Subversive Holiness and the Building of a Christian Community in Cynewulf’s Juliana

Abstract

In Cynewulf’s Juliana, Juliana’s suitor Heliseus, called “the guardian of treasure,” represents secular material culture, in which women are weakened by the male control of materiality. The material culture of the heroic world reproduces the masculine body politic, reducing women to objects of exchange in contractual relationships between men. The present paper makes a case that from the poem emerges a contrast between a perception of materially constituted masculinity, aligning manhood with wealth and status, and a more inclusive spiritual manhood, available to both sexes. In relation to this Juliana achieves spiritual manhood as a miles Christi exemplifying how feminine holiness empowers women. Consequently Juliana’s emasculation of the devil becomes a challenge to the secular patriarchal order in which they are the currency of exchange.

Keywords: Cynewulf, The Old English Life of Juliana of Nicomedia, Old English poetry, Anglo-Saxon England

Although medieval women saints’ lives promulgate and disseminate the patriarchal notion of hierarchy that naturalised the oppression and subjugation of women, they often also represent women’s agency that is articulated in terms of acts of subversions that undermine secular notions of gender hierarchy. As Alison Gulley demonstrates in her recent studies on Ælfric’s virgin martyr lives, in Latin sources of the legend, rendered into vernacular languages in later periods, “the persecutors perceive the young women as members of a group subversive to authority” (52). According to Gulley, Christian virgins’ refusal to worship gods and marry non-Christians on account of cultus disparitas were perceived by pagan authorities of the Roman Empire as acts undermining social order:

For the Roman citizen, religion, any religion, served as a unifying civic force. Piety and careful attention to the details of religious observance ensured prosperity, political stability, and social responsibility. “In all probability,” wrote Cicero in the first-century BCE On The Nature of Gods, “disappearance of piety towards gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and
of justice itself, the queen of all virtues.” Such words laid the groundwork for the anti-Christian sentiment in the centuries to come […]. The Christian sin against the state […] becomes rather a sin against reason, history and tradition, without which the Roman society was doomed to fall. In the world of the stories [virgin martyrs’ lives, JO], the impious persecutors are not fighting against threats to the state perse, but against threats to stable social order by the unpatriotic and un-civic-minded maidens. Virgin martyrs were particularly symbolic of the Christian opposition to worldly power because, as virgins, these women lived outside of the emperors’ attempts to reform the Roman bureaucracy, army, and family in accordance with classical Roman law. (52–54)

A similar conflict between pagan and Christian values unfolds in the anonymous life of Saint Juliana of Nicomedia, printed in the Acta Sanctorum of Boland, and the Old English life of Juliana, one of the four poems signed by Cynewulf, dated from the eighth to the tenth century, extant in the Exeter Book, a codex compiled during the tenth century Benedictine reform in England. Juliana, a young Roman girl, rejects a powerful suitor of high social rank Eleusius (called Heliseus in the Old English version by Cynewulf). Her rejection of the powerful suitor is not only an act of defiance of Africanus’s, her father’s, will that she will marry Eleusius but also an uncivic and unpatriotic subversion articulated by her refusal to worship Roman gods.¹ In his version, Cynewulf expands the Latin version’s representation of Juliana’s subversion by transposing the saint from the second-century Roman empire to a heroic world that closely resembles the world of such Old English heroic poems as Beowulf, presenting Heliseus as a powerful lord, Africanus, as his loyal retainer and Juliana as a disobedient daughter, whose refusal to marry Heliseus brings both men dishonour in the eyes of the heroic society in which they live.

Juliana’s adamant subversion of the established social order is already present in the Latin source from which Cynewulf drew. The perception, however, that female recalcitrance is of significance in the process of the construction of a Christian community may have become complicated by the very fact that persecutions had long been a thing of the past from the perspective of Cynewulf’s Anglo-Saxon audiences. In the face of the poem’s emphasis on Juliana’s disobedience and her society’s violence, questions arise regarding the significance of the holy woman’s subversive actions: what value did a story of rebellion and disobedience have in Anglo-Saxon England assuming that women in early medieval England did not have to die for their faith and that the secular perceptions of social life were contingent upon the Christian frame of reference? As Gulley reflects, in the Christian world of the early Middle Ages “stories about saints unify the community of believers and reinforce their behaviour, communal needs and expectations respond to variations in society” (33). The aim of the present article is, accordingly, to discuss the significance of the holy woman’s recalcitrance and subversion in the unification and reinforcement of a Christian community, which can be gleaned
from Cynewulf’s *Juliana*, a poem that represents its female protagonist implicated in the contradictory masculinist representations of femininity, one material and secular, the other Christian and spiritual.

Taking up the trail set by Gulley, I would like to explore the way in which Cynewulf’s adaptation works to unify and reinforce the intended Anglo-Saxon audiences of his poem. In Cynewulf’s poem, pagan religion, which Gulley characterizes as a “unifying civic force” (54) is, as argued here, replaced by wealth and treasure. It seems that in Cynewulf’s poem Juliana’s subversion is pivoted upon the perception that wealth and treasure serve in traditional Old English verse as symbols of family obligations and relationships that are of prime importance for the pagan characters in the poem, and that wealth and treasure may have been of significance even to the monastic audiences, who in all probability were the poem’s intended audience. In contrast to the source, the poem required the audience to partially identify with its pagan heroes before the audience embraces the view on wealth and materiality fostered by Juliana. Wealth and material values, which men and women of religious orders were required to relinquish if they had been born into aristocratic families, were implicated in personal family history. While many other poems from the Exeter book are pervaded with a intertwined theme of transience of wealth and worldly values, in *Juliana* wealth is presented as a symbol of family obligations. The audience is impressed upon with Juliana’s own feminine perception of the secular culture. Juliana is perceived as not only renegotiating her own identity but also as enforcing her own perception of the masculine world in which she lives. The antagonism between Juliana and her father is significant when viewed in relation to Juliana’s assertion of her autonomy by becoming a religious convert.

There have been many studies that reveal the complexities of the social reality behind Old English saints’ lives. As Dabney Anderson Bankert remarks in her analysis of Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, holy lives “dramatize the conflict between virginity and the imperatives of family, chiefly the retention and extension of property through marriage and heirs” (139). However, the criticism of the versified saints lives in Old English, many of which predate the Benedictine reform of the later tenth century, has paid scant attention to the poem’s social and historical background. The social secular world, represented by Heliseus and Affricanus, has only been discussed in the poem as regards style, influenced by the heroic diction of Old English poetry. Three approaches to the poem that have developed over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have usually downplayed the poem’s vivid portrayal of social life. The first wave of criticism represented a formulaic analysis of Cynewulf’s usage of the heroic diction and motifs. Rosemary Woolf, for example, perceived the poem as an uncomfortable mixture of heroic diction with Christian hagiography. The poem was defended by the second wave of critics who developed the many allegorical interpretations of the poem. Amongst these critics, Joseph Wittig understood Juliana’s virginity in a purely figurative
sense. By virtue of her virginity, Juliana, according to Joseph Wittig, was made by Cynewulf to denote the Church.3 The third wave of critics, represented by feminist scholars, pointed to the limitations imposed on the allegorical approach, as the school of allegorical interpretation perpetuated the medieval representation of women as passive and insignificant. As Alexandra Hennessey Olsen pointed out, “the response of literary critics to the problems raised by Elene and Juliana has been to retreat from discussing them as women at all, depicting them instead as allegorical counters in typological narratives […]. The problem, however, is that the scholars who make such statements refuse to see the female characters as human beings but reduce them to counters manipulated by the poet” (223–224). According to Olsen, allegorical criticism of women saints’ lives makes it impossible to see that women became virgin martyrs in Late antiquity as “they sought to assert their personal autonomy” (227).

The social life depicted in the poem, accordingly, deserves much more attention. The criticism that has been attentive to the poem’s heroic theme and style, has most often subordinated these to the poem’s hagiographic theme. Jane Chance, for instance, claims that the presentation of Affricanus and Heliseus as warriors reinforces the spiritual warfare between the holy woman and her enemies: “the spiritual contest between the adversaries is depicted imagistically and symbolically as a martial contest” (42). More recently, Shari Horner claims that the theme of material values is used in the poem to expose the “empty materialism” of the pagans (117). Rather than exposing the emptiness of Heliseus and Affricanus’s materialism, as dismissed in Horner’s reading of the poem, Juliana engages in a metatextual play of the poem’s heroic diction and doctrinal content. Like most Anglo-Saxon versified saints’ lives, including Andreas and Guthlac A, Cynewulf’s Juliana is a poem in which two literary traditions merge. On the one hand, being a vernacular adaptation of a Latin holy life, it represents the genre of hagiography and is informed by Christians notions of holiness, virginity and spirituality. On the other, it is remarkable for its formulaic language that belongs to the heroic tradition of Old English poetry and, as Rosemary Woolf remarked in her edition of the poem (1993, 19), it contains a number of verses resembling those of Beowulf. As will be shown in the following pages, however, the heroic form of the poem invests the representation of the social world of Juliana with all the paraphernalia of Anglo-Saxon secular materiality that define secular notions of identity and community. Their significance in the poem lies in the fact that they create for Juliana’s struggle for autonomy, a struggle that Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, quoted above, considers to be the defining element of any account of female martyr’s life.

It is demonstrable that Cynewulf employs vernacular poetic tradition in order to redefine Juliana’s position as an agent of subversion. The setting of the Old English version reflects the secular values of Old English heroic poetry and the wealth that Juliana rejects is a symbol of the masculine desire that directs
the parameters of gender relations in the poem, the parameters that empower, or disempower, particular individuals regarding their sex. In Old English poetry, the exchange of treasure in the hall is represented as an act of validating identities. The distancing of the self from the secular world through the practice of Christianity is thus appropriately presented as the radical renunciation of wealth. In the poem, wealth, however, is not represented as sinful and there is no notion of pagan suffering from the sin of avarice. Rather, wealth is just a corollary to status in a heroic society in which solitude, abnegation is viewed as antisocial. From the perspective of Juliana’s father and suitor, who are pagans, abnegation, an essential element of religious life, is queer, in terms of sexuality, because it shows the subject deviates from the normative homosocial model, in the case of the male saints, and the heterosexual model, in relation to the female saints.

In Juliana, the overvaluation of wealth by the pagan characters is Cynewulf’s invention, since treasure and possession play little part in the Latin original. So is Juliana’s rejection of treasure in Cynewulf’s version. In the Latin source, Juliana does not initially turn down Heliseus’s advances, insisting that he should become a prefect before formally asking for her hand. Only once he buys the position does she reject his proposal. In the Old English poem, she rejects the suitor, never promising Heliseus to consider his proposal. It has been remarked that Cynewulf’s drawing of characters respects Christian morals and he does not reproduce any narrative element of the source that invites a criticism of Juliana as a saint. It has often been claimed that Cynewulf draws upon the technique of polarisation to universalise and generalise characters in the story. However, his handling of the source may reveal the same kind of anxiety over a holy woman’s autonomy that is revealed in Ælfric’s Lives of St Agnes and his homily on Judith.

The emphasis on material values articulated in Cynewulf’s poem, however, is not only motivated by Cynewulf’s tendency to polarise characters along an axis of good and evil. The world of Juliana, as presented in the Old English poem, is a homosocial world, and all individuals’ desire is subordinated to an ideology that Peter S. Baker calls the exchange of honour, a system of exchange in which “treasure and honour, indissolubly bonded, are traded up and down the social hierarchy in such a way that the participants gain (and occasionally lose) honour with each transaction” (37). It must be remarked that the exchange of honour defines an individual’s place in society and depends on his or her gender. The secular notions of honour limits women’s agency, as is evidenced by the many studies of Old English peace-weavers in secular poems such as Beowulf, where queen Wealhtheow and Hildeburh are not entitled to the same agency that men have.

Many representations of material culture in Old English poetry demonstrate a semiotic aspect of treasure, as an indicator of identity and worth. Drawing an example from Beowulf, treasure and military accoutrements are adjunct to the masculine body of a hero. They articulate the individual’s status, his kinship
relationships and sworn obligations, as well as his belonging to society. This semiotic function of treasure was studied by Jos Bazelmans. In Beowulf, one’s identification as a man is linked to what Bazelmans defines as “worth” and “image.” Using Ernst Leise’s concept of Ehrensold-Ordnung, Bazelmans observes that “the significance of wealth in Germanic society […] lies not in its aesthetic enjoyment or the life comforts that it yields – valuable gifts should be, after all, reciprocated and passed on – but rather in shaping of the personal worth of its giver or recipient” (162). Bazelmans’s claim is that apart from the inner constituents of personhood such as mind and soul, there is an attribute that he calls “image” or “worth,” the essential and defining attribute of the hero in the heroic language of Beowulf (157). “Worth,” Bazelmans writes, is an external quality, ostentatiously represented by war gear and valuables that were passed on to the individual as gifts from his father or lord. They not only raise the hero’s esteem but also are material signs of his bonds with the lord and his tribal ancestry (159).

The relationship between Juliana, her father Affricanus and her suitor Heliseus may be elucidated by the cultural model of the exchange of honour, outlined by Baker, as well as the concepts of “worth” and “image” that Bazelmans uses to describe the social world and heroic identity in Old English heroic poetry. He follows the Latin source in portraying Heliseus in love with Juliana. However, he reformulates the source by bringing attention to the homosocial bond established between Heliseus and Affricanus, whose relationship is coloured by Anglo-Saxon heroic tradition. First, Affricanus, Juliana’s father, and Heliseus, her suitor, are identified as “sweor and aþum” [“father-in-law and son-in-law”] (Juliana l. 65). Second, in the Old English poem, Juliana is construed as “wifgiftu.” She is literally an object of exchange. Thirdly, both men are concerned with honour. Juliana’s refusal to marry her suitor is represented as a textual manipulation of treasure as a symbol of masculine bonds.

One of the aspects of the heroic colouring of the Latin legend is Cynewulf’s change of Affricanus’s social status. In the Latin source, Heliseus is Affricanus’s equal at the beginning, but becomes Affricanus’s superior once he buys the position of prefectship on Juliana’s insistence. In Cynewulf’s poem, however, he is depicted as a reeve and Affricanus’s superior. When Affricanus approaches his daughter, he chastises her for rejecting Heliseus, because he is “betra þonne þu, æþelra for eorþan, æhtspedigra feohgestreona” [“better than you, nobler on earth, wealthier in treasures”] (Juliana l. 100–103). Affricanus appears to be Heliseus’s retainer and owes loyalty and obedience to his lord. Juliana serves as a peace-weaver between the two men. Her marriage is a “wifgifta” [“marriage”] (Juliana l. 38), which literally translates as wife-gift.

Another instance of Cynewulf’s heroic embellishment of the legend is predicated upon representing both men expecting Juliana to act as a peace-weaver between them. Juliana, contrary to their expectations, instigates a conflict between both men, rather than produces an alliance by giving birth to Heliseus’s sons:
Reord up astag,
siþþan hy togædre garas hlændon,
hildeþremman. Hæðne wæron begen
synnum seoce, sweor ond aþum.
ða reordode rices hyrde
wið þære fæmnan fæder frecne mode,
daraðhæbbende. (Juliana ll. 62–67)

Speech rose up after the warriors leaned their spears together. They were both
heathens, sick with sins, father-in-law and son-in-laws. Then the guardian of the
kingdom spoke to the father of the woman with fierce mind, holding a spear. (trans.
Robert E. Bjork)

In the Latin version, Heliseus complains about Juliana’s refusal, but he does not
behave threateningly towards Affricanus. Heliseus is described as “rices hyrde”
[“the guardian of the kingdom”] who approaches Affricanus aggressively, both
men holding spears. Heliseus is called “aþum” [“son-in-law”], while Affricanus
is his “sweor” [“father-in-law”]. Their heroic bond is thus precariously pivoted on
Juliana’s obedience as a peace-weaving daughter, whose role is not only to bring
prosperity to both men but also to attenuate a conflict between them.

Cynewulf’s also manipulates the way in which Heliseus airs his grievance.
In the Latin version, her offence is constituted mainly by her refusal to worship
her suitor’s gods in public. In the Old English version, Heliseus and Affricanus
are more concerned about their own honour. Heliseus discusses his proposal
to Juliana in public. His betrothal is for him a matter of his honour. Since her
father Affricanus is of lower social position, the betrothal is also a matter of
honour for him, since the gift of his daughter’s hand is to strengthen the bond
between himself and his reeve. In the heroic society, as Peter S. Baker observes,
the bond created in the process of treasure exchange “is not merely contractual:
it is moral and emotional, and the rewards and payments confer honour along
with wealth” (58). Cynewulf emphasizes the moral and emotional aspect of the
contract that binds Affricanus to Heliseus. Affricanus’s inability to honour the
promise exposes him to shame. His sense of shame is compounded by the fact
that in the Old English version Juliana defies Heliseus’s advances in public. As
Cynewulf remarks, “heo þæt eal forseah, ond þæt word acwæð on wera mengu”
[“she despised all that (Heliseus’s proposal and his wealth”]; trans. J.O.) and spoke
these words (i.e. turning down the proposal; J.O.) to the multitude of men] (Juliana
ll, 44–45). When Heliseus complains about Juliana’s reply, he is enraged because
she caused him to suffer shame before other men:

Me þin dohtor hafað
geywed orwyrdů. Heo me on an sagað
þæt heo mæglufan minre ne gyme,
freondraedenne. Me þa fraceðu sind
You daughter has shown dishonour to me. She tells me outright that she does not care for my love, my affection. To me those insults are most painful in my heart that she so grievously should attack me with blasphemy before this people; she commands me to worship with riches, praise with words, exalt in mind a strange god over the others that we knew before or not have her. (trans. Robert E. Bjork)

The emphasis is shifted from Juliana’s offence against religion, which motivates her enemies to destroy her in the Latin source, to the dishonour that her recalcitrance brings her father and suitor.

Cynewulf thus shows Juliana exposing Heliseus and Africanus’s to shame, which is another heroic aspect of his adaptation that is connected to the representation of the material culture in the Old English poem. The public context of their transaction is an element of Anglo-Saxon heroic culture. This heroic element is cast into relief by Cynewulf’s amplification of the symbolism of sight and eyes that he expands from the Latin source:

You, my daughter, are the dearest and the sweetest in my heart, the only one on earth, the light of my eyes, Juliana. You in foolishness have through your pride against the judgment of the wise taken a vain course. You refuse too quickly by your own counsel your bridegroom, who is better than you, nobler than you, nobler on earth, wealthier in treasures. He is good as a friend. Therefore it is worth it for you that you not lose the man’s love, his eternal blessed affection. (trans. Robert E. Bjork)

The pagan characters in *Juliana*, like the heroes of *Beowulf*, are depicted as seeking honour and being anxious to evade shame. Douglas L. Cairns shows in
his study on shame and honour in ancient Greek literature that metaphors of eyes and sight are recurrent in the depiction of the audience that induces the individual to experience shame (18). Both men are sensitive to the public scrutiny, on which their self-image and honour depends. In the family drama of conversion, Africanus and Heliseus’ shame and honour are pivoted on Juliana’s willingness to recognize their masculine authority. She is represented as an object of exchange, treasure that is an external sign of the homosocial bond that both men forge between themselves. The convert to religious life is implicated in the drama of honour that is played out by her family.

Juliana is shown to manipulate the heroic masculinist representation of femininity by exposing her father and suitor to public shame as well as the men’s representation of her as an object of exchange. The text constructs an idea of the virgin as a reader of masculine signifieds that constitute the foundation of the secular and heroic material culture. Juliana manipulates the pagan idea of treasure as signifieds of men’s honour. She also rejects the pagan interpretation of her body as a treasure that they possess and exchange to maintain their homosocial bonds and the continuation of their pagan culture. Juliana averts the masculine gaze that constitutes her femininity as a sign of their exchange and masculine bonds. Rather than a sign of their honour, her body becomes a public display of their shame; they cannot control Juliana and cannot maintain their bond as father and son-in-law as a manifestation of the hierarchy and social cohesion. This series of subversive acts on Juliana’s part becomes a source of empowerment showing how Cynewulf adapted the source with a view to presenting her as able to subvert the heroic representation of femininity.

Cynewulf’s handling of Juliana’s confrontation with the devil also demonstrates that the spiritual warfare that he finds in the source is coloured by the secular values with which his audiences could identify. In the source, Juliana is represented as a soldier of Christ, as she confronts Belial, a devil; like many other female martyrs, the Latin text attributes to the female saint spiritual heroism that parallels the secular notion of masculine heroism. In early Christian literature, this spiritual virility is applied both to male and female saints. In accordance with this tradition, Juliana is once called “comes” [“companion”] by Belial in the Latin source. In the Old English version, the perception of spiritual life as warfare is maintained. For example, the Latin “comes” is paralleled by the OE “cempa” [“warrior”] (l. 290). While the Latin comes is rather neutral, the Old English cempa has straightforward military connotations. While cempa is attested four times in Juliana, it is never applied to Juliana herself. The word is applied to male saints only. First, the martyrs slaughtered under the reigns of Roman emperors are called “Godes cempan” [“the soldiers of God”] (l. 17). Secondly, the soldier who wounds Christ dying on the cross is called a “cempa” [“the warrior”] (l. 290). The most extended use of the metaphor appears again in the devil’s confession. The confession is found in the Latin version of the legend.
This fragment, however, is Cynewulf’s own invention, as no parallel fragment is found in the Latin source:

Gif ic ænigne  ellenrofné
ge mete modigne  metodes cempan
wið flanþræce,  nele feor þonan
bugan from beadwe,  ac he bord ongean
hefeð hygesnottor,  haligne scyld,
gæstlíc guðref,  nele gode swican,
ac he bealde in gebede  bidsteal gifed
fæste on feðan,  ic sceal feor þonan
heanmod hweorfan,  hroþra bidælæd,
in gleda gripe,  gehóu mænan,
þæt ic ne meahte  mægnes cræfte
guðe wiðgongan,  ic ic geomor sceal
secan ðerne  ellenleasran,
under cumbolhagan,  cempan sænran,
þe ic onbryrdan mæge  beorman mine,
agælan æt guþe. (Juliana II. 382–397)

If I should ever meet any courageous warrior of the measurer, bold against a storm of arrows, not willing far from there to flee from battle, but wise in mind he raises a board, a holy shield against me, spiritual battle gear, not willing to fail God, but brave in prayer he makes a stand steadfast in the troop, I must depart far from there, downcast, deprived of joys, in the grip of burning coals, lament my miseries, that I could not prevail in battle by force of might, but sad, I must seek another, less courageous one in the phalanx, a worse warrior who I can incite with my leaven of evil, hinder in battle. (trans. Robert E. Bjork)

Here the devil speaks of “metodes cempan” [“warriors of the measurer”] (l. 383) and describes them in terms that bear resemblance to the Letter to Ephesians, VI.11–20, by Saint Paul of Tarsus. The phrases like “flanþræce” [“storms of arrows”] (l. 384), “haligne scyld” [“a holy shield”] (l. 386) and gæstlíc guðref” [“spiritual battle gear”] (l. 387) all echo the description of the spiritual armour found in Ephesians.

Although Cynewulf does not refrain from the application of heroic vocabulary in the poem as a whole, as regards both the pagan antagonists as well as the martyrs to which the devil alludes, Juliana in the central portion of the Old English poem does not approximate the masculine spirituality of the female miles Christi that can be found in the Latin representation of her spiritual fight with Belial. In fact, Cynewulf modifies the source by establishing a hierarchy between the male saints as a model of spiritual masculinity and the female saints whose perseverance is portrayed as an imitation rather than a legitimate expression of spiritual masculinity. The devil of the Latin source is compromised to assert Juliana’s spiritual masculinity:
My lady Juliana, companion of the apostles, associate of the martyrs, partner of the patriarchs, consort of the angels, I entreat you for the Passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, have pity on my wretchedness. (Latin Life of Juliana 128)

Cynewulf translates “domina mea” into “hlæfdige min” [“my lady”] (l. 539), but does not provide an equivalent for “comes” [“soldier, companion”]. More to that point, Juliana’s virginity does not match the militant virginity found in the source. It is the militant aspect of Juliana’s virginity that is registered in Belial’s speech in the Latin version of the legend: “O virginitas, quid contra nos armaris” [“Oh virginity, why are fighting against us?”]. In accordance with the conventions of hagiography, the first part of the Latin life of Juliana emphasises the saint’s struggle to keep her virginity intact. This remark is removed from the devil’s speeches in the Old English version and seems to suggest and the militant aspect of Juliana’s holiness is not present.

Instead of applying the idea of miles Christi to Juliana, Cynewulf asserts Juliana’s femininity. The devil is impressed by her strength, saying that Juliana is superior to other women, as she “wurde þus wigþrist ofer eall wifa cyn” [“became so daring in battle above all womankind”] (l. 432). Juliana’s spiritual strength does not rely on her militant virginity but her continuing rejection of the Anglo-Saxon secular values that the devil of Cynewulf’s version embodies. In the poem, Juliana’s recalcitrance derives from her subversiveness and abnegation rather than from expressly militant spirituality that would make her approximate male saints. It seems that Cynewulf foregrounds the subversive character of Juliana’s words and actions the colour her confrontations with her father and suitor, he retains the established gender hierarchy while drawing comparisons between Juliana and other saints to demarcate a separate feminine space within the church.

In the Cynewulf’s poem, the theme of Juliana’s virginity recurs in its final part, when Juliana strives for martyrdom. Cynewulf selects and abridges the material that he finds in the Latin source. In chapter three of the Latin Life of Juliana, Juliana is stated to be a virgin three times. She is called a virgin when Heliseus orders to stretch her on an iron wheel (Latin Life of Juliana 130). Finally, the citizens of Nicommedia convert to the faith as they acknowledge their belief in “the God of the holy maiden Juliana” (Latin Life of Juliana 130). In the Old English version, Cynewulf introduces many more epithets as well as some instances of antonomasia that endow Juliana with spiritual masculinity, that were earlier avoided in the adaptation. Juliana is called “mægþa bealdor” [“the lord of the maidens”] (l. 568), the only masculine antonomastic reference to Juliana in Cynewulf’s adaptation as well as the sole allusion to the motif of militant virginity. She is also called “wuldres mæg” [“the virgin of glory”] (l. 600) before her death. Also, she is “clæne and gecorene” [“clean and chosen one”] (l. 613). While she is being tortured on an iron wheel, the virgin-suitor theme is evoked briefly, as her body is called “the noble body of Christ’s virgin” (Latin
Cynewulf is mindful of this reference to the suitor theme, calling Juliana “Criste gecorene” [“chosen by Christ”] (l. 605).

Cynewulf does not reproduce the motif of Juliana’s virginity mechanically. On the contrary, he imaginatively adapts and reinforces the motif by evoking the suitor theme from the first part of the poem. The evocation of the motif is made by the repetition of the theme of treasure after Juliana’s martyrdom. After Juliana is martyred by Heliseus’s command, he leaves Nicommedia on a ship, accompanied by a retinue of his followers. The ship drowns and Heliseus’s grim death is given an ironic comment by the narrator that the evil men will find their wealth in hell to no avail:

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\begin{align*}
\text{þær XXX wæs} \\
\text{ond feowere eac} & \quad \text{feores onsohte} \\
\text{þurh wæges wylm} & \quad \text{wigena cynnes,} \\
\text{heane mid hlaford,} & \quad \text{hrœra bidæled,} \\
\text{hyhta lease} & \quad \text{helle sohton.} \\
\text{Ne þorftan þa þegnas} & \quad \text{in þam þystran ham,} \\
\text{seo geneatscolu} & \quad \text{in þam neolan scræfe,} \\
\text{to þam frungare} & \quad \text{feohgestealda} \\
\text{witedra wenan,} & \quad \text{þæt hy in winsele} \\
\text{ofer beorsetle} & \quad \text{beagas þegon,} \\
\text{æpplede gold. (Juliana II. 678–688)}
\end{align*}
\]

There thirty of the warrior kind and four besides were deprived of life through the billows of the wave; wretched with their lord, bereft of joys, without hope, they went to hell. The servants in that dark home, the band of attendants in that deep pit, had no need to expect from that leader their allotted riches, or that they along the beer-benches would receive rings, embossed gold in the wine-hall.

(trans. Robert E. Bjork)

Cynewulf’s emphasis on treasure brings attention to his original treatment of the suitor theme that is evocative of heroic values. At the beginning of the poem, Juliana scorned Heliseus’s treasure. Now he applies heroic diction to portray pagan characters and makes a conscious choice of heroic formulas to provide a perspective from which to view secular Anglo-Saxon values *sub specie eternitatis*, as in the final section of the narrative treasure is identified with hell. The subversion of secular values in which Juliana engages at the beginning of the poem is thus maintained by the poem’s narratorial voice. The passage was once criticized as inartistic and Rosemary Woolf claimed it is “a typical example of Old English litotes, but one which produces here a grimly incongruous effect” (1993, 18–19). However, the passage is not at all incongruous, since it not only fits Heliseus’s characterisation as the guardian of treasure, but it is also faithful to the hagiographic tradition, since Heliseus’s association with treasure is a variation on the traditional suitor theme.
Cynewulf develops the suitor motif to reveal the complexities of the Anglo-Saxon secular society. While the Latin version emphasizes the spiritual warfare and the juxtaposition of Juliana against the devil, Cynewulf’s version is thus more attentive to the social world imagined in the poem. Cynewulf’s emphasis on Juliana’s family drama is pivoted upon his foregrounding the virgin-suitor theme and playing down the source’s emphasis on militant virginity that Juliana fosters in the Latin version. The reference to Juliana’s virginity at the closing part of the Latin source suggests that the anonymous author develops the theme of militant virginity from the central part of the life that describes Juliana’s fight with the devil, while Cynewulf develops and varies the suitor motif.

Heliseus’s ignominious death that happened during a sea voyage is juxtaposed with the description of Juliana’s burial:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ungelice wæs} & \quad \text{læded lofsongum lic haligre} \\
\text{micle mægne} & \quad \text{to moldgræfe,} \\
\text{þæt hy hit gebrohton} & \quad \text{burgum in innan,} \\
\text{sidfolc micel. (Juliana II. 688–692)}
\end{align*}
\]

With songs of praise the body of the holy one was led to the grave in a different manner by a great host whey they, a great mass of people, brought it inside the town. (trans. Robert E. Bjork)

The presence of Juliana’s holy body cleanses Nicommedia from the materiality that lay at the foundation of Affricanus and Heliseus’s pagan world. Juliana’s union with Christ is therefore appropriately juxtaposed with sterile bond between Heliseus and his companion, whose inability of exchanging treasure is a symbol of the spiritual sterility of their secular community, in which human bonds are made and perpetuated by economic exchange. In the Old English poem, Juliana’s sexuality is thus defined through her relationship to God, which is pivoted not only on her rejection of secular values but also on the active resistance to the masculine economy of exchange that objectifies her body, emptying it of its spiritual significance.

In Cynewulf’s poem, the conflict between Juliana and Heliseus is more pervasively connected to the questions of social status and material values. Cynewulf emphasizes the secular overvaluation of human relationships as well as material wealth. Her resistance challenges both men’s patriarchal claim that subordinates her body into a system of signs representing the values of their homosocial obligation, the claim that turns the female body into a gift and a material sign that defines bonds between secular men. Cynewulf adapts his source in accordance with the expectations of an audience who is familiar with the secular heroic tradition. His evocation of the heroic vocabulary, so prominent in his portrayal of the social world of the poem, fits the social realities that a religious individual faced in the process of his or her conversion from the secular to the religious community.
The most important aspect of his adaptation is the way faith is gendered. While paganism is represented as masculinist and oppressive, Christianity emerges as not only inclusive but also assigning femininity with power. The subversive nature of Juliana’s action is, however, within masculine authorial control in the Old English version and serves the masculine interest of Christianity, which was a masculine religion. Juliana acts subversively towards the secular and pagan masculine authority to comprise her autonomy before another type of authority, that of Christian patriarchy.

Notes


2 As Claude Schneider demonstrated, in Juliana “Cynewulf consistently associated militant physical aggression with the villains of the story” (112). In his article, Schneider made a statement that Cynewulf deliberately evokes heroic sentiment in Juliana only to devalue it by forging an association between heroic code and agents of pagan persecutions (112ff).

3 “If Juliana’s purity seems unrealistically adamantine, is it not because the poet wanted his audience to see, suggested in it, the virgin church and that absolute virginity which homilist took as a symbol for the Christian’s relationship to the world” (Wittig 41). Wittig also quotes from Ælfric’s homily for the common of virgins: “Christ is the pure bridegroom and, all the Christian church is a bride, by which he daily begets human souls to his heavenly kingdom” (40). Many critics have read Juliana figuratively as representing the Church. For Joseph Witting the figurative significance of Juliana is a rationale for the number of tortures she suffered before her death: “instead of being merely an individual enduring repeated hurts, she might be meant to suggest the vigour of the community which the martyr’s witness established” (51). Witting also claims that the figure of the church embodied by the saint emerges from the fact that she preaches the faith to the crowd that convert before her martyrdom, which suggests “the collective testimony of the church” (52). His view that Juliana denotes the Church is supported by Jane Chance (45). Wittig uses allegory to defend the poem against a criticism “finding hagiography embarrassing as history” (37). If Anglo-Saxon religious audiences understood Juliana figuratively as church, the typology was strengthened by the vitality of the poem’s heroic element: Cynewulf makes a contrast between the church and the secular hall.
Daniel G. Calder observes that choosing to call images of idols *hæþengield*, “Cynewulf immediately develops the notion that Satan’s idols are connected with treasure – again an addition to the Latin” (1973, 361).

As Rosemary Woolf observes, “Cynewulf considerably blackened the prefect’s [Heliseus’s] behavior [...] In Cynewulf’s version, however, the issue is much more clear cut. Eliseus’s casual tolerance has been replaced by a zeal in the service of the heathen, devil-inspired idols” (15).

Such a view is expressed by Joseph Wittig who claims that Juliana is “the archetypal Christian who suffers, then vanquishes the devil” (40).

“She said to him, “Unless you attain the rank of prefect, there is no way I can marry you.” When he heard this, Eleusius gave the Emperor Maximianus gifts and replaced another prefect in the administration” (*Latin Life of Juliana* 123).


The Latin source only states that “When the prefect heard this, he called her father and told him word for word what Juliana had sent him” (*Latin Life of Juliana* 123).

In the Latin version, Eleusius allows Juliana to worship Christ in private on condition that Roman authorities do not find out that she is Christian: “Blessed Juliana replied, ‘If you agree with me to worship God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I will give in to you. But if you refuse you will not be my lord.’ The prefect said, ‘My lady Juliana, give in to me and I will believe in your God.’ Blessed Juliana replied, ‘Receive the Spirit of God and I will marry you.’ The prefect said, ‘I can’t, my lady, because if I do, the emperor will hear about it; and when he has appointed a successor to me, he will behead me with a sword’” (*Latin Life of Juliana* 124).

The devil has no name in Cynewulf’s version.

Stephen Morrison was the first reader of *Juliana* who identified *Ad Ephesios* VI.11–20, the source of all formulations of the *Miles Christi* idea, as the source of Cynewulf’s representation of hole men and women as warriors (84).

Jane Chance tries to show that the first part of the poem develops the tropological level of signification, stressing Juliana’s virginity, while the second and third part develop the allegorical and anagogical levels, presenting Juliana as *miles Christi* and the Church (41). I argue that the tropological level is important for the first and the third part of the poem.
References


Morrison, Stephen. 1979. “Of *cempa* in Cynewulf’s *Juliana* and the Figure of *miles Christi.*” *English Language Notes* 17: 2: 81–84.


