

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: **AMBIGUOUS BODIES: GENDER NON-
CONFORMITY AND BODILY
TRANSFORMATION IN EARLY MODERN
ITALIAN ART**

Sara K. Berkowitz, Doctor of Philosophy, 2020

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Art History and Archaeology**

This dissertation examines images of ambiguously gendered human bodies in early modern Italian art (1600-1750). Specifically, it explores how artists rendered bodies that underwent a physical change, transforming from conforming men and women into ambiguous or gender-fluid entities. However, the alterations to these figures' forms did not relegate them to the period's third category of gender, the hermaphrodite. Rather, they entered into liminal spaces between the defined boundaries of male and female. Focusing on Italy and its interactions with other European centers, including England and Spain, I explore the ways in which artists constructed a new visual language for the portrayal of ambiguously gendered bodies by turning to a variety of novel sources. In particular, I examine artists' use of medical knowledge from treatises on congenital diseases, anatomical illustrations, and surgical manuals. In combination with artists' use of classicizing myths and religious doctrines, these medical sources enabled artists to render figures as

recognizable derivations from the natural order, while still retaining attributes of their humanity. Three case studies demonstrate how these issues manifested on the painted surface: Jusepe de Ribera's portrait of *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband* (1631); Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends* (1750–1752); and Giovanni Andrea Coppola's altarpiece *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (1650). The subjects of these paintings—hirsutes (figures whose hair covers the entire body or face), *castrati* (male singers who were castrated before reaching puberty so that their voices would remain at a prepubescent height and pitch), and Saint Agatha (an early Christian virgin martyr whose breasts were amputated) demonstrate how slippages between conforming male and female bodies existed across early modern life and belief. Drawing from the fields of Art History, Social History, Gender Studies, History of Medicine, and Literature, this dissertation elucidates the early modern preoccupation with understanding bodily difference—a preoccupation, I argue, of equal importance for artists, philosophers, and medico-philosophers as studying and representing the ideal Renaissance body. This project, therefore, presents an opportunity to reconsider the parallels between early modern definitions of non-conforming bodies and issues surrounding gender identity in contemporary society.

AMBIGUOUS BODIES: GENDER NON-CONFORMITY AND BODILY
TRANSFORMATION IN EARLY MODERN ITALIAN ART

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2020

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Dedication

To Steve, for everything, *and more.*

Acknowledgements

Representations of bodily difference have been part of my world for so long that I have often recognized aspects of myself in the lives of my subjects—the hirsute Magdalena, the *castrato* Farinelli, and Saint Agatha. In fact, it has sometimes proved difficult to separate my own experience and investment in issues of gender inequality from the objective distancing that such an undertaking as a dissertation on a historical period requires. I am first and foremost grateful for the opportunity to study the lives and art of these compelling figures. While we may never fully understand their experiences from their perspective, I hope this dissertation brings exposure and awareness to the issues of gender identity and difference, as well as recognition that the current debate about what constitutes a normative body is not a modern phenomenon but rather a centuries-old discourse on status, access, control, and fear of the unknown.

My interest in these issues began as early as my time as an undergraduate, thanks to courses on the sociology of gender and the art history of women. I am grateful to the professors who fostered my interests at such a nascent stage in my academic development and who ignited in me a passion to uncover and critique gender's historical constructions. Thank you especially to Tracy Citeroni and to my undergraduate mentor, Marjorie Och, who, in a course entitled "Women in Western Art," permitted me to write on the *representation* of the female body while every other student researched a "great woman artist." This experience crystalized in me a profound curiosity about bodily figuration that would eventually lead to the questions of gender ambiguity that guide this present study.

At the graduate level, I found continued support and guidance from my advisor, Anthony Colantuono. Anthony encouraged my ideas from my first day at the University of Maryland, and I truly believe this project could not have been undertaken with anyone else. But above all, thank you, Anthony, for believing in me and my work—even when I struggled to do so myself. I would also like to thank the members of my committee, Meredith J. Gill, Maryl B. Gensheimer, Kim Butler Wingfield, and Kimberly Coles for their support throughout this project. Dr. Gill, long before this project came to fruition, I explored ideas about medicine and ambiguity in your seminar on Leonardo da Vinci. That seminar, and your comprehensive exam question on religion and medicine, have remained with me throughout this project, and I am grateful that you saw a connection between these two areas that inspired my third case study on Saint Agatha. Dr. Gensheimer, your role in the development of this project goes far beyond serving on my committee. Since my first semester at Maryland, you have become a personal mentor and role model for me. You sparked an unexpected passion in me for Roman art and archaeology when you introduced me to *cassate* during a summer in Naples. Drs. Butler Wingfield and Coles, I am honored to have had your participation on this committee. It is especially meaningful that in a project with no female artists, this committee includes a number of female scholars whose research critically engages with issues of gender in art and literature. Thank you.

I would also like to thank a number of scholars who have provided support and feedback throughout this process, including James Anno, Sheila Barker, Patricia Simons, and Jutta Gisela Sperling. I am deeply grateful to another group of scholars

who both provided academic feedback and served as mentors, including Renée Ater, Meghan Callahan, Emily Egan, Touba Ghadessi, Fredrika Jacobs, and Jacqueline Musacchio. Thank you especially to Yui Suzuki, whose mentorship and friendship I hope will continue for many years to come.

To the students in my Spring 2020 “Transgressive Bodies” seminar at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, words cannot express my gratitude for your engagement with the class material, the majority of which was inspired by the topics in this dissertation. Your passion, personal investment, and drive in asking new and challenging questions reminds me daily of the necessity for more research on artists and subjects who defy the conventions of the canon of art history.

The international travel that this project necessitated would not have been possible without the support of several institutions, including the Cosmos Club Foundation, a summer research fellowship and Goldhaber travel award from the University of Maryland, and a six-month fellowship at La Capraia: Centro per la Storia dell’Arte e dell’Architettura delle Città Portuali in Naples, Italy. A special thank you to La Capraia’s research coordinator, Francesca Santamaria, for her assistance throughout my residency.

As anyone who has undertaken a dissertation or similar multiyear endeavor knows, the overused aphorism “it takes a village” does not adequately acknowledge all those whose support made a difference every day of this process. I owe a great debt to Alana Dunn and George Flowers, who stepped into my life at times when their help could not have been more appreciated. Thank you both for your encouragement throughout this journey. And to my family and friends, for all the

missed social engagements, the times I did not know “how to turn the dissertation off,” and the one too many times I talked about castration at a dinner party: thank you. Indeed, I would be hard-pressed to learn of any father who contributed more substantially—and wholeheartedly—to editing his daughter’s writing on premodern castration than my own. To my familial support system—my brother, Greg; my parents, Joanne Browning and Ted Berkowitz, and my stepmom, Heidi Levine; and the family I have added along the way, including Sue and Nick Mandravelis—and to the friendships of a lifetime: Erica Longenbach; Elena Weissman Davis; Becca Alt; my fellow “goats” from La Capraia; and my colleagues from UMD: thank you. And to my dog Remy: I look forward to finally taking you on all the walks you have missed the past few years while I have been abroad or stuck at the computer.

It is undoubtedly my husband, Steve, to whom I owe the greatest debt of gratitude. You have been my partner in life since we met in graduate school ten years ago, but our relationship goes so far beyond that: we have grown up together, and our shared passion for art history has transformed into a professional collaboration. This project is as much a reflection of my research as it is of all the late-night conversations we have had over the years, in which you never stopped challenging me to push my conclusions further or to rewrite sections that were unclear or needed better explication. You persisted in supporting me and my research, even when to do so was to put your own writing second. To say that I dedicate this dissertation to you does not do justice to the role you played in its completion. I look forward to the next chapter of our lives and to many more research collaborations in the future. *Ti amo.*

“In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous.”

Aristotle

“[It is] not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”¹

Julia Kristeva

¹ Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, Book I, 645a. 16 and Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4. Cited in Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds. *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 15.

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Introduction: Locating Bodily Ambiguity in Early Modern Art

In 1587, Elena de Céspedes was brought before the inquisitorial tribunal of Toledo, Spain, for deceiving the court regarding her true gender identity.² Records from her testimony describe what happened to her body while giving birth, which led to a transformation of her genital organs: "...[W]hen she gave birth, she pushed with such force that a piece of skin located above her urethra broke and the head [of a penis] emerged that was half the size of a thumb. It looked like the swollen gland of a male member. When she felt aroused it came out and got bigger."³

For Elena, this addition of a new sex organ not only altered the external appearance of her body but also transformed how she identified her own gender.⁴ Now fully accepting that the addition of a penis changed her gender from female to male, she decided to go by the masculine name Eleno and engaged in socially defined masculine expectations for dress, behaviors, and employment, and also pursued sexual relationships with women. Eleno lived as a man for multiple years in Madrid,

² Tribunal de la Inquisición de Toledo. "Proceso de fe de Elena de Céspedes." Legal Case. 1587–1589. *Digital Transgender Archive*, accessed December 11, 2019, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/k930bx13w>. Elena de Céspedes was born around 1545 in Alhama de Granada to a man who had a relationship his black slave. For more information on her biography, see Richard Kagan and Abigail Dyer, eds. and trans., *Inquisitorial Inquiries: Brief Lives of Secret Jews and Other Heretics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 36–59.

³ Archivo Histórico de Nacional, Madrid, *Sección Inquisición, legajo 234, exp. 24, III, fol. 6v*. Published in François Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender in Early Modern Spain and Portugal: Inquisitors, Doctors, and the Transgression of Gender Norms*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 65n33.

⁴ Medical historians suggest that what Elena described was likely the swelling and increase in size of her clitoris, which resembled a small penis. This observation, however, is speculative and it is unclear from a contemporary perspective what, in fact, happened to Elena. See Raúl Carrillo-Esper, Jorge Raúl Carrillo-Cordóva, Luis Daniel Carrillo-Cordóva, Dulce María Carrillo-Cordóva, and Carlos Alberto Carrillo-Cordóva, "Elena de Céspedes: The eventful life of a XVI century surgeon." *History and Philosophy of Medicine* 151 (2015): 502–6.

and in 1576, trained as a surgeon's assistant, studying human anatomy and procedures for operations.⁵

Eleno's identity as a man went unquestioned until years later when *he* requested approval from the general vicar to marry the woman Maria del Caño.⁶ In going through the period's customary channels for seeking approval to marry, Eleno's identity as a man was officially called into question. Upon observing him for the first time, the vicar expressed doubts about Eleno's physical appearance, noting that he "lacked facial hair, had delicate features, and [had] a high-pitched voice."⁷ Eleno asserted his masculinity in spite of these observations and asked the vicar for a medical examination to demonstrate his true gender identity as male. Two doctors performed the examination of Eleno, found him to be a man, and thereby granted him the license to marry Maria.⁸ After hearing the public pronouncement of the vicar's decision, however, two townspeople decried that it was "public knowledge" that Eleno was, in fact, not a man but "male and female" (*macho y hembra*) and had both male and female genitalia.⁹ These serious accusations prompted the vicar to order a second medical examination by more experienced doctors. The second examination produced starkly different results than the first, leading to the proclamation that "she

⁵ Eleno eventually received a license to practice surgery by the *Protomedicato* of Madrid in late 1577. Carrillo-Esper et al., "Elena de Céspedes," 503.

⁶ This portion of the text refers to the masculine form of the subject's name, Eleno, and uses the masculine personal pronoun "he," reflecting the subject's self-identification as male at this stage of the narrative.

⁷ These traits prompted the vicar to ask Eleno if he was a *capón* or eunuch, which Eleno rejected. Carrillo-Esper et al., "Elena de Céspedes," 503.

⁸ It is important to note that the development of a penis did not mean that Eleno's vagina ceased to exist, but rather that Eleno saw himself as a man and made the determination to live as a man. It is unclear if Eleno privately believed he had transformed into fully intact man, or if he thought he was a hermaphrodite, or what would be generally acknowledged today as intersex or transgender.

⁹ Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 59.

[was] not, nor has ever been, a man but rather a woman...and that she possesses a vagina.”¹⁰ Eleno/a’s story is not an aberration in the historical record, however. As this dissertation will demonstrate, numerous cases of bodily ambiguity and transformation survive in written and visual form.

This dissertation opens with the story of Eleno/a to illustrate the value in examining the relationship of gender and sex to bodily difference. The events surrounding Eleno/a’s life demonstrate the existence—and acknowledgment—of early modern figures who disrupted the male/female binary system. The ruling in Eleno/a’s trial, however, also suggests that these figures’ capacity to deceive others by assuming another gender posed a considerable threat to the established social order. The two contrasting medical examinations of Eleno—the first of which verifying he was a man, and the second claiming that he was a woman—had grave effects for Eleno and his ability to live as a man, and specifically as a husband to Maria. Both Eleno and Maria were subjected to interrogation. Eleno attempted to resolve the medical examinations’ conflicting findings by suggesting that frequent horseback riding had “ulcerated his penis,” which eventually led him to make small external cuts to stop the swelling of his penis and testicles.¹¹ Maria, in her testimony, ultimately conceded that while she had believed Eleno was a man because they had had penetrative intercourse, she never saw his phallus.¹² As a result of these claims, the vicar ordered further medical tests of Eleno and Maria to be carried out by

¹⁰ Archivo Histórico de Nacional, Madrid, *Sección Inquisición, legajo 234, exp. 24, I, fol. 27r.* In Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 61n27.

¹¹ Archivo Histórico de Nacional, Madrid, *Sección Inquisición, legajo 234, exp. 24, I, fol. 42.* In Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 62n28.

¹² Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 62–63.

midwives charged with specifically examining both their vaginas and hymens. While Maria's examination yielded that her hymen was no longer intact, Eleno's examination revealed that he possessed what appeared to be a vagina, but that it resisted penetration. This observation led the midwives to conclude that Eleno was a virgin even though he had previously given birth.¹³

As a result of these contradictory observations from multiple medical professionals, the government charged Eleno with disguising *herself* as a man “without possessing the penis of a man,’ illegal transvestitism, as well as using magic to deceive the first medical examiners.”¹⁴ In the trial that followed, Eleno claimed the status of a hermaphrodite, insisting that *they* had both male and female genitals.¹⁵ The court ultimately rejected this assertion and found Eleno/a guilty of sorcery and disrespecting the sacrament of marriage, arguing that she was always a woman. Consequently, Eleno/a was sentenced to two hundred lashes, to hear the results in public to evoke shame, and to serve in a charitable hospital for ten years dressed in women's clothes.¹⁶

The story of Eleno/a provides an unprecedented glimpse into a core issue of this dissertation: the experience of gender ambiguity and fluidity in the early modern

¹³ Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 63.

¹⁴ Archivo Histórico de Nacional, Madrid, *Sección Inquisición, legajo 234, exp. 24, I, fols. 51r–51v*. In Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 63n31.

¹⁵ In the remainder of the discussion of this narrative, Eleno is henceforth referred to as Eleno/a to reflect the court's rejection of his masculine identity and the complicated and ever-changing status of Eleno/a's gender—as both determined by himself and the ruling bodies that were ultimately responsible for determining his gender identity in connection with documents such as a marriage certificate and other social rights. The pronoun “they” is also applied to reflect the ambiguity of gender identity, but also specifically when Eleno/a's status as a hermaphrodite is foregrounded.

¹⁶ Soyer, *Ambiguous Gender*, 67.

period. Eleno/a's bodily change and subsequent trial reveal the multitude of ways in which gender and sexual identity were contested, and often nebulous and contradictory, sites during this period of history. Although the court ultimately ruled that Eleno/a's gender was female all along, its final decision does not repudiate all the twists and turns, the confusion and alleged deception, and the questioning and examining that officials—and arguably Eleno/a—underwent. It is within this context that Eleno/a's "true" gender identity of male, female, or hermaphrodite is less important than the themes of bodily change, transformation, ambiguity, and questioning that their experience raises.

Scholars have long recognized the prevalence of figures like Eleno/a, hermaphrodites, and other forms of gender-non-conforming bodies such as cross-dressers, those with medical deformities, and those who engage in socially transgressive behavior in early modern culture. Called monsters, natural wonders, marvels, and, more recently, transgendered, this broadly shaped category of bodily ambiguity is most often engaged from the perspective of these figures' marginalized social status in society. As a result, the relationship between their physical difference and their gender and sex is understudied. In addition, art historical studies that interrogate visual representations of these figures and consider how artists articulate their difference are even further limited.

Eleno/a and their trial have received significant attention among literary scholars and historians in recent years, but the lack of surviving visual representations of them, however, prohibits the application of art historical methods. This dissertation asserts that these cases of gender ambiguity—many of which survive and cross

geographic and temporal boundaries—reflect the early modern preoccupation with understanding bodily difference, a preoccupation, I argue, that was of equal importance for artists, philosophers, and medico-philosophers as studying and representing the ideal body. The cases I will discuss provide an opportunity to reconsider, from a methodological perspective, how attitudes toward bodily difference were articulated across media and genre, encompassing social, medical, and legal contexts. Like other well-known examples of figures who underwent gender disguise and transformation, such as the French case of Marie/Marin Le Marcis and the Spanish case of Catalina de Erauso, a woman who was commonly referred to as the Lieutenant Nun, rumors of Eleno/a and their trial spread, leading to a level of infamy across Granada.¹⁷ While the trial records and other accounts inspired by Eleno/a's life survive, there are no visual representations of Eleno/a, to my knowledge, that document how they looked or how they would have been visually understood by the people of their time.¹⁸

This dissertation builds upon the discourse of bodily ambiguity from well-documented cases such as Eleno/a's to figures who, through acquiring a disease, undergoing surgery, or experiencing a religious intervention, no longer conform to conventional standards of a gender-conforming body. While scholarship on Eleno/a

¹⁷ Marie/Marin Le Marcis was a woman who later claimed to be a man and carried on a relationship with a woman. The surgeon Jacques Duval published an account of Marie/Marin in 1612. See *Des hermaphrodits, accouchemens de femmes: et traitement qui est requis pour les relever en sante* (Rouen: David Geuffroy, 1612), a7r. For a comprehensive account of Catalina de Erauso's life, see Sherry Velasco, *The Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, & Catalina de Erauso* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), esp. 45–86.

¹⁸ Eleno/a's story, for example, was inspiration for a character in Miguel de Cervantes's novel *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda: Historia Setentrional*, published in 1617. The character was a sorcerer from the same region as Eleno/a, who described herself as "unique." See Carrillo-Esper et al., 505.

discusses them as an example of complicated gender norms, I argue that this case does not take the issue of ambiguity as far as it went during the period as there are more types of figures that do not fit within Eleno/a's "third" hermaphroditic space. I examine three examples of this type of gender ambiguity that extend issues of bodily ambiguity beyond the category of the hermaphrodite. The first case, *hirsutes*, are figures whose hair covers the entire body or forms in women in a male pattern, such as on the face and chest, either from birth or as the result of an illness. The second example is a category of male singers who were castrated before reaching puberty so that their voices would remain at a prepubescent height and pitch. These vocalists, known colloquially as *castrati*, were highly prized for their singular sound but were also publicly derided for their appearance. The third case study widens the issues addressed by these two historical examples to include a religious figure in order to demonstrate how slippages between male and female bodies existed across early modern life and belief. It focuses on Saint Agatha, an early Christian virgin martyr whose breasts were forcibly removed after she rejected the advances of a Roman general. Written and visual accounts of Agatha's *vita* often portray her in an in-between state, with gaping red wounds signifying the place her breasts once occupied.

Compared to Eleno/a's experience of attempting to live as a heteronormative male, *hirsutes*, *castrati*, and representations of Saint Agatha were figures who functioned within liminal spaces. Their lack or obfuscation of all the defining elements of their masculinity or femininity did not refute their association with one of the two normative genders, but it did complicate their status as conventional and gender-conforming members of society. Neither fully intact men nor women, they did

not fit into any defined category of gender or sex, including the third space of the hermaphrodite, leaving them in a constant state of flux and contradiction. I argue it was, in part, their ambiguous gender identity that made these subjects so compelling to artists, writers, medico-philosophers, and collectors. Hirsutes, for instance, were often brought to the courts of Europe from around the world and served as members of royal households. Indeed, well-known artists of the seventeenth century such as Lavinia Fontana and Agostino Carracci were commissioned to paint portraits and narrative scenes focused on these individuals. Unlike some cases of court dwarves and giants, hirsutes were often afforded a level of autonomy, including permission to marry and hold property. *Castrati*, in turn, were equally celebrated on stage for their voices' unusual blend of height and power, even as they were disparaged for their gargantuan size. Their rumored affairs with men and women alike also called their sexuality into question, especially in popular caricatures where their clothes and bodies were manipulated to suggest a level of effeminacy. And lastly, the myriad of altarpieces and single-subject portraits of Saint Agatha attest to her fame, especially in southern Italy. And centuries later, she is still celebrated for her heroism in disembodied pastries and silver *ex-votos*, both in the shape of her breasts. Thus, by analyzing the impact of bodily change in visual representations of these three cases, the project also explores the significance of such bodily parts as hair, testicles, and breasts and how their excess or absence contributes to a change in gender, demonstrating their integral or prosthetic attributes.

The ubiquity of cases such as these proves that there was a recognizable notion or discourse on gender ambiguity beyond the category of the hermaphrodite or

intersexed. This dissertation argues that figures who lacked all the characteristics of an intact man or woman, or whose physical features obscured these traits, were not understood as hermaphrodites but instead occupied a different space along an early modern continuum of sex and gender. More broadly, it shows gender was more complex at this time than was previously understood by allowing spaces for those who were not fully male or female.

The remainder of this Introduction is divided into three sections. The first establishes the historical context necessary for the study of early modern ambiguous bodies. The section begins by examining how the early modern period defined the body and bodily difference in general terms. It then explains the period's understanding of what constituted a body by drawing from the medical, philosophical, social, and religious contexts which, together, saw the formation of identity, sex, and gender—formations that vary distinctly from these contexts today. It also elucidates how this project will contribute to expanding our knowledge on early modern definitions of the body, and of art and culture, more broadly. The second section builds on the first, turning to the history and historiography of early modern sex and gender. It specifically considers the relationship between bodily difference, sex, and gender and elaborates on why these constructions are important for the aims of this project. The third and final section addresses methodology, scope, and introduces the three chapters and artistic case studies that follow.

0.1: The Early Modern Body and Bodily Difference

The human body is arguably the most prolific subject of investigation among historians of early modern Italian art. Beginning with the “first art historian” Giorgio Vasari’s (1511–1574) celebration of Michelangelo’s divine talent for figuring the body in *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, published in 1550, to Jacob Burckhardt’s (1818–1897) seminal study of the individual in *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, published in English in 1878, and continuing with the work of scholars such as Michael W. Cole and Patricia Lee Rubin, early modern art history has been preoccupied with the artistic process for articulating the perfection that resided in the ideal human body.¹⁹ Indeed, depictions of the human body, whether portrayed in a battle scene, an act of religious devotion, or a portrait, represented what the early modern period deemed some of the most important artistic subject matter in the hierarchy of art.²⁰ The effects of studies such as Vasari’s and Burckhardt’s—and those produced by the generations that followed—on art historical narratives of the early modern period are undeniable. As a result of their work, the Renaissance, and the Italian Renaissance in particular, became the pinnacle of cultural and artistic achievement, and, as Burckhardt suggested, the foundation on which the tenets of modernity were built. These publications privileged the notion of

¹⁹ Michael W. Cole, *Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Art of the Figure* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), and Patricia Lee Rubin, *Seen from Behind: Perspectives on the Male Body and Renaissance Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

²⁰ The literature on the body in early modern art, and on the body in art, in general, is vast. For a recent general survey, see *Body of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 2015), and for the body specifically in the medium of sculpture, see the exhibition catalog by Luke Syson, Sheena Wagstaff, Emerson Bowyer, and Brinda Kumar, *Like Life: Sculpture, Color, and the Body*. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018).

singular male artistic geniuses, setting up a linear narrative that linked Italian Renaissance art's association with perfection to the depiction of the human body. Innumerable studies of the artists and tastemakers believed to be at the center of this discourse followed and continue to be produced today. Yet, the human body that remains at the fore of a majority of these studies, in its myriad of cultural, artistic, medical, religious, philosophical, and other contexts, is examined primarily from the perspective of its ideal iterations, most frequently epitomized in the figures of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raphael.²¹

Scholarship on these individuals, their colleagues, and their artistic theories on the body is especially informed by recent interdisciplinary studies on the body and science, and as a result, artistic representations of unideal and nonnormative figures remain understudied.²² In the last twenty years, however, scholars have begun analyzing the nonnormative body, in its different forms and departures from the ideal figure, representing a critical shift in the scholarship on the early modern body. This burgeoning subfield of studies on “others,” including nonnormative bodies, monsters, natural wonders and the marvelous, hermaphrodites, and other figures on the margins of society represents the most important area of scholarship on which this current

²¹ There are recent studies of great merit that focus on idealized bodies and thematic discussions on theories of figuration. For example, see Martin Kemp, *Leonardo*, revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially Chapter 3: The Body and Machine, and Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²² A recent catalog for the 2018 exhibition *The Renaissance Nude*, organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, authored by prominent scholars in the field epitomizes this claim. Of the 112 objects published in the catalog, for example, only ten were listed under the category “Part Four: Beyond the Ideal Nude” and were discussed in the exhibition catalog essay by Stephen L. Campbell, “Unruly Bodies: The Uncanny, the Abject, the Excessive,” *Renaissance Nude*, edited by Thomas Kren, with Jill Burke and Stephen J. Campbell, assisted by Andrea Herrera and Thomas DePasquale (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2018), especially 269–306.

project builds.²³ It has especially seen recent growth in how these subjects are characterized, from a perspective that once saw them as derogatory “freaks of nature” to nuanced and diverse individuals or imaginary figures, each with their own history and position in early modern society.²⁴ This interest stems in part from the influence of fields and methodologies outside of traditional modes of art history, reflected in the growing trend toward interdisciplinarity across all academic fields. Such examples include the rise of monster theory (also known as tetralogy), animal studies, disability studies, and transgender studies.²⁵

Scholars of the medieval period, especially those from the fields of English and literature, have generally incorporated these nontraditional methodologies into their studies on the body at a faster rate than scholars of early modern art.²⁶ Indeed,

²³ Figures within this grouping include imaginary or mythical animals and humans, such as those with mental or physical deformities including dwarves, giants, and hirsutes, or birth defects such as conjoined twins or figures with missing or extra limbs. Other examples include figures who lived on the margins of society, including witches and Jews, and black bodies. Interest in all the aforementioned figures undoubtedly grew out of the rising interests of postcolonial theory and disability studies. For two recent publications that explicitly address discourses of difference across race and ability, see Kimberly Anne Coles, Ralph Bauer, Zita Nunes, and Carla L. Peterson, eds., *The Cultural Politics of Blood, 1500–1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and Ann Millet-Gallant and Elizabeth Howie, eds., *Disability and Art History* (London: Routledge, 2017), respectively.

²⁴ For a previous study that uses the typology of the “freak” in the modern pejorative sense, see Barry Wind, *A Foul and Pestilent Congregation: Images of ‘Freaks’ in Baroque Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998).

²⁵ These fields are often directly tied to anthropology and cultural studies. For critical texts in these fields, see Asa Simon Mittman, ed., with Peter J. Dendle, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), especially Surekha Davies, “The Unlucky, the Bad, and the Ugly: Categories of Monstrosity from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,” 49–76; Jonathan Hsy, “Disability,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, eds. David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 24–40; and Jonathan Hsy, “Analytical Survey: Encountering Disability in the Middle Ages” (with Richard H. Godden), in *New Medieval Literatures*, vol. 15 (for 2013), eds. Laura Ashe, David Lawton, and Wendy Scase (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 313–39.

²⁶ See John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981; revised 2000); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, *Marvels, Monsters, and Miracles: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Bloomington, Indiana: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002); Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); and for a recent

scholars who have focused on medieval art such as Caroline Walker Bynum have pursued this line of inquiry prior to the incorporation of interdisciplinary theories into broader scholarship, simultaneously contributing to the growth and application of such theories.²⁷ Because the overlap in attitudes, beliefs, and cultures between the medieval and early modern periods is now commonly accepted—that is, the divide that had separated the centuries within these two periods is understood to be, in part, an artificial consequence of scholarly trends in periodization—this project draws from the example of medieval scholars’ interest in the abnormal in order to extend these questions and inquiries into the early modern period.

While studies of monsters, marvels, and wonders in the medieval period generally focus on beliefs that these figures functioned within the frame of the divine, sometimes serving as mysterious portents from God, the growing scholarship on these figures and their visual representations in the early modern period more often connects them to theories of natural philosophy, representing a shift—though not complete a separation—from their previous spiritual context.²⁸ The collaboration between medical historian Katharine Park and mathematical and scientific historian Lorraine Daston has produced numerous important texts on the nature and natural philosophy of wonders in the medieval and early modern periods.²⁹ In *Wonders and*

exhibition catalog that specifically investigates visualizations of monsters, focusing on a range of media from large-scale altarpieces and tapestries to illuminated manuscripts and physical artifacts, see Sherry C. M. Lindquist and Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, and Wonders* (London: D. Diles, 2018).

²⁷ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

²⁸ Lindquist et al., *Medieval Monsters*, 124.

²⁹ For one of the earliest results of their collaboration, see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, “Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England,” *Part and Present* 92 (1981): 20–54.

the Order of Nature, 1150–1750, they examine the relationship between wonder and science from the perspective of elite collectors who amassed and displayed of hundreds of objects as a means of expressing their knowledge of the natural world and its systems of order.³⁰

This seminal publication, among others, paved the way for additional studies of figures whose bodies challenged norms.³¹ Most generally, early modern scholars have approached this examination through the lens of a single type or case study, including such examples as dwarves, giants, hirsutes, the medically deformed, imaginary creatures (such as human and animal amalgamations), and hermaphrodites. According to art historians such as Toubia Ghadessi, the terms monster and monstrous refer to a broad range of cases, each associated with a form of bodily difference.³² She explains that “the use of the term in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries allowed for many different ‘others’ to fall under its umbrella: from imaginary marine creatures, to fabricated hybrid beings, to created terrifying and destructive species, and to human beings who simply diverged from ideal norms.”³³ Importantly, she adds

³⁰ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998). They argue that the obsession with the marvelous that often characterizes previous scholarship on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, started as early as the medieval period.

³¹ For two examples of note, see Fredrika Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), which discusses hirsutes and the medical developments of the period, and Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman, eds., *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies, and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period* (London: Macmillan, 1999). Essays consider a number of subjects that digressed from the normative and ideal male human body, such as women, children, apes, savages, madmen, feral children, and monsters.

³² For clarity and consistency, the remainder of this section employs the term monster, or the monstrous, to refer to all cases of bodily difference—encompassing such terms as the aforementioned wonders and marvels.

³³ Toubia Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters in the Renaissance: Dwarves, Hirsutes, and Castrati as Idealized Anatomical Anomalies* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications, 2018), 1.

that “they were also beings intended to be shown,” following the derivation of “monster” from the Latin *mostrare* (to show), a point critical to this project’s discussion of the significance of visual representation for conveying and shaping meaning.³⁴

In keeping not only with current interdisciplinary trends but also with the period’s historical blending of multiple fields of inquiry, including the natural and mystical sciences and religion, scholars typically approach the study of these individuals through textual evidence provided in treatises of natural philosophy, medical and anatomical writings, and religious doctrine. Common examples include works by the surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510–1590), the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), and the physician Fortunio Liceti (1577–1657), among others.³⁵ Each of these learned men’s treatises provides systems of classification for categories of monsters, with suggestions on medical, spiritual, or other causes of difference. In so doing, they often situate monstrosity within discourses on disease and infirmity, implying, in some cases, that the cause for a particular bodily abnormality could be attributed to an imbalance of bodily fluids or humors, or to a behavior. Illustrations also accompanied descriptions. Ambroise Paré’s *Des monstres et prodiges*, for example, portrayed a range of monstrous bodies, including conjoined twins and man-animal amalgamations, such as a figure who was half man and half pig. On one page, Paré’s descriptive caption supplements an illustration of an unnamed young boy with

³⁴ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 1.

³⁵ Ulisse Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum historia* in *Opera Omnia* (Bologna: Manolesiana, Feronii, Thebaldinum, 1638–1681); Ambroise Paré, *Vingt cinquième livre traitant des monstres et prodiges* (Paris: G. Buon, 1585); and Fortunio Liceti, *De monstrorum causis, natura, et differentiis, libri duo* (Padua: Frambotti, 1634).

shortened limbs (Fig. 1). Paré, interestingly, attributes the boy's aberrance to a deficiency of semen.³⁶ The boy appears fully nude, gazing to the left so that he does not make direct eye contact with the viewer. The only other element in the illustration is a hat that the boy wears, which is as significant to the image's meaning as the boy's shortened limbs. Following Ghadessi's analysis, the importance of such images rested in the recognition that the symptoms of monstrosity they articulate represent the belief that disease visually manifested on the exterior of the body. It was, therefore, essential that illustrations supplemented textual descriptions to reflect their veracity. Seemingly extraneous details, such as the boy's hat, thereby demonstrate a reliance on visual description to make the figures look like real and believable subjects, suggesting that there was a truth to their depictions.³⁷ Yet, as a result of scholars' general prioritization of these treatises—and especially the written text within them—paintings and other visual material, including illustrations, are often treated superficially, or are not analyzed at all.

Touba Ghadessi's *Portraits of Human Monsters in the Renaissance: Dwarves, Hirsutes, and Castrati as Idealized Anatomical Anomalies*, provides a model for this current project. Ghadessi traces the relationship between anatomical knowledge and artistic practice in portraits of three types of monsters: dwarves, hirsutes, and *castrati*. Each case study centers on a single painting of a subject whose occupation or identity was directly influenced by Italian court culture.³⁸ Her work offers an example for how

³⁶ Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges*, 1036: "Figure d'un enfant monstrueux, de defect de la semence en deue quantité," cited in Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 18.

³⁷ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 18.

³⁸ Ghadessi's project and this current dissertation have two monstrous types in common, namely the hirsute and *castrato*, but this dissertation diverts from Ghadessi's study by focusing on two different

to examine multiple types of monstrosity within a single project, resulting in a balance between deep visual analysis and inquiry into the wider cultural implications informing all three of her case studies. As a result, *Portraits of Human Monsters* provides scholars with comprehensive information about three individuals, the category of monstrosity they occupy, and the broader world and cultural attitudes in which they existed. This current project, then, extends Ghadessi's original inquiry into issues of identity and social status to the problem of understanding and visualizing these figures' and others' sex and gender, an area of investigation whose importance Ghadessi acknowledges but does not fully address.

Apart from the contributions of scholars such as Ghadessi, the majority of studies that consider visual representations of monsters focus on England and northern Europe, leaving a gap in studies of Italian cases. Indeed, Katharine Park has suggested this trend toward emphasizing English and northern European cases, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, may demonstrate how intellectual and cultural developments connected to the so-called Scientific Revolution were first visible in Italy in the sixteenth century and were only adopted

paintings of equal import in the art historical canon that have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. In addition, I treat these two works from the perspective of sex and gender; issues, this dissertation contends, that have not yet received adequate attention within studies on these types of monsters, more broadly. The case studies and the central objects for analysis in this dissertation were established before the publication of Ghadessi's book in 2018, but her book has nonetheless remained an important model for this thematically based project. I would also like to personally thank Touba for her mentorship and support of my work during the early stages of dissertation research. The only other scholar, to my knowledge, whose research on deformities includes examinations of hirsutes and *castrati* in the same study is Lilian H. Zirpolo in A. Victor Coonin and Lilian H. Zirpolo, eds., *Vanishing Boundaries: Scientific Knowledge and Art Production in the Early Modern Era* (Ramsey, NJ: WAPACC Organization, 2015), especially "Depicting Sexual Deformity in Early Modern Art: Scientific, Medical, and Socio-Cultural Considerations, Part I—Excess and Absence," 113–64, where she discusses hermaphrodites, eunuchs, and *castrati*, and "Part II—Female Hirsutism," 191–223.

by French and English writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³⁹ I also suggest the lack of scholarly attention to Italian cases may reflect the investment in Italy as the birthplace of the ideal body. This gap extends to studies on hermaphrodites, or intersexed individuals, which represent some of the only examples of nonnormative bodies where scholars have examined the constructs of sex and gender in relation to bodily abnormality. Along with the study of birth defects and other aforementioned forms of bodily difference, early modern culture saw an interest in figures who fell under the category of monstrous, specifically for their sexual ambiguity. This interest is best epitomized in the figure of the hermaphrodite, who occupied multiple spaces in culture, from stories in classical mythology to treatises on the abnormal, and, as was described at the beginning of this Introduction, in historical cases from life.⁴⁰

Perhaps what makes figures such as the hermaphrodite so compelling, then, is the hermaphroditic body's close connection to, or derivation from, the conforming human body (Fig. 2). Unlike previous cases of dual animal and human figures, or bodies with a combination of real and mythological elements, hermaphrodites were

³⁹ See Katharine Park, review of *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution*, by Zakiya Hanafi, *Early Science and Medicine* 8, no. 1 (2003): 76–77, especially 76. Although this explanation is merited, it does not account for how Italians in the seventeenth century responded to the writings from the previous century or to what extent cultural conditions may have changed and, perhaps, limited or changed production in this area. One exception is the aforementioned work by Hanafi, *Monster in the Machine*, which focuses on Italy from 1550 to 1750.

⁴⁰ Two examples of classical writings that influenced early modern interest in the hermaphrodite include the story of Hermaphroditus and Salmacis from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, IV.285–388, where the two figures merge, creating the association of the hermaphrodite, and the figure of Aristophanes from Plato's *Symposium*. Aristophanes describes three sets of double beings, male, female, and hermaphrodite. See M. Robinson "Salmacis and Hermaphroditus: When Two Become One: (Ovid, Met. 4.285–388)," *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 212–23, and Pablo Maurette, "Plato's Hermaphrodite and a Vindication of the Sense of Touch in the Sixteenth Century," *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (Fall 2015): 872–98, respectively.

closely linked to the normative or ideal standard of humanity. Indeed, many hermaphroditic origin stories hinged not on the birth of a hermaphroditic child but rather on a physiological or an environmental condition that triggered a person's transformation into a hermaphrodite. Consequently, the early modern fascination with hermaphrodites signaled, as Katherine Crawford notes, "assumptions about corporeal sexual instability and cultural discomfort with the malleability of sex. Put simply, hermaphrodites brought the line between man and woman into question."⁴¹ This critical point signifies one of the core inquiries at stake in this dissertation. That is to say, the interest in hermaphrodites stemmed in part from a curiosity, and in some cases an anxiety, about understanding the boundaries that defined bodily difference, especially across sex and gender. Some of the unease with the hermaphroditic body and other examples, such as the cases explored in this project, reflect these figures' combination of organs and body parts from each of the two sexes, and on their capacity to change from a gender-conforming body to an ambiguous one.

Unlike monsters and marvels, the hermaphrodite's bodily ambiguity and non-conformity were directly tied to issues of gender and sex. It is within this vein that studies on hermaphrodites provide the closest precedent for this project's focus on bodily and gender non-conformity.⁴² As this dissertation argues, the existence of

⁴¹ Katherine Crawford, "Sexuality: Of Man, Woman, and Beastly Business," in Linda Kalof and William Bynum, eds., *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 67.

⁴² Stories of hermaphrodites or bodies that undergo a transformation, rendering them hermaphroditic, are often characterized by women developing the organs of men, but other examples of men developing the organs or capabilities women did occur. I am grateful to Sheila Barker who, at a conference on early modern infirmity, shared with me the story from an unpublished, newspaper-like report of the meeting of two hermaphrodites. One of the two was a priest who was giving confession to the second, a young woman. During this event, they allegedly realized they were both hermaphrodites. The encounter continued with the two participants examining each other and the priest subsequently

these subjects in the historical record speaks to a broader instability of the categories of sex and gender. And yet, hermaphrodites were only one example of gender ambiguity that existed during this period and that called the standard categories of male and female into question.

Examining cases that go beyond the category of the hermaphrodite offers an unprecedented opportunity to interrogate the existence of further layers of slippage within the early modern binary model. That these slippages demonstrate the significance of sex and gender as contributing factors to cases of monstrous bodies, and their representations in the visual arts, has gone understudied. Instead, scholars have generally focused on the issues surrounding these wondrous figures' social status, their patrons' collecting habits, and their role in reaffirming the status of their patron within a court context.⁴³ While this scholarship broadens studies of early modern culture to include the people who for so long appeared at the margins, I suggest that grouping these figures into the category of the monster or monstrous may also pose limitations to understanding the wider implications of their varied identities and diverse experiences in society.⁴⁴ This study's emphasis on the gender non-

became pregnant. *Avviso* from Rome of November 11, 1662, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Mediceo del Principato 4027a, unpaginated folio (ca. f. 386), document n19865 in Documentary Sources for the Arts and Humanities listed in the Medici Archive Project. For a brief description of the *avviso*, see Sheila Barker, "An Age of Wonders," The Medici Archives, April 30, 2008. *The Florentine*, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://www.theflorentine.net/artart-culture/2008/04/an-age-of-wonders/>.

⁴³ For examples, see Franca Trinchieri Camiz, "Music and Painting in Cardinal del Monte's Household," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 26 (1991): 213–26; Nicolás Morales and Grover Wilkins, "The Castrato Voice and the Spanish Court of the Eighteenth Century: A Sound Ideal to Consider," *Choral Journal* 40 (September 1999): 25–31; Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Robin O'Bryan, "Grotesque Bodies, Princely Delight: Dwarfs in Italian Renaissance Court Imagery," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 1 (2012): 252–88.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that I reject the total use of the terms monster or monstrous, or their potential possibilities as a methodological framework, but that their use poses limitations specific to this project's focus on evaluating the intersection of gender and sex with bodily non-conformity within

conformity of these figures also functions, on a corollary level, as an attempt to move away from the sometimes derogatory term “monster.” In addition, studies of hermaphrodites and other monstrous figures whose ambiguous identity centers on a change to their sex and gender are more commonly pursued by scholars focusing on England, France, and Spain, leaving a critical gap in Italian studies.⁴⁵

Whereas cases such as Eleno/a’s have received recent scholarly attention, figures who do not neatly fit into the category of intersexed or hermaphrodite have yet to attract adequate consideration, especially from the perspective of art historians. While the retelling and interpretation of stories like Eleno/a’s are made possible, in part, through the publication of records from their trials during the Spanish Inquisition, I suggest that other modes of evidence, namely visual representations, when available, have gone underutilized by scholars. Literary accounts of these cases, and more broadly, literature related to treatises, pamphlets, and discussions on gender identity remain critical assets for building a greater understanding of the state of gender and gender difference in the early modern period. But the focus on textual sources alone misses a critical opportunity to probe deeper into how these issues manifested in the visual arts of the time. Unlike written documents, works of visual

figures who may not necessarily fit into the category of the monstrous. In other words, to diverge from standards of body normativity may call for an association with the wondrous or marvelous, but not necessarily with the monstrous.

⁴⁵ For studies on hermaphrodites in early modern France, see Cathy McClive, “Masculinity on Trial: Penises, Hermaphrodites and the Uncertain Male Body in Early Modern France,” *History Workshop Journal* 68 (Autumn 2009): 45–68; Kathleen P. Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Marian Rothstein, *The Androgyne in Early Modern France* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); and Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, *Sex, Identity and Hermaphrodites in Iberia, 1500–1800* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2013). For a later example that focuses on France and England between 1860 and 1915, see Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the Medical Invention of Sex* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

and material culture offer a different perspective for interpreting the often subtle and multilayered messages artists imbued—both explicitly and implicitly—in their works through iconographic, stylistic, and compositional cues that allude to their subjects’ often complicated identities. Working with visual material as the primary source of evidence also permits a new investigation into the representation of bodily difference, especially when substantial literary records do not survive. Indeed, many of the issues surrounding bodies that did not confirm to normative standards of gender and gender-acceptable behaviors were often excluded from written reports due to their taboo nature.

Though the dearth of visual documentation of Eleno/a may be an accident of time, I suggest that it may also reflect the contested and wrought circumstances of their trial. As a person ultimately charged with deception, they may not have been a suitable subject for a prominent or expensive commission, let alone for ephemeral media, which often do not survive today. Building upon the example of Eleno/a, this dissertation explores visual representations of figures whose change in gender identity did not result in a court trial but rather led to visits to royal courts, careers in opera, and participation in religious celebrations. This project, grounded in art historical analysis, examines subjects with bodily and gender ambiguity who not only functioned in society in spite of their abjectness but, in some cases, thrived in it. In these examples, surviving visual representations in the form of commissioned portraits, caricatures, altarpieces, and other types of material culture reflect a broader cultural interest in documenting forms of bodily ambiguity that, as I will argue, did

not disrupt the balance of male and female—as Eleno/a did—but instead existed somewhere between an intact male and intact female.

It is worth noting that each case study deliberately focuses on one painting. These three works all reflect large-scale projects commissioned by elite and influential members of society—a viceroy, the famed *castrato* Farinelli, and a prominent church official. Examining such works permits an investigation into how commissioned artworks that celebrated—or at the very least displayed—difference appeared in a society that was heavily stratified, resulting in tight control on which images were disseminated to the public and how. In addition, as compared to prints, which are often satirical or caricaturizing in nature, and to sculpture, which often limits the ability to render the interaction of multiple figures within a fully actualized background, the paintings chosen for this analysis portray large, multifigural compositions, including backgrounds that add symbolism for the figures' difference. And yet, it is also important to acknowledge that these paintings—or any form of visual or textual evidence, for that matter—do not always present how the subjects perceived themselves nor how the greater society perceived them. It is, therefore, with caution that this project applies visual observations to the personal experiences of depicted subjects.

In sum, by not necessitating reinscription into one of the three categories of male, female, or hermaphrodite, I argue that figures who experienced bodily change and transformation that resulted in an *alteration* to rather than a reversal of their gender identity were acknowledged and permitted to exist within liminal spaces

between the two normative genders of male and female.⁴⁶ These designations of less-than-intact males and females reflect the blending, obscuring, or removal of bodily traits, which are, in turn, visualized on the painted surface. These explorations into what I term “ambiguous” and “gender non-conforming” bodies reveal that the constructions of gender normativity were far more complicated in this period than previously thought.

This section has discussed the major historiographical trends in scholarship on early modern cases of bodily difference as well as the critical gaps that persist in the literature. First, through the influence of interdisciplinary methods such as monster theory and cultural studies, the examination of monsters, wonders, and hermaphrodites has steadily increased in the last twenty years, especially among medievalists and literary scholars, and specifically in England, France, and Spain. Italian cases of abnormality, however, still present a significant gap in the literature. In addition, while visual representations of these figures have received scholarly attention, they are often still viewed as secondary to textual sources. This secondary status is especially true for paintings and other forms of “fine art,” which are often not fully considered in relation to theoretical attitudes on the body compared to illustrations in medical treatises, which are typically regarded as documentary evidence, lacking in visual artifice and artistic style. This dissertation seeks to fill this

⁴⁶ The court’s ultimate rejection of Eleno/a’s later claim that they were a hermaphrodite did not mean that hermaphrodites did not exist as their own category in the early modern period. In fact, some writers believed that subcategories of male hermaphrodites and female hermaphrodites existed. See Long, *Hermaphrodites in Renaissance Europe*, esp. 29–49.

gap by conducting an art historical analysis of visual representations of bodily difference by examining paintings on a range of subjects.

Second, previous studies have relegated these monstrous subjects to a marginalized “third” space in society, applying the blanket terms “other” or “liminal” to describe these figures’ participation. This limits a discussion of how these figures interacted with other members of society and provides a false reading of their isolation. In broadening the scope of what defines an aberrant body—to such figures as the mutilated body of Saint Agatha—this dissertation also contends that an important corollary to understanding these figures is how definitions of their difference and their reception in society actually informed normative and ideal constructions of the body. That is to say, idealism, normalcy, and non-conformity were all related categories.

Third, as this section has demonstrated, studies seldom account for how bodily difference is inextricably tied to and informed by sex and gender. This dissertation contends that sex and gender were—and to an extent still are—part of what made corporeal matter a human body, giving it social meaning. These categories, especially in the early modern period when sex and gender were mutually reinforced, shaped how bodies were understood, identified, and experienced. Therefore, to study any case of bodily difference, such as a dwarf or a giant, and not take into account how their monstrosity informs their sex and gender and vice versa, is to miss a critical opportunity toward building a broader and more holistic understanding of how difference was imbued with meaning in the early modern

period. In other words, I argue that discussions of the body cannot be separated from discussions of its sex and gender.

In this dissertation, I address these three gaps in the scholarship by integrating sex and gender into an analysis of bodily aberrations in early modern Italian art. Approaching this problem through visual representations provides an unprecedented glimpse into the relationship between bodily difference and sex and gender through subtle allusions encoded in a visual language. By teasing out and analyzing such details as gesture, expression, color, and compositional arrangement, among others, we can begin to piece together a larger picture of how sex and gender are embedded in all experiences of bodily difference. Furthermore, in foregrounding visual representations of the human body, this project also provides a reconsideration of how artists contributed to the messaging and meaning behind how the early modern body existed within—*or outside*—conventional definitions of a conforming body.

0.2: Definitions of Sex and Gender in the Early Modern Period

In the last twenty years, scholarship on the early modern body has increasingly turned to how sex and gender identity informed definitions of the body.⁴⁷ Just as there are current debates about these terms, the early modern period did not experience these categories as neat and isolated systems. Rather, definitions and associations changed over time, drawing influence from classical and medieval precedent, and varying across medical, spiritual, and vernacular contexts. The

⁴⁷ There is an extensive body of literature on this topic. For a review on the historiography of gender studies in Italian Renaissance art, see Evelyn Welch, “Engendering Italian Renaissance Art—A Bibliographic Review,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000): 201–16.

following section contextualizes scholarship on early modern sex and gender within these terms' historical definitions and expands upon the importance of these frameworks for understanding the body and bodily difference.

The definitions of the terms *sex* and *gender* vary across culture, time, and context. As such, the use of these concepts in relation to the topics covered in this project warrants attention before turning to their relationship to the body. In general terms, the use of the word *sex* within this period—and its use within this dissertation—refers to the period's two primary anatomical or biological categories of the human species; “the male sex” and “the female sex.”⁴⁸ It is important to note that within this context, the term *sexuality* and its association with *sexual orientation*, or a person's sexual identity in relation to their preference for a particular sexual partner, are distinct categories that did not hold the same social significance in the early modern period as they hold today. In contrast with the use of *sex*, early modern definitions for *gender* prove to be more slippery and complex, and in turn, for scholars of this period. Starting in the fifteenth century, it appears that gender began to be used almost interchangeably with *sex* to refer to “a grammatical subclass,” suggesting its application in phrases like “the male sex” and “the female gender” were used simultaneously.⁴⁹ Scholars who work on issues of early modern gender tend to refer to *gender* when discussing the psychological and sociocultural traits associated with the male or female sex. Indeed, in Evelyn Welch's “Engendering

⁴⁸ According to Merriam-Webster, this definition of *sex* appears to have been in use since the fourteenth century. See “Gender.” *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc., accessed January 5, 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gender>.

⁴⁹ “Gender.” *The Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*.

Italian Renaissance Art—A Bibliographic Review,” she focuses exclusively on topics related to women; that is, women subjects, women artists, and women patrons when referring to gender in the Italian Renaissance.⁵⁰ The choice to utilize the word *gender* in the title of this dissertation, and as the one of the core foundational concepts at stake in its theoretical framework, then, was a deliberate decision to reflect the complexities of these two terms’ relationship. Indeed, a corollary interest in employing *gender* in the title and throughout the text of the project is to draw attention to what I see as the equally problematic use of the word *sex* in scholarly discourses on early modern history, often characterized by an assumption of the “naturalness” of sex and its grounding in the “neutral truth” of the anatomy of the body.

With these associations in mind, I will now turn to definitions of the body and the factors that inform the intersecting relationship between sex and gender, and the body. Definitions of the body, as this dissertation argues, were almost always understood through models of difference: a holy versus earthly body; a royal versus nonroyal body; and distinctions across age, profession, race, and gender, among other markers. What follows is a contextualization of the medical definitions of sex and gender and the societal factors that informed these definitions. Ultimately, the categories of sex and gender functioned as vital criteria to a standard of perfection

⁵⁰ It is important to note that this comment is not intended to invalidate the myriad of important contributions to the subfield of women in early modern art and literature, but functions, instead, to bring awareness to the extent to which gender is often discussed as primarily a “woman’s problem,” rather than as a holistic question in which “non-women” are also affected by the period’s constructs of gender. In addition, this observation also recognizes the extent to which it is nearly impossible for writers to discuss these issues so inclusively while also devoting enough depth to each case of a given research inquiry.

against which an early modern body was measured. In addition, these constructions were inextricably tied to their medical definitions; thus, a body's internal balance of elements—which will be discussed later—informed notions of external idealism.

Because the early modern period's definitions of the body, sex, and gender were inseparable from their medical and scientific framework, I will ground the previous discussion of sex and gender in a brief explanation of the body's medical understanding. The aim of this following discussion, then, is to explore how medical definitions of the body informed an interest in bodily difference. As will be discussed, theories on the body evolved over time and eventually moved toward a model that promoted the idea of difference across sex. Consequently, and in contrast to previous mentions of the definitions of sex and gender at their most general, medical practitioners in the early modern period devoted significant attention to exploring and categorizing the corporeal contrasts between male and female, acknowledging they were two separate sexes that required, for example, different diagnoses and forms of treatment to promote health and to cure sex-specific diseases. This evolution in belief, and how it manifested in visual culture, is critical to the dissertation's grounding in bodily difference.

Spanning centuries with wide geographic and cultural differences, the early modern period saw an approach to science and medicine that was far from a single, uniform system. Instead, it changed in theory and practice over time, and it was shaped by a variety of antique and contemporary models. What follows is an outlining of the range of factors that influenced early modern definitions of the body, sex, and gender, and the social context that produced them. Because science was not a

defined discipline in the early modern period, the realms of medicine and anatomy generally occupied an intellectual space akin to natural philosophy. One goal of the period's natural philosophy was to uncover the secrets of "nature" through studying ancient texts and contemporary publications, and through observation from life.⁵¹ Within this paradigm, the physical body, including its internal workings and its external appearance, was critical to understanding the broader medico-philosophical premise of difference and its design informed by nature. One of the most significant factors that affected how the body, and by extension, sex and gender, were understood was the rediscovery of ancient texts.

At the core of the majority of ancient texts was the notion that the body was composed of matter in the form of four fluids, or humors, known as blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy. This concept was promoted—to varying degrees—by ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and physicians such as Galen and Hippocrates until around the 1700s. Their writings on the humors not only shaped how the body was viewed but also how bodily health was conceived and how diseases were diagnosed and treated. Each humor carried associations with heat and moisture and was employed to understand the function of bodily fluids, including menstrual blood, breast milk, and ejaculate. This model had significant implications for how bodies were differentiated across sex and gender. Rather than viewing difference through absolute distinctions between males and females, the humoral model defined difference by the proportion of each humor in the body.⁵² Males were believed to be

⁵¹ Katherine Crawford, *European Sexualities, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.

⁵² Crawford, "Sexuality," 61.

hotter and drier, while females were colder and moister. This general distinction was utilized, in part, to explain all manner of variations between male and female bodies, including physiology and character. Women's colder temperature, for example, was believed to account for their smaller size, longer hair, and the internal placement of sex organs.⁵³ Balance of the bodily humors, therefore, was critical not only to maintaining one's health but to presenting a normative body. Indeed, medical practitioners from the period noted that the humoral system of bodily fluids was, itself, prone to instability. A change in bodily temperature and moisture had the potential to impact a person's temperament as well as their physiology. There was also anxiety on a corporeal level that the primary bodily fluids that comprised a body—blood, sperm, milk, and fat—were all thought to derive from the same basic material, furthering the notion of a corporeal basis for sexual instability.⁵⁴ As a result, medical practitioners acknowledged that the ratio of bodily fluids that defined difference was capable of wide degrees of transformation, challenging modern assumptions that boundaries between male and female were impermeable.⁵⁵

In keeping with the notion that bodies were differentiated by the ratio of the four humors, classical writers, especially Aristotle, promoted the notion that sex, too, was defined by one set of criteria, which then varied across the humors. This one-sex model, as some scholars refer to it today, maintained that the one category of sex was the male, and that the female body was the imperfect inversion of male anatomy caused by an excess of the wet and cold humors. In historian Thomas Laqueur's

⁵³ Crawford, "Sexuality," 61.

⁵⁴ Crawford, "Sexuality," 61.

⁵⁵ Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 111.

widely-read work, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, he maintains that this model persisted, without variation, until the mid-eighteenth century when society necessitated a new two-sex model that differentiated the male and female body as part of the tenets of Enlightenment thought.⁵⁶ This argument, however, has been challenged by a number of scholars for its oversimplification and narrow use of early modern sources.⁵⁷ Recent scholarship has complicated the primacy of the one-sex model in early modern natural philosophy, as Katherine Crawford notes, by accounting for the specific material experiences of male and female bodies.⁵⁸ Medical scholars such as Helen King and Michael Stolberg have argued that the adoption of a two-sex model, which Laqueur contends began after the Enlightenment, was actually part of the discourse on sex as early as the classical and medieval periods.⁵⁹ Thus, as this dissertation asserts, the codification of the two-sex model signaled important developments in medicine centered on the study of difference across male and female bodies.

What transpired in the period, then, was a reevaluation of classical theory and its place within evolving early modern medical practices, epitomized by the reinstatement of the practice of dissection, as well as a new, and empirically

⁵⁶ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

⁵⁷ Helen King's scholarship represents one of the most comprehensive critiques of Laqueur's thesis. See *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). For other scholars' critiques see Crawford, "Sexualities," 106n5; Michael Stolberg, "A Woman Down to Her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries," *Isis* 94 (2003): 274–99; and Crawford, *European Sexualities*, 62.

⁵⁸ While bringing much-needed attention to the topic of the history of sex, Laqueur's thesis has encountered criticism for overgeneralizing the universality of the one-sex model, for his narrow application of historic material—often ignoring important medical sources in Latin—and for oversimplifying the one-sex model as the prevailing system until Enlightenment.

⁵⁹ King, *One-Sex Body on Trial*, 2–5, and Stolberg, "Woman Down to Her Bones," 274.

grounded, interest in learning more about known organs and discovering new ones.⁶⁰ Scholars have often read these developments and their implications for the growing importance of visual representations in the anatomist Andreas Vesalius's (1514–1564) publication *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* of 1543.⁶¹ Vesalius challenged the primacy of the Galenic model by prioritizing direct observation over textual evidence. And yet, an observation often minimized in the scholarship is Vesalius's subject on the frontispiece of *Fabrica*, the dissection of a female corpse, which represented a decidedly gendered choice (Fig. 3).⁶² The nude female body is positioned at an upward angle so that her exposed organs are visible to the throngs of men who surround her, gazing upon her body and gesturing toward her. Only Vesalius looks out from the picture plane, his hand touching the corpse's skin as he pulls a layer back, almost like an embodied *écorché*. Importantly, the woman's breasts and vagina remain intact, visibly differentiating her body from the audience of male onlookers.

Vesalius's direct contact with his subject in the frontispiece also represents an early modern interest in dissecting and studying the human body. This interest had particularly important implications for understanding differences among the sex organs in male and female bodies, which, as Michael Stolberg argues, led to the

⁶⁰ For another example of an early modern adaptation to a classical model, such as neo-Aristotelian medical theories and their relationship to ideas on managing libido, and these theories' role in informing artistic commissions of the time, see Anthony Colantuono, *Titian, Colonna and the Renaissance Science of Procreation: Equicola's Seasons of Desire* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010).

⁶¹ Interestingly, for all the significant developments in Vesalius's *Fabrica*, its illustrations are limited to only ideal and normative configurations of the body, which Ghadessi argues actually contributed to a simultaneous interest in exploring the unideal in opposition to the ideal. Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 5.

⁶² For a more extensive discussion of the significance of the corpse's gender, see Katharine Park, *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (New York: Zone Books, 2006), 207–29.

promotion of a model of sexual dimorphism as early as the late fifteenth century.⁶³ Drawing on a range of Latin and vernacular medical writings, Stolberg explains the motivating factors behind physicians' interest in studying the anatomical structures that defined difference between male and female bodies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He notes three critical developments: a general shift toward greater empiricism in medical practice, including the idea of personal observation ("autopsia"); the growth of a subfield of study specifically on women's diseases; and an emphasis on personal discovery rather than mastery of ancient texts in the international scientific community.⁶⁴ Taken together, these developments signaled a new interest in exploring the female body as a means for understanding its physical "otherness" from the ideal male body. This emphasis on empiricism and personal observation demonstrated the gradual shift from viewing the body and its workings as a collection of humoral fluids to solids, which placed sexual difference within the context of the genitals and other systems, such as the skeletal system.⁶⁵ In addition, the subfield of women's diseases, a precursor to the modern practice of gynecology, looked to the uterus as an organ distinct from those of the male body and as the source of hundreds of female diseases.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the emphasis on personal discovery prompted physicians to seek acclaim and status through "discovering"

⁶³ Stolberg, "Woman Down to Her Bones," 274.

⁶⁴ Stolberg, "Woman Down to Her Bones," 289–91.

⁶⁵ Stolberg, "Woman Down to Her Bones," 295.

⁶⁶ This topic is the subject of Monica H. Green's book *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

bodily organs, such as Realdo Colombo's "discovery" of the clitoris in 1559.⁶⁷ Such findings impacted not only the treatment of disease but also the understanding of how functions of the female body, such as menstruation and lactation, were distinct from those of men rather than a product of their imperfect, inverted male bodies.

Many of the factors that informed this corollary interest in the nonnormative body included medical treatises from ancient, medieval, and contemporary writers; theological debates on humanity;⁶⁸ works from ancient mythological writers such as Ovid; and the intersection of all these discourses in popular culture.⁶⁹ From a medical perspective, the more that bodily systems, organs, and diseases began to be understood as elements that shaped difference, the more did interest in actively pursuing the study of abnormalities shift from the margins to its own subarea of medical specialty. It is worth noting, however, that while each of these early modern medico-philosophers claimed to be working from an empirical lens, founded upon direct observation, many treatises included figures from myth and imagery in their studies of abnormalities. This blending of the real and imaginary—which may seem incongruous to modern readers—is a reminder that scientific pragmatism was still imbued with religious and social attitudes toward the body, holiness, and difference.

⁶⁷ For more on this "discovery," see Katharine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris: French Medicine and the Tribade, 1570–1620," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 171–93.

⁶⁸ The writings of early Christian theologian and philosopher Saint Augustine are especially important for their examination of orders of nature. He observed that monsters and prodigies functioned on earth as "spiritual traces of God's omnipotence." Park and Daston, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 40. For the impact of Augustine's writings on early modern art, see Meredith J. Gill, *Augustine in the Italian Renaissance: Art and Philosophy from Petrarch to Michelangelo* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁹ Ghadessi notes that as medical discourses on the monstrous and nonnormative body increased in number, the other historical, religious, and social factors declined in influence. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 10.

This move from a narrow narrative to a diverse and wide-ranging conception of the body is most representative in works from historians of science and medicine.⁷⁰ I extend previous studies by turning to cases where the subject's sex was altered through the removal or addition of sexually charged organs. In so doing, I examine how notions of the ideal male or female were tested, which furthers the debate on how idealized bodies are also vulnerable constructions. In addition to exploring the structures of sex and sex difference in the early modern period, my project also builds on studies that elucidate the particular factors, and, in some cases, constraints, of one particular sex. For example, Patricia Simons's *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History*, a study grounded in visual and literary evidence, critically intervenes on notions of the early modern male.⁷¹ Simons argues that male identity was attached most directly to the testicles, rather than the penis, as was previously believed. While this study represents an important contribution to furthering the understanding of early modern sex, the majority of research on this subject still often focuses on categories of the ideal male or female.

In addition, Katherine Park's *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* represents one of the most important studies to date on the medical and social connotations of the female sex and body. Focusing on the late

⁷⁰ For examples of note, see Sharon Strocchia, *Forgotten Healers: Women and the Pursuit of Health in Late Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*; Helen King, *Midwifery, Obstetrics, and the Rise of Gynecology: The Uses of a Sixteenth Century Compendium*. *Women and Gender in the Early Modern World*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, eds., *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3, *Early Modern Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

⁷¹ Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

medieval period through the sixteenth century, Park contends that there was an understanding of the body during this period, particularly within the practice of dissection, that transcended the university amphitheaters where medical training generally occurred to the context of other nonmedical institutions. She explores autopsies of potential female saints to look for evidence of miracles, such as an imprint of Christ's face on their heart, and of women who did not survive childbirth. Each case highlights the significance of the female body to the history of anatomy—a point that has heretofore gone unacknowledged. Park's assertion of the critical role of the female body holds important implications for this project by recognizing the role that bodily difference played in the period and by demonstrating that the female body was understood as distinct from the male body and that, as a result, medical practitioners sought to study it.

It is within this vein that this project also turns to medical and literary historians who have examined how bodily difference was understood in early modern society through the lenses of sex and gender. In Joan Cadden's *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture*, she establishes a foundation for how sex and gender were linked in the Middle Ages, which subsequently informed early modern attitudes on the body, which are of critical importance to this study.⁷² Cadden argues that scientific and cultural ideas about bodily difference across sex were interrelated. For example, she notes that the social definitions of childbearing, spirituality, marriage, and sexual pleasure and desire were

⁷² Joan Cadden, *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

all folded into medical conceptions of male and female bodies.⁷³ This model of difference represented Christianity's assertion of a binary typology for gender that only allowed for male and female bodies. The differences between the two sexes reflected men's inherent physical, moral, and intellectual superiority, against which women's inferiority was measured. Expanding on this point, Cadden establishes that medieval medical and natural philosophical writers viewed these distinctions as part of a natural order established by God, and not as social or cultural constructions, as is often understood in modern society. As a result of this blending of the social and scientific, physiology and anatomy were believed to inform one's character and behavior.

In addition to recent developments in the understanding of how difference was conferred on the early modern body, scholars have begun to consider the specific role of diverse bodily systems and the medical and social associations for particular organs. Studies such as *The Body in Early Modern Art*, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, and *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices* inform this project's investment in exploring the role of sex organs and secondary sex characteristics (such as facial hair and the lactating breast) in setting the standard for determining a body's conformity.⁷⁴ Importantly,

⁷³ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 2.

⁷⁴ Julia H. Hairston and Walter Stephens, eds., *The Body in Early Modern Italy* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Hillman and Mazzio, *Body in Parts*; and Jutta Gisela Sperling, ed., *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). The breast as a secondary sex organ that signifies women's gender and associations with motherhood has been an important topic for medieval and early modern historians alike. See Margaret R. Miles, *A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

these publications represent three rare examples that foreground visual culture as a form of evidence in addition to textual sources on the body.⁷⁵

This project extends the issue of bodily difference from behaviors and specific questions within one conventional gender to bodies that, both in action and appearance, do not conform to societal expectations. As well as understanding how the corporeal elements of the body contribute to its meaning, scholars considered bodily difference through the performance of gender, and particularly through the study of gender-transgressive behaviors. This subtopic poses important questions about the role of social expectations of the body and its close ties to gender formation. Two areas of recent scholarship include the exploration of social behaviors that are considered transgressive or that divert from conventional expectations of the body, particularly as related to gender, and the gender-specific field of masculinity studies, which, at its broadest, explores the constructions and vulnerabilities imposed on masculine bodies. One of the most prominent issues explored in studies on social transgression is the crossing of sexual and gender boundaries, including cross-dressing, and erotic or sexual behavior deemed deviant by the Catholic Church, such as acts of sodomy and lesbianism.⁷⁶ Works by Allison Levy, Michael Rocke, James

⁷⁵ Other examples that operate in a similar vein include Douglas Biow, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy: Men, Their Professions, and Their Beards* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), and Rebecca Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold: Abundance and Excess in the French Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), which examines the role of these mutable and multilayered fluids in informing French Renaissance visual culture.

⁷⁶ The term “sodomy” in the early modern period connoted any sexual behavior outside of what the Church classified as sexual acts that promoted procreation. For more information on this definition, see Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9. While the term “lesbianism” is often referred to in modern studies of early modern cases of sexual acts between two women, it is often in an effort to avoid confusion with cumbersome language and is not used to suggest that early modern women self-identified as such. For one scholar’s explanation of her use of the term, see Heather Rose Jones, “Sex

Saslow, Patricia Simons, Bette Talvacchia, and Sherry Velasco represent some of the most important contributions to this subfield.⁷⁷ Each takes a narrow approach to a specific deviant sexual act or acts and contextualizes them within the period's visual culture. Each relies on archival sources and traditional art historical methods of visual analysis and sets an important precedent for examining difference, on which this project builds. Though most of the aforementioned scholars work on Italian cases, broader developments in scholarship, particularly those on cross-dressing and transvestism, often focus on the theatrical stage, thus limiting explorations to a confined space that generally does not account for instances of transgressive behavior across gender in society at large. Additionally, the majority of these studies focus on cases in England and Spain, two countries known for strong theatrical traditions, rather than Italy.⁷⁸

As much as this project recentralizes the role of female gender and sexuality in the early modern period, it draws equally from the question of what it meant to be a male during this time. Masculinity studies directly considers how attitudes on gender shaped meaning for the male body; in other words, “the social construction of

between Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” presentation from Society for Creative Anachronism. West Kingdom Collegium, November 10, 2010. *Alpennia*, accessed December 29, 2019, <https://www.alpennia.com/lhmp/essays/sex-between-women-middle-ages-and-renaissance>.

⁷⁷ Allison Levy, ed., *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy: Practice, Performance, Perversion, Punishment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); see n78 for reference to Michael Rocke; James Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); Patricia Simons, “Lesbian (In)Visibility in Italian Renaissance Culture: Diana and Other Cases of donna con donna,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 27 (1994): 81–122; Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); and Sherry Velasco, *Lesbians in Early Modern Spain* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ For a notable example, see Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

masculinity.”⁷⁹ While this recent subfield opens up discourses on masculinity and manhood to the same scrutiny that has been applied to the female body and femininity over time, it is often from the perspective of elite male bodies, such as princes and nobles, which is likely due to the dearth of information available on men of subelite statuses.⁸⁰ Consequently, this provides an incomplete picture of the diversity of male experience across physiology, age, status, and profession. My project expands on these studies that have produced important contributions to the understanding of masculinity as a vulnerable construct by extending the conversation to other categories, such as musical performers. By examining the social implications behind paintings of these figures, this project widens the scope of the medical literature, which does not provide a clear understanding of how these figures functioned in society nor how they were viewed by different people, an area where visual representations may provide an additional perspective. This project also addresses questions of patronage and display, such as why a wealthy, high-status individual might commission a portrait of a hirsute, and what this might tell us about collecting

⁷⁹ Michael Kimmel and Tristan Bridges, “Masculinity,” *Oxford Bibliographies Online*: Oxford University Press, 2011, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0033.xml>.

⁸⁰ See Valeria Finucci’s two important works: *The Prince’s Body: Vincenzo Gonzaga and Renaissance Medicine*. I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) and *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Allison Levy, *Re-membering Masculinity in Early Modern Florence: Widowed Bodies, Mourning, and Portraiture* (New York: Routledge, 2006) takes a different perspective of the male body by discussing how themes of masculinity are reinscribed onto the bodies of their widowed wives; Sara F. Matthews-Grieco’s edited volume, conversely, does include cases of subelite subjects and vernacular texts. See *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe (15th–17th Century)*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

habits in the period. In turn, this may allow us to suggest how these paintings operated as extensions of patrons'—and viewers'—own identities.

Feminist theorists such as Judith Butler have made critical advancements to these claims, with Butler's work, in particular, informing this dissertation's approach to gender in the early modern period. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler argues that categories of sex must be differentiated from gender, especially because of the assumption that sex is natural because of its link to biology, and therefore politically unbiased. She further contends that sex should be understood as a construct, noting that “perhaps this construct called ‘sex’ is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps, it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.”⁸¹

I draw from Butler to extend discussions of early modern gender ambiguity beyond the categories of male, female, and the third space of the hermaphrodite to the liminal spaces within intact and less-than-intact male and female bodies. Butler's claims provide a critical framework through which the differentiation between sex and gender—a modern concept—may be reconsidered in light of the early modern period's understanding of these terms, and general lack of disciplinary boundaries between all categories of knowledge, especially between the social, science, and

⁸¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd ed., (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10–11.

religion.⁸² It is, in part, from this context that fields such as masculinity studies have begun to gain traction in early modern art and gender studies.

By prioritizing gender and sex as social performances, scholars have recently begun to reconsider the relationship of gender and sex to the body, and specifically to the body's material makeup. This dissertation positions itself within these debates on the body's material and social associations. Contrary to modern notions, which often describe these associations as separate systems, this project sees the body's corporeality as integral to understanding how the early modern period experienced gender and sex, which, from an art historical perspective, was most significantly and tellingly articulated through the visual representations of the physical body. The works of Susan Bordo and Anne Fausto-Sterling are two recent examples that foreground the material nature of the body.⁸³ In *Unbearable Weight: Feminism,*

⁸² Though Butler's work has contributed to advancements in the understanding of gender in its modern construction, it has also been met criticism in recent years over what is seen as her reduction of gender to a discourse; that is, her disengagement with the corporeal and material connotations of the gendered body, particularly in her early works. She has also been critiqued for appearing to promote a form of gender voluntarism, implying that gender is a choice. Susan Bordo, for example, has argued that Butler reduces gender to the form of a language at the stake of acknowledging gender's relationship to the body. See Susan Hekman, dual review of *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* by Susan Bordo, and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* by Judith Butler, *Hypatia* 10, no. 4 (1995): 151–57. It is within this context of critique that reminds scholars of the constant need for acknowledging and reevaluating the historical factors informing the development of theory. While the works of Butler and others serve a role in informing our own biases, they also provide a useful opportunity for reconsidering the historiography of such historical topics and how scholars' own subjectivity informs research. Though this project's interrogation of early modern gender may be informed by modern questions of gender and the body, it is always approached within the early modern context, and with great caution toward preserving the historical specificity of the period in question.

⁸³ Major works by Susan Bordo, professor of gender and women's studies at the University of Kentucky, include: Editor, *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989); *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999); and *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Major works by Anne Fausto-Sterling, professor of biology and gender studies at Brown University, include: *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); and *Sex/Gender: Biology*

Western Culture, and the Body, Bordo argues for a situatedness of the body in feminist theory that reaches beyond gender dualisms grounded in experience.⁸⁴ Fausto-Sterling's research similarly highlights the importance of human variation beyond the two-gender model, allowing for a spectrum of genders.⁸⁵ She also situates biology and society as part of the same system. In *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, she argues that social learning informs biology and naturalism, as it does gender, stating that “[h]ow bodies are sexed comes from the standards that society has placed on what a male and a female are supposed to look like and be.”⁸⁶ Fausto-Sterling's alignment of sex with social identity also brings to light some of the ways in which sexual expectations are determined and enforced in society. That is to say, she reminds us that one of the most important, and arguably first, ways in which standards of correct sex—and gender—are assessed is through what someone is “supposed to look like,” or the visual elements of their discernable or observable physical appearance. Observation from life became one of the hallmarks of the early modern period in theories of both science and art, and, as I will discuss, played a critical role in shaping how differences in the body, sex, and gender were determined.

in a Social World. The Routledge Series Integrating Science and Culture (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012). Elizabeth Grosz is another feminist scholar working in the same vein of materialist studies, who also interrogates the psychoanalytic works of Freud and Lacan. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁸⁴ Bordo, *Unbearable Weight*, 278.

⁸⁵ Anne Fausto-Sterling, “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough,” *Sciences* (March/April 1993): 20–24. This paper, notes Fausto-Sterling, was more of a thought experiment than a scientific proposition. In it, she describes the need for an alternative model of gender, which allows for five sexes: male, female, merm, ferm, and herm. See her second iteration, “The Five Sexes, Revisited,” *Sciences* 40, no. 4 (2000): 18–23.

⁸⁶ Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, 58.

0.3: Methodological Approach, Scope, and Chapter Outline

This project is first and foremost an art historical investigation into the visual representation of bodily ambiguity in the early modern period. It questions the form, function, and meaning behind paintings of hirsutes, *castrati*, and Saint Agatha. I analyze the artwork at the center of each case through a combination of formal and iconographic analyses, artistic style, considerations of patronage, and social art history. I supplement the close reading of each painting with examinations of secondary works of visual and material culture, including prints, medical treatises, illustrated manuals, caricatures, religious objects, and medical equipment to demonstrate the broader trends that informed a visual vocabulary of ambiguity.

The following three chapters each focus on the representation of an ambiguously gendered figure. Each subject undergoes a change from a conforming to a non-conforming body. The analysis of each figure rests on a single, representative work of art that depicts the subject in their transformed state, or in the very process of transforming. Together, these three cases reflect the fluidity that existed between the defined genders of male and female and build toward increasingly invasive forms of bodily change and transformation. Chapter One explores hirsutes through an examination of Jusepe de Ribera's *Portrait of Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband*, 1631 (Fig. 4). Magdalena was summoned to the Spanish-run court of Naples, Italy, to be painted from life at the behest of the duke, who was fascinated with Magdalena's reputation as a "bearded woman." The chapter identifies the various ways the male-patterned body hair that Magdalena began to grow in middle age altered her gender from a conforming woman to an ambiguously gendered, less-than-intact woman. It

argues that the growth of hair on Magdalena's face and chest in the portrait obscures her identification as a woman, but it does not firmly resituate her as a hermaphrodite. Rather, her male-patterned hair, and other elements of the painting, leave her gender displaced and her identity ambiguous. The chapter also provides a general history of how hirsutism and body hair were medically understood and engendered in the period.

Chapter Two examines the man-made *castrato* through Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends*, c. 1750–1752 (Fig. 5), building on Chapter One's exploration of a naturally acquired disease to consider the implications of human intervention on the physical body. Unlike Magdalena's development of an excess of hair, the *castrato* Farinelli's difference was characterized by a lack of gender-determining body parts, namely his testicles, which altered his alignment with the male gender. The castration procedure, whereby a practitioner removed or crushed a prepubescent boy's testicles, resulted in a disruption of testosterone and androgen in the body. Consequences were both internal and external: *castrati* could not produce children, which was a vital aspect of the social performance of masculinity at the time, and their bodies were visibly distorted due to a lack of male hormones, leading to attenuated limbs, extreme height, and fat deposits in female-associated areas such as the hips, stomach, and chest. These elements marked them as different and led to the seemingly contradictory yet coexisting stereotypes of hypersexuality and impotence. This chapter also considers the medical context for how castration was understood and executed in the period, and how the

complex, and often opposing, social attitudes toward *castrati* were shaped by the unsettling combination of a high-pitched voice with an often elongated body.

Chapter Three turns to the early Christian figure of Saint Agatha to explore how the effects of her martyrdom complicated her gender. Building on Chapter Two's examination of the surgical removal of a critical body part, Chapter Three considers the reverse scenario of what happens when the breasts—organs essential to early modern definitions of womanhood—are forcibly removed. The painting of focus for this chapter, Giovanni Andrea Coppola's altarpiece *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, 1650, for the Cathedral of Saint Agatha, from Gallipoli in Puglia, depicts the moment following the dramatic excising of one of her breasts (Fig. 6). Agatha is glorified with throngs of people gazing at her in awe, her bloodied flesh exposed for the viewer (Fig. 7). Significantly, Agatha's story transcends reality and concludes with the miraculous restoration of her breasts by Saint Peter. This act of spiritual intervention signals the importance and *necessity* for Agatha's body to return to its original state before she is officially martyred and becomes a saint. In turn, this chapter considers how the veneration of Agatha's breasts as entities separate from her body, in the form of *ex-votos* and paintings that highlight their presence by prominently displaying them on a platter, conveys an additional layer of meaning regarding the importance of body parts to determining identity. Finally, the focus on this painting of a saint who is venerated in southern Italy also brings to light an artist, a painting, and a city that are often ignored in the canon of early modern Italian art.

The Conclusion considers the implications for this model of ambiguously gendered and non-conforming bodies in early modern culture. These figures and their

representations had a lasting impact beyond the century they occupied. Indeed, as I will discuss, these debates on what constitutes a normative body prefigure many of contemporary society's discourses on intersex, transgender, and LGBTQA+ bodies and sexualities.

To analyze these case studies, I examine a number of written sources from archives, libraries, and collections in southern Italian cities that have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. Though Naples has recently gained favor among Anglophone scholars as a site deserving as much attention as the already-celebrated cities of Florence, Milan, Rome, and Venice, cities further south, such as Lecce and Gallipoli in Puglia, and Catania and Palermo in Sicily, are still understudied or are studied by almost exclusively Italian scholars. While the siting of each case study was, admittedly, not one of my first reasons for choosing each subject, it has nevertheless grown into a critical component of this project. Materials found in archives in Naples, such as the Archivio di Stato, La Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, and the Archivio Storico del Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella have led to essential reinterpretations of such issues as music conservatories' payments to local physicians to castrate young boys and Giovanni Andrea Coppola's possible medical training. Such findings speak to the larger interconnectedness of art patrons, producers, and practitioners in the sciences across southern Italy and Europe more broadly. In addition, Spanish rule in Naples, Farinelli's travels to England and other European centers, and his long-term position at the court in Madrid imbue this project with a cross-cultural perspective, particularly regarding the cultural overlap between Spain and its territories. The exchange of ideas, people, and goods in sites

across Europe and the New World has long been accepted by scholars as a hallmark of the early modern period, a narrative this dissertation hopes to extend to the domain of southern Italy. It is a secondary hope of this project, therefore, to expose English readers to a broader narrative of the artistic, scientific, and cultural production of Italy beyond the sites and people that continue to occupy surveys and studies of early modern Italian art.

As a result of its methodological plurality, this project also must reconcile multiple—and often divergent—perspectives on the body that inform its approach to the question of visualizing ambiguity: the art historical perspective, historical (literary, textual, social) perspective, medical perspective, gender and queer theory perspective, and the “other” or deformed perspective. To be sure, these methodological theories and practices have different agendas, and it is often difficult to discern which is the most appropriate in a given moment, and more importantly, how to treat these issues in an early modern way; that is, in a fluid and combined manner that reflects how these disciplines in the period were all seen as connected and informing one another. The fields of science and religion, for example, functioned within a more complicated system of beliefs about the relationship between human nature and the divine, and knowledge and the unknown or unknowable.

To accomplish this challenge, I have deliberately limited the number of case studies in an effort to produce more in-depth analyses.⁸⁷ In addition, I ground the

⁸⁷ Ghadessi’s project takes a similar approach. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 1.

project in the plurality of bodily ambiguity over a focus on a single form or case study with the aim of permitting comparison across types, questioning how ambiguity manifests differently depending on what change takes place. This effort also extends to the sensitivity a project like this one demands. With any investigation into a problem grounded in the historical past, and seemingly removed from our current experience, it is tempting to treat subjects at a distance, to forget about their humanity and their history, however those concepts were understood at the time.⁸⁸ In this project, I have intentionally focused on historical individuals, with the exception of Saint Agatha—whose story is likely shrouded in a mix of real and mythologized events—in an attempt to bring readers closer to experiences of the past and, on a secondary level, to lead us to reflect on our own experiences of difference and abjection. While I do not claim that this project’s interrogation of early modern gender ambiguity mirrors contemporary debates on transgenderism and sexual orientation, for example, I do hope that the questions it raises will prompt readers to consider the legacy of these beliefs on our own systems of identity making.

0.4: Conclusion

This project extends the work of past and present feminist scholars and scholars of the body. It explores questions of gender from a predominantly female perspective to one that examines historical figures who did not fit within the

⁸⁸ The case studies in this current project were all discussed as topics in my Spring 2020 upper-level undergraduate “Transgressive Bodies: Gender and Sexuality in the Renaissance Art World and Beyond” course at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. I owe a great debt of gratitude to my students, whose insistence on understanding bodily difference through a combined lens of empathy and historical relevancy informs my approach to the subjects in this current study.

categories of man or woman, thereby shifting the conversation from questions of one gender's power over another to the limits of these categories as part of a neat system.⁸⁹ The last thirty years have seen significant changes in gender scholarship across disciplines, moving from a strict focus on the feminine to broader issues of femininity and masculinity, and gender's intersection with categories of sex, sexual orientation, and more recently, the transgender body. Of particular importance to this project is the move toward viewing gender as a socially constructed performance and as separate from the belief of sex as biologically and anatomically determined. Likewise, it views sex and anatomy as physical matter that are only given meaning through their socially constructed nature.

I am indebted to the previous scholarly contributions that have paved the way for this current study. With gratitude, I acknowledge that a project of this nature—a project that aims to further deconstruct and challenge historicized definitions of gender, sex, and bodily difference—could have not been undertaken thirty years ago.

⁸⁹ Since the rise of feminist theory in the 1970s, gender has become one of the most used critical lenses through which contemporary and historical scholars approach inquiries into cultural issues. Within this context, art historians such as Norma Broude, Mary Garrard, and Linda Nochlin, among others, saw it as their mission to excavate understudied and forgotten female artists, affording them new pride of place next to the male artists who dominated—and still dominate today—the pages of all major art history survey textbooks. While shedding light on artists such as Lee Krasner and Artemisia Gentileschi, and the historical and societal factors that contributed to their limited appreciation in the canon, this endeavor was also a product of its historical and political environment. It necessarily saw debates over gender as confined to women's issues, and as a result, discussions of gender often presumed an essentializing and biodeterministic point of view. Put in general terms, to be a feminist scholar was to expose the injustices against women—often framed as political interventions—rather than to focus on interrogating definitions of gender. This mode of investigation continues to be an important aspect of feminist art history today, especially for early modern art historians. For example, see Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi and Feminism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Reaktion Books), scheduled for release in March 2020. These important developments in feminist theory and their early application in art historical discourses on gender paved the way for later studies, which have begun to deconstruct the very nature of gender, and how distinctions in Western cultures are often divided between the binary model of man and woman.

While its aims certainly test previous narratives of gender, especially the view of an essentializing feminism, it is still, at its core, a feminist study. By extending debates to subjects whose bodies do not fully conform to their period's definitions of male or female, the project calls into question the primacy of the gender binary model, proposing a level of fluidity within these otherwise confined spaces.

The issues currently surrounding gender demonstrate the necessity for further exploration into the premodern systems that inform those of today. From recent debates about gender-neutral bathrooms and the ban on transgender people serving in the military, to Merriam-Webster's declaration of the use of "they" as a personal gender pronoun as the 2019 word of the year, issues of gender have been at the forefront of today's cultural discourse. This project, therefore, presents an opportunity to explore how early modern questions of what defined a body have the potential to impact future definitions of non-conforming and conforming bodies, feminism, and gender identity more broadly.

Chapter 1: Of Breast and Beard: Hirsutism and Natural Wonder in Jusepe de Ribera's *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband*

*"A bold woman is against nature, for a woman ought not to have a beard either by law or by natural reason."*⁹⁰

In a letter dated February 11, 1631, the Venetian ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples described a scene he witnessed on a visit to the workshop of the Jusepe de Ribera in the Palazzo Reale in Naples. The ambassador writes:

In the rooms of the viceroy stood a very famous painter who was making a portrait of a married woman from Abruzzi. A mother of many children, she has a completely virile face, with more than a *palmo* of a beautiful black beard and a very hairy chest. His excellency, [the Viceroy of Naples] took delight in [showing] me such a marvelous [sight] and it truly is.⁹¹

The portrait of which the ambassador writes is Ribera's portrait *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband* (Fig. 4) signed five days later on February 16, 1631, and currently on display at the Museo del Prado in Madrid—a work that garnered attention not only during the period of its creation but still today for its direct and unflinching portrayal of a bearded woman with her husband and child.⁹² The patron, Don Fernando Enríquez y Afán de Ribera, Duke of Alcalá and Viceroy of Naples, had heard stories

⁹⁰ Clerk of Enghien, *De monstruosis hominibus* (BN, MS fr. 15106), cited in Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 129.

⁹¹ Cited in Sherry Velasco, "Hairy Women on Display in Textual and Visual Culture in Early Modern Spain," *South Atlantic Review* 72, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 62–75, 64.

⁹² The painting is currently on display in the Museo del Prado in Madrid, but it is owned by the Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli in Toledo. The painting passed from the collection of the Duke of Alcalá to the Duke of Medinaceli in 1808. See "La mujer barbuda," Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli, accessed September 15, 2019, <http://es.fundacionmedinaceli.org/coleccion/afondo/la-mujer-barbuda/>.

of Magdalena and her aberrant appearance and requested that she travel from her hometown of Abruzzi to the city of Naples so that she could be painted from life at his residence.⁹³

Magdalena's "beautiful black beard and very hairy chest," as the ambassador exclaimed, functioned as the defining elements of her bodily abnormality, and thus they also represented the reasons behind the viceroy's request for a portrait. In drawing attention to the length ("more than a *palmo*") and the quantity ("very") of hair on Magdalena's face and chest, the ambassador's statement also highlights the dissonances between the traits that mark her as feminine—he first identifies her as a "married woman," then as a "mother of many children"—and her "marvelous" presentation of excessive hair in a predominately male growth pattern on the face and chest. It is from this observation that the ambassador characterizes Magdalena as marvelous because it is not simply that she has facial hair and other traits that render her appearance "virile," but that these traits are juxtaposed against Magdalena's social roles as a wife and mother.⁹⁴

Ribera's painting underscores these relationships in the portrait of Magdalena, where he foregrounds her physical and social incongruities by depicting her as the central figure situated within a dark and nondescript background. She stands upright,

⁹³ This quote from the ambassador also suggests that guests of the duke were permitted to watch Ribera as he painted Magdalena, emphasizing the role of the onlooker's gaze in shaping the mythology surrounding Magdalena and her appearance. She likely would have been paid for traveling to Naples from her hometown of Abruzzi, though bank records from Naples's most prominent banks, held in the Archivio di Banco di Napoli, have not been uncovered at this time.

⁹⁴ A marvel in the early modern period encompasses the broad terrain of the "'exceeding-natural,' the divine, the very exact and the unexpected...and the fictional." Peter G. Platt, ed., *Wonders, Marvels and Monsters in Early Modern Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 16.

occupying a significant portion of the vertical picture plane as she gazes out at the viewer. Through the strategic use of light and shadow, Ribera fixes our attention on her body, especially on her face and further down to her exposed breast, where a child rests in her arms, presumably poised to nurse. The figuration of Magdalena's breast, however, suggests a deliberate exaggeration, its bulbous shape and unnatural placement in the middle of her chest furthering heightening the incongruity between her body's male and female signifiers. Ribera also inserts external markers into the composition, each referencing different aspects of Magdalena's contested gender identity. Such elements include Magdalena's husband, who stands behind her on the viewer's left, almost indiscernible from shadow, and two stacked stone slabs to the right of Magdalena. On them, Ribera inscribes a lengthy epithet attesting to the veracity of his depiction, and to Magdalena's bodily change, culminating in the growth of hair on her face and chest, which started when she was thirty-seven (Fig. 8). And, in a gesture that harkens back to the mythical birth of painting, Ribera glorifies himself as "a second Apelles," on the bottom of the second stone slab, thus implying that his patron, the duke, was a "second Alexander the Great."

The dilemma that then arises from the ambassador's assessment of Magdalena and from Ribera's visual description is how to understand her status as a marvel within the context of the period's definitions of gender and sex, and of medicine and disease. The manner in which Ribera articulates Magdalena's body, the Venetian ambassador's observation that she truly appeared on the painted surface as she did in life ("[the Viceroy of Naples] took delight in [showing] me such a marvelous [sight] and it truly is"), and the duke's insistence that she be brought from her hometown to

be portrayed in front of witnesses all attest to the period's interest in exploring, representing, cataloging, and—perhaps most importantly—*experiencing* cases of bodily difference firsthand. This interest reached an apogee in the seventeenth century, when developments in the theory and practice of medicine, anatomy, and dissection contributed to a desire to understand the cause, effects, and implications of disease and bodily deformities. Travel to the New World during this time also led to an increased exposure to different ethnicities, cultures, and illnesses, which furthered the specific interest in studying cases of bodily difference. Philosophers in the natural sciences looked to multiple contexts to explain abnormalities either on the surface or interior of the body: from divine intervention to a mother's imagination, and from a change in humoral heat to spending too much time with the opposite sex. In many cases, images of the afflicted accompanied their descriptions in treatises, manuals, and guidebooks—functioning, in part, as testaments to the veracity of the written description. In an effort to reflect this desire to know and exert control over the natural and preternatural worlds, rulers and elites participated in collecting and commissioning objects—from acquiring rare animal skeletons to paintings of dwarves.

This arresting portrayal of Magdalena's infirmity represents one of the most striking portraits of a bearded woman from the period. While previous studies have acknowledged the importance of this painting within the context of court collecting practices, and within Ribera's oeuvre as a testament to his skill in rendering his subjects in naturalistic precision, few have adequately addressed the issues Magdalena's bodily transformation raises for her gender identity, and how this

painting presents an opportunity to delve deeper into early modern notions of gender change.⁹⁵

This chapter expands upon previous studies and explores Ribera's visual strategies for what I argue were deliberate adaptations to Magdalena's body—such as the positioning and shape of her breast and the emphasis on her beard—and contextualizes these alterations within medical and social attitudes on the body and bodily change. In doing so, it argues that the physical changes Magdalena's body underwent when she was thirty-seven speak to early modern notions of gender as a paradigm that was susceptible to change. Ribera's strategic addition of feminizing elements such as the child in Magdalena's arms, the position and shape of her exposed breast, her husband in the background, and the lengthy epitaph all speak to the constructed nature of Magdalena's identity as female. As a result, I contend that the inclusion of these elements—meant to bolster Magdalena's association with the female gender—also suggests an underlining vulnerability to these categories, and that without these additions, a viewer may not be able to reconcile the gender of the figure at which they were looking.

Magdalena's bodily transformation and other documented cases from the period are significant for how we examine early modern notions of gender and beliefs

⁹⁵ For recent examples focusing on the court context of Ribera's painting and other similar cases, see Christopher William Wells, "Court 'Monsters': Deformity in the Western European Royal Courts between 1500 and 1700," *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural* 7 (2018): 182–214; M. A. Katritzky, "'A Wonderfull Monster Borne in Germany': Hairy Girls in Medieval and Early Modern German Book, Court, and Performance Culture," *German Life and Letters* 67 (October 2014): 465–80; Touba Ghadessi, "Inventoried Monsters: Dwarves and Hirsutes at Court," *Journal of the History of Collections* 23, no. 2 (2011): 267–81; and Mark Albert Johnson, "Bearded Women in Early Modern England," *Studies on English Literature, 1500–1900* 47 (Winter 2007): 1–28.

in the body's capacity for change. When gazing upon Magdalena's portrait today, it is hard to ignore that her general visage appears more aligned with traits of masculinity than femininity—as though Ribera rendered a man with a breast, rather than a woman with a beard (Fig. 9).⁹⁶ Consequently, this painting presents an opportunity to examine the broader cultural stakes of depicting a gender-ambiguous body within both Italian and Spanish contexts, as well as the larger problems of categorizing degrees of bodily transformation and the extent to which an alteration signaled a complication to one's existing gender identity or called for an entirely new gender identity. It also considers how the period understood the relationship between internal and external bodily changes, especially in light of the emphasis on Magdalena's physical appearance, rather than suggest her change included internal additions, or additions only visible without clothes, such as a phallus and testicles. By drawing attention to the issue of visible versus concealed change, Ribera also underscores the vulnerability and instability of the male-female-hermaphrodite system. A corollary theme in this chapter, therefore, is the conceptual problem of what defines a man and the relationship between secondary sex characteristics such as the beard and sex organs.

⁹⁶ The modern observation that Magdalena's portrayal appears to present more like a man with a breast, rather than a woman with a beard, also raises questions about the subject's sexuality, for if Ribera was indeed depicting a man with a breast, it would also imply that he (the subject) had a male sexual partner in the form of Magdalena's husband, Felici de Amici, who appears in the portrait behind Magdalena. This association would have had significant consequences in the early modern period, especially within the context of its Spanish patron, who undoubtedly participated in a specifically Spanish culture of fear and anxiety toward same-sex relationships, which was especially strong within the context of exerting control over the male body, in part to avoid associations with effeminacy and homosocial or sexual relationships between men. I am grateful to the attendants of my presentation on this chapter at the May 2019 Scientiae conference in Belfast, Ireland, for bringing this observation to my attention.

The changes Magdalena experienced were particularly problematic because artists had to contend with alerting the viewer that the subject's body had undergone a change from gender conformity to ambiguity. Ribera addresses this task by creating a multilayered viewing experience that encourages the viewer to contemplate Magdalena's current appearance and consider how she might have looked prior to her transformation by imbuing the painting with allusions to her previously conforming identity. As a result, Magdalena's gender falls into the category of the in-between. No longer an intact woman, yet not completely transformed into a man, Ribera's portrait presents the figure of Magdalena not as a hermaphrodite but as a less-than-intact woman. The insistence by Ribera and his contemporaries that she was a bearded woman fits within the anxieties about women's position in society and the necessity of preventing such aberrant women from undermining definitions of masculinity and participating in masculine activities. The example of Magdalena reaffirms that bodies were capable of change and fluctuation in the early modern period, provoking thinkers, writers, and artists to wrestle with how cases of bodily difference and ambiguity both challenged and reinforced boundaries between normative and nonnormative categories of gender.

In order to trace the contradictions inherent in Ribera's portrayal of Magdalena and the portrait's implications for the reception of figures like Magdalena in larger society, the first section of this chapter focuses on reconstructing Magdalena's story and how she developed symptoms of hirsutism. It contextualizes the limited biographical information on Magdalena's life with the factors surrounding the commission of her portrait, including the role of its patron—the Duke of Alcalá—

in summoning Magdalena and arranging for Jusepe de Ribera, one of the most celebrated painters working in Naples at the time, to paint her from life. The second section examines the portrait in light of medical and social understandings of hirsutism and of hair in general. Building on this discussion, the third section considers the period's multilayered associations of the male beard with masculine power and virility, and how these connotations informed writings and visual representations of bearded women. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections return to Magdalena and elaborate on how these social and medical contexts for understanding her hirsutism are embedded in, and are complicated by, Ribera's portrait. The next section examines the traits that define Magdalena's masculinity, including her beard, but also her "virile face," skin, hands, and receding hairline, and analyzes them within the context of the male beard's power to either reify, or in the case of Magdalena, contradict previously established expectations of the gender-conforming body. These sections reflect the conflicting elements of Magdalena's identity, with each attribute falling into one of three overlapping, yet distinct, categories: the elements that contribute to her masculinity; those of her femininity; and those of her as in-between, or less-than-intact. The final section reevaluates the relationship between her infirmity and ambiguous gender identity in light of Ribera's representation and concludes with a discussion of the implications of Magdalena's case on other examples of bodily transformation and gender non-conformity in the early modern period.

1.1 Magdalena Ventura and the Commission of Her Portrait

In contrast to other well-documented cases of bodily transformation, such as the example of Eleno/a, with which the Introduction of this dissertation opened, Jusepe de Ribera's portrait *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband* represents an opportunity to investigate an early modern articulation of gender difference from an art historical perspective. An investigation of the factors that informed Ribera's composition reveals the particular significance of the painting's patron in shaping the reception of Magdalena's condition, in paint and in life. This section begins by piecing together the little-known details of Magdalena's biography in order to understand the duke's motivations for commissioning the portrait, culminating in an examination of the pictorial conventions of bearded women, which may have contributed to both the duke's and Ribera's perspective on the subject.

Few details on Magdalena Ventura and her life survive today. This dearth of preserved material suggests that unlike the subjects of other visual representations of hirsute men and women, such as the Gonsalvus family and Barbara Ursler, Magdalena likely did not travel to other European courts to be viewed, examined, and documented, resulting in a lack of multiple firsthand accounts in the form of letters, medical observations, and visual renderings. As a result, it is difficult to discern the extent to which she—and possibly her husband—deliberately marketed her medical condition to earn money, fame, and protection beyond her trip to Naples. The only known example of textual evidence on the specifics of Magdalena's biography and her medical condition derives from the inscription Ribera provides on the stone slab on the right side of the composition. The full inscription reads:

The great wonder of Nature, Magdalena Ventura, from the town of Accomoli in central Italy, or in the vulgar tongue, Abruzzi, in the kingdom of Naples, aged fifty-two years, the unusual thing about her being that when she was thirty-seven she began to become hairy and grew a beard so long and thick that it seems more like that of any bearded gentleman than of a woman who had borne three sons by her husband, Felici de Amici, whom you see here. Jusepe de Ribera, a Spanish gentleman of the Order of the Cross of Christ, and another Apelles in his times, painted this scene marvelously from life on the orders of Ferdinand II, Third Duke of Alcalá, Viceroy of Naples, on the 16th February 1631.⁹⁷

Through Ribera's strategically crafted rhetoric, the inscription chronicles a story akin to a foundation myth aimed at establishing the veracity of Magdalena and her supernatural qualities. In so doing, he contextualizes Magdalena as a real person and not an imagine subject to be associated with such monstrous figures as Wild Men and other fantastical hairy beings.⁹⁸

While medical records from the period that describe the context of Magdalena's condition do not survive, examples from other seventeenth-century studies suggest that she suffered from an illness known today as female hirsutism.⁹⁹ The most noticeable consequence of female hirsutism was—and is still in cases today—the development of hair in a predominantly male growth pattern, most noticeable around the lower face and chest. Importantly, the inscription indicates that Magdalena acquired hirsutism later than life, rather than it being a congenital

⁹⁷ For the original Latin inscription see Zirpolo, "Part II: Female Hirsutism," 204. English translation of the original Latin text from Wind, *Foul and Pestilent Congregation*, 56.

⁹⁸ For more on early modern perceptions of hairy people, including the mythic Wild Men, satyrs, and werewolves, see Katritzky, "A Wonderful Monster Borne in Germany," 469 and 476.

⁹⁹ In contrast to hirsutism, which is characterized by an excessive growth of hair, especially on women in male-patterns, hypertrichosis—a condition also used by describe cases from this period—consists of a development of hair all over the body. Hypertrichosis, also known as Ambras syndrome, is also understood to be a "hereditary disease, with pediatric onset," which would explain some of the differences between the Gonsalvus family and Magdalena. See Gianfranco Biolcacti and Carla Dolazza, "1599: First Iconographic Description of Hepatoerythropoietic Porphyria," *International Journal of Dermatology* 45 (2006): 976–978, 976.

condition. While a precise medical explanation—either in early modern or contemporary terms—for her transformation is unclear, it is possible she experienced a humoral imbalance, caused by any number of factors such as her pregnancy, her sexual activity, or her menstruation patterns.

Whether Magdalena experienced the growth of hair on other parts of her body—which, as mentioned above, may have been possible depending on the specific factors of her condition—was not of equal or greater consequence than signaling the viewer to her male-identifying beard. The presence of Magdalena’s husband, Felice de Amici—rendered in the portrait behind Magdalena on the right and mentioned by name in the inscription—also signals her femininity by affirming her status as a wife. Through these rhetorical gestures, the inscription goes to great pains to exert Magdalena’s femininity in spite of her beard.

The inscription ends with the statement that Ribera painted the scene in a marvelously life-like way, suggesting that it was intended to be perceived as naturalistic, both in subject and style. Along with establishing the historical context through which Ribera intends the viewer to appreciate the painting and its subject, this portion of the inscription also asserts the prominence of the painter himself and of the patron, the Duke of Alcalá, in summoning Magdalena and providing the space in which to paint her. In including himself and the duke in the inscription, Ribera foregrounds a corollary, yet nonetheless significant, theme of the spectacle of the strange and the importance of *witnessing* a marvelous wonder with one’s own eyes. In other words, the act of watching Ribera paint Magdalena’s portrait from life—memorialized in written accounts such as the Venetian ambassador’s description—

was as important to Ribera and the duke as the finished painting itself. One had to observe and experience Magdalena's deformity firsthand to attest to her wondrous condition.

The Duke of Alcalá's commissioning Ribera to paint Magdalena's portrait reflects his broader interests in scientific and intellectual history and the collecting of medical oddities.¹⁰⁰ Like many elites of his time, the duke (1583–1637) received a classical education at home by private tutors in Seville. This education fostered a love of antiquity and ancient intellectual culture. As a result of these cultivated interests, he amassed a vast library that reportedly rivaled almost every contemporary collection in the world.¹⁰¹ Exposure to art through his family also led him to foster relationships with local and influential artists and art collectors in Seville, such as the esteemed art theorist and painter Francisco Pacheco del Río (1571–1654).¹⁰² Pacheco played an integral role in the development of the duke's growing art collection by advising him how to follow artistic trends.¹⁰³ By the time of the duke's death in 1637, he had amassed over four hundred paintings.

Prior to his appointment as the Viceroy of Naples in the 1620s, the duke traveled throughout Italy, learning about art and acquiring objects for his personal collection in such cities as Genoa, Venice, and Rome. His time in Rome was

¹⁰⁰ For the most in-depth discussion of the Duke's habits as a collector, see Jonathan Brown and Richard Kagan, "The Duke of Alcalá: His Collection and Its Evolution," *Art Bulletin* 69 (June 1987): 231–55.

¹⁰¹ See Ignacio Gongora, "Claros varones en letteres," Biblioteca Colombina, Seville, cited in Christopher R. Marshall, *Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 220.

¹⁰² Dubbed the "Vasari of Seville," Pacheco's most famous publication is his *Arte de la pintura* (1649), where he describes his methods on iconography, material, and techniques. See Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 233–35.

¹⁰³ Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 236.

especially influential as the duke was able to visit important archaeological sites, experiences which undoubtedly informed his later collecting habits. His travels over the course of his career, along with an appointment as the ambassador of Spain to Pope Urban VIII from 1625 to 1626, solidified the duke's reputation as an established art collector, and particularly as an investor in followers of Caravaggio, including Artemisia Gentileschi and Jusepe de Ribera.¹⁰⁴

By the time of the duke's twenty-one-month tenure as the Viceroy of Naples, he had already become as a serious collector. Indeed, his taste for art and literature—amounting to the acquisition of over seventy-five works of art during his short stay in Naples—may have superseded his political ambitions. Records on the duke's collection mainly derive from two inventories that chronicle the artists, genres, and subjects he preferred. The first inventory was produced in Seville sometime between 1632 and 1636, while the second inventory was carried out in Genoa between May and June 1637 to conduct an estate sale following the duke's death in Austria that same year. Among the genres one might expect to find in the duke's collection, including portraits, landscapes, mythological and ancient subjects, still lifes, and religious scenes, were a number of paintings of medical oddities, a trend that—while no doubt popular among the elite court circles in Spain—also speaks to the duke's especially vast education in the arts and sciences. In particular, his inventory notes

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, the Duke's patronage of Artemisia Gentileschi was likely the impetus for her move from Rome to Naples around 1630, coinciding with the Duke's arrival in 1629. The Duke's relationship with such artists as Artemisia establishes a pattern of interest in the "dramatized naturalism" (my phrase) seen in works like Ribera's *Magdalena*, and speaks to the larger impact of the Duke's collecting habits on the art market in Naples, as well as in Seville where he later displayed his collection. See Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 239–40 for the Duke's relationship with Artemisia.

two portraits of dwarves attributed to Pacheco, *Portrait of Gabriel the Dwarf* [II. 29] and *Portrait of Hetias the Dwarf* [IX. 100], which suggests these two figures were likely identifiable members of the court.¹⁰⁵

Little is known today surrounding the specific circumstances of the duke's request for Ribera to paint a portrait of Magdalena in Naples.¹⁰⁶ According to the 1631 inventory, the painting was listed as the last of nineteen works under a category of objects displayed in the room where the duke ate.¹⁰⁷ The painting itself was described as a large, rolled-up canvas of a bearded woman with her husband by the hand of Joseph de Rivera.¹⁰⁸ The duke's desire to commission a portrait of a bearded woman likely stemmed from firsthand knowledge of a painting by Juan Sánchez Cotán, *Brígida del Río, the Bearded Lady of Peñaranda*, oil on canvas, from 1590 in Madrid (Fig. 10).¹⁰⁹ The duke would have likely seen Cotán's painting of Brígida when he traveled to Madrid in 1598 at the behest of Philip II, providing the inspiration for his own commission of such a portrait. Brígida was a well-known figure in late-sixteenth-century Spain, as mentions of her bearded status circulated in

¹⁰⁵ These two works are listed in the second inventory from 1751. See Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 238.

¹⁰⁶ The duke does appear, however, to have had connections to Ribera more generally through his stay in the painter's city of residence. For more on their relationship, see Delphine Fitz Darby, "Ribera and the Wise Men," *Art Bulletin* 44 (December 1962): 279–307, especially 288–90.

¹⁰⁷ "Quadra quinta donde comia el Duq^e mi s^{or}." My translation. Original text cited in Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 251.

¹⁰⁸ The full description reads: "un lienço grande de una muger Barbuda con su marido de mano de Joseph de rrivera vino en enrollado primo del caxon." My translation. Original text cited in Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 251.

¹⁰⁹ The painting is in the Museo del Prado's permanent collection. For its provenance, see "Brígida del Río, the Bearded Lady of Peñaranda," Museo del Prado, updated January 29, 2020, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/brigida-del-rio-the-bearded-lady-of-pearanda/4a025c3f-1cd4-4a77-92f0-eb0890110675>. Notably, the painting was recently exhibited in the show *Trans. Diversidad dei identidades y roles de género*, organized by the Museo de América de Madrid, which took place from June 22 to September 24, 2017, following the growing trend in museum exhibitions toward thematic interrogations of the body and gender.

several popular literary works and visual renderings. She was invited to the court of Madrid in 1590 to be painted from life, much like the dwarves and other medical oddities depicted by artists such as Diego Velázquez and Agostino Carracci during this time.¹¹⁰ In the painting, Brígida occupies the center of the vertically formatted canvas. She stands erect with her hands clasped at her waist, while her gaze rests firmly on the viewer, even as her head slightly tilts to the left. The viewer's attention, however, moves quickly from her timid expression to her long and graying beard, which almost reaches the top of her chest. Brígida's beard is rendered all the more shocking against the white ruff of her collar—which, along with her skirt and head covering, represent the only visual signifiers of her feminine identity beyond the gendering of her pose.

The similarities between Cotán's and Ribera's paintings are unmistakable; each work portrays an aged woman with a receding hairline in comparably humble dress. Each also relies on a darkened background to highlight the central subject. The affinities between Cotán's and Ribera's paintings also extend beyond the subject matter and staging of the composition to the blurring of their sitters' gender identities through the incorporation of both male and female characteristics demonstrated by their ruddy complexion, aged expression, and clothing. Yet Cotán's rendering unmistakably lacks some of the elements of Ribera's painting, including the stone slabs and still life, Magdalena's husband and the infant, and most noticeably, the centrally exposed breast, all of which contribute to the shock and contrast of

¹¹⁰ The duke also had his portrait painted by the court artist Juan Pantoja de la Cruz while in Madrid, demonstrating his already-developed interest in the arts. Brown and Kagan, "Duke of Alcalá," 233.

Magdalena's visibly conflicted identity. Instead, Cotán's painting appears to rely exclusively on external markers to cue the viewer to the coupling of Brígida's physically masculine traits with elements of socially sanctioned femininity, specifically her timid posture and expression, and her feminine dress. Ribera's derivations from Cotán's model to Magdalena's pose and expression therefore signify the evolution between these two painters' works: the once timid Brígida transforms into the confrontational Magdalena.

1.2: Hirsutism in the Early Modern Period

The issues inherent in rendering the portrait of an exceptionally—and visibly—different subject from life speak to the larger interest in this particular genre during the period. This section contextualizes the articulation of Magdalena's bodily aberrance within a broader understanding of the medical and social definitions of her infirmity: hirsutism.

The fascination with commissioning portraits of medical oddities stemmed in part from a growing awareness of the relationship between external and internal bodily systems and how an imbalance in these systems might lead to externally aberrant bodies. Since the publication of Vesalius's *De humani corporis fabrica* in 1543, a new interest specifically in monsters and the diseased began to take shape among early modern natural physicians, theorists, and practitioners. Much of Vesalius's work and that of his colleagues centered on direct observational methods, which challenged the prevailing Galenic traditions. Despite this trend, Vesalius's research was still largely focused on the ideal normative body. In turn, an interest in

the anomalous and the malformed grew into its own subfield of early modern empirical inquiry as a result of further interest in understanding the causes and documenting the symptoms of congenital and contracted diseases by physicians such as Ulisse Aldrovandi, Ambroise Paré, and Felix Platter.¹¹¹

To comprehend how the period diagnosed, classified, and assigned meaning to diseases or conditions that altered hair growth, it is first necessary to consider how excessive hair on women was understood. This association becomes especially important for later considerations of the beard when it is taken out of the context of its typical associations with men to be found on the faces of women. According to writers such as Saint Albertus Magnus, “a woman’s menstruation, the integrity of the reproductive system and the frequency or infrequency of sexual relations” could all be causes for the growth of excessive hair.¹¹² These explanations suggest that a specific element of a woman’s feminine body was responsible for her change, and it is through the period’s preoccupation with regulating and balancing the four bodily humors that notions of physical change and transformation were understood. Women in particular were believed to be more vulnerable and susceptible to humoral changes. The malleability of their internal systems was likely viewed within the context of neo-Aristotelian notions of the female body as derivative of the male’s more perfect form.

¹¹¹ Ghadessi, “Inventoried Monsters,” 268.

¹¹² Mónica Arrizabalaga, “La barbuda de Peñaranda, entre mujer y hombre,” ABC Cultura, September 14, 2015, <https://www.abc.es/cultura/arte/20150914/abci-barbuda-penaranda-entre-mujer-201509091223.html>.

Based on the visual characteristics of Magdalena's representation in Ribera's painting, scholars have suggested she had an infirmity that is known to us today as hirsutism or hypertrichosis, whereby the whole body is covered with hair, or where the growth of hair is heavy specifically on the face. If not shaved, a person's hair could reach a length of several inches. Physicians today have linked the condition to an "inherited autosomal dominant trait," meaning that it was likely hereditary.¹¹³ The history of this condition is rich with overlapping cultural and scientific associations that, when woven together, speak to the all-encompassing manner in which knowledge was shaped and disseminated in the early modern period.

During the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, cases of this infirmity were often believed to be caused by a woman's imagination during conception, whereby a woman would contemplate an image in her mind or gaze upon an actual image for too long, thus imprinting it in the womb. Indeed, there is one example of a pregnant woman who kept an image under her bed of Saint John the Baptist from his time living in the wilderness with long hair and a long beard, causing her child to be born a hirsute.¹¹⁴ In other cases, those afflicted were understood to be "descendants of mythological satyrs or savage creatures that lived in the woods."¹¹⁵ In each explanation—and surely there were others—parentage and traits of difference were shaped by the actions or behaviors of another, particularly the mother.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 100.

¹¹⁴ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "The Wild and Hairy Gonzales Family," *Appearance[s]* 5: 2014, 8, <https://journals.openedition.org/apparences/1283>.

¹¹⁵ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 104.

¹¹⁶ For other examples, see Wiesner-Hanks, "Wild and Hairy Gonzales Family," 6.

Early modern cases of this infirmity are described in both textual and visual form, as well as in records that indicate they lived and served in the courts of Europe, such as in France, Parma, and Naples. Interest in the medical aspects of disease and deformity was also accompanied by the publication of numerous illustrated books and treatises on such topics as physiognomics, such as Giovanni Battista della Porta's well-circulated treatise on human physiognomy, which included a discussion on human oddities and ugliness.¹¹⁷ As a result of these inquiries, artists and patrons in the seventeenth century grew increasingly invested in visually representing figures with infirmities. Depending on the subject's particular condition, however, an artist often faced the difficult task of rendering an internal abnormality recognizable on the surface or adapting the externally visual malady to suit a desired message or convention. With Magdalena and other painted representations of hirsutes, the artists had to necessarily reconcile the sitters' marvelously aberrant physical traits—namely their hairy bodies and faces—with their condition's well-known associations with medical theories on humoral change and beliefs surrounding its impact on social identity and status. Depending on the intended meaning of a work, artists mitigated some of these—often negative—factors by portraying the sitter with attributes of elevated status such as fine clothes, the inclusion of writing implements to suggest a high level of education, and through pose and expression.

Lavinia Fontana's *Portrait of Antoniette Gonsalvus* is one such example (Fig. 11).¹¹⁸ In this painting, Fontana portrays Antoniette in the center of the vertical

¹¹⁷ Giovanni Battista della Porta, *De humana physiognomonia libri IIII* (Vici Aequensis: Apud Iosephum Cacchium, 1586).

¹¹⁸ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 102–3.

composition, shown from the waist up, and directly facing and making eye contact with the viewer. She wears a regal and fashionable dress, consisting of a shiny silver brocaded fabric with floral and geometric details, with delicate lace accents at the wrists and on the edges of the collar around her neck. Fontana's sensitivity to the articulating the subtle differences in texture and detail of Antoniette's costume are only matched by the articulation of softly blended brush strokes for the hair that covers her entire face, except for the areas surrounding her eyelids, nose, and lips. To distinguish Antoniette from an uncivilized hirsute, however, Fontana also includes a letter in that she grasps in her glabrous hands, implying that Antoniette possessed the necessary erudition to read and write.

Antoniette's father, Pierre, was brought from the Canary Islands to the court of Henri II in France. Pierre had a non-hirsute wife and fathered seven children with her, a number of whom were born hirsute. He was treated as a courtier and received military training and an education in Latin. Court portraits of his hirsute children visualize the complicated dynamics of picturing figures who—though they had an education and were given titles—were still part of the category of the monstrous.

The tension in these figures' position somewhere between courtier and monster is particularly tangible in works such as Agostino Carracci's complex, multifigure composition, *Triplo ritratto di Arrigo peloso, Pietro matto e Amon nano* (*Triple Portrait of Hairy Harry, Mad Peter, and Tiny Amon*), dated 1598–1600, which portrays Pierre's hirsute son Henri or Harry—referred to as *Arrigo Peloso* (Hairy Harry)—among other medical oddities and exotic animals from the court of

Cardinal Odoardo Farnese (Fig. 12).¹¹⁹ Harry reclines in the foreground flanked by the dwarf *Amon Nano* (Tiny Amon, short for Rodomonte) to his left and by *Pietro Matto* (Mad Peter) to his right. A menagerie of animals accompanies the three human subjects: from the left, a spaniel on which Amon rests his arm, and a parrot—whose size underscores Amon’s diminutive stature—that sits on Amon’s shoulder; in the middle, a small pug that sits in between Harry’s legs; and a small monkey that rests on his left shoulder, reaching for the cherries in Harry’s outstretched left hand and simultaneously appearing to prune the hair on Harry’s head. A larger, second monkey crouches alongside Harry’s right thigh and grasps the pug’s paw. Harry gazes toward Pietro and points with his outstretched right hand toward Amon, seemingly uniting all three figures.¹²⁰ The focal point of the painting, however, remains on Harry, who, apart from the *tamarco* he wears over his shoulders from his native Canary Islands, is pictured with his hairy chest exposed and seemingly sheared or trimmed down, permitting an unmitigated view of his muscular chest and abdomen, a detail neglected in the literature on the painting.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ The painting is currently displayed in the Museo a Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples. Duke Ranuccio Farnese sent Harry to Cardinal Odoardo Farnese as a gift prior to the portrait’s commission. See Anne Summerscale, *Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 321.

¹²⁰ Roberto Zapperi, one of the leading scholars on this painting, has discussed the its relationship to other works in the cardinal’s collection and how it reflects the cardinal’s interest in medical oddities. Zapperi argues that the work represents an elevated and overall positive portrayal of the three sitters. Others, such as Barry Wind, have disputed this claim and argue the work portrays the sitters negatively. See Zapperi, “Arrigo le Velu, Pietro le Fou, Amon le Nain et Autres Bêtes: Autour d’un tableau d’Agostino Carrache,” *Annales Economies Sociétés Civilisations* 40 (1985): 307–27, and Wind, *Foul and Pestilent Congregation*, 19–21.

¹²¹ I would like to thank Mary Vaccaro for our conversation in March 2019 about this painting and the Gonsalvus family in general.

While Carracci's rendering of Harry raises a number of questions regarding the potential for sexual appeal of the hirsute man that are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to return to the issue of gender and address its role in affirming the appearance of other representations of bearded women before resuming the discussion of Magdalena's portrait.¹²² Although some paintings, such as Antoinette's portrait mentioned earlier, portray the form of the illness whereby hair forms over the entire face and body, paintings of women where hair is specifically gathered or shaped in the male pattern of a beard form a specific subgenre of hirsute portraits. This subgenre—including the paintings of Brígida del Río and Magdalena—represents a particular interest among court royals in collecting images of marvelous women who, through the appropriation of the male beard, defied the conventional markers of their gender.¹²³

In other contexts, however, there was also a desire to present a moralizing message with representations of hirsutes. As Sherry Velasco notes, “the representation of hirsutism frequently involved a visual spectacle in conjunction with a [written] narrative destined to interpret the transgression of cultural norms regarding gender and sex categories.”¹²⁴ These moralizing commentaries often accompanied illustrated printed publications and thus permitted a greater potential audience

¹²² No scholar, to my knowledge, has explored the potential sexual implications of the exposure of Harry's idealized physique and what the portrayal of his body suggests about the relationship between hirsutism, gender, and erotic appeal.

¹²³ The painting of Barbara Ursler, recently acquired by the Wellcome Collection, is one of the only other examples, to my knowledge, of a painting of a bearded woman that contrasts the subject's femininity, especially through the exposure of the top of her breasts through a low décolleté and bright pink ribbons. Unlike Brígida and Magdalena, Barbara's full face is covered in hair and she is only pictured from the waist up. Some scholars have attributed this painting also to Ribera.

¹²⁴ Velasco, “Hairy Women,” 62.

compared to that of Ribera's painting, demonstrating the larger cultural reach on this discourse of bodily difference. In such examples as Sebastián de Covarrubias's *Emblemas Morales*, 1610, a bearded woman—whom scholars have identified as the same Brígida from Cotán's painting—is pictured in the center of the folio accompanied by verses in the first person below (Fig. 13). The inscription describes the subject's identity as "neither one nor the other," and the subject goes on to describe herself as "lowly like a horrid and rare monster[;] view me as wicked and an evil omen."¹²⁵

And yet, other cases of women with beards or excessive hair exist that speak to the alternative meanings this presentation could carry, especially for a female viewer or devotee. Examples within a religious context, for instance, include figures such as Mary Magdalene—who was often depicted with long unruly hair covering her body while she sought penitence. Others, such as Saint Wilgefortis, also known as Saint Uncumber, address more explicitly the appropriation of facial hair (Fig. 14). In order to evade an unwanted arranged marriage, Wilgefortis prayed to God and a beard miraculously appeared on her face. Her betrothed broke off the engagement and her father—a pagan ruler—had her crucified as punishment. By growing a beard, Wilgefortis was able to preserve her honor by becoming unattractive and appropriating a symbol that did not conform to her gender. Wilgefortis was subsequently venerated in the fourteenth century and again later especially by women who wanted to get out of unhappy marriages.

¹²⁵ Covarrubias, Sebastián de, *Emblemas Morales* (Madrid: Louis Sánchez, 1610), 164.

Cases such as *Mary Magdalene* and *Saint Wilgefortis* speak to the multivalence of the beard and its potentiality to mean different things to different people. As in the example of *Wilgefortis*, Ribera's portrayal of *Magdalena* hinges on the miraculous discovery of her beard and on the viewers as witnesses. Yet no other paintings come close to the striking and singular quality of Ribera's representation of *Magdalena* and the amount of information it provides about early modern attitudes on the diseased and monstrous body. What further complicates our understanding of *Magdalena*'s identity is the addition of other early modern masculinizing traits such as her receding hairline and her large and indelicate hands.

While *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband* receives brief mention in monographs on Ribera and in catalog entries on exhibitions pertaining to the Spanish Baroque, scholars generally group it with other depictions of the monstrous and deformed, most notably with Ribera's *Boy with a Clubfoot* (Fig. 15) and Diego Velázquez's paintings of dwarves, such as *Portrait of Sebastián de Morra* (Fig. 16).¹²⁶ These groupings—which still exist in recent publications—have undoubtedly contributed to the growing interest in monster studies and teratology, and consequently, produced a limited view on *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband*'s cultural impact, especially regarding what it can teach scholars about the diverse understandings and multiplicities of bodies that defied easy categorization as male or female in the early modern period. Recent work by literary scholars such as Will Fisher and Sherry Velasco, and art historians such as Toubia Ghadessi, have begun to

¹²⁶ The most comprehensive discussion of this painting from a museum catalog context is still Craig Felton and W. B. Jordan, eds., *Jusepe de Ribera, Lo Spagnoletto, 1591–1652* (Fort Worth, TX: Kimbrell Art Museum, 1982), 129–31.

challenge this narrative of the “monstrous freak” by examining written and visual evidence of the lived experiences of these individuals and how their portrayals both reified and rejected normative codes of masculine and feminine gender.¹²⁷ Velasco’s work, in particular, stresses the potential use of queer theory for understanding the these figures’ experience of bodily difference, often resulting in social ridicule. Nevertheless, these studies lack a sustained investigation of Ribera’s portrait in concert with social, medical, and gender analyses on Magdalena’s body and its portrayal. Furthermore, little attention has been devoted to a detailed visual analysis of *how* Ribera depicts the contrasts inherent in Magdalena’s body. Addressing these lacunae in the scholarship allows for different questions to be asked about the relationship between the cultural definitions of bodily aberrance and its translation into visual form. The following sections consider the seemingly dissonant elements that contribute to Magdalena’s association with both the male and female genders. The two most defining traits of Magdalena’s dual identity—her beard and exposed breast—function on both physiological and social levels in terms of how they were understood in the early modern period.

1.3: The Beard’s Social Capital for Early Modern Men

This section begins with the social context for understanding perhaps the most palpable sign of Magdalena’s visually discordant body: her wearing of the strictly male-associated beard. A man’s beard, in general, not only visibly distinguished a

¹²⁷ Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” Velasco, “Hairy Women,” and Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*.

man from a woman in appearance, thus providing a means of differentiating sex, but it was also related to a man's social performance of masculinity through the belief in facial hair's connection to the production of semen. Therefore, a man's facial hair could be equated with the social expectation of reproduction.

Beards in the early modern period—and arguably still today—functioned as one of the most powerful signifiers of masculinity, demonstrated in both written and visual sources. Examples from a range of contexts—from medical treatises and writings on physiognomy, to drama and poetry—all expound upon the importance of facial hair in determining maleness. And, as the English physician and natural philosopher John Bulwer notes, the beard was an essential part of the body and should not be reduced to just hair.¹²⁸ Within this context, the beard signified something greater than the hair on a man's face and reflected his true identity as male.

Indeed, the association of the beard with masculinity often extended from the realm of nature to God, where the beard, in some cases, was viewed as a gift from God to distinguish men from women. In the writings of Saint Augustine, for example, the beard not only signified a masculine wearer but also functioned as a manifestation of man's superiority and courageous character. As he remarks, “[T]he beard signifies the courageous; the beard distinguishes the grown men, the earnest, the active, the vigorous. So that when we describe such, we say, he is a bearded man.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd, or the Artificial Changeling* (London, 1654), 206–7, cited in Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” 168.

¹²⁹ Brantly Millegan, “5 Church Fathers on that Most Manly of Traits: the Beard,” *Aleteia*, October 30, 2013, <https://aleteia.org/2013/10/30/5-church-fathers-on-that-most-manly-of-traits-the-beard/>, and “Exposition on Psalm 133,” *New Advent*, accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801133.htm>.

Additional writings further argue that to alter a man's beard would be detrimental to his masculinity. The *Apostolic Constitutions* from the fourth century, for example, note:

Nor may men destroy the hair of their beards, and unnaturally change the form of a man. For the law says: You shall not mar your beards. For God the Creator has made this decent for women but has determined that it is unsuitable for men. But if you do these things to please men, in contradiction to the law, you will be abominable with God, who created you after His own image. If, therefore, you will be acceptable to God, abstain from all those things which He hates, and do none of those things that are displeasing to Him.¹³⁰

In proclaiming that a man who destroys, presumably by shaving, his beard will unnaturally change his form as of man, the passage underscores the importance of presenting visibly recognizable—and approved—traits of masculinity in order for one's masculine identity to remain intact. In so doing, however, the passage also alludes to the notion that masculinity, in its need to be protected and maintained, is also vulnerable to change and could be called into question or even lost.

The notion of the beard's bestowal by God paralleled its association with nature in medical and physiological literature. In *Physiologia barbae humanae*, a three-hundred-page treatise published in 1603 and devoted solely to the physiology and social significance of beards, Marcus Ulmus wrote: "Nature gave to mankind a Beard, that it might remaine as an Index in the Face, of the Masculine generative faculty."¹³¹ In so doing, Ulmus links the importance of being a man with having a beard, and that a beard distinguishes men from women, who are expected to be

¹³⁰ "Apostolic Constitutions (Book I)," New Advent, accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07151.htm>.

¹³¹ This quotation derives from John Bulwer's summary of Ulmus's writing. Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, 206–7, cited in Fisher, "Renaissance Beard," 174.

without facial hair. Texts such as these, then, suggest that the beard functioned as much as a sign of masculinity as it did to define what the wearer was not: a woman. In this context, the naturally developed beard on a man visually and materially signified sexual difference. And in invoking nature, these writers also employed the beard as a sign of social difference. In Bulwer's *Anthropometamorphosis*, for instance, he writes: "[W]oman is by Nature smooth and delicate; and if she have many hairs she is a monster."¹³² He goes on to say: "[T]he beard is the sign of man...by which he appears a man."¹³³ Importantly, Bulwer's claim does not deny that women do grow hair—and presumably, within this context we may infer he means facial hair—but that if the amount is excessive, she is a monster, not that she is a man. Consequently, his remark implies that beard growth on a woman does not automatically transform her into a man but instead calls her humanity into question. In this case, and as will later be discussed in relation to Magdalena, the question of what to do with a bearded woman's gender and sex remains.

The beard's power as a device to distinguish the sexes in early modern writings in the context of spiritual and natural science studies also extends to the beard's correlation with procreative potential, which renders the juxtaposition of Felici de Amici's straggly beard against Magdalena's long and thick one all the more visually compelling.¹³⁴ The burden on men to visually embody masculinity also involved the social act of *performing* masculinity through participating with a woman in the production of male heirs. Although the pressure to produce an heir may have

¹³² Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis*, 215, cited in Fisher, "Renaissance Beard," 168.

¹³³ Cited in Fisher, "Renaissance Beard," 168.

¹³⁴ For a discussion of the derision of men without beards, see Simons, *Sex of Men*, 29.

been more acutely experienced among elite men, it nonetheless functioned as one of the key aspects of defining a man.¹³⁵

The social expectation of reproduction and its correlation to beard growth stemmed in part from medical treatises, which often associated beard growth with semen production. Thomas Hill, for example, wrote that the same “heat and moisture” that contributed to the production of semen in the testicles also contributed to the growth of facial hair. Thus, the beard, in Will Fisher’s words, “is figured as a kind of seminal excrement,” that through its visibility on the external body could materialize sexual difference in a way that the male phallus and testicles—hidden underneath clothes—could not.¹³⁶

Evidence for the multivalence of the beard in early modern discourses extends to visual representations. The ubiquity of facial hair on men in European portraiture from the early modern period attests to its cultural pervasiveness and the significance of its association with masculinity across regions. In fact, more portraits than not portray men with a beard or with a form of facial hair throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹³⁷ Thus, what happens to these physiological, spiritual, and cultural associations of the beard with masculinity when it is worn by a woman? Is the potency of the male beard affected or does it take on new meaning when a woman

¹³⁵ As numerous scholars have shown, this pressure to reproduce was certainly not confined to men, and in all likelihood, was felt to a greater extent by women, who were often blamed if they could not conceive, something went wrong with a pregnancy, or they did not bear a boy. An example is the woman who was blamed in Ambroise Paré’s writing for her child’s developing excessive hairiness because she allegedly meditated too long on an image of Saint John the Baptist. See Zirpolo, “Part II—Female Hirsutism,” 193.

¹³⁶ Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” 166.

¹³⁷ Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” 155.

possesses it? In textual and visual cases, it appears that the vulnerability of the male beard caused by a woman wearer is mitigated by attacking or isolating the case of the woman as an accident of nature. In the previous example of Saint Wilgefortis, for instance, whose beard took shape only after she prayed to God and he intervened, was often framed as women's malicious desire to sneak out of a marriage through whatever means necessary. In this case, Wilgefortis's beard implied she resorted to trickery to transform her appearance, even though it could also be interpreted as sanctioned by God. Writers such as Bulwer are clear, however, that the potency of the beard for men did not necessarily change a woman's gender to male if she acquired a beard. Thus, her ambiguous identity falls under the category of the monstrous and the inhuman, as opposed to reclassifying her as a hermaphroditic man, which would call the primacy of the beard as a strictly male attribute into question. With bearded women, then, reinscribing the female wearer as an "anomaly of nature" appears to have been male writers' most logical choice for preserving the potency of this symbol of masculine power, while simultaneously preventing the transfer of that power to women sporting beards.

1.4: Magdalena's Masculinity

The multilayered connotations of the beard, including its associated meanings for both its male and female wearers, are transposed onto the textual description of Magdalena's wondrous beard from the stone slab. Her beard, in the words of Ribera's epithet, represents her status as a "wonder of nature." The description goes so far as to compare the appearance of her beard more to "that of a bearded gentleman than a

woman who had previously lost three sons whom she had borne to her husband,” and it is, of course, her beard’s length and thickness that Ribera takes great pains to rhetorically describe, suggesting that it is not just the appearance of facial hair that makes Magdalena aberrant but also the large amount of facial hair in the form of a prolific beard.

The impact of the textual description of Magdalena’s beard and her status as a wonder of nature on her gender identity and her beard’s relationship to the beard of a gender-conforming man becomes more complicated, however, when translated from the text of the stone slab into the visual representation of Magdalena’s body. Like the visual conventions employed in the portrait of Brígida, Ribera includes other physical attributes of a man in his depiction of Magdalena, such as large hands—which appear to show signs of physical labor in the roughness of the skin—a receding hairline, thick and unmanicured eyebrows, a furrowed brow, and lines and redness around the eyes, nose, and cheeks, all of which contribute to the Venetian ambassador’s description of Magdalena’s “virile face.”¹³⁸ Indeed, her direct and frontal gaze, though bordering on the confrontational, was a portrait convention most commonly reserved for men at the time, and represents one of the more noticeable diversions from Cotán’s portrait of Brígida, whose head is turned to the side and whose gaze appears almost submissive, or at the very least presents as less confrontational when compared to Magdalena’s. These bodily and gestural traits not only highlight

¹³⁸ For more on how receding hairlines, or baldness in general, was understood as “an ambiguous marker of masculinity,” in the early modern period, see Anu Korhonen, “Strange Things Out of Hair: Baldness and Masculinity in Early Modern England,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 371–391, 371.

Magdalena's associations with period definitions of masculinity but also suggest something about Magdalena's age, namely that she is portrayed as a mature figure who has advanced beyond the typical years for childbearing for this period. These traits—employed in the paintings of both Magdalena and Brígida—suggest that when coupled with their beards, their assignments as “not men” or “unfeminine” may be called into question.

The inclusion of additional masculinizing elements also suggests a further layer of ambiguity to Magdalena's gender identity that belies a reading of her as an ungendered wonder of nature, isolated from the categories of male and female. These elements—which have often escaped scholarly attention—indicate that Magdalena's portrait represents her as a figure that defies the neither or both supposition: she is not entirely a man, and she is not entirely a woman; nor can we ascertain if she is depicted or understood in the period as a hermaphrodite. In portraying Magdalena with features most closely associated with men of her age, Ribera also expands upon the relationship between gender, age, and generation through the miraculous nature not only of Magdalena's beard but also of the purported birth of a child at the age of fifty-two. Indeed, if it were not for the centrally exposed breast and child in her arms, viewers might mistake Magdalena for a man.

Ribera also goes to great lengths to distance his representation of Magdalena from the sometimes-derogatory associations of wonders of nature with monstrosity. Magdalena's frontal stance, the presence of her husband in the background, and both their direct gazes create a sense of sympathy in the viewer. Furthermore, Ribera's handling of subtle variations in texture—such as the contrast between light and

shadow that delineates the veins and lines on her hands; the reflection of the circular stones on her ring; and the range of fabrics in her attire—suggests the great lengths he took to make Magdalena appear human. Still a participant in the duke's *Wunderkammer* of an art and natural science collection, Magdalena's appearance notably diverges from the fully nude illustrations of female hirsutes in Ambroise Paré's and Ulisse Aldrovandi's monster treatises, and from the portrayal of Hairy Harry in Agostino Carracci's painting of a menagerie of medically aberrant bodies. Magdalena's status as a bearded woman, then, need not suggest that she is inhuman.

The articulation of a long and luxurious beard on Magdalena's face speaks to the simultaneously necessary yet prosthetic nature of the beard to constructions of normative masculinity in the early modern period. In order to retain its associative meanings of power and virility for its male wearer, writers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries aligned bearded women with the abject, the monstrous, and the wondrous. Thus, a woman with a beard was rendered no more a man than a young prepubescent boy, a distinction that will become even more critical in the following chapter on the gender identity of *castrati*. Ribera's articulation of Magdalena's beard, however, complicates this narrative through the addition of other masculine elements such as her receding hairline, virile face, and large hands, suggesting that a beard alone was not enough to constitute a full gender transformation from woman to man. By including these attentional elements—whether they were observed from life or exaggerated for effect—Magdalena appears to have reaped some of the social cache of the male beard but also existed somewhere in between a complete man and a complete woman.

1.5: Magdalena's Femininity

In addition to highlighting the masculine elements of Magdalena's body, Ribera stresses the feminine elements both of her body and throughout the composition. Coupled with her masculine attributes, these elements—including her exposed breast, the child in her arms, her attire, and the objects on top of the stone slab—contribute to the ambiguity of her gender identity. Beyond simply affirming the stone slab's description of Magdalena as a bearded *woman*, these feminine elements further point to the instability of the male-female gender dichotomy in categorizing cases of difference that do not fit neatly into this model. The following section contextualizes Magdalena's attributes of femininity within social and medical definitions of the female body, arguing that the addition of certain elements—especially those external to her own body—reflect the vulnerability of anatomical parts in operating as the sole indicators of one's gender. By combining elements of the “painted-from-life” naturalistic style, for which Ribera is known, with undeniable exaggerations or alterations to Magdalena's natural body, he heightens the contrast between her breast and beard, which is especially significant since these two attributes of her difference are in direct physical contact with one another.

Magdalena's exposed breast represents one of the most striking elements of Ribera's composition as it is the most explicit reference to femininity on her physical body. Its spherical shape, central position, and its noticeably high placement on her chest call attention to its conspicuous discordance with the articulation of the rest of her body. The breast itself, for instance, appears without any of the lines or variation in skin tone that accompany the portrayal of her aged face and hands. In so doing,

Ribera renders Magdalena as a composite figure, whose bodily difference not only cuts across markers of sex and gender but also age: she appears with the features of a mature man and of a young—and fertile—female mother.

And yet, the peculiar shape of Magdalena's breast also appears to function as an intentional exaggeration, designed to alert viewers to its conflicting relationship with the rest of her body. As Margaret Miles has noted, late-medieval Italian paintings of the Virgin Mary followed a rule of visual decorum whereby the Virgin's exposed breasts were prohibited from appearing too naturalistic, often resulting in her breasts appearing "to be dislocated and disfigured," as seen in such examples as Paolo di Giovanni Fei's *Madonna and Child*, 1370s (Fig. 17).¹³⁹ It is possible, then, that Ribera's articulation of Magdalena's breast deliberately echoes the visual conventions of the Virgin Mary's breasts from late-medieval and early Renaissance Italian painting—conventions that Ribera would no doubt have recognized from his travels in Italy and in Spain, where Italian works were frequently collected. Thus, in calling attention to the unnatural appearance of Magdalena's breast, Ribera is perhaps also implicitly associating Magdalena's miraculous transformation with Mary's miraculous conception of the Christ child.

In addition to its function as an anatomically visible element on Magdalena's body, her bare breast, and its proximity to the child she holds, also highlights the its

¹³⁹ Margaret R. Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 193–208, 204. It is also worth noting that the stylization of the Virgin's breast was not limited to Italian sources. The French artist Jean Fouquet's well-known representation of the Virgin's breast in the left panel *The Virgin and Child with Angels* from the *Melun Diptych*, ca. 1450–1455, is one such example.

association with motherhood through the context of breastfeeding. Its shape and position in the center of her chest, in particular, recall imagery of *Madonna Lactans*, or the nursing Virgin. Magdalena's exposed breast similarly signals her body's potential for generating milk and nourishing a child, linking it to the miraculous transformation of matter, or as the period understood it, the female body's conversion of blood to male breast milk.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, it is possible that the breast's high placement on Magdalena's chest also references its recent removal from her garment to perform the act of breastfeeding. Notably, however, the child in Magdalena's arms does not make direct contact with her breast; its lips are poised just above her nipple, separated by a small but discernible black shadow. The portrayal of the child just out of reach of the breast calls into question whether Magdalena is capable of breastfeeding and whether the child is in fact hers. Rendered in an almost "pure" or abstract form, her breast—and its relationship to the beard with which it is in almost direct contact—functions as the site where all her bodily and ideological contradictions hinge. And perhaps only from this perspective can Magdalena be understood as both human and otherworldly, and as the living embodiment of gender's capacity for change.

Beyond the physical elements inherent in and on Magdalena's body, Ribera adds external attributes that underscore her associations—however conflicted—with

¹⁴⁰ Jutta Gisela Sperling has written extensively on the topic of the breast and breastfeeding in early modern northern European art. See Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Roman Charity: Queer Lactations in Early Modern Visual Culture* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016), and Jutta Gisela Sperling, "Address, Desire, Lactation: On Some Gender-Bending Images of the *Virgin and Child* by Jan Gossaert," *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch* 76 (2015): 49–77. For the specific reference to the breast and breast milk's relationship to the transformation of matter, see Jutta Gisela Sperling, "Squeezing, Squirting, Spilling Milk: The Lactation of Saint Bernard and the Flemish *Madonna Lactans* (ca. 1430–1530)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 71 (2018): 868–918, especially 871.

femininity. The most notable inclusion is the child that Magdalena holds in her arms, which also complements her status as a marvel, not just in relation to her beard but also with regard to her age of fifty-two. If the child is indeed hers biologically, this would speak to both her capacity to fulfill her role as mother and wife in producing and rearing a male heir and to her ability to conceive and birth a child, retaining her fertility at an advanced age for the time.¹⁴¹ Ribera may have included a reference to the miraculous nature of this achievement with what appears to be a branch of coral attached to the bow on the infant's head, which was believed to have both apotropaic and medicinal qualities, perhaps acknowledging the miraculous circumstances of Magdalena's condition (Fig. 18).¹⁴²

The objects on top of the stone tablets also carry symbolic connotations related to Magdalena's complex identity (Fig. 19). However, identifying the components of this so-called still life has continued to prove difficult, as it is unclear if the obscurity of the objects' forms is a product of intention or the painting's wear over time. Some scholars have suggested that the still life consists of one object, either a snail or shell—both of which were understood as hermaphroditic symbols in the period—while others have argued that the still life consists of two objects, a spool

¹⁴¹ A question that arises is whether or not Magdalena's child is monstrous or an aberration of nature, based on the claim that Magdalena gave birth to it at an advanced age for the time. It is also unclear if the child will develop the symptoms of Magdalena's hirsutism or not. Compared to visual representations of the Gonsalvus family, which underscore the hereditary nature of the father's hirsutism and his hirsute children, Magdalena's symptoms developed later in life, and it is therefore unclear how sources would have understood the likelihood of Magdalena's child to also undergo a change and develop Magdalena's symptoms. Notably, the child appears glabrous, or smooth skinned, in the portrait.

¹⁴² For coral's apotropaic properties, see Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, "Lambs, Coral, Teeth, and the Intimate Intersection of Religion and Magic in Renaissance Italy," in *Images, Relics, and Devotional Practices in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, eds. Scott Montgomery and Sally Cornelison (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 139–56.

of thread in front and a woven textile behind.¹⁴³ Upon close inspection, the object in front also appears to resemble a spindle, and the object behind may resemble the top of a distaff, as seen in such examples as Enea Vico's engraving after Parmigianino, *Old Woman with a Distaff*, from the sixteenth century (Fig. 20). The spindle and distaff were two items intended for the female-only activity of spinning or weaving. According to Alison Stewart, the distaff, and the act of spinning in general, carried several—at times, seemingly contradictory—associations with female virtue and lasciviousness. The spindle, she argues, represents a metaphor for male eroticism, for although spinning was a female activity, the “tools assumed unquestionably male shapes,”¹⁴⁴ particularly with the pointed and elongated ends of the spindle. The distaff, a tool whose specific function was to spin wool along the spindle, was also popularly associated with female witchcraft, which—though not directly aligning Magdalena with the practices of witchcraft—may also provide a further association between this object and the mystical secrecy that surrounded a woman's body. Indeed, both objects appear to be covered in hair or wool, which would also serve as textural contrast to the thick hair of Magdalena's beard.¹⁴⁵ Within the context of Ribera's composition, then, the incorporation of multivalent symbols of female industry—if the identification of the distaff and spindle is accurate—represent not

¹⁴³ Zirpolo, for example, notes: “Included in the painting is a snail, symbol of hermaphroditism since the gastropod possesses both sexes.” See Zirpolo, “Part II: Female Hirsutism,” 202. Tunbridge, instead, describes the objects as “a spindle—a symbol of womanhood, and a shell of a snail, a hermaphrodite.” See W. Michael G. Tunbridge, “La Mujer Barbuda by Ribera, 1631: A Gender Bender.” *Q J Med* 104 (2011): 733–736, 734. For the suggestion that it is a spindle and a bobbin, see Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” 171.

¹⁴⁴ Alison G. Stewart, “Distaffs and Spindles: Sexual Misbehavior in Sebald Beham's *Spinning Bee*,” in *Saints, Sinners, and Sisters: Gender and Northern Art in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jane L. Carroll and Alison G. Stewart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 130.

¹⁴⁵ Fisher, “Renaissance Beard,” 171.

just an attempt to highlight the feminine activities in which Magdalena might participate but also a reflection of Magdalena's appropriation of recognizably male physical traits. Taken together, these elements—Magdalena's exposed breast, her attire, the child, and the still life—connote her femininity but also stand in stark contrast to the other focal point of the painting, her beard. It is my contention, then, that Magdalena can never be understood, or presented as fully female so long as her beard remains. As a result, Ribera's multivalent depiction of Magdalena serves as a reminder of the complex relationship between physical appearance and behavior that governed definitions of sex and gender.

1.6: Magdalena's Identity as a Less-than-Intact Woman

Though the elements of Magdalena's body and the items associated with her appear at odds with each other, and at odds with what were believed to be the necessary components of a conforming male or female body, they relationally work to inform one another, creating an unprecedented example of a gender-non-conforming body. This final section considers how the components that make up Magdalena's masculinity and femininity contribute to a new reading of her gender as a less-than-intact woman, existing not only outside the boundaries of normative male and female bodies but also outside the third sex, the hermaphrodite. Indeed, the presence and the identification of the man behind Magdalena as her husband, Felici de Amici, further suggests that her transformation was not intended to be viewed as altering the internal organs and systems responsible for a complete change from female to male.

Felici de Amici's role in Ribera's composition is one element of the painting that has yet to receive full scholarly attention, with many recent publications glossing over him almost entirely.¹⁴⁶ Felici's presence, however, not only anchors Magdalena's identity as a mother and a wife but also serves as a foil to Magdalena's masculinity—especially as he, too, wears a beard. Felici appears in the left corner of the canvas, his body almost completely absorbed into the dark background except for the white of his stockings, shirt collar, and face. Of perhaps greater significance is the juxtaposition of Magdalena's beard to Felici's, which appears short, patchy, and gray by comparison. His lines and wrinkles and the lack of warm red tone on his skin also imply that Felici may be older than Magdalena. And yet, Felici appears resolved in his position behind Magdalena, as he, too, directly meets the viewer's gaze, if even from the three-quarters turn of his head. Unlike the oft-portrayed cuckold husband—generally intended to incite humor about a wife cheating on her oblivious husband—Ribera's depiction of Felici suggests a closer analogy to the somber conventions of elite Spanish portraiture, soliciting a reaction more along the lines of sympathy from the viewer, rather than disgust or laughter.¹⁴⁷ Felici's presence, as a result, serves to relationally associate Magdalena with her identity as a woman, a wife, and a mother.

¹⁴⁶ In Richard Tilbury, "The Renaissance of the Bearded Woman: An Examination of Ribera's Problematic Portrait of Magdalena Ventura," in *The Role of the Monster: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. Niall Scott (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2007), 193–204, the author does not mention the husband, except in the transcription of the stone slab. Lilian H. Zirpolo likewise does not mention Felici in her discussion of the painting. See Zirpolo, "Part II: Female Hirsutism," 191–222, especially 202–5. In Mark Albert Johnson's discussion of the painting, he describes Felici as Magdalena's "fortunate husband," for her having borne her three sons. He is only mentioned one more time in a sentence about Magdalena's beard, where Johnson notes that "the most powerful cultural symbol offsetting Magdalena's beard in Ribera's painting...is the beard of her husband." See Johnson, "Bearded Women," 7–8.

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion of the visual conventions of the cuckold husband, see Matthews-Grieco, *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery*, 149–290.

This chapter argues that Magdalena's bodily transformation constituted a change of gender identity from a conforming woman to that of a less-than-intact woman. The growth of a beard, likely developing after giving birth, represents the most consequential—and visible—alteration to Magdalena's female body. It is unclear if her virile face, as described by the Venetian ambassador, was Magdalena's true appearance in life, or if this description served to bolster the shock value of witnessing such a marvel of nature. Nor is it clear the extent to which Ribera deliberately altered and exaggerated aspects of Magdalena's body for similar reasons. Within this context, it is difficult to discern how—or if—Magdalena's transformation impacted other systems of her internal and external body, resulting in the virile attributes both the ambassador and Ribera articulate. And yet, Ribera's composition highlights the contrast between the feminine elements of her body and social persona that withstood her change and her masculine elements that appeared later in life. Indeed, a quantification of masculine to feminine elements reveals an almost perfectly even ratio of approximately five attributes to each gender category.¹⁴⁸ This ambiguous, even balanced, relationship between the conflicting elements of Magdalena's transformed body does not automatically transfer her identity to the "third space" category of the hermaphrodite. Instead, the language of the stone slab appears to cautiously preserve her femininity, introducing her with the feminine name

¹⁴⁸ For masculine traits, I included her beard, her receding hairline, her virile face, her hands, and her husband's beard (which appears to be directly contrasted with her long and thick one). For feminine traits, I included her breast, the child, her clothes, her husband, and the purported spindle and distaff on top of the stone slab. This example functions only as an exercise in demonstrating the relatively even distribution of gender traits and does not represent an accurate formula for quantifying bodily difference on a more substantive level.

Magdalena; referring to her with feminine pronouns (translated into English as “she” from the original Latin); and contrasting her beard more as “that of a bearded gentleman than a woman who has previously lost three sons.” The text also, importantly, characterizes her transformation solely through the growth of a beard, rather than including any indication of the addition of a penis or testicles—the elements so critical to the treatment of Eleno/a’s and Marie/Marin’s transformations, which were discussed in the Introduction. This description, then, reflects the early modern conundrum of attempting to understand bodies whose external appearance refused categorization as male, female, or hermaphrodite. Within this context, Magdalena’s development of a beard—and possibly other masculine features—does not result in a rebuke of her status as a woman, but rather in her ability to exist in a liminal space between these three categories, under the guise of a wonder of nature. And her ability *to exist* in this realm, unlike some other cases of complete gender reversal that have resulted in court trials and criticisms, speaks to the very nature of her status as a partial woman, and the extent to which this category functioned outside of—and without threatening—the normative boundaries of early modern gender.

Similar to the recounting of Eleno/a’s transformation, it is unclear where the truth of Magdalena’s bodily change begins and ends and to what extent she underwent any additional alterations hidden by clothes or indiscernible on the canvas. Which is to say, the presence of her beard alone does not appear to constitute a complete gender change nor warrant the attribution of hermaphrodite. In rendering her female to male transition within the arguably “safer” realm of an altered, and thus wondrous, woman, Ribera and the duke are able to participate, even celebrate,

Magdalena's exceptionality without her beard threatening the stability of standards for male normativity. Ribera's highlighting of both male and female elements further elevates his subject's status as a marvel of nature, soliciting shock and wonder, but not fear. Indeed, though the neutral dark background suggests an otherworldliness by its nondescript nature, it also represents a stark derivation from the narrative focus of such paintings as Agostino Carracci's mythologizing portrayal of Hairy Harry and his cohort of exotic and deformed beings—a work where it is less clear if the viewer is to read the portrayal as sympathetic to their conditions or as a negative or humorous interpretation.

This negotiation of identity also extends to an inherent tension between generalized and individualized traits within the conventions of portraiture. Without photographic evidence or further descriptions from witnesses who saw Magdalena firsthand, it is unlikely that Magdalena's true likeness may be discerned. The conflation between nature and artifice is further complicated by such elements of virtuoso detail as articulation of different textures in the composition—what Barry Wind refers to as the “astonishing array of textural effects rang[ing] from the rough wrinkled visages of her face [...] to the delicate fringe on her apron”—which, through their naturalistic rendering, momentarily suspend belief that the painting is still an artificial construction, calling into question our notions of naturalism and reality in Ribera's painting.¹⁴⁹ As a result, it is unclear if what we see on the canvas derived

¹⁴⁹ Wind, *Foul and Pestilent Congregation*, 152.

from life or to what extent Ribera deliberately altered and exaggerated Magdalena's appearance to create the memorable effect that it still has on viewers today.

1.7: Conclusion

Through Ribera's insistence on reinstating Magdalena's femininity, I argue that the inclusion of her exposed, centrally positioned breast juxtaposed with her beard also functions to destabilize a clear gender identity. If we look back to her face, we note that it is not just Magdalena's beard that has masculine associations. She is also pictured with a receding hairline and coarse skin more in line with period standards for masculinity, suggesting that part of her newfound marvelous nature is in the mystery and incongruity of her body and its gender. Indeed, part of the painting's notoriety appears to hinge on the role of the viewer becoming a witness to Magdalena's indeterminacy, and it is his or her curious gaze that confirms its truthfulness.

Ribera's portrait represents not just a desire to articulate Magdalena's medical difference with lifelike veracity but also to enhance and exaggerate elements of her anatomy such as her breast and her masculinized facial features. And, perhaps too, Magdalena—and maybe her husband—played a role in the cultivation and maintenance of her beard as a means of soliciting the duke's patronage. Through evaluating these elements within the context of seventeenth-century notions of gender and disease, I propose a new interpretation of the painting and other similar examples that suggests the importance of reframing Magdalena as feminine—despite her beard and other male-presenting traits—in order to refocus attention away from her bodily

ambiguity and instead posit it on her status as an aberration of nature. As a result, it is the beard's significance as a symbol of masculinity that is rendered as vulnerable as Magdalena's femininity by her facial hair, demonstrating the importance of external markers of infirmity in shaping definitions of gender and the body.

Magdalena's case represents but one of many examples of ambiguously gendered subjects in early modern art. Her existence in a state between a conforming male and a conforming female body also speaks to the larger debate on the role of change and transformation in creating aberrant figures out of ones previously compatible with normative standards of gender. The role of an external secondary sex characteristic, such as Magdalena's beard, in contributing to a bodily change is furthered problematized in the next chapter, which explores the phenomenon of *castrati* and how the removal of an organ indiscernible when clothed led to a host of external changes and implications for their gender.

Chapter Two: Of Song and Semen:
The *Castrato's* Body and Manufactured Masculinity
in Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group:
The Singer Farinelli and Friends*

From the seventeenth century through the first half of the eighteenth century, society sought vocal perfection for musical productions in the figure of the boy soprano; through his high pitch and sweet tone, he reflected the period's penchant for artifice. The most talented among these highly prized boy singers received rigorous training and achieved extraordinary vocal capabilities. However, their angelic voices inevitably deepened with the onset of puberty. Surges of testosterone and androgen enlarged and thickened the vocal mechanisms as their physical bodies built greater muscle mass to accommodate the newfound strength of this mature voice. The most devastating consequence was loss of the original sweetness of their high-pitched voices, which would eventually give way to the characteristic tenor or baritone associated with the adult male. In order to subvert this natural process, the prepubescent boy sopranos who showed the most musical promise were castrated before their voices changed, producing preternatural singers whose bodies remained forever altered in a state of flux between a fully formed man and an adolescent boy.¹⁵⁰

While castration preserved the beauty of the prepubescent voice, it also visually differentiated the singer's body from the unaltered male. These singers—

¹⁵⁰ Alessandro Moreschi was the last *castrato* to perform in the Sistine Chapel Choir before his death in 1922. The Gramophone and Typewriter Company recorded two sets of his singing in 1902 and 1904. A reproduction of this recording can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6U8VZ6riNk>. The practice of castration for singers disappeared by the twenty-first century. See Irina V. Rudakova, "‘Uncertain Nature’: History of the Castrato in the Early Modern Gender Paradigm" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1999), 86.

popularly referred to as *castrati*—often grew to extreme height with attenuated limbs and developed secondary sex characteristics closely associated with the female body, such as fatty tissue around the breast, hips, and stomach, and a lack of facial and body hair.¹⁵¹ In addition to outwardly visible alterations to the “male” bodies with which they were born, *castrati* also experienced a transformation of their sexual capacities, resulting in an inability to father children—the defining act through which a man of this period demonstrated his masculinity. However, the sacrifice of *castrati*’s reproductive capabilities for the musical pleasure of an audience or private patron did not necessarily void their masculine gender and relegate them to the status of women. Instead, they were perceived as less-than-intact-men, akin to prepubescent boys, fundamentally altering their status within early modern gender norms.

Nowhere were the tensions between voice and body—or more specifically, between *song* and *semen*—more explicit than on painted and printed surfaces. Like images of hirsutes, representations of *castrati* employed sophisticated visual strategies to articulate their subjects’ physical difference and exceptionality. Allusions to *castrati*’s physical differences in visual representations varied from outright exposing their aberrance—even exaggerating it to the point of caricature—to subtle cues only a viewer who understood the effects of the surgery might recognize, such as

¹⁵¹ For clarity, this chapter refers to these figures universally as *castrati*. However, it is worth noting that this descriptor is but one example of the many used to identify these singers in society. Indeed, *castrati* appears to be used more by historians than period sources. Other names from the period include geldings, eunuchs, capons, putti, *evirati*, and the diminutive form of their stage names, such as Nicolino, Senesino, and Pauluccio. See Roger Freitas, “The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato,” *Journal of Musicology* 20 (Spring 2003): 196–249, esp. 214. Other—and politer—names also include *musici* and *soprani*. See Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), xi.

attenuated arms and increased height, or through external attributes that referenced their musical careers, such as sheet music or instruments. The differences between these two extremes often depended on the broader context of the artwork, including who commissioned or produced it and how was it intended to be consumed. As will be discussed later, a formal portrait commissioned by a *castrato* himself would certainly impact his portrayal as compared to a printed image intended to satirize and circulate widely. As its primary case study, this chapter examines the *castrato*'s complicated gender and sexual identity using Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends*, c. 1750–1752, currently in the National Gallery of Victoria, in Melbourne, Australia (Fig. 5).¹⁵² It considers how the physical mutilation of the *castrato*, Carlo Broschi (called Farinelli), was articulated when juxtaposed to normative male and female bodies.¹⁵³ In so doing, it questions how *castrati* fit into and challenged early modern conceptions of gender and sexuality.

Amigoni's group portrait with Farinelli represents the only example, to my knowledge, of a *castrato* pictured among a cohort of friends and close confidants. The painting was likely executed, at Farinelli's request when he and Amigoni were living in Madrid.¹⁵⁴ It depicts the main subject at center, with his close friend, the

¹⁵² This chapter does not go into detail on the biography and career of the Venetian artist Jacopo Amigoni due to limits on space. For more information on his career, see Martina Manfredi, "Jacopo Amigoni: A Venetian Painter in Georgian England," *Burlington Magazine* 147, no. 1231 (October 2005): 676–79.

¹⁵³ Farinelli's fame lives on today through popular culture depictions of his life in such works as the 1994 film *Farinelli: Il Castrato*, directed by Gérard Corbiau. While the movie is not historically accurate, it speaks to a larger fascination with understanding and categorizing the *castrato* body. Another recent example is the 2015 Broadway production of *Farinelli and the King*, which explored the potentiality of music as a form of healing through the effects of Farinelli's otherworldly voice on the Spanish king's melancholia.

¹⁵⁴ Without many examples of autobiographies, or writings by *castrati*, visual representations commissioned by *castrati* are some of the most useful documents for considering how the subject may

librettist Pietro Metastasio, at far left, followed by the soprano Teresa Castellini, who performed with Farinelli in Madrid. Amigoni includes himself in the portrait to the right of Farinelli and a young page boy. Scholars have previously suggested that this portrait and others like it fit within the subgenre of flattering portrayals of *castrati*, where the *castrato* is glorified almost to the point of erasing his physical differences and his recognizability as a castrated male.¹⁵⁵ Instead, scholars argue these portraits alert the viewer to the singer's exceptional status through external markers, such as awards and other attributes of wealth and success. Yet, a deeper consideration of Amigoni's portrait reveals subtle iconographic, compositional, and contextual clues that draw attention to Farinelli's distinctly non-conforming body, and thus to his visible identity as a *castrato*.¹⁵⁶

Instead of hiding the *castrato*'s physiological irregularities, as previous scholars have suggested, the group portrait genre facilitated an integration of the *castrato* into a visual hierarchy of gender—in between an older man and a prepubescent boy at the far ends of the poles, and a fully intact woman and man, with the *castrato* at center. Indeed, it was within this reflection of early modern constructs of gender and sex that Farinelli, and *castrati* in general, were categorized. Through Amigoni's strategic placement of figures the *castrato* occupies a third space that is

have intended to be portrayed.—One of the few examples of a record from a *castrato*'s perspective are the letters of Atto Melani. Roger Freitas uses these letters as representative of an autobiographical account of Melani's life. See Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). The *castrato* Farinelli also wrote letters over the course of his life, especially to his close friend Metastasio. Only the letters written by Metastasio survive.

¹⁵⁵ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 142–44.

¹⁵⁶ This approach builds upon Todd Olson's iconographic analysis in "Long Live the Knife!: Andrea Sacchi's Portrait of Marc'Antonio Pasqualini," *Art History* 27, no. 5 (November 2004): 697–722.

not male or female, but more closely associated with other non-conforming figures such as hermaphrodites and eunuchs. Farinelli's placement within the painting, coupled with the subtle depiction of the effects of the castration procedure that are alluded to on his physical body through coloring, gestures, and external markers, secure Farinelli's identity as a *castrato*. As a result, the *castrato*'s position is defined by both biology and behavior, akin to a different form of masculinity most associated with the conceits of the ideal lover and the prepubescent genderless boy.

To fully understand how perceptions of the *castrato*'s body, gender, and sexuality are translated in Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends*, the first section of this chapter examines the specific case of Farinelli and the making of the *castrato* body from social and medical contexts. The second section considers how these perspectives are visually embedded in Amigoni's portrait and how the painting relates to visual representations of *castrati* more broadly. The third section examines the portrait in light of the more explicitly exaggerated depictions of *castrati* bodies in caricatures and compares how these two genres contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the *castrato*'s place within the period's gender paradigm than previously explored. The final section reconsiders the original portrait in light of medical, social, and sexual dynamics and concludes by reflecting on the *castrato* as an early modern example of gender ambiguity.

2.1: The Rise of the Castrato

The popularity of castrated male singers proliferated across Europe from the early sixteenth century to the eighteenth century, as their singular voices

distinguished them from both their male and female counterparts.¹⁵⁷ Unlike the mature female soprano, the castrated male voice had the power and volume afforded by the larger and stronger male breathing apparatus, thus producing the unique effect of a high and delicate soprano, with the strength and sustainability of a male tenor or baritone. *Castrati* performed in almost every court, church choir, and theater in early modern Europe. Indeed, there was no court that did not have a *castrato* among its retinue of performers.¹⁵⁸ *Castrati*'s rise to fame in early modern Europe also coincided with a number of new developments in musical production, including *opera seria* (a genre of opera based on a serious and often classicizing subject), the transition from polyphonic singing to solo performances, and the increase in public theaters, which resulted in greater support and visibility for the musical arts.¹⁵⁹

The venue with which *castrati* were most associated, however, was the operatic stage. *Castrati*'s participation in opera was predicated as much on their vocal abilities as it was on stereotypes of their sex and gender. *Castrati* played a range of parts in opera productions that crossed gender lines, from lovestruck young men to the female object of a man's desire. A critical element for understanding how and why *castrati* became so popular, then, hinges on how their gender identity was adapted or complicated to fulfill these different roles. While casting practices changed

¹⁵⁷ The first appearance of a *castrato* in the historical record is in 1562, specifically in the Sistine Chapel Choir. Adami da Bolsena notes this introduction of castrated singers in his *Observazione* from 1711. See Rudakova, "Uncertain Nature," 26n63. Women were banned from participating in this venue, which likely functioned as one of the factors that led to the hiring of castrated male singers.

¹⁵⁸ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 136. For the most comprehensive study of a specific *castrato*'s experience at a European court, see Richard Sherr, "Guglielmo Gonzaga and the Castrati," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 33–56.

¹⁵⁹ For information on the specific casting practices for *castrati* in opera, see Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, especially 236–39.

across centuries and adapted to the specific tastes of each city and theater, one trend that was a mainstay throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was cross-gender casting. That is, men often were assigned the role of female characters while women—once permitted to act on stage—were known to also play men. This reversal or complication of typical binary gender norms suggests that the stage functioned as a site where normative codes of gender representation were blurred or temporarily suspended.¹⁶⁰

The potential for interchangeability between male and female actors was not without the consideration of their physical sex, however, for there are patterns indicating that certain roles were designed or more flexible for cross-gender casting. According to Valeria Finucci, *castrati* often began their careers playing the part of a woman, or an allegorical figure such as a god or goddess. The significance of this casting is not only in the youthful *castrati*'s physical appearance and possible androgyny but also in the symbolism behind playing a woman or a nonhuman god.¹⁶¹

Around the second half of the sixteenth century, records indicate that *castrati* began to play particular male roles and were most often characterized as heroes and

¹⁶⁰ The notion of a theater as a space for blurred boundaries follows Michel Foucault's argument of the theater as a heterotopia, or an "alternative space" that simultaneously functions within and outside of the real world. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971). Foucault's work is not directly engaged in this chapter beyond this point. For further reading on the theater as a heterotopic space, see Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Sydney: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), and Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology: Disciplinary Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁶¹ See Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 236, and Rudakova, "Uncertain Nature," 159 and 162. Records indicate that this was not an aberration but a widely conceived practice. According to Rudakova, "the mere number of these examples suggests that the interchangeability of male and female singers in male roles during the period should be considered the norm," 187.

lovers.¹⁶² Finucci observes that “*castrati* were never cast as kings, demonstrating that no matter how inconsequential it seemed to have a feminized man perform male heroic parts, it was not right for a ruler to be associated with one.”¹⁶³ Finucci’s assertion also conveys that there was indeed a consideration for cross-gender casting, whereby a character’s behavior, actions, and motives were just as gendered as their physical bodies. In this context, the emperor Nero, or the hero Achilles, could be played by a woman as long as the character was portrayed as more focused on his amorous relationships than on matters of state. Indeed, it was the “masculine uncertainty” or “powerlessness” of a character and his “uncontrollable and voracious sexual[ity]” that made the part viable for a woman or *castrato*.¹⁶⁴

The deliberate casting of *castrati* and women in the parts of weak or vulnerable men suggests the blurring of gender lines may also have been intentional. Roger Freitas notes that there was also an erotic dimension to these decisions. He argues that they played these heroic roles “not in spite of their physical distinctiveness, but because of it.” As a result, *castrati* on the stage were celebrated for their difference and were not considered neutral or neuter but alluring.¹⁶⁵ These descriptions imply a level of participation and acknowledgment on the part of the audience that the actor’s personal gender did not correspond to the character he was

¹⁶² This appears to first take place in Venice in the 1640s, where theatrical productions reflected “a return to themes of military honor and moral soundness.” By the 1680s, the casting of *castrati* in male roles seems to be adopted everywhere else. This shift may, in part, be attributed to the split between *opera seria*, in which *castrati* sang, and *opera buffa*—a comedic production—in which *castrati* did not participate. Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 236 and Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato*, 27.

¹⁶³ Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 236.

¹⁶⁴ Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 237.

¹⁶⁵ Freitas, “Eroticism of Emasculation,” 202.

playing. Perhaps even aware of the erotic potential of cross-gender casting for *castrati*, a cross-dressed Achilles sings in *La Finita Pazza*, “Oh, sweet change of nature, a woman transforming herself into a man, a man changing himself into a woman, varying name and figure...how many of you envy my state, that of being both man and girl?”¹⁶⁶

Castrati were far from just features of the music scene, however. The most successful *castrati* infiltrated the upper echelons of society, parlaying their relationships with rulers into political posts, and were simultaneously celebrated in large-scale paintings and lampooned in caricatures. Most large-scale paintings took the form of commissioned portraits. Of the portraits of *castrati* that survive, scholars have noted that the majority follow a general set of conventions, as seen in Alexander van Aken’s mezzotint, after Thomas Hudson, *Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino*, for instance (Fig. 21).¹⁶⁷ Like other portraits of *castrati*, Hudson depicts Senesino as a single figure in the center of the composition. He wears regal and formal attire rather than stage costume and, like in other portraits, he holds a sheet of music, or in other cases, a musical instrument, alluding to his professional talent and success. Here, the sitter’s talents, social status, and wealth are put on display through such visual elements as the print’s elaborate, classicizing frame—drawing the viewer’s attention to an open book of music. The addition of white highlights around his head also emphasizes the subject’s body. Any allusions to physical or personal

¹⁶⁶ Freitas, “Eroticism of Emasculation,” 202.

¹⁶⁷ Much of the work on *castrati* portraits comes from musicologists. In these cases, the analysis of the portrait is often secondary to identifying the sheet music in many of these paintings. For an example, see John Rosselli, “The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550–1850,” *Acta Musicologica* 60.2 (August 1988): 143–79.

flaws are dismissed in favor of elevating the sitter almost to the point of abstraction. As a result, the subject is imbued with an idea or conceit as much as he is rendered a recognizable person observed from life. By focusing on these external attributes as the primary locus for extrapolating the core meaning of *castrati* portraits, scholars have suggested that the intention of these works was to convey the financial and social status that stemmed from their musical acumen—often demonstrated through the multitude of instruments they played in addition to singing.¹⁶⁸

Studies of *castrati* have almost exclusively focused on their musical output and their relationship to the development of opera. Consequently, the *castrato*'s gender and sexuality and the articulation of these elements of his identity in art are underrepresented in the literature.¹⁶⁹ When gender and sexual identity are discussed, it is often within the context of understanding casting procedures for musical productions and how these crossed gendered lines. Rarely are questions of how *castrati*'s gender and sex were defined and experienced at the center of an inquiry.¹⁷⁰ Images of *castrati* in the form of both commissioned portraits and satirical drawings have likewise rarely constituted studies in their own right.¹⁷¹ Even more infrequent

¹⁶⁸ Scholars' focus on external markers of status reflects similar analyses of eighteenth-century portrait conventions more generally. This broader period trend often promoted the exaltation of the subject, attending more to the subject's embodiment of an ideal type than to replicating his or her likeness. For more on this trend, see Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁶⁹ One exception is Freitas, "Eroticism of Emasculation," 196–249.

¹⁷⁰ Some examples exist, but they are speculative and are often geared toward a more popular audience, resulting in unsubstantiated claims about *castrati*'s sexual lives without references to period sources. See Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (San Diego, CA: Da Capo Press Music Reprint Series, 1975).

¹⁷¹ Below is a nonexhaustive list of art historical studies on *castrati*, which tend to focus on portraits as representations of *castrati*'s exalted status. See Franca Trinchieri Camiz, "The Castrato Singer: From Informal to Formal Portraiture," *Artibus et Historiæ* 9 (1988): 171–86; Daniel Hertz, *Artists and Musicians: Portrait Studies from the Rococo to the Revolution* (Ann Arbor, MI: Steglein Publishing, 2014); Daniel Hertz, "Farinelli and Metastasio: Rival Twins of Public Favour," *Early Music* 12

are studies that combine these two areas to explore the relationship between the *castrato*'s physical body, the castration procedure that shaped it, and its articulation in art. It is one of the aims of this chapter to rectify the gap in the literature by analyzing how subtle and implicit attitudes toward *castrati* were embedded beneath the surface of paintings such as Amigoni's portrait.

While these studies have provided a place for the *castrato* portrait within the broader portrait trends of the time, most have ignored the representation of the *castrato*'s body altogether. Along with the external markers of identity, these portraits also share similarities with regard to the treatment of the *castrato* body. What is similar in many of the figurations of *castrati* subjects lies not in what is represented, but in what is absent. The deformities of their body compositions, including their often-extreme height, feminized body shape, and attenuated limbs—the elements that become the central focus of caricatures, as will be discussed momentarily—are all but erased in these prints and paintings. The question that follows, then, is why a *castrato*, the patron (if not the subject himself), and the artist of a given work would intentionally obscure or redefine the elements of the *castrato*'s physical body, if these elements not only made him recognizable but also singlehandedly contributed to his success as a singer? By dismissing this question, previous studies lack a deeper consideration of the problem of articulating bodily difference in portraits of *castrati*.

(August 1984): 358–66; Daniel Hertz, "Farinelli Revisited," *Early Music* 18 (August 1990): 430–43; and F. J. B. Watson, "A Portrait of Farinelli by Bartolommeo Nazari," *Burlington Magazine* 92 (September 1950): 266–69. Caricatures have also been dismissed as dramatizations and inaccurate, which denies the possibility that embedded within the exaggerations of the body are attitudes, anxieties, and critiques of the *castrato* body that could be useful in deepening our understanding of the *castrato*'s role in societal debates on gender and sexuality. For one example of such a dismissal, see Feldman, *Castrato*, 10–11.

To illustrate the potential of deep visual and iconographic analysis for understanding the meaning behind portraits of *castrati*, it is worth returning to Alexander van Aken's mezzotint, after Thomas Hudson, *Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino*. The work appears at first glance to be a straightforward reflection of these aforementioned ideas on the unilateral glorification of the *castrato* without alluding to his physical aberrance. Yet, if the viewer did not recognize the name of the sitter carved on the frame, he or she may not understand that Senesino was one of the most well-known *castrati* from the eighteenth century. Upon closer inspection, Senesino presents with a large potbelly and a long torso, two traits associated with *castrati*. Through further analyzing such seemingly inconsequential details, more information may be ascertained on how artists navigated the problem of simultaneously elevating the *castrati* they depicted (in certain contexts) and visually acknowledging that *castrati*'s status and success were inextricably staked on their visible and audible difference. Reading portraits of *castrati* solely through their external markers of status, then, hinders further exploration into the sometimes-subtle visual strategies artists employed to aggrandize their subjects in relation to their status as *castrati*. As will be discussed, these visual strategies for conveying bodily difference were especially important when considering that two-dimensional works could not call on the *castrato*'s vocal exceptionality to identify the sitter. These strategies add additional layers of meaning to a portrait *Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino*, when his identity as a *castrato* is revealed.

An example that helps elucidate this point is Andrea Sacchi's *Portrait of Marc'Antonio Pasqualini*, 1640, currently in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New

York, a work that art historians Todd Olson and Touba Ghadessi have analyzed for the implications of its portrayal of the *castrato* body. (Fig. 22).¹⁷² Sacchi's painting is a rare portrait of a *castrato* that includes a full-length nude figure in the composition. Importantly, the nude figure is not the *castrato* but the god Apollo, who is depicted in almost the center of the picture plane with an intact penis and testicles as he crowns the clothed Pasqualini. The painting is rife with sexual symbolism: the nude Marsyas about to be flayed in the background; the figure of Daphne, who famously turned into a tree to evade a sexual encounter with Apollo, on the instrument; and the animal skin draped over Pasqualini, all evoking base desires and emotions. Each element is carefully choreographed to imply Pasqualini's triumph, and, as both Olson and Ghadessi have argued, his hypersexuality.¹⁷³ In this case, the contradictions of the *castrato*'s impotency and hypersexuality within popular culture at the time are displayed for the viewer through skillful allegory and references to classical mythology. The *castrato*'s identity as othered or deformed is all but lost amid the trappings of his wealth, musical talents, and elite status. Olson's and Ghadessi's analyses address the problem of representing the *castrato* through an allegorical lens. However, neither scholar elaborates on the particular figuration of Pasqualini in the painting and how the viewer would know that he or she is looking at a *castrato*.

¹⁷² See nn.7–8.

¹⁷³ Olson focuses on the singer's likeness in relation to his symbolic attributes, including a crown of laurels bestowed upon him by the nude god Apollo. According to Olson, the identity of Pasqualini is established through exterior signifiers, what he calls "a circuit of attributes and personifications"—namely Apollo's act of crowning, and the bound satyr Marsyas, who challenged Apollo to a musical contest, only to lose. See Olson, "Long Live the Knife!," 697. Ghadessi builds on Olson's argument by furthering the analysis of Pasqualini's role as the painting's patron in *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 146.

2.2: Farinelli and the Making of a Castrato

The fame and success of Carlo Broschi, called Farinelli (1705–1782), represents an exceptional outcome of a *castrato*'s life.¹⁷⁴ Of the hundreds of *castrati* that were believed to be created per year, only a small fraction of them reached the level of stardom and financial status of Farinelli. He is widely considered one of the most famous *castrati* of all time. He performed in theaters across Italy and Europe, served as a trusted confidant and advisor to Kings Philip V and Ferdinand VI of Spain for twenty-two years, and was awarded membership into the Order of Calatrava in 1750. His contemporaries frequently celebrated his vocal talents on stage, noting that these talents were owed, in part, to the incredible power and range of his voice and his unparalleled breath control, which they claimed was matched only by his beauty, humility, and composure. The following section contextualizes the exceptionality of Farinelli's case within a broader picture of the *castrati* phenomenon in order to understand the factors that led to their rise in musical productions, as well as how they were medically "manufactured" and how they participated in and were perceived by larger society.

Most *castrati* were born into poverty or lower-class families. Farinelli, however, grew up in a family of minor nobility in Apulia, Italy.¹⁷⁵ Farinelli's father, Salvatore Broschi, served as governor of the towns of Maratea (today Basilicata) in 1706 and Terlizzi, near Apulia, in 1709. Significantly, his family included a number of musicians. Before taking a post in local government, Salvatore worked as a

¹⁷⁴ Henceforth, this chapter refers to the singer "Carlo Broschi (called Farinelli)" simply as Farinelli.

¹⁷⁵ For more on Farinelli's upbringing, see Daniel Hertz, "Farinelli and Metastasio," especially 358–60.

composer and served as the *maestro di cappella* of his town's cathedral. In 1711, Farinelli, his parents, and his older brother Riccardo moved to Naples for Riccardo to attend the Real Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto for training in musical composition. During this time, Farinelli, who was already recognized as a talented singer, began working with the famous composer and teacher Nicola Porpora. At the age of fifteen, Farinelli made his debut as a singer in Naples.

Prior to his training, Farinelli underwent a castration procedure. The circumstances surrounding the procedure, including when it took place, how and where it was performed, and who specifically ordered it, are unclear.¹⁷⁶ Like many of the families of boys who were castrated in hopes of developing into successful singers, Farinelli's family probably claimed that he had had a physical accident, such as falling off a horse, in order for him to require castration. Although the procedure was likely performed without Farinelli's consent, he owed his career to the operation in that it—along with his extensive training—enabled him to raise his voice to almost unimaginable heights and to hold notes for unprecedented amounts of time. Indeed, it was rumored he could hold a note for a full minute. As a result of his technical virtuosity, Farinelli quickly gained a large following of supporters and patrons.¹⁷⁷ He performed internationally throughout his career, traveling to such cities as Vienna,

¹⁷⁶ Salvatore Broschi died unexpectedly in 1717 when he was thirty-six years old. It is possible that the economic insecurity of this time prompted the family to castrate Farinelli. Farinelli would have been twelve years old when his father died, an age that was slightly later than the general age when boys were castrated at this time. Some have suggested that Farinelli's older brother, Riccardo, facilitated the surgery, but there is not clear evidence to confirm or deny his involvement. As the new patriarch of the family, it is certainly likely that Riccardo played a role in Farinelli's castration.

¹⁷⁷ Indeed, his stage name Farinelli appears to be inspired by the last name of the brothers Farina, two wealthy Neapolitan lawyers who provided support early in his career.

Milan, Bologna, Munich, Venice, and London. In 1737, Queen Elisabetta Farnese of Spain recruited him to move to Madrid in an attempt to cure her husband, King Philip V, of depression with his singing—one of the earliest examples of music as a form of therapy. During this period, he was appointed court music director and only performed for select private audiences. Farinelli remained in Spain, serving the royal family until 1759 when he retired to Bologna, where he had gained local citizenship and acquired a large villa, where he would live until his death. He received visits from international aristocrats, intellectuals, and musicians, including the English music teacher and composer Charles Burney, whom he met in 1770. Farinelli later died in 1782, leaving his estate to his sister's only son.¹⁷⁸ His memory was far from lost, however, as his visit with Charles Burney led to the publication of Farinelli's biography in Burney's *Italian Tour*, which circulated widely among European music circles and in multiple editions.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Farinelli's collaboration with Burney demonstrates the singer's astute awareness of the potential to shape one's public image, a process in which he engaged throughout his career with the commissioning

¹⁷⁸ According to his final will and testament, executed by the notary Lorenzo Gambarini, Farinelli listed a number of artworks and objects in his collection including tapestries, paintings, jewelry, silverware, and other pieces of furniture (p. 5). Upon his death, he requested that his estate, his *fideicomiso*, go to his only sister's son, Don Matteo Pisano, since Farinelli's brother, Riccardo Broschi, died in 1756 without children (p. 11). Other objects were donated to local charities and conservatories (pp. 22 and 32). Of his collection of paintings, he singled out portraits of his "Clementissimi Augusti," his sovereign Spanish patrons, and "those of other sovereigns who number twenty, all by famous painters in carved and gilded frames of various sizes according to which you can see placed in the great hall of this country house [in Bologna] of mine" (p. 23). Lorenzo Gambarini [notary], Archivio di Stato di Bologna, "Testamento di Carlo Broschi Farinelli," dossier of 48 pages, 1782. Transcribed by Francesca Boris, accessed April 15, 2019, http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/farinelli/italiano/testi/testamento_farinelli.htm.

¹⁷⁹ Burney colloquially referred to his *Present State of Music in France and Italy* as the *Italian Tour*.

of numerous portraits.¹⁸⁰ But for all his talent and training, it was the castration procedure that arguably had the greatest impact on Farinelli's success.

The act of castration, or bilateral orchiectomy, as it is referred to in medical terms today, consists of the removal of both testicles.¹⁸¹ Human cultures have practiced castration since antiquity for a number of medical, punitive, and religious reasons. Reasons for castrating a male in the early modern period ranged from torture, to punishment for a crime, to a medical preventative or curative measure, or to religious or sexual reasons.¹⁸² To perform a castration for nonmedical or nonpolitically sanctioned reasons was otherwise illegal in seventeenth-century Italy.¹⁸³ The procedure was officially condemned by the Church, which employed

¹⁸⁰ For more on Farinelli's awareness of self-fashioning and how he strategically promoted an image of himself as a musically talented gentleman through his interactions with Burney, see Anne Desler, "'The Little that I Have Done is Already Gone and Forgotten': Farinelli and Burney Write Music History," *Cambridge Opera Journal* (27): 215–38.

¹⁸¹ Bilateral or partial orchiectomies are performed today as an option to treat testicular cancer. For more information about the procedure, see "Radical Orchiectomy," Johns Hopkins Medicine, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/testicular-cancer/radical-orchiectomy>. During the period, castration was often mistakenly associated with eunuchism, or the complete removal of both the testicles and penis. Stories of eunuch guards in Eastern harems and characters from classical mythology led to a general link between the physical traits of eunuchs and that of *castrati*, especially in relation to contrasting stereotypes of impotency and hypersexuality, which will be discussed later in the chapter. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 137nn.24–25, and Piotr O. Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, trans. John A. Broadwin and Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2001).

¹⁸² See André M. Smith, "Eunuchs and Castrations: JAMA Faces the Music," *JAMA* 266 (1991): 655 in Rudakova, "Uncertain Nature," 23. Smith leaves out the religious and sexual reasons for castration, however. See also Enid Rhodes Peschel and Richard E. Peschel, "Medical Insights into the Castrati in Opera," *American Scientist* 75, no. 6 (November–December 1987): 578–83, especially 578. Castration was also performed for medical reasons as a preventative measure for gout or to cure hernia, elephantiasis, or leprosy. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 138.

¹⁸³ Today, it is often hard to understand what may appear to some as the malicious and self-promotional motivations behind parents' choosing to castrate a son. Some recent scholars have begun to unpack the larger circumstances that may have led to some of these boys' fates. In some cases, parents likely were seeking monetary gain, but it may have also been a result of the financial hardships many faced, especially in southern Italy, from famine, plague, and civic unrest. Others have also acknowledged the pressure families felt with multiple sons, where a second or third son would have no inheritance of property or title. In these instances, setting up a third son for a musical career may have provided some families with another option if they could not afford to sustain the boy, nor provide for a marriage dowry. Others, still, have suggested that castrating a son may have been seen as a savvy—

castrati, but only those who were allegedly castrated due to an accident or medical necessity.¹⁸⁴ The procedure's use in the torture of enemy or deserted soldiers and in the punishment of adulterers and other criminals speaks to the negative and stigmatized impact that it would have on the recipient. That is to say, castration not only inflicted physical pain but also altered the identity of the recipient. As it was understood in the period, the removal or incision of one's testicles prevented a man from producing semen and impregnating a woman, thereby preventing the conception of male progeny. This aim was directly linked to the performance of masculinity, and without it, a man's gender was vulnerable. For example, these effects of the surgery not only impacted Farinelli's appearance but also altered his identity by preventing him from producing semen and impregnating a woman. As a result, he was unable to produce progeny and therefore extend his name and legacy through direct heirs. This masculine inadequacy, then, led him to seek relationships with his sister's children and with his music students as an alternate means of ensuring the preservation of his memory.

And yet with such high stakes for both the performer of the procedure and those who were castrated, the phenomenon of *castrati* flourished, reaching its apogee in the mid-eighteenth century. However, due to the illegality of the castration procedure, few records detailing its circumstances remain.¹⁸⁵ Perhaps for this reason, it was often performed in the privacy of a person's home or in the workshop of a

and in this sense, not inherently negative—move for political gain. Successful *castrati* served popes, high-ranking members of the church, and the princes and nobles of Europe. Castrating a son may have therefore signified a family's desire to build important friendships and advance networks of exchange.

¹⁸⁴ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 139n41.

¹⁸⁵ Rudakova, "'Uncertain Nature,'" 137.

barber surgeon, rather than a public anatomical theater, which also suggests the procedure was not viewed as a scientific experiment that required specialized training and practice.

Burney lamented his inability to find specific details of where and how boys were castrated when he visited Italy in 1770. In his *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, published in 1771, he writes:

I enquired throughout Italy at what place boys were chiefly qualified for singing by castration, but could get no certain intelligence. I was told at Milan that it was at Venice; at Venice, that it was Bologna; but at Bologna the fact was denied, and I was referred to Florence; from Florence to Rome, and from Rome I was sent to Naples. The operation most certainly is against law in all these places, as well as against nature; and all the Italians are so much ashamed of it, that in every province they transfer it to some other.¹⁸⁶

Burney's description of traveling across the country to uncover the circumstances of boys' castration speaks to the procedure's illicit status in Italy as well as the inherent cultural bias against *castrati* as an Italian phenomenon. When Burney asserts the procedure "was most certainly [...] against nature; and all the Italians are so much ashamed of it," he morally implicates Italian propagators of knowingly altering boys' natural states, so much so that they shroud their practices in secrecy. Thus, Burney's claims reflect the contradictions between international audiences' praise of the *castrato* voice on the stage and judgment of the *castrato* body in life.

Interestingly, records of surgical payments from the Real Conservatorio di Sant'Onofrio a Capuana in Naples refute Burney's claim that boys were never

¹⁸⁶ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy, or the Journal of a Tour through these Countries, undertaken to Collect Materials for a General History of Music* (London: T. Becket, 1771), 301–2. See 303 for a discussion on the practice of castration, including possible venues for the procedure.

castrated in the music conservatories. In one example, a man named Signor Mattia di Franco was authorized by the conservatory to pay the surgeon Andrea Carrocci “to make three eunuchs in May of 1705” and for his assistance over the course of ten days while the boys convalesced in the conservatory.¹⁸⁷ This important document demonstrates the proactive role some members of conservatories took to not only pay for multiple boys’ surgeries but also to ensure their recovery, speaking to the level of investment at stake in creating and supporting *castrati*. Indeed, additional records from the Real Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto in Naples indicate how *castrati* were treated differently from other students, especially in terms of the clothing they were provided, which visually distinguished them and signaled their status as special and in need of protection. In winter, for instance, they wore *giappone di tarantola*, a special and expensive fabric used only for *castrati*.¹⁸⁸ Its white color and durable material likely suggested an angelic appearance, which would also allude to *castrati*’s vocal associations with angels and otherworldly beings.

There were two different methods to “make a *castrato*,” which were generally performed on prepubescent boys between the ages of six and thirteen. According to a rare, eighteenth-century account in Charles d’Ancillon’s *Traité des Eunuques* (1707), the first option was to altogether remove both testicles through incision. The second

¹⁸⁷ My translation. The original text reads “tre figliuoli fatti eunuchi nel mese d’ maggio 1705.” Real Conservatorio di Sant’Onofrio a Capuana, reg. III.1.5.1, c. 53r, preserved in the Archivio di Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella di Napoli.

¹⁸⁸ I am grateful to the staff of the Archivio Storico del Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella di Napoli for their assistance. See Archivio Real Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto, fasc. I.2.1, C.4, CM NA a.s. For more information on the daily lives of young *castrati* training in the Naples conservatories, see Maurizio Trabucco, “I ‘Figlioi Eunuchi’ del Real Conservatorio di Musica di Sant’Onofrio a Capuana nelle Fonti dell’ Archivio Storico del Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella di Napoli” (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, 2003), 27–40.

option was to either externally compress the testicles until they ceased to exist or to make a small incision along what is known today as the vas deferens.¹⁸⁹ D'Ancillon describes these two approaches in his treatise:

This...Class is of those whole Testicles, by a detestable Art have been made so frigid, as at last quite to disappear and vanish, this is done by cutting the Vein that conveyed their proper Aliment and Support, till at last they actually dry up and come to nothing. Another Method was, to take the Testicles quite away at once, and this Operation was commonly effected, by putting the Patient into a Bath of warm Water, to soften and supple the Part, and make them more tractable; some small time after, they pressed the Jugular Veins, which made the Party so stupid and insensible, that he fell into a kind of Apoplexy, and then the Action could be performed with scarce any Pain at all to the Patient...Sometimes they used to give a certain quantity of *Opium* so the Persons designed for Castration, whom they cut while they were in their dead Sleep, and took from them those Parts which Nature took so great Care to form.¹⁹⁰

D'Ancillon's remarks not only reveal the different procedures used for castration but also describe the preparations that were taken to account for the patient's pain. He goes on to say, however, that such measures as administering a narcotic like opium or other drugs were often not carried out due to the financial cost and due to the risk of death for the patient. In the end, it appears that care for the patient during and after the procedure was limited and likely led to the suffering of many young boys onto whom this procedure was inflicted.

Only a few other sources survive today that textually or visually describe early modern practices of castration. Two instruments in the Farmacia Storica degli Museo

¹⁸⁹ Charles d'Ancillon, *Traité des Eunuques* (1707), trans. C. d'Ollincan (pseudonym), *Eunuchism Display'd: Describing All the Different Sorts of Eunuchs* (London: E. Curll, 1718). See especially 14–16. This treatise is a rare example of an eighteenth-century description of how to perform a castration (likely promoted for other medical needs rather than to make a *castrato*). The full treatise discusses such topics as different categories of eunuchs, how they came to be made, whether they are capable of marriage, and if they should be protected by civil, canon, and common law.

¹⁹⁰ D'Ancillon, *Eunuchism Display'd*, 14–16.

delle Arte Santarie's collection in Naples, Italy, provide examples of surgical tools used for castration (Figs. 23 and 24). The instruments, likely from the eighteenth or nineteenth century, have two jagged, curved clamps at one end that suggest a deliberate design intended to grasp the testicles for complete removal.¹⁹¹ These tools indicate that there was probably a large market for medical tools specific to the practice of castration. An illustration from German surgeon Caspar Stromayr's *Practica copisoa*, completed in 1559, is also a rare example that visualizes how the procedure may have been conducted (Fig. 25).¹⁹² In the image, a fully nude boy reclines on a stretcher, his legs tilted upward, accompanied by an inscription on the next page that reads: "This figure shows exactly how to lay the children down."¹⁹³ Four well-dressed men encircle him and gesture toward his centrally exposed genitals while one man holds an instrument over them. Though this representation of a castration confirms that the operation was documented and that there may have been a set of codified practices for carrying it out, it is unclear if this depiction reflects a castration for the purposes of making a *castrato* or as a means of curing a different ailment or injury, as the procedure was also prescribed for cases of hernia and leprosy, among other issues. This image, therefore, must be applied to the case of *castrati* with caution.

¹⁹¹ I would like to extend a special thank you to Gennaro Rispoli, Director of the Farmacia Storica degli Museo delle Arte Santarie, for allowing me access to these objects and for granting me permission to photograph and publish them from his personal collection. Exact dates are unknown beyond his speculation, and the writing on the implements—what appears to be inventory numbers—likely belonged to a previous collector.

¹⁹² See Meyer M. Melicow, "Castrati Choir and Opera Singers," *Urology* 3 (1974): 663–70, and Feldman, *Castrato*, especially 40–78.

¹⁹³ The original inscription reads: "Dise Figur ziaigt gar Eben/Wie die Kinder sein zu legen" (my translation).

The procedure caused a number of physiological complications to a boy's development. Removing the testicles or cutting the vas deferens before puberty led to a disruption to the endocrine system, where testosterone and androgen production—which takes place in the testicles—would be suspended. As a result, numerous bodily organs and systems did not receive the typical amount of hormones necessary for adult growth and development. The organs directly related to vocal production that were affected included the larynx, or voice box, and the vocal cords. The larynx did not grow and drop as a result of a decrease in testosterone, and the vocal cords also did not elongate and remained short without androgen. *Castrati* therefore had more powerful voices than women due to their greater lung capacity and larger rib cage but retained the same high soprano pitch. As a result, *castrati* became living embodiments of the male-female-prepubescent boy paradox: they simultaneously possessed the strength of the adult male breathing apparatus, with the height and pitch of a female and/or a prepubescent boy.

2.3: Jacopo Amigoni's Group Portrait

Farinelli commissioned a number of painted and printed portraits of himself, demonstrating an awareness of the prominent artistic conventions for the time and the power of visual display to shape and disseminate ideas regarding one's image and reputation. He was especially adept in hiring prestigious artists, including his friend, the Venetian painter Jacopo Amigoni, who followed him to Spain and produced at least two large-scale, single-person portraits of Farinelli, one of which hangs in the National Museum of Romania today (Fig. 26). He also commissioned portraits from

other well-known artists such as Corrado Giaquinto, who produced a grandiose painting of the singer around 1753 (Fig. 27). The composition depicts Farinelli standing in front of a tondo with bust-length portraits of his patrons, the king and queen of Spain, held up by a number of putti and allegorical personages.¹⁹⁴ Each of these works heroize Farinelli in a manner that was more often reserved for royalty and aristocrats, demonstrating the singer's commitment—and artists' willingness—to aligning himself with the status of nobility, and also to distancing himself from the lower status of both the performance profession and the negative traits of castration.

Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends* presents an opportunity to understand how the social and medical associations with castration impacted the visual articulation of Farinelli's *castrato* body, especially as the painting represents the only group portrait of a *castrato* from this period. The subject is pictured with his contemporaries and juxtaposed against a group of friends with normative bodies and unambiguous genders. Indeed, Farinelli, himself understood the power of art for crafting and disseminating a desired image of oneself. An avid art collector and commissioner of portraits of himself and of his royal patrons, and other noble colleagues, Farinelli astutely worked with artists to portray himself in these portraits as a cultured gentleman, only subtly alluding to his *castrato*-ness. From what we know from Burney's account of visiting Farinelli in his villa in Bologna, and from Farinelli's will and testament, he likely displayed this

¹⁹⁴ Corrado Giaquinto's work merits further investigation into Farinelli's self-presentation, including his wearing of a ceremonial sword juxtaposed by a seated putto holding a sword among other riches and allegorical elements, especially in light of the sword the Hungarian Hussar wears in Amigoni's group portrait.

painting, and others of esteemed dignitaries in rooms of prominence, where his guests could partake in viewing them.

At first glance, Amigoni's portrait depicts a conventional group of eighteenth-century elite sitters. The composition presents five figures looking directly out of the picture plane, with Farinelli occupying almost the exact center of the canvas. He wears a medal around his neck and a pin on his jacket with the gold and red emblem of the Order of Calatrava, (Fig. 28).¹⁹⁵ Two figures flank Farinelli on each side: his friend and fellow musician, the abbot Pietro Metastasio, occupies the far left, and the soprano Teresa Castellini sits between them. Amigoni includes himself in the portrait to Farinelli's left, and a figure sometimes identified as a page boy, or an Austrian or Hungarian hussar holds Amigoni's palette. Each of these figures is significant for their sex, gender, and age. Their bodies, clothes, pose, and attributes represent a contrast to Farinelli's ambiguous body. In addition to the figuration of their physical bodies, each participant wears or holds his or her own set of accoutrements associated with his or her identity and relationship to Farinelli.

At the far left of the composition, Pietro Metastasio (1698–1780), a librettist, poet, and opera composer is pictured leaning on a figural, bas-relief pedestal, on which his name ("P. Metastasio") is inscribed on the right corner (Fig. 29). He wears dark clothes with a long, powdered wig, and he holds a quill in his right hand over a sprig of laurel. In contrast to Farinelli's visage, Metastasio is unequivocally portrayed

¹⁹⁵ Scholars have suggested that Farinelli commissioned this painting in honor of his receipt of the prestigious Order of Calatrava after his directorial debut in Spain. Gladys Wilson notes that this performance took place on the king's birthday either in the theater of the Buen Retiro Palace in Madrid or in the summer palace at Aranjuez. See Gladys Wilson, "One God! One Farinelli: Amigoni's Portraits of a Famous Castrato," *Apollo* 140 (1994): 45–51, especially 48, 50, and 51.

as the older man. Shadow on the lower part of his face and neck also suggests a latent beard. It is likely that Metastasio's portrait was not painted from life, unlike the portraits of Farinelli, Amigoni, and Teresa, who were all in Madrid. Metastasio was noted to be in Vienna in 1750, and according to Burney, Farinelli requested Metastasio send portraits of himself for Amigoni to reference, which arrived in Madrid in 1749 and 1751.¹⁹⁶ The pedestal on which Metastasio rests appears to depict a fragmentary relief sculpture with two men engaged with one another. The figure occupying the left side of the sculpture stands upright, leaning over the second figure who is seated or kneeling. The standing man is possibly dressed in classicizing attire, with one hand to his chest while the other hand appears to point in a moment of address in the direction of what seems to be a burning altar.¹⁹⁷ Standards or banner flags appear to occupy the background, potentially implying a military context. The composition likely alludes to one of Metastasio's plays, many of which were based on classical subjects, such as *Achille in Sciro*, especially given Metastasio's role in reshaping casting practices for *castrati*.¹⁹⁸ Compared to seventeenth-century productions, which often saw *castrati* play men who displayed the "feminine" traits of lust, lovesickness, and weakness of will, Metastasio was one of the first to cast

¹⁹⁶ See Burney, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio*, Vol. 1 (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796), p. 289, cited in Ursula Hoff, *European Painting and Sculpture before 1800* (Melbourne, Australia: National Gallery of Victoria, 1973), 2n8.

¹⁹⁷ There is a strong classical precedent for this pose as a form of address. A recognizable example is the statue of Aulus Metellus, also known as *L'Arringatore*, from the late second or early first century BCE. This particular work was discovered in 1566 and was displayed in the collection of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo de' Medici, according to a letter from Giorgio Vasari. See "Arringatore," accessed July 8, 2019, http://spazioinwind.libero.it/popoli_antichi/Etruschi/arringatore.html.

¹⁹⁸ Farinelli also owned a tapestry depicting the life of Achilles, mentioned on p. 27 of his final will and testament, suggesting this subject had significance for him as well. Lorenzo Gambarini, notary. State Archive of Bologna, dossier of 48 pages, 1782. Transcribed by Francesca Boris, accessed April 15, 2019, http://www.comune.bologna.it/iperbole/farinelli/italiano/testi/testamento_farinelli.htm.

castrati in more conventionally heroic masculine roles. In addition, such inclusion in casting may have also functioned on a secondary level to symbolize the close relationship between Metastasio and Farinelli himself. The two friends, who met in Naples, where Farinelli studied music, wrote to each other throughout their lives, even referring to the other as “twin.”¹⁹⁹

Across the composition to the far right is a young boy, likely a courtly page, who, with his extended right hand, holds the painter’s palette (Fig. 30). The boy’s body is almost in profile view as his head turns, directing his attention out of the picture plane. He is dressed in what some scholars have identified as the ceremonial costume of an Hungarian hussar.²⁰⁰ Although a portion of his body is out of view, his left hand clearly grasps the handle of a sword, an early modern emblem of masculinity, and a common attribute in portraits of aristocratic men (Fig. 31). These masculine props that adorn his prepubescent body prefigure his status as an adult. Unlike Farinelli, this boy will likely mature and develop into an intact adult man who will advance his family’s name by fathering male children, while Farinelli will remain stunted in his masculine development and unable to produce a natural heir.

¹⁹⁹ Metastasio’s letters to Farinelli are published in Burney’s memoir on the librettist. Unfortunately, Farinelli’s letters to Metastasio have not survived. For more information on Metastasio’s letters and his written production, in general, see Bruno Brunelli, ed., *Tutte le opera di Pietro Metastasio* (Milan: I Classici Mondadori, 1952).

²⁰⁰ Ursula Hoff observes that an “old label on the back of the picture describes the page as an Archduke of Austria” *European Painting and Sculpture before 1800*, 3n9. The boy’s identity as a page is also based on the appearance of the accompanying dog behind him whose collar displays Farinelli’s initials. Ghadessi suggests he may also be identified specifically as the Hungarian Prince Joseph. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 143n49, and Shearer West, *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40. Magnified details of his elaborate jacket (see Fig. 31) convey a coat of arms, although its identity is not discernible.

Amigoni places himself and Teresa Castellini, the Milanese soprano, in the center of the composition flanking Farinelli (Fig. 32). Teresa, sitting between Metastasio and Farinelli, is identified by an inscription on the piece of sheet music that rests near her on the ground (Fig. 33). She wears a full-skirted white gown, embellished with blue bows along the bodice, and a corsage of flowers on her left breast. Her body is turned slightly outward toward the viewer. Teresa holds up a second piece of sheet music with Farinelli's initials, C. B. F., in her left hand, (Fig. 34) which Farinelli delicately grasps with his left thumb and index finger. The music is a canzonetta, which Burney in his *Memoirs* refers to as *La Partenza*, or "The Departure." The lyrics on the sheet music are almost completely decipherable, which Burney translates as:

[...], the dreadful time is come to bid adieu
 Nor to a distant clime must I they steps pursue,
 No hope will fate allow to soothe the harsh decree
 Yet who can tell if thou will ever think of me.²⁰¹

Metastasio wrote the canzonetta and it was likely set to music by Farinelli, thus uniting all three musicians professionally through its production and spatially through its position in the painting.²⁰² Scholars have interpreted this sheet of music as alluding to Farinelli's close relationship with Teresa and his sadness over her imminent departure from Madrid. Farinelli appears to have acted as her teacher and mentor,

²⁰¹ In the original Italian: "Ecco quell fiero istant Nice mia Nice addio come vivro ben mio cosi lontan da te Io vivro sempre in pene Io non avro più bene e tu chi sa se mai ti sovuerrai di me." Translation from: Madame d'Arblay [Fanny Burney], ed., *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections, by His Daughter, Madame d'Arblay* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832) vol. 3: 271–2.

²⁰² In a letter dated June 13, 1750, Metastasio refers to a canzonetta that Farinelli set to music, which musicology scholars have connected to this work in the painting. d'Arblay, *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, 365.

although nothing is known about whether the relationship was romantic.²⁰³

Completing the scene is Amigoni, on Farinelli's left, with his arm draped over Farinelli's shoulder. Amigoni identifies himself by his painter's smock and turban, and a signature on the handful of paintbrushes he holds, which reads "G. Amiconi" (Fig. 35).

Farinelli dominates the composition and captivates our attention, serving as a middle ground between the two striking appearances of Teresa and Amigoni. Unlike Amigoni, Farinelli's face is smooth with no evidence of facial hair. His delicate facial features and skin tone also contrast with Amigoni's dark and ruddy complexion. Indeed, Farinelli's pale flesh appears as though it is covered in a chalk-like film, which not only visually distinguishes him from Amigoni but may also allude to the stage makeup Farinelli would have worn while performing. Farinelli's clothes contrast with Amigoni's green smock in color and style; his pale pink coat with blue collar and exposed lace cuffs resemble Teresa's dress more closely. His bond with Teresa is further established as his right hand reaches up toward her shoulder—narrowly missing direct contact with her body—while his left hand delicately shares a sheet of music for *La Partenza* with her.

Amigoni's choice of stage-like setting for his painting, complete with a basket of flowers and green plants in the foreground, suggests an almost pastoral conceit in which his sitters occupy an altogether different world where all the arts are

²⁰³ Metastasio asked about "the beautiful Castellini" in a later to Farinelli dated September 6, 1749. He discusses her in another letter from May 2, 1750.

celebrated: writing, singing, and painting.²⁰⁴ The vague cityscape behind Amigoni and the page may very well be Madrid, but it is unclear from its generalized depiction (Fig. 36). The tree trunks and branches behind Metastasio and Teresa, as well as the groundline populated with patches of grass and flora, imply the figures occupy an outside space—an uncommon setting for a formal group portrait and typically reserved for the more casual genre of conversation pieces.²⁰⁵ The rendering of the flat, grayish blue tonalities of the background and ground level also contribute to the painting’s spatial unity, suggesting more of an idyllic stage setting or backdrop to a theater production than an actual, realized space.

Taken together, the generic Arcadian background and the staging of the sitters with their thoughtfully designed attributes contribute to the composition’s mimicking a royal family portrait. Farinelli holds court and demonstrates his command over all of the arts through his central position and his proximity to both written music and Amigoni’s palette.²⁰⁶ Indeed, for Farinelli these sitters may have occupied a place of

²⁰⁴ Botanist Roland Louise Daguerre suggests the floral species in the groundline are likely depicted from life, but they do not appear to resemble plants and flowers produced in either Italy or England at the time. This level of detail demonstrates the purposefulness of all of Amigoni’s visual choices on the canvas, suggesting an intentionality that extended to the depiction of the figures as well as the background.

²⁰⁵ According to Berta Joncus, conversation pieces “were private narratives whose break from the conventions of formal portraiture simulated intimacy between sitter and viewer.” See Berta Joncus, “One God, so many Farinellis: Mythologising the Star Castrato,” *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2005): 437–96, especially 485 and 495n102.

²⁰⁶ It is worth mentioning that the presence of six paint puddles on Amigoni’s palette highlights color’s function in differentiating gendered identities in the composition. The palette’s mixtures of white, and shades of rose, blue, and verdigris dominate Amigoni’s composition, except for the deep red of Farinelli’s medal that lies on his chest at the center of the picture. Metastasio and the court page wear the most saturated hues of blue, gray and rose-red, respectively. The page’s costume, as well as Teresa’s dress, Farinelli’s collar and coat, are all accented in the same shade of blue. These choices function as deliberate commentaries on the identities of the sitters. While each figure at the periphery of the scene represents an extreme, either a matured adult male or a prepubescent, pregendered child, the artist’s use of color and variation of tone visually unites them. Farinelli and Teresa are painted with the closest color scheme. Amigoni renders them with layers of white for the areas surrounding their

pride for him in a similar way as one's parents or progeny. Furthermore, as Farinelli was unable to produce a biological heir to inherit his wealth and name, his role as an artist and *creator* of art was all the more important. As the forthcoming section discusses, these messages of professional and social status, interpreted through the portrayal of Farinelli's body, are imbued with both visible and invisible derivations from the conventionalized figures that surround him in the portrait. Farinelli's *castrato* body is also inescapably tied to the sexual and humorous connotations associated with *castrati* in society at large—some of which may have been perpetuated by *castrati* themselves.

2.4: Complicating and Caricaturizing the Castrato Body

Beyond these formal portrait conventions, it is also necessary to examine how the physical side effects of castration shaped popular perceptions of the *castrato*'s sexual and gender identities. The *castrato*'s difference extended beyond the artificial virtuosity of both his voice and his sterilization to his external physical body, which lay bare the visible markers of his manufactured mutilation. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, some of the procedure's effects were immediately recognizable and did not require close inspection. For example, due to the diminished levels of testosterone and androgen, the subject's growth plates continued to extend,

legs and arms, shades of rose around the chest, and accents of blue around the elbows or forearms and chest or neck. The use of a more highly saturated rose for Farinelli's coat solidifies his place in the middle of the spectrum: he is somewhere between Teresa, who is completely woman, yet he is not the page boy, who through the grasping of his sword and the coat of arms on his dress—implying a strong tie to family lineage and that he likely stands to inherit the family line—reinforces his identity as an intact, prepubescent boy; thus, he is firmly established as not a *castrato*, and we can infer he will grow up to be an intact male.

leading many *castrati* to be noticeably tall, with attenuated limbs. The hormonal imbalance between testosterone and estrogen also led to an increase in female-associated secondary sex traits, such as the accumulation of fat around the stomach, hips, and breasts, and the lack of male-patterned facial hair. Because of these bodily transformations, the subject's difference from a normative male body and adoption of feminized traits left him in a gender limbo. He was neither a fully formed man nor woman.

While *castrati*'s identities offstage were often shaped by unease, anxiety, and derision, they were almost universally beloved for their performances onstage, which is especially important within the acknowledgment, and even acceptance, as the historical record suggests, of the common practice of cross-gender casting for *castrati*.²⁰⁷ Indeed, Though Irina Rudakova has suggested that cross-gender casting “demonstrate[ed] that the physical sex of a singer was often irrelevant to his or her role,”²⁰⁸ I would instead suggest that the acceptance of cross-gender casting may speak to a broader acceptance of the malleability of gendered behavior. If audiences were presumably not disturbed by casting across gender nor by transvestite characters, the question that follows is how these perceptions of *castrati* translated into their experiences off the stage. As the next subsection discusses, a significant aspect of their reality beyond theatrical performances was defined by the circumstances, and specifically, the sexual side effects, of the castration procedure.

²⁰⁷ It appears that this anxiety is mostly from the perspective of other men in the form of textual and visual critiques and humorous jokes. However, it is hard to ascertain how women might have participated in this mocking or perception of *castrati*, as almost all evidence comes from sources written by men.

²⁰⁸ Rudakova, ““Uncertain Nature,”” 170.

Written material from the period generally discusses the issue of *castrati*'s sexuality from two perspectives, which, to modern readers, may initially appear at odds with each other: the first describes the *castrato* as impotent and therefore not a full man, and second characterizes the *castrato* as a hypersexual being, capable of corrupting women both through his voice and his feminized demeanor. This dichotomy, which at first may seem antithetical to twenty-first century readers, reflects the period's broader beliefs on the role of sexual behavior and sex acts in shaping a subject's sexual identity. Within this frame, a *castrato*'s hypersexuality may be perceived as a consequence of engaging in multiple sex acts, but it also suggests that he was viewed in this manner for what was believed to be his inability to complete the act of intercourse through the ejaculation of sperm, and thus—as was suggested at the time—achieve self-satisfaction. This trope was not understood as simply an abundance of sexual desire but also as a reflection of the *castrato*'s unfulfillment, and if anything, aligned him further with the behaviors and actions of the weaker sex—that is, women, who were believed to be lustful and were often blamed for seducing or manipulating men.

Belief in the *castrato*'s hypersexuality as a feminizing trait also stems from the cultural anxiety surrounding conception, especially regarding a woman's pregnancy out of wedlock. These fears, which, in part manifested in the social ostracizing of women who carried on extramarital affairs, also suggests that women would be compelled to seek relationships with *castrati* if it meant they would not run the risk of pregnancy. Behind the apocryphal and social constructions surrounding this dual sexual identity of the *castrati* is also the idea that the period considered

castrati potentially capable of penetrative sex. A *castrato*'s potential for sexual activity is significant for reconstructing how he fit within social constructions of identity at the time.

Another physiological consequence of the castration procedure was the effects it was believed to have on their sexual functioning. According to a recent medical study, the penis of a *castrato* likely remained small or underdeveloped.²⁰⁹ While their bodies' lack of hormones such as testosterone and androgen after the procedure prevented them from fathering children, it did not necessarily preclude them from participating—or being rumored to participate—in sex acts altogether. Several scientific researchers have accepted the notion that some *castrati* could achieve an erection, but their ability to ejaculate and experience orgasm remains unclear.²¹⁰ It is likely, then, that these acts depended on the age of castration and if the procedure occurred closer to the time when puberty would have begun, around ten to twelve years old.²¹¹ In some cases, *castrati* were said to have had sexual relationships with

²⁰⁹ Martin Hatzinger, Dominick Vöge, Matthias Stastny, Friedrich Moll, and Michael Sohn, "Castrati Singers—All for Fame," *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 9 (2012): 2233–37.

²¹⁰ Hatzinger et al., "Castrati Singers," 2233. Angus Heriot and Meyer M. Melicow believe it was possible for *castrati* to have penetrative sex with women. See n21 for Heriot and n43 for Melicow. Patrick Barbier notes that they had sustained relationships with women. Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon*, trans. Margaret Crosland (London: Souvenir Press, 1996), 138. It is also worth noting that sexual relationships with women could encompass a number of different acts. Enid Rhodes Peschel and Richard E. Peschel, both doctors, reject the idea that *castrati* could carry on sexual relationships. Their views on general definitions of sexual activities are narrow, which may reflect more contemporary attitudes toward sex and sexuality than the period in question. See Peschel and Peschel, "Medical Insights," 582-83. Importantly, Valeria Finucci complicates this narrow reading by adding that sperm are not needed to produce ejaculate, suggesting that the performance of sex acts was still possible. See Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 246.

²¹¹ Another possible factor would be the actual method of performing the castration; that is, whether the testicles were squeezed and compressed or if they had been fully excised from the body. It is likely that with the former situation, an erection could still be achieved, but it would be less likely with the latter. See Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, 260.

both men and women, resulting in the often-cited yet conflicting trope of *castrati* as hypersexual yet impotent. By leaving their paternal duties unfulfilled, however, *castrati* were rumored to represent ideal lovers for women who wished to avoid a pregnancy, thus complicating normative period standards for sex and gender.

While it is impossible to make overarching claims about *castrati*'s sexual capabilities within the limited extant material, it is worth noting that the emphasis in the literature on penetrative, heteronormative sexual intercourse precludes the potential that *castrati* engaged in a range of sexual acts that may not have fit within this category.²¹² Broadening this category to include such acts as anal penetration and oral intercourse challenges previous studies and allows for a wider scope in considering how a *castrato*'s sexual life may not have been confined to questions of penetration and ejaculation.²¹³ The impact of the castration procedure was therefore multilayered: though *castrati* were undeniably loved for their supernatural voices, their bodies were perceived as threatening to masculine norms and attitudes on procreation. Along with the physical changes that characterized the *castrato*'s man-made deformity was the question of his sexuality and potential for sexual activity, both of which were critical to the *castrato*'s identity, how he was perceived in society, and thus how he was represented in images.

Two drawings by Anton Maria Zanetti highlight these attitudes regarding the *castrato*'s sexual persona (Fig. 37). The two works are adhered onto the same sheet of Zanetti's *album amicorum*, a collection of caricatures he executed of friends and

²¹² For how sexual acts are broadly defined in the early modern period, see Levy, *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy*.

²¹³ For sources on sodomitic acts in early modern Italy, see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*.

famous personages.²¹⁴ The first drawing portrays the *castrato* Senesino on the right—indicated by an inscription—with the prima donna Faustina Bordoni. Senesino towers over Bordoni as he grasps her hand. Both are rendered in elaborate stage costumes, with Senesino in a male dress including a cape, sword, and multiplumed headdress. The second drawing, which pictures the *castrato* Nicolino and the soprano Lucia Facchinelli, called La Beccheretta, elaborates on first image, with the plumage of each figure’s headdress increasing in size. The most significant alteration from the first drawing to the second is in the relationship between the two protagonists. In the second image, Nicolino holds his sword upright and looks away from his companion toward the left side of the picture plane, while La Beccheretta kneels on the ground bowing toward him. As she grasps the *castrato*’s garment with one hand, his holstered second sword juts out toward her lap in a suggestive gesture of potential—yet, unfulfilled—penetration. The artist’s rendering of the *castrato*’s seemingly oblivious expression and the female soprano’s slight smile and grasp of his garment implies a level of ribald humor: the *castrato* is unable to fully penetrate the soprano, his “sword” just barely missing her dress. Works such as these convey the complexity of the *castrato*’s relationship to normative masculine expectations with regard to both his visible physicality and his internal deformity. In each of Zanetti’s drawings, the *castrato* is both excessively large and unable to perform a man’s generative duty with the sword in the first example curving away from the soprano, and the second, overt example of unfulfilled penetration.

²¹⁴ For the full collection of Zanetti’s drawings, see Alessandro Bettagno, *Caricature di Anton Maria Zanetti: disegni della Fondazione Giorgio Cini* (Milano: Pirelli, 1970).

One later case from 1825 demonstrates the ridicule *castrati* received abroad for their sexual ambiguity even more explicitly with the addition of a caption. A *castrato*, identified as Veluti, sings offstage for a crowd of listeners (Fig. 38). At the bottom of the sheet reads: “An Italian Singer, Cut out for English Amusement, or Signor Veluti Displaying His Great Parts.” Visual cues help the viewer discern the singer’s identity as a *castrato* and, further, that the intent of the print is to deride Veluti for his “*castrato*-ness.” If one looks closely at Veluti’s costume, it is clear that between his legs there is a thick, black contour alluding to the folds of a vagina. These voids are replicated in the darkly shaded slashes on his pants on the upper thighs. The floor he stands on is patterned with similar void or cell-like forms, ranging in sizes, further reinforcing Veluti’s association with the feminine or the vaginal.

Surviving visual representations of *castrati* serve as some of the only examples that articulate these effects of the procedure, and as a result, aid in reconstructing how these figures were viewed in society or, in some cases, how they wanted to be viewed. Caricatures and satirical prints are particularly useful in this manner, for though their intention is often to exaggerate and deride the sitter, they also build on and reinforce cultural stereotypes, thus embodying ideas and conceits about the *castrato*’s body and his perception in broader society. Like their formal portrait counterparts, caricatures and satirical prints of *castrati* typically followed a set of conventions regarding the pose and attributes of the *castrato* body. The subjects are often portrayed devoid of a background or setting, and either alone or with one or two other people, usually a female singer to draw attention to the disparity in scale.

The emphasis is on the body and its extreme proportions and ungainly facial features, usually highlighted by picturing the subject in profile.

In caricatures of *castrati* in general—but especially in examples depicting Farinelli—the body and physical beauty for which he is known are exaggerated and deformed, resulting in a subject that is entirely unrecognizable, unlike in Amigoni's portrait.²¹⁵ For instance, Farinelli is often portrayed as impossibly tall and elongated, and at times depicted with grotesque facial features, such as a large and overhanging upper lip and nose. Comical drawings and prints of Farinelli and other *castrati* serve to poke fun, alerting the viewer to the visible aspects of their bodies that mark them as different. They also, however, speak to a deeper anxiety and resistance or ridicule of non-conforming male bodies. No visual representation, to my knowledge, critiques their voice and the artificially produced soprano pitch, leaving their physical deformities as the principal identifying symbols.

Some of the most well-known artists of the period, including the aforementioned Anton Maria Zanetti, Pier Leone Ghezzi, and William Hogarth, satirized Farinelli, and indeed, Farinelli appears to have owned copies of some of these drawings. In Zanetti's 1725 pen and ink drawing, pasted in the center of a page with eight other caricatures of performers from his *album amicorum*, a copy of which Farinelli appears to have owned, he depicts Farinelli in a full-figure profile format, facing left (Fig. 39).²¹⁶ Zanetti's subject is impossibly tall, occupying almost the

²¹⁵ In letters and odes to Farinelli, he is described as having a very attractive physical appearance. Even after his death, he is written about in relation to his beauty. See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 141–42.

²¹⁶ Zanetti's album consists almost entirely of caricatures of operatic performers who appeared in Venetian productions. Zanetti playfully caricaturizes each subject, exaggerating their dress and

entirety of the vertical composition. He wears a frock coat with a hat and cane. His upper lip and nose protrude, as seen in other caricatures of Farinelli, suggesting this was a popular trend and possibly functioned as an exaggeration of traits taken from life.

Likewise, Pier Leone Ghezzi, a Roman artist famous for his satirical works, completed a pen and brown ink sketch of Farinelli dressed in a female costume, entitled *The Famous Castrato: Il Farinelli* which follows a similar set of conventions as Zanetti's work, with some significant differences that warrant discussion (Fig. 40).²¹⁷ Farinelli is presented in profile, facing left. He wears an elaborate, female costume, complete with a corseted dress, veil, and a closed fan held in his left hand. His dress alerts the viewer he is in the guise of a theatrical character, but there is no hint of a stage or other participants, which indicates that Farinelli is in the process of

physical features. The medium of these works was critical to their dissemination across the Italian operatic scene. The original *album amicorum* is held in the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. La Biblioteca di Storia dell'Arte Bruno Molajoli in Naples owns a facsimile of the full album. Interestingly, Farinelli appears to have owned a copy of Zanetti's drawing, according to his notarized list of possessions that accompanied his will: under the category of "Disegni," "10) Anton Maria Zanetti, *Farinello in abito da viaggio*, mm. 269 x 176, penna e inchiostro bruno e bistro, Venezia, Fondazione G. Cini." See his will, published in the State Archive of Bologna, by Lorenzo Gambarini, notary. Dossier of 48 pages, 1782. Transcribed by Francesca Boris, p. 200. Farinelli's owning a copy of caricatures depicting himself would certainly prove important for understanding the market for these items, which it seems *castrati* directly shaped or controlled. While this question is beyond the scope of this present study, it is an important consideration that deserves future attention. For a record of the drawing, see Bettagno, *Caricature di Anton Maria Zanetti*, nn. 78 and 205.

²¹⁷ It appears Farinelli owned a copy of this drawing as well. See "Disegni," "9) Pier Leone Ghezzi, *Farinello napoletano...*" from Farinelli's will, published in the State Archive of Bologna, by Lorenzo Gambarini, notary. Dossier of 48 pages, 1782. Transcribed by Francesca Boris, p. 200. The drawing is currently in the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. The inscription on the bottom left corner of the recto reads: Inscribed by the artist in pen and brown ink, "Farinello Napolitano / famoso castrato di Soprano che / cantò nel Teatro d'Aliberti nell'Anno 1724. / fatto da me Cavre ["re" in superscript] Ghezzi di 2 Marzo 1724." There are two biographical inscriptions of Farinelli on the verso. See "The Famous Castrato: Il Farinelli," Morgan Library & Museum, accessed April 17, 2019, <http://corsair.themorgan.org/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?BBID=141807>. See also Jacob Bean and Felice Stampfle, *Drawings from New York Collections. Vol. 3: The Eighteenth Century in Italy*. No. 20. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art. Pierpont Morgan Library, 1971.

acting.²¹⁸ The lack of a theater setting highlights the conflict and ambiguity of the *castrato*'s position, and the single-figure composition grants unmediated access to Farinelli's body. These elements draw attention to the disparity between Farinelli's lavish costume and his facial features—especially to his open mouth and disproportionately large and overhanging upper lip—which serve as additional reminders of the subject's status as a humorously grotesque and ambiguously gendered figure in women's clothing.²¹⁹

In contrasting Farinelli's protruding and unflattering profile with the delicate details of his costume, Ghezzi emphasizes the contradictions inherent in the *castrato* body, alerting the viewer to the *castrato*'s unstable position. Artists such as Zanetti and Ghezzi faced the challenge of signaling a *castrato*'s difference through the secondary markers that were visible on the surface. This delineation speaks to the wrought relationship between the articulation of invisible and visible difference.²²⁰ For the *castrato*, this dichotomy translated into the veiled lack of testicles hidden underneath his clothes as compared to his visible and highly recognizable exaggerated height and weight. Unable to picture *castrati* without clothes for rules of

²¹⁸ Ghezzi's other caricatures of *castrati* follow the same, nondescript pattern for delineating space through a striated ground, suggesting these works may have been intended to be bound in an album. See his drawing *The Castrato Carlo Discreti, called Carluccio, dressed for one of his soprano roles*, black chalk, pen and brown ink, 330 x 228 mm, now owned by a private collector in the United States. In this work, the subject is also pictured in profile, facing left. For a digital reproduction and information on the drawing's provenance, see "Pier Leone Ghezzi," Artnet, accessed January 17, 2020, <http://www.artnet.com/artists/pier-leone-ghezzi/2>.

²¹⁹ These significant differences between the Farinelli's dress and height in the two drawings suggest that there may be a correlation to the flexibility of height based on the *castrato*'s portrayal as a cross-gender actor or as a person out of costume in male dress.

²²⁰ Ghadessi discusses this concept in a similar context when she says the *castrato*'s "anatomical irregularity was invisible. They were the foils to perfect courtly masculinity. It is via complex iconographies that the androgyny...of the *castrato* was made visible rather than audible only. The *castrato*'s otherness needed to transcend his voice in order to be captured." See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 142.

decorum, artists turned to external signs of their bodily difference, suggesting that even though *castrati* were produced to be shown in public, their internal bodies remained private or only visible to a select few. It is why artists often looked to other forms of iconographical representation, such as attributes like the sword or clothing, to convey the complexity of the *castrato*'s bodily difference.

While Ghadessi notes that “Ghezzi’s drawing of Farinelli in a female role is particularly telling of the uneasy gender position occupied by *castrati*,” it is also the relationship of the *castrato*'s costumed body with the absent background that adds to the discomfort or unease surrounding Farinelli’s gender.²²¹ Without a clear delineation of space, the boundaries between performance stage and the streets of everyday life break down, and Farinelli’s identity as an actor or “real person” becomes less discernible. Within this context of ambiguity, caricatures are at their most effective in satirizing real concerns about the *castrato* body and its place in society and off the stage. Such drawings and prints by these artists challenge the viewer to see the similarities between Farinelli’s commissioned paintings—which would only be seen by a select group of viewers—and the satirical art that was widely circulated by artists and collectors. This discrepancy in access accounts in part for the seemingly contradictory visual systems that governed the practices of formal portraiture and satirical prints.

These works were more than just reductive jokes, however. When read in concert with flattering portrayals, they speak to a broader societal trend regarding the

²²¹ Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 142.

reconciliation of the *castrato*'s extraordinary voice with the mutilation that made his voice possible.²²² Comparing works from both formal portraits and caricatures demonstrates the various means through which artists—and in some cases patrons—fashioned identity, messages, and meaning through the body.²²³ Though these caricatures must not be taken as fact or as a generalized reflection of the reception of *castrati* by all groups, there is meaning to be found behind the farce in connecting the *castrato*'s physical deformity with the anxiety surrounding the masculine body and its performance in society.

In addition, the implications of Farinelli owning copies of caricatures are significant. And while it is unclear if these works would have displayed for his visitors in Bologna, or kept in his private collection, their identification in his will suggest they were important or of monetary value to him. It is possible that in owning these works, Farinelli further exercised an ownership—or even a potential acceptance, although this cannot be ascertained at this time—of his image within the realm of satire and popular culture. His ownership, perhaps more importantly, also demonstrates a direct awareness of the visual paradigms employed by popular caricaturists to express *castrati*'s social atypicalness, and the visual exaggerations that artists specifically employed for depictions of Farinelli. This awareness and

²²² As previously mentioned, scholars such as Martha Feldman have dismissed caricatures and their overt critique of *castrati* gender as mere farce and not indicative of larger systemic claims on the vulnerability or fluidity of early modern masculinity. Others, such as Ghadessi, have convincingly countered that “caricatures are perhaps the most telling instances of the ways in which *castrati* were perceived in the collective imagination.” See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 140.

²²³ Writers also engaged with the same set of coded critiques of the *castrato*'s body and sexuality. In 1646, an English traveler in Italy, John Raymond, for example, said of *castrati* that their “throates [sic] and complexions scandalise their breaches.” See Rudakova, “Uncertain Nature,” 190 n327.

visual literacy of the period's conventions for portraying difference undoubtedly informed the commissioning his own formal portraits, suggesting that his grandiose portrayal in paint functioned as implicit—or even possibly explicit—reactions or commentaries on how he is portrayed in caricatures.²²⁴

2.5: Farinelli's Representation as a Castrato in Amigoni's Group Portrait

With a deeper understanding of the perceptions of *castrati*'s gender and sexuality in society, it is now possible to return to Amigoni's portrait and examine how these attitudes are brought to bear on the representation of Farinelli's body. As this section argues, Farinelli's status as a *castrato* is far from ignored in this portrait, as previous scholars have suggested.²²⁵ Although Farinelli is not pictured in an exaggerated state as in the aforementioned caricatures, his body in the portrait subtly conveys the external markers of his difference through the visual language of position, pose and gesture, and color.

In opening up an artwork such as *Farinelli and Friends* to a critical and contextual inquiry beyond previous focus on its celebratory and flattering portrayal of the sitter, we can begin to account for the varying degrees to which bodily difference was highlighted, altered, or selectively represented in portraiture from the period, more generally. And, as a result, we can challenge the notion that Farinelli's bodily difference was fully ignored; in fact, it was his physical mutilation that paradoxically contributed to his fame, success, and recognizability. As such, I contend that the

²²⁴ It is unclear based on Farinelli's will and testament if he purchased these works directly or if they were gifted to him.

²²⁵ See Ghadessi, *Portraits of Human Monsters*, 141–44.

figuration of Farinelli in Amigoni's portrait does not represent an asexual void between man and woman, as others have suggested, but instead reflects the strange liminality of Farinelli as a *castrato*, both normalizing and celebrating his appearance yet delicately emphasizing his difference. In so doing, Amigoni's portrayal of Farinelli signifies the early modern embodiment of the prepubescent boy who is not yet fully gendered male.²²⁶

One of the most significant ways in which Amigoni alludes to Farinelli's aberrant body and gender identity is Farinelli's position between normative representations of a man and woman—Teresa and Amigoni himself—who serve as indices of Farinelli's intermediate bodily identity. Within this frame, Amigoni's composition represents a continuum of male and female characteristics. At the periphery of the picture plane are the two poles: the austere, intellectual man represented by the librettist Metastasio at left, and the prepubescent, "feminized" page boy at right.

The comparison between Metastasio's and Farinelli's masculinity is further elucidated by returning to the scene on the pedestal in front of Metastasio. If the bas-relief is, in fact, intended to portray an event from classical history, or more specifically, from an act in one of Metastasio's plays, it could also serve to represent a subject closely tied to Metastasio's identity and occupation while simultaneously referring to Metastasio's role in instigating the casting of *castrati* in heroic male

²²⁶ Roger Freitas first proposed the idea of *castrati* occupying the bodies of prepubescent boys. See Freitas, "Eroticism of Emasculation," 206.

roles.²²⁷ As mentioned previously, Metastasio was crucial in reshaping *castrati* casting practices from assigning them to weak male characters known for their vulnerability to love to conventionally heroic and strong male figures who showcased honor, love of state and duty, and wisdom. In this context, the bas-relief may also be read as a scene between two types of masculinity: the tall, erect, and “intact” warrior, and the other figure, who is less easily identified and more ambiguous. It is unclear if these two figures, then, represent Metastasio and Farinelli, or if the scene represents a moment on the stage where Farinelli occupied the upright figure, and the other figure were played by a different actor. Regardless, the pedestal’s subject conveys the variety of roles and connotations associated with men during the period.

The depiction of Farinelli’s physical characteristics in the center of the composition single him out as a distinctive figure within the group. Even though he is not rendered in the grotesque extreme of the previous caricatures, Farinelli, although seated, is almost the same height as the artist, who is standing, albeit slightly hunched over. This arrangement suggests that if he were standing, Farinelli would appear extremely tall in comparison with Amigoni. Furthermore, Farinelli’s ambiguous positioning and height are underscored by the lack of a visible piece of furniture on which he is likely sitting, alerting us to the constructed awkwardness and artificiality of his pose and body.

²²⁷ This reading is in line with general seventeenth- and eighteenth-century portrait practices of extending visual conceits from the sitter to objects, whereby the appearance of “accidental” classicizing fragments, such as this fragmentary relief, acts as a secondary reflection of the identity or a noteworthy trait associated with the subject. I am grateful to Anthony Colantuono for drawing my attention to this practice.

The perception of age is another subtle way in which Amigoni differentiates Farinelli from the other man in the portrait. When Amigoni painted the portrait around 1750–1752, Farinelli would have been approximately forty-five years old. In the painting, however, Farinelli displays no signs of age—he clearly lacks wrinkles around the eyes and forehead. His skin is pale—another trait typical of most *castrati*—and there is no sign of facial hair, which contrasts with the shadows of regrowth on both Metastasio’s and Amigoni’s faces.²²⁸ Farinelli’s skin instead appears powdery, almost to suggest a layer of stage makeup on his face, reminding the viewer that his prestigious status is linked to his identity and career in opera. These distinctions in skin tone and complexion are especially heightened when contrasted with Amigoni, whose skin appears ruddy with dark shading, including lines around the forehead, eyes, and jawline

Farinelli’s skin is as smooth and pristine as Teresa’s. Furthermore, unlike the two men and the page, whose bodies are completely clothed, Farinelli’s wrists, neck, and chest are exposed—similar to Teresa, whose chest, neck, and forearms are also uncovered. These identifiers, such as his pale skin, dress, exposed neck and chest, demure posture, and lack of a beard, are noticeable in other portraits of Farinelli by Amigoni and different artists and are consistent with visual representations of *castrati* in general, including in an additional portrait of Farinelli by Amigoni, entitled *Portrait of Carlo Broschi, called Farinelli, Holding a Dove*, c. 1730-1739 (Fig. 41).

²²⁸ For the importance of beards and facial hair for early modern men, see Will Fisher, “The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 155–87.

All of these elements emphasize Farinelli's difference from the other sitters and imply a recognition, or even an acceptance, of Farinelli's bodily transformation. As a result, his differences become not only the markers of his socially and bodily constructed identity but also indicate his success through his juxtaposition with the other figures. Indeed, Farinelli's spatial position in the composition—between an intact and idealized woman and a self-portrait of the painter Amigoni—and the figuration of his body suggest an underlying acknowledgment of the *castrato's* identity somewhere between the poles of femininity and masculinity.

In addition to the placement of the figures around Farinelli, their interactions with him and their bodily gestures further reflect his in-between gender status. The exchanges between Amigoni, Farinelli, and Teresa are especially significant. Amigoni leans over Farinelli and rests his hand on his shoulder in a protective, almost paternal, gesture, while Farinelli reaches out to Teresa, his favorite pupil, in an act of support.²²⁹ By holding the sheet of music with her and reaching toward her shoulder, Farinelli performs the role of teacher, clearly illustrating his commitment to pedagogy and preserving a legacy of musicians who follow in his methods. By helping train Teresa, Farinelli also conveys his ability to understand and work with female sopranos, demonstrating his own command of the soprano role. It is also worth noting that while there has been speculation that the relationship between Farinelli and Teresa may have been romantic, there is no evidence to support this claim. It is my contention, however, that her role likely functioned more akin to a pseudo-heir or as a

²²⁹ Amigoni and Farinelli were close colleagues when they spent time together in London. Amigoni eventually took a position at the Spanish court, where Farinelli received the Order of Calatrava—most likely at the behest of the singer.

possible musical progeny for Farinelli. In showing his physical connection to Teresa in the painting, he is able to claim her as a signifier of his ability to participate in the male performance of fatherhood.²³⁰

Farinelli's close relationship to Teresa is accentuated by his bodily affinities to hers, as his pose, complexion, and coloring are overall more akin to Teresa's than they are to Amigoni's. Indeed, Farinelli's head leans to one side, an action coded as a gendered behavior in a time when men tended to present their head in a consistently vertical position, whereas women were more likely to be portrayed gracefully leaning to one side. These signs were associated with a gentle demeanor, submissiveness, or vulnerability. Farinelli's head posture, then, may allude not only to his closeness with Teresa but may also attribute to him a species of "femininity." Note that Farinelli's outstretched hand does not make physical contact with Teresa's body; close inspection reveals a layer of paint around his pinky finger, preventing direct contact with Teresa's shoulder. If intentional, this lack of touch could suggest Farinelli's inability to fully connect with women in normative society, as *castrati* were prohibited from marrying.²³¹ The tactile separation also reminds us that *castrati* were not quite women themselves.

²³⁰ For more information on the conjecture that Farinelli had a romantic relationship with Teresa and possibly other female singers, see Desler, "'The Little that I Have Done': 222–23. Desler suggests that Metastasio made "playful allusions to [Teresa] in his letters to [Farinelli], and her inclusion in the portrait group among Farinelli's most intimate friends...attest to his fondness for Castellini," 233. She goes on to say that Farinelli may have originally misidentified Teresa as Faustina Bordoni when he showed the painting to Burney. See Burney, *Italian Tour*, 220.

²³¹ There is one rare exception, to my knowledge, of a *castrato*, Bartolomeo Sorlisi, who successfully received permission to marry a woman from his local church on the grounds that he could "render the marital debt." See Mary E. Frandsen, "'Eunuchi conjugium': The Marriage of a Castrato in Early Modern Germany," *Early Music History* 24 (2005), 53–124, especially 55.

Amigoni also exploits color to underscore the negotiation of gendered identities. For example, the page's presentation of Amigoni's palette shows his use of six primary colors that have been adeptly mixed and blended. Layers of white, and shades of rose, blue, and verdigris dominate Amigoni's composition, except for the deep red of Farinelli's medal that lies on his chest at the center of the picture. Metastasio and the court page wear the most saturated hues of blue, gray, and rose red. The page's costume, as well as Teresa's dress and Farinelli's collar and coat, are all accented in the same shade of blue. These choices function as deliberate commentaries on the identities of the sitters. While each figure at the periphery of the scene represents an extreme, either a matured adult male or a prepubescent, pre-gendered child, they are linked through the artist's use of color and variation of tone.

Farinelli and Teresa are painted with the closest color scheme. Each is rendered with layers of white for the areas surrounding their legs and arms, shades of rose around the chest, and accents of blue around the elbows or forearms, and chest or neck. The use of a more highly saturated rose for Farinelli's coat solidifies his place in the middle of the spectrum: he is somewhere between Teresa, who is completely woman, and the page boy, whose sword and coat of arms on his dress—which signify that he likely stands to inherit the family line—firmly establish his identity as not a *castrato*, and imply he will grow up as an intact male.

The negative space between Farinelli's legs indicates a secondary level of meaning. From his knees to his nearly crossed ankles is a diamond-like hollowness suggestive of a vaginal-shaped void, similar to the shape that Veluti's costume produced in the aforementioned print. This absence implicitly signals the *castrato's*

lack of generative capabilities, as at that time the testicles were associated with procreative potency rather than the phallus.²³² In fact, Farinelli seems to be deliberately making this shape between his legs through the unnatural curve of his right leg and its placement in front of his left leg. His legs almost cross at the ankles, a period gesture of femininity. This association was clearly not lost on contemporary viewers, nor was it a conceit particular to Amigoni, as the *castrato*'s anatomical deficiency was satirized prints in prints using the trope of a "lack or void"—synonymous with the vagina, and visualized in a 1796 engraving by John Nixon, for example (Fig. 42). Within this context, Farinelli's likeness and spatial proximity to Teresa do not dispute his masculine attributes but align him more closely with notions of womanhood than an "intact" man on a gendered spectrum.

In Amigoni's group portrait, as well as in single portraits of Farinelli, there is little trace of the visibly deformed *castrato* body displayed in caricatures. Importantly, though, Amigoni does not altogether negate Farinelli's identity as a *castrato*. Instead, he calls attention to it through subtler means, which only a beholder familiar with *castrati* would likely recognize. In so doing, Amigoni directs the viewer to decode the ways in which he defuses the same elements that are otherwise harnessed to mock *castrati*, such as showing Farinelli seated, yet still clearly taller than Amigoni, if he were standing. The conventional use of celebratory material attributes also calls attention to Farinelli's exceptional status, including the sheet of music he holds, the untied scroll of music at the hemline of Teresa's skirt, and the

²³² See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, especially 114–48. For a more recent addition that complicates these issues further, see Simons, *Sex of Men*.

Order of Calatrava medal around his neck. Compared to other representations of Farinelli or other *castrati* as single figures, however, this portrait also relies on Farinelli's visual approximations to his company to distinguish him as a *castrato* and an exceptional figure. In designing a new and complex composition, Amigoni extended the recognition of Farinelli's identity beyond a *castrato* to that of an exceptionally successful *castrato*, surrounding him with equals in singing, composing, and diplomacy, signifying all the alternative ways in which Farinelli enacts a form of masculinity beyond siring a male heir. And while limited information prohibits a complete reconstruction of the hanging of this painting and its display within the larger context of his villa's artistic program, it is clear from his will and testament that works of great importance to Farinelli, such as paintings of his Spanish patrons, were proudly displayed for such visitors as Charles Burney.

2.6: Conclusion

This chapter has examined the phenomenon of *castrati* and how they were able to offer through their exceptional voices an alternative to the "male as progenitor" paradigm that defined notions of masculinity at the time. As such, *castrati* reflected the malleability of early modern masculinity whereby one could still perform as male without all the necessary "parts" by enacting male-associated behaviors and traits. Though the *castrato's* perception in society and his status as a less-than-intact male did not go unchallenged, his bodily deformity was often a site for visual and textual ridicule and humor. Visual representations of Farinelli, from the group portrait by Jacopo Amigoni to caricatures by Pier Leone Ghezzi and Anton

Maria Zanetti, speak to the complicated identities *castrati* inhabited on and off the stage.

Farinelli's group portrait, in particular, reveals the multilayered strategies through which artists such as Amigoni subtly alerted period viewers to the *castrato*'s bodily difference and exceptional status. The group portrait subgenre permitted Amigoni the unprecedented ability to reference Farinelli's difference through comparison to other normative sitters. In contrast to caricatures, Amigoni's portrait both normalizes Farinelli and establishes him as different by calling attention to the qualities that identify him as a *castrato* and complicate his masculinity. By focusing on Farinelli's desire to be portrayed as a learned gentleman and a talented musician, Amigoni's portrait obfuscates the often-grotesque treatment of *castrati* seen in Ghezzi's and Zanetti's caricatures. And yet, Amigoni does not completely reject that elements that have contributed to Farinelli's career: his recognizably aberrant *castrato* body, subtly alluded to through his feminizing physique, his dress, pose, gestures, among other attributes. Instead of portraying Farinelli as a monster, however, Amigoni's portrait represents a means through which Farinelli can repurpose his bodily difference, transforming these markers of difference from attributes of derision to attributes of heroism—a celebration and acceptance of his bodily ambiguity. Thus, Amigoni's depiction of Farinelli—surrounded by his closest colleagues and collaborators—visually demonstrates how song could be just as powerful as semen in shaping identity.

Chapter Three: A Martyr's Mastectomy: Saint Agatha's Breast Amputation, Gender Transformation, and Restoration in Giovanni Andrea Coppola's *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*²³³

In the previous chapter, I explored visual representations of *castrati* and contextualized portrayals of their physical aberrance within medical and social discourses on ambiguously gendered bodies. In both the case of *castrati* and Chapter One's discussion of hirsutes, their difference hinged on physiological alterations to a previously gender-conforming body. The castration procedure, for instance, changed the distribution of hormones in the *castrato*'s body, preventing him from fathering children and altering his external appearance. Hirsutism, when acquired later in life, likewise led to a hormonal imbalance, causing excessive hair growth in a male-patterned formation or all over a majority of the body. Critical to each subject's transformation, then, was the removal or alteration of bodily elements essential to a conforming identity—namely a *castrato*'s testicles and a hirsute's excessive hair. The aim of this next chapter is to build upon these previous explorations of the relationship between internal and external change by examining the consequences of a bodily transformation that is ultimately reversed.

²³³ A corollary to this chapter's study of visual representations of Saint Agatha's martyrdom is her role as an intercessor for worshippers suffering from breast cancer. In researching this chapter, it has become ever clearer how this disease—in all its different forms—has impacted the lives of its victims and their families for centuries. Indeed, it is difficult to find someone today who has not been directly or indirectly touched by cancer. I dedicate this accounting of Agatha's story to my mother, Joanne Browning, my father Ted Berkowitz, to my late uncle, Michael Berkowitz, my father-in-law Nicholas Mandravelis, and to the late Kevin Longenbach, all of whom are fighting or have fought battles against cancer. Their perseverance through trying times recalls Agatha's own strength of body and mind in the face of evil. It feels only fitting that this chapter developed during the breast cancer awareness month of October.

It examines the subject of Saint Agatha, an early Christian virgin martyr whose breasts are amputated and then subsequently restored through a spiritual intervention. By extending the problem of gender ambiguity and difference to the realm of religious imagery, this chapter aims to uncover how the discourse of ambiguity pervades all representations of the human form, be they earthly or otherworldly. At the core of this examination is the role of the breast as an external marker of female identity. Compared to the *hirsute* and the *castrato*, the radical anatomical change of removing Agatha's breasts occurred on the exterior of her body, often visually portrayed with multiple witnesses to the drama unfolding. On a broader level, this chapter also hopes to bridge a gap in the scholarly treatment of medical and religious ideologies in the period by demonstrating the overlapping and mutually informing relationship between medical and spiritual definitions of the body. Indeed, the veneration of Saint Agatha often linked her breast mutilation to the suffering of women with breast disease or breast cancer, infirmities understood as distinct from other forms of cancer in the period.

This dissertation purposefully closes with the exploration of Saint Agatha as her case not only offers an opportunity to consider the impact of a reversed transformation but also to shift from examining portraits from life to religious altarpieces and other objects of visual and material culture. A vast and significant area of the early modern art market, religious works undoubtedly occupied different spaces and functions in society than the semiprivate portraits of Farinelli and Magdalena Ventura—from issues of decorum and display context to patronage and reception. And yet, while certain restrictions placed on religious—specifically

Catholic—imagery in the seventeenth century, following the Council of Trent’s decrees on art (1545–1563), shaped some of the choices on subject matter and interactions between artists, patrons, and viewers as compared to other artistic genres, these restrictions also arguably solicited a range of bodily manifestations beyond the level of believability expected of earthly representations.²³⁴ Consideration of representations of Saint Agatha, therefore, must remain sensitive to the intended message behind such works, noting that the expectations governing the previous two chapters’ examinations need not necessarily apply to the iconography and multilayered meanings inherent in depictions of martyred and miraculously healed saints.

To investigate these questions, this chapter analyzes Giovanni Andrea Coppola’s *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, 1650, an altarpiece for the Cathedral of Saint Agatha in Gallipoli—a small town in the region of Puglia, Italy—as its primary case study in order to explore how these issues of Agatha’s transformation manifested in visual form (Fig. 6). The altarpiece represents the titular early Christian virgin undergoing the moment of torture for which she is most well-known: the amputation of her breasts. The vertical composition presents Agatha in the center of the scene, framed by a large barrel vault and vibrant blue background. Upon first glance, the painting conforms to general iconographic conventions for depicting this disturbing act of mutilation from the saint’s life: multiple onlookers gather in shock and horror as they witness the two torturers flanking Agatha, her chest exposed, red and white

²³⁴ For the impact of the Council of Trent’s decrees on religious images, see John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013), and Alexander Nagel, *The Controversy of the Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

drapery covering the lower half of her body. The torturer on her left has already severed one breast—marked by a bright red and misshapen wound—and the second torturer looks at Agatha, poised with instrument in hand to remove her right breast. Agatha looks up as a number of putti and angelic figures descend from heaven, offering a crown and palm of martyrdom in anticipation of her heroic perseverance. And yet, while together these visual elements draw our gaze toward Agatha's body, the arrangement of the composition, figures, and use of color also bring our attention to the space above Agatha's head, where the torturer on her left dangles the severed body part by the nipple, fresh blood dripping down onto Agatha's head. Though the painting's focus on Agatha's breasts is consistent with iconographic conventions of the time, the portrayal of her severed breast overhead is a significant departure, which—to my knowledge—has not been documented in any other painting from the period at this point in time, nor have its implications received adequate scholarly attention. I suggest that by highlighting Agatha's severed breast and the blood that flows from it onto her head, Coppola's altarpiece presents the isolated body part as equally important to the story as Agatha herself. Thus, her breast becomes a metaphorical symbol—akin to a second crown of martyrdom or the dove of the holy spirit—and the means through which she is transformed from an earthly to a spiritual entity, as if baptized by her own blood.

A consideration of this understudied altarpiece provides an opportunity to further investigate how paintings from this period conveyed the affective role of images, with particular attention paid to the role of gender in shaping discourses of bodily transformation and viewer engagement. To explore these ideas, I examine the

intersection of religious and medical understandings of the female body and breast disease; how this is reflected in the circumstances surrounding the commission and execution of the altarpiece; and how these attitudes on the female body and breast disease are manifested pictorially to bring the worshipper's attention back to Agatha's altered body and severed breast, which—seen from below—permits direct and active engagement.

Expanding the discussion of bodily ambiguity to portrayals of Saint Agatha, then, permits an exploration into how depictions of her breast mutilation, like the *castrato*'s testicular mutilation, problematized or added an additional layer of meaning to her eventual restoration and ascension to heaven. Agatha's experience signifies a double transformation: from an intact to a less-than-intact woman, and back again, and from an earthly human being to a canonized saint. Artists tasked with depicting the saintly body, especially in cases such as Agatha's, where the removal of sexed body parts was central to the narrative, had to negotiate the paradox of portraying saints as recognizably corporeal human beings while still referencing their elevated states through attributes alluding to their stories, such as the addition of wings for angels.²³⁵ In examining the visual elements that differentiate Agatha's portrayal from the previous cases, this chapter reveals the extent to which issues of difference and gender ambiguity extended beyond the debates over physical likeness

²³⁵ I am grateful to Meredith J. Gill for sharing with me her presentation "Sex and the Spirit: Angels and Gender," from the 2016 Renaissance Society of America conference. In it, she discusses the topic of angels' gender (or if they have a gender) in visual and contextual analyses of several artworks from the mid-fourteenth- to sixteenth century. For more on the iconography of angels, see Meredith J. Gill, *Angels and the Order of Heaven in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

and exaggeration in portraits of hirsutes and *castrati*. As such, it offers new insights into the early modern body and the prevalence of discourses on gender conventions and ambiguity across subject and genre.

In viewing this painting today, it is not hard to imagine that its visual drama and emphasis on the body, blood, and torture of Agatha would have awed all spectators at the time of its creation. Yet the altarpiece might have held special resonance for viewers (including lay worshippers and members of religious communities) who had a personal relationship with Agatha not just in her role as the city's patron saint but in her position as an intercessor for sufferers of breast disease. Though breast cancer had been understood since antiquity, it was not until the seventeenth century, and after the Council of Trent's decrees on the importance of images, that we see a correlation between the graphic portrayal of the physical suffering of saints and their secular counterparts. Agatha's case, then, presents an exceptional opportunity to consider the role of medical, social, and religious attitudes in shaping artistic portrayals of her bodily transformation.

This chapter considers how formal and compositional elements—particularly the gazes and gestures of the women in the painting—evoke empathy and act as an instructional model for viewers, enabling them to connect with Agatha's bodily trauma and triumph over torture. I argue that in doing so, the painting not only conveys the artist's technical skill and satisfies the patron's desire to honor and legitimize his associations with the city's patron saint, but more significantly, it signals the importance of Agatha's wounded body and amputated breasts through their role as points of entry into the picture plane, whereby the viewer is encouraged

to linger on Agatha's mutilated form. In addition, by showing her exposed and amputated chest, Agatha's gender identity—and arguably, its ambiguity—is rendered all the more explicit. Contrary to other social identifiers of gender such as clothing, jewelry, body language, or the arrangement of hair, the display or the lack of biologically associated body parts such as breasts implied a quick and indisputable association with the female or male gender. Consequently, the presentation or absence of breasts on Agatha's figure serves as one of the first indicators as to whether a viewer was looking at a male, female, or ambiguously gendered body.

Exploring these moments where Agatha's body is less than completely female permits reconsideration of what constituted a female body in the early modern period, as Agatha's lack of breasts signifies neither an automatic reassignment to the male gender nor an “ungendering,” as previous scholars have suggested.²³⁶ Instead, I argue her gender—in the moments during and immediately following her breast amputation—exists somewhere in between, allowing bodies to be understood as in flux or as unstable entities capable of change, alteration, and transformation. That Agatha's breasts need to be restored, and that scenes of her torture typically display

²³⁶ For the argument that Agatha and other female saints “become male,” when their bodies are mutilated, see Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), 53–77; Martha Easton, “Saint Agatha and the Sanctification of Sexual Violence,” *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1991): 83–118, 102; Elizabeth Castelli, “‘I will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity,” in *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 24–49; and Eileen Marie Harney, Chapter Two: “Saint Agatha of Catania: Breast Amputation and ‘Becoming Male,’” in “The Sexualized and Gendered Tortures of Virgin Martyrs in Medieval and English Literature,” PhD diss., (University of Toronto, 2008): 25–84. For a discussion of female saints as androgynous, see Gabriella Zarri, “Living Saints: A Typology of Female Sanctity in the Early Sixteenth Century,” in Daniel Borstein and Roberto Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9.

one breast still attached to her body, suggests the necessity that she retain some marker of gender identity. Yet this also implies a vulnerability to the construct of gender and its reliance on such markers in order for gender to be recognized. Expanding beyond previous claims that Agatha either becomes male or ungendered allows us to question how moments of bodily vulnerability actually challenged notions on the rigidity or stability of gender binaries in the early modern period.

3.1: Saint Agatha's "Forced Mastectomy"

The popularity of paintings that depict early Christian martyr saints—both in the form of public altarpieces and private devotional objects—stems in part from the opportunity these subjects presented artists and patrons to portray the human body in a variety of states, poses, and contexts. The decrees on the importance of images following the Council of Trent further promoted the idea that sacred art should inspire the viewer through dramatic scenes and emotional vitalism, which stemmed from the human figure and its capacity for active engagement.

Concurrent with these developments was increased interest in the cult of saints as intercessors with the worshipper and Christ, along with devotion to the Cult of the Virgin Mary, in part sparked by the sanctioning of belief in the Immaculate Conception.²³⁷ Scholars have examined this period from the mid-sixteenth through the seventeenth century as a time of specific investment in the veneration of female

²³⁷ For a discussion of some views on the Immaculate Conception, or the belief in the purity of the Virgin Mary's own birth, and how it, in part, informed period ideas regarding the praising of the Virgin Mary and her relationship to Christ, see Kim E. Butler, "The Immaculate Body in the Sistine Ceiling," *Art History* 32 (April 2009): 250–89.

saints, especially early Christian virgin martyrs. Although gender is employed as a marker of identity in stories from the lives of all saints, it is arguably nowhere more palpable nor more explicitly integral to the plot and outcome of a saint's life than it is with female saints. In accounts from Perpetua to Lucy, from Barbara to Agnes, the female subject's physical form and behavior are identified as attributes of femininity, such as beauty and chastity. The events surrounding their martyrdom are also often tied to their gender by representing the cause of their torture and martyrdom. For instance, if women were deemed beautiful, and thus were propositioned, they were raped as an attack on their virtue.

Saint Agatha (ca. 231–251 CE) is but one example of the many female virgin martyrs venerated in the early modern period for their willingness to die for their faith and for their commitment to upholding their honor through the preservation of their sexually untouched physical bodies. According to Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, a popular thirteenth-century compendium on the *vite*, or lives, of saints, Agatha's story of "forced mastectomy" begins when a Roman consul, Quintianus, propositions her.²³⁸ She refuses his advances on the grounds that she has already committed herself as a *Sponsa Christi*, or a bride of Christ, and thus intends to preserve her virginity. Infuriated by her answer, he commands her to perform a sacrifice to pagan gods, which goes against her Christian beliefs, and she vehemently refuses. Quintianus sentences her to live in a brothel in hopes of corrupting her body and forcing her to accept his demands. After she resists again, he orders her breasts to

²³⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 154–57.

be twisted and then severed. Agatha is denied medical care and left to die in a jail cell. Saint Peter then visits her in the guise of a doctor and restores her breasts through the word of God.

Voragine's retelling of Agatha's heroics is worth quoting at some length, both for his interpretation of her actions, which illustrates the central role her physical body played in the story, and for his portrayal of Agatha's rhetorical witticisms and her acknowledgment—even willingness—to be mutilated if it would bring her closer to God. He begins by describing the positive attributes of Agatha's upbringing and comportment, noting:

The virgin Agatha was highborn and a great beauty, living in the city of Catania where she worshipped God at all times and in all holiness. Quintianus, the consular official in Sicily, who was baseborn, libidinous, greedy, and a worshipper of idols, was determined to get her in his grasp... [;] her beauty would satisfy his libido...and being a pagan, he would force her to sacrifice to the gods.²³⁹

Voragine further describes how Agatha quickly and unequivocally rejects Quintianus's demands. Eventually, Quintianus demands she make a choice: "Either sacrifice to the [pagan] gods or submit to torture!"²⁴⁰ Agatha replies: "These pains are my delight!"²⁴¹ Agatha's embrace of anticipated physical pain and torture further angers Quintianus, who orders

...the executioners to twist her breast for a long time and then cut it off. Said Agatha: "Impious, cruel, brutal tyrant, are you not ashamed to cut off from a woman that which your mother suckled you with? In my soul I have breasts untouched and unharmed, with which I nourish all my sense, having consecrated them to the Lord from infancy."²⁴²

²³⁹ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 154.

²⁴⁰ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 155.

²⁴¹ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 155.

²⁴² Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 155.

After Agatha's breasts are forcibly removed, Quintianus insists Agatha be brought to a jail cell and forbids her from receiving medical attention to attend to her wounds.²⁴³ While in jail, a man in the guise of an elderly doctor and accompanied by a small boy with a light visits Agatha. He announces that he has come to heal her wounds, proclaiming: "I saw that your breasts could be healed."²⁴⁴ Agatha refuses his treatment, stating that it would be shameful to apply any ointment or remedy to her body, but the man persists, reassuring her that he is a Christian. Steadfast, Agatha says: "How could I be ashamed, since you are so old and a grandfather, and I am so cruelly mangled that no one could possibly desire me?"²⁴⁵ Here, Voragine's retelling highlights another theme critical to the alteration of Agatha's status as a previously conforming and intact woman: the association of her breast mutilation with a newfound undesirability. The removal of her breasts—an element so critical to her femininity, as will be discussed later in this chapter—reverses her "great beauty" that Voragine described at the beginning of her narrative. Her diminished or, perhaps in Agatha's words, lack of, beauty, signals her transformation. Like the changes to the

²⁴³ It is worth noting that it is unclear from Voragine and other period accounts if both breasts are twisted and removed or just one, as Voragine, for example, first describes an executioner twisting "her breast" (singular) and then quotes Agatha as saying "in my soul I have breasts" (plural). Visual representations of Agatha, as will be discussed later, also differ in the portrayal of the removal of one or both breasts. For clarity, this chapter will henceforth refer to the removal of both of Agatha's breasts, interpreting Voragine's earlier mention as more of a product of omission to focus the story's progression—twisting one then the next—rather than implying that only one breast was twisted and removed. Magdalena Elizabeth Carrasco and Andrew Beresford also briefly touch upon this issue with no clear conclusions. See Magdalena Elizabeth Carrasco, "An Early Illustrated Manuscript of the Passion of St. Agatha (Paris, Bibl. Nat., MS lat. 5594)," *Gesta* 14 (1985): 19–32, 25, and Andrew Beresford, *The Severed Breast: The Legends of Saints Agatha and Lucy in Medieval Castilian Literature* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta-Hispanic Monographs), 2010, 114.

²⁴⁴ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 155.

²⁴⁵ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 155.

castrato's body after surgery, I suggest that Agatha becomes a less-than-intact woman rather than converting to a man or becoming unsexed in general.²⁴⁶

Voragine's retelling continues with the old man eventually sharing with Agatha that she should permit him to heal her because he is an apostle of Jesus Christ and was sent by Christ to help her, adding: "Know that in his name you are healed."²⁴⁷ After this exchange, the old man, now identified as Saint Peter, vanishes. Voragine describes Agatha: "[She] knelt in thanksgiving, and found that all her hurts were healed and her breast restored to her bosom."²⁴⁸ In the description of both Agatha's mutilation and subsequent restoration, her breasts are the focus more than anything else, whether they are held by pincers, about to be removed, or displayed on a salver as attributes of her martyrdom. This visual emphasis suggests that the importance of Agatha's breasts lies not only in helping viewers recognize her and recall the critical moments from her *vita* but also in their potential to signify a broader association with definitions of womanhood and the female gender on a physical or bodily level.

Later on, Quintianus discovers Agatha's miraculous restoration and orders her "to be rolled naked over potsherds and live coals strewn on the ground."²⁴⁹ An earthquake simultaneously shakes the city, killing two of Quintianus's counselors,

²⁴⁶ For an argument that "virgin martyrs 'become male' during their *passiones*," see Eileen Marie Harney, "The Sexualized and Gendered Tortures of Virgin Martyrs in Medieval English Literature" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2008), iii. This line of thinking in regard to "gender-bending" saints is part of a relatively recent discourse that also considers the "femininity" of male saints, including reading Saint George as a "virgin martyr saint," a title typically assigned to female saints, and consistent discussion of the erotically charged depictions of Saint Sebastian's seminude body in terms of both the female and the male gaze.

²⁴⁷ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 156.

²⁴⁸ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 156.

²⁴⁹ Voragine, *Golden Legend*, 156.

and prompting the populace to view Agatha's torture as a sign of wrongdoing. Frustrated, Quintianus orders Agatha to be returned to jail, where she prays for her suffering to end. Upon finishing her prayer, Agatha passes away.

The veneration of Agatha's life, especially her perseverance in the face of evil, continues today in Catholic tradition, particularly in southern Italy and in the Sicilian city of Catania, where she was believed to be born. Agatha is still called upon as the patron saint of breast cancer, nurses, and bells across the world. Her depictions in visual art from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reference her strength of body and of mind. Giovanni Andrea Coppola's altarpiece represents one of the most dramatic and shocking portrayals of the specifically gendered violence inflicted on Agatha's body, and in so doing, celebrates her exalted status as a virgin martyr saint.²⁵⁰

3.2: Early Modern Definitions of the Breast and Breast Cancer

In order to explore the significance of the breast and its role in signifying gender identity for Agatha and for women in general, this chapter first asks how breasts functioned as necessary elements of a woman's normative gender identity, whether explicitly visible or alluded to under clothing. In the case of images that portray the moment of Agatha's amputation, does her breasts' removal mean that she is a less-than-intact woman? If so, does this suggest she "becomes male," or can she

²⁵⁰ Other female saints such as Barbara, Dorothy, and Saint Sophia's daughter Fides, have had their breasts removed, but none is so directly signaled out in art as Agatha. For discussion of other female saints who have had their breasts amputated, see Kirsten Wolf, "The Severed Breast: A Topos in the Legends of Female Virgin Martyr Saints," *Artiklar* 112 (1997): 97–112, especially 98n5, which specifically engages with Old Norse-Icelandic textual sources on saints' lives.

be still considered a full woman without her breasts? What does this say about the breasts' previously believed primacy in creating and reinforcing female and feminine identity if their removal does not affect the sense of being female?

Scholars have long noted the importance of the breast and its multivalent associations with female identity in the early modern period, particularly with the nourishment of both the physical body and the spiritual.²⁵¹ Indeed, the display of the bare breast in art, from images of sensual goddesses to the *Madonna Lactans* and stories of Roman Charity, offered viewers an opportunity to contemplate the many, often overlapping, roles of the breast. And yet through the fluids associated with the physiology of the breast—blood and milk—and their articulation in images, artists also alluded to the breast's overall association with the experience of being a woman, whose identity, whether—put generally—as a wife, mother, and even as a bride of Christ, was inextricably linked to her physical body and specifically to the role of her breasts in fulfilling these identities. Thus, the removal of a subject's breasts had the potential for rendering her identification as a woman vulnerable.

In addition to these connotations of the breast, a broader cultural discourse surrounding the treatment of breast disease began to take shape in the seventeenth century. Since antiquity, cancer of the breast was understood as a disease distinct from other forms of cancer, often attributed to an imbalance of the bodily humors.²⁵²

²⁵¹ See the numerous publications by Jutta Gisela Sperling, including Sperling, ed., *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations: Images, Rhetorics, Practices*. Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); *Roman Charity: Queer Lactations in Early Modern Visual Culture* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016); and Miles, *A Complex Delight: A Complex Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350–1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²⁵² The Greek physician Hippocrates termed the word “cancer” or carcinoma (*karkinoma* in Greek) based on cancer tumors' crab-like appearance of a central body and extensions resembling crab legs.

Ancient practitioners have noted, however, that there was no universal cause for acquiring the disease nor a method for remedying it. Hippocrates, for example, suggested cancer of the breast developed from hard, nonpurulent lesions under the skin that continued to harden over time. He believed “hidden cancers” formed from these lesions, and noted it was better to avoid invasive surgery and to only use surgical methods to provide patient relief or a potential cure for ulcerative cancer lesions.²⁵³ Galen believed cancer was linked to an unhealthy diet and that tumors likely developed from excretions of bile in the liver, warning that “if bile is not cleansed through the spleen, the veins become congested, thereby creating tumors, [which] explained why women in menopause are likely to be affected by breast cancer and why tumors [that] are black in color are the most grave.”²⁵⁴

While much of antiquity’s diagnostic theories informed the medical teachings of the early modern period—particularly in the sixteenth-century studies of such practitioners as Andreas Vesalius, Ambroise Paré, and Gabriele Fallopio—seventeenth-century developments in surgical practice provided physicians with greater opportunity to treat breast cancer through the method of mastectomy, or complete removal of the breast and breast tissue.²⁵⁵ The procedure generally consisted

For more on the development of diagnosis and treatment in the ancient period and over time, see W. A. Cooper, “The History of the Radical Mastectomy,” *Annals of Medical History* 3 (1941): 36–54, and for proposed visual representations of breast cancer in the early modern period, see Raffaella Bianucci, Antonio Perciaccante, Philippe Charlier, Otto Appenzeller, and Donatelli Lippi, “Earliest Evidence of Malignant Breast Cancer in Renaissance Paintings,” *Lancet Oncology* 19 (February 2018): 166–67.

²⁵³ Konstantinos A. Ekmektoglous, Theodors Xanthos, Vasiliis German, and Georgios C. Zografos, “Breast Cancer: From the Earliest Times Through to the End of the 20th Century,” *European Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Reproductive Biology* 145 (2009): 3–8, especially 4.

²⁵⁴ Ekmektoglous et al., “Breast Cancer,” 4.

²⁵⁵ Vesalius, Paré, and Fallopio all participated in early developments in the practice of surgically removing breast cancer, each employing different methods for the excising of the malignant tumor and

of making an incision over the top of the diseased breast using forceps or a curved needle. Treatises such as Johannes Scultetus's surgical manual and catalog of surgical instruments, *Armamentarium chirugicum*, published in 1645, illustrated the general practice of removing a patient's diseased breast (Fig. 43).²⁵⁶ In three progressive scenes, Scultetus's surgical manual depicts a woman with her head covered and her garment pulled down to her abdomen. Here, the emphasis is as much on portraying the process of extraction and the use of different instruments as it is on visualizing the resulting fluids and wounds post-surgery. In the last two scenes, the amputated organ, labeled number 3, is held up as visual proof of the operation, with droplets of blood overlapping the second arm. In the final scene, the subject's wounded chest is in full view while a hand reaches to complete the operation and cauterize the wound.

Contrary to the calm demeanor of the subject, who appears to be a nun or noblewoman based on her garment, an engraving by Romeyn de Hooghe depicts the patient in perhaps a more realistic manner with her mouth agape and arms outstretched in a pose of visceral agony (Fig. 44). Given this context, it is likely that Agatha's identity as the patron saint of breast cancer carried profound meaning for viewers of Coppola's equally dramatic altarpiece, not just for local worshippers but

for closing the wound—most frequently in the form of cautery. See Ekmektoglous et al., "Breast Cancer," 4.

²⁵⁶ Johannes Scultetus, *Armamentarium chirugicum* (Venetiis, Comb & La Nou, 1645), cited in Daniel de Moulin, *A Short History of Breast Cancer* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 137. Scultetus received a degree in medicine from the University of Padua in 1621 and continued to practice medicine in Ulm, the city of his birth. His treatise was translated into multiple languages and published in different editions. See Michael B. Shimkin, *Contrary to Nature: Being an Illustrated Commentary on Some Persons and Events of Historical Importance in the Development of Knowledge Concerning Cancer* (Washington, DC: US Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1977), 65–66.

also for Coppola, the doctor-turned-painter, who would have had firsthand knowledge of the latest medical treatments of the time.

In addition to medical treatment, patients and their families would seek spiritual aid through the support of interceding saints such as Agatha—reminding us that physical and otherworldly healing were part of the same belief system during this period. By leaving votive offerings at a saint’s altar or shrine, people would enlist saints to intercede on their behalf. Votive objects often took the form of anatomical body parts and were rendered in a range of materials including papier-mâché, wax, and silver.²⁵⁷ In each case, they served as “proxies for the worshipper’s body” and represented the votary’s appeal to a saint for the alleviation of suffering or for protection from danger.²⁵⁸ The physical act of leaving an object at a holy site also functioned as a public and visual manifestation of the votary’s belief in the intercessor’s ability to perform a miracle, signifying a devotional dialogue between the votary, intercessor, and other visitors to the site.

Examples of silver breasts from the Diocese Museum in Gallipoli convey the importance of Gallipoli for the veneration of Agatha and her role as an intercessor for healing diseases of the breast (Fig. 45).²⁵⁹ The expensive material used in these objects also reflected a high level of artistic skill through attention to rendering a

²⁵⁷ Megan Holmes, “Renaissance Perspectives on Classical Antique Votive Practices,” in *Ex Voto: Votive Giving Across Cultures*, ed. Ittai Weinryb (New York: Bard Graduate Center, 2016), 106–39, especially 107.

²⁵⁸ Syson et al., *Like Life*, 215.

²⁵⁹ Other examples of anatomical casts made of wax and metal (*immagini*) are found in Loreto. Visitors to Loreto and elsewhere by the mid-sixteenth century, for example, would encounter a plethora of these objects hanging from rafters and suspended from tie beams spanning chapels. See Fredrika Jacobs, *Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 16.

sense of texture and tactility, and as such “were perceived to reflect the donor’s illustrious status.”²⁶⁰ The examples portray breasts in a variety of shapes and sizes—both in pairs and as single entities—suggesting that some may have been designed or adapted to resemble the purchaser. One example pays particular attention to the portrayal of texture, suggesting a tactile quality to some of these objects (Fig. 46). Like the breast dangling over Agatha’s head and the almost three-dimensional effect of her wound, these votives suggest an independence to the breast, which is able to exist and convey meaning separate from that of the host’s body. In this scenario, the bloodied wound itself functions as a visual analogy of sorts for the three-dimensional ex-votos of breasts that visitors to Agatha’s shrine would offer her to heal their tumor or that of a loved one.

These medical and religious contexts of the breast are accentuated by the formal elements of Coppola’s composition and draw the worshipper’s attention to Agatha’s “forced mastectomy.” While it is difficult to ascertain who had direct and prolonged access to the altarpiece, its large scale and close proximity to the high altar in the left side of the transept, and the esteem of the artist and patron, suggest it would have been a highlight for visitors, especially on feast days and holidays. With this context elucidated, it is now possible to return to Coppola’s altarpiece and consider how formal elements such as the gazes and gestures of the figures present a model for meditating on Agatha’s torture, thus invoking the active participation of the viewer.

²⁶⁰ Jacobs, *Votive Panels*, 17.

3.3: Pictorial Conventions in Paintings of Saint Agatha

Paintings of Saint Agatha from the medieval period through the seventeenth century invoke the corporeal experience associated with the pain of breast disease, for, as Jill Burke notes, “images of the tortured body are central to Christian iconography—the Crucifixion being the symbolic referent for all these images.”²⁶¹ Artists often portrayed the most dramatic and violent episodes from her life in order to emphasize and render her suffering visually legible, especially the moment of anticipation just before her breasts are severed and her imprisonment when Saint Peter visits and restores her breasts. In addition, artists also focused on her restored body, portraying her as a martyred saint in a single-figure composition—typically displaying her amputated breasts on a plate as an attribute of her martyrdom.²⁶² Giovanni Cariani’s version, *Portrait of a Young Woman as Saint Agatha*, from 1516 of this less-dramatic type extends it further, however, by rendering subtle marks of blood at the bottom of the glass salver on which Agatha displays her breasts (Fig. 47). The saint is shown in Cariani’s painting with all the period markers of a beautiful woman: She is dressed in fine multi-colored and slashed brocades, and her hair is wrapped in a delicate veil. Yet, as Agatha’s right hand delicately caresses one of her

²⁶¹ Jill Burke, “Sex and Spirituality in 1500s Rome: Sebastiano del Piombo’s ‘Martyrdom of Saint Agatha,’” *Art Bulletin* 88 (September 2006): 482–95, 482. Burke also argues that these images often become hypersexualized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially as number of paintings on from this period focus on the twisting or clamping of Agatha’s nipples rather than on the act of severing her breast or breasts. This point is further complicated, however, in Coppola’s version, where there is a stark contrast between the one preserved breast, whose view is unobstructed and possibly available for the viewer’s gaze in a sensual context, and the concave bright red wound that marks the place of the already removed breast.

²⁶² Martha Easton discusses these trends in medieval illuminated manuscripts, where she notes that these narrative conventions were consistent throughout Europe. Martha Easton, “Saint Agatha and the Sanctification of Sexual Violence,” *Studies in Iconography* 16 (1994): 83–118.

amputated and subtly bloodied breasts on a glass salver, her left arm simultaneously draws the viewer's attention to her chest (Fig. 48). In so doing, her gesture creates shadows which suggest the latent presence of breast tissue, implying that the allusion of her "wholeness" was necessary for Agatha to be pictured as a beautiful and venerable woman.

In keeping with some of these aforementioned conventions, Giovanni Andrea Coppola's altarpiece portrays Agatha in the center of the composition, flanked by two male torturers and other witnesses to her punishment (Fig. 49). In artists' multi-figural works from the period, including Sebastiano del Piombo's and Francesco Gaurino's, at least one torturer is poised—instrument in hand—to twist or amputate one of Agatha's breasts (Figs. 50 & 51). The presence of multiple onlookers heightens the drama in the compositions. Their gestures and gazes, in almost every case, draw the viewer to Agatha's body and its ensuing mutilation. Coppola, however, portrays the moment after the amputation of her first breast, evoking unusual iconographic and symbolic references to the eucharist and baptism through the breast's position, grasped by the nipple overhead. Indeed, the only example of a work that references a similar iconography of the severed breast, grasped by the nipple, to my knowledge, derives from a fifteenth century Castilian altarpiece in the Chapel of the Alcázar of Segovia, in Spain (Figs. 52 – & 53).²⁶³ As I argue, the

²⁶³ As stated, the closest example, to my knowledge, of a similar iconography specifically of Agatha's bloodied breast held by the nipple appears in a large fifteenth century Castilian School seven-panel altarpiece currently in the Chapel of the Alcázar of Segovia, in Spain. The altarpiece portrays multiple scenes of visceral martyrdoms including a central panel depicting 'Santiago Matamoros' or Saint James the Moor-slayer on horseback, and a panel on the upper left of Saint Sebastian, with blood dripping down his body from arrow marks. The arguably most gruesome panel below Sebastian depicts Saint Agatha after her restoration. In one hand, she holds the palm of martyrdom, while in the

employment of the breast in this manner represents a visual interpretation of Agatha's bodily transformation from an intact woman to liminal less-than-intact figure, foreshadowing her transition from an earthly being to a saintly one. Coppola's rendition of the martyrdom also departs from Sebastiano's and Guarino's in its scenographic additions—such as the grand, barrel-vaulted architecture, vibrant blue sky, and ascending staircase populated by an overabundance of figures in the foreground and middle ground. The additional female participants, such as the figure at far right holding a metal object against her chest, and the woman to the lower right of Agatha, who looks up at her, clutching her own breast, signal the importance of Agatha's physical trauma for the viewer and act as models for experiencing the image.

3.4: Saint Agatha, Gallipoli, and Giovanni Andrea Coppola

Saint Agatha has been worshipped as a patron saint in the town of Gallipoli since the twelfth century. Her special relationship with the small Pugliese town began with the legend that her severed breast washed up on Gallipoli's shore while being transported from Constantinople to her birthplace in Catania. As a result of this miracle, she joined Saint Sebastian as patron saints of the city alongside the preexisting veneration of Saint Sebastian. Agatha's and Sebastian's associations with bodily suffering and disease—specifically with breast cancer and plague, respectively—suggest an emphasis on the relationship between spiritual and medical

other, she grasps her severed breast by the nipple as blood from the site of the wound spills down. Her other severed breast appears on the floor to her side. I am grateful to Theresa Kutasz Christensen for this reference.

healing of the body, and the cathedral's role as a space connecting the two, as their altars face one another in the arms of the transept (Fig. 54). And yet, compared to the depiction of Saint Sebastian by Nicola Malinconico in *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, c. 1715–1721, Agatha's bodily torture is on full display, whereas Sebastian's figure is unmarked by the arrows known to have pierced him (Fig. 55).

The extent of Gallipoli's devotion to Agatha is demonstrated by the decision to reconsecrate the cathedral in her name after it had fallen into disrepair during the seventeenth century.²⁶⁴ With funds donated by Giacomo Lazzari, an esteemed local doctor, the bishop of Gallipoli, Consalvo de Rueda, commissioned architects to update the facade and painters to decorate interior chapels (Fig. 56).²⁶⁵ For his own personal chapel in the left arm of the transept, Rueda turned to one of the most prominent local artists, Giovanni Andrea Coppola, to paint an altarpiece dedicated to the martyrdom of Saint Agatha.²⁶⁶ Completed by the summer of 1650, the painting is one of six large-scale altarpieces Coppola executed for the cathedral, including an *Assumption of the Virgin* for his own family chapel, which he negotiated in lieu of

²⁶⁴ The cathedral was originally dedicated to Saint John Chrysostom. See Antonio Cassiano, "La Cattedrale di Gallipoli," in *Guida al Museo Diocesano e alla Cattedrale di Gallipoli* (Bari: Mario Congedo Editore, 2011), 74. Noble families and confraternities also commissioned Coppola to paint other altarpieces for chapels in the cathedral, including *Il miracolo di San Francesco da Paola*, *l'Adorazione dei magi*, *Le Anime Purganti*, *l'Assunzione della Vergine*, and *San Giorgio*.

²⁶⁵ It likely that Rueda suggested the martyrdom of Saint Agatha as the subject matter, but it does not appear that he was involved in determining or designing the iconographical program for the altarpiece. These decisions were likely left to the artist, as he was already well established by the time he returned to Gallipoli from his travels across the Italian peninsula.

²⁶⁶ On the right side of the nave, Coppola executed *The Souls of Purgatory*, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, and *Saint George and the Dragon*, a work which, like the Saint. Agatha, pays unusual and exceptional attention to the articulation of breasts or breast-like tumors on the dragon (which was likely for the right arm of the transept, mirroring the *Martyrdom of Saint Agatha*, suggesting that the two works—one figuring the diminishing of a woman's bodily attributes and the other a proliferation of them—may have been intended to dialogue with one another).

payment for *Saint Agatha*, as seen in a diagram of the cathedral's altars after its reconsecration (Fig. 57).²⁶⁷

Coppola's career prior to this prestigious project is distinct from most seventeenth-century southern Italian artists. Born into a patrician family that collected art and supported advanced scholarly education, Coppola did not receive traditional studio training before pursuing an independent artistic career.²⁶⁸ He instead traveled to Naples, Rome, Florence, and Paris, where he was exposed to the latest artistic trends, theories, and practitioners of the time, many of which influenced figures in his altarpieces.²⁶⁹

Adding to Coppola's unconventional training is his studies as a medical doctor before devoting his life to the visual arts. From 1633 to 1636, he trained at the University of Naples, where he gained a foundational knowledge of the anatomy of the body, the diagnosis and treatment of well-known diseases, and the tools and instruments used for examination.²⁷⁰ Upon completing his degree, he returned to his hometown and became an active member of public life. He served as a salaried

²⁶⁷ For an analysis of the stylistic references to Michelangelo, Raphael, Caravaggio, and others, within the scenographic elements of the painting, see Lucio Galante, *Giovanni Andrea Coppola "picturae perquam studiosus,"* *Storia e Arte in Terra d'Otranto*. (Galatina, Italia: Mario Congedo Editore, 2011), 69–81.

²⁶⁸ Paola Renna, *Collezione Coppola* (Gallatina: Editrice Salentina, 2008): 11–12.

²⁶⁹ It is also during these travels where he was likely exposed to a number of artists, artworks, and styles outside of Gallipoli. Indeed, it is tempting to consider if his idea for the breast as the vehicle for Agatha's "baptism of blood" may have been inspired by Andrea del Verrocchio's *The Baptism of Christ*, c. 1472–75, Florence, in which the Baptist holds a glass cup over Christ's head. For other iconological references to cups and shields, see Anthony Colantuono, "The Cup and the Shield: Lorenzo Lippi, Torquato Tasso and Seventeenth-Century Pictorial Stylistics." *L'arme e gli amori: Ariosto, Tasso and Guarini in Late Renaissance Florence: Acts of an International Conference*. Florence, Villa I Tatti, (2004): 397–417.

²⁷⁰ An unpublished document from the notary Giovanni Sgura confirms correspondence between Coppola and *protomedico* Santorelli, in which Coppola mentions gifting the doctor fruit from Gallipoli. This correspondence suggests that Santorelli may be the doctor that Coppola trained under in Naples. Notaio Giovanni Sgura, 13 gennaio 1645, Gallipoli, f. 324, Archivio di Stato di Lecce.

physician and held the office of mayor from 1639 to 1640, all while receiving artistic commissions from clients in Gallipoli and Salento. The importance of his medical degree to his professional status, and its possible influence on the portrayal of Agatha's body, is underscored by one of the only paintings he signed, *Souls of Purgatory*, in which he referred to himself as "Doctor Phisicus, Patrizio, Pictuare Perquara Studiosus" (Fig. 58). This signature not only privileges his status as a doctor but also demonstrates his elevation of the fine arts to a studious and scholarly endeavor—perhaps aligned with the medical arts.

Despite Coppola's knowledge of anatomy and exposure to principles of dissection and surgery, Agatha's wounds, particularly the cavity in her chest from where her first breast was removed, appear wholly unnatural in shape, color, and perspective. I suggest here that based on the sensitivity to form with which he renders the musculature and movement of other bodies in the composition, this was not for lack of ability. Instead, this artifice represents an attempt, on a symbolic rather than purely representational level, to draw the viewer's attention to Agatha, her amputated breast, and the wound. It is thus through Coppola's status as a celebrated local painter and his connection to Gallipoli's devotion to Agatha's physical body that we might be able to reconcile the symbolic representation of her trauma with his medical knowledge and artistic experience. While it may be difficult for us today to resolve a male patron's and male artist's understanding and empathy for Agatha's specifically gendered assault, I would add that her story and her status as the city's patron saint offered each an opportunity to legitimize their own illustrious status in association with her devout faith and perseverance.

3.5: Experiencing the Body of Saint Agatha in Coppola's Altarpiece

It is perhaps the presence of female supplicants that offers the most compelling guide or model for viewer experience. While the left of the composition is generally occupied by men on horseback, the Roman consul, and Roman standard bearers, we find one kneeling female supplicant who, with her back exposed except for a translucent drapery, looks down at Agatha and reaches to touch her red drapery and, upon closer inspection, the subsequent blood that drips from it (Fig. 59). This act, similar to the apostle Thomas's touching of Christ's wound, suggests a correlation between the visual and corporeal experience of the painting: one is necessarily reminded of the physical pain and suffering Agatha endures through the supplicant's contact with Agatha's blood.

The figure to the lower right of this woman also provides a model for experiencing the painting. With her torso draped in a white garment, she too appears to be an intended focal point for the viewer. Almost mirroring Agatha in her profile pose and facial features, she looks up toward the saint with her hand over her own breast—perhaps serving as an analog for the restoration of Agatha's body once she is visited by Saint Peter. Both the gesture of touching of her own breast, and the figure who gazes directly out at the viewer, with a shield protecting her chest, exemplify the worshipper's possible somatic response to the painting. Through these acts of looking and touching, viewers are reminded of their own corporeal form and thus are encouraged to meditate on their connection to Agatha and her wounds as a sign of faith.

These witnesses bring our attention to Agatha's body, especially the wound from the removal of her first breast, and its position overhead, gripped delicately by the torturer so as to not obstruct it from view (Fig. 60). Coppola has rendered its interior visible through the use of a deep red hue on the right underside, adding to the illusion that we are viewing the severed breast from below and as firsthand witnesses to Agatha's torture. In this vein, the breast dangling over Agatha symbolizes both a chalice and a crown, alluding to her initiation into the ranks of saints, and to the act of baptism, whereby the water that would have once covered Christ is now Agatha's own flesh and blood. From this vantage point, we are also in closer proximity to the blood that gently drips in controlled, vertical lines onto her head. By highlighting the active role of Agatha's severed breast, this representation reflects the importance of her own body and bodily fluids for the act of transformation from an earthly to spiritual figure.

Coppola's portrayal of the blood dripping from Agatha's severed breast onto her head also signifies the organ's relationship to multiple bodily fluids, namely blood and milk, and their capacity to transform into one another. According to Rebecca Zorach, bodily substances in the early modern period were believed to be capable of transforming, "physically or metaphorically, into one another." Of milk and blood, she writes: "[T]hey [can] translate into one another in the body through processes of 'cooking,' digesting, and purifying, and in images of Christ suckling believers with the blood that flows from the wound in his side."²⁷¹ These associations

²⁷¹ Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, 28.

also hold true in a medical context, where a woman's breast milk was understood to be made from the body's blood.²⁷² It is in this context that the blood that flows from Christ's wounds and the milk that flows from Mary's breast are capable of providing the same form of physical and spiritual nourishment. Thus, as in images of Christ's crucifixion and Mary nursing, we find the same life-giving connotations and connection between sacrifice and fertility that are suggested in the severing of Agatha's breast—the single most defining element of her femininity.²⁷³

Yet, as viewers contemplate the horror of the events unfolding before them, Agatha does not meet their gaze, nor does she outwardly express the pain and fear that one imagines would accompany such an assault. While the direct object of her gaze is slightly ambiguous, in that she appears to be looking upward, implying an anticipation of her ascendance to heaven, she is actually gazing at her antagonist, the Roman consul who ordered her punishment. With her mouth slightly agape, it appears she is vocalizing one of the bold retorts from Voragine's account of her *vita*, with which this chapter began. By including this subtle detail, almost too difficult to discern, Coppola's composition succeeds in portraying Agatha as a defiant and triumphant female figure—her full story only ascertained through close and prolonged contemplation.

As a result of the altarpiece's composition, which conveys two different viewing experiences depending on the visitor's vantage point—from a far distance

²⁷² Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, 85.

²⁷³ See Jutta Gisela Sperling, "Squeezing, Squirting, Spilling Milk," 874. Agatha's relationship to Christ and the Virgin Mary may also be underscored by the Madonna of Fiori statue that currently resides in front of Agatha's altar in the cathedral during the month of May.

across the aisle, the scene reads as a beautiful classicizing vista, but up close, the drama and spectacle become decipherable—the painting and its architectural and cultural contexts solicit the active engagement of the viewer. For it is only when a viewer is in close proximity to the altar that details such as Agatha’s breast overhead, the torturer’s subtle, almost graceful grasp, and the dripping blood become visible. It is from this vantage point where we might infer that a female supplicant offering a votive to Agatha would experience the full scope and significance in the details of Coppola’s design. Indeed, the chapel in its totality underscores this notion of a triumphant, female-coded space with panels of Saints Apollonia, Lucy, Agnes, and Cecilia flanking the altarpiece, added years later (Fig. 61). In addition, Coppola’s portrayal of the dragon in the Saint George altarpiece—of which the original location within the cathedral is unknown, although it was probably for a chapel dedicated to the saint, which has since been demolished—has a multiplicity of mammary glands (Figs. 62 & 63). This striking detail may also be intended to be read in dialogue with the Agatha altarpiece depending on its original location within the artistic program and the dates of its commission and execution.²⁷⁴

Up to this point, Agatha’s bodily mutilation has been discussed primarily in terms of the events that precipitated her torture, the actual torture itself, and how Coppola’s depiction of the scene on a monumental scale meant to invoke an empathetic response from the beholder. Viewers are alerted to Agatha’s

²⁷⁴ Galante suggests the chapel may have originally been in the space directly across from Agatha’s chapel. For this and the possible stylistic influence of Giulio Romano, see Galante, *Giovanni Andrea Coppola*, 41-45. Galante, however, does not offer an explanation for the emphasis on the dragon’s exposed glands, which contradict Giulio Romano’s version of the subject, currently held in the British Museum.

transformation from a fully intact female to an ambiguously gendered body through such elements as the bright red hue of her chest wound from the first amputation, the curved instrument cupping her remaining breast, and the severed body part overhead with its dripping blood reminding the viewer that it was once a part of Agatha's physical form. In creating a scene that diverts from both textual and artistic precedent, Coppola's image is able to simultaneously allude to multiple moments from Agatha's narrative, evoking both her torture and her transformed state in an otherworldly and gender-non-conforming figure. This conflation of her "before and after" status on a single plane, and its celebration through Coppola's multi-figural composition, where all of the secondary participants clamor for a firsthand experience of Agatha's transformation, speaks to the vulnerability of the human body to remain in the physical state in which it was originally conceived and the acknowledgment—and perhaps even elevation—of this idea in early modern society and religious belief.

3.6: *Baptism of Blood: Agatha's Bodily Transformation*²⁷⁵

Coppola's portrayal of Agatha's body in its moment of transformation raises the issue of how to categorize her gender identification, namely whether she is still understood as a fully intact woman or if her breast amputation renders her less than

²⁷⁵ In invoking the notion of "baptism of blood," I refer to a disputed category of baptism along with baptism of water and desire. Baptism of blood is often discussed in the case of martyrs who died before receiving the sacrament. St. Cyprian (Epistle 73), for example, refers to "the most glorious and greatest baptism of blood (*sanguinis baptismus*)." Other writers, including Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, have also debated the efficacy of this type of baptismal "regeneration" within the context of martyrs and in general. For example, in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas notes "Therefore the baptism of the spirit is more powerful than that of blood." (volume 57, Baptism and Conformation: 3a. 66–72). For an example of a study that deals with martyrdom as a metaphor for baptism, see M.H. Griffen, "Martyrdom as a Second Baptism: Issues and Expectations for the Early Christian Martyrs," PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2002.

female, thus calling her gender into question. In Coppola's painting, as with the majority of depictions from the period, it is significant that Agatha is shown with one breast still attached to her body. Although the viewer's attention is drawn to the bright red wound where Agatha's left breast was once attached, there is still emphasis on her second breast through the torturer's curved instrument.²⁷⁶ The elongated tool diverts from the sharp and pointed pincers used by the first torturer, almost perfectly mirroring the breast's curved shape as it cups its form, seemingly poised for severing with one swift motion. Agatha's first breast overhead and the position of second torturer's instrument and gesture indicate that what we are witnessing is not the anticipatory moment before the climax but the actual moment of her bodily transformation. In portraying Agatha's physical body in its state of transition from a fully intact female to somewhere in between, Coppola's image simultaneously draws attention to the vulnerability of Agatha's gender and the necessity of female-identifying gender markers, such as the second breast still attached to her body.

The status of Agatha's gender has remained an open question for scholars over the last forty years. Some, such as Margaret Miles, have argued that through the removal of Agatha's breasts and her taking on male social characteristics, including moral strength, she "becomes male." Others suggest she is "disgendered" or androgynous, implying a complete lack of gender-identifying markers.²⁷⁷ Although these studies rightfully link definitions of gender and sex to both physical and

²⁷⁶ Interestingly, a close inspection of the torturer who dangles her breast overhead and the bloodstained pincers he holds underneath his arm reveals that the pincers are positioned almost directly over his nipple, perhaps alluding either to the necessity of the nipple and its association with the breast, or that he, too, is vulnerable to a gendered attack.

²⁷⁷ See n4.

performative traits, they also risk presuming a strict binary system for early modern gender identification whereby if a figure is not an intact female, he or she must then be male, or without gender at all. This concept becomes especially problematic when considering the retention of Agatha's second breast in the painting, prompting the question: How can Agatha be considered male or ungendered if she—in the present moment—still retains one breast attached to her body?

Historically, the portrayal of a signal breast, most notably in paintings of the Madonna nursing the Christ child, alluded to the existence of a second, covered breast underneath her garment, implying that although only one breast was necessary for feeding, the subject was still an intact female figure. The exception to this paradigm is the example of the mythological Amazons, who in textual and visual representations are often depicted with one breast exposed and no sign of a second breast underneath as a result of self-inflicted amputation to aid their mobility in fighting.²⁷⁸ In each of these cases—the Virgin Mary and the Amazons—the visible single breast does double duty: in addition to other external tropes such as clothing, hair, and gestures, it alerts the viewer to the subject's female status, and it demonstrates the subject's capability to perform the same tasks that a woman with two breasts could—namely the duties of motherhood in the form of nursing. The issue of Agatha's gender, then, hinges on the relationship between both the corporeal and performative aspects of her body's association with both male and female genders. I suggest here we consider the

²⁷⁸ See Kathryn Stewart, "Missing the Breast: Desire, Disease, and the Singular Effect of Amazons," in *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe*, eds. David Hillman and Carla Mazzio (New York: Routledge, 1997), 147–70.

possibility that Agatha's body was allowed to exist in a state of flux, somewhere in between fully female or fully male.

Agatha is not the first subject from antiquity to have prompted associations with both male and female traits. Indeed, perhaps no greater correlation exists between Agatha's bodily ambiguity than with that of Christ and his association with the female characteristics of nourishment and motherhood. Like Agatha, Christ's relationship to the opposite sex stems from his experience with suffering and bodily torture, specifically in the case of his side wound. Beyond its visual proximity to the position of a breast on the female body, Christ's wound has been known to exhibit similar characteristics to the bodily and social functions of the breast through its role in nourishing those who had visions of nursing from it, such as Saint Catherine of Siena.²⁷⁹ Despite the metaphor of Christ as mother through these social and physical associations with the female, he is still understood as male in gender. Examples such as Saint Catherine nursing from Christ's wound speak to the complexity of determining a figure's gender identity, especially in the case of subjects that carry associations with spiritual miracles, thereby rendering them somewhat distinct from the typical human experience. In permitting Christ to take on both male and female attributes in specific roles, we can begin to understand how Agatha's bodily suffering and transformation represents a form of *imitatio Christi*, or an emulation of Christlike behavior, thus adding a performative layer to her complicated gendering.

²⁷⁹ Easton, "Saint Agatha," 108.

3.7: Performing Gender in Representations of Martyrs

The significance of Agatha's gender to her identity and how her transformation is understood and portrayed in art is further elucidated by contrasting the representation of her body with that of male saints, especially her counterpart in Gallipoli's Cathedral, Saint Sebastian, for, as Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell have noted, "nothing so clearly divided the ranks of saints as gender."²⁸⁰ While gender was a marker necessary to the stories and artistic portrayals of all saints, female martyrs' gender arguably played a far greater role in the events surrounding their torture than that of males. In other words, though male figures were certainly marked by socially gendered traits and behaviors such as physical strength and bravery, the forms of torture they endured and the events that led to their punishment were generally not intended to alter their sex.

Saint Sebastian, to whom an altar is dedicated directly across from Agatha's in Gallipoli's cathedral, represents a foil to female saints' physical trauma. According to Sebastian's *vita*, he was a Roman officer under the emperor Diocletian who converted people to his Christian faith. When Diocletian demanded that Sebastian renounce his religion, he was ordered to be shot with arrows. Sebastian survived this punishment and was subsequently flagellated to death. In depictions of Saint Sebastian prior to the fourteenth century, he is portrayed as a mature, bearded man with an emphasis on his noble and brave personality. Yet from 1450 onward, depictions of him present a beautiful youth, often with arrows barely punctuating his

²⁸⁰ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000–1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 100.

body, allowing viewers to gaze upon his physical vitality and intact body without any hindrances or allusions to his suffering and trauma. Indeed, in examples such as Antonello da Messina's 1476–79 painting, the arrows are placed strategically along Sebastian's body in a perspectival system to draw the viewer's attention upward and around the subject's form (Fig. 62). No arrows appear to deeply pierce his flesh or leave significant traces of blood, providing an unobstructed path for the contemplation of Sebastian's physically beautiful and intact form.²⁸¹ This articulation is consistent with the altarpiece of the same subject in the Gallipoli cathedral. Though produced later than Coppola's Agatha, the work represents the same theme of Sebastian's intact physical body in contrast to Agatha's mutilated form. Interestingly, in written accounts of Sebastian's life, less emphasis is placed on describing him as nude, youthful, or beautiful, as compared to the emphasis in Agatha's and other female saints' *vite*, where their physical beauty is central to the description of their character and virtues, often culminating in extolling the preservation of their virginal status.²⁸²

This comparison prompts a return to the original question of the role gender plays in a saint's identity and visual portrayal, and if female saints appear to have a greater vulnerability or predisposition to gender transformation and mutation. One of the main distinctions between Agatha's and Sebastian's bodily suffering is the return

²⁸¹ See Karin Ressouni-De Migneaux, "The 'Imaginary' Life of Saint Sebastian," in *The Agony and the Ecstasy: Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians*, eds. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 17–32, 25, and Robert Kiely, *Blessed and Beautiful: Picturing the Saints* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 119–41.

²⁸² One of the few examples of the importance of nudity to a male saint is in the case of Saint Bartholomew, who was flayed alive, and thus portraying him nude was directly related to his narrative.

of Agatha's breasts to her body through divine intervention, representing her capacity to transition from an intact to a less-than-intact woman and back again.

The circumstances surrounding the commission and execution of Coppola's altarpiece—including the artist's background, the saint's local veneration, and new developments in the treatment of breast cancer—suggest that the significance behind the iconography of Agatha's dangling breast lies beyond its reading as an artist's unconventional interpretation. Exploring works such as this allows for further questioning into the possibilities of female spectatorship, and indeed, into Agatha herself, who gazes not just toward the heavens but defiantly toward her assailant.

3.8: *Miraculous Medicine: The Restoration of Agatha's Breasts*

The second half of Agatha's story presents further complications for understanding the function of gender ambiguity in religious contexts, specifically because her physical transformation is not a permanent one but is reversed through divine intervention. That is to say, although the act of removing Agatha's breasts was intended to be everlasting—and did prove to visibly alter the exterior of her body—it is ultimately reversed when Saint Peter restores breasts to her body.²⁸³ This reversal of a physical alteration has theological, social, and medical implications for how we understand Agatha's bodily transformation. This section builds on the analysis of Coppola's altarpiece, considering the example of Luca Longhi's (1507-1580) *Saint Agatha Visited by Saint Peter in Jail*, to interrogate how her restoration was

²⁸³ It is unknown if her original breasts are restored to her body, or a different pair—which raises different questions on the issue of bodily ownership and authenticity that space does not permit discussion of here.

understood and visually represented (Fig. 65). Like Coppola's painting, Longhi's composition portrays Agatha as the central figure, with her wounds as the main focus. Displayed in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Ravenna, the painting also blends religious and surgical motifs, conveying the direct relationship that existed between spiritual and physical interventions on the body. Indeed, the church, itself, appears to stress these themes with an altar dedicated to the Madonna of the Tumors, that was relocated to the right arm of the transept in the mid-seventeenth century (Fig. 66).

Agatha and her transformation represent one of the only contexts in which the body is acted upon in both physical and spiritual terms. While scholars have acknowledged the necessity of her restoration on theological grounds—namely, the importance of her physical body's intactness before she can ascend into heaven to be with Christ—few have considered how these beliefs intersect with medical and social understandings of gender, and how Agatha's second transformation may also be read in terms of Saint Peter's evocation of contemporary medical discourses on the body, including procedures for operating on and healing wounds. This is especially significant for understanding the breasts' role in determining gender identity, as indicated by their necessary return to her body.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ The necessity that Agatha's breasts be returned to her body before she is canonized as a saint may also relate to ideas on the incorruptibility of saints' bodies, whereby it is believed that saints' bodies would resist decomposition as a form of divine intervention. See Joan Carroll Cruz, *The Incorruptibles: A Study of the Incorruption of the Bodies of Various Catholic Saints and Beati* (Charlotte, North Carolina: Tan Books), 2012. In addition, martyrs like Agatha would also not have to become a corpse after death, waiting for the Last Judgment and Resurrection, and, as result, they would skip "the stench of decomposition" that followed the death of mortals, while also transcending all earthly pain. These concepts are found in such examples as the writings of Augustine on martyrs in *The City of God. Translated by Marcus Dods.* (Peabody, Mass.: Henderickson Publishers Inc., 2009). See also Erica M. Longenbach, "Constructing *Campanilismo*: The Sacred Topography of Ravenna in the Middle Ages." PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015, 56–58.

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, paintings of Agatha's healing and restoration constitute the second most reproduced narrative scene from her life after her breast amputation. Depictions of this event increased in the seventeenth century, coinciding with an overall rise in the portrayal of gruesome and graphic scenes of martyrdom as part of Catholic Reformation and Tridentine dictates and the publication of anatomical and medical texts, which highlighted the fragmentation of the human body.²⁸⁵

These works tend to depict Saint Peter's visitation in a dark, nondescript, intimate setting, featuring Agatha, Saint Peter, and an accompanying boy or angel as the main subjects. The jail cell is often indicated by a window with bars, or chains around Agatha's body, such as in paintings by Simon Vouet (Fig. 68) and Giovanni Lanfranco (Fig. 69). The space is usually illuminated only by the candle the angel or attendant holds. This clarifies the dark setting, and more importantly, the candle's placement—strategically in line with Agatha—artificially highlights her body and draws the viewer's attention to its significance.

Agatha's body is typically the central focus of the composition. Whether she appears in the middle or on the left or right of the canvas, visual elements such as lighting, color, and scale draw the beholder to her. Like in scenes of her torture, she is often portrayed nude from the waist down.²⁸⁶ However, one way in which depictions

²⁸⁵ Liana de Giorlami Cheney, "The Cult of Saint Agatha," *Woman's Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (1996): 3–9, especially 5. See also Burke, "Sex and Spirituality," 484–89, who talks about the influence of classical fragments on portrayals of the body.

²⁸⁶ In some rare cases she is portrayed fully clothed, such as in Alessandro Turchi's *Saint Agatha Attended by Saint Peter and an Angel in Prison*, c. 1640–45, from the Walters Museum. It is possible that in this instance, the painting portrays the moment in the narrative after her breasts are restored and Saint Peter and the angel are about to leave, although it is not entirely clear given the presence of the

of this scene vary is in the articulation of her wounds and their visibility on her body. In some cases, her bloodied chest is viscerally and graphically portrayed, as in the paintings of Francesco Rustici (Fig. 70) and Jacopo Vignali (Fig. 71). In Vignali's work, in particular, Agatha's bloodied chest is rendered almost unrecognizable as a site that once contained breasts. Instead, the viewer is confronted by a smattering of dark blood, which Agatha accentuates by opening her dress and looking down toward the red mass below. In other examples, Agatha covers herself, and the only suggestion of her wounded chest is through blood on her drapery. One exception is Paolo Veronese's *Saint Agatha Visited in Prison by Saint Peter*, 1566–1567, in San Pietro Martire in Murano, where Agatha is bedecked in bright green and pink garments (Fig 72). Only after close and prolonged observation do the subtle drips of blood on her wounded chest become visible.²⁸⁷

Saint Peter's interaction with Agatha and his role in healing her is also a motif across different artists' representations. Peter, accompanied by a young boy or angel, is often shown speaking to Agatha and gesturing toward her wounds with one hand, though in some cases, he touches her chest directly. Interestingly, some works portray

ointment jar and Peter's gesture of reaching toward her breasts. It is also possible that this was a specific request by a patron, depending on the circumstances of its commission and display context.²⁸⁷ See Xavier F. Salomon with Maichol Clemente and Claudia Vittori, *Veronese in Murano: Two Venetian Renaissance Masterpieces Restored* (New York: Frick Collection, 2017), 40–50. I would like to personally thank Xavier F. Salomon for speaking with me about this painting on January 24, 2018. During this conversation, he noted the interesting compromise between the brutality of story and the decorous manner in which it is portrayed in Veronese's work. Little is known about the priest who commissioned it and his relationship to the veneration of Agatha. It is likely that only a few people had access to this small, private chapel beyond the priests and nuns that used the facility. This is an important distinction between the public display of Coppola's altarpiece and the role of display context in shaping viewer experience. Veronese's piece, for instance, is believed to have originally hung over a doorway, so the graphic portrayal of Agatha's wounded chest would likely be less discernable than in Coppola's altarpiece, which hangs slightly above eye level. There is also no evidence, according to Salomon, that Veronese had any medical experience, unlike Coppola.

Peter holding a surgical instrument to aid in healing her wounds, such as in a painting by the workshop of Giovanni Bilivert (Fig. 73). These works indicate that artists were invested in portraying Agatha's healing as achieved through recognizably contemporary surgical methods. While there is little evidence to suggest the practice of breast restoration surgery was a common form of treatment, it was generally understood that open wounds necessitated cauterization and that the application of ointments to the area might aid in the healing process.²⁸⁸ The angel in these works underscores this point through the additional function of his candle, cauterizing Agatha's wounds through its placement directly below Peter's scalpel.

Regardless of the specific manner in which this scene is depicted, the general emphasis is always on Agatha's breasts and the necessity of their restoration. What makes many of these works especially compelling is the ambiguity in the timeline of events, as it is often unclear which moment of the narrative the painting is depicting: whether it is Peter speaking to Agatha before she permits him to heal her; whether he is in the act of restoring her breasts; or whether it is the moment right after she is healed. Deciphering this dilemma hinges on the portrayal of Agatha's breasts, the state they are in, and what Peter's and Agatha's hand gestures might suggest.

In the case of Longhi's painting, on which the remainder of this section will focus, the emphasis is clearly on the moment before Agatha is healed (Fig. 65). In this

²⁸⁸ Cauterization has been used as a medical practice to stop bleeding since antiquity. Scholars such as the Arab medieval scholar Avicenna and the previously discussed physician Ambroise Paré have discussed methods and instruments in their writings. See S. M. Alsanad, A. A. H. Asim, I. M. A. Gazzaffi and N. A. Qureshi, "History of Cautery: The Impact of Ancient Cultures," *Journal of Advances in Medicine and Medical Research* 25, no. 9 (2018): 1–17.

image, Longhi highlights Agatha's wounds by portraying both breasts in almost the same three-dimensional and stylized manner as Coppola's rendering of Agatha. The painting—like Coppola's altarpiece—represents the actual moment of transformation, with Peter reaching toward Agatha's mutilated body. Similar to the secondary figures in Coppola's altarpiece, Peter provides a model for viewing in Longhi's work. Within the composition, it appears as though he is meditating on Agatha's wounds, reminding the viewer that she is not yet healed. Longhi's portrayal of Agatha's breasts as two gaping, red wounds signifies where her breasts were once attached, and thus represents the importance of her breasts for her identity.

Agatha is a monumental, statue-like figure. She looks upward, pointing with one hand, while the other already holds the palm of martyrdom, prefiguring her ascent into heaven. Saint Peter appears slightly smaller than Agatha as he bends forward toward her, almost bowing down to her in both reverence and contemplation. He grasps the keys to the kingdom of heaven in his left hand; in his right, he holds a scalpel and gauze poised at Agatha's breast to begin healing her wounds. Peter is accompanied by a small angel who reaches up with an ointment jar in one hand and a candle in the other to assist Peter. Above the figures is a barred window looking out on a mountainous landscape. Longhi's painting is a rare example of the graphic, almost abstracted, portrayal of Agatha's chest wounds, as well as of Peter employing surgical tools to heal her.

Little information is known about Luca Longhi and his artistic training. He was born in Ravenna in 1507 and likely studied in a workshop in or near his hometown. According to Vasari, Longhi traveled to Bologna and Florence, noting

that he was not bound to any individual artistic school or master. Instead, Vasari alleges that Longhi prided himself on being a native artist and not easily influenced by other neighboring styles.²⁸⁹ Longhi's artistic production largely consists of altarpieces and portraits, including a *Marriage of Saint Catherine with Four Saints* completed in 1529 for San Vitale in Ravenna, and portraits of Raffaele Rasponi and Girolamo Rossi from 1567, both currently in the Pinacoteca di Ravenna.²⁹⁰ Longhi had two children, Barbara and Francesco, both of whom he trained as artists.

The circumstances surrounding the commission and production of Longhi's *Saint Agatha Visited by Saint Peter in Jail* are unclear. The work is currently displayed in Santa Maria Maggiore in Ravenna, although it is believed to be previously housed in the sacristy of San Vitale.²⁹¹ The moment Longhi depicts in *Saint Agatha Visited by Saint Peter in Jail* signifies an important turning point in her narrative where she is transformed back again into a fully intact female. Compared to her first bodily change—the product of malicious human intervention—Agatha's restoration is a divine act that represents a second, spiritual form of change, from an earthly to an otherworldly body. One of the most distinctive components of the

²⁸⁹ Vasari visited Ravenna for two months in 1548 when he was working on a deposition scene for the church of the monastery of S. Apollinare in Classe. It is during this period that he likely met Longhi, occasioning the chance for each to influence the other's work. Giordano Viroli, "Luca Longhi," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani—Volume 65* (2005), accessed December 1, 2018. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luca-longhi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

²⁹⁰ The one known exception to these genres is a painting of Venus commissioned by the Marquess Quaranta Aldrovandi of Bologna. It was later purchased by Count Ferniani di Faenza and is currently in a private collection. The work, which shows the subject nude from the waist up, suggests Longhi did complete anatomical studies on the human body, even if the articulation of the body is slightly stiff and awkward in the connection of individual limbs to the whole figure. Viroli suggests this conveys Longhi's study of other artists' engravings. Viroli, "Luca Longhi."

²⁹¹ The painting was likely moved from San Vitale to Santa Maria Maggiore between 1897 and 1907 by Corrado Ricci. See Giordano Viroli, *I Longhi. Luca, Francesco, Barbara pittori ravennati (sec. XVI–XVII)* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2000), 83.

painting is how Longhi displays both of Agatha's breast wounds in full view for the beholder. In contrast with other representations that typically portray her mutilated chest more subtly, either implied through small red incisions or slightly covered by bloodied drapery, every element in Longhi's composition brings the viewer's attention to her chest. From Saint Peter's reddish pink tunic and orange cloak and Agatha's light pink and green drapery to the tints and highlights on her pale flesh, the viewer cannot help but be visually drawn to her wounds. In portraying both of her breasts as wounded and thus absent, Longhi represents Agatha as less than a complete woman while simultaneously alluding to her previous status as fully intact through the bloody wounds. As discussed earlier, this was not a typical convention in paintings of Agatha's healing in jail, suggesting that Longhi, like Coppola, was influenced perhaps by local traditions or iconographic references not yet understood in the literature. As well as the portrayal of both her wounded breasts, the depiction of a scalpel and a sponge or gauze likely soaked in balsam was an atypical addition to the composition. The angel's candle positioned in direct line with Peter's tool also implies a medical knowledge of the use of heat to cauterize wounds, a commonly understood practice of the time.

Agatha's martyrdom was also the subject of a second painting by Longhi, *Saint Agatha with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Cecilia*, from the Church of Saint Agatha in Ravenna, produced around 1546 (Fig. 74). This work also consists of an unconventional portrayal of Agatha's body and wounds. She is shown in the center of the composition and elevated above the other saints by an elaborately patterned rug draped over the footstool on which she stands. Her left hand holds the palm of

martyrdom, and her right delicately balances a platter displaying her two severed breasts. Although she is pictured after her restoration, as evidenced by these two attributes, she is still shown with one of her one of her breasts wounded, deliberately revealed to the viewer through the loose blue drapery that falls down to her waist on the right side. Interestingly, the breast that has been restored to her body, as evidenced by the shading and highlighting of her garment, which implies a rounded form, is covered. Like Longhi's painting of Agatha in jail, this work also suggests a moment of flux and bodily ambiguity whereby only one of her breasts is seemingly restored.

3.9: Conclusion

This chapter explored the case of Saint Agatha's gender transformation, which hinged on the removal and subsequent restoration of her breasts, external body parts known for their association with the female gender. Agatha's status as an earthly human who becomes a saint through the alteration of her physical body represents arguably the most multilayered and complex case discussed in this project. Like *hirsutes* and *castrati*, Agatha occupied an earthly body, but like Achilles's status as a mythological being, she ultimately takes on a nonearthly status as a saint, imbued with spiritual power as a result of her experiences. The physical act of her bodily transformation resonates most closely with that of the *castrati*, who underwent the surgical removal of male-identifying body parts. Agatha's and the *castrato*'s bodies experienced significant external changes from the extraction of gender- and sex-identifying organs. However, unlike the *castrato*'s experience, Agatha's is reversed,

and her breasts are restored through spiritual intervention. Agatha's case, therefore, represents one of the most striking examples of a figure whose gender and identity directly depended on the intersection of social, religious, and medical conceptions of the body. The removal of her breasts and the necessity of their restoration before she can ascend to heaven confirm their importance to her figure in both theological and cultural terms.

It has been argued that breasts were critical to gender identity for early modern women—a concept that, in part, holds true today. Unlike other organs associated with sex and gender differentiation such as the vagina, breasts were externally visible markers of gender identity. As such, removing or altering a woman's breasts signified a direct comment on the capacity for her gender to be transformed. While the breast was not the sole marker of femininity, it—unlike any other body part—signaled multiple associations with the female gender, including sexual, maternal, and spiritual forms of nourishment. Religious subjects such as the *Madonna Lactans* and Roman Charity, and mythological ones such as the Amazons, all point to the importance of the breast for conveying particular messages regarding a woman's identity, whether in the form of spiritual nourishment or of healing, physical strength, or fecundity.

Conclusion

In 2000, Renaissance art and culture historian Evelyn Welch opened her essay “Engendering Italian Renaissance Art—A Bibliographic Review” with what was sure to be a polemical but nonetheless genuine question for the time: “Does gender matter?”²⁹² Far from a rhetorical gesture, Welch’s call to arms remains relevant and, arguably, unanswered twenty years later. Through her tracing of Italian Renaissance art historians’ slow turn toward issues of gender—from the 1970s and the influence of such essays as Joan Kelly-Gadol’s “Did Women Have a Renaissance?”²⁹³ to twenty-first century historians’ induction into queer studies—however, it becomes clear that for many scholars today, gender remains a woman’s problem; a problem available to all historians, but one that is still predominantly viewed from the lens of women subjects, women patrons, and women artists.

Twenty years after the publication of Welch’s essay, the place of gender in the art historical canon remains one of the most contentious debates facing the field. The field of Italian Renaissance art has begun to widen, as demonstrated by an increase in studies on the male gender, cross-dressing, and hermaphrodites. Yet, the problem of gender largely remains on the margins of its scholarship. It is still often treated as an either/or issue: a woman’s issue, a man’s issue, or a third-gender issue.

Notwithstanding these traditional views, I contend that the place of gender is an issue confronting every field within academia.

²⁹² Welch, “Engendering Italian Renaissance Art,” 201.

²⁹³ Joan Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–64.

At the center of this issue, are debates about gender in mainstream American society, which have clearly influenced its rise as a topic of academic inquiry.²⁹⁴ From recent debates over gender-neutral bathrooms to Merriam-Webster’s declaration of the use of “they” as a personal gender pronoun as the 2019 word of the year, issues of gender are at the forefront of current cultural discourse. Indeed, this project developed from a seminar paper on *castrati* I wrote at the University of Maryland in 2015, when the country was first increasingly embroiled in these disputes about the expansion of the gender system to reflect the newfound visibility of nonbinary individuals. The issues presently surrounding gender demonstrate the necessity for further exploration into the premodern systems that inform those of today.

As my research in this dissertation argues, early modern artistic explorations into the boundaries of physical difference—in all its shapes and forms—provides a timely opportunity to question the social and political culture of the body broadly experienced in society. Indeed, the artworks and artists at the center of this project affirm the primacy of art as one of the main loci through which cultural attitudes on difference in the early modern period may be accessed today. In so doing, this project allows us to reflect on how issues regarding early modern gender parallel increasingly urgent, contemporary struggles to define and categorize gender difference, especially when the health and safety of those marked as different is jeopardized.

As previously mentioned, the starting point for this dissertation derived from preliminary explorations into the social perceptions of the *castrato* as interpreted

²⁹⁴ “Get the Facts,” National Museum of Women in the Arts, accessed November 18, 2019, <https://nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>.

through their portrayal in paintings and in caricatures. I noticed that sources in the historical record appeared to describe these neutered singers not as women or hermaphrodites but as incomplete and stunted male adolescents. Indeed, the more I studied satirical representations of *castrati* off the stage, the clearer it became that their altered and ambiguously gendered bodies contributed to their dualistic reputation as sexually desirable yet repulsive and monstrous. To mitigate these social associations, formal portraits commissioned either by *castrati*, themselves, or their esteemed patrons, went to great lengths to smooth over the bodily exaggerations in caricatures, while also highlighting external markers of their success through the display of awards, sheet music, and fine clothing. In exploring the secondary literature on *castrati*, I also observed resistance to treating them, as well as other early modern cases of non-conformity and gender ambiguity, with the cultural relativity and sensitivity necessary for such endeavors. This included, for example, the assumption that *castrati* could not have had intercourse as a result of side effects from their operation—which was believed to often lead to impotence—without considering the possibility of alternative sex acts beyond heteronormative penetrative sex. In addition, few studies had been undertaken from the perspective of how *castrati*'s visibly aberrant bodies manifested in visual representations, especially from the perspective of formal portraits, which have often been dismissed as complete idealizations of *castrati*'s differences without any consideration for the inclusion of subtle references to their post-castration bodies. This early research confirmed for me that spaces for ambiguity and overlap existed within the early modern gender paradigm. This finding warranted an expanded study to consider other cases where

bodily change led to a disruption to the otherwise-conforming relationship between gender, sex, and the body.

My project engaged these debates as a point of departure for questioning how a different era, the early modern period (1500–1750)—centuries removed from our own—negotiated gender through art, asking how visual code systems helped to reify these constructions and inform and complicate other social systems such as the body, medicine, and religion. This project therefore presented an opportunity to explore how early modern questions of what defined a body have the potential to impact future definitions of non-conforming and conforming bodies, feminism, and gender identity more broadly. As it has shown, visual constructions of gender during the early modern period allowed for the existence of less-than-intact men and women and acknowledged the susceptibility of the physical body to change. At stake in writing a dissertation grounded in the history of early modern art and gender, then, is not only the demonstration of the broad utility of gender-focused art history as a mode of historical inquiry but to offer an alternative to treating gender as an isolated issue bound by the binary system that still informs contemporary understandings of gender and its relationship to sex, identity, and sexual activity. These aims provided the purpose of this study: to uncover how artists explored the areas of slippage that existed within early modern categories of gender; namely, male, female, and hermaphrodite.

In this dissertation I examined three cases of figures whose bodies underwent a physical change resulting in a transformation of their previously conforming external appearance. These alterations were brought on by either contracting a

physical condition or undergoing surgery or torture that removed a body part critical to sexual identity such as testicles or breasts. Studying cases of previously gender-conforming individuals enabled me to examine the meaning and necessity of particular physical and social markers of gender difference and how either their removal or the addition of new attributes signaled a bodily transformation. I began with the figure of the hirsute (a person who experienced an excess in hair growth, either over the entire body or—especially among women—in a male pattern on the face and chest). Specifically, I examined the artist Jusepe de Ribera's portrayal of a woman who developed hirsutism later in life in *Magdalena Ventura and Her Husband* (1631). I considered Ribera's visual strategies for what I argued were deliberate adaptations to Magdalena's body, such as the positioning and shape of an exposed breast in the center of her chest and its juxtaposition with her long, dark beard. As a result, Magdalena's gender falls into the category of the in-between. No longer an intact woman, yet not completely transformed into a man, Ribera depicts Magdalena as a less-than-intact woman rather than a hermaphrodite. The second case expanded on my preliminary study of *castrati* (young boys who were castrated to preserve their prepubescent voices) to examine the *castrato's* complicated gender and sexual identity using Jacopo Amigoni's *Musical Portrait Group: The Singer Farinelli and Friends* (ca. 1750–1752) as its primary example. I argued that Amigoni's use of the group portrait genre facilitated an integration of the *castrato* into a visual hierarchy of gender—between an older man and a prepubescent boy at the far ends of the poles, and a fully intact woman and man, with the *castrato* at center. The project culminated in the third example, Saint Agatha (an early Christian martyr whose

breasts were forcibly removed). I analyzed Giovanni Andrea Coppola's *The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha* (1650) and the artist's particular portrayal of Agatha's severed breast over her head. I contended that the breast, no longer just an external marker of her pre-mutilated body, also functions in a second role: the visual device by which she is baptized by her own blood, completing another transformation from an earthly to a saintly entity.

In each case, I found that the physical changes to the subjects' bodies altered their appearances and transformed their identities, calling into question their status as conforming men or women. And yet, despite lacking all of the characteristics of an intact man or woman, or developing additional physical features to the point of obscuring other conforming traits, these figures were not relegated to the opposite gender or viewed as hermaphrodites—as previous scholars have contended—but instead occupied a different space along an early modern continuum of sex and gender. A space, I argued, that permitted more room for ambiguously gendered bodies than has previously been acknowledged. Artists negotiated, and contributed new meanings to these issues on the canvas through a number of visual strategies including: subtle allusions to differences on the bodies of their subjects, adding conforming figures to compositions to facilitate comparison and heighten contrast, and through the exaggeration of the color, shape, and position of body parts or traits, in addition to other compositional, iconological and stylistic choices. Each visual example of gender ambiguity explored in this project, then, reflected the period's commitment to exploring the body in all its manifestations and revealed the profound

extent to which social attitudes and medical knowledge permeated artistic practices across genre.

A number of connecting themes emerged between the three case studies: human intervention—medicine or torture—versus nature in creating bodily difference; the relationship of parts of the body to the whole; the artist's role in conveying difference seen in life versus on the canvas; and the culture of collecting that facilitated the commissioning of each of the three paintings examined in this study. Each case study also represented the idea of gender as a negotiation between the additive and subtractive constituent elements that signaled a change or transformation. For *castrati* and Saint Agatha, a violent removal of sexually associated organs—the testicles and breasts—characterized the alteration of their bodies. And yet, to my knowledge, visual representations depicting a *castrato*'s lack of testicles, indicated through nudity, were deliberately avoided during the period. Conversely, almost all paintings of Saint Agatha and her breast mutilation necessitated the exposure of her body from the waist up. In comparing the treatment of subtractive modes of gender change, it became clear how strong a role social and spiritual ideas of decorum played in shaping a visual language of difference. Furthermore, the contrast between these two subtractive cases and the additive example of Magdalena Ventura, whose change was characterized by excess hair on her face and chest, also elucidated the connections among the three cases. By adding the beard and masculinizing elements to Magdalena's visage, Ribera drew the viewer's attention to the seemingly abstract shape and placement of her breast in a manner similar to Coppola's depiction of Agatha's equally concave and

metaphorically abstracted wound. And while further study is necessary to expand on the use of abstracted and stylized forms in this context, the relationship between these subjects and the factors that informed how artists portrayed their bodies, remind us of the importance of not reading any of these cases without uncovering the broader social context that informed their making.

4.1: Contribution to the Field

This dissertation extends the recent scholarly trend in the history of early modern art of viewing gender as more than a construct synonymous with women. Indeed, even the rise of masculinity studies as a subset of early modern art historical inquiries reflects a desire to see gender as a single-sex problem, or in other words, as about women *or* about men. Resistance, then, to viewing gender as a *human* issue—an issue in which definitions of masculinity, for example, have implications not just for the “masculine” but for all individuals—continues to be a core problem, especially for early modernists who, arguably, have been among the last groups of art historians to acknowledge gender.

My project is the first art historical examination to consider both medical and spiritual cases of gender ambiguity, resulting in a new methodological model for adapting interdisciplinarity to the study of early modern art. In so doing, I contribute a new perspective to traditional art historical methods by combining close attention to a diverse range of visual objects with early modern theories on gender, sex, and the history of science. I take an interdisciplinary approach to complicating ideas of the body as a homogenous category to question how artists and viewers actively defined

what it meant to occupy a non-conforming body. While the study of anatomy and medicine has long been recognized as a principal artistic strategy for mastering the body in its ideal form, the relationship between medical sources and depictions of bodies that do not conform to standards of perfection has been understudied. My project adds to this lacuna in the scholarship by expanding early modern definitions of the body and its relationship to medical and social constructions of sex and gender to include subjects often characterized as unideal, ambiguous, and monstrous. In contrast to previous studies—which have relegated these works to categories of the monstrous or dismissed them altogether as mere iconographical oddities—this dissertation also carries disciplinary and cultural significance by reframing the works of art depicting such subjects within their original medical, social, and religious context. This multidisciplinary approach aligns with current trends in fields such as disability studies and medical humanities, which often “reach across the aisle” to the sciences, such as biology, in an effort to understand what it meant to be human from a more holistic and diverse perspective.

There are several considerations inherent in any study of a historical period that must be made to preserve the cultural relativity of the inquiry in question. This point holds especially true for this project, which is grounded in ambiguity and, often, in social derision. I purposely chose cases where primary source material survived in order to support iconographic and stylistic analyses of the paintings themselves. The decision to focus on a close reading of three types of bodily ambiguity through one primary visual example also provides a future opportunity to examine cases beyond Italy and Spain to include a decolonial perspective that engages with issues of bodily

difference in the European colonies. An expansion of this nature would enable consideration of how cultural exchange during colonialism likely impacted social attitudes on the body, further connecting the issues inherent in this project's discussion of gender to current discourses on race in the early modern period.

4.2: Looking Forward: Future Research

The findings in this dissertation represent a small fraction of the potential questions to ask and subjects of inquiry to investigate in order to deepen our understanding of the complexities of early modern bodily ambiguity. For instance, this project has shown just how integral travel was to the construction of early modern artistic culture. Each chapter involved cultural exchange and travel, from the Viceroy of Naples facilitating Magdalena Ventura's transport from Abruzzi to Naples, to Farinelli's and Amigoni's journeys across Italy, England, and Spain, to Coppola's departure from his hometown of Gallipoli to receive medical training in Naples and to visit artistic sites across Italy, only to return to produce altarpieces for his local cathedral. The natural expansion of this project is to broaden its geographic scope to include cases of gender ambiguity and transformation beyond southern Italy to examine the extent to which the problems inherent in understanding the gender of hirsutes, *castrati*, and Saint Agatha reflect wider phenomena across other European cultures. This turn will also reflect emerging scholarly discourses on global resonances across Europe and the colonies, permitting a consideration of how European notions of gender may have been in dialogue with more globalized trends at the time. A clear addition will be an examination from Spain, which would allow for

a more direct, comparative analysis with the culture of collecting, especially as explored in the hirsute chapter, which focused on Spanish-controlled Naples. This case study will examine another form of bodily and gendered ambiguity: obesity, specifically in the double portraits of *Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, Naked*, and *Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, Clothed*, by Juan Carreño de Miranda around 1680 (Figs. 76 & 77). *Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, Naked*, in particular, is an exceptional example of a court-commissioned portrait. Not only does the painting represent a rare example of a painting of a nude, six-year-old girl—who weighed approximately 154 pounds at the time she was painted—it also portrays Eugenia in the guise of Bacchus, a male mythological figure known for the transformation of his state of being aided by the consumption of alcohol. Juan Carreño de Miranda portrays Eugenia with a wreath of grapes on her head—a reference to the wine-loving deity—leaning on a stone plinth and looking into the distance. She holds another bundle of grapes in her left hand; a group of leaves from one of the branches blocks her genitals, preventing the full exposure of her body. Like the cases of Magdalena and Brígida discussed in this project, and other fixtures of the European royal social scene such as jesters and dwarves, Eugenia was brought to the court of Madrid to be painted from life. And yet, unlike the arguably sympathetic portrayals discussed in this dissertation, Eugenia was referred to as *la monstrea* and “the Person of a Giant Girl-Child called Eugenia.”²⁹⁵ Examining a case such as Eugenia’s, then, will also permit an opportunity to delve further into different methodological approaches, such as disability studies, as a

²⁹⁵ “Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, Naked,” Museo del Prado, accessed December 11, 2019, <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/eugenia-martinez-vallejo-naked/8e2d05fe-8310-469f-9154-45a7706515fd>.

means of questioning how a different category of bodily infirmity impacted gender identity.

The project will also consider representations of another Spanish case, Catalina de Erauso (1592–1635)—also known as “Lieutenant Nun”—a woman who escaped a nunnery and traveled to modern-day Peru and Chile to fight for the Spanish army disguised as a man. Accounts of Catalina’s story traveled throughout Europe by way of an autobiography as well as firsthand accounts from people who met her. Her story is noteworthy not only because she was painted by Spanish court artists, such as Francisco Pacheco, but also because her autobiography details her experiences in the New World, allowing for further investigation into the regions Spain occupied in the colonial expansion that occurred during the majority of the early modern period (Fig. 77). Indeed, Pacheco’s portrait of Catalina circulated widely in printed form into the nineteenth century, which also allows for a deeper consideration of artistic viewership and the ways in which medium may impact meaning (Fig. 78). In extending the project’s research to the Americas, including present-day Mexico, Chile, and Peru, I will assess how cultural exchange between European empires and the indigenous cultures they fought to suppress may have led to a reciprocal dialogue on the categorizing of bodily difference. This approach will also provide for a closer investigation of how gender non-conformity intersected with race in this period, as evidenced already in such works as an illustration from Ambroise Paré’s *Monsters and Prodiges* in which a nude, hirsute woman is pictured with an African child, who is also depicted fully nude (Fig. 79). The image is discussed in relation to the status of both subjects as monsters, both conditions likely caused during in utero when their

mothers experienced a dream or an episode of imagination that generated each figures' difference.²⁹⁶ The goal of the next phase of this project, then, is to expand questions of gender ambiguity to a transnational context, exploring visual representations of and their shared ideas on the body between Italy, Spain, and the Spanish colonies from a gendered and decolonial perspective.

As this dissertation has demonstrated through the study of depictions of hirsutes, *castrati*, and Saint Agatha, the definition of gender and what constituted a gendered body in the early modern period was complex and influenced by a variety of artistic, social, and medical, factors. To return to and answer Welch's question with which I began this conclusion: yes, gender does matter, but in order to better understand all its variances and its relationship to the problematics of representation in the early modern context, further examination is required.

²⁹⁶ Velasco, "Hairy Women," 63.

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