# The Four Modes of Seeing

Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of
Madeline Harrison Caviness

# 'Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?' Transforming and Transcending Gender in the Lives of Female Saints

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A highlight of *My Fair Lady*, Lerner and Loewe's musical retelling of the Pygmalion tale, is Henry Higgins' blustering song, 'A Hymn to Him,' in which he peevishly asks his sidekick Colonel Pickering, 'Why can't a woman be more like a man?' Eliza Doolittle has just run off in tears after the two men congratulate each other for their success at passing the lowly flower girl off as a princess at a London ball, oblivious to her contributions to the proceedings. In the eyes of Higgins and his like, the transformation of Eliza Doolittle allows her to move from one class to another, but her perceived emotionality and whimsy firmly characterize her as female, and thus not worthy of notice. She can transcend her class, but not her gender; she can pass as a lady, but not as a man.

In contrast, despite the relatively rigid social roles assigned to ordinary men and women in the Middle Ages, there are many instances of female saints who did become 'more like men,' and because of this shift in gender roles, they were lauded in hagiographic writings ranging in date, function, and audience from the *vitae* of the early church to later compilations of saints' lives such as Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*. This latter work, a compendium of hagiographic and liturgical material organized according to the Church calendar, was compiled in the second half of the thirteenth century and quickly became the most widely-reproduced text outside of the Bible in the later Middle Ages, bringing the stories of these saints to a large audience.[1]

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[1] The best recent translation is Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, 2 vols, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 1993), based on the second edition of the Latin transcription published by T. Graesse in 1850. The edition was reprinted in 1890 and later a photo-offset reproduction produced: T. Graesse, ed., *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea Vulgo Historia Lombardica Dicta*, (Osnabrück, 1969). See also Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda aurea: A Reexamination of Its Paradoxical History* (Madison, Wis., 1985); Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, ed., *Legenda aurea: Sept siècles de diffusion* (Montreal, 1986); Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, ed., *Legenda aurea—la Légende dorée (XIIIe–Xve s)*, (Montreal, 1993); Barbara Fleith, *Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Lateinischen Legenda aurea*, Subsidia Hagiographica 72 (Brussels, 1991); and Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, *Ricerche sulla composizione e sulla trasmissione della Legenda aurea*, Biblioteca di Medioevo latino 8 (Spoleto, 1995).

The method of the female-to-male transformation varied, but was usually successful through an abandonment of characteristics deemed to be 'feminine' and an appropriation of those typically recognized as 'masculine;' this latter could be accomplished through social, spiritual, or even physical transformation. One of the most effective ways women could become more like men was by adopting male dress; there are close to forty cross-dressing female saints who lived between the earliest days of Christianity and the sixteenth century.[2] Here I propose to examine both textual accounts and artistic representations of female saints who are 'masculinized' both in word and image in order to connote their uncommon spirituality; while I intend to focus on female saints included in the *Legenda aurea*, I will contextualize this discussion with an examination of the gender-bending potential of the lives of other female saints as well as certain romances featuring women who cross-dress as men. Yet despite the best efforts of these women to take on masculine roles, both the hagiographic and romantic 'heroes' paradoxically enact their gender transformations through their bodies, typically gendered feminine in medieval discourse.

Most of the discussion about medieval cross-dressing in recent scholarship has focused on its treatment in medieval texts, with almost no consideration of the role images play in the medieval and modern perception of this phenomenon.[3] By the very nature of the narrative form, both hagiographic and romantic texts present a more ambivalent view of cross-dressing women. The stories follow similar arcs during which the protagonists embrace cross-dressing as the solution to a narrative crisis. The women then successfully pass (usually for long periods of time) as men, until at the climax of the tale their gender is revealed and the extent of their accomplishments is fully realized. The reader experiences the narrative progression of the text, where the tension between embodied sex and gendered performance is constantly in play. In contrast, medieval images illustrating the lives of transvestite saints, as well as other female saints who are 'masculinized' in hagiographic texts, often freeze them in activities or attitudes that are explicitly female-gendered in medieval culture. In the end, despite its potential for transgression, the cross-dressing of

2 Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1996) includes an appendix with synopses of the lives of thirty-four female cross-dressed saints.

3 Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*; John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,' *Viator* 5 (1974): 1–32; Vern Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974): 1381–94; Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992); Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia, 1993); Vern L. Bullough, 'Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York, 1996), 223–42; E. Jane Burns, 'Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies' Man or Lady/Man?' in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz, Medieval Cultures 11 (Minneapolis, 1997), 111–34; E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading Through Clothes in Medieval French Culture* (Philadelphia, 2002); Stephan J. Davis, 'Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10:1 (2002), 1–36.

saints, along with other methods of gender transformation, simply underscores typical gender roles and normative heterosexuality; in hagiography, the only ones doing the cross-dressing are women.

The differences between men and women were evident in medieval medical beliefs and practices. The Galenic idea that women were 'colder' than men, and therefore necessarily more passive, was given great credence in medical thought. According to this theory, the greater warmth of the male allowed the male sexual organs to develop fully and extend outside the body, whereas the female sexual organs stagnated in a more primitive state.[4] Even more influential was the idea that a women's reproductive system was but a man's turned outside in; medieval medical literature calls the ovaries 'female testicles.'[5]

This latter belief is particularly illuminating in suggesting how the binary system of gender might be made flexible in medieval thought.[6] Although the male and female were associated with particular properties and characteristics, the fact that women were perceived as essentially inside-out men implies that gender is not irreversibly inscribed on the body, but might be transformed. Women who spread their legs too far might even risk having their reproductive organs fall out; Pliny had described a few such incidents in which women turned into men,[7] and such tales can be found in ancient, medieval and early modern folk literature.[8]

According to Philo, in order to progress, to become more 'masculine,' a woman had to give up her natural connection to the body; the easiest way to achieve such an evolution was through celibacy.[9] The connection between female sanctity and celibacy, and even better, virginity, is a long-standing one in the Christian hagiographic tradition; the denial of bodily appetites is an important first step in the move from feminine to masculine, even if virginity is not nearly as common a leitmotif in the lives of male saints.[10] The oft-quoted

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4 Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body (De usu partium)*, trans. Margaret Tallmade May, 2 vols (Ithaca, N.Y., 1968) 14.6 in 2:628–30; Jacqueline Murray, 'Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages,' in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, 127.

5 Vern Bullough, 'Mediaeval Medical and Scientific Views of Women,' *Viator* 4 (1973): 493.

6 For more on medieval attitudes towards gender, which extend back to Aristotle, see: Bullough, 'Mediaeval Medical and Scientific Views,' 484–501; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge History of Medicine (Cambridge, 1993), 169–227; Vern L. Bullough, 'On Being a Male in the Middle Ages,' in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare Lees, Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis, 1994), 31–45; and Martha A. Brozyna, *Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages: A Medieval Source Documents Reader* (Jefferson, N.C., 2005). Also on the ideas of the influential Egyptipan Jewish philosopher Philo, Richard A. Baer Jr., *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden, 1970).

7 Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham (London, 1968), 7.4, 31.23, and 17.37.

8 Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing*, 49. See the discussion of the one-sex model in Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), but also the review by Katherine Park and Robert A. Nye, *The New Republic* 204, no. 7 (1991), 53–57.

9 Baer, *Philo's Use*, 46–51.

10 But see Samantha J. E. Riches, 'St. George as a male virgin martyr,' in *Gender and Holiness: Men, women and saints in late medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London, 2002), 65–85. Also on virginity see Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, eds,

statement by Saint Jerome crystallizes this idea; as 'long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men as body is from the soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called a man.'[11] In the later Middle Ages, arguably the most popular saints were the virgin martyrs, who possessed the irresistible combination of the beauty and sexual naiveté of the maiden and the loquacious wit of the philosopher, capped by an eroticized torture and death.[12] Not only are the virgin martyrs celibate, but many of them are represented in both text and image having their breasts cut off (most notably, Agatha, Barbara, and Margaret), which I have argued elsewhere is a potent indicator of their move toward masculinity and a more advanced spiritual state through the removal of their most visible physical symbol of both femininity and sexuality.[13]

Other female martyrs are not virgins, but in their heroic passage to sainthood reject female roles, or change their physical appearance in a manner even more dramatic than those who have their breasts removed. Saint Perpetua is the mother of a newborn at the time of her martyrdom in the arena at Carthage in the third-century CE. A first-person account of the events leading up to her death describes how she abandons one by one all aspects of her femininity; her breast milk evaporates, and in a strikingly poignant detail, Perpetua flings her infant away from her.[14] The ultimate displacement of gender occurs during a vision Perpetua has of her coming death in the arena; her clothes are stripped from her body in the usual ritual of humiliation, but Perpetua suddenly realizes that she has physically become a man. Like Perpetua, Saint Paula abandons four of her five children; she sails away to the Holy Land as her children cry with outstretched arms on the shore. Paula remained unmoved, '... putting her love of God above her love for her children. She knew not herself as mother in order to prove herself Christ's handmaid.'[15] To a modern reader, particularly a female one, these voluntary denials of maternal obligation typically included in accounts of female saints seem particularly callous, but it is clear that the (invariably male) hagiographers applauded such acts as indicative of spiritual

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*Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1999); and Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih, eds, *Medieval Virginities* (Toronto, 2003).

11 Jerome, 'Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephasios,' in *Patrologiae Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1884), bk. 16, col. 56.

12 Martha Easton, 'Pain, torture and death in the Huntington Library *Legenda aurea*,' in *Gender and Holiness: men, women and saints in late medieval Europe*, ed. Samantha J. E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London, 2002). For more on virgin martyrs see Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1997); Cynthia Hahn, *Portrayed on the Heart: Narrative Effect in Pictorial Lives of Saints from the Tenth through the Thirteenth Century* (Berkeley, 2001).

13 Martha Easton, 'Saint Agatha and the Sanctification of Sexual Violence,' *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 83–118.

14 Herbert Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Chrisian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1972), 106–31; see also Elizabeth Castelli, '"I Will Make Mary Male": Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,' in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York, 1991), 33–43; and Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York, 1997).

15 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings*, vol. 1, p. 122.

fortitude and readiness; Augustine describes Perpetua as 'neither male nor female, so that even in them that are women the manliness of their souls hideth the sex of their flesh.'[16]

Some of the most compelling female saints are those who are associated with sexual excess, such as Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene, who subsequently abandon themselves instead to lives of piety, chastity, and extreme asceticism; the fulfillment of bodily pleasure gives way to a denial of even bodily nourishment.[17] Mary of Egypt leads an austere life in the desert for forty-seven years, after having repented of her seventeen years as a prostitute.[18] She lives on bread, surviving miraculously on the three loaves she brought with her into the desert; in this way she divorces herself from the vices of the flesh, sex and food, both associated with the female.[19] Mary Magdalene is the most well-known case of the penitent sensualist; Jacobus de Voragine describes her not as a prostitute but as a well-born woman 'known for the way she gave her body to pleasure—so much so that her proper name was forgotten and she was commonly called "the sinner."'[20] After her repentance, she lives a chaste life and for a time travels, preaches, converts, and performs miracles. Eventually she too retires to the wilderness, in her case for thirty years. Unlike Mary of Egypt, the Magdalene was nourished on celestial delights and required no food of any kind.[21]

In spite of the emphasis in these stories on the rejection of the sinful feminine body and its various functions, medieval images of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene ironically often emphasize the body and particularize its very femaleness. Because of the parallels in and conflations of their legends, texts often describe both Marys as experiencing miraculous growths of hair to cover their nudity while in the desert, but visual images more typically depict them nude, with an ineffectual swag of hair coursing down their back, or with hair growing in short, luxurious tufts all over their bodies so to some modern viewers at least they resemble nothing so much as giant female pudenda. A favorite scene from the legend of Mary of Egypt is illustrated in one fifteenth-century Flemish manuscript (a variation of the *Légende dorée*, the French translation of the *Legenda aurea*),[22] depicting the first meeting between Mary of

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[16] See Jo Ann McNamara, 'Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christianity,' *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 154

[17] Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 1 (1990): 3–32.

[18] Onnaca Heron, 'The Lioness in the Text: Mary of Egypt as Immasculated Female Saint,' *Quidditas: Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 21 (2000): 23–44.

[19] Gail Ashton describes how the holy fasting woman becomes spirit rather than flesh, becomes a 'non-excreting, non-menstruating, non-sexualised body.' See *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London, 2000), 143.

[20] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings*, vol. 1, p. 375.

[21] The identity of the various Marys mentioned in the Gospels is disputed; Jacobus connects some incidents to Mary Magdalene that are associated with other women by other authors. For Mary Magdalene see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York, 1994); Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2004).

[22] Jean de Vignay undertook this translation in 1333 at the instigation of the French queen Jeanne de Bourgogne. For other notable exceptions to the largely unillustrated Latin texts of

Egypt and the monk Zozimus of Palestine, who comes across her in the desert clothed in nothing more than the miraculous growth of hair and therefore gives her his cloak. Only rarely is Mary shown with the cloak on; here she kneels before Zozimus with her long hair streaming down her back, clearly separate from the abbreviated curls that cover her body from her neck to her ankles (fig. 19.1; New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 672–5, fol. 206v).[23] Ironically, these images of the hair-covered Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene are particularly reminiscent of those of the wild men and women associated in medieval culture with sexual excess.[24]

While the hairiness of Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene seems to underscore their connection to the female body they repudiate, the hirsutism of certain saints ties them more explicitly to the masculine body, especially if the hair is facial. Saint Wilgefortis is the most popular of several female bearded saints.[25] Daughter of the pagan king of Portugal, Wilgefortis is horrified to learn that her father has negotiated a treaty with his enemy, the king of Sicily, with her as the prize. She refuses to marry, saying that only Christ crucified will be her husband, and is tortured by both her father and her spurned bridegroom. Praying for the preservation of her virginity, she asks God to make her undesirable to men; she then miraculously grows a beard. After further tortures, she is ultimately crucified. Yet Wilgefortis is commonly depicted with but the faintest trace of facial hair, with the emphasis much more on her long, flowing, feminine hair and her close-fitting woman's garment; a typical example of this appears in a Dutch Book of Hours dated around 1500 (fig. 19.2; Princeton, Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 59, fol. 161r.)[26] This minimization of the beard is particularly interesting when considered against the anecdote of Raymond of Capua's vision of Catherine of Siena; concerned about the authenticity of the visions reported by Catherine, Raymond has his own vision in which Catherine's face transformed into that of a bearded man. He assumed that the bearded face was Christ's, and therefore Catherine's visions were

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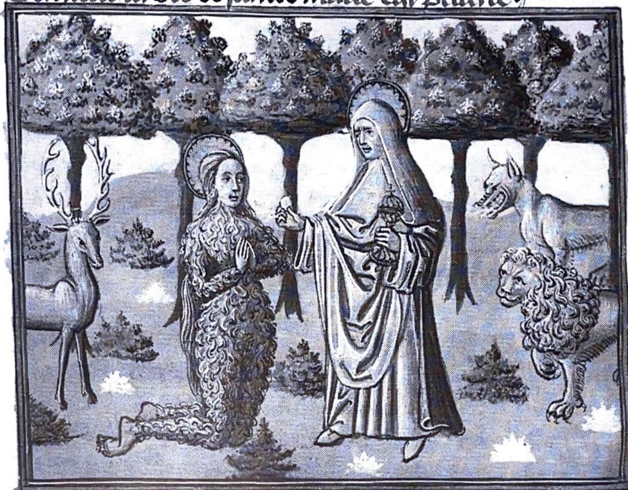
the *Legenda aurea*, see Martha Easton, 'The Making of the Huntington Library *Legenda aurea* and the Meanings of Martyrdom,' unpublished Ph.D. diss. (New York University, 2001), 24–29. For the illustrations of the *Légende dorée*, see Hilary Maddocks, 'Pictures for Aristocrats: The Manuscripts of the *Légende dorée*,' in *Medieval Texts and Images: Studies of Manuscripts from the Middle Ages*, ed. Margaret M. Manion and Bernard J. Muir (Chur, Switzerland, 1991), 1–23; and Hilary Maddocks, 'Illumination in Jean de Vignay's *Légende dorée*,' in Dunn-Lardeau, *Legenda aurea*, 155–70.

23 For this manuscript, see Jean Caswell, 'Double-Signing Method I the Morgan-Mâcon Golden Legend,' *Quaerendo* 10 (1980), 97–112; Figs. 1–3; and Maddocks, 'Pictures for Aristocrats,' 8, 13; Figs. 9–10.

24 Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, 1952); John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

25 Elizabeth Nightlinger, 'The Female *Imitatio Christi* and Medieval Popular Religion: The Case of St. Wilgefortis,' in *Representations of the Feminine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (Dallas, 1993), 310 and 313–16; Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis Since the Middle Ages* (Ontario, 2001).

26 See Philip E. Webber, 'Medieval Netherlandic Manuscripts in Princeton University Library,' *Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique*, LIII (1982), 101–5.



19.1 Mary of Egypt, *Morgan-Mâcon Golden Legend*, The Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 673, fol. 206v Flanders, 1445–65.

19.2 Wilgefortis, *Book of Hours*, Princeton University Library, MS Garrett 59, Netherlands, ca. 1500, fol. 161r.

legitimized.[27] As a bearded figure on a cross, Wilgefortis is even more closely connected to Christ, but without a visible beard, the Christological and masculine transformation of Wilgefortis is compromised.

The origin of the legend of Wilgefortis is probably tied to the 'feminine' appearance of certain images of Christ on the cross, where Christ was depicted with long hair and a tunic as opposed to the more typical loincloth; because the tunic was associated with women's clothing, the story of the bearded female saint developed in order to explain the aberration in dress. The significance of clothing as a marker and constructor of gender can also be seen in the lives of the transvestite saints; while the physical transformation of saints such as Wilgefortis was a particularly dramatic method of gender transformation, perhaps the most effective method of becoming more like men was simply to don men's clothing.

Examining texts and images featuring women who cross-dress as men is a particularly useful way to tease out medieval attitudes regarding gender, and

[27] Caroline Walker Bynum, '"... And Woman His Humanity": Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages,' in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Stevan Harrell (Boston, 1986), 257–88.

the possibility of transforming or transcending gender. Although in the early years of Christianity holy women who cross-dressed or cut their hair in order to pass their lives as monks were condemned by the mid-fourth-century church Council of Granga, nothing was done to prevent this and throughout the Middle Ages there are numerous accounts of female saints who cross-dressed with at least tacit approval for their motivations.[28] These women usually cross-dressed to maintain their virginity, to escape marriage, to live lives of pious asceticism, often passing as clerics in monasteries. In this way they aspired to become 'more like men' by giving up their feminine sexuality, by denying the body, theologically and culturally associated with the feminine. The female transvestite saints gave up their social identity as women in order to lead a more spiritual life, and cross-dressing became the means of achieving that goal as well as a hagiographic device connoting their uncommon faith and devotion as evidenced by their separation from society and their prescribed social roles. In most cases their performances were so successful that their true biological sexes were often only revealed upon their deaths.

The sympathetic treatment of cross-dressing women in not only medieval hagiography, but also literature allows for possibilities of rethinking and redefining restrictive categories of gender, suggesting that gender is not essentially inscribed on the body but instead socially perceived and performed.[29] This juncture between 'nature' and 'nurture' is explicitly addressed in one of the so-called 'transvestite romances' popular during the later Middle Ages. *Le Roman de Silence*, written by Heldris de Cournuälle in the third quarter of the thirteenth century,[30] describes incidents in the life of the girl Silence, who is dressed and raised as a boy in order to protect the family inheritance. Not only does Silence completely pass as a man, she surpasses other men during her social 'performances' as a jongleur and a knight. At one point in the narrative, the allegorical figures Nature and Noreture debate the identity of Silence, Nature insisting she is a woman because of her female anatomy, Noreture countering that she is a man because of her dress and social role. Later, Eupheme, the promiscuous queen of King Ebain (responsible for the law prohibiting female inheritance), falls in love with the cross-dressed Silence, believing she is a man. When she is rebuffed by Silence, the queen first decides to have her executed, but then relents and instead sets her the seemingly impossible task of capturing the magician Merlin and bringing him to court. Much to everyone's shock, Silence succeeds. In his appearance at court, Merlin

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[28] Bullough, 'Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change,' 228.

[29] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

[30] Heldris de Cornuälle, *Le Roman de Silence*, trans. Regina Psaki, vol. 63, Garland Library of Medieval Literature (New York, 1991). See Peter Allen, 'The Ambiguity of Ambiguity of Silence,' in *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language and Medieval Thought in Literature*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse, 1989), 98–112; Simon Gaunt, 'The Significance of Silence,' *Paragraph* 13, 2 (1990), 202–16; Peggy McCracken '"The Boy Who Was a Girl": Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*,' *The Romanic Review* 85, no. 4 (1994): 517–36; Lorraine Stock, 'The Importance of Being Gender "Stable": Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman de Silence*,' *Arthuriana* 7 (1997): 9–16; Robert L. A. Clark, 'Queering Gender and Naturalizing Class in the *Roman de Silence*,' *Arthuriana* 12, 1 (2002), 50–63.

makes two public revelations. First, he declares that he cannot be seized by men, but is vulnerable to capture by women, thus exposing Silence as a woman and explaining her success. Next, he divulges that a nun living as part of Queen Eupheme's entourage is actually a man, and the queen's lover. As a result of these disclosures, the cross-dressers are exposed, Silence quite literally as her male clothing is removed in front of the court and her woman's body revealed to all. Queen Eupheme and her disguised lover are executed; Silence is redressed as a woman and married to King Ebain, and thus returned to her 'natural' social role as a woman, thereby forfeiting her father's inheritance and insuring that it will be properly disposed of through male heirs.

Certain plot elements of the story of Silence and other transvestite romances are also present in the lives of the cross-dressing saints. The *Legenda aurea*, dating from approximately the same time as the *Roman de Silence*, includes five accounts of cross-dressing female saints: Marina, Theodora, Eugenia, Pelagia, and Margaret called Pelagius.[31] In donning men's clothing, both Silence and the saints are transformed not only in appearance but also in action. Silence becomes a great knight, surpassing other men; the cross-dressed clerics are often the most virtuous monks in their order. It is as if the outward disguise affects not only social perception but also public performance, with the performance not just an impersonation but an interior transformation. Yet in both transvestite romance and transvestite hagiography, the emphasis on the female body belies the masculine roles that the heroines inhabit. Even if female cross-dressers pass their lives as men, their female bodies are intimately involved in their *vitae*, and overtones of eroticism are often present in their legends.

The story of Marina in the *Legenda aurea* contains many elements found in both transvestite romances and other legends about cross-dressing female saints. Like Silence, Marina first cross-dresses at the instigation of her father, who wishes her to enter a monastery with him upon the death of his wife. She dresses like a boy and is brought up in the monastery as Marinus. She remains disguised at the monastery even after her father's death, until she is accused of fathering the child of a local innkeeper's daughter. Rather than denying her responsibility, she is exiled from the monastery and spends five years living outside the gates and begging for food for herself and the child. Ultimately, the monks relent and Marinus reenters the monastery, only to die a few days later. In preparation for burial, the monks discover her 'true' sex and both they and the innkeeper's daughter repent of their false accusations.

These false accusations of seduction are common in both hagiographic and literary accounts of female cross-dressing, with their attendant overtones of same-sex desire. Other women fall in love with the cross-dressed heroes or

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31 The stories of Marina and Margaret called Pelagius are so similar that the saints are probably identical; Margaret's legend also contains some elements of Pelagia's story. Jacobus' account of the Virgin of Antioch also includes a cross-dressing scene, but it differs from the others in that it is not a lifestyle choice but rather a temporary accommodation. Sent to a brothel and fearful for her purity, the Virgin switches clothes with a knight so that she may escape.

monks, and when their overtures are rebuffed, often accuse them of seduction, rape, or fathering a child. Interestingly, in the few romances where there is some suggestion that the desire might be reciprocated, the heroine miraculously transforms into a man, diluting the subversive potential of the female-female pairings.[32]

With the exception of Pelagia, female cross dressers in the *Legenda aurea* all suffer such false accusations of paternity; both Marina and Theodora are not only expelled from their monasteries but also spend many years caring for their 'children.' In fact, most later medieval images of Marina and Theodora, although they are represented tonsured and in male dress, depict them with their children. In one fourteenth-century image of Theodora, she plays the role of both sexual and saintly woman; in the foreground she is seduced by a suitor (it is this adulterous act that makes her disguise herself as a man, leave her husband, and enter a monastery). In the background, she accepts the illegitimate baby from another monk as other monks, the devil, and the kneeling accuser watch (fig. 19.3; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 244, fol. 195v.) Here Theodora is imaged in two incidents which connect her most explicitly to her feminine body as opposed to her masculine performance; first she is depicted as the gullible, easily seduced adulteress, and then as a woman who cannot escape her maternal instincts, even for a child who is not her own.

The climax of the stories of the female cross-dressers is the moment when their secret is uncovered and their female bodies are exposed. This disclosure of sex is cast as a literal uncovering of truth, a triumph of Nature over Nurture, anatomy over social performance. In most cases this does not occur until after the death of the cross dresser, but in the notable case of Eugenia, the revelation is made in dramatic fashion by the saint herself. The cross-dressed cleric Eugenia is accused of rape after she rejects the overtures of the noblewoman Melanthia; she exposes herself to the Roman prefect Philip in order to prove her innocence. She reveals her biological identity in two ways, exposing herself as both a woman and also as the daughter of the unaware Philip. This moment of revelation serves as the ultimate scene in a painted altar frontal containing four scenes of Eugenia's life (fig. 19.4).[33] The image is fraught with visual allusions and ambiguities; the scene of a half-naked female saint standing before a seated, cross-legged man raising an accusatory finger greatly resembles contemporary images of virgin martyrs standing before their spurned accusers.

[32] Blanchandine in *Tristan de Naneteuil* and Yde in *Yde et Olive*, both from the fourteenth century, experience such biological transformations. This also happens in Ovid's Iphis-Ianthe pairing. See Diane Watt, 'Behaving Like a Man? Incest, Lesbian Desire, and Gender Play in *Yde et Olive* and Its Adaptations,' *Comparative Literature* 50, no. 4 (1998): 265–85; and Francesca Canadé Sautman, 'What Can They Possibly Do Together: Queer Epic Performances in "Tristan de Nanteuil,"' in *Same Sex Love and Desire Among Women*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York, 2001), 199–232. For more on the transvestite romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, see Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, 105–24.

[33] The thirteenth-century Spanish altar frontal by the Master of Soriguerola was originally from the Church of St Eugenia in Saga and is now at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris; see Walter Cook, 'Catalan Altar Frontal in Paris,' *Studies in the History of Art* (1959): 17–20; Figs. 1–9.

19.3 Theodora, *Légende dorée*, Paris, BnF MS fr. 244, fol. 195v, France, fourteenth century.

19.4 Eugenia, Master of Soriguerola, Altar frontal of Saint Eugenia, Spain, thirteenth century, Paris, Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Yet unlike the scenes of female martyrs, whose involuntary nudity is a humiliating part of their torture, and perhaps a titillating sight for viewers both inside and outside the frame,[34] here Eugenia herself has removed her own clothing and controlled the circumstances under which her body may be viewed. Eugenia, unlike her more passive transvestite sisters, rejects the false accusations, chooses the moment of revelation rather than waiting for others to discover her sex upon her death, and fully assumes the active, masculine role. Perhaps in support of this masculine behavior, the moment of anatomical clarification when imaged leads to further visual ambiguity, as the tiny tubular breast of Eugenia looks like nothing so much as a flaccid penis, blurring the boundaries even of her biological sex. Yet even so, it is through the body that Eugenia expresses her true identity, ambiguous or not.

In contrast to the generally tolerant view of women who cross-dress as men, traditionally in medieval theology, literature, and social practice men who cross-dress as women are treated with suspicion and distaste, or even considered buffoons.[35] The vastly different treatment of Silence, cross-dressed

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34 For strategies of the gaze and its theoretical implications, see Madeline H. Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia, 2001).

35 Bullough, 'Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change,' 231–37.

as a man, and the queen's lover, disguised as a nun, suggests how differently such gender-bending performances were perceived. Silence is simply placed in a new social role corresponding to her female anatomy while the cross-dressed nun is killed, although the lover is executed for his illicit liaison with the queen and not for his transvestism alone. Although there are many accounts of men cross-dressed as women in medieval texts, they are often accused of base motives, such as easy access to gullible women for seduction; they are even sometimes accused of witchcraft.[36] It was in fact acceptable for men to dress as women in medieval theater as well as during festivals or carnivals, but in most of these instances the male-cross dressing serves to emphasize the masculinity of the heroes, with quite opposite effects and intentions of female cross-dressing.[37] It is telling that both the theatrical and the carnivalesque instances of cross-dressing are merely temporary masquerades, the latter in particular underscoring the inappropriateness of this type of behavior in everyday life.

Significantly, there are no male transvestite saints, and in the *Legenda aurea* there is only one incidence of a man cross-dressing as a woman. Upon rising for matins, Saint Jerome inadvertently puts on a woman's robe left at his bedside by his enemies, who hoped to give the impression that the holy man had been with a woman the night before. Although Jerome could be viewed with some amusement for his absent-mindedness, the impression given by the text is that Jerome is concerned with spiritual matters and cannot be bothered with the mundane details of everyday dress. Further, the emphasis is on the duplicity of Jerome's enemies rather than the effect of the cross-dressing saint; the intention of his enemies was to cast doubt upon his celibacy rather than to expose him as a cross-dresser. Interestingly, this incident is almost never illustrated in medieval art.[38]

The implication is that women who cross-dress as men, particularly for religious purposes, are commendable for their desire to 'better' themselves, to take on the trappings of a spiritually upright, 'masculine' gender role. In hagiographic convention, there would be no worthy reason for a man to cross-dress as a woman. Perhaps this is why the one female saint whose contemporaries viewed her cross-dressing with ambivalence is Joan of Arc.[39] Unlike the other cross-dressers, Joan made no attempt to conceal her sex. She herself seemed unable to account for her decision to don male clothing; during both her ecclesiastical investigation at Poitiers and her trial at Rouen she gave

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36 Bullough and Bullough, *Cross Dressing*, 61.

37 Ad Putter, 'Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature,' in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 1997), 321–47.

38 An exception is the The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, MS 54.1.1, fol. 184v); see Millard Meiss, *The Belles Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry* (New York, 1974), and Jean Porcher, ed., *Les Belles Heures de Jean de France, Duc de Berry* (Paris, 1953).

39 Susan Crane, 'Clothing and Gender Definition: Joan of Arc,' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1996): 297–319; Susan Schibanoff, 'True Lies: Transvestism and Idolatry in the Trial of Joan of Arc,' in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood (New York, 1996): 31–60; Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia, 2002).

a variety of answers to questions about her transvestism.[40] At times she suggests that she was directed to do so by God or by St Michael; at others she suggests that male dress is most efficient in the performance of the male-gendered tasks she is set to do. She often replies to questions about her costume with irritation, suggesting that it is a minor detail. But because she never attempts actually to pass as a man, questions about her gender pursue her through her life and even after her death. The Poitiers council directs that some women at court examine Joan to confirm not only her virginity, but also her sex. Questions about her identification as a woman were such that her body was displayed to the crowd during her execution. The only surviving contemporary illustration of Joan depicts her in a side view, dressed in a garment reminiscent of armor, but with a skirt, ample breasts, and long hair.[41] This feminization of her image is particularly interesting since it directly contradicts the way her masculine appearance was condemned at her trial: 'You even wear your hair cut round above the ears, not displaying anything about you that confirms or demonstrates sex, except what nature has given you ... you are suspected of idolatry and blasphemy of yourself and your clothing, according to the customs of the heathens.'[42] As one of the most popular female saints depicted in art, this tendency to feminize Joan has persisted. Regardless of the date, most artistic representations of Joan focus on her biological sex rather than her cross-dressed performance; even if she wears armor, she is generally represented in some way that underscores her 'true' nature, through her youthful beauty, long hair, flowing skirt, and other cultural markers of the female sex.

The female bodies of the cross-dressing saints both save and betray them in the end. Both transvestite hagiography and romances play with undermining the binary system of gender, but through the revelation of the protagonist's true anatomy put it back into place. In the end, these gender transformations are transgressions, and must be reversed to maintain the status quo. The bodily exposures in hagiography and romance are usually involuntary; Silence is stripped in front of the court, Joan's clothes are burned off and her body displayed to a crowd, the bodies of the transvestite saints are revealed as other monks prepare them for burial. Only Eugenia maintains her own agency, but in the end, it is her body that proves her innocence and her identity. Cross-dressing female saints write their spirituality with their bodies in a way that men do not. They are commended by their hagiographers for their desire to lead a 'masculine,' ascetic life; only through a revelation of their true sex can the enormity of their sacrifice and subsequent spirituality be appreciated. So in spite of their efforts to become 'more like men,' in the end, their masculine aspirations are temporary ones, and their biological 'nature' wins the battle with their gendered performance, fixing them once and for all as women.

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[40] Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, 49–68.

[41] Journal of Clément de Fauquembergue, May 10, 1429. (Paris, Archives nationals, MS XIA 1481, fol. 12.)

[42] Jules Quicherat, ed., *Procès de condamnation et de rehabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc dite La Pucelle*, (Paris, 1841–49), 1:432–3; Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, 59–60.