

While Aldhelm carefully emphasizes spiritual virginity, he does not – and theologically cannot – deny that the fundamental definition of virginity is, as he quotes Augustine, "an intact body" (129). Nevertheless, the intact virginal body is almost entirely absent from discussion or representation. When Aldhelm praises virgins in general and his audience in particular in the beginning of the *De Virginitate*, the virgins of the dedication are replaced by ambiguous and indefinite images: sweaty athletes, soldiers, and *bees*. Real, physical, female bodies are not described. As Lees and Overing observe,

> Even a brief look at its specific images and metaphors reinforces the complexity of the processes by which the *De Virginitate* performs a female Christian subject. Having initially praised the nuns' intellects (Lapidge and Herren 59), Aldhelm launches his preamble with a wholesale removal of female agency and body. He addresses the nuns as 'adoptive daughters of the regenerative grace brought forth from the fecund womb of the ecclesiastical conception through the seed of the spiritual Word' (59-60). Aldhelm then suggests that the nuns think of their *minds* as male athletes, and the exercise of learning Scripture as a wrestling routine. As they are exhorted to greater intellectual effort, Aldhelm fixes their (and our) gaze on male bodies, panting, heaving with physical exertion, covered with grease, 'sweating with the sinuous writhings of their flanks' (60)." (321)

The intact female body, therefore, while initially crucial to the definition of virginity, is not a focus in the *De Virginitate*. Indeed, the *De Virginitate* draws attention away from that intact body and concentrates on either spiritual or mental virginity or upon the social conduct of that body. Lees and Overing read this removal of the actual female body as a consequent exclusion of female agency. However, this disappearance of a concretely described and represented female body allows the emphasis upon will and mind as the primary constituents of virginity and also serves to direct the gaze of the audience, these female not-virgins of the dedication, not inward but outward. These "non-virgins" are not concerned with a description of the virginal body or with any concrete relation of what physical virginity is or where it is located in that body. They have already, and permanently, lost that physical virginity. The exact state of the virginal body, therefore, has no direct bearing upon their situation, while spiritual virginity, which Aldhelm frequently describes using elaborate metaphors, is within their reach, as is a social performance of that spiritual virginity. It is this outward gaze – upon social behavior and interaction – that engenders a sense of collusion, of shared identity and community, between Aldhelm, his audience, and the catalogued virgins.

Importantly, Lees and Overing use the word "gaze," with all of its visual connotations, to describe the reader's relationship to Aldhelm's images of figurative male bodies. Ultimately, the *De Virginitate* does present a clear description of a body – but not a virginal one. Instead, Aldhelm presents this body to his audience as opposition to their own selves. Laura Mulvey, in her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema[18]," describes the relationship between a male spectator and a female object. Mulvey argues that the male gaze or spectator has power over the female figure or subject of that gaze. In Mulvey's paradigm, women are displayed for the enjoyment and satisfaction of the

[18] The article was originally published in 1975 in *Screen* and included in her 1989 collection *Visual and Other Pleasures*, and is generally regarded as foundational in the discussion of the male/female gaze.

male bystander[19]. Whether or not one accepts the psychoanalysis upon which Mulvey bases much of her discussion, she does point out an important, gendered relationship between the watcher and the watched.

The gender dynamics that Mulvey points out, however, are not active in Aldhelm's text; indeed, they are reversed. Despite the obvious distinction between narrative cinema and written treatise, the *De Virginitate* does, as Lees and Overing implicitly point out, revolve around highly visual images, and Aldhelm takes care to direct his reader's attention towards those images. But, while watching and being watched are crucial to understanding the *De Virginitate*, the treatise does not depend upon the modern male gaze and female subject Mulvey identifies. Instead, the prose *De Virginitate* inverts that modern standard; both male and female virgins, and, by extension, their author Aldhelm, become subject to anticipatory female onlookers. Jenny Jochens, in her article "Before the Male Gaze: The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse," applies Mulvey's term "the male gaze" to Old Norse literature and culture, and discovers that the period witnesses "a greater attention to male than female beauty," which suggests "that Old Norse culture had not yet constructed a fully developed male gaze, even by the thirteenth century. When men did take a look, climate forced them to notice female clothing rather than the body [. . .] male attire elicited more comment than female" (22). The *De Virginitate* demonstrates a similar disregard for the female form, and, perhaps coincidentally, Aldhelm also reveals a significant interest in male and female apparel. While Aldhelm authors the *De Virginitate*, he also identifies a *female* gaze, directed at a clothed, but illusively gendered, Other.

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[19] Mulvey argues that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19). Analyzing the dynamics of film, Mulvey continues, stating that "traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen" (19).

Aldhelm does not present a clear image of the female body, but his description of the *clothed* body more than makes up for that earlier lack. Aldhelm's discussion of Judith begins an association between an undesirable, irreligious Other and certain types of clothing. The relatively brief discussion of Judith precedes Aldhelm's discussion of vanity and clothing. Of Judith, Aldhelm says that "it is written in the Septuagint: 'And she clothed herself with the garments of her gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets, and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments' [Iud. X. 3] , and tricked herself out to prey on men" (Lapidge and Herren 127). If not for the particular situation Judith finds herself in – the defense of her country necessitating her behavior – Judith's comportment would be reprehensible. This behavior, Aldhelm observes, is also that of the

> stubborn and insolent woman in Proverbs who foreshadows the figure of the Synagogue, who promised that her own husband would (only) return when the moon was full (and who), in the trappings of a harlot and with alluring luxury, is described as having enticed a foolish young man and, when she had deceived him with the fraudulent delights of her promises, destroyed him pitiably, so that (it was) truly like an ox led to the slaughter, enchained by the wantonness of his own blind desire (that) he entered the vile brothel of this whore without fear, 'not knowing that he is drawn like a fool to bonds till the arrow pierce his liver: as if a bird should make haste to the snare' [Prov. VII. 23] (Lapidge and Herren 127).

Aldhelm narrows the association between clothing and behavior to refer to dangerous, wrongful sexual behavior. This villain is specifically female, ill-intentioned in both clothing, like that of Judith, and in her behavior with men. While Aldhelm's gendering of the Synagogue as female is both iconographic and rhetorical, it also emphasizes the wrongness of the metaphorical female's behavior. Aldhelm emphasizes her both her outward appearance and her conduct. Her clothing is specifically tied to her prostitution

of her mind and body; in this case, the clothing does make the woman. This woman, and to some extent Judith, contrast the monastic women of Aldhelm's dedication, who are engaged in a performance, not of harlotry and evil, but of spiritual virginity.

However, Aldhelm also widens his idea of that Other beyond women alone. His idea of the poorly-dressed and badly behaved body expands to include both men and women. This vainly adorned body is hardly abstract, but rendered in precise detail – and living color:

> This sort of glamorization for either sex consists in fine linen shirts, in scarlet or blue tunics, in necklines and sleeves embroidered with silk; their shoes are trimmed with red-dyed leather; the hair of their forelocks and the curls at their temples are crimped with a curling-iron; dark-grey veils for the head give way to bright and coloured head-dresses, which are sewn with interlacings of ribbons and hang down as far as the ankles. Fingernails are sharpened after the manner of falcons or hawks, or more properly, to the likeness of the night-owl, whom the innate need for food naturally incites to pursue and attack with cruelty small mice and birds with the curved trident of their feet, and the ravenous grappling-hook of their talons.
>
> (127-8).

Aldhelm cannot resist the negative image of the night-owl, but the passage otherwise abounds with a very exact image of the vainly adorned person of either sex; Aldhelm's description literally reaches from the head to the ankles.

Aldhelm's detailed description of vain clothing and adornment contrasts the appearance of the virgin and the unrepentantly non-virgin. His concrete description of the vain adornment again suggests the performance of virginity. While non-virgins, like those of Aldhelm's audience, cannot regain physical integrity, they *can* oppose themselves in conduct and appearance to this portrait of outward non-virginity. In effect,

the spiritual virginity available to Aldhelm's audience permits them to perfect the outward behavior crucial to pure virginity. Virginity, thus, becomes a social construction, a tool facilitating the interaction within a Christian community. Clothing functions as a visible sign, not only of interaction between people, social standing, and the like, but also of an interior choice, a willful inclination towards spiritual virginity. The idea of spiritual virginity, therefore, links Aldhelm and his specifically female monastic audience and serves as a mark of difference between that audience and a secular world.

Virginity, the ostensible subject of the *De Virginitate*, serves as the sign of community between the nuns of the dedication and the whole of Christian history, from the prefigurative patriarchs of the Old Testament to fairly recently deceased New Testament martyrs and bishops. As a communal link, virginity does not segregate the nuns; they are not isolated in their female bodies. They *are* separated from secular society, but they are also firmly linked to a Christian tradition and community. Their exclusion from secular society and restriction to a nunnery does not isolate these women from community. As Aldhelm's dedication reveals, these women are actively engaged in communication and they consider their connection to Christian tradition to be equally as real, valid and valuable as any secular relationship might be. It is important to remember that these women have freely adopted a monastic lifestyle, frequently after great struggle and difficulty, and have themselves preferred spiritual connections over secular ones. Yet, the virginity of spirit desired by these women does not deny their femininity; indeed, the opposite is true.

While Aldhelm does not shift from the broad theological outlines of virginity provided by his patristic forbears – he maintains the hundred-fold, sixty-fold and thirty-fold heavenly rewards or "fruit" attributed respectively to virginity, chastity and marriage, for example – his prose *De Virginitate* does allow a large amount of laxity in the application of the term. Aldhelm consistently preferences spiritual virginity over

physical intactness, and his virgins reveal important information about the relationship between the text and its audience. The nuns at Barking are female spectators, viewing a historical progression of virginity across the Old and New Testaments. Virginity in their eyes becomes a social construction, mediated by outside pressures but always manifested from the interior spirit onto the exterior body. The nuns, the readers and listeners, the subjects of the dedication, interact with the text of the *De Virginitate* and with the ideal of virginity. The *De Virginitate* is not a text that prescribes behavior, but rather one that conforms to fit its audience.

Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate*, the prose *De Virginitate*'s later verse counterpart, elaborates upon the identification of spiritual virginity with behavior; spiritual virginity is not rooted *in* the body, but demonstrated *by* the body. Spiritual virginity, therefore, is performative; the body, governed by the will, conducts itself as virgin. Even more than the prose treatise, the *Carmen* emphasizes the spiritual aspect of virginity. As the *Carmen* concretely connects spiritual virginity to behavior and moral – rather than physical – integrity, it also indicates that the female body itself is not intrinsically harmful or sinful. Rather, it is the body's comportment that determines sanctity. Acutely aware of sexual temptation, Aldhelm never denies either physical femininity or masculinity; the virgins in the *Carmen* are not androgynous. Aldhelm's female virgins do not become virile or male in any modern sense; their bodies remain female as does the sense of self rooted in that physical form. The *Carmen*, thus, elaborates upon the idea of spiritual virginity presented in the prose *De Virginitate* even as it depicts an active female body possessed of power and agency.

The *Carmen* lacks the close relationship between writer and audience present in the prose work, beginning with the noticeable absence of a dedication. Instead, the work begins with an "acrostic *praefatio*, consisting of a simple invocatory prayer to God the Father" (Lapidge and Rosier 98). The editors of *Aldhelm: The Poetic Works* note other differences between the prose and verse treatments of virginity as well. Aldhelm omits,

adds, and alters some descriptions of his virgins and reduces his discussion of the "three grades of virginity" (Lapidge and Rosier 98). Most significantly, however, Aldhelm's verse version of the treatise is predominantly allegorical, culminating in a final battle between Vices and Virtues, with Virginity ultimately triumphing over all the Vices. This allegorical treatment of virginity enhances the spiritual aspects of the term even as it minimizes the significance of physical integrity. Raised to a state of allegory, Virginity becomes a virtue linked almost exclusively to the mind and the spirit, with physical intactness taking a definite backseat to spiritual virtue.

From the beginning of the work, Aldhelm configures virginity in preparation for this allegorical battle. As Lapidge and Rosier observe,

> There is also a perceptible shift in emphasis: *virginitas* in the poetic account becomes a much more aggressive virtue, vigorously 'trampling' down foul vice, where the verb most frequently used is *calco* . . . The sense of aggression associated with virginity is matched by the vocabulary of filth and foulness associated with the flesh. This heightened poetic vocabulary prepares the reader for the violent conflict between the virtues and vices which concludes the poem. (98-99).

Virginity is not just a more active, violent virtue, but also specifically concerned with the physicality of the body it inhabits. Whereas virginity becomes a more spiritual virtue, the body it inhabits, especially the female body, is more clearly revealed. Bodies possessed of this virtue – bodies controlled by spiritual virginity – avoid the vulgarity and vileness otherwise associated with the human form. In the *Carmen de Virginitate*, as in the prose *De Virginitate*, virginity is exhibited both by men and women, but the *Carmen* exhibits a more intense interest in the feminine body. Female virgins in the *Carmen* remain actively feminine, their bodies persistently sexual and sexualized. At the same time, these female virgins use their virginity to create exclusive religious communities.

The *Carmen* continues Aldhelm's interest in virginity as a communal link. However, while the *De Virginitate* centers its specifically female audience's attention on the outside, the *Carmen de Virginitate* concentrates its more ambiguous audience on the establishment of community, especially a community shared by women. The *Carmen*, as the virgins Mary, Cecilia, Agatha, and Lucia, illustrate, is particularly interested in the relationship between virginity and the female body. Much more so than the prose *De Virginitate*, the *Carmen* elaborates on the femininity of their bodies, invariably presenting virginity as an active, empowered virtue.

Aldhelm's description of Mary in "this chaste report" (140) unsurprisingly dwells on the traditional paradox of the virgin mother. Mary traditionally functions as the ultimate example of female intactness – the Virgin Mother. However, her virginity is not just a physical trait, but one linked to her spirit: God, "seeing the undefiled heart of the chaste virgin, preferred that this virgin should give birth to the divine offspring" (140). The remainder of the entry, however, consistently focuses on the femininity of Mary's body. In particular, it creates a specifically maternal image, repeatedly referring to Mary's womb. Mary is "abundant with child," and "pregnant with heavenly offspring," and she "produced from her womb the King Who redeems all ages, Who alone rightly controls the government of the world" (140). Aldhelm ends the entry with one final image of Mary's maternal body: "When this had been said the mother's womb swelled with the child Who, when He had been born, delivered the world from its lamentable defect (of sin) and, when He had been crucified, wiped away its foul wickedness" (141). The implicit comparison between Mary and Christ's different contributions to redeeming the world is worth noting, but it is the last image of Mary's actively female body that is truly significant. Mary's body is neither passive nor static throughout the passage, but active and changing. Aldhelm does explain Solomon's reference to "a garden closed up, verdant on the flowering summit [*scil*. of Libanus], a fountain sealed up, welling from the heavenly pool" (140) as referring to Mary's virgin body. Even though Aldhelm interprets

Mary's body as "closed up" and "sealed," it remains actively feminine, engaged in change and growth. Intact though she may be, her virginity neither negates her sexuality nor renders her body inert or inactive.

The last image in the passage is one of Mary's womb – swelling, growing with a child who also has an active role to play in the salvation of the world. As in the prose *De Virginitate*, Aldhelm is not interested in a physical equation or definition of virginity, and Mary's virginity also remains a rather spiritual virtue, rooted in the purity of her heart and mind. But the *Carmen*'s treatment of Mary also reveals a notable regard for Mary's body. Her femininity, despite or because of her virginity, is both pronounced and active.

Cecilia, Agatha, and Lucia's bodies are also emphasized, but in sexual rather than maternal terms, and it is the corresponding attributes of their bodies that receive attention. The bodies of these three virgins, like Mary's, are beautiful; but such beauty and sexual allure are commonplace in hagiography. Strikingly, however, Cecilia's body is not just passively sexual. Cecilia "turned her betrothed to the teaching of Christ, scorning sweet sports of carnal excess, since she loved instead the sweet kisses of Christ, embracing His fair neck with her lovely arms" (141). Christ also "preserves my [Cecilia's] body continually for all eternally so that no-one inflamed by foul passion can defile my limbs with shameful sin" (141). Cecilia's body lies at the heart of this narrative, which partakes of the familiar motif of Christ-as-lover. Cecilia's body is actively engaged in love-making; her arms are entwined around Christ's neck as she receives his kisses. The very relationship that she denies her intended spouse is vividly embodied with Christ. Cecilia's avowed virginity does not annul her femininity or negate her body, but emphasizes instead the continued sexuality of that virgin body.

Agatha and Lucia's femininity is even more readily apparent. The "little virgin" Agatha endures tortures that focus on and illustrate the explicitly female parts of her body:

> Who indeed can express in words the harsh punishments, and who can speak of the dark calamities of torture which this little virgin endured on her body while on earth? She suffered the terrible pains of a wound-inflicting sword, which mutilated her body with its bloody edge: her fair bosom was deprived of its virgin breasts . . . Torturers also burned the maiden with flame, roasting her chaste limbs in black fires . . . There was not a single persecution of her body, but rather a triple torment racked her limbs: the burning pyre, the fragments of red tile, and the cruel cutting of the unbending sword bloodied her limbs, which were without any guilt of foul sin (141-142).

Lucia's body is similarly described and treated. Paschasius "violated her [Lucia's] fair inwards with a rigid sword, and dark red blood immediately flowed from her flesh" (143). Previously, Lucia was roasted and "pressed forward" by cattle[20]. Lucia and Agatha both endure similar tortures, and their virginity, ostensibly the cause of that torture, does not de-emphasize their physical selves. Rather the opposite: Lucia and Agatha's virginity underscores a persistent sexuality.

This motif of unavailable sexuality is a common feature of the virgin martyr genre, but the fact that it here underscores an active body engaged in social interaction and growth and governed by a spiritual virginity bears emphasis. Too, although the virgin martyr genre is in some aspects truly "generic," critics such as Karen Winstead acknowledge that even repetitive elements render information about the motives and interests of the individuals who fashion and tell the lives (*Virgin Martyrs* 4). In particular, Karen Winstead, whose interests revolve around Middle English virgin martyrs and saints' lives, suggests that "Like so many paradoxical symbols, virgin martyrs lent themselves to the exploration of tensions and contradictions within medieval

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[20] As Lapidge and Rosier observe in a note, the sense of this statement is unclear. They suggest that "the sense seems to be that Lucia, bound, was dragged by a rope and herded along with cattle" (259).

culture. On a host of issues-political, social, cultural, and economic-these legends could be construed simultaneously in radically different ways and thus serve conflicting interests" (*Virgin Martyrs* 12-13). Therefore, the paradox here of the sexualized virgin, pervasive though it may be throughout classical and Middle English hagiography, nevertheless casts light on Aldhelm's conception of virginity and the female virgin body. For Aldhelm, then, the virgin body is neither androgynous nor isolated from society. Indeed, virginity in the *Carmen* has the opposite effect of enhancing particularly female body parts: Mary's womb, Cecilia's sexual embrace, Agatha's breasts, Lucia's fair inwards. This emphasis, as Innes-Parker notes of the saints' lives of the Middle English Katherine Group (209-211, 213-214), results in empowerment[21]. These saints each assume control over their own bodies; their femininity, whether maternal or sexual, represents control and autonomy, as the choice of virginity determines the saint's outward presentation and social interaction. Governed by a specifically spiritual virginity, characterized by the mind and represented by the body's conduct, the virgin body is very much involved and active in society and continues to establish a link between and within a religious community.

The role of Mary's maternity in the creation of a Christian community is both critical and apparent and needs little elaboration[22]; Cecilia, Agatha and Lucia, however, participate in a less obvious establishment of community. Cecilia

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[21] For example, Innes-Parker concludes that "it is the virgin 'victim' who is in control, as she transforms the instruments of her torture into the vehicles of her redemption. The virgin martyrs thus provide the anchoress with examples of virginity assailed yet triumphant, transforming spiritual assault into spiritual regeneration [. . . .] The saints' lives recognize the potential for violence as a fact of women's existence and offer a mechanism for coping with it, affirming fro the female anchoritic reader that her choice is vindicated by God, and that in maintaining her chastity she takes control of her own destiny, both earthly and heavenly" (214).

[22] Innes-Parker makes an interesting observation about the persistence of maternal imagery and desires in the lives of even virgin anchoresses: "the association of chastity and motherhood recalls the incarnation, effected by a virgin, through which the transformation of human nature is achieved. The maiden and the motehr both bear children, one physically, and one biologically. The spiritual offspring of the maiden in the anchoritic texts are identified as virtues. However, the virgin anchroess also re-enacts the incarnation as she is spiritually impregnated with Christ in the eucharist. The virgin thus emulates the Virgin Mary, the archetypal virgin-mother" (212).

> converted her betrothed to God, as well as her (future) brother-in-law, releasing them from an ancient error and so, believing at last, they might obtain the gifts of the baptismal font; suffering tortures of the flesh, they both were made martyrs and became fellow-inhabitants in the highest regions (141).

Cecilia converts her would-be groom and his brother and they join her in belief.

The relationship between Agatha and Lucia is still more interesting, for they construct, not just a general religious community, but a specifically female community. Agatha "purchased the garland of a martyr, and rising above flesh she assumed the perpetual wreaths of the Kingdom" and "her bones rested in the tomb of a sepulchre and her holy spirit rejoiced in the starry heaven" (142). In other words, after Agatha's death, she becomes the subject of a cult, and her remains perform various posthumous miracles. Lucia recognizes Agatha's merit and a connection between Agatha and needy, still-mortal women:

> She advised her mother, who was exhausted by a weakness of the blood, to touch the tomb in which the body of the gentle virgin Agatha was confined and rested in peaceful death [1790], just as once another woman, troubled by an issue of blood, unobserved touched Christ; that woman was healed and made whole by the hem of His robe, the Lord bestowing health upon her [Matth.IX.20]. Lucia's mother, therefore, believed, and through the holy power of the tomb was made able to close up her open veins so that the blood-stream in her veins never again flowed (so) freely and, quicker than can be said, the effusions of her blood dried up. Thereupon the daughter began to explain in words to her mother that she wished to serve Christ continually as a virgin . . . . At once the daughter by her words won over her mother as a friend; she opened her heart to her

> daughter's chaste words so that together, as wealthy persons, they might offer their patrimony to Christ (142-143).

Significantly, Agatha and Lucia's deaths both emphasize blood; "dark-red blood flowed in drops from her [Agatha's] flesh" (141), and also "dark red blood immediately flowed from her [Lucia's] flesh" (143). Lucia's mother also suffers from a blood disease, a different but equally malignant loss of blood. One blood-letting cures another; Lucia's mother is cured, in effect, by Agatha's violent blood-loss; Agatha's bloody death heals Lucia's mother's mortal sickness. Lucia's mother's sickness and Agatha's healing are both rooted in the body; their bodily effusions parallel each other, with drastically different causes and results. Indeed, blood is central to all three women, virgin or not, and also suggests inherited associations of women with excess moisture and images of menstrual blood. Discussing the works of the Middle English writer Julian of Norwich, Elizabeth Robertson observes that Julian's

> revelations are permeated with images of blood. She writes, 'with him I desyred to suffer, livyng in my deadly bodie, as god would give me grace . . . . And in this sodenly I saw the reed bloud rynnyng downe from under the garlande, hote and freyshely, /plentuously and lively, right as it was in the tyme that the garland of thornes was pressed on his blessed head' (long text, chap. 3, 293, and chap. 4, 294) [. . . .] Here Christ's blood, like menstrual blood, is purged, matching her own natural purgation of excess. Elsewhere Julian expands this image so that the blood is even more evocative of menstrual blood ("Medieval Medical Views" 154).

Robertson notes an obvious connection between Christ's bleeding at the time of his crucifixion and female menstrual blood. She terms "Julian's use of blood, water, or her own littleness" celebratory rather than subversive (161) and also comments that

> Julian's image of blood, evocative of menstrual flow, also suggests blood lost in losing virginity; the blood of Christ is even more explicitly

> connected with her own bed. Furthermore, the fact that the age viewed menstrual blood and semen as homologous underscores the erotic implications of the image. Christ's blood is linked with all kinds of moisture, all redemptive of feminine excess [. . . .] Excess moisture is thus redemptive, and thereby so is femininity itself ("Medieval Medical Views" 155).

Although Julian of Norwich is separated by more than a few centuries – not to mention linguistic and cultural shifts – from Aldhelm, Robertson's comments can also shed light on the importance of blood in the narratives of Agatha, Lucia, and Lucia's mother.

Like Julian of Norwich's *Book of Showings*, Aldhelm's presentation of the *vitae* of Agatha and Lucia depends heavily on the centrality of blood to their lives and deaths. Their blood very much represents their physicality. Moreover, their deaths contain certain violently sexual overtones, and their blood may also, as Julian's does, suggest a figurative virginal blood loss. Lucia's mother's illness is also one of blood, linked not just to her body but also to her basic femininity. Therefore, as in Julian's much later writings, the blood loss experienced by Agatha and Lucia is evocative of their basic femininity, and it also serves a Christ-like, redemptive function, healing Lucia's mother's blood based illness.

However, Lucia and Agatha are connected by more than just Lucia's mother and Agatha's posthumous healing. Their stories partake of certain obvious similarities; each maintains her virginity at the expense of her life, and both suffer similarly painful deaths. Lucia's response to Agatha indicates a more important connection between the two virgin martyrs. Lucia recognizes a connection between Agatha and herself, but also one between Agatha and Lucia's mother, assuredly a non-virgin. Agatha and Lucia's mother replicate the Biblical story of Christ and a nameless woman healed by Him. Lucia also uses Agatha's success to shape her own life. Influenced by the effectiveness of her "cure," Lucia's mother listens to her persuasive argument and joins her in faith.

Aldhelm uses other examples to demonstrate the relationship between virginity and conversion. Julian and his "wife," who agree to a feigned marriage, afterwards

> sustained the rule of righteousness [and] according to the prescribed course founded monasteries for the followers of Christ. They also established lowly cells for (female) celibates [1300]. Even though these celibates were kept separated by the lower order of their sex, yet they were not made separate by the lower rank of their virtues. Indeed, in these monasteries ten thousand holy monks flourished: here both day and night they continually served with incessant songs and frequent chanting of psalms, besieging the court of heaven with unbroken strength while they seek the entrance of starry Olympus with their prayers (131).

Julian's and his wife's virginal chastity also creates community – in this case, a very real, physical, expansive series of monasteries. Agatha and Lucia's virginity accomplishes similar, if less grand, results. Unlike Julian and his wife, and even Cecilia, Agatha and Lucia specifically attract women. Lucia recognizes a similarity between herself and the dead but not forgotten Agatha; she also extends Agatha's powers to specifically female ailments. Agatha's virtue, in turn, is influential in motivating Lucia's mother to agree to Lucia's decision and to choose a similar lifestyle for herself. Agatha, Lucia's mother, and Lucia herself create a continuity of virgins, a female history, that stretches beyond the physical virginity Lucia's mother so obviously lacks.

In their very different studies of the saints' lives of the Katherine Group, both Catherine Innes-Parker and Karen Winstead[23] rely on a similar assumption: the lives of the Katherine Group were shaped and designed for a specifically female audience. Though Innes-Parker and Winstead are interested in different aspects of the lives and

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[23] See Innes-Parker's article, "Sexual Violence and the Female Reader: Symbolic `Rape' in the Saints' Lives of the Katherine Group" and Chapter 1 of Winstead's *Virgin Martyrs*, "Martyrdom, Marriage, and Religious Communities, 1100-1250."

draw different conclusions, both suggest that specific details and characteristics of the lives make them particularly suitable for an audience of anchoresses, enclosed women. Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* addresses a similar group of women, who, though by no means anchoresses, might still be termed enclosed; the *Carmen* avails itself of a looser conception of audience, but presumably still concerns itself with female monastics. Like the Katherine Group, the *Carmen* and the prose *De Virginitate* present models and example for the instruction of their female audience. With a clear audience of non-virginal monastic women, Aldhelm focuses on a spiritual virginity, defined by mental choice and represented by social conduct and behavior. He, thus, extends to these non-virgins a route to "revirginization," by which their spirits, if not their bodies, may emulate virginity. But Aldhelm also uses the *Carmen*'s clear description of empowered virginal bodies, active and reactive within society, to further the creation of a Christian community – a community in which his audience of experienced, non-virgin women can fully participate.

Ultimately, Aldhelm's influence stretched beyond his own life and impacted later writers of the Anglo-Saxon period[24], and his writings on virginity provide a valuable foundation for the development – and evaluation – of the Anglo-Saxon religious women. In the light of Aldhelm's extensive treatment of virginity as both a physical reality – *integritas* – and a spiritual possibility for even non-virgins, it is not sufficient to recognize virginity as a mere "patriarchal trope," although on a large scale virginity was indeed a critical concern of patristic and Medieval male writers. Indeed, Aldhelm's treatment of virginity reveals a pervasive female interest in the term, and it is this female

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[24] Aldhelm was known by both Bede and Alcuin, and, after the ninth century, "Aldhelm's writings became a staple of the school curriculum in England" (Lapidge and Herren 2).
Lapidge and Herren also comment that "Aldhelm is a cardinal figure in Anglo-Saxon literature, both in Latin and Old English. Indeed, in view of Aldhelm's profound influence on later English writers, it might well be argued that the study of Anglo-Saxon literature should properly begin with Aldhelm [. . . .] After too many years (and centuries) of neglect, Aldhelm deserves fresh attention, for he has much of precious value to tell us about Anglo-Saxon civilization" (4).

involvement in the creation of the term that Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* and *Carmen de Virginitate* suggest.

Aldhelm's treatments of virginity bear remarkable witness to a tenuous connection between female physicality and virginity. Aldhelm grounds his definition of virginity in physical integrity, but he also focuses on the spiritual aspects of virginity, arguing, as do many patristic writers, that "spiritual virginity," is even more important and valuable than mere physical intactness. Ostensibly based in the body, Aldhelm's treatment of virginity displays definite similarities to Augustine's association between virginity and mental, more than physical, virtue. Although the *Carmen* does dwell on the feminine characteristics of female virgins, Aldhelm is more interested in the spiritual virginity and the possibility of performing that spiritual virginity within society. Additionally, the *De Virginitate* and the *Carmen de Virginitate* both use virginity as a sign or mark of religious community. While virginity would ostensibly alienate men from women and women from men, Aldhelm uses the idea, rather than the ideal, of virginity as a link. He connects Christian history, indicated by his catalogues of male and female virgins, and his own audience, present participants in religious communities. As such, virginity is open to a much wider interpretation than mere physical integrity; both the nuns of Barking, whose own physical virginity in many cases is more than dubious, and women like Lucia's mother, whose maternity matter-of-factly denies the possibility of virginity, are admitted to and embraced within the Christian community.

In the *De Virginitate* and the *Carmen de Virginitate*, thus, virginity is both a realistic and a responsive idea. Aldhelm's expansive discussion of virginity unites saintly virginity with that available to his contemporaries. Relying upon the importance of a spiritual virginity, Aldhelm suggests that even the experienced, worldly women who compose his audience may undergo a process of "revirginization." Though they may never regain physical integrity – they are not, after all, physical virgins – they may embrace a spiritual virginity, represented in society by their actions, conduct, and,

symbolically, their dress. While Aldhelm must still distinguish between intact virginity and married or widowed chastity, in practice virginity serves as a connective link between male and female members of the religious community, joining present women to a history of male and female virgins and also admitting non-virgins to a Christian continuity. Yet, as the *Carmen* suggests, even virgin women remain exactly that: actively and positively female. If anything, their virginity enhances, rather than denies, their femininity.

Chapter 2

Married Virginity:

Merging Action and Contemplation

"Ic þe mæg gesecgan þæt þu þec sylfne ne þearft
swiþor swencan. Gif þu soðne God
lufast ond gelyfest, ond his lof rærest,
ongietest gæsta hleo, ic beo gearo sona
unwaclice wilan þines.
Swylce ic þe secge, gif þu to sæmran gode
þurh deofolgield dæde beþencest,
hætsð hæþenfeoh, ne meaht þu habban mec,
ne geþreatian þe to sinhigan.
Næfre þu þæs swiðlic sar gegearwast
þurh hæstne nið heardra wita,
þæt þu mec onwende worda þissa."
Juliana 46-57[25]

Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* is not primarily a hagiographic text, although much of it is a catalogue of martyrs, but a virginity tract or treatise. While it shares similarities with hagiographic texts, its primary interest is virginity, and it often takes the form of a sermon or a discussion. Later Anglo-Saxon works deal more directly with the

[25] "I say to you that you need not / trouble yourself more: if you love / and believe in the true God, praise Him, / recognize the Protector of souls, I am ready / to give myself to you, grant your wish / to have me as your bride. At the same time / I say this to you: if you place your trust / in inferior gods, practice idolatry, / engage in violent heathen sacrifice, / you can not have me as your wife. / Threaten as you will, no torture, / no punishment, no act of violence / can make me break my solemn promise" (Nelson 57).

intersection between virginity and hagiography, although a distinct generative line remains obvious between earlier texts, such as Aldhelm's or Bede's, and later works of the tenth century. Lees and Overing, for instance, comment that "Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (c. 998) may be read as the vernacular equivalent to Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* despite the fact that his interest in sanctity is broader than Aldhelm's focus on virginity" (325). Virginity after Aldhelm remains an expression of idealized social behavior and interaction, and it continues to offer the same mitigating view of femininity and female physicality as in Aldhelm's virginity tract and its specific aim at real female audiences.

The link between virginity and self-proprietorship has been quite thoroughly explored and does not need to be reiterated here[26], but it is nevertheless true that virginity does coincide with both self-control and self-determination; the female virgin defying her father and/or suitor – and sometimes even her mother – is a commonplace. More interesting, however, is the virginity that does not coincide with self-determination at the expense of social bonds, the virginity that exists alongside normative ideas of marriage and male-female interaction. Aldhelm adapts virginity to the social requirements of his female audience; later hagiographers are no less aware of the social conditions in which they write. Perhaps surprisingly, in some hagiographic lives marriage and virginity are not mutually exclusive; both married and widowed women enact virginal behavior and are termed virgins. In fact, virginity in some Anglo-Saxon hagiography reflects women existing, not in isolation or at the margins of society, but *within* society, as functioning components of society. Overall, such a "married" relationship between virginity and marriage recuperates the female position in both religious and secular culture, enabling virginity to indicate not just an ideal state, attainable by only a few isolated paragons, but one also allied with the common state of most women – marriage. This continued

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[26] This is obvious in any examination of Elizabeth I, perhaps the best-known historical virgin of any age (excluding, of course, Mary). Writers such as Phillipa Berry have argued that Elizabeth I's militant virginity signifies self-control – "power over her own body" (82).

development of virginity as a social or communal virtue also echoes a growing dissatisfaction with the earlier model of the contemplative life and an increasing emphasis upon communal Christian involvement. Moreover, in the hands of some Anglo-Saxon hagiographers and writers – like Ælfric – chaste widowhood opens up a possibility of "revirginization", whereby the spiritual virginity described by Aldhelm redefines the state and status of widows, including Æthelthryth, Judith, and Elene. Hagiographers, therefore, express the continuing possibility of "revirginization," suggesting that redefining identity is both possible and appropriate to different stages of life.

There are only eight female saints' lives found in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. As Upchurch relates,

> Only eight female saints are included in the *Lives*: four unmarried virgin martyrs (Eugenia, Agnes, Agatha, and Lucy) and four married virgin spouses, three of whom (Basilissa, Cecilia, and Daria) have husbands who are also saints. A fourth virgin spouse, though not a martyr, is Æthelthryth, the English wife and nun who maintained her virginity throughout (despite) two marriages. She is not considered here because hers is a story of virginity presented in spite of her spouses rather than in unanimity of spirit with them. (1-2)

Upchurch's dissertation, "The Hagiography of Chaste Marriage in Ælfric's 'Lives of Saints,'" focuses on virginity willingly adopted by both husband and wife. Æthelthryth, as he notes, does not fit this profile; according to her biographers, she maintains her virginity only through God's will and not with the acceptance and accord of either of her husbands. Though Upchurch disqualifies Æthelthryth from his study based on the apparent disharmony of her marriage, Æthelthryth, of the few female saints found in the *Lives of Saints,* best illustrates a conflation of marriage and virginity.

Notable especially because she is an *English* saint, Æthelthryth is more closely linked to the native situation than her older Roman relatives. As Susan Ridyard observes, "The earliest and most concise interpretation of the sanctity of the royal ladies is found in Bede's account of St Æthelthryth" (82). Despite admitting actual marriages first to Tondbryht and then Ecfrid, Bede, Ælfric, and the writers of the *Old English Martyrology* and the *Liber Eliensis*[27] unanimously express and laud Æthelthryth's persistent virginity. To varying degrees, each of these versions accept that the virtuous woman did not engage in sexual conduct with either of her two husbands. These were not brief marriages of a day or so, either; Æthelthryth was married to her second husband, Ecfrid, for twelve years, and most of the versions of the life acknowledge that Ecfrid, if not Tondbryht as well, desired a physical relationship with his wife. At the very least, acceptance of Æthelthryth's physical virginity recquires a suspension of disbelief and awareness of social pressures – as each writer tacitly recognizes. Patristic teachings further compound the problem, for, while Augustine recommended abstinence, both he and Paul were quite clear that such continence must be desired by *both* partners, with neither husband or wife having a moral right to deny the other (Jackson 251)[28]. But Æthelthryth's *vita* does not necessarily mandate such an immediate acknowledgement of what is, in the context of social reality, a frankly unlikely situation. While the genre of hagiography renders extraordinary miracles mundane and ordinary in sheer number and predictability, Æthelthryth's unusual status invites interpretation beyond a basic recognition of divine intervention.

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[27] As a twelth-century work, however, the *Liber Eliensis* is outside the scope of this study and will be touched upon only briefly. E. O. Blake's edition of the work deals extensively with dates of composition and probably authorship. Two other manuscript versions of Æthelthryth's life are also outside the scope of the study. These Lives, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 393 and Trinity College Dublin, MS 172, are respectively dated twelth and thirteenth/fourteenth centuries (Ridyard 54-5).

[28] Bede, the *Old English Martyrology*, and Ælfric to some extent each ignore this issue. Alcuin, however, unhesitantly revises Bede's version of the story to eliminate the problem of mutual consent; in Alcuin's Latin *York Poem*, Æthelthryth persuades Ecgfrith to her point of view, and their chastity is mutually desired (Jackson 251).

Significantly, Æthelthryth's hagiographers treat her virginity in subtly different ways. While Bede, Ælfric, and the author of the *Old English Martyrology* agree on the fact of her virginity, they interpret the nature and implications of that virginity differently. Bede most stringently advocates Æthelthryth's physical integrity and total abstinence from sex; Ælfric and the *Old English Martyrology* draw less attention to her physical state and focus on "testing" that virginity and proving and connecting Æthelthryth's conduct to a vernacular audience; the *Liber Eliensis* more extensively develops both fantastic adventures and an equally extraordinary history of Ely. Unlike Bede's, Ælfric's version of her *vita* depends heavily on the "proof" of Æthelthryth's virginity as well as the description of her conduct in marriage, and contains a difficult and surprising fifteen-line addendum advocating, not virginity, but chaste marriage. In the context of her portrayals by Bede, the author of the *Old English Martyrology*, and Ælfric, Æthelthryth's "married virginity" indicates an evolving balance between virginity and chastity and contemplative and active lifestyles.

Subsequent versions of Æthelthryth's life utilize Bede's narrative in the *Ecclesiastical History*. This earliest version most stringently propounds the physical fact of her virginity, "virginitatis integritate gloriosa," (390), an emphasis increasingly disregarded in later versions. Although Bede recognizes the inherent dubiousness of the saint's persistent virginity, he nevertheless offers "proof" of that virginity – hearsay. Bede comments that

> When I asked Bishop Wilfrid of blessed memory whether this was true, because certain people doubted it, he told me that he had the most perfect proof of her virginity; in fact Ecgfrith had promised to give him estates and money if he could persuade the queen to consummate their marriage, because he knew that there was none whom she loved more than Wilfrid himself.
>
> (391, 393).

Bede's account is particularly interested in hearsay or word-of-mouth proof of Æthelthryth's virginity; even when describing the removal of her body from its tomb after the space of sixteen years, Bede relies upon a doctor's description of the events. Cynefrith, who earlier operated on her tumor and attended her deathbed, describes what is for Bede the most telling evidence of Æthelthryth's virginity – the postmortem healing of her wound and the incorruptibility of her body. Surprisingly, Æthelthryth's virginity does not reside in her body, despite Bede's insistence upon the reality of that virginity. Instead, Æthelthryth's virginity is very much a condition applied to her by outside commentators, whether Bede, Wilfrid, or Cynefrith. Her body is observed; her virginity is attested to by spectators. Indeed, whether or not the saint remains physically intact is *not* relevant, and her physical intactness may actually be accepted as given. What *is* important is the process by which Æthelthryth's virginity is expressed and verified by her hagiographers. She is actually created, and recreated, by her biographers, who effectively "revirginize" a married woman. The basic concept of the saint's virginity is simple: physical intactness. But the reality of that virginity is quite different, and entirely dependent upon authorial creation. Æthelthryth's virginity, then, is finally shaped, not by the saint herself, but by her biographers, who verify, not only the truth of her miracles, but the persistence of her virginity.

The relation of Æthelthryth's life in the *Old English Martyrology* resembles a short and concise summary of Bede's account. Like Bede, the *Martyrology* notes her marriages to two men, observing that she yet emerged a "clæne fæmne," a pure woman (102.3) and spends a brief amount of space giving names and ancestry. Notably, however, the *Martyrology* lacks Bede's insistence upon eyewitness accounts of Æthelthryth's virginity. The *Martyrology*'s account of "Etheldreda" also wants Bede's insistence upon and in virginity. Beyond the sole identification of Æthelthryth as a clean or pure woman, the *Martyrology*'s account is very prosaic in its relation of her life. It observes that Ecgferð could not change her thoughts, but it does not dwell on the

difficulty of preserving her virginity. Indeed, the fact of her virginity is not as interesting to the *Martyology* as the entirety of her life, very much presented as a normal and expected progression of events. Æthelthryth is first married to Tondberht, then becomes Ecgferð's wife, and then

> . . . onfeng heo haligryfte on þæm mynstre þe
> is nemned Colodesburh. þæs æfter anum geare heo timbrede
> fæmnena mynster on þæm londe þe we nemnað æt Elie ; ond heo
> wæs þær abbodysse . . .
> . . . ond þurh godes gast heo self ær foresægde, hwonee heo sceolde
> of middangearde leoran, ond heo þa geleorde. ond heo wæs sextene
> geár on eorðan bebyrged, ond þa mon eft þone lichoman upp dyde,
> þa wæs he swa ungebrosnad gemeted, swa heo þy ilcan dæge wære
> forðféred. (102.8-11, 16-20).[29]

Æthelthryth maintains her virginity, taking the veil, building a nunnery, and predicting her own death. Finally, she is excavated uncorrupted from her grave. For the *Old English Martyrology*, this is a perfectly expected, normal series of events. There is no wonder, no doubt, in the account found in the *Old English Martyology* – but there is also very little emphasis on the fact of her virginity. The *Old English Martyrology* is interested in the entirety of Æthelthryth's life, not just the years spent in marriage, consummated or not. Æltheltryth's virginity is a meaningful factor in her life, but it is not the defining element of her life. Instead, her virginity functions as a connection, a link, between the first and the second parts of her life, a life demarcated between public or active and more private or contemplative periods.

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[29] "Then she took the veil in the monastery called / Coldingham. A year after this she built a nunnery in the place / that we call Ely; there she was abbess . . . / . . . . / . . . by divine inspiration she foretold her-/self when she was going to depart from this world, and then she / really departed. She had been buried in the earth sixteen years, / and when they afterwards took up the body it was found so un-/corrupted, as if she had died on the same day" (103.8-10, 15-19).

While Ridyard comments that "Ælfric adds nothing to Bede's narrative, although the sequence of events is slightly modified; like Bede, he concludes with a passage in praise of virginity" (55), Ælfric does substantially reinterpret Æthelthryth's virginity, and his concluding passage does not deal with virginity but *chastity*. Ælfric's version of Æthelthryth's *vita* further clouds the existence and importance of virginity, clearly instructing its audience in an external "proof" of virginity, a proof not at all manifested on or in the maiden's body, but announced by miracles, exterior signs of purity. Æthelthryth remained a virgin, Ælfric says, "swa swa þa wundra geswulteliað þe heo wyrcð gelome" (432.4)[30]. Ælfric reiterates this point twice, commenting that "swutele wundra / hyre mærða cyðaþ . and hire mægð-had gelome" (432.16-17)[31] and "Hit is swutol þæt heo wæs ungewemmed mæden . / þonne hire lichama ne mihte formolsnian on eorðan . / and godes miht is geswultelod soðlice þurh hi" (438.107-9)[32]. Without doubt, Ælfric accepts the fact of Æthelthryth's virginity, but he does not explicitely connect it to her living body; virginity in this life, while ostensibly a physical condition, is more accurately an exercise in authorial definition[33].

Æthelthryth herself does not "perform" her virginity; no explicit actions signify that virginity, although her behavior does set a good example to other nuns (434.40). Æthelthryth desires the monastic life; she fasts; she prays; she wears woolen garments; she seldom bathes; and she regards a painful, ultimately fatal tumor as deserved and almost a blessing. This behavior suggests only a vocation; nothing in Æthelthryth's conduct illustrates a virginal, untouched body, and her living self does not perform

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[30] "as the miracles show which she often worketh" (433).

[31] "evident miracles / often make known her sacred relics and her virginity" (433).

[32] "It is evident that she was an unspotted virgin, / since her body was not suffered to moulder in the earth, / and in her, God's power is verily manifested" (439).

[33] This does not mean that virginity is not defined as physical intactness. It is. However, Æthelthryth's physical intactness, her bodily virginity, is neither particularly interesting nor critically noteworthy. What is interesting is the process by which her biographers evaluate and define that virginity. Æthelthryth's biographers accept as given the facts of her marriages. Yet, they also reshape and redefine the social realities of those years to allow a persistently virginal woman.

miracles. Nor does it visibly, demonstrably resist temptation or rape as in other, more typical legends of virgin martyrs. Æthelthryth is not tortured, although she does endure pain, and she is not executed. Her virginity, therefore, is not subject to public display during her lifetime. Æthelthryth's existence, however, is distinctly divided into two opposing states; alive, there is little to attest to the truth of her virginity. Dead, though, Æthelthryth is a much more malleable construction, and her biographers can shape the proof of her virginity as they wish. Thus, the miracles upon which Æthelthryth's virginity depends are, in Ælfric's version, postmortem; her body's inability to decay and ability to heal other sick bodies manifests its purity. Æthelthryth herself, however, is dead, her soul departed, no longer an active participant in any part of society. These miracles do, obviously, attest to the saint's sanctity, but they are also, and more importantly, an authorial tool for *creating* that sanctity. The obvious connection between intact virginity and the postmortem physical miracles does not reflect Æthelthryth's actual conduct within marriage; the patina of virginity is applied to Æthelthryth, after the fact of her life, by divine and authorial intention.

Æthelthryth does not achieve her own virginity; God holds her incorrupt, keeps her a pure maiden (432.18; 434.25-30) and her biographers accomplish much the same objective through their records of her postmortem miracles. Æthelthryth's marriages neither support nor negate the hagiographical insistence upon her virginity. Her marriages are an obstacle, but not of particular relevance to authorial substantiation of her virginity. Indeed, Æthelthryth's virginity does not coincide with her marriages. As a state proven "after the fact," by postmortem miracles and hagiographical attribution, Æthelthryth's virginity does not manifest itself during those marriages. While her virginity is a certain fact after her death, the state of her married body is more uncertain.

The fifteen line discussion of married chastity attached to the end of Æthelthryth's *vita* further complicates the dynamics of her married body. This addendum, praising the consummated, fruitful, and eventually chaste relationship between a layman and his wife,

has also complicated critical study of Ælfric's version of Æthelthryth's life. Virginia Blanton-Whetsell[34] sees Ælfric's addendum to the story as evidence of a gendered agenda. She argues that it shifts the focus from women or wives to men, and "by excluding the wife from the narrative, Ælfric negates her participation in the chaste marriage, and by extension, he suggests that as a lay woman and a mother, she has no association with the virginal Æthelthryth" (qtd. in Jackson 256). Gwen Griffiths also ultimately regards Æthelthryth as marginalized (35). Peter Jackson, however, has a more optimistic take on the *vita* and its addendum, suggesting that the "wife's role is that of a partner, not that of an inconvenient ancillary whose function is exhausted once she has borne children. If this reading is correct, for Ælfric it is the layman and his wife who should really serve as a model to all married couples: not (as Stephanie Hollis would argue) Æthelthryth, for all her undoubted sanctity" (259).

If Æthelthryth's vita in Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints* is to be seen as an unqualified approbation of physical virginity, this brief sermon on married chastity strikes a discordant note. The last lines of the *vita* do not deal with virginity at all; nor do they recommend contemplative or ascetic-style isolation from society and social relationships. The *vita* ends with unqualified approval of *chastity* and an uncertain connection between virginity and chastity:

> Manega bysna synd on bocum be swylcum .
> hu oft weras and wíf wundorlice drohtnodon .
> and on clænnysse wunodon . to wuldre þam hælende .

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[34] Æthelthryth is the subject of Blanton-Whetsell's doctoral dissertation, "St. Æthelthryth's Cult: Literary, Historical, and Pictorial Constructions of Gendered Sanctity" (State Univ. of New York at Birmingham, 1998). In her article, "*Tota integra, total incorrupta*: The Shrine of St. Æthelthryth as Symbol of Monastic Autonomy," Blanton-Whetsell studies the *Liber Eliensis*'s treatment of Æthelthryth, and concludes that the *Liber* actively masculinizes the saint, making her in effect a *virago*. Blanton-Whetsell argues that "The monastery's official discourse, therefore, reimagined Æthelthryth's gendered position, a shift that allowed the Anglo-Norman community to reimagine their association within the body politic. By changing Æthelthryth into a *virago*, they could more easily identify with the now-masculinized saint, and without anxiety they could assert their identity as masculine aggressors who, alongside her, diligently guard the Ely estates" (258-59). The Æthelthryth of Ælfric and preceding writers, however, retains her feminity.

> þe þa clænnysse astealde . crist ure hælend .
>
> þam is á wurðmynt . and wuldor on ecnysse. AMEN.
>
> (440. 131-35)[35]

The connection between Æthelthryth, married chastity, and the small sermon ending with these lines can only be located in the portion of her life which her *vita* does not touch – the married years.

Æthelthryth is named a virgin in the Latin heading of the life, but in the tale itself the terminology of her virtue is less absolute. She is called the "engliscan mædene" (432.2) and she remains "mæden" (432.3) and is held in "clænnysse" throughout her marriages. "Mæden," or "mægden" does signify modern maiden or virgin, but it also has the less prescriptive meaning of "girl." "Clænnysse" also does not perfectly correspond with virginity, suggesting instead "cleanness" or "chastity." While Æthelthryth's overall virtue cannot be contested, the physical *integritas* of her body during its marriages is by no means as certain, dependent as it is upon authorial substantiation. The consummation of Æthelthryth's marriage and the consequential loss of intact, physical virginity is not implied in any of Æthelthryth's Anglo-Saxon *vitae*[36] – indeed, the opposite is true. But the state of the saint's body within her marriages is inconsequential; Æthelthryth is subject to a retroactive rewriting of her life. Æthelthryth experiences a postmortem revirginization that both confirms and coincides with Ælfric's interest in chastity *within* marriage rather than idealized virginity.

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[35] "Many examples of such are there in books, / how oftentimes men and their wives have lived wondrously, / and dwelt in chastity, to the glory of Jesus / who consecrated virginity, even Christ our Savior; / to whom be honour and glory for ever. Amen." (441).

[36] However, later versions of the *Life*, as Pulsiano observes, do sometimes imply the possibility of rape. Pulsiano comments, "later versions of the life would highlight the precarious position in which the virgin saint found herself. In the short life in London, British Library, Tiberius E. I, Part 2, fols. 19r-20v, the diction of the opening lines is multivalenced and ambiguous: the saint, we are told, is 'given' or 'consigned' into marriage, or alternately 'surrendered' (*traditur in vxorem*); and Tondberht, on quiet nights when he would enter the bridal chamber, takes hold of her, but equally the text can be read as Tondberht having seized, stained, or polluted the future saint (*contigit*)" (37).

Thus, Æthelthryth's *vita* requires acceptance of two mutually opposed states. On the surface, Æthelthryth *is* a virgin, kept "pure" and "intact" by the power of God, and accepted as such by all of her hagiographers. More interesting, however, are the deeper implications of Æthelthryth's marriages and life. Chastity, particularly married chastity, hovers around the edges of Æthelthryth's life, and the treatment of Æthelthryth's virginity by Bede, the *Old English Martyrology*, and Ælfric indicates the same delineation between the state of virginity and the physical body accomplished in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*. None of these accounts of Æthelthryth's life are particularly intersted in physical proof of her virginity; rather, they discuss that virginity in terms of exterior observations and postmortem miracles. Virginity itself is not located in, or even manifested by, Æthelthryth's living body[37]. But Æthelthryth's virginity does not exist on a purely symbolic level; she is not just the trope of virginity loosely adhered to a feminine form. Nor does Æthelthryth's virginity isolate her or deny her a reality separate from the monastic life. Rather, the treatment of Æthelthryth by Bede, the *Old English Martyrology*, and Ælfric reveals an increasing preference for the active over the purely contemplative lifestyle and indicates a growing sense of balance between religious and secular desires and pressures. Æthelthryth's virginity does not, as might be expected, isolate her from the secular world. Instead, that virginity serves as an indication of her thorough involvement in communal life, denoting an equilibrium between active and contemplative states[38].

Æthelthryth, unlike later royal female saints such as Edburga[39]**,** is not dedicated to the monastic, virgin life from the outset. While Bede, the *Old English Martyrology* and

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[37] Again, it should be stressed that this does not mean that virginity is not equivalent to physical intactness; however, Æthelthryth's biographers are responsible for defining *the saint* as virgin.

[38] Æthelthryth, it must be admitted, is an anomaly – but all saints, female or otherwise, are "abnormal," distinctly separated from society's behavioral norms and expectations. But, despite or, perhaps, because of, their exceptionality, Æthelthryth and other saints are particularly suited to serve as models of ideal devotion, behavior and religious pressures.

[39] Susan Ridyard relates the story of Edgburga's early dedication to the Church: "Edburga, summoned before her father when only three years old, was presented with two groups of objects, symbolising the

Ælfric do allude to her persistent desire to leave her marriage and abandon worldly life, she does not or cannot for at least twelve years. Æthelthryth's *vita*, then, separates into two distinct periods, corresponding to the wordly and monastic years of her life.

Ælfric's short addendum to Æthelthryth's vita identifies a desired balance between worldly and monastic lifestyles. Conspicuous in a *vita* ostensibly focused on virginity, Ælfric's exemplum focuses on chastity:

> Oft woruld-menn eac heoldon swa swa us bec secgað
> heora clænnysse on synscipe for cristes lufe
> swa swa we mihton reccan gif ge rohton hit to gehyrenne .
> We secgað swa-ðeah be sumum ðegne
> se wæs þrittig geara mid his wife on clænnysse
> þry suna he gestrynde . and hi siððan buta
> ðrittig geara wæron wunigende butan hæmede .
> (440.120-26)[40].

Like Æthelthryth, Ælfric's unnamed man, after producing sons and living in chastity with his wife, eventually seeks the monastic life (440.127-28). Participating in both worldly and monastic lifestyles, then, this individual suggests a symbiotic relationship between the two states. Ælfric's example also implies a desired balance between the two lifestyles – neither is preferenced over the other. Instead, the contemplative or monastic way of life naturally follows the active, wordly, productive – in the sense of producing offspring – existence. This frequent medieval topos of a balanced and divided life is here unique because of its association with, and dependence upon, redefinition, most obviously depicted in the revirginization of married women such as Æthelthryth.

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secular and ecclesiastical lives; her instinctive movement towards the ecclesiastical objects represented her abandonment of the world and her commitment to the church" (84).

[40] "In like manner have laymen also, as books tell us, / preserved often their chastity in the marriage-state, for the love of Christ, / as we might relate if ye cared to hear it. / However, we will tellyou of a certain thane, who lived thirty years with his wifein continence; he begat three sons, and thenceforward they both lived / for thirty years without cohabitation" (441.120-26).

Significantly, Æthelthryth is not the lone representative of this harmoniously divided life; Hild, of Cædmon fame, also suggests this progression and balance. Mentioned briefly in the *Old English Martyrology*, her life is divided between two stages. The sainted "Hylda wæs þreo ond þritig geara / on læwedum hade and þreo on þritig geara under haligryfte, ond / heo þa gewat to Criste" (206.24-25)[41]. Hild also participates in the active life before adopting the monastic lifestyle. Significantly, however, neither Æthelthryth, nor Ælfric's unnamed example and his wife, nor Hild, subscribe to the solitary or eremitic life. Instead, these three conflate active and contemplative customs, preferring balance and moderation over the severities of the anchoritic life.

Unlike later Medieval England, which embraced with some regularity the solitary religious life, especially in the cases of anchorites and anchoresses, Anglo-Saxon England from the seventh to the tenth centuries witnesses a movement away from the eremitic or anchoritic life towards active participation in secular and monastic lifestyles, a preference demonstrated by the treatment of virginity in Ælfric's *vita* of Æthelthryth and by the broader handling of virginity throughout the period. With the exception of Bede, who promoted "a balance of action and contemplation in each individual," the Anglo-Saxon Church of the seventh and eighth centuries evinces "widespread interest in the eremitic life, manifesting itself in the numbers of Anglo-Saxons who adopted the contemplative life, both in England and abroad, and in the influence exerted by the lives of the desert saints as hagiographic and as actual models" (Clayton 156). Writers of the later Anglo-Saxon period, however, express the same interest in balance and in the active life as Bede. As Mary Clayton concludes,

> >From the later Anglo-Saxon period, howver, we have less evidence of hermits or, indeed, the type of asceticism associated with this life, and the individualism that allowed the anchoritic ideal to coexist with the

[41] "St. Hilda was for thirty-three years in worldly life and for thirty-three years in the cloister, and then she went to Christ" (207).

> cenobitic in the early period seems to have been less common. The outstanding saints of the later period are all cenobitic, propagating the ideal of Benedictinism and a sense of community, although not adverse to looking back with approval at the eremitic saints of early Anglo-Saxon England. Ælfric, however, the most prolific exponent of Benedictine values, appears not to have entirely shared this sense of approval and the evidence of his selection of sources and hagiographic models points to an alternative ideal of pastoral involvement.
>
> (167).

Ælfric promotes an ideal of teaching and involvement completely in accord with the realities of monasticism, in which "enclosed asceticism" might have been ideal but was really "far from being fact" (Clayton 166). In actuality, the dividing line between secular and religious lives and lifestyles was very thin indeed, and the ideal of the isolated contemplative life relinquished in favor of more realistic communal cenobitic practices.

This growing preference for community and communal involvement shapes the ideal of virginity and the corresponding vision of the virgin woman and virgin saint. Aldhelm uses virginity as a unitive link between himself, his audience, and an entire history of virgin saints; writers at the latter end of the Old English period, including Ælfric and the author of the *Old English Martyrology*, also emphasize virginity as a social virtue. Æthelthryth's life and that of other virgin saints is not one of isolation but one of interaction, both between individuals and between two modes of being. Æthelthryth, like other saints and individuals of the period, partakes equally of secular and religious lifestyles and merges the active and the contemplative lifestyle. Æthelthryth is also emblematic of a particularly malleable conception of virginity.

Æthelthryth maintains her virginity within marriage; also telling are those women whose chastity and/or virginity occurs after marriage, during widowhood. Of these, Judith, the warrior-widow whose story constitutes one of the only Old English verse

treatments of a female saint, is most notable. Besides the vernacular verse treatment of Judith's *vita*, Aldhelm and Ælfric also comment upon and reshape the life to varying degrees. Elene, or Saint Helena, Constantine's mother, also forms the subject of a vernacular verse poem. The poem, *Elene*, stresses Elene's maternity alongside her sanctity. Together, these two poems compound the difficulty of associating virginity with idealized, unreal, and isolated women and suggest the attainability of sanctity through a very real and actual state for many women – marriage. These poems also further suggest the possibility of revirginization, for neither Judith nor Elene can be considered to have even the dubious virginity of Æthelthryth, yet follow a virginal lifestyle at the ends of their lives and are associated with virginity. Finally, these two women echo Æthelthryth's balanced life and continued participation in society.

Judith is distinctly different from the saints, male or female, described by Ælfric in the *Lives of the Saints*, but she does bear one particular similarity to many of the holy virgins Aldhelm chooses for the *De Virginitate* and the *Carmen de Virginitate*. Judith is an Old Testament figure, and hence not an obvious candidate for sainthood, which would seem to require at least a New Testament vintage. Judith was, however, of obvious interest to Anglo-Saxon writers of hagiography, including Aldhelm and Ælfric, both of whom chose to relate Judith to and interpret her for their monastic, female audiences. Additionally, Marie Nelson makes a convincing argument for bestowing sainthood upon Judith:

> That Judith lived before the Christian era should not, I think, preclude our consideration of her actions as those befitting a saint. Robert L. Cohn points out that Biblical characters like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Jeremiah – and like Sarah, Rebekka, Ruth, and Esther as well – achieved the status of exemplary human beings. Cohn also says that ' in popular Jewish piety holy men (but not women) . . . occasionally achieved a status analogous to that of saints in other religions' (1988:48). The

> *Judith* poet, however, does not seem to have been aware of a 'not women!' rule. He refers to his female hero with the epithets 'eadigan mægð" (35), 'eadhreðige mægð' (135), 'halige meowle' (56), 'nergendes þeowen' (73-74) and 'scyppendes mægð' (78). These references to her blessedness, her holiness, and her relationship to God strongly suggest that Judith, as far as her representation in this poem is concerned, deserves to be considered a saint, at least according to one of the common definitions of sainthood. Judith led an exemplary life. And her actions, as we have just seen, show she was a fighting saint (32-33).

Judith can, then, be at least tentatively considered analogous to a saint, even though she predates the Crucifixion and the establishment of the Church.

Despite her uncertain status, Judith presents an important vision of both widowed virginity and widowed sexuality. Aldhelm, in the *De Virginitate*, flatly recognizes what the author of the poem *Judith* as well as Ælfric choose to minimize or ignore altogether: Judith's actively manipulative sexuality. Judith, he says,

> . . . scorned the flattering allurements of suitors after the death of Manasses, taking up the weeds of widowhood and rejecting a wedding dress–and (this at a time) when the clarion-calls of the apostolic trumpet had not yet put out the call: 'But I say to the unmarried and to the widows; it is good for them if they so continue' [I Cor.VII.8]. Flowering */*p.317*/* like a bright lily in her devout chastity and hiding from the public gaze she lived a pure life in an upstairs solar. (And) when in company of her hand-maiden she undertook to overthrow the dreadful leader of the Assyrians, who had terrified the quaking world with his innumerable thousands of soldiers glorying in the cavalry and infantry, she did not believe he could be deceived in any other way, nor think that he could be killed otherwise, than by ensnaring him by means of the innate beauty of her face and also

> by her bodily adornment. Of her, it is written in the Septuagint: 'And she clothed herself with the garments of her gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets, and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments' [Iud. X.3], and tricked herself out toprey on men. You see, it is not by my assertion but by the statement of Scripture that the adornment of women is called the depredation of men! But, because she is known to have done this during the close seige of Bethulia, grieving for her kinsfolk with the affection of compassion and not through any disaffection from chastity, for that reason, having kept the honour of her modesty intact, she brought back a renowned trophy to her fearful fellow-citizens and a distinguished triumph to her fearful fellow-citizens and a distinguished triumph for (these) timid townsfolk– in the form of the tyrant's head and its canopy [cf. Iud. XIII.19]. (Lapidge and Herren 126-127).

In his brief recitation of Judith's story, Aldhelm accomplishes a number of points. First, Aldhelm establishes Judith's widowed state and describes her behavior and her dress. He also notes the significant change in Judith's dress when she deals with the enemy. Most importantly, though, Aldhelm both criticizes and justifies Judith's actions. Judith's sexuality, expressed through her clothes and her outward appearances, captures her victim. Conveniently, however, the Assyrian leader, Holofernes, is also the enemy of Judith's people, and Aldhelm quickly seizes upon this fact as a rationale for her actions. Holofernes, in effect, becomes not a victim, entrapped by Judith's sexual snare, but a vile foe correctly defeated through Judith's quick mind and divine support. Aldhelm recognizes the essential problem of Judith's sexuality, actively employed to subdue her male enemy, but he also allows the character and nature of Holofernes to justify the manner by which Judith achieves her victory. Having stated his misgivings about the bait

Judith offers Holofernes, he contextualizes Judith's actions, justifying her actions *only* in that particular situation.

The poem *Judith*, however, lacks even implicit criticism of her actions. The poem consistently describes Judith, as Marie Nelson recognizes, in heroic language, and focuses on her courage and conviction rather than her sexuality. This lack of purely physical description has led critics to overemphasize the poem's characterization of Judith as pure and as a single woman. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, for example, comments that

> the author of the Anglo-Saxon poem refashioned the "historical" ancient Jewish widow/heroine into a bold virgin who espoused the ideals and values of the early Christian period. According to the epic, Judith's ability to maintain her chastity against the advances of Holofernes, and her heroic acts of killing him were essentially predicated on her virginal purity. For virginity contained in itself extraordinary power; it was credited as the source of Judith's invulnerability (*Forgetful of Their Sex* 136).

It is true that *Judith* lacks the overt sexual manipulation that so preoccupies Aldhelm. But *Judith* does not entirely reconfigure its title character as physically virginal, and it does not overlook the process by which she accomplishes her goal.

Judith is consistently referred to as a "mægð[42]," which *can* imply a maiden, virgin, or girl. But it also has the broader meaning of woman or wife. The poem does, however, redirect all licentious thoughts and intentions directly onto Holofernes. Judith herself is the subject of Holofernes's lust, but she is not touched or tarnished by it. The poem observes of Holofernes:

> . . . . Þa wearð se brema on mode
> bliðe, burga ealdor, þohte ða beorhtan idese
> mid widle ond mid womme besmitan. Ne wolde þæt wuldres dema

[42] One such reference, and also one of the earliest direct references in the extant poem to Judith, occurs in line 35 and is typical of later references: "eadigan mægð," or "fortunate woman."

geðafrian, þrymmes hyde, ac he him þæs ðinges gestyrde,
dryhten, dugeða waldend.
(57b-61a)[43].

While "ides" has the normative meaning of virgin, poetic texts loosen its meaning, admitting the broader sense of woman or wife[44]. This passage also indicates a distinct separation between the perpetrator and the recipient of lust; Holofernes's intentions are obvious, but they do not impact the description of Judith as the "beorhtan idese." Indeed, the poem intentionally contrasts the baseness of Holofernes with the persistent, untouchable purity of Judith. Early in the what remains of the poem, Judith is described as "gleaw on geðonce, / ides ælfscinu[45]" (14b-15a), and despite representing her as the object of Holofernes's dubious affections, the poem regards Judith's purity as separate and distinct from lustful attentions. Her sexuality, the attraction that appeals to Holofernes, is conflated with neither her beauty nor her wisdom.

Yet the poem does not elide the grim realities of Judith's final encounter with Holofernes. She is brought to his tent for one reason only – sex – and her execution of Holofernes is enacted sexually. Judith, strengthened with divine courage, kills her enemy:

. . . Þa wearð hyre rume on mode,
haligre hyht geniwod; genam ða þone hæðenan mannan
fæste be feaxe sinu, teah hyne folmum wið hyre weard
bysmerlice, ond þone bealofullan
listum alede, laðne mannan,
swa heo ðæs unlædan eaðost mihte

[43] "Holofernes exulted, planned to defile / the bright, beautiful woman; but God, /our Judge, the Guardian of glory, would / not permit the war-leader to harm Judith" (Nelson 13).
[44] See the discussion of this word in *The Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.
[45] "the shining woman, bright in thoughts," translation mine.

wel gewealdan.

(97b-103a)[46].

Judith's killing of Holofernes becomes almost a parody of the sex act that the drunken leader earlier desired. The poem, thus, recognizes Judith as a sexual being, but distinguishes between her physical allure and the bright mental and spiritual beauty, faith and wisdom that enables her defeat of Holofernes and distinguishes her among her people. Judith's virginity or lack thereof is not an issue in the poem, and, although she maintains both her sexuality and her appeal to the opposite sex, her power derives from an inner purity reminiscent of Aldhelm's insistence upon a spiritual virginity. Like Æthelthryth's Judith's life is divided into two parts; her marriage and widowhood are separate from her current state – much as Æthelthryth's two marriages do not interfere with her hagiographer's insistence upon her virginity. Judith's state and status are defined, not by the realities of her marriage and her "past" life, but by the desires of her biographers. She, too, is subject to a process of redefinition, of revirginization, that occurs only at the hands of her hagiographers.

Judith is not the only treatment of the holy widow; Ælfric also deals with the story and, much more explicitely than the poem, constructs Judith as an emblem of virginity. In *Forgetful of Their Sex*, Schulenburg observes that

> In the late tenth century, Aelfric, an Anglo-Saxon abbot, appended to the poem *Judith* a moral directed to contemporary nuns. Here Aelfric emphasizes the seriousness of the commitment to consecrated virginity and stresses that becoming a *sponsa Christi* necessitated great struggle. The life of one committed to God he describes as a 'martyrdom,' with nuns specifically denoted as 'Christ's martyrs.' In order to maintain their

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[46] "Her mind was opened, / her noble hope renewed. Judith took the heathen / by his hair, pulled him toward her as if / to perform a shameful act, positioned / the man so she could manage his miserable body, / control him" (Nelson 15).

> untarnished chastity they must be involved in daily battle. Aelfric also underlines the guilt before God of those who had broken their vows of chastity; he elaborates upon the fate of lapsed virgins and their future punishments in hell. (136).

Magennis agrees, commenting that "even the Old Testament heroine Judith becomes a kind of honorary virgin in Ælfric's treatment" ("St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric" 109). Mary Clayton also emphasizes the relatively new element of virginity added to the story by Ælfric: "Ælfric's Judith is, throughout, more decorous and less active than the biblical one. The more 'virginal' Judith of Ælfric's text, therefore, prepares the way for his turning to virginity at the end of his text and for his statement that she exemplifies humility (lines 407-11)" ("Ælfric's *Judith*" 224). Clayton views Ælfric's "re-virginization" of Judith as problematic, observing that

> However much he tries to manipulate meaning, Ælfric cannot cancel the manipulativeness and sexual autonomy of his heroine and, in the end, he digs a hole for himself by his determination to play down these elements, to contain Judith within patterns dictated by his desire to make her into a model for virgins rather than following the biblical portrait of a forceful, resourceful woman who, though chaste, exploited her sexual attractiveness to kill an enemy of her people ("Ælfric's *Judith*" 225).

For Clayton, therefore, Ælfric's treatment is negative; she views Judith's "new" virginity as interfering with her power. However, Ælfric's emphasis upon Judith's virginity is remarkably like his and other hagiographers' insistence upon Æthelthryth's virginity and is in keeping with the recognition of virginity as a conduit between two states of life – active or married and contemplative or chaste (or widowed, which amounts to the same thing). As with Æthelthryth, Judith's virginity is something applied to her *vita* despite traditional – and, in the case of Æthelthryth, historical – acceptance of previous marriage.

Judith's virginity – her "re-virginization" at the hands of hagiographers – is telling on another level as well. The fact that such an obviously non-virginal woman, one whose marriage is universally accepted and its consummation unquestioned, is treated by Ælfric as a virgin and as a model for real virgins attests to a certain amount of authorial willingness to bend the seemingly inviolate limits of the term "virgin." In Æthelthryth's case, marriage, in which one partner ardently desires sexual consummation, is not an obstacle to her own virginity. In effect, a woman need not be single – even in the realities of Anglo-Saxon society[47] – in order to be considered a virgin. Judith pushes the barrier even farther; in order to contextualize her as a virgin, Ælfric ignores both her marriage and her physical state. Ælfric, of course, exhibits his own ability to redefine the lives of his subject. More importantly, Ælfric's application of virginity to both women occurs after the fact – after their deaths, of course, but also after the end of their marriages. Both women adopt dramatically different lifestyles in the latter periods of their lives. Both women *are* single during those periods, although to varying degrees they continue to participate in communal life, whether in a monastery or secular town. The virginity applied to them by Ælfric and other hagiographers does not define the state of their bodies, but recognizes a successful translation from one lifestyle to another. For their hagiographers, the defining moments of their lives are enacted while Æthelthryth and Judith are once again single women, living lives devoted to God. Their virginity, such as it is, invokes the purity of the second period of their lives.

The poem *Elene* also describes a sanctified woman whose lack of physical virginity is absolutely without question. Traditionally, the poem has been accepted as a

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[47] As has been noted, Æthelthryth is particularly interesting precisely because she is *English*. There are three other married female saints in the *Lives of Saints*, Basilissa, Cecilia, and Daria. However, as Upchurch observes, they and their husbands enter into chaste relationship amiably and mutually, and their husbands are also saints (1-2). Æthelthryth's respective husbands are definitely *not* saints. Æthelthryth's *vita* also lacks the historical distance and perspective that makes it easier to accept the miracles implicit in the lives and relationships of the other three married virgin saints. Simply because Æthelthryth is not that far separated from Ælfric's audience, either temporally or geographically, her regard as a virgin is all the more remarkable.

dual hagiography, relating the sanctity of two figures, Elene and Judas/Cyriacus[48], but, of the two saints, Elene is most crucial to the poem. Like Judith, absence of physical virginity is unquestioned; her emperor son Constantine bears living evidence to the success of her marriage. As in the poem *Judith*, *Elene* emphasizes the femininity of its central character. Her sexuality, unlike Judith's, has been realized; her maternity, rather than her sexual allure, remains the dominating aspect of her character. Indeed, the first mention of Elene is as a mother: Constantine command his "modor," his mother, to seek the cross (214-16). More significantly, Elene serves as the instrument of Judas's figurative rebirth into the Christian Bishop Cyriacus.

Elene's journey to Jerusalem at the behest of her son ultimately results in the recovery and reclamation of the cross of the Crucifixion. For much of the poem, Elene enacts the part of the woman warrior or war-leader; a host accompanies her, and she does not hesitate to use force to accomplish her goal. In order to unearth the cross, Elene must literally force the recalcitrant Jewish people to admit its location; she focuses her efforts on one learned Jewish man in particular, Judas. Her torture of Judas precipitates his conversion, and, as a Christian, he is renamed Cyriacus.

Eusebius, the Roman bishop, actually baptizes and renames Judas. However, by the time Eusebius arrives in Jerusalem, Elene has already effected all of the significant changes in Judas's attitudes and beliefs. Eusebius only formalizes Judas's conversion, while Elene actually engineers his conversion. Elene's torture of Judas does prompt his reconsideration of his refusal to reveal the location of the Cross, but the torture itself, and not merely its result, is significant. Indeed, Elene's torture of Judas reenacts a birth, rendering him literally as well as figuratively reborn. Upon Judas's final refusal to reveal the location of the Cross, Elene:

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[48] Bjork, for example, identifies *Elene* as "essentially a double saint's life," focusing on both "Elene's realized and Judas's potential power" and on the double nature of Judas's dialogue, which expresses his "human condition, his personal capacity for both saintliness and wickedness" (62).

Heht þa swa cwicne corðre lædan,
scufan scyldigne – scealcas ne gældon –
in drygne seað, þær he duguða leas
siomode in sorgum VII nihta fyrst
under hearmlocan hungre geþreatod,
clommum beclungen, . . .
(691-96)[49].

Upon Judas's repentance, Elene retrieves Judas from his dark captivity:

Þa ðæt gehyrde sio þær hæleðum scead,
beornes gebæro, hio bebead hraðe
þæt hine man of nearwe ond of nydcleofan,
fram þam engan hofe, up forlete.
(709-712)[50].

While Judas undeniably experiences a spiritual epiphany, he also undergoes physical torment that parallels birth, with Elene acting as a maternal figure. Through Elene's actions, he is first placed – conceived – in a dark cavity, and there he remains until Elene returns him to the world. Elene, therefore, is the instrument of Judas's salvation and his Christian rebirth, acting as both his mother and his guide.

Elene's motherhood, of both her real son Constantine and her metaphorical son Judas, does not interfere with her sanctity; rather, as the conduit to Judas's conversion, it enhances and confirms it. Elene – like Judith – is living *after* her marriage, and she has not re-married. She assumes an equivalent role with both of the other central figures of the poem, her son, Constantine, and her victim/protege, Judas. This role, motherhood,

[49] "She ordered Judas / to be led from the company alive and instructed / her servants, who did not hesitate to obey her command, / to push him into a dry pit, where he was to stay / imprisoned, miserable and alone, threatened by hunger, / bound with fetters, weary and without food for seven nights" (Nelson 153).
[50] "When the woman who held him captive heard / about the man's new way of thinking she / immediately ordered her servants to release / him from his prison, lead him from the pit / into which he had been cast, free him from / that place of close constraint" (Nelson 153).

dominates her relationship with both of these figures, and the possibility of re-marriage – or any other sort of sexual relationship – is inconceivable. While Elene is not even as "re-virginized" as Ælfric makes Judith, she does remove herself from any sexual economy. However, her status as a single woman does not eliminate or alter her femininity; her motherhood persists beyond the birth of her physical son. Nor does Elene's motherhood or her femininity render her powerless or weak; like Judith's sexuality, Elene's maternity responds to and resolves the principal problem of the poem.

Both of these poems, *Elene* and *Judith*, figure central female characters who have been married and who no longer fit any sort of virgin physicality. But neither Elene nor Judith at any time even consider the possibility of re-visiting a married state; both are content in their chastity. This solitary state leaves Judith, at least, open to re-interpretation as a sort of mature, experienced virgin, and both Elene and Judith remain provocative, effective, potent members of their communities, able to implement change. Elene and Judith enter a state of chastity analogous to pure virginity, a state open to re-interpretation and authorial manipulation. Their present, not their past, characterizes the two women.

With Judith, Ælfric blurs the definition of her chastity, identifying her with virgin women if not outright stating that she is a virgin. Ælfric's desire to translate Judith's chastity to virginity also offers an explanation for Æthelthryth's troublesome marriage. Elene and Judith both participate in the salvation and creation of community; both of their histories illustrate distinct periodization. The poems' authors are most interested in the latter stages of Elene and Judith's lives, the after marriage years when both act to preserve and save their societies. Similarly, Ælfric and other writers dwell almost exclusively on Æthelthryth's behavior *after* the end of her marriages. Her husbands' unwillingness to share in her state of chastity presents a theological problem that also demands "proof" for Æthelthryth's persistent virginity. Plausible or not, Æthelthryth's virginity is only attested to through the accounts of others, and through postmortem

miracles; her living body never outwardly demonstrates its virginity[51] – or its lack thereof.

Æthelthryth, therefore, indicates a heavy degree of authorial manipulation; her virginity is something established externally by her biographers and hagiographers and is only really verified through repeated attestation of that virginity. Æthelthryth's marriage, in contrast, exists in a murky, ambiguous state of authorial ignorance and disinterest – much like Judith's and Elene's previous married years. The state of chastity eventually adopted by all three women – the historically real Æthelthryth and less immediate Judith and Elene – denotes a distinct division between pre- and post-marital periods of their lives. It also enables their authors, the writers of their lives, to re-configure the facts of their earlier lives. Interested only in the latter periods of their lives, the authors and hagiographers allow the character of those latter periods to dominate their descriptions of and attitudes to the women. The facts and physical realities of their married lives are not important; the sanctity that they manifest during their latter years recreates and re-inscribes their youthful bodies. Moreover, their virginity, actual or recreated, also marks a transition or a translation between the two periods of their lives, acting as a connective link between married and not-married, secular and religious. After all, none of these women exist outside of community; their lives track their movement through various social conditions.

Ultimately, Æthelthryth, Judith, and Elene – and the malleable states of their bodies – indicate both an acceptance of the social reality and necessity of marriage and the possibility of re-writing actual women's lives to allow for virginal sanctity. Æthelthryth's virginity, then, does not necessarily represent her actual physical status

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[51] Æthelthryth's physical intactness is not, obviously, subject to exploration by any version of a medieval gynecologist. But other virgin martyrs and saints *do* outwardly demonstrate their virginity, most commonly by refusing marriage, repudiating suitors, and suffering various sexually explicit attacks. As Innes-Parker observes, these virgin martyrs – by far more common than virgins like Æthelthryth – offer demonstrable models of virginity both attacked and defended (214). Their bodies, thus, *do* display their virginity; it is, indeed, frequently inscribed upon those bodies in blood.

through years of marriage. It does, however, indicate an authorial willingness to accept, and disregard, the realistic actions, behaviors, and conditions of women who are and remain active participants in society. The virginity enacted by Æthelthryth and to some extent by Judith and Elene is very much a social virginity, emblematic of changed status. Above all, that virginity represents a conduit to an expected and laudable state of life – chaste participation in society.

Chapter 3

Transgressive Sex:

Harlots, Transvestites and Rapists in Anglo-Saxon Hagiography

> Every public exposure of an honourable virgin is (to her) a suffering of rape: and yet the suffering of carnal violence is the less (evil), because it comes of natural office.
>
> Tertullian, "On the Veiling of Virgins," Chp. 1

> . . . ond æfter Cristes uppastignesse heo wæs on swa micelre longunge æfter him, þæt heo nolde næfre siððan nænge mon geseon; ac heo gewát on westenne ond þær gewunade þritig geára eallum monnan uncuð.
>
> "St. Mary Magdalene," *Old English Martyrology*, 126.14-17[52]

> þa fæmnan Sisinnius se gesið sealde his cempum to bismrienne. þa hi þa hi læddon to þære scondlican stowe, þa ætywdon þær twegen godes englas on cæmpen hiwe ond genamon þa fæmnan ond hi gelæddan on swa heanne múnt þær hire ne mihte nænig man to genealecean; ond heo þær hire gast onsænde, ond hire lichoma resteð on Thessalonica þære ceastre . . .
>
> "St. Irene," *Old English Martyrology*, 54.22-27[53]

For the female saint and her biographers, sex presents problems and paradoxes of varying degrees of severity. Ideally, female saints are virginal and pure, isolated from

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[52] "After Christ's ascension she had such a great longing after him that she could no longer look on any man; but she went into the desert and lived there thirty years unknown to all men" (*Old English Martyrology* 127.14-17).

[53] "The thane Sisinnius handed this virgin over to his soldiers, that they might defile her. When they led her to the place of defilement, two angels of God appeared there in the shape of soldiers and took the virgin and led her up to such a high mountain, that nobody could approach her; and there she gave up her ghost, and her body rests in the town of Thessalonica . . . " (*Old English Martyrology* 55.23-28).

society by the very fact of that virginity. In practice, however, virginity functions as a social connection, firmly integrating the virgin saint into a community and, in a broader perspective, society as a whole. Moreover, even virgin saints seldom achieve perfectly contemplative, ascetic lives; they are consistently forced back into the social fold, if only to die good martyrs' deaths. There are also a great many saints who act out or encounter what might be termed transgressive sex acts – prostitution, transvestitism, rape. These behaviors distinguish the saint in question from both normative society and other, more prosaic saints. Significantly, prostitution, tranvestitism, and rape – and it should be noted that the saint is the object, not the perpetrator, of rape or attempted rape – all involve specifically female saints. There are no male transvestites and hardly any male saints who find themselves subject to either prostitution or rape, although there are a few instances, such as that of Calchus in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, in which a male saint does skirt the boundaries of either prostitution or suffering rape.

As a general rule, prostitution, tranvestitism and rape are all enacted upon specifically female bodies; there are female harlots, female transvestites, and female rape or almost-rape victims. Each of these situations conflates sex with social liminality; none of these acts, whether perpetrated by or upon a female saint, is socially acceptable. However, while prostitution, transvestitism and rape are all acts exclusively fixed in the female body, the treatment of these acts in Anglo-Saxon hagiography does not involve a condemnation of the female form. In each of these situations, the female body is accepted as a given, a requirement for the development of the saint, and, while that body may be hidden or disguised, it never loses or alters its basic femininity. Indeed, prostitution, transvestitism and rape ultimately confirm the femininity of the saint, but also deflect criticism from the saint's physical form. Thus, while the female saint's body may be flawed and may engage in or suffer socially and religiously untenable acts, it is not also subject to *gendered* criticism. Instead, each of these acts presents the female saint as a mirror, often harshly critical, of human, frequently male, sin. The saint herself

is not lost in this reflection; nor is she relegated to the margins of her story or her society. Her role is binate: the female saint, a willing or unwilling participant in a transgressive sexual situation, relocates culpability beyond her own body and identity and criticizes the failings implicit in normative society. Hagiographic descriptions of the transgressive sex of female saints, therefore, do not marginalize their saintly women, but foreground their participation in Christian society.

To be socially pious, a dutiful daughter must marry; yet, the embryo saint has no choice but to disregard familial and societal obligations and follow the higher mandates of God and His representatives. In Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, Eufrasia's instructions from a monastic brother are typical: "Eala swustor ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man þinne lichaman be-smite . ne ne syle þu þinne wlite to ænigum hospe . ac bewedde þe sylfe crist . se þe mæg for þisum gewitenlicum þingum . syllan þæt heofon-lice rice" (340.79-80)[54]. Eufrasia, of course, follows the brother's instructions and achieves her sanctity. However, not all saints are so immediately ready to plunge headlong into chastity; others are more closely tied to the urgings of their bodies – at least initially. No Anglo-Saxon or patristic writer doubted that sexuality was a fundamental component of the human composition[55], and a saint's efforts to deal with sexuality are often at the foreground of hagiographic texts. Frequently, saints succeed in translating their own physical sexuality into quite real spiritual experiences only to find themselves the objects of both male and female desire.

In fact, Anglo-Saxon hagiographic texts present three primary visions of sanctified sexuality. In the first, the saint has willingly experienced sexuality and overcome it; in the next, the saint is the object of others' desires, a situation which may include rape or the possiblity of rape; and, finally, the saint has translated human

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[54] "O sister! suffer thou not that any man defile thy body, neither give thou thy beauty to any shame; but wed theyself to Christ, who for these transitory things can give thee the heavenly kingdom" (341).

[55] Sex is often conflated with desire, and Salih, for example, notes that desire constitutes the "selfhood of Medieval theology " (22).

sexuality into a desire for God, which may nor may not be expressed physically. In all of these three situations, the sanctified body retains its capability for desire but loses the ability to immorally express that desire. The female saint's body remains feminine; her femininity is, if anything, emphasized. Her physical body, however, is distinguished and estranged from sexual desire. Thus, hagiographic texts frequently portray the female saint's still sexual body as benign, while concentrating on and condeming the more active sexuality of bystanders – usually but not always *male* bystanders.

Reformed harlots present one of the most intriguing moments of sanctified female sexuality. While there are men who have relinquished both the married state and accompanying sexual activity – Dryhthelm, for example, in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, is compelled by a deathbed[56] vision to leave his wife and sons and adopt the monastic lifestyle (V.12) – there are no male versions of the reformed harlot[57]. Female versions do not exactly abound, either. Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, often confused with each other, are common; less so are others. Ruth Karras notes that there are six main prostitute saints:

> The prime example of the prostitute saint was Mary Magdalen, probably the most popular saint (after the Virgin Mary) in all of Medieval Europe. Five other prostitute saints also appeared prominently in Medieval hagiographical literature. Four of the stories–Mary of Egypt, Thaïs, Pelagia, and Mary the niece of Abraham–came from the literary tradition of the *Vitae Patrum*, tales of the desert fathers of late antiquity, and were retold throughout Europe. Afra of Augsburg was known mainly in Germany. (4)

Of these, Mary of Egypt, whose life appears in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, presents a telling portrayal of the sanctified and reformed prostitute.

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[56] A deathbed from which, fortunately or unfortunately for his family, he recovers.
[57] Unless, of course, Augustine counts.

The *Death of Saint Mary of Egypt*[58] reveals a deep interest in the nature of Mary's sexual sin. *The Death of St. Mary of Egypt* is one of only four legends in the *Lives of Saints* consistently regarded as not authored by Ælfric; Skeat recognized the tale as "not by Ælfric," and his initial impression has been confirmed by other editors (Magennis "Contrasting Features" 317). Notwithstanding uncertain authorship and lack of modern familiarity with the tale, Mary was particularly well-known to Medieval audiences. The Old English version appearing in British Library Cotton MSS Julius E. VII and Otho B. S. can be traced to a ninth-century version, and from there to Latin and Greek versions of the seventh century (Chase 25). A seventh-century Greek text authored by Sophronius is generally held to be the source for all medieval western versions of the story (Karras 6). Additionally, the legend was popular in both Spanish and French versions (Chase 25) and also occurs in a later form in the *South English Legendary* (Crowther 76). In any case, Mary's popularity continued beyond the Anglo-Saxon period into the Middle Ages and beyond. As Lavery observes, "There are four extant Middle English redactions of her story, and one in Middle Scots [. . .] all found in large hagiographical collections which appeared between the late thirteenth century and 1495" (113). The Early Modern period continues to tell Mary's story. The Syon *Martiloge* of 1526 and *A sacred poeme describing the Life and Death of S. Marie of Aegipt*, of 1630, both describe Mary's life (Stevenson 19-20), and the twentieth century itself has seen two novels, a poem, and two operas concerning Mary of Egypt (Stevenson 20).

Mary of Egypt is often confused or linked with another Mary, the sinner Mary Magdalene who wiped Christ's feet with her hair (Friesen 241), although Mary

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[58] Mary's *Life* is generally recognized as non-Ælfrician; there are three other lives also considered to have non-Ælfrician origins. As Hugh Magennis in his study "Contrasting Features in the Non-Ælfrician Lives in the Old English *Lives of Saints*" observes, "There are four questionable items in the *Lives of Saints* manuscript, British Library MS. Cotton Julius E vii: the *Legend of the Seven Sleepers* (Skeat XXIII), which is a free reworking of the Lation *Passio Septem Dormientium* (*BHL* 2316); the *Life of St. Mary of Egypt* (Skeat XXIII B), a much closer treatment of the Paulus Diaconus *Vita* (*BHL* 5415); *the Life of St. Eustace* (Skeat XXX), a paraphrase of the *Passio* (*BHL* 2760); and the *Life of St. Euphrosyna* (Skeat XXXIII), a somewhat freer paraphrase of the *Vita* (*BHL* 2723)" (317).

Magdalene probably played only a small role in the evolution of Mary of Egypt. As Stevenson observes, tracing Mary's development:

> Mary's representation as a penitent harlot might now be thought to link her with Mary Magdalene, but this is probably not the case [. . . .] Probably more relevant is a series of early Byzantine lives of harlots-turned-ascetics, notably the very well-known lives of Pelagia and Thaïs, both of which probably predate the life of Mary, though not by much (25).

Her fame or infamy notwithstanding, Mary presents a challenging image for modern interpreters, who often perceive in Mary's story of sin and salvation a criticism of uniquely female flaws and a condemnation of the female body.

In her consideration of "Holy Harlots," Ruth Karras comments that, in the texts she studies, "the saint's life before her conversion played a relatively small role; prostitution merely provided the background against which penitence stood in stark contrast" (Karras 5). In contrast, the story of Mary of Egypt revolves in large part around her narration of her pre-conversion, pre-eremitic lifestyle. Mary spends a significant chunk of her life indulging herself at every conceivable opportunity, becoming a prostitute at the untimely age of twelve, not for money or presents, but to satisfy lustful desire. Mary is Eufrasia's opposite, denying not only the presumed wishes of her brother and relatives but also all social and religious behavioral mandates.

Like most saints, Mary is not given to moderation, either in sin or piety; excess characterizes both the beginning and the end of her life. Mary's story is rooted in her body, and her dramatic transformation from harlot to saint is traditionally read as a condemnation of both human physicality and sexuality. More specifically, Mary herself is often read as a female incarnation of the sins of the flesh. Andrew Scheil, for example, argues that the "text is a complex rejection of the body, a repudiation of the base songs of the flesh" (151) and compares Mary's form to that of "a demonic figure, sent to test the holy man," a composite of "Antony's temptations: she is a woman *and* black of body"

(141). Hugh Magennis also acknowledges the importance of Mary's naked body, commenting that "Mary's care about keeping her hair short in her solitude may be seen as a repudiation of her life of fornication, during which she would have worn it long and free-flowing, but in rejecting clothing she is also rejecting community itself" ("St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric" 104-5). But Mary is not demonized in the text; she is a figure of genuine, if isolated, respect and reverence. Mary's story ultimately censures neither her body nor her desire, but her will. The legend configures Mary's problems as not specifically female experiences and troubles, but ones common to humankind and thus understandable and forgivable if not laudable. Despite the *Life*'s non-Ælfrician authorship and definite distinguishing features, it reveals goals and interests ultimately not that dissimilar from Ælfric's own.

Sex is the first and most problematic of the distinguishing features of Mary's *vita*. Mary is the only female saint in the *Lives of Saints* manuscript to engage in, and to actively enjoy, intercourse with men; even the four *married* female saints of the manuscript are chaste and, moreover, virgins (Upchurch 1-2). Mary herself blames her youthful indiscretions on lust, perhaps Medieval terminology for raging hormones. Additionally, the young Mary can easily be read as a type of Eve, leading men astray. Speaking of her voyage to Jerusalem, Mary relates how she turned well-intentioned men from good: "And ic hi þa ealle sona to þam manfullum leahtrum . and ceahhetungum bysmerlicum astyrede; Mid manegum oþrum fullicum" (26.374-76)[59]. However, Mary does not enact the role of temptress or succubus; she is simply not concerned with the effects of her behavior upon her partners or victims. Mary, not her partners, is the subject of the tale she relates, and the adult, aged Mary presents quite a contrast to her youthful self. Matured, "Mary the Penitent is a type of the Christian people who, beginning as outcasts, people who sit in darkness, turn *towards* God" (Stevenson 21). Indeed, while

[59]"And I soon excited them all to wicked vices and shameful jestings, with many other filthy and lewd expressions."

Mary's sexual sins may be particularly suited to her femininity, it is not as a flawed female that Mary ultimately functions. Instead, Mary's vulnerability and her subsequent redemption from sin allow her to function as both a representative of flawed humanity and as an emblem, analogous to the Virgin Mary, of humanity's possible situation.

Significantly, Mary's desires are self-directed; in a sense, it is her own nature, her own identity, as well as divine law, that she sins against. She has no interest in the world or the people around her, beyond the brief pleasures it and they can offer her. She tells Zosimus:

> Ne forleas ic na minne fæmn-hád for æniges mannes gyfum ; Oþþe ic itodlice ahtes onfenge fram ænigum þe me aht gyfan woldon . ac ic wæs swiðe onæled mid þære hátheortnysse þæs synlustes . þæt ic gewilnode butan ceape þæt hí mé þe mænigfealdlicor to gurnon . to þy þæt ic þe eð mihte gefyllan þa scyldfullan gewilnunga mines forligeres ; Ne þú ne wén þæt ic aht underfenge for ænegum welan . ac symle on wædlunge lyfde . for þon ic hæfde swá ic ær sæde unafyllendlice gewilnunga swá þæt ic me sylfe unablinnendlice on þam ádále (sic) þæs manfullan forligeres besylede and þæt me wæs to yrmðe. and þæt ic me tealde to lífe þæt swá únablinnendlice þurhtuge þæs gecyndes teonan . . .
>
> (22.334-24.345)[60].

Mary's interests are not mercenary; presents or money do not sway her. Only the "þurhtuge þæs gecyndes" motivate Mary. In this, Mary's interests are suprisingly similar to those of other, more traditional female virgin saints, who are often tempted – though

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[60]"Neither did I lose my virginity for any man's presents, nor would I indeed receive anything from any one who desired to give me somewhat; but I was greatly excited with the heat of sinful lust, so that I desired that they would come to me in greater numbers without any price, to the end that I might the more easily satisfy my culpable desires for wicked living. Nor do thou suppose that I would recieve anthing for any world's wealth, but ever lived in poverty, because I had, as I said before, insatiable desires, so that I ceaselessly polluted myself in the puddle of wicked adultery, and this was my misery; and this I accounted as life, that I might thus ceaselessly fulfil the vexations of flesh.

not successfully – by prestige and wealth. Juliana, for example, is uninterested in Heliseus's riches. Ælfric, when he revises the story of Judith, is also perturbed by her traditional acceptance of the booty resulting from Holofernes's death and the defeat of his forces. In Ælfric's revised version of Judith's story, she rejects the war-spoil her people give her, associating even Holofernes's possessions with the tarnish of sin (Clayton "Ælfric's *Judith*" 221). Mary's situation is, of course, different; she is not the tempted but the temptor. Nevertheless, her rejection of any monetary reward for her actions disconnects her sin from that of her partners, individuating Mary's guilt. Like Juliana and the Ælfrician Judith, her refusal of her partner's money sets her apart from them and isolates the nature of her sin. Mary's guilt, therefore, is ultimately her own and depends solely upon her own actions, and not those of her partners.

Mary's legend – though of course not by Ælfric – also recalls Ælfric's discussion of the nature of the soul:

> Uþwytan sæcgað . þæt þære sawle gecynd is ðryfeald . An dæl is on hire gewylnigend-lic . oðer yrsigend-lic . þrydde gesceadwislic. Twægen þissera dæla habbað deor and nytenus mid ús. þæt ís gewylnunge and yrre. Se mana na hæfð gesceád . and ræd. and andgit.Gewylnung is þam menn forgifen to gewilnienne þa ðing þe him fremiað to nit-wyrðym þingum and to þære ecan hæle . Þonne gif seo gewylnung mis-went . þonne acendð he gyferness . and forlygr and gitsunge. (16.96-103)[61].

Mary's lusts exist on the same level as those of the beasts – pure physicality, subject entirely to bodily desires. In this, of course, she partakes of much of the Christian identification of woman with the body and all of the evils associated with it. However,

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[61] Philosophers say that the soul's nature is threefold: the first part in her is capable of desire, the second of anger, the third of reason. Two of these parts, beasts and cattle have in common with us, that is to say, desire and anger; man only hath reason and speech and intelligence. Desire is given to man to desire that which profiteth him, both in things needful and for everlasting salvation; but if the desire be perverted, it begetteth Gluttony, and Lechery, and Avarice.

Mary does not only, or even mostly, invoke the physical and sexual evils of the female body. Indeed, these have little part in the development of her legend. Rather than being associated with feminine evil, Mary is constructed as humanly vulnerable.

The story of Mary is actually the story of Mary and Zosimus; as Stevenson observes, the *vita* "which intertwines the lives of Mary and Zosimus to their mutual advantage, represents them as not oppositional, but mutually supporting" (Stevenson 22). Mary's human frailty also provides a beneficial contrast to Zosimus's pompous perfection. The angel who sends Zosimus to Mary both praises his nature and pops his ego, implicitly suggesting that Zosimus is actually on a lower level of spiritual edification than Mary herself:

> Eala þu Zosimus . swiðe licwyrðlice þu gefyldest . swa þeah-hwæðere . nis nan man þe hine fulfremedne æteowe ; Miccle máre is þæt gewinn þæt þe toweard is . þonne þæt forð-gewitene þeah þu hit nyte . ác þæt þu mæge ongytan . and oncnawan hu miccle synd oþre hælo wegas ; Far út of þinum earde . and cum to þam mynstre þæt neah iordane is geset (4.56;6.57-62)[62].

The perfection Zosimus believes he already exhibits contrasts to the imperfection so readily admitted by a shame-faced Mary; moreoever, the angel implies that Zosimus has yet to face temptations of a similar severity, if not a similar nature, to Mary's own. Mary and Zosimus are lumped together as representatives of the struggles and temptations that face all of humanity. Mary's sin *is* sexual, and *is* uniquely feminine; but she is not, ultimately, a type of the female sinner. Instead, she embodies the challenging path of sin and salvation not experienced by Zosimus, but by much of humanity. Having been dominated by monasteries and monkly contemplation, Zosimus's life has been fortunate

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[62] "Oh, thou Zosimus! very well-pleasingly hast thou done; nevertheless there is no man that showeth himself perfect. Much greater is the conflict which is before thee than that which is passed, though thou know it not; but that thou mayest perceive and understand how great are other ways of salvation, go out of thy native country and come to the minster that is placed near Jordan" (5.57; 7.58-63).

in its relative isolation from worldly tempation and human communication. Mary, though she spends the majority of her life alone in a desert, is emblematic of both the problems and the rewards of human interaction and communication. Subject to far greater tempations and difficulties than Zosimus ever dared encounter, Mary overcomes her youthful sin. Just as her early life demonstrates problematic interaction between people, her last days dramatize the rewards of human communication.

Despite her isolated life, Mary is not alienated from the rest of Christianity. As Stevenson observes, "Her prayers are not only for herself; thus, for all her solitude, she is functional within, and for, the Christian community" (Stevenson 23)[63]. Moreover, Mary ultimately both desires and needs the communion that Zosimus's presence offers. Zosimus gives Mary the opportunity to tell her story to a human audience, to teach; he also allows Mary ceremonial reentry into the Church. Though Mary's eremitic lifestyle keeps her in continuous contact with God, Mary cannot, by herself, perform essential Christian rites – Zosimus offers Mary communion. Mary's imperfection and redemption thus demonstrate a path of salvation, not just for inherently flawed women, but for the whole of inherently flawed humanity – including even the pompous and apparently flawless Zosimus.

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[63] Notably, Hugh Magennis disagrees about Mary's relationship with the Christian community. Observing that there are significant thematic reasons for distinguishing Mary's *vita* from those actually authored by Ælfric, he observes that ""The celebration of such a life of asceticism and solitude, however, provides a radical contrast with the attitude to spirituality revealed in the other hagiographical texts in the *Lives of Saints* manuscript and in the writings of Ælfric in general. As has recently been shown, Ælfric's emphasis in his hagiographical works is very much in the directions of cultivating a coenobitic rather than eremitical ideal of monasticism, and one which is conscious of the responsibilities of the monastery to the outside world. Indeed, throughout Ælfric's writings, the monastery is seen primarily not as a place for individual contemplation but as a community. And the regulation of this community should be governed, for Ælfric, by the principle of moderation rather than asceticism. Ælfric's ideal of monasticism is not one which views the monastery as a fortress, whose gates should remain (as in the *Life of St Mary of Egypt*) firmly shut against the outside world. His ideal is not exclusively contemplative, but incorporates also an active and pastoral dimension. For Ælfric, the city of God includes the community outside the monastery as well as that within it" (Magennis "St. Mary of Egypt and Ælfric" 105). Ælfric definitely preferred community and did not favor the eremitic lifestyle; however, despite her years of isolated desert living, Mary does retain a connection, albeit tenuous, with the overall Christian community.

Afra, another prostitute saint, also suggests the potential of salvation for all humankind. Although Afra is known primarily as a German saint (Karras 4), the *Old English Martyology* contains an entry on her martyrdom:

> On þone eahtoðan dæg þæs monðes bið sancta Affran þrowung ond hire modor mid hire, þære noma wæs sancta Hilaria, ond hire þreo þeowena, þa wæron on naman sancta Digna ond sancta Eunomia ond sancta Eutropia. sio Affra wæs ærest forlegorwif mid hire þeowneum, hio þa eft þeah gelyfde gode ond fulwhite onfeng þurh þa wundor þe heo geseah æt þam biscope sanctus Narcissus. ac se dema Gaius mid witum heo ongon æft nedan to hæðenscipe ond cwæð hire to: 'Þu eart meretrix, þæt is forlegorwif, forðon þu eart fræmde from þara cristenra manna góde.' þa cwæð sancta Affra: 'Crist self sægde þæt he for þam synfullum monnum astige of heofenum on eorðan.' þa het se dema hi nacode bebinde to anum stenge ond hi bærnan mid fyre, ond heo þæs dyde gode þancunga ond hire gast onsende; ond cristene men gemitton hire lichoman gesunde æfter þam fýre ond bebyrgdon on þære æfteran mile fram þære ceastre þe is nemned Augusta.
>
> (*Old English Martyrology* 140.16-24; 142-1-6)[64].

Like Mary, Afra is a willful prostitute whose sins are characteristic of a pre-Christian state. Though Afra does not die Mary's natural death, her life indicates the same delineation between sin and salvation as Mary's.

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[64] "On the eight day of the month is the martyrdom of St. Afra and of her mother named St. Hilaria with her and of her three servants, who were named St. Digna, St. Eunomia, and St. Eutropia. This Afra was first a harlot together with her servants, yet afterwards she believed in God and received baptism in consequence of the miracles that she saw performed by the bishop St. Narcissus. But Gaius the judge tried by tortures to compel her again to become a pagan and said to her: 'Thou are meretrix, that is, a harlot: therefore thou art a stranger to the God of the Christian people.' St. Afra said: 'Christ himself said that for the sinful people he had descended from heaven on earth.' Then the judge commanded her to be bound naked to a pole and to be burnt with fire; she offered God thanks for this and sent forth her spirit. Christian men found her body unhurt after the burning and buried it two miles from the town that is called Augusta" (*Old English Martyrology* 141.16-25; 143.1-6).

Afra's life is also particularly noteworthy because of her response to her torturers, who are convinced that the sins of her past continue to affect and define her present nature. In other words, once a harlot, always a harlot. Interestingly, as in Mary's situation, Afra's treatment of her own body is characteristic of a pagan, un-Christian state. The sexuality of her sin is not explicitely tied to her feminity, but to her state of unbelief; once Christian, Afra gains control over her body's willful, animalistic tendences. The manner of death is reminisent of the sexual nature of her sin; suggestively, her body is naked and burned. However, Afra's body is not damaged by the flames; it is as sound as it was before her death. Afra's conversion elevates her spirit over her body and renders her sins powerless to determine her future.

Afra also allies herself to both the purity of Christ and the transgressions of her fellow humans. Like Mary, Afra adopts a teaching role, though her pupil is much less apt; she responds to her torturer's verbal attacks by implicitely admitting her past sins, but also arguing that it was for "synfullum monnum," of which she is certainly one, that Christ stepped down from heaven in the first place. Afra's sin does not set her apart from humanity, but connects her to it. Like Mary, Afra's sin is indicative of a fault, a weakness, mended by the conversion process. Thus, while the sexual sins of Afra and Mary are tied to the femininity of the two saints, their erring ways do not result in a repudiation of their bodies. Neither Mary nor Afra become any less female after their conversions; Mary still feels the need to cover her body from Zosimus's eyes, and Afra's torturer makes a point of stripping her naked before completing her execution. Moreoever, Afra's body, the same body that was prostituted, remains intact after burning and Afra's death. Her female body is not marred, not destroyed, and not rendered sexless – despite both past sexual sins and death. Mary's and Afra's sins, therefore, suggest not an intrinsic problem with the female body itself, but with the human ability to govern the body. Only after Mary and Afra convert, only after they experience their religious epiphanies and gain contact with divine authority and power, are they able to successfully

regulate and understand their bodies. Once Mary and Afra convert, their sins, sexual or not, no longer define their natures. Indeed, the very fact that they did sin – that they experienced such excessive and degrading temptation – connects them to the rest of humanity. Thus, while Mary and Afra's sins may at first seem essentially female and representative of female flaws, the very extremity of those sins actually allows them to signify human sins in general, not just female shortcomings.

The treatment of Anglo-Saxon prostitute saints demonstrates a distinction between the sinner's actual status and the sexual sins of which they are guilty. Additionally, prostitute saints, such as Mary and Afra, represent the combined human potential for both sin and salvation. Transvestite saints, including Eugenia, Eufrasia, and Thecla, indicate the same mild view of the female body, but they do so in different ways. Transvestite saints differ from reformed-prostitute saints in more than one important respect. Although their actions, like those of the harlots Mary and Afra, involve the manipulation and appearance of the female body, the nature of those actions is obviously different than Mary and Afra's specifically sexual sin. Still, transvestism is something Eugenia and Eufrasia, from the *Lives of the Saints*, and Thecla, from the *Old English Martyrology* voluntarily do to themselves, not something done to them. Another important difference in the "sins" of transvestism versus the definite crimes of prostitution involves the stage at which these actions occur. Mary of Egypt and Afra reform *after* conversion; the transvestism of Eugenia, Eufrasia and Thecla is a direct result of the conversion experience.

However, like the former prostitutes, transvestite saints occupy a position at once divinely sanctioned and socially prohibited. Biblical and patristic writings blatantly prohibit cross-dressing[65], yet it is not that uncommon a tradition among *female* saints.

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[65] Szarmach, for example, in "Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia," observes that "Deuteronomy may condemn transvestism and St. Paul may rail against it, but Eugenia nevertheless triumphs unto salvation as do those converted by her moral ways" (147).

The process by which a female saint adopts male garb and, consequently, a male identity has almost universally been regarded as a renunciation of femininity and a denunciation of the female body. Vern Bullough confidently compares the transformation to "a normal longing not unlike the desire of a peasant to become a noble" (1392), commenting on the lower status and position afforded Medieval women, and Paul Szarmach reads the *lives* of both Eugenia and Eufrasia as denial and refutation of female sexuality. However, the Anglo-Saxon female saints Eugenia, Eufrasia and Thecla also suggest an important distinction between the female body and the female identity.

Recent theoretical work has suggested that "gender" ought not to be quickly and simply equated with the biological sex of the body. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body, and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (179).

Gender, she suggests, is different from biological sex; gender and identity are social constructions, imposed upon a body and performed through various acts (181-90). Butler's transformation of feminist theory has ramifications for Medieval literature as well.

> Referring to Butler's *Bodies That Matter*, Anke Bernau observes that Judith Butler's questions about the relationship between sex and gender, though formulated in relation to a twentieth-century debate, are pertinent to Medieval texts as well. Butler questions the distinctions made between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' – terms which imply a 'natural' material suface

> (the body) upon which cultural meanings (gender) are later inscribed [. . . .] In other words, the gendered meanings of the Medieval body, like those of the modern body, are inseparable from their social meanings [. . . .] The body and its gender were inseparable since physical markers were interpreted as signs of 'inner' character traits and vice versa. (37).

Incidents of hagiographic transvestism, however, suggest that the Medieval body and its gender *can* be separated. As Eugenia and Eufrasia[66], two of the virgin saints found in the *Lives of Saints* manuscript, and Thecla, of the *Old English Martyrology*, indicate, the essential identity and nature of the female saint can change, but her body remains constantly and permanently feminine. While Bullough's assertion that female saints naturely seek to become more perfect by becoming more male is in some ways correct, it is also too simplistic a model. These female saints do assume a masculine identity, but this new masculinity co-exists with the persistent femininity of their bodies, which, though temporarily disguised as male, are not permanently altered and are eventually revealed – restored – as feminine. Surprisingly, once the female saint has experienced this transformation of identity, the emphatic persistence of her body is not criticized; indeed, her body – and the femininity of that body – is treated as a benign reality.

Though the lives of Eugenia and Eufrasia are roughly parallel, following essentially the same steps (transvestism adopted to protect virginity and allow participation in the Church, lifelong piety, eventual revelation of the saint's feminity, and either immediate or delayed death), Ælfric's tale of Eugenia is by far the more complex and interesting of the two portrayals of transvesite saints. Still, Eufrasia's *vita* contains several useful points and offers a good backdrop to Ælfric's more intricate work.

Much more so than in Eugenia's life, Eufrasia's *vita* emphasizes the masculine, and thus social, authority and approval underlying Eufrasia's transvestism. She

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[66] The *vita* of Eufrasia or Euphrosyne/Euphrosyna is one of the non-Ælfrician saint's lives found in the *Lives of Saints* manuscript.

effectively receives permission before every stage of her actions, and her transvestism, though still socially surprising and certainly disruptive in the context of the situation, is much less transgressive than Eugenia's. Eufrasia is the only, and much-longed for, child of a Christian man named Paphnutius; she spends much of her youth learning through "halgum gewritum . and godcundrum rædingum" (336.26-27)[67]. Eufrasia also grows up in close contact with a neighboring abbot and his monks, and may, in fact, be regarded as the daughter of two *men*: her father and his friend the abbot. As Szarmach comments, "The vagaries of OE pronoun reference allow the reading that Euphrosyne is daughter to father and abbot, a biological impossibility of course but (eventually) a thematic reality for these 'father figures' ("St. Euphrosyne" 355). Even Eufrasia's transvestism may be attributed in great part to the advice of one of those monks, who tells the vacillating Eufrasia

> Eala swustor ne geþafa ðu þæt ænig man þinne lichaman be-smite . ne ne syle þu þinne wlite to ænigum hospe . ac bewedde þe sylfe criste . se þe mæg for þisum gewitenlicum þingum . syllan þæt heofon-lice rice . ac fár nu to mynstre digellice . and alege þine woruldlican gegyrlan . and gegyre þe mid munuc-reafe . þonne miht þu swa yþest ætberstan (340.77-82)[68].

Indeed, a different monk actually divests Eufrasia of her worldly garments and cuts off her hair, allowing her admission to the brotherhood. Consequently, Eufrasia is encapsulated in a masculine world, figuratively born of two men and consecrated into the religious world by other men. Her identity has already been determined by her environment, by her education, and by her teachers. It is not an accident that Eufrasia's mother dies; female culture is not a formative part of Eufrasia's interests or her

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[67] "holy writings and godly readings" (337).

[68] "O sister! suffer thou not that any man defile thy body, neither give thou thy beauty to any shame; but wed thyself to Christ, who for these transitory things can give thee the heavenly kingdom. But go now to a minster secretly, and lay aside thy worldly garments and clothe theyself with the monastic habit; thus mayest thou most easily escape" (339, 341).

schooling. From her birth, she is inundated with teachings generally regarded as masculine; her body is the sole marker of her femininity.

Upon gaining admittance to a monastery, Eufrasia adopts the name Smaragdus and the identity of a wealthy eunuch. Notably, the inheritance that she promises the abbot is her own; as her father's only child, she has the hope of eventually gaining and giving it to the monastery. Unfortunately, because Smaragdus is apparently no less physically appealing a eunuch than Eufrasia the young woman, many of the monks are tempted[69], and the abbot soon isolates Eufrasia alone in an empty cell.

Here, however, Eufrasia prospers, and soon offers counsel to her grieving, and unknowing, father, who believes his daughter lost to some ill end. Paphnutius is also the cause of Eufrasia's eventual revelation of her true femininity. After thirty-eight years, Smaragdus/Eufrasia is dying, and Paphnutius is inconsolable, believing that he has lost both his daughter and his friend. At the very end of her life, Eufrasia reveals that "God ælmihtig hæfð wel gedihtod min earme líf and gefylled minne willan þæt ic moste þone ryne mines lifes werlice ge-endian . næs þurh mine mihta ac þurh þæs fultum þe me geheold fram þæs feondes searwum . and nu geddodum ryne me is gehealden rihtwisnysse weg wuldor-beah . Nelle þu leng beon hoh-ful be þinre dehter eufrosinan . soðlice ic earme eom sio sylfe . and þu eart pafnuntius min fæder." (352.286-292)[70]. Once again, Eufrasia attributes her actions to some higher power, and despite the obvious emotion of the scene, Eufrasia does not neglect to finish her speech with a request that her father deed all of his possessions – her inheritance – to the monastery, thus fulfilling the promise she made to the abbot years before. Eufrasia also asks that her father not

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[69] Szarmach wonders whether these temptations are homosexual or heterosexual ("St. Euphrosyne 358).

[70] "God Almighty hath well ordered my poor life and fulfilled my desire, that I might manfuly end the course of my life. It was not by my own might, but through the assistance of Him who preserved me fro the snares of the fiend; and now, my course being ended, the glorious crown of righteousness is kept for me. Be no longer careful about thy daughter Euphrosyne. Verily I, miserable one, am she herself; and thou art Paphutius my father" (353).

reveal her identity until *after* her death; even now, in the last moments of her life, she is careful to avoid public disclosure of her femininity.

Interestingly, Eufrasia's long-suffering father is not at all impressed with the intensity with which she protected her secret. Had he known, he vows, he would have willingly lived with her in her monastery – and certainly suffered less. But the wonder he does feel is shared by the monks who at last discover Eufrasia's womanhood: "þa hí ða onfundon þæt heo wæs wif-hades man . þa wuldrodan hí on god se þe on þam wiflican . and tydran hade swilce wundra wyrcað"[71]. Eufrasia's transvestism, thus, is treated carefully by the *vita*'s unknown author; it is only on the surface a reprehensible act – although it does disrupt the chastity and purity of the monks, who are after all frailer than they ought to be. Eufrasia's transvestism is carefully constructed under both the Church and divine authority; though God receives ultimate approbation and praise for the wonder of her status, Eufrasia herself consistently acted at the prompting and with the guidance and permission of monks. But Eufrasia's transvestism is also not a direct result of her own femininity. Eufrasia does not "become male" because of a fault in her own body or identity, but because of social pressures and the desires of others. The extent of Eufrasia's transformation should also be carefully considered. Szarmach strongly argues that "Euphrosyne 'unwomans' herself in her transformation to sainthood in taking on a monk's appearance. Such a metamorphosis is not sensational: it is thematic, for she/he is becoming one with Christ and is achieving the heavenly state where there is neither male nor female." ("St. Euphrosyne" 360). But Eufrasia's transformation is not so absolute as that. Eufrasia's transformation allows her to express the identity generated and nutured by her dual male "parents" – her natural father and her spiritual father – and by her own education, but it does not alter her basic physical femininity. Nor does the story suggest a moral reason to change Eufrasia's physicality. Her transvestism is ultimately a calculated

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[71] "Then when they found that she was a woman, they gloried in God, Who in the womanly and tender nature worketh such wonders" (355).

act that does not change her body, but her identity, gaining her admittance to a male brotherhood and protection of her chastity. Eufrasia's basic identity, her underlying femininity, does not change, and her body's femininity is finally publically reinstated.

Indeed, the *vita* eventually requires Eufrasia's female body to be revealed both to her father and to the public at large; though she may have acted a "male" part for much of her life, it is as a woman that she dies, and as a woman that her reputation is celebrated. It is also her female body that performs posthumuous miracles. By touching and kissing the corpse (with, hopefully, a properly pious attitude), the vision of a one-eyed monk is fully restored. Additionally, Eufrasia's female body is never treated as intrinsically flawed. It is as a *eunuch* that she inspires the wrongful desire of the monks, not as a woman, and the *vita* carefully comments that this is not really Eufrasia's fault, but, instead, attributable to the dual action of the devil and to the monks' own unfortunate and unexpected human frailty. Eufrasia's transvestism, thus, is not as socially reprehensible as might be expected. Her actions are conscripted throughout by a superior authority, whether divine or monastic. But neither is Eufrasia's transvestism the result of a flaw in her female body. Eufrasia's transvestism permits her to alter and improve a gendered identity that has little to do with her underlying physical femininity. However, Eufrasia's *vita* is limited in a number of ways. Its plot is very basic, and its treatment of transvestism not ultimately very daring. And though it does not condemn or criticize Eufrasia's basic femininity, neither does it give her a great deal of agency, or, indeed, render her a likeable or admirable character.

Ælfric's Eugenia is a different story indeed. Eugenia's family is not Christian, and she is not an only child; she has two brothers. Eugenia also actively seeks Christianity on her own, not at the behest or introduction of a friend or family member. Finding Christians, Eugenia adopts male garb as a precaution, in order to protect herself. As in Eufrasia's story, Eugenia's transvestism receives divine approval, though not divine inspiration. Advised by a bishop to persist in her male garb, eventually Eugenia is

chosen as abbot. Eugenia's new identity is so successful that Melantia, a widow, tries to seduce the abbot. Eugenia, of course, refuses Melantia, and the scorned woman reports the abbot to the ruler of the city, Eugenia's father, who believes Melantia's twisted story. Eugenia then triumphantly reveals her identity:

> Hwæt ðá eugenia seo æþele fæmne .
> cwæð þæt heo wolde hi sylfe be-diglian .
> and criste anum hyre clænnyse healdan .
> on mægðhade wuniende . mannum uncuð .
> and forðy underfænge æt fruman þa gyrlan .
> wær-lices hades . and wurde ge-efsod .
> Æfter þysum wordum heo to-tær hyre gewædu .
> and æt-ewde hyre breost . þam breman philippe .
> and cwæð him tó . þu eart mín fæder .
> [. . . .] and ic soðlice eom
> eugenia gehaten . þin agen dohtor.
> (38.227-239)[72].

Melantia's lust and anger require Eugenia's revelation and the end of her transvestism, and Melantia certainly serves as a foil to Eugenia's purity. Szarmach, in fact, comments that "Melantia, her cold and calculating viciousness exposed, is undisguised woman at her moral worst, contrasting with the de-sexed Eugenia" ("Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia" 151). But Melantia is not just proof of the lustful state of fallen woman; she indicates the peculiar desireability of the female saint, the tendency of both men and women to regard the female saint with hateful lust. Eufrasia, after all, is

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[72] "Well then, Eugenia, the noble woman, said that she had desired to keep herself secret, and to preserve her purity to Christ alone, living in virginity, unknown to man, and therefore at the first had assumed the robes of a man's garb, and had had her hair shorn. After these words she tore apart her robes, and revealed her breast to the angry Philop, and said unto him: 'Thou art my father ! [. . . .] and verily I am named Eugenia, thine own daughter." (39).

subject to the same desire – but manifested by men, and monks at that. This lust, directed at the female saint, is crucial in understanding the *vita* of female saints in which the rape motif plays a large part. Here, however, Melantia offers proof of the success of Eugenia's identity transformation; she is believed male by men *and* women.

Significantly, Eugenia's story does not end with the literal disclosure of her femininity; she does not suddenly die. Instead, Eugenia transits back into society as a woman, but she maintains the same sacrosanct identity that her transvestism allowed her. Paul Szarmach suggests that "Eugenia is repudiating her own sexuality, which is *de rigueur* for those who join 'sex-negative' Christianity, and she is presumably changing her social status" (Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia 148). But this argument of renunciation does not account for the fact that Eugenia bares her female body and is restored to femininity in the eyes of her family, Church, and society. Eugenia, like Eufrasia, indicates a split between the female identity and the female body; she is able to maintain the more masculine identity her transvestism allowed her to present, but her female body is a reality that ultimately cannot be denied or changed. Szarmach ultimately suggests that the *vita* represents an increasing movement toward sexlessness. He does not finally argue that Eugenia's *Life* denies women's sexuality; instead, he says,

> . . . it is Galatians 3:28 and its complex view of sexuality that is operating in the deep structure of Ælfric's *Life*. Eugenia has un-womaned herself, Protus and Jacintus are un-manned, and these three sexless saints anticipate on earth the state in heaven. Melantia and Pomepeius are too much of this world in seeking sexual satisfaction, while Claudia as chaste widow and Basilla as virgin are ready for the beatific life. ("Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia" 155).

Eugenia's purity also results in the conversion of her family and many others. Eugenia eventually moves to Rome and is instrumental in the conversion of Basilla. Significantly, Eugenia's mother goes with her, and, as her daughter converts virgins, so does the mother convert pure widows. It is in Rome, too, that Eugenia, along with many

of her friends and Basilla, is martyred, on the day of Christ's birth. However, the saints of Eugenia's *vita* do not indicate denials of the female body. While identities may move towards a masculine or, as Szarmach would have it, sexless character, Eugenia's body clearly maintains its female form and characteristics.

Eugenia's chaotic *vita* underscores several more points. First, transvestism *is* a transgressive act, socially and religiously. Both the lives of Eugenia and Eufrasia suggest a considerable need to justify the saints' actions, framing them within the sanction of God, suggesting that, without that authorization, their transvestism would indeed be problematic and punishable. Unlike Eufrasia, though, Eugenia consistently acts on her own, without much advice or guidance from others. Eugenia adopts transvestism as a practical solution to her desire to learn more about Christianity and to ensure her own safety. She chooses to reveal herself to her father, and she does so with greater willingness and generosity than Eufrasia. Eugenia's life also does not end with the cessation of her transvestism; she continues to be an active force in the Christian world until her martyrdom. Finally, Eugenia's transvestism does not indicate a need to erase her femininity, but to adapt to the social realities, pressures, and dangers of the world around her. Eugenia's identity does change – her virginity is essential to her relationship with Christ, and she becomes a teacher and participant in the Christian faith – but her physical self, her body, does not. Indeed, the *vita* takes a very mild view of the female body, emphasizing its persistence in the face of intellectual change. Both Eugenia and Eufrasia are women, and though they successfully alter their behavioral genders, their bodies are stable and constant.

The *Old English Martyrology* also contains an intriguing rendition of a transvestite saint, written in its consistently matter-of-fact and quixotic style. Thecla, like Eugenia and Eufrasia, adopts male clothing in response to social dangers. But Thecla's *vita*, in many ways, is reversed, following almost the opposite of the usual progression of the female saint and the sanctified transvestite. Thecla, as is common with female saints,

persists in her virginity, with one interesting variation: she adopts virginity *after* her marriage:

> On þone ilcan dæg bið sancte Teclan tid þære halgan fæmnan. seo wæs in þære ceastre Iconio, on heo wæs þær bewedded æðelum brydguman. þa gehyrde heo Puales lare þæs apostoles, þa gelyfde heo góde ond awunode in hyre mægðhade. ond forðon heo arefnde monigu witu : hy mon wearp in byrnende fýr, ond þæt hio nolde byrnan, ond hy mon sende in wildra deora menigo, in leona ond in berena, ond þa hie noldon slitan; hy mon wearp in sædeora seað, ond þa hyre ne sceðedon ; hy mon band on wilde fearras, ond þa hyre ne geegledon. ond þa æt neahstan heo scear hyre feax swa swa weras ond gegyrede hy mid weres hrægle ond ferde mid Paulum, þam godes ærendracan. Tecle wæs swa myhtigu fæmne þæt heo geþingode to gode sumre hæðenre fæmnan gæste hwylce hwegu ræste in þære ecan worulde. (*Old English Martyrology* 176.6-18)[73].

Thecla also reverses both the usual order of torture-then-death and transvestism-then-revelation. Thecla is repeatedly tortured, and though it is fairly common for a saint to experience torture without actual pain or death, it is not equally common for the saint to survive that experience. Typically, saints withstand all manner of torture as a manifestation of God's power and the saint's own purity, and then without much pomp or circumstance join God in heaven. Thecla does not complete this pattern. She cannot be harmed, and so, apparently to avoid further bother, Thecla adopts male garb and joins

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[73] "On the same day is the festival of the holy woman St. Thecla. She lived in the town of Iconium, and there she was wedded to a noble bridegroom. When she heard the teaching of the apostle Paul, she believed in God and remained a virgin. For this she suffered many tortures: she was thrown into a burning fire, and it would not harm her; she was brought into the midst of wild beasts, of lions and of bears, and they would not hurt her; she was thrown into a pit full of sea-beasts, and they did not harm her: she was bound to wild bulls, and they did not injure her. At last she cut off her hair like a man, put on men's clothes and went with Paul, the messenger of God. Thecla was such a powerful woman that by her intercession she procured from God some rest in the eternal world for the soul of a pagan woman" (*Old English Martyrology* 176.6-18).

Paul. Nor does Thecla's admittedly short *vita* end with any revelation of her true identity. From the beginning, her femininity is never in doubt; in fact, it seems to be the primary cause for her tortures. Atypically, Thecla's *vita* suggests the possiblity of maintaining both that femininity and transvestism at the same time – a shocking possibility admitted only by Thecla's great holiness and power. For Thecla does not relinquish her femininity after she puts on male clothing. Though she has joined Paul, the last comment in the vita dwells upon her connections to other women. Through her prayers, Thecla intercedes for a dead pagan woman, gaining her soul some leniency. Though Thecla is a transvestite saint, her concerns remain with women, even – or perhaps especially – pagan women.

Both Eugenia and Eufrasia – and ostensibly even Thecla – adopt male clothing for protection, yet both Eugenia and Eufrasia find themselves subject to the sexual desires of those around them. Ironically, they find themselves falling victim to the very lusts that their transvestism was designed to avoid. Though male monks lust after Eufrasia and a raunchy widow craves Eugenia, both saints are particularly vulnerable to the sexual desires of others, both male and female. In this, these transvestite saints bear similarities to female saints who also find themselves in transgressively sexual situations: those female saints who are almost raped or whose bodies endure metaphorical enactments of rape.

These rape or almost-rape victims do not, of course, find themselves in the same sort of transgressively sexual situations as either prostitute or transvestite saints; these latter women willingly act upon their own bodies. In contrast, female saints who find themselves in literal or metaphorical danger of rape do not cause or willingly precipitate that threat; instead, they find themselves objects of others' hatred and lusts and unwilling participants in brothels and bedrooms. Although, as the heirs of Greco-Roman and early Christian misogyny, Medieval writers do reveal a periodic tendency to regard a rape victim as culpable in the offense, Anglo-Saxon hagiography demonstrates no such intent.

Instead, hagiography – particularly that of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* – regards rape as a sexual sin, but one in which the agressor, not always male, is completely at fault. Such saints' lives, especially those of Agnes, Agatha, and Lucy, emphasize the sexuality of the saints. These female saints are not neutered and they are not masculinized; they are female and remain female. But their sexuality is redirected; in a manner reminiscent of the mysticism of the later Medieval period, these female saints direct their desires towards God, and sometimes even describe what amounts to a physical relationship. But these saints also find themselves the objects of very human desire. This lust as well as the manner in which these saints are dispatched to their maker implies that femininity is at the very heart of these women's sanctity. They are female, and their persecutors specifically and intentionally attack that femininity. Consequently, these saints not only represent a persistently mild view of the female body, they also suggest that the femininity of the saints themselves is holy.

Agnes is only the third female saint depicted in the *Lives of Saints*, but her life is the first of a triad of related female saints' lives. Agnes's *vita* is quickly followed by those of Agatha and Lucy, who were also significant in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*. Agnes also provides a solid foundation for the accounts of these latter two saints, for she best articulates the nature of her relationship with Christ. Agnes translates all things of worldly importance or status into spiritual goods; likewise, she describes a very physical relationship with Christ. Agnes blatantly states, "Ic hæbbe oðerne lufiend" (170.27),[74] and she means it literally. She explains Christ's appeal to her scorned mortal suitor in terms that he can understand and that an Anglo-Saxon audience would appreciate: Christ has given Agnes rich jewelry and clothing, priceless stones and gems to circle her hand and neck. Moreover, Ages argues that her relationship with Christ has indeed been consummated:

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[74] "I have another lover," (171.27).

His bryd-bed me is gearo . nu iú mid dreamum .

His mædenu me singað . mid geswegum stemnum .

Of his muðe ic under-feng meoluc . and hunig .

Nú iú ic eom beclypt . mid his clænum earmum .

His fægera lichama is minum geferlæht .

And his blod ge-glende mine eah-hringas .

[. . . .]

Þonne ic hine lufige . ic beo eallunga clæne .

þonne Ic hine hreppe . ic beo unwemme .

ðonne Ic hine funder-fó . ic beo mæden forð .

and þær bærn ne ateoriað . on ðam bryd-lace .

Þær is eacnung buton sare . and singallic wæstmbærnyss.

(172.43-62) [75].

Agnes's description of the physicality of her relationship with Christ is not surprising in the light of a rich Christian tradition including, of course, the *Song of Songs*, but it does emphasize the femininity of Agnes's body and her own awareness of her form. It also sexualizes any relationship Agnes, or, for that matter, Agatha or Lucy, might have with Christ. As virgins, they are still sexual beings, still female, and Agnes has placed both her virginity and her faith in a sexual arena. Agnes is thus doubly vulnerable to a sexual attack; first, because she has refused a mortal lover, and secondly because she has not renounced her sexuality.

Agnes's infuriated and rejected suitor reacts accordingly, stripping her naked and conveying her to a house of harlots. God, however, protects Agnes in all ways; she

[75] "His bridal-bed hath been now of a long time prepared for me with joys, His maidens sing to me with melodious voice. From his mouth I have received milk and honey; now already I am embraced with His pure arms; His fair body is united to mine, and His blood hath adorned my eybrows (*lit*. eye-rings). [. . . .] When I love Him, I am wholly pure; when I touch Him, I am unstained, when I receive Him, I am still a virgin, and there, in the bridal, no child lacketh. There is conception without sorrow, and perpetual fruitfulness" (173.43-62).

grows a furry pelt, in order to hide her nakedness from the sight of others, and an angel is sent to protect her and clothing to cover her. Agnes shines so brightly that even the Prefect's son's mind turns away from rape at the sight of her glowing countenance. Failing to rape Agnes, her frustrated tormentors eventually kill her.

Agatha's *vita* follows a similar path; she too is roughly deposited in what amounts to a whorehouse, and her persecutors have no more success than Agnes's tormentors. Agatha's subsequent torments are more thoroughly detailed than in Agnes's *vita*, however, and her tortures serve as enactments of rape. Her breast is cut from her body, which serves not to deny her feminity but to accentuate it, for that same breast is also restored by divine might. The breast itself is generally regarded as a fundamental symbol of female sexuality and maternity (Heffernan 283). By directing their attention towards her breast, Agatha's tormentors are attacking the entire woman. Agatha's body, therefore, is the principal concern of her *vita*, and her attackers focus on the most obviously female features of that body.

Lucy's *vita* is the third and last in this series of assaulted female saints and is the most extreme, culminating the ideas progressively developed in the previous two lives. In this life, Lucy's attacker clearly explains the rationale behind raping or attempting to rape a female saint: "Ic hate þe ardlice læden . to þæra myltestrena huse . þæt ðu þinne mægð-had forleose . þæt se . halga gast þe fram fleo . ðonne þu fullice byst gescynd ." (214.81-83)[76]. Lucy's response, "Ne miht þu gebigan minne willan to þe . swa hwæt swa þu minum lichaman dest . ne mæg þæt belimpan to me" (214.92-93)[77], illustrates the disjunction between body and spirit early emphasized by Aldhelm, but it also suggests one further point. Lucy's body *is* subject to mortal authority; her body can be attacked physically. Lucy herself admits the possibility that the proposed rape may be successful.

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[76] "I shall straightway bid men lead thee to the house of harlots, that thou mayest lose thy maidenhood, that the Holy Ghost may flee from thee, when thou art foully dishonoured" (215.81-83).

[77] "Thou canst not bend my will to thy purpose; whatever thou mayest do to my body, that cannot happen to me" (215.92-93).

She also denies, of course, that the rape will have any valid spiritual outcome; paradoxically, harming the physical aspect of her sanctity, her body, will only render her more spiritually pure. Lucy is not literally raped; the limits of the genre do not allow such to happen to one divinely inspired and protected. But a rape is figuratively enacted upon the maiden's body. The Holy Ghost will not allow Lucy to be transported to the house of harlots, an action unsurprisingly in keeping with her own willful refusal to submit, no matter what physical indignities she must endure. Her attackers finally "Ac heton acwellan þæt clæne mæden mid swurde . heo wearð þa gewundod . þæt hire wand se innoð út " (216.126-127)[78]. Lucy's abdomen is pierced by the sword; her body is violated.

These three saints, Agnes, Agatha and Lucy, purposely follow each other within the *Lives of Saints*, but their vita are connected by more than space on the written page. Each saint is specifically attacked on the basis of her sexuality, resulting in the dual effects of emphasizing her femininity and endorsing it. Most martyred saints, male and female, are physically attacked; because they challenge the corporeal world and its leaders, they are assaulted accordingly[79]. Agnes, Agatha, and Lucy, however, endure more precise physical violence; their suffering has a purposely sexual aspect. They do, of course, refuse marriage and intimacy with mere men, and their punishments do fit that crime. But the assaults upon Agnes, Agatha and Lucy also emphasize the reality of the women. They are not just saints, inviolable and sacrosanct, the especial chosen of God; they are also mortal women. The fact that they can be attacked sexually, that rape for

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[78] "but they bade men kill the pure maid with the sword. Then was she wounded, so that her bowels fell out" (217. 126-127).

[79] Sarah Salih, though she does not regard rape as a necessary element of the saints of the *Katherine* group, does argue that "The choice of the virgin identity, then, requires torture scenes [. . . .] Their chosen virginal identity requires an unambiguous statement of their virginal bodies, and it is torture, or, more precisely, their behavior under torture, that can provide this. The virgin body is constituted by suffering and resisting torture. Torture reveals a body that is un-feminine, unashamed, impenetrable, miraculously self-healing" ("Performing Virginity" 109). The tortures undergone by Agnes, Agatha and Lucy, however, are specifically sexualized, and administered within the context of rape. These tortures serve to enhance rather than deny their femininity.

them as Lucy admits is a real possibility, connects them to Anglo-Saxon women. Additionally, even as these *lives* emphasize the physicality of the saints, even as these *lives* suggest that those bodies are not intrinsically flawed, they also separate the saint from her form. What may happen to the body, as happens to Lucy's body, does not affect the nature of the saint herself. She is not culpable in her abuse.

Instead, the fault for this sexually transgressive act – rape – is firmly attributed to the perpetrator. Lucy's attacker, almost immediately after her stabbing, is dragged before her in chains and eventually beheaded. While that brings a certain degree of satisfaction or poetic justice to the ending of the *vita*, it also emphasizes the guilt of Lucy's tormentor. However, it also confuses the question of agency. Lucy is attacked on the basis of her female body, and she does not actively resist. Indeed, Lucy does nothing to avoid her fate. Yet, despite the fact that Lucy is constantly acted upon, objectified as a sexual object in the eyes of her accusers, and violated if not actually raped, she does not lack self-awareness or power. Lucy is completely subject to the authority of her society; she is literally as well as figuratively constrained by its laws. Within that society, however, Lucy defines herself according to Christian precepts and ethics. Despite her lack of temporal authority, Lucy presents herself as independent, capable of deciding her own fate within the bounds of her society. Lucy does not react against social authority; she does not resist its control. But Lucy is not alone subject to overarching social boundaries, and she does not die alone.

Paschasius, Lucy's attacker, has been throughout the *Life* a man of power, the controlling and active force in Lucy's suffering. Ultimately, though, he finds himself just as subject to social control as Lucy herself. Paschasius is not executed just for hurting Lucy; his actions apparently constitute a pattern: "he wæs æe ge-wreged for his wælhreowum dædum . to romaniscre leode . þe ða ealle land geweolden . He wearð þa

gebroht on bendum to rome . and þa witan heton hine beheafdian" (218.141-144)[80]. There is a nice symmetry in the timing here; it is fortunate that Paschasius has been chained in time for Lucy to see him so fallen. His punishment, however, is independent of the crime he commits in this *vita*; the text specifically states that "he wæs ær ge-wreged," he was accused earlier, suggesting that past misdeeds have finally caught up with him. Both Lucy and Paschasius, thus, are equally subject to the laws and desires of their societies. Lucy does not successfully resist; she does not resist at all. But she nonetheless has agency.

These three *lives*, therefore, offer significant suggestions for interpreting the sexually assaulted female saint. First, these saints are sexual beings, whose sexuality does not expire with the maintenance of their virginity. To some extent, the persistence of that sexuality determines the nature of the violence they endure. But their attacks also distinguish their female bodies from the evil of the violence they endure. Though they are assaulted on the basis of their femininity, their bodies themselves are not at fault; the women themselves are not culpable. These three *lives* also place the women saints on a more equal social footing with their attackers. In some ways, these martyred saints are the most victimized of any female saint; their bodies are rendered powerless through their attacks. But these *lives* both separate the saints from their bodies and identify power as a social fiction. The last of these *lives*, the *vita* of Lucy, contrasts Lucy's suffering with Paschasius's control. Finally, though, both Lucy and Paschasius are subject to social forces and authority; both deaths are determined by power outside their grasp. Lucy, however, invited her own end.

It is not unusual for a female saint to be placed in a transgressively sexual situation. In most cases, her sanctity grants her "permission" to violate the accepted social order; in any case, her achieved holiness nullifies any valid social objections to her

[80] "He had previously been accused, for his cruel deeds, to the Roman people, who governed all the land. He was then brought in bonds to Rome, and the senators commanded him to be beheaded" (219.141-144).

past or present disorderly conduct. Yet, prostitution, transvestism, and rape all remain transgressive situations, situations which emphasize rather than deny the sexuality and femininity of the saint, situations that ultimately enhance social consciousness of the saint as female. Prostitution, transvestism, and rape are also particularly sexual situations, which either depend upon the revelation of the saint's feminity or social exploitation of it. Sigificantly, these transgressively sexual conditions and circumstances do not repudiate the physical body of the female saint. Instead, they suggest a distinction between form and spirit or intellect; the saint's mind, not her body, may become asexual or masculine, but her body remains permanently female. It is this female body that is constantly revealed to society, repeatedly stripped bare either by force or self-inclination. It is this body, too, that effects wonders and miracles even after the saint herself has departed. And it is this body, this female form, which cannot permanently be disguised as male and stubbornly resists change.

Edith Williams's article, "What's So New about the Sexual Revolution?" suggests that sexuality was an active component of the make-up of the Anglo-Saxon woman from the eighth to tenth centuries. "Even on such slight evidence," she says, referring to the four riddles she examines in her article, "we get a picture of her as a spirited individual, fully capable of physical and sexual gratification in this most important area of human life" (144). It should not be surprising that the female saint, like the secular woman, also maintains sexuality as an important part of her character. Despite her virginity, the female saint is an entirely sexual being, understood as such by both her adversaries and her friends.

Chapter 4

Dying to Live:

The Body of the Female Saint in Pain and Death

"Ic þæt geswerige þurh eorne hyge:
þone ahangnan god, þæt ðu hungre scealt
for cneomagum cwylmed weorðan,
butan þu forlæte þa leasunga
ond me sweotollice soð gecyðe."

Elene speaking to Judas, *Elene*, 685-690[81]

. . . þa yrsode he ond bebealh hyne ond het hig aþenian on yren bed ond hig begeotan myd weallende leade, ond hyre þæt ne geeglode. þa het he hig don on fyrenne ofen, þa ne dederede hyre þæt. þa het he hys leasere hig behamelian ond hig þa nacode geunarian; þa cwæð heo: 'ic wat for hwæne ic þys þrowige, efne for Cryste.' þa het he hig lædan to beheafdunge: þa cwæð heo to him: 'ic cume eft on domes dæg ond þe þonne wrege beforan Crystes þrymsetle, ond þu þonne ongistst myne ansyne.' ond sona swa hig man heafdode, þa com þær fæger culfre of þam lychaman ond fleah ymbe þone lychaman ond hyne freode ond þa fleoh to heofenum; ond hyre lychama resteð on Barcelonia ceastre.

"St. Eulalia," *Old English Martyrology* 216[82].

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[81] "I swear by the Son of God, / the crucified Son of God, that you will die of hunger / here before your kinsmen if you do not leave / your lies and tell the truth" (Nelson 153).

[82] " . . . Then he was angry and indignant and ordered her to be stretched out on an iron bed and to be sprinkled with boiling lead, but this did not harm her. When he commanded her to be put into a burning oven, it did not hurt her. When he bade his jester mutilate her and dishonour her while she was naked, she said: 'I know for whom I suffer this, even for Christ.' When he ordered her to be led away to be beheaded, she said: 'I shall come again on Doomsday and accuse thee before Christ's throne, and then thou wilt recognize my face.' As soon as she was beheaded, a beautiful dove came from the body and flew around it and caressed it and then flew to heaven. Her body rests in the town of Barcelona" (*Old English Martryology* 217).

The transgressive and resistant sexual situations encountered or experienced by many female saints indicate both the permanence of the female body and a distinction between that gendered body and the equally gendered identity adopted and embraced by those saints. Transvestism, for example, allows the saint to assume masculine characteristics and roles that do not in any way nullify the existence of her female body; indeed, the femininity of that body is consistently and publicly revealed and affirmed in highly positive ways. Likewise, rape attempts directly respond to the femininity of the saint's body, endeavoring to both destroy the sanctity of that body and to subjugate the saint's identity. In both cases, the saint's body is depicted as guiltless and positively female; her identity, however, is not rooted in that body and can adapt, gaining characteristics not typically associated with female bodies. This apparent contradiction between a permanently – and benignly – female body and a malleable, fluid identity is dramatized in the suffering and death experienced to varying degrees by female saints. All but one of the female saints in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* is also a martyr, and human suffering is also a significant component of the life of even Æthelthryth, the lone unmartyred English female saint, whose death is due to natural causes rather than the sharp and insistent blade of a sword. The torture and pain experienced by female saints at once emphasizes the saint's humanity, the presence of a body affected and manipulated by physical suffering, and the saint's evolving identity. Pain, for the saint, is the validation of her religious identity; it is also evidence of a final connection with the mortal world, an association underscored by Ælfric's discussion of martyrs and martyrdom in his *Catholic* Homilies. While the "conceptual format of the virgin martyr seems to require the process of torture and the corporeality it denotes" (Riches 67), Ælfric extends the concept of martyrdom beyond traditional limits of virginity and torture and offers a more expansive definition. Torture, too, loses its specificity, becoming analogous to the state of pain common to and shared by humanity.

The treatment of the human body in the *vitae* of Marina/Margaret, *Elene*, *Juliana* and in Ælfric's *Lives* of Basillisa, Cecilia, Daria and Æthelthryth accentuates these two opposing states of the female saint – her physical humanity juxtaposed with her spiritual incorporeity. Her female body is an undeniable and even positive reality, but it is one ultimately associated with the mortal, fleshly world. Her spirituality, on the other hand, is not as specifically gendered. Ultimately, the pain and death experienced by the female saint establishes a division between body and will and underscores the power and purity of her physical body.

Elaine Scarry's definitive study *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* is often used to probe the behavior and consequences of tortured saints[83]. Scarry explores the relationships between pain and power, noting that torture has two aspects, "a primary physical act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation" (28). She speaks of the "annihilating power of pain" (33), the "intense pain that destroys a person's self and world, a destruction experienced spatially as either the contraction of the universe down to the immediate vicinity of the body or as the body swelling to fill the entire universe" (35). Pain, thus, establishes the body as central to a person's world; the body becomes all important, and a torturer gains the ability to control and create or re-create the totality of a person's experiences[84]. Scarry's analysis of

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[83] *Juliana*, for example, is often read as an inversion of Scarry's pain paradigm; Scarry notes that "Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject." Juliana, on the other hand, adamantly retains her language skills in the face of devastating pain.

[84] While Scarry bases her study on "verbal accounts of people who were political prisoners during the 1970's" (19), amongst other research, she does not neglect religious use and invocation of pain. Scarry comments, almost as an aside, that "The self-flagellation of the religious ascetic, for example, is not (as is often asserted) an act of deyning the body, eliminating its claims from attention, but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world are cancelled and the path is clear for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force. It is in part this world-ridding, path-clearing logic that explains the obsessive presene of pain in the rituals of large, widely shared religions as well as in the imagery of intensely private visions, that partly explains why the crucifixion of Christ is at the center of Christianity, why so many primitive forms of worship climax in pain ceremonies, why Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is built on the principle first announced in Lockwood's dream that the pilgrim's staff is also a cudgel, why even Huysman's famous dandy recognizes in his sieges of great pain a susceptibility to religious conversion, why in the brilliant ravings of Artaud some ultimate and essential principle of reality can be compelled down from the heavens onto a theatre stage by the mime of cruelty, why, though it occurs in widely

torture and its consequences, while predicated upon modern observations and reports, has analogues in the study of Medieval pain and is especially useful in the consideration of Anglo-Saxon female saints. Scarry's pain paradigm revolves around both control and reality; inflicted pain has the ability to both grant power and shape a sufferer's reality. Female saints invoke pain, seizing it as a useful if uncomfortable way of bridging the gap between the two worlds encompassed by their bodies – the physical and the spiritual.

The torture scenes in *Elene* parallel Scarry's pattern, but also offer a surprising example of pain in the life of a female saint, for it is Elene who administers, not receives, torture – she, the woman saint, is the torturer and not the tortured. Her "victim," too, is not female, as might more commonly be expected[85], but male. Elene's decisive and inflexible behavior toward Judas and his fellow Jewish scholars has resulted in an occasional critical tendency to read the poem in general as anti-Semitic in nature and Elene in particular as a tyrannical bully or interrogator[86]. However, Elene's treatment of Judas reveals more about the importance of pain in the saint's experience than it discloses about anti-Semitic prejudice. Elene's torture contains both elements Scarry denotes as integral to the structure of torture, verbal interrogation and physical pain – in Judas's case, he is harangued and then literally deprived of the surrounding world, isolated in a pit and denied both sensory stimulation and food. Starved and weakened, Judas gives into the questions he had previously denied. Motivated by pain, Judas accepts Elene's

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different contexts and cultures, the metaphysical is insistently coupled with the physical with equally insistent exclusion of the middle term, world" (34).

[85] As Philip Pulsiano observes, accounts of native Anglo-Saxon saints cannot simply insert pagan magistrates to fill the required roles of villain and torturer extraordinaire. But, as he notes, some lives "find innovative ways of reconstituting the narrative so as to emulate earlier models." The example he provides, that of Mildreth, employs a *woman* as the torturer who uses a conventional technique for "persuading" recalcitrant saints: the misguided or evil abbess stuffs the young virgin Mildreth into a lit furnace. "In the figure of the abbess Wilcom," Pulsiano notes, "we find the obvious corollary with the pagan magistrate who, when the saint refuses to submit, inflicts severe torture" (28-34).

[86] John P. Hermann adamantly argues for the poem's anti-Semitical nature, whereas W. A. M. van der Wurff calls Elene an "interrogator." Olsen also observes that "Those who assume that the woman's role in Anglo-Saxon society was passive disapprove of the fact that Elene resorts to torture to persuade Judas to divulge the hiding place of the Cross, because they assume that she has more in common with Grendel's Mother than with Hildeburh" (225).

version of the truth and admits her greater moral reality. Judas's capitulation is initially surprising, acceptable only because he is a juvenile saint-in-the-making, not an already fully formed and vehemently sacrosanct saint. Mature saints do not give in to the pain imposed by their torturers; Judas is the exception, completely in keeping with Scarry's evaluation of pain as world-altering. The time Judas spends in Elene's dark pit, alone, without food or light, literally recreates his identity along the lines Elene desires and requires. Even Judas's name is changed after his torture and conversion.

Judas is a male saint, but his experience at Elene's hands provides crucial evidence for the female saint's experience with pain. Firstly, for Judas pain is *real*, something that his sanctity neither denies nor shields him against. Torture and not death is the central defining moment of his experience as a saint. The reality of pain, therefore, is persistent despite the sanctity of its victim. This fact prioritizes the torture of a saint, lending it both importance and power in the saint's own experience. It also fully legitimizes the saint as human, as mortal, as subject to the laws and conditions of the human body. The moment of pain – in Judas's case, the days of pain – fully grounds the saint in the human world. While suffering, the saint is not primarily a spiritual being but a physical one.

Perhaps more importantly, *Elene* also foregrounds female control of pain, of the experience of torture. In Elene's hands, pain becomes an important tool, though she uses it to hurt another person and not to manipulate her own identity. Elene demonstrates an awareness of the effectiveness of pain to transform the spirituality of Judas, and she uses torture as not just an exercise of temporal authority and power but a crucial component of the conversion process. Elene consciously uses the experience of pain as a spiritual instrument. In turn, for Judas, pain does not simply rewrite Judas's understanding of the world and reinforce Elene's truth, although Elene's use of torture both represents and enforces her own power. Judas also undergoes torture as a personal and individual step in his spiritual evolution. Pain, therefore, is both public and private, something shared

between Judas and Elene and also something uniquely Judas's, an intensely private experience.

Pain in more typical female saint's lives also demonstrates this mixture of public and private. Pain is at once something displayed to the world, an exterior validation of the saint's identity, and a personal, physical experience. Cecilia, for example, boils in a bath for a day and a night without breaking a sweat, so angering her persecutor that he commands an executioner to behead the girl – without, unfortunately, first removing her from that bath. The inept executioner strikes Cecilia's neck without killing her, finally leaving her lying half-dead. Cecilia "leofode þa þry dagas . and þa geleaffulan tihte . / and hire mædena betæhte þam maran papan" (*Lives of Saints* 376.358-359)[87]. Her public suffering creates an opportunity to teach, to demonstrate the truth to others. She makes use of her pain in much the same way that Elene utilizes Judas's suffering. Daria's lengthy dying also has a public benefit much like Cecilia's, enabling not just visual but verbal contact with an audience. The suffering of the saint, the changes and wounds inflicted upon her body, therefore have a highly visual dimension. The manifestation of her injuries grants her the voice that her torture and death deny her; even if she can no longer talk – and Anglo-Saxon saints consistently vocalize until they are forcibly silenced – her body speaks for her.

In contrast, while the saint's damaged and vulnerable body is publicly displayed, her experience of pain is also intensely private and enables the conflation of two worlds, the physical and the spiritual. Crucially, the female saint's pain is *real*; like Judas, she actually feels pain. Her spirituality does not serve as a potent anodyne, nor does her body repel injury. Tortured saints are generally depicted as resistant to the pain and suffering imposed upon them; in the *Life of St. Eulalia*[88], for example, neither boiling lead nor a

[87] Cecilia "lived three days and instructed the faithful, / and committed her handmaidens to the illustrious pope" (*Lives of Saints* 377).
[88] See the quotation that opens this chapter.

burning oven injure the saint. But many Anglo-Saxon female saint's lives, especially those found in the *Old English Martyrology*, are also concerned with the attempt to change the saint's mind or erase her determination. The apparent absence of physical pain or harm, thus, is conflated with the impermeability of the saint's mind. In reality, however, only the saint's mind, and not her body, is invulnerable to harm and pain. Lucy's implicit admission that she *could* possibly be raped suggests that the female saint's body is neither invincible nor permanent; it is only the saint's will that is unyielding. Even Eulalia is ultimately subject to the destruction of her body. The reality of pain, rather than its denial, confirms the basic humanity, the true physicality of the saint. She experiences physical suffering as a terrible reality that links her body to the bodies of her spectators, her followers, and, in the case of hagiographies, her readers.

Ælfric's *Lives* of women saints replicate a pattern of initial invulnerability to physical harm or injury quickly followed by the saint's successful – and often prolonged – execution. This pattern indicates that the early stages of the saint's tortures are not as much concerned with proving the invulnerability of her body as they are with representing the strength of her will. Pain marks the saint's body, but it cannot alter her mind, and Ælfric and others graft this spiritual invulnerability upon the saint's physical form. Cecilia's *Life*, for example, states that she endures her boiling bath with "ungederodum lichaman," uninjured body. Cecilia's experience obviously parallels baptism, but the soundness of her body is questionable. The executioner initially fails to kill the saint, but he does wound her body so grievously that she eventually dies, and her lingering death is in no way described as pleasant. Cecilia's end demonstrates the vulnerability of her body, and her lack of reaction to the first stages of her torture, then, should be understood as operative on a spiritual or mental level and not on the physical plane. Similarly, Daria's *Life* initially describes a body invulnerable to torture, but finally concedes the susceptibility of the saint's body to pain and injury. Though an initial attempt to torture the saint fails, her execution, like Cecilia's, is both prolonged and

successful; in a manner reminiscent of Elene's treatment of Judas, Daria[89] is buried alive and left to die. The two saints' supposed early resistance to pain would seem to indicate both a simple and easy death and would also seem to concentrate importance upon the saint's holiness and inviolability – not upon her humanity. In fact, however, these initial aspects of the saint's tortures, which have no apparent physical consequences, should be interpreted as reflections of a test of will. Simply put, the saint's mind and determination cannot be harmed; in contrast, her body can be destroyed.

The confluence between this spiritual immunity to harm and physical weakness to it becomes more apparent in saint's lives that more directly involve spiritual forces. Juliana of the eponymous poem exhibits a resistance similar to that of Cecilia and Daria to the pre-execution tortures her persecutor, Heliseus, imposes upon her. Notably, a significant and lengthy part of *Juliana* revolves around the challenges imposed upon the saint, not by a human evil, but by a devil. The poem's emphasis upon the confrontation with this demon elevates Juliana's difficulties to a spiritual level, suggesting that much of the torment Heliseus imposes upon her may also be interpreted as a challenge to her faith and fortitude. The very real possibility of pain underlies Juliana's apparent physical invulnerability. The poem also contrasts Heliseus's enraged physical torture of the saint with her spiritual resistance: Heliseus

> grymetade gealgmod ond his godu tælde,
> þæs þe hy ne meahtun mægne wiþstondan
> wifes willan. Wæs seo wuldres mæg
> anræd ond unforht, eafoða gemyndig,
> dryhtnes willan (598-602a)[90].

[89] Daria, like Cecilia, is one of Ælfric's chastely married saints. Her husband accompanies her to her death, and is likewise buried.

[90] Heliseus "cursed his gods who had no power, who could / not obstruct the power of the woman's will. / The maiden of God, confident in the strength / and will of God, was resolute and unafraid" (Nelson 89).

Juliana's "willan," her will, is tested by her tortures. Underlying her apparent resistance to pain, therefore, is her strength of character. While Juliana's seeming invulnerability to Heliseus's tortures confirms her faith, her death verifies her body's susceptibility to both pain and physical attack. The attempts to torture these saints, then, are both successful and fruitless – the saint's body changes, feels pain, but the saint's mind is ultimately unaffected.

While female saints experience physical suffering and death, they do not actually invite pain or torture[91]; instead, they *use* necessary or unavoidable suffering and torture as instruments of control. Ælfric's Basillisa, for example, actually prays to God to die peacefully *before* experiencing martyrdom, and receives this answer:

> Ealu þu basillisa þine gebedu synd gefyllede
> þæt ealler þine mædenu of middan-earde gewitað
> ær ðan þe seo arlease ehtnys , ofer eow be-cume .
> þæt ge ne beon ge-wem-mede . þurh ða wodan ehteras .
> (*Lives of Saints* 96.92-95)[92].

Basillisa's consequently painless, quiet death denies the messy ending typically expected of a martyr, but it introduces an unfortunate reality inherent in the lives of real Anglo-Saxon monastics.

The positive response to Basillisa's prayer confirms the certainty that her body *would* have been violated, would have been subject to some sort of successful attack. Given the *Life*'s heavy and typically Ælfrician emphasis on chastity allied with virginity, the threat of rape probably underlies Basillisa's request and God's surprising concession

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[91] Olsen does comment that "Even though on the face of it Juliana goads nobody to do anything, she actually goes so far as to goad her father into permitting her to be tortured and Heliseus into killing her" (227). However, Juliana does not initiate the circumstances that lead to her torture and death; she responds to her father and torturer with ferocious integrity, but never actually *asks* to be tortured. Given two options, it is the one she chooses.

[92] "'Ho! thou Basilissa, thy prayers are fulfilled, / that all they maidens shall depart from the world, / before the cruel persecution shall come upon you, / that ye be not polluted by the mad persecutors'" (*Lives of Saints* 97).

to her request. Basillisa's fear, then, is possibly not so much based on physical suffering as on the sexual nature of the upcoming torments. Her fears of martyrdom and accompanying sexual violation invoke the similar fears of real monastic women, continually subject to threats of invasion, rape, and violent death. Like Basillisa, several royal women saints of the Anglo-Saxon period faced bloody endings. Unlike Basillisa, God infrequently granted them an easy escape. In the case of Ebba, abbess of Coldingham, the saint and her charges faced the invasion of Danish pirates. Ebba and her the other women responded to the threat of rape by severing their noses and facing the surprised and suddenly lustless pirates with bloody and mutilated visages (Pulsiano 18). Such self-mutilation is not an uncommon female response to the threat of rape during the period[93], and it suggests a willingness to consciously accept and even introduce pain in order to deter a greater misfortune – spiritual or physical. Ebba and Basillisa use their own pain or death in order to prevent a different sort of physical violation, much as more conventional saints, like Cecilia and Daria, invoke their suffering as spiritual resistance, their physical pain preferable to any sort of spiritual concession.

These saints seek not merely to *endure* pain, but to *understand*, and therefore dominate, it. Sister Mary Timothy Prokes conveys a modern Catholic understanding of pain, commenting that suffering

> belongs to the mysterious call to go beyond the self. Victor Frankl's observation in *Man's Search for Meaning* has become almost proverbial – the human person can bear intense suffering if it is perceived to be meaningful. The *meaning* of suffering, revealed in Christ, changes the possibility of 'bearing under' the diverse causes of suffering. Christ not only taught the necessity of taking up one's cross, but also dignified with his respectful response those persons who endured

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[93] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg discusses this phenomenon extensively in her article "The Heroics of Virginity: Brides of Christ and Sacrificial Mutilation," and in her book *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100*.

> sufferings which others would consider repulsive: e.g. the ranting, possessed man who dwelt among the tombs, and the lepers with their severely ravaged flesh. (151).

These female saints do not endure tortures and death only because a more powerful, earthly authority wants them to hurt for his own perceived embarrassment or inconvenience; they suffer because it is their will and their vocation[94]. In Scarry's pain paradigm, there are really three forces active in a torture situation: the person enduring the pain, the person causing the pain, and the pain itself. The union of pain and the person causing pain effectively "rewrite" the sufferer's world, reducing it to the pain itself and the desires of the torturer. These saints, however, minimize the torturer's role in their experience of pain. Their suffering both tangibly marks their bodies and scores their interpretations of the exterior world, and their *Lives* demonstrate a melding of the interior and exterior world. Their bodies partake of their minds' invulnerability to pain persuasion, presenting no signs of physical harm.

But the saints are not unaffected by pain; nor is Scarry's paradigm entirely misaligned with their experiences. Pain separates the saint from the world outside the body, concentrating and reinforcing the saint's ties to religion and a spiritual existence. The suffering of pain forces reconsideration of that body's place in the world. From a modern medical perspective, Smolkin observes that the sufferer's pain often prompts a reassessment of his place in the world. He comments that "Metaphysics may become the tool that the sufferer uses in the quest to re-orient himself to the whole, to re-anchor himself. If he is successful, he ends up replacing a world-view that no longer works with one that does" (8). Similarly, for the saint, pain is a final verification of her religious ties;

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[94] This also offers an explanation of the saint's seeming invulnerability to physical harm. As Smolkin observes in a modern consideration of pain, "It is frequently the context of bodily pain more than the intensity or duration that determines how much suffering results" (4). The saints' greater purpose may indeed distract them from or diminish their suffering.

her torture distinguishes her from worldly authority and control and concentrates her attention inwards, focused on both her pain and the transcendence that that pain enable. Consequently, torture marks the first stage of an evolution ultimately resulting in the saint's death and assumption, either spiritually or corporeally, into heaven.

Pain also confirms the saint's humanity, her connection to the flawed and afflicted physicality of less sanctified women. Æthelthryth, a native English saint, cannot logically experience the conventional tortures of female saints of the patristic era. The end of her life, however, is nonetheless marked by suffering and its own brand of torture. Æthelthryth "wearð geuntromod swa swa heo ær witegode . / swa þæt an geswel weox on hire swuran / mycel under þam cynn-bane" (*Lives of Saints* 434.50-52)[95]. Æthelthryth does not see her tumor as punishment, but as an anticipated response to the "guilt" of her youth; where once she had worn gold necklaces, a tumor now adorns her neck. Æthelthryth's suffering is tied to the humanity of her body. Her pain arises, not from torture imposed by an exterior persecutor, but from the very mortal weakness of her own body and her interior flaws. Her pain is sickness rather than torture, but it is equally real, a suffering equivalent to that of any patristic saint. Moreover, Æthelthryth does not mutely accept her pain; she makes a conscious effort to understand it, to explain its origins. Æthelthryth does not merely endure her tumor; she controls the presentation and representation of that sickness. Her suffering is not just a natural occurrence, attributable to age or bad luck or random chance. Instead, Æthelthryth reshapes her suffering to fit her faith. Æthelthryth cannot control her physical pain, but she can manipulate her own understanding of it and reaction to it. She also does not present that pain as a negative, nor exactly as a penalty for past misbehavior. Instead, her pain offers her a chance to mark both her transient human body and her more durable connection to Christ.

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[95] Æthelthryth "was grievously afflicted, as she had herself foretold; / for a large tumour grew on her throat / just under her chin-bone" (435.50-52).

Æthelthryth, in effect, manipulates her pain, though she cannot mediate its very potent power over her own body and life.

Whether the saint's pain arises from actual torture or physical frailty, her torment ties her to her humanity, concretely realizes her physical form. As Sister Mary Timothy Prokes observes, "because of our embodiment, *every* human experience has corporeal dimensions, but this is particularly true of suffering, whether it be physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional" (148). The saint's pain also ties her to the rest of humanity, whose bodies are equally real, equally subject to torture imposed by internal as well as external forces. Moreover, the saint's pain indicates the "secret" martyrdom described by Ælfric:

> Twá cynn sind martirdomes: án dearfunge, oðer eawunge. Se ðe on ehtnysse for Cristes geleafan his líf alæt, se bið openlice martir. Eft se ðe forberð ðurh geðyld hosp and teonan, and ðone lufað þehine hatað, and his ágene unlustas and þæs ungesewenlican deofles thitinge forsihð, se bið untwylice martyr on digelre dæde. Þissere segene we nimað ús Crist to gewitnysse, se ðe cwæð to his twám apostolum, Iacobum et Iohannem, "Mage ge drincan þone calic þe ic drincan sceall?" Hí sædon þæt hí mihton. Drihten sæde, "Witodlice ge drincað minne calic." Hwæt is se calic þe Crist dránc buton seo ðrowung þe hé for mancynne ðrowade? Be ðære hé cwæð to his Heofenlican Fæder, "Fæder mín, gif hit gewurðan mæg, afyrsa þisne calic fram me." Þas twégen apostolas, Iacobus and Iohannes, gehyrdon æt Cristes muðe þæt hí sceoldon his calic drincan, ac swa-ðeah hí begen næron geendode ðurh openne martirdom. We witon þæt Iacobus wæs beheafod for þæs Hælendes geleafan, and Iohannes his broðor geendode his líf on sibbe únofslegen; ac hé wæs ðeah martir, forðan ðe hé heold ða digelan þrowunge on his mode, þeah ðe hé on lichaman gemartirod nære. And we magon beón martiras, ðeah ðe we mid ísene acwealde ne beon, gif we þæt gðyld on urum mode unleaslice healdað. Godes gelaðung hæfð on sibbe lilian, þæt is, clæne drohtnung; on ðam gewinne, rosan, þæt is, martyrdom. Us is to witenne, þæt on

> ðreo wisan bið geðyld æteowod: oðre ðing sind þe we fram Gode ðoliað, oþre fram ðam ealdan wiðerwinnan, oðre fram urum nextum. Fram Gode we þoliað swingla, fram ðam deofle costnunga, fram urum nextum ehtnyssa and teonan. Ac ús gedafenað þæt we mid wacelum eagum þas ðro gemetu behealdon, swa þæt we nateshwón ne ceorion ongean Godes swinglum, ne we eac ne geðation ðæs deofles tihtinga to urum forwyrde, ne we ures nextan yfel mid yfele forgyldon. Þes is se digela martirdom, healde se ðe wille.
>
> (Ælfric, "On the Nativity of Holy Martyrs," *The Homilies of the Catholic Church*¸Vol. II, 544, 546[96]).

In keeping with his consistent tendency to bridge the gap between lay and secular and establish religious community, Ælfric removes martyrdom from the sole possession of tortured and persecuted martyrs, virgin or otherwise. He acknowledges a more subtle variety of martyrdom, more "secret" and hidden than the publicly displayed sufferings of most patristic martyrs. In doing so, Ælfric recognizes a link between the more mundane sufferings common to humanity and the spectacular torments of martyred saints. He admits the suffering inherent in the human condition, but focuses on behavior, reaction to that pain, as the primary qualification of a martyr. Saints such as Cecilia, Daria and

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[96] Of martyrdom there are two kinds: one secret, the other manifest. He who in persecution lays down his life for Christ's belief, is openly a martyr. But he who through patience endures scorn and injury, and loves him who hates him, and despises his own vices and the prompting of the invisible devil, he is undoubtedly a martyr by secret deed. To this saying we will take us Christ as witness, who said to his two apostles, James and John, "Can ye drink the cup that I shall drink?" They said that they could. The Lord said, "Verily ye shall drink my cup." What is the cup that Christ drank but the passion that he suffered for mankind? Of that he said to his Heavenly Father, "My Father, if it may be, remove this cup from me." These two apostles, James and John, heard from Christ's mouth that they should drink his cup, and yet they were not both ended by open martyrdom. We know that James was beheaded for the faith of Jesus, and John his brother ended his life in peace unslain; but he was, nevertheless, a martyr, for he held the secret suffering in his mind, though he was not martyred bodily. And we may be martyrs, though we be not killed with iron, if we sincerely hold that patience in our minds. God's church in peace has lilies, that is, a pure life-course; in strife, roses, that is, martyrdom. We are to know, that in three ways patience is manifested: there are some things that we suffer from God, others from the old adversary, others from our neighbors. From God we suffer stripes, from the devil temptations, from our neighbors persecutions and injuries. But it befits us that with watchful eyes we observe these three ways, so that we murmur not against God's stripes, also that we yield not to the incitements of the the devil to our perdition, nor requite the evil of our neighbor with evil. This is secret martyrdom, undergo it who will." (545,547).

Elene *use* pain to their benefit and to that of others; in their hands, it becomes a sort of teaching tool. Pain also confirms their resistance to a worldly threat and locates that resistance in their bodies, in the real, tangible world surrounding them. Similarly, Ælfric locates his two species of martyrdom within the human body. He does not deny the value of traditional martyrdom, in which the martyr suffers and dies, but he also extends that martyrdom beyond the exaggerated encounter between the patristic saint and the hateful ruler and into the "real world" interactions of more mundane people. Realistically, of course, Ælfric can hardly recommend the traditional variety of martyrdom to his readers, but he can influence their understanding of their own suffering and pain. Ælfric extends martyrdom beyond the limited reach of dead patristic saints and into the hands of his fellow Anglo-Saxon Christians, and pain serves as the vehicle for that transfer.

According to Scarry's study, pain, suffering and torture possess creative ability, the capacity and power to reshape the victim's world and his understanding of that world according to the desires of the torturer. Elene certainly possesses this ability; her treatment of Judas functions almost exactly as Scarry suggests. But in Elene's hands, pain also becomes a female implement; Elene is not just a figure of authority, but a woman, and a saint at that. Elene controls pain, though she is not the recipient of it. Saints who experience pain rather than inflicting it also wrest away control of that pain from the exterior – or interior – circumstances or people administering that suffering. While their pain is a physical reality that ties them to the world, the sanctity of these saints also depends in large part upon their reaction to that pain. Saints are variously described as unaffected by their tortures, their bodies still sound in the face of boiling water, hot ovens and sharp rocks; but they are *never* invulnerable to their tortures. Their persecutors inevitably succeed in hurting and killing the saint. What remains constant, therefore, is not the saint's body, but her will. Her mind, not her body, is undamaged. Her body, like the bodies of Anglo-Saxon Christians, is subject to worldly laws of pain and suffering. Pain still reshapes the saint's world, and her role in it, but it does so along

the lines she, herself, delineates. The saint's attitude toward pain, therefore, duplicates and parallels the experience Ælfric describes as "digela martirdom," secret martyrdom. Those who undergo this species of martyrdom experience the same sort of problems as more traditional saints – pain, persecution by enemies, inexplicable problems – like Æthelthryth's tumor – but their torments are scaled down, reduced in degree though not in importance. These are human, rather than saintly, martyrs. They are Æthelthryth's sisters.

While pain functions as a connective link between true saints and Anglo-Saxon Christian women, pain and death also operate as a divisive moment in the saint's life. Paradoxically, the saint's death is often the most important, most defining point of her life. Her death illustrates the instant when her body is most human, most vulnerable to attack by exterior or interior forces. Simplistically, her death separates the saint from the physical, mortal world and introduces her to the true world of saints – Heaven. However, the saint's death occupies a more complex and complicated role in her life. The saint does not so easily leave the physical, nor is her body so quickly discarded. Instead, as Saint Margaret, or Marina as she is variously known[97], and Æthelthryth indicate, the saint's physicality and spirituality are often mixed, demonstrating both the multifaceted transformation of her identity and the permanence and benevolence of her physical body.

Ideally, the saint's body and mind, soul or identity – her non-corporeal essence – are separable and easily divided along finite lines. But, as later Middle English poems like *The Debate Between the Body and the Soul* and *The Soul's Address to the Body*

[97] Wendy Larson observes that "Marina and Margaret share the same genetic code, that is, they share the same *vita*. However, the development of their cults took place in different cultural environments: St Marina is venerated in the Eastern Orthodox Church while Margaret is the saint recognised in the Latin West, and the iconographic traditions associated with each are very distinct . . . . the very prominent role of women patrons in the cult of St Margaret offers a contrast with the cult of St Marina, which does not appear to have had a clearly marked gender affiliation" (23). Larson also observes that some Western hagiographies include both Margaret and Marina, listing them as separate saints; later, Marina is lost from the West (24-25). In the case of the *Old English Martyrology*, Marina analogous with Margaret; except for their differing names, they are the same saint and, for the purposes of this study, will be considered equivalent. Moreover, Marina of the *Old English Martyrology* partakes of the same audience and patronage as that of the Western Margaret described by Larson.

vividly remind, the body and soul maintain a clear relationship and expect some sort of reunion after Judgment Day[98]. Anglo-Saxon hagiography, like the *Lives* of Margaret/Marina, does not often dwell on this vision, but the female saint's death sometimes shows a strange integration of the physical and the spiritual. The saint's death gives surprising prominence to her body, not just her soul, elevating that physical form to an unexpected primacy. Her death also belies the frequent argument that female saints completely assumed male or androgynous identities in order to complement the views expressed in Galatians 3:28[99].

The various *Lives* of Saint Margaret, or Marina as she is variously known, offer clear and vivid representations of the divide between physicality and spirituality. Margaret's suffering and death both accentuate the femininity of her mortal body and well illustrate those of her spiritual traits that could be termed "male." The tale of Saint Margaret is found in a variety of versions and is extant in Greek, Latin, Old English and Middle English accounts. A short version of the *Life* appears in typically restrained and concise fashion in the *Old English Martyrology*; a longer version of the life, elaborating on the elements summarized by the *Martyrology*, appears in the Cotton Tiberius A. iii. manuscript[100], dating from the middle of the eleventh century (Clayton and Magennis

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[98] Anglo-Saxon literature also enjoys the complicated and reciprocal relationship between soul and body, particularly in the case of saints. This is particularly evident in the well-established Anglo-Saxon cult of the Virgin Mary, which has been elaborately studied by Mary Clayton in *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*. Clayton recognizes that the Marian texts from Anglo-Saxon England derive from a tradition that "describes the corporal assumption of Mary and the reuniting of her body and soul" (9). In this tradition, "Mary dies and her soul is taken to heaven immediately, while her body is laid in the sepulchre for three days. Christ then comes and either takes the body with him to paradise, where it is reunited with the soul, or, bearing with him Mary's soul, he joins it with the body at the tomb, before bringing Mary back with him to paradise" (Clayton 9). The texts dependent upon this tradition suggest that the body and soul are not so easily sundered at the moment of death. Instead, there is either immediate or anticipated reunion between body and soul. In some cases, this mutually dependent relationship between body and soul, earth and heaven, is more complicated, as in the *Lives* of Marina/Margaret.

[99] Vern Bullough most notably discusses the female saint's desire to become male; Paul Szarmarch, on the other hand, wavers between Bullough's views and his own suggestion that it is not masculinity but androgyny to which the saint aspires. He identifies "Galatians 3:28 and its complex view of sexuality" as the motivation between Eugenia's transvestite impulse in Ælfric's *Life* ("Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia" 155)

[100] Although the version of the Cotton Tiberius A. iii. manuscript is dated a little later than any of the other works studied here, its definite similarities to the account in the *Old English Martyrology* mandate its

41). Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, in their extensive study entitled *The Old English Lives of Saint Margaret*, recognize two varying strands of transmission of the legend from its Latin to Old English accounts, the Tiberius/Casinensis and the Mombritius versions. The variant of Margaret's Life occurring in the Cotton Tiberius A. iii manuscript, descended from a lost Latin version, bears a marked difference to the Mombritius versions. Notably, the Latin Casinensis and the Old English Tiberius versions both depict angels bearing Margaret's actual *head*, and not her soul, to heaven after her execution. This difference signals a crucial preoccupation with the state of Margaret's female body on earth and in heaven. This crucial and interesting difference is also preserved by the account in the *Old English Martyrology*.

Even more so than other saint's lives, the physicality of men and women is, from the first, of central importance to the legend. Theotimus, who narrates the Cotton Tiberius A. iii. version but is not present in the shorter version of the *Old English Martyrology*, places Margaret's life in the larger arena of the suffering of all holy martyrs since the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. More importantly, Theotimus also comments upon the corporeality of Christ Himself, commenting on the necessity of believing in the physical humanity of Christ. Before even the first mention of Margaret, she is securely located in the *imitatio cristi* tradition, and a transformation of her physical state is implied: just as Christ became mortal flesh to save mankind, the instrument of Margaret's salvation, and that of her followers, is her own human, female body. Indeed, Margaret's own, *female* body replaces Christ's *male* body in the process of salvation; she is both a representative of God on earth and a savior for those who follow her message and eventually revere her relics. More significant, however, is the process of transformation that occurs within Margaret's own body.

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inclusion. It is in some ways a more typical Western account of Margaret's life, for it refers to the saint as Margaret rather than Marina, which is the name the saint is known under in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Studying the later Middle English *Life of Saint Margaret*, Robertson comments that it "presents a model of female sanctity that assumes a woman's essential, inescapable corporeality. Because a woman can never escape her body, her achievement of sanctity has to be through the body" ("Corporeality" 269). Robertson further argues that the woman saint – and her body – partakes of the recurrent Adam/Eve dichotomy: "Adam is continually associated with the mind and reason, whereas Eve is associated with the body and willful appetite. As daughters of Eve, all women, even female saints, were alleged to inherit Eve's rootedness in the body, her incapacity for theory, and her dependence on the senses" ("Corporeality" 270). Robertson assumes that the female body, even that of the saint, is from the outset a "bad" thing, flawed, incomplete, limited. She supposes an inherent iniquity in what she calls the female "rootedness" in the body. The Anglo-Saxon treatment of Marina/Margaret does, indeed, concentrate upon the female body, as do many other hagiographic texts, including Ælfric's treatment of Æthelthryth. However, rather than focusing on the body as a solely female problem, these *Lives* present the female body as an answer – not to her own female flaws and limitations – but to the suffering bodies of others – including, and sometimes emphasizing, male bodies. These *Lives* extend the undeniable physicality of their subjects, the female saints, to embrace and assist the corporeal bodies of both men and women. In doing so, they confirm, not only the female saint's preoccupation with her physical form, but an obsessively human – both male and female – anxiety and concern for the body.

The *Old English Martyrology* neatly captures all of the important elements of Margaret/Marina's life and death in a relatively brief passage. Speaking to her tormentor, Marina responds:

> 'ic þe þonne selle minne lichoman to deaðe, þæt ic on heofonum reste hæbbe mid þæm halgum fæmnum.' þa het se gerefa hi swingan þæt þæt blod fleow of hire þæm merwan lichoman swa wæter of áspringe, ond het mid monige wite hi þreagan from Cristes geleafan; ond he mid nænge þara wíta ne mihte hire geþoht

> oncierran. þa bead he þæt hi mon lædde to þære beheafdunga. þa gebæd heo hire to drihtne ond cwæð: 'drihten, ic þe bidde þæt swa hwelc mon swa cierecean getimbre on minum naman, oððe swa hwelc mon swa condella onbærne on ciricean of his gestreonum on minum noman, syn þæs monnes synna adilgade; ond gif hwilc mon sie on ondyrstlecum wisum, ond he sý mines naman gemyndig, drihten, gefriða þu hine from þæm brógan; ond gif hwilc mon his synne geondette on minum naman, drihten, forgif þu him þa; ond on swa hwelcre stowe swa min þrówung awriten sý on man þa mærsige, afyrr þu, drihten, from þære stowe blindnesse ond helto ond dumbnesse and deofolseocnesse, ah cume on þa stow bliss ond sibb ond soð lufu.' [. . . .] þa wæs sancta Marína for Criste beheafdad; ond se swellere sona hine selfne ofslog mid þy ilcan sweorde, ond þa ne wæs hire heafod no on earðan geméted, ac is wén þæt englas mid him hit læddan to godes neorxnawonge. se lichoma elles is gested on Antiocha ceastre.
>
> "St. Marina," *Old English Martyrology* 115, 116[101]

Marina's torture and death illustrates several important points: she is literally tortured, her body injured and her suffering as real as Christ's. The point of the torture is also quite clear: to alter Marina's faith and her steadfast will, to break her will. This *vita* does not evidence a need to represent Marina's strong dedication with physical invulnerability.

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[101] "Marina answered: 'Then I shall deliver up to you my body to kill it, that I may have rest in heaven with the holy women.' The prefect ordered her to be flogged that the blood flowed from her tender body like water from a fountain, and commanded that by many tortures she be forced to renounce the belief in Christ; but by none of these tortures was he able to make her change her mind. When her ordered her to be led to her execution, she prayed to God and said: 'O Lord, I beseech thee, which man soever build a church in honour of thy name, or which man soever light a candle in church from his earnings in my name, may the sins of this man be blotted out; and if any man be in dreadful straits and he remember my name, O Lord, protect him from his terror; and if any man confess his sins in my name, O Lord, forgive him them; and werever my martyrdom be described and it be celebrated, from this place remove thou, O Lord, blindness, lameness, dumbness and devil-sickness, but there may come to this place happiness, peace and true love.' [. . . .] Then St. Marina was beheaded for Christ's sake, and the executioner soon killed himself with the same sword. Her head was not met with on earth, but it is believed that angels brought it with them to God's paradise. Otherwise the body is buried in the town of Antioch" (*Old English Martyrology* 115, 117).

Indeed, it does the opposite: Marina is quite completely susceptible to the prefect's ungentle ministrations.

Accordingly, her body is thoroughly present throughout the *vita*, and its condition is the *Life*'s most compelling concern. Marina's body is literally divided at the end of her *vita*, her head carried to heaven and the rest of her remains buried and no doubt considered relics. Her earlier remarks provide a foundation for the ultimate division of Marina's body and the implicit divide between heaven and earth, feminine and masculine. As a soon-to-be saint and intercessor, Marina is surprisingly less concerned with the state of her follower's souls, though she does ask God for mercy for their sins, than with their mortal bodies. Marina's true interests are revealed at the end of her execution-speech; she worries about her the condition of her follower's bodies, setting herself up as a healer of physical afflictions. While not a highly spiritual interest, this concern is shared by the Margaret of the Cotton Tiberius manuscript, who likewise concentrates upon physical ailments.

Marina's death authenticates her speech's focus on the human body. Significantly, Marina dies by the sword. Decapitation is commonplace in Anglo-Saxon hagiography and secular poetry[102] and is quite literally an important way to die; John Edward Damon suggests that the dismemberment and fragmentation of the historical Kings Edwin and Oswald typify a sort of "trophication" (405), with their severed heads correspondingly representing "leadership or 'head'-ship" (423). Damon cites Bruce Lincoln, who observes that "A wound to the head or eye marks those who are sovereign (by virtue of royalty, sacrality, knowledge, magic, and/or righteousness" (qtd. in Damon 421). Through her death, Marina joins a league of masculine, frequently sanctified mortal rulers whose heads represent the entirety of their beings and their status and

[102] For example, a number of scholar have recently become very interested in physical fragmentation in Beowulf, including, of course, Grendel's postmortem decapitation (Damon 400-01).

authority. Additionally, Marina's actual amputated *head*, not the more expected and intangible soul, is taken to Heaven. Margaret's *vita* removes all doubt about what the angels take to heaven, stating absolutely that it is her head. The head has been described as the source of the spirit, the site of the faculties of reason – in effect, qualities generally expressed as more masculine[103]. Marina's head, like the decapitated trophy heads of Edwin and Oswald, represents her temporal authority – the religious power conferred by her faith and her virginity. Severing that head concentrates Marina's essence in the least physical body part, the one most associated with the masculine qualities of reason and the intellect[104]. Therefore, Marina's decapitation and the transferal of that head to Heaven indicate, at least initially, that Marina has left her femininity behind, on earth, to assume a masculine identity in Heaven. But this has never been Marina's intention.

Marina's blatantly stated goal has been to suffer and die in order to join with "þæm halgum fæmnum," the community of holy women, in heaven[105]. Marina, even after death and the dissolution of her body, maintains the femininity of her body[106]. Marina, like transvestite saints, has transformed her gendered identity – but she has not abandoned her female physicality. She has assumed a *male* role, but the power and status

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[103] See, for example, Mary Flavia Godfrey's study of decapitation in *Beowulf* and *Judith*, which emphasizes "the head as source of intellection and creation" (qtd. in Damon 403).

[104] Joyce Salisbury in her article "Gendered Sexuality" discusses the ancient Western association between maleness and reason: ". . . the ancient world associated maleness (through semen) with rational though and action. Men were 'strong to think and act.' The early church fathers, too, divided the world by gender, and men were defined as rational (dominated by mental activity) and strong. Early churchmen believed these defining qualities of men gave them authority over women. Isidore of Seville summarized patristic wisdom when he wrote 'Women are under the power of men because they are frequently spiritually fickle. Therefore, they should be governed by the power of men.' Elsewhere, Isidore referred to man as the 'head of woman.' Men's power was visible in his physical qualities and bearing; St. Ambrose explained that men had 'different customs, different complexions, different gestures, gait, and strength, different qualities of voice'" (85).

[105] It is also worth nothing that Marina realistically achieves this sense of female community on earth – the thirteenth century Middle English *Life of Saint Margaret* was written for a specifically female, contemplative audience like that of the *Ancrene Wisse* (Robertson "Corporeality" 268).

[106] This is true in more than the obvious way. In Western traditions, Margaret comes to be known as a saint specifically interested in women and the problems of women's bodies; she becomes a saint of childbirth among other things (Larson 26-27).

that have accompanied that role have not negated her essential femininity, the female gender of her body if not her actions. Nor has Marina abandoned her association with women; she intends to resume the company of women in heaven. Nor does she adopt a sexless role. Patristic tradition had tended to view assimilation to Christ as an androgynizing process; Gregory, for example, "asserts that in Christ 'there is neither male nor female'" (Bloch 116), but this also does not account for the persistent femininity of Marina's body and language in the face of torture and death.

If gender can be understood, as Judith Butler suggests, as a set of behavioral patterns typically attributed to a particular gendered identity, then Marina, like many transvestite saints, has altered her own identity. The body underlying that gender, however, remains the same – even in Marina's eyes. She is physically female, and she carries the consciousness of that physical state with her into heaven. Yet she leaves behind her body, and with it the most important markers of her biological sex, including the characteristics so valued by the lustful prefect. Whatever part of Marina has removed itself to Heaven – be it her soul or her head – it lacks the body parts to render it correctly female. But Marina maintains her connection with a community of women, and continues to recognize "women" as a valid category both on earth and in heaven *because* she has chosen to act as an intercessor for those on earth, and on earth the female/male divide is legitimate and real. Marina realizes the close connection between heaven and earth and body and soul that is manifested in the saint's power over her own pain and suffering. The saint's body in torment and pain – and Marina is beaten severely – is at an apex of humanity; pain links the human with the sanctified. But her control over her own pain, her ability to translate that pain into spiritual resistance, manifests her spirituality, what Ælfric would term her martyrdom. Her death, like her suffering, creates this relationship with the shared condition of mortal humanity. Thus, although Marina's behavior and the gender associated with her actions have changed, she maintains a close connection with the femininity of her body – and with other women on earth.

Marina's head is easily associated with her mind and her spirit; its relocation to heaven is understandable if not predictable. So too is Marina's carefully maintained association with femininity and with the female body; though her head or soul in Heaven lacks the sex-specific traits of her mortal body, Marina maintains a close connection with the rest of her body and with the bodies of her followers. The actual transference of Marina's corporeal head takes a part, if not an obviously sexed part, of her physical form to a purely spiritual realm, suggesting her continued participation in, and awareness of, the physical. The rest of Marina's body remains on earth, where, according to the information given in the *Old English Martyrology*, it is buried. The longer version of Margaret's life, while it preserves the division between Margaret's head and body and the divide between earth and heaven, clarifies the post-mortem treatment of her headless body. Marina in the *Old English Martyrology* asks to be considered a legitimate saint even before her death; she meticulously outlines a detailed proposal for her "afterlife" on heaven and earth. She establishes herself as an intercessor, and the places of her death and veneration as holy. She is, in effect, preparing the précis for her own cult. In the version of Margaret's life, her remains are treated as relics.

Such veneration of the physical remains of a saint – be it clothing or actual parts of the body – is typical of cults of the saints. Even the Virgin Mary, whose body supposedly ascended to heaven along with her soul and, consequently, could not be located in her tomb, produced relics. These Marian relics are, as Clayton notes, "a relatively late development, much later than the relics of the martyrs" but during the "tenth and eleventh centuries many English churches and monasteries must have been in possession of relics of Mary," from expected bits of hair and clothing to the more outrageous samples of her milk (*Cult* 131, 138). However, the cult phenomenon does have surprising features. In the cases of female saints, it is generally the parts, remains or relics most *female* in nature that receive the greatest attention. The femininity of these saints is never minimized, but emphasized and even exaggerated. Their female bodies,

like Marina's left on earth after death, represent the source of the saint's sanctity and offer a tangible connection to that departed saint. These bodies and relics often gain a sort of animation of their own; though their owners have departed for loftier residences, these physical remains are frequently capable of interaction with the living humans around them. Postmortem miracles[107] and the veneration of female saints' bodies indicates that it is the very femininity of these women saints that renders them helpful and valuable to their mendicants.

These miracles and relics reveal a double focus: they are interested in tangible, corporeal remains, but also in *gendered* remains. The relics are not simply objects, but items still closely linked to the saint who produced them. The relationship between the saint's body and her spiritual self is still very active. The saint is rooted in her body; her pain and suffering grant her control over both that body and her spirituality. Her relics, however, also partake of the sanctity of the saint. Thus, Marina intercedes, not just for her followers' souls, but for their bodies. More explicitly, Æthelthryth's postmortem activity demonstrates a continued link between the dead saint and her body. That body serves as a conduit between the saint's spiritual power and the earthly problems.

Sixteen years after her death, Æthelthryth's body is raised from the ground by Sexburh, who wishes to place her sister's bones in the church proper. Sexburh providentially locates the perfect tomb, but then finds a greater wonder. Æthelthryth, when the coffin is opened, is found to lie "swilce heo læge on slæpe / hal eallum limum" (Ælfric *Lives* 438.90-91)[108]. Not only is Æthelthryth's body perfectly preserved, it has also healed itself; the wound from the tumor that ultimately killed the saint has repaired itself, and the clothes that wound Æthelthryth's body are likewise "swa ansunde . swylce

[107] Not all hagiographic traditions are interested in postmortem miracles. In this respect, Anglo-Saxon written hagiography is somewhat unique; Welsh, Breton and Irish hagiographies, for example, are "little concerned with giving details of postmortem miracles" and are equally disinterested in allocating miracles to any sort of relic (Smith 339-340).

[108] Æthelthryth lies "as is she lay asleep, / sound in all her limbs" (*Lives* 439.90-91)

hi eall niwe wæron" (438.95)[109]. Ælfric attributes the incorruptibility of Æthelthryth's body to her virginity, but he also suggests that the state of her body physically manifests God's power and influence:

> and godes miht is geswutelod soðlice þurh hi .
> þæt he mæg aræron ða for-molsnodon (*sic*) lichaman .
> seðe hire lic heold hál on ðære byrgene
> git oð þisne dæg. Sy him ðæs á wuldor .
> Þær wæron ge-hælede þurh ða halgan femnan
> fela adlige menn . swa swa we gefyrn gehyrdon .
> and eac ða þe hrepodon þæs reafes ænige dæl .
> þe heo mid bewunden wæs . wurdon sona hale .
> and manegum eac fremode seo cyst micclum
> þe heo ærest on læg . . .
> (438.109-440.118)[110].

Æthelthryth's perfectly preserved body indicates God's ability to hold the body as well as the soul of the saint inviolate, but it also suggests God's active response to human flaws. It is as natural for souls to sin as for bodies to decay; Æthelthryth recalls the glamour of her youth as sinful vanity, and, logically, her body should have decomposed. God's power, however, is restorative; he "mæg aræran ða for-molsnodon lichaman," he can raise moldering bodies. God restores apparent health and permanence to a mortal body long dead of sickness in much the same way that he cleansed Æthelthryth's sin-tarnished soul.

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[109] "as fresh as if they had all been new" (439.95).

[110] "and in her, God's power is verily manifested, / namely, to raise up corruptible bodies, / in that He hath kept her body uncorrupt in her grave / even unto this day; wherefore to Him be everlasting glory. / By means of this holy woman were healed / many sick men, as we have heard of old; / those also who touched any part of the shroud in which she had been wound, were instantly cured; / and likewise the coffin wherein she had first lain / greatly benefitted many persons" (*Lives* 439.109-441.118).

Interesting too is the subsequent treatment of Æthelthryth's body. This "halgan femnan," holy woman, heals men. Certainly the recipients of her miracles can be understood in the broader context of all of humanity, but there is probably also a degree of specificity operant in the choice of "fela adlige." Marina clearly describes a special connection with a female community in heaven, and it is easy to extend the boundaries of that relationship to include mortal women on earth. Æthelthryth also demonstrates an active bond with mortal women; it is her sister, after all, who sets her postmortem miracles in action by moving Æthelthryth's body to a grander tomb and better location. But Æthelthryth also evidences an interesting connection to men, especially given Æthelthryth's own struggles to maintain her virginity in the face of male desire. Too, the description of her miracles begins only a few lines after Ælfric again emphasizes Æthelthryth's position as a "ungewemmed mæden," a clean woman or, in Skeat's translation, "unspotted virgin." Whether or not Æthelthryth's body is now or always has been virgin, her dead body has been recreated by God. Instead of following the natural course of death and decay, God not only halts the corruption process but reverses it, preserving Æthelthryth's body as an indicator of both his power and the possibilities inherent in the human soul. This recreated body signifies the perfection of the saint's relationship with God, and it allows her to rewrite her relationship with mortal men. Instead of the strife and sexual desire that has colored the saint's marriages to men, Æthelthryth's body manifests healing ability. Her sanctity is also shared with the inanimate objects in immediate contact with her body; both the clothes that wrapped around and the coffin that enclosed her gain her ability to heal, as if that capacity rubs off like gold dust.

Æthelthryth's *Life* is one of very few in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* to include the presence of postmortem miracles, and Ælfric uses those miracles to place emphasis entirely upon the state and purpose of her body. While he dwells on the perfection of her preserved corpse, and even takes care to describe her various coffins and the state of the cloth wrapped around her, he offers no details as to the *type* of healing Æthelthryth was

responsible for. Her miracles might as easily be spiritual as physical in nature, unlike those of Marina, whose *Lives* reveal a narrow interest in physical afflictions like blindness. In contrast, Ælfric is uninterested in describing the exact nature of Æthelthryth's powers and spends no time at all describing the process by which men might benefit from her sanctity. Instead, Ælfric concentrates upon the location of the miracles, focusing on the exact site where they occur: Æthelthryth's body. The saint is still very much a physical presence, possessed of a concrete and tangible – if dead – human body. Nor has that body been neutered or rendered androgynous by its inhabitant's death. Ælfric focuses on the contrast between the female saint and the male recipients of her healing powers; he also again stresses her virginity, and hence her femininity and implicit sexuality. Æthelthryth's is a dead, inanimate female body, dispossessed of its soul. As such, it is absolutely material, thoroughly representative of the corporeal, earthly feminine. It is also a redeemed body, rendered holy and pure through God's power, but not a body that has been translated to heaven.

Æthelthryth's body is only truly perfect after its death – but this is not surprising, and it does not negate the importance of that body. Dead or not, Æthelthryth's body represents corporality perfected, polished to the same brilliance as her pure soul. Her body is finally located on earth, amongst other imperfect, living bodies – specifically, the bodies of men – and is both a powerful influence and help to them. Like Marina, whatever aspects of Æthelthryth that might be termed reasoning – and hence masculine – have departed, and only her body, female flesh, remains. The perfection and intransience of Æthelthryth's body confirms the connection between the saint's two opposing states. Marina took her head with her to heaven; Æthelthryth's body does the opposite, keeping an intangible amount of the saint's spirituality. In both cases, the body is not easily abandoned, even by a dead saint. It is a permanent aspect of the saint's reality and that of her followers.

Easton correctly observes that the martyr, "often a social outcast in perception or practice, glides between the apparent polar opposites of body and spirit, suffering and impassibility, passivity and assertiveness; he or she may even transcend the biological and cultural constrictions of sex and gender" (62). But the female saint is not, ultimately, such an isolated, liminal figure. Even in traditional accounts of virgin martyrs, which feature the torture, persecution and finally execution of the saint by a powerful prefect or other authority figure, the saint is not segregated and alone. Instead, she is consistently part of a community. Certainly, the saint relates to her "audience," the readers or hearers of her *vita*, much as Aldhelm directed his accounts of martyrs towards the female monastics of Barking. However, within the structure of the *vita* itself, the saint acquires companions. She may already be part of a religious order; she may join one. She may, like Basillisa, be one half of a chaste and virginal marriage. She may also enact a teaching relationship with a crowd, teaching them as much by her pain as by her words. In any case, the female saint is a public figure, surrounded by a crowd present within and without her *Life*. Her pain, suffering, and death link her to the common state of humanity. In a sense, her body is constantly with her audience, overlaid, page by page, upon its own corporeal identity.

The female saint's body is a permanent aspect of her experience and her development as a saint, but it is too easy – and also too simplistic – to merely accept that body as merely possessed of inherent weakness and deformity. The female saint's body is most concretely evident in her pain, suffering, and death, but that body is not a liability. Instead, its very humanity, its earthly physicality, enables that body to remain on earth, to be a positive link to the saint's spiritual essence and power. Nor does the female saint's pain deny or eradicate the physicality or femininity of her body. The saint's suffering positions her between the worlds of heaven and earth, but it also firmly links her to a common human state. Because the female saint is so highly physical, so deeply associated with her body, she is able to maintain a vital link with the imperfect and often

wretched bodies of the women *and* men still on earth. *Her* body represents *their* conduit to help and salvation.

Conclusion

What Is Woman to Christ?

" . . . the only good virgin – that is, the only true virgin – is a dead virgin."

– Howard R. Bloch, "Chaucer's Maiden's Head," 120

On þone ylcan dæg byð þære wydewan þrowung mid hyre þrym sunum þære name ys Theodota, ond hyre yldesta sunu is nemned sanctus Euodius; hi wæron in þære mægðe Biðinia ond in þære byrig seo is nemned Necia. þære burge ealdormon, se wæs on naman Necitus, he het sumne scandfulne man, se wæs on naman Hirtacus, bysmrian þa halgan wydewan mid hys fyrenlustum. þa he hyre nealæhte, þa stod hyre big iong man fæger mid gyldenum hræglum gegyred; þæt wæs godes engel, se hine sloh mid his fyste on þæt næsþryl þæt þær utfleow ungeendod blod, ond seo halige wydewe æfter þam þurh fyr geendode hyre life mid hyre þrym sunum.

– "St. Theodota," *Old English Martyrology* 136[111]

Modern critics have generally evidenced a strong unwillingness to accept a basic *humanity* underlying Medieval female saints, an unfortunate fact strikingly evident in studies of Anglo-Saxon hagiography. Juliana and Elene, for example, subjects of two of the most important Anglo-Saxon poems – significant, that is, for any number of reasons – have often been the worrying recipients of a refusal to consider them in any other terms or categories than the purely allegorical (Olsen 223). Other areas of scholarly interest have witnessed the same critical disinclination to admit into consideration the female

[111] "On the same day is the martyrdom of the widow with her three sons whose name is Theodota, and her eldest son is called St. Euodius; they lived in the province of Bithynia and in the town called Nicæa. The prefect of the town, Necitius by name, bade an infamous man named Hyrtacus defile the holy widow with his sinful lust. As he approached her, a handsome young man clad in golden garments stood near her: that was God's angel, who hit him with his fist on the nostril that blood flowed out unceasingly; and after this the holy widow's life was ended by fire together with her three sons" (*Old English Martyrology* 137).

subjects of hagiographical texts. Jane Cartwright details the prolonged critical resistance to the acceptance of many Medieval Welsh saints as legitimately female. From Bund's long-standing claim that women "rarely became saints in Wales and Ireland," to David Farmer's much more recent *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, Cartwright points out that scholars have been quick and ready to dismiss the "truth" of the lives of female saints (2-3), preferring instead to focus on male lives or to quickly disavow even the existence of female saints. When female saints *are* recognized, scholars have then demonstrated an equally unfortunate tendency to treat them as the disadvantaged stepchildren of patriarchal values and prejudices.

In their study of saints from 1000 to 1700, Weinstein and Bell compare the lives of male and female saints:

> In the vitae of male saints, women (other than mothers and most sisters) invariably were portrayed as limbs of Satan; they had no other function than to enhance the stature of the saint by making futile efforts to induce him into sin. Even if these were only tales for the titillation and consolation of celibate clerics, they transmitted widely a stereotype of women deeply rooted in Christian culture, going back to Eve, the Serpent, and the Fall. To what degrees women as well as men were influenced by these myths about their sex is problematical, but contemporary social psychology tells us that powerful stereotypes were internalized by their victims as well as by their perpetrators.
>
> To read the lives of female saints, however, is to discover a wholly different cultural idea, although one that had to coexist with its opposite. Here women are in the mold of Mary, virgin in spirit if not in body, longing for freedom from the importunities of the world – a more sympathetic image to be sure, but equally devastating. The woman who internalized the ideal of Mary and sought to achieve it was virtually assured of failure, not only because the flesh

was weak but because the world demanded marriage and motherhood. (Weinstein and Bell 98).

In Weinstein and Bell's perspective, the woman saint literally can't win; from a social perspective, she's damned no matter whose life she finds herself in. Weinstein and Bell do recognize a relationship between the ideal of the woman saint as portrayed in hagiography and her audience, actual women, but they imbue that connection with negative consequences. The woman saint is a role model to be sure; but, in their eyes, ultimately a very *bad* one.

In a sense, it is not terribly surprising to find a plethora of such grim interpretations of both Medieval female saints and real women. Modern critical and theoretical advances and new approaches, including New Historicist, Feminist, Marxist and other movements, have done Medieval literature much genuine service, reclaiming lost or forgotten writers, lending new interest to others, and, above all, firmly establishing the Medieval woman as an object of critical inquiry. But they have also, inevitably, clouded the very interest and studies that they have inspired, bringing the very same prejudices that they have tried to both reveal and diminish to any study of Medieval literature. For example, it is easy to recognize the absence of women authors or "feminine" texts from the canon; it is even easier to blame that lack, with some justification, on the workings of a social patriarchy. From there, though, it becomes too easy to extend that conception of patriarchy – itself a thoroughly modern concept – and all that it implies about women to Medieval studies.

If we begin with the expectation of limited women, women with poisonous bodies and simple minds, then generally it is not difficult to find them. It is harder to push facile expectations of powerful men and resistant women aside for a moment, and consider the subject's human roots. Anglo-Saxon hagiography, of course, carries within certain additional implicit complications to the study of its female saints; primarily, there is little that can be accurately identified as a securely female voice. As Mooney observes but

does not completely grant, "Given the patriarchal and misogynistic cast of Medieval society and, in particular, the Medieval Church, many scholars have increasingly expressed skepticism regarding these sources[112], noting that male-authored depictions of holy women, however sincerely intentioned, are likely to reveal far more about men's idealized notions of female sanctity and its embodiment in women's lives than they reveal about the female saints themselves" (3). From these texts, therefore, any attempt to identify characteristics inherent in the saint herself must also consider the input of the male hagiographer. Fortunately, for Anglo-Saxon hagiography, the impact of a male writer upon the female subject is irrelevant – or perhaps the only pertinent point.

Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, from Aldhelm to Ælfric, preserve a carefully shaped, intentional cultural image of the female saint – and her body. While they may, as is common, use and re-use the *lives* of patristic female saints, they place those lives in a particular cultural bias and context and reshape, emphasize, delete, or create new details as suits their purpose and beliefs. Their texts form part of an ongoing cultural conversation about the religious woman, one in which actual Anglo-Saxon women played a crucial part. As such, they offer important evidence about the treatment of the body of the Anglo-Saxon female saint and, consequently, the idea of the female body in a religious, Christian context.

The Anglo-Saxon female saint's body is critically important, both in her characterization and meaning in hagiographical texts and to modern interpreters of her position and role in society. From patristic writers, Anglo-Saxon hagiographers inherit a conception of the body as flawed. Paradoxically, however, the body of the female saint functions as a link to the bodies of her male and female readers. Moreover, her body is fully developed, a body linked to both sin and salvation. It has been argued that Anglo-

[112] Mooney is primarily concerned with the relationship between identifiable – thus, real – female saints, like Hildegard, and their immediate scribes and biographers, but the doubt and uncertainty she describes also applies to Anglo-Saxon depictions of female saints.

Saxon texts show little interest in sex[113], but hagiographic texts are consumed with it. Sex operates as an expression of physical reality, an appreciation and admission of the reality of the body. Anglo-Saxon saints consistently deal with the sexual motif, from the inevitable emphasis on virginity to the more surprising problems of rape, prostitution and transvestism. The saint's biological sex is also crucial, for her body repeatedly confirms both its femininity and its permanence. The saint's body is always with her, although her identity is more fluid and can assume different gender roles.

Yet, if the saint's body is always with her, so too is it with her audience, both her spectators and students within the text itself and the readers of her *vita*. The female saint is fully embodied, "rooted," so to speak, in that body. Yet, her body consistently functions as both a positive and a direct representation of her humanity. In the end, her embodiment is not solely tied to that femininity, but to her own participation in the greater part of humanity. Samantha Riches has argued that the "the conceptual category of virgin martyrs can be extended across the boundary of gender" (66), and so can the idea of embodiment, generally tied only to Medieval woman and not to Medieval man. The female saint, the purest expression of the Church's ideal of womanhood, retains her body, and through that body, she forms a community, a connection, with both women *and* men that stretches past marriage, loss of virginity, prostitution, transvestism, attempted rape, and even the mutilation and torture of that body and its final death and, usually, decay.

Moreover, the saint's female body is not directly linked to its owner's sins nor to the abuses others perpetrate upon it. Instead, the body becomes a tool, a physical path to sanctity, confirmed when the saint's pain and suffering narrows her consciousness to her body. The saint's fluid, changeable identity is also not precisely tied to her biological sex and physical form. When she adopts a "male" identity, the saint does not discard her

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[113] Lampe, for example, comments that "Old English (or, if you prefer, Anglo-Saxon) seems to show very little interest in sex and Middle English almost has too much" (401).

body. Always, always, that body reveals itself to be feminine before a public audience. Instead of changing her body, or even truly altering her sex, the saint assumes a pattern of action and conduct and a new status and place in the world. Effectively, the saint alters her "gender," but that gender functions as an outward expression of social behavior and interaction dislocated from her biological sex. The saint's identity change, thus, depends not on her body, but upon her mind. Indeed, the female saint has, in a way, "become male," as Jerome would wish, but she has done so spiritually and not physically. Consequently, her body is detached from the negative aspects of femininity, which may indeed be rooted more in a set of behaviors than in a biological sex.

The Anglo-Saxon female saint's body is genuinely multifaceted, linking her to the realities of her female audience[114]. Her body may not deflect physical injury, but it is able to undergo marriage, prostitution, torture, death, and even, Lucy vehemently argues, as would Augustine, rape without impinging upon or corrupting the sanctity of the saint. Her faith – or that of her hagiographers – literally rewrites the corruption of her body, rendering it finally as perfect and benign as Æthelthryth's long-dead corpse. The same process may be extended to the "real" Anglo-Saxon woman, who, like Æthelthryth, finds herself participant in social roles or events that do not leave her body perfectly virginal.

Ultimately, Anglo-Saxon hagiographies render up a female saint whose greatest qualities are her humanity and her consequent ability to bridge the gulf between her own sanctity and the less-perfect bodies and spirits of her followers. She is a saint capable of expressing and inspiring both awe at the divine and a sense of the human ridiculous. Her humanity, of course, is not always to the saint's benefit. Saint Theodota, facing the typical and tired assault upon her chastity – for she is the mother to three sons – finds

[114] It should be noted that in the Anglo-Saxon period, as in later Medieval periods, that female audience was most likely limited to royal women. Additionally, only in some cases are hagiographic writers kind and considerate enough to blatantly denote the make-up of their intended audience – Aldhelm, for example, explicitely writes to the nuns of Barking. Written hagiographic texts, however, necessarily reflect impulses and desires omnipresent thoughout a culture, even in the areas the written word does not reach. Hagiography, after all, is not limited to the written, and many local saints's hagiographies are exclusively verbal.

herself defended by a marvelous, celestial angel who brilliantly, if rather ineffectively, hits the would-be rapist on the nose and gives him a nose-bleed. Theodota dies anyway, her angel's martial prowess notwithstanding. The humor of the *vita* corresponds to the succinct, pithy, dry style carried throughout the *Old English Martyrology*, but it also indicates that the saint has been brought down to a human level, subject to the same physical depends, spiritual flaws, and ironic sense of divine humor as other mortals.

The female saint, of course, changes radically after 1066 and the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. She gains a voice, if one filtered through a male scribe[115], and the number of actual female saints begin to grow in numbers. Weinstein and Bell comment that "The era of the female saint began in the thirteenth century, when the percentage of women nearly doubled to 22.6 percent (36 of 159), and continued into the fourteenth (25 of 107, or 23.4 percent) and through the fifteenth century, when 23 of 83 saints (27.7 percent) were female. This increase is even more impressive when we consider that the total number of saints in our sample declined from 153 in the twelfth century to 83 in the fifteenth" (220). Lay sanctity, too, increases, beginning in the tenth and eleventh centuries (Vauchez 21). But, if numbers of actual canonized women increase, the connections between those women and their less sacrosanct sisters decline. Vauchez discusses "the new conception of holiness: in order to reach perfection, it was no longer enough to carry out the full responsibilities of one's position and to exemplify the highest moral virtues. In addition, the potential saint had to imitate the meekness and poverty of Christ, even his humility and suffering, performing unhesitantly acts considered 'insane' by society – even by Medieval society that considered itself Christian" (31). Caroline Walker Bynum has drawn important notice to the bodies of later Medieval religious women in her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, but her study also depends upon the very serious extremes to which those women interpreted and mistreated their bodies. Those

[115] Mooney describes the situation, commenting that "Women's words almost invariably reach us only after having passed through the filters of their male confessors, patrons, and scribes" (7).

extremes, notably, led one scholar writing at approximately the same time and on a similar topic to title his book *Holy Anorexia*[116].

Additionally, what female saints gain in reality and in personal contact with their hagiographers or biographers, they lose in the resultant *vita*. As Mooney observes,

> male hagiographers were more likely to conceal or diminish a saint's this-worldly activities if the saint in question was a woman. Fear of offending a Church or public opposed to feminine assertiveness likely influenced their choices, but other agendas, ranging from their unconsidered assumptions about women and female sanctity to their own-self interest, also played apart. These women were 'others' in the eyes of their male admirers, and this otherliness included the women's proximity to the supernatural realm, a holy intimacy the men admired but felt incapable of imitating. (11).

Anglo-Saxon female saints depend upon their humanity, a humanity consistently expressed and represented by the persistence of their bodies in every kind of situation. Anglo-Saxon hagiographic writers use the women saints in the creation of religious community, as tangible links in a Christian lineage descending from martyr to martyr, saint to saint, believer to believer. Anglo-Saxon female saints embody the best and the worst: at once, they symbolize great human weakness and exalted spiritual strength. But, it may be argued, they are not real. The degree of interpretation imposed upon a saint's life by her Anglo-Saxon hagiographer is irrelevant because the saint, even those, like Æthelthryth, who are based in historical fact, are ultimately creations of the writer, shaped according to his desires and felt social pressures. While post-conquest hagiographers relinquish a comfortable relationship with their female subject, they also acquire the complex problem of a real woman with a female voice. Post-conquest

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[116] Bell, Rudolph M. *Holy Anorexia.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

hagiography, then, paradoxically lose a human subject and gain a woman's experiences and views.

Both Anglo-Saxon and post-conquest hagiographies have benefits and complex problems in the interpretation of the role of the religious woman, canonized or not. In both, she is a figure of increasing importance. Crucially, in Anglo-Saxon hagiography, the woman saint represents, not female power, but female interaction and participation within society and that most extreme expression of religious interests, goals, and ideals: sainthood. This study, of course, denies neither the realities of patriarchal society nor misogynistic writers and oppressions. But it does reevaluate one moment in the life of the Medieval women, suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon female saint, at least, lived a fully developed, fully human *life*. The question, *what has woman to do with Christ?*, might be rephrased as *what is woman to Christ?* In Anglo-Saxon hagiography, the answer is simple: human.

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