Athanasius Pulled Apart: *Her*esiology and the (Dis)membered (Fe)male Body

Jennifer Barry
University of Mary Washington; jbarry@umw.edu

Abstract

In this article, I engage Athanasius of Alexandria's invocation of the infamous dismemberment of the unnamed woman found in Judg 19. By the fourth century, this story of gang rape—along with other preserved stories of sexual violence—found in Judges, were scattered throughout early Christian literature. Judges 19 holds a particularly troubling history in the late ancient context. The story of the rape and dismemberment of the unnamed woman in Judg 19 gave life to another story and typified a style of writing that I characterize in the article as a *her*esiology. The spectacle of Judges, along with other gruesome deaths of women, was one way in which heresiological discourse frames rhetorical arguments for writers like Athanasius of Alexandria. Here, I purposely draw our attention to how Athanasian orthodoxy became reliant on gender-based violence.

Keywords

Athanasius of Alexandria, exile, heresiology, orthodoxy/heresy

Introduction

When applying a critical gendered lens to ancient texts, it quickly becomes obvious how often ancient writers used women to spark a call to arms in times of conflict. Athanasius, a fourth-century contested bishop of Alexandria, began and ended his career crafting an orthodox legacy reliant on the logic of gender violence. At the very start of his episcopal career, Athanasius was on the defensive, which had much to do with his unusual path to his post. He became a deacon as soon as his age would permit, and Alexander, bishop of Alexandria from 313 to 328 CE, took

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him on as a trusted assistant and protégé. He is said to have been present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE and was almost immediately an ardent defender of its decrees.[1] Upon the death of his mentor, Athanasius was named Alexander's heir, despite the fact that he had not reached the canonical age for the episcopacy.[2] And so, from its very inception, Athanasius's career as the bishop of Alexandria was a controversial one.

Athanasius was removed from his seat of power roughly five times.[3] His first two periods of flight from Alexandria were spent outside of Egypt. Given the contradictory reports found in the primary sources, the precise reasons for these

[1] As early as 326 CE (possibly 328), Athanasius was defending a theology of the incarnation of the Logos and defending the date of Easter in his *Festal Letters*. By 350 CE, he had launched a full campaign securing the legacy of Nicaea, as is most clearly demonstrated in his work *On the Council of Nicaea*, composed ca. 350–356. For a detailed bibliography of cited Athanasian texts, see n. 2 below.

[2] T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) and David Gwynn, *Athanasias of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); both authors provide extensive biographies on Athanasius's contested career as bishop of Alexandria. I have also taken note of how difficult it is to reconstruct Athanasius's many flights from Alexandria in Jennifer Barry, *Bishops in Flight: Exile and Displacement in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019). Not only was his election called into question, but a rival bishop was put in place by a competing Christian faction in Alexandria. In order to further undermine his authority, Athanasius's enemies accused him of multiple counts of misconduct. Athanasius was initially accused of four charges, which he related in his *Festal Letters*, *Defense against the Arians*, and *Index*. He extorted the Meletian community in Alexandria, his representative Macarius destroyed church property, he was elected well below the permissible canonical age, and he bribed an imperial official. See Athanasius, *Ep. fest*. 4.5; idem, *Apol. sec*. 60.4; and idem, *Index* 3. To further complicate the matter and veracity of several biographical details, which David Gwynn has helpfully laid out, the afterlife of the *Festal Letters* has a long and complex history and survives primarily in Syriac and Coptic (although originally written in Greek). See also William Cureton, *The Festal Letters of Athanasius* (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1848), revised and translated by Henry Burgess in *The Festal Letters of Saint Athanasius* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1854), which has been consulted here. For a detailed description of the textual history, see David Gwynn and a more recent publication by Gwynn, "Patronage Networks in the Festal Letters of Athanasius of Alexandria," in *Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity: Connection and Communication across Boundaries* (ed. Carmen Angela Cvetković and Peter Gemeinhardt; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019) 101–15, esp. 104 n. 11.

[3] The events surrounding Athanasius's trips into exile bend to different interpretations depending on the biographer, whether ancient or contemporary. T. D. Barnes, for example, notes that some primary materials set Athanasius's defensive stance on the topic of exile in the context of his relationship with emperors, while others set it in the context of conciliar politics. Yet even Barnes frequently states why it is often extremely difficult even to define what constitutes a trip into exile. See Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 24. I have also stressed how Athanasius's first exile (335–337) is described in painstaking detail in three of his apologetic texts: *Defense against the Arians* (349), *Defense before Constantius* (353, 357), and *History of the Arians* (357); see Barry, *Bishops in Flight*, 24–28. All three texts were composed well after the fact and deliberately misrepresent historical events to place Athanasius in a favorable light. Athanasius remains the primary source for historical information that later biographers, such as the ecclesiastical historians of the 5th cent., easily adopted or reformatted to ensure that Athanasius was remembered as a hero.

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flights are difficult to pin down.[4] What is clear is that Athanasius took advantage of his displacement and its literary possibilities to construct a sympathetic and powerful identity as a persecuted figure. Exile, Athanasius argued, was synonymous with persecution. And while he continuously construed himself as a victim, in reality, he was hardly a passive one.

Athanasius's early career as a displaced bishop worked to his advantage with the help of what I will term here a violent *her*esiological discourse. By using the suffering of vulnerable gendered bodies to articulate his own life of displacement, Athanasius crafted a rhetorical legacy as a victim of persecution, which proved to be powerfully successful. While Athanasius should have been remembered as a criminal, he lived on as a champion of orthodoxy through a careful refashioning of the suffering gendered self. To do so, he turned to biblical narratives to reread and reinterpret his particular moment of displacement. As we will see in his *Encyclical Letter*, he will deploy the story of the dismembered woman in Judg 19 first to compare to his suffering as a bishop on the run, then to highlight the excessive violence deployed by his enemies in his rereading of the attack on the Alexandrian church, and, finally, pieces of the story will be sent out as a call to arms to his fellow orthodox Christians. The logic of violence first articulated in this letter will resurface again and again in his later polemical works as Athanasius moves from a comparable passive victim to a righteously violent orthodox hero.

The Book of Judges and the Violence of *Her*esiology

The book of Judges has preoccupied the scholarly imagination within the history of feminist/womanist biblical interpretation and is often labeled a text of terror.[5] To

[4] Many of Athanasius's polemical works were written during his third flight (356 CE). It is very difficult to reconstruct actual historical events, given how details shift and change to serve different arguments or positions Athanasius presented to the reader. As noted above, most of the sources on Athanasius's frequent departures from Alexandria and the events leading up to his flights come from Athanasius and are later adopted by his defenders: for example, later pro-Nicene ecclesiastical historians, who, at a very different moment in history, used Athanasius as a credible witness without much interrogation. For a discussion on the reception of the Athanasian legacy, see, Barry, *Bishops in Flight*, 124–30, and Edward J. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) 182–89.

[5] *Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3rd ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012) 129. See also Phyllis Trible's classic work, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), and see the recent volume responding to the significant influence Trible's work has had on the field of biblical studies: *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence* (ed. Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon and Robyn J. Whitaker; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2021). Other notable works that take the book of Judges as a central point of departure include *Feminist Companion to Judges* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (ed. Carol L. Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Shepard Kraemer; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000); and Rhiannon Graybill, *Texts after Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

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summarize briefly, the book is comprised of a series of narratives that trace a cycle of rebellion, suffering, and deliverance. Its main characters are flawed, violent, and even at times sadistic. And it is in Judges that we find stories of both female triumph and extreme horror. For example, in Judg 4–5, Deborah surpassed patriarchal expectations and led as commander and judge, which secured the Israelites' victory over their enemies. And within Deborah's narrative, we also find the story of Jael, who boldly drove a stake through the head of her enemy and won praise among the tribes of Israel even as an outsider. But Judges also preserves the haunting stories of Jephthah's daughter's unwarranted death (Judg 11), the brutal ends of Samson's many consorts (Judg 13–16), and the dismemberment of the Levite's concubine (Judg 19). It is undeniably a book that showcases the worst impulses of humanity and a glorification of gender-based violence.

And while the book of Judges was frequently noted as troubling for ancient commentators, it nevertheless became a site of fantastical exploration for Christian authors in late antiquity.[6] Many of these authors were equally enthralled and horrified by the mistaken vow and subsequent sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. Augustine of Hippo, for example, spent a great deal of time in his *Questions on Judges* both describing Jephthah's error, comparing it to the sacrifice of Isaac, and reminding his audience that this story was an exception that proved the rule: child sacrifice is wrong.[7] Ambrose of Milan, Augustine's mentor, on the other hand, in *On the Duties of the Clergy*, read the story allegorically to help settle some of the more unsavory details.[8] It is a reminder, he states, of the willing sacrifice that all are called to make as followers of Christ. It is Athanasius of Alexandria's invocation of the infamous dismemberment of the unnamed woman found in Judg 19, however, that stands out, not simply for its gruesome narrative but also for the ways in which the story became embedded within Athanasius's larger theological project.

The story of the nameless woman preserved in Judg 19 holds a long history in the late ancient context.[9] The spectacle of Judges, along with other gruesome

[6] Blake Leyerle has made note of the use of women in patristic biblical exegesis at several points in her scholarly career. Her work on Lot's wife is particularly revealing and helps further support my point that there was a larger trend of use (and abuse) of women as objects within male Christian exegesis. See Blake Leyerle, "Lot's Wife on the Border," *HTR* 107 (2014) 59–80. I thank an early anonymous reviewer for reminding me of Leyerle's earlier article, "John Chrysostom on the Gaze," *JECS* 1 (1993) 159–74, which was also developed and expanded upon in her book *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriag*e (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[7] Augustine, *Questions on Judges* 49.2–4.

[8] Ambrose, *Duties of the Clergy* 3.12.78, 81; John Chrysostom also comments on this passage in his *Homilies Concerning the Statues* 14.7.

[9] For an analyses on the reception of Judg 19 in Jewish literature, see Christopher Begg, "The Retellings of the Story of Judges 19 by Pseudo-Philo and Josephus: A Comparison," *EstBib* 58 (2000) 33; and for an examination of the anonymity of the Judg 19 woman, see Don Michael Hudson, "Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19–21," *JSOT* 62 (1994) 49–66; J. Cheryl Exum, "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," *CBQ* 52 (1990) 410–31; and Adele Reinhartz, *"Why Ask My Name?" Anonymity and Identity in Biblical*

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stories of deaths of women, was one way in which heresiologists framed their rhetorical arguments.[10] As both Averil Cameron and Karen King have noted, the logic of heresiological literature is frequently exclusionary and often violent.[11] As we will see, Athanasius capitalizes on this story to claim that a war against the Christian church is underway.[12] Thus the story of the rape and dismemberment of the unnamed woman in Judg 19 gave life to his *her*esiology.

The growing interest during the 1990s in the concept of orthodoxy and its twin, heresy, in the history of Christianity, culminated in two overlapping schools of thought. In 1996 the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* published a collection of essays on heresy in late antiquity.[13] Then, in 1998, a group of scholars gathered at the École française de Rome and afterward published a collection of essays that includes the Middle Ages and modernity.[14] Both collections stress the theoretical

Narrative (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 122–26.

[10] Here I want to make clear that I am not interested in heresy as a historical object but in the discursive structure of heresiology. For a history on this distinction in early Christian studies, see Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin, "Introduction: From Heresy to Heresiology; Recent Trends in Scholarship and the Contribution of This Volume," in *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (ed. Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 1–27. Other representative works include Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Rebecca Lyman, "A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism," in *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (ed. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 45–62; and Teresa M. Shaw, "Ascetic Practice and the Genealogy of Heresy: Problems in Modern Scholarship and Ancient Textual Representation," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies: Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography* (ed. Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005) 213–36.

[11] Averil Cameron, "The Violence of Orthodoxy," in *Heresy and Identity* (ed. Iricinschi and Zellentin), 102–14; Karen L. King, "Social and Theological Effects of Heresiological Discourse," in *Heresy and Identity* (ed. Iricinschi and Zellentin), 28–49.

[12] The story of the rape of the unnamed woman is frequently linked back to Gen 19 where another narrative of attempted gang rape is preserved. Two angelic beings are sought after in a similar manner as foreigners and outsiders. Their vulnerability as outsiders puts them at risk to sexual violence. Lot, like the Benjaminite housing the Levite in the Judges narrative, offers his two virgin daughters in exchange for the angelic visitor's safety. In this exodus narrative the girls are rejected. See Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19–21: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *CBQ* 44 (1982) 365–78; Stuart Lasine, "Guest and Host in Judges 19: Lot's Hospitality in an Inverted World," *JSOT* 9 (1984) 37–59. See also David I. Block, "Echo Narrative Technique in Hebrew Literature: A Study in Judges 19," *WTJ* 52 (1990) 325–41; Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22 (1992) 3–11.

[13] See *JECS* 4.4 (1996). These essays stemmed from papers presented at the University of British Columbia's Twenty-Fourth Medieval Workshop in 1994.

[14] See *Orthodoxie, christianisme, histoire / Orthodoxy, Christianity, History* (ed. Susanna Elm, Éric Rebillard, and Antonella Romano; CÉFR 270; Rome: École francaise de Rome, 2000).

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shift in the field of Christian history focusing on the discourse, both ancient and contemporary, of orthodoxy and heresy. Subsequently, scholars such as Karen King, Rebecca Lyman, Susanna Elm, Virginia Burrus, and Todd Berzon have expanded how scholars of late antiquity engage the discourse of orthodoxy and heresy, not as a social phenomenon but as an exercise in rhetorical control as well as discursive political and theological war of words.[15] In this rhetorical exercise, to call forth an orthodox self, you must also have a heretical other by which to define and call the self into existence. To state it another way, these categories are mutually dependent and do not exist outside of one another.

The most classic examples of heresiological texts that scholars have explored have been treatises that contain catalogs, which systematically list named heretics and describe their heretical beliefs, such as Irenaeus of Lyon's *Against Heresies*, Hippolytus of Rome's *Refutation of All Heresies*, and Epiphanius of Salamis's *Refutation of All Heresies*.[16] But this was just one way that heresiological literature surfaced in late antiquity. The field of heresiological studies has also turned to other literary genres to identify a larger discursive politics at play. So-called histories of heretics, for example, were a popular genre alongside highly stylized letters addressed to, and in opposition of, doctrinal enemies. Richard Flower has explored how letters composed to imperial figures quickly became a popular register to deploy Christian invective in order to identify and condemn heretical emperors in a new age of Christian imperial politics.[17] I have also argued that the invocation of classical tropes of displacement and exile took on a new powerful way to construct the orthodox self and locate heretics.[18]

As these scholars demonstrate, heresiological discourse crossed a host of different literary genres and rhetorical techniques. What I term here as *her*esiology, then, was a set of literary practices deployed by competing Christians to defend their version of orthodoxy much like those described before but that were reliant on the exploitation of the real and imagined experiences of gender violence. As we will see, Athanasius's *her*esiological project began as a carefully constructed narrative built out of the violence of Judg 19 and showcases how gender violence and heresiology merge.

[15] See Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Rebecca Lyman, "2002 NAPS Presidential Address: Hellenism and Heresy," *JECS* 11 (2003) 209–22; Susanna Elm, *"Virgins of God": The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); Todd Berzon, *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[16] See Andrew Jacobs's recent biography on Epiphanius for a thorough examination of the heresiologists' contribution to the orthodox project; Andrew S. Jacobs, *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

[17] Richard Flower, *Emperors and Bishops in Late Roman Invective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[18] For a detailed discussion on the problems associated with describing Athanasius's many departures from Alexandria as exiles, see Barry, *Bishops in Flight*, 2–5, 31–55.

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This style of *her*esiological reasoning reemphasizes Averil Cameron's claim that violence remains inextricably linked to the orthodox project. To push her logic further, I argue that too often orthodoxy was—and remains—reliant on the logic of gender violence that continues to inform how gender is constructed. Athanasius's invocation of Judg 19 was not intended to console or even recover the specific names or stories of those who suffered or would suffer these or similar wrongs. The experience of violence was instead used to make a point.

Dismembered and Remembered

We find the Judg 19 story preserved in Athanasius's *Encyclical Letter* composed during his second flight from Alexandria and circulated widely beyond the Alexandrian region.[19] In this letter, and while he was tucked safely away in Rome in the summer of 339, Athanasius described for his audience a series of dramatic events that initiated his flight to Rome.[20] To frame his narrative of displacement and suffering, Athanasius describes a coordinated attack on the Alexandrian community and rereads the events alongside the shocking story of Judg 19.

As a brief reminder, Judg 19 preserves the story of a Levite man traveling with his wife through the Benjaminite territory of Gibeah.[21] They stop for the evening and take up shelter with another member of the tribe of Israel, who is also described as a stranger among the Benjaminites but who takes pity on the visitors. His hospitality, however, is immediately challenged. When the male inhabitants of the town learn of the Levite's presence, they storm the house and demand the host hand over the Levite to satisfy their sexual whims. As a compromise, two women are offered instead: the unnamed partner of the Levite and an unnamed virgin daughter of the host (who we never hear from or more about in the story). The hostile men then torture and gang rape the unnamed woman all night long and only release her at dawn. She falls at the threshold of the house where the Levite discovers her the next morning. The Levite then unceremoniously tosses the brutalized woman on his donkey, and he returns to his homeland. Once home, he cuts the woman's body into pieces and sends each part out to all the tribes of Israel to call the Benjaminites to account for their crimes.

This story of sexual violence and torture is quite shocking. It is therefore disturbing how the narrative became wrapped into Athanasius's renarration of his

[19] Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* H. G. Opitz, *Athanasius Werke* (vol. 2.1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1940) 169–77. Unless otherwise noted, the English translation is from M. Atkinson and A. Robertson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.4 (ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace; Buffalo, 1892). There are two encyclicals cited in this text. They are composed contemporaneously. For the sake of clarity, I will use Opitz's titles to distinguish the two works.

[20] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 50.

[21] The identity of the woman traveling with the Levite is debated. Some label her a concubine, others a common-law wife. Here, I've defaulted to wife to avoid some of the stigma associated with concubine and also to point to the domestic and intimate nature of the extreme violence preserved in the text.

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experience of persecution in Alexandria. In this *Encyclical Letter*, we find that the Judges' narrative was deployed to contextualize a history of terror grounded in biblical precedent. In Athanasius's version of the story, much of the details of the Judges narrative were glossed over. Athanasius even states that he is not interested in the sordid details, but he begins with this saga of violence to usher in his own story of horror. His story, he exclaims, is far worse:

> For my object in reminding you of this history is this, that you may compare those ancient events with what has happened to us now, and perceiving how much these exceed the other in cruelty, [and you] may be filled with greater indignation on account of them, than were the people of old against those offenders. (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 1)

In other words, Athanasius uses the story of Judg 19 to prepare his listeners for the atrocities that he and his companions face. By comparison, he argues, the Levite's suffering—and here, he intentionally draws us back to the suffering of the Levite and *not* the nameless woman—was but one small offense.

Why then does Athanasius invoke this passage at all? I argue its use was not just a passing biblical comparison. The topic of in-group fighting (the Benjaminites are one among the twelve tribes of Israel) and excessive violence (particularly the dismemberment of the woman's body) successfully frames Athanasius's description of his own experience of intra-Christian violence and displacement in Alexandria. Moreover, his use of the language of pollution and corruption to describe what happened to the unnamed woman highlighted for Athanasius the ongoing danger heretics posed to the church. The symbolic, and literal, rape of the church would not be lost on his audience.

To unpack this invocation further: Athanasius's flight to Rome was intentionally grafted into the story of the Levite and his partner in two key ways. First, it is in this text that Athanasius gives life to his *her*esiological discourse, starting with the death and dismemberment of a woman. And second, it is in this letter that the details of the attack on the Alexandrian church would serve as a template for how Athanasius's logic of gender violence would be used in subsequent polemical treatises.

In her work *Sex Lives of the Saints*, Virginia Burrus argues that women must die in order for a man to get a Life (or *vita*).[22] In her assessment of hagiographical literature, Burrus states:

> Men, it seems, first write their autobiographies by giving testimony to the death of an Other, a woman. Jerome and Gregory, as well as Augustine, tell their own stories by reliving their grief for a friend, a sister, a mother. "She"

[22] Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints*: *An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Burrus is discussing hagiographical literature more narrowly in her assessment, but I find her argument applicable here as well. The birth of the heresiologist, in other words, begins with the rape and death of a woman, not unlike other origin stories.

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> is dead; "he" survives. But "she" also lives on (she gets a Life), even as "he" (the writer) surrenders to a memorial of what he has become.[23]

Here Burrus explicitly identifies hagiographical narratives (which we will return to later), but I argue that her observation extends to a variety of literary genres, including heresiological literature. Athanasius first calls attention to and then exploits the unnamed woman's experience to piece together his *her*esiological corpus. His was not a lament for the woman. In other words, the unnamed woman does not get a Life in return for her suffering. Instead, Athanasius explicitly stated that it was not his intent to renarrate the details of the Judges narrative but to make another point. The unnamed woman is but a dismembered and remembered object, who was owned, used, tortured, and divided among men. Her death gave life to a man.

But why this story from Judges? There are many other women who die ignominious deaths in the book of Judges, as briefly highlighted before. Any one of Samson's love interests, for instance, could work. Or, if Athanasius wanted to highlight the violent treatment of virgins, he might have considered Jephthah's lamentable daughter. And yet, Athanasius zeroes in on the unnamed woman for several explicit reasons. He states:

> On that occasion [when the woman's body was divided and sent out] the tribes were astounded, each at the sight of part of the body of one woman; but now the members of the whole Church are seen divided from one another, and are sent abroad, some to you, and some to others. They bring word of the insults and injustice, which they have suffered. (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 1)

To be clear, it is now the exiled men who stand in for the pieces of the broken woman—which is a change from his earlier reasoning, where the story of violence would prepare his readers for the shock of his experience. In this second invocation of the story, the living men carry with them the stories of horror, which the mute dismembered woman could not. She dies so they might live (this is a theme we will see again).

He goes on to explain two explicit accounts that detail just what those insults and injustices were. Athanasius first refers to Gregory of Cappadocia's initial invasion of the city and his impious attack on the "Great Alexandrian Church" during the season of Lent.[24] In this first account, the church and its baptistery were set on

[23] Ibid., 87.

[24] The church referred to here was probably the same church Athanasius refers to in his *Defense before Constantius*, which the exiled bishop had used illegally, as it had not yet been dedicated to the emperor. According to Barnes, the "Great Alexandrian Church" Athanasius refers to here is the Church of Dionysius mentioned also by Socr., *HE* 2.11, 6, and Julius, *Ep*. 1 (341). See Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 49. I believe Athanasius is referring to the Caesareum also known as St. Michael's. For a discussion on why it is possibly the Caesareum, see Jennifer Barry, "We didn't Start the Fire: The Alexandrian Legacy within Orthodox Memory," *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 3 (2020) 13–30.

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fire and then plundered by heathens and Jews.[25] Known Arians then ravaged the sanctuary and tortured the faithful. Virgins were stripped and raped, presbyters and laymen were flayed alive, and many others were handed over to the authorities to be cast into prison to prolong their suffering.

Then, in a much shorter and less detailed account, Athanasius states that Gregory turned his attention to a second church where the bishop had been hiding. Upon learning of Gregory's plans to repeat the same assault, Athanasius fled to safety. Those left behind were thrown into prison, and the church succumbed to the desires of the Arians. These two descriptions parallel the unnamed woman's story in graphic detail. Like the Judges passage, the rape of the church's virgins and the torture of its members is excessive and violent. The perpetrators were described as ravenous and inflamed by their madness and rage. And like the Judges narrative, the story did not end there.

A key detail that Athanasius retains in both his version of the Judges narrative and its connection to the atrocities committed against the Alexandrian church is the dismemberment. As Susan Jeffords has noted in her gender analysis of narrative theory:

> A dismembered body, like a murdered one, is silent, and needs to have someone else tell its story, explain its murder. But a murdered body remains whole, retains its initial appearance, a semblance of its identity, itself. A dismembered body can be reassembled to become a "different" self, can take on any number of appearances, any number of identities, can become any number of stories.[26]

As Jeffords highlights, it is the dismemberment that is most useful for narrative progression. She, or they, are then reassembled to become something different and change to meet the needs of the narrative. It is clear that the dismembered body is central to Athanasius's self-fashioning in this and later polemical texts. As he cuts through the narrative, he points to his own excessively violent reality. He argues that it is a persecution that surpasses any that has come before. Athanasius laments:

> For the treatment we have undergone surpasses the bitterness of any persecution; and the calamity of the Levite was but small, when compared with the enormities which have now been committed against the Church; or rather such deeds as these were never before heard of in the whole world, or the like experienced by anyone. For in that case it was but a single woman that was injured, and one Levite who suffered wrong; now the whole Church is

[25] His invocation of these two groups is also quite troubling. Both groups stand in as othered bodies that are also meant to invoke fear and violence.

[26] See Susan Jeffords, "Narrative as Violence, Violence as Patriarchy, Patriarchy as Story-Telling," in *Gender: Literary and Cinematic Representation: Selected Papers from the 11th Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film* (ed. Jeanne Ruppert; Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994) 82–95, at 84. Jeffords uses both literary theory and psychoanalytic theory to engage a gender analysis of various cultural narratives that consistently use murder scenes, specifically of women, to move the story forward. She invokes several case studies that include the Judg 19 narrative.

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> injured, the priesthood insulted, and worst of all, piety is persecuted by impiety. (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 1)

What is so shocking to Athanasius was that, like the Benjaminites, the rapacious enemies considered themselves a part of the community. And like the Benjaminites, the Arians allowed their madness and insatiable desire for violence to distinguish them from the other members who claim the same faith. Their perversion proves what a threat they pose to the Christian church and to her bishop.

And here, Athanasius invokes a familiar method of biblical exegesis. The biblical pericope serves as a predictive narrative to interpret his contemporary moment. The link between the Judges narrative and the violence taken against the Christian Alexandrian community, with Athanasius at the center of the narrative, is meant to emphasize the excessive bloodlust he presents in his record of the coordinated attacks against his city. We are encouraged to compare the city to the ravaged woman's body and Athanasius to the Levite.

The bishop draws for his readers a connection between male property and the polluting lust of those enemies of the church. Athanasius, like the Judges narrator, removes the humanity of the raped victim(s) to make a point. The body transforms into an object or piece of property that was ravaged by the excessive violence of men.

Athanasius then takes this story a step further, however, and reassembles the ravaged body as his own. Ultimately, what stands out is Athanasius's adoption and co-opting of the suffering of the sexually violated women in both the biblical text and his account of the attacks on the Alexandrian community. The brutalized woman, like the vulnerable citizens of Alexandria, may have suffered a terrible fate, but the suffering of the man who recorded these stories was, according to Athanasius, far worse. It is here that Athanasius deploys the biblical narrative to frame the start to his *her*esiological argument: the true victim is not the dismembered woman but the bishop in flight.

As others have noted, Athanasius built his career and identity as a persecuted defender of the faith.[27] To reinforce this identity, he created a larger-than-life enemy, that is, those infamous *Ariomaniacs*.[28] These straw men, not unlike the Benjaminites, helped to bolster his identity as a persecuted figure—but, as he began to intimate in this letter, he must become more than a victim. As his *her*esiological logic progresses in later texts, the body must be dismembered once again to be reassembled into the victorious champion of Nicene orthodoxy. Nevertheless, this logic was reliant on this narrative of gendered violence.

[27] See the introduction for Athanasius's tenuous claim to his episcopal throne.

[28] Athanasius, in *Syn*. 13 and *C. Ar.* 4, cleverly coins the phrase "Arian madmen" or *Ariomaniacs*, as an effective way to dismiss his enemies. For a detailed discussion on the rhetorical degradation and creation of the category of "Arian madmen" in Athanasius's other works, see Virginia Burrus, *"Begotten, Not Made": Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 47–68.

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From Dismembered Victim to Reassembled Hero

It is clear in his later works that Athanasius continues to compare his suffering to other gendered suffering bodies, including Christian martyrs, but his position (and embodied persona) shifts from passive victim to active hero. While the stories of attacks are recycled, the role of the bishop shifts. In the following section of the text, Athanasius's *her*esiological logic, which began in this *Encyclical Letter* explored above, shifts to help him identify his enemies. And while an explicit link to the Judg 19 narrative drops out, the story of ravage and sexual exploitation remains too compelling for Athanasius to let go.

In her more comprehensive analysis of Athanasius's gendered embodied commitments, Burrus first sees Athanasius's use of gendered language in his other *Encyclical Letter of the Council of Egypt* (which appears to have been written around the same time as the text explored above).[29] In this letter, Athanasius refutes charges brought against him at the council of Tyre, which had resulted in his first flight from Alexandria. To do so, he intentionally compares the veracity of Nicaea with the false council of Tyre. Unlike the outcome of Nicaea, where truth was birthed and gave life to the orthodox fathers, Tyre spawned the corruptive powers of heretics and brought about the miscarriage of imperial justice. To defend his status as inheritor of a Nicene legacy (and to dispel accusations of a seemingly cowardly flight), he disavows the activities at Tyre and constructs a distinctly masculine Nicene legacy.

The paternal terminology remained central to Athanasius's re-imaging of Nicaea. The language of masculine triumph grew whenever his claim to the Alexandrian episcopate came under threat. Regarding his treatise *On the Council of Nicaea* (ca. mid-350s CE), Burrus draws attention to Athanasius's frequent reference to those who attended Nicaea as "fathers," placing himself firmly within that tradition. She states:

> Since those who attended Nicaea are in a conspicuous sense the transmitters and agents of the divine "tradition" or "paradosis," that is, of the "teaching" or "didaskalia" that is handed down from "Fathers to Fathers," they themselves are designated with this title, which is surely the highest that Athanasius has to bestow.[30]

To contrast his vision of masculine transmission of truth and knowledge, the heretical lineage is transformed into a decidedly dangerous and effeminate one. For example, the charge of impiety plays a significant role in his creation of a counter-history in two works composed during his third flight from Alexandria.

[29] The contents of the letter conflate a few of the events that transpired in Alexandria that resulted in Athanasius's initial flight from Alexandria. For example, at Tyre, Athanasius notes that his enemies colluded with corrupt officials to accuse Athanasius of a number of nefarious activities that eventually brought about his exile to Trier; see, Burrus, *"Begotten Not Made,"* 61. Burrus also notes that this letter is included in his *Second Apology against the Arians*, written ca. 357.

[30] Burrus, *"Begotten Not Made*," 61.

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In his *History of the Arians* (358 CE), he describes a heretical lineage that cut off all access to the generative power of the orthodox.[31] By associating the heretics with eunuchs, Athanasius contrasts the generativity of the fathers with the impotence of heretical branches and the futility of their efforts. Athanasius demonstrates this point in his description of a plot to persuade the bishop of Rome to accept an anti-Nicene position. Eusebius of Nicomedia sent an unnamed eunuch on his behalf (and, presumably, the emperor's behalf as well) with both gifts and letters to seduce the bishop and turn him against Athanasius.[32] If the bishop of Rome refused, then the eunuch was to threaten him and any other wayward bishop with violence (*H. Ar.*, 37). There is no limit to the depraved tactics the heretics would undertake.

To accomplish their goal to malign Athanasius and corrupt the church, the court eunuchs were used to sow confusion and discord with womanly gossip and false information. The gendered allusions do not end there. Eunuchs, who were also frequently enslaved peoples, carried with them a stigma of sexual aggression and availability.[33] And so, their feminine wiles must not be trusted, especially in ecclesiastical matters. Athanasius insists that the unholy alliance between Ariomaniacs and eunuchs proved successful. Emperors and bishops continue to be fooled.[34] The problem, according to Athanasius, is that their deceptions remain

[31] *CPG* 25 675–796.

[32] See Athanasius, *H. Ar.* 35–41. While Athanasius's suspicion of eunuchs was representative of 4th-cent. views, others have noted how closely eunuchs and male Christians are tied in ideology at the very least. See, for example, Mathew Kuefler's argument that the success of Christianity in the Roman Empire was due in part to the rise of alternate images of masculinity, as more and more Roman men left the army and took up alternate positions and spaces that might otherwise be perceived as effeminate or emasculating, including the rise and influence of the court eunuch. Sexual renunciation and ascetic retreat from social responsibility began to take on more cultural capital, particularly in the Latin West as the martyr gave way to the monk, and introduced new modes of social virility and Christian prowess. Athanasius straddles this shift and in an eastern context begins to play with the ideology as he scrutinizes different bodies at play in the Nicene debate. Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[33] Athanasius describes the court eunuchs as a "a pleasure-loving sort" (φιλήδονον γὰρ τὸ τούτων εἶδος; *H. Ar.* 38). Earlier in the passage, the stereotype is particularly accented, as the category of Ethiopian eunuch is deployed for extra effect. The links to the biblical allusions and incorporation of the stereotype have been central to scholarly engagements with blackness, sexuality, and early Christian exegesis. Gay L. Byron has been the foundational thinker on the persistent symbolism in early Christianity; see, e.g., Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). See, in particular, sections on Athanasius's *Life of Antony*, which further support his use of the stereotype in his *H. Ar*. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness*, 86–88 and 160–64.

[34] Work on the hypersexualization of Ethiopian eunuchs has become an extensive area of study, especially for queer studies. For a recent exploration of the racial and sexual histories associated with this trope in early Christian history, see, e.g., Sean D. Burke, *Queering the Ethiopian Eunuch: Strategies of Ambiguity in Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), and Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sexuality, Gender, and Race in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020) 161–204. And for a recent engagement of the Ethiopian eunuch and their invocation in texts related to violence specifically in Alexandria, see Christine Luckritz Marquis, *Death of*

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difficult to expose—a point he laments at several points in this work. Athanasius, therefore, has to provide evidence to distinguish the orthodox heroes from the heretical enemy.

As Burrus has shown, pious obedience to the tradition of the fathers served as a litmus test for Athanasian orthodoxy.[35] It was a test that required vulnerable bodies to suffer, which is most clearly seen in his slightly earlier apologia *Defense of His Flight* (357 CE). Here Athanasius argues that the heretics proved their guilt by dishonoring the memory of the martyrs by mimicking the violence of imperial persecution.[36] Those who persecuted the Alexandrian church did so as if the imperial persecutions of the past were alive and well.[37] And here the events of the earlier attack narrated in his general *Encyclical Letter* are recycled, but now with a growing list of new characters to accuse.

In the apologia, George of Cappadocia, another rival to the Alexandrian patriarchate (like Gregory) used imperial troops as well as other known heretics to attack the Alexandrian community: "George, that abandoned person . . . stirred up against them the commander Sebastian, a Manichee; who straight away with a multitude of soldiers with arms, drawn swords, bows, and spears, proceeded to attack the people, though it was the Lord's day" (Athanasius, *Fug.* 6.21).[38] Here we see multiple causes for alarm. The Arians collude with imperial officials and attack the defenseless with the aid of a Manichaean. To further stress this heinous behavior, and conflate the tactics between the two invading bishops, Athanasius recounts the atrocious treatment of a group of dedicated virgins, saying: "Having lighted a pile, he placed certain virgins near the fire, and endeavored to force them to say that they were of the Arian faith: and when he saw that they were getting the mastery, and cared not for the fire, he immediately stripped them naked, and beat them in the face in such a manner, that for some time they could hardly be

the Desert: Monastic Memory and the Loss of Egypt's Golden Age (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022) 119–24. Many thanks to Christine for allowing me early access to this publication. See also David Brakke's important early work on the association between sexuality and ascetic visions of Ethiopian boys in "Ethiopian Demons: Male Sexuality, the Black-Skinned Other, and the Monastic Self," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001) 501–35.

[35] Burrus, *"Begotten, Not Made,"* 63.

[36] In Athanasius's *Defense of His Flight*, we find a defensive response written to those who felt abandoned by the bishop in flight. In this text he invoked a long-standing biblical tradition of men who flee into the desert during times of persecution to justify his own movement into the Alexandrian desert (during his third exile). Athanasius focused on rebutting the charge of cowardice and placing blame upon his persecutors, whom he claims are false Christians.

[37] I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to the feminine form of the church as another signal to the reader of an intentional play that Athanasius uses in his gendered logic.

[38] Two rivals were brought in during Athanasius's flights from Alexandria. First, Gregory of Cappadocia (339–345) and then George of Cappadocia (357–361). Often the two competitor bishops are confused or interchanged, but the narrative is the same. An attack was made on the church and the point is to emphasize that these men were not the true bishops of Alexandria. Only Athanasius could make that claim—even in absentia.

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recognized" (Athanasius, *Fug.* 6.24).[39] Once again, the Alexandrian community was the target of excessive violence.

When Athanasius's enemies were unable to capture the orthodox bishop in flight, they predictably tortured the innocent, whose faith was tested. The test was not about loyalty to Christ, however. Their loyalty was to their bishop. By subjecting their bodies to the abuses of the outsider George and the Arian heresy, they proved their allegiance to Athanasius. Here Athanasius makes a subtle but significant move in his use of the martyr's authority. These burning bodies, like the unnamed woman in the Judg 19 pericope, were ravaged in place of the fleeing bishop. Athanasius stresses that the martyrs' bodies, once the paradigm of Christian authenticity, were not the true victims, however. Their bodies were only capable of saying so much.

To further emphasize the distinction between the brutalized victims and the father who survives, Athanasius invokes biblical exemplars to reconstruct a tradition of fleeing men:

> What will they do when they see Jacob fleeing from his brother Esau, and Moses withdrawing into Midian for fear of Pharaoh? What excuse will they make for David, after all this idle talk, for fleeing from his house on account of Saul . . . the great Elijah, after calling upon God and raising the dead, hiding himself for fear of Ahab, and fleeing from the threats of Jezebel? At which time the sons of the prophets, when they were sought after, hid themselves with the assistance of Obadiah, and lay concealed in caves . . . the disciples also withdrew and hid themselves for fear of the Jews; and Paul, when he was sought after by the governor at Damascus was let down from the wall in a basket, and so escaped him. (Athanasius, *Fug.* 18)[40]

The implication here is that these masculine men escaped the excessive violence of their manic enemies (Jezebel is a particularly striking biblical type here). They survived so that other men might emulate their flight. The Alexandrian martyrs stand as testaments to justify the actions of the fleeing bishop, whose exile was the

[39] The excessive violence used against female martyrs remained a striking image used by both the martyrological tradition and later inheritors of the cult of the martyrs. For example, during Diocletian's persecution, the Antiochene sister martyrs Agape, Chione, and Irene were said to have been burned alive. See *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (vol. 2; ed. Herbert Musurillo; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) xlii–xliii, 280–93; *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 4.1. And the stripping of Perpetua and Felicitas in the *Passio* (*BHL* 6633–6636, *BHG* 1482 [Latin and Greek]) has been frequently commented upon. For an extensive analysis of the expansive reach of the martyrdom account and new translation of the text, see *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas in Late Antiquity* (ed. L. Stephanie Cobb, trans. Andrew S. Jacobs and L. Stephanie Cobb; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021). Many thanks to Candida Moss for pointing me to these examples.

[40] Candida Moss has noted how the declamation of voluntary martyrdom is intertwined with Christian apologetics to reconfigure flight as self-withdrawal. Moss highlights in particular a revision project for the *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonike* where Agathonike does not immolate herself but is added to the pyre. See Candida Moss, "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern," *CH* 81 (2012) 531–51, at 545–46. I have also noted this shift in later texts, as well as ascetic ideals and terminology deployed by fleeing bishops; see Barry, *Bishops in Flight*, 27.

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direct result of his defense of the Nicene cause.[41] Athanasius's orthodoxy is tied to the stories of their tortured bodies, but those beaten or cruelly treated were passive victims or simply collateral for a much greater cause. Ultimately, he concludes, the patriarchs of the faith were not called to suffer the same fate as the martyrs.[42] In fact, the actions of the saintly fathers serve as the superior model of Christian piety. And here the resonances with the *Encyclical Letter* described above are particularly striking. In a bold statement, Athanasius writes:

> The flight to which they [the saintly fathers] submitted was rather a conflict and war against death. For with wise caution, they guarded against these two things; either that they should offer themselves up without reason . . . or that they should willingly subject themselves to the reproach of negligence, as if they were unmoved by the tribulations they met within their flight, and which brought with them sufferings *greater and more terrible than death*. (Athanasius, *Fug.* 17.18; emphasis mine)[43]

The masculine virtue of fortitude is cultivated under the pains of ongoing persecution and, according to Athanasius, this active suffering is much greater than that of the Alexandrian martyrs. As a bishop in exile, Athanasius's virile suffering body must be tied to all those saintly fathers who fled before him. It is a paternal generativity that relies on a set of discursive strategies and rhetorical performances that continue to blur gender roles and create queer crossings as before but not in ways we might have expected.[44] Athanasius's flights into exile served as a type of masculine performance used to forge a distinctly orthodox patrilineal legacy.

Athanasius invokes paternal generativity to place himself among a male lineage of holy men who fled during times of persecution, men such as Abraham, Moses, David, and, most importantly, Christ. These saintly men fortified their manly courage through trials of persecution while in exile, and their authority is strengthened by the proper use of that time and space. Athanasius continues:

> Behold, therefore, in that they were thus engaged in conflict with their enemies, they passed not the time of their flight unprofitably, nor while they were persecuted did they forget the welfare of others: but as being ministers of the good word, they grudged not to communicate it to all men; so that even while they fled, they preached the Gospel, and gave warning of the wickedness of

[41] See Athanasius, *Fug.* 6–7.

[42] James Ernest points to Athanasius's use of παράδείγμα as the primary tool with which to bolster his defense: "His exempla are taken not simply from past events and definitely not from events he made up himself but almost always from the paradigmatic narrative of scripture" (James D. Ernest, *The Bible in Athanasius of Alexandria* [Leiden: Brill, 2004] 196).

[43] Compare with Athanasius's quote from *Ep. encycl.,* quoted above.

[44] Burrus examines Athanasius's exiles in the context of her discussion of how Nicene orthodoxy took shape through the gendered language of the aptly named "Church Fathers," noting that " 'Nicaea' enters Athanasius's texts on the heels of 'Arianism,' but initially with faltering steps" (Burrus, *Begotten Not Made*, 61). Nicaea only enters into Athanasius's polemical works after Gregory and his successor George are sent from Cappadocia to replace Athanasius.

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> those who conspired against them, and confirmed the faithful by their exhortations. (Athanasius, *Fug.* 21.14)

These fathers did not suffer silently, nor did they waste their time in exile. They openly proclaimed the gospel, speaking not just with their bodies, as the dead martyrs do, but with their lively tongues. The saintly fathers were preserved so that their testimony might affirm the message of right belief.[45]

Athanasius stresses that the Arians disinherited themselves from this past of persecution. They were worthy of blame because they conspired and colluded with the empire: "For the Arians were mixed with the soldiers in order to exasperate them against me" (Athanasius, *Fug.* 24). The Arians not only mimicked the past of imperial persecution but also took a leading role as the new persecutors of the faith as they cast holy men out of their episcopal territories and attacked the faithful.

The orthodox subject displays an image of the appropriate relationship between Father and Son. Conversely, the heretic mocks this heavenly relationship by acting impiously [ἄσεβείᾳ] (Athanasius, *Fug.* 2.9). It is clear that Athanasius emphasizes a particular form of filial piety to defend this vision of orthodoxy. That piety, however, is reliant on the torture and death of others. Thus, the resonances of the gender violence first found in his *Encyclical Letter* continue to ground his *here*siological project in these later polemical works. And once again it is Athanasius's suffering that is described as the test of truth. When it comes to Nicaea's legacy, Athanasius continues to carve up and scatter the stories of suffering to bring his story of truth to life.

Conclusion

In the first encyclical letter we explored, the story of the unnamed woman is pulled apart and pieced back together to give life to Athanasius's flight. And here, her body is purposely used to transform Athanasius's displacement from criminal guilt to righteous suffering. Jeffords has noted that dismembered bodies frequently take on new functions: "The resultant 'change' is that the woman's dismembered body has been re-membered to look like someone else."[46] Athanasius intentionally alters and downplays details such as the second attack on the church to emphasize the deadly consequences of the first attack that resulted in his flight: "For while the ministers

[45] It is unsurprising, then, that Athanasius identifies the divine Logos as among the exemplary characters of flight. The Logos hid himself within flesh for the sake of humanity and fled from his enemies so that others might follow his example: "Thus the Lord acted, and thus he taught" (Athanasius, *Fug.* 13.7). James Ernest argued that, for Athanasius, the Son is the primary exemplum, the principal source of human conduct; he is the Logos of the Father enfleshed. By taking on the human body, he experienced persecution just as the saints do. The Son's flight is thus paradigmatic of the flight of all who are persecuted, and the slanderous charge of cowardice is a charge made not against Athanasius but against the divine Logos himself. Episcopal flight is confirmed as an act of filial allegiance to those saintly men who have come (and gone) before him and, more importantly, to the Son who affirmed his role as an authentic witness to the truth.

[46] Jeffords, "Narrative as Violence."

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of the Church are under persecution, the people who condemn the impiety of the Arian heretics *choose to remain sick* rather than run the risk that a hand of the Arians should come upon their heads" (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 5). The church, in other words, had done nothing to prevent what would inevitably follow, and here the true intent of his initial letter we explored is revealed: "But you must not stand in awe of their iniquity, but on the contrary, avenge: and show your indignation at this their unprecedented conduct against us. For if when one *member* suffers all the *members* suffer with it" (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 6). His very presence in Rome, with all the pieces of the narrative in hand, reinforces that fact. He then concludes:

> And I have represented to you, what has now been done, both for them and by them, with greater cruelty than is usual even in time of war, in order that after the example set before you in the history which I related at the beginning [that is the Judges narrative], you may entertain a zealous hatred of their wickedness, and reject those who have committed such enormities against the Church. (Athanasius, *Ep. encycl.* 7)

In this revealing remark, we are drawn back to the beginning of the Judges story to pick up and reexamine the dismembered pieces once again. And so will Athanasius, who, as we saw in his more developed *her*esiological logic, continue to build on and capitalize on this story of persecution, embellishing it with new horrors and tales of violence in his more developed *her*esiological treatises. With each remembrance, in texts such as *Defense against the Arians*, *Defense of His Flight*, and *History of the Arians*, he reassembles the stories of terror as he renders the unnamed woman's body and her experiences as his own.[47] As the stories move through his various defenses of those fathers who came before and the feminized enemies that haunt that legacy, he constructs a story of a masculine hero who both survives and eventually returns from his many flights.

I would like to end with two points. First, Athanasius used the rape, death, and dismemberment of a woman to initiate his *her*esiological discourse. The body of the unnamed woman from the Judg 19 narrative symbolized the ongoing pollution of the church body by heretics and the eunuchs, those member-less bodies, they employed. Like many other origin narratives, the death of a woman marked the beginning of a new life. Her death brought about the start to Athanasius's polemic against the Arian heretics. The story of the violent invasion of the Alexandrian church and the displacement of her bishop was sent out via the encyclical letter. This *her*esiological narrative was meant to call Christians to arms—or legs, or any other limb they might encounter—as the story of displacement traveled along with the displaced bishop and took on new narrative form in later texts.

As I have argued, the unnamed woman's night of horror did not end but continued to inform Athanasius's other polemical works. In this inaugural *her*esiological text, Athanasius may have fled to Rome, but he did not come empty-handed. He carried with him the message of persecution and pieces of the stories of gender violence

[47] See Athanasius, *Apol. sec.* 78; *H. Ar.* 10.1; *Fug.* 26–27.

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that continued to prop up Athanasius's identity as an orthodox hero in subsequent texts. Those who received these pieces, Athanasius concluded, ought "to feel the wrong as if they themselves have suffered the same calamity" (Athanasius, *Ep. Encycl.* 6). In its very excessiveness, the story was meant to call on the faithful to avenge the wrong that had been done to the displaced bishop, or risk repeating the same error.

The second conclusion is that we should pause to consider how Athanasius constructed what I have identified here as a *her*esiological discourse. His flagrant use of a violent reality many women still face today is a troubling topic and should remain so. It is all too easy to bypass or read over these shocking narratives—especially when the women and enslaved eunuchs in question were left unnamed and transformed into traveling objects. I ask that we not dismiss these stories so easily or simply pass over them out of discomfort. Instead, we ought to keep in mind the violence upon which orthodoxy was constructed and the bodies that were used not just to think with but also pulled apart, reassembled, and put on display to recover a man's reputation.

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