

A Space of Her Own:  
Genderfluidity and Negotiation in  
*The Life of Christina of Markyate*  
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**T**he *Life of Christina of Markyate*, written in Latin by an anonymous monk of St. Albans sometime in the mid-twelfth century, relates the story of Theodora of Huntingdon, a noblewoman born around 1096, who escaped her parents and an unwanted marriage to maintain her purity.<sup>1</sup> Adopting the name Christina, she remained devoted to Christ through years of hiding, sexual temptation, and demonic attacks. By her midthirties, Christina was in charge of the hermitage (later priory) at Markyate, where she remained until her death sometime after 1155.<sup>2</sup>

This essay considers how Christina of Markyate resists gender policing by coexisting within and moving among multiple gender spaces. She flees Huntingdon, for example, dressed as a man on horseback. As she prepares to take the veil, angels crown her with a bishop's mitre. When fighting lust, she preserves her feminized virginity through masculinized

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1. The earliest dating for the *Life of Christina of Markyate* is 1140-1150. Rachel M. Koopmans, "The Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 51, no. 4 (2000): 663-698, at 695, doi:10.1017/S0022046900005091. The latest is 1155-1166. C. H. Talbot, introduction to *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1998), 10.

2. The surviving copy of the *Life of Christina of Markyate*, MS. Cotton Tiberius E. I, does not cover her full life, ending sometime around 1142. It is unknown whether the final portion of her life is missing, or whether the Tiberius copy is an abridgement of the original. See Talbot, "Introduction," 4-6.

courage. In these moments, Christina is neither woman nor man, but somewhere beyond the binary. As a secular, religious, and masculinized virgin Christina is genderfluid, performing and being performed into multiple gender spaces that allow her to establish her own authority. Reading her *Life* through contemporary transgender and gender performative theories illustrates that though the term “genderfluid” may be recently coined, we are not limited to modern examples to understand genderfluidity and its potential to, as stated by Kate Bornstein, “solve problems with boundaries.”<sup>3</sup>

### Genderfluidity and Performativity

Genderfluidity has not yet received the same scholarly focus as other trans identities; for example, it appears only a handful of times in the extensive essay collections *Transgender Studies Reader* (2006) and *Transgender Studies Reader 2* (2013), in contrast to a multitude of references to identities such as butch, intersex, and male-to-female transsexual.<sup>4</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary*, which added the adjective “gender-fluid” in September 2016, notes that early usage of the term in the late 1980s equated “gender-fluid” with “androgynous” while the more current definition is “designating a person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.”<sup>5</sup> Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, offers a definition emphasizing the variability inherent in genderfluidity. They describe genderfluidity as:

[S]ubtly different from ambiguity. If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number

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3. Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), 63.

4. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, eds., *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (London: Routledge, 2013).

5. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “gender-fluid,” accessed November 26, 2018, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/77468?redirectedFrom=gender-fluid>.

of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that genderfluidity does not necessarily involve binary movement between male and female, but can incorporate movement among multiple gender identities. Moreover, the movement is flexible and unpredictable, occurring “for any length of time, at any rate of change.”

In her essay “Felt Matters,” Jeanne Vaccaro uses felt (a “freestyle” “anti-fabric”) and craft (an “anti-machinic practice” that insists “on individuality and embrace of amateur aesthetics”) to question linear gender transformation.<sup>7</sup> She proposes a “non-predictive theory of gender in which predetermination of gender identity or expression is neither possible nor desirable,” and in which transgender identity is not “defined by binaries of surface/depth or before/after.”<sup>8</sup> According to Vaccaro, too much focus is often placed on transgender transitions as linear movement to/from fixed male and female gender locations. The space between, where genders are partially or conditionally embodied, is overlooked.<sup>9</sup> Vaccaro does not specifically address genderfluidity—she studies bodies in transition “to recognize myriad forms of bodily capacity” and to push against limiting binaries and “economies of ‘wrong’ embodiment.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, her concept of “non-predictive” gender speaks to the shifting nonpermeance of genderfluidity and provides helpful theoretical grounding through which to consider Christina of Markyate’s fluidity.

Genders beyond female and male are often termed as “third.” In *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, for example, Marjorie Garber classifies moments of cross-dressing such as Christina’s as participation in a “third” gender category. She defines the “third” as “that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis” and stresses that the “third” is not a concrete term for a “blurred sex” but rather a “mode

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6. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 63.

7. Jeanne Vaccaro, “Felt Matters,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (London: Routledge, 2013), 91-100, at 91-92.

8. Vaccaro, “Felt Matters,” 92-93.

9. Vaccaro, 94-95.

10. Vaccaro, 93-94.

of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility.”<sup>11</sup> Jack Halberstam critiques Garber’s view of the “third” as limiting, remarking that “Garber’s insistence that there is ‘a third space of possibility’ occupied by the transvestite had closed down the possibility that there may be a fourth, fifth, sixth, or one hundredth space beyond the binary.”<sup>12</sup> Several scholars in the last two decades have discussed beyond-binary sexes or genders present in medieval texts and contexts.<sup>13</sup> Although these gender spaces are most often all referred to as “third” in these conversations, they also suggest multiple spaces beyond the male/female binary as proposed by Halberstam. Monk, nun, and virgin have all been perceived as third spaces in which medieval men and women performed gender differently and are now commonly accepted as such. R. N. Swanson, for example, describes the clergy as a third gender which he terms “emasculinity.” Within the emasculine, he argues, “the synonymity of sex and gender evaporates” and all clergy can be viewed as engaging in “cross-gender behavior.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Sarah Salih purposes virginity as a third category, which, she specifically clarifies, is not “a neuter or non-gendered state” but an understanding of virginity as a “continuing, lived and unstable identity” that grants women a holy state not attainable within the strictly female procreative gender role.<sup>15</sup> Both Swanson and Salih make it explicit that these categories of “emasculine” and “virgin” are still gendered—nuns were considered inferior to monks, and monks, while sexually chaste, were not frequently emphasized as virgins (note,

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11. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 11.

12. Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 27.

13. For an overview of the uses of feminist, queer, and gender theory in medieval scholarship over the past two decades, see Madeline H. Caviness, “Feminism, Gender Studies, and Medieval Studies,” *Diogenes* 57, no. 1 (February 2010): 30–45, doi:10.1177/0392192110369441.

14. R. N. Swanson, “Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to Reformation,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 160–77, at 161.

15. Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 17, 2.

for example, that only female saints could be categorized as “virgin”).<sup>16</sup> Thus while monks and nuns can both be categorized as “third,” they do not necessarily fit within the same “third,” pointing to the existence of multiple thirds.

Scholarship on medieval alternative gender spaces has tended to define a particular space (such as the “emasculine”) or to focus on how a person performs in one particular third, such as female-to-male cross-dresser. Various critics have, for example, discussed Christina of Markyate as a virgin martyr, a virgin fighting a masculinized battle for chastity, or a nun, although not always with direct reference to these as alternative genders.<sup>17</sup> However, they tend not to consider how figures like Christina exist simultaneously within or move among multiple thirds—how they are genderfluid.

Essential to my discussion of Christina’s genderfluidity are theories of gender performativity, starting with Judith Butler’s iconic work. While her gender performance theories have become widely accepted by scholars considering how monks and nuns did gender differently, I offer a brief review in order to establish the groundwork for understanding Christina’s performing and being performed into multiple thirds. In her seminal book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler questions the categorization of the male/female binary as stemming from biological difference. Instead of expressive of pre-determined qualities that make up an essential sex, she views gender as a “stylized repetition of acts,” as something constructed through repeated “bodily gestures, movements, and styles.”<sup>18</sup> These gestures as performed by individuals are “imitative practices which refer laterally

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16. Swanson, “Angels Incarnate,” 162; Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 17.

17. See Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 39–50, 127–33, on Christina as virgin martyr and as nun; Kathryn Kelsey Staples and Ruth Mazo Karras on Christina as virgin fighting a masculine battle of chastity; and Samuel Fanous on Christina as virgin martyr and ascetic martyr. Kathryn Kelsey Staples and Ruth Mazo Karras, “Christina’s Tempting: Sexual Desire and Woman’s Sanctity,” in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth-Century Holy Woman*, ed. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (New York: Routledge, 2005), 184–96; Samuel Fanous, “Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown,” in Fanous and Leyser, *Christina of Markyate*, 53–78.

18. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 179.

to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, gender is a community production in which individuals learn the gestures expected of them and repeat them back to society, thus contributing to the continuation of those ideals. Recognizing the performative nature of gender as such provides one with the power to create change by interrupting the norm. As Butler observes, “The question is not: what meaning does that inscription carry within it, but what cultural apparatus arranges this meeting between instrument and body, what interventions into this ritualistic repetition are possible?”<sup>20</sup> This idea of intervening in the “ritualistic repetition” of gender evokes the concept of the “third”—by performing as a third gender, one breaks the expected gender patterns and interferes with the continuation of male/female binaries by calling them into question. The third functions as a means of disrupting and overcoming what Butler refers to as the “police function” of gender norms.<sup>21</sup>

Feminist physicist Karen Barad critiques and builds on Butler’s theories of performativity through her concept of “intra-action.” While Butler understands performativity as “iterative citationality” (the repetition of societal expectations), Barad argues this “ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices.”<sup>22</sup> To put this in terms of gender, a person’s gender identity emerges from the repetition of cultural scripts and discourse, even when that identity breaks with the “norm.” In contrast, Barad proposes that performativity is “iterative intra-activity,”<sup>23</sup> and that it is “through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the ‘components’ of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful.”<sup>24</sup> Again,

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19. Butler, 176.

20. Butler, 186.

21. Judith Butler, “Your Behavior Creates Your Gender,” *Big Think*, February 19, 2011, <http://bigthink.com/videos/your-behavior-creates-your-gender>.

22. Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009), 120–54, at 151n26.

23. Barad, 146.

24. Barad, 133.

to put this in terms of gender identity, one's gender (the "phenomena") does not exist individually; rather, it materializes through intra-actions of matter affecting gender such as cultural expectations/life events/education/biological factors. Gender performance repeats cultural scripts, but it alters them and is altered by them, forms from them and forms them, comes to be through intra-action ("in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which presumes the prior existence of independent entities/relata").<sup>25</sup> As matter shifts, intra-actions change and "result in the production of new phenomena. . . . Boundaries do not sit still."<sup>26</sup> This concept of performativity as intra-active helps us understand genderfluidity as a transitional process in which one's gender identity forms, shifts, and defines itself from within material relationships.

Barad also critiques Butler's theories as "limited to an account of the materialization of human bodies."<sup>27</sup> In response, Barad proposes a "posthumanist notion of performativity—one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors."<sup>28</sup> Although she does not use the term "intra-action," Vaccaro's theories of transgender embodiment echo Barad's theory of performativity:

The body *becomes*. It becomes with and over time. It becomes with and through other bodies that are human, possibly "transgender" or "queer" or "sexed" in manners similar to one another, as well as objects, species, events, infrastructures and institutions. The body *becomes* with and through its movement and proximity to these other bodies. In this way, *the* body is *a* body is *my* body is *your* body, a choreographed set of spatial relations and discursive practices.<sup>29</sup>

To understand Christina's genderfluidity, then, we must not only consider her intra-actions with cultural practices and expectations, but with her material surroundings.

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25. Barad, 133.

26. Barad, 135.

27. Barad, 151n26.

28. Barad, 126.

29. Vaccaro, "Felt Matters," 94.

## Hagiography and Intentionality

When working with a text such as *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, it is important to keep in mind the nature of the work as hagiographical. As had been noted by Rachel Koopmans, there has been a scholarly trend to read Christina's life as more of an autobiography than a third-person narrative.<sup>30</sup> This is understandable considering the level of intimate details present in the work—it is clear that the narrator knew Christina well, and it seems likely a large part of the *Life* was based on conversations the monk had with the holy woman (on more than one occasion, for example, he implies conversation by remarking that she refused to answer a question concerning the nature of a vision).<sup>31</sup> However, throughout the text the author's presence is persistently clear through his commentary on Christina's actions and his strong emphasis on Christina's relationship to his own abbey at St. Albans. It is more fruitful and accurate to view him as "acting like a portrait painter, sketching out an image of Christina to his liking" rather than as "an amanuensis, a transparent transmitter of Christina's thoughts and actions."<sup>32</sup> Koopmans suggests that the last third of the *Life*, which focuses on Christina's relationship with Geoffrey, the Abbot of St. Albans,<sup>33</sup> best

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30. Rachel Koopmans, "Dining at Markyate with Lady Christina," in Fanous and Leyser, *Christina of Markyate*, 143-59, at 143.

31. For example, "How she saw this vision (though she herself well knows) we have never been able to elicit from her up to the present." "Quomodo autem hanc visionem viderit. cum ipsa bene sciret. ab ea usque presens nullo modo potuimus elicere." C. H. Talbot, ed. and trans., *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse* (Toronto: Medieval Academy of America, 1998), 151 (hereafter cited as *LCM*). All translations of the *Life* in this article are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

32. Koopmans, "Dining at Markyate," 143.

33. Geoffrey de Gorran was abbot of St. Albans from 1119 until his death in 1146. Scholars have debated Geoffrey's role in the creation of Christina's *Life*, as well as the extent and nature of the abbot and holy woman's relationship, but the *Life* itself presents them as close friends. According to the *Life*, Geoffrey came to rely on Christina for spiritual guidance after he was beaten by holy messengers for not heeding Christina's advice. Geoffrey developed "a deep respect for the maiden and saw in her something divine and extraordinary" (Talbot, "Introduction," 143), while Christina continually prayed for the wellbeing of "her dear friend Abbot Geoffrey" (*LCM*, 193), often receiving visions that allowed her to watch after him. St. Alban's *Gesta*

indicates the narrator's perception of Christina, and this may be true if one is largely interested in how he stresses Christina's association with St. Albans.<sup>34</sup> I argue, however, that the narrator does much more than accentuate this connection. He also provides justification for Christina's powerful role in the community despite her being a woman, and does so by describing her or her actions as "manly" on multiple occasions throughout the text. In considering Christina as genderfluid, therefore, I look not only at how Christina performs gender, but also how she is performed by the narrator.

That the text is hagiographical also poses a challenge to intentionality. In *Gender Outlaw*, Bornstein shares that they "never did feel like a girl or woman; rather, it was my unshakable conviction that I was not a boy or a man."<sup>35</sup> Bornstein specifies that genderfluidity "is the ability to *freely and knowingly* become one or many of a limitless number of genders" and defines "trans" as referring to anyone "for whom the *conscious* management of their gender identity and/or expression takes up a significant part of their lives"<sup>36</sup> (emphasis mine). This stress on how one feels, on gender interiority in relation to gender expression, and on the knowing, conscious, intentional articulation of gender identity permeates transgender studies. But the *Life of Christina of Markyate* does not provide this focus—we are not told how Christina inwardly felt or thought about her gender, though some of her actions are suggestive of certain gender spaces. Modern theories of performativity and genderfluidity were, of course, not part of her vocabulary or conceptualization of her identity.<sup>37</sup> However, as Ruth Mazo Karras and Tom Linkinen note in their study of John/Eleanor Rykener as transgender, this does

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*Abbatum*, which details the lives and deeds of the monastery's leaders, records Abbot Geoffrey as a founder of Christina's priory of Markyate in 1145. Rodney M. Thomson, *Manuscripts from St. Albans Abbey, 1066-1235* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 22.

34. Koopmans, "Dining at Markyate," 144.

35. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 28-29.

36. Bornstein, 63, 83.

37. For these reasons, I am continuing to use "she/her" pronouns for Christina rather than non-gendered pronouns such as "they," "ze," or "hir." Not only would Christina almost certainly have used "she/her" given the vocabulary of her time and her identification as a nun, but pronoun choice is a personal decision that I am not comfortable making on Christina's behalf.

not mean that we cannot use modern gender terms “analytically about those medieval individuals about whom we have evidence to work with. If we must think of medieval people only in medieval terms there would be no analysis.”<sup>38</sup>

### Christina as Genderfluid

Christina first enters an alternative gender space as a secular virgin, referring to the period before she takes her official vows and enters the space of religious virginity.<sup>39</sup> Christina lived as secular virgin for about half of her life and her *Vita* is heavily concentrated on this period—two-thirds of the *Vita* relates her life before she takes her vows and one-third narrates her story up to her escape from her family and husband. It is from this gender space as secular virgin that Christina pushes most obviously against gender binaries by refusing to repeat the socially established actions that would place her as traditionally gendered according to Butler. Christina’s “interventions into . . . ritualistic repetition”<sup>40</sup> start young with a private vow of virginity and rapidly escalate once she reaches a marriageable age and her family and societal expectations push her to conform. She resists her marriage to Burthred, a young nobleman, with the declaration: “I wish to remain single, for I have made a vow of virginity,” to which she holds firm against attempts at flattery, persuasion, gifts, and threats.<sup>41</sup>

As noted by Sarah Salih and Samuel Fanous, this section of Christina’s narrative relies strongly on tropes of saints who rejected traditional marriage to pursue lives of virginity and dedication to Christ like Saint

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38. Ruth Mazo Karras and Tom Linkinen, “John/Eleanor Rykener Revisited,” in *Founding Feminisms in Medieval Studies: Essays in Honor of E. Jane Burns*, ed. Laine E. Doggett and Daniel E. O’Sullivan (Cambridge, MA: D. S. Brewer, 2016), 111–21, at 114.

39. Christina as religious virgin will be addressed in more detail later in this essay. Sarah Salih also briefly discusses Christina as a secular and religious virgin. Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 131.

40. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 186.

41. “Causam querentibus. malo respondit casta manere. nam et votum feci.” *LCM*, 45.

Alexis and virgin martyrs such as saints Cecilia and Agnes.<sup>42</sup> While there is often a tendency to dismiss tropes as mere participation in a tradition and therefore not worthy of more than passing notice, I think this fails to recognize that specific tropes were purposefully selected by holy persons and their hagiographers in the construction of their identities. Christina's and her narrator's blending of tropes with her life is an important part of the holy woman's gender performance. Appropriating particular tropes provides the means to break with societal norms and showcase Christina's strength and right to preserve her place as virgin.

In describing Christina's resistance to marriage, her narrator paints Christina as not a woman by contrasting Christina's secular virginity directly against female gender norms beyond the sexual. He explains how her family tries convincing Christina to marry through pointing out the rewards of upholding her gender role. Her friend Helisen is persuaded by Christina's parents to "soothe her [Christina's] ears by a continuous stream of flattery, so that it would arouse in her, by its very persistence, a desire to become the mistress of a house."<sup>43</sup> One can imagine the list of traditionally gendered acts included in Helisen's "continuous stream of flattery"—commanding servants, planning for meals, picking out fabrics for fancy dresses, raising children—all expected to appeal to Christina as a young noblewoman of marriageable age. Christina, however, shows no interest in these norms and neither does the narrator, whose statement that such "flattery" might arouse desire "by its very persistence" suggests the plan could only succeed by wearing down the listener rather than by offering any real temptations advanced by being mistress of a house. In the end Helisen herself also rejects this norm, entering the space of religious virginity by taking the veil to amend her "criminal behavior" against Christina.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 46-50; Fanous, "Christina and the Double Crown," 53-63. Also, saints' days added to the Saint Alban's Psalter while most likely in use by Christina include virgin martyrs who rejected traditional marriage such as saints Hilda and Juliana. Talbot, "Introduction," 24.

43. "Novissime quendam ipsius collateralem et individuum comitem Helisentem vocabulo seduxerunt. que virginis aures sedulo demulceret lenociniis. ut vel assiduitas confabulacionis huiusmodi suscitaret in audientis animo appetitum fastigii matronalis." *LCM*, 45.

44. *LCM*, 45.

The narrator builds on Christina's fluidity while listing reasons why her parents are so stubbornly insisting on her marriage:

Another reason was that Christina was conspicuous for such moral integrity, such comeliness and beauty, that all who knew her accounted her more lovable than all other woman. Furthermore, she was so intelligent, so prudent in affairs, so efficient in carrying out her plans, that if she had given her mind to worldly pursuits she could have enriched and ennobled not only herself and her family but also all her relatives. *To this was added the fact that her parents hoped she would have children who would be like her in character.* So keen were they on these advantages that they begrudged her a life of virginity.<sup>45</sup>

First, this passage emphasizes that Christina would make a good wife if she chose, as indicated by the praise of her feminine virtues ("comeliness and beauty" and a prudence in affairs that speaks well to her ability to manage a household). But Christina is more than a woman, and not only because she was accounted "more lovable than all other woman." In a study of medieval masculinity entitled *From Boys to Men*, Ruth Mazo Karras discusses the importance of lineage, and especially of patrilineage, in defining medieval manhood.<sup>46</sup> Both women and men were expected to reproduce, but the priority was the continuation of the male line. When a man became a monk, he not only rejected sexuality but also the continuation of his genealogy—an issue less commonly brought up for those ordained as nuns.<sup>47</sup> In this passage from Christina's *Life*, however, her parents resist her turn to virginity because they value her lineage.

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45. "In Christina iam tunc eluxit tanta morum honestas. tale decus. tanta gratia. [ut] omnibus qui nosset eam merito super reliquas feminas esset amabilior. Insuper inerata ei tantum acumen in sensu. talis providencia in gerendis. ea efficacia in deliberatis. ut si seculi rebus tota vellet incumbere crederetur non se tantum suamque familiam. sed reliquum genus suum posse divitiis et honoribus ampliari. Huc accessit quod sibi speraverunt ex illa nepotes proles matri non dissimiles. Et hos fructus intendentes vitam ei celibem inviderunt." *LCM*, 67-9. Italics mine.

46. Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 165-66.

47. Karras, 162.

Her continued virginity would not only be a loss because of the wealth and reputation she could bring her family through her marriage, but because it would disrupt her genealogy, preventing descendants “like her in character.” Christina here is an in-between—her positive characteristics are feminine, but the impending loss of them is masculinized.

A brief consideration of conception theory further illustrates the masculinizing potential of this passage. Medieval theories of conception, like the early Greek theories on which they were based, held conflicting views on the existence and role of female semen. Some argued that female seed played no role in producing children and some that it served to feed the male semen during reproduction, but no matter its perceived purpose female seed was considered inferior to its male counterpart.<sup>48</sup> Philosophers like Giles of Rome, drawing on Aristotle, saw female seed (or “menstruum”) as passive while male seed conveyed the “active formative virtue.”<sup>49</sup> Cases in which children resembled their mother resulted from menstruum “offer[ing] more resistance to the semen in one conception than in another.”<sup>50</sup> Christina’s parents’ hope that she will have children like her potentially masculinizes Christina by implying her seed will offer this resistance on multiple occasions, resulting in children like her rather than children like Burthred.

However, Christina’s power to challenge binaries as a secular virgin is most strongly established when placed in direct conflict with gender norms and hierarchies. The catalyst is Christina’s confrontation with Ralph, bishop of Durham and friend of Christina’s family. Spurred by the devil, Ralph lusts for Christina and solicits her for sex. She escapes through trickery, and Ralph, “eaten up with resentment,” arranges for Burthred to marry the girl as “the only way in which he could conceivably gain his revenge was by depriving Christina of her virginity, either

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48. Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 191.

49. M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception: A Study of the De formation corporis numani in utero* (London: Athlone Press, 1975), 70. For more on female seed and its role in reproduction according to classical and medieval philosophy, see pp. 67–94. Also see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 117–29.

50. Hewson, *Giles of Rome*, 70.

by himself or by someone else, for the preservation of which she did not hesitate to repulse even a bishop.”<sup>51</sup> The threat Christina poses by maintaining her virginity is continued when she spends the night talking with Burthred about chastity rather than submitting to him. When Burthred leaves the bedroom, his friends mock him and return him to her room on another night with instructions not to “lose his manliness. Either by force or entreaty he was to gain his end . . . all he had to mind was to act the man.”<sup>52</sup> Others in the community also find her virginity problematic. The prior Fredebert tells Christina: “submit yourself to the lawful embraces of the man to whom you have been legally joined in marriage,” and Christina’s mother “swore that she would not care who deflowered her daughter, provided that some way of deflowering her could be found.”<sup>53</sup>

To an extent, Christina participates in the virgin martyr tradition through her refusal of sex. Martyrs such as Agnes, Agatha, and Lucy reject those who would take their virginity and are subsequently sent to brothels for deflowering (where they are protected by Christ), tortured, and killed. Christina’s *Life*, however, shows an intensified focus on her pursuit of virginity as a threat to masculinity, which I suggest replaces the threat that Christianity offered in the earlier lives. Although their punishments are highly sexualized, Lucy, Agatha, and Agnes are not tortured for their refusal to submit to sex, but rather for their refusal to worship pagan gods. Agnes is even offered the option of becoming a virgin of Vesta—her Christianity is the problem, not her desire to remain a virgin.<sup>54</sup>

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51. “Tunc ille miser videns quia illulus esset ab adolescentula. contabuit dolore [ut nisi] contemptum ulcisceretur. nichili [pend]eret quantumcumque videbatur habere [po]tencie. Set nullo alio modo se ultum ir credidit quam ut vel per se vel [per] alium auferret Christine florem pudicicie. propter quam tutandam episcopum quoque spernere non dubitavit.” *LCM*, 43.

52. “ne infinitis ambagibus et candidis sermonibus fallentis effeminetur. Sed omnino seu prece seu vi voto suo pociatur . . . modo meminerit esse virum.” *LCM*, 51-53.

53. “[N]ichil restat nisi ut nostrum consilium sanamque doctrinam suscipias. et honestis amplexibus viri cui legitime desponsata fuisti collum tuum submittas.”; *LCM*, 73-5. “Denique iurabat quod non consideraret quis filiam suam corrumpere. <si> tantum aliquo casu corrumpi potuisset.” *LCM*, 61.

54. See Madeline H. Caviness, “Sado-erotic Spectacles, Breast Envy, and the

For those opposing Christina however, the threat she poses stems directly from her pursuit of virginity. By maintaining her secular virginity, unprotected by the vows and community of a religious virgin, Christina blatantly rejects her prescribed gender role as submissive woman.<sup>55</sup> This alternative performance threatens the masculinity of Ralph and Burthred by denying their gender dominance and penetrative roles. It also challenges what Butler calls “the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce and sustain discrete and polar genders” upheld by many in the Huntingdon community, and thus is met “with clearly punitive consequences.”<sup>56</sup> Her community takes on the role of what Bornstein terms “Gender Defenders”—those “who actively, or by knowing inaction, defend the status quo of the binary gender system, and thus perpetuat[e] the violence of male privilege and all its social extensions.”<sup>57</sup> Christina’s parents keep her locked up and abuse her, the local church authorities rule she is legally married against her objections; physically and socially, Christina is disciplined for “fail[ing] to do [her] gender right.”<sup>58</sup> Like the crowds who sent the virgin martyrs to the brothel, Christina’s community will not be satisfied until she has been penetrated and thus reclaimed as woman. Punishing Christina is not enough—her identity must be reconstructed into the “illusion of an abiding gendered self” who poses no threat to the communal repetition of gendered actions.<sup>59</sup> Her virginity becomes representative of her rejection of societal norms, of her denial of her own gender, and the hazard she presents to the gender of others. As long as Christina remains a virgin she is not a woman but a third, and as a third she gains power to challenge socially established gender binaries.

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Bodies of Martyrs,” in *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle, and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 83-124. Walter W. Skeat, ed. and trans., “Saint Agnes, Virgin,” in *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, Early English Text Society, v. 76 (London: N. Trübner, 1881), 171-87, at 177.

55. Religious virginity as a third space is discussed in more depth later in this paper.

56. Butler, *Gender Matters*, 178.

57. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 94.

58. Butler, *Gender Matters*, 178.

59. Butler, 179.

However, Christina's performing as secular virgin is not by itself enough to free her of the policing forces of societal gender roles maintained by her community. To escape, she briefly performs and is performed in a masculine third, which, layered on her secular virginity, grants her new roles and through them new power. After months of resisting consummation of her marriage to Burchred, Christina receives word from a hermit named Edwin that she has the support of the archbishop of Canterbury to uphold her vow of virginity, inviting her into the church-sanctioned third space of virginity denied her by Ralph, Fredebert, and other religious authorities in Huntingdon. Edwin offers to help her flee to a place of refuge, and Christina commands Edwin's servant to wait for her in a field at a specific date and time with a pair of horses.<sup>60</sup> The prearranged day arrives, and Christina, dressed in "masculine garb," meets the servant in the field.<sup>61</sup>

Christina literally dons masculinity for this scene by cross-dressing "in order to disguise herself as a man."<sup>62</sup> In so doing she participates in the trope of cross-dressing/transvestite saints/holy women seen in saints like Eugenia, an early Roman martyr who fled home as a man, became an abbot, and whose sex was not revealed until she stood trial after accusations of sleeping with a woman, and Euphrosyne, an early Christian saint who dressed as a monk to escape marriage and whose sex was only discovered upon her death.<sup>63</sup> Christina's cross-dressing is neither this

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60. *LCM*, 85-89.

61. "[V]estimentis virilibus." *LCM*, 91.

62. "[E]t eludens in sexum [virile vestita cap]pa talari exivit foras." *LCM*, 91.

63. Other cross-dressing saints include Hildegund of Schönau, a twelfth-century woman who lived disguised as a man named Joseph in a monastery (Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man*, 33); Pelagia, a converted dancing girl who lived a majority of her life as a male hermit known as Pelagius; and Saint Margarita-Pelagius and Marina/Marinus, two women who played the role of monks so well that they were successfully accused of impregnating women (Bullough, "Transvestites," 1384-85). For more on transvestite/cross-dressing saints, see Valerie R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996); 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 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 223-42; Vern L. Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 6 (May

dramatic nor this extended, but it is just as concerned with passing. “Passing,” states Bornstein, “is defined as the act of appearing in the world as a gender to which one does not belong, or as a gender to which one did not formerly belong.”<sup>64</sup> Passing “emphatically equals membership, and passing includes all the privileges of gender membership.”<sup>65</sup> Successful passing offers Christina the male privilege of unquestioned travel, allowing physical movement towards another gender space.

The performativity of her cross-dressing is emphasized not only by Christina’s donning male clothes, but also through her casting off of garments and objects representative of her repression. On her way to meet the servant with the horses, a sleeve of one of her male garments slips from beneath her cloak. When it is spotted by Christina’s sister Matilda, Christina instead hands her a “bombicinum” and her father’s keys, remarking “Sister dear, take it with you when you go back to the house for it is getting in my way. . . . And these too, sweetheart, so that if our father returns . . . he will not get angry because the keys are missing.”<sup>66</sup> Talbot translates “bombicinum” simply as “veil,” and Christina’s discarding the veil can be seen as a physical casting off of her marriage and its inherent restrictive feminine gender norms. But “bombicinum” also connotes a silken garment,<sup>67</sup> and Christina’s forsak-

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1974): 1381-94, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2777140>; Stephen 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, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 1-36, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/10244>; Sandra Lowerre, “To Rise Beyond Their Sex: Female Cross-Dressing Saints in Caxton’s *Vitas Patrum*,” in *Riddles, Knights and Cross-dressing Saints: Essays on Medieval English Language and Literature*, ed. Thomas Honegger, vol. 5, *Sammlung/ Collection Variations*, ed. Thomas Hunkeler, Sylvie Jeanneret, and Martin Rizek (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 55-94; Garber, *Vested Interests*.

64. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 160.

65. Bornstein, 163.

66. “Cara michi [so]ror accipe. regrediensque deferto do[mum] quoniam impedit me. Et baiulavit illi bombicinum clavesque patris: dicens. Et has pariter dulcis michi anima. ne si pater noster interim venerit. et in qualibet [ar]charum suarum videre quippiam affecta[ve]rit non inveniens claves ad man[um] moleste ferat.” *LCM*, 91.

67. Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, in their revised edition of Talbot’s translation, use this translation of “bombicinum.” *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, trans. C. H. Talbot, rev. ed. by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.

ing of the rich material along with the keys that signify her status as a noblewoman foreshadows her appropriation of the rough garments and routines of monastic life.<sup>68</sup> Her silky feminine clothes and her father's keys obstruct Christina's settling into a space of secular virginity, and discarding them is an important prelude to her subsequent masculine performance. This is also an example of Christina's gender identity materializing through Barad's "intra-action," both human and nonhuman. Christina's sister becomes unwitting liberator; Christina's veil and keys, which in other interfaces may offer shelter or access, become breached boundaries. Through these intra-actions, Christina embodies a different masculinity than she would if still carrying these objects as she flees.

Dressed in her masculine garb and prepared to escape, Christina grabs one of the horses and then

paused, covered with embarrassment. Why delay, fugitive? Why do you respect your feminine sex? Put on manly courage and mount the horse like a man. At this she put aside her fears and, jumping on the horse as if she were a youth and setting spurs to his flanks, she said to the servant: "Follow me at a distance: for I fear that if you ride with me and we are caught, they will kill you."<sup>69</sup>

Stephen Jaeger has described this scene as "swashbuckling," "romantic," and "superfluous," chalking it up to the dramatic sensibilities of the narrator and arguing that "it adds nothing to the story of Christina's sanctity, miracles and visions, nor to her close relations with Christ."<sup>70</sup> It may not add to her purity or miracles, but I argue that this occurrence is anything but "superfluous," and its significance can actually be

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68. For more on keys and early medieval women, see Stephanie Hollis and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "St. Albans and Women's Monasticism: Lives and the Foundations in Christina's World," in Fanous and Leyser, *Christina of Markyate*, 25-52, at 36.

69. "Quorum unum arripiens: rubore perfusa substituit. Quid fugitiva m[ora] is? Quid sexum feminei vereris? [Vi]rilem animum indue. et more viri [in] equum ascende. Dehinc ab [iecta pusil]lanimatate: viriliter super equum [saliens] atque calcariibus eius latera [pungens] famulo dixit. Sequere me a [tergo. timeo] ne si mecum equitaveris: de[prehensis] nobis tu moriaris." *LCM*, 93.

70. C. Stephen Jaeger, "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," in Fanous and Leyser, *Christina of Markyate*, 99-115, at 104.

found in its “swashbuckling and romantic” nature. The emphasis in this passage is on “manly courage,” which was an important masculine characteristic both in twelfth-century romance literature (think of the courageous knight)<sup>71</sup> and in the lives of early male saints and martyrs, such as the soldier saint Antony the Younger.<sup>72</sup> Early Christian women were sometimes described as having “become male” when they demonstrated courage generally associated with religious men.<sup>73</sup> The narrator has previously described Christina as lacking this courage, stating that she, “being suspicious, *became fearful of everything, as the habit of women is,*”<sup>74</sup> and at the beginning of this scene, Christina is briefly paralyzed by that same womanly fear. At this point, the author breaks from his narration to intra-act with Christina—“Put on manly courage and mount the horse like a man,” he commands, performing her into a masculine role. His choice of “induere,” which can also be translated as “dress oneself in,” emphasizes the performativity of the action. While she is at first “covered with embarrassment” as though she is cloaked in her “feminine sex,” she breaks this repetition by dressing herself as a man, not only in masculine garb but in masculine qualities. Once she has put on her courage, Christina is able to continue a masculine performance—she jumps on the horse and commands the servant to follow her, taking on the same leadership role she held towards the servant when she came up with the escape plan in the first place.

The significance and intention behind the narrator instructing Christina to “mount the horse like a man” may not be as straightforward as it first seems. It may be that he simply refers to her riding astride rather than sidesaddle. Comments by chroniclers Gerald of Wales and Odericus Vitalis both suggest women in the twelfth-century generally

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71. Karras, *From Boys to Men*, 60.

72. S. F. Tougher, “Images of Effeminate Men: The Case of Byzantine Eunuchs,” in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 89-100, at 95.

73. Margaret Miles, “Becoming Male: Women Martyrs and Ascetics,” in *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989), 53-77, at 55.

74. “Christina considerabat eorum clandestina conventicula. et nescio quid suspicata: sicut est feminae consuetudo metuebat omnia.” *LCM*, 68. Italics mine.

rode horseback either behind a man or to the side.<sup>75</sup> Other sources, however, suggest the sidesaddle was not common in England until Anne of Bohemia popularized it in the fourteenth century.<sup>76</sup> Medieval depictions of women on horseback often show them riding astride, particularly if riding at high speeds such as while hunting.<sup>77</sup> As the *Life* provides no indication of whether Christina rides astride or sidesaddle or even by cart when she travels elsewhere, it is difficult to say if physically riding “like a man” would have been unusual for Christina, thus necessitating the narrator’s direct instructions.<sup>78</sup>

Regardless, the physicality of mounting and racing away on horseback carries Christina further from her gender role as a woman whom men desire to mount. Talbot’s translation states that Christina mounts her horse “as if she were a youth,” but “viriliter” can also mean “manfully” or “with manly vigor,” referring back to the concept of “manly courage.” As Jacqueline Murray has noted, “By demonstrating his equestrian skills and his ability to control and dominate a powerful horse a man was also, by extension, exhibiting his military prowess and his ability to control and rule over men.”<sup>79</sup> Her masculine garb in itself is not enough to “garner a desired gender attribution from others”—to be perceived as male, she must exhibit the correct behavioral cues in order to pass.<sup>80</sup>

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75. Richard Almond, “The Way the Ladies Ride,” *History Today* 62, no. 2 (February 2012): 36-39, at 36-37, <https://www.historytoday.com/richard-almond/way-ladies-ride>.

76. Anne Hyland, *The Horse in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 62.

77. “‘Upon an ambler esily she sat:’ Visual Evidence for Medieval Women Riding Astride,” *Medieval & Renaissance Material Culture*, <http://www.larsdatter.com/women-horseback.htm>; Almond, “The Way the Ladies Ride,” 37.

78. In fact, the only other mention of riding a horse in the *Life* occurs when Godescalc of Caddington and his wife are asked by Roger to escort Christina to visit the Archbishop of York at Redbourn. Godescalc and his wife ride one horse, which would suggest the wife rides pillion, but no mention is made of whether she rides to the side. *LCM*, 111-13.

79. Jacqueline Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life: Sexual Prowess, the Battle for Chastity, and Monastic Identity,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), 24-42, at 31.

80. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 31-32. Bornstein defines “behavioral cues” as

Even more than her dressing like a man, Christina's riding the horse represents her performative use of masculinity to work towards a gender space of control and power over the masculine binary—a gender space where she can exist as secular virgin without continual opposition.

Once Christina arrives at Flamstead where she will shelter with the anchoress Alfwen, she ceases her performance of masculinity, fluidly returning to secular virginity by trading her masculine garb for a rough habit and concealing herself in a small dark chamber.<sup>81</sup> While cross-dressing saints like Eugenia and Euphrosyne lived as monks for years, finding the masculine monastic space safer to perform than that of secular or even religious virgin, Christina does not pursue that form of protection. Though passing offers gender membership, secret passing comes with a price. Bornstein notes that “Transgender people who choose or opt for a stealth life path (not revealing any previous gender or transition) are not allowed any history beyond their current gender. Denied the opportunity to speak our stories, stealth trans people are denied the joy of our histories. . . . Discouraged from examining our past, trans people are discouraged from growth.”<sup>82</sup> Extended stealth passing for Christina would deny her future association with her family or any who knew her gender history. It would inhibit her freedom to move among gender spaces. This reminds us of the balance struck in Christina's *Life* between reality and trope. Tropes offer an apparatus with which saintly persons and their hagiographers intra-act, but as Barad clarifies, “The particular configuration that an apparatus takes is not an arbitrary construction of ‘our’ choosing. . . . ‘Humans’ do not simply assemble different apparatuses for satisfying particular knowledge projects but are themselves specific local parts of the world's ongoing reconfiguring.”<sup>83</sup> Christina, as a real person, cannot become an alternative gender through a relationship with any trope apparatus she or her narrator desires—she is limited to intra-action with those located within

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including “manners, decorum, protocol, and deportment.” They are one means of gender expression, which is “how we garner a desired gender attribution from others.”

81. *LCM*, 93.

82. Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw*, 163.

83. Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 146.

the reality of her experiences. She thus does not subsume the masculine so much as use the space as a stepping stone into her own gender identity.

Several years later, Christina reenters a masculine space as a virgin engaged in a masculinized battle for chastity. After the death of her protector, Roger of Markeyate, Christina finds herself facing sexual temptation from a monk with whom she has taken refuge. Spurred by the devil, whom the narrator refers to as “the enemy of chastity,”<sup>84</sup> this cleric tries to seduce Christina by flirting with her, begging her, and appearing to her naked.<sup>85</sup> Christina is extremely attracted to the cleric, feeling “so inwardly inflamed that she thought the clothes which clung to her body might be set on fire.”<sup>86</sup> Yet, Christina firmly resists the cleric’s advances, and the narrator remarks that

Whence he [the cleric] sometimes said that she was more like a man than a woman, though she, with her more masculine qualities, might more justifiably have called him a woman. Would you like to know how manfully she behaved in so imminent a danger? She violently resisted the desires of her flesh, lest her own member should become the agents of wickedness against her.<sup>87</sup>

He then continues to describe Christina’s efforts at resistance, including fasting, going without sleep, scourging herself, and praying ceaselessly to God. Finally John the Evangelist, St. Benedict, and Mary Magdalen lose patience with the cleric and appear in a dream to tell him to control himself, but even though Christina grants him forgiveness when he asks, the holy woman is still plagued by temptation. She finds no relief until Christ comes to her as a child and allows her to carry him:

And with immeasurable delight she held Him at one moment to her virginal breast, at another she felt His presence within her even

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84. *LCM*, 115. “diabolus castitatis inimicus.”

85. *LCM*, 115-17.

86. “ut de se p[uta]ret incendi posse vestimenta c[orpori] suo adherencia.” *LCM*, 117.

87. “Unde nonnunquam virum illam non feminam esse dicebat quem virago virtute virili predita recte effeminatum appellare poterat. Vis scire quam viriliter ipsa se continuerit in tam grandi periculo? Violenter res[pu]ebat desideria sue carnis. ne propria mem[bra] exhiberet adversum se arma iniquitatis.” *LCM*, 115.

through the barrier of her flesh. Who shall describe the abounding sweetness with which the servant was filled by this condescension of her creator? From that moment the fire of lust was so completely extinguished that never afterwards could it be revived.<sup>88</sup>

Medieval relationships between male and female virginity and chastity were intensely complicated. “Virginity” and “chastity” were often used interchangeably, but were also at times separately defined. Monastic men were often considered to be pursuing “chastity”—a state of purity that needed to be earned through continual struggle—rather than “virginity.” The masculine fight for chastity was frequently expressed in terms of battle or violence, such as Hugh of Lincoln’s description of the devil directing “all the ancient weapons of his infernal armoury” and shooting bolts from a crossbow to evoke Hugh’s “carnal lusts.”<sup>89</sup> Such battles were famously fought by the “desert fathers”—ascetic monks such as Paul the Hermit, St. Antony, and Hilarion who spent years in the desert struggling with the devil and striving successfully to control their lust.<sup>90</sup> But a chaste man was not necessarily virginal. As John Arnold clarifies, while chastity entailed a struggle of willpower and self-control, “male virginity is a different state: lust made absent. . . . This is the state for only a blessed few, those who have lost all desire” through an act of divine intervention.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, male virginity was often achieved only after an inner battle for chastity because, as Karras notes, “there was little glory in never having felt [these desires] in the first place.”<sup>92</sup>

I do not wish to suggest absolute genderings of virginity and chastity.

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88. “Et inestimabili de[lectacione] nunc et virginali illum in suo tenebat sinu. nunc intra se immo per ipsam cratam pectoris [apprehen]debat intuitu. Quis eruc[tabit memo]riam abundancie suavitatis qua [leta]batur mancipium ex hac dignacio[ne] sui conditoris? Ex tunc ille lib[idin]is ardor ita extinctus defecit. quod nun[quam] postea reviviscere potuit.” *LCM*, 119.

89. Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life,” 36.

90. Fanous, “Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown,” 63–68.

91. John Arnold, “The Labour of Continence: Masculinity and Clerical Virginity,” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 102–18, at 111.

92. Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 39.

Women could also fight interior battles for chastity (Margery Kempe being a prime later example). However, they were less frequently portrayed as doing so than men.<sup>93</sup> The virgin martyrs, for example, are rarely depicted as experiencing lust for their suitors. They seek to preserve their chastity against exterior threats and tortures rather than against their own desires, which they do not seem to experience. Women who did struggle against and overcome their lust were sometimes called “viragos” or manly women.<sup>94</sup> Since women were thought less capable of controlling their lust than men, those who triumphed in these inner conflicts could be seen as superior to men who fought similar battles and possibly as more praiseworthy than those who experienced virginity without temptation.<sup>95</sup>

Christina’s inner struggle to maintain her chastity against her lust for the monk has been proactively set in contrast to the holy woman’s night-long chat with Burthred soon after their wedding. During their conversation, Christina tells the story of the virgin martyr Saint Cecilia, who successfully persuaded her husband Valerian to live a sexless marriage.<sup>96</sup> She then asks Burthred to live chastely with her until they can pursue a religious life in a monastery and offers to act “ostensibly as husband and wife” until that time so his “friends may not reproach you with being rejected by me.”<sup>97</sup> In her study of chaste marriage, Dyan Elliot suggests “women [in particular] seem to have availed themselves of this model as a means of attaining autonomy in marriage through chastity,” and this freedom from the control marriage places over her is Christina’s goal.<sup>98</sup> She seeks to usurp the marriage space as one in which

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93. Karras, 38.

94. Karras, 42. For more on *viragos* see Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 5, 26-29.

95. Karras, “The Sexuality of Chastity,” 39, 42.

96. *LCM*, 51.

97. “Non pudeat te repudia[ri. sci]licet ne tui concives impropere[n]t tibi [quasi] a me repudiato vilter ingrediar [in do]mum tuam. et cohobitemus in ea ali[quan]do tempore. specietenus quidem con[iuges] <.> in conspectu Domini continentes.” *LCM*, 51.

98. Dyan Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 11.

she can continue her secular virginity and use as a bridge to a space of religious virginity.<sup>99</sup> Her only hope of achieving this with the help of Burthred is by convincing him to fight his own battle of chastity, to encourage his intra-action with the story of Saint Cecilia, and her speech shows sensitivity to the challenges involved. She asks him not to be insulted that she has “declined your embraces,” offers to fake marriage so he will not be mocked, and encourages chastity but never virginity—it is possible that Burthred, as a man with no monastic intentions, is not a virgin.<sup>100</sup> This all acknowledges the interior battles of wounded pride and unsatisfied lust Burthred may fight if choosing chastity. In contrast, Christina herself does not participate in an interior struggle of chastity as she feels no lust for Burthred. She seeks to preserve her virginity against outside forces rather than inner temptation.

Returning to the cleric, Christina’s confrontation with him differs from her conflict with Burthred because Christina now directly battles lust, seeking inner chastity rather than preservation of her virginity against exterior forces. Through her struggle, she appropriates a masculinized form of chastity which overlaps her secular virginity. This

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99. Various *vitae* tell the stories of a handful of women who successfully appropriate the marriage space to preserve their space as virgins. As Elliot points out in *Spiritual Marriage*, one of the key elements in their ability to do so is the complicity of their husbands, who “[have] not taken the more usual route of refusal to marry . . . instead, [they have] followed a more typically female pattern of rebellion under the influence of [their] wive[s]” (267). Christina does not find such complicity in Burthred and so cannot appropriate the marriage space. It is interesting to compare Christina’s attempt at chaste marriage with the remarkably successful chaste marriage of Dauphine of Puimichel and Elzear of Sabran. Dauphine, committed to virginity from a young age, persuades her husband, Elzear, to remain chaste through telling him stories of saints’ lives, through her illness, and through his love for her. After three years of marriage, Elzear has a mystical experience of his own which leaves him free of lust, and the two live in chaste marriage for almost twenty-five years. Both undergo similar challenges as Christina and Burthred began to face (and would likely have continued to face), such as familial interventions and trickery, social pressures for heirs, and the difficulty of keeping a secretly chaste life while living openly as married. But both overcome these trials through mutual dedication to God and each other, which allows them to appropriate their marriage space as safe haven for their virgin gender roles. For more on Dauphine and Elzear, see Elliot, *Spiritual Marriage*, 283–95.

100. *LCM*, 51.

female masculinity provides what Halberstam calls “a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity.”<sup>101</sup> We see this when the sexually-frustrated cleric responds to Christina’s reproaches by stating that Christina is “more like a man than a woman.” The narrator’s quippy retort that Christina “might more justifiably have called him [the cleric] a woman” suggests the cleric’s assertion is disparaging rather than complimentary. While the narrator praises Christina for her masculine qualities, the cleric criticizes her nonconformance to sexual submissiveness in a manner similar to the resistance she experiences from Ralph, the Bishop of Durham, Burthred, and her family. He resents her for it, but the cleric sees Christina as performatively masculine, constructing masculinity as an ability to control oneself even in the face of extreme temptation. The cleric himself fails to perform this masculinized chastity—egged on by the devil, he is attracted specifically to Christina, fails to fight this temptation due to his effeminate inability to control his lust, and repents only when threatened.

Christina’s struggle is more intense than the cleric’s and better adheres to the monastic ideal that “[t]rue chastity should not come too easily or naturally.”<sup>102</sup> An example lies in the appearance of either the cleric or a devil to Christina “in the form of an enormous wild, ugly, furry bear.”<sup>103</sup> Medieval bestiaries described bears as coupling face to face, “embracing one another as men and women do. Pleasure lasts longer for them than for any other species and is accompanied by caresses and playfulness similar to those of two lovers.”<sup>104</sup> This belief led clerics and theologians to associate bears with lust, lewdness, and abnormal sexual behavior.<sup>105</sup> Bears were also depicted in Celtic and Germanic mythology and in some

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101. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1.

102. Murray, “Masculinizing Religious Life,” 35.

103. “[A]pparuit ambulans ante [se in specie] cuiusdam inmanis uris: val[de ferocis] atque deformiter hispidi.” *LCM*, 117. Missing text makes it unclear whether the bear is the cleric (as suggested by Talbot, 117) or a devil (as suggested by Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser in their revised edition of Talbot’s translation, 93n47).

104. From an anonymous thirteenth-century Latin bestiary, quoted in Michel Pastoureau, *The Bear: History of a Fallen King*, trans. George Holloch (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 68.

105. Pastoureau, *The Bear*, 68.

twelfth-century romances as a particular threat to women, whom they would sometimes seduce and sometimes abduct and rape.<sup>106</sup> The appearance of the bear dehumanizes the face of temptation—this is no longer Christina’s struggle against attraction to one man, but against lust as sin itself. This internalization continues when, after the cleric is cured of his lust by the saints and Christina retreats back to the “pleasant” wilderness of the hermitage at Markyate, she still faces the “stings” of lust.<sup>107</sup> For Christina, the fight against lust is long and interior, but it is one she faces “manfully” and “violently.” This language, reminiscent of the battle diction used to describe the fights of the desert monks, performs Christina as a masculine soldier locked in a struggle against temptation.

Christina is not fully masculinized, however, because her battle ends in a feminized manner and with a feminine result. Her sexual torment is assuaged by Christ, who both allows her to hold him as a child “to her virginal breast” and is felt within her “even through the barrier of her flesh.” This culminates in the complete removal of lust so that “never afterwards could it be revived.” If, as Karras suggests, those who achieved this complete removal of temptation “might be considered as no longer men . . . [as] no longer quite human . . . because the flesh mattered not at all to them,”<sup>108</sup> then Christina is performed by Christ and the narrator into a third space that transcends gender. Alternatively, one could argue, Christina has entered a space of male virginity as defined by Arnold as the state for “those who have lost all desire and have transcended human pleasure.”<sup>109</sup> Yet the act of divine intervention that ends Christina’s masculinized battle against lust clearly maintains her within a feminine space by evoking traditional women’s roles. Christina is performed as a mother cradling Christ and as a maiden penetrated “through the barrier of her flesh,” her lust permanently cured through a metaphysical version of the very act she struggled to avoid.<sup>110</sup> As masculinized virgin, Christina is

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106. For examples, see Pastoureau, 71–76.

107. “[R]edit ad felicem ab ipsa celi regina datum sibi solitudinis locum . . . Cuius stimulos invita pertulit et in solitudine.” *LCM*, 117–19.

108. Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe*, 42.

109. Arnold, “The Labour of Contenance,” 111.

110. For an interpretation of this vision as “mother-mystical,” see Alexandra Locking, “‘And they shall be two in one flesh’: The Battle over the Virgin’s Body in

genderfluid; her gender identity is, as Vaccaro describes transgender in relation to fiber, neither “a condition of interiority or exteriority. Rather, it is the connective tissue between these dimensions.”<sup>111</sup>

Christ’s presence within Christina “even through the barrier of her flesh” is also a moment of performative disidentification. “To disidentify,” explains José Esteban Muñoz, “is to read oneself and one’s own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject.”<sup>112</sup> Disidentification is a performative strategy the “minority subject” adopts to survive the challenges and punishments they face by failing to conform to the normative ideals of the majority.<sup>113</sup> Christina as a secular virgin is a “minority subject” seeking to negotiate the majoritarian need to punish her for not conforming to the gender binary that would see her as wife and mother. As a virgin, she is not culturally coded to identify with penetration—it represents loss of control and violence suffered at the hands of Burthred, Ralph, or the lustful cleric. In her interaction with Christ, however, Christina disidentifies with penetration as a moment in which she gains freedom and power to uphold her virginity. But this is not the only act of performative disidentification that has provided authority; wearing masculine clothes, donning masculine courage, mounting a horse, and fighting lust are all moments with which Christina as virgin is not culturally coded to identify, and yet she reads herself (or is read into) each of them as she negotiates her gender space.

The space requiring the most negotiation for Christina is religious virginity, which she enters by taking her vows at the start of the final third of her *Vita*. As a “religious” virgin, Christina is meant to take part in an “institutional virginity,” which, as noted by Salih, “disavows the contestation of masculine authority and binary gender of the virgin martyr legends.”<sup>114</sup> The space fosters a community that challenges the gen-

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*The Life of Christina of Markyate*, *Medieval Feminist Forum* 50, no.2 (2015): 64–84, at 80–81, <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.2013>.

111. Vaccaro, “Felt Matters,” 93.

112. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

113. Muñoz, 4.

114. Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 133, 164.

der binary but still operates within a set of guidelines—the *Life* speaks to this when it describes how Christina was “encouraged to *put herself under obedience* and to confirm her vow by solemn consecration.”<sup>115</sup> The veiling ceremony which accompanies a nun’s vows is performative, providing her a means to halt or avoid participation in the traditional gender binary.<sup>116</sup> Yet the taking of the veil and vows also denies religious virgins the freedom and genderfluidity of secular virginity. It “fixes the meaning of virginity by specifying it to be that of a nun,”<sup>117</sup> which is a third space created and regulated by the church, in similar manner to the marriage veil and vows constricting the virgin to the gender role of “wife.”

As a religious virgin, Christina does not have the same resistance to policing forces that she has as a secular virgin. Christina recognizes this and hesitates to take official vows because she wants to seek a hidden refuge “somewhere off the beaten track”<sup>118</sup> where she could, presumably, live in devoted virginity as she sees fit. To take the veil would place her within a boundary-defined space, which is something she sought to escape when she handed the veil to her sister as she fled her marriage. While she eventually consents to taking her vows at the pleading of her friend Abbot Geoffrey, she consistently resists gendering as a virgin nun.

This resistance actually begins before Christina’s official vows. Thinking about her consecration and concerned about the unchaste thoughts she experienced during her battle with lust, Christina prays to Mary for assistance in calming her doubts. In response, a group of angels confirms Christina as a virgin of Christ, placing on her head a crown “whiter than snow and brighter than the sun.”<sup>119</sup> This scene first helps

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115. “[U]t collum iugo subderet et animi votum sacraeionis dignitate firmaret.” Italics mine. *LCM*, 147.

116. For more on the performative nature of the veiling ceremony, see Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 132–33.

117. Salih, 133.

118. “[I]ncertum habens si maneret in loco utpote que remotas olim disposuerat petere terras si forte civitas incognita latebras alicubi pro Christo fovere potuisset.” *LCM*, 147.

119. “Erat quippe sicut ipsa asseruit. cuius species candore nivem. splendore solem transcenderet. cuius forma describe. cuius material sciri nequiret.” *LCM*, 129.

Christina resist the institutional power of religious virginity, since her eventual consecration by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, is only an echo of that first performed by Christ. Christina's authority comes from the Lord, not the Church. Second, the scene empowers Christina through a brief moment of cross-dressing—the narrator describes her crown as hung from the back with “two white fillets” that reach to her waist “like those of a bishop's mitre.”<sup>120</sup> This paints an image strikingly different from the crown-topped veils often seen on nuns, saints, and the Virgin in paintings and manuscript illustrations.<sup>121</sup> Crowned like a bishop, Christina receives masculine authority authenticated by Christ and free from the limitations of stealth passing. It indicates that even as a religious virgin Christina can move between and challenge masculine and feminine thirds and binaries.

As her cross-dressing is echoed in her religious virginity, so is Christina's performance of manly courage. One Sunday before Matins, the devil attempts to frighten the holy woman by appearing to her without his head. The appearance of the devil, especially in his headless state, frightens the nuns who are with Christina: “At this sight (for women are timid creatures), they [the nuns] were terrified and all of them fell on their faces at the feet of their mistress. . . . At the sight of this monster the handmaid of Christ was somewhat afraid, but, taking her courage in her hands, she turned to the Lord and, uttering prayers, thrust out that monstrous phantom.”<sup>122</sup> In this passage, all of the women, includ-

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120. “A parte posteriori pendebant albe due tanquam vitte instar episcopalis mitre. descendentes usque ad renes eius.” *LCM*, 129.

121. For example, an unidentified virgin martyr wears a shoulder-length veil under a gold crown in an illustration from an early fourteenth century breviary. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Lat. Liturgy, d. 42, roll e.6, fol. 044r, “The Chestery Abbey Breviary,” <http://bodley30.bodley.ox.ac.uk:8180/luna/servlet/detail/ODLodl-1-1-46048-120680:Breviary-of-Chertsey-Abbey,-fragmen>. In a thirteenth century English book of hours, an historiated initial depicts the Virgin in a long white veil and golden crown. London, British Library, MS Egerton 1151, fol. 7, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=4170>.

122. “Quo perviso perterrite sicut se puellaris habet timor. omnes prone circa pedes domine consternantur. . . . Quo monstro conspecto ancilla Christi quantum perterrita. sed concepto roborata spiritu. convertit se ad Dominum. fuisque precibus

ing Christina, feel fear, but Christina is the only one not paralyzed by it. She “takes her courage in her hands” and thrusts out the devil with the same authority that had allowed her to take a leading role in her escape once she has “put on manly courage.” This time, however, the courage is not described as “manly,” but as belonging to Christina. It is her courage—the other women present do not possess this same courage and must seek protection from the holy woman. Halberstam has noted the importance “when thinking about gender variations such as male femininity and female masculinity [of] not simply. . . [creating] another binary in which masculinity always signifies power; in alternative models of gender variation, female masculinity is not simply the opposite of female femininity, nor is it a female version of male masculinity.”<sup>123</sup> In this scene, Christina’s courage is not masculinized and her fear is not feminized. She performs female masculinity that does not specifically place power with male or female, but within her own alternative space. Rather than in-between, Christina is “elsewhere,” language Vaccaro uses in order to “generate another landscape . . . in which transgender is legible beyond the limitations of identity and the discrete boundaries of the body.”<sup>124</sup> “In between” retains focus on the binary, while “elsewhere” allows for further gender identities that do something different than move to/from feminine and masculine.<sup>125</sup>

Christina also retains her genderfluidity in resistance to the institutional limitations of religious virginity by physically and metaphorically inhabiting male spaces. The most important of these is the hermitage at Markyate, which Christina refuses to leave even when offered positions as a mother superior at monasteries in York, Marcigny, and Fontevrault.<sup>126</sup> The narrator attributes Christina’s desire to remain at Markyate to her devotion to St. Alban, to Geoffrey, and to Roger, but another likely motivator is her inheritance of the hermitage. Before his death,

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fantasticum illud monstrum eiecit.” *LCM*, 179.

123. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 29.

124. Vaccaro, “Felt Matters,” 93.

125. As Vaccaro also notes, this language is not meant to disparage transgender or transsexual feelings or experiences that do transition to/from male/female, but rather to generate discussion of further gender identities. Vaccaro, 93.

126. *LCM*, 127.

Roger chose Christina as his successor.<sup>127</sup> At first this worries Christina, but her right to the space is confirmed when the Virgin declares “She certainly shall have it” in response to Christina’s request for “that place to dwell in.”<sup>128</sup> While this does not translate to actual ownership of the land, it nonetheless mirrors the inheritance of property by male heirs.<sup>129</sup> As Roger’s successor, Christina holds masculinized power at Markyate that is authenticated by the Virgin Mary, confirming her authority more profoundly than if she was installed by the church at another religious establishment.

Metaphorically, Christina inhabits male space through a pair of rather unusual visions. The first of these visions is experienced by Abbot Geoffrey as he is lying awake in his bed one night:

As he turned his eyes this way and that, he saw clearly (for it was no dream), he saw clearly, I say, the handmaid of Christ near his head like one anxious to see how he bore himself towards God in his innermost thoughts: he saw her but could not speak with her. However, filled with surprise and joy, he spent the rest of the night with profit.<sup>130</sup>

The next morning, he sends a nun down to tell Christina about his vision. Christina, however, already knows—she had dreamed about Geoffrey’s vision the night before.<sup>131</sup> The second vision is experienced

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127. *LCM*, 109.

128. “[Et dixit]: utinam detur michi locus [iste ad habitandum]. Respondit imperatrix: [vere] dabitur et si plus vellet [illi] ovancius daretur.” *LCM*, 111.

129. Karras notes in *From Boys to Men* that “The inheritance of land marked a big step toward mature manhood” (160).

130. “Circumducens itaque oculorum orbis vidit manifeste. neque enim somnium erat. vidit inquam eandem ancillam Christi. suo assistentem capiti similem sollicitate qualiter se erga [Deum] in suis haberet secretis: vidit [illam] inter notas sed verbum cum illa nullum conferre poterat. Stupore tamen perfusus et gaudio. noctem reliquam magnum habuit emolumentam.” *LCM*, 153.

131. Christina hastily stops the nun (Lettice) and asks her own sister Margaret to tell her what Christina had said about “that dream” (illo somnio) the night before. Margaret replies: You said for certain that last night at such a place and hour his daughter had been to see him . . . And you added that if such a thing had happened in the time of blessed Gregory he would have preserved it for posterity, even though

by Simon of Bermondsey, a monk who greatly respects Christina but has been disturbed by rumors that Christina and Geoffrey are having inappropriate relations with each other. Simon prays to God for the truth, and God

therefore wished to put an end to his troubles and to show him [Simon], as a lover of the truth, the true state of affairs; and so one day whilst the same venerable man Simon was at the altar celebrating Mass, mindful of his prayer, he saw, with surprise, Christina standing near the altar. He was astonished at this for the virgin could not have come out of the cell and it was hardly possible that any woman would be allowed to approach the altar. Not without amazement he awaited the issue. Then she said: "Thou mayest be sure that my flesh is free from corruption." And when she had said this she vanished.<sup>132</sup>

These visions are significant and unusual in a number of ways. First, even though they are visions and Christina does not actually move from her cell on either occasion, they are suggestive of translocation and bilocation—miracles generally associated with male saints throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>133</sup> Second, they grant Christina access to male spaces

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it was a small thing. I said it was not small but something marvelous and worthy to be remembered by those who come after us.' On hearing this the aforementioned Lettice was greatly edified and glorified God in His saints: 'This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes. "Inquid pro certo <h>ac nocte. tali loco et hora. ad eum visendum sua venerit puella. . . . Et adiunxit. quod si tale quid in tempore beati Gregorii accidisset: mandasset illud memorie. quamvis res parva sit et memoria parum digna. Respondique non parum quid esse. sed mirabile: posterisque memorabile. Audiens hec prefata Leticia. edificata plurimum Deum glorificavit in sanctis: A Domino factum est istud et est mirabile in oculis nostris." *LCM*, 155.

132. "Volens itaque Deus et ipsius labori finem imponere et veritatis amico quod verum erate pandere. quadam die dum idem vir venerandus Simon altari astans missam celebraret sue postulacionis non immemor. mirum dictu ipsam Cristinam videt altario consistere. Obstupefactus in hoc: neque enim virgo cellam egredi. sed nec [ad] altare illud mulier quelibet facile [vale]bat admitti: non multa sine admiratione rei prestolabatur exitum. Cum illa. Scias inquid carnem meam omnis corrupcionis immunem. Et hiis dictis evanuit." *LCM*, 177.

133. Emma Pettit, "Holiness and Masculinity in Aldhelm's *Opus Geminatum De Virginitate*," in Cullum and Lewis, *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, 8–20,

which she cannot physically enter. Geoffrey and Simon are startled to see Christina because Christina, *as a woman*, cannot possibly be in Geoffrey's bedchamber in the middle of the night or standing by the altar in Simon's church.<sup>134</sup> But the wakeful nature of these visions creates the illusion, however brief, that Christina has entered a distinctly male setting, and it is from here that she performatively demonstrates her power as a visionary and confirms her virginity. These two visions thus grant her a legitimate presence in the male space that shapes Christina as an "elsewhere" gender identity and allows her to resist the policing binaries of gendered spaces and religious virginity.

Christina's genderfluidity reflects the transitional religious culture of the early twelfth century. Christina balances between the secular virginity and masculinity of early virgin saints and the more institutionalized, feminized world of the religious virgin who faced a growing enclosure movement.<sup>135</sup> The real events of her life, particularly those concerning her struggle to leave her marriage and family, lend themselves to dramatic emphasis on her performative gender more easily than later lives of holy women who grew up within a space of institutional virginity. Salih argues that Christina "fails" monastic virginity, creating "chaos and abjection" through her years of living in a cell unregulated

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at 14.

134. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Gender, Celibacy, and Proscriptions of Sacred Space: Symbol and Practice," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 185-206. The medieval church was seen as a "symbolic code" or model that was "imbued with divine order and harmony." Schulenburg, "Sacred Space," 186. It was vital to keep certain spaces sacred, which generally meant denying anyone access except for members of the male clergy. The altar, as noted by Simon's shock, was one such place women could not go.

135. While enclosure did not peak until Pope Boniface VIII's *Periculoso* decree in 1298, measures to limit monastic women's exposure to the temptations of the outside world started much earlier than that. An example is Sopwell Priory, a fully enclosed nunnery close to St. Albans that was founded by Geoffrey in 1140, just five years before Geoffrey founded Christina's own priory at Markyate. Hollis and Wogan-Browne, "St Albans and Women's Monasticism," 25. The Markyate priory was not enclosed, and there is some evidence to suggest that some of the monks at St. Albans, possibly after Geoffrey's death, viewed the open nature of Markyate as problematic. Koopmans, "Conclusion of Christina of Markyate's *Vita*," 695.

by “monastic discipline” before taking the veil.<sup>136</sup> I contend that Christina is a space not of chaos but of negotiation. She performs and is performed in alternative genders that break the repetition and often the policing functions of binaries and even other thirds. Moving between alternative gender roles provides Christina a space of empowerment and negotiation, a space where she can, if not escape binaries, then question them, stretch them, play with them. The multiplicity and fluidity of her gender performances, rather than focusing on Christina just as virgin, just as chaste, just as nun, recalls Halberstam’s statement that “identity might best be described as a process with multiple sites for becoming and being.”<sup>137</sup> To describe Christina as one gender would be misleading. She is elsewhere, she is all and none.

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136. Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 132-33, 165.

137. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 21.