

**BROKEN BODIES AND UNRULY IMAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF
MARTYRDOM IN COUNTER- REFORMATION ROME**

DISSERTATION

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I, Conor Kissane confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This project is concerned with martyrdom and its representation in the unique cultural climate of post-Tridentine Rome. The devotional virtues of violent martyrological imagery came to be extolled by many of the most important thinkers in the Roman church in the wake of the Tridentine Council, and depictions of martyred saints proliferated all over the city during the closing decades of the 16th century. Visceral displays of maimed holy bodies were theorised as effective spurs to devotion in ideologically motivated programmes of ecclesiastical decoration, shoring up and even inventing collective memories of persecution for contemporary audiences still preoccupied with the spectre of confessional schism. In this milieu, artists such as Nicolò Circignani would make their entire careers on their ability to effectively image the brutalised body. But the adoption of the unruly medium of representational violence was also problematic, proving to be an uneasily fluid semiotic code that might lead its viewers towards undesirable acts of beholding. As a discursive site that rejected univocal interpretations, the represented martyred body can be seen to encompass many of the contradictions inherent to the reforming Church's promotion of imagery during the Counter-Reformation.

Recognising that the concept of martyrdom is discursively flexible, I argue that only a fundamentally interdisciplinary approach to its study can hope to recover something of its complexity as a practice of cultural formation. Accordingly, this thesis proposes a series of inter-medial encounters centred on the martyrological fresco cycle produced by Circignani for the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo in 1582. In exploring both the productive possibilities of Circignani's violent images and the ways in which these bodies were simultaneously reluctant to speak with the voices they had been assigned, new light will be shed on the complexity of the early-modern visual encounter between beholder and image.

IMPACT STATEMENT

The interdisciplinary scope of this thesis situates martyrological representation at the centre of a range of contemporary practices of cultural formation in a way that has not been attempted before in any systematic sense. By seeking to draw out the fundamentally intermedial implications of Circignani's work both from a compositional and hermeneutic perspective, I have attempted to show that the making of visual art was inextricable from the making of other kinds of contemporary devotional stimuli. This insight paves the way for much further research into the ways in which visuality, aurality and textuality interacted during the Counter-Reformation, along with further considerations of the opportunities and challenges that came with exploiting the unique characteristics of each kind of sensory response. The third chapter's attempt to situate these frescoes on a musical footing in particular proffers a methodological approach that has implications for the way in which the study of art history can be effectively expanded into interdisciplinary and collaborative avenues that exploit the distinctive scholarly skill-sets of other academic disciplines.

Moving from methodological considerations to subject matter, the engagement of this thesis with a wide range of primary material that has to date not received extensive study in English language scholarship points the way towards contributions to the field that could be of much benefit to future students of this period. I have undertaken extensive translations of the treatises of Giovanni Andrea Gilio and Alfonso Paleotti in particular, only a small portion of which could be included or analysed in this thesis. Building upon this with an annotated translation of this latter work in particular would make this fascinating primary document available to a much wider audience, and this work would be eminently feasible on the back of the work I have already done in this context.

In addition, a scholarly study of the ways in which relic, violence and representation coalesce in Paleotti's acheiropoetic admixture would have the potential to shed much more light on the relationship between fragmented bodies, devotion and representation during this period. More generally, the study of violence both historical and contemporary is a field of emerging relevance; encouraging critical interrogation of the political ramifications of attempts to exploit representational violence for ideological ends has obvious valence in contexts that extend far beyond the specific historical milieu examined in this thesis. Reaching back to these early-modern negotiations of the complex entanglings of violence, identity and cultural formation has much to tell us about how these same issues have become amongst the most defining features of our own era.

By contributing to the study of a period that has historically received unduly short shrift in the scholarship because of its awkward position between the period styles of Mannerism and the Baroque, this thesis also might be seen as a starting point upon which future studies can build. Santo Stefano was certainly not the only martyrological programme undertaken during late sixteenth-century Rome; comprehensive interdisciplinary studies of the fresco cycles painted at San Vitale and Santi Nereo ed Achilleo in the same period (which could not be treated in this thesis) would have the potential to greatly enrich our understanding of the place of the visual arts in one of the most febrile periods of Western history.

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Source: https://www.123rf.com/photo_64692927_rome-italy-march-11-2016-the-fresco-of-christ-the-redeemer-in-glory-with-the-heavenly-host-by-niccol.html.

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INTRODUCTION

SANTO STEFANO ROTONDO AND THE PLURAL BODY OF MARTYRDOM

Here nothing is shown to impress the thought of greatness of mind in the martyrs, or of strength in the belief which gave them courage to offer up their lives for it. The death of the martyrs is represented in glaring pictures round about; we see a row of horrible executions; here the breasts of a woman are cut off; there one is torn to death; here the eyes are plucked out; there another cut limb from limb, and then roasted or boiled.

- Hans Christian Andersen, *A Poet's Bazaar*¹

As Mendelssohn's *Wedding March* filters through the vast circular space of the Roman basilica of Santo Stefano Rotondo, a young woman wearing a wedding dress and long white veil walks up its central aisle arm-in-arm with her father. After embracing the awaiting groom the father retreats, and the couple advance to an altar draped with flowers where the presiding priest begins the wedding mass (fig.31).² Apparently jarring with the symbolism of the modern ceremony, emblazoned all along the ambulatory wall surrounding them is a late-sixteenth-century fresco cycle depicting the violent tribulations of hundreds of martyrs from the first four centuries of Christianity. From the perspective of the camera lens, directly over the betrothed the viewer can make out a large pictorial field in which a man cuts out the tongue of a cloaked figure in a classical landscape (figs.32,29). Next to this image, divided by a large stone column in the foreground, four dead bodies stretch out upon a grassy plane. The couple exchange their wedding vows; with the larger than life-size depiction of an executioner hacking at the

¹ Andersen (1846), p.267.

² The wedding ceremony video is in the public domain on the video sharing website Vimeo as promotional material for a Roman wedding photography agency, and is representative of standard ceremonial practice at the basilica.

wrist and fingers of a young woman as his backdrop (fig.27), the bridegroom slips a ring onto the finger of his wife-to-be (fig.33). The bride's father looks on, his paternal gaze framed by the frenzied actions of a machete-wielding figure in the fresco on the wall behind him chopping furiously at a lifeless corpse (fig.34). The now-married couple take the communion of bread and wine offered by the priest, consuming the sacral matter of flesh and blood so vividly depicted all around them (fig.35). The ceremony is at an end.

For the modern observer, the pictorial ornamentation that forms the vivid backdrop to this joyous ceremony might seem to raise troubling equivalences between gestures of betrothal and dismemberment, between declarations of faith and their bloody consequences. Behind the altar, in the direct eye-line of the nuptial couple, three female saints are represented in the midst of their martyrological passions. Saint Cecilia stands bleeding in a deep vessel of liquid; to her right is Saint Agatha, whose mangled torso reveals her as the victim of a punitive mastectomy. In the following image a muscular hand wrenches the teeth of Saint Apollonia from her gums (figs. 14-16). Each of their passion narratives is concerned with the sacrament of marriage; this aspect of their hagiographies was emphasised in a number of martyrological sources produced in the Counter-Reformation scholarly orbit out of which these frescoes emerged, and points towards unacknowledged resonances between the present-day ceremony and the late-sixteenth-century images that constitute the pictorial staging being so studiously ignored by both celebrants and witnesses alike.

As committed brides of Christ, the precondition of these saints' marriage to God was their terrestrial torment. Cecilia's commitment to chastity in marriage leads to her persecution, whilst Apollonia's status as a virgin 'well along in years' opens her up to pagan suspicion and condemnation.³ The explicitly sexual nature of Agatha's torture meanwhile stems from her refusal of the advances of a local official. After Agatha's torments conclude with her

³ For Cecilia see Voragine (1993), pp.704-9; for Apollonia, *ibid*, p.268.

eventual death in prison, Jacobus da Voragine's immensely popular hagiographic compendium the *Golden Legend* describes how 'airs bore his bride heavenward to Christ.'⁴ It is perhaps in the hagiography of the Roman saint Agnes however, whose passion appears further along the ambulatory wall (fig.21), where the disjunct between the symbolism of Santo Stefano's late-cinquecento fresco cycle and the modern usage of the space it adorns is most explicit. Agnes' execution is again precipitated by her refusal of the local governor's son's marriage proposal. In his 1591 *History of the Virgin Saints of Rome*, the Oratorian Counter-Reformation scholar Antonio Gallonio imagines Agnes informing the governor's son that she is already betrothed to Christ, describing at length the worthiness of her celestial spouse-to-be:

I have already given myself to another lover, much more noble than you, and more worthy. He has proffered to me the most precious ornaments, which are not like yours. I have given him my faith, and he has promised to be my spouse; and he has already married me with the ring of the holy faith. Still not satisfied, he has put a necklace of inestimable value on my neck, and pearls without price on my ears; he has adorned me all over with resplendent gems; moreover, he has put his sign on my face, so that I will not receive lovers other than him.⁵

Agnes knows that her commitment to remaining a bride of Christ will lead to her torture and murder; she is however so delighted at the prospect of being reunited with her divine spouse that she exhorts her 'trembling' executioner to get on with it, 'offering herself spontaneously to his knife.'⁶ When he finally deals Agnes the death blow, the resulting blood is the consummation of her mystic union with Christ: as an early sixth-century *passio* relates, 'with her

⁴ Ibid., p.157. For the continuing resonances of these narratives in the marriage economy of early-modern Europe see especially Elliot (1993), esp.p.65; 209-10.

⁵ Gallonio (1591b), p.17. For original text, see appendix 1. For Gallonio's text as an attempt to resolve a Counter-Reformation paradox seeking to exalt both the early-modern institution of marriage and the superiority of early-Christian chastity, see Ditchfield (2001).

⁶ Gallonio (1591b), p.22.

death, Christ consecrated for Himself a bride and a martyr, who was soaked in the rosy-red blush of her own blood.⁷ In the various narratives of Agnes' terrestrial death, marriage and martyrdom coalesce in a sacramental act that eschews the temporary pleasures of the material world and aims at a kind of eternal union.

Today Santo Stefano Rotondo, a consecrated basilica that holds no regular liturgical services, enacts its public function in the city of Rome almost exclusively as host to the sacrament of marriage. Funerals, with their focus on the ontological transformations enacted through death and rebirth, are not staged here, and nor are baptisms, the sacramental rite most fully associated with martyrdom in early-Christian and early-modern theology. Online message boards are awash with prospective couples eager to tie the knot at the basilica, but the frescoes that will provide the visual backdrop to their ceremonies are rarely mentioned. One handbook does note the apparent incongruity between the imagery and the sacrament in its recommendation of the basilica as a wedding location, suggesting that the *sposi* 'ignore the *martiri atroci* figured in the mosaics of the church,' focusing their gaze instead on the impressive architectural space and the light flooding in from the windows high up in the central drum.⁸ The author resolves the disjunct between the joy of the 21st-century ceremony and the torments depicted all around with a tongue-in-cheek assertion that 'love is blind,' and given her mischaracterisation of the massive frescoes as mosaics it seems that it is possible to avoid looking too closely at the 'atrocious' scenes if one is determined enough. But the martyrological backdrop emblazoned in a continuous, eternally recursive cycle around the central space of the basilica remains an unavoidable ever-present in the visual records of all the marriages staged there, afterimages visible and yet not seen in a panoply of wedding photographs, videos and cards housed as treasured mementos all over the city.

⁷ Collected and translated in Lapidge (2018), p.359.

⁸ Coltellacci (2014), giorno 292.

The scene of martyrological marriage, implicit in the modern ceremony but whose web of significations is only made clear when brought into dialogue with the hagiographic sources conditioning the basilica's ornamentation, contains as in a microcosm the lines of inquiry this thesis pursues. Images have their own histories, and the ways in which they are seen (or not seen), conceptualised and appropriated change over time. Yet those initial signifying codes can live on in unexpected ways, perpetually haunting the present as shadowy presences. The irruption of disembodied presence implied by the corporeal avatars of Cecilia, Agatha and Apollonia brought uneasily into the light of the modern matrimonial ceremony raises interpretive challenges that visitors to the Roman basilica might be ill-equipped to resolve. As presences both there and not there, they can tell us much about the uncanny power of the cadaver and its representation. Haunting the selfies and official photographs of these ceremonies, their invisibly-visible cadavers are barely acknowledged relics with one foot in the past but still living on in the present (fig.36).

Recognising the polyvalent signifying power of images of the body across time and space, this thesis is concerned with martyrdom and its representation in the unique cultural climate of post-Tridentine Rome. The Council of Trent's decree on imagery had fundamentally linked image-making to the formation and maintenance of sanctity in 1563, and the saintly body was a vital tool in the reforming church's promotion of imagery.⁹ As a potential site of desire and waywardness, however, its presentation had to be rigidly controlled. As Stephen Campbell perceptively writes of Counter-Reformation negotiations of the fraught role of the body and its representation in Catholic devotional practices, 'the body is a dangerously unstable symbolic vehicle, even in the visual propaganda for a religion that

⁹ For an overview of how the 'ancient idea that martyrs repeat, complete and renew Christ's passion and his work of salvation gained new currency in Counter-Reformation Rome,' see Herz (1988a).

has as its core the mysteries of incarnation and resurrection.¹⁰ Campbell is speaking primarily of the controversies unleashed by the unveiling of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and its critical aftermath, but careful attention to sacred art treatises of the latter cinquecento reveal that concerns about the body's inherent instability as a 'symbolic vehicle' carried over into negotiations of the violated bodies of martyrological imagery in this period.

The virtues of this increasingly popular genre came to be extolled by many of the most important thinkers in the Roman church; during the final three decades of the sixteenth century depictions of martyred saints proliferated all over the city, and artists such as Nicolò Circignani made their reputations on their ability to effectively image the brutalised body. The popularity of this genre was surprisingly short-lived, however – the insistently iterative model of martyrology proposed at Santo Stefano Rotondo would rapidly give way to a much more abstract approach to martyrological representation, one where landscape and its meditational potential came to the fore. This is most clearly expressed at the Jesuit novitiate church of San Vitale which was frescoed with 'landscape martyrdoms' in the closing years of the century, a topic I wish to explore in a subsequent project.¹¹ With regards to the much more direct images of Santo Stefano, I argue that in these images the ambiguous signifying potential of the violently disintegrating body was stretched to breaking point, provoking concerns that they might lead their viewers towards undesirable acts of beholding. As a discursive site that tenaciously rejects univocal interpretations, the represented martyred body can be seen to encompass many of the contradictions inherent to the reforming Church's promotion of imagery during the Counter-Reformation. The wider story of this pictorial trend has yet to be written, and although this thesis will draw upon a wide range of this visual material, Circignani's 1582 fresco-cycle at Santo Stefano Rotondo is the lynchpin around which my work revolves.

¹⁰ Campbell (2002), p.612.

¹¹ For San Vitale see especially Witte (2008), pp. 108-16.

As one of the most imposing and architectonically complex early-Christian edifices in Rome, the church itself has been the subject of much research and speculation from the early-modern period up to the present day. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace this (still contested) history in detail, in what follows I offer a truncated account of the basilica's genesis and its late-sixteenth-century institutional evolution into the site of the vivid pictorial martyrology that this project proposes to analyse. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, Santo Stefano was consecrated by Pope Simplicius in the late fifth century.¹² Upon its completion the edifice was one of the city's largest churches, rivalled only by the Apostolic basilicas of San Pietro and San Paolo fuori le Mura.¹³ Its vast size and unusually complex centralised plan has led to a number of competing theories concerning the original function of the church. The original structure, as reconstructed in Hugo Brandenburg's isometric plan (fig.37), consisted of four concentric circles of increasing diameter. The inner circle comprised 22 ionic columns supporting a trabeated roof (today an arcade) surmounted by a drum perforated by 22 windows.¹⁴ This was surrounded by an outer ambulatory ring, which also had a colonnade of 36 columns and 8 piers (44 vertical elements in all) supporting an arcade. Although the arcade is now blind and constitutes the wall on which the frescoes are painted, this was originally open and led to a second ambulatory punctuated by four cross arms which terminated in chapels. The cross arms gave access in turn to a narrow fourth, outer ring.

During the early-modern period it was widely believed that the edifice had been adapted from a pagan structure, often identified as the Temple of the Faun, so out of touch did its richness of decoration and grandiose plan

¹² Loomis (ed.), *The Book of the Popes* (1916), p.105.

¹³ Brandenburg (1998), pp.2-3.

¹⁴ Szakács (2012), p.219.

seem with received perceptions of humble early-Christian spirituality.¹⁵ Excavations carried out in the twentieth century demonstrated that the building had been a Christian one from its genesis; nonetheless, the basilica's siting atop an important pre-existing pagan complex (including a large Mithraic temple), as well as the extensive use of *spolia* as evidenced in the columns, liturgical furnishings and architectural detailings remain vivid reminders of its pagan prehistory and continual evolution as an architectural and devotional palimpsest.¹⁶

The church's centralised plan has led some scholars to identify its original function as a martyrium, as this kind of architectonic form was often utilised for such a space in early-Christian architecture.¹⁷ More specifically, the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem has been frequently adduced as an architectural paradigm for the Roman basilica, most influentially by Richard Krautheimer.¹⁸ Problematizing this otherwise plausible hypothesis, Santo Stefano appears to have been founded in the absence of the holy body which would justify its role as such a locus of veneration. If the architectural signifiers of the martyrium in general and the Holy Sepulchre more specifically do offer an insight into the founding principles of the church, it is more likely to be found on a symbolic level. Another scholarly tradition proposes that the apparently irresolvable contradictions between the space of the church and the exigencies of Catholic worship indicate that the building was originally begun as a secular project, owing its singular architectonic character and symbolically resonant geometry to the influence

¹⁵ The Florentine patrician Giovanni Rucellai simply referred to it as a 'tempio d'idoli' in 1449, whilst it was also sometimes identified a temple of Bacchus or the Templum Divi Claudii. See Polacco (1972), pp.65-66., n.2. For Ingo Herklotz (2009, p.561), this paradoxical 'paganisation' of what was actually a Christian building was part of a discursive attempt to distance Christian architectural practice from earlier pagan ideals.

¹⁶ Ceschi (1982). The excavations uncovered the presence of an ancient barracks, the *Castra Peregrina*, as well as the Mithraeum beneath the foundations of the church. For a recent compilation of Santo Stefano's *spolia*, see Hansen (2015), pp.206-18.

¹⁷ Bailey (2003), p.134.

¹⁸ Krautheimer (1969), pp.69-106.

of antique architectural theory and neo-pagan ideals. Caecilia Davis-Weyer argues that the building was begun not under papal authority but instead commissioned by the Emperor Anthemius.¹⁹ In his final work on the basilica, Krautheimer further theorised that the building, which he identified as a palatial reception space, was incomplete on the emperor's death, and that Pope Simplicius simply adapted the project into a church and added the dedication to Saint Stephen.²⁰

More recently, Bèla Szakács has demonstrated that the basilica's perfectly centralised character in fact owes much to later renovations that sought to align the building with Renaissance ideals exalting the architectonic and spiritual superiority of centrally planned spaces. According to Szakács, the earliest iterations of the church possessed a markedly axial character. The present location of the altar, for example, positioned in the centre of the inner colonnade, can only be dated to the restoration undertaken by Bernardo Rossellino in the mid-fifteenth century.²¹ Rossellino may have collaborated on the project with Leon Battista Alberti, who did much to exalt the spiritual pre-eminence of circular churches during the quattrocento. Before this it is likely that the altar was located in the western part of the church, opposite the original entrance in the eastern wall.²² There was also an altar in the eastern chapel of Primus and Felicianus, further emphasising the liturgical significance of this axis. Rossellino added the altars on the north and south of the building, creating a system of altars in the shape of a centralised cross.²³ As Szakács argues, whilst the central altar accords to what Renaissance architectural theorists such as Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Sebastiano Serlio considered to be the ideal arrangement of a circular ecclesiastical space, it ran the risk of blurring the clear hierarchical relationship between altar, priest and congregation made possible by a longitudinal orientation. If

¹⁹ Davis-Weyer (1989), pp.64-69.

²⁰ Krautheimer (1994), p.11.

²¹ Szakács (2012), pp. 216-56.

²² Davis-Weyer (1989), pp.78-9.

²³ Szakács (2012), p.229.

the original arrangement of the church possessed a more axial focus than usually imagined however, then some of the paradoxes relating to the apparent disjunct between its form and function might be resolved.

A lack of solid documentation means that these architectural analyses must remain to some degree speculative, and this thesis makes no attempt to enter into this debate. These complex questions of changing relationships between form and function also resonated through the later decorative history of the basilica, whose fortunes over the coming centuries fluctuated significantly. As its ecclesiastical significance waxed and waned, Santo Stefano was subjected to a number of restorations, re-articulations and modifications. The church was restored and ornamented with mosaics as early as the sixth century under the auspices of Pope John I, and then more importantly by Pope Theodore I between 642-9. Theodore's restoration included the translation of the relics of Primus and Felicianus to the basilica and the construction of the chapel that houses them, as will be discussed in chapter 1. In the twelfth century the church was subjected to major renovations ordered by Innocent II, probably to save the fragile building from collapse. During this campaign the original outer wall was destroyed, and the arcade of one of the ambulatory rings was walled up to form the new surface on which the frescoes would be painted over 400 years later.²⁴

Innocent's intervention notwithstanding, the church's increasingly isolated position on the still-shrinking footprint of the medieval city made its decline inevitable - in the 1430s the humanist Flavio Biondo noted that it had lost its roof and was in a state of near ruin.²⁵ During the massive infrastructural works instigated by Pope Nicholas V throughout the city in preparation for the Holy Year of 1450 the basilica was restored by Rossellino, who gave it a new roof and entrance portal and rearranged its liturgical

²⁴ For the dating of the walling in of this arcade, see Krautheimer (1970), p.221; Ceschi (1982), pp.131-133; Avagnina (1976), pp.197-203.

²⁵ Quoted in Ugonio (1588), p.290: 'la chiesa di S. Stefano Rotondo che ha il cognome dell'istesso monte Celio, et al presente è senza tetto.'

space.²⁶ Despite its venerable historicity and intrinsic architectural value, however, Santo Stefano's relatively inaccessible location on the lower slopes of the Celian hill continued to limit its utility as a liturgical space. In 1454 the basilica was entrusted to an order of Hungarian Pauline hermits, under whose auspices it was decorated with frescoes representing the lives of St. Stephen and St. Paul the Hermit a year later.²⁷

Hungarian Catholicism had been ravaged by both the Reformation and Ottoman incursions during the cinquecento, and by the 1570s over 70% of the population practiced Reformist doctrine in some form or other.²⁸ As the number of Hungarians joining monastic orders continued to dwindle, fewer and fewer of Santo Stefano's monastic community hailed from the Magyar lands. The increasingly ad-hoc order was rumoured to be given to licentiousness, and was subjected to heightened scrutiny in the orthodox climate of the Roman Counter-Reformation.²⁹ Istvan Szanto, the first Hungarian alumnus of Rome's Jesuit-run German college, argued that the monastery should be taken from the hermits and transformed into a seminary training Hungarian priests who could play a role in arresting the faith's decline in the mother-country.³⁰ Szanto's campaign succeeded, and Pope Gregory XIII officially founded Rome's Hungarian College in 1579. Santo Stefano was to be requisitioned from the hermits and returned to the control of the Hungarian state, on the condition that it be provided as the site for the new institution. A pontifical delegation arrived at the site in May 1579, and the decree was read out to the four remaining hermits who were forcibly ejected from the monastery by armed guards. Because of their recent successes in administering other national colleges in Rome and further afield,

²⁶ Ceschi (1982), p.140.

²⁷ For the decorations see Biermann (2000), pp.111-127.

²⁸ Bitskey (1996), p.23. A disastrous defeat at the hands of Turkish troops at Mohács in 1526 devastated the country's ranks of high-profile adherents to Catholicism. See Daniel (1992), p.49. Lutheranism then spread rapidly and bloodlessly in the 1520s, and Calvinism was widely established when the Second Helvetic Confession was approved in 1567. Tóth (2007), p.210.

²⁹ Koller (2008), p.30.

³⁰ Bitskey (1996), p.32.

the Hungarian institution was entrusted to the care of the Society of Jesus, with the Jesuit theologian Franciscus Turrianus elected as its first rector.³¹

The autonomous Hungarian college enjoyed only the briefest of existences, however. Unable to attract enough students, the College failed to establish itself on a viable footing and Gregory ordered its amalgamation with the nearby Jesuit German College in April 1580.³² This latter institution had been re-founded under the pope's auspices in 1573, from which time it had been managed by its rector Michele Lauretano, a Jesuit of Illyrian descent from the Marche town of Recanati who had taught theology at the University of Bologna, where he became friends with the city's future bishop and influential sacred art theorist Gabriele Paleotti.³³ Lauded by contemporaries as 'rector primus et optimus,' the documents that detail the re-founding of the Germanicum indicate that Lauretano was a key figure in its re-organization. In 1579 he formulated the *Leges Collegii Germanici*, in which he elaborated on the extensive liturgical programme that was to be an essential component of the students' training.³⁴ The papal bull announcing the amalgamation in the following year decreed that Santo Stefano would pass to the unified German-Hungarian college, with the proviso that the Jesuit fathers regularly celebrate the divine offices there. Despite the Polish king Stephen Báthory petitioning the Pope to restore Santo Stefano to the Hungarian nation against what was seen as its expropriation to the German institution, the basilica passed into the possession of the unified college, whose property it remains to this day. At first the forced union caused great consternation in the ranks of the remaining Hungarian curia, and the nephew of the Polish king, Andrea Báthory, caustically remarked that fire and water

³¹ For the rapid spread of the Jesuit schools and colleges see O'Malley (1993), pp.200-42.

³² According to a letter from the rector of the College Aloisio Spinola to the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide in 1658, the college 'da se stesso non poteva mantenersi.' Transcribed in Veghseo, p.138. The foundation and early history of the German college has received much scholarly treatment and I do not re-tread this ground here. See especially O'Malley (1993) pp.234-8; Cesareo (1993); Fink (2018).

³³ H. Jacobs (2001), p.2293; Nimmo (1984).

³⁴ Transcribed in Lukacs (1981), pp.68-77.

would mix more easily than Hungarians and Germans.³⁵ Lauretano claimed that relations between the two sets of students quickly improved under his tutelage however, writing in 1584 that 'Hungarians and German get along very well in the College.'³⁶

Shortly after coming into possession of Santo Stefano Rotondo in 1580, Lauretano embarked on his most extensive patronage campaign of the visual arts.³⁷ According to Pope Gregory XIII's contemporary biographer Marc'Antonio Ciappi, soon after Santo Stefano's re-assignment it was ornamented with 'nobili pitture con l'histoire più celebri de'Santi Martiri di Christo.'³⁸ The blind arcades of the ambulatory's outer ring each received a large-scale martyrological fresco, thirty-one in all (fig. 37a), as related by Lauretano in a diary he kept of events in the college between October 1582 and July 1583 and now preserved in the college's archives. The rector's diary is arguably the most valuable surviving primary source related to the cycle, and his description is worth quoting in full: in this 'large and beautiful church of round form,' 'vi sono depinte le persecuzioni della chiesa, che furono sotto diversi Imperatori nelle primi 400 anni ab incarnazione, distribuite in 31 quadri.'³⁹ Thirty survive, with two eighteenth-century additions.

The series begins with Christ's crucifixion (fig.1) and cycles through a catalogue of the bodily horrors of Christian persecution over the next 400 years before concluding with an image of revitalised and triumphant sanctity liberated from terrestrial torment (figs.30 & 38). Taken together, the images constitute what Leif Holm Monssen has aptly described as a 'continuous polyptych...an earthly mirror image of a *militia coelestis*.'⁴⁰ The frescoes were

³⁵ See Bitskey (1996), p.40.

³⁶ Ibid., p.45.

³⁷ Lauretano had overseen the restoration of the college's satellite church of San Saba in 1575, but this intervention was limited in comparison to the scale of the decorations commissioned for Santo Stefano. See Strinati (2009); Zuccari (1984), p.38.

³⁸ Ciappi (1596), p.22.

³⁹ Lauretano, *Diario*, p.49.

⁴⁰ Monssen (1982a), p.28.

rapidly transformed into prints by Giovanni Battista de'Cavalieri, ensuring their wide dissemination across Europe - no fewer than four series were published in the decade after the cycle was completed.⁴¹ Completing his programme of renovations, Lauretano had an octagonal stone 'recinzione' replace the balustrade that ringed the central altar; this was decorated with 24 small monochrome frescoes relating the life and miracles of St. Stephen, also by Circignani.⁴² Contemporary with the Santo Stefano martyrology, Lauretano also commissioned a fresco cycle for the nave of San Apollinare (another of the College's satellite churches), dedicated to the eponymous saint's life and martyrdom. This cycle has been destroyed, but survives in a series of prints also engraved by de'Cavalieri. According to an obituary of the rector, Lauretano's singular and sustained martyrological emphasis in these projects marked him as an innovative patron on the contemporary sacred art scene, with the author declaring that he was 'the first that I know who began to paint the martyrs suffering for the confession of Christ, with captions that declare the persons and the qualities of the torments, and afterwards it was much followed and imitated by many others.'⁴³ It was primarily down to Lauretano that the Society of Jesus came to be known as 'pioneers in proposing martyrdom cycles,' as Flavia Strinati notes.⁴⁴

The artist Lauretano turned to in order to realise his vision in both churches was Nicolò Circignani, a prodigiously industrious painter from the Tuscan hill-town of Pomarance.⁴⁵ At the time he was employed by the Pope as a superintendent to the on-going works on the third floor of the Vatican

⁴¹ Noreen (1988), pp.689-715.

⁴² See Mara Nimmo (2009).

⁴³ P.Fabio di Fabiis, 'Necrologio del P.Michele Lauretano,' quoted in Haskell (1958), p.399: 'Fu il primo che io sappia che cominciassse a far dipingere nelle chiese li Martirii patiti da S.ti Martiri per la confessione di Christo, con le sue note che dichiarono le persone et le qualita de tormenti, come si vede in S.to Stefano Rotondo: et dopo fu seguitato ed imitato da molti altri.'

⁴⁴ Strinati (2009), p.586.

⁴⁵ Baglione (1642, p.178) describes him as a 'facile dipintore a fresco.'

palace and in the Tower of the Winds.⁴⁶ Circignani, who had been working in Umbria throughout the 1570s after his first, brief stint in Rome in 1564, had been recalled to the papal capital specifically to participate in this project by the astronomer and mathematician Ignazio Danti, who came up with the elaborate decorative programme.⁴⁷ Danti speaks highly of Circignani's 'elegantissime pitture' in his *Anemographia*, written to commemorate the completion of the Tower's decoration, and his approval must have increased demand for the painter in the city.⁴⁸ Another of the artist's patrons, Cardinal Fulvio della Corgna, for whom Circignani worked in Castello del Lago, may also have recommended Circignani's services to Lauretano through his connections with the Jesuit hierarchy.⁴⁹

The work at Santo Stefano began in the summer of 1581 and, after a protracted break during the winter months, finished in August the following year.⁵⁰ Circignani enlisted the collaboration of the landscape specialist Matteo da Siena to contribute the elaborate pastoral backgrounds to his own figural work.⁵¹ In October 1581, after he had begun work on the cycle, the Roman Academy of Saint Luke accepted Circignani's deposit for membership to the society, whose statutes limited association to artists who had reached a certain degree of acclaim.⁵² Giulio Mancini reports that the artist possessed a 'pleasing manner' and way of speaking, vital traits for a painter moving within the refined circles of the city's secular and ecclesiastical elites, and this was a period of 'unceasing activity' for the painter.⁵³ Mancini further

⁴⁶ Degl'Innocenti (1997), p.26; Nicola Courtright, (2003), pp.89-102. For further biographical details concerning the artist's early life, see Galassi (2007), p.9. For transcripts of the archival sources that allow a reconstruction of Circignani's career and personal life, see especially Canuti (1952) and Prato (1996).

⁴⁷ Nimmo argues that the haste with which he left his ongoing projects behind in Umbria indicates he left for Rome with the guarantee of a big commission. See Nimmo (1984), p.197.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.202.

⁵⁰ The completion date is provided in Lauretano's *Diario*, p.32.

⁵¹ Baglione (1642), p.41.

⁵² Degl'Innocenti, p.32. For an account of the evolving statutes of the *Accademia*'s early years see Witcombe (2009), pp.107-18.

⁵³ Mancini (1956), pp.206-7; Canuti (1952), p.192.

described him as a 'uomo di grand'invenzione' and approvingly noted his *prestezza*, whilst Giovanni Baglione records in his biography that Circignani was 'praised in every place that he worked.'⁵⁴ Circignani was thus a respected and established artist, far from the 'acknowledged hack' and 'second-rate painter' conjured up by numerous modern scholars.⁵⁵ Whilst it is true that Baglione asserts that Circignani was content to work for 'poco moneta,' the sums that the artist received for the Jesuit college cycles do not seem to be exceptionally low considering the rapidity with which the works were completed: for Santo Stefano he received 320 scudi (a sum to which the pope himself contributed), and the later cycle at the English college fetched him fully 700.⁵⁶ He was certainly well-enough paid to become a rich man by the end of his life, when he owned extensive properties in Castel della Pieve.⁵⁷

The results of Circignani's industry at Santo Stefano were widely appreciated by its first audiences, and the cycle's immediate impact is amply attested to in contemporary writings. Pompeo Ugonio wrote that the basilica was 'so wonderfully adorned and illustrated that there was perhaps no other church in Rome as beautiful and joyful to behold,' and Ottaviano Panciroli lauded the 'beautiful pictures in fresco that express with great vivacity the martyrdoms of the most celebrated saints.'⁵⁸ Lauretano records in his diary that high-ranking members of the Curia frequently travelled out to the Celio eager to see for themselves the cycle's novel martyrological idiom – amongst them were Popes Gregory and Sixtus, and Cardinals Carlo Borromeo, Gabriele Paleotti, the art-collector Ciriaco Mattei and powerful patron Alessandro Farnese.⁵⁹ That the church suddenly enjoyed such influential and widespread praise marked a dramatic elevation in status on the Roman landscape for a

⁵⁴ Mancini (1956), pp.206-7; Baglione (1642), p.42;

⁵⁵ See Spivey (2001), p.134; Haskell (1958), p.399.

⁵⁶ Nimmo (1985), p.101. For the wild vacillations in going rates for artists in Rome during this period, see Spear (2013), pp.310-20.

⁵⁷ Canuti (1952), p.193.

⁵⁸ Ugonio (1588), p.290; Panciroli (1725), pp.42-3.

⁵⁹ Lauretano, *passim*.

structure described only a century earlier as being without a roof and falling into abject disrepair.

A number of important studies have attempted to situate Circignani's ambulatory frescoes in their historical, theological and political context, unravelling their relationship to the pedagogical and political goals of the Society of Jesus in particular.⁶⁰ Valuable as these studies are, they have tended to elide in varying ways the most striking aspect of these frescoes: that is, the viscerally graphic visual presentation of the body in pieces. Take, for example, Kirsten Noreen's summative assertion that the martyrdom imagery of Santo Stefano 'demonstrates an emphasis on the accurate historical recording of saints and martyrs characteristic of the Counter-Reformation period.'⁶¹ Noreen's conviction that the frescoes embody an intellectualising and even objective spirit of historical inquiry does not seek to account for the frenzied nature of the bodily desecrations to which the martyrs of the early church are being subjected, or the frequent and deliberate discontinuities of chronology and place identifiable within these scenes. Monssen meanwhile explicitly absolves himself from the obligation to account for the corporeal violence of Circignani's scenes, arguing that they so 'obviously adhere to [a] late Manneristic idiom' that they invite no further art-historical analysis. Relegating the visual evidence to the background, Monssen instead argues that the scenes are 'conditioned by their main textual sources,' and devotes himself to uncovering the hagiographic genealogies of each martyr depicted in the cycle.⁶²

The present project takes a different course, proposing to return the violence attendant to representations of fragmented bodies to the centre of analysis. I argue that the interpretive codes governing representations of the martyred body were exceptionally fluid during a period where the Christian

⁶⁰ See especially Buser (1976); Monssen (1981, 1982, 1983); Nimmo (1984&5); Noreen (1998); Korrick (1999); Insolera (2000); Bailey (2003).

⁶¹ Noreen, (1998) p.713.

⁶² Monssen (1983), p.40.

past was being hotly contested along confessional lines, and only a fundamentally interdisciplinary approach to its study can hope to recover something of its complexity as an agent of cultural fashioning during the Roman Counter-Reformation. This thesis accordingly proposes a series of intermedial and inter-textual encounters taking Circignani's frescoes as their starting point. By bringing these visual records of martyrology into dialogue with a range of contemporary matter including post-Tridentine treatises on relic veneration, art-theory, sacred music and guidebooks to Rome's numinous landscape, a richer picture of the opportunities and limitations attendant to representations of the disfigured holy body can be brought to light.

Although the lines of inquiry this thesis pursues are often markedly different from the concerns that have animated previous academic engagements with Circignani's work, I of course build on this body of scholarship. It thus remains illuminating to delineate the major interpretive strands that have shaped this critical discourse in more detail. For most authors, the confessional divide playing out all over Europe during the sixteenth century provides the key to interpreting the cycle. The nature of martyrological sacrifice, and what it meant to be a witness to the faith in times of persecution, had a clear resonance for the students of the Roman Jesuit colleges who had committed to the restoration of Catholicism in their native lands. Missionary work emerged as a central activity of the Society of Jesus in the wake of the Tridentine council, and the students of the various national pedagogical institutions were expected to return to frequently hostile environments where persecution and even death were very real possible outcomes for those preaching Catholic doctrine. Rome's Jesuit-led English college, founded with the aim of ministering to the recusant communities of Elizabethan England, suffered so many losses to its alumni on their return to Britain that it was informally known as the 'seminarium martyrium,' and Filippo Neri greeted the students of the college with the

Prudentius-inspired appellation 'flores martyrium.'⁶³ The College's church of San Tommaso di Cantorbery was also decorated with 35 martyrological frescoes (now lost but again preserved in engravings by de'Cavalieri) by Circignani shortly after the work at Santo Stefano was completed.⁶⁴ These frescoes conjoined scenes from contemporary Britain with images of ancient martyrs, rendering explicit the continuity between these temporally distant moments of persecution: the victims of Elizabeth's purges were the spiritual heirs to the martyrological tradition of the early church.⁶⁵

The Santo Stefano frescoes are by contrast limited to depictions of scenes of early-Christian martyrdom; but although the extent of persecution directed towards missionaries seeking to proselytise and minister in the German-speaking north was limited in comparison to events in Elizabethan England, instilling a spiritual readiness to risk personal safety in the re-evangelising mission was also a central goal of the German-Hungarian college. According to the papal bull announcing the college's foundation, the German-born students would emerge from the institution equipped to 'search out the hidden venom of heretical doctrine, to refute it, and then to replant the uprooted trunk of the tree of faith' in their homeland.⁶⁶

For Ignatius more generally, the crucifixion of Christ was the centrepiece of mankind's chances for salvation, and his companion Jerome Nadal wrote that the principal founding motivation of the Society of Jesus was to

⁶³ Bitskey (1996), p.19; Dillon (2002), p.173.

⁶⁴ Underscoring the link between the two institutions, Lauretano's diary suggests that members of the English community were regular visitors to the German-Hungarian college in the year following the completion of the frescoes at Santo Stefano and San Apollinare. In an entry written during Lent in 1583, the rector lauds 'the good behaviour of the devoted English who are in the German College noon and night.' (p.55).

⁶⁵ See Williams (2005). Describing the imperative to document the plight of the college's alumni in Britain, William Allen wrote to the institution's rector Alfonso Agazzari in 1582 that he would divine in their actions 'a constancy quite equal to that of the ancient martyrs. Quoted in Pollen (1908), p.ix.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Cesareo (1993), p.831.

encourage its members to take up the cross in his emulation.⁶⁷ The Santo Stefano cycle begins with the image of Christ crucified, before viscerally demonstrating the bloody sacrifices that might be necessary to enact such an *imitatio Christi* in practice. In this reading, the martyrs depicted along the walls of Santo Stefano are exemplars of a particularly Christian form of steadfast devotion, willingly suffering torture and terrestrial death for their religious convictions. Confronted with these virtuous models of devotion, the students of the college were provided with a paradigm against which they might assess their own progress on the road to a life in Christ. The link between Jesuit missionary practice and the cycle's presentation of the martyrs' steadfastness in the face of persecution has been frequently drawn in the scholarship: Leslie Korricks' view that the frescoes were intended to 'encourage novitiates to consider, draw strength from and imitate the sacrifice made by the martyrs and originally by Christ in the name of their religion' is representative.⁶⁸ Noreen meanwhile posits that missionaries would have carried de'Cavalieri's prints with them as sources of inspiration on their perilous northward journeys after graduating from the college.⁶⁹

In Sebastian Morales' report of his visitation to the German college in 1578, a clearer picture of Michele Lauretano's conviction that an Ignatian form of *imitatio Christi* was vital for the project of Northern Europe's salvation emerges. Morales finds much to praise and much to censure in Lauretano's rectorship, but one of the most revealing comments refers to his frequently fraught relationship with students who displayed less than exemplary commitment in their search to walk the path of perfection ('*caminar a la perfettione*'). According to Morales' report, the rector openly demonstrated his 'disgust' at these types, not showing them any warmth or even deigning to speak to them. Whilst Morales in general has reservations about Lauretano's harsh and unbending attitude, the visitor acknowledges

⁶⁷ For the cross as central metaphor of the cycle see Monssen (1983) pp.37-9; Insolera (2000), p.132.

⁶⁸ Korricks (1999), p.170. See also Macioce (1990), p.87 and Beltrame (1990), p.213.

⁶⁹ Noreen (1988), p.699.

that 'he has his reasons which are not to be disdained.' That is, 'the remedy of Germany hangs entirely on the German college, and in order to aid it there is a need of highly virtuous and holy priests.'⁷⁰ Lauretano's concern for countering heresy in the north could hardly be clearer, even taking on the extreme manifestation of snubbing his own students if he deemed them unfit for the challenge of taking up Christ's cross.

The kind of emulation the fresco cycle sought to inspire in its viewers might alternatively be understood in a more figurative sense for those observers outside the Order who encountered them on feast-days, a kind of martyrdom accessible to the everyday faithful without the necessity of giving up one's body for Christ. For Alexandra Herz, the martyrological imagery of late-cinquecento Rome was not directly 'intended to bolster courage' amongst a viewership preparing for a similar fate. Instead, it sought to demonstrate to a much wider audience the way in which the martyrs helped to bring about 'the establishment of God's kingdom,' showing how their example might be followed in daily struggles against the works of a devil who was everywhere present in a corrupted world.⁷¹ For the great majority of the Catholic faithful for whom actual martyrdom was not a feasible demonstration of their piety, it nonetheless remained possible to display similar values of steadfastness or *patientia* in approaching the travails of the world with equanimity.⁷² In reality, it seems likely that the frescoes were intended to inspire a readiness for both literal and abstract emulation of Christ and his martyrs. Describing the 'wonderful power of the cross against the demons' in 1542, the Jesuit companion of Ignatius Pierre Favre conjoined

⁷⁰ Transcribed in Lukacs (1981), p.330: 'Et ha le sue raggioni non da sprezzare, con dire che Germania da questo solo rimedio del Collegio Germanico sta pendendo, et per agiutarla bisogna preti di molta virtù et santità.'

⁷¹ See Herz (1988a), p.68.

⁷² See Gross (2005), p.32. This more allusive understanding of the role of the cross in man's daily search for salvation was taken up by the influential Counter-Reformation theologian and preacher Luis de Granada, who wrote in 1580 that the life of a true Christian comprised a striving towards *perfettione* that was 'quasi una perpetua croce.' Granada (1580) Bk.3, part 2, pp.29-30. For a contemporary formulation of martyrdom as the most perfect exemplification of *patientia*, see Rocca (1588), pp.81-93.

the literal and metaphorical aspects of Nadal's call to take up the cross of Christ: 'I desired it to be possible that I might always bear that cross (I mean that material cross) in my soul, in a real but spiritual way through faith and hope.'⁷³

If emulation of Christ and his followers through various kinds of *imitatio Christi* was one way in which the frescoes may have linked the distant events they portrayed to the political climate of early-modern Europe, exalting the idea of martyrdom and its representation might also be considered as part of a wider project of configuring the triumphant Catholic church as the true heir of the early church's apostolic mission. In demonstrating that the earliest Christian communities and patristic fathers venerated both the relics and likenesses of the martyrs as a central aspect of their liturgical practices, Counter-Reformation scholars and churchmen sought to revive Rome's reputation as a spiritual *caput mundi* in direct counter to the arguments of Protestant reform. From this perspective Santo Stefano's massive martyrology emerges as a triumphant reassertion of the legitimacy of the cult of the saints. Thomas Buser has argued that the primary function of martyrdom scenes in late cinquecento Rome was propagandistic rather than emulatory, an attempt to reassert the legitimacy of the martyrological pantheon in the face of Protestant ridicule.⁷⁴ For him, the Jesuit college frescoes and the prints derived from them constituted potent weapons in a propagandistic battle being waged with contemporary Protestant histories such as the *Magdeberg Centuries* (1559) and John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Days* (1563), texts which sought to portray the modern Roman church as the embodiment of an increasingly corrupted institution in which secular power had contaminated genuine sentiments of faith.⁷⁵

⁷³ Chipps Smith (2002), p.8.

⁷⁴ Buser (1976), p.428.

⁷⁵ See Röttgen (2009), pp.115-33.

One vital way in which the Roman church sought to position itself as legitimate heir to the Christian mission in a climate of confessional division was through a recovery of the early Christian patrimony that was indelibly imprinted into the physical landscape of the city itself. The so-called Paleo-Christian revival movement was giving a revitalised historical face to the steadfast heroism of the earliest exemplars of martyrological witness, and contemporary explorations of the Catacombs and other archaeological sites of Christian interest helped to increase the visibility and presence of the Early-Christian world for a late cinquecento Roman audience.⁷⁶ In a well-known passage, the Oratorian historian, martyrologist and patron of the arts Cesare Baronio described how ‘all of Rome was filled with wonder’ at the discovery of what was believed to be the Catacombs of Priscilla on the Via Salaria in 1578, ‘for it had no idea that in its neighbourhood there was a hidden city, filled with tombs of the days of the persecutions of the Christians.’⁷⁷ Inspired by these discoveries, numerous restoration projects were undertaken by Roman cardinals in their titular churches that sought to invoke the pious atmosphere of early-Christian houses of worship, demonstrating the ‘continuity of the contemporary church with that of the first centuries.’⁷⁸ Ambitious works of ecclesiastical history such as Baronio’s *Annales Ecclesiastici* and archaeological texts such as Antonio Bosio’s *Roma Sotteranea* sought to provide what Simon Ditchfield has described as a *lectio divina* of Rome’s sacred landscape’ for learned audiences.⁷⁹ A rash of popular guidebooks meanwhile provided the common pilgrim with the means to explore the city’s surviving martyrological patrimony as preserved in its sacred sites.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ For the significance of the rediscovery of the presumed catacombs of Priscilla to the supposed ‘archaic’ style of the Santo Stefano frescoes, see Buser (1976).

⁷⁷ Baronio, quoted in Pastor, Vol.19, pp.268-9.

⁷⁸ Zuccari (1984), p.33; 89.

⁷⁹ Ditchfield (2005), pp.167-92.

⁸⁰ See for example Pompeo Ugonio’s *Historia delle stationi di Roma che si celebrano la Quadragesima* (1588), Giovanni Severano’s *Memorie Sacre delle Sette Chiese di Roma* (1630) and Ottavio Panciroli’s *Tesori nascoti nell’alma città di Roma* (1600). Each of these texts made much of Rome’s status as spiritual home to the martyrs, who in

The Society of Jesus was centrally involved in bringing the glory of the early-Christian city to light during this period: permits to excavate ancient sites frequently found their way into the hands of prominent members of the order such as the Spaniard Bartolomeo Alcazar, who boasted in 1589 that he had been able to collect ‘cabezas y huesos de muchos Martyres’ from the cemetery of San Sebastiano.⁸¹ A veritable flood of relics made their way out of the city through the auspices of prominent Jesuits, and the German-Hungarian college itself had a profound role to play in this resurgent relic trade. In 1576 Gregory XIII donated a small vineyard near the Via Salaria to the institution for the stated purposes of the relaxation and repose of its young scholars.⁸² Beneath their new *terreno*, the Jesuit fathers discovered the cemetery of Basilla, thought at the time to be part of the wider subterranean city of Priscilla so lauded by Baronio.⁸³ Baronio himself was recorded to have descended into this catacomb along with ‘molti Padri della Compagnia’ in the 1590s, providing his authoritative judgements on the provenance of the remains they found there.⁸⁴ Free to explore the abandoned passageways of the complex undisturbed, the Society enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the custodianship and diffusion of sacred bodies found on their property. Claudio Acquaviva, general of the Order at the time of the Santo Stefano commission, obtained a permit from the papacy granting him the privilege of extracting as many relics from the cemetery as he wished, and to send them to any parties he considered worthy of receiving them.

Acquaviva’s commitment to liberating corpses from the cemetery was well-known, and some of the bodies destined for Jesuit institutions around the world were of more than doubtful provenance. When Bosio visited the cemetery in 1608 guided by the Jesuit fathers, he noted with dismay the

Panciroli’s representative characterization were like soldiers with their relics as identifying heraldic symbols. See Toubert (2014), p.196.

⁸¹ Ghilardi (2009a), p.441.

⁸² Steinhuber (1906), Vol.1, p.161.

⁸³ For the cemetery, see Amore (2013), pp.21-2.

⁸⁴ See Ghilardi (2009a), p.471.

damage the Society has caused to the catacomb in their zeal for removing its sacred treasures: 'the cemetery was ruined, and broken, and with all its monuments opened.'⁸⁵ It seems certain that the discoveries made on the German college's land in the late 1570s would have influenced the martyrological emphasis of Lauretano's patronage a few years later, and the rector writes in his diary that he and the students frequently visited the *vigna*.⁸⁶ The relationship between the resurgent relic culture of the late cinquecento and the production of images of desecrated saintly physiognomies at Santo Stefano will be explored in detail in the opening chapter's interrogation of the material conditions surrounding martyrological representation in the Counter-Reformation city. Analysing the profound urban transformations undertaken in Rome in the 1580s, I argue that Circignani's frescoes operated as 'relic proxies,' two-dimensional images performing the vital devotional work of 'real' holy body parts as building blocks of an imagined sacred geography founded upon the ancient blood and flesh of martyrdom.

Chapter two contextualises the rise of martyrological imagery in late cinquecento theories of sacred art, arguing that graphically violent representation should be considered as a distinctive genre of artistic practice at this time rather than a recidivist aberration. Challenging a scholarly narrative that divorces this kind of imagery from so-called 'progressive' artistic currents leading to the development of the early Baroque, this chapter asserts that martyrological imagery was enthusiastically embraced by artists, patrons and theorists alike as 'una cosa nova e bella,' a kind of art that was as aesthetically pleasing as it was liturgically effective. In this context, I will interrogate what kind of pleasures could be derived from looking at graphic violence in this period through the specific prism of Circignani's frescoes. By closely engaging with the rash of art-theoretical texts that were published in the wake of the Council of Trent's final session

⁸⁵ Bosio quoted in Ghilardi (2010), p.216.

⁸⁶ For visits to the *vigna* see Lauretano's *Diario*, p.82;83;88.

on imagery in 1563 (with particular focus on Giovanni Andrea Gilio's 1564 *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* and Gabriele Paleotti's 1582 *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*), new light will be shed on the productive nature of martyrological art in the final decades of the sixteenth century, and the pressure that such works exerted on Counter-Reformation ideals of decorum.

Chapter three explores the relationship between musical performance and visual representation in the specific context of Rome's German-Hungarian college in the final decades of the sixteenth century. Under Lauretano's rectorship, the college enjoyed a pre-eminent reputation for polyphonic music at the same time as its churches were being adorned with the martyrological frescoes that constitute the central concern of this thesis. How might a contemporary visitor more steeped in the conceptual discourse of music than of painting, whether that was Lauretano himself, the students who came into contact most frequently with the frescoes, or reforming ecclesiastical figures seeking to police the nature of sacred art in the wake of the Reformation, approach the violent imagery at Santo Stefano Rotondo and San Apollinare? Engaging with theoretical approaches to music in the Counter-Reformation dealing specifically with concepts of clarity, harmony and variety, I argue that post-Tridentine musical theory and practice offer an illuminating parallel to coeval martyrological imagery.

Building upon the interpretive challenges and interdisciplinary lines of enquiry raised in the preceding chapters, chapter four interrogates in more detail the difficulties encountered by patrons and painters in their attempt to harness the discursive power of the martyred body in the Roman Counter-Reformation. Images of extreme violence have been characterized by twentieth-century theorists such as Valentin Groebner and Elaine Scarry as destroying subjectivities and making stable identity formation impossible. Engaging with this critical corpus and bringing it into dialogue with contrasting early-modern discursive efforts to promote models of

commemoration and invent usable histories centred on the holy body, this chapter will question to what extent the readability of traditional markers of hagiographic citation could be ensured in the context of violent martyrological imagery during the Counter-Reformation. Drawing parallels between the Santo Stefano frescoes and Alfonso Paleotti's 1599 *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore et delle Piaghe in Esso Impresse col suo Prezioso Sangue*, a discourse on the mutilated body of Christ as mediated by the Turin Shroud, I explore the mobilisation of systems of inscription and captioning in visual martyrological programmes in an attempt to fix stable hagiographies onto the images they complemented. Ultimately, the focus of this chapter also constitutes the analytical thread of this entire thesis: how could violent images of distant martyrdoms, with their emphasis on (nearly) naked bodies, violence and impious lusts, be harnessed into a wider narrative in which they are legitimised? Could these images be made to speak with a single and unified voice through the authoritative power of the *logos*, or did they invite an inevitably pluralistic spectatorial response which threatened to undermine the devotional messages they were intended to convey?

Broadly speaking, the cornerstone of my methodological approach is an attempt to bring the Santo Stefano frescoes into dialogue with a range of post-Tridentine texts which engage with sacred imagery in general and martyrological representation in particular, demonstrating how the critical perspectives concerning the possibilities and limitations of this kind of imagery that they outline both find expression and are challenged by actual martyrological artistic practice in Counter-Reformation Rome. Although these texts are well-known to art historians, an investigation of how they relate to martyrological imagery specifically has not heretofore been carried out in any detail. Deriving from multiple institutional institutions, the sources I draw upon are not always easily or naturally aligned in their assessment of the devotional merits of visual registers of graphic violence. Of the principal writers that will receive attention here, Gabriele Paleotti was a respected

jurist and expert in canon law close to the Oratorians;⁸⁷ Paleotti's cousin Alfonso was also deeply influenced by the mysticism of Filippo Neri, and under the spell of a Bolognese visionary controversially attempted to institute devotional practices based around spiritual sermons and music in imitation of the Roman oratory in the canonry he held in his native city.⁸⁸ Also operating within the Oratorian orbit was the martyrological historian Antonio Gallonio; although he eschewed the mysticism practiced by Alfonso in favour of more conventional hagiographic concerns, he also demonstrated a near obsessive concern with the specifics of bodily fragmentation.⁸⁹ Gilio, finally, was an ordained Dominican priest. Attending more freely to the plurality of discursive factors that crowded in upon Circignani's ostensibly simple act of creating a fresco cycle for a Jesuit college church in 1580s Rome allows for a fuller picture of the semiotic webs of significance in which these images are entangled to emerge.

If Santo Stefano's violent images did not signify singly for the multiple contemporary audiences and theorists who grappled with them, it is inadequate to propose singular critical readings that attempt to foreclose the possibility of their discursive doubling; accordingly, the same images recur multiple times as objects of analysis in different contexts as this thesis progresses. Take the 29th fresco of the cycle (fig.29): when read through the prism of a contemporary culture of relic veneration and exchange, the scene appears to foreground the relationship between the partitioning of the holy body and the consecration of sacred space on the devotional map of the Counter-Reformation city. If the same image is brought into dialogue with the kind of sacred music for which the German-Hungarian college became famous, a very different reading showcases the discursive potency of polyphony to overcome the silencing of religious persecution and declaim the glory of god. In a similar way, the cycle's 27th image (fig.27) provides the

⁸⁷ For Paleotti see Prodi (1959).

⁸⁸ Fanti (1984), p.371.

⁸⁹ For Gallonio see Touber (2014).

starting point for a re-evaluation of a pictorial regime that extolled the aesthetic and signifying potential of the bloody reality of martyrdom in chapter two; in chapter four, meanwhile, the fresco foregrounds the paradoxes inherent to a commemorative practice that sought to elevate the formless material matter of corporeal degradation to a key somatic marker of identifiable sanctity.

As this thesis engages with the mutability and multiplicity of interpretive response, at certain points I deploy the writings of modern works of theory in my attempts to negotiate what I take to be the inherently pluralistic encounter between viewer and artwork set into motion by the Santo Stefano fresco cycle. In drawing on authors from Roland Barthes to Valentin Groebner and Elaine Scarry, I do not do so in a systematic sense or with the intention of seeking in them an explicit methodological framework for my discussion of Circignani's frescoes. Nor, I hope, does the presence of these authors in my readings replace historically grounded analysis founded upon documentary evidence with anachronistic speculation. The primary visual evidence of the images themselves, seen through the prism of the art-theoretical tracts of the *trattatisti* who sought to expand upon the laconic Tridentine decrees, in every case forms the starting point of my arguments; deviations into modern-driven theoretical avenues are pointed towards only in as much as they can help to frame or illuminate the wider questions of representing violence and viewer response that I argue lie nascent within the challenging martyrological imagery of Santo Stefano Rotondo. As will be seen in the context of my engagement with Scarry's work on the epistemological and ontological ramifications of torture in particular, it is often the discontinuities as much as the parallels between these diverging models that can be most illuminating. My intention, in short, is not to obscure what is historically distinctive about these works or their post-Tridentine context, but rather to bring this out through a principle of juxtaposition.

Nonetheless, it would be disingenuous to deny that the fundamental lessons of post-structuralism have influenced the course this thesis has taken: a critical approach that attempts to do justice to the polyvalent interpretive possibilities set into motion by images of martyrdom is in once sense obviously aligned with post-structuralist negotiations of the multiple and contested nature of any interpretive process. Perhaps most famously, Roland Barthes attempted to lay to rest the spectre of an 'Author God' who disseminates a 'single theological meaning' to his readers, arguing that by privileging the author of a work one inevitably imposes upon it 'a stop clause,' furnishing it 'with a final signification, to close the writing.'⁹⁰ If any one ideological position might be taken to run through this thesis, it might be related to the conviction that to ascribe stable singular meanings to these visual 'texts' is to risk doing violence to the complex and shifting relationship between viewer and artwork that such material instantiates. I am convinced, however, that a recognition of the plurality of viewer response, and a concern over its implications, is as fully characteristic of debates surrounding the possibilities and limitations of sacred art in the closing decades of the sixteenth century as it is of post-structuralist attempts to undermine once and for all the univocal possibilities of any text; an attempt to restore plurality to the pictorial field of martyrdom is not, in other words, merely an anachronistic application of post-modern scepticism towards meta-narratives. In Gabriele Paleotti's 1582 *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, a critical treatise on the possibilities and limitations of sacred art in the Counter-Reformation, the bishop would draw attention to exactly the same issue. Acknowledging the essentially constitutive role that a viewer might play in imbuing a single image with multiple, and often contradictory, significations, Paleotti writes: 'as from the sap of flowers born in the fields bees make sweet honey and spiders extract deadly poison,' the 'same image will give birth to more differences according to the various ideas that the viewers take from it.'⁹¹

⁹⁰ Barthes (1977), p.147.

⁹¹ G. Paleotti (1582), p.172. For original see appendix 1.

Paleotti's spectator foreshadows Barthes' reader, whose neurological landscape constitutes a subject-space where the multiplicity of a text is fully inscribed and meaning finally produced. This insight for Paleotti serves to underscore the difficulties inherent to the policing of the boundaries between sacred and profane images: a painting that should, through its formal characteristics and content, convey only the pious doctrine of sacred history 'may nonetheless be seen in another light by another viewer.'⁹² But whilst this potential for multiplicity was a source of anxiety for Paleotti, it also provides the justification for the interdisciplinary methodologies that structure this project. Adopting the terms of Paleotti's metaphor, this thesis will attempt to play the role of both the honey bee and the poisonous spider, bringing contradictory readings of the nature of martyrological imagery into dialogue. Rather than insisting on singular interpretations of visual sources that naturally encourage diverging readings depending on the cultural and intellectual formation of its plural viewership, I will attempt to foreground such plurality - for it is often in the interstices between competing theories of interpretation, and the dialogues instantiated at the sites of their collision, where meaning most forcefully resides.

⁹² Ibid, p.171. For original see appendix 1.

CHAPTER 1

MARTYRDOM, RELIC PROXIES AND INVENTING THE 'NEW JERUSALEM': MEDIATIONS BETWEEN BODY AND CITY IN POST-TRIDENTINE ROME

Introduction: Angelo Grillo's Rome: A City of Risen Bones

At the imperious sound of this dread pope's trumpet, the resurrected bones of this vast body half-buried beneath the Roman countryside have sped to answer his call: thanks to the power of his zealous and exuberant genius, a new Rome is born from its ashes.

- Angelo Grillo, 1616¹

Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

- Book of Ezekiel, 37

Returning to Rome after a ten year absence from the city, the Genovese priest and poet Angelo Grillo was astounded by the changes that had been imprinted everywhere upon its urban landscape. In a letter written to his cousin from a metropolis being transformed at dizzying speed into the majestic *Città Santa* of pope Sixtus V's imagination, Grillo marvels that 'everything seems to be new' - from piazzas to fountains, aqueducts to obelisks. So little did he recognise the crumbling city of his youth that he evinced a kind of cognitive dissonance centred on the newly unfamiliar city: 'Io sono in Roma, & pur non ci trovo Roma.'² The Rome that Grillo encountered was in the midst of a profound spiritual re-fashioning. 'From every part of the world the faithful gather,' Pompeo Ugonio writes in the same period, 'stirred by the desire to admire and delight in the treasures of this holy city, seat of Religion, and a New Jerusalem on earth.'³ The papal city was being colonized by the treasures of its own past, a past dramatically cast as the bedrock of a spectacular future. A magnificent new urban space was

¹ Grillo (1616), p.352. For original see appendix 1.

² Ibid, p.351.

³ Ugonio (1588), p.3.

rising from the moribund Roman *campagna*, made possible through the re-appropriation of its own long dormant bones; those distant bones took on many forms, from the corporeal remains of forgotten Christian martyrs dredged from the recently rediscovered catacombs to the marble limbs of antique sculptures which had been hidden from the light of day for over a millennium, or even the exoskeletons of long-buried pagan and early-Christian monuments. As the sixteenth century drew to a close and the Counter-Reformation reached its apogee, these multivalent bodies and body-proxies were compelled to unite and rise up through the earth to restore the glory of what was once and forever the Christian *caput mundi*.⁴

The idea that Rome could be made anew by 'becoming old,' that the venerable bones of centuries past could be fashioned into a newly resplendent centre of the Christian world, exerted a powerful grip on the contemporary imagination. Grillo's striking metaphor of Rome as a vast semi-decayed body finally ready to rise up from its own substratum to don the new clothes of a holy city purged of vice explicitly deploys the language of corporeal resurrection.⁵ It is impossible not to be reminded of vivid cinquecento renderings of the raising of the dead, from Michelangelo's skeletons transmogrifying into muscular nudes as they rise from the Sistine Chapel floor to Signorelli's resurrected anatomical studies conversing with skeletons in Orvieto cathedral (figs. 39-40).⁶ Given that the martyrs themselves would be the first to share in Christ's bodily resurrection, Grillo's metaphor implicitly points to the status of Rome as the glorious site of Early-Christian persecution, a graveyard for saints whose bodily sacrifices formed the devotional foundation on which the Christian world was sustained.⁷ In an

⁴ As Frederick McGinness (1995, p.189) writes, Rome's Counter-Reformation preachers contended that Rome was *caput mundi* 'because the place itself was holy, elected before all time to be the seat of the *sancta romana ecclesia* [corresponding] to the divine archetype established before all time.'

⁵ For earlier usages of metaphors of exhumation and resurrection in Renaissance Rome, see Greene (1982).

⁶ For Signorelli's skeletons see Gilbert (2002), pp.122-3, 128.

⁷ Whether or not martyrs were subject to bodily resurrection immediately after their death is a matter of scholarly debate. See Holleman (1996), p.147.

influential post-Tridentine account of the city's sacred sites, Giovanni Severano argued that 'all the countryside' crossed en-route to the church and catacomb of San Sebastiano 'can be called sacred' because of the caches of martyrs' bodies buried beneath the route.⁸ Grillo's contemporary Giovanni Botero also explicitly linked the physical presence of the martyrs with Rome's exalted reputation in his 1588 treatise *Of the Reasons for the Greatness of Cities*, where he writes that the city owed its pre-eminence to martyred blood, saintly relics and the sanctity of its places, things which 'drew innumerable people to it from the ends of the earth.'⁹

Harnessing the signifying power of these historically distant martyrs was thus a central aspect of the post-Tridentine acts of sacred urban renewal recounted by Grillo. This power extended beyond their material traces; during the final two decades of the cinquecento, depictions of martyred saints both ancient and modern proliferated all over the city, emerging as dramatic markers of Rome's revitalized sacred topography. A vast undead army was being conjured up throughout the Eternal City by theologians, patrons and painters seeking to repopulate and transform the churches and monuments of the city with the sanctity of their divinely-spilt blood. With heresies and schismatic visions buffeting the Catholic Church, blown in, as Pope Gregory XIII's cosmographer and iconographic advisor Ignazio Danti breathlessly put it, by bitter northern and eastern winds, the city's history and geography were mobilised in the defence of their faith as almost never before.¹⁰ To repel an invasion, Rome paradoxically had to invade itself.

⁸ Severano (1630), p.419: 'tutta la campagna, che si camina, si può dir Sacra; perche ha in sé molti Cimiteri.'

⁹ Botero (1588), p.32. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁰ See Danti's commentary on his programme for the Tower of the Winds at the Vatican, translated in Courtright (2003), p.73.

Three nearly identical bodies stretch out rigidly on an carpet of green grass (fig.28). Such are their physiological similarities, it seems that the viewer is witnessing the progressive mutilation of a single corpse, as in some early-modern precursor to the flip-book or animator's notepad. Behind this polyvalent martyrological form, the pulverised remnants of another body lie crushed between huge slabs of stone. The immense weight has caused this figure's eyes to pop out of their sockets, and bowels seep from his stricken torso. The insistent seriality of these bodies encourages the viewer to read this image not in the conventional left to right of the Western printed book or the right to left of Hebrew and Aramaic, but instead from top to bottom as eyes follow the evolution of the three corpses exhibiting progressively more complete stages of decapitation beneath the massive plinth which immures their sacred companion. This sepulchre exerts such huge physical pressure on both the body of the saint and the fresco itself that it seems to take on the material characteristics of a geological feature, an ancient rock formation rising from the pictorial bedrock like some great glacial erratic dominating its surrounding landscape. If one interprets this strange rocky outcrop to be instead the product of human labour, it would seem to be of prehistoric facture: a collapsed dolmen, or the blasted remnants of a megalithic tomb. In either case, the abiding impression it conveys is of a distant and mysterious past geography made eerily present by these freshly mangled bodies, whose fleshy organicity suggests that this massacre is a recent one despite the otherwise tangible antiquity of the scene.

This is the 28th fresco of the martyrological cycle Nicolò Circignani painted for Santo Stefano Rotondo in 1581-2. Constituting perhaps the most ambitious programme of ecclesiastical decoration centred upon the depiction of the martyred body in post-Tridentine Italy, the cycle graphically instantiates the imbrication of massacred Christian physiognomies with strategies of urban renewal in the devotional climate of the Counter-Reformation city. This scene depicts the aftermath of the martyrdoms of the Roman saints Bibiana, John and Paul, whose legends had been long

apocryphally intertwined;¹¹ joining them is the crushed Artemius, a Roman soldier renowned for his ability to cure maladies relating to the spine and testicles, also martyred under the reign of Julius the Apostate but otherwise unrelated to his painted companions.¹² On first glance it would appear that the holy bodies in this fresco are being dragged slowly down into a loamy oblivion by the inescapable pull of gravity and the geological rhythms of time, fulfilling the logic of memorial expurgation frequently ascribed to pagan persecutors in Christian hagiographies.¹³ But what if, instead of viewing this scene as representative of corporeal decomposition, of bodies subjected to processes of organic decay and putrefaction, this temporal narrative were to be inverted? One might equally plausibly read these saints as emerging *upwards* out of the earth, narrative signification following the passage of our gaze as it moves up the wall from the lowermost decapitated body to the more complete physiognomies of those above. Rising up from the ancient bedrock of the Roman countryside that had imprisoned them for over a millennium, the holy corpses of the martyrs are in this reading answering the papacy's clarion call of resurrection in the dying years of the cinquecento, taking their place as the exalted corporeal foundations of the new Rome that Grillo imagined to be heterochronically rising from the ashes of a traumatic century of religious schism.¹⁴

Read in conjunction with Grillo's description of a subterranean Rome rising up to colonise itself at the dawn of the seicento, the passage from the Book of Ezekiel that forms this chapter's second epigraph allows us to reconceptualise the discursive import of this surprisingly passive

¹¹ See Leyser (2007), pp.158-9.

¹² For Artemius' historicity and ninth-century passion-text see Teitler (2017) pp.41-9.

¹³ For a detailed post-Tridentine account of this kind of memorial expurgation see Bosio (1632), ch.2; see also Kyle (1998) p.254; Lehtipuu (2015), p.166.

¹⁴ I refer to Michel Foucault's use of the term (1986, pp.22-27), denoting the existence of multiple temporalities co-existing in a single space such as a library, museum, urban palimpsest or, significantly, a cemetery.

martyrological drama.¹⁵ The still bleeding bodies of the Christian saints pictured at Santo Stefano are on the one hand antithetical to the dry and ossified skeletons described by Ezekiel. For Georges Bataille, the human corpse constitutes a powerful taboo across time and culture because it so graphically represents decaying corporeality, homeostatic rupture and the cessation of physiological processes, becoming nothing more than ‘food for worms.’¹⁶ Only when decomposition is complete and putrefying flesh finally gives way to clean white bones does mortality become more tolerable. In Ezekiel's vision, a similar process of rehabilitating the human body constituted a crucial step in preparing it for Resurrection. In this reading the body's ossification plays an important role in controlling the horror of its ineluctable decay, a precondition for those who hope to don the garments of eternal life.

On the other hand, such a sanitisation of the body also inherently distances it from the terrestrial concerns of a still-corporeal present. Fresh flowing blood was widely considered to be metaphorically as well as literally generative in Christian conceptualisations of martyrdom, most forcefully expressed in Tertullian's famous challenge to the magistrates of Carthage that ‘we multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed.’¹⁷ More broadly, early-modern theories of fertility were couched in the fleshy and fluid language of both agriculture and the bodily humours,¹⁸ and in this context the stricken corporeal matter uneasily emerging from the earth at Santo Stefano becomes a far more potent signifier of a sacral urban regeneration than Ezekiel's dry bones. The oozing bodies of Santo Stefano possessed the miraculous capacity to fertilise the earth and

¹⁵ Beyond offering a prophetic typology for Christian resurrection, Ezekiel's vision was also theorised in the early-modern period as dramatising the future restoration of Israel, buttressing its appropriateness as a metaphor for the revivification of sacred space described by Grillo. See Tromp (2007), esp.pp.61-2.

¹⁶ Bataille (1987), p.86. Bataille explicitly draws on the common medieval and early-modern European characterisation of the corpse precisely as ‘food for worms.’ See K. Cohen (1973), pp. 24; 78-9; 94.

¹⁷ Tertullian (2014), 50.13, p.227.

¹⁸ See Smith (2010), pp.69-79; Evans (2014), p.40; Oren-Magidor (2017), pp.57-59.

imprint upon it a singularly sacred footprint in a way unbounded by the limitations of time. It is precisely their fleshy embodiment which constitutes their perennially generative potential, their capacity to infect the fabric of the modern city with the corporeal matter of their distant persecution and transform it into a site of ontological remaking.

The corporeal and heterochronic conception of sacred space and geography envisaged by Grillo and represented in the Santo Stefano fresco sets into motion the lines of inquiry this chapter will pursue. In what might be described as Grillo's seismographic conceptualisation of urban space, the polyvalent fabric of Rome's sacred geography is constituted by a series of sedimentary eruptions that crack apart the linear progression of historical record. In this context it is worth focusing in more detail on the last type of monument he describes – the obelisks that so spectacularly emerged from the earth all across Sistine Rome. These dangerously pagan monuments would metamorphically rise from the city's subterraneity as spectacularly as the martyred bodies rose from the catacombs, and their soaring verticality fundamentally transformed the Roman cityscape in the dying decades of the sixteenth century.

I: Raising Obelisks, Transforming Bodies

'I shall raise from ruins the divine banner which shall be a remedy for our sins.'

- St. Helena¹⁹

As the blisteringly hot summer of 1586 drew to a close, Domenico Fontana completed one of the most daring feats of civic engineering in early-modern Rome: as part of Sixtus V's ambitious programme of urban renewal, Fontana directed the transportation and re-erection of the immense Egyptian obelisk that had been abandoned for centuries behind Saint Peter's basilica. Weighing over 350 tonnes, it took the labour of 800 men and 140 horses to install the monument as the centrepiece of what was fast becoming the Catholic world's most important public space.²⁰ Numerous contemporary accounts and engravings attest to both the complexity of the engineering project and the degree that the raising of the obelisk was staged as a spectacular public event (fig.41).²¹ An illustration from Fontana's account, *Della trasportatione dell'obelisco Vaticano*, vividly showcases the convoluted machinery he devised for the occasion (fig.42). In Fontana's version the actual transportation of the obelisk is effected by a pair of angels soaring high above the basilica; in the pious climate of the Counter-Reformation city, even the ingenuity of the Pope's own architect was contingent on divine approval.

After elaborate ceremonies of ritual exorcism and baptism overseen by the pontiff, the purified and converted stone was symbolically topped with a bronze cross, universally recognised symbol of Christ's victory over death through his martyrdom and crucifixion. The installation of the cross was marked by an extravagant procession, replete with the deafening roar of

¹⁹ As quoted by Gregory Nazianzus, transcribed in McCauley (1953) p.327.

²⁰ Magnuson (1982), p.44.

²¹ The massive public interest in the raising of the obelisks is reflected in the fact that a section on them quickly became a standard part of printed pilgrims' guides to Rome, beginning with the 1588 edition of Pietro Felini's *Trattato Nuovo delle Cose Maravigliose dell'Alma Citta' di Roma*. See Zorach (2008), p.146.

cannon-fire, the rhythmic drumming of the Swiss Guard and the hymns of the papal choir (fig.43).²² As the cross was placed at the summit, the choir sang the *Vexilla Regis*, a sixth-century verse originally used to commemorate a procession of a relic of the true cross, and a key part of public relic displays during Easter week in the late sixteenth century.²³ The association of the cross with victory had its origins in Constantine's adoption of it as his 'victorious vexillum' at the battle of the Milvian bridge, and the symbolic raising of this icon recalls the emperor's mother Helena's words on reaching Golgotha in her search for the true cross.²⁴ Helena's symbolic association of the act of raising with the redemptive power of the cross shares much with the Sistine project: in both, the cross possesses the miraculous capacity to redeem fallen man, vividly emblematised in the obelisk's pagan stone. Fontana recalled the impetus for his momentous undertaking in similar terms, proudly describing 'snatching the obelisk from the opprobrium of the idols to which it had in antiquity been dedicated' and finally 'consecrating it as support and foot of the holy cross.'²⁵

The Vatican obelisk was not the only pagan icon to be raised and converted to Christianity during the heady days of Roman renewal and reform. Buoyed by Fontana's technical triumph at the Vatican, Sixtus repeated the procedure at Santa Maria Maggiore a year later. Here the obelisk that once embellished the Mausoleum of Augustus was victoriously raised once again before the apse of the Marian basilica. A 1575 engraving by Étienne du Pérac depicts the immense monolith lying stricken in fragments outside the ancient Mausoleum on the Renaissance street, a vivid exemplar of the neglected state of these monuments just a decade before Sixtus'

²² Mercati (1589), pp.363-4.

²³ For the singing of the relics at Santa Maria Maggiore, see Lightbourne (2004), p.280; Bettley (1994), p.47.

²⁴ Herz (1988), p.60.

²⁵ Fontana (1589), p.3: 'traendola dall'obrobrio de gli Idoli, à cui fu anticamente dedicata...e consacrandola in sostegno, e piede della Santissima Croce.'

intervention (fig.44).²⁶ Once again, the restoration and transformation of the obelisk is inextricably linked to both the salvific power of the cross and the pope's power to compel fallen stone to do his bidding so memorably asserted by Grillo. As recorded in the inscription on the south-western face of the obelisk's base, 'Sixtus the Fifth, Supreme Pontiff, bade the obelisk lying in the street by San Rocco...to be restored to its original appearance and erected here in more auspicious wise to the Cross which brings salvation.'²⁷

The symbolism of the baptism of the Esquiline obelisk was perhaps even more pointed than that of its Vatican counterpart, as here the Egyptian monument itself is impelled to describe the logic of its own conversion and transformation. Inscribed around its base are the following words: 'I, who once sorrowfully served the tomb of a deceased Augustus, [now] very happily honour the crib of Christ, the eternal living God'(fig.45).²⁸ In an encomiastic celebration of Sixtus V from 1588, Giovanni Francesco Bordini also envoices the Esquiline obelisk. In elegant Latin verse, the obelisk-narrator explains that whilst Augustus reduced him to a state of death, Christ has returned him dramatically to life in a proxy-resurrection.²⁹ The engravings that accompany Bordini's text depict the now Christian obelisks soaring majestically towards the heavens, dwarfing even the basilicas they have been re-appropriated to glorify (figs.46&47). Between the tip of the obelisks and the crosses that they support are the prominent heraldic symbols of Sixtus' papacy, three mountains and a star.³⁰ The message is clear: the blasted fragments of du Pérac's engraving have been salvaged and glorified through Sixtus' intervention.

In the context of Counter-Reformation Rome, the implications of these

²⁶ For Raphael's abortive plan to transport the obelisk to St. Peter's for 30,000 ducats nearly 70 years earlier, see Marino Sanuto's diary (2008), p.461.

²⁷ Translated in Lansford (2009), p.121.

²⁸ Translated in Ostrow (1996), p.91. For the original inscription, see Iversen (1968), p.53.

²⁹ Bordini (1588), p.23. For original see appendix 1.

³⁰ For Sixtus' heraldic emblems see Mandel (1990), pp.22-3.

ritual acts of religious transformation, situated somewhere between forced conversion and willing metamorphosis on the part of the anthropomorphized obelisks, are highly suggestive.³¹ By empowering the obelisk to speak, the pope and his writers conferred upon it the morphology of a human body. Exploiting the literary topos of *prosopopeia*, the absent or voiceless entity gains the right of reply. As Paul de Man describes it, 'voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poiēn*, to confer a mask or face.'³² Giving face to the obelisks, the church's propagandists gave them identity. The imperfect pagan icons which lay mute and abandoned are rehabilitated and take their place amongst the Christian faithful, raised again through the infinite power of God's grace. As Grillo implicitly recognised, long dormant monuments, bodies, and classical statues were being salvaged, restored and transformed into powerful symbols of a reformed Catholic orthodoxy.³³

If the *prosopopeia* described in the inscription and by Mercati can be considered as part of an attempt to afford the resurrected obelisks a new identity and personal subjecthood, there was also a profound violence to this strategy of giving face. To return to the rituals of purgation that the obelisks underwent, the culmination of their conversion came about when the Pope 'carved a cross into each of its four faces with a knife' according to Mercati's account.³⁴ In order to redeem the obelisk's stone, still infected to its core with the stain of paganism, Sixtus personally carried out upon it a kind of divinely-ordained *sfregio*, a permanent disfiguring of the face that re-defines the victim's role in the community in a brutally visible act.³⁵

³¹ For the obelisks in the wider context of Sixtus' paradoxical role as both a destroyer and a conservator of pagan idols, see Cole (2009), p.57.

³² De Man (1984), p.76.

³³ For contemporary re-figurings of classical sculptures to fit Christian subjects, see Montagu (1989).

³⁴ Mercati (1589), p.363: 'scolpendo con un coltello una Croce in ciascuna delle quattro facciate dell'Obelisco.'

³⁵ In early-modern Rome, the face-disfiguring crime of *sfregio* was considered an escalation of other honour crimes related to trespass, damage to property and 'house-scorning.' See Cohen (1992), p.607.

The *sfregio* was a facial disfiguring perpetrated predominantly against women who challenged the patriarchal hierarchy of early-modern Italian societies or who undermined the honour of their male relations, inscribing 'a complex story of sin and sanction' onto 'the body of someone defenceless,' to adapt Valentin Groebner's broader definition of defacement.³⁶ In a similar way the cross disfigures the past symbolism with which the obelisk was originally invested, even as it bestows new honour on the monument as handmaiden to a Christian God. The *sfregio*-like inscription thus simultaneously redeems and forever marks the obelisk with the record of its ancient idolatry. The twin narratives of resurrection and transformation that enabled the re-integration of these pagan monuments into the urban geography of the city were part of an effective and adaptable metaphorical discourse which tied a narrative of salvation into the urban fabric of the city itself. A similar message was relayed in much starker terms in Tommaso Laureti's 1585 fresco depicting the *Triumph of Christianity* in the Vatican Palace's Sala Costantino (fig.48). Here, however, the materiality of the pagan statue of Mercury cannot be reformed, and the transformation enacted is a typological one. The idolatrous proxy of a pagan God is broken and morphs before our eyes into its legitimate Christian equivalent, the iconic cross of Catholic orthodoxy.³⁷

The sacramental nature of the obelisks' conversions under Sixtus invites a more detailed consideration of the nature of baptism in the theological climate of the Roman Counter-Reformation. The visual culture of the city was awash with scenes of the sacrament which vividly recall the logic of divine conversion emblematised in the obelisks' physical restorations. In 1599, for example, during Clement VIII's Jubilee-inspired restoration of San Giovanni

³⁶ Groebner (2004), p.87.

³⁷ For Laureti's fresco as representative of the productive iconoclasm that pervaded the papacies of Gregory XIII and Sixtus V see Buddensieg (1965), p.62. For more on the origins of the cross as a symbolic type capable of disfiguring pagan symbolic forms through its apotropaic power in late antique Christian practice, see especially Burkhardt (2016), pp.143-147 and Brown (2016), pp.150-177.

in Laterano, Cristoforo Roncalli depicted the mythic foundational moment of Constantine's induction into the faith (fig.49).³⁸ A decade earlier in 1588, the most ancient of the Roman obelisks had been dragged in pieces from the Circus Maximus and re-assembled before the basilica's transept. As part of this final Sistine resurrection, the base of the Lateran obelisk was inscribed with the assertion 'Constantine was baptised here,' and the apocryphal account of the emperor's baptism at the basilica was widely re-asserted in Counter-Reformation scholarship.³⁹

In Roncalli's depiction of the event within the basilica, a muscular, beautiful male body kneels in elegant contrapposto, arms folded across his chest. The emperor has been stripped of his imperial trappings, metaphorically rendered as a *tabula rasa* ready to receive the newly Christian crown and sceptre being proffered by the figure on the left. History's first Christian empire is being conjured into being through the holy water flowing from Pope Sylvester's baptismal bowl.⁴⁰ Like the stone-made-flesh of the obelisks in their own animating sacral ceremony, Constantine's flesh is afforded new meaning through its contact with water. But this stream of liquid has been perpetually arrested in mid-air, and it seems the key moment of baptism has been violently dragged into the time-span of a permanent present. Or perhaps in its stilling the sacrament has in fact been forever denied that temporal moment. Constantine's conversion, and baptism in general, was an act of becoming, and like all such acts it sidesteps the present.

In its most fundamental form, baptism encompassed a transformative remaking of body and soul, a ritual signifying the abandoning of a life led before conversion and a cleansing leading to a fresh start freed from old sins.

³⁸ For the historical associations between baptism and the Lateran basilica, see Freiberg (1995a), pp.16-17.

³⁹ These included Gregory XIII's *Martyrologium Romanum* and Baronio's *Annales Ecclesiastici*. See Pohlsander (2004), p.28.

⁴⁰ For the rise of Constantinian imagery in the Counter-Reformation city and the special significance of the baptismal scene, see Freiberg (1995b), pp.66-87.

Baptism's symbolic power as an act first of separation and then integration was recognised from the earliest codifications of Christian ritual practice. An initiate undressed completely, plunged into a tub or pool of water, and donned new clothing after emerging.⁴¹ This sequence of events is graphically illustrated in a tenth-century manuscript illuminated in Fulda depicting the Irish saint Cillian baptising a catechumen as part of his missionary work in pagan Bavaria (fig.50).⁴² In this two-part scene, the bishop blesses a naked neophyte immersed to his waist in a baptismal font in the upper register, flanked by two figures who assist in the rite. In the lower register this newest member of the Christian community dresses himself once more, his active gesture of pulling a garment over his head dramatically emphasising the sacrament's progression as a transformational process. Baptism transpires here along the lines of Arnold van Gennep's description of a rite of passage, passing through rituals of separation, transition and finally incorporation.⁴³ In the continuous narrative of the manuscript illustration, the baptismal pool itself functions as a threshold space, the place in which the liminally positioned exercitant completely gives up one life and commits to another. If, as Victor Turner argues, liminal moments of transition are ultimately invisible,⁴⁴ then the logic of the eternally stilled water dripping from Pope Sylvester's baptismal bowl in Roncalli's fresco receives a logical basis: to represent the highpoint of the liminal sacrament, that infrathin moment when past, present and future are simultaneously suspended, is fundamentally impossible. The old-fashioned pictorial device of continuous narrative depicts the progression of the ritual, but the exact moment of the lustral miracle remains elusive.

⁴¹ See Sennett (1994), p.140.

⁴² For the distinctive hand gesture Cillian is performing as part of the baptismal rite and its relationship to the sign of the cross, see Hahn (1997), p.23.

⁴³ Baptism occupies a heterochronic place in Gennep's theory, simultaneously a rite of separation and incorporation: 'the person baptized not only loses an attribute but also gains one' (1960, p.62).

⁴⁴ Turner (1967), p.95.

Baptism's role as a transformational ritual and central moment in a Christian's journey towards God places it in a conceptual relationship with martyrdom.⁴⁵ Like the rituals of sacralisation enacted upon the body of the catechumen and the stone of the obelisks, the purification of martyrdom also constitutes a violent effacement of one identity and the re-inscription of another in its place.⁴⁶ Recognising the profound analogues between these two ritual processes, baptism and martyrdom had been fundamentally linked in Christian theology ever since Saint Paul wrote to the Romans that 'so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death.'⁴⁷ A plethora of patristic writers explicitly formulated martyrdom as a 'second baptism of blood' that constituted a miracle of corporeal and spiritual transformation.⁴⁸

Returning to St. Cillian, one of the most well-known early-modern depictions of his life graphically insists on the relationship between these two symbolically charged sacramental acts (fig.51). In the foreground of the Master of Nuremberg's late fifteenth-century altarpiece, the freshly decapitated trunk of the Irish saint still kneels in pious supplication even as blood spurts from his viscerally opened neck and his head bounces towards the picture-plane. Directly behind this martyrological narrative and framed by the bloodied swords of the executioners, the still living Cillian baptises three figures in a large wooden tub, probably the Franconian king Gozbert and his retinue whom Cillian had converted years earlier.⁴⁹ The saint's martyrdom is symbolically positioned as his own form of privileged baptism; in dying for God and exchanging the holy water of ritual for the bitter sweetness of purifying blood, the martyr completes a journey initiated by the adherent's first lustral rite.

⁴⁵ See Jeanes (1993).

⁴⁶ See Mills (2005), p.150.

⁴⁷ Romans 6:3f.

⁴⁸ Origen (2010), pp.97-8; Cyril (1999), p.16; Augustine (2009), p.307; Cyprian (1964), pp.282-3.

⁴⁹ For Cillian's *Passio*, see Wood (2001), pp.160-1.

Within the pictorial logic of Santo Stefano's martyrological fresco cycle, acts of martyrdom and baptism are also frequently conjoined. Waist-deep in a great copper vessel filled to the brim with liquid, Saint John the Evangelist raises his eyes towards heaven (fig.6). As his pupils roll backwards in their sockets, the saint appears to be temporarily transported away from the terrestrial world in a moment of religious ecstasy. At first glance in the gloomy ambulatory, one might imagine that this is a sacramental scene of baptism by immersion, recalling the Fulda manuscript's illustration of St. Cillian baptising a catechumen. As eyes become accustomed to the light details quickly resolve themselves, however, and it soon becomes clear that we are witnessing a very different kind of ritual act. The cauldron contains not the bracing cold of purifying water, but rather scalding oil. As water and oil are very different mediums, it might be argued that the equation between martyrial cauldron and baptismal font here is an imperfect one. But oil had its own important role to play in the early-Christian sacrament. Before descending into the holy waters, the catechumen was typically anointed with an exorcising oil held aloft by a deacon standing to the left of the priest. After emerging once more, another deacon standing to the priest's right anointed this new Christian with an oil of thanksgiving. In Roncalli's depiction of Constantine's baptism, a figure kneeling to the pope's left holds aloft two distinctive ampoules which probably contain the two oils (fig.52). The metaphorical power of oil caressing flesh in the ritual is multiple: paralleling the transition from one state of life to another that baptism brings about, the double anointing of oil materialises the sacrament's twin dramas of exorcism and newfound proximity to God.⁵⁰

Oil thus anoints the body of the catechumen in baptism, but at Santo Stefano it also anoints the body of the martyr. In a dramatic doubling, baptism and martyrdom come together in the moment of contact between liquid and body. According to legend, the evangelist miraculously survived this first step towards his second baptism at the hands of the emperor

⁵⁰ See Cramer (1993), p.14.

Domitian, emerging from the cauldron 'untouched' and banished to distant Patmos.⁵¹ The site of the saint's miraculous escape outside Rome's Porta Latina is marked by a small oratory decorated with an enormous fresco of the muscularly naked Evangelist violently struggling to free himself from the iron grip of two men forcing him downwards into the steaming vat (fig.53&54).⁵² Above the door to the oratory, a Latin inscription reinforces the exalted status of Rome as site and urban witness to the Church's glorious martyrs, linking this to the ritual power of oil that runs through baptism, martyrdom, and the saint's life:

Here the athlete John drank the cup of martyrdom...Here the proconsul beat him with a rod and scraped him with shears, he whom the boiling oil was unable to injure. [His] flesh and the hairs on his head were sacrificed in this oil jar, which are consecrated to you, glorious Rome (*inclita Roma*).⁵³

John's would-be martyrdom, the inscription makes clear, redounds to the credit of the city in which it occurred; oil takes on yet another productive theological role, fundamentally linking the site of temporally delimited persecution to the eternal devotional time of sacred commemoration. Ultimately unable to harm the saint, the substance is paradoxically transformed instead into the preserving medium for his flesh and hair, holy corporeal matter that becomes consecrated to the city itself in its oleaginous immersion.

Oil, sanctified by sacred proximity, descends to anoint the very ground of 'glorious Rome' itself, a holy urban agglomeration that can rival the New Jerusalem of heaven in the terrestrial time of the sixteenth century. Even in

⁵¹ For a late-cinquecento account of John's escape to Patmos see Rocca (1588), p.82. Modern scholarship contends that John the Evangelist and the author of *Revelation* were likely distinct personages. See Crimm and Buttrick (1976), p.60.

⁵² Crescimbeni (1716), p.66.

⁵³ For original see appendix 1.

torture the ritually potent substance performs a consecratory role, partitioning sacred matter from its profane equivalent and producing the city of Rome as a privileged holy space in the process. John's mundane corporeal remnants signify polyvalently as traces of both Domitian's futile desire to obliterate the memory of the Evangelist and of the saint's perpetually enduring commemoration. The binding of oil and holy corporeal matter in the tempietto's oil jar creates a permanent life-in-relic, and analogously draws attention to the way in which the binding of oil or water and pigment in the pictorial reproductions of the event miraculously creates a kind of permanent life-in-painting. Quite literally, water or oil binds pigment to surface, colour to wood, canvas, or stone. It was partly down to the quasi-magical way in which pigment mixed with water alone could adhere permanently to otherwise impermeable wall surfaces that led Vasari to describe fresco as 'the most masterly and beautiful of all methods.'⁵⁴ That there might be an equivalence between the making of a relic and the making of a fresco will be taken up in more detail later in this chapter.

The image of John's cauldron is far from the only fresco at Santo Stefano which blurs the typological boundaries between lustration and death. If John was twice anointed, a number of other saints depicted in the cycle literalise the concept of holy death as a second baptism through their watery torments. Further along the wall is the geographically proximate final moments of the third-century pope Callistus, martyred in the Roman quarter of Trastevere (fig.13). A common thread in the various fragmentary accounts of his life is a devotion to baptism, and according to the *Golden Legend* a string of pagan converts were baptised by his hand.⁵⁵ When the emperor Alexander heard of Callistus' insurgent baptismal campaign, he ordered him defenestrated from the upper story of a prison into an awaiting well, which is still venerated in

⁵⁴ Vasari (1907), p.221.

⁵⁵Voragine (1993), p.628. Callistus was criticized for his overzealous baptismal practices by his contemporary rival Hippolytus, who claimed he tolerated 'second baptisms' promising forgiveness for sins which only God himself could pardon. See Hall (1991), p.81; Ferguson (2009), p.380.

the courtyard of Callistus' eponymous church. The manner of Callistus' execution is an ironic travesty of the sacrament for which he would be remembered in subsequent hagiography; but the punishment also emerges as the logical concluding act of the pope's baptismal mission, which began with his own lustration, continued in the mass conversions he wrought through his papacy, and concluded in his final bloody baptism in the Roman well. The representation of this scene at Santo Stefano, where the well-mouth that opens beneath the falling Callistus emerges as a visual proxy for the baptismal font utilised by the saint during his life, and in which the saint's blood and water suggestively intermingle, certainly impels the viewer towards such an interpretation.

Further details of liquid persecution recur in almost every scene. Next to Callistus appears Saint Cecilia immersed in an enormous pot, upper body stained with streams of blood flowing down her neck like so many tresses of golden hair (fig.14). Cecilia's *vita* constitutes perhaps the most sustained meditation on the twin salvific power of water and blood in Christian hagiography: after the failure of pagan attempts to boil her alive in her bath and a botched beheading, Cecilia survived for three days in her mortally mangled state preaching, converting, and baptizing visitors to her house.⁵⁶ Cecilia's martyrdom reputedly took place beneath the present site of her eponymous church in Trastevere a mere 700 metres from the well that doubled as her contemporary Callistus' sepulchre; the proximity of these two frescoes thus restages the actual geography of the city within the immersive microcosm of the basilica, grounding the physical space of the city in a discourse of holy interlocation through her site-specific death.

In the foreground of the cycle's 25th fresco meanwhile, Vitus, Modestus and Crescentia lie within a magnificent Roman bathtub which strongly recalls the red porphyry basin that serves today as the baptismal font of Milan's Cathedral (figs. 55&56). The backgrounds of many other scenes feature

⁵⁶ Voragine (1993), p.709; Gallonio (1591b), p.225; Goodson (2010), p.245.

figures being dumped into rivers, seas and lakes. In his Counter-Reformation sacred history *Roma Sotteranea*, Antonio Bosio noted that ‘the waters of our own Tiber have become, one could say, religious for the holy bodies thrown into it.’⁵⁷ The corpse-choked waterways at Santo Stefano are vivid visual analogues of Bosio’s macabre geography, lending credence to GB Bowerstock’s assertion that such acts could ‘become literally, as it often was metaphorically, a second baptism.’⁵⁸ It is surely for this reason that water, molten metals and bubbling oils play such a central role in so many of these paintings, the material conveyors of a miraculous spiritual transformation.

Whilst baptism was fundamentally a sacrament pertaining to new life, the spiritual transformation engendered by the act of salvific washing was always profoundly linked to death. A central tenet of Christian salvation maintains that one must die before being born again, and so if baptism signifies a birth into a new Christian life, by definition it must also constitute a kind of death.⁵⁹ That baptism invokes death in life in the same way that martyrdom invokes life in death was a cornerstone of much early-Christian catechetical exegesis. Cyril of Jerusalem writes that by ‘going down into the water’ a catechumen is ‘in a manner buried in the waters, as [Christ] was in the rock.’⁶⁰ In dramatically eschatological imagery, the descent into the baptismal font becomes a journey towards death, a ‘burial in the waters’ that foreshadows the final liquid interments so frequently rendered at Santo Stefano. Inscribed above the fresco depicting Vitus, Modestus and Crescentia immersed in their own boiling bath are the words of Psalm 123: ‘our soul hath passed through a torrent.’ According to the psalm the route to salvation encompasses being plunged into the uncertain waters of persecution and death, ‘a water insupportable,’ before emerging on the side of eternal life with the help of God’s grace.

⁵⁷ Bosio (1632), p.14: ‘il nostro Tevere, le cui acque divennero (si può dire) religiose, per li santi corpi in esso gittati.’

⁵⁸ Bowersock (2002), p.52.

⁵⁹ For baptism as a ‘proleptic sepulchral rite’ see Jensen (2011), p.40.

⁶⁰ Cyril (1999), p.17.

Cyril's allusive enjambment of baptismal font and holy sepulchre resonated in the historical texts, paintings and buildings produced in the spirit of Paleo-Christian revival in late sixteenth-century Rome. For scholars attempting to place the primacy of the Catholic Church on sound historical footing and defend the validity of the sacraments against sustained Protestant critique, harnessing the venerable metaphorical power of sacred space was a valuable discursive practice.⁶¹ In Carlo Borromeo's 1571 *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*, which sought to clarify how to adapt the Tridentine decrees to ecclesiastical spaces, the reforming bishop gives concrete form to Cyril's architectural eschatology. In a section outlining the appropriate design of baptisteries, we read that 'by the descent and moderate depth it should bear some resemblance to a sepulchre.'⁶² Borromeo's injunction that the design of the baptistery should resemble a tomb set into a recess in the floor of a chapel was taken up in numerous late-cinquecento Roman depictions of baptism. The space in which Caravaggio's *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* (fig.57) unfolds closely accords to Borromeo's conception of an early-Christian baptistery, for example.⁶³ In Roncalli's Lateran *Baptism of Constantine* meanwhile, the steps downward into the baptismal area called for by Borromeo and evoked by Cyprian are clearly visible to Constantine's left and right. This baptistery would probably have recalled the space of the sepulchre for educated contemporary viewers, indicating that here too the spectre of death hangs over what is outwardly an image of transformation and new life.

Intriguingly, Roncalli appears to have borrowed the striking pose of the baptised Constantine at San Giovanni from a composition he produced for

⁶¹ For a vivid contemporary account of the sacramental fault-line that had opened up in sixteenth-century Europe, see the Venetian courtier Girolamo Muzio's 1570 excoriation of reformers who rejected rites and ceremonies associated with the holy body - in particular baptism, confirmation, martyrdom, celibacy and fasting - in the dedication to his *Historia Sacra*.

⁶² Voelker (1977), pp.250-51.

⁶³ See Marini (1979, p.29); Trinchieri-Camiz (1990), pp.89-105.

Santa Maria in Aracoeli some years earlier (fig.58). This morphological precursor doesn't depict the transformational moment of the first Christian sacrament, however; instead, the athletic young Constantine has pictorially transformed into venerable Saint Paul, and the baptismal bowl that forms the instrumental centrepiece of that act has been replaced by an executioner's blade.⁶⁴ Recognising that baptism and martyrdom are linked by such gestural repetitions, in 1675 the Jesuit historiographer Daniello Bartoli saluted the 'strength of spirit' of those catechumens who 'lowered their heads' both to the priest in their new birth of baptism and to the '*mannaia* of the *manigoldo*' in the ultimate consummation of their new faith.⁶⁵

Like Constantine's baptism, the apocryphal execution of Saint Paul also exerted a generative impact on Rome's urban fabric. According to hagiographic tradition, three springs of holy water miraculously issued forth at the reputed site of his martyrdom in the city's southern outskirts, each font corresponding to the point of ground sacralised by the decapitated saint's bouncing head (fig.59).⁶⁶ In a material echo of the relationship between blood and water initiated in Christ's crucifixion, the jets of blood spurting from Paul's carotid artery are transmuted on each earthly contact, assuring the devoted pilgrim that the Apostle's martyrdom attains to the sacramental level of baptism. In the two works painted by Roncalli at the close of the sixteenth century, the obscured history of this sacramental doubling achieves an unexpected pictorial logic: within the contours of his pragmatic workshop practice, martyrdom has quite literally become a form of baptism, and baptism a form of martyrdom.

⁶⁴ Paul seems an appropriate prototype for Constantine - like the Emperor, the apostle was converted in a blinding vision during his middle-age, and Constantine himself implicitly encouraged the comparison. See Drake (2000), p.377. For Roncalli's paintings at the Aracoeli, see Heideman (1982), pp.69-97.

⁶⁵ Bartoli (1675), p.231.

⁶⁶ See Barbiero, (1938) p.10. The hagiographic tradition appears to have arisen in the thirteenth century. See Aavitsland (2017), p.13.

The unexpected sacramental doublings implicit in Roncalli's paintings and Circignani's Santo Stefano frescoes serve in each instance to imprint the geographical space of the Counter-Reformation city with the holiness attendant to venerable Christian acts of baptism and martyrdom. The fourth-century Iberian poet Prudentius, whose influential works of literary martyrology were an important touchstone for post-Tridentine authors such as Gallonio and Baronio, strikingly anticipated the later period's preoccupation with the production of sacred space in his own negotiation of sacramental doubling.⁶⁷ Describing a baptistery founded in the ancient city of Calagurris at the site of the martyrdom of the soldier-saints Emetrius and Chelidonius, Prudentius writes:

This is a spot chosen of Christ for raising tried souls to heaven through blood, and for cleansing them with water. Here two heroes that were slain for the Lord's name won scarlet martyrdom by their noble death, and here too mercy flows in the limpid fount and washes away old stains in its new stream...The earth drinks in sacred drops of water or of blood and ever wet streaming to the glory of God. The Lord of the place is He from whose two wounded sides flowed here discharge of blood, then of water. When you pass from here you will have been raised up through Christ's wounds, each as he is able, one by the sword, another by water.⁶⁸

The Christian monument described by Prudentius is fundamentally palimpsestic: the otherwise obliterated memory of a martyrological past is still locatable in the space-time of the baptismal present, a point reinforced by Maurice Lavarenne's hypothesis that the verses were originally conceived as an inscription for the baptistery.⁶⁹ Andreas Huyssen describes urban

⁶⁷ For Prudentius' role in the creation of the cult of the martyrs see Roberts (1993); for his increasingly exalted status in the late cinquecento as 'primary witness of the martyr-cult in the early Church' see Gaston (1973).

⁶⁸ Prudentius (1953), pp.219-20.

⁶⁹ Lavarenne (1955), p.106.

spaces as inherently constituting 'palimpsests of history, incarnations of time in stone, sites of memory extending both in time and space,' and this kind of temporal and memorial compression resonates powerfully with the conflation of martyrdom and baptism this section has documented.⁷⁰ The real blurring of ecclesiastical function imprinted into the baptistery's stones reveals a profound doctrinal truth: the water of baptism and the blood of martyrdom are directly correlative, both sanctifying the ground onto which they flow. Like the bodies of John, Callistus, Cecilia and the other martyrs of Santo Stefano, the earth of Calagurris has been twice-anointed. Blood, earth and water intermingle and fertilise the world, transforming secular landscapes into sacred geographies just as human flesh is sacralised through the metamorphic sacraments of baptism and martyrdom.

II: Blood, the Body, and Generating New Urban Geographies

The heavens I tell you do not so shine when the sun casteth its beams, as doth the city of Rome with these lamps, that lighten the whole world. Oh that I might be so happy as to embrace and grip that body of Paul round about, to be tied awhile in his monument, to see but the dust of that body which carried the marks of Christ.

- John Chrysostom, quoted by Gregory Martin⁷¹

That sacral acts of baptism and martyrdom had the miraculous capacity to fertilise the ground of a newly Christian world was widely re-asserted in the Counter-Reformation. In a theological climate centrally pre-occupied with issues of urban renewal, conversion and transformation, patristic texts that traced the ways in which sacred space might be produced regained

⁷⁰ Huyssen (2003), p.101.

⁷¹ Martin (1581), p.225.

widespread currency.⁷² Gregory Martin, whose attentiveness to the martyrological politics of Rome's geography is a recurring theme of his 1581 *Roma Sancta*, turned to the fourth-century bishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom to exalt the salvific power exerted by the city's 'living dust,' mixed as it was with the bodies and blood of Christian saints. With characteristic rhetorical flourish, Chrysostom describes the dirt of the Roman streets as more illuminating than the sun itself, elevated above the celestial bodies through its one-time contact with the city's apostolic protectors Peter and Paul. The powerful emotions that so overwhelmed Chrysostom during his encounter with the sacralised grit of the papal capital were echoed by Martin some 1200 years later in his own Roman peregrination: this time speaking for himself, Martin exults that he was so 'moved with devotion toward the very carcasses of those Apostles' and 'the City where they are to be seen' that he 'could melt for love.'⁷³

For Martin, Rome's capacity to compel legions of pilgrims to travel there from all over Europe was founded upon the singularly affecting sight of the corporeal remains located in every corner of the city: 'the Martyrs, the glorious ashes of undoubted Sainctes, the places where they prayed, preached, fasted, were imprisoned, dyed,' rendered Rome unique.⁷⁴ The holy body as imagined through the lens of early-Christianity possessed a unique discursive power; the devotional life of late sixteenth-century Rome was framed by a near continuous circulation of relics and saintly bodies into and around the metropolis, coupled with a parallel flow of devoted pilgrims seeking to venerate them. Lauretano captures the excitement attendant to the privileged experience of encountering a valuable holy body in his *Diario*. In an entry for February 1st 1583 he describes how, after they had taken

⁷² Sixtus V established a printing press in the Vatican library with the intention of making the works of the church fathers more available for study. An *avviso* from March 1586 notes that the pope raided the Vatican library for texts concerning the rites of the early Church, carrying them off to his room with the intention of re-instituting their observances. See Freiberg (1995a), p.208.

⁷³ Martin (1583), p.14.

⁷⁴ Martin (1581), p.7.

confession and finished their classes, many students eagerly traipsed to San Clemente in order to gaze upon the body of Saint Ignatius of Antioch on display there.⁷⁵ Ignatius met his end in a Roman arena after a transcontinental trek from the Near East in 108 A.D., and his martyrdom was depicted in Santo Stefano's eighth fresco.

As the new religious orders springing up in the sixteenth century increased in influence, a wave of ecclesiastical building projects were initiated in the papal capital.⁷⁶ At the same time, bishops were being enjoined to restore the often dilapidated titular churches for which they were responsible. Martin sums up the enthusiastic spirit of renovation by rhetorically asking his readers 'whom would it not delight to see the Cardinals so renew and beautify the Churches of their titles?'⁷⁷ According to a precedent established in the ninth century, the churches and altars consecrated or re-consecrated during these projects required the legitimising stamp of a saintly fragment, accessory, or ideally entire holy corpse.⁷⁸ To take one important example, in 1597 Cesare Baronio configured the translation of saints Nereo and Achilleo as the highpoint of his restoration of their eponymous church in a dazzling procession that began in the basilica of San Adriano in the Forum and weaved its way past the city's most august holy sites.⁷⁹ Included amongst the procession were the students of the German-Hungarian college bearing emblematic trophies.⁸⁰ Similarly, when the new Jesuit mother-church of the Gesù was completed in 1583, the Society required a relic befitting the dignity of their high altar. The bodies of the

⁷⁵ Lauretano, p.57.

⁷⁶ O'Malley (2006), p.225.

⁷⁷ Martin (1581), p.59.

⁷⁸ The requirement for churches to be consecrated with relics was codified in conciliar decrees in 801 and 813 which mandated that all altars lacking associated relics be destroyed. See Dale (1997), p.17. Geary (1990) notes that this caused shortages of available relics during this, leading to the rise of an unscrupulous counterfeit trade and unauthorized translations - a situation replicated by the widespread renovations of Rome's ecclesiastical infrastructure in the late cinquecento.

⁷⁹ Krautheimer (1967), pp.174-178.

⁸⁰ Sarra (1862), p.120.

martyrs Abbondio and Abbondanzio had recently been brought to light in the course of renovations being carried out at the church of Santi Cosma e Damiano; Gregory XIII magnanimously delivered the bodies into the care of the Jesuits, who transported them to the Gesù in a solemn procession through the streets of Rome (fig.60).⁸¹ The students of the German-Hungarian and English colleges also formed a key part of this procession. Sandwiched between the catechumens and orphans in the Society's care and the seminarians of the Roman college, they appeared 'dressed in linen tunics and carrying lighted torches' whilst singing hymns dedicated to the newly elevated saints of the Order.⁸² When Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santori presided over the church's consecration ceremony the following year, the saints' relics were finally deposited beneath the high altar.⁸³

The elaborate ritual procedures that took place at a new or restored church in the concluding acts of processions such as those at Santi Nereo ed Achilleo and the Gesù recall Sixtus' ceremonial conversion of the obelisks described earlier in this chapter. Before consecrating the new space, the presiding bishop drew the sign of the cross on the threshold accompanied with the words 'Ecce crucis signum, fugiant phantasmata cuncta' – 'beholding the sign of the cross, all the demons take flight.'⁸⁴ The combined power of the saintly corpse, the cross and the invocation ensured that malevolent demons are driven out of the sacred-space-to-be before the holy relics take up their residence beneath the altar. A contemporary account of another important relic translation vividly demonstrates the apotropaic power imputed to holy bodies as they criss-crossed post-Tridentine Rome: according to the chronicler Giovanni Bernardino Rastelli, when the body of Saint Gregory Nazianzus was being transported to Pope Gregory XIII's new chapel at the Vatican from its former resting place in Santa Maria in Campo Marzio in 1580

⁸¹Ciappi (1596), p.18.

⁸² Cardulo (1584) p.42.

⁸³ Pastor, Vol. 20, p.579.

⁸⁴ For the performative nature of the Roman *dedicatio ecclesiae* see Schmidt and Schmidt (2012), esp.pp.319-24. Incantation at n.23. See also Monssen (1981), p.16.

(fig.61), 'a possessed woman was screaming at the top of her voice that she had been terribly persecuted; but when she was reached she said she had been liberated, which she attributed to the virtue of the presence of this sainted body.'⁸⁵

As the cypress casket wound its way towards St. Peter's carried aloft on a silver bier, it passed verses and images recalling the saint's life and teachings strategically posted along the route, bringing the space-time of Gregory Nazianzus into the present of his papal namesake.⁸⁶ The procession paused at the German college, where three students dressed as angels sang an ode whose text hung upon a temporary triumphal arch behind them, decorated with a picture of saint Gregory, Apollinare and others.⁸⁷ The landscape of the city was being re-transcribed across the boundaries of both time and space, a transformation embodied in the living and mobile corpses of early-Christian martyrs. It was not simply the inert presence of relics, static traces of a glorious past, that was having such a revitalising effect on the *urbs sacra*, but their *movement* across the renewed city.⁸⁸

Returning to Santo Stefano Rotondo, one of the most important activating images in the complex representational logic of the church's late-sixteenth century restoration also documents the relic-body in motion, and in doing so brings the Early-Christian world directly into dialogue with the Counter-Reformation city. The fresco was painted for the chapel of Primus and Felicianus by Antonio Tempesta the year after Circignani's martyrological cycle was completed in the ambulatory (fig.62).⁸⁹ The decoration of the chapel centres around a seventh-century mosaic depicting the eponymous

⁸⁵ Rastelli (1580), p.6: 'Una spiritata che fra il popolo era gridando ad alta voce che era stato tanto perseguitato finché era stato giunto, e dicesi che fu liberata, lo che si attribuisce alla virtù della presenza de questo santo Corpo.'

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.2; Cornelison (2012), p.255.

⁸⁷ Lelio, cited in Monssen (1981), p.19.

⁸⁸ The renewed movement of martyrs and relics around Rome reflected a wider Italian phenomenon - for an introduction to this wider context see Ditchfield (1995), pp.84-94.

⁸⁹ For details of this commission see Vannugli (1983), pp.101-16.

saints in glory either side of a jewelled cross on a shimmering golden ground, commissioned to commemorate Pope Theodore 1st's translation of their corporeal remains to Santo Stefano in 642 (fig.63).⁹⁰

If later re-articulations of Roman sacred space in the sixteenth century were conceptualised as part of the symbolic attempt to transform the city into a New Jerusalem described by Pompeo Ugonio, it is noteworthy that Theodore built the chapel to house the remains of his father, a bishop who fled his native Jerusalem in the 630s after the city was besieged by the Islamic Caliphate.⁹¹ The cross adheres to a Byzantine typology recalling the gemmed cross Theodosius II erected on Golgotha in the fifth century, further reinforcing the link to that city.⁹² The translation of Primus and Felicianus to the chapel was an important act in both the history of the church and the city, constituting the first known translation of saintly remains from the sepulchral sites of the Roman campagna back into the urban centre.⁹³ Even more significantly, the bodies of Primus and Felicianus were the first relics of any kind to be deposited in Santo Stefano, which had been founded without the presence of a relic of its patron saint.⁹⁴

To either side of the Byzantine mosaic commissioned by Theodore, the chapel's altar and lateral walls are dominated by Tempesta's images depicting the tortures of the eponymous saints in a style fully in keeping with Circignani's cycle. They are variously displayed being scourged, burned with flaming torches, forced to imbibe molten metal, crucified, attacked by prowling bears and lions, and finally decapitated. In conjunction with these violent scenes, along one of the side-walls of the chapel Tempesta represented the burial procession of the two saints. According to their

⁹⁰ Herrin (1987), p.267.

⁹¹ Mackie (2003), p.76.

⁹² de Blaauw (2014), p.149. See also the gemmed cross in the apse mosaic at Santa Pudenziana surmounting the representation of Christ and the Apostles in Jerusalem's Holy Sepulchre (fig.64), once again linking the two cities.

⁹³ Mackie (2003), p.77.

⁹⁴ Krautheimer and Corbett (1970), 236-237.

hagiographies, the saints were transported by the Christian community for burial in the sandpits (*arenaria*) that were situated along the course of the Via Nomentana heading north-east from Rome.⁹⁵

Tempesta's fresco offers an insight into contemporary conceptions of what early-Christian funereal processions looked like. The peacefully resting bodies of the two saints lie upon a funereal bier, carried by the faithful in a massive procession winding its way up the hill and into the pictorial space towards their sandy sepulchres. Young acolytes carry burning paschal candles, whilst a cowled figure decorously bows his head in mourning at the catafalque's rear. Early-Christian funeral processions constituted the second act of a tripartite burial procedure, preceded by the preparation of the body through washing and anointing, and followed by the final interment.⁹⁶ Reflecting the relationship between baptism and martyrdom, the religious service held either at the church or the graveside in the course of the burial often focused on the way in which death constituted a marvellous completion of the journey a Christian began in baptism.⁹⁷ In Tempesta's fresco the younger members of the procession appropriately wear white garments, symbolic of the baptismal rites. A young boy walking in front of the catafalque faces outwards with mouth opened in song: in an echo of the translation ceremonies of the late sixteenth century, musical performance was an essential part of the funereal cortege, corresponding to the injunction from the Apostolic Constitutions that 'in the funerals of the departed' one must 'accompany them with singing.'⁹⁸

The significance of this fresco in the context of the chapel it was commissioned to adorn is clear, linking the first movement of the holy corpses from the city to the campagna with Theodore's translation of the

⁹⁵ See Withrow (1877), p.40 for the inaccurate conflation of the *arenaria* and the catacombs.

⁹⁶ For the stages of early-Christian funerals, see Yasin (2005) pp.447-51.

⁹⁷ Long (2009), pp.71-2.

⁹⁸ Transcribed in Roberts (1985), p.464.

saints back from the periphery to the sacred space of the Roman basilica. By situating Theodore's act of urban re-articulation in the seventh century as an analogue to the early Christian funeral cortege, the consecratory power of the mobile martyred body through time as well as space is emphasised, and provides a direct link to the acts of urban renewal being carried out through the medium of the martyred body in Counter-Reformation Rome. Underlining this trans-temporal logic of commemoration, the boys who take part in the procession out of the city along the Via Nomentana resemble the novices of the Jesuit college who would pray before this image at the close of the sixteenth century, and who themselves participated in the modern procession of Abbondo and Abbondanzio dressed in white linen, carrying candles and singing hymns in praise of the martyrs.

One other Counter-Reformation processional image merits a brief discussion here, as it gives dramatic visual form to the ever present but usually implicit relationship between relic translation and the acts of martyrdom that often conditioned them. This remarkable fresco was painted by Antonio Circignani (son of Nicolò) on the vault of the chapel of Saint Anicetus in Rome's Palazzo Altemps, and demonstrates that it was not only the perambulations of holy bodies themselves that could exert productive effects on the urban landscape. The chapel was decorated to commemorate the translation of Anicetus' relics from the catacombs to the Palazzo in 1603, as part of a wider attempt by the patron Giovanni Angelo Altemps to rehabilitate the reputation of his father, executed for adultery in 1587 by Sixtus V.⁹⁹

The north wall of the chapel depicts the saint's decapitation. Anicetus crosses his arms in front of his chest as an executioner raises a sword to deal the death-blow, whilst in an adjoining panel a woman reverentially mops his corpse's spilled blood into a jar, corporeal matter already transmogrifying into precious relic (fig.65). A more original engagement with the pictorial

⁹⁹ Ditchfield (2009), pp.556-7.

genre of martyrdom is pictured on the trompe l'oeil vault (figs.66). Here, in an unexpected departure from the scenes of procession that usually adorned chapels elevated by relic translations, the actual transportation of Anicetus' body is not directly depicted. Instead a procession of celestial putti cavort along the chapel's ceiling, each holding aloft a different martyrological implement: amidst the carnivalesque parade are an array of axes, daggers, maces, manacles and even what appears to be an early-modern flame-thrower.

The procession inevitably recalls Ciappi's depiction of the translation of the relics of Abundus and Abundatius to the Gesù and Tempesta's fresco of the burial procession of Primus and Felicianus. Here, however, the torches carried aloft by the Jesuit and Early-Christian faithful have metamorphosed into the incendiary weapons of a bellicose celestial army. Much like the lamps shining light on the perambulation of the saints' corpses in those translation processions, the martyrdom instruments in the Altemps chapel illuminate the reconsecration of space effected through contact with a violated holy body. Despite being physically absent,¹⁰⁰ the presence of Anicetus' martyred body is thus nonetheless actively felt by the viewer - its signifying capacity has merely been displaced onto the instruments of its unmaking. As Antonio Gallonio demonstrated in his 1591 *Treatise on the Instruments of Martyrdom*, and as would be showcased in the encyclopaedic grisailles of torture instruments covering the facades of Santi Nereo ed Achilleo and San Vitale in the 1590s as part of their own martyrologically-themed restorations (figs.67&68), the weapons deployed in the unmaking of the holy body possessed their own unique sacralising power as they hurtled across the real and pictorial sacred spaces of the city.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ The body of Anicetus that the chapel was built to accommodate was an opportunistic forgery by the artist and relic-hunter Toccafondo - Anicetus had been buried near St. Peter's and not in the catacombs of San Sebastiano, which didn't exist at the time of his death. See Ghilardi (2012), p.11.

¹⁰¹ Offering archaeo-historical support for this kind of devotion, Bosio maintained in *Roma Sotteranea* that early-Christian martyrs were frequently buried alongside the death-dealing instruments that hastened their ends, and the numinous sepulchral

If the devotional spaces of Rome were being redefined by the trans-temporal perambulations of bloodied bodies, body parts and the instrumental agents of their dismemberments, the power of corporeal metaphor was also a persuasive rhetorical device through which to identify the city itself as an active agent of its own regeneration. Although equations between the city and the human form can be traced back at least as far as Vitruvius,¹⁰² the rich symbolic potential of the analogy was harnessed to particular effect in articulations of sacred geography in the late sixteenth century. A striking example in the context of this chapter comes from the poetry of Giambattista Marino, perhaps the foremost literary innovator of the early seicento and who enjoyed the patronage of papal circles during his Roman sojourn in the first decade of the new century.¹⁰³ Marino made the connection in a poem written in honour of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese in 1602. Odoardo was well known for the enthusiasm and frequency with which he undertook the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius, and was responsible for the creation of numerous holy spaces dotted around the city where he could devote himself to these meditations.¹⁰⁴ Addressing the reader directly in the poem's opening lines, Marino figures Rome's topography as a series of interconnecting sacred spaces animating and anthropomorphising the city:

Oh pilgrim, you who admire the relics
Of the great body of Rome, shrouded in ivy,
Its ashes buried under grass...¹⁰⁵

landscape beneath Rome that he describes is a treasure-trove of hatchets, nails, iron pincers and blades (pp.56-9).

¹⁰² Sennett (1996), pp.104-6.

¹⁰³ For Marino's position within the circle of Clement VIII's papal nephew Pietro Aldobrandini, see Kendrick (2007), p.1160.

¹⁰⁴ The oration delivered at Odoardo's funeral made special mention of his devotion to the *Exercises* and the massive amount of money he was prepared to spend on the sites where he undertook them. See Witte (2008), p.65.

¹⁰⁵ "In lode del Signor Cardinale Odoardo Farnese," collected in Marino (1674), p.119: 'O peregrin, che la reliquie/ ammiri del gran corpo di Roma, e d'edra avvolto/ e sotto l'erba il cenere sepolto...'

Recalling Grillo's metaphor of Rome's body rising up from the urban sediment, Marino also imagines the city as a body whose features are constituted by relics half-buried across its landscape. Rome takes the form of an anthropomorphised body that is in turn animated by the bodies and body-parts that form its metropolitan physiology. Like Odoardo moving from one retreat to another across Rome in search of spiritual enlightenment, the reader-pilgrim who traverses this corporeal terrain mediates between these two kinds of bodies, animating the 'gran corpo' of the city through a perambulation between its sacred sites.

Cities, it might be argued, always traffic in bodies. Laurie Nussdorfer describes early-modern Rome as 'a thickly textured social and symbolic environment' whose citizens 'brag, mock, shout, argue, and throw things at each other,' 'activating' the city in the process.¹⁰⁶ In terms that have striking resonance with this argument, Elizabeth Grosz contends that the body and the city more generally have a 'constitutive and mutually defining relationship.' As Grosz argues, the city is 'an active force in constituting bodies, and always leaves its traces on the subject's corporeality.'¹⁰⁷ The martyred body, both in its composition as relic and composition as representation, is of necessity conditioned by the urban landscape in which it operates, Rome's 'gran corpo.' But the converse is equally as true: if the Counter-Reformation city defines the martyred body, then the martyred body simultaneously defines the Counter-Reformation city. Grosz's configuration of both bodies and cities 'not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts' strongly echoes Marino's description of the city's relic-saturated urban landscape, also an assemblage of individual numinous sites that achieve intelligibility only through their inter-relationship.¹⁰⁸ The mutually constitutive relationship between body and city centring on the privileged constructive power of the fragment sheds light on the way in

¹⁰⁶ Nussdorfer (1997), p.162.

¹⁰⁷ Grosz (1999), p.387.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p.389.

which Rome's sacred landscape was articulated in specifically corporeal terms in the late sixteenth century.

The symbiotic interface of body and city emerges as an important interpretive lens through which to understand the way in which the represented site of martyrdom was imbricated into a discourse of urban refashioning at Santo Stefano Rotondo. In a 1589 collection of emblems and poems produced by the humanist alumnus of the Roman seminary Giulio Roscio in collaboration with Lauretano designed to amplify the message of the frescoes, the reader is explicitly informed that his or her spectatorial task at the basilica is analogous to that of the anthropomorphised city:¹⁰⁹

You will look in wonder on youths
In the flower of their years
As they undergo horrible tortures with glad faces.
How often, may Rome be a witness, they will pray
That the unwilling lion bring them death with its rabid mouth.¹¹⁰

Witnesses are everywhere in Circignani's scenes (figs.69-71). Every atrocity has its spectators, a reminder that 'martyr' and 'witness' are etymologically related and proof that the sacrifice willingly offered by the martyrs does not go unacknowledged. The word 'martyr' originally signified nothing more than a 'witness,' and the act of witnessing Christian truth and dying for it only conceptually diverged midway through the second century.¹¹¹ In these frescoes, however, the distant memory of that original etymology lives on. Every wound is penetrated by a series of gazes. Both eyes and weapons open

¹⁰⁹ For Roscio's career as poet and humanist see Gioacchini (1989).

¹¹⁰ Roscio (1589), p.3, translated in Monssen, (1983) p.83. For original see appendix 1. The cycle features three scenes of lion-led martyrdom – Ignatius, Perpetua and Felicity, and Primus and Felicianus (also represented in Tempesta's frescos in the eponymous chapel).

¹¹¹ For an account of this etymology see Bowersock (1995), pp.1-23. For the debate over whether Christian martyrdom is related to Jewish antecedent traditions, see Boyarin (1998), pp.577-627.

up the martyred body, enabling analogical access to Christ's body and empathetic participation in it.¹¹²

As the poem makes clear, the viewer must emulate these legions of stony-faced observers. But though the verse is initially directed to the conjectured viewer in the basilica, there is another protagonist here: the act of witness, so crucial to the theological discourse of martyrdom, is displaced from the beholder of the frescoes and onto the city of Rome itself. Time and again in the cycle the architectural fabric of Rome appears to play witness to martyrial sacrifice. Examples are so numerous that a representative selection must suffice: Agapitus is executed in the middle of a street whose fantastical classical architecture *alla Romana* strongly recalls Serlio's *Tragic Scene* stage setting (figs. 72&73), as does the cityscape framing Erasmus' torture (fig.22).¹¹³ Callistus is thrown into his well from a beautiful Roman loggia supported by Ionic columns (fig.13), whilst the ruined Colosseum and intact Roman Forum mark the site of Peter's crucifixion (fig.3). In two frescoes otherwise devoid of onlookers, finally, a sequence of Roman statues set into marble niches bear witness to the martyrdoms depicted there (figs.5&12). It seems clear that at Santo Stefano the inchoate epistemological power of the martyred body relied on the witnessing city for its activation, just as the emergent sacred city required the martyred body to enable its transformation into a holy landscape in a period dominated by pilgrimage, spectacle and Jubilees.¹¹⁴

Expanding upon this rich metaphor of urban corporeality, a variety of

¹¹² According to Caroline Walker-Bynum (2007, p.14), 'the wounds of Christ are more frequently hymned as doorway and access, refuge and consolation, than as violation; to penetrate is to open the way.'

¹¹³ Underscoring the resonance of this type of architectural ensemble in sixteenth-century Rome, Nicolas Temple (2011, p.85) argues that Serlio's scene is an 'idealisation' of the Renaissance Via Giulia.

¹¹⁴ Gregory XIII's 1575 Jubilee attracted over 400,000 visitors to Rome, whilst Sixtus V announced an extraordinary holy year to mark the beginning of his reign in 1585. For the financial implications of the 1575 Jubilee, see Romani, (1948), esp pp.323-30.

contemporary writers emphasized the relationship between the martyred holy body and the city. Their work can be productively situated in the wider field of what Zur Shalev calls 'sacred geography,' a 'mode of thinking about space, land, history, and their role in a world where the divine had a powerful and immediate presence.'¹¹⁵ By emphasizing its specifically religious dimensions, the geography of any region 'could become 'sanctified' or 'sacralised.'¹¹⁶ Asserting that fragmented saintly vestiges could function as actively constitutive elements of Rome's contemporary physical landscape, Counter-Reformation historians attempted to imbricate histories of martyrdom with the mapping of sacred urban space in a manner fully aligned with Shalev's thesis.

Giovanni Severano provides a striking example in his 1630 *Memorie sacre delle Sette Chiese di Roma*, an exhaustive account of Rome's sacred sites and their relics. In his introduction, Severano articulates a well-established post-Tridentine view of Rome's exalted status as both the originary site of the Christian church and the font of its renewal in the wake of the debilitating crises of the sixteenth century:

Queen of cities, font from which the entire Christian republic and all mankind derives the waters of doctrine and Apostolic faith, the vital aura of sanctity and spiritual graces; arsenal of weapons raised against Hell; repository and conservator of the sainted treasures of the church; city that is head of the world and second only to the Triumphant and glorious city of God, irrigated by innumerable rivers of martyrs' blood and sanctified by the remains of countless saints...City, in short, that in the extreme theatre of the Last Judgement will send more of its citizens to heaven than the rest of the world, making of them a most gracious spectacle (*grato spettacolo*)...¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Shalev (2011), p.3

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.206.

¹¹⁷ Severano (1630) unpaginated, *Al benigno lettore*. For original see appendix 1.

Severano's grisly urban paean to a city 'irrigated' by rivers of martyrs' blood suggests that the urban fabric of Rome itself had undergone a privileged form of baptism on account of the holy sacrifices to which it had so many times played host, a sacrament that continued to resonate in the devotional landscape of the reformed Catholic world. The divinely spilt blood that still stains the city's streets figure Rome as a permanently sacred space. In a recursive martyrological logic, the city is in its turn an active producer of those holy bodies, and Rome emerges as a kind of bloody factory generating corporeal matter with which to populate the New Jerusalem of the heavenly firmament. Even as the bodies of the martyrs ascend to join the ranks of the heavenly chorus, they are simultaneously deployed as powerful weapons in the battle against Lucifer-inspired unbelief on earth.

Severano's exposition of martyred bodies fertilising and transforming the ground they touch like so many contact relics was fully aligned with contemporary ritual practice. The great changes to Rome's topography enabled by the relic processions and church consecrations that became such a constant feature of late sixteenth-century Roman life were part of a wider revival of the cult practices of the early church centred around the sacred body.¹¹⁸ The chance discovery of what was thought to be the first-century catacomb of Priscilla near the Via Salaria in May 1578 seemed to miraculously open a direct window onto the steadfast sufferings of the city's earliest Christian communities.¹¹⁹ The Venetian ambassador to Rome, Antonio Tiepolo, described the newly discovered catacomb in awed tones to the senate of the *Serenissima*, recounting how people flocked to see what was 'perhaps the greatest antiquity linked to the holy Religion,' and the magnetic

¹¹⁸ For an overview of Counter-Reformation projects of *historia sacra* and the work of Baronio and Bosio in particular, see Ditchfield (1997).

¹¹⁹ For a counter to the characterization of the catacombs as uniquely Christian spaces see Bodel (2008), pp.177-242.

pull of the holy corpse reached fever-pitch over the coming decades.¹²⁰ Cesare Baronio excitedly recounted in his monumental *Annales Ecclesiastici* how 'all Rome was filled with wonder' at the revelation of this 'hidden city,' whilst Gregory Martin triumphantly declared that 'Rome is the same as it was in the time of the apostles.'¹²¹ For these authors, the city's past was rising to sanctify and transform its present in an irruption of holiness fully aligned with the seismographic model of history advanced at the beginning of this chapter. This exploding relic-culture proved difficult to regulate, however: an *avviso* notes that the cardinal vicar of Rome Giacomo Savelli quickly had the entrance to the catacomb on the Via Salaria closed in an attempt to conserve the site, but it was soon forced open again by curious hands eager to reach into the pristine past it promised to contain.¹²²

Nor were the catacombs emerging on the fringes of the city the only source of this corporeal excitement. The revelation of Cecilia's body from the bedrock of her own church in 1600 caused a public sensation that threatened the total breakdown of law and order, such was the excitement that greeted the spectacle of her miraculously preserved material remains. According to an eyewitness, not even the Pope's Swiss Guard could contain the waves of pilgrims thronging the streets of Trastevere.¹²³ Similarly, in a collective expression of acquisitive devotion, an ecstatic crowd had to be prevented from tearing Filippo Neri's own body apart after his death in 1595. Despite his Oratorian guardians' best efforts, the proto-saint's hair, beard and clothing were secretly carried off as powerful contact relics by unknown

¹²⁰ For contemporary accounts of the discovery see Ghilardi (2006), pp.14-15. For Tiepolo's letter see Herklotz (2012), p.426.

¹²¹ Baronio, translated in Ditchfield (2009), p.556; Martin (1581), p.8. Baronio praised Filippo Neri's Oratorian meetings in similar terms, writing 'it seemed as though the beautiful days of the first Christians...had been revived and adapted to the conditions of the times.' Von Pastor, Vol. XIX, p.172. For discussion see Herz (1988), p.593.

¹²² Herklotz (2012), p.426. The authorities become so concerned with the stripping of the catacombs and the trafficking of their relics that Clement VIII explicitly outlawed visits to the cemeteries under pain of imprisonment and even excommunication. See Ghilardi (2009a), p.444.

¹²³ Montanari (2005), p.152.

parties.¹²⁴ When the Capuchin friar Raniero di Sansepolcro expired four years later, the faithful could once again not moderate their desire to avail of his sacred corpse: a great throng rushed to the convent where his body was being held, and 'not content with his clothes, they plucked the hairs from his head and beard, cut off his nails, and finally even his flesh.'¹²⁵

It was just such a preoccupation with the material remnants of holy figures that had so inflamed a generation of Protestant reformers seeking to locate salvation in terms of the Lutheran doctrine of *sola fides*.¹²⁶ Contrasting this kind of base materialism with genuine spiritual sentiment, Jean Calvin acerbically noted in his *Treatise on Relics* that 'instead of discerning Jesus Christ in his Word, his Sacraments, and his Spiritual Graces,' the world has 'amused itself with his clothes, shirts, and sheets, leaving thus the principal to follow the accessory.'¹²⁷ Luther himself imputed a fetishistic necrophagy to the cult of relics and holy bodies, famously denoting such practices as *Totenfresserei* – literally the devouring of the dead.¹²⁸

A 1522 play by the Swiss printer Pamphilius Gengenbach attacked the rapacious economics of these Catholic death-eaters, especially as it related to masses for the dead in purgatory, and its frontispiece shows a group of ecclesiastics sitting around a table carving up a corpse for consumption at a banquet presided over by demonic musicians and waiting staff (fig.74).¹²⁹ But for institutionally-minded Catholic reformers, the power of the (frequently fragmented) holy body to constitute new geographies and to embody articles of faith had the indelible and authoritative stamp of

¹²⁴ Santing (2005), p.207.

¹²⁵ Zaccaria and Benedetto (1645), p.662.

¹²⁶ See Luther (1976) passim. For Protestant rejections of material spiritualism see Eire (1986) pp.1-2.

¹²⁷ Calvin (1854), p.218; Ozment (1975), pp.111-16.

¹²⁸ Heming (2003), p.39.

¹²⁹ Burke and Briggs (2009), p.66. It should be acknowledged that though he was a reformist who expressed many of Luther's ideas and pointed out Church abuses and corruptions, Gengenbach never explicitly acknowledged allegiance to any of the new denominations. See van Abbè (1950), pp.46-7.

authentic historical precedent. In the battle to claim patrimony over the history of the early church, a cultural memory shared and contested by Catholics and Protestants alike, the material culture of relics and martyrs was on the front-line.¹³⁰ In his account of the role of art in the early-Christian church, Jaś Elsner has noted that Rome was re-imagined in the fourth century 'as a sort of martyr-filled mother earth.'¹³¹ The re-animation of these heroic exemplars in the late-sixteenth century loudly proclaimed that the city's transformation was a form of return, a return that gave legibility to an otherwise partial and bewildering network of holy traces. By figuring its early modern re-formation through the prism of the early Christian martyred body, the city paradoxically demonstrated its own timelessness.¹³² As Baronio announced, Rome was, like Christianity itself, *semper eadem*.¹³³

Despite Baronio's protestation that the new *Roma Sacra* was a faithful facsimile of the early-Christian metropolis, the redefinition of the post-Tridentine city through the transportation of vestigial bodies between its sacred sites nonetheless promoted a very particular map of the past projected onto the present. Urban space itself is palimpsestic, a multi-layered structuring of different spaces and temporalities competing for primacy of signification in any given moment. But these urban palimpsests inevitably privilege one version of the past over others, and the Counter-Reformation project of rendering Rome as a timeless holy landscape constituted an act of forgetting as much as one of remembering.¹³⁴ By foregrounding the role of

¹³⁰ Perhaps the most successful attempt by Protestants to assert their own continuity with the martyrs of the early church was John Foxe's 1563 *Acts and Monuments of these Latter and Perilous Days*, which presented itself as a scrupulously historical document linking Catholic persecutions of Protestants in sixteenth century England with the plight of the first followers of Christ. For an argument that positions Santo Stefano's fresco cycle in the context of a coordinated propagandist response to Foxe's text, see Buser (1976), pp.424-433.

¹³¹ Elsner (2003), p.99.

¹³² As Robert Markus (1990, p.92) argues in the context of the first flourishing of martyrological devotion in late antiquity, 'the cult of the martyr conflated the present and the past.'

¹³³ Parish (2005), p.40.

¹³⁴ For an introduction to the productive power of forgetting in early-modern practices of cultural memory, see Ivic and Williams (2004).

(frequently obscure) martyrs in the sacred history of Rome, an obliterating discursive violence was being perpetrated against the city's plural pasts.

In an exploration of the strategies by which institutions assert synoptic, unified visions of urban space within the contours of a city, Michel de Certeau describes the violence that systems of mapping perpetrate on living communities in the search for coherence. According to de Certeau, geographical systems possess a 'voracious' capacity to 'transform action into legibility' by 'constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties.'¹³⁵ This inevitably recalls the virtual cartography of Rome conjured into existence through the relics perambulating between nodes of ecclesiastical influence in the post-Tridentine city. But for de Certeau, the inscriptive transformation initiated by such mapping emerges as a force as destructive as it is generative, causing 'a way of being in the world to be forgotten.'¹³⁶ A 1575 map of Rome depicting the seven principal pilgrimage basilicas of the city published by Antoine Lafréry graphically demonstrates the type of transformation described by de Certeau (fig.75). These churches were host to some of the city's most prized relics, and to visit them all in one day required a challenging trek of sixteen miles through, over and around the sacred sites of the city and surrounding countryside.¹³⁷

In Lafréry's map, a continuous stream of pilgrims rush across the city's sacred landscape. Barely recognisable as tiny, sketchy shadows on the fringes of the city, bodies dramatically gain both size and animation as they near the churches that so dominate this peculiar cityscape. These waves of pilgrims appear to push and shove in their impatience to offer up their devotions to the eternal holy figures presiding over their eponymous basilicas. It seems

¹³⁵ de Certeau (1984), p.94.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.97.

¹³⁷ Wisch (2011), p.273. The ritual pilgrimage to the ancient basilicas had been revived by Filippo Neri in 1559 as a 'recreational alternative to the excesses of carnival.' See Ditchfield (2005), p.173. Extolling the merits of the pilgrimage to the Sette Chiese in a diary entry from February 18th 1583, Lauretano also complains about the bad behaviour that marred carnival celebrations.

that the city has been re-articulated here into a space legible solely through the devotional practices enacted at these sites, distorting scale and obliterating the complexity of everyday life in its projection of a very specific set of timeless actions onto the urban fabric.¹³⁸ Animation is only made possible through pilgrimage and sacred proximity. The wild world of the Roman carnival, with all its contingent violence and subversion of social norms, has been effectively de-inscribed from the city's streets.¹³⁹ And yet, in the unruly actions of the time-bound pilgrims, it appears as if the everyday present nonetheless pushes back against the timeless past being privileged by Counter-Reformation authors such as Baronio. The competing temporalities set into dialogue within this cartographic space exemplify de Certeau's contention that the privileging of certain iterations of urban space over others is a process fraught with difficulty, and one which the contingencies of bodily movement continuously undermines.

Another late sixteenth-century map does, however, seem to succeed in eliding the activating, everyday presence of the contemporary citizen, and dramatically emphasises how the topography of the city could be rhetorically re-conceptualised as a schematic matrix of signs in response to the process of urban transformation I have been describing. This map comes from Bordini's exaltation of the achievements of Sixtus V cited earlier in this chapter, and returns us to the obelisk as privileged marker of this new geography (fig.76). Unlike Lafréry's plan, which figured the city as an accumulation of devotional actions, Bordini's map is iconic in the extreme, imagining Rome as an interconnection of material markers entirely devoid of human intervention. Nor was this violent transformation of the landscape purely an artistic flight of fancy on the part of Bordini and his engraver. According to Domenico Fontana, Sixtus was attempting to refashion the real topography of the city in just this way, forging a new Roman streetscape 'without caring for either the

¹³⁸ For an analysis of the early modern creation of Rome's urban space informed by de Certeau's writings on space and everyday life, see San Juan (2001).

¹³⁹ For the rise of violent crime during Carnival in late-cinquecento Rome, see Blastenbrei (2006), p.73.

hills or the valleys they crossed.’ By ‘levelling these and filling those, he reduced them to sweet plains and beautiful sites’ which ‘nourished the senses of the body with their beauty.’¹⁴⁰ For Sixtus, the city’s geography had to be tamed in the name of pilgrimage and the logical inter-relationships between holy sites.¹⁴¹

Bordini’s map envisions a total obliteration of the messiness of urban reality, the *reductio ad absurdum* of Sixtus’ reforming vision and an ‘icon of a reformed urban totality’ in Charles Burroughs’ apt description.¹⁴² The residential and commercial spaces of the city have disappeared, and all that remains are holy icons: obelisks, columns and statues. In line with Fontana’s description of Sixtus’ preternatural ability to obliterate topographical complexity, here too the physical landscape of the city is unrecognisable: Rome, the city of hills, has become an undifferentiated planar continuum, a neutral pictorial ground suspended in space and time poised to absorb the symbols of this renewed *Roma Sancta*. When compared to Tempesta’s near contemporary representation of the city (fig.77), a labyrinthine accumulation of competing public and private spaces, it is clear how the conflation of time and space implied in these practices of urban sanctification worked to reinscribe an always-already holy identity onto the polysemous landscape of the sixteenth-century city.¹⁴³ The sacred symbols of Bordini’s map, displayed so starkly against an indeterminate ground that obliterates the city’s real topography, graphically exemplify de Certeau’s identification of the voracious capacity of geographical systems to insist upon reductively schematic modalities of legibility. The isolated columns, monuments and sculptural holy

¹⁴⁰ Fontana, (1589), p.101: ‘...pascano con la lor vaghezza i sensi del corpo.’ For full original see appendix 1.

¹⁴¹ Increasing foot traffic to Santo Stefano in the wake of Laurentano’s commission was also only made possible through Gregory XIII’s opening of the Via Merulana which made the church’s rural location more accessible to pilgrims. See Monssen (1983), p.14.

¹⁴² Burroughs (1994), p.191.

¹⁴³ This is not to claim that Tempesta’s map is a completely faithful or un-ideological view of the city. For the deformations to Rome’s topography perpetuated by Tempesta in order to increase the visibility of Sixtus’ urban projects, see de Seta (2011), p.188.

figures suspended in the landscape as legible cartographic inscriptions simultaneously point to the invisibility of other urban processes that failed to achieve the readable status of holy historical record. Any attempt to imprint a coherent sacral identity upon a metropolitan geography necessarily encompasses violent acts of exclusion or consciously willed amnesia.

De Certeau's meditation on the paradoxical relationship between presence and absence, between remembering and forgetting in the life of a city centred upon the rigid signifying parameters of the map, offers a fruitful interpretive analogue through which to explore the way in which relics and holy bodies were deployed to transform the urban imaginary of Counter-Reformation Rome in the closing years of the sixteenth century. Prefiguring the creation of the Counter-Reformation's *Roma Sacra*, Robert Markus argues that it was specifically the cult of the martyrs that 'provided a means for turning the spatial world into a network of holy places' in late antiquity.¹⁴⁴ The succession of post-Tridentine popes Gregory XIII, Sixtus V and Clement VIII were all emulating the attempts of their early-Christian predecessors to establish Rome as a *theopolis* where geography and history were inextricably intertwined at the urban site of the martyred body. The frescoes produced for Santo Stefano Rotondo by Circignani provided the means for a similar spatial transformation, in which the revived memory of historical martyrdom ruptured the space-time of the painterly present and imprinted it with a uniquely sacral identity. Trafficking between hundreds of martyrs over 400 years and three continents, they propose a highly selective virtual itinerary of sanctity in a visual analogue to the network of interconnected sacred sites that formed the early-Christian city's sacred geography as described by Markus.¹⁴⁵ The final section of this chapter will analyse in more detail exactly

¹⁴⁴ Markus (1990), p.142.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp.142-155; That the Santo Stefano martyrs are not limited to Roman saints, who play a central but not exclusive role in the cycle, also has its analogue in early-Christian programmes of *geografia sacra* - as Elsner (2003, pp.71-5) argues, a central challenge of the Roman papacy was to reconcile a religion that exalted 'salvific universalism' with the local necessity of inventing a sacred 'rootedness of place.'

how these martyrological images enter into dialogue with the discourse of Rome's sacred geography I have been describing.

III – From Relic To Representation And Back

The 29th fresco of the Santo Stefano cycle depicts the torture and execution of Christian victims of a fifth-century pogrom in Vandal administered North Africa (fig.29). Passive figures line up on one side of the scene to have their hands cut off; on the other side another group awaits having their tongues cut out, meekly submitting to their grisly fate. The scene's apparent preoccupation with the ramifications surrounding the loss of the human body's most important communicatory organs seems to foreground the limits of individual agency in the face of obliterating acts of violence. To remove the hand is to deny a sovereign subject of the body's primary and most important instrument, that which joins mental intention and manual action as Galen asserted in his forensically anatomical *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, a text well-known in sixteenth-century Italy.¹⁴⁶ Following this reasoning, its loss can be figured quite literally as the loss of the capacity for action, fundamentally limiting the kind of human agency which so frequently takes the limb as its 'material sign.'¹⁴⁷

In pictorial terms, the loss of agency associated with martyrological acts of dismemberment obviously poses a challenge for the protagonists of narrative action: what is a protagonist, etymologically the 'first combatant,' other than one who acts? Todd Olson argues that images of martyrdom are profoundly incompatible with the pictorial demands of the Renaissance *historia* as codified by Alberti: whilst the latter requires heroic bodies imbued with the agency to dictate the narratives in which they are depicted, actively re-configuring the world around them as architects of their own destiny,

¹⁴⁶ Galen (1968); For Galen's text in early-modern period Italy and its influence on the genesis of Vesalius' *Fabrica* see Siraisi (2001, p.300).

¹⁴⁷ See Rowe (1999), p.1.

Olson points out that martyrological images demand passive bodies which are acted upon instead of acting.¹⁴⁸ The abject victims of Christian martyrdom are stripped of the heroic self-determination typical of the ideal Renaissance pictorial archetype, and their hagiographic significance paradoxically lies in inverse proportion to their pictorial dynamism.

This appears to be reflected in the scene of Vandal mutilation, which in this reading would vividly depict a fundamental loss of agency on the part of the assembled faithful. The grotesque yet strangely pathetic pile of useless hands at the base of the chopping block on the left inevitably recalls Galen's assertion that a 'dead hand or one made of stone' represents the very inverse of human agency.¹⁴⁹ If the martyred bodies of Santo Stefano are thus unable to attain to the status of Albertian protagonists, it is necessary to examine exactly how they *do* function as agents of pictorial meaning. I argue that the frescoes do not seek to exalt the martyrs as heroic, individualist protagonists, and instead promote the mutilation of the holy body as the terrible precondition for the production of sacred space - space that can only be consecrated through the presence of disembodied corporeal fragments sanctified as relics. In the Counter-Reformation city the bloody reification of sacred urban space is openly celebrated: Christian Rome's violent foundational origins constituted the very grounds for its continuing and increasingly privileged position as the Catholic world's most important urban centre.

At Santo Stefano, then, theological meaning is produced *through* rather than in spite of an apparently endless catalogue of dismemberment. Here is Saint Agatha bound to a pillar, with absent breasts replaced by bloodied voids (fig.15). Squeezed between the arms of a long pincer held by her torturer is the unmistakable shape of the missing gland, seemingly being passed down into the space of the church itself. Next to her is Apollonia,

¹⁴⁸ Olson (2014), p.57.

¹⁴⁹ Galen (1968), p.81.

whose teeth are being viciously extracted (fig.16). A bulging eyeball, a severed tongue, a wrenched out tooth or a cut off breast: it is the disembodied corporeal fragment that sets these frescoes in motion, a series of startling pictorial details that forces the viewer to confront challenging questions about bodily fragmentation, sacred space and the nature of spectatorship.

In order to better understand how these individual details of dismemberment might constitute both the theoretical and affective centrepieces of the Santo Stefano frescoes, I would like to bring them into dialogue with Roland Barthes' account of the unpredictable and potentially traumatic experience of encountering what he refers to as the *punctum* of an image in his text *Camera Lucida*. In Barthes' image theory, the *punctum* constitutes a detail of an image which unpredictably touches or affects those who gaze upon it in a way that exceeds the bounds of disinterested visual appraisal, an 'accident which pricks, bruises' and even 'wounds' its viewer.¹⁵⁰ Barthes' terminology is directed towards the unique representational conditions that govern 20th-century photography, but his analysis of the capacity of striking pictorial details to activate a more fully embodied and sensorially engaged kind of viewer response strongly recalls a recurring preoccupation in Counter-Reformation martyrological image theory with instigating powerful affective responses on spectators through the deployment of graphically violent pictorial details. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two, representations of the wounds of Christ and the martyrs are frequently figured as having the capacity to variously hit viewers in the guts, burn their eyes and set fire to their spirits in numerous post-Tridentine treatises. Adapting Barthes' terminology, in the Santo Stefano fresco cycle it might be argued that it is the martyrological wound itself and the resulting details of dismemberment that 'wounds' the most, 'that rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces' us.¹⁵¹ Perhaps

¹⁵⁰ Barthes (1981), p.49.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Barthes' own most intriguing example of a *punctum* at work also revolves around the aftermath of violent spectacle. Gazing at Alexander Gardner's 1865 photograph of the shackled Lewis Payne awaiting execution in an American jail, Barthes is pricked by the realisation that the young man depicted there is both 'dead and...going to die.' For Barthes, one of the most striking aspects of this *punctum* is its fundamental heterochronicity: 'This will be and this has been: I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.'¹⁵²

The details of martyrological wounding operate on a similar level, simultaneously representing both the 'will be' and 'has been' of persecution. As with Barthes' *punctum*, a reading of the violent moments rendered in the Santo Stefano frescoes must also negotiate a form of temporal doubling: here too the viewer finds oneself in the strange situation of 'shuddering over a catastrophe which has already occurred.' There is however a subtle difference in the ways the respective *puncta* of photography and martyrological imagery harness the multiplicity of time. Photography constructs a record of subjects who no longer exist, or at least not in the forms in which they were originally captured, and so forces upon its viewers a consideration of mortality and temporal finitude.¹⁵³ At Santo Stefano by contrast, it is not only death that is at stake in the anterior futures of these represented subjects. The temporally complex *puncta* constituted by the martyrs' dismembered body parts also encompasses the 'will be' of the eternal relic that constitutes the essential building block of sacred space, a future that is vividly pointed to for example in the piles of tongues and hands depicted in fresco 29, thus firmly joining the site of death to the paradoxical future memory of resurrection.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid., p.96.

¹⁵³ See Schlossman (1997), p.153.

¹⁵⁴ For an argument positioning the heterochronicity of photographs as appertaining to eternal life rather than ever-present death, and so linking them to the 'living context' enjoyed by relics in religious worship, see Berger (1980), p.57.

For Barthes, the wounding detail that constitutes an image's *punctum* takes on a signifying role far in excess of its compositional prominence: 'while remaining a detail, it fills the whole picture.'¹⁵⁵ If, as I have argued, the city of Rome itself was being redefined by the perambulations of saintly vestiges across its urban topography, the landscapes and cities of the Santo Stefano frescoes are also fundamentally defined by the bodies being dismantled within them. Like the expansive power of Barthes' *punctum*, the violated corpse takes on total epistemological significance within the frescoes' wider scenographic compositions. Federico Zeri recognised that the productive potential of these martyred bodies constituted a radical departure in late-sixteenth-century sacred art: they depict 'a new geography, where the hills are heaps of cadavers, the waterways rivers of blood, the volcanoes burning pyres, and the cities complex and ingenious gallows.'¹⁵⁶ In Zeri's evocative description the topography of the Christian world is literally formed by the fragmented bodies of the martyrs and the instruments employed to unmake them, and the striking details of dismemberment assume a world-making dimension. In these scenes of the violent early years of the faith the viewer is witnessing Elsner's 'martyr-filled mother earth' in the very act of its formation, a landscape of martyrial *puncta* that wound the viewer as they expand to fill the entire interpretive parameters of the picture.

Considering the central role that the material remains of the Christian saints played in the formation of Rome as this essentially sacred 'mother-earth,' it comes as a surprise that Santo Stefano Rotondo itself was founded in the absence of any such relics. The tomb of saint Stephen was reputedly discovered in the year 415 in Jerusalem (fig.78). The subsequent diffusion of his relics across the Mediterranean was so rapid that Augustine was moved to write only a decade later that 'his body has brought light to the whole world.'¹⁵⁷ Stephen's corpse never reached the Roman basilica, however, and

¹⁵⁵ Barthes (1981), p.45.

¹⁵⁶ Zeri (1957), p 58.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Markus (1990), p.148.

the church remained without a major relic until Pope Theodore's seventh-century translation of Primus and Felicianus.¹⁵⁸ I suggest that the frescoes commissioned by Lauretano nearly a millennium later, a vast encyclopaedia of sanctified bodies cycling eternally through an unbroken history of the Church, functioned as 'relic proxies' - visual stand-ins for the bones the basilica did not possess. The Jesuit Order's preoccupation with the power of relics to spiritually enrich their institutions, and the great lengths to which they were prepared to go in order to obtain sacred fragments from the cemetery beneath the German-Hungarian college's *vigna* on the Via Salaria has already been mentioned in the introduction. A flood of relics excised from the bodies of 'martyrs' completely unknown to historical record or early-Christian hagiography flowed from the cemetery of Basilla to Jesuit colleges all across Europe and even as far as the Indies.¹⁵⁹ In a cultural climate once again preoccupied with the numinous power of the sacred corpse Lauretano was perhaps unwilling to profit from such a historically dubious approach, and instead appropriated the painter's brush in an attempt to right the historical anomaly of Santo Stefano's relic-free foundation.¹⁶⁰ That this might be a legitimate devotional exchange is buttressed by Hans Belting's demonstration that the conflation of relics and images has a long history, and the iconoclastic texts of Jean Calvin in the early doctrinal exchanges of the Reformation consistently figured the two as interchangeable objects of opprobrium.¹⁶¹ If hagiography typically 'associates a figure with a place,'¹⁶² which is in turn sacralised by the presence of the figure of the saint in the form of a relic, then Santo Stefano's relic proxies seek to overcome the limitations of this sacred spatial logic.

If the acquisition of Stephen's actual body was beyond the rector's

¹⁵⁸ Krautheimer and Corbett (1970), pp.236-7.

¹⁵⁹ For a list of these consignments, see Ghilardi (2009a), p.462.

¹⁶⁰ Lauretano did profit from the global relic trade at San Apollinare, receiving a relic of Apollinare's arm from Jacobus Curtius in June 1586. See *Acta Sanctorum Julii*, vol.5 (1727), p.376.

¹⁶¹ Calvin, *passim*; Belting (1994), p.60; Dillenberger (1999), pp.14-15.

¹⁶² De Certeau (1988), p.272; Randall-Coates (1992), p.11.

capabilities, representing the moment his body was transformed from fleshy corporeal matter to inviolable relic was an admirable devotional compromise. After the *Crucifixion*, the first scene of the martyrological cycle proper depicts the stoning of the proto-martyr in Jerusalem (fig.2). Stephen's martyrdom, as the first Christian sacrifice suffered in *imitatio Christi*, sets out the conditions for the world-making capacity of such bloody testaments of faith. Stephen kneels in a red mantle, surrounded by soldiers hurling stones from point-blank range as he gazes towards an apparition of Christ and God the Father on a cloud above. Christ stands holding a cross aloft, whilst the seated Father cradles a globe. This scene is the only image in the cycle which features any form of non-naturalistic divine intervention into the sacrificial world of terrestrial martyrdom, and the objects held by Christ and the Father provide the clue as to why this incursion is necessary here. Taken together, the cross and globe serve to link the sacrifice of martyrdom with the invention of a specifically Christian geography, a process represented as fully by Santo Stefano's relic proxies as by the actual relics moving across Rome's sacred landscape. That the cycle's activating scene takes place in a first-century Jerusalem cityscape transposed into the sixteenth-century Roman basilica further reinforces the claims being made for the Counter-Reformation metropolis as glorious successor to the faith's original holy city. The preceding fresco of Christ's crucifixion on Golgotha also links the two cities, and the cityscape of Jerusalem is visible nestled in the surrounding hills (fig.79).

A remarkable description of the martyrdom of Saint Anastasia from Gallonio's 1591 *History of the Virgin Saints of Rome* (fig.80) vividly demonstrates that the generative power attributed to the fragmented body in contemporary hagiographic discourse could appertain as much to images of martyrdom as it could to actual material relics. Gallonio's ambitious work of Catholic scholarship proposed a kind of temporal compression similar to the Santo Stefano cycle, drawing a direct link between the sacrifices of the 'nobly born virgins of ancient Rome' and the actions of 'the Roman virgin servants

of Christ in our own times' as Simon Ditchfield points out.¹⁶³ In Gallonio's reconstruction of Anastasia's trial, the defiant virgin-martyr rebukes the Roman administrator Probus for both his ineffectual threats and wheedling attempts to convince her to submit to Imperial authority. Anastasia asserts that her soon to be fragmented body-parts will speak more eloquently of God's glory in their piecemeal state than they ever could have as part of a unified and conventionally beautiful physiology:

You threaten to have me put to death, cruel judge; and what else do I seek, and what else do I want, if not to die from bitter torments? Divide my limbs into pieces; order that my tongue, hands and nails be cut off, and my teeth dug out; each of my body-parts I owe to my Creator, and it was always my heart's most ardent thirst that he will remain in every bit of my glorified limbs. I will offer them up to him as gifts, and they will ornament his most beautiful and noble throne with the beauty and grace of my sincere confession.¹⁶⁴

The empty throne of Christ, or *Hetoimasia*, was a popular subject of early-Christian and Byzantine art, and was frequently depicted adorned with the instruments of Christ's Passion (fig.81).¹⁶⁵ Anastasia extends this iconographic tradition, conjuring a startling image of God's heavenly throne gaudily bedecked with disembodied corporeal fragments. Instead of the readily interpreted martyrological instruments of the *Hetoimasia*, we are confronted with precious yet disjunctive body-parts festooned across the seat of judgment in a violent synecdoche which emphasises the complex relationship between part and whole characteristic of relic worship more generally.

The aesthetic value being attributed to the fragmented holy body here

¹⁶³ Ditchfield (1995), pp.181-4. Anastasia's relics were conserved at San Saba, the German-Hungarian college's satellite church. See Strinati (2009), p.609.

¹⁶⁴ Gallonio (1591b), p.199. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁶⁵ See Grabar (1952), p.40; Parani (2003), pp195-6; Tradigo (2006), p.254.

is worth further exploration, and will be taken up in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis. What is most interesting in the context of the present discussion is that the accumulating sequence of body parts recited like a litany by Anastasia undergo a transformative and sanctifying change of state at the very moment of their excision, underscoring the heterochronicity that ensures the continuing devotional significance of Christian dismemberment. In Anastasia's account the transition from temporally contingent corporeality to eternal relic emerges also as the passage from materiality to representation. Her limbs, tongue, hands, nails and teeth become beautiful adornments to the throne of Christ, that is objects of specifically aesthetic regard, even as they return to sanctify the terrestrial world as mobile relics.

Anastasia's vivid conceptualisation of the way in which martyrdom constitutes the initiating act of a complex economy of relic veneration can be mapped with precision onto the walls of Santo Stefano. In the scene of persecution taking place in Vandal North Africa, a theatrically moustachioed torturer fulfils Anastasia's exhortation as he sets about slicing off the tongues of an impassive group of soon-to-be-saints, pliers and razor blade the tools of his obscene trade (fig.29). Nearby another executioner holds aloft a blood-stained machete, poised to descend onto the already mangled wrist of another emotionless female martyr. Her brothers and sisters in Christ look on, already gushing blood from their dismembered stumps. Piles of disembodied tongues and hands litter the ground below, visual analogues of the body-part gifts so willingly offered by Anastasia to decorate the heavenly realm.¹⁶⁶ But far from representing the loss of agency and meaning, here we are paradoxically also witnessing the creation of the very objects that were generating new urban geographies in late sixteenth-century Rome and giving

¹⁶⁶ For the role of relics as gifts in wide-ranging networks of exchange between privileged prelates in early-Christian Europe and the way this fostered the contagious spread of holiness, see Cox Miller (1997), pp.113-138. For Gregory the Great's extension of this gift economy in an attempt to shore up his relationship with his bishops, see Leyser (2000), pp.289-307.

new meaning to the city's monuments, literally being carved from the fabric of the saintly body.

The passage from dismembered body-part to sempiternal relic rendered in Gallonio's envoicing of Anastasia and the Santo Stefano fresco was reflected in the real world fate of the body of Francis Xavier, the Jesuit 'Apostle of the Orient,' in the decades after his death during an abortive missionary foray to China in 1552 (figs.82&3). His miraculously incorruptible corpse rapidly became a material lynchpin for Goa's Christian community, where it had been returned after his death.¹⁶⁷ Such was the reputation of his mortal remains that a fragment was procured for the papal capital; Claudio Acquaviva, Jesuit Superior General at the time of the Santo Stefano commission, ordered the lower half of Xavier's right arm to be severed from his corpse and returned to Rome, where it was enshrined in precious metals and displayed above the altar of a side-chapel in the Gesù (fig.84).¹⁶⁸ The perilous journey of the lower arm from sacred periphery back to Christian centre inverted the normal flow of relics across the Catholic globe, demonstrating that Rome remained fertile ground for urban sacralisation, always ready to drink in the blood of ever-more holy relics. Five years later, the remaining portion of Xavier's arm was also detached from his torso, divided into three parts and sent to the Jesuit Colleges of Malacca, Cochin and Macau.¹⁶⁹ The frequent transits of the corpse were noted by Francisco de Sousa in 1697, who marvelled at how Xavier was like a still-living pilgrim, 'wander[ing] from Shangchuan to Malacca, from Malacca to Goa, from one grave to another, changing tombs, coffins, cubicles, rooms, and chapels.'¹⁷⁰ Like the infectious fertilising capacity of the corpses perambulating around Rome during the same period, Xavier's body produced a sacred landscape in the wake of its movement across the region through its powerful corporeal presence.

¹⁶⁷ Gupta (2014), p.66; Zupanov (2005), p.109.

¹⁶⁸ Zupanov, p.81.

¹⁶⁹ Wojciehowski (2011), p.220.

¹⁷⁰ Quoted in Brockey (2015), p.64.

The transformation of corpse into relic in a flourishing global economy provides a striking real world extension of the sacred narrative implicitly pointed to in the severed tongues and hands obscenely piling up on the ground of Santo Stefano's 29th fresco. In light of the consecratory power ascribed to baptism explored earlier in this chapter, it is significant that Xavier's right arm was the subject of these relic-producing severances, ostensibly because it was the active member associated with his lustral missionary practice.¹⁷¹ As Callistus' martyred body sanctified the urban fabric of Trastevere in a continuation of his baptismal campaign, so too Xavier's limb traced newly sacred geographies in death. In the case of both the saint's limb and the disembodied organs painted on the basilica's walls, the temporal enjambment of the moment of bodily fragmentation and relic-formation seems to demonstrate David Hillman and Carla Mazzio's assertion that 'the body in parts is not always the body in pieces.'¹⁷² In early-modern negotiations of the role of the body in acts of religious devotion and cultural fashioning, corporeal destruction and corporeal desecration are far from coterminous: the apparently punitive partitioning of the holy corpse could be discursively transformed into a process through which urban space might be sanctified.

The relationship between material relic, representation and the consecration of sacred space at Santo Stefano perhaps takes definitive shape in the cycle's 27th fresco (fig.27). Here the viewer is confronted with a frenzied act of dismemberment centred around the recumbent corpse of a young man jammed so close to the picture-plane as to admit no means of spectatorial escape. This provocatively excessive site of martyrdom is presided over by an impassive executioner brandishing a long-bladed butcher's knife in both hands high above his head. The air of the

¹⁷¹ For Xavier's reputation and subsequent hagiographic construction as an agent of missionary baptism, see Leone (2010), pp.350-1.

¹⁷² Hillman and Mazzio (2013), p.xi.

slaughterhouse hangs heavily over this fresco - the cleaver wielding butcher wears an apron to protect himself from the staining spatter of Christian blood, and the trestle table which carries the unnamed martyr's corpse resembles a butcher's block or rustic banqueting table. Despite the apparently frenzied nature of the executioner's knife-blows, the neatly severed right arm of the martyr, complete with the sickening detail of its central white bone poking out from glistening red flesh, indicates that the young man's body is being methodically divided into joints of meat. The fresco graphically visualises the etymology of the early-modern Italian term for an executioner – a *carnefice*, or literally someone who produces meat.¹⁷³

The slaughterhouse emerges as a more than fortuitous reference point for this scene of martyrial dissection. Equations between the dehumanising treatment meted out to the martyred body and the carcasses of butchered animals had a long history in Christian accounts of religious oppression. In his monumental *History of the Church*, Eusebius graphically describes how martyrs were roasted over slow-burning wood fires, whilst their noses, ears, and other limbs were severed 'and the portions of the body cut up like meat.'¹⁷⁴ Eusebius' perturbing quasi-culinary catalogue of execution finds repeated visual expression at Santo Stefano. Agapitus hangs upside down by his feet, choking over a slow fire that seems to be smoking him like a side of bacon (fig.20), whilst Vandal persecutors slice off tongues and hands like so many delectable morsels in fresco 29. In countless other scenes martyrs are deposited into cauldrons simmering with boiling water or oil.

Even more pertinently, in his 1581 *Roma Sancta* Gregory Martin luridly described the city in which early-Christian communities first took root as a great open-air abattoir; his account of Christian persecution provides a fascinating supplement to Circignani's visual record of butchery unveiled only a year later. For 300 years after Christ's death, Rome

¹⁷³ Guerra (2003), p.78.

¹⁷⁴ Eusebius (1984), p.342.

was a boucherie and as it were a verie Shambles of Martyrising Christians and puttinge them to Death for confessing the name of Christ. In whiche space (thincke you) were they secretely buried and reserved? How many places embrewed with their bloud? How manie prisons, cheynes, swordes, other instrumentes [...] sanctified by their deathes and passions?¹⁷⁵

Martin emphasises the sacred nature of Rome's physical geography, which constitutes a vast urban slaughterhouse stripped of the wider infrastructural mechanics that usually underpin city life. As in Severano's later *Memorie Sacre*, for Martin the ancient city is first and foremost a factory engaged in the mass manufacture of Christian martyrs, a process that 'embrews' and sanctifies the ground beneath their mutilated feet. The otherwise dehumanising correlation between butchery and martyrdom is thus re-articulated to exemplify Christianity's capacity to invert degrading narratives of persecution into signs of confessional triumph.

The bloody metaphor of the meat-processing industry adopted by Martin for this purpose effectively placed the distant discourse of martyrdom he was invoking in a context easily explicable in early-modern Rome. The denizens of the papal capital consumed an enormous amount of meat in the late sixteenth and early seventh century thanks to concerted efforts by a series of popes to keep its frequently unruly populace satiated with a ready supply of food. In the opening decades of the seicento one anonymous chronicler asserted that Romans consumed twice as much meat and wine as Naples, even though it was only half the size.¹⁷⁶ To maintain such a flourishing market, the sights, sounds and smells of animal slaughter were an ever-present feature of city life. In the Rome that Martin visited and in which Circignani's frescoes were produced, the city's major abattoir was located in

¹⁷⁵ Martin (1581), p.44.

¹⁷⁶ Revel (1979), p.48.

a central position just off Via dei Coronari, a thoroughfare that was regularly traversed by pilgrims participating in religious processions leading to the Vatican. The nearby streets ran fresh with the guts of slaughtered animals thrown there by the butchers and tanners who worked in and around the abattoir.¹⁷⁷ The cannibalistic Shambles of pagan Rome vividly lived on in the early modern city-as-slaughterhouse, where sacred space and bloody dismemberment remained closely intertwined.

In this context, juxtaposing the Santo Stefano fresco with Annibale Carracci's masterful *Butcher's Shop* scenes, also completed in the early 1580s and which depict the meaty products that constitute the fruits of the slaughterman's industry, is illuminating (fig.85). Carracci's painting is more concerned with the transformation of these carcasses into marketable products than it is with the bloody moment of slaughter itself, and it would be mistaken to push the analogy between the images too far. This rendering of an emerging market economy situated in the commercial premises of the butcher's shop is tied to the modes of labour and exchange that were being fundamentally transformed in sixteenth-century Europe, emblematised in the halberdier reaching for his coin pouch and the butcher carefully weighing out his change. The relic economy that I argue is being literally carved into existence in Circignani's work emblematises a different and altogether more problematic kind of contemporary commodification, one that brought the sacred into the orbit of global and trans-temporal trade.¹⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the elision of the genre scene and the sacred image in Circignani's work is startling. The repetitive manual labour of the executioner-butcher secularly and sacrilegiously produces cannibalistic joints of meat on the one hand, whilst piously fashioning sacred relics from this holy corporeality in order to feed a voracious global trade on the other.

¹⁷⁷ Partner (1980), p.89.

¹⁷⁸ According to Adriano Prosperi (1996, p.42), the increasingly global scope of relic veneration 'opened up the field to a kind of social commerce without limits.'

The equations made in Circignani's fresco between the martyr's physical death and the butchering of an animal thus fundamentally grounds the work in the realm of the corporeal earthly city, apparently far from the rarefied preoccupations of sanctity and martyrial ascension to the immaterial sphere of heaven. The composition of the fresco itself also encourages us to focus our attention firmly on the terrestrial plane: the work's dominant thrust is downward, and our eyes inevitably follow the profuse streams of blood that flow off the table and pool on the earth below, dramatically marking this space as sacred ground.¹⁷⁹ The generative, life-giving properties of martyr's blood exalted by contemporary propagandists such as Severano and Martin find their visualisation here. Within the sacred space of the church, it is as if the blood perpetually cascading down the painted walls of the transept is consecrating the basilica itself, visual image performing the role of holy relic. In contrast to the wince-inducing mimetic detail with which the martyr's physiology has been rendered, these rivulets of blood embody such a freedom of facture that they take on an abstracted pictorial quality, seeming to challenge a conventionally imitative paradigm of painting.¹⁸⁰ The free intermingling of the semiotic codes of blood and paint imbricates representation in the task of sanctifying the space of the basilica in a way that extends beyond simple mimesis.

Within the recursive circularity of Santo Stefano's fresco cycle, the passage of time itself telescopes in a series of images depicting body-parts metamorphosing into imaged relics at the very moment of their severance from defunct terrestrial forms. Destruction and generation vie for the same temporal and representational space, infinitely deferring the moment of

¹⁷⁹ In a sermon delivered to mark the feast of St. Stephen in 1586, the Jesuit William Baldwin also appropriated butchery imagery to highlight the plight of English Catholics, describing the seminarians of the English College as sheep headed 'for that bloody butcher stall of England.' See McGinness (1995), p.122.

¹⁸⁰ This recalls George Didi-Huberman's description of the way in which the '*material* existence of the index, the pictorial trace,' assumes centre stage in Fra Angelico's frescoes at San Marco in Florence. At Santo Stefano too the 'spattering, the throwing of pigment onto the wall' becomes a key driver of the painting's meaning. See Didi-Huberman (1990), p.30; p.2.

corporeal obliteration. Julia Kristeva's characterisation of Christ's death as 'a life-giving discontinuity, closer to nutrition' than 'simple destruction' is a particularly suggestive meditation on the complex relationship between the competing states of corporeal identity co-existing within the saintly body at the moment of martyrdom.¹⁸¹ For Kristeva, the ontological fracture constituted by Christ's death and bodily desecration is ultimately a generative wound and, significantly in the context of the cannibalistic overtones of Santo Stefano's butchery fresco, one that can nourish the community as spiritual food in a ritual of incorporation. The meaty meal of the Eucharist is the crucial moment that establishes a powerful bond between the worlds of God and man.

For Kristeva, the sacrifice of Christ's body must be further thought of as 'the offering of an acceptable and accepted gift,' an offering directly echoed by Gallonio's Saint Anastasia gifting her body-parts as ornaments for the heavenly throne and more allusively by the dismembered martyrs of Santo Stefano. In one fresco St. Dionysius leads a procession through a pastoral landscape, carrying his own severed head before him like an auto-votive offering (fig.7). The bishop's eyes seem to stare beyond a death that he cannot see or does not acknowledge. No longer belonging to this world but neither fully residing in the next, the bishop's ambiguously animated head is perhaps the relic-object *par-excellence*. If the relic can be defined through its heterochronicity, cut off from the inexorable flow of temporality to which the mundane world is subject and occupying multiple times and spaces simultaneously, then the moment of its slicing free of this temporal bond is powerfully figured in the butcher's blade.

Circignani's frescoes are thus far more than simple depictions of the violent ends of Christian martyrs. Equally importantly, they seek to visualise both the ways in which martyrdom sanctifies sacred spaces and the complex ontological mutations engendered in the creation of relic-objects. But the

¹⁸¹ Kristeva (1989), pp.130-1.

frescoes do not merely aspire to *represent* these crucial practices of Catholic devotion; instead, they attempt to *enact* them. The ways in which freely circulating visual images of post-Tridentine saints and *beati* could operate as 'substitutes' for their actual holy bodies has been increasingly recognised by scholars of Jesuit hagiography in particular.¹⁸² Such images were not simply second-order facsimiles of authentic corporeal loci of devotion. In the case of the fresco of the anonymous martyr on his butcher's block at Santo Stefano, an even bolder claim is being made for the valence of the visual image. Here the lost corporeal prototype never existed in the first place, and the absent saintly body is reconstituted through abstract visual traces that refer only to themselves.

If the Santo Stefano frescoes can be interpreted as relic-proxies, imaged stand-ins that signify every bit as powerfully as their absent agents, they nonetheless insist on a history of violence in a manner not paralleled in those material objects. As Peter Brown has demonstrated, relics are first and foremost defined by their *praesentia*: that is, the continuing, 'physical presence' of a specific holy identity within the devotional object. Although long removed from the horrors of their violent moments of inception, distant events in time endure eternally within their contours. Despite being associated with the 'unambiguously good happenings' of present-day ritual practice, 'the relic itself still carried with it the dark shadows of its origin.'¹⁸³ After centuries of fragmentation, subdivision, damage, theft and exchange, the narrative of evil death that was the prerequisite for their creation might be somewhat obscured; nonetheless, the relic's very survival implicitly spoke to the power of the ever-present saint to overcome that malignant genesis.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² San Juan (2001), for example, argues that Francis Xavier's image was 'reconceived as a kind of substitute for the loss of the authenticity of [his] body in the early seventeenth century' (p.7).

¹⁸³ Brown (1981), p.101.

¹⁸⁴ See Olson (2014), p.69.

Painted images couldn't make the same claims of *praesentia*. Any suggestion that the martyrs invoked at Santo Stefano somehow inhabited the space of their representations would be idolatrous, an affront to the Tridentine decrees that unambiguously discounted the animistic power of images.¹⁸⁵ As Catholic apologists were at pains to point out, the devotion paid to the representation of a holy personage passes fully to its prototype.¹⁸⁶ Unlike the relic itself, an image was a conduit rather than an object of veneration. But even whilst respecting this crucial distinction, the relic-proxy could compensate for its lack of *praesentia* through exploiting the visceral immediacy of representation. In this way the relationship between violence and the saintly body could be emphasised in a manner not possible in the dynamics of indexical substitution that pervaded the affective power of the relic.

Praesentia at Santo Stefano thus takes on a new significance: the activating presence of the trans-temporal witness to the violated martyred body. Re-presenting the very moment of violent relic-formation for a contemporary audience firmly established the continuing relevance of the saintly community in the contested confessional landscape of late sixteenth-century Europe. Brown relates how the wealthy fourth-century bishop of Brescia Gaudentius described the church in which he deposited relics collected on a pilgrimage to the holy land as playing host to a *concilium sanctorum*, or an assembly of saints who had 'gathered together from various lands.'¹⁸⁷ Whilst the martyrs themselves may not have descended upon the basilica of Santo Stefano in such sacred assembly, Lauretano restaged Gaudentius' holy *concilium* in vivid representational analogue along the walls of the nave.

¹⁸⁵ Freedberg (1982), p.139.

¹⁸⁶ Hall (2011), p.118; The prototype defence originated with St. Basil and was frequently invoked by Tridentine image theorists. See, for example, G. Paleotti pp.252-7; Bosio, p.565. Reformers such as Karlstadt refuted this distinction, arguing that worship centred upon the image of a saint risked imputing numinous power to the image itself. See Scavizzi and Mangrum (1998), pp.8-9.

¹⁸⁷ Brown (1981), p.95; Bartlett (2013), p.446.

Broken bodies, resurrected obelisks, partial maps and perambulatory relics: in the febrile culture of Counter-Reformation Rome, both the fundamentally fragmentary body of the city and the body of the saint were elevated to a pre-eminent position in the collective urban imaginary. The fresco cycle of Santo Stefano Rotondo emerges as a fruitful site to explore the ways in which this new *Roma Sancta* was generated through the complex theology of the martyred body, a discursive space where the terrestrial and divine worlds collide. The animation of the saintly body was ironically only made possible through its fragmentation; death, instead of bringing about stasis, brings about the vivification of the Counter-Reformation city. But the city conjured into life by the martyred body and its representation was a pious fiction always on the verge of dissolution. Even as holy corpses were brought to the centre of Roman urban discourse, its dark double, the despised and alien body, was increasingly confined to the periphery. The bodies of Jews, foreigners and prostitutes were habitually marked and segregated, made to wear distinctive garments¹⁸⁸ and forced to reside in specifically defined areas of the city.¹⁸⁹ In 1566 Pope Pius V himself dramatically juxtaposed these two kinds of bodies in a ringing denunciation of the city's courtesans, arguing that as Rome was a *specchio del mondo* it was unacceptable for prostitutes to 'inhabit the most beautiful streets of *Roma santa*, where the blood of so many martyrs has been spilled [and] where there are so many relics.'¹⁹⁰ The positive contagion of the saintly body that cured maladies and sanctified earth as it perambulated across the Roman landscape had its threatening doppelgänger: in the xenophobic and misogynist cultural imagination of the Counter-Reformation city, the alien

¹⁸⁸ See Cohen (1988), p.398. Martin (1581, p.80) observes that the city's Jewish population were made to wear yellow caps to distinguish them from the capital's Christian community.

¹⁸⁹ The Jewish ghetto had been established by Paul IV in 1555. See Barry (1996), pp.18-31. Pius V attempted to confine the prostitutes of the city to a prescribed area known as the *Ortaccio* in 1566, physically marginalising their bodies in what Elizabeth Cohen (1992, p.611) describes as an 'inverse Eden.'

¹⁹⁰ Quoted in Pastor, Vol. 17, p.396. For original see appendix 1.

body too spread contagion, the contagion of moral decay, disease and cultural miscegenation.

In the Santo Stefano frescoes too these doppelgängers find vivid visual expression, where the identities of Christian persecutors are frequently mapped onto the marginalised communities of late-sixteenth-century Catholic Europe. One of the architects of Vandal persecution in the cycle's 29th fresco, for example, resembles a contemporary Ottoman Turk wearing a white turban and clutching a curved sword with a delicately spiralled handle. The pale complexion, white hair and extravagant moustache of his companion meanwhile suggests that he hails from the modern Protestant North (fig. 29). These figures are no doubt symbolic of the great twin-threats to contemporary Catholicism as described by Ignazio Danti earlier in this chapter: the schismatics of the North and the heretics of the East are conjured backwards in time to assert a continuity of persecution between the early-Christian world and post-Reformation Europe. The newly amalgamated German-Hungarian college was an appropriate space in which to represent this twin-threat: the German college had been founded with the explicit aim of reclaiming German communities from the spread of Protestantism, whilst the Hungarian college was committed to countering Ottoman dominion over the Magyar lands.¹⁹¹

One must remain attentive to the ways in which the implicit figuring of the other as a scapegoat in such imagery might itself contribute to the 'production of prejudice' in a contemporary context, as Robert Mills has argued.¹⁹² Mills' caution serves to remind us that there is a necessarily ethical component to looking at images of violence if we are to uncover the various kinds of work that frescoes such as those at Santo Stefano were expected to perform in their original context. But inseparable from these questions of ethics are questions of aesthetics too. If the Santo Stefano frescoes were to be

¹⁹¹ See Bitskey (1996), p.32.

¹⁹² Mills (2002), pp.206-7.

effective agents of cultural fashioning, they of necessity had to engage with pressing concerns related to the practice of art itself. Moving beyond widespread characterisations of Circignani's work as operating merely at the level of propaganda, the following chapter will seek to situate the frescoes in the context of late cinquecento artistic theory, arguing that their devotional efficacy was widely held to be inextricable from their capacity to provoke visual pleasure in their audiences.

CHAPTER 2

'UNA COSA NOVA E BELLA': TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF MARTYRDOM IN THE ROMAN COUNTER-REFORMATION

**Introduction - Martyring Marius: Suspended Between Pain and
Beauty in the Counter-Reformation**

*Behold your desirable one disfigured...Where are now the cheeks flushed
with life, the skin fair as snow? Where in this ravaged body will you find
any beauty?*

- Bonaventure, thirteenth century¹

*Your hair has been transformed into regal purple. Oh my Lord, who has
rooted out the hair above your forehead, and given you so much beauty
(vaghezza)?*

- Alfonso Paleotti, 1599²

Tied by his wrists to the rough timber of a cross-beam, an idealised male body hangs in exhibitionist display (fig.86). His torso recalls a classical tradition, a muscularly sculpted anatomy worthy of the ancient statues given pride of place in the Vatican's octagonal sculpture garden founded by Pope Julius II at the beginning of the sixteenth century (figs.87&88). Nicolò Circignani had recently been working in the Vatican for Pope Gregory XIII, and the aestheticized bodies of antiquity were undoubtedly percolating through his artistic imagination.³ One might also think of Michelangelo's elderly yet muscle-bound saints in the nearby Sistine chapel, reproduced in so many prints over the previous half-century (figs. 89&90); as with Michelangelo's exemplars, here only the saint's thinning white hair and hoary

¹ Bonaventure (1960), pp.167-8. For discussion see Bestul (1996), p.152; Enders (1999), p.69.

² A. Paleotti (1599), p.71.

³ For Circignani's work at the Vatican, see Courtright (2003).

beard betray his hagiographically mandated venerability.⁴ A judiciously placed white loincloth is a firm reminder that, *pace* Michelangelo, such expressions of classically inflected corporeal beauty had their decorous limits in 1580s Rome.

Thus far the aesthetic precedents on which the artist draws seem clear, twin prototypes recognisable from Vasari's codification of the canon of Italian art in the concluding section to his *Lives of the Artists* first published in 1550.⁵ The ostensible subject of this composition, the *Martyrdom of Saint Marius*, might be seen as little more than an irrelevant accretion of sacred narrative. As with so many Renaissance depictions of St. Sebastian, one could argue that the work constitutes a transparent excuse for a beautiful corporeal display.⁶ Federico Borromeo lamented this practice in his Counter-Reformatory treatise *De Pictura Sacra*, censuring artists who used Sebastian in particular as an excuse to 'to demonstrate their skill at depicting a nude body in its prime.'⁷ A closer analysis of the structuring principles of Circignani's Marius seems to confirm such a suspicion of the artist's pictorial motivation. Enclosing the saint's body on three sides, the wooden structure on which he hangs emerges as a fictive pictorial frame.⁸ To frame is, by its very nature, to posit an object for aesthetic regard, directing and focusing the

⁴ Courtright suggests that Circignani consciously adopted a 'High Renaissance vocabulary' in the Tower of the Winds (pp.89-91), while Moreschini identifies a Michelangelism in Circignani's Umbrian works (p.71). For a brief treatment of Michelangelism at Santo Stefano, see Korrick (1999), p.188, n.60.

⁵ For Vasari's conception of artistic merit as 'an adaptive mastery of the models provided by classical antiquity' that reached its fullest expression with Michelangelo, see Rubin (1995) esp.p.253.

⁶ For the appropriation of Sebastian as an artistic avatar for corporeal perfection in the Renaissance, see Talvacchia, (2010). As she notes, 'the sensual accentuation of Sebastian's physical beauty' always encompassed a macabre acknowledgement that this was a beauty in the midst of being desecrated by a hail of arrows, a kind of corporeal cognitive dissonance that resonates with the doubling effected by Circignani's Marius analysed below.

⁷ Borromeo (2010), p.29.

⁸ The structure recalls Rudolf Arnheim's morphological conception of a frame as two posts topped by a lintel (1983), p.54. Martha Easton (1994, p.90) has published numerous medieval illustrations of St. Agatha in which she is shackled to a very similar wooden framing armature during her mutilation (figs.91&92).

gaze of the proposed observer towards the compositional centre.⁹ The narrative of the crossbeam thus emerges as a particularly ingenious ploy which allows the artist to display the full skills of his anatomical repertoire, a device of sacred narrative with a meta-pictorial function. The saint is explicitly figured as a representational unit, a body scopically encoded for pleasurable ocular consumption.

Framing devices, whether real or fictive, provide natural conceptual limits for the spectator's interpretive gaze.¹⁰ But this scene within a scene constitutes only one aspect of the fresco; looking past the artificially imposed boundaries of the two trunks that support the cross-beam on which the saint hangs, other bodies quickly slide into our field of vision (fig. 19). For these bodies, the Apollonian corporeal integrity of Marius is a distant memory. To his right two boys bleed profusely as iron hooks rip through their supple skin, gore pooling around youthful feet. An inscription relates that these youths are Audifax and Abacum, Marius' sons who have been condemned to share his fate. To the patriarch's left, a Roman matron revealed as his wife Martha is draped in the complex folds of antique costume, *stola* reaching all the way to the ground, mantle drawn up decorously around her head in a manner recalling the descriptions of antique costume in Cesare Vecellio's 1590 treatise on the same subject (figs. 93&4). This otherwise accurate depiction of Roman dress contains a startlingly anachronistic accessory, however. Hanging by a thread from the matron's neck are her own

⁹ According to E.H. Gombrich (1979, p.157), 'the frame, or the border, delimits the field of force, with its gradients of meaning increasing toward the centre. So strong is this feeling of an organizing pull that we take it for granted that the elements of the pattern are oriented towards their common centre.'

¹⁰ Examples of illusionistic framing devices performing a role of interpretive containment and constituting a coherent organising principle for complex multi-scene pictorial programmes abound, from Giotto's work in Assisi's Basilica of St. Francis in the 1290s to the 1580s cycle of sacred histories that adorn the ceiling of the Vatican's Galleria delle Carte Geografiche and early Baroque schemes such as Annibale Carracci's *Loves of the Gods* in Palazzo Farnese (1597-1608). For an examination of the way in which the frame as a 'conceptual marker of limits' became an essential perceptual component of ceiling painting a generation later, see Duro (1996).

dismembered hands, adorning her simple outfit in a terrible travesty of a necklace. Two livid stumps confirm the recent mutilation.

Whilst this detail is related in contemporary works of hagiography,¹¹ its visual representation has very few artistic precedents.¹² A well-informed contemporary viewer might have been instead reminded of reports reaching Rome concerning the bodily desecrations supposedly being perpetrated against recusant Catholics in northern Europe. In Richard Verstegan's propagandistic 1592 text *The Theatre of Cruelties*, the author describes a barbaric Huguenot who fashioned a necklace from the severed ears of priests, boasting that 'it was made by his strenuous efforts;' the accompanying engraving inevitably recalls Circignani's depiction of Martha (fig. 96).¹³

The norms of classical beauty locatable in the figure of Marius thus do not extend to the entire pictorial field. As one's gaze returns to the wooden frame-within-a-frame, our perception of the scene's principal protagonist surely changes. A disinterested contemplation of Marius's classically inflected beauty suddenly seems out of place in light of the horrors being perpetuated just beyond the margins of his scaffold. But this initial classicising impulse might not be altogether mistaken – perhaps another antique paradigm that brought pain and beauty into dramatic dialogue is being sought. The most famous classical representation of violent death known in contemporary Rome, the *Laocoön*, does not offer an exemplum for Marius. Whilst *Laocoön* conjoined violence and aesthetics in a way that has provoked artists and writers from Pliny to the present day, the statue's very expressivity, a

¹¹ It is more typically the sons Audifax and Abacum who were considered to have suffered this indignity however, and Martha's role is usually that of witness and familial exhorter. See for example, Marulo (1580), p.165.

¹² One notable exception is Giovanni Amadeo's marble relief depicting the family's martyrdom for the church of San Lorenzo in Cremona in 1482, where in line with the major hagiographies Abacum and Audifax are garlanded with their own severed hands (fig. 95).

¹³ Verstegan (1592), p.53.

characteristic that was widely lauded by sixteenth-century critics, is notably and deliberately absent at Santo Stefano.¹⁴ For Marius and his family, facial expression and gestures give little hint as to the bodily rigours they are undergoing or about to undergo; the French academicians who studied the pathognomonic concordances between facial expressions and the physiological mechanisms of corporeal trauma locatable in the *Laocoön* during the seventeenth century would have found precious little material to occupy them in Circignani's painting.¹⁵ Contra the *Laocoön*, there are no 'immeasurable screams' rending the fresco's silent scenography.¹⁶ What Esther Cohen has described as 'the totally unmediated, primary expression of experience, the absolute truth of the body,' is notable only in its absence.¹⁷ There was however another ancient sculptural prototype on which the artist might have drawn in his attempt to confer aesthetic authority to Marius's beautiful male torso, and one whose most well-known contemporary iteration vividly recalls the hanging saint. This was the satyr Marsyas, condemned by Apollo to be flayed alive for having the temerity to challenge the god to a musical contest.

Crossed wrists fastened above his head, a satyr's body stretches out defenceless upon a marble tree trunk (fig. 97). Skin is pulled taught over an impressive physiognomy, and muscles are flexed in anatomically correct perfection. His venerable head is decorously bowed, whilst flowing white hair and beard cover an age-lined face. No loincloth covers his genitalia, but the visual likeness between Circignani's painted Marius and this marble Marsyas is nonetheless striking. Marius, as far as can be ascertained from his

¹⁴ For an account of the shifting reception of the *Laocoön*, from the 'physical and emotional excess' that rendered the sculpture *mirabile* to sixteenth-century audiences to Winckelmann's attempt to 'etherise' it through his characterisation of its 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur,' see Loh (2011), pp.393–414.

¹⁵ For these seminars, see MacSotay (2013), esp.pp.16–23.

¹⁶ The phrase is Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto's, quoted in Loh (2011), p.400.

¹⁷ Cohen (2000), p.65. Winckelmann made this claim about the *Laocoön* itself, arguing that 'no awful cry is raised, as Vergil sings of his *Laocoön*: the opening of the mouth does not allow it.' In the Santo Stefano fresco however there really is no scream, all mouths remaining resolutely closed.

scanty existence in the hagiographic shadows, was not flayed. In this sense he is no Christian Marsyas, a role famously reserved for St. Bartholomew. But as an example of the beautiful male form poised between bodily integrity and disintegration, *Marsyas* emerges as an epistemological as well as a morphological precursor to the frescoed Marius. This Marsyas is stoic and dignified, resigned to his future fate much like the later saint, and is far removed from the shrieking satyrs that emanated from the fevered contemporary imagination of Jusepe de Ribera (fig. 99). The statue is now in the Uffizi where it faces its altogether more horror-struck sculptural cousin, whose variegated red marble flesh and twisted rictus indicate that his torment has already begun (fig. 98).

As part of Andrea della Valle's renowned collection of classical sculpture in the 1580s, the white marble *Marsyas* was an exalted and highly visible representative of antique sculptural taste in late sixteenth-century Rome (fig. 100).¹⁸ Unlike other exemplars of an antique aesthetic in the early-modern city such as the *Belvedere Torso* and the *Apollo Belvedere*, however, the horrific narrative events that we know are about to occur suggests a very different relationship between beholder and sculpture in the context of the *Marsyas* than in those idealised paragons of heroic virtue.¹⁹ The screams that will inevitably replace his stoic grace are only just out of earshot, his lividly flayed skin just out of vision. Whilst one might admire his magnificent torso, it is nonetheless difficult not to wince at the future memory of its desecration. Scanning between the figures of Marius to Martha and back again in the Santo Stefano fresco, the spectator is placed in an analogous viewing position. Beauty and violence vie for supremacy in the eye of the beholder, but there can be no victor. To negotiate images of martyrdom is to walk this spectatorial tightrope, coming to terms with the paradoxical beauty of

¹⁸ *Marsyas* was sold by Gregory XIII in 1584 to Ferdinando I de' Medici for 400 ducats, and was widely reproduced in print anthologies over the coming centuries. See Haskell and Penny (1981), pp.262-3.

¹⁹ For the vexed nature of the relationship between classical sculpture and Renaissance canons of aesthetics see Barkan (1999).

disfigured holy forms enunciated by Alfonso Paleotti and engaging seriously with the question posed by Saint Bonaventure at the beginning of this chapter: 'where in this ravaged body will you find any beauty?'²⁰ Parsing Bonaventure's demand in the terms of early-modern aesthetics, one might instead take up the lines of Giambattista Marino, who wondered in his epic rendering of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, 'against fury what worth is beauty?'²¹

The complex spectatorial position set into motion by the image of Marius suspended between corporeal beauty and disintegration serves as a microcosm of the subjects that will be interrogated in this chapter. What were the pictorial conventions that regulated scenes of sacred violence in late sixteenth-century Rome? Did contemporary audiences envision works such as Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano Rotondo purely as pious devotional objects intended to inculcate appropriate devotional responses in their viewers, or were they also viewed as rarefied objects of artistic discourse, produced with the aesthetic regard of their spectators firmly in mind? Suggesting that there was a specifically aesthetic impulse underpinning the genesis of the fresco cycle, or even that its images were apt to inculcate affective responses in their viewership, is at odds with much of what has been written about these images.²² Circignani's work did however directly engage with some of the most pressing art theoretical and aesthetic concerns of the late sixteenth century, and exploring these inter-relationships can move the debate surrounding Counter-Reformation martyrological imagery

²⁰ For the centrality of a *bellezza* that paradoxically only increased during the horrors of the Passion in Bonaventure's devotional theology, see Solà (2016), esp. pp.140-2.

²¹ Marino (1913), p.380.

²² For Monssen it is 'highly unlikely' that 'any aesthetic intention' underpins the cycle (1981a, p.133); Dillon inaccurately claims that Lauretano himself 'made clear that these frescoes were not to be seen as works of art;' Korrück repeatedly emphasises their 'psychological distance' from the observer (p.171 and 177), understatedly describing them as 'explicit yet tidy depictions of torture and death' (p.171). For Prato they are 'anything but horrifying' (p.182). More generally, Chipps-Smith refutes aesthetic motivations of Jesuit patrons, arguing artworks produced within their orbit 'merely serve as a means to a religious end' (p.3).

beyond censorious evaluations of scholars who have denounced the Santo Stefano cycle as 'verging on anti-art' and 'nauseating.'²³

The widespread reluctance to engage directly with the aesthetic or affective questions posed by Counter-Reformation martyrological imagery is perhaps not surprising. James Elkins has recently speculated that representations of pain and violence in general 'remain difficult to theorise,' with scholars preferring to interrogate historiographic or hagiographic contexts rather than the pictorial properties of such images.²⁴ But as Elkins argues, what must be at stake in analyses of violent imagery is precisely the nature of representation itself, and not merely the historical events they purport to document.²⁵ In this sense, the under-examined position that Santo Stefano's mutilated forms occupy in a discourse of aesthetics becomes a question of pressing critical concern. The complex imbrication of beauty and violence animating the Marius fresco demonstrates that aesthetic questions of form and beholding are inseparable from the ethical concerns that encountering images of atrocity more obviously raise.²⁶ By returning to the theoretical texts that sought to place the production and use of sacred art on a sound theological footing in the late sixteenth century, this chapter will clarify the important role accorded to martyrological imagery in both contemporary aesthetic discourse and the devotional practices of the Counter-Reformation church.

²³ Freedberg (1971), pp.448-449; Wittkower (1999), p.4 respectively.

²⁴ Elkins (2013), p.xii. Martha Easton concurs, writing that 'the modern scholar tends to ignore the visual information' of such imagery' in favour of purely historical and theological exegesis (1994, p.83).

²⁵ Elkins (2013), p.xii.

²⁶ As Simon Richter (1992, p.11) argues, 'aesthetic discourse should no longer be artificially separated from the many other discourses that between them constitute a historically specific understanding of the human body.'

I. Negotiating the Beauty of the Broken Body with Giovanni Andrea Gilio

The painter would demonstrate much more the force of his art if he depicted Christ afflicted and bloody, covered in spittle, stripped of hair, wounded, deformed, livid and ugly, in such a way that he no longer possessed the form of a man. This would demonstrate the genius, power and virtue of his art, as well as the decorum and the perfection of the artificer.

- Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo*, 1563²⁷

Six educated and refined young men amble contentedly through a beautiful Renaissance garden. Wandering along paths dappled with mingling sunlight and shadows cast by innumerable trees, they contemplate the beautiful vegetation growing everywhere around them; they admire fields carpeted with an immense variety of wild flowers, and regard the limpid waters of the river Giano murmuring pleasingly as it flows by. Sitting finally upon the riverbank, the party recites pastoral poetry and sing madrigals accompanied by the strains of a violin, before debating the differing charms of the gardens that grace Italy's various duchies and city-states. In such aesthetically suggestive surroundings, the conversation naturally turns to art's capacity to mimic nature's beautiful superabundance. The work of the modern painters, they all agree, cannot lay a candle to the spectacular vivacity of the natural world, a majesty which only the greatest artists of antiquity could rival. One of the party's number, a doctor of canon law by the name of Ruggiero, states the position succinctly: 'I would like to know,' he demands, 'how the art of painting, so beautiful and so valued by young and old alike, could be so reduced today at the hands of poor and ignorant people? Rare are the painters of our times who don't err in the painting of histories.'²⁸

²⁷ Gilio (1564), p.39. For original see appendix 1.

²⁸ Ibid., p.11. For original see appendix 1.

So runs the surprisingly pastoral opening of Giovanni Andrea Gilio's *Dialogue Concerning the Errors and Abuses of Painters*, an art-theoretical treatise published mere months after the Council of Trent's final session explicitly restated the role of images in Catholic devotional practices in 1563. Perhaps best known for its extended attack on Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel, Gilio's text re-purposes the long-standing art-historical category of decorum in an attempt to reform artistic practice along strictly theological lines.²⁹ The contorted forms of Michelangelo's acknowledged masterpiece were singled out by Gilio as being fundamentally incompatible with a restrained and decorous Christian art, the misguided creations of an insane anatomist obsessed with disorderly bodies.³⁰ Gilio certainly had Michelangelo and his followers in mind when he criticised painters who delight in depicting nude saints, accusing them of valuing the '*vaghezza* of art' over '*honestà*' and '*appropriate decorum*.'³¹ Michael Cole has further pointed to the way in which Gilio is concerned by the disjunct between painted corporeal form and accurate celestial ontology in Michelangelo's *figure sforzate*, especially the angels swooping around the figure of the judging Christ whose struggle with the terrestrial weight of the *arma Christi* belies their supernatural status.³² Gilio's reputation has thus been firmly associated with a conservative strain of ecclesiastical art-theory that appears to propose an inverse relationship between painterly virtuosity and religious decorum. But moving beyond the well-worn example of Michelangelo, how exactly did the modern painters who so pricked Gilio's ire err in their history paintings, and more specifically what were their shortcomings in the resurgent genre of martyrology?

²⁹ See Blunt (1962), p.122.

³⁰ See Campbell (2002), p.612. In *On Painting*, Alberti anticipates Gilio's criticism by censuring artists for making excessive use of contrapposto and related bodily contortions, describing the *ingegno* of these artists as '*troppo fervente et furioso*.' See Summers (1977), p.341.

³¹ Gilio (1564), p.80. For an account of the shifting fortunes of Michelangelo's fresco in the Counter-Reformation, see O'Malley (2012), pp.388-397.

³² Cole (2001), pp.528-29.

Later in the dialogue, the lawyer Troilo Mattioli clarifies exactly where contemporary artists have gone wrong in representing the bloody and heroic acts of the martyrs. For Troilo, modern works in this field neither please, enlighten nor move their audiences, and thus fail the famous rhetorical challenge first laid down by Cicero and adapted by Thomas Aquinas to the sacred orator, whose speech must be able to *docere, delectare* and *movere*.³³ To general acclaim, Troilo excoriates the ‘vanity’ of those artists who depict

Stephen stoned without stones, Blaise whole and beautiful on the *eculeus*, without blood; Sebastian free from arrows; Lorenzo on the gridiron unroasted and unburned, but white: and for nothing other than the sake of art, to display muscles and veins. Oh vain vanity, oh error without end!³⁴

Troilo’s impassioned comments can shed some light on the vexed relationship between artistic virtuosity, centred on a successful rendering of the beautiful body, and the particular mimetic demands of representing the sickening violence to which the martyrs of the early church were supposed to have been subjected. In the first instance, the speaker’s specific insistence on the inappropriate whiteness of Lorenzo’s body in contemporary renderings, when the dictates of both narrative accuracy and physiological verisimilitude demand instead that the saint’s scorched skin should be picked out in livid shades of red and black, is worthy of further scrutiny. The kind of work singled out by Gilio would perhaps find its most extreme manifestation a few years later in Bronzino’s *Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence* commissioned by Duke Cosimo de’Medici for the church of San Lorenzo in Florence in 1565 (fig. 101). In this well-known fresco, frequently censured by late cinquecento writers for its monomaniacal focus on the twisting contours of the male

³³ See Vickers (1988), p.74-80. Gabriele Paleotti also adopts this rhetorical framework as a system for judging the success of a work of art. See Jones (1995), p.321, n.19.

³⁴ Gilio, p.41. For original see appendix 1.

nude,³⁵ Lawrence reclines elegantly on his fiery grill at the centre of a composition peopled by an implausible sea of glistening and muscular naked flesh. His own pristine ivory body is entirely unmarked by the coal-driven flames licking beneath him; nowhere evident is the scorched and crackling skin whose pungent smell 'brought on the nostrils an avenging horror' according to Prudentius' somatically charged account of the saint's passion.³⁶

Whilst Gilio, who elsewhere explicitly rebukes artists for their tendency to portray 'sacred history through nudity and by contorting the body,' would certainly have disapproved of the artistic license exercised by Bronzino, the mere fact of Lawrence's nudity might not have been an insuperable problem. His advanced state of undress had ample historical basis – Prudentius' authoritative version clearly narrates the deacon being stripped naked by his tormentors, for example.³⁷ In a canvas painted for the church of San Lorenzo in Spello, Circignani himself represented the saint naked on the gridiron, even to the rare extreme of including his uncovered genitals, at the same time as Bronzino's work was underway in Florence (fig. 102). Circignani's corpus was not overtly criticised by the reforming *trattatisti*, and the widespread patronage he enjoyed at the epicentre of the Counter-Reformation world indicates that there were few institutional concerns associated with his pictorial strategies.³⁸ His later depiction of the same subject at Santo Stefano judiciously veils Lawrence's genitals with a single piece of fluttering white drapery, although even here he is no more covered than Bronzino's depiction of the saint, on whom the work is presumably modelled (fig. 103). It is the narratively unsanctioned nakedness of the multitude of bystanders and the exceptional beauty of the deacon's body figured through his smooth pale skin

³⁵ See Borghini (1584), Book 1, p.62.

³⁶ Prudentius (1953), p.130.

³⁷ Ibid. Paleotti acknowledges that some degree of nudity is intrinsic to images of martyrdom. In contradistinction to the lascivious saints proliferating around the peninsula, however, Paleotti emphasises that the proportions of these nearly nude martyrs should not be 'Apollonian.' See Bianchi (2008), p.73.

³⁸ A concern was actually raised regarding the 'scandalous nudity' of Circignani's Bronzinesque *Massacre of the Innocents* in Città del Castello's church of San Agostino during an Apostolic visitation in 1571. See Galassi (2007), p.49.

that really differentiates Bronzino's work from those of Circignani, rather than an engagement with sacred nudity *per se*.³⁹

Returning to Gilio's uncompromising criticism of modern artistic praxis, it is not unreasonable to interpret this passage as a direct attack on contemporary canons of aesthetics. Gilio's demand for a kind of bloody verisimilitude leaves no room for the conventionally noble body of the Western canon in martyrological imagery. His denigration in the same passage of the modern artist's predilection for showcasing anatomical virtuosity no doubt stems from the same motivations. There is nothing intrinsically wrong about the accurate depiction of muscles and veins; it would, after all, be difficult to convincingly render the human form otherwise, and the desirability of naturalism was frequently asserted by contemporary theorists of sacred art. But in his rendering of a suffering martyr, the artist owes a deeper debt of verisimilitude to his subject than that of mere physiognomic mimesis. Theologically speaking, a martyr is defined by the corporeal degradations to which he or she has been subjected. Painting such a violent scene in a beautiful manner at the expense of the atrocity appropriate to the subject cannot lead to beauty, as it threatens to undermine the profound link between bodily disintegration and spiritual exaltation that is so central to the martyr cult. It is in this context that we can better understand the Jesuit Antonio Possevino's later criticism of Sebastiano del Piombo's *Flagellation* in San Pietro in Montorio for depicting Christ as if he were being scourged with strands of woollen yarn rather than harsh thongs (fig. 104).⁴⁰

The difficulty inherent to reconciling the pre-occupations of painterly practice and the competing claims of theological accuracy in the context of martyrological representation emerges as a leitmotif of Gilio's treatise. A

³⁹ This was the objection of the sixteenth-century sacred-art theorist Giandomenico Ottonelli (1652, p.42), who writes that Bronzino had insufficient grounds to depict the emperor's courtly associates 'nude or with insufficient covering garments.'

⁴⁰ See Donnelly (1982), p.157.

particularly interesting example occurs when the doctor of medicine Pulidoro Saraceni takes it upon himself to describe the slippery slope down which artists risk slipping if they pay insufficient attention to even the most minor details of sacred history in their search for an original painterly idiom. Deploying the diagnostic tools of his profession, Pulidoro takes Michelangelo to task once again for having represented St. Peter in the Pauline Chapel (fig.105) 'crucified without nails, ropes and other things that demonstrate *l'atrocità del martirio*.'⁴¹ According to Pulidoro, any depiction of a scene of crucifixion without visible nails is a 'great error,' all the more so because it might embolden a subsequent artist to omit the cross altogether from his own version of the subject. In the *reductio ad absurdum* of the doctor's argument, the scene's most essential carrier of pictorial and theological meaning is at risk of becoming largely expendable at the altar of painterly invention.

Worse again for Pulidoro are representations of the sufferings of Christ and the saints that veer into the realm of symbolism. According to the doctor, the sight of 'our Saviour crucified in an arbour' surrounded by 'branches, tree trunks, and other trifles' is nothing less than 'nauseating' to behold.⁴² Crucially, Pulidoro's rising nausea is caused by the sweet beauty of the arboretum, and not the torments being inflicted on the body of the son of God.⁴³ According to Pulidoro 'as far as devotion goes, a wooden cross set up in a wild hermitage, in a cave, or in a desert will move me far more than those of gold and of silver, full of jewels in the city.'⁴⁴ An artist preoccupied with representing beauty where ugliness is required, then, commits a grave error not only of theological ethics, but of pictorial aesthetics as well. Contrary to

⁴¹ Gilio, p.95.

⁴² Ibid, p.96: 'io mi stomaco a vederle.'

⁴³ Given the longstanding association between Christ's cross and the Tree of Life popularised by Bonaventure's thirteenth-century *Lignum Vitae*, whose mnemonically resonant image of the crucified Christ nestled within the tree's leafy boughs is a common subject in early-modern Italian painting (fig.106), Pulidoro's arboreal opprobrium is surprising. See Debby (2014) p.48; Ritchey (2014), pp.91-158.

⁴⁴ Gilio, p.96. For original see appendix 1.

what one might expect, it is in that rustic wooden cross that Pulidoro sees ‘a real richness of ornament’ and the ‘excellence of the artificer.’ Gilio’s search for painterly decorum thus cannot be divorced from a specifically aesthetic vision.

Reining in the artist’s natural instinct to demonstrations of pictorial virtuosity (most vividly embodied in Michelangelo’s work at the Vatican and carried on by Bronzino at San Lorenzo) emerges as being particularly important to the martyrological painter, and it is in this context that we should understand Michele Lauretano’s seemingly understated praise of the works he commissioned to adorn Santo Stefano in his diary:

It is a thing that greatly moves one to devotion seeing the infinite sorts of torments and the great number of martyrs; the pictures are moderately beautiful but full of devotion, and many can’t see them without [shedding] tears and being moved by spiritual impulses.⁴⁵

Leslie Korricks has subjected Lauretano’s use of the term *mediocremente* in this passage to sustained scrutiny, demonstrating that the rector’s critical reference point is the restrained moderation of classical rhetoric rather than the artistic mediocrity implied by the term’s English cognate.⁴⁶ The rector’s telling comment points the way towards the radical re-evaluation of aesthetic theory that I argue lies at the centre of Counter-Reformation martyrological imagery. If, as Peter de Bolla argues, aesthetic value can be located first and foremost in the affective potential an artwork might wield, then the moderately beautiful images of Santo Stefano that could nevertheless impel their viewers to tears emerge as vivid exemplars of a fundamentally aesthetic

⁴⁵ Lauretano, p.49: ‘È cosa che move molto a divotione vedere infinite sorti di tormenti, et tanto gran numero de Martiri, et esser la pittura mediocremente bella, ma molta divota, molti non la possono vedere senza lagrime et moti spirituali.’

⁴⁶ Korricks (1999), p.177; 184. It is worth pointing out that the Ignatian *Constitutions* explicitly counselled *mediocritad* or moderation as the guiding principle of the order’s ‘way of proceeding.’ See O’Malley (1993), p.336.

vision of martyrdom.⁴⁷ Just as a simple wooden cross moves Gilio more than one encrusted with jewels and precious metals and is more aesthetically pleasing as a consequence, it is the frank and unflinching portrayal of ‘infinite torment’ that might paradoxically ensure the aesthetic as well as the devotional value of Circignani’s work.

Despite Gilio’s obvious misgivings about excessive pictorial ornamentation, it would thus be mistaken to characterise the *Dialogue* as a wholesale attack on the pictorial conventions of Renaissance art practice and the intrinsic value of beauty *per se*. Gilio should not be equated with authors such as the German theologian and polemicist Hieronymus Emser, who argued that as beautiful images encouraged a contemplation of art rather than of sanctity, it would be more fitting to keep ‘really bad images in the churches.’⁴⁸ Gilio harboured no such desire to foist bad art on a contemporary viewing public. As is clear from the treatise’s pastoral opening extolling the manifold delights of an Italian springtime, *vaghezza* was not simply to be reviled as incompatible with the pious mind-set of post-Tridentine Catholicism, and Gilio’s text in fact serves to demonstrate the impossibility of drawing a stark distinction between the didactic and theological imperatives of violent martyrological imagery and the more familiar concerns of Renaissance art-criticism, centred on an aesthetics of beauty and acts of pleasurable viewing.⁴⁹

In keeping with his commitment to decorum, Gilio insists that it is the context and content of a work that must dictate the manner in which an artist deploys his mimetic and aesthetic faculties. Every sacred narrative calls for a unique set of pictorial coefficients: using the plural body of Christ as an example through which to elaborate this theory, Troilo details the manifold ways in which the human form may be represented depending on the

⁴⁷ de Bolla (2003), p.17.

⁴⁸ Emser, quoted by Hall (2011), p.21.

⁴⁹ For an introduction to the development of a critical language of beauty in 15th and sixteenth century Italy, see Rogers (2010).

demands of the scene. If an artist wishes to showcase his 'mastery of anatomy', he might choose to depict the *Baptism of Christ* in the river Jordan. For a painter with an especial facility for rendering the 'delicacy and grace' of the body, images of Christ's childhood are more appropriate, whilst the *Resurrection* and *Transfiguration* afford the opportunity for the representation of a majestic divine form. Scenes of Christ's passion, however, require a very different pictorial idiom: here his body must be depicted as 'bloodied, ugly, deformed, afflicted, consumed and dead.'⁵⁰ The challenge for the 'prudent painter,' as another interlocutor makes clear, is 'to know how to accommodate pleasing things (*cose convenevoli*) to the person, the time and the place' being represented.⁵¹ In this way, the horrific image of Christ's brutalised body imagined by Troilo paradoxically showcases the perfection of its artificer through a profound accord between form and subject in a way that was foreign to Sebastiano's graceful Christ at San Pietro in Montorio. Seen in this light, the first great theorist of sacred art in the wake of the Tridentine Council did not set his stall out to dismantle the precepts of contemporary aesthetics. Instead, in the specific context of martyrological imagery, what demanded reconceptualisation was the very nature of beauty itself.

Taking up this challenge, Silvio Gilio, doctor of law and the true mouthpiece of the Dominican theologian in his dialogue, sets out to revise the unedifying spectacle of bloodless martyrdom described by his friend Troilo:

Certainly it would be a new and beautiful thing (*cosa nova e bella*) to see a Christ on the cross wounded, spat at, scorned and transformed by blood, Saint Blaise lacerated and de-fleshed by combs, Sebastian so full of arrows that he resembles a hedgehog, Lawrence on the burning gridiron, cooked, blistered, lacerated and deformed.⁵²

⁵⁰ Gilio, pp.40-1: 'sanguinoso, brutto, difformato, afflitto, consumato e morto.'

⁵¹ Ibid, p.20.

⁵² Ibid., pp.77-8. For original see appendix 1.

In this remarkable passage, a fundamental pictorial inversion has taken place. The nauseating serenity of Blaise, Sebastian and Lawrence has been replaced with a miraculous effusion of deformed bodies, blistered skin and lacerated flesh. Gilio brings together violence, aesthetics and *novità* in a manner that I contend has profound implications for the martyrological frescoes of Santo Stefano Rotondo. Whilst the 'novel' was frequently treated with suspicion by the Tridentine *trattatisti*, in this instance Gilio attempts to adapt that prerequisite of artistic virtuosity to the ends of a reformed sacred art. In Gilio's alternative canon of aesthetics, the beautiful paradoxically becomes ugly, and what might naturally be classified as ugly (degradation, disfigurement, deformity and death respectively) becomes something beautiful and new. For Gilio, the degree of graphic violence an artwork manages to represent emerges as a reliable index of its aesthetic value; each arrow that pierces Sebastian's body is a notch of painterly achievement, each laceration of Blaise's flesh a novel pictorial delight. The representation of the latter at Santo Stefano amply fulfils Gilio's re-articulation of martyrological beauty, his muscular body covered in blood as a torturer deploys an iron comb to rip open another wound running down the entire length of his torso (fig.107).

Building upon his bloody aesthetic, Gilio later clarifies how beauty and corporeal degradation might be harmoniously aligned in martyrdom in a fascinating divagation on the nature of reformed bodies after the Last Judgement. Echoing Augustine, Gilio argues that one of the central differences between the forms of the blessed and the damned will be that whilst the former will be resurrected 'without any deformity or other defect that renders the body ugly,' those consigned to hell will retain the corporeal signs of their terrestrial infamy for all eternity. For those joining the celestial ranks, all that will remain will be 'the parts that make the body beautiful,

graceful and charming [*bello, leggiadro* and *vago*].⁵³ The three inter-related terms adopted here by Gilio were highly charged theoretical constructs central to Italian aesthetics during the cinquecento, famously considered for instance by Agnolo Firenzuola to embody the elusive appeal of women in his 1548 *Dialogo della bellezza delle donne*;⁵⁴ these were certainly not terms to be used uncritically, and I will explore the wider implications surrounding the adoption of this terminology in the context of martyrological representation in more detail in the next section of this chapter.⁵⁵

Thus far, Gilio's description of the unblemished body of resurrection seems hardly so very different to the majestic heavenly forms of Michelangelo's Sistine fresco. Surprisingly however, included amongst these corporeal markers of the perfected human form are the 'scars of the bright and resplendent wounds' of the martyrs, which instead of signifying imperfection like the 'crippled, limping, shrunken and maimed' limbs that are the preserve of the damned, emerge as beautiful 'signs of their faith and constancy';⁵⁶ the fertile ground of the martyrs' bodies has been 'tilled,' in Gilio's evocative metaphor, with the uniquely productive furrows of a martyrological plough.⁵⁷ Gilio adapts the lexicon of contemporary aesthetics to the pious end of exalting the martyrs as exemplars of steadfast faith. The metaphor he employs is positively painterly, bringing to mind material equations between blood and paint, and in doing so figures the

⁵³ Gilio, p.66. For original see appendix 1. According to Augustine (1955, p.392), meanwhile, 'the bodies of the saints shall rise again free from blemish and deformity, just as they will be also free from corruption, encumbrance, or handicap.'

⁵⁴ See Sohm (1995), p.773.

⁵⁵ To take one example of how these terms were used in wider contemporary aesthetic discourse, Giambattista Marino adopted exactly the same phrasing in praise of a portrait by Ambrogio Figino depicting his beloved. For Marino, Figino's work demonstrated both the artist's skill and the power of love through its showcasing of 'beltà, vaghezza, e leggiadria.' Marino (1630), p.261.

⁵⁶ Gilio, p.66: 'I martiri aranno le cicatrici de le loro ferite lucide e risplendenti...' The enduring beauty of the resurrected martyrological scar is also described by Augustine. See Frank (2000b), p.514.

⁵⁷ Gilio, p.66. Gilio is re-appropriating a common early-Christian martyrological metaphor, and John Chrysostom described Christian persecution in similar terms: 'Making deep furrows they pierced their sides as if they were tilling the earth with a plough, and not mutilating human bodies.' See Ross (2008), p.227, n.52.

martyrological wound as a privileged metonymic sign of sanctity.⁵⁸ In a poem appended to a 1587 edition of Cavalieri's engravings written by Giulio Roscio, the wounds of the martyrs depicted by Circignani at Santo Stefano are described as similarly resplendent, shining as brightly as the stars of the firmament as their bloodied hosts trip through the aether in a marvellous 'dance of joy' towards heaven.⁵⁹ This is echoed in the cycle's final fresco, where the resurrected kings and bishops of the early-Christian world line up in full regalia with blood still streaming down their bodies (fig. 108).

A very different but perhaps even closer analogue to the resplendent martyrological furrows of Gilio's imagination can be found in Santo Stefano's 27th fresco, where all that remains of a decimated narrative structure are such dazzling wounds (fig. 109): in the absence of conventional signifiers of sanctity such as the palms of victory so frequently proffered to martyrs by descending angels or a reassuring divine presence observing the constancy of his martyrs from above, the deep furrows carved into the unnamed martyr's flesh here take on total epistemological significance. A comparison of this fresco with a drawing by Antonio Pollaiuolo from the previous century is illuminating in this context (fig.110). Pollaiuolo's work depicts the lamentation of a number of naked figures over a centrally positioned corpse set upon a table similar to that on which Circignani's martyr rests. Despite the morphological similitude between the two images, the later work seems to signify in a profoundly different way than does Pollaiuolo's drawing. The compositional symmetries so carefully described by Antonio through the privileged medium of the multiple nude bodies, which structure the image in a way fully aligned with contemporary art-theory, have been totally

⁵⁸ Buttressing this reading, Todd Olson (2014, p.85) argues that disturbing the ontological distinction between blood and paint was a key strategy of Counter-Reformation visual practice. This equation was also made in the fourth century by Asterius in an ekphrastic description of Euphemia's martyrdom that was regularly cited in post-Tridentine image theory, where the painter's *pharmaka* metamorphoses into the saint's blood in the Chalcedonian bishop's act of beholding. See Webb (2007), p.22;25.

⁵⁹ Roscio (1587), unpaginated; For original see appendix 1. Brief discussion in Monsen (1983), pp.32-3.

displaced in the Santo Stefano fresco onto those hypnotic and rhythmic incisions carved into the martyr's flesh.⁶⁰

The total elimination of the Albertian subsidiary figures that mediate the viewing experience in Pollaiuolo's work poses a stark challenge to the interpretive logic that governs conventional Renaissance pictorial narrative, and perhaps suggests that this is what inevitably happens to the *istoria* when the destructive logic of martyrology reaches its logical pictorial conclusion. The enormous contrast between these works in terms of overt affective emotional appeal and compositional logic makes clear that Gilio's theory and Circignani's praxis did indeed constitute a radical pictorial and aesthetic departure. In representing violence with such veristic detail, and in a way that highlights the epistemological power of the site of the wound above all else, Gilio's conception of a profound alternative canon of beauty that would be 'new, beautiful, delightful and beneficial for the ignorant (*nuovo, bello, dilettevole et utile per gli ignorantī*)' takes on real visual form in the Santo Stefano cycle.⁶¹ Interestingly, the language adopted by Gilio to describe novel pictorial spectacles of violent death strongly recalls contemporary chronicles describing the crowds that flocked to witness the executions of heretics on both sides of the confessional divide throughout sixteenth-century Europe. The Protestant martyrologist Jean Crespin, for example, recounted in 1539 how the townspeople of Agen in Aquitaine enthusiastically gathered to witness the torture and immolation of Jerome Vindocin for heresy in 1539 'comme chose nouvelle.'⁶²

⁶⁰ For Pollaiuolo's drawing as an exemplar of contemporary experiments in symmetrical composition and anatomical representation, see Wright (2005), p.182.

⁶¹ Gilio, p.38.

⁶² Quoted in Nicholls (1988), p.69.

II: *Vaghezza*, Disfigurement and Scopic Pleasure at Santo Stefano Rotondo

Gilio's treatise was written nearly two decades before the Santo Stefano cycle was commissioned, thus pre-dating the explosion of martyrological imagery that came to characterise the artistic climate of Rome in the 1580s. Nonetheless, his tentative steps towards an aesthetics of martyrdom in which veristic spectacles of blood both instruct the unlettered in the spirit of Gregory the Great's 'pauper's bible' and delight as beautiful visual ensembles, would have a fruitful afterlife in both artistic theory and practice.⁶³ The earliest written sources describing Circignani's work at Santo Stefano, San Apollinare and San Tommaso suggest that the critical language of beauty was also a recurring critical framework employed by their first viewers. Girolamo Francini updated his description of Santo Stefano in the 1605 edition of *Le Cose Maravigliose dell'alma Città di Roma* to note that the church was 'molto ben ornata di bellissime pitture,' while in 1638 Pompilio Totti describes how the English College had been 'adorned with beautiful pictures of all the martyrdoms suffered by many Catholics.'⁶⁴ In his own diary, Lauretano notes with evident satisfaction that Cardinal Alessandro Farnese came to the church to see the paintings and left 'molto sodisfatto e contento.'⁶⁵ Perhaps most interestingly, in his 1588 text *Historia delle Stationi di Roma*, the antiquarian and connoisseur Pompeo Ugonio enthusiastically writes that the church was 'so wonderfully adorned and illustrated that there was perhaps

⁶³ Gregory's formulation is collected in Tatarkiewicz (1970), pp.104-5. Gilio refers to this justification for the use of sacred images twice in his treatise, arguing that paintings exert a uniquely affective hold over unlettered viewers (p.25 and 108). For the view that Gregory's argument applies equally well to educated observers, see Ottonelli, p.62.

⁶⁴ Francini (1605), p.188; Totti (1638), p.199: 'havendola ornata con belle pitture, tutte de' Martirij, che molti Cattolici patirono.'

⁶⁵ Lauretano, p.33. An unpublished *vita* of the rector records that Farnese was inspired by the example of the Santo Stefano frescoes to commission his own martyrological scenes in the nave of San Lorenzo in Damaso from Giovanni de Vecchi and Cavaliere d'Arpino in 1589. See Zuccari (1984), p.139.

no other church in Rome as beautiful and joyful to behold.’⁶⁶ The precise Italian term adopted by Ugonio in his panegyric is significant: in describing the church as *vagamente adornata*, Ugonio explicitly places the frescoes in the context of an art-viewing audience whose concerns extended well beyond the merely liturgical and into the realm of aesthetics, beholding and the power of the desirous gaze.

‘*Vagamente*’ is the adverbial form of ‘*vaghezza*,’ the word that so exercised Gilio in his treatise on artistic misadventure and a term that had great valence in sixteenth-century art theory.⁶⁷ Various translations as ‘beauty,’ ‘loveliness’ or ‘allure,’ in John Florio’s well-known 1611 English/Italian dictionary the reader is informed that *vaghezza* means ‘beauty, loving handsomenesse, lovely grace, and delightfull admiration.’⁶⁸ So much we might expect. But Florio then refines his definition, asserting that the term also encompasses elements of ‘amorous lust or desire’ and ‘love-alluring delight.’ The Academia della Crusca concurred, providing ‘desire’ and ‘want’ as primary definitions for the term in the first edition of its *Vocabolario* from 1612.⁶⁹ This second aspect of *vaghezza* had a literary pedigree extending at least as far back as Boccaccio, as Firenzuola points out in his treatise.⁷⁰ For Firenzuola, the beauty of *vaghezza* is fundamentally a sensual one, something with which Gian Paolo Lomazzo would concur when he wrote in 1584 that the term describes ‘nothing else but a desire and a longing for something which delights.’⁷¹ *Vagheggiare*, meanwhile, the verb from which it derives, is glossed by Florio as ‘to behold or view amorously, to court or make love unto with longing and loving looks, to desire, to admire or gaze upon with delight.’⁷² The subject of that gaze, the *vagheggiatore*, is ‘an

⁶⁶ Ugonio, (1588) p.290: ‘é stata questa chiesa di S. Stefano si vagamente adornata e illustrata, che non vi é forse in Roma chiesa più bella e più gioconda vista.’

⁶⁷ For the evolution of this terminology in Italian poetry see Castellano (1963).

⁶⁸ Florio (1611), unpaginated.

⁶⁹ *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612), p.915.

⁷⁰ Firenzuola (1992), p.36.

⁷¹ Lomazzo (1584), p.145.

⁷² Florio (1611).

amorous beholder, a gazing lover, a viewer with love and delight.⁷³ The desirous connotations of the term were thus a critical commonplace, and it would seem unthinkable for an educated writer such as Ugonio to adopt this term without at least an implicit acknowledgment of its sensuous undertones.

This etymological digression reveals a startling fault-line in the relationship between beholder and violent image; if one takes the viewer at Santo Stefano to be a *vagheggiatore*, as implied by Ugonio's description, then we are forced to consider whether violence possesses its own *vaghezza*. Within the very lexicon of sixteenth-century art criticism there was a nascent recognition that beauty is always linked to the desiring, erotic gaze, and Elizabeth Cropper has shown how the relationship between beholder and artwork was often explicitly correlated with that between lover and beloved during this period.⁷⁴ That this logic extended to violent religious imagery is suggested by a seicento paean to the power of Christ's wounded body written by the Jesuit preacher Emanuele Tesauro entitled *Il Memoriale*. Tesauro describes how 'as true lovers leave tokens of memory to remain in the heart when they depart from their beloved's gaze,' Christ left behind a beautiful 'living' and 'amorous' portrait (*vivo e amoroso protratto*) of himself shining with his five wounds that could 'awake the senses' of its beholders.⁷⁵ Robert Mills' argument that images of the 'naked, tormented bodies of the martyrs and Christ' had the potential to create 'spaces for the exploration of certain forms of desire' thus seems to have much to recommend it.⁷⁶ If there was a beauty to be found in beholding the violence of martyrdom, it was a beauty tinged by desire. But how might the viewing experience at Santo Stefano be

⁷³ The original *vagheggiatore* of Boccaccio's Decameron is the Catalan Deigo della Ratta, who admires the beautiful ladies of Florence during the tale's sixth day. As his gaze roves possessively over their desirable bodies, the actions of this 'piú che grande vagheggiatore' implicitly invoke another of the term's many significations: the unpredictable pleasures of the wandering eye.

⁷⁴ Cropper (1995).

⁷⁵ Tesauro (1660), p.331.

⁷⁶ Mills (2005), p.18. See also Caviness (2001), pp.84-5.

experienced as pleasurable, despite the tightly controlled ideological remit out of which the fresco cycle emerged?

Circignani's contemporary Federico Barocci was widely praised for fulfilling the artistic imperative of permeating his works with a pleasure-activating *vaghezza* whilst maintaining the devotional purity required by ecclesiastical patrons in the late-sixteenth century.⁷⁷ As Stuart Lingo shows, Barocci relocates *vaghezza* from the lineaments of the human body, where it had primarily resided during the flowering of High Mannerism around the mid-century, to more abstract spaces of pictorial facture such as colour, finish, and pleasing compositional detail. Contemporary observers frequently lauded Barocci's ability to 'treat affairs of religion *vagamente*' without imbuing his sacred figures with an unwarranted lasciviousness, and it was this that ensured his popularity amongst important Counter-Reformation patrons such as Filippo Neri, Cesare Baronio and Federico Borromeo.⁷⁸

Even a cursory knowledge of Barocci's corpus makes clear why such a line of inquiry might be fruitful in his particular context. The rich yet 'melting' colours, endearingly plump children, beaming parents and captivating domestic details that characterise an image such as Barocci's 1575 *Madonna of the Cat* (fig.111) all work to chastely please the eyes with a 'holy *non so che*' in Lingo's memorable phrase.⁷⁹ Barocci's investment with the pictorial language of a decorous *vaghezza* demonstrates that integrating the pleasurable aspects of spectatorship remained an important critical consideration in the sacred art of the Counter-Reformation. Nonetheless, his practice was not centrally aligned with the devotional demands of martyrology. To suggest that Circignani's work at Santo Stefano might also be analysed through such a prism might seem more difficult to justify, as the

⁷⁷ Lingo (2008), p.13

⁷⁸ Francesco della Torre, quoted in Lingo, p.13. For Borromeo, Baronio and Neri's patronage of Barocci see Verstegen (2003).

⁷⁹ Lingo (2008), p.149.

near iconoclastic veneration of the dismembered human form exhibited there could hardly be further from Barocci's honeyed sacred visions.

It is true that a number of the characteristic features of Barocci's religiously inflected pictorial *vaghezza* are nowhere present in Circignani's frescoes. The majority of the cycle's sacred actors are hardly conventionally sensual, and the sweetness that so many viewers saw in Barocci's portrayals of the Virgin is absent from Circignani's elegant but stern virgin martyrs. The pleasures of everyday life depicted in minutely attentive detail by Barocci also have no place in the cycle's drastically minimal *mise-en-scène*, where any narrative detail not contributing to martyrological explication was ruthlessly excised. If parergal matter in Barocci's oeuvre took the shape of symbolically resonant cats and birds, wicker baskets and wine jugs, at Santo Stefano the equivalent marginalia is limited to details such as a maimed figure crawling across a fresco's background on bloodied stumps, or dismembered body parts festooned across tree boughs (fig.112). Citing the example of Federico Gonzaga's attempt to acquire a painting by Sebastiano del Piombo in any genre as long as 'it is not about saints, but rather something lovely and beautiful to look at,' Alexander Nagel argues that images of God's chosen interlocutors were by their very nature often implicitly excluded from the category of the *vago* by educated patrons in the cinquecento.⁸⁰ The fact that the earliest sources describing Circignani's Santo Stefano cycle nonetheless adopted precisely this critical terminology thus deserves further attention.

Despite their near monomaniacal focus on the dynamics of violent death and resulting compositional minimalism, there is nonetheless much in Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano that might appeal to a cinquecento beholder versed in contemporary canons of style. Contrary to Nigel Spivey's

⁸⁰ Nagel (2003), p.349: 'religious images tend not to belong to the category of pictures that are lovely and beautiful to look at,' whilst secular subjects are 'more capable of *vaghezza*.'

representative assertion that Circignani was ‘an acknowledged hack’⁸¹ working on cut-price commissions for penniless patrons, the artist was an important figure in the development of an elegant strand of late-Mannerist idiom throughout central Italy.⁸² Circignani’s graceful twisting of the human form into sinuous *contrapposti* and exaggeratedly balletic poses is fully in-line with Mannerist aesthetics more generally. The dynamics of violent action provided a particularly rich subject matter for this kind of pictorial experimentation, vividly demonstrated in the acrobatically duelling protagonists of Circignani’s 1575 fresco in Castiglione del Lago’s Palazzo della Corgna depicting the condottiero Ascanio della Corgna defeating his rival Giovanni Taddei in a multi-sword combat before a crowd of 3,000 spectators (fig.113).

Some scholars argue that Circignani consciously limited his Mannerist credentials and adopted a more prosaic idiom for his Jesuit patrons in Rome. Making much of Giulio Mancini’s observation that Circignani ‘worked with two brushes, the one of an ordinary master and the other of a good and practiced master,’ they distinguish between the solid forms, convincing anatomies and extravagant compositions of Circignani’s work elsewhere and the austere schematism of Santo Stefano.⁸³ Whilst he certainly demonstrated a capacity to work in various idioms, using this as a basis to assert that the latter works instantiate a kind of anti-aesthetic medium designed to appeal to wholly conservative Jesuit sensibilities is overstating the case.

Many aspects of Circignani’s elegant late-*maniera* style are also in evidence in the Santo Stefano frescoes. The pagan officials and executioners directing these persecutions are frequently depicted with physiognomic torsions as exaggerated as those he painted in works such as the *Martyrdom*

⁸¹ Spivey (2001), p.134.

⁸² Circignani was granted honorary citizenship of Città di Castello, Città della Pieve and Volterra in recognition of his contribution to their cultural patrimony. See Prato (1996), p.179.

⁸³ Korrück (1999), p.179.

of *Saint Stephen* in Città di Castello and *St. Lawrence before the Judge* in Spello for example, or *St Francis before the Sultan* in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini (figs.114-16). Recalling Gilio's censure of *figure sforzate*, it might be argued that these twisting forms are not indecorous like Michelangelo's angels because they appropriately visualise the violent straining inherent to such impious barbarousness. By investing his frontal martyrs with a degree of figural iconicity whilst projecting more elaborate figural types onto executioners and witnesses, it might be argued that Circignani is seeking to reconcile competing devotional and aesthetic demands. The devotional power of the icon was positively appraised by numerous contemporary *trattatisti* as a purer conduit of the divine;⁸⁴ but abandoning the pictorial pleasures and explicatory potential of virtuoso composition was not an option to be seriously considered by a painter whose reputation had been made on the back of elegant composition.⁸⁵ It is significant that this was the very word used by Lauretano to describe the frescoes in his *Annual Letter* of 1582, where he describes Circignani's 'picturae elegantiae' as 'spectacles of infinite torment.'⁸⁶

Circignani's reputation as a painter with an especial talent for rendering things beautifully and in a style fully aligned with broader currents of contemporary taste is further attested to by the fact that he was scheduled to deliver a lecture to the Roman Academy in 1594 on the subject of the role that beauty plays in a well-composed history painting. During the meetings of the nascent academy, the members of the institution were enjoined by the *principe* Federico Zuccaro to discourse on themes relevant to the making of

⁸⁴ Gilio (p.55) praised the simple frontality of medieval imagery, which he described as their 'prosopopea.' See also Nagel (2011), p.233.

⁸⁵ For the pictorial modes of narrative and icon see Ringbom (1984). This solution was developed much more explicitly at Santi Nereo ed Achilleo a decade later. See Kissane (2011).

⁸⁶ *Annuae Litterae MDLXXXII*, p.14.

art in post-Tridentine Rome related to their individual spheres of expertise.⁸⁷ As described in Romano Alberti's record of the meetings,

It fell to Nicolò Circignani to discuss what beauty is, its importance in a *historia*, and what such a composition means, and what conditions must be satisfied in order to compose a *historia* well.⁸⁸

Whether Circignani ever delivered this talk is open to dispute; at the very least, no record of what he said survives, and he had already painted his last work in Rome and retired to the Umbrian countryside four years before the lecture apparently took place. Regardless of whether the lecture came to pass, it is interesting that Circignani was the artist chosen to discourse on the topic in the first place, over a decade after he had risen to prominence as Rome's pre-eminent painter of violent martyrdom – it seems that his facility in that bloody subject did little to dim his reputation as an artist well-versed in the virtues of more conventional aesthetic codes. Might it be argued that the visual language of martyrdom that Circignani developed in such detail over the preceding decade in fact represented another aspect of his aesthetic practice in the eyes of his contemporaries, rather than signifying a radical renunciation of it?

As suggested above, the Santo Stefano frescoes retain many hallmarks of the ornamental style that characterised Circignani's work the previous decade in Umbria and at the Vatican – bright pastel tonalities, powerful *contrapposti* and a focus on the minutiae of texture and costume easily link these projects, and it would be unsurprising if this played some role in Santo Stefano's immediate popularity. Nonetheless, the sheer extremes of graphic violence to which the human body is subjected remains the most notable pictorial feature of the basilica's frescoes, and it is likely that Gilio's paradigm

⁸⁷ Giovanni de' Vecchi explained how to master the art of drapery for example, while Federico Zuccaro lectured on the subject of *colorito*.

⁸⁸ Romano Alberti (1604), p.55. For original see appendix 1.

of sacred violence constituting 'una cosa nova e bella' in and of itself was the principal source of pleasure-inspiring *vaghezza* within the cycle. If his proclivity for depicting angelic blonde youths, stately patrician women and muscle-bound executioners in skin-tight costumes contributed to the aesthetic appeal of his work here, it was most likely as a result of the exciting *frisson* created by their dramatic juxtaposition with narrative acts of viscerally graphic corporeal disintegration.

Such an unexpected aesthetic alliance had an important precursor in Prudentius's early-Christian martyrological poetry. To take just two relevant examples, Prudentius describes the proto-martyr Stephen's face as shining radiantly with glory 'amid the rain of stones' that disfigured him, whilst Lawrence's visage 'shone with beauty' even as his limbs were bound and stretched out in preparation for immolation.⁸⁹ The language adopted by Prudentius in his detailed accounts of corporeal maiming adds a further layer of aesthetic resonance to these martyrological acts, and Jacques Fontaine has aptly characterised this dialectical aesthetic strategy as 'an alliance of the horrible and the graceful' which ultimately creates 'sensuous riches.'⁹⁰ Prudentius's gory poetic vision vividly demonstrates that exposing 'the fragilities of the body with macabre precision' could indeed contribute to a coherent aesthetic programme, as Gilio had optimistically hoped in his treatise.⁹¹

Giambattista Marino would also tie the paradoxical symbiosis of pleasure, pain and beauty directly to the spectatorial experience of observing martyrdom during this period: in a poem dedicated to a painting of *Saint Catherine* seated upon her wheel by Giovanni Contarini (fig.117), Marino informs the reader-viewer who 'admires' the 'beautiful virgin' that 'many find

⁸⁹ Prudentius (1953), pp.128-9.

⁹⁰ Fontaine (1981), p.188.

⁹¹ The phrase is Peter Brown's (1981), p.83.

sweetness amongst the martyrs.⁹² The erotic overtones to Marino's lyrical ekphrasis indicates that the beholding experience set into motion by the 'new and beautiful' martyrdoms demanded by contemporary theorists of sacred art can be linked to the pleasurable aspects of the art-critical *vago*.

Within Circignani's Santo Stefano cycle the twin martyrdoms of the young virgin saints Euphemia and Lucy (fig. 24) might be taken as representative of the way in which the aesthetic codes of beauty, with its concomitant potential for erotic desire, are inextricably joined to moments of corporeal degradation at the site of martyrdom. Euphemia was described by the fourth century bishop and iconophile Asterius of Amasea as 'a philosopher, and withal a comely one' in a famous ekphrastic description of a Byzantine painting depicting her martyrdom which 'captivated him entirely.'⁹³ Like the figure that left Asterius so dumbstruck, Circignani also depicts the two young women as conventionally beautiful. Their alabaster skin, golden hair and delicately blushed cheeks fully accord to the norms of sixteenth-century female aesthetics as reconstructed by Paola Tinagli.⁹⁴ Lucy's beautiful patrician features are justified as a necessary product of narrational exigency: her long slender nose, full lips, carefully plucked brows and elegant hairstyle all reflect her noble birth as attested to in hagiographic sources. Beneath the rich folds of the robes which further mark her elevated social status, her body is delicately curved in a subtle *contrapposto*. As a coarsely featured executioner runs the point of an improbably long sword through Lucy's swan-like neck, he gazes at her in rapt intensity, face mere inches from hers. As with Marino's ekphrasis of St. Catherine, this scene is highly sexualised, and the penetration of the saint's neck serves as an analogue for the desired for violation of her virginity, an equation made more obvious by the attention drawn to the executioner's genitals through the decorative device of his tunic.

⁹² Marino, *La Galeria* (1630), p.79: 'tanta sente dolcezza infra i martiri.'

⁹³ Translated in Mango, (1972), pp.37-39.

⁹⁴ Tinagli (1997), p.85.

Narratives of female martyrdom frequently displaced the threatened yet frustrated act of sexual violation onto the scene of torture itself, and the sexualised nature of Lucy's final penetration here was a common trope of early-Christian passion texts: in the passion of St. Perpetua, the saint herself takes 'the trembling sword-hand of the young gladiator' tasked with despatching her and 'guides it to her throat.'⁹⁵ Prudentius meanwhile has St. Agnes 'welcome the whole length of this blade into my bosom [and] to the depths of my breast.'⁹⁶ As Kathryn Gravdal writes, saints' upper bodies were often fetishized as 'a snare for visual attention' in martyrological texts, and it would appear that just such a snare has enraptured Lucy's executioner at Santo Stefano.⁹⁷ The penetrating gaze of the torturer's eyes boring into the wound his sword is producing draws our eyes to those of Lucy in turn, which are invisible behind closed lids (fig. 118). Recalling the narrative of Lucy's passion reminds us that those lids conceal an absence: depending upon the hagiographic source to which we cleave, the saint's eyes have either already been gouged out in an earlier stage of her torments or were instead plucked out by the saint herself in order to disfigure the object of her pagan tormentor's desire.⁹⁸ If a woman's eyes constitute the primary locus of her power to attract, as sixteenth-century heirs to the Petrarchan tradition such as Firenzuola and Luigini da Udine attested,⁹⁹ then the startling revelatory shock that there are no eyes here implies that this fresco's relationship to the erotic aspects of pleasurable viewing remains profoundly ambivalent. The disembodied eyes whose gaze neither her persecutors nor we can ever meet will become Lucy's iconic attributes, accessible to the faithful once more only

⁹⁵ Musurillo (1972), pp.130-1.

⁹⁶ Prudentius, p.343.

⁹⁷ Gravdal (1981), pp.22-4.

⁹⁸ The earliest *passios* do not mention this detail, but variations on the theme became common from the medieval period onwards. See Butler (2000), Vol.4: pp.548-9.

⁹⁹ Luigini da Udine (1913), p.235: 'gli occhi di una donna sono quei, che più attirano ed allettano l'uomo ad amare ed a farsi servo d'amore.'

through the miraculous metamorphic power of the relic and ritualised devotional practice (fig.119).

In depicting the saint with her eyes closed Circignani respects the dictates of decorum as laid down in Federico Borromeo's *De Pictura Sacra*, which asserts that the her eye sockets 'should not be shown even if the whole sequence of the martyrdom is being painted,' and 'certainly no one should show exactly how the executioners dug the virgin Lucy's eyes out.'¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, this unrepresented moment of the martyrological narrative would remain near the forefront of the mind of any contemporary viewer, and the power of the gaze and the gaze denied is central to the pictorial dynamics at play in this image. If an erotics of the eye has been denied to the fresco as a result of Lucy's implicit blindness, then perhaps one might be justified in echoing assertions that the sexual appeal of Guido Reni's depictions of *Lucretia* and *Cleopatra* a generation later in the 1620s lay instead in the 'iniquitous excitement derived from watching women suffer *in extremis*.'¹⁰¹ The cruel intensity of the torturer's gaze and the hidden history of Lucy's empty sockets also buttress Margaret Owens' argument that 'to speculate on the cultural work performed by virgin martyr legends is to raise the question of voyeuristic sadism.'¹⁰² As with Marino's ekphrastic text, here discourses of spectatorship, pain, pleasure and beauty are all conjoined at the site of the martyred body.

A poetic account of Lucy's martyrdom by Benedetto dell'Uva, a Campanian monk resident at the monastery of Monte Cassino published just as Circignani's work was being completed in 1582, insists even more clearly that the perforated body of the virgin saint constituted an object of scopic insight for both Lucy's persecutors and the witness/reader outside the temporal frame of historical action. Describing the climax of the

¹⁰⁰ Borromeo (2010), p.117.

¹⁰¹ Spear (1997), p.86

¹⁰² Owens (2005), p.60.

martyrological narrative visually rendered in the Santo Stefano fresco, dell’Uva writes that ‘to satiate the eyes (*saziar gli occhi*) of the disquieted ruler, a deputy raced up and with his daring right hand made a wide window (*ampia finestra*) in the middle of her throat.’¹⁰³ Lucy’s stricken throat is transformed into an aperture opening onto the hidden recesses of her corporeal interior, an object of fascination for the pious Christian reader no less than the text’s pagan persecutors. Although Lucy avoids the sexual violation apportioned to her in the local Roman governor’s punishment, an invasive kind of visual penetration rushes in to perform analogical work.

The potential pleasures attendant to a privileged corporeal discovery enacted by eyes no less than swords emerges as an operating principle of both dell’Uva’s text and Circignani’s fresco, an echoing of Prudentius’ assertion that ‘through the wide wound opened by the persecutor’s sword a glorious gateway opens to the righteous.’¹⁰⁴ In an exploration of the gendered spectatorial politics of early Middle English hagiography, Jocelyn Wogan-Brown argues that the desire to bring the hidden sights of the mysterious corporeal interior into the visible realm regularly evinced in martyrological texts is often inflected with a degree of sadism, and necessarily implicates their authors in the impious actions of the pagan persecutors they ostensibly excoriate.¹⁰⁵ The justifications advanced for the graphic display of bloodied martyrs’ bodies in Counter-Reformation theories of the sacred image ostensibly elide the scepticism elicited by Wogan-Brown over the motivations of martyrological narrators, however. Instead, the positive affective relationship between pious beholder and violent spectacle takes

¹⁰³ dell’Uva (1582), p.65. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁰⁴ Prudentius (1953), p.100. This recalls Linda Williams’ (1989, p.191) argument that the modern horror film ‘pries open the fleshy secrets of normally hidden things’ through its obsession with the opened body; it seems that representations of graphic violence, whatever their historical context, betray a common preoccupation with scopical revelation.

¹⁰⁵ Wogan-Brown (1994), p.175. Caviness (2001, p.115) amplifies this argument, arguing that the structure of martyrological texts/images furnishes their readers/viewers with the perceptual means ‘to disassociate themselves from collusion with the punishments they fantasise.’

centre stage, embracing what David Frankfurter describes in a different context as ‘a pious *curiositas* into the powers that gore revealed.’¹⁰⁶ In order to understand how spectacular pictorial violence was crystallised as a vital tool of devotion in the generation after Gilio, it is necessary to return to Romano Alberti’s account of the early years of the reformed Roman Academy.

III. Gabriele Paleotti, Affective Piety and the Power of Representational Violence

In the dedication to Federico Borromeo prepended to the 1599 edition of Alberti’s text, the Academy finds itself in the midst of a potentially painful political transition. Borromeo, erstwhile cardinal-protector of the Academy, is returning to his native Milan to fill the position of the city’s archbishopric.¹⁰⁷ He is to have two replacements: renowned connoisseur and Caravaggio’s first major patron Cardinal Francesco del Monte, and the veteran Bishop of Bologna, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti.¹⁰⁸ Paleotti had been friends with the German-Hungarian college’s rector Michele Lauretano ever since they were colleagues at the University of Bologna in the 1550s, and his presence at the beginning of Alberti’s text is highly significant in the context of the Santo Stefano frescoes. His 1582 *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* remains perhaps the most famous post-Tridentine treatise on sacred imagery, a work where the ideological apparently trumps the aesthetic in a manner that recalls Gilio’s earlier work.¹⁰⁹ Like Gilio, Paleotti’s principal concern is to defend the utility of images in Christian devotional practices, laying bare the manifold errors committed by artists and patrons that undermine this worthy goal. For many scholars Paleotti’s *Discorso* demonstrates a commitment to the imposition of a visual language that

¹⁰⁶ Frankfurter (2009), p.234.

¹⁰⁷ R. Alberti (1604), unpaginated.

¹⁰⁸ For an account of del Monte’s twenty-five-year tenure as cardinal-protector of the society, see Waźbiński (1994), p.551 ss. For Paleotti’s briefer term, see Beltrame (1990), pp.201-33.

¹⁰⁹ For Pamela Jones, the cardinal’s ‘lack of sensitivity towards artistic style,’ is ‘incongruous in [the writer of] a tract devoted to sacred art (1995, p.132).

aimed for universal comprehensibility at the expense of novel aesthetic strategies, and in this sense Paleotti emerges as almost an inversion of his liberal co-cardinal-protector del Monte.¹¹⁰ Despite his reputation however, Paleotti shared many of the ideals of his colleague, and possessed his own refined sense of 'il bello' as fostered in his humanist education.¹¹¹

Paleotti's vision for the role of art in a revitalised church is in fact as ambitious as anything imagined by the secular theorists of the previous century who aimed to elevate painting to the exalted sphere of the liberal arts: 'Painting, which before had as its goal merely resemblance, now as an act of virtue dons a new garment, and more than resembling rises towards a greater aim – beholding eternal glory, recalling men from vice and inculcating in them the true cult of God.'¹¹² For Paleotti, one of the ways in which painting might adopt this new and spiritually exalted guise was to exploit its unique capacity to render the acts of the martyrs in wince-inducing visual detail, forcing a consideration of how 'incomparably greater the pains and afflictions of the martyrs were than the ones we are feeling in the infirmities and miseries of this life.'¹¹³ Hinging on the powerful affective capacity of judiciously produced works of sacred art, some of the most persuasive sections of the *Discorso* engage directly with the interpretive ramifications of violent imagery.

According to Paleotti, representations of strikingly mutilated bodies could have an extremely positive impact on the souls of its viewers, inspiring even the simplest observer with an emulatory zeal or at least with a concrete sense of the lengths to which one must be willing to go in professing the Christian faith. In Paleotti's hierarchical conception of different kinds of viewers, the uneducated masses, or *idioti*, were capable only of a limited

¹¹⁰ According to Beltrame (1990, p.208), for Paleotti 'painting could not be allowed any obscurity of pictorial language or of intention whatsoever.'

¹¹¹ Prodi (1959), p.530; Shearman (1977), pp.165-70.

¹¹² Paleotti, p.211. For original see appendix 1. For the evolution of painting as a liberal art in the Renaissance, see Puttfarken (2005), pp.15-40.

¹¹³ Paleotti, p.417. For original see appendix 1.

range of responses to the complex visual stimulus constituted by a work of art.¹¹⁴ Whilst the metaphysical implications of an abstract landscape for example proved beyond the interpretive ken of the average viewer, the visceral impact of violent martyrdom posed no such meditative roadblocks for the unlettered. In this context Paleotti's approbation of images depicting grievously wounded sacred bodies can be firmly fixed to theories of 'affective piety' long associated with Franciscan devotional practice and which received renewed vigour in the wake of the Council of Trent.

In its simplest terms affective piety can be defined as a kind of approach to religious devotion that posited the capacity of sensual response to arouse powerful religious sentiment in the hearts of the faithful.¹¹⁵ As far as martyrological representation is concerned, this is manifested in the ethical power that disarmingly violent images inevitably wield upon their beholders, their capacity to infiltrate into the viewer's consciousness and provoke powerful emotional responses of compassion, empathy, guilt and righteous indignation. If the art of painting could be considered a 'universal' language, then the end of this uniquely comprehensible system of communication is to harness the power of mimesis in order to 'persuade persons to piety and to direct them to God.'¹¹⁶ The author sets out his position most trenchantly in the 25th chapter of his treatise:

To hear narrated the martyrdom of a saint, the zealousness and constancy of a virgin and the passion of Christ are things that touch the essence of truth itself. But having placed before our eyes in vivid colours the saint martyred, the virgin struggling and Christ nailed [to the cross], this without question so increases our devotion and hits us

¹¹⁴ Jones (1995), p.137.

¹¹⁵ Medieval texts such as Ludolfus of Saxony's *Vitae Christi* and the Franciscan *Meditationes vitae Christi* promoted a devotional practice focused on the contemplation of Christ's terrestrial sufferings in a 'vividly pictorial, highly emotional and deeply embodied' way. See Keitt (2005), p.68. For the recurrence of this kind of spirituality in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* see O'Malley (1993), p.46;264.

¹¹⁶ Jones (1995), p.128.

in the guts that anyone who doesn't recognise it is made of wood or marble.¹¹⁷

Implicitly elevating vision to the pre-eminent sensory faculty,¹¹⁸ Paleotti argues that well-judged violent images wielded a profound affective charge that went beyond even the persuasive rhetorical effects of sacred oratory, a field in which the students of the Jesuit colleges were especially well-versed.¹¹⁹ Lauretano records that an alumnus of the German-Hungarian college delivered a sermon before Gregory XIII on All Souls Day in 1582 which was so successful that an oration at the Vatican by a member of the college became an annual event.¹²⁰ The moving sermons delivered by the priests of the English college on the topic of martyrdom meanwhile were widely praised in 1580s Rome.¹²¹

The visual equivalents to these orations that came to emblazon the spaces where they were being delivered must have added a whole new dimension to the seminarians' affecting rhetoric, as Paleotti readily anticipated. In a subtle dig at the iconoclasts of all stripes who were destroying holy images around Europe in order to demonstrate their lack of divine favour, the bishop inverts this radical Protestant paradigm: instead of inanimate images being too unfeeling to arrest their own defacement, here it is the impious *viewer* who remains unmoved by the affective power of martyrological imagery that is equated with inert stone and timber.¹²²

The well adjusted (Catholic) observer, by contrast, cannot help but

¹¹⁷ G. Paleotti, p.228. For original see appendix 1.

¹¹⁸ For Counter-Reformation image-theory's elevation of sight over the other senses see Jones (1993) pp.118-9. This was a somewhat fluid hierarchy however, as the following chapter will argue.

¹¹⁹ For the role of an oratory of praise in refashioning the image of Rome during this period see McGinness (1982). For the conflation of orator and painter in contemporary image theory see Paleotti, pp.214-6; Bosio, p.566.

¹²⁰ Lauretano, p.32.

¹²¹ McGinness (1995), p.122.

¹²² For the ways in which Protestant reformers frequently defaced sculptures to demonstrate their lack of divine favour, see Satz (2007), pp.35-51.

experience a visceral 'gut reaction' to scenes of sacred violence. Paleotti's position is echoed by numerous other late sixteenth-century writers who expanded upon the Council of Trent's laconic guidelines concerning the role of imagery in Christian worship. In his *Trattato della Nobiltà della Pittura*, composed at the behest of the Academy of San Luca in 1585 and frequently seen as a statement of the nascent institution's artistic intent, Romano Alberti rhetorically asks his readers

Who will there be who, gazing at the flagellation or crucifixion of Christ our Lord, doesn't feel in himself at least some glimmering of spirit that moves the heart? Seeing, in a certain way, present the torments, the rages, the furies and the martyrdom to which the only-begotten Son of our Lord was subjected because of our sins.¹²³

Referring to the powerful emotions that preachers could evince in their audiences when recounting Christ's execution, meanwhile, Gregory Martin asserts that even 'the hardest hart melteth into dropping teares and craveth mercie for his sinnes by the merites of that bitter passion.'¹²⁴ According to the accounts of Martin, Alberti and Paleotti, the capacity of words or images to move the heart emerges as central to the relationship between the disseminator of divine truth and his audience. For these authors the ability to be moved is intrinsic to the human condition, and the skill of the preacher, painter or poet is inextricably bound to the activation of this innate characteristic. Hearing, seeing and touching are the essential conduits of this process - external senses move the internal spirit of the heart in an embodied experience that characterizes man's relationship with God as fundamentally sensorial.

At the same time as Circignani and Lauretano were finalising the details of the Santo Stefano cycle, Paleotti was writing to acquaintances working in a

¹²³ R. Alberti (1585), p.42. For original see appendix 1.

¹²⁴ Martin (1581), p.71.

wide range of professional disciplines all over Italy for last-minute advice on matters relating to his treatise, which was already in an advanced state of completion.¹²⁵ The work was circulated in manuscript form towards the end of 1581, reaching the hands of its first readers just as Circignani was forced to temporarily halt his own work at Santo Stefano in deference to the inclement winter weather. Whilst there is no record as to whether Paleotti maintained a correspondence with his former colleague Lauretano concerning his upcoming treatise, he was a frequent visitor to the College as the rector's guest during this period. Paleotti's eagerness to discuss his project with scholars and theologians around Italy makes it likely that the two men discussed the progress of their respective interventions into the discourse of sacred art during these visits, and it is probable that Lauretano's foray into the visual arts was related to the theoretical work being undertaken by his friend in Bologna.

Our knowledge of Paleotti's conception of martyrological iconography is unfortunately more attenuated than it might be: the bishop managed to complete only two of the five books he had intended to publish, and a portion of the third book was to be devoted to 'pictures of the martyrs and their insignia and various martyrdoms.' Nonetheless, Paleotti's response to the Santo Stefano frescoes offer valuable clues as to his understanding of the power that a specifically martyrological aesthetic might inculcate in its audiences. Paleotti was in Rome throughout the autumn and winter of 1582-3 attempting to institute liturgical reform in partnership with Carlo Borromeo, and came to Santo Stefano to examine the frescoes shortly after their completion. According to Lauretano's diary, the bishop came to say mass at Santo Stefano Rotondo on January 9th 1583, 'and after mass went to see the pictures, which much pleased him, and he had them redrafted and copied.'¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Prodi (1959), 532.

¹²⁶ Lauretano, p.57: 'Il Cardinal Paleotto andò a dire Messa a Santo Stefano, e dopo la Messa andò vedendo le pitture, et li piacquero molto, et le fece rescrivere et ritrarre.'

Paleotti's act of homage justifies the supposition that one can trace a mutually reinforcing relationship between Paleotti's aesthetic theory in his *Discorso* and Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano Rotondo.¹²⁷ A year later in 1584, the full extent of Paleotti's admiration for the work carried out by Circignani for Lauretano would become clear. As part of his plan to restore the venerable but crumbling edifice of Bologna's Cattedrale di San Pietro to its former glory, Paleotti commissioned a series of graphic martyrological scenes for the cathedral's crypt which bore striking formal and iconographic similarities to Circignani's images.¹²⁸ The wondering characterisation of the seicento art-historian Carlo Malvasia, who wrote that in the gloomy space of the crypt one encounters the saintly martyrs '*in strane guise tormentati*,' demonstrates that the sight of varied corporeal deconstruction in evidence at both the Roman basilica and its Bolognese successor was a novel one that compelled even experienced aesthetes into unexpected and even disquieting experiences of pictorial beholding.¹²⁹ Malvasia was writing some decades later, but seems to suggest that Paleotti's confidence that well-adjusted Catholic observers would always see what he saw in images of graphic violence was misplaced.

The format of the crypt frescoes followed the verbal-visual amalgams pioneered at Santo Stefano. As with the Roman cycle, each image in the crypt was accompanied by two written inscriptions providing a contextual gloss for the saint being represented, establishing the fresco's use-value as both a devotional and mnemonic prompt in the liturgical calendar.¹³⁰ In his instructions to the painters Bartolomeo Cesi and Camillo Procaccini regarding this commission, Paleotti repeatedly advises them to paint the martyrs in an iconographic and stylistic idiom similar to Circignani's work at

¹²⁷ An inventory of his library further records that Paleotti possessed editions of both the *Ecclesiae Militantis Triumphus* and the *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Trophaea*.

¹²⁸ For the cycle's programme and genesis, see Bianchi (2008), pp.95-171.

¹²⁹ Malvasia, (1732), p.48.

¹³⁰ Bianchi, p.106.

Santo Stefano.¹³¹ Here is a ghostly trace of the drawings mentioned by Lauretano in his diary: Paleotti's chosen artists at San Pietro probably had access to these copies, and this explains the cardinal's instructions to his painters to depict the saints 'as they are amongst the pictures in Rome.' Whilst the surviving fragments of the Bologna frescoes are too damaged to shed light on the ways in which they adapted Santo Stefano's prototypes, a number of preparatory drawings still survive and have been recently published by Ilaria Bianchi. These drawings demonstrate that Lauretano and Paleotti differed in their conception of what kind of pictorial composition would be most effective in delivering the kind of affective shock each sought to inculcate in their viewers.

One of the surviving drawings by Cesi relating to Paleotti's Bologna commission is a preliminary study for a fresco depicting the martyrdom of St. Artemius, a subject also depicted at Santo Stefano (fig. 120). There, the flattened corpse of the saint wedged between massive stone slabs is one of four bodies neatly aligned on an acid-green carpet of grass, popped out eyes and ruptured bowels darkly undermining the pastoral credentials of the surrounding landscape. Cesi makes some important pictorial revisions to the iconic stillness of the Santo Stefano fresco (fig. 121). Firstly, Circignani's archaic compositional structure of including multiple different narrative scenes in the same image has been abandoned. The isolated outdoor setting has been transformed into a complex architectural ensemble, with massive classical columns set upon imposing pediments framing the scene's singular narrative action. More significantly, the artist revises the temporal moment depicted at Santo Stefano; in Circignani's Roman fresco, the time of action has passed. The viewer witnesses the aftermath of the martyrological moment, and Artemius' corpse is already beginning to take on the iconic power of an eternalised relic invested with the kind of community-making potential

¹³¹ Referring to the *Martyrdom of Blandina*, Paleotti advises 'pingasi in una rete levata de le corna di un toro, come nelle pitture di Roma.' The same goes for Ignazio and Agapitus. Ibid., pp.116-7.

explored in this thesis's opening chapter. Cesi instead depicts the saint in the midst of his grisly passion, eyes opened wide in horror as his body is crushed and broken by the stone being wedged into place above him through back-breaking labour. The mystery of the past action in Circignani's strangely silent image has been resolved; the geological mass exerting such unbearable pressure on the saint's body is the product of human toil, the result of calloused hands operating long levers. The massive physical forces at work on the saint's fleshy form have already caused devastating rupture, snapping ligaments and bursting organs.

The obscure narrative depicted in these images unexpectedly receives one of the most detailed treatments of any martyrdom referenced in the extended 1594 Latin edition of Gallonio's *Treatise on the Instruments of Martyrdom*.¹³² No doubt the novel martyrological detail it offered appealed to the encyclopaedic tendencies of the Oratorian scholar as much as it did to Lauretano and Paleotti. Viewing the Santo Stefano fresco and Cesi's preparatory sketch in the context of this contemporary textual hagiographic source sheds light on the radical way in which the pictorial renderings of Artemius' martyrdom shifted the focus of the narrative from the expected message of divine favour to the darker theme of a purely terrestrial torment. If Brad Gregory is correct to associate Gallonio's preoccupation with the technical details of ancient martyrdom with a conviction that divine reward is directly proportionate to earthly suffering, then the torture endured by Artemius emerges as the logical precondition for his eternal salvation.¹³³ In order to complete this discursive circle, the precise nature of the saint's ultimate victory is also fully fleshed out in the text, something entirely absent in the images commissioned by Lauretano and Paleotti. As an example of the kind of high-pitched rhetoric of violence that this chapter traces combined

¹³² For differences between the Italian and Latin editions, see Touber (2014), esp. p.52&194.

¹³³ Gregory (2009), p.281.

with a more traditional hagiographic structure of salvation, Gallonio's text is worth quoting in some detail.

Enraged at Artemius' desecration of Constantinople's pagan monuments, the emperor Julian the Apostate orders local stonemasons to divide a massive block of stone that had broken off from the city's amphitheatre in two. Laying Artemius flat upon one of the pieces, they lower the other onto him so that his 'flesh and bones [are] crushed out of all shape.' Such was the enormous pressure that 'as his bones broke asunder, a sound of splitting and cracking was actually heard by many.' His innards meanwhile 'were torn to pieces and the articulations of his bones were crushed, while his eyes started out of their sockets.'¹³⁴ Gallonio's unflinching detail effectively captures the corporeal trauma pictured by Cesi, whilst the disgusting detail of eyes popping from their sockets is carefully depicted by Circignani at Santo Stefano in what may be a novel pictorial first.¹³⁵ At this point images and text diverge, however, for in Gallonio's account bodily destruction merely forms a narrative precursor to the saint's miraculous denial of the logic of persecution: 'even though he was reduced to such a pitiable state, he did not neglect to sing to God's praise; for he chanted where he lay between the stones...'¹³⁶

Artemius' defiant assertion of agency even as he is being crushed out of shape is fundamentally at odds with the passive holy bodies rendered by Circignani and Cesi, acted upon and ultimately silenced by forces beyond their control. The dénouement of Gallonio's account skips forward 24 hours, and describes the ultimate failure of the cruel and unusual torture. After a 'day and a night inside the stones,' the emperor was naturally certain that 'no

¹³⁴ Gallonio (2003 [1594]), p.60. Artemius is more briefly treated in the Italian edition, where Gallonio simply notes that he was crushed between two enormous stones.

¹³⁵ Tempesta's engraving accompanying Gallonio's text for example depicts the moment before the stones are wedged into place, and thus the saint's anatomy remains unblemished, eyes still housed in their sockets (fig.122).

¹³⁶ Gallonio (2003), p.60.

vestige of life [remained] under so grievous and overwhelming a weight.' To his utter amazement, however, out walked Artemius in a

miracle worthy of all wonder and admiration! A man, naked and unprotected, whose eyes had started out of his head, whose bones had been crushed and all his limbs and flesh squeezed into one mass by the weight of the stone, so that his bowels had miserably gushed out, this man was walking and talking, and speaking words of rebuke against the tyrant, so that even he was astounded.¹³⁷

As it relates the aftermath of Artemius' torture, the conclusion to Gallonio's account bears direct comparison with Circignani's fresco. And yet it is perhaps here where the two martyrologies differ the most: whereas Gallonio's Artemius emerges from two days squeezed between the ruined amphitheatre's massive stones miraculously alive and ready to remonstrate with his torturers, a holy triumph over death familiar from a multitude of written hagiographies, Circignani's saint appears to have more prosaically fallen victim to the inescapable dictates of terrestrial physics. Here is the man 'naked and unprotected' described by Gallonio, eyes starting out of his head, bones crushed, limbs and flesh squeezed into a single lumpen mass as bowels miserably gush from perforated belly. But instead of the strange and 'unexampled miracle' of a still sapient entity able to walk and talk even in that reduced state, this is a body that is unambiguously dead, left as carrion for the birds on an abandoned plain. More so than Cesi's sketch or Gallonio's text, Circignani's Artemius seems to encapsulate the ultimate Christian fear of a death without rebirth, the horror of degrading corporeal matter which is no longer living flesh but not yet the eternal and unchanging sacral matter of a heavenly body.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ As Julia Kristeva (1982, pp.3-4) writes, 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection.'

If the three accounts of Artemius' martyrdom differ in the prominence they afford to dramatic action, narrative progression and the reassuring inevitability of salvation, they certainly share a commitment to depicting the desecrated holy body in unflinching and scopically apprehensible detail. Paleotti makes this commitment clear in the notes he prepared for Cesi and Procaccini before they began work on the Bologna cycle, where he made particular reference to the importance of the *visibility* of the saint's agonised limbs. Focusing on the actions of Julian's stonemasons in carrying out the emperor's orders, the cardinal instructs the painters that 'those ministers force him with wooden bars into a lying position between two massive stones in such a way that one sees the head, an arm and a leg hanging down from the stones that he has been made to lie between, and one sees on the ground a great quantity of blood.'¹³⁹

Paleotti's insistence on the visibility of the bloody act and his sensitivity to the role of the viewer in the constitution of this scene re-emphasises the role of the spectacular in Counter-Reformation image theory. A conviction in the potentially edifying possibilities of witnessing the spectacle of impious atrocity is not only shared by all the major late sixteenth-century writers on sacred art, but can also be traced back to some of the earliest Christian writings on this subject. Eusebius, who was a vitally important primary source for Counter-Reformation martyrologists, forcefully emphasises the positive impact that scenes of Christian martyrdom could have on the souls of those privileged enough to gaze upon them. In a striking passage of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius structures his description of the martyrdom of Polycarp around the onlookers present at the scene rather than on the event itself:

They say that those who were standing around were amazed when they saw that at one time they were torn by scourges down to deep-seated

¹³⁹ Transcribed in Bianchi, p.121. For original see Appendix 1.

veins and arteries, so that the hidden contents of the recesses of their bodies, their entrails and organs were exposed to sight.¹⁴⁰

Eusebius's witnesses, faint with wonder at the spectacle of the martyrs' viscerally exposed interiors, recall the spectatorial dynamics discussed above in the context of the final moments of Saint Lucy's martyrdom at Santo Stefano.¹⁴¹ Just like the gaping aperture carved into Lucy's throat, the opened bodies of Polycarp and his followers provide privileged access into a hidden world for those fortunate enough to witness the bloody spectacle.¹⁴²

The bystanders wondering at Polycarp's ruptured integument and the miraculously revealed contents of its deepest hidden recesses appear far removed from stereotyped characterisations of pious Christians disquieted by the taboo spectacle of the opened body, fearful of participating in the violation of what Marie-Christine Pouchelle has described as a 'divine prohibition on forbidden knowledge.'¹⁴³ These awestruck martyrological witnesses seem instead to have more in common with the throngs clamouring to catch a glimpse of the cadaver being meticulously dissected on the frontispiece of Andrea Vesalius's seminal 1543 anatomical treatise *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (fig.123). The description of Bologna's thriving early-modern public anatomy scene by a visiting scholar as a well-attended 'useful spectacle' indeed joins the spectacular logic of a thirst for making

¹⁴⁰ Eusebius (1926), p.341.

¹⁴¹ Interestingly Girolamo Muzio's 1570 *Historia Sacra* (Bk. 2, p.28) emphasises precisely this aspect of Eusebius' account, describing how 'in order to shock the people into ceasing to follow the Christian religion, they flagellated the martyrs until they had stripped them of flesh, exhibiting their interiors (*in fin che nudati di carne mostravano le interiora*).'

¹⁴² This preoccupation with the scopic revelation of martyred interiors is also a recurring feature of Prudentius' martyrology. The judge presiding over Vincent's trial for example commands his minions to 'with cleaving strokes lay bare his ribs of their covering, so that his organs shall be exposed as they throb in the recesses of his wounds' (p.177).

¹⁴³ Pouchelle (1990), p.82.

visible the body's deep-seated epistemology to an edifying didacticism which resonates with much Counter-Reformation martyrological art-theory.¹⁴⁴

An interesting visual parallel to Eusebius's spectacular exposition of the body turned inside out, and one which concretizes the relationship between holy martyrdom and the exposed bodies of anatomical dissection, is found in one of the engravings designed by Antonio Tempesta to accompany the text of Gallonio's *Trattato* (fig.124). The engraving depicts various solutions to the problem of representing a body being flayed of its skin, a punishment which Gallonio informs us was inflicted upon martyrs both historical and contemporary whilst 'in full possession of their consciousness and all their senses.' As with Eusebius's account of Polycarp, one of the principal concerns of the engraving is the theatrical display of the exemplary martyr's circulatory system. Whilst the skin of the figure bound to the tree on the right is being torn off in a single epidermal layer in a manner recalling the depiction of St Bartholomew's like punishment at Santi Nereo ed Achilleo (fig.125), the body of the still-sentient martyr on the left of the composition seems to more closely approximate the product of an early-modern anatomy lesson. Beneath the layer of now dead skin hanging uselessly from the martyr's leg, the throbbing veins and muscles of Eusebius's imagination are vividly exposed to the viewer. Taken in isolation, this deconstructed limb propped up upon a low stool appears to owe a debt to the peeling leg of one of the flayed bodies in Vesalius' treatise (fig.126). In the absence of subsidiary figures functioning to comment on and mediate the viewing experience of the image as in Alberti's theory of the *historia* and represented in Eusebius's spectators 'standing around,' the witness to Gallonio's deconstructed holy body becomes the reader of the treatise him/herself. By displacing the act of witness from within the narrative time frame to the eternal-present of the reader, the task of testifying to the miraculous reality

¹⁴⁴ See Ferrari (1987), p.52.

of Christ's sacrifice (mediated through his martyrs) is fundamentally brought to bear for a Counter-Reformation audience.¹⁴⁵

Eusebius's echoing of the anatomist's desire to open the human body and inspect its hidden recesses in an attempt to understand the nature of martyrdom constitutes an interesting pre-history to confluences between the medicalised and holy body that would become common in the cinquecento. Dissecting the bodies of holy figures in search of unambiguous signs of their sanctity was a fairly widespread practice during this period, with the autopsy of Filippo Neri and the resultant discovery of his enlarged pericardium and arterial vein perhaps being the most famous example.¹⁴⁶ The bladder stones extracted from Pius V after his death would quickly become metonymic indices of his own sanctity, so powerfully did they showcase his stoic acceptance of suffering in life.¹⁴⁷ In Michele Mercati's *Metalloteca Vaticana* the macroscopically enlarged stones take on the appearance of geographic globes, indicating that profound world-creating epistemologies could be found deep within even the humblest of holy accretions (fig. 127).

Similarly, when the locally revered Capuchin friar Raniero of Sansepolcro's body was opened on the orders of the bishop of Todi after his death in 1589, the surgeon's scalpel revealed three 'triangular stones, each the size of a chestnut,' proof of his longstanding devotion to the Trinity. One of the stones was inscribed with the image of the Virgin and infant Christ on one side, and a bloodied column on the other. According to the account, Christ wanted to demonstrate in the body of his servant the devotion he had held for the Nativity, the Passion and the Virgin - and so in death 'one sees

¹⁴⁵ In this context it is worth recalling Romano Alberti's contemporary celebration of martyrological imagery's capacity to allow viewers to see 'in a certain way present' the torments of Christ and his martyrs.

¹⁴⁶ For a reconstruction of the autopsies of Neri and Carlo Borromeo, see Siraisi (2001), pp.356-80. For the increasing medicalisation of the holy body in general see Park (1994) and Bouley (2016).

¹⁴⁷ Toubert (2013), pp.23-44.

these living figures impressed into his very viscera.’¹⁴⁸ Piero Camporesi’s suggestion that Gallonio’s sustained martyrological interest in the opened holy body should be situated within this emerging culture of sacred dissection has been widely followed.¹⁴⁹

Adding to this, I would like to point to an instance where the link between anatomy and holiness was brought specifically into the context of the evolving nature of martyrological imagery in the late sixteenth century. In 1581, when Paleotti’s *Discorso* was on the verge of being printed, the bishop’s friend Ulisse Aldrovandi wrote to him with some observations concerning how the natural sciences touch on the art of painting. Aldrovandi’s role in popularising a form of detailed naturalistic draughtsmanship in late-sixteenth-century Bologna has been well-documented, but his intervention into the discourse of martyrological representation has received less attention.¹⁵⁰ In his letter, Aldrovandi writes persuasively of the utility of anatomical investigation for the martyrological painter specifically:

It is necessary to converse with the most excellent anatomists and diligently examine all the sections of the human body, both interior and exterior, so that one can understand the shape of the heart, the liver, the spleen, the intestines, the stomach, the throat, and the brain. In this way, when one comes to paint some martyrdom such as that of St. Erasmus and others like him...you can paint it naturalistically.¹⁵¹

Aldrovandi’s comments appear to confirm the suspicion that a commitment to detailed reconstructions of martyrological torment was fundamentally tied to an increasing interest in what Jonathan Sawday describes as ‘autoptic

¹⁴⁸ Zaccaria and Benedetto (1645), p.662: ‘...imprese nelle sue viscere le vive figure.’

¹⁴⁹ Camporesi (1994), pp.137-41.

¹⁵⁰ Aldrovandi’s collection of natural objects contained over 7,000 specimens, each accompanied by a detailed illustration. For Aldrovandi’s role in fostering the links between scientific study and artistic practice, see Olmi and Prodi (1986), pp.213-237.

¹⁵¹ Aldrovandi (1960), p.929. For original see appendix 1.

vision,' a medicalising gaze preoccupied with inspecting, categorising and defining the bodily interior.¹⁵² His motivation for insisting on the relevance of up-to-date anatomical knowledge for patrons and artists cannot be attributed solely to an abstract intellectual desire for epistemological coherence, however; Aldrovandi's concerns can also be placed squarely in the discourse of art, and the implications that an acute anatomising gaze might have for the development of a naturalistic martyrological idiom that would satisfy Gilio's earlier demand for brutal mimesis.

Aldrovandi's conviction that direct anatomical observation was vital for the martyrological painter was certainly topical: in 1594, the Roman Academy of which Paleotti was Cardinal Protector and Circignani an important member acquired a 'pedestal' on which anatomical dissections could be performed before the artists, and Federico Zuccaro obtained a cadaver for the institution shortly thereafter. Once again demonstrating the aesthetic pleasure possible in corporeal discovery, Romano Alberti reports that the academicians 'savoured seeing and discovering (*gustando di vedere e scoprire*) every muscle, bone and vein' of the flayed cadaver over fifteen days.¹⁵³ A drawing from the same decade attributed to Jacopo Ligozzi depicting studies from a decaying suspended cadaver vividly showcases the uses to which such bodies were put by contemporary artists (fig.128).

A recognition that the study of anatomy was an important component in the formative training of an artist was hardly new. Vasari relates that the sculptors and painters of Florence were engaged in painstaking analyses of the human form throughout the cinquecento, and he largely attributes Michelangelo's pre-eminence in *disegno* to his willingness to dissect and flay cadavers from his teenage years onwards.¹⁵⁴ In 1570 Bartolomeo Passerroti

¹⁵² Sawday (1995).

¹⁵³ R. Alberti (1604), p.28.

¹⁵⁴ Vasari (1965), Vol.II, pp.332-3. Michelangelo's commitment to anatomical accuracy led to slanders that he crucified a porter alive in order to more accurately depict the suffering of Christ. See Eaker (2015), p.179.

would even depict the artist leading an anatomical dissection in the presence of Raphael, Andrea del Sarto and other renowned artists (fig.129). But as Gilio's criticisms of Michelangelo demonstrate, the idea that first-hand anatomical knowledge might lead the sacred artist astray increasingly gained traction as the century wore on. Paleotti also shared a suspicion of anatomy's conjunction with the art of painting, writing in his *Discorso* that

if some authors on the art of medicine have judged that it is inappropriate to perform dissections on living bodies, no matter how necessary they are for ensuring human health...why would a judicious painter not similarly abstain from imitating these things that are obviously abhorrent to the law and the senses?¹⁵⁵

Aldrovandi's observations to Paleotti can perhaps be seen as an attempt to reconceptualise the relationship between anatomy and the visual arts in a fashion that was acceptable to the Counter-Reformatory historical moment. In this reading, anatomical study is not to be undertaken as part of a misguided attempt to demonstrate painterly virtuosity in the vein of the 'notomisti del furioso' censured by Gilio for their obsession with twisting and contorted bodies. Instead, Aldrovandi implies that a profound knowledge of both the internal and external workings of the body can enable the artist to activate the full affective power of martyrdom in complete accord with narrative exigency. Perhaps his arguments had their desired effect, as Paleotti goes on to exempt the artist's vivisection impulses from censure if they contribute to the production of images that 'minutely express' the 'atrocious' tortures of the saints.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ G. Paleotti, p.417. For original see appendix 1. Unlike dissection in general, fears and prohibitions surrounding vivisection were very real in the early-modern period. Many of the leading anatomists of the cinquecento were rumoured to have engaged in the unsavoury practice, including Vesalius himself. See O'Malley (1964), pp.304-5.

¹⁵⁶ G. Paleotti, p.417.

In contemporary Rome's martyrological culture, a long-standing metaphor of artistic creation is inverted: if Michelangelo's artistic practice can be understood in an inverse relationship to his anatomical practice, a kind of corporeal 're-animation' founded on his ability to take the dead body apart and bring it miraculously to new life through the genius of his art, then Aldrovandi proposes a very different conception of the creative process and its relationship to anatomy.¹⁵⁷ Instead of the artist operating as a kind of 'deus artifex,' animating inanimate matter in imitation of (and for Gilio, inappropriately in competition with) the creator of the world himself, the Counter-Reformation martyrological painter is in fact more like the professional persecutors he is enjoined to depict, or the executioner-surgeons of sixteenth-century Europe.¹⁵⁸ Fredrika Jacobs' assertion that 'anatomizing had more to do with creative assemblage than with the violation and destruction of the body'¹⁵⁹ does not apply to the martyrological artist; his knowledge of anatomy allows him to take the human body apart, to convincingly separate intestines from stomach and liver from spleen, but without the ultimate obligation to restore it to corporeal integrity. In pictorially enacting such fragmentation, the painter allows the viewer privileged access to the theological truth of Christian sacrifice vividly emblazoned on every dismembered limb and shattered organ in a manner not so different from the surgeon's exposition of the miraculous images displayed on the stones of Raniero of Sansepolcro's viscera.

The theological and epistemological ramifications of the corporeally destructive, anatomising eye of the martyrological painter is vividly illustrated in an engraving by Pierfrancesco Alberti depicting the daily tasks of the Roman Academy in the opening years of the seicento (fig. 130). Beneath a familiar image of Christ's stricken body hanging helplessly from its

¹⁵⁷ Vasari writes that Michelangelo created David in an act of resuscitation, whilst Cellini later makes the same boast about his Perseus. For Michelangelo as 're-animator,' see Campbell (2002), esp.pp.598-602.

¹⁵⁸ For the executioner's common dual-role as surgeon in early-modern Europe, see Stuart (2006), pp.149-86.

¹⁵⁹ Jacobs (2002), p.441.

cross, an academician directs the dissection of a cadaver for the instructional benefit of the young students in the print's right middle-ground. Witnesses within the scene of crucifixion who are unable to look at Christ's ravaged anatomy instead avert their gazes down into the real space of the academy, fixing them upon the dismantled criminal body that will ultimately form the basis of the young trainees' own pictorial sacralisations of capital punishment. Further blurring the easy distinction of artist, executioner and anatomist, the cadaver upon which the academicians perform their dissection bears an uncanny resemblance to the corpse of the English martyr Richard Fetherston as depicted in an engraving after Circignani's fresco at the English College (figs. 131&132). In both images, the dead weight of a nude male body lies limply, right arm hanging heavily and head lolling uselessly backwards as thoraxes are split open and excavated by knife-wielding painters and executioners respectively. Corporeal fragmentation and painterly practice thus collide in Counter-Reformation Rome, and this equivalence illuminates the ways in which progressive theories of sixteenth-century art-theory need not be in direct competition with the ostensibly more conservative ideals of patrons and theologians such as Gilio, Lauretano and Paleotti. The witnesses of Christ's death above the dissection table, one with head sadly bowed and the other covering his tear-streaked face with his hands, perfectly exemplify the affective spectatorial end towards which the martyrological painter must strive, an affective end made possible only through real and virtual practices of dissection.

For many contemporary Roman observers the corporeally destructive ensembles of Santo Stefano certainly possessed this affective power to hit the viewer in the guts, to recall Paleotti's phrase. Lauretano noted in 1582 that there had been many observers over the previous year who had been 'unable to regard them without crying.'¹⁶⁰ No less an observer than Pope Sixtus V himself was so struck on a visit to the basilica, as recounted in Lauretano's diary:

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Bailey, p.310, n. 40.

This Sunday, our Lord came from his vineyard to mass in the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo, afterwards noting and observing minutely the figures of diverse martyrs painted all around in the manner in which they were martyred. While admiring these spectacles (*spettacoli*), his Holiness was seen to shed tears of tenderness (*lacrimare un pezzo di tenerezza*) and many times had to dry his eyes.¹⁶¹

The empathetic tears of tenderness shed by the pope as he beheld the violent fates of the saints in these spectacles serve to emphasise their affective power in line with Paleotti's theory. But the act of crying was also a culturally expected gesture that had rhetorical power in Counter-Reformation theology and image-theory.¹⁶² In 1616, Roberto Bellarmino published a treatise entitled *De Bono Lachrymarum*, in which he asserted the devotional merits of pious tears and itemised twelve appropriate situations that might impel such sorrow in a Christian soul. Significantly, one of these fonts of grief concerned reflecting on the sufferings of the church's martyrs.¹⁶³ Pope Gregory XIII meanwhile, pontiff at the time of the completion of the Santo Stefano cycle, regularly wept in public, often impelled by the sight of early-Christian relics and bodies. Gregory was moved to tears during the translation procession of the body of his namesake Gregory Nazianzus recounted earlier in this thesis, as was Clement VIII a decade later at the beginning of the Eucharistic devotional ceremony of the *Quarant'ore*.¹⁶⁴

The lachrymose culture of the Counter-Reformation took its cues from patristic precedent. In his treatise, Paleotti demonstrated the antique

¹⁶¹ Quoted in Orbaan (1910), pp.309-10. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁶² Such a gesture was especially appropriate in a Jesuit church; the eyes of Ignatius were reputed to be constantly stained with tears, something that so impressed Roland Barthes that it emerges as a kind of *punctum* in his idiosyncratic account of the saint's life. Barthes (1971), p.74.

¹⁶³ See de Santillana (1955), p.102.

¹⁶⁴ Courtright (2003), p.247, n.33.

exemplarity for such open displays of emotional affect and assiduously linked it to the world of representation when he approvingly recounted how Gregory of Nyssa always burst into tears when passing a picture of Abraham and Isaac.¹⁶⁵ Paleotti further writes that Asterius was overcome by tears before the painting depicting the martyrdom of Saint Euphemia, so brilliantly did it express 'the bitterness of her passion and the greatness of her fortitude.'¹⁶⁶ It would not be surprising if Paleotti imitated his Cappadocian predecessor on his visit to Santo Stefano in 1583 as he gazed upon Euphemia submerged in a den of writhing vipers, hands clasped in pious prayer. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona argues that an early-Christian 'theology of compunction' conceived of tears as 'the visual, yet silent symbol of the purification of the soul following the recognition of human finitude and guilt.'¹⁶⁷ The tears of Sixtus and his contemporaries at Santo Stefano should be considered as an extension of this doctrine, a graphic visual demonstration of martyrological imagery's efficacy in a representational culture where a theory of affect was beginning to take centre-stage. To gaze on such violence is to understand the nature of the sacrifice willingly undertaken by Christ and his saintly imitators. To be moved to tears by it is to begin on the path of absolution of one's own culpability in this suffering. The implication of Sixtus' tears, then, is that the appropriate beholding of pious imagery can function as nothing less than a kind of sacramental confession before God, a recognition that images of martyrdom hit one in the guts and purify the soul.

¹⁶⁵ G. Paleotti, p.231.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.232. For the original context of these tear-filled responses in Byzantine ekphrastic rhetoric, see James and Webb (1991), pp.9-10.

¹⁶⁷ Apostolos-Cappadona (2005), p.206.

IV. Atrocious Bloodlust, *Meraviglia* and the Spectacular Logic of Martyrdom

In light of the powerfully affective charge that violent sacred imagery wielded according to Counter-Reformation image-theory, it follows that the more graphically violent such imagery was, the greater its capacity to move the viewer to cathartic expiation. The logic underpinning such a position would lead some critics and patrons to quite remarkable expressions of bloodlust. Perhaps most instructive is the example of Paleotti's cousin Alfonso, who eventually succeeded Gabriele as Bishop of Bologna and whose treatise on the Turin Shroud will be treated in detail in chapter four. Alfonso regularly corresponded with Gabriele concerning the details of the martyrological fresco-cycle in the cathedral's crypt during its planning stages, exhorting his cousin to elevate the graphic nature of the crypt frescoes to new and spectacular heights. In a letter discussing the iconography and expressive idiom appropriate to the scene of Saint Lenonio's martyrdom, Alfonso voices his desire that the saint 'should be painted completely lacerated, abrogated and stripped of flesh,' his hands 'shattered and bruised and streaming jets of blood.' According to Alfonso, 'because it is new and atrocious, this will be a beautiful martyrdom.'¹⁶⁸

It is precisely through its novel atrociousness that the representation of Lenonio's martyrdom will be beautiful, and the imaginative detail of Alfonso's bloodlust recalls Gilio's first steps towards a 'new and beautiful' aesthetics of martyrdom twenty years earlier in his *Dialogo*. For both men, novelty, graphic violence and beauty are joined together in an enticing admixture that provides the basis for a progressive but distinctly Counter-Reformatory art. The different tenses in which the two authors operate is instructive: Gilio writes speculatively of a new kind of art that would be distinguished by its beautiful deformity, his conditional construction denoting this as an imagined future genre, whilst Alfonso employs the

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Bianchi, p.115: 'Questo sar  bello martyrio per esser novo et atroce.'

confident certitude of the indicative mood; the novel atrociousness that he hopes to see in his cousin's fresco cycle is very much an achievable reality. The natural bridge between the imagined and real pictorial futures conjured by Gilio and Alfonso Paleotti are the Santo Stefano frescoes, which vividly demonstrated how a sustained interrogation of martyrdom's bloody reality might be integrated into contemporary aesthetic discourse.

Whilst the theological impetus for a martyrological aesthetic centring around the mutilated body is compelling, a purely doctrinal commitment to historical and physiological accuracy in the production of sacred narrative cannot fully account for the frequent inter-leavings between theories of beauty and violence during this period.¹⁶⁹ A conviction in the signifying and aesthetic potential of violent corporeal destruction freely crossed sacred and secular boundaries, carrying these ideas far beyond the concerns of reforming ecclesiastical patrons. Intriguing parallels can be drawn to contemporary experiments in the theatre for example, where a 'dominant aesthetic code of gory illusionism' fed a wider cultural appetite to 'witness the violent dismantling of the human body.'¹⁷⁰

One example of spectacularly violent dramaturgy that demands comparison with the martyrological theorisations of the Paleotti cousins is Giraldi Cinthio's *Orbecche*, whose innovative ensembles of sensational violence shocked audiences on its 1541 debut.¹⁷¹ In one scene, a messenger recounts how the tyrant Sulmone solemnly presents his daughter Orbecche with the severed heads and hands of her husband Oronte and children on a silver salver draped in black silk. The king assures his daughter that a 'wedding present' is concealed beneath the dark fabric; Orbecche raises the material, and recoils in horror at the dreadful sight.

¹⁶⁹ For a consideration of this issue in the context of Neapolitan painting and the work of Jusepe de Ribera in particular, see Hendrix (2003), pp.68-92.

¹⁷⁰ Owens (2005), p.26.

¹⁷¹ For Giraldi's development of a tragic idiom based on Senecan violent excess, see Puttfarken (2005), pp.64-6.

In Giraldi's 1554 *Discourse Concerning the Composition of Comedy and Tragedy*, the author proudly describes the impact that this scene had on its first spectators: their initial disgust may echo the on-stage reaction of the unfortunate protagonist, but in the crucible of artistic beholding simple horror is elevated to the rarefied experience of *meraviglia*:

I still have in my eyes the wonder (*maraviglia*) I saw in those people who watched and listened to the representation of the messenger in my *Orbecche*. It seems that the earth still trembles beneath my feet as I felt it then, when the portrayal of that messenger inspired horror in everyone, provoking such horror and compassion in their souls that everyone remained as if stunned.¹⁷²

As Marianna Tempera points out, Giraldi is more interested in watching the reaction of his audience than the play itself.¹⁷³ He gleefully recounts how some audience members faint, burst into tears or are overcome with emotion by the events of the play, and is particularly proud of the fact that the fiancée of Giulio Ponzoni, who played the part of Oronte and to whom the later treatise was addressed, was utterly overcome by the scene of the silver salver. Significantly, Giraldi's audience is provoked to *meraviglia* specifically through the misappropriation of severed body-parts as narrative or aesthetic devices. Echoing saint Martha's hand-necklace as depicted at Santo Stefano, Sulmone mockingly offers Oronte's freshly severed hands back to him as a 'sceptre' of power, travestied symbol of the status the king denies him.¹⁷⁴ Gazing upon Martha's ravaged form later in the century, gaudily bedecked with her own perverse body-part accessory, it would not be surprising if contemporary viewers at Santo Stefano were filled with the same mingling of horror and wonder that rippled through the audience at Ferrara in 1541,

¹⁷² Giraldi (1554), pp.278-9: For original see appendix.

¹⁷³ Tempera (2005), p.239.

¹⁷⁴ Giraldi (1547), p.42.

where a novel ensemble of violence led those experiencing it to a heightened state of affective compassion even as it threatened to overwhelm their sensibilities.

Although Jesuit writers frequently excoriated the capacity of secular stagecraft to exalt immorality, a certain cross-pollination of beholding experience would have been inevitable between violent theatrical spectacle and martyrological imagery.¹⁷⁵ The Jesuit theorist of sacred art Domenico Ottonelli himself allowed that there was ‘an affinity between the Jesuit order and theatrical practice,’ and despite his subsequent caution that a performance which seeks merely to distract the viewer is an obscenity,¹⁷⁶ it seems justified to posit that patrons of the order such as Lauretano were alive to the profound affective power that striking theatrical ensembles might wield. Indeed, sacred dramas were frequently staged in Rome’s Jesuit colleges. A German college production of a dramatization of the life of Saint Catherine in 1566 was enlivened ‘con grande apparato scenico’ and attended by cardinals and ambassadors; the spectacle proved so affecting that a massive crowd clamouring to get a better view started a riot and stormed the stage.¹⁷⁷ In 1574 the College staged a performance of Stefano Tucci’s *Christus Iudex* in Palazzo Colonna, with Marcantonio Colonna himself in attendance. An account of a later performance of the play describes how ‘wonder and terror gripped the audience’ as they witnessed the ground opening to swallow the damned, who howled with pain as the flames of hell engulfed them.¹⁷⁸

Near contemporary martyrological plays such as Nicolas Soret’s 1606 *La Céciliade* meanwhile deployed revelations of mutilated bodies through judicious use of drapes and curtains in a manner fully aligned with

¹⁷⁵ For a fascinating Jesuit defence of the theatre based on its capacity to vivify martyrdom’s bloody reality, which is uniquely effective at arousing pity and fear and leading to Aristotelian catharsis, see Galluzzi (1633), pp.71-6.

¹⁷⁶ Daddario (2011), pp.13-14; Daddario (2017), p.162.

¹⁷⁷ Villoslada (1954), p.77.

¹⁷⁸ Körndle (2006), p.485.

Orbecche.¹⁷⁹ Spectacles of dismemberment and bodily travesty, be they sacred or secular, were thus specifically theorised as aesthetic strategies that could elevate the viewing experience of the audience to a state of *meraviglia*.¹⁸⁰ Paleotti for his part, although wary of virtuoso artistic performance in general, makes an exception for representations of events taken from the lives of the saints (above all their martyrdoms), explicitly linking such images to the positive implications of *meraviglia* and *vaghezza* in aesthetic discourse: scenes from the lives of the saints, ‘judiciously chosen, will bring *meravigliosa vaghezza*, utility, exemplarity and greatness to those who use them and to the place where they are found depicted.’¹⁸¹ Within the formal rubric of the violent martyrological image, the artistic concerns of cinquecento aesthetic theory and the exigencies of effective devotional strategies found a shared space where they could exist in harmony, each reinforcing the power and legitimacy of the other.

That the discursive lineaments of marvellous spectacle, so central to the theories of affect that drove contemporary theatre in the wake of Giraldi, could have a real bearing on the practice of visual artists working on martyrological subjects is vividly demonstrated in a passage from Giorgio Vasari’s description of his own career appended to the 1564 edition of the *Lives of the Artists*. Vasari recounts in detail a painting he produced for the Martelli chapel in the Florentine church of San Lorenzo depicting the martyrdom of the sixth-century Burgundian saint Sigismondo and his family at the hands of a rival pagan king (fig.133).¹⁸² His description of the motivations underpinning his compositional decisions helps to clarify the links between violence, sanctity and aesthetic theories of *meraviglia* and spectatorship that this chapter has traced.

¹⁷⁹ See Meere (2015), p.21. For the increasingly graphic nature of martyrological plays in general see Teulade (2002); Ibbett (2002).

¹⁸⁰ For an overview of the theoretical language of *meraviglia* as later codified by Marino, see Mirollo (1999), pp.36-8.

¹⁸¹ G. Paleotti, p.466. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁸² Vasari (1850), p.540.

According to Vasari, although his patron had intended to commission a small *sacra conversazione*, the artist insisted on producing a martyrological painting in an epic key because of ‘the honour to be derived from the work.’¹⁸³ For him the subject was perfectly suited to the specific representational demands associated with the *istoria* as theorised by Leon Battista Alberti, widely considered by sixteenth-century Italian patrons and artists as emblematising the highest achievement of the painter’s art.¹⁸⁴ In Alberti’s formulation, the *istoria* encompassed a compositional approach to dramatic subject matter that sought to compel the viewer to ‘weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving.’¹⁸⁵ The Jesuit Antonio Possevino revised Alberti’s theory for a Counter-Reformation audience in 1593 by adding to it the coefficients of martyrdom: according to Possevino, ‘the highest art, which imitates reality itself,’ similarly ‘expresses martyrdom in the martyrs, tears in the weeping, sorrow in the suffering, glory and joy in the risen, and fixes them in our hearts.’¹⁸⁶

Vasari anticipates Possevino’s clarion call for a rarefied and bloody mimesis in the Martelli chapel, depicting the dramatic high-point of the narrative when Sigismondo, his wife and their two sons are ‘on the point of being thrown into a well.’ His description of the painting is too lengthy to quote directly, but his stated intention to ‘give every figure its appropriate expression and proper attitude’ showcases a commitment to a visually coherent concomitance between gesture, expression and action that is quintessentially Albertian. Significantly, Vasari emphasises his sensitivity to the inherently spectacular nature of the martyrological *istoria*, recalling Giraldi’s heady mix of *orrore, meraviglia* and the dynamics of spectatorship in his *Orbecche*: ‘within the Loggia on one side, I depicted the people regarding

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ For the widespread adoption and adaptation of the critical terminology of the *istoria* in late-cinquecento sacred art theory, see Ostrow (1996), p.244.

¹⁸⁵ L.B. Alberti (1970), p.27.

¹⁸⁶ Quoted in Donnelly (1982), p.157. Possevino incidentally formulated the 1573 *Constitutions* of the German College which formed the basis for Lauretano’s more severe *Leges* 6 years later. Bitskey, pp.182-3.

that horrendous spectacle [*orrendo spettacolo*].¹⁸⁷ Vasari's terminology anticipates an eye-witness account describing a public execution in 1580s Rome similarly as a 'horrendo spettacolo di tutta Roma:¹⁸⁸ as a real spectacle occurring in the measurable scope of historical time such violence might be horrendous, but transfigured through the prism of art that very quality ultimately ensures its pictorial value and renders it capable of transfixing its viewers as Alberti demanded of the effective *istoria*.¹⁸⁹ In figuring his work in terms of the spectacular, Vasari is attentive to the power of sight both within and without the frame, constructing the image upon the foundation of a series of gazes between Christian protagonists, pagan antagonists, witnessing bystanders, and the viewer. The scene only becomes activated as a *spettacolo* through the witnessing of the people 'regarding' it from the Loggia, and the *spettacolo* further only takes on clear theological meaning through the gaze of Sigismondo himself: as angels swooping downwards carrying palms and crowns enter his field of vision, the ultimate justification for his bodily sacrifice is rendered explicit and the image's status as a martyrdom is ensured in that 'mightily sustaining and consoling sight.' The final actor in this scopic chain is the viewer of the image in the real space of the Martelli chapel itself; acting as a supra-temporal witness to the events, (s)he ensures the continuing relevance of the act of holy witnessing begun by the spectators depicted by Vasari within the *istoria*.

The imbrication of this ultimate and most important viewer into the time and place of the martyrological action is achieved through integrating the chapel's architectonics into the fictive architectural setting of the narrative. As Vasari informs us, the chapel's semi-circular framework metamorphoses into the gate of the tyrant's palace, thus becoming a threshold between two orders of space and time which offers a privileged vision into the moment of

¹⁸⁷ Vasari (1850), p.540.

¹⁸⁸ See Ingersoll (1994), p.188, fn. 25.

¹⁸⁹ L.B. Alberti (1991), p.75. Interestingly Verstegan also justifies the graphic nature of his martyrological idiom in the *Theatre of Cruelties* via an appeal to this Albertian precept: 'since the eye is held by pictures, what is brought before the eyes has greater effect than that which is brought to the ears.'

martyrdom beyond.¹⁹⁰ If, as Jean-Luc Marion asserts, 'holiness generally defines the setting apart that distinguishes what belongs to the divinity in opposition to what remains in the world, what stays in the temple in opposition to what remains on the threshold,' then the full implication of this architecture-image ensemble becomes clearer.¹⁹¹ For Marion, becoming a saint is to transgress the fixed limit between 'in the world' and 'in the temple,' and the complicated practices of purification that he argues accompanies such a metamorphosis might be understood as the process of martyrdom itself. By envisioning the space of the threshold, the pregnant narrative moment in which the martyr is poised for his sacralisation through a witty meta-pictorial device, Vasari showcases the miraculous power of art to materialise otherwise ineffable truths of Christian history through the medium of vision. The ability to look and the obligation to see at once glorifies the painter's skill to fashion a window into the invisible and crystallises a key theological doctrine, resolving Marion's paradox of the saint's inherent invisibility to a terrestrial audience. Aesthetic theory centred on the activating power of the spectacular buttresses the Christian belief that martyrdom is an act of witness that itself gains relevance through being witnessed by others in turn.

The complex interleaving of violence, *vaghezza* and the spectacular that characterises Circignani's martyrological work at Santo Stefano thus amply fulfilled the devotional requirements of the sacred image whilst being fully in line with contemporary theories of art, effectively conjoining Gilio's *cosa nova e bella* and Vasari's *orrendo spettacolo*. By way of a conclusion to this chapter, I wish to draw attention to a fourth-century patristic sermon delivered in honour of the Roman soldier-martyr Theodore which demonstrates that harnessing the affective power of spectacular martyrdom was a pictorial strategy that allowed Counter-Reformation patrons and theorists to assert a continuity with the practices of the early church. The sermon, delivered by

¹⁹⁰ Vasari (1850), p.541.

¹⁹¹ Marion (2009), p.707.

Gregory of Nyssa at Theodore's sanctuary in the town of Euchaïta, recounts how the saint was cast alive into fiery oblivion by an enraged local governor after refusing to sacrifice to pagan idols.¹⁹²

Gregory establishes his audience's emotional connection with Theodore through an ekphrastic envisioning of his passion as represented on the shrine, and his description of Theodore's 'continuous pain,' the 'bestly appearance of the tyrants,' and the 'blazing furnace that was the athlete's most blessed end' all strikingly recall Vasari's *orrendo spettacolo*. Gregory's ekphrasis also illuminates the ways in which martyrological imagery could take on a dual-role as both aesthetic object and effective devotional stimulus: the image of Theodore enunciates the truth of his martyrdom 'as if in a book that uttered speech,' that most enduring position of Christian iconophilia, whilst at the same time 'adorning the church as a beautiful meadow.'¹⁹³ Significantly, it was precisely these two aspects of Gregory's ekphrasis that Antonio Bosio approvingly cited in a defence of the ancient utility of sacred images in his Counter-Reformatory *Roma Sotteranea*, proof that martyrological imagery 'illuminates the intellect and inflames the passions.'¹⁹⁴

That the bishop's dual conceptualisation of the martyrological image is also an appropriate model for Circignani's work at Santo Stefano is borne out by the cycle's 18th fresco, which takes as its subject a multitude of Christians being cast into a fiery furnace not dissimilar to that in which Theodore was immolated (fig.18). Like the image conjured by Gregory's artist, here too the blazing furnace shines forth in a brilliant emanation of white-hot light; the invisible core of this fiery abyss is both the focal point of the composition and a transfixing allure for the gaze of pious martyr, persecutor and witness alike, as no fewer than thirteen pairs of eyes are focussed upon it. The inscription

¹⁹² For the homily see Delehaye (1933), p.169. For Theodore's hagiography, see Walter (1999).

¹⁹³ Gregory of Nyssa, collected in Leemans (2005), p.85.

¹⁹⁴ Bosio, p.566: '...illuminar l'intelletto & infiammar l'affetto'.

above the image, adapted from a well-known psalm, implicitly casts these figures as rarefied works of art in their own right, asserting that they are being 'tried as silver is tried.' Just as the precious metal is purified in fire, so too the martyrs are refined into the ideal aesthetic form of embodied sanctity, their bodies emerging as what Mirella Pardee has described in a different context as 'the battered vehicle of an amazing transformation.'¹⁹⁵ The site of Santo Stefano's metamorphic atrocity, a carpet of vibrant green grass where willing flesh is transmogrified into heavenly treasures in the heat of a sacralised alchemical crucible, also recalls the 'beautiful meadow' into which Theodore's shrine has been miraculously transformed through the prism of representation. The soaring landscapes characteristic of the cycle more generally, with their verdant pastures, sparkling lakes and densely wooded arbours, combine and coalesce with the violent atrocities committed within them, emerging as the site of a unique and specifically martyrological *vaghezza*.

The manner in which Gregory's patristic pre-history of the martyrological *istoria* binds *vaghezza* and violence together is highly suggestive in of itself, but his account goes further in proposing that the viewer's investment in such pious imagery ultimately extends far beyond the confines of the visual field. According to Gregory, the 'delight in seeing' such works is not an end in of itself but rather a conduit or stepping stone towards a fuller sensorial engagement with the profoundly embodied ritual experience that martyrdom entails. The artwork inspires a desire to approach the relics of the saint contained in the shrine, even enabling 'those beholding it [to] embrace it with the eyes, the mouth, the ears.' As the observer moves from what at first sight appears to be an immaterial image and towards the material relic, the incredible power of the beholding experience to actuate empathetic bonds between devotee and saintly

¹⁹⁵ Pardee (2012), p.77.

exemplar come to the fore: 'when they have approached it with all the senses, they pour tears out over it from piety and emotion.'¹⁹⁶

Whilst these bonds are activated by vision, they extend far beyond the confines of a merely scopic encounter. In order to satisfy a spiritual longing that again comes close to early-modern characterisations of a desire-tinged *vaghezza*, the ideal Christian beholder must engage each of his senses in his coming closer to the sacred interlocutor.¹⁹⁷ Gregory Martin extolled a similarly multi-sensorial approach to optimal devotional practice at sacred monuments, writing that one should imitate the 'best Christians of the primitive church' by seeking 'to kiss, to lick them, and to weep in the place.'¹⁹⁸ Whilst kissing and licking the frescoes of Santo Stefano was not an affective response open to the sixteenth-century viewer, the multi-sensorial turn adopted by the two Gregoryses opens up the lines of enquiry that will be taken up in the next chapter of this thesis. In what follows I will attempt to uncover the ways in which Circignani's martyrological frescoes at Santo Stefano might be sensorially apprehended in ways beyond the visual, taking seriously the possibility that the engaged beholder could affectively embrace such representations 'with the ears' as well as the eyes. As Gregory of Nyssa so evocatively contends, 'even though it remains silent, [a] painting can speak on the wall and be of greatest profit.'

¹⁹⁶ Leemans, pp.85-6.

¹⁹⁷ Byzantine descriptions of encounters between devotees and relics often display a remarkable degree of corporeal longing and desire, as Glenn Peers (2004, p.127) notes. For the origins of this kind of 'tactile piety' in early-Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land, see Wilken (1992), p.116. For multi-sensorial practices of devotion and 'haptic visuality' more generally see Frank (2000), pp.100-33 and now Betancourt (2018), esp. pp.243-84.

¹⁹⁸ Martin (1583), p.14.

CHAPTER 3

LISTENING TO THE POLYPHONIC BODY: MUSIC, MARTYRDOM AND THE VISUAL ARTS

**Introduction: Sounding in the Silences: Listening to Images of
Martyrdom**

The cruel torturer tore out from thee the tongue that played on palate and throat, and yet did not impose silence on the lips wherewith thou wert confessing God. The voice that bears witness to the truth cannot be annihilated, even if its passage be cut away and it can only gasp. So my speech sticks and stammers with feeble tongue and labours in inharmonious measures; but if thou sprinkle my heart with the dew from on high and flood my breast with the milk of the spirit, my hoarse voice will unloose the sounds which are now obstructed.

- Prudentius, *Crowns of Martyrdom*, X¹

A powerful, blood-stained hand grips a razor as a pair of pliers wrenches a tongue violently into our field of vision (fig. 134). The blade performs its gruesome work; the tongue is severed, and joins its disembodied companions littering the ground by the torturer's feet. Beside this latest victim a haloed face stares blankly outwards, blood trickling over closed lips and down her chin. No speech, shouts or screams penetrate the silence of these repetitious mutilations - sound is notable only in its deafening absence. But the sheer excess of this scene, the absurd obscenity of the mound of tongues smearing its way across the fresco's lower reaches, reminds us of the dangerous power of enunciation even through its attempted effacement. The silent world ensured by these mutilations is a temporary sonorous respite. Sound, the medium privileged to transmit the word of God in both speech and song, will inevitably triumph over these mutilations. Within Circignani's Santo Stefano frescos, the silencing of corporeal destruction and the unstoppable sounding of martyrological triumph are locked in a continuous state of negotiation – it

¹ Prudentius, p.229.

is the aim of this chapter to explore in detail the profound relationship between martyrology and the world of sound.

In his fourth-century *History of the Martyrs of Palestine*, Eusebius recounts the Passion narrative of Romanus, a deacon and exorcist of the Caesarean church. Eusebius' account narrates a familiar tale of Christian intransigence in the face of an Imperial edict commanding sacrifice to Diocletian. Whilst suffering torture on the rack for his refusal to acquiesce, Romanus continues to preach to the gathered crowds. The enraged emperor personally intervenes, ordering that the deacon's tongue be cut out to stopper his unruly voice. The mutilation proved ineffective: the pious Romanus' 'intellectual tongue' couldn't be 'restrained from preaching,' and he miraculously exhorted the crowd to worship one God alone even in his reduced bodily state. Romanus is eventually strangled, but not before he succeeded in 'scattering the seed of the word of God into the ears of all men.'²

Romanus' ability to preach without a tongue proved to be a potent hagiographic device. When Zurbaran was commissioned to depict the saint in 1638, the artist represented him grasping a naturalistic severed tongue in one hand and an opened bible displaying the word of God to the viewer in the other (fig.135). The drama of the mutilation and its miraculous aftermath is recounted far more extensively in Prudentius' *Crowns of Martyrdom*, where Romanus' lingual dismemberment forms the climax of a long series of tortures alternating with theological debate between the deacon and the Roman judge Asclepiades. In this sense, the text constitutes an extended exploration of unruly speech-acts, exemplifying the philosophical concept of *parrhesia*. Deriving from classical Greek rhetoric, Michel Foucault defines *parrhesia* as 'a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal

² Eusebius (1861), p.8.

relationship to truth' in the face of personal risk.³ *Parrhesia* is frequently central to martyrological texts,⁴ and it is Romanus' commitment to speaking truth to power that guarantees his own public torture and violent death. That he is miraculously able to continue his preaching after his speech organ had been cut out signifies a triumph of *parrhesia*. The human voice retains the power to speak to the glory of God even in the face of disfigurement and death: the divine truth of the martyr needs no tongue to sound, and *parrhesia* transcends the biological limitations of the human body.

Enraged at the deacon's intransigence, Asclepiades orders a doctor to cut out Romanus' tongue by its root, as with its 'impudent wagging' it constituted the 'very wickedest organ in the whole body.'⁵ The physician performs the dismemberment with a surgeon's precision, 'exploring the voice's outlet' with finger and lancet. During the severance Romanus remained 'firm and unmoved, jaws open wide as blood gushed out - 'a noble figure with his chin overspread with the red emblem of glory.'⁶ Prudentius' wince-inducing description of the noble Romanus standing tall as blood streams down his chin might almost be an ekphrasis of Circignani's much-later fresco. In both poem and painting, the victims remain remarkably unmoved by their mutilations. As the latest victim in the fresco appears to lean in obligingly towards the executioner's pliers, his stony faced companions betray a studied disinterestedness at the sight before them.⁷ The lack of response engendered by these acts of mutilation can be attributed to Christian values of stoicism in the face of persecution, and the martyrs' refusal to acknowledge the horror of

³ Foucault (1999), non-paginated.

⁴ See Hatlie (1996), p.272.

⁵ Prudentius, p.289.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The contrast here with Ovid's description of Philomela's like-dismemberment in the *Metamorphoses* is striking. Ovid's account anticipates Prudentius' account in instrumental detail, complete with 'cruel pincers' and 'savag blade,' but Philomela's violent struggles to speak and her repeated calling of her father's name during her ordeal is far removed from the placid contentment demonstrated by the Christian saints. Ovid (2000), VI:555-557.

their tortures fundamentally undermines the Imperial logic of torture either as punishment or judicial tool.⁸

After the doctor's work is completed, Asclepiades is confident that he has succeeded in silencing the martyr's unruly mouth, mockingly inviting Romanus to 'speak out as you please, hold forth at length, discourse...use your voice unhindered.' The deacon needs no second invitation to take up his parrhesiastic harangue once more. Combining anatomical knowledge with theological exposition, the tongueless deacon paradoxically describes how 'a tongue never failed him who spoke of Christ.' God himself invented the mechanism whereby the voice originates in the lungs, is forced into the mouth, and is transformed there by the interaction of teeth and palate. 'For these processes,' Romanus explains, 'the tongue plays the part of the nimble quill.' In the absence of that crucial organ, God has simply devised a new kind of vocal operation for his amanuensis: instead, the 'throat blows like a set of pipes in concert with harmonious breath,' while 'in the orifice of the mouth the lips utter speech by being now slightly closed and again opened wide, like a pair of cymbals.' 'Speech,' the deacon concludes, 'shall not demand the agency of a tongue.'⁹

Prudentius demonstrates his knowledge of the mechanisms of the human voice as articulated in classical anatomy only to demonstrate the inadequacy of such objective physiological observation as an explanatory tool.¹⁰ Romanus' tongue-less oration makes clear that the word of God will inevitably ring out despite the most egregious attempts to silence it. If the tongue can no longer interact with the palate and teeth to form intelligible sounds, the throat and empty mouth can nonetheless operate in concert like

⁸ For an analysis of a characteristically Early-Christian 'voluntary, nonviolent discipline' that offered passive resistance to the legitimacy of a social order founded upon pain, punishment and sovereign power, see Kolbet's (2008).

⁹ Prudentius p.291.

¹⁰ Hippocrates codified the role of the lungs in making sound and the role of the lips and tongue in vocal articulation, whilst Galen argued that the glottis was the 'principal organ of the voice.' See Karpf, (2006) ch. 14.

the soundings of pipes and cymbals to sing to the glory of God. When conventional speech, operating along the principles of writing with the tongue playing the part of a 'nimble quill' is no longer possible, a new kind of communication takes its place. In Prudentius' vivid metaphor, this tongueless communication is likened to the mysterious workings of divine music.

The relationship between music, silence and disfigurement recurs like a leitmotif throughout Asclepiades' attempts to stop the deacon's incessant seditious speech. Earlier in the text Romanus surprises his tormentors by voicing a hymn as he is beaten by a dozen clubs. The judge responds by commanding his minions to 'shatter the seat of his verbosity,' but the disfiguring chasms carved into the saint's face once again fail to silence his discourse. On the contrary, the wounds themselves are miraculously transformed into new outlets for the spoken word of God, and the singular saint explodes into a multiplicity of voices speaking to the glory of Christ: 'the voice I utter finds open fissures; issuing by many a wide-open mouth, it delivers more sounds on this side and on that, proclaiming from all sides the everlasting glory of Christ and of the Father.'¹¹ The futile attempt to silence Romanus results instead in a superabundant heavenly chorus, a deafening polyphony of Christian doctrine that drowns out all other sound around it.

Far from engendering silence, the corporeal site of martyrdom is thus transformed into a discursive soundscape of the spoken word and musical performance. As Prudentius writes of his own poetic practice, the intercessory aid of Christ is nothing less than a surrogate tongue which 'bountifully bestows graceful song on the mutest of men.'¹² Bringing martyrdom's mute music into line with the Counter-Reformation discourses of civic regeneration discussed in chapter one, the Jesuit Roman College professor of theology Stefano Tucci's 1585 funeral oration for Gregory XIII describes how 'the bodies of the saints that have been discovered and

¹¹ Prudentius, pp.226-7.

¹² Ibid, p.229.

translated with extraordinary pomp' and sacralised Rome's urban fabric are like 'the tongues of mute things that will speak forth the name of Gregory for all eternity.'¹³

The capacity of the mutilated body to speak or even sing, to make noise and engender dialogue, emerges as a fundamental characteristic of martyrological discourse.¹⁴ In her influential study of the dehumanising effects of torture, Elaine Scarry has characterised the body in pain as pre-linguistic, and torture as a process that renders its victims unable to speak to the rest of the world. According to Scarry, 'ultimate domination requires that the prisoner's ground become increasingly physical and the torturer's increasingly verbal, that the prisoner become a colossal body with no voice and the torturer a colossal voice with no body.'¹⁵ But as Prudentius' excursus on Romanus demonstrates, the massive hagiographic project of martyrological commemoration contradicts Scarry's schema. Instead of physical trauma ushering in a reversion to 'a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned,' here the language and its medium have been transformed. Romanus' continued loquacity is not merely the product of his adept tongue; in martyrdom, God's grace ensures that the fractured body itself is transformed into a medium of vocal expression, elevating Christian suffering above the non-signifying void of mere torture in the process.

One final detail from Prudentius' text clearly establishes the role that musical performance might play in establishing the sacral nature of martyrdom. Martyred alongside Romanus was Barulas, a young boy who dared to speak in support of the deacon at his public trial and pictured next

¹³ Translated in McGinness (1982), p.359.

¹⁴ Similar stories abound in early-Christian passion texts. One of the most striking is recounted in the passion of Christina of Bolsena: after her tongue was cut out on the orders of Julian the Apostate, the saint reportedly threw the disembodied organ at the emperor's face, whereupon it continued Christina's parrhesiastic harangue. See Constantinou (2005) p.53.

¹⁵ Scarry (1985), p.57.

to the older saint in Zurbaran's painting. The only witness undismayed by the judge's cruelty in executing the boy was his mother; recalling the pious examples set by the Jewish matriarch in *Maccabees* and the Christian Saint Felicity (fig.136), she delights in her son's impending martyrdom. In a dramatic juxtaposition that will resonate throughout this chapter, the boy's mother turns to the salvific capacity of sacred music as her son is decapitated: while the 'headsman struck the little neck with the sword,' she begins to sing. As she does so, 'she stretched forth her hands beneath the stroke to catch the stream that ran from his flowing veins.'¹⁶ The pious strains of the mother's voice function as a soundtrack to her son's beheading: music, an art-form traditionally associated with the divine realm through the sweet playing of the angelic heavenly chorus, allusively conjures the spiritual journey set into motion by the violent moment of martyrdom.

Prudentius's account of the miraculous discourse of the stricken Romanus sets the wheels of this chapter in motion. What role did sound, in the form of speech but more especially music, play in the workings of Circignani's martyrological frescoes at Santo Stefano Rotondo? Musical performance was a regular aspect of the students' daily routine at the German-Hungarian college, and these two ecclesiastical art-forms taken together were part and parcel of the same liturgical celebrations there. When the college's choirs descended on Santo Stefano to celebrate the feast of his martyrdom on the second Sunday of Lent in 1585 for example, they sang a motet dedicated to his stoning with Circignani's still gleamingly fresh fresco of the same subject as their highly suggestive backdrop.¹⁷ In the sacred space of the basilica sound and vision interacted in a way that the disciplinary boundaries of scholarship too frequently occlude. Even if Circignani's frescoes frequently appear to be silent, Prudentius's fascinating construction of the harmonic music of martyrdom reveals that in order to understand how

¹⁶ Prudentius, p.285.

¹⁷ Recorded in the diary of Friederick Overbeck, transcribed in Casimiri (1942), p.163.

these images operated in a contemporary devotional context it is not enough to approach them with the tools of visual analysis alone; we must listen to them as well. Aurality is a process of resonances – meaning is made as much in the reverberations and the return of sound as it is in its initial vocalisation. In this sense, it is our act of listening that gives meaning to the stilled bodies of martyrdom. As the strains of the church choirs gave voice to these silent images and conferred speech on the tongueless martyrs depicted there in an echo of Barulas' mother, so too must our analysis.

**I: The Reform of Sacred Music and Martyrological Imagery in
Counter-Reformation Rome**

It is the most blessed varietie in the world, where a man may goe to so many Churches in one day, chose where he wil, so heavenly served, with such musike, such voices, such instrumentes, al ful of gravitie and majestie, al moving to devotion and ravishing a mans hart to the meditation of melodie of Angels and Saintes in heaven.

- Gregory Martin, *Roma Sancta*, 1581¹⁸

The Rome that Gregory Martin visited in the late 1570s was a city awash with music. In the urban narrative of widespread affective piety that the English author breathlessly sets out in *Roma Sancta*, the melodious strains of near-constant polyphonic performance spur the spirits of the populace towards pious contemplation of the community of angels and saints inhabiting the divine realm of heaven. Giving vivid visual expression to this musical preoccupation, contemporary vault decorations in churches across the city depicted this heavenly chorus in the midst of performance. In 1587 Circignani represented this musical community on the dome of Santa Pudenziana (fig.137). Here, the winged members of the celestial firmament are so numerous as to make up a full orchestra, strumming on harps and lutes, bowing violas, beating drums, playing organs and blowing into flutes and trumpets. At the centre of this holy polyphony is Christ himself, both object and enabler of this elaborate performance. In the same year, Circignani depicted a similar concert surrounding Christ seated on a globe in benediction in the apse of San Giovanni e Paolo (fig.138). This time the orchestra has been joined by a chorus of saints, who kneel with their mouths opened in song. Here is a vivid visualisation of the power of musical praise as described in Psalm 150: 'Praise him with the sound of the trumpet:/ praise him with the psaltery and harp./ Praise him with the timbrel and dance:/

¹⁸ Martin (1581), p.37.

praise him with stringed instruments and organs./ Praise him upon the loud cymbals:/ Praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.’¹⁹ The text of the psalm and Circignani’s images both amply reflect Martin’s lyrical description of a city in which music filters out from innumerable churches and diffuses along myriad streets, ravishing the hearts of all who hear it - an appropriate soundtrack for a city being consciously transfigured into an earthly vision of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Martin’s conception of the powerful role that music could play in a reformed Catholic liturgical piety is beguiling, vividly capturing the central position carved out for musical performance in Counter-Reformation polemic. At the same time, the *trattatisti* who expanded upon Tridentine directives concerning the role of imagery in Catholic worship frequently commented on the capacity of martyrological works to move the hearts of its observers in a manner very similar to Martin’s celebration of sacred music. The remainder of this chapter will explore the ways in which Post-Tridentine musical theory, practice and patronage can shed light on the evolving genre of martyrological imagery in Counter-Reformation Rome through the prism of the city’s Jesuit run German-Hungarian College.

Whilst it was at Santo Stefano that Roman martyrology was most vividly expressed in the 1580s under the patronage of its rector Michele Lauretano, during the same period San Apollinare emerged as one of Europe’s pre-eminent centres of polyphonic music.²⁰ Polyphony, in its broadest terms, can be defined as a form of musical composition and performance in which multiple independent melodic lines sound simultaneously, as opposed to the monophony of liturgical plainchant. Gregory Martin himself was struck by the complex musical productions of the college during his time in the city, writing that

¹⁹ Psalm 150:3 (KJV).

²⁰ According to Ludwig von Pastor (Vol. 19, p.240), the music performed there was considered ‘the best in the whole city.’

Within the Church I can never forget the Jesuites, and of them those especially in S. Apollinare of German Colledge. What order, what majestie, what uniformitie, what lightes, what musicke, what odoriferous savour more than the best frankincense! The aultars (good lord) how decked, other ornamentes how suitable and correspondent...²¹

Written in the same year that Circignani began the frescoes at Santo Stefano, it is significant that Martin links music and the decoration of the German College in his account. Whilst the musical practice of the College has been rehearsed by musicologists, its significance in the context of the college's fresco cycle commissions has rarely been remarked upon by art historians.²² The primary documents relating to the college and its rector are repeatedly pre-occupied by the relationship between these two art-forms however, and how the compositional practices of both have the capacity to affect their audiences in analogous ways. Sacred music and martyrological imagery worked together during the liturgical celebrations at the churches under the administration of the college, and it would have been rare for a visitor to encounter the frescoes adorning their walls in any context other than in the course of a mass punctuated by musical performance. The college boasted three separate choirs populated by the most musically adept of its young students, and like Prudentius' account of the mother of saint Barulas, their various voices constituted the soundscape in which the bloody travails of nascent Christianity's first martyrs were visually encountered.

Regular and accomplished musical performance constituted a central part of Lauretano's liturgical vision for the college. Under his direction, students had to attend lessons in Gregorian chant, figured singing and

²¹ Martin (1581), p.98.

²² For the college's musical programmes see especially O'Regan (1988), Culley (1969 & 1970) and Lightbourne (1997 and 2004).

counterpoint each day, and in the evenings recited specially-selected madrigals in their rooms.²³ On trips to the *vigna*, meanwhile, students performed motets, *passaggi* and *versetti*.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, the German-Hungarian college rapidly became one of the most important centres for the practice of both Gregorian chant and polychoral music in post-Tridentine Rome.²⁵ The mass was regularly sung in its entirety by the students, unique in the city during this period.²⁶ This was a highly pragmatic consideration: as Lauretano had been appointed as part of an attempt to revivify the fortunes of the institution, he was alive to the importance of keeping a high profile in the city's increasingly crowded ceremonial scene. Keen to avoid the depressing sight of 'seeing the sacred ceremonies and services carelessly performed by the students in a church without spectators,' Lauretano integrated the 'attractions' of Gregorian chant and figured singing to the masses in order to 'please the listeners.'²⁷ His attempt to ensure that it would 'never bore [the congregation] to continue coming' was clearly successful: according to Pompeo Ugonio, the heretofore little-regarded San Apollinare came to be 'esteemed and visited by a large number of people' eager to listen to the divine offices celebrated 'by beautiful music, with voices, organ and other instruments.'²⁸ The church's newfound status is vividly encapsulated in an account describing an 'extraordinary crowd' that showed up there to hear

²³ Lauretano had exacting standards for his students, writing in his diary that 'those who sing badly are given punishments.' *Diario*, p.45. On the feast of St. Matthew in 1584 meanwhile, twenty-two students were censured for errors committed in 'singing and in decorating the altars.' See Culley (1970), p.75.

²⁴ Culley (1969), pp.12-13.

²⁵ The college's musical direction was entrusted to a succession of well-known composers in the role of *maestro da cappella*, most notably the renowned Spaniard Tomas Luis de Victoria from 1565 until 1577 and Annibale Stabile from 1578-1591.

²⁶ At the English college and the Roman Seminary polyphonic music was performed by professional singers, and only on special occasions as opposed to San Apollinare's regular sung masses. O' Regan (1988), p.53.

²⁷ This according to a history of the college written in the mid-1600s by William Fusban, quoted in Culley (1970), p.75. For Fusban's stay in the college in the 1650s, see Crook (1994), pp.35-9.

²⁸ Ugonio, p.286.

a mass sung by the Hungarian priest Martin Janciense in 1591 to the accompaniment of horns and trombones.²⁹

Because of its peripheral location on the slopes of the Celio, Santo Stefano did not play host to daily liturgical celebration even after the amalgamation of the German and Hungarian colleges, which continued to take place at the smaller but more central San Apollinare. Given the students' heavy liturgical workload there and regular programme of lessons at the Collegio Romano, masses at Santo Stefano were necessarily reserved for important occasions. Nonetheless, increasing the frequency of liturgical celebrations there was a priority for Lauretano, and according to Panciroli was a precondition of Gregory XIII's decision to entrust the church to the Jesuits.³⁰ Lauretano enthusiastically writes at the beginning of 1583 that 'this year we are staging many masses at Santo Stefano, where we sing the mass and some Cardinals and many others come to listen.'³¹ The students travelled out to the church to sing the entirety of the divine offices on the feasts commemorating Saint Stephen's martyrdom and the finding of his body (when Santo Stefano was the stational church). These days saw the city's most important prelates come to the church, whilst large crowds thronged the piazza outside. Pope Gregory himself, who was 'very attached to the works' of Circignani at Santo Stefano according to Lauretano, 'continuously displaying much affection to them,' came to listen to the mass being sung with 'great gusto' on this day in 1583.³²

The students also celebrated mass there on the feast day of Saints Primus and Felicianus, whose relics were the most prized in the church's possession. According to Lauretano's diary, trips out to Santo Stefano were involved undertakings. Describing one such outing, Lauretano writes that the students had to take with them 'the books of singing, candlesticks, small rugs, torches,

²⁹ Quoted in Culley (1970), p.86.

³⁰ Panciroli, (1725), pp.42-43.

³¹ Lauretano, p.51.

³² *Ibid.*, p.49.

candles and anything else that they can.’³³ In an entry dating from March 6th 1583, Lauretano provides a fascinating description of how the unique architecture of the church was exploited in the musical performances undertaken there: the students ‘made a *gran circolo* and sang the litany of Christ in two choirs. After the litany, they sang the motet of Saint Stephen inside the circular ring where the altar was located.’³⁴ Divided into two circular groups in the centre of the basilica, presumably to ensure the coherence and audibility of their harmonies as they sang, the students would have been surrounded by Circignani’s recently completed frescoes as they hymned the sacrifice of Stephen’s martyrdom.

In order to give a clearer idea of how aural and visual elements coalesced during the college’s religious celebrations, it is worth turning to an exemplary religious spectacle undertaken by the students and described in detail in Lauretano’s diary. On June 12 1583, the German-Hungarian college’s members gathered for one of the city’s most important religious processions.³⁵ Celebrating the feast of Corpus Christi, over 200 people took part in an elaborate and meticulously rehearsed sensorial display of religious pageantry.³⁶ The procession began at San Apollinare, and was constituted by a motley collection of different groups divided into a lay and clerical section: white-robed youths carrying olive branches, unmarried virgins dressed as the three holy Marys, luminaries from the confraternity of San Apollinare carrying their standard, lay doctrinal teachers and priors draped in white sackcloth. In the second section came the entire student body and faculty of the college itself, divided into a complex hierarchy of mini-groups headed by a college prefect or senior student. Music was central to the procession: each of the college’s three choirs, representing the different types of music

³³ Ibid., p.67.

³⁴ Ibid., p.63.

³⁵ The procession and preparations are described in *ibid*, pp.94-8. Lightbourne (1997) also gives an account of the procession.

³⁶ The Corpus Christi festival was instituted in thirteenth century to celebrate blessed sacrament. By the sixteenth century it had become a carnivalesque combination of sacred and secular elements. For a contemporary critique of the debased nature of the celebrations, see Peterson, (2012), pp.115-8.

employed at the institution, had a role to play. The choirs were separated by non-singing groups of students carrying rosaries,³⁷ creating a complex rhythmic interplay between the diverse musical styles as the procession moved through the city.

First came the choir of Gregorian chant, who sang the hymn *Pange Lingua* as they processed. After a rosary-carrying group, the second choir of the *falsobordone* followed – this was a simple polyphonic musical style that harmonised on the Gregorian psalms in a manner somewhere between plainsong and full-scale polychoral performance.³⁸ Lauretano writes that these students each carried a sheet of paper inscribed with the words and music of the hymn they were to sing, Thomas Aquinas' traditional Corpus Christi hymn celebrating the consumption of Christ's flesh, the *Sacris Solemniis*.

After another rosary carrying group came the polyphonic choir, the most prestigious of the three. Whilst the other choirs processed in pairs two paces apart, the polyphonic choir walked together in a tightly formed group, 'all in a globe,' so that the students could hear each other and remain in harmony. After the choirs came the final group of the procession, dedicated to the celebration of the sacrament whose veneration was the purpose of the Corpus Christi festival. In contrast to the choric section of the procession this part was more visual, centring around a gold and velvet tapestry representing the *Last Judgment*. The retinue climaxed with a monstrance containing the consecrated sacrament itself, reverentially carried aloft by Lauretano and protected by an eight-poled baldachin.

The procession took a circular course through narrow streets thronged with onlookers, starting and ending at San Apollinare, and stopped

³⁷ Lauretano, p.94.

³⁸ See Bradshaw (1997), pp.224-47.

frequently to allow the choirs to perform hymns at strategic points along the route. Arriving finally back at the church, the first choir to enter was that of the Gregorian chant, who sang until the *falsobordone* entered. They then took over singing duties in their turn, ceasing only when the polyphonic choir made their entrance to the sound of trombones. The priest censured the sacrament and gave the benediction to the strains of the polyphonic choir, marking the end of the ceremony. Within the small space of the church, the recently completed series of thirteen frescoes depicting the life and violent martyrdom of the eponymous saint along its walls formed a resplendent backdrop to the procession's conclusion (fig. 139).

Lauretano's account of the procession raises a number of points worthy of further consideration. Most importantly, the rector makes clear that different kinds of singing have different liturgical functions and work towards distinct sonic effects. The groups singing Gregorian plainsong are focused on the intelligibility of the hymns they perform, graphically demonstrated in the large pieces of paper they carry inscribed with the words and music of the *Sacris Solemniis*. The polyphonic chorus meanwhile must stick close together to ensure the accuracy of their harmonies and the correct inter-relationship between their various voices, just as they did when singing the motet celebrating Stephen's martyrdom at Santo Stefano. Beyond the musical, Lauretano is concerned with the procession's visual appearance. Three prominent visual ensembles punctuated the rhythm of the procession, in correspondence with the three choirs of singers. First came the standard of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament of San Apollinare. The next image mentioned is the large *Last Judgement* tapestry carried before the Sacrament. The final visual ensemble was the sacrament itself, framed by the splendid baldachin carried aloft by various gentlemen and prelates, and followed by a great crowd of bystanders. The procession emerges as a complex rhythmic organism setting into motion a series of aural and visual encounters as it snaked its way through the streets. An engraving of a procession carrying a confraternal standard from St. Peter's basilica to the church of San Giovanni

dei Fiorentini in 1629 gives a vivid idea of what the German College procession might have been like, complete with musical performance, confraternal standards and religious tapestries. (fig. 140).³⁹

The regular performances of Gregorian plainsong and polyphonic music at San Apollinare and Santo Stefano can be brought into fruitful dialogue with the martyrological fresco-cycles Lauretano commissioned for these same spaces. Lauretano's superiors in the Jesuit hierarchy considered his foregrounding of painting and music to be related, and were concerned that the rector's single-minded focus on the cultural elevation of the churches under his administration bordered on the monomaniacal. An official report written after the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva's annual visit in 1585 counselled him to 'moderate the care he takes in the matters of governing, especially regarding the decoration of the churches, the offices, and the divine worship,' both for his own health and the 'edification of others' - apparently Lauretano couldn't control his agitation and 'harsh words' when his students didn't share his exacting standards.⁴⁰ The report demonstrates that Lauretano took the martyrological adornment of the churches as seriously as he did their musical performances, undermining commonplace assessments of the Santo Stefano cycle as the product of a cash-strapped institution unconcerned with pictorial quality.⁴¹ Instead, the rector emerges as a micro-managing perfectionist with an all-too-clear vision of the role that the arts of painting and music could play in the liturgical life of the college.

³⁹ The German college often provided the music for San Giovanni's processions - a diary entry reports that during a procession of the relics of saints Protus and Hyacinth there in 1592, the students 'made such beautiful (*gagliarda*) music that everyone marvelled, and it was reported to the Pope that the music of the College was the best in existence.' Original in O'Regan (1996), p.150.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Culley (1970), p.33. Recall also Morales' account of Lauretano's 'disgust' at his lazy students from his visit in 1578.

⁴¹ See Haskell (1958), p.399. Further undermining this theory, Morales notes in his visitation report of 1578 that Lauretano spent at least 500 scudi a year on church expenses, 'che è somma molto notabile.' Transcribed in Lukacs, p.328. In an act of particular profligacy, Lauretano paid 472 scudi for San Apollinare's state-of-the-art organ, capable of imitating the song of nightingales, the clash of tambourines and the blare of trombones through its innovative employment of reeds and chimney flutes. See Culley (1970), pp.62-3.

Lauretano's 'excessive diligence and application,' in the words of Acquaviva's report, and his willingness to spend money to further his aims quickly established the German-Hungarian college as an epicentre of innovative sacred music in Rome. It is likely that he entertained similar ambitions for his patronage of the visual arts.

Acquaviva's caution indicates that Lauretano's focus on music and decoration in the liturgy was not universally popular amongst his contemporaries. For instance, the rector of the Jesuit College in Paris entertained banning polyphony entirely in a bid to restore musical propriety to the College in 1579.⁴² In 1586 the *Ratio Studiorum* cautioned against the performance of overly ornate music in Jesuit College churches, in particular in Germany where it was feared it could serve little spiritual purpose.⁴³ The Jesuit Assistant General for Germany Paul Hoffaeus meanwhile complained that the German-Hungarian college in Rome itself had become so pre-occupied by music that its principal functions were being forgotten: 'Nor does this college obtain any praise in Rome except for chant and ceremony. How will these help in healing Germany?'⁴⁴ Nonetheless, Lauretano's belief that liturgical music could help revive Catholicism in Northern Europe was influential. In 1579 Wilhelm V sent word to the German College requesting that someone be sent to the Bavarian court who could instruct them in the correct and up-to-date Roman performance of the sacred rites. Lauretano sent the recently graduated Walram Tumler to Munich. Tumler was apparently shocked at the lapsed state of the liturgy he found there, and set about reforming the Mass along Roman lines, with the institution of appropriate music one of his central aims.⁴⁵

In light of Tumler's sponsored journey to the Bavarian court, it seems that the approach taken to musical performance at the German College was

⁴² Crook (2006), p.457.

⁴³ See Fisher (2014), p.50

⁴⁴ Quoted in Porter (2008), p.34.

⁴⁵ See Crook (1994), pp.35-9.

by-and-large in line with contemporary orthodoxy. But how did Lauro's focus on music accord with Tridentine efforts to reform and standardise the Mass, and might this further an understanding of Circignani's contemporaneous frescoes? To answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to the debates concerning the performance of sacred music and its reform during and after the Council of Trent. Complaints about the abuses being perpetrated in the practice of church music had been swirling around Europe throughout the cinquecento; amongst the most frequently recurring notes of concern related to a too-liberal mixing of the sacred and the profane, and an insufficient focus on the words of religious texts being set to music.⁴⁶

The specificities of these complaints bear striking parallels to learned contemporary discussions about the lapsed state of religious art during this period. The first point recalls Gabriele Paleotti's exemplary denunciation of 'how repugnant it is for we Christians to put things of our world in churches.'⁴⁷ The second point meanwhile is analogous to reproaches by theorists of sacred art that painters were paying too little attention to the sacred subjects they were supposed to be representing, rendering underlying narratives and doctrines largely illegible. Pirro Ligorio was already repeating a critical commonplace when he wrote in the 1570s that 'the licence of the painters and sculptors of our times has been so great that we do not recognize our saints evoked by their images.'⁴⁸

The decrees finally agreed upon by the Council concerning the state of the visual arts and sacred music were also strikingly similar in scope, both couching their reforming assessments in primarily interdictory terms. According to the decree formalised in the 22nd session of the Council in 1562, music that 'contains things that are lascivious or impure' was to be banished from the churches. Similarly prohibited was 'all worldly conduct, vain and

⁴⁶ See Lockwood, (1957), p.342.

⁴⁷ G. Paleotti, p.302.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Coffin (1964), p.197.

profane conversations, wandering around, noise and clamour.’⁴⁹ The Council’s decree on the visual arts a year later similarly condemned images that could excite lust, and cautioned that liturgical celebrations surrounding relics and images must not devolve into ‘boisterous festivities and drunkenness.’⁵⁰ Whilst leaving little doubt as to what was unacceptable in both church music and sacred imagery, the Council failed to outline what appropriate manifestations of these sister-arts would look or sound like within a reformed ecclesiastical context. Ultimately it was the task of local bishops to ensure that nothing ‘disorderly, unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, profane or indecorous’ should mar the house of God.⁵¹

Although the Tridentine decree on sacred music was rather laconic in its advice, a related canon published during the same session offers a more detailed insight into what might be expected of reformed sacred music. According to this canon, the music accompanying liturgical texts must be composed so that the words being sung could be understood by all those listening, and should never devolve into exercises of pleasurable sound divorced from the holy texts.⁵² Just as the Tridentine decree on sacred images and subsequent treatises made clear that veristic similitude to the holy texts and to the likenesses of saints was essential, and that ‘nothing was to be confusedly arranged,’ so here too the issue of intelligibility was paramount. A surviving manuscript detailing Gabriele Paleotti’s own account of the Tridentine session brings the issues of intelligibility in music and clarity in the visual arts into definite alignment.⁵³ According to Paleotti, it was agreed that music was to be retained in the churches because of its capacity to ‘arouse the faithful to love of God, provided that it should be free of

⁴⁹ Collected in Schroeder (1978), p.151.

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp.216-7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Sherr (1984), p.75.

⁵³ Paleotti’s role in shaping the Tridentine decree on music is discussed in Prodi (1959), p.183. For his wider interest in music see Monson (2003).

lasciviousness and wantonness, and provided that, so far as possible, the words of the singers should be comprehensible to the hearer.’⁵⁴

Developments in post-Tridentine Italian sacred music were thus characterised by ‘an ever-closer relationship between words and music,’ where the absolute intelligibility of the texts being sung became paramount.⁵⁵ But what in practice was the real danger of liturgical music in which the audience was not able to clearly discern every word? An important clue comes from a report prepared by the Bishop of Vienne in France for Pope Paul III, first convenor of the Council of Trent, that described various abuses in his diocese which he intended to address. The bishop complains that the cathedral’s singers were unconcerned by the accuracy of the missals and breviaries from which they took their hymns. ‘But since even one vowel, incorrectly written, is able to make the sense of the words and prayers perverse and heretical’ it was vital to ensure the accuracy of these texts.⁵⁶ The problem of corrupted musical texts would be dealt with in the 1570s when Gregory XIII ordered Palestrina to revise the books of liturgical chant.⁵⁷ But the dangers associated with corrupted texts also applied to musical performances where the congregation were unable to clearly hear every vocalised vowel. Ensuring that listeners did not inadvertently derive ‘perverse and heretical’ doctrine from a misheard passage of song was essential for reformers who considered liturgical music to be an amplifier of divinely inspired texts rather than independent works of sonic art.⁵⁸

Despite the risk of heresy that difficult-to-decipher liturgical music inevitably courted, the acknowledged effectiveness of sacred music as a tool

⁵⁴ Quoted in Monson (2002), p.23.

⁵⁵ O’Regan (2006), p.75. See also Baroffio (1995).

⁵⁶ Quoted in Schaefer (1994), p.19. Accidental heresy was also a concern in post-Tridentine art theory. Paleotti (p.166) cautions artists against unwittingly lending credence to heretical doctrines, advising that painters should consult ‘knowledgeable men’ before taking up their brushes.

⁵⁷ See Pastor (vol.XIX), p.273; Rusconi (2009).

⁵⁸ For Cesare Baronio’s articulation of music as ‘evidencing and underlining the exceptionality’ of sacred texts, see Maione (2009).

of affective devotion ensured that innovative sacred music continued to flourish. Many reform-minded ecclesiastics shared Lauretano's conviction that music could bring men closer to God if exercised with due gravity and respect for the divine words of the liturgy.⁵⁹ As with post-Tridentine reassertions of the role of sacred images, this defence of music also had a polemical basis. Numerous English Protestant preachers condemned complex liturgical music, and in his 1563 tract *The Reliques of Rome*, Thomas Becon denigrated the 'trifling traditions' and 'drowsy dreams' of Catholic devotion along these lines:

in the tyme of Paule there was no singing, [but today] what other thing doth the common people heare, than voyces signifying nothing? And such for the moste part is the pronounciation, that not so much as the wordes or voyces are heard: only the sound beateth the eares.⁶⁰

Whilst Becon's critique resonates with the concerns of conservative Catholic reformers such as Giovanni Morone, it would not have been politically apposite to concede such a wholesale denunciation of sacred music.⁶¹ In Elizabethan England, sacred music even emerged as a clandestine medium of commemoration for the persecution of recusant Catholic communities. In 1582, shortly before Circignani's English college frescoes were unveiled in Rome, the English composer William Byrd transformed a poem by Henry Walpole commemorating the martyrdom of Edmund Campion into a musical composition. Although the publisher of the original poem had his ears chopped off in retribution,⁶² the Jesuit Thomas Fitzherbert related that the musical piece was 'often heard' over the coming years.⁶³ Music, then, certainly had its role to play in post-Tridentine Catholic devotion. What was

⁵⁹ See Lockwood (1957); Morucci (2012).

⁶⁰ Becon (1563), p.122. For more on Becon, see Sterrett (2012), p.xxii.

⁶¹ Given the German College's future fame as one of Europe's pre-eminent centres of polyphonic music, it is ironic that its co-founder Morone was the most forceful Tridentine advocate of banishing polyphony from the church. See Lockwood (1957), p.343 and n.5.

⁶² Kerman (1981), pp.43-4.

⁶³ Caraman (1960), p.282.

required was a sacred music that could marry the prosaic demands of musical intelligibility with an affective charge that could still transport listeners to the ineffable domain of 'angels and saintes in heaven' described by Gregory Martin.

In Milan, Carlo Borromeo took up the challenge to reform sacred music along these lines with gusto. Writing to his vicar during an absence in Rome, Borromeo expresses satisfaction that his cathedral's students are being properly instructed in polyphony, but reminds his *maestro di cappella* that he must 'reform the singing so that the words may be as intelligible as possible, as you know is ordered by the Council.'⁶⁴ In March 1565, the Cardinal sought the advice of Nicola Vicentino, renowned for his polyphonic compositions.⁶⁵ In his own theoretical writings, Vicentino repeatedly resorts to comparisons between music and the visual arts and architecture. According to Vicentino, accomplished artists employ various aesthetic adornments within the confines of immutable compositional rules. Similarly exhorting composers to 'delight the listener with plenteous variety,' Vicentino nonetheless describes the words of a sacred composition as 'the most important foundation a composer must have in mind.'⁶⁶ All variety and musical ornamentation must be built upon and be in keeping with this grounding compositional principle of textual fidelity. It seems that post-Tridentine composers practiced what they preached: in *Roma Sancta*, Gregory Martin marvels at the ability of Roman choirs to 'deliver every word and everie syllable so distinctly, so cleane, so commodiously, so fully that the hearers may perceave al that is sung.' Later, he further exults that 'every syllable may be heard in thy eares like a Preacher's voice.'⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Quoted in Lockwood (1957), p.348.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Vicentino (1996), p.345. The composer Giovanni Animuccia makes exactly the same point in a Roman context. See Lockwood (1970), p.196.

⁶⁷ Martin (1981), p.96; 101.

Returning to Lauretano's musical patronage at the German-Hungarian college, contemporary sources place him in the mainstream of the reforming current promoting the merits of 'intelligible music.' Despite the college's burgeoning reputation for the polyphonic liturgical celebrations, Lauretano also encouraged the regular performance of plainsong during masses. His reasoning is outlined in a biography written by his former student Matthias Schrick, who provides a clear explication of why intelligibility was an essential prerequisite for effective sacred music. 'When it is sung seriously, slowly and tastefully,' Gregorian chant

weakens the sense of the words very little, but rather impresses perfectly upon the ears and souls of the listeners the meaning of the underlying text, and thus moves to piety of soul those who understand and [are] devoutly attentive, and increases remarkably the devotion that is felt.'⁶⁸

For Lauretano, the clear enunciation of the words made possible by the grave recitation of plainsong increases the devotion of those listening because it allows the unvarnished truth of the divine words to reveal their full affective power. The text is 'impressed perfectly upon the ears and souls of the listeners' in much the same way that Paleotti argued naturalistic works of visual art could 'represent before our eyes, while simultaneously impressing (*imprimendo*) onto our hearts' sacred narratives and doctrines.⁶⁹ Recalling the German-Hungarian college's Corpus Christi procession of 1583, that the *falsobordone* choir carried sheets of paper with the words of their allocated hymn inscribed on them in large letters emerges as a graphic rendering of the concern for musical legibility championed by Borromeo, Martin and Lauretano.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Culley (1970), p.77.

⁶⁹ G. Paleotti, p.214.

How might the commitment to intelligible music demonstrated by Lauretano and his fellow post-Tridentine patrons of sacred music deepen an understanding of Circignani's contemporaneous frescoes at Santo Stefano? Even though these works are seemingly crowded with obscure martyrological detail, they nonetheless seek to guarantee a high level of historical legibility through the elaborate paratextual apparatuses surrounding each image. Italian and Latin captions recount the names, dates and locations of each act of persecution, ensuring that even the most minor narrative detail in the cycle can be traced back to the authority of pre-existing sacred texts. To take just one example, from a compositional perspective the background of the cycle's 23rd fresco is a confused jumble of unrelated narrative detail (fig.141). One figure kneels in prayer before prowling lions as another kneels beneath an executioner's sword. A cloaked woman stands in a halo of burning fire at the fresco's extreme right, whilst only the legs of another figure are visible protruding from a cauldron at the composition's extreme left. In the centre of this dizzying array a man sits upon a burning grill, and next to him four naked figures of indeterminate sex are being scourged. If this scene relied on purely pictorial cues for its interpretation it would be largely incomprehensible - the visual equivalent of overly complex polyphonic music overwhelming and obscuring the liturgy it was composed to augment. Beneath the image, however, the inscription reveals that the viewer has witnessed the respective persecutions of Primus and Felicianus, Peter, Marcellinus, Anastasia, Boniface, Vincent, and the Four Holy Crowned Martyrs. Through this relatively crude device, it might be argued that the unwitting heresy of ignorance is kept at bay: by ensuring the fresco's comprehensibility, the divine messages it conveyed had a greater chance of being absorbed by its audience, bringing them closer to God.

II: Towards a Musical and Theological Harmony

*Merry and tragical! tedious and brief! / That is, hot ice and wondrous
strange snow. / How shall we find the concord of this discord?*

- Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*⁷⁰

*Music is nothing other than harmony. That is to say, it is a discordant
concord, or a concord of various things which may be conjoined
together.*

- Gioseffo Zarlino, *Istitutioni harmoniche*⁷¹

Whilst the gravity of Gregorian chant amply satisfied Tridentine requirements of intelligibility, polyphonic singing offered a different kind of devotional impetus to its audiences. According to Fusban, Lauretano reasoned that despite its natural affinity with the 'meaning of the underlying texts,' Gregorian chant was 'not tempered with such sweetness that it could be hoped that worldly men, or not too devout ecclesiastics, might, after some time, be kept [coming to the church] with that frequency with which they had begun.'⁷² To guard against the mercurial tastes of the cultivated Roman curia, the rector also integrated more fashionable polychoral and instrumental pieces into the College's liturgical programme.⁷³ Even those reforming voices seeking to place the role of music in church celebrations on sounder liturgical

⁷⁰ Shakespeare (1997), V.i.77-78.

⁷¹ Zarlino (1562), p.10: 'Musica non è altro che Harmonia. Cioè una discordante concordia, come sarebbe dire, Concordia di varie cose, le quale si possino congiungere insieme.'

⁷² Quoted in O' Regan (1988), p.8.

⁷³ Animuccia makes a similar point, writing that when he composed music designed to be heard by 'important gentlemen' he increased the polyphonic devices so that the music 'with the aid of harmony might penetrate more sweetly the hearts of those who listened.' Crucially, he too remained mindful not to 'obscure the meaning of the words.' Quoted in O'Regan (2006), p.80.

footing weren't immune to the prevailing taste for novel musical expression; Lauretano's pragmatic decision to temper the ascetic nature of Gregorian chant with the 'sweeter' tones of polyphony in order to stimulate the interest of worldly men throws light onto the complex set of considerations that ecclesiastical patrons had to keep in mind during the Roman Counter-Reformation.

In line with Tridentine dictates of intelligibility, Lauretano's biographer Matthias Schrick clarifies that polyphony as practiced at the college maintained the integrity of the sacred texts they embellished: such music, whether because of

the rarity of the excellent voices, or the unusual smoothness of the harmony, or, more notably, the clearly expressed dignity of the sacred words (attended to more carefully) not only pleased the listeners but also, through a certain sweet and pious feeling, consoled the devoted spirits of those who understood.'⁷⁴

Even whilst extolling the power of polyphony, the principle of intelligibility as a founding precept was borne in mind. Schrick elaborates that Lauretano 'studiously guarded against' two errors: firstly that 'the sense of the words' might be 'weakened by crude shouting, unskilled voices, or by the complicated intricacies of too many rhythmic devices,' and secondly that 'nimble and effeminate voices of men, and the soft instruments of musicians should disturb the gravity of the divine offices.'⁷⁵ This was a greater or lesser concern depending on the audience towards which the music was directed; whilst the risk of corrupting the minds of the Roman bishops might be slim, more caution had to be exercised when the listening subjects were young novices, for example, or women. Gregory XIII imposed a total ban on figured music in nunneries as part of his brutal campaign of claustration during the

⁷⁴ Quoted in Culley (1970), p.78.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

1580s, despite his more general acceptance of polyphony in ecclesiastical settings.⁷⁶ Borromeo also enforced strict limitations on the practice of polyphonic music in Milanese nunneries even as he encouraged contrapuntal experimentations through his patronage.⁷⁷

This kind of audience-specific interdiction has its analogue in Counter-Reformation theorisations of sacred art. Reforming *trattatisti* repeatedly censured artists for valuing too highly the refined complexities of elegant composition at the expense of the coherent dissemination of doctrinal precepts or sacred narratives, as chapter two demonstrated with particular reference to Gilio and Paleotti.⁷⁸ As with sacred music, what was appropriate for an educated (male) audience was not necessarily fit for a wider viewership. As Federico Borromeo remarks in his own treatise on sacred art, if confronted with visual stimuli they were ill-equipped to interpret, ‘unsuitable thoughts could steal into viewers’ souls.’⁷⁹ Gregory’s ban on figured singing in nunneries was also reflected in the strict proscription of certain types of visual expression in the convents being subjected to stricter laws of enclosure in the wake of the Tridentine council.⁸⁰ In both music and the visual arts, the line between aesthetically harmonious productions that elevated the soul towards God and excessively complex works that would lead its audience down the road of empty pleasure was a thin one, and required constant safeguarding. Maria Loh writes that one of the principal ideological tasks of the post-Tridentine *trattatisti* was to prevent ‘wayward spectators’ from seeing ‘incorrectly’ – preventing them from hearing incorrectly was a scarcely less pressing concern.⁸¹

⁷⁶ See Pastor, Vol. 19, p.112, n.1.

⁷⁷ Kendrick (1996), p.70.

⁷⁸ See, for example, Gilio, p.106.

⁷⁹ Borromeo (2010), p.23.

⁸⁰ Fairchilds (2007), p.168. Ottonelli re-iterated the importance of audience-specific proscription in his 1652 treatise, writing that whilst ‘virtuous spirits who were experts in the things of art’ could appropriately process and interpret a wide variety of images, the same could not be said for ‘spectators of unstable virtue’ – that is, women, children, servants, and the poor. See Loh (2013), p.101.

⁸¹ Loh (2013), p.99.

Whilst Tridentine reform took these concerns into account, the Council nonetheless re-affirmed that polyphonic composition and performance was a legitimate form of expression during sacred ceremonies. As he had done with plainsong, Schrick details Lauretano's understanding of the contribution this more ornate style of liturgical music could make to celebrations at the German-Hungarian college. It is telling that he does so through the prism of an inter-medial comparison with the compositional strategies and spectatorial effects he associated specifically with the visual arts:

Just as pictures, tapestries and other artistic things exhibit more dignity, effort and beauty, since they are subtle because of a variety of figures, so also this type of singing, through various and numerous embellishments, [and] by a sound [that is] indeed agreeable and most pleasing to educated listeners, reduces the natural discord of voices to concord and exhibits a certain, more divine harmony.⁸²

For Lauretano the beholding processes set into motion by painting and music were largely analogous, and he echoes Gregory Martin's conception of harmonic music's capacity to invoke an affective piety in its listeners. Annibale Stabile, the college's *maestro di cappella* from 1578, reinforces this point, claiming that under Lauretano's patronage 'he had in a short time, acquired more taste and Judgement in the art of using music for arousing pious affection, than during all that time before in which he had diligently worked for his teachers.'⁸³ Stabile's description of the rector's attempt to use music to arouse 'pious affection' recalls Lauretano's own account of the affective capacity with which he believed the martyrological frescoes at Santo

⁸² Quoted in Culley (1970), p.77 .

⁸³ Quoted in O' Regan (1988), p.12. Schrick recounts that Lauretano himself had since his youth composed 'sacros hymnos' and 'pias odas' venerating the holy martyrs. See Schrick, *Vita*, p.124. The devotional role afforded to music under Lauretano's direction recalls contemporary assessments of Filippo Neri's use of music during gatherings of the nascent Oratorian order. According to Pastor (Vol.XIX, p.186), Neri also 'looked upon music as a means of raising the heart to God,' describing the art as a 'pescatrice di anime.'

Stefano were imbued. As recounted earlier in this thesis, Lauretano asserted that ‘seeing the infinite sorts of torments’ of the martyrs was something that ‘greatly moves one to devotion,’ inspiring ‘spiritual impulses’ in its viewers. Where Gregorian plainsong moved the heart with the simple gravity of its message, polyphonic singing had the unique capacity to bring harmonic unity to a wide variety of divergent sounds, transforming inharmonious discord into divine concord. For Lauretano, distinct voices and musical chords come together in a way similar to the pictorial convergence of the individual coloured threads of a tapestry.⁸⁴

Lauretano’s comments make clear that he was versed in contemporary musical theory, and his conception of harmony as being produced *through* and not in spite of discordant variety is in line with the view of the century’s most influential theorist of musical composition, Gioseffo Zarlino. Zarlino writes in his 1558 treatise *Istitutioni Armoniche* that ‘harmony can only be born from things which are amongst themselves diverse, discordant and contrary, and not from those that agree in everything.’⁸⁵ His definition of harmony as the coming together of discordant things recalls Boethius’ influential assertion that ‘consonance is the concord of voices different from one another but brought together into one,’ and is re-iterated by almost every major musical theorist of the century.⁸⁶ So important was this theoretical construct of harmony that the frontispiece to the Renaissance composer and musical theorist Franchinus Gaffurius’ 1518 treatise *De harmonia* depicts the author declaiming the phrase ‘Harmonia est discordia concors’ to an assembled group of students (fig.142). As a metaphor for the aims of the reforming church trying to reverse the devastating effects of half a century of discordant schism it is a powerful one; despite Lauretano’s critic

⁸⁴ In an analysis of Raphael’s Vatican tapestries, John Shearman (1972, p.13) argues that the cinquecento predilection for tapestries was equated with an enthusiasm for polyphonic music, and it’s interesting to see Lauretano taking up this inter-medial reasoning later in the century.

⁸⁵ Zarlino, p.176: ‘l’Harmonia non può nascere, sen non da cose tra loro diverse, discordanti, & contrarie; & non da quale, che in ogni cosa si convengono.’

⁸⁶ Boethius, quoted in Jeserich (2013), p.139; for more on the relationship between harmony and discord in sixteenth-century musical theory see Isgro (1979).

Hoffaeus' dismissal of the College's musical programme as offering nothing more than a pretext for impious carousing, the profound capacity of polyphonic music to alchemically transform dissonance into harmony perhaps demonstrated that it could play an important role in the salvation of the Protestant north.⁸⁷

The link drawn by Lauretano between effective painting and polyphonic music through their shared harnessing of harmony can be placed in the context of a wider comparative theoretical practice, memorably dubbed *ut pictura musica* by Leslie Korrick.⁸⁸ This was precisely the topic of discussion when the Roman Academy gathered to listen to a lecture delivered by the Florentine artist Giovanni Balducci (Il Coscia) on the 27th of March, 1594. Arguing for painting's place in the hierarchy of the liberal arts, Coscia writes that painting 'has a great similarity to music,' both sisters born of Mathematics.⁸⁹ His characterisation of the arts as sisters was hardly unique, and is vividly taken up for example in a canvas by the Bolognese artist Giovanni Andrea Sirani towards the middle of the next century, where the precise tracings of the artist's brush are equated with the subtle modulations of the musician's voice (fig.143). Coscia foregrounds the compositional equivalences between the two arts as well as linking them through their capacity to induce specific emotions in their audiences: whilst musicians judiciously employ dissonance in order to make their harmonies sweeter and more profound, the skilled painter similarly applies principles of contrast and variety in search of 'an amazing concord' (*mirabile concordanza*) capable of generating pleasure (*vaghezza*) in the eyes of its beholder.⁹⁰

Lauretano's assertion that polyphonic music brings harmony to otherwise discordant vocal cacophonies in a manner aligned with painterly

⁸⁷ It is worth noting that Pope Leo X was lauded for deploying music in the service of bringing harmony to a church in crisis earlier in the century. Shearman (1972), p.58.

⁸⁸ Korrick (2003), p.194.

⁸⁹ R. Alberti (1604), p.62. Coscia's lecture was delivered shortly before Circignani was scheduled to address the academicians on the subject of beauty.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.63.

practice prefigures Coscia's configuration of the relationship between painting and music, suggesting that the rector had an up-to-date knowledge of artistic theory. In order to understand how harmony might constitute the conceptual link between Lauretano's activities as a patron of sacred music and martyrological painting respectively, it is important to appreciate the philosophical valence that the term carried during the late sixteenth century. For Lauretano, Zarlino and their contemporaries, the concept of 'harmony' went far beyond the technical confines of music.⁹¹ Reaching back to its conceptual origins in antiquity, the term conjured images of personal and social equilibrium, balance and even the healthy relationship between body and soul. This last idea was a central tenet of Pythagorean and Platonic theory, both of which featured cosmologies structured around musical principles.⁹² Plato approved of music only insofar as it could function as a conduit for the wider metaphysical power of harmony, and Lauretano would almost certainly have been familiar with his defence of musical performance in the *Timaeus*:

Music was bestowed for the sake of harmony. And harmony [is not] an aid to irrational pleasure, but an auxiliary to the inner revolution of the Soul, when it has lost its harmony, to assist in restoring it to order and concord with itself.⁹³

This ethical defence of music provides a justification for polyphonic performance that could be easily adapted to a confessional landscape in which congregations had metaphorically lost their own harmony; in the

⁹¹ See Spitzer (2004), p.142.

⁹² In the *Timaeus*, Plato situates the celestial bodies on a seven-note musical scale, with the difference between each governed by Pythagorean harmonic ratios. According to Jamie James (1993, p.51), Plato 'subscribed without reservation to the Pythagorean concept of a musical universe based on mathematical principles of harmony.'

⁹³ Plato (1929), p.109. Plato's writings had a central place in the Jesuit curriculum as set out in the *Ratio Studiorum*. See Schwickerath (2009), pp.396-8. Christian Platonism became more controversial as the century drew to a close, and was explicitly attacked in Possevino's *Bibliotheca Selecta* of 1603. See Hankins (2005), pp.402-3.

German speaking world that the Lauretano-led institution was founded to safeguard, the Catholic church saw it as its mission to restore congregations to the 'order and concord' from which they had fallen through their adoption of Lutheran doctrine on both personal and geopolitical levels.⁹⁴ This, I believe is the key to understanding why Lauretano defended his patronage of both music and painting through an appeal to their capacity to unify diverse elements into harmony.

Plato's equation of spiritual health and audible harmony became a commonplace of musical theory, carried through into the early-modern period through Neo-Platonic philosophy. Plato's configuration of harmonious music as a curative that might ensure an internal concord of the soul gradually came to also encompass the physical health of the body. Gaffurius explicitly linked musical harmony, rhythm and bodily health, arguing that corporeal processes are set into motion by a musical process: 'when we say something or are set in motion from within by the pulses of the veins, it is proved that we are joined to the virtues of harmony through musical rhythm.'⁹⁵ The rhythmic and harmonic pulsing of blood is distinctive proof of music's privileged position as a conduit for bodily health.⁹⁶ Echoing Gaffurius' biological metaphor, Henri Lefebvre has analysed the relationship between discord and harmony within the human body through the principle of musical rhythm. For Lefebvre, a discordance in rhythm, an *arrhythmia*, inevitably leads to pathology, suffering and ultimately fatal disorder.⁹⁷ In the context of martyrological discourse, Gaffurius' equation of the rhythmic pulsing of blood and musical performance combined with Lefebvre's association of discord and pathology is significant.

⁹⁴ In the new constitution Lauretano drew up for the institution, he confirmed that the College's principal concern remained the 'salvation of souls and the conversion of heretics in Germany.' Transcribed in Lukacs (1981), p.70.

⁹⁵ Quoted in Kim (2015), p.25.

⁹⁶ For the way in which the various rhythms of the pulse were deployed as diagnostic indicators in the Renaissance see Siraisi (1975), pp.689-710.

⁹⁷ Lefebvre (2013), p.68.

Returning to the Prudentian narrative with which this chapter began in light of these biological theories of music, the blood coursing from the neck of the young Barulas to the accompaniment of his mother's hymnal strains can be reconceptualised as an aural interplay between diverse rhythms. Barulas' arterial gushing is the product of his own heartbeat, proof of the relationship between music and the body as Gaffurius would attest. From one point of view the decapitation of the boy might be thought to lead to the ultimate pathology of death, the jets of blood spurting from his neck representing a fatal and permanent biological discord as the pulse's dilations and contractions lose their equilibrium.⁹⁸ But as blood flows freely from his opened throat and onto the ground, it is brought into dialogue with the similarly rhythmic soundings of his mother's voice. Her harmonising musical response as she sings in praise of holy death instead forges a miraculous eurythmia, what Lefebvre defines as the harmonious association of different rhythms within a polyrhythmic whole, with her son's martyrdom, transforming his death into a positive act in accordance with the psalm verse she sings: 'Precious is the death of a holy one in the sight of God.'

In contrast to the narrative of Barulas recounted by Prudentius, the acts of bloodletting depicted at Santo Stefano are not accompanied by musical performance within the pictorial scenes themselves. It thus rebounded upon the voices of the College choirs in the real space of the church to restore harmony to the otherwise discordant and arrhythmic bodies of the martyrs. In the final act of the Passion narrative depicted by Antonio Tempesta in the chapel of Primus and Felicianus, irregular streams of blood gush forth from the exposed carotid artery of the latter saint (fig. 144). In one sense the massive volume of blood spurting out and pooling on the grass below obviously signifies his mortal death. But within the context of the liturgical performances that occurred in the chapel on the saints' feast day, such as the

⁹⁸ According to Gaffurius, musical tempo that accords to 'a pulse dilating and contracting evenly' cannot be dissonant. Quoted in Bonge (1982), pp.171-2.

mass celebrated on June 10th 1583 recorded in Lauretano's diary, this narrative is transformed.

That day the rector made the trek to Santo Stefano along with his *maestro di cappella* Annibale Stabile, and a choir composed of the college's sopranos coupled with two students per voice.⁹⁹ Set into rhythmic dialogue with the music of the Germanicum's boy choir, the fatal swing of the executioner's blade and the blood streaming from the stricken saint produce a very different message: arrhythmia is miraculously transfigured into a profound celestial rhythm, and the dissonant notes of death take on a divine harmony that signifies the concordance of the saint's sacrifice with that of Christ. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the pictorial ornamentation at Santo Stefano is limited to the lower reaches of its walls – the church has no dome, and the drum is devoid of the portrayals of the heavenly realm that grace Santa Pudenziana and SS. Givoanni e Paolo. Painting effectively depicts the brute realities of martyrdom, but the work of conjuring the final heavenly destination guaranteed by the martyr's sacrifice has been left to the sonic harmonies of the college choirs. Music emerges as an entirely appropriate accompaniment to the journeys undertaken by Barulas and Felicianus away from their corporeal forms and towards the heavenly realm. This association of music with the freeing of the Christian soul from the confines of earthly dolour recalls John Chrysostom's assertion that 'nothing so arouses the soul, gives it wing, sets it free from the earth, releases it from the prison of the body, teaches it to love wisdom, and to condemn all the things of this life, as concordant melody and sacred song composed in rhythm.'¹⁰⁰ Harmony and rhythm thus did not merely reflect the health of the human body or the peace of the soul, but also the miracle of their journey heavenward.

Chrysostom's celebration of 'concordant melody' need not be confined to sacred song, and also offers a clue as to how 'listening' to images in the

⁹⁹ Lauretano, p.94.

¹⁰⁰ Collected in McKinnon (1987), p.80.

manner suggested in the introduction to this chapter might be enacted. Returning to Lauretano's *apologia* for polyphony as recorded in his biography, the fact that this kind of music's capacity to bring unifying harmony to the natural discord of multiple voices is set into relief by an explicit analogy to painting should not be overlooked. Leonardo da Vinci's preoccupation with placing his own pictorial compositions on a musical footing has been well documented, and his observations provide an important insight into the rector's comparative theory. Whilst 'many varied voices joined together at one and the same time' can amaze its listeners, the visual arts could paradoxically produce an even more profound kind of harmony which, as in Lauretano's formulation, is fundamentally polyphonic: 'an even greater effect is made by the beautiful proportions of an angelic face in a painting, whose proportionality results in a harmonic polyphony (*armonico concento*) which hits the eye in one and the same instant as it does the ear in music.'¹⁰¹ Seeking harmony with the ears and seeking it with the eyes emerge as analogous processes.

In a commonplace of aesthetic theory codified for a Renaissance audience by Leon Battista Alberti, the pursuit of the elusive compositional effect of harmony was considered central to the practice of competent artists or architects. Thus, when Lauretano suggests that 'artistic things' exhibit more dignity and beauty by conjuring harmony 'from a variety of figures,' he is articulating an aesthetic theory fully in line with established practice. Within Alberti's extensive critical oeuvre, the essential theoretical term that joins harmony and beauty together is *concinnitas*, a concept borrowed from the discourse of classical rhetoric.¹⁰² In its broadest terms, Albertian *concinnitas* can be understood as encompassing the ultimate concord of all the constituent parts within a body, whether that body be corporeal, pictorial or architectural.¹⁰³ By respecting immutable laws of symmetry and

¹⁰¹ Leonardo (1817), Libro primo, p.16. For original see appendix 1.

¹⁰² Tatarkiewicz (2005), p.82.

¹⁰³ See Guest (2015), p.189; Pearson (2011), pp.171-2.

mathematical proportion, the various members of a body have the miraculous capacity to cohere as a perfected unified whole despite their individual diversity. In *On the Art of Building* Alberti asserts that 'beauty is a form of sympathy and consonance of the parts within a body, according to definite number, outline, and position, as dictated by *concinnitas*, the absolute and fundamental rule in nature.'¹⁰⁴ Beauty is a singular concept: each composition has only one ideal arrangement of its elements that can engender an overarching harmony. Such a composition is harmonic when nothing can be added or removed without compromising the coherence of its overall structure, in line with Aristotle's theory of perfection.¹⁰⁵

Alberti provides his own vivid caution as to the aesthetic and metaphysical rupture that would inevitably result from a composition that failed to adhere to the natural world's harmonic principles. In a letter written to Matteo de' Pasti in 1454 concerning his design for Rimini's Tempio Malatestiano (fig. 145), he warns the sculptor that his plans for the building must be followed exactly: 'you see from whence the measurements and proportions of the pilasters are born; if you change anything, you will bring discord to all that music.'¹⁰⁶ Ignoring Alberti would bring unresolved discord to the church's potentially harmonic structure, undermining an otherwise perfect accord between architecture and divine function. In the context of this chapter, it is significant that Alberti situates his discussion of visual harmony through an analogy to music. For him, the ratios governing musical harmony were the same as those that underpinned beautiful visual ensembles: 'the very same numbers that cause sounds to have that *concinnitas*, pleasing to the ears, can also fill the eyes and mind with wondrous delight.'¹⁰⁷ As the ear can hear the proportions governing music through its intuitive perception of harmony, so too could the eye apprehend

¹⁰⁴ Alberti (1988), pp.202-3.

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle (1954), Book II, 6: 'we often say of good works of art that it is not possible either to take away or to add anything, implying that excess and defect destroy the goodness of works of art, while the mean preserves it.'

¹⁰⁶ Transcribed in Grayson (1957): '...si discorda tutta quella musica.'

¹⁰⁷ Alberti (1988), p.305.

visual harmony created through proportionate measure.¹⁰⁸ The Venetian architect and Lauro's contemporary Andrea Palladio made the point even more directly, famously arguing that 'the proportions of voices are harmonies for the ears; those of measurements are harmonies for the eyes.'¹⁰⁹

Alberti's musically-inflected definition of beauty as a proportionate relationship between parts leading to a harmonious compositional whole would be frequently repeated over the following century. In his 1584 *Trattato della Pittura*, Lomazzo repeatedly equated the way in which 'proportion and measure' pleases the eye to the harmonious functioning of music, writing that painters 'strive to produce that variety which so delights and pleases, which allures souls with its sweet power, in a way no different to how a smooth harmony and a sweet musical polyphony (*dolce concerto di musico*) can captivate the spirits of those who listen.'¹¹⁰ Paleotti also linked music and painting through the concept of harmony in his *Discorso*. In a chapter devoted to 'inept and indecorous pictures,' Paleotti writes that if a work of art is to merit praise, it must possess

due correspondence among all its circumstances, like perfect music (*a guisa di perfetta musica*) that renders its harmony proportionate in all voices, and they say that the virtue that brings this about is *decorum*: if it happens that this is lacking in any part, it leaves on the body of the work that mark and that discordance commonly called the inept.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Given Alberti's wider conceptualisation of the circularly planned church as the apogee of ecclesiastical design, the vast circular space of Santo Stefano Rotondo punctuated by the rhythmic intercolumniation of its ring of slender columns might be considered an exemplar of Albertian *concinnitas*. Significantly, Alberti himself probably had a hand in Santo Stefano's restoration alongside Bernardo Rossellino under Pope Nicholas V. The basilica's elegant proportions are in no small part due to this intervention, re-imagining Santo Stefano in the image of the an ideal Renaissance centrally-planned church. See Szakács, p.229; Borsi (1975), pp.29-58; For a caution as to the significance of Alberti's role see Tafuri (1992), pp.32-88.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Wittkower (1971), p.13.

¹¹⁰ Lomazzo (1584), p.117. For original see appendix 1.

¹¹¹ G. Paleotti, p.371. For original see appendix 1.

Paleotti's attempt to marry music and the visual arts through the idea of polyphonic harmony, and his description of this as a form of *decorum*, brings Alberti's theory up to date for the specific exigencies of the Counter-Reformation moment. Excessively confused painting is the visual equivalent of a musical composition which retains marks of discord, a failure that was censured by contemporary musical theorists such as Zarlino.¹¹² But for Paleotti, harmony is not merely an aesthetic issue or a precondition of spectatorial pleasure. Appropriately given his investment in Tridentine reform of the visual arts, Paleotti places harmony on an ethical footing by figuring it as an analogue for *decorum*, that 'most exquisite virtue' which moderates all things' and 'gives no offense to either the eyes or the ears.'¹¹³ Given the high esteem in which Paleotti held Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano, it seems fair to conclude that he believed them to sound harmoniously like perfect polyphonic music, according to both Albertian *concinnitas* and the art-theoretical dictates of his own harmonic decorum. But how might these principles of musical and painterly harmony be read through Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano Rotondo, images that outwardly portray bodies whose internal harmonies have been violently ruptured by the rigours of torture and execution?

Certainly many of the saintly bodies represented in the foregrounds of Circignani's frescoes are harmonically proportioned in their negotiation of the relationship between part and whole. The depiction of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, conventionally represented at the moment the wheel on which she was to be tortured is miraculously broken, is exemplary (fig. 26). Catherine is a classically constructed figure, explicitly based on Raphael's famous version of the subject (fig. 146). This homage was a clear statement of

¹¹² For Zarlino (p.80), dissonance occurs where contrasting tones 'come harshly to the ear.' While 'such tones wish to unite with one another, they are forced to remain independent; and since they offend one another, they strike the sense of hearing sharply.'

¹¹³ G. Paleotti, pp.371-2.

Circignani's harmonic intentions, as Raphael's name had become a byword for an aesthetics of harmony in the cinquecento.¹¹⁴ The saint's delicate and noble face appropriately expresses her role as a pious virgin martyr, establishing a concord between her external physiognomy and inner soul. Proportionate pictorial elements recur frequently in the fresco's composition. Catherine's hands are raised in a symmetrical gesture, and her would-be torturers are also almost perfect mirror images of each other, matched in both their poses of surprise and tight-fitting pastel jerkins. The stricken wheel fragments of the broken torture device perform another doubling, whilst the expansive tumbling of the executioners' bodies formally reconstitute the wheels' deconstructed circular forms. This inventive device draws the attention of the viewer both to the complex relationship between part and whole and the paradoxical dialectic of fragmentary dissonance and unifying harmony that this section has traced.

Within the compositional logic of the fresco, formal harmonic symmetries are literally constructed out of discord, forged from the jagged fragments of torture instruments, the panicked bodies of fleeing executioners, a roaring pyre of identically robed Christians, and so on. It doesn't seem too great a stretch to read into this image Zarlino's influential construction of musical counterpoint: 'for greater beauty and charm one uses dissonances which, although not very pleasing to the ear when used by themselves, nonetheless are not only tolerable and inoffensive to the ear, but give it great pleasure and delight.'¹¹⁵ The beautifully proportionate body of Saint Catherine, calm and pious at the centre of the composition, is the unifying fulcrum around which this scene turns. The initial 'dissonance' engendered by the broken wheels and fleeing executioners is resolved not only by their own symmetrical doublings, but also by their relationship to this central figure; balance is achieved through a carefully constructed inter-relationship

¹¹⁴ Vasari wrote that Raphael inspired such *concordia* in his peers that all bad feelings dissolved in his presence. See Britton (2008), p.176.

¹¹⁵ Translated in Isgro (1979), p.32.

between harmonic and discordant elements. This kind of compositional logic is fundamentally musical: a moment of dissonance creates suspense which is ultimately resolved in a 'terminal harmony' as the composition unfolds.¹¹⁶ The dissonance of the executioners' panic is the pictorial equivalent of the moment of suspense, resolved by the terminal harmony of the compositionally central and classically constructed saint.

The dialectical structuring principles of this fresco are frequently repeated throughout the cycle. The dissonance suggested by the executioners retreating from the site of Agnes' martyrdom is resolved by the terminal harmony of the saint's perfectly symmetrical *orans* gesture, whilst the symmetrical compositional triangle traced by Vitalis and the two young men burying him alive lends pictorial harmony to a scene of horrible torture (figs 21&4). The dynamic circular arrangement of Saint Stephen surrounded by his persecutors meanwhile recalls the harmonic architectural structure of the basilica itself (fig.147). These images confirm that what Benedetta Moreschini identifies as a 'symmetrizing obsession' in Circignani's Umbrian oeuvre also characterised his Roman work.¹¹⁷ Each of these compositional concordances situates the body of the saint as the central terminal harmony which resolves the scene, a pictorial solution that would have certainly pleased Paleotti. As Thomas Puttfarcken notes, Paleotti censured paintings that failed to place figures in their appropriate place within a scene, as he believed this led to a disproportionate relationship between part and whole.¹¹⁸ Depicting narratively subsidiary figures at the centre of a composition, or relegating a narratively central figure to the fringes of a scene was both a compositional and theological error. Thus Catherine's central, fulcrum-like position not only marks the composition as conventionally beautiful; as it ensures harmony by expressing the correct

¹¹⁶ This accords with Robin Maconie's assertion that 'in conventional tonal music a leading dissonance at a cadence creates a moment of suspense and uncertainty that the listener recognises as the cue for a resolution to a terminal harmony' (2010, p269).

¹¹⁷ Moreschini (1997), p.71.

¹¹⁸ Puttfarcken (2000), p.56.

relationship between part and whole, it also affords the saint an appropriate degree of narrative decorum. The centralised compositions of Catherine, Stephen, Cecilia, John, Agatha and others all position the saints at the focal point of circular surrounding groups of executioners and onlookers, making clear the principal focus of these scenes.

Interestingly, Puttfarcken sees the orthodoxy of central arrangement lauded by Paleotti (and realised at Santo Stefano) as looking back not to the High Renaissance but instead to conventions of medieval art. Puttfarcken draws on Michael Camille's characterisation of 'clear and centralised' Romanesque compositions, which were 'aimed at the visual memory of the viewers just as conventions of rhyme and repetition in literary performances were aimed at their oral memory.'¹¹⁹ Camille's allusion to rhyme, repetition and memory is significant, linking formal principles of centralised composition to conventions of clear musical progression in aural performance. Earlier in this chapter I demonstrated how a renewed focus on the intelligibility of sacred music was central to Counter-Reformation attempts to ensure congregations would be able to assimilate the divine message of the liturgy. Following Camille, it could be further argued that the coeval privileging of harmonic and centralised pictorial composition was another manifestation of this theological project.

Whilst conventional theories of harmony as a proportionate combination of diverse parts synthesised into a unified whole can be frequently traced onto the Santo Stefano frescoes, this interpretive model cannot be easily reconciled to every image depicted there. As the cycle hurtles towards its dénouement, many of its scenes appear far from 'harmonic' either conceptually or compositionally, apparently speaking instead to discord, confusion and incoherence. Like the saints mentioned above, the unnamed actor of the cycle's fifth fresco forms the visual epicentre of a circular composition (fig. 5). But it would be difficult to argue that this figure is

¹¹⁹ Camille (1985), p.34.

anything like the ‘terminal harmony’ constituted by Saint Catherine. Dressed in furs and barely distinguishable from the dogs devouring him, the body of this martyr is part of the discordant and violent scene into which he has been thrust, and not a harmonic resolution of it. To take an even more immediately striking example, we might again turn to the fresco depicting an unnamed Christian being butchered into joints of meat in its foreground (fig. 27). The Raphaellesque physiognomic unity so obvious in the image of Saint Catherine is absent here, and despite a certain rhythmic logic apparent in the wounds left by the butcher’s cleaver blows, the mutilated body would seem to be entirely incompatible with Albertian *concinnitas*. Recalling Alberti’s caution of the dire consequences of unconsidered alterations to the perfectly measured proportions of the Tempio Malatestiano, how much more of a violation of the harmonic principles of *concinnitas* must it be to violently dismember what *Corinthians* describes as the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’?¹²⁰

One might argue that the corporeal disintegration enacted through the rigours of torture by its very nature thus implies an undoing of the principles of harmonious polyphony or the Albertian *historia*, centred on the diverse parts of the human body coming together to create a unified harmonic whole. In this view martyrdom is an inherently discordant process violently severing harmonic bodily unities of limbs and organs. How, then, can these scenes of corporeal discord be reconciled with Lauro’s overt praise of harmony inspired by contemporary musical theory, and with Paleotti’s positive evaluation of Circignani’s frescos based on his own harmonic aesthetics?

One way of approaching this problem is by considering the fresco cycle itself as a compositional whole, of which each scene is merely a constituent part. This respects the serial, circular nature of the cycle, and avoids the potentially arbitrary de-contextualisation of specific pictorial details within this overall structure. Given the complexities of the cycle’s architectonic

¹²⁰ *Corinthians* 6:19.

framework it is likely that the frescoes themselves were understood as parts of a whole rather than individually. If visual analysis of these frescoes must therefore be undertaken relationally, it is also necessary to adopt a long view of harmony, relating this musical concept to the macro-pictorial logic of the cycle's thirty paintings working together. To return to the biological metaphor that has underpinned my understanding of compositional harmony in this chapter, we must attend to the corporeal whole as well as to its constituent body-parts. If we do so, and likewise take a long theological view of salvation, then the inherent dissonances of individual martyrological moments can be conceived of as ultimately leading to a totalising ontological harmony. The sweeter, more profound harmony created through the violent discord of each martyr's corporeal unmaking is the amazing unity of the saved communion of saints in heaven, hymning their salvation together as represented on domes across the Counter-Reformation city such as Circignani's frescoes at Santa Pudenziana and SS. Giovanni e Paolo. The more discordant and violent the images become, the sharper they set into relief the ultimately harmonious conclusion of martyrdom's life-cycle. This explains why some of the most graphically disturbing images are clustered towards the end of the cycle, where they are set into sharper contrast with the salvational logic towards which they lead. The cycle's musical martyrological composition, in other words, rises to a crescendo.

The final fresco of the series reinforces this interpretation (fig. 30). Here the message of a heavenly harmony created through the discordant martyrial acts of the terrestrial realm is vividly pictured as *discordia concors* in action. In contrast to the cycle's other scenes, which utilise temporal and geographical specificity as structuring principles in their juxtaposition of multiple persecutions within a single pictorial space, here a group of martyrs from different eras and different lands are joined together, standing triumphant before a city which might be identified as a simulacra of the New Jerusalem into which Rome was consciously being transformed during this period. This scene is a variant on the well-known typological category of the

sacra conversazione, a type of image that emphasises the community of saints in heaven who exist ‘outside historical narrative time and events,’ as Rona Goffen describes it.¹²¹ The supra-temporal existence of these saints renders them more immediately present to the worshipper than the exemplars of Early Christianity’s golden but distant beginnings depicted earlier in the cycle. After a series of depictions of distinct moments in a terrestrial past, the cycle concludes with an inclusive representation of the religion’s eternal present populated with the real presence of the heavenly community discoursing harmoniously. Whilst *sacre conversazioni* are generally silent affairs apart from the angel-musicians that frequently strum on lutes in their foregrounds, the Santo Stefano variant appears to add aural interaction between the saints themselves.¹²² A venerable mitred bishop and crowned king on the extreme right are clearly engaged in conversation, whilst the third saint from the left has parted her lips in what might be interpreted as song as she raises her eyes towards heaven and blood gushes from her neck. This is the only scene in the cycle in which there is a demonstrable aural interaction between the saints; the temporary silence that pervaded the previous images has been finally overcome, the soundscape of lived experience visibly restored to the martyrs through a macro-pictorial visualisation of the musical principle of harmony.

Ultimately, the theological and philosophical implications of musical metaphor are fundamentally related to its ability to engender harmony. As Iain Fenlon notes, an enduring Platonic tradition ‘emphasises the ability of music to bring together any group, political, social or otherwise, into concord, a concord which can be equated with universal law.’¹²³ Through its own engagement with the musical principle of harmony, culminating in a depiction of the heavenly concord that is the product of the martyrs’ own adherence to divine law on earth, the fresco cycle of Santo Stefano Rotondo

¹²¹ Goffen (1979), p.202.

¹²² For the typically ‘non-aural’ nature of the dialogues in *sacre conversazioni* see *ibid*, p.201. For angel-musicians see McIver (2003), p.45.

¹²³ Fenlon (1992), p.202.

bears out this thesis. When Lauretano wrote that polyphony had the miraculous capacity to transfigure the natural discordance of multiple voices to a divine harmony, he thus pointed the way to an understanding of how considerations of a seemingly aesthetic nature could have a wider impact on the theological and philosophical valence of musical performance and the visual arts.

A fascinating precedent for this argument lies in a late 15th-century anecdote by the Dominican friar Felix Fabri recounting a voyage to the Holy Land undertaken by pilgrims from a variety of European communities. As the pilgrims neared the Holy Land in their boats, they all began to sing the *Te Deum* together in their various accents and according to their own regional musical conventions. Fabri describes how he has

never heard so sweet and joyous a song, for there were many voices, and their various dissonances made as it were sweet music and harmony; for all alike sang the same words, but the notes were different and yet sweetly harmonized together, and it was a joyous thing to hear so many priests singing the same song together out of the gladness of their hearts. There were many Latin priests, Sclavonians, Italians, Lombards, Gauls, Franks, Germans, Englishmen, Dacians, Bohemians, and Spaniards, and many there were who spoke the same tongue, but came from different dioceses, and belonged to different religious orders. All these sang the glorious *Te Deum*...¹²⁴

The image of various discordant accents and languages joining together in a miraculous harmony in praise of God is a reminder of the rhetorical power that the idea of polyphony could invoke in a Christian context. Returning to Tucci's 1585 funeral oration for Gregory XIII, it is clear that post-Tridentine Rome itself was being figured in similar terms of polyphonic and polyglottal

¹²⁴ Fabri (1892), pp.208-9. For an account of this miraculous moment as a 'Pentecost-like event' see Beebe (2014), pp.114-5.

harmony. According to Tucci, in the aftermath of the 1575 Jubilee 'visitors leaving the city proclaimed the same sentiments, though in different languages, that Rome was the fatherland of the nations.'¹²⁵ Nicola Vicentino further concretised this point in the context of developing musical styles and instrumental technology in the same period when he extolled the virtues of a six-manual harpsichord he had invented which could reproduce the characteristic sounds of German, French, Spanish, Hungarian and Turkish through its ability to play intervals of quarter tones and smaller. 'With the division of our harpsichord,' Vicentino writes, 'we can accommodate all the nations of the world.'¹²⁶ Like the pilgrims of all nations singing their hymns as they sailed to Jerusalem and the panlingual strains of Vicentino's harpsichord, the saints of Santo Stefano's final fresco have miraculously produced harmony from the bewildering discord of the frescoes that precede them.¹²⁷

Dividing the sacred chorus of the resurrected saints from the heavenly city in the background of this fresco, a grassy plane plays host to an archetypal, temporally unbounded scene of slaughter. All around defenceless saints are being chased, stabbed and shot. Between the field of slaughter and the city beyond is a wide river being slowly crossed by a flotilla of overcrowded boats attempting to reach the far shore. The water is choked by haloed bodies who have fallen overboard, indicating that to reach the promised land of the Eternal City one must traverse a tortuous path of persecution, a journey far more fraught even than that of Fabri's pilgrims making their own sea-borne journey to the historical Jerusalem. The global chorus of the timeless *sacra conversazione* in the foreground however demonstrates that these saintly interlocutors will always be there to guide

¹²⁵ Translated in McGinness (1982), p.360.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Winn (1981), p.167; pp.168-9.

¹²⁷ That an equivalence between polyphony and a universally comprehensible language of praise would have resonated with Lauretano is supported by two references in his *Diario* (p.55 & p.80) to masses where the college's choirs faced each other whilst singing the motet *Deus misereatur nostri* – this composition adopts the words of psalm 66, which exhorts all the people of all the nations of the world to together praise God through song.

the faithful along this bloody route with their own harmonic equilibrium. Beneath the fresco, an inscription relates how Christian communities continued to suffer oppression even after the end of the major pogroms of the Imperial period that constitute the principal subject of the cycle.¹²⁸ Vividly recalling Fabri's roll-call of the nations of the world united under a Christian banner, an extended version of the inscription in Cavalieri's *Ecclesiae Militantis Triumphi* details the names and nationalities of exemplary martyrs who 'fought for the holy religion' in the centuries following the golden epoch of Christian persecution. Amongst these are Ursula in Germany, Adalbert in Hungary, Gerard in Bosnia, Boniface in Sweden, Thomas Becket in England, and Wenceslaus in Bohemia. Instead of looking back in time to the terrestrial world of Early Christian persecution represented earlier in the cycle, these heroic exemplars of later centuries provide the harmonic musical thread linking that past to the Eternal future of the New Jerusalem shining on the river's distant shore.

¹²⁸ 'Dopo che i beati martiri dei quali quell'aurea epoca Cristiana fu feconda, debellato l'inferno ed abolito il culto dei demoni acquistarano con la loro morte la pace alla Chiesa di Dio, altri ancora quasi in tutti i secoli minori per numero ma pari in virtù per la santa religione pugarono.'

III. Between Repetition and Variety: Martyrdom, Music and the Invention of Sacred Time

If we die of repetition we are also saved and healed by it.

- Gilles Deleuze¹²⁹

The previous section of this chapter sought to demonstrate that harmony was a central theoretical consideration in Lauretano's musical and pictorial commissions. This harmony emerged from the coming together of varied elements, as Zarlino states in his *Istitutioni Armoniche*: 'perfect harmony consists in variety.'¹³⁰ Lauretano equated the 'various and numerous embellishments' of polyphony to works of visual art, and the final part of this chapter seeks to uncover what 'variety' might have signified for Lauretano and his contemporaries in these related compositional processes.¹³¹ By embracing the complexities of polychoral music, Lauretano appealed to his audience's appreciation of the established Renaissance compositional category of *varietas*, which had its roots in classical rhetoric but was widely adapted in later theories of music and the visual arts. But how was *varietas* deployed within the strict compositional confines of both sister-arts in the Counter-Reformation, and what might this tell us about the serial evocations of martyrdom at Santo Stefano Rotondo?

In the works of classical rhetoric where the term was first codified, *varietas* was conceptualised as an oratorical device which had the capacity to delight an audience. Cicero for example asserted that a speech intending to give pleasure above all to its listeners should feature a special focus on *varietas*, and the fifteenth-century musical theorist and composer Johannes

¹²⁹Deleuze (1994), p.7.

¹³⁰ Zarlino, quoted in Isgro (1979) p.12.

¹³¹ Quoted in Culley (1970), p.78.

Tinctoris adapted his reasoning to music. In his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* he writes that ‘as variety in the art of speaking most delights the hearer, so also in music a diversity of harmonies vehemently provokes the souls of listeners into delight.’¹³² Lauretano lauded polyphonic music for the same reason: such music, just like ‘pictures, tapestries and other artistic things,’ proves pleasing to educated listeners on account of the subtle variations it employs. But as Mary Carruthers points out, the pleasure-principle of *varietas* did not sanction the deployment of an unconsidered panoply of rhetorical devices. Instead, it sought a rhetorical medium between superfluous ornamentation on the one hand and excessively tedious repetition on the other.¹³³

Taking their cue from these rhetorical origins, early-modern composers and musical theorists such as Tinctoris and later Zarlino were also concerned to ensure that their work demonstrated a judicious application of variety. Most scholars agree that musical *varietas* is centrally engaged with contrapuntal composition, or music that exploits the sonic potential of multiple independent musical lines operating together.¹³⁴ But the self-imposed constraints imposed on the variety of their rhetoric by Quintilian and Cicero also had their analogue in explorations of musical counterpoint. As Alexis Luko argues, the variety attendant to such a compositional strategy is rendered much more effective when brought into a dialectical relationship with the seemingly antithetical principle of repetition.¹³⁵ Repetition in some guise or other provides the structuring principles for almost all musical practice, and is paradoxically the principle that allows variation to flourish.¹³⁶ Where variety has the power to delight, repetition confers both rhetorical force and a unity of finish to a composition.

¹³² Tinctoris (1961), p.139.

¹³³ Carruthers (2009), p.11.

¹³⁴ See Gallagher (1988).

¹³⁵ Luko (2008), p.120. See also Sisman (1993, p.21), who argues that variation ‘is a form founded on repetition.’

¹³⁶ As the German composer Nikolaus Huber asserts, repetition ‘drives the listening towards the difference, i.e., it separates and enhances the variation’ of the piece. Quoted in Miranda (2009), p.11.

The resulting principle of 'varied repetition' constitutes a useful compositional paradigm through which to arrive at a deeper understanding of the relationship between the reformed sacred music being performed in the churches of the German-Hungarian college and the martyrological frescoes contemporaneously commissioned to adorn their walls. *Varietas* was a term that also enjoyed critical valence in early-modern theories of painting, and Luko equates Tinctoris' commitment to a kind of 'varied repetition' with the pictorial theory of his near contemporary Alberti.¹³⁷ In the latter's codification of the conditions an effective *historia* must satisfy, variety occupies a central position: 'The first thing that gives pleasure in a *historia*,' Alberti writes, 'is plentiful variety.'¹³⁸ Whilst a profusion of pictorial detail might be pleasurable for the beholder however, excessive copiousness pursued as an end in of itself leads to a work marred by confusion and disorder (*dissolutus*). In *On the Art of Building*, Alberti structures his argument on this point by a comparison between painting and music:

Variety is a most pleasing spice where distant objects agree and conform with one another; but when it causes discord and difference between them, it is extremely disagreeable. Just as in music, where deep voices answer high ones, and intermediate ones are pitched between them, so they ring out in harmony, a wonderfully sonorous balance of proportions results, which increases the pleasure of the audience and captivates them.¹³⁹

As with the oratorical devices of the classical rhetoricians and the variations of sacred composers, pictorial variety only elicits pleasure when applied within carefully constructed compositional boundaries.¹⁴⁰ True

¹³⁷ Luko (2008), pp.127-30.

¹³⁸ Alberti (1991), p.75.

¹³⁹ Alberti (1988), p.24.

¹⁴⁰ Elsewhere Alberti disapproves of painters whose compulsion to 'leave no space empty' plunges their *istorie* into turmoil (1991, p.75). For an analysis of this passage see Baxandall (1971), p.136. See also Anthony Grafton's definition of the ideal

compositional *varietas* can thus only be achieved where such variation contributes to a coherent pictorial whole.

In Alberti's terminology it is more properly the quality of *copia* or copiousness that relates specifically to the quantity of different things represented in a painting. *Varietas* is instead concerned with the subtler, qualitative differences between similar things.¹⁴¹ As Luko elaborates, Alberti applies the term 'only to those varied elements in paintings that are essentially of the same 'genus' or category.'¹⁴² The clearest example Alberti provides of such a composition is a work in which 'the attitudes and movements of [human] bodies differ very much among themselves.'¹⁴³ Whilst the depicted bodies must all conform to inalterable principles of anatomy, real aesthetic pleasure derives from the near infinite variety possible in their poses, gestures and actions. The Pollaiuolo brothers' *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* might be considered an archetypal exercise of disciplined Albertian *varietas* in action (fig. 148). The varied repetition of the archers through 360 degrees of movement fully represents the body's range of motion as Alison Wright relates, a pleasing variety of expression that is naturally limited by the boundaries of its subject matter.¹⁴⁴ It is exactly this kind of variation in repetition that structures the Santo Stefano martyrology and aligns it with contemporary principles of musical composition.

It might be objected that Alberti's articulation of the place of *varietas* in a well composed *historia* is an anachronistic frame of reference through which to explore the relationship between sacred music and painting during the Counter-Reformation. After all, various reform currents in sixteenth-century art would appear to reject the Albertian concepts of copiousness and variety.

Albertian *istoria* as 'copiousness without chaos, variety without indiscipline, decorum above all' (1999, p.58).

¹⁴¹ For a detailed exposition of the differences between the terms see Baxandall (1971), pp.92-96; pp.135-9.

¹⁴² Luko (2008), p.128.

¹⁴³ Alberti (1991), p.76.

¹⁴⁴ Wright (2005), pp.221-2.

The reformed paintings of Santo di Tito in Florence or of Scipione Pulzone in Rome for example moved in a very different direction, focusing on a reduced number of figures performing few, clearly distinguishable actions and gestures. Their austere works have often been considered to epitomise the gravity demanded of painters in the wake of the Counter-Reformation (fig.149).¹⁴⁵ Alexander Nagel has argued that contemporary art theory also disapproved of Albertian variety, asserting that Gilio ‘came out vehemently against the entire tradition of praising *varietas*’ in his 1564 treatise.¹⁴⁶ However, Gilio censures *varietas* only when it devolves into empty feats of artistic virtuosity; when he asserts that a beautiful new art could be forged from the multifaceted nature of early Christian martyrdom in the passage that was analysed extensively in chapter two, he in fact seems to be proposing a specifically martyrological form of *varietas*. Where Alberti found the human form depicted in a variety of dissimilar but related poses particularly pleasing, Gilio extolls the beauty of sacred bodies subjected to a varied sequence of corporeal degradations within the delimiting framework of martyrology.

That *varietas* encompassed the subtle variation possible within a framework of repeating elements thus naturally draws it into the orbit of martyrological discourse. Repetition is itself a theological imperative inherent to martyrdom: after all, martyrdom is nothing more than the ‘repetition, renewal and completion of Christ’s victory by his followers,’ or what Donald Kelley has described as ‘*Imitatio Christi* with a vengeance.’¹⁴⁷ Similarities between passion stories help to establish their continuity in an unbroken narrative of Christian steadfastness, and lend greater credence to the truth-claims being made in any individual text. The repetitive nature of the martyrs’ submission to persecution is precisely what marks their special relationship with Christ, whose own crucifixion was the precondition for

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Zeri (1957).

¹⁴⁶ Nagel (2011), p.233.

¹⁴⁷ Herz (1988a), p.63; Kelley (1981), p.121.

their later sacrifice.¹⁴⁸ Circignani's fresco cycle at Santo Stefano accords to this iterative model of martyrology - the first scene depicts the crucifixion of Christ, which sets into motion the cyclical sequence of *Imitatio Christi* that follows. The repetitive elements of these images have been frequently remarked upon (and criticised) by scholars. Monssen, for example, censured the lack of individualisation of each individual fresco and saint, asserting that the holy protagonists 'behave more like types than human beings,' resembling 'marionettes acting their parts.' For him, the schematic structures of early-Christian passion texts 'account for the same shortcoming in the pictorial representations.'¹⁴⁹ There is no doubt that these frescoes *are* in one sense repetitive, as each image in the cycle follows the same guiding principles of composition. But this is not a compositional failure; instead, this systematic formal re-iteration exposes the viewer to the rhetorical power of repetition as advanced in classical theories of oratory,¹⁵⁰ establishing a continuity between martyrs hailing from 400 years of history and three continents.

Repetition, furthermore, never occurs identically. The American novelist Gertrude Stein once wrote that idea of perfect repetition is an illusion, that close analysis will always uncover variation within seemingly identical acts.¹⁵¹ As John Muckelbauer elaborates, the idea that every act of repetition is simultaneously an enactment of difference underpins the practice of imitation, which never constitutes the simple reproduction of a prototype.¹⁵² Significantly, this kind of differential repetition is also an essential component of Christian martyrdom's imitative rhetorical strategy, something that can be clearly observed in the relationship between the first and third

¹⁴⁸ For Hippolyte Delehaye, 'the legend of the martyrs is nothing but a mass of repetitions.' Delehaye (1907), pp.24-5.

¹⁴⁹ Monssen (1983), p.40.

¹⁵⁰ See Quintilian (2002), pp.115-125.

¹⁵¹ Stein (1935), p.167.

¹⁵² Muckelbauer (2008), p.65. The concept of differential repetition is also centrally associated with the theory of Giles Deleuze, for whom 'identical repetition is impossible' - repetition constitutes instead the 'same of that which differs,' forever reliant on the 'intensity of the different.' See Deleuze (1990), p.7; 289.

fresco of Circignani's cycle at Santo Stefano. The first fresco represents the archetypal moment of Christ's crucifixion, a symbolically over-determined body nailed to a cross and exposed to its viewers within and without the frame (fig.1). The third fresco of the cycle depicts the martyrdom of Christ's foremost apostle St. Peter, and repeats the same pictorial elements. Peter is also crucified, but introduces a variation into his imitative act by insisting that his cross be planted into the ground upside down (fig.3). Whilst Peter wishes to repeat Christ's passion and assert a continuity between their holy sacrifices, it is crucial that his imitative act reproduces Christ's example differentially and not identically. By asserting his unworthiness to enact a perfect imitation of Christ's crucifixion, Peter's humility demonstrates that the 'repetition of difference' is a useful way of approaching the imitative act of martyrdom; the varied repetitions at play between the frescoes at Santo Stefano emerge as a central aspect of their didactic potential.

Approaching the fresco cycle as a coherent whole, a unified polyphonic artwork constituted by thirty separate but fundamentally interdependent images, the serial nature of its overall composition brings this argument into sharper focus. Taking his cue from the compositional principles of classical music, Umberto Eco posits that repetitious or serial-like artistic productions across a variety of media offer pleasure to their audiences 'not so much for the return of the same thing,' but rather 'for the strategy of the variations.'¹⁵³ The aesthetic pleasures afforded to attentive audiences negotiating this kind of dialectic of variation and repetition resonates with the predictive pleasures attendant to the varied repetitions of Santo Stefano's martyrological sequence. Providing implicit support for the link drawn here between Eco's meditation on the pleasures of varied repetition and martyrological imagery, Patricia Cox Miller has emphasised precisely this aspect of the late-antique martyrological collections of Prudentius, arguing that by emphasizing a 'textured play of repetition and variation,' they enable

¹⁵³ Eco (1994), p.92.

'a recognition of, and a certain pleasure in, the structure of the form itself.'¹⁵⁴ For Miller the 'real interest' of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* lies in the 'network of relationships' between its individual vignettes, which construct the 'theological vision of the collection as a whole.'¹⁵⁵

A revealing passage from Paleotti's *Discorso* seems to confirm that the pleasures of the 'infinitesimal variations' attendant to apparently repetitive sequences of hagiographic content might live on in post-Tridentine image theory. Exulting 'what diversity one finds in the representation of each order of the blessed in the celestial court,' Paleotti offers a vision of the incredible variety possible in depicting sacred figures:

What a difference there is between a picture of an angel and that of a patriarch; between the image of a martyr and that of a confessor; between that of a bishop and that of a virgin; what's more, in the same order witness how much dissimilarity is often discerned from one person to the next, like between Saint Peter and Saint Bartholomew among the apostles, or Saint Stephen and Saint Vincent among the martyrs...Then consider how much variety there is amongst the accidents conjoined to their persons, in their movements and bodily deeds, in the actions they express by themselves or in relationship with others; but above all how many differences arise among the accidents separable [from their persons], like dress, insignia, ornament, habitation, location, and other such particulars.¹⁵⁶

Paleotti vividly recalls both the 'infinitesimal variations' described by Eco and Cox Miller as well as the principle of varied repetition that was

¹⁵⁴ Cox Miller (1998), p.113; 134. See also Alison Goddard Elliott's argument that the habitual repetitions characteristic of early-Christian and medieval hagiography more generally, their *repetitio cum variatione*, were a valued element of their contemporary reception. Elliott (1987), p.8.

¹⁵⁵ Cox Miller (1988), p.133.

¹⁵⁶ G. Paleotti, pp.294-5. For original see appendix 1.

fundamental to the aesthetic theories of Tinctoris and Alberti. Indeed, this seems to be a description of Albertian *varietas* adapted to the generic and categorical limitations of the celestial court.

Nonetheless, a modern viewer might not share Paleotti's confidence that martyrs such as Stephen and Vincent are so easily distinguishable in their early-modern depictions. At Santo Stefano one martyr appears physiologically much the same as the next, and it would be difficult to disagree with Monssen's assertion that these figures are virtually indistinguishable 'types' if we take their faces to be the prime signifiers of their identity. Differentiating venerable Saint Peter from equally venerable Saint Marius on the basis of their facial features alone would clearly be an exercise in futility, whatever Paleotti claimed. But Paleotti's argument nonetheless points towards an essential aspect of the relationship between similitude and difference within the cycle's serial evocations of martyrdom. As with the Counter-Reformation composer who consciously limited his composition to structures that allowed the clarity of the divine Word to shine forth unhindered, physiognomic repetitions did not imply that Circignani rejected the aesthetic capacity of *varietas*.

Take saints Cecilia, Agatha and Apollonia, the 14th-16th frescoes of the cycle (figs.14-16). On a formal level, the similarities between the three are striking. In each, a face is turned in three-quarters profile, two to the left and one to the right, lips slightly parted, eyes dilated and raised heavenward. Taken in isolation, these faces could easily belong to the same person. As the frescoes occur one after the other in sequence this similarity is no doubt deliberate, helping to establish the continuity of the saints' sacrifices in an unbroken history of Christian persecution. For a contemporary audience attuned to seeking variety in martyrological repetition, however, the recoverable identities of Agatha, Cecilia and Apollonia did not lie only in their physical appearances. Instead, it resided in what Paleotti calls 'the accidents separable from their personages': the methods of their tortures, the unique

character of the martyrological instruments deployed there, and consequently the specific intercessionary power that each could wield for those who prayed to their images. One might think of these saints as members of a specifically martyrological choir, strumming intercessionally on the musically-inflected instruments of their martyrdom - swords, shears and pliers. At Santo Stefano specificities of wound and martyrological instrument differentiate otherwise indistinguishable figures, exactly the kind of *varietas* within circumscribed generic boundaries described by Alberti and re-iterated by Paleotti, repurposed for the exigencies of martyrology.¹⁵⁷

It is worth pointing to one further example: the *Artemius* fresco (fig.28) graphically exemplifies the same kind of interaction between serial repetition and subtle variation through the three martyrs at the front of the scene, and might be considered as an exemplary microcosm of the entire cycle in this regard. As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, whilst these three bodies are physiologically identical, progressive variations in Paleotti's accidents 'conjoined' to and 'separated' from their persons distinguish them as individual but related imitators of Christ's own martyrdom. These soon to be heavenly bodies might be seen to embody Gilles Deleuze's assertion that 'if we die of repetition we are also saved and healed by it.'¹⁵⁸ Repeating Christ's passion with a difference confers sanctity upon the martyrs and ensures their heavenly reward. Within the strict confines of hagiographic and martyrological representation, the musical concept of variety-in-repetition emerges as a central formal characteristic that both brings pleasure to its audiences and makes a serious theological point about the nature of salvation itself.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ One might think also of the putti cavorting along the ceiling of the chapel in Palazzo Altamps - given the central role of musical performance in early-modern sacred processions, the blurred line between musical and martyrological instrument represented there seems deliberate.

¹⁵⁸ Deleuze (1994), p.7.

¹⁵⁹ The same procedure structures Gallonio's contemporary *Trattato degli Strumenti di Martirio*, whose categorising impulse takes the concept of 'varied repetition' to its extreme logical conclusion. Martyrs are subdivided according to the kind of martyrdom they endured, each section of the work proffering a comprehensive list

Circignani's employment of a macro-pictorial structure based on the relationship between variation and repetition explicitly marks the cycle as operating along a temporal axis.¹⁶⁰ For Henri Lefebvre, it is precisely the 'differences induced or produced by repetitions' that 'constitute the thread of time.'¹⁶¹ Lefebvre helps to illuminate the way in which Circignani's fresco cycle proposes a virtual passage along a sacred chronology, a sequential unfolding of four centuries of Christian history around the real space of the church. The unique architectonics of the circular ambulatory sets into motion a recursive succession of temporal moments, where each link in the serial chain of Christian time is marked by a compositional variation centring upon the specificity of martyrological method or instrument (fig. 152). It is precisely the variation-in-repetition enacted by the martyrological sequence that confers upon it the history making potential of temporality, or duration. The kind of temporal progression described by Lefebvre and imaged at Santo Stefano is also fundamentally auditory. Roman Jakobson argues that where visual signs are naturally aligned with space, auditory cues speak instead to the temporal dimension: 'a complex auditory sign consists, as a rule, of serial successive constituents.'¹⁶² According to Lefebvre, the fundamentally ineffable concept of duration, a prerequisite for temporal progression, becomes quantifiable only through the imposition of abstracted measure.

of saints subjected to the torture in question and an illustrative engraving showing the different ways in which each martyrological method might be employed. In a plate illustrating the various methods by which victims might be suspended, hung or crucified, no fewer than seven variations are squeezed into one pictorial field (fig.150). In the caption accompanying the plate, the serial development of these tortures is typographically represented in an alphabetical descriptive key moving from 'A' to 'G. (fig.151). The subtle differences described in the caption couched in a repeating terminology underscores the inherently serial nature of Christian martyrdom as a constantly evolving, differential system: in this shifting corporeal and lexical landscape, foot becomes feet, up becomes down, hang becomes crucified, hair becomes arm.

¹⁶⁰ Monssen (1982, p.13) also sees the fresco cycle as a 'procession covering a temporal rather than spatial distance.' Figuring the viewer as the mobile agent of a procession through the frescoes, he/she becomes the temporal agent that activates the cycle's chronology.

¹⁶¹ Lefebvre (2013), p.7.

¹⁶² Jakobson (1980), p.469.

One of the most vivid examples of such a measure is musical progression carried on by melody and rhythm: 'everywhere where there is a rhythm, there is measure, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project.'¹⁶³ Bringing together Lefebvre's and Jakobson's understanding of space-time, it can be argued that a systemised sacred time is introduced into the Santo Stefano fresco series through a compositional principle that is inherently auditory, and by extension musical.

At Santo Stefano each scene of martyrdom emerges as a beat, a musically inflected measuring, gauging and dividing of unformed and un-ideological past time into a profoundly signifying theological system. In this way a very specific kind of rhythm has been overlaid onto the space-time of the basilica through the fresco sequence, instituting a vision of sacred history that progresses to the musical beat of martyrdom. The relationship between rhythm and historical evolution has also been taken up by Lefebvre, and his argument resonates with the Santo Stefano frescoes:

Objectively, for there to be *change*, a social group, class or caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner. In the course of a crisis, a group must designate itself as an *innovator* or *producer* of meaning. And its acts must inscribe themselves on *reality*.¹⁶⁴

These differentially repetitive images of Christian persecution imprint just such a rhythm on the past, a rhythm constituted by spectacularly visible acts of martyrdom forcefully inscribed onto (and even *producing*) reality itself. By reducing the manifold rhythms and cadences of lived experience that otherwise help to mark the passage of time exclusively to martyrological

¹⁶³ Lefebvre (2013), p.8. He goes on to complicate this relationship by arguing that whilst rhythm 'appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws,' it is also 'in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body.' Rhythms 'escape logic, and nevertheless contain a logic' (p.11).

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p.14.

events, the cycle successfully creates an eternally recursive sacred history in its own image, carried on by a musical principle of differential repetition. But the signifying capacity of musical metaphor was only one of the methods deployed at Santo Stefano in an attempt to assert the all-encompassing reality of martyrdom across distant spans of time for early-modern audiences. The final chapter of this thesis will explore in more detail the difficulties involved in such an attempt to imprint this specific and partial reality onto the walls of the church, and suggests that another, much more concrete, inter-medial intervention was adopted in an attempt to shore up this ideological programme: textual inscription.

CHAPTER 4

INSCRIBING A 'TERRIBLE ALPHABET': IMAGE-TEXTS AND THE SEMIOTICS OF COUNTER-REFORMATION SANCTITY

Introduction: The Sack of Roermond and the Fragmented Holy Body

The bodies of the dead are not to be despised and left unburied...For the body is not an extraneous ornament or aid, but a part of man's very nature.

- St. Augustine¹

On the 23rd of July 1572, in the midst of the Dutch Revolt, the troops of William of Orange besieged the small Flemish city of Roermond. After breaching the town's defences despite fierce resistance, William's largely Calvinist troops laid waste to the city. According to reports reaching a scandalised Rome, the soldiers attacked the town's Catholic population with particular ferocity, and immediately made their way to the Bishop's residence and the local Carthusian monastery. An *avviso* was quickly published in the Papal capital, aiming to bring the 'unheard of and monstrous cruelty perpetuated by the heretics against the ministers of God' in Flanders to the attention of the newly elected Pope Gregory XIII (fig.153). Amongst a panorama of decapitated heads, severed ears and plucked out eyes, the *avviso* recounts the grim fate of the charterhouse's porter in particularly lurid detail:

After inflicting many injuries upon him, they threw him to the ground, pulled out his entrails and scattered his bowels. Having cut off his privy-parts, they stuffed them into his mouth and called many local women of the quarter to observe this spectacle. Afterwards they made their way to the choir where the brothers were kneeling with great devotion before the high altar, and set upon them with ferocious violence...Still not sated with the many cruelties they had perpetuated in other parts of the church, they started killing more in the portico,

¹ Augustine (2009), 1:13, p.17.

piling up the miserably defiled nude bodies at the entrance to the monastery.²

Although now little more than a historical footnote in the wider story of socio-political change wrought by the Dutch Revolt, the horrific spectacle of torture, murder and degradation that lit up Roermond in the summer of 1572 enjoyed a fruitful visual and textual afterlife in the final quarter of the sixteenth century. In 1583, the Venetian Faustino Tasso recounted the events of Roermond in detail in his thirteen-volume chronicle *The Histories of the Happenings of Our Times*. Tasso embellishes the account given in the 1572 *avviso*, adding that a number of the Carthusian monks were boiled in an enormous cauldron, whilst still more were roasted alive. The final indignity in Tasso's account arrives when the Calvinist soldiers come across the bishop's confessor, 'a preacher of good standing and sound doctrine.' According to Tasso, seemingly adapting a narrative element from the original *avviso*, 'without compassion they tore out his heart and stuffed it into his mouth, and so with his still-beating heart in his mouth he died.'³

A decade later Cesare Campana's twenty-six volume epic *Of the Histories of the World* moved the violence from the charterhouse into the streets, describing how the heretics 'violated virgins dedicated to God, raped married women, dismembered children, tearing them from their mothers' very wombs, and even tortured the elderly.'⁴ Showing an acute political awareness, Campana explains that such beastly inhumanity could hardly be matched even by the Turks and Saracens of the East, linking Northern schismatics and Eastern heretics in a manner recalling Circignani's penultimate fresco at Santo Stefano Rotondo where 'Turkish' and 'German' enemies are conjured backwards in time to assert a continuity of persecution between late antiquity and the present day. The lesson Campana wishes his

² *L'inudite et monstruose crudelta...*(1572), unpaginated. For original see appendix 1.

³ Tasso (1583), pp.310-12: 'col proprio cuore in bocca morì.'

⁴ Campana (1599), p.174.

readers to draw from the persecutions he describes implicitly situates the events in the context of established martyrological discourse. Not 'abjuring their faith in the heat of battle,' the victims of Roermond are perfect exemplars of Catholic behaviour 'worthy of eternal in the times to come.'⁵

The martyrs of Roermond also left their trace in contemporary visual culture. The English Catholic polemicist Richard Verstegan includes them in his *Theatre of Cruelties*, and the engraving accompanying his verbal description is largely faithful to the account given in the 1572 *avviso* (fig.154).⁶ Centring on the bloody events that took place in the city's charterhouse, a group of monks kneel piously before the chapel's high altar at the centre of the composition. Elaborately costumed soldiers fall upon them in balletic slow-motion, swords raised and ready to dispatch the unruffled Carthusians who have eyes only for God's divine presence as manifested in the as yet undefiled polyptych altarpiece.⁷ Bodies of the dead and dying are already piling up at their feet; in an acknowledgement of the decorum expected of the visual realm, however, the engraver has clothed the nude bodies described by the *avviso* and other textual accounts.

The fall of Roermond was hardly an isolated incident in a decade that saw large swathes of Europe ravaged by internecine violence. The hanging of nineteen Catholic friars in the northern Dutch city of Brielle two weeks earlier received even more widespread publicity, conjuring the so-called 'Martyrs of Gorkum' into the hagiographic record.⁸ On the other side of the confessional divide, the cruelties inflicted by William's troops on their march through Flanders quickly paled in comparison to the slaughters initiated in France less than a month later in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, where thousands of Protestant Huguenots were butchered in an event celebrated by

⁵ Ibid, p.174: 'degni d'eterna Gloria nelle future età.'

⁶ Verstegan (1592), p.41. For an overview of Verstegan's *Theatre of Cruelties*, see Dillon (2002), pp.235-275

⁷ For the role of iconoclasm in the Dutch revolt, see Arnade (2008), pp.1-125.

⁸ See de Valk (2005), pp.371-394.

Pope Gregory himself with musical performances, the minting of a commemorative medal and frescoes commissioned from Giorgio Vasari in the Sala Regia (fig. 155).⁹ In the context of the Society of Jesus, the persecution of Jesuit missionaries in England that culminated in the deaths of Edmund Campion and his followers in 1581 would have a seismic impact on the Order at home and abroad, and both verbal and visual accounts of these events also reached Rome in a flood of publications (fig.156).¹⁰

Nonetheless, the taking of Roermond, or more specifically the multiple versions of the event that were disseminated around Gregorian and Sistine Rome in the 1580s, fruitfully open up the avenues of discussion that will form the focus of this chapter. In a sense, it is the very peripheral nature of the massacre that allows it to function as an exemplary moment, stripped of the distracting specificities of familiar historical circumstance and well-known personages. Each of the accounts relating the events of Roermond in 1572 betrays an insistent, seemingly excessive focus on both extreme bodily degradation and the de-humanising anonymity of scattered corpses in death. At the same time, each text has made it clear that these descriptions were intended to function as part of commemorative projects that ensured the identities of the dead are accorded ‘the eternal glory and fame’ that they deserve ‘in the times to come.’¹¹ The mutilation of these bodies can thus be positioned as the process thorough which their sacralisation is martyrologically encoded as historical fact. But how exactly could the bodies

⁹ Eire (2016), p.540; Pollman (2017), p.182.

¹⁰ See the account published at the behest of Rome’s English College entitled *Historia del Glorioso Martirio di Sedici Sacerdoti Martirizati in Inghilterra per la confessione, & difesa della fede Catolica* (1583). This is not to mention the tales of persecution suffered by missionaries in more exotic parts of the newly globalised world returning to Rome in the same period. Graphic accounts and images of the martyrdom of 52 Christians in Nagasaki would rival anything produced by Circignani or Verstegan for example (see Mochizuki, 2014), and martyrological imagery was also central to the documentation of missionary work in New Spain (see McAllen, 2017). In book 3 of his 1611 *La Peinture Spirituelle*, Louis Richeome notes that these atrocities were represented in (now lost) images in the Roman Jesuit novitiate of San Andrea al Quirinale, where they hung alongside contemporary images of martyrdom in India, Ethiopia and Brazil. See Richeome, pp.6-14.

¹¹ Campana (1596), p.174.

of the holy dead be appropriately honoured in violent scenes of mutilation, dismemberment and bodily dispersal? At the heart of martyrological practice lies a paradox: representing martyrdom constitutes an imagined destruction and even obliteration of the holy body through its negotiation of extreme violence, whilst simultaneously positioning these ravaged bodies as privileged signs of identifiable sanctity.

Beyond the specific discourse of martyrology, and indeed in stark contradistinction to the commemorative politics it proposes, acts of extreme violence and torture have been characterized by scholars such as Jean Améry and Elaine Scarry as destroying subjectivities and making stable identity formation impossible.¹² In a virtuoso rumination on the fundamental 'nonreferentiality' of the body of an exemplary young soldier blown to pieces by a bomb in one of any number of conflicts, Scarry writes that

There is nothing in the interior of what had been a boy's face, nothing in the open interior of what had been a torso, that makes the wound North Korean, German, Argentinian, Israeli. Though a moment before he was blown apart he had a national identity that was Chinese, British, American, or Russian, the exposed bones and lungs and blood do not now fall into the shape of five yellow stars on a red field, nor the hammer and sickle, nor is there written there the first line of some national hymn, though he might have, up to a moment ago, been steadily singing it. Only alive did he sing: that is, only alive did he determine and control the referential direction of his body, did he determine and control the ideas and beliefs that would be substantiated by his own embodied person and presence.¹³

¹² Améry (1980, p.40) describes the capacity of torture to force its victims to contemplate their transformation from a human subject with a body into nothing more than an accumulation of abject flesh; Scarry (1985, p.57) similarly sees the attempted destruction of identity brought about through torture and corporeal degradation as reducing its suffers to 'a state anterior to language.'

¹³ Ibid., p.118.

Scarry's assertion that the dead body and its constituent wounds are perforce emptied of both embodied presence and stable cultural referents remains an influential perspective in contemporary investigations into the relationship between violence and subjecthood. Nonetheless, it might be recalled that the inner organs of numerous sacred figures in the Counter-Reformation *were* claimed to have been emblazoned with the emblems of their faith, like the globes imprinted into Pius V's kidney stones and the bloodied column inscribed into Raimondo of Sansepolcro's viscera described in chapter two. Scarry's convincing but very much 20th-century oriented account of the instability of identity politics in the face of defacing violence offers a starting point for thinking in more detail about how these post-Tridentine accounts negotiate this relationship in a profoundly different manner. The sacred origins of these body parts opened them up to a kind of metamorphosis not available to their non-sacral modern counterparts, and their communal veneration sought to make exactly the kind of claim for meaning that their original persecutors strove to deny.

Building on what I take to be the productive originary paradox of martyrological discourse, this chapter will question how (or if) the readability of traditional markers of hagiographic citation could be ensured in the context of violent martyrological imagery in post-Tridentine Rome. Specifically, it explores how martyrdom and cultural memory interacted in the Counter-Reformation by examining the ways in which the recurring acts of inscription, citation and captioning in Circignani's fresco cycle worked to fix stable hagiographies onto the images they complemented.¹⁴ How could violent images be effectively harnessed into a wider narrative in which they are legitimised as objects of devotion? Could they be made to speak with a single and unified voice through the authoritative power of the word, *logos*

¹⁴ For an introduction to the field of cultural memory, defined as formalised symbolic articulations of the past activated in communal frameworks, see Assmann (2008). The literature on verbal and visual representations of violence in early-Christian martyrological discourse as carriers of cultural memory and identity is vast. Key texts include Perkins (1995), Castelli (2004) and Grig (2004).

illuminating *disegno* to adopt common early-modern theoretical terminology, or did they invite an inevitably pluralistic spectatorial response that challenges what Katharina Schramm has described as the sacralisation of violence in the service of collective memory politics?¹⁵ This, in its broadest terms, is the subject of this chapter.

**Section I: Martyrdom, Violence and the Formless Horror of the
Ungestalt**

*His goodly corps on ragged cliffs yrent, / Was quite dismembred, and his
members chast / Scattered on every mountaine, as he went, / That of
Hippolytus was left no moniment.*

- Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*¹⁶

The fifteenth fresco at Santo Stefano Rotondo depicts a scene as conventional as it is recognisable (fig.26). No Christian viewer could be in any doubt that it is Saint Catherine of Alexandria who kneels before them in elegant contrapposto, hands raised in a gesture of benediction. The saint dominates the centre of the composition's foreground, her statuesque face demurely turned towards heaven. The bodies of her would-be executioners scatter in all directions, each contorted into displays of amazement or shock, whilst the elaborate wheel on which she was to be tortured lies stricken in splintered fragments to either side of the saint. From Gallonio's *Treatise on the Instruments of Martyrdom* we gain a clear idea of how such a device might have operated according to the contemporary techno-historical imagination.¹⁷ In Gallonio's reconstructions, martyrs are tied to the spokes of massive wheels and rolled over red hot flames or paths of razor-sharp spikes (figs. 157 & 158). Here however the winding crank lies idle, and the wheel

¹⁵ Schramm (2011), p.7. For the relationship between *disegno* and *logos* in late cinquecento Rome, see Dempsey (2009) pp.43-55.

¹⁶ Spenser, (1590), 1:V: 38, p.78.

¹⁷ Gallonio (1591a), p.28.

has succeeded in injuring only one of its operators, who clutches his face with bloodied hands as he flees.

Although Catherine was uninjured by the wheel and it thus played no part in her actual martyrdom (effected by the more prosaic means of decapitation shortly after this technical failure), the device was by far the single most recognisable element of her passion narrative, and the saint is rarely seen without it in cinquecento depictions of her martyrdom. Catherine's identity has thus been rendered intelligible and beyond doubt through narrative detail, martyrological attributes and an appeal to established pictorial norms. Figured in these terms the Santo Stefano fresco emerges as exemplary of conventional hagiographic representation, and fully in line with contemporary guidelines governing the production of sacred art. Ecclesiastical authorities concerned with reforming Catholic image culture repeatedly cautioned painters on the importance of representing the saints accurately, a position crystalized by the Milanese bishop and patron Federico Borromeo in his treatise *De Pictura Sacra*. 'If we cannot obtain authentic portraits of the saints,' Borromeo writes, 'we at least ought to keep using the attributes that have been derived from sacred scripture, general history, the biographies of the saints, or the received authority of the church.'¹⁸ In this context, Circignani has performed his painterly role admirably. Catherine is immediately recognisable, and her image amply performs the liturgical and commemorative functions required of it by both the Jesuit novice community of Santo Stefano and the wider community that visited the church on feast-days. The caption beneath the image, an inscription on a fictive marble panel confirming that this is indeed Catherine, tortured and martyred during the reign of Maxentius in fourth-century Egypt, is as good as redundant.

To single out Saint Catherine would be to provide only a partial account of this fresco, however. As the inscription makes clear, there are a number of other devotional loci of commemoration lurking within the pictorial field. In

¹⁸ Borromeo (2010), p.125.

the background's hazy landscape the viewer can just make out innumerable rows of Christian philosophers being immolated upon a roaring pyre, white robes dancing sinuously in red-hot flames, a story traditionally associated with the virgin saint. Beneath the profile of an obelisk soaring into the heavens nearby, another confusing tangle of lifeless bodies pile up upon each other. Other frescoes in the cycle are even starker in their imaging of mass slaughter. In one scene thousands of defenceless Christians are being exterminated by a surrounding army like so many ants, whilst three hundred martyrs line up in the foreground to be thrown into a burning furnace (figs.18&159). Suddenly we seem far from the conventional commemorative logic that animated the scene of Catherine, in which a universally recognised holy figure was depicted in her fully fleshed out hagiographic context, formal painterly signifiers and devotional signifieds chiming in interpretive harmony. The heaps of cadavers littering these landscapes have by contrast been reduced to simmering piles of nameless flesh, vast seas of bodies and body-parts that resist the quantification or individuation often seen as central to effective commemorative practice.¹⁹

To take one more example: immediately behind the fresco depicting a martyr being butchered into pieces on a trestle table, a horrifying scene of devastation unfolds (figs.160&161). A mangled, mutilated swathe of sketchily painted bodies occupy an indeterminate middle-ground too amorphous to be described as a landscape. Perhaps 'ground' is indeed the appropriate word, evoking the essential materiality of painting before it attains to the level of mimetic representation. Faces and haloes can just about be made out amongst the carnage, but this dizzying panorama of butchery seems able to tell us little about the embodied, corporeal experience constituted by the genuine sufferings of real individuals with recoverable identities. In line with the scene's ambient of fourth-century Persia, some figures are mitred and

¹⁹ For the importance of the 'naming of the dead' in enabling more effective individual commemoration in medieval Europe see Gordon and Marshall (2000, p.4).

some are turbaned; it seems however that infidel persecutor and Christian persecuted intermingle freely in this broth of limbs and bones, and it is virtually impossible to discern who is who, to argue for any distinctions in signification amongst the dead and dying. Recalling Scarry's examination of the non-referential character of the dead in the aftermath of war, here too differences in religion, gender and class cease to cohere before an all-encompassing logic of bodily destruction. The laconic caption beneath the fresco baldly enumerates the scale of the atrocity: amidst this twisted heap of corpses are the mortal remains of the bishop Simeon and sixteen-thousand fellow martyrs.²⁰

The seemingly absurd body-count claimed by the inscription accords to a sacred logic of corpse inflation common in late-antique and early-modern hagiography.²¹ In the earliest sources recounting the life of St Ursula, for example, she was described as being accompanied to her eventual martyrdom in Cologne by eleven virgin attendants. By the eighth century, that number had risen to eleven thousand, causing the French reformer Jean Calvin to drily note in the sixteenth century that 'although this is a respectable number, yet it is still too small, considering that the remains of these virgins are to be seen everywhere; for besides there being about one hundred cart-loads of their bones at Cologne, there is hardly a town where one or more churches have not some relics of these numerous saints.'²² In Cavalieri's engraving after Circignani's depiction of Ursula's narrative at the English college, a row of indistinguishable female figures line up behind the saint to be slaughtered by surrounding soldiers armed with daggers and bows (fig. 162). Behind them are the shadowy forms of a further mass of pious women. Further back, in the engraving's middle ground, a variety of persecuted and persecuting stick-figures flit about incoherently on the banks

²⁰ This number derives from the writings of the fifth-century Greek historian Sozomen in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1855), Book II, Ch. 14, p.71.

²¹ See de Ste. Croix (1954), p.104.

²² Calvin (1854), p.203. Montgomery (2009, p.12) attributes the elevated number to a medieval clerical error.

of the river Rhine. In their attempts to keep pace with this hagiographic game of numbers, artists had little choice but to reduce the bodies of these martyrial armies to near total pictorial insignificance.

Earlier in the century some artists did attempt to maintain a degree of legibility in their imaging of sacred genocide: Dürer and Carpaccio both peopled their versions of the difficult-to-depict *Martyrdom of the 10,000* with a large number of representative figures being martyred in different ways, for example (figs.163&164) – compositional strategies of variety and repetition work to suggest the unending number of martyrs that they could only hint towards within limitations of the pictorial field, whilst retaining intelligibility within each martyrological vignette. But the backgrounds of the Santo Stefano frescoes adopt a different strategy. Here, it seems, representing the multitude of Christ's stricken army meant that traditional markers of subjecthood had to be sacrificed. How then could the bodies of the dead be productively commemorated in scenes of such brutal annihilation? *Contra* Saint Catherine, and analogously to the heaps of corpses choking the entrance to the Roermond charterhouse, how can pious Christian identity be identified in a heaving mass of dead and decaying flesh such as that depicted behind the butcher-executioner of fresco 27?

The quasi-martyrs of Roermond and the anonymous bodies of Santo Stefano's exotic landscapes open up intriguing questions surrounding the relationship between violence, identity and commemoration. Underscoring the manifold difficulties involved in any project attempting to affix stable meaning to depictions of corporeal destruction, Valentin Groebner argues that 'visual representations of extreme physical violence renders its victims anonymous, [making] of real people nameless exemplars of horror. It renders them, to use the German word, *ungestalt*, formless, defaced.'²³ If *gestalt* theory asserts the primacy of the whole, a perceptual unity that supersedes the individual and separate functioning of its constituent members, then the

²³ Groebner (2004), pp.11-12.

ungestalt on the contrary obliterates the cohesion and coherence located within the organic structure of the human form.²⁴ Violence, in this formulation, renders ‘humans formless and identification impossible.’²⁵ Here one might again recall the ‘miserably defiled nude bodies’ piled high in the portico of Roermond’s monastery described in the 1572 *avviso*. The pitiless actions of William’s *geuzen* take on a terrible logic: by defiling the corpses of the dead Carthusians, the Calvinist troops were systematically attempting to expunge their identities, a kind of *damnatio memoriae* brutally inscribed onto the monks’ bodies.

The subjective void opened up by extremes of graphic violence might be thus seen to problematize the secure bonds of symbolic attachment between the living and the ever-present dead frequently asserted in accounts of memorial practice in Western culture. That bodily degradation possesses the dangerous capacity to rupture these bonds has its own long history. Perhaps most significantly in the context of this chapter, it constitutes a central thematic in the Old Testament Book of Job’s negotiation of terrestrial suffering and death, an immensely popular text in the commentaries of the Church fathers that would offer a paradigm in turn for Counter-Reformation examinations of the bodily rigours attendant to the passion of Christ and subsequent Christian martyrdoms. The prophet betrays a recurring preoccupation with the specificities of corporeal disintegration in the text, a dizzying series of images of pus-filled abscess and scab-covered flesh, oozing lesions and festering wounds. After being struck with an ulcerating disease from head to toe, Job’s body is covered with excruciating sores that writhe with worms, diminishing him to a pathetic pariah subsisting on a pile of dung outside the city walls.²⁶ This language of corruption has profound implications for Job’s self-perception of mortality as Dan Mathewson

²⁴ For the essentially gestalt or synthetic nature of embodiment and the structure of ‘the experiencing body,’ see Leder (1990), esp.p.24-5.

²⁵ Groebner, p.12.

²⁶ Job 2.8-9. For the widespread popularity of the image of Job’s ulcer-ridden body in Byzantine art, see Evangelatou (2009).

suggests, ultimately threatening to sever the prospect of death from the wider cultural symbol systems of which it is normally part. Job's catalogue of unjustified suffering precipitates his loss of faith in the 'symbol system' of divine justice which undergirds his community's understanding of death, transforming it into a 'blank space that means nothing but can also mean anything.'²⁷

As the prospect of death ceases to signify coherently, Job's meditations become increasingly dominated by a language of organic disintegration. Describing the debased state to which his corporeal form has been reduced, Job writes: 'I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust. My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death.'²⁸ Job's bodily travails inevitably have long-term consequences, precipitating a crisis of faith emblematised in his increasingly incoherent body. Shorn of a stable position within his community and a secure hold on the afterlife, his friend Bildad links his reduced physical condition to a profounder ontological disappearance: 'His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off. His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street.'²⁹ As Mathewson argues, the discourse of death can only regain interpretive stability for Job when it finds a new 'operative semiological context' through which his sufferings can be meaningfully anchored. Otherwise, the brute mechanics of corporeal disintegration threaten to obliterate not just his terrestrial body, but also the very foundations of his identity.³⁰

The capacity of extreme violence to provoke corporeal, and therefore metaphysical, formlessness is also frequently invoked in later Patristic sources dealing with the challenges facing early Christian communities

²⁷ Mathewson (2006), p.25.

²⁸ Job, 16.15-16

²⁹ Ibid, 18:17.

³⁰ Mathewson (2006), p.25. See also San Juan (2013, p.95), who argues that 'if death is revealed to be final and without hope for continuity or redemption, it will serve to unsettle the symbolic system.'

seeking to commemorate their dead in times of persecution. In his homily dedicated to the soldier-martyr Theodore, Gregory of Nyssa describes the profoundly disquieting experience of encountering the 'formless remnants' of an open grave, a 'disgusting' sight that forces 'all kinds of unpleasant emotions' on its viewer.³¹ Eusebius' account of the mutilations perpetrated against Saint Sanctus even more clearly draws the martyred body into the orbit of the formless *ungestalt*: 'his body was a witness of his sufferings, being one complete wound and bruise, drawn out of shape, and altogether unlike a human form.'³² Tertullian meanwhile writes about the atrocities committed by pagans against the corpses of dead Christians in a similar fashion in his *Apologia*: 'how often has the hostile mob,' he asks rhetorically, 'spared not even a dead Christian, but tear him from the quiet of a tomb, the sacred refuge of death, and mangle the body, hideously deformed already, and rotting to pieces; and in this rueful condition drag it about the streets?''³³

Tertullian's rebuke of such 'bacchanal furies' was later quoted approvingly by Bosio in his *Roma Sotteranea* and is particularly telling, re-emphasising that bodies marked with the signs of extreme deformation and putrefaction violently rupture the sacrosanct set of philosophical coefficients that govern the way in which societies encounter and process the reality of death.³⁴ In times of persecution the tomb is no longer a space of 'sacred refuge,' and the dead body itself has thus been shorn of its 'operative semiological context.' The terror of the *ungestalt*, then, forms a central part of Christian writings on suffering and death, and provides a valuable insight into the challenges attendant to martyrological representation in both early-Christian and Counter-Reformation culture.

The horror of the void attendant to bodies stripped of their human identities through disfiguring violence described in these accounts is a horror

³¹ Transcribed in Leemans (2003), p.85.

³² Eusebius (1994), p.214.

³³ Tertullian (1709), p.323.

³⁴ Bosio (1632), p.17

that must also be negotiated by the viewer at Santo Stefano. The ‘miserably defiled’ bodies depicted with such disquieting directness by Circignani betray a recurring preoccupation with deformity, or more specifically the rendering formless of the human form. Gazing at the heap of limbs piled high behind the butcher-executioner of fresco 27 is to gaze into a void of subjecthood, and sifting through this mass of amorphous pigment in search of specific holy identities would appear to be a fruitless spectatorial task. Identities are as hopelessly dispersed across these walls as the bodies that once housed them, strewn across the exotic panoramas of persecution like the bowels of the stricken Roermondian porter. What Edmund Spenser penned of the Euripidean tragic figure Hippolytus might apply equally well to Circignani’s serially dismembered saints: ‘of Hippolytus was left no monument.’

The specific term adopted by Groebner in his analysis of the anonymising power of disfiguring violence deserves further scrutiny. In Groebner’s formulation, *ungestalt* simultaneously encompasses notions of shapelessness, amorphousness and, importantly, defacement. Gestalt theory typically makes much of the perceptual unity of the human face, asserting that its condition as a prime marker of identity relies on the established morphological organisation of its features. Looking at this kind of facial gestalt as through a glass darkly, it follows that the breakdown of these organisational principles naturally poses a threat to social relations between citizens. For Groebner, a medieval theological predisposition to see the divine reflected in the mirror of the human face also made the question of facial disfigurement a pressing one in the context of the relationship between man and God, as it ‘made it possible to render the entire person a hideous monster by disfiguring the face.’³⁵ The philosopher Georg Simmel has argued that this kind of mimetic mirroring between face and soul explains the unique importance of the face as a subject in the fine arts.³⁶ In true pathognomic fashion, Simmel echoes the French painter and academician Charles Le Brun’s adaptation of Cartesian

³⁵ Groebner (2004), p.76.

³⁶ Simmel (1965), pp.276-281.

metaphysics in asserting that ‘the soul, lying behind the features of the face,’ is nonetheless visible in their lineaments.³⁷ If the face can be characterised as ‘the preeminent human site of signification,’ however, it follows that pictorially rupturing the relationship between face and soul might have grave consequences for the maintenance of coherent subjectivity in representational space.

A 1580s Dutch ornamental silver plaque depicting the *Flaying of Marsyas*, produced at the same time as the Santo Stefano frescoes, graphically renders the profoundly ontological nature of the horror that early-modern representations of disfiguring violence might wield (fig.165). At the bottom left, Marsyas himself is sprawled on the ground, writhing in evident agony. Standing above him and dominating the centre of the composition is the physiognomically perfect Apollo. His right hand grips a short-bladed knife, and in his left he holds triumphantly aloft the face of the stricken Marsyas – the face, and not, it should be emphasised, his head, whose mangled remnants remain stubbornly affixed to the satyr’s neck. Just to the right of the defaced face, another sketchily cast satyr seems to be recoiling in horror at the sight, his own still corporeally grounded face a dark doubling of Marsyas’s horrific death mask. The face, now an empty envelope of sagging flesh, takes on the quality of a grotesque theatrical mask familiar from performances on the classical stage, an inert prop designed for the performing of a role rather than a privileged marker of individual subjecthood. This is where the profound terror of this image emerges, and what impels the satyr-witness’s uncomprehending howl of anguish.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid, p.277. For Le Brun’s theory of the passions as it relates to pathognomics and Cartesian dualism, see Montagu (1994).

³⁸ The relationship between masks, anonymity and fluid individual subjectivity were commonly drawn in the early-modern period. Actors in mystery plays, especially if playing the devil, often wore masks, ‘depersonalizing the wearer and dissociating [him] from normal society.’ See Beadle and King (1995), p.xxiv; In a fascinating description of the executioner’s trade in his 1589 tract *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, meanwhile, Tommaso Garzoni criticizes ‘mask-makers who sometimes give him an outer mask to cover the mask of shame that he carries within.’ pp.744-5.

Apollo's gesture would have been recognisable from early-modern spectacles of execution, where the executioner often displayed the product of his bloody work to the watching crowd (fig.166). Like Apollo, what he held up was no longer a face, but rather 'a human mask, horrible, grimacing' in Maurice Chardon's phrase.³⁹ The mutilated satyr, still alive at Apollo's feet, retains his head but has been fundamentally defaced. He is a graphic visualisation of the *ungestalt* in all its amorphous horror, and the violence of this scene dramatises Groebner's 'terrifying void' of displaced subjecthood. For where does Marsyas now reside? In the face that constitutes his relationship with God and thus his ontological position? Or in his flayed yet still living corporeal form, a semi-embodied body without a face? The satyr's horrified words as recounted in the Ovidian myth could hardly be more apposite: 'why do you tear me from myself?'

The plaque's negotiation of the complex horror of a face unstitched from its head, body, and subjecthood is also expressed in Circignani's Roman martyrdom frescoes, and a detail from one of the lost English College murals uncannily reproduces the effect of the Dutch image (fig.167). The 13th plate of the *Ecclesiae Anglicanae Trophaea* depicts the eleventh-century Anglo-Norse bishop Sigfrid coming across the disembodied faces of his nephews Unaman, Sunaman and Winaman in a Swedish forest. The trio had been martyred by a group of avaricious pagans hoping to plunder the wealth of the local church whilst the bishop was away proselytising in Denmark, and their decapitated heads were dumped into a nearby lake.⁴⁰ In de'Cavalieri's surviving engraving, the newly returned Sigfrid piously regards an open casket out of which stare the disembodied facial forms of his murdered kin. The artist has made little effort to render the faces with any distinctive individuality, and their schematic features and staring eyes once again recall the subjectivity rupturing semiotics of the theatrical mask. Reflecting a common hagiographic

³⁹ See P.Smith (2008), p.137.

⁴⁰ See Moberg (1972), p.78.

trope, according to the saints' passion narratives the disembodied heads miraculously retained the capacity to speak, outing the identities of their persecutors to their uncle.⁴¹ Circignani's image pays no heed to this element of the legend, however. Here the faces of the three brothers are nothing more than inert flesh, violently detached from the wider biological or philosophical systems that might confer upon them some degree of semantic coherence. They, like the unstitched face of Marsyas, graphically denote the loss of coherent identity associated with masking and graphic violence.

The radically decentring potential of this kind of destructive body horror is repeatedly foregrounded in this series, and 'martyr-masks' make a number of further appearances in the engravings. In the fifth plate, St. Alban is depicted moments after his beheading (fig.168). The face of the British proto-martyr lying on the ground before his kneeling headless trunk stares blankly up at his executioner, a two-dimensional form seemingly entirely deprived of a structuring cranium onto which it might be grafted. In the engraving featuring the demise of the East Anglian king Edmund at the hands of marauding Vikings meanwhile, the royal saint's killer holds aloft his flatly disembodied mask-like face in a visual analogue to the Marsyas plaque (fig 169). In taking on the anonymising and de-subjectifying characteristics of the mask, Marsyas' unstitched face and the flattened visages of the English College martyrs seem to reveal the horrible reality that there are no human faces concealed behind them: staring masks are all that remain of their destroyed subjecthoods after their violent murders. Stripped of the gestalt coherence ensured by the apparently inextricable relationship between body and soul, they seem to propose that identity literally only runs skin deep, powerfully exemplifying the dangerous potential that violence has to make 'humans formless and identification impossible.' In doing so, they inevitably raise troubling questions surrounding the ontological status of the victims of extreme acts of violence and the possibility of their future commemoration.

⁴¹ See Lawrence (1898) p.131.

Section II: The Amorphous Body of Christ in Alfonso Paleotti's
Explication of the Holy Shroud

That acts of violence carried with them the potential to deface their victims and obliterate their identities was thus a recurring concern of martyrological discourse, and one which found repeated visual expression in the martyrological cycles of late cinquecento Rome. In order to provide a fuller historical basis for this line of analysis, I will now turn to a fascinating contemporary text which deals directly with the profound semiotic challenges opened up by violently defaced holy corporealities. The work in question, Alfonso Paleotti's 1599 *Explication of the Holy Shroud in which was our Lord was Wrapped, and of the Wounds Impressed in it with his Precious Blood*, constitutes an in-depth scriptural, medical and philosophical analysis of Christ's body as deduced from the material evidence of the Turin Shroud (fig.170).⁴² Over the course of twenty-one chapters, the text presents a virtual cartography of Christ's ravaged form, examining in excruciating detail each sacred body-part and the desecrations to which they had been subjected. Paleotti's advisory role during his cousin Gabriele's commissioning of the Santo Stefano-inspired Bologna cathedral crypt cycle has already been mentioned, and he was a committed martyrdom-enthusiast and relic-collector during his own later tenure as Bologna's archbishop.⁴³ The *Explication* provides valuable insights into the ways in which prominent churchmen attempted to overcome some of the interpretive difficulties that came with the territory of sacred bodies deformed and defaced by the rigors of martyrdom.

Foreshadowing Groebner's configuration of the *ungestalt*, Paleotti also argues that identity and individual human subjectivity are closely bound up

⁴² An original 1598 edition actually exists with a slightly longer title. The mutations of the versions are beyond the scope of this thesis, and I quote from the redacted 1599 version. For the controversies that led to the first version being suppressed and replaced, see Fanti (1984).

⁴³ In his introduction, Paleotti describes the 'good quantity of holy relics arranged in my sacred mausoleum.'

with the recognisability of corporeal form. Throughout the *Explication* he repeatedly emphasises that the brutality inflicted upon Christ's body by his persecutors renders him unrecognisable to external observers. Outlining the first encounters between the condemned Christ and his witnessing public after his flagellation for example, Paleotti writes that 'those who saw him, who no longer bore the semblance of a man (*sembianza d'huomo*), took him for a leper.'⁴⁴ For Paleotti the destruction of Christ's external form affects his interior identity, calling into question his humanity for those gazing upon his ravaged form.⁴⁵ Explicitly taking the Book of Job's near-nihilistic preoccupation with corporeal degradation as his theological paradigm, Paleotti adds that Christ's 'humanity was almost reduced into dust' over the course of his Passion, emphasising that corporeal degradation affects both the external envelope of the body and the ontological status of the victim. This resonates with Scarry's theorisation of torture, in which she argues that the *raison d'être* of extreme violence is always to strip its victims of their distinctive subjectivity, ensuring that their bodies are able to speak only the language of subjugation instituted by their persecutors.⁴⁶

One might argue that this process is being viscerally enacted in the foreground of Santo Stefano's twenty-seventh fresco, where the young victim splayed upon the butcher's block seems to be characterised by a totalising anonymity (fig.171). Nothing about his features or body suggests any semblance of specific personhood, of an identity beneath the serially mutilated skin. This body is one amongst many, a historically non-specific and corporeally de-contextualised object. In contrast to the diagnostic and revelatory implications frequently apportioned to the penetration of the body's outer integument in early-modern texts influenced by the rapidly

⁴⁴ A. Paleotti (1599), p.33.

⁴⁵ Leprosy was a corporeally degrading disease that was also associated with the inner corruption of the sufferer, the external manifestations of the disease reflecting the degradation of the soul. See Brody (1974), pp.104-5. For the mental image of Christ as 'quasi leprosus' in devotional texts from the Middle Ages onward, see Bestul (1996), pp.156-7

⁴⁶ Scarry (1985), p.28.

developing field of dissection as analysed in chapter two, the revealed interior here apparently speaks to no revelation other than that of the meaty carnality of flesh and bones.⁴⁷ This is the very definition of a body that has been reduced from unique personhood to a 'nameless exemplar of horror,' and what Paleotti writes of Christ can be fruitfully applied to the Santo Stefano martyr: 'he was so deformed that he had lost his own likeness (*l'effigie propria*) to the degree that he was no longer recognisable. We have looked upon him and seen him without the form of a man (*senza forma d'huomo*).'⁴⁸ Form and identity, and on the flip-side deformity and the loss of identity, are inextricably bound in post-Tridentine negotiations of martyrological semiotics.

A linguistic register of obliteration dominates Paleotti's attempts to adequately portray the corporeal and spiritual effects of Christ's suffering, indicating that the nature of his persecution is not merely physical but rather all-encompassingly ontological. As he moves his analytical gaze up and down the sacrosanct shroud-body member by member, each element reveals the catastrophic damage it has sustained in similar terms. In one particularly striking passage, Paleotti describes how Christ's once perfect golden locks suffer such mistreatment at the hands of his tormentors that they are violently stripped of their lustrous vitality, 'rooted out and reduced in some parts down to the nude skin.' He laments seeing 'the blonde hairs of our Lord so confused, badly treated and so stuck together with the viscosity of blood [that] they lost all of their beauty and their colour.'⁴⁹

By focusing on Christ's hair, Paleotti seems to be invoking and obscenely inverting the characteristics of the Petrarchan love sonnet. Petrarch lingers on Laura's uncommonly beautiful hair almost as much as he does her eyes

⁴⁷ For an exploration of the relationship between the diagnostic, exploratory language of surgery and the exposition of violence on the Renaissance stage, see Goth (2016), pp.139-62.

⁴⁸ A. Paleotti, p.90. For original see appendix 1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.69, 71. For original see appendix 1.

over the course of his oeuvre, and their miraculously glinting golden tints exert a powerful pull on his soul. Where Laura's curly blonde hair 'scatters sweet gold' in the breeze, however, Christ's sacred hair is so 'tinted with blood' that its 'gold is obscured.'⁵⁰ More generally, Paleotti's fragmented part-by-part unfolding of Christ's corpse also darkly recalls Petrarch's fragmented compartmentalisation of Laura's body into what Nancy Vickers describes as a 'collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects.'⁵¹ Paleotti thus figures Christ's persecutors as offering violence not only to the theologically sacrosanct body of the son of God, but also to the exalted aesthetic tradition of the Petrarchan sonnet.

Paleotti's negotiation of the ontological element of bodily destruction reaches its apogee when he comes to describe in detail the wounds suffered by Christ on his 'divine face,' that terrestrial mirror through which the image of God himself might be reflected. The recognisability of the face of the deceased was an important element of contemporary Italian funereal practice, where its ritual exposure ensured an appropriate commemorative relationship between mourner and deceased.⁵² Helen Hills has also recently shown the important role that imagining the facial features 'of saintly beings past and present' played in the production of new models of sanctity in post-Tridentine Catholicism.⁵³ Problematizing the security of this relationship between external form and inner identity in the wake of violent persecution, Paleotti's text imagines the Virgin Mary's reaction to the sight of her son's bloodied and largely unrecognisable visage:

It gives the pious Christian material for meditation to consider how great was the sadness of the holy Virgin on regarding the delicate face of her Son, which she herself had so often cleansed, and towards which she daily raised her maternal eyes to admire with tenderness,

⁵⁰ Petrarch (2004), Canto 227, p.620.

⁵¹ Vickers (1981), pp.107-8.

⁵² See Strocchia (1992), pp.21-22.

⁵³ Hills (2008), p.550.

and which she used often to kiss, to see him now so beaten and transformed, and his beard torn to pieces, without the form of a man. And so she can well say with Isaiah that 'the face of my Son is hidden and transformed'...And so accompanied by the sadness of the holy Virgin, the pious reader himself can say: 'Oh my Lord, where is your serene forehead? Where are your divine eyes? The holy Virgin meditated in such a way, kissing the face of her son, and it excites the same compassion to kiss his image in the Holy Shroud.⁵⁴

Paleotti's ideal pious reader struggles in vain to delineate Christ's divine features in the livid flesh of his mutilated face, and this radical disjunct between a previous foreknowledge of Christ's ideal form and the contradictory evidence of the bloodied Shroud forces the exercitant into more profound and complex meditations on the nature and mystery of his sacrifice. Turning the logic of the relationship between face and soul on its head, one might speak here of an initial horror associated with an extreme case of prosopagnosia, a cognitive disorder that inhibits our capacity to recognize faces. James Clifton has written persuasively of the disturbing effect that an inability to recognize the human face can have on the viewer of an artwork, but how much more disorienting must it be to be unable to recognise the face of the divine?⁵⁵ This initial horror that Paleotti's readership must overcome is none other than the horror of the *ungestalt*, a crisis of defacement and unrecognizability.

There is a way out of this hermeneutic bind. Following the compositional structure of the text, Paleotti's reader can indeed bring productive meaning to the ambiguously signifying landscape of Christ's disfigured body. The *Explication's* extended meditation on Christ's mutilated form begins not with a verbal description, but with a visual image (fig.172). This rudimentary chiaroscuro woodcut, sketched in shades of yellow and ochre, is not quick to

⁵⁴ A. Paleotti, p.93. For original see appendix 1.

⁵⁵ See Clifton (2011), p.388.

reveal its subject. Only with some effort is the form identified as a kind of plan view of a human body, stretched flat across the picture plane. Just like the kinds of conventional anatomical drawings it superficially resembles, abstracted lines criss-cross the corporeal surface. In contrast to an image like Helkiah Crooke's contemporaneous annotated drawing of the venous system however, this diagram doesn't attempt to represent the inner workings of an actual human body, and its schematic linear overlay conforms to no known bodily system(fig.173&174); as the text clarifies, these marks and streaks are instead the material traces of long absent wounds, bloody reminders of Christ's torture and crucifixion.

The *Explication's* foundational image thus constitutes a replica of a two-dimensional surface imprinted with the lineaments of an absent body, a body constituted entirely by the external signs of damaged bones and necrotic flesh. Far from shying away from the thorny issue of bodily corruptibility, Paleotti positively embraces it as the single most characteristic feature of Christ's crucifixion, and by extension of wider martyrological discourse: 'as we see in the drawing', this is a form in which 'there remained not a single part that was healthy from the base of the feet up to the peak of the head.'⁵⁶ This privileged window into the space of Christ's tomb proposes an inextricable metonymic relationship between the wounds suffered by Christ and his whole body, elevating the former to the primary carrier of signification in a manner that recalls the serially mutilated body of Santo Stefano's 27th fresco. 'We are wrong,' Paleotti writes, even to speak of individual wounds inflicted on Christ's body in isolation: 'as we see in the Shroud, this is an accumulation of wounds which increases the pain of our Lord immensely. In Christ's body wound is added upon wound, bruise upon bruise, fracture upon fracture, and blood upon blood.'⁵⁷ Christ's body takes the form of one massive and ever growing lesion, focusing the attention of the reader on the material, incarnate nature of the Son of God and increasing

⁵⁶ A. Paleotti, p.32.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.60-61. For original see appendix 1.

the affective reach of the *Explication*. As Paleotti reminds his readership towards the end of his treatise, ‘it only remains now, my dear souls, to fix our eyes frequently upon this sacred Shroud, taking these redeeming wounds into our hearts and recognising in them the torments and the pains dedicated to us for our sins.’⁵⁸

As suggested by Paleotti’s recourse to a visual image at the beginning of his treatise, the complex debate surrounding the nature of form and deformity as expressed in the contours of bodies marked by extreme violence has a natural link to the world of artistic production. Whatever definition one might give to the term, form constitutes one of the fundamental building blocks of artistic facture, and the possibility of representing ideal forms in visual media animated numerous late cinquecento theorists.⁵⁹ But deformity, form’s dark double, also had its place in contemporary theories of art; as Philip Sohm has pointed out, the seventeenth-century art-critic Marco Boschini tantalisingly described contemporary Venetian painting as constituting ‘forma senza forma,’ or even form deformed (‘forma difforme’).⁶⁰ Boschini’s attempt to capture the paradoxical visual effect that the spotty *macchie* of Titian’s brushwork engendered in his viewers is surprisingly analogous to the terminology adopted by Alfonso Paleotti in trying to evoke the ontological void opened up by Christ’s violently disfigured body, also a ‘forma quasi senza forma.’⁶¹

The image conjured by Boschini of a painting that appears as nothing more than a livid accumulation of stains, but which ultimately possesses an expressive power far in excess of works operating along more conventional principles of *disegno*, emerges as a perfect metaphor for the unique capacity of the graphically violated and deformed body to speak in a new and more

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.142. For original see appendix 1.

⁵⁹ To take just one example, Lomazzo argued that nature’s perfect forms didn’t exist in the observable physical world and could only be expressed through artistic facture. See Panofsky (1968), pp.83-99.

⁶⁰ Boschini (1674, *Disegno* ch.5). Discussion in Sohm (1999), p.124.

⁶¹ A. Paleotti, p.33.

affectively resonant way. To look at the muddled stains patinating the surface of Paleotti's Shroud diagram and see only chaotic disorder is an unenlightened response not unlike that of the Vasarian viewer in Boschini's treatise, who confidently asserts that 'he who does not apply pigment evenly makes his figures completely blemished (*tute machiae*).'⁶² In both cases the viewer has a responsibility to meditate carefully upon these 'blemished' forms in order to uncover their deeper significations. Boschini's response 'oh *machie*, like so many pure stars,'⁶³ positions the liminal, 'formless' elements of painting as inherently transformational, just like Paleotti's Christ, whose formless form ultimately emerges as a clear sign of his redemptive role in mankind's salvation when situated in the correct interpretive context. As the seicento art theorist Domenico Ottonelli would remark in a discussion of the manner in which the sins of man have travestied God's perfect original form, only Christ could 'remedy this ugly image from deformity with the most precious blood of his body.'⁶⁴ Perhaps this helps point the way towards the productive potential of the mangled approximations of human corporeality choking the landscapes of Santo Stefano Rotondo: their very formlessness, their negotiation of the *ungestalt* in other words, is central to their hermeneutic significance.

The following page of Paleotti's treatise furnishes the reader with another image, which provides a very different representation of Christ's form as imprinted into the Shroud (fig.175). In this next engraving, the author himself kneels before the cityscape of Bologna, his episcopal see. In the sky above the city, three angels unfurl a large sheet. Etched into the fabric is the schematic dotted outline of a man pictured from both the front and back, seemingly a precursor to Jan Comenius's shadow-image depicting *The*

⁶² Quoted in Sohm (1999), p.124.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ottonelli, (1652), p.271: 'Christo ha rimediato alla deformita di questa brutta imagine, col sangue pretiosissimo del suo corpo.' In his *City of God* (Book 9, 6:14), Augustine also remarks that God has the power to 'reform our deformities.'

Soul of Man in his 1658 work *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (fig.177).⁶⁵ Like Paleotti's second Shroud image, the engraving representing the *Soul of Man* in Comenius' text shows the dotted outline of a human form imprinted onto a piece of white cloth in the process of being unfurled. Comenius adopts the metaphor of the *tabula rasa*, or blank tablet which can be potentially written upon, in his description of man's soul, an analogy that emphasises the inscriptive relationship between body and soul also visible in the image.⁶⁶ One author has noted that the fabric upon which this 'pixelated outline of a human figure' is rendered resembles a 'winding sheet.'⁶⁷ Based on the visual equivalence between Paleotti's Shroud-image (fig.178) and the *Soul of Man*, might it thus be suggested that the dotted outline on a winding sheet at the beginning of Paleotti's *Explication* is referring to Christ's soul?⁶⁸

If one accepts this hypothesis, then the two engravings that begin Paleotti's text join Christ's body and soul in a materially symbiotic relationship. They encourage the reader to direct his attention during his meditational practice towards the external semiotic markers of Christ's Passion-body on the one hand and his human soul on the other, thus firmly establishing the material presence of his corporeal and spiritual incarnation. The images represent the freshly imprinted acheiropoetic impressions of the two irreducible components of Christ's humanity, divine photograms imprinted into their material grounds not by the miraculous action of light, but of blood.

Paleotti's conviction that a semiotically charged acheiropoetic art has been realised in the Shroud permeates the entire text, and a subsequent passage elucidates the multiple levels of artistic facture he sees manifested in

⁶⁵ See Stoichita (1997), p.157.

⁶⁶ See Sadler (2013). p.56.

⁶⁷ Goodrich (20014), p.45.

⁶⁸ Ludovico Carracci's preparatory drawing (fig.176) does not depict the image of Christ's body imprinted into the Shroud as 'pounced' in the manner of the engraving, indicating that Christ's body was intentionally rendered in this fashion when integrated into Paleotti's text.

its fabric: Christ himself is a rock 'engraved' during the passion in a process whereby wounds were 'sculpted' into his stony surface 'with scalpels and with nails, the cross and the lance.'⁶⁹ This first order aesthetic production, fashioned out of the very ground of Christ's body, would soon give way to a second order representation: 'And now our Lord Jesus has left painted the form of that sculpture, that is of his redeeming wounds in the holy Shroud, painting them with his own blood.'⁷⁰ Paleotti's engagement with the *paragone* between painting and sculpture is worth commenting upon: sculpture, as a production in three dimensions, is perhaps closer to the reality of the human form, and so the temporally specific body of Christ's passion is figured as sculptural.⁷¹ But the second order 'painting' retains a position of great importance as well. Although further removed from tangible reality because of its status as a two-dimensional copy, a painted replica derived from Christ's sculptural body, it is nonetheless a privileged object of meditation that brings the material truth of Christ's sacrifice to bear in the terrestrial world. Within Paleotti's complex skein of multiple corporeal iterations, there is of course a third level of representation at work. This is constituted by the text itself, and more specifically the diagram with which it begins, a printed copy of a painted copy of a sculptural copy of Christ's body. Fleshy originary sculpture becomes bloody painting becomes linear diagram – a portable, infinitely re-usable object of meditation.

Although each of these images and levels of facture help to establish the figuration of an incarnate God manifested in the Shroud, the opening diagram

⁶⁹ Paleotti's vision here is close to a poem by Giambattista Marino recounting the miraculous artistry of the Shroud, where wounds and torture instruments assume a constitutive force in the production of Christ's image, analogies for the materials of the painter's trade – the cross is a 'panel', the Shroud its stretched canvas; 'nails' are brushes and 'tears and blood' are its pigments. See Marino (1674 [1614]), p.99. See also Emmanuele Tesauro's contemporary characterisation of the Shroud as both an apotheosis and dissolution of mimesis in his panegyric *Il Commentario*, a 'self-portrait' where 'tutto il Corpo se stesso pinse,' from blood to wounds, bones to veins. Tesauro (1659), p.38.

⁷⁰ A. Paleotti, pp.56-7. For original see appendix 1.

⁷¹ This was the position taken by advocates of sculpture in the *paragone* debates of the mid-cinquecento, who maintained that sculpture portrayed 'quell che è' as opposed to the more fictive charms of painting. See Preimesberger (2011), p.68.

of Paleotti's work is the real centre-piece around which the book revolves. The bishop makes this clear in his programmatic preface, where he explains that the dynamic relationship it stages between textual and visual explication constitutes the interpretive key that governs the book's logic:

Now to say something about the way to use this book in order to extract profit from it for the spirit. At the beginning of the work is placed a little portrait of the Holy Shroud, similar to the original with the sole addition of some letters of the alphabet placed around it necessary for our purposes. And so the pious reader will observe both sides of the drawing, taking a chapter per day to meditate upon, and making use of some pious considerations placed at the end of each chapter, or even of others as the Spirit suggests. He will keep in consideration that in the chapters appropriate to each part of the body of our Lord the reader must refer back to the aforementioned letters of the alphabet on the drawing and to that part [of the body] that is treated in the chapter. And so when one comes to the end of everything, one can begin the work again in order to better affix in the heart the stigmata of our Saviour.⁷²

The captioned diagram sets into motion a recursive devotional process in which the meditant is engaged in an interactive reading experience. (S)he examines an image, reads an explicatory text, refers back to the appropriate part of the initiating image, meditates upon the sketchy details with the aid of 'some pious considerations,' derived from scripture, and when the process reaches a conclusion it begins immediately once again, as the journey of coming to know and understand Christ's bloody sacrifice can never be complete. Text and image combine and transform each other, the two media working in tandem to furnish the user of the work with an extremely

⁷² A. Paleotti, unpaginated *epistola*. For original see appendix 1. For the numerous copies of the Shroud circulating in late-sixteenth-century Bologna, see Cingoli (1983).

powerful memorial and didactic tool. The systematic organisational principles of the *Explication*, centred upon a methodology of inscription and captioning, work to bring regulatory order to Christ's formless and dangerously disintegrating body by abstractly reducing it to a surface inscribed with a readable network of signs through the device of a symbological alphabetical key.

Paleotti's commitment to a hermeneutic logic of inscription extends far beyond the simple exigencies of pedagogy. On a more profound theological level, the bishop figures the acheiropoetic production of the Shroud itself as a form of inscription, with the forms of the wounds left impressed into the cloth by Christ's body functioning as typographic analogues, 'salutiferous wounds' taking on the role of universally comprehensible letters:

It was the pleasure of our Lord to leave a record of his flagellation on the rear of the Shroud, written in the blood of [Christ's] legs and thighs like so many letters. In this way, the stupid and the illiterate came to know the appearance of these salutiferous wounds as if they had read of them or studied pious books in the same manner that Saint Gregory says we are to make use of images.⁷³

Clearly, the alphabetical letters graphically represented in the work's opening wound-diagram visualise the metaphorical bloody letters later described by the text. Interestingly, the Jesuit preacher Emmanuele Tesauro's later paean to the Shroud *Il Commentario* also figured the blood imprinted into its linen as a signifying linguistic system: the 'ink' of this 'book' is 'no other juice than painted purple blood.'⁷⁴ As the panegyric concludes in the 'Last Days,' the Shroud itself metamorphoses into the Book of Judgement

⁷³ Ibid, p.55. For original see appendix 1.

For the Gregorian tradition of images functioning as wordless scripture for the devotional edification of an illiterate public that Paleotti is drawing upon, see Chazelle (1990), pp.138-53.

⁷⁴ Tesauro (1659), p.83.

itself: it is the bitter fate of the damned to 'read their condemnation' in the 'carrateri di Sangue' imprinted into the stained cloth.'⁷⁵

Another Counter-Reformation source closer to the genesis of Paleotti's text and the Santo Stefano frescoes also posits the bloody wounds of martyrdom as being produced through an inscriptive linguistic process. In Gallonio's *Treatise on the Instruments of Martyrdom*, the author echoes both Paleotti's concern with the relationship between the recognisability of faces and the stability of holy identity and his configuration of a bloody typography. In one plate a martyr is depicted having his face flayed off, whilst a companion's visage is being 'ignominiously branded' (fig.179). The accompanying caption describes this type of torture as an 'inscriptione damnari.'⁷⁶ Carlo Borromeo also contemporaneously described Christ's wounds as 'gashes (*squarci*) our Lord wishes us to penetrate, so we can read' what is written there.⁷⁷ The figuration of bodily wounds as typographical characters in these early modern sources have an important late antique precedent in Prudentius' *Crowns of Martyrdom*, where the bloody marks being incised into the face of the martyr Romanus by his pagan tormentors are described in similar terms: according to the poet, the Roman executioner 'engraves both cheeks with marks written by claws and he cuts bloody letters into his face.' Saint Lactantius meanwhile refers to the scars of his martyrdom as 'eternal marks of torment and letters engraved onto his flesh,' whilst Cassian is described as an 'umens pagina,' or a page wet with ink. In the account of Saint Eulalia finally, Prudentius describes how 'the very scarlet of the blood that is drawn speaks the holy name.'⁷⁸

The martyrs, through torture and blood letting, are thus literally being written upon in a divine alphabet in a way that might be considered

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp.108-9. Elaborating his inscriptive metaphor, Tesauo also compares Christ's bloody Shroud-typography to 'hieroglyphs' (p.87). For more on Tesauo's conception of the *Shroud* as a mirror of the world, see Maggi (2005).

⁷⁶ Gallonio (1591a), pp.126-7.

⁷⁷ Original quoted in Frigerio (2010), p.147.

⁷⁸ Prudentius (1953), p.266; 244; 150. See also Ross (1995), pp.325-355.

analogous to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's assertion that the socius operates by 'tracing its signs directly on the body, constituting a system of cruelty, a terrible alphabet.'⁷⁹ For Deleuze and Guattari this kind of violent inscription vividly imprints bodies with the clear signs of the cultural signifying system which appropriates them, forcing them to take their place within a territorialised 'social machine.'⁸⁰ Literalising Deleuze's potent language of inscription, the alphabetical letters overlaid onto the narrative spaces of Santo Stefano's pictorial fields, Paleotti's Shroud-diagram and Verstegan's Roermond print stage a remarkably similar process. To return to Circignani's fresco of an anonymous young martyr being hacked to pieces, the livid letter 'A' permanently imprinted into the intonaco just above the corpse's blankly staring face appears to have been fashioned from the same sanguinary liquid that streams down the wall immediately beneath him, the vivid opening note of Deleuze and Guattari's 'terrible alphabet' (fig.180). Blood, or blood figured as a typographic medium, makes legible the truth of Christ by transforming unthinking carnal destruction into the eternally coherent word of God. For the Christian artist the martyred body can signify as a profound divine language, but only when it has been discursively transformed from the realm of the purely visual into the sphere of the textual.

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1984]), pp.144-5.

⁸⁰ Ibid. As Bruce Lawrence and Aisha Karim (2007, p.396) put it, the inscriptive scarification of the body is what 'initiates it into the cultural-linguistic body without organs.'

Section III: Memorable Dismemberment: Corporeal Reconstruction in the Counter-Reformation

In her foray into the impossible, the historian must make the dead other re-member...She may ask, ringing changes on Augustine's questions, 'how am I to interpret remembering?' Whom do I re-member when I re-member you, the dead others?

- Edith Wyschogrod⁸¹

Thus far this chapter has focused primarily on a dynamic of mutilation and dismemberment, positing in etymologically suggestive terms that to dismember the body is to violently dislocate it from memory, to quite literally cut it off from the semiotic systems to which the embodied body appertains. Acts of martyrological dismemberment not only fracture the body: they also always seek to frustrate the possibility of remembering the identity of the persecuted in the future. But as Paleotti's attempt to transform Christ's deformed body into a legible text demonstrates, the commemorative discipline of martyrology was concerned with countering the ineluctable logic of dis-membering persecution even as it acknowledged the fragility of the body as a memorial locus. Extending the semantic metaphor, martyrology might be thought of as a project of re-membering, an attempt to restore meaning to the vestigial fragments of religiously inflected corporeal desecration which are always at risk of slipping away from the historical and memorial record.⁸²

This dialectic of dismembering and re-membering is repeatedly played out in Paleotti's *Explication*. Corporeal fragmentation constitutes both subject and structuring principle of the text, a mental dismemberment of Christ's body in which each segment of the holy corpse is portioned into separate

⁸¹ Wyschogrod (1998), p.173.

⁸² For remembering's relationship to dismembering see also Enders (1999), p.64.

chapters that allow for its study and meditation body-part by body-part and wound by wound. Yet although the text is primarily concerned with the mechanics of corporeal disintegration, it simultaneously also engages with processes of re-membering. As Paleotti informs us, the principal purpose of the *Explication* was to 'excite the holy with the memory of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ' through the mediating power of the Shroud, which is itself nothing less than 'a living memorial (*vivo memoriale*) in which one sees impressed the great multitude of the wounds of [Christ's] body perforated part by part.'⁸³ Paleotti's negotiation of the precise manner in which memories are transferred from a powerful visual stimulus such as the Shroud to the mind of an exercitant can shed light on the broader theoretical question of how the sacred truth of distant moments of religious persecution might imprint themselves into the present.

Despite the important role that text and inscription played in ultimately bringing order to Christ's deformed body, for Paleotti the act of remembering remained visual in nature. Describing the far-reaching devotional impact that his pilgrimage to Turin had upon him, Paleotti explains that he was impelled to have an exact copy of the Shroud produced for his own personal edification: 'Seeing that it was a thing so admirable, I was struck with the desire to have a transcript (*transunto*) made from it of the same measurements, in order to (fixing it intently with my gaze) thus imprint in my mind those most sacred wounds, for the health of my soul, just as our Lord figured it from the life to leave a memory of himself.'⁸⁴ This passage is of crucial importance in understanding the kind of devotional practice centred upon Christ's broken body that Paleotti is promoting. For the body-shroud replica to possess devotional and memorial power, it must be a precise facsimile of the unblemished prototype, reproducing it in every particular of

⁸³ A. Paleotti (1599), p.14. For original see appendix 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, unpaginated dedication to Pope Clement VIII. For original see appendix 1.

size and facture.⁸⁵ Only then can it function as a spur for memory, transferred through the eyes to the mind via an intensely visual focus. To vividly 'see' the wounded body of Christ across the gulf of fifteen centuries with corporeal eyes is to 'see' the real magnitude of his suffering and sacrifice with the internal eyes of the soul, a classical Ignatian formulation.⁸⁶ Paleotti's insistence on the link between intense seeing and sacred knowledge might also be thought of as an adaptation of early-Christian devotional practices. On entering Jerusalem, Constantine's mother Helena reportedly 'avidly visited all the places in the city and vicinity which bore the marks of God's presence. She was eager to absorb through her eyes the faith which she had gained by devoted listening and reading.'⁸⁷ As the pre-eminent trans-temporal site bearing the 'marks of God's presence' in the world, gazing upon the contact relic of the Shroud might enable a similar absorption of sacred truths.

If the link between vision and memory proposed by Paleotti can be situated in both patristic and Ignatian theologies of the gaze, it also accords to Alfonso's cousin Gabriele's defence of religious art two decades earlier. According to Gabriele, who enacted an edifying imitative practice similar to Alfonso's copying of the Shroud when he had facsimiles of the Santo Stefano frescoes produced for his own personal devotion, images 'represent before our eyes, and simultaneously stamp onto our hearts, heroic and magnanimous acts.'⁸⁸ This is in close accordance with the classical conception of the process of remembering as outlined in a tradition extending back to Plato, where each person possesses a wax tablet in their mind onto which memorial images are vividly imprinted as from the seal of a

⁸⁵ In his defence of the utility of artistic replicas in the face of 'condescending and arrogant men' who denounce them 'regardless of [their] perfection,' Federico Borromeo also avers that the exactness of the copy is essential to its effective functioning. See Borromeo (2010), p.161.

⁸⁶ In his *Autobiography*, Ignatius claims to have often seen the humanity of Christ with the 'eyes of the soul' whilst at Manresa (p.29). Significantly, activating the 'eyes of the soul' was also a central goal of the Byzantine ekphrastic texts that were so frequently cited in Counter-Reformation image theory. See James and Webb (1991), p.11.

⁸⁷ Paulinus of Nola, quoted in Frank (2000a), p.99.

⁸⁸ G. Paleotti, p.214.

ring.⁸⁹ Gabriele emphasises that the similitude between material artworks and the phantasmata of artificial memory confers a special legitimacy on the visual arts as a tool of devotion: ‘we know that what is called artificial memory relies for the most part on the use of images, so it is no wonder that the sacred images we are talking about keep memory even more refreshed.’⁹⁰ Elaborating the link between image-making and memory, he writes that ‘images sculpt what they teach into the panels of memory (*tavole della memoria*) so firmly that it remains stamped there for many years.’⁹¹

The association these authors draw between the disarmingly immediate affective power of visual stimuli and the mechanics of memory marks them as distant precursors to modern theorists of trauma and its representation, who frequently situate the visual as a space that has the unique capacity to directly link a subject to long absent sites of initial trauma.⁹² In the art theology of the Paleotti cousins, the originary moments of violent martyrological trauma can only be made present, or re-presented, to their audiences with the stimulating help of images.⁹³ Of course, this unique power was precisely what made it so important for the production of such images to be regulated and to be exactly faithful to their prototypes: if artworks had the capacity to indelibly imprint themselves as memories onto the blank canvas of the beholder’s mind, then visual stimuli promoting the *wrong* kind of memory could have a catastrophic effect on impressionable viewers. Georgia Frank’s characterisation of an Early Christian apprehension concerning ‘vision’s [dangerous] power to connect the viewer intimately to an object, an adhesion that could damage the soul beyond repair’ can help to explain the

⁸⁹ Plato (1922), p.67. For this metaphor as a ‘cognitive archetype’ in Western thought see Carruthers (2008), p.18.

⁹⁰G. Paleotti, p.208. For original see appendix 1.

⁹¹ Ibid, p.222.

⁹² See Bennett (2005), pp.39-40.

⁹³ In his 1585 *Trattato della Nobiltà della Pittura*, Romano Alberti also argued that painting was a pre-eminent medium of expression because it ‘doesn’t render events as if in the past, but rather as if they were present’ (p.29).

Paleotti cousins' insistence on the mimetic accuracy of their acts of imitative patronage.⁹⁴

The crucial importance, but also the manifold difficulties, of remembering emerges as a central concern of Paleotti's *Explication*. In a lengthy anti-Semitic diatribe, Paleotti describes Jerusalem's Jewish population as 'ravenous beasts' who sought to 'consume and reduce to nothing' not only Christ's body but also his name so that 'he would never be remembered in the memory of the people.'⁹⁵ Paleotti's slander reflects widespread accusations of ritualistic cannibalism that were a common feature of anti-Semitic polemic in early-modern Europe,⁹⁶ but in the context of this thesis it is his conflation between the devouring obliteration of Christ's body and the expunging of his name from historical record that is most significant. The name of Christ is both a privileged bearer of identity in the present and an essential component of commemorative practice in the future, and for Paleotti conflicts over Christ's continuing memorial presence centre around the relationship between the legibility of his body and its afterlife as a miraculously enduring textual name.

Andreas Huyssen argues that an insistence on the naming of names constitutes a powerful strategy of memorialisation,⁹⁷ and permanently linking dead victims to the eternal written record of their names was a common feature of early-modern martyrological texts. Paleotti's *Explication* can be situated in a discourse that attempted to ensure that attempts by Christ's persecutors to deny later Christian communities 'any memory of his name' would fail, a project that perhaps reaches its clearest visual expression in Baciccio's dazzling Baroque centrepiece crowning the ceiling of the Gesù. Here, the letters that make up the Christogram *IHS* are worshipped by saints,

⁹⁴ Frank (2000a), p.107. Federico Borromeo voiced similar concerns concerning imagery's capacity to indelibly imprint itself in the viewer's mind. See Jones (1993), p.111.

⁹⁵ A. Paleotti, p.114.

⁹⁶ See Trachtenberg (1943), pp.137-8.

⁹⁷ Huyssen (2003), p.105.

cherubs and kings in an apothecic explosion of divine blinding white light (fig.181). If heaven has been drawn tantalisingly close to the terrestrial viewer through the virtuoso device of Baccicio's vertiginous *quadratura*, it is the preservation of Christ's memory through the visual record of his eternal name that forms the conceptual link between the two realms. In light of the previous chapter, it is significant that this memorial preservation also had its analogue in contemporary musical practice: Lauretano reports that every Friday during Lent the German-Hungarian college's students sang 'the litany of the name of Jesus' in two polyphonic choirs before the altar of the cross at San Apollinare.⁹⁸

Paleotti's conviction that one of the principal motivations underpinning the attempted corporeal obliteration of Christ was to ensure that his memory would be expunged in the minds of generations to come would be adduced as the guiding principle behind early-Christian persecution more generally by Paleotti's contemporary Antonio Bosio. In his *Roma Sotteranea*, one of the first texts of the Paleo-Christian revival to document the extent of the Roman catacombs, Bosio recounts in detail the desecrations perpetrated against the bodies of early Christians and the extreme lengths to which their persecutors went in order to 'completely wipe out the memory (*togliere affatto la memoria*) of the holy martyrs, to destroy and disperse their corpses.'⁹⁹ In their attempts to suppress Christianity and foreclose the possibility of pious worship at the martyr's shrines, Bosio's Roman officials display a near pathological zeal to render bodies irrecoverable and identities unintelligible. 'In order to extirpate them from the world, and to ensure that there remained absolutely no memory of them,' Bosio writes that the martyrs' bodies were habitually mutilated and deprived of burial.¹⁰⁰ In *Roma Sotteranea's* ensuing topography of persecution, corpses and body-parts are accordingly violently disposed of in wells, lakes and sewers, in abandoned forests and gushing

⁹⁸ Lauretano, p.61.

⁹⁹ Bosio, p.17.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.6.

rivers. In successive chapters they are exposed to the devouring birds of the air, the animals of the earth and the fish of the sea. Frequently, Bosio informs us, the bodies of the martyrs were fragmented, chopped into minute pieces and mixed with the bones of criminals or wild animals, 'so that Christians couldn't distinguish and recognise them.'¹⁰¹

Both Bosio's *Roma Sotteranea* and Paleotti's *Explication* seek to negotiate the memorial aporia opened up by the persecutors of Christianity. Paleotti proposes that this can be overcome by devoting oneself to the detailed study of Christ's body and its constituent wounds as imprinted into the image of the Shroud, whilst Bosio's work reaches back to the historical precedent set by early Christian communities in their lasting commitment to collecting and categorising the bones and organs of their fallen co-religionists. According to Bosio, 'the Christians of the nascent church adopted exquisite diligence in searching for and collecting the bodies, blood and relics of the holy martyrs, and having procured them, giving them burial' in order to make possible their bodily resurrection.¹⁰² Some fallen martyrs even took matters into their own hands, making sure that their maltreated corpses were appropriately interred. Sebastian appeared to a Roman matron to tell her where exactly his body had been dumped into the city's sewer, for example, whilst Lucian revealed to a disciple in a vision the place where his body was being miraculously conserved by a dolphin. Other saints 'took particular care of the most minor parts of their bodies, so that they might be interred with the rest of their bodies.'¹⁰³ Januarius, Naples' patron-saint, 'commanded that a finger of his which had been cut off at the same time as his head be searched for and then interred with the rest of his body.'¹⁰⁴

One of the principal reasons for this commitment to bodily re-assembly was, as Bosio hints, related to Early Christian materialist beliefs surrounding

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, p.10.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p.26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.27.

the importance of the terrestrial body in the process of resurrection. For many church fathers, the body was not merely a fleshy envelope concealing a pure soul trapped within, and resurrection was a triumph over corporeal division and decay. Resurrection constitutes ‘the reunion of particles of self’ as Caroline Walker Bynum writes, ‘guaranteeing the rest and re-assembly – the burial – denied to the dead.’¹⁰⁵ Identity and the material continuity of the body were irreducibly linked, and the abstract theology of resurrection was thus joined to a literal, materialist project of reconstituting the violently separated ‘particles of self.’ But thwarting attempts at bodily destruction and dispersal was important not just to ensure that the persecuted would be properly resurrected when the time came; it was also a vital precursor to the production of Christian shrines and sites of worship. The burial place of a martyr-saint quickly became a building block of Early Christian settlement, the focal point around which newly Christianised cities and towns could develop.¹⁰⁶ But to ‘use’ these bodies, one first had to identify them. And so the production of a discourse that emphasised the recovery of the ‘real’ identities of the saints shortly after their executions took on real political importance. Seemingly impossible acts of identity-reconstitution, then, was what Christianity demanded of its faithful, and devotion to the cult of the martyrs meant first and foremost seeking to restore their identities. One of the earliest records of this kind of recuperative corporeal piety is recounted in the second-century *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, where the saint’s followers ‘gather up his bones,’ more precious than jewels and finer than pure gold, and deposit them in a ‘suitable spot’ where they can assemble together ‘as the occasion allows.’¹⁰⁷ In order to forge the space of a newly Christian topography, it was necessary to literally undo the unmaking of the martyred body by collecting, classifying and reconstituting their material remains. As

¹⁰⁵ Walker Bynum (1995), p.58.

¹⁰⁶ See Markus (1990), p.95.

¹⁰⁷ Transcribed in Staniforth (1968), pp.17-18.

Peter Brown remarks, 'fantasies of disintegration and reintegration lurked in the back of the mind of ancient men.'¹⁰⁸

Returning to the realm of the visual arts, such a devotional practice of bodily reconstitution is suggestively evoked by Prudentius in an ekphrastic passage well known to Bosio, Baronio and other scholars of the Paleo-Christian revival.¹⁰⁹ Prudentius describes a wall-painting from the Roman catacombs in which the scattered fragments of the martyred body of Saint Hippolytus are reverentially collected and made whole once more by his devoted followers:

Stunned with grief, they were searching with their eyes as they went, and gathering the mangled flesh in their bosoms. One clasps the snowy head, cherishing the venerable white hair on his loving breast, while another picks up the shoulders, the severed hands, arms, elbows, knees, bare fragments of legs...[until] the thick wood held no longer any part of the sacred body, nor cheated it of a full burial. The parts were reviewed and found to make the number belonging to the un-mutilated body.¹¹⁰

In the context of Circignani's negotiation of *ungestalt* bodies at Santo Stefano, this passage is highly suggestive. Prudentius' grief-filled parishioners sift through confusing heaps of mangled flesh, separating the shattered fragments of the sacred body from the loam of the trees, the bodies of animals and whatever else is concealed in the gloom of the thick wood. Like so many sacralised Frankensteins they reattach shoulder to arm, elbow and hand, knee to fragment of leg, head to breast until the body is made whole once again, a unified ontological *gestalt* of body and soul. Through faith and devotional action, the mutilating actions of the impious can be erased, and

¹⁰⁸ Brown (1981), p.82.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., Bosio, p.52.

¹¹⁰ Prudentius, p.315. See also Roberts (1993), pp.154-5.

the memory of the holy figure assured through his reconstitution and appropriate burial. Prudentius' account of Hippolytus' fruitful corporeal afterlife presents a striking contrast to Edmund Spenser's version of the saint's classical namesake in *The Faerie Queen*, where the dismembered limbs of the tragic hero are so hopelessly scattered that 'of Hippolytus was left no monument.'¹¹¹ With the aid of his followers the saint's holy body could achieve what his Greek predecessor could not, and leave a lasting monument to his memory through the material remains of his reconstituted body.¹¹²

Pious early-Christian acts of bodily reconstitution were frequently depicted in late-sixteenth-century Roman churches, and an analysis of one of these pictorial sources can shed further light on the degree to which Counter-Reformation martyrology exploited the discursive potential of a dialectic between dismembering and re-membering. In the fourth-century basilica of Santa Pudenziana (site of Circignani's own celestial chorus in the apse), a work attributed to the obscure Antonio Tanari vividly portrays a Prudentian model of commemoration at work in the post-Tridentine city (fig.182). In the gloomy light of the ancient church, at first only a few details picked out in white highlights can be made out from the painting's muddy ground. A waxen torso, dead weight collapsing inwards; a pallid head being lowered into a well by a pair of youthful hands; a desolate field of scattered corpses in the distant background. Only gradually does the narrative resolve itself. To any reader of Bosio or Prudentius, however, the story will be familiar.

According to pious legend, the well-to-do Roman virgin sisters Prassede and Pudenziana spent their days diligently collecting the bodies of persecuted Christians that had been abandoned in the Roman campagna, and then preparing them for decent burial. Before interring the bodies they collected their spilt blood with sponges, squeezing it into a well located at the

¹¹¹ Spenser (2007), p.78.

¹¹² See also Malamud (1989 pp.79-4) for Prudentius' conflation of the two Hippolytuses.

site of the church. In the painting, one of the sisters collects the blood of a mangled martyr's body in a sponge, whilst the other squeezes blood directly from a decapitated head into the well. Their commemorative actions, centred on preserving the blood of the martyrs' dismembered bodies, bears a striking resemblance to accounts of the actions of the English recusant community that reached Rome during this period. According to a contemporary report of the 1605 death and subsequent dismemberment of Thomas Percy in the aftermath of the failed Gunpowder Plot, those faithful to the old religion 'gathered up the martyr's blood so diligently with handkerchiefs and linen cloths, that not even a straw stained with it was suffered to remain without carrying it home to be treasured as a sacred relic.'¹¹³

The Santa Pudenziana fresco thus provides a vivid example of the way in which saintly commemoration and corporeal reconstitution were inextricably inter-related in early-modern martyrological practice. In the distant background, on the blasted plane of a bare, apocalyptic topography, one can dimly make out the sketchy forms of mangled corpses, tangled and confused in a dark after-image of a massacre. At first sight these bodies appear to be abandoned to carrion birds and the oblivion of history described by Bosio. But heading towards the foreground two figures challenge this initial hypothesis. In a dim echo of the figures carrying Christ's limp body away from the site of crucifixion and towards a decent burial in Raphael's *Deposition* (fig.183), the sisters grapple with the inert form of a stricken body, carrying it towards the future-action depicted in the foreground.

Their passage from background to foreground might be figured in temporal terms as a journey from the past-time of massacre to the future time of pious commemoration. Prassede and Pudenziana's actions install the corporeal remains of the martyrs as *loci* of religious memory, and both early-Christian sources and their Counter-Reformation re-articulations abound

¹¹³ Nicholas Sander, quoted in Camm (1914), p.180.

with similar stories of pious saints collecting the anonymous bodies of their fallen co-religionists. According to Gallonio, the sisters gathered together the fragmented bodies of 2,300 martyrs at the basilica.¹¹⁴ Their collecting of martyred bodies emerges as an act of memorial preservation, an obvious precursor to subsequent devotional practices centred on the display and veneration of relics. By simultaneously honouring the *fama* of Pudenziana and Prassede and also the memory of the nameless faithful to whom their devotion was in turn directed, the painting restages the vital commemorative work undertaken by the sisters for a new generation of Christian congregations; equally importantly, the fresco demonstrates the manner in which the visual arts might continue the project of re-membering the violated bodies of martyrdom begun by the earliest Christian communities.

That the sisters' memorial actions, and the commemorative acts of the viewers who witness their acts immortalised in fresco, are set into motion by a scene of disfiguring violence reflects an ancient mnemonic principle that violence is an inherently memorable medium of expression. According to the first-century BC *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, a popular source for mnemonic study during the Renaissance, to render concepts memorable it is necessary to associate with them striking mental images.¹¹⁵ Whilst a pleasing composition might temporarily adhere in the memory, if it were disfigured with the introduction of figures 'stained with blood, soiled by mud or smeared with red paint,' its form will inevitably become more striking.¹¹⁶ According to the logic of the ancient manual, both the disfiguring stains of violence and livid smears of pigment are uniquely positioned to imprint themselves into the receptive wax of memory.¹¹⁷ The *Herennium's* reference to the mnemonic power of the bloody stain inevitably recalls the chiaroscuro diagram of Paleotti's Shroud and the bloody *macchie* of the Santo Stefano

¹¹⁴ Gallonio (1591b), pp.72-3.

¹¹⁵ Pseudo-Cicero, p.221.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Mary Carruthers (1990, p.171) demonstrates that the use of graphically violent imagery was ethically justified by medieval authors such as Thomas Bradwardine and Alberto Magnus precisely because of their unique position in the art of memory.

frescoes.¹¹⁸ Jody Enders' assertion that the manual's mnemonic spurs vacillate between 'forming and deforming' only reinforces the argument that the preoccupation with a formless corporeal *ungestalt* at Santo Stefano and in Paleotti's treatise is fundamentally related to their negotiation of acts of remembering in the face of disfiguring violence.¹¹⁹

The connection between memory and representational violence at Santo Stefano Rotondo has already received some scholarly attention from Leif Monssen and Leslie Korrick.¹²⁰ The field of mnemotechnics was the subject of much study in the Jesuit schools of the late-sixteenth century, where the didactic applications of the *Herennium*, Cicero's *On the Orator* and Quintilian's *The Orator's Education* percolated through to young Jesuits through Cyprian Soarez's handbook *De Arte Rhetorica*, produced for use in the classroom in 1562.¹²¹ Jesuit investigations into the educational and meditational power of mnemonic systems would reach their apogee in Matteo Ricci's *Trattato della Memoria*, a work designed to aid the author's subsequent proselytising in China, and which he first drafted whilst a student at the Collegio Romano in the 1570s.¹²² For Korrick Circignani's frescoes fit easily into this intellectual history, operating as memory aids for the young German and Hungarian Jesuit novices who were the primary users of the church. For her the relationship between the frescoes and the unique architecture that frames them is a physical manifestation of that between *locus* and *imago* in classical mnemonics, and each image becomes an effective spur for an Ignatian 'composition of place.'¹²³ Korrick's positioning of the Santo Stefano frescoes in the context of the memorial practices of both Ignatian meditation and classical mnemotechnics is fully justified when brought into dialogue with

¹¹⁸ It is perhaps more than coincidental that the opening and closing scenes of the cycle feature resurrected saints wearing crowns and colourful cloaks, a figural type explicitly recommended by the *Herennium* as effective *imagines agentes* (p.221).

¹¹⁹ See Enders (1996), p.24.

¹²⁰ Monssen (1983), pp.78-85; Korrick (1999), pp.173-6.

¹²¹ Flynn (1956), pp.367-74.

¹²² See Spence (1984).

¹²³ For an authoritative account of the evolution of the art of memory in the ancient world and the relationship between *locus* and *imago*, see Yates (1999), pp.1-27.

the striking *imagines agentes* of the ancient manuals and the mental architectural ensembles devised by Ricci. These latter virtual buildings featured a logical subdivision of space, discrete narrational units and sequential progressions which all recall the compositional principles of the cycle.¹²⁴ Outlining the mental itinerary one must chart through a memory palace to the Chinese governor Lu Wangai, Ricci describes ‘walking through the door’ of this imaginary repository, ‘turning to the right’ and then accessing the mnemotechnical images contained in each ordered space in turn: ‘as with the practice of calligraphy, in which you move from the beginning to the end...so is everything arranged in your brain, and all the images are ready for whatever you seek to remember.’¹²⁵

In the real architectural space of Santo Stefano the images set within their discrete architectonic surrounds are also designed to be viewed sequentially, moving from the bloody opening act of mankind’s salvational narrative in Christ’s crucifixion to its teleological endpoint in the final fresco’s harmonious communion of saints in heaven (figs.1&30). If the previous chapter suggested that this sequential unfolding of varied repetitions was inherently musical, the example of Ricci’s virtual memory palace suggests that the cycle’s ordering principle had a mnemonic function as well, operating along an inscriptive principle of calligraphy.¹²⁶ According to Lauretano’s diary, the students took part in a circular procession around the ambulatory of the basilica following the progressive route of the frescoes chanting the litany as they went, moving through the physical space just as

¹²⁴ The *Herennium* (p.209) also figured an intercolumniation, recess or arch as the ideal *locus* of mnemonic space, whilst Quintilian asserts that a series of pictures can be effective as structuring spatial *loci* (Book 11, p.69). Cicero meanwhile suggestively equated the creation of memory-images to producing paintings (pp.479-81).

¹²⁵ Spence, p.9.

¹²⁶ Interestingly, Quintilian describes the unfolding of mnemonic signs through imagined architectures as being linked together like ‘a chorus.’ Solidifying this link, Noel O’Regan (2014) has shown that music was deliberately harnessed as a stimulus for memory in Counter-Reformation Rome.

Ricci advocated moving through the mental space of his imagined edifice.¹²⁷ When one compares Francis Yates' reconstruction of the virtual memory theatre of Giulio Camillo, a direct precursor to Ricci, with an architectural plan of Santo Stefano Rotondo, the mnemonic implications of the latter's unique architecture surrounds become all the more persuasive (figs.184&185). Santo Stefano's gory sequence of dismemberment thus paradoxically emerges as an ideal vehicle of memory fixation for the viewer picking his way along the frescoed walls of the ambulatory, a concrete materialisation of the abstract structures of ancient and contemporary mnemonic practice that could bring the pious narratives of Christian martyrology dramatically to life in the minds of its beholders.¹²⁸

The Santo Stefano frescoes, then, might be considered as visual loci of martyrological memory in much the same way as Paleotti conceived of the opening diagram of the *Explication*. There the Shroud's bloody stains were figured as especially effective spurs to memory, a point that is buttressed by Tesauro's already-mentioned panegyric to the wounds of Christ, *Il Memoriale*. Tesauro echoes Paleotti in figuring Christ's wounds as 'perforations' pouring out divine information, eternal material reminders of his Passion deliberately fashioned for their mnemonic resonance:

After the triumph [Christ] maintained the wounds in his hands, feet and ribs vermillion and open as a sempiternal memory; and so anyone who gazes on them asking *what are these wounds?* apprehends their benefits, imprinting them fully into the memory.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Lauretano, p.63: 'Si cantò la Messa solennemente, et avanti quella si fece la processione attorno la chiesa, dicendo le litanie.'

¹²⁸ Ricci did not limit himself to mental images during his expositions on memory to the Chinese court, producing eight exemplary images that materialised the virtual space of the memory palace (Spence, pp.11-12).

¹²⁹ Tesauro (1660), p.314. For original see appendix 1. For Christ's wounds and subsequent stigmatic repetitions as spurs for a Christian *memoria beneficiorum* in Tesauro's rhetoric, see now Torre (2016).

Christ himself emerges here as a mnemotechnician in the vein of the *Herennium's* anonymous author, forever preserving his own body in its penetrated and blood-stained state for the continuing devotional benefit of the Christian community.¹³⁰

In the paradoxical logic of martyrological mnemonics then, the more viscerally disfigured the holy body the more readily its viewers will remember it. But if the art of memory is centrally engaged with the violence appertaining to bodily mutilation, it also seeks to explore the way in which the dislocations of past violence might be stitched together again in the interpretive present. The temporal dislocation between the violent passions of Christ and his followers and the later moment of their memorial apprehension through representation suggests that the originary memorial sites being probed in Circignani's martyrology might be conceived of as sites of collective traumatic memory, belatedly repeated and repurposed in the representational present of late sixteenth-century Rome.¹³¹ Reaching back to the antique origins of the study of memory, these various intersections between violence, traumatic memory and representation become explicit.

According to classical tradition, the art of memory was founded upon a moment of collective trauma. Its invention was credited to a renowned Greek poet, the 'honey-tongued' Simonides of Ceos, and his origin story is recounted in detail by both Quintilian and Cicero. According to Quintilian, Simonides had been engaged by the wealthy Scopas to perform a poem in his honour at a lavish party. Fully utilising his poetic license, Simonides introduced

¹³⁰ In his unpublished autobiography, Alfonso makes a similar point concerning Christ's role as active mnemotechnical artist producing a striking visual image. Apparently Christ himself appeared to Paleotti's spiritual advisor to laud the cardinal's work: 'from the life [he] showed him all the wounds placed on the Shroud, and said that this was the true Shroud...in which with his true blood he impressed all his wounds to leave this exhibition (*mostra*) of his wounds to the world.' Italian quoted in Fanti (1983), p.373.

¹³¹ The temporality of trauma is always based on the concept of a belated return, as Dominick LaCapra (1994, p.174) notes: 'trauma is effected belatedly through repetition, for the numbingly traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only after a temporal gap or period of latency.'

unsanctioned praise of the twin-gods Castor and Pollux into his panegyric 'for the sake of embellishment.' Incensed, the conceited host withheld half of the stipulated sum from the poet, advising him to 'apply for the other half to the deities whose praises he had chosen to celebrate.' Shortly afterwards, Simonides was called away from the banquet by a message that two men wanted to see him. As soon as he had departed, the dining room collapsed, crushing the guests 'so horribly that those who went to look for the bodies of the dead, in order to bury them, were unable to recognize, by any mark, not only their faces, but even their limbs.' In the context of this chapter's discussion of the piles of flesh repeatedly depicted to the point of nausea in the Santo Stefano frescoes and their relationship to the desubjectifying power of the *ungestalt*, the significance of this tale is obvious: for the horror of the scene that greeted those hastening to Scopas' ruined house is centred upon the unrecognizability of the dead, whose faces and limbs appear to have disintegrated into non-signifying inert matter.

Within the narrative logic of the story, the greatest problem caused by the fatal building collapse was not the tragedy of the mass-mortality of Scopas' guests. It was, rather, the mangled confusions of their corpses, so scattered and twisted that the families who came to collect them were unable to sort them out or recognize them. Equally significant, however, is Simonides' response to the sight of carnage that he so narrowly avoided: thanks to his excellent memory, he 'points out the bodies to their friends in the exact order in which they had sat.'¹³² The poet's prodigious recollection of the party's seating arrangements saves the day, enabling the re-joining of bodies and identities through the art of memory.¹³³ In his version of this story Cicero praises Simonides' clear memory, noting that it has paved the way for the 'separate interment' of the party guests.

¹³² Quintilian (2001), p.65.

¹³³ Ricci adapted the originary story of Simonides for his Chinese audience, transforming Simonides into the 'noble Western poet' Xi-mo-ni-de in the process. See Spence, p.2.

The pious Roman sisters Prassede and Pudenziana's lifelong project of collecting the fragmented bodies and blood of the city's Early Christian martyrs was motivated by just such a desire to ensure the possibility of their respectful and separate interment. Simonides in his turn, possessing the unique artistic capacity to recreate the dislocated past, is the guarantor of collective memory, and crucially provides the grounds for subsequent appropriate commemorative practices.¹³⁴ As Tamás Bényei and Alexandra Stara have argued, the anecdote makes clear that whilst trauma 'cannot simply be erased, just as it cannot be properly remembered, it can be made into a culturally useful discourse, something that is indispensable for the restoration of what the disaster shattered into an inoperative community.'¹³⁵ Simonides' gesture of commemoration emerges as a salvific and restorative act, enabling the literal reconstitution of dismembered bodies that had been stripped of their identity and severed from their past by the obliterating force of violence. The capacity to remember, in other words, emerges as one of the most powerful cognitive counters to the obliterating logic of the *ungestalt*.

Not all scholars have been convinced that the art of memory's originary myth proffers such an optimistic vision of the quasi-miraculous power of mnemonic recall, however. Recognising the valence that the tale of Simonides might exert in the discourse of trauma studies, Dubravka Ugresic has extended and problematised the original text in an exploration of the political stakes of remembering in the aftermath of the Balkans war. In Ugresic's revised version, Simonides's post-traumatic poetic reconstruction is cut violently short when a particularly powerful after-shock causes the remaining ruins to collapse, killing him and the mourners who had assembled to commemorate their soon to be identified relatives. Without the

¹³⁴ Underscoring the visual nature of the poet's actions, Simonides was known in cinquecento image-theory as one of the first enunciators of the dictum *ut pictura poesis* – 'painting is mute poetry and poetry is speaking painting.' See R. Alberti (1585), p.21; G. Paleotti (1582), p.147.

¹³⁵ Bényei and Stara (2014), p.4.

aid of the deceased poet, the witnesses of the second disaster are unable to identify the majority of the newly dead, consigning them to oblivion along with the initial victims, the key to whose identities rested solely with Simonides. The past, for Ugresic, 'must be articulated in order to become memory.'¹³⁶ In the absence of someone capable of conjuring memory from the dis(re)membered fragments of time, the forgotten past 'behaves like an incomplete body, which from time to time suffers from the syndrome of the phantom limb.'¹³⁷

Ugresic's re-appropriation of the origin story of Simonides challenges the political feasibility of practices of re-membering, and suggests that the body of the past always tends to 'slip away' from the present despite the best efforts of history's mnemotechnicians. We might still remember the poet Simonides of Ceos, but the victims of the building collapse in Thessaly have long been transformed from real people into the interchangeable elements of a parable. A similar tension is at work in the Santa Pudenziana fresco. The sacred memory of the sisters has been ensured within the logic of the painting, their position in the hierarchy of the blessed guaranteed by the crowns of martyrdom being proffered by the angel descending towards them from above. But the pallid bodies of the victims of the earlier massacre tell a different story. They are immortalised here not as Christian saints, intercessors for mankind invested with a supernatural and super-temporal existence. Instead, they are imaged as uncomfortably real corpses, agglomerations of putrefying greenish flesh, stained with streaks of dried red blood. The head that Prassede deposits in the well on the left is unambiguously and permanently dead, eyes forever closed (fig.186). Certainly the scene is memorable by the standards of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, down to the striking red smears of painted blood disfiguring the white skin of the dead (fig.187), but the vexed question of *exactly* what it is about the bloody narrative that its audience was expected to remember

¹³⁶ Ugresic (1996), p.39.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p.36.

remains unresolved. For the viewer within the real space of the church, where really are the signs of redemption in these bodies? Ultimately this scene speaks as much to the impious desecration of the holy body as much as it eulogises its reverential reconstitution.

The fraught question of whether violent imagery can operate as an effective spur for the reconstitutive project of collective memorialisation or whether it instead dramatises the inherently irrecoverable nature of an unruly and dismembered past is at the centre of the interpretive difficulties posed by the Santo Stefano frescoes. To merely recall the violence inherent to these scenes of dismemberment would be an inadequate spectatorial response. The positive utility accorded to excessively violent imagery by earlier theorists such as Albertus Magnus and Thomas Bradwardine was far from unproblematic in the climate of the Counter-Reformation. Reproving depictions of ‘people drinking blood from the veins of living humans, or others who roast human bodies and make a banquet of them, distributing entire limbs around as a dish for each diner,’ Gabriele Paleotti writes that if such images are shorn from specific moral contextualisation then they not only lack utility, but also ‘greatly deprave the human senses.’¹³⁸ Instead of

¹³⁸ G. Paleotti, p.416. For original see appendix 1. Though he doesn’t make the link himself, Paleotti’s seems to implicitly evoke the spectre of New-World cannibalism, especially potent in an era busily codifying the stereotype of the savage native threatening European colonisers in the New World and distant islands of the Pacific. Representations of this theme are legion, from the woodcuts accompanying Hans Staden’s 1550s account of his captivity amongst the Tupinambas of Brazil to Theodore de Bry’s *Grand Voyages to America* later in the century. One of the earliest examples is Jörg Breu’s 1515 rendering of *Cannibals in Java*, illustrating the travelogue of Italian adventurer Ludovico di Varthema. Here a naked man is butchered on a wooden pallet even as he is being pushed into a smokehouse which will cure his remains for consumption (fig.188). Though beyond the scope of this thesis, a number of Circignani’s frescoes for the English college as recorded by Cavalieri depict cannibalistic acts every bit as depraved as those troubling Paleotti’s fevered imagination. The engraving ostensibly depicting the martyrdom of Edmund Campion for example appears to recast this act of capital punishment into the preparations for a heretical feast along Paleottian lines (fig.189). If the figure stuffing a limp arm into a simmering cauldron of body fragments in the right foreground is a perverse travesty of a chef, then the other figures in the scene also take on culinary roles in the preparation of this unholy banquet. Behind him a butcher’s block supports the prone form of a human body, over which another figure raises a meat cleaver. This narrative detail is an obvious repurposing of the

remaining passive consumers of this memorable violence, therefore, the novices of the German-Hungarian College were expected to become active producers of memory, furnishing the images with the contextualisation that would confer meaning upon them.

Following the pious examples of Prassede, Pudenziana, and their classical antecedent Simonides, the viewer becomes tasked with restoring the identities and bodies of these memorably dismembered bodies. At Santo Stefano, however, there are no overt scenes of bodily restitution in the cycle, no vignettes of pious Christians reverently collecting up body parts in order to enable more effective veneration as in Prudentius's ekphrastic poem or the anonymous Santa Pudenziana canvas. Clearly the observer outside the frame here cannot match the eagle-eyed followers of Saint Hippolytus, and nor can (s)he bring meaning to those amorphous piles of bodies in the manner of Simonides, armed with the salvific mental image of a pre-traumatic seating-plan. Nonetheless, the fundamental necessity of arresting the logic of defacement inherent to extreme violence is still explored in the frescoes, which are centrally engaged with the problem of returning visual records of corporeal formlessness to the realm of the universally comprehensible. In order to demonstrate how they attempt to achieve this, the final section of this chapter will explore in greater detail the semiotic relationship between visual and verbal expression within the church.

'butcher-figure' of Santo Stefano's 27th fresco, and renders unmistakable the set of cannibalistic associations that were implicit in the earlier image. In another image in the series a human corpse has metamorphosed into the carcass of a slaughtered animal, torso slit open from neck to groin, as it is carried to a butcher's table for dismemberment (fig. 190).

Section IV: Images, Texts and Uncertain Signs

To constitute the field of the image as a linguistic system is in fact to forearm oneself against the suspect marginal zones of the mystical experience: language is the guarantor of orthodox faith...

- Roland Barthes¹³⁹

The narrative scenes of martyrdom depicted along the ambulatory walls of Santo Stefano constitute only one element of the fresco cycle, and any account of these works that limits itself entirely to the realm of visual mimesis is only a partial one. Beneath each painting an illusionistic inscription tersely recounts the names of the martyrs and the Roman emperors under whom they were persecuted, whilst resonant psalmic quotations are inscribed above. The large alphabetical capital letters jarringly superimposed in livid red pigment onto the pictorial surface of each scene link the images and key captions, inevitably recalling Paleotti's strategy of inscription in the *Explication's* opening diagram. As an interpretive aid it is a simple one, apparently owing more to the didactic world of the textbook or cartography than the illusionistic world of the Albertian *historia*, whose reliance on the viewer's suspension of disbelief it violently ruptures (fig.190).¹⁴⁰ As with Paleotti's *Explication*, it is in the relationship between image and citation that the tension between hagiography's preoccupation with establishing stable saintly identities and the radical dis-identifying nature of represented violence becomes explicit.

¹³⁹ Barthes (1976), p.67.

¹⁴⁰ To take one example, Ulisse Aldrovandi was adamant that text and image should be inextricable in his natural encyclopaedia, expecting his readers to 'alternate smoothly between textual and visual examination and identification' in a work replete with detailed textual description, images and explanatory captions. See Duroselle-Melish (2016), p.35. For a broader evaluation of the indispensable role of text in sixteenth-century anatomical and botanical imagery, see Kusukawa (2012).

The central importance of these ancillary inscriptions and letters to the interpretive unity of the fresco cycle is explicitly referenced in Lauretano's obituary, whose author asserts that the rector was 'the first' patron to have depicted 'the suffering of the holy martyrs along with annotations outlining the persons depicted and the manner of their torments.'¹⁴¹ The symbiotic relationship between word and image proposed by the fresco cycle thus appears to have been recognised by a contemporary viewership. Image-text ensembles in the form of emblematic images combined with epigrammatic poems featured frequently in the didactic programmes of the Jesuit colleges more generally. According to the 1584 Annual Letter, the pope himself attended the inauguration ceremony of the Roman College's great hall in 1584, and 'enjoyed contemplating the beauty [of word and image] together.'¹⁴² Scholars of Santo Stefano frequently reference the content of these citations in their works, animated by a conviction that Circignani's images are largely dependent on their textual hagiographic sources.¹⁴³ But the visual impact of these impressive fictive marble panels, and the exact nature of their relationship to the frescoes they supplement, is much less frequently considered.

Thomas Buser has convincingly linked the cycle's identification system of keyed inscriptions and letters to Jerome Nadal's illustrated book of gospel meditations, the *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines, Adnotationes et Meditationes*, published in 1593 but whose preparatory drawings by Giovanni Battista Fiammeri were already circulating in manuscript form in 1580.¹⁴⁴ Over the course of 153 engravings, the series recounts the gospel stories in a clear graphic style, with multiple separate scenes depicted simultaneously in each plate. Beneath each image Latin captions provide

¹⁴¹ Original quoted in Haskell (1957).

¹⁴² See Villoslada (1954), p.152.

¹⁴³ See Monssen (1982a), p.40. Scholars have generally judged the adoption of this device at Santo Stefano harshly. Ciardi is representative, arguing that the letters 'dissolve the tension of the events and render the situations almost ridiculous.' Ciardi (1997), unpaginated. Korricks also notes the challenge the letters pose to Albertian illusionism (p.171).

¹⁴⁴ Buser (1976), p.424.

laconic descriptions of the events recounted above, which are further elaborated as spiritual prompts in detailed annotations that strongly recall Alfonso Paleotti's complex reciprocal image-text apparatuses.¹⁴⁵ As at Santo Stefano, letters superimposed onto the scenes link image and text, proposing a virtual cartographic itinerary through the multiple narratives to the reader-viewer.¹⁴⁶ The format of the Santo Stefano frescoes closely adheres to the model proposed in Nadal's text, both in terms of the interaction between image and citation and the spatial arrangement of the scenes themselves, as even a cursory comparison between the two illustrates (figs. 192&193). For Buser, these systems of captioning demonstrate a conservative conviction that visual representation should simply function as an instrument for instruction or propaganda. No doubt there is some truth to this, but one can extend this argument much further: whilst the imposition of textual inscriptions into the visual ensembles at Santo Stefano seeks to impose uniform interpretive parameters on the frescoes, they also implicitly highlight the fraught nature of such a pedagogic strategy.

Reaching beyond the well-established paradigm of Nadal's verbal-visual project, I would like to draw attention to a heretofore unexamined early-Christian precedent for the format of the inscriptions accompanying the Santo Stefano frescoes. This precedent lies in the late fourth-century *Epigrammata Damasiana*, a series of 59 metrical inscriptions that similarly seek to assemble the fragmented strands of a historically violent originary memory for the collective use of the present.¹⁴⁷ Damasus is regarded as one of the first ecclesiastical figures to systematically instrumentalise the memories of the martyrs of the early church, characterised by Dennis Trout

¹⁴⁵ For an account of the way in which word and image combine to form an interactive peregrination through the gospels in the *Adnotationes*, see Melion (1998).

¹⁴⁶ That Jesuit-commissioned imagery often instantiated a kind of spiritual pilgrimage through the space-time of the numinous was most eloquently argued in the context of the first decorations of the Gesù by Hibbard (1972).

¹⁴⁷ For a reconstruction of the text and format of the epigrams, see Ferrua (1942). For English translations, see Trout (2015).

as an 'impresario of the cult of the Roman saints.'¹⁴⁸ According to Damasus's near contemporary biography in the *Liber Pontificalis*, the pope 'searched for and discovered the bodies of many saints, and also proclaimed their acts in verses.'¹⁴⁹ Bestowing new-found relevance to the martyr-shrines of the city's periphery, the pope had them adorned with architectural ensembles, visual ornamentation, and most significantly of all, epigrammatic inscriptions naming the saints housed there and extolling their virtues. These inscriptions performed paratextual work very similar to the captions at Santo Stefano, and were carved onto marble tablets located either above the graves of the saints or set into the walls of churches in 'exquisite red letters' (fig.194).¹⁵⁰

As Marianne Sághy writes, Damasus's epigrams functioned as 'building blocks in the construction of the collective identity of the Roman church.'¹⁵¹ The inscriptions were far more than simple collations of established hagiographic knowledge, and form the first large-scale textual evidence of a widespread devotion to martyr-cults in Rome. According to Alan Thacker, knowledge of the Roman martyrs in the fourth century was scanty at best, and Damasus's inscriptions were as generative as they were commemorative:

Damasus' saints have no history and often no name. Far from blotting out, or selecting from a countless multitude, he was adding and elaborating, seriously enriching Rome's martyrial traditions by providing the city with saints and feast days that had never before existed or had been remembered so dimly that they had to be reinvented.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸Ibid, p.2.

¹⁴⁹ English text given in *The Book of Pontiffs* (1989), p.29.

¹⁵⁰ Sághy (2012), p.248; Bremmer and Johnson (2001), p.140.

¹⁵¹ Sághy (2012), pp.17-18.

¹⁵² Thacker (2007), p.20.

Following the logic of this argument, Damasus' undertaking was as much about *creating* the memories of the martyrs he was commemorating as it was about recovering them from the oblivion into which they had fallen. The very act of naming the saints that apparently occupied these graves thus carried serious political and cultural signification. A number of martyred saints even received their formal introduction to the historical record in the epigrams of Damasus: thirteen of the martyrs eulogised by the pope had not previously featured in the *depositio martyrum* maintained by the Church of Rome, a kind of martyrological ur-list that detailed the names, burial places and feast-days of the city's known martyrs. Amongst these are names that feature in the inscriptions beneath the Santo Stefano frescoes: Nereus, Achilleus, Anastasius, Faustinus, Chrysanthius and Daria were all conjured into the hagiographic spotlight by the authority of Damasus's epigrams.

In order to bring his project of instituting an alternative history of Rome through the prism of martyred bodies to fruition, Damasus brought the permanent authority of the text, in the form of inscription, to bear upon these corporeal remains. The epigrams inevitably privileged certain loci of sanctity and types of holiness over others, harnessing the commemorative power of memory in order to trace an orthodox history of the faith over its heterodox reality. By adding inscriptions to the previously abandoned or unknown resting places of the martyrs, Damasus literally set their stories in stone, ensuring that his carefully curated narrative would pass into official historical record. The pope's promotion of a specific sacred geography of which he was the sole custodian was part of a wider strategy to assert authority over a church divided by sedition, a historical situation that would have resonated with the Tridentine institution battling to retain its authority as rightful heir to the Apostolic mission.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ For Damasus' attempts to assert control as leader of a unified contemporary church over rival claims, see Curran (2000), pp.129-57. Damasus' epigrams were well-known in the late sixteenth century. Bosio transcribes the inscriptions he finds at martyrs' shrines across the city's cemeteries in *Roma Sotteranea*, noting that Damasus enriched his own family tomb with epigrams symbolically linking them to

The inscriptions with which Damasus adorned the city's martyr-shrines bear striking visual resemblances to the explanatory plaques beneath Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano. Red and black letters are exquisitely carved into pristine white marble in one, whilst red and black letters are illusionistically incised into fictively painted marble plaques in the other, semiotic gashes recalling the readable wounds of Christ as described by Paleotti, Borromeo and Tesauro (figs. 194 and 195). Damasus employed one of the foremost calligraphers of late antiquity, Furius Dionysius Filocalus, to incise his poems into the marble tablets, and his typography closely matches that used in the Santo Stefano captions.¹⁵⁴ What's more, a number of the epigrams were installed at shrines already furnished with images, following a common early-Christian tradition that linked images and inscriptions in unified ensembles. According to Michael Roberts, the differing rhetorical functions of the two media, striking images capable of 'arresting the attention and arousing the emotions' of the viewer on the one hand, and brief inscriptions suited to 'paraenetic purposes' on the other, were 'employed as mutually reinforcing and semantically coextensive' in such ensembles, a description that accords with my own characterisation of Santo Stefano's image-texts.¹⁵⁵

Beyond the inevitably hypothetical question of the formal influence of Filocalus' calligraphic art in the sixteenth century, wider methodological parallels can be drawn between Damasus's epigrammatic programme of martyrial commemoration and the verbal-visual martyrology at Santo

martyrs in the catacombs (p.261); Severano cites them frequently in his 1630 *Memorie Sacre* (esp.440-1), and Baronio also cites the epigrams in his accounts of some of the more obscure Roman saints in his authoritative *Martyrologium Romanum*. See Tosini (2007), p.74. In an appendix to the *Annales Ecclesiastici* meanwhile, Baronio collected and transcribed a large number of the epigrams. See Mazzoleni (2009), p.415. It would thus be surprising if Lauretano was not fully cognisant of the similarities between the Santo Stefano panels and Damasus' inscriptions.

¹⁵⁴ For Filocalus see Salzman (1990), p.11; Ferrua (1942), pp.21-35.

¹⁵⁵ Roberts (1993), p.153.

Stefano Rotondo. At the most basic level, both ecclesiastical patrons produced monumental devotional schemata in which textual inscription played a central role in fixing saintly identity to specific geographical and corporeal locations. More fundamentally, both projects derive their rationale from a systematic attempt to revive, re-create and re-invent the hazy histories of the earliest martyrs who glorified the church they served. Damasus' programme of embellishment at the shrines of the martyrs carried the cult of the martyrs and their veneration into the public sphere. At the same time, the image of the Christian past that was brought into the light of public worship was one that spoke to the needs of Damasus as leader of the contemporary Christian community. This dual-project on the one hand publicised or even invented the heroic histories of the martyrs in order to enable their appropriation as common cultural currency, and on the other controlled that appropriation in the name of specific contemporary institutional exigency. Thus, even if Damasus didn't entirely invent the martyrs he eulogised, as SÁghy notes, 'he made them work for *his* church.'¹⁵⁶

One might describe the martyrial projects of patrons such as Michele Lauretano and Gabriele Paleotti in a very similar way. Damasus sought for and located the bodies of the saints he wished to instrumentalise in the Roman catacombs and churches, stabilising his privileged relationship with them through inscriptions that physically joined his name with theirs. Lauretano and Paleotti, meanwhile, performed their own renewed pious searches for early Christian martyrs in patristic texts and records such as those created by Damasus, and established their relationship with them through image-text ensembles in their titular churches. In both cases, it was a mediation between sacred site, holy body, representation and inscription that brought these respective projects to fruition. Acts of naming and inscription have thus been associated with commemorative practices surrounding the cult of the martyr-saints from the beginning. Re-membering the holy figures of antiquity is a process inextricably bound up with the

¹⁵⁶ SÁghy (2010), p.18.

institution of a language through which they can be effectively described, and the act of naming emerges as a strategy of memorial invention as much as one of commemoration.¹⁵⁷

Santo Stefano's textual captions, and the alphabetical characters that link them to the images, are thus more than simple descriptions of the visual narratives they accompany. To adapt a term from literary theory, they are what Gerard Genette terms paratextual; that is, whilst apparently constituting a peripheral addendum to the main work, easily cropped from view by overzealous photographers, the captions perform essential contextualising work in seeking to guide the viewer's interpretation of the scenes.¹⁵⁸ Existing in a threshold space between the work and the world, the captions and alphabetical characters actively invent the memories of the martyrs they serve to name and categorise, defining what properly 'belongs' to the representational field and thus taking the first steps towards proscribing its meaning. To take an earlier cited example, even though the visual signifiers relating to the death of Hippolytus the Euripidean tragic hero and Saint Hippolytus the early-Christian martyr are identical, the caption accompanying this scene at Santo Stefano fundamentally 'fixes' this violent death as belonging to the latter, a deacon of Saint Lawrence martyred during the third-century (figs. 196 and 197). The connoted interpretive pagan parallel has been suppressed by the caption's linguistic anchor, which seeks to delimit the interpretive parameters within which the viewer can operate. Working in tandem with the captions, the red-letters in their turn become the eyes of the devoted beholder, reforming identities that would be irrevocably

¹⁵⁷ That naming constitutes a vital precursor to more elaborate acts of veneration is illustrated by the genesis of Circignani's martyrological fresco cycle at San Tommaso di Canterbury. The cycle was paid for by George Gilbert, who had escaped persecution in England and fled to Rome in 1581. According to an obituary written by Acquaviva, Gilbert's 'great veneration for the martyrs' and 'ardent desire to become one' formed the impetus for the commission. Crucially, however, before 'he caused their acts of martyrdom to be represented in paintings,' Gilbert 'took great pains to learn the names of all the English martyrs of former and modern times.' See Richardson (2005), p.259.

¹⁵⁸ Genette (1991), p.261.

lost but for their intervention. One might argue that this is the triumphant return of the sign, signification emerging from the yawning aporia of defacing violence. For 'to speak of signs,' as Groebner points out, 'always means to speak of order.'¹⁵⁹ An insistence on textual identification then, such as that enacted by the Santo Stefano captions, has the apotropaic power to overcome the subjectivity-destroying power of represented corporeal disintegration, 'to banish the wordless horror of the *ungestalt*.'¹⁶⁰

The captioning system provides the key, I argue, for understanding the way in which violence is mediated for the viewer at Santo Stefano. Although the Santo Stefano fresco cycle depicts the martyred body in all its gory abjection in graphic imagery that imprints itself vividly into the wax of memory, the re-inscription of sanctity effected through text simultaneously seeks to point the way towards its sublimation. If the obscene body, as Lynda Nead asserts, is the 'body without order or containment,' the kind of body that forms the centrepiece of fresco 28, where jellied eye and twisted bowel seep freely from stricken corporeal interior, then the re-inscription of identity through alphabetical key-captions is what keeps that obscenity at bay, what brings the obscene back into the realm of the comprehensible. If the *ungestalt* constitutes a kind of subjectivity destroying horror that exists beyond the confines of language, then it follows that any project which attempts to overcome it will be centrally concerned with the linguistic realm.¹⁶¹ As soon as the *ungestalt* can be articulated or defined through the structures of language, then the formless, indefinable character of its power has been brought to heel. Tying *ungestalt* images of martyrdom to language is thus an attempt to transform the labile nature of violent representation into a coherent and fundamentally readable text.

¹⁵⁹ Groebner (2004), p.129.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.155.

¹⁶¹ Groebner (p.127) describes the *ungestalt* as an 'evocation of the unutterable and the unrepresentable – of a horror consistently presented as formless and beyond language.'

If Lauretano was confident that harnessing the dual-interpretive power of word and image together could ensure that judiciously conceived martyrological imagery would inspire the 'right' response in its pious observers, such logocentrism should not, perhaps, be taken for granted. In his clandestine diary of daily life at Rome's Jesuit English College in the 1580s, the Elizabethan spy and *agent provocateur* Anthony Munday notes that some of the novices there frequently flagellated themselves in their chambers before images of the crucifixion, whilst imploring the image to observe and acknowledge their blood-letting. According to Munday, one student even died during one of these image-inspired excesses of penitence.¹⁶² Such an immoderate response was certainly not envisaged by either Alfonso Paleotti or Michele Lauretano in their respective attempts to draw meditative attention to the lineaments of the martyred body, but it seems that mobilising the abjection of the disintegrating human form in a representational context was a project that inherently challenged the boundaries of appropriate devotional practice.

Munday's account may be largely propaganda, but nonetheless reminds us that exploiting graphic violence as a conduit of hagiography risked activating an unruly affective power that could mislead impressionable viewers. Whilst a number of the most prominent late-sixteenth-century martyrologists were Jesuits keen to exploit the genre's didactic potential, many in the order's hierarchy were also concerned by such imagery's tendency to exalt excessive emotions.¹⁶³ Policing the variety of possible phenomenological responses to graphic martyrological imagery was a difficult endeavour, as Munday's text attests. The inscriptive word-image ensembles of Santo Stefano can be read as simultaneously an attempt to reduce the incomprehensibility of corporeal chaos that accompanies the violence of martyrdom to the order of established, intelligible religious

¹⁶² Munday (1980), p.56.

¹⁶³ For the increasing regulation of excessive Ignatian emotionality as the order grew, see Zupanov (2005), p.113.

doctrine, and a vivid exemplification of the impossibility of such a project. If the recurring invasions of the pictorial field by textual apparatuses at Santo Stefano strive to stave off the unruly presence of the *ungestalt*, the effectiveness of such an attempt could only ever be contingent on the pliability of the disciplined observer.

CONCLUSION

MARTYROLOGICAL COUNTER-MEMORIES AND THE MARTYRS OF FANO

Taking the discursively flexible *figura* of the Christian martyr as its starting point, this thesis has sought to demonstrate both the productive possibilities and the interpretive anxieties that surrounded the visual representation of graphic violence in Counter-Reformation Rome. To conclude, I would like to draw attention to a source that implicitly showcases the propensity of artistic appropriations of the violated body to exceed the interpretive boundaries that putatively govern their interpretation. Although this thesis has been largely dependent on material produced from the perspective of the cultural institutions that ostensibly controlled the flow of information in the early-modern city, the Church and its patrons were not alone in appropriating the martyred body for their own ends. One site of opposition to these narratives was the satirical genre of the pasquinade: pasquinades took the form of dialogues, poems and even musical compositions airing anonymous grievances attached to the damaged sculptural bodies of the ancient statues of Pasquino and Marforio (figs.198&199, as depicted in the 1593 edition of Cavalieri's *Antiquarum Statuarum Urbis Romae*). Another kind of image-text, pasquinades often featured visual representations enriching their textual content, and were frequently read out to crowds gathered around the statue.¹ After their initial appearances pasted onto the speaking statues, they were regularly copied and sold on to wider audiences, ensuring the dissemination and survival of their satire.

¹ Hunt (2016b), p.192.

Pasquino came to be adopted as a subversive and foul-mouthed commentator on urban life, and in one striking case the statue weighed in on one of the central issues that has animated this study: that is, the pictorial and theological contradictions inherent to the exploitation of graphic violence as a spur to devotion in martyrological imagery. Although this pasquinade first appeared on the streets of Rome in 1537 and thus emerged from the earlier cultural and political environment of Paul III's Rome, its negotiation of the complexity of martyrological representation powerfully resonates with the debates this thesis has traced. The pasquinade takes the form of a dialogue between 'a painter of certain new martyrs' and Pasquino himself, and refers to rumours swirling around the pope's illegitimate son and future Duke of Parma and Piacenza, Pier Luigi Farnese (father of Ottavio, Ranuccio and Alessandro).² The rumours concerned Pier Luigi's behaviour in the Marche town of Fano during a visit there in 1537, the same year he had been granted the coveted position of Captain General of the Church by his father (fig.200). Contemporary chroniclers claimed that Farnese had violently raped the up-and-coming young bishop Cosimo Gheri, who died from his injuries shortly thereafter.

According to the Florentine humanist historian Benedetto Varchi, Gheri's learning and holy bearing 'was marvellous, and almost incredible,' an aggravating factor that rendered the libidinous frenzy of the out-of-control aristocrat all the more abhorrent. Varchi relates the vicious nature of the assault in salacious detail. Farnese is so riddled with syphilis that he requires the support of his henchmen to stand, as the bishop is held down and stripped of his clerical vestments. Gheri's desperate protests and invocations of God and the saints are futile, and Farnese's lackeys stuff rags down his throat to keep him quiet. As a consequence of the brutal violence he had suffered, 'but much more from the shame and incomparable sadness that he conceived in his soul,' Gheri reportedly died forty days later. Varchi laments that far from being ashamed of his monstrous crime, Farnese boasted about

² For Pier Luigi's position in the Farnese dynasty see Partridge (1978), pp.14-18.

it, and escaped any punishment from his father who dismissed the event as the product of 'youthful high spirits.' What was worse, the story gave potent material to Lutherans in Germany looking for any excuse to deride the Papacy, and they gleefully noted that the Pope had come up with 'a new method of martyring saints.'³ The controversy of the so-called 'Rape of Fano' remains better known as a tool of Lutheran propaganda, but the first, sensational accounts of the event, including mocking references to martyrological fabrication, derived from within the Papal States themselves.⁴

The dialogue between the supposed would-be painter of the martyrs of Fano and Pasquino opens with the perplexed artist worrying about the political and theological exigencies of the work he has been assigned, along with the conundrum of how to ensure his completed painting accords to the theoretical dictates of pictorial decorum:

Because the church wants to canonise
The Bishop of Fano and all the others
That have been left, youths and angels,
By Pier Luigi badly martyred (*mal martirizate*),

And they want me to paint the figures
Holding the instruments that conveyed them
To death, and the martyrs themselves curse anyone
Who renders a martyrdom shamefully

And I who call myself a painter, would like to know
From you, our Pasquino who knows everything,

³ Varchi (1721), Vol.16, pp.639-40.

⁴ The first English account of Farnese's deeds comes from Richard Moryson's 1539 polemic *An Exhortation to styrre all Englyshe men to the defence of theyr countreye*, where the author delights in the propagandist value of the tale. See Parks (1962), pp.193-200. Cinquecento Italian reformers such as Pier Paolo Vergerio and Francesco Negri also referenced the incident in pamphlets penned in critique of Paul III. See Casalini (2015), p.36, n.12. For a summation as to the arguments of the story's original source, see Schutte (1977), p.190, n.9.

Which instruments in hand they should have?⁵

Of course church authorities had no intention of canonising any of Farnese's alleged victims, but it is worth suspending our disbelief in order to briefly consider the kind of commission for which the painter has been supposedly engaged: the artist has been hired to produce a commemorative work honouring the *fama martyrii* of the bishop, or his public reputation as someone who died heroically for the faith, a work which might ideally become a locus of veneration for his cult and thus justify his upcoming elevation to the celestial ranks.⁶

The nature of this commission would have been in line with contemporary hagiographic practice, and the link between a successful canonisation campaign and concerted programmes of visual propaganda in the early-modern period has been well documented. The Counter-Reformation in particular saw a flood of devotional images depicting recently deceased figures of the new orders in attempts to establish a cult of worship around them, and without the visual reinforcement provided by the dissemination of their portraits, candidates' sanctity trials had little chance of success.⁷ But representing the 'heroic virtue' that was a prerequisite of sanctity in visual form was not always a simple matter - key signifiers of a saintly life such as 'the mortification of the flesh, the search for the divine, and the experience of devotional rapture' did not easily lend themselves to easily apprehensible imagery.⁸

If depicting the abstract characteristics of mystical experience was challenging, however, the Fano pasquinade vividly demonstrates the ways in which producing appropriate commemorative images of martyrs might be

⁵ Collected in Marucci (1983), p.530. For original see appendix 1.

⁶ For an outline of the increasing codification of *fama sanctitatis* in the late cinquecento, see Parigi (2012), pp.80-106.

⁷ Ditchfield (1992), pp.379-422.

⁸ Hills (2008), p.553.

fundamentally impossible. It goes without saying that the bishop's brutal violation could never be represented as proof of his sanctity outside the subversive world of the pasquinian satire, but as more conventional and acceptable kinds of martyrdom imagery relied on narrative signifiers very similar to Varchi's detailed description of the event, the impossible task of the perplexed painter can be seen as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* for the entire discourse of visual martyrology. The bishop's passive helplessness in the face of infamy, his appeals to God and the saints during his ordeal, the stripping of his garments, the repulsive attacker whose moral turpitude is reflected in his decrepit physiognomy, the alternation of threats and exhortations delivered at the point of a knife, the wicked henchmen who enable and spur the villain on: all of these details could just as feasibly derive from the pious hagiographical sources I have referred to throughout this thesis were it not for the social identity of the perpetrator and the sexual nature of the crime itself.

The very absurdity attendant to linking these two sources, despite their obvious similarities, is itself instructive. As Robert Mills writes, although the spectre of rape is often a central concern of virgin-martyr texts and images, 'actual forced sex remains unrepresentable within Christian symbolic order, a theoretical possibility that is not realisable as such.'⁹ To undergo sexual violence constitutes a *de facto* disqualification of the victim's holy status. By contravening this convention and painting the newest additions to the ranks of the martyrs as victims of church-sponsored sexual violence, the pasquinade undermines both the heroic possibilities of martyrdom and the feasibility of policing a visual language that relies so fully on potentially excessive emotional responses.

That the Bishop of Fano and his fellow victims are 'mal martirizzate' by the Pope's son is a paradox. In Christian theories of martyrdom there can be no such thing as being 'badly martyred.' One is either martyred or not

⁹ Mills (2005), p.116.

martyred; the violence entailed in the former is inherently transformative, an essential and positive proof of the sufferer's innate sanctity. If a saint can be badly martyred, the whole basis for his or her sanctity is brought into question. The violence perpetrated by the Pope's son on the body of the young bishop ultimately has the opposite effect of that committed by the pockmarked henchmen who strip and torture the similarly youthful Artemius in Bartolomeo Cesi's preparatory drawing for the Bologna cathedral cycle, for example (fig.121). Even though Gheri's holiness was almost otherworldly according to Varchi, he is permanently disqualified from ascending the ladder of sanctity because of the nature of the crimes committed against him.

This thesis has pointed a number of times to the powerful link drawn between physiognomic signifiers and holiness in early-modern theories of sanctity. Bodies are canvasses on which signs of sanctity or damnation are readily inscribed; if a central aspect of the 'heroic virtue' that came to be increasingly regarded as an important signifier of the holiness possessed by a candidate for sanctity was suffering the marks and pains of Christ's passion with willing endurance, then the infamous signs of corporeal degradation to which Gheri has been subjected emerge as a kind of dark analogue to those more easily categorisable wounds.¹⁰ The pasquinade seems to indicate that the enormous crimes of Farnese, and the inadequate attempts to gloss over them in the Curia, have somehow ruptured the coherence of the relationship between martyrdom, sanctity and appropriate acts of veneration. Perhaps it was not entirely coincidental that the Papacy had felt unable to canonise any new saints for fully 65 years between 1523 and 1588.¹¹

In the second stanza of the 1537 Pasquinade the painter laments his hopeless artistic task, acknowledging that it will be impossible for him to

¹⁰ Schutte (1999, p.146) identifies the most common forms of these signifying wounds as relating to the stigmata, those contracted whilst ministering to victims of the plague, or suffered through persecution whilst undertaking missionary work.

¹¹ Burke (1987), pp.48-62.

follow established precedent in representing the martyrs with the attributes of their martyrdoms whilst maintaining the decorum demanded of him by Church patron and the heavenly martyrs alike. The painter has been placed in the impossible position of attempting to reconcile historical truth, artistic decorum and representational clarity, a combination that was forcefully emphasised by every post-Tridentine theorist of sacred art. A brief consideration of these terms as outlined in Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso* makes clear the bind the artist finds himself in. According to the bishop, the painter is one whose 'office is the imitation of the true,' and his verisimilar works must possess a decorum that respects the 'dignity of the person.'¹² The images he produces must be 'entirely free of lasciviousness, as 'obscenity in pictures' makes such a strong impression on the senses that it inevitably corrupts the minds of those who look on.

For Paleotti, each of these prerequisites applies all the more to representations of the saints - painting Peter decapitated or Ignatius flayed when we know they were crucified and thrown to the lions respectively is great error, as is clothing Elias or St. John the Baptist in delicate brocade when they were known to wear animal skins. The saints should never be depicted in ways that are not elevating in some way, which is why one doesn't see Petronius dressing himself, Philip taking a nap or Agatha taking off her shoes. They should instead only be shown engaged in conventionalised heroic and holy tasks which increase their veneration in the minds of the faithful.¹³ Such a brief may have been apparently possible were the artist tasked with depicting those particular saints, but the hypothetical case of Cosimo Gheri explodes the Counter-Reformation fantasy of a martyrological art whose production and reception could be controlled and monitored at every stage by ecclesiastical authorities, reflecting only a conventional form of heroically virtuous sanctity. It is tempting to rethink the difficult task Circignani himself encountered at the Jesuit college churches in

¹² G. Paleotti, p.365; 372.

¹³ Ibid. p.364; 404.

light of the impossible work demanded of Pasquino's supplicant painter. Circignani was likewise enjoined to 'invent' a martyrological idiom in bringing Lauretano's novel commissions to fruition, a particularly difficult task at San Tommaso where he was directly following in the footsteps of the pasquinade by painting the 'new martyrs' of Elizabethan England, whose iconographies had yet to be established.

Pasquino's response to the painter's quandary is as predictable as it is violently homophobic,¹⁴ yet also displays an ironic awareness of established hagiographic strategies and iconographic conventions:

If you were dealing with Saint Blaise,
As he was made to sit on the combs
It's with the combs in his hand you'll see him

Therefore if you want
To paint these modern martyrs (*martiri moderni*)
Who had their arses broken

Then you'll see that you must
Paint them with a cock in their hand or arse
With an inscription (*un motto*) that says 'this belongs to the mule.'¹⁵

Pasquino appeals to precisely the artistic categories and conventions that a contemporary theorist of religious art would recommend to a putative painter of martyrological scenes. His example of Saint Blaise's conventional representation with the iron combs with which he was subsequently tortured echoes a passage from Borromeo's *De Pictura Sacra*, in which he reassures artists that 'it does not violate historical accuracy to show saints

¹⁴ For the common practice of posting homophobic insults on Pasquino, see Barkan (1999), pp.220-2.

¹⁵ Collected in Marucci (1983), p.530. For original see appendix 1.

with their attributes, even if those attributes only arose from the nature of their martyrdom and the final hour of their lives.¹⁶ Whilst a narrative version of Blaise's passion will see the saint being scraped with iron combs, as in his representation at Santo Stefano (fig.201), the iconic, eternalised representation of the risen Blaise will hold in his hands the death-dealing instruments themselves, as in Michelangelo's visioning of the saint in the Sistine *Last Judgement* (fig.202).¹⁷

In logic that is as impeccable as it is blatantly sacrilegious, Pasquino asserts that the painter thus has no choice but to represent the violated Bishop of Fano and 'all the others' with the grotesque equine appendage that hastened their deaths. Significantly, Pasquino even advises the artist to adopt a method of inscription similar to that deployed at Santo Stefano half a century later. This inscription, however, does anything but re-assure the viewer as to the pious nature of the narrative being depicted, as the *didascalie* that accompanied Circignani's Roman martyrologies attempted to do. Instead, it emphasises the monstrous perversion of the act and its unbridgeable distance from the discourses of sanctity into which it is being satirically shoehorned. The privileged role accorded to inscription in Jesuit theories of representation as pioneered by Jerome Nadal has been fatally undermined. In his preface to the *Adnotationes*, Nadal's secretary Diego Jiminez exulted that the image-texts were so effective because they 'vividly impress the event[s] on our imagination' and simultaneously 'put a brake on it so that it can wander less (*il meno che si puo vagabonda*).'¹⁸ But instead of guiding viewers through images along pre-ordained lines of sight and appropriate routes of psychological peregrination, here the elevating spaces of Ignatian spirituality towards which those captions might lead have been crudely and brutally reduced to a basely materialistic act of violent lust.

¹⁶ Borromeo (2010), p.121.

¹⁷ Ironically it was precisely Michelangelo's Blaise that most upset Gilio in his treatise, who interpreted the saint as attempting to commit an act 'poco onesto' with nearby saint Catherine (p.81). Iconographic accuracy wasn't the only banana skin that the martyrological painter might encounter. See also Barnes (1998), p.86.

¹⁸ Nadal (1593), unpaginated.

Completely inverting the intended role of inscription as deployed in the hagiographic visual sources described in this thesis, Protestant retellings of the events at Fano also exploited the implicit authority conferred by the permanency of inscription in an attempt to commemorate the demonic rather than the saintly nature of the Pope and his son. In William Baldwin's 1552 mock pasquinade conducted between 'P. Aesquillus' and 'Mark Forius' entitled the *Wonderful news of the death of Paul the III*, the base satisfactions that Pier Luigi 'wroughte by force vnnaturallye [from the] Byshoppe Fanensis' ensures his condemnation on the Day of Judgement.¹⁹ As he awaits the descent of his father into the abyss in the guise of the Whore of Babylon, Pier Luigi appears 'wrapped in a Goates skinne' surrounded by 'Catamites innumerable.' Emblazoned on his chest in the place where one might expect the noble image of a 'golden Bull, hong a great Priapus.' In a perverse re-articulation of the series of temporary triumphal arches that lined the routes of processions marking the Papal *possesso* which concluded a new pope's ascent to power and also featured in the relic-translation ceremonies described in chapter one, triumphal arches also frame the demonic procession's course, complete with inscriptions recounting the endless litany of sins perpetuated by the Pope and his family.²⁰ Pier Luigi has been eternally fixed to his devilish crimes in the same way that the inscriptions beneath the Santo Stefano frescoes sought to permanently declare the sanctity of the figures depicted above them.

The pasquinade and the story on which it was based may have been crass slanders designed to discredit Farnese, whose unpopularity was such that he was allegedly castrated after his assassination in Piacenza in 1547.²¹ Much scholarly ink has been spilled in attempts to prove or disprove the allegations, and according to some accounts Gheri in reality succumbed to

¹⁹ Baldwin, unpaginated.

²⁰ For temporary arches created for *possesso* processions, see Temple (2011), esp.pp.68-71.

²¹ Lowe (2017), p.44.

malaria after a long illness.²² Ultimately the historical veracity of the 'Rape of Fano' is irrelevant here, however. What is significant is that the anonymous author of this Pasquinade successfully re-articulated the conventional and institutionally recommended norms of martyrological representation to create a wildly sacrilegious, anti-establishment critique of the Church and its attempts to co-opt moments of violent action in the fixation of pious collective-memory. That the narrative of Gheri's 'new kind of martyrdom' was gleefully taken up by Lutheran propagandists further demonstrates that martyrdom and its representation was a potent discourse ripe for co-option - its exportation to the North emerges as an analogous but inverted process to the importation and co-option of martyrdom narratives such as that of the Roermond Charterhouse in Rome. As a dramatic counter to the literary and textual efforts undertaken to restore stable, pious identity to the Roermond martyrs, the 'new martyrs' of Fano provide a vivid exemplification of Gabriele Paleotti's concern that even pious genres of imagery might be interpreted in ways antithetical to their ordinary intentions. The author of the pasquinade has extracted from the sacred discourse of martyrdom the 'deadly poison' of scurrilous satire.

In contradistinction to the commemorative practices centred on the martyred body that this thesis has traced, the Fano pasquinade seems to accord instead to Michel Foucault's conceptualisation of 'counter-memory.' For Foucault, counter-memories are those cultural or memorial precipitates that tenaciously resist easy assimilations into a linear and official historical record, enabling the past to be read 'against the grain.' If institutionally sanctioned histories shine a 'divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadow or casts it into darkness,' then it can be an enlightening practice to juxtapose these kinds of historical discourses with the partial and unreliable counter-histories provided by texts such as the pasquinade.

²² See Parks (1962), p.193.

In this context it is worth recalling the tender emotion demonstrated by Pope Sixtus V as he gazed at the images of the Santo Stefano martyrs in 1589 as recorded in Lauretano's diary. Contemporary pasquinades regularly caricatured the fearsome Sixtus as a bloodthirsty tyrant ever-willing to personally carry out capital sentences,²³ and in one instance he was recorded to have amputated the hands and tongue of the author of a pasquinade calumniating his sister.²⁴ Confronted with the decimated piles of hands and tongues littering the ground at the base of Santo Stefano's 27th fresco, it seems legitimate to question whether the memory of such an anecdote might have rendered the pope's apparent compassion suspect to his contemporaries. Even if the records of Sixtus' two acts of witnessing identical mutilations in 1587 and 1589 cannot be directly equated, the cross-pollination of different kinds of violent spectatorship they imply is a vivid exemplification of the very mutable conditions that surround representations of the violated human form, and renders the possible presence of the Peretti family's Villa Montalto as the site and witness of Ignatius of Antioch's execution in the cycle's eighth fresco (and perhaps even the pope himself gazing down from its *piano nobile*) all the more suggestive (fig.8).²⁵

Images, it might be argued, always already contain within them their own kinds of counter-memories, ghostly presences that keep 'present in the world of today an image of yesterday that contradicts it' in the phrase of Jan Assmann.²⁶ Whilst Tommaso Laureti's 1585 fresco the *Triumph of Christian Religion* dramatically represents paganism's defeat by the unstoppable representational logic of Christianity and the cross, for example, it also

²³ See for example the pasquinades transcribed in Silenzi (1932), p.232; 234 and La Sorsa (1947), p.113. See also Penacchia (1988), p.56.

²⁴ As recounted in a 17th-century biography by Gregorio Leti (1686, pp.197-8). Whilst the historicity of Leti's work has been questioned, Irene Fosi (1993, p84) remarkably demonstrates that his unflattering account was largely based on an earlier critical biography of Sixtus written by none other than Gabriele Paleotti himself.

Leti (1686), pp.197-8.

²⁵ Zeri, p.57.

²⁶ Assmann (1998) p.220.

paradoxically serves to keep alive the memory of classical idolatry in its very desecration (fig.48). Although provisionally destroyed, the statue of Mercury lives on in the fresco as an after-image, a desecrated physiognomy that nevertheless retains its capacity for signification. As Assmann notes, the flow of information across both time and space is a complex process where the present is 'haunted' by a past that is in its turn 'modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present.'²⁷ This bi-directional flow of signification certainly resonates with the repurposing of early-Christian bodies in late-sixteenth-century martyrologies: whilst the past was being re-written in these images of a future-present, the unruly codes of ancient violence nonetheless haunted the present-day images in ways that defied proscription.

And the chain continues: Circignani's frescoes at Santo Stefano in their turn appear to have generated a series of after-images in which the original images and their new contexts combine and transform each other. It seems appropriate to conclude this thesis by pointing to one particularly striking example, whose repurposing and even inversion of the Roman prototype undermines the possibility of fixing memories of a martyrological past within a stable interpretive framework in a manner that extends the logic of the Fano pasquinade. In 1598 the Belgian Protestant printer and artist Theodor de Bry produced a series of engravings to accompany a new Latin edition of Bartolomè de Las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. The resulting images bore striking formal and narrational similarities to Circignani's martyrological idiom, despite adopting an ideological position diametrically opposed to the earlier project. Las Casas was a Franciscan missionary to the New World and an implacable critic of the exploitative horrors undertaken there in the name of the Spanish crown. His *Brevísima relación* was written in 1542 and published a decade later, and through its exposé of wanton Spanish cruelty argued that the Castilian state had a duty of care towards its new subjects in the Americas. Despite some initial success at

²⁷ Ibid, p.9.

the Spanish court, Las Casas' pleas ultimately fell on deaf ears, and after this first edition his text would not be republished in Spanish for almost a century. Although dedicated to the future king Philip II and written with the intention of staging an internal intervention in Spanish practices of government in the New World, the *Brevísima relación* found its widest readership in Northern Europe, where it quickly became a best-seller and ran through multiple editions in English, Dutch and German.²⁸

It was in this context that de Bry, who had been publishing texts relating to European activities in the New World culled from various authors and embellished with his own engravings since 1590, entered the frame. In 1598 he translated a 1579 French version of Las Casas' text into Latin, with the addition of a harrowing series of illustrative copper-plate engravings designed by Joos van Winghe (fig.203). It seems likely that the religious violence of late sixteenth-century Europe, which had forced him to flee his homeland for the safer climes of Germany in 1570, cast a long shadow over his images of Spanish cruelty in the New World, and Bernadette Bucher has argued that the engravings 'mirrored, for the Protestant victims of the Spanish Inquisition, their own misfortune.'²⁹ And yet, their format and content also inevitably recalls the Santo Stefano frescoes and their widely diffused printed iterations, images which by contrast 'mirrored' for Catholic audiences *their* contemporary persecution in northern Europe.

In each, a major narrative event depicted in the foreground gives way to smaller loci of generalised cruelty set within exotic landscapes. De Bry's images are also keyed to the text they accompany by means of a numbering system positioned in the corner of each engraving, 'fixing' their otherwise questionable historicity via an appeal to the authoritative status of the Latin text, as Tom Conley argues.³⁰ The arguments advanced in this thesis

²⁸ Adorno (2007), p.79.

²⁹ Bucher (1981), p.10.

³⁰ Conley (1992), p.107.

concerning the mutability of violent imagery might lead one to question whether such a strategy could successfully provide a final signification to these motifs of desecration, however. Conley himself implicitly points to the fraught relationship between supposedly historical text and image when he writes that ‘the *gap* between the immediate and graphic horror of the pictures and the Latin text underscores a difference between what is taken to be seen and what must be imprinted as immutable history.’³¹ The historical memories apparently ‘imprinted’ into the mind of the reader/viewer by the privileged combination of striking image and authoritative caption remain open to interpretations that exist outside this logocentric framework, and these interpretations can be productively opened up by an analysis of their tangled visual provenance.

One of the final engravings of de Bry’s series portrays atrocities unfolding under the auspices of a ‘Spanish captain’ in Granada seeking to extract gold from the local population (fig.204). At the focal centrepiece of the composition a soldier raises a hatchet high above his head with a powerful right arm. Before him a naked native kneels in front of a wooden block upon which his left arm is resting, whilst his right terminates in a bloody stump. The axe-wielding executioner holds the victim’s forearm in place as his weapon is poised to swing downwards onto his immobilised wrist. A disembodied clenched fist sits perversely upright upon the block, whilst other hands litter the ground below. Behind this scene, the arms of a naked woman are being held behind her back by a soldier, as a colleague gouges fiercely at her nose. At her feet are the material relics of earlier dismemberments, a series of noses scattered freely around the pictorial field. The text illustrated by de Bry’s image notes that in the town of Cota alone, seventy pairs of hands had been severed by Spanish soldiers.

The formal and thematic similarities between de Bry’s engraving and the twenty-ninth fresco at Santo Stefano Rotondo are striking (fig.205): in each,

³¹ Ibid.

the destructive logic of persecution is powerfully rendered by the uncanny presence of these disembodied organs, each one at once a startling *punctum* capable of arresting the viewer's gaze and an after-image of a body-part forever severed from its originary function much like the broken tool become its own image that the philosopher Maurice Blanchot argues emblematises the relationship between a corpse and its absent living body.³² Beyond the obvious continuities between the images however, the very different conditions of their production necessitate morphological mutations: the sleeves of de Bry's amputating protagonist are rolled up in accordance with the bloody nature of his work, but unlike the heretical and turbaned North African Vandal depicted in the Santo Stefano fresco, his distinctive outfit positions him as a Spanish Catholic conquistador, a self-styled pious warrior of a Christian God.

Other copperplates by de Bry reveal details that bear striking resemblances to the violent indignities inflicted upon early-Christian martyrs in Circignani's earlier images. The young man stoking a fire flickering away under the feet of hanged natives on a slipshod wooden gallows at Hispaniola can be mapped back to the figure tending the flames beneath the head of Saint Agapitus at Santo Stefano, who hangs upside down on a similarly makeshift timber gibbet (figs. 206&207). De Bry's engraving of a native being roasted upon a grill, meanwhile, bears comparison with the narrative of Saint Lawrence, and the formal composition of the scene recalls the Santo Stefano version of his martyrdom (figs.208&209). De Bry's victim however throws his head back in agony, and is no discursive match for Circignani's classically sculpted *parrhesiastes* arguing with his tormentors. A closer inspection reveals that the native is being penetrated by a long wooden stake as part of his torment, a detail that inevitably further problematizes any easy equation

³² Blanchot (1989), pp.257-8. This detail also ironically recalls Catholic propagandist accounts of the massacre at Roermond – Faustino Tasso insists that William's Protestant troops 'cut off the noses and ears of many priests' before driving them through the streets to their deaths, leaving a trail of the disembodied organs in their wake (p.174).

between Christian saint and American native – the sexual violence attendant to this scene instead seems to bring it into the orbit of the Fano pasquinade. At a time when there was a notable ‘increase in the central control of the sacred’ and the policing of exactly how sanctity was categorised,³³ such free inter-mixing of sacred and profane narrative details inevitably undermined the capacity of violent imagery to operate as unambiguous markers of the kind of heroic virtue associated with early-modern Catholic sanctity.³⁴

By remaining sensitive to the multiple mutations and inter-texts coexisting within a single image such as this, it becomes clear how violent art might exceed and even invert the interpretive paradigms established by its initial producers. Whilst these images furnish us with specific information about the intentions of their creators, simply uncovering those intentions does not fully explain the complex and ever-shifting relationship between viewer and violent artwork. Their intended signification could not be codified or ossified for future viewers, and images of violence always work on multiple audiences in multiple ways. In both the scurrilous pasquinade recounting the new martyrs of Fano and de Bry’s re-articulations of Christian martyrdom in the New World, the radical impossibility of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate violence, between bodies that embody pious sanctity and those that speak to darker and more ambiguous realities, is brought to the fore. Just as those repurposings of martyrological discourse violently ruptured the possibility of thinking of martyrdom in the sixteenth-century as an unproblematic building block of stable confessional identity, inherent within the very bodies depicted at Santo Stefano in the service of cultural memory is the grounds for their own critique. The face of the mutilated figure kneeling before the soldier’s flashing blade in de Bry’s penultimate plate, noseless, hairless, and so emaciated that he barely even

³³ Burke (1987), p.51.

³⁴ Whilst the extent of de Bry’s interaction with de Cavalieri’s *Ecclesiae Militantis Triumphus* cannot be definitively established, as a prominent bookseller based in one of the centres of the European book-trade where texts produced on both sides of the religious divide were readily available, it would not be surprising if he knew these works.

registers as recognizably human (and yet who uncannily resembles early-modern images of Pasquino's blasted physiology), seems to graphically visualize the de-subjectifying fault-line that runs through violent representation (figs.210&211). At the heart of violent martyrological imagery exists an aporia where meaning is in a continuous state of inscription and re-inscription, an aporia that even the fixing power of text struggles to contain. Within their contours are a multitude of possible images awaiting activation, and it is up to the individual viewer to create the image that they see looking back at them.

Appendix 1: Original Texts of Longer Italian Passages Quoted in Translation in the Main Text

*Note: Passages can be cross-referenced to the relevant footnotes in the thesis, and are provided as supplementary material for reference purposes.

Introduction

Footnote 5, Antonio Gallonio, *Historia delle Sante Vergini Romane* (1591), p.17: 'Mi son già data ad altro amante, molto più nobile di te, e più degno; mi hà proferti più pregiati ornamenti, che non sono i tuoi; io gli ho data la fede mia, & egli mi ha promesso esser mio sposo; e fin'hora hammi col l'anello della santa sede sposata; né satio ancora mi ha posto collane d'ineestimabili valore al collo, & alle mani, all'orecchie poi perle, ch'apprezzar non si possono; hammi adornata tutta di risplendenti gemme: in oltre ha posto il suo segno nella mia faccia, acciò non riceva altro amante, che lui; mi ha vestita di vestimenti tessuti di oro.'

Footnote 91, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.147: 'La medesima imagine partorirà più differenze, secondo i varii concetti che di essa piglieranno i riguardanti, conforme assai a quel detto delle scuole, se bene in altro proposito: *quod omne receptum habet se per modum recipientis et non recepti*. Onde noi veggiamo che ancor del succo de' fiori nati alla campagna le api ne fanno soave mele e le aragni ne cavano mortifero veleno. Il che accade similmente in molte altre cose, come ognuno può comprendere...

Footnote 92, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.171: 'Perché potrà essere che una imagine di sua natura e secondo la sua forma debba giustamente essere riposta tra le sacre, e nientedimeno chi la mira la collocherà in altro ordine. Questo avviene perché lo spettatore averà concetto molto diverso nella imaginazione sua da quello che l'artefice ha avuto.'

Chapter 1

Footnote 1, Angelo Grillo, *Delle Lettere del Reverendissimo Padre Abbate D. Angelo Grillo* (1616), p.352: 'All'imperioso suono della temuta tromba di quel magnanimo Pontefice le membra, e l'ossa venerabili del vasto, e mal sepolto cadavere di lei, rotte e sparse per la gran campagna Latina siano state in parte ricerche e ragunate e che in virtu' di quel fervido e vivacissimo spirito ne sia risorta quasi fenice dalle sue ceneri questa novella Roma.'

Footnote 9, Giovanni Botero, *Delle cause della grandezza delle Città* (1588), p.32: 'Roma poi non è debitrice della sua grandezza al sangue de'Martiri, alle reliquie de'Santi, alla santità de'luoghi, e a la suprema sua autorità nelle materie beneficali e sacre? Non sarebbe ella un deserto, non una solitudine, se la santità dei luoghi non vi tirasse gente innumerabile fin dal ultime parti della terra, se'l seggio Apostolico, e la podestà delle chiavi nō vi facesse cōcorrere moltitudine inestimabile d'huomini, che n'hāno bisogno?'

Footnote 29, Giovanni Bordini, *De Rebus Praeclare Gestis a Sixto V. Pontifex Maximus* (1588), p.23: 'Qui sueram cinerum custos tristisque Sepulchri, / Cunarum excubitor, nunc obeliscus ero./ Intulit Augustus mortem mihi, mortuus, ast nunc / Nascentis Christi munere vita redit. / Sic reduces Astraeae, & relligionis honores / Exultans, Sixto Principe, Roma videt.'

Footnote 53, Engraving over the entrance to San Giovanni in Oleo, Rome: 'Martyrii calicem bibit, hic athleta Johannes / Principii Verbum cernere qui meruit. / Verberat hic fuste proconsul forfice tondet/ Quae fervens oleum laedere invaluit/ Conditur hic olium dolium cruor atque capilli/ Quae consecrantur inclita Roma, tibi.'

Footnote 110 Giulio Roscio, *Emblemata sacra S. Stephani Caelii Montis intercoluniis affixa*, (1589), p.3: 'Miraris teneros iuuenes florentibus annis / Horribiles hilari fronte subire cruces: Invitum quoties, testis sit Roma, leonem / Orarunt rabido ferret ut ore necem.'

Footnote 117, Giovanni Severano, *Memorie Sacre delle Sette Chiese di Roma* (1630) *Al benigno lettore*: 'Regina di tutte le Città; Fonte da cui si derivano à tutta la Republica Christiana, & à tutto il genere humano le acque della Dottrina, e Fede Evangelica, e l'Aure vitali della santità, e delle gratie spirituali; Arsenale delle armi contra l'Inferno; Gazzofilatio, e conserva de'Tesori della Santa Chiesa; Città, che sola è capo del Mondo, e sola seconda alla Trionfante, e gloriosa Città di Dio; che è stata irrigata da tanti Fiumi di Sangue de'Martiri; sanctificata da i vestigij di tanti Santi...Città insomma, che nell'estremo Teatro, e final Giuditio del Mondo invierà maggior numero, e renderà più grato spettacolo al Cielo de' suoi Cittadini, che tutta la terra.'

Footnote 140, Domenico Fontana, *Della Trasportatione dell'Obelisco Vaticano*, vol. 1 (1589), p.101: '...con spesa veramente incredibile, e conforme all'animo d'un tanto Principe, ha tirate dette strade da un capo all'altro della Città, nulla curando i monti, o le valli, che vi s'attraversavano: ma facendo spianar quelli, e riempir queste, l'ha ridotte in dolcissime pianure, e vaghissimi siti, scoprendosi in più luoghi, dove elle passano, le più basse parti della Citta con varie, diverse prospettive, si che oltre le devozioni pascano ancora con la lor vaghezza i sensi del corpo.'

Footnote 164, Antonio Gallonio, *Historia delle Sante Vergini Romane* (1591), p.199: 'Mi minacci crudelissimo Giudice darmi morte; e che altro cerco io e che altro voglio, se non per via di asprissimi tormenti morire? Fammi una volta dividere in più parti le membra; ordina, che mi si tagli la lingua, le mani, le unghie, mi si cavino i denti, essendo che quanta io sono con tutte le parti del corpo mio, tutta mi debbo al mio Creatore, e questa e' stata del continuo l'ardentissima sete del mio cuore, che egli restasse in ciascuna parte delle mie membra glorificato, e che esse poi avanti il suo nobilissimo e ricchissimo trono regale fossero con la beltà, e l'ornamento della sincera confessione.'

Footnote 190, Pope Pius V, *Avviso di Roma*, 27 July 1566, quoted in Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, Vol. XVII, p.396: '...nè è bene comportar, che dalle meretrici siano habitate le più belle strade di Roma santa, ove è sparso il sangue di tanti santi martiri, ove sono tante reliquie, tante devotioni, ove è

la Sede Apostolica et tanta religione: città, che per specchio del mondo tutta doverà esser monda da vicii et peccati a confusione d'infideli et heretici, in fine non conoscete il ben vostro: con che se gli levò davanti.'

Chapter 2

Footnote 27, Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564), p.39: 'Molto più mostrerebbe il pittore la forza de l'arte in farlo afflitto, sanguinoso, pieno di sputi, depelato, piagato, difformato, livido e brutto, di maniera che non avesse forma d'uomo. Questo sarebbe l'ingegno, questa la forza e la virtù de l'arte, questo il decoro, questa la perfezzion de l'artefice.'

Footnote 28, Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564), p.11: 'Io dessidererei sapere da che avviene che, essendo la pittura arte sì bella e lodata da grandi e da piccoli, oggi redotta sia in mano di gente povera et ignorante; e rarissimi sono i pittori del nostro tempo, che non errino nel dipingere l'istorie.'

Footnote 34, Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564), p.41: 'Veggio Stefano lapidato senza pietre; Biagio intiero e bello ne l'eculeo, senza sangue; Sebastiano senza frezze; Giacopo Apostolo senza pertiche in capo; Lorenzo nella graticola non arso et incotto, ma bianco: non per altro, che l'arte nol comporta, e per mostrare i muscoli e le vene. Oh vanità vana, oh errore senza fine!'

Footnote 44, Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564): 'Vi dico che, quanto a la divozione, più mi muove una croce di legno in un romitorio, in una grotta, in un deserto, che non fanno quelle d'oro e d'argento, piene di gioie, ne le città: perché in quella io considero la semplice verità, in queste la ricchezza e l'ornamento, la nobiltà de la materia e l'eccellenza de l'artefice.'

Footnote 52, Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564), pp.77-8: 'Certo sarebbe cosa nova e bella vedere un Cristo in Croce per le piaghe, per i sputi, per i scherni e per il sangue trasformato, San Biagio dai pettini lacero e scarnato, Sebastiano pieno di frezze rassimigliare un estrice, Lorenzo ne la graticola arso, incotto, crepato, lacero e difformato.'

Footnote 53: Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564), p.66: 'Né fra i beati sarà difformità alcuna, come monchi, zoppi, attratti, stroppi, ciechi et altri tali difetti che fanno il corpo brutto, ma tutti si rimaranno ne' reprobis, anzi si aumenterà loro il male per aggravarli la dannazione e le pene. Questa, secondo alcuni, sarà la differenza fra i beati et i dannati: che questi non si mancheranno di quei difetti che fanno il corpo sozzo e brutto, et a' beati resteranno solo le parti che fanno il corpo bello, leggiadro e vago, et atto a la gloria. I martiri aranno le cicatrici de le loro ferite lucide e risplendenti per maggior segno de la fede e costanza loro e de la crudeltà de' tiranni.'

Footnote 59, Giulio Roscio, *Triumphus Martyrum in Templo D. Stephano Caелиi. Montis* (1587), unpaginated: O qui purpureo sanguine lauream / Estis promeriti, qui super aethera / Longo, nec trepidi tenditis, agmine / Sacro vulnere saucij. / Vos non compedibus carcer ahenis, / Non Regum gladij, non lapidum fragor / Non sorbens pelagus, non rabidae ferae, / Non vis terruit ignea. / Absternis lacrimis en modo caelitum / Immisti choreis gaudia ducitis: / Et toto renitent corpore vulnera / ceu lucentia sidera.

Footnote 88, Romano Alberti, *Origine, et Progresso dell'Academia del Disegno, de Pittori, Scultori & Architetti di Roma* (1604), p.55: 'Tocco' a M. Nicolò Circignani Pomarancio à discorrere che sia, & quanto importi il bello, e buon compartimento in un'istoria, e che s'intenda esso componimento, e che circostanze deve havere per esser ben composta l'istoria.'

Footnote 103: Benedetto dell'Uva, *Le vergini prudenti di don Benedetto dell'Uva monaco casinense*, (Firenze, 1582), p.65: 'Per saziar gli occhi del signor

turbato / Corse un ministro, e con l'audace destra / Lese in mezo la gola
ampia finestra.'

Footnote 112: Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.211: 'La pittura, che prima aveva per fine solo di assomigliare, ora, come atto di virtù, piglia nuova sopraveste, et oltre l'assomigliare si inalza ad un fine maggiore, mirando la eterna gloria e procurando di richiamare gli uomini dal vizio et indurli al vero culto di Dio.'

Footnote 113, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.417: 'quanto incomparabilmente sono stati maggiori i dolori e l'afflizioni dei martiri, che quegli che noi sentiamo nelle infirmità e miserie di questa vita.'

Footnote 117, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.228: 'Il sentire narrare il martirio d'un santo, il zelo e costanza d'una vergine, la passione dello stesso Cristo, sono cose che toccano dentro di vero; ma l'esserci con vivi colori qua posto sotto gli occhi il santo martirizzato, colà la vergine combattuta e nell'altro lato Cristo inchiodato, egli è pur vero che tanto accresce la divozione e compunge le viscere, che chi non lo conosce è di legno o di marmo.'

Footnote 123, Romano Alberti, *Trattato della nobilta della pittura* (1585), p.42: 'Chi serà quello che, risguardando la flagellazione o la crocifissione di Giesù suo signore, e simili, non senta in sé stesso almeno qualche scintilla di spirito, che li commuova il cuore? Vedendo in un certo modo presenti li strazii, rabbie, furori e martirii, ai quali per i peccati nostri l'unigenito figliuol del grande Iddio si sottopose.'

Footnote 139, Gabriele Paleotti, quoted in Ilaria Bianchi (2008), p.121: 'Quali ministri lo pongono con le spranghe di legno a giacere in mezzo a un pietrone di tanta larghezza quanto a detto santo, di modo che si vede la testa, un braz[z]o e una gamba che pendono giù dal sasso nel quale è posto a giacere et si vede giù per terra gran quantità di sangue.'

Footnote 151, Ulise Aldrovandi, “Avvertimenti del dottore Aldrovandi,” p.929: ‘Bisogna che habbia conversatione con gli anatomici eccellentissimi et vedda con dilligenza tutta la settione del corpo humano così interiore come esteriore acciò possa conoscere di qual figura siano il cuore, il fegato, la milza, gli intestine, il stomaco, la gola, il cervello affine che occorrendo a dipingere qualche martirologio come di S. Erasmo et simil’altri, quali sono mille volte più notati a V.S. Rev. ma che a me li possa dipinge naturalmente.

Footnote 155, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.417: ‘E se alcuni degli autori dell’arte di medicina hanno giudicato non convenirsi che le anatomie de’ corpi umani, tanto necessarie per curare bene la sanità degli uomini, si facciano nei corpi de’ viventi, se bene siano, come rei nocenti, condannati agli ultimi supplicii; perché non dovrà parimente un giudizioso pittore astenersi dall’imitare quelle cose che dalle leggi e dai sensi si vedono aborrire?’

Footnote 161: Michele Lauretano, quoted in Johannes Orbaan, *La Roma di Sisto V negli avvisi* (1910): ‘Domenica nostro Signore passò dalla sua vigna a messa nella chiesa di Santo Stefano Rotondo, notando poi et osservando minutamente le figure di diversi martiri depinte d’ogni intorno nella maniera con la quale sono stati martirizzati et fu vista Sua Beatitudine nel mirare quei spettacoli lacrimare un pezzo di tenerezza et pù volle asciugarsi gli occhi.’

Footnote 172: Giraldo Cinthio, *Discorsi di M. Giovambattista Giraldo Cinthio, Nobile Ferrarese*, (1554), pp.278-9: ‘Ho anchora, M. Giulio, negli occhi la meraviglia, ch’io vidi in que signori, che il videro, et l’udirono rappresentare il messo della mia Orbecche. Mi pare di sentirmi anchora tremare la terra sotto i piedi, come mi parve di sentirla allhora, ch’egli rappresento quel messo con tanto horrore di ognuno, che parve che per l’horror, et per la compassione, ch’egli indusse negli animi de gli spettatori, tutti rimanessero, come attoniti.’

Footnote 181: Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.466: ‘le quali, scielte con giudicio, seranno per apportare

meravigliosa vaghezza, utilità, esempio e grandezza, con riputazione di chi le usará e del luogo dove si troveranno rappresentate.’

Chapter 3

Footnote 101, Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della Pittura*, p.16: ‘molto piu farà le proportionali bellezze d'un angelico viso posto in pittura della quale proportionalità ne risulta un'armonico concerto, il quale serve all'occhio nel medesimo tempo che si faccia dalla musica all'orecchio.’

Footnote 110, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'Arte della Pittura, Scoltura, Architettura* (1584), p.113: ‘Ora rappresentando tutte queste passioni, e affetti ne le istorie che dipingiamo, co' suoi convenienti, e proprij moti, veniamo a causare quella tanta varietà, che così diletta, e piace allettando, e traendo à se con dolce forza gli animi nostri, non altrimenti di questo che si faccia una soave armonia, e un dolce concerto di musico, ò suonato eccellente, in tirare a se gli animi di chi gl'ascolta, cosa tanto potente, e efficace che si legge in musico essersi dato vanto di far' col suono impazzare gl'huomini, e poi ritoronarli nel premierò stato loro.’

Footnote 111, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.371: ‘Ogni operazione, perché riesca lodevole, deve avere la debita corrispondenza in tutte le circostanze, a guisa di perfetta musica che rende la sua armonia proporzionata in tutte le voci, e dicono che quella virtù ch'opera ciò da' Latini è chiamata *decorum*, la quale, quando per caso venghi in parte alcuna a mancare, lascia nel corpo dell'opera quella nota e quello sconcerto che comunemente si chiama inetto.’

Footnote 156, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), pp.294-5: ‘Si consideri quanta diversità si trovi in ciascun ordine de' beati nella celeste corte, per rappresentarli: come saria tra la pittura di un angelo e quella di un patriarca; tra l'immagine di un martire e di un confessore; tra quella di un vescovo e di una verginella. Di più, nell'istesso ordine vedasi quanta dissimilitudine spesso si scorga tra persona e persona: come, nella

schiera degli apostoli, tra S. Pietro e S. Bartolomeo; in quella de' martiri, tra S. Stefano e S. Vincenzo...Poi, quanto agli accidenti congiunti con le persone loro, quanta varietà possa concorrere nei movimenti et atti del corpo; quanta nelle azzioni che si esprimono, o sole, o che hanno corrispondenza con altre; ma maggiormente quanta differenza occorra negli accidenti separati, come nei vestimenti, insegne, ornamenti, abitazioni, luoghi et altre simili particolarità.'

Chapter 4

Footnote 2, *L'inudite et monstruose crudelta usate da gli heretici contra li ministri di Dio, nella espugnatione della Città di Ruremonda in Fiandra il di 23 di lulgio 1572* (1572), unpaginated: 'havendoli date molte ferite appreso a un pozzo lo gettorno a terra, e li cavoro le viscere, e sparsero tutte l'interiora, e havendoli tagliato le parti dishoneste gli'attacorno in bocca, e chiamorono a quel spettacolo molte donne di quel vicinato; corsero dipoi nel choro dove i frati erano con gran devotione posti ingenocchioni avanti l'altare Maggiore, a li quali con grand'impeto si aventorno adosso... Non satij ancora di tanta crudelta tutti li altri parte nella chiesa, parte nel portico ammazorono, e accumularono nell'entrata della chiesa tutti i lor corpi nudi miserabilmente trattati.'

Footnote 48, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), p.90: 'Egli era così deformato, c'haveva perduta l'effigie propria in maniera, ch'egli non era più riconosciuto. L'habbiamo riguardato, & vedutolo senza forma d'huomo, si che ne pur l'habbiamo conosciuto.'

Footnote 49, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), pp.69-71: 'erano estinti, svelte, e ridotti in qualche parte alla nuda pelle...vedendo le bionde chiome del Signore così cōfuse, mal trattate, & per la viscosità del sangue congiunte insieme, haver perduta la bellezza loro, & il colore.'

Footnote 54: Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), p.93: 'Dia materia di meditatione al pietoso Christiano il

cōsiderare qual fusse il dolore della Vergine santissima, riguardando la delicata faccia del suo Figliuolo, la quale essa tante volte tenne monda, & cō occhio materno di giorno in giorno teneramente soleva mirare, & con molta sua vita tal volta ancor baciare, à vederla hora percossa, & trasformata, & la barba schiantata, senza forma d'huomo: onde ben poteva dire con Isaia. La faccia del mio Figliuolo è nascosta, & trasformata; & con Giobbe. Gli hanno percosse le guancie. Et vedendo le piaghe, e tumor del volto dolorosamente con Michaela dire. Con verghe, e guanciate hãno percosso la faccia del mio figliuolo. Et così accompagnando il pio Lettore il dolor della Vergine sacre potrà dire rivolto à Christo. Deh Signore mio dov'è la fronte serena; dove gli occhi divini? Così meditando la Vergine santissima, che baci la faccia del suo figliuolo, e eccitar se stesso à compassione baciando l'immagine sua nella sacra Sindone.'

Footnote 57, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), pp.60-1: 'Non è questa una piaga per semplice percossa; ma come si vede nella Sindone, è un cumulo di piaghe, ch'accrebbe il dolore al Signore' estremamente. S'aggiunse nel corpo del benedetto Christo (& specialmente in questa parte) piaga sopra piaga, livore sopra livore, rottura sopra rottura, & sangue sopra sangue; tal che furono le sue piaghe senza numero.'

Footnote 58, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), p.93: 'Resta hor, Anime mie care, d'affisar gli occhi spesso in questa sacra Sindone, prendendo queste redentrici piaghe nel cuore, & riconoscendole per tormenti, e pene devute à noi per li nostri peccati.'

Footnote 70, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), pp.56-7: 'Christo [è] vera pietra, & pietra intagliata nella passione, in cui furono scolpite le piaghe coi capelli de'chiodi, Croce, & lancia, come osserva S. Girolamo. Così Giesù, Signore nostro, hora ne hà lasciato dipinta la forma di quella scoltura, cioè delle sue redentrici piaghe, nella santa Sindone in questa parte delle gambe, & coscie, dipingendola col proprio sangue.'

Footnote 72, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), unpaginated epistola: 'Hora per dir del modo da tenersi, per cavarne profitto per lo spirito, potrassi cōsiderare, che in principio dell'opera è posto un picciol Ritratto della sacra Sindone, simile allo stesso originale, aggiuntevi solamente intorno alcune lettere dell'Alfabeto, necessario all'intento nostro: poiché il pio lettore havrà guardato il disegno nell'una, & nell'altra parte, potrà pigliare un Capitolo per giorno da meditare, valendosi delle pietose cōsiderationi poste in fin di ciascun Capitolo, ò pure di altre, come lo spirito li suggerirà, & haverà riguardo, che ne i Capitoli appropriati à qual si voglia parte del corpo del Sig, si rimette il Lettore cō le predette lettere dell'Alfabeto al disegno, & à quella parte, di che si tratta nel Capitolo. Et così venuto al fine di tutti, si potrà di nuovo cominciar l'opera, perben' affissarsi nel cuore le stimate del Salvatore.'

Footnote 73, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), p.55: 'Di tal flagellatione s'è cōpiaciuto la pietà del Signore nostro lasciarne, come tanti caratteri, scritti col sangue delle sue gambe, & coscie nella parte posteriore della sacra Sindone; accioche gl'idioti stesi, & quelli ancora, che non sanno leggere, con l'apparenze di queste salutifere piaghe vengano in notitia di esse, come se leggessero, ò studiassero libri pij, che per questo dice S. Gregorio si usano le pitture.'

Footnote 83, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), p.14: 'In gran veneratione devesi veramente avere questa sacra Sindone tanto mirabile; & fatta dalla stessa persona del Figliuol di Dio, per vivo memoriale della sua gran carità, nella quale si vede impresse gran moltitudine del le piaghe di quel corpo à parte à parte perforato.'

Footnote 84, Alfonso Paleotti, *Esplicatione del Sacro Lenzuolo Ove fu Involto Il Signore* (1599), unpaginated dedication: 'Veduto c'hebbe cosa tanto ammirabile, restai con acceso desiderio d'haverne un transunto della stessa misura, per potere (affissandovi gli occhi) così imprimermi nella mēte quelle

sacratissime piaghe, à salute dell'anima mia; come esso Sig. lascicuele entro per memoria di se figurate al vivo.'

Footnote 90, Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.208: Della memoria che diremo? Sapendo noi che quella chiamata artificiosa sta la maggior parte posta nell'uso delle imagini; onde non è meraviglia che queste sacre, di che parliamo, tanto più la tenghino rinfrescata, *ut contemplatione picturae*.

Footnote 129: Emanuele Tesauro, "Il Memoriale" in *Panegirici et Ragionamenti del Conte D. Emanuele Tesauro*, Vol. III, (1660), p.314: 'Dopo il trionfo, ancor vermiglie & aperte serbò le Piaghe nelle Mani, ne' Piedi, & nel Costato, per Memorial sempiterno; accioche chiunque le mira, interrogando *Che cosa son queste Piaghe?* apprenda il ricevuto Beneficio; & altamente l'imprima nella Memoria.'

Footnote 138: Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), p.416: '...quelle [cose] che chiamiamo orrende, perché esprimono senza alcun fine virtuoso certi atti che la natura degli uomini aborrisce: sì come il dipingere [di] alcuni che bevano il sangue dalle vene degli uomini vivi, o altri che arrostiscano i corpi umani e ne facciano un convito, distribuendo i membri intieri per vivanda a ciascuno. Tutte queste simili cose non solo sono disutili, ma attristano grandemente il senso umano, come ferine e fuori d'ogni ragione.'

Conclusion

Footnote 5, Pasquinade from 1537 collected in *Pasquinate romane del Cinquecento*, (Rome: Salerno, 1983), p.530:

Pittore: 'Perche la chiesa vol canonizare
Il vescovo di Fano e gli altri tutti,
Che lasciati si son, gioven e putti,
Da Pier Luigi mal martirizate,

E le figure lor pinger vol fare
Con l'istrumento in man che gli ha condutti
Alla morte, e i martír dicon sì brutti,
Che fan lo martilogio vergognare,

E io che son pittor, vorrei sapere
da te, nostro Pasquin che 'l tutto sai,
qual istromento in man debbon avere?'

Pasquino: Se a san Biagio tu riguarderai,
perche' sui petti fu fatto sedere,
con li pettini in man lo vederai.

Adunque se vorai
Dipinger questi martiri moderni,
a' quai son stati rotti li quaderni.

Acciò che si discerni
depinge lor un cazzo in man o in culo,
con un motto che dica: egli è d'un mulo."

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