Acknowledgements

This Masters thesis would not exist were it not for Dr Mark Masterson. He was there from the beginning of “operation sexy dead men” and saw it through to the end. He gave his ideas, time, and expertise freely and corrected more of my mistakes than I am able to enumerate. I am deeply grateful for Dr Masterson’s support and guidance and I can but thank him for all his hard work. Any errors which remain in this text are my own.

I was fortunate to have the assistance and support of many people while writing this thesis. I must thank my family: My father, Stanley Marshall who was always on hand to steal my child when I needed him to and his partner Clare MacMillan who was always understanding and willing to have another boy in their home; My Mother, Gillian Magee and her partner David Johnson who were also a constant source of love and support; My many siblings who politely discussed my work despite possibly wishing I would discuss something else; My son Virgil and my cat Monkey for their patience whilst their Ma was occupied writing and reading; and finally Ben Clark for his love and understanding.

I also had the good fortune to have many friends who were willing to discuss ideas, proof read portions and cheer me up when necessary. Thus I must also thank Jen Oliver (who knows what she did), Michael Homer, Hannah Mason, Judy Deuling, Alex Wilson, Sheryn Simpson, Jo Whalley, and Cecily Duncan. If I have forgotten someone I can only beg their forgiveness.
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Introduction

‘hic, hic amator iam, fateor, placet:
  ibo inruentis gressibus obuiam,
  nec demorabor uota calentia:
  ferrum in papillas omne recepero
  pectusque ad imum uim gladii traham.’

‘Now this lover, I confess that this lover pleases me: I shall meet his eager steps halfway and not put off his hot desires. I shall welcome the whole length of his blade into my chest drawing the force of the sword to the depths of my breast.’

- Peristephanon  Agnes 14. 74-78.

‘este, precor, fortes, et uincite uiribus annos;
  quod defit aeuo, suppleat crudelitas.’

sed male conatus tener infirmusque laborat;
  tormenta crescunt, dum fatiscit carnifex.

‘Be manly, I beg of you, and surpass your years through your efforts; let cruelty supply what is lacking due to age’. But their tender and weak attempts labour in vain: as the executioner shows exhaustion, the torture increases.

- Peristephanon  Cassian 9.65-68.¹

It is now generally accepted that Saint Agnes is portrayed in the Peristephanon² as ambiguously gendered (she is masculinized and refeminized), sexualized and objectified in such a way as to intentionally lead the reader to view her as a sexual object³. Scholars have used philology, intertextual readings, gaze theory and, most

¹ All translations are my own though occasionally adapted from Thompson unless otherwise noted. The Latin text is from Thompson (1961).
² The Peristephanon shall be abbreviated hereafter as Pe.
successfully, Laura Mulvey’s conception of the workings of voyeurism\(^4\) in order to explicate and examine the portrayal of Agnes in Prudentius’ *Peristephanon*\(^5\).

However, as the above quotations indicate, there is a similar though different, subtler mode of sexualization, sexual allusion and, therefore, objectification that may be read in the *Peristephanon*’s martyrdoms--those of the male saints. The passages quoted above show Agnes welcoming her executioner as a lover in strident rhetoric while Cassian’s executioners are exhausted from torturing him to death and are described in terms similar to lovers near the end of their exertions, giving new meaning to his exhortation that they ‘be vigorous’. This highlights the importance of the virility of the executioner/s as they stand in for God as agents whose actions will complete the contract of martyrdom and bring the martyr into a union, or marriage, with Christ. The eagerness and ability of the executioners is integral in this transaction. Agnes’ lover with his ‘eager steps’ and ‘hot desires’ is masculine and forceful enough to please even the masculinized Agnes. While Cassian’s torturers fail because they are not fully-grown and cannot therefore bring the contract to completion. Indeed Cassian only speaks once in the entire poem and it is to exhort his torturers to finish him off, to exhort his lovers to (at last) become men. Cassian is presented with exactly the kind of lover that Agnes has spurned, soft effeminate boys. Yet Cassian does not speak against their suitability as the chosen instruments of his bridegroom. He is feminized through his passive acceptance of the manner of his death. Then, much like Agnes, is remasculinized as the boys’ penetrations fail to kill him and God must step in. Cassian’s masculinity is undermined by that which is not present: ability in rhetoric, agency, and virility. And although it is recouped by God, it is interesting that he and his masculinity have taken a detour through mute objectification and passivity, a sort of sexualization.

This subtler sexualization and its possible purpose will be examined through a close reading of three of the poems about male saints in the *Peristephanon*; Laurence, Hippolytus, and Cassian. In order to examine the sexualization of male martyrs in the *Peristephanon*, it is necessary to have an understanding of late-antique masculinity, which is deceptively complex. Late-antique masculinity is further complicated by Christianity’s subversion of societal norms. This is further

\(^4\) Mulvey (1975).
complicated by Prudentius writing about martyrs who died a century or more before his birth. This means that although the *Peristephanon* is set within a pre-Christian State and dealing with a pagan political apparatus, it is also dealing with the norms of Prudentius’ time⁶. This means, to a certain extent, Prudentius is concerned with the subversion of “pagan” masculinity, as shall be seen in chapter two on Saint Laurence through his portrayal of the prefect. After the examination, primarily, of late-antique masculinity, there will be a summary of the arguments on Saint Agnes’ sexualization and objectification in the *Peristephanon*. This will highlight the arguments that will be applied to the male saints and, in places, will extend the arguments on Agnes’ presentation, particularly in order to assist with the examination of similar functions within the poems on male martyrdoms. Part of this investigation will highlight Agnes’ use of rhetoric and how Prudentius portrays the saints with rhetorical ability, or at times significantly portrays them without rhetorical ability.

Lastly on violence and eroticism. Martyrologies recorded the violent spectacle of a martyr’s torture and death, often in lurid detail. The viewing and recording of martyrdoms, especially when the violence was graphically recounted, have been criticized both *in illo tempore* and by modern scholars⁷. The spectators were criticized for the pleasure they derived from these spectacles: the authors were derided for showing a lack of taste by graphically recording, or sometimes creating, the violent images⁸. That these accounts of martyrs’ deaths are often portrayed as sexual and with varying amounts of amatory language combined with graphic

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⁶ Palmer notes that Christianity suffered a major blow when the ‘pagan Emperor Julian’ came to power in 361 CE. However Julian died in 363 and his successors Jovian, Valentinian, and Valens helped to continue the Christianization of the Empire (1989: 17). That Christianity suffered a major blow is perhaps an exaggeration and certainly by the time Prudentius published the *Peristephanon* Christianity was widespread. This was obviously not the case when the martyrs died.

⁷ Castelli (2007: 106) lists some contemporary Christian authors and splits them into two groups: apologists who thought Christians were uninterested in the spectacles, like Tatian, and those who warned against the allure of the games, for example Tertullian and Augustine. She goes on to examine how Christian memory subverted the spectacles for its own ends.

⁸ It has been suggested that Prudentius created the martyrdom of Cassian based on the murder of a schoolteacher recorded in Livy (5.27). See Palmer (1989: 242). There are also parallels between Hippolytus’ death and the death of Mettus Fufetius which Livy recorded (1.28). See Malamud (1989:99-100). The general consensus seems to be that Prudentius probably created the martyrdoms of both saints.
violence has without a doubt added to the discomfort felt by modern readers. It seems that no author or text has been criticized by modern scholars for the lurid detail in their work more than Prudentius and his *Peristephanon*. The palpable eroticism in his work has perhaps made the need to criticize more urgent.

**Prudentius in context**

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens was born in 348 CE, in northern Spain. We know from his *praefatio* that he was a barrister and an administrator and that he probably received an award from the Emperor Theodosius I of the rank of *comes primi ordinis*. The date of his death is unknown but it has been suggested that he died after 405 the year in which his collected works were published and before 410 since he does not mention the sack of Rome. The *Peristephanon* or *Crowns of Martyrdom* consists of fourteen poems. The lengths and meters of the poems vary widely, with only two metres recurring in the collection twice: *Pe. 11* and *8* are in elegiac couplets while *2* and *5* are in iambic dimeter. It seems likely that many of the poems were written before he retired from politics when he traveled to perform the duties of his office. As Margaret Malamud points out Prudentius was "a man fully engaged with his times: well travelled, well

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9 Levine (1991:5-7) lists many modern complaints about Prudentius’ style and content.
10 Malamud (1989: 13) suggests Calagurris (Calahorra) as his birthplace and it is generally agreed that he was probably born there. However Prudentius himself does not name his birthplace. For the reasoning behind excluding Caesaraugusta as a possible birthplace see Palmer (1989: 21).
11 Malamud suggests that he died after 405 (1989:13). However, Palmer suggests that he died around 408 or 410, since the death of Stilicho (408CE) is not mentioned in his poetry nor the sack of Rome (410CE) (1989: 31).
12 Palmer points out that the length of the poems in the text varies wildly from the shortest *Pe. 8* which has only 18 lines to the longest *Pe. 10* with 1140. (1989:70). The lengths of the four poems in this thesis are: *Pe. 2* – 584, *Pe. 9 – 109, Pe. 11 – 246, and *Pe. 14 – 133*.
read and well connected. She goes on to point out some of those literary connections saying he was "as familiar with the new Christian poetry of Damasus, Ambrose and Paulinus as with the more traditional classicizing poetry of Claudian and Ausonius."

Ann Marie Palmer also points out his familiarity with both Christian and Pagan literature:

"[H]is poetry gives expression to the new confidence felt by contemporary Christians, by accepting implicitly many aspects of secular poetry and combining them with the new ideals and forms of expression provided by Christianity."

This combination of classical literature and Christian themes has led various scholars to label Prudentius as the Christian Vergil or Horace. However, this combination of old and new means that the Peristephanon may be read on a number of levels. The most significant reading for this thesis is, of course, that the amatory language and representations of the sexualized body are deliberate and intentional. Prudentius, in using these earlier authors, is adding layers of meaning to his own work in order to both show his learning (thus his credentials as a poet and educated man) and to allow the reader to see his poetry as part of an ongoing Roman tradition. One reason for this is the concept of ‘secondarity’. Secondarity is perhaps best understood as acknowledged cultural appropriation. Christianity arose within the Roman Empire and its practitioners were Roman but they were also other. Cobb explicates this division best when discussing the purpose of martyr texts.

[T]he martyr acts functioned in the Christian community as identity-forming texts and... the authors of these texts appropriated Greco-Roman constructions of gender and sex to formulate a set of

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17 Mastrangelo mentions that ‘the great Latinist Bentley’ named Prudentius the ‘Christian Vergil and Horace’ while Macklin Smith names him ‘the best Latin poet’ between the age of Augustus and the 12th century (2008: 3).
18 See Wilken (2011).
19 Brague (2009).
acceptable Christian identities. These stories are both descriptive and prescriptive²⁰.

This allowed Christians to introduce rules and concepts that separated their group from the pagan Romans while simultaneously appropriating Roman ideas, social framework, and concepts of gender, sexualities, and identities. Secondarity does not simply acknowledge that there was another culture from which Christianity grew but also allows that history, poetry, and culture to be celebrated by Christians²¹. As Wilken says ‘[e]very poet depends on readers who can appreciate and enjoy form as well as content, and [Prudentius’] poetry would not have been possible had there not been a long tradition of Latin poetry before the rise of Christianity’²². This use of intertextuality depended upon an educated audience and this education was known as *paideia*²³. *Paideia* refers to the education of well-rounded and knowledgeable citizens and encompassed subjects and abilities like rhetoric, science, philosophy, poetry, and the physical. *Paideia* allows a writer to include references, allusions and even citations of well known and lauded works and ensures that the reader recognizes these works in his own. Prudentius was not merely playing clever word games since he expected (and there is evidence to suggest this expectation was not misplaced) his readers or listeners to understand and appreciate the allusions he made. Thus when Prudentius ties up Saint Cassian, with the line “*uincitur post terga manus spoliatus amictu*” (stripped of his clothing, his hands are tied behind his back), he intends to remind the reader of Virgil’s *Aeneid* book 11: 81 “*uinxerat et post terga manus...*” (he had also bound their hands behind the back...). This partial line from Virgil is part of the procession for Pallas’ funeral and the men whose hands are tied behind them are to be sacrificed on his pyre. Thus Prudentius makes an explicit comparison between martyrdom and the ancient practice of sacrifice through his use of a line reminiscent of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. This is but one of many allusions in the *Peristephanon* but it shows that Prudentius relied upon his audience to have a

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²⁰ Cobb (2008:5).
²¹ Secondarity is not solely a Christian concept it may be applied to any culture which embraces the one it grew out of whilst maintaining a separation.
²² Wilken (2011: 33).
²³ For more on this see Masterson (2014: 4) ‘*Paideia* fostered high degrees of linguistic competence and demanded familiarity with, if not mastery of, the important masterpieces of the Latin and Greek canons.’
level of *paideia* in order to illustrate his own and bring poignancy to lines which might otherwise be prosaic. Thus when exploring the sexualization and the imagery surrounding the martyrs’ bodies it must be remembered that Prudentius is playing both with the poetry of his own time, Christian themes, and earlier works, meaning that the same line may have multiple meanings and therefore readings.

**Rhetoric**

We know from his *praefatio* (8-9) that Prudentius studied rhetoric, which is unsurprising given the popularity of such schooling in Spain in the mid fourth century. He writes ‘*mox docuit toga infectum vitiis falsa loqui, non sine crimine*’ (8-9). Mastrangelo reads these lines as Prudentius claiming that rhetoric ‘taught him the art of lying’. This is an understatement since Prudentius is vehement. ‘Soon the toga taught me, riddled with vice, to speak false things, not without sin’. On the surface Prudentius seems to be saying that rhetoric (the toga) is a pagan and therefore sinful art, which he sets aside at the end of the *praefatio* (36-45) when he is converted to Christianity. However, it is not rhetoric itself that is objectionable rather it is the *vitia* (defects or faults) presumably civil matters which are flawed because they are performed without reference to God or God’s law. This is supported by Levine who says that ‘Prudentius engages in a contest with the predominantly pagan texts and traditions from which he derives his skill and authority, but whose beliefs he as a Christian poet must oppose’

Prudentius repurposed pagan skills like rhetoric for Christianity. Nor was he alone in doing so though it is possible that he took it further. Levine argues that:

Prudentius shows none of the guilt about using classical rhetoric that penetrates the texts of Jerome and Augustine, perhaps because he sees literary ramifications in the Eusebian

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24 For a detailed analysis of intertextuality in Prudentius see Mastrangelo (2008).
Levine does not explore the possibility that Prudentius is merely using the forms in which he has been extensively educated. Nor does he mention secondarity. Both *paideia* and secondarity help to explain Prudentius’ use of these forms. However it would be shortsighted to say that Prudentius could not have created new forms and he certainly could have cut down his use of rhetoric. It seems likely that Prudentius is using rhetoric to appeal to his audience most of whom would have been familiar with the forms of speeches given in the *Peristephanon*. This shows it is clear that Prudentius had no problem with rhetoric only the uses to which it may be put.

Rhetoric occurs throughout the *Peristephanon* but it is not always the martyr who uses it. For instance, in *Pe.* 9 Cassian’s pupils speak with far more rhetorical flair than Cassian who seems to die willingly but passively. In contrast Agnes (*Pe.*14) is masculinized by her command of rhetoric, Romanus (*Pe.*10) continues to speak despite his tongue and lower jaw being ripped off, Laurence (*Pe.*2) makes several long rhetorical speeches and then continues to quip as he is tortured, and Cyprian (*Pe.*13) is so greatly renowned for his persuasive speech that his tongue is made into a relic after his death. Rhetoric becomes a major theme in the *Peristephanon*: ‘[i]n several poems of the *Peristephanon*, rhetoric itself becomes not merely a tool, but the central subject matter’.

The prevalence of rhetoric means that it is conspicuous not only when present but also when absent. Thus when Prudentius writes saints as silent, especially saints who should be accomplished rhetoricians like Cassian (a school teacher) and Hippolytus (the head of a church), it would be a mistake to infer no meaning. It seems possible that they are displaying proper *patientia* by stoically enduring in silence. However since other saints, like Laurence and Romanus speak at length this may not be the only reason.

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Schemata on sexual objectification

When discussing the sexualization of the female saints in the *Peristephanon*, classics scholars have used film theorist Laura Mulvey's schema which differentiates between the presentation of the objectified subject as being either sadistic voyeurism (similar to hard-core pornography) or fetishistic scopophilia (as a vision of romanticized nudity)\(^{30}\). However these are not absolute states in the *Peristephanon*. Prudentius will sometimes present his Saints with fetishistic scopophilia but he often then moves to scenes that are more likely to be categorized as sadistic voyeurism, usually the Saint’s death scene.

Agnes is an apposite example of this (as will be seen below). She is initially presented with fetishistic scopophilia (as a desired and beautiful object but with *pudor* intact and her body concealed), then she is repeatedly stripped. This "peep show" presentation of Agnes builds through the text until her death scene where she is presented with sadistic voyeurism. However this stripping only partially reveals her body and her *pudor* remains mostly intact as the crowd turn their backs on her nudity, leaving only the external reader to receive the tantalizing glimpses of her naked form. When one observer does view her naked body he is struck blind and it is clear that he has seen her wholly naked (*Pe.4*:43-9)\(^{31}\). Thus here we have an example of a viewer seeing Agnes with sadistic voyeurism since he sees that which should not be seen if Agnes’ *pudor* is to remain intact. The gaze of the viewer here can be taken as a form of penetration since he is viewing Agnes in a lustful manner and seeing her in a way that threatens her chastity and virginity. Striking him blind is a form of protection and a miracle, since he may no longer gaze upon her and thus penetrate her *pudor*. This is interesting in the context of what is to come. For Agnes must die and she must therefore be penetrated and exposed. Viewing things that should be hidden is at once a violation of *pudor* and necessary in terms of the goals of martyr texts. Prudentius laments when the details of tortures are unknown or

\(^{30}\) Grig (2005), Burrus (1995), and Uden (2009).

\(^{31}\) intendit unus forte procaciter/ os in puellam nec trepidat sacram/ spectare formam lumine lubrico./ en ales ignis fulminis in modum/ ubratur ardens atque oculos ferit. caecus coruscum lumine corruit/ atque in plateae puluere palpitat. (*Pe.4*:43-9)
unrecorded\textsuperscript{32}. He even goes as far as speculating graphically upon the unknown tortures\textsuperscript{33}. In a move that can be described as sadistic voyeurism, since the details of the martyrs deaths are denied, he does not merely describe possible tortures or implements of torture but describes in detail the punishments which will be given by the devil to the pagan sinners using their own implements upon them in hell (\textit{Pe.1}:103-14). It is not enough to see the claw one must see it rend flesh.

While there is little doubt that being penetrated is feminizing and penetrating is masculinizing, neither gender nor sexualities fit into such a simple schema. The priapic model of "impenetrable penetrator" has been contrasted with the feminized \textit{cinaedus}\textsuperscript{34}. However, though men in the ancient world may have been expected to fit into one of the two categories socially, the reality of lived experience was surely rather different. A penetrated man is still a man. He "plays the role of the woman" in some respects but this does not completely emasculate him. However it does feminize him. In the \textit{Peristephanon}, as will be shown, Agnes is masculinized while Cassian and Hippolytus are feminized. Agnes is presented as a warrior in gendered terms, which masculinizes her, while Cassian and Hippolytus, in particular, are feminized as they display passivity more culturally appropriate to women than men. The feminization of these saints is far subtler than the masculinization of Agnes.

Sexualization is also complicated by desire. Desire and desirability are simultaneously socially constructed and intensely personal ideas. It is easier to understand and view sexualization when desire and desirability are part of the sexualizing dynamic. It is generally far harder to understand the sexualization of non-normatively desirable bodies. The conflict between socially constructed desire and personal desire may lead to confusion when a text offers a sexualized protagonist who is not normally sexually objectified. For example it is far easier for a modern heteronormative audience to view Agnes as an object of desire than to view Hippolytus as a sexual object. It should be noted that modern sexual mores complicate Agnes’ desirability since she is fourteen and therefore considered underage but in late antiquity she was of marriageable age. Hippolytus’ age is not

\textsuperscript{32} (\textit{Pe. 1}:73-4) o uetustatis silentis obsoleta obliuio!/ inuidentur ista nobis fama et ipsa extinguitur
\textsuperscript{33} (\textit{Pe. 1}:79-81) hoc tamen solum uetusta subtrahunt silentia,/ iugibus longum catenis an capillum pauerint,/ quo uiros dolore tortor quaue pompa ornauerit.
\textsuperscript{34} For more on this see Parker (1997).
given but he is described as ‘senior’ and is therefore an older man (Pe. 11: 78).

Older men are generally not considered as sexual objects by either modern or ancient societies and indeed elderly bodies in general are often viewed as grotesque or used as a source of humor. Grotesque sexualization is often about power. It lacks an aspect of the titillation that occurs when the sexualized object is obviously desirable. It is also usually presented as sadistic voyeurism. The aim of grotesque sexualization is to horrify or to present the subject as an object of mirth rather than any form of titillation. However, older men can be viewed sexually and, though their bodies are less likely to be objectified, there are examples of older men who are seen as so-called “sex-symbols”, Sean Connery for instance. There is reason to suspect that this was also true in the ancient world. For example Alcibiades’ sexual attraction to Socrates in the Symposium shows that younger men could be sexually attracted to older men and that part of that attraction was an appreciation for their wisdom and power. Thus there is little reason to expect that an ancient audience would not have read the subtle sexualization present in the male martyrdoms of the Peristephanon and recognized their bodies as possible sexual objects. It seems likely that since sexualization is easily read in texts where the sexualized body possesses socially constructed desirability; the scholarship on sexualization has ignored or elided the sexualization of bodies that fall outside a “socially acceptable” standard, as it is harder to show.

The eroticizing of male flesh in the Peristephanon has been largely ignored by scholars and if mentioned at all it tends to be used as an example of “Prudentian excess” and read as violent rather than sexual or sexually violent.

There are many varied reasons why people are reluctant to read the Peristephanon with a focus on the sexual objectification or sexualization of male

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35 This is a Greek example and anachronistic in many ways. However, since Prudentius is educated and therefore well read there is little doubt that he would have at least been aware of Plato’s works even if he does not directly allude to them.

36 It should also be noted that sexuality is a spectrum and many people will desire bodies which fall outside socially constructed desirability.


39 This may be in part because the most obviously sexual poems concern the female martyrs Agnès and Eulalia and since there is a long traditional of women as sacrifices, for example Polyxena, the language surrounding their deaths though clearly sexual may have been explained away as a normal trope when sacrificing women.
martyrs. Reading sexualization in a religious text can make the (largely Christianized) modern western world uncomfortable to say the least. Uncovering and exploring same-sex desire in Christian texts may be difficult since we are talking about an active religion. It is far easier to explore same sex desire in “heathen” texts, which few (if any) people believe in anymore, than to court the controversy that will inevitably arise when discussing the same themes in a religion, Catholicism, presently practised by approximately 2 billion people worldwide. Furthermore, although the western world is generally becoming more tolerant of homosexuals, bisexuals and gender queers, much heteronormativity dominates our culture/s. Resistance to recent advances in the law allowing same sex marriage have shown that a large part of the western world (one might say a large and vocal minority) are homophobic and anti civil rights for homosexuals. When one’s present culture is often ignorant of (and thus scared of) sexual difference, it becomes far more convenient to ignore themes and references in ancient texts that may present an alternative attitude towards gender identity, sexuality and especially manhood. Heteronormative privilege informs western societal structure and is defended zealously by many religious groups\textsuperscript{40}. This combination of heteronormative privilege, homophobia, and religious tolerance (meaning the desire not to offend a practising religion) has led to the homosocial themes and the sexualization of the male martyrs in the \textit{Peristephanon} being overlooked or mentioned only briefly as part of other arguments. Scholars are a product of their time and will bring the attitudes of the society in which they reside into their scholarship (no one is suggesting that they should be superhumanly unbiased) oftentimes even when they are trying not to, or think they have succeeded in not doing so.

\textbf{Christian masculinity and sexual deviance}

The primary difference between sexualizing and objectifying male and female bodies lies in our perceptions of masculinity, femininity, sexual desirability, and social expectations of gender. Gender is not even necessarily related to biological sex. Genitals can be ambiguous and it is clear from historical records, such as

\textsuperscript{40} It must be noted that while many individual churches are becoming more progressive in this area, there is still a dominant belief that homosexuals and people who are gender queer in any way are sinners who should repent.
Diodorus Siculus, that there were cases where people's genitals were not easily categorized as male or female\(^{41}\). Diodorus Siculus also shows that when genitals "change" society seems to accept the person as the gender they now appear to be. Gender is therefore a cultural contrivance. Society sets gender norms and behaviors based on its perception of biological sex and thus fits people into male or female roles. As Dreger points out, '[h]umans like their sex categories neat, but nature doesn't care. Nature doesn't actually have a line between the sexes. If we want a line we have to draw it on Nature\(^{42}\). This means that gender traits must be looked at contemporaneously. Society dictates, to an extent, which traits are masculine and which are feminine\(^{43}\). Thus when an author ascribes traits normally associated in their society with one gender to a person who is the other gender it is both subversive and intentional.

It can seem as though negatives define masculinity; there is a long list, and many sources, defining what men cannot or must not do. Christianity co-opted and adopted the qualities and behaviors “pagan” Romans considered masculine or effeminate. However, there are more similarities in these lists of qualities and actions than differences. When explaining the concept of ‘secondarity’, which was explicated above as a form of cultural appropriation, Wilken puts these similarities into an easily understandable context.

Christianity was born in a world with a mature and fully developed culture, an established educational system, a canon of literary classics, sophisticated philosophical traditions, a coherent understanding of the moral life, an inheritance of art and architecture, and law and politics\(^{44}\).

Gender performance and presentation was part of this culture. Prudentius plays on the differences between pagan and Christian masculine virtues. Judges, tyrants, and torturers are effeminated by their behaviors and actions not only according to the

\(^{41}\) Diodorus Siculus, (XXXII 10.2). From Brisson, 2002: 35.  
\(^{42}\) Dreger (2010: 23).  
\(^{43}\) Of course there is a level of biology involved but that is a very basic reproductive matter and this argument does not concern sexual reproduction but sexual performance and proclivity.  
\(^{44}\) Wilken (2011: 33).
rules of Christian masculinity but also the rules of pagan masculinity. A prime example of this is the greed shown by Laurence’s condemnor who is portrayed as avaricious. This love of luxury was effeminating both by pagan and Christian standards. Masculinity was strongly linked to the concept and retention of *uirtus* (manly virtue). Many behaviors and actions could threaten one’s *uirtus* and scholars have connected the loss of *uirtus* and thus effeminacy with pleasure, *volutas*. This meant that being an “impenetrable penetrator” was not enough to save oneself from charges of effeminacy. Dress and grooming habits, even if designed to appeal to women, could lead to accusations of *mollitia* (softness or effeminacy). Indeed anything that showed a lack of control or that might bring pleasure to oneself or others such as womanizing, hedonistic luxuries including food, drink, and self-adornment, hiring oneself out as a gladiator, or excessively displaying pain or grief could endanger your masculinity. As Williams points out:

In the end, a man’s full masculinity was not guaranteed simply by asserting the penetrative power of his phallus at another’s expense, and yielding his body to the power of another man’s phallus was only one among many practices that could lay a man open to a charge of effeminacy.

Men who dress or act a certain way in the ancient world were often considered to be *cinaedi* and thus the exception to the Roman expectation of masculinity meaning that men should be ‘impenetrable penetrators’. However, it takes two to “tango” and it is clear that *cinaedi* had sexual relationships and “encounters” with men who would have been seen as “impenetrable penetrators”. This is unproblematic for the penetrating partner since his *uirtus* would not have been in question. As Gleason points out:

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45 *Uirtus*, as a concept, is far more complex than ‘manly virtue’. It also involves strength, courage, worthiness, value, manliness and character to name but a few of the qualities needed to retain or gain *uirtus*.
46 Walters (1997: 30).
47 Williams (2010: chapters 4-5).
49 Walters (1997: 30).
A man who actively penetrates and dominates others, whether male or female, is still a man. A man who aims to please – anyone, male or female – in his erotic encounters is *ipso facto* effeminate\(^50\).

However it is clear that not all *cinaedi* were easily singled out by mannerism and dress\(^51\). Julius Firmicus Maternus provides evidence that in late antiquity there was anxiety surrounding so called hidden *cinaedi* (*Mathesis* 7. 25. 12)\(^52\). This shows an awareness of the penetrability of men and that *cinaedi* could have a manly exterior or the appearance of the possession of *uirtus*. This is an important point to keep in mind when discussing sexualization. There is no suggestion that the male martyrs are *cinaedi*. Though it is entirely possible there is simply a lack of evidence. Rather it is important because outwardly masculine men could be penetrated and with the idea of the hidden *cinaedus* in mind there is the possibility that they welcomed and enjoyed this penetration. Thus when we discuss whether the objectified person is suitable for penetration, or whether it would be desirable to penetrate them, an outward performance of *uirtus* does not exclude them.

Having briefly, and only partially, covered the long list of qualities, traits and behaviours that could lead to a charge of effeminacy, it remains to define what masculinity is. Williams suggests that:

> [C]ontrol and dominion constituted the prime directive of masculinity. A man must exercise dominion over his own body and his own desires as well as the bodies and desires of those under his jurisdiction – his wife, children, and

\(^{50}\)Gleason (1995: 65).
\(^{51}\)Since it is clear that charges of effeminacy meant that one was named a *cinaedus* and that these accusations did not need to be based on being the penetrated partner in sexual acts the term *cinaedus* will be used in this thesis to signify effeminate behavior rather than sexual passivity. As Williams says ‘[e]ffeminacy was thus a disorder embodied in various symptoms, only one of which – and not a necessary one at that – was a predilection for being anally penetrated’. (2010: 138).
\(^{52}\)Firmicus lists the types of sexual deviance that occur based on birth signs. Certain configurations of Venus and Saturn ‘*latentes cinaedos efficiunt*’ (make hidden *cinaedi*). Latin is from the Teubner edition: Volume I (Books I IV), 1897; Volume II (Books V VIII), 1913.
slaves…Masculinity was not fundamentally a matter of sexual practice; it was a matter of control\textsuperscript{53}.

Williams of course is discussing the masculinity of pagan Rome\textsuperscript{54}. However this idea of control being central to masculinity was “adopted” by Christianity\textsuperscript{55}. Christians somewhat paradoxically connected this manly control to the ideal of \textit{patientia}. As Kuefler points out this is often translated as ‘patience’ but it carries a sense of enduring suffering and submission\textsuperscript{56}. He goes on to point out how the concept of \textit{patientia} ‘contrasted sharply with the myth of the Roman as bellicose aggressor, driven by the ideal of the \textit{uitsa militaris}’\textsuperscript{57}. Christians had to reimagine masculinity so that it fit into their ideals of passivity and in order that their martyrs could be seen as Christian heroes, soldiers of Christ dying in a different battle. Kuefler explains:

[Some] men tried to find ways both to remain true to what they felt to be their Christian ideals and to counter pagan imputations of unmanliness, or perhaps also to allay their own concerns about their manliness. These men made frequent reference to the paradox of the Christian reversal of symbols, in which weakness was strength and defeat was victory, to create a manifesto for a new Christian masculinity. They embraced the paradox that a man might find military success even in \textit{patientia}\textsuperscript{58}.

\textsuperscript{53} Williams (2011:155).
\textsuperscript{54} Most of Williams’ sources in this section are from the early Empire or late Republic. For example he uses Cicero, Livy, Juvenal, Martial, and Pliny among others.
\textsuperscript{55} “Adopted” is used here in scare quotes because it like other important ideas and ideals came into Christianity through secondarity (see Williams above). However it is important to remember that the Church picked and chose ideas and ideals rather than merely taking on them all.
\textsuperscript{56} Kuefler (2001:109).
\textsuperscript{57} Kuefler (2001:109). It should be noted that, while the connection between \textit{patientia} and masculinity is present before Christianity coopted it, Christians reinforced this connection and took it further.
\textsuperscript{58} Kuefler (2001:111).
This is the major difference between pagan and Christian masculinity. Christians, rather than forging a new masculinity, adopted and adapted the masculinity of the Empire that they were born into. As Cobb points out this appropriation of masculine ideals was part of the propaganda of martyrdom. ‘By depicting the martyrs as full, active citizens of God’s polis, the authors of the martyrologies appropriate the Roman ideals of citizenship and masculine virtue’\(^{59}\). They stretched masculinity to include *patientia* much more than before and then proclaimed it the most manly of all the virtues. Tertullian called *patientia* the ‘*summa uirtus*’ (Tertullian. *De Patientia*. 1.7). In contrast, the mid-third century C.E. author, Cyprian the Bishop of Carthage, equated *patientia* with *firmitas* (stability or strength) rather than virtue, though strength is of course a virtue (Cyprian *De bono patientiae*. 12.16). Thus the martyrs who die without complaint, like Hippolytus, or who jest or are defiant in the face of their painful deaths, like Laurence and Agnes, are displaying the now masculine virtue *patientia*.

**Penetrating Agnes**

Outlining the arguments on the sexualization of Saint Agnes in the *Passio Agnetis*, hereafter referred to as *Pe*.14, gives a starting point for exploring the sexualization of the male saints in the *Peristephanon*. Though not all the points and arguments will be applicable many of the motifs used occur in the *Peristephanon* regardless of the martyr’s gender. For example Agnes’ double crown of martyrdom and virginity is not an honour to which male saints may aspire in the *Peristephanon*\(^{60}\). That male saints do not receive the double crown is not an indication that these saints are, or have been, sexually active: it shows the different qualities Prudentius emphasized and prioritized for each saint. Male virginity is ignored but male chastity is clearly assumed. Agnes’ *pudor*, represented in part by her virginity, is the central theme of her martyrdom. As Ambrose, Prudentius’ near contemporary, says ‘*habetis igitur in una hostia duplex matyrium, pudoris et*


\(^{60}\) ‘*duplex corona est praestita martyri*’ (*Pe*.14: 7). The double crown of virginity and martyrdom is given to male saints in some early Christian texts. Notably the Virgin marriages see: Upchurch (2007).
The import placed upon Agnes’ pudor effectively ties her martyrdom to the sexual integrity of Agnes’ body. Sex and sexual desire become the battleground for her soul, as her own desire to stay a virgin for Christ conflicts with the prefect’s desires. This makes Agnes’ body the focus of her trial and martyrdom.

Pe.14 is about Saint Agnes who was martyred in Rome probably shortly before the Diocletianic persecution. Prudentius begins by describing Agnes’ grave in Rome, proclaiming her a protector of Rome and strangers who pray ‘puro ac fidei pectore’ (‘with a pure and faithful heart’), before finally praising her ‘duplex corona’ (‘double crown’) of untouched virginity and martyrdom (1-9). Having established Agnes’ worth, Prudentius starts the tale of her martyrdom beginning with the information that she is ‘iugali vix’ (‘scarcely of marriageable age’), and Christian, she refuses to worship pagan deities despite attempts to persuade her ‘ore blandi iudicis inlice’ (‘by the smooth speech from the seductive Judge’), and offers her body for torture and martyrdom (10-20). The Tyrannus (the iudex), realizing that Agnes would rather die than lose her virginity, sentences her to a pubic brothel unless she repents and begs Minerva’s pardon (21-30). Agnes stridently refutes the Tyrannus, stating that, while he may kill her, Christ will protect her virginity and her pudor (31-7). So the iudex orders her stripped in the square but the crowds turn away to protect Agnes’ verendum (‘thing that must be venerated or feared’) (38-42). However, one man in the crowd looks at Agnes’ sacram formam (‘sacred beauty’) with ‘lumine lubrico’ (a slippery, lustful eye) and he is miraculously incapacitated.

Ambrose De Virginibus 1.2.9 ‘You have therefore in one victim a twofold martyrdom, of pudor and of the needs of religio’.

Thompson notes that ‘the date of [Agnes’] martyrdom is uncertain: it may have been earlier than Diocletian’s persecution’. (1961: 339 n.a). Grig, in line with many other scholars, dates her martyrdom to c.304 during the Diocletian persecution (2004:111). Palmer outlines the argument for an earlier date (257AD) but points out that this information is from the Acta, written in the early fifth century ‘at the earliest’, and is thus an unreliable source. She concludes that the exact date of Agnes’ martyrdom ‘can only remain conjectural’ (1989: 251).


Iudex and tyrannus are used interchangeably throughout the text.

It is clear in context that Agnes’ verendum is probably her vagina or genital area. See Barton (2002) for more on the shame associated with verenda.

It is unclear whether the crowd is full of Christians or Pagans who are uncomfortable with the deflowering of an aristocraticuirgo.
and struck blind by lightning\(^{67}\) (43-51). Agnes triumphantly passes the man singing holy songs, which restores his sight, and he is converted to Christianity (52-60). The \textit{iudex} complains that he is losing the battle and orders Agnes’ death by the sword. Agnes responds to this joyously in a striking and ‘stridently masculine’\(^{68}\) speech before bowing her head so that her executioner (a soldier) might remove her head quickly and cleanly (67-90).\(^{69}\) Prudentius then describes Agnes’ disembodied spirit leaving her and journeying to heaven while looking down at the world and judging the pagan ills of wealth, pride and other vanities (91-125). Prudentius ends the martyrdom with a prayer to Agnes saying ‘\textit{cui posse soli cunctipares dedit castum vel ipsum reddere fornicem}’ (128-9) (‘and her alone did the Father of all give the ability to make even a brothel pure’) (126-133). This recalls the beginning of the poem and Agnes’ protection of those with pure and faithful hearts. It also reiterates the major themes in Agnes’ martyrdom, purity and the danger to Agnes’ \textit{pudor}.

Agnes is both a dangerously liminal figure and a desirable object. This may be seen when it becomes clear to her ‘\textit{trux tyrannus}’ (savage persecutor) that Agnes will not yield to his demands or persuasions and he decides to attack her \textit{pudor} since he sees that it is all she values (\textit{Pe.14}: 21). As Burrus says ‘he invokes the threat of rape’\(^{70}\):

\begin{verbatim}
hanc in lupanar trudere publicum
certum est, ad aram ni caput applicat
ac de Minerva iam veniam rogat,
quam uirgo perigit temnere uirginem.
onmis iuventas inruet et nouum
ludibriorum mancipium petet.
\end{verbatim}

\(^{67}\) In alternate versions of Agnes’ martyrdom the miracle is not as violent rather her hair grows to cover her naked form. It is striking that Prudentius uses lightning in the heart of Rome as a Christian miracle: this may be read as the ultimate usurpation of Jupiter.

\(^{68}\) Grig (2004:117).

\(^{69}\) This passage is discussed at length below. It highlights Agnes’ gendered performance and supports many of the arguments about her sexualization within the text.

\(^{70}\) Burrus (1995:35).
It is resolved thrust her into a public brothel unless she lays her head upon the altar and presently begs pardon of Minerva, the virgin whom she, a virgin too, persists in despising. All the young men will rush in and will seek a new slave for their sport. (Pe.14: 25-30)

In this excerpt the tyrant highlights Agnes’ physical desirability and her dangerous liminality. He must force Agnes back to a proper place in pagan society in order to win the battle, which means she must become either wife and mother or priestess. *Uirgines* are dangerously liminal because they are on the threshold of adulthood. They are not safely married and, though still under the control of their *pater familias*, they are old enough to be tempting to men. In general their potential makes *uirgines* liminal. A wife’s value often lay in her chastity. This liminality is also a theme in Cassian’s *passio*, through the liminality inherent in the youths who stab him. Here the tyrant threatens Agnes’ virginity by objectifying her physically. It is clear that though Agnes is not presented to the reader with sadistic voyeurism the tyrant is viewing her this way. This is not to say that one must be physically desirable to become a victim of rape, since it is a tool of torture much like the rack or the claws in this instance, but it is clear in context that Agnes herself is desirable in a socially normative sense.

Prudentius has given several hints as to how Agnes’ nudity may be read through internal viewers.\(^{71}\) The crowd who turn away (*aversa uultus*) (Pe.14: 41) are safe from the lightning unlike the man who dares to look upon her *uerendum locum* (Pe.14: 42)\(^{72}\). It is clear from the context that this is an assault upon her *pudor*, her *uerecundia*, but it is also clear that it fails. The crowd by turning their faces away affords Agnes a measure of respect while the man who violates her *pudor* is punished. Prudentius simultaneously reveals Agnes to his reader as he lays bare her sacred beauty (*sacram formam*) thus presenting her with sadistic voyeurism and hides her from proper view, meaning not that she cannot be seen but should not. The blinded man acts not only as a warning for the viewer to preserve Agnes’ *pudor* by turning away but also as a reminder that there is indeed something to be seen. Something, moreover, that is desirable. As Grig, noting that the display of Agnes’

\(^{71}\) For more on internal viewers within texts see Sharrock (2002).

\(^{72}\) See Barton (2002:217).
nudity is highly transgressive, says it ‘provides an opportunity… both conjuring up the erotic and beautiful naked female figure… and taking it away’\textsuperscript{73}. This presentation of Agnes allows Prudentius to have it both ways as it were because ‘she is naked and yet not naked because unseen’\textsuperscript{74}. Agnes is exposed and objectified but concealed by lightening and the modestly turned heads and is thus also presented with fetishistic scopophilia. Therefore the reader (or external viewer) is given a titillating glimpse of a beautiful and desirable girl and then warned to turn away. By having two layers of internal viewer Prudentius is able to present Agnes with both fetishistic scopophilia, since the turned heads of the crowd veil her, and with sadistic voyeurism, as the man sees her fully (\textit{conspiceret}) (\textit{Pe}.14: 42).

After the unnamed man is struck blind Agnes sings her thanks to God and then prays for the restoration of his sight. At this point, since it is clear that no one will be able to rape Agnes given that they cannot even look upon her naked form, the magistrate is given little choice but to order Agnes’ death. As Burrus points out ‘the magistrate’s problem is no longer persuasion but the enforcement of his threats. If Agnes’ virginity cannot be defiled, her life can still be taken…’\textsuperscript{75}. The magistrate orders that she be put to the sword, which gives Agnes joy.

\begin{verbatim}
ut uidit Agnes stare trucem uirum
mucrone nudo, laetior haec ait:
`exulto, talis quod potius uenit
uaesanus, atrox, turbidus armiger,
quam si ueniret languidus ac tener
mollisque ephebus tinctus aromate,
qui me pudoris funere perderet.
hic, hic amator iam, fateor, placet:
ibo inruentis gressibus obuiam,
nec demorabor uota calentia:
ferrum in papillas omne recepero
pectusque ad imum uim gladii traham.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{73} Grig (2004:113).
\textsuperscript{74} Grig (2004:114).
\textsuperscript{75} Burrus (1995: 36).
When Agnes saw the grim man standing there with his naked sword, more happy she says the following: ‘I rejoice that there comes a man like this, a savage, cruel, wild armed man, rather than a listless, soft, womanish youth bathed in perfume, who would destroy me through the death of my pudor. Here now, does a lover, I confess, please: I shall meet his steps, as he rushes against me, and not put off his hot desires. I shall welcome the whole length of his blade into my breasts, and I will draw the force of the sword into the depths of my chest.’ (Pe.14. 67-78).

Agnes’ speech reinforces her desire to die rather than lose her virginity. It also shows the kind of man whom Agnes considers a suitable executioner. She viewed the loss of her virginity as worse than execution and was disdainful about pagan husbands or rapists (had she been consigned to the brothel against her will her customers would most accurately be described as rapists), naming them effeminate. However, the man she welcomes as a lover is (it seems) as stridently masculine as she is. He is man enough to finish her off as it were. Burrus points out ‘[t]he vivid eroticism of Agnes’ speech both strengthens and complicates the … suggestion that martyrdom may be identified with rape.’

Agnes welcomes her executioner as a lover while his sword is welcomed ‘as a deflowering penis’. Thus Agnes sexualizes herself while she rejoices in the preservation of her pudor. This is not necessarily unusual (in the Peristephanon at least) since, as will be seen, Laurence also self-sexualizes. Her speech is explicitly sexual as she accepts her death-bringing lover claiming that his penis-blade will allow her to marry Christ (sic nupta Christo) (Pe.14: 79). Burrus claims that ‘Agnes’ Christocentric arousal here serves to frame and thereby recontextualize the enclosed narration of her triumphant resistance to the phallic threat represented by the magistrate and his cohorts…’. Indeed Agnes has insisted since the beginning of the poem that she will die before losing her pudor and, despite his best efforts to persuade and torture her, the magistrate is forced to bend to her

78 Burrus (1995:37). Burrus also notes that this narrative is lacking in both Ambrose’s and Damasus’ versions. ‘[N]either of these Agnes texts includes the story of her forced prostitution or miraculous release.’ (n. 35).
will rather than she his. At this point Agnes could have simply accepted her sentence and passively died, having received the judgment she wished for, but by sexualizing her executioner in this final speech she mocks his judgment and therefore his authority. As Malamud says ‘when Agnes emerges unscathed from the brothel, she reverses the judge’s substitution of rape for death by imagining her death as the ultimate form of sexual experience’\(^{79}\). However it is not only a sexual experience it is the consummation of her marriage to Christ.

Agnes has rewritten her death as a \textit{limen}, which will take her to Christ’s side. Furthermore she unambiguously connects her death with sex. This is perhaps because like her death, which is a liminal event, sex is also a transformative and therefore liminal event. In welcoming a lover Agnes crosses the threshold to a form of adulthood, which she legitimizes by naming it marriage to Christ. This is a theme that shall be seen in the \textit{passiones} of the male martyrs. Martyrdom itself is a liminal event. The internal or external viewers of the martyrdom use the event as a means to renew their faith or to gain faith. The martyrdom also transforms the saint into a \textit{limen} through which one may approach Christ. This will be seen in Cassian’s \textit{passio} when Prudentius includes himself and prays at Cassian’s tomb and in Hippolytus’ \textit{passio} when Prudentius takes a stroll through the cemetery to pray at the tombs of the many who were martyred. Agnes’ defiance and self-sexualization is reminiscent of Laurence’s “jests” and his own self-sexualization. While the male saints mentioned do not rewrite their deaths as marriage to Christ, there is an overarching theme of liminality that produces a reading of eventual union with Christ.

**Chapter outlines**

Chapter one will look at Cassian’s martyrdom as a reversed paederastic encounter. Saint Cassian, a teacher who is stabbed to death by his own pupils, is presented as the penetrated and objectified partner in a scene of inverted pederasty. It will highlight the subtle sexualization and divergently gendered performance of Cassian, which is present in the text, highlighting Cassian’s passivity and his unusual

\[^{79}\text{Malamud (1989: 159).}\]
(for a schoolteacher) lack of rhetorical performance. Cassian is portrayed as a *cinaedus* but as will be seen the boys are inept and unaccomplished lovers.

Chapter two will look at Laurence’s gendered performance primarily in relation to his slow death by “cooking” but also at the contrast between Laurence’s Christian *uirtus* and the judge’s “pagan” *uirtus* or lack thereof. It will explore Laurence’s command of rhetoric and humour (particularly how as Laurence’s eloquence grows the judge’s diminishes) and Laurence’s self-sexualization. Laurence rewrites masculinity and history as Christian before usurping Venus.

Chapter three will look at Saint Hippolytus, who is torn apart just like his namesake, and the description of Hippolytus’ fragmented remains being an objectification of the male form in segments. The significance of Hippolytus’ lack of rhetoric and silence in parts of the poem, building on similar arguments in the previous two chapters, will be explored. Hippolytus becomes a metaphor for the resiliency of the Church.
Cassian

The *Passio Sancti Cassani Forocorneliensis* (hereafter referred to as *Pe. 9*) is the first of the three *passiones* that will be discussed in order to explore the dynamic within the *Peristephanon* which sexualizes some of the male martyrs. Offering up a sort of inverted pederasty, *Pe. 9* reverses the traditional power dynamic between teacher and taught, man and boy, and, therefore, ἐραστής and ἐρώμενος. The sexualization of the man and teacher, Cassian, can be seen on both a philological and thematic level. The *passio* sexualizes Cassian through: the language which draws attention to the saint’s body; metaphors and allusions to ploughing, that recall the consummation of a marriage (and thus the production of legitimate heirs); writing metaphors that show the inscription upon the saint’s body to be of his own making; and, the liminality of his executioners which complicates and complements Cassian’s own liminal status, reinforcing the reading of pederasty. Cassian’s body lies at the centre of this inverted pederasty since the traditional penetrator becomes penetrated when the authority shifts, by judicial edict, to the *pueri* from the *magister*. An absence of "normal" martyrological motifs—there are, for example, no rhetorical speeches designed to convert the internal audience—highlights Cassian's passivity, a theme that is reinforced by the language used to describe his body. Cassian’s flesh is at once the wax, upon which the boys are practicing their letters (71), a plowed field (77) the wet page dripping blood (50), the cramped and hidden places (*artas et latebras*) which hold his soul (88), and, through these allusions, a sexually penetrated body. Cassian loses agency when he is not given the opportunity to refute the heathens' demands. It is this passivity, in conjunction with the language used to describe his body, which marks him a sexual object. Cassian’s masculinity can be seen as compromised by the manner of his death and his passivity in the face of pain. In comparison, Agnes does not display the same passivity. She is a passionate and

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80 *Pe. 9* is the first recorded account of Saint Cassian the school teacher’s martyrdom. It has been speculated that Prudentius created the martyr and based his martyrdom on a passage from Livy (5.27) in which a schoolteacher is killed by his pupils. This argument is compelling since Prudentius does not include any particularly dateable information in the poem, for instance the name of the emperor, as he does in other poems. For more on this see Malamud (1989: 242).


willing participant in her penetration and subsequent death, thus displaying “masculinity”. Comparing Agnes’ masculine fortitude, which portrays her as a brave soldier dying for Christ, to Cassian’s performance of masculinity highlights Cassian’s unusual gender performance, which casts Cassian as a *cinaedus*. The descriptions of Cassian’s body combined with the descriptions of the boys’ actions and the shifted power dynamic make a reading of inverted pederasty, and therefore a reading of a sexualized Saint, not only possible but also probable. Before exploring Cassian’s sexualization within the text, a brief outline will be provided to assist the reader less familiar with Prudentius’ *Peristephanon* and thus Prudentius’ version of Cassian’s martyrdom.

*Pe. 9* is about the martyrdom of Saint Cassian who was a Christian and teacher in a presumably pagan school. Prudentius begins the passion with his own travels to Rome and his spiritual experience at Cassian’s tomb before he starts an ecphrasis of the tomb painting (10). The verger, or sacristan, interrupts the ecphrasis (at line 16) assuring Prudentius of the truth of the martyrdom and then begins to tell the passion (by describing the events in the picture), introducing the teacher Cassian, his torturers – his pupils –, and the *poenarum artifex*, the representative of the state who ordered Cassian’s torture and death. The *artifex* orders Cassian to be handed over to his pupils so that they may “play” with him and get revenge for Cassian’s “harsh” teachings. This is the full extent of the *artifex*’s role in the text as the pupils take over the role of torturer and authority. The narrative continues at line 43 and it is unclear whether it is the verger speaking again or whether it is once again the author. This ambiguity of speaker effectively leaves the ecphrasis open and gives the impression that the entire martyrdom is somehow

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84 Agnes is not simply a masculinized soldier of Christ as outlined in the introduction.
85 Prudentius’ own experience emphasizes the tomb as a liminal space in which the martyr and their bones are the *limen* through which prayers are heard and taken by the martyr to Christ for consideration. For more on this see Roberts (1993: 20-1).
86 This method of “authentication” is common in later hagiographic texts since it authenticates the miracles that occur after the Saint’s death. Prudentius does not include these post-death miracles in the *Peristephanon*.
87 Interestingly the man who orders Cassian’s torture is never named as a *rector*, *gubernator*, or *dux*. Prudentius describes him only as ‘*poenarum artif[ex]’ (33) (the mastermind or creator of punishments).
contained in the tomb painting. This foregrounds Cassian’s mutilated body in the mind of the reader, since if the entire poem is contained in the picture Cassian’s body is present throughout the entire poem. Be that as it may, a narrator describes Cassian’s torture, being tied up then stabbed and slashed by the styli of his pupils, (43-64), until he is interrupted by Cassian’s only direct speech, a couplet (65-6) in which Cassian begs for release. The narrator then briefly describes the boys’ exhaustion (67-8), before he is once again interrupted, this time by a speech from one of the boys (69-82). The ambiguous narrator returns to describe Cassian’s pain and God’s release for the suffering martyr (83-92). Then Prudentius unequivocally returns to the ecphrasis which is then followed by an exhortation to pray to Cassian (93-8). Finally Prudentius ends, as he began, describing his visit to the tomb and the prayer he makes while clasping the tomb and “warming” the altar with his lips (99-106). This means that Cassian is not only the limen to God for the reader but also for Prudentius himself.

From almost the beginning of Pe. 9 the reader is confronted by the spectacle of the penetrated body of Saint Cassian. The introduction of Cassian’s death is also paralleled by Prudentius’ own ‘pains’. Spread prostrate before Cassian’s tomb and speaking in the first person, he ‘reflect[s] on [his] wounds and all the labours of [his] life and the pricks of grief” in tears (7-8). The author’s own figurative wounds, described as uulnera (8), are presented only three lines before the Saint’s literal wounds: plagae (11). The use of plaga rather than uulnus of Cassian’s wounds also emphasizes Cassian's corporeality, since uulnus refers to a wound while plaga may refer to things such as land or a physical mark. This is a deliberate allusion that lays the ground for the latter comparison of Cassian’s body to a ploughed field.

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88 See Malamud (1989: 110-3) for more on Prudentius’ use of ecphrasis. Though she discusses Pe. 11 (Hippolytus) many of the points she makes are applicable to Prudentius’ use of ecphrasis in Pe. 9.
89 *dum lacrimans mecum repute mea uulnera et omnes/uitae labores ac dolorum acumina*
90 For more on the author’s comparison of himself to the martyr see Goldhill 1999: 81.
91 Plāga – ae from the greek πληγή is wound, while plaga – ae from the Greek πλακῦς is region or tract. The first syllable is long but this may be by position. Chambers Murray (2005: 546). The choice of plaga to describe the saint’s wounds may be meant to recall both meanings given the later comparison of Cassian to earth.
Though Adams does not list *plaga* as a word with sexualized meaning, it is hardly a stretch from *ulnus* (which he states 'is often associated with the deflowering of a bride') to *plaga*, which lends credence to the argument that Cassian's wounds may be viewed as a physical representation of his "deflowering"\(^\text{92}\). However, the wounds (if not an obvious representation of "deflowering") are definitely a sign that Cassian has been penetrated. This penetration is in some ways a metaphor that allows the penetrated to transverse the threshold from childhood to adulthood. A pederastic relationship helps to give the ἐρώμενος the requisite knowledge to enter the adult world just as the relationship between martyr and their torturer/s allows the martyr to enter God's "world". This liminality, common in martyrdoms, is heightened in Cassian’s *passio* by the presence of normally liminal figures: the pupils, who by rights should be subject to a ritual in order to cross into the adult world, are instead officiating Cassian’s ritualized ascent. This liminality, inherent in *Pe*. 14 since Agnes is a girl of marriageable age, is present in *Pe*. 9 in the form of Cassian’s torturers: Cassian’s students.

Cassian’s torturers are present almost immediately after Cassian’s tortured body is described but they do not draw the focus from Cassian. This means that, in short succession, the reader is confronted with the author’s pain, Cassian’s mangled flesh, and the boys penetrating his flesh. The focus is always upon Cassian’s penetrated body.

erexi ad caelum faciem, stetit obuia contra fucis colorum picta imago martyris plagas mille gerens, totos lacerata per artus, ruptam minutis praeferens punctis cutem. innumerī circum pueri, miserabile uisu, confossa paruis membra figebant stilis, unde pugillares solitī percurre rē cē sarolāe murmur adnotantes scriperant.

I raised my face to heaven and there stood confronting me the image of a martyr painted in coloured hues, bearing a thousand wounds, his entire

\(^{92}\) Adams (1982: 152).
body mangled, displaying his skin broken with tiny punctures. Countless boys surround him, a miserable sight, were piercing the punctured limbs with their little styli, with which they used to pierce the wax writing tablets writing down the droning lessons in school. (Pe. 9.9-16)

The liminality of the boys is highlighted later in the text with their rejection of Cassian’s, and therefore Christ’s, teachings. Cassian’s liminality is featured first and last through the visit to his tomb and the author’s prayers. Cassian is thus presented for the first time at the height of his martyrdom, being penetrated by boys with writing implements. His body is the spectacle at the center of the tomb and the text, much like an image of crucified Christ in a church. Like a church the tomb is a liminal space within which Christians may connect to God through the Saint. Prudentius does this by identifying his own metaphorical wounds with those depicted upon Cassian’s body. Cassian’s body is the focal point of the tomb because he has crossed into the heavens and is with Christ, leaving his earthly remains as a kind of spiritual limen that will allow Prudentius contact with Christ. While his body becomes the focal point of the text through Prudentius’ open ecphrasis, Cassian’s body is objectified as this spiritual doorway and path to God. Even in death Cassian’s role is passive, as he is throughout the poem, as he functions as a conduit to God.

Cassian’s passivity is shown in the narrative of his martyrdom through his silence. There are no long speeches from the Saint denying his persecutors' demands. Indeed his persecutors seem to demand nothing more than that he be a spectacle, as he is never offered the opportunity to repent. Ostensibly the reason for his martyrdom is that he is a Christian and Prudentius offers little more than this and the boys’ fear of Cassian’s teachings as a reason for his death.

aspera nonnumquam praecpta et tristia uisa
inpube uulgus mouerant ira et metu.
doctor amarus enim discenti semper ephebo,
nec dulcis ulli disciplina infantiae est.
Sometimes his harsh teachings and grim looks moved the young mob with anger and fear. For the teacher is always distasteful to the young student, nor is education sweet to any childhood. (Pe. 9.25-28).

Though the *iudex*, when describing his proscribed punishment, offers a reason (claiming that Cassian excessively punished the boys), it has already been undercut by the narrator’s claim that the boys are simply uninterested pupils. The judge’s sentencing of Cassian is an unusual one for a Roman official and he pronounces his sentence vehemently\(^93\). He begins with imperatives and shifts to hortatory subjunctives, which combine to give the impression that he is relishing sentencing Cassian and perhaps eager to see one of his own childhood fantasies played out\(^94\).

‘*ducite*’, conclamat, ‘*captiuum ducite*, et ultro
donetur ipsis uerberator paruulis.
ut libet inludant, lacerent inpune manusque
tinguant magistri feriatas sanguine.
ludum discipulis uolupe est ut praebeat ipse
doctor seuerus quos nimis coercuit.’
uincitur post terga manus spoliatus amictu.
adest acut
is agmen armatum stilis.
quantum quisque odii tacita conceperat ira.
effundit ardens felle tandem libero.

‘Take him’, he cried, ‘take him as a captive and let the flogger be
given to the small children themselves. As it pleases, let them to play
with him, let them mangle him without punishment, and let them
soak idle hands in their Master’s blood; It is a pleasant thought that
the strict teacher himself may provide sport for his students, whom

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\(^{93}\) Palmer claims that this sentence is unusual and believes it offers evidence that Prudentius created Cassian’s martyrdom based on Livy (1989: 242).

\(^{94}\) The boys as the instruments of the *iudex* and the relationship between the two during Cassian’s martyrdom becomes complex when considering the tools used to punish Cassian, see below.
he punished excessively’. Stripped of his clothing, his hands are tied behind his back and the class is present armed with sharp styli. All of the hatred each one had conceived in silent anger, each raging student pours out, the poison free at last. (Pe. 9.37-46).

The poem allows no time for Cassian to bravely confront his punishment, unlike Agnes’ *passio*. Cassian is silent. He is stripped and bound within a single line, reminiscent of Virgil\(^{95}\). The absence of defiance is unusual in an educated man. For example Laurence (Pe. 2) and Romanus (Pe. 10), both deacons and therefore educated, speak extensively in their martyrdoms refuting the Pagan demands and joking or glorying in their tortures\(^{96}\). It is also interesting to note that the boys have held *tacita ira* towards Cassian. Thus it is not only the power that has shifted between the boys and Cassian but also the silence. Cassian has lost his authority over the boys and gained their silent suffering. There is an exchange of knowledge, as the boys return the skills imparted to them by Cassian, meaning that this relationship may more easily be read as a straight role reversal in a pederastic relationship. Cassian takes on the role of passive partner, never “enjoying” the (virtual) sexual contact of the relationship and receiving instead “knowledge” from the boys who have taken on the roles of educators and active partners\(^{97}\).

The boys’ unnatural role as penetrators is complicated by their normally liminal status. The students have been forced by a pagan edict to become the active participants in this act of penetration, a role for which they are not yet ready. The judge has usurped Cassian’s authority as the teacher and, rather than guiding the boys gently towards manhood, he has prematurely forced them across the limen to pagan manhood. One of the boys frames this as a return of the knowledge that Cassian was imparting to them. This therefore may be read as the boys rejecting Christian learning. This return of “knowledge” reemphasizes the unnaturalness of the boys being the active partners and their usurpation of the teaching role. It is clear that the boys had a choice of two limina and that, rather than being allowed to grow

\(^{95}\) Aeneid 11.81. See the introduction for an extended discussion on this reference in particular and *paideia* in general.

\(^{96}\) Romanus speaks directly for many hundreds of lines even after half his jaw is ripped off and his tongue removed. For more on this see Levine (1991: 22).

\(^{97}\) Though one imagines that he enjoyed the outcome of the interaction since he is taken to God.
into proper Christian men through Cassian’s teachings, they are forced by the pagan authorities into pagan manhood before they are ready. Thus the martyrdom may be read as a transformational experience not only for the martyr but also for the torturers. However, as will be seen, the boys fail to transform into pagan men capable of killing the saint and instead it is Christ who must step in and consummate the martyrdom.

Though the boys accuse Cassian himself of arming them it is clear that he has not armed them sufficiently for the task which they are set. Perhaps because Cassian was arming them with the words of Christ and it is the iudex who has twisted the implements into a method of torture, a penetrating device, and therefore substitute penis. Although there does not appear to be another instance in Latin literature where a stylus may be read as a metaphorical penis, it is apposite that the boys’ styli be read this way, since, as Adams points out, ‘[n]o objects are more readily likened to the penis than sharp implements’. It is also apt, in part, because they are boys and not grown men and thus their penises will be correspondingly smaller. However Roberts, noting that the boys are learning shorthand, points out that they are students of the notarius and are thus older pueri who would therefore have the physical strength to turn on their teacher. The boys being older does not effect the argument that a smaller sharp implement is more aptly read as a boy’s penis than a larger sharp implement because the boys are not fully grown men with a man’s size and stamina.

Indeed, the pupils’ lack of stamina is graphically highlighted in terms which may be read as sexual during the Saint's torture. That the boys lack the required strength and stamina to “finish the saint off”, as it were, and send him to God is emphasized in the passage below as is their youth, their non-traditional role as penetrators, and the reversal of power between the parties. The passage in which Cassian's torture is at its height features a graphic speech by one of the boys (lines 98)

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98 The OLD lists *stimulus* (goad, prick or sting) as a cognate of *stilus*. Things that prick or penetrate flesh in Latin are often metaphorical penises. See Adams (1982: 14-16).
100 Roberts (1993: 144).
101 See below for the outcome of the boys’ lack of stamina.
With adept wordplay, more suited to a poet than a student, the boy accuses Cassian of being the author of his own downfall 102.

'quid gemis?' exclamat quidam; 'tute ipse magister istud dedisti ferrum et armasti manus. reddimus ecce tibi tam milia multa notarum, quam stando, flendo te docente excepimus. non potes irasci quod scribimus; ipse iubebas numquam quietum dextra ut ferret stylum. non petimus totiens te praeceptore negatas, auare doctor, iam scholarum ferias. pangere puncta libet sulcisque intexere sulcos. flexas catenis impedi re uirgulas. emendes licet inspectos longo ordine uersus. mendosa forte si quid errauit manus. exercite imperium: ius est tibi plectere culpam. si quis tuorum te notauit segmentus.'

talia ludebant pueri per membra magistri, nec longa fessum poena soluebat uirum.

‘Why do you lament?’ one calls out, ‘you yourself as our teacher gave us this iron and put the weapon into our hands. Look! We are returning to you all the many thousands of letters, as we, while standing and crying, received while you were teaching. You cannot be angry because we write; you yourself ordered that we never carry an idle style in hand. We are not asking for that which was so often denied with you as teacher, mean teacher, a holiday from school. It pleases us to penetrate [you leaving] punctures, to weave furrows with furrows and to bind tortuous lines with chains. Having examined the furrows, you may

102 The boy’s speech is full of metaphors, allusions, and alliteration. It is also rather condensed in part and in short seems to be too complex an oration for an uninterested and petulant student to create. See below for a discussion of his use of farming and writing language.
correct the long lines, in case any faulty hand has wandered. Enforce your authority; you have the right to punish a fault if any of your pupils has carelessly branded you’. The boys played in this way with the limbs of their master. The long punishment was not freeing [i.e., finishing off] the worn out man. (*Pe. 9.69-84*).

Here we see the boy assert his new authority and explain that the boys are returning the lessons taught to them by Cassian. His exhortation to Cassian to assert his authority is clearly taunting since Cassian no longer has authority. Furthermore the authority he once held as the boys’ teacher is never asserted in the text. Cassian has not spoken yet to issue commands or explain a lesson. He has been voiceless as his body is focused on and tortured by the instruments of his own trade.

The boy’s speech neatly combines language connected to writing and farming. This reemphasizes the idea that the styli may be seen as the boys’ penises. The styli create furrows (*sulci*), which is a farming term but also a term which can be used for vagina. Obviously *sulcus* may mean vagina on the basis of a seed planting metaphor. Adams explains that terms used to mean vagina are readily used to refer to a male’s anus. Cassian’s entire body is the field being ploughed, making his physical presence an orifice suitable for ploughing or in other words an anus.

Ross comments on Prudentius’ use of *sulcus*:

‘The repeated use by Prudentius of the word *sulcus* to refer to the wounds on the martyrs’ bodies clearly brings out the idea that they are fertile fields whose lines or furrows of writing are opened up so that something can be implanted by God, the result of which will be the yielding of a marvellous fruit, the fruit of salvation.’

Whether the seeds planted through, and in, Cassian bloom slowly or immediately Prudentius has used a clearly sexual metaphor. This is a metaphor often used to

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103 See Adams (1982: 24,28,84). He notes that *sulcus* was inoffensively used to denote the vagina.
describe the fertility of women\textsuperscript{106}. That the metaphor is inoffensive means that it may be applied to legitimate unions made for procreation. Thus not only is the fruit of salvation created through Cassian’s penetration it may be seen as legitimate. In this way Prudentius emphasizes the legitimacy of Christianity. That the seeds implanted into Cassian’s flesh by the boys are his own teachings, which the boys are returning to him, means that they are legitimate Christian teachings (his own) planted into faithful Christian soil (Cassian). Thus while Cassian is cast as the fertile bride it is the words of Christ (through the boys’ learning) with which he is impregnated. The boys are once again inadequate both as students (and thus legitimate heirs to Cassian’s Christian teachings) and as bridegrooms, since they are neither converted as a good student would be nor capable of inseminating Cassian without Cassian’s Christian teachings.

This predominant language which is connected to writing and its intertwining with farming words and images, during Cassian’s death scene, has been examined by a number of scholars. However no one has explicitly argued that this language objectifies Cassian as a sexualized object both as a page to be written upon (\textit{pagina, cera}) and the earth to be ploughed. It is often compared to Eulalia’s martyrdom as she counts the wounds upon her body and declares them to be the name of Christ (\textit{Pe. 3.136-40})\textsuperscript{107}. Eulalia is delighted by her wounds and seems to show endurance and a lack of pain not granted Cassian. Cassian is not delighted nor is he stoic. He does not speak to refute his torturers, nor to glory in the wounds inflicted upon his body, since his torturers do not demand conversion and there does not appear to be a crowd watching. The text concentrates upon the actions of the boys and silences, or ignores, Cassian. His body is likened to a page and a wax tablet: his body is likened to inanimate objects and he is thus a vessel rather than a person with true agency. Furthermore these objects are blank until an author chooses to inscribe them. Reynolds argues that in this scene ‘Prudentius evokes the sensory qualities of the martyr’s skin and flesh before their mutilation’ through his description of the styles’ use upon the wax tablets (\textit{nitescens area 9.54}) and ‘that this description also strongly

\textsuperscript{106} Adams (1982: 83).
\textsuperscript{107} Eulalia’s \textit{passio} is the third text in the \textit{Peristephanon}. Eulalia interrupts pagan rites and then refuses to refute Christ and Christianity despite the threat of horrible tortures. When the executioner has been tearing at her with the \textit{ungulae} she views the wounds as Christ’s name writ large upon her body. For more on Eulalia see Uden (2009).
recalls the smooth, luminous expanse of the martyr’s unbroken skin. Cassian’s body is therefore the blank page upon which God’s word may be written.

Some hurl brittle tablets and they break against his face, the wood bursts into fragments against his shattered brow. They crack the wooden wax covered tablets which break upon his bleeding cheeks and the wet and incomplete page grows red from the blow. Then others brandish goads and sharpened iron points with the part with which the wax is written on in the ploughed furrows, and with the part with which the letters that have been incised are erased and the roughened surface is again restored into a smooth space. On one side the Confessor of Christ is stabbed and on the other he is cut, one part enters soft guts and the other splits his skin. Two hundred hands together have pierced him. As many drops drip at the same time from wounds. (Pe. 9.47-58).

Cassian’s face is called a page, as other “pages” (the wooden tablets) are violently hurled into it. If we read Cassian as a text here, more importantly a text dedicated to God, there is a clear contest between “pages” or things that may be written upon.

The boys’ fragile pagan tablets are breaking upon *pagina Christi* but they do not break Cassian’s page-face. Instead the tablets provide the ink to mark his face with God’s message. The boys mark Cassian through pagan authority but it is God’s word that appears as Cassian is transformed from devout Christian to Saint Cassian and so the Confessor of Christ’s wounds cannot help but be eloquent. Reynolds also notes that the parallel between the wax and Cassian is interesting because *cereus* (wax) has been used poetically to refer to young boys, being at an age to be molded into their adult selves\(^{109}\). This lends weight to a reading of inverted pederasty as Cassian, the elder and teacher, becomes the youth to be shaped and penetrated.

However it becomes apparent that the role reversal is incomplete because the boys lack the stamina to finish Cassian off. Prudentius has hinted at a sexualized relationship between the boys and Cassian and in order to fulfill this sex act the boys, like Agnes’ executioner, must send Cassian to God by killing him. Here Prudentius explains how the torture is heightened by the boys’ lack of strength.

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
maior tortor erat qui summa pupugerat infans
quam qui profunda perforarat uiscera;
ille, leuis quoniam percussor morte negata
saeuire solis scit dolorum spiculis,
hic, quanto interius uitalia condita pulsat,
plus dat medellae dum necem prope applicat.
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

A greater torturer was the child who pricked the surface than the one who broke through into the deep entrails; the one, since as gentle assassin, with death denied knows to savage with stings only of pains, while the other, to the extent he strikes further into the hidden vitals, gives more comfort by bringing death closer. (*Pe*. 9.59-64)

Here again Prudentius uses a term that may be read as a vagina and therefore an anus. *Uiscus* means insides or guts but is also used to denote the vagina or rectum\(^{110}\). This is emphasized by the use of *conditum uital* (hidden vitals) shortly

\(^{109}\) Reynolds (2009: 102). She mentions Horace’s ‘*Ars poetica*’ 163 as an example.

thereafter. The youths who manage to penetrate Cassian properly are fulfilling their role as executioners and therefore sending Cassian on towards God. Their place in the ritual should be to facilitate Cassian’s transformation, from living man to dead saint, and thus bring him comfortably into the arms of Christ. However, unhappily for Cassian, there are more boys who cannot penetrate his flesh into his hidden vitals than there are boys who can. This causes Cassian to speak for the first and only time:

'este, precor, fortes, et uincite uiribus annos;  
quod defit aeuo, suppleat crudelitas.'  
sed male conatus tener infirmusque laborat;  
tormenta crescent dum fatiscit carnifex.

‘Be vigorous, I entreat you, and conquer your years with strength. What you lack in age let savagery supplement’. But the soft and weak one labours ineffectively; the torments increase while the executioner fails. (Pe. 9.65-68).

Cassian begs the boys to finish him off. He acknowledges their youth and asks them to defy it by presumably penetrating him as a fully-grown man might; they can’t, as it were, penetrate Cassian’s body as deeply as he needs them to. Unfortunately for Cassian the boys are too young, and now too tired, to kill him properly. At this point Christ himself steps in and releases Cassian’s soul from his tortured body (tandem… Christus/ iubet resolve pectoris ligamina (Pe .9.85-6)), completing the transformation that the boys are unable to.

Prudentius’ language in Pe.9 allows the reader to see a sexual component to Cassian’s torture and death. Cassian’s penetrated body is the central theme of the text. Prudentius utilizes the *ecphrasis* to leave the reader with the impression that Cassian’s brutalized body is present through the entire text. His body carries the key to Christian salvation and this is highlighted through Prudentius’ use of metaphors.

111 Though the Latin reads as only one boy is failing it is clear from context that Prudentius means all the boys are tired.
Through Cassian’s unusual gendered performance, he is cast as a bride going to Christ’s side and therefore cast as a *cinaedus*. The farming metaphor casts Cassian as the earth, and therefore bride, while the boys are cast as inadequate husbands whose sole value lies in their ability to return Cassian’s teachings to him, ploughing the word of Christ into Cassian’s flesh. Though Cassian does not convert the internal audience, it is clear through the boys’ rejection of his teachings that they are not only inadequate executioners and lovers but also inadequate Christian heirs. Rather it is Prudentius himself who is renewed through Cassian’s martyrdom.

Prudentius, who receives the fruit of salvation, becomes Cassian’s heir. In turn his text presents Cassian’s salvation to the reader, allowing the reader to use Cassian as a *limen* to Christ. Cassian’s passive role in these highly sexualized metaphors is further highlighted by his lack of agency symbolized through his silence. His silence marks him as an object. He is unusually passive, offering no resistance at all, and speaks only to beg for an end to his torture. There is no internal audience there to witness his martyrdom neither faithful Christians nor heathens to convert through his suffering in imitation of Christ. Where one might have read his silence as stoic resistance and an expression of Christian *patientia* (endurance) his few words disrupt the reading. Cassian’s body is central in the *passio*, seen from almost the very beginning of the text as a penetrated object. Prudentius’ combination of writing language and farming language combine with more obvious bodily metaphors to produce a reading of failed sexual intercourse; with the boys as the penetrators using their small weapons with which Cassian himself had armed them. Cassian’s passive performance and pregnancy is only one way that Prudentius sexualizes the male martyrs. As will be seen, Laurence is objectified and sexualized despite being the protagonist of his *passio*. 
Laurence

The sexualization of male saints in the *Peristephanon* is easier to discern when their gendered portrayal is passive, feminized (like Cassian). However, saints who are portrayed in a more traditional manner, like Laurence, are also sexualized. The *Hymnus in Honorem Passionis Laurentii Beatiissimi Martyris* (hereafter referred to as *Pe.*) is the second of the three passions discussed and, unlike Cassian, Laurence is neither silent nor a passive sexualized object, rather he sexualizes himself in an exchange of banter which ultimately reveals Laurence to be the true *progenitor* of Rome. The gods themselves are replaced when the prefect lays Laurence upon Vulcan’s bed and Laurence usurps Venus\(^{112}\). Rather than effeminizing Laurence, through passivity and penetration, Prudentius rewrites acceptable masculinity and the ancestry of Rome as Christian. Throughout the text the reader is invited to compare Laurence’s masculinity with the prefect’s masculinity and through this comparison one can see that Laurence’s masculinity, the new Christian performance of masculinity, is superior to the old pagan masculinity, which it appropriates. At the point of his death, Laurence makes his infamous offer for the torturers to taste him and see whether he is nicer raw or cooked. This line in the Latin does not specify a body part but since he offers a taste of both his raw and cooked “meat” it is possible to read it as an offer that might involve both his buttocks and genitals. This self-sexualization, as Laurence offers his own body to the prefect’s mouth, casts Laurence as the active participant in fellatio or analingus and thus casts the prefect as sexually deviant and even a *cinaedus*. Laurence essentially sexualized himself in a manner guaranteed to highlight the prefect’s proclivities. This combination of Laurence’s offer and the constant comparison of pagan and Christian values naturally lead to a reading that compares the masculinity of the two leaders, Laurence and prefect, in the text. Before exploring Laurence’s sexualization within the text and his usurpation of masculine ideals and Rome, as in the preceding chapter, a brief outline will be provided in order to assist the reader.

\(^{112}\) It is possibly this usurpation that leads Conybeare to highlight the personification of Rome as female within her prose (2002: 179-80). There is definitely a theme of masculinization of the feminine throughout the *Peristephanon* but this theme is perhaps the basis for another thesis.
Pe.2 concerns the final days, martyrdom, and death of Saint Laurence, who was one of the seven deacons of Rome martyred during the Valerian persecution in 258 CE\textsuperscript{113}. Prudentius begins by addressing this hymn to Rome itself and praising Laurence as Rome’s saviour. He even compares him to Augustus. He then briefly describes the martyrdom of Xystus (Sixtus II), Laurence’s superior in the Church\textsuperscript{114}, and Xystus’ prophesy of Laurence’s own imminent martyrdom while Xystus is dying on the Cross\textsuperscript{115}. The prefect then comes not to kill Laurence but to demand a tithe from the Church’s treasury, which Laurence controls, for the state (57-108). Laurence readily and meekly agrees that the Church is rich and will accede to the prefect’s demands asking only for a brief respite that he might make a tally of the Church’s treasures. Laurence, granted the respite, spends three days gathering his flock of beggars and the infirm (the true treasure of his Church) and making a list of their names before he asks the prefect to return. When the prefect sees the treasure Laurence lines up before him he begins to rage but he is preempted by Laurence’s lengthy speech on the beauty of Christian souls (185-311). The outraged prefect responds to this speech by complaining that Laurence is mocking him (and therefore his office) and ordering Laurence’s death by a slow burning, assuring Laurence that it will be particularly painful (312-56). The torturers, who prepared the coals while the prefect made his speech, strip and bind Laurence, laying him out on the fire. Prudentius interrupts the action here with a description of Laurence’s countenance, comparing him favorably to other biblical heroes, such as Moses and Stephen (361-396). Prudentius then abruptly shifts the narrative back to the Laurence’s death scene (\textit{postquam vapor diutinus} 397) and it seems that Laurence has been “cooking” on the coals for a long time. Laurence makes a pointedly macabre jest on cannibalism before launching into a prayer for Rome (413-84) and finally dying (485-7). Prudentius outlines the feelings of the witnesses Laurence converted through his martyrdom then gives details of how his death changed Rome and how Laurence is honoured in an extended exhortation to “worship” Laurence (489-572). Finally Prudentius, describing himself as a rustic poet (\textit{poetam rusticum}), offers a prayer to

\textsuperscript{113} Thompson (1961: 109 n. c) notes that Augustine refers to Laurence as \textit{archidiaconus}.

\textsuperscript{114} Xystus is called \textit{sacerdos} (\textit{Pe.} 2: 21) which is a term used to describe Bishops.

\textsuperscript{115} See Thompson (1961: 109 n.c) for an outline of Xystus’ position and death, which was probably a beheading rather than a crucifixion.
Laurence that he himself might be released from the prison of his body in order to go to the freedom of heaven (573-84).

*Pe.* 2 is the first poem, within the collection, in which Prudentius knows, or has sources on, exactly how the martyr died and his approach is traditional (a straightforward narrative of events) especially in comparison to Cassian’s *passio* which cuts straight into the heart of the action by beginning at the height of his martyrdom. Given the despair expressed in *Pe.* 1 about the lack of information regarding the details of Emeterius’ and Chelidonius’ tortures (1.74) and deaths one might expect some “Prudentian excess” in describing Laurence’s death by slow roasting. Conybeare points out that this lack of focus upon Laurence’s torture and death is reminiscent of earlier prose accounts of martyrdoms which tended to focus on the confrontation between the martyr and torturers, or the authorities, and of course the conversion of the “viewer” to Christianity. Prudentius does not offer viewers within the text to be converted by Laurence and it seems likely that it is the reader who he aims to convert or teach. Palmer states that ‘the oldest sources of information about Laurence are the inscriptions composed by Pope Damasus, and the writings of the Bishop Ambrose’.

It is generally agreed that Prudentius’ hymn was written later. An early version, attributed to Damasus, has Laurence miraculously saved from the flames but Prudentius uses the less spectacular version of Laurence’s martyrdom. This is in line with Ambrose’s version and it seems likely that Prudentius used it as a source though it is also possible that Prudentius draws from older sources.

Prudentius begins the hymn by comparing Laurence to ancient (and some less ancient) heroes of the Roman Republic. The beginning passage, which foreshadows Laurence’s eventual usurpation of Venus, highlights that Laurence will be a new kind of hero and a superior man through his Christian faith. But it also emphasizes that Laurence will win Rome through his “bloodshed” (*non incruento proelio*) rather

116 *Iniudentur ista nobis fama et ipsa extingitur*’ (that tradition is denied us and destroyed).
117 For arguments on Prudentius’ “excesses” see Levine (1991: 12).
120 Palmer (1989: 244).
121 Palmer shows verbal parallels and points to Prudentius’ use of Ambrosian iambic dimeter (1989: 244).
than by shedding the blood of others \((Pe\,2:16)\)\(^{122}\). Unlike these pagan heroes and rulers Laurence will be the sole warrior or soldier and leader. He will not allow others to die for him and the rhetoric leads one to believe that even alone Laurence is better than whole armies. Whether this is true or even believable, Prudentius’ rhetoric has ‘faith’ and Laurence take on the historical figures of the pagan past and outdo them. Conybeare cautiously agrees:

> The framing stanzas of the poem *seem* to establish an image of Laurence as a military hero, male participant in the *militia Christi* and triumphal agent for female Rome\(^{123}\).

Indeed Prudentius places him at the end of a list of pagan heroes (Cossus, Camillus, and Caesar) in a comparison of sorts intended to show how Laurence’s martyrdom dwarfs these heroes’ achievements \((Pe.2:14)\). Prudentius describes Laurence as *‘haec sola derat gloria urbis togatae insignibus’* \((Pe.2:9-10)\). This suggests that Laurence is the heir to Roman power and through Laurence Rome will be delivered to God. Palmer explains that in this passage *‘[a] parallel has been seen between Laurence and Augustus as the inaugurators of a new age’*\(^{124}\).

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haec sola derat gloria
urbis togatae insignibus,
feritate capta gentium
domaret ut spurcum Iovem,
non turbulentis uiribus
Cossi, Camilli aut Caesaris,
sed martyris Laurentii
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\(^{122}\) ‘The far from bloodless battle’ (see the passage below). This is an interesting detail especially given Laurence’s death by slow roasting. Perhaps the blood might best be read as the metaphorical blood of the faithful or the faithful themselves might metaphorically be considered the blood of *Fides* (capitalization intended).

\(^{123}\) Conybeare (2002: 179-80) emphasis my own. That Roma is female is somewhat important for Conybeare’s argument but irrelevant to mine. Her argument emphasises that Emperors were set up to be the triumphal heroes for Rome and Laurence is written as a replacement. This of course casts Rome as the damsel in distress.

non incruento proelio.
   armata pugnavit fides,
proprii crurius prodiga;
nam morte mortem diruit,
ac semet inpendit sibi.

The one glory missing from the honours of the city of the toga, with the
savagery of the people [pagans] having been seized it [Rome] might conquer
dirty Jupiter, not with the tempestuous force of Cossus, Camillus, or Caesar,
but with the far from bloodless battle of the martyr Laurence. Faith in arms
fought lavish with her own blood; for she destroyed death with death and spent
herself for herself. (Pe.2.9-20).

This explicit comparison portrays Laurence as a masculine hero and it will be
directly at odds with his passive acceptance of the Prefect’s demands only nine
stanzas later. This passage, particularly Laurence’s victory being described as far
from bloodless, has been read in a number of ways. Palmer sees this as Prudentius
replacing Augustus with Laurence, as a way of Christianity surpassing ‘the pagan
heroes even on their own terms’125. However Conybeare reads the same passage
slightly differently:

‘The victorious martyrdom of Laurence surpasses the greatest
victories of Republican Rome. This is apparently an easy rhetoric to
establish and sustain; and yet Prudentius’ attitude to these victories
is not wholly without ambivalence, which complicates his narrat
ion of Laurence’s achievement in surpassing them’126.

She speculates that the ambivalence she reads is explained by ‘[t]he pointed litotes of
“non incruento proelio” (16)’ concluding ‘that Prudentius’ ambivalence may be

linked to the issue of *whose* blood is spilt\textsuperscript{127}. However the passage may also be read as positioning Laurence’s, and through Laurence Christian, masculinity against pagan masculinity. It is not only that Laurence has surpassed these pagan heroes it is how he surpassed them. Christians took pagan ideas and ideals and updated them to fit their purposes by emphasizing qualities like *patientia* and repositioning the meaning of *virtus*\textsuperscript{128}. These lines signal to the reader that Laurence as a Christian will not be a reckless and forceful hero, like the pagan heroes, and that this new Christian form of heroism, and through heroism - masculine performance, is superior.

Once Laurence’s role as Christian leader and soldier of Christ has been established by comparing him with the pagan heroes of old, he is almost immediately portrayed as subservient to the prefect. This works to destabilize Laurence’s gender presentation as we have been told that he will be a greater hero than great men of the republic and the Emperor but he now seems to be subservient to a greedy, and therefore effeminate, prefect. Greed was associated with femininity or hedonism and therefore not an ideal quality in a Roman man\textsuperscript{129}. This is reinforced by the prefect’s speech to Laurence as he attempts to persuade him to recant:

\begin{quote}
'soletis', inquit, 'conqueri
saevire nos iusto amplus,
cum Christiana corpora
plus quam cruenta scindimus.
abest atrocioribus
censura feruens motibus;
blande et quiete efflagito
quod sponte obire debeas.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{127} Conybeare (2002: 181). Italics added for emphasis in Conybeare’s article. She goes on to explain exactly why she reads this ambivalence stating: ‘[t]he application of the adjective *turbulentus* to these Republican heroes- coupled, perhaps, with the cacophonous alliteration of the chosen names- should give us pause. Prudentius seems to be signaling his discomfiture with even the most immaculate representatives of pre-Christian Rome’.

\textsuperscript{128} See above “Christian masculinity and sexual deviance”.

\textsuperscript{129} Kuefler (2001:127).
‘You are accustomed’, he says, ‘to complain that we rage beyond what is right when we cut Christian bodies more than cruelly. Judgement burning with dreadful passions is absent. Oh so persuasively and softly I urgently request what you must honour of your own free will. (Pe. 2.57-64).

When the prefect introduces himself he describes himself as lacking dreadful passion. He also tells Laurence that he is making his request both ‘blande et quiete’. This self-description of his conduct coupled with his initial sentence, which could be read as a veiled threat, make the prefect’s self presentation vaguely sinister. While one might read it as calm and rational, and therefore proper masculine behavior, it could also be read as wheedling or coaxing which is an odd tack for the prefect to take and also something that is considered a feminine quality. Presumably he has the power to command Laurence to pay “taxes” but he does not demand, command or even simply ask. Conybeare notes a lack of ‘authoritative masculine pronoun[s]’ in the prefect’s speech and highlights his use of impersonal constructions (66, 68, 83). For example, the prefect does not demand the money: the state does. The prefect’s use of impersonal constructions is echoed in his speech by his animation of objects and ideas. This can be seen in lines 60-1 where judgement is the subject of his sentence though in context it is clear that he is the judge who will make this judgment. As the two men converse Prudentius reminds the reader that Laurence’s meek pose is in fact a pose. The prefect’s lengthy and greed filled speech concludes finally at line 109. Laurence then begins his reply, which is introduced by a phrase with a double meaning ‘ut paratus obsequi’ (111). Conybeare translates the line “as if he were prepared to obey” rather than “like someone ready to obey”132. This double meaning signals to the reader that Laurence is not subservient to the prefect and will not be giving him what he wants but the speech from Laurence, which follows this line, gives no such hint. Indeed, the prefect sees no double meaning in Laurence’s speech or behavior and leaves happy in the mistaken knowledge that

132 Conybeare (2002: 184). Thompson’s translation presents the latter translation ‘as ready to obey’ which presents Laurence as meekly perhaps even obsequiously obeying the prefect (1961: 115). Given that Laurence is preparing a “trick” Conybeare’s translation fits the context better.
Laurence will shortly be presenting him with the treasure he expects. Prudentius has not only stated outright that Laurence will be the greatest hero and a worthy successor to Rome but he has reminded his reader that, though Laurence appears to be subservient to the prefect, it is a show entirely for the prefect’s benefit. The reader is in on the joke but the prefect sees a subservient man who will do as asked.

Much later, once Laurence has assembled the church’s riches for the prefect, the prefect realizes the trick Laurence has played upon him. The prefect laments his own softness (*mollis*) and thus subtly reinforces his status as a possible, perhaps even probable, *cinaedus*.

‘*ridemur*, exclamat furens
praefectus, ‘et miris modis
per tot figuras ludimur:
et uiuit insanum caput!
inpune tantas, furcifer,
strophas cauillo mimico
te nexas esse existimas,
dum scurra saltas fabulam?
concinna uisa urbanitas
tractare nosmet ludicris?
egon cachinnis uenditus
acroma festium fui?
adeone nulla austeritas,
censura nulla est fascibus?
adeon securem publicam
mollis retudit lenitas?

‘We are being ridiculed’ exclaimed the furious prefect, ‘and I am being played with in amazing ways through all these so many figures [of speech]: And the crazy one (lit. head) lives! You think, rogue, that you have, with impunity, created such great tricks with stagey banter, while you, a jester, mime a play? Did it seem a fine sophistication to treat us as a plaything? Was laughs, a festival
presentation? To this extent is there no severity, no judgement for the \textit{fasces}? To this extent has effeminate lenience blunted the axe of public authority?’ (\textit{Pe}. 2.313-328).

The prefect’s use of the “royal” plural becomes, at this point, almost comical. What little authority he had has been undermined to the extent that when he speaks directly and does not wheedle it feels false, like a child having a temper tantrum. However, it is also possible to read the plural as meaning not only the prefect but also all the agents of pagan authority. If the prefect intends the latter meaning he is still avoiding personal responsibility. Either reading makes a mockery of the prefect’s authority, which ironically enough is the very thing he is complaining about. Furthermore he describes his own behavior as ‘\textit{mollis lenitas’}. \textit{Mollis} is not associated with masculinity. When the word is used to describe a man’s behavior it tends to mean that one is discussing \textit{cinaedi}. Thus the prefect himself with his ‘\textit{blande et quiete}’ (63) approach, now described as ‘\textit{mollis lenitas}’ (328), has undermined not only his own authority but the authority of the \textit{fasces}. Indeed his approach has made him a “plaything” sold for laughs. In his own speech he names himself an actor, who were known \textit{cinaedi}, and an object for sale, either a male slave or a \textit{cinaedus}\textsuperscript{133}. However in the speech he also levels accusations against Laurence’s masculinity, since Laurence is described as a jester and thus also an actor.

The damage to Laurence’s heroic masculine status may be seen in the next lines of the prefect’s speech, even as the prefect continues to damage his own image.

dicis, ‘libenter oppetam,
 uotiua mors est martyri’.
est ista uobis, nouimus,
persuasionis uanitas.
sed non uolenti inpertiam
praestetur ut mortis citae
conpendiosus exitus,

\textsuperscript{133} Though it should be noted that the language surrounding patronage also often made use of selling metaphors.
perire raptim non dabo.
uitam tenebo et differam
poenis morarum iugibus,
et mors inextricabilis
longos dolores protrahe
prunas tepentes sternite,
ne feruor ignitus nimis
os contumacis occupet
et cordis intret abdita.
uapor senescens langueat,
qui fusus adflatu leui
tormenta sensim temperet
semustulati corporis.
bene est, quod ipse ex omnibus
mysteriarches incidit;
hic solus exemplum dabit,
quid mox timere debeant.
conscende constratum rogum,
decumbe digno lectulo;
tunc, si libebit, disputa
nil esse Vulcanum meum!"
their secret rites has fallen into our hands, for he by himself will furnish an example of what they soon must fear. Get up on the pyre laid out for you, lie down on the worthy bed. Then, if it will please, argue that my Vulcan is nothing!’ (Pe. 2.329-356).

Here the prefect briefly but unambiguously takes control of the situation. However his exertion of authority soon subsides as the fire becomes the active agent. This would not be remarkable were it not for his previous wheedling softness. The prefect swings wildly from one extreme of mollis to the other in this enraged speech. His emotional volatility is at best an oddity and at worst a further indication of his status as a cinaedus. This description of Laurence’s torture also objectifies Laurence’s body. Initially it would seem that the objectification is not sexualized as he highlights the heat that will creep slowly into Laurence’s heart (343) and his soon to be half burned body (347) but then the prefect describes this torture as a worthy bed and brings in his god Vulcan in a curious twist which leads one to read Laurence as an offering in Vulcan’s bed and therefore as Venus. The comparison is subtle but present. As Conybeare points out:

Laurence, climbing into his “bed” and preparing to recline upon it, is cast in the seductive pose of Venus about to be overpowered by Vulcan; the subsequent lines dwell upon his unclothing and on his glowing countenance as he prepares for this lovers’ meeting, which, though the explicit similes liken him to Stephen and Moses, hardly allows the Venusian resonances to lapse. Beyond being merely ambiguous, as he prepares for his martyrdom Laurence is gendered female.

However, Laurence is not merely being “gendered female” he is usurping the most desirable female god’s place. The speech also sets the scene for Laurence’s famous quip.

135 Conybeare (2002: 192).
After the long continued heat has melted away his burnt side, Laurence voluntarily challenges the judge and addresses him with a short speech from the scaffold. ‘Turn this part of my body over, cooked without cessation enough, and make an inspection of what your burning Vulcan has done.’ So the prefect orders him to be turned over. Then Laurence said: ‘it is cooked, eat it, and gather evidence through experience as to whether it is raw or tastily roasted’\(^{136}\). (Pe.2. 397-408).

Here Laurence is not only making another joke at the prefect’s expense but also self-objectifying. He has equated himself with food. It is unclear which part of his body is being offered up for eating since the Latin only uses *pars* to refer to this body part. However given that Laurence has been showing up the prefect as unmanly and even as a sexual deviant in his tricks and jests it is possible that he is offering either his buttocks or genitals as suitably edible. Either part casts doubt upon the prefect’s masculinity. Laurence’s offer continues to unmask the prefect as an inept and unsuitable leader and possible *cinaedus* but in doing so he shows himself to be a suitable object of desire. This would be fairly normal were it not for the fact that he

\(^{136}\)Palmer (1989: 244) points out that Laurence’s reply to the judge is directly from Ambrose’s version: ‘*assum est, uersa et manduca*’.
has mere verses above been compared with Venus. Conybeare highlights Laurence’s acceptance of his role as Venus:

"Especially with the lover’s epithet “ardens,” the sexual Vulcan shimmers behind the taunt; so does the more literal meaning of “fac periclum,” “take a risk”… Laurence gladly, laughingly, accepts his casting as Venus."\(^{137}\)

Laurence as Venus is self-sexualized, sexualized, and feminized and he uses his “re-gendering” as yet another tool to highlight the prefect’s status as a cinaedus. Conybeare highlights the prefect’s willingness to follow Laurence’s orders and shows how Laurence has consistently mocked the prefect’s authority and through the prefect the state’s authority.

In every possible way, from his humiliating deathbed, Laurence preempts the authority of the prefect and lampoons him as a caricature of the Roman state. The prefect is, once again, silent throughout this mockery, except for his order in oratio obliqua that Laurence be turned\(^ {138}\).

Laurence as Venus highlights the prefect’s sexual deviance. Though Laurence has been feminized and presented as a suitably penetrable object, he is still a man. The idea that the prefect might desire to place his mouth upon Laurence’s body (and it should be recalled that which part of his body is open to interpretation) casts the prefect as sexually deviant. Using one’s male mouth upon the sexual regions of another almost automatically makes said man a cinaedus whether the genitals and buttocks involved are female or male\(^ {139}\).

At the beginning Laurence appeared to meekly accept the prefect’s gentle orders and thus seemed to be feminized in comparison to the prefect who himself showed less than properly masculine behavior. In the end it is turned around and Laurence is feminized to the point that he is being compared to the goddess of love,

\(^{137}\) Conybeare (2002: 194).
\(^{139}\) See “Christian masculinity and sexual deviance” for the discussion on proper masculine behavior and possible accusations of being cinaedi.
one of the most sexualized goddesses, moreover the goddess who produced Aeneas by fornicating with a mortal. In an odd way this makes him both highly sexualized, being not only presented as a suitably penetrable object but the most desirably penetrable object, and connects back to his comparison with the heroes of Pagan Rome. Laurence’s martyrdom will produce a new Christian Rome just as Aeneas’ lineage created the heroes of pagan Rome. In order to create this new Christian Rome Laurence accepts the role of the ultra feminine Venus but in order to show Laurence’s superiority, and thus the superiority of new Rome, the prefect’s masculinity and authority are shown to be fraudulent. Laurence may be cast as Venus but the prefect is cast as one who would be either sexually subservient to a woman or who would play the submissive role with a cinaedus.
**Hippolytus**

The 11th poem in the *Peristephanon*, entitled ‘Ad Valerianum Episcopum De Passione Hippolyti Beatissimi Martyris’\(^{140}\), concerns the martyrdom of Saint Hippolytus\(^{141}\). The sexualization of Hippolytus has commonalities with the sexualizations of both Laurence and Cassian. For example, Saint Hippolytus is a leader like Laurence but remains passive throughout his martyrdom not unlike Cassian. There is a lack of normal martyrrological motifs in the text (as with Cassian). Hippolytus does not show any great oratorical skill, during his death scene, and he does not speak often in the text. His followers are present during the martyrdom, meaning that unlike the other two saints he has a sympathetic internal audience during his martyrdom. His death does not convert any pagan present, which is fitting considering his lack of speech and therefore persuasion. The *iudex* himself, at the behest of his soldiers, singles Hippolytus out for a special punishment that suits Hippolytus’ name. While Laurence’s congregation participate in his defiance of the prefect, the members of Hippolytus’ congregation are either silently watching (or presumably) being martyred themselves. Hippolytus as the head of the church is shattered completely leaving the Christian followers to gather him back together whereas the other martyrs are killed whole. This focuses attention on Hippolytus’ body, setting him apart from the other martyrs discussed who, despite dying horribly, die whole. However, there is more physical contact between Hippolytus’ body and his followers and the most obvious eroticization of Hippolytus takes place after his physical death rather than in the interaction between martyr and executioner. Hippolytus’ body is thoroughly eroticized through the description of his disintegration, a disintegration that is symbolic of the pagan oppression of the church, and the reintegration of his body by his congregation, which is of course symbolic of Christian resiliency in the face of the aforementioned oppression and the formation of the congregation becoming the body of the Church.

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\(^{140}\) ‘To Bishop Valerian on the Passion of the most Blessed Martyr Hippolytus’ will be referred to hereafter as *Pe*. 11.

\(^{141}\) Prudentius gives us the first version of this martyrdom and it may be that he created it. See Palmer (1989:248-9) for a full discussion.
As the title suggests, this poem is framed as an epistle to Bishop Valerian. Prudentius begins by addressing Valerian with an explanation that he cannot enumerate and record all the names on the Christian graves in Rome. He describes the graves and imagines the bodies within for 19 lines before introducing Hippolytus’ grave and martyrdom. Prudentius then immediately reveals that Hippolytus had been part of the Novatian schism, before he emphasises the Saint’s repentance, his return to “orthodoxy”\(^{142}\), and the subsequent martyrdom\(^{143}\). Prudentius elaborates upon Hippolytus’ return to the main body of the Church (23-37) and within this section Hippolytus speaks for the first time in an address to his followers in which he encourages them to return to orthodoxy with him (29-34).

Prudentius next introduces the auctor, who will order the Saint’s death, giving a long description of his mania for ordering Christians, including Hippolytus, tortured and his rage when they do not forewear God and return to paganism (37-58). The torturers are now worn out and the auctor, now described as iudex, is further enraged (59-62) so he orders, in a frantic speech, that the Christians be put to death in a multitude of ways (beheading, burning, drowning – with the hope that they shall be eaten by a sea monster-, and crucifixion) (63-76). While the iudex is ordering this, Hippolytus is dragged before him by youths who call for a special torture and death for him since he is the head of the Church (76-84) (nova poenae/ inventa, exemplo quo trepident alii. (83-4)). The iudex asks for Hippolytus’ name and then, when he has heard the name, condemns him to “be Hippolytus” in reality by ordering that he be dragged apart by horses\(^{144}\). Prudentius describes the youths preparing for the death in detail (89-104) before Hippolytus is tied to the horses that are to drag him to his death. Hippolytus now speaks for the second and final time (110), before Prudentius goes on to describe the disintegration of his body as he is dragged to his death. Prudentius addresses Valerian once more in an extended ecphrasis describing this death as it is depicted in a tomb painting (125-150). As with Cassian’s passio the ecphrasis is open ended as Prudentius shifts from describing the scene showing the

\(^{142}\) Prudentius uses the word Catholica here (clearly meaning the Catholic Church). Thompson translates this as ‘orthodoxy’ and for the purpose of this discussion orthodoxy will suffice despite being slightly anachronistic.

\(^{143}\) It is important that Hippolytus returned to the fold because it signifies that he is part of proper Christianity rather than the ‘other’. See Cobb (2008:21).

\(^{144}\) Malamud points out that Hippolytus’ ‘death corresponds suspiciously well to the saint’s name’ (1989: 81).
dismembered body, and the followers retrieving it as completely as possible, back to the present and his visit to Hippolytus’ tomb. Prudentius highlights the importance of the tomb describing the land around it, the grave itself, and the temple built beside it (151-188) before giving details of the worship of Hippolytus (189-230). Finally Prudentius finishes the poem by addressing Valerian once more exhorting him to worship Hippolytus on his feast day, the Ides of August.

The *Peristephanon* is one of the earliest sources on Saint Hippolytus and is the first source to mention the manner of his death. Prudentius’ Saint Hippolytus was most likely an amalgamation of two or perhaps even three historical Hippolytuses and has clearly been combined with the mythological Hippolytus. We can date part of his story to the mid third century C.E. based upon his participation in the Novatian schism but many scholars maintain that Prudentius must be wrong about Hippolytus’ participation in this schism, saying that he was misled by Damasus. Two shrines have been found to Saint Hippolytus, one on the Via Tiburtina and one at Ostia. Malamud argues that Prudentius appears to have known about both of them since he says that Hippolytus was returned to Rome for burial (11.1-2) but martyred at Ostia (11. 40). Furthermore neither site contains information on how the Saint died, which suggests that Prudentius was using etymology and mythology to add depth to his Hippolytus. Since ‘the popular etymology of Hippolytus derives it from the Greek *hippos*, horse, and *luo*, to loosen’.

Like Cassian, Hippolytus is feminized in the text as he is presented as passive. He primarily presented as passive through his lack of rhetorical prowess (much like Cassian). In *Pe.* 14 Agnes is masculinized through her speech, as she stands up to her tormenters. In comparison Hippolytus utters only one line within the hearing of his torturers, his final words.

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145 As with Cassian, leaving the ecphrasis open allows Prudentius to leave the visual image of Hippolytus’ tortured body within the reader’s mind.
148 Malamud (1989:81). The shrine on the Via Tiburtina held an epigram by Damasus which says that Hippolytus followed the Novatian schism but eventually repented.
149 Malamud (1989:82). The shrine at Ostia dates to the early fourth century.
150 Malamud (1989:81). See below for more on the use of mythology in this text.
ultima uox audita senis uenerabilis haec est:
'hi rapiant artus, tu rape, Christe, animam!'

These were the last words heard from the venerable old man: ‘They may take my body but you, Christ, take my soul’. \(Pe.11.109-10\).

Hippolytus passively surrenders to his fate. He does not fight back with rhetoric like Agnes or Laurence. His position as head of a church makes it unusual that he should not have a diatribe to launch against the people killing not only him but his flock also. Agnes who has no such clerical authority speaks at length against those who would threaten her \textit{pudor} and demands a warrior’s death \(Pe.14:31-7\). Hippolytus simply surrenders. As argued in the chapter on Laurence and, briefly, in the introduction using rhetoric is a masculine skill prized by pagan and Christian alike. By depriving Hippolytus of rhetoric Prudentius feminizes him. He is presented as the passive party in his death. This shift in presentation of gender, which is followed by his death, and the objectification of his scattered body highlights Hippolytus’ lack of agency. He does not mock his tormentors as Laurence did nor does he become an active participant in his death like Agnes. Hippolytus simply commends his own soul to Christ \(Pe.11.109-10\).

The mythological resonances help to sexualize Hippolytus. Malamud catalogues the other ways in which the poem echoes or resembles the myth (other than just an association through their names): The mythological Hippolytus is famed for his chastity while Prudentius’ Hippolytus is a priest and can thus be assumed to be chaste; she goes on to link the priest’s repentance of his heresy with the mythological Hippolytus’ rebirth\textsuperscript{151}; both deaths are located by the sea; and, perhaps most interestingly, there is a connection to Seneca’s \textit{Phaedra} with the dismemberment and subsequent collecting of his body parts\textsuperscript{152}. However, Palmer notes that the collection of Hippolytus’ fragmented remains is too difficult a task for the followers in Seneca’s play while Prudentius has his followers soaking up even the spilt blood with rags. She posits that the focus Prudentius places on locating and collecting Hippolytus’ body is partially explained by the Christian focus on relics

\textsuperscript{151} Malamud (1989: 84) notes that in Ovid’s and Vergil’s versions Aesclepius and Diana bring Hippolytus back to life and rename him Verbius “twice-born”.

\textsuperscript{152} Malamud (1989: 84).
and a Christian focus on burial of a whole body\textsuperscript{153}. However this can also be read as an erotic focus on Hippolytus’ body. Or as Frankfurter argues, when discussing martyrs’ suffering as ‘sado-erotic fantasy’, ‘[Hippolytus’] body provides the medium for imagining utter dissolution, eroticized through the listing of members’\textsuperscript{154}.

Prudentius explicitly describes the destruction of Hippolytus’ body. The frenzied horses are apt executioners given Hippolytus’ passiveness, as will be discussed later. This is a fitting death for the head of a church, especially one which has “countless” martyrs all ready. Indeed one may read Hippolytus’ bodily disintegration as a metaphor for the disintegration and subsequent reintegration of his church, since he is the head (\textit{caput}) torn from the body, being of course his followers (11: 80). This reading brings forth the theme of reincarnation since the church survives and Hippolytus’ disintegration is reversed, not miraculously but, by his people.

\begin{quote}
maerore attoniti atque oculis rimantibus ibant,

inplebantque sinus uisceribus laceris.

ille caput niueum conplectitur ac reuerendam
canitiem molli confouet in gremio;

hic umeros truncasque manus et brachia et ulnas
et genua et crurum fragmina nuda legit.
palliolis etiam bibulae siccantur harenae,
ne quis in infecto puluere ros maneat.

si quis et in sudibus recalenti aspergine sanguis
insidet, hunc omnem spongia pressa rapit.
nec iam densa sacro quidquam de corpore silua
obtinet aut plenis fraudat ab exequiis.
\end{quote}

Stunned with grief, they were searching with their eyes as they went, and gathering the mangled flesh in their laps. One embraces the snowy head and cherishes the venerable white hair in his soft lap, while another picks up the shoulders, the severed hands, arms, elbows, knees, bare fragments of legs. They wipe dry the soaking

\textsuperscript{153} Palmer (1989: 191).
\textsuperscript{154} Frankfurter (2009: 228).
sand with their garments, so that no drop should remain to dye the
dust; and wherever blood adheres to the spikes on which its warm
spray fell, they press a sponge on it and carry it all away. Now the
thick wood held no longer any part of the sacred body nor cheated it
of a full burial. (Pe.11.135-46).

The veneration shown to Hippolytus’ body slides from reverent to erotic with this
detailed description. It is simultaneously an erotic close up of the body and almost
necrophilia as the crowd embrace various parts of him. Both sinus and gremium may
mean lap, bosom or genital area, and gremium may also mean womb. The molle
gremium (138) may thus be read as a soft or even effeminate womb. This reiterates
the concept of Hippolytus’ rebirth through the actions of his followers but it also
sexualizes the body as the congregation may be read as literally taking his body into
their bodies. This move remasculinizes Hippolytus in death (much like Cassian is
remasculinized) as he becomes the inseminator of new or renewed faith in his role as
a martyr.

Like Laurence, Hippolytus’ executioner/s are a step removed from his death.
Unlike Agnes and Cassian who are stabbed and penetrated by people, Hippolytus is
killed by animals. The horses are worked into frenzy. That it takes such powerful
animals to tear Hippolytus apart is both a testament to the perceived strength of the
old man and a comment upon the animalistic nature of the tyrant and his men. That
the horses are panicking and directionless may also be read as a comment upon the
pagans who have condemned Hippolytus to death.

prorumpunt alacres caecoque errore feruntur,
qua sonus atque tremor, qua furor exagitant.
incendit feritas, rapit impetus et fragor urget,
nec cursus uolucer mobile sentit onus.
per siluas, per saxa ruunt, non ripa retardat
fluminis aut torrens oppositus cohibet.
prosternunt saepes et cuncta obstacula rumpunt,
prona, fragosa petunt, ardua transiliunt.
The horses rush off headlong, rushing about blindly wherever the din and their quivering nerves and frantic excitement drive them, spurred by their wild spirit, carried on by their dash, impelled by the noise and their winged career does not sense the burden as it moves [behind them]. They run through woods and over rocks, no riverbank nor river slows them. They knock over fences and break through every obstacle. They run down slopes, cross broken ground and leap hills. (Pe.11.111-8).

The frenzied horses are apt executioners since horses are strong and dangerous animals. Though since Hippolytus is being killed in a manner fitting his name he could hardly be killed any other way. However, given that it seems likely that Prudentius created this Hippolytus, or at the least rewrote his death, it seems likely that one may read more into the manner of his death. Prudentius clearly felt that this was a suitable death for a martyr, sufficiently gory and frightening enough to glorify Hippolytus, allowing him to traverse to Christ’s side.

Saint Hippolytus is portrayed as having an ambiguous gender. He becomes a passive sacrifice, who makes no effort to convert his executioners, and then he is remasculinized, becoming the inseminator of his congregation an action that allows the Church to rebuild and renews the faith of his flock. Hippolytus is eroticized, not before his death like Agnes, Cassian, and Laurence, but after death. The language used to describe his reintegration for burial shows his followers taking his physical form into themselves. Hippolytus becomes a metaphor, as the head of his congregation, for the Church. While the horses symbolize the pagan who threaten the church, physically strong but spiritually weak and panicking with no direction. In contrast Hippolytus’ followers, and thus the Church, know exactly what they must do and where they must go. They reintegrate Hippolytus’ body, lovingly cradling each part of him, and in so doing they reveal their Church to be full of faith and purpose.
Conclusion

The saints discussed are all portrayed with gender identities which are deviant according to the societal norms of the time in which they lived and the time in which Prudentius wrote. These deviances in the portrayal of their gender make reading them as sexualized objects possible. Common themes pertaining to this sexualization have been shown such as the following: the language that highlights the suitability of the executioners as penetrating lovers; the imagery and language which depicts the saints’ bodies as penetrable and sometimes fertile fields or seeds; the interplay between the internal audiences or followers and the saints or executioners which not only highlights the saints as spectacles but also allows the saints to become a way for Christians to communicate with God; and the passivity, which is present in some cases, highlighted by the saints’ silence. These themes reinforce the saints’ eventual function as limina to God and highlight the martyrdoms as transformational experiences, which allow the saints to go to God’s side. Throughout the text the common theme is the spread of Christianity through the saints’ deaths. The Peristephanon is of course a way to spread the Christian faith and this is mirrored in the internal audience. The language leads to a sexualized reading because sex is a transformative social and physical act which changes one’s social standing from youth or child to married adult. It is the threshold that must be crossed to allow one the benefit of producing legitimate children. It seems that Prudentius in using this sexualizing dynamic is providing Christianity with a record of its legitimate parentage.

There are two obvious metaphors present when the saints are penetrated, sexual metaphors and fertility metaphors. The sexual metaphors, which require penetration or a sexual act, portray the executioner/s as lovers. The executioners of Agnes and Cassian are clearly portrayed as lovers whose purpose is to consummate the compact which will send the saints to their heavenly bridegroom. Agnes’ eager and virile lover with his ‘penis-sword’ is a suitable stand in for God, as she herself proclaims. In contrast, Cassian’s students are not strong enough and are thus unworthy to stand in for God, who himself consummates their Union by releasing Cassian’s soul. The language that describes the executioner/s focuses the attention of the reader upon the weapons they use and this helps to emphasize the weapons as
phallic symbols, especially when one contrasts the grown man with the full-length sword against the schoolboys with their tiny styli. The stress that is placed upon the virility of the executioner/s is emphasized by each saint’s last words. Agnes names her executioner man enough while Cassian begs his executioners to become manlier. Unlike Agnes and Cassian, Laurence has no direct executioner, as it were, since he is slowly roasted. Instead the relationship between the saint and the prefect assumes this place. Laurence undermines the prefect’s authority and masculinity with his posturing and defiant wit. Laurence himself offers up his body to the prefect as a sexual object when he offers the prefect a taste, the inference clearly being that the prefect is a *cinaedus* who will perform sexual acts with his mouth (in this case either rimming or fellatio). And lastly, Hippolytus’ direct executioners are animals - horses worked into frenzy. That it takes such powerful animals to tear Hippolytus apart is both a testament to the perceived strength of the old man and a comment upon the animalistic nature of the pagans. Each of these three poems depicts the executioner or judge as a sexual partner to the saint involved. Of course this also highlights the saints’ physical presence and penetrability. Reading the martyrdoms as sexual intercourse is therefore possible. Sexual release or climax is replaced by death and the release of the soul. At this point it is not the “lover” who claims the saint but God for whom the executioner-lover is a stand-in. Here God’s promise is a life at his side in the kingdom of heaven and consummating this promised union requires death.

In the second instance, the saints’ bodies are likened to fertile fields and become seeds, which will impregnate the world with faith. Cassian is “ploughed” by his students when they make furrows (*sulcus*) on his body meaning Cassian is the earth in which a seed will be planted. Hippolytus becomes the seed, which will renew the fruit of faith in his congregations’ wombs (*gremia*) when they collect his dismembered body parts. These are of course both forms of penetration. Cassian is penetrated while still alive and Hippolytus penetrates when dead. The fertility metaphors that allow Prudentius to show how the Christian faith will be renewed and flourish because of the saints’ martyrdoms sexualize the saints. These inseminations beget “children” of a sort: more Christians. Thus because the saint has died and joined God these offspring are legitimate. This is a concern for Prudentius as we have seen that he legitimizes the faith of Hippolytus by emphasizing his return to the Church and his denial of the Novatian schism. This ensures that the Christians
created or reaffirmed by the saints, whether through witnessing the martyrdoms or praying at the tombs, are following the correct teachings of the Church, that they are legitimate Christians.

Finally it remains only to address the presentation of the male saints both as effeminized and sexualized object. The saints are feminized through their passivity (Cassian and Hippolytus) or their posturing (Laurence). This allows the “lover”, who stands in for God, to take the role of husband or penetrator. However each saint is remasculinized at the point of death or shortly thereafter: Cassian requires the virility of God to attain his release; Laurence turns his executioner into a *cinaedus* with his wit; and, Hippolytus inseminates his followers with faith. This remasculinization shows that while the saints may be passive or effeminate in order to join God they are still more masculine than their pagan executioners.

Martyrs are *limina* through which one may contact God. The martyrdom itself is a threshold for the martyr to pass to God’s side so that they may become a conduit, an intercessor for Christians to speak with God. Prudentius in his *Peristephanon* plays with this theme of transformation of body, transition of soul and, ultimate union with God, by highlighting language that imagines this union as a form of marriage. It is easy to see Agnes as Christ’s bride but there is more than a little to the notion that Cassian, Hippolytus, and Laurence are visible as Christ’s husbands.
Bibliography

Primary


Secondary


