

FEMALE PAIN IN PRUDENTIUS' *PERISTEPHANON**

ABSTRACT

Within Prudentius' Peristephanon there are three main episodes which focus upon the torture and/or death of women: the torture and death of Eulalia in Perist. 3, that of Encratis in Perist. 4 and the death of Agnes in Perist. 14. This article compares the variety and types of pain that these women are depicted as undergoing during their martyrdoms, analysing the extent to which gender and sexuality play a role in their responses to pain or to the threat of it. The article first examines the martyrdoms of Agnes and Eulalia and uses these as a basis for analysing the torture of Encratis who is depicted as suffering the most pain and who, even more than the other two, is represented as a liminal figure, not only in terms of gender but also in terms of her status as a living being. A comparison and contrast between Prudentius' representation of Encratis and his depiction of Loth's wife in his Hamartigenia will give further insight into the significance of Encratis' suffering and the way in which the slow and painful decay of her flesh links her with the city she protects. It will be shown how the vulnerability of these martyrs' female flesh and the threatened or actualized violation of their virginal bodies are rendered at once shocking and their source of triumph over traumatic pain.

Keywords: pain; torture; female martyrs; virginity; gender; sexuality; *Peristephanon*; Prudentius

While the majority of martyrs in the *Peristephanon* are male (Lawrence, Vincent, Cassian, Romanus, Cyprian), there are three main instances where Prudentius focusses on the torture and/or death of women. These are the torture and death of Eulalia in *Perist.* 3, that of Encratis in *Perist.* 4 and the death of Agnes in *Perist.* 14.¹ These three women are sometimes referred to as the virgin martyrs;² the fact that they are

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¹ For Eulalia and Encratis, Prudentius provides the first written evidence: A.-M. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford, 1989), 239–42. There are a few sources for Agnes that pre-date Prudentius' poem on her: a ten-line hexameter inscription by Damasus (Trout 37 = PLL 13), some allusions in Ambrose's *De uirginibus*, which is thought to have been based on three sermons composed in honour of the saint, and an incidental reference in his *De officiis ministrorum* 1.41.203. There is also a hymn in honour of Agnes attributed to Ambrose but of doubtful authenticity. See further D. Trout, *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry: Introduction, Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Oxford, 2015), 150–2, Palmer (this note), 250–1, J.H.D. Scourfield, 'Violence and the Christian heroine: two narratives of desire', in M.R. Gale and J.H.D. Scourfield (edd.), *Texts and Violence in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2018), 309–37, at 327 and H. Jones, 'Agnes and Constantia: domesticity and cult patronage in the *Passion of Agnes*', in K. Cooper and J. Hillner (edd.), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome* (Cambridge and New York, 2007), 115–39, at 123.

² For both Eulalia and Agnes, adherence to virginity is the reason they are martyred. Prudentius does not state why Encratis was tortured, but he does refer to her as *uiolenta uirgo* (111) when he introduces her in *Perist.* 4.

all virgins has a symbolic resonance in an era in which virginity was becoming highly prized and the symbolism surrounding it was in the process of evolution.³

At first glance, these three accounts of female martyrdom do not share many similarities in regard to the ways in which the martyrs die.⁴ While Eulalia and Encratis are both tortured by the *ungula* or claw, Eulalia is subsequently burnt alive, whereas Encratis survives the claw only to die a prolonged and agonizing death, presumably from gangrene or blood poisoning. Agnes neither is tortured nor experiences any pain when she dies, although the potential for pain is present and what she says to the executioner implies that she will embrace it if it arises.

However, the very fact that they are female and virgins distinguishes these martyrs from the others in the collection. Cathryn Chew has observed that 'in ancient Greco-Roman society a woman's body is both the locus of her social worth and power' and, as the martyr's body functions as an important battleground in martyr narratives, it stands to reason that the body of the female martyr, particularly in regard to its sexual and reproductive capacities, would become a key area of focus.⁵ Many scholars have observed the strong sexual or erotic overtones to the speech which Agnes makes before she dies; similar overtones are also apparent in the way in which the torture and death of Eulalia is represented, although they are less pronounced. As we will see, there are also sexual, or at least gendered, elements to Prudentius' description of Encratis' torture and death. It is thus worth analysing how gender and sexuality play a role in the representation of female martyrs' pain in the *Peristephanon* and their response to pain, or to the threat of it. How is the female body treated in scenes of painful torture or under the threat of pain; in what ways is it sexualized? How much variety is there in the way in which these three women receive and interpret their pain? And how far do the boundaries between traditional gender categories become blurred when these virgin martyrs confront and overcome the spectre of traumatic pain?⁶

³ On the evolution and growing importance of virginity from the third to the fourth centuries, see M. Malamud, 'Making a virtue of perversity: the poetry of Prudentius', *Ramus* 19 (1989), 64–88, at 70, V. Burrus, 'Word and flesh: the bodies and sexuality of ascetic women in Christian antiquity', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994), 27–51, at 44–5 and Averil Cameron, 'Virginity as a metaphor: women and the rhetoric of early Christianity', in Averil Cameron (ed.), *History as Text: The Writing of Ancient History* (London 1989), 181–205, at 190.

⁴ B. Riposati, 'La struttura degli inni alle tre vergini martiri del *Peristephanon* di Prudenzio', in R. Cantalamessa and L.F. Pizzolato (edd.), *Paradoxos politeia: studi patristici in onore di Giuseppe Lazzati* (Milan, 1979), 25–41 analyses the structural and narrative similarities between Prudentius' accounts of these virgin martyrs. While he identifies many similarities between them, he acknowledges that the martyrdom of Encratis is the least similar to the other two (at 25) and that, even with Eulalia and Agnes, the manner of their deaths is quite different (at 30). The poems are also in quite different metres: *Perist.* 3 is in dactylic trimeter hypercatalectic, *Perist.* 4 in Sapphics, and *Perist.* 14 in Alcaic hendecasyllables.

⁵ C. Chew, 'The representation of violence in the Greek novels and martyr accounts', in S. Panayotakis, M. Zimmerman and W. Keulen (edd.), *The Ancient Novel and Beyond* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 129–41, at 132.

⁶ There have been various studies on the representation of pain in ancient literature, e.g. F. Budelmann, 'The reception of Sophocles' representation of physical pain', *AJPh* 128 (2007), 443–67 and D. King, *Experiencing Pain in Imperial Greek Culture* (Oxford, 2018), on the representation of pain in medical and literary texts such as Lucian and Aristides. There have also been studies of pain in relation to Christianity and martyrdom: S. Elm, 'Roman pain and the rise of Christianity', in S. Elm and S.N. Willich (edd.), *Quo Vadis Medical Healing: Past Concepts and New Approaches* (New York, 2009), 41–53, J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London and New York, 1995), but neither of these works mentions Prudentius. And while there are an increasing number of works devoted to

As Agnes deals with the threat of pain rather than with pain itself, her martyrdom is the least relevant for these questions. Prudentius' treatment of her is important, none the less, as her martyrdom was the most widely known and the best established of the three;⁷ it is also likely to have served as a model for Prudentius' version of the martyrdom of Eulalia.⁸ It is a matter of debate as to whether Prudentius represents Eulalia experiencing pain during her torture (this article will argue that he does), but it is the case that he represents her as experiencing less pain than Encratis, or, at least, experiencing it in a different way. This article will, therefore, analyse the martyrdom of Agnes, compare it with that of Eulalia and then use this analysis as a background for examining the torture of Encratis who is depicted as suffering the most pain.⁹ Comparatively less scholarship has been devoted to Encratis, who, unlike the other two, does not have a poem exclusively on her martyrdom but who, nevertheless, occupies a significant place in *Perist.* 4. In many respects Prudentius' treatment of Encratis is unique to the collection, for, unlike most of his other martyrs, Encratis neither makes light of her pain nor declares that it is restricted to her body.¹⁰ She is also a special case because she is not killed immediately after her torture but is released and is thus properly a confessor rather than a martyr.¹¹ Prudentius, however, is keen to stress her claim to martyrdom (he gives her the title of *martyr* twice in the space of nine stanzas, at lines 135 and 144), but the fact that he has to assert her claim to martyrdom may be one of the reasons why he treats her differently from the other two. Even more than Agnes and Eulalia, she is represented as a liminal figure, whose gender not only is unstable but also hovers between life and death. We can gain further insight into her liminal aspects and the way in which her suffering unites her with the city that she helps to protect, by comparing and contrasting her with Prudentius' representation of Loth's wife in his *Hamartigenia*, who, like Encratis, is strongly identified with the boundaries of a city.

Prudentius' *Peristephanon*—e.g. Palmer (n. 1), M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor, 1993), C. O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2016)—these do not give focussed attention to the role of pain and suffering in Prudentius' martyr narratives. Indeed, L.S. Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland, 2017) argues that pain is *not* a significant element in early Christian martyr narratives, including Prudentius'; her argument receives more attention below.

⁷ L. Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London, 2004), 80; Jones (n. 1), 121.

⁸ See further J. Petruccione, 'The portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 3', *AB* 108 (1990), 81–104, at 84–5, Palmer (n. 1), 240, Malamud (n. 3), 70 and V. Burrus, 'Reading Agnes: the rhetoric of gender in Ambrose and Prudentius', *J ECS* 3 (1995), 25–46, at 33.

⁹ Although we know that Prudentius released his poems in a collected edition in some form in A.D. 405, there is no certainty either about the order in which he composed his poems or about the order in which he arranged individual poems in the *Peristephanon* (the modern numeration was established in Sichard's 1527 edition); on this, see Palmer (n. 1), 87–8, O'Hogan (n. 6), 14. There is thus no reason to examine the female martyrs in the order in which they appear in the *Peristephanon* (Eulalia, Encratis, Agnes); a more productive approach is to analyse the two female martyrs who are most similar (Agnes and Eulalia) and then contrast them with the martyr who is the most unusual (Encratis).

¹⁰ Of the six poems which have extensive scenes of torture (*Perist.* 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10), in three the martyrs react to pain in a positive manner, even making jokes (2.406–9, 3.142, 5.125), and in three the martyrs externalize the pain to their bodies, denying that it penetrates their souls (3.91–5, 5.153–60, 10.518–20). Cobb (n. 6), who argues that pain is not a 'locus of meaning' in early Christian martyr narratives, briefly acknowledges the pain of Encratis, but dismisses it as not 'central to the meaning of martyrdom' (117); in the course of this paper I shall demonstrate that this claim is not correct.

¹¹ A confessor was deemed to be someone who had confessed Christ publicly during a time of persecution and kept fast to their faith despite being subjected to hardship (e.g. torture, imprisonment), while a martyr was someone who underwent death for their faith. There was, however, some slippage between these terms in Late Antiquity; see Grig (n. 7), 105–6.

AGNES: PAIN ANTICIPATED

The ferocity of character that Agnes exhibits in response to the threat of painful torture is a characteristic that is shared not only by Eulalia and Encratis but by female martyrs in general.¹² In the *Peristephanon* Prudentius underscores the ferocity of the female martyrs by applying similar adjectives to martyr, tortures and opponents. Thus in *Perist.* 3 he sets Eulalia's fierceness of spirit against the violent onslaught that she is about to face (... *ingenii ferox | turbida frangere bella parat*, 32–3), while in *Perist.* 14 he applies the same adjective *ferox* to Agnes' strength which she uses to resist the threat of cruel tortures: 'she stood firm in her fierce strength and, moreover, offered her body for the harsh tortures' (*stabat feroci robore pertinax | corpusque duris excruciatibus | ultro offerebat*, 18–20).¹³ In Agnes' case, her fierce strength means that the savage persecutor (*trux tyrannus*, 21) decides not to torture her and resorts to more indirect methods to make an assault on her faith, launching an attack on her *pudor* rather than on her tolerance for pain. The fact that Agnes manages to preserve her virginity during this assault is the first reason for which she has been granted a double crown of martyrdom; according to Prudentius, 'a double crown of martyrdom was granted: her virginity was untouched by any sin' (*duplex corona est praestita martyri: | intactum ab omni crimine uirginal*, 7–8);¹⁴ the second crown is awarded to her because she has the glory of a *mors libera* (*mortis deinde gloria liberae*, 9). The phrase *mors libera* has several implications: it indicates that Agnes' death is both freely accepted and liberating.¹⁵ It also serves to focus attention on the manner of her death, for Prudentius repeats the adjective *liber* in line 92 to indicate how the swift stroke of the executioner's sword releases Agnes' spirit freely into the breezes without her body enduring the long-drawn-out agony and bodily violation of torture (*sensum doloris mors cita praeuenit. | exutus inde spiritus emicat | liberque in auras exilit*, 90–2).¹⁶ Thus, suffering or endurance of pain is not one of the reasons for which Agnes is granted her double crown and does not make her into a martyr.

However, the speech that Agnes delivers before she dies reiterates her willingness to embrace pain which she reconceptualizes as a form of defloration in marriage. The adjectives of approval that she bestows on her executioner (*uesanus, atrox, turbidus*, 70) may remind the reader not only of the implicit violence in the Roman marriage ceremony¹⁷ but also of the corresponding fragility of the female body. Her sentiments

¹² See Palmer (n. 1), 155–7 and P.-Y. Fux, *Les sept passions de Prudence* (*Peristephanon* 2.5.9.11–14) (Fribourg, 2003), 468 on the militant figure of the virgin martyr.

¹³ All quotations from Prudentius are taken from M.P. Cunningham, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementis Carmina* (Turnhout, 1966). The quotations from pagan Latin texts are from OCT editions and the quotations from the *Passio Perpetuae* are from *The Latin Library* at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/perp.html>.

¹⁴ Grig (n. 7), 84 states that Agnes was 'consistently acclaimed dually: as both a virgin and a martyr', whose double virtue 'made Agnes especially effective as an intercessor, that is, especially effective in obtaining a supplicant's demands before God'. Prudentius seems particularly keen to stress Agnes' virginity, even more than Eulalia's and Encratis'. In line 8 he employs the rare and archaic term *uirginal* (Fux [n. 12], ad loc.), emphasizing the term with the adjective *intactum* which is separated from the noun and placed at the beginning of the line.

¹⁵ M. Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology* (Ithaca and London, 1989), 151, Fux (n. 12), ad loc.

¹⁶ Cf. *Perist.* 10.518–19, where Romanus tells the torturer: *fac ut resecto debilis carnis situ | dolore ab omni mens supersit libera*.

¹⁷ This is best illustrated by Ausonius' *Cento nuptialis*, where the act of defloration is assimilated to being killed by a spear (117–21). Cf. also Claud. *Nupt. Hon. et Mar.* 4.5–15, 4.25–9, August. *De civ. D.* 6.9. G. Clark, 'Bodies and blood: late antique debate on martyrdom, virginity and resurrection', in

echo the traditional Roman conception of marriage in which the groom is *ferus* and the bride, by implication, *tenera*.¹⁸ Many commentators have drawn attention to the erotic implications of Agnes' declaration that she will welcome the whole length of the executioner's blade into her breast and draw the force of his sword deep into her chest (*ferrum in papillas omne recepero | pectusque ad inum uim gladii traham*, 77–8),¹⁹ for *papillas* and *pectus*, in combination with *ferrum* and *uim gladii*, assume strong sexual connotations.²⁰ While in her first speech Agnes appeared to draw a distinction between the violation of her body and the loss of her chastity (36–7), here she seems to imply that the sword's penetration will be the death of her *pudor* (*qui me pudoris funere perderet*, 73).²¹ And although Agnes makes no direct allusion to pain in this speech, Prudentius' audience would be aware of the potential for pain in such a death. Perpetua, who demonstrated equal defiance and was as mindful of her chastity,²² cried out as the sword struck her breast bone and she had to guide the hand of the executioner to her throat.²³ With the subtext not only of Perpetua beneath this poem but also of the deaths of Roman literary heroines such as Dido and Camilla who experience painful or difficult deaths by a sword or spear thrust to the chest,²⁴ the possibility of pain for Agnes hovers until the swiftness of the executioner's stroke releases her spirit freely into the breezes (91–2).²⁵ So, although pain does not

D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London and New York, 1998), 99–115, at 107 observes that 'Christians inherited a discourse of sexuality as invasive and violent. Intercourse, especially first intercourse, was thought to make a woman's blood flow.' In *Perist.* 14 Prudentius' use of the term *uim* in line 78 may also suggest rape but, in conjunction with Agnes identifying herself as a bride of Christ in the following line (*nupta Christo*, 79), more likely evokes the notion that marriage involved violence. That this perception of Roman marriage persisted into Late Antiquity is attested by Macrobius who observes that the virgin on her wedding seemed to experience a form of *uis* (*nuptiae, in quibus uis fieri uirgini uidetur*, *Sat.* 1.15.21). On this, see also S. Undheim, *Borderline Virginites, Sacred and Secular Virgins in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York, 2018), 54.

¹⁸ Catull. 61.56–9: *tu fero iuueni in manus | floridam ipse puellulam | dedis a gremio suae | matris*; cf. also Catull. 62.21–4. See further V. Panoussi, *Brides, Mourners, Bacchae: Women's Rituals in Roman Literature* (Baltimore, 2019), 23–8, on the sexual violence inherent in these wedding hymns of Catullus; Panoussi suggests that such allusions contain echoes of the *raptio* practised in early Roman marriage ceremonies (the pretence of snatching a bride from her mother's arms), a rite that was linked to the legendary rape of the Sabine women (19).

¹⁹ Malamud (n. 15), 169–70, Grig (n. 7), 83, Burrus (n. 8), 36, Clark (n. 17), 104. On the eroticization of virgins and ascetic women in the writings of the Church Fathers, see E. Castelli, 'Virginity and its meaning for women's sexuality in early Christianity', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2 (1986), 61–88, at 71–2.

²⁰ For precedents for this sort of imagery in pagan literature, see Livy's account of the deaths of Lucretia (1.58–9) and Verginia (3.48), and P.K. Joplin, 'Ritual work on human flesh: Livy's Lucretia and the rape of the body politic', *Helios* 17 (1990), 51–70, at 67: 'In both the Lucretia and Verginia narratives, the pierced, lifeless corpse of a female is paraded through the streets, her "wound" openly exposed. The "stab to the heart," the showable wound, serves as a double for the vagina, the natural opening that must be covered.'

²¹ Scourfield (n. 1), 333.

²² The *Passio Perpetuae* states that, after being tossed by a wild heifer, Perpetua was 'rather mindful of her chastity than of her pain' (*pudoris potius memor quam doloris*, 20.4).

²³ *Passio Perpetuae* 21.9.

²⁴ Virgil describes Dido's wound gurgling in her chest (*Aen.* 4.689), her struggle to raise herself (4.690), her groan at the light of heaven (4.692), and her 'long pain and difficult departure' (*longum ... dolorem | difficilisque obitus*, 4.693–4). The death of Camilla is represented as less painful, but Virgil still describes how the spear drinks her maiden's blood (11.804), how she tries in vain to extract it from the deep wound (11.816–17), and Camilla herself refers to her wound as 'bitter' (*uolnus acerbum*, 11.823).

²⁵ Cf. *Aen.* 4.705 of Dido: *dilapsus calor atque in uentos uita recessit*. Many scholars argue that, in having Agnes beheaded rather than stabbed through the chest, Prudentius denies her a masculine death

make Agnes into a martyr, her willingness to endure it is part of what makes her *ferox*. Her act of bravery is enhanced by the recognition that her body is fragile and vulnerable to pain.

EULALIA: PAIN CORPOREAL

In some ways, Eulalia exhibits even more ferocity of spirit than Agnes, for she displays it in behaviour which is a complete reversal of that which was expected of young girls of good family. She not only makes a journey of her own volition to the governor to declare her faith, but also, when he tries to reason with her, she howls, spits in his eyes and tramples on the sacrificial flour in the censers (127–30). The fact that she resorts to action rather than to speech (*ad ista nihil*, 126) not only belies her name but also indicates a masculine propensity for deeds over words at this critical juncture in the poem. Even more so than with Agnes in *Perist.* 14, Eulalia's masculine traits serve as a foil for the fragility of her body. While male martyrs in the *Peristephanon* also speak of their bodies as fragile vessels,²⁶ the vulnerability of the flesh and its potential for violation and corruption are better illustrated by the bodies of the female martyrs. Graphic depictions of torture enacted upon the bodies of female martyrs would likely have more shock value for a Roman audience, while the strength of the martyrs' resistance would be deemed even more admirable. The contrast between Eulalia's frail flesh and her doughty spirit is made clear in her statement to the governor: 'It is easy to destroy such a brittle thing, but the inner spirit will not be penetrated by the racking pain' (*soluere rem fragilem facile est, | non penetrabitur interior | exagitante dolore animus*, 93–5). Although the verb *penetrare* does not carry overtly sexual associations in Classical Latin,²⁷ the way in which Prudentius draws out this verb, places it first in its clause and juxtaposes it with *interior* may serve to remind his audience that the penetration of a woman's interior was a highly charged act. This is confirmed by Church Fathers such as Ambrose who placed great emphasis on virgins keeping their boundaries intact.²⁸

When Prudentius describes the torture of Eulalia's body by the claw in lines 131–5, the language he uses suggests that her body is being subject to a trauma which holds the potential for violation. Prudentius describes the torturers as *carnifices* (131), literally 'makers of flesh', and employs three verbs which stress the violence of their actions and the damage it causes: *dilacerant* (132), *pulsat* (134), *secat* (134). He sets these verbs in contrast to Eulalia's body (*pectora*, 132; *latus*, 133), while the adjectives he employs of it, *iunceus* (132) and *uirgineus* (133), emphasize its delicacy and purity, for the first adjective probably denotes the fact that it is slender or perhaps that it is easily cut,²⁹ and

and puts her back in her place as a female; see Burrus (n. 8), 41, Malamud (n. 15), 17, Grig (n. 7), 83. But it could also be claimed that in his poem Prudentius reverses, or at least throws into doubt, the usual gender expectations about these deaths. According to N. Loraux (transl. A. Forster), *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1987), 56–60, being stabbed in the chest is usually a death for male heroes but Agnes' speech has explicitly feminized it with her comparison to defloration in marriage; moreover, her swift beheading means that her body is not violated as Eulalia's and Encratis' are when their chests are exposed by the claw.

²⁶ Vincent at *Perist.* 5.163–4 expresses similar sentiments.

²⁷ J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 151. But cf. *C. Symm.* 1.78: *gremium penetrare puellae*.

²⁸ See Burrus (n. 3), 40, who cites Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.45.

²⁹ It is not easy to determine the meaning of this term for—as P.-Y. Fux, *Prudence et les martyrs: hymnes et tragédie* (*Peristephanon I. 3–4. 6–8. 10: commentaire* (Fribourg, 2013), ad

the second reminds the reader that, as a virgin, her body is *intactum*. Significantly, Prudentius in line 133 places the term for the torture instrument, *ungula*, between *latus* and *uirgineum*; the implications of the word order are that the breaching of Eulalia's flesh has the potential to threaten her virginal status. Prudentius also conveys the depth of the claw's penetration, making it clear in line 134 that it cuts right to the bone (*ad ossa secat*). But after this last image he draws the reader's attention back to Eulalia herself whom he depicts as detached from this violence to her body, for he portrays her counting the marks of the claw on her flesh (*Eulalia numerante notas*, 135). She appears to be dealing with the trauma by viewing her body as something apart from herself, an object rather than a person. Indeed, it could be said that she is acting as her own narrator,³⁰ for she proceeds to interpret what she sees in the following stanza.

In Eulalia's reconceptualization of her trauma in the next stanza (136–40), the phrase 'behold me, master' (*ecce mihi, domine*, 136) stands out, for it implies that Eulalia's vision has moved to a different plane, while her use of the personal pronoun *mihi* reasserts her identity, separating her essential self from her violated body. Eulalia glories in this separation of herself from her body and makes Christ instrumental to this process; her interpretation of the marks as Christ's writing brings her closer to the deity. Note how Eulalia in line 140 uses the noun *purpura* of the blood that flows from her: *nomen et ipsa sacrum loquitur | purpura sanguinis eliciti*, 139–40. While the adjective *purpureus* can be used of the colour of blood in Latin poetry,³¹ and in Christian literature *purpureus* and *purpuratus* are regularly associated with martyrs,³² the noun *purpura* is not commonly linked with spilt blood; it is more often used of the shellfish and its dye or of the purple cloth that was a mark of wealth and power.³³ By having Eulalia begin this stanza with the interjection *ecce* and by combining it with her allusion to her *purpura sanguinis* Prudentius could be reviving the metaphor of martyrs' purple blood by recalling the reader to the verses from the New Testament, when Pilate dresses Jesus in a purple garment and proclaims *Ecce homo*.³⁴ Thus, it seems that Eulalia here is employing language that ennoble the violence done to her body, by identifying it with Christ's.³⁵ The identification is reinforced by Eulalia's use of the term *Christe* in line 138, when she associates his holy name with her spilt blood, for this image of flowing

loc. observes—the adjective is rarely applied to people's bodies, but at Ter. *Eum.* 316 it is employed of girls who are so slender that they have lost their feminine characteristics; cf. also Auson. *Ep.* 14.46. See also J. Clarke, 'Bridal songs: Catullan epithalamia and Prudentius *Peristephanon* 3', *Antichthon* 40 (2006), 89–103, at 98: 'An unusual word, appearing only here in Prudentius, it [*iuncea*] is used of Eulalia's chest with the metaphorical meaning "slender" but literally means "made from rushes" (*OLD* s.v. def. 1). As the executioners cut into her chest, *iuncea* in combination with *dilacerant* calls to mind the cutting or tearing of a plant.'

³⁰ '[T]he vociferous young saint is becoming not simply a text, but a text that reads and interprets itself, thus neatly eliminating the problems of difference and interpretation': Malamud (n. 3), 78. Thus the fact that Eulalia is her own narrator/reader removes any ambiguity in the message that her body/text is transmitting. On Eulalia's body as text, see also J. Ross, 'Dynamic writing and martyrs' bodies in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*', *J ECS* 3 (1995), 325–55, at 343–4.

³¹ *OLD* s.v. 2b; *TLL* 10.2.2710.66–2711.11. See also J. André, *Étude sur les termes de couleur dans la langue latine* (Paris, 1949), 97.

³² A. Blaise and H. Chirat, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens. Revu spécialement pour le vocabulaire théologique* (Strasbourg, 1954), s.v.; *TLL* 10.2.2711.11–18.

³³ *OLD* s.v. 3; *TLL* 10.2.2701.8–65, 10.2.2703.56–2704.26 and André (n. 31), 91. Prudentius himself uses *purpura* to denote cloth at *Perist.* 10.512.

³⁴ John 19:2 and 19:5. Cf. Romanus at *Perist.* 10.909–10, whose purple blood bathes him like a garment: *cruenti pectoris spectat decus | fruiturque et ostro uestis ut iam regiae*.

³⁵ On Eulalia and her torture as *imitatio Christi*, see I. Fielding, 'The virgin martyr and the *uerbum dei* in Prudentius *Peristephanon* 3', *C&M* 64 (2013), 269–85, at 277–8.

liquid may evoke in Prudentius' readers' minds the literal meaning of *Christus* as 'the anointed one'. Eulalia's blood conjures Christ's name, because it anoints her as an imitator of Christ's martyrdom; it is by employing such metaphorical associations in her speech that Eulalia is able to reconceptualize the trauma to her body in a way that does not cause her psychological distress. As she herself has predicted in line 95, the pain will not upset her.

But Prudentius himself in his role as narrator minimizes neither the trauma nor the pain that is being inflicted on Eulalia's body, a trauma which, as with his account of Agnes in *Perist.* 14, may be meant to recall the painful defloration that young Roman brides were thought to experience on their wedding nights. For in line 144 Prudentius depicts how Eulalia's limbs are painted with fresh blood (*membraque picta cruore nouo*). The fact that Prudentius applies the adjective *nouus*, 'fresh', 'new', to the blood in this image could reflect the notion prevalent in Roman medicine that the passage of the menses was only possible after the first act of sexual intercourse opened up the sealed vagina.³⁶ This act was considered very painful and it may be significant that a term for pain appears in the line prior to this and is accentuated by the adjective *dirus*. While these terms form part of a declaration that pain is absent from Eulalia's soul (*dirus abest dolor ex animo*, 143), lying within this declaration is the implication that such pain is actually present in Eulalia's flesh. Thus, in these lines, Prudentius reminds his readers that bloodletting is painful, particularly when it involves the breaching of barriers. The fact that Eulalia can react to the traumatic pain inflicted on her body in a positive frame of mind (*laeta ... et intrepida*, 142) because of the way in which she has re-envisioned it does not mean that pain does not play a role in transforming her into a martyr.³⁷

In the final line of this stanza, Prudentius elaborates the image of Eulalia's blood by describing it as a fountain which washes her skin (*fonte cutem recalente lauans*, 145). Scholars have observed that the terms *fonte* and *lauare* in this line recall the rites of baptism,³⁸ but Eulalia's skin is being bathed by blood instead of water, thus turning it from white to red. The dramatic colour-change from white to red, frequently associated with violent or traumatic events in Roman poetry,³⁹ and Prudentius' substitution of blood for baptismal water, underscores the profound nature of the transformation which is being effected on Eulalia's body. As Martha Malamud has observed, the phrase *membra picta* at line 144 implies that Eulalia is, or is becoming, a work of

³⁶ A. Rousselle (transl. F. Pheasant), *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity* (Oxford, 1988), 33: 'The anatomical errors made by the Roman doctors, which were contested by Soranus of Ephesus, himself from the Greek world, could only be the result of girls being deflowered before puberty, as he repeatedly pointed out to these physicians. These Roman doctors imagined that the vagina was completely sealed internally and that this, plus the hymen, made the first act of intercourse very painful. According to this theory the man had the privilege of opening up the passage for the menses.'

³⁷ Cobb, in contrast, argues that it is not clear that Eulalia's body experiences pain when she is being tortured and that, in any case, the experience of the body, which is different from that of the spirit, is 'cast as insignificant': Cobb (n. 6), 68. But this does not take into account the way in which Eulalia's torture is associated with the painful and bloody act of defloration; Eulalia's body undergoes pain, as virgins did on their wedding nights. And even if Eulalia declares that her body is fragile and easy to destroy, this does not imply that the experience of her body is 'insignificant'. As Clark (n. 17), 106 observes, 'The martyr may be shown declaring that what is done to his or her body does not affect the soul, but the suffering of the body is of central importance.' See also Scourfield (n. 1), 318 on this contradiction.

³⁸ Malamud (n. 3), 78, Petruccione (n. 8), 99.

³⁹ Cf. *Aen.* 12.35–6, *Hor. Carm.* 3.13.6–8, *Ov. Met.* 4.51–2, 6.527–30. On these last two, see also C.C. Rhorer, 'Red and white in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: the mulberry tree in the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe', *Ramus* 9 (1980), 79–88, at 82–4.

art.⁴⁰ With the use of this phrase Prudentius may well be drawing upon the well-established tradition of *ekphrasis* in ancient poetry, for it was elaboration of striking details such as words evoking colour (*picta cruore*, 144), moisture (*fonte ... lauante*, 146) and warmth (*recalete*, 145) that were the hallmarks of this rhetorical technique;⁴¹ moreover, descriptions of actual or imaginary works of art came to represent the culmination of the practice.⁴² Jill Ross suggests that Prudentius means to evoke a tapestry with his description of the blood staining Eulalia's limbs,⁴³ but, in an ironic twist, the phrase might also evoke a marble statue with painted or even blood-spattered limbs;⁴⁴ Eulalia is thus being transformed into an image of suffering. It is also significant that, when he concludes this episode of torture, Prudentius brings the reader back to the surface of Eulalia's body, her skin (*cutem*, 145), for it is the breaching of the martyr's skin that has engendered this baptism of pain. And when she faces the ultimate torture of being burnt alive (146–60), Prudentius represents her, like Agnes, as desiring a speedy end (*uirgo citum cupiens obitum*, 159); this could be in part because, like Agnes, she wishes death to obliterate her *sensum doloris*.

ENCRATIS: PAIN ASCENDANT

Prudentius' account of the martyrdom of Encratis in *Perist.* 4 is arguably the most realistic and distressing of his descriptions of the effects of torture on a body. He singles Encratis out along with Vincent as the most important of the martyrs of Caesaraugusta (89–144) and reiterates the importance of these two martyrs towards the end of the poem (177–80). But Prudentius devotes more stanzas to Encratis in this poem than he does to Vincent (who is given a lengthy poem to himself in *Perist.* 5), and the nine stanzas which tell of Encratis' torture and death in *Perist.* 4 are the most extended narrative in a poem that in other ways comes across as less focussed than the others in the collection.⁴⁵ And all these stanzas are devoted to Encratis' suffering. Coming as it does in the midst of this somewhat rambling poem, Prudentius' description of Encratis' pain is almost startling. In some respects, Encratis' death is the opposite of Agnes', for in *Perist.* 14 the swiftness of the executioner's sword spares Agnes any

⁴⁰ Malamud (n. 3), 78.

⁴¹ R. Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham and Burlington, 2009), 72–3.

⁴² J. Elsner, 'Introduction: the genres of *ekphrasis*', *Ramus* 31 (2002), 1–18, at 2.

⁴³ Ross (n. 30), 343–4.

⁴⁴ For the application of paint to marble statues as an 'integral part of the finishing process' and for the representation of blood on a statue, see M. Bradley, 'The importance of colour on ancient marble sculpture', *Art History* 32 (2009), 427–57, at 438 and 441 respectively. The metaphorical transformation of Eulalia into a statue would provide an ironic twist, as earlier in the poem Eulalia has castigated the pagans for worshipping stone statues (69, 82) and, in her ultimate act of defiance, scatters the pagan images (128–9). But, while Prudentius condemns pagan works of art such as statues (*C. Symm.* 1.433–1), he also acknowledges their beauty (*C. Symm.* 1.501–5), sharing the views of other Christian writers, such as Augustine and Paulinus of Nola, that art can serve a useful purpose for the Church provided that a written inscription removes any possibility of an ambiguous interpretation; see further O'Hogan (n. 6), 135–53.

⁴⁵ Roberts (n. 6), 28 observes: 'The poem is unusual as the only one in the collection that owes its structure to the enumerative principles of epideictic rather than to the temporal and spatial criteria of narration and description'; he labels it a *laus urbis*, while Fux (n. 29), 108 states that the poem is 'à la manière des catalogues épiques', and observes that its narrative elements are incidental and fragmentary (at 111).

pain; in contrast, the sword of the persecutor at 4.133–4 grudges Encratis the release of death so that she has to endure pain that is as agonizing as it is prolonged.

Prudentius is keen to stress that Encratis is no less a martyr for the fact that she survived beyond her torture: in lines 135–6 he makes a point of addressing her as *martyr* and links this title with the extent of her *poena*: *plena te, martyr, tamen ut peremptam, | poena coronat*. The term *poena* can mean 'suffering' as well as 'punishment', particularly in post-Augustan literature,⁴⁶ and, as he recounts her torture, Prudentius does not attempt to minimize or explain away Encratis' pain. On the contrary, he emphasizes it, not only by employing the most common Latin term for pain, *dolor*, twice in the space of five lines (126, 130) but also by his inclusion of adjectives such as 'foul' (*taetra*, 119), 'bitter' (*amaros*, 119), 'poisonous' (*uenenatos*, 126) and 'burning' (*ardens*, 130) in his lengthy description of the results of her torture. Furthermore, he places some of these terms into Encratis' mouth by employing the verb *narras* in line 120; Encratis becomes her own narrator, like Eulalia, but she is unlike Eulalia who reconceptualizes the trauma to her body in ways that ennoble and exalt it. While Eulalia in *Perist.* 3 described the wounds that the claw has made as Christ's writing (3.136–8) and the blood that spurts from them as *purpura* (3.140), in *Perist.* 4 Encratis' use of adjectives such as *taetra* and *amaros* to describe her wounds (*taetra quam sulcus habeant amaros | uulnera narras*, 119–20) brings home all the ugliness of pain and mutilation. Eulalia spoke of the wounds that the claw made on her body as marks (*notas*, 3.135); Encratis refers to them as 'gashes' or 'furrows' (*sulcos*, 4.119) and these, moreover, are gashes that are *amaros*, an adjective that undercuts any fertility overtones that the term *sulcus* might convey.⁴⁷ Likewise, when Encratis describes her *uulnera* as *taetra*, her audience is reminded not only of the foul appearance of festering wounds but also, perhaps, of their unpleasant smell.⁴⁸

The names of many of the martyrs in the *Peristephanon* are often symbolically linked with their martyrdoms: Hippolytus is torn apart by wild horses, Agnes dies for her chastity like a sacrificial lamb and Eulalia argues eloquently with the governor. However, both Eulalia and Agnes also act in ways that are contrary to their names: Agnes does not display the gentleness of a lamb and Eulalia ultimately resorts to violent action rather than speech. The name Encratis, on the other hand, is closely tied not only to her punishment but also to the way in which she responds to it. Her name is probably derived from ἐγκράτεια, 'mastery over' or 'self-control' (and is thus a counterpart of the name Vincent),⁴⁹ but the verb from which this noun is derived, κρατέω, has similarities in sound to χράω, 'to scrape', 'graze', χράω, 'fall upon', 'attack', and χράω, 'proclaim'. As we will see, all of these concepts operate in the way in which the story of Encratis' torture unfolds.

As he did with Agnes and Eulalia, Prudentius lays emphasis on Encratis' ferocity of character: he describes her as a *uiolenta uirgo* whose *uirtutes* put the spirit of the savage world to shame (*ossa uirtutum, quibus efferati | spiritum mundi, uiolenta uirgo, | dedecorasti*, 111–12). Prudentius' placement of the adjective *uiolenta* next to

⁴⁶ *TLL* 10.1.2506.5–28; cf. *Perist.* 6.94, *Apoth.* 85.

⁴⁷ The adjective *amarus* can also be used of soil that is salty or bitter; cf. Verg. *G.* 2.238, Plin. *HN* 17.33. In the *Peristephanon* the term *sulcus* is quite commonly employed of a martyr's wounds (cf. 5.338, 9.77, 10.448, 10.550, 10.1127) and often this word suggests the fertility which ploughing engenders; see Ross (n. 30), 349. But Encratis' 'bitter furrows' are, by implication, unfertile.

⁴⁸ For *taeter* used of the stench of corpses, cf. Caes. *BCiv.* 3.49.2, Lucr. 2.415.

⁴⁹ In this way, Encratis' story leads naturally on from Vincent's, whose victories in *Perist.* 4 Prudentius equates with victories in the wrestling ground (101–4).

uirgo is quite striking; the juxtaposition of these words would suggest that Encratis possesses the same fierce spirit as a *uirago*. This is also the only time that Prudentius uses the term *uirtus* to describe a woman's best qualities in the *Peristephanon*, implying that Encratis has attained the stature of a warrior or hero;⁵⁰ the notion of heroic stature is continued into line 118, where Prudentius describes the way in which Encratis held onto her spoil of flesh even though it had been cut away: *carnis et caesae spoliū retentans*. Thus Encratis is portrayed somewhat in the manner of a Homeric hero, doing battle over her own corpse. But, as Prudentius proceeds with his description of her torments, her gender assumes a certain fluidity, as more feminine characteristics intrude and are mingled with male. Such fluidity of gender not only is manifested in narratives of female martyrs⁵¹ but will also become apparent in Prudentius' representation of Loth's wife (as we will see further below), whose body, like Encratis', undergoes a striking transformation into something 'other' that is at once male and female.

The violation of the female body is underscored by the excision of Encratis' breast: *pectus abscesa patuit papilla | corde sub ipso*, 123–4. On one level this could be viewed as an extension of the heroic topos, for Amazons also had a breast removed, but the introduction of a term such as *papilla* into this scene of torture serves not only to remind the reader of Encratis' femininity; this attack upon an essential female trait is also suggestive of rape.⁵² While a comparison can be drawn with the way in which Prudentius at *Perist.* 14.77–8 employed *papilla* together with *pectus* in his highly sexualized depiction of the sword penetrating Agnes' body, in Agnes' case her self-identification with a bride of Christ in line 79 lent positive and potentially fertile overtones to the act, because she chose to interpret it as the consummation of marriage. But in Encratis' case the excision of a breast is an assault not merely upon an attribute of beauty but also upon motherhood; at the same time her chest is literally laid open (*pectus ... patuit*, 123) to the gaze of the male torturers and of authority figures. This graphic and shocking representation of sexualized violence might influence the reader to interpret the first two lines of the stanza (*barbarus tortor latus omne carpsit | sanguis inpensus, lacerata membra*, 121–2) in a more gendered and sexualized way. While the verb *carpsit* is not uncommonly employed in scenes of torture, its primary sense of the plucking of fruit or flowers may also be activated here, and the suggestion of defloration is reinforced by the allusion to the shedding of Encratis' blood (*sanguis inpensus*, 122).⁵³ We have already seen how much symbolic resonance is imparted to the shedding of a virgin's blood in *Perist.* 3.

⁵⁰ For the Roman belief that *uirtus* was 'fundamentally a man's rather than a woman's quality' and that women who perform acts of *uirtus* 'act like men', see C.A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality* (Oxford and New York, 2010²), 145–6. While Prudentius employs *uirtus* in general of martyrs in the *Peristephanon* (1.49, 1.106, 13.39) and applies the term also to specific male martyrs (the soldiers Emeterius and Chelidonius at 1.33, Vincent at 5.426 and 5.572), this is the only time he employs it of a female martyr; he does not use it of Eulalia or Agnes. The use of this term to introduce Encratis in *Perist.* 4 also links her more closely with Vincent, whose *uirtutes* Prudentius has alluded to eight lines earlier at 102.

⁵¹ See above on the instability of Agnes' gendered sexuality and the contrast between Eulalia's fierce spirit and girlish body. See also D. Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, 1999), 75 on the ambiguous construction of the sexuality of female martyrs in texts of the fourth century.

⁵² According to Chew (n. 5), 136–9, scenes of torture both of female martyrs and of heroines of Greek novels often involve the mutilation or excision of a breast. This is usually associated with an assault on their chastity, as with the story of the martyrdom of Agatha who is first made to reside with a procuress and then has her breast twisted off (at 136). Such metaphorical sexual violence enacted upon women of good reputation has a shock value that contributes to the drama of these texts (at 137–8).

⁵³ For the association between the plucking of flowers and the shedding of blood, cf. *Ov. Met.* 9.342–5.

In *Perist.* 3, however, the shedding of blood purified and transformed Eulalia's body in a form of baptism. In Encratis' case her wound continues to bleed without healing and this is what keeps her in pain: *cruda te longum tenuit cicatrix | et diu uenis dolor haesit ardens*, 129–30. The bleeding that issues from Encratis' wound is instrumental in transforming her body, but in a different way from the transformation that is effected on Eulalia. The pain that it engenders is both poisonous and burning (*uenenatos ... dolores ... dolor ... ardens*, 126–30), and it and the associated trauma occupy her body and alter it in fundamental ways (*tenuit ... haesit ... tenuat*, 129–31). In many respects, pain in this episode usurps the role of opponent, a role which was occupied by the governor in the poems about Eulalia and Agnes. In the case of Encratis, her persecutor is alluded to only once and then indirectly;⁵⁴ increasingly it is her pain which takes on the characteristics of a vengeful human being, or even, perhaps, of a poisonous snake, for the pain clings to her veins, refusing to relinquish its hold (130).⁵⁵ Unlike in *Perist.* 3, Prudentius includes no statement in this poem about pain not penetrating within, or not affecting the spirit. In fact, pain becomes so much a part of Encratis that ultimately it consumes her from the inside out: *dum putrescentes tenuat medullas | tabidus umor*, 131–2.⁵⁶

How then does Encratis triumph, when her experience of pain is so different from that of Agnes and Eulalia? As one possible interpretation of her name ($\chi\rho\acute{\alpha}\omega$ = 'declare') suggests, she proclaims her torture, becoming a witness to her own pain in a way that makes it part of her new identity (117–20):

uiuus, ac poenae seriem retexis,
carnis et caesae spoliū retentans
taetra quam sulcos habeant amarus
uulnera narras.

Michael Roberts argues that the literal sense of 'unravelling' is active in the verb *retexis* that Prudentius employs at line 117;⁵⁷ Encratis opens out or unravels the sequence of her *poena*, just as, on another level, she herself is metaphorically unravelling as her body decays (*putrescentes tenuat medullas*, 131).⁵⁸ Roberts also observes that, in doing this, Encratis usurps the role of martyrologer in this collection.⁵⁹ The

⁵⁴ *inuidus quamuis obitum supremum | persecutoris gladius negarit*, 133–4.

⁵⁵ Prudentius uses *uenenum* and its cognates both for serpents as the symbol of the Devil (e.g. *Perist.* 14.112–15) and for those who are in league with the Devil, such as persecutors (*Perist.* 5.191–2); as Fux (n. 29), ad loc. observes, '*uenenatos* suggère une intervention diabolique'.

⁵⁶ For *medulla* used to denote the innermost part of the body (*OLD* s.v. 2; *TLL* 8.600.21), cf. *Perist.* 1.108, 13.14. The term is frequently employed in descriptions of the effects of poisoning or putrefaction of a body; see *TLL* 8.600.355–44.

⁵⁷ Roberts (n. 6), 57.

⁵⁸ In this respect, Prudentius' choice of the verb *tenuat* here might be deliberate, for it can be used to refer to the drawing out of wool in spinning (*OLD* s.v. 1b), for instance at Manilius 4.131, *Stat. Achil.* 1.581; for the term applied metaphorically to the 'spinning' of song, see Prop. 3.1.5. For the deeply rooted association between wool-working and female storytelling in Graeco-Roman society, see J. Heath, 'Women's work: female transmission of mythical narrative', *TAPhA* (2011), 69–104, at 72–7. Heath comments that 'the most poignant association between spinning and a narrative—the "span" of a human life—is to be found in the Fates' (72). In the Graeco-Roman mindset there is thus a nexus between wool-spinning, the human lifespan and the events that constitute the person's life; cf. Catull. 64.338–71. The span of Encratis' life will be cut short by the unravelling of her body, but the story that she narrates of her body's sufferings will endure because she has managed to 'spin out' a tale that will be passed on (line 117).

⁵⁹ Roberts (n. 6), 57.

fact that Prudentius makes the verb *narras* the concluding word in this stanza, a verb that he only uses twice in the *Peristephanon*, might suggest that he wishes to place emphasis on the way in which Encratis is making herself into a story. It is perhaps telling that Prudentius' other use of *narrare* is in *Perist.* 10: in this poem the verb is placed into the mouth of a Christian mother who relates the story of the Maccabean martyrs to her son as an edifying antetype of biblical martyrdom.⁶⁰

ENCRATIS AND LOTH'S WIFE: LIMINALITY AND GENDER

The grim details of Encratis' prolonged and painful death enable Prudentius to play upon the notion that this martyr occupies a liminal position, between life and death: towards the beginning of her story he says to her: 'you alone survived your own death, living in the world' (*sola tu morti propriae superstes | uiuis in orbe*, 115–16), and when he refers to her again near the end of his poem he identifies her as the 'girl who lived on after exemplary suffering' (*uiua post poenae specimen puella*, 178). Pierre-Yves Fux has observed that the present tense of *uiuis* in line 116 almost implies that Encratis is still alive in the world when Prudentius is writing, underscoring the strangeness of the situation.⁶¹ There is thus a fluidity and instability, not only to the martyr's gender but even to her status as living being. In both of these aspects she can be compared with Loth's wife in the *Hamartigenia*, whose gender is confused by her transformation into a pillar of salt and who also experiences a form of life after death as *specimen poenae*, but in a different way. While the Old Testament gives no indication as to why Loth's wife turns around to see the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:26), Prudentius makes it clear in the *Hamartigenia* that this is due to her feminine inconstancy and weakness (738–9), character flaws which are punished by being solidified into salt. Anthony Dykes has observed that, in her transformation into something hard, Loth's wife 'seems to undergo a kind of sex-change and to acquire some masculine solidity' and, when Prudentius refers to her as *durata* in line 768 (*atque inter patrias perstat durata fauillas*), she 'finally crosses the line of differentiation marked by *mollis* and *durus*', changing into something that is characteristically masculine.⁶² But, as he also points out, even as a pillar of salt, she retains certain aspects of her feminine weaknesses, for Prudentius portrays the salt continually dissolving (lines 743 and 749) in a way that 'projects her moral incontinence' (at 92). Prudentius' striking image of a pillar (or statue) that runs continuously with salt sweats (*liquitur illa quidem salsis sudoribus uda*, 749) carries with it a suggestion of unhealthy corruption which is meant to remind the reader of the city of Sodom and may also impart unsavoury sexual undertones to the way in which the cattle lick the tasty pillar.⁶³

⁶⁰ *narraui et illud nobile ac memorabile | certamen, una matre quod septem editi | gessere pueri, sed tamen factis uiri*, 751–3. J.R. Ballengee, *The Wound and the Witness: The Rhetoric of Torture* (Albany, 2009), 118 notes that this mother's tale has structural and thematic echoes of Prudentius' own narrative songs.

⁶¹ Fux (n. 29), ad loc.

⁶² A. Dykes, *Reading Sin in the World: The Hamartigenia of Prudentius and the Vocation of the Responsible Reader* (Cambridge, 2011), 92.

⁶³ ... *quantumque armenta saporum | attenuant saxum tantum lambentibus umor | sufficit ...*, 751–3. Although *lingere* was more commonly used to describe the use of the tongue to stimulate the sexual organs, *lambere* could also be employed in this sense (cf. Juv. 1.2.49–50, Mart. 2.61.2, 3.81.1–2) and seems to have been favoured by Ausonius in his epigrams to denote fellatio or cunnilingus: 78.1, 82.2,

While Prudentius describes this woman as an *uxor* (738), her desire for a city which was emblematic of sexual depravity in the Bible throws doubt on her *puđicitia*,⁶⁴ and Prudentius' depiction of her as a woman who has paid attention to the physical superficialities of *decus et cultus* (746) may even suggest that, like a courtesan or harlot, she cultivates her external appearance rather than guarding her moral boundaries.⁶⁵ According to Virginia Burrus, in the works of Church Fathers such as Athanasius, 'The orthodox virgin has her counterpart in the figure of the heretical harlot. If the virgin represents a community whose boundaries are intact, the heretical harlot expresses the threatening image of a community whose boundaries are uncontrolled.'⁶⁶ Thus Loth's wife, whose boundaries are fluid and weak, like those of a harlot, resembles the city of Sodom with its uncontrolled sexual boundaries (760–2) and walls that collapse completely under God's wrath (759, 768).

ENCRATIS AND LOTH'S WIFE: INSTABILITY AND INTEGRITY

While we can identify some interesting similarities between the liminal qualities and shifting gender of Loth's wife and Encratis, the contrasts that can be drawn between them are even more illuminating, particularly in regard to the relationship between their exterior forms and the inner reality. As a pillar of salt, Loth's wife projects a superficial stability, but the way in which this pillar shifts between a masculine hardness and a feminine wetness means that in actuality her appearance is as unstable as her character. On the other hand, the unstable appearance of Encratis' gradually decomposing body is countered by the strength and integrity of her soul. Although both women are portrayed as occupying a space between life and death,⁶⁷ this is manifested in very different ways. Loth's wife has been given a type of immortality that is all on the surface:⁶⁸ her physical

83.1, 86.1; note especially 87.8, which plays upon the Greek character lambda and the obscene sense of *lambere*.

⁶⁴ Philo states that Loth's wife looked back because she loved Sodom, thus reverting to the nature that had been overthrown by God (*Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis*, 3.213), while Jerome (*Ep.* 22.2) cites her story as a warning against sexual promiscuity. Ambrose in his *De uirginibus* presents a comparatively more positive version of her, implying that, although she herself was chaste, she chose to look back at what was unchaste (2.29); J.B. Snyder, 'Looking back at Lot's wife: a reception-critical character study' (Diss., Emory University, 2016), 210 argues that her choice 'is tantamount to identifying with the crimes of the Sodomites'. In the *Hamartigenia* the association of Loth's wife with original sin and loss of chastity is strengthened, because—according to M. Malamud, 'Writing original sin', *J ECS* 10 (2002), 329–60, at 354—she is 'adduced in the text in the first place in order to stand as a figure for Eve'.

⁶⁵ For the association of *cultus* with a proclivity to take lovers, see Prop. 1.2.1–6, 1.2.19–26 and the discussion by L.C. Curran, "'Nature to advantage dressed": Propertius 1.2', *Ramus* 4 (1975), 1–16, at 13. While elaborate hairstyles or the use of cosmetics were not merely restricted to courtesans, such practices were often portrayed in Graeco-Roman literature as markers of unchastity or moral corruption; see further M. Wyke, 'Woman in the mirror: the rhetoric of adornment in the Roman world', in L.J. Archer, S. Fischler and M. Wyke (edd.), *Women in Ancient Societies* (London, 1994), 134–51, at 135–7. This notion continued into Christian texts: cf. Ambrose, *Virg.* 1.28–9. In the *Hamartigenia*—as M. Malamud, *The Origin of Sin* (Ithaca and London, 2011), 152 observes—Loth's wife has many similarities with the 'made up woman' whom Prudentius castigated earlier at lines 258–78, a woman whose carefully cultivated external appearance conceals a 'tide of sin' within.

⁶⁶ Burrus (n. 3), 36.

⁶⁷ The portrayal of the pillar of salt as living also occurs in other texts: cf. Ps.-Cyprian, *De Sodomā*, where the pillar even menstruates (123–6); see further Snyder (n. 64), 216–18.

⁶⁸ Malamud (n. 64), 356.

beauty is preserved, even as a salt pillar, and her skin continually renews itself as it is worn away: ... *atritamque cutem per damna reformat*, 753. Her beauty could aptly be described as 'skin deep', for her spirit is fluid (*fluidumque animum*, 755) and her resolution fragile (*fragilis iussa ad caelestia*, 756). In contrast, Encratis' skin has been raked by the *ungula* down to the bone and will not renew itself, that most feminine of attributes (her breast) has been torn off, and the ugliness of her wounds means that she has lost any feminine attractions she may have possessed. She has in fact become a living representative of 'Pale Death' (139–40), inhabiting a form of death-in-life as a walking corpse but one whose spirit and *uirtus* shine through. And, although her physical boundaries have been breached, her moral boundaries remain intact, something which helps to protect the city of Caesaraugusta from dangers that beset it both within and without (lines 65–72).⁶⁹ Thus, as a *uirgo/uirago*, Encratis in many ways is a reverse image of Loth's wife whom Prudentius represents as a harlot. The internal and external instability of Loth's wife are synonymous with the blurred moral boundaries and collapsing walls of Sodom; Encratis' inner steel, on the other hand, forged by the extreme suffering she has endured, will help to guard her hometown, whatever evils assail it.

What is also interesting about the way in which the narrative of Encratis' tale unfolds is how Prudentius seems to bring her story to a climax in lines 135–6 and then embarks on another two stanzas that mark Encratis' martyrdom as even more special. He describes how part of her body was torn off by the claw and lay far away even while she was alive (*uidimus partem iecoris reuulsam | unguis longe iacuisse pressis*, 137–8);⁷⁰ her living body is thus engendering relics. Like Vincent who left a shower of blood on the earth which linked him with Caesaraugusta in this poem (89–92), this piece of *iecur* which was torn off (and was, presumably, flung on the ground) ties Encratis more closely to the city of Caesaraugusta. Significantly, at this point in the tale Prudentius introduces himself and his fellow citizens with *uidimus* in line 137, the first word in the stanza. He and his townsfolk have entered into Encratis' experience to such an extent that they have become witnesses to her traumatic pain and to her survival in their home as an 'ever-living martyr': *iuge uiuentis domus ut dicata | martyris esset*, 143–4. In these concluding lines to the Encratis episode within *Perist.* 4, the way in which Prudentius introduces the emotive word *domus* and places it immediately after the participle *uiuentis* (reinforcing its intensity with *iuge*) not only helps to elide any distinction between past and present but also accentuates the message that the survival of Prudentius' hometown depends upon the pain of martyrs such as Encratis.⁷¹

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of these three poems, it is apparent that there is more than one type of martyrdom for women in the *Peristephanon*. Within each of these poems there is a whole range of experience of pain and ways of dealing with it: Agnes experiences no

⁶⁹ On the soteriological significance of the martyrs of Caesaraugusta, see J. Petruccione, 'The martyr death as sacrifice: Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 4.9–72', *VChr* 49 (1995), 245–57, especially 252.

⁷⁰ Commentators disagree about which part of the body *iecur* denotes here; J. Petruccione, 'The persecutor's envy and the rise of the martyr cult: *Peristephanon* Hymns 1 and 4', *VChr* 45 (1991), 327–46, at 338 argues that it is a piece of liver, while Fux (n. 29), *ad loc.* states that the term is used metonymically for the breast. Prudentius' allusion at line 123 to the severing of Eulalia's breast by the claw would tend to support Fux's interpretation.

⁷¹ Cf. Petruccione (n. 70), 340.

pain; Eulalia experiences it only in her body; Encratis experiences it fully. Yet, despite these differences, there are certain commonalities with how these women respond to pain or to the threat of it. While the bodies of both male and female martyrs are represented as fragile and easily broken, the vulnerability of female flesh acquires its own peculiar significance. The ferocity of these women's spirits serves as a foil to the delicacy of their bodies, a factor that contributes to the blurring of gender roles in their martyrdoms. Agnes reconceptualizes the traditionally masculine death of a sword thrust to the chest as a form of defloration in marriage; while this comparison reminds the reader of her frail female body, her willingness not merely to endure but even to embrace the pain of such a death is a hallmark of her *ferox robor* (18). Eulalia envisages the violation of her body in a way that helps her separate herself from the pain and bring it closer to the image of Christ, but Prudentius as narrator reminds the reader that a young girl's body is undergoing a violent and painful transformation. While Encratis exhibits the *uirtus* of a hero in her battle with traumatic pain, the intimations of sexualized violence that dwell in the details of her excised breast and exposed chest call attention to the fact that she is at the same time a vulnerable and unprotected woman; this violent assault on her purity makes the resulting dissolution and corruption of her flesh even more shocking.

The fact that these martyrs are at once women, whose bodies represent the main locus of their power, and *uirgines*, whose corporeal boundaries need to be preserved intact, means that their manner of death is doubly important. In each of these poems Prudentius plays upon the symbolic resonance of rupturing the smooth, unbroken surface of a young girl's body. The potential violation of this boundary imparts a sense of suspense to the death of Agnes, for, although she declares that she is willing to embrace a sword in her chest, the possibility not only of pain but also of bodily violation hovers until her swift beheading. The fact that the skin of her chest is pierced by neither sword nor claw means that in a sense her virginity remains intact, something which seems to ease the passage of her spirit into the ether as a bride of Christ. Eulalia's bodily boundaries, on the other hand, *are* breeched by the claw, an event that is underscored by the vivid image of blood staining her limbs; for Eulalia, victory resides in not allowing the pain that is assailing her body to penetrate her spirit as well. For Encratis, pain almost becomes a person in its own right as it clings to her flesh and will not grant her the relief of death. Her triumph consists of making pain the reason for her existence and merging it with her identity, as she narrates the details of her gruesome torture to her fellow townsfolk. In this, like Loth's wife, she achieves a form of immortality that is all her own, for she is transformed or, more correctly, she transforms herself into a life-in-death memorial of the effects of torture on a body. It is thus largely Encratis' *ardens dolor*, as it is witnessed by the Christian community of Caesaraugusta, that weds her to her city with an indissoluble bond.

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