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Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood: The Female
Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD (Theology/Ecclesiastical History)
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Declaration

I composed this thesis, the work is my own. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

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Thesis Abstract

The late antique figure of the female monk has been commented upon within the spheres of socio-history, theology, and literary analysis, but no comprehensive study has focused on the contemporary historical and gendered context. This thesis therefore reexamines female transvestite monk hagiographies, revealing that the female protagonists are portrayed as possessing a holy womanhood regardless of having layers of masculinity applied to them. Three layers of masculinity, namely outward, social, and inward, are identified in the characterizations of the female monks. Each masculine layer is scrutinized separately to explore its purpose in the plot structures and to show plausible motivations for the utilization of transvestite figures in religious literature. The use of an intertextual method reveals gendered intertexts, or literary motifs, in the hagiographies which serve as familiar ideological vehicles carrying the intended inspirational, instructional, and theological messages of the writers.

Through the removal of these holy women's masculine layers, this thesis reveals that outward and social masculinity are superficial and heavily relied upon as a means of concealment, but inward masculinity, considered akin to genuine expressions of self in these literary characters, is essentially non-existent. Hagiographers had no intention of transforming their religious protagonists into anything but determined, holy women who are forced to act drastically to sustain ascetic dreams begun while mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. Masculinities and intertexts located in these *Vitae* contextualize praise for a holy womanhood within acceptable gendered language, which seems to support a belief in the spiritual potential of women. In comprehending the intertexts' function in these legends, this thesis highlights the potential for complex irony to develop around the figure of a female transvestite, which supplies religious tales with intrigue and interest, the ability to instruct or chastise mixed audiences, and the potential to portray the reversal inherent in the human drama of salvation.

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Abbreviations

AASS – Acta Sanctorum

Bib. Nat. – La Bibliothèque Nationale de France

BHG – Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca

BHL – Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina

BHO – Bibliotheca Orientalis

Brit. Mus. – British Museum

CPG – Clavis Patrologia Graeca

CSCO – Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium

gr. – Greek

Hist. Laus. – Palladius. Historia Lausiaca.

J ECS – Journal of Early Christian Studies

PG – Patrologia Graeca

PL – Patrologia Latinae

PO – Patrologia Orientalis

ROC - Revue de L'orient Chrétien

SC – Sources Chrétiennes

Syn. – Synaxarion

Synax.CP – Synaxarion of Constantinople

QE – Philo, Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum.

QG – Philo, Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin.

Introduction

τὰ βυζία αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ἦσαν ὡς ἐπὶ δύο φύλλων ξηρῶν¹
“...because his breasts were those of a woman like two withered leaves.”

The female transvestite² monk legends belong to a subgroup within Byzantine Christian literature which has evoked a great deal of scholarly interest throughout the years. In the past century academic trends and foci in the interpretation of these legends have been varied and conflictive, building off each others' theses with criticisms and corrections. Scholars began in the Victorian age with comparisons to pre-Christian romances, deemed by them the most influential. This approach was replaced by sociological and psychological examinations. These fields, headed by scholars such as Marie Delcourt and John Anson,³ found within

¹ The edition used for the *Life of Anastasia Patricia*, unless otherwise stated, is *Vie D'Anastasia le Patrice* introduced by Leon Clugnet and contained in *Revue de L'orient Chrétien* 5 (Paris: 1900): 50-53. This is cited within this thesis as *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 52, lines 26-27.

² The terms “transvestism” and “transvestite” are used in this thesis in a metaphorical and expanded sense. The term transvestism at its basic level is constructed with the Latin prefix trans-, meaning “across,” and root vestire, meaning “to clothe” or “to dress.” Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term transvestite in the early twentieth century to denote the occasion of an “erotischer Verkleidungstrieb,” but it was rejected by his contemporary Havelock Ellis who preferred the term Eonism, which seemed to single out male transvestites with little consideration to female transvestites. Vern Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), vii. Both men assumed the psychological and sexual implications of transvestism. This thesis uses the word without the added sexual or sensual connotations as does Valerie Hotchkiss who states that the term transvestite has gained validity in literary analyses, although she uses the terms transvestite and cross-dresser interchangeably. Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (NY: Garland, 1996), 4.

However, the mechanics of the masculine ruses cannot simply be termed “cross-dressing.” The term transvestism is preferred as it allows for an expanded understanding of women of being clothed symbolically in the masculine. Also, the terms “transgender” and “transsexual” are not applicable. The transvestism present in these legends is a female enterprise utilized to safeguard chastity and attain spiritual aspirations. Hagiographers do not describe these women as changing sex or as realizing their spiritual strengths within an opposite gender beyond the superficiality of a masculine disguise. The general term “heteroclite,” i.e. a person that deviates from the ordinary rule or form, although closer in applicability, is considered unfavorable because within the legends these women deviated in superficial ways from “stereotypical” female forms, but did so to remain women. Once more, these characters are read as realizing their spiritual existences within themselves as women and therefore use drastic methods to sustain their autonomy and monastic careers. It is a deviation for the sake of continuity. Therefore, this thesis prefers the term transvestite. It must be admitted that no term describes adequately the three-layered masculine situation of the female monk figures except for “andromimesis,” meaning “man mime,” but it is avoided as it is not a recognizable term to most readers.

³ Marie Delcourt, “Le complexe de Diane dans l'hagiographie Chrétienne,” *Revue de L'histoire des Religions* 153 (1958): 1-33; Marie Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (London: Studio Books, 1961); John Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,” *Viator* 5 (1974): 1-32.

these holy female transvestites gendered reactions to social plights, reflections of the psyches of late antique women, and the erotic or imaginative needs of monastic communities suffering from their celibacy. Beginning in the 1970s, feminist scholars used these women to show the social freedom and liberation asexuality offered women of late antiquity. Later critics, such as Sandra Lowerre and Valerie Hotchkiss,⁴ used these same women to show the presence of misogyny and ideological conformity because women are encouraged to become masculine to gain human value.

In this thesis, hagiographies featuring woman monks are scrutinized in order to reveal that a holy womanhood is present within the portrayals of female protagonists regardless of the outward, social, and inward masculine layers applied to their characters.⁵ This thesis discusses whence these layers of masculinity and what were their effects on the portrayals of holy women and their function for hagiographers and external audiences. Since hagiographers present their female monk characters as actively constructing and projecting masculinity in performance of a socio-sexual role, both readers and supporting characters found within the tales are considered audiences of their role-play.

A mixed readership containing lay and monastic, men and women comprise the external audiences of these legends. The makeup of this group is evident from the circulation and republication of these legends throughout the centuries in many different languages and the celebration of these figures on the holy calendars of both Eastern and Western Christendom. These issues are discussed in detail in a following chapter. External audiences, aware that the male monks are secretly women, are the intended recipients of the dramatic irony that culminates when true sexual identities are abruptly discovered by lesser characters at the conclusions of the legends. Hagiographers ensure this awareness of the female monks through tracing the continuity of spiritual aspirations from their lay lives into their monastic careers,

⁴ Sandra Lowerre, *The Cross-dressing Female Saints in Wynkyn de Worde's 1495 Edition of the Vitas Patrum: A Study and Edition of the Lives of Saints Pelage, Maryne, Eufrosyne, Eugene and Mary of Egypt*, series XIV, Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature, vol. 428 (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, NY, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2005); Hotchkiss, 1996.

⁵ This thesis provides its own translations for all Greek, Coptic, and Latin. Some of the female monk hagiographies are for the first time translated into English within this thesis.

asserting the pragmatism of these women's transvestism, and using female pronouns, names, and verb endings when referring to them behind their male personas. External audiences experience the masculine layers of these female characters as components of gender ruses employed to sustain ascetic lifestyles as autonomous single women.

Supporting and lesser characters, i.e. internal audiences, enhance storylines and provide occasions for the hagiographer to use many additional plot points to test the mettle of the female monks. In contrast to external audiences that receive the female monks as women, internal audiences are deceived by the masculine ruses, receive them as men or as male eunuchs, and react to them in relevant ways depending on the plot. This deception provides female monks with a type of anonymity that can provide a means to escape and to avoid detection by intruding family members or members of the male brethren. This anonymity, provided by outward and social masculinity, establishes the female monks within these *Vitae* as autonomous, single women.

It is argued here that the masculinization of these women is a practical, descriptive attempt used by male Christian intellectuals to praise a holy womanhood. It is a question of the lack of positive vocabulary to describe womanhood on its own terms and not one of a conscious hateful attack on femininity. Masculinity contextualizes praise for a holy womanhood within acceptable gendered language, one which deals with the opposites of positive (masculine) and negative (feminine), where then all positive human traits are deemed masculine. Therefore, masculine language also seems to support the spiritual potential of women.

Extremely helpful to this thesis are the latest examinations, such as that of Stavroula Constantinou and Georges Sidéris,⁶ that scrutinize the female monk characters on performative and theological levels to highlight the function of their literature. However, no scholar adequately treats the spectrum of masculinity present in the female monk hagiographies. Here, in this thesis, each masculine layer, outward, social, or inward, is scrutinized separately to reveal its function in and connection with the overall story. Outward masculinity includes physicality, choice

⁶ Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005); Georges Sidéris, "Le sexe des anges: la byzantinologie et les questions de genre," in *Byzance en Europe*, ed. M.- F. Auzépy (Saint-Denis: Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2003), 217–233.

of institution, name, and dress; social masculinity concerns the reception of these holy women as men within the legends by supporting characters, which is still largely dependent on transvestism; and inner masculinity involves descriptions of self, the perceivable voices of these women, and external opinions of their character as presented by male hagiographers to readers. This is an unexplored approach to these late antique female characters and one that provides for the first time a comprehensive study focused simultaneously on all these aspects of the contemporary historical and gendered context.

If taken metaphorically, transvestism denotes adopting more than just the clothes of the opposite sex, but its total outward and social form. In this thesis transvestism at its full extent includes dress, hairstyle, bodily transformations due to asceticism or environmental factors, name, and choice of institution, called here institutional transvestism. Past studies have overlooked the importance of renaming and institutional transvestism as completing the overall male disguise. Together transvestic acts provide multifaceted male disguises for single women to remain anonymous to searching family members and to achieve a level of autonomy to practice asceticism in monastic society.

A re-examination of the essence of and motivations for the acts of transvestism within the legends supports the following three innovative views of this thesis. One, transvestism was a means to an end and not the most significant element of the story; it was a vehicle for single women to encroach freely upon monastic worlds within the legends. Therefore, in this context, masculine transformations portray continuity for holy women and not change – transvestism should be considered a female enterprise within the legends for the sustainment of a holy womanhood.

Transvestism ultimately functions for the female monks as a method to escape portions of their lay lives that prevented the freedom to choose their religious lifestyle and profession. This thesis refers to this as an escape from a previous lay life, not specifically a female life in order to counter previous scholarship that called this escape a type of female castration.⁷ True, laywomen experienced a severely

⁷ Delcourt, 1961, 97.

limited freedom within a domestic or social setting when compared to laymen, but it is recorded that men were at times also compelled to abandon and escape family and home, at times resulting in harsh objections of family members.⁸ Both men and women made worldly sacrifices, which included sex, homes, and families, in order to dedicate their lives to asceticism. It is only those who equate the woman with sex, the home, and the family that call this escape as cutting off of the feminine or womanhood. Since both men and women give up major portions of their lives to become ascetics, this thesis calls the escape found within these legends abandonments of worldly or lay existences. Therefore transvestism provides for these women the means to escape a lay existence, to choose a monastic career, and to remain safely hidden, sometimes until death, within a monastic home.

Two, the female monks do not realize their spiritual or ascetic aspirations or potential after they become men; this realization occurs while still acting and being received as women within their social and familial circles. Additionally, for these women ascetic and asexual longings are not formed outside of themselves within the essence of a man or male eunuch. These women became men for their own sake as women. A religious desire needed to be sustained and developed, not begun.

An additional point can be made with their entry into male institutions. It is not as important that they enter a *male* world, as that they enter a *monastic* world, which must be male orientated by default if they are to successfully hide from those seeking them. Therefore the choice to enter a male monastery in the legends is seen as institutional transvestism and not as a desire to commune with a gender category that they viewed themselves a part of or aspired to emulate. The female monk characters are portrayed as realizing their spiritual potential within themselves as women. This is shown at times in the *Vitae* by initial desires to enter convents. The final decisions to enter male monasteries are guided by the fear that convents could not adequately hide them. This fact further shows that these women were ascetically minded within their lay existences because family members naturally assume that convents would be desired destinations. Therefore, all acts of transvestism should be

⁸ For a discussion of this see Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement: A Paradox of Late Ancient Christianity," *Anglican Theological Review* 63 (1981): 241-245; Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 119-120; 126-127.

viewed as a female enterprise used by hagiographers to conceal women within the monastic world in order to sustain dramatic tension and promote theological and inspirational messages for readers.

Three, this thesis seeks to prove that hagiographers were interested in what their main characters could do as women within the *Vitae* and not as women metamorphosed into men in any real sense. Hagiographers, through their stress on the pragmatism guiding the female monks' choices to adopt and accept masculine personas, established transvestism as a necessity and last resort for these women to become successful, ascetic women. It is evident that outward and social masculinities are superficial and heavily relied upon as a means of concealment within the stories, but inward masculinity, construed as a form of self expression from these literary characters, is essentially non-existent. Therefore a holy womanhood is consistent throughout the stories.

The overall intention behind the production of religious literature with successful female transvestites as the main protagonists is to provide interesting, instructional, and theologically loaded tales. Hagiographers utilize intertexts, i.e. textual themes or literary motifs, in conjunction with women that are layered with masculinity to serve as familiar cultural ideological vehicles capable of carrying these intended messages. The intertextual method highlights texts as constructions of popular cultural intertexts, focuses on the interplay between texts and authors, and gives particular attention to the active role that readers perform in shaping the significance of texts. There exist three prominent intertexts present within the female monk *Vitae*. The first involves the cultural ideology surrounding the figures of the "male woman" and the eunuch with which the female monks are metaphorically associated. Both figures work to contextualize praise for a holy womanhood within acceptable gendered or sexual language, which seems to support a belief in the spiritual potential of women. The second utilizes the transvestite figure as it acts as a neutral and familiar symbol of reversal. The transvestism contained within these legends, in addition to its integral role in shaping the entire plot structures of these legends, involves women who represent to readers the symbolic reversal inherent in

the human salvation drama.⁹ The third contains themes found in other stories of celebrity holy women and men, including reformed harlots, steadfast martyrs, fallacious charges of sexual promiscuity, the dedication and miracles of desert ascetics, and pious virgins.¹⁰ Shared themes amongst religious literature allow for dialogue to occur between tales of various holy figures and the female monks. This ultimately enhances the symbolic and religious value of the female monks' actions and behaviors if read alongside an awareness of other religious celebrities. This intertextual maneuver bonds instances of human resolve and devotion for Christ into a community of stories that depict strength and spiritual power to larger audiences.

Hagiographies with female transvestite monks as main characters are considered here as hagiographic myth or fictional monastic literature.¹¹ All those examined here fit the definition of hagiographic myth and are viewed largely as fictional creations, however, the *Vita* of Saint Matrona of Perge, which records a historical figure, remains hagiographic myth because it has been elaborated upon and edited to such an extent that the saint within the text emerges as a constructed figure loosely based on the historical Matrona.¹² These women's historicity matters not; they are constructed as historical figures in order to provide readers with personified

⁹ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story," in *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity*, eds. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 36-37.

¹⁰ James Drescher, ed. and trans., *Three Coptic Legends: Hilaria, Archellites, The Seven Sleepers*, cahier no. 4, *Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de L'Égypte* (Le Caire: Imprimerie De L'Institut Français, D'Archeologie Orientale, 1947), xxiii-xxiv; Benedicta Ward, "The Monastic Pattern in Egypt," *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (Cistercian Publications, 1980), 33; Claudia Rapp, "Figures of Female Sanctity: Byzantine Edifying Manuscripts and Their Audience," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 50 (1996), 313; 114-115, 119; Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995), 8-9.

¹¹ E. Amélineau, "Histoire des deux filles de l'empereur Zenon," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 4.10 (Feb. 1888): 181-206; Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. Donald Attwater (Dublin and Portland: Four Courts Press Ltd., 1998), 3-6, 51, 153-154; Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 13; Claudia Rapp, "'For Next to God, You are my Salvation': Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, eds. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 64-66.

¹² Although Saint Matrona is indeed a historical person, her *Vita* has undergone noticeable edits which temper her overall independence and erase her outright negative attitudes towards husbands and the marriage bed, as well as provide her with miraculous occurrences that attest to her personality and spiritual powers that add depth to her character.

embodiments of valued Christian, specifically ascetic, characteristics, behaviors, and ethos.¹³ The creation of religious legends for holy persons allows one

“to study the dynamism of the model projected by the text, even where the model behind the text eludes recovery or turns out to be fabricated; in other words, it gives historical meaning and function to those holy men who never existed in the flesh.”¹⁴

This is also true for holy women. These religious legends are fictional products of woven cultural, gendered, and religious intertexts to portray a holy womanhood with theological intent. The female monk *Vitae* function thus: a personified symbol of reversal, the transvestite, is coupled with the figure of a pious woman that possesses the desire for an ideal ascetic and/or virginal life. This allows a hagiographer to offer external audiences spiritual inspiration and instruction on the reversal present during salvation, namely the transformation of sinner to saved. Simultaneously, female transvestite monks are titillating female characters portrayed underneath masculine layers that allow hagiographers and external audiences to honor a holy womanhood within an accepted masculine framework. However, the fictional natures of these holy women do not belittle their significance or their esteemed place in religious culture. It proves highly useful to question why the female transvestite motif, which embodies the ideal female figure of the “male woman” and the spiritual reversal of salvation within a monastic milieu, regularly resurfaces to be readily received by Christian audiences.

It is useful to outline each chapter before one delves into the examination of these holy transvestite female characters. Chapter one, The Female Monk *Vitae*, establishes the research boundaries affecting the selection of female transvestite legends through a brief discussion of the technical and temporal boundaries of the group examined. This thesis establishes and justifies its opinion on the authorship, origin, parent language, and usefulness of available manuscripts recording these *Lives* within this chapter. Chapter two, Read and Reread, scrutinizes previous

¹³ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome Chrysostom and Friends: Essays and Translations*, 2, *Studies in Women and Religion* (NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 47; Hotchkiss, 1996, 3; Paul Magdalino, “‘What We Heard in the Lives of the Saints We Have Seen with Our Own Eyes’: the Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth Century Constantinople,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, eds. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86.

¹⁴ Magdalino, 1999, 85.

scholarship dedicated to these figures, whether the scholar found them to be historical, fictional, or hybrids due to hagiographical embellishment. This chapter discusses the observed contributions, innovations, and shortcomings of previous scholarship from the Victorian Age to contemporary material, which is located within the fields of literary analysis, sociology, psychology, theology, performative theory, and feminist studies.

Chapter three, named Written and Read, offers an introduction to the methodology of this thesis, a survey of the production and reception of texts in general, an exploration of the literary intentions and spiritual messages of the female monk legends, and a brief study of the three primary intertexts that have been woven together to produce these *Vitae*. It begins with an explanation of the mechanics of the intertextual method, which is viewed as the best method to shed light on the portrayal of the female monk characters. Intertextuality gives equal attention to texts, authors, readers, and the space between texts in which thematic associations are constructed. The intentions of hagiographers are revealed by isolating and scrutinizing the intertexts used to construct such religious tales, which will also highlight probable receptions of these texts by external audiences. The receptions, as they are theorized, are guided by the words or messages of the hagiographers. However, they are expanded on and at times misconstrued due to subjective and/or individual elements naturally brought to texts by listeners and readers. The chapter moves on to evaluate the intertexts present in the legends. Intertexts permit complex irony to develop around the figures of female transvestite monks within which external audiences will discover intrigue and inspiration, instruction or chastisement, and an overall portrayal of the reversal inherent in the human drama of salvation.

This chapter includes a review of late antique Christian gender ideology that influenced these women's characterizations to embody a figure called the "male woman." This is a constructed gender ideal used to show not only the spiritual potential of women, but of human potential. This ideological alignment of women with the positive attributes of the ideal Man provided a foundation on which to praise women as honored colleagues in late antique Christian culture. The "male woman" may have been a masculinized woman, but it must never be confused that she came to embody anything other than a strong, holy, or intellectual womanhood.

Hagiographers had no intention of transforming their religious protagonists into anything but determined, holy women who are forced to act behind masculine ruses to sustain ascetic dreams begun while mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters.

Chapter four, Outward Masculinity, discusses the function and use of transvestism as a superficial layer of masculinity laid upon these women by hagiographers to secure for them a sanctuary within which to practice asceticism as single women in religious literature. Active transvestism, including dress, hairstyle, name, and choice of institution, and passive transvestism, which consists of the physiological changes caused by extreme asceticism and environmental factors, are the outward signals utilized by hagiographers to present these women as masculine, either as man or male eunuch, to internal audiences. Outward masculinity allows these female characters to actively construct for themselves anonymity by which to achieve a level of autonomy required to take control over the maintenance of their own spiritual aspirations. Transvestism is a means to an end; not an end in itself within these legends. It ultimately allowed hagiographers to move their female characters through the plots to present intriguing dramatic irony at the conclusions of the *Vitae* for the instructional, inspirational, and theological benefit of external audiences.

Chapter five, Social Masculinity, concentrates on the reception of these women as men or male eunuchs by internal audiences who receive and react to outward masculinity. Whereas outward masculinity allowed them to enter into a life of asceticism, social masculinity allows them to remain undisturbed behind their male personas for the entirety, or at least a good portion, of the plots. For hagiographers, social masculinity provides a level of readability or believability to the whole story because it secures the basic storyline of women hiding as men, on which other obstacles and characters are added to enhance the theological and inspirational potential of the legends and to provide deeper intrigue. Social masculinity is constructed by the hagiographer through internal audiences, but it is a natural result of the successful and active endeavors of the female monk characters to project male personas outwardly to others. External audiences are aware of the mechanics and superficiality of social masculinity because they are privy to the dramatic irony of the

tales and continually are made aware of the presence of a holy womanhood underneath the social and outward masculine layers.

Chapter six, Inner Masculinity, scrutinizes the masculinization of the sentiments or essential beings of these women through two foci. The first is hagiographers' use of masculine language to describe their traits and behaviors and to praise their spiritual capabilities. This suggests the intertextual presence of a gender ideology that believed masculinity to be superior and femininity inferior, to which these female monks did not correspond. Also, through masculine language and association with male figures such as the "male woman" and male eunuch, female monks, along with other religious figures in literature, were given celebrity status due to their escapades and successes, praise in an accepted gender cultural framework, and an extraordinariness or exceptionality that ensures a correct emulation of their virtues and not their actions. The second are any vocalized self-realizations, reactions, dialogues, or statements of these women that seem to suggest an inner manhood. Inward masculinity, as expressed by hagiographers through female characters, is practically non-existent because it is clear that female monks are to be read alongside a holy womanhood; however, what readers are presented with are male hagiographers' viewpoints on holy womanhood. This may seem to be a disadvantage, but it is more revealing to the intentions of this religious literature to examine the amount of femininity or womanhood that hagiographers attempted to leave in or enhance, than what they tried to eliminate. Hagiographers were concerned with what their religious characters could do as women within the legends. This final type of masculinity shows clearly the superficiality of all three layers of masculinity applied to these holy, women characters.

At the end of this thesis, once the intertexts of these *Vitae* are scrutinized in light of a three-layered masculinization to show the tales' overall ability to develop complex irony around the figure of a female transvestite, which provides readers with religious tales of intrigue that instruct or chastise mixed audiences and portray the reversal inherent in the human drama of salvation, each *Vita* is evaluated separately on the extent that it successfully carries spiritual instruction, religious inspiration, collegial praise, and theological significance through a holy womanhood.

Chapter One: The Female Monk *Vitae*

“[It is] clear...that in Scetis legends of women monks were sufficiently widely disseminated that by the sixth century there had gradually accumulated an entire literary cycle.”¹

This thesis concentrates on the *Vitae* of Anastasia, Apolinaria, Athanasia, Euphrosyne, Hilaria, Mary, Matrona, and Theodora even though over thirty female transvestite saints are recorded within the *BHG*, *BHL*, and *BHO*, most of which Hotchkiss conveniently lists in an appendix.² However, these eight have been chosen because they conform to the following criteria. All feature holy women who permanently use transvestism in their monastic careers not just as a fleeting disguise, and are characterized by a fully developed three-layered masculinity by their hagiographers. Each *Vita* was produced during the peak time of the female transvestite monk figures’ use as theological and instructional vehicles, the fifth to the seventh centuries. Also, each contains a female character with a clear tradition and cannot be considered merely as a version of another legend based on variant name or nickname, or as a simple merging of legends. This chapter establishes this thesis’ views on the date, location of origin, and authorship of each of these eight legends while discussing the quality of manuscripts available and textual critics’ opinions of the recensions of these tales.

Research Parameters

This examination covers three centuries of female monk *Vitae* production. The peak period of production, in which most of the legends were produced and the highest level of popularity can be determined based on available languages and reproduction, covers the fifth to the seventh centuries. The female monk or cross-dressing woman appears a few times in the third and fourth centuries, which seems to lead up to this motif’s mass-production in the following centuries, while the eighth begins the period in which the theme of the pious female transvestite diminishes in popularity. After the eighth century the holy housewife begins to replace the

¹ Anson, 1974, 12-13.

² Hotchkiss, 1996. Hotchkiss lists saints who simply cross-dressed, but this thesis concentrates on those who chose a monastic vocation.

independent female transvestite as the most popular type of female figure in religious literature due to “une demande nouvelle.”³

Concerning temporal restrictions, it is easy to exclude the *Vitae* of Anna,⁴ that features a ninth-century transvestite monk akin to Mary with added fantasy elements; of Marina, an eleventh-century tale of feigned insanity and isolation as a male anchorite;⁵ of Euphrosyne the Younger, a tenth century female abbot of a male monastery and isolated hermit;⁶ and of Susanna, written during the fourth century to record the story of a convert who reveals her true identity to avoid death by stoning, which includes a unique pagan conversion element and martyrdom which hints at an early tradition.⁷ The extremely popular second-century story of Thecla, the woman in man’s clothing who follows the apostle Paul and gains a spiritual authority of her own, is additionally excluded based on this research boundary.

It is convenient to limit focus to female monks that have clear traditions in order to see fully the hagiographer’s use of masculine layers in the legends. A few female monk *Vitae* exist only through a separate preservation of confused storylines, mistaken names or nicknames, and merged figures. Based on this fact, the omissions are as follows: the eleventh-century Marina, mentioned above, whose legend was erroneously equated with that of Mary, and Margarite,⁸ who is a vague character associated with Mary and Pelagia and is active in a legend that reads like a hodge-podge of all the legends in question. Margarite is absent from most scholarship dealing with the female transvestite monk motif and first appears categorized by Delcourt. The Bollandists list the *Vita* of Margarite in the *Acta Sanctorum* within the appendix to the *Vita* of Mary because of the similarities between the two stories,

³ Evelyn Patlagean, “L’histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l’évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance,” *Studi Medievali* (1976): 604.

⁴ BHG 2027; *Menaia Graeca* October 29; *Synax. CP* 174¹⁶-178. *De S. Anna, Quae et Euphemianus*, AASS Oct. 12.915-916; N. Delierneux, “Anne-Euphémianos, l’épouse devenue eunuque: Continuité et évolution d’un modèle hagiographique,” *Byzantion* 72 (2002): 105-140.

⁵ BHG 1170; *De Marina Scaniensi in Sicilia*, AASS Jul 4.288.

⁶ BHG 627; *Vitae Sanctae Euphrosynae Iunioris*, AASS Nov 3.861-877.

⁷ BHG 1673; *De S. Susanna Virg. M.*, AASS, Sept 6.153-159.

⁸ BHL 5323; *De Reparata seu Margarita, Pelagius dicta*, AASS Jul 4.287; Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 613-614; Hermann Usener, *Legenden der heiligen Pelagia* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1879), 3-16 ; Delcourt, 1958, 2-3 ; Anson, 1974, 11.

implying that she exists only as a mistaken variation of a better-known story. Margarite, a virgin who changed her name to Pelagius, has been confused throughout the ages with Pelagia, a prostitute, known by the nickname Margaret, who changed her name to Pelagius. At best, the *Vita* of Margarite was seen as a divergent tale of Pelagia in past scholarship. This is understandable since the legend of Pelagia can be viewed as one of the major female monk archetypes, the others being Thecla, Perpetua, and Eugenia.⁹

This thesis concentrates on female monk characters that are presented as hiding within fully developed three-layered masculine ruses to the ends of the tales. It makes an exception for the *Vita* of Matrona of Perge, for her legend best exemplifies masculine language and androcentric praise.¹⁰ However, this would exclude the *Vita* of Eugenia that portrays a temporary transvestite martyr historically active in the legend during the second century, which seems intended to honor a martyr and her martyred family.¹¹ This second century martyr appears in a sixth century tale, which accounts for the encroachment of the female transvestite monk motif upon an original tale of a martyr in order to provide a deeper spiritual reading

⁹ The stories of these women, along with other major male and female figures, all of whom are discussed in detail within this thesis' third chapter, act as intertexts because they seem to be used as source materials. The intertextual stories of Pelagia, Thecla, and Eugenia, from which at times the female monk hagiographers seem to have heavily borrowed, share major plot points and theological thrusts with the eight *Lives* chosen here. For instance, Pelagia's tale is considered an intertextually influential due to its striking theme of the repentant harlot coupled with the symbolic reversal of a cross-dresser. The themes of reversal, repentance, and salvation in the story of Pelagia are exaggerated forms of those present in all female monk *Vitae*. However, the differences between both sets of stories show that the female monk *Vitae* are not just simple reconstructions of the tales of previous holy women and men, but carefully constructed legends that use popular literary and cultural texts to present familiar and engaging characters and stories in an new inspirational and theological way.

However, Pelagia's legend is thought to have been written in the fifth century during the time of the peak production of the female monk *Vitae*, which would place it in very close temporal proximity to those texts it influences. Delehaye, in his work on this legend, has discovered that James of Edessa embellished a vague version of a story of an Antiochian virgin in the fifth century and produced the story of Pelagia that exists now. Delehaye, 1998, 153-156; see also Pierre Petitmengin, Matei Cazacu, François Dolbeau, Bernard Flusin, Antoine Guillaumont, François Guillaumont, Louis Lenoir, Carlos Lévy, Jean-Pierre Rothschild, Jean-Yves Tilliette, Michel van Esbroeck, eds., *Pélagie la Pénitente Métamorphoses d'une Légende*, tome I, *Les textes et leur histoire Grec, Latin, Syriaque, Arabe, Arménien, Géorgien, Slavon* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981), 15-18. Texts that are penned during the peak time of the production and popularity of the female monk *Vitae* can still function as intertexts - dialogue between texts can occur laterally.

¹⁰ This *Vita* is discussed in detail below.

¹¹ *BHG* 607w-608b; *Synax*, CP 339; *BHL* 2666-2670; *PG* 116.609-652; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Étude sur le légendier Romain: Les saints de novembre et de décembre*, 23, *Subsidia Hagiographica* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, Paris: 1936), 175-186.

through popular cultural trends and intertexts. Because her transvestism was temporary (she assumes a female life after dramatically ripping her tunic to expose her breasts at the royal court) and that the account concentrates more on her martyrdom, her *Vita* will not be scrutinized in detail like the other legends, but it may be referenced to support hypotheses or make comparisons. This research boundary would of course again exclude Thecla and the aforementioned Susanna.

The story of Pelagia,¹² which conforms to the above mentioned research boundaries, records a tale of a reformed harlot and female transvestite hermit. It is easy to see Pelagia's tale as a reworking of the romantic elements of Thecla and Paul that have been heavily influenced by popular late antique intertexts, akin to the transformation of the legend of Eugenia mentioned above. However, Pelagia's tale is dissimilar from those of the female monks examined here on many points. She, a novice Christian, joins together with a pious male character out of love and awe. Most female monks begin their active ascetic careers by hiding from husbands or fathers, who may be pushing for betrothals, to avoid what could be termed love. Pelagia's desire to be an ascetic woman is formed at the spiritual suggestion of Nonnus whereas most female monk *Vitae* have piously minded laywomen as their main characters that seek to kindle a flame that had begun in their own minds. Pelagia abandons Nonnus, an intimate Paul-like figure, autonomously to practice asceticism as a repentant woman in male clothing. Her hagiographer has no need to develop a detailed threefold masculinity around his character. It seems that she would have been free to practice asceticism under the supervision of Nonnus, but she leaves as a cross-dresser to live a solitary life in the desert. In contrast, within the *Vitae* examined at length within this thesis, masculine ruses are much more heavily relied upon. Therefore Pelagia is omitted because the hagiographer did not develop a layered masculinity around his character and transvestism is used vaguely during the latter third of her tale with no consequence or observable necessity.

These research boundaries, while omitting a number of women, allow for the majority of distinctive female monk *Vitae* to be scrutinized. Many were produced

¹² BHG 1478-1479; BHL 6605-6611; PG 116.908-920; PL 73.663-672; Usener, 1879; Petitmengin, 1981, 13-15; Vern L. Bullough, "Transvestitism in the Middle Ages," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James Brundage, (NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 46; Delehay, 1998, 153-154.

from the fifth to seventh centuries using as main characters religious women in permanent transvestic guise. The eight legends chosen here all share a common plot: a laywoman realizes that her ascetic lifestyle is limited or her virginity is endangered by familial or sexual relations; she subsequently decides that escape within a male disguise and persona is a necessary outlet; she remains hidden through establishing a social masculinity within a male institution; she practices asceticism as an autonomous, single woman until death; and supporting characters, those which are not already privy to her secret sexual identity, express great awe during the preparation of her corpse or after learning the corpse's sexual state. Upon this general plot hagiographers travel in different directions to include theological, intriguing, or inspirational tangents. These are usually formed by the intrusion of the repentant harlot theme, dramas involving charges of homo- or heterosexual lust, false charges of impregnating women, and/or unwanted family reunions, all of which add layers of intrigue, complication, or vulnerability that will further test the women's mettle for the benefit of external audiences.

Before the content of each legend is scrutinized, which takes place in the following chapters dedicated to the three types of masculinity applied by hagiographers to their female characters, this thesis discusses the manuscripts that preserve the tales of a masculinized holy womanhood. For brevity these *Vitae* are grouped together below by the type of female main character they contain, namely wives, daughters, princesses, or virgins.

The Female Monk Legends in Question

Wives

Three of the female monks appear as wives within the legends: Matrona, an abused wife and mother who fears and avoids her husband at all costs; Theodora, an adulterous, yet penitent wife who is charged with impregnating a local girl; and Athanasia, a wife who, along with her like-minded husband, enters into a monastic career, but later uses a male persona to rejoin him at his monastery.

Matrona of Perge, renamed Babylas

Matrona of Perge's *Vita* differs in three ways from the other legends chosen for this thesis. One, it records a historical figure whose life has been embellished;

two, it is the longest; and three, she is the only female monk granted the continued use of masculine dress as a symbol for her sanctity and as material acknowledgment of her success. Two major versions of Matrona's *Life* exist, both in Greek, the *Vita Prima*,¹³ and the *Vita Altera*, which is the Metaphrastic version from the tenth century that was more widely circulated, however not without editorial liberties that omitted Matrona's sense of autonomy and anti-marriage attitude.¹⁴

In the fifth and sixth centuries Matrona lived mainly in Constantinople and in seclusion in the Holy Land. Cyril Mango has reconstructed a timeline for the historical Matrona relying to some extent on the chronological research performed by Khalifa Bennasser and Hippolyte Delehaye. He concludes that she was born around 430 in Perge, was active as a male monk for three years in the late 450s since Bassianos' monastery in Constantinople was not established until the 450s, returned to Constantinople for a reunion with Bassianos between 472 and 474, had a theological conflict with the Patriarch Macedonius in the third year of his

¹³ The *Vita Prima* used for this thesis is found in *S. Matronae Vita Prima*. AASS Nov. 3.794-813. Delehaye reconstructed the *Vita Prima* from the following codices: Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. Par. 1519, which survives in one complete copy from the eleventh century; Vatican, cod. Pal. 80, f209, penned in the twelfth century; and Vatican, cod. gr. 807, f315, which was produced in the tenth century. *BHG* 1221-1223.

¹⁴ Present in the *Vita Altera* is an important aberration. In the *Vita Prima*, Saint Bassianos conferred the male monastic habit onto Matrona and granted her the right to confer it to participants at her convent – this is an outward sign of her authority, leadership, and power. The Metaphrastic version omits this entirely. The authority of Matrona is further undermined by the *Vita Altera* as it describes Matrona giving counsel to one of her female followers through the young girl's husband, whose consent is now necessary as a prerequisite for an ascetic life. This is quite different from the Matrona in the *Vita Prima* who has no difficulty in abandoning husbands or advising women to do the same. The later Matrona is a complete Metaphrastic makeover of Matrona. This is discussed in Khalifa Bennasser, "Gender and Sanctity in Early Byzantine Monasticism: A Study of the Phenomenon of Female Ascetics in Male Monastic Habit with a Translation of the Life of St. Matrona" (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 1984), 117-118 and in Eva Catafygiotu Topping, "St. Matrona and her Friends: Sisterhood in Byzantium," in *καθηγητρια (Kathegetria): Essays Presented to Joan Hussey on her 80th Birthday*, ed. Chrysostomides, J., (Camberley: Porphyrogenitus, 1988), 223. She has been transformed from a rebellious female religious authority, into a supporter of the social marital hierarchy at the expense of spiritual goals. This is clearly the work of a later redactor toning down the female perspective found within the original story. The *Vita Altera* is found in the *AASS* and represents Vatican, cod. gr. 804, f244 from the twelfth century; Vatican, cod. gr. 810, f222 from the twelfth century; Vatican, cod. Otto. 427, f222 from the twelfth century; and cod. Monascensis 364, f364. Additionally, her life is preserved with a *Vita Tertia*, also found in the *Acta Sanctorum*, Venice, St Marci bib. cod., f332 from the eleventh or twelfth century.

patriarchate around 500, and died within the years between 510-515.¹⁵ Historical dates for Matrona can be established through the figures recorded in the legend that sought her counsel, namely the empress Verina, the wife of Leo I, whose reign spanned 457-474, and the wife of the emperor Anthemius, who reigned from 427 to his death in 472.¹⁶ Matrona's historicity also is witnessed by imperial chroniclers who report on her religio-political career during her opposition to the Monophysite policy, specifically the conflict between a group of protagonists, which included Matrona, and the Patriarch Macedonius mentioned above.¹⁷ This timeline is sound if one ignores the obvious fantasy insertion in the *Life* of Matrona, in which Matrona is present at the recovery of the head of John the Baptist.¹⁸

It is believed that a written life of Matrona, perhaps a prototype of the *Vita Prima*, appeared soon after her death due to such striking details preserved of her life, but the *Vita Prima* could not have been written before the mid sixth century because of certain references within the legend. Delehaye discusses these within his introduction to her *Life* in the *Acta Sanctorum*. He was unimpressed by the romantic elements of her escapes and wanderings, the claim of the prevalence of idolatry at

¹⁵ However, Bennasser's timeline places her death ten years later than that hypothesized by Mango because he establishes a date of 450 for the establishment of Bassianos' monastery. The *Vita* reports that she was twenty-five years of age when she entered the monastery and that she died at around the age of one hundred. Bennasser simply counts up one hundred years from her birth to establish her death around 525. Mango seems sceptical and calls this record of her old age an exaggeration. He suggests 80 or so years as a more realistic age. Delehaye, "De Sancta Matrona, Commentarius Praevius," *AASS* Nov 3.786; Bennasser, 1984, 110; Cyril Mango, "Introduction: Life of St. Matrona of Perge," in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, 1, *Byzantine Saints' Lives in Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 16, 64 ff 117.

¹⁶ Bennasser, 1984, 110.

¹⁷ Mango, 1996, 14. He mentions Theodore Lector's *Ecclesiastical History* written in 525, see Theodoros Anagnostes, *Kirchengeschichte*, ed. G. C. Hansen (Berlin, 1971), 109.3-6; Romanos the Melode's mutilated hymn honors this story in the mid sixth century, see *Sancti Romani Melodi cantica dubia*, ed. P. Maas and C. A. Trypanis (Berlin, 1970), no. 89; and the chronicler Theophanes, who relied on the account of Lector in the late eighth or early ninth century to write his account of the conflict, which he dates to 488/489, which is discussed by Hansen cited above.

¹⁸ This miraculous event occurs within the legend after she becomes superior at the convent of Hilaria, but this historical event "occurred" either before the death of Valens in 378, according to Sozomen and Callistus, or in February 452 or 453, both of which are too early for her careers at the monastery of Bassianos and of Hilaria to have run their course. Markellos of Emesa's text, which records this event, is found in C. DuCange, *Traité historique du chef de S. Jean Baptiste* (Paris, 1655), 215 ff; Delehaye, *AASS* Nov 3.789-790; Bennasser, 1984, 111-112; Mango, 1996, 16. Delehaye was suspicious of Markellos' appearance in the legend and his dating of an event that also occurred in a legend in which he was featured.

Beirut, and the prominent role given to the deacon Markellos of Emesa within the legend.¹⁹ However, overall Delehayé's evidence is circumstantial. Mango solidifies Delehayé's beliefs by calling attention to the reference to the church of Saint Mary the New at Jerusalem that was dedicated in 543, which would make its reference impossible if written any earlier.²⁰ This thesis sees no reason to disagree with these findings and therefore holds that the *Vita Prima* was written during the mid-sixth century, but this thesis also champions the notion that a prototype in some form of the *Vita Prima* existed earlier in the sixth century for reasons explained below.

This is the only *Vita* in which the production of the text is discussed in detail at the opening and closing of the legend. The accepted view on the *Vita Prima*'s authorship, which follows basically that which is described in the legend by the hagiographer, is that an anonymous male monk of the monastery of Bassianos produced it using the recorded notes of Eulogia, who was a nun at Matrona's convent and therefore a firsthand witness.²¹ Mango convincingly argues that an early prototype of her legend, consisting of either the collected and organized notes of Eulogia or a proto-*Vita Prima* produced by a male monk from those notes, existed in the early sixth century and was a source of the later *Vita Prima*.²² For instance, Mango highlights the tone of a passage that describes the conflict of the church during the time of Anastasios I to show the influence of an earlier prototype or organized group of notations. Mango states,

“The coded reference to the ‘tempest’ and ‘upheaval’ that overtook the Church at the time would be understandable on the part of an author writing while Anastasios was still alive. But why omit one of Matrona's most famous achievements, especially one in the cause of orthodoxy, if the text was first written in the second half of the sixth century or later?”²³

To explain this omission, he concludes that a proto-*Vita Prima* did not record the event and therefore it was left out of the completed *Vita Prima* as well. This thesis sees Mango's reasoning as lending credit to the possibility that at least this prototype

¹⁹ Delehayé, *AASS* Nov. 3.789.

²⁰ Mango, 1996, 15.

²¹ Delehayé, *AASS* Nov 3.789; Mango, 1996, 14.

²² Mango, 1996, 15.

²³ Mango, 1996, 15.

may have been written in Matrona's own convent by a woman, especially if this prototype was produced shortly after Matrona's death.

Likewise, Eva Catafygiotu Topping believes that the notes of Eulogia produced a written source of the *Vita Prima*, but, conversely, she champions the view that a woman belonging to the convent of Matrona also penned the completed *Vita Prima*.

“If the editors are correct in dating it to the middle of the sixth century, that is, within several decades after Matrona's death in 524, then it is more likely that the hagiographer belonged to Matrona's monastery, rather than to Bassianos's monastery as suggested by the editors.”²⁴

Topping's argument is based on temporal considerations. However, she places Matrona's death a decade later than Mango, basing her opinion on Bennasser's timeline, and this would narrow the time gap between Matrona's death and a mid-sixth century production of a finished *Vita Prima*. She also believes that the overtly feminine tone and perspective of the whole piece proves that this *Vita* was intended for a female audience, which at first consists of the sisters of the female hagiographer at Matrona's convent.²⁵ According to Topping, only a female audience would truly enjoy the short, collected stories about aspiring female nuns that feature in the latter part of this legend.²⁶ This would support her theory of the production of this *Vita Prima* by the hand of a woman in the convent of Matrona. However, this thesis shows that male authors and readers also praised holy women as colleagues and could have also enjoyed such stories, which calls into question her reliance on the sexual makeup of the audience to denote the sexuality of the hagiographer.

As for the sex of the author, she compares the portrayal of the women and the tone of the hagiographer in the *Vita Prima*, written by a woman for women, to the *Vita Altera*, reworked by a man for a larger audience. The male redactor reduces the authority, transforms the attitude of Matrona, refers to women in a slightly misogynistic way, and tones down the praise given to these overtly independent

²⁴ Topping, 1988, 223.

²⁵ Topping, 1988, 223-225.

²⁶ Topping, 1988, 224.

women surrounding Matrona.²⁷ As mentioned above,²⁸ the male redactor omits the permission given to Matrona to retain the male monastic habit for use amongst her community. These omissions need not be misogynistic in nature though, and can stand as evidence of a shift in the cultural significance; the stress on chastity in late antiquity changed to stress on motherhood, families, or holy wives centuries later when the *Vita Altera* was produced.

Mango is not convinced by Topping's arguments concerning female authorship because of the use of a masculine principle within the legend. He argues that a masculine sense of self or mindset of the hagiographer would naturally intrude into the story even if using the notes that Eulogia transcribed.²⁹ This thesis agrees for the most part with the conclusions of Mango. Eulogia's notes, or a prototype legend written by a woman, were indeed used to produce the *Vita Prima*, but given the statistics of monastic book production in late antiquity it is more likely that the *Vita Prima* was produced within the male institution of Bassianos, which is highly plausible given the close relationship between Matrona and Bassianos within the legend.³⁰

²⁷ Topping, 1988, 223-224.

²⁸ See footnote 14.

²⁹ Mango, 1996, 14. He refers to the points in the narrative that the hagiographer refers to himself or to the larger monastic group to which he belongs in the *Vita Prima*. These passages are found in *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.791, 1 lines 59-60; 3.792, 4 lines 39-43; 3.812, 501-5. This thesis would like to add to this and highlight the fact that the hagiographer casually and naturally refers to the Eulogia in the third person while discussing his own participation in the production of the *Vita*.

³⁰ This thesis wishes to extend this reasoning that assumes a male authorship, which is based largely on the masculine tone or mindset clearly present within all the legends from the use of the "male woman" to present a holy womanhood, further discussed as necessary for male authors in chapter three, and on the findings of scholars who research late antique book production in the Egyptian monasteries, especially in the Scetis region since it is the region constantly highlighted within the tales, to all the female monk legends examined here and feels safe in doing so. Please see: James E. Goehring, "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt," *JECS* 1:3 (1993): 281-296; Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde van Dijk, eds., *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Anson, 1974; Chrysi Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in *The Early Christian Book*, eds. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 48-66. In addition to Topping, for plausible and challenging alternative theories for women scribes and hagiographers, see: Hotchkiss, 1996, 3; Kim Haines-Eitzen, "'Girls Trained in Beautiful Writing': Female Scribes in Roman Antiquity and Early Christianity" *JECS* 6.4 (1998): 629-646; Kim Haines-Eitzen, "Engendering Palimpsests: Reading the Textual Tradition of the Acts of Paul and Thecla," in *The Early Christian Book*, eds. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 177-193.

Theodora, renamed Theodoros

The legend of Theodora³¹ that is used within this thesis appears in K. Wessely, *Die Vita S. Theodoraë*, Fünfzehnter Jahresbericht des K. K. Staatsgymnasiums in Hernals (Wien, 1889), 27-44. He publishes three versions of this text: Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. 1454, f36a; Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. 1468, f12a; and Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. 1506, f28a. Wessely, sharing Usener's pity for the editor of these manuscripts, bemoans the quality and cohesion of these unedited and confusing sixth century manuscripts and this thesis is forced to add its own wailings to his.³² He attempts to publish them with some cohesion and writes, "So verhielt ich mich denn referierend: ich schreibe den Text der Handschrift 1454 ganz ab, gebe dazu die Varianten der Handschrift 1468 (B), soweit sie reichen und die zweite Recension (Handschrift 1506)."³³

The opening line of the *Vita* establishes the temporal environment within the legend as during the reign of Zeno, 474 to 491. Even though her *Vita* is no doubt romanticized, one could argue that Theodora was a historical figure because her sayings are preserved separately in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, which was compiled in the sixth century to preserve the sayings of holy ascetics from the fourth century onwards.³⁴ A dialogue between Theodora and archbishop Theophilus is recorded that discusses the habits of pious ascetics, certain theological points, and reactions to

³¹ BHG 1727-1730; BHL 8070.

³² Usener, 1879, xix; Wessely, ed., *Die Vita S. Theodoraë* (Fünfzehnter Jahresbericht des K. K. Staatsgymnasiums in Hernals. Wien, 1889), 26. Scholars who agree with a sixth century date are: Anson, 1974, 12; Stephen J. Davis, "Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men," *J ECS* 10.1 (Spring 2002): 4; Natalie Delieuneux, "Virilité physique et sainteté féminine dans l'hagiographie orientale du IV^e au VII^e siècle" *Byzantion* 67 (1997): 191, 201. Due to the vague and at times incomprehensible nature of the original narrative, this thesis may occasionally refer to the Metaphrastic version because it makes interesting expansions and offers clarity on the sixth century manuscripts that have been preserved. *Vita et Conversatio S. Matris Nostræ Theodoræ Alexandrinæ*, PG 115.665-690.

³³ Wessely, 1889, 26.

³⁴ *Apophthegmata Patrum. Theodora* 1-7, PG 65.202-203; *De S. Theodora Alexandrina*, AASS Sept 3.790-791; Benedicta Ward, translator's note to *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), xxvii-xxxi. Rev. Baring-Gould believes that the hagiographer elaborated on a life, which simply consisted of a(n) marriage, adulterous affair, grief, cross-dressing, and her recognition by Gregorius, her husband, who allows her to return to her monastery. Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, vol. 11, *October* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914), 172-173.

demonic and angelic situations.³⁵ However, Theophilus' patriarchate of Alexandria lasted from 385 to his death in 412, which casts historical doubts on the *Vita*'s account of her life. It suggests that this is a fictionalized *Life* of a desert mother written in the sixth century heavily influenced by the popular late antique female monk motif. However, it could be a question of two separate Theodoras, for which the hagiographer erroneously entered the name of Zeno into the *Vita*, or, as it is seen in the case of Hilaria's *Vita* below, this emperor may have been referenced to further honor his donation to the monks of Scetis.³⁶

Athanasia, renamed Athanasios

Athanasia,³⁷ a pious wife, and Andronicus, her pious husband, share their religious story, but both are closely associated, like Anastasia Patricia whose *Vita* is discussed below, with the abbot Daniel of Scetis. Clugnet publishes a collection of legends that have been traditionally grouped together as a *Vita* collection for Daniel, but he keeps separate the individual stories that highlight other main characters, including Athanasia and Anastasia, amongst others.³⁸ Clugnet offers for this collection the manuscripts: Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. gr. 1598, f247v-252 from the tenth century, Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. Coislin 283, f291^v-295 from the eleventh century, and the tale from the *Menaea Graeca* October 9, all of which are supplemented with variant readings from Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. Coislin 232 and Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. Coislin 282, both of which date from the eleventh century.

The first two manuscripts listed above contain Greek versions closest to what could be considered primary texts for the legends because of later manuscripts' structural relationship to them. Clugnet designates the Greek group above as the source of the Syrian and Arabic versions, which is evident by the similarity of their content and arrangement of individual legends. A second group that represents a later

³⁵ One portion of the dialogue concerns a brother who is too sick to pray, but, near the point of death, he decides to say his prayers and is healed. An additional report is of a hermit who has the power to expel demons. He asks the demons for the reason they flee the bodies of their victims. They answer that it is not vigils, subjection to solitude, or fasting. These ascetic behaviors do not affect demons because they do not eat, sleep, or need companionship. However, demons cannot endure the monastic quality of humility, proven greater than any other religious weapon or power.

³⁶ Anson, 1974, 19, ft 59.

³⁷ *BHG* 120-123i.

³⁸ *Vie (et Recits) de l'abbé Daniel le Scétoite*, ed. L. Clugnet (Paris: Librairie A. Picard et fils, 1901).

tradition consists of the Coptic and Ethiopian versions, which weave these legends into a tighter biography for Daniel with the addition of content containing Monophysite propaganda to secure Daniel as a figure active in the cause.³⁹ He does not reproduce these because he calls attention to past and future publications of these other translations.⁴⁰

He does not offer a critical edition of the *Vita* of Athanasia, and this is true for Anastasia as well, but offers the manuscripts listed above to stand as the best witnesses of an original reading of the legend. He apologizes to his readers, but with the following reasoning:

“Il n'en allait pas de même avec les textes hagiographiques. Anonymes, les récits qu'ils contenaient avaient pour but uniquement d'édifier et n'étaient pas considérés comme la propriété littéraire de ceux qui les avaient rédigés. Aussi l'important, quand on les recopiait, était non pas tant de les conserver intégralement dans leur forme primitive, que de les rendre aussi profitables que possible aux lecteurs... Il est plus que probable que si une dizaine d'hellénistes entreprenaient, simultanément et sans communiquer entre eux, de reconstituer la forme originale des récits concernant l'abbé Daniel, ils nous donneraient dix textes critiques différents.”⁴¹

For the production date of this *Vita*, and also that of Anastasia below, one must trust that the Daniel within the stories is indeed the historical person that scholars

³⁹ Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, XXV-XXVI.

⁴⁰ Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, XXVII; see also the critical treatment of the Ethiopic in *Vida do abba Daniel do Mosteiro de Scetê*, ed. Lazarus Goldschmidt and F. M. Esteves Pereira (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1897).

⁴¹ Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, XXVII.

reconstruct.⁴² If this legend, and the others associated with Daniel, were indeed told by Daniel to his disciples, some of which were recorded and collected, then this type of production could have occurred during the later years of his life or shortly after death. If this is true, then this legend was produced in Scetis at an institution associated with Daniel, or even at an institution in Tambok, a town in Egypt where he sojourned until his death, during the late sixth to mid seventh centuries, of which manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh centuries have survived.

The internal history of the legend is hard to pinpoint except for the presence of Daniel. However, Daniel's timeline must be constructed from the very texts in which he appears. Even though this particular *Vita* offers little by way of datable biographical data for the figure of Daniel, Clugnet has used the other legends in the collection with better result.⁴³ Given the conclusions of Clugnet and the assumption of this thesis discussed below,⁴⁴ Athanasia would have been active in the convent of Tabenna during the latter half of the reign of Justinian I and would have died within her husband's monastery in the mid to late sixth century.

Daughters

⁴² Clugnet, who always takes the average of time spans, reconstructs the history of Daniel. Anastasia flees into the desert when the empress Theodora dies in 548, where she meets Daniel, who must be middle-aged and quite prestigious by 548 to be sought after. When Anastasia dies 28 years later in 576 he must quite old. Around 560, when he is visited by Eulogius and tells him that 40 years previous he was a young monk, he must be at least in his upper middle ages. If he was a young monk in the early 520s, then his confession of murder must be in the mid to late 520s, which corresponds to the time that patriarch Timothy III, who heard Daniel's confession, held office from 518-535. This does not however establish an exact birth date, but Clugnet thinks that twenty to twenty-five is a good age for a young monk. This would place his birth around 501-506. As for his death, Clugnet relies on the observance of good health from the legends and states "Daniel se trouvait dans le désert de Scété vers 576 et qu'alors il semble qu'il fût en bonne santé, s'il est vrai qu'il est allé finir ses jours à Tambok, dans la Basse-Egypte, il faut croire qu'il est mort à une date assez avancée au delà de 576. En résumé, s'il était fort âgé lorsqu'il mourut, c'est-à-dire s'il avait alors environ quatre-vingt-dix ans, comme c'est fort possible, on peut admettre, sans craindre de trop se tromper, qu'il a vécu à peu près pendant toute la durée du vi^e siècle." Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, IV. This is a good amount of conjecture. However this thesis will let this reconstruction stand for the temporal environments within the legends. Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, I-XIII.

Since Andronicus and Athanasia knew Daniel, then the start of their monastic careers dates in the late 530s to the 560s. This is a span of twenty odd years, but Andronicus and Athanasia did not need to wait until 548, when Daniel is first recognized as an authority figure, to seek him out because they hear on their pilgrimage of Daniel from conversations with other monks. It is reported within the legend that after twelve years at Daniel's institution Andronicus takes a second pilgrimage, after which Athanasia accompanies him as an anonymous male colleague back to his monastery probably in the mid-sixth century, depending on the date given to the commencement of their ascetic careers.

⁴³ Clugnet, *l'abbé Daniel*, 1901, I-XIII.

⁴⁴ See footnote 42.

Two daughters take part in transvestic ruses on behalf of their ascetic dreams, namely Mary, who joins a monastery alongside her father and later is accused of fathering a child herself, and Euphrosyne, a pious maiden who hides from a loving father figure who would reclaim her if discovered.

Mary, renamed Marinos

Marcel Richard provides the scholarly world with a critical edition⁴⁵ of the Greek text of the *Vita* of Mary,⁴⁶ which he designates the *Vita Antiqua*, reconstructed from a tenth century manuscript with three others involved in the reproduction.⁴⁷ The production of the Greek original, or at least a very early edited version, is placed by Richard between 525 and 650.⁴⁸ This is based on the *Vita Syriaque*, which dates from the eighth century; specifically its relationship to and use of the other versions. He shows it “est de montrer qu’au début du dernier quart du VIII^e siècle le Vie de Marie dite Marinos était déjà ancienne et qu’avant cette date il en existait déjà plusieurs recensions.”⁴⁹ In addition to maturity, Richard uses the fact that this legend seems to

⁴⁵ Richard announces that he takes the second approach to hagiographic study, one that is in opposition to the approach undertaken by Leon Clugnet for the legend of Mary in another publication, although not the edition used here, and for the *Vitae* of Athanasia and Anastasia. Clugnet’s reason for not producing a critical text for hagiography is quoted above. However, Richard states, “D’un autre point de vue, c’est un bon exemple de ces textes instables, très nombreux dans la littérature spirituelle byzantine et qui démontrent si efficacement la liberté totale de la transmission manuscrite dans ce domaine comme dans d’autres, mais qui font aussi le désespoir des éditeurs, des historiens de la littérature byzantines et des auteurs des catalogues de manuscrits grecs. Devant de pareils textes l’éditeur a le choix entre deux méthodes, publier toutes les recension ou chercher à retrouver le texte original dont dérivent tous les autres.” Marcel Richard, introduction to “La Vie Ancienne de Sainte Marie Surnommée Marinos,” in *Opera Minora*, vol. III, no. 67, eds. E. Dekkers, M. Geerard, A Van Roey, and G. Verbeke. (Turnhout, Belgique: Leuven University Press, 1977), 67.83.

⁴⁶ *BHG* 1163-1163e; *BHL* 5528-5530c.

⁴⁷ Athonite Vatopedi 38, f52-55 from the tenth century, Athonite Ivion 408, f110r-116r from the fourteenth century, both of which make up the primary texts amongst this group, Athonite Philothéou 52, f150v-163v from the eleventh century, and Moscow, Bibl. Syn. gr. 148 (Vlad. 410), f69v-71v from the fifteenth century. Amongst this group, which he believes to preserve a touched up version of the original legend, the Vatopedi manuscript is given primacy because it contains the highest amount of vulgarisms showing its preservation of an ancient version of this *Life*. His choice to reconstruct a critical text from these manuscripts is discussed at length within his introduction to the reproduced *Vita* of Mary, for this detailed discussion see Richard, 1977, 67.99-115. Briefly, through the scrutiny of each variant or subsequent family of manuscripts, which are respectively the *Vita rescripta*, *Vita aucta*, and the oldest witness the *Vita syriaque* (*BHO* 697), which focused on their omissions, paraphrases, additions, summations, dramatizations, and dependencies, Richard shows that the manuscripts belonging to the *Vita antiqua* offer the closest to original reading that scholars can construct.

⁴⁸ Richard, 1977, 67.112.

⁴⁹ Richard, 1977, 67.111.

be witnessing an era when female institutions were rare, hence why we see a woman joined a male monastery, and why it uses certain monastic administrative titles and offices.

Richard has argued convincingly that his Greek *Vita antiqua* represents the closest to original reading. However, earlier analysis led by Clugnet found Latin to be the original language, which then causes the Greek and Syriac to be translations, while the Coptic, Arabic, and Ethiopic to appear as later translations of the Greek.⁵⁰ M. Richard was “stupefied” with the “deficient” findings of Clugnet and calls into attention the fact that the Latin version is a translation of a corrupted or contaminated Greek version, the *Vita aucta*.⁵¹ As for the Syriac, Richard comments on the importance of Agnes Lewis Smith’s work and credits F. Nau with providing the first nearest to the original translation that appeared prior to his own work.⁵² However, the Syriac translation was made from the Greek. This is evident from the arrangement and style of the Syriac version when compared to the others. Richard’s critical edition of the *Vita* of Mary is chosen for this thesis based on its value and credible reproduction as the most original version available to modern scholars.

Mary’s popularity is shown by the many languages in which her legend was circulated and by the spread of her cult throughout Eastern and Western Christendom.⁵³ Perhaps the reason why this legend found a home within every region is that this saint is not historically or temporally specific. The legend of Mary does not give any clues to the internal time of legend or to her location. However, this does not prevent traditions from claiming her as their own. Scholars base this *Vita*’s production in Syria on the locations where Mary and her cult were particularly active

⁵⁰ Clugnet, 1905, III-IV, III ft3; Oscar von Lemm “Kleine koptische Studien. I–XLV,” *Bulletin de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences* (1904), 33.056-057.

⁵¹ Richard, 1977, 67.84.

⁵² *BHO* 690-697; Richard, 1977, 67.85; John the Stylite, *Select Narratives of Holy Women from the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest*, trans. Agnes Lewis Smith (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1900). Smith edits *BHO* 697, which represents the *Vita syriacque* that Richard refers to in his own work.

⁵³ Leon Clugnet, “Introduction,” in *Vie et Office de Sainte Marine. Textes Latins, Grecs, Coptes, Arabes, Syriaques, Éthiopien, Haut-allemand, Bas-allemand, et Français*, eds. Leon Clugnet, E. Blochet, I. Guidi, H. Hyvernât, F. Nau, and F.-M.-E. Pereira (Paris: Librairie A. Picard et fils, 1905), III; Richard, 1977, 83; Nicholas Constatas, “Introduction: Life of St. Mary/Marinos,” in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, 1, *Byzantine Saints’ Lives in Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), 1; Guita Hourani, “Saint Marinos the Monk,” *Journal of Maronite Studies* 4.1 (2000); Davis, 2002, 1.

and the fact that this female transvestite monk motif reflects misogynistic attitudes present in the Syrian church.⁵⁴ The different translations of this *Vita* have their own agenda: Greek legends report that Mary was born in Bethany, the Coptic directs the reader to Egypt, and a few of the Latin manuscripts place her birth in Italy.⁵⁵ Guita G. Hourani, chairperson of The Maronite Research Institute, presses upon her readers the fact that Lebanon is the home of Mary and cites the conclusions of Clugnet and the location of Mary's monastery, the monastery of Qannoubine in the Valley of Qadisha, to support this claim.⁵⁶ Yet there is enough doubt as to her true origins for scholars like Constan to conclude safely that her "geographic origins are shrouded in legend."⁵⁷

Euphrosyne, renamed Smaragdus

The *Vita* of Euphrosyne⁵⁸ is edited by Anatolii Boucherie from the manuscript Paris, Bib. Nat. cod. gr. 1454 that dates from the tenth century. Scholars believe that an original version was penned in the late fifth to the early seventh centuries.⁵⁹ This is plausible due to the hagiographer's peculiarities of speech that were observed by Boucherie, who decided to not correct them because they were witness to the age in which it was first written, and, as this thesis adds, the hagiographer's use of the popular late antique female monk motif and cultural trends.

"Ceterum in animo mihi non est emendationes adjicere, ubi in documento
nostro occurrunt quædam vocabula aut formæ loquendi a classicorum

⁵⁴ Leon Clugnet, "Histoire de Sainte Marine," *Revue de L'Orient Chrétien* Sixième Année (1901): 277-279; Clugnet, 1905, VII, X-XII; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and The Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 115-116.

⁵⁵ Hourani, 2000; Clugnet, 1905, VI, ft. 2.

⁵⁶ Hourani, 2000; Clugnet, "Saint Marine," 1901, 276-277.

⁵⁷ Davis, 2002, 1.

⁵⁸ *BHG* 625-626m; *BHL* 2722-2726.

⁵⁹ The version used in this thesis is found within *Vitæ Sanctæ Euphrosynæ*, ed. Anatolii Boucherie, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, II, eds. Carolus De Smedt, Gulielmus Van Hooft, and Josephus De Backer (Société Générale de Librairie Catholique, 1883), 195-205. Boucherie discusses only a vague primacy of a Greek *Vita*, with no dates put forward, and spends more time on the discussion of the Latin version. This thesis sees that it is plausible to date this *Vita* from the fifth to the early seventh centuries because of the popular literary motifs found within the plot of this legend and from an expansion of Richard's reasoning concerning these female monk legends and their use in John the Stylite's collection. Additional scholars have suggested these dates as well: Anson, 1974, 12; Davis, 2002, 4; Patlagean, 1976, 601.

scriptorum consuetudine abhorrentia: quippe quæ ab ipso Vitæ scriptore intenta sint, utpote ad rationem scribendi ætatis suæ accommodata.”⁶⁰

Attention has been given to the Latin translation of this legend, although its main character is absent from the Latin calendar of saints, by the Bollandist Rosweyde who used the *Vitae Patrum* for the edition in the *Acta Sanctorum*.⁶¹ Amazed at the Bollandists’ choice for publication, Boucherie publishes an alternative Latin text, that of Montpellier, Bib. Med. 55, which he determines to be a superior version of the legend found within the *Vitae Patrum*.⁶² The manuscript from Montpellier was written in the ninth century, but contains signs of a possible existence of an earlier Latin translation from the eighth century stemming from the original Greek version.⁶³ Rev. Baring-Gould believes this *Life*’s translation into Latin and additional languages occurred because her cult gained favor within the Latin church.⁶⁴

This female monk also features in the work of John the Stylite, along with Mary who is discussed above, which are eighth century Syriac preservations of saints’ lives from earlier stories. Given the fact that the *Vita* of Euphrosyne appears along with that of Mary, this thesis believes Richard’s arguments are applicable to an extent here as well. The *Vita* of Euphrosyne probably had the same amount of time to mature and to be touched up by early editors by the time it came to be preserved in the Syriac as did that of Mary, but of course this opinion is hypothetical.

There are no internal signals that a historian can use to set the time within the legend. The legend, like most, is set within Alexandria and Scetis. The abbot of this legend remains unnamed, which makes it difficult to properly associate the monastery Euphrosyne joins with a known institution or to set a date for this event. The other two named characters are her father, Paphnutius, and her monastic instructor at the monastery while she is a novice, Agapios, neither of whom can be dated or associated with a specific place around Alexandria even though the

⁶⁰ Boucherie, 1883, 195.

⁶¹ *Vita Sanctæ Euphrosynæ*, PL 73.643-652, see Rosweyde’s notes to the *Vita* of Euphrosyne from the *Vitae Patrum* and especially the introduction by Godfrey Henschen to the *De S. Euphrosynæ Virgine Alexandrina*, AASS Feb 2.537-544.

⁶² Boucherie, “La vie de sainte Euphrosyne,” *Revue des langues romanes* 2 (1870): 23-62.

⁶³ Boucherie, 1870, 23-25, 40-62.

⁶⁴ Baring-Gould, vol.2, *February*, 1914, 264.

monastery is in near proximity given the frequency of travel between the two in the legend. At age eighteen Euphrosyne abandons the home of her father and lives an unnumbered amount of years at her monastery at which point her father seeks her counsel. Thirty eight years pass from their rendezvous to the time in which he returns to visit her on her deathbed. Euphrosyne's age at her death can be calculated, but no date can be assigned.

Princesses

Hilaria and Apolinaria are two young princesses who denounce their royal heritage by trading their palaces for desert abodes. It seems that on both accounts sexuality and wealth were seen as equal obstacles. During their monastic careers both receive their possessed sisters for healing, which results in charges of sexual misconduct. They appear before the royal court, with their imperial fathers presiding, reveal their identities, and return to their monasteries. However, only in the legend of Apolinaria does the sister become possessed for a second time; the second giving the

appearance of pregnancy. This unique plot point becomes a major issue for past scholars that analyzed the relationship of these similar legends.⁶⁵

Apolinaria, renamed Dorotheos

The manuscript used for Apolinaria is published by Drescher, with no translation, as an appendix to the *Vita* of Hilaria and is the only version referenced by Halkin in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*.⁶⁶ Drescher, mentioning that this story appears in many MSS in Greek and Latin, reproduces only the Greek text found in Vatican, cod. gr. 819, f213v, dated from the eleventh or twelfth century, from which the later Latin translations of Lipomanus, Surius, and that found in Migne have been produced. He only offers variant readings from the Bodleian, cod. Barocc. 148 because of the late date of this manuscript. Drescher allows a quotation from the Rev. J. Simon S. J. to suffice for the whole of his discussion of the other MSS.

⁶⁵ Drescher considers the plot structure of Apolinaria's *Vita* rougher, and therefore more primitive, than that of Hilaria. Drescher, 1947, 126-127. If this is true, then the original version contains repeated elements, which later redactions of Hilaria smoothed over. However, it can also be argued that when using textual sources an author tends to elaborate, correct, and expand, which would make a pre-existing legend of Hilaria influential upon Apolinaria's. Drescher believes the addition of elements is unthinkable for an author of a religious text and believes that the Hilaria's hagiographer used Apolinaria's legend, but condensed it into a tighter, more plausible story. "On the whole it is difficult to imagine an adapter of Hilaria making such changes and such peculiar additions as we find in Apolinaria." Drescher, 1947, 126. Anson agrees and views the *Vita* of Hilaria as a variation that omitted the stories of the swamp and physical pregnancy of the sister and replaced the emperor Anthemius by Zeno. The overall effect produced a more elegant Egyptian *Vita* to account for the famous donation of Zeno to the monks at Scetis. Anson, 1974, 19, ft 59.

Oscar von Lemm argues that the legend of *Hilaria* is a reproduction or adaptation not of the Greek *Vita* of Apolinaria, but of local Egyptian folklore. Lemm, 1899-1912. Wensinck believes not only in a Coptic Christian origin for Hilaria's legend, but places its origin in pre-Christian Egyptian imagination. "As the origin of the legend of Hilaria is to be sought in the old-egyptian story of Bent-resch it is a priori probable that of the Coptic, Arabic, Syriac and Karshuni versions, the first has preserved the original features better than the other ones." Arent Jan Wensinck, ed. and trans. *Legends from Eastern Saints*, vol. II, *The Legend of Hilaria* (Leyden: E. J. Brill LTD, 1913), XVIII-XIX. Wensinck believes the pre-Christian origins of this Christian legend belong to the era of either the Ethiopic invasion of Egypt or the reign of the Ptolomies. Wensinck, 1913, XXX. However, Drescher disagrees and believes that there are too many literary elements and characterizations found mainly in Christian literature present. He mentions specifically the female monk motif, possibly the *Vita* of Eugenia as the most influential, tales of holy men having to cope with fabricated sexual charges, legends of exorcisms, and the reoccurring theme of reunited imperial families as possible Christian literary sources. Drescher concludes that Coptic or Egyptian literary roots had no unique foothold, which prevents him from calling the hagiography of Hilaria "a very original piece of work." Drescher, 1947, 121-124. After his comparison of the *Vita* of Hilaria with the story of Bent-resch, Drescher sees little, if any, real significance beyond that of the heroines' names. Drescher, 1947, 128-130. However, this thesis explains their relationship by the fact that both of these stories are products of late antique intertexts, but with familiar or local cultural elements, namely Greek versus Coptic and Zeno versus Anthemius.

⁶⁶ BHG 148.

“Un manuscrit, attribué au XI siècle, est dans la bibliothèque du monastère du ‘Leimon’ de Lesbos: cf. A. Ehrhard, *Überl. U. Bestand d. hagiogr. u. homil. Liter. d. griech. Kirche*, I, 1 (=T. u. U., 50), Leipzig 1937, pp. 424, 561. Un autre manuscrit sensiblement moins ancien, du XV siècle, est le Barocc. 148 de la Bodléienne: cf. C. Van de Vorst et H. Delehay, *Catal. codd. hagiogr. graec. Germaniae, Belgii, Angliae*, Bruxelles 1913, p. 302. Dans le même catalogue (p. 204), est mentionné aussi le ms. 8229 de la Bibl. Royale de Bruxelles, qui est un de ceux qui proviennent de l’ancienne bibliothèque des Bollandistes; mais ce n’est qu’une transcription, faite au XVII siècle, pour les Bollandistes (d’après, je suppose, le Vat. gr. 819).”⁶⁷

The original language of this *Vita* was Greek, and with its relationship to the *Vita* of Hilaria,⁶⁸ and the presence of popular late antique intertexts including the female transvestite monk motif, this thesis agrees with scholars who state that a Greek legend was produced in the late fifth or sixth centuries.⁶⁹

According to tradition, Apolinaria was the daughter of the Roman emperor Anthemius, who reigned from 427 to his death in 472. However, Metaphrastes was incorrect.⁷⁰ If Metaphrastes had been correct, then Apolinaria was active in the monastic world during the mid-fifth century. However, the emperor Anthemius had only five known children within the annals of history, four sons and one daughter named Alypia. There is no evidence that this emperor had a daughter named Apolinaria, nor a second daughter whom Apolinaria healed later within her *Vita*.⁷¹ Another discrepancy in dating her active monastic life concerns the life of the abbot Macarius. Macarius, who died in 390, was the abbot of the monastery she joined under a male ruse.⁷² If this date is taken as accurate, then she was active in the monastic world during the mid to late fourth century and therefore is not the daughter of the emperor Anthemius.

If Apolinaria was indeed a historical person, then her true father would be Anthemius, praetorian prefect of Constantinople, an Egyptian by birth, and the

⁶⁷ Drescher, 1947, 152.

⁶⁸ Discussed in footnote 65.

⁶⁹ Patlagean, 1976, 600; Davis, 2002, 4; Anson, 1974, 12; Baring-Gould, vol. 1, *January*, 1914, 70.

⁷⁰ Baring-Gould, vol. 1, *January*, 1914, 70; Patlagean, 1976, 600.

⁷¹ J. R. Martindale, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. II, AD 395-527 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 96-97.

⁷² Wensinck, 1913, XVII-XVIII; John Bagnell Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I to the Death of Justinian*, vol. 1 (NY: Dover Publications, 1958), 314-315, 338.

grandfather of the emperor Anthemius.⁷³ He has been called the ‘virtual ruler’ of the eastern empire, who received spiritual honors through a congratulatory letter from John Chrysostom concerning his appointment.⁷⁴ Anthemius came to exert control over the Emperor Arcadius in 405 after the death of the empress Eudoxia. After the death of Arcadius, Anthemius became regent over seven year old Theodosius II from the time of his rise to the emperorship until 413, when Anthemius was dismissed.⁷⁵ If this is true and Apolinaria’s father is indeed this prefect, although no children are listed by name in Martindale’s prosopography of the later Roman Empire, the dates would be more favorable for an association between Apolinaria and Macarius. This fact would place Apolinaria active in a male institution concealed within a male persona in the mid to late fourth century within the legend.

Hilaria, renamed Hilarion the Eunuch

The scholar first to introduce Hilaria as a product of monastic imagination was E. Amélineau through his analysis of surviving Coptic fragments of her *Life*.⁷⁶ Concerning these fragments he writes, “comme je l’ai déjà dit, nous n’avons malheureusement plus l’histoire entière en copte: mais nous en possédons des fragments qui remontent au plus tôt, je crois, au milieu du septième siècle.”⁷⁷ The

⁷³ Rev. Baring-Gould is the only scholar to express a belief that Apolinaria was a historical figure due to the intrusion of the author into the narrative: “And after some days we had found the traveling group and we went into the holy city. And we stopped at a place and we rested a little while because of our burden and the servants and the female slaves who were with us.” To him the tone of this passage suggests the presence of a witness describing the entourage and its inability move freely. Baring-Gould bases his opinion on the extremely casual nature of the author’s allusion and states, “this is the only allusion to himself made by the writer, and it is so casual, that it is difficult to not regard it as an evidence of the authenticity of the piece.” Baring-Gould, vol. 1, *January*, 1914, 70.

⁷⁴ John Chrysostom, *Epistula ad Anthemio*, PG 52.699-700; Martindale, vol. II, 1980, 95.

⁷⁵ Martindale, 1980, 93-95; Baring-Gould, vol. 1, *January*, 1914, 70; Bury, vol. 1, 1958, 70, 155-160; Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wādi’n Natrūn*, vol. 2, *The History of the Monasteries of Nitria and Scetis* (NY: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1932), 118, ft. 1.

⁷⁶ BHO 379; Amélineau edited the Coptic fragments: John Rylands Library, Manchester, 35^{1, 2, 3, 4} and one parchment leaf from National Museum of Antiquities, Leyden, MS Insinger 56. This latter one belongs with three fragmentary parchments leaves held in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale: Paris, Bib. Nat. 132^{19, 20, 21}, edited by N. Giron, *Légendes coptes* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1907), 54, and rests between 132²⁰ and 132²¹. Drescher publishes all of these with another two fragments: Paris, Bib. Nat. 78³⁹, also edited by Giron, and London, Brit. Mus. Or. 6073, Cat. No. 1101, edited by W. E. Crum, *Catalogue of the Coptic Manuscripts in the British Library* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, Ltd., 1905.), 460, no. 1101, which seems to be a private letter from the emperor concerning Hilaria and the possessed younger sister.

⁷⁷ Amélineau, 1888, 194.

Sahidic Coptic version of the *Life* of Hilaria used for this thesis,⁷⁸ according to Wensinck, could not have been written before 500 due to an overall absence of historical facts about the emperor Zeno.⁷⁹ In addition, the production can be no later than the mid-seventh century because Amélineau dates the fragments around this time. Drescher considers that the hagiographer wrote in Coptic even though a Greek version of the legend of Apolinaria was available as source and the hagiographer was fluent in Greek. Drescher concludes,

“the story as we have it, was written in Egypt by a Monophysite cleric probably about the beginning of the 7th century A.D. Scetis is honorably prominent in his story and he may have been a monk thereof. How much credit he deserves for originality within the limits already imposed cannot be estimated as we cannot be sure that we know of all his materials.”⁸⁰

The Coptic production of this legend took place during a time when Greek was becoming unpopular in the Monophysite church, hence the use of Egyptian folkloric elements to be found within this Christian tale.⁸¹ This theory also lends credit to the independent construction of Hilaria apart from that of Apolinaria. This thesis deems it odd that Hilaria’s tradition would rely heavily on a Greek story of a Greek Christian woman when Greek was unpopular. The ability to establish a direct link is not forthcoming and even Drescher, who strongly believes that the *Vita* of Hilaria was modeled on Apolinaria’s, concedes that it is likely both stories were produced from circulating trends in Christian literary culture, which is the favored argument of this thesis.⁸² With these arguments taken into account, in conjunction with information about the abbot Pambo, an approximate date within 474-491 for the donation of Zeno to the monks at Scetis, which funded a large library,⁸³ and a belief that the Coptic *Vita* of Hilaria needed no source text to exist,⁸⁴ this thesis views this legend originating during the early to mid sixth century, which allows time for the

⁷⁸ New York, Pier. Mor. Lib. M. 583. See also *A Check List of Coptic Manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library* (NY: privately printed, 1919).

⁷⁹ Wensinck, 1913, XXX; Amélineau, 1888, 194.

⁸⁰ Drescher, 1947, 130.

⁸¹ Drescher, 1947, 130-131.

⁸² Drescher, 1947, 127, 131.

⁸³ Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *The Monasteries of the Wadi 'n Natrûn*, vol. 1, *New Coptic Texts from the Monastery of Saint Macarius* (NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), xxiii-xiv; Anson, 19, ft 59.

⁸⁴ Drescher, 1947, v.

fragments that Amélineau examined to be produced, but soon enough so that Zeno's donation could be timely honored.

The temporal setting of Hilaria within the legends must coincide with the reign of her father Zeno, 474-491, if indeed this legend does work to honor his donation.⁸⁵ However, the dates within the legend are now irreconcilable. Though she is Zeno's daughter, she is also a monk of the monastery of Pambo, but the life and administration of the abbot Pambo predates the emperor Zeno's reign by roughly a century.⁸⁶ Clearly this was a religious legend was constructed to contain monastic and theological significance, to honor the emperor Zeno for his great donation, and perhaps to promote the name and deeds of a renowned abbot of Scetis, Pambo, with an anachronistic interjection.

Virgins

Anastasia, known as an anonymous eunuch

Although the female monks discussed under the subheadings of daughters and princesses were all virgins themselves, Anastasia is impossible to place within either of those two categories because she is an independent woman who found safety and solace within the isolation of the desert. The edition of her *Vita* used here appears in Clugnet's publication within the *ROC* from the collection of legends associated with the Daniel.⁸⁷ In fact, in Anastasia's legend, Daniel is identified clearly throughout the tale whereas the identification of Anastasia is non-existent until the end after her death.⁸⁸ Clugnet offers two manuscripts of her *Vita*, Paris, Bib. Nat. Coislin gr. 283, f163^v-165 from the eleventh century and Paris, Bib. Nat., gr. 914, f188-189^v from the twelfth century; and her account within the *Menaea Graeca*

⁸⁵ Martindale, 1980, 1200-1202.

⁸⁶ Evelyn-White, 1932, 52-55; *PO* 11.624-638.

⁸⁷ Anastasia's life is published and edited by L. Clugnet: *Vie D'Anastase le Patrice*, *Revue de L'Orient Chrétien* 5 (Paris, 1900): 50-53; the same manuscript is published in *Vie D'Anastase le Patrice*, in *Vie (et Recits) de l'abbé Daniel le Scétoite*, ed. L. Clugnet (Paris: Librairie A. Picard et fils, 1901), 2-10.

⁸⁸ This *Vita* is essentially a tale of the abbot Daniel and an anonymous eunuch until the conclusion of the legend. At that point the secret of the eunuch was revealed to the brethren for spiritual instruction and Anastasia's true motivations and life were exposed. Halkin includes in the *BHG* an entry for an anonymous eunuch that leads to further information on this religious legend of Anastasia: "Eunuchus mon. = Anastasia Patricia." *BHG*, vol. 1, 188.

March 10.⁸⁹ The reasons for the choice of these manuscripts for Anastasia have been discussed previously in the section concerning the dating, authorship, and validity of Clugnet's published manuscripts for Athanasia. This *Vita* is then considered to have been produced by a monk within the Scetis region or that of Tambok within the late sixth or early seventh centuries in Greek.⁹⁰

Within the legend, Anastasia Patricia, a maiden at the sixth century imperial court in Constantinople is forced into masculine anonymity because of the sexual advances of the emperor Justinian I, who reigned 527-565.⁹¹ In all legends where figures, whether male or female, fall in love with the featured female monk, only in the *Vita* of Anastasia is the lustful character an imperial figure, and, even further, a married Christian emperor. If the emperor Justinian I was indeed the historical figure associated with Anastasia, then the active ascetic career of the transvestite character Anastasia must be dated in the mid-sixth century. She flees into the desert on the death of the empress Theodora. This fact would place the start of her career in the desert around 548 and this would favor an association with Daniel, the same abbot who features in the *Vita* of Athanasia. If she indeed lived in Daniel's community for twenty-eight years, as Daniel reports in the legend, then she died around 576. Daniel, who had two female transvestite monks in his community, the other being Athanasia, was a monk from the 520s to around 590, which is the late date that Clugnet posits his death at Tambok, a town in lower Egypt.⁹² Technically the persons featured within this legend produce a believable timeline.

Conclusion

The female transvestite monks examined within this thesis are Anastasia, Apolinaria, Athanasia, Euphrosyne, Hilaria, Mary, Matrona, and Theodora. They are chosen because their *Vitae*, which contain women in permanent masculine transvestic personas, were produced and first circulated during the peak time of the utilization of a female transvestite figure in monastic literature, i.e. in the fifth to

⁸⁹ BHG 79-80. See also *Synax.* CP 523-528.

⁹⁰ Patlagean, 1976, 600; Davis, 2002, 4; Anson, 1974, 12.

⁹¹ Martindale, 1980, 645-648.

⁹² Clugnet, "l'abbé Daniel," 1901, IV.

seventh centuries. These legends begin, except for the sole exception of Anastasia, with the women's lay lives highlighted and then carry on with these women using masculine dress and roles to protect the ascetic aspirations begun while laywomen until death.

In most cases these legends take place within three major areas: Constantinople, Alexandria, and the region of Scetis. The fact that Scetis is featured in almost every story supports the production of these legends within male monastic institutions of Scetis, except for Mary's, thought to be written in Syria due to the center of cultic activity, and that of Matrona written in Asia Minor because of the location of Matrona's and Bassianos' monasteries. In every case, except for the *Vita* of Hilaria that originates in Coptic, Greek is the parent language. For some of these *Vitae* critical editions have not been published and scholars reproduced all manuscripts considered close to their original forms, but this thesis' choice in each individual case as to the best editions to use for its examination has been justified. These *Vitae* offer a representative selection of texts through which to examine the inspirational and eschatological significance of this subgroup of Christian Byzantine monastic literature. This thesis now turns its attention to the ways in which they have been reread by modern scholars.

Chapter Two: Read and Reread

“Although gender issues have become a primary theme of medieval scholarship, the general phenomenon of medieval women in male disguise has not been studied in detail. This arises not from a lack of examples but rather from the slight attention the texts in which they appear have received.”¹

Previous Scholarship

The interest here is to examine the examiners, the scholars who reread these legends in modern day. In this chapter scholarship is surveyed from the realms of literary criticism, psychoanalysis, new historicism, structuralism, feminist theory, anthropology, and sociology. The overall opinion reached here on past scholarship is that while it has examined most aspects of the masculine ruse from a variety of points of view, it neglected the importance of renaming and institutional transvestism as part of the overall male disguise, thereby placing undue gendered importance on the transvestism within the legends. In addition, some scholars overstate the claims that either these female characters are breaking socio-sexual boundaries and actively transgressing their gender or that hagiographers are suggesting that women can indeed be liberated. Later scholars sought to correct these views by rereading the portrayals of these women so that their masculinization became a misogynistic maneuver to belittle the potential of women or were literary instances revealing the extent to which women would go to be free of socio-sexual bonds.

However, this thesis argues that no study to date pinpoints adequately the full range of reasons for the use of masculine praise and portrayal. However, although critical of past scholarship this thesis is very appreciative of past endeavors, though this thesis will not agree with them completely. It is argued here that the masculinization of these women is a practical, descriptive technique used by male Christian intellectuals to praise female figures as colleagues due to the lack of positive vocabulary to describe strong women on their own terms and the need to validate their deeds within an androcentric world. It also served to characterize these women as extraordinary, or perhaps even as celebrities, for audiences eager for inspirational religious dramas connected to the desert myth.² This thesis moves forward with a practical approach in identifying the intertexts and threefold

¹ Hotchkiss, 1996, 6.

² Both of these arguments are fully discussed within chapter three, Written and Read.

masculinity present in the legends, a notion examined for the first time within this thesis, in order to extract multiple receptions and intentions of the female transvestite monk characters within an Eastern ascetic Christian milieu.

Early Modern Examinations

Late nineteenth century scholarship searched mainly for the origins of the female transvestite saint motif and traveled outside the realm of Christian legend into that of Greek mythology. The first obvious motivation for this pursuit was the knowledge that certain Greek traditions employed cross-dressing in rituals and enjoyed bisexual or androgynous legends of their deities. A governing motivation for early scholarship in searching for answers in pagan myths involves the unwillingness of Victorian scholars to give this seemingly bizarre, transgendered theme a Christian birth.

For Hermann Usener these hagiographies retell in Christianized or purified form the myths surrounding certain portrayals of the goddess Aphrodite; Aphroditos, from the island of Crete and Cnidus; and Amathus of Cyprus, which again can be considered a form of Aphrodite/Aphroditos.³ Their myths depict androgynous and hermaphroditic goddesses who have the physical attributes of a man, most notably a beard and male genitalia. This form of Aphrodite was worshipped by participants who cross-dressed during rituals; men in the clothing of women and women in the clothing of men.

However, none of the female transvestite monk hagiographies mention a bearded female or a woman with male genitalia. More often than not, the female monks' social masculinity is received by internal audiences as eunuchial, where they exist in an asexual state and not one that is hermaphroditic. Additionally, hagiographers are concerned with portraying holy *women* throughout the legends to external audiences underneath layers of masculinity. The Aphroditian influence may be better connected with saints such as Wilgefortis⁴ or Galla.⁵ Wilgefortis grows a

³ Usener, 1879, xx-xxii.

⁴ *De S. Liberata Alias Wilgeforte Virgine et Martyre*, AASS Jul. 5.50-70; Usener, 1879, xxiii; Delehay, 1998, 150-156; Delcourt, 1958, 15-16.

⁵ *De S. Paula, Cognomento Barbata*, AASS Feb. 3.174; Gregory the Great, *De transitu Gallæ ancillæ Dei*, in *Dialogorum Liber 4.13*, PL 77.339-342; Usener, 1879, xxiii; Delehay, 1998, 150-156; Delcourt, 1958, 15-16.

beard after her father, the king of Lusitania, still a pagan at that time, orders her to marry a pagan prince. After the demand is made, she prays to God that she may become disfigured to escape marriage and remain chaste. As a result she grows a beard, after which her father has her crucified. Wilgefortis is depicted as a female bearded saint hanging from a cross; however, this saint was fabricated through a misinterpretation of the “Volto Santo” of Lucca passed around by Christian pilgrims. Related is the story of Galla, who grows a beard due to unfulfilled female heat and unresolved ecstasy because she had refused to remarry. This outward masculinization is read as a blessing for the widow because it is a gift that protects her chastity and allows her to spend her life in a convent. However, it also symbolizes punishment for breaking social customs because a doctor prescriptively warns her of unwanted hair growth if her womb remains unregulated, unsatisfied, and, as implied, unmarried. Upon reflection, one must seriously ask to what extent a bearded, androgynous goddess and her cross-dressing pagan congregations influenced monastic writers and Christian readers to popularize a female transvestite monk motif. This thesis answers with the word “little.”

Usener offers another type of association with the transvestite saint Pelagia to support this theory of Aphroditic origins. Usener considers the epitaphs given to the Greek goddess of the sea for thematic associations: Aigaia, Epipontia, Thalassaia, Pontia, Euploia, and Pelagia.⁶ This is a weak comparison. The critics of Usener, Hippolyte Delehay and Marie Delcourt, call his comparison illusory and see no correlation between a transvestite motif and the cult of Aphrodite because of varying celebration dates.⁷ Additionally, as explained in detail by Delcourt in *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, the cross-dressing rites that Usener uses as evidence usually involve male lay participants and priests, more often than female, donning the clothes of the opposite sex.⁸

Delehay, in his renowned work indispensable to students of medieval history and hagiography, *The Legends of the Saints*, critically examines the merits of

⁶ Usener, 1879, xx-xxii.

⁷ Along with geographical considerations, Delehay deems it important that certain saints share the time of worship with those men and women they may be modelled on. Delehay, 1998, 135, 142-143, 150-156.

⁸ Delcourt, 1961, 85.

arguments that directly trace Greco-Roman religious elements into Christian saint worship. First, he discusses the similarities between hagiographical romances⁹ and mythic hagiographies both of which contain saints that are purely imaginary or semi-historical adapted from other materials. He then compares them to historical and true hagiographies in which an established historical cult can be traced to a real life figure.¹⁰ The *Vitae* of the female transvestite monks clearly fall into the first category.

Concerning the female transvestite monks, Delehayé questions the value of Usener's theories, especially where there is a reliance on epitaphs to show a purification of ancient myth. Delehayé concludes that these transvestite saint figures are not simply the re-workings of pagan names for deities. The argument that connects Pelagia to the goddess Aphrodite is described by Delehayé as illusory and misleading because there are more pertinent factors that should be considered, such as the region in which the cult first emerged and the date of their celebration.¹¹

For Delehayé, these legends have Christian origins even though they are fictional reproductions of a creatively reworked "type" of human "program" embodying common saint behavior.¹² The transvestite saint motif holds no more significance than any other reproduction of religious legend and he calls a cult built around these types of hagiographies "deplorable." Due to the reoccurrence of the female transvestite monk legend, Delehayé bluntly states, "what is this but a pious novelette?"¹³ He uses as example the expansion of John Chrysostom's story of the anonymous fifteen year old virgin suicide by a redactor called James within the figure of Pelagia, the sinful actress turned chaste, pious Christian. Chrysostom's story, in its elaborated form, gained popularity once the masses had something in which to sink their teeth. The resulting "pious novelette" contains the pseudo-romantic story, akin to that of Paul and Thecla, involving Pelagia, the sinful actress

⁹ This is a term which Delehayé says was never used extensively; however, Gillian Clark uses this to describe these types of hagiographies in her work: Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 1993.

¹⁰ Delehayé, 1998, 5.

¹¹ Delehayé, 1998, 135.

¹² Delehayé, 1998, 20-24, 51

¹³ Delehayé, 1998, 51.

turned penitent, Nonnus, a bishop with strong compassion, and her engaging escapades while dressed as a man enjoying ideal chaste solitude as a hermit.¹⁴

Delehayé strips the transvestite saint hagiographies of their individuality by concluding that Mary, Apolinaria, Euphrosyne, and Theodora, “are nothing but literary replicas of ‘James’s’ Pelagia; or else, as in the case of Eugenia, the theme of a woman hiding her sex has intruded into a narrative about some historical person.”¹⁵ However, the plots of the transvestite hagiographies do not all simply conform to each other; there are many themes which intrude into the storylines of some legends and not others. This observation caused Delcourt to be shocked by Delehayé’s treatment of the *Vita* of Pelagia as merely an invention to give body and detail to a vague story penned by Chrysostom.¹⁶

The work of Ludwig Radermacher¹⁷ on Saint Thecla and Pelagia is often criticized as restrictive. He views the transvestite hagiographies as Christianized renditions of Greco-Roman tales, most notably the novel *Ephesiaca*, which survives in one partial copy thought to be written by Xenophon of Ephesus possibly in the second century.¹⁸ In this short Greek novel, readers follow the trials and tribulations of two fated lovers, Habrocomes and Anthia. This delightful romance takes readers into cycles of captivity, near death experiences, promises of chastity upheld, forceful advances of interested lovers, slavery, and thwarted reunions until eventually, like in many good stories, they live “happily ever after.”

The catalyst for the production of the Christian transvestite monk motif is located unimpressively in one subsidiary tale. A short episode in Book Five, described below, contains a popular reoccurring theme in Greco-Roman and Oriental romances.¹⁹ Habrocomes encounters a fisherman, Aegialeus, who tells him that while

¹⁴ Delehayé, 1998, 153-154.

¹⁵ Delehayé, 1998, 153-154.

¹⁶ Delcourt, 1961, 86.

¹⁷ L. Radermacher, *Hippolytos und Thekla: Studien zur Geschichte von Legende und Kultus*, Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 182.3 (Vienna, Alfred Hölder, 1916).

¹⁸ Xenophon, *An Ephesian Tale*, trans. Graham Anderson, in *Collected Greek Novels*, ed. Reardon, B. P. (Berkeley; Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁹ Graham Anderson, introduction to *An Ephesian Tale*, by Xenophon, in *Collected Greek Novels*, ed. B. P. Reardon (Berkeley; Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989), 127.

an ephebe in Sparta, he fell madly in love with Thelxinoe. They meet in secret to conceal their love, but when threatened by an arranged marriage, the couple elopes. It is only here that one can reflect on the transvestism of the female monks. Aegialeus tells Habrocomes that “both of us dressed as young men, and I even cut Thelxinoe’s hair. We left Sparta the very night of the wedding for Argos and Corinth, where we took ship for Sicily.”²⁰ An incompatible feature between the female monk *Vitae* and this novel is the fact that Thelxinoe dresses as a man and cuts her hair not to escape a marriage in lieu of celibacy, but just the opposite. She escapes an unwanted engagement by dressing as a man, but chastity is not the desired outcome. It is possible to view a Christianized version of this incident where the object of carnal love transforms into spiritual love, i.e. where Jesus or the Church replaces Aegialeus, but this does not justify early scholars’ use of this myth as a point of origin for the production of the *Vitae*. It seems a rigid connection at best. Additionally, a fact even more detrimental to Radermacher’s theory is the Spartan nuptial tradition of women dressing in male clothing and shaving their heads to escape malevolent spirits and entities. It was a method used by pagan practitioners to safeguard not their chastity, but their nuptial rites.

With the same focus, but in a less restrictive manner, Rosa Söder connects Greco-Roman romances and the transvestite theme present in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.²¹ Instead of trying to pinpoint one specific myth for the origin of the female transvestite monks, she traces the origins of this motif throughout multiple sources in which cross-dressing takes place. She refers to Achilles Tatios, Iamblichus, and Apuleius, as well as the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Philip* to show that the romantic and mythic influence on female saints has more than one avenue.

Söder receives criticism from social historians and feminists because she believes that female characters of apocryphal literature are characterized by gender expectations. The women in apocryphal stories behave in an expected way towards male authority figures and lack true individuality. Basically, they act in accord with gendered hierarchies even when seemingly fighting against them.²² This issue

²⁰ Xenophon, 1989, 159.

²¹ Rosa Söder, *Die Apokryphen Apostelgeschichten und die romanhafte Literatur der Antike* (Stuttgart: S. Kohlhammer, 1932; reprint, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969).

²² Söder, 1969, 127, 148.

resurfaces many decades later in the research of Sandra Lowerre, who sees that transvestite female saints are in fact products of gender stereotypes and expectations because male authors promote their own beliefs through this type of female figure.²³

For Söder, Thecla refused marriage, escaped persecution, death, and her mother, only to attach herself to another authority figure, Paul. Thecla is in essence keeping gender hierarchies alive when she follows a new patriarchal figure that has emerged in her life. This opinion is specifically refuted by Kerstin Aspegren, who admits that this is somewhat true for the beginning of Thecla's narrative, but in the latter half, where Paul abandons her, she acts of her own will and baptizes herself, therefore expressing a type of feminist self awareness and social independence.²⁴ Her faith is no longer connected to the figure of Paul, thus establishing true individuality and authority. This sounds very different than Söder's idea that Thecla was lacking lifelike individuality.²⁵ Söder, however many times refuted or supported, has expanded the field of dialogue in which legends of female transvestite monks are discussed.

Criticism of Usener's research resurfaces in the theories of Heinrich Günter.²⁶ Günter supports a linguistic connection between Greco-Roman myth and instances of female transvestism in hagiography as does Usener. However, Günter sees that Thecla, notably the first Christian transvestite saint who lacked an apparent connection to Aphrodite, is particularly foundational to, but oddly neglected in, Usener's examination. Günter ultimately concludes that once the Greco-Roman origins for the female monk *Vitae* are established, it brings scholars neither closer to see the significance of transvestism nor to understand the way in which literary sources influenced Christian writers.

Psychological Studies

A decade later, these transvestite figures are analyzed under a Freudian and Jungian microscope. Marie Delcourt's work on the legends of the female transvestite

²³ Lowerre, 2005.

²⁴ Kerstin Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*, ed. René Kieffer (Sweden: Uppsala, 1990), 106-109, 114.

²⁵ Söder, 1969, 148.

²⁶ Heinrich Günter, *Psychologie der Legende: Studien zu einer wissenschaftlichen Heiligen-Geschichte* (Verlag: Herder Freiburg, 1949), 281-286.

monks contains within its title the medical condition “the Diana Complex,” which is the condition in which women adopt masculine traits and behaviors.²⁷ She turns a critical eye on scholars who belittle this paradoxical literature by dismissing it as merely romantic, Christianized reproductions of Greco-Roman and Oriental novels. She expresses astonishment at the inability of her colleagues to see the significance of these hagiographies beyond the literary realm.

“Mais comment ramener aux dimensions d’un simple procédé littéraire un thème d’une valeur psychologique si riche et si constante? On s’étonne qu’Hippolyte Delehaye, indépendamment de Radermacher, se soit satisfait de voir dans la sainte en habits d’hommes un thème du folklore oriental, une variation Romanesque dans l’histoire de la courtisane convertie. Si cela était, le thème apparaîtrait-il dans l’histoire avec une signification identique à celle qu’il a dans le légende?”²⁸

In her other work, *Hermaphrodite Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity*, she expresses amazement at Delehaye, Usener, and Radermacher who were interested in only finding an origin to a peculiar theme and “did not stop to examine its significance; even less would it have occurred to them to mingle history and legend by a comparison of Thecla and Pelagia with real women nearer to our times,” namely Joan of Arc and Antoinette Bourignon. She continues, “yet nothing better brings home the value of certain symbols than to see them recorded in both legend and history, and showing psychological characteristics that vary neither with the centuries nor the setting.”²⁹

Contrary to her predecessors Delcourt sees in these hagiographies a rich potential for a psychological study of the Christian comprehension of gender conflict. Delcourt admits that Greek romance may have influenced these stories, but it is the psyches and minds of these transvestite saints that will lead to a connection between cross-dressing and the three major psychological elements of these stories: breaking with a former life, hostility towards the family, and renunciation of sexuality.³⁰ However, this thesis believes that research must tread cautiously when it gives substance to the living minds and consciousnesses of literary characters; it was not they who wrote the legends, but male authors. Those who hold the pen hold the

²⁷ Delcourt, 1958, 1-33.

²⁸ Delcourt, 1958, 8-9.

²⁹ Delcourt, 1961, 86.

³⁰ Delcourt, 1961, 97; Delcourt, 1958, 23.

ability to characterize. However, those who hold the written legend, i.e. the external audiences, while guided by the portrayals of characters from the authors, hold the ability to interpret and add meaning to the characters not necessarily intended. This thesis suggests that Delcourt might have argued her theory better from the standpoint of the readers, who gave these legends a popular reception, than from the psychology of the female characters. However, a mixed audience enjoyed this religious fiction so an examination of the connection between “the Diana Complex” and an emulative readership is questionable.

For Delcourt, all masculine activities of the women exhibit a rupture, whether breaks with former sinful lives, avoidances of the advances of impertinent men, or escapes from betrothals and marriages. She determines that these actions are the equivalent of sex changes or, ultimately, a type of female castration, i.e. cutting off and discarding femininity.³¹ Delcourt discusses the potential for each *Vita* to shed light on the psychological anxiety experienced by young girls when threatened by matrimony and dysfunctional familial issues, which is related to the “anti-maternal complex” and usually characterized by a refusal of a sexual life. The hagiographers’ descriptions of the Diana Complex record for Delcourt the plight of young Christian women adopting asceticism.³² In opposition to past scholarship, she concludes that these legends are better rooted in gnostic ideals of the body and early Christian asceticism than Greco-Roman or Oriental myths. However, one must seriously question to what extent a female castration was portrayed by male authors? As is argued within this thesis, hagiographers were much more interested in what their female characters could do as women and therefore were not interested in castrating their holy women figures for their tales.

In an impressive article by John Anson, which focuses on the authors of the stories, these legends are treated with a literary analysis mingled with a psychological examination.³³ Anson finds more significance in the fact that these stories were written by men. “They are with the exception of Thecla products of a monastic culture written by monks for monks, and it is in this situation that the

³¹ Delcourt, 1961, 97.

³² Delcourt, 1958, 1-2.

³³ Anson, 1974, 1-32.

psychological explanation should be sought.”³⁴ The literary structure of these stories records the psyches of the monks and reflects the monastic culture to which they belong, rather than a female portion of society through the female characters. He views these stories as products of monastic imagination and not attempts by male authors to record actual historical events or to report on women’s issues. Anson builds upon the research of E. Amélineau, which introduced Hilaria to the scholarly world. Amélineau was convinced that

“les célèbres ascètes de la Thébaïde ou de la vallée des Natrons, tout comme leurs ancêtres, aimaient fort les nouvelles et les romans. Leur genre de vie leur laissant beaucoup de loisirs, ils employaient agréablement ce temps à la lecture ou à la composition d’œuvres romanesques dans lesquelles les auteurs cherchaient la satisfaction de leur goût littéraire et les lecteurs les douces émotions ou l’étonnement que donnaient à leur esprit naïf les œuvres de cette sorte.”³⁵

Anson relies on such scholarship to argue that these legends were the products of monastic imagination for entertainment purposes.

Anson believes that a search for origins is unimportant. He states, “whether it came from Greek romance, the apocrypha, or arose, as it might have, independently, the motif caught hold at a certain historical moment and invited invention and elaboration.”³⁶ This thesis agrees with Anson and states that the importance of the female monk motif lies not in its origin, but in the fact that the motif was important enough to be regularly elaborated upon, expanded, and reread. The question this thesis hopes to answer is “why was this so?”

The theory of Anson focuses on the fact that monastic authors were active in a celibate and misogynistic world and supportive of an antifeminist view. Once realized, the psychological significance lies in the explanation of why the theme of female cross-dressing, forbidden by scripture, would be elaborated and expanded upon by monks. What could have prompted the reuse and popularity of this motif for monastic audiences? Anson suggests that this literature was pleasing to monastic audiences because it attempts to “neutralize the threat of female temptation”³⁷ by

³⁴ Anson, 1974, 5.

³⁵ Amélineau, 1888, 181.

³⁶ Anson, 1974, 5-6.

³⁷ Anson, 1974, 5.

dressing sexual temptation in male clothing. In a male form female sexuality is neutralized and no longer a danger to men. Monks could virtually surround themselves with defeminized women with whom they could react socially while remaining immune to any lustful or sinful recourse. Anson views that female monk characters possess a sponge-like behavior where sin is drawn in and held, usually during the plot point of erroneous sexual charges being levied against them, and then expunged during the portion of the story that reveals their true sex. This leaves the women renewed, respected, and blameless while the monks are untouched by and excused from their own temptations to be intimate with women. Also, this type of woman could be approached, befriended, and made into a close colleague without guilt. To put this candidly, these *Vitae* could in fact be an early form of erotic literature attempting to satisfy an intimate need of the opposite sex.

Anson traces the literary development of this “genre” of Christian drama, which ranges from stories including simple attempts to escape unwanted situations to complicated constructions, in order to reveal that certain *Vitae* utilize deeper levels of disguise and discovery to place women securely within the world of the monks.

“Thus, quite simply, the secret longing for a woman in a monastery is brilliantly concealed by disguising the woman as a man and making her appear guilty of the very temptation to which the monks are most subject; finally, after she has been punished for their desires, their guilt is compensated by turning her into a saint with universal remorse and sanctimonious worship”³⁸

The example that Anson highlights concerns female monks having pseudo-sexual relations with laywomen and being charged with fathering children. In effect, these female saints become sexual scapegoats and the literary, transvestite whipping-boys for a horde of piously repressed individuals.

Anson, with whom Sandra Lowerre agrees,³⁹ attempts to show how these extracurricular legends functioned as innocent sexual conduits for the brethren but this cannot be their true function. These *Vitae* were not solely for the enjoyment of monks who suffered from longings for female companionship. The popularity of this

³⁸ Anson, 1974, 30.

³⁹ Lowerre, 2005, cxx-cxxi.

literature went well beyond a monastic audience and gained esteem with lay populations, which is evident from the sheer number of female monk stories reproduced and the many languages in which they are preserved. Here the potential for this literature to satisfy a repressed sexual component by supplying female companionship in secret loses its mark. This thesis agrees with the opinion stated by Benedicta Ward,

“It is exactly the monastic choice of chastity lived out as celibacy for life that formed these stories. Their popularity among monks is neither a sign of unhealthy repression leading to sexual fantasy and a prurient desire for stories about forbidden fruit, nor are they in any way a part of the rejection of sexuality which at times marks the writings of the early Church, particularly in the Gnostic tradition.”⁴⁰

In fact, these female characters stand as symbols for the reversal inherent in salvation and provide intriguing religious tales with exceptional dramatic irony from which to instil hope and inspiration. The intriguing theological subject matter assures readership in a localized monastic audience as well as a broader, mixed audience. It can be assumed that people wanted to read about these women’s hardships, faith, and ascetic dedication to inspire their own spiritual undertakings.

Social History, Gender Studies, Liminality, and Theology

Evelyn Patlagean discusses the female transvestite monks as they embody an ideal type of religious female figure for late antique Christian audiences. At one point in history the female transvestite monk was one of the most popular female literary characters used to offer Christian readers devotional and theological comprehension. During the early medieval period female monk *Vitae* diminish in popularity and become a motif less reproduced by hagiographers. For instance, corresponding to major sentiments or events in the religion, at first holy women are praised as persecuted martyrs; a few centuries later they martyr themselves on account of their own bodies and sexuality (hermits and ascetics, which includes female monks), then they enter into a female coenobitic setting; and finally they become lay ascetics or martyrs in marriage (pious housewives).⁴¹ The change in the

⁴⁰ Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (London: Mowbray, 1987), 102.

⁴¹ Patlagean, 1976, 597.

popularity of female main characters corresponds to the changing social structures and gender ideals within Christian culture.

For Patlagean, a structural approach reveals how the threefold plot of these legends shed light on Christian gender thought and practice. She, like Anson, finds a common structure to these hagiographies in which the transvestite characters conform to “la situation initiale de la femme et les motifs de sa retraite; son travestissement, et les péripéties qui interviennent; enfin, le dénouement qu’est la révélation de son sexe véritable,” but looks at this with the structuralist methods of Lévi-Strauss in a socio-historical examination.⁴² Specifically she examines these female characters as they represent one moment of female self-reliance within Byzantine socio-culture. The female transvestite who becomes male in dress and form, who is usually mistaken for a eunuch, represents a figure overturning established gender hierarchies.

“Cette solution est commandée par la logique du récit comme seule possible dans un monde byzantin où moines et solitaires sont barbus. Mais elle revêt aussi un sens lié à celui du travestissement lui-même. L’eunuque participe de la virilité spirituelle sans être assujéti à une catégorie sexuelle, il transcende la distinction des sexes, dont il est libéré.”⁴³

For Patlagean, the female saints are actively abolishing gendered types to reside on a liminal plane akin to eunuchs. Regardless of whether their true sexual identities are eventually discovered, they have moved beyond femininity and its corresponding socio-sexual obstacles, which are their husbands, male lovers, fathers, or sons. An additional element to consider is the fact that the mother is at times an antagonist and a hurdle to an ascetic daughter. One need simply recall the words of Theocleia, Thecla’s mother, to realize that patriarchal control is not the only form of control these women were sometimes escaping.

Patlagean shows a breakdown of the normative categories of gender relations by the fact that male dress allowed these women freedom to move into a male dominated socio-culture.

“En somme, l’histoire, de la femme déguisée en moine propose un modèle de sainteté qui transgresse, dans les versions les plus radicals, tant le hiérarchie

⁴² Patlagean, 1976, 604.

⁴³ Patlagean, 1976, 606.

du couple et de la famille que l'ordre du monde monastique, et qui abolit, en tout état de cause, les deux catégories constituantes, de l'humanité."⁴⁴

It is true these female transvestite monks navigate within gender ambiguity to free themselves from sexuality by use of dress and form. However, this thesis posits that by using outward masculinity they were allowed to function as ascetic women; no gender transformations take place. External audiences are reminded throughout the *Vitae* by hagiographers that these gender-bending characters are women who are often victims of their beauty and sexuality regardless of their male ruse. Gender ambiguity seems to work only on internal audiences, who at times cannot discern between a man and woman. It can also be stated confidently that the female monks rarely freed themselves from sexuality within the tales. For instance, Euphrosyne's male persona incurs a strong homosexual attraction from the brethren and Theodora, Apolinaria, Hilaria, and Mary are all charged with sexual misconduct. Often these female monks become scapegoats for promiscuous sex, accidental pregnancies, and questionable intimacy.

Khalifa Bennasser, in his unpublished thesis for Rutgers University, delves into Byzantine society.⁴⁵ The fact that these legends were written by men, more specifically by male monks, is less important than the fact that they were intended for audiences comprised of both men and women.⁴⁶ These legends reflect general social attitudes and this resulted in the interest in the female monk motif. In opposition to Delcourt and Anson, Bennasser views acts of transvestism as a peculiar, but common, element of the history of asceticism. He warns in his work not to over-prioritize transvestism; it is neither a "break" from any type of past femininity as Delcourt outlines nor does it reflect the psychology of the monastic authors as Anson explores. Bennasser states, "be careful not to see in the disguise of these saints more significance than is actually there." The disguise employed by these women,

"does not signify a break with the former way of life more than does St. Anthony's decision to retire to the Egyptian desert, St. Basil the Great's abandonment of the civil career for which he was educated and trained or St. Paula's, Melania's, or Macrina's resolve to dedicate their lives to God."⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Patlagean, 1976, 615.

⁴⁵ Bennasser, 1984.

⁴⁶ Bennasser, 1984, 40.

⁴⁷ Bennasser, 1984, 61.

This literature reflects the situation of women in society by showing what options and extremes women endured in order to be independent and active in a patriarchal society. Therefore, this transvestitism was not a break with a former existence, but a means by which a continuation of a previous life, one associated with piety and religious devotion, could be preserved.⁴⁸ A male persona is employed to escape the reigning gendered socio-sexual structures, namely marriage, motherhood, and domestic enslavement. According to Bennasser, the main factor that generated this genre's loss of popularity in the ninth century was the social consensus that salvation could be achieved through marriage and childbearing. Therefore, the need to conceal their female identity to be able to practice asceticism was no longer necessary once salvation came in the form of a Christian mother.⁴⁹ Bennasser, concentrating on biblical texts and patristic documents, looks at the larger historicity of the cross-dressing monastic phenomenon, alongside the influence of martyrdom, gnosticism, salvation, and the social attitude towards gender.

In her book, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*,⁵⁰ Benedicta Ward examines penitent female saints, who were considered harlots at one point in their lives, and focuses on Pelagia as a symbol of repentance and hope for all monastic or lay men and women. She dismisses these stories as deliberate tales that condone a secret sexual desire, which obviously is aimed at Anson, or as literature rejecting gender, as viewed by Delcourt. Ward would also be opposed to scholars who see a strong, gnostic influence, such as Elizabeth Castelli, who views these legends shaped into a type of dogmatic, hagiographical genre promoting the rejection of the material and sexual world.

Ward's refreshing take on these hagiographies places the female characters' sexuality and the readers' devotion back into academic perspective. For Ward, the importance of these reformed harlot legends, which include the tale of the transvestite hermit Pelagia, lies in the fact that they instructionally express fundamental aspects of human life for the Christian reader. Within each penitent harlot story the natural, sexual desire inherent to human life is played out for recognition and acceptance while it is used to instruct that this desire has a part in

⁴⁸ Bennasser, 1984, 62-63.

⁴⁹ Bennasser, 1984, 75-79.

⁵⁰ Ward, 1987.

God's plan, namely in a sanctioned marriage or marriage to the church.⁵¹ Equally can a weak, tempted monk read these stories to find reassurance and a proud, over assured monk gain necessary insight to question his assumptions and deepen his understanding of human nature and of himself. Ultimately, these *Vitae* are records of the relationship of human and divine elements that offer inspiration to or draw spiritual reflection out from monastic readers and the larger Christian audience.

Eva Catafygiotu Topping chooses the *Vita Prima* of Matrona in order to examine the fifth century Byzantine social history of women, more specifically the support networks and friendships formed and maintained amongst pious women.⁵² She reveals the social spectrum of the women who were members of Matrona's friendship and counsel circles in order to make a broader statement about female socio-religious sisterhoods of late antiquity.

“Her [Matrona's] circle cut across ethnic, religious, generational, and social lines to include young and old; married women, widows and virgins; slaves, free women, aristocracy and two empresses; pagans as well as Christians. These women represent a cross-section of Byzantine society.”⁵³

The social spectrum of Matrona's patronesses and sisters records the religious activities of Byzantine women and their status, patronage, relationships, and abilities. Topping, for the first time surveys instances where these female saints began to feel masculine in their sentiments, attitudes, and intellect, which may point towards the motivation of Byzantine women to join or become patronesses of holy women.

However, her use of Matrona's *Vita* as a historical, though literary, example of religious networks of Byzantine women raises the question, “How valid are these descriptions, due to fictional elaborations and male authorship?” However, Topping believes these to be apt descriptions because the author of the *Vita Prima* was a woman, and not just any woman, but one close to Matrona and her associates, and therefore an eyewitness.⁵⁴ Her opinion on the authorship of the *Vita Prima* of Matrona has been discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

⁵¹ Ward, 1987, 102-103.

⁵² Topping, 1988.

⁵³ Topping, 1988, 212.

⁵⁴ Topping, 1988, 222-224.

Kerstin Aspegren's *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church*, is a significant contribution to gender scholarship, but was left unfinished due to her untimely death. Although incomplete it was published because it categorically examines the gender ideals and expectations of early and late antique Christian culture. She traces philosophical, scientific, and religious debates on the sexes, including opinions on the biological, mental, and psychological aspects of the Woman, to examine what she sees as an exception to stereotypical femininity and masculinity. This exception is the "male woman," the gender paradox which characterizes women with an applied masculinity. Aspegren examines Thecla to reveal how the "male woman" figure coupled with a cross-dressing woman reflects attitudes on Christian gender ideology, i.e. what it means to be a man or woman, and what it means for a female to become male.

Aspegren highlights Thecla as the apocryphal embodiment of the "male woman," who acts and thinks in ways that were uncharacteristic of women. Important to Aspegren is the fact that Thecla, the model figure of a pious woman, adopts male clothing at the time in which her spiritual aspirations are realized and the desire to act on them burns bright. This led to her participation and authority in the active socio-religious realm of Man.⁵⁵ Male identity, and in association male attire, is linked in society with the realm of "activity, initiative, reason and spiritual life," while the female image is characterized with "passivity, indolence, an irrational emotional life and materialism."⁵⁶ Aspegren seems to connect the decision to adopt male clothing with a conscious desire to function in the male public sphere.

However, this thesis argues that this is not an accurate description of the stories told by the legends. Female monks do not desire to encroach upon a *male* world; they use male dress, hairstyle, appellatives, and institutions to fulfill a desire to encroach upon a *monastic* world, which happens to contain more endeavors geared towards men because men had more social freedom to choose a life dedicated to asceticism. Also, and of greater importance to the tales, is the fact that male institutions gave to their disguises an element of deeper concealment. Therefore, female transvestite monks are looking for a type of social freedom that allows them entry to a monastic world, which must be masculine to provide anonymity to gain

⁵⁵ Aspegren, 1990, 108-109.

⁵⁶ Aspegren, 1990, 108.

autonomy. The following chapters show that some female monks would have joined convents if familial obstacles were not insurmountable. They realize their spiritual potential within themselves as women, but out of necessity are forced to utilize transvestism in order to gain freedom to participate in a monastic world.

Aspegren makes a distinction between becoming male and being recognized as male, which this thesis stresses as extremely important to fully comprehend the portrayal of the female transvestite monks. For instance, Thecla was never called male or urged to become male.⁵⁷ Thecla clearly remains a woman throughout her life, but needed pass as a man to travel safely and inconspicuously as a single woman following Paul. Readers find within the figure of Thecla an outward masculinity devoid of the sustained trickery used by female transvestite monks. Thecla does not need such a high level of social masculinity because she is known to be a woman. She does not need to sustain a social male persona in order to live undetected amongst a population of male monks and hermits as do the female monks examined here.

Susan Ashbrook Harvey examines these female figures as theological symbols of reversal that represent both the human condition after the Fall and human salvation.⁵⁸ The element of paradox, or reversal, not only includes women dressing up as men, achieving a male level of piety as women, and being sainted as women for their manly deeds, but also the fact that male authors fail to describe women in accord with their own derogatory gender beliefs.⁵⁹

Therefore, the function of female transvestite monk fiction was to praise, exalt, and report on a very holy event taking place within the human world and not to recount historical facts or call for gender reform. Harvey posits that all *Vitae* have one overarching purpose: to offer readers theological moral tales that are descriptive of the human situation after the Fall.⁶⁰ Hagiographers constructed the female monks to embody a human reversal in order to fully express the salvation drama, which in

⁵⁷ Aspegren, 1990, 115. However, Aspegren is careful to point out that Thecla does receive a male appellation in later traditions.

⁵⁸ Harvey, "Women," 1990.

⁵⁹ Harvey, "Women," 1990, 38.

⁶⁰ Harvey, "Women," 1990, 36-37.

itself is a “drama of reversal – reversing our state of sin to one of salvation.”⁶¹ This reversal, as expressed within the figure of a woman, promoted a symbolic relationship between Eve and Mary. Here, women embody the point in human history where their choices resulted in sin, death, sexuality, and loss of innocence, but also redemption and salvation. This relationship between a blamed woman and a redeemed woman can be symbolized or actualized in the figure of a holy woman. Harvey states “women’s bodies symbolized with acute clarity the conditions of purity and perdition, to such an extent that they represent that condition for the whole of humankind.”⁶² All holy women have this ability, but with harlots and transvestites this message is located within a monastic setting. In the case of Pelagia, who is able to embody both Eve and Mary, the reversal from demonic temptress to heavenly saint offers external audiences an intriguing story of the ultimate human salvation drama. In this legend a woman changes from the cause of sin to a reason for praise from her struggle for redemption through asceticism.

Harvey believes that “each holy woman is an exception to her kind, so much so, that she ceases to be of her kind, becoming instead an honorary male.”⁶³ The transformative power of redemption, gained through asceticism focused on humility and chastity, has spiritually modified women into better humans with a type of ideal masculinity. Additionally, it was important that a woman be used to make this point. The figure of a redeemed man is not the most powerful theological symbol because he need not improve himself to begin a journey for salvation – in other words, it should be easier for him. For a woman, stereotypically thought to be of lesser spiritual and intellectual worth than a man, she must first rise to the level of Man to eventually rise to the level of a redeemed human. Therefore, if Pelagia’s salvation shows that the ultimate redemptive transformation is possible for a harlot, then it offers hope to all readers regardless of sex or gender.

The next scholar, Elizabeth Castelli, looks at the female transvestite figures in light of the gnostic ideology associated with the female body, in which she observes a connection with the transformation and blending of genders in the *Gospel of*

⁶¹ Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 45.

⁶² Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 51.

⁶³ Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 41.

Thomas.⁶⁴ She uses Philo to understand two seemingly contradictory passages in the *Gospel of Thomas*. One, maleness is championed over femaleness in saying 114, and two, in saying 22, non-gender, which is neither male nor female, but represents the original state of oneness, is preferred. Therefore true salvation is possible for women, but they, “can do so only through the manipulation of conventional gender categories.”⁶⁵ Women must work to reach the first step, the state of maleness, before moving on to becoming a perfected living spirit, which is the goal for humankind as stated in the *Gospel of Thomas*.

She focuses on Perpetua, who willingly refuses her maternity and femininity before her martyrdom by rejecting her family and child. As Perpetua is awaiting martyrdom, she receives a vision where she is physically transformed into a man during an athletic competition. This is meant to symbolize Perpetua’s victory over gender ideology and feminine weakness in the face of martyrdom. Castelli feels strongly that her martyrdom makes an important statement. “I believe that something else is at stake here. The pinnacle of Perpetua’s struggle is described in this scene, and she is victorious in the battle – and victory is described *as* and *by* the stripping off of feminine gender.”⁶⁶

If one can strip off the feminine, then one can also apply the masculine. Castelli sees adopting male clothing and other acts, like the shearing of the hair, as body signifiers that act as “signs” or “outward gestures” of gender ambiguity and transformation.⁶⁷ For Castelli, outward masculinization does not simply symbolize women liberating themselves from cultural stereotypes or restrictive androcentric Christian ideology. The potential for gender transformation within Christian culture, whether symbolic, superficial, or genuine, marks a point in late antiquity where gender categories could no longer be explained in dualistic terms.⁶⁸ This is attested to by the fact that many church authorities applaud religious legends of female power, while simultaneously denounce the same behavior in practice. In the words of

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male:’ Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (NY and London: Routledge, 1991), 29-49.

⁶⁵ Castelli, 1991, 33.

⁶⁶ Castelli, 1991, 42.

⁶⁷ Castelli, 1991, 44.

⁶⁸ Castelli, 1991, 45-47.

Castelli, the Christian world was victim to “moments of slippage, spaces where the self-evidency of gender conventions and the relationships for which they were foundational might have been thought otherwise” and this is reflected in the female transvestite saint motif.⁶⁹

A slight interruption to innovative research on the female transvestite monks is represented by Kari Vogt’s article for the Norwegian Institute at Athens. This body of scholarship is a collection of short declarative statements on the female monk figure in literature, briefly examining the legends of Mary and Hilaria.⁷⁰ She lauds Patlagean as first categorizing this saintly figure, but ignores subsequent scholarship, and states that a historical dossier of this figure is non-existent, which is a gap that this thesis seeks to remedy.

This is an adequate introductory work, which highlights all the main elements, but without further explanation on the social and sexual implications of these gender “departures.” However, she does entertain the social reception of this male figure in a direct way, albeit briefly. She lauds transvestism as the primary element and regards the female monks as transgressing gender boundaries, not only transcending them. This thesis disagrees. Transvestism is a necessary element to these legends, which was employed to secure the desired plot points for the irony and conclusion of the tales, but not their main element. Transvestism allowed hagiographers to use female characters to offer intended theological and inspirational messages to readers.

Nicholas Conostas, who translated the *Life of St. Mary/Marinos* for Dumbarton Oaks, views these transvestite figures as liminal, transitional figures within a socio-anthropological discipline.⁷¹ Conostas sees that the basic three stage plot structure of the legends, “separation, liminality, and reaggregation,” represents a transformation of the main character from a gender stereotype to a newly defined spiritual being inside the walls of a monastery.⁷² Conostas criticizes previous scholars, such as Delehayé and his “reductive criticism” of Mary. He states that Delehayé

⁶⁹ Castelli, 1991, 47.

⁷⁰ K. Vogt, "The 'Woman Monk': A Theme in Byzantine Hagiography," in *Greece and Gender*, eds. B. Berggreen and N. Marinatos (Bergen: Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1995), 141-148.

⁷¹ Conostas, 1996, 1-5.

⁷² Conostas, 1996, 4.

“underestimates the significant social, psychological, and religious concepts embodied in the dramatic figure of the saintly female transvestite.”⁷³ According to Conostas these legends are literary instances of liminal ritual, which attempted to resolve a specific gender based problem that the monastic world had itself created. This problem involves how to award pious females with due respect regardless of their sex and how to promote female spiritual potential within an androcentric culture.⁷⁴ These hagiographies are witnesses to a point in history that “suggest a moment when monastic androcentrism became a problem, or at least a question, to itself.”⁷⁵ For Conostas, the female transvestite monk motif is a literary tool with which to address restrictive gender issues and remedy suffocating gendered assumptions on the spiritual potential of women. This thesis believes Conostas to be correct to an extent, but does not see that male authors had a problem with their own androcentrism because they attempt to fit holy women into this system instead of challenging the unfairness of the system outright.

However for Conostas, these female characters become heroic. He describes them as “creatures of margins,” who undertake a “mysterious rite of passage,” which offer to readers a “symbolic process of redefinition” and a “grand exchange of otherness” concerning women and related gender issues in society.⁷⁶ When speaking of Mary he applauds her as a hero, showing that in the

“conquest of manhood...her exploits suggest that the female element is part of the ambivalence of virile strength, and that it may serve to balance and amplify that strength, as well as subvert its authoritative claims to dominance and hegemony.”⁷⁷

His language echoes anthropological works that examine the communal evolution of humans, such as Arnold van Gennep’s *Les rites de passage: étude systématique des rites*,⁷⁸ and K. Dowden’s *Death and the Maiden: Girl’s Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology*.⁷⁹ For Conostas this literature expresses a change in gender status as related

⁷³ Conostas, 1996, 3.

⁷⁴ Conostas, 1996, 5.

⁷⁵ Conostas, 1996, 5.

⁷⁶ Conostas, 1996, 3-5.

⁷⁷ Conostas, 1996, 3.

⁷⁸ Paris: Librairie Critique, 1909.

⁷⁹ London: Routledge, 1989.

to Christian participants more so than references to piety and he supports this view by commenting upon the absence of scriptural references in the *Life of Mary/Marinos*.

Innovative Examinations

Valerie Hotchkiss, using a new historicism approach, is interested in late medieval Western female transvestite saints, specifically Hildegund Von Schönau, Jeanne D'Arc, the female pope, disguised wives, and the female cross-dressers of romance. For her these figures prove that gender boundaries were often blurred before the modern period.⁸⁰ She focuses on women's motivation to cross-dress, cross-dressing as a vehicle with which these female characters manifested or attained holiness, and the ability of transvestism to highlight the inferiority of women. She stresses that by conforming to the Christian masculine ideal these "unusual women accede in some way to male hegemony or social constructs of gender"⁸¹ and do not break free from gendered social constraints.⁸² Hotchkiss analyzes gender inversion in the legends and discerns between transvestism as it confirms traditional order, overturns order, or remains an ambiguous trope.⁸³ She concludes that

"in general, historical and fictional depictions of women who cross dressed substantiate the conventional understanding of women's place in medieval society. Descriptions of the protagonists' situations before and after disguise depict a strict gender hierarchy in which women are governed by men. The illusion of maleness, however, often calls into question suppositions about gender differences."⁸⁴

Although not examined in Hotchkiss' work, this last statement reflects upon gender constructs within the original late antique versions of female transvestite saints. Hotchkiss does state that gender categories were never fixed, but it is important to note that women were not the only ones called to conform to a gendered ideal. Women were deemed exceptional by Christian intellectuals when they emulated masculinity in a socially acceptable fashion, but the definition of masculinity for men also shifted from a Greco-Roman context to a Christian understanding. This makes

⁸⁰ Hotchkiss, 1996.

⁸¹ Hotchkiss, 1996, 3.

⁸² Hotchkiss, 1996, 13-14, 126.

⁸³ Hotchkiss, 1996, 10.

⁸⁴ Hotchkiss, 1996, 12.

men, if they aspire to emulate the ideal, also under the control of male Christian intellectuals.⁸⁵ Although Hotchkiss is completely correct in stating that women, and their cultural definitions, were under the control of men, a scholar must not forget that men also fell short of the Christian standards set for them.

Stephen J. Davis offers the academic world an innovative study of the female transvestite monk hagiographies using an intertextual literary examination which removes the transvestite hagiographies from the imposed literary patterns of the structuralists.⁸⁶

“The typical structure of these transvestite saint legends—ascetic retreat, transvestitism, revelation of sexual identity—is more variable (less consistent) than structuralist interpreters...have suggested. Especially given the significant variation observed from legend to legend, this structure should not be considered a fundamental or universal feature of the texts, but rather the result of interpreters’ attempts to impose upon the texts a structural unity where one does not necessarily exist.”⁸⁷

Davis examines the production (the author), the post-production (the readers), and finally the reproduction (the reader-authors) of the legends. Locating intertextual connections, competitions, and selections reveals the agendas of hagiographers through the construction of their main characters and storylines. However, the author is only one human element that comes into contact with texts and Davis offers an examination of the legends’ readers as well. He raises questions such as, “how did the authors of saints’ lives seek to shape ancient perceptions of women? How did they, in effect, help ‘construct’ women’s gender for early Christian readers?”⁸⁸ These questions relate to the production of literature, in which male authors write with agendas to promote, consciously or not, a sexual, theological, and cultural ideology.

Davis questions how the female transvestite motif would have functioned in the minds of external audiences. Davis writes,

“What is the narrative function of this act for the heroine? What would it have signified for an ancient community of readers? For those looking for

⁸⁵ Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁸⁶ Davis, 2002.

⁸⁷ Davis, 2002, 14.

⁸⁸ Davis, 2002, 1-2.

satisfying answers to these questions, the texts themselves are not very forthcoming. In many of these *Lives* the heroine's change of dress is virtually left unexplained."⁸⁹

Davis' query continues. "Why would the Greek monks at Mount Athos have had an interest in this story? In such a setting, why would Mary, a "cross-dressing" female saint, have been lauded as an exemplary model for the male monastic life?"⁹⁰ The texts themselves are not forthcoming with this information for modern scholars, however, after an examination of intertexts alongside a scrutiny of a three-layered masculinity, such as this thesis provides, the functions and reader responses of this literature is better revealed. This thesis' use of intertextuality to reveal intentions and receptions is discussed at length in the following chapter.

Davis argues that a fascination with female counterparts and a desire to focus blame and hostility towards the female sex prompted the reproduction of this transvestite motif up until the ninth century.⁹¹ He locates his study of female transvestite saints in the following cultural intertexts to map out his theory: the story, iconography, and cult following of Thecla;⁹² the lives of early Christian holy men, for instance the call of Anthony is read as a subtext for the call of Hilaria; the large cultural discourse on eunuchs, which makes these transvestite figures analogous to the Egyptian eunuch in *Acts* 8:26-40; the story of Joseph, as an androgynous hero, and Potiphar's wife; the larger early Christian discourse on the female body, "in particular, its textual fragmentation and intertextual reconstitution in the context of wo/men's community;"⁹³ and the "gospel of Christ (writ large)" and its "meta-narrative" nature as an "intertextual trump card."⁹⁴

Davis does not view these legends as tools used to promote some type of socio-political homogenization within a community, but rather as means to highlight the dual aspect of gender while also undermining it. Davis reveals this in the case of Matrona, who was woman, turned man, discovered as a woman, given the position of

⁸⁹ Davis, 2002, 15.

⁹⁰ Davis, 2002, 4.

⁹¹ Davis, 2002, 4.

⁹² For an excellent discussion of the cult of St. Thecla see Stephen Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

⁹³ Davis, 2002, 15.

⁹⁴ Davis, 2002, 34.

an abbess, and who vocationally achieves a respectable masculinity as a man-like woman. Here, “two discourses ‘cross,’ they do not cancel each other out. As a result, the bipolar view of human gender - while tacitly endorsed - is ultimately destabilized.”⁹⁵ In light of this, Davis discusses the androgynous features of the iconography of Christ and Christ’s appearances in feminine form in many eschatological visions. For Davis, readers who are familiar with these androgynous portrayals and are eager to imitate Christ, saints, and martyrs may see in these female monks an undoing of gender categories, which represents a real potential to attain a higher spiritual ideal.

This thesis’ main criticism to Davis’ work is that it is too broad in scope, but it remains a remarkable treatment of these legends nonetheless. Davis brilliantly identifies highly influential intertexts, but does not go far enough in applying them to the specifics of the female monk legends. For instance, though Davis highlights Thecla, he does not pay close attention to other cross-dressing figures or the larger issues of the transvestite figure because he concentrates too heavily on the figure of the eunuch, which for these women is a received religio-social role produced by the acts of transvestism or a metaphorical association. Also, though all the scriptural and Christocentric intertexts highlighted by Davis are indeed important cultural texts through which to understand these *Vitae*, this thesis sees that a focus on later monastic literature and the desert myth will produce more narrowed contextual results as to the motives and intentions of the hagiographers as well as the inspirational and theological messages taken away by readers. The intertexts deemed most pertinent to comprehend the function of these legends are discussed in the following chapter.

Georges Sidéris, in a provocative article calling for a reconceptualization of Byzantine gender categories,⁹⁶ uses the female transvestite monks Mary, Pelagia, and Matrona, with reference to the female transvestites that Jerome criticizes, to question gender categorization. It is refreshing to see a scholar demarcate between a true sexual identity and a socio-sexual identity received within a gendered culture.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Davis, 2002, 32.

⁹⁶ Sidéris, 2003, 217–233.

⁹⁷ Sidéris, 2003, 219, 222, 227.

However, in contrast to this thesis, he believes that this type of holy woman existed in reality and was recognized by society as a eunuch.⁹⁸

Sidéris highlights the external and physiological male signs certain women project to a Christian audience to show that a eunuchial existence was a recognizable social category or performative role in the culture. Therefore these women are eunuchs. However, Sidéris criticizes those who compare the eunuchial state of female transvestite to the asexual state of angels. This is the view of Nathalie Delierneux, who surveys all major elements present in the female monk *Vitae*, including socio-sexual power structures, ideal masculinity, gender transgressions, and the motivations to cross dress. Delierneux concludes that female monks possess an asexual state akin to that of angels and not an androgynous one as previously thought by scholars.⁹⁹

“Pour les travesties – cet aspect vient tout naturellement encadrer ce qui a été dit plus haut sur la perte de féminité et l’asexualisation – la ξενιτεία prend une dimension supplémentaire: non seulement elles ont quitté leur famille et leur patrie, mais elles sont même étrangères à leur propre sexe.”¹⁰⁰

However, Sidéris is quick to point out the shortcomings of this asexual view.

“En effet, si les eunuques sont asexués, le caractère subversif que représente pour la société et les pouvoirs byzantins, temporel ou spirituel, le fait que des femmes décident volontairement de transgresser les frontières qui fixent l’ordre des genres est minime, voire inexistant.”¹⁰¹

At the foundation of Sidéris’ criticism is his belief that four gender categories, “quatre sexes,” existed in Byzantine socio-gender ideology.¹⁰²

Sidéris acknowledges four gender categories: male, female, male eunuch, and female eunuch within his research.¹⁰³ This suggests that male and female gender benders were not uncommon in the ascetic world and were viewed as parallel to each other. For Sidéris, women would be recognized as female eunuchs. This renders the descriptive masculine language used to portray their merits and behaviors as

⁹⁸ Sidéris, 2003, 227-228.

⁹⁹ Delierneux, 1997, 179-243. See also, Delierneux, 2002, 105-140.

¹⁰⁰ Delierneux, 1997, 202.

¹⁰¹ Sidéris, 2003, 220.

¹⁰² Sidéris, 2003, 226, 230.

¹⁰³ Sidéris, 2003, 226.

culture's attempt to describe strong women as female eunuchs. In the system that Sidéris highlights neither a man nor a woman who becomes a eunuch does so at the expense of their true sex or gender. However, it is very surprising that Sidéris does not include in his article Apolinaria, who specifically is referred to by her hagiographer as a εὐνοῦχος ἄνθρωπος, male eunuch. Surely this would have either lent support to his theory on the “quatre sexes” or would have challenged his reading of Byzantine gender categorization?

Nevertheless, this thesis applauds Sidéris for highlighting that gender and spiritual ideals for men and women were constructed by male Christian intellectuals. Both sexes were able to transform and better themselves through self-mortification and self-control into higher eunuchial gendered beings. Of course, this eunuchial transformation is seen in a masculine sense when it comes to women, which is discussed in the “male woman” section of the following chapter. Sidéris firmly places eunuchs within the multifaceted gender structure of Byzantine socio-culture and retrieves them from a shadow existence outside a binary gender system as representatives of a liminal third sex.¹⁰⁴

Within the *Anglo-Saxon Language and Literature* series, Sandra Lowerre explores four *Lives* of the female transvestite saints. This study, *The Cross-dressing Female Saints in Wynkyn de Worde's 1495 Edition of the Vitas Patrum: A Study and Edition of the Lives of Saints Pelage, Maryne, Eufrosyne, Eugene and Mary of Egypt*, concentrates on the written and pictorial content of the fifteenth century English publication of the *Vitas Patrum*. She examines how this first vernacular English copy compares with its source, the 1486 French edition published in Lyons by Jean du Pré and Nicholas Philippi. The 1495 *Vitas Patrum*, meant solely for an English audience, was published under the assumption that there was a demand for the work. Lowerre concludes that a demand for the *Vitas Patrum* in Middle English was voiced by more general, uneducated religious readers, i.e. female audiences not formally educated in Latin that devoted time to reading hagiographies. To reconstruct the intended English audience, Lowerre uses the lists of inherited goods, contents of monastic libraries affected by the Dissolution, patronage records for the manufacture of books, and

¹⁰⁴ Sidéris, 2003, 220, 222, 229.

scholars who examine literature production, such as Michael Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record. England From 1066-1307*.¹⁰⁵

Beyond a technical literary analysis, Lowerre discusses the motivations for female transvestism, the appeal for the reproduction of the female transvestite motif throughout history by monastic authors, and reasons for a fifteenth and sixteenth century English audience to desire a copy of a book that contains stories of female monks. She sees that the female monks were portrayed by male hagiographers in a manner that harmonized them with the misogynistic views of a patriarchal social and an androcentric religious structure.¹⁰⁶ Lowerre shows

“that the women portrayed in these *Lives* are not at all presented as empowered individuals by virtue of their femaleness but instead as subordinate followers of male authority, a presentation which helped to re-enforce established social structures in the minds of the audience.”¹⁰⁷

She surveys the gender attitudes of the early church, paying attention to the ideal figure of the “male woman” and the male eunuch in order to understand the appeal of these figures for an English reader.¹⁰⁸

As far as the original legends are concerned, Lowerre agrees with the views of Anson who saw these women as imaginary defeminized female companions to monks within monasteries and the theological assertions of Harvey that highlight the performance of the ultimate human salvation drama within these figures.¹⁰⁹ This thesis agrees with Lowerre's view of Harvey, but disagrees on her opinion of Anson. It is believed here that Ward's criticism on Anson's theories should be taken to heart in light of a mixed audience for these legends as discussed previously within this chapter.

Stavroula Constantinou claims to make an “important departure” in the study of hagiography by re-categorizing all *Vitae* into gendered subgenres.¹¹⁰ The subgenres are termed male hagiography or female hagiography depending on the

¹⁰⁵ Lowerre, 2005, xlvii-lxxviii.

¹⁰⁶ Lowerre, 2005, xii.

¹⁰⁷ Lowerre, 2005, cxxxix.

¹⁰⁸ Lowerre, 2005, cxi-cxx.

¹⁰⁹ Lowerre, 2005, cxx-cxxii.

¹¹⁰ Constantinou, 2005, 11-12.

gendered role of the main character. Each subgenre contains anticipated gendered content, but with unexpected peculiarities or intrigue that audiences would recognize, react to, and learn from. For instance, a woman who proves herself capable to surmount female obstacles or to prevail at masculine endeavors is seen as more than her sex. Therefore the audience learns of female potential and the ability for all humans to achieve a spiritual ideal.

These masculine and feminine hagiographical subgenres can be broken down into subdivisions depending on what type of saint participates in the story, i.e. the penitent, virgin, abbess, cross-dresser, or pious housewife.¹¹¹ The type of saint affects the plot patterns and message of the entire legend. Thus, Constantinou can state the obvious

“If, for example, the central heroine of a Life becomes a coenobitic cross-dresser, the plot has the following sequence: it starts with the heroine’s life before the cross-dressing act. Then her decision to cross-dress is presented. Her transformation into a man follows. Later she enters a male monastery. Immediately afterwards her life as a coenobitic monk is depicted. At some point her identity as a man causes problems both to herself and her community and finally her female nature is revealed. The Life of a cross-dresser—especially that of the cross-dresser who is accused of fathering a child—contains an element of suspense that is not shared by the Lives of other holy women such as the abbess, the solitary, defender of images and the pious wife.”¹¹²

This is an important observation for a scholar viewing holy women through performance theory. Role-playing, in a theatrical sense of the term, through the use of appearance, the treatment of the saintly body, gesture, and expectation associated with the characteristics of the performers delivers the intended messages of the *Vitae* to external audiences.¹¹³ Constantinou provides a much needed look at the audience and how it is influenced by the traits and behaviors of the holy troupes of literary male and female saints. He is also the first scholar to seriously entertain the female monks renaming as the descriptive title to the roles they play, to which this thesis agrees, but wishes to expand on by examining this verbal element of role-playing within its outward, social, and inward situations.

¹¹¹ Constantinou, 2005, 11.

¹¹² Constantinou, 2005, 12.

¹¹³ Constantinou, 2005, 13-15.

For Constantinou, these saintly actors provide an ontological model to readers. The performative elements affecting audiences are the christomimetic natures of holy female transvestite monk figures, the social situations in which this specific religious role finds itself, and the anticipated outcomes of the plot points. Audiences, whether reading or listening, participate in the story by internalizing the performance of the saints alongside cultural expectations and definitions.¹¹⁴ Additionally, since every play has its critic, the function of this religious role was promoted by certain church fathers, who, as stated by Constantinou, understood “the ascetic life as a form of theatre directed at pious spectators, who in turn should imitate this way of life.”¹¹⁵

In the point of view of Constantinou, the female transvestite saint gains her desired level of spirituality by obliterating her femininity and beauty within the costume of the opposite sex and through a performance of a harsh ascetic lifestyle.¹¹⁶ These female characters achieve perfection once they find their true selves after erasing their female natures. The points he highlights suggest that perfection is attainable through losing oneself and finding one’s true self through hating one’s life, which would naturally lead someone to attempt a new life.¹¹⁷ Following Patlagean and her use of the *Gospel of Thomas*, Constantinou seeks to explain the origin and importance of this motif in light of the sayings of Jesus concerning perfection, but supplements Patlagean by using passages from the gospels of Mark and Luke. The female monks then are able to present perfected selves to audiences which can perform as Christ-like figures or as humans truly emulating the teachings of Jesus.

Gender transformation is realized in stages within the legends; perhaps like acts in a play. First, what Constantinou terms “the making” takes place at the beginning of the theatrical performance and contains the justifications for the use of transvestism. Then one of two events may occur: “the remaking,” where a

¹¹⁴ Constantinou, 2005, 13.

¹¹⁵ Constantinou, 2005, 14.

¹¹⁶ Constantinou, 2005, 16.

¹¹⁷ Constantinou, 2005, 100-101; Mark 8:34-35, 16:25; Luke 14:25-26. He specifically notes that it is usually these passages that female transvestite saints, those who were actually motivated from scriptural readings in church, heard before becoming male monks.

reconstruction of femininity must take place after discovery leading into another series of adventures and lessons, or “the unmaking,” where true identity is not discovered until death. The unmaking provides audiences with the significance of these women’s religious feats, especially if legends contain the suspense of sexual misconduct.¹¹⁸ However, this seems to be a convoluted system based on the concise three part plot structures found within the research of Anson and Patlagean, but with added stress on the function of performative roles in literature when abnormalities or dramatic irony occurs. It would seem as though hagiographers are making gendered statements. However, beyond the masculine language utilized to support the notion of female spiritual potential in Christian culture, hagiographers are not seeking to make gender transgression or assimilation the main focus of their tales. Readers may experience a degree of gender emulation from internalizing the personas and roles of the characters, but they primarily receive the legends’ instructional, devotional, and theological messages. In other words, they are asked to emulate the virtues of the saints and not necessarily their actions. In sum, it is supposedly through theatrical role-play, that external audiences see the value of the outward masculinity of the female transvestite monks and are influenced by their roles to emulate Christ.

Conclusions

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, many scholars influenced this thesis’s treatment of the female monks. For instance, great insight has been gained in particular from the work of Davis, on the methodology to apply to these texts; Harvey, on the theological intentions of the hagiographers; Ward, for projecting the inspiration contained within these legends which appeal to mixed audiences; and Sidéris and Constantinou for understanding social elements of the female monks. However, this thesis is innovative in that it performs a detailed examination of the three layers of masculinity used to characterize these women by male hagiographers. This thesis also seeks to offer a practical approach to monastic literature to show that it functions first and foremost to provide readers with religious insights. Gender issues and sexuality may be an integral element to the characterization of the female

¹¹⁸ Constantinou, 2005, 12, 103-125.

monks and the incidents of the storylines, but they are not integral to the message of the texts. This is why so many receptions of gender issues are championed by different scholars.

The female figures in the stories use masculinity for their own purposes and become, in an outward and social sense, superficially male. Most scholars above focus on outward masculinity through these women's transvestism, but do not satisfactorily entertain the issues of masculine renaming or the subtle differences between using male dress to join a *male* monastery and using male dress, and institutional transvestism, to enter into a *monastic* world. Constantinou, building on the theories of Patlagean, presents the most plausible function of active transvestism as a type of role-play in society, although without much attention to institution.

Social masculinity is the result of a successful projection of a male persona into the social world by the characters. Most scholars only relay how these women, and their outward masculinity, break down social norms or strengthen misogynist limitations on the female nature, such as Harvey, Lowerre, and Hotchkiss. However, scholars, with the exception of Sidéris who highlights the social identity of these women, have not adequately outlined how social masculinity functions as part of the overall masculine ruse. This inadequacy will be tackled and resolved by this thesis.

Inward masculinity, observed in a psychological sense by Delcourt and a social sense by Topping, involves sentiments or expressions of masculinity communicated by these female characters to internal audiences within the legends. Through the main body of this thesis, the portion that deals with the three-layered masculinity, inward masculinity proves to be the most difficult to detect. This thesis posits that these legends' overall meaning and function lie, not within the play on gender or a bond with masculine sentiments, but within female holy figures steadfastly doing what they must to imitate Christ within their womanhood.

Chapter Three: Written and Read

“The Palestinians were eager to observe and took care to listen to whatever was told them, accepting much that may have been embroidery rather than fact. They [the hagiographers] do not however suggest that the more extreme ascetic practices are to be imitated by their reader: the signs and wonders of the monks are to be admired, it is their virtues that are to be imitated.”¹

Approaching Texts

This chapter surveys the contextual history and the major intertexts of the female transvestite monk *Vitae* in order to comprehend fully the roles that texts, authors, and readers perform in constructing meaning and function for the holy womanhood of these masculinized women. This thesis defines intertexts as the cultural texts and literary texts that influence the portrayal of characters and content of storylines. Cultural texts, simply, can be also termed cultural opinions, themes, and ideologies, and literary texts, of course, can be whole texts or motifs, plot points, and characterizations taken from portions of texts considered influential. This distinction must be made in order to clarify the choice of intertexts used for this thesis because the intertextual method is employed to explore the authorial intentions of and possible reader response to the female monk *Vitae*.

The intertexts found within this chapter are literary figures, cultural themes, and written texts. They are considered capable of carrying cultural familiarity for mixed audiences attempting to comprehend the significance of the text as a whole. The intertexts focused on in this chapter are the neutral figure of the transvestite as a symbol of reversal, the ideology of the “male woman,” and the textual and cultic traditions of both male and female holy figures that act as exemplary of an ideal human piety within a larger association with the desert myth and asceticism. Authorial intentions are best found within the intertextual portrayals and characterizations of the female monks’ holy womanhood, especially since a highly developed three-layered masculinity is so heavily depended upon within the plotlines to allow the texts to function successfully.

The Intertextual Method

As a general term, intertextuality describes the natural construction processes

¹ Ward, 1980, 27.

that occur when an author writes a text.² Academically, it refers to a method that examines the production of literature through the roles of authors, readers, and cultures. Scholars using this method study intertexts, which are seen as building blocks of texts.³ Most agree that the act of writing is an intentional and continuous

² Julia Kristeva coined this term to describe text production as “the passage from one sign-system to another,” and the “transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into another.” Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (NY: Columbia University Press, 1980), 65-74, 124-130; Julia Kristeva, “Revolution in Poetic Language,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 111. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who states that intertextuality is “the interweaving of different texts (literally ‘web-s’) in an act of criticism that refuses to think of ‘influence’ or ‘interrelationship’ as simple historical phenomena.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, translator’s preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), lxxxiv.

³ Intertexts have many names, such as James W. Voelz’s “sets and complexes of signs,” Derrida’s and Spivak’s “web-s,” Barthes’ “codes,” and Julia Kristeva’s “sign systems.” The idea of literary themes, or intertexts, as “threads” comes from the work of Roland Barthes, prominent in his *S/Z* and *Image, Music, Text*, which presents his popular metaphor for text as a woven fabric.

Intertextual scholars have called culture the fabric of life, the all-absorbing, all-reproducing text. Jacques Derrida uses the term “general text” to represent the larger textuality of history, subject, and society that must not be thought of as existing beyond text. “There is no outside-text; il n’y a pas de hors-texte.” Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 59-60; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158. Barthes expresses this cultural influence on texts by calling the general text, “c’est-à-dire au Livre (de la culture, de la vie, de la vie comme culture).” Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), 27-28. This general text, which this thesis would call the cultural text, is the ultimate producer of threads and this is gleaned from Joseph Conrad’s use of the term “knitting machine.” Joseph Conrad, “Letter to Cunningham Graham, December 1897,” found in Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (NY: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1979), 400. It is out of this knitting machine that voices weave their stories. The cultural text is a stage set in which author(s) and reader(s) react. However, human readers and authors cannot be a part of “everything, all at once, everywhere.” Timothy Beal, “Ideology and Intertextuality: Surplus of Meaning and Controlling the Means of Production,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 28. This echoes Jonathan Culler’s view that one cannot make the universe the object of attention. Jonathan Culler, “Presupposition and Intertextuality,” *Modern Language Notes* 91 (Dec. 1976): 1384.

In addition to this, readers and authors construct from birth an individually tailored general text, i.e. a personal text, by forming positive/negative opinions, biases, and associations to support or criticize elements of their socio-culture. They naturally refer to this as they participate in writing or reading. Authors, along with their personal texts, are quickly absorbed by the texts they produce and this is one way texts received their intended meaning. Gary A. Phillips, “‘What is Written? How are You Reading?’ Gospel, Intertextuality and Doing Likewise: Reading Lk 10:25-42 Otherwise,” *Semeia* 69/70 (1995), 118; Magdalino, 1999, 111-112; Catherine Mooney, “Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity,” in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 3. “If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet; no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscriptions ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author; his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life (and no longer the contrary).” Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 161. It has been said that an author is a part of his/her text, but it must also be noted that the reader is just as intertwined within the life of the text.

recycling and reformation of previous textual-cultural intertexts, or themes, and ideologies into new literature which is actively interpreted by readers. Once understood, this approach, as it is “set over against a traditional, restrictive notion of ‘literary influence,’” has “expanded the ways of accounting for the complex relationship of texts to texts, to interpretive traditions, to writers and readers, and to institutional contexts.”⁴ Once a text is left to tell of its world in its own voice, instead of being placed within an expected structure, it reveals how authors and readers perceived or idealized their own realities and culture.⁵

This thesis understands that texts can exist contemporarily to the texts for which they become influential intertexts. Source use, where a text of a previous era is chosen to base another text on, although included in an intertextual process, is a limited way to see intertexts at work. For example, a text can be produced in the same decade as its intertexts because it sparks a dialogue between textual themes in order to supply a deeper reading. Within the production of literature, even if texts are simply reproductions of the same fictional plotline enhanced to different degrees, as in most cases of the female monk *Vitae*, the cultural minds of the readers are present

⁴ George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, “Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis,” *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): 7; “Discreet, closed-off entities” is a description that David Chandler uses to show how structuralism treats texts. Chandler is quoted in Davis, 2002, 13. Stephen Davis also disagrees with a structuralist handling of transvestite hagiographies.

⁵ Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 81-83; Evelyn Patlagean, “Ancient Byzantine Hagiography and Social History,” in *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. Stephen Wilson, trans. Jane Hodgkin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 103-104; Alice-Mary Talbot, “General Introduction,” in *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation*, 1, *Byzantine Saints’ Lives in Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996), vii.

since texts are written to be received.⁶ In fact, it has been stated that these types of embellished texts are “likely to reveal more of this mind than the most stylish life or mosaic. The Bollandist’s chaff may thus prove to be the social historian’s grain,”⁷ due to the fact that some texts seem produced to take advantage of cultural demands, popular trends, and/or the need to address issues within the cultural texts of societies.⁸ A scholar using intertextuality is able to find collisions of divergent attitudes, conflicts of intertexts, and/or attempts to preserve old ideas or champion new ideas in a changing society.⁹

The Intertextual Method and the Female Monk *Vitae*

These female monk legends are examined using the intertextual method to analyze their thematic content. This method reveals probable reasons for the popular use and reception of the female transvestite, masculine woman, and holy figures to best reveal the probable receptions and intentions of the *Vitae* in question because it does not favor one human presence over another. For example, it does not focus so strongly on the authors’ active participation in writing as to ignore the readers’ active

⁶ It is stated that the “function of a text is defined as its social role, its capacity to serve certain demands of the community which creates the text.” Juri M. Lotman and A. M. Piatigorsky, “Text and Function,” trans. Ann Shukman *New Literary History* 9 (1978): 233. Texts express issues that authors want to convey. Audiences may be more or less primed by cultural and personal opinions to receive these issues in a positive and/or negative sense. James W. Voelz states that “texts are not arbitrary collocations of signs, with no pre-conceived intentionality (such as a pattern made by ink dripping from an uncapped pen). . . . Texts have meaning which is intended. We know this, not from being receptors of various texts. We know this from being producers of various kinds of texts.” James W. Voelz, “Multiple Signs, Levels of Meaning and Self as Text: Elements of Intertextuality,” *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): 157. The intended meaning or purpose of texts lack true depth and applicability until they come into contact with readers who internalize the intentions of writers and return to the text its intended, but reconceived and interpreted, meaning. Intertexts inspire or inform readers as to the cultural, spiritual, or intellectual intentions of the piece. “Perhaps best put, we may say from an intertextual perspective, that, through the presence of a multiplicity of texts, both written and non-written, the meaning of a text arises in the presence of an interpreter.” Voelz, 1995, 150. Readers can reciprocally give to the text unintended or additional meaning. This fact is observed by Peter D. Miscall, who states, “this returns us to the reader who must decide what limits are to be placed on what is to be read and how it is to be read.” Peter D. Miscall, “Texts, More Texts, a Textual Reader and a Textual Writer,” *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): 252. Readers naturally read texts from their own perspectives, interests, and bias; the author can only guide and instruct. Within the intertextual method reading is an active undertaking where a personal text of a reader absorbs the intertexts, which were placed there by authors, and reacts with empathy, emulation, negativity, morality, and/or approval.

⁷ Sergei Hackel, “Introduction,” in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel, *The University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies* (Chester, UK: The Bemrose Press Limited, 1981. Published by the Fellowship of St Alban and St Serguis), 2.

⁸ Burrus, 1987, 81-83; Lotman, 1978, 233.

⁹ Aichele and Phillips, 1995, 10.

employment in interpreting textual meaning and significance. This method allows for layers of theological, inspirational, and instructional significance to be discovered for this type of monastic literature. Intertextuality makes plain the interplay between author, reader, and intertexts, which will reveal multifaceted functions and reader responses for these *Vitae*.

Once an intertextual method is employed, this thesis asks the primary question: “what intertexts influenced the masculine construction and characterization of these strong holy women within late antique Christian literature?” An additional question is “what do the intertexts of the female monk legends convey regarding late antique Christian ideological and cultural attitudes towards women within a theological milieu?” The major intertexts, which are discussed in detail below alongside more minor ones, include: the symbolic value of the transvestite figure to represent reversal in literature, the socio-gender ideology of the “male woman,” and other ascetic figures, men, eunuchs, and women, found preserved in *Vitae*, patristic literature, and apocryphal acts, some of whom were cross-dressers. A dissection of these intertexts alongside an examination of these women’s thrice layered masculine portrayals, to which the main body of this thesis is dedicated, reveals the intentions and motivations of hagiographers to produce female transvestite *Vitae* and the conjectured reception of this type of monastic literature by external audiences.

There are of course multiple motivations and intentions that one can locate for hagiographers. For instance, there is evidence within the legends that reveals male Christian intellectuals and spiritual leaders coming to terms with having strong, spiritual women as colleagues and learning to praise women’s capacity for and success at notable ascetic and spiritual feats.¹⁰ Nicholas Conostas observes these transvestite monk legends mark a point in history when “monastic androcentrism became a problem, or at least a question, to itself.”¹¹ Conostas highlights this major motivation to produce this type of legend, but this thesis adds that his point can be used to explain also the reason for the use of masculine language to describe holy women. Legends that promote masculinized women as fictional colleagues to male

¹⁰ Hotchkiss, 1996, 9; Mooney, 1999, 7.

¹¹ Conostas, 1996, 5.

ascetics allow a male author to acknowledge and praise holy women within masculine parameters. This in turn validates the endeavors of holy women to external audiences, which in turn justifies admiration of them by men and women. This will be discussed below within the section concerning the “male woman” intertext. In addition, hagiographers write ironic tales with intriguing plots that the external audiences, whether monastic or lay, may find fascinating to read in order to project the theological, instructional, or moral intentions rooted in the text.¹²

Also, a demand for stories of strong, holy women must not be overlooked by scholars though it may be difficult to prove such demand existed. Delehayé believes demand existed for all hagiographic myths and looks “to the hagiographer only in so far as he echoes the voice of the people.”¹³ The popularity of a text, as it is related to its larger audience

“can no longer be thought of as an objective relation between text and extratextual reality, but instead it arises from the subjective or ideological juxtaposing of text with text *on behalf* of specific readers in specific historical/material situations in order to produce new constellations of texts/readers/readings.”¹⁴

This may have resulted in the mass-production of these female transvestite legends for which many scholars argue.¹⁵

The demand for stories of female heroines, whether believed to be fictional or historical, can only be indirectly proven by the popularity of these legends, which is observable through the variety of available languages, the number written and embellished, their reproduction in other collections, and the attempts made to preserve these stories. A fascinating story of preservation comes to us from Agnes Lewis Smith. While on a research travel in Egypt she found on a vellum palimpsest, with noticeable thumbprints on the back, which is a sign of frequent use, the lives of holy women written over an early copy of the gospels. These stories, preserved here

¹² Cloke, 1995, 36.

¹³ Delehayé, 1998, 39; Constat, 1996, 2.

¹⁴ Aichele and Phillips, 1995, 14-15.

¹⁵ Amélineau, 1888, 181; Drescher, 1947, 126-127; Anson, 1974, 12-13; Patlagean, 1976, 600; René Aigrain, *L'hagiographie; ses sources, ses méthodes, son histoire*, Subsidia Hagiographica, 80 (Paris: 1953. Reprint, Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 2000), 229-230; Davis, 2002, 4.

in Syriac, were deemed important and popular enough to warrant the erasure of a copy of the gospels to ensure their survival and circulation.¹⁶

Audiences make things popular. If audiences did not, then the many versions of female transvestite monk *Vitae* would not exist. In general, authors write texts that contain information that is contextually applicable to and/or persuasive for different issues, hopes, and ideologies of their worlds.¹⁷ The figure of a strong woman transvestite monk who experiences sexual escapades and has a hidden secret proves to function successfully in offering audiences intrigue, inspiration, and theological understanding. This thesis stresses that these legends were addressed to the whole of society and should not be considered only “pop culture” for monastic audiences.¹⁸ Broadly, these characters are so intriguing and potentially symbolic that they can offer inspiration and hope for salvation to a mixed audience. Conversely, their instructional value can also offer interesting “shaming devices” for localized male monastic audiences that may have become victims of pride or haughtiness.¹⁹

The Intertexts

The intertexts that were used and reconstructed alongside additional elements and plot points of the storylines will allow scholars to pinpoint moments within the texts where authorial intent can be inferred and reader response can be hypothesized. This thesis feels as though it is highly important to discuss each intertext separately in order to reveal the instructional, theological, and inspirational functions of each female monk *Vita* as well as the motivation to use masculine language to describe holy women.

The “Male Woman” – Masculine Praise for Strong Women

The type of woman that the female monks embody is the ideological figure of the masculine woman. The term “male woman” has been coined by scholars in order

¹⁶ John the Stylite, *Select Narratives of Holy Women from the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest*, trans. Agnes Lewis Smith (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1900); A. Whigham Price, *The Ladies of Castlebrae* (Gloucester, UK: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1985), 125-129.

¹⁷ Patlagean, 1976, 604; Burrus, 1987, 83.

¹⁸ Patlagean, 1983, 101-102.

¹⁹ Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the ‘Linguistic Turn,’” *J ECS* 6.3 (1998): 428; Ward, 1980, 29; Ward, 1987, 102-103.

to categorize the notable women described in masculine ways in both the Christian and pre-Christian worlds.²⁰ This intertext is a personified ideal female nature constructed by male intellectuals to embody the Christian masculine traits of chastity, patience, devotion, and self-control. The “male woman” figure is most closely related to the inward masculinity of the female monks, but it exists only as a tool to describe externally observed deeds, behaviors, and sentiments of holy women. Within the *Vitae* female monks never describe themselves as masculine beyond references that are purely reflective of their superficial male disguises. They are not presented to external audiences as having changed into anything that could be construed as genuinely masculine in sentiment or motivation. The female monks begin their spiritual journeys as wives, sisters, daughters, and virgins and use masculine deceptions to preserve ascetic aspirations, to sustain monastic lifestyles, and to protect chaste states as women. This thesis highlights within the inward masculinity chapter that what is portrayed by hagiographers is continuity of character, and not change.

The “male woman” becomes a descriptive term used to highlight human characteristics within female figures that are considered positive. However, it belongs to a gendered language that is based on an idealistic understanding of opposites, i.e. positive (masculine) and negative (feminine).²¹ The use of the terms masculine and feminine in an expanded, metaphorical sense can denote and describe the positive and negatives traits found within all human subjects. Hence the existence of the “male woman” as an idealized female figure who enhances her positive human traits and the effeminate man as a derogatory male figure who seems to exercise his negative or weaker human attributes. This realization helps to disprove opinions that view “male woman” figures as misogynistic tools, which are discussed in the previous chapter concerning previous scholarship.²²

Although the ideal masculinity was updated from pre-Christian Greco-Roman to Christian standards, the idea of Man governed the intellectual, religious,

²⁰ Aspegren, 1990.

²¹ Cloke, 1995; Hotchkiss, 1996, 19; Maud Burnett McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 5.

²² Hotchkiss, 1996; Aspegren, 2000; Lowerre, 2005.

philosophical, and scientific standards of human perfection.²³ For instance, the update is clear as Ambrose gives a tidy list of traits contained within male and female humans:

quædam femineæ sunt, malitia, petulantia, luxuries, intemperantia, impudicitia, aliaque hujusmodi vitia, quibus animi nostri quædam enervatur virilitas. Masculinæ sunt, castitas, patientia, prudentia, temperantia, fortitudo, justitia.²⁴

“Of the female sex is malice of thought, petulance, sensuality, self-indulgence, immodesty, and other vices of that nature which tend to enervate those traits we associate with what is distinctively manly. The male sex is chastity, patience, wisdom, temperance, fortitude, and justice.”

Mathew Kuefler, using Ambrose in his own work, discusses this transformation of ideal masculinity from the virile, militaristic, patria potestas of the Greco-Roman world to the sexually controlled, patient, and empathetic Christian practitioner as a conscious shift towards an independent Christian identity.

“Christians transformed the concept of *virtus* by using it to describe the paradox of Christian masculinity where true manliness might be found in apparent unmanliness. But they also still used it to distinguish manliness from unmanliness in very traditional ways and readily applied it to the persons and activities...that they wanted to criticize or condemn. Indeed, because they identified Christian manliness with Christian holiness, they were also able to identify unmanliness with sin and thus also with paganism.”²⁵

Masculinity was changed by the figure of Christ through his loving sacrifice for humankind – Christ is the ideal Man. To this idea one could add discourses that describe men’s souls as feminine, which are passively primed for the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the marriage of Christ, the bridegroom, to a Christian participant, male or female, the bride.²⁶

However, Ambrose is speaking of idealized positive and negative traits and reserves no positive traits for women. Seen here, female traits aggravate those of the male, which clearly, by the inherent friction between the two, make the attributes

²³ Kuefler, 2001, 170-214.

²⁴ Ambrose, *De Cain et Abel* 1.10.47, PL 14.358.

²⁵ Kuefler, 2001, 213-214.

²⁶ For discussion see Elizabeth A. Clark, “The Use of Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers,” in *Ascetic Piety and Women’s Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1986), 387-427; Kuefler, 2001, 137-142.

opposites and offensive antagonists to each other.²⁷ It implies that a broad misogynistic, or at least decidedly pessimistic, view of the intellectual and spiritual capacity of women existed.

The inferiority of Woman, which provides the equation of negativity equals femininity, was a subject often discussed in Greco-Roman²⁸ and Jewish²⁹ cultures

²⁷ Aspegren, 1990, 86; Cloke, 1995, 26; Hotchkiss, 1996, 3.

²⁸ Greco-Roman: Plato, *Timaeus* 42a, 50d-e, 91d, in *Plato: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, trans. Rev. R. G. Bury, 7, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952); Plato, *Symposium* 189d7-192a1, 208e, ed. Kenneth Dover (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Plato, *Protagoras* 320d-322a, trans. C. C. W. Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Plato, *Menexenus* 238 A-B, in *Plato: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, trans. Rev. R. G. Bury, 7, *The Loeb Classical Library* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1952); Plato, *Leges* 781 d, 836c-d, in *The Laws of Plato*, trans. A. E. Taylor (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1934); Plato, *Meno* 71 E, trans. R. W. Sharpes (Wiltshire, England: Aris & Phillips Ltd., 1985); Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 716a5, 727a16, 727a2, 728a17, 728a27, 730a24, 736a24, 737a28-30, 738b20, 740b25-741a20, 775a11, ed. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1963); Aristotle, *Politics* 1260a8-14, ed. H Rackman (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons; London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1932); Hesiod, *Theogony* lines 520-529, 585-600, in *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18, 20-21; Hesiod, *Works and Days* lines 48-95, 100-102, in *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 38-40; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, ed. Mark Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Celsus, *On Medicine*. 1.1-2, 2.13-16, 6.5, trans. Guy Serbet (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995); Hippocrates, *On the Nature of Woman*, trans. Florence Bourbon (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008), 2-96; Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, trans. Jacques Jouanna (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996); Tacitus, *Annals* 3.33, in *The Annals*, trans. Anthony John Woodman (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2004); Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); ed. Jane Rowlandson, *Women and Society in Greek and Roman Egypt: A Sourcebook* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London and NY: Routledge, 1998); Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 73-88; Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (Oxford University Press, 2000); Helen King, *Greek and Roman Medicine* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2001).

²⁹ Jewish: Gen 3; Lev 12:1-5; Num 30; Deut 24:1; Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim* 1.33-47, in *Philo*, supplemental vol. 1, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London: Heinemann, 1953), 20-27; Philo, *De opificio mundi* 137, 139, 151, in *Philo*, vol. 1, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London: Heinemann, 1929), 109, 119; Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum* 1.7, in *Philo*, supplemental vol. 2, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London: Heinemann, 1953), 14-15; Aspegren, 1990, 79-98; Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, Calif. and Oxford: University of California Press, 1993); Marc Zvi Brettler, "Women and Psalms: Toward an Understanding of the Role of women's Prayer in the Israelite Cult," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, eds. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 25-56; Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Victor H. Matthews, Bernard Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 79-96; Carolyn Pressler, "Wives and Daughters, Bond and Free: Views of Women in the Slave Laws of Exodus 21.2-11," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Victor H. Matthews, Bernard Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), 147-172; Miriam Peskowitz, *Spinning Fantasies: Rabbis, Gender, and History* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1997); David Winston, "Philo and the Rabbis on Sex and the Body," *Poetics Today* 19.1, *Hellenism and Hebraism Reconsidered: The Poetics of Cultural Influence and Exchange* I (Spring, 1998), 41-62; Lowerre, 2005, lxxxiv.

prior to Christianity. Christianity, during its expansion out of and into these cultures, adopted many of the socio-sexual attitudes governing the gender situations of men and women of these cultures.³⁰ Christian writers discussed gender theories within their own treatises and discourses,³¹ but supplemented preexistent views with new theological parameters based on the human participation in the *imago dei*, human cultivation of the *homo interior*, the sexual implications of the Fall, and the theology and social attitudes of the Pauline epistles.³² For example, Epiphanius, in his seminal work on heresy, states "Ἀγε τοίνυν, Θεοῦ δούλοι, ἀνδρικὸν φρόνημα ἐνδυσώμεθα, γυναικῶν δὲ τούτων τὴν μανίαν διασκεδάσωμεν. Τὸ πᾶν γὰρ θήλεως ἡ ὑπόνοια, καὶ Εὐὰς πάλιν τῆς ἀπατωμένης τὸ νόσημα"³³ "Come now, servants of God, let us don a manly mind and reject the madness of these women. This whole deception is female; the disease comes from Eve, who was deceived long ago." Here he is admonishing customs within the Collyridian heresy so naturally his tone is colored by sharp criticism, but one can see a general opinion of the female nature based on the detrimental, influential effect that Eve has on all her daughters. Didymus the Blind, a theologian of the Alexandrian Greek Church, echoes this type of thought within his discussion of 1 Tim 2:14.

³⁰ Kuefler, 2001, 210, 226; Richard Finn OP, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

³¹ 1 Cor 11:3-10, 14:33-36; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:9-15; 1 Pt 3:1-7; *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Arsenius 28, PG 65.96-97; Origen, *Homiliae In Exodum* 2.1, PG 12.304-306; *Didascalia Apostolorum*, 15, in *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac*, vol. I Text, trans. Arthur Vööbus (Louvain: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1979), 157-172; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 3.2.79.1, PG 42.740; John Chrysostom, *Homilies in Epistolam Primam ad Timotheum Commentarius* 9.1, PG 62.544-545; John Chrysostom, *Homilies in Epistolam Pauli ad Ephesios* 20.1-6, PG 62.135-150; Gregory of Nazianus, *Orationes* 8.11, PG 35.801; Augustine, *civ. Dei* 16.8, PL 41.485; Lactantius, *op. Dei* 12, PL 7.53-58; Caelius Aurelianus, *Tardarum Passionum* 4.9, ed. I. Drabkin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* 9.7.28-30, PL 82.367-368; Ambrose, *Epistola ad Horontiano*, PL 16.1267-1269; Tertullian, *De cultus feminarum* 2.2, PL 1.1431-1433.

³² Origen, *Entretien d'origène avec Héraclide et les évêques ses collègues sur le père, le fils, et l'âme*, in *Origen, Entretien avec Héraclide: Introduction, texte, traduction et notes*, SC 67, ed. Jean Schérer (Paris: Cerf, 1960), 88-102; Didymus the Blind, *Traité du Saint-Esprit* 107, 109, in *Didyme, L'Aveugle, Traité du Saint-Esprit*, SC 386, eds. Louis Doutreleau and Pierre Nautin (Cerf: Paris, 1992), 244, 246; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate* 9, PG 46.357-360; *Did.* 15, 1979, 157-172; Augustine, *civ. Dei* 14.17, PG 35.425-426; Augustine, *De trinitate* 12.7.10, PL 42.1003-1004; Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 8-10, PL 2.900-904; Tertullian, *cult. Fem.* 1.1-2, PL 1.1417-1421; Gregory of Nazianus, *Or.* 8.6, PG 35.796; Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.16, PL 23.245-247; Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 23 ad Severo 24, PL 61.272-273; Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula ad Paulinus et Therasia* 3, PL 61.393; Clark, 1994, 167-170; Kuefler, 2001, 170, 172; Bailey, 1959, 8-16.

³³ Epiphanius, *Pan.* 79.2, PG 42.741.

ὁ ἔστιν, μὴ ἐξεῖναι γυναικὶ ἀναίδην ἐξ οἰκείας προστάξεως βίβλους συγγράφειν καὶ ἐ δάσκειν καὶ τούτῳ ὑβρίζειν τὴν κεφαλὴν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὸν ἄνδρα· «Κεφαλὴ» γὰρ «γυναικὸς, ὁ ἄνθρωπος· κεφαλὴ δὲ ἄνδρος, κριστός.» Καὶ ἡ κατασιγάουσα τὰς γυναῖκας αἰτία πρόδηλος· ἐπειδὴ ἡ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τῆς γυναικὸς διδασκαλία οὐ καλῶς τὸ κοινὸν ἔβλαβε γένος. «Ὁ» γὰρ «ἄνθρωπος,» ὡς γράφει ὁ Ἀπόστολος, «οὐκ ἡπατήθη, ἀλλ' ἡ γυνή.»³⁴

“He means that he does not permit a woman to write books impudently on her own authority and by this offend her head, this is the man; for ‘the head of woman is man and the head of man is Christ.’ The reason for the silencing of women is clear: because from the beginning the teaching of woman caused common harm to the human race; for the Apostle writes: “It is not the man who was deceived, but the woman.”

Here one can easily see the influential result of the Fall on the characterization of women, specifically with her ability to successfully lead or teach. There is a hierarchy of worth implied in this passage taken from the Pauline epistles, but notice that although man is the ruler over woman, Christ is the head of man. The ideal Christian Man, Christ, oversees the lives of both men and women while they both strive to emulate his virtues.

However, there were flaws to refine or behaviors to avoid for both male and female natures and, conversely, there was a comprehension of a positive womanhood and manhood.³⁵ The ideal Woman is portrayed within patristic discourse on virgins, which promoted and outlined the best social behavior for Christian women; patristic correspondence, which counseled and bragged of the merits of patronesses; and *Vitae*, which were preserved to offer an example of piety and miracle.³⁶ The masculinity of the ideal Man was a gender element that both men and women could participate in and, subsequently, could fail at.

For women, the term “male woman,” or its equivalent such as “exception to her sex” or “manly woman,” uses masculine allusions to describe strong, pious women in a gendered language conditioned by the socio-sexual categories of Christian and Greco-Roman cultures.³⁷ The “male woman” figure and at times the

³⁴ Didymus the Blind, *De trinitate* 3.41, PG 39.989.

³⁵ McInerney, 2003, 79. She discusses Augustine’s use of the words feminine and woman to describe negative characteristics inherent in men and women.

³⁶ Examples from these various types of writings will be referenced throughout this chapter.

³⁷ Gail Paterson Corrington, *Her Image of Salvation: Female Saviors and Formative Christianity* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 19.

eunuch, act primarily as metaphors³⁸ so male hagiographers may depict women within the approved sphere of masculinity to show that they possess positive traits and abilities to be respected and acknowledged. They do so by isolating their ideal female and male traits to distinguish between them and the majority of more stereotypical women. This is best expressed in the *Vita* of Matrona with the hagiographer's use of the descriptive terms mother and father that is discussed in the following chapters.³⁹ Audiences must have possessed an understanding of this ideology because masculine language is used regularly and casually for notable holy women, which is discussed below.

Men and women, both seeking perfection within Christianity, are victims of those male intellectuals who construct gender definitions and judge human and spiritual value. This type of comparative thinking is well stated by Clement of Alexandria, φιλοσοφητέον οὖν καὶ ταῖς γυναῖξιν ἐμπερὼς τοῖς ἀνδράσι, κἂν βελτίους οἱ ἄρρενες τὰ πρῶτα ἐν πᾶσι φερόμενοι τυγχάνωσιν, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ καταμαλακισθεῖεν.⁴⁰ “Women must seek wisdom, like men, even if men are superior and have the first place in every field, at least if they are not effeminate.” It is clear that all humans, such as eunuchs, effeminate men, men, manly women, women, enemies, and slaves are compared to the masculine ideal to calculate their worth and potential.⁴¹ Here with Clement women and effeminate men fall short of this perfection although his statement seeks to promote overall the intellectual capacity of pious women active in the church.

³⁸ Kuefler, 2001, 206; Corrington, 1992, 18-20; Kathryn Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33; Rachel Moriarty, “‘Playing the Man’: The Courage of Christian Martyrs, Translated and Transposed,” in *Gender and Christian Religion* 34, *Studies in Church History*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 1998), 1; K. Vogt, “‘Becoming Male’: A Gnostic and Early Christian Metaphor,” in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 171.

³⁹ Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought* (London: Longmans, 1959), 17; McInerney, 2003, 5; Elizabeth A. Clark, “Ideology, History and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Antique Christianity,” *J ECS* 2.2 (1994), 166-167; Cloke, 1995, 25-28; Aspegren, 1990, 11-15; Kuefler, 2001, 1-6; Bullough, 1982, 44.

⁴⁰ Clement of Alex., *Stromateis* 4.8, PG 8.1276.

⁴¹ Lactantius, *De opificio Dei* 12, PL 7.53-58; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 16.8, PL 41.485; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (NY: Vintage Books, 1989), xxi-xxii; Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (NY: Verso, 1991), 21-24; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greek to Freud* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 22; Flemming, 2000, 123.

However, it must be stated that though men and women were both categorized, they did not start on the equal levels; judgment commenced with a consideration of sex. This is discussed in a positive sense when praise is given to holy women. For instance, Gregory of Nyssa writes in his introduction to the *Vita* of Macrina, γυνὴ δὲ ἦν ἡ τοῦ διηγήματος ἀφορμή· εἴπερ γυνή· οὐκ οἶδα γὰρ εἰ πρέπον ἐστὶν ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὴν ὀνομάζειν, τὴν ἄνω γενομένην τῆς φύσεως,⁴² “And it was a woman who provided us with our account; if it is true that she is a woman, for I do not know if it is fitting to name her by her sex who so surpassed her sex;” and it was said of Melania the Elder that, (At quam tandem feminam) si feminam dici licet, tam viriliter Christianam,⁴³ “What a woman she is, if one can call so manly a Christian a woman,” which is akin to the admiration given to the “manly deeds” of Melania the Younger.⁴⁴ Also consider Theodoret’s introduction to the very few female figures appearing in the back of his work

Τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν τὴν πολιτείαν συγγράψας, προὔργον νομίζω καὶ γυναικῶν οὐδὲν ἥττον εἰ μὴ καὶ μάλλον ἡγωνισμένων ἐπιμνησθῆναι. Αὗται γὰρ εὐφημίας μείζονός εἰσιν ἀξιώτεραι, φύσιν μὲν ἀσθενεστέραν λαχοῦσαι, τὴν αὐτὴν δὲ τοῖς ἀνδράσι προθυμίαν ἐπιδεικνύμεναι, καὶ τῆς προγονικῆς αἰσχύνης τὸ γένος ἐλευθεροῦσαι.⁴⁵

“After writing the daily life of the noblest men, I think it useful to mention the women contending no less if not more; for they are worthy of still greater praise, who despite having received a weaker nature, display the same zeal as the men and free their sex from its ancestral shame.”

Here the woman cannot escape mention of her sex, though at times it did not limit or prevent her intellectual and spiritual potential. At times, a woman could surpass socio-sexual limitations. Clement of Alexandria believes,

Οὐκ ἄλλην τοίνυν πρὸς τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα φύσιν ἔχει ἡ γυνή, ἄλλην δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ φαίνεται, ἀλλ’ ἢ τὴν αὐτήν· ὥστε καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν. Εἰ δὲ ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴ σωφροσύνη δῆπουθεν, καὶ δικαιοσύνη, καὶ ὅσαι ταύταις ἀκόλουθοι νομίζονται, ἀνδρὶ μόνῳ ἐναρέτῳ εἶναι προσήκει, γυναικὶ δὲ ἀκολάστῳ καὶ ἀδίκῳ. Ἀλλὰ ἀπρεπὲς τοῦτο καὶ λέγειν.⁴⁶

⁴² Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Macrinae Virginis*, PG 46.960.

⁴³ Paulanus of Nola, *Epist. 29 ad Severo* 6, PL 61.315.

⁴⁴ Gerontius, *Vita S. Melanae* Prologue, in *Vie de Sainte Mélanie: Texte Grec, Introduction, Traduction et Notes*, SC 90, ed. Denys Gorce (Paris: Cerf, 1962), 126.

⁴⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Religiosa Historia* 29, PG 82.1489.

⁴⁶ Clement of Alex., *Strom.* 4.8, PG 8.1272.

Also, this is echoed by Palladius who states

“It is necessary that women of manly qualities, to whom God gave prizes equal to those of men, are remembered in my book; lest they should have the excuse of being too weak for the accomplishment of virtue.”

[illegible]

“Inasmuch as we learn from the divine Paul who says that in Christ Jesus is no male nor female, it has seemed good to us to introduce the history of persons also who were by nature females; for the subject of their lives does not fall short of the standard of the series of the histories of the saints; since neither is the course of life of these persons lower than that of the high path in which each one of these walked, but their habits of life also are great, and surpass written narratives.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ trans. and ed. E. W. Brooks, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* 12, PO 17:166-167.

and as exceptional once bettered by ascetic and asexual practice, colored discourse on the merits of certain holy women.

Specifically referring to human potential as it pertains to the woman, Mediterranean and Near Eastern culture possessed a notion of female potential prior to Christianity where women could become more perfect by aspiring to embody the characteristics observed in each culture's ideal Man. It is useful to simply reference examples from Greco-Roman, Jewish, Gnostic Christian cultures⁵¹ since it is believed that,

“in order to keep up the male claim on superiority in the church and in the world, the Church Fathers made use of a pattern of explanation which was already current in pagan times: the woman who performed extraordinary deeds was simply described in male terms and endowed with male qualities. Thus, not only did they make ‘men’ the sole measure of things, they also re-enforced the image of the weak woman as normal.”⁵²

This description did occur and naturally it would turn some women into extraordinary exceptions which would imply that the less impressive majority fit the stereotypical gender rule. However, this thesis believes that masculine descriptions were more a language of praise than a misogynistic categorization of women. It is true that when masculinity was applied to a woman it proved highly useful in placing

⁵¹ Greco-Roman: Soranus of Ephesus, *Gynecology* 1.2.1-2, 1.22-23, trans. Paul Burguière, Danielle Gourevitch, and Yves Malinas (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988); Hyginus, *Fabulae* 274.10-13, trans. Jean-Yves Boriaud (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997); Porphyri, *Epistula ad Marcellam uxorem* 33, in *Porphyry the Philosopher to Marcella*, ed. and trans. Kathleen O'Brien Wicker (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), 74; Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 7.3.33-36, in *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History*, trans. and ed. Mary Beagon, 7, Clarendon Ancient History Series, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 8.3, trans. and ed. David Roy Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Flemming, 2000, 152; Dean-Jones, 1994, 58-59; Aspegren, 1990, 43-44.

Jewish: Philo, *QE* 1.8, 1953, 15-17; Philo, *QG* 2.49, 1953, 129-131; Philo, *De legatione ad Gaium* 319-320, in *Philo*, vol. 10, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London: Heinemann, 1962), 158-161; R. C. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970); eds. Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (London: Duckworth, 1984); Michael L. Satlow, “‘They Abused Him like a Woman’: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity Author(s),” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5.1 (July, 1994): 1-25; Aspegren, 1990, 79-98, within her discussion she highlights a new pattern posited by Philo where a man, though manly and on the road to perfection, must also become feminine to a degree in order accept and be ruled by God.

Gnostic Christian: *Gospel of Thomas* 114; *Gospel of Mary* 5:3; Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta ex scriptis Theodoti* 21, 67-68, 79, PG 9.667, 690, 695; Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, “Gnosticism: A Study in Liminal Symbolism,” *Numen* 31.1 (1984): 106-128; Vogt, “Becoming Male,” 1995, 170-186; Castelli, 1991.

⁵² Lowerre, 2005, lxxxvi.

a certain amount of exclusivity around this woman in order to quell large-scale sentiment to emulate the life-style of a saint instead of just the intended virtues.⁵³ Kuefler posits that

“it must be admitted that for early Christians, ‘no more male or female’ often meant ‘no more female.’ But even if the genderless ideal in earliest Christianity was understood mostly as a call for women to become men, the idea that women might choose to abandon their gender identity and all its limitations and restrictions was still a challenge to the sexual hierarchy.”⁵⁴

For instance, Clement of Alexandria, who claimed an equivalence between human natures also states, Καὶ μήτι οὕτω μετατίθεται εἰς τὸν ἄνδρα ἢ γυνή, ἀθήλυντος ἐπίσης καὶ ἀνδρικῇ καὶ τελείᾳ γενομένη.⁵⁵ “thus is not the woman translated into the man; when she becomes equally womanly and manly and perfect.” Also, in Gerontius’ *Vita* of this female saint, he narrates that, τὴν μακαρίαν ὡς ἄνδρα δέχονται οἱ τῶν ἐκεῖσε ἀγιώτατοι πατέρες· καὶ γὰρ ἀληθῶς παρεληλύθει τὸ γυναικεῖον μέτρον, καὶ φρόνημα ἀνδρεῖον μᾶλλον δὲ οὐράνιον ἐκέκτητο.⁵⁶ “The holy fathers there received the blessed one as a man. For in truth, she had surpassed the female measure and had acquired a masculine mind, or rather, a heavenly one.” Though potentially men and women may be at least equivalent, it seems that most women were dissuaded from breaking free of social bonds through the use of promoting exceptional holy men and women as religious superstars above the majority of Christians – ones to admire, but not to literally emulate.

⁵³ The danger lies of course in the possibility of women breaking the bonds of social structures and infiltrating free society; this is discussed in the following section that discusses inspiration versus emulation. Jerome, *Epist. 22 ad Eust.* 26, *PL* 22.411-412. See also, Clark, 1981, 245-257; Jo Ann McNamara, *A New Song Celibate Women in the First Three Christian Centuries* (NY: Haworth, 1983), 109; Salisbury, 1991, 4-5, 97-98; Clark, 1994, 126-127; Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance 4e-7e siècle*, vol. 1, *Le droit impérial* (Paris: De Boccard, 1990), 137-138. McInerney expresses this best: “It was all very well for women to behave like men when facing imminent death; now that the Church was not only legal but also powerful, however, the possibility that women might claim, on the grounds of their virgin status, the right to self-determination or even some active role in ecclesiastic life, as Thecla had done, was unthinkable. By the end of the fourth century, the legend of the virgin martyr had been rewritten from one that promised freedom from male domination to one that inculcated female submission to male authority, and especially female silence.” McInerney, 2003, 50.

⁵⁴ Kuefler, 2001, 226.

⁵⁵ Clement of Alex., *Strom.* 6.12, *PG* 9.321.

⁵⁶ Gerontius, *Vita S. Melanae* 39, 1962, 200-202.

It is important to inquire why a progression of character and self is seen in masculine terms and at what this progression is aimed in the female nature of women. Stereotypically, if women exercise a self-control considered masculine, then they can move up a level on the scale of human worth to reside on the higher levels occupied by esteemed Christian men. This self-control would have the largest effect on the element thought to belong inherently to the derogatory Woman – her sexuality. The mechanics of sexual relations, namely the passive or receptive role women take on during sex, is one element of her characterization because men have enjoyed the role of active penetrator, physically showing his ability to overpower and embody a dominant role amongst humans. Sexual licentiousness, an obstacle to both holy men and women as a negative result of the Fall, was thought to affect a woman more due to her weak and fickle nature and, since she is unable to control it, poses a great danger for men.

If she can control it, then the passive or weak element of her nature can be surpassed.⁵⁷ Women could do this easily with a renunciation of her sexual nature, a refusal to (re)marry, and an association with lauded women from the Bible. Gillian Clark thoroughly sums up the transformation of woman into a redeemed, more perfect human, who is able to participate more freely in Christian society.

“A Christian woman had the option of refusing the role defined for her by society and Scripture. She could argue that Mary’s obedience to God had redeemed the disobedience of Eve; that Christ had redeemed all the children of God from slavery to sin, and that she too was a baptized Christian who had Christ’s help in resisting sin. Her physical weakness could be overcome, and she had the moral and spiritual strength to manage without the support of a husband; she could resist desire and refuse to bear children in pain; she would be choosing the better part by devoting her life to God, as the bride of Christ, as a chaste widow, or even (with her husband’s agreement) in a celibate marriage. So a Christian woman could achieve respect by rejecting the claims of family, by devoting herself to the study of theology, and even by traveling on pilgrimage to sacred places and martyr-shrines and holy ascetics, walking among people from whom she would usually keep her distance on mule-back and with an escort.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Stevan L. Davies, *Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 12-13; Bailey, 2000, 8-10; Lowerre, 2005, lxxxvii.

⁵⁸ Clark, 1993, 126-127.

Given that church fathers associated sexual renunciation with commitment and strength, the conditioning of one's sexual temperament was given a masculine appeal and spirit.⁵⁹ However, as Maud Burnett McInerney aptly points out, "they [Christian intellectuals] thus fail to recognize that to imagine virginity as an asexual ideal in a world in which sexuality itself is gendered feminine, as was the body itself, is to make the asexual functionally masculine."⁶⁰ Through this reasoning, maleness became a moral quality and an indication of sanctity within religious language.⁶¹

Hence, female advancement was deemed possible if a woman was able to exert a type of self-control to expurgate, censor, or ignore her primary characteristic, i.e. sexuality, which would then have a positive effect on her inherent secondary characteristics of frailty, incompetence, cognitive weakness, and carnality. For instance, it was said of Olympias *Μὴ λέγε «γυνή», ἀλλ' «οἷος ἄνθρωπος»· ἀνὴρ γάρ ἐστι παρὰ τὸ τοῦ σώματος σχῆμα.*⁶² "do not say 'woman' but 'what a human being:' for she is a man in everything but body." She remains a woman in body; a woman only because of her inescapable biological situation, but she has moved beyond any type of female personality or proclivities that can be deemed sexual and weak. Also, Jerome, who was no stranger to pious women, described some of his patronesses as "oblita sexus et fragilitatis corporeæ,"⁶³ "forgetful of sex and weakness." He writes to a patroness that "habes tecum prius in carne, nunc in spiritu sociam,"⁶⁴ "you have formerly a companion in flesh, now a companion in spirit," as she moved "de conjugē germanam, de femina virum, de subjecta parem"⁶⁵ "from a wife, [to] a sister; from a woman, a man; from a subject, an equal." This thesis stresses that the use of masculine descriptions for women was a necessary type of language created by male writers to describe gender progression or masculine

⁵⁹ Kuefler, 2001, 174; David Brakke, "The Lady Appears: Materializations of 'Woman,' in Early Monastic Literature," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.3 (Fall 2003), 389-390.

⁶⁰ McInerney, 2003, 5.

⁶¹ Hotchkiss, 1996, 14-19.

⁶² Palladius, *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom* 16.186-187, SC 341, ed. Anne-Marie Malingrey (Paris: Cerf, 1988), 319.

⁶³ Jerome, *Epist. 108 Eust.* 14, PL 22.890.

⁶⁴ Jerome, *Epistula ad Lucinium* 3, PL 22.670.

⁶⁵ Jerome, *Epistula ad Lucinium* 3, PL 22.670.

refinement that women could aspire to and that align women with an ideal that is far more acceptable to or digestible by other Christian male intellectuals.

This thesis believes that a “male woman” ideology, or at least a cultural association with masculine metaphors for an exceptional womanhood, existed in order to comprehend the fact that strong women should, in special circumstances, be accepted as active and commendable spiritual colleagues in certain socio-religious instances. This language also practically expresses and justifies admiration because there existed a limited vocabulary with which to laud women beyond that used to describe a job well done in the domestic sphere. There is an exception. The use of the term mother is used in the *Vita* of Matrona, which is discussed in detail in the final chapter, as well for other women, to praise a nurturing presence in a spiritual family, but when used to describe carnal relations it retains a derogatory tone. Hence, masculine language was largely used for women when they were considered praiseworthy, collegial, or inspirational because it seems that male intellectuals had difficulties in fathoming a strong and proficient woman on her own terms. In summation, the “male woman” was a woman physically and internally, but was observed to possess the desired qualities and demeanor of the ideal Man, and this is especially true if she was seen to be particularly active or self-autonomous in the religious realm or public sphere. However, a positive description for a masculine woman was dependant on her not severely overstepping her social boundaries as a female creature. Hence, the use of the “male woman” as metaphor establishes an exceptionality that female readers could not practically emulate, but still aspire to.

Female transvestite monks are undergoing this type of masculine categorization from their hagiographers, although, except in the case of Matrona, it is never blatantly stated as it is for the holy women mentioned above from patristic literature. They, through a gender ruse which allowed freedom of movement into the world of ascesis, were able to claim for themselves a degree of autonomy as they encroached upon the male dominated world of monasticism for their own salvation. The intertext of the “male woman,” as it functions here as a language of praise, is expressed in these figures within their ascetic sentiments involving self-control and chastity that sparked their transvestism. Their success was deserving of praise, but the type of praise received was formed in the masculine because these women were

seen to be active and strong in a way that corresponded to the behaviors of the ideal Christian Man. The female monks, as embodiments of the intertexts of the “male woman”, then become types or programs of female humans that carry with them exceptionality, intrigue, and spiritual instruction that are based on the transformative and refining powers that masculinity and asceticism can have on a human.

The Figure of the Transvestite – Symbol of Reversal

Female transvestites, clearly related to the outward masculinity of the female monks, are the main characters of these monastic legends. This type of woman may seem a strange choice for protagonists of Christian hagiographies, especially given legislation and scriptural and patristic opinion on such figures; however, it is the intention of this section to show that the transvestite is quite an obvious choice when forming the character of a female heroine of legend because it was a very familiar symbol of reversal.⁶⁶ In fact, the appeal of this literary intertext is its widespread usage in literature, arts, and mythologies of pre-Christian and Christian cultures.⁶⁷ Therefore, it is a fertile field in which authors can plant theological intentions through a type of cultural figure ensured to generate an expected or desired reaction.

“Transvestism in theory might well have been prohibited by the medieval church, but in practice it took certain socially desirable forms. Under such circumscribed condition it was institutionalized. Only when it went beyond tolerated levels and threatened the status quo...or might have had too much erotic appeal...was there reaction to it.”⁶⁸

The transvestite is a convenient figure to use in literature and art because authors, artists, or, here, hagiographers, know how it will be received – the transvestite will either receive praise or condemnation from audiences based on its biological sex. In the case of the female transvestite monks the reaction would be positive.

⁶⁶ Deut 22:5; 1 Cor 4-7; 1 Cor 14-16; Canon 13, 14, 17 from the Council of Gangra, in *Canons from the Council of Gangra*, trans. by Larry Yarbrough, in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990): 448-452; Tertullian, *cult. fem.2.2*, *PL* 1.1431-1433; Codex Theodosianus 16.2.27.1, in *Theodosiani Libri XVI cum Constitutionibus Sirmondianis et Leges Novellae ad Theodosianum Pertinentes*, ed. TH. Mommsen et Paulus M. Meyer (Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1962), 844; Anson, 1974, 10-11; Bullough, 1982, 43-54; Vern L. Bullough, “Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (NY and London: Garland Publishing, Ltd., 1996), 223-242; Bullough, 1993, 45-73.

⁶⁷ Patlagean, 1976, 604; Constas, 1996, 1-2; Hotchkiss, 1996, 3.

⁶⁸ Bullough, 1982, 54.

To understand how the transvestite can go from a neutral symbol of reversal to either a condemned figure of digression or an esteemed figure of progression one must ask the question, “why would the biological sex of the figure of the transvestite determine the overall opinion of this gender bending figure?” It is the man or woman, and not the transvestite itself, which receives either criticism or praise for transvestism. In other words, it depends on who is doing the cross-dressing and why, but not the fact that cross-dressing occurs in literature and art. This means of course that acts of transvestism are not inherently appalling or malevolent; these acts gain positive or negative attributes once utilized by a man or woman. Ambrose concisely expresses this. *Esto tamen ut illæ imitari videantur melioris sexus naturam, quid viri inferioris sexus mentiri speciem volunt?*⁶⁹ “Still, it exists that they [Greek women] should appear to imitate the nature of the good sex, but why should men desire to assume the appearance of the inferior sex?” This statement is witness to the hierarchy associated with the gender worth of the man and woman. Ambrose shows confusion with why a man, thought to be the superior human of creation, would want to imitate the lesser. The fact that the man should appear inferior by assuming the behavior and appearance of the woman highlights that emulation of the opposite sex leads to an association of gender progression for the women or, in the case of the man, gender digression.

When a man acted or dressed in a way associated with women, he was thought to downgrade himself by assuming female qualities. Critics reasoned that the man was using superficial femininity and female dress to gain access to women for personal perversions and sexual gratification; was negatively affected by spending an overabundance of time with women, in other words, when constant intimacy is experienced with women their traits and behaviors are transferred and manifested through a transformation of behavior and dress; and/or was acting consciously in a non-Christian way, either sexual or heathenistic usually concerning the theatre or those participating in traditional rituals or festivals, which were remnant of

⁶⁹ Ambrose, *Epist. 69 ad Irenæo* 4, PL 16.1233.

paganism.⁷⁰ The male transvestite figure was used more as a tool for slander or as a shaming device for men who exhibited negative female traits, fell short of the masculine ideal, or spent too much time within the company of women.⁷¹

Conversely, when a woman is found in the guise of a man she is praised or, at least tolerated, because her motives were based on necessity, piety, and chastity.⁷² Female transvestites found in literature and art were deemed to have improved, bettered, or refined themselves using a superficial masculinity with some positive purpose in mind, which was almost always attainment of chastity and salvation.

However, it seems that in reality, away from the safety of fiction, the female transvestite who overstepped her restrictive cultural gendered boundaries received harsh criticism. For instance, Jerome writes, *Aliæ virili habitu, veste mutata, erubescunt esse feminæ quod natæ sunt, crinem amputant, et impudenter erigunt facies eunuchinas*,⁷³ “others change their dress to male garments, they blush for

⁷⁰ Gregory de Tours, *History of the Franks* 10.15-17, trans. and ed. O.M. Dalton (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1927); Julius Firmicus Maternus, *De Errore Profanarum Religionum* 4, PL 12.989-991; Maximus Taurinensis Episcopus, *Homiliae In Quatuor Classes Distributae Homilia* 16, PL 57.253-258; Severian, *Homilia de Pythonibus et Maleficis*, found in E.K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. 2 (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1903), 294; Voragine, 1993, 212; Bullough, 1982; Bullough, 1993; Bullough, 1996; Kuefler, 2001.

⁷¹ For instance, although highly tangential to the centuries concentrated on in this thesis, one can use the inadvertent transvestism of Saint Jerome as an example of this. Johannes Beletel elaborated on the mechanics of the ruse in the mid-twelfth century and it is learned that the malicious snare performed by his monastic and clerical enemies involved the dress of a woman. Later, Jacobus de Voragine told the story with all of the sordid details. It is Voragine’s version that was artistically recreated in the fifteenth century by Jean de Limbourg called *St. Jerome Tricked into Wearing Female Dress to Matins*. This illumination can be found in Eberhard König, “Was kann man aus den *Belles Heures* über die Limburgs lernen?” in *The Limbourg Brothers: Reflections on the Origins and the Legacy of Three Illuminators from Nijmegen*, eds. Rob Dückers and Pieter Roelofs (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 124. The last line of the legend reads, “He got up one morning to go to matins...and found beside his bedside a woman’s gown, which, thinking it was his own, he put on and so proceeded into the church. His adversaries, of course, had done this in order to make it look as if he had a woman in his room.” (Voragine, vol. II, 1993, 146) Also see, Eugene F. Rice Jr., *Saint Jerome in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), 28-29; Bullough, 1993, 51.

⁷² This is true for all the female transvestite monks as well as figures such as Thecla, *De actis Pauli et Theclae*, ed. Ricardus Adelbertus Lipsius, in *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, ed. Constantinus Tischendorf (Hildesheim and NY: Georg Olms Verlag, 1972), 235-272; and Pelagia, *Sanctæ Pelagiæ Antiochenæ*, PG 116.908-920, and *Vita Sanctæ Pelagiæ*, PL 73:663-672, who all utilized transvestism for safety and sexual or personal anonymity in order to dedicate themselves to a Christian ascetic life. This also related to the story of the virgin martyr and the soldier told by Ambrose, *De Virginibus Ad Marcellinam Sororem Sua Libri Tres* 2.4.22-33, PL 16.212-216. Also see, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Bessarion 4, PG 65.140-142; *De S. Glaphyra Virgine, Amasæe in Ponto*, AASS Jan 2.53-54.

⁷³ Jerome, *Epist.* 22 *Eust.* 27, PL 22.413.

shame of being born women, they cut their hair, and they impudently build the appearance of eunuchs.” This description has been extracted from a longer section of his letter to Eustochium, a female ascetic, which warns against the potential to gain personal pride from ascetic achievements.

Jerome contains this description within his “invective” against pseudo-virtuous Christian women that should be avoided and definitely not be imitated. It is safe to conclude that the female transvestite monk strikes him as an affront to genuine piety and humility. Although Eustochium was not prompted to become manly, this letter shows that some Christian women used religious transvestism to literally remodel their lives. There are always those impressionable enough to absorb these female transvestite figures as enthralling celebrities to be imitated in form and behavior, and to this portion Jerome was criticizing. These stories hope to inspire women, and even men, to emulate the virtues of the female characters, fictitious or not, in religious literature, but not necessarily to imitate their social autonomy or domestic flight. Holy women did gain a degree of personal power and freedom through an active practice of asceticism, but monastic authorities and patristic writers had very definite ideas to how they should behave in reality to prevent them from becoming a threat to social hierarchy.⁷⁴

By casting strong holy women as transvestites or honorary men male writers insist that only exceptional, “superstar” women, if they are able to de-feminize

⁷⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Virginitate*, PG 46.317-416; Basil the Great, *Liber de Vera Virginitate Integritate*, PG 30.670-810; John Chrysostom, *De Virginitate* 63, PG 48.581-582; John Chrysostom, *Quod regulares feminae viris cohabitare non debeant*, PG 47.513-532; John Chrysostom, *Ejusdem ad eandem de non iterando conjugio*, PG 48.609-620; John Chrysostom, *De Priesthood* 3.16-17, PG 48.654-658; John Chrysostom, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos Homilia* 30 3, PG 60.664-665; Ambrose, *De Virginitate Liber Unus*, PL 16.265-302; Ambrose, *Exhortatio Virginitatis Liber Unus*, PL 16.335-364; Cyprian of Carthage, *Liber de Habitu Virginum*, PL 4.439-464; Jerome, *Epist. 79 ad Salvinam*, PL 22.724-732; Jerome, *Epist. 130 ad Demetriadem*, PL 22.1107-1124; Jerome, *Epist. 54 ad Furiam*, PL 22.550-560; Methodius of Olympus, *Convivium decem virginum*, PG 18.27-239; Athanasius of Alexandria, *Epistula ad uirgines* (CPG 2147), in *S. Athanase. Lettres festales et pastorales en copte*, ed. Louis-Theophile Lefort, CSCO 150 (1955), 73-99; Alice-Mary Talbot, “A Comparison of the Monastic Experiences of Byzantine Men and Women,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30.1 (Spring 1985): 1-20; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 207-208; Salisbury, 1991, 28-31, 37, 60, 97-98; Clark, 1993, 98-106; Cloke, 1995, 61-62, 157-159; McInerney, 2003, 36; Patricia Cox Miller, ed., *Women in Early Christianity: Translations from Greek Texts* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005, 8-11; J. T. Schulenburg, “Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience 500-1100,” in *Medieval Religious Women*, 1, *Distant Echoes*, eds. J. Nichols and L. T. Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 51-86.

themselves, can act autonomously within Christian society.⁷⁵ Sandra Lowerre, one such scholar, argues that,

“the hagiographers had no intention of representing the female saints as deviant or incompatible with orthodox teachings. On the contrary, in the depiction of their saints, the male authors and translators could convey the religious ideals which formed the heart of their misogynist traditions.”⁷⁶

This is stated again by Harvey, although here she is specifically referring to female transvestite monks. “The image of the transvestite saint, then, allowed the Byzantine Church the appearance of praising women in dramatic terms. But the terms were the institution’s own, and served its interests.”⁷⁷ Although the language used to describe them is indeed masculine, there are passages, which are highlighted in this section on the various intertexts of the female monk *Vita*, where the woman described as manly remains clearly a woman to be praised. This thesis thinks that a masculine discourse, even if gender boundaries were to be upheld for the preservation of a working social structure, which is ashamedly based on sex and human value, was a mechanism by which women could be validated and praised in a culture that was androcentric. It is a fact that a holy womanhood existed; it was a topic of male authors. However, female masculinization does not need to be seen as misogynistic – it can also be a way to express the greatness of these women’s deeds by appealing to a sense of exceptionality and reversal by use of the “male woman” figure, masculine language, and the female transvestite that was a symbol of positive reversal.

Although cross-dressing is never promoted for women and is usually advised against, the masculine symbolism behind the female transvestite monk is viewed as positive in fictional tales. The intention of hagiographers was not to cause an emulation of these female transvestite monks, which the majority of readers understood. These titillating figures are inspirational figures, personified dramas of the reversal inherent in salvation, and examples of strong Christian heroines.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Cloke, 1995, 9; Hotchkiss, 1996, 3-4, 14; Karen Jo Torjesen, “Martyrs, Ascetics, and Gnostics: Gender-crossing in Early Christianity,” in *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures: Anthropological and Historical Perspective*, ed. Sabrina Petra Ramet (NY and London: Routledge, 1996), 79-91; Mooney, 1999, 11.

⁷⁶ Lowerre, 2005, lxxxii.

⁷⁷ Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 48.

⁷⁸ Constanas, 1996, 3; Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 45; Hotchkiss, 1996, 19.

Benedicta Ward explains that hagiographers “do not however suggest that the more extreme ascetic practices are to be imitated by their reader: the signs and wonders of the monks are to be admired, it is their virtues that are to be imitated.”⁷⁹ Most readers are assumed to have received this intertext within these *Vitae* in the appropriate manner because there is not a massive amount of literature condemning a large population of active socio-gender female absconders. For audiences, hagiographers’ choice of a cross-dressing figure merged with the ideology of the “male woman” and merged again with a pious ascetic character, discussed just below, heralds a type of reversal, refinement, and/or progression throughout the plot. This thesis wants to elucidate that throughout the *Vitae* hagiographers make every attempt to remind audiences that these transvestite characters were always women behind their social masculinity or underneath their outward masculinity.

The hagiographers were interested in their characters as women, not as pseudo-men, because of theological and collegial intentions. The female monks were seen protecting their virginity or chastity, almost always by abandoning carnally minded husbands or fiancées, in order to struggle within the monastic or ascetic world for salvation and/or repentance as women. Therefore, the figure of a holy female transvestite should simply be seen as a character using a superficial masculinity to gain a type of autonomy through anonymity in which to practice asceticism; and it is the practice of asceticism that truly betters these women.

Transvestism is the symbolic and culturally recognizable intertext on which the whole theological and inspirational plot depends. This thesis believes that the female transvestite monk figures supply texts with fertile fields for hagiographers to plant an intended drama of reversal symbolizing the power of salvation and the redemption of humanity.⁸⁰ The theology of the female transvestite monk hagiographies that speak to the salvation of all humans, which encourages a mixed readership, is believed to function as follows. First, the “stereotypical” female nature

⁷⁹ Ward, 1980, 27; This view is also shared by Marie-France Auzépy, “La sainteté et le couvent: libération ou normalisation des femmes?” in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VIe - XIe siècles): colloque international organisé les 28, 29, 30 mars 1996 à Bruxelles et Villeneuve d’Ascq*, eds. Stéphane Lebecqz, et al. (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Centre de Recherche sur l’histoire de l’Europe du Nord-Ouest, 1999), 177-178.

⁸⁰ Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 39-45; Hotchkiss, 1996, 19.

is considered symbolic for all sins and human deficiencies through its natural association with the first woman, Eve, whose disobedience resulted in the Fall. Eve caused the plight of the human race – condemning it so to speak into an existence of shame, sex, death, and carnality. Through Eve humans have fallen from grace. Second, the female transvestite figure presents an element of reversal. Third, since the transvestite is a woman, essentially a daughter of Eve, underneath male guise, the reversal is seen as positive according to cultural texts on gender progression. This involves a woman engaging with masculinity to utilize more positively valued human characteristics. This is especially seen as true since she pragmatically adopts the persona of a man to fulfill spiritual dreams and ascetic tendencies – she becomes a male monk or eunuch. Fourth, the gendered words “masculine” and “feminine” have a larger function to act as descriptive terms to represent the inferior and superior qualities in every human being, which was shown above by McInerney’s observation in the writings of Augustine. Therefore, if “female” can represent weakness stereotypically embodied by a woman, then her reversal that leads to salvation and sanctity reveals that a woman is capable of becoming transformed by Christ into a redeemed and positive figure. It is a play on the classic reversal of the sinner into saint, which is especially forceful if the theme of the repentant harlot encroaches upon the female transvestite ascetic.

Finally, the female transvestite monk does not only represent a reversal or salvation for women. It stands for all humans, men and women, because if a woman, who again as “female” represents weakness, actively participates in a life of piety and salvation, then both women and men should be able to emulate their virtues and perform as such. The fact that the subject of salvation and reversal is a woman makes the transformation from sinner to saint all the more impressive, symbolic, and meaningful for all humankind. Candidly, if a weak woman can do this, then why not a stronger man? This is amusing because in this way the female transvestite monk can act equally as an inspiration and as a shaming device, which Castelli has highlighted and was mentioned above. This may have been a driving force for the portrayal of these women – that every human can achieve salvation. The theology concerning the reversal inherent in human salvation through the female transvestite

seems to be a plausible authorial motivation to produce this type of legend and also one way this particular intertext was received by audiences.

Influential Figures – Holy Women, Eunuchs, and Men

The female monk *Vitae* reproduce many themes found in the legends of holy men and women.⁸¹ It is easy to associate holy women with their predecessors such as Thecla, Perpetua, Pelagia, and perhaps even Amma Sarah from the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, but in truth holy men of the desert, especially those associated with Scetis, some of which appear in the *Vitae* as abbots to the female monks, are influential as well. The intertext consisting of these holy figures represents the influence of asceticism on Christian culture, especially as it weaves together a type of myth of the desert for audiences.

Holy Women

Legends of holy women, which include virgins, martyrs, repentant harlots, and cross dressers, that serve as intertexts are woven into the legends of female monks in order to anchor the female transvestite figures in a larger spiritual tradition and to provide a familiar symbol of piety and chastity for audiences keen to read this type of Christian heroine story. This produces and validates dialogue between the female monk *Lives* and other legends which constructs for Christians a community of stories portraying holy women striving actively in the pursuit of salvation.

The three most obvious female figures whose personalities and feats were woven into the lives of the female monks are Thecla, an ultra-devoted disciple of Paul and almost martyr who cross-dressed to follow the apostle Paul on his journeys; Perpetua, a female martyr who envisioned her masculine transformation as an expression of her religious struggle in terms of strength and endurance during martyrdom; and Pelagia, herself the product of intertextual embellishment,⁸² a repentant harlot, who, much like Thecla, lovingly follows a religious figure, here the

⁸¹ Amélineau, 1888, 181; Drescher, 1947, 126-127; Anson, 1974, 12-13; Patlagean, 1976, 600; Aigrain, 2000, 229-230; Davis, 2002, 4; Harvey, "Women," 1990, 38; Bullough, 1996, 228; Constas, 1996, 2.

⁸² Delehay, 1998, 153-154. Delehay speaks of the redactor James who took a tale, first preserved by John Chrysostom, of an anonymous, penitent actress and formed from it the Christian romance of Pelagia and the bishop Nonnus.

bishop Nonnus, into the realm of Christian repentance and asceticism to finally disappear into the desert in male clothes to live a solitary life.⁸³ The intertextual function of the legends of these three holy women for the *Vitae* examined here is discussed below.

Thecla

Thecla's legend was discussed briefly in the first chapter in order to omit her from detailed study, but here it stands as an intertextual Christian romance of conversion, longing, martyrdom, divine intervention, cross-dressing, and holy womanhood. This tale has represented many things throughout the centuries.⁸⁴ Early church fathers such as Tertullian and Cyprian deplored Thecla's audacity in teaching and baptizing, but during the fourth and fifth centuries she was used in the East as an exemplary virginal figure to promote ascetic practice and orthodoxy.⁸⁵

Thecla, who depicts a strong womanhood and the power of virginity within her legend and enjoys strong cultic worship, validates by extension later holy women and their more active masculine behaviors.⁸⁶ Thecla experienced an almost martyrdom, was a cross-dresser to follow her Christian teacher, and became an authoritative Christian voice. Her popularity gave to her, and also women similar to her by association, an approved role model status. The legend of Eugenia, who was a

⁸³ See also the discussion within Amélineau, 1888, 181; Drescher, 1947, 126-127; Anson, 1974, 12-13; Patlagean, 1976, 600; Aigrain, 2000, 229-230; Davis, 2002, 4; Harvey, "Women," 1990, 38; Bullough, 1996, 228; Constanas, 1996, 2.

⁸⁴ Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1906), 55, who traces Thecla all the way back to stories of earth goddesses; Eva C. Topping, "Thekla the Nun: In Praise of Woman," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 25 (1980): 353-370; Burrus, 1987, 32, 53-55, who look at the legend of Thecla in light of its folkloric content; Lynne C. Boughton, "From Pious Legend to Feminist Fantasy: Distinguishing Hagiographical License from Apostolic Practice in the Acts of Paul/Acts of Thecla," *The Journal of Religion* 71.3 (July 1991): 362-383; McInerney, 2003, 15-45; Davis, 2001; Kim Haines-Eitzen, 2007, 185-193.

⁸⁵ *Tertullian, De Baptismo* 17; *Cyprian, Epistle* 75 *Firmilian to Cyprian* 11, in *The Father of the Church Series: The New Translation* 51, *Saint Cyprian Letters (1-81)*, trans. Sister Rose Bernard Donna (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 303-304; Methodius *Symposium* Logos 8, in *St. Methodius: The Symposium, A Treatise on Chastity*, ed. Herbert Musurillo (London: The Newman Press, 1958), 104-131; Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita S. Mac Virg*, PG 46.961; Léonie Hayne, "Thecla and the Church Fathers," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994): 210, 214. Clark believes that Thecla escaped harsh criticism for her decision to cross dress from later male writers due to her using male dress to ensure safety during travels. Clark, 1993, 117.

⁸⁶ McInerney, 2003, 48. An early pilgrim's account is recorded in Égéria, *Journal de Voyage* 22:2, 23:2-23:6, in *Égéria, Journal de Voyage: Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes, index et cartes*, 296 SC, ed. Pierre Maraval (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 226-231.

temporary female monk and martyr, which was discussed in chapter one, blatantly promotes the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as inspirational material and witnesses the power of Thecla as a role model for aspiring ascetic virgins. In its earlier versions, namely the Greek, Armenian and Syriac, it contains an episode in which, prior to her gender ruse, Eugenia secretly and repeatedly reads the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and decides her path afterwards. Later versions omit this reference to Thecla as she began to lose popularity as an exemplary socio-spiritual model and replace it with divine epiphanies.⁸⁷

Perpetua

Concerning Perpetua the holy martyr, Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey state that “to see the martyr as the imitator of Christ is to see the starting assumption of the audience for these stories.”⁸⁸ If audiences associate female monks, who are technically practitioners of self-mortification, with the figure of the female martyr, which would also align them further with Thecla, then this will give their transvestic actions and pursuits of salvation legitimacy and a place amongst Christ’s honored.⁸⁹ Perpetua, whose diary told of her imprisonment, her familial relations, her visions of becoming a man during her martyrdom, her actual martyrdom where she held her gaze while spectators lowered theirs, and her death, was described as possessed of a type of παρρησία, which can be understood as a “boldness,” “confidence,” “liberty,” or type of “freedom” in social and civic settings.⁹⁰ These are not adjectives commonly associated with a woman in the ancient world. A reader who is familiar Perpetua and her masculine descriptions may naturally read her back

⁸⁷ F. C. Conybeare, ed., *The Apology and Acts of Apollonius and other Monuments of Early Christianity* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1894), 147-189, for the Armenian; Delehaye, 1936, 175-186, for the Greek; John the Stylite, Smith, 1900, 1-35, for a translation of the Syriac. Later omissions have caused F. C. Conybeare to view the Armenian version, which considers Thecla a legitimate role model and her *Acts* valuable Christian literature, as a third century text.

⁸⁸ Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Introduction,” in *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, eds. and trans. Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 18. Also see McNerney, 2003, 15-45, 50.

⁸⁹ Talbot, 1996, xii.

⁹⁰ *Passio SS. MM. Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, AASS Mari 1.633-38; PL 1.13-62; Mary R. Lefkowitz, “The Motivations for St. Perpetua’s Martyrdom,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44.3 (1976): 417-421; M. A. Tilley, “The Ascetic Body and the (Un) making of the World of the Martyr,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.3 (Autumn, 1991): 467-479; B. D. Shaw, “The Passion of Perpetua,” *Past and Present* 139.1 (1993): 3-45.

into the stories of the female monks to an expanded tale of Christian redemption and hope, as well as masculine strength and pious womanhood.

Pelagia

The significance of Pelagia, a repentant and redeemed harlot, whose “conversion is presented as especially striking,” is expanded within the figure of the transvestite monk, who symbolizes transformation and reversal, and with the “male woman” to form a story of female salvation that “is therefore meant to bring the hope of salvation to all sinners, whatever form their alienation from God has taken; if these women can be saved, as these stories affirm, so can everyone.”⁹¹ It also promotes chastity as an ideal Christian human trait and highlights the need for mercy and God’s inclination to offer grace to those repentant.⁹²

The combination of Pelagia’s and the transvestite monks’ symbolic reversals allows for a deeper understanding of the power of salvation to reverse the state of a sinner into one of a saint to be propagated. Men and woman can gain understanding of salvation because a woman, one who previously exhibited negative and stereotypical weakness and sexuality, is successful at rising above her faults through an inspired self control and participating in the salvific reversal from sinner to a redeemed human.

The presence of this intertext is so strong that Delehayé concluded most female monk *Vitae* to be, “nothing but literary replicas of James’ Pelagia, or else as in the case of St. Eugenia, the theme of a woman hiding her sex has been intruded into a narrative about some historical person.”⁹³ However, this thesis stresses that one should not view these stories as mere replicas, but as dialogues between texts of strong Christian women. Within the section on intertextuality it was stated that intertexts need not be considered stories from the past influencing a contemporary text; intertexts may coincide or exist laterally with the texts they become a part of.

⁹¹ Ward, 1987, 57. Also see, Ward, 1987, 7-8, who looks at the repentant prostitute motif in Christian literature and the figure of Mary Magdalene among others; Harvey, “Women,” 1990, 50; Gillian Clark, 1993, 31, who also stresses Mary, Abraham’s niece, as an influence much akin to Pelagia; Patricia Cox Miller, “Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 33.3 (Fall 2003), 419-435.

⁹² Ward, 1987, 7-8; Clark 1993, 31.

⁹³ Delehayé, 1998, 153-154.

The true connection is the dialogue readers are able to construct between texts to provide a deeper reading into the intentions of the author and the meaning of the text itself as a whole.

Eunuchs

Scholarship that examines the social definitions and functions of the eunuch in Christianity and other cultures has been utilized to shed light on the socio-sexual position female monks occupy as part of their masculine disguises.⁹⁴ Biological eunuchs in late antique culture were considered figures inhabiting a sexually safe middle ground, which eliminated the danger of sexuality and forced upon them a higher level of self-control.⁹⁵ The eunuch represented for patristic and medieval writers an ideal asexual state within Byzantine culture and it became a convenient metaphor to describe both men and woman who left carnal desires, sex, and familial duties for the sake of religious pursuits.

The broadest definition of this term in Byzantine society until the ninth century included men that could not engender children, men born sterile, men that became sterile through accident or illness, and men that lacked sexual desire, which could all be referred to as biological eunuchs; and metaphorical eunuchs, which were men and women who were celibate for religious purposes.⁹⁶ Therefore, these women fit the definition of a eunuch because they refused to take part in a sexual world for

⁹⁴ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978); Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Gilbert H. Herdt, *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), especially the contribution by Kathryn M. Ringrose, 85-109; Delierneux, 1997, 179-243; Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, trans. John A. Broadwin and Shelley Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2001); Kuefler, 2001; Delierneux, 2002, 105-140; Sidéris, 2003; Ringrose, 2003; Davis, 2002, 21-24; Shaun Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (London: Routledge, 2008); Lowerre, 2006, lxxxvii.

⁹⁵ Shaun F. Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: An Overview, with Special Reference to their Creation and Origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (NY and London: Routledge, 1997), 170.

⁹⁶ Ringrose, 1994, 86. The last portion of this definition may have prompted the hagiographer of Apolinaria to specifically mention that she was considered a *male* eunuch by internal audiences as discussed in the social masculinity chapter. It appears that this hagiographer understood the broad use of the descriptive term eunuch and wanted to stress his portrayal of Apolinaria's eunuchial social masculinity as male and not female in order to outline the definite male parameters of her outward disguise. The edition used for *The Life of St. Apolinaria* is that contained in James Drescher, 1947. Drescher does not provide line numbers for the *Vita* of Apolinaria so this thesis supplies its own. It is cited in this thesis as *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 157, lines 26-29.

the sake of ascetic aspirations. However, this broad association between monastic participants and the figure of the eunuch, based only on a shared celibacy, does not prove to be a striking intertext of these female monk *Vitae*.

As the social masculinity chapter shows, female monks are deemed to be eunuchs by supporting characters who attempt to make sense of the physiological aberrations between the female monks' masculine bodies and those of normal adult men. It seems from the narratives that female monks transform themselves into men and most often accept the titles of eunuch given to them by supporting characters or narrators as part of their disguises. It is always through internal audiences or narrators that these women exist as eunuchs. Even though the word eunuch is spoken twice by Matrona and once by Euphrosyne, hagiographers have them use this term to refer to their outward masculine transformations, i.e. their male disguises, and not in any self-reflecting manner or in reference to a desired state of existence. Matrona and Euphrosyne predict the type of social reception they will experience. They, as men, will be considered eunuchs because they are fair and soft, both are described as such by their hagiographers, underneath masculine clothes and shorn heads. This superficial association can be expanded to apply to all female monk transformations even if not specifically mentioned within the tales. Most members of internal audiences receive women who project outward masculinity as male eunuchs because of the physical attributes of women contained within masculine personas and religious roles.

Additionally limiting the intertextual value of the figure of the eunuch for the female transvestite *Vitae* is the realization that the ultimate purpose of outward and social masculinity was to supply anonymity in order to sustain virginity or chastity, not to symbolize asexuality itself. The connection between these women and the asexuality of eunuchs, which is formed by some scholars who see women breaking away from their previous sex to become sexless, calling the female monks "eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven,"⁹⁷ loses further significance because voluntary celibacy is a requirement of all ascetic and monastic institutions. A woman's celibacy or asexuality needs no automatic equation with the figure of the male eunuch.

⁹⁷ Patlagean, 1976; Salisbury, 1991, 103; Vogt, "Monk," 1995; Hotchkiss, 1996, 27; Davis, 2002, 24; Delierneux, 2002; Constantinou, 2005, 16.

Asexuality, or non-sexuality, can equally be associated with a single, celibate woman.

This thesis agrees with Sandra Lowerre who criticizes scholars that champion female monks as “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven,” although she states that in the figure of the “male woman,” sexuality could be “ignored,” which is not true in the case of the female monks.⁹⁸ These women are at times considered sexual by fellow characters of the *Vitae*. By tracing the shifting sexual states of each female monk it is observed that often the asexual state of a eunuch is highly temporary. In fact, at times supporting characters receive them as sexual men and approach them for sexual favors. Therefore, it is argued here that female monks, through a social eunuchial masculinity, have climbed onto an additional level of sexuality where their female or male sexuality could not be ignored. Additionally, without sexuality, hagiographers would not have been able to include within their tales stories of resolve and penitence as these women become fathers, reunite with spouses, repent for adultery, or speak as wives and daughters. Hagiographers had to *work with* their female sex, and at times their male sex, and couple it with monastic successes in masculine terms to promote these ascetic figures as possessing a holy womanhood. Therefore, beyond an association with the eunuch in its broadest sense of the word, in which men and woman who pronounce celibacy are included under this title, and the superficial social reception of these women as men, this thesis does not see this figure as a prominent intertext within these *Vitae*.

Holy Men – The Intertexts of Asceticism

These stories also gained popularity through their association with the sayings and lives of the desert fathers, which, along with intertextual holy women, shows the presence of an expansive cultural intertext promoting the powerful salvific effects of asceticism on human participants. Also, there existed a type of celebrity ascetic culture found within assemblages of desert myths and *Vitae*, which involved

⁹⁸ Lowerre, 2006, cxi-cxv, lxxxviii. This is also a theme discussed in Sidéris, 2003.

intriguing tales of hardships, miracles, and grace.⁹⁹ Drescher reports that the forty-nine fathers of Scetis enjoyed a high reputation throughout the Christian world where many Christian wished to visit them and hear their discourses.¹⁰⁰ Ward describes the visitors to the desert father as Christians who decided to capture the experiences and tales of the desert monks and hermits for “mental snapshots for the long evening at home.”¹⁰¹ Holy men offered experiential examples of piety, virtue, and endurance; were known for their supernatural gifts such as miracles, visions, and healings; and performed the social roles of counselor, intercessor, judge, and provider to a large Christian audience.¹⁰² Holy women can stand for the same attributes.

Holy women, including the female monks, were counted amongst these desert celebrities and in turn helped to enlarge the prestige and intrigue of the desert myth. The association between the fathers of the desert and the female transvestite monks promotes the capacity for women to reach the same heights of piety and redemption as men and places them within an approved androcentric strain of

⁹⁹ *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 5, trans. Norman Russell, in *Lives of the Desert Fathers* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1980), 67; White, vol. 2, 1932. See the following for an understanding of the desert myth: Conrad Leyser, “The Uses of the Desert in the Sixth-Century West,” in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, eds. Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde Van Dijk (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 113-134; Claudia Rapp, “Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination,” in *The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, eds. Jitse Dijkstra and Mathilde Van Dijk (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 93-112.

¹⁰⁰ Drescher, 1947, xxiii-xxiv. For instance, they are present in the Syriac version of the *Vita* of Hilaria, which was produced from an Arabic translation of the Coptic original, but expanded and embellished to include Scetis monks featuring in references to donations, intercessions on behalf of others, and childhood stories. Wensinck, 1913, 22-24. Wensinck translates a portion of the Syriac legend to read, “They [her governesses] told her about the life of holy men and humble virgins who had given themselves to God and were betrothed to Christ and had mortified their flesh by asceticism. They told her especially about the holy Fathers who were abiding in the desert of Egypt, which is called Skete.” Wensinck, 1913, 39. The Coptic version leaves this passage out, so it must be considered a chance for a translator, who was outside of Egypt, who wished to emphasize the importance of the desert fathers to readers. The later Syriac emphasis on Hilaria’s appreciation of the desert myth attests to the timeless appeal of the holy men and women of the desert. A reason for this exaggeration and addition could stem from the widespread undying desire to be near the ascetics of the Egyptian desert. Stories of the desert were circulated for inspirational and theological reasons and were, in effect, capable of bringing Christians, who had not the means to travel, closer to these holy celebrities and the spirituality of the desert.

¹⁰¹ Ward, 1980, 20.

¹⁰² Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80-101; Peter Brown, “The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* 1.2 (Spring, 1983): 1-25; Ward, 1980, 12-13; 33-35; 40-44; Averil Cameron, “On Defining the Holy Man,” in *The Cults of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, eds. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 38; Rapp, 1999, 65, 66-67.

monastic culture so that they may more readily receive the praise due to them. The use of cultural intertexts associated with holy men show the overall power of asceticism in transforming men and women into more perfect human creations. Also, one cannot completely ignore the publicity factor found in the female monk *Vitae* for the monks of Scetis.¹⁰³ Most female monk *Vitae* are produced in this region, which then can claim these holy women as its own success stories. Boastful or commercially minded hagiographers may have used these women to show Christian audiences the value of the asceticism practiced and taught within the Scetis communities.

Additional Intertextual Themes

There are other trends within romantic and religious literature that act as additional intertexts, but the lesser intertexts function more as recognizable plot points than foundations for the overall intention of the *Vitae* as do the intertexts discussed above. One can add figures such as Amma Sarah, who refers to her masculine mind; Xanthippe and Polyxena, who have obvious connections to Thecla; Mary of Egypt, a repentant harlot and Desert Mother; Eugenia, an early second century transvestite abbot and Christian martyr mentioned previously; and perhaps notable ascetic sisters, mothers, and female colleagues of Christian intellectuals such as Macrina, Melania the Younger and Elder, and Paula. Conceivably these may also include the repentant harlot motif; the story of the innocent holy person wrongly accused of sexual wrongdoings; biblical stories such as the intertext of Joseph and Potiphar's wife or a similar Greco-Roman version of Peleus and Acastus' wife, but recast from a woman's perspective; biblical familial reunions; the runaway princess bride theme; and exorcisms of princesses.¹⁰⁴ These are all found within many of the female transvestite monk *Vitae*. Also, there are scholars, which are discussed in the previous chapter, who trace the intertexts back to Pre-Christian and Christian Gnostic origins, such as the bearded Aphrodite of Crete, Greek romance stories, Mydonia and

¹⁰³ John Wortley, "The Spirit of Rivalry in Early Christian Monachism," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 33:4 (Winter 1992): 383-404.

¹⁰⁴ Some instances of holy men enduring false charges of impregnating women: *Apophthegmata Patrum*, *Macarius of Egypt* 40.1, PG 65.257-260; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 70, 1904, 165-167; Ward, 1975, 124-125. Drescher speaks of the runaway bride theme in Near Eastern literature, Drescher, 1947, 124-125. Davis discusses the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, to which this thesis adds the Greco-Roman version listed above, Davis, 2002, 1, 15, 25-28. Constantinou, 2005, 92, also mentions Eusebia, renamed Xene in the Western Christian tradition.

Tertia in the *Acts of Thomas*, Jesus' statement concerning Mary Magdalene in the *Gospel of Thomas*, or Charitine in the *Acts of Philip*.¹⁰⁵ Together all of these intertexts construct and give significance to the female monk *Vitae*. They provide them with the means to engage in dialogue with other religious tales and figures found in Christian culture and theology. They also allow familiar figures, roles, and plot points to act as conduits for hagiographers' theological and inspirational instructions that they intended for large mixed audiences.

Conclusions and Prelude

The above intertexts are highlighted because they indicate hagiographers' intentions and possible reader responses, even though liberal academic assumption on readership must occur. This chapter has duly prepared the reader of this thesis by introducing the *Vitae* as they are related to a larger intertextual study of literature and the major intertexts that are present. It has discussed the figure of the "male woman" to reveal it as a type of masculine language that can express collegial praise for a holy womanhood and has argued for the presence of theological symbolism in the figure of a female transvestite ascetic to show that a holy womanhood is capable of offering inspiration and spiritual instruction on human sanctity and salvation. Both of these elements are amplified once it is realized that the female monk hagiographies are read amongst and/or experienced alongside legends of holy women and men, who also participate in the desert myth. Appropriately, now that the intertexts that formed these tales have been discussed, the following chapters of this thesis, which form the detailed analysis of the masculinization of these holy women, scrutinize the female monk *Vitae* to reveal how hagiographers use a three-layered masculinity to promote a holy womanhood capable of carrying theological and inspirational significance to audiences.

The next chapter begins the innovative three part study on the masculinity that was applied to these female characters by male hagiographers. This examination commences with an analysis of their outward masculinity, which includes their transvestism, appearance, and body signals. This chapter concentrates on the mechanics of the male ruse which provide these women with autonomy through a

¹⁰⁵ *Acts of Thomas* 93-138; *Gospel of Thomas* 114; *Acts of Philip* 44; Castelli, 1991.

disguise that rendered them a stranger, and therefore anonymous, to the members of their lay existence they were attempting to escape. Throughout this chapter, this dissertation seeks also to show how the characters remain women to readers regardless of any masculinization.

Chapter Four: Outward Masculinity

“The habit clearly did not make the monk, but what benefits it conferred upon him!”¹

Outward Masculinity

The outward masculine appearance of these women is caused by active transvestism, namely the alteration of dress, hair, and name, and choice of institution, and passive transvestism, concerning the changes in the physical body caused by environmental conditions and ascetic practice. Transvestism is indeed a key element of these *Vitae*; however, as argued within this thesis, transvestism is not the intended focus of each legend. Outward masculinity, the first and most obvious layer of masculinity applied to these women by hagiographers, must be revisited in order to show transvestism as a symbol of reversal and a pragmatic disguise on which the plot structures and overall function of the legends depend.

This thesis posits that outward masculinity does not symbolize a break with a previous feminine state of existence or womanhood – it represents continuity. Adopting an outward male persona is a pragmatic means by which these female characters are able to practice a desired level of asceticism safe from social obligations or interfering family members as autonomous women. Outward masculinity needs to be understood as a necessary plot point present in intriguing stories and the major element of the tales’ dramatic irony. As will be shown transvestism and the shearing of the hair are responses to high levels of anxiety when the continuance of a religious life is threatened by social, familial, and cultural obstacles. Male personas are adopted to sustain or protect religious lifestyles that began while still wives, princesses, and mothers. The reasons behind the decisions to go to such drastic means are always revealed by hagiographers due to their interest in justifying their characters’ actions along pragmatic lines for external audiences.² Hence, transvestism within these legends is to be received as a method and not as a masculine goal of these women. It intertextually represents the reversal inherent in the human drama of salvation while providing an intriguing characterization of a holy woman for religious entertainment and inspiration.

¹ Ernest W McDonnell, “Monastic Stability: Some Socioeconomic Considerations,” in *Charanis Studies: Essays in Honor of Peter Charanis*, ed. A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 127.

² Constantinou, 2005, 108.

As this thesis shows, external audiences clearly see that the pragmatic decision to play the role of a man belongs to strong female characters interested in salvation. These women are visible behind their gender ruses regardless of how they are received by internal audiences or how they react to people or situations within storylines. Hagiographers had no intentions to make their female characters into anything but women, though they applied to them layers of masculinity, because they wanted to supply an eschatological message, praise for strong female colleagues, and an ironic climax to each religious tale. At the conclusion of most tales, when the corpse of the female monk is prepared for burial, the undressing of the body reveals a holy sister. The awe and disbelief expressed upon the discovery of a holy woman amongst men signals, in light of stereotypical ideas of the negative attributes of the Woman discussed in previous chapters, a great opportunity for inspiration, eschatology, and instruction to be read from the overall tale. For external audiences, the discovery of the female character's true sexual identity at the conclusion provides a sense of validation for what they had known from the start of the legend – that the legend, from start to finish, concerns a holy womanhood.

That being said, this chapter reveals three things. First, active transvestism involving dress, hairstyle, name, and institution is utilized within the legend for pragmatic reasons to supply a disguise. This disguise supplies the female monks with a type of anonymity that allows them to act with some degree of autonomy concerning their lives as religious women. Second, the difficulty of sustaining their ascetic lifestyle directly affects the degree of outward masculinization used by hagiographers to keep characters concealed. This is observable when female monks are challenged by reunions or chance encounters with family members and spouses, which adds new levels of intrigue to the tale. Hagiographers use detailed descriptions of passive transvestism, i.e. bodily transformations, in addition to dress and name to construct a deeper outward masculinity in which to hide their female characters. This thesis believes that this stress on masculine dress *and* bodily transformation also adds to the believability and readability of the plot for external audiences. Third, external audiences are the privileged receivers of the dramatic irony of these stories. Hagiographers remind readers that these female figures, no matter their layers of masculinity, are women throughout the whole story. They do so through their choice of the female transvestite and “male woman” as intertexts, the pragmatism of the transvestism, the use of gendered grammar, and the descriptions of their bodies, beauty, and sentiments.

Active and Passive Transvestism

Transvestism functions within the legends as a means of concealment and as an integral plot point and intertext supporting the movement and the significance of the whole story.³

“The idea [that fashion can reveal gender] is so well established among the persons appearing in the Lives of cross-dressers that it becomes the principle sustaining the structures of the texts. The conviction held by these persons that appearance, name and behaviour make the man or woman, is what allows the realisation of the holy cross-dresser’s role, otherwise it would have been impossible for the heroines to present themselves as men and be accepted as such.”⁴

Outward masculinity becomes a vehicle that allows these female characters to encroach upon the monastic world and claim of space of their own. Transvestism is a means to an end and not an end within itself; it must not be overanalyzed so that it becomes the heart of the legends though it is the glue holding together the whole story.

A freedom is claimed by transvestism within the legends, but it is not a liberated, new, or masculine existence. Although transvestism, which results in escape, offers a chance for these women to live autonomously, this newly gained freedom does not present a liberated gendered existence since it was attainable only while parading as a socially acceptable active figure, i.e. a man. Freedom gained by deceit and dependence on false images is not true liberation and, additionally, these women fear discovery, which is a highly limiting factor, and submit themselves entirely to Rules and patriarchal figures, i.e. bishops and abbots. This latter element should not be considered misogynistic because men submitted to the same upon their entrance into monasteries. External audiences glean from the hagiographers’ descriptions that deliberate outward masculinization is prompted by religious zeal and necessity. In order to live as single women or remain virgins, and therefore to claim some sort of independence for themselves, these female characters parade as men in the world.⁵ All acts of transvestism within these *Vitae* should then be

³ Constantinou, 2005, 120.

⁴ Constantinou, 2005, 105.

⁵ Clark, 1981, 251-252.

considered a female enterprise, which solidifies a holy womanhood's presence in the legends.

However, even if the pragmatism that governs their choice of transvestism is ignored, is the fact that they utilize male monastic institutional clothing telling of socio-sexual status? According to Palladius, monastic women wore the same outfits as male ascetics usually without the hairshirt.⁶ The choice of clothing for transvestism may not have been so dramatic a choice for late antique readers knowledgeable of monastic fashion and trends even though some hagiographers specifically refer to their outfits containing hairshirts. However, this possibility does not contradict a very important statement by Judith Herrin, who writes “the element of transvestism which pervades this literature often distracts attention from one basic and very obvious fact: that apparel, far more than physique, identified a person.”⁷

These female monks are received as religious men by internal audiences from their dress, hairstyles, and choice of institutions or associations, but what does this show – gender identity or anonymity? Are the hagiographers, and therefore the characters, constructing male identities or anonymity through a use of a role? This thesis makes a strong distinction between these female characters *becoming men* and *passing as men*. Following this point, it is a male identity that gives to them anonymity and autonomy. They use an identity to construct anonymity – they were not acting on masculine sentiments or proclivities to become male in any real sense. They realize their ascetic salvation and lifestyles in themselves as women – not men. The masculine ruse produced by transvestism is ultimately superficial, but works to protect their holy womanhood.

The initial transvestite ruse moves these women into the body of the tales, in which the female monks live out their ascetic lives within coenobitic monasteries, isolate themselves as anchorites, or are discovered to be women due to some circumstance. In many instances, the male disguise fails to render them undesirable to other male and female characters in the stories, therefore not protecting them from the temptation, lust, and sexuality that they tried desperately to escape in the first place. Therefore, by changing sex through dress, some only remove themselves from

⁶ Palladius, *Hist. Laus.*, 32 and 33, 1904, 87-97; Rebecca Krawiec, “‘Garments of Salvation:’ Representations of Monastic Clothing in Late Antiquity” *J ECS* 17.1 (Spring 2009): 136.

⁷ Judith Herrin, “In Search of Byzantine Women: Three Avenues of Approach,” in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, eds. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Croom Helm: 1983, Routledge: 1993), 179.

one lustful relationship to the center of another. Transvestism succeeds or fails depending on the storyline, where added layers of guilt, sexual misconduct, reunion, and repentance can enter the story to add intrigue and/or stress the intended theological and instructional message of hagiographer.

Transvestism and Dress Theory

Active transvestism is often seen as an element through which to interpret the *Vitae* within scholarship that uses dress theory to comprehend images of the projected self versus the images received by culture and society.⁸ “Visceral seeing” is a term that concentrates on the reception of dress and fashion used by some art and body scholars.⁹ According to these theories, fashion and dress reflect everyday choices or compulsions and therefore naturally construct a symbolic social language that articulates class, gender, religion, disposition, and heritage.

“The term ‘bodily appearance’...signifies hair-style, dress code, make-up, jewelry and other ornaments of the body. The way in which these elements appear on the body of a person or the fact that some of them are absent from it, provide it with a particular appearance which is characteristic of a particular role.”¹⁰

Through fashion identifiers and body types the projected identity becomes a reflection of the psyche, ideology, or stature of a subject, in this case female monks, which is discussed further in the next chapters. This reflection is beautifully summed up by Terence S. Turner who states within his introduction on the social body and the Kayapó tribe of the Amazon

⁸ John Carl Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (New York: International Universities Press, 1969, c1930); Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, (London: Bloomsbury, 1992); Catherine Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich, eds., *Reading the Social Body* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993); M. E. Roach and J. B. Eicher, eds., *Dress, Adornment and the Social Order* (NY: Wiley, 1965); Robert Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6, no. 4 (1994): 43-60; Krawiec, 2009, 126; Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (London : Routledge, 1970; reprint 2003), 67.

⁹ Ward, 1975, 25; Wayne A. Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13.3 (Feb. 1974): 183-185; John G. Gager, “Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity,” *Religion* 12 (1982): 345-363; C. Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993); Teresa Shaw, “*Askesis* and the Appearance of Holiness,” *J ECS* 6.3 (Fall 1998): 486; James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Linda B. Arthur, ed., *Religion, Dress and the Body* (Oxford: Berg, 1999); Patricia Cox Miller, “Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity,” *J ECS* 12.4 (2004): 395-398; Krawiec, 2009, 127.

¹⁰ Constantinou, 2005, 104-105.

“The surface of the body, as the common frontier of society, the social self, and the psychobiological individual, becomes the symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialization is enacted, and bodily adornment (in all its culturally multifarious forms, from body-painting to clothing and from feather headdresses to cosmetics) becomes the language through which it is expressed.”¹¹

In light of such theories the adoption of male dress and a shorn head, especially if a Freudian influence occurs to scholars, which is not always the case, seems to signal gender reversal or renunciations of social custom.¹² For example, hair has been deemed the natural aspect of female beauty or humbling veil of women. According to some, when a female figure shaves, she exposes a psychological desire to rid herself of that beauty or denounce femininity and inferiority.¹³

However, in the case of the female monk figures why do these acts necessarily point towards a renunciation? Can it not point towards a continuation? It is evident in the legends that male transformations provide anonymity through the form of a novice monk or eunuch. They do not necessarily stage a rebellion against their sex, but allow these women to abscond on social agendas, i.e. sex, marriage, childbearing, and domestic dependence. Transvestism is not to be automatically connected to a gender rebellion. Scholars, who argue for such, as highlighted in a previous chapter, should instead remark upon instances where ascetically minded men absconded from their social agendas as well, which are instances that are not automatically equated with a sexual or gender rebellion.¹⁴ It seems that only with women are these decisions considered gender significant.

The female monks are escaping everyday situations by their dramatic use of dress and fashion in order to continue to be piously minded women. Yes, they are projecting false roles in order to escape unwanted social roles, but these transvestic

¹¹ Terence S. Turner, “The Social Skin,” in *Reading the Social Body*, eds. Catherine B. Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press: 1993), 15.

¹² Charles Berg, *The Unconscious Significance of Hair* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951); E. R. Leach, “Magical Hair,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88.2 (July – Dec. 1958): 147-164; Salisbury, 1991, 105-110; Delcourt, 1961, 90-91; Vogt, “Monk,” 1995, 145.

¹³ Hotchkiss, 1996, 27. See her discussion of St. Jerome.; *The Song of Songs* 4:1, 7:5; 1 Corinthians 4-7, 14-16; Canon 13 from *Canons from the Council of Gangra*, Yarbrough, 1990; Salisbury, 1991, 105; Delcourt, 1961, 90-91. See also the research on the legislation on the hair of a woman: Stefanie A. H. Kennell, “Women’s Hair and the Law: Two Cases from Late Antiquity,” *Klio*, 73 (1991): 526-536.

¹⁴ For the instances discussed see: Jane Simpson, “Women and Asceticism in the Fourth Century: A Question of Interpretation,” *The Journal of Religious History* 15.1 (June 1988): 39, 49-50, 55; Talbot, 1990, 119-120, 126-127; Clark, 1981.

acts do not reflect an everyday self-consciousness to become men or to renounce womanhood. Transvestism is an extraordinary means to an end and not an honest expression within the legends. The end goal is anonymity and ultimately their salvation as women – not a new male existence or gender liminality.

Bodily Transformations

Descriptions of physiological changes should not be eclipsed by the more abrupt change in form caused by active transvestism.¹⁵ Outward masculinity is constructed as a layer for holy women by hagiographers in order to set the stages of these religious tales. Therefore, when a higher degree of deception is required for an encounter with a close family member or associate hagiographers deepen the projected male disguise by stressing bodily transformations in addition to transvestism. Bodily transformations that are brought about by asceticism and harsh environmental factors enhance the descriptions of these women's bodies in order for the disguise to be almost divinely sanctioned or fashioned, to show the natural effects of self-mortification on the body, and to make the transvestic ruse more believable for readers.¹⁶ Also, the desert myths often portray the bodies of holy men and women as hardened and withered through asceticism to describe their successes, abilities, and endurance. This transformation is described also for the female monks.

It is evident that hagiographers felt it necessary to report on the female monks' appearances before and after they entered into an ascetic career.¹⁷ The differences that are portrayed should not be understood as comparisons of a past feminine beauty to a new masculine form, but, as this thesis believes, as comparisons between the *lay* beauty and the *ascetic* beauty of holy women. In most cases, after being described with a sought-after beauty, female monks are described by an absence of *female* body signals; they are described by what they lose. They are never compared with or described by a male physique. These descriptions concern women who have become hardened by their religious struggles, which involves the deflation of the breasts, wrinkling and tanning of the body and face, swelling of skin due to

¹⁵ Constantinou, 2005, 113; Colette Guillaumin, "The Constructed Body," in *Reading the Social Body*, eds. Catherine B. Burroughs and Jeffrey David Ehrenreich (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 42-43.

¹⁶ Ward, 1981, 20-28.

¹⁷ Alexander Kazhdan, "Byzantine Hagiography and Sex in the Fifth to Twelfth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 44 (1990): 134-135.

insect bites, thinning of the body, and, in the Coptic *Vita* of Hilaria, the cessation of the menstrual cycle. The contrast between the two different female bodies, i.e. a beautiful lay body and ascetic body, shows external audiences that they are encountering a holy womanhood undergoing the transformation that ultimate obedience has on a *human* body.

Institutional Transvestism

This thesis regards institutional transvestism as extremely important in understanding transvestism as a means to an end and not as the intended focus of these legends. The fact that all acts of active transvestism precede entry into *male* institutions has fuelled an erroneous interpretation of the actions and wishes of these literary figures. On a basic level the progression of events, cross-dressing, abandoning family, and then entering a male monastic institution, can read as a desire to “consciously” participate as men in a male social and religious sense. However, this thesis argues that the decisions of the female monks to join male monasteries are not conscious gestures to become like men or eunuchs in order to liberate themselves from their own sex. It posits that male institutions become part of the disguise thereby removing the gendered importance of the male world they enter. Monasteries become tools to further their costume and supply additional anonymity through male associations, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter on social masculinity.

Therefore, the male monasteries chosen for their monastic careers were not end goals, but again a means to a desired end, namely their anonymity, autonomy, and salvation. These characters are always compelled by outside factors to add this layer of disguise to their gendered ruse, and, as argued here, these women may have joined female institutions in the legends were it not for familial or sexual conflict. Any theory that believes a desire exists to participate as men is further undermined by the realization that these women are simply acting in ways that will sustain ascetic desires that had blossomed in their female minds previous to any masculinization. Therefore, this thesis states strongly that it is not important that they encroached upon a *male* world, but that they entered into a *monastic* world that could safeguard their ascetic desires and conceal them as women on the run.

Masculine Names

Related to institutional transvestism is an exchange of names. Hagiographers trade female names for masculine ones in order for the female monks to be introduced into male institutions as men. In the legends they either rename themselves or are given new names and titles upon entry or shortly after entry into monasteries. This is a common occurrence because male names are necessary; it is impossible to enter male monasteries with their female name. Since this was such obvious necessity, the new masculine names of the female monks often lack originality or depth. Names and titles are part of the overall gender ruse because a name carries with it assumptions and signals that present a type of person to another, but this thesis feels that the female monks' names reveal more if examined in a social context. Therefore renaming is discussed in the following social masculine chapter.

Textual evidence

The primary source examination of outward masculinity begins with the unique legend of Anastasia Patricia. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that her motives and true identity are described by the hagiographer at the end of her legend. Character development does not proceed from her pre-monastic life to her career as a solitary as in other legends. The hagiographer presents her as an anonymous male eunuch, whom he refers to with masculine endings, at the beginning of her legend and it is in this way she confronts the abbot Daniel in the desert.

Εὐνοῦχος τις ἔμενεν εἰς τὴν ἐσωτερὰν ἔρημον τῆς Σκήτεως· εἶχεν δὲ τὸ κελλίον ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων δέκα ὀκτὼ τῆς αὐτῆς Σκήτεως. Ἀπαξ οὖν τῆς ἐβδομάδος παρέβαλλεν τῷ ἁββᾷ Δανιὴλ νυκτὸς μηδενοῦ νοοῦτος εἰ μὴ τί γε τοῦ μαθητοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ μόνου. Παρήγγειλεν δὲ ὁ γέρον τῷ μαθητῇ αὐτοῦ ἵνα γεμίξῃ κέραμον ὕδατος τῷ αὐτῷ εὐνοῦχῳ ἅπαξ τῆς ἐβδομάδος καὶ τιθεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ κρούειν καὶ ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ μὴ ὁμιλεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ.¹⁸

“There was a eunuch who stayed in the inner desert of Scetis. He had a cell that was 18 miles from Scetis itself. Therefore, once during the week at night alone so no one recognized, he approached the Abbot Daniel, no one knowing except his disciple alone. The old man ordered his disciple to fill the water jar for the eunuch once a week, place it for him, knock, and withdraw and not speak with him.”

External audiences may have thought they were reading about a male eremitic eunuch until the end of the tale when her withered breasts are seen by the brethren on her corpse. For this story external audiences are not privy to the gendered irony of

¹⁸ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 51 lines 4-10.

the tale; they may have been intended to share the internal audiences' shock at the conclusion. However, the secrecy involved in this rendezvous may have developed an initial intrigue in the tale for external audiences.

In this *Vita* there is no detailed mention of her apparel or motivations at the start. There is a slight reference to a conspiracy dealing with escape and Daniel's aid during the dialogue below, but this cannot be gleaned as advice given to a woman specifically.

Καὶ ἀναγνοὺς ὁ γέρων ἔκλαυσεν κλαυθμὸν μέγαν καὶ εἶπεν· Ὁ βάλαντα τῇ ἐσωτέρᾳ ἐρήμῳ! ποῖον στῦλον ἔξαφῇ σήμερον! Καὶ λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ αὐτοῦ· Βάστα ταῦτα τὰ σκεύη, καὶ ἄγωμεν φθάσωμεν τὸν γέροντα, μήποτε στερηθῶμεν τῶν εὐχῶν αὐτοῦ.¹⁹

“And having recognized these things the old man wept with great tears and said, ‘Alas! For inner desert! How great a pillar has gone today!’ And he said to his disciple, ‘Bear these things. And let us go and meet the old man, lest we be deprived of his prayers.’”

Only upon reflection do readers understand that here is the moment when the ruse becomes a plan facilitated by Daniel, who arranges for her sustenance during her isolation in the desert. However, there is no description of her redressing or outward appearance to Daniel during their introduction. It turns out that engineered isolation rather than dress causes the brethren to remain oblivious to the female member of their community. The brethren simply assume that all members of their community will be men.

In this secluded way she lives as a solitary in the desert for twenty eight years. The hagiographer gives no details of her outward appearance because no one had contact with her during these years. Logically, if there are no instances where she is visibly seen, then there exists no need to describe how she was viewed. Since Daniel arranges for her provisions and constructs her male ruse by using male pronouns in dialogue with his disciple, then readers may assume that Daniel also gives to her a male monastic tunic, but obviously the hagiographer deemed this information unnecessary because she was in no danger of discovery due to her complete isolation.

¹⁹ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 51 lines 14-17.

The only clear reference to dress precedes the moment of her death.

Καὶ λέγει τῷ γέροντι· Διὰ τὸν Κύριον μὴ ἀποδύσετέ με ἃ φορῶ, ἀλλ’ ὥς εἰμι οὕτως με πέμψατε πρὸς Κύριον, καὶ μὴ μάθη ἄλλος τίς ποτε τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ εἰ μὴ ὑμεῖς καὶ μόνοι.²⁰

“And he said to the old man, ‘By the Lord do not remove from me the clothes that I wear, but, thus as I am send me to the Lord and let no one else at all learn the things about me except you alone.’”

However, this does not necessarily mean that she was in a habit or tunic that can be specifically called masculine. This storyline lacks a description of her as a man beyond using the masculine εὐνούχος to categorize her and male pronouns to refer to her throughout the legend. A reader can only assume that she is visually presented as a man for two reasons: one, the men made no mention of anything unique about their acquaintance with this eunuch, and two, the other member of the internal audience later shows surprise at the sight of her naked body.

Shortly in the legend she dies. Those surrounding her weep, exchange blessings, receive a short vision of the Lord in heaven, bless the body, and prepare their brother for burial.

Καὶ ἔκλαυσαν ἀμφότεροι· ὀρύξαντες δὲ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ σπηλαίου καὶ ἀποδυσάμενος ὁ γέρων λέγει τῷ μαθητῇ αὐτοῦ· Ἐνδυσον αὐτὸν ἐπάνω ὧν φορεῖ. Ἐφόρει δὲ κεντόνην καὶ φασκίδιον ἀπὸ σιβύνου. Ἐνδύων δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ ἀδελφὸς προσέχει καὶ βλέπει ὅτι τὰ βυζία αὐτοῦ γυναικὸς ἦσαν ὥς ἐπὶ δύο φύλλων ξηρῶν καὶ οὐκ ἐλάλησεν. Καὶ θάψαντες αὐτὸν καὶ ποιήσαντες εὐχὴν λέγει ὁ γέρων· Καταλύσωμεν σήμερον καὶ ποιήσωμεν ἀγαπὴν ἐπάνω τοῦ γέροντος.²¹

“And they both wept. After they had dug in front of the cave, he had undressed him, the old man said to his disciple, ‘Clothe him for burial on top of what he was wearing before.’ And he was wearing a patched cloak and a leather thong from the pike. Clothing him, the brother takes heed and sees that his breasts were those of a woman like two withered leaves. He did not say anything. And after they had buried him and after they had prayed, the old man said, ‘Let us go today and let us hold an agape for the old man.’”

Here, disrobed, lays a holy sister. It would seem that the story has ended, but the second half of the story continues with Daniel recounting Anastasia’s plight in

²⁰ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 52 lines 14-16.

²¹ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 52 lines 23-31.

order to provide a humbling spiritual lesson to the disciple who saw her naked female form.

‘Οδευόντων δὲ αὐτῶν κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν λέγει ὁ μαθητὴς τῷ γέροντι· Οἶδας, πάτερ, ὅτι γυνὴ ἦν ὁ εὐνούχος ἐκεῖνος; τὰ βυζία γὰρ αὐτῆς εἶδον. Καὶ λέγει ὁ γέρων· Θέλεις ἐξηγήσομαί σοι τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς.²²

“As they were traveling down the road, the disciple said to the old man, ‘You know father, that eunuch was a woman, for I saw her breasts.’ And the old man said, ‘If you want, then I will teach you about her.’”

This is slightly comical dialogue between teacher and disciple. A reader may laugh at this confession made by the disciple, but it does firmly establish that this anonymous eunuch was indeed a woman for external audiences. Her true identity must be revealed by the hagiographer in order to have the dramatic irony culminate for an inspirational lesson and for the theological significance, which is then given to internal audiences and, through them, to external audiences.

Obviously the fact that Daniel is able to offer an entire synopsis of Anastasia’s life shows that she is honest with Daniel about her situation and goals from the start. She approaches him in the desert as a woman and after their encounter she assumes the superficial role of a man in order to go into hiding. Daniel reports on her aristocratic life at Alexandria, her fear of the emperor’s lustful advances, her banishment at the hands of the empress, her flight into Scetis, and the subsequent large-scale search for her by the emperor. What the hagiographer manages to show in this portion of the legend is that the two main characters, Anastasia and Daniel, consider transvestism to be a necessary and practical outlet to guard her chastity. Here, the practicality of institutional transvestism is reflected in her choice of an isolated cell associated with a male monastic community because a convent or community of women, if available, is an obvious place to search for a missing, unmarried woman.

Bodily transformations are not stressed during Anastasia’s lifetime. There is no need for such a description because her *Vita* reports that she sees no one during the time of her isolation, even the water and food to sustain her are left at her door. Therefore it is unnecessary to fully develop her masculine ruse along passive

²² *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 52 line 32-53 line 1.

transvestic lines. The vague reference to a male persona and the use of male pronouns to refer to her suffices to project a masculine identity because her story contains no added elements of sexual intrigue or repentance in reaction to charges of rape or fornication. In fact, the revelation that she is a woman comes at the end of the legend and the resulting amazement is shared by the internal and external audiences.

At the conclusion of her legend, a bodily change is mentioned through reference to her withered breasts to stress the fact that this eunuch is indeed a woman during the whole of the legend and to show that her obedience to an ascetic life had conditioned her body like those of male and female ascetics in other desert myths. The hagiographer needed to make sure the fact that this is a holy woman is presented to external audiences, who have had no real signifiers up to this point concerning the sexual secret of the eunuch from Scetis and may have been just as surprised as the internal characters to learn that she was a woman.

When a physical change is mentioned in the hagiographies women are not described in masculine terms; there are no descriptions of their bodies as masculine. The descriptions are of the bodies of women, but those hardened and shrunken by rigorous self-mortification and harsh environments. Take for instance the following lines from the *Vita* of Apolinaria.

τῆς δε μακαρίας μεινάσης ἐν τῷ ἔλει ἔτη πολλά· καὶ ἀθλούσης γενναίως κατὰ τοῦ διαβόλου· γέγονεν τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ὡς χελώνης δέρμα· ἐγένετο γὰρ βρωσκόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν κωνόπων· αὐτὴ δὲ κατετάκη ὑπὸ τῆς ἐγκρατείας καὶ τοῦ κανόνοσ οὗ ἐδίδαξεν ἑαυτήν· ὅτε δὲ ὁ δεσπότης χριστὸς ἠβουλήθη ἀξίαν αὐτὴν ποιῆσαι τοῦ στεφάνου τῶν ἀγίων πατέρων· ἐποίησεν αὐτὴν ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἔλους.²³

“After the blessed woman had stayed in the marsh for many years and nobly wrestled the devil, her body became like the skin of a tortoise since she was being eaten up by gnats. She was wasting away under the self control and the rule which she had taught herself. But when the lord Christ wanted to make her worthy of the diadem of the holy fathers, he made her leave the marsh.”

This is not a description of a masculine body, but a body of an ascetic woman. However, it must be mentioned that the bodies of male and female hermits and monks were described in this emaciated and hardened manner by various writers.

²³ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 157 lines 1-7.

Even though she is accepted as a man by internal audiences, it is not the intention of the hagiographer to construct a story in which she is somehow no longer a woman. If anything, she has become bodily neutral from the description above, which other scholars refer to as “asexual” or “non-sexual,” with nothing that can be described as desirous in a male or female sense of the body.²⁴

Apolinaria, eldest daughter of the emperor, would not have been permitted such an active level of solitary asceticism had it not been for her outward masculine ruse. Within her legend a change of dress is catalyzed by her noble lineage, most notably the royal marriage into which she would soon be forced. However, her escape is not a simple plan quickly put into practice. She asks permission to go on a pilgrimage to extend the period of her virginity. Once in the Holy City she decides to abandon her retinue of servants during a trip to Alexandria and pays an old woman to procure for her the dress of a hermit.

Ἐν δὲ τῷ τόπῳ ἐν ᾗ τὴν οἰκίαν εἶχεν ἡῦρεν μίαν γραῦν καὶ παρέχει αὐτῇ ὀλίγην εὐλογίαν καὶ λέγει αὐτῇ δέξαι ἀδελφή· καὶ ἄπελθε ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἀγοπασόν μοι ἐν λεβητονάριον μοναχικόν· ὁμοίως καὶ μαφόριον καὶ κουκούλιον καὶ ἀνάλαβον καὶ ζωνάριον· ἡ δὲ γραῦς ἀπελθοῦσα ἐποίησεν τὴν διακονίαν· καὶ ὥς ἡνεγκεν αὐτὰ· ἡῦξατο αὐτὴν· λέγουσα βοηθήσει σοι ὁ Θεὸς ἁμμά· καὶ λαβοῦσα ἐκρυψεν αὐτὰ διὰ τοὺς παῖδας.²⁵

“In the place where she lived, she found a single old woman, and she offered to her a few prayers and said to her, ‘Greetings sister. Go into the church and buy me monk’s clothing, and likewise a veil, cowl, scapular, and belt.’ The old woman went and did the service, and then she brought them. She praised her, saying, ‘God aid you mother!’ And after she took them she delivered these on account of the child.”

After receiving monastic clothing she keeps it with her until a moment presents itself to escape. Under the cover of night she ventures alone into a marshland.

τῇ δὲ ἐξῆς ἐλθόντος τοῦ λεκτηκαρίου ἔμεινεν ἕως οὗ ἐγένετο ἐσπέρα καὶ συνταξαμένη τῷ οἰκονόμῳ καὶ τῷ παιδαρίῳ ἀνῆλθεν ἐν τῷ

²⁴ The following scholars use these descriptive words: Delierneux, 1997, 198-200, 206-207; Clark, 1979; Sidéris, 2003, 217-233. However, quotation marks are used above in order to disagree simultaneously with the choice of these terms. The outward masculinization of the female monks does not always succeed in presenting them as asexual or non-sexual to fellow characters. Often female monks find themselves victims of lustful relationships, either hetero- or homosexual, and/or in predicaments where they have fathered children. This acceptance of the female monks as sexual creatures after outward masculinization is discussed in detail in the following chapter. This thesis uses “bodily neutral” in place of “asexual” or “non-sexual.”

²⁵ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 154 line 27-155 line 6.

λεκτηκίῳ ἔχουσα ἔσωθεν αὐτῆς τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῆς μοναχικὰ καὶ
 θαρεσκευασεν ἀνελθεῖν τὸν εὐνούχον ὀπισθεν καὶ τὸν λεκτηκάριον
 ἔμπροσθεν καὶ ἤρξατο εὐχεσθαι ἡ μακαρία ἔσωθεν οὖσα καὶ αἰτεῖν
 βοήθειαν παρὰ κυρίου τοῦ Θεοῦ· περὶ δὲ τὸ μεσονύκτιον ἔφθασεν τὸ
 ἔλος σύνεγγυς λιβάδος ἣτις μέχρι τοῦ νῦν λέγεται ἡ λιβάς
 ἀπολιναρίας· καὶ ἀνακαλύψασα τὰς πάλλας τοῦ λεκτηκίου εὗρεν
 ἀμφοτέρους κατ' οἰκονομίαν Θεοῦ κοιμωμένους καὶ ἀποδυσαμένη τὰ
 κοσμικὰ ἱμάτια ἐνέδυσε αὐτὴν τὰ μοναχικὰ λέγουσα ὁ ἐναρξάμενός
 με τυχεῖν τούτου τοῦ ἁγίου σχήματος ἄξιαν με ποιησον ἐκτελέσαι
 αὐτὸ κατὰ τὸ θέλημά σου κύριε· καὶ κατασφραγισαμένη ἔρρηψε
 αὐτὴν ἐκ τοῦ λεκτηκίου καὶ εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῷ ἔλει·²⁶

“After coming to the tent she waited until it was evening and, placed the steward of the tent and the young slave in charge. Then she went in to the tent with the monk’s clothes inside of her dress and prepared to go. The eunuch was left behind in front of the tent and the blessed one began to pray within herself and to beg support from the Lord God. But around midnight she came to a marsh near a small stream, which is still called the stream of Apolinaria. Having unveiled the entrance of the tent she found both the steward and the slave of God resting. She stripped off the worldly dress, she clothed herself like a monk, saying, ‘May you who happened to make a beginning of this in me, make me worthy of the holy fashion to accomplish it according to your will Lord.’ And sealing up the tent, she left slowly and went in to the marsh.”

This seems to be the consummation of weeks of planning, especially since she travels by boat to and from pilgrimage points and waits until the perfect moment to escape those in charge of her tent and goods. This planning period allows an external audience to understand that the major issue in this legend concerns a virgin princess who desires to ascetically struggle in dedication to Christ, but one that is also hindered by her royal lineage, wealth, and future marriage.

The male disguise allows Apolinaria to escape her royal retinue, but active transvestism coupled with the physiological changes during her sojourn at the swamp allow her to approach an unwary Abbot Macarius in Scetis for membership to his monastery. Passive transvestism is necessary to fool an abbot and will prove to be even more important in the legend when Apolinaria begrudgingly reunites with her sister. She introduces herself to Macarius as Dorotheos, a new male monastic novice. She remains within the walls of his monastery proving to be extraordinarily strong in ascetic practice and dedication.

²⁶ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 156 lines 4-16.

Her sister encroaches upon the plot as a demonized girl in need of healing. Due to the honorable reputation of the monks of Scetis the younger princess is sent to the monastery of Macarius. Eventually it is decided that a healing performed by Apolinaria would have the best results. The text reports that although Apolinaria recognizes her sister she does not reveal her true identity. Conversely, the possessed sister is completely unaware that this monk is her long-lost sister, which is especially obvious later in the story during her second possession when she accuses Apolinaria of being the eunuch with whom she had intimate relations. The hagiographer does not relay the sister's ignorance directly to external audiences, which is at times blatantly stated in other legends, but it can be safely assumed that the detailed layers belonging to passive and active transvestism have been successful in supplying an anonymous monastic identity. Her own blood is fooled by the ruse, which has also worked on the entire male community, and Apolinaria remains unrecognizable even as a woman.

The climax of the plot centers on her family reunion and the revelation of the royal family that the monk appearing before them to answer for charges of sexual misconduct is their missing Apolinaria. After this reunion she returns to the desert to fulfill her lifelong dream of salvation through the intense practice of asceticism. The portion which describes the family reunion is examined in the inward masculinity chapter in order to highlight the shared love and sentiments of the internal characters. Apolinaria resumes her ascetic practices and monastic affairs in the desert until the time of her death.

Καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ὅτε ἔγνω ὅτι ἔχει ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ βίου λέγει τῷ ἀββᾶ μακαρίῳ· ποίησον ἀγάπην ἐὰν συμβῇ με ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ βίου μὴ σχηματίσωσίν με ὥς οἱ μοναχοί· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· πῶς ἐνδέχεται· τελειωθείσης δε αὐτῆς· ἦλθον οἱ ἅγιοι πατέρες ὅπως ἀποπλύνωσιν τὸ ἅγιον αὐτῆς σῶμα καὶ εἶδον ὅτι γυνὴ ἦν τῇ φύσει καὶ ἀνεβόησαν λέγοντες δόξα σοι.²⁷

“When, after some days, she knew that she was leaving this life she said to the abbot Macarius, ‘Bless me, if it should happen that I depart this life, I was not formed as the monks.’ And he said to him, ‘How is this possible?’ When she was made perfect, the holy fathers came in order that they might wash her holy body and saw that she was a woman by nature and crying aloud saying, ‘Praise to you!’”

²⁷ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 160 lines 21-26.

Here is the revelation of her true sexual self by the brethren. They are obviously shocked by the sight of a woman's body before them and this event will have theological and inspirational effects on readers. They knew her as a fellow male colleague and it is only by removing the male disguise that they realize a woman had been in their midst all along. Important to see here is the convincing effect that outward masculinity has on internal audiences to provide a place of concealment within which a runaway princess may achieve salvation as an autonomous woman.

In a closely related story, that of Hilaria, the hagiographer tells in greater detail the bodily transformations of ascetic women. It is reminiscent of the physical description of Mary of Egypt in which feminine bodily markers, most notably on the condition of the breasts, have become unlike those with which most women are adorned.²⁸ Hilaria, also the daughter of an emperor, is presented as greatly troubled over her nobility. Her concern focuses upon the materialistic and carnal connotations of royal life, more specifically an inevitable royal marriage threatening the state of her spirit.

ΤΝΟΒ ΔΕ ΝΩΕΕΡΕ ΜΠΡΡΟ ΝΕΥΝ ΟΥΝΟΒ ΝΡΟΟΥΩ ΖΪΧΩC
 ΕΕΡΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΔΕ ΝΕΕCΕΠΙΘΥΜΕΙ ΕΤΜΝΤΑΠΟΤΑΚΤΙΚΟC
 ΕΤΕ ΤΜΝΤΜΟΝΑΧΟC ΤΕ ΝΕCΡΖΟΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΠΕ ΕΒΩΚ
 ΕΝΕΜΟΝΑCΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΜΠΒΥCΑΝΤΙΟΝ ΧΕ ΝCΕΝΑΨΟΠC ΕΡΟΟΥ ΑΝ
 ΕΤΒΕ ΝΕCΕΪΟΤΕ ΝΕΥΝ ΟΥΝΟΒ ΝΡΟΟΥΩ ΨΟΟΠ ΝΑC ΧΕ ΟΥ
 ΠΕΤCΝΑΑΑΑ4 ΨΑΝΤΕCΕΪ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΤΩΖΜ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ
 ΝΤΜΜΝΤΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC.²⁹

“The eldest of the king's daughters had great concerns about her virginity. Moreover, she had set her heart upon a life of monastic renunciation. Therefore, she feared to go to the monasteries of Byzantium since they will not receive her because of her parents. She was greatly concerned with what she should do until she went into the holy convocation of virginity.”

The choice of institution is presented as a concern within the legend. She must find a monastic community that will not recognize her, and conversely, that will conceal her from her family. Once again a well thought out plan enters into the mind of a female monk that includes the use of a male institution as an integral part of the masculine disguise. Her primary concern is how to escape the palace without her servants or family noticing.

²⁸ *Vita Sanctæ Mariæ Ægyptiacæ*, in *Vitas Patrum Liber Primus*. PL 73.671-690.

²⁹ The edition used for the Life of Hilaria is that contained in Drescher, 1947. It is cited within this thesis as *Hilaria*, Drescher, 2 lines 10-16.

ΑΚΤΩΟΥΝ ΝΤΠΑΩΕ ΝΤΕΥΩΗ ΜΠΕΪΖΟΥ ΝΟΥΩΤ· ΑΚ† ΖΙΩΩC
 ΝΟΥCΧΗΜΑ ΝCΠΑΘΑΡΙΟC ΑCΜΟΡC ΝΝΟΥΜΟΥC ΝΚΑΜΠΙCΤΡΟΝ ΑΥΩ
 ΑCΧΙ ΝΝΟΥCΗC ΝΝΟΥΒ ΕΤΕCΘΙΧ· ΑCΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΧΝ ΘΑΛΑCCA·
 ΜΠΕ ΛΑΛΥ CΟΥΩΝΕC ΕΠΤΗΡC· ΑCΖΕ ΕΥΧΟΪ ΕCΝΑΩΘΗΡ
 ΕΥΠΟΛΙC ΧΕ CΑΡΑΛΗΑ·³⁰

“That same day she alone arose in the middle of the night. She put on herself the fashion of a knight. She tied on herself a strap of the knight and she took a sword of gold in her hand. She went onto the sea. No one recognized her. She found a ship which will sail to the city of Saralea.”

The ship captain does not recognize her as a woman even though from the story it seems all she does is don a soldier’s uniform. Even though these are strangers, this proves that a projected self through fashion and outward signals is very convincing to supporting characters.

A string of characters follows the ship captain in not recognizing her as a woman within soldier’s garb: the deacon that she meets agrees to accompany her into the desert, the gate keeper of the monastery in Scetis introduces both visitors as men, and the Abbot Pambo, concerned with the appearance of her obvious comfortable lifestyle, advises this male soldier to find a less rigorous monastery to join where many other “ΝΡΩΜΕ,” “men,” who have enjoyed luxury do battle with their spirits and the devil. However, upon pleading Hilaria as a soldier is allowed to enter the monastery of Pambo and was given the monastic habit.

ΑΥΩ ΑC† ΝΑC ΝΟΥΛΕΒΙΤΟΝ ΜΝ ΟΥΩΤΗΝ ΝΒΩ ΑΥΩ ΑCΒΩΚ ΕΥCΑ
 ΜΑΥΑΑC· ΑCΚΑΑC ΚΑΖΗΥ ΝΝΕΖΟΪΤΕ ΕΤΖΙΧΩC· ΑC† ΖΙΩΩC
 ΝΤΛΕΒΙΤΟΝ ΑCΕΪ ΩΑ ΠΠΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ· ΑΥΩ ΑCΜΟΡC ΖΕΝ ΝΕCΘΙΧ
 ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ· ΝΕCΟΟΥΝ ΔΕ ΑΝ ΧΕ ΟΥCΖΙΜΕ ΤΕ·³¹

“And he gave to her a monastic habit and hairshirt. She went apart alone. She took off the clothes which were upon her. She put on herself the habit and went up to the holy one. He tied it [a girdle] on her with his holy hands and did not know that she was a woman.”

Here Hilaria is in the garb of a monk. The soldier’s dress allows her to enter a monastic career, but now male monastic clothing and institution, coupled with a male name and title she will soon receive from the brethren, allow her to stay safely as a young maiden. Transvestism is utilized to escape the type of life that impeded her total salvation and chaste existence. This is a very practical outlet to take when

³⁰ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 3 lines 13-18.

³¹ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 6 lines 11-15.

forced to hide status, both social and sexual, from those surrounding her and searching for her. External audiences are reading of a woman who enters a monastic life due to her chaste spiritual proclivities formed while a princess and daughter.

Shortly thereafter Pambo, through his great powers lauded by the hagiographer, receives a dream revealing that brother Hilarion is a woman. However, during a plot twist, Pambo does not banish her from his monastery. He instead advises her to keep her secret and guard herself because the female sex is a temptation for even very holy men. The fact that she is allowed to remain in the monastery after her discovery is significant. The hagiographer has not finished with her story – she needs to remain.

It would seem that the mention of any bodily alterations would be unnecessary at this point because external audiences and Pambo know that she is a woman. However, she is to meet her sister once again. The hagiographer describes detailed bodily changes, even describing that her menstruation had ceased due to ascetic practices, because he must set the stage for the deception of her own family.

ΝΕΣΕΚΙΒΕ ΔΕ ΟΝ ΞΕ ΜΠΟΥΕΡ ΘΕ ΝΝΑΝΕΖΙΟΜΕ ΤΗΡΟΥ· ΜΩΟΡΠ
ΜΕΝ ΑΣΩΟΟΥΕ ΖΙΤΝ ΤΑΚΥCIC ΑΥΩ ΜΠΕCΖΥΠΟΓICΘΕ ΕΠΠΑΘΟC
ΝΝΕΖΙΟΜΕ:---- ΕΠΙΔΗ Α ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΠΠΑΝΤΟΚΡΑΤΩΡ ΟΥΕΖCΑΖΝΕ
ΝΑC ΜΠΖΩΒ ΕΤΤΗΩ.³²

“Her breasts were not those of all women, and most importantly, she was dried up in asceticism and was not subject to the curse of women – since God the all-sovereign had bade for her the thing appointed.”

It is interesting to highlight the language of the hagiographer during the following description of Hilaria before her sister. The physical changes described above are the most important elements of Hilaria’s anonymity because they produce a high level of body neutrality for those with whom she is familiar, namely her brethren, her sister, and later her father. However, the tone of the hagiographer, when referring to her male disguise once bodily transformations have become more important, show the strong influence that passive transvestism has on the overall effect of outward masculinity.

ΤΜΑΚΑΡΙΑ ΔΕ ΖΛΛΑΡΙΔΑ ΝΤΕΡΕCΝΑΥ ΕΤΕCΩΝΕ ΝΚΟCΜΙΚΗ
ΑCCOΥΩΝC ΑΛΛΑ ΜΠΕ ΤCΩΝΕ ΝΚΟCΜΙΚΗ COΥΩΝ ΤCΩΝΕ
ΜΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC· ΕCΝΑCOΥΩΝΕC ΝΑΩ ΝΖΕ ΕΠΙΔΗ Α ΝΕCΑΡΞ
ΩΟΟΥΕ ΖΙΤΝ ΤΑΚΥCIC· ΑΥΩ Α ΠCΑ ΜΠΕCΩΜΑ ΩΙΒΕ ΜΝ

³² *Hilaria*, Drescher, 6 lines 30-34.

ΠΕΣΣΜΟΤ ΕΝΕΜΝ ΛΑΔΥ ΝΖΗΤΟ ΝΟΑ ΠΚΑΟ ΜΝ ΠΩΔΑΡ· ΕΧΕΝ ΝΑΙ
ΔΕ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΝΕΟΦΟΡΕΙ ΝΟΥΘΧΗΜΑ ΝΖΟΟΥΤ.³³

“The Blessed Hilaria, when she saw her secular sister she knew her, but the secular sister did not know the virgin sister. How should she know her since her flesh was dried up in asceticism and the beauty of her body changed with her form with nothing on her behind the skin and the bone? Besides all these things, she was wearing their male fashions.”

The monastic costume, having fulfilled its ultimate purpose of allowing her to enter into and remain in a male monastery, has been mentioned by what feels like an afterthought. It sounds as though it was almost overlooked by the hagiographer who mentions it after elements more pertinent to the disguise at this point in the legend, but it is both active and passive transvestism that render Hilaria unrecognizable. In this legend, Hilaria has to appear as a man to enter a monastery, but her appearance must really be changed to fool the family.

She fools her sister who comes to the monastery possessed and desperate for healing. Due to the intimacy between Hilaria, the male monk, and the royal princess in his cell during the healing, the emperor summons the eunuch to confess concerning his relationship with the princess. At court Hilaria reveals her true identity to her father and the royal family rejoices, but they keep her secret in order to aid her salvation. Hilaria returns to her male monastic home.

At her death Hilaria is buried in her habit undisturbed. This legend lacks the abrupt and awe inspiring discovery of a female form beneath male clothing although it is the most vocal concerning bodily transformations and outward appearances. However, there is no need to shock the internal audience when external audiences possess a large bulk of information regarding this monk's true sexual nature. Even though the brethren were not privy to the sight of her as a woman, they still learn of her true sexual nature and are inspired by her situation because Pambo makes a lesson of her life.

With the *Vita* of Hilaria, bodily transformations that occur because of ascetic practice have been shown as the ultimate element of the male disguise, especially when layered on top of fashion and male association. This will prove to be a valid observation for the remaining female monk *Vitae*. Active transvestism is utilized pragmatically to begin and sustain an ascetic lifestyle, but passive transvestism

³³ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 8 lines 24-30.

occurs because of their dedication. This thesis suggests that when hagiographers stress bodily transformations they are attempting to show that women are securely hidden by their ascetic practice. Their ultimate anonymity is in a way gifted by God since body neutrality occurs while honoring him within an ascetic setting.

Bodily transformations are not only required to disguise blood relations, but needed also to fool husbands. The *Vita* of Athanasia is woven within that of her husband, Andronikos, due to their mutual desire for asceticism and simultaneous entry into separate monastic foundations. This is a dual *Vita* perhaps intended by the hagiographer to give audiences an inspirational romance where husband and wife are reunited, although this reunion is not immediately realized by Andronikos who thinks her to be a man. This must have been amusing to external audiences because Andronikos should be curious about his attraction to, connection with, and love for his newly found “brother” in faith. Athanasia even expresses her concern over his overdependence on her within the legend, which is further discussed in the inward masculinity chapter.

Male dress, which is vaguely introduced within the story with no explanation except for the assumption that it secures safer travel for her pilgrimage as it did for Thecla following Paul, is not used to escape a lover, but to reunite with one.³⁴ Transvestism is utilized within the story as an element that allows for the secret cohabitation of an estranged husband and wife. However, this is not a mutually engineered ruse. Athanasia is not forthcoming with information of her true identity and Andronikos is presented as unaware.

Athanasia is unique among female transvestite monk figures because she enjoys a good marriage with children before she becomes an ascetic and there are no domestic obstacles to surmount. She and her ascetically like-minded husband, Andronikos, live in Antioch with their two children. In the twelfth year of their marriage both children die. The devastated couple prays for many hours a day seeking consolation. One day, Athanasia experiences a paranormal encounter while grieving at the tomb of her children at the church of Saint Julian by receiving counsel from a spectral abbot. She returns home and relates this extraordinary affair to her

³⁴ John C. B. Petropoulos, “Transvestite Virgin with a Cause: The Acta Pauli et Theclae and Late Antique Proto-Feminism”, in *Greece and Gender*, eds. Brit Berggreen and Nanno Marinatos (Bergen: Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1995), 125-139.

husband. The consolation from the apparition of Saint Julian inspired them to give away all their possessions, begin their pilgrimage, and dedicate themselves to God for the remainder of their lives.

They travel together to Jerusalem to visit the holy places and then to Scetis to begin monastic careers. Here they meet the Abbot Daniel. However, he will not receive Andronikos into his monastery until provisions for Athanasia are made.

Καὶ συνταξάμενοι ἀλλήλους κατέβη αὐτος εἰς τὴν Σκῆτιν, καὶ προσκυνήσας τοὺς πατέρας κατὰ λαύραν ἤκουσε περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Δανιήλ, καὶ ἀπελθὼν κόπῳ πολλῷ ἠδυνήθη συντυχεῖν αὐτῷ. Ἀνέθετο οὖν πάντα τῷ γέροντι. Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· Ἀπελθε φέρε τὴν γυναῖκά σου καὶ ποιῶ σοι γράμματα καὶ ἀποφέρεις αὐτὴν εἰς Θηβαίδα εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον τῶν Ταβεννησιωτῶν.³⁵

“And both of them journeyed down into Scetis, and visited the fathers in their cells and heard of the abbot Daniel. They went to ask permission to join him. When they found the old one, the old one said to him, ‘Go and dedicate your wife and I will allow you to; place her in Thebaid into the monastery of Tabenna.’”

Athanasia is advised to live in an isolated cell near the monastic institution of Tabenna and Andronikos joins the ranks of the brethren in the monastery of Daniel. At this point in the legend there is no need for a disguise involving dress, hairstyle, name, or institution because there is no need to hide.

The story continues with details on Andronikos’ life in the monastery. He expresses a wish to make pilgrimage and travels to the Holy Land with Daniel’s permission. Athanasia, but reappearing abruptly as Athanasius, and Andronikos are reunited during a coincidental, simultaneous pilgrimage. Of course, Andronikos does not recognize his wife. Athanasia’s transvestic transformation is not described or explained – she simply rejoins the narrative again with a male name and masculine anonymity. What is the purpose of the late mention of transvestism? Why add this to the story? Why would it be necessary to hide from a husband who shares the same aspirations as her? The only reason is that the hagiographer wants this female monk to live with her husband again among his brethren. The hagiographer needs a way for her to do so safely and anonymously to establish an ironic conclusion for this pious

³⁵ The edition of *L’orfèvre Andronicus et son épouse Athanasie* is found within *Vie (et Recits) de l’abbé Daniel le Scétoite*, ed. L. Clugnet, 1 Bibliothèque Hagiographique Orientale (Paris: Librairie A. Picard et fils, 1901), 47-52. It will be cited as *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 50 lines 23-28.

love story. However, for the benefit of the external audiences he continues to use female pronouns and the term “wife” to refer to Athanasia.

‘Ο δέ ἀββᾶς Ἀνδρόνικος ὁδεύων κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἐκάθισεν ὑποκάτω ἀκανθαίας ἵνα λάβῃ ἀναψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ καύματος· καὶ ἰδὼν κατ’ οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἐρχομένη ἐν ἀνδρικῷ σχήματι ἀπιοῦσα καὶ αὐτὴ ἐπὶ τοὺς Ἁγίους Τόπους. Καὶ ἀσπασαμένων ἀλλήλους, ἐγνώρισεν ἡ περιστερὰ τὸν ὁμόζυγον· αὐτὸς δὲ πῶς εἶχεν γνωρίσαι τοσοῦτον κάλλος μαρανθὲν καὶ ὥς Αἰθίοπα φαινομένην.³⁶

“The abbot Andronikos journeyed down to Egypt and sat down beneath a tree in order to refresh himself from the heat. And behold, according to the stewardship of God, his wife in the fashion of a man departed into the holy places. She was a similar companion, and while she recognized her husband, he did not recognize her because of the fading away of her beauty under much ascetic exercise and that she looked like an Ethiopian.”

This fellow pilgrim was Athanasia, but she remains unidentified due to outward masculinization caused by strict asceticism, exposure to the sun, and active transvestism. This passage also shows a woman made bodily neutral as the hagiographer compares her previous lay beauty with that of her ascetic beauty, but never is she described as or compared to masculinity. This complex description, not necessary until this point in the narrative, must be made if the plot is to reunite them to live together in a male institution unbeknownst to Andronikos and Daniel. This is the only female monk legend where inhabiting a male monastery is in fact a goal of the holy woman. She recognizes her husband, but does not reveal to him her identity. Here is a holy woman, still dedicated to the ascetic ways, who also still wants to be a wife, which is a point developed in the chapter concerning inward masculinity.

Not surprisingly, they make excellent travel companions and, at Andronikos’ bidding, she accompanies him to his monastery, but safely underneath the layers of her male guise. One final mention of Andronikos’ ignorance is given by the hagiographer to stress her anonymity and to remind external audiences of the success of the masculine ruse.

Ἐπαναλύσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἔμειναν ἐν φόβῳ Θεοῦ ἄλλα ἔτη δώδεκα, καὶ οὐκ ἐγνώρισθη αὐτῷ.³⁷

“They returned to his abode together in fear of God, but twelve years passed, and it was not known who she was.”

³⁶ Athanasia, Clugnet, 51 lines 2-7.

³⁷ Athanasia, Clugnet, 51 lines 21-22.

It was because of the male monastic habit and the bodily transformations that enable her to remain with him until death.

Καὶ ποιησάντων εὐχὴν, καὶ κοινωνήσας ἐκοιμήθη ἐν Κυρίῳ. Ἐλθον δὲ κηδεύσαι αὐτόν, καὶ ἰδοὺ τῇ φύσει εὐρέθη γυνή, καὶ ἠκούσθη εἰς ὅλην τὴν λαύραν. Καὶ πέμψας ὁ γέρων ἀνήνεγκεν τὴν Σκήτιν πᾶσαν καὶ τὴν ἐσωτέραν ἔρημον. Καὶ ἀνῆλθον πᾶσαι αἱ λαύραι Ἀλεξανδρείας, καὶ πᾶσα ἡ πόλις συνήλθεν καὶ οἱ Σκιτιῶται λευκημονοῦντες, Οὕτως γὰρ ἔστι τὸ ἔθος αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ Σκήτει· Καὶ μετὰ κλάδων καὶ βαίων ἐξεκόμισαν τὸ τίμιον λείψανον τῆς μακαρίας Ἀθανασίας, δοξάζοντες τὸν Θεόν, τὸν τοσαύτην ὑπομονὴν παρασχόντα τῇ γυναικί.³⁸

“And when they had prayed, she had fellowship and fell asleep in the Lord. They came to take care of him, and behold, her womanly nature was discovered, and it was heard in all the cells. And the old one was sent for and he brought the whole of Scetis. The brothers that inhabited the inner desert and all from the cells of Alexandria came. The entire city gathered and all the Scetians were wearing white, for that is the habit in Scetis. When the arms and feet were tended to of the respected remains of the blessed Athanasia, they praised God that a great patient endurer here by nature was a woman.”

Here at the closing of the legend the true sexual nature of Athanasia is discovered and her fame spreads across the land. Many gather to participate in the memory of this extraordinary holy woman. All gather except for Andronikos, who because of his grief, waits to die in her cell. She was a brother to him, but also his wife.

The need to hide from a husband features prominently also in the legend of Theodora, the wife of a prefect of Alexandria named Gregorius. This wife is not interested in abandoning her husband because of negative attitudes to sexuality or marital subjugation, but, prompted by love and the guilt felt from dishonoring him with an adulterous affair, she abandons him in order to perform private and intense penance. Vaguely within the manuscripts published by K. Wessely,³⁹ Theodora makes plans and goes into the desert to seek solitude and to repent both spiritually and bodily through asceticism. It is not long before she finds a superior of a monastery.

ἔλαβε δὲ αὐτόν ὁ ἀρχιμανδρίτης ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τέκνον διατί ἦλθες ὧδε; μή τινι χρεώσσης; ἢ φόνον πεποίηκας; ἢ τινὲς

³⁸ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 51 line 32-52 line 6.

³⁹ The text(s) used for the *Life* of Theodora, unless otherwise stated, is found in K. Wessely, *Die Vita S. Theodorae*, Fünfzehnter Jahresbericht des K. K. Staatsgymnasiums in Hernals (Wien, 1889), 27-44. This thesis will refer to revised edition of Symeon Metaphrastes, *Vita et Conversatio S. Matris Nostrae Theodorae Alexandrinae*, PG 115.665-690, only within the footnotes in order to supplement certain points of the original narrative. Neither Wessely nor Metaphrastes provide line numbers for the *Vita* of Theodora so this thesis will supply its own.

σε θλίβουσιν; ἢ παιδίᾱ ἔχ(ει)ς; μὴ διὰ πρόσωπον ὑποστελλῇ· ἣ δὲ λέγει
μετανοῆσαι ἦλθον κύρι· καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τίς καλῇ; καὶ εἶπεν·
Θεόδωρος.⁴⁰

“The superior took him into his cell and said to him, ‘Child, why have you come thus? You are not a debtor, a murderer – or do certain ones crush you? Or do you have children? Do not hold back on account of your character.’ He said, ‘I have come to repent lord.’ And he said to him, ‘What are you called?’ And he said, ‘Theodoros.’”

Evidently from the hagiographer’s use of male pronouns and name change she is abruptly passing as a man in the story with little information for external audiences. The quotation above shows Theodora in a position to rename herself with a male appellative, so it must be assumed, especially with a slightly later reference to her manly form, that she did indeed pass as a man in some fashion. One can assume that external audiences, if familiar with various tales of transvestite heroines, would not need detailed descriptions and could move along in the story by their own assumption that she is outwardly male to some extent or that this could be just a corrupted manuscript. Alternatively, this *Vita* may be setting up both the internal and external audiences for the intriguing gendered irony at the conclusion of the tale like in that of Anastasia.

The masculine appearance of Theodora is described during an episode while she is administering to the commercial needs of the brothers. A most curious exchange of dialogue takes place between Gregorius and an angel, who explains in detail the motives of Theodora. It is important to the hagiographer that Gregorius, and through him external audiences, are privy to the motivations and reasons for his abandonment. It turns out that it is not for dishonorable reasons, but for a life that may result in forgiveness and salvation. Heaven seems quite keen to aid Gregorius to find his lost wife or at least comfort.

Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου· ὀρθρισον ἐπὶ ὁδὸν τοῦ μαρτυρίου Πέτρου τοῦ ἀποστόλου καὶ ὅστις ἀνπροσαγορεύσῃ σοι αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ γυνή σου· ὀρθρίσας δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς εἶδες τὰς καμήλους καὶ αὐτὴν μετ’ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐν τῷ φορεῖν αὐτὴν ἀνδρικὸν σχῆμα σύρουσα τὰς καμήλους οὐκ ἐγνώρισεν αὐτὴν ὅλως.⁴¹

“And the angel of the Lord said to him, ‘At daybreak on the road of the martyr Peter the apostle, certainly whoever calls to you, he is your wife.’ At

⁴⁰ *Theodora*, Wessely, 28 lines 8-11.

⁴¹ *Theodora*, Wessely, 29 line 18-30 line 4.

daybreak her husband saw the camels and her with them wearing her manly form whistling to her camels. He did not recognize her at all.”

Theodora stands before Gregorius anonymously disguised as a monk. She appears to him in a manly form. The audience must assume that this concerns a change of fashion. However, there must be a greater change suggested by the narrative because her husband is fooled, regardless of the fact that he is specifically directed to this monk by an angel. Her manly form may include bodily transformations since she is so well hidden from her spouse, but it is not mentioned explicitly. It is implied within a following passage in which she gains permission to fast for four days straight. Later in the narrative, her hagiographer is willing to have Theodora approach her husband with a greeting and blessing, which is discussed within the inward masculinity chapter, to show the success of the disguise. The disguise that is alluded to has the power to guarantee that she will not have to return with him once this exchange has taken place because she is unrecognizable as a woman to the brethren and as a wife to a husband. The remainder of the story can then be focused on her career in the monastery, her endurance during sexual charges, the discovery of her identity upon her death, and a post-mortem reunion of husband and wife.

At Theodora’s death, the abbot receives a dream that Theodoros is a woman. Upon waking the abbot goes into her cell and discovers her corpse.

ἔπαρον τὸ ἱμάτιον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ· καὶ ἐπάρας εἶδεν ὅτι γυνὴ ἦν· καὶ πάντες ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεόν.⁴²

“They lifted the garment from him, and saw that it was a woman, and all were frightened with a great terror and they prayed to God.”

All who are present at the preparation of the body are overwrought with a great terror upon discovery of her female body underneath a male habit. This scene dissolves into one of prayer and praise shortly afterwards.

This would seem to be a great ending for such a *Vita*, where the brethren are shocked to know that their brother is a woman and express an overpowering awe caused by the existence of a strong womanhood undetected amongst them, but it is not the conclusion of the tale. The *Vita* concludes quite comically with the abbot taking his horse and in faith heading towards Alexandria. He is charged to search for

⁴² *Theodora*, Wessely, 43 line 20-44 line 1.

a man frantically running in his direction out into the desert. The abbot, who is given this quest from his dream, finds Gregorius sprinting down the road towards the monastery, which is an impressive eighteen miles out of the city. The abbot relieves Gregorius from his divinely inspired half-marathon by bringing him back to the monastery to oversee the burial of his wife. Gregorius, a loving and loyal husband to the end, spends the rest of his life in her cell. This clearly establishes the fact that a woman's space, a wife's space, existed within this male institution, which is discussed further in the inward masculine chapter. He dies in the same cell and the brethren buried the lovers side by side for a good, if not somewhat cliché, "happily ever after" ending.

While Theodora and Athanasia both are influenced in a positive sense by their husbands to become female monks, Matrona considers her husband so dangerous that escape is the only option. The primary and constant hindrance that prevents her dedication to the practice of asceticism is her marriage. Her husband, Dometianos, is the principal catalyst for her transvestism. From the commencement of this tale, she is presented as a pious wife and mother to a daughter, Theodote. However, Matrona possesses an encratic zeal that places a strain on her and Dometianos' relationship which escalates once she and her family relocate to Constantinople. The hagiographer writes that

τῆς οἰκείας πατρίδος ἀποστᾶσα βουλήσει τοῦ πάντων Θεοῦ καὶ γνώμῃ τοῦ οἰκείου ἀνδρός, ὅντινα καὶ συνοδοιπόρον εἶχεν, οὐ μὴν δὲ καὶ τῶν καλῶς αὐτῇ μελετωμένων ὁμογνώμονα⁴³

"She departed from her homeland by the wish of the God of all and the will of her husband, who had accompanied her, but he was not like-minded to her well thought over pursuits."

Here the hagiographer provides the fact that a type of plan, or at least a specific focus for her future life, inhabits the pious mind of Matrona. External audiences understand that she possesses a firm belief of the type of Christian person she wants to become before she has even entered the Christian capital and, consequently, that all acts of transvestism to follow in the story will aid in the successful completion of this plan.

⁴³ The text used for the *Life* of Matrona is *S. Matronae Vita Prima*, ed. Hippolyte Delehaye, *AASS* Nov. 3.794-813. It is cited as *Matrona*, *AASS* Nov. 3.791, 2 lines 25-29.

In Constantinople, Matrona participates in countless nightly vigils, sanctuary visits, fasts, and almsgiving; the final enterprise without the knowledge or permission of her husband. They begin to argue. A very imaginative Dometianos believes that his wife has become a prostitute and her vigils are overnight revelries at brothels. He intervenes and prevents her from going to these mysterious, perhaps sexual, assemblies. However, Matrona wins him over by persuasive words and is permitted to go to what would be her last vigil. That night Matrona receives a dream in which monks rescue her from her limiting domestic situation. The hagiographer summarizes Matrona's interpretation of God's nocturnal counsel in the following way:

Ἐκ τούτου οὖν συνῆκεν, ὅτι ἐν ἀνδρικῷ μοναστηρίῳ δεῖ αὐτὴν μονάσαι καὶ διαλαθεῖν τὸν ἄνδρα. Καὶ ἀποκειραμένη τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ εἰς εὐνούχον μετασχηματισθεῖσα, εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους σὺν τῇ μνημονευθείσῃ ἀπῆλθεν⁴⁴

“Therefore from this she understood that it was necessary for her to enter into a male monastery and to escape the notice of her husband. Cutting her hair and changing herself into the form of a eunuch, she went to the church of the Holy Apostles with the aforementioned one [Eugenia].”

The commencement of transvestism follows a decision on the best method to dedicate her life to her religious desires and is driven by the fear that her husband will ruin her salvific pursuits. The reference to the eunuch is discussed in the following chapters, but here it suffices to say that the hagiographer shows how other characters will accept her outward form. She changes herself into a man, but because she naturally projects womanly body signals, described later in the tale as fair, she is assumed to be a eunuch.

This masculine ruse is necessary because Matrona discerns that she cannot join a female convent. Matrona thinks to herself, Μήποτε πράγματα παράσχη ὁ Δομετιανὸς τῇ λαμβανούσῃ με μονῇ καὶ κωλύσῃ με τοῦ σκοποῦ τῆς σωτηρίας μου⁴⁵ “Lest ever Dometianos should cause trouble to the convent which receives me and should prevent me from the proof of my salvation!” The hagiographer places the pragmatic reason for institutional transvestism in the thoughts of Matrona so that there can be no confusion as to her motivation. Dometianos is a potentially dangerous figure not only to her, but also to the convent and her future sisters. This

⁴⁴ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.792, 4 lines 10-15.

⁴⁵ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.792, 4 lines 3-6.

point is strengthened later in the legend when Matrona admits to being physically abused. Matrona considers her husband to be a genuine threat and it is this fear of him which catalyzes her institutional transvestism.

To protect others she must be a stranger to her husband, therefore a convent cannot be an option for Matrona because it cannot adequately conceal a female matrimonial absconder. In what better form for a married, yet separated, woman to hide than that of a male monk? Where better for a married woman to hide than a community of male monks? Hence, the male monastery is best seen as part of the disguise within the *Vita* of Matrona and this holds true for the situation of the other female monks as well. This thesis posits that if it had not been for the spousal threat within her life she may have joined a convent as she first considered. This ruse is not meant to be a malicious trick – it was necessary for her safety and salvation as a woman. She adopts male monastic dress and joins a male institution because her goals do not allow her to remain a wife or mother. Matrona is presented as consciously deciding, in practical terms, that transvestism, including entry into a male institution, is the only possible outlet for her future as a married woman who desires an ascetic struggle for salvation without spousal permission.

Therefore, she enters into the monastery of Bassianos as a man.

Εἰς τοιαύτην τοίνυν ἀγέλην τιμίαν ἀγαγοῦσα τὴν ὁσίαν Ματρῶναν ἡ μακαρία Εὐγενία τοῖς τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀσκηταῖς ἐγκαταλέγει, εἰς ἄνδρα μετασχηματισθεῖσαν ὅλην καὶ ἄνδρὸς φέρουσαν ὄνομα Βαβυλᾶς ἐκαλεῖτο⁴⁶

“Accordingly, into such an honorable company, did the blessed Eugenia bring the holy Matrona and enrolled her among those devoted to asceticism, she was now wholly transformed into a man and bore a man’s name, Babylas.”

Notice that the hagiographer mentions that her outward masculinization, and thus her anonymity, is complete only after entry into the monastery of Bassianos and change of a name. Both these elements are clearly a part of the overall masculine ruse and active transvestism is only fully developed if all components are seen to be practical and mechanically functional.

She enjoys a successful monastic career at the monastery of Bassianos until a dream reveals to him that she is a woman. When Bassianos confronts Matrona with this fact she explains to him in length her motivations, which are discussed in detail

⁴⁶ *Matrona*, *AASS* Nov. 3.792, 4 lines 35-40.

in the inward masculine chapter. Subsequently she is asked to leave the monastery. At this point in the *Vita*, Matrona is received as a woman by internal audiences and resides at the house of her friend Susannah. Her ruse discovered and her sex revealed; there is no longer any need to play the man, or in her case, the eunuch. However, soon she is prompted again, once fame of her ascetic deeds and manly escapades spreads and her husband comes to reclaim her. She first avoids him by sailing to Emesa and joining the convent of Hilaria. However, after the discovery of the head of John the Baptist and the miraculous healings that followed, her fame spreads once again. The next sentence of the legend reads, "Ὅθεν ἐκ ταύτης τῆς φήμης καὶ Δομετιανὸς τὴν Ἑμεσσαν κατέλεβεν"⁴⁷ "Whence due to this fame, Dometianos, too, arrived at Emesa."

She leaves the convent of Hilaria with a ration of bread, staff, and hairshirt to become an anchorite in the holy places of Jerusalem. Readers are certain that she is once again in male garb because of the hagiographer's specific mention of a hairshirt, which was usually absent in female monastic clothing. After her flight, Dometianos makes inquiries and a group of women describe for him a woman. ἡλικία αὐτῆς ὑψηλὴ ἐστὶν καὶ ἀναλόγως κειμένη, τὸ δὲ φόρεμα τρίχενον, τὸ δὲ χρῶμα λευκόν, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπον ἰλαρὸν καὶ τερπνόν"⁴⁸ "Her stature is tall and well proportioned, her garment of hair, her skin white, and her countenance cheerful and delightful." This is unlike the usual weathered descriptions of anchorite women, such as Mary of Egypt and other female monks, and Dometianos, who is now being referred to as a κύων λακωνικὸς καὶ εἰς θήραν δεδιδαγμένος"⁴⁹ "Lacedaemonian dog trained in the hunt," easily recognizes that this holy figure is his wife.

She escapes in male disguise and flees to Mt. Sinai. She is discovered at Mt. Sinai. She flees again. These relocations, driven by what reads to be a fanatic need for sexual and spiritual freedom, are continuous and prompt the use of a male disguise to outmaneuver her antagonist and continue her spiritual career. She disguises herself as a man and goes to an abandoned pagan temple in the area to practice. The final mention of Dometianos takes place after a lengthy and successful career as a spiritual leader at the pagan temple; he is obstructing Matrona's reunion

⁴⁷ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.797, 13 lines 1-2.

⁴⁸ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.797, 14 lines 8-11.

⁴⁹ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.797, 14 lines 58-59.

with Bassianos in Constantinople. She decides to travel nevertheless. She has retained her male disguise throughout her stay at the pagan temple so she travels in her masculine ruse. After the reunion with Bassianos, Dometianos disappears from the narrative and it is unclear whether he ceases to search or dies. However, it is clear that the hagiography moves into a new series of stories that tell of the establishment of her convent, her counsel for aristocratic women, her acquisition of land, her community's administration, and further additions to her ascetic circle. Once the hagiographer moves on to stories of her as an established holy woman, which are further discussed in the chapter on inward masculinity, Dometianos is no longer a relevant topic or needed antagonist. The story of Matrona as a woman establishing herself in the monastic world has concluded and the legends continue with a portrayal of her as an established abbess.

Every single act of transvestism within these legends is governed by the sense that these women are compelled to use transvestism. The legend of Mary clearly describes such a predicament. Eugenios, a widower who desires to leave all worldly concerns and goods in the hands of his daughter Mary, was on the verge of abandoning her to become a monk, when he is impeded by her entreaties to follow him.

Ταῦτα ἀκούσασα ἡ θυγάτηρ αὐτοῦ εἶπεν· Οὐχί, κύριέ μου, οὐκ εἰσελεύσομαι καθὼς σὺ λέγεις, ἀλλ' ἀποθρίξασα τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς μου καὶ ἀνδρεῖον σχῆμα ἐνδυσάμενη συνεισελθὼ μετὰ σοῦ εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον· Ὁ δὲ ποιήσας τοὺς λόγους τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ διαδῶσας πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτῷ πτωχοῖς καὶ ἀποθρίξας τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνδύσας αὐτὴν ἀνδρεῖον σχῆμα⁵⁰

“To which his daughter responded, saying, ‘No my lord, I will not enter as you say, but I will first cut off my hair and I shall clothe myself in male dress and enter with you into the monastery.’ The father listened to his daughter’s words and donated all his goods to the poor, cut off her hair, and clothed her in male dress.”

Mary’s motivation is clearly expressed as the desire to prevent abandonment by her only remaining family member. Mary and Eugenios enter a monastery as a father-son team with an oath between them that Mary will constantly guard herself to prevent

⁵⁰ The text used for the *Life* of Mary is found within Richard, 1977, 87-94. It is cited as *Mary*, Richard, 88 lines 21-28.

becoming a sexual temptation for the brethren. Mary lives in this monastery for many years after the death of her father and advances in ascetic practice and piety.

At this point the hagiographer must say something of her masculine ruse and its reception since her father is no longer available for to support. Her father had been essentially the co-creator of her outward and social masculine identity. He called her his son and others followed suit based on her appearance and mannerisms. The hagiographer informs external audiences that her fellow brothers assume that she is a eunuch, a reception that is discussed in more depth in the following chapter. The eunuch was a common religious figure so therefore a simple description of a delicate, fair, and beardless man within their midst satisfied the curiosity of the internal audience.

Mary, now Marinos, lives as a eunuch among them until sexual charges are raised against her by the daughter of the local innkeeper. Mary is accused of fathering a child and is subsequently banished from her monastery. Clearly a masculine ruse is so successful that a lay woman receives her as a religious man, who is described as beautiful. It seems that female monks are pursued by some portion of the internal audiences when hagiographers do not add to them a highly effective layer of passive transformation, which will prove true for Theodora and Euphrosyne during the social masculinity chapter. For now it suffices to mention that she sits outside the monastery walls as father to a bastard child until the abbot allows her to return diminished in rank. She dies within her monastery many years later.

Καὶ ὥς ἦλθον ἀπολοῦσαι αὐτον, εὗρον ὅτι γυνή ἐστι καὶ ἐθροήθησαν καὶ ἤρξαντο πάντες κράζειν καὶ λέγειν μιᾷ φωνῇ· Κύριε ἐλέησον.⁵¹

“And as they came to wash him, they found that he was a woman and, crying aloud, all began to cry out to say in a single voice, ‘Lord be merciful!’”

Here the brethren express a strong sense of disbelief and awe at seeing the true form of their brother. They are surprised at their ignorance and are in awe of this miracle, but this turns into guilt concerning her unjust banishment. Here, before them is a holy woman who endured false charges of sexual licentiousness as a penitent outside the monastery walls in full exposure for years with a child. They stand in awe at the

⁵¹ *Mary*, Richard, 93 lines 144-147.

presence of a holy womanhood who is able to withstand hardships that perhaps even they would fail at. Through this scenario, Mary becomes an instructional figure who provides a sense of humbling shame and inspiration for external audiences.

The retention of beauty is also a bane for Euphrosyne, who innocently, or at least inadvertently, causes the ranks of brethren at her monastery to fall into the clutches of homosexual lust. The *Vita* of Euphrosyne begins to narrate events before her birth with a tale of barrenness and distress. Her parents spend a good portion of their days in prayer in the local church and neighboring monastery of an anonymous abbot. Their prayers are answered and to this God-fearing couple Euphrosyne, a beautiful girl with remarkable cognitive ability, is born.

Ἐχαίρον δὲ ἐπὶ αὐτῇ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς ὅτι ἦν ἀστεία τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ὡραία τῇ ὄψει καὶ καλὴ εἶδει σφόδρα. Γενομένης οὖν αὐτῆς δωδεκάετους, ἡ μήτηρ αὐτῆς ὑπεξῆλθε τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον, ἔμεινε δὲ ὁ πατήρ αὐτῆς παιδεύων αὐτὴν γράμμασι καὶ ἀναγνώσμασι καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ σοφίᾳ. Ἐτυχε δὲ ἡ κόρη δεξιᾶς εἶναι φύσεως, καὶ τοσοῦτος ἐγένετο φιλομαθὴς ὥς θαυμάζειν τὸν πατέρα αὐτῆς τὴν τοσαύτην αὐτῆς φιλομαθίαν. Φήμης οὖν πλατυτέρας γενομένης ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ πόλει περὶ τῆς φρονήσεως αὐτῆς καὶ πολυμαθίας, οὐ μὴν ἄλλ' ὅτι καὶ εὐφυὲς ὑπῆρχεν καὶ ἡ διάπλασις δὲ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῆς εὐπρεπεία τε καὶ ὡραιότητι κάλλους διέλαμπεν, πολλοὺς τοίνυν τῶν ἐν ἀξιώμασιν εἰς πόθον εἴλκυσεν λαβεῖν αὐτὴν νύμφην τοῖς υἱοῖς αὐτῶν.⁵²

“Her parents rejoiced because she was elegant to God, ripe in outward appearance, and exceedingly beautiful in form. When she turned twelve years old, her mother died and her father continued rearing her in writing, knowledge, and the eternal wisdom. The maiden was worthy to be on the right side of nature and she loved learning to such an extent that she astonished her father with her great love for it. Legend spread throughout the entire city concerning her wisdom and great knowledge, but even more so because she had become exceedingly beautiful in the shapely mold of her body and in her countenance. Therefore many men of reputation yearned to seize her as a young wife for their sons.”

It is interesting to note that the hagiographer stresses her intelligence as well her beauty. She is not a person to make a rash decision; the hagiographer considers her intelligence in a masculine sense and supplies her masculine ruse with a sense of practicality and reason.

⁵² The text used for the *Life* of Euphrosyne is found within Anatolii Boucherie ed., “*Vitae Sanctae Euphrosynae*,” in *Analecta Bollandiana* II Carolus De Smedt, Gulielmus Van Hooff, and Josephus De Backer eds. (Société Générale de Librairie Catholique, 1883), 195-205. It is cited within this thesis as *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 196 lines 29-197 line 7.

However, much to the future dismay of eager suitors, who see her as a beautiful woman, she was brought up in an exceedingly pious environment that would prove pivotal in her life. She and her father, Paphnutius, frequent the nearby monastery for prayers, blessings, and spiritual instruction. During this time, Euphrosyne exhibits extreme aversion to marriage as a consequence of the teachings of the abbot. The hagiographer reports that this aversion began as a fear of God that blossomed within her own mind and as a desire for spiritual redemption and salvation. Here this desire blossoms while a young woman and a daughter. She returns home and brainstorms a plan that would prevent her ever approaching the marriage bed.

This plan gains structure when a holy recluse visits her home to invite Paphnutius to a vigil at the monastery. At this point, Euphrosyne inquires into the workings of the monastic institution, most notably the entry requirements and acceptance rate. The replies of this brother transform the conjectural plans brewing in the mind of Euphrosyne into an attainable reality.

Λάθρα τοίνυν ἀποκειραμένη ἔξελθε τοῦ οἴκου, καὶ ἄπελθε ἐν σκητηρίῳ, καὶ σώζῃ. Ἡ δὲ ἀκούσασα τοῦτο πάνυ ἡδέως ἔσχεν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Καὶ τίς με ἔχει κουρεῦσαι; οὐκ ἠθελον γὰρ ὑπὸ κοσμικοῦ κουρευθῆναι, ὅτι πιστὰ οὐ φυλάσσουσι. Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ μοναχός· Ἰδού, τὸν πατέρα σου ἐπάραι ἔχω ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ, καὶ ποιεῖ ἐκεῖ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἢ καὶ τέσσαρας, καὶ φέρε ἓνα μοναχόν, καὶ ὡς θέλεις συνέρχεται σοι.⁵³

“Therefore secretly cut off your hair, leave the house, enter into the monastery, and be saved.’ Listening to this she gladly grasped all of it and she said to him, ‘And who will shave me? I do not wish to have a worldly one shave me, because they cannot be trusted to keep secrets.’ The monk said to her, ‘Behold, I came to take your father to the monastery and he will be in that place for three or four days. During that time send for a monk and thus you will be able to finish preparing.’”

The mechanics of the cunning plan are devised by this monk and Euphrosyne is very willing to follow his instructions. Following quickly in the story are the details of her outward masculinization through active transvestism.

Καὶ ἀναστάς ὁ ἀββας καὶ ποιήσας εὐχὴν κουρεύει αὐτὴν καὶ δίδωσιν αὐτῇ τὸ ἅγιον σχῆμα τοῦ μοναχοῦ, καὶ ἐπευξάμενος αὐτῇ εἶπεν· “Ο

⁵³ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 198 lines 24-30.

Θεὸς ὁ σῶσας πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους αὐτός σε διαφυλάξει ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.” Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ γέρον ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου.⁵⁴

“And the abbot raised himself up, made a prayer as he shaved her, and, giving to her the holy fashion of a solitary, prayed for her saying, ‘May God, who redeemed all of the saints, preserve you from evil.’ And when the old man said this he departed from the house.”

However, at first she wears female clothing with a shaved head. She quickly realizes that her father, who loves her greatly and knows her religious proclivities, would naturally search for her at a female convent. Therefore she looks for a way to strengthen her disguise and decides that institutional transvestism will suffice. The hagiographer specifically refers external audiences to her decision to struggle actively amongst men as a pragmatic means to an end. Anonymity is needed to attain her spiritual desires. In order to become an autonomous single woman, who is able to decide her own fate and champion goals formed to protect her chastity, the hagiographer needs her to remain hidden within the story. The hagiographer stresses the pragmatic quality of her decision through use of Euphrosyne’s own words.

Ἡ δὲ Εὐφροσύνη σύννους γενομένη εἶπεν ἐν ἑαυτῇ ὅτι Ἐὰν ἀπέλθω εἰς γυναικεῖον μοναστήριον, ὁ πατήρ μου δι’ ἐρεύνης γενόμενος εὕρήσει με καὶ συμβῇ ἀποσπάσαι με διὰ τὸν ὀρμαστόν μου. Ἀλλὰ δίδωμι ἑαυτὴν εἰς κοινόβιον ἀνδρῶν, ὅπου οὐδεὶς ὑπονοεῖ. Καὶ ἀποδυσαμένη τὴν γυναικεῖαν στολὴν καὶ ἐνδυσαμένη ἀνδρείαν, ἐσπέρας βαθείας ἐξῆλθε τοῦ οἴκου.⁵⁵

“Euphrosyne, having thought deeply, said to herself, ‘If I enter into a female monastery, my father, on account of searching, will find me and drag me away through force. But if I surrender myself into a domicile of men, then no one will suspect.’ Taking off the female clothing and dressing in that of a man, that evening she departed from the house.”

Clearly, as argued throughout this thesis, the choice of institution strengthens the male disguise and this is acknowledged specifically by this female monk. Had it not been for such a fanatical, loving father this thesis believes that the question of joining a male monastery may not have arisen, but of course the hagiographer must place her within that type of institution for the benefit of his overall plot and message. This simple disguise suffices to gain entry into the nearby monastery, even though the abbot had met and instructed her on occasion, but external audiences must assume

⁵⁴ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 199 lines 31-34.

⁵⁵ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 199 line 35-200 line 5.

that he would not be familiar enough with Euphrosyne, now called Smaragdus, to recognize her. Later in the tale, the hagiographer must supply a description of her bodily transformations in order to set the stage for the reunion with her father and produce the climactic conclusion after discovery of her true identity.

However, no bodily transformation has taken place up to this point in the legend so therefore she is not considered bodily neutral. It is assumed that she still possesses her renowned beauty. Therefore, though she looks like a man on the outside through dress, her beauty causes many brothers to approach sexual temptation; an issue which is seen as the result of social masculinity and is further discussed in the following chapter. Since she retains her lay beauty, she remains a sexual creature, but she is now a sexual male creature. Without a bodily transformation to neutralize lay beauty into that of an ascetic practitioner, Euphrosyne finds herself as an object of lust, which is the very thing she had tried desperately to escape. The outward disguise may be able to secret her within the monastic world, but it is not enough to remove her sexuality.

Her escape from the carnal world does not go unnoticed at home. A frantic Paphnutius searches for his lost daughter throughout the narrative. As he exhausts all natural resources, he turns to the monastic community that through fervent prayer brought about her birth. He goes to the nearby monastery so that the brethren may pray on his behalf. The monks and the abbot attempt to discover the whereabouts or fate of Euphrosyne through prayer, but they fail. The hagiographer states that the prayers of Euphrosyne override the prayers of the pious men – her resolve to stay among her brethren in disguise moves God more than the prayers of her father. This, apparently, is where God wants Euphrosyne to be.

However, this turn of events is to have an adverse effect on her situation. The abbot decides to send Paphnutius to her to gain knowledge of his missing daughter. If anyone can query God on behalf of Paphnutius, it would be the most pious and revered among them. However Paphnutius does not recognize Euphrosyne as his daughter due to the bodily transformations that the hagiographer now supplies.

Ὡς οὖν εἶδε τὸν ἑαυτῆς πατέρα, ὅλη δακρύων ἐπληρώθη. Ὁ δὲ ἐνόμιζεν ὅτι χάριν κατανύξεως οὕτως ἐστίν· ὅλως γὰρ οὐκ ἐγνώρισεν αὐτὴν διὰ τὸ μαρνανθῆναι τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὑπὸ τῆς ἐγκρατείας καὶ

ἀφάτου χαμευνίας. Τῷ οὖν κουκουλλίῳ κατεκάλυπτεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς, ἵνα μὴ διὰ τινος συσσήμου ἀναγνωρισθῇ αὐτῷ.⁵⁶

“When she saw her father she was wholly filled with tears. But he thought it was because of the pricking at the heart because he did not recognize her at all due to the wasting away of her beauty under self-control and immensely sleeping on the ground. Then she covered up her face with a cowl, in order to not be distinguished to him through this reunion.”

Paphnutius is completely unaware with whom he is speaking. Passive transvestism, not necessary to fool the abbot or brethren as to her sexual identity, although there were sexual consequences, is stressed here in order to fool her father to bring him back into the plot. They have an emotional discussion and he leaves comforted. In his mind, he compares his love for this monk to the love for his daughter. Shortly after Euphrosyne is dying and Paphnutius returns to honor him and say farewell. During this meeting she reveals to him her true identity which is then relayed to the rest of the brethren. They all marvel at the fact that their brother was a woman.

Paphnutius retires to the cell of his daughter and in ten years dies. He is buried by her side. Although she flees his authoritative control over her socio-sexual body, this is a story of family reconciliation. In the end they reestablish themselves in love and are reunited through monastic piety and Christian fellowship. She escaped her father in order to protect her own spiritual and chaste life but it was necessary in order to have control over her own body and mind. At her death, once the need for anonymity to continue her monastic career expires, she reveals all and reestablishes herself as his ascetically minded daughter, an observation that is further discussed in the inward masculine chapter. Euphrosyne as a literary figure is projecting the existence and spiritual potential of a holy womanhood to external audiences.

Conclusions and Prelude

These legends depend on active and passive transvestism, especially how they function together to produce outward masculinity, to carry their female main characters through storylines for the benefit of their overall readability and theological intention. In these *Vitae* women need to pass as men to internal audiences during their monastic careers, but need to be seen by external audiences as women. Therefore, regardless of the female monk figures' outward masculinity, underneath

⁵⁶ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 203 lines 4-9.

male clothes is a holy womanhood for all audiences, internal and external, to see in the end.

Active transvestism is utilized for pragmatic reasons to provide an escape through the establishment of anonymity for each female monk character. Changes in dress, hairstyle, name, and association, are used to perform the role of a male monastic in order to abandon portions of their lay lives, namely family members, finances, and husbands. The female monks desire to be ascetically minded autonomous women, which, through the use of transvestism, they become. The masculine ruse proves to be successful in constructing anonymity through which to gain autonomy. However, to provide more complex irony and intrigue, additional obstacles are added to the plotlines, i.e. charges of fathering children, familial reunions, and the dangers of beauty, which then either deepen the need for a detailed masculine ruse or complicate it.

To provide a deeper level of concealment hagiographers use descriptions of passive transvestism. During their self-mortification, their lay beauty naturally transforms to something considered ascetically beautiful. This change in physiology could be considered an asexual shift if so many supporting characters did not approach the female monks for sex or blame pregnancies on them, therefore this transformation is instead considered bodily neutral within this thesis.

Active transvestism is proven to work only as a disguise on lesser characters semi-familiar with the female monks, but at times it proves so successful that the female monks become sexual scapegoats or objects of lust, which is discussed in detail in the following chapter. This shows that active transvestism mainly functions to move the plot along and to bring these women into additional escapades in order to test their mettle for external audiences and show the power of salvation through dedication to Christ. Upon their deathbeds, where often the female forms are laid bare before the brethren, the awe expressed by those preparing the body, which at times includes descriptions of neutralized body parts, drives home the point that the real participant in this story was a holy womanhood.

The female monks are constantly shown to be women throughout the legends, except in the legend of Anastasia. Hagiographers had no intention to portray these

women as liminal humans or as literal men. Hagiographers portray them as women continuously throughout the entire tale with the use of neutralized bodily descriptions, which never explicitly compare between the bodies of these holy women to holy men, and the use of female pronouns to refer to these monastic men. These are strong holy women characters that go to great lengths for their salvation, promote a womanhood worthy of praise, and stand as examples to all humans striving for salvation. They are able to illustrate these points to external audiences because they embody the ideology of the “male woman,” which concerns spiritual potential expressed in an accepted positive, and therefore masculine, tone, and the drama of reversal found in the story of human salvation through the figure of the transvestite. This thesis states that although male personas are projected to internal audiences, external audiences are presented with a holy womanhood underneath the masculine ruses.

In the next chapter, the further implications of this outward masculine layer are examined by scrutinizing social masculinity. Outward masculinity actively projects a male persona to others in order to provide anonymity to escape the notice of those who would recognize them as sister, wife, daughter, or woman and to participate in a strict regimen of asceticism. Their social masculinity, the gendered persona received by the internal audiences of the legends, is the result of their active and successful gender ruses. Social masculinization is often placed upon these women by the hagiographer during their reception by other characters. Here, in this chapter these monks are viewed as strong women underneath their clothing and withered bodies. In the next chapter, concerning social masculinity, they remain women behind the social male personas established by active and passive transvestism.

Chapter Five: Social Masculinity

“It is through the performer’s corporeal presence, appearance and behaviour under the spectators’ gaze that a performance takes place.”¹

Previously, outward masculinity was shown to be a pragmatic vehicle in which female characters gain a type of autonomy through anonymity to access the monastic world in male personas as single women. All acts of active transvestism have had their gender reversal and feminist symbolism reduced because familial and sexual obstacles cause masculine ruses to be necessities. The female monks, for the sake of continuity, are forced within the legends to adopt a male persona in order to fulfill religious dreams aspired to while secular, but ascetically minded, betrothed or married women. What they require is a fabricated anonymity that will allow them to escape characters with whom they are familiar.

The pragmatic quality of transvestism reveals an urgency concerning the desires of each pious female character to establish a place among the ascetic world for herself as a human within these legends. Outward deception is employed by hagiographers to place their characters within inspirational situations of redemption, hope, and salvation, and also within intriguing situations involving penitence, sex, discovery, ill-timed family reunions, notable ascetic feats, and amazed reactions caused by postmortem discoveries of their true sex.

Social masculinity

This chapter concentrates on the social reception of the outward masculine layer and the “visceral seeing” of the supporting characters within the *Vitae*, which involves the transmission and enforcement of the female monks’ male identities.² Outward and social masculinity are so closely related that they are at times difficult to separate. This is because the social body is a natural consequence of the outward or physical body. For instance, when a woman changes into male dress and shears her hair as part of an

¹ Constantinou, 2005, 17.

² Miller, 2004, 395-398.

outward masculine ruse she creates the potential for her male social identity. This results in a superficial social masculinization. Also, institutional transvestism becomes an integral part of a disguise because the female monk is associated with a certain gendered social group from that point on by supporting characters as a part of a successful social masculinity.

However, the moment each female monk projects a male persona she becomes dependent on its reception by internal audiences to live unquestioned and unhindered. The physical body and its clothing only succeed in projecting a desired form if audiences are ready to read and receive outward symbols as the subject intends and/or as the culture dictates.³ The relationship can be explained in the following way

“The body, as a vehicle of communication, is misunderstood if it is treated as a signal box, a static framework emitting and receiving strictly coded messages. The body communicates information for and from the social system in which it is a part. It should be seen as mediating the social situation in at least three ways. It is itself the field in which a feedback interaction takes place. It is itself available to be given as the proper tender for some of the exchanges which constitute the social situation. And further, it mediates the social structure by itself becoming its image.”⁴

The surface of the body is the site where interactions and cultural dialogues are exchanged in order to perceive identity, sex, and/or status. Outward masculinity is a gendered state that women present to social and private worlds to be accepted as single, monastic men.⁵ Within these legends “holy cross-dressers pass as men both inside and outside monastic communities” to show “that gender is created by particular appearances and performances and that it is not necessarily connected to an individual’s

³ Constantinou, 2005, 104-106; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (NY and London: Routledge, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Thomas J. Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18 (Mar 1990): 5; Peter Corrigan, *The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World* (London: Sage Publications, 2008).

⁴ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 83.

⁵ Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna, *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach* (NY: John Wiley and Sons, 1978), 2; Douglas, 2003, vii, 67-87; Burroughs and Ehrenreich, 1993, 1-14; Turner, 1993, 15-39.

sex.”⁶ It is in the space betwixt the main characters and internal audiences, where the gendered body resides, that their outward masculinity is received and social masculinity is constructed.

Social masculinity’s function for hagiographers is that it strengthens outward masculinity and aids in immersing holy women in storylines that grow, twist, and become more complex for inspirational and theologically geared tales. They must supply it to sustain the readability, or perhaps even believability, of the dramatic irony at the conclusions. Social masculinity stems from the fact that internal audiences believe that the outward masculine signals are honest expressions, receive these women as men, and assign to them corresponding social identities based on the type of gendered figures they are perceived to be. This produces the following results within the legends: new masculine names are accepted as valid by other characters, internal audiences often supplement the male names with titles to show a further reception of outward masculinity, these disguised women are deemed to be eunuchs in order to excuse the aberrances to their male physiology,⁷ and, at times, both male and female supporting characters are so affected by the masculine ruse that they become sexually attracted to the female monks and/or they use them as sexual scapegoats for their own sexual licentiousness.

This thesis believes that external audiences do not construct this social masculinity for the female monks. Hagiographers apply social masculinity through internal characters in order to secure the progression of the plot and intrigue of the dramatic irony. At the conclusion of the tales, where they are openly recognized and defined as women once more, the dramatic irony is then acknowledged by external audiences, who have seen these figures as strong women behind their male identities throughout the tales. External audiences see *through* the ruses and realize that women are performing in superficial masculine ways in order to safeguard a life of asceticism.⁸

⁶ Constantinou, 2005, 104.

⁷ Sidéris, 2003, 217-233.

⁸ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (NY: Routledge, 1992), 9.

Masculine names

A social element closely related to a physical disguise is the name or title of the female monk as mentioned in the previous chapter. Both are projected outwardly to establish identity, however, names and titles travel beyond the physical disguise and move into the social world as powerful designators for states of existence because they can establish masculinity separate from the disguise.

“The issue of name is an important part of the heroines’ new identities: it is a prerequisite for their treatment by the others as men. The male names they adopt allow them to exist socially as men and be placed in male contexts, such as the monasteries they enter.”⁹

A name, which is indeed part of the overall masculine ruse, is more social by nature because it abstractly secures the image projected by a subject and acts as a verbal denotation of a subject’s gendered and cultural existence even if actual visual perception of it has not occurred.¹⁰ Names supply the visual elements of the female monks’ masculine ruse with verbal authority. Their new names are gendered names, names of freedom, and masculine names for single women.

In general, names and titles prompt a certain social reception of a subject even if others have not yet laid eyes on the referent. This function is summed up well by Scott Soames, who attempts to clarify Saul A. Kripke’s published lectures on the function of names.¹¹ For instance, they function as rigid designators of subjects and identity reinforcers. They verbally transmit information on or supplement visual definitions with

⁹ Constantinou, 2005, 110.

¹⁰ M. I. Finley, “The Silent Women of Rome,” in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, ed. Laura K. McClure (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2002), 148-156; also see footnote 9 for further references.

¹¹ Scott Soames, *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

additional clusters of descriptive elements belonging to socio-cultural status.¹² Also, and very important to female monks, names can associate a subject with erroneous socio-cultural definitions and pass these along to others during conversations or introductions.

“The standard case goes roughly as follows: A name is introduced and, once introduced, is passed from one speaker to another. Each time it is passed to a new speaker, the person acquiring the name intends to use it to refer to whomever or whatever that person’s sources use it to refer to. Often when this happens, the person acquiring the name picks up substantial information about its referent in the process. However, this is not always so, and in some cases considerable misinformation may be passed along. Because of this, speakers’ answers to the question

Q. To whom or what are you using the name n to refer?
are not always reliable.”¹³

The misinformation in the case of the female transvestite monks concerns their real sex. These women are seen as and believed to be a type of gendered human that corresponds to a masculine name. After an introductory dialogue between a female monk and another character, this other character strengthens outward and social masculinity by offering the male name to others as a reference point for the female monk. Male names succeed in producing their own social masculinity apart from visual disguises because they can potentially transmit invalid information to others not yet acquainted with the subjects. Conversely also, since outward and social masculinity are tightly intertwined in the case of masculine names, once others meet the female monks whose masculine names they already know, their male names are strengthened by the observable outward masculinity and/or association with a male monastery.

In most instances these are not creative names. Hagiographers take the female monks’ true names and simply alter them with masculine endings to conform to their

¹² John R. Searle, “Proper Names,” *Mind* 67.266 (April 1958): 166-173; Gareth Evans, “The Causal Theory of Names,” in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, ed. Stephen P. Schwartz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 192-215; Saul A. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Blackwell Publishing, 1972); Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Indiana University Press, 1987), 68-88; Elizabeth Carney, “‘What’s in a Name?’ The Emergence of a Title for Royal Women in the Hellenistic Period,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah B Pomeroy (Chapel Hill and London: The University of Chapel Hill Press, 1991), 154-172.

¹³ Soames, 2002, 119-120.

outward masculinity. Additionally, hagiographers may have wanted to keep the renaming simple so that external audiences do not expend too much energy contemplating the identity of this “new” character. In this way, a male name belongs to the transvestism of a holy woman as a means to encroach upon a monastic world. It is simple to associate Mary with Marinos or Hilaria with Hilarion. This simple transformation supports this thesis’s argument that external audiences clearly see that these masculinized figures remain women throughout the legends. The names of these women are barely changed, therefore barely disguised, which shows hagiographers intended to portray these novice monastic characters as the same women.

Less often the male appellative is quite different from the original; however, hagiographers introduce this name in such close proximity to the original female name, a female pronoun, a verb form, or a demonstrative that there is little confusion to the true identity of this newly named character. However, should renaming be deemed more important when it is not a simple masculinization of female names? Can the meaning of a name point towards some sense of self for these female characters that the hagiographers intended to relay to readers? These questions are discussed in detail in the following chapter because these types of names may reveal a hagiographer’s understanding of a female monk’s self-perception or sentimentality and shed additional light on authorial intentions for these *Vitae*. For now it suffices to mention that there is only one instance examined here where a female monk chooses for herself a completely different name; this is Euphrosyne choosing the name Smaragdus. The remaining instances when a completely different name is supplied involve Apolinaria being renamed Dorotheos by a divine messenger in a dream when she is commanded to trade her seclusion for a coenobitic life and Matrona being referred to in the third person by the narrator as Babylas with an allusion to the name being given to her by her friend and confidant. However, at the present this thesis deems it important to consider the social significance of all masculine names.

Male Eunuchs and Proud Fathers

In addition to names, female monk characters are at times given supplemental titles or associations. The received titles, for instance Hilarion *the Eunuch*, are signs of how internal audiences perceive them, but not of how the female monks necessarily perceive themselves. In this chapter, issues associated with the perception of women as eunuchs are considered when they help to construct or deconstruct a social identity. Within the following chapter, a reexamination of eunuchs will make use of verbal declarations, dialogue between characters, expressed sentiments, and observable behaviors to show if any self-reflection can be read into the masculine ruse they construct.

The female monk characters reside on multiple sexual and gendered levels at various times in the tales and do live sizable portions of their monastic lives as male eunuchs, but they also live as women, female eunuchs, and sexually active men. Clearly their gendered and sexual existences are not consistent. This thesis strongly states that the one enduring nature retained throughout the tales is that of a holy womanhood – they begin and end the tales as women.

All gender types found in these legends are employed by the hagiographer for the benefit of the plot; hence why gender is so fluid within these hagiographies. The social identity that results from the female monks' outward masculinity depends on the type of person from internal audiences who is receiving the projected outward masculine persona. It is this particular supporting character that constructs the social identity of the female monk. In this way masculinity is (re)constructed differently over and over again in the same legend. Scholarship on the social body aids in viewing what the hagiographers are doing within their stories.

“The hypothesis that the human body can only be sexed, that it *is* sexed, seems accepted in every society where this idea functions as the ideological basis of sexual division (whether labor, of space, of rights and obligations, or of access to the resources of life). Since societies assume that the body cannot *not* be sexed they find it appropriate to intervene to make it so.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Guillaumin, 1993, 41.

Many scholars find in human nature the tendency to see a human as “a certain kind in an appropriate bodily style”¹⁵ or to reshape a body in order “to accommodate a particular society.”¹⁶ Supporting characters do this within the legends in order to make sense of the male physical states, either considered normal or irregular, of the female monks. This chapter’s analysis of the female monks’ social bodies as they are shaped and reshaped will show that connections with gendered states are superficial and are mainly based on the opinions of members of internal audiences.

The titles of these women, when supplied by hagiographers, reveal many different receptions. Monastic colleagues consider them to be male eunuchs because the body signals and physical disposition associated with eunuchs explain the aberrations between the physiology of the female monk and a conventional adult man. The female monks are beardless, fair of face, and delicate of voice, but are allowed entry into male institutions in male clothes with male names. Therefore, it is reasoned that these non-masculine male figures must be eunuchs, which is easily done since eunuchs had become common figures within late antique monasteries.¹⁷ This last fact would make it easy for hagiographers to use the figure of the eunuch in monastic literature without hesitation in order to show that a reshaping of a cultural body to fit a socio-sexual role can be effortlessly made. The result is a believable portrayal of women as men and male eunuchs that benefits a complex plot structure.

Lay characters construct the social identity of the female monks as such: they act like monastic men, live with men, have male names, and wear male clothes; therefore, they should or must be men. If lay characters are family members, then the masculine disguises work to render the female monks anonymous and unrecognizable. However, if lay characters are strangers, then the masculine ruse becomes an issue in the legends that adds to the suspense and danger of the tales. The latter involves their reception as sexually enticing men by female characters of the legends, with the sole exception of the

¹⁵ Douglas, 1970; 2003, 69.

¹⁶ Burroughs and Ehrenreich, 1993, 4.

¹⁷ Tougher, 2008, 72.

holy brethren surrounding Euphrosyne who express a homosexual passion. This happens in two ways: one, secular women or the brethren become sexually attracted to these “men” and two, couples find that these “men” make adequate scapegoats for unwanted pregnancies.

This thesis wishes to challenge scholars, discussed in a previous chapter, who believe that these figures represent an asexuality because it is obvious that a masculine disguise, although safeguarding them from family members and colleagues, does not obliterate the human sexuality of the female monks. At times the disguise presents its own sexual predicaments. These are women who become men and who are then received as eunuchs by some, but lusted after by others. At times they reveal their bodies at the royal court or do penance as fathers until they are discovered to be women postmortem. These added sexual elements build the intrigue of the legends; they add depth to inspirational religious tales of women enduring further hardships for the sake of ascetic goals.

Outward and social masculinity allow female monks to secure a world for themselves away from familial obstacles, but they do not succeed in providing them asexual natures or complete safety from the worries of unwanted carnal situations. In order for situations and escapades to be written into the plots, masculine disguises need to succeed at times and fail at others to reveal the steadfastness and dedication of the female monks, even under harsh punishment, for the readers of these legends. Clearly hagiographers build up and then tear down sexual states within the plot in order to fuel intentional, inspirational, and theological significance.

Textual evidence

Athanasia during the last chapter is found to reappear in the plot in male clothing without discussion of the reasons for her doing so; although one may assume that it provides safe travel and then also anonymity for the future reunion and cohabitation with her husband. The hagiographer writes that her anonymity is a product of her male fashion, male name, and bodily transformations that have occurred since her dedication into a community in the Thebaid.

To highlight her social masculinity, this thesis reenters the story at the point she joins a fellow pilgrim in the Holy Land, who happens to be her husband Andronikos. After a short while they have a conversation which results in an invitation for Athanasia to return with Andronikos to the monastery of Daniel. The story continues with the companions spending the rest of their lives together at the monastery of Andronikos practicing asceticism side by side in brotherly support.

Ἐπαναλύσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἔμειναν ἐν φόβῳ Θεοῦ ἄλλα ἔτη δώδεκα, καὶ οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη αὐτῷ.¹⁸

“They returned to his abode together in the fear of God. Twelve years passed, and it was not known who she was.”

The brethren have accepted Andronikos' companion as a brother. They use and respond to her new male name and they interact with her as a brother. The only instance that records the use of her name by a member of the brethren is when a brother speaks of the health of Athanasia, Ὁ ἀββας Ἀθανάσιος πρὸς Κύριον ὑπάγει. “The Abbot Athanasios goes towards the Lord.” After her death, which follows shortly after this in the tale, she is discovered to be a woman and her female name is quickly used by the hagiographer once again to refer to his holy woman main character. Andronikos mourns greatly for his wife, which, due to the extent of his surprise, exemplifies just how successful the male persona of Athanasia was in producing the desired level of social masculinity. Later, at Andronikos' death, the brethren bury these two lovers side by side acknowledging them as a holy pious couple, which is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Whereas the new name of Athanasia is a simple male version, but suffices when coupled with an outward ruse and bodily transformations to fool her husband and the brethren, the new male name of Apolinaria is quite different from her female name. After Apolinaria redresses herself, goes into the marsh, and is physically altered due to

¹⁸ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 51 lines 21-22.

¹⁹ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 51 lines 26.

sun, insect bites, and asceticism, she is inspired to abandon a solitary life for a struggle within an ascetic community.

ἀγνώριστος οὖν γέγονεν πᾶσιν ὅτι γυνὴ ἦν εὐνοῦχος ἐνομίζετο· ὥφθη δὲ αὐτῇ ἐν ὁράματι· λέγων ὅτι ἐὰν ἐπερωτηθεῖς τίς καλῇ εἰπὲ ὅτι δωρόθεος· πρωΐας δὲ γενομένης ὑπήντησεν αὐτὴν ὁ ἅγιος μακάριος· καὶ λέγει πρὸς αὐτὸν εὐλόγησον πάτερ· οἱ δὲ δόσαντες ἀλλήλοις τὴν ἀγάπην περιεπάτουν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἐπερώτησεν δὲ αὐτὸν δωρόθεος λέγων πάτερ τίς εἶ· ὁ δὲ εἶπεν ἐγὼ εἰμὶ μακάριος· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ποιήσον ἀγάπην ἑασόν με οἰκῆσαι μετὰ τῶν ἀδελφῶν· καὶ παρέσχεν αὐτῷ εὐθέως κελλίον.²⁰

“Therefore the woman was unrecognizable to everyone because she was considered a eunuch. She received a vision that said, ‘If you are asked what to call yourself, say Dorotheos.’ When it was morning, she approached the holy Makarios and said to him ‘Bless me Father.’ Giving to one another brotherly love they walked around in the desert. Dorotheos asked him, saying, ‘Father who are you?’ He said, ‘I am Makarios.’ And she said to him, ‘Bless me as a brother and permit me to live with the brothers.’ And he immediately granted to him a cell.”

This legend is unique for it is the only one where a completely new name, not a masculinized version of a female name, is given through divine instruction. The meaning of this new name, as it functions to perhaps reveal an element of her personality, is discussed at length in the following chapter on inward masculinity. External audiences understand from the passage above that a change of name has occurred as a heavenly sanctioned pseudonym; heaven seems keen in aiding Apolinaria to complete her ascetic dreams. Shortly after the above interaction, the hagiographer specifically mentions her reception by Macarius.

ὁ δὲ Θεὸς θέλων δεῖξαι τὴν ἀνδρείαν αὐτῆς οὐκ ἐφανερώσεν τῷ ἀββᾷ μακαρίῳ τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς ὅτι γυνὴ ἦν· ἀλλ’ ὡς εὐνοῦχος ἀνὴρ ἐλογίζετο παρ’ αὐτοῦ.²¹

“God wished to present her as manly and did not reveal to the Abbot Makarios that she was a woman. He considered her a male eunuch.”

It is quite interesting that the hagiographer makes it a point to say that *she* is considered a manly, male eunuch and not a woman. If ever redundancy was meant to stress a point

²⁰ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 157, lines 7-13.

²¹ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 157, lines 26-29.

then this is clearly an example. Since the hagiographer uses redundancy, this thesis believes that the hagiographer stresses not the eunuchial quality of Apolinaria herself, but of the male eunuchial quality belonging to her masculine ruse and social masculinity. This specific reference to the figure of the male eunuch makes sense here for it has been shown that late antiquity acknowledged a sexed eunuch where one could be considered either a male or female eunuch and the definition of the eunuch at its most symbolic and broad sense includes ascetic women.²² The hagiographer may have wanted to portray a male version of this figure to external audiences that may not have felt it strange to refer to a woman as a eunuch. Therefore the hagiographer does this to ensure acknowledgement of a constructed male persona within the story.

To further her association with a male eunuch figure, the hagiographer writes that her sister is brought into the royal court to identify Apolinaria as the monk that performed her healing. This brings together all the family members into the ruse. This can be seen as a method to determine if the right monk had been summoned, but for the legend it is a final test to show the success of her outward masculinity. Her sister refers to her as ὁ εὐνοῦχος ὁ μετὰ θεὸν ποιήσας με ὕγιῃ.²³ “the eunuch, who with God, made me whole.” However, they are convinced that Apolinaria is sexually a man because they blame their daughter’s pregnancy on her.

During the legend in which she plays the role of a male monk the name Dorotheos is used. However, when she reveals her true identity to her father in order to quell derogatory opinions on the monks of Scetis because of the pregnant appearance of the princess, the name Apolinaria is used once again at court because she is seen as a woman and a daughter. After her return to the desert she resumes her male pseudonym while in the company of the brethren until death. Once again she becomes a man within the legend. This changeability proves that the social reception of the female monks is not

²² Kathryn Ringrose, “Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium,” in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. Gilbert H. Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 86; Sidéris, 2003, 226.

²³ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 160, line 2.

dependant on their true sex or person behind the ruse, but on those surrounding them who receive their projected identities.

It is convenient to examine next the legend of Hilaria since her story is so similar to Apolinaria's. As discussed in the previous chapter, after hearing a scripture reading that seemed to reinforce her aspirations to lead an ascetic life, Hilaria dresses as a soldier to escape the palace. The ship captain allows his ship to be commandeered because this soldier who holds a writ from the emperor appears to be genuine. The captain addresses her as "Lord Knight," but here the hagiographer betrays her true sex as he reminds external audiences that she is a woman. The ship captain uses the Greek word for lord, "κύριος," but, although copticized, with a feminine ending, "ΚΥΡΕΗ." However, the ship captain remains unaware that he has aboard his ship a woman, let alone the eldest princess. Thus it proves that militaristic transvestism armed with a writ of authority from the emperor is successful in providing anonymity for a princess. Later she meets a deacon who is willing to travel with her to the monastery of Pambo, and he addresses her in the same way as the ship captain. No matter what male title she holds, whether lord or later eunuch, the hagiographer uses female pronouns and feminine verbs throughout the story for Hilaria. External audiences are primed to receive her as a woman throughout the tale.

Once admitted into the monastery the soldier Hilaria pleads with Pambo that he is ready for a strict ascetic lifestyle found within this monastery. Pambo relents and offers to her the male monastic habit. She spends many years in his monastery and even though Pambo is privy to her ruse because of a divine dream, as discussed in the previous chapter, the others are unaware.

ΜΝΝCΑ ΨΙΤΕ ΔΕ ΝΡΟΜΠΕ ΑΥΝΑΥ ΕΤΩΕΕΡΕ ΩΗΜ ΧΕ ΜΝ ΜΟΡΤ
ΜΜΟC· ΑΥΩ ΑΥΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟC ΧΕ ΖΛΛΑΡΙΟΝ ΠΕCΙΟΥΡ· ΕΠΙΔΗ ΕΥΕΝ
ΖΑΖ ΝΡΩΜΕ ΖΜ ΠΕΙCΧΗΜΑ ΝΤΕΙΜΙΝΕ.²⁴

"After nine years, they saw that the young girl was beardless. And they called her Hilarion the Eunuch; since there are many men of this sort in [monastic] fashion."

²⁴ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 6, lines 27-30.

This is the social reception of Hilaria by the brethren. Through the internal audience's reception of her emaciated and withered female form as described by the hagiographer and her abnormal male physiology, Hilaria is seen as their resident male eunuch. Hilaria may have been considered a biological eunuch, who is incapable of sex, or an ascetic so excelled in self-control as to receive this title because when the younger possessed princess arrives at the monastery, she primarily comes to mind as the best, and perhaps safest, choice for her healer.

ΑΠΑ ΠΑΜΒΩ ΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΥΑΚΚΙΤΗΣ ΝΝΑΡΧΑΙΟΣ ΠΕΧΑÇ ΝΑÇ ΧΕ ΧΙ
 ΝΤΕΪΚΟΥΪ ΝΩΕΕΡΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΕΚΜΑ ΝΩΩΠΕ· ΝΓΩΛΗΛ ΕΧΩC
 ΨΑΝΤΕ ΠΧΟΕΙC ΧΑΡΙΖΕ ΝΑC ΜΠΤΑΛΒΟ – ΝΤΟÇ ΔΕ ΠΕΧΑÇ ΝΑÇ ΧΕ
 ΜΠΑ†ΠΩΖ ΕΝΕΪΨΙ ΝΤΕΙΔΟΤ ΕΤΡΑΧΙ CΖΙΜΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΑΜΑ ΝΩΩΠΕ·
 ΠΕΪΖΩΒ ΠΑΪ ΠΑΖΕΝΡΩΜΕ ΝΑΤΠΑΘΟC ΝΕ· ΠΕΦΙΛΟCΟΦΟC ΔΕ ΑΠΑ
 ΜΑΡΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΠΕΧΑÇ ΧΕ ΤΑΑC ΝΕΛΛΑΡΙΟΝ ΠΕCΪΟΥΡ· ΝΤΟÇ ΓΑΡ
 ΠΕΤΕΥΟΥΝ ΩΘΟΜ ΜΜΟÇ ΕΧΙ CΖΙΜΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΕCΜΑ ΝΩΩΠΕ ΑΥΩ
 ΑÇ† ΝΤΚΟΥΪ ΝΩΕΕΡΕ ΝΤΟΟΤC ΝΤΕCΩΝΕ· ΑCΧΙΤC ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΕCΜΑ
 ΝΩΩΠΕ.²⁵

“Apa Pambo called to an aged ascetic and said to him, ‘Take this young girl into the place where you live. Pray for her until the Lord grants her healing.’ But he [aged ascetic] said to him, ‘I have not reached so great a level that I can take a woman into my abode. This is a task for those men who are free of passions.’ The philosopher Apa Martyrion said, ‘Give her to Hilarion the Eunuch; for he is one that has strength to take a woman into his abode.’ And he gave the young girl to her sister and she brought her into her abode.”

This is an ironic passage because Pambo, who is aware by this point in the legend of her true sex, does not send the princess to Hilaria at first. Could this be received by external audiences as Pambo attempting to protect Hilaria's anonymity? Pambo may not have sent the princess to Hilaria lest she recognize “him” as her sister and cause a great ascetic career to prematurely end. However, Father Martyrion suggests Hilarion as the best candidate. Martyrion is not privy to the masculine ruse, but views Hilarion as capable of performing the healing because he possesses great self-control. Hilaria, the male monk and eunuch, is deemed to be at such a state of dispassion that it is safe for a young maiden to be in close contact with him.

²⁵ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 6, lines 27-30.

Hilaria prays for her sister and succeeds in healing her. However, the proximity and the mechanics of the healing, namely the embracing, kissing, and sleeping on the same bench, disturbs the emperor greatly and Hilaria is subsequently summoned in front of her father, the emperor, to expand on the details. Hilaria reveals her true identity at court to dispel any negative reputations for the monks of Scetis that may stem from her behavior towards the princess. Hilaria is reunited with her family for a number of months before resuming her male identity, returning to the desert, and living out the rest of her life within the monastery as a male monk.

The description of Matrona's transvestism includes a metaphorical association with the eunuch that foreshadows the reception of her social masculinity later in the story. After she convinces her husband to give his consent for her participation in her last religious vigil, she goes to stay with her friend and that night Matrona receives a dream where monks rescue her from her husband and provide safety. This dream inspires her to join a male community instead of a female one for protection and a social anonymity. This same passage was referred to in the previous chapter, but it is useful to repeat its use here because the hagiographer uses the term eunuch to describe the social reception of the social figure she is to embody for internal audiences.

Ἐκ τούτου οὖν συνῆκεν, ὅτι ἐν ἀνδρικῷ μοναστηρίῳ δεῖ αὐτὴν μονάσαι καὶ διαλαθεῖν τὸν ἄνδρα. Καὶ ἀποκειραμένη τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ εἰς εὐνούχον μετασχηματισθεῖσα, εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους Ἀποστόλους σὺν τῇ μνημονευθείσῃ ἀπῆλθεν²⁶

“Therefore from this [dream] she understood that it was necessary for her to enter a male monastery in order to escape the notice of her husband. Cutting her hair and changing into the clothes of a eunuch, she went to the church of the Holy Apostles with the aforementioned one [Eugenia].”

The hagiographer refers to the eunuchial form that Matrona simulates. A description of Matrona's outward feminine body signals, namely fairness, white skin, and brightness of countenance, which are described later in the legend, coupled with an accepted outward masculinity causes her to be received as a eunuch. The brethren of Bassianos' monastery

²⁶ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.792, 4 lines 10-15.

assume that this novice's socio-gender identity aligns with the outward masculine form that they observe.

Due to her accepted male persona, she lives as a eunuch amongst the brethren and is described as surpassing many of them in dedication and ascetic feats. She is accepted on masculine terms. They call her by her male name Babylas, work side by side with her, and are fooled by her outward mannerisms and appearance. However, although pierced earlobes nearly foul the ruse at one point, she is quick to dismiss such inquiries or physical abnormalities with lies. Her ability to protect herself through deceptive explanations does nothing to quell her fear of discovery. She experiences severe anxiety over the impossibility of her situation, but continues her endeavours at the monastery of Bassianos nevertheless.

Soon her fears are justified for the next major event in the plot involves Bassianos and his colleague Akakios, the superior of the monastery of Abramios, receiving dreams that reveal the true sexual identity of Matrona. During a short “woe is me speech” when she is asked to appear before Bassianos to explain her ruse she refers to her social masculinity as eunuchial once again.

ὅτι ἐγνώσθη ὃ εἰμι, καὶ οὐκέτι ὡς ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς διαλέγομαι, οὐκέτι ὡς εὐνοῦχος νοοῦμαι καὶ Βαβυλᾶς φωνοῦμαι, ἀλλὰ πάλιν γυνὴ ὀρώμαι καὶ Ματρῶνα καλοῦμαι.²⁷

“It is now known who I am. No longer am I considered a brother amongst the brethren; no longer am I thought to be a eunuch called Babylas, but again I am seen to be a woman called Matrona.”

The dialogue during the interrogation of Matrona is examined in the next chapter for it reveals the desires and motivations that the hagiographer penned as coming from Matrona herself. However, here, Matrona is bewailing the fact that people will no longer consider her a male eunuch, which will destroy her anonymous masculine persona that she had worked to establish for her autonomy. Matrona does not make a connection between herself and this figure beyond its use as a social element of disguise that results

²⁷ *Matrona*, *AASS*, Nov. 3.794, 7 lines 12-17.

from and helps to validate her outward masculine ruse. After said interrogation, she is asked to leave the monastery, to which she must agree.

Matrona is the only female monk examined here who experiences a type of social masculinity in male clothes while it is positively known by internal audiences that she is a woman. The hagiographer reports that people knew her as a holy woman and, more specifically, ἡ μετὰ ἀνδρῶν μονάσσα καὶ λαθοῦσα ἐπὶ κρόνον²⁸ “the one who lived as a monk and was hidden among men for a time,” which is an act of strength and endurance within the legend that magnifies her spiritual power to the level of healer. Social masculinity is accepted by internal audiences as descriptive and symbolic, i.e. it describes her past associations, her great asceticism, and her gifted healing powers. This masculine praise directed at Matrona takes place even though it is common knowledge that she is a woman using a masculine guise to escape her husband. Also, discussed in the next chapter, but deemed important enough to be repeated here, Matrona is granted the right to use the male habit by Bassianos within her own convent for herself and her sisters.

οὐκ ἔρεᾶ δὲ ζωνάρια καὶ μαφόρια, οἷσπερ εἰώθασι γυναῖκες κεχρηῆσθαι, αὐτῇ δέδωκεν, ἀλλὰ ζωνάρια λώρινα πλατέα ἀνδρικὰ μαῦρα καὶ παλλία ἀνδρικὰ λευκά.²⁹

“He did not give to her woolen girdles and veils as is usually used by women, but the wide, dark leather girdles and white cloaks of men.”

This can be seen as a symbolic social masculinity, which stems from the language of praise that involves the “male woman,” and should be intertextually associated with the figure of Thecla, who, through the establishment of her own social masculinity, taught others of Christ within the public sphere.

A social masculinity, when projected by one known to be a woman, especially when sanctioned by a renowned holy male figure, is a masculine form that calls for respect and an acknowledgment of the socio-spiritual potential in women. Since dress is a form of language extended outward to a social audience, this can be read alongside the

²⁸ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.797, 12 lines 9-11.

²⁹ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.812, 51 lines 45-48.

positive vocal language used to describe women as masculine, which is discussed as a metaphorical tool to praise holy women in the third chapter of this thesis. Matrona's retention of the male monastic habit can be viewed here as an outward materialistic acknowledgement of her strength and leadership as abbess, which should be received as a similar type of manliness possessed by other renowned holy women since these female monk hagiographies participate in intertextual dialogues with stories of other holy women and men.

The *Vita* of Anastasia is unique among the rest due to the lack of a male name and the manner in which the term eunuch is utilized. Unlike most female monk legends where a clear progression of events occur, which usually involve audiences reading about lay lives previous to escapes, and then the motivations, ruses, and renamings that follow, this legend begins with the story of an anonymous eunuch and only at the end of the story does the abbot recount her story as a lesson to a disciple. It is questionable whether external audiences truly realize they are reading or listening to a story about a religious woman. Anastasia is presented from the start as an anonymous eunuch who goes into the desert for refuge and finds Daniel. Again for consideration, this thesis uses the opening lines of her *Vita* that read:

Ευνούχος τις ἔμενεν εἰς τὴν ἐσωτερὰν ἔρημον τῆς Σκήτεως· εἶχεν δὲ τὸ κελλίον ὡς ἀπὸ μιλίων δέκα ὀκτὼ τῆς αὐτῆς Σκήτεως. Ἀπαξ οὖν τῆς ἐβδομάδος παρέβαλλεν τῷ ἄββᾷ Δανιὴλ νυκτὸς μηδενο νοοῦτος εἰ μὴ τί γε τοῦ μαθητοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ μόνου. Παρήγγειλεν δὲ ὁ γέρων τῷ μαθητῇ αὐτοῦ ἵνα γεμίξῃ κέραμον ὕδατος τῷ αὐτῷ ευνούχῳ ἅπαξ τῆς ἐβδομάδος καὶ τιθεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ κρούειν καὶ ἀναχωρεῖν καὶ μὴ ὁμιλεῖν μετ' αὐτοῦ.³⁰

“There was a eunuch who stayed in the inner desert of Scetis. He had a cell that was 18 miles from Scetis itself. Therefore, once during the week at night alone so no one recognized, he approached the Abbot Daniel, no one knowing except his disciple alone. The old man ordered his disciple to fill the water jar for the eunuch once a week, place it for him, knock, and withdraw and not speak with him.”

Anastasia is not renamed within this legend for no other monk saw nor had contact with her. Also, there is no need to describe any bodily changes or to clearly

³⁰ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 51, lines 4-10.

reference any transvestism until the conclusion of her tale when she is undressed and the monks espy her withered female form for the first time. There is no one to fool since Daniel is a co-conspirator. The only clear evidence that Daniel is presenting Anastasia to other monks as a man within this legend is the use of male pronouns during his instructions concerning her. This is the equivalent to the creation and the transmission of new male names within other legends. By using male pronouns to refer to Anastasia to the other monks of his community, Daniel is perpetuating and supporting her male identity because a name, and any gender pronouns associated with a figure, has an independent ability to construct social masculinity separate to a physical disguise.

Mary also receives a clear connection with the eunuch figure from her hagiographer, but she is clearly known to be a woman from the start. However, the reception of her as a eunuch is challenged when she becomes a male scapegoat for another's sexual promiscuity. As part of her transvestism, her father, Eugenios, renames her immediately following her outward masculinization transformation.

‘Ο δὲ ποιήσας τοὺς λόγους τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ διαδώσας πάντα τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτῷ πτωχοῖς καὶ ἀποθρίξας τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνδύσας αὐτὴν ἀνδρεῖον σχῆμα μετωνόμασεν αὐτὴν Μαρίνον.³¹

“The father listened to his daughter's words and donated all his goods to the poor, cut off her hair, clothed her in male dress, and renamed her Marinos.”

With this male name she enters a monastery with her father.

Καὶ προσλαβόμενος τὴν θυγατέρα αὐτοῦ εἰσῆλθεν ἐν τῷ κοινοβίῳ

“And taking his daughter, he entered a religious community.”

She may have a new male name within the story, but she will still be known as Eugenios' daughter. This identification will continue throughout the story for external audiences even though internal characters are fooled into receiving her as a eunuch and/or a man. Her fellow monks repeatedly refer to her as ἀββα and ἀδελφέ and all characters use male pronouns to refer to her.

³¹ *Mary*, Richard, 88, lines 25-28.

Socially within the monastery Mary is deemed a eunuch because she possesses a delicate voice and a fair face, which would suggest that the brethren were thinking of a biological eunuch, but others think these physical aberrations are due to her great asceticism.

Ποιήσασα δέ τινας χρόνους ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ, ἐνόμιζον ὅτι εὐνουῆχος ἔστιν, διὰ τὸ ἀγένειον καὶ τὸ λεπτὸν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτῆς· ἄλλοι δὲ ὑπελάμβανον ὅτι ἀπὸ τῆς πολλῆς ἀσκήσεως τὸ διὰ δύο ἡμερῶν ἐσθίειν αὐτήν.³²

“After she had lived for many years in the monastery many supposed that she was a eunuch because she was beardless and possessed a soft voice, but others believed it resulted from extensive asceticism because she ate only every two days.”

The monks present at her monastery consign her to a sexual category in order to understand her appearance. Since Eugenios is no longer there to give substance and support to her male ruse, her fellow monks make sense of her outward appearance on their own. From the passage above, a reader assumes that some type of conversation or discussion ensues amongst the brethren concerning her social masculinity and that these two theories are prominent. It is not until this eunuch is charged with impregnating a local innkeeper's daughter that the latter hypothesis found in the above passage is proven correct, and then it is not until her female body is discovered upon burial that a realization of her as a woman is made.

The only female lay character assumes Mary to be a sexually functioning man. The same type of delicacy or ascetic beauty that describes Marinus the eunuch is used later to promote a very different matter. Her beauty draws the attention of a promiscuous daughter of an innkeeper and a concupiscent soldier as they conspire to cover their own sexual licentiousness.

³² *Mary*, Richard, 88, lines 35-39.

Εἶπε δὲ αὐτῇ ὁ στρατιώτης· Ἐὰν γνωσθῇ τοῦτο παρὰ τοῦ πατρός σου, εἰπὲ ὅτι· Ὁ μοναχὸς ὁ νεώτερος, ἐκεῖνος ἐκοιμήθη μετ' ἐμοῦ· Γνοὺς δὲ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτῆς ὅτι κατὰ γαστρὸς ἔχει, ἐξέταζεν αὐτὴν λέγων· Πόθεν σοι τοῦτο; Καὶ ἔβαλε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐπάνω τοῦ Μαρίνου λέγουσα ὅτι· Ὁ νεώτερος, ὁ μοναχὸς ὁ τοῦ κοινοβίου ὁ εὐειδής, ὁ λεγόμενος Μαρίνος, ἐκεῖνος ἐποίησέ με ἔγκουν.³³

“The soldier said to her, ‘If your father should learn of this, say to him that, ‘It was the young monk who slept with me.’ Her father realized that she was pregnant and questioned her saying, ‘How is it possible for this to happen to you?’ And she accused Marinos saying that, ‘The young monk of the monastery, the attractive one called Marinos, he impregnated me.’”

They choose Marinos as their scapegoat, and distinguish “him” from the others by referring to his physical attractiveness; the deception needed once the daughter appears as pregnant. Mary has not been described by the hagiographer as being withered away or shrunk by asceticism and the environment – she is only beardless and apparently retains a type of beauty regardless of the physical and mental struggle at the monastery. No description of her as bodily neutral figure is present.

In fact, the innkeeper’s daughter is so fooled by transvestism that she can neither distinguish between Mary and the rest of the male brethren nor recognize her as a fellow woman. Socially, Mary is received as a man by another woman due to her outward masculinity. For the hagiographer Mary needs to remain attractive in order to be singled out amongst the other monks for a worthy scapegoat. This is after all a theological story focused on an individual’s strength, endurance, and repentance. In the following chapter Mary’s speech during her indictment is discussed, but for now it suffices to say that she is accused and she accepts her punishment “as a man” instead of revealing her true identity. The monastery is her home – and as far as the hagiographer is concerned, she will not leave it. She must stay to prove her resolve and dedication; she must stay to be an icon for inspiration and salvation after the climax of the story where the brethren undress her female body for burial.

Mary is subsequently banished from the monastery. She sits alone outside the gate until her son is born and the innkeeper comes and throws him at her feet.

³³ *Mary*, Richard, 89, lines 63-69.

Εὗρε δὲ τὸν Μαρίνον ἔξωθεν τοῦ πυλῶνος καθεζόμενον καὶ προσρίψας αὐτῷ τὸ παιδίον λέγει· Ἰδοὺ τὸ τέκνον σου ὃ κακῶς ἔσπειρας· λάβε αὐτό.³⁴

“He found Marinos sitting outside of the gate and threw the child at him and said, ‘Behold the child you have wickedly sown. Take it.’”

Eventually, due the pleading of the brethren, the abbot allows Marinos to reenter the monastery albeit at the lowest rank along with her son. The child is presented as viewing Mary as a male figure, namely his father, with which other characters must agree upon since Marinos proved to be a sexually functioning man who engendered a son. The child follows Mary around calling out and addressing her with a new male title, “father.”

Εἶχε δὲ αἰὲν τὸ παιδίον ἀκολουθοῦν ὀπισθεν αὐτοῦ, κλαῖον καὶ λέγον· Τατά, τατά³⁵

“The child continuously followed behind him crying and saying, ‘Dada, dada.’”

It is ironic, but Mary is a part of a second father-son team within her monastery. She possesses the largest spectrum of sexual and gender roles of all the female monks. She has been received in the story as a young woman, daughter, male eunuch, man, father, and finally woman again at the tale’s conclusion when her true identity is discovered and the false charges are dismissed; notice however, that her womanhood is the only constant throughout.

Theodora is another transvestite female monk who becomes a sexual scapegoat. In this legend a laywoman attempts to entice Theodora sexually, but when her advances are rejected she seeks the companionship of another man. This laywoman later blames Theodora for her pregnancy. This is quite ironic because Theodora enters into an ascetic lifestyle in order to perform intense penance for her own adulterous sexual escapades. By outwardly becoming a man and escaping her husband, she gains the ability to repent her own sinful fornication undisturbed within a monastic setting; however, her outward masculinity causes sexual temptation to be aroused in other female characters who are fooled into socially receiving her as a man.

³⁴ *Mary*, Richard, 91, lines 99-102.

³⁵ *Mary*, Richard, 92, lines 127-128.

As is seen in the previous chapter, Theodora abruptly appears in the tale offering to an abbot a male name. It must be assumed that she uses transvestism to some extent or else the name could not be accepted socially.

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· τίς καλῇ; καὶ εἶπεν· Θεόδωρος· ὁ δὲ γέρων εἶπεν· ἀδελφὲ Θεόδωρε, νηστεύειν ἔχεις, καὶ ἀδιαλείπτως προσεχέσθαι.³⁶

“And he said to him, ‘What are you called?’ And she said, ‘Theodoros.’ The old man said, ‘Brother Theodoros, you have to fast and unceasingly devote yourself.’”

After this exchange she is admitted into his monastery and lives a very pious and penitential life for many years. The outward ruse is strong enough here to support a male name even though no bodily transformations have been discussed up to this point.

On behalf of the brethren she goes into the city with camels to procure goods for and to sell the wares of the community. During this business trip Theodora must stay overnight in the stables with the camels away from the monastery. Once night falls a young maiden awakens her and offers sexual favors.

Καὶ ἔδωκαν αὐτῇ τὸν σταβλὸν καὶ ἀναπαύσασα τὰς καμήλους ἐκοιμήθη πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτῶν· νυκτὸς δὲ οὕσης, ἰδοὺ, κοράσιον θυγάτηρ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἡγουμένου μοναστηρίου ἦλθεν ὑπολαβούσα ἄνδρα αὐτὴν εἶναι ἐν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ ἐλθοῦσα ἐν τῷ σταβλῷ ἐνθα ἀνέκειτο πλησίον τῶν καμήλων ἐνυξεν τὴν μακαρίαν Θεοδώραν καὶ λέγει· δεῦρο κοιμήθητι μετ’ ἐμοῦ· ἡ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· οὐκ ἤθησα εἰ μὴ παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν καμήλων κοιμασθαι· ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπος κοιμώμενος εἰς τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ στάβλου καὶ ἀπελθοῦσα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ κόρη ἐκοιμήθη μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ συνέλαβεν.³⁷

“And he gave to her the stable. Resting the camels she [Theodora] slept at their feet. Night fell and, behold, a young daughter of that same leading monastery came to her, having taken her to be a man, she who is in truth [a woman], and, having went into the stable, there she reclined near the camels and pricked the blessed Theodora and said, ‘Come hither, sleep with me.’ And she said to her, ‘I don’t want to sleep except at the feet of the camels.’ Also, there was a man sleeping in the other part of the stable and going to him the girl slept with him and had sex.”

Theodora has been socially received as a man by the supporting characters who give to her accommodation, which allows this young girl in the story to want “him” as such.

³⁶ *Theodora*, Wessely, 28, lines 11-12.

³⁷ *Theodora*, Wessely, 35, lines 4-12.

The lusty young woman propositioning strangers in the stables believes, based on outward masculinity and the fact that Theodora is on monastery business, that she is making advances to a real man. Even though this young girl hears the voice of Theodora, which is presumably softer than a man's and more in line with that of a eunuch, she believes that this is a man who may want to sleep with her.

Just as in the *Vita* of Mary, the maiden who makes sexual advances becomes pregnant from a night of passion with another man and blames this pregnancy on the visiting monk Theodoros during a later interrogation.

ἐξήταζον αὐτὴν ἰσχυρῶς καὶ ἡρώτων αὐτὴν λέγοντες· εἶπε ἡμῖν τις σε ἐφθείρεν; λέγει αὐτοῖς ἡ κόφη· ‘Ὁ ἀββᾶς Θεόδωρος ἐκοιμήθη μετ’ ἐμοῦ.’³⁸

“They questioned her strongly and examined her saying, ‘Tell us who corrupted you?’ The girl said to them, ‘Abbot Theodoros slept with me.’”

Here the young girl refers to Theodora by her male name. It is unclear in the story at what point this young girl, who only appears in the plot to find a sexual companion, becomes privy to the identity of this monk, but this establishes the social masculinity of Theodora for the other supporting characters now active in the tale. The pregnant laywoman is able to name the guilty “man” for those questioning her. These unnamed supporting characters, which enter into the story at this point, do not need to see Theodora to believe her to be a man. Based on a pregnancy and a charge of sexual promiscuity of a monk who possesses a male name, Theodora is sexually received as a man without visual evidence. Here a name carries with it enough power to fuel, or at least support, a male ruse on its own. It is important to note that within the dialogues of members of the internal audience the name Theodoros is used, but within the narrative the hagiographer continues to use her female name for external audiences.

Theodora is banished with her child and must provide for their sustenance outside the monastery walls. A decade later she is readmitted along with her son. In the monastery she remains until her death, during which the abbot receives a vision. In this vision angels refer to this female monk as a bride of Christ and explain Theodora's

³⁸ *Theodora*, Wessely, 35, lines 14-16.

penitential predicament, ruse, and reasons for rearing a child that is not her own. The abbot and other members of the brethren run to her cell and witness this awe-inspiring fact as they view her female form for the first time.

Euphrosyne proves to be the odd “man” out for she is the only female monk to provoke a homosexual passion while active within a monastery. Once she heeds the advice of visiting ascetics, which includes escaping her father and shaving her head to sustain a virginal life, she decides the best method to escape the notice of her father would be to dress as a man and enter a male monastery instead of a convent. She journeys to the neighboring monastery to ask permission to join the brethren.

Ἡ δὲ Εὐφροσύνη ἔρχεται εἰς τὸ κοινόβιον εἰς ὃ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτῆς εἶχε τὴν γνῶσιν, καὶ καταμηνύει ἑαυτὴν διὰ τοῦ θυρωροῦ λέγουσα· Εἰπέ τῷ ἀββᾷ ὅτι εὐνούχος ἀπὸ τοῦ παλατίου ἐστὶ, καὶ συντυχεῖν ὑμῖν θέλει. Εἰσελθὼν οὖν ὁ θυρωρὸς διεσάφησε τῷ ἡγουμένῳ τὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ κελεύει αὐτὸν εἰσελθεῖν. Καὶ εἰσελθοῦσα ἔβαλε μετάνοιαν, καὶ γενομένης εὐχῆς ἐκάθισαν, καὶ λέγει ὁ ἀββᾶς· Τί ἐσκύλη πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἡ θεοφίλειά σου; Ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· Ἐγὼ τοῦ παλατίου γέγονα, καὶ ἐπεθύμησα τὸν μοναχικὸν βίον. Καὶ ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν ἡ ἀγία οὐ πάνυ οἶδε τοῖς ἀσκηταῖς ἡσυχίαν παρέχειν· ἀκήκοα δὲ περὶ τῆς ἀγιωσύνης σου, καὶ ἦλθον συνοικῆσαι ὑμῖν, εἴ γε πληροφορεῖσθε τοῦ δεξασθᾶί με. Ἐχω δὲ καὶ πράγματα πολλὰ, καὶ εἰ οἰκοδομηθῶ ἐπὶ τῇ ἡσυχίᾳ, φέρω αὐτὰ ὧδε.

Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ ἡγούμενος· Καλῶς ἦλθες, τέκνον· ἰδοὺ τὸ μοναστήριον ἐνώπιόν σου· εἴ σοι ἀρέσκει, καθέζου μεθ' ἡμῶν. Τί δαὶ λέγεται τὸ ὄνομά σου; Λέγει αὐτῷ ἡ Εὐφροσύνη· Σμάραγδος. Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἀββᾶς· Ἐπειδὴ νεώτερος εἶ, καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύνασαι καθίσαι, δεόν ἔτι σοι λαβεῖν ἐπιστάτην, ἵνα σοι διδάξῃ τὰ σύμβολα τῆς μοναχικῆς πολιτείας. Καὶ λέγει τῷ ἀββᾷ· Ὡς κελεύεις ποιῶ. Καὶ ἐξενέγκας ὁ Σμάραγδος τὰ πεντακόσια νομίσματα, δίδωσιν εἰς χεῖρας τοῦ ἡγουμένου εἰπὼν· Λάβε ταῦτα, καὶ ἐὰν ἴδω ὅτι δύναμαι ἡσυχάσαι ὧδε, ἔρχονται καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ. Καλεῖ οὖν ὁ ἀββᾶς ἓνα τῶν ἀδελφῶν ὀνόματι Ἀγάπιον, ἄνδρα ἅγιον καὶ ἀπαθέστατον, καὶ παραδίδωσιν αὐτὸν τὸν Σμάραγδον λέγων· Ἰδού, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὗτος υἱός σου ἐστὶ καὶ μαθητής.³⁹

“Euphrosyne went into the community in which her father had known, and she informed the doorkeeper of herself saying, ‘Say to the abbot that a eunuch from the palace is here, and wishes to join you.’ Therefore, going in, the doorkeeper told the superior about the matter, and he ordered him to enter. And having entered, she prostrated out of repentance, received blessings, and sat down. The abbot said, ‘What causes you to come to us, the beloved of God?’ She said, ‘I

³⁹ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 200, lines 8-30.

was born in the palace, and I have love for the monastic life. And our city has heard of all the holiness that asceticism peacefully provides. I heard about your holiness, and I came to live with you all, if indeed it assures you to receive me. I have many affairs, and I am fashioned for silence. I wish to bear it here.’ The superior said to her, ‘Appropriately you came, child. Behold the monastery is before you; if you are pleased, sit down with us. By what name are you called?’ Euphrosyne said to him, ‘Smaragdus.’ And the abbot said to him, ‘Since you are young, and are not able to live by yourself, it is fitting still for you to take a master, in order that you are taught the Rule of the way of life of the monastery.’ And she said to the abbot, ‘I will do as you order.’ And Smaragdus brought out 500 coins, placing these into the hands of the superior said, ‘Take these, and if I know that I am able to live quietly, I will bring the remainder.’ The abbot therefore called in one of the brothers who was called Agapios, a holy man and one detached, and entrusted him Smaragdus saying, ‘Behold, from now this is your son and disciple.’”

At the beginning of this long set of passages, the doorkeeper believes that he is looking at a male eunuch. Euphrosyne informs him that she is one and, based on her dress and perhaps delicate outward appearance and voice, the doorkeeper tells the abbot that a eunuch is standing outside waiting for counsel. Euphrosyne, like Matrona, is aware that her outward appearance, which is described as particularly beautiful by the hagiographer at the beginning of her story, if received as male, will correspond better to that of a eunuch. She uses this to her advantage and uses this to build up a false personal history as part of her male disguise.

As seen above, based only on the testimony of the doorkeeper, the abbot, upon hearing the word eunuch and associating a type of male person with this title, tells the doorkeeper to let the male eunuch enter. Euphrosyne converses with the abbot and falsifies her personal history even further. The abbot is convinced that this eunuch is indeed sincere in his desire to enter into a monastic life and asks his name, to which Euphrosyne replies with Smaragdus. The abbot uses Smaragdus to address her and to introduce her to others, most notably an aged and pious ascetic who is requested to consider this novice eunuch his *son* and disciple. This is a simple transference of masculinity onto the internal audiences by the hagiographer – they quickly, and almost naively, receive Euphrosyne as a male eunuch.

At this point, a reader may wonder if Euphrosyne's great beauty, as described in the beginning of her legend, troubles the abbot. Perhaps this is an unspoken reason for giving this eunuch over to a master. Even though this was common practice, this is the only time this occurs in the female monk *Vitae*. Additionally, this is the only *Vita* in which a female monk's lay beauty is exaggerated.

However, even the appointment of an overseer does not prove to safeguard the brethren. Practically in the next sentence Euphrosyne's beauty becomes a stumbling block for those in the monastery. A beautiful woman becomes a beautiful man who is sought after by the brethren. However they address this problem with their abbot instead of falling into the clutches of lust.

Ἐπειδὴ οὖν εἶχε τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ κατηγλαϊσμένον τῷ κάλλει ὁ Σμάραγδος, ἐν τῷ ἔρχεσθαι αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀριστητηρίῳ, πολλοὺς ἐτόξευεν ὁ διάβολος εἰς τὸ κάλλος αὐτοῦ, ὥστε καταγογγύζειν τοῦ ἡγουμένου καὶ λέγειν αὐτῷ· Τί τοιοῦτον πρόσωπον κατεδέξω· Μαθὼν δὲ τοῦτο ὁ ἀββᾶς, προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν Σμάραγδον, λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἐπειδὴ ἡ εὐπρέπεια τοῦ προσώπου σου πολλὴ οὖσα τοῖς ἀστηρίκτοις πτώσις καθίσταται, βούλομαί σε ἐν τῷ ἀναχωρητικῷ κελλίῳ ἡσυχάζειν, κάκει ψάλλειν καὶ ἐσθίειν, καθεύδειν τε καὶ ἀπρόϊτον εἶναι. Καὶ ἐπιτρέπει τῷ Ἀγαπίῳ τὸ ἀναχωρητικὸν κελλίον εὐτρεπίσαι, ὥστε ἡσυχάσαι τὸν Σμάραγδον ἐν αὐτῷ.⁴⁰

“After that the face of Smaragdus, adorned with beauty, entered in to the church and in to treachery. The devil wounded all because of his beauty. As they were murmuring against the superior, they said to him, ‘Why has such a kind of face been introduced?’ Wherefore this abbot, calling to Smaragdus, said to him, ‘Due to the fair appearance of your face, all the unstable ones are arranged to fall. I am ordering you into an isolated cell to be quiet, and there to struggle, to eat, to sleep, and to be unseen.’ And he entrusted Agapios to prepare the isolated cell so that Smaragdus may live in it.”

The retention of her lay beauty becomes a danger and brings an onslaught of noisy complaints from the brethren concerning lust and entrapment. The abbot is forced to act. He quenches the surfacing eroticism by isolating her to a cell away from the rest of the community. This is necessary in order to prevent any of the brethren to fall because of homosexual cravings. Of course, external audiences know that this man is in

⁴⁰ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 200 lines 33-35, 201 lines 1-7.

reality a woman, so these men are expressing a natural heterosexual attraction. However, this is unbeknownst to internal characters who construct a social masculinity for Euphrosyne – for them she is male and they experience a homosexual attraction.

After this episode, Euphrosyne lives for years in the monastery excelling in dedication and self-mortification. Throughout these years her father is concerned and frantic about her whereabouts. He goes to the monastery to have the monks intervene on his behalf to God for information. They fail because Euphrosyne's prayers to remain hidden are more influential and Paphnutius is eventually sent to Smaragdus because of his elevated religiosity to petition God. Here, as discussed in the previous chapter, Paphnutius remains unaware that he is speaking and praying with his daughter. At one point the love Paphnutius feels for this monk troubles him – he does not understand why he feels such love for this “man.” However, this is not a carnal, homosexual love as experienced by the brethren. This is a spiritual and familial love.

Ἐν τῷ οὖν διαλέγεσθαι τον Σμάραγδον ταῦτα ἡ καρδία τοῦ Παφνουτίου ἰλιγγία, καὶ ὅλος ἐπληροῦτο δακρύων καὶ χαρᾶς, καὶ ὥρμησεν περιπλακῆναι θέλων αὐτῷ καὶ συναποθανεῖν, ἡσχύνετο δέ πως καὶ κατεῖχε τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ βουλευματα. Πολλὰ τοίνυν διαλεχθέντες περὶ ψυχωφελῶν πραγμάτων, ἀνεχώρησεν ὁ Παφνούτιος τοῦ Σμαράγδου, καὶ λέγων εἰς τὸν ἡγούμενον λέγει αὐτῷ· Εἷς Θεός, δέσποτα, τί ὠφελήθην εἰς τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον; Οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς ὅτι οὕτως προσετέθην αὐτῷ οὔτε εἰ ἦν τὸ τέκνον μου. Καὶ συνταξάμενος τῷ ἡγουμένῳ καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ἀνεχώρησεν.⁴¹

“When Smaragdus was conversing with him concerning these things, the heart of Paphnutius was dizzy and wholly filled with tears and joy. He was inclined to embrace him and to lament. Ashamed, he restrained the wish of his soul. Hence after conversing together concerning the matters of the soul, Paphnutius left Smaragdus, and saying to the superior, ‘Into God, my lord, how I was helped by this man; God knows that this companionship with him is as if it were with my own child.’ And he left the superior and the brethren and returned [home].”

Confused, but comforted, Paphnutius leaves the monastery to return home only to be summoned by the monks once Smaragdus' death approaches. Here she reveals her secret to him and requests that only he prepare her body for burial. As was seen in the previous chapter, her secret remains so for only a few moments due to an eavesdropping Agapios

⁴¹ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 203 lines 11-20.

spreading the news. Her father remains in her cell until the time of his own death, whereupon he is buried by her side.

Conclusions and Prelude

Throughout this chapter excerpts from the *Vitae* are selected to reveal how other characters perceive the gendered and sexual identities of these women. In these legends internal characters clearly receive and process the outward masculinity of the female monks to construct social masculinity, which in turn shows the success that transvestism and bodily transformations have on altering the social perceptions of gender. Social masculinity is revealed through the use and acceptance of male names and titles, an observation of sustained anonymity, and the sexual lust perpetuated by outward masculinity. It allows for a deeper male identity to be explored by hagiographers and often supplements the complexity of the plots with instances of sexual drama. Social masculinity results in loving reunions, abrupt discoveries, and additional penitential situations that offer external audiences *Vitae* full of courage, steadfastness, intrigue, immeasurable spirituality, and salvation.

However, external audiences, reading or listening to these tales are not fooled by outward and social masculine ruses; they gain inspiration from or empathize with the women underneath the masculine layers. At all times these holy women remain wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters to external audiences. The female monks retain a perceived holy womanhood because they are portrayed as using masculine gender ruses in order to exist and act as autonomous single women secreted away from those familiar with them. They have actively procured for themselves a masculine social identity for pragmatic reasons although they must at times deal with the sexual consequences and obstacles their new male identities supply. The dramatic irony of the religious legends grows in complexity for external audiences once outward and social masculinity are functioning successfully.

The examination of outward masculinity revealed the mechanics of the masculine ruses and their pragmatic justification. Anonymity is produced to escape notice as women, daughters, mothers, or wives. Social masculinity provides these

characters with added masculine depth that allows them to sustain their monastic lifestyles through plot twists capable of further testing the mettle of these women for the spiritual benefit of the external audiences. Within the final chapter, inward masculinity, if it is indeed detected in the legends, is examined to reveal how these literary characters perceive themselves and their struggles as reported by the hagiographers. Inward masculinity is expressed by these female monks through their choices, reactions to new obstacles, behaviors as described by hagiographers, and dialogues or speeches, especially when they provide what seem to be personal statements.

Inward masculinity, if developed by hagiographers, would be utilized to masculinize the personalities and psyches of these female characters to external audiences. However, this does not seem likely to happen. Outward masculinity, a pragmatic means to an end, and social masculinity, the result of the projection of a male form, are utilized because they prove effective in sustaining women within a monastic world. They are applied onto the outside of these female figures so that it is simple to view the women hiding underneath. As this thesis has already begun to show by the analyses of outward and social masculinity, hagiographers are clearly trying to preserve and portray a holy womanhood beneath layers of masculinity.

Instead, this thesis will show that the voices coming from these holy figures are female voices full of love and respect for family members, of ambition as holy women, and of dedication to God throughout all adversity. Their voices speak of the ascetic aspirations that had formed during their lay lives and their gestures speak of the motivations behind the masculine deceptions utilized to sustain their spiritual undertakings for the entirety of their lives. They begin and end the legends as wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, and women. These observations help to prove that the female monks, even after long periods of time as men, are speaking out with the same voices with which they began their journey.

Chapter Six: Inward Masculinity

“It would be shameful for every woman to think merely that she was a woman.”¹

The previous two chapters examined the layers of masculinity that hagiographers place on the female monks and that female monks brandish within chosen socio-religious spaces within the legends. Outward masculinity concerns the surface of the body and the immediate space around it, including both the physical boundaries, such as hair, skin, and physiology, and any outward trappings. Outward masculinity forms the projected male disguise, which here includes choice of institutions and masculine names in addition to elements associated with body and fashion. If utilized adequately and convincingly, fabricated male personas allow women to escape previous lay lives and construct spaces for themselves through anonymity in the monastic world.

Social masculinity enjoys a more expansive existence. It is constructed in the space outside of the female monks betwixt themselves and any other(s) in a social setting. Female monks project masculine bodies and social signals outwardly by using male dress, choosing to be active within male institutions, and offering masculine names, but these signals can go only as far as they are received by internal audiences. Therefore, social masculinity is dependent on the projection of masculine programs or descriptive sets, but then also their reception. The social reception of outward masculine personas constructs social masculinity by validating the outward masculinity of the female monks and strengthening the ruses for other supporting characters, however this could not be done unless these women actively construct these personas in their social worlds within the legends.

Inward Masculinity

The present chapter explores the emotive or personal side of these female monks; it concentrates on the internal world of the characters as expressed by hagiographers through the female monks' sentiments, self-expressions, self-descriptions, and motives. The pragmatic motivations to use transvestism are engaged with in the outward

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Pedagogues* 2.2, PG 8.429.

masculinity chapter, which dispels belief that a gender transgression or transformation takes place, but they will be highlighted here also in order to gain a better sense of an overall characterization for the female monks.

However, an exploration of the psyches of the female monk characters will in turn instead reveal the minds of their creators and readers.² These idealized female characters, their bodies and minds, are the constructed religious programs of male hagiographers. Therefore, in order to examine the psyches of these female monks for an inner masculinity, if any is indeed present, one must understand the ideological motivations of male authors to portray women in such ways that reveal the aspirations, anxieties, and/or empathies possessed by late antique readers. These ideological motivations are previously discussed within chapter three, which sought to pinpoint the major intertexts of these *Vitae* in order to reveal the intentions of hagiographers and reader responses of external audiences. A practical analysis of inward masculinity depends on the discussions of the figure of the “male woman,” the transvestite, and the metaphorical use of the eunuch figure to reveal the type of ideological figure these characters embody for external audiences. This may help also to reveal the potential emotive or emulative reasons for the popularity and readability of these legends.

The only sources for inward masculinity are the male hagiographers’ portrayals of femininity and the (masculinized) womanhood of these female figures. This may seem to be a disadvantage, but it is not. This thesis believes that it is more important to highlight the level of residual femininity and womanhood that hagiographers attempt to retain within these ascetic characters than that which they omit or obliterate through masculinity. This strengthens the stance of this thesis’s argument that these “male woman” monk characters are portrayed with their holy womanhood intact and thriving.

This thesis believes that the female monks are only noticeably masculine in body, fashion, and social associations. If an inner masculine layer cannot be detected, then its absence proves hagiographers are not interested in constructing these women as

² Harvey, “Women,” 36-37; Mooney, 1999, 3.

internally or genuinely manly. Further on this point, it shows that the inner workings of these female monks are portrayed as consistent throughout the stages of their lay lives and into their monastic careers. These characters remain virgins, wives, mothers, and daughters beneath their outward and behind their social masculine layers. These characters are not women who have abandoned these positions for the sake of masculinity; they are sisters, mothers, daughters, and wives hiding behind false masculinities in order to achieve an autonomous existence for the sake of ascetic goals, dreams, and desires. Therefore, inward masculinity may be the least prominent type of masculinity present within these legends.

Inward masculinity is broken down into two main categories for the purposes of this examination: external observations and self-descriptions. Each category has a number of elements which then express inward masculinity in various ways.

External Observations

The first category, external observations, contains the masculine language that hagiographers and internal audiences use to express amazement or respect for these women. In general, statements containing the perceived masculinity of certain holy women are not reflective of their sentimentality or psyches; they are formed outside of holy women for use on them by men who describe them in letters, hagiographies, and treatises. The “male woman,” as a term that relays to others the perceived masculinity of a woman is a form of symbolic language that stems from gender ideologies and is based on observations of a woman’s positive deeds, sentiments, and actions.

The “Male Woman” and the Question of the Eunuch Revisited

The external observations of inward masculinity are directly linked to the intertext of the “male woman.” Scholars who construe this as a misogynistic type of praise overzealously state that “she was praised but at the expense of her own sex.”³ This thesis believes that praise formed in the masculine was a linguistic tactic used to compare inspirational figures of both sexes to idealized human natures, namely the ideal

³ Aspegren, 1990, 93.

Man and derogatory Woman. Hagiographers and Christian intellectuals are not comparing notable holy women to all men; they are gauging them with an ideal Christian masculinity.

The positive human traits that hagiographers idealize as masculine are in fact attributes that have been shown as belonging to these female characters throughout their lives. The female monks do not gain traits deemed masculine after their male transformations; they are already possessed of characteristics such as chastity, intelligence, modesty, self-control, and endurance during their lay lives as reported on by the hagiographers. Therefore, female monks utilize outward and social masculinity within the tales in order to protect, sustain, and refine these traits, not to discover them, which demonstrates that hagiographers are portraying a holy womanhood within these tales and not internally masculinized women.

Since laywomen can possess these traits, then it is clear that the traits have been idealized as masculine in order to describe positive portions of human actions and attributes which can belong to all humans in varying degrees. Masculine praise works to symbolize the positive because of an androcentric cultural ideology on gender states, which is discussed in a previous chapter. It is important to note that women and men were encouraged to enhance ideal traits and virtues and often both men and women fell short of gendered ideals as humans. Therefore, superficially, in the case of the female monks, masculine language provides positive cultural and/or ideological depth to fictional holy women.

The important observation here is that hagiographers are not changing the characters of these holy women, but refining them through ascetic vocations. These are not women who have castrated themselves, to again refer to the theories of Delcourt,⁴ from previous lives symbolic of their sex, as Aspegren assumes above.⁵ They do not change as persons because the same positive human traits are present in their personality before and after outward and social masculine transformations. These female characters,

⁴ Delcourt, 1961, 97.

⁵ See footnote 3.

no matter how deceptively masculinized, are portrayed as the same women who were introduced at the beginnings of the tales, but at times as women who inhabit levels of autonomy on which they can choose to practice strict asceticism for the benefit of their salvation.

Additionally, even though they escape previous lay lives to dedicate their lives to asceticism, the concerns and persons from these previous lives are persistent throughout the tales. In fact, the hagiographer needs elements of their previous lay lives to resurface in order to add intrigue and complexity to the legends' dramatic irony and overall significance. This chapter seeks to highlight that female monks retain all of the relationships and concerns of their lay lives, which includes concern for children, love for husbands, fear of sexual compliance, and love or fear for family members. They are in fact mothers, wives, daughters, and women hiding within masculinity to gain the freedom to dedicate their lives to strict asceticism. This observation limits receptions of their inward masculinity.

Related to this is the use of the eunuch figure to describe these female transvestite monks. However, when the eunuch is used as a title of reference, as it has been shown in the social masculinity chapter, it is used to describe the reception of a social body either by internal audiences or the female monks themselves. Never is the eunuch figure used to describe what they hoped to become in spirit, it is used only to predict how their male persona is to be socially received. The eunuch proves to be more an element of social masculinity than an intertext or a personal association.

The chief query in this inward masculinity chapter concerns the asexual aspirations of these women and if they are realized within the figure of the eunuch. This thesis states that there exist no such aspirations. These women use masculine ruses to enter a monastic world because their non-sexuality is realized within their own sense of holy womanhood. Asexuality and chastity are not elements these female characters relate to a particular figure outside of themselves. They act in order to protect their own chastity, they masculinize themselves to remain virgin women, and they parade as men

in male institutions to conceal themselves from family members to remain autonomous single women.

As is argued throughout this thesis, female monks dress as men and are received as eunuchs, but this means only that the gender ruse fits the social role. A delicate, fair, and beardless man with a soft voice in a monk's habit performing as a man in society will be deemed a male eunuch by supporting characters based on the expected outward signals and appearance of a eunuch. These women become eunuchs when they wear the dress of a man and cut their hair due to the reception of their outward woman signals, contained within male fashion and male social roles. They, as men, are considered eunuchs by default.

This thesis deems any spoken connections between the female monks and male eunuchs as part of the outward and social masculine layers and argues that hagiographers are more interested in what the female monks can do *as women* to live ascetic lives. Therefore no new psychological or self-conceptual existence is created by hagiographers once these women change clothes, shave their heads, and rename themselves – only new superficial social personas to exist within.⁶ This gender ruse is performed because ascetic and pious women need to sustain a level of religiosity; not an emulation of the eunuch figure. They set out as anonymous sisters, wives, and mothers that do not realize their desire for asexuality, spirituality, and autonomy in the figure of the eunuch, but in themselves as women within the legends.

Textual evidence – External Observations

Matrona is examined first for her *Vita* offers the clearest examples of the external observation elements of inner masculinity. No *Vita* except that belonging to Matrona contains a prologue within which the hagiographer mentions an ideological gender progression. The prologue to her *Vita* reads

⁶ Shaun Tougher, "Social transformation, gender transformation? The court eunuch, 300-900," in *Gender in the Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82.

Προσθεῖναι δὲ τούτοις ἄξιον καὶ τὸν τῆς μακαρίας καὶ ἁγίας Ματρῶνης ψυχωφελῆ βίον, γυναικὸς τὰ ἀνδρῶν ἁγίων μεταξὺ ἀνδρῶν ἐγκρατῶν, ὡς μικρὸν ὕστερον ἐροῦμεν, ἐπιδειξαμένης καὶ τὰ τῶν ἐν ἐρημίαις κατορθούντων κατορθωσάσης· ὡς οὐχὶ τυχούσα οὐδὲ ἀποδεύουσα, ἀλλὰ καὶ μείζων ἐστὶ τῶν ἐν ἀσκήσει διαλαμπάντων γυναικῶν, καὶ τοῦτο ἐκ τῆς κατ’ αὐτὴν ἁγίας ἀγέλης ἔστι μαθεῖν, ἣν αὐτὴ τε ἤθροισε καὶ Θεῷ προσήγαγε⁷

“It is worthy to add to these the Life, for the profit of the soul, of the blessed and holy Matrona, the woman who displayed the power of holy men amongst monastic men, as later we shall relate, and who accomplished those feats of the accomplished ones of the desert. That she was neither ordinary nor lacking, but rather greater than those women having shined through in asceticism, is to be learned from the holy company of women around her, which she had gathered together and brought as an offering unto God.”

It is safe to assume from the above passage that the hagiographer believes Matrona has moved beyond negative feminine traits and behaviors during an ascetic career. He stresses the fact that she struggled and lived amongst men, who, because of the greater self-control required for a woman to successfully do this, makes her more noteworthy than other renowned female anchorite or cenobite superstars. This is coupled with the fact that she became an ascetic leader of other women. Hence, Matrona is more inwardly masculine than other “female men of God”⁸ such as Macrina, Mary of Egypt, or Melania the Elder because she is a female monk who utilizes transvestism, lives amongst men and, later leads a group of female disciples.

Matrona is described not long after the prologue as being imbued with a type of παρρησία, the same word associated with Perpetua as seen in a previous chapter, which can be understood as a “boldness,” “confidence,” “liberty,” or type of “freedom” in social and civic settings. These are not adjectives commonly associated with a woman in the ancient world. Her *Vita* reads καὶ φαίνεται μὲν παρρησία μετὰ τῶν ὁμοίως αὐτῇ πολιτευσαμένων. Διαβαίνει δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς πόθῳ καὶ φρονήσει καὶ προνοίᾳ μητρὸς φιλοστόργου,⁹ “she appears with a boldness among those who have

⁷ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.790, 1 lines 5-14.

⁸ The description is adapted from a reference made by Palladius, *Lausiac History* 9.1, referring to Melania the Elder.

⁹ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.790, 1 lines 29-32.

lived in the same way as she. And she comes to us with the longing, wisdom, and foresight of a loving mother.” Even with the final statement, which compares Matrona’s character to that of a loving mother and locates her strength within her womanhood, it ultimately seems that the hagiographer understands this “boldness” only if he places it also in non-female terms.¹⁰ Even out of the mouths of supporting female characters are announcements of this perceived masculinity. Two women state, ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν αὕτη μου ἡ ἁγία καὶ μήτηρ ἐστὶ καὶ πατήρ¹¹ “from now on this holy one is both my mother and father” and another is recorded as approving the manly purpose of Matrona’s ascetic career

διηγησαμένης δὲ αὐτῇ τῆς μακαρίας, πῶς τε εἰσηλθεν εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον καὶ ποίῳ τῷ σχήματι καὶ πῶς μετὰ τοσοῦτον χρόνον ἀπεκαλύφθη τῷ ἁγιωτάτῳ βασιανῷ τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς, θαυμάσασα τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ ἐπιχειρήματος καὶ ἀποδεξαμένη τὸ ἀνδρεῖον τοῦ φρονήματος παρεκάλει αὐτὴν εὐχεσθαι ὑπὲρ τε αὐτῆς καὶ τῶν παιδίων καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως¹²

“When the blessed one described to her how she had entered the monastery, and in what form, and how after a long time her secret had been revealed to the most holy Bassianos, she wondered at the greatness of the undertaking, accepting the manliness of her purpose, and begged her to pray for her and her children, and the emperor.”

Here another woman observes that Matrona has accomplished astounding feats in a male ascetic world. This accredits her with a type of masculine purpose in life. This portion of narrative allows the hagiographer to emphasize the masculine strengths of Matrona through a female supporting character – a move that may legitimize his own gender opinions or reflect a gender ideology in which both men and women believed. However, this thesis maintains that by using the term “mother” in addition to the terms “father” and “manly” to offer praise for this figure, the hagiographer is also giving homage to her holy womanhood using a female term. The only other time a female term is used for praise is found in the *Vita* of Anastasia when the abbot Daniel refers to her in the last line as ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου, our Godmother. The term mother in the legend of Matrona is

¹⁰ Torjesen, 1996, 79-80.

¹¹ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.800, 19 lines 15-16; 3.807, 38 lines 33-34.

¹² *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.805, 32 lines 18-26.

analyzed below in its two different uses. The first, in a socio-sexual sense to show its restriction upon a woman and the second, in a spiritual sense to reveal how a motherly pastoral role requires nurturing, as well as vigor, from a woman.

If masculinity is a descriptive tactic utilized to praise certain women for religious deeds and successes, then the commendations belonging to Matrona phrased in the masculine are considered necessary descriptive mechanisms and practical symbolic gestures. Thus, Matrona is considered inwardly masculine by observers because of her character and resolve, outwardly masculine due to her transvestism, and socially masculine for her accepted male identity amongst the brethren and her authority within her own community. Hence, these transvestite figures stood not only as examples to women because of their holy womanhood, but also as embodiments of spiritual inspiration for men because they belonged to their world. Although direct masculine language is found only in the *Vita* of Matrona, the same observations of gender progression and inward masculinity are contained indirectly in the other *Vitae* as well. It is shown by the amazement and shock monastic communities express during the discovery that their very successful brother is in fact a sister.

A unique element of Matrona's inward masculinity is the fact that her outward and social masculinity continues into her life after she was known as an eremitic holy woman and coenobitic abbess. In no other story does the female monk continue to use masculine dress once it had become common knowledge she is a woman. At times in the female monk *Vitae* the abbot or a few family members know that the monks are indeed women, daughters, or sisters, but they keep their secrets. In most cases female monks go back to or are allowed to stay in their monasteries safely within their masculine disguises. For the majority of the legends, the true sexual identity of the female monk is not known to internal audiences, which at most times is represented by the brethren, until the point of their death or shortly thereafter.

Her story continues at the pagan temple with Matrona besting demons, inspiring conversions within the surrounding pagan population, and encircling herself with pious women. She, known to be a woman, is still in male garb throughout this new series of

stories, which may or may not be prompted by her searching husband, but surely given the persistence of his character throughout the legend, knowledge of her in the surrounding region would have brought him had he been around. She decides, despite the danger of her husband, who seemingly disappears from the story since he is no longer needed as a necessary antagonist to the tale, to return to Constantinople to visit Bassianos. Upon her return she gains a blessing from the abbot to establish a convent for the female converts and disciples that had joined her at the pagan temple. Much of the remaining story is dedicated to recounting the counsel and the acquirement of land and resources from wealthy patronesses of Constantinople. Here is evidence, which is discussed below, of a network of women supporting each other and trusting in Matrona's holy womanhood to lead and counsel them.

However, Matrona is now a renowned abbess and is still using male monastic garb. Why is this? There is no longer a practical need because Dometianos has disappeared from the story. He is the catalyst for the masculine lifestyle and persona that afforded to her notability, but now she is abbess and possesses her own authority – she needs no ruse to supply or protect it. The hagiographer needs no justification for Matrona's transvestism for Bassianos grants permission to her and her sisters to retain the male habit.

οὐκ ἔρεᾶ δὲ ζωνάρια καὶ μαφόρια, οἷσπερ εἰώθασι γυναῖκες κεχρηῆσθαι, αὐτῇ δέδωκεν, ἀλλὰ ζωνάρια λώρινα πλατέα ἀνδρικὰ μαῦρα καὶ παλλία ἀνδρικὰ λευκά.¹³

“He did not give to her the woolen girdles and veils, as in the usual manner that is used by women, but the wide, dark leather girdles and white cloaks of men.”

Unique to the *Vita* of Matrona, male dress now symbolizes her experiences, legacy, and spiritual position, which is clearly related to the figure of Thecla, who was also known socially as a holy woman in male garb. However, is this fashion now completely symbolic? The interpretation can lead in divergent directions. This could be a symbolic acknowledgment of her sanctity and ability as a woman – a bestowed honor in a sense.

¹³ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.812, 51 lines 45-48.

On the other hand, if Matrona requests to retain male garb it simply may be that she has grown so accustomed to this type of dress that she considers her continued freedom in terms of this costume. Either way, the continuation of transvestism is an outward symbol of what she has achieved and a visible demand for due praise. This outward symbol of masculinity, once used out of necessity, is now a sign of Matrona's holy womanhood and proficiency to lead as abbess.

The most important symbol of her sanctity recorded in the tale is the fact she is allowed to retain the male monastic habit; an act that defies imperial and ecclesiastical law. According to her hagiographer Matrona is a woman worthy of masculine dress. However, this recognition of sanctity goes beyond the figure of Matrona because her sisters inherit this outward masculine signal because they, as ascetically dedicated women, have learned from their superior an admirable type of ascetic resolve and ability.

Self-descriptions – The Voices of Women

The second category, self-descriptions, concerns the female monks' utterances and pronouncements, especially when they communicate motivations for their masculine ruses and reactions to events or other people. This involves female monks approaching their husbands, reacting lovingly to fathers and sons, performing penance due to adulterous acts against loved ones, making proclamations where a "sense of self" can be gleaned, acting in order to protect their sexuality and chastity, revealing to others their true selves, and renaming themselves, especially if these new names can be seen as professing a spiritual or cultural symbolism. It is shown below that all of these elements have as foundational the voices of women.

What does this thesis intend to show by its examination of the voices of masculinized women? It simply attempts to reveal that within dialogues and emotional reactions female monks are never wholly separated from the concerns that they had as laywomen. As discussed above, it is true that they removed themselves from situations that included threats to virginity or chastity and from familial obstacles, such as royal wealth, spousal relations, meddling fathers, loving husbands, or expectant fiancés, but

they are continuously confronted by them nonetheless. For some female monks, family members and husbands continue to appear in the storylines until the conclusions of the tales. They intrude into their male monastic lives in order to provide the tales with added complexity and irony.

The reactions of the female monks to these familial intruders reveal a persistent sensitivity to family members, which even includes at times bastard children. This sensitivity manifests as a desire to approach a loved one with kind words, to vocalize a perceived state of being as a type of “woe is me” digression, to reveal to family members their true selves, to vocalize the reasons for their disappearances, or to feel an overwhelming sense of guilt over wronging a loved one. It may seem strange that men and women who seek to isolate themselves would have so many dealings with society and family, but in monastic literature

“in spite of the standard hagiographic rhetoric describing the ascetic’s decision at the outset of his career to turn his back on earthly ties, families were rarely forgotten by Byzantine saints.”¹⁴

The fact that hagiographers use people from previous lay existences to cause apprehension or longing within their monastic lives shows that a complete break, or castration of the feminine as described by Delcourt, is not what was intended. No matter how these women appear in the stories, no matter what types of masculinity hagiographers employ in order to sustain anonymity and autonomy, they remain women who appear concerned with elements and persons belonging to their lay existences.

Masculine Names Revisited

This thesis must return to the two questions put forward in the previous chapter concerning the adoption of male names. Should renaming be deemed important when it is not a question of a simple masculinization of female names? Can the change or meaning of a name point towards some sense of self for the female characters that

¹⁴ Dorothy Abrahamse, “Byzantine Asceticism and Women’s Monasteries in Early Medieval Italy,” in *Medieval Religious Women*, eds. J. Nichols and L. T. Shank, vol. 1, *Distant Echoes* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 40. For further reference see: Kathryn Ringrose, “Saints, Holy Men and Byzantine Society, 726 to 843” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1976).

hagiographers intended to relay to audiences? For the social anthropologists discussed in a previous chapter, it is possible to associate the renaming of these women with symbolic life-stage naming rituals, which have been shown by anthropologists to represent growth of personal power and progression of community identity.¹⁵ However, as shown in the previous chapters, hagiographers are interested in presenting characters as women throughout the legends, whether they are to be seen underneath monastic dress or behind social identities. Continuity of character is important in these tales. Renaming only represents growth of personal power and progression of community identity if it is considered integral to masculine ruses, i.e. as one of the elements required for an autonomous woman to experience this growth and progression within a monastic setting. Two different types of renaming are examined here, simple modifications of female names into their masculine forms and adoptions of completely new names.

Most new masculine names are simply female names reformed with masculine endings – a simple construction supplies characters with names that were required for entrance into male monasteries. A woman cannot dress as a man and then give the name Eugenia or Matrona to a gatekeeper of a male institution to be permitted entrance. Also, a practical reason for this simplicity to be considered is overall textual continuity. It is easy to associate Hilaria with Hilarion or Mary with Marinos throughout the story without expending too much energy to discern the true identity of this monk. In this way, masculine names are best classified as part of the outward and social masculine layers and nothing more. Masculine names stand as they did in previous chapters: as important abstract designations that transmit to others types of persons as part of male disguises. It is doubtful then that any value should be given to simple masculinized

¹⁵ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 62-63; Claude Levi-Strauss, *Savage Mind*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 172-216.

female names to reveal masculine characters. However, to what extent a change of name may have been associated with a symbolic change by external audiences is enigmatic.¹⁶

There are only three instances where a unique masculine name for a female monk is used by hagiographers. Euphrosyne offers the name Smaragdus to the abbot upon entry into his monastery, Apolinaria's masculine name is granted to her by a divine messenger, and, arguably, Matrona should also be discussed here, although it is unclear from the narrative whether she chooses her new name or if Eugenia, her spiritual advisor and friend, renames her.

In the plot Matrona is escorted to the monastery of Bassianos with the name Babylas. Matrona means "lady" or "noble and married woman" and is a general female name. Her masculine name, Babylas, is difficult to expand beyond its obvious connections with Babylon, based on the Hebrew for confusion and disorder, which can also generically be construed as a word meaning "the gate of god." Perhaps asceticism or chastity is represented abstractly as the gateway of God in this legend; as Matrona passes through its threshold she becomes closer to God, which commences upon entry into a monastic career. It is possible that the hagiographer wanted to show within the name Babylas that Matrona was enhancing her life through God, which, as received by external audiences, is construed as a personal threshold that all humans can move through if desired. The adoption of this name could also be a form of homage paid by the hagiographer to the male martyr Saint Babylas, a bishop of Antioch during the third century.¹⁷

Euphrosyne in Greek means "cheerfulness" or "rejoicing." This corresponds to the beginning of her *Vita* that records her parents' infertility, their constant prayers for a

¹⁶ Philo, *De mutatione nominum*, 70, in *Philo*, vol. 5, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (London : Heinemann, 1934), 179; Philip A. Harland, "Christ-Bearers and Fellow-Initiates: Local Cultural Life and Christian Identity in Ignatius' Letters 1," *J ECS* 11.4 (Winter 2003): 487, ft 15; T.J. Leary, "Paul's Improper Name," *New Testament Studies*, vol. 38 (1992), 467-469; Herbert, Thurston, "Christian Names," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* vol. 10 (NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1911); William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 36-37.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *In Duos Sermones in Sanctum Babylam - Admonitio*, PG 50:527-572.

child, their entreaties to the brethren of the nearby monastery to intercede to God on their behalf, and the joyous birth of Euphrosyne who was seen as a miraculous gift. This name seems to reflect the family's sentiments at that time within the legend. Smaragdus, her new male name, refers to a precious stone of a green color. There is not much potential for etymological work with Smaragdus to reflect a type of heightened spirituality. However, this name is still very interesting because of the figure of Pelagia. Pelagia had the nickname Margarita, which was associated with the beautiful jewels and pearls she wore. Additionally, the hagiographers of Euphrosyne and Pelagia stress these women's beauty to an exasperating extent; one using the mouth of a bishop and the other the power of a narrator. The hagiographer succeeds in setting up for external audiences a deeper understanding of Euphrosyne's motives and actions, as well as a connection of the eschatology inherent in the figure of the female transvestite, as read intertextually betwixt her story and that of Pelagia.

Apolinaria is a name associated with the god Apollo; clearly a common Greek name used for many men and women both pagan and Christian, but with pagan origins.¹⁸ However, Apolinaria has become a dedicated bride of Christ extremely interested in salvation and chastity; therefore it is not fitting for her to continue in this Christian life with a male form of a pagan name. The hagiographer provides a masculine Greek name with a better Christian connotation. In her dream, a divine messenger tells her to use the name Dorotheos, which means "gift of God." Here, the hagiographer is interested in the power of a name to reveal the association between a subject and religious lifestyle. Since this name is a tool with which to gain entry into a ascetic community, external audiences are presented with the notion that this lifestyle, or at least an emulation of the purity and dedication found within Apolinaria's character, can result in salvation, i.e. the gift of God, embodied here by the female transvestite's ability to

¹⁸ Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, vol. II, ed. and trans. James Moffatt (London: Williams and Norgate; NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), 35-45; ed. T. Corsten, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, vol. 1-5, additional volumes to follow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987-2010).

represent the reversal inherent in the salvation drama and read against the redeemed harlot intertext from the story of Pelagia.

The above discussion on masculine names suffices for this chapter on inward masculinity and names will not be examined further below in the textual evidence section. The remainder of this chapter concentrates on the proclamations coming from the mouths of the female monks or the recorded thoughts within which a sense of self can be perceived as presented by hagiographers. Due to a lack of inward masculinity, this analysis provides a deeper reading of the characterizations of these female monks' womanhood.

Textual Evidence – Self-descriptions

The dialogue within these *Vitae* that best depicts a woman desiring freedom to practice a high level of asceticism for the benefit of her soul is the prayer by Matrona. In her pleas to God, one is struck by the anti-spousal tone of her prayer. She cannot become the religious woman that she envisions if she is in a restrictive and dangerous domestic situation.

καὶ δυσωπήσατε ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ τὸν δεσπότην Χριστὸν ρύσθηναί με ἐκ τοῦ ματαίου βίου τούτου, ἀξιωθῆναι δὲ δουλεύειν αὐτῷ γνησίως, ὅτι φοβοῦμαι τὴν κρίσιν καὶ δέδοικα τὰς κολάσεις· μή μου παρίδητε, ἅγιοι ἀπόστολοι, τὰς οἰκτρὰς δεήσεις μηδὲ ἀπόσκηθὲ με ὡς ἀναξίαν, ἀλλὰ προσαγάγετε καὶ ἐμεῖς ὡς ἑαυτοὺς καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον τῷ φιλανθρώπῳ Θεῷ· καταμαλάξατε τὴν καρδίαν τοῦ ἀνδρός μου, ὅτι αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ κωλύων καὶ ἐμποδίζων με. Παράσχετε μοι βοήθειαν, δέομαι, καὶ δωρήσασθε ἀντίληψιν, παρακαλῶ¹⁹

“Beseech the Master Christ on my behalf to deliver me from this vain life, to be considered worthy to serve Him truly, for I am afraid of the Judgment and I fear the Retribution. Deprive me not, O holy apostles, of my sorry entreaties or reject me as unworthy, but bring me unto yourselves and the entire world unto the God who loves humankind. Soften the heart of my husband, for he is the one who hinders and prevents me. Give me aid, I pray, and grant me succor, I beg.”

¹⁹ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.791, 3 lines 15-26.

Her ascetic dreams are dependent on her husband – she needs either his permission or his absence. This thesis insists that the application of her masculine ruse directly results from the marital conflict prompted by her extreme asceticism.

The hagiographer later offers a rhetorical lamentation of Matrona to the external audience that outlines the motivations behind her masculine ruse. This “woe is me” digression takes place after the discovery of her true sex. Bassianos receives a vision that the monk he knew as Babylas is in fact a woman. He calls her before him to answer for this deception. At her summons, Matrona bewails her plight,

Οἶμοι τῇ ἀθλίᾳ, ὅτι ἀπορρίπτομαι ὡς ἀναξία· οἶμοι τῇ ταλαιπώρῳ, ὅτι ἐγνώσθη ὅ εἰμι, καὶ οὐκέτι ὡς ἀδελφὸς τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς διαλέγομαι, οὐκέτι ὡς εὐνοῦχος νοοῦμαι καὶ Βαβυλᾶς φωνοῦμαι, ἀλλὰ πάλιν γυνὴ ὀρώμαι καὶ Ματρῶνα καλοῦμαι.»²⁰

“Woe is me, wretched one that I am! For I am cast aside as one unworthy. Woe is me, miserable one that I am! It is now known who I am. No longer am I considered a brother amongst the brethren; no longer am I thought to be a eunuch called Babylas, but again I am seen to be a woman called Matrona.”

It is clear that her anguish stems from the loss of her autonomy and anonymity supplied by the monastery, in addition to her loss of the monastery itself. She must leave her ascetic home, but more importantly, she must leave the institution that provides safety for her as a married, yet separated, woman. This supports the theory of this thesis that institutional transvestism is used pragmatically to aid in escaping married life and/or associated obstacles for all female monks.

As she stands accused of deception and sexual endangerment she goes into a lengthy dialogue that concisely explains every detail of her ruse. She begins by stating that her only desire was δουλεύειν δὲ Θεῷ μᾶλλον ἢ γάμῳ καὶ ἁμαρτίᾳ²¹ “to serve God rather than marriage and sin” and continues to weave a tale for the abbot of her piety punished by mental and physical abuse from her husband, her pleas to God to be free from this dangerous domestic situation, her desire to lead a life of self-mortification, and her fear that her husband would violently pursue her and harm any convent that

²⁰ *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.794, 7 lines 12-17.

²¹ *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.794, 8 lines 11-12.

housed her. She repeatedly states during this dialogue that it was her husband who motivated her gender ruse and that her enrollment in a male monastery had been decided upon after consideration was given to other options. She directly connects this last fact to the divine dream that suggested transvestism. καὶ διυπνισθεῖσα συνήκα ἐν ἑαυτῇ, ὅτι ἐν ἀνδρικῷ μοναστηρίῳ δεῖ με σωθῆναι καὶ ἀποκρυβῆναι τὸν ἄνδρα²² “upon waking I understood within myself that it was necessary for me to be preserved in a male monastery and hide from my husband.” She continues,

Τότε οὖν ἐσκεψάμεθα τὸ μὲν παιδίον Θεοδότην παραθέσθαι τῇ κυρίᾳ Σωσάννῃ, ἐμὲ δὲ μεταμφιασμένην καὶ σχηματισθεῖσαν εἰς ἄνδρα εἰσελθεῖν εἰς μοναστήριον ἀνδρῶν· καὶ ὅπερ ἐσκεψάμεθα, ἔργῳ ἐπληρώσαμεν· τὸ γὰρ παιδίον Θεοδότην παραθέμεναι τῇ μνημονευθείσῃ Σωσάννῃ, εὐθέως ἀποθεμένη τὴν γυναικείαν στολὴν καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποκειραμένη καὶ – ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν – ἀνὴρ γενομένη καὶ τῷ σχήματι καὶ τῇ προαιρέσει, συνεργία Εὐγενίας καὶ ὁδηγία Θεοῦ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ ἅγιον σου μοναστήριον, εὐνοῦχος ὁρώμενος καὶ Βαβυλᾶς καλούμενος²³

“Thereupon, we devised that my child Theodote should be entrusted to the lady Susannah, and that I, dressed as and transformed into a man, should enter a monastery of men; and we accomplished the very plans which we had devised. For as soon as the child Theodote had been entrusted to the aforementioned Susannah, I immediately removed my female attire and cut off my hair; and, in a word, becoming a man both in form and purpose, with the cooperation of Eugenia and God’s guidance I came to your holy monastery, appearing as a eunuch and calling myself Babylas.”

Within the above quotation one must not read too far into her statement “becoming a man both in form and purpose.” This is not a self-reflecting declaration, but a concise summary of her deeds given to her abbot in order to justify the ruse and escape harsh criticism. This could be evidence of an intruding ideological mindset of the male hagiographer, and therefore, it is reasonable that a male hagiographer would place within the dialogue of Matrona descriptions of her monastic career as an active, masculine struggle – monasticism has been described along militaristic and athletic

²² *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.794, 8 lines 33-36.

²³ *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.794, 8 lines 42-54.

lines²⁴ and, again, terms to describe positive human traits as feminine were not prevalent.

Upon hearing the whole of Matrona's confession, Bassianos is impressed with her sincerity and her dire predicaments, and, even though he orders her to leave the monastery, he assists her throughout the remainder of the *Vita*. She must leave her beloved institution that symbolizes two things: salvation and safety. She is now in a vulnerable position and may be reclaimed by her husband. She is no longer an autonomous single woman hidden as a eunuch in a monastic world; she is now a married woman discovered and banished back into the secular world. This is a very anxious time within the legend.

However, as seen in the previous chapters, Matrona is known to be a woman, but still relies on masculine garb and her own wits to conceal her from the one member of the internal audience that could prevent her ascetic practice. The hagiographer presents to external audiences a very anxious and vulnerable period of time immediately following her banishment from Bassianos' monastery. She must independently work to fool her husband with only male clothes, and possibly still hairstyle. Here the hagiographer presents a holy womanhood that contains endurance and resolve; this woman will continue her female ascetic enterprise.

It is clear that Dometianos dominates her existence throughout the story. He was abusive and intolerant while she was with him; after she escapes he pursues her; after locating her, he confronts any who stands in his way; and his goal is the greatest fear of Matrona, to repossess her as his wife. He is the antagonist of the legend, a constant reminder for the internal and external audiences of the reality of her femininity and womanhood. He is the catalyst for her relocation and isolation; the one who drives

²⁴ For instance, Palladius uses this language in his *Lausiac History*, Athanasius uses the term "athlete" to describe Anthony in his *Life*, within the *Vita* of Pachomius the monastic struggle is contrasted with that of the martyrs, and both of John Cassian's works, *Institutes* and *Conferences*, will easily show that an association between the struggles and endurance of ascetic figures and those of athletes, warriors, and martyrs.

Matrona to desperately and repeatedly use deception to continue her socio-spiritual freedom.

It is clear that her existence as a type of religious and spiritual woman is at stake. Matrona uses a male persona, trickery, and stealth to sustain a desired existence as a woman by constantly relocating from place to place. The hagiographer describes in her tale relocations that are driven by what reads to be a fanatic need for sexual and spiritual freedom. They are continuous throughout the narrative and prompt the use of a male disguise to escape her antagonist and continue her spiritual career.

At this point in the story her daughter Theodote dies. It states within the legend that God decides to take Theodote from the world to ease Matrona's burdens.

πρὸ τοῦ ἐξελθεῖν τὴν μακαρίαν ἐκ τοῦ μοναστηρίου προσελάβετο τὸ παιδίον αὐτῆς Θεοδότην, ἵνα μὴ τῇ ἀθυμίᾳ αὐτῆς ἀθυμίαν προσθήσῃ καὶ τῇ ταύτης μερίμνῃ ἐκκόψῃ τι τῆς προθέσεως αὐτῆς· ὅθεν εὐρούσα αὐτὴν τεθνηκυῖαν, χαρὰν μᾶλλον καὶ οὐ πένθος ἔσχεν, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὴ τῆς κατ' αὐτὴν φροντίδος ἀπηλλάγη κάκεῖνη πρὸ τοῦ τῶν κακῶν τοῦ βίου πειραθῆναι ἀπῆλθεν ἀπαλλαγεῖσα· καὶ ὅσον ἐθλίβετο διὰ τὸ χωρισθῆναι αὐτὴν τοῦ μοναστηρίου, τοσοῦτον παρεμυθεῖτο ἀποβαλοῦσα τὴν παῖδα. Θεοῦ γὰρ ἔργον²⁵

“Before the blessed one departed from the monastery, he [God] had taken unto himself her child Theodote, so that despair may not be added to her despair and this worry may not ruin any of her purposes. Whence, finding that she had died, she had more joy rather than sorrow, for she was thus set free from concern for [Theodote], and that one [Theodote] before the evils of life were experienced, departed and was also set free. And as greatly as she grieved over being separated from the monastery, so greatly she was comforted by the rejection of the child, for this was the work of God.”

It is now evident that there are two opinions of motherhood present within this *Vita*. One, within the narrative above, motherhood is portrayed as a burden and distraction; an obstacle that God is willing to remove for a Christian practitioner experiencing hardships. To drive home this point, the hagiographer records Matrona as expressing joy and relief at Theodote's death. She has already abandoned her position as wife and she seems very happy to let go of her position as mother over a child carnally produced. One

²⁵ *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.795, 10 lines 6-17.

can conclude from this expressed joy that Matrona has shed or eliminated a portion of her womanhood that contained motherhood, but it is clear that this has not occurred. Theodote has been saved and this is seen by Matrona as a reason for celebration; a celebration which also naturally includes her own release. She rejoices for the death of her daughter out of love and out of relief because Theodote will no longer exist in an ungodly world. The misery of life for Theodote has ended before it began. This, coupled with the fact that the provisions for the adoption of Theodote was a primary concern, shows that motherly aspects of Matrona's character are still present and are never in question for the hagiographer.

Two, Matrona is described as a loving mother throughout the legend in positive terms – positive as long as the term “mother” refers to a relationship within spiritual families.²⁶ The positive use of the term mother is used to refer to her care over the company of pious women that encircles her due to her charisma and piety; to describe her loving counsel, criticism, and instruction; and portray her inspirational nature. She is a loving mother who is attentive to her spiritual children; an icon akin to the figure of the shepherd who lovingly tends to his flock. This positive use of the term mother can be equally compared to the way that Matrona is described as manly. To be manly is to be active and outgoing, in control, strong, and piously minded and to be a loving mother to a whole company of female disciples is to be active and outgoing, in control, strong, and piously minded. This paper believes that if masculine language is used out of necessity to show how certain women differ from others or a woman can possess human traits deemed positive, then this term mother, when describing a spiritually nurturing existence, is attempting to express that same opinion of strength and activity in feminine terms. The term mother speaks to Matrona's holy womanhood.

She receives praise through the use of the term mother at the pagan temple where she attracts and instructs a group of pious women. During her last escape Matrona disguises herself as a man and goes to an abandoned pagan temple in the area to practice

²⁶ A reader finds the positive use of the descriptive term “mother” on the following pages: *Matrona, AASS*, Nov. 3.790, 800, 803, 807, 812.

έλομένη μάλλον ὑπὸ δαιμόνων ἢ θηρίων ἀναλωθῆναι ἢ εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς περιπεσεῖν²⁷ “choosing rather to be consumed by demons or wild animals than to fall into the hands of her husband.” For Matrona, death is preferable to once again becoming a wife restricted and abused by her husband. She needs to be active autonomously – so she chooses isolation to sustain a holy womanhood.

The prestige and admiration gained from her masculine existence and training draws both Christian and pagan women to her, which leads to conversions and the organization of a community at the pagan temple. The organization and spiritual maintenance of women for their salvation is highlighted as the ultimate accomplishment and manifestation of her saintly power and authority. The hagiographer of the *Vita* of Matrona writes

ἀριθμῶ τε ὅτι πλείστην καὶ τῇ κατὰ ἀρετὴν ἐμμελεία κομῶσαν· ἥρκει τοῖνυν αὐτῇ καὶ τοῦτο μόνον πρὸς ἔπαινον, ἵνα τις τὸν ἄλλον αὐτῆς ἀνιστόρητον καταλείψῃ βίον, τὸ τοσαύτην καὶ τοιαύτην ποίμνην συστήσασθαιμ, ἣν αὖξιν καὶ φυλάττειν καὶ ποιμαίνειν οὐκ ἀμφιβάλλομεν.²⁸

“If one were to leave the greater part of her story untold, this alone may be sufficient for her praise: she brought together such a company, which she will increase, guard, and shepherd we do not doubt.”

The circle of women which forms around Matrona due to her spiritual enticement and erudition is impressive and her success is reminiscent of the early desert fathers to an extent, but here as a female monastic leader attracting other devout women. This is of course what the hagiographer intends his description to convey and the type of portrayal of holy womanhood that this thesis highlights.

Theodora also makes a “woe is me” speech within her *Vita* which reveals a continuing concern for her husband. Unbeknownst to Theodora, Gregorius had been guided to her by angels attempting to stage a reunion. As external audiences know, Theodora has committed adultery and is using the autonomy provided by her male persona to perform undisturbed penance at a male monastery. Theodora recounts for

²⁷ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.798, 14 lines 7-9. Here the reader is reminded of his abusive nature.

²⁸ *Matrona*, AASS, Nov. 3.790, 1 lines 15-20.

readers the reason for her penance. ἡ δὲ κλίνασα τὰ γόνατα ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ αὐτῆς
 ἰκέτευε τὸν Θεὸν ὅπως βαστάσῃ τὸν ζυγὸν τοῦτον λέγουσα· συγχώρησόν μοι
 κύριε τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἣν ἐποίησά ὅτι ἀπώλεσά μου τὴν σωφροσύνην.²⁹ “Kneeling in
 her cell, she entreats God as one bearing this yoke, she says ‘O Lord, make concessions
 to me for the sin that I committed in that I destroyed my discretion [chastity].’” Here,
 she is a penitential woman expressing guilt and sadness over her adulterous affair; she
 understands this guilt and sin within the context of herself as a woman, and more
 specifically as a married Christian woman.

From the above speech, readers can discern genuine guilt and regret. This female
 character has experienced a loss of control and self-worth. She has become for the
 hagiographer an example of the female nature deemed weak and sexual by cultural
 definitions. The guilt and regret she directs at herself stems from either a failure to
 adhere to personal ascetic or asexual goals, which are never explicitly mentioned within
 the legend, or a loss of honor and the ability to control desire. Also, this guilt is the
 emotional consequence of doing harm to a loved one, namely dishonoring her marriage
 vows and distressing her husband. These concerns are extremely close to the type of
 redemptive reversal found with the redeemed harlot intertext. Theodora has acted in an
 adulterous manner, which is related to the lusts of the harlot, such as those symbolized
 by the rich parade of bodies in the story of Pelagia, and now seeks through asceticism to
 perform penance for her deeds.

During what she thinks to be a chance encounter with Gregorius, which takes
 place while she attends to the camels of her monastery at a neighboring village, she
 revisits for external audiences the very emotions that caused her masculine ruse. Upon
 sight of her husband, she offers a short speech expressing her love.

Ἡ δὲ μακαρία Θεοδώρα ἰδοῦσα τὸν ἑαυτῆς ἄνδρα εἶπεν· οἵμοι οἵμοι ἄνερ
 μου ἀγαθέ, πόσα κάμνω ἵνα ὀυσθῶ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἣς ἐποίησά εἰς σέ· καὶ
 ὥς ἦλθεν ἕως αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπλησίασεν αὐτὸν βαδίζουσα προσεκύνησεν

²⁹ *Theodora*, Wessely, 29, lines 9-11.

αὐτῷ λέγουσα· χαῖρε ἀνερ μου καὶ κύριε καὶ ἐπήκουσεν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐκεῖνος μὴ εἰδώς, ὅτι ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστίν· καὶ ἀπῆλθον ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων.³⁰

“The blessed Theodora upon seeing her husband said, ‘Woe is me my good husband, how much have I toiled that I might undo the sin that I have done against you!’ And she came to him, approached him slowly walking, and prostrated herself to him saying, ‘Greetings my man and my lord!’ And he listened to her in that place but did not see that she was his wife. And they departed from one another.”

After this encounter Gregorius is crestfallen. ὁ δὲ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς θρηνῶν καὶ κοπτόμενος καὶ προσευχόμενος δι’ αὐτὴν ἔλεγεν· κύριε δεῖξόν μοι εἰ μετὰ ἄλλου τινὸς ἀνδρὸς ἀπῆλθεν ἡ γυνή μου³¹ “Her husband lamenting, beating himself, and praying because of her, said, ‘O Lord, my right hand has departed with another man!’” Gregorius is a husband who loves his wife and searches to recover her no matter what she has done, but he is not portrayed in a negative sense as is the husband of Matrona.

However, one must ask, why this reunion between husband and wife? This scenario in the narrative is staged in order for the angel to explain and clarify, and also to sanction, the pious and redemptive nature of Theodora to Gregorius, and also to the external audiences through him. Heaven seems very keen for him to know that his wife left him for spiritual, and not carnal, reasons. If Gregorius sees his “wife the male monk” instead of his “wife the adulteress,” then he will understand that her motivations were spiritual in nature and this will ease his pain.

For external audiences, the realization of the penitential nature of her dramatic masculine ruse reveals the ideological distance that the hagiographer has placed between Theodora and the majority of women, who, as discussed in a previous chapter, were thought by some to be incapable of exercising a manly mind over their weak and sexual female natures. She was a woman who had fallen victim to her own sexuality, but she is now a woman who seeks to redeem herself through continence and asceticism. Theodora, because her motives, although deceptive, are pure and geared towards redeeming a regrettable adulterous affair, is afforded honor. She becomes a woman of

³⁰ *Theodora*, Wessely, 30, lines 4-9.

³¹ *Theodora*, Wessely, 29, lines 15-17.

complete self-control even when confronting her husband. Clearly, Theodora embodies the intertext of the “male woman” through exceptionality, but with an added element of the penitential harlot theme popular to religious stories.

As seen in the previous chapter, Theodora is charged with fathering a child and is banished from her monastery. She lingers at the gates and rears the child for many years until the brethren invite her and her son to return. Theodora is admitted back into her monastery at the lowest rank and dedicates herself to severe chores and penance until her death. On the eve of her death the abbot dreams a woman is in the midst of the spirits of martyrs, apostles, prophets, and deacons.

αὐτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀββᾶς Θεοδωρος· αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ψευδῶς κατηγορηθεῖσα εἰς τὸ παιδίον ἐφ’ ἧς ἑπτα χρόνοι ἡλλάγησαν βοτάνας ἀγρίας ἐσθιούσης καὶ ὕδωρ θαλάσσιον πινούσης καὶ οὐκ εἶπεν ὅτι γυνή εἰμι ἐπαιδεύθη γὰρ ὅτι κοίτην ἀνδρὸς ἐμίανεν, ἀνδράσιν οὖν ἑαυτὴν κατέλεξεν ἵνα λύσῃ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἑαυτῆς· ἐπαιδεύθη γὰρ καὶ οὐκ ἀντεῖπεν· διὰ τοῦτο ζῶν αἰώνιον ἐκληρονομήσεν.³²

“He was the abbot Theodoros. She was falsely accused of fathering a child and seven seasons passed, during which the plants of the field you ate and the water of the sea you drank, but you did not see that she was a woman. She reared the child because she stained her husband’s bed; and she told a tale of her own manliness in order that she may free herself from sin for she reared the child and did not speak against it. Through this she has received a share of the eternal life.”

Here an angel reappears in order to offer information to the abbot concerning Theodora, a holy sister amongst the brethren who was mother to a child not her own. One can see that Theodora’s care for the promiscuous girl’s child is akin to that between a real mother and child, but it is unnecessary to connect nurturing explicitly with the role of the mother; fathers can nurture as well. It is better to see this sexual incident as an accepted burden that causes added hardships to the penance Theodora thinks she already deserves as an adulterous woman and apologetic wife. Theodora’s hagiographer uses this as an occasion to present an even greater ascetical endurance of his female character. The hagiographer has Theodora withhold the secret of her true sexual identity

³² *Theodora*, Wessely, 43, lines 4-9.

from the brethren even in the face of banishment and isolation in order to perpetuate her male persona for the benefit of the plot structure to show the power of redemption.

The only *Vita* containing a female monk who enters the monastic life in conjunction with her husband is that of Athanasia. They mutually decide to give up their worldly lives after the death of both their children as a way to come to terms with their grief and as a preparatory method for the afterlife, in which they are sure to meet their children once again. Their loss is expressed in a statement by Athanasia early in the legend where her grief stricken voice as mother enters into the story. “Ὅτι μετὰ τῶν τέκνων μου ἀποθανοῦμαι.”³³ “So that I may die with my children!” During this declaration of loss, an apparition in the form of an abbot is sent to console Athanasia.

Μεσούσης δὲ τῆς νυκτὸς παραφαίνεται αὐτῇ ὁ μάρτυς ἐν σχήματι μοναχοῦ, λέγων αὐτῇ· Τί οὐκ ἀφῆς ἀναπαυῆναι τοὺς ὧδε. Ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· Κύριέ μου, μὴ λυπηθῆς κατ’ ἐμοῦ, ἐπειδὴ πονοῦσα εἰμι· δύο γὰρ τέκνα εἶχον, καὶ σήμερον τὰ δύο ἐξεκόμισα ὁμοῦ.³⁴

“In the middle of the night, the martyr appeared in the form of a monk and said to her, ‘Why not leave the dead alone to be at rest?’ And answering she said, ‘My lord, do not be annoyed with me since exceedingly I am grieved. For I had two small children, and I buried them both.’”

Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Τὶ οὖν ὑπὲρ ἐκείνων κλαίεις; εἴθε ἔκλαιες τὰς ἀμαρτίας σου! Λέγω σοι γάρ, γύναι, ὅτι ὃν τρόπον ἀπαιτεῖ ἡ φύσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὴν βρώσιν, καὶ ἀδύνατον μὴ δοῦναι αὐτῇ φαγεῖν, οὕτως καὶ τὰ νήπια ἀπαιτοῦσι τὸν Χριστὸν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τὰ μέλλοντα ἀγαθὰ· λέγοντα, Δικαιοκρίτα, ἐστέρησας ἡμᾶς τὰ ἐπίγεια, μὴ στερήσης ἡμᾶς καὶ τὰ οὐράνια. Ἡ δὲ ἀκούσασα κατενύγη καὶ μετέβαλε τὸ πένθος εἰς χαπὴν λέγουσα· Εἰ ἄρα ζῶσι τὰ τέκνα μου ἐν οὐρανοῖς, τί λκaiώ;³⁵

“He said to her, ‘Do not weep concerning them; instead weep for your sins! For I say to you, Woman, because in the way that the nature of man wants food in return, and is unable itself to devour it, thus your children desire Christ into that day of the great good, saying, ‘Righteous judge, replace the earthly things of which we were deprived with those of heaven.’ Hearing this she was moved to repent and her grief was changed to joy, saying, ‘Thus my children are living in heaven, why am I weeping?’”

³³ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 48 lines 28-29.

³⁴ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 48 line 34-49 line 4.

³⁵ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 49 lines 5-13.

After this phantasmal counsel she goes to her husband with the idea that they should do away with their possessions and enter into dedicated ascetic lifestyles. She pleads with her husband and asks him to

Ἐὰν ἀκούσης μου, βάλλης με εἰς μοναστήριον ἵνα κλαύσω τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου.³⁶

“Listen to me, place me into a monastery so that I can lament for my sins.”

Clearly parental grief is the motivator here at first, followed closely by a personal desire for ascesis. Mutually they donate their possessions, arrange for an heir to take charge of the remainder, go to make pilgrimage, and enter into a monastic lifestyle. The ruse that is performed later by Athanasia seems to be unwarranted given this shared desire to enter into a monastic life. However, as shown in the previous chapter on outward masculinity, this ruse allows for plot development, i.e. the fact that Athanasia lovingly reunites with her husband and, for all practical purposes, they live happily ever after.

At this point in the story they meet Daniel, who makes provisions for them both. Many years pass separated in their respective monastic communities, but Andronikos and Athanasia are on pilgrimage within the story at the moment of their rendezvous. This reunion prompts a request for cohabitation, to which Athanasia in her male form agrees. They spend many years together as an ascetic couple, growing closer and closer on an entirely new spousal-spiritual level as years pass. Shortly after this, Athanasia is on her deathbed expressing loving sentiments for Andronicus as a loving wife. A fellow monk has inquired into the reason for her sadness at her death.

Καὶ ἐπανάλυσας ὁ γέρων εὗρεν αὐτὸν συνεχόμενον. καὶ ἤρξατο κλαίειν ὁ ἄββας Ἀθανάσιος. Καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· Ἀντὶ τοῦ χαρῆναι ὅτι ἀπαντῆσαι ἔχεις τῷ Κυρίῳ κλαίεις; Λέγει αὐτῷ· Οὐ κλαίω, εἰ μὴ διὰ τὸν ἄββαν Ἀνδρόνικον· ἀλλὰ ποίησον ἀγάπην, καὶ μετὰ τὸ θάψαι με εὐρήσεις πιτάκιον κείμενον πρὸς κέφαλά μου. Ἀνάγνωθι καὶ δὸς αὐτὸ τῷ ἄββᾳ Ἀνδρονίκῳ.³⁷

“And having returned the old ones found the abbot Athanasios feverish and weeping. The old ones said to him, ‘Why do you not rejoice? You weep because

³⁶ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 49 lines 23-24.

³⁷ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 51 lines 27-32.

you are on your way to meet God?’ She said, ‘No, I weep on account of the abbot Andronikos, because how he loves me. After you carry me out for burial, you will find a written message lying underneath my head, and after you discover it, give it to the abbot Andronikos.’”

This is the only *Vitae* examined within which the female monk deems it necessary to reveal to a husband her true identity without any influential outside factors. In every other story where a husband plays a significant role in prompting his wife to use a disguise to escape him, the wife chooses to remain anonymous. The difference here is the hagiographer wanted to give to external audiences a theological and inspirational story that contains love and companionship between two ascetic humans.

The existence of this love is obvious at the beginning of the legend through the medium of shared grief and a shared desire to become monastic practitioners, but the hagiographer shows to external audiences a survival of that love throughout their ascetic lives and into their deaths. This is a story of a man and a woman who love each other; this is a story of a woman who never ceases to be a loving wife.

The love is not only clearly expressed by Athanasia within this legend, but also by Andronikos. Once the letter she writes is given to him, he realizes that his companion had been his wife. He cries out in his grief, μετὰ τῆς κυρίας μου τελευτήσω³⁸ “With my mistress I die!” Even his fellow brothers acknowledge this love because they understand Andronikos’ death in light of that of his wife and honor this holy couple by burying them side by side. Together they are reunited as husband and wife to take their place within the ranks of those honored by God. Here concludes the religious legend of a woman who was portrayed by the hagiographer as a holy wife to a holy man, a holy mother to her children, and a holy brother to fellow monks in order for an external audience to read about strength and piety contained within a holy womanhood.

The *Vita* of Mary is constructed from a more straightforward, simpler storyline when compared to those of the other legends. Mary, who does not desire to be abandoned by her father, dresses in male garb and joins a male monastery with her

³⁸ *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 52 lines 9.

father as a father-son team. There seem to be no motivations other than the sustainment of companionship, love for her father, and a general personal piety. Her father dies while at this monastery and she remains there as the brother Marinos. As discussed in the previous chapters, a soldier and local innkeeper's daughter conspire to blame any consequence that may result from their own sexual promiscuity on Mary, who they mistake for a man. The following passages reference an inward masculinity for Mary and are collectively discussed on the following page.

Φθάσαντος δὲ τοῦ Μαρίνου μετὰ τῶν τριῶν ἀδελφῶν, λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἡγούμενος· Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ πολιτεία σου καὶ ἡ ἀσκησίς σου, ὅτι κατέλυσας ἐν τῷ πανδοχείῳ καὶ διέφθειρας τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦ πάνδοχος; Καὶ ἐλθὼν ὁ πατήρ αὐτῆς ἐνταῦθα θέατρον τοῖς κοσμικοῖς ἐποίησεν ἡμῶν. Ταῦτα ἀκούσας ὁ Μαρίνος ἔπescen ἐπὶ πρόσωπον λέγων· Συγχώρησόν μοι, πάτερ, ὅτι ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐπλανήθην.³⁹

“When Mary returned with the three other brothers, the superior said to him, ‘This is your conduct and your asceticism, that while staying at the inn you corrupted the innkeeper’s daughter! And coming here, her father, has made a spectacle of us to the laypeople.’ Hearing all these things, Marinos fell upon his face saying, ‘Forgive me, father, because I have sinned like a man.’”

After this accusation, Mary is banished from the monastery. For many months she repents outside the walls alone and answers to those who ask, ὅτι ἐπόρνευσα καὶ ἐξεβλήθην ἐκ τοῦ μοναστηρίου⁴⁰ “because I fornicated I have been banished from the monastery.” Months later her bastard child is delivered by the innkeeper to her

Λαβὼν δὲ ὁ Μαρίνος τὸ παιδίον ἐθλίβετο λέγων· Ναὶ ἐγὼ ἀπολαμβάνω κατὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας μου. Τί δὲ καὶ τὸ ἄθλιον βρέφος τοῦτο σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀποθνήσκει; Ἡρξάτο οὖν ἐκ τῶν ποιμένων λαμβάνειν γάλα καὶ τρέφειν τὸ παιδίον ὡς πατήρ.⁴¹

“Receiving the child, Marinos was distressed and said, ‘Yes, I received punishment for my sin. Why should this miserable newly born babe with me face death?’ Therefore, he set out to receive milk from the shepherds and to support the child as a father.”

³⁹ *Mary*, Richard, 90, lines 83-90.

⁴⁰ *Mary*, Richard 91, lines 95-96.

⁴¹ *Mary*, Richard, 91, lines 102-106.

The above passages are the only instances of self-expression from Mary that the hagiographer creates for external audiences. It proves difficult to connect clearly the statements that express a masculine type of sin to the womanhood of Mary. If Mary's words are received as purely pragmatic, then these statements attempt to secure her place within the monastery through a request for forgiveness in order to protect herself as a single woman alone in the world. Also, her use of the words "sinned as a man" shows external audiences that both men and women are capable of being imperfect concerning sexual issues, that carnal lust, as it is a negative human trait, does not belong only to the Woman. This hagiographer apparently understood that both men and women could fall short of the asexual ideal of late antique Christianity. The hagiographer's use of "to support the child as a father" shows that a nurturing nature is not monopolized by women; that men are also capable of nurturing and sustaining the lives of others. However, for the narrator, since Mary is still using her male disguise although banished, then in essence Mary as a man is raising the child as a male parent.

She pretends to be the father, which becomes a title associated with her social masculinity, in order to stay near to her monastic home. Where exactly would she go if she were to admit her ruse at this point? Mary is a single woman not interested in marriage. She has no other family members, or at least none are mentioned within the legend. She has no possessions because her father donated all that he owned before their entry into the monastic life. Adding to this deficiency is the fact that the hagiographer describes no skill or trade at which she is adept. Mary has absolutely no means by which to sustain her existence outside of a monastery. Therefore, it is necessary for her to accept the false charge in order to continue to be a man to remain at the monastery. It would be more detrimental and dangerous to her life to confess her true sex and then suffer as an outcast than accept her punishment and then sit banished at their gates. A related question is why she does not join a convent at this point. She could admit her ruse and escape dishonor. However, as mentioned previously, the hagiographer is interested in his female character as she is able to represent Christian endurance, strength, and repentance to mixed audiences. As related to this purpose, if Mary admits her ruse, then she fails at embodying these traits for external audiences.

While the outcast Mary continues her ruse, and consequently her punishment, she offers in explanation to others the reason for her banishment as fornication. As readers may assume from her patient endurance of her punishment, she hopes to one day be readmitted. She rears her son out of love for another human being and a feeling of responsibility – why should this child perish when it is she who is being punished? This child has nothing to do with her, but she is a loving person who will not see a child die. Additionally, through the supporting character of the child, the hagiographer adds hardship to hardship for an even greater example of endurance and steadfastness. Keeping up with her farcical male persona through her career as a monk and father, her punishment, and her lowly rank as a brother who has sinned are elements that show the esteemed quality of her holy womanhood.

As it has been pointed out in previous chapters, the legend of Anastasia is vague concerning the motivations and mechanics of her masculine ruse. The hagiographer, however, has no need to provide details in the beginning because it is reported that no one except for the abbot had any contact with her during her ascetic life. This removes the need to construct an over-convincing outward or social masculinity for Anastasia. In fact, it is not until the end of the legend that readers find the reasons for her escape, and consequently, the first instance of a woman's voice.

Anastasia leads a solitary life up until her death, at which time she requests a favor from the abbot concerning her burial. Καί λέγει τῷ γέροντι· Διὰ τὸν Κύριον μὴ ἀποδύσετέ με ἅ φορῶ, ἀλλ' ὥς εἰμι οὕτως με πέμψατε πρὸς Κύριον⁴² “And she said to the old one, ‘Through the Lord do not undress me, but, as I am thus send me to the Lord.’” Members of monasteries or communities of solitaries shared the task of preparing and bathing each other's corpses. This special request would reveal to external audiences that the death of this eremitic male eunuch presented special circumstances; however, there are many reasons that can be read into Anastasia's postmortem request and these requests of other female monks.

⁴² *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 52, lines 14-15.

This reluctance to be undressed, which is present within other legends, could be construed as a type of humility women possesses over their bodies, and, also, one must not dismiss sexual or physical modesty on the part of the hagiographers as one of the reasons behind these burial requests. The female monks are aware of their sexed bodies. They may not wish a member of the brethren to participate in handling them during the physical intimacy contained in undressing, washing, and then redressing a naked human body for burial. This request not to be undressed, understood alongside the Christian notion that a naked and/or beautiful body is capable of posing a great danger or temptation, may imply that the hagiographer attempts to describe away any suspicions of temptation or of blame for holy women who consciously entered as a woman into the midst of holy men.⁴³ It may seem comical to be summarized in this way, but female monks were not entering into male institutions while alive in order to tempt and destroy holy men, therefore they are certainly not trying to bring about a colleague's demise by appearing naked and sexed before them while deceased. Also, for external audiences, a sense of security has been established through outward masculinity and it is possible that the hagiographer wanted to end Anastasia's life with her sexuality safely protected. This reluctance to be undressed also strengthens the idea for external audiences that this is not a dying man; this is a woman still mindful of her female body.

It is more realistic to consider this request as the final setup for the dramatic conclusion of the legend. It is plausible that for the hagiographer this character has been fully developed within a male persona, which contains a vague suggestion of male garb, so that the ironic conclusion depends on the abrupt discovery of Anastasia's sex and the subsequent sense of awe from the brethren. This could be the principle reason for clothing requests never being adhered to within these tales.

Anastasia does not discuss or explain her situation or the motivations of her transvestic enterprise within the legend. At the end of this manuscript, the hagiographer has the abbot recount her story to the internal audience in order to provide a spiritual lesson. This literary tactic, where the main character is silent throughout the story,

⁴³ Kazhdan, 1990, 135.

belittles Anastasia's own voice within the legend, but it does serve to glorify the figure of Daniel who is responsible for the maintenance of this holy woman. Constructively however, the hagiographer transfers attention from the entertaining aspects of this legend to the instructive and eschatological elements of this legend by having the abbot officially recount the details of Anastasia's life at the end.

According to the abbot, chastity, virginity, fear, and anonymity are Anastasia's motives for becoming an eremitic ascetic. It is reported that ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἰουστινιανὸς πάνυ ἡγάπα αὐτὴν καὶ ᾔθελεν λαβεῖν αὐτήν⁴⁴ “the emperor Justinian loved her very much and wished to seize her,” which prompted her to reveal the lustful advances of the emperor to Θεοδώρα τῇ Αὐγούστη, καὶ ἡ Θεοδώρα ἐξώρισεν αὐτὴν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ⁴⁵ “to the empress Theodora, and Theodora banished her from Alexandria.” Daniel continues to reveal that she fled into the desert to find solace and escape because πόσους μαγιστριανοὺς ἀπέστειλεν ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀναζητῶν αὐτήν, οὐ μόνον δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος καὶ πᾶσα σχεδὸν ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρεια! καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐστὶν ὁ μαθὼν ἕως τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας ἐν ποίῳ τόπῳ ἐστίν.⁴⁶ “many royal magistrates set off searching for her, and not only the royal [magistrates], but the archbishop and all the neighborhoods of Alexandria, and nothing was ascertained until it was today in this place.” This last statement proves just how successful a masculine persona, when used in isolation, especially if an authoritative figure constructs its social masculinity, is at establishing anonymity for a young virgin hiding from the most powerful man in the empire. Even though a search party had the backing of the emperor, no woman could be found matching Anastasia's description because she chooses to hide amongst a company of men.

The outer and social masculinity of Anastasia, although not highly developed, presents her as a male eunuch to audiences, allows her the means by which to retain her chastity, and would suffice in dismissing suspicion of her true identity if any members of

⁴⁴ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 53, lines 3-4.

⁴⁵ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 53, lines 4-6.

⁴⁶ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 53, lines 16-19.

the internal audience besides the abbot make contact with her. Virginity is the catalyst for her sojourn as an isolated male eunuch because no element other than escaping the advances of the emperor is discussed. This female monk character is a young woman who knows what type of life she does not desire, i.e. a sexual courtly and worldly life. For the protection of and control over her sexuality and womanhood, Anastasia becomes a male monk in the desert.

Euphrosyne, who is portrayed as an ultra-pious loving daughter, joins an ascetic life in order to protect her chastity and become a pure bride of Christ. She joins a male monastery in order to hide from her father, who, out of love, would naturally search for her and substitute her spiritual plans with betrothal plans of his own. Her pious character is shown by the hagiographer to be clearly situated and fully blossomed in her womanhood from the onset of the legend. For readers, any evidence of inward masculinity is overshadowed by her desire as a young maiden to remain bodily and spiritually unspoiled and by her emotional attachment for her father.

The following passage belongs to a discussion between Euphrosyne and a religious hermit. She asks his advice concerning an inevitable future marriage, which she dreads. This aversion to sex and marriage is a trait praised in many holy men and women by patristic writers. If Euphrosyne's motivations are associated with the ideal asexual state of humans as discussed in chapter three, then she embodies the ideology of gender progression because she is moving towards the ideal Christian Man by dedicating herself to a strict *monastic* lifestyle. However, the fact that she chooses to do so in male monastic garb is not important. This monastic lifestyle by default must be male because she is in hiding. What is important is that a woman wants to remain a pious and virginal woman, which is further shown by a following passage.

Πάντα οὖν τὰ τοῦ μοναχικοῦ βίου περιεργασαμένη λέγει τῷ μοναχῷ·
Ἦθελον δυνάμεως ἔχειν καὶ ὑπελθεῖν τὸν βίον τοῦτον, ἀλλὰ φοβοῦμαι
τὸν πατέρα μου, ὅτι διὰ τὰ μάταια τοῦ βίου τοῦτου πράγματα
βούλεταί με ἐκδοῦναι ἀνδρί. Λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ μοναχός· Μη μίανη
ἄνθρωπος τὸ σῶμά σου, μηδὲ παραδῶς κάλλος τοιοῦτον πάθει
αἰσχύνης, ἀλλ' ὅλην σεαυτὴν νύμφευσον τῷ Χριστῷ τῷ δυναμένῳ

χαρίσασθαί σοι ἀντὶ τῶν παρερχομένων τούτων πραγμάτων πᾶσαν
τὴν τῶν οὐρανῶν βασιλείαν.⁴⁷

“Therefore all of the affairs of the monastery were tediously elaborated upon, she said to the monk, ‘I wish that I had the ability to steal away from this life, but I am afraid my father, because according to the profanity of this life, wishes to consider giving me up to men.’ The monk said to her, ‘Do not defile your body with a man, do not deliver up beauty of such quality to suffer from tarnish, but your whole self become a young bride to Christ who can give graciously to you all the kingdom of heaven instead of these things that are coming against you.’”

Euphrosyne takes this advice to heart. In the next passage, which is discussed in detail in the outward masculinity chapter, the hermit shaves her hair and dresses her in the clothes of a novice female ascetic, which acknowledges the dedication of a holy woman to a religious life.

In the next passage she changes herself into the clothes of a man. The pragmatic reasoning behind her entrance into a male monastery is reported on by the hagiographer through Euphrosyne’s own voice, which was examined in detail in the chapter on outward masculinity. During this speech she discerns that a convent does not provide adequate levels of concealment for the defense of her virginity, but a male disguise enhanced through institutional transvestism provides the ultimate disguise. In the male monastery that she and her father have had a close relationship with throughout her youth, Euphrosyne enjoys peace, anonymity, and autonomy and excels in piety and self-mortification for her entire life, although homosexual tensions almost ruin her plans.

However, her father reenters the plot. Throughout the plot in the background, Paphnutius never ceases searching for her. Eventually he goes to the monastery to ask for prayers. He is sent to Euphrosyne, a notable spiritual figure amongst the brethren, for counsel. After this first encounter, Euphrosyne is seen as a very emotional daughter. Ὡς οὖν εἶδε τὸν ἑαυτῆς πατέρα, ὅλη δακρύων ἐπληρώθη. Ὁ δὲ ἐνόμιζεν ὅτι χάριν κατανύξεως οὕτως ἐστίν.⁴⁸ “Thus when she saw her father, she was wholly filled with tears. But he thought it was because of grace that she was in this way.” She

⁴⁷ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 198, lines 17-30.

⁴⁸ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 203, lines 4-6.

cries at the sight of her father whom she abandoned for the sake of her own soul many years previous. He is completely unaware who this monk truly is due to her outward and social masculinity, which is gleaned from his misunderstanding of her tearful reaction. They become very close spiritual friends and remain that way until her death, at which point he returns to say his farewells. She asks him to remain with her for three days, during which she reveals to him her identity.

Ἀπελθὼν οὖν ὁ Παφνούτιος καὶ ἐπιπεσὼν τῷ σκιμποδίῳ ἐν ᾧ ἀνέκειτο ὁ Σμάραγδος, κατεφίλει αὐτὸν λέγων· Εὕξαι ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, κύρι ἀδελφέ, ἵνα δώῃ μοι ὁ Θεὸς παραμυθίαν περὶ τοῦ τέκνου μου, ὅτι οὐπω ἀπεθεραπεύθη ἡ ψυχὴ μου τῆς λύπης. Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· Μὴ λυποῦ μηδὲ δάκρυε, ὁ γὰρ Θεὸς ὥς ἔτι εἰ ᾧδε πληροφοπεῖ σε ἕνεκεν αὐτῆς· ἀλλὰ παρακαλῶ σε, κύριέ μου, παράμεινον ᾧδε τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ μὴ ἀποστῇς ἀπ' ἐμοῦ.⁴⁹

“Therefore Paphnoutios returned and fell upon the pallet on which Smaragdus was reclining. He kissed him saying, ‘Pray for me, lord brother, so that God will give to me comfort concerning my child, because not yet has my soul been healed of its pain.’ And she said to him, ‘Do not pain yourself and do not weep, for God, while you are here, will satisfy your concerns for her. I entreat you, my lord, remain here for three days, and do not leave me.’”

The three days pass.

Ὡς οὖν ἔγνω ὅτι μέλλει λοιπὸν πρὸς Κύριον ὑπάγειν, προσκαλεῖται τὸν ἑαυτῆς πατέρα καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Ἐπειδὴ ὁ Θεὸς ὠκονόμησεν τὰ κατ' ἐμὲ ὥς ἠθέλησεν, καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν τὴν ἐμὴν ἐπιθυμίαν, βούλομαι λοιπὸν ἄλυπον εἶναί σε ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον χάριν τῆς θυγατρὸς σου Εὐφροσύνης. Ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ἡ ταπεινὴ, καὶ ἰδοὺ, εἶδες καὶ ἐπληροφορήθης, ἀλλὰ μηδεὶς γινωσκέτω τέως, μηδὲ ἀφῆς ἄλλον συστειλαί τὸ σῶμά μου, ἀλλὰ σὺ αὐτὸς τοῦτο ποιήσον.⁵⁰

“Therefore when it was known that she was at the point of death, she summoned her father and said to him, ‘Since God has been steward over me as he has willed and has fulfilled my desire, I wish that from today you will be without grief because of your daughter Euphrosyne. For I am the humble one, and behold, you have seen me and are fulfilled, but meanwhile let no one know and do not allow another to shroud my body, but only you do this.’”

She wants her father to know her identity and her love for him. She needs her father to realize that his abandonment is not malevolent in nature, but one that secures her place

⁴⁹ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 203, lines 28-34.

⁵⁰ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 204, lines 1-7.

among the angels. She needs to be recognized as his daughter once again, although based on her emotive reactions she has never ceased to be this figure for external audiences, to whom the hagiographer presents her tears of love at the sight of him, their reunion, and her confession of identity. This disclosure comes with a request for him to preserve her secret, prepare her body alone for burial, and distribute her assets to the brethren. Euphrosyne only wants a neutral male figure to see and administer to her nakedness after death, which here it should have been Paphnutius, in secret, caring for the remains of his daughter so that no other man is privy to the sight of her female body or to her gendered secret. Again there seems to be a concern with a female body and the physical intimacy involved with the handling of bodily remains.

To all of this he agrees and she then dies. However, seconds later the promise of secrecy is forgotten. When the reality of her death set in, which is the second time Paphnutius loses his daughter, he wails over her body and through his grief speaks aloud of her disappearance and disguise.

ἐπιπεσὼν τῷ ἁγίῳ αὐτῆς προσώπῳ καὶ δάκρυσι τοῦτο βρέχων, ἐβόα λέγων· Οἶμοι, τέκνον μου γλυκύτατον, διὰ τί μὴ πρὸ καιροῦ ταῦτά μοι ἐθάρρησας, ἵνα καὶ γὰρ συναπέθανόν σου τῇ προαιρέσει.⁵¹

“Falling upon her holy face and moistening the surface [of her face] with weeping, he shouted saying, ‘Woe is me my sweet child! Why did you not tell this to me in confidence sooner, so that I also could have died with you?’”

Agapios, the spiritual supervisor of Euphrosyne, overhears this and immediately shares this information with the rest of the brethren, who are all astonished. Lying dead before them is the pious daughter of one of their patrons, a holy woman who passed as a man to secure her place as a woman among the saints.

For the *Vita* of Hilaria the primary concerns are the materialistic and carnal connotations of a royal life, especially an inevitable royal marriage versus the state of her spirit, which is seen as directly affected by her sexual state.

ΤΝΟΘ ΔΕ ΝΩΕΡΕ ΜΠΡΟ ΝΕΥΝ ΟΥΝΟΘ ΝΡΟΥΩ ΖΙΪΩΘ
 ΕΕΡΠΑΡΘΕΝΟΘ ΜΑΛΛΟΝ ΔΕ ΝΕΕΕΠΙΘΥΜΕΙ ΕΤΜΝΤΑΠΟΤΑΚΤΙΚΟΘ

⁵¹ *Euphrosyne*, Boucherie, 204, lines 17-20.

ΕΤΕ ΤΜΝΤΜΟΝΑΧΟC ΤΕ ΝΕCΡΖΟΤΕ ΓΑΡ ΠΕ ΕΒΩΚ ΕΝΕΜΟΝΑCΤΗΡΙΟΝ
ΜΠΒΥCΑΝΤΙΟΝ ΧΕ ΝCΕΝΑΩΟΠC ΕΡΟΟΥ ΑΝ ΕΤΒΕ ΝΕCΕΪΟΤΕ ΝΕΥΝ
ΟΥΝΟC ΝΡΟΟΥΩ ΩΟΟΠ ΝΑC ΧΕ ΟΥ ΠΕΤCΝΑΑΑΑΨ ΩΑΝΤΕCΕΪ ΕΖΟΥΝ
ΕΠΤΩΖΜ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΝΤΜΜΝΤΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC.⁵²

“The eldest of the king’s daughters had great concerns about her virginity. Moreover, she had set her heart upon the life of monastic renunciation. Therefore, she feared to go to the monasteries of Byzantium since they would not receive her because of her parents. She was greatly concerned with what she should do until she went into the holy convocation of virginity.”

The hagiographer discloses Hilaria’s female voice above within the narrator’s statement that “*she* had set her heart upon the life of monastic renunciation.” The legend of Hilaria commences with mention of her virginity as part of her holy womanhood. The hagiographer describes to external audiences that in her heart there exists a yearning for the spiritual struggle of asceticism and a reader can assume that she would have joined a convent had it not been for the inescapable obligations of a princess, which involve a future marriage, political partnership, and royal heirs. Therefore, because a monastic and virginal life is impossible to achieve if she remains with her royal family, she abandons her aristocratic life to enter into ascetic isolation. After her admission into a male institution, chosen in order to supply a necessary level of anonymity, she excels in ascesis, becomes exemplary in self-control, and is granted the power to heal. Due to her successes the brethren send the youngest princess, now possessed, to Hilaria for healing.

At this sibling reunion Hilaria weeps out of concern and expresses love for her sister even though she had abandoned her family. The internal audience present at this emotional scene conveys surprise over such overwhelming compassion, especially for a young girl with whom the monk was previously unacquainted. These reactions are presented so external audiences, privy to Hilaria’s true identity throughout the tale, do not confuse this type of emotional response with normal monastic behavior. This is something more – this is the true grief of a loved one.

ΝΤΕΡΕCΝΑΥ ΔΕ ΕΤΕCΩΝΕ ΑCΜΚΑΖΝΖΗΤ ΑΥΩ Α ΠΕCΑ ΝΖΟΥΝ
ΩΤΟΡΤΡ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΕCΩΝΕ· ΑCΠΑΖΤC ΕΧΜ ΠΚΑΖ ΑCΠΙΜΕ· ΖΩCΔΕ
ΝCΖΕΡΤ ΠΚΑΖ ΖΝ ΝΕCΡΜΕΪΟΟΥΕ ΕCΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ ΠΧΟΕΙC ΩΑΝΖΤΗΚ

⁵² *Hilaria*, Drescher, 2, lines 10-16.

2Α ΤΕΙΚΟΥΪ ΝΩΕΕΡΕ – ΝΕCΝΗΥ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΡΟΥΝΑΥ ΕΡΟC ΑΥΡΩΠΗΡΕ
ΕΞΜ ΠΕCΜΚΑ2Ν2ΗΤ ΑΛΛΑ ΜΠΟΥΕΪΜΕ Ε2ΩΒ ΝΤΕΙΜΙΝΕ ΑΛΛΑ
ΝΕΥΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ 4ΩΟΟΠ 2Ν ΟΥΜΝΤΩΕΝ2ΤΗ4 Ε2ΟΥΝ ΕΡΟC.⁵³

“When she saw her sister, she was grieved and her heart was troubled because of her. She threw herself upon the ground and wept until she wet the ground with her tears and said, ‘My Lord, have mercy on this young girl!’ And when the brothers saw her they marveled over her grief, but did not understand it and were saying, ‘He feels compassion for her.’”

ΕCΩΑΝΤΩΟΥΝ ΕΩΛΗΛ ΝΕΩΑCΩΛΗΛ ΝΜΜΑC ΕCΩΑΝΘΩΩΤ Ε2ΟΥΝ
Ε2ΡΑC ΩΑΡΕ ΠΕCCA Ν2ΟΥΝ ΒΩΛ ΕΒΟΛ – ΩΑCΠΑ2ΤC ΕΞΜ ΠΚΑ2
ΝCΡΙΜΕ ΩΑΝΤΕC2ΕΡΠ ΠΚΑ2 2Ν ΝΕCΡΜΕΪΟΟΥΕ – ΕCΩΑΝΤΩΟΥΝ ΔΕ
ΟΝ ΩΑC2ΟΛΘ Ε2ΟΥΝ ΕΡΟC ΝC†ΠΕΪ ΕΡΩC· 2ΕΝCΟΠ ΔΕ ΟΝ
ΩΑCΕΝΚΟΤΚ 2ΙΧΕΝ ΟΥΠΟΪ ΝΟΥΩΤ ΝΜΜΑC ΝΤΕΥΩΗ ΤΗΡC⁵⁴

“When she would rise to pray, she would pray with her; when she would look at her, her heart weakened inside of her. She would throw herself upon the ground weeping until she wet the ground with her tears. Further, when she rose she would embrace and kiss her. Also, at times, she would sleep on the same bench with her all night.”

However, the ultra-compassionate and intimate mechanics of the healing cause suspicion and Hilaria is summoned to the royal court. The peculiarity of the whole affair is expressed through the surprise of the royal internal audience that learned of this eunuch’s behavior towards the princess. When the healed princess is asked about her experiences, she reports to her father that

ΟΥΝΟΘ ΤΕ ΤΕ4ΜΝΤΩΑΝ2ΤΗ4 Ε2ΟΥΝ ΕΡΟΪ· ΟΥΜΗΗΩΕ ΓΑΡ ΝCΟΠ
ΩΑ4ΑCΠΑΖΕ ΜΜΟΪ ΕΤΑΤΑΠΡΟ· 2ΕΝCΟΠ ΔΕ ΟΝ ΩΑ4ΕΝΚΟΤΚ ΝΜΜΑΪ
2Ν ΟΥΠΟΪ ΝΝΟΥΩΤ ΝΤΕΥΩΗ ΤΗΡC – ΠΡΡΟ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΡΕ4CΩΤΜ ΕΝΑΪ Α
Π2ΩΒ ΩΩΠΕ Ε42ΟΡΩ ΝΑ2ΡΑ4 :- ΠΕΧΑ4 ΧΕ ΜΠΙCΩΤΜ ΕΝΕ2 ΧΕ
ΩΑΡΕ ΜΟΝΑΧΟC ΑCΠΑΖΕ ΝC2ΙΜΕ· Η Ν4ΕΝΚΟΤΚ 2ΙΧΝ ΟΥΠΟΪ
ΝΝΟΥΩΤ ΝΜΜΑC – ΑΛΛΑ ΝΩΑΙCΩΤΜ ΧΕ CΕΜΟCΤΕ ΜΠΕΙΓΕΝΟC ΧΕ
C2ΙΜΕ· ΕΤΒΕ ΠΑΙ ΡΩ ΝΕΥΒΗΚ ΕΠΧΑΪΕ ΑΥΩ ΧΕ ΜΕΥΑΝΪΧΕ ΡΩΑΧΕ
ΝΜΜΑΥ ΕΠΤΗΡ4· ΑΥΩ ΝΕΡΕ ΠΕΪΜΕΕΥΕ ΠΑΪ ΩΤΟΡΤΡ ΜΜΟ4⁵⁵

“Great was his compassion towards me. For on many occasions he would kiss me on the mouth. Sometimes, also, he would lie with me on the same bench with me all night.’ When the king heard this affair it befell heavy on him. He said, ‘I never heard that a monk often kisses a woman or lies on the same bench with

⁵³ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 8, lines 30-35; 9, lines 1.

⁵⁴ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 9, lines 12-17.

⁵⁵ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 10, lines 10-19.

her, but I have always heard that they hated womankind. Because of this fact they go to the desert and cannot bring themselves to speak with them at all.’ And this thought was troubling him.”

It is clear that this is considered abnormal compassion, suspected of being sexual in nature, expressed by a monk, who, the emperor reasons, should be detached from the affairs of the world. The emperor requires that Hilaria explain the details and motivations behind the healing. During a lengthy dialogue with her father Hilaria reveals her true self.

ΤΠΑΡΘΕΝΟC ΔΕ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑCΜΕΚΜΟΥΚC ΕCΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ †ΟΥΩΩ
ΕΖΗΠ ΠΩΑΧΕ· ΑΛΛΑ ΧΕ ΝΝΕ ΠΚΕCΕΕΠC ΝΝΕΜΟΝΑΧΟC †ΟCΕ
ΝΤΑΑΦΟΡΜΗ· ΕΤΡΕΥΜΕΕΥΕ ΕΥΤΩΛΜ ΝΤΕΙΜΙΝΕ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΝΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ·
ΑΥΩ ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΑΝΙΝΕ ΝΑΪ ΜΠΕCΤΟΟΥ ΝΝΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ ΕΠΙΜΑ
– ΝΓΩΡΚ ΝΑΪ ΧΕ ΝΓΝΑΟΥΕΝΖ ΠΖΩΒ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΝ· ΟΥΔΕ ΝΓΝΑΚΩΛΥ
ΜΜΟΪ ΑΝ ΕΒΩΚ ΕΠΑΜΟΝΑCΤΗΡΙΟΝ – ΑΥΩ ΑΥΩΡΚ ΝΑC ΝΟΙ ΠΡΡΟ –
ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΑΝΟΚ ΠΕ ΖΛΛΑΡΙΑ ΤΕΚΩΕΕΡΕ· ΠΡΡΟ ΔΕ
ΝΤΕΡΕCΩΤΜ ΑΥΩΤΟΡΤΡ· ΑΥΩ ΜΠΕCΕΩΘΜΘΟΜ ΕΩΑΧΕ ΝΝΑΟΥΝΟΥ
ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΡΕCΑΙCΘΑΝΕ ΑΥ† ΠΕCΟΥΟΙ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΤΕCΩΕΕΡΕ ΑΥΠΑΖΤΥ
ΕΖΡΑΪ ΕΧΜ ΠΕCΜΑΚΖ ΝΘΕ ΝΙΩCΗΦ ΜΠΕΪΟΥΟΕΙΩ ΝΤΑCΟΥΩΥΤ ΕΧΜ
ΠΜΑΚΖ ΝΪΑΚΩΒ ΠΕCΕΙΩΤ ΑΥΩ ΑΥ†ΠΪ ΕΡΩC ΕCΡΙΜΕ.⁵⁶

“The holy virgin thought to herself, saying, ‘I wish to reveal the affair lest the remainder of the monks suffer through my fault and such thoughts should pollute the saints.’ And she said to him, ‘Bring to me the four gospels here and swear to me to not make the affair known or prevent me from returning to my monastery.’ And the king swore to her. And she said to him, ‘I am your daughter Hilaria.’ When he heard this he was troubled and he did not have the power to speak for many hours. When he came to himself, he approached his daughter and threw himself on her neck, like Joseph when he threw himself on the neck of his father, Jacob, and kissed her, weeping.”

ΑΥΩ Α ΠΡΡΟ ΖΕΠ ΠΖΩΒ ΕΝΕCΝΗΥ ΝΤΑΥΕΪ ΝΜΜΑC ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑΥΩΡΚ
ΝΑC ΑΥΚΑΤΕΧΕ ΝΝΕCΝΗΥ ΖΑΤΗΥ ΩΟΜΝΤ ΝΕΒΟΤ ΕΤΒΕ ΤΕCΩΕΕΡΕ·
ΧΕΚΑC ΕCΕΩ ΕCΝΑΥ ΕΡΟC ΜΜΗΝΕ ΑΥΧΝΟΥC ΔΕ ΕΤΒΕ ΘΕ ΝΤΑCΕΙ
ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ ΠΕCΗΪ – ΑΥΩ ΑCΤΑΜΟΥ ΕΤΒΕ ΘΕ ΝΑΤΑCΦΟΡΙ ΜΠΕCΧΗΜΑ
ΝCΤΡΑΤΗΛΑΤΗC· ΜΝ ΘΕ ΝΤΑCΕΪ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΡΑΚΟΤΕ ΜΝ ΘΕ ΝΤΑCΒΩΚ
ΕΩΪΗΤ ΜΝ ΠΔΙΑΚΟΝΟC⁵⁷

“And the king hid the affair from the brothers who had come with her and he kept the monks with him for three months because of his daughter so that he was able to her every day. He asked her how she left his house. She told him how she

⁵⁶ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 11, lines 21-34.

⁵⁷ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 12, lines 7-13.

dressed in the form of the soldiers, how she went to Alexandria, and how she went to Shiet with the deacon.”

The obvious motivation for her disclosure is to dispel any negative opinions of the monks of Scetis caused by the mechanics of the healing. However, her father Zeno is more eager to retain her at the palace than she is to stay. It seems as though Hilaria is only keen to reveal herself to her family once they had sworn to keep her secret and acknowledge her freedom as a single ascetic woman. This will allow her return to the monastery. This shows that this reunion is not the intended conclusion or apex of the tale and that her ascetic lifestyle is an autonomous woman’s enterprise.

Regardless, it seems important for the hagiographer that she is known as a daughter once more by internal audiences in order to give additional depth to her story by intertextually connecting it to the story of Joseph and his father Jacob. Hilaria, who assumes the patriarch’s role in the story, which reflects the spiritual authority she has claimed for herself through asceticism, is reunited with her family. Her family experiences relief and satisfaction over finding a lost loved one, but also an overpowering love and happiness as evident in the tale. This is a family willing to support their member by perpetuating her disguise so that she may be able to return to the desert for the sake of her salvation. Hilaria, though reunited with the lay life she had previously escaped to make possible her salvation, returns to her monastery because that is where she has made her struggle for redemption and has made her home. The climax of the story is to be at the end, when the brethren are instructed according to her example as a holy woman.

Hilaria lives the remainder of her life in her monastery as Hilarion the eunuch. As she lies dying, she requests to remain clothed in her male habit for burial.

ΝΤΕΡΕCΕΙ ΔΕ ΕΨΙΗΤ ΑCΩΝ2 2ΝΚΕΜΝΤCΝΟΟΥC ΕΝΡΟΜΠΕ· ΕΠ2ΑΗ
ΔΕ ΑC2Ε Ε2ΡΑΪ ΕΠΩΩΝΕ ΕΤΕΨΑCΜΟΥ Ν2ΗΤ4 ΑC2ΥΠΟΜΙΝΕ ΕΡΟ4
2Ν ΟΥΜΝΤΧΩΩΡΕ· ΑCΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΠΠΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΠΑΜΒΩ ΑCΤΑΡΚΟ4
ΕCΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ ΕΪΨΑΝΧΩΚ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΑΒΙΟC· ΕΠΙΔΗ ΝΤΟΚ
ΠΕΤCΟΟΥΝ ΜΠΤΩΨ ΘΡ4 ΜΠΑΒΙΟC ΜΝ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ· ΜΠΕΡΤΡΕΥΚΑΑΤ
ΚΑ2ΗΥ ΝΤΑΛΕΒΙΤΟΝ ΑΛΛΑ ΜΑΡΟΥΚΟΟCΤ ΝΜΜΑC – ΝΑΪ ΔΕ

ΝΤΕΡΕCΧΟΟΥ ΑC† ΠΕΠΝΑ· ΝΕCΑΖΕ ΔΕ ΕΡΑΤΗ ΖΙΧΩC ΝΟΙ
ΠΠΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΠΑ ΠΑΜΒΩ· ΑCΤΡΟΥΕΪΡΕ ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑCΧΟΟC.⁵⁸

“When she came to Shiet, she lived twelve more years. In the end she fell down with a sickness, which she bore without hindrance, that causes her to die. She summoned the holy apa Pambo and made him swear saying, ‘When I finish my life, since you know my whole life story along with God, do not let my habit be taken off of me, but let me be buried in it.’ When she had said this she gave up her spirit. The holy apa Pambo stood over her. He had it done as she had requested.”

Since Pambo learns of her true identity earlier in the tale, he respects her final request. Hilaria achieves a desired level of post-mortem humility concerning her naked female body. This is clearly not a final attempt by the hagiographer to provide further anonymity for her amongst the brethren, but it is meant to be a statement of humility. Here is a holy woman aware of her sexed body and protective over it and the effect it may have on the brethren. This is evident from the fact that although no one views the naked corpse of Hilaria, Pambo betrays her anonymity and proceeds to reveal her truth to the brethren in a spiritual and inspirational lesson after her burial. Eternal anonymity does not exist for these women for it seems they make better figures to reflect upon. In this way, at the end of the tale, readers become internalized within the text as the brethren, and find themselves positioned around the abbot learning of the significance of this example of a holy womanhood.

The legend of Apolinaria contains an almost identical storyline to that of Hilaria. Just as the hagiographer for Hilaria describes ascetic aspirations found within her heart while still a princess, so too does the hagiographer of Apolinaria for external audiences. These desires blossom within Apolinaria’s heart before any masculinization occurs. Her masculine ruse will then be received as a woman’s enterprise.

γεναμένης οὖν αὐτῆς ἐννόμου ἡλικίας ἐζήτουν οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς ζευξαί
αὐτὴν ἀνδρὶ· ἡ δὲ οὐκ ᾔθελεν· ἐν μίᾳ οὖν τῶν ἡμερῶν λέγει τοῖς ἰδίοις
γονεῦσιν πόθον ἔχω ἀπελθεῖν εἰς μοναστήριον καὶ ἀκοῦσαι τὰς ἀγίας
γραφάς· καὶ τὸν κανόνα τὸν μοναχικὸν θεάσασθαι· οἱ δὲ λέγουσιν αὐτῇ·
τέκνον· θέλομέν σε ζευξαί ἀνδρὶ· ἡ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἐγὼ ἀνδρὶ ζευχθῆναι

⁵⁸ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 12, lines 17-26.

οὐ θέλω ἀλλὰ ἐλπίζω ὅτι ὅν τρόπον ἐφύλαξεν ὁ θεὸς τὰς ἀγίας αὐτοῦ παρθένους ἀμιάντους.⁵⁹

“When she grew older, her parents sought to betroth her to a man. She did not wish this. Therefore one day she said to her parents, ‘I have a desire to go into a monastery, hear the holy scriptures, and to see the monastic rules.’ They said to her, ‘Child, do you wish to be betrothed to a man?’ But she said to them, ‘I do not wish to be betrothed to a man, but I hope for the way of life that the Holy God guards for his pure virgins.’”

This dialogue is repeated shortly afterwards in the legend. λέγουσιν αὐτῇ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς· τέκνον τί θέλεις· ἡ δὲ λέγει αὐτοῖς· παρακαλῶ ἵνα με προσαγάγητε τῷ θεῷ ὅπως τὸν μισθὸν τῆς παρθενίας μου ἔχητε.⁶⁰ “Her parents said to her, ‘Child, what do you wish?’ And she said to them, ‘I ask that you introduce me to God so that the payment of my virginity is kept.’” After this dialogue, the hagiographer writes μετ’ ὀλίγας δὲ ἡμέρας ἤνεγκαν ἀσκητρίας καὶ ἐδίδαξαν αὐτὴν τὸ ψαλτήριον καὶ τὰς γραφὰς ἀναγινώσκειν.⁶¹ “Within a few days, they took the female ascetic and taught her the psalter and to read scripture.” This passage, which immediately precedes a request to visit the holy places, is interesting because the hagiographer uses the word ἀσκητρίας in reference to Apolinaria.

This Greek word ἀσκητής is the female version of the word that means “one who practices asceticism.” Apolinaria, prior to any masculinization, is associated already by the hagiographer with a holy womanhood before the plot structure has been fully realized. Here is an ἀσκητρίας, or at least one who desires to become such, who must find a way to continue this desired type of spiritual life. An inward masculinity is non-existent because she is an ascetically-minded royal princess who must use a ruse to actualize this goal.

She gains permission to visit the holy places. Her parents send with her servants and supplies, which represent wealth and abundance, but she releases and distributes them upon her arrival in the Holy Land. This wealth is also an obstacle to gaining

⁵⁹ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 152, lines 4-7, 153, lines 1-3.

⁶⁰ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 153, lines 9-11.

⁶¹ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 153, lines 13-14.

entrance to a monastic community. She makes pilgrimage to various sites and gradually makes her way through the Holy Land, but for Apolinaria, this whole spiritual voyage is a tactic to prolong her virginity and she is now in a more conducive situation to procure a male habit as a disguise. Her subsequent escape ensures the permanence of her ascetic leanings through an autonomy provided through anonymity.

Apolinaria spends many years isolated in a swamp and then in a male monastery where she excels in virtue and self-control. During this time her sister is victim to demonic possession and is sent to the monastery of Apolinaria to be healed. She is eventually given into the charge of her sister, now called Dorotheos. The mechanics of the healing read much like those that Hilaria used, but with less emotion involved in the reunion with her sibling because Apolinaria seems more concerned with her anonymity. When told that she would take the princess into her cell for prayer she argues with the Macarius,

ἀκούσασα δὲ τοῦτα ἤρξατο ὀδύρεσθαι καὶ λέγειν τίς εἰμι ἐγὼ ὁ
ἁμαρτωλὸς ὅτι τοιαῦτα ἔχετε περὶ ἐμοῦ· καὶ κλίνας τὰ γόνατα ἔλεγεν
συγχώρησόν μοι πάτερ κλαῦσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας μου ὅτι πολλάί εἰσιν ἐγὼ
γὰρ ἀσθενής εἰμι καὶ ἰδιώτης εἰς τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦτο.⁶²

“Hearing this, she began to lament and to say, ‘Who am I? A sinner, because sin possesses me.’ And kneeling said, ‘Forgive me father, my sins cause me to weep because they are many and I am weak, and an untrained person in this affair.’”

Clearly this can be seen as a normal argument by a male monk who does not trust himself with temptation. However, Dorotheos is a woman, which is a fact that the hagiographer presents to external audiences throughout the tale, therefore this argument is understood as a maneuver to retain her anonymity against her sister. This is what Apolinaria fears – a loss of autonomy that has been supplied by her masculine ruse. There should be no connection between this statement and an inward masculinity since she is attempting to remain a single holy woman within this legend.

However, Apolinaria yields to her abbot’s request. When she sees her sister for the first time the hagiographer describes an emotional response, although it is not

⁶² *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 158, lines 12-15.

comparable the spectrum of reactions found in the tale of Hilaria. παρέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ καὶ ἔγνω ὅτι ἡ ἀδελφὴ αὐτῆς ἐστὶν καὶ δακρύσασα ἡσύχασεν· ἀσπασαμένη δὲ αὐτὴν εἶπεν καλῶς ἦλθες ἀδελφή.⁶³ “She brought her into her cell and knew that she was her sister. Weeping, she remained quiet concerning this, and welcoming her she said, ‘You have come well sister.’” She cries, which is a move to compunction by sight of a loved sibling, and refers to the possessed princess as “sister,” which is a title of reference for others in Christian communities, but given the emotions of Apolinaria at this reunion, this statement may have a double connotation.

Soon, her sister returns to the emperor fully healed, however, shortly after she appears pregnant due to a second demonic possession. The only logical explanation is that one of the monks of Scetis has impregnated her. Due to this Apolinaria is summoned before her father to explain the mechanics of the healing.

ὁ ἀββᾶς δωρόθεος λέγων παρακαλῶ τὴν εὐσέβειάν σου μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἀκοῦσαι τὸ πρᾶγμα τῆς θυγατρὸς σου· ἀπέλθομεν καθιδίαν καγὼ ὑμῖν πάντα ἀναγγείλω οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐφθάρη· οὐδὲ ἔχει κακὸν μὴ γένοιτο; καὶ ὥς ἀπῆλθον κατιδίαν αὐτῇ καὶ οἱ γονεῖς αὐτῆς· εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· διὰ τὸν κύριον δότε μοι λόγον ὅτι ἐὰν γνῶτε τὸ ἀληθές ἀπολύετε με ἐν τῷ τόπῳ μου· καὶ δωσάντων λόγον αὐτῇ τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ.⁶⁴

“The Abbot Dorotheos said, ‘I beg you reverent one with peace to listen to the affair concerning your daughter. She left whole and I proclaim to all that I did not ravish her, nor has she become corrupted; and she returns as she was before to her parents.’ She said to them, ‘Through the Lord, these things I will grant, because even if you know the truth, you will send me back to my place.’ And the king and his wife promised.”

λέγει πατέρα ἐγὼ εἰμι ἀπολησαρία ἡ θυγάτηρ σου.⁶⁵

“She said to her father, ‘I am Apolinaria, your daughter.’”

In this dramatic moment, she voluntarily reveals her true identity. Although it is not explicitly stated as in the *Vita* of Hilaria, the hagiographer presents this as an attempt to dispel negative criticism of the activities of the monks of Scetis. This occurs only after procuring a promise from her royal parents that she will be allowed to continue her

⁶³ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 158, lines 18-20.

⁶⁴ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 159, lines 18-24.

⁶⁵ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 153, lines 28-29.

existence as an autonomous holy woman, but Apolinaria finds that they are willing to support her by keeping her secret. There is no longer a need for anonymity to escape a worldly life; there is now only a need for outward and social masculinity in order to return as one of the brethren to complete her life as a monk.

Apolinaria returns to her monastery and lives the remainder of her life within its walls. Shortly thereafter the reader finds Apolinaria on her deathbed. The last dialogue given to her in the legend contains a clothing request.

καὶ μεθ' ἡμέρας ὅτε ἔγνω ὅτι ἔχει ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ βίου λέγει τῷ ἀββᾷ μακαρίῳ· ποίησον ἀγάπην ἐὰν συμβῇ με ἐξελθεῖν ἐκ τοῦ βίου μὴ σχηματίσωσίν με ὥς οἱ μοναχοί· καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· πῶς ἐνδέχεται.⁶⁶

“When, after some days, she knew that she was leaving this life she said to the abbot Macarius, ‘Bless me, if it should happen that I depart this life, I was not formed as the monks.’ And he said to him, ‘How is this possible?’”

Here again, this request portrays a sense of her modesty, but it is quickly disregarded. The brothers see her naked female body as they are preparing her corpse for burial. Here naked before them is proof of holy womanhood, which in retrospective speaks towards the spiritual potential of women, which then allows the hagiographer to offer her character to mixed external audiences for inspirational and theological significance.

Conclusions

Inward masculinity, which would have supported the notion of a change having occurred, is absent within the characterizations of these holy women. In fact, it is safe to say that within recorded sentiments, personal statements, speeches, dialogues with loved ones, and reactions towards family members there is instead evidence of continuity. In these stories there exists a persistent holy inward womanhood which outward and social masculinity cannot fully mask. These legends are, and are meant to be, about holy women.

These holy women do not realize their (a)sexuality or religiosity in the figures of men or eunuchs; they realize these concerns within themselves as women – hence the

⁶⁶ *Apolinaria*, Drescher, 160, lines 21-23.

use of masculine deception to become autonomous for ascetic aspirations. One must be willing to concede that the constructed outward and social masculinity in these tales serves the purposes of the women as women, whereas the commendations for these women formed in the masculine serves the purposes of the authors as men. Even then, a masculine appraisal does more to point towards traits idealized as positive in the culture's gender ideology than to show that these women are masculinized in any genuine manner.

The female monks are portrayed as possessing a holy womanhood throughout the tales, no matter the layers of masculinity placed upon them. Hagiographers have presented to external audiences holy women, more specifically holy sisters, wives, and daughters, who use superficial masculinity for anonymity, autonomy, and socio-religious freedom, which allows them to work towards their goals for salvation or penance through ascetic practices undisturbed. These characters start out as women at the beginning of the tales with concerns over chastity and salvation, they proceed through masculine worlds as women, and they remain the holy women they have always been, albeit more spiritually refined, at the conclusions of the tales. Audiences are offered stories of women gaining for themselves, on their own terms, salvation as women. Their legacies continue with their sanctification as women with their original female names, which exposes an official and popular acknowledgment of these women's potential to be exemplary for mixed audiences.

Hagiographers use the voices and emotions of these women to show a holy womanhood. It is important for the womanhood of the characters to remain intact if hagiographers intend to convey inspirational, intriguing, instructive, and theological significance for these *Vitae*. In the next chapter, which is the conclusion to this thesis, each *Vita* will be judged on its ability to satisfy the outlined intentions of the hagiographers through a final reflection on the female monks' intertexts and their threefold masculinity. The final thoughts of this thesis will attempt to evaluate the success of each legend's ability to deliver the inspirational, instructional and theological messages intended by hagiographers for the benefit of external audiences.

Conclusions

Καὶ λέγει ὁ γέρων· Θέλεις ἐξηγήσομαί σοι τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς.¹

“...and the old man said, ‘If you want, then I will teach you about her.’”

This thesis posits that the hagiographers of these *Vitae* present to readers a holy womanhood throughout their tales. It has revealed this fact through locating and stripping away the masculine layers placed upon their female main characters. It contributes to existing scholarship by, one, highlighting the practical choice of the female transvestite figure to represent, in a performative sense, the reversal inherent in human salvation and, two, pinpointing the pragmatic tenor behind the outward and social masculinization of these holy women, which reveals the continuity present in these women’s natures that negates ideas that they become male in any genuine, or inward, sense. These legends concern holy women regardless of an applied or described masculinity.

This thesis has discovered that there are two major directions of study that best expose how masculinity functions for these holy women. The first is a dissection of masculinity into its separate outward, social, and inward components in order to analyze how they collectively characterize female figures. This also highlights how the application of masculinity is fluid and largely metaphorical. The second is an examination of the intertexts found woven together in these tales. Intertexts were chosen purposely in order to present external audiences with familiar figures and plots that communicate the intended instructional, inspirational, and eschatological significance of each legend.

What is revealed is a group of similarly themed hagiographies that were produced in a span of just over two centuries within monastic centers mainly located in the Scetis region of Egypt. The popularity of saints’ stories generated a celebrity culture of the ascetic desert that late antique audiences, both monastic and lay, sought to read about. That celebrity culture was comprised of both holy women and men. Therefore the overall, but more general, reason these stories were produced was to entertain readers with stories that were connected with the popular myth of the desert, as was briefly discussed in chapter three, and that were capable of delivering critical instruction and a number of inspirational and theological messages. The

¹ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 53 line 1.

female monk *Vitae* were produced to add to the larger myth of the desert and to heighten admiration for those belonging to this culture. However this is the larger literary value of these hagiographies; there exist additional operative purposes for producing such entertaining tales of religious heroines, which are discussed below.

Description and Emulation

Inward masculinity, or better stated the absence of inward masculinity, is located through the external descriptions and self-declarations of the female monks found within the tales. Where outward and social masculinity are considered largely functional, inward masculinity can be highly symbolic in its external descriptive form. In the case of Matrona, who is known to be a woman for the better part of her story, but who must conceal herself from an abusive husband, her inward masculine character is praised by others through symbolic gesture. Matrona is granted permanent use of male clothing as a symbol of her authority and strength. Masculine dress as a social symbol will relay to others her leadership, authority, and teaching, and her spiritual, physical, and mental endurance because of the relationship between these types of attributes and the masculine in the cultural mind. This is further validated by the fact that a renowned male religious authority, the abbot Bassianos, sanctions her use of male dress, which almost begs respect and praise from others.

Inward masculinity is most closely related to the ideology of the “male woman,” but only as the “male woman” acts as a descriptive or evaluative language communicating ideas of positive human traits found within a female figure. Masculine language was a necessity of sorts because terms to describe a positive femininity on its own terms were lacking, though not entirely non-existent as the use of the word “mother” within the *Vita* of Matrona and “Godmother” in the *Vita* of Anastasia prove.

More often than not, male intellectuals chose a masculine tone with which to praise female figures in order to promote their exceptionality and spirit within an accepted gendered framework belonging to an androcentric culture. This also helps to cast them as part of the religious celebrity culture. However, external observations do not genuinely reflect the personalities of the female monks because they are formed outside of these women by those observing or preserving their lives. There are no instances where this thesis can pinpoint an inward masculinity within the personas of the women themselves. At all times, even in the case of Matrona which is discussed above, these women are seen to be wives, sisters, and daughters who are

utilizing masculine ruses in order to continue their practice of asceticism as wives, sisters, and daughters undisturbed. Additionally, these women are sustaining religious convictions and ascetic practices that began while living as lay women. In other words, the female monks do not discover their religious aspirations once they become monks, but they become monks to autonomously continue their religious aspirations. This is the element of continuity that this thesis recognizes in the characterization of these holy women.

If there had been statements of self or sentiments deemed to be genuinely male, then this thesis would have had no choice but to admit that hagiographers wanted to show these women as changed by masculinity or monastic vocations. However, an inward masculinization does not occur. Within this examination it became clear that hagiographers were more interested in presenting how these holy women were capable of performing as *women* within the legends. This is proven by hagiographers' stress on the pragmatism of the transvestic ruses, the continual or residual concern for the loved ones that they had once abandoned, and the perpetuation of ascetic convictions.

Inspiration

Outward masculinity, which is connected to the intertext of reversal as it is embodied by the figure of the transvestite, and social masculinity, which is the natural result of a successful male disguise within social settings, are both practical and functional mechanisms through which hagiographers build up their female characters and religious storylines. However, the practicality concerning the characterization of female figures with layers of applied masculinity, which can also be considered the relation of pragmatic transvestism to the overall plot structures, does not negate the creativity or entertainment value of these stories. The practicality is visible through the hagiographers' choice of protagonists that resonate with cultural sentiments and intertexts. They cleverly chose intriguing, yet functional, female transvestite characters because such characters can support complex and ironic plots. Hagiographers, whose works are examined here, chose to layer outward and social masculinity upon religious women in order to place them within plots that contain obstacles, reunions, sexual misconduct, sexual revelation, and salvation. It is when female monks experience true hardship that their strength and resolve are tested; it is when this occurs in the stories that external audiences are confronted with inspirational behaviors and pious characters worthy of emulation and admiration.

The applications of outward and social masculinity vary in complexity depending on the types of plot twists and irony hagiographers utilize. For example, when female monks are pursued or confronted by family members, such as Euphrosyne, Hilaria, Apolinaria, and Athanasia, they need a complex anonymity to remain undisturbed within ascetic lifestyles. However, if they are to be charged with sexual misconduct in the stories in order to portray penitential endurance, which happens to Mary and Theodora, they need to project a highly convincing masculinity to cause lust in supporting characters. In the case of Theodora, a highly developed anonymity and masculinity are needed because she fathers a child and confronts her husband. This brings to mind the underdeveloped outward and social masculinity within the legend of Anastasia, but this is easily explained because her storyline does not contain escalated anxiety and sexuality, intruding family members, or the need for penance. The hagiographer did not choose to construct a complex masculinization during the first half of Anastasia's legend; instead he decided to place the significance of this story at the end where the abbot Daniel uses her life as a lesson for his disciple. It is clear that outward and social masculinity function in every tale to place the female characters into the desired storylines to stress different traits and behaviors to external audiences.

It matters not whether the hardships of the female monks appear early or late in the story; each *Life* is meant to be read as a complete tale where a woman goes to drastic means to sustain a desired lifestyle. For example, compare Mary, who easily enters a male monastery because of the support of her father in the beginning of her tale, with Matrona, who endured mental and physical abuse and being hunted by her husband at the beginning of her strict ascetic lifestyle. Conversely, Matrona ends her tale as a successful abbess safe from the clutches of her husband, while Mary dies in her tale as one guilty and demeaned by sexual misconduct. As complete stories, both read as action adventures with successful religious female figures as the main characters. The female monks are clearly the "heroes" of the stories.

To place this within the larger context of hagiographical literature, hagiographers shape the protagonists of religious legend to allow readers, in an emotional and mental sense, to suffer all the hardships and unfairness; to feel all the pain and love; and to share in the hope and resilience of the characters. Readers take part in the stories as if they themselves are the characters; the lessons and experiences are shared through empathy and intimacy. The external audiences are

experiencing a point of contact between a human and the divine through such stories. Even when *Vitae* offer insight into the everyday routine of ascetic dedication, practice, and belief, they offer readers examples of ideal behaviors and (re)actions belonging to holy figures. All of this together generates admiration and adoration for religious characters, which then causes inspiration to be found within their deeds and convictions.

For example, when female monks fall to carnal desires, either as women, such as the adulterous Theodora, or as men, such as Mary, Apolinaria, Hilaria, Euphrosyne, and, again, Theodora, they repent and endure a slow process of regaining confidence, after which they receive exoneration. Through these stories external audiences see that grace and forgiveness accompany human shortcomings and weaknesses, and also that hardships can be accepted and readily endured if the purpose or goal is worthy. This is an additional purpose for producing the female monk *Vitae*; to supply entertaining and inspirational literature that can affect readers on a small scale, in their own self-reflections and everyday conscience, and on a large scale, in their understanding of repentance, endurance, and forgiveness and in their appreciation of ascetic lifestyles and the ideals of chastity and virginity.

The Human Salvation Drama

Without active transvestism, which is shown to be a pragmatic tool in these legends, the mettle of these holy women could not have been tested for the benefit of external audiences, who, because they are readers, receive and participate in the stories through the main characters. Transvestism is a vehicle that transports these female characters into monastic worlds to act as hidden ascetic women in the tales. It allows for exceptionable stories to be told of autonomous holy women and acts as a candid mechanism that exemplifies the reversal inherent in the human drama of salvation. An additional purpose for the production of these legends is to prompt theological reflection on the state of humanity and salvation.

Through salvation and grace a sinner may be transformed into a saint. It is a question of reversal, redemption, and opposites. Given that all humans may experience this, Christians may be interested in reading stories in which fellow believers experienced salvation. Reading these accounts may make salvation seem more comprehensible, attainable, or tangible. The performative aspects of the transvestite concern reversal and, for the female monks, they metaphorically act out the symbolic reversal present in salvation in a visual sense. This metaphor is layered

on top of what is actually the base story of each hagiography: women, who are concerned with their own salvation, undergo a performative, masculine reversal, i.e. active and passive transvestism, in order to lead religious and chaste lives. They transform in these stories twice: from women to men, in a superficial outward and social sense, in order to safeguard lifestyles that will lead to reversals of their inner selves from weak to strong and from sinner to saved. Therefore the human drama of salvation is played out within this literature for external audiences.

This embodiment of the human salvation drama through the figure of the female transvestite is present in every female monk *Vitae*, but it is particularly apparent when the repentant harlot intertext is applied. For instance, Theodora, who committed adultery and then abandoned her lay life in order to perform extreme penance, can at first be seen as embodying a stereotypical sexuality found in most women. Intertextually this can also be seen in conjunction with the sexual reversal of Pelagia, who is deemed the best model for the repentant harlot theme. Theodora is a woman who has sinned through lust and she can represent this weakness in all humans. She changes herself into her opposite, i.e. a man, in order to dedicate herself unburdened to the practice of asceticism for atonement. She atones in hope for another chance to change herself into her opposite, i.e. a redeemed woman. This symbolism of opposites which is present in the figure of the holy female transvestite represents the reversal of sinner into saint, or at least, that of the fallen into the redeemed for all humankind.

The fact that Theodora represents this best, because she is an adulteress who is repenting, does not lessen the importance of this theme of redemption found in the legends of Mary, Hilaria, and Apollinaria. Since they are all charged with sexual licentiousness, they have the ability to represent a weakness or lust in all humans. Also, if the sexual charges are unwarranted and later proved false, then the stories can also carry messages of the beneficial endurance of suffering, which of course would reflect back on the sacrifice of Jesus and the struggles of the martyrs.

This thesis continuously stresses that the message of salvation found within the female monk *Vitae* is applicable to all humans. It is explicitly because the main characters of these *Vitae* are women that the salvation drama expressed in these stories is applicable to both men and women. Take for instance the passage found at the end of Athanasia's *Vita*, Καὶ μετὰ κλάδων καὶ βαΐων ἐξεκόμισαν τὸ τίμιον λείψανον τῆς μακαρίας Ἀθανασίας, δοξάζοντες τὸν Θεὸν, τὸν τοσαύτην

ὑπομονὴν παρασχόντα τῇ γυναικί.² “When the arms and feet were tended to of the respected remains of the blessed Athanasia, they praised God that a great patient endurer here by nature was a woman.” As shown in a previous chapter, women are associated with negative stereotypes. These stereotypes are largely associated with weakness or sexuality. Therefore, if women, who are the mentally and emotionally weaker of the two sexes, actively perform a strict ascetic lifestyle that leads to salvation, then it must also be attainable by men. If men are indeed stronger and more capable than women, then they should find it easily attainable with dedication and control. Additionally, if it is believed that women begin to strive for salvific heights from much lower levels than men, who are higher up on an ideological scale, then men should not allow women to shame them when it came to endurance and redemption. This could suggest that one purpose of these legends is instruction through guilt or negative self-reflection. However, overall, due to the ability of the transvestite figure to enhance the message of reversal in a performative sense, it is extremely important that external audiences see the women underneath outward and social masculinity struggling for salvation in order for the theological message to function correctly. This larger message is that all humans, men and women, are capable of reaching salvific, spiritual heights.

Instruction and Chastisement

A very useful element of all the female monk legends is that they have an ability to provide monastic instruction, in addition to eschatological instruction, and to instill inspiration within a larger Christian population. For instance, the hagiographer of Matrona wants readers to discover that God’s love is available to all humans through the story of Matrona’s trials and accomplishments.

Ἡ γὰρ μακαρία Ματρῶνα ἐκ τοῦ κατ’ αὐτὴν ὑποδείγματος σπεύδουσα ἐπαλείφειν τὰς συνούσας αὐτῇ ἀδελφὰς πολλάκις μετ’ αὐτῶν καθεζομένη, ὡς μήτηρ φιλόστοργος νουθετοῦσα αὐτάς, διηγείτο τὴν εἰς αὐτὴν γενομένην ταπὰ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου θεοῦ ἀντίληψιν, οὐκ ἐπιδεικτιῶσα – μὴ γένοιτο – οὐδὲ δημοσιεύουσα τὰ αὐτῆς κατορθώματα, ἀλλ’ οἰκοδομοῦσα καὶ πείθουσα αὐτάς, ὅτι ὁ τὸν Θεὸν θεραπεύων καὶ τὰ ἀπεστὰ αὐτῷ πράττων, κἂν διώκηται, κἂν πολεμῇται, κἂν ἐν ἐρήμῳ τυγχάνῃ παρὰ μηδενὸς γινωσκόμενος, οὐκ ἐγκαταλιμπάνεται ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ.³

² *Athanasia*, Clugnet, 52 lines 1-6.

³ *Matrona*, AASS Nov. 3.812, 50 lines 12-24.

“For the blessed Matrona, seeking to encourage her sisters from under her example, often sat down with them as a loving mother to counsel them. She told them of the aid she received from God, who loves humankind, not to boast – heaven forbid – and not to publish her achievements, but to edify and convince them that if one serves God and does what is pleasing to Him, even though he be persecuted or attacked, or he be in the desert unknown to anyone, he will not be abandoned by Him.”

Prompting audiences to receive this type of inspiration and hope is done so in a positive manner with the story of Matrona through her endurance, suffering, repentance, hope, achievement, and reward. That is the general beauty of this type of monastic literature and it prompted the widespread popularity of these legends.

The instructive function of these tales is best exemplified by the legend of Anastasia. Here the hagiographer gears his whole story towards the conclusion where a recapitulation of Anastasia’s life by Daniel becomes a lesson in spirituality and endurance for his disciple. The quotation used to introduce this thesis’ conclusion, Καὶ λέγει ὁ γέρων· Θέλεις ἐξηγήσομαί σοι τὰ περὶ αὐτῆς.⁴ “...and the old man said, ‘If you want, then I will teach you about her,’” records the beginning of an instructive dialogue between master and disciple concerning the holy female eunuch who chose isolation in order to avoid a worldly life that would inhibit the promise of a spiritual life that she could attain through asceticism. Clearly, this discussion is held so that the disciple can mature in his own religious thinking and receive inspiration from an admirable holy woman. External audiences become, through reading or listening to the tale, this disciple of Daniel; they are learning from the message of the tale as is the disciple.

Additionally, this is the function of the *Vita* of Mary. At the conclusion of the legend, once the innkeeper’s daughter is healed at Mary’s tomb, her hagiographer describes her spirit as it should be received by a large, mixed readership.

Καὶ παραχρηῖμα ἰάθη ἐν τῷ μηνίματι τῆς ὁσίας Μαρίας καὶ πάντες ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι σημείῳ καὶ τῇ ὑπομονῇ αὐτῆς, ὅτι μέχρι θανάτου ἐκαρτέρησε, μὴ φανερώσασα ἑαυτήν. Ἡμεῖς οὖν, ἀγαπητοί, ζηλώσωμεν τὴν μακαρίαν Μαρίαν καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν αὐτῆς, ἵνα εὕρωμεν ἔλεος ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς κρίσεως παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.⁵

⁴ *Anastasia*, Clugnet, 53 line 1.

⁵ *Mary*, Richard, 94 lines 171-177.

“And immediately she was healed at the tomb of the blessed Mary and everyone glorified God because of this sign and of her [Mary’s] patient endurance, because she vigorously endured them [hardships] until death and did not make herself known [as a woman]. Then let us, beloved ones, zealously emulate the blessed Mary and her patient endurance, so that on the day of judgment we may find mercy through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The above examples from the *Vitae* all act as positive counsel that is aimed at the feelings of inadequacy or imperfection that Christians, lay or monastic, may experience during their lives. It inspires them in a positive sense to find strength in the figures of these holy women and to reflect upon their own lives. A reader may be able to recognize some type of similarity between his/her life and a female monk upon hearing her story, which may ignite a renewed sense of resolve or acceptance.

However, given that the stereotypical understanding of the female nature suggests a proclivity to weakness, fickleness, and lack of self-control, these tales’ instructional value can also be used in a negative sense, as already mentioned in an above section. Consider Pambo’s lesson concerning Hilaria to his disciples.

ΝΤΕΡΟΥΤΟΜΩ ΔΕ ΑΥΚΟΤΥ ΑΥΖΜΟΟC ΑΥΩΑΧΕ ΜΝ ΝΕCΝΗΥ
ΕΥΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ ΑΛΥΘΩC ΑΥCΚΕΥC ΝΩΒ †ΩΠΤΕ ΝΝΟΥΜΗΗΩΕ
ΜΜΟΝΑΧΟC ΕΥΟΥΗΖ ΖΕΝ ΩΙΗΤ ΜΠΟΟΥ ΝΤΑ ΝΙΜ ΧΠΟ ΝΑΥ
ΝΤΕΙΖΥΠΟΜΟΝΗ ΖΩCΤΕ ΕΤΡΕCΩ ΖΝ ΤΜΗΤΕ ΝΤΕΙΑΩΗ ΝΖΟΟΥΤ
ΝΤΕΙΖΕ ΝΤΑ ΝΙΜ ΩΩΩΤ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΜΟΤΝC ΝΤCΑΡΞ ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑΙ· ΕΙΕ
ΝΤΑ ΝΙΜ ΑΠΟΤΑCCE ΜΠΕΟΟΥ ΕΤΩΟΥΕΙΤ ΜΠΙΚΟCΜΟC ΝΤΕΙΖΕ
ΝΘΕ ΝΤΑΙ· ΝΕCΝΗΥ ΔΕ ΝΤΕΡΟΥCΩΤΜ ΕΠΕCΒΙΟC ΑΥΡΩΠΗΡΕ ΑΥΩ
ΑΥΤΕΟΟΥ ΜΠΝΟΥΤΕ.⁶

“After she had been buried, he [Pambo] returned and sat and spoke to the brothers, saying, ‘Truly a weak vessel has put to shame many monks living in Shiet today. Who has achieved such endurance as to remain a woman in the midst of these many men? Who, such as she, has cut away the comfort of the flesh? Who, such as she, has renounced the glory of this world?’ The brothers, after hearing about her life, marveled and glorified God.”

This type of self-reflective instruction through shame or guilt justifies these legends’ characterizations as “shaming devices,” which was suggested by Castelli when highlighting the various functions of this type of hagiography. These legends, because they record instances of extraordinary women, shame monks into trying harder because men, who are stereotypically positioned closer to the spiritual ideal, should not allow themselves to be outdone by women. Even further, if women are

⁶ *Hilaria*, Drescher, 12 lines 26-34.

highly successful, but then do not experience pride, then men should not allow pride to get a hold of them since they are supposed to possess more self-control. Shaming devices also work to eliminate the haughty pride from which some monks suffer due to their successes. Whether the instructional value of these legends is used in a positive or negative sense by those sharing these tales with others, all of these stories possess the ability to offer examples of hope and humility, of the rewards of endurance, and of grace to external audiences.

Conclusions

As separate stories, regardless of any intertextual relationship, each story, through a holy womanhood, successfully communicates a deeper understanding of the human drama of salvation in which all humans may participate, instructs participants in lessons of endurance and self-control, and projects an understanding that forgiveness accompanies human weakness. These *Vitae* function to entertain, instruct, and offer intrigue and inspiration. However, clearly these stories are constructed from the same intertexts and use layers of masculinity in similar fashions to characterize female protagonists. Due to this fact, they are able to hold dialogue amongst themselves as a group of thematically analogous hagiographies, which could be considered a hagiographical sub-genre, in order to deepen their inspirational messages, theological instruction, and promotion of a holy womanhood worthy to be an exemplary model for humanity.

Collectively these legends interact with intertextual legends and cultural themes belonging to late antique Christian popular culture. The female monk *Vitae* belong to a larger hagiographical tradition that helps to form a web of Christian literature. All genres of Christian literature assist Christians in exploring the relationship between humans and God in various ways. The presence of a holy womanhood, which has been revealed as consistent despite the layers of masculinity placed upon it, has the power to encourage a more detailed comprehension of human salvation, divine grace, and the beneficial effects of asceticism. This thesis demonstrates that a holy womanhood and female masculinity are highly successful cultural and literary tools to use on mixed late antique Christian audiences for their instruction and inspiration.

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Scripture:

Genesis 3

Deuteronomy 22:5, 24:1

Leviticus 12:1-5

Number 30

The Song of Songs 4:1, 7:5

Mark 8:34-35, 16:25

Luke 14:25-26

1 Corinthians 4-7, 11:3-10, 14-16

Galatians 3:28

Ephesians 5:22-33

Colossians 3:18

1 Timothy 2:9-15

1 Peter 3:1-7

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