

Subaltern Saints: Medieval Iberian Hagiography in Dialogue with Latin American *Testimonio*

By

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### Abstract

This dissertation rereads five thirteenth-century Spanish hagiographic poems in the light of modern subaltern studies: the anonymous *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca*, and Gonzalo de Berceo's *Martirio de San Lorenzo*, *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla*, *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos*, and *Vida de Santa Oria*. Observing the numerous similarities between hagiographic writing and twentieth-century Latin American activism literature known as *testimonio*—the innocent and suffering victim, the elite facilitator of the narrative, the illiterate speaker, and the sense of urgency caused by oppression and injustice—the project concludes that the invention and promotion of martyrs and saints provided a crucial space for Christianity to constitute and maintain its power and identity while at the same time providing a space for diverse, marginalized individuals to find expression and influence in their societies. In hagiography, as in *testimonio*, powerful writers seek legitimacy within their communities by representing, imitating, conveying, facilitating, or portraying voices in pain, exploiting the heroism of suffering and the ideal of administering to others in need. In this way, the politics of suffering unifies the discourses of both hagiography and *testimonio* as multivalent interests and variant powers cohabitate not merely to entertain or instruct, but to motivate change in society.

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## Introduction

Shortly before his death in 1284, Alfonso X, king of Castile and León,<sup>1</sup> began work on an impressive funerary display for his parents Fernando III and Beatriz in Sevilla, where the Great Mosque had been rededicated as a cathedral after Fernando conquered the city in 1248 (Dodds 199). Though an earthquake destroyed the majority of this homage in 1365, contemporary descriptions indicate an underlying Christian imperialist discourse there. At the focal point of the display near their tombs sat enthroned life-size sculptures of the three monarchs below an interpretation of the Virgin Mary and her Son all adorned in colorful garments and jewels. An inscription on Fernando's casket broadcasted his and his son's expansionist project in Latin, Castilian, Hebrew, and Arabic as he "who conquered all of Spain." The ornamented piers near the tombs told the story of St. Helena, the Christian mother of Constantine, who, according to tradition, inspired her son to deal mercifully with those of her faith and played a crucial role in his conversion, connecting Fernando and the first Christian emperor of Rome together.<sup>2</sup>

We are accustomed to thinking of rulers like those in Christian Iberia as operating with enormous power and oftentimes oppression, but both the Christianity before Constantine and the Castile prior to Fernando III were once weak and oppressed themselves, hardly worth noticing for the world powers of their time. How could such insignificant religious and political

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<sup>1</sup> These are his most prominent and oft cited titles. His complete titles also include king of Toledo, Galicia, Sevilla, Córdoba, Murcia, Jaén, and Algarve from 1260 onward.

<sup>2</sup> Description of the tomb is based on Hernán Pérez de Guzmán's report of 1345 as transcribed in Burriel 214-216. For information on the multilingual inscriptions, see Dodds 199-201. Description of the ornamented piers comes from Teresa Laguna Paúl 242.

movements become so effective? This dissertation examines the ways in which Christianity used its own suffering and inferior position to Roman authority as an advantage to gain a voice in Mediterranean politics that contributed in many ways to its rise to hegemony and even perpetuated it long after the reality of its powerlessness faded into memory. This is a study of how individuals and groups across time use discourse to frame themselves as oppressed, regardless of the reality of their circumstances, and regardless of their political orientation, doing so through the leverage and promotion of saints like Helena. Gayatri Spivak denounced this strategy in an interview with Leon de Kock, saying, “Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous” (45). Because of the multivalence of this rhetorical strategy, at times the project will confront the powerful as they abuse the signification of the victim, while at other times it will inquire into the limits that such a discourse offers for hearing the voices of those in pain and otherwise inaudible, making use of the only political strategy they have available to them.

In contrast to the role suffering plays during the Middle Ages, historian and thinker Joseph Amato observes that

If any one thing distinguishes the modern mind from the traditional mind, it is our doubt about the universality of suffering as the measure of human good.

Ambivalence about the place of suffering in human life characterizes the modern mind. On one level, all modern men and women have no doubt that they will suffer to love and to accomplish things. On another level, though, they doubt whether suffering is inevitable or a universal requirement, much less a good. We no longer are ready to accept suffering as the price that God and nature have put on all things. (24)

He then explains that because of this suspicion of suffering along with larger and more available political and medical mechanisms, many today compete about who suffers the most in order to procure measures for an antidote, oftentimes thwarting systems to which they appeal, as lines between sufferer—usually portrayed as an innocent victim—and perpetrator grow ever more oversimplified and equivocal. Amato calls this a “politics of suffering” that individuals and groups leverage for the sake of gain and recognition, regardless of pain’s reality, cultural construction, or falsity.<sup>3</sup>

While Amato acknowledges how other cultures face suffering and even notes that modernity’s crusade on oppression resembles Christianity in several respects, his concentration on modern secular political and legal machines divert his attention from earlier uses of this attitude for political and social advantage. Hagiography, or biographies of saints, the most visible locus for this rhetoric from the Middle Ages, constitutes a genre that has seen increasing attention from scholars during the last three decades.<sup>4</sup> “Hagiography” serves to describe this genre along with related terms “*vita*” and “lives of saints” despite Heffernan’s reticence that the term “hagiography” has “become fossilized and [falsifies] the psychological realities of [the]

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<sup>3</sup> The situation has only intensified since Amato’s essay. Sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning describe the current “Culture of Victimhood” that supplants older codes of honor and dignity and reacts to conflict by making immediate appeals to large legal entities and social media even for what is termed “microaggressions,” or any behavior or word interpretable as offensive to a member of a recognized minority.

<sup>4</sup> According to the MLA database, research into “medieval hagiography” doubled from the seventies to the eighties and since 2000 has seen a steady increase in publications.



period” (16). Indeed, his impressive implementation of the term “sacred biography” in place of “hagiography” in large measure restored the original meaning to the latter such that either term can now safely substitute the other. Easily the most influential study on saints’ lives during the last thirty years, Heffernan’s book additionally strives to find “in what way sacred biography can be considered historical writing” due to the unusual interaction the genre features between fictitious, sympathy-invoking elements, and the intent it displays of portraying real events in order to do so (66). Because of this potential for insight into oppressed or invisible cultures, in recent years many have even attempted to take post-colonialism into the study of medieval hagiography. In 2001, Bruce Holsinger issued a call to medievalists, suggesting that “postcolonial medievalism may well emerge as a revisionary agent within the futures of postcolonial theory, forcing it to ask self-critical questions about the histories it uncovers,” allowing medievalists to avoid “theoretical exile” (1198). Other scholars have since followed suit, such as Lisa Lampert-Weissig in the field of medieval Iberia and Robert Mills on the subject of hagiography in particular. Other scholars seem to be moving in this direction, although they have not done so explicitly, by endeavoring to use hagiography to hear voices that have gone silenced for centuries.

For example, in studies of thirteenth-century Castilian hagiography, Robin Bower has applied Elaine Scarry’s theories about pain to *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* to establish that while many of the suffering bodies in the text carry a “semantic value” (“Body” 174), they also are symptomatic of a real world sociopolitical system—“Berceo’s imagined Spain” as she calls it (176)—that is particularly “vulnerable at the margins” (175). In a different approach, Mark Aquilano responds to *Vida de Santa Oria*’s “blend of fact with fiction” with a dose of contemporary psychology and theological dream theory in order to argue that her dreams bear

“psycho-biological authenticity” and therefore should not be regarded as purely allegorical (134). He even goes so far as to extrapolate some of the vicissitudes the anchoress suffered in an otherwise subaltern life. Arguing against scholarship that brushes Oria’s mother Amunna aside, Emily Francomano posits that “the poem is about the negotiation of female bonds” (“Spiritual” 159); then, in a haunting hint toward the subaltern—a mainstay of postcolonial studies—she clinches her argument by observing that a key moment in the text “is devoted mainly to religious recluses such as Oria and her mother” so that both women can metonymically stand in for scores of other voiceless religious women (164). In “From Virgin Martyr to Holy Harlot” Andrew Beresford observes the functional role of saints in the lives of laymen suggestive of real life, quotidian concerns of a culture thoroughly familiar with myriad saints, each of which offered a different remedy for banal and national troubles; the same article also broaches the ways in which women were indoctrinated by texts about saints. Espí Forcén applies modern medical science to the maladies visible in hagiography to prove the probability of the accounts’ historical accuracy. Nevertheless, scholars’ ability to piece together these silenced lives remains limited by the constant encroachment of the masculine, dominant authors’ creativity and filtration.

Based on such a critical climate in Hispano-medieval studies, how does hagiography, therefore, fit into the larger realm of subaltern studies? In 2001, Daphne Patai, attempting to understand some of the contempt toward Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonial literature—a genre belonging to subaltern studies according to John Beverley—observed a strain of hagiographic rhetoric about the Guatemalan woman. She develops the comparison:

The adventures of medieval saints are for the most part fanciful, and in any case cannot ordinarily be verified by scholarly research. But to the pious reader, the historicity of these incidents is unimportant because both the lives and reading

about them are acts of faith. In their brave deeds, above all in their passions, saints and martyrs demonstrated the truth of their religion, so it hardly matters to the devout reader whether a particular story is historically accurate or not. The saint's life, told reverently, is an exemplary narrative. It is taken to embody a higher kind of truth to which its hero is the witness. (270)

Kimberly Nance also has an article that corroborates Patai's findings, stating that testimonial performers are cast as "wiser, surer, saintlier, better equipped to deal with pain, or even just more used to it [. . .] in effect turning *testimonio* into secular hagiography" ("Disarming" 577). Can these comparisons, then, run in the other direction? Can a hagiography have testimonial characteristics that scholars like Bower and Aquilano already sense? Can theories about testimonial literature help overcome the artistic interventions in hagiography to get at the lives behind them?

This project explores the limits and possibilities of studying thirteenth-century Castilian hagiography through the lens of *testimonio* literary theory, taking into consideration medieval Iberia's unusual historical position relative to the rest of Europe. Such an analysis reveals greater insight into the lives of saints, the political machinations of their biographers, and the historical lives of those at the margins of their societies, as well as the degree to which modern testimonial literature owes its strategies to the medieval genre of hagiography. The project will use Castilian hagiographies attributable to the thirteenth century: the anonymous *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca* (1215-1250) as well as Gonzalo de Berceo's lives *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla* (c. 1230), *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* (c. 1236) and *Vida de Santa Oria* (c. 1254), and his one *passio*, *Martirio de San Lorenzo* (c. 1260), along with other relevant texts from the period. After adjusting and adapting the theory to a different historical context, research reveals that

*testimonio* has roots going back much farther than the colonial period. The politics of suffering rhetoric in hagiography, so integral to *testimonio*, assisted in early Christians' entrance to mainstream discourse, obtain hegemony, and then maintain it; however, on the same note, for the same reason hagiography provides better understanding of such otherwise silent groups as Jews, the peasantry, and women.

Antonio Gramsci first introduced the concept of the "subaltern" in his *Prison Notebooks* as he analyzed the notion that some individuals by virtue of their social position have no voice in the management of their society. Since then, the term has taken a life of its own such that some, as referred to earlier in Spivak, can use it to characterize themselves as such despite their ability to influence important decisions throughout government and society exactly by doing so. The Subaltern Studies Group to which Spivak belongs took up Gramsci's use of the term in the eighties as a way of identifying its work as "history from below" within the context of British imperialism and the longstanding effects of colonialism in southern Asia. In 1992 John Beverley formed the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group with Ileana Rodríguez, exerting a particular influence on recognizing the nature of subalternity outside the Asian subcontinent. One prominent member of this group, Walter D. Mignolo, has been instrumental for his ventures into colonial practices of Early Modern Spain. This project seeks to take the next steps in this process as it interrogates the cultural and rhetorical resources that gave way to colonialism in the early modern period, including concepts of resistance introduced by Homi Bhabha that already operated in medieval Iberia such as hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry, though the modern connotations of these terms precludes their application to the period of study except by allusion.

Kimberly Nance defines *testimonio* as "the body of works in which speaking subjects who present themselves as somehow 'ordinary' represent a personal experience of injustice,

whether directly to the reader or through the offices of a collaborating writer, with the goal of inducing readers to participate in a project of social justice” (*Can* 7). Just as modern *testimonio*, saints’ tales strive to invoke sympathy from their readers, often for a project of social justice that will change their political circumstances, but also to criticize differences with the papacy and sins in if the social body—*testimonio* today also means to raise awareness of contemporary sins afflicting and committed by its interlocutors. Nance’s use of the word “ordinary” also plays out in hagiography because the audience needed to be able to identify with the saint at a certain level in order to admire him or her.<sup>5</sup>

To add to Nance’s definition, Beverley explains that

A *testimonio* is a novel or novella-length narrative, produced in the form of a printed text, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. Its unit of narration is usually a ‘life’ or a significant life experience. Because in many cases the direct narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account (“*Testimonio*, Subalternity” 571).

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<sup>5</sup> Brigitte Cazelles notes that “The extraordinary component of the saints’ achievements indicates that they did not serve as models to be imitated, but as figures to be admired. [. . .] Yet, although superior to the average listener [. . .] the mores and customs of feudal society” were represented in them, making them, in that sense, ordinary (22).

Though Beverley emphasizes the first-person perspective of *testimonio*'s protagonist, hagiography generally does not—the saint must be dead in order to be a saint and therefore cannot recount the story directly. Nevertheless, whether or not the tale comes in the first person, the concept of “witness” punctuates all saintly narrative, as corroborated by a recent article by Beresford and Twomey: “medieval hagiography was obsessed with looking” (“Visions” 104), as though in a sense documenting and preserving first-person accounts of a historical past. Beverley connects life writings as *testimonio* and the issue of subalternity; since hagiography also makes claims as a life writing mediated by another author—a “*vita*”—we can likewise see its connection with the subaltern. In answer to his question whether or not the protagonists of early martyr tales can speak, Robert Mills concludes that the saint’s speaking position is a “heteroglossia” rather than a stable Cartesian “I” (207), ever punctuated with multiple voices, just as the elite writer, the testimonial speaker, and the community she represents all compete for voice in *testimonio*. During the Middle Ages, the distinction between first-person and third-person narrative mattered little inasmuch as “Christ’s behavior in the Gospels was the single authenticating norm for all action” (Heffernan 5). Audiences took little notice of authorial perspective as long as they could justify believing the narrative. Work about the saint often began as a confession to a clergyman, who then could import the account into the third person, depending on his creative means and purposes.

The difference in time between the saint’s death and when his or her story was written down distinguishes it from *testimonio*, but connects the two as well. Both have a living sense of urgency, the latter to save lives on earth, and the former to save lives for heaven. As modern subalterns featured in *testimonio*, Peter Brown observes that unlike pagan heroes, “martyrs, precisely because they had died as human beings, enjoyed close intimacy with God” (5-6). In

other words, saints, like subalterns today, are only heroes because they are dead, either in the literal sense, or in the sense that they are dead to structures of power. John Beverley has gone to some lengths to emphasize that “The presence of a ‘real’ popular voice in the *testimonio* is in part an illusion” (*Testimonio: On* 39); just as we cannot quite hear the saint, both genres rather serve to represent a more powerful author’s interpretation of them at the same time that other voices fight to come through. This project will argue that despite the interventions of these powerful authors that threaten to silence the saints and others who speak about pain in their narratives, *testimonio* literary theory makes it possible to negotiate with those quieter voices, and indeed, to some extent, as Kate Greenspan has suggested, we can consider them “autohagiographical” in a similar sense to *testimonio*.

To add to the “real” and “witness” nature outlined by Beverley above, *testimonio* means to tell some kind of truth, as when Nance says, “*Testimonio* is simultaneously political and literary. The fact that the project takes place through a medium that at least has many hallmarks of literature cannot be ignored—hence the inadequacy of wishful forwarding of the issue of *testimonio* to colleagues in other disciplines” (*Can* 11). While she emphasizes the literariness of the genre here, she does so in order to reserve it from those in other disciplines who study it scientifically or historically. To make this emphasis, she couples it with its “political” component, which within medieval literature would correspond with “true.” “Truth” had a political aspect in the medieval period, and much hagiography carries a political vector, but to say it was only political is reductive. One way this is visible is in the way that much hagiography asks the sufferers to endure pain by deferring its relief to post-mortality rather than to conquer or resist oppression politically. “Truth” in hagiography, therefore, additionally carries a doctrinal, devotional element along with any political element it may also bear.

Despite this relative meaning for “truth,” both hagiography and *testimonio* promise historical fact. One of Spain’s leading scholars of hagiography, Fernando Baños Vallejo has argued:

En la Edad Media aceptaban estos relatos como ‘reales’ así, entre comillas para nosotros, no solo por su valor histórico sino por su valor moral o simbólico. Como repetimos siempre los medievalistas, en aquella época la realidad material, tangible, no era la única realidad, ni siquiera la más importante. (“El conocimiento” 67)

To have such a “real” value placed upon them, though different from our own post-Enlightenment concept of history, Heffernan explains that hagiographical accounts still “were records purporting to describe the historical lives of individuals” (39). Ángel Gómez Moreno takes the historical aspect of hagiography a little farther saying that “la leyenda hagiográfica [. . .] acaba por encontrarse inevitablemente con los modos de vida y las creencias de los pueblos” (12). In other words, hagiography allows us to hear voices not only of the saint and of God, but of those at the margins of the stages upon which they perform.

In describing hagiography’s rhetorical strategy, Heffernan says, “Truth without ornament necessary to persuasion cannot teach; persuasion without truth is empty” (8), thus underlining the historical and literary aesthetic hagiography strives to achieve. As to how subalternity informs hagiography, Heffernan explains that narrative lives of saints stem from the life of Christ and “the illiteracy of the audiences for whom these texts were intended” (5). In other words, hagiographers’ mediating word began as a tool to educate and inscribe the religious subaltern, but also as a way to give voice to Christian subalterns who had died long ago due to legal systems of the Roman Empire that on occasion punished individuals that professed Christianity.



Heffernan uses Gregory of Tours as the chief exemplar of hagiography's didacticism for the illiterate masses, but Gonzalo de Berceo takes on a comparative role, whom Julian Weiss calls an "intellectual," and whom Pablo Ancos places in dialogue primarily with other male clerics ("Primary"), much in the way that Kimberly Nance describes collaborating *testimonio* authors who represent speaking subjects not to other subalterns, but to the English-speaking elite, the God of the twentieth century, in hopes of intervention against the ills mankind suffers.

A related genre to *testimonio* helpful to consider in this dissertation is the trauma narrative. Unlike *testimonio*, a trauma narrative features a reflective voice that seeks healing without advocating any punishment for wrongdoing, as observed by Felman and Daub. Often the narrator of such a life has attained a certain degree of autonomy that allows them to speak directly through the narrative without a third party intervention. Trauma narrative will come to play a role in chapter 5 because its more psychological affinity makes it possible to tease out the lived reality of the women analyzed in that chapter, but it does not figure as a central theoretical element to the dissertation's larger arguments.

Finally, this dissertation stands by earlier scholarship that advocates the death of *testimonio* as a genre, but with a twist. Though perhaps never a genre, *testimonio* has always been a rhetoric, a strategy available to any political, social, or religious entity that invokes the victim in order to denounce an oppressor, which Amato calls the "politics of suffering."

Just as this study elucidates practices in medieval Iberia, it also sheds greater light on the broader subject of *testimonio* studies, responding to Bruce Holsinger's challenge to medievalists mentioned earlier (1198). One such contribution has to do with the nature and importance of performance to achieve the aesthetic of *testimonio*. Scholars such as Linda Marie Brooks and John Beverley emphasize the important role that performance plays in resisting oppressive

forces. This probably constitutes the central reason why testimonial studies have not ventured into the realm of medieval literature before: one cannot presence a medieval person's "resistance" to hegemonic forces. This study therefore argues that performance and presence can take place in solidarity with literature as well as measured through it. Since the politics of suffering has always existed as a rhetorical strategy, it thrived well before the colonial period, including during the thirteen century when Gonzalo de Berceo and his contemporaries used it to explore political postures of their time.<sup>6</sup> Taking *testimonio* studies farther back in time proves that people have always striven to use performance to provide voice for their suffering, not just those impacted by colonialism.

The first chapter will engage longstanding scholarly recognition of Christianity's identification with suffering in order to lay the groundwork for later chapters to dialogue with *testimonio*. The chapter will examine the evolution of the Lawrence of Rome motif with special emphasis on Gonzalo de Berceo's last and incomplete work, *Martirio de San Lorenzo*. Though one of the latest literary works this dissertation will discuss, Lawrence's cult epitomizes the *passio*, or martyr's tale, as a precursor to hagiography that clarifies how medieval Christians perceived persecution as innate to their identity and how this perception assisted its rise to dominance. The chapter explores the medieval literary tradition of Saint Lawrence to outline the complexity of *testimonio* rhetoric. While it does mean to comment on *testimonio*, it will make

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<sup>6</sup> Kimberly Nance attests to a testimonial sensibility beginning in the work of Bartolomé de las Casas (*Can* 64). John Beverley acknowledges that "*testimonio*-like texts have existed for a long time at the margin of literature" (*Against* 71), citing confessions in particular, though none of his analysis goes farther back than 1400.

only limited use of scholarship from the genre for the sake of space and also in order to concentrate on the Middle Ages. Thus, its assertions that the *passio* politicizes suffering implicate *testimonio* and make the operations of both more transparent. The chapter will use the figure of Saint Lawrence as a case study in the appropriation of suffering in Christian literature and doctrine common throughout the Western development of the Church. While each *passio* and *vita* has unique qualities that make them worth studying on their own, the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence ties other Christian narratives to Latin American *testimonio* through its passage through Castilian during the thirteenth century, providing helpful continuity for the rest of the dissertation. Though studies on visual culture surrounding Lawrence abound, such as analyses of architectural and artistic articulations of the gridiron on which he died, the practical absence of any historical elaboration based on his oral and written traditions in modern scholarship attests to the cult's generic status among *vitae*, making it ideal for a case study.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter advances knowledge in the field of medieval literature and Christianity by its comparison of two genres often contrasted, namely martyrs' and saints' tales, as well as by calling critical attention to a surprisingly understudied subject: the study of Saint Lawrence. Additionally, while Robert Mills compares virgin martyrs to subalterns, this chapter contends that the correlation extends to the figure of the martyr and saint in general. This chapter unpacks the "historically situated" narrative that Gonzalo proffers to claim that the same could be said for any martyr (Mills 207), whether masculine or feminine. This chapter will concentrate on the

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<sup>7</sup> Delehayé's 1933 "Recherches sur le Légendrier romain: *Passio Polycronii*," constitutes the most recent in depth study of Lawrence as a historical figure rather than only a figurative symbol.

similarity between the two categories—*passio* and *vita*—while each subsequent chapter will add nuance to this initial common ground, especially as the initial comparison sheds light on what it means to be or to use the term *subaltern* in a medieval context. To begin, this chapter emphasizes individuals employing such concepts rather than the complexity of the terms themselves or those they mean to designate.

Chapter 2 continues by examining how the poem *Vida de santa María egipciaca* does this, tracing its protagonist's tradition from its inception until its translation and redaction as one of the first poems in Iberian vernacular, focusing on how the survival of rhetorical suffering benefits the groups that repurpose it in hagiography during a time in which Christians no longer experience literal persecution from powerful political enemies. Through careful adherence to hagiographic convention, the poet of *VSME* manages to transform the martyr of the *passio* into the ultimate hagiographical sadomasochist, at first a dominatrix who, adoring her own sexuality, wields it as a new kind of spiritual oppressor of the Christian faith, but upon repenting, turns her oppression against herself and transforms it into masochism. Finally, rather than leaving Mary of Egypt's legacy in the thirteenth century, the chapter will bring her story up to the present day by deconstructing how various scholars appropriate her figure to position themselves within the modern politics of suffering, placing a special emphasis on how feminist scholars study her. The evolution of the myth of Saint Mary of Egypt highlights how the politics of suffering relies just as much on physiological pain as on a complex network of imagined suffering and domination.

Building off work in the first two chapters stating that Christians see themselves as an oppressed group, Chapter 3 will analyze Gonzalo de Berceo's *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla*, concentrating on lines drawn between themselves as exorcists and spiritual "oppressors." This text features those failing to pay the pledge of San Millán and a saint who saves Christians from

Muslims together with battles fought with devils. *Testimonio* depends on the presence of an enemy from whom the group seeks liberation. Therefore, while we may use hagiography to gain information about subaltern groups such as women and peasants—an analysis undertaken in later chapters—at the same time it creates additional subaltern categories as it seeks to silence and distort individuals such as “unfaithful” Europeans and Muslims. This chapter problematizes notions of Américo Castro’s *convivencia*, a peaceful coexistence between Christians, Jews, and Muslims, arguing that at least part of the rise of *cuaderna vía* poetry during the thirteenth century relates to its utility during the Reconquista. *Cuaderna vía* enables its poets to articulate a unique Christian identity that made former political foes like the Muslims look weak compared to the might of God and the Crown. Interestingly, no Castilian, thirteenth-century hagiography features any Sephardi. Far from an innocent oversight, the abundance of antisemitism in Braulio’s and Gonzalo de Berceo’s other work bespeaks a more deliberate exclusion from their nascent proto-national self-awareness. More appropriately, Jews may constitute the only completely subaltern group this project will approach.

Chapter 4 begins in earnest to hear subaltern voices by using Nance and Beverley’s work on the collaborating writer to analyze Gonzalo de Berceo’s *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* with consideration also of Grimaldus’ *Vita Dominici silense* (1100) and Pero Marín’s *Los Milagros romançados de Santo Domingo de Silos* (1275-1287). Because of miracles attested to within these accounts as they strive to represent and give hope to suffering, sick, dying, and captive ignoble Christians, it is possible to partially encounter their real lives even though they were not able to write about it themselves. It argues that Grimaldus’ and Gonzalo de Berceo’s work as collaborators on Domingo’s life compares well with the work of *testimonio* collaborators like Elizabeth Burgos-Debray and Subcomandante Marcos. In this case the writers may be seen in the

Gramscian sense as “traditional intellectuals” working to maintain a regular order, but their work opens a window into the work of “organic intellectuals,” the lives and beliefs of peasants whose values focalize in the saint and give birth to narratives of healing that make the activity of the elite’s written discourse possible. In this process the modern scholar may never have a full vista of the lives exemplified in the tales’ margins, but that allows them to retain a certain level of power. They will always know something that we do not—secrets like those to which Rigoberta Menchú alludes—that prevent us from colonizing them and owning them anew. The chapter also asserts that the hagiographies go beyond the political because these texts do more than propagate nation-building and resistance to Moors; traditions like Domingo’s gave hope to the oppressed groups represented through the tradition in the only possible way available to people at the time: through faith in God and the Church.

The fifth chapter takes collaboration a step further by arguing that female protagonists in Gonzalo de Berceo’s *Vida de santa Oria* may be considered authors in the tale. The chapter settles Isabel Uría Maqua’s longstanding dispute about whether or not Oria’s story is a visionary poem or a *vita*. By applying *testimonio* literary theory, we find that *Vida de Santa Oria* “testifies” on behalf of the woman oppressed by the pain of being earthbound in contrast to the visionary literature to which Uría Maqua claims it belongs. The context, details, and historicity of *Oria* suggest that it had a life writing function different from strict visionary literature, which strove to witness only for God. It therefore argues testimony and “witness” as essential characteristics of vernacular hagiography that helps to identify its function in opposition to visionary narrative despite the role of “seeing” that both genres share. Along the way, this analysis will help to emphasize the utility of using *Vida de Santa Oria* as a *testimonio* in order to learn about the life of medieval women. It will especially look at the sense in which the text

suggests that Oria actually resisted forces that oppressed her “Against Literature,” in John Beverley’s sense, in order to express her sense of pain through performance rather than writing, despite having solidarity with it. Thus, we can still discern how Oria originally strove against the forces against her through the echo of her performance within Gonzalo’s writing.

The project concludes by reviewing the points of contact between hagiography and *testimonio* along with the adjustments necessary for the theory to function during the medieval period. It will also review some of the discoveries that *testimonio* allows that would not have been possible otherwise, such as the medieval Christian’s discursive self-designation as a subaltern group, the role and function of the hagiographer, the settling of hagiographic generic disputes, and hearing the voice of the subaltern. It will also delineate ways in which the project has elucidated *testimonio* studies to the benefit of those using it in a modern context.

By correlating hagiography with *testimonio*, this thesis improves our understanding of the rhetorical power of subalternity to construct identity and advance political agenda. Using Heffernan’s departure from post-Enlightenment disdain of hagiographical literary innovation in order to go beyond the historical realities of the saint, it will peer into the margins to hear those that we know existed but could not preserve their experience except through solidarity and mediation. The fortunate rise of the vernacular in the thirteenth century makes this analysis possible as those holding the quill more directly engage and become aware of those who speak outside the margins. These genres together prove that it is possible to hear the subaltern speak, and that it constitutes a device that the subaltern can even use to influence society, but at the same time, it invites reflection that all power, even the subaltern’s, is vectored and can benefit from reflection rather than existing as a moral authority in and of itself.

I fear that some may view this dissertation as criticizing attempts to alleviate human suffering and resist oppression due to its recognition that subalternity can be used as a discourse to both weaken and maintain hegemony. Quite to the contrary, this research seeks to take an objective look at the politics of suffering in the hopes that understanding its mechanisms can improve conversations and (mis)understandings between those who see themselves as oppressed or suffering and their reputed oppressors. Much that leads to the delay of helping those in need stems from a failure to understand that suffering is not only physiological, but learned. Therefore, a subaltern or minority bewilders its oppressors and therefore are not helped because the definitions of suffering and oppression differ between the two parties. Suffering as a form of political resistance, like all other forms of power, likewise engenders resistance both from other weaker groups and from the powerful groups that would prefer to maintain their power, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of victimhood.



## Chapter 1

### Listen to the Dead:

#### Saint Lawrence of Rome and the Politics of Christian Suffering

In a letter to the Jeronimite order in 1561, Felipe II stated that because of his victory at St. Quentin on the feast day of Saint Lawrence, he would dedicate a monastery to the saint's name (Sigüenza 407). After the San Lorenzo del Escorial's second architect Juan de Herrera made changes to Juan Bautista de Toledo's original design, the structure in many respects bore resemblance to the gridiron, the instrument of execution for the monastery's namesake. Since its erection, the ambitious architectural monument has ignited countless polemics as to its meaning. Historian Henry Kamen references numerous hypotheses of what the building symbolizes, many of which attempt to highlight Spanish-Catholic political interests: "Philip II intended to vaunt his military victories, construct a pantheon for his family, raise a monument to his own power, proclaim the triumphs of the faith, imitate the Temple of Jerusalem, and shut himself up in a gloomy anchorite's cell" (xiii-xiv). Kamen deconstructs Felipe's motives and forefronts one: "the military successes occupy for him a secondary place. The primary motive, to which the king gave due prominence, was the need to assure his father a worthy tomb" (61). Kamen's brief synthesis shuts down paranoid inferences that the Escorial was a symbol of Catholic power both in Europe and its colonies bent on silencing alternative worldviews. These adherents of Spain's black legend point out that Felipe financed the enterprise with no less than 6.5 million ducats' worth of American gold mined with the sweat of indigenous labor (237).

It is thus that Lawrence's gridiron, a symbol of tyranny and pain, served as a pawn across political interests: on the one hand Spain held it up to celebrate the sacrifice of early Christian

martyrs whose suffering they saw perpetuated in contemporary opposition to Catholicism; on the other, opponents to the Spanish empire saw the Escorial's gridiron as persecuting them, new players on the European political landscape. Of course, neither of these is the first to use Lawrence and his suffering for political and social gain, but rather they engage in a tradition as old as the story of Lawrence itself. Few narratives in history capture the complexity of Amato's conundrums about mankind's relationship with suffering than that of the Archdeacon of Rome martyred during the Valerian persecutions of 258 AD. The figure of Saint Lawrence's inspiration to men of the cloth and laity alike for centuries underscores Amato's arguments that the traditional mind regards the "universality of suffering as the measure of human good" (24). However, ever since Cyprian first reported the event before the end of the same year to strengthen his immediate band of Christians, it would appear that the story of Saint Lawrence complicates Amato's assumptions about the "traditional mind." Rather than a strict symbol of the universality and value of suffering, the archdeacon has signified a politics of suffering that appropriates his victimhood to assist Christianity's expansion throughout time. With a special emphasis on Gonzalo de Berceo's version of the tale,<sup>8</sup> this chapter traces the political uses of Lawrence's gridiron from the third to the thirteenth century which, like *testimonio*, leverage disadvantage and pain to confront rivals and gain a voice through an appeal to sympathy.

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<sup>8</sup> In general this dissertation will refer to Gonzalo de Berceo by his baptized name "Gonzalo" rather than his place of origin "Berceo" for the shortened moniker, as he would have generally gone by this name in life until he "had become the subject of general knowledge and perhaps fame" associated with the toponymical appellation originally meant to distinguish him from others of the same name (see Lappin *Gonzalo* 8-9).

### **Listen to the Dead: The Imperative of the Politics of Suffering**

Aside from the central narrative of Christianity, the passion of Jesus Christ, the New Testament anticipates and intimates the persecutions of Stephen, Paul, Peter, and James among others. As its foundational literature, these depictions exemplify Jesus' beatitudes: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake" (Matt. 5:10-11). Scholar of early Christianity Niels Willert concedes that such narratives insinuate that "to be a Christian means to suffer in the same way as the suffering Messiah" (31). Christianity's earliest non-biblical works abound with persecution narratives like the Scillitan Martyrs, the *Acta Perpetua*, and the *Passio polychronii*, the closest possible source text for Gonzalo de Berceo's *Martirio de san Lorenzo* (henceforth *MSL*), dating from around the fifth or sixth century.<sup>9</sup> Candida Moss elaborates on the aesthetics of these early narratives by saying, "Scriptural accounts, both canonical and noncanonical, were treated by early Christian communities as evidence that the Church was, from its beginning, in conflict with the world" (*Ancient* 13). Concerning martyr tales, historian Jakob Engberg notes that the genre lends itself both "to comparison with the death of Christ and it was a testimony of and to Christ" (94). This observation reminds us that the etymological root of the word "martyr" means "witness," connecting the martyr of Christianity and the martyr of *testimonio* in which both see the crimes committed against them and allow us to witness both the crimes and the virtues by which the individual suffers.

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<sup>9</sup> A copy of the section of the *Passio polychronii* that corresponds to *MSL* is available in Dutton's edition.

Once the state sanctioned and sponsored Christianity, martyrdom receded, but the rhetoric did not—one could not be Christian without it, as evinced in the sixteenth-century erection of the Escorial. Klostergaard and Engberg remark: “There exists an intrinsic relationship between the martyr literature and Christian identity forging” (7). The persistence of persecution in Christian literature exemplifies and affirms that “to be a Christian was to suffer and die” (Perkins 24). As history ceased to generate new martyrs, a different kind of suffering hero rose to prominence that Charles Altman addresses at length by developing Delehaye’s separation of *passio* (martyr’s tale) and *vita* (saint’s tale) (*Legends* 92-98). Altman explains that the *passio* features a diametrical opposition wherein “an author or artist opposes virtue to vice” whereas the *vita* features gradational opposition, which distinguishes “between action and contemplation” (1). Despite these differences between the two genres, a medieval person probably did not differentiate between the two because even though they featured different crowning events—death versus miracles—a pious audience identified with the suffering that both genres limn. Heffernan argues that, as the *passio* before it, the saint’s tale teaches “the faithful to imitate actions which the community had decided were paradigmatic” (5). He continues that both genres “written in and for a cultic function iterate a system of values with wide community acceptance. Such narratives are designed to promote social cohesion” (18). Therefore, at the very least, the *vita* undertakes the same identity-building community project as the *passio* that continues coexisting with it. The *passio*’s failure to abate with the rise of hagiography insinuates their similar functionality. This chapter and the following argue that because suffering persisted as an essential component of Christian identity after the religion gained political dominance, martyrs’ tales did not become obsolete.

These narratives gave Christians a political advantage by showcasing voices no one had ever heard before. Judith Perkins contends that martyrdom appealed to nascent notions of “the human self as a body liable to pain and suffering” that earlier Classical discourse “of a soul/mind controlling the body” previously rendered unutterable (3). While G. E. M. de Ste. Croix considers Christians fanatics for sacrificing themselves, Perkins notices that this behavior helped Christians gain the upper hand within a short period of time. Analyzing Greek romances of the second and third centuries, she describes heroes and heroines undergoing arduous journeys that brought them into contact with people that no one had written about before, and sometimes even behaving like them, after which the protagonists return to their elevated and comfortable status. In contrast, Christian narratives eschew resolutions of ease and comfort in favor of marginalization, “death as a happy ending” (41). Additionally, Perkins explains that second-century medical discourse “represented the human self as a body in pain” to which Christianity appealed (2). Public interest in Greek romances and medical knowledge combined with admiration for the fearlessness associated with martyrdom—regardless of how infrequent it may have actually occurred—cultivated “a subject ready for its call—a subject that apprehended itself as a sufferer” (9). Using Foucault, Perkins argues that Christianity filled a power gap created by changing cultural paradigms (143).

Scholars give many other reasons for how martyrdom and its narratives strengthened the position of the Christian church. Jakob Engberg’s work “demonstrates that Christianity made an impression on people whom we would otherwise not have expected to have even noticed Christianity since it was still a rather obscure sect, and that part of this attention was attracted because of what the Christians would begin to call martyrdoms” (97). Just as modern *testimonio* amplifies subalterns to the elite, martyrdom made Christianity audible to Romans. Likewise,

during the thirteenth century, suffering rhetoric made it possible for Gonzalo de Berceo to criticize ecclesiastical management from Rome and to defend his marginalized opinions about the faith. Engberg further explains that the Christian *passio* created meaning out of suffering, giving adherents reason not to despair about reports of persecution and execution. Nicole Kelley agrees, saying, “What might have been viewed as meaningless suffering (and indeed the demise of the Christian faith) inflicted by a tyrannical power becomes something very different: suddenly death is not merely understandable or tolerable, but in some cases even desirable” (736).<sup>10</sup> Martyr tales also provided opportunities to exaggerate the degree to which Christian behavior impressed pagans. Enberg says, from a Christian standpoint, such exaggeration nurtured the hope “that some of the spectators or persecutors would be so impressed that they would acknowledge the truthfulness of the Christians’ beliefs, thus prompting their conversion” (116). The circulation of martyr narratives thus advantaged Christians regardless of how rulers treated them: either the authorities had to cease prosecuting Christians and allow the culture to spread, or they risked eliciting further sympathy for it.

Of the numerous pagan documents that affiliate Christianity with martyrdom cited by Engberg, his most forceful example illustrates how persecution allowed the sect to thrive. Responding to an inquiry concerning Christians from Pliny the Younger, governor of Bithynia-Pontus, Emperor Trajan writes, “Christians are not to be sought out. If brought before you and found guilty, they must be punished, but in such a way that a person who denies that he is a

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<sup>10</sup> The rest of Kelley’s essay supports the community building project based on persecution recognized by Perkins and Engberg. She sees the *passio* as cultivating a Christian “suffering self” (729). See also Paul Middleton.

Christian and demonstrates this by his action, that is, by worshipping our gods, may obtain pardon” (Ep. 10.97). Despite its magnanimity, this ruling reinforces the way Christians were identified with persecution because, according to Trajan, they ceased to be Christians the moment they reneged, but if they remained obstinate (that is remained Christian), they were to be persecuted. Therefore, Christianity emerged and thrived as a response to an environment that punished deviation from Roman/pagan normativity. This potentiality in Christian literature continued throughout the Middle Ages, allowing poets like Gonzalo de Berceo to appeal to the rhetoric the *passio* provided in order to make their own voices heard.

In many respects Latin American *testimonio* enacts this same resistance and helps to explain the early Church’s initial expansion and adoption by the powerful elite as well as how modern subalterns have ascended on the modern scene. To modify Perkins’ definition of Christianity mentioned earlier to syncretize it with postcolonial studies, “To be a [subaltern is] to suffer and die” (24). To suggest that he or she ever does anything otherwise—even figuratively—transforms an individual into something other than subaltern, much as a non-suffering medieval Christian constitutes a moral paradox. Like the saint, Spivak marks death as the place in the narrative where the subaltern comes to life: “It is only in their death that they enter the narrative *for us*, they become figurable” (“Can” 21-22). Thus, Beverley asserts that *testimonio* obfuscates the voice of the subaltern: “‘writing one’s life’ implies necessarily that the narrator is no longer in the situation of marginality and subalternity that his or her narrative describes” (“*Testimonio*” 572). Moss alludes to the political importance of keeping the subaltern or saint dead and silent when she describes the power of martyrdom: “The reason these Christians invented martyrdom stories and saw their history as a history of persecution is because then, as now, martyrdom was a powerful tool” (*Myth* 19). Nevertheless, this tool offers

ambivalent service to the individual subaltern because, as Spivak and Beverley assert above, he or she cannot wield it; thus ancient, medieval, and modern martyrdom often benefits elites like Gonzalo, if it benefits the dead subaltern at all.

In this light, Peter Brown's extensive research on saints in antiquity has striking similarities with modern discomforts with a speaking subalternity. He discusses the uneasiness pagans felt with Christians' incorporation of bones and relics of saints into "areas from which the dead had once been excluded" (4). In doing this, "the saint was believed to be 'present' at his tomb on earth" (3). The parallel between the dead and the subaltern should not be lost to the modern scholar and dovetails with Perkins' work on ancient epistemological shifts during the same period. As mentioned earlier, prior to the rise of Christianity, the poor, the sick, and the maimed did not have entrance into public discourse; they were silent and invisible, subaltern. As will be demonstrated, Gonzalo took advantage of this invisibility by suggesting that with the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the papacy enacted a similar process of silencing opposing voices. The upsurge in *testimonio* at the end of the twentieth century sought to do with political and social subalterns what Christianity did with similarly marginalized figures two millennia prior, making the invisible visible—the absent a "seething presence" in the words of Avery Gordon (8). Through this rhetoric, Gonzalo offers a dissonant, audible discourse to the discussion Rome hoped to close as it reformed the Mozarab liturgy. As for many today, as for Gonzalo, an individual was only worth listening, ironically, if he or she cannot speak, especially because it can misdirect an elite's agenda, necessitating the poet's engagement with a respected voice long dead and gone.

It is notable that most discussions of subalternity and sainthood concern the authors just as much as their protagonists. Shortly after Rigoberta Menchú won the Nobel Prize for her work



in Guatemala and then clarified Elisabeth Burgos-Dubray's edition of her *testimonio*, David Stoll undertook his own investigation of her allegations only to produce a defamed version of the events that revealed that Menchú's *testimonio*, though broadly accurate, did more to serve the interests of Guatemala's left-wing *guerrilla* insurgents than the peasants many had come to identify with Menchú's account. Stoll's critique disappointed those that hoped that at long last the subaltern could speak. However, in his preface to *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Stoll repeats that he by no means seeks to subvert any of Menchú's larger claims about the atrocious human rights violations committed by the Guatemalan government. Frankly, he distances himself from questions about subalternity in order to engage directly with what his immediate audience is doing: "The underlying problem is not how Rigoberta told her story, but how well-intentioned foreigners have chosen to interpret it" (xiv). He goes a long way to interrogate Rigoberta as "a quasi-sacred symbol" (xiv) and "the air of sacrilege about questioning" *testimonio* (xv). In the same vein, this chapter, and indeed the first part of this dissertation, does not seek so much to deny or not deny the experiences embodied in the saints' lives themselves, so much as to examine how others speak for them and appropriate them.

Comparisons to medieval Christian literature and activism literature after Stoll highlight *testimonio*'s own politics of suffering. Patai's summary notes that "in the hostile responses that have greeted David Stoll's (1999) critique of Rigoberta's story, there is revealed a depth of commitment on many readers' parts to Rigoberta and to her book that is closely akin to hagiography and the absorption of it by the faithful" (270). She observes how the Guatemalan activist turns self-aggrandizement on its head, "as if she were wise to the strange competition going on in the contemporary world over what groups are to be accorded most-oppressed status" (279). Ironically, while Patai concludes that "no one could have imagined that in our time the

self-proclaimed ‘oppressors’ would themselves insist on the superior virtue of the oppressed, and that bizarre internecine disputes would ensue over who should be granted the distinction of this honorable status” (285), in reality such a competition has taken place for two millennia now. Christians discovered the politics of suffering to garner sympathy from the powerful and since have availed themselves of it over and over again to maintain that power. The “self-proclaimed ‘oppressors’” that she describes here reenact the rhetoric inherited from Christianity in order to accord power to modern groups, including themselves. This chapter takes up Patai’s argument through the lens of medieval politics of suffering to prove the pervasive force it has in amassing power and motivating sympathy.

### ***Martirio de San Lorenzo and the Politics of Suffering***

Gonzalo de Berceo began *MSL* around 1260.<sup>11</sup> The work terminates abruptly with the saint’s final words while roasting on the gridiron, probably due to the poet’s death. Many versions of the *Passio polychronii* circulated at the time that may have served as Gonzalo’s inspiration for Lorenzo, whose traditional affiliation with Huesca, only about 250 km from the San Millán monastery, would have appealed to his audience. Unlike tradition, Gonzalo’s Lorenzo does not travel from Huesca to Rome with the Greek Sixtus prior to his ascendance to the papacy where they fall victims to the Valerian persecutions of 258. Instead, Lorenzo travels with a group of locals where the already powerful Sixto confronts them and requires that Lorenzo remain in Rome. Gonzalo’s version follows the majority of contemporary versions of Lawrence’s tale in that he departs from Huesca after which he becomes a deacon in Rome, entangling himself with the tyrannical demands of Emperor Decius. Having special stewardship

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<sup>11</sup> See Dutton, “Chronology” 76. All citations originate with Dutton’s edition (1981).

over the Church's treasury, Lorenzo ultimately suffers death on the gridiron for his refusal to yield any ecclesiastical donations to the emperor.

Despite his almost cliché status in the Catholic imaginary, few studies exist about Saint Lawrence outside the field of art history, and *MSL* is no exception. Due to this, it is hoped that what follows will profit any scholar interested in him as a historical figure as the text serves to frame broader cultural paradigms of the Western European Middle Ages along with research into Gonzalo's version individually. These rhetorical uses of Lawrence's suffering depend on the social position of each beneficiary: for early Christians, vaunting Lawrence as an innocent victim to a corrupt emperor meant survival within the Roman kingdom, whereas later iterations like Gonzalo's tend to reinforce Christianity's already well established position as well as criticize differences within the elite church hierarchy. Names in Spanish are used in reference to *MSL* for ease of discussion but in English when referencing the tradition as a whole. Beginning with the *Passio polychronii*, the story of Saint Lawrence circulated in almost any collection of early saints during the Western Middle Ages such as the *Acta Sanctorum* or the *Legenda Aurea*. Prior to the *Passio polychronii*, his story has an early popular oral circulation, as several early authors mention him.<sup>12</sup>

Though exaggerated, plenty of evidence exists that Lawrence's martyrdom and other similar stories have a historical basis. De Ste. Croix interrogates the longstanding assumption that early Christian martyrdoms happened with the frequency and magnitude that the *passio* and

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<sup>12</sup> See Prudentius' *Liber Peristephanon*, Augustine *Sermones* 302-305, Maximus of Turin *Sermones* 70-73, Pseudo-Peter Chrysologus *Sermo* 135, and Leo the Great *Sermo* 85.

Ziolkowski's notes are particularly helpful (52-54).

subsequent Church chroniclers claimed, but that they happened nonetheless to a lesser extent. Using ancient documents with special interest in the pagan perspective, he places the bulk of Christian persecution as ending early on when “the persecution of Decius had been preceded by serious anti-Christian rioting in Alexandria. Spontaneous popular hostility to Christianity seems to have virtually ceased by the end of the third century” (67).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, he emphasizes that any persecutions were brief, very localized, and resulted in a relatively low number of Christian deaths. Incidentally, most Christians would have had the opportunity to avoid capital punishment for breaking Roman laws proscribing their religion just by not drawing attention to themselves. This leads to the term he coins, “voluntary martyrdom,” meaning that many individuals during the first centuries of Christianity essentially forced Romans to kill them in order to uphold law and order. De Ste. Croix attributes voluntary martyrdom to Christians’ pride and belligerence, but voluntary martyrdom provided Christianity with political advantages by fomenting sympathy and appealing to the larger groups’ paradigms about heroism.

However few and infrequent such martyrdoms may have been, they made an indelible impression on both the Christian and pagan imaginary. Even de Ste. Croix admits that his data does “not prove that the persecution was a trivial affair or that it did not cause the Christian community great anxiety and misery,” and he concludes that “some of those who apostatized in fear or under pressure may have suffered great agony of mind” (66). De Ste. Croix goes on to say,

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<sup>13</sup> Notice the discrepancy between Valerian and Decius committing the persecutions associated with Lawrence and Sixtus. While Pope Sixtus died during the reign of Valerian, most texts depict Decius as the antagonist.

We must beware of underestimating the great suffering caused to Christians by the atmosphere of hostility, liable to turn at any moment into active persecution [. . .]. The threat of persecution, always hanging over their heads, was a factor of the utmost importance in the environment of the early Christians. And some of the [. . .] features which we find in the mentality of so many of the prominent churchmen and writers of the fourth and following centuries—above all the readiness to persecute and the hysterical denunciation of theological opponents—the atmosphere of constant menace in which Christianity had matured was in some degree responsible. (68)

Christianity went on to own and adopt the trauma of these early persecutions as integral to its identity and promulgation, as Gonzalo does in *MSL* or as subalterns might potentially do later as they articulate themselves through mediums like *testimonio*.<sup>14</sup>

As far as Christianity's self-identification with suffering, it is important to note that this consciousness about suffering and sickness does not apply to individuals' bodies alone; rather, Christians, germinating within the context of classical Rome and Greece, saw their whole families and communities as part of their own bodies, and therefore misconduct from another member meant their own misconduct and was therefore in need of medicine. De Ste. Croix says, "Christians generally shared the outlook of their pagan contemporaries to the extent of feeling that religious misbehavior of individuals might bring down punishment not merely on the individuals concerned but upon at least their immediate communities" (204). Therefore, since

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<sup>14</sup> See McGrath for an in depth psychological correlation between the trauma of Jesus' death and the growth of the early Christian church.

Gonzalo de Berceo disagrees with giving more jurisdiction to church hierarchy for spiritual matters, he fears that compliance will not only invite divine retribution on himself or the reform's proponents, but upon the entire *corpus Christi*. De Ste. Croix notes that Christians only called for tolerance when they perceived persecution, which reinforces the idea that victimhood provides a rhetoric that allows an individual or group to resist political aggression even when one does not endure a political disadvantage.

The figure of Lawrence in particular has reliable credibility because Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, mentions the deaths of four deacons along with Pope Sixtus during the persecutions by Valerian within months of its occurring, even providing a date as to its occurrence, along with a clear use of the execution to mobilize Christians in his own area and tarnish the emperor and the Roman governor. The particulars of Cyprian's letter speak very little to the volumes that would come later. He does not even mention Lawrence by name, instead citing the deaths by Valerian of "Xistum [. . .] et cum eo diacones quattuor" (840). While he does not elaborate on the individuals and circumstances involved, he does use the occasion to parry back at his adversary by using it to strengthen his interlocutors and point out that a victory lies in the loss: "Fraternitas corroborari et ad agonem spiritalem praeparari, ut singuli ex nostris non magis mortem cogitent quam immortalitatem [. . .]. In qua sciunt Dei et Christi milites non perimi sed coronari" (840). Thus the tale of Lawrence from its beginning arises within a context of "persecutioni" that is in turn used as a reason to be Christian and remain so in the face of political authority (840), even if the political authorities of the time acted well within their legal prerogatives. During the following centuries, both those speaking about and writing the story of Lawrence add elaborations to Cyprian's account, but with all of them, the story retains these core values in

relation to Christianity: that Christians are persecuted, and that they ought to coalesce and rejoice because of it.

Gonzalo begins his version of the events by announcing in his characteristic style, the purpose of the enterprise to “fer la passion de sennor sant Laurent / en romanz qe la pueda saber toda la gent” (1cd). By this time the use of Latin among both lay and clergy had evolved in such a way as to necessitate alternative strategies by which to educate them. The other biographical works that Gonzalo translates include hagiographies, a genre upon which the rest of this dissertation will concentrate. At the end of his lifetime, the poet turns back to an older, but by no means less popular, genre. After a long, productive life, he finds solace in the happy ending of death that characterizes martyrdoms. Moreover, he may perceive his dedication to the poetic craft as a kind of martyrdom, which the next chapter makes more evident as it analyzes how hagiography allows martyrdom to continue even where it is absent. To be a true Christian, Gonzalo had to see himself as a sufferer on the earth, if not persecuted by worldly authority, then persecuted by human frailty and self-sacrifice to his faith. In this way he fulfills Augustine’s interpretation of Lawrence’s martyrdom in his *Sermo 304* that “Intelligamus ergo praeter effusionem cruoris, praeter periculum passionis, quomodo Christum debeat sequi Christianus” (*PL* 38.1396). Through the difficulty of producing *MSL* at the end of his life, he made accessible the Christian virtue of martyrdom and even died while writing it, a victim to the physical exertion and privation he may have hoped others saw reflected in the charitable service and sacrifice of his final protagonist.

Gonzalo’s version provides background information for its protagonists not included in the *Passio polychronii* designed to interpolate and reinforce his immediate community rather than forge a new one. Gonzalo introduces San Vincente and San Valerio as contemporaries of

Lorenzo and Sixto, though Dutton points out that the deaths of Lawrence and Saint Valerian occurred so many years apart that this is improbable (*MSL* 159). Nevertheless, this anachronism makes sense if Gonzalo meant to acknowledge the holy men of his region. Because of this fellowship, he is able to:

- direct the patrons of the San Millán monastery to identify themselves as part of Lorenzo's community.
- characterize Lorenzo and Vicente as worthy of emulation.
- instruct the audience how to behave based on their relationship with his characters.

Aside from identifying them with the region of his immediate audience, Gonzalo draws it in by calling them “sin depresura” (2a) and “de grant cordura” (2c). These simple terms allow the audience to contrast who is good with the later evil, as delineated earlier in Altman's definition of the of the *passio* (1). Moreover, because the audience would prefer to be identified as possessing the same virtues, Gonzalo's portrayal causes the (Iberian) audience both to identify with the characters as well as strive to imitate them. Lorenzo and Vicente, the two younger protagonists, subjugate themselves to Valerio, who “nudrió estos criados, demostrólis la vía / qe amassen al fijo de la Virgo María” (3cd). This depiction reflects and reinforces the existing social structures that Gonzalo considers ideal, further allowing the *passio* to affirm the identity of the group that already identifies with the paradigm that he presents. Gonzalo doesn't really so much seek to convert anyone that disagrees with him here as he seeks to ratify what his group already accepts, as in Beverley's “forms of solidarity practice” (*Against* 18), a common characteristic of modern *testimonio*.



Gonzalo reduces time as a barrier between himself and his objects of study. When describing the impressive learning acquired by Lorenzo and Vicente, he says it seemed that “los oviesse de sant Paulo doctrinados” (4b). Just as the apostle Paul, who would have died two centuries earlier, can continue to instruct these brilliant pupils, so can Gonzalo and his milieu find instruction directly from Lorenzo and Sixto, a literary illusion and perception about time that might mystify moderns by making the entire period appear monolithic. This technique allows the text to interpolate its audience regardless of the period from which it originates by avoiding the cultural, geographic, and teleological barriers that might otherwise alienate.

*Copla 5* continues to characterize Lorenzo and Vicente in a manner that inscribes the audience by placing the audience in an inescapable circuit: “Convertién los errados con su predicación” (5b). They must not be one of the “errados” here described, or they will lose from “Jesu Christo plenos de bendición” (5d); the audience, therefore, becomes one of those converted by their preaching or else stands outside the circuit, in damnation, regardless of their actual need for such a conversion. In turn, to fully find itself free of error, the audience must also correct others, an intimation that might lead a modern reader to assume that during the Middle Ages, no one could be left to correct, though there is no way to prove this is actually the case.

After meeting these characters, the text introduces Pope Sixto as he summons “las clerecías cuándo fuessen juntas” (7d). While he turns out a hero by the time he dies, in this version of the *passio*, his first appearance creates some curious dissonance as observed by Daniel Hartnett: “The associations of an ambitious and pushy pope coupled with the legal defense of papal privilege have strong parallels to Berceo’s perspective as a cleric in the Spanish church in the first decades of the thirteenth century” (236). Unlike other versions of the story that feature Sixto as a close associate of Lorenzo living and ministering together in Huesca, Gonzalo’s Greek

and pontifical Sixto alienates the audience and even arouses sympathy for Valerio who has to relinquish Lorenzo for papal service, constituting the first victimization for Christ the poem elaborates. Sixto makes a showy petition to Valerio that turns into intimidation:

Ruégote, mi amigo, por Dios e karidat,  
 que recibas mi ruego e fes esta bondat,  
 que me des estos clérigos por en esta cibdat.  
 Gradecértelo hé mucho de coraçón,  
 seré tu adebdado pora toda sazón;  
 frayre, cata derecho e non digas de non,  
 ca fariés contra ley e non serié razón. (10b-11d)

The aged bishop tries to reason with his ecclesiastical superior by emphasizing how the two men strengthen his “flaqueza” in the Huescan ministry (12c), where souls should not have lower priority than in Rome: “si non, somos perdidos yo e la mi cibdat” (12d). Because of a speech impediment and his old age, Vicente and Lorenzo helped Valerio succeed in his bishopric for “el uno es mi lengua, el otro mi privado” (13b). Valerio has so much confidence in the two men that he would rather the pope strip him of his office than dispose his city of its two best spiritual advisors. Valerio prevails to strike a deal that Sixto choose only one of them, “mas non sin repindencia” (15d). The text makes clear that the effect of Sixto’s demand leaves “Vincencio con Valerio, tristes e desmarridos” (16d), sufferers for the abuse of one with greater power against which they cannot defend.

After the exchange between Valerio and Sixto, the rest of the narrative more or less follows the *Passio polychronii*, making Sixto’s unfair treatment the centerpiece of Gonzalo’s interpretation of the tradition and the locus of greatest local color. Especially interesting about

this exchange is that it underlines the complex and multivalent use of the politics of suffering. It is not a strictly “weak” versus “powerful” strategy; it can be used by anyone. Moss describes the strategy in these terms:

It is not only the suffering and oppressed who think of themselves as persecuted. Martyrdom is easily adapted by the powerful as a way of casting themselves as victims and justifying their polemical and vitriolic attacks on others. When disagreement is viewed as persecution, then these innocent sufferers must fight.  
(*Myth 8-9*)

This complexity can make it difficult for observers to discern whether or not anyone has suffered. Anyone in any social or political position can deploy the rhetoric irrespective of their actual status as a victim or an oppressor. This helps to demonstrate the slipperiness of dichotomizing rather gradational terms like victims and oppressors, which as it turns out has to do as much with real oppression as with perceived oppression as well as those who would manipulate its discourse. Victimization can constitute a cultural paradigm in which individuals and communities gravitate to victimization as a typical reaction for offense as opposed to acting under other cultural paradigms such as dignity, aggression, or honor.<sup>15</sup> Individuals can see themselves as sacrificial lambs or martyrs every time another does something with which they disagree as a political strategy to advance their own cultural paradigm.

As Gonzalo abandons his local twists for a stricter translation, the text gives insight into broader European and less Iberian concerns and strategies. The narrator tends to elucidate Lorenzo’s character through the perspective of others, giving direction to the audience

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<sup>15</sup> See Campbell and Manning.

concerning how it should also view him. It starts with the most important member of the church structure: “Sixto con sant Laurencio ovo grand alegría” (18a). Then his fame and good works spread throughout the entire city: “Volava el so precio por toda Romanía” (18c). “Todos dizién qe Dios lo avié embiádo” (19c). These perspectives serve as stage directions to the audience, indicating the attitude they ought also to adopt regarding the protagonist.

On the other hand, this consciousness of the masses allows the text to emphasize the sickness of the cultural body that Lorenzo strengthens, revealing complex social layers and individuals that suffer in diverse ways. He administers to the people’s education, which also makes the lack thereof a sickness of the people: “Catávalo por padre la gent desconsejada” (20b). This line especially matters because it highlights the cultural aspect of the text’s discourse: those within the group, the heroes, need no education, but must rather educate, whereas those of differing viewpoints are sick and are victims of error in need of succor. Therefore, if one is a good Christian, he will educate those that do not conform rather than solely receiving education, further reinforcing the strength of the circuit. The text also reveals those that suffer economically: “Era por en consejos muy leal consejero, / de lo qe Dios li dava era buen almosnero” (22ab). He also handles emotional, mental, and spiritual distress: “udié bien los cuitados, entendié bien razón / doliese de las almas qe van en perdición” (23b). The emphasis the text makes on healing this sick cultural body may seem to contradict the notion that Christians see themselves always as sufferers. Even though the Christians depicted in these *coplas* find healing in Lorenzo, the audience nevertheless must first identify itself as in need of the medicine that someone like Lorenzo can administer. As Gonzalo depicts them, Christians seek healing for every imperfection, death offering them the only ultimate escape from affliction; if they are not legally afflicted, then they are to afflict themselves, as the second chapter will demonstrate.

Moreover, the promise of healing has to exist in order for the politics of suffering to have any leverage, as Amato explains. Lorenzo and Christianity's healing impetus has to stand in contrast to infectious paganism and Roman oppression.

After this characterization of Lorenzo as healer for the broken masses, the text turns to corrupt political powers where it continues the politics of suffering. "Levantaron los romanos un mal emperador, / si Nero fue muy malo, non fue ésti major; / cogió con Jesu Christo un tan grand desamor" (25abc). The text dichotomizes Decio as the aggressor to the innocent Christians: "Desafió al mundo, e a la Christiandat, / empeçó en los clérigos fazer grand crüeldat" (26ab). The rhetoric exhibited through *passio* narratives tends to push blame outside the individual to those in political power. When Christianity itself gains political power, saints' tales transfer suffering by splitting the individual and making the subject a sufferer of his or her own past sins and present weaknesses. However, the earlier rhetoric of political oppression remains available, as in Gonzalo's comparison between Sixto and his own pope, opting to see themselves as oppressed as a way to manage conflict. In this case Gonzalo's indeterminable intent does not matter inasmuch as the medieval Christian paradigm directed the individual to perceive dissonance as another malady to which mortality and human frailty subjected him. The suffering medieval writer oriented everything around his own body, including his own worldview and evaluated experience and perspective outside of himself against whether or not it harmonized or created burden with that worldview.

The crux of Decio's persecutions does not come from a pagan mouth until a Christian one first speaks it, paralleling the politics of suffering, which also speaks for the victim's oppressor. Sixto gathers together his priests in council and declares to them, as Gonzalo declares to us that

El emperador anda por la fe guerrear,  
 quiere fer los christianos a Christo denegar,  
 qe vayan a los ídolos offercer e orar,  
 los qe lo non fizieren quiérelos martiriar. (29)

The persecution here from Sixto's perspective is eminently spiritual or religious: suffering in body appeals more than suffering in soul, both of which persecutions come at the hands of the earthly polity. In essence, it does not matter what Decio does, since he is not a Christian politician, he of necessity will persecute them in one way or another. Chapter 3 will talk more pointedly about how this type of characterization of the suffering self distorts those blamed for oppression.

In order to rally the courage of his entourage, Sixto continues to face Decio's supposed opposition by referring back to earlier martyrs, illustrating how Gonzalo and other Christians interested in the *passio* were supposed to react to social and political dissonance.

Amigos, esta vida mucho no la preciamos,  
 olvidemos el mundo, de las almas pensemos;  
 quanto aquí dessáremos todo lo cobraremos,  
 non nos embargue miedo, en Dios sólo fiemos.  
 Dios por Sancta Ecclesia salvar e redemir  
 dio so cuerpo a pena, en cruz quiso morir;  
 murieron los apóstolos pora Christo seguir,  
 por alçar la Ecclesia, la mala fe premir.  
 Los que agora somos conviene qe muramos,  
 nuestros antecessores muriendo los sigamos;

demos por la Ecclesia las carnes qe cevamos,  
 por poco de lazerio las almas non perdamos. (30-32)

They saw such opposition as comparable to Christ's suffering and as a tradition handed down from his apostles and onward until it arrives in this case to Gonzalo's audience. They were not to act with aggression, but rather with obstinacy to any perceived contradiction to the faith, and should they suffer even death, the act of suffering itself would strengthen the larger social unit to which the individual martyr pertained. Moreover, death itself would recompense the martyr for the sacrifice.

This might seem a counterintuitive argument about a period well known for war and persecution, but it nevertheless constituted an important aspect of how Christians understood themselves in relationship to those with distinct worldviews, as pointed out earlier by Moss. Where Christianity became the most powerful political entity, this mentality was adapted in order to justify the persecution of the weak, seen as imperfections affecting the health of the Christian body. Moreover, individuals that did not speak up for the faith conspired with diseased elements of society. Thusly, Sixto actively seeks audience with Decio even though avoiding him allays or delays conflict: "Fue el santo obispo ant el emperador, / disputó con el lobo como leal pastor" (35ab). This way Sixto assures that no one can consider him part of the sickness of their society or that he approves of Decio's alterity. Anyone not Christian worked actively against the religion's cause, and active belligerence to the non-Christian was the only way to combat such oppression. Consequently, in this crucial moment Sixto transforms from the oppressive pontiff of Gonzalo's fancy to the holy pastor, when he becomes oppressed by choice, sacrificing for the Christian path.

Sixto's characterization of Decio recalls his own earlier abuse of Valerio: "Tú eres grand omne, mucho es Dios mayor, / non precio tus menazas un dinero valor" (40cd). In a subtle irony, the tables have turned. The theme of unequal power inspires sympathy for the weaker characters that the narrator has depicted with positive character attributes. The narrator sides with the weaker group even though its cause in each case loses from a political standpoint. This emphasis on inequality helps to explain why early pagans countenanced Christianity and decried their own political institutions, because they saw the nobler cause defending the weak, even though no such persecution may have really taken place to the degree insinuated. Ultimately, Christianity became the state religion in part because of the sympathy it engendered. Here, we begin to recognize the same sort of sympathy inspiring *testimonios* which go to the rescue of the subaltern, identifying such as the new sick of the global body. While many times the politics of suffering works well because it has such fierce legitimacy and urgency, as Patai observes, it becomes dangerous if taken for granted.

When Sixto refuses to grant Decio anything from the church's treasury, an outpouring of mudslinging occurs that exemplifies the poetic nature of the politics of suffering, the winner of which becomes the oppressed hero of the audience's story. Decio performs abysmally by calling Sixto "enloquido / andas fuera carrera en un vano roído" (42ab). Perhaps recognizing his own poetic ineptitude in transforming the pope into an object worth abhorring, he switches from the realm of speech into physical force, "sacrífica connusco, cambia essi sentido, / si non, en ora eres qe serás mal baylido" (42cd). Sixto does much better, using the sovereign's own aggression against him,

Decio fablas grand vanidat,  
non yaz en tus falagos punto de piadat;



andas por confonder toda la Christiandat,  
 mas tú serás confuso, esto será verdat.  
 Yo a don Jesu Christo quiero sacrificar,  
 qe fizo de sí ostia por las almas salvar;  
 non quiero a tus ídolos servir nin adorar,  
 qe non han nul sentido nin se pueden mandar. (43-44)

Decio responds by mandating his public decapitation, but Sixto wins the verbal bout. First of all, Sixto unleashes far more epithets than his pithy opponent, the sheer imbalance of which tips the scales in favor of the pontiff. Additionally, however, Sixto makes sure to advise the audience of his defenselessness by mentioning that Jesus Christ died in the same manner. This makes Decio's behavior inexplicable if he not evil or greedy. Importantly, Sixto does not win based on his correct characterization of the emperor: Decio never says anything about his intentions for Christianity. Allegations about generalized persecution have only issued from Sixto's mouth up until this point. This inaccuracy underlies the politics of suffering because in order for the "oppressed" social or political entity to succeed, the "oppressor" must oppress as much as possible in order to avoid confusion and to arouse sympathy for the "weaker" party. Amato explains that the politics of suffering "implies that anyone who does not fall in the privileged categories of suffering therefore does not suffer at all, but instead is responsible for the suffering of everyone else" (28). The third chapter will deal exclusively with the nature of this poetization of the oppressor, but for now, note that it occurs largely in this case to arouse sympathy for the speaking, supposedly weaker group of early Christians, in the estimation of patrons of the San Millán Monastery. Even though in essence Sixto loses this political exchange, the power of his words leave the door open for others to finish Decio off, giving the first loser the last laugh.

Meanwhile, Lorenzo dutifully distributes the church's treasury in its entirety to the poor, an act that continues to elevate the status of Christianity by contrasting his behavior diametrically to Decio's: whereas Decio seeks to take money from the weak and oppressed, Christians give money to them. Such rhetoric inspires favor for Christianity among the masses, who have never known a regime that even acknowledges their existence. According to Perkins, "Hagiographic discourse offered a radically different script and continued the work of martyr texts by introducing and maintaining different categories of subjects into the cultural consciousness" (204), in this case, by introducing the poor and suffering masses. This contrasting attitude toward the poor makes Decio look even worse when his wrath turns toward Lorenzo. Likewise, whereas the narrator repeats scenes in which Decio harms others, Lorenzo "si sobre los enfermos ponie las manos, / los qe eran dolientes tornavan luego sanos" (48ab). It is clear that of the two worldviews, Christianity understands sickness better and how to heal it while the pagan Romans only enlarge wounds—not an attractive political quality. The text mentions specifically the healing of one widow who had protected many Christians in the area. The politics of suffering only functions inasmuch as healing can occur: sufferers complain because they believe that the causes of their discomforts can be ameliorated. It aligns those who suffer and heal suffering in opposition with those who oppress. Unlike the *passio*, in hagiography characters no longer face political threats but instead only cultural and religious disagreements configured as oppression. In the case of the widow, a life without faith oppresses her, from which Lorenzo's "sanctas manos" relieve her (49a), symbolic of Christianity's constant ability to relieve—especially in death—versus life's constant pain. Even though death offers mankind a more attractive reward, all must do everything possible to continue enduring life, which as seen here, means that the

woman eschews the death threatened by her illness by accepting Lorenzo's healing power.<sup>16</sup>

Thus Gonzalo reinforces piety's political role in Christian subjects' lives as the only comfort to life's pain.

After distributing the entire treasury to the poor, Lorenzo encounters Sixto bound on his way to martyrdom. Rather than focus on any Roman law that Sixto may have violated, the narrative concentrates on how Sixto's impending death grieves Lorenzo. He entreats Sixto, "non me desempares por Dios e caridat; / si non me lievas padre, en tu sociëdat, / fincaré como uérfano en toda pobredat" (64bcd). Additionally, Lorenzo beseeches him not to die with any secret spite toward his deacon and even offers to expire in his place. Sixto rejects this proposal, citing the hope of the young, but then proceeds to prophesy of Lorenzo's own martyrdom only five days later, calling it a "grand corona mejor de oro puro" (72d). Here, the crown refers to death, but not just any death. In order for it to be glorious, it must not be a natural death, but one occasioned by the unequal exercise of power over him. This prophecy subverts Sixto's earlier insistence that he and Lorenzo should not exchange places; at least one of their lives could be spared if such an exchange were possible. However, two deaths in the name of Christ have a much more powerful postmortem taint on Decio's image than Lorenzo's death alone.

When Sixto does die, he does so in the correct manner, without yelling or in show of deference to the authority that punishes him. In imitation of Christ himself, he shows "muy grand paciencia" and the two servants who die with him "de buena cabtenencia" (155cd). The text follows a similar pattern when Lorenzo himself dies later on the gridiron with enough presence

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<sup>16</sup> For a more in depth look at the dizzying history of Christian theological attitudes about martyrdom and suicide, life and death, see Paul Middleton.

of mind to mock his persecutors, demonstrating his composure and the inefficacy of earthly power before the power of God that he represents. As Hartnett says, “Subversive acts deprived his persecutors of their power over him” (238). Whether literal or rhetorical, this characterization of the victims’ attitudes in death allows them to retain autonomy from their oppressors until the end because they fail to determine the weaker group’s behavior despite threats and torture. It also portrays the martyrs with greater fortitude and self-control than their superiors. This reconfigures the social hierarchy of the situation even if it does not change the political reality that makes it possible. The text strives to arrest the real political power that makes both men literal subalterns—criminals of the hegemony—so that the audience sees a different hierarchy; this begins to allow the existing political structure to weaken and become replaced by the ideal here depicted.

When the Roman officers finally apprehend Lorenzo, the text does not cite any broken Roman law, but because rather “los omnes malos en él mientes metiendo” (78b). As this occurs, the text depicts Decio sadistically “plaziendo” in his power and tyranny (78d). As Altman observes, everything is black and white rather than anything in between. Even the privates that bring him to the emperor collude with the murders as “cadiellos carniceros” (79a), who offer him up for money. The politics of suffering has no gray area or complexity in reference to its characters.

As more poor and infirm flock to Lorenzo in prison, Decio calls him forward and demands he give him the church’s treasury. Once again, Decio tries to use language to deform the weak person standing before him, calling him the epithet “don christiante” (86c). However, Lorenzo neutralizes this by standing firm and confident in the face of enormous power, making Decio look even worse. Moreover, this exchange strengthens the community feeling offered by

Christianity by allowing the audience to feel bound together by the common negative connotation of Decio's epithet.

Before the poem's abrupt ending, it arrives to the irony most associated with the saint, consisting of Lorenzo promising to show the location of the church's treasury to the emperor only to assemble the poor together and saying,

Estos tesoros quiso siempre Dios más amar.  
 Estos son los tesoros que nunca envejecen,  
 quanto más se derraman siempre ellos más crecen;  
 los que a éstos aman e a éstos ofrecen,  
 éstos avrán el Regno do las almas guarecen. (96d-97d)

While this scene continues to contrast Lorenzo's composure with Decio's avarice, it also designates the Christian concept of the holy. In this scene, Lorenzo does not indicate that the righteous or most obedient will ascend to heaven, but rather the poorest, with explicit reference to the economically poor, not just the spiritually poor referred to in Jesus' beatitudes. By Lorenzo's definition, the subaltern is the righteous, a definition that does not seem to have changed significantly during the last two thousand years. Moreover, this configuration of the righteous makes the Church powerful because it seeks to both serve and give voice to a much larger group than those that wielded power before it, making a change in the balance of power more attractive to those previously below this literary horizon.

The text cuts off abruptly as Lorenzo taunts and then forgives his persecutors with his famous request that they turn him over on the grill so that he will be well done on both sides. Dutton provides sufficient evidence that this text is incomplete rather than missing folios (*MSL* 139). Moreover, the text does not end with Gonzalo's characteristic benediction and signature. It

befits this last work, which deals more explicitly with the death of its protagonist, that the narrative itself should “die” due to Gonzalo’s own demise as a reflection of the arduous exercise entailed in writing during the Middle Ages. Bower describes Gonzalo’s perspective of his arduous task as “the labored, tenebrous tale *he* tells that attracts the attention of heavenly readers” (“Ca” 186, her emphasis). In this sense, as Bower goes on to note, *MSL* may not depart from Gonzalo’s other saints’ tales, which “underscore the saints’ engagement with a textual tradition that conveys the model of sanctity” (188). Like his protagonist, Gonzalo dies a martyr to his own enterprise in that he risks his own (sometimes subversive) opinions as well as subjecting himself to a painful mental and physical labor. His death during the poem’s redaction draws a parallel between himself and Lorenzo. Gonzalo is a new sufferer for the cause of Christianity, laughing at the powers that surround him.

To conclude, Amato’s final injunctions about the politics of suffering deserve reissue, as few have referred to him since his call two decades ago: “Every individual must be allowed to value and tell the story of his own experience with suffering. While these stories don’t need to be accepted as either true or even significant, the human community cannot thrive when a few are able to assert a monopoly over the power of innocent suffering” (29-30). After Christianity’s two thousand year-old monopoly on suffering visible through this analysis of Saint Lawrence, intellectuals seek to give voice to other sufferers. However, while we must appreciate those clamoring for attention today just as the Romans did during the rise of Christianity, it is essential to recognize that any of these new voices is just as capable of repeating the past as another. Hearing such new voices may assist in the conquest against suffering, they can assist in oppression, and they may even deconstruct the very faith that depreciates suffering.

## Chapter 2

## The Dominatrix of Alexandria:

## Mary of Egypt's Reconfiguration of Oppression

Duo sunt autem martyrii genera, unum in aperta  
 passione, alterum in occulta animi uirtute. Nam multi  
 hostis insidias tolerantes et cunctis carnalibus desideriis  
 resistentes per hoc quod se omnipotente Deo in corde  
 mactauerunt etiam pacis tempore martyres facti sunt, qui  
 etiam si persecutionis tempus existeret, martyres esse  
 potuissent.

--Isidore of Seville. *Etymologies* 7.11.4.

Gonzalo's sacrifice for the sake of *MSL* anticipates the literary genre that rose to prominence as Christianity gained political power and could draw less from stories about individuals suffering legally for their faith: the saint's tale. Like the *passio*, this genre employs the politics of suffering, but does not often feature emperors oppressing its vulnerable protagonists. As first delineated by Isidore of Seville in the quote above, this difference is often designated in the Christian imaginary as "red martyr" and "white martyr," respectively. In this transfer, Moss comments that saints' tales continue to pit Christians against the rest of the world: "Whether ancient Christians suffered prolonged agonies in the arena or long lives bearing the burdens of self-restraint, their bodies were shaped by these ideologies of martyrdom" (*Ancient* 167). The suffering and oppressed Christian remains central to the articulation of its identity.

After the heyday of the *passio*, hagiographies became popular throughout Europe as the embodiment of the new kind of persecuted Christian. As far back as 1973, K.D. Uitti has observed this subtle transformation:

The faithful demonstrated increased interest in the holy man (or woman) who, unlike the earlier martyrs, practiced a rigorously conceived style of life and dedication to God summed up in the concept of *askesis*, the confessor saint. The ascetic confessor, through his renunciation of the world [the new (old?) persecutor], his humility, and his constantly renewed faith, came to be known for his miracles. (19)

This chapter analyzes some of the implications of making Christianity's suffering voluntary and its oppressor the world and sin, thus linking *passio* and *vita*, two genres that often go separated. This change culminates in a gender-bending aesthetic, observable even in Uitti's quote above in which he wavers with respect to who can be holy, but ultimately emphasizes the masculinizing and empowering position of asceticism.

According to Moss, debates about the value of voluntary suffering surfaced soon after the rise of Christianity with Clement, who "distinguishes between simple martyrdom (death) and true, gnostic martyrdom. The latter [. . .] entails a life lived purely, in knowledge of God, without passion, and in obedience to God" (543 "Discourse"). This attitude toward martyrdom anticipates and begins to shift away from the death that the *passio* requires and moves toward a deathless suffering. Meanwhile, other scholars have scrutinized to what extent it closed gender gaps during the Middle Ages. Caroline Walker Bynum took notice of the Christian fragmented body's complex relationship with power and gender during the Middle Ages (*Fragmentation*). In a way picking up where Bynum leaves off, Karmen MacKendrick mobilizes Nietzsche, Freud,



Bataille, Deleuze, and Foucault among others to view asceticism as a transgressive pleasure. She argues that asceticism is “unquestionably powerful, subversive precisely in its conformity to religion’s demands” (86). This conformity allows asceticism’s participants to undertake invisible resistance to the medieval power structures that Bynum describes. The extremity of the self-deprivation described in works like *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca* (henceforth *VSME*) left medieval audiences gaping in wonder at the holy perversity that its subjects engage, somewhat like a medieval freak show, but strange precisely because it was so conforming, yet permitting a “sense of power [. . .], an extraordinary relation to one’s own self, flesh, and subjectivity” (MacKendrick 103). Thus, what appears to perpetuate oppression and inequality actually provides a location of limited but sanctioned self-realization and expression while still hanging on to present structures and relationships. Virginia Burrus asks whether or not MacKendrick’s findings might not disclose a “distinctly feminine performance” (60). This chapter helps to answer this question by reconciling to some degree the paradox that MacKendrick sees in hagiography’s “self-denying and yet self-overcoming” aspects (86).

*VSME* acts as a clerical fantasy that interrogates existing power structures in a play reminiscent of sadomasochism. Like masochism, *VSME*’s discourse about self-induced pain “complicates our political understanding of domination because it locates pleasure in submission” (Mennel 1). Rather than subverting existing power structures, the asceticism in saints’ lives leaves them intact, while yet persisting beyond their reach. Barbara Mennel describes that while perverse performances such as these may have subversive “potential,” she demarcates “their psychic investment in hegemonic representational practices” (8). Therefore, they depend on the status quo for their pleasure, “always subversive *and* hegemonic” (4, her emphasis). Mennel decides that the play that masochism and asceticism stage has no easy

resolution, but is instead itself a question for its audience, which must decide whether it “reproduces existing power differentials or whether it offers ways to work through power differentials and resignify symbols of power” (10). To that end, the author of *VSME* along with his hagiographical cohorts before and after present the saint without ever providing an easy solution about who suffers and who savors, who dominates and who serves. It is the retention of an answer, the “pleasure in the suspense” (Mennel 1), that drives these narratives and allowed them to explore the machinations of power and submission for hundreds of years during the Middle Ages.

In order to map the transferral of suffering from *passio* to *vita*, the chapter will distinguish between the word “suffering” and external forms such as “pain” and “hurt.” While many use such terms synonymously, it is helpful to see that unlike a physiological “pain” and “hurt,” whose referents can also find relief beyond the self, “suffering” originates with the subject, an internal hermeneutic that mobilizes experience, ascribes pain and hurt to it, and then makes political moves to compel others to heal what originates with the self. Others can heal pain and hurt, but only the sufferer can relinquish suffering. While concrete pain can occur in conjunction with suffering, the latter only occurs when the individual decides that the experience does not conform to an ideal. Many who feel pain refuse to suffer, while some that have no pain insist that they do and may even create it for themselves in a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. A distinction between these two terms assists those who strive to alleviate pain because suffering exerts a loud political influence, whereas pain, as Scarry points out, is subtle and often silences expression.

The earliest known story about a woman living in the Jordanian desert performing penance for a life of frivolity and sin and encountered by an admiring monk, comes from

Sophronius in the seventh century. Ernesto Delgado proves the improbability that the story depicts a real person, but rather that Sophronius assembled elements from the stories of Mary Magdalene and Paul the Hermit in order to moralize about the pride that the original story's male protagonist displays. Sophronius' version focuses on the monk Zosimas rather than on Mary of Egypt. Feeling depressed because he has attained such a high level of piety and righteousness that he can no longer progress, he retires to a monastery near the Jordan river and then into the wilderness where he encounters a woman of such great holiness despite a previous life of such intense wickedness, that he realizes that he has a great deal more of spiritual progress possible. With such a tale, Sophronius warns his audience of the imprudence of spiritual complacency.

As one of Christianity's earliest and most popular saint's tales, Sophronius spins a yarn that no longer involves political or legal intimidation of Christians. However, as part of the legacy of Christian literature, the story still retains many features of the *passio* genre. According to Patricia Grieve, "Mary's story dramatizes the view of the double disruptiveness—civic and spiritual—of the prostitute, and that her reformation and self-transformation into a saintly ascetic renders her life a paradigm for a new kind of community" ("Paradise" 134). Mary's asceticism constitutes the new Christian martyrdom, one afflicted by sin that allows admired members of the community to retain their earlier identity as sufferers as a strategy for maintaining the power that Christianity has finally achieved. Grieve notices that this core feature of the tradition allows it to inscribe the audience into a paradigmatic community of sufferers despite the absence of persecution, because they choose to see themselves as such and may even cause themselves pain. Grieve concludes that "Mary's story spreads out in ever-widening circles, drawing into one spiritual nation the family of humankind and contributing to that nation's salvation and eternal life" ("Paradise" 151). Thus, while any Christian text seeks to implicate the entire family of

Adam, it also inevitably seeks to strengthen its inner community of already initiated adherents, as *VSME* will demonstrate.

Over time, as the story of Zosimas grew in popularity, the role of the original protagonist diminished in favor of interest in the literary evolution of the story's second major character Mary, whose past and present grew ever more disparate with each elaboration. By the time a Spanish monk took it upon himself to translate the French *Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egiptienne*, Zosimas—now named Gozimás—occupied only a chapter of Mary's incredible tale of debauchery and sexuality turned piety and holiness. The Spanish version is the only poem this dissertation will discuss in detail not written in *cuaderna vía* or authored by Gonzalo de Berceo. *VSME* offers important balance to the other chapters by demonstrating that other writers had an interest in saints' tales and followed similar patterns rather than that the arguments made only apply to him and his work. Additionally, although *VSME* was not written in *cauderna vía*, it nevertheless fits into a larger literary movement of thirteenth-century Iberia called *mester de clerecía*. More will be said of both *cuaderna vía* and *mester de clerecía* in the next chapter. This chapter will quote from the Spanish text when it concurs with the French version, but important differences that emphasize the activities of the Castilian poet will be made.

The poem begins when María rejects her Christian upbringing and retires to Alexandria where, rather than strictly prostitute herself, she becomes the most popular woman in the city for her beauty and adoration of sexual activity for its own sake, selling cloth on the side and living off of gifts from her admirers. Bored with her lifestyle, upon observing a galleon of pilgrims preparing to set sail for the holy land, she offers her body in exchange for passage with a casual curiosity about their religious endeavor. While she continues her lifestyle in Jerusalem, a pair of angels prevents her entrance to the temple, whereupon she finally recognizes God's displeasure,

repents, and retreats to the wilderness for forty-seven years of penance for what she has done until she encounters the admiring Gozimás—the earlier iterations’ protagonist Zosimas. This story features no political intimidation and no marginalization of Christianity, but nevertheless continually raises the themes of oppression and suffering.

The first allusion occurs in the poem’s introduction in which the poet invites his imagined male audience to listen and believe his story “de corazón / sí ayades de Dios perdón” (4d).<sup>17</sup> One of Christianity’s central tenants is that of sin and forgiveness, but this invitation presents a complex relationship between the narrator, the audience, and God. The narrator uses the concepts of sin and eternal punishment if not as threatening motivators to hear and believe his story, then at least out of concern for his anticipated audience. He either sees his audience at risk of sinning if they do not believe him, or he sees them as sinful already, escape from which they might achieve through adherence and faith in what he will tell them. In either case, he views sin as a form of oppression. However, a political entity does not embody this form of oppression. Rather, it incites an individual to masochism (repentance), while in tacit ways the narrator coerces the audience, using the threat of sin as leverage for the agendas embedded in his narrative. Additionally, his invitation indicates his own desire to evade complicity with the sins he observes or otherwise anticipates, a declaration that parallels the loud protesting language of the martyrs which brings risk of death when they could otherwise remain silent and alive. Even though no political force literally occurs here, the language of suffering survives for its author to use in a new social and political context: everyone is oppressed by sin. Since no one can confront

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<sup>17</sup> All citations from the Spanish as well as the anonymous French it is based on derive from Alvar (1972).

an emperor to face an evitable execution like Sixto, individuals therefore are to punish themselves to avoid complicity with sin. Moreover, viewing himself as the Christian administrator, the poet and his story can heal or prevent the suffering associated with sin, thus maintaining the medical role of Christianity.

Early on in the author's depiction of María, he contrasts God's goodness with María's sinfulness by addressing the way she uses her body. "Beltad le dio Nuestro Sennyor / porque fue hermosa picador" (24-25). This situates a problematic position for María. Why did God give her such a beautiful body, knowing that disclosing such a gift in any way constituted a sin according to Christian doctrine? If the only righteous end for women was either in the convent or in marriage, why would God make any woman more desirable than another? This vocabulary draws the poet's audience into María the dominatrix's circle, for if they agree with the poet, they must see women and their bodies as serving more than a pious purpose, making them voyeurs under the new oppressor. If it is true that María is so beautiful, then the poet's audience may be tempted to see it wasted when she becomes converted, provoking a sense of shame by the insinuation. Many early martyrs' tales played on the same motif, featuring a beautiful Christian woman beneath the eye of a wicked pagan who would demand her sexual favor only for her to rebuff him with her chaste piety. This would incur the powerful pagan's wrath and end with the woman's death and suffering, as in the case of Agatha. The author of *VSME* plays with the traditions of female beauty in tension in order to question the very concept and role of femininity within Christian and secular frameworks as beauty seems to put women in an impossible position. He invites the audience to relinquish physical notions of beauty and see beauty as a spiritual attainment which María achieves by the end of the story. Only a few lines after this, he

points out that “Dios del çielo non crió pecado” (41) so that his making María beautiful was not synonymous with making or tempting her to sin.

María’s sinful use of her beauty also juxtaposes with God’s willingness to preserve her beauty despite his power to revoke it. This again elevates the merciful Christian operative with the corruption and abuse of secular power, which María herself now embodies. Just as God puts Decio in power in *MSL* and could have revoked it, he allows everyone to use well or poorly their positions in contrast to how mankind uses such gifts to exploit, manipulate and oppress. María acts as the rhetorical descendent of the pagan politician, further complicating the role woman occupies in the story. Rather than a weak virgin or ancient matriarch, María begins her journey with enormous power. While this could be chalked up to masculine fear of a world turned upside-down, María retains this power over men even at the end of the story when she encounters Gozimás. Though a man has control over the *vita*’s fantasy, her contrasting lifestyles make her highly accessible to women because she above all characterizes the possibility that anyone can obtain forgiveness from God. *VSME* elaborates a much more complex portrayal of women than might normally be expected of a thirteenth-century Christian text.

The poet’s thesis for the poem most explicitly underlines his understanding of sin as a new form of oppression:

Esto sepa tod’ pecador  
que fuer’ culpado del Criador,  
que non es pecado  
tan grande ni tan horrible,  
que Dios non le faga perdón  
por penitencia ho por confession. (27-32)

Enrica Ardemagni points to these lines as separating themselves from the earlier versions of Saint Mary of Egypt, and that they reflect the influence of the Fourth Lateran Council,<sup>18</sup> which conferred greater authority on clergy and placed greater emphasis on confession and penance. The author of *VSME* demonstrates from these verses his understanding that sin is a disease curable through Christian devotion, as Zubillaga observes: “sitúa al pecado como requisito previo de la penitencia ulterior” (454). This creates a curious double-bind. First, all mankind suffers from the disease of sin, the new emperor. However, on the other hand, the only healing from the first existential weight lies in further oppression, that of voluntary subjection to suffering, the new martyrdom. Post-martyrdom literature in which no polity punishes Christians features a bifurcating of the human subject by collapsing time and depicting mortality itself as disease which only the self-surgery of penitence can bring hope for a death in which suffering no longer continues, a death that can match that of the martyrs. Christianity postulates that every human individual that *will* suffer in death by judgment (future) is *already* suffering even if it be so unwittingly (present). This sense of suffer now for a bit or suffer now and later forever comprises the central argument of *VSME* as its protagonist goes from enjoying the fleeting physical pleasure of mortality to realizing how much longer eternity is, at which time pleasure itself transforms into a form of sinful self-coercion. In both kinds of persecution, whether in martyr or saint’s tales, the suffering has some degree of voluntariness. Christians, one way or

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<sup>18</sup> Other scholars that have linked Spanish textual production during this period to the Fourth Lateran Council include Baños Vallejo (“Hagiografía”), Hartnett, Pepin and Feiss, and Weiss.



another, are to seek out ways to suffer in this life rather than seek its comforts, which lead to damnation. Otherwise, they are oppressed already by the sins that entangle them.

María's initial rebellion from her Christian parents reveals a complex contest about the location of oppression, reminiscent of modern debates about who is the most oppressed or who is oppressed at all. Rather than accept her and before attempting to reclaim her, "sus parientes, cuand' la veién, / por poco que se non murién" (101-102). Her mother approaches her to convince her to take another path, for her father already "te ha airado / non será en su vida pagado; / maldize essa hora en que nasciste" (119-121). Her defiance brings both parents to the brink of death, and her mother "sus ojos lloraba" (124), so that they begin to pay for their daughter's behavior. Her choices are bound up in their own happiness, for they view her as a part of their own body. When one member suffers—for she will suffer at judgment—the entire body suffers according to Paul (1 Corinthians 12:26). The text does not depict María's parents as dominating their daughter, for the girl experiences no apparent suffering when she continues to delight in a different lifestyle. Instead, after María ignores her mother's council, the poet depicts her attitude thus: "María poco lo preçiaba, / que mançebía la gobernaba" (125-126). María is not viewed as having autonomy in her behavior by choosing a different path other than Christianity. Rather, she is seen as being coerced into another path, as not having the Christian courage to stand up and speak out against sin like her mother does. Rather, sin here is seen as the new gods of Rome. When given the choice to die of the things of this world or confess pagan gods, María chooses the latter: "María se va en otro regno / por acabar más de preçio" (135-136).

In her new kingdom, she reigns supreme as the poet depicts her in numerous acts of tyranny that connect her to the old pagan kings of the martyr tales. First, he characterizes her departure from home as "como ladrón" (139), similar to how Decio seeks the papal treasury.

Furthermore, “non demandaba companyía” on her road (142), a behavior that characterizes her until she reaches Jerusalem. As sexual empress of Alexandria, she has no need for companionship as she looks without compassion on the suitors who kill each other for her attention, lending her authority. Those in power oppress alone, antithetical of the sense of community that the poet strives to create through the hagiographic enterprise.

The people of Alexandria treat María as an empress when she arrives despite her vulnerability, being only twelve years old upon her arrival. In fact, Patricia Miller points out that she is not attached to a “pimp, or indeed to any man, unlike most prostitutes who have very little control over their bodies and were subject to legal regulation and disabilities” (428). Instead,

Las meretriçes cuando la vieron  
de buena miente la reçibieron;  
a gran honor la reçibieron  
por la beltat que en ella vieron.  
  
Los fijos de los burzesses mando llamar,  
que la viniesen mirar.  
  
Ellos de ella abién grant sabor,  
que tal era como la flor.  
  
Todos la hi van corteyar  
por el su cuerpo alabar.  
  
Ella los recibí de volonter  
porque fiziessen su plazer. (151-162).

This is no exploited innocent taken advantage of by the rich and the powerful of the city; she is the one taking advantage. Much like a trumpeted entrance of a king or ruler heralded by the

masses, María enters the city with cheers and admiration. She serves no one, but like an obliging, self-centered despot, she receives their favors with pleasure. While possible to interpret this scene as another masculine fear of feminine leadership, the Castilian poet, unlike the French, reminds the audience that while she exerts one kind of oppression, she herself also suffers from another, more subtle one, for “tanto quiere jugar e reir, / que nol miembra que ha de morir” (169-170). Hence, neither men nor women should covet power, for in doing so either gender risks spiritual demise.

She also has the power to incite violence like the tyrannical leaders of in the *passio*.  
When the men of the city gather around her to compete for her,

Los juegos tornan a sanyas;  
ante las puertas, en las entradas,  
dábanse grandes espadadas:  
la sangre que d’ellos salía  
por medio de la cal corría. (176-180)

This carnage she watches with “nulla piedad” (182), much like the bloodthirsty Roman rulers before her. However, again continuing to anticipate her later conversion and to underscore the new concepts of suffering during the Middle Ages, the poet sees her as “cativa” (181), a word which at the time meant “desdichada, triste” (198) according to Alvar. Her life as an oppressor ironically oppresses her.

The poet associates her beauty with nobility and lineage, continuing to translate the tyranny of Rome into the Middle Ages: “No nasció tan bella; / nin reina nin condessa” (210-211). Aside from the bodily beauty she enjoys that connects her to royalty, she also dresses the part:

Prendie oro e argento,  
 bien se vistie a su talento.  
 Brial de xamit se vistié,  
 manto erminyo cobrié.  
 Nunca calçaba otras çapatás,  
 sino de cordobán entretalladas;  
 pintadas eran con oro e con plata,  
 cuerdas de seda con que las ata. (237-244).

The poet here may very well have imagined María here wearing a chopine, one of the most popular and extravagant accessories of the period. Elizabeth Semmelhack traces “the history of the chopine from its origins in antiquity and its dissemination across the Iberian Peninsula under Roman rule to its transformation by the Moors into an unrivaled feature of elite women’s dress in Christian Spain” (120). The poet’s attention to María’s footwear belies the prestigious importance that the article lent to women’s status in both socioeconomic terms as well as physical, with many chopines often measuring several inches in height. However, the performative potential of lavish shoes also meant their identification with Spanish courtesans during the Early Modern period (Semmelhack 120, 134). The leather material from which they were made and described here in *VSME* also echoes modern prescriptions of the dominatrix’s leather costume as a second skin, to say nothing of the essential role her footwear plays in fetish culture.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the poet here portrays María fully performing in the role of the powerful

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<sup>19</sup> Simon Gaunt has suggested that Mary’s detailed physical description constitutes a type of medieval scopophilia, reminiscent of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative

woman, ready to dominate and inflict pain. María's dress and appearance so captivate the entire city that "todos la tienen por de paratge / [. . .] que un fijo de emperador / la prendria por uxor" (248, 251-252). Her influence alone on the city places her at its supreme command. She symbolizes the city's debauchery that binds every inhabitant with the same power that Roman soldiers held before, none of whom dares speak out against María or the frailties of their own bodies. For this reason, the poet concludes, "Bien debe llorar esta juventa / porque nació tan genta" (259-260).

As María grows more restless—she cannot climb any higher than she has—she encounters a band of pilgrims preparing to travel to Jerusalem. While this episode helps advance her story and symbolizes her own journey toward Christ, it also continues to mark María as a power laden empress that carries on the legacy of paganism after the recession of the Roman Empire. First of all, the episode demonstrates María's mobility. On a whim, she abandons the city that adores her and has raised her to her present status, showing that even the masses cannot fix her position. Like an actual empress, she freely departs from her home and makes conquests for larger borders. In this case, like Rome itself, she heads for Jerusalem where, also like Rome, she will face the epicenter of the empire's most formidable and unexpected foe, Christianity itself, only to finally succumb to its righteous influence as well. However, along the way she will continue to dominate and conquer as she tantalizes the pilgrims with her licentiousness by giving her body for passage. Even though she petitions passage by feigning weakness and vulnerability, the poet characterizes her treatment of the other pilgrims as a conquest:

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Cinema." Closer attention to Gaunt's argument will be paid later in the chapter. For now, his comments help to underline the poem's "associations with Sadism" (Mulvey 49).

Primerament los va tentando;  
 después, los va abraçando.  
 E luego s' va con ellos echando,  
 a grant sabor los va besando. (369-372)

In like manner, she shows no weakness or vulnerability as she beholds the enormous waves of the sea or the tempestuous rains of the Mediterranean, not even deigning to call on God when he appears to wield control over the vessel. Instead of God, she ultimately wields supreme command of the ship: “Ellos tanto la querién, / que toda su voluntad complién” (391-392). The poet injects a sharp invective when not a single man is chaste enough to resist her, despite his determination to cross the ocean as a sign of devotion to God, inviting the audience to consider its own constancy and also pointing out all mankind’s need for the Redemption of Christ.

María first displays a chink in her armor after her arrival to the Holy Land. Evidently disappointed that the place does not placate her ennui,

lorando seye en la marina,  
 non sabe ques faga la mesquina.  
 Non conoscié homne nin fembra,  
 aquella tierra nada nol sembla. (403-406)

After a time, she travels to Jerusalem to take up her previous lifestyle, determining still with some irony from the narrator that “yo bien me gobernaré” (412). She enjoys only moderate success compared to her domination of Alexandria until, on the day of Ascension, two armed angels prevent her entrance to the temple. Indeed, from the very beginning of her journey in the Holy Land, she becomes more and more aware of the oppression of her sins and that she never had any dominion at all, almost as if the land itself begins to turn her around. After all, she was

also alone in unfamiliar territory when she first went to Alexandria and when she boarded the boat toward Jerusalem. María as the embodiment of sin stands little chance against the holy power of the new land she intends to conquer. With her impediment at the temple, she finally realizes her own lack of freedom and power, and she becomes ready to embrace the culture of suffering in order to avoid eternal death—in other words she is ready to convert to Christianity.

María's conversion, as argued by Pepin and Feiss, is not contrived or against her will. Throughout the text she shows "growing restlessness and mounting dissatisfaction with her way of life; her very strong will; and her relationships with others" (43). Her obstruction by the angels from entering the temple does not preclude her from going about her previous ways. This is important because Christianity stands in opposition to oppression, as the true liberator. From this point on, María ceases using her body to dominate others and instead adopts masochism in order to free herself from the addictions of her self-tyranny:

Aquí comienza a pensar  
e de corazón a llorar.  
D'amas manos tira a sus cabellos,  
grandes feridas dio a sus pechos. (456-459)

Unlike Agatha or other female martyrs of earlier stories, no earthly authority exists that will tear out her hair or cut off her breasts and make her a saint. In their absence, she must enact such violence upon herself, even going so far as to beg God for death. However, in a Christian context, this phrase cannot mean that she desires to die physically, for that would only accelerate her arrival to eternal suffering, but rather, it must mean that she wants her current self to die in favor of one that can escape such condemnation. She yearns to become a new kind of martyr.

She carries this portrayal of death further when she turns to an image of the Virgin Mary and relinquishes her power as a queen,

Eres del çielo reina,  
 Tu seyas oy mi melezina.  
 A las mis llagas, que son mortales,  
 non quiero otros melezinables. (496-498).

The mortal wounds she bears refer not to her body but to her soul, and she now seeks the surgery available through Christianity to heal them.

In an extensive monologue that María addresses to the Virgin Mary, the poet transmutes his voice in order to preach some of his understandings of how oppression and suffering work in Christianity. First, he emphasizes Christianity's ability to liberate anyone regardless of background, even someone as depraved as the dominatrix of Alexandria: "Non tenemos amas huna vía. / Tú ameste siempre castidat, / e yo luxuria e malveztað" (536-538). According to Enrica Ardemagni, "María becomes a model of conduct and represents not only the repenting of sin, but the value of penance. The author uses this story of a sinner to show that no matter how much one has sinned, if he repents, he will be forgiven by God" (314-5). Then the poet reconfigures oppression and power by delineating alternate and unequal spheres of authority:

El diablo fue tu enemigo,  
 él fue mi senyor e amigo.  
 Tú eres duenya mucho omildosa  
 e yo só pobre e ergullosa. (539-542)

She here refers to two different authorities over her, the devil in her past and the Virgin Mary in her present. While authority can be oppressive, it largely matters on whom one recognizes as



such. While previously María subjected herself to the tyranny of Satan, she now subjects herself to the liberating power of God, much as early Christians willingly were martyred as proof of their subjectivity. Even when “the saint really has no reason to repent, his penitential acts are seen as essential to his or her submission to God” (Ardemagni 313). María further clarifies this concept by portraying the dying Christ as vanquisher of death itself: “E si el non muriesse / non es homne que paraiso hobiesse [. . .] / porque diablo es vençudo” (568-569, 571). Christianity places spiritual and physical death in opposition, the one of paramount importance compared to the other. This makes those of earthly authority of no consequence inasmuch as it does not administer to the spiritual body. Rather, these kinds of authorities can even impede the security of the spiritual body, making them the truest and greatest oppressors.

Thus, at a time when Roman authority has long since receded and the poet faces no immediate threat to his religious practice, rhetoric about oppression persists in permutations wherein the individual (or group) can allow sin to oppress his or her spiritual body—which is true tyranny—or the physical body can suffer in order to eschew the other, the one excluding the other. Through such adjustments and reconfigurations, it becomes apparent that oppression can be a cultural construct, a construct that continues today depending on political expedience. Speaking oppression does not presuppose oppression and indeed can even determine it. It is especially vexing to face such rhetoric because of its urgency: if a person really is in pain, measured analysis of the situation to corroborate the person or group’s claims conspires in his or her endangerment. However, because suffering itself is a construct, one must evaluate whether or not the accused oppressor may not also be a victim. Of course, often it is a complex and multivalent series of coercions on both sides of political lines. Where power is especially unequal, the politics of suffering may be the only means a weaker polity or social group may

have of resistance, but this does not necessarily justify the weaker group. They are not right and do not deserve political authority solely because they are the smaller or weaker group. Indeed, sadomasochism would see the pleasure of forsaking political authority, not as a way of perpetuating cycles of oppression, but rather as a way of annoying them.

María receives immediate forgiveness when she repents. The remainder of the Castilian version of the tale—less so in the French—emphasizes the Christian sacrament of penance, which, having repented, she pays in order to heal from her sins and overcome selfishness, all of which requires her to constantly sacrifice her mortal appetites and comforts. Ardemagni notes that her years in the wilderness represent each day of Lent until Easter (315). Thus, she not only enacts her own penance, but she also enacts the total Christian memorialization of suffering and pain. She relives suffering, her own, and Christianity's, every day of every year that she wanders in the wilderness.

In contrast to her lonely arrival to the populous city of Alexandria, she enters the Jordanian wilderness with Christ as her companion, “ante la imagen de su senyor, / que por su mercé non la dexasse” (679-680). Instead of taking orders from herself or her body, she obeys “una boz” that commands her to the monastery of Saint John near the Jordan River (632). There, she receives the delight of the body of Christ instead of her own, which the voice calls “una melezina” that will heal the suffering that the oppression of her sins have inflicted upon her (636), such as her taking only three loaves of bread into the wilderness where she sleeps on the ground, and she faces constant exposure to the elements.

The poet makes several parallels between her new reborn life and the previous one, such as detailed descriptions of her decrepit clothing and body along with the godly association she

enjoys in isolation in contrast to the friendlessness she exerted in Alexandria while surrounded by concourses of people. Despite all this,

Cuand' huna espina le firía,  
de sus pecados uno perdía;  
e mucho era ella gozosa  
porque sufrié tan dura cosa. (752-755)

Here, her pain does not cause suffering, but pleasure, because it heals the suffering that she has ascribed to the oppression of her sins, comparable to what Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen call the “cathartic game” of masochism (56). The text offers a parallel description of her body after forty-seven years of privation that foils its original description of her beauty, line by line parallel with which parts of her body it describes, but now her physical appearance is ugly and battered, unlike her soul, which now exudes holiness. This contrasting description displays the understanding of oppression in Christian epistemology. Though at first her body deprives her spirit of liberty, the tide has turned and her spirit now has full control of the body, even to the point that she can endure any physical extremity, including years of starvation. Asceticism, as in masochism, resignifies pain and plays with the meaning of pleasure, challenging audience and participants to question who really possesses power.

Upon her first entrance into the wilderness, the devil continues attempting to rule her. He reminds her of “lo que ella solía amar: / los grandes comeres e los buenos lechos / do solie fer los sus deletos” (783-785). The text makes clear that the physical pain she imposes on her body, as of a ruler upon a martyr, sanctifies her and liberates her from authority that would otherwise bring her eternal damnation: “Mas tanto fue bien aventurada, / que de todo fue olvidada” (786-787). The process of self-harm means resisting powers greater than her own in preference to

others. Both before and after her retirement into the wilderness, the text depicts her as a ruler, in the first case a sadist delighting in controlling others, and in the latter, the tyrant that administers the healing masochism of medieval martyrdom, now devoid of death but full of pain. The difference between the two versions of María lies in the recognition that even though she experiences pain and discomfort in the latter, she only suffers in the former.

Finally, after this representation of extreme self-privation, the narrative shifts to the story of someone more immediate to the poet's audience, Gozimás and the inhabitants of the monastery of Saint John. They also endure self-inflicted pain:

Grandes abían las coronas,  
 sayas vistién a caronas.  
 Non abían cura d'estamenyas  
 ni yazién en lechos ni en camenyas.  
 Por alimpiarse de sus pecados,  
 non calçaban çapatos.  
 Noche e día a Dios servién,  
 sabet por cierto que non durmién.  
 Todo el día eran en su mester  
 fasta la hora del comer.  
 E quando hiban a comer  
 non querían hi mucho seyer.  
 En pobredat s'en mantién,  
 por amor de Dios lo fazién. (804-817)

The poet invites his clerical cohort to see itself in the description of Jordanian cenobites as well as in María by offering parallel descriptions of the two. Like María, the poet refers to the monks' nakedness, that they do not sleep in beds if they sleep at all, that they reject the lavish chopines that once adorned the dominatrix, and they eschew food, all for their love of God. While María importantly excels in every arena, this comparison makes both more accessible, as well as setting the stage for the tale's moral, which is that everyone can advance spiritually and should not remain stagnant or proud of his (or her?) attainment. The key element is that Christians actively strive for the *jouissance* of self-persecution. Even the abbot, who would theoretically hold the most power within the monastery, abases himself by washing each community member's feet in imitation of Christ. This insinuates some of the poet's concern for translating: he criticizes what he perceives as pride within the church hierarchy of his day.

The monks' behavior may seem illogical to the uninitiated. However, the poet explains that

Miémbrables del grant juicio,  
do los ángeles tremerán,  
del gran pavor que ellos abrán  
cuando el grant rey de la potestat  
verná seyén en su magestat.  
E delante Él, el fuego ardiente,  
do el diablo tiene grant gente.  
E tantos otros hi entrarán  
que nunca agua saldrán.  
Por esto eran los monjes santos:

por lloros e por grandes plantos.

Pora escapar d'aquest periglo. (873-884)

The poet's Christian discourse continues to elaborate the presence of an unjust oppressor upon himself and those with whom he identifies, whose power is so great that only another greater, God's, can overthrow it. The devil's oppressing status as a signifier can also be applied to other real world political and social entities whenever a writer needs the significance of an oppressor to advance his agenda, as the following chapter will elaborate.

When Gozimás encounters María in the wilderness, the poet spares no expense playing up motifs from the beginning of the story about Alexandria in which María uses her body to wield supreme authority over men. During this exchange, even though “pareçié la carne quemada / del sol e de la helada” (958-959), she refuses to speak to Gozimás until he lends her some clothing in order to avoid tempting him. No matter how unattractive she may appear, she still senses the possibility that her female body could snare her male interlocutor. When Gozimás discovers her holiness because she knows his name without their ever having met, he subjects himself before her like the masses on the street of Alexandria: “A los pies de la duenya se echó, / su bendición le demandó” (1021-1022). Despite continuing to enjoy such great power, this scene contrasts with her earlier self by her unwillingness to use the power to exploit Gozimás or to show him indifference. She requires his cloak instead of engaging in sexual activity with him. Unlike the icy belle of Alexandria whose suitors bore her with their carnage, this María demands that he bless her which he refuses until she finally concedes and prays for the both of them.

The poet invites his fellow Christians to be willingly dominated by God rather than unwittingly dominated by any other. Gozimás says, “Non só de tal actoritat” as María (1167),

suggesting an authority not born of church hierarchy, but of spirituality, born of persecuting the physical body. While it is tempting to say that this constitutes an oppression, that the Church seeking to have power oppresses and convinces others to deny themselves happiness and pleasure so that it can maintain power, such a stance fails to recognize the learned nature of perceiving oppression and suffering. Humans learn to decide what oppresses them and what does not. Even those who really experience pain may convince themselves, for example, that they deserve their pain and may not consider themselves oppressed, for, according to María, “El gozo d’esta vida, / todo lo torna en gran tristicia” (1287-1288). Instead, in both cases, accusations of oppression constitute a political act, an attempt for power, and whichever side manages to cull the most sympathy wins out between the two. This strategy stands in opposition to overt shows of aggression and often manifests as an immediate defensiveness to disagreement, using offense against itself.

Once literal opposition to Christianity ceased—except in the case of Islam as the next chapter will discuss—it continued to employ the politics of suffering as a means of perpetuating itself; it had after all availed of it in the past. Baños Vallejo accords, saying, “[Hagiografía] es el cambio de una literatura utópica, expresión de una minoría perseguida, a una literatura ideológica, al servicio de una Iglesia que, al convertirse en la Edad Media en elemento fundamental del poder, tiende a mantener el sistema de valores” (*Vidas* 21), the value system referred to here being that of suffering. Calling saints voluntary martyrs in a move reminiscent of de Ste. Croix, Baños Vallejo also gives this as the reason that hagiographies also have greater emphasis on miracles, “porque la hagiografía debe otorgar una prueba definitiva de la santidad, una prueba no menos fehaciente y no menos sólida que el martirio que ahora ya no es posible” (20). Therefore, the use of miracles in hagiographies also transfigures martyrdom and

oppression. By them, the saint proves his or her faith, just as the earliest saints did it by speaking out against Rome and Judaism. Thus, the end of *VSME* is littered with levitation, clairvoyance, and friendly lions. Like death in the martyr's tales, saintly death "llegará como el final deseado que anticipa la eternidad y que por ello se vuelve vida verdadera. [. . .] La prostituta-santa [. . .] representa en su vida de pecado y su arrepentimiento posterior a cualquier hombre y a todos los hombres y resulta, entonces, un ejemplo" of the hope for eternal life after death for all that espouse its principles (Zubillaga 453). Christianity's position and strategy allows for its own immortality, for if the church is killed, as Lorenzo or María or Gonzalo de Berceo die at the end of their tales, they win, always placing any victors over them into the losing position, which the text and tradition fix in time. *VSME* illustrates this in its last scene wherein Gozimás, having returned from burying María, returns to his companions and "les contó toda su vida" (1426), which now arrives to us by means of oral and textual transmission, presumably. This end, death, is absorbed by the Church and keeps it up by keeping death meaningful, as the poet concludes, "Él nos dé grant partida / en la perdurable vida" (1448-1449). However, it also underlines the stories' function as a *testimonio*. Patricia Grieve explains that "Mary also needs Gozimás to bear witness so that her story—her life—may be disseminated ("Paradise" 150). While the story is probably invented, it nevertheless bears the consciousness of the *testimonio* rhetoric.

Incidentally, several modern scholars have even used the legend of Saint Mary of Egypt in order to suggest that it oppresses women, reconfiguring its reconfiguration of suffering. While scholars may continue to debate whether or not Mary of Egypt's story really does this to varying degrees, this study strives to underline that the transferability of oppression in her tale supports suffering as a cultural construction as much as a reality. This helps to illustrate Spivak's assertions that "the ventriloquism of the speaking subaltern is the left intellectual's stock-in-



trade” (“Can” 27). For example, Cazelles interprets “a manipulative representation of femaleness, one in which prominence induces loss of freedom and power” in the French version which is also legible in the Castilian (44). However, this reading discounts how a medieval person might have actually used or perceived Mary’s story, who could have seen her retaining as much power and visibility even by the end of her story despite her efforts otherwise. Both men and women identified with Mary in the sense that she represented the redemptive potential of every human soul, not just of women’s, all of whom must humble themselves in order to hope for salvation; *VSME* is, after all, directed toward an imagined masculine audience: “Oit, varones” (1). In this sense, it may also miss the mark to call Mary an “Everywoman” as does Patricia Grieve when she strives to establish that what Mary symbolizes of a necessity requires a feminine figure. Weiss sees Grieve’s choice as “limiting the ideological effects of her exemplarity” (86). Weiss hesitates calling Mary exemplary at all, which opens her up to a more symbolic status that embodies Christianity’s fears about becoming victim to evil and sin.

Additionally, Cazelles asserts that “male discourse endeavored to exalt women as a means of exalting, in fact, the merit of [. . .] the poets who praised them” (45), criticizing men’s poetic distortion of women. However, since modern *testimonio* tends to feature an elite undergoing a process by which she gives voice to a subaltern in order to advance a political and intellectual agenda, Cazelles seems to undertake the same enterprise that she criticizes, in which case, perhaps the remark is too pointed. As Patai notices of *testimonio*’s affinity to hagiography, Cazelles’ analysis acts within Heffernan’s paradigm of the sacred biography in which “the major anticipation which unites author and audience is how the text reflects the received tradition, a tradition whose locus is in the community. Such tradition is neither monolithic nor frozen but changes as the community selects and reinterprets anew from within itself” (Heffernan 19).

Operating within a new moral paradigm, Cazelles reinterprets Mary's story for the sake of her new community.

More on target is her assertion that the female saint's "quest for anonymity is counteracted by the hagiographic commemoration. In giving prominence to the heroes and heroines of Christianity, the writing of Saints' Lives runs counter to the virtues of humility and self-denial that typically characterize holiness" (50). This might serve as a similar definition to the paradox that confronts *testimonio* today in that giving voice makes the subaltern audible and therefore no longer subaltern, no longer a modern saint. Thus, the elite must continue to speak for them. Rather than a speaking subject, they remain a poetic signifier that does not go beyond the printed page and whom those within the hegemony still cannot really apprehend, or they must escape our control and become something other than saintly or subaltern.

Another criticism derives from the poem's voyeuristic sadism, taken in consideration of the male poet and his imagined audience. Simon Gaunt alleges that the French version, somewhat like the Spanish version, allows its masculine interlocutors to

enjoy both the titillating spectacle of the adventure of the comely and sexy harlot, and then the physical degradation of that very same body as it is punished, largely for the desire it aroused in them. The text appeals to the libido of the men in the audience by playing on the desire of the male characters for Marie and by offering an erotic description of her body, but then it enables them to feel morally uplifted by the tale and in so doing it parallels the sadism of virgin-martyr narratives. The implied male audience has its cake and eats it. (*Gender* 228)

This bizarre turn of events makes a sadist not out of Mary, but out of her audience and author.

However, Gaunt's reading here focuses only on his understanding of masculine uses of

hagiography, especially in France, and conforms to the overarching argument in his work that hagiographical “texts inscribe obliquely the sadistic sexual fantasies of some straight men” (“Straight” 443). While this may be true of many texts and the men who use them, even Gaunt provides an exception, and in any case, his interpretation does not take into account how women might have sexually appropriated Mary of Egypt and other saints’ tales in a homoerotic turn. Likewise, Weiss does not see the same issues in the Spanish version, at least not to the same degree, due to the poet’s repeated “moralizing hue” that makes masochists out of the alleged sadists (87). While Weiss rescues Gaunt’s reading to some extent, he must do so “by resituating the portrait of physical degradation back into its full narrative context” (87), a decided relief for Gaunt’s conclusion, but unfortunate in terms of his analysis, which has set some evidence aside in favor of that which fulfills his agenda. Even Weiss’ own reconfiguration of suffering in the poem remains much more complex than Gaunt’s, settling with the poet’s “ambivalence” (88) before trying for Jerome’s admonition that women be “oblita sexus” (*Jerome’s* 14.3). This makes the text oppressive to women because the text never fully portrays her as such, rather opting to disguise her femininity with masculine traits after the order of other saints’ tales in which women spend their lives disguised as abbots only to turn out as women after they die. This interpretation overlooks Miller’s reading of Mary because “Mary is not troped as a female man of God, nor is she ever in total disguise” (425). She argues that Mary’s oscillations between male and female suggest that “they are narratives of an emergent, not an accomplished, comprehension” (425). She notices how Mary embraces the sexualized stereotypes and apprehensions men have about women, which allows her to cross “forbidden boundaries between domestic, private, female-gendered and public, male-gendered space” (429). She continues to do so even when she encounters Gozimás “by switching teaching and priestly roles” with him (429).

By comparison, other scholars strive to keep Mary's reading nuanced. Ernesto Delgado asserts that María, "Por ser una mujer, ha conseguido un nivel ascético superior al de él" (287). Sophronius' generic reconfiguration of the tale allows the hermit, as a woman, to travel greater spiritual distance to arrive at her destination. This longer distance traveled makes her/him superior to Zosimas. Additionally, he observes that while we can hardly see *VSME* as a feminist text, as it still requires the discursive use of the woman as the lowest sort of spiritual being in order to prove that even she can be redeemed by God, he also points out that Sophronius' tale marks a change, a step away from the total subjugation and marginalization of women. He says that "las vidas de las santas del desierto [. . .] reflejan la humanización de la práctica ascética" (288). Asceticism provided women with options previously unavailable to them: "reorienta el concepto de santidad femenina—normalmente mártires o vírgenes" (292).

Catherine Sanok has also criticized scholars that argue that women's saints' tales in general of necessity allowed men to control women. While acknowledging the exemplarity posed by the narratives, she points out that the same narratives could have "encouraged medieval hagiographers and their audiences to reflect on historical continuity and discontinuity through the category of women's religious practice" (ix). Such observations on the rupture between narrative and reality could engender discontent about present circumstances: "Hagiography provided a useful discursive and gestural vocabulary for women's resistance to masculine authority, despite—indeed often because of—its representation of idealized feminine spirituality" (xiii). She notices that hagiography even made possible "women [that could] surface in the historical record as book owners, patrons, and readers" (xi), thus granting women an unprecedented degree of social mobility. While it may pale in comparison to the kind of mobility on the agenda of modern feminists, in the absence of evidence that medieval women saw men as oppressors, the

fifth chapter of this dissertation will argue that religion and hagiography provided a significant outlet for their expression.

Indeed it is impossible to pin down Mary in order to make any assumptions about what she was supposed to teach about gender. Instead, Miller coincides with Brown's concept of the dead in that medieval subjects, male and female, were to see her as a symbol of a new gender that the gospel made possible for all, therefore attempting to "speak the unspeakable" (429). This final conclusion by Miller especially approaches the subalternity embedded in saintly narratives. From their very beginning, as argued by Perkins and Brown, they attempt to enunciate beyond the horizon of human awareness both to and for other groups. In this case, they attempt to articulate the contradictory "holy woman" (Miller 423), something so far-fetched to the medieval mind that it often transgresses the concept in the same attempt to formulate it, thereby both offending and confounding the modern mind.

As an alternative to Gaunt's reading, *VSME* not only reconfigures the *passio*'s identifications with suffering oppression, but it also continues Perkins' observations of a heightened medical consciousness in Christian literature. Michael Solomon observes that "la manera en que el poeta relata la historia de una mujer que se transforma a lo largo del texto de prostituta en santa es equiparable al proceso por el que pasa el lector: su cuerpo enfermizo alcanza un estado de bienestar sexual" (431). He goes on to explain that the poem does not only provide the male reader with the pleasure of the woman's sexualized body, but also provides the medicine necessary to cure both the guilt and the beauty of the world of sin that she represents. Weiss agrees, pointing out that "any voyeuristic pleasure experienced by the male audience is inevitably tinged with guilt, which the Spanish adaptor seems rather keen to pick out and develop" (87).

One final question to address remains. If suffering's persistence in hagiography had a political as well as a community-building purpose, what agendas lie behind the poet of *VSME*? Other scholars have already addressed this at some length and therefore it will take up little space here. Patricia Grieve comments on the monetary consciousness of the piece indicative of the poet's concerns about the oppressive rise of newer economic systems that corrupt the religion of the region ("Paradise"). Weiss discusses the poem's emphasis on the escape into the wilderness from the debauchery of an urban landscape indicative of concern over the increasing size of cities during the period. Ardemagni argues that it advances the Fourth Lateran Council's emphasis on penance. Hagiography allows the poet an opportunity to resist the systems he dislikes by creating victims out of those that espouse them.

Like masochism, Christian saintliness plays a game with power and domination. It contemplates a world in which the powerful suffer and the weak enjoy pleasure. In hagiography power and ease do not supply the greatest measures of enjoyment and fulfillment, but instead bondage and flogging do. In these narratives, the oppressed slip through the fingers of the powerful, ever denying their despots the full satisfaction of their dominion precisely by taking pleasure in oppression. These narratives question the value of seeking political influence and instead stage romances in which the obscure and the weak, even the invisible subaltern, is better off than the vile dictator, not as a way of allowing tyrants to avoid "political accountability for processes of victimization" as Mennel fears (2), but as a serious ontological challenge to the very essence of power. This impunity stands somewhat at odds with the *testimonio*, which strives to wrest the oppressors of power and reconstitute the indigenous subject. However, the two genres may differ in this way due to the subject position of the authors. The clerical writer of *VSME* can afford to imagine a world of equivocal directions of power and pleasure "purchased and

ultimately controlled by a male subject” from which the patron of the pro-domme can return (Mennel 2). However, there was a time when the Christian was as desperate for voice as the modern subaltern, inviting us to take a second glance at the ascetic perversion and wonder what might happen should every discourse of suffering realize its fantasy.

How does Mary’s account compare to those featuring more masculine saintly figures? Do their protagonists also suffer in the face of new worldly persecutors, or do they get a break? The next two chapters discuss male saints at some length, but it is appropriate to note a few differences between the two male saints discussed in this dissertation, San Millán de la Cogolla and Santo Domingo de Silos, and its two feminine ones, Saint Mary of Egypt and Santa Oria. When it comes to using suffering to criticize perceived oppression, all four do so. Like Mary of Egypt, San Millán endures an ascetic lifestyle until his death, even rejecting the relative comfort of a monastery when his miracles thrust him into the limelight. His self-abnegation sanctifies him so that the Christians can prevail in battle against the Moors. Santo Domingo has it a little easier than Mary of Egypt, dispensing with his physical discomforts after only a few years. However, he faces opposition when the evil King García de Nájera demands the church’s treasury in a gesture reminiscent of Decio before Lorenzo. More like *VSME*, the cult of Santo Domingo de Silos also engages in a thorough community-building project through its depiction of his numerous miracles to inflame the name of both the San Millán and Santo Domingo de Silos monasteries, as we encounter countless individuals flocking there for the afflictions for which they endure. Anthony Lappin has looked at *Vida de Santa Oria* for its resistance to Roman authority in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council. While little doubt can exist about the differences between men and women in these stories, each uses suffering to strengthen or

perpetuate the agenda of its community, in contrast to overt criticism of or submission to authority.



### Chapter 3

#### (Ob)literating the Enemy:

##### The Poetics of Exorcism in *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla*

Rather than pan-(Western) European considerations, this chapter will consider saints' lives within the specific context of Medieval Iberia. As the crux of this dissertation, the chapter brings arguments on the politics of suffering in the rise and maintenance of Christian power to a culmination while simultaneously setting the stage for analyzing other voices negotiating through its rhetoric. Gonzalo de Berceo's earliest hagiographic poem, *Vida de San Millán de la Cogolla* (henceforth *VSMC*), elucidates two complementary issues in Iberian letters respecting *testimonio*: first, *VSMC*'s invocation of saintly suffering raises issues concerning an awakening Christian-political self-awareness during the thirteenth century, which in turn clarifies the ascendancy of *cuaderna vía* during the same period. The tactic of the poem parallels stories of La Cava in which, according to Grieve, "Jews and Muslims needed to be excluded, even expunged, from the national narrative of history" (*Eve* 13). Gonzalo's marginalization of Muslims and omission of Jews in *VSMC*, far from supporting Américo Castro's concept of *convivencia*, deploy *cuaderna vía* as a rhetorical weapon at the service of Christian expansion, emerging as Castilians forged an identity eclipsing religious others.

Castro introduced the term "*convivencia*" in the idealistic sense of medieval Christians, Muslims, and Jews living together in relative peace in his 1948 *España en su historia*. His claims proved polemical from the beginning with detractors like Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, who responded in his *España, una enigma histórica* that Spain owed none of its culture to Muslims and Jews, but rather had preserved Visigothic principles despite centuries of contact with the

other two religions. Since then, many scholars have debated the term, ultimately recognizing that some aspects of the concept address modern issues of diversity and transculturation, but that it tends to romanticize the extent to which the various groups tolerated one another. For example, Lucy Pick asserts that *convivencia* “describes something far more problematic and interesting than simple tolerance between different groups sharing the same space. It describes a cultural situation in which potential cooperation and interdependence in economic, social, cultural, and intellectual spheres coexist with the continual threat of conflict and violence” (1). Maya Soifer recommends that scholars abandon the term and its nationalistic evocations: “the Christian states in Iberia were no different from their northern European counterparts” in regards to the treatment of religious minorities (25).<sup>20</sup> However, the complete abandonment of *convivencia* may lead to the presumption that the three communities lived in constant conflict when ultimately more complex analyses elucidate the situation better.

For example Brian Catlos observes: “La estrategia política de los principados cristianos y musulmanes no consistía en la conquista y subyugación de los príncipes infieles, sino en la búsqueda de una hegemonía regional” (1720). He explains that conflict between the three groups did not arise out of any essential contradiction between them, but rather from expedience and the nature of political culture of the time. The later concept of religious incompatibility arose through discourse designed to advance its proponents’ agendas. This search for hegemony finds expression in *VSMC* where Gonzalo de Berceo enunciates the imaginary of his ideal polity, one

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<sup>20</sup> See Mann, Glick, and Dodds for a concrete discussion of the cultural exchange that took place between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia. See also Ray and Wacks for additional nuanced readings of *convivencia*.

in which no religious others compete for sovereignty. Interestingly, Antonio Garrosa Resina cites Gonzalo as an exceptional antisemitic voice in thirteenth-century Iberia, rhetorically flouting Alfonso X's protections of Hebrews, surmising that "quizá la condición de clérigo de Gonzalo de Berceo y el influjo sobre la Iglesia de la orden monástica de Cluny, marcada por el antisemitismo europeo (que era más fuerte que el español), tengan bastante que ver con su actitud duramente contraria a los hebreos" (131). *VSMC* may seem to contradict this affirmation, as no Jews appear in the poem. However, rather than showing oversight or disinterest, his other anti-Jewish discourse to which Garrosa Resina refers suggests that their omission in *VSMC* is deliberate, as though exorcising their unsavory presence from the ideal Castile that he forges. Additionally, he portrays the Muslims in the tale as impotent secondary characters, hardly worth considering as threats to Christian expansion.

Before concluding with reflections about Gonzalo's omission of the Jews in *VSDC*, this chapter will consider how his apocryphal insertion of the *Privilegio* of San Millán and Battle of Clavijo to his translation of Braulio's seventh-century biography of San Millán threatens several other groups with varying and complex degrees of marginalization. Gonzalo writes to prolong the memory of the saint and his accomplishments, but in doing so, he speaks over Millán and others summoned into the narrative. Calling this elitist ventriloquism, Spivak comments on similar rhetoric in contemporary literature ("Can" 27) while Mills brings it into the arena of hagiography (201). By using Millán and his other characters as puppets for Gonzalo's own agenda, this chapter argues that narratives implementing the politics of suffering threaten several groups with rhetorical colonization visible in:

1. Some kind of ideological antagonist, in Gonzalo's case, devils and Muslims.

2. Those ideologically close to the writer, such as those Christians of Gonzalo's time neglecting the pledge of San Millán.
3. The loss of memory of the saint that the writer seeks to reverse.
4. The ironic resultant subversion that makes a puppet of the saint behind whom the writer dissembles despite the solidarity they share.

All of these feature in a *testimonio*, taking Alicia Partnoy's *Little School* (1986) as an example:<sup>21</sup>

1. The vilification of the Argentine military as devil incarnate.
2. The shaming of the elite that does not take action to assist or punish in the way the speaker insists: "Not until justice is brought in cases like that of the Little School will there be a safeguard against the recurrence of these crimes in the future" (17-18).
3. The disappeared or other subalterns the speaker conjures into memory: "By publishing these stories I feel those voices will not pass unheard" (18).
4. The collaborators' mediations of these voices that distorts them at the same time that they recuperate them, often causing them to appear other than her own: "In little schools the boundaries between story and history are so subtle that even I can hardly find them" (18).

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<sup>21</sup> Partnoy originally published her story in English in the United States based on disjointed notes in Spanish, which her editors helped her to translate. Citations from *The Little School* are based on the English original.

The majority of this dissertation concentrates on the last two types of subalterns embodied in the saint, but this chapter will examine the implications of creating villains upon which the saints' suffering depends as well as those close to the writer whom he seeks to influence.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the politics of suffering requires an antagonist—an instigator of the suffering—characterized in binary terms as the sufferer's oppressor, in the narrator's depiction characterized as motivated by nothing but evil. Psychologist Roy Baumeister accepts that "if there were no victims, there would be no evil" as at the heart of the definition of evil (1). He goes on to explain that

The idea that suffering is random, inevitable, and meaningless has never been satisfactory to most people, and victims desire specific explanations. Evil is a partial explanation, and many victims can be satisfied (at least for a while) by concluding that their attackers were evil. But in the long run, evil needs to be explained, too. (2)

The truism that oppressors commit evil against victims overshadows its subtle irony: *testimonio* turns the tables on its opponents, distorting or silencing the group or individual that allegedly does the same to the narrator. Whether or not an oppressor carries out the crimes alleged against it, this strategy marshals a poetic no less reductive than those poetics that raze sufferers in the first place, for the sufferer has no interest in depicting the oppressor with the same level of humanity as himself or herself. Oppressors are subhuman, monsters, criminals that do not speak for themselves within the contained narrative of suffering. In Nance's terms, "*they are less than human, they do not feel pain like we do*" (*Can* 43, her emphasis).

*Testimonio* avoids assuaging potential pain endured by an aggressor that might explain or complicate his immoral behavior, opting to condemn "others" in order to heal the "self". Though

speakers mobilizing the politics of suffering may or may not be literal subalterns, they characterize themselves as such at the risk of creating new kinds of subalterns. Francomano addresses this relative to the tribute of one hundred maidens that surfaces in *VSMC* and other places in Castilian literature: “the virtual non-existence of a frontier, of visible, physical differences between groups that had coexisted and intermingled for centuries, is ‘romanced’ away, sublimated by an imagined divine project in which one group must unequivocally triumph over and, indeed, obliterate another” (“Legend” 17). Her use of the word “obliterate” is apropos, meaning, etymologically, “to make against the letter” or “to erase.” By the same means, poets and sophists engineer subalternity both by writing over (“literating”) powerful groups as well as erasing (“obliterating”) them. Literating in this case consists of oversimplifying opponents as evil villains as well as by emasculating them and treating them as unworthy of respect. Obliterating takes place when alternative worldviews disappear entirely from the page so that no one considers them in the first place. Both of these strategies can be summarized by what Louise Mirrer refers to as “pseudoidealizations, or ideal constructions, antithetical to actual experience” (2-3). After all, the scribe declares in the heading of *VSMC* that his story is “tornada de latín en romance” (85),<sup>22</sup> rather like history to story.

The characters associated with saints highlight the poetic competition and discursive relativity necessary to manufacture subalternity that determines whose words end up written on the pages and whose do not. Ancos points out that attacks on Muslims or Islam do not constitute “el objetivo esencial de la obra” (“Musulmanes” 243) in Gonzalo de Berceo because they feature competing Christian interests. However, the secondary function that the Muslims realize in

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<sup>22</sup> All citations come from Dutton’s edition (1967).

Gonzalo's narrative proves their marginalization because it treats an otherwise powerful political and religious opponent as unimportant, transforming them into a poetic object useful insofar as it fulfills a supporting role in a Christian drama. In the same essay Ancos affirms that these texts "transmiten la impresión de que, en comparación con épocas pasadas, los musulmanes representan un peligro menor para los cristianos del momento y lugar en que se compusieron y difundieron" ("Musulmanes" 245). Addressing another, even a minority, with sufficient attention for scrutiny and debate, or even with contemptuous ridicule, reifies it even as it marginalizes it because it invites the other into the discourse as a "you," but the Muslims do not merit such attention in this case.

A look across *cuaderna vía* throughout Iberia in the thirteenth century uncovers similar patterns. *Cuaderna vía* is a poetic style unique to medieval Iberia that clerics used from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, written in monorhymed Alexandrine quatrains divided into two hemistiches. The *mester de clerecía* movement of the thirteenth century often features this poetic form, but Weiss cautiously ties *cuaderna vía* to the University of Palencia and *mester de clerecía* to the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council (2). He includes such *pareados* as *Vida de Santa María Egipcíaca* within the *mester de clerecía* movement because they insinuate the same clerical didacticism as those written in *cuaderna vía* despite difference in form. Though the two styles of poetry make sense together as he studies them because of their similar ideologies, the University of Palencia had a vested interest in producing a unique poetical form.

Elena González-Blanco offers an important key to the university's adoption/invention of *cuaderna vía*. She breaks down several French, Latin, and Provençal antecedents that feature elements reminiscent of the style, finding several poems in each language of similar versification. She brings her arguments to a head by unpacking the use of the word "prosa" as it

appears in several early works of the form which seems unusual since poetry is not prose: “nos lleva a asociar el significado de la palabra ‘prosa’ con los tropos y el tipo de composiciones litúrgicas latinas” (204). Thus, *cuaderna vía* derives from twelfth-century liturgical exegesis in which a French cleric analyzes each line of the liturgy by writing several lines of his own beneath it, creating the appearance of the quatrains we now associate with *cuaderna vía*. This argument gains force when she considers how poets of the thirteenth century essentially engage in the same process, never strictly translating from earlier material, but interpreting as they go.

As satisfying as González-Blanco’s analysis is, it neglects the need Spanish clerics felt to adjust their meter to *coplas* of fourteen syllables instead of imitating French styles which feature “testimonios en tetrásticos monorrimos” of twelve syllables (196). However, Gonzalo de Berceo’s antisemitism and flippancy toward Islam, to say nothing of animosity toward competing Christians, clarify the issue. In the wake of the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) and the receding borders of Al-Andalus contemporaneous to Gonzalo himself, a desire developed to define a Northern Iberian identity unsullied by the cultural amalgamations of previously Muslim occupied territories such as their architecture, *adab*, political and legal structures, and even narrative forms like the *frametale*. In the *Arts of Intimacy*, Dodds, Menocal, and Balbale consider Don Juan Manuel “as the first great writer of Castilian prose” but deeply indebted to Islam in both content and style (239). Contrast this to *cuaderna vía*’s utter aloofness to Islamic culture. As Castile grew more powerful and self-aware, *cuaderna vía* provided a space that not only affiliated it with its neighbors to the north, but at the same time asserted a cultural dominance over other competing Christian regions and the now-distant Muslims. María García Otero makes a similar observation as she analyzes *cuaderna vía*’s use of geography in that “el autor favoreció a Castilla, proponiéndola como líder en el intento de unificación cristiana



peninsular y en la formación de la futura nación española y cristiana” (30-31). In this process, Gonzalo need not treat political enemies with serious respect; instead, by poeticizing them, or “literating” them, he reduces them behind his assertions of dominance. Accordingly, Baños Vallejo has noted that “Gonzalo de Berceo se refiere a los moros en tres de sus obras hagiográficas” (“Moros” 255), more than any other *cuaderna vía* author, suggesting that despite the secondary role they play, that they nevertheless comprise a special interest in his proto-nationalistic project. Though its role changes in the fourteenth century, all *cuaderna vía* translations/exegeses of the thirteenth century derive from Latin or other European works, including such works as the *Libro de Alexandre* and the *Libro de Apolonio*.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the Alfonsine school of translators largely based in Toledo and Sevilla who established the importance of Castilian vis-à-vis Arabic and Jewish letters, recalling Greek science and philosophy into European consciousness, *cuaderna vía*, closer to Latinized Europe, looks in that direction for its inspiration.

Through the implementation of *cuaderna vía*, Gonzalo does not marginalize all four of the aforementioned categories. Those figures interpolated into the text, i.e. those belonging to group two that he urges to pay the pledge, he does not diminish in any significant way, but rather threatens. Bower says, “Fulfillment of the pledge guarantees the fitness of the cultic body that

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<sup>23</sup> According to García López’ edition, *Libro de Alexandre* derives from Walter de Châtillon’s *Alexandreis* along with numerous other Latinate sources, which principally include *Roman d’Alexandre*, *Historia de preliis* and the Pseudo-Calístenes (43-52). Dolores Corbella suggests no fewer than five source-texts for *Libro de Apolonio* in her addition, all European, along with numerous other intertexts and authorial interventions (18-31).

comes into being through the reading of the poem, while denial entails a more drastic medicine [excommunication which] mutilates the cultic body, but, like the pruning of a tree, it is a therapeutic injury” (“Prescriptions” 282). Marginalization entails a semiotic process that affects those characters within a text referred to in the third person, resulting in this case in Edward Said’s famous “Other,” that makes it possible to “write over” or “literate” them so that they fulfill a prescribed role but occupy no presence, much like Spivak’s *sati*.<sup>24</sup> In these cases, the character exists as a poetic but bears an indeterminate resemblance to the complex subject it replaces, even when the writer uses it to inspire sympathy in an audience. Meanwhile, the “you” and “I” of the text remain present and provide data that allow us to understand their historical and cultural reality. Subalternity lies beyond all these, featuring those groups “obliterated” from the text despite their relationship to its affairs, in this case the Jews, but it too requires engineering before it can determine any reality, as we find here. Notwithstanding, the boundary between marginal and subaltern is equivocal, multivalent, changing, and porous and therefore not always designated; this chapter opts rather for what the text appears to do regardless of its external success: exorcise “Others” through (ob)literation.

### **VSMC and Threatening Literation**

Gonzalo de Berceo composed his earliest hagiographic work sometime around 1230 (Dutton, “Chronology” 76), depicting the deeds of a sixth-century hermit, who for a brief time

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<sup>24</sup> Spivak discusses the practice of widow self-immolation on funeral biers in her famous “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in order to emphasize how both competing discourses of British colonizer’s condemnation of the practice and masculine Hindu native’s praise of the practice resulted in “manipulation of female *subject-constitution*” (61, her emphasis).

accepted ecclesiastical responsibilities from the Roman Catholic Church. As with other hagiographic writings associated with *cuaderna vía*, the poem derives from an earlier text, but unlike other saints' tales, Gonzalo translates from multiple sources. The first two books derive from a Latin version of Braulio's original;<sup>25</sup> however, book three, the details of the saint's posthumous thaumaturgy, translates from a variety of material and oral tradition Gonzalo had access to, especially a version or versions of the *Privilegio de San Millán*.<sup>26</sup> *VSMC* makes sense as the priest's first *vita* due to his place of employment, just as the monastery's cartulary presents the *Privilegio* in its introduction. Critics have viewed this document as propagandistic due to Dutton's research, but more recent work has produced an apologetic approach. John Esten Keller considers the dark twentieth-century connotations entailed by "propaganda" in Gonzalo de Berceo anachronistic, as most contemporaries would have interpreted his activity as pious (59). Baños Vallejo concludes that "la disyuntiva entre catequesis y propaganda es falsa, pues ambos propósitos son perfectamente compatibles" ("Hagiografía" 8).

Recent scholars also reject notions of the *Privilegios*' forgery either by Gonzalo or his contemporary Fernando. Lappin finds evidence that "The *Privilegium votorum* was [. . .] a century old when Gonçalvo composed his *Vida de San Millán*. Neither he nor Fernandus could have been involved in its forgery" (*Gonzalo* 103). He discerns that Gonzalo's *oeuvre* only tangentially served the interest of the San Millán monastery, fitting instead within the larger framework of European ecclesiastical movements of the time: "his world-view was first and foremost European rather than localist. He was not a propagandist for the monastery of San

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<sup>25</sup> References to Braulio come from Toribio Minguela's Spanish translation (2005).

<sup>26</sup> For a full list of possible sources, the reader may consult Dutton, "Fuentes."

Millán” (237). David Peterson notes that the strategy of invoking an origin story as a way of supporting a spiritual community was not unique to the monastery of San Millán: “un texto de estas características es exactamente lo que cabía esperar en la sección introductoria de un cartulario benedictino del siglo XII” (682). Moreover, evidence of fire and rebuilding at the monastery insinuates not forgeries but the restitution of lost documentation reproduced from the memory of its clerics of what the original cartulary contained. Peterson calls the production of this kind of introductory material of monastic cartularies “la reconstrucción de la memoria institucional” (672). Gonzalo engages in a similar act of reconstruction in an age in which deteriorating Latin threatened to forget the monastery’s heritage.

Along with other monasteries like that of San Pedro de Arlanza, the monastery of San Millán led the way in written production of Castilian until it found powerful patronage in Alfonso X. *VSMC* not only extended the memory of the monastery’s origins, it signifies the birth of a Castilian self-awareness, an awareness that not everyone spoke Latin as they supposed, and that this new language possessed important communicative benefits. Even though clerics at other locations spoke similar dialects, Gonzalo de Berceo embraced his as a language worthy of the monastery’s interests and preservation. While the ethnic groups and political entities represented by this poem predate Gonzalo’s own originality, his Castilian assemblage of these characters perpetuates old attitudes about them into a new phase of Riojan self-consciousness as it emerges from the Reconquista. As Ancos relates, Gonzalo could and did both repress and amplify—whether by oral transmission or personal preference (Ancos “Musulmanes” 234-235)—by which he could have painted a prettier picture of Castille’s *convivencia*. Instead, Gonzalo uses his own monastery’s withering origins story to accentuate his region’s ascendant hegemony over Muslims (and Jews), a group that once threatened the area and was probably even responsible for

an “incendio del monasterio por Almanzor en 1002” that accounts for the loss of the original *Votos* so that Gonzalo would seem to translate from later, spurious material (Peterson 668). Therefore, while the *Votos* may not serve an exclusively propagandistic function *a la* Brian Dutton, they nevertheless threaten audiences with potential exclusion from the identity-building structure, along with the poem’s secondary religious antagonists.

As with St. Lawrence, the tradition of San Millán associates its protagonists with dichotomies of good and evil from the onset of the narrative. Like other saints, as a shepherd, “bien referié al lobo e al mal robador” (6c). The flock that he cares for constitutes the community that owes him for keeping them safe just as the theme of the prowling wolves and conniving thieves inaugurates a discourse of belligerence continued by devils or Arabs. Analyzing the formalisms in Gonzalo’s work, Francisco Grande Quejigo observes that “el poeta no se permite libertades con Lucifer. Lo ha de mencionar por su activo papel en la historia, pero intenta caracterizarlo con los suficientes atributos negativos como para no permitir simpatía” (114). The separate episodes of satanic and then Islamic antagonism are not discrete but rather work together to form part of a larger narrative arc of defamation, tied rather to the shepherd’s retirement from “el mundo [que] era pleno de enganno” (12a). This overarching conflict unifies it, using “Muslims” at the service of the narrator rather than in any serious attempt to represent them, resulting in an early example of what Grieve calls “gendering and demonizing of the enemy Other” in order to fashion a national narrative (*Eve* 14). As Ancos states, Gonzalo does not really care about Muslims anymore (“Musulmanes” 243); he uses them as a convenient rhetorical tool for instructing/constructing Christians. However, the cult’s casual deployment of Muslims is not harmless, rather distorting their meaning to the Christian mind as Gonzalo imports them into Castilian and associates them with wolves, thieves, and devils, the essential

milieu of everything Millán is not. This first section will examine Christians threatened with literacy but who mostly occupy the discourse while the next will discuss those the text actually (ob)literate.

Gonzalo invokes the *Votos* in the very first *copla* of the poem, and while this may seem propagandistic, it also intimates a community-building project that entails poetic threat. He explains that by telling the history of the monastery, “qui la vida quisiere de sant Millán saber / [. . .] verá a do embían los pueblos so aver” (1a, d). Gonzalo does not address his audience directly, but places them in an unstable third person indirect address: “qui quisiere.” Whoever declines to know the history of the San Millán monastery (including its incumbent fiscal responsibilities), are “literate” antagonists; such are *not* addressed, but lie outside his discourse. To those entities resistant to paying the *Votos*, these lines offend while those that identify with them see no problem or may repent of any negligence. According to Matthew Bailey, the environs of San Millán had fallen on economic hard times, explaining that Gonzalo’s dramatization implies that, “if they had made the payments as prescribed, then the hard times they are experiencing could have been avoided, and if they renew the payments, the good times will return” (81). Gonzalo thus makes use of every rhetorical resource necessary to craft, in the words of Bower, “an audience to match the narrator’s desire for a constituency of listeners complicit in the message of the text” at both economic and devotional levels (“Prescriptions” 280).

Though threatened by such marginalization, those that Gonzalo addresses have a voice. The act of addressing them invites them to reply, which reifies them by virtue of the narrator’s need to conjure them or else he would have no reason to speak. Gonzalo’s address evidences to the medieval (and modern) reader that there were “pueblos” in the environs of San Millán in a

position to support its monastery (1d). Their culture is not foreign to Gonzalo but is a part of him. The towns are not written over or distorted by his agenda but invoked by his dependence on them, having produced their own insinuated discourse of religious (in)action to which Gonzalo reacts, whose reaction we may use to read them. He may not even be in a position to enforce his rhetorical threat should paying “tres meajas [. . .] li será pesado” (2b). The Christian townsfolk are not the featured oppressors of this particular politic of suffering, though the narrative confronts them with the possible assimilation with those beings that the narrator strategically uses to motivate them to his cause, much as Partnoy condemns Western elites for not punishing more criminals responsible for the Dirty War, complicit therefore with its crimes (17-18). As much as he threatens marginalization and excommunication, Bower also identifies Gonzalo’s theme of the pledge as “The pseudo-baptism of the ‘tres meajas’ of *San Millán*, which determines membership in a privileged body of believers” (“Prescriptions” 295). He crafts a cohesive religious community as much as he purifies it of foreign elements.

Meanwhile, Millán himself, though Gonzalo seeks to recover his memory and hardly an antagonist, vanishes into rhetorical subalternity because the cleric writes over his memory with a new discourse. While not a complete excision of the saint, as with modern Latin American *testimonios*, the readers may not really hear the saint speaking even though the writer claims to innocently and nobly transmit a subaltern voice. Gonzalo formulates Millán similar to Spivak’s *sati* because they antagonize no one and even seem saintly, but they are instead lightning rods for a community’s core values. Though unusual to use *VSMC* to learn about its sixth-century eponymous hero, this point rather strives to underscore how modern suffering rhetoric can perpetuate sainthood for subalterns so that neither they nor their oppressors figure into discourse except as poetic pawns for political and social interests. It is not really this simple, as will

become evident in later chapters, but it is worth noting that a complex negotiation with the text must take place in order to understand and get at the living beings behind the literature that depicts them, even when atrocious behavior comes into play.

Whether medieval clerics or modern activists, the politics of suffering portrays the protagonists as subaltern whether they are or not. The writers distract from everything that their saints really say in order to depict the silence from which they suffer. While easy to understand *VSMC* as an untrustworthy source for understanding Jews and Muslims in thirteenth-century Iberia; the same skepticism fails to prevail in the urgency associated with the twentieth-century Guatemalan government's representation in Rigoberta Menchú's testimony or Alicia Partnoy's portrayal of the Argentine guards during the Dirty War, because questioning them implicates the skeptic in the crimes committed against them. Such a recognition does not excuse individuals for any crimes and hurt that really did occur, but rather serves as a preventative measure rather than a punitive one. Failing to interrogate the complex networks that exploit sympathy undermines *convivencia* by discounting quieter expressions of pain, even pain suffered by antagonists that may have led them to oppressive behavior. Another obvious difference between hagiography and *testimonio* lies in the dead versus living subalterns that can still be saved and spoken with, but it may nevertheless matter to act critically even if also with urgency.

After tending his flocks for many years, Millán has an epiphanic dream that overtakes him and inspires him to retire into the wilderness as a hermit under the spiritual tutelage of San Felices. During his time there, it was as though "ya querrié del castiello fuera seer exido, / por tornar a los montes" (23cd). Here the narrator turns to a common hagiographical motif of the saint's depreciation for wealth, seeing poverty itself as riches. As Gonzalo confronts the audience with this self-denial, he challenges the audience to reflect on any materialism that may



inhibit it from contributing to the religious prerogatives of the monastery. His portrayal of Millán's denial serves to inspire the audience to adopt similar attitudes toward wealth that might lead it to fund the Christian mission in its own environs.

Another potentially marginalized antagonist featured in saintly discourse could also be nature. After a time with San Felices, Millán “demandó al maestro licencia el criado, / ca qerrié a las sierras tornarse de buen grado” (24cd). In the wilderness, like Saint Mary of Egypt, Millán endures countless vicissitudes, considering them pleasures compared to the oppression of sin:

Era en essi tiempo un fiero matarral,  
serpientes e culuebras avién en él ostal.  
Estavan grandes peñas en medio del vallejo,  
avié de yus las peñas cuevas fieras sobejo;  
vivién de malas bestias en ellas grand concejo,  
era por en grand siesta un bravo logarejo. (27c-28d)

Despite the wild essence of the place, we find him spared and protected miraculously from any violence with which it threatens him. Predators flee shamefully from his presence and vacate their caverns for him. Snake bites do not kill him. However, “con todo est lazerio avié grand alegría” (33d). Ecocritics recognize the limits of using such a description of the Cogollan landscape to learn about the relationship between the environment and men during the time, instead seeing the purposeful execution of the poetic that assists in conveying Millán's suffering. Connie Scarborough's ecocritical approach to the scene provides a poetic analysis: “The serpents living in this place are, of course, associated with the devil, and a key feature of many of the lives of the anchorites is struggling in the wilderness against demons and temptation. Snakes are

also repulsive and dangerous and add to the perception of the area as hostile and treacherous” (*Inscribing* 39).

Millán’s relationship with nature as antagonistic has limits, however. Eventually, the narrative shifts to apprise the audience of the results of his hermitage on the local population: “sonó la buena fama” of the saint and many people come to see him (41a), causing him to withdraw and find preferred companionship “con las serpientes, / maguer son enojosas” (45ab). One of the overarching themes of the tale is Millán’s continued misanthropy as he moves from place to place toward ever more remote locations to avoid the encroachments of society and find communion with God in the pain of deprivation in nature. Later on, after the bishop of Tarazona has him ordained a priest, he eventually withdraws again into the wilderness where he prefers the company of beasts and the austerity of the elements. Thus, similar to *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca*, rather than oppressing, nature provides an option for the saint to administer its elixir of pain to avoid the oppression of sin; pain is not synonymous with suffering. It is the sin of his community members that causes him to suffer.

In any of the depictions of the wilderness, Millán may have realistically suffered as the text alleges. A.T. Fear even uses Braulio to find evidence of Millán’s real life. As he retires into the mountains annoyed at the company of pilgrims, the text portrays the hermit struggling “por las cuevas enfiestas e por los espinares” (93). Neither these nor the extreme weather he faces deters him from reneging his vow with God. By the same token, antagonists in narratives invoking the politics of suffering across time feature struggles based in reality, whether they be medieval Muslims killing Christians or modern Argentine government officials committing crimes against humanity. The poetization of any oppressive figure does not deny any abhorrent behavior in reality, but it can, just as much as it can conceal abhorrent behavior committed by the

subaltern, obscure the writer whose orchestration makes him or her invisible within the narrative, a puppeteer of the (post)colonial drama as it unfolds. The point here is not that crimes were not committed, that pain did not happen, but that literature tends to obscure the complexity of suffering and oppression which may not always find ready solution through condemnation and punishment. Oppressors may also struggle with pain and sufferers can cause harm. Just as individuals learn to suffer, they also learn to identify oppressors.

Finally, after forty years in the wilderness, Millán answers a summons from Dimio, the bishop of Tarazona that results in an exchange and episode in the saint's life reminiscent of Christian debates concerning eremitic versus cenobitic monasticism that underwent change during Millán's lifetime and features to some degree in *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca*. Bishop Dimio's use of his ecclesiastical authority to coerce Millán into a position that he does not desire also reverberates with Sixto's intimidation of Valerio in *Martirio de San Lorenzo*. While, as Dimio predicts, Millán saves "muchas almas, varones e mugieres" (87c), operating among fallen man results in rivalry with other priests and an overall dissatisfaction with communal living. The tension between the bishop and the saint signifies the endurance of a criticism that Gonzalo's *oeuvre* corroborates, but may have survived from Braulio's time that expressed reservations about the Church regulating spirituality at all times. It also resembles the opposition between the Church and ascetics like Millán that it cannot control and that possess a connection to God that Rome cannot police. Fear elaborates,

The martyr attained his place in heaven independently of the Church, and, while such achievements attested to the strength and veracity of the faith, they could also give the unfortunate impression that adherence to the formal structures of the Church was not necessary for salvation. By the late sixth century the chance of

meeting a heroic death or persecution at the hands of pagans had all but disappeared and the eremitic life appeared an ideal substitute. (193-194).

All of these tensions place Rome itself in an antagonistic position, probably underlying the same kinds of resentments Gonzalo expresses in *Martirio de San Lorenzo* and in his other hagiographic works *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* and *Vida de Santa Oria*, as also observed by Matthew Desing: the prominence of Gonzalo's mystical saints "calls into question the obedience that is owed to ecclesiastical authority" (8). This is a case of someone in a weaker position (Gonzalo de Berceo) literating a more powerful authority and endorsing alternative paths of spirituality. Apparently, the secular priest would like a little more breathing room on a local and individual level than the Fourth Lateran Council gives him. In this case, we see that while it seems unlikely that the poetic will win out, Gonzalo writes a sort of "romance" of his own ideal spirituality, one that portrays Rome a stone's throw from contemporary Islamic communities. While such a sentiment never comes to fruition and seems impossible for him to realize, a similar romance prefigured the fall of the first Rome when Christianity never should have prevailed.

In one instance Gonzalo compares Millán's fellow priests to Satan: "Mas en los clergos ovo envidia a nacer, / la qe fizo a Lúçifer en infierno caer" (100cd). A similar scuffle ensues in *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* in which the protagonists' fellow clerics depose him in order to accept political favors in exchange for monastic funds. Clearly, "others" here does not have to pertain to ethnic or religious background. Even though these enemies are close they are as dangerous and as marginalized as the foreign elements of the text. This moralizes with Gonzalo's immediate audience, putting the question to them whether or not they stand with Millán or with his the jealous priests and overbearing bishop, threatening them with rhetorical assimilation with

his poetic. Later on, the evil priests attempt to impose on Millán the rhetoric that Gonzalo imposes on them: “Blasmáronlo qe era omne galeador, / qe era de los bienes del común gastador” (102ab). In this case different powerful men take advantage of a single person, Millán, to advance their own interests. During Millán’s own lifetime, it served the interests of his fellow priests to complain to Dimio about Millán’s flippant use of ecclesiastical resources, while Gonzalo finds it convenient to reorient the antagonism around the priests, neither of which provides Millán with a chance to speak. Hagiography (and *testimonio*) lends a unique opportunity to draw boundaries around behavior depending on who controls the word. The saint speaks with his feet, retiring back into the wilderness.

A couple of miracles feature the poor robbing Millán after he graciously provides for them, which Gonzalo modifies to some degree. In the first (239-243), having nothing to give them, Millán removes his outer robe and sleeves for a group of beggars. While in Braulio’s version, one of them is punished just for wearing the sacred clothing, Gonzalo adjusts it so that one conspires to run away with them, incriminating him as “ávol” (243b), or a thief, for his brazen lack of gratitude for the saint’s gesture, and he falls into the unforgiving hands of his companions when they discover his treachery. Similarly, several *coplas* later thieves steal away with the mule Millán employs to transport kindling for the poor (271-278). They do not get far before they are so “confondidos por sos graves peccados” that they return the animal in recognition of the saint’s holiness (273b). These two miracles occur within a context in which Millán also miraculously provides wine and water to yearning multitudes, conveying a message that no one is too poor if they trust in the Lord and that just as Millán miraculously provided and can continue to provide for them, they ought not to retain anything to further his services. This

intimates Gonzalo's point of view on the matter of the *Votos*, which he warns his audience not to neglect to avoid affiliation with the aforementioned thieves.

In the last miracle of the second book (281-293), Millán receives a revelation that the city of Cantabria's evil ways will occasion its destruction unless it repents. Accordingly, the holy man travels to the city to impart the information so that it has fair warning. This episode features competing obliterating narratives. After preaching, a knight insults him, saying, "Viejo e loco e desmemoriado, / qe en seso de mozo eres todo tornado" (284cd). The knight, Abundancio, in turn receives a double helping of vilification, first from Millán in both versions,<sup>27</sup> who prophecies the knight's literal obliteration at the hands of the Visigoths for his "malvezdad" (286d) and then from Gonzalo who adds "mal raçonado" to his description of the knight (284b). Neither the knight nor the rest of Cantabria pays any heed to the warnings and consequently falls into the hands of Gonzalo's pen as he relegates them to literal subalternity when Leovirgilio arrives:

Empeçóla â lidiar muy denodadament,  
 quebrantar las adarves por llegar a la yent,  
 darlis mala pitaça, non sabroso present,  
 qual mereció tal pueblo tan desobedient.  
 Issieron los de dentro por con ellos lidiar,  
 Abundancio primero por el precio ganar;

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<sup>27</sup> In Braulio it reads: "Pero uno, llamado Abundancio, dijo que el Santo chocheaba por su anciandida: mas él le aviso que por sí mismo experimentaría la verdad de su anuncio, y el suceso lo confirmó después, porque murió al filo de la vengadora espada de Leovigildo" (26).

mas tanto non se pudo del mal passo guardar  
 qe rimero de todos non ovo a finir. (290-291)

This episode illustrates two important points that help transition from threatening liberation to rhetorical obliteration. First, it demonstrates the mentality held by most Christians in Iberia at the time that their own sins had occasioned the Muslim invasion of the peninsula. Therefore, this episode anticipates the later Battle of Clavijo, in which having finally repented, Christians assuage the divine disapproval incurred by collusion with Islam. Second, this episode illustrates what makes *testimonio* rhetoric so powerful. Mudslinging in the sense that Abundancio uses it or as the earlier Decio uses it in *Martirio de San Lorenzo*, fails to reconfigure an opponent into an oppressor because it lacks a victim with a cult of admirers. In this episode, Abundancio is never a victim even after Leovirgillo's arrival; with Gonzalo having power of the word, Abundancio's demise at the end is his just reward. Meanwhile, Millán suffers due to the ridicule he endures in order to deliver a message that requires him to travel miles, for "no l' dolié so lazerio por las almas salvar" (282b), and the episode begins with him "martirizando so cuerpo" (281a). Gonzalo confronts his readers with a series of Christian deviants that contrast with the saint as an invitation to join his communal ideal.

### **Devils, Clavijo, and Religious Obliteration**

In the first two books of *VSMC*, Millán faces off against the devil himself as a central antagonist, which prefigures the Muslims in Book Three, who could hardly be considered worthy adversaries. For Gonzalo to marginalize the Muslim, he cannot depict them as equal with Christianity in strength; instead, he portrays them as easy fodder to the might of the exalted Christ and saint. In each conflict presented in the text, the enemy attacks first, never the Christian warrior. In the first encounter Millán minds his holy business in the wilderness when Satan

“guerreávalo mucho por muchas de maneras” (53a). The subaltern must not transgress so as to deserve any punishment from authority. Nance delineates *testimonios* that break from “forensic and epideictic *testimonio*” that she calls “deliberative *testimonio* [. . .] characterized by retardations, delays, slippages, etc.” (*Can* 45). However, this latter kind may not really feature less innocent/more realistic protagonists, but rather a different kind of saint for an audience with an unconventional standard for saintliness. Her example of deliberative *testimonio*, Alicia Partnoy’s *The Little School*, corroborates this. As an example, Nance cites an episode from Partnoy in which she wets the bed because she spends eighteen hours sleeping (Nance *Can*, 42; Partnoy, 32). The episode fails to prove that testimonial speakers lack innocence because the context of the episode alleges that the oppressive circumstances of the state violence against her underlie her motive not to get up and use the bathroom. Moreover, even in the absence of such circumstances, Partnoy and her confessions of atheism suggest her interpolation of an audience that appreciates values foreign to mainstream Christianity—in this case the virtue of special importance to the exclusion of others is at least the appearance of blunt, undiluted honesty (Partnoy, 62). Her modern cult of elite followers and status as a victim ultimately configures her into a saint rather than her adherence to a traditional set of values. Accordingly, in *VSMC*, book one concludes upon Millán’s departure back into the wilderness as a victim of clerical politicking, after which book two inaugurates his thaumaturgy, one which emphasizes and anticipates his ability to crush and heal all spiritual oppression, but in the process making old oppressors into new subalterns.

For Millán’s first miracle (111-125), Satan confronts him in the wilderness and attempts to engage in obliterating him rhetorically, accusing him, “semejas en tos dichos que traes mansedumne, / amarguean tos fechos plus que la fuert calumne” (113cd). Gonzalo here reveals



the tension that occurs when two powers compete to have the last word about the other. Satan also calls Millán's hermitage an act of war: "entresti a los montes por a mi guerrear" when just as easily it could be said that the devil is the belligerent party (114b). Millán banishes the beast with a prayer to God causing "toda la fuerça el diablo perdida" (120b), and he falls to the earth, blowing up dust and screaming as he goes until "fusso e desterróse a la tierra estranna" (122a). At this point in the narrative, Gonzalo inserts a quasi-nationalist sentiment: "mientras el sieglo sea e durare Espanna, / siempre será contada esta buena fazanna" (122cd), so that the entire episode connects powerfully with the central miracle of the third act, Millán's victory at the battle of Clavijo. As in the episode with the devil, during this battle, Gonzalo presents equivocal motives for war, strips the enemy of both power and voice and exiles him. Despite how powerful the Muslims really are and have been, Gonzalo's literation writes over them so that they become nothing more than devils which God easily exorcises from the record.

While Millán specializes in the banishment of devils like Muslims encroaching on Christian Iberia, the poem has its fair share of sick and infirm made whole, reminding us of Christianity's medical consciousness that leads it to view the encroachments of religious others as infections on the social body. The first of these kinds of miracles deals with the monk Armentero who suffers from a swollen stomach (126-131). This and other miracles of healing like it show that just as Millán heals the masses that flock to him, *cuaderna vía* provides an opportunity for Gonzalo to rewrite society in the image of his ideal by imitating French and Latin iterations of the *alejandrino* just enough to associate it with larger Christian Europe rather than with Islam or Judaism, while at the same time changing it just enough to ideate a unique polity. In this imagined community, to refer to Benedict Anderson, Muslims do not threaten any borders, and no Jews can be found anywhere. For example, Gonzalo characterizes the healing of

Armentero's affliction in the same way that he does the devil's departure from Millán: "fusso la maletía del cuerpo manamano" (130c). In the following miracle of a woman bedridden from paralysis (133-137), the narrative describes Millán not as the man who survived forty years in the mountains or who healed the sick monk, but as "qe echo al diablo e venció las serpientes" (133d), suggesting that Gonzalo engineers Millán's character in order to focus on his ability to exorcise perceived oppression.

Along with the monk of his first miracle, Millán also heals a priest overtaken with a devil that controls both his words and his actions (157-160). If Gonzalo can ascribe aberrant Christian behavior to the machinations of the devil, then he can brush other explanations aside. In turn, if he compares Muslims to devils, Gonzalo can explain that their refusal to accept in Christianity and even to impose Islam on others equates to the ravings of a lunatic. Otherwise, they must deliberately act contrary, like devils do, effectively writing over them so that the complexity of their motives and desires reduces to evil. Additionally, Millán's assistance of so many religious men after the narrative has criticized the strictures of Rome reinforces Gonzalo's irritation with Church hierarchy. Millán's direct connection with God places him in a higher position to those religious men who come to him from monastic orders and offices.

In the miracle of Tüencio (161-168), the beneficiary has some standing in the community when he approaches Millán with a servant who also suffers as a demoniac. Millán alleviates the servant's malady as he does others, but is impressed by the display made after the exorcism so that he asks how many devils there are, discovering that he has unwittingly cast out five. Millán rebukes them again, saying,

Cosa es desguisada

seer tan malos huéspedes en tan buena posada,

casa es de Dios esta con crisma consegrada,  
mal es qe tan grant tiempo estido vïolada. (166)

With this elaborate *amplificatio* from the Braulio that compares the body to a house, Gonzalo reflects Christians' attitudes toward Muslims in Millán's reaction to the devils: the land of Iberia is God given and not at fault for the Moorish occupation. As Bower remarks, in Bercean hagiography the body serves as "a metonym of local constituencies" as well as "local and geographical territories that define corporate identities" so that Gonzalo sees the peninsula as a body God has healed and is healing after a long time of Islamic infirmity ("Body" 175).

The miracles develop a greater community consciousness in the miracle of Onorio, a senator from Parpalinas overtaken with a devil (181-198). The devil prevents him from eating and drinking, putting the man in physical danger, so—hearing about Millán—he suggests a "romería al sancto oratorio" to solicit his services (186b). The use of the word "romería," not present in Braulio, interpolates the audience, the majority of whom would have been pilgrims on the road to Santiago as well as other sites, including the monastery of San Millán itself. By doing so, Dutton argued that Gonzalo strove to make the audience see the monastery of San Millán as the focal center of a religiously identifiable community to which pilgrimages can be made (*MSL* xii). When the contingent arrives to Millán's location, he decides to return the favor by following them back to Parpalinas where he invites the entire community to turn the demon's tactic on its head by fasting for the man during three days, consecrating the suffering that the demon has imposed upon him for his and the community's gain, as hagiographic and *testimonio* rhetoric seeks to do with suffering. Finally, when the demon sees he has no hope of retaining Onorio, he seeks desperately a new body to inhabit. This looks like an allegory of the Moors occupying Iberia, and then retreating after the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. However, "el siervo de

Christo avié pocco cuidado. / Cuitólo con los salmos e con la ledanía / issió el vezín malo, ovo de ir sue vía” when the demon resorts to throwing stones at the saint (196d-197b). This moment exemplifies Ancos’s comment that Gonzalo doesn’t really seem concerned with Muslims in this text. Just as Millán treats demons without much concern, drowning out their expression with Christian litany, Gonzalo also brushes Muslims aside in order to assert a burgeoning Christian self-awareness that depreciates the 500 years that Islam has affected it up until that point in time.

Millán considers the threat of demoniacs of such little concern to him that

Yacié el sennor bueno con los demoniados  
 que avién los demonios rabiosos e irados;  
 dormién ambos sos ojos tan bien segurados  
 como si de mil omnes soviessen aguardados. (201)

By the mid-thirteenth century, based on what he writes here, he considers the Moors are so well expunged from the peninsula that being Christian there is like having both eyes closed and asleep to any threat they once posed, and he seeks to promote this estimation for his audience. Even if they were to attempt an attack, as “queriénlo muchas veces los malos escarnir” (202a), their attempts would amount to nothing, “valient una paja li podiessen nucir” (202d). Gonzalo’s contempt for political threats is not a matter of foolish self-assurance, but a strategy of reality building by attributing success to God and demonizing the enemy—transforming the perception of dangerous Muslims into demonic presences saints such as Millán can exorcise from the region.

Since the devils cannot prevail over Millán nor the sick that he heals, they convene together in one episode to devise a way to destroy him (199-224). After a lengthy council that mentions several demons from earlier miracles that Millán has exorcised, one devil suggests

“demos fuego al lecho quando yoguier dormiendo” (212d), which all the others agree upon. Unfortunately for them, the attempt goes horribly awry: “tornáronse las flamas atrás como punzones; / qemávanlis las barbas abueltas los grinnones” (216bc), resulting in “grant dissensión, / non fue en Babilonia mayor confusión” (219cd). Gonzalo lends significant *amplificatio* to Braulio’s version of the scene (“18. De cómo Dios le protegía”), which features no devils in council together and no reversal upon his attackers. Gonzalo’s turn with the scene belies a certain imaginary about how enemies behave when they keep losing, as Christians may have imagined about the retreating Muslims on the peninsula, whose attacks seem to result in further detriment, such as in the Siege of Santarém (1184). Millán’s reaction when he awakes and finds the chaos is particularly telling about the kind of attitude Gonzalo wants to cultivate toward oppressors: “por pocco se non riso tant ovo grant sabor. / Rendió gracias al Fijo de la Virgen gloriosa” (222d-223a). After so many repetitions about the devils’ misadventures throughout *VSMC*, it is very difficult not to associate them with the culminating conflict in the third act. Millán’s skill with exorcism makes him an ideal companion for Santiago in the Battle of Clavijo for this reason, suggesting that he was not chosen at random for the story, but that he culturally became an ideal candidate, or, vice-versa, those members of the San Millán monastic community recognized in the Battle of Clavijo an appropriate presence for their patron saint because of this skill that he possessed. This may help to explain Gregory Kaplan’s thesis that Gonzalo overstates Millán’s affiliation with the monastery to the deprivation of Cantabria, his more probable origin.

On another occasion, as Millán’s life wanes in old age, the devil reappears to him to once again accuse him of hypocrisy because he lives with two women that care for him (260-270). This exchange plays out largely like Satan’s earlier attempt (111-129), but this time Millán wins without any intervention from God, rather confounding the devil with his rebuttal, not because of

sound reason but with faith, reminding him that he rests in God's hands, not the devil's: "El que me dio derecho de vos tantas vegadas, / qe fiço a vos mismas darvos a tiçonadas, / Essi será custodia d'estas carnes lazdradas" (269abc). Unlike the display of unequal power of his first encounter with the devil (111-129), here Gonzalo showcases Millán's superior skill through debate, reminiscent of polemics like Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Judaeos* (ca. 1110) or Peter the Venerable's *Liber contra sectam siue haeresim Saracenorum* (ca. 1150).<sup>28</sup> Gonzalo's attitude during this exchange indicates that during such polemics, he does not so much interpolate the religious other as he does with those not paying the *voto*, viewing opponents instead as devils whose accusations Christians need not take very seriously. On the same token, however, visible in such an exchange is the threat to his interlocutors of occupying the same verbal space as the devil should they continue to neglect their obligations, for he can fill the space for them unless they fill it with their own monetary and devotional reply.

After Millán's death and burial, Gonzalo proceeds to the saint's post mortem miracles, but as Braulio only provides four, Gonzalo updates the account using oral tradition and the monastery's cartulary, which includes the monastery's origin story and *Privilegio* as it pertains to the Battle of Clavijo.<sup>29</sup> This apocryphal portion of *VSMC* has traditionally formed the crux of analyses on the poem as it suggests that Gonzalo wrote the poem to improve the economic conditions of the monastery. The *Privilegio* consists of one epitomizing miracle upon which the monastery's history rests, set toward the beginning of the Reconquista during the battle of

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<sup>28</sup> Pick includes a lengthy list of anti-Islamic polemic on 4-5. The majority of her book focuses on Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's activities.

<sup>29</sup> See Dutton "Fuentes."

Clavijo. In 1948 Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz casts suspicion on the historicity of the battle (“Auténtica”), and most twentieth-century historians regard the event as part of the “imaginario hispano” (Domínguez-García 69).<sup>30</sup> The battle does not only feature in *VSMC*, but throughout medieval Iberian chronicles from the twelfth century on, its earliest surviving source originating in “el siglo XII cuando la *Crónica Najerense* (1160) hace un breve comentario, meramente retórico y estilístico, sobre la intervención de Santiago en tal batalla” (Domínguez-García 71). This episode lends important insight into how Christian Iberians viewed Muslims during the Middle Ages even though rather than smearing Muslims, it forges a Christian identity in the wake of the recession of Muslim borders on the peninsula.<sup>31</sup> The episode minimizes a powerful entity that continued to threaten Christians on the peninsula instead of suggesting unity or solidarity between the two faiths.

The episode recounts, as in the prophecy of Cantabria, that “por culpa de christianos que eran peccadores” the Moors arrived and dominated the region (366a). It is important that the sinners here are the Christians, because this is the group that Gonzalo seeks to interpolate, not Muslims, although this does distort the Christians of the eighth century into iterations of real people. Meanwhile, Gonzalo consigns the Muslims as “mortal enemigo de todos los christianos” (369b). Reminiscent of the language by which he characterizes Decio (*MSL* 26ab, 43-44),

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<sup>30</sup> Domínguez-García provides a helpful historiographical sketch of the Battle of Clavijo and the *Diploma de Ramiro*, which like the *Privilegio de San Millán*, stipulates devotional offerings for Santiago’s intervention in the battle, including medieval chronicles that mention it.

<sup>31</sup> See also Francomano (“Legend”) and Grieve’s comments (*Eve*) on this confrontation as well as Domínguez-García’s *Memorias del futuro*.

Gonzalo literates historical Muslims and reduces them to a narrative motif at the service of the Christian narrator and his audience that prevents both them and us from getting at any real speaking people that “paganos” points toward (369a). More than just marginalized, like the *sati*, they serve the speaking culture but never participate in it. This sense of subalternity exists relative to a speaker; the subaltern does not speak because those with the word like Gonzalo choose not to listen to or convey it. Therefore, even though politically the Muslims were far from subalterns in relation to Gonzalo, in the instance of this text, he imagines them as such in a literary move toward reification of this imaginary. With this theoretical structure, real political subalternity begins before culminating in what Edward Said describes as Orientalism, far from *convivencia*. Again, as the majority of this dissertation asserts, subalterns need not be enemies and oppressors as in this case, but may be and often are heroes at the service of a speaker.

It is tempting to suggest that because Gonzalo has the Christians at fault for their “servidumne” (371a), the Muslims do not really oppress anyone here. However, since this is a *vita* rather than a *passio*, good and evil do not dichotomize so simply. As we saw in *VSME*, sin and mortality become the oppressors in saints’ tales, but for a time, María herself is identified with that oppressor, and thus we find the same occurring in *VSMC* in which Christians’ slake the Muslims’ lust and greed with one hundred maidens of tribute annually—yet another connection with Decio (*MSL* 86). This opposes the martyr’s stance who risks his own life by speaking out against such oppression’s sinfulness. In *Martirio de San Lorenzo*, Gonzalo even refers to the Romans as “moros” (76), tying the two groups together as confederate in their legacy of oppression (Baños Vallejo, “Moros” 255).

Terrorized by three signs from heaven for their unwillingness to stand for Christian principle, King Ramiro I of Asturias and Count Fernán González arrive on the scene and inspire



the Christians to be Christians: to suffer rather than succumb to oppression. From this moment the narrative characterizes the Christians as victims worthy of sympathy, instead of party to the crimes of the oppressor, with Fernán González rallying them together despite their disadvantage: “maguer somos menores” (401d). These two men exhort the Christians from various regions to unite and fight the Moors, but first invite them to pledge themselves to Santiago and San Millán. The Christians take heart, prepare for battle and make the pledge. Consequently, as the battle unfolds, both saints appear on the field and turn the tide in favor of the Christians, even turning the Muslims’ arrows backward against themselves. Finally,

El rei Abderraman, qe los moros mandava,  
 quand vío qe el pleito tan mal se li parava,  
 desamparó el juego, el pleyt en qe estaba,  
 ca la otra partida grandes embites dava.  
 Desamparó el campo todo so vassallage,  
 Mucho omne de precio, de mucho buen lignage;  
 A malas dineradas pagó el ostalage,  
 non quiso embiar otro con el message.  
 Luego qe ‘l entendieron qe era él movido,  
 El su mucho grand pueblo fue luego descosido;  
 Perdieron tod esfuerzo e todo so sentido,  
 Cadieron en desarro como pueblo vencido. (449-451)

The Muslims are impotent to the Christians, ultimately vanquished like so much chattel, and as Mirrer observes, being stripped “of their maleness, viewing them not as men but as objects to be appropriated” (12). The two groups are essentially incomparable, the one so weak that it is of no

real consequence to Gonzalo's interlocutors except to make their worldview appear superior. The text describes the Moors as losing all power and sense; they are nothing, obliterated.

To this attitude toward Islam the text offers one hopeful exception, as Ancos has also observed ("Mahoma" 11), in its attitude toward the Muslim camp's *alfaqui*, whom it considers "persona muy onrada" (455c). This exception does reveal the nuanced nature of literating one's political and ideological opponents, never achieving a perfect dichotomy between good and evil, along with the ever evolving nature of subalternity which can change and is changing at any given moment in time. In the camp's *alfaqui*, Gonzalo perhaps sees someone commensurate with himself, a holy man striving the best he knows how to impart spiritual guidance to his people.

### **Of the Jews and Conclusion**

Before entering into *VSMC*'s absence of Jews the question begs whether or not it *should* feature any of the third prominent sect of the peninsula, as they do in other works by Gonzalo de Berceo, most prominently in *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* but also featuring in his doctrinal work *El duelo de la Virgen*, *Los loores de la Virgen*, and *Sacrificio de la misa* wherein Antonio Garrosa Resina points out that Gonzalo spares no expense associating "el judaísmo con las prácticas mágicas y de hechicería" (128). Baños Vallejo observes that other medieval Iberian saints' tales feature a similar excision of Jews: "Sólo una de las doce obras incluye un personaje judío de mínima entidad, y ello en una función meramente circunstancial" ("Moros" 254). Setting aside that Christianity has defined itself against Judaism as its religious inferior since its advent, additional reason exists for Visigothic Christians in Iberia to do so during the lives of both Millán and Braulio as well as Gonzalo so that removing them entirely from their narratives constitutes a deliberate act of exclusion in the enterprise of self-idealization.

So much scholarship has gone into thirteenth-century Sephardic experience and influence it is practically shocking that Gonzalo did not find some pretense to add them into his translation, not even for the sake of polemic or reference to scriptures. Gonzalo even excises Braulio's only explicit reference to the Old Testament on an occasion in which Millán miraculously feeds a multitude of people and Braulio takes the opportunity to compare Millán's miraculous preservation in the wilderness to a vision of Jeremiah and the deliverance of Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago from Nabuchodonosor ("22. De cómo faltando manjares para los huéspedes, fueron llevados súbitamente"). Gonzalo's antisemitism is exceptional in any case, since Jonathan Ray insists that "The real problem was not the exclusion but rather the acceptance of Jews" in thirteenth-century Iberia (4).

The relationship between Christians and Jews during the Visigothic period differs, but Norman Roth makes some key observations. While extensive tradition exists for the presence of Jews in Iberia, no firm evidence that we have today emerges until the fourth century. From that time, cursory references exist, but certainly by the sixth century, Jews had grown influential enough to excite disdain from various quarters of the region. Roth's central thesis claims that Byzantine influence on the peninsula explains "animosity toward the Jews, precisely during those centuries when the Church generally was exhibiting a rather tolerant policy with regard to the Jews" (7). In any case, by 613, Sisebut issued a decree dictating the forced conversion of all Jews in the kingdom, a position likely inflamed by his bishop, Isidore of Seville. Despite this decree, Roth notes "continued puzzling reference to 'Jews' in Visigothic legislation" (13). Thus, certainly during Braulio's time Jews lived in the region and concerned prominent Christians. Roth additionally demonstrates that, like Gonzalo, Braulio's other work in the region is fiercely anti-Semitic (22-25), making the absence of any polemic in his story of Millán remarkable.

While none of this means that Jews represent the sole motivating cause for writing the life of Millán, in either Braulio or Gonzalo's case their blatant absence despite the religious climates of both writers' times and the evidence of their other anti-Semitic activities makes the complete absence of Jews in either redaction of Millán's life incongruous. Baños Vallejo suggests that "posiblemente por la convivencia más o menos pacífica con los judíos en la España medieval, el antisemitismo en los relatos de la época es menor del que cabría esperar" ("Moros" 259), but the evidence brought to bear in this dissertation must support a different conclusion. Rather than a coincidence that Millán's life happens to lack meaningful interaction with this particular religious other, it makes sense rather that Jewish absence in the story actually fits in comfortably with these writers' other anti-Semitic activities, even though in this particular case it may not have even been deliberate. Like Francomano's understanding of the tribute of a hundred maidens, both Braulio and Gonzalo compose Millán's *vita* as a romance that imagines an ideal Christian landscape, a rhetorical weapon of emergent Christian self-awareness upon which Jews did not feature and upon which Muslim power had receded. In both cases, they wrote Millán's life under circumstances in which Catholic politics had only recently started to play an important role: Visigothic kings had converted from Arian to Nicene Christianity at the end of the sixth century, and the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 had reduced Islamic power on the peninsula sufficiently that Gonzalo's daily concerns freed him to recreate a Christian identity on the peninsula, instead of distressing about having his borders overrun by powerful religious enemies. The result poetically reduces two cultures crucial to the formation of the same identity: an exercise in writing subalternity. In one case, Gonzalo minimizes a powerful political contemporary while the weaker non-threatening opponent disappears entirely from contributing to the narrative of identity construction.

By comparison, modern *testimonio* likewise possesses a latent ability to transform even the most powerful enemies, like the Argentine government, into subalterns, criminals punished before earthly tribunals. Even though one hopes that this always results in justice, misfires can occur and perpetuate endless cycles of (ob)literation. Larry Reynolds observes a concern for this kind of characterization of the enemy in Nathaniel Hawthorne's attitude toward anti-slave movements in nineteenth-century United States: "Hawthorne's skepticism about purifying the country by eliminating slavery arose not from any proslavery sentiments [. . .] but, rather, from his deep-seated belief that attempts to rid a village, a region, or nation of evil could produce results just the opposite of those desired, especially if the means used were violent" (2). Like those plagued by the injustice of the Argentine Dirty War or nineteenth-century African slaves, Millán stands as a liminal figure without a home; however, according to Matthew Desing, "liminal journeys are often dangerous spaces; Millán's is no different. Berceo relates that the Devil constantly assaults Millán on his journey" (109). There lies a certain syncretism between liminality and marginality. Gonzalo portrays Millán as a man who manages liminality/subalternity safely, defeating the devil that dwells there, in contrast to Domingo de Silos who serves as a bridge between the silent realm of subalternity and the speaking hegemony. Rather than translate, during the initial and final parts of his asceticism, Millán is gyrovagus, wandering and without cenobium. However, nor does he stand as a spokesperson like Alicia Partnoy. He symbolizes the hegemony's admiration for the subaltern that remains an "other" despite its desire to order it. Today, both the right and left arduously mobilize the image of the subaltern as a modern "moor slayer," conjured to defeat those groups they see as incompatible with their utopias, those groups that they attempt to silence into new subalternities. The devils

that Millán subjects turn into Moriscos, then exiles, and now terrorists, but whom intellectuals conjure in the notion of “resistance.”

Concluding her brief history of *testimonio*, Nance comments that “by the end of the nineties, the genre was beginning to cede to a new generation of less politically charged memoirs” (*Can* 178). This change may owe to the inevitable trajectory of *testimonio* that meant recognizing the cyclical effect of (ob)literate one’s torturer in the name of justice. Recent *testimonios* like the Oscar Torres’ film *Voces inocentes* depict danger across all political lines, begging for hope in the individual audience member’s own ability to identify with his or her larger global context because “el cambio existe al nivel personal” rather than in punitive retribution (1:02).<sup>32</sup> This approach avoids producing new subalterns in order to transcend one’s own subalternity. Alicia Partnoy’s narrative never fully discloses any of her oppressors; we encounter them like she does, through only a tiny hole of her blindfold and the aliases the guards have given each other. The acts of violence and torture they commit themselves cast a smokescreen at the world, preventing anyone from seeing the naked reality that motivated their actions that evil never fully satisfies to explain.

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<sup>32</sup> In an interview with the University of Kansas,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcX4hsLJJ7I&feature=youtu.be>.

## Chapter 4

## The Importance of Secrets:

## Intellectual Collaboration in the Cult of Santo Domingo de Silos

Et hoc audenter et absque aliqua trepidatione  
dicimus, uisibilia enim beneficia fidem dant  
beneficiis inuisibilibus

--Grimaldus. *Vita dominici siliensis*. 1.7.105

Numerous individuals collaborated to produce the extant record of the cult of Santo Domingo de Silos, a figure that riveted Iberian Christianity from the eleventh to the thirteenth century with tales of healing and liberation from captivity. While his most prominent writers Grimaldus, Gonzalo de Berceo, and Pero Marín played crucial roles in the preservation of these stories, they owe a significant debt to many illiterate people whose voices history would otherwise render silent. As Baños Vallejo has said about hagiography: “se propaga no solo de la Iglesia al pueblo, sino también en la dirección inversa” (*Vidas* 9). The process of writing from the margins looks very similar in *testimonio*:

[*Testimonio*] is a mediated narrative: [. . .] an oral narrative told by a speaker from a subaltern or ‘popular’ social class or group to an interlocutor who is an intellectual or professional writer from the middle or upper class (and in many cases from a different ethno-linguistic position) [. . .] who then, according to this subject position, edits and textualizes the account, making it available to a similarly positioned [. . .] reading public. (Beverley, *Testimonio: On* 47)

This definition supplies at least two participants in the process: an elite of a more powerful group and a marginalized or subaltern “representative” that engages the more powerful group. Though not conforming neatly to Gramsci’s definitions for them—his have more to do with nascent and waning social groups and the production of goods—this chapter will avail itself of the relational aspect with which he endows them by referring to the first type of collaborator as the traditional intellectual and to the second as the organic intellectual. Both types of intellectuals comprise a fundamental component to the existence of the *testimonio* narrative: without the traditional intellectual, the subaltern has no access to the means of production necessary by which to broadcast his or her experience, but without the organic intellectual the elite would have no story of suffering with which to promote a higher truth.

Although Nance insists that “not all *testimonios* have been collaborative” (*Can 2*), the genre tends to surface when an orally oriented group desires relief from the group with which an elite identifies. In written accounts of Domingo de Silos, the clerical writers embody the traditional intellectual whereas Domingo himself constitutes the organic, despite his obvious hegemonic rhetorical function. As it turns out, “The testimonial narrator [. . .] is not the subaltern either, rather something like an ‘organic intellectual’ of the subaltern who speaks to the hegemony by means of a metonymy of self in the name and in the place of it” (Beverley, *Testimonio: On 52*). *Testimonio* and hence hagiography feature multivalent intellectual voices in collaborative negotiation, each representing the interests of distinct and unequal social castes. While this chapter will emphasize the similarities between intellectuals in the production of *testimonio* and intellectuals producing hagiography, they do have important differences. Traditional intellectuals in the Middle Ages focus their activities around the Church and have considerable technological limitations, whereas modern intellectuals have significant visibility



across social spheres and tend to focus on weaknesses and injustices in large political entities. Organic intellectuals across time are extremely heterogeneous and vary from one time and place to another depending on the struggles they face and the means they have to communicate them. In this particular case, the medieval organic intellectual is more of an idea than a man who represents the people's hope for relief from sickness, pain, and war. Modern organic intellectuals tend to be real people seeking ways to engage the government when they have very little access to the operations of power in their society, although they may often taken advantage of the medieval concept of the icon as will be discussed later on.

Whereas the previous three chapters examined *testimonio* rhetoric as “a potent and empowering ideology promoting imperial Christianity” (Kalleres 258), this chapter and the next analyze Beverley's concept of “transculturation *from below*” by analyzing not how the dominant Church appropriates the saint but how the marginalized do (*Testimonio: On*, 69, his emphasis). This chapter concentrates on how the medieval intellectual mediates marginalized social entities as a means of speaking *with* them rather than only speaking *for* them. It will focus on Gonzalo de Berceo's version of Domingo de Silos' life due to its temporal proximity to other texts studied in this dissertation, its writer's unique intellectual status, and the ramifications of his poetic style, which makes the saint's life more accessible for clearer analysis. Nevertheless, Grimaldus' *Vita Dominici Siliense* and Pero Marín's *Miráculos romanzados*' episodic structures underscore the testimonial nature of the cult and will have important bearings on its analysis.<sup>33</sup> All three versions elevate the common person to the consciousness of the more powerful Church,

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<sup>33</sup> The chapter uses Valcárcel (1982) and González Jiménez' (2008) editions, respectively.

heightening awareness of the challenges the weaker group faces. The chapter therefore concurs with Weiss' formulation of Gonzalo de Berceo as a traditional intellectual, but whose mediating and educating functions require him to bring information to the Church about occupants of other social groups, which he distorts, but without whose voices he cannot speak otherwise.

Rigoberta Menchú, an organic intellectual in her own right, references the intellectual as she closes her tale of the Guatemalan government's atrocities against the indigenous inhabitants of that region, saying, "Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tenga muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos" (271). As it turns out, while through *testimonio* and the cult of the saint, we find means of better understanding the subaltern or marginalized other, neither genre fully discloses its weaker occupants. Spivak says that wherever there is the trace of the subaltern's voice, "there is a space of withholding, marked by a secret that may not be a secret but cannot be unlocked. 'The native,' whatever that might mean, is not only a victim, but also an agent. The curious guardian at the margin who will not inform" (*Critique* 190). *Testimonio* and hagiography function as means by which to speak *with* an individual or group normally inaudible to a more powerful entity, either because the larger group itself abuses the other or because it can fulfill the other's need. By its very nature, the subaltern subject or marginalized other will always remain partially hidden, speaking only what advances its own agenda. This hearkens back to chapter 1 and 2's demonstration that *testimonio*'s suffering bends its own history at first for survival, but it can evolve into a powerful, well-elaborated political machine.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of an already traditional power, to know the subaltern any more than it wants would constitute a sort of unethical, neo-colonial violation of one of the limits Beverley refers to as "what we can or should do in relation to the subaltern" (*Subalternity*

38). We must subject ourselves to what we normally want to subject in order to advance a dialectic. In the words of Doris Sommer, “maybe we are not so much outsiders as marginals, allies in a possible coalition rather than members. We are not excluded from her world, but kept at arm’s length” (37). This component of this chapter departs largely from Shigeko Mato’s thesis “to explore [. . .] how an intellectual’s knowledge that can be a tool for approaching the marginalized other, inevitably coopted by hegemony, is ultimately incapable of apprehending ‘the secrets of the subaltern’” (7). However, this chapter argues that genres like *testimonio* and hagiography still benefit the oppressed because they create a space through which traditional and organic intellectuals can dialogue on behalf of their respective groups to the benefit of both, as long as the more dominant group respects the secrets of the other, the only thing no one has taken from them.

The charismatic Subcomandante Marcos, who, donning a ski mask, represented the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico, during the 1990s and the first part of this century, will serve as another productive modern comparison to hagiography for this chapter. Even though he was neither indigenous nor one of the commanders of the movement, his personality captured national and international attention and rallied many to their cause. Nick Henck has recently observed that

Marcos’ political language appears heavily indebted not to the somewhat jargon-laden and convoluted Marxist-Leninist prose he read during his university days, but to the literary language of the works of world literature that accompanied him throughout his life, coupled with the linguistic forms of the indigenous peoples whom he encountered and lived alongside in Chiapas. (58-59)

This literary sensibility enabled him to act both as a traditional intellectual that could relay the testimony of an oppressed people while at the same time acting as a saintly protagonist in a self-fashioned narrative. Similarly, Gonzalo de Berceo in *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* (henceforth *VSDS*),<sup>34</sup> appropriates literary memes and testimonial collaboration that allow him to occupy both intellectual and popular spheres and reveal plights of the common people. Richard Posner defines “public-intellectual goods [as] entertainment goods and solidarity goods as well as information goods” (3). Thus, Gonzalo de Berceo, like the Rafael Guillén behind the ski mask, raises awareness of contemporary issues with his intellectual prowess earned from the University of Palencia and a “discursive arsenal” of literary entertainment coalescing in the icon of Santo Domingo de Silos (Henck 57), who then transforms into the “man of the people” (Daas 162).

This transformation allows the intellectual members of the powerful institutional Church to collaborate with sick and distressed Iberians in order to produce Santo Domingo de Silos, an icon that serves as their public representative and organic intellectual. Concerning the cult of personality, Desirée Martín confers on the saint and his writer “status as a traditional political or revolutionary hero [. . .] with his role as a master manipulator of his own endlessly transferable word and image” (142). This allows the struggle of the masses to manifest, provide options for relief, and raises awareness within the Church of the strain of living under threat of sickness, war, and death. The intellectual need not live and breathe in the world; he or she can be an idea projected by the people in their time of need. In both *testimonio* and hagiography “the distinctions between text and history, representation and real life, public and private spheres,

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<sup>34</sup> All citations come from Dutton’s edition (1978).

objectivity and solidarity [. . .] are blurred” (Beverley, “*Testimonio*, Subalternity” 573). This ambiguity makes hagiography as well as *testimonio* valuable sites for negotiating with groups that have no voice otherwise while protecting the weaker group from further exploitation because of its retention of the full story. It also controverts Gramsci’s assertion that “the mass of peasantry, although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own ‘organic’ intellectuals” (*The Gramsci Reader* 302).<sup>35</sup> Indeed, because of the traditional, oral nature of most cults, saints eventually became a locus of knowledge for many social groups, including peasantry, even though this did not always relate to the means of production, as Gramsci understood them. However, their iconicity and usual affiliation with the Church made saints sites of contestation between the traditional clerics and the organic laity that identified so strongly with them.

In his 1957 monograph *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages* Jacques Le Goff takes a closer look at intellectuals in the high Middle Ages, where he argues that the social figure “developed in the town schools of the twelfth century, and flourished in the universities at the beginning of the thirteenth. It denotes those whose profession it was to think and share thoughts” (1). Weiss recognizes that “the newly formed University of Palencia [in Iberia] trained clerics to cater for the expanding administrative needs of Church and State, and produced an initial group of writers with an acute sense of their own worth and collective identity” (1), situating Gonzalo, a Palencia

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<sup>35</sup> As Gramsci’s theories relate to the lack of intellectuals among the peasantry, Mao Zedong first disagreed in *Talks at the Yen-an Forum*. Since then, only a handful of scholars such as David Meek and Andriy Zayarnyuk have attempted any revision of his assessment, but only in relation to more recent peasant movements.

graduate, at the center of the social revolution Le Goff describes. In terms of Gramsci's dichotomy of organic versus traditional intellectual, Weiss considers Gonzalo's milieu a "notoriously amorphous group" (9), sometimes acting in the interests of the Church, other times in the interest of the rising aristocracy and monarchy. However, Weiss does not list the peasantry or merchant class as a group to which clerics owe intellectual representation, and with good reason. Gonzalo does not belong to this group any more than Rafael Guillén to the indigenous people of Chiapas or Elizabeth Burgos-Dubray to Guatemalan Indians. However, his intellectual status, as with these other two modern examples, does place him in a position to mediate dialogue with other social groups, especially through *their* adopted organic intellectuals, in this case Domingo de Silos.

Therefore, while "organic intellectual" does not conform to Le Goff's use of the term "intellectual" in an elite sense, it must here substitute for someone that can ably represent a nascent or marginalized social group, like Rigoberta Menchú, something which Alain Boureau approximates when he describes medieval intellectuals as "accessible, in principle, to all men" (146). This study, therefore, subverts Marcia Colish's concern that someday scholars "would regard intellectual history as such as suspect, or as politically incorrect, since it includes, inevitably, the study of elites" (195). As it turns out, *testimonio* allows for both the study of elites and commoners as intellectuals in tandem and in complimentary ways. While the dominant group does not always fully understand these figures or the groups they represent and often appropriates them for their own ends, they still often serve the minority group as well. This chapter will focus on Gonzalo and Domingo's roles as intellectual collaborators and then progress to the possibilities and limits of this subject position in lending voice to weaker subjects depicted in narratives throughout the writings about Domingo de Silos.

### **Gonzalo de Berceo and Domingo de Silos as Intellectuals**

Santo Domingo de Silos was born in Cañas around 1000-1010 AD and was ordained by the age of thirty.<sup>36</sup> After serving as a prebend and then living as a hermit for a year and a half, he became a monk at the San Millán monastery only to leave it several years later under pressure from King García de Nájera. Subsequently, under the patronage of Fernando I, García's brother and king at the time of Galicia and León, Domingo became abbot of the derelict monastery San Sebastián de Silos, which he rebuilt and reinvigorated, remaining there until the end of his life. Soon after his death, the new abbot Fortunio commissioned Grimaldus to write Domingo's *vita*. Gonzalo de Berceo took it upon himself (as far as we are aware) to translate about half of this Latin version for a contingent more comfortable with vernacular sometime around 1236 (Dutton, "Chronology" 76).

Gonzalo references Grimaldus throughout his composition, drawing attention to the collaborative nature of Domingo de Silos' cult. Hagiography, as Lappin has said, "evolved over a period of time through a process of addition, reorganization and recension" (*Medieval* 3). Gonzalo does not "fer una prosa" out of nothing, but gathers data from his monastery's archives from a contemporary witness that he complements using information gained by word of mouth as well as by personal knowledge of the region. Grimaldus' version collaborates as well: "Et omne quod referemus idonei testes, si necesse fuerit uel si tantum causa increuerit, ecclesiastico iure roborabunt, qui stantes et presentes et uidentes fideliter interfuerunt" (238). Martha Daas succinctly summarizes this process by describing hagiography "as a representation of the *vox populi* [that] emphasizes the wishes of a community that is devoted to a particular saint" (159).

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<sup>36</sup> See Lappin *Medieval*, 32.

None of these participants sees the poem as a finished project. Ancos explains, “Los poemas conservados del mester de clerecía fueron concebidos originalmente como textos cerrados, tras los que se intuyen, sin embargo, unas obras abiertas” (“Poemas” 155). This collaborative pattern surrounds Domingo and his tradition from the beginning until its demise in the face of Marian devotion of the late thirteenth century. Unlike modern intellectuals, Gonzalo considers God a collaborator as well, making the impetus of his text more visible than it sometimes does in modern *testimonios*. Gonzalo’s collaboration places him as a mediator between all those that contribute to the enterprise and those to whom he delivers it.

As is his custom, Gonzalo de Berceo begins *VSDS* with a prologue that positions himself as an agent that acts “en el nomne del Padre que fiço toda cosa, / e de don Jhesu Christo, fijo de la Gloriosa, / e del Spíritu Sancto que equal d’ellos posa” (1abc). He acts under the auspices of a higher power that he considers a universal truth. According to Michel Foucault, “each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (131). Gonzalo invokes what Stoll considers an act of “moral authority,” which “must be axiomatic, so self-evident that it does not require rational proof” (“Moral” 351). It then becomes the intellectual’s prerogative, based on truth as he understands it and the sicknesses and pains it produces in society, to ascertain “the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth” (Foucault 133). Meanwhile, Mary Jane Kelley observes: “By modeling exemplary conduct while condemning sin in their works, these writers affirmed the privileged imperative of the clerical cast [*sic*] to define what constituted order and disorder and to prescribe remedies” (131). The modern intellectual does so as well, compelled by the burden of education to rescue those considered, in Stoll’s estimation of moral authority, “victims.”



Gonzalo displays the central role of mediation in intellectual activity as he continues into the second *copla* and conjoins the unconverted groups that his burden of truth requires him to enact:

Quiero fer una prosa en romanz paladino  
 en qual suele el pueblo hablar con so vezino  
 ca non só tan letrado por fer otro latino  
 bien valdrá, como creo, un vaso de bon vino. (2)

Beyond the godly and the worldly, this *copla* combines divergent elite and vulgar categories: the Latin from which he translates and the “romanz paladino” in which he wants to “fer una prosa”, the “letrado” culture of his poetic apparatus and the oral speech of one’s “vezino”, and finally, the multivalent symbol embodied in his “vaso de bon vino” that appeals to both groups but which assaults the senses rather than the intellect. Ancos has observed how Gonzalo’s genre, *mester de clerecía*, means to operate within these multiple registers: “proporcionar entretenimiento, función primordial del juglar; moralizar y amonestar desde una perspectiva cristiana, objetivo del clérigo profesional; y transmitir, explicar y comentar diferentes tipos de saber a los oyentes, tarea del docente” (“Narrador” 49). The poem even joins past and present elements as well as divergent geographical and competing clerical locations. Mishtooni Bose observes the resemblance of modern and medieval intellectualism in this mediation: “The objects of our study can seem rather gratifyingly like ourselves: *clerics*, mediators between different social worlds, leading lives fraught with paradox; at once closely bound up with, and distant from, the worlds of commerce and politics” (92). Weiss sees as central to their identity as medieval intellectuals how clerics “adopted the role of intermediaries between the lay world of

the unlettered and the secular wisdom and spiritual values which they had acquired through the privilege of their literacy” (1).

Robin Bower observes the traditional intellectual throughout Gonzalo’s prologues where his voice speaks loudest, “offering a salve for the wounded human condition” (“Prescriptions” 276). Likewise, a prologue often accompanies *testimonios* that addresses the audience and arouses it to a consciousness of the testifier’s plight, as in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la consciencia*. In this prologue, Burgos-Dubray characterizes her protagonist as “ejemplar, puesto que encarna la vida de todos los indios del continente americano” (9). She moralizes with her peer group that “también nosotros somos opresores” (10) for which she prescribes a remedy: “Escuchar la llamada de Rigoberta Menchú y dejarse guiar por esta voz tan singular” (10). She infuses her narrative with multiple quasi-mystical/spiritual moments such as “lleva a los indios guatemaltecos en el corazón” (11) and “desde la primera vez en que nos vimos supe que íbamos a entendernos” (12). She suppresses her questions to Menchú, fomenting the illusion that she writes Menchú’s book rather than her own, but also suppressing the curious expedient that should Menchú win her war in Guatemala, Burgos-Dubray wins her own on an intellectual level. While Moema Viezzer tones down her introduction to Domitila Chúngara de Barrios’ *Si me permiten hablar*, it nevertheless establishes the intellectual’s role for her equally elite audience. Thus we see that “medieval notions of the therapeutic uses of literature” have far from receded in the modern consciousness (Bower, “Prescriptions” 277).

Gonzalo’s translation into vernacular of his source text additionally typifies his intellectual interposition. *VSDS* had a “transmisión primaria a través de la voz, una recepción acústica y un receptor colectivo y masculino” that commanded Latin poorly if at all, necessitating the use of vernacular to train them and placing Gonzalo in an erudite position

(Ancos, *Transmisión* 247).<sup>37</sup> Even though any cleric encountering Gonzalo's poem probably already knew something of Domingo's life by word of mouth, Gonzalo uses his bilingualism to deliver his audience less amorphous data, providing a sort of "official story." Thus, although "muchos son los miraglos que d'est padre sabemos, / los unos que oímos, los otros que leemos" (*VSDS* 351ab), Gonzalo's written poem regulates Domingo's oral tradition and reins it in, allowing the oral and the written worlds to establish the saint's importance together. Therefore, his special liminal position as literate in both Latin and vernacular sets him apart from his caste and enables him to help other clerics better negotiate the realms of orthodoxy and oral permutations of religion that encompassed them both inside and outside the monastery. It does not surprise that both traditional and organic intellectuals undergo the same process whereby bilingual indigenous communities communicate with hegemonic governments that only command Spanish.

After the narrator delineates his position as a border agent between two cultures, he introduces his protagonist Domingo with an appellation that designates a similar role: "sancto Domingo toda bien verdadera / el que dicen de Silos que salve la frontera" (3cd). As the narrator withdraws into the margins of the poem, he links himself to his hero: the two of them seeking to make life safe for those living between worlds. Robin Bower observes this when she says, "The necessary cure of Christian souls [lies] not in the mediation of saints or relics, but in the ministry of a priesthood capable of comparable mediations" ("Prescriptions" 276). To clarify, this refers to Gonzalo's agenda, even though a medieval aristocrat or peasant might disagree, identifying

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<sup>37</sup> See Linehan pp 29-31 for a depiction of the Iberian clergy's decadence during the first half of the thirteenth century, least of all its poor command of Latin.

more with Domingo even as Gonzalo strives to appropriate some of the saint's power. Elisabeth Burgos-Dubray makes a similar move in her introduction to *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* by concluding that “La admiración que su valor y su dignidad han suscitado en mí facilitó nuestras relaciones” (12). Domingo goes on to ease life for Christians of every class despite political, spiritual, and even existential adversity by mediating between them and heaven while the narrator seeks to do the same by mediating cultural registers and with God, from whom he hopes “da galardón larguero” (4d).

While the majority of this chapter will analyze Domingo's activities along borders, it does so while analyzing Gonzalo's similar role. At one point, Gonzalo even describes how Domingo “catavan todos como a un espejo” upon whom others could look to become like Christ (92a), thus inspiring them to put Domingo into a position of authority. “Espejo” has many meanings during the Middle Ages, but one signifies the familiar meaning of mirror, one in which Gonzalo saw himself. As Bower says, “Poet and poem mirror the function of the saint who serves as a conduit of the holy in the realm of the profane” (“Prescriptions” 286). Comparatively, the modern intellectual strives to appropriate the life of the testifier in order to heal not only the subaltern, but perhaps more importantly those intellectually diseased and morally atrophied immediately within the writer's sphere of influence. Gonzalo in *VSDS* identifies himself “with the saint whose suffering is rendered as a service to God” (Bower, “Prescriptions” 284), but in order to improve the conditions of his immediate peers, giving only secondary consideration to other groups. The intellectuals of *testimonio* also view their collaborations as a sacrifice with risks, drawing a connection between the writer and the testifier who then labor for a remedy. However, this can supplant the testifier and the group he/she represents in favor of motivating

the immediate audience of the writer. The testifier is not only a saint to his or her own milieu, but for the writer's as well, each of whom sees and uses that saint's image for different ends.

To dignify him for Christian affection, Gonzalo characterizes Domingo as “fecho a toda derecha” (5c). Having linked himself to Domingo, this also suggests that Gonzalo's intellectual activity has a righteous demeanor. This comes across in modern collaborations as well based on Stoll's aforementioned moral authority to which many such intellectuals appeal in contemporary writing. However, an additional consideration here includes how Domingo's righteousness echoes how Gonzalo's writing fixes the unruly oral word and the Latinate tedium, each intellectual posing as the best of his kind.

One may also suppose that members of his listening audience, probably not all of whom were clerical, would have found the virtues appealing, shedding some light on the culture of the peasantry. *VSDS* and similar works were not solely, in the words of García Otero, “herramientas discursivas intencionalmente elaboradas para la transmisión de propagandas geográficas e ideologías políticas” (15) that could manipulate such an unlettered class. They could only do so if they engaged sensibilities that the people already possessed, or else evidence of resistance to such hagiographies would arise from somewhere within the Christian communities they sought to interpolate. Weiss likewise avoids reputing *mester de clerecías* as political engines: “These works do not simply advance one set of ideas which are shaped, as if in a vacuum, by the dominant social group; the particular conformation of the ideas they espouse is determined dialectally” (11). Through the depiction of Christian virtue, the negotiation between nascent political powers and local village customs comes into relief.

Both Grimaldus and Gonzalo try to link Domingo to noble lineage, but each does so in a way that arouses suspicion. According to Valcárcel Grimaldus signals “el nombre de su padre sin

aludir a su patronímico. Este hecho nos induciría a pensar que la afirmación de su nobleza, por parte del autor, es un mero topos,” whereas Berceo’s manuscripts “no son ni claros ni unánimes en la lectura de este supuesto patronímico” (163).<sup>38</sup> Domingo’s desire to live “onesto con más limpias compannas” (34d) compares his sheep to the peasant class of which he forms a part that, lacking an education of Christ and whose sins putrefy their souls, requires the shepherding of their own organic elite. Accordingly, Domingo, somewhat like Gonzalo himself, “tollióse el capiello; / en la mano derecha priso su estaquiello, / apriso fasta’l títol en poco de ratiello” (36bcd), separating himself from the caste into which he is born in order to make liberation possible for his peers. This has a similar feel to someone like Rigoberta Menchú who identifies with oppressed groups but that becomes educated in the culture of the powerful to make their plight visible.

Like many intellectuals across time such as the UNAM educated Subcomandante Marcos depriving himself as a guerrilla, Domingo receives the best possible education for his day but eschews comforts disposable to such an education,:

Poníe sobre su cuerpo unas graves sentencias,  
ieiunios e vigalias e otras abstinencias;  
guardávase de yerros e de todas fallencias,  
non falsarié por nada las puestas convenencias. (41)

Unsatisfied even with these basic forms of Christian self-denial, Domingo later becomes a hermit in a “lugar más apartado” to avoid temptation from the sins of his time (52c).

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<sup>38</sup> See also Dutton, *VSDS* 13-14.

Domingo recognizes that “qui por salvar las almas dexaron los poblados” (60b). Domingo’s time as a hermit gives him power over “el mortal enemigo [que] sedió’l en su assecho” (68c). Organic intellectuals stay close to and minister to the weak and the poor of their communities. In Domingo’s case, this especially applies with those associated with Iberia’s threatening borders with Al-Andalus—among whom he is “querido e amado” (49c), again comparable to the ministrations of Marcos in Chiapas in opposition to the Mexican government.

Domingo’s time in the wilderness, moreover, gives him knowledge greater than that which his colleagues attain in church education:

Todos los sus lacerios, todas las tentaciones,  
no lo sabrién decir los que leen sermones;  
si non los que sufrieron tales tribulaciones,  
e passaron por ellas con firmes coraçones. (47)

An intellectual that lives directly with the oppressed people has greater knowledge than those that study the issues from afar. This may also constitute another locus of sympathy which Gonzalo held for his protagonist, for the narrator peppers his narrative with evidence of first hand experiences with the Iberian landscape and popular customs, not least of which includes his use of vernacular, very little to which Grimaldus’ version attests. Gonzalo has the right to tell this story not only because he has studied it well, but also because “Berceo conocía estas regiones” (Dutton, *VSDS* 207).

Also like proper intellectuals, the text describes Domingo, and by implication Gonzalo, as a teacher:

castigava los pueblos [. . .]  
acordava las yentes, partiélas de peccado;

en visitar enfermos non era embargado,  
 si podié fer almosna, faziéla de buen grado (46).

Who falls under the auspices of the intellectual's education, however, seems a crucial difference between hagiography and *testimonio*. Whereas in the above quote, we find Domingo teaching people of all kinds, in *testimonio*, both organic and traditional intellectuals educate only the dominant population, a position most hagiographical narrators also take. Ancos calls this aspect of *mester de clerecía* "la pose de docente escolástico" ("Narrador" 49) and indicates that what this position implies "no es un público de inferiores; tampoco, es cierto, de superiores. Lo que implican es un público de pares" (59). According to Ancos, Gonzalo mostly seeks to address those he considered his social equals even though lay Christians also had some exposure to his poetry. Similarly, intellectuals possess bicultural registers that allow them to speak both to and for both kinds of audiences, but primarily address powerful governments and populations even though they may offer other types of cultural production for their own populations (Henck 55). Even while the elite comprises the primary imagined audience for both kinds of intellectuals, they do so not to marginalize the already marginalized, but rather to bring such groups to the knowledge and succor of the elite. The organic intellectual in hagiography (Domingo), by contrast, comfortably converses and directly assists not only the powerful Church, but also marginalized groups. This probably stems from Domingo's lack of agency in the production of the narrative.

As Domingo emerges from his hermitage, Gonzalo notes the several objects for which the saint prays on behalf of his people. While this list may not reveal anything surprising about the conditions of many Christians of Iberia during the period, it nevertheless reveals the utility hagiography offers for research into medieval lifestyles due to its affinity to *testimonio*. The



intellectual collaborators allow familiarity with real life to inform the tale: the saint prays for “pan e paz” for the people (75c), “temporales temprados” (75d), “enfermos” (76a), “encaptivados” (76b), against “ereges falsos” (77b). This list appeals to the sensibilities of an audience for “which hunger and even starvation were not uncommon” (Bynum *Holy 2*), who faced uncertainty about the elements, sickness, political unrest, and struggled with educational danger that could lead to eternal damnation.

While on the one hand Gonzalo constructs an image of sanctity that will unite Christians together as a stronger political entity, he does so by offering the people a picture of the only known path during the thirteenth century for finding relief from such existential struggle. This interest in his audience’s welfare characterizes *VSDS*’s reading as a *testimonio* that both relays such a daily struggle to those with the sophistication to study them and to offer relief to those enduring it. The remedies the Church offered included both those undertaken by Domingo, “usado de lacerio / non dava a sus carnes de folgar nul remedio” (80ab) in order to bring the flesh into subjection to the spirit and thus avoid spiritual danger, along with remedies such as alms, sanctuary, and even doctrine that at least gave hope of a life better than their current one.

Accordingly, after his askesis, Domingo has gained sufficient strength to stand as a defender of the Church as an institution safe for the people and therefore “asmó de ferse monge e fer obediencia” (81c). This service places him in a position to assist the downtrodden but also to foment positive relationships with the structure that makes healing possible for the masses. The majority of the second half of book one of *VSDS* focuses on how much Domingo impresses his supervisors and fellow monks, such that he is given more responsibilities until eventually being appointed an abbot. This increase in responsibility also relates to Domingo’s righteous behavior, which grants him divine grace, which he will avail himself of once he starts performing miracles.

First his supervisors send him to repair the neglected church of Cannas to see “si fer no lo quisiere o demostrare sanna, / allí lo entendremos que trae mala manna” (96cd). Naturally, he accepts the challenge and revitalizes the tiny church: “Fue en pocos de annos la casa arreada” (110a). This so impresses his abbot that “dioli el priorado” (122b). This series of promotions within the church show his favor in the eyes of his elite contemporaries, important in his own work as an organic intellectual that seeks to mobilize the more educated social group in behalf of the suffering of the uneducated. As Domingo mediates these groups, Gonzalo collaborates with him to make gains with the clerics during his own time.

Domingo’s greatest test of intellectual integrity comes when King García of Nájera arrives to the monastery of San Millán to demand “los tesoros” from its foundation (133d), a scene deeply reminiscent of Decio’s demands of Lorenzo. As Domingo has spent time gaining favor in the eyes of those with more power than himself, this demand serves as a temptation for him to gain secular power along with the ecclesiastical gains he has made and maybe even serve an intermediary there as well, at the cost of the ideals he represents. However, Domingo’s burden requires him to defer to his moral authority, much as a modern intellectual might, which means that Domingo must defend the Church as emblematic of his mission. Therefore, to do anything other than defend the monastery’s funds as belonging to anyone but the God of Truth he espouses would serve to syphon away valuable resources for the institution of truth on the earth and weaken the poor and uneducated. Domingo advises the king and, implicitly, the abbot to let the king live from his own “tributos, de tus derechas riendas” (141b) and demonstrates his real allegiance to truth, not to power, at the risk of losing his own position within the Church, in order to also demonstrate his opposition to earthly, corrupt institutions. Domingo’s activities resemble those of the modern intellectual of *testimonio* standing at constant odds with political, corrupt

authority both on the right (Guatemala, Argentina), and on the left (Cuba, Venezuela), as an oppressive weight on the weak that perverts the truth in order to maintain their position of oppression.

García Otero has analyzed Gonzalo's contrasting portrayals of King García and King Fernando "relegando a Navarra y su rey a una definición indirecta, antagónica, de Castilla" by the way Domingo entreats Fernando after exiling himself in protest of García and the abbot of the San Millán monastery's collusion (124). While intellectuals defy corrupt political authority, they shy away from balking at all forms of power. Peter Osbourne says of the intellectual's association with politics: "The intellectual as moral hero [. . .] is deeply ambivalent towards politics. Exclusion from power is its life-blood. Yet how, then, is the intellectual to effect change with the public demonstration of his or her individual moral worth, once we discount appeals to enlightened political absolutisms?" (xiv). They recognize political institutions and their incumbent powers as most likely to effect change and enact intellectual prowess to persuade institutions to stand by truth. Domingo's political sacrifice and educational faithfulness ultimately rewards him after King Fernando receives him and makes him abbot of the monastery of San Sebastián. Fernando, unlike his wicked brother, rather than taking ecclesiastical resources, adds to them when he not only accompanies them, but "embió con élli [Domingo] mucho omne onrrado" to help rebuild the monastery (213d). Thus the intellectuals, whatever truth they espouse, become a hub between educated elitism or what Bower calls "pastoral activism" (287 "Prescriptions"), political activism, and the underrepresented other.

Domingo's fellow monks contrast with the appropriate role that a medieval intellectual ought to have. His abbot "non fue firme" before King García's behest (167a), while the other members of the monastery eased their consciences of Domingo's exile by saying "que lo facién

sin grado, / porque vedién que era el rey su despagado” (169ab). The ideal intellectual never yields to the demands of political authority, only the other way around. Domingo “guardava so officio que avié comendado, / si lo ficiessen mártir serié él muy pagado” (157cd). A willingness to sacrifice everything for a cause has been a hallmark of intellectual activity that contrasts to politicians’ and their servants’ constant wavering on the tide of public opinion and personal expediency. While Gonzalo does not evidence sacrifice to this degree, Lappin does say that his works “are better understood as being motivated by a desire to diffuse the ideas and ideals of the thirteenth-century reform movement and to discourage heterodoxy” (*Gonzalo* 97). This tendency suggests his admiration for Domingo’s willingness to stand up for a cause. Gonzalo de Berceo cannot be considered a mere propagandist for the monastery of San Millán, but rather an intellectual crusader by his own estimation.

Toward the end of the first book, Gonzalo describes a dream of Domingo that typifies his intellectual position. In it he beholds a narrow, glass bridge that spans “dos ríos, dos aguas bien cabdales, / ríos eran muy fondos, non pocos regajales” (230ab). On the other side of the bridge, Domingo beholds “dos barones” (232b) with “preciosas coronas, / de oro bien obradas” (233b, c) and “mucho piedra preciosa” (234b). Upon asking the men if he may cross the bridge and come to them, they invite him, and he describes the journey toward them:

Metíme por la puente maguer estrecha era,  
 passé tan sin embargo como por grand rarera;  
 recibieronme ellos de ferosa manera,  
 viniendo contra mí por media la carrera. (236)

Once he arrives to the two men and asks them the meaning of the crowns, they promise that if he remains faithful to the end, they are his. This dream has many possible interpretations, but at

least one points toward Domingo's character as someone that can cross bridges as well as someone allegorized in the act of bridging. While Domingo mediates, this dream goes a little bit farther in characterizing him as someone capable of effecting transference and change. He can traverse boundaries and barriers and through him—and, incidentally through this text about him—others can do the same. Significantly, Domingo does not arrive to the other side of the bridge on this occasion, but rather meets the men halfway, as intellectuals ought as they negotiate with groups with less powerful constituencies, rather than entering and ontologically colonizing their world. The dream also underlines the important role of the legal witness as Domingo's fellow monks must believe him based on their colleague's testimony with no other collateral than his Christian life, much as those that encounter Gonzalo's text must believe that it witnesses faithfully or else the peasant's plight remains invisible and unalterable.

After relating his dream, Domingo uses it not to draw attention to himself, but to rally the members of the monastic community together:

Pensemos de las almas, frayres e companneros,  
 a Dios e a los omnes seamos verdaderos;  
 si fuéremos leales a Dios e derecheros,  
 ganariemos corona que val más que dineros. (245)

As an intellectual intermediary, Domingo challenges the traditional intellectuals of the Church to work together for God and man, including the laity whom he represents to them, not for political favors as the corruptible abbot of the San Millán monastery. Organic intellectuals form and mobilize communities in a race to ratify what they accept as the highest ideals.

Following this rallying cry, book one culminates in the translation of the remains of Saint Vincent with his two martyr sisters Sabina and Cristeta, during which episode Gonzalo not only gathers together religious elite, but creates “una unidad política organizada” (García Otero 111):

Combidó los obispos e los provinciales,  
 abades e priores, otros monges claustrales,  
 diáconos e prestes, otras personas tales,  
 de los del sennorío todos los mayores.  
 Foron y cavalleros e grandes infançones,  
 de los pueblos menudos mugieres e varones;  
 de diversas maneras eran las processiones,  
 unos cantavan laudes, otros dicién canciones. (269-270)

During such impressive displays of leadership, Domingo always shifts focus from himself to his ideal: “Dixo él: ‘Benedícite’ en voz muy bien sabrido, / dixieron ellos ‘Dominus’ en son bono complido” (277cd). An intellectual does not seek to be savior himself, but to shift glory to the ideal for the sake of the group. For example, Desirée Martín explains that the EZLN also conceals the identity of its members to “symbolically [rearticulate] and [reject] the characterization of the indigenous people as forgotten, generic Others in order to produce the collective voice” that makes them audible (145). Even the way in which the community around the San Millán monastery projects its ideas and ideals into the figure of Santo Domingo figures into this process of disguise.

The remainder of *VSDS* dwells on Domingo’s ministrations among folk outside of religious orders and the efficacy of his beneficence among them. Domingo does not mean to build up the Church only even though Gonzalo might like to use him that way, but rather his

mission extends to every (Christian) soul. Not only do these episodes underscore Domingo's role as bridge and intermediary, it also highlights the text's ability to lend insight into all of these social groups, as the remainder of this chapter will analyze. In fact, during the translation of the remains, "fueron muchos enfermos de los dolores sanos, / unos de los pies, los otros de las manos" (275bc), serving as a prelude to the infirmities Domingo will manage during the rest of the poem, but also revealing such diseases as present on the peninsula during that time and the Church's role in relieving them through administration of alms, educating of the masses, and the promise of eternal life through devotion. The manifestation of the marginalized social groups of *VSDS* allows audiences of the poem today to continue conversing with them rather than just about them. They can continue to influence the world today through their experiences and ideas rather than stand passively on the pages of centuries past.

### **The Marginalized Subject in Domingo's Thaumaturgy**

The miracles given by Grimaldus and Gonzalo only begin to sketch the way that Domingo brings groups of Christians together in a way that records the lives of otherwise invisible, often uneducated people. Domingo's cult in Iberia continued beyond the lifetime of both these writers in testimonies compiled by Pero Marín in a documentary fashion in *Miraculos Romanzados* at the end of the thirteenth century as popularity for the saint waned. The hagiographical apparatus allows the lives of those otherwise incapable of recording their lives' often-adverse experiences for posterity. This section will examine a representative sampling of Domingo's miracles with an emphasis on *VSDS* to highlight the important insights gained about these individuals as well as demarcating locations of their secrets, information which the community withholds by its own agency, not just because the powerful traditional intellectual Gonzalo de Berceo disagrees with it or dislikes it. Gonzalo's version of Domingo's miracles

places greater emphasis on voice than Grimaldus' version, revealing his keen awareness of the word that marginalizes voices divergent from his intellectual ideal but which also dialogues with a world that speaks to him out of its desperate need for relief from the institution that he epitomizes.

Gonzalo's portrayal of his unlettered collaborators lends insight into their lives, struggles, and cultural paradigms that draw them to invest interest in Domingo's hegemonic iconicity, even though their reasons for doing so differ from those of the traditional intellectual's. Gonzalo fulfills the *testimonio* requirement of "tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, ethnographer, or literary author" (Beverley, "*Testimonio, Subalternity*" 571), preserving the ephemeral voices at the edges of Domingo's oral tradition that facilitate dialogue with them by writing them down on parchment. While hardly anyone would study Santo Domingo de Silos as a marginal figure, Domingo, in collaboration with Gonzalo, reveals local cultural knowledge(s) that allows oral, illiterate, underprivileged voices recognition from the elite Church. As Robin Bower observes:

Every saint's story includes, indeed requires, an assembly of broken folk that linger at the periphery [. . .], threatening the boundaries that the stainless body of the saint limns. Berceo's narratives are crowded with the ailing and unhallowed whose only recognized value has been, as in the Latin hagiographies, to provide a platform for the miraculous displays of the protagonist. ("Body" 175)

Gonzalo filters these marginalized voices with his own agendas, but one can still turn to such characters for, in Jara and Vidal's words, "una huella de lo real" (2), of others who can talk to us through the text besides Gonzalo, Grimaldus, or even Domingo. Similarly, in *testimonio*,



collaboration facilitates dialogue between two normally unacquainted groups, usually very unequal in power.

The rest of this chapter connects Foucault's concept "régime of truth" referred to earlier in the chapter and implemented by the traditional intellectual to Dori Laub's concept of "historical truth" which the traumatized can wield without respect to historical fact (60): "Knowledge in the testimony is, in other words, not simply a factual given that is reproduced and replicated by the testifier, but a genuine advent, an event in its own right [. . .] testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival" (62). This trauma without respect to historical fact relates to the cultural potent of suffering delineated in chapter 2. However, whereas in that chapter we saw how the powerful Christian church appropriated the signification of physical pain for the maintenance of its own subject position, this chapter and the next will explore how this implementation differs when undertaken by entities of little or no power. While in both cases pain and historical fact are culturally constructed, in this case, we will see that while powerful subjects use suffering to manage disagreement with political rivals, the impotent use it because it is their only option. Therefore, during the rest of this chapter historical facts about individuals depicted through the cult of Santo Domingo de Silos will not take precedent over the marginalized individual's adherence to their conceptualization of historical truth that has allowed them to survive. This secret they will disclose, but the rest of their régimes of truth, which writers like Gonzalo display so boldly, will remain buried below the surface for the sake of their protection.

The first of these secondary characters Gonzalo introduces are Domingo's peasant parents. The text's description of them reveals what an audience may have considered as acceptable if not realistic portrayals of those of their particular social groups. He provides very

little information about them except that they lived off the land, of such necessity that they asked their son to tend their flocks of sheep so that they could attend to their own tasks. Grimaldus says even less than Gonzalo about it, Gonzalo being the first to say that Domingo cared for his family's flocks. Later, when Domingo returns to Cannas to restore the church of Santa María there, he convinces his father to become a friar and then later buries him while his mother "non quiso la orden recibir / no la quiso el fijo a casa aducir; / ovo en su porfidia la vieja a morir" (112abc). Even though "non somos certeros del logar" where these two are buried (111d), Gonzalo eulogizes them with his narrative and allows two otherwise obscure individuals to live and have voice, one which speaks in favor of the church and another whose voice dissents at least to some degree.

Domingo's first beneficiary described in *VSDS* is María de Castro (289-314), who, according to Dutton, originates from Castro Ceniza even though Gonzalo identifies the location as Castro Cisneros (*VSDS* 166). This error reflects how all of Domingo's beneficiaries fade with each iteration of the hagiography. Despite the deterioration, those that desire to dig her out will find her buried beneath the rhetorical rubble. María apparently has some means, since she can wear "sus buenos pannos, aguisó sus dineros / ixió pora mercado con otros companneros" (290cd), allowing for a rare portrayal of female social life in thirteenth-century Iberia, albeit limited and potentially filtered by Gonzalo. The episode also reveals the stress such a society endured from the constant danger of sudden illness: "metióse en carrera / [. . .] enfermó adesoras de tan fiera manera / que se fizo tan dura como una madera" (291). This may seem a condemnation from Gonzalo about María's lavish lifestyle, but the narrative indicates no disapproval and exacts no repentance from her, and throughout the thaumaturgy, only a few suffer explicitly for having sinned, some of which will be mentioned later. Instead, the mention

of her wealth seems more in order to emphasize God's willingness and ability to bless those of every social position.

The illness paralyzes her, but Gonzalo emphasizes its effect on her articulation: “demudada la boca, / fablava de la lengua mucha palabra loca” (293ab), which to some extent corresponds to Grimaldus' description of her appearing dead: “Ut non iam pretenderet miseranda mulier formam egrotantis corporis, sed miserabile et horribile monstrum informis et fetentis cadaueris” (262). The affliction of muteness and deadness repeats throughout the miracles, indicating the collaborators' consciousness of voice and silence in the lives of those the work describes. Throughout the collection we encounter many that lose their voices, regain them, or whose voices no one understands. This underscores the voice-giving operation of hagiography, which strives if not to give voice to the subaltern, strives to understand it enough to speak *with* it.

Without hagiography, the devastation of this woman's illness remains untranslatable, perished in the ephemerality of spoken language. Thanks to Grimaldus and Gonzalo, this woman not only speaks her pain to a modern audience, she can also offer a solution that lies in the intellectual and historical truth of her time. Gonzalo's version has narrative flourishes to increase the drama of the episode—such as the description of parts of her body that suffered—that he derives from the sensibilities of his anticipated audience. At the same time that this elaboration partially conceals her with his own agenda, he reveals to us other unnamed members of his audience that would have related to this particular episode. The narrative also gives the effect of María's sickness on her comrades that, seeing her suffer, “querriénla veer muerta” (294d). The woman's party has the good fortune of knowing about Silos as a favorable destination and goes to strenuous lengths to arrive there, all of which constitute culturally disparate norms from other times and places. As soon as Domingo brings consecrated wine to her lips, she not only stands,

but also finds her speech restored and her ability to express herself revived, which ability she uses to bless Domingo. The holy abbot seizes the opportunity to heal both her body and the cultural spirit that darkens her ability to see God as her “true” benefactor: “non fablas como deviés fablar; / a Dios sennero debes bendezir e laudar / porque de tan grand cueta te dennó delibrar” (311bcd). He not only uses his sanctity and connection to truth to remedy her and her company’s situation, he educates them. He requires that they take action and align themselves with truth, which would in turn improve the lives of others with whom they will interact.

At the same time, however, this moment of holy education signifies a disjuncture in the narrative, a location where María’s and Gonzalo’s cultural paradigms depart. Gonzalo strives to resignify María’s behavior by having Domingo rebuke her, which does not happen in Grimaldus’ version. Nevertheless, through this moment we recognize that not all those on the peninsula temper their excitement about healers in the way Gonzalo would like. We wonder at the end whether or not or to what extent María internalizes Domingo’s rebuke. Indeed, we cannot be sure that Domingo ever issued such a rebuke or whether it arose to make the record of him conform to Gonzalo’s vision of the Church’s standards. The record of this episode does not reify María de Castro or her story, which may or may not have ever happened, but it does make her a social entity communicative in such a way that we may extrapolate expectations about Gonzalo’s audience and the tradition of Domingo’s cult. While Gonzalo clearly speaks here, he does so in negotiation with the voice of dissonance he finds in Domingo’s thaumaturgy. She speaks with the Church to find relief from the pain of her life while the Church speaks with her to administer to that pain while also exploring to what extent it can use her to instruct Gonzalo’s immediate audience. In doing so she leaves her mark on his writing and transcends the death and silence that plagued her, still retaining secret what she saw prudent to keep secret.

The most common type of miracle associated with Domingo is “que saca los cativos, / por ond de luengas tierras li embían bodivos” (352cd), a skillset that allows us to have a sense of the cultural imaginary of a Christian at the time living near the border of a powerful political and religious enemy. People even feared “andar por los caminos” because of this threat (353b). We learn from the episode of Domingo de Soto (351-375) that the Moors required ransom to return prisoners, a price that his relatives never could have hoped to pay off even if Gonzalo had not exaggerated its amount. When they hear about Domingo, they journey to the monastery where he gives them the church’s only horse to sell and receive payment for their prisoner relative, but the man escapes on his own in the midst of Domingo’s fervent prayers on his behalf. The beginning of the episode describes how the Moors “dieron por aventura salto una vegada, / allinnaron a Soto essa gent renegade” (354ab), depicting a cultural environment of constant fear and suspicion that any town could face attack from the Moors. This assault, however, is not how Grimaldus characterizes Domingo’s captivity, opting rather not to specify how he arrived there. This reconfiguration as with other episodes featuring captivity recalls the previous chapter’s analysis of how *testimonio* rhetoric tends to create new subalterns even as it attempts to hear others. While scholars might use this tale to better understand Domingo de Soto and his family, Gonzalo does not use it to collaborate and understand what motivates the Arabs, who of necessity act as the perpetrators of Domingo’s suffering.

However, the text does not depict the Moors as the only source for concern among Christians, for enemies also lie within, as already exemplified by King García. In the following miracle (376-383), sin incites thieves to invade and steal from Silos’ orchard, but miraculously fail to find a single fruit. While on the one hand this episode has clear theological ramifications, it also discloses the role the earth played in the lives of both the thieves and the monastery.

Dutton notes that while this miracle does not appear in Grimaldus' version, it does surface in Aemilianensis 10 123c-126a ("Incipit"), a collection of saints' tales in Latin kept in the San Millán monastery. The episode occupies only a few lines on column 125b among other more prominent miracles. Dutton points out that such a tale "faltaba en Grimaldo pero que se haría muy popular entre un público campesino" (VSDS 215). While Gonzalo may have invented it for such an audience, it seems as much if not more likely that Gonzalo heard of the miracle from such a group together with Aemilianensis 10. Finally, the thieves' behavior insinuates a cultural paradigm divergent from the Church's stance against robbery which Gonzalo has now unwittingly preserved to prove the heterogeneity of Burgos during the period.

The miracle of Garci Munoz (397-418)<sup>39</sup> has much in common with others except that its degree highlights some of Gonzalo's understanding of the truth he means to communicate through his intellectual activity and its synchrony with some aspects of the people's intellectual ideal. In this miracle, Garci Munoz, later referred to as "don" (407a) and referred to as noble by Grimaldus, suffers from "una gota mortal, / omne qui éssa vío non vío su equal" (398cd). This man, like the paralyzed woman of Castro, loses his expressivity and has it restored by the saintly apparatus: "tolliéli la memoria, fabla e visión; non avié nul acuerdo nin entendié raçón" (399bc). Again, in this episode we find the communal nature of the individual's suffering for "todos sus amigos vivién en grand ardura" (401d). However, the episode takes a new turn when he recurses to several other venues before receiving a letter of invitation from Domingo soliciting an attempt at the cure: "Oratió nin ieunio no li valieron nada, / nin escantos nin menges nin cirio nin oblada; / por ninguna manera no'l trobavan entrada" (403abc). Unsurprisingly, despite

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<sup>39</sup> Dutton observes that the surname would be Muñó, see page 168, note 398.

the failure of so many other approaches, Domingo finally manages to free the man from his terrible infirmity. The victory credits “al Criador, / fincó con su victoria el sancto confessor” (417ab). Despite this attribution, the episode reveals that the community had other competitors to relieve their maladies to whom Garci Munoz had first appealed.

While it is possible to read the miracle of Garci Munoz as giving credit to Domingo rather than God, this episode has greater complexity. The sick and his cohort turn to God on their own prior to Domingo, so it would seem that his beneficence accomplishes the miracle where others failed. While this conclusion would tend to support theories that Gonzalo wrote to build up fame for his own region, God still represents the “truth” here because while prayers and fasts and offerings are used on behalf of the afflicted, the collaborators make sure to accentuate the extraordinary nature of this particular disease. Both Gonzalo and Grimaldus describe Domingo going to much greater lengths than he has hitherto gone, performing psalteries together with the other monks, holding vigils, prayers, flagellation, and so forth:

Maguer era la gota contraria de sanar,  
 el confessor caboso óvola a sacar,  
 ca non quiso el campo élli desamparar  
 fasta q non ixió ella a todo su pesar. (416).

Grimaldus calls the affliction the Saint’s greatest challenge: “Sed nullum quemlibet alium infirmum quem sanare disposuit numquam tam difficulter uel laboriose sanitati restituit” (276).

Domingo does not get the credit for healing here. The other pious attempts to heal Garci fail

because they do not use the “truth” correctly.<sup>40</sup> Grimaldus goes into some detail about Domingo’s epiphany related to the gospel of Mark that this illness would require more of him than his others had: “Omnino denique in sue infirmitatis opprobio dedecore uel infortunio nil distabat ab illo demoniaco quem prodiit, scribente Euangelista Marco” (274). Moreover, nothing sounds as revolutionary as suffering to the bitter end for one’s cause, something that appeals to both the Church and the people. Through this miracle, both Gonzalo and the common people express the possibility that any Christian progress their agenda if they will take their faith to the same degree.

Before he dies, Domingo prophesies that the king, queen, and bishop will visit the monastery proximate to his death even though the king lives too far away for anybody to send him a message in time to arrive within the time stipulated by the holy abbot. This discrepancy causes some at the monastery to doubt Domingo. However, when he proves correct about their arrival by supernatural means, all unite together. The episode differs from Grimaldus in key particulars, such as Domingo revealing that he refers to Christ and Mary as king and queen rather than earthly rulers; nevertheless, the sense of unification that Domingo’s prophecy occasions occurs in both versions:

Monges e capellanos, quantos que lo udieron,  
 todos por una cosa estranna lo tovieron;  
 el dicho / del buen padre no lo contradixieron,

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<sup>40</sup> Garrosa Resina even references this episode as an example of perseverant medieval belief in magic so that the episode also showcases competing intellectual alternatives to Domingo and Christianity (102).



los que ante dudaron todos venia pidieron. (513)<sup>41</sup>

Like the earlier translation of the remains of St. Vincent and his sisters (269-270), this episode emphasizes how Domingo's adherence to truth unites all people together, including those of previously more skeptical disposition. For a people defined by political disunity on every side, this makes him a potent symbol for both the Church and the people, traditional and organic intellectuals. He has such success that when he dies, "pueblos e clerecías, vasallos e sennores" attend his funeral (532d). Nevertheless, each class of people appropriate his borderland figure for different ends: the Church to advance its political and religious reach, and the people that pine for relief from the aggravation of continual political upheaval.

As with *Vida de San Millán*, Domingo's miracles do not end with his death since miracles post mortem solidify the saint's cult. This tradition within hagiography contributes to the possibility of hearing otherwise invisible individuals of the Middle Ages that have their voice amplified through the cult of the saint. While these miracles include Domingo as their centerpiece, they transition from the truth in his hands to its engagement in the hands of the people who previously had failed to achieve the miracle without his extra help.

In the posthumous miracle of the woman of Palencia (557-570), the protagonist becomes dumb and deaf when, instead of attending Saturday vespers, she elects to stay home kneading dough. While muteness features to some degree in Grimaldus, Gonzalo gives it greater emphasis in his version, showing his heightened cognizance of the clergy's responsibility to give voice to the dead so that Christ and the saints would intervene on their passage to heaven. This woman benefits from the hagiographical apparatus because she loses her voice by forsaking the

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<sup>41</sup> In Grimaldus: "Congregata autem omni multitudine fratrum expletisque" (306).

expectations of the institution that can record her worldview. However, when she repents, and with the assistance of those that *can* speak and pray on her behalf who bring her to the monastery of Silos, she regains her voice after participating in matins. Paul Gehl would suggest that this episode alludes to the medieval practice of monastic *silentium*, “an approach to God through the moral and mystical dimensions of language [or] language beyond language” (126). Gonzalo adopts this medieval philosophy of silence to perpetuate the early Christian reconfiguration of suffering that allows him to influence his audience. However, the episode provides evidence of dissenting voices on the peninsula that could not have their opinions recorded and archived, who being deaf and dumb, never repented in order to have their voices restored by someone like Gonzalo. This woman’s indiscretion is witness of all the other women kneading dough during vespers, indirectly and ironically lending them speech at the same time that it strives to leave them out or otherwise interpolate them through its warning anecdote.

In a later tale of a paralytic healed by lying by the saint’s remains, Gonzalo omits the hometown of the episode’s protagonist Cid, one of the only times the poet does so, despite its appearance in Grimaldus (591-596). Of Arabic origin, the name indicates that the truth that Domingo represents transcends even political and religious boundaries. Even if it turns out that Cid has European background like his contemporary Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, his name indicates a society of mixed ethnic arrangement. Gonzalo transforms the Arabic signifier and makes it a Christian signified, rendering him subaltern in large measure, but leaving a trace of the Arab’s real voice, a very human one indicative of physical suffering and political, religious subjection.

In the miracle of the woman of Enebreda (606-8), Gonzalo emphasizes Domingo’s, God’s, and their intellectual ideal’s contingent to hear those oppressed by the figuration of silence, those whom the hegemony does not hear and does not want to hear. The woman cannot

speaking or using her hand, for which she is “lazrada” (606a), emphasizing an environment that demanded these capacities and in which few vocations existed that would have allowed her to make a living, unlike today. Even though the woman’s speech aligns her with the subaltern, truth in the form of God still hears and helps her:

Fo a sancto Domingo a merced li clamar,  
 cadió ant él a preces mas non podió fablar;  
 mas el Sennor que sabe la voluntad judgar,  
 entendió qué buscava e quísogelo dar. (607).

Subsequently, God not only hears her despite her inability to speak, but also “soltóseli la lengua” (608b). Her healing and rehabilitation thus revive her in the ears of those previously unable or unwilling to hear her, especially through intellectuals writing down and disseminating her story.

The next miracle of an unnamed blind man (609-611), though brief, has a curious feature distinct from the others. As one of the only miracles whose beneficiary goes unspecified, whose town of origin Grimaldus names as Castro Alcozar, Gonzalo excuses himself, “ca era mala letra, encerrado latino, / entender no lo pudi” (609cd). This deterioration of Gonzalo’s manuscript underscores the ephemerality of discourse, even of the written word, a process through which time itself causes all voices eventually to fade into subalternity. However, by Gonzalo’s writing down what he did have available, he rescues this particular miracle from oblivion, granting amnesty to the grateful blind man for another several hundred years so that intellectuals today hear his plight again and alleviate it again in the act of our reading it to see a man to whom we were blind before. Even though many other voices imprint themselves over his, including Domingo’s, the Catholic Church’s, Grimaldus’, Gonzalo’s, and now modern scholars’ and their editions, something of the original blind mind echoes through, still standing precariously in the

twilight between absolute subalternity and remembrance, allowing us to learn something from his plight. Each of the miracles in Domingo thaumaturgies carry this potential.

Gonzalo reconfigures the demoniac Diago de Celleruelo (626-635) from Grimaldus' (348) in a curious fashion to emphasize voice, causing it to relate more strongly to his testifying enterprise. While Grimaldus makes no mention of speech or muteness in his version, Gonzalo writes, "Oras lo facié sordo, oras lo facié mudo; / facié'l a las devezes dar un grito agudo, / el mal huésped faciélo seer loco sabudo" (627bcd). The "demon" possessing the man cuts off his communication to the larger Christian community. What he does say is distorted to those around him: "dicié dichos locos e palabras radías" (629d). While he may actually suffer from some real physical or spiritual ailment, it may be that he operates from within a disparate cultural paradigm as a subaltern upon whom others impose their own worldview in order to signify his otherness. God and Domingo can heal this alterity as well. The Christians prevail to translate him into their culture as "los perfectos christianos / [. . .] fazién por él vigiliás e clamores cutianos, / non serién más solícitos si fuessen sos ermanos" (633a, cd). Rather than casting him out or killing him for his difference, they destroy him figuratively by treating him as a brother, which in turn sends him back to Celleruelo with "grand goço" (635b). Scholars may decide the ethicality of changing one's culture as a solution for cultural alterity; however, at the time many Christians responded this way to the confusion of otherness.

Additionally, this miracle along with the following one in which Domingo combines three of Grimaldus' miracles of demoniac women into one (636-643) showcases the dead Domingo's continued operations. The intellectual himself does not bring about the changes in the oppressed community, but rather the idea of the intellectual in the minds of those that seek emancipation does so: "fueron al cuerpo sancto a merced li pedir" (641d). Thus, Domingo's

literally dead, subaltern body that cannot speak, takes on life through the idealization of the people, becoming an essential component for bringing about change. The idea of Domingo, as mediated by the monks at the monastery, frees the women that “laudavan al confessor” punctuating the cure with vociferous expression enabled by intellectual collaboration (643). However, Gonzalo and Grimaldus have ultimately translated all of these demoniacs, giving us their suffering as a nexus between their world and ours. He keeps their full world at a distance by ascribing a frightful malady to their difference, at the same time preventing us from fully understanding any “eresías” that may have comprised part of their larger, personal worldview (640b). Moreover, a full disclosure of the demoniacs’ culture would not serve their best interests and may have resulted in even more terrible consequences than mere treatment as demoniacs.

Gonzalo introduces the miracle of Serván of Cozcorrita (644-674) in a curious manner in that he enjoins the reader, “devedes a oírlos las orejas abrir, / de firme voluntad lo devedes oír, / veredes al buen padre” (644bcd). Here Gonzalo implies that in hearing him, we may not see or understand what he means, and so run the risk of making him a subaltern as well. In this act he therefore gives us direction about what to do to avoid such a mistake: listen with a will to hear. This has risky ontological and political implications; however, those outside of centers of power likewise have political and social goals and therefore want to be heard and understood differently from how those powers depict them. The miracle tells of Serván of Cozcorrita, who, after attacking some Moors, becomes captive to them. While he suffers much at the hands of his captors, “lo que más li pesava udiendo malos motes, / ca clamávanlos canes, ereges e arlotes” (648bc). Worse than suffering pain by whip and privation, he cannot stand the words his captors use against him. This describes the process by which one power transforms another power into a subaltern, a poetic process that makes another human’s desire and intents void, in such a way

that the hegemony does not actually hear the subaltern himself, but its own words about him in the third person. Desperate for someone to “hear” him (instead of themselves), he cries to God, whom Gonzalo has now clearly established will hear all people no matter their station. In this miracle, not only is Serván “de Dios oído,” but the subaltern, dead Domingo himself speaks for the first time since his own death in the second book when God himself sends him to deliver him from the Moorish dungeon. First, demoniacs ask his body for favors, and now it even speaks. The intellectual today can speak after his death too, not only through the books he leaves behind, but through the voices and minds of his disciples that conjure him across numerous challenges. While these essentially convert the saint (and the intellectual) into a subaltern as well by obscuring his or her original voice with living voices who now control the original words, his transformation has multivalent consequences that do not only serve the larger institutional power. Consequently, Serván takes up the role of Gonzalo himself in carrying his chains to Silos where the fame of Domingo’s miraculous intervention inflames Christians as far as the pope in Rome. The chains that Serván leaves at Domingo’s sepulcher allow the dead abbot to speak and for the people to hear him, much as Gonzalo’s own manuscript keeps the voice of the saint alive.<sup>42</sup>

While many miracles may be pure fiction, evidence suggests that at least some are true or have true elements, and all of them resonate in the sense that people of the time would have recognized their own daily lives in them. In the story of the demoniac of Penna Alba (679-699),

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<sup>42</sup> Throughout the thirteenth century, manacles adorned Domingo’s shrine as Christians liberated from Muslim captivity celebrated the saint for their escape. See Lappin for a full table based on the *Miráculos romanzados* of instances in which this occurred (*Medieval* 366-371).

Gonzalo affirms that the story comes from “la su misma boca” (681b), an orally transmitted story that would have been lost to history if not for Grimaldus’ recording it, as he affirms also, “ut nobis ipsa postea, sanitate recepta, cum terribili iuramento referebat” (366). Espí Forcén and Espí Forcén have used this miracle along with that of Dïago of Celleruelo (626-635) to gain insight into medieval psychological maladies, concluding that “some of the symptoms of demoniacs he reports coincide rather strongly with modern criteria and allow us to venture a diagnose [sic] in terms of mental illnesses as currently defined” (268). The woman of this miracle also has her language hampered by the devil and can speak again after her deliverance. While a friar tries to perform the exorcism, St. Martin and Domingo appear and overthrow the demon, who here could substitute for any oppression Iberians fear, based on the numerous other afflictions the text presents, whether death or fear or enslavement. Interestingly, the demon here also begins with a voice, but as the miracle progresses, he loses it and is banished, exemplifying the rhetorical power of the intellectual to transform an idea (or person) into silence.

The final miracle of *VSDS* concerns a group of rogue knights led by a man named Juhan that attack the Moorish city of Guadalajara (732-751), vassal to King Alfonso, despite his having warned retribution upon any that do so. This miracle features no sickness or deformation but differs from captive tales in that a Christian king replaces the ruthless Moor in persecuting the weaker though ideal religious soldier. Robin Bower depicts Alfonso as the antagonist here, linking “Alfonso and García Sanchez as two worldly kings who yield to rage, who punish Christian ‘soldiers,’ and whose irate decrees transgress the memorial function of reconquered landscapes” (“Ca” 205). Before the miracle concludes, Gonzalo cuts it short: “Ca falleció el libro en que lo aprendía; / perdióse un quaderno, mas non por culpa mía” (751bc). Traditionally, scholars have taken this admission literally that Gonzalo works off a defective copy of

Grimaldus. However, Bower has seen this as a more playful or pedagogic gesture from Gonzalo, whose audience by now should supply the end of the miracle based on its internalization of the previous episodes (“Ca” 187). This project must side with Bower’s reading, for it best conforms with the mold of an intellectual to take such a course. An intellectual does not want to bear the burden alone of the marginalized; he or she endeavors to empower that group through collaboration as well as to engender intellectual descendants to carry on the legacy. Here Gonzalo accomplishes the latter. Like Juhan, who took on Domingo’s mantle, Gonzalo wants the audience to transform into Christian soldiers and defy corrupt political authority that stands to thwart its cause.

The cult of Santo Domingo de Silos culminated during the end of the thirteenth century in Pero Marín’s *Miraculos Romanzados*, a collection of ninety miracles that deals almost exclusively with captives’ tales that the monk transcribed from first hand testimonies. Marín transcribes them in the third person as prose narratives, documenting the name of the beneficiary, their occupation, city of origin, and the year the miracle occurred or was reported. González Jiménez considers it unlikely that Marín interferes with the tales, as is evidenced in the “conciación de la escritura y hasta en un cierto descuido en la redacción” in contrast to Marín’s other more careful and precise writings (19). Even more than Grimaldus or Gonzalo, this collection approximates *testimonio*’s attempt to memorialize the subaltern’s experiences in order to make them known to the larger world elite. Especially due to the repetitive nature of the narrative, it appears as a compilation of proof after irrefutable proof: “Es como si se pudiera conferir al milagro un carácter real o verosímil, como si formara parte de la realidad” (Anton 284). Much of this collection’s verisimilitude and accuracy owes itself to Pope Innocent III’s reforms from the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council. As Lappin explains:



The form of the *Miráculos romançados*, its extent and its wealth of detail, is determined by the reforms of Innocent III as expressed in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which prescribed the keeping of a conscientious and well-researched record of miracles at shrines. The purpose was to provide the details that would allow papal investigators, at least in theory and often in practice, to interview witnesses and so gauge the veracity of both individual accounts and the collection as a whole. (*Medieval* 329)

The individuals in Marín's collection conform well to the concept of the subaltern especially because the captives and slaves that populate them signify the original meaning of subaltern though in a less than colonial context. González Jiménez, Molina Molina, and Rodríguez have already taken an impressive foray into the facts that can be gleaned from Marín's process that allows these individuals' voices to be heard after centuries despite their lack of access to literacy. Karl-Heinz Antón observes that the collection underlines Domingo's intellectual appeal, "más que local, nacional, y si se tiene también en cuenta el temor que le tienen los moros, universal se testimonia y se confirma así indirectamente" (283). He likewise observes the liminal nature of the protagonist when he says, "Santo Domingo de Silos es el que mejor conoce la zona meridional de la península, el que mejor y con más éxito corre en esta zona enemiga" (283).

The first miracle includes a conversation between the Christian slave that laments having to work on Sunday and his master's wife's sharp rejoinders. While remarkably the text preserves the man's "gran suspiro" as he recalls resting on the Sabbath (45), the record also documents the Moorish woman's attitudes as well as she belittles his memories and beliefs and threatens him if he fails to accomplish his tasks. Ironically, this miracle restores the voice of two marginalized

individuals without placing much moral value on either. We find the woman indifferent to the man's plight because she lives in a border culture that allows her to have a Christian bondsman. This resembles Amy Remensnyder's observation about captives' tales that feature the Virgin Mary: "The Virgin offered Christians a symbolic field on which to articulate the nature of their encounters with non-Christians" (645), except that this miracle reveals a specific historic instance that conditions the formation of the symbolic field that she describes. The cult of Domingo and the practice of recording his miracles not only elevates the saint, but also the common folk who identified with him in such a way that their beliefs come across as vividly as Pero Marín's.

Finally, Miracle 31 in Marín's collection offers a few final insights to the testimonial practice surrounding Domingo de Silos. It reveals native cultural practices of the Moors such as the master's wife throwing filthy water on her captive as a form of discipline, and then as the captives escape, they sneak through another Moor's home as he warms his bath. This miracle and others mentions how many of the captives pass through large groups of Moors unseen. This is an advantage only a subaltern can have, for they are invisible to the hegemony. In this way, the subaltern's secrets always pass through dominant powers unseen.

## **Conclusions**

The story of Domingo de Silos was a collaborative effort from its beginning, a hallmark characteristic of *testimonio*. In his prologue to the work, Grimaldus states by the commission of his superior Fortunio, "opus quod michi imponere dignati estis" (152). Domingo does not write of his activity among the people, but rather others fashion him as a symbol of the efficacy of their intellectual projects which happens to benefit both the elite and the common man, who circulate their own versions of his operations among them much as can happen with *testimonio*,

as evidenced by Subcomandante Marcos' self-dissemination. This activity attains a high level of historical accuracy due to the nature of its process, as described in Valcárcel: "Las fuentes históricas de V. Dci. [Vita Dominici] que, primero en la biografía y después en los milagros, el autor utiliza y declara son orales. La información le llega de testigos oculares y en algún caso del propio protagonista del suceso. [. . .] En general, de fuentes recientes, cercanas cronológicamente a los hechos" (124). This collaboration effort continues after the abbot's death, beginning with Grimaldus and Fortunio, but continues in large measure unseen, by the voice of the people.

Each of those featured within any iteration about Domingo have some hand in the formation of the text, without whom we would not have the same final product. This production was a way that people asserted their voices when they would otherwise remain silent to us. While the writer can intervene in any part of the narrative, the fact remains that *someone* on the other side of the story serves as a catalyst for his artifice, and the story has something to do with the preservation and promulgation of that individual's knowledge of coping with pain. During this time and in this culture, it did nothing for the marginalized or the rest of society to accept them as they were. Instead, the Church's primary solution for the challenges faced by Christians relied on God transforming others into something religiously and socially identifiable through participation in the Christian rite. Nevertheless, throughout the borders of all of these miracles, we can also sense the encroachment of heterodoxy and dissent, of those that used the Christian faith because of its incredible power, but whom also held other private conditions that the traditional intellectual writers may criticize or sanitize, but whose voices nevertheless remain etched on the pages by the quill. Modern intellectuals may never know the full breadth of these medieval individuals' conditions. Any efforts to do so will inevitably push those people farther

into the obscurity of subalternity. They did not speak so that we would understand them, but rather to converse with the Church and, to some degree, with us, negotiating the multivalent realms of power across time and space.

## Chapter 5

“A ella merçet pido: ella sea mi guía”:

Female Protagonists as Authors in *Vida de Santa Oria*

Gonzalo de Berceo’s final completed poem *Vida de Santa Oria* (henceforth *VSO*) grants life to its female protagonists in a tradition that otherwise disregards them. Despite Isabel Uría Maqua’s contention that “dejando a un lado las diecisiete estrofas de la introducción, en el resto del poema apenas se dice nada de las vidas de Oria y de Amuña” (*Mujeres* 10), these visions disclose abundant biographical information, as this chapter will establish. Along with discovering the reality of her life, we can use the figure of Oria as well as her dreams “to analyze what her representation tells us about the possibilities and limits for women’s behavior” during the thirteenth century in Iberia (Corteguera 9). This late work of Gonzalo de Berceo displays numerous testimonial qualities that bespeak verisimilitude, revealing not only Oria as a historic individual, but other nameless and silent women like her.

In her 1976 analysis of the poem, Uría Maqua contrasts Gonzalo de Berceo’s last completed work with his other two saints’ tales. Most conspicuously, *VSMC* and *VSDS* have a tripartite structure, whereas his story about Saint Oria, an eleventh-century anchoress of the San Millán monastery, remains seamless.<sup>43</sup> She also mentions the “vida muy activa” of the male saints versus Oria’s passivity (121) and, most prominently, the disproportionate percentage of Oria’s poem devoted to dreams rather than biography. After rechristening it *Poema de Santa*

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<sup>43</sup> See also Weber for a similar observation about structural differences between works by Gonzalo de Berceo (114), which in turn informs Uría Maqua’s conclusions.

*Oria*, she advocates that these differences invalidate the poem as a thirteenth-century Hispanic *vita* due to its affinity to “literatura mística-visionaria” of the ilk of Teresa de Ávila (122), as Menéndez y Pelayo broached (177) and Frida Weber developed later (130). Uría Maqua renews this position nearly thirty years later in her monograph *Mujeres visionarias de la edad media: Oria y Amuña en Berceo* wherein she asserts, “algunos estudiosos siguen utilizando el nombre tradicional, *Vida de Santa Oria*” despite the aforementioned evidence against doing so (10). Including the latest scholarly edition by Lappin in 2000, “algunos estudiosos” apparently refers to more than double the number of scholars who prefer the perennial title to her alternative, a penchant that persists even after reissuing the argument in 2004, suggesting that many remain unconvinced by her proposition.

Some scholars such as Joseph Chorpenning, Kate Greenspan, and Kristine Ibsen have even taken the reversal that mystical-visionary writing such as that by Margery Kempe or Teresa de Ávila are (auto)hagiographical such that *VSO* makes as much sense as a witness of a medieval Christian woman’s suffering as it does for research into eleventh or thirteenth-century Iberian mysticism. Greenspan argues that “we must look to hagiography rather than autobiography as the genre to which medieval women’s spiritual autobiography is most closely related” (157). According to Greenspan, medieval women autobiographers seldom “write about themselves in the first person” anyway (159). In Gonzalo’s case, this meant removing *Oria* as a central agent of the narrative in order to privilege a male narratological prerogative, which in her case may have been a choice that allowed the tale to withstand the scrutiny of *VSO*’s male stewards, preserving it for research today. This chapter by no means strives to understate the fictionalization that takes place in *VSO* and related works, but recovering the factual components of the work rescues *Oria*’s voice so that, as Greenspan admits, “some historical fact emerges” (159).

Along with supporting the story's female protagonists' historicity, viewing *VSO* as an "autohagiography" in Greenspan's sense, recognizing both the poem's confessional and hagiographical elements, makes it possible to consider the women as collaborators in men's tales about them. In *testimonio*, both erudite writer who makes a testifier's experience known to the rest of the world elite as well as the testifier who collaborates with him or her often take credit for the work, as in the case of Elizabeth Burgos Dubray and Rigoberta Menchú.<sup>44</sup> In her preface to the work, Burgos Debray even calls Rigoberta's story "ejemplar" (9), conjuring the exemplarity of saints' lives in the Middle Ages. When Stoll examined *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, he debunked Menchú as an author much more than Burgos Dubray, not as a protagonist in Burgos Dubray's story, whom he hardly even mentions, oftentimes relegating her identity to nothing more than the "French anthropologist who edited her testimony" (*Rigoberta* ix). In addition, Beverley characterizes authorship in *testimonio* as "a point of conflict between the parties involved in its production" (*Testimonio: On* 106); ultimately, collaborators must compromise and share the speakers' story to avoid legal issues. These details illustrate the weakness of crediting Gonzalo de Berceo, or the women's confessor Munno, for *VSO*. Doing so marginalizes the women in the poem, giving power back to the male thirteenth-century erudite because the women spoke their stories instead of writing them down.

Since *VSO* fits Greenspan's concept of autohagiography even though Gonzalo tells it in the third person, this chapter will consider what Beverley characterizes as "affinity between testimony and autobiography," but which "involves an erasure of the function and thus also of

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<sup>44</sup> Other prominent examples include *Biografía de un cimarrón* and *Si me permiten hablar*.

the textual presence of the ‘author’ that is so powerfully present in all major forms of Western literary and academic writing” (“*Testimonio*, Subalternity” 573). In this portrayal, Beverley does not so much deny authority to the subaltern testifier as he defines “author” as weightier than that actually invoked by the testifier due to his or her metonymy with the group represented.

However, there is merit to calling testifiers authors, even if it applies to a collective, because doing so allows them to appropriate the power Beverley describes, making them audible in a way that diverting their authority does not. Beverley’s definition of author appears to fix testifiers into the margin as if they cannot transcend their silence, remaining unredeemable objects of someone else’s story. This chapter imbues Oria with a similar sort of authority as that which Stoll grants Menchú when scrutinizing her *testimonio* as *her* work but in order to ratify Oria rather than debunk her.

Recognizing Oria and Amunna’s roles in the poem may make them some of the first female Iberian authors of which we have record and open the door to recognizing others. Corteguera and Vicente use a similar philosophy for understanding women in Early Modern Spain:

Rather than presuppose that the intervention of men in the process of creating those texts inevitably reduced women’s authority, [it is] possible to consider texts that women dictated to men, those where men interpreted women’s words and deeds, or even anonymous texts in which women appear as secondary characters.

(2-3)

While men’s agendas loom over any work by or about women in the Middle Ages, such work nevertheless constitutes the best evidence at hand to recover them. As Corteguera and Vicente continue, “Women depended on male authorities to achieve their desired ends. Such



compromising generally did little to change men's attitudes about women in general; yet to individual women it might have meant the difference between recognition or oblivion" (11). Hearing marginalized groups from the Middle Ages requires a more inclusive tolerance for data at hand. Corteguera and Vicente use Teresa de Ávila as an example of collaboration between women and men, but Teresa has as many male collaborators as Oria if not more in the final publication of her "autobiography." According to Antonio Carreño, the following interlocutors contribute to the production of Teresa de Ávila's story, many of whom are men: "la presencia de un confesor o de varios que aconsejan; de numerosas monjas que leerán el texto (valor didáctico), y de un censor, el Maestro Juan de Ávila, que finalmente juzgará lo escrito. Detrás también está el posible y tan temido dictamen de la Inquisición" (31). The purview of Carreño's essay does not include the men and women who posthumously brought the story to the publishers nor editors and printers who were free to make additional emendations before disseminating the final product.

If scholars consider Teresa de Ávila or Rigoberta Menchú authors, their many similarities with Oria and Amunna raise the latter to a comparable level of authority. Alexander Nehamas clarifies this further by dichotomizing the figures of writer and author: the "writer is a historical person, firmly situated within a specific context, the efficient cause of a text's production" (272) while the author is "manifested or exemplified in a text and not depicted or described in it" (273). He continues, "Texts can be taken away from writers and still leave them who they are. Authors, by contrast, own their texts as one owns one's own actions" (288). An examination of the narrative discloses that *VSO* helps to "exemplify" the anchoretic women as much as if not more than Gonzalo, supporting the terms "life" or "*vita*" over terms like "hagiography" that subordinate saints to their writers.

Because Oria does not author poetry, researching her through that genre leads back to Gonzalo de Berceo. Raymond Williams recognized a similar issue with how nineteenth-century workers expressed their plights, explaining,

The most popular form was the novel, but though they had marvelous material that could go into the novel very few of them managed to write good or any novels. Instead they wrote marvelous autobiographies. Why? Because the form coming down through the religious tradition was of a witness confessing the story of his life. [. . .] Indeed the forms of working-class consciousness are bound to be different from the literary forms of another class, and it is a long struggle to find new and adequate forms. (25)

One of the reasons the subaltern does not appear to speak is because he or she does not speak like the hegemon, even in terms of which forms of expression he or she values. Oria does not express herself in Latin prose or *cuaderna vía*, but she does speak in a confessional language similar to the mode described by Williams, which in this chapter will be treated as a *testimonio*. Likewise, Beverley's approach to *testimonio* moves "us 'beyond the politics of representation' to a model of teaching and criticism that would see [countercultural] forms of solidarity practice" (*Against* 18). This allows for both literature and performance to cooperate, manifesting the oral, performing Oria together with the intellectual Gonzalo to such an extent that Oria and her mother join the men as co-authors in *VSO*. While Oria and the dominant culture of the time often converge, she nonetheless asserts her own agency, as in "popular culture represented by rock" in the United States (Beverley *Against* 8). The need for expression despite ineptitude with elite forms does not pertain uniquely to the modern era; Beverley himself admits that "there are experiences in the world today (there always have been) that cannot be expressed adequately in

the dominant forms of historical, ethnographic, or literary representation that would be betrayed or misrepresented by these forms” (*Testimonio, Subalternity* 573). This chapter will amplify the female voices in *VSO* by considering alternative forms of expression imbedded in the text Gonzalo has left as evidence of them.

Handing the narrative over to the male collaborators due to the extravagant nature of Oria’s tale risks what Laub calls the “annihilation of a narrative” of trauma (68), making us coconspirators with the male writers in “a flood of awe and fear; we endow the survivor with a kind of sanctity, both to pay our tribute to [her] and to keep [her] at a distance, to avoid the intimacy entailed in knowing” (72). This corroborates work by Dipesh Chakrabarty in the field of subaltern studies that invites the historian to ask is the subaltern’s “way of being a possibility for our own lives and for what we define in our present? Does the Santal [or subaltern] help us to understand a principle which we also live in certain instances?” instead of always approaching a subaltern past as an outsider (23). Accordingly, this chapter will often take what Gonzalo, Oria, and *VSO*’s other interlocutors say at face value, even when what they say does not support a “rational” historical framework in the hope that doing so will make their voices more audible. This responds to Felman and Laub’s prescription that listening functions as a panacea for the traumatized and their story, in many ways subverting Beverley’s characterization of the subaltern as unable to speak “in a way that would carry any sort of authority or meaning for us without altering the relations of power/knowledge that constitute it as subaltern in the first place” (*Subalternity* 29). This chapter strives to dislodge the tendency to impose either twenty-first-century or traditional male readings upon Oria’s subjectivity and allow her to speak for herself.

While some may not consider Oria subaltern, Weiss recognizes her as so by deploying Oria’s near-contemporary John of Salisbury to define writing in the Middle Ages: to “speak

voicelessly the utterances of the absent” (76). This highlights Oria’s layered subalternity because she is absent both to us and to Gonzalo when he writes about her,<sup>45</sup> plus the script itself silences her original utterances. More evidence of Oria’s subalternity lies in Gonzalo’s description of the girl: “Con ambos sus labriellos apretava sus dientes / que non salliessen dende biervos desconvenientes” (16cb). Weiss explains that her very office in life required that she discipline her speech and refrain from expressing herself, as “the figurative bars of her teeth are exchanged for the symbolic confines of her habit and the real confines of her cell”(75). Finally, on two occasions the poem refers to Oria’s promised throne in heaven as “vazía” (77d; 110c). Since we know that Oria is to inherit the chair and fill that void, the poem draws a connection between Oria and the emptiness of the chair. She herself equates to an empty space, something not quite yet existing. In many ways her anachoresis also reinforces this. As Bynum has posited: “Infirmity was the central factor in reputation for sanctity. [. . .] Many holy women desired to be ill” (*Holy* 123). Oria’s illness and wasting away points toward vanishing, toward Oria’s being or becoming nothing.

Like María’s parents or Domingo’s father, Gonzalo describes Oria’s very Christian family as insurgents fighting against oppressive forces of evil: “siempre en bien punaron, pariéronse de mal” (11c). Oria herself from the very beginning of her life “ovo con su carne baraia e contienda. / Por consentir al cuerpo nunca soltó la rienda” (15cd). Though her religious devotion offers her no immediate respite, its more rigorous requirements resist the cycle of manual labor forced upon her by birth. Moreover, in a more politically marginal sense, her

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<sup>45</sup> The Middle Ages stands as a marginalized field to begin with, as Catherine Brown and Lee Patterson affirm.

parents “davan a los sennores a cad’ uno su pecha” (12b), simultaneously coloring them as obedient Catholics who paid their lords as well as people with little political autonomy. They did not wield power or wealth whose fineries Oria must reject out of guilt. Instead the text calls Oria a “serraniella” (51d), likely with poor education, something Oria and Amunna would have gained by taking vows. Bynum notices that “the involuntary poor usually express their *imitatio Christi* not as wealth and exploitation but as struggle” (*Fragmentation* 34), the epitome of the subaltern condition. Bynum goes on to say that “holy women saw themselves as acting—not merely as suffering—in *imitatio Christi*; indeed in their own view, suffering *was* acting and vice versa” (54). Accordingly, this chapter will show how Oria appropriates her marginalization and pious pain as a way of speaking in a representation. This invites reevaluation of Uría Maqua’s contestation that she, unlike Gonzalo’s male saints, does not act as much. Despite her subaltern qualities, Oria’s characterization in the poem problematizes the degree to which she succeeded in both choice and expression, relativizing the concept of subalternity. Despite her silence and invisibility, by viewing *VSO* as a “life,” her voice rings loud and clear and her presence inflates. This chapter will review the evidence that *VSO* contains in order to at least partially reconstruct Oria, Amunna, and others of their social class and then go on to analyze what those voices say about the pain of her experience and her dissent with Roman authority in order to establish her authority and role in the production of her own testimony.

### Evidence of *VSO*'s Historicity

Gonzalo de Berceo wrote *VSO* in his “vegez” (2a), dating the original text toward the middle of the thirteenth century.<sup>46</sup> The poem relates the visions of an eleventh-century anchoress from the environs of Villavelayo, La Rioja at a time when Muslims still threaten the region, beginning with details about her pious parents and prayed-for birth. Sometime after her mother Amunna does so, and “desqué mudó los dientes” (20a)—likely by the age of nine—Oria retires into the monastery of San Millán de Suso.<sup>47</sup> After some years of devoted worship, the young woman receives three visions upon which the majority of the poem dwells.

Lappin observes a double entendre at the onset of the poem in which even Gonzalo calls his source text a “vida,” one that you “leyerdes” (6d), a hagiography, the type of biography recognized then as having a historical basis, not merely a treatise on mystic visions. His goal to transform that *vita* into romance—“de esta sancta virgin romançar su dictado” (2b)—mirrors his approach to *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* in which he states, “quiero fer una prosa en román paladino / en qual suele el pueblo fablar con so vecino / ca non so tan letrado por fer otro latino” (2abc). In both *VSDS* and *VSM*, Gonzalo refers his text to a Latin source to which modern scholars can still use to corroborate his translations, increasing the probability that he did the

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<sup>46</sup> Madrid, Real Academia de la Lengua, ms 4b (*F*) contains the oldest extant copy, which Lappin in *Gonzalo de Berceo* dates to “1400, and probably a good few years later” (24), more than a century after Gonzalo’s death. All citations come from Lappin’s edition of the text (2000).

<sup>47</sup> There are two structures that comprise the monastery of San Millán: the sixth-century de Suso has a history of hermitage and is where Oria would have enclosed herself. The eleventh-century de Yuso was a cenobium out of which Gonzalo would have worked.

same with *VSO*. Evidently, at least in Gonzalo's mind, this was a true story in the medieval epistemological sense; as he says about the manuscript from which he translates: "Él qui lo escrivió non diríe falsedat" (204a). While he poeticized the version and made logical adjustments for his audience as with the other two hagiographies, Gonzalo's habits tend to strive for "truth" to the source text with which he works rather than toward pure invention. This conforms to Jerome's definition of translation widespread during the Middle Ages of translating "not word for word, but sense for sense" ("Letter" 23).

John K. Walsh discounts the role of a source text for *VSO* and instead suggests that Gonzalo's "repetition of the connection between his word and Munno's text could belie an effort to dispel the invention, or to demean his tasks of *poesis* and fabrication" (293) in order to create an aura of sanctity that would draw visitors to the monastery. Lappin counters Walsh by calling Gonzalo's frequent references to Munno "a means of reassuring his audience of the truth of his account, since the medieval public, far from being a credulous rabble, were themselves profoundly suspicious of those who claimed divine revelation" (*VSO* 28). Lappin lists numerous medieval thinkers that do the same as Gonzalo: Bede, Gregory of Tours, Peter of Cornwall, and the Monk of Eynsham all resort to this rhetoric to persuade their audience of "the reliability of the source, its being written by a contemporary witness who knew the matter well" (28). It stands to reason that Walsh allows the "*poesis*" of Gonzalo in *VSO* to lead him into the trap of which Laub warns, that because of Gonzalo's "flood of awe and fear" for Oria (72), Oria's testimony is not to be trusted. However, the incredible nature of Oria's account should not deter the possibility of its having important veridical aspects.

In addition to Munno, Gonzalo mentions God, Oria, and Amunna as contributing to the construction of the narrative. He certifies Amunna with much the same formula as he does

Munno: “Aviégelo la madre todo bien razonado / que non querrié mentir por un rico condado” (5cd). However, Gonzalo makes Oria his most important collaborator: “A ella merçet pido: ella sea mi guía / ruegue a la Gloriosa, madre Sancta María” (3bc). Consequently, as he does in *VSDS* (289d), he establishes a unique relationship dependent on the living performance of a deceased character to help him write the story. However, in this case, he subordinates himself to a woman normally unable to speak for herself in order to produce a story about her life of suffering. He does not use her death as a means to circumvent her voice—to write *about* her without consent—but rather he hopes that she will contribute actively to the project. By Beverley’s standards, this appears collaborative testimonial writing. The erudite, privileged Gonzalo reaches out to the voiceless, marginalized Oria in order to, with her help, write her story and transmit it to others and inspire change. Unlike *testimonio*, the purpose is not for others to intervene on behalf of Oria or other anchoresses: Christ has already intervened, making the purpose to invite listening Christians to change themselves so that Christ can do the same for them.

Since Gonzalo strove with fidelity to translate events which he considered true, it now stands to prove the trustworthiness of those he depended on. While continued existence of Oria’s cell serves as powerful evidence of her life, the best way to substantiate Munno’s text is by mining *VSO* for evidence that she was probably real rather than an invention of Munno or any other involved in the process of redaction. One of the strongest evidences of the poem’s historicity lies in its style, whose divergence and orality point toward the contribution of women or other illiterates in its production. Corteguera and Vicente recommend that to overcome the difficulty of using records to distinguish between male and female voice, one can pay “close attention to deviation in the style established for a document’s genre” (8). *VSO* differs stylistically from many hagiographies of its time, as Uría Maqua points out, so much so that



Frida Weber calls the poem “menos organizada intelectualmente” (Weber 114), discounting that such difference could derive from Gonzalo’s maturing skill or that Oria’s original oral expression to her confessors would differ stylistically from a traditional narrative.

Weiss has already gone into Oria’s performative voice in depth. At the end of the poem, he notices that Oria defies the written word, transforming even death itself into a performative expression that wrestles against other prevailing forms: “When Oria dies, and her voice recovers the prelapsarian unity of body and spirit, there is a moment of dramatic anxiety: the poem dwells on the desire of Oria’s mother and confessor to recollect the saint, and to preserve women’s oral experience in the physicality of the clerical written word” (71). Weiss reveals Oria’s desire to subdue the corrupting influence of language in order to obtain a heavenly voice, as “Oria’s body is an enclosed space whose boundaries are protected from the intrusive and corrupting influence of worldly language” (75). Oria and Gonzalo’s concerns about transcending the fallen nature of language mirrors Beverley’s concerns about postmodern literature: the question of “whether literature can or should continue to be the privileged signifier of the desire for a more egalitarian, democratic and ecologically sound social order” (*Against* xiv), or in this case, a holier life. Therefore, while Weiss says she struggles against worldly language, this must mean that she resists not only profane conversation but also textuality because the language of her expression confounds text and makes her inaudible unless we listen to the text as an echo that distorts her. Gonzalo’s tale acts as a *testimonio* which, in George Yúdice’s words, “[emphasizes] popular, oral discourse” rather than the writing that transmits it (17). During a period in which the tape recorder did not exist, Munno and then Gonzalo execute the act of interlocutors in Beverley’s sense of *testimonio* as on behalf of “someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer” (“*Testimonio, Subalternity*” 571), in this case a peasant turned

anchoress. The many performative qualities of Gonzalo's protagonist suggestive of illiteracy reticent toward textual expression constitute a significant deviation from standard hagiographic narrative patterns which often feature longstanding popular traditions or complex exegetical themes, as seen in earlier chapters of this dissertation.

While Gonzalo relates Oria's life as a narrative in typical fashion for an erudite of his time and place, we find that Oria does not attempt to express herself in the same linear discursive style. Desing illustrates this by noting that by focusing her story around her visions, rather than on the lineal narrative of her life, "Oria valorizes process over destination; she values the journey in and of itself" even though Gonzalo has striven to arrange it otherwise (118). This corroborates the work of Bynum in *Fragmentation and Redemption*: Oria, like other medieval women, speaks her story with "neither reversal nor elevation but continuity" (50). Even when the men emphasize elevation and reversal in their redactions, Oria bends the narrative, allowing for feminine voice. If we listen to her instead of the men, she does not tell us her life chronologically from birth until death: the first dream begins with what will happen after her life, the second with her death, and the final has no temporal referent, possibly even synthesizing past, present, and future elements. She speaks darkly to those who will hear her story, almost in defiance to the rules that govern storytelling. This seeming defiance toward convention may be one reason that Uría Maqua resists calling it "hagiography." However, if we consider the story a "life," then it is not necessary to call it a "poem" in order to move through its complex generic layers and arrive at the testifier underneath.

Uría Maqua's contestations that *VSO*'s dreams subvert the hagiographical apparatus contain some of the strongest evidence that the poem conceals a marginalized voice rather than fabricates. *VSO* describes five dreams in total, three by Oria and two by Amunna. The poem

dwells most on the first in which three holy women that Oria admires appear to her and guide her into heaven to view her reward if she continues faithful until the end. The second occurs a year later wherein, having redoubled her efforts of piety, the Virgin Mary comes to her and prophesies that she will soon become so sick that only a few days after, death will overtake her, and she will ascend to the throne promised to her in her first vision. Sure enough, in a veritable delirium caused by the prophesied sickness a month and a half later she sees a concourse of the righteous on the Mount of Olives in one final vision before succumbing to death. Amunna's first dream occurs in conjunction with this final dream of Oria's, in which her deceased husband arrives to warn her that Oria stands on death's threshold and to put all her affairs in order. Finally, as an epilogue to the poem, Amunna has one more vision in which Oria appears to her to confirm that the promises of her first dream were fulfilled. Uría Maqua notes that 94.2% of the poem relates to the exposition of a dream (*Poema* 122). However, below will be seen how recent scholars such as Aquilano, Bower, and Francomano have made enough use of these dreams to piece together Oria's life as to conclude that they are essential in her historical reconstruction, and thus the hypodiegetic dreams suggest the operation of a subaltern voice coming to the surface.

One of the central evidences of the dreams' verisimilitude is the power and voice they endow both women. Aquilano applies theological and psychological dream theory to *VSO*, concluding that "a scientifically informed exploration of the first vision as if it were a true, psycho-spiritual event taking place in a human body and brain suggests a surprising degree of verisimilitude in the poem's account of Oria's remarkable dream" (134). Gonzalo admits that his own male literary approach to Oria's visions does not capture their essence: "non las podríen contar palabras nin sermones" (24d). Due to being separated from her by time, gender, and social

position, Gonzalo does not really hear the meaning of Oria's dreams, but intuiting their importance, he writes them down, making it possible for scholars such as Aquilano to do so. It thus becomes necessary to distinguish between Gonzalo's agenda as a cleric and Oria's echo in them. Aquilano argues that "by both rooting her more fully within her earthly identity as part of a community that had partially constrained her and by granting her a taste of complete spiritual freedom, the dream offers a form of consolation for a life situation deeply bereft of external power and authority" (135). The dream demonstrates the trust that she had in the institution of the male-dominated church to create a space for this kind of agency.

Another component of the dreams that supports that Gonzalo did not fabricate it is that all the literary allusions attributable to Oria's side of the story stem from works redacted from or before her lifetime as opposed to works that only Gonzalo could have known. These works also appeal more to a female reader than to a male one, weakening the likelihood of Munno's authorship. The narrator reveals Oria's focalization:

vido tres sanctas virgins de grant auctoridat,  
todas tres fueron mártires en poquiella edat:  
Agatha en Catanna, essa rica civdat,  
Olalia en Melériða, ninna de grant beltat.  
Cecila fue tercera, una mártir preçiosa. (27a-28a)

When the virgins appear to her, they compliment the way that she delights "en las nuestras passiones" (34a). The text even says that that very night she went to sleep after having heard "las matinas" of Eugenia, another virgin martyr. Oria had access to works about all of these saints in one form or another by the end of the eleventh century in the monastery of San Millán as Lappin demonstrates: "The message contained in the visions can be related to a woman's own reading

and theological understanding, a message whose invention by a male cleric would have been unlikely, if not impossible” (*VSO* 31). Oria would have felt an affinity to the stories of each of these women as Bailey and Francomano (“Spiritual”) have also demonstrated.

Gonzalo’s description of Oria’s use of literature is also true to the practices of her time. Bailey explains, “Oria, a devoted reader of their passions, has followed their example on earth and will receive their reward in heaven. The readings have served as a model for Oria’s life of virgin sacrifice, and she seems to have turned their lives into hers” (28). She fashions herself after the image of the virgin martyrs that she studies, suggesting that marginalized groups like anchoresses either did or were expected to use such literature to find solace—or grief as the case may be. Bailey also observes how Oria’s dictating her story to Amunna and then to Munno approximated eleventh-century writing practices (26). Additionally, Bower demonstrates how Oria’s meticulous study of virgin martyrs results in “a miraculous narrative opening that [. . . becomes] transcendent *vitae*, otherworldly biographies that unfold for the further delectation of the reader Oria” (“Ca” 185). Bower explains how individuals throughout the Middle Ages participated in the absorption of the stories of saints in order to inscribe them into their own bodies, as does Oria. Gonzalo himself strives to emulate this possibility for us by reviving Oria through his “*prosa*.” Thus, *VSO* is not just a nexus of intertextual allusions that Gonzalo uses to showcase his literary prowess as Walsh and Poole would have it but rather demonstrate the likelihood of Oria’s real life.

Amunna’s dreams corroborate the aforementioned verisimilitude of Oria’s dreams. During the final scene of the poem in which the deceased Oria appears to her mother, when Amunna inquires after her daughter’s ultimate fate, Oria requests communion rather than answers the question. Lappin offers that “the rather shaky hold a peasant woman, in all

probability illiterate, might have had over Christian doctrine” (VSO 213) led Amunna to have the disjuncture of a deceased person making such an unnecessary request. However, upon suspending disbelief in the dream’s veracity and considering Aquilano’s approaches, Oria behaves as Amunna observed her daughter behave in life, with tireless devotion and reverence for the body of Christ. This lends force to Lappin’s further insistence that “devotion to the Eucharist was very much a feature of the Mozarabic church” (214). Therefore, the dream serves both as a psychological projection of Amunna’s perceptions of Oria as well as eases her grief for her death. It also grounds the dream in devotional practices that shaped Oria’s life.

Ultimately, despite Gonzalo and Munno’s ventriloquism in the poem, both Oria and Amunna still lurk beneath the poem’s masculinities. Upon careful examination, it turns out that Oria does not reveal her dreams except the third to anyone. In a paradoxical juxtaposition of *coplas*, Gonzalo betrays the genealogy of the dreams:

[Amunna] recontógelo todo a Munno su querido:  
 él decorólo todo como bien entendido.  
 Bien decorólo esso como todo lo ál.  
 Bien gelo contó ella no-l aprendió él mal;  
 por end’ de la su vida fizo libro cavdal:  
 yo end’ lo saqué esto de essi su missal.  
 Coniuróla Amunna a su fijuela Oria,  
 ‘Fija,’ sí dios vos lieve a la su sancta Gloria,  
 si visión vidiestes o alguna historia,  
 dezítmelo de mientre avedes la memoria.’ (170c-172d)

Rather than acquiescing to Amunna with a description of her visions, Oria responds with irritation, insisting that she cannot speak. After explaining that Munno learned everything about Oria's life from Amunna, we see Oria deny her any information. Since Oria refuses her mother's solicitation at this time, it seems that Oria reveals them on some other occasion, or that the male writers fabricate them. The males appear to throw their voices into Oria's mouth, which may be due to what Gérard Genette calls "intermediary narrative" in which an extradiegetic narrator makes someone else's story his own in order to protect "narrative privilege" (241), but it could also constitute some other kind of lapse by the masculine writers, which to one degree or another diminishes the women and makes them harder to hear.

However, during the last few lines of the poem, the narrator lets the genealogy of Oria's dreams slip as Amunna asks who accompanied her daughter as she waited outside the gates of heaven:

‘Madre, las sanctas vírgines, que de suso oyestes,  
 ‘stovi en tal deliçio en qual nunca oyestes.  
 ‘La Virgo Gloriosa lo que me pormetió  
 ¡ella sea laudada!, muy bien me lo guardó. (197c-198b)

Oria must have talked about the three virgins of her first and second dream at some point with her mother, although the text does not say when. Therefore, notwithstanding the prominent masculine interference, Oria survives since without her, the men would have nothing to say at all. Rather, they take on the role of solidarity spoken of by Beverley and the role of listening described by Laub in which "the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt [she] bore alone, and therefore could not carry out" (85). Despite the interference that threatens to relegate her to subaltern status, by listening carefully,

one can still discern immense authenticity in the testimony of her testimony even to the point of uncovering evidence of her reality and voice.

The distinctive narrative style and structure along with the performative qualities of its protagonists, the verisimilitude of the dreams, and the use of intertexts in *VSO* all point toward the interposition of actual witnesses in the redaction of the poem, including of Oria and Amunna. By listening to these characters, their voices come to the surface, revealing the real motives and desires of these women and decentering the narrative's hegemony. In turn, hearing the women in the poem mutually reinforces its historicity because it continues to deteriorate the notion that Gonzalo or Munno would have invented such abundant feminine expression. During the next section, the analysis will proceed with the assumption that Oria was a real person who played a significant role in the production of the tradition even though Munno and Gonzalo have their own agendas with the narrative and intervened in significant ways, especially due to Gonzalo's apparent admiration for mysticism. Rather, though any number of these readings may be attributable to the men, they constitute proposals of where the voice may belong to the women, even where there is ambiguity about their representation.

### **Hearing Oria and Amunna**

Her performative choices and the verisimilitude of her dreams assist in allowing Oria's voice to transcend subalternity. Gonzalo calls Oria an "emparedada [que], yazié entre paredes. / Avié vida lazada" (6bc). This inaugurates the description of many painful experiences of a life, as already noted above. Nevertheless, an analysis of her agency and expression problematizes notions of subalternity by relativizing and gradating the concept:

Desqué mudó los dientes, luego a pocos annos,  
págavase muy poco de los seglares pannos.



Vistió otros vestidos de los monges calannos:  
 podrién pocos dineros valer los sus peannos.  
 Desamparó el mundo Oria, toca negrada;  
 en un rencón angosto entró emparedada.  
 Suffrié grant astinencia, vivié vida lazrada.  
 por ond' ganó en cabo de dios rica soldada. (20-21)

Oria takes on religious garb, forsakes peasant and family life, and inflicts suffering upon herself, all in acts of explicit expression. Even though her parents “Rogavan a dios siempre de firme corazón / que lis quisiesse dar alguna criazón / que para su servicio fues’, que para ál non” (14abc), they never fulfill this promise since the child does so independent of their direction. The word “lazrada” connotes a life of mental and emotional penitence and discipline: “Martiriaba las carnes dándolis grant lazerio, / cumplié días e noches todo su ministerio, / ieunios e viglias e rezar el salterio” (112abc). She seeks such self-affliction as a means of emancipation from a life that she views as of little worth, an extreme asceticism Bynum argues constitutes “a rejection of family. [. . .] Many medieval girls seem to have expressed such rejection, both of their own families and of the state of marriage, through fasting and food distribution” (*Holy* 223). Thus, her Christian acts serve as modes of expression. Rather than marrying or working the land she chooses avoidance of both. Her alternative to the enclosed life means manual labor, risk of sickness and war, marriage with very little options after which the cycle will continue to another generation. Through religious life, she at the very least finds solace in breaking free from the monotony of mortality into a better afterlife.

Though at one level Gonzalo appropriates her deliberate use of agency, Oria negotiates the cenobium and makes active choices and even uses the strictures of the lifestyle to empower

herself. Michel de Certeau argues that despite the overarching worlds of power that limit human expression and activity, “microscopic, multiform, and innumerable connections between *manipulating* and *enjoying*” allow individuals to move independently through imposed systems (xxiv, his emphasis). Subalternity requires perspective; even though the dominant class does not care to hear the voice of the subaltern, to another subaltern, a comrade has choice and expression. It should therefore not surprise that many of Oria’s actions appear conformist while at the same time expressive. As Oria dies, her last expression is not verbal but performative,

Alçó ambas las manos iuntólas en igual,  
 como qui riende gracias al buen rey spirital;  
 çerró oios e boca la reclusa leal,  
 rendió a dios la alma, nunca más sintió mal. (177)

While not words, the gesture signifies and allows Oria to have a voice even as her male writer binds them in text. This tends to support Bynum’s understanding in *Fragmentation and Redemption* that women appropriate “society’s dominant symbols and ideas in ways that revise and undercut them” (17). To deny that Oria has agency even though all these acts are choices means refusing to hear her in a way that “really matters,” as Beverley has said (“Testimonio, Subalternity” 576), instead appropriating her figure for other intellectual ends. While she acts well within the range of male expectations for her behavior, she still finds ways to assert her own opinion.

Likewise, Oria had limited contact with others, including close family, especially because she entered the monastery at such a young age. At one moment when her mother approaches her, Oria rebuffs her: “¡qué-m affincades tanto!” (173a), insinuating a less than perfect relationship between the two. As her mother tries to break the isolation that her daughter suffers, Oria resists

in silence and weakness. Oria afflicts herself so much that she ultimately transcends her earthly relationship with her mother, who then “becomes her biological daughter’s spiritual child and the recipient of the virgin’s divine instruction” (Francomano “Spiritual” 162). Her seemingly self-defeating choices function as strategies for emancipating herself from any other earthly authority, whether familial or clerical.

Due to the promises of her first dream, Oria forces herself to suffer even greater pain and daily trauma than ever before: “Non fazié a sus carnes nulla misericordia. / Martiriava las carnes dándolis grant lazerio” (111d-112a). Oria’s behavior displays the same obsessive behavior about social norms expected of her as anyone diagnosed today with *anorexia nervosa*, a prevalent modern trauma. She stays awake day and night fasting or praying, which ascribes to her suffering a certain degree of glory. By and through her suffering she gains prominence in her community and the promise of riches without bounds. While modern testimonies of trauma eschew this sort of glorious pain, the earlier chapters of this project have shown how they may be used to the speaker’s advantage. Oria’s glorious suffering intensifies what Weiss classifies as the medieval sense of “urgent struggle” as the anchoress wrestles for heavenly glory by performing penance on earth (76). Yúdice considers urgency fundamental to *testimonio*: “Told by a witness who is motivated by the urgency of a situation” (17). Jara and Hernán Vidal even consider “narración de urgencia” as an alternative name for the literary phenomenon (3). Speakers in *testimonio* promote immediate action to bypass bureaucratic lag since any time wasted endangers the people with which the speaker stands. In the Middle Ages, on the other hand, this urgency connects not with freedom from death but rather salvation in death by taking action with awareness of death’s ubiquity.

Along with depictions of performance in the poem, Oria and Amunna's dreams reveal insight into their real lived experiences. Oria begins her oneiric journey by floating up with a dove into an Edenic field while accompanied by three virgins:

Vidieron un buen árbol, cimas bien compassadas,  
 que de diversas flores estaban bien pobladas.  
 Verde era el ramo, de foias bien cargado  
 fazié sombra sobrosa e logar muy temprado  
 Tenié redor el tronco maravilloso prado:  
 más valié esso sólo que un rico regnado.  
 Estas quatro donzellas, ligeras más que biento,  
 obieron con est' árbol plazer e pagamiento.  
 Subieron en el todas, todas de buen talento,  
 abién en el folgura en él grant conplimiento. (43c-45d).

While Lappin, Farcasiu, and others examine the theological symbols of this moment, the scene also has quotidian significance to a mountain girl like Oria. Instead of approaching the tree or the meadow around it to labor for food, the tree and its field offers her rest without any constraint of time. Therefore, this scene unravels a silenced life that Oria abandoned before entering her cell as well as many others who lived off the land during that period, especially those hearing the poem or who helped transmit the tradition to Gonzalo. Scarborough observes this in other works by Gonzalo de Berceo as she takes an ecocritical approach to medieval Castilian literature: "they were not merely using nature as a backdrop; they were reproducing and reflecting nature through literary lenses" (6). All of the pleasures that the dream presents also speak for the pain and agony of a present life for which the dream promises contrasting joy and hope.

From the meadow, the group of women ascends into heaven with the intercession of three “sanctos barones” (48a). There, Oria begins to see processions of righteous individuals and groups that dwell there having lived faithfully on earth, many of which result as real figures whom Oria knew personally in life. Don Gómez de Massiella, don Xemeno and Galindo each originate from the vicinity of Oria’s hometown of Villavelayo, constructing thereby a real life connected with people whom she admired.<sup>48</sup> By placing them in heaven, we receive clues about her values, though with considerable difficulty since no further documentation survives about them. By and large, Oria appreciates Christian virtue in the traditional (Mozarabic) sense. She does not rebel against the *status quo per se*: both she and her mother stand as “exemplary representatives of the Mozarabic tradition” prominent of their region (Lappin, *VSO* 44), but with the subversive slant that they resist the Roman one. Their adherence to cultural norms also strengthens the veracity of the narrative in that it presents values that Oria most likely would have held. Oria and her mother avail themselves of the *status quo* to express themselves where they otherwise had little opportunity. Conveniently, Gonzalo apparently has sympathy for this position as well, as evidenced in the similar criticism found in *MSL*.

For example, along with expression, the dreams give Oria power and voice through their dialectic structure: “con esta visión fue mucho enbargada, / però del Sancto Spíritu fue luego conortada: / demandólis quí eran e fue bien aforçada” (31bcd). At the onset of the dream, faced with three figures of “auctoridat” (27a), rather than tighten her lips as trained in her childhood, Oria breaks her silence and not only finds expression, but even reward for doing so as three of

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<sup>48</sup> See Lappin *VSO* 142 concerning Gómez de Massiello and for information on the other two men in Uría Maqua, *Poema* 107.

her virgin heroes, far from censuring her, encourage her speech and call her a “compañera” and “hermana” (32d, 33a), signifying an association she has not enjoyed in the narrative up to this point. As more and more heavenly beings address her and allow her to speak, she becomes “más osada” (69b) and willing to speak what before she felt “mucho enbergonzada” to say (69a). As Aquilano has observed, examining all of these features “through the lens of contemporary neurocognitive approaches to dream life reveals the compensatory and subversely liberating nature of the oneiric state in the life of the nun” (134). These compensatory and subversive qualities of her dream shed light on the subaltern nature of her waking life that necessitates the outlet that the dreams provide.

These exchanges, however, also offer another insight into Oria’s own personal agenda independent of Gonzalo’s. The dream depicts a series of situations in which Oria encounters individuals and groups that confuse her, followed by an explanation from her guides: “una cosa estranna / ca nunca vido cosa daquésta su calanna” (52cd). The three virgins who accompany her clarify what she sees, transforming the visit to heaven into a quest for knowledge. As Oria wondered about Christian theology and history, the Church would have promoted mysteries accepted on faith. However, rather than exercise faith during her oneiric conversations, Oria gains so much understanding that she leverages significant ontological advantage over any priest or religious scholar on earth. This knowledge empowers her to speak mysteries: “vedién que murmurava, mas no la entendién” (148b). Instead of remaining silent to others out of subalternity and weakness, she chooses to withhold information as Munno, her mother, and others approach her for clarification. The tables have turned. As Oria nears death and her mother asks “si visión vidiestes o alguna istoria, / dezítmelo de mientre avedes la memoria” (172cd), Oria responds exasperated but almost coyly:

‘Madre,’ dijo la fija, ‘qué-m affincades tanto!  
 Dexatme, ‘sí vos vala dios, el buen padre sancto:  
 assaz tengo en mí lazerio e quebranto;  
 más me pesa la lengua que un pesado canto.  
 ‘Queredes que vos fable: yo non puedo fablar.  
 Veedes que non puedo la palabra formar.  
 Madre, si me quisieredes tan mucho afincar  
 ante de la mi hora me puedo enfogar.  
 ‘Madre, si dios quisiesse que podiesse bevir  
 aún assaz tenía cosas que vos dezir,  
 mas quando no lo quiere el criador soffrir  
 lo que a él ploguiere es todo de soffrir.’ (173-175)

Unlike the country peasant child turned anchoress from whom mortality denied so much, she now denies the privilege of her knowledge to others. Despite claiming she cannot speak due to physical weakness, she manages to carry on for three *coplas* while her mother sustains only one in exchange. Even the information that she did apparently disclose riddles its readers and continues to confuse scholars today; she still seems to know something we do not. Desing agrees: “Although Amunna and Munno try twice to impose the authority of the written word on Oria’s visions, the protagonist resists the effort both times by withholding her words” (128). She remains an oral performer with power over her own expression until the end.

The exchange in which Amunna attempts to find out more about Oria’s visions marks a departure from the rest of the poem as a parley outside of a dream state as well as a time when Oria speaks discernably while she is awake. However, Oria truncates the interrogation because

she does not yield any answers to Amunna. Oria's ability to speak intimates her discernability, but she acts with agency, demonstrating that no earthly power need control her. While she speaks, mortals still do not get to understand her, anticipating the voice she will enjoy shortly thereafter when she inherits her heavenly throne.

Thus, Oria's dreams reward her with access to the ultimate authority, bypassing all earthly ones that fail to hear her. The three virgins declare that "envíanos don Christo de quien todo bien mana / que subas a los çielos e que veas que gana / el serviçio que fazes" (33bcd). Christ himself even addresses her later in the vision, promising that after she suffers a little longer on earth, "verná el tiempo de la siella cobrar" (102d). While she worries that she will not remain worthy, the Creator reassures her "de lo que tú más temes non serás enbargada" (107a). If Oria feels marginalized in her waking moments, this dream reassures her that the most important beings do hear her: "By both rooting her more fully within her earthly identity as part of a community that had partially constrained her and by granting her a taste of complete spiritual freedom, the dream offers a form of consolation for a life situation deeply bereft of external power and authority" (Aquilano 135). Desing's dissertation corroborates this position by recasting Oria's visions as a pilgrimage:

Although Oria is a cloistered nun who would not normally be permitted to travel, through her visions she makes spiritual journeys to the heavenly realm. In these visionary travels, Oria witnesses several scenes that question normative gender roles, ecclesiastical hierarchies, and the primacy of written discourse over oral communication. (8)

Oria also mentions that "Christo [es] mi sennor natural" in her final monologue to her mother (191c), hinting that her earthly superiors were not. Many religious of the time laid claim



on this concept as a means of shedding the oppression of earthly authority. On one occasion, she even excludes “el obispo don Gómez [. . .] / tal fue como el árbol que florez e non grana” from the heavenly throng (62a, c). As Desing has suggested, she finds ways in her dream to criticize some powerful members of the church hierarchy, elaborating that “Oria and Millán’s journeys are both spaces in which ecclesiastical authority is challenged [. . .]. Oria’s first journey contains a critique of Church hierarchy in that an important member of that hierarchy, a bishop, is conspicuously absent from heaven” (113). He attributes the resistance solely to Gonzalo, but the appearance of Urraca a little later in the poem stresses that Oria also engaged in such resistance since such a character would have interested Gonzalo little. While Desing notes the strange attribution of authority to the three virgins whom Oria so admired from her reading after having stripped it from the corrupt bishop, this attribution approximates her encounter with her teacher Urraca whom she “querría [. . .] que fuesse” in the company of the blessed (72c). Oria’s desire largely determines what she sees in the dream: virgins with authority, friends and mentors among the blessed, offenders excluded. Also weakening his own argument that only Gonzalo seeks an outlet for criticism here, Desing goes on to say, “It is significant that the virgins come closer to the top of the order than do the bishops in this progression of saintly authority, which is a subtle critique of both the established ecclesiastical and gender hierarchies” (114-115). Though maintaining that Gonzalo is the reformist in the poem, this sentence’s reversed gender hierarchies also point toward Oria. The poem contains acerbic criticisms of those in power; these not only further identify the reality of Oria’s strong presence in the production of the tale, but also disclose her own voice and opinion about matters religious.

As to the significance of the throne, Aquilano explains, “Finally, through her vision of the heavenly seat she was assured of a place of honor in the afterlife in which she would

potentially claim an authority that her cultural conditioning and the prevailing social reality of gender relations had made completely inaccessible in her earthly travails” (155). Only the Church could offer her any comfort about her social position and pain. Rather than only oppressing her, the Church also acts as a conduit for liberation and self-realization, as seen also in earlier chapters of this dissertation. The throne represents the voice that Oria finds in her dream, as “[The throne] denotes the place where she recovers her voice in the presence of the divine [. . .]. Because she has done much to tame flesh and word, she has advanced towards the time when language is no longer mediated” (Weiss 77). Thus in her dreams, she finds both power and voice, defeating her own subalternity by forging an alternate reality through mysticism.

This important moment of the poem highlights the metonymic force of reading Oria as a testimonial figure. This scene describes a throne “de oro bien labrada, / de piedras muy preçiosas toda engastonada” promised to her if she continues faithful (77bc). Next to the seat and guarding it stands a mysterious figure named Voxmea whose manner of dress conjures numerous invisible figures whom Oria typifies:<sup>49</sup>

Vistié esta mançeba preçiosa vestidura  
 más preçiosa que oro, más que la seda pura.  
 Era sobresennada de buena escriptura.  
 Non cubrió omne vivo tan rica cobertura.

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<sup>49</sup> Scholars have debated the meaning of the figure Voxmea for many years. See Uría Maqua in her edition, Simina Farcasiu, Kevin Poole, and Lappin in the introduction to his edition. This chapter will add a few considerations to her complex meaning.

Avié en ella nombres de omnes de grant vida  
 que servieron a Christo con voluntat conplida,  
 pero de los reclusos fue la mayor partida  
 que domaron sus carnes a la mayor medida. (91-92)

Francomano notices that the “omnes” written on Voxmea’s vestment refers not only to men, but “is devoted mainly to religious recluses such as Oria and her mother” (“Spiritual” 164), intimating an entire group of people not visible in the poem, yet connected to Oria. Likewise, Weiss observes that she becomes a “penitential surrogate for the whole community” (75). Referring to Urraca, Oria asserts that “yo por la su doctrina entré entre paredes” (74c) rather than due to her parents or even God suggests solidarity among a class of subaltern women, a solidarity that extends to the possible effects of the poem on those who identified with Oria. As Aquilano explains, “The healing offered to Oria suggests answers to her that bring comfort to the recipients of the text as well” (147). She identifies with this group and reveres them and vice-versa, allowing her to represent with little record of them anywhere else, at least in the region of la Rioja in the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It is not coincidental that Voxmea herself is a woman, the visual representation of Oria’s metonymy with the religious women written on her dress.

Like the first dream, Oria’s second dream illuminates Oria’s life during her waking hours. When the Virgin Mary first appears to her, she announces, “Yo só Sancta María, la que tú ruegas de noche e de día” (131d). Along with revealing more about Oria’s life in terms of her prayer habits and desires, this pronouncement rewards Oria immediately, like her first dream, by giving Oria validation for her austere behavior—instead of having to defer them to the next life—in the form of the physical, albeit oneiric, appearance of the object of her prayers.

Likewise, once again, the dream allows her to have voice and open her mouth so that she may interrogate a higher authority than any she has met on earth, to give her “un signo sennal buena provada” (134c) that Mary is who she says she is, who responds with the promise that the anchoress will soon become sick and perish.

The prophecy begins its fulfillment two *coplas* following Mary’s pronouncement, after which Gonzalo depicts Oria’s third and final oneiric journey on the Mount of Olives. Like her other dreams, Oria has greater pleasure in the dream than in her exterior life of pain and trauma: “si no la despertassen cuidó seer folgada” (139d), “que non sintié un punto de todos los dolores” (146d). The dreams bespeak an escape valve for a life she does not want, yet must endure. As soon as those looking on arouse her from the ecstatic dream, she reverts to the regular inaudibility from which she suffers outside of dreams:

Dizié entre los dientes con una voz cansada,  
 ‘Mont’ Oliveti Monte, ca non dizié ál nada.  
 Non gelo entendié nadi’ de la posada  
 ca non era la voz de tal guisa formada. (147)

To highlight the subalternity of her position, none of the women can interpret her so that they must turn to Munno who enters the narration, supplanting Gonzalo: “La madre de la duenna fizo a mí clamar” (149a). The befuddled women call upon a higher authority to discern the meaning of Oria’s confusing speech. Consequently, as soon as Oria recognizes Munno’s presence, suddenly, “entró en su memoria” (151b), restoring her ability to speak coherently about her dream by Munno’s facilitation.

After Munno has brought Oria back to her senses so that she may speak, he makes a request that reveals a couple of layers of complexity for the poem: “‘Amiga,’ dixo, ‘esto fáznoslo

entender. / Bien non lo entendemos, querriémoslo saver;” (153bc). Here we see, as expected, Munno’s masculine desire to interpret Oria to the audience and transform her into something audible, something that matters while at the same time revealing that he does not understand her, that she needs translation. The request thus exposes a tension between the masculine voice that desires to publish her story to the world and the subaltern confusion by which she expresses herself and which signifies that the story presented to us may not only mean what the narrators want it to mean. If we listen to Oria, she speaks of the disregard for a life that has given her almost nothing and the embrace of religion for the sake of respite from a world of disease that now grips her and carries her to the brink of death: “[codiçia] allá ir [. . .] m’as que vivir” (158ab). Through her life and dreams, she rebels against a life of pain as well as seizes the power and knowledge that make her religious superiors seek her for knowledge. She inspires the men to preserve her knowledge and to disseminate it to larger audiences, even if they distort it in an attempt to make it work for the masculine Church. At the level of the poem, of the masculine writers, she remains a discursive function, a subaltern, but at the level of the *vita*, she continues to live and have voice.

Amunna’s status differs little from her daughter. Gonzalo states that independent of his own male circumscription, Amunna’s choice to express herself granted her great fame: after having entered into the religious life herself, “Los pueblos de la tierra faziénli grant honor, / salié a luengas tierras la su buena loor” (18 cd). If true, living such an austere lifestyle granted her both a voice and power to influence others in a way that she would not have otherwise.

On the eve of Oria’s death, Amunna experiences her own vision, which includes a visitation from her deceased husband García. Like Oria, Amunna is able to ask questions and receive knowledge that she cannot receive in her quotidian life: “dezitme de la fija, si verá crás el

día” (166d). The vision reveals other pains than those undergone by Oria. Although Amunna does not go to the same lengths of religious devotion as her daughter, especially since she is not the poem’s protagonist, the dream nevertheless details the agony that Amunna suffers from seeing her own child reduced to such anguish. Amunna’s dream includes the presence of three angelic beings that “non fablavan nada ni querién signas fer” (168d). These three people have no apparent functional purpose in the poem except to have presence in the dream. Farcasiu suggests that they serve to multiply the number three which arises throughout the poem and imply the number four (Amunna, García, Oria, Mary) in order to evoke the four wheels of Ezekiel (314). Lappin suggests their phantasmagoric presence means to reflect Amunna’s doubt about her daughter’s future (*VSO* 199). Gonzalo or Munno easily could have dropped them, but both considered them significant enough that they kept them present through each redaction of Amunna’s story. At least one probable explanation for this stems from the need to make Amunna an ascending spiritual character who also manages to touch heaven like Oria does. Having her husband come alone, someone she knew in life, does not give the dream as heavenly of a touch. It is also noteworthy that these beings do not deliver the message. Amunna has a voice but they do not. In a heavenly reversal, these angles are now the subaltern instead of the pious mother, they whom we do not hear nor understand.

Amunna’s final dream results from her desire that “la podiesse sonnar una vegada” (186c). It is both psychologically and spiritually realistic for Amunna to have a dream of her daughter elevated to heaven, especially due to her bereavement. Following the pattern of the other dreams, Amunna becomes privy to knowledge inaccessible to those who surround her in waking hours through the process of asking questions and receiving answers. In the final dream, both women finally achieve dialectic through the oneiric as they converse for the first time in the

poem without interference. Amunna's questions pertain to the emancipation of Oria from her silence and suffering: "si sodes en pena o sodes end' salida" (190d) and "si en el passamiento resçibiestes pesar" (195). Oria answers that "La Virgo Gloriosa lo que me pormetió / ¡ella sea laudada!, muy bien me lo guardó" (198ab). The entire exchange inspires Amunna to proclaim, "avédesme guarida" and reassure her about her daughter's enjoyment of the promised throne as well as provide her with hope about her own future after death (190b).

Setting aside Oria and Amunna as poetic artifice, discursive devices at the service of male narrators, its evidence of feminine performance exposes their living voices. Both women exerted significant influence within their sphere and expressed themselves by manipulating performative signs available to them. Above all, these women's visions granted them remarkable power and knowledge of mysteries directly from heavenly authority. These dreams also open a window into the women's lived experience by recording their pain and desire for earthly emancipation. Though the surfacing of her voice redeems her from subalternity, Oria still stands in for other women living under similar conditions.

### **Testimony in *VSO***

*VSO* evinces a particular emphasis on seeing that ties it back to the visionary literature with which Uría Maqua categorizes it; however, the end of this emphasis, as with other hagiography, preserves a testimony of a life with the hope of Christian liberation. The witness language of the poem manifests in at least two ways: the poem's emphasis on the sense of sight as a form of evidence and the poem's portrayal of speech and memory. The words "veer," "visión," "oios" and their derivatives appear in the poem at least 70 times. Gonzalo even punctuates the poem with sight, ending the vernacular with "que allá nin aquí nunca veamos mal, Amen" (205d). Weiss has noted that "Berceo three times places special emphasis on how she

hears a ‘disembodied’ voice” (77). However, even when the poem presents voices, such as Urraca and the voice of God, the narrator makes sure to do so in the context of sight as paramount: “Conosçió la voz Oria, entendió las sennera; / veer non la podió” (75cd). “Oyó fablar a Christo en essi buen conviento, / mas non podió veerlo” (88bc). “Padre, peroque no te veo [. . .]” (103a). This emphasis on sight presents an interesting paradox of the *testimonio* project since even though “*testimonio*” refers to the eye-witnessing of events, it must communicate by sound and voice. After all, its ultimate goal is to lend a voice to the voiceless, to anyone who has suffered that they may speak what he or she has seen and felt.

Speech and memory add to the testifying quality of the work. When Munno first brings Oria to her senses, and she rebukes those who wake her from her glorious vision, Munno invites her to testify of her experience: “‘Amiga,’ dixo, ‘esto fáznoslo entender. / Bien non lo entendemos, querriémoslo saver; esto que te rogamos tú debeslo fazer’” (153bc). She indulges the confessor with the preface that “non te mintré en nada” (154a), a verbal flourish easily attributable to Gonzalo that serves to reassure the audience, but that also highlights the dependence the truth of her speech and the integrity of her memory have both for preserving and understanding her experience, placing her in a similar position as a defendant on the witness stand. Likewise, after her dream, Amunna “recontógelo todo a Munno su querido: / él decorólo todo como bien entendido” (170cd), thus preserving her memory and speech in text. Shortly thereafter she attempts to do the same with Oria: “‘Fija, ’sí dios vos lieve a la su sancta gloria, / si visión vidiestes o alguna istoria, / dezítmelo de mientras avedes la memoria’” (172bcd). This key moment in the text emphasizes testimony because, as Felman and Laub assert, “literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated” in verbal testimony (xviii). While Amunna does not gain any of Oria’s



memories on this occasion, she intends to do so, and the poem itself evidences the success she must have had on other occasions. Finally, Gonzalo concludes the poem with his own witness in defense of its authors and collaborators as he tries to preserve memory through literature:

Él qui lo escrivió non diríe falsedat,  
 que omne bueno era de muy grant sanctidat;  
 bien conosció a Oria, sopo de poridat,  
 en todo quanto dixo, dixo toda verdat.  
 Dello sopo de Oria, de la madre lo ál,  
 de ambas era elli maestro muy leal. (204a-205b)

Along the same line, Beresford and Twomey describe the importance of gaze in all medieval hagiography, both of the saint, his/her *milieu*, and the audience. In the Middle Ages, seeing ruled supreme over the other senses for many religious reasons but especially related to “beliefs about the ability of corporeal sight to obtain knowledge of the divine” (Hahn, 169). The Dream Vision constituted a category of “seeing” since Biblical times while hagiography constituted a genre in which “as an audience, we are compelled to become active participants in the operation of the gaze, as we come face to face with the gruesome but necessary corporeality of saintly experience” (Beresford and Twomey, 103-4). They continue, explaining that the saints, “divested of worldly distractions, [. . .] could see God more clearly, while allowing others to see the workings of God through their endeavors” (104). Dreams in hagiography also constitute a type of seeing and “what dreams revealed to the seer was knowledge” (112), as evinced by the ontological power *VSO*’s female protagonists wield due to the insight into the afterlife. Hagiography disseminated truth of God and godliness otherwise inaccessible to mortals, much as *testimonio* reveals knowledge otherwise unknown to the hegemony.

Kelley interprets *mester de clerecía*'s huge emphasis on sight as a conduit for knowledge: "By modeling exemplary conduct while condemning sin in their works, these writers affirmed the privileged imperative of the clerical caste to define what constituted order and disorder and to prescribe remedies" (131). After seeing *VSO* as a *testimonio*, some caution must be exercised when ascribing "privilege" to the clerics as if they went around exploiting poor, uneducated Christian women so that they could maintain their privilege. If hagiography constitutes a type of witness literature, then the worldview of the people visible through its lens perceives the Church as the only opportunity for any kind of relief in a life of pain, not as an underhanded power-hungry institution. However, privileged also makes sense since such an intervention of a privileged class makes knowledge and amelioration of the marginalized culture possible. It is thus necessary to recognize that privilege places one in a stronger position over others, but at the same time in a stronger position to *help* those others.

*VSO*'s intended audience helps to highlight the dynamic between the privileged writer and his marginalized testifiers. Ancos argues that we may "consider the thirteenth-century *cuaderna vía* production as a true *mester de clerecía* at all levels of its literary creation and communication" ("Primary" 132) in that it always at some level has a male, clerical audience in mind. This strengthens the notion that *VSO* operated as a *testimonio* to some degree since, as demonstrated in chapter 4, the poet strove to influence other elite clerics' opinion of the marginalized groups he represents in his poetry. However, Ancos' conclusion only stands if Gonzalo receives sole credit for the work. When we consider Oria and Amunna as authors as well, other scholars' opinions about intended audiences harmonize with that of Ancos'. For example, in her book Jodi Bilinkoff describes "the ways in which clerics related to female penitents they determined were spiritually gifted and how they related the lives of these women

for others to read and emulate” (x). She emphasizes the male component of confession that we have accessible to us but fails to hear the female voice as anything other than assimilated by the sacrament of confession which they “accepted frequently with considerable enthusiasm” (76). More recently, John Coakley has complicated this relationship for the Middle Ages by observing, “It was authority itself that engendered subservience [to women], as clerics put themselves willingly under the sway of those who seemed to be able to show them the pearl of great price that their authority could not obtain for them” (3). Sanok agrees: “Hagiography provided a useful discursive and gestural vocabulary for women’s resistance to masculine authority, despite—indeed often because of—its representation of idealized feminine spirituality” (xiii). These observations lend credence to the possibility of a female author appealing to a higher male authority rather than a hermetic conversation between men.

In writing of her fervent devotion after her first dream, Gonzalo opines that this dream brings a grace to her that “*meior nunca le vino / más dulz’ e más sabrosa era que pan nin vino*” (116cd), referring to the appearance of the Virgin Mary and her prediction that Oria would soon die. The poet’s envy of his protagonist offers insight into how others may have also reacted to Oria’s story. That this admiration comes from a male, lettered cleric demonstrates the nuanced role women played in medieval Iberia at the time that did not only relegate them to a secondary status. Oria’s unique gifts and performance as well as her liminality allow the erudite to pay attention to her—whether or not he ultimately gets her message—as he takes up the role of listener by Laub’s standards: “The listener, therefore, by definition partakes of the struggle of the victim with the memories and residues of his or her traumatic past. The listener has to feel the victim’s victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony” (58). While Gonzalo’s success at hearing is limited to the extent that he over-

adulates her or imposes his own male interpretation of her, the preservation of her life has allowed access to a person and a group of people otherwise silenced by the anchoritic lifestyle. In fact, Oria's marginality enhances her remarkable position. Gonzalo often adds words of contrast about Oria with more powerful groups, mentioning, for example, that the apparel of the virgins visiting in her second dream "nunca tal cosa ovo nin Genüa nin Pisa" (118d), drawing our attention to how poor she is compared to the oligarchy of the time, and yet that she enters the presence of those with much greater status. This adds further complexity to Judith Butler's observation that "the divine name makes what it names, but it also subordinates what it makes" (31). In this case, Munno and Gonzalo's naming Oria allows her to exist at all, and it indeed strives to subordinate her to them, but with only a limited degree of success. Oria resists them, and in a way, uses them to bring herself into existence and fruition, rather subordinating them to a significant degree as they stand in awe before her.

Thus, while the Church and literacy gave the majority of power to clerics to determine what aspects of their lives survived, *VSO* illustrates how during the Middle Ages women often had the power to subject men by, in this case, performing and gaining access to knowledge denied to the clergy by God himself. Others have taken issue with this argument, such as Elisabeth Davis in her recent thesis (17), especially since such an interpretation of confession ignores the female voice because it does not say something more subversive. Similar issues have arisen in *testimonio* studies when the subaltern has taken a more political right stance than the leftist erudite would like.<sup>50</sup> Mills warns of this tendency in female martyr tales when he says, "We simply ventriloquize our own concerns when we make the virgin martyr speak" (201). We

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<sup>50</sup> See Beverley's debate with Stoll in his essay in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*.

must accept the complexity of the real voice of the subaltern, some with which we will agree and some with which we will not. As Mills continues, “The agency of the virgin martyr cannot be idealized as a force totally separate from the order it opposes. Exploited by ideologies of patriarchal violence and simultaneously inserted into narratives of female resistance, the saint has a role to play in the discourses of both” (202). Ultimately, the relationships between Oria, Amunna, and Munno appear very much like the operations of the collaborator and the speaker of *testimonio* as the performer appeals to the higher power for help, who then returns with solidarity with the subaltern; at times, this voice resonates with subversion, sometimes with conformity, and sometimes with neither.

Heffernan draws similar conclusions from his analysis of the tale of Perpetua, an ancient martyr story from the second or third century with features comparable to *VSO*. Like Oria, much of Perpetua’s story concerns dreaming and dream interpretation which Heffernan and most scholars agree are “probably genuine” just like Oria’s (202). The end of Perpetua’s life is told by an editor who plays a role much like Gonzalo de Berceo in preserving her prison diary for posterity. However, scholarship on Oria, unlike Perpetua, only recently feels comfortable accepting the veracity of Oria’s tale with Aquilano especially viewing the dreams as essential to understanding her real life.

Oria transcends her subalternity in such a way that even death, that which should most ultimately silence her, does not have power to quash her voice. While the hagiographers Munno and Gonzalo do obscure her, their own texts offer evidence of how she still breaks free and surpasses them as writers, to call us back to Nehamas’ distinction between writer and author. Following her death, they explain

Avié buenas conpannas en essi passamiento

el buen abbat don Pedro, persona de buen tiento,  
 monges e hermitannos, un general convento,  
 éstos fazién obsequio e todo complimiento. (178)

Don Pedro's "complimiento" is the first speech that begins to obscure the anchoress with the "flood of awe and fear" described by Laub mentioned earlier (72). He must do so, however, in order to appropriate her power, given that so many "conpannas" show interest in her. In the immediate aftermath of her expressive life, many hear her or want to hear her. This begins the laborious process by the clergy of transforming her into a sign for the church and preventing others from seeing that while she showed great conformity to the church, she also dissented. During the eleventh century, the cult of saints still thrived outside of the hands of the church through the activities of the people.<sup>51</sup> Of Oria and Amunna's sepulcher, Gonzalo writes, "cuerpos son derecheros que sean adorados / ca suffrieron por Christo lazerios muy granados: / [. . .] que nos salve las almas, perdone los peccados" (183a, b, d). Their popularity among local worshippers persisted for at least two centuries, up until Gonzalo eulogized them, providing evidence of how the women were able to use the discourse of religious hegemony in order to be heard.

Furthermore, Oria literally transcends the silence of death when she appears to her mother at the end of the poem. As Mills points out, hagiography "refuses to acknowledge the threat that death poses to speech. [. . .] The martyr's death does not put an end to the martyr's voice, and the act of silencing conversely endows her speech with permanence and authority" (195). In other words, the saints keep talking after they are "silenced" by death.

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<sup>51</sup> See Vauchez chapters 1 and 2.

The title *Poema de Santa Oria* reinforces Oria as a subaltern, a poetic much like Spivak's sati, whilst the title *Vida de Santa Oria* sets the poetic Oria aside, and makes her mean something that matters, someone that speaks, someone other than a subaltern, someone with a life no matter to what degree others may have interfered with its redaction. This highlights the poetic function of subalternity imposed from without, but when allowed to author her own *vita*, the subaltern sets the rules and becomes her own, whether or not the hegemony chooses to hear her. Given the abundant evidence that a young woman named Oria did live in the monastery of San Millán late in the eleventh century and that after a series of dreams, confessed her life to others, in the future, librarians and curators might consider referencing this crucial piece of performance by its author's name and displace her collaborator Gonzalo de Berceo as has happened with many modern *testimonios* that descend from such a *vita*.

## Conclusion

*Testimonio* is not only a text. It is a project of social justice in which text is an instrument.

-Kimberly Nance. *Can Literature Promote Justice?* 19

The invention and promotion of martyrs and saints provided a crucial space for Christianity to constitute and maintain its power and identity as well as for diverse marginalized individuals to find expression and influence in their societies, a process which continues to this day. In hagiography, as in *testimonio*, powerful writers seek legitimacy within their communities by representing, imitating, conveying, facilitating, or portraying voices in pain, exploiting the heroism of suffering and the ideal of administering to others in need. In this process the writers must negotiate with the foreign realms of the subaltern as they strive to make that world meaningful to larger structures of power. Because of this negotiation, the subaltern and the marginalized find an opportunity to advance their own agendas as well, taking advantage of the sympathy their weakness provokes. In this way, the politics of suffering unifies the discourses of both hagiography and *testimonio* as multivalent interests and variant powers cohabit not merely to entertain or instruct, but to “persuade [. . .] readers to act,” as Nance has said (*Can* 19). However, whereas the supreme ideology featured in *testimonio* is social justice, as Nance states above, hagiography has salvation as its centerpiece. Despite this difference, their comparison is mutually illuminating as ideologies designed not only to benefit the elite, but those otherwise excluded from record.



This project combined hagiographical literary studies with theories on subalternity, especially those related to *testimonio* literature of twentieth-century Latin America in order to see hagiography in a new light. By applying subaltern studies to saints' tales, it is possible to see that clerical writers relied on the genre as way of navigating their political realities and influencing those in power over them with an understanding that doing otherwise made them complicit with the sins of those individuals with whom they disagreed. Saints served as icons of Christianity's highest values while at the same time they remained relatable in such a way that audiences could identify with them. This allowed clerical writers to draw attention to perceived deficiencies in opponents' behavior while at the same time inscribing audiences into an imagined community that the writer sought to create. In light of theories from John Beverley, hagiography becomes an act of witnessing atrocity even when it does not feature the first person by granting audiences a glimpse into the endangered lives and souls documented in saintly activity. While this invites the audience to reflect on injustices or sin in his or her own environment, it does so while also preserving voices otherwise dead to history, and by allowing those voices a weight of influence (or life/afterlife) they may otherwise never have. This life/afterlife of the hagiographic subject applies regardless of any measure of the text's historical precision, insofar as even overtly fictional narratives like *VSME* acquired a degree of "truth" among its imagined community of readers whose own values they saw reflected and preserved in the text, which in turn makes it possible for us to better understand them today. Hagiography also anticipates the urgency of twentieth-century literature in its desire for social and political change for the sake of saving souls in heaven.

Both Heffernan and Beverley emphasize the historicity that their respective specializations mean to convey. Neither hagiography nor *testimonio* is as impactful to audiences

if they fail to project a true story. This becomes complicated as the audiences of both genres have particular expectations that lend the stories to exaggeration. However, despite this, cautious study of both traditions permits valuable insight into history and to marginalized communities. While hagiography tends to instruct the illiterate masses, it also seeks to persuade elite contemporaries into subscribing to particular moral values the writer sees as in need of redress in his location. This tendency for the traditional intellectual to address his contemporaries also allowed those of inferior social position to do likewise, making their complaints and interpretations about society available through their performances which the cleric in turn wrote down and disseminated.

To demonstrate how the politics of suffering has worked across time, the first chapter looked at the tradition of Saint Lawrence since its beginning in the third century to its use by Spanish cleric Gonzalo de Berceo in the thirteenth century. Scholars of ancient Christianity agree that one of the basic tenants of the religion's identity is suffering. This identity was fostered in an environment of actual persecution, but when the majority of threats subsided, the identification persisted, at least partially because of its political utility. More than just forming part of Christian identity, though, suffering made several crucial connections with Classic culture that allowed Christianity to advance, including interest in romances about high-born protagonists entering the life of the lowly, a growing medical consciousness, and admiration for those with courage to die for their beliefs. At the same time, martyrs' tales strengthened the coherence of Christianity by creating meaning out of suffering and providing an opportunity to overstate the degree to which such sacrifice impressed pagans. The idea of dead and tortured Christians parallels *testimonio*, which also must feature multitudes of dying and dead folk for whom others speak. However, the potential for self-amplification did not only benefit early Christians: by the thirteenth century,

cultural craftsmen like Gonzalo de Berceo continued to portray their own versions of Lawrence's story in order to criticize what they perceived as injustices of their own time. Using Patai's arguments about Stoll's debates with Rigoberta Menchú and John Beverley, it is possible to see that "competition [. . .] over what groups are to be accorded most-oppressed status" continues into the present day as writers portray victims for the sake of renouncing opponents to modern ideals (279).

Chapter 2 engaged the implications of Christianity's retention of suffering at a time in which it faced few, if any, threats. According to MacKendrick, the asceticism in saints' tales like *VSME* opens fissures in power structures that question binaries between man and woman, Church and worshiper, that became useful both to the Mozarabic Church for maintaining its status, as well as for individual worshipers who gained the opportunity to take pleasure in their subalternity. The author of *VSME* along with many others during the Middle Ages portrayed asceticism as a way of interrogating hierarchies, simultaneously criticizing and upholding them, creating a constant play between those at the bottom as well as at the top as to who really wielded the most power. Hagiography does this by transforming the victim of the *passio* and displacing the concept of physiological pain. Instead of the tyrannical Decius of Saint Lawrence's time, sin itself, embodied in the voracious strumpet Mary of Egypt, oppresses the Christian subject who sacrifices himself or herself through self-denial rather than martyrdom. This transferral allows the writer to locate oppression in any figure with whom he or she disagrees, attaching the epithet of sin upon the dissident's head which in turn threatens the health of the Christian body. Such transformations continue today, visible as scholars of feminism use *VSME* in ways antithetical to its original environment—accusing it, for example, of oppressing

women, despite evidence of a more complex reality, one born of the pleasure to be found in pain.<sup>52</sup>

As a consequence of this mutable potential in suffering which need not correspond to actual pain, the politics of suffering has the potential to marginalize others at the same time that it amplifies the voices of its victims. Chapter 3 analyzed the implications of this side effect in Gonzalo de Berceo's *VSMC* as the poet manufactures a proto-nationalistic Castilian identity by distorting the influence of Muslims in Iberia and pretending that Jews do not exist. This complicates Castro's concept of *convivencia* because Gonzalo de Berceo's work demonstrates reluctance toward the idea of Christians, Muslims, and Jews living together in relative harmony in thirteenth-century Iberia. Even though Gonzalo does not attack these two religious groups in the text, his light treatment marginalizes them in his audience's imaginary as he ideates a Castilian polity in which neither group plays a significant role. This also suggests that the *cuaderna vía* in which Gonzalo wrote emerged in this context as influenced by Christian styles to the north, while paying less heed to discursive models from the south. Ultimately, the implementation of the politics of suffering makes subalterns speak at the risk of distorting and silencing rivals.

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<sup>52</sup> For example, Cazelles contends that Mary only ascends spiritually by relinquishing her earthly power, Patricia Grieve argues that the author wants the audience to read Mary as an "Everywoman" ("Paradise"), and Simon Gaunt suggests that her story provides male clerics a peep show as well as moral superiority (*Gender*). However, Weiss, Miller, Delgado, and Sanok provide more complex interpretations.

Moving from the use of the politics of suffering in high culture to its implementation in marginalized cultures, the fourth chapter looked at how the collaboration between the elite writer and the people suggests intellectual activity within both spheres. It adapted theories from Antonio Gramsci, looking at authors like Gonzalo de Berceo, Grimaldus, and Pero Marín as traditional intellectuals with interests that brought them into communion with the peasantry, whose differing needs were also met by their relation of the miracles of the icon representing their own collective, organic intelligence: Domingo de Silos. This collaboration need not result in the traditional intellectual speaking *for* the organic, but rather results in a conversation, one in which both sides benefit while also withholding information according to their interests. Due to this dialectic, hagiography, like *testimonio*, becomes a valuable locus for encountering voices that had no other way of preserving their legacy except through their dependence on the literate intellectual. However, inquiry into those lost lives is limited by the fact that the subaltern purposely retains secrets which he or she does not consider expedient for the elite to know. While some of these secrets may still turn up through careful investigation, for the most part, it is the traditional intellectual's duty to respect them in order to avoid colonizing and distorting the speaker anew. Ultimately, while the Church appropriated the figure of Domingo de Silos in order to establish itself as the proprietor and arbiter of holiness, the common folk of Iberia saw Domingo the icon and his connection to the Church as the best option for relief from the vicissitudes of the medieval life. Thus, by shifting the focus of analysis about Domingo away from how he benefits the powerful Catholic institution, it is possible to hear multitudinous voices in pain—distorted but real human needs amplified through the operations of the saint.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation took this understanding about the saint's subalternity one step further by using Gonzalo de Berceo's *Vida de Santa Oria* to suggest that sufficient

evidence exists as to the historicity of her life as to displace Gonzalo as the primary collaborator in the work. Isabel Uría Maqua's contestation that Oria's tale is a mystic poem rather than a *vita* places the power of Oria's destiny into the male writer's hands. However, since in *testimonio* authorial credit for the life story often goes to the illiterate speaker more than to the elite facilitator, it is reasonable to do the same in confessional narratives of the Middle Ages as a way of returning power to the women contained in them. Oria's tale of dreams bespeaks evidence of both the challenging and restricting reality of her circumstances as well as her interpretation of what she encountered. The evidence of the poem reveals that she took advantage of the confessional and ascetic apparatuses the Church offered her in order to assert some control over her own destiny during a time in which a woman's options were extremely limited. Likewise, the story's connections to Oria's mother, her teacher Urraca, and Voxmea's vestment indicate that her experience was not unique, but rather that others like her underwent similar experiences, such that Oria may serve as a metonym for other invisible maidens in a similar way that Rigoberta Menchú stands in for the dead, nameless Indians of Guatemala.

The dissertation concentrated on material from thirteenth-century Iberia due to the diversity of cultic traditions available from the period, but also as a way of limiting the scope of an otherwise overwhelming array of available material. Moreover, engaging hagiographies from the Spanish language provides a connection to *testimonios* written in the same language. The insights gained by focusing on the thirteenth century in the light of subaltern studies joins with other scholars seeking new approaches the Middle Ages in similar ways, and in doing so, has led to further discoveries specific to thirteenth-century Iberia. These five texts serve as case studies and have focused on work by Gonzalo de Berceo. Scholars may benefit from this revised reading of Gonzalo's narrative poetry by recognizing how deliberately he crafts his work. Far from an

obscure, unthinking translator, the Riojan priest was a master manipulator of language and culture, an innovator in a new poetic language that both allowed him to assert his own resentment for clerical oversight from Rome while at the same time elevating “romanz paladino / en qual suele el pueblo fablar con so vezino” in a way that elevates the speakers of that language (VSDS 2ab). As seen in chapter 1, rather than a workhorse for the monastery of San Millán, Gonzalo committed deliberate political acts in writing conceived by his own identification as a sufferer, as a martyr on a crusade for Christ against the expansion of the Roman Church into the Mozarabic tradition and as an apparent private admirer of mysticism. His advancement of *cuaderna vía* likewise suggests an intimate participation in the inauguration of a proto-nationalistic Castile that avoids religious heterogeneity, existing in tandem with but independent of Alfonso X’s politics farther south. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, this proto-nationalism in Berceo is worth studying as the anticipation of imagined cultural purity that inspired later generations of Castilians in the Modern Period.

Although this study has only digressed when necessary into earlier and later centuries as it traced the contours of its principle texts, it begs the question of whether or not its findings apply to other regions and time periods. How did the French and English transmit their saints’ tales? How does suffering rhetoric function in ascetic traditions from India or China? How does the Byzantine tradition differ from Roman Catholicism? Moreover, the study has concentrated on only one literary movement: *mester de clerecía*. While it made brief observations on tangential works written in prose and originating in other places, it would be appropriate to explore whether its findings surface in other Iberian works like the epic or the *obras sapienciales* from the same period. Despite the necessarily limited focus of a dissertation, the project has

made gains in establishing the utility of subaltern studies to literature produced prior to colonialism and its benefit to both sides of the temporal disciplines.

With consideration of all the benefits and discoveries made possible by placing medieval hagiography in dialogue with Latin American *testimonio*, this dissertation responds to Bruce Holsinger's call for medievalists to bring post-colonialism into the Middle Ages rather than maintain "theoretical exile" (1198). Scholars must do this while also avoiding the anachronism that happens so easily when applying criticism of modern paradigms to the Middle Ages. Therefore, while this study emphasized the application of postcolonial theory associated with one particular modern phenomenon, the *testimonio*, it has done so with the hopes of opening avenues for dialogue with other modern critical theories and modes of cultural production. As scholars continue to exercise all due concern for anachronism, they will profit from ventures into literatures from many other disciplines, ventures that will continue to illuminate human experience and revitalize the classroom.

The dissection of subalternity as a rhetoric rather than as a subject position in this research reveals an enormous capacity for political gain, allowing a group like Christianity with almost no voice in Rome to expand into the strongest systems of thought, faith, and community organization in Ancient Europe by the beginning of the Middle Ages. It appears that this strategy serves as one of the most effective means for an invisible or nearly invisible voice to gain entrance into larger dialogues. This suggests that suffering carries similar potentiality for modern usages, such as in the case of *testimonio*. In reality, time will tell whether *testimonio* and micro-aggression databases can dislodge modern power in the same way that Christianity overturned Rome, but if history is any indicator, doing so may be a repeat as much as it is a victory.



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