

XI

The Conquest of the Real by the Imaginary: On the *Passio Perpetuae*

by

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Perpetua, approximately twenty-two years old, *honeste nata, liberaliter instituta, matronaliter nupta* (2.1),¹ born into the wealthy Roman Vibii family, classically educated, able to speak Greek, and married according to her status, was condemned, following a trial presided over by the procurator Hilarianus, to be thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre at Carthage. The occasion is the birthday of Geta, the son of Emperor Septimius Severus.

Several weeks previously, Perpetua, together with a group of young Christians—all of whom were catechumens—had been arrested. Among them was the heavily pregnant Felicitas. Perpetua herself is the mother of an infant for whom she endeavours to care while in prison. The group are baptized during their imprisonment. Saturus, who had given the group Christian instruction, gives himself up to the authorities to die together with the others.² No mention whatsoever is made of the husbands of Felicitas and Perpetua.

¹ Quotations from *Passio Perpetuae* are from P. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter oder Bilder des Bösen im Frühen Afrikanischen Christentum* (Berlin, 2004²), 6–29. Shortly after the Latin version, a Greek translation followed. Both versions were edited by van Beek. On the question of authorship and the priority given to the Latin translation, see E. Rupprecht, 'Bemerkungen zur Passio SS. Perpetuae et Felicitatis', *Rheinisches Museum* NF 90 (1941), 177–92; Bremmer and Formisano, this volume, Introduction. For an impression of the longer-term influence of the *Passio Perpetuae*, see Augustine's *Sermones* 280–2 (written to commemorate the *dies natalis* of Perpetua: *PL* 38, 1280–6: *In Natali martyrium Perpetuae et Felicitatis*), also the version by Jacobus de Voragine, *Legende Aurea*, edited and translated into German by Richard Benz (Darmstadt, 1984), 928–9, cf. Weitbrecht and Farrell, this volume, Chapters VII and XVI, respectively.

² Tertullian, 'Ad Martyras', in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Anti-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 3. *Tertullian, I,II,III* (Michigan, 1995) (Reprint of the American Edition of the Anti-Nicene

RECORDING, AUTHORIZING, SANCTIFYING
OF THE TEXT

The text is unusually complex. Both its introduction and conclusion—in other words how it is framed—are written by a contemporary who is clearly not an eye-witness. However, he refers to the permission of the Holy Spirit and an appeal by Perpetua herself (*quasi mandatum sanctissimae Perpetuae*)³ to recount the final scene. The main part of the text contains descriptions (in the first-person narrative) of four visions of Perpetua, who had kept a diary in prison. The narrator marks the exact point at which Perpetua records the entire martyrdom ‘in her own words and from her own perspective’. He describes how ‘from this point on the entire narrative of her martyrdom is her own, just as she left it written out by her own hand according to her own intention’ (*sui iam hinc ipsa narravit sicut conscriptum manu sua et suo sensu reliquit*, 2.3), recounting the events and her visions. In narrative terms, this is a precise reference. She not only functions as the authorization of the text (her own written account, her own perspective), but also provides a ‘structured recording’ of the martyrdom and bequeaths a testament (*reliquit*): what we read is in the truest sense a text as relic. The text has been sanctified by the hand of Perpetua and takes on the aura of a Holy Relic. The visions and dreams of Perpetua are followed by a vision of Saturus, which, likewise, has been written by Saturus himself.⁴ Then the narrator resumes the account himself of the murderous scenes in the arena. He finishes, as he tells the reader, with the last will of Perpetua.

At the close, he calls the visions and accounts *exempla in aedificationem ecclesiae* (‘testimonies for the edification of the Church’, 21.11). At the beginning, there is mention of *fidei exempla* (1.1). The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* should, according to the narrator, provide a lesson, *lectio* (1.5), for use in the liturgy. Through listening, the events should be recreated for the listener (*repraesentatio rerum*, 1.1) to commune with the martyrs, and, through their mediation, enter communion with Christ. The martyrs, therefore, operate as media of communion with Jesus. At the same time, this

Fathers, vol. 3, = 1885¹), 693–7; 695–6 criticizes the deliberate embracing of martyrdom as presumptuous, and equally condemns the attempt to avoid martyrdom through escape.

³ The title *sanctissima* suggests that a certain time had elapsed between the martyrdom on the one hand and the composition of the texts by Perpetua and Saturus as well as the narrative and liturgical framing by the author on the other. Perpetua has already been elevated to martyr. However, the text as a whole cannot date much later than 203 AD, cf. Bremmer and Formisano, this volume, Introduction.

⁴ *Somnium* and *visio* are used practically as synonyms in the text (1.4; compare Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 74–8).

corresponds to an early Christian custom of incorporating accounts of martyrdom into the liturgy, particularly on their *dies natalis* (day of death as the day of their second birth), in a ceremonial sense.⁵ The references to the listening aspect correspond to the historical form of the dissemination of the martyrdom accounts, since these were communicated orally to a largely illiterate audience. They were intended to heal (*beneficium*, 1.5) and to strengthen community identity (1.6).

Central to our understanding of the text's representational power is its claim to a nature as relic. The text itself is a *parousia*, it 'holds' the powerful presence of the martyr. As such, in having been written, the text has also to some degree been contaminated and impregnated. It is a relic that has been 'touched'. It is not by coincidence, therefore, that the author says that he has 'heard' and 'felt' the story (*contrectare*, also connoting to 'touch' or 'stroke'). Hearing in itself is something that is physically contagious—this is why it has such an exceptional status within Christian tradition and continues to fascinate right up to today. Perpetua and Saturus are 'present' in their texts; they are 'coming' and 'returning' in the instructive narrative present tense. The texts 'are' their present tense—right up to their actual *parousia*, the second coming of Christ on the Last Day. Only this will render all narrative and testimony finally superfluous, but until that time, the texts enact, prefigure, 'embody' the second coming. The literal quotation from Acts of the Apostles 2.17 at the beginning of the *Passio Perpetuae* (1.4) on the visionary spirit of the sons and daughters on the Last Day affirms this central theological connection: the end of time is anticipated as present tense in the presence of the martyrs, in the present tense beholding of their visions—the representational power of the text *per se*. Rarely can the 'sanctifying' of the text be discerned so strongly as in the *Passio Perpetuae*. It is easy to see why the power of communion is attributed to the narrative. Throughout the text, we experience a transubstantiation of arbitrary signs and conventional narrative modes. These become sacred. The text itself becomes sacrament and *eschaton*. It becomes that which it narrates, as is reiterated towards the end (21.11). Modern notions of performativity are too weak to do justice to the affective power attributed here to the text.

The narrator knows that the events and visions which he records as *testimonia* are relatively recent, and yet authority and witnessing power are usually only conferred on older documents. He argues that at the end of time (*in ultima saeculi*), the dreams and envisioning will increase in number so that it will be precisely the newer records that will be of note, since these will be a

⁵ In the third and fourth century AD, the *dies natalis* established itself as the day of death of the martyrs, see A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1994), 129.

sign of the beginning of the end (1.1–1.5).⁶ In older scholarship, this interpretation served the argument that the *Passio Perpetuae* was a Montanist document,⁷ preaching an extreme asceticism, retreat from the world and nearing apocalypse. It was also suggested that Tertullian, who was at the very least close to the Montanists (although not as early as 202/3 AD) may have been the author of the *Passio Perpetuae*, but this has been proven not to have been the case. Nevertheless, Tertullian was a contemporary of Perpetua in Carthage who, prompted by the mounting persecution of Christians, wrote on a number of occasions in their defence. Among his writings was a tract dedicated to the martyrs (*Ad Martyras*, dating approximately 202 AD and, therefore, written during the severe persecution of the Christians by Severus, to whom Perpetua herself fell victim). Although it has not been proven beyond all doubt that the text does not stem from the Montanists, this is no longer considered to be the case. There is no convincing evidence for it within the text. Perpetua was, after all, very quickly recognized by the Catholic orthodoxy and taken into the community of Saints (around 450 AD, Perpetua is even included in a Roman list of twenty-three martyrs). Therefore it would not have made sense to attribute this unique text (there is no comparable first-person narrative) to a radical Christian sect that was regarded as heretic by the mother Church.

The salient point in relation to the text is that it makes use of a finely woven set of authorization strategies within which personal testimony and witnessing accounts are carefully balanced. As far as possible, scholarship has set about verifying the historical references. The text is set in the religious, administrative, and legal jurisdiction of Carthage. The incongruous presence of both pagan and Christian motifs as well as the intertextual connections to other texts have been checked, with the result that the Perpetua narrative is regarded as authentic, even in scholarly research. Authentic in this context means that those parts of the text written in the first person are likely to stem from Perpetua and Saturus (her teacher). This does not preclude the possibility, however, that an intensive literary re-working took place.⁸

⁶ The narrator interprets the contemporary increase in signs of the end of the world and the Last Judgement, among which the martyrs are included, in terms of parousia. On the other hand, however, he suggests that there will come a time in which the contemporary and therefore ‘new’ testaments will appear as old as the current ‘old’ ones. In other words, he thinks in terms of a *longue durée* of Saeculum. This tension between the anticipation of the end of time and its deferral is characteristic of the early Christian sensibility.

⁷ See now Marksches, this volume, Chapter XIV.

⁸ For an overview of Perpetua scholarship, see the Bibliography in this volume. In this chapter, I have drawn on the following as a general foundation: E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965); Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*; J. Perkins, *The Suffering Self. Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London, 1995), 104–12; C. Auffarth, *Irdische Wege und himmlischer Lohn. Kreuzzug, Jerusalem und Fegefeuer in religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive* (Göttingen, 2002); B. Feichtinger and H. Seng (eds), *Die Christen und der Körper. Aspekte der Körperlichkeit in der christlichen Literatur der Spätantike*

This chapter will not address historiographical detail; nor will it examine where the text is situated in religious history or seek to contribute to philological textual analysis. I will be treating the text as a literary testimony and placing strong emphasis on one dimension only: every literary text can be seen as an aggregate of encoded psychic energies. This does not mean that we look to it for a psychological portrait of an individual. For the latter, the *Passio Perpetuae* contains far too many supra-individual traits. These stem from tradition and the existing rhetorical pool of reference to martyrdom. We should not forget that in the Judeo-Christian context there has long been a tradition of martyrdom both in pagan and Judeo-Christian cultures, so that we can say for Christianity that Jesus to some extent represents the primordial martyr. In the New Testament and Pauline writings, Christ's legacy incorporates a martyrdom which becomes the central path of redemption for Christians. Perpetua, after all, belongs to the second, if not third, generation of Christian martyrs, in other words to a genre of martyr narrativity that has not entirely sedimented into a normative framework. Narrativities and theologies of martyrdom are still very much in development—and we would do well to think of the text written by Perpetua in terms of one whose author had access to wider literary traditions. The main literary motifs of martyr-narratives only take on their characteristic form with the writings of the martyrs Polycarp, Justin, and Carpus, as well as the Scillitan Martyrs who, like Perpetua, were executed in Carthage. These date to the sixties, seventies, and eighties of the second century AD, and, together with the later *Acta Pauli et Theclae*, determine the literary shape of martyr narratives.⁹

As a result of this, methodological approaches that reconstruct the *Passio Perpetuae* in both form and semantics from the religious milieu and its literary traditions offer highly plausible readings. Nevertheless, this martyrdom is more than a literary document within the framework of the martyr acts. It is also more than an instance of something that can be physically painful and spiritually redemptive—it is first and foremost a phenomenon of the *psychê*. As such, it bonds together particular spiritual procedures and cycles of affects within a firm typological mould. This narrative genre, following the

(Munich, 2004); P. Brown, *The Body and Society: men, women, and sexual renunciation in early Christianity: twentieth anniversary edition with a new introduction* (New York, 2008). Specifically on Perpetua: J.E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: the Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York and London, 1997); J.N. Bremmer, 'Perpetua and her Diary. Authenticity, Family, and Visions', in W. Ameling (ed.), *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten* (Stuttgart, 2002), 77–120 and 'The Vision of Saturus in the *Passio Perpetuae*', in F. García Martínez et al. (eds), *Jerusalem, Alexandria, Rome. Studies in Ancient Culture Interaction in Honour of A. Hilhorst* (Leiden, 2003), 55–73.

⁹ Compare W. Ameling (ed.), *Märtyrer und Märtyrakten* (Stuttgart, 2002); K. Greschat and M. Tilly (eds), *Frühchristliche Märtyrerakten* (Wiesbaden, 2002), 29–102; E. Hennecke (ed.), *Die verborgenen Akten der ersten Christen* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 82–131.

martyrdom of Christ, greatly influences the psychodynamics of Christian culture. It operates, in other words, on a level that is not of individual, but of cultural significance. Psychological and in particular psychoanalytic interpretations—whether following depth-psychology and archetypes à la C. G. Jung (Marie-Louise von Franz) or Freudian-feminist angles (P.C. Miller)—have met with scepticism in the scholarly literature on Perpetua from philological, historiographical, and theological disciplines.¹⁰ Part of the reason for this is the methodological one-sidedness of these few psychological studies. However, my chapter will nevertheless maintain that the Perpetua text cannot be adequately understood without recourse to psychoanalytic and psycho-historical approaches.

2. MIRACULOUS METAMORPHOSES OF WOMEN

In the martyrdom, two wholly heterogeneous cultural elements overlap with each other in a very intricate manner: one is the martyrdom of Christ, who calls in the New Testament writings for others to follow suit in order to be near him. The other is the thinking of the Roman state, with its grand style of liberal religious politics, which saw the Christians—in their refusal to follow the emperor cult—as a provocation. Apart from these, there are many locally specific interreligious conflicts which led to the persecution and murder of Christians. Often, their persecution was fuelled more by excesses of local rage than by state decree.

2.1 Felicitas: Premature Birth and Gender-Crossing

For women, excluded from making a name for themselves in both Christian and pagan milieus, the practice of martyrdom represented a career opportunity *par excellence*.¹¹ Felicitas (the Beatific) and Perpetua (the Abiding)—one a

¹⁰ Von M.L. Franz, 'Die Passio Perpetuae. Versuch einer psychologischen Deutung', in C.G. Jung (ed.), *Aion. Untersuchungen zur Symbolgeschichte* (Zürich, 1951), 389–496; P.C. Miller, 'Perpetua and her Diary of Dreams', in P.C. Miller (ed.), *Dreams in Late Antiquity. Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* (Princeton, 1994), 148–83. Even if one does not agree with their conclusions, both studies develop new angles of interpretation. On the gender aspect which Miller also emphasizes, see in addition E.A. Petroff, 'Women in the Early Church. St. Perpetua and St. Macrina', in E.A. Petroff (ed.), *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford, 1986), 60–82. Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, also argues in places along psychological and psychoanalytical lines, albeit somewhat superficially.

¹¹ Compare Miller, 'Perpetua and her Diary of Dreams', and see P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1982), 1–36, as well as Petroff, 'Women in the Early Church'.

slave, the other of noble birth—are the heroines of the text. Both become saints, the Brides of Christ. Effectively, there is no higher moral ground. Felicitas, eight months pregnant, knows only one aim: to die with her fellow believers.¹² However, a law exists that prohibits the execution of pregnant women. Felicitas is afraid, therefore, of being separated from her fellow prisoners and ultimately shedding her 'holy and innocent blood' at a later stage among common criminals. At the prospect of this, all of her fellow Christians embark on a course of fervent prayer and the pains of labour duly set in well before their time. She endures great agony. One of the guards mocks: 'If this is how you act now, what will you do when you are thrown to the beasts [. . .]?' Her answer: 'Now I am the one suffering what I suffer, but then another inside me will suffer for me, since I will also be suffering for him' (*modo ego patior quod patior; illic autem alius erit in me qui patietur pro me, quia et ego pro illo passura sum*, 15.1–7).

This reply, as can be heard also in the Latin, is a stylistic master-stroke. Felicitas sets out an economy of suffering that rests on the strictest distinction of categories of pain—those that are 'natural' and felt by the embodied self (labour pains), and those in which the spiritual self merges in a mutual representation with the other (Christ), identifying in a form of projection with the crucified Christ. Here, the physical pain is sublimated and in agony elevated to an idealized self, one which longs for fusion with the suffering Christ. Psychoanalytically speaking, this is a secondary narcissistic symbiosis of self and other in suffering. It contains elements of desire, allowing the martyrdom to be palpable as an instance of joy and light, as suffering which begets desire. This psychic paradox is at the core of every martyrdom. Its masochistic components are impossible to overlook. And yet, in a psychoanalytic sense, one hesitates to say that the desire for pain in martyrdom is masochistic since it serves to narcissistically fortify the self.

How can horrendous pain such as torture or being thrown to the animals be a source of joy? It is a question of the 'turning' or 'transformation' of pain for Felicitas. One could speak in this sense of a transubstantiation of pain. Felicitas succumbs to the 'natural force' of the pains of labour or the 'power' of torture. However, this surrender is turned into an active, intentional position, one in which the suffering can be transformed into a desire—longing for and bringing about the closeness to Christ. This relationship of closeness and representation is expressed in the harmony and syntactic balance of the sentence quoted above. It provides a clue which we will be following further. At this point already, it is clear why Felicitas' husband, like Perpetua's, is hardly worth mentioning. The martyrdom instates a form of love that wipes out the

¹² For Felicitas, see also Bremmer, this volume, Chapter I.

genealogical bonds of marriage and the family. This gives way to the higher fusion with the community (*communio*) of martyrs, all of whom in turn coalesce with Christ.

Felicitas' self-possessed answer to the prison guard is immediately followed by the sentence: 'And she delivered a girl, which one of the sisters raised for her as her own daughter' (15.7). This, too, is significant. In the martyrdom process, the mother-child bond gives way to another type of bond. The child, both motherless and fatherless, has an abundance of potential mothers. Felicitas, on the other hand, swaps the prematurely-born baby for Christ, 'who will be in me' (*erit in me*, 15.6) at the hour of death. The child that was in her is 'externalized' by the premature birth which she has willed and a symbolic space is created for the internalization of Christ. Each complements the other. With Christ, she swaps suffering, so that both can become one. The martyrdom takes on the status of a symbolic curriculum in an ascendancy of being. At its end is the jubilant merging as one—a marriage with Christ in death and in blood. It is precisely this fusion of believer with the believed that confers mystique on martyrdom—they form a unity, one which cannot be understood from any natural, social, or philosophical standpoint. It is a mystery of the soul. And for this reason, the text requires psychological and psychoanalytic interpretation.

Felicitas strides, therefore, 'from blood to blood', 'rejoicing to have survived childbirth so that she might battle against the beasts, going from one blood-sport to the next, from midwife to gladiator, to bathe after childbirth in her second baptism' (18.3), the blood of her martyrdom. The martyrdom therefore makes possible something which in terms of dogma would be impossible: a self-baptism, one in which the first baptism is repeated and heightened. In an emphatic sense, the bloodbath is a cleansing.¹³ The martyrdom is a blood baptism which, as we will see, is intended to lead directly to God.¹⁴ Her transformation will be from the *obstetrix* (effectively, midwife; indeed, Felicitas becomes her own midwife) to the *retiarius* (the gladiator who fights with the net and trident). Just as the *obstetrix* has no masculine form, the *retiarius* has no feminine form: in the transformation from one to the other, Felicitas undergoes a gender metamorphosis.¹⁵ She becomes a man to the same extent as Perpetua who is transformed into a man and who, as a gladiator, has to enter into battle with the Egyptian. Not only the familial order, but the gender order also is inverted, crossed, or cancelled in the martyrdom. Both Perpetua and Felicitas experience as a 'metamorphosis' something which might also be

¹³ In the *Passio*, the colour white stands for cleansing and purity in a sacred sense. In Justin (died approximately 165 AD), *1Apol.* 61, baptism washes as white as wool or as snow; compare also M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966).

¹⁴ On the blood baptism in relation to the sacrament of baptism in Tertullian, compare F.J. Dölger, 'Tertullian über die Bluttauf. Tertullian De baptismo 16', in F.J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum 2* (Münster, 1930), 117–41; see also Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien*, 62–6.

¹⁵ For the gender aspects of the *Passio*, see also Williams, this volume, Chapter II.

the breaking out from a socially-defined role of womanhood, or perhaps the discovery and emergence of a hitherto repressed masculinity.

2.2. The Interior Stage: Perpetua's Struggle

With this in mind, we will need to look more closely at Perpetua's fourth vision, the Egyptian vision, which she has one day 'before our combat' in the arena (10.1–14). This vision represents the climax of her series of visions. It is also the symbolic encoding of what is to follow the next day, as well as her preparation and steeling of herself for what is to come. In her vision, Perpetua is led out of prison through winding, subterranean pathways (association with Hades) into an amphitheatre. Here, she has to engage in a pankration, 'free-style battle', with an Egyptian 'of repulsive appearance' in front of a 'huge crowd'. Awakening from her vision, she recognizes the Egyptian to be the Devil. Pomponius assures her of his support and 'departs'—a strange paradox (see below). However, she does receive support, albeit from handsome young men. She is undressed and transformed into a man herself, a gladiator, who is massaged with oil ('as is the custom for combat'). The battle is led by a man, *mirae magnitudinis* (a formulation which she also uses in the first vision for the leader as well as for the dragon, 4.3–4). He is made up of a strange mixture of pagan and Christian elements. He embodies the traditionally disreputable *lanista* ('fencing-master' who rents out gladiators entrepreneurially), a referee, and a Christ-like initiator of rituals adorned in a magnificent robe and decorative footwear. That the gladiator elements (not altogether correctly represented by Perpetua) coincide with components of ritual and martyrdom shows that the battle scenes which follow in the arena have a real as well as a spiritual meaning.

This blending of gladiator contest and martyrdom is also to be found in Tertullian: 'You will engage in a good fight (*bonum agonem*) in which the playmaker (*agonothetes*) is the living God, the overseer (*xystarches*) the Holy Spirit, the victory laurels of immortality the wages of angelic essence, the citizenship in heavenly glory for all eternity. This is why your trainer (*epistates*), Christ Jesus, anointed you with the spirit and led you to this arena so that you would be distinguished by yet harder trials [. . .] one day before the games in order that your strengths would be heightened'.¹⁶ We can see clearly here how Tertullian 'translates' the dramatic elements of the gladiator games one by one into the theology of the martyrdom. The *belief* in the power of this 'translation' forms the core from which the sufferer is sustained in resistance

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Ad martyras* 3.3.

to pain and despair. Perpetua and Felicitas ‘operate’ in the same way. They use an extreme psycho-technique of self-mastery.

The *lanista* is an over-sized, indeed superhuman figure who, as well as the crop, holds in his hands a ‘green branch, the golden apple’—a clear symbol of paradise.¹⁷ It is this branch that promises Perpetua entry into paradise, and a life of redemption and bliss if she can claim victory in combat with the Egyptian.

The fight is therefore a metaphor for the internal battle which Perpetua must face ‘in herself against evil’—in other words, against the Egyptian, the Devil. The entire visionary scene can, therefore, be understood as an internal stage. It operates with ‘regard to stageability’, as Freud puts it in relation to dreams.¹⁸ This can be said to apply fundamentally for visions and voices. In this case it implies that the fight for moral self-mastery and Christian self-disclosure has to take on a dramaturgical form. Here, real elements of the gladiator games, with which Perpetua was familiar, are put to use in the service of her imagined battle, the internal ‘test’ of her Christian sensibility. In the vision, Perpetua’s imagination—beyond her consciousness—plays out the question of whether she has won the battle against evil and will therefore proceed to martyrdom the following day. Awakening from her vision as from a dream, Perpetua ‘knows’ that she will do battle: ‘And I realized that I was going to be fighting not with animals but with Satan’ (10.14). For her to attain this certainty, the vision encodes all realistic elements of an ordinary arena fight into one of an imaginary stage for Perpetua’s anticipatory self-scrutiny. It is therefore strictly self-referential—like every dream in which only one presence is palpable: the ‘I’ of the dreaming self.

This claim requires a certain revision. As Adorno points out, between ‘it came to me in a dream’ and ‘I dreamt’ lie the ages of the world. But which is the more true? ‘No more than it is spirits who send the dream, is it the ego that dreams’.¹⁹ No dream, whether in pre-modern or modern times, separated by ‘the ages of the world’, corresponds in the strict sense of individual psychology simply to the dream of a single ego. Within the ego, the ego delivers the dream. These are the topical and historical elements in Perpetua’s envisioning. And no dream is simply the rendition of spirits or gods, no matter how much they

¹⁷ The golden apples are reminiscent of those in the garden of the Hesperides, also known as the ‘African sisters’. They bestow eternal youth on the Olympians. This pagan myth lends itself to the imagination of Perpetua, in that her visions set out a heavenly garden of paradise. The golden apple in her vision is most likely a symbol of redemption and the blissful eternity sought by the martyrs as reward for suffering unto death. This appears likely, although we cannot say for certain that Perpetua, well-versed in Greek, was in fact familiar with this Hesperidean legend.

¹⁸ S. Freud, ‘Die Traumdeutung’, in A. Mitscherlich *et al.* (eds), *Freud, Studienausgabe II* (Frankfurt/M, 1975), 335–44.

¹⁹ T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt/M., 1985), 252 (quotation is from the translation: *Minimale Moralia*, London, 2005, 190 [= 1974¹]).

may be felt as such and treated as visions. The pre-modern dreams, like their modern counterparts, are products of an ego that encounters itself within the dream. These are the differentiating moments of Perpetua's dreams—the factors that set them apart from pagan or Christian motifs and configurations and which themselves are creations of Perpetua's imagination, therefore *also* expressions of her self. This dream dialectic always has to be taken into account. The same rule applies to each type of dream—irrespective of who or what is dreaming, 'Ich' or 'Es', the ego or the id, namely its 'regard for stageability'—without this, there would be neither dream nor vision. This accounts for the overlaying of contemporary scenic elements such as the 'reality of the gladiator games' with Christian motifs which follow an entirely different logic, namely that of martyrdom. The martyr logic leads to a grandiose metamorphosis of the real into the imaginary to such an extent that the latter becomes the scene of Perpetua's self-examination: she will prove herself as a blood witness in the lineage of Christ; she will have defeated evil within herself. In this way, the vision establishes a form of self-assurance for Perpetua.

The question of stageability requires two encodings in separate directions: the 'inner scene' of self-scrutiny in which good and evil do battle with each other borrows from the gladiator games in the amphitheatre. And vice versa, these 'real' elements are radically transformed into the symbolic and the imaginary. This enables Perpetua to behave as she does in her battle against the Egyptian—she does not succumb to the 'weight' of material bodies and takes on from 'elsewhere' a freedom and strength which allows her to beat the Egyptian. This 'elsewhere' refers to her moral and Christian certainty. It has many 'helpers' (*adiutores*) on its side (Pomponius, the handsome young men)—not in a real sense, but in a pastoral and aesthetic capacity, which in turn are reflected in Perpetua's powers. Beauty (that of the handsome young men) is always also the good (as evil, that of the Egyptian, is ugly). And the beautiful-good is male—a canonical view of ethics in antiquity since Plato—and transposed here into Christian discourse.

Perpetua's sex-change is therefore not to be understood in a physical sense.²⁰ It is nothing singular, rather a multivalent literary trope in antiquity. In Christian martyr discourse, the martyr always undergoes a ritual-symbolic change of status, showing that he or she has departed from the matrix of natural gender. This can entail having no gender at all anymore (in anticipation of divine sexlessness), or a change of sex, as in the cases of Perpetua and Felicitas. 'Becoming a man' means, for Perpetua, the emergence of the inner force of good, which is also beautiful. In a grammatical sense, she remains, of course, feminine, and the games' referee addresses her as 'daughter' (*filia*).²¹

²⁰ For the sex-change, see also Williams, this volume, Chapter II.

²¹ Augustine understood very well that no real metamorphosis has taken place here, but that the male represents a dreamlike 'similitude' of the engendered self, cf. the detailed discussion in

Handing her the branch with the golden apple, he gives her the kiss of peace and pronounces the eschatological words of peace—something entirely out of place in a Roman arena. As she advances *cum Gloria* (which adorns her as a heavenly glow) ‘to the Gate of Life and Health’ (*ad Portam Sanavivariam*, 10.13), the meaning of the gate is altered. Normally this is the gate through which the victorious gladiators exit, their sentences commuted to death by the sword. Now it becomes the portal through which Perpetua will enter the heavens. When she ‘awakens’ (*experrecta sum*) this connotes both an awakening from the dreamlike visionary state of the ‘here and now’ and an awakening to eternal life after the martyr’s death. Victory over the Egyptian does not symbolize the ‘saving of physical life’, but rather transition through the sacrificial death to martyrdom, hereby achieving heavenly bliss.

If Pomponius and the handsome young men ‘represent’ internal *adiutores*—symbolic figures of the forces of good within Perpetua; if the Egyptian ‘represents’ the externalized force of evil that struggles for dominion over her and within her, if all of these figures are actors on Perpetua’s internal stage, then the question remains: who is the towering figure of the *lanista*? In his magnificent vestments and majestic sovereignty, in his guises of judge, redeemer, and eschatological peace-giver, he represents the internalized and also transcendent presence of Jesus Christ within Perpetua. The *lanista* presents within Perpetua an independent, transpersonal, and idealized entity in which, psychoanalytically-speaking, functions of the (moral) super-ego and the ego-ideal are fused. Since Perpetua has been victorious in the internal self-scrutinizing battle—itself externalized in the visionary form—the *lanista* metamorphoses into a positive, paternal figure who speaks lovingly and

his *De anima et eius origine* 4.26, tr. Philip Schaff: ‘St. Perpetua, for instance, seemed to herself in dreams to be wrestling with an Egyptian, after being changed into a man. Now, who can doubt that it was her soul in that apparent bodily form, not her body, which, of course, remained in her own sex as a woman, and lay on the bed with her senses steeped in sleep, whilst her soul was struggling in the similitude of a man’s body? What have you to say to this? Was that male likeness a veritable body, or was it no body at all, although possessing the appearance of a body? Choose your alternative. If it was a body, why did it not maintain its sexual integrity? For in that woman’s flesh were found no virile functions of generation, whence by any such process as that which you call congelation could be moulded this similitude of a man’s body. We will conclude then, if you please, that, as her body was still alive while she slept, notwithstanding the wrestling of her soul, she remained in her own natural sex, enclosed, of course, in all her proper limbs which belong to her in her living state, and was still in possession of that bodily shape and the lineaments of which she had been originally formed’.

According to Augustine, women are not capable of configuring the image of God. The sex-gender order is an order of the flesh. Therefore, in the degree to which a woman (such as, for instance, Perpetua) becomes an image of God or of Christ, she departs from her gendered exterior and becomes both man and woman simultaneously, cf. J.M. Rist, *Augustine. Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge, 1996), 92–148 (Soul, body, and personal identity). See also Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 122ff. Focussing entirely on parallels, Habermehl, however, misses the crucial psychological significance of the gender transformation.

bears the promise of peace. From this moment on, Perpetua in the light of her glory (*gloria*) carries Jesus Christ within her, and so is strengthened for the rite of sacrifice which will follow the next day. Christ is fixed within her, as she has become a part of Christ.

2.3 Play, Charisma, Joy

The appearance of Saturus' face is entirely in keeping with the logic of the vision sequence. Once again contrary to the law of gravity, he is introduced together with Perpetua and led by angels to the extraordinarily brilliant light of heavenly paradise. Saturus is an additional, paternal comrade-in-arms and an exemplary figure. He serves to strengthen her psychologically as well as in steeling, 'masculinizing' her will. In the midst of paradise, they proceed to a pure architecture of light, filled with the eternal *Sanctus* of the heavenly choir. Here, the vision of the heavens in the Gospel of St. John is predominant. In a throne room, they meet God/Christ; they are raised up to him, allowed to kiss him and then, in a beautiful, yet atypical gesture of blessing, their faces are touched by the hand of God.²² Perpetua and Saturus exchange kisses of freedom. The on-looking elders, among them the four evangelists to the right and left of the throne, say to them: 'Go and play' (*Ite et ludite*, 12.6).

This thoroughly unexpected and original motif of play implies a new childhood, new innocence, their having become (once again) children of God. This throws light on the games of Dinocrates, the long-since dead, unbaptized brother of Perpetua,²³ whose fate concerns her in the second and third visions (7.1–8.4). Dinocrates had died of a facial cancer which had filled all those who beheld it with 'horror', and, after his death, he had been forgotten. During prayer in her dungeon cell, Perpetua suddenly and involuntarily cries out his name, 'Dinocrates'. This emergence of the unconscious, the

²² The God figure takes on traits of God the Father as well as of Jesus Christ: He is an elderly man with snow-white hair, yet with a youthful countenance—the quintessential, iconic merging of Father and Son. He is at the same time the symbol of divine majesty and the ruling Christ who does not so much preside as strict judge as receive sinners into grace.

²³ Augustine, *De anima et eius origine* 2.12, questions whether Dinocrates was truly unbaptized since he, unlike Vincentius Victor, for dogmatic reasons cannot accept that an unbaptized soul might be welcomed into grace. He argues that Dinocrates was capable of sin, in other words of being tempted into idolatry by the pagan father. For this reason, his being condemned to punishment in Hades is, as far as Augustine is concerned, justified. Nevertheless, his 'redemption' by Perpetua's intercession is likewise possible, but requires his having been baptized; see also F.J. Dölger, 'Antike Parallelen zum leidenden Dinocrates in der Passio Perpetuae', in F.J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum II* (Münster, 1930), 1–40 at 20–8. With the water from the *piscina* ('basin') and by drinking from the golden *fiala*, a manner of Hades-baptism is performed along the lines envisaged by the Shepherd of Hermas and Clement of Alexandria. However, this is doubtful (see below).

repressed, into waking consciousness can be understood as Perpetua's newly-attained Christian mercy setting aside the censorship processes of her memory so that the *memoria* can shoot up like a flash. In this way, Perpetua recognizes that she is in the 'state of grace'. Therefore, in her dream, in what is shown to her, she sees Dinocrates with his physical disfigurement in the dark, gloomy, hot, dirty Hades-Tartarus—in the pit of suffering, parched with thirst and tormented. This underworld of hellish punishment is miraculously transformed by Perpetua, now sharing the redemptive powers of Jesus Christ, into a place of divine redemption (third vision).²⁴ Here, Dinocrates, whose facial cancer has healed leaving only a scar, can drink from a golden bowl (*fiola aurea*) which never empties. Through Perpetua's faith, he is given the grace of God and transferred from the place of brutal punishment into the realm of paradise.²⁵ Here, his thirst for healing can be quenched and he is allowed to play in innocence (8.1–3).

Clearly, there had been a *damnatio memoriae* with regard to Dinocrates (if even Perpetua had 'never' thought of him, how much less, perhaps, the others?). Why? His illness caused repulsion in 'all' (!)—this is the very opposite of mercy—*misericordia* as practiced by Christ—towards a sufferer. Only now, retrospectively, can Perpetua feel empathic pain for her brother's misfortune (7.1). The 'repulsion'—always a turning away in which the sufferer is left alone—therefore also contains guilt. In the unconscious utterance of his name, 'Dinocrates', Perpetua, now a Christian, involuntarily acknowledges this guilt. She feels compassion and, noticing this fundamental Christian sentiment, straight away recognizes 'that I am in the state of grace' (7.2). This is immediately followed by intercessionary prayer. Perpetua, having already sinned by abandoning Dinocrates through her repulsion and her forgetting of him, now in her dream becomes his compassionate intercessor and, in doing so, atones for her sins. This is not just a memorial, but an eschatological (re)integration of her brother. Furthermore, Perpetua feels affirmed in her profession of faith: *Christiana sum* (6.4).²⁶ Her state of grace bestows on her the status of a chosen one who can carry out charismatic deeds. In so far as dreams are also wish-fulfilment, we can see in her dream of Dinocrates both her desire to make good her guilt and for elevation to the ranks of the chosen few. Her brother's open wound holds open also the

²⁴ See also the Thecla-legend from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in which Thecla's intercessionary prayer saves the unbaptized Falconilla (who subsequently baptizes herself) from punishment in Hades.

²⁵ Paradise-like settings appear on two occasions in the *Passio*—once in Perpetua's first vision and the second time in Saturus' vision. On each occasion, it is a heavenly paradise. See also the lucid interpretation and explanation in terms of religious history by Auffarth, *Irdische Wege und himmlischer Lohn*, 36–72.

²⁶ For the profession, see also Bremmer, this volume, Chapter I, note 44.

sins she has committed while a pagan. In healing Dinocrates, she fulfils her own desire to bury her old identity and create a new one.²⁷

The new identity is sealed when Dinocrates is seen by Perpetua at play—and therefore free (12.6). Dinocrates' freedom is also her own. As *ludus*, at play and thus released from all of the burdens of existence, he appears in the text as being in a state of paradise. This is not the same as Schiller's variation in which human beings are only human when at play. Instead, (heavenly) paradise is the (second) innocence and it is marked by pure pleasure. This motif of pleasure and happiness is presented at the end of the Saturus vision—as indeed throughout the narrative—when they are invited to play and Saturus says to Perpetua: 'You have what you want!' (*habes quod vis*). And she answers: 'As happy as I was in my body, I thank God I am even happier here now!' (12.7)

It becomes evident at this point that the martyrdom is based on desire which transcends all mortal pleasure in the fusion with Jesus and oneness with God. A radical shift of all psychic energies takes place. In desiring only to merge with Christ, Perpetua casts off all bodily longing and all earthly belonging. Beating evil—the Egyptian—she accedes to peace in God. There is a clear libidinal economy in this. The price is death and endurance of pain;²⁸ her reward is the instant welcoming into the grace of God *post mortem*. An additional reward is that one is stripped naked in the social sense (as every martyr is naked and made vulnerable) in order to be dressed anew in the robe of Christian life—a charismatic transformation that does not take place in the afterlife, but in the 'here and now'. Perpetua can take pleasure in this charisma, this richness of healing power and the aura it bestows. From the very first vision, the goal is to be sure in the joy, the foretaste of heaven.

The more certain Perpetua becomes of her charisma, the more contained and self-assured she becomes in her newly-found Christian identity. In the first vision, she proves herself—following her teacher, Saturus, in her encounter with the dragon, who seems to fear her more than she fears it. She stands on its head and proceeds onto the rung of the ladder which is inlaid with sharp weapons. The dragon is, of course, only another Egyptian, a mask of Evil which Perpetua has to defeat within herself on her difficult path towards God, her *ascensus* through horrific dangers.²⁹ The name, Jesus Christ, lends the

²⁷ See the informative study of Dölger, 'Antike Parallelen'. However, in the fullness of philological references to parallel passages in antiquity, Dölger misses the psychological and moral dimensions of the Dinocrates-visions.

²⁸ Only this endurance, this 'patience of the flesh' (3.5) is what Perpetua hopes for in the baptism. It should, above all, strengthen her for the blood baptism. The latter is what ensures the immediate entry to paradise and union with Christ. Ascension is Perpetua's goal.

²⁹ It is doubtful whether it is correct to interpret this ascension on the ladder in terms of the two-path-model which is often used. This model sets out a right way—one that is narrow and difficult, but leads to God (or, in pagan antiquity, to the moral Good) and a wrong way—one that

security that arms her against dragons and weapons. Reaching the top of the ladder, a vast paradise garden is opened to her (prefiguring the heavenly garden in vision five). Here, the classical figure of the good shepherd gives her some of the seeping cheese of his freshly-milked sheep to taste. This is a ritual act and she responds to it with an equally ritualistic gesture, whereupon the by-standers (the countless number of the redeemed) pronounce the word, 'Amen'. This liturgical act anticipates Dinocrates' drinking from the golden bowl, *fiala aurea*, and echoes the baptism which Perpetua has just received in her dungeon (3.5).³⁰ She awakens with the sweet taste in her mouth that she believes is from her dream. Perpetua recognizes from this vision that her martyrdom is impending—the fight with the dragon, the Egyptian, and the wild beasts. She will triumph in dying with and for Christ and will be granted eternal life in paradise. The hellish pain of martyrdom is therefore sweet—a foretaste of eternal joy.

From now on, she is certain of her charisma, as she has seen in her Dinocrates visions. In the Saturus vision, we recognize her charisma in her presence in the heavenly garden, even though she is not in the throne room.

is wide and inviting, but leads to Tartarus/hell. There is no mention of two pathways in the text. On the contrary, Perpetua has already made her decision for 'one' way, the Christian pathway. In the visions, it is a question of attaining the strength and certainty to carry this decision through to its climax in the martyrdom. It is a case of standing firm, also indicated in her name. The ladder should also not be confused with the ladder ('steps') in Jacob's dream (Genesis 28.10–16), where it is a metaphor for movement between heaven and earth, God and humans, and is mediated by descending angels. It is not a question here of whether the believer will succeed in ascending to God or will descend into hell and to Satan. In spatial terms, the Genesis passage is characterized by a bi-polar vertical which encodes the directions which may be taken in life (by the Christian) with regard to the afterlife. In Perpetua scholarship, there is too much of a tendency to see pagan or Christian patterns re-emerging in her vision-motifs, and this leads to a frequently hypertrophic search for so-called parallel passages. As a result of this type of interpretation, the differences between the dreams in relation to tradition and to their own individual content are easily lost. Instead, methodologically, the dream texts become allegorized and conventionalized, as is rightly pointed out by Miller, 'Perpetua and her Diary of Dreams', 154–5 with reference to Dronke, *Women writers of the Middle Ages*, 6f.

³⁰ In scholarly literature, this scene has often been interpreted as a baptism or as similar to a baptism. However, this overlooks the fact that Perpetua has already been baptized. She herself reads the ladder and paradise scene as an unmistakable sign of her impending martyrdom. Therefore, the fresh cheese she is given by the shepherd is more an act of welcome by the 'good shepherd' and of reward for her martyrdom. It has no connection to baptism, rather to the Eucharistic covenant, but even shows strong variation from this. There is, however, considerable evidence that would support the baptism analogy: In his tract *De corona* (3), Tertullian refers to the baptismal ritual according to which, after being immersed in water three times the person is allowed to enjoy 'a mixture of milk and honey', although he does not mention this custom in his baptismal tract. Augustine also mentions the tradition in his *De doctrina Christiana* 2.12, tr. J.F. Shaw: '[...] as understanding consists in sight, and is abiding, but faith feeds us as babes, upon milk, in the cradles of temporal things (for now we walk by faith, not by sight)'. On milk, compare Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 101; the impressive study by H. Usener, 'Milch und Honig', in idem, *Kleine Schriften IV* (Leipzig, 1913), 398–417, and von Franz, 'Die Passio Perpetuae', 55–9.

She receives the bishop of the splintered Carthaginian community and his delegation. In a reversal of the Church hierarchy, these throw themselves at the feet of Saturus and Perpetua and beg them to bring peace and harmony. However, the accompanying angels remind the bishop of his own duty to bring peace to his community.³¹ As is often the case in a dream, the bishop and his escorts disappear suddenly,³² and Saturus and Perpetua immediately recognize many (already deceased) brothers and martyrs—they are all refreshed and sated by an ‘indescribably beautiful scent’—this is the paradisaical nourishment of charisma in which they share. And Saturus ‘woke up, rejoicing’ from the dream.

Perpetua will become more and more certain of this very joy, which, from the first vision onwards, is a sign of her martyrological destiny. In this sense, it is in good cheer that she hears her death sentence pronounced by the procurator Hilarianus (6.6), and can stride into the arena to do battle, ‘cheerfully, as if to heaven, with composed expression(s), except perhaps for an excitement caused by joy and not by fear’ (18.9). The ostentatious self-identification at the tribunal during the hearing with the procurator is an important station on this journey (*Christiana sum*, 6.4). This public proclaiming of her existence as a Christian (and the refusal of the sacrifice to the emperor) is a central turning point in many *Acta martyrum* in which the plot points in the unmistakable direction of the martyrdom. With the words ‘I am a Christian’ the persecuted proclaim their identity and offer themselves consciously and wilfully in sacrifice.³³ The name of Christ, which Perpetua, like all martyrs, takes on in her profession of faith and which seals her change of status, necessitates the judgement and makes inevitable her punishment in a legal sense as well as offering a protective outer layer and the manner of defensive function with which all martyrs make themselves invulnerable to their impending suffering and death.

The triumphant enactment of the authority of the State and the raging hatred of the masses are diametrically reversed, becoming the scene of a jubilant enthusiasm of those sacrificed. It is the victims who dominate the scene and who have therefore triumphed over the world.

³¹ It is not known which precise inner-Christian conflict is being referred to here. However, it is well known that in Carthage many Christian currents were in conflict with each other. The closing scene of the fifth vision anticipates the ‘catholic’ influence of Perpetua, but also the emphasis on individual responsibility for peace in the sense of Church unity. See also Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 194–5.

³² It seems that the Gates to Paradise are closing before them (13.7). That is to say, they are ‘out of the picture’.

³³ See Bremmer, this volume, Chapter I, note 44.

3. SNIPPING THE AUTHORITY OF THE FATHER

The four-act internal drama between Perpetua and her father is part of the undercutting, indeed, eliminating of the familiar order. Social order and the power of the family as concentrated in the *pater familias* have to be radically deconstructed in order for the martyrological process and the *Christiana sum* to develop. It is indeed the ambivalence which it brings to light and the degree of tension between familial bonds and their overcoming that make the *Passio Perpetuae* such an exceptional text.³⁴ The father is not the family tyrant of later bourgeois tragedies. Without doubt, he loves his daughter, indeed more so than he loves her brothers, and is credible in asking: 'Didn't I bring you up with these hands, so that now you are in the flower of youth? Didn't I put you first, before all your brothers?' (5.2). He has remained a pagan and would like to protect his family from scandal and his daughter from sentence. This is why he advises her to behave tactically, not to admit in court to being a Christian (3.1–4)—revealing in doing so his deep misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian. That she would save her life by heeding this advice is not the illusion of a protective father—it is confirmed later by the procurator (6.3–5).

The father has underestimated the linguistic intelligence of the daughter as we can see in the logical trap she sets for him in order to explain the impossibility of being a Christian, but not professing as such. In passing, she points to a jug and asks if one could refer to this by another name 'than that which it is'. No, the father replies—and has lost straight away. Perpetua's linguistic trap contains—along the lines envisaged by Benjamin³⁵—a semiotic significance of naming that makes it impossible in linguistic and ontological terms to treat the name as something purely conventional and arbitrary. Perpetua cannot simply argue for tactical reasons that she is not a Christian because to be a Christian means to be so *through-and-through*, to be so in *essence*. Naming and being coincide: Perpetua puts to full rhetorical use the fact that, in baptism, the name is bound in essence to being. She extends this logic to other things. The defeated father becomes so enraged that he wants to scratch her eyes out (a female gesture that pre-empts the coming inversion of power relations between father and daughter. All of this leaves her free of her father for several days and in precisely this 'fatherless' interim period, Perpetua manages to be baptized.³⁶ This strengthens her assertion that the sentence, 'I am a Christian', is no play of signifiers—not something that is open to

³⁴ Habermehl, *Perpetua und der Ägypter*, 63–73, has been the first, as far as I can see, to have recognized this ambivalence in the relationship with the father.

³⁵ W. Benjamin, 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen', in R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (eds), *W. Benjamin: Gesammelte Schriften II.1* (Frankfurt/M, 1980), 140–57.

³⁶ She feels too much love for the father and the 'paternal' to be free of ambivalence. She has to recover (!) in his absence in order to be able to be baptized. In other words, she needs this

manipulation—but the welding of signifier to the signified: what my ‘Christian name’ says, I am (3.1–5). Her father has failed to recognize that his well-intended advice, from a Christian point of view, has to be seen as an attempt to take her away from Christ. The text uses the verb *evertere*: as though Perpetua should be moved, pulled away, shaken, undermined, turned around by the suggestion of her father. This verb shows how much Perpetua feels her father to be a ‘tempter’. It is the reason why, for the remainder of the drama that will unfold, he will become a mask of the Devil. Only by demonizing him can Perpetua manage to break free from the hold of the family.

In the second act of the de-potentiating of the *pater familias* and of the law of the father in which the daughter is normally the object of patriarchal authority, the father appears humbled and beseeching, kissing his daughter’s hands and throwing himself at her feet sobbing (5.1–6). If previously he was cast as the tactician, the tempter, he is now in the role of the pitiful, humbled, castrated father who, through Perpetua’s stubbornness, is delivered into scandal and loss of honour. He calls her ‘no longer daughter’, but ‘lady’, as Perpetua expressly notices. Perpetua sees her father’s grief and sorrow and she also sees that he is acting out of love, but she bemoans in his unhappiness only that he cannot rejoice in her martyrdom! She doesn’t suffer in seeing him suffer—she suffers because he does not share her joy. This is a deep emotional schism between father and daughter, but also within herself.

This is continued in the third scene: the father appears at the trial scene (6.1–8) and appeals to Perpetua’s pity for her infant. This is a powerful motif, since she is tormented by worry for the baby and is still nursing (3.6). The father receives support from the procurator who wants to move her to pay homage to the emperor at least out of pity for the age of her father and the tenderness of her child. All of this is perceived by Perpetua as a satanic temptation—her ladder/paradise vision has, after all, served its purpose—and she looks on the temptation as a test of her faith, a challenge in which she must succeed. She is joyful, therefore, at being sentenced to death, albeit pained at the suffering of her father. In the meantime, he has been sentenced to be punished by the birch for disorderly conduct in court. From this point on, her child, whom she has hitherto entrusted to her mother and her brother—both Christians—is taken from her by her father. God, however, stops the infant from demanding its mother’s milk, and even ensures that Perpetua’s breasts do not become infected and inflamed.

Psychoanalytically, this is important, since, as though it had been the will of God, not only is the bond between father and daughter severed, but also the closest bond of all—the nursing bond between mother and child. Perpetua had cared for her infant more than anything else and nothing had bound her to her

absence in order to take the formal step that will separate her definitively from the authority of the father and enable her to overcome the love that she still holds for him.

life so much as her child. Leaving him, since this is what she does, must therefore awaken great feelings of guilt. These can only be allayed by the knowledge that God himself had ordained it and had determined that the infant would no longer need her to nurse him, but be able to be fed by others now. His life is saved and Perpetua can advance to her martyrdom without becoming the murderer of her child. This dramatic episode is symbolically linked to the first vision: the milk offered by the good Shepherd in paradise. Its nutritive value is higher than that of the breast milk. The ensuing Dinocrates dreams after the separation from the infant are connected to the episode with the breast milk in that Perpetua here makes good her 'guilt'. Her small brother who is parched with thirst is given water to drink thanks to her intercession. According to the rule of metonymy, Perpetua, in the Dinocrates dreams, bequeaths to her infant a symbolic testament: the quenching of thirst through the higher water of life.

Altogether, Perpetua's fantasies revolve to a great extent around nutrition—understandable in terms of her role as woman and mother.³⁷ On the day before her death she will transform the 'hangman's supper' into the festive meal of Pentecost, the 'last supper' (17.1), or in the Saturus vision, she will satiate herself in the heavenly scent (13.8). It is always a case of earthly foodstuffs being transformed into the spiritual and divine. In this inversion of the real with the symbolic, her will triumphs in following the way of Christ and overcoming the flesh. In the spiritualizing of nutritional substance, Perpetua's actions are reminiscent of the magical transformations enacted by Jesus in the words he pronounces over the bread and wine during the Last Supper. Perpetua, however, does not banish the nutritional trace or remnant of substance entirely. In this way, she is able to remain in the symbiotic flow that links her in the breast milk to her child. At the same time, she sublimates this symbiosis, transforming it into the unity with Christ that gives nourishment to her and all believers. It is the sheer psychological radicalism with which Perpetua manages to overcome the conflict of ambivalence with her father and the child (beyond, but not only beyond her conscious awareness) that makes this text so gripping and indeed compelling. She cannot accede to the role of martyr with a burden of guilt—this would be psychologically untenable. The dreams, therefore, have a psychological function in atoning for any wrongdoing so that she can be strengthened in her will towards martyrdom—something which is frequently overlooked. Moreover, the dreams serve to overcome Perpetua's ambivalence and the fear, indeed horror,

³⁷ In general, fluids play a major role—from the 'overflowing grace' to the milk, runny cheese, water, oil, and the blood that is shed. Together with the strong sensory sensations (taste, smell), the powerful visual images and the particular attention to clothing and shoes, these are the features of representational concretism generally suited to dreams.

that she understandably feels in the dungeon and in advance of her martyrdom (3.5–6, 4.4, 6.8, 10.4, 18.1).

In the fourth dramatic encounter with the father (9.2), he appears broken down with sorrow; he plucks out his beard, scatters the whiskers on the earth and prostrates himself before Perpetua, his face to the ground. This gesture repeats the de-potentiating, an ancient gesture of *proskynesis*, in which the persons prostrate themselves to express deepest submission. In this mode, the father urges and begs Perpetua with such insistence ‘that would move the whole of creation’ (*universam creaturam*, 9.2–3). Perpetua does indeed feel pain at the old man’s misery. However, anything that can and does evoke creaturely pain and sympathy cannot and must not touch her now. This is the schism she must produce in herself emotionally, so that, in letting go of the world, she is able to tear herself away from her father. It is part of the psychological realism of the text that the pain of separation from the father, the cost of renouncing the world, is felt right up to the end. To a certain extent, Perpetua now no longer belongs to the *universam creaturam*. In a dreadful way, it is helpful to her in this process of separation that she demonizes her father from the beginning. She has given him the mask of the tempter, even though the text makes clear that he is far from being this demonic figure. Perpetua is not allowed to feel ‘human’ sympathy anymore if she is to enter the kingdom of heaven as one who has renounced the world. Her sacrifice in turn demands renunciation, and this takes the form of her love for her father and his love for her. She demands a superhuman strength from herself which could justifiably be called inhuman. However, we can see why this scene is immediately followed by the vision of Perpetua as an oiled gladiator—the disempowerment of the father is a precondition of Perpetua’s imaginary sex-change. The symbolic order of the family is wiped out. The redemptory drama of the martyrdom can proceed, rid of all mortal and familial encumbrance. Perpetua explicitly declares herself free (18.5). Psychologically, however, this freedom is only the inversion of the compulsion to which she succumbs.

4. TRIMMING THE AUTHORITY OF THE STATE AND TRIUMPH OF MARTYRDOM

Like the family and like gender, the state, too, is subverted. Granted, it has its power. It inaugurates laws, ordains trials, and presides over prisons and public arenas of punishment. However, as early as in the first prison scene, the prison guards prove themselves amenable to bribery (3.7). The dungeon becomes more like a palace for Perpetua (3.9). The procurator, wanting to avoid pronouncing the death sentence, falls victim to Perpetua’s steadfastness and is *forced* to

pronounce the sentences (6.1–8). A lower-ranking officer among the guards is so impressed by the Christians that he allows them to receive many visitors (9.1). A hard-hearted tribune is so greatly put to shame by Perpetua's accusations that he treats the prisoners more humanely (*humanius*) (16.2–5). The dungeon guard becomes a Christian (16.5). The last meal before execution becomes a pentecostal supper (17.1); Jesus had set the precedent. Many of the observers become believers along the way (17.3).

And so, in the light of the day of her certain victory, Perpetua enters the arena 'with a radiant expression' singing psalms, triumphant, *ut matrona Christi, ut Dei delicata*—like the bride of Christ, 'a favourite of God'. In her dream, she has already taken on the honorary title of a 'daughter' (10.13) who has no family; the father has addressed her as 'lady'; the bodily connection to her child as nursing mother has been severed by the will of God; now she has even advanced to the role of *matrona Christi*. This game of metamorphoses is a radical inversion of family genealogy and gender order. For Perpetua, the highest acclaim, entry to immortality and eternal memory in the world to come are all awaiting. The price of martyrdom carries a reward that surpasses anything to which a nobly-born woman—a wife—could ever aspire. No state authority can affect her. In this world she has become immune to all things and can step forward 'joyfully' (*felicitas*, 17.1) for martyrdom, 'parrying the gaze of all with the strength of her own' (18.2). Indeed, Perpetua has taken control of the scene of her surrender and helplessness, but also of her fears and ambivalences, bringing them into line in the choreography of her martyrdom.

The condemned successfully resist being dressed in the customary robes in Carthage for those dedicated to Saturn and Ceres (18.3–6). The tribune is forced to allow them to appear in their own clothes, which in itself counteracts the pagan scenery. It is suggested to the procurator (and, as such, highest representative of state power) that just as he has passed sentence on the Christians, so too will sentence be passed on him (18.8). Driven on by spurs, the martyrs rejoice, 'quite gratified to experience something of our Lord's sufferings' (18.9). The women are undressed and led into the arena in combat nets. When the spectators are horrified at seeing this shamelessness, the women have to be clothed in their own garments again (20.2–3). The wild heifer that is supposed to kill Perpetua and belittle her gender only knocks her over. It tears her clothing and injures her, but Perpetua, long since in a state of pain-free delight (*in extasi fuerat*, 20.8), covers herself and ties her hair up once again (20.4–5). Whereas the letting-down of hair symbolized mourning, with her hair fixed, Perpetua shows that she is ready for the 'hour of grace'. The attempt to kill the two women by setting the animals on them fails. 'The cruelty of the masses is overcome' (20.7). In the cases of the remaining martyrs, either the animals refuse to come out of their cages or the martyrs die in exactly the manner they had hoped for (21.1ff). Saturus, as he had wished, is mortally wounded by one fatal leopard bite, but can still—covered in

blood—insert the ring from the converted soldier into his wound and bequeath the bloodied ring (*relinquens*) as *memoria sanguinis* and *hereditas*—a ‘memory of the blood’ and ‘testament’ (21.2–5).³⁸ What we are witnessing here is the unmediated production of a relic in the midst of a mass spectacle for a hostile pagan audience that is hungry for sensation.³⁹ After all previous attempts at her execution fail, Perpetua is finally set to be killed by the sword. But the untrained gladiator falters and Perpetua, stabbed between her bones, cries out ‘so that she might taste some pain’ (21.9). Since he has not managed to fulfil his task alone, she takes the gladiator's ‘faltering right hand’ and brings it to her throat. Her execution by state decree is therefore inverted into a self-killing. ‘Perhaps’, the narrator muses, ‘such a great woman, who was feared even by an unclean spirit, could not have been killed unless she herself had wished it’ (21.10). In the execution of the victim, the Last Judgement is pronounced on the Empire.

From the very beginning, the legal authority of the state is turned into a stage on which the events are in no way determined by court, administration, and the military. More and more, the martyrs themselves take matters in hand.⁴⁰ We can call this the politics of martyrdom. What had been intended as a triumph of state sovereignty with the roaring of the crowd as affirmation is turned into a spiritual drama in which the *Civitas Dei* is manifested. That is the meaning of the martyrdom drama. Right up to today, the desire of the martyrs is unchanged: through their actions, they destroy the familial order, subvert the power of the state and, with their blood, allow the divine to triumph over the world. In its bloody pathos, the imaginary takes control of the real. That is the irrepressible desire of the martyrs.

The logic of the visions and the triumph at the close are clear in their meaning. In order to be a descendent of Christ, Perpetua must ascend the ladder of martyrdom. She must be undeterred by all worldly things; the pains and temptations of the world must be as nothing for her; she must show masculine virtue to triumph in the violent struggle over evil, and overcome the world. She must be successful in all of this in order to gain entry to paradise

³⁸ On this episode see the insightful study by F.J. Dölger, ‘Gladiatorenblut and Martyrerblut. Eine Szene der Passio Perpetuae in kultur- und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung’, *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1923–1924* (1926), 1–40.

³⁹ The cult of the relic is closely linked to martyrdom, as we can see in one of the earliest martyr-tracts, that of Polykarp (*Martyrium Polycarpi* 18.2), cf G. Buschmann, *Das Martyrium des Polykarp* (Göttingen, 1998), 338–42; see also Angenendt, *Heilige and Reliquien*, 149ff.

⁴⁰ This ‘reversal’ of the real order by the power of the symbolic and the imaginary is explicitly described by Tertullian, *Ad martyras* 2, as a martyrological strategy. The dungeon in which the martyrs are imprisoned is a release from the world, itself a dungeon. There then follows a chain of reversal figures—a cornerstone of all martyrological narratives: ‘Darkness is there, but you are light; fetters are there, but you are free before God. Unpleasant exhalations are there, but you are an odour of sweetness. There the judge is expected at every moment, but you shall judge the judges themselves’. All of these reversal figures are also to be found in the *Passio Perpetuae*.

and be redeemed by Christ and then, as a blessed martyr, to perform miraculous good deeds in the Church after her death. This is how the martyr *avant la lettre* helps construct the kingdom of God. Familial bonds, love of the father, love of the child, duty to the spouse, female fearfulness, fear of state authority, fear of pain and death—all of these things are nothing but evil temptations that pose a distraction on the straight-and-narrow path to heaven. The martyr pursues a strategy of auto-redemption. Initially appearing as the passive subject of worldly forces, he transforms the world into a stage of grandiose self-production. He turns his powerless, nameless insignificance into a triumph that will make his name immortal and his subjection into the turning-point of his redemption. The self-absorption which is only one variation of entrapment in the throes of worldly temptation is now relinquished in the act of total submission. The humble ego is now led into union with the narcissistic glow of a redeemed ego-ideal. Here, it is invulnerable to any law, whether the law of the father, of gender, of the state. It is free. That Perpetua should be *in extasi* means two things: firstly, she is anaesthetized in her perceptions of the world and, secondly, she is already in a state of worldly and bodily enlightenment. The real scene of the amphitheatre has been infiltrated by phantasmagorical images given to her in dreams and visions. In certain respects, the arena scene at the close is the direct continuation of her earlier visions, only this time taking on embodied form. It is no coincidence, therefore, that she meets the Egyptian once again (18.7) and that he is the Devil (*diabolus*, 20.1) acting within the wild beasts. Dying, the martyrs have triumphed over evil and the evil of the world.

It is precisely through the martyrs' total passivity in the *Passio* that their complete directorial control is secured over the events. These events only appear to unfold according to the rules of worldly authority. In reality, they follow the directions of the martyr who has taken control of them in his or her visions. In this way, every execution becomes an indirect suicide in which the martyrs cast off their body in order to rescue their ego-ideal. Death itself is nothing, since it opens the door to eternity. The symbolic and the real are annihilated; the imaginary triumphs. It is easy to see how worldly states—right up to today—not only have difficulty in dealing with these imaginary conclaves, but are, in fact, utterly helpless.