

necessary to participation in this particular form of *agon*. The dress of the judge, as well as his baton and branch of apples, are all authentic features as attested particularly by bas-reliefs and coins; by calling the *agonothete* a *lanista*, the Latin text has transposed onto the figure of the judge another official, one who supplied gladiators for games and also trained them.⁷⁴

Following Robert, Amat also recognizes the dream's indebtedness to the iconography of the amphitheater.⁷⁵ However, she finds the significance of the dream not in its mirroring of a cultural phenomenon but rather in its representation of the martyr as athlete of Christ, particularly because this theme is present in other martyrological literature as well as in the letters of Paul. The theme of the martyr-athlete is the ground upon which Amat constructs an interpretation of the dream's images in Christian terms. Imaginally linked by the loose tunics that they wear, Pomponius the deacon and the supernaturally large judge are both symbols of Christ, Pomponius because his knocking at the prison gate "prefigures the eschatological 'passage' to Christ," the judge because the bands of purple symbolize the passion and are also found in representations of divine apparitions in catacomb paintings.⁷⁶ The judge's baton is reminiscent of the rod used by God to punish transgressions in Ps. 89.32 and foreshadows Perpetua's death by sword.⁷⁷ Perpetua's oneiric picture of golden apples, while originally part of the mythic cycle of Heracles' labors, is an example of the way in which her imagination has been guided by images in Christian literature and art: the tree of temptation in Genesis that becomes the tree of life in paradise regained, the tree of life with fiery fruits in apocryphal apocalypses, and pictorial uses of apples to symbolize the orchard of paradise are all suggested as possible influences on the dream's image.⁷⁸ Similarly, the oil rubbed on the oneiric Perpetua's body is a memory of prebaptismal unction, and the image of the devil-as-Egyptian recalls the biblical condemnation of Egypt in the book of Exodus.⁷⁹

Although Dronke for the most part resists this kind of allegorical translation of the dream's images, he contributes to a reading of the dream as a

⁷⁴ Robert, "Une Vision de Perpetué martyre à Carthage en 203," pp. 255–71.

⁷⁵ Amat, *Songes et Visions*, pp. 77–79.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79. For other symbolic associations of the baton, see Martine Dulaey, "Le symbole de la baguette dans l'art paléo-chrétien," pp. 3–38.

⁷⁸ Amat, *Songes et Visions*, p. 80.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83; Robert, on the other hand, sees the presence of the Egyptian in the dream as an accurate reflection of the participation of large numbers of Egyptians in athletic competitions in the imperial era ("Une Vision de Perpetué martyre à Carthage en 203," pp. 272–73); Dronke, referring to Graeco-Roman associations of Egypt with "pagan sacred wisdom," suggests that the Egyptian represented for Perpetua an "Egypt of the mind" which, after her conversion to Christianity, she was struggling to overcome (*Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 14).

product of Perpetua's Christian training by offering a unique exegesis of the opening of the dream as a reminiscence of the fifth chapter of the biblical Song of Songs. Perpetua's dreaming has been influenced by early Christian mystical readings of the scenario of the Song's bride awakened, called, abandoned by her lover-brother, and tormented as "a moment of divine visitation, both summoning and harshly testing the soul that loves God."⁸⁰

Despite the debates over the sociocultural or religious derivation of the individual elements of this dream, commentators agree that the outstanding theme of the dream is the martyr's courageous resolve to remain faithful to her new religious commitment. Facing physical death, Perpetua dreamed of spiritual life.

THE foregoing interpretations of Perpetua's dreams exemplify the way in which the interpreter's choice of perspective and context will to a large extent determine the kind and range of readings that a given text can yield. When the dreams are interpreted from the perspective of martyrdom, the texts yield a reading of Perpetua's psychological condition as well as a view of her historical situation as one at the nexus of a religio-political conflict. On the other hand, when the dreams are interpreted from the perspective of Christian catechetical training, the texts yield a reading of Perpetua's religious consciousness either as one immersed in Christian scripture and cultic practice, or as one that reflects the persistence of "pagan" literary and religious forms in the thought-patterns of the new convert.

In their various ways, these interpretive stances read Perpetua's dreams as mimetic to the culture in which they occurred; this is part of their attempt to reproduce the text's (and Perpetua's) meaning. However, as John Winkler has pointed out, such attempts to reproduce an author's meaning are involved in an important methodological issue: "Should we concede that much authority to the writers we read? If our critical faculties are placed solely in the service of recovering and reanimating an author's meaning, then we have already committed ourselves to the premises and protocols of the past"—a past whose structures of cultural violence, such as the metanarrative of patriarchy that I will explore in the following pages, continue to exert a pernicious influence in the present.⁸¹ Winkler recommends the strategy of "reading against the grain" of conventional interpretive positions as a means to engage such protocols and also as "an occasion to struggle against the tacit, conventional, and violent embrace in which we are held by the past."⁸²

The reading of Perpetua's dreams that I will offer is such a "reading

⁸⁰ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 13.

⁸¹ Winkler, *The Constraints of Desire*, p. 126.

⁸² *Ibid.*

against the grain" which views the dreams as expressions of a Christian woman, as differentiated from conventional readings of them as expressions of a *Christian* woman. In so doing, I do not mean to displace or deny other readings but rather to add to the range of interpretive possibilities that these texts present. Using, as context, a perspective that dreams are vehicles for the forging of new understandings of self-identity, I will read Perpetua's dream-diary as *both* reflective of *and* resistant to the sexual politics of her community, a community in which there was a power struggle that was engendered in male and female terms. When read as a critique of culture rather than only as a mirror of it, Perpetua's diary offers a powerful articulation of a woman's struggle to establish her own voice in the context of patriarchal devaluations of female witness.

In what follows, the term *patriarchy* will be used to designate a metanarrative. A metanarrative is a system of thought, or a structure of thinking, that suppresses difference in order to legitimate its own vision of reality; because it makes totalizing claims to universal validity, a metanarrative suppresses or devalues discourses that are "other," that are different. As a metanarrative, patriarchy supports the dominance of the paternal metaphor in the establishment of meaning. I am going to argue that Perpetua's diary, written in such a patriarchal context, can be read as an expression of difference, a voice of otherness that questions the dominance of maleness in the construction of meaning. In order to enable this voice of difference to speak from the diary, I will use interpretive strategies taken from French feminist writers. My own strategy in this endeavor is not to do violence to the historical specificity of an ancient text by replacing, and so erasing, its categories with those of a contemporary discourse, but rather to show another integrity in the text that is also consonant with contemporary discourse. The writers whose literary and feminist theory provide the interpretive position of the discussion that follows are Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, both of whom are in the vanguard of an ongoing critique of monological values in Western culture.

In an essay entitled "Word, Dialogue and Novel," Kristeva presents and develops the idea of "carnavalesque discourse" introduced by the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin.⁸³ In contrast to linguistic practices that are univocal and prohibitive of polysemy, carnivalesque discourse is discourse that achieves a poetic logic: "By adopting a dream logic, it transgresses rules of the linguistic code and social morality as well."⁸⁴ In the discourse of the carnival, words are poetic, "polyvalent and multidetermined," and they conform to a "logic exceeding that of codified discourse," coming to expression fully only in the margins of culture.⁸⁵

⁸³ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," pp. 64–91.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Carnavalesque language is thus language that constitutes an "other" side of the discourse that is dogmatic, determined by what Kristeva calls Law and Definition. In the carnival, authority is challenged because words are freed from presupposed values; carnivalesque discourse is rebellious and subversive insofar as it allows the articulation of marginal, misunderstood, or repressed perspectives to emerge.⁸⁶ Transformation of values in language is the experience of the carnival.

The exuberance suggested by the metaphor of the carnival has, however, its sinister aspect. As Kristeva says, "Pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death, become part of the narrative."⁸⁷ Such pathological elements—dreams, split personalities, death—are pertinent to carnivalesque discourse because "they destroy man's epic and tragic unity as well as his belief in identity and causality; they indicate that he has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself."⁸⁸ In the carnival, one dreams subversive, irreverent dreams and in the process sees his or her identity split, dead, no longer "total." Further, in the carnival a transformation of identity is taking place, and that transformation is accomplished through the polysemantic discourse of a perspective that has been repressed or marginalized by univocal structures of discourse usually attributed to Law, God, and Father—that is, to the metanarratives of patriarchy.

It has been noted by interpreters of Perpetua's diary that, in the course of discussions with her father and the judge at her trial, Perpetua gives up her name. "*Christiana sum*," she says: "I am a Christian/I am Christiana."⁸⁹ She thus loses—even denies—the identity given her by the dominant culture.⁹⁰ Interestingly, in the *Acta minorum*, a shorter, somewhat later version of Perpetua's story, the "carnavalesque" quality of Perpetua's change of name is reinforced by the following statement attributed to her. In reply to the judge's question whether she is a Christian, she says, "I am a Christian, and I follow the authority of my name, that I may be perpetual" (*Christiana sum, et nominis mei sequor auctoritatem, ut sim perpetua*).⁹¹ Her embrace of the

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 78–80.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁸⁹ *Pass. Perp.* 3.2; 6.4 (ed. Van Beck, pp. 8, 18).

⁹⁰ On the status of the name Christian, Peter Brown observes about the martyrs that "friendship with God raised the Christians above the identity that they shared with their fellows. The *nomen Christianum* they flaunted was a 'non-name.' It excluded the current names of kin and township. . . ." (*The Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 56). See also Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 5, for his characterization of Perpetua's insistence on her new name as a kind of "grammatical Platonism" for which "names are not arbitrary; there is a primordial, divinely ordained harmony between names and things."

⁹¹ *Acta minorum* 5.9: "Proconsul ad Perpetuam dixit: 'Quid dicis, Perpetua? Sacrificas?' Perpetua respondit: 'Christiana sum, et nominis mei sequor auctoritatem, ut sim perpetua' (ed. Van Beck, p. 66).

Christian "non-name," which is itself a "new" name, at the same time reveals another dimension of her "old" name.⁹²

Curiously, to follow the authority of the name is to flout authority. Perpetua's new name sets her free from paternal and social definition. In Kristeva's terms, this name is a word from the carnival, because in the carnival words are freed from presupposed values and so are subversive of the master narratives of established authority. Luce Irigaray might agree, but she would describe this scene differently, arguing not from literary theory but rather from a feminist perspective. The purpose for bringing these two theorists, Kristeva and Irigaray, together is to show that there is a feminist dimension of carnivalesque discourse—or better, to suggest the ways in which the language of the carnival is particularly pertinent to female discourse and, more basically, to female presence in language.

In her book *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray argues that, because of male dominance in language and culture, the female has been reduced to a kind of "shadow" of the male. She quotes the psychiatrist-philosopher Jacques Lacan to this effect: "There is no woman who is not excluded by the nature of things, which is the nature of words. . . ." ⁹³ This means that "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects."⁹⁴ Women, then, are "objects" deprived of an authoritative discourse of their own.

Irigaray does not resolve the problem of feminine silence at the hands of masculine definition, but she does provide gestures toward possibilities of the expression of the feminine in language; these are the points at which her theory makes contact with Kristeva's notion of the carnivalesque. Irigaray writes that if there were to be such a thing as "feminine syntax" in language—that is, an "order" of discourse not organized by conceptual, representational thinking—"there would no longer be either subject or object, 'oneness' would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, 'proper' attributes. . . . It would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation."⁹⁵ Surely this is what Kristeva describes as carnivalesque discourse, which precisely splits identity and subverts totality. As with Perpetua, "proper" names break apart and reveal dimensions not authorized by Father or Law. Indeed, when Perpetua declares *Christiana sum*, her father rushes at her as though to pluck out her eyes, and the judge condemns her to the beasts.⁹⁶ Her discourse, however, declares that she will not be owned by masculine definitions of what it means to be "Perpetua."

For Irigaray, the issue in the "issue" of a feminine presence in discourse is

not the elaboration of a "new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object*, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal."⁹⁷ The idea of "jamming" discursive practices that depend upon such distinctions between subject and object will be pertinent to my analysis of Perpetua's oneiric discourse as one in which subject and object, author and text, are confabulated as "author" becomes "character" in her own narrative, which, as dream, is not univocal but polyvalent.⁹⁸

If there were to be such a thing as "her language," what would it be? For Irigaray, it would be "somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to [it] with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand."⁹⁹ Further, "one would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an 'other meaning,' always in the process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words. . . ." ¹⁰⁰ The "other ear" hears a whisper of an "other" that lies waiting within fixed, congealed perspectives: the laughter of the carnival, but also its discourse of dream and death.

According to Irigaray, women are outside the system. On the one hand, this means that "woman does not have access to language, except through recourse to 'masculine' systems of representation which disappropriate her from her relation to herself. . . ." ¹⁰¹ On the other hand, being outside the system gives her critical leverage on it—even if her only means of expressing something different from the system is the dream-speech of the carnival.

Perpetua wrote her diary in a time and place in which the masters of discourse were men and maleness was the determinant of meaning. In order to understand how feminist theory can be useful in eliciting a reading of Perpetua's diary that allows her voice to be heard as a woman's voice, some attention to the patriarchal narratives that dominated the sexual politics of her social and religious world is necessary.

Foremost among the representatives of the patriarchal perspective in Perpetua's own community in Carthage was Tertullian, arguably the most prominent Latin Christian theologian of his day. In his writings, the patriarchal contours of the context in which Perpetua professed her faith can be clearly discerned. Tertullian's most basic dictum on woman is his characterization of her nature in theological terms. The truth of woman's condition, he says, should be enacted bodily: she must avoid elegant dress and wear rags, thus presenting herself as a mourning and repentant Eve.¹⁰² Tertullian

⁹⁷ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 78.

⁹⁸ This is where Perpetua's characterization of her dream-speech with the verb *fabulor* assumes its importance as a perspective on oneiric constructions; see p. 151 above.

⁹⁹ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁰² Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* 1.1.1 (CCL 1.343).

⁹² Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity*, p. 56.

⁹³ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 87.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 86 (italics in original).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹⁶ *Pass. Perp.* 3.3; 6.5–6 (ed. Van Beek, pp. 8, 18).

thought that woman's outer appearance should match her inner nature, indelibly tainted by "the disgrace of the first transgression and the odium of the ruin of humankind."¹⁰³ Everywoman is Eve, and she lives under the judgment of God. In a famous piece of rhetoric, Tertullian says: "You are the devil's gateway; you are she who unsealed that tree; you are the first deserter of divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not able to bribe; you easily destroyed the image of God, the man Adam."¹⁰⁴ This is a blunt articulation of the univocal discourse of representation in which a masculine "subject" judges a feminine "object," depriving her of access, except through male discourse, to relations with God, herself, and (as we shall see) to speech as well. In Irigaray's terms, Tertullian's construction of woman exemplifies the sexual logic that privileges the paternal metanarrative.¹⁰⁵

Theologically, woman is defined sexually, and her sexuality is negative; it is something to be repressed, subjected to submission, plainness, and lack of show. These qualities are the proper character of women's dress that most appropriately signify her inner condition.¹⁰⁶ Tertullian presents his definition of woman as though it had the character of theological law. How could a woman like Perpetua come to terms with such a definition? How could a female martyr acknowledge the value of a Law that stigmatized her as "the devil's gateway"?

There is a striking passage in Perpetua's diary that might speak to these questions. Perpetua reported that, following her baptism while under arrest, "the spirit enjoined me not to seek from that water any favor except physical endurance" (*sufferentiam carnis*).¹⁰⁷ Her inspiration pertained to endurance, perseverance, suffering of the flesh. The meaning of such a statement in the context of her captivity seems clear: she wanted the strength to live in order to testify. In the context that I propose, however, her statement speaks on another plane of signification altogether. What might suffering the flesh connote for a woman whose "flesh" had been so degraded theologically? What might physical endurance mean in a condition of captivity to a discourse for which a female witness must surely have been a paradox, if not a contradiction in terms? One of the most compelling of Irigaray's arguments revolves around what she calls "sexual indifference": if

the female exists only insofar as she is defined by the male, then there is actually only one sex.¹⁰⁸ This phenomenon showed itself, for example, in Augustine's sermons, where the "virile" quality of Perpetua's acts as martyr is constantly underscored. This is an interpretive move that effectively reduces, if it does not deny altogether, the possibility of conceptualizing spiritual courage as female. Indeed, Augustine went so far as to say that Perpetua's virtuous mentality had made her "sexuality according to the flesh" "invisible" and that, in her oneiric fight in the arena, the devil had felt himself in the presence of a woman who acted like a man.¹⁰⁹ Given this kind of assimilation of the female to the male, Perpetua's petition for "endurance of the flesh" can be read as a petition for, and a spirited affirmation of, the perseverance of her very body—her female being—as a fitting testament to a system that would not, theologically, allow such a testament.

In Kristeva's terms, Perpetua's statement is a "poetic word," because it "adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse," the theological discourse of her own church.¹¹⁰ Perhaps such multi-determined words were the only kind available to her, given Tertullian's pronouncement on female speech. Commenting on various practices of heretics, Tertullian explodes:

These heretical women—what impudence! They dare to teach, to engage in argument, to perform exorcisms, to promise healings, and perhaps even to baptize.¹¹¹

Elsewhere, Tertullian shows that it is not only heretical women who, by virtue of speaking, are immodest. In fact, the real heresy is that women should speak at all. In one treatise, he attacked a woman who taught and led one of the North African congregations, calling her a "viper," and in another he petitioned "the precepts of ecclesiastical discipline concerning women":

It is not permissible for a woman to speak in church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, to baptize, or to offer [the Eucharist], nor can she claim a share for herself in any masculine office, not to speak of any priestly duty.¹¹²

If, as Tertullian makes so clear, woman was cut off from the discourse as well as the sacramental offices of the institution, what role did she play in the church? For she did have a role to play. In the following quotation, it is

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 1.1.2 (CCL 1.343).

¹⁰⁵ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁶ This is Tertullian's argument throughout *De cultu fem.* See, for example, his concluding chapter, in which he states that it is not enough for Christians to be modest; they must also present a modest appearance. "[Christian modesty] must be complete to such an extent that it emanates from the soul to the clothing and bursts out from the conscience to the outer appearance" (*De cultu fem.* 2.13.3 [CCL 1.369]).

¹⁰⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 3.5 (ed. Van Beek, p. 8).

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *Serm.* 280.1 (in Van Beek, p. 150*); *Serm.* 281.2 (in Van Beek, p. 152*); *De nat. et or. an.* 4.18.26 (in Van Beek, p. 155*); see also *Serm.* 282.3 (in Van Beek, pp. 153*–54*).

¹¹⁰ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," p. 65.

¹¹¹ *De praescriptione haereticorum* 41.5 (CCL 1.220).

¹¹² On the "viper," see *De baptismo* 1.2–3 (CCL 1.277); on the denial of official ecclesiastical duties to women, see *De virginibus velandis* 9.1 (CCL 2.1218–19).

evident once again that sexual logic dominated Tertullian's description of (apparently permissible) female Christian activities. This passage comes from a lengthy letter to his wife, in which Tertullian raises the specter of the scenario that might occur should a Christian woman marry a pagan man.

Who would allow his wife, for the sake of visiting the brethren, to go around from street to street to other men's meager huts? Who will willingly tolerate her being snatched from his side by nocturnal assemblies? Who will bear without anxiety [her attendance] all night long at the Paschal rites? Who will, without his own suspicion, send her forth to attend the Lord's Supper, which they defame? Who will suffer her to creep into prison for the purpose of kissing a martyr's fetters or, indeed, to exchange the kiss with some one of the brothers?¹¹³

As outlined here by Tertullian, women's duties as Christians are erotic—or at least potentially so from the male perspective. Deprived of speech, woman is the one who creeps into jail to kiss the chains of martyrs, and who can tell what might transpire during the ritual of the kiss of peace? Thus, even when she is serving the discourse of the Law, woman is erotically suspect, tainted by her sex.¹¹⁴

As a context for understanding Perpetua's historical situation, Tertullian's unremittingly patriarchal construction of woman in theological terms may not tell the whole story. There is a possibility that Perpetua had been a participant in a revivalist movement within Christianity, the "New Prophecy" of Montanus, that held out tantalizingly "liberationist" promise for women. Montanism, as the movement was later called after the name of its founder, originated in Phrygia in Asia Minor in the late 150s or early 160s, when Montanus began to fall into ecstatic trances, claiming that his prophetic utterance was the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking through him.¹¹⁵ He was joined by two female prophets, Priscilla and Maximilla. Central to the message of this movement was the conviction that the Spirit could still speak directly to the Christian community through inspired individuals, whether male or female. Envisaging the imminent end of the world and the

descent of the heavenly Jerusalem, the New Prophecy urged its followers to testify publicly on behalf of their faith, thus appearing to encourage martyrdom.¹¹⁶

This movement was notable for the leadership roles that it accorded to women, as its opponents did not fail to perceive.¹¹⁷ According to the fourth-century heresiologist Epiphanius, Montanists viewed Eve as the source of knowledge and also admired the prophetic sister of Moses.¹¹⁸ In this movement, even divine sources of revelation could be feminized, as the following oracle attributed to Priscilla suggests: "Appearing as a woman clothed in a shining robe, Christ came to me [in sleep]; he put wisdom into me and revealed to me that this place is sacred and that here Jerusalem will come down from heaven."¹¹⁹ Most important to a view of the New Prophecy as a movement that offered expanded opportunities to women was its apparent claim that confessor-martyrs, once released from prison, had ministerial status, at least in Asia Minor. Central to this claim was the view that martyrs could exercise "the priestly power of the keys," that is, the power to forgive sinners and so restore them to the faith. As Frederick Klawiter has explained:

By exercising this power to forgive, the martyr was able to restore a lapsed person back into communion with Christ and his church. Since the power of the keys had been traditionally in the hands of the bishop-presbyter, anyone who exercised such power was thereby demonstrating a ministerial power. Strict logic would lead one to conclude than an imprisoned confessor could have the status of a minister.¹²⁰

Thus both in its individualistic view of prophecy and in its attribution of priestly power to martyrs, Montanism posed a political threat to the stable hierarchy of the church as an institution and it challenged its construction of ecclesiastical authority as male.¹²¹

Despite the condemnation of Montanus and his followers by Asian bishops and eventually by the bishop of Rome as well, the New Prophecy

¹¹⁶ Klawiter, "The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity," p. 253; Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, pp. 133–35; Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 131.

¹¹⁷ See Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 407, for the insistence of Montanism's opponents on viewing prophets as male. Evidence for the persistence of such misogyny is his quotation of a lexical article on Montanism in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, published in 1882: "If Montanus had triumphed, Christian doctrine would have been developed not under the superintendence of the Christian teachers most esteemed for wisdom, but of wild and excitable women" (p. 409).

¹¹⁸ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.2 (PG 41.882A).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.1 (PG 41.880C), translated by R. M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity: A Collection of Fragments*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ Klawiter, "Role of Martyrdom and Persecution," p. 254.

¹²¹ For a discussion of these issues, see Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, pp. 165–66, 170, 177–81.

¹¹³ *Ad uxorem* 4.2–3 (CCL 1.389).

¹¹⁴ Lefkowitz, "Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," has pointed out that the church fathers praised Perpetua and Felicitas for "acting uncharacteristically for women, in overcoming the inherent weakness and sinfulness of their flesh." She goes on to note "the consistent failure of male scholars to acknowledge the positive significance of femininity in the performance of certain heroic acts" (p. 421 and n.13). In a similar vein, Stevan Davies has discussed the roles of women in early Christian *Acta*, showing that women were often categorized (negatively) according to conventional values and that they were denied "apostolic" roles, even when they had shown themselves to be as chaste, as pious, and as devoted as their male companions. See *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts*, passim.

¹¹⁵ Montanism's date of origin is disputed; for discussion, see Robert M. Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, pp. 132–33.

spread westward rapidly, taking hold especially in Carthage.¹²² The two main witnesses to the strength of Montanism in the Cathaginian church are Tertullian, who became a full-fledged adherent of the movement, and the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*.¹²³ The anonymous author who wrote this *passio* incorporated the writings of Perpetua and Satyrus in a frame that is clearly Montanist in perspective, offering the visions of these two martyrs as proof that the Holy Spirit continues to speak and emphasizing the “grace” of martyrdom.¹²⁴ A Montanist-inspired respect for women may be indicated by the title of the work, which names the female martyrs even though the stories of their male companions are also part of the document, as well as by the lengthier narrative attention given to describing the deaths of the two women.¹²⁵

Was Perpetua herself an adherent of the New Prophecy, and if so, was she attracted to this movement within Christianity because of its empowerment of women? The evidence is suggestive. Her firm espousal of martyrdom as well as her oneiric visionary abilities are consonant with the beliefs and practices of the New Prophecy.¹²⁶ Furthermore, her understanding of her dream of her brother Dinocrates as evidence of her ability to release him from punishment may stem from the role played by “the power of the keys” in the New Prophecy’s view of the status of martyrs.¹²⁷ Also, the author of the *passio* twice calls attention to Perpetua’s role as leader of the group of martyrs in prison.¹²⁸

While this evidence is suggestive, it is not definitive. If Perpetua *was* a Montanist, this dimension of her profession of Christianity was ignored or suppressed by later interpreters like Augustine, who used her witness as exemplary of orthodox Christian courage and faith and, as we have seen, understood her fortitude as male.¹²⁹ Also, even the author of the *passio*, who appears to highlight the importance of the female martyrs, has framed Perpetua’s diary in a theological context that directs attention away from the specificity of her testimony as a woman by using it to polemicize on behalf of the New Prophecy’s spiritualist revivalism. There are even paternalistic touches in this author’s commentary: he calls Perpetua “a wife of Christ,”

and his description of Perpetua in the arena, tidying her hair and covering her thighs after having been tossed by a heifer, coheres more with Tertullian’s view of female modesty than it does with the Perpetua of the diary.¹³⁰ As Dronke remarks, such a woman “will hardly have gone to her death in a fit of prudery.”¹³¹ Finally, Tertullian’s view of women, particularly his refusal to accord them any kind of institutional authority, shows that, at least in Carthage, being Montanist did not necessarily entail an acceptance of expanded roles for women in the church. Thus while Perpetua may have perceived the liberationist elements that the New Prophecy held out for women, the institution to which she belonged did not choose to incorporate those elements into its theology or its praxis.¹³²

As opposed to these various strategies that deflect a reading of Perpetua’s diary as a *woman’s* testimony, I suggest that, when it is so read, it expresses the plight of a woman caught in the cross-currents of a theological debate in which sexual politics played a prominent role. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it is certainly strong enough to indicate that there was a debate about the status of women’s leadership and authority in the Cathaginian church. It appears that in Perpetua’s religious context femaleness was affirmed by the views and practices of a revivalist movement, but finally subjected to the dictates of the patriarchal metanarrative of the larger institution.

Given such a context, it is not surprising that all of the figures in Perpetua’s dreams, her own presence excepted, are male. Maleness is the fundamental trope of her oneiric language. From the perspective of dream, male figures are constitutive of her martyred condition, and it is these that are being acknowledged—but they are also being subverted because, as Kristeva indicates, oneiric language is a discourse of the carnival. Significantly, the male figures of Perpetua’s dreams are not single but double, both positive and negative, perhaps reflecting the division in her community regarding women but also indicating an unhinging of the masculine from its univocal moorings in authority.¹³³

¹³⁰ *Pass. Perp.* 18.2; 20.3–5 (ed. Van Beek, pp. 42, 46–48).

¹³¹ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 15.

¹³² Klawiter’s conclusion is worth quoting:

In the catholic church woman was ‘liberated’ to become a minister as long as she participated in the suffering of Christ. The moment she was set free from the suffering of prison, she was placed back into the ‘imprisoning’ role of female subordinate to male. In the New Prophecy, liberation also came by participating in the suffering of prison on account of the name, but a release from such suffering did not mean a retreat to the former role of subordinate female prior to prison experience. (“The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in the Early Church,” p. 261).

¹³³ See Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 5–6 for a discussion of the juxtaposition of positive and negative male figures in Perpetua’s diary.

¹²² Grant, *Augustus to Constantine*, pp. 135–38; Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 131.

¹²³ See Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 130–42, for a full account of Tertullian’s Montanist views.

¹²⁴ *Pass. Perp.* 1.1–6 (ed. Van Beek, pp. 4–6); see Barnes, *Tertullian*, p. 77; Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, p. 161; Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity,” p. 257.

¹²⁵ Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, p. 161.

¹²⁶ See Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.1–2 (PG 41.880–82), for evidence that Montanists practiced dream-incubation.

¹²⁷ Klawiter, “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity,” pp. 256–60; Barnes, *Tertullian*, pp. 77–78.

¹²⁸ *Pass. Perp.* 16.2–4; 18.4–6 (ed. Van Beek, pp. 38–40, 42–44).

¹²⁹ On the later use of Perpetua as an exemplary figure, see Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 16–17.

The masculine image in the first dream, the shepherd, has uniformly been viewed as a kind, fatherly figure, and the discussion of Dream One above has shown how commentaries have domesticated the meaning of this dream, including the image of the shepherd, in service to a theological metanarrative by placing it in the context of catechetical and martyrological teaching and scriptural references.¹³⁴ From a carnivalesque perspective, however, this dream speaks differently. The gray-haired shepherd does seem to be kindly and paternal; indeed, he is a paternal figure shown in a maternal stance, milking sheep and thus connected with female sexual fluids. However, he is, as the dream says, "huge" or "vast" (*grandem*). What looms large here is the male; the female, in the form of Perpetua, is suppliant, obviously subordinate to this Father in his immense garden. Further, the shepherd is linked by the ladder to the serpent, a signifier whose exaggerated phallicism is clearly a threatening trope of male domination. The ladder that links these two may indeed be an image of otherworldly initiation, as some have argued.¹³⁵ But its function as something that establishes a *connection* between the figures of shepherd and serpent has not to my knowledge been noticed. Laden as it is with sharp, pointed weapons (metallic repetitions of the phallic serpent), and described as flesh-rending and mangling, the ladder suggests that "beneath" the paternal position lurks a phallic figure of destruction. In the carnival of Perpetua's first dream, kindly shepherd and destructive serpent belong together. This is indeed an "other" world.

A further issue in this dream is the stance of Perpetua as oneiric figure. Again the serpent is important. As the factor that tries to prevent Perpetua from stepping on the ladder, the serpent is that which might undermine her stance or standpoint. Perpetua, however, is unafraid of phallic terrorization and treads on its head, thus taking a first step toward that transformation of identity characteristic of the carnivalesque discourse of dream. Just as male identity is split open (like the split personality of the carnival) and subverted by the connection between shepherd and serpent, so female lowliness is here countered with an assertion of power. We will meet again this "repeated metaphor of trampling," because there is in Perpetua's dreams "a curiously consistent association of feet with power."¹³⁶

A final perspective on this first dream is provided by the frame of the dream, the narrative portion of the diary. At several points, Perpetua describes the agonized relationship she had with her father.¹³⁷ He was opposed to her insistence on following the martyr's path and tried to dissuade

her. Two of his attempts at dissuasion involved force, one when he rushed at her as though to pluck out her eyes, and the other during her trial, when he pulled her off the step of the tribunal (just as the serpent tried to keep her from the rung of the ladder).¹³⁸ In the longest scene between them, Perpetua's father appealed to her sense of duty as daughter and mother and characterized her commitment to her faith as pride. In so doing, he framed her within the sexual dictates of patriarchal law: her being is filial and maternal only, and her courage is reduced to a moral vice. He ends this interview by throwing himself at her feet, while Perpetua remains unmoved.

Perpetua's standpoint, signified by her feet, is unshaken by the Father's emotional appeal in the face of the breakdown of its own authority. The paradox here is that the "real" Perpetua lived out literally a masochistic fantasy, at least when her death is viewed as support for a theology that denied the value of her being, while the oneiric Perpetua of the diary engaged in a discourse that mocked the very structures that mediated the "real" woman's death. As an imaginal space, the dream was a vehicle for articulating a view of female worth that revised cultural norms.

Death was much on Perpetua's mind, not only in the immediate circumstance of her forthcoming contest in the arena, but in her dreams as well. Subsequent to the emotional interview with her father, Perpetua saw the two dreams of her brother Dinocrates. The first of these dreams presents an extremely pathologized image: it shows Dinocrates in a dark, dirty place with the cancerous facial wound that would kill him still festering. As one commentator has suggested, "The dream-figure Dinocrates is suffering from a cancer: that is to say, he is subjected to a state of inner decay which cannot be arrested."¹³⁹ Furthermore, his wound is on his *face*; what is cancerous, from the perspective of the dream, is this male persona that is "brother" to Perpetua. This persona is placed by the dream in heat, dirt, and darkness.

Once again, maleness is the problematic that is being troped by the dream. It is striking that, in the narrative portion of the diary that introduces this dream, Perpetua described the presentation of the word *Dinocrates* to her conscious awareness as a slip: "I was amazed," she wrote, "for he had never entered my thoughts except just then." A word from the carnival intruded itself, and this was followed by the fully developed carnivalesque picture of the dream, a picture that suggests that it was precisely what she had embraced as "brother" that was cancerous. If one reads these dreams as constitutive of Perpetua's conflicted situation, then the testimony offered in this dream is especially strong. As a trope of maleness, the brother is afflicted with a deadly wound—yet he is alive in the carnival of the dream as a dimen-

¹³⁴ See pp. 152–58 above.

¹³⁵ There are extended discussions of the ladder as symbolic of an initiate's journey to a higher or heavenly consciousness in Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, pp. 7–8, and Von Franz, *The Passion of Perpetua*, pp. 16–20.

¹³⁶ Lefkowitz, "The Motivations for St. Perpetua's Martyrdom," p. 419.

¹³⁷ *Pass. Perp.* 3.1–3; 5.1–6; 6.2–5 (ed. Van Beek, pp. 8, 14–18).

¹³⁸ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 6.

¹³⁹ Von Franz, *The Passion of Perpetua*, p. 37.

sion of Perpetua herself because, in dream, author becomes character in her own narrative. Other readers of this dream have also noted that in some way Dinocrates' suffering is an image of Perpetua's painful condition.¹⁴⁰

Whatever one might say about the painful situation of the "actual" Perpetua, existing within a system that would allow her no discourse other than that of the dominant male grid, the oneiric Perpetua *does* articulate her suffering. In this dream, suffering is presented as a state of decay in the persona of the brother. Suffering is also presented as a great abyss that separates Perpetua and her brother; it is a separation so profound that no approach is possible. What the female and the male both appear to be lacking is the possibility of approach, that is, the possibility of relationship, each allowing the other to be. In this context, the separation between the two figures can be read as a sign that sexual difference—as opposed to sexual indifference—is a possibility; yet no approach to a situation in which the female is granted independent value is possible as long as she is tormented by the cancerous aspect of the male.

Certainly the theological discourse of Perpetua's time did not valorize male and female equally, and it was to the institution that authorized this discourse that Perpetua had committed her faith; she was, after all, preparing to die for it. Yet, in the polysemantic language of her dreams, it appears that, paradoxically, what she was dying for was itself dying, yielding to a logic that exceeded that of the conventional code.

There is a further scene of suffering in this dream. Dinocrates, hot and thirsty, stands by a pool whose rim is too high to allow him to drink. Separated, with no approach open to his sister, the brother has no access to the water of life.¹⁴¹ Surely the conventional code would have reversed this scene because, according to one of its representatives, Tertullian, God's image was man's prerogative, ruined by woman. Should not she be parched, rather than he? A transformation has occurred in this dream, a transformation that becomes more evident in the dream that followed this one.

Upon awakening from the dream of Dinocrates and realizing his suffering, Perpetua began to pray for him, confident that she could help. Her subsequent oneiric image of Dinocrates showed him clean, healed, drinking water and even playing in it. The precondition for this dream was an assertion of power by Perpetua; she knew that she could help that ailing male so separate from her, yet so near. Once inside the dream, there is immediately a change of face, that is, a change in the way in which the male trope is "faced" or presented. Now it is healed, no longer dark and dirty. When the female is empowered, the male is no longer in a state of inner decay; the badly faced

aspects of maleness have been faced and released into play. As Dronke has suggested, Perpetua "transforms the Dinocrates element in herself from something anguished into something liberated."¹⁴²

This release has something to do with water, the dream's major metaphor. There is an abundance of water, both in the pool and in the golden bowl. The bowl is said specifically to be a container that does not contain, in that it never runs out of water, while the rim of the pool, whose containing sides were earlier formidably high, has now been lowered; its barrier is down. Such containers of fluid substances are feminized images, particularly of breasts, suppliers of the milky water of life.¹⁴³ In the first dream of Dinocrates, where the male is so cancerous that no approach by the female is possible, such containers are inaccessible; the univocal world of patriarchal discourse prevents the flow of life's substance. When that discourse is "split" by contact with the empowered female, however, healing occurs, and the brother is released into play. Just as, in Perpetua's first dream, the shepherd as male trope has been feminized by its contact with the maternal sheep, so here maleness is "refreshed" when it approaches or makes room for the female. In these dreams, the discourse of a marginalized perspective is coming to expression, just as the discourse of mastery is being exposed and split apart.

When she awakened from this dream of the healed brother, Perpetua wrote, "I realized that he'd been freed from pain" (*intellexi translatum eum esse de poena*). Literally, Dinocrates has been "translated" from torment. The term *translatum* is derived from *transfero*, which means not only "to carry or bring over," but also "to translate into another language," "to use figuratively or tropically." *Translatio* means "trope" or "metaphor."¹⁴⁴ In the present context, this language suggests that in the carnivalesque discourse of dreams there is a translation taking place, a troping of suffering, and, for Perpetua, a release into a language different from the paternal metanarrative.

Prior to her fourth and final dream, Perpetua had a final interview with her father. She writes in the diary that "wasted and worn, he began to tear out the hair of his beard and fling it on the ground, and he hurled himself headlong and cursed his life, and said such things as would move every living creature. I ached for his unhappy old age."¹⁴⁵ Dronke's observations on Perpetua's reaction to her father in this scene are compelling. "While she depicts him more impassioned and desperate than ever," he notes, "a tone almost of detachment enters her description, as if her father's behaviour had

¹⁴² Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 285n.51.

¹⁴³ For a discussion of such female symbols, see Page duBois, *Sowing the Body*, pp. 47–49, 107–9, 110–29. See also Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin*, pp. 53–58.

¹⁴⁴ Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *transfero* and *translatio*.

¹⁴⁵ *Pass. Perp.* 9.2–3 (ed. Van Beck, p. 24).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36; Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ On the water of immortality, see M. Meslin, "Vase sacrés et boissons d'éternité," pp. 127–36.

become more like a histrionic performance, which she was watching sadly but without any impulse to participation. The last phrase—"I ached for his unhappy old age"—while voicing compassion, comes so abruptly after his extremes of pleading that it has a strangely dry effect. She has made herself deaf to him."¹⁴⁶ Although I do not want to deny the father's real grief, I would extend Dronke's observations by adding that Perpetua had "made herself deaf" to her father as patriarch who had once tried to confine his daughter within the dictates of a male economy of power; that patriarch is now powerless, prostrate, his face in the dust. This scene from the diary provides an appropriate context for Perpetua's final dream, which repeats and intensifies the "doubled male" as well as the female desire of earlier dreams.

In this dream, maleness is again the major trope, so much so that Perpetua herself becomes male. In comparison with the other dreams, a striking transformation in the dream's masculine images has occurred. In the dream of shepherd, ladder, and serpent, the two male images were equally huge; the sinister serpentine figure, signifier of phallic mastery, was equal in size, and so in importance, to the kindly paternal shepherd. In this last dream, however, the bestial opponent, the Egyptian, while still male, is reduced in size. This dimension of mastery, associated with the phallic sword as instrument of death, is now seen by Perpetua "rolling himself in the dust." This figure is decisively defeated as Perpetua, flying, knocks him down on his face and steps on his head, just as she had done before with the serpent. Further, the Egyptian, like both her father and the serpent, is unable to threaten her stance, even though he tries to do so by grabbing at her feet. The transformative message is that, when the female is in the ascendant, elevated above the foul figure of repressive structures, that foul figure succumbs to the liberating rebellion of what it had marginalized.

The Egyptian's oneiric double is Pomponius, equal in size to the Egyptian but opposite him in the dream's valorization. Pictured by the dream as the caring deacon who called Perpetua out from prison, Pomponius takes her to the scene of the contest, assures her of his presence, and disappears. Immediately following his disappearance, the Egyptian appears; in the dynamic of the dream, both aspects of maleness have been quickly juxtaposed. It is significant that Pomponius and the Egyptian are not related to each other as the images of the shepherd and the serpent were in the first dream. There is no link between them, because Pomponius vanishes before the Egyptian enters the scene. It would seem that, in the oneiric imagination, the destructive aspects of paternal kindness have been erased. In the figure of Pomponius, the ecclesiastical "prison" has opened itself to a recognition of the value of the female.

The male trope that dominates this dream both literally and figuratively is the fencing-master. Surprisingly, what the dream emphasizes in its description of this figure is not his symbol of authority, the baton, which may have been understood in antiquity as a personification of the *agon*.¹⁴⁷ De-emphasizing the sign that would link this figure with male contestation, the dream associates him with exquisitely ornate sandals, and with a branch laden with golden apples, whose importance is underscored by being mentioned three times. The sandals are made of silver and gold; unlike the metal attached to the ladder of the first dream, which was shaped into weapons that inflict pain, these metals are precious, and they "contain" the stance or standpoint of a male trope no longer undermined by a sinister figure as large as itself. Further, this is the standpoint that emerges immediately following Perpetua's transformation into a man. How is this juxtaposition to be understood?

Commentators both ancient and modern have remarked that Perpetua's transformation into a man signifies her recognition that she would need "male" qualities in order to brave the ordeal that she was facing. According to this view, Perpetua realized that she must shed all that was "womanish" in her—in this case, her female body, and so also her sexual identity—in order properly to testify.¹⁴⁸ This kind of reading views the dream as a mirror of the conditions of Perpetua's social situation, which denied the value of female witness. In order to be valuable, her witness must be male. In this interpretation, the dream would merely replicate the conventional code of patriarchal denial of power to women.

From the perspective developed in this chapter, however, the oneiric imagination is transformative and not only mimetic. For although the dreams do present a picture of Perpetua's painful situation within the paternal order, they also present a vision of a new, empowered sense of self-identity that is "other" to the constructs of the social order. Thus the dream is an irruption into the master narrative of paternal logic, which it subverts and rebels against, offering as it does a competing vision of the female.

Perpetua's dream does not mean that she somehow "became male." Such a perspective undermines her sexual being, her worth as a woman. It is important to emphasize that it was *in the carnival* that Perpetua became

¹⁴⁷ Robert, "Une Vision de Perpetué Martyre à Carthage en 203," p. 261.

¹⁴⁸ Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 75, understands her transformation as "a triumph of Perpetua's will"; Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 14, remarks that the change in gender is "not so much a sexual fantasy as a willed identification, in her dream, with the heroine's end to which she aspires. . . . Perpetua wants to strip herself of all that is weak, or womanish, in her nature." See also p. 163 above. Amat, *Songes et Visions*, p. 83, says that the change of sex "materialized the masculine aspects of the young woman's personality and qualities of audacity," although she admits that the mutation is "not exempt from some misogyny" (p. 84).

¹⁴⁶ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, p. 13.

male; the transformation took place in oneiric image, not spiritual or physical fact. This moment in the dream suggests that what was formerly signified by male images no longer pertains. Sinister shepherd, cancerous brother: these tropes of a totalizing discourse of mastery and domination have been emptied of their power. Now the masculine trope can be embraced; it has become the site for an expression of otherness. How this is accomplished in the poeticized logic of the dream will take the discussion back to the fencing-master's bough of apples.

Throughout antiquity, the apple was thought to be an erotic, female fruit.¹⁴⁹ Frequently used as a symbol for women's breasts, the apple was above all the fruit of Aphrodite and so was seen as an embodiment of *eros* and of female desire in particular.¹⁵⁰ As a figure of love, the apple played a role in courtship and marriage, processes of erotic binding. Literary renditions of this role show, for example, the lovers Daphnis and Chloe throwing apples at each other; Philostratus portrays *Erōtes* kissing an apple that they throw back and forth; and "Lucian adds the refinement of biting a piece out of an apple to cast into the bosom of the girl."¹⁵¹ In the social realm, brides were to munch an apple of Cydon before crossing the threshold of the bridal chamber by order of the Solonic code. According to Plutarch, apple-eating would give the bride sweet words!¹⁵² Medicinally, the apple was thought to be an antidote to poison; as a poisoner of poison, it was the fruit of life and death, as in the tale of Callimachus and Chrysorrhoe, in which an apple both kills the hero and brings him back to life. Finally, apples were the only fruit, or so the lore had it, that would give relief to a woman in labor.¹⁵³

In Perpetua's dream, the fencing-master holds a bough of apples. Thus connected with an object with Aphroditic associations, this male trope has been intensely feminized or radically eroticized in the direction of female desire. The fencing-master appears in the dream just after Perpetua has become a man: just at the moment when she fully embraces the male, that trope is itself troped by the appearance of an image of sexual identity that is female and not inscribed within the code of patriarchal definition. When Perpetua embraces the male, what appears is an image of maleness whose highly valued stance is a recognition of female identity. The "sweet words"

¹⁴⁹ For an extensive collection of literary references, see A. R. Littlewood, "The Symbolism of the Apple in Greek and Roman Literature," pp. 147–81. For mythological and social functions of the apple, see Marcel Detienne, *Dionysos Slain*, pp. 40–44.

¹⁵⁰ Littlewood, "The Symbolism of the Apple in Greek and Roman Literature," pp. 159–60; Detienne, *Dionysos Slain*, pp. 40–44.

¹⁵¹ Littlewood, "The Symbolism of the Apple in Greek and Roman Literature," pp. 153–55 and n.15.

¹⁵² Detienne, *Dionysos Slain*, p. 43, referring to Plutarch, *Moralia 2 (Conjugal Precepts)*: 138D.

¹⁵³ Littlewood, "The Symbolism of the Apple in Greek and Roman Literature," pp. 167n.40, 174–75, 159n.25.

that these apples offer is the possibility of a female discourse or, as Irigaray says, a "feminine syntax" that would "preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, and thus any form of appropriation."¹⁵⁴ In the image of the fencing-master, the masculine is released from the destructive code of univocal discourse by virtue of its recognition of female value. Such recognition is, indeed, the defining quality of this dream-image. To use Kristeva's formulation, the male "has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself."¹⁵⁵ The "irreverent" dream of this carnival releases the male as well as the female from the prison of sexual indifference.

In her dream, Perpetua wins the golden apples for herself and is kissed by the fencing-master, who wishes her peace. She then walks alone toward the Gate of Life in triumph. The oneiric Perpetua was, one might say, a woman in labor for whom the apples were a prize signifying both life and death. What dies in her dream-discourse is the master narrative of theological doctrine that so devalued female identity. In this sense, the dreams unlock theological prejudice by exposing it to the polyvalent discourse of the oneiric imagination. Similarly, what comes to life in the dreams' poetic logic is a series of gestures toward the expression of female desire. The *eros* of Perpetua's dream-diary is its articulation of the value of difference, and its imaginal empowering of a woman's voice.

¹⁵⁴ Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 134.

¹⁵⁵ Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," p. 83.