Man to Man

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the investigation of same-sex desire and homosociality among late-Roman elite men, and the connection of both to the making of masculine authority, centering on the *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius. Continuities between the masculinity proposed for Antony and that of elite men earlier in the book are considerable. As with other elites, a holy man such as Antony increases his *auctoritas* or ἀξίωμα though connection to things not of this world; defeat of demons, besting the Devil, and the omnipresent marks of God’s favor indicate a transcendent source of power and recall the designation of “Your Sublimity” in the law codes. Which is appropriate here since Antony received letters from emperors (*Vita Antonii* 81.1). Athanasius also underscores Antony’s status as a *vir* or anēr, presenting him as *patronus* to his clients and endowing him with virtual mastery of *paideia*.

While Antony’s masculinity possesses these continuities with elite late-ancient manhood, there is discontinuity in the matter of same-sex desire and same-sex sexual attractiveness. If a reader has Julian’s glamorization of Marcus Aurelius via Plato or the three emperors’ address to Orientius as “most dear and delightful” in mind, he or she will note that the construction of Antony’s masculine glamour proceeds with a relative absence of same-sex desire. The (nearly complete) embargo on desire between men in
the *vita*—though there are complexities here—is explicable on the bases of the pronounced homosocial nature of ascetic withdrawal and Athanasius’ interest in presenting Antony as unambiguously exemplary: same-sex desire would be exquisitely disruptive in an assertedly men-only space featuring complete sexual renunciation.

In the preface to the *vita*, Athanasius states directly that exemplarity is his goal, and the language he uses is similar to that just seen in the previous chapter. Addressing those in the West who are considering desert-style asceticism, he declares that he offers a *charaktēr* or pattern for *askēsis*:

> And I know that you, when you have heard, apart from your admiration for the man, will want to emulate his determination; seeing that for monks the life of Antony is a sufficient *charaktēr* (i.e., pattern) for *askēsis*. (Praef. 3)

Athanasius’ *charaktēr* is to function as a model for mimesis. In this direct embrace of mimesis, Athanasius’ use of *charaktēr* diverges significantly from Julian’s polysemous use of it in his seventh oration. There, *charaktēr* plays an important role in the discussion of the value of myths; “the unspeakable and unknown nature of *charaktēres*” (7.11/216C) brings those reading/hearing myths to understanding amid a surfeit of mystery, understanding valuable to individual and community in matters of initiation and communal rites (7.11/216B). While the *vita* also exhibits concerns about the proper constitution of the individual, communal living, and initiation, *charaktēr* being used, the distance from an “unspeakable and unknown nature of letters” that enjoins an embrace of opposites rendering even communication mysterious is considerable. Athanasius’ *charaktēr* for imitation is not the thing of mystery seen in writings of Julian. Presenting, instead, a surfeit of rationality, Athanasius seemingly takes mystery out of his model masculine subjectivity, even when he is perhaps raising some questions. Although Athanasius’ relative silence about desire between men indicates that Antony complies with, say, the *sacra generalitas* to be identified by Theodosius II’s board, his admirable Antony departs in other ways from the accepted canons of elite manly deportment. But it is even more complicated than this.

As was seen in the introduction and previous chapter, in elite circles there is refusal of same-sex desire and, at the same time, an embrace of its

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1. Οἶδα δὲ, ὅτι καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες, μετὰ τοῦ θαυμάσαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, θελῆσετε καὶ ζηλώσαι τὴν ἑκείνου πρόθεσιν. Ἐστι γὰρ μοναχοὶς ἱκανὸς χαρακτήρ πρὸς ἀσκήσιν ὁ Ἀντωνίου βίος.
liveliness to increase grandeur and authority. The address of “amantissime” in the legal documents or the often seen intertextuality with Plato indicates this embrace, to take some examples. In the vita the appearance of same-sex desire is different. Not obvious, either as thing explicitly forbidden or in use as a metaphor, it appears instead as an artifact of reception by an audience versed in the realities of the world.

When a reader who is aware of the realities attending homosocial environments notes the absence of same-sex desire (though not of pederastic desire, which is a different thing of course) in the depiction of Antony, questions arise. Antony’s perfect embodiment of earthbound moral ideals renders the vita’s asserted sufficiency (Athanasius says that it is a “sufficient” [bikanos/ἰκανός] charakter or pattern at Praef. 3) brittle and lacking at the point of readerly reception. As I have had occasion to argue elsewhere, utopian accounts, such as the Vita Antonii, proliferate desire when readers in the real world have to make sense of them. The unreality of a utopian account causes the reader to jump to conclusions on the basis of his or her experience with non-utopian, i.e., real humanity. And so here, awareness of the reasonable assumption that homosocial environments, especially if sealed, will increase the incidence of same-sex desire and same-sex sexual behavior causes the surface of the vita to give way to reveal the presence of same-sex desire in a complex of physical symptoms. Same-sex desire emerges as an attribute of Antony’s body and a same-sex sexual charge spreads to his wrestling match with the Devil (and to other things too).

The emergence of same-sex desire in physical symptoms and entities is a function of the fact that, instead of the mystery in the transcendent seen, for example, in late-Platonism, Athanasius posits a transcendent colonized by earthly morals. Mystery denied the transcendent appears on earth as this world’s reality. This conclusion gains considerable support when the contours of Athanasius’ intellectual project are considered.

Athanasius is confident that earthly standards of behavior are reflective of the situation in the transcendent. In two of his treatises, written decades before he wrote the vita and showing the continuity of his thought across his life, he moralizes the transcendent and declares the material world as both non-existent and evil (see Contra Gentes 4.18 and De Incarnatione 4.23). With some irony separating this world from the next (for he con-

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4. Ὄντα δὲ ἐστὶ τὰ καλά, οὐκ ὃντα δὲ τὰ φαῦλα.

5. Οὐκ ὃντα γάρ ἐστι τὰ κακά, ὃντα δὲ τὰ καλά.
nnects it quite strongly to man-made morals), Athanasius refuses to associate the transcendent with mystery and instead locates mystery, along with whatever he regards as immoral, in the physical world. In terms significant to this investigation of late-Roman manhood’s relation to same-sex desire and pleasure, Athanasius twice (once in the Contra Gentes and again in the De Incarnatione) quotes Romans 1:26–27 as a summative explanation for mankind’s refusal of God’s law in order to favor things of this (treacherous) earth. As Romans 1:26–27 is Paul’s famous denunciation of same-sex desire, Athanasius makes male bodies by definition prone to this sin which is now a sin of sins. Same-sex desire on this basis becomes a corporeal inheritance for all men. Given the exemplary power that Athanasius attributes to same-sex desire in his understanding of the nature of the universe, a reader of the vita will be thinking long and hard about the same-sex desire seemingly missing from Athanasius’ Antony, same-sex desire that is then added because of things known about the dynamics of homosocial spaces, both closed and, indeed, not closed (as seen in the previous chapter and introduction to this book). An additional result of readerly engagement with the vita is that Athanasius starts to look like the three emperors who put their signatures to Collatio 5.3. He takes his place as a powerfully penetrating authority from whom no secrets of life can be kept, knowing, as he does, the forbidden nature of all men’s bodies.

**SOURCES AND ATHANASIOUS’ MÉTIER**

The main sources for this chapter are the Vita Antonii of Athanasius and a number of his other works, especially the Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione.

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7. 5.16–34.
8. The literature on Romans 1:26–27 is vast and complex. Just what this important text that features same-sex desire between females (θηλειαί) and between males (ἄρρενες) meant in Paul’s context, and how this text is supposed to matter now, have been subjects of much debate. For more, a reader may start with Scroggs 1983, Brooten 1996, and Moore 2001.
9. Athanasius’ making same-sex desire a concern for all men interestingly prefigures part of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s discussion (1990) of understandings of homosexuality since the late nineteenth century. Sedgwick suggests that there have been two modern discourses in conflict about homosexuality, the minoritizing and the universalizing. The minoritizing discourse regards homosexuality as a quality that only a minority of persons possesses in any meaningful way, while the universalizing one asserts that homosexuality is present in or a concern to all persons to a degree (small or large) (cf. Halperin 2002a: 10–13, 123). Athanasius’ position on same-sex desire of course has similarities to Sedgwick’s “universalizing” discourse.
10. There has been debate about whether Athanasius wrote the vita or not. Going along with most scholars, I think he did. For further discussion of the authorship question, start with Barnes 1986; Pettersen 1987: 238; Louth 1988; Bartelink 1994: 27–42; Cameron 1999; Bertrand 2005: 19–20.
tion. The *Vita Antonii* (written between 359 and 362) is one of the first texts to document withdrawal to the *erēmos*11 (or “desert,” on the understanding that desert will designate any place that is uninhabited).12 The *vita* was enormously influential and Latin translations, one by Evagrius Antiochensis and the other anonymous, appeared within twenty years (both these Latin texts will be consulted later, as they provide valuable information on how Antony and the *vita* were understood in antiquity).13 In words from the introduction, if accepted as genuine,14 Athanasius states that he was writing his account “for monks in foreign parts,”15 and he also makes reference to the existence of monasteries elsewhere in the empire and to “excellent competition in *askēsis* directed toward virtue”16 between these monasteries and those in Egypt. Even without these words, however, it is clear that the *Vita Antonii* was intended to spread the word and to provide a *charaktēr* for ascetics everywhere. The treatises *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* will be discussed later in the chapter.

In addition to works by Athanasius and the two Latin translations of the *vita*, other works related to withdrawal to the *erēmos* round out the discussion: the anonymous *Apophthegmata Patrum* (second decade of the fifth century), the anonymous *Historia Monachorum* (circa 400), and Jerome’s translation of Pachomius’ rules for monastery living (*Interpretatio Regulae Sancti Pachomii*; circa 405). It is common practice to read these works (or a similar combination) together.17 They all treat the fourth-century expe-

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11. The word *erēmos* is to be preferred to desert because the word “desert” may be misleading, implying that ascetic withdrawal was always to the middle of nowhere. In fact, withdrawal to the *erēmos* [literally “the uninhabited zone”] could be to a location relatively proximate to inhabited land. That the middle of nowhere, i.e., the deep desert, could be a destination for a monk was certainly true. Indeed, it predominates in the historical record, but it certainly was not as common as the sources say it was. James Goehring (1993) convincingly argues that the predominance in the historical record of retreat to the deep desert does not reflect reality at all, but is, rather, a function of the desire to record the remarkable.


13. For discussion of these translations, see Bartelink (1994: 95–98) and Bertrand (2005: 27–28).


15. πρὸς τοὺς ἐν τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ ἀρχηγοὺς.


rience of withdrawal from society to the erēmos in Egypt and were either written during the fourth century (Athenasius’ Vita Antonii, the Historia Monachorum) or they are in retrospective mode: depiction in the early fifth century of fourth-century Egypt (the Apophthegmata Patrum, Jerome’s translation of Pachomius’ regulations). There are differences between them, but, on balance, these works are useful for teasing out what is said in compressed fashion in the vita.

An important qualification to arguments to come. A strong distinction will not be made between coenobitic and anachoretic/eremitical asceticisms: the former asceticism practiced in a monastery and the latter alone. There are distinctions to be made, of course. Coenobitic asceticism is an intensely social project that creates a new identity within the confines of a monastery, while anachoretic asceticism embraces a utopian solitude. One of the goals of the coenobium of monastery living is “world replacement,” as Bentley Layton (2007) puts it. The monastery offers a new social world along with individual transformation in the process.\(^{18}\) The anachoretic monk, in contrast, pointedly removes himself from the saeculum as an essential part of his personal transformation. The anachoretic monk also defines himself in opposition to society that remains as it was, and he and/or his publicizers have ambitions to change it through his glorious example. Since the goal of this discussion is to consider how asceticized manhood depicted in the Vita Antonii reflects, diverges from, and interacts with manhood and same-sex desire among elite men in general in the empire, it is not too much of a deformation of the evidence to allow these two types of withdrawal to run together somewhat, especially when the appreciable similarities between them are noted. In the case of both coenobitic and anachoretic asceticism, secular society, judged wanting, is rejected and there is concomitant personal transformation. Both modes also employ physical practices to secure a connection to things beyond this world. It is perhaps a question whether asceticism as a concept is able to be separated out and discussed separate from these two modes of its ancient social expression. The argument will proceed on the understanding that there is enough of an affirmative here to go forward.\(^{19}\) With these qualifications in place, the vita will now be further contextualized through consideration of the circumstances of Athenasius’ life.

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129]) for reflections on the advantages and limitations of this common practice.


19. Indeed, as will be seen below, the vita has the predominantly anachoretic Antony occasionally interacting with other monks in a communal setting.
While enduring the third of his five banishments from Alexandria, Athanasius wrote the *Vita Antonii*. Athanasius often ran afoul of emperors. He had to endure the displeasure of Constantine, Constantius II, Julian, and Valens. He was banished to the West twice (335–37 and 339–46). He was on the lam in the erēmos during the latter three banishments (356–62, 362–63, and 365–66). The world of the fourth-century bishop was characterized by high-stakes politics, and the penalties for the unsuccessful were severe. Athanasius occasionally had to use force to subdue his enemies.²⁰ Paul, the bishop of Constantinople, having declared for the usurper Magnentius, was strangled at the order of Constantius II in 350.²¹ George of Cappadocia, one of Athanasius’ replacements as head of the Alexandrian See, was lynched in 361. The bishop’s life in the fourth century, then, was not only an abstracted realm in which devotion and theology reigned. Devotion and theology did matter, of course, and Athanasius wrote theological works (the *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione* are examples), but politics were a concern too.

Given this mixture of religious devotion and his need to acquire and maintain power, it is reasonable to imagine that Athanasius would want to share the truth and further his political objectives in one and the same document.²² Indeed, a coincidence of truth and policy is on display in the *Vita Antonii*, and it is clearly related to his efforts to win monks over to his side in the push to consolidate his power in Alexandria.²³ But this document that was part of a campaign to win allies among the monks and to (re) build support in Alexandria had to walk a fine line. Even as it offered an at times innovating charaktēr of a magnificent man for mimesis, there needed to be (and there was) much that would meet conservative expectations for men.²⁴ Had Athanasius not taken account of the conservative notions of his (often senatorial) readers in the saeculum, his charaktēr meant to further his objectives, via literary means, would have lost some of its persuasive power. In any case, this campaign, in which the *Vita Antonii* served, is best seen as part of Athanasius’ long-lasting and multi-faceted crusade to bring elite laity and monks under more regular ecclesiastical authority.

Among the laity, Athanasius’ strategy manifested itself in discourage-

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ment of an academic, questioning Christianity.²⁵ Such questioning led to heresy.²⁶ To replace intellectualized Christianity, the Vita Antonii makes the proposition that a Christian life be realized through ascetic discipline.²⁷ Burrus sees Athanasius forging in the vita a modified manhood meant to travel from the erēmos back to the secular world to do needful work:

... *anachōrēsis*, or “withdrawal,” as Athanasius represents it, constitutes not a simple rejection of the city in favor of an alternative but rather a strategy for refashioning the city, to which there is never, in Athanasius’s mind, any alternative. (2000: 70)

While he had these recommendations for the laity, Athanasius was also concerned to bring the monastic movement into a more formal relationship with the See in Alexandria. The erēmos possessed great freedom from outside authority, and Athanasius, through the simple need, at least, for allies in the dangerous situations in which he often found himself, needed ties organizing the erēmos in relation to Alexandria—ties that would emphasize orthodoxy and secure the monks’ support. To bring about this closer relationship between erēmos and himself as bishop, Athanasius did a number of things. He ordained monks as priests, some of whom were reluctant.²⁸ He emphasized Antony’s obedience to the clergy (*Vita Antonii* 67). Also, bringing his authority into an intimate area of the erēmos, he ruled, in the *Letter to Amun*, on the relationship of nocturnal emissions to a monk’s ascetic practice.²⁹ In the matter of church doctrine, Athanasius emphasized the need for orthodoxy among the monks. Accordingly, Athanasius depicted Antony as an implacable foe of heresy. Brakke notes that “the *Life of Antony* was the climactic weapon in Athanasius’ campaign against monastic sympathy for the Arian cause and indifference about the controversy [of Arianism]” (1995a: 135).³⁰ Accordingly, Athanasius depicts Antony being critical of the Meletians and the Arians (*Vita Antonii* 68, 82), and even shows Antony making a special trip to Alexandria to denounce the Arians (*Vita Antonii* 69–70).³¹

²⁷. Brakke 1995a: 214; cf. Pettersen (1990: 5–34) on Athanasius’ understanding of the body’s importance as a tool to be used in service to God.
³¹. See Burrus’ (2000: 74–75) discussion of this passage; she remarks tellingly: “Antony appears oddly at home during this carefully scripted visit to the big city” (74).
Athanasius had a vision of an Egypt where there would be an association of lay semi-ascetics and ascetics. The laity would imitate the ascetics to the best of their ability and the ascetics would have their model in Antony:

Athanasius is clearly attempting to present not one model among many, but the model of the Christian life. His goal is to freeze the flow of imitation and to create a single icon, one powerful enough to mirror a diverse set of virtues into a single civic life. (Brakke 1995a: 262 [emphasis in original]; cf. 13)

His life a charaktēr, Antony is at the crossing of chains of mimesis that extend through lay elites and, at the same time, through the monks: the vita speaks to both groups. Furthermore, the mimetic function of this account is not merely asserted in the vita; it is something that contemporaries recognized early on. Writing in 380, Gregory Nazianzenus calls the Vita Antonii “a codification of the monk’s life in the form of a narrative.”32 The vita also features in Augustine’s Confessions at 8.6.15: there, two friends who are serving the emperor (most likely Valentinian I) at Trier find a copy of the vita, and, having read it, are inspired to change their lives in imitation.

In writing the Vita Antonii, Athanasius wished to suggest the proper way to live a life, the proper way of belief, and what the proper abode of authority was. Antony modeled all of these, and did so in such a way that he advanced Athanasius’ interests and—and this is key—as a man revolutionary in some ways and yet, ultimately, deeply conservative. Seemingly violating some of the canons of masculinity—he avoided cultivating the skills of elite manhood, claiming its privileges, or performing its duties—Antony uncannily possessed these seemingly rejected skills and easily commanded respect because Athanasius’ portrait cleverly rendered Antony legible as an elite man.

**ANTONY THE LEGIBLE**

One of the first things Athanasius does to establish Antony’s legibility as an elite man is to show that he is well-to-do, free, and of some standing in the community. Entering church one day, he hears Matthew 19:21 in a sermon.33 In this passage, Christ implores the rich man to give away his

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32. Or. 21.5.6–7: τοῦ μοναδικοῦ βίου νομοθεσίαν, ἐν πλάσματι διηγήσεως.
33. 2.3.
possessions. That, and another sermon with another tag, Matthew 6:34 ("Have no care for tomorrow"), and Antony is on his way to the erēmos:

And Antony, as though having come into possession of the mindfulness of the Saints through the agency of God, and as though the reading [Matthew 19:21] had been made with him in mind, after he had gone straight out of the church, made a gift of all the possessions he had from his forefathers (and there were 300 arourai, fertile and exceedingly choice) to those from the village so that they should not trouble at all for him and his sister. As regards all other things, the movable things they possessed, having sold it all and having gotten together sufficient money, he distributed it to the beggars, having preserved a little for his sister. (2.4–5)

Clearly no longer a boy as he is able to exercise paternal authority, Antony starts off his career in sanctity by giving away nearly all his possessions to the villagers, which, as it provides for those with less, makes him seem the good patronus. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that he has given up his household, he paradoxically remains a good pater familias because his female dependent is “properly” supervised. He entrusts her to local virgins who welcome her into their convent.

Besides showing Antony’s behavior as a proper head-of-household, Athanasius also surveys Antony’s sexual interests. The Devil comes to Antony:

For [the Devil] was thrusting filthy thoughts [into Antony’s mind] and [Antony] was overturning them with his prayers. [The Devil] was causing an itching, but he, while appearing to blush, through faith and fasts was walling off his body. The wretched Devil was even keeping at it to the extent that he took on the shape of a woman and in every way mimicked one during the night, only so he could deceive Antony. (5.4–5)

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34. 3.1.
35. Ο δὲ Ἀντώνιος, ὡσπερ θεόθεν ἐσχηκὼς τὴν τῶν ἁγίων μνήμην καὶ ὡς δὲ αὐτὸν γενομένου τοῦ ἀναγνώσματος, ἐξελθὼν εὐθὺς ἐκ τοῦ κυριακοῦ τάς μὲν κτήσεις ὃς ἦσαν ἐκ προγόνων (ἀρουραι δὲ ἦσαν τριακόσιαι εὔφοροι καὶ πάνυ καλαί), ταύτας ἐχαρίσατο τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς κώμης, ὅταν εἰς μηδὲ ὁτιοῦν ὁχλήσωσιν αὐτῷ τε καὶ τῇ ἀδελφῇ. (3) Τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ὄσα ἦν αὐτοῖς κινητά, πάντα πωλήσας καὶ συναγαγὼν ἱκανόν ἄργυρον, διέδωκε τοῖς πτωχοῖς, τηρήσας ὀλίγα διὰ τὴν ἀδελφήν.
37. Vita Antonii 2–3; for more on Antony’s sister, see Burrus 2000: 76.
38. For this translation of ὑπέβαλλε, see Lampe 1961: ὑποβάλλω 1.
39. Ὡ μὲν γὰρ ὑπέβαλλε λογισμοὺς ῥυπαρούς, ὁ δὲ ταῖς εὐχαὶς ἀνέτρεπε τούτους. Καί ὃ μὲν
The temptation in this section indicates a primary object of Antony’s sexual desires. Both Athanasius and the Devil know that Antony’s interests are directed at women. In the next section of the \textit{vita}, as though to round out the shape of Antony’s sexual desires with a proper Greco-Roman fullness, the Devil returns to Antony, this time in the shape of a black boy\textsuperscript{40} who goes by the name “Spirit of Fornication”:

Finally then, as the serpent was not able to take Antony in this way [i.e., in the form of a woman], but rather saw himself thrust from his [Antony’s] heart, gnashing his teeth, as it is written, and then, as though he were changing strategies, he subsequently appeared to Antony in a vision as a black boy, and this was a reflection of his [black] mind. (6.1)\textsuperscript{41}

The boy announces that he is both the friend (\textit{philos/φίλος}) and spirit (\textit{pneuma/πνεῦμα}) of fornication (\textit{porneias/πορνείας}). Thereupon, he and Antony debate for a while. As it is a wise man teaching a younger male, a Platonic encounter may come to mind. No sexual activity is present, but that is fitting, as sublimation is Platonic too. Besides, as the black boy goes by the titles of “Friend” and “Spirit of Fornication,” sexual activity is here anyway.

And so, Athanasius establishes through these two encounters that Antony’s sexual interests are normative, i.e., directed towards women and younger males. Antony behaves according to norms of the proposed readership of the \textit{vita}. This is a situation of some paradox, however; Antony has sexual objects/activity choices, but does not have sex. Antony’s sexual interests should not matter, but Athanasius clearly wants his readers to know that \textit{if} Antony were going to be sexually active, his choice of activity would be penetration of a woman or a younger male.

Another significant element in Athanasius’ depiction of Antony is the fact that he possesses the eloquence that is the possession of worthy men.

\textsuperscript{40} As nearly always when considering pederastic scenes, “boy” should be understood as referring to a male at some point in his maturation past the commencement of puberty and prior to the arrival of his heavy beard. Also see Brakke (2006: 157–81 and 2001) for discussion of the effect of Ethiopian ethnicity and blackness in the \textit{erēmos}. I don’t address this issue.

\textsuperscript{41} Τέλος γοῦν, ὡς οὐκ ἠδυνήθη τὸν ᾿Αντώνιον οὐδ᾿ ἐν τούτῳ καταβαλεῖν ὁ δράκων, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔβλεπεν ἑαυτὸν ἐξωθούμενον ὁ διάβολος ὡς γυνὴ σχηματίζεσθαι νυκτὸς καὶ πάντα τρόπον μιμεῖσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τὸν ᾿Αντώνιον ἀπατήσῃ. (5) Καὶ ὁ μὲν διάβολος ὑπέμενεν ὁ ἄθλιος καὶ ὡς γυνὴ σχηματίζεσθαι νυκτὸς καὶ πάντα τρόπον μιμεῖσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τὸν ᾿Αντώνιον ἀπατήσῃ.
in antiquity. It is revealed early in the *vita* that Antony could not abide learning to read.\(^{42}\) But for all the deficits this unwillingness to learn to read should have brought Antony's way, he nonetheless was able to speak with grace through divine intervention:

> He [God] also gave grace in speaking (*charin . . . en toi lalein/χάριν . . . ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν*) to Antony. Thus he encouraged many of those who were in pain, and others in disputes [he encouraged] to change to friendship, saying to all that they should not place any of the things of the world before the love of Christ. (14,6)\(^{43}\)

The ability to use words effectively was an essential mark of *paideia*, and through skillful use of words, elite men projected authority and built bonds with each other. Grace in speaking got things done and furthered careers.

But Antony has more than the ability to charm and achieve objectives through grace in speaking. He does not shy away from competition and presses home his arguments. Athanasius depicts Antony debating some "philosophers" when they come to visit him. Antony speaks, "that our faith is effective, observe then: we contend mightily with a faith that is Christ's, and you [do so] with sophistic word battles."\(^{44}\) Antony sets the terms of argument, defining the philosophers' procedures as sophistry, against which he opposes his faith. Elsewhere, though, and in spite of his stated disdain for sophistic wizardry, Antony defeats them at their own game. Antony "astounds" them with a verbal coup complete with a New Testament tag: "If you come to a fool, then your effort is wasted. But if you suppose that I am wise, *become like me* [Galatians 4:12]."\(^{45}\) In other words, swear off learning. It is short but it is sweet. Antony prevails through verbal mastery and the philosophers "withdrew impressed" (*thaumasantes anechōroun*).

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42. 1.2:

But when he, having grown some, had become an [older] boy and was advancing in age, he could not endure to learn letters . . .

43. Χάριν τε ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν ἐδίδου τῷ ᾿Αντωνίῳ· καὶ οὕτω πολλοὺς μὲν λυπουμένους παρεμθεῖτο, ἄλλους δὲ μαχομένους διήλλατει εἰς φιλίαν, πᾶσιν ἐπιλέγων μηδὲν τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προκρίνειν τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν ἀγάπης.

44. ὅτι ἐνεργής ἐστιν ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν, ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμεῖς ἐπερειδόμεθα τῇ πίστει τῇ εἰς τὸν Χριστόν, ὑμεῖς δὲ σοφιστικὰς λογομαχίας.

45. Εἰ μὲν πρὸς μωρὸν ἠλθετε, περιττός ὑμῶν ὁ κάματος· εἰ δὲ νομίζετέ με φρόνιμον εἶναι, γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ.
As such, it is an instance of wordplay in the text and, hence, thematizes the verbal mastery Antony has just displayed, as this verb is used technically of monastic withdrawal from the secular world. Is Antony’s victory so thorough that he has made anachoretic monks of the philosophers? In any case, Antony has just achieved domination in a competitive arena and acted as any man of his station would have hoped to.\footnote{Brakke (1995a: 253–54) remarks that these exchanges with the philosophers embody Athanasius’ suspicion of academic Christianity and his preference for “unschooled wisdom” (254). This scene shows these things, but Antony’s beating them at their own game also builds up the profile of Athanasius’ hero.}

Antony’s competitive spirit also spreads to his monastic bodily practice:

Moreover, as he was accustomed, withdrawing by himself into his retreat, he extended his practice and daily he groaned, thinking of the dwellings in heaven, having his desire directed at them, while he was looking at this life of humans that was bound to pass. For on the point of eating, sleeping and \cite{Brakke1995} in the matter of other necessities of the body, he was ashamed while in contemplation of the intellelction of the soul. Indeed, being about to eat in the presence of many of the other monks, having remembered the food of the spirit, he begged and went a great distance from them, knowing that he was ashamed to be seen eating by others. He did eat, however, because of the necessity of the body, both by himself and often too with the brothers, being ashamed before them on the one hand, but, on the other, freely offering \cite{Brakke1995} words of helpful encouragement. (45.1–4)\footnote{Αὐτὸς μέντοι συνήθως καθ᾿ ἑαυτὸν ἀναχωρῶν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ μοναστηρίῳ, ἐπέτεινε τὴν ἄσκησιν, καθ᾿ ἡμέραν τε ἐστέναζεν, ἐνθυμούμενος τὰς ἐν οὐρανῷ μονάς, τὸν τε πόθον ἔχων εἰς αὐτὰς καὶ σκοτών τὸν ἐφήμερον τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίου. (2) Καὶ γὰρ καὶ μέλλων ἐσθίειν καὶ κοιμᾶσθαι καὶ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀνάγκαις τοῦ σώματος ᾐσχύνετο λογιζόμενος τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς νοερόν. (3) Πολλάκις γοῦν μετὰ πολλῶν ἄλλων μοναχῶν μέλλων ἐσθίειν, ἀναμνησθεὶς τῆς πνευματικῆς τροφῆς, παρατηρᾶτο καὶ μακρῶν ἀπ᾿ αὐτῶν ἀπιήλθεν, νομίζων ὑπὲρ ὁμολογίαν, οἱ βλέποιτο παρ᾿ ἐπέρῳ ἐσθίουν. (4) Ἡθικός μέντοι καθ᾿ ἑαυτὸν διὰ τὴν τούτῳ σωμάτως ἀνάγκην, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄδελφων, αἰδούμενος μὲν ἐπὶ τούτοις, παραθησιαζόμενος δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς ὑπὲρ ὁμολογίας λόγοις.}

He is ostentatious in his practice, even after spending twenty years in the deep desert. One can almost hear the other monks asking each other where Antony has gone when he has withdrawn to extend his practice. Anticipation mounts (for days?) and then, finally, he returns, more sanctified than before. When he is with the other monks, sometimes it is too much for him to be seen giving his body what it needs, and he makes an exit sure to be noted by all because he begged to be excused. Still other times, his behavior oscillates between shamed gratification of hunger and advice offered from a
superior vantage-point. He has labored at his practice of denial, becoming the best practitioner among those around him. Further, Antony not only performs his denial of sustenance in public, his sexual renunciation is at times played for an audience (5.3; to be discussed below).

In time, then, Antony secured a great reputation through his obvious excellence. Emperors accordingly wrote him:

The renown of Antony made it even up to the emperors. For having heard of these things [i.e., Antony’s deeds and admirable mode of life], Constantine Augustus and his sons Constantius [II] and Constans, both augsti, wrote to him as to a father, and they requested that they receive a response from him. (81.1)

Antony realized these marks of imperial esteem through uncanny verbal excellence and public mortification of his body recoded as a winning performance in a competitive arena. And so, as remarked above, the net effect of Athanasius’ representation is of a manhood for Antony that would have been recognizably that of a vir or anēr. Athanasius repeatedly brings out commonalities between Antony and elite Roman masculinity in terms of the duties he fulfills, the skills he displays, and the competitive situations in which he is seen. Indeed, the imperial recognition Antony enjoys recalls the end point of elite men’s ambitions represented on the Missorium plate or textualized in the imperial addresses of parens karissime atque amantissime or Experientia Tua in the legal corpora.

As already noted, Athanasius emphasizes at the beginning of his account that Antony is free and elite. But Antony gives up the accoutrements of his class privilege, the surrender of which certainly could have brought his social identity close to that of a slave. Being a slave had ramifications for gender performance because a slave had no right to bodily integrity. It is significant, too, that his solitary practices of prayer and solitude were more than likely supported by slave labor on estates located near the places he lived as a monk. Most of the time Antony relied on the delivery of loaves to his hermitage every six months or so (12.5). Athanasius also reports

48. Cameron remarks that the holy man “needs an audience; doing good by stealth was not enough in itself, and many hagiographic tales turn precisely on recognition and revelation. The writing of a Life recognizes this explicitly by making his deeds known to the world, and to posterity” (1999: 37).

49. Ἐφθασε δὲ καὶ μέχρι βασιλέων ἡ περὶ ᾿Αντωνίου φήμη. Ταῦτα γὰρ μαθόντες Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Αὔγουστος καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ Κωνστάντιος καὶ Κώνστας οἱ Αὔγουστοι, ἔγραφον αὐτῷ ὡς πατρὶ καὶ ἱγχοντο λαμβάνειν ἀντίγραφα παρ᾿ αὐτοῦ.
that Antony’s understanding of his relationship to his body is such that it replays the subjugation of slave to master in Roman society:

And he [Antony] said that it was necessary to give all attention to the soul instead of the body. [He also counseled] to concede a little space of time to the body through necessity, but to devote the whole of one’s time to the soul and to seek help for it so that it [the soul] would not be dragged down by the pleasures of the body but rather that the body be enslaved by it [the soul]. (45.5–6)\textsuperscript{50}

Athenasius mostly leaves servility out of Antony’s identity. His sense of himself works from a spot defined oppositionally to that of a slave. Indeed, the definition of Antony’s subjectivity in opposition to that of a slave is of a piece with the formation of elite male subjectivity at large in the rest of the empire. The contours of elite Roman manhood seen in Athenasius’ portrait of Antony occur elsewhere in the literature of the erēmos.

Abba Sisoes is getting on in years and is surely entitled to a reduced helping of bitter askēsis. Perhaps, as he is older, it would be advisable. When his disciple suggests that he come in closer to settled land, he is appalled by the idea that he may encounter a woman:

Abba Sisoes’ disciple said to him, “Father, you have become old, let’s go back nearer to the inhabited area for the remaining time [you will be alive].” The old man says to him, “To the place where there are no women, let’s go back to there.” His disciple says to him, “What place does not have women except for the erēmos?” The old man says accordingly, “Take me to the erēmos.” (Apophth. Patr., Sisoes 4 [PG 65 392D])\textsuperscript{51}

Even amid old age’s exhaustion, the temptation that women provide to the monk seemingly remains overpowering. This disavowal remains a key proof of the monk’s serious attitude to his practice. Another example makes this point in an even balder manner. Arsenius has been fooled into looking

\textsuperscript{50} Καὶ ἔλεγε χρῆναι τὴν πᾶσαν σχολὴν διδόναι τῇ ψυχῇ μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ σώματι καὶ συγχωρεῖν μὲν διὰ τὴν ἀνάγκην ὀλίγον καιρὸν τῷ σώματι, τὸ δὲ ὀλίγον σχολάζειν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ τὴν ταύτης ὑφέλειαν ἐχεῖν, (6) ἵνα μὴ αὐτὴ καθέλκηται ὑπὸ τῶν ἡδονῶν τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον τὸ σῶμα παρ᾿ αὐτῆς δουλαγωγῆται.

\textsuperscript{51} ᾖλεγεν ὁ μαθητὴς τοῦ ἀββᾶ Σισόη πρὸς αὐτὸν· “Πάτερ, ἐγήρασα, ἀπέλθωμεν ἐγγύς τῆς οἰκουμένης, λοιπὸν.” Λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· “Ὅπου οὐκ ἐνι γυναῖκι, ἐκεῖ ἀπέλθωμεν.” Λέγει αὐτῷ μαθητὴς αὐτοῦ· “Καὶ ποῦ ἐστι τόπος ὁ μὴ ἔχων γυναῖκα, εἰ μὴ ἔρημος;” Λέγει οὖν ὁ γέρων· “Εἰς τὴν ἔρημον ἄρον με.”
upon a virtuous virgin of senatorial rank from Rome. She wanted to meet him to ask him to pray for her. Appalled by seeing her, he says, “I pray to God that he erase the memory of you from my heart.”

Disconsolate over the way everything turned out, the virgin returns to Alexandria and becomes ill. Bishop Theophilus visits her and explains Arsenius’ reaction. He says that women are the way the Devil battles against the monks: “Don’t you know that you are a woman and that through women the enemy wages war against the holy ones?” In the face of this dismaying news, however, Theophilus reassures her that Arsenius will pray for her. This reassurance comforts her: having recovered her health, she returns to Rome joyfully.

What should be noted from this story and the others is that depictions of the erēmos featured nearly total separation of the sexes and a concomitant hysterical heightening of men’s desire for women, such that an old man could be expected to take his (probably) arthritic frame out into the erēmos, or that a monk would pray to forget the sight of a woman, or that, even at ninety years old, John of Lycopolis, who had not seen a woman for forty years, would absolutely refuse to allow a woman into his sight.

On the other side of this hysteria, and in impeccably logical counterpoint, monks are sometimes accused of impregnating women in the neighborhood or of bringing women into their cells. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, there is an example of this latter story-line; Ammonas keeps monks who are searching a monk’s cell from finding a woman by sitting on the wine jar that conceals her. Stories such as these strengthen the sense of continuity between masculinity in the erēmos and that extant back in the cities. Both the hystericalized separation and the suspicion or clear evidence of desire consummated depict the presence of normative sexual desire among the monks in much the same way the Devil coming as a woman to Antony does.

Furthermore, similar to the Devil’s appearance as a boy to Antony, younger males appear as objects of desire in other literature of the erēmos. Isaac of Kellia cautioned against boys: “Don’t allow boys to remain here in this way, for four churches at Scetis have become deserted because of

53. *Apophth. Patr.*, Arsenius 28 (*PG* 65 97B): Οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι γυνή ἐν, καὶ διὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ὁ ἐχθρὸς πολεμεῖ τοὺς ἁγίους:
boys.”

Abba Eudaemon said [this] about Paphnutius the father of Scetis: “I went there when I was younger and he did not allow me to stay there, saying about me, ‘I will not allow the face of a woman to stay at Scetis on account of my struggle with the enemy.’” (Apophth. Patr., Eudaemon [PG 65 176B])

As competition in the Vita Antonii reveals a continuity between masculine life in the erēmos and that found in the cities, so in other works that document withdrawal to the erēmos. The anonymous author of the Historia Monachorum sees in competition a salient characteristic of anachōrēsis as a whole:

And some in the caves in the uninhabited places and others in the most remote places, all in every way most desirous of competition with each other display their marvelous askēsis. The ones further out making the effort so that no other in his disciplinary practices should surpass them, and those nearer [making the effort] so that not one [of them], since sin was burdening them from all sides, should be esteemed less than those further out. (Praef.11)

The erēmos is the site of individual competition too:

“I [Ammoun is speaking] have greater travail [in discipline] than you, and how is it that your name is made greater among men over and beyond me?” Abba Antony says to him, “I love God more than you do.” (Apophth. Patr., Ammoun of Nitria [PG 65 128B])

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58. See Gould (1993: 125) for more instances of boys as objects of sexual desire in the erēmos.

59. Εἶπεν ὁ ἀββᾶς Εὐδαίμων περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Παφνουτίου τοῦ Πατρὸς τῆς Σκῆτεως, ὅτι “Κατῆλθον ἐκεῖ νεώτερος, καὶ οὐκ ἀφῆκέ με μεῖναι ἐκεῖ, λέγων ἐπὶ ἐμοῦ, ὃς γαναικός οὐκ ἀφιῶ μεῖνα εἰς Σκῆτιν, διὰ τὸν πόλεμον τοῦ ἐχθροῦ.’’

60. Καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐν τοῖς σπῆλαιοι τοῖς ἐν ἐρήμοις, οἱ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἀπωτάτοις, πάντες πανταχοῦ φιλουκκότατον ἄλληδων τὴν εαυτῶν ὁσκημὴν θαμαστὴν ἐπιδιέκνυνται, οἱ μὲν πόρρωθεν σπουδάζοντες μὴ τὶς ἔτερος ἐν τοῖς κατορθώμασι αὐτοὺς ὑπερβάλλω, οἱ δὲ ἐγγυθεὶς μὴ τὶς κακίας αὐτοῖς πανταχόθεν ὀχλούσις ἢττον τῶν πορρωτάτων εὐδοκιμήσωσιν.

In another instance of competition from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Antony 17 [PG 65 80D]), Joseph proposes some scripture (not specified) to a group of monks for interpretation. Each monk offers an interpretation and each time Joseph pronounces the attempt wrong. When it is Antony’s turn, he says he has no idea how to interpret the passage. This is the answer Joseph has been looking for and Antony wins.

Also in much the way the *Vita Antonii* does, other literature from the erēmos shows monks identifying with the master and not with the slave. Pit-yrion, one of Antony’s disciples, spoke of the passions needing enslavement:

> “Accordingly, my children,” he says to us, “whoever wishes to drive out demons, first he must enslave the passions. For whichever passion one overcomes, he also drives out its demon. It is necessary that you conquer the passions little by little, so that you may drive out their demons.” (*Hist. Monach.* 15.2–3)\(^{62}\)

In a mildly humorous example, Arsenius addresses sleep as though it were a slave:

> Abba Daniel said about Abba Arsenius that he used to spend the whole night sleepless. And when around dawn he came to sleep because of the requirements of nature, he used to say to sleep, “Come here, you wretched slave.” And he seized it, sleeping a little, and then straightaway he would awaken. (*Apophth. Patr.*, Arsenius 14 [PG 65 92A])\(^{63}\)

In sum, then, the various authors of literature of the erēmos complcte the actions of their ascetic heroes so that continuities between them and men who have not withdrawn to the erēmos—and who are an important part of the reading audience—are visible. That said, though, it is important to underscore that the reading audience of non-monks is getting back a simplified version of their manhood. The complexities around finessing hierarchy and depicting friendship through metaphors of same-sex desire are not much in evidence. In reference to the *vita* and this simplified version of manhood, one might say that the charaktēr is something of a carica-

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\(^{62}\) ὖστις οὖν, ὦ τέκνα, πρὸς ἡμᾶς φησίν, ὃς ἰδοὺς δαίμονας ἀπελαύνειν, πρότερον τὰ πάθη δουλώσῃ. (3) Οὗτος γὰρ ἂν πάθους τις περιγένηται, τούτου καὶ τὸν δαίμονα ἀπελάυνε. Καὶ δεὶ κατὰ μικρὸν ὑμᾶς νικῆσαι τὰ πάθη, ἵνα τούτων τοὺς δαίμονας ἀπελάσῃτε.

\(^{63}\) Ἐλεγεν ὁ ἀββᾶς Δανιήλ περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ ᾿Αρσενίου, ὅτι ὅλην τὴν νύκτα διετέλει ἀγρυπνῶν· καὶ ὅτε ἦλθεν περὶ τὸ πρωῒ διὰ τὴν φύσιν καθευδῆσαι, ἔλεγεν τῷ ὕπνῳ: “Δεῦρο, κακὲ δούλε” καὶ ἤρπαξε μικρὸν καθεζόμενος, καὶ εὐθέως ἤγείρετο.
ture. All the same, though, these continuities build a bridge and make the transgressive nature of Antony’s and other monks’ actions more palatable to a reading public in the saeculum that has had its self-image supported to a large degree. But the vita and other literature from the erēmos don’t merely give back a simplified reflection of the canons of elite masculinity. This literature means to be an intervention; there is a brief for transformation, and aspects of monastic withdrawal depicted in these works depart from expectations for elite men in the empire. Visible here are men who figure themselves as slaves, avoid competition, and are submissive. The models are Christ and the martyrs. The literature from the erēmos is one of the ways the deadly ideals embodied by the savior and those who died for their faith were domesticated for use in a life to be lived. On the basis of the masochism evident in these models, it is arguable that the ascetics subvert their identities as men.\(^64\) But such a perception is attenuated in the first place by the countervailing details, discussed above, that associate the ascetics with elite men of the saeculum. Secondly, and no less importantly, the association with Christ and the martyrs (and with holy scripture) that “biblicize[s]”\(^65\) the ascetics connects their actions to a higher power, i.e., God, which resignifies their actions as holy and therefore as suitably and masculinely attached to something beyond this world. The address of Tua Sublimitas or the title, illustris, may come to mind at this moment.

The Vita Antonii contains moments of undeniable submissiveness in Antony that contrast with his masculine assertion elsewhere. For example, while he rejects the persona of the slave at one point (45.5–6), he embraces it at another. Here, Antony compares his devotion to *askēsis* to what a slave has to do:

> Just as the slave would not dare to say, “Since I worked yesterday, I’m not working today,” [so] will he [sc. the ideal ascetic] not, in consideration of time gone by, leave off [working] during the days to come, but daily, as it is written in the gospels, he shows the same eagerness so that he may please his master, and not incur risk. . . . (18.2)\(^66\)

On another occasion he declares that he will not avoid any beating that the Devil may care to give him (9.2). Slaves are the ones who receive beat-

\(^{64}\) Harpham 1987: 81; Burrus 2004: 11.

\(^{65}\) Frank 2000: 160.

\(^{66}\) ῦΩσπερ οὖν ὁ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν τολμήσῃ λέγειν·”Ἐπειδὴ χθὲς εἰργασάμην, οὐκ ἐργάζομαι σήμερον,” οὐδὲ τὸν παρελθόντα χρόνον μετρῶν, παύσεται τῶν ἐξῆς ἡμερῶν, ἀλλὰ καθ’ ἡμέραν, ὥς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ γέγραπται, τὴν αὐτὴν προθυμίαν δείκνυσιν, ἵνα τῷ κυρίῳ αὐτοῦ ἀρέσῃ καὶ μὴ κινδυνεύῃ ἡμᾶς. . . .
ings, of course. Antony also demonstrates his submissiveness in the context of his relationship to the clergy:

How forbearing was his character and how humble he was in his soul! For being of this sort [i.e., forbearing and humble], he both emphatically honored the rule of the church and he preferred that all clergy be placed ahead of him in honor. For he was not ashamed to bend his head to bishops and presbyters. (67.1–2)\(^{67}\)

Antony’s self-effacement here contrasts with his aggressive questioning of the philosophers at 72.4–5 (discussed earlier). Elsewhere, in a further example of submissiveness, Antony characterizes his behavior through reference to 2 Corinthians 12:10:

He would not anoint himself with oil, saying it suited young men to be earnest in training and not to seek what would soften the body; but they must accustom it to labor, mindful of the Apostle’s words, “when I am weak, then I am strong.” (7.8)\(^{68}\)

The proximate reference, encapsulated by the New Testament quotation, is to the body that has been disciplined and weakened by *askēsis* so that the soul will be stronger (7.9). But the quotation also designates the submissiveness that marks the holy man in whom authority and power reside on account of his resemblance to Christ and the martyrs (which in turn connects him to God).

A survey of the literature of the *erēmos* uncovers other examples of activity that can be understood via 2 Corinthians 12:10. There is, for example, Agathon:

They said about Abba Agathon that he held a rock in his mouth for three years until he mastered silence. (*Apophth. Patr.*, Agathon 15 [PG 65 113C])\(^{69}\)

Such silence is not the grace in speaking that served Antony well (14.6) and most assuredly is not Demosthenes practicing declamation with pebbles.

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67. Πῶς δὲ καὶ τὸ ἰθὸς ἀνεξίκακος ἦν καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ ταπεινόφρων. Τοιούτος γὰρ ὄν, τὸν τε κανόνα τῆς ἐκκλησίας ῥήματος ἐτίμα καὶ πάντα κληρικὸν τῇ τιμῇ προηγεῖσθαι ἤθελεν ἑαυτοῦ. (2) Τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ἐπισκόποις καὶ πρεσβυτέροις οὐκ ἤδειτο κλῖναι τὴν κεφαλήν.  

68. Ἄλειψθαι δὲ ἐλαίῳ παρατίθετο, λέγων μᾶλλον πρέπειν τοὺς νεωτέρους ἐκ προθυμίας ἐχειν τὴν ἀσθένειαν καὶ μὴ ζητεῖν τὰ χαυνοῦντα τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐθίζειν αὐτὸ τοῖς πόνοις λογιζομένους τὸ τοῦ ἀποστόλου μήτην· “Ὅταν ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι.”  

69. Ἔλεγον περὶ τοῦ ἀββᾶ Ἄγαθωνος, ὅτι τρία ἔτη ἔποιήσεν, ἔχων λίθον εἰς τὸ στόμα αὐτοῦ, ἐώς ὡς κατώρθωσε τὸ σιωπῆν.
in his mouth.

This cultivation of silence is an abrogation of paideia that trained men to communicate and compete with figured words. In another example, Father Achilles does not challenge one of the brothers who said something that bothered him; he bleeds from his mouth instead:

One of the old men came to Abba Achilles and he saw him spitting blood from his mouth. He asked him, “What is this, father?” The old man said to him, “a brother’s word pained me, and I have fought mightily against telling him, and I begged God that he remove [it] from me. The word became blood in my mouth, I spat it out, I have obtained rest, and I have forgotten my pain.” (Apophth. Patr., Achilles 4 [PG 65 125A])

When I suffer in silence I have won. When I am weak, then I am strong. Is this behavior less than manly? To the extent that the mouth may be metaphorized as any other bodily opening, male or female, this particular story suggests a passivity and femininity, or effeminacy, in Abba Achilles. But in the end, the insult that this story may impart merely marks a moment of weakness underwriting greater strength in the future as this man is made more worthy of respect through his forbearance.

The story of Paul the Simple from the Historia Monachorum provides another example of empowering weakness. He is practically an anti-type to the assertive vir or anēr who has mastered paideia. His wife—note the wife—commits adultery, and he, when he discovers that she has been unfaithful, just packs up and leaves the home they shared. Adultery was a serious matter and complete acquiescence in the face of it was a scandal:

Having apprehended his wife in the very act of adultery, saying nothing to anybody, he headed out to the erēmos to Antony. (Hist. Monach. 24.1)

In the erēmos, Paul becomes Antony’s disciple. Antony, as his abba, demands amazing amounts of discipline from him. On Antony’s orders, Paul stands in a sunny place for a week (24.2), gathers up spilled honey from the ground...
without bringing any dirt up with it (24.8), weaves and unweaves baskets, and sews and unsews Antony's cloak (24.9). Graham Gould (1993: 52–58) argues that absolute obedience (hypakoē/ὑπακοή) was required in the relationship between abba and disciple. This was how the disciple would learn humility and endurance. In the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Hyperechius compares the perfected obedience of the monk to the acquiescence of Christ to his sad destiny, which underscores the high regard accorded this quality.74 And a scenario like the one between Antony and Paul was a hyperbolic representation that clarified roles decisively because of its extreme nature. What is of interest here, however, is the submission of Paul, this “when I am weak, then I am strong” type of abasement that yields rewards later. He submits in service to a greater goal:

And to so great an extent did the man [sc. Paul the Simple] possess obedience (hypakoēn/ὑπακοήν), that a grace from God (charin . . . theothen/χάριν . . . θεόθεν), the power to drive out demons, was bestowed on him. The demons that the blessed Antony was not able to drive out, these he sent to Paul and they were cast out immediately. (*Hist. Monach.* 24.10)75

In one respect, and not a trivial one, given the high value placed on the ability to drive out demons in the erēmos, Paul tops his tyrannical former master, and the contradictions inherent in Paul's identity are harmonized away through God's grace. Paul comes to possess an enviable accrual of auctoritas or ἀξίωμα courtesy of God himself.76

The literature from the erēmos avoids the metaphorization of auctoritas or ἀξίωμα by metaphors of same-sex desire and attractiveness. Whereas Julian, for example, conjures with same-sex desire and attractiveness in order to metaphorize admiration and excellence, the *vita* and related literature from the erēmos do not feature discussion of same-sex desire and behavior between adults, and in the *vita* there is no explicit mention of them at all. This elision produces tension at the point of reception of these texts. Those who know of the realities of homosociality and/or have experience of elite late-ancient homosociality’s at times close relationship to same-sex desire—these readers will find they have questions and will start reading more closely.

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75. Καὶ τοσαύτην ὁ ἀνὴρ ἐκτήσατο ὑπακοήν, ὥστε καὶ χάριν αὐτῷ δεδόσθαι θεόθεν τὴν κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων ἐλασίαν. Οὓς γὰρ οὐκ ἠδύνατο ὁ μακάριος Ἀντώνιος ἐκβάλλειν δαίμονας, τούτους πρὸς Παῦλον ἀπέστειλεν καὶ αὐθώρου ἐξεβάλλοντο.
76. For more on Paul the Simple, see Brakke (2006: 236–37) and Masterson (2006).
In the first place, the *erēmos* is a homosocial space, and, as such, there is the reasonable expectation that it will be a place of heightened levels of same-sex desire. A reader cognizant of realities sooner or later will be driven to ponder such things, especially if the author opts for a utopian sheen for his account (and this precisely describes the complexion of the *Vita Antonii*). Athanasius proposes a *charaktēr* for *askēsis* whose utopian inaccessibility makes a reader who is concerned with mimesis read with ever increasing engagement because reality demands what utopia elides.\(^{77}\)

The relentless idealization that characterizes Athanasius’ account proposes Antony as a man who will be the one least likely to feel same-sex desire or pleasure. His relation to them is that he seemingly has none. All the same, though, recreation of a reception of this text that takes into account the text of the *vita* as a whole, its intertextuality with the Septuagint and Plato, and the dynamics of homosociality—in short, the recreation of an *engaged* late-ancient reception of this text—reveals that same-sex desire is perceptible in the *vita* and that its author, Athanasius, is an authority as knowledgeable about forbidden matters as the authors of *Collatio* 5.3.

The coming interpretation may well be the very *charaktēr* of a “wayward” reception. Indeed, I hear that “Athanasius surely did not mean this!” I hope I am not setting up a straw man, but at this point I encourage readers to consider whether approaches to the *vita* should be restricted to ones based on perceived authorial intention, especially when readers who want such a restriction will have their position tested when this chapter concludes with discussion of the *Contra Gentes* and the *De Incarnatione*. The more that is known about Athanasius’ intellectual project, especially as it relates to the body (and this is where, according to the argument to come, he places same-sex desire and pleasure in the *Vita Antonii*), the stronger the reading about to commence becomes.

**FIGURING ANTONY**

The Devil sexually tempts Antony as a woman and then as a boy. A backstory establishes the existence of a wife for Paul the Simple. These details can be understood as part of knowledgeable authority’s staging of the exemplary contours of desire. The more transgressive possibility that a monk will

\(^{77}\) For an example of a utopian account of life in the *erēmos* that drives the reader into engaged interpretation, see my “Impossible Translation” (2006), where I discuss the story of Paul the Simple in the *Historia Monachorum*. 
desire or be desired by another adult male, and the chaos that would cause in the erēmos, don’t emerge into explicit representation. Readers mindful of realities attending the pronounced homosociality depicted in the vita and other literature will have questions: the explicit encounters don’t cover all likely permutations of desire and activity.

The argument to come will be that Antony’s encounter in section five of the vita with the Devil features, in addition to the Devil’s assumption of the tempting form of a woman, a highly obscene anal intrusion that addresses, in corporeal fashion, the possibility of sexual activity between monks in the erēmos. Readers encounter an itching interior to Antony’s body whose obscenity comes into view when the passage’s mise-en-scène of a wrestling match (palē), which recalls for educated readers the palaestra of the Platonic dialogues, takes its place in an interpretation that encompasses the passage’s intertextuality with both Plato and the Septuagint. If readers assume, reasonably, that Athanasius is an authority as knowledgeable as the consistory that will write Collatio 5.3 in about thirty years, they will not overlook this feature of the text that a close reading reveals.

Before proceeding to discussion of Vita Antonii 5, however, it is best to take note of some moments from the literature of the erēmos in which same-sex desire and behavior are approached. In this literature, there is occasional direct mention of same-sex desire, but more common is a practice of not addressing it directly. All the same, when its handling is indirect, imaginative pressure often is able to bring into evidence that which lacks explicit mention.

Shenoute of Atripe (late fourth to early fifth century) considered same-sex sexual activity a serious transgression in the White Monastery. David Brakke (2006: 101–102) and Caroline Schroeder (2006, 2007) both discuss his often articulated concern over same-sex sexual behavior. Indeed, Shenoute’s recourse to sexualized imagery to name and denounce sins of all kinds leaves little doubt about how serious a transgression same-sex sexual behavior would have been in his establishment (Schroeder 2007: 37–39). Brakke, e.g., notes that “homoerotic activity . . . became for Shenoute the archetypal sin” (2006: 101). In addition to the rhetorical use of homoeroticism, Shenoute frankly discusses varieties of sexual sin, including, in Canon 1, “fornication in general and homoerotic encounters, pederasty, and masturbation” (Schroeder 2007: 36 [cf. 2006: 87–88]). Schroeder elsewhere remarks: “Shenoute’s frequent admonitions against sexual desire seek to purge sexual expression from the community, yet ironically they also serve to position sexuality as one of the foremost markers of monastic identity” (2007: 56). In Pachomius’ monastery, same-sex
sexual encounters were not tolerated either; they apparently were grounds for expulsion.\(^78\)

In a translation of Pachomius’ regulations for proper coenobitic living, and moving in the direction of less explicit mention of same-sex desire, Jerome presents a number of rules that seem dedicated to keeping same-sex desire from emerging.\(^79\) Prevention of intimacy was a \textit{desiderandum}:

No one should look at another while he is making a rope, or praying; he should be intent on his work with his gaze averted. (Jerome, \textit{Reg. Pachom.} 7 [\textit{PL 23} 69A])\(^80\)

No one will wash another or rub oil on [another’s body], unless he has been ordered to do so. (Jerome, \textit{Reg. Pachom.} 93 [\textit{PL 23} 78A])\(^81\)

No one should speak to another after lights out. No one should sleep with another on a rush mat. No one should hold another’s hand; but whether they stand, walk, or sit, let [each] be separated from the other by one cubit. (Jerome, \textit{Reg. Pachom.} 94 [\textit{PL 23} 78A–B])\(^82\)

No one will dare to remove a thorn from the foot of another, with the exception of the head of the house, or in the second place, another who has been ordered to do so. (Jerome, \textit{Reg. Pachom.} 95 [\textit{PL 23} 78B])\(^83\)

Rather than outlawing sexual behavior directly, these rules limit social and physical contact, closing off opportunities. It is clear enough what is at issue, however. Corollary to these prohibitions is a poignant (and likewise indirect) saying of Abba Agathon:

\begin{quote}
If someone is dear to me beyond bounds, and I know that he brings me to a fault, I cut him off from me. (\textit{Apophth. Patr.}, Agathon 23 [\textit{PG 65} 116B])\(^84\)
\end{quote}

\(^78\). Rousseau (1985: 95–97); for still more on sexual behavior between adult males addressed in the literature dedicated to providing rules for coenobitic living, see discussions and evidence in Layton 2007 and Espejo-Muriel 1991.


\(^80\). VII: \textit{Nemo aspiciat alterum torquentem funiculum, vel orantem; sed in suo defixis lumini - bus opere sit intentus.}

\(^81\). XCIII: \textit{Nullus lavare alterum poterit, aut unguere, nisi ei fuerit imperatum.}

\(^82\). XCIV: \textit{Nemo alteri loquatur in tenebris: nullus in psiathio cum altero dormiat: manum alterius nemo teneat; sed sive steterit, sive ambulaverit, sive sederit, uno cubito distet ab altero.}

\(^83\). XCV: \textit{Spinam de pede alterius, excepto domus praeposito, et secundo, et alio cui iussum fuerit, nemo audebit evellere.}

\(^84\). ἹΑγαπητός μού τις ἐὰν ἣ καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν, καὶ γνῶ ὅτι κατάγει με εἰς ἐλάττωμα, ἀποκόπτω αὐτόν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ.
While Agathon says nothing specific about present actions, the future, minus prevention now, could be full of desire, and even physical consummation.

It is with this amount of pressure that *Vita Antonii* should be read, or perhaps with even more, for the *vita* is cagier on this subject than either the rules Jerome translated or Agathon’s *apophthegma*. The utopian *vita* extorts hyperbolic awareness from the reader at the point of the text’s reception. It compels this awareness not only because of readerly knowledge about the realities of homosocial spaces: both paideia and knowledge of the Septuagint also play crucial roles. Here is the entirety of section five of the *vita*, printed here for convenience:

But the Devil, who hates what is beautiful and is envious, could not endure to see such resolution in a younger one (*neōterōi*/νεωτέρῳ) and he endeavored to carry out against him too the sorts of things he was accustomed to work [against others]. (2) First of all, he tried to lead him away from *askēsis*, thrusting [into his mind] memory of his wealth, care for his sister, claims of kindred, love of money, love of glory, the various pleasures of the table and the other relaxations of life, and at last the difficulty of virtue (*aretēs*/ἀρετῆς) and how the labor for it is a great undertaking. He suggested also the body’s weakness and the length of the time. (3) In a word, he raised in his mind a great dust storm (*polyn . . . koniorτον*/πολὺν . . . κονιορτόν) of thoughts, wishing to cut him off from his righteous intention. But the enemy [the Devil] saw that he had little power in the face of Antony’s resolve, and that rather he was outwrestled (*katapalaiomenon*/καταπαλαίωμενον) because of Antony’s strength (*strerrotētos*/στερρότητος); that he was flipped over by his faith and was taking a fall by means of Antony’s constant prayers—then indeed feeling confident in the weapons of “the belly’s navel” [Job 40:16] and glorying in them (for these are the first innermost things [τα πρῶτα . . . ἐνεδρα] to attack when battling against the younger ones), he proceeds against this younger one (*neōterou*/νεωτέρου), harassing him by night and harrying him during the day, such that even those watching were perceiving a great grappling/wrestling (*palēn*/πάλην) between them. (4) For [the Devil] was thrusting filthy thoughts (*logismous rhuparous*/λογισμοὺς ρυπαρούς) [into Antony’s mind] and [Antony] was overturning them with his prayers. [The Devil] was causing an itching (*egargalίζειν*/ἐγαργάλιζεν), but he, while appearing to blush, through faith and fasts was walling off his body (*eteichize to sōma*/ἐτείχιζε τὸ σῶμα). (5) The wretched Devil was even keeping at it to the extent that he took on the shape of a woman and in every way mimicked one during the night,
only so he could deceive Antony. But he, directing his mind to Christ and contemplating both nobility through him and the intellectual part of his soul, was quenching the coal (apesbennue ton anthraka/ἀπεσβέννυε τὸν ἄνθρακα) of that one’s lie. (6) Again the enemy was thrusting [into Antony’s mind] the ease of pleasure. But he, similar to one raging and grieving, was contemplating the threat of the flames and the labor of the worm. Setting these [thoughts] in opposition, he was passing through, unharmed by these [designs of the Devil]. All these things were happening to the shame (aischunēn/αἰσχύνην) of the Enemy. (7) He who supposed himself to be the equal of God was now being made a plaything by a young man (hypo neaniskou...epaizetelo/ὑπὸ νεανίσκου...ἐπαίζετο). The one vaunting himself as the victor over flesh and blood was being flipped over by a flesh and blood mortal. Christ was working with him—he who took on flesh for our sake and who gave victory over the Devil to the body [through the resurrection] with the result that each of those who are struggling in reality might say, “not I but the grace of God which was with me.” [1 Corinthians 15:10]

At about the mid-point of section 5, the Devil makes a play for Antony:

For [the Devil] was thrusting filthy thoughts (logismous rhuparous/λογισμοὺς ῥυπαρούς) [into Antony’s mind] and [Antony] was overturning
them with his prayers. [The Devil] was causing an itching (ἐγαργάλιζεν) . . . (5.4) 86

Just what does the Devil have in mind? Readers familiar with the *Philebus* (47A–B87)—and the *Philebus* had an honored place in paideia88—will note that gargalizō/γαργαλίζω, the verb that designates the itching, appears in this text of Plato where it indicates a pain that, when it accompanies pleasure, creates an all-around delightful sensation:

SOCRATES: Surely then, whenever there is more of pleasure mixed throughout all these things, the less prevalent element of pain causes an itching (gargalizei/γαργαλίζει) and makes for gentle irritation. Yet, again, the large element of pleasure, the element pouring in the more, makes one strain and sometimes throb. Does it not bring about all manner of colors to your face, all manner of bodily postures, all kinds of changes in your breathing, while it causes astonishment and shouting with madness?

PROTARCHUS: Absolutely!

SOCRATES: Furthermore, my friend, it makes one say about himself (and another say about him) that he is being charmed by these pleasures as though to die from them. And he most assuredly pursues these pleasures closely by all means possible, and this is in proportion to how undisciplined and thoughtless he happens to be. He will call them, too, the greatest of things and he will number the one living always amidst these pleasures absolutely the most blessed. (Phlb. 47A–B)89

Coming on the heels of remarks on how too much discomfort can cancel the effect of pleasure present at the same time, this passage asserts that if the level of discomfort is lower than that of the concomitant pleasure, there may be a (quite possibly delirious) intensification of this pleasure.

86. Ὅ μὲν γὰρ ὑπέβαλλε λογισμοὺς ρυπαρούς, ὁ δὲ ταῖς εὐχαῖς ἀνέτρεπε τούτους. Καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐγαργάλιζεν . . .

87. My thanks to Steven Smith for drawing my attention to this passage from the *Philebus*.


89. ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν ὁπόταν αὖ πλείων ἡδονὴ κατὰ <τὰ> τοιαῦτα πάντα συμμειχθῇ, τὸ μὲν ὑπομειγμένου τῆς λύπης γαργαλίζει τε καὶ ἠρέμα ἀγανακτεῖν ποιεῖ, τὸ δ᾿ αὖ τῆς ἡδονῆς πολὺ πλέον ἐγκεχυμένον συντείνει τε καὶ ἐνίοτε πηδᾶν ποιεῖ, καὶ παντοτικά μὲν χρώματα, παντοτικά δὲ σχήματα, παντοτικά δὲ πνεύματα ἀπεργαζόμενον πάσαις ἐκπληξίν καὶ βοῶς μετὰ ἄφροσύνης ἑνεργάζεται; ΠΡΩ. Μάλα γε.

ΣΩ. Καὶ λέγειν τε, ὡ ἕταίρε, αὐτόν τε περὶ ἑαυτοῦ ποιεῖ καὶ ἄλλον ὡς ταύτας ταῖς ἡδοναῖς τερπόμενος σιῶν ἀποθυγάκης καὶ ταῦτας γε δὴ παντάπασιν ἀεὶ μεταδιώκει, τοιότων ἄλλον δόσῃ ἀν ἀκολαστότερος τε καὶ ἀφρουστερὸς ὑπὸ τυχαίας, καὶ καλεῖ δὴ μεγίστας ταύτας, καὶ τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὃτι κλάλιστ’ ἀεὶ ζῶντα εὐδαιμονεστατον καταριθμεῖτα.
Putting the *vita* together with the *Philebus* (and other instances from Plato⁹⁰) because of this verb, *gargalizō*, and indeed because the reference to filthy thoughts (*logismous rhuparous*/*λογισμούς ρυπαρούς*) suggests some manner of sexual activity, is tantamount to importing scandal to this context, for anal penetration generally has some measure of discomfort associated with it until relaxation sets in.

In a move that suggests “better safe than sorry” and supports the idea that anal penetration is at issue, Antony closes up his body—seemingly to avoid a painful intrusion, the pain of which may give way to an all-around delightful sensation (why else the blush?):

> . . . but he [Antony], while seeming to blush, through faith and fasts was walling off his body. (5.4)⁹¹

He renders himself impenetrable, walled-off, and safe. The Devil is not going to get in, though he keeps trying.⁹²

At length giving up, the Devil will try to entice Antony to come out:

> The wretched Devil was even keeping at it to the extent that he took on the shape of a woman and in every way mimicked one during the night, only so he could deceive Antony. (5.5)⁹³

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⁹⁰. The related noun, *gargalismos*/*γαργαλισμός*, appears in the *Symposium* (188E) where it refers to the tickling that Aristophanes, using some object or other (185D: *τί τοιοῦτον*), caused to induce a sneeze to end his hiccups. The verb and noun also occur in the *Phaedrus* (251C and 253E) where they refer to the itching of the wings growing in the charioteer’s soul because of his desire for his beloved (*paidika* [251A], *paix* [251E], *erōmenos* [252C]).

⁹¹. . . . ὁ δέ, ὡς ἐρυθριᾶν δοκῶν, τῇ πίστει καὶ νηστείαις ἐτείχιζε τὸ σῶμα.

⁹². Besides the scenarios with Satan, Antony’s body is sealed and rendered impenetrable later in the *vita*:

> Taking heart, thereupon, he [Antony] answered back, “If you [he is addressing demons] have the ability and a power against me in your possession, then come on!; but if you don’t, why do you stir yourselves up to no purpose? For my faith in Christ is a seal and wall of safety for me.” (9.10)

> Θαρρῶν γοῦν πάλιν ἔλεγεν· “Εἰ δύνασθε καὶ ἐξουσίαν ἐλάβετε κατ᾿ ἐμοῦ, μὴ μέλλετε, ἀλλ᾿ ἐπίβητε· εἰ δὲ μὴ δύνασθε, τί μάτην ταράσσεσθε; Σφραγὶς γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ τεῖχος εἰς ἀσφάλειαν ἡ εἰς τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν πίστις.”

This passage is not overtly sexual, but can be interpreted as a covert instance as it recalls Antony’s prophylactic sealing up of his body (especially the reference to a wall) when he is confronted by the Devil at 5.4.

⁹³. Καὶ οἱ μὲν διάβολοι ὑπέμενεν ὁ ἄθλιος καὶ ὡς γυνὴ σχηματίζεσθαι νυκτὸς καὶ πάντα τρόπον μιμεῖσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τὸν Ἀντώνιον ἀπατήσῃ.
The Devil encourages Antony to penetrate him. There had been danger of the Devil getting in, but Antony has parried diabolic provocation, and it is the Devil who faces the charge of passivity. Antony’s sexuality appears to be directed properly. But the situation is more complicated than this, as the itching indicates.

There are two desires (for women and boys), on the one hand, that Antony refuses overtly, while, on the other hand, there is something stowed away in “filthy thoughts” and in the verb “to cause to itch” whose refusal Athanasius stages in an occult manner. But this does not mean that the refusal and desire are invisible. In order to carry forward the argument that anal penetration is at issue and that this is the writing of an authority knowledgeable about life, the passage will be contextualized further with its surroundings in the *vita* (particularly the intertextuality with the Septuagint and references to wrestling). Following this will be consideration of the way the Latin translators understood this passage, for they provide valuable early evidence of the way it was received. In sum, the vitality imported by reading the *vita* with the *Philebus* finds confirmation.

Just before the Devil provokes filthy thoughts and Antony walls off his body, the Devil, frustrated with his lack of progress against Antony’s resolve, decides to put his faith “in the weapons of the ‘belly’s navel’” which he has found to be effective against the younger ones (5.3). The “belly’s navel” is a quotation from Job (40:16). It appears in God’s words to Job, where he describes the strength the great beast, the Behemoth, has in its belly. G. Bartelink (1994: 143) points to a number of interpretations that have been offered to explain this moment of intertextuality with the Septuagint.

In the first place, it has been suggested that the Devil is trusting in Antony’s stomach, which can mean he is relying on Antony’s appetite (understood as sexual, for the *logismoi rhuparoi* are right around the corner) to bring the saintly young man down. At times, exegesis of the Septuagint has provided an additional allegory of the navel of Behemoth; it is first allegorized as the stomach and then, presumably because the stomach is a cavity, it is re-allegorized as female genitalia (*morion thēlykon*/μόριον θηλυκόν). The double allegorization looks forward to the appearance of the Devil as a woman, that is, unless it could be the penetrable anus of Antony, which cannot be ruled out on account of the grappling to come and the fact he is still a young man. This quotation from Job has also been understood to refer to male genitalia (*morion andros*/μόριον ἀνδρός), which in turn could have a referent in Antony’s penis or, interestingly, in the Devil’s (for the reference in Job is to the strength of a beast). Ultimately it is undecidable what the precise referent is, and interpreters are best off viewing the “belly’s
“navel” as an instance of intertextuality that is polysemous and polymorphously sexualizing.\(^94\)

In any case, and moving on, there follows grappling or wrestling (5.3: \( \textit{palēn/πάλην} \); cf. “outwrestled” \([\textit{kata} \textit{palaiomenon/καταπαλαιόμενον}]\), also at 5.3)) between the Devil and Antony, which is something that the younger ones do together—and the wrestling grounds or \( \textit{palaestra} \) (the place where \( \textit{palē} \) takes place) was the site of much same-sex eroticism in classical Greece, and is the setting of Plato’s \textit{Charmides}. Athanasius also mentions Antony’s younger age three times in the passage. Twice he is a younger one \( (\textit{neōterōi/νεωτέρῳ} \textit{at 5.1, neōterou/νεωτέρου} \textit{at 5.3}) \), and once he is called a young man \( (\textit{neaniskou/νεανίσκου} \textit{at 5.7}) \). While ages are always difficult to determine, it is safe to say that he is younger but not a boy;\(^95\) it is his strength \( (5.3: \textit{strerrotētos/στερρότητος}) \) that is “flipping over” the Devil, after all, and he was, as previously noted, competent to dispose of his father’s estate and put his sister in a convent. This approach by the Devil, therefore, is not an encoded version of an invitation that would be given to a boy. It is, rather, a competition that will produce a humiliated loser; when the Devil is defeated, Athanasius remarks that “all these things were happening to the shame of The Enemy.”\(^96\) The word for shame, \( \textit{aischunēn/αἰσχύνην} \), is redolent of the sexual humiliation of someone who should be impenetrable being penetrated. And this point is brought home when Athanasius immediately adds the following: “he who supposed himself to be the equal of God was now being made a plaything by a young man \( (\textit{hypo neaniskou...epaizeto/ὑπὸ νεανίσκου...ἐπαίζετο}) \)” \( (5.7) \). The Greek word for “was made a plaything” \( (\textit{epaizeto}) \) is from the same root as boy \( (\textit{pais}); \) so the Greek says in addition that the Devil is playing the role of a boy, a penetrable \( \textit{pais}, \) and this becomes a reality in the very next section when the Devil arrives as the black boy \( (6.1: \textit{melas...pais/mέλας...παῖς}) \). Continuing into this section of the \textit{vita} is worthwhile in the present moment.

At this point in Athanasius’ text, the verb \( \textit{gargalizō} \) (and the noun related to it) appears again. The Devil as a black boy speaks to Antony:

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\(^{94}\) Cf. Shanzer’s discussion (2006: 191–92) of the capability of the belly’s navel in the Job story to be both male and female genitalia in Jerome and other late-ancient Latin sources.

\(^{95}\) The Latin translations of the \textit{vita} diverge on this point. Calling Antony \textit{a iuvenis} (young man) and \textit{iunior} (younger one) in his translation of the \textit{vita}, the anonymous Latin translator certainly does not see him as a boy and hence quite directly supports my assertion. Indeed, men are called \textit{iuvenes} up to the age of forty in Latin. Consistently calling Antony an \textit{adolescens} throughout the passage, Evagrius Antiochensis in his translation places him on the cusp between boyhood and manhood. Evagrius and I don’t appear to be seeing eye to eye.

\(^{96}\) 5.6: Ἡν δὲ ταῦτα πάντα πρὸς αἰσχύνην γινόμενα τοῦ ἐχθροῦ.
The noun *gargalismos*/*γαργαλισμός* appears here for the first time in the *vita*, while *gargalizō* and “the innermost things” (*ta eis tautēn enedra*/*τὰ εἰς ταύτην ἔνεδρα*) are repeated from section five. These verbal repetitions put sections five and six in a close relationship, and the sexualized nature of the itching is now undeniable. Indeed, “the innermost things” (*ta eis tautēn enedra*/*τὰ εἰς ταύτην ἔνεδρα*), surely now activated with sexual meanings (if they were not before), have become quite interesting in this regard. *LSJ* ἔνεδρος II shows an adjective used by the fourth-century C.E. medical writer Oribasios: *enedros-a-on*/*ἔνεδρος-α-ον*. When this adjective appears with the noun *syringes*/*σύριγγες* (in plural) to create the phrase, *enedrai syringes*/*ἔνεδραι σύριγγες*, it is translated as “anal passages.” Following *LSJ*, then, the phrase, “the innermost things of it” (*ta eis tautēn enedra*/*τὰ εἰς ταύτην ἔνεδρα*), is able to be translated as “the things anal about it.” Indeed, any reasonable reading of section six will see that the boy is trying to tempt Antony into penetrating him. Reading sections five and six together accordingly shows that there was an association of things anal with the verb *gargalizō*. And this association supports the assertion that Antony walling off his body is a refusal of penetration.

Two Latin translations, one anonymous and the other by Evagrius Antiochensis, appeared within twenty years of Athanasius’ original. The one by Anonymous was most likely the earlier of the two. These translations provide evidence of late-ancient understandings of Athanasius’ text that support the reading just offered of the feeling that itches, the walling off of the body, and, too, the seeming blush. Here are Anonymous’ and Evagrius’ renditions of Athanasius’ Greek:

Et ille quidem ad inmunditiam voluntatem provocabat, hic vero quasi verecundiam passus, fide et ieiuniis ut muro circumvallabat corpus suum.

(Anonymous, *Vita Antonii 5*)
And that one [the Devil] indeed was provoking his will to uncleanness, but he, just as if he had endured the shame, by faith and fasts, as though they were a wall, was putting up a rampart around his body.

Nam et ille cogitationes sordidas conabatur inserere et hic eas oratu sub-movebat assiduo. Ille titillabat sensus naturali carnis ardore, hic fide, ac ieiuniis corpus omne vallabat. (Evagrius Antiochensis, *Vita Antonii 5*)

For that one [the Devil] was also trying to thrust/graft\(^\text{99}\) filthy thoughts [into/onto Antony’s mind], but he was removing them by constant prayer. That one was thrilling his senses with the natural heat of his flesh, while he through faith and fasts was fortifying his entire body.

In all three versions (the two translations and Athanasius’ original), Antony takes measures so that the Devil does not gain access to his body. The Latin versions also give details about how this itching, which demands these measures, was understood in antiquity. In Anonymous’ version, the Devil tries to provoke Antony’s will so that he desires something unclean, while Evagrius understands the Devil to be using the body’s natural warmth to create compelling sensations. There are further contrasts to observe between the Latin texts and Athanasius’. Athanasius portrays Antony walling off his body by means of his belief and discipline and, as he does so, he seems to blush. Seemingly reflecting to some extent Athanasius’ phrasing with its mention of a blush, Anonymous says that it was “just as if he had endured the shame.” Evagrius in contrast leaves Athanasius’ blush and Anonymous’ shame out of his translation. The introduction of shame by Anonymous raises questions that Evagrius, if he had been aware of this translation, perhaps opted to avoid through translating Athanasius’ Greek differently.

When Anonymous renders Athanasius’ “while seeming to blush” (\(\text{hōs \ έρυθριαν \ δοκῶν / \ophi \ εχθρίαν \ δοκῶν}\)) with “just as if he had endured the shame” (\(\text{quasi \ verecundiam \ passus}\)), he underscores the sexual subtext perceptible in Athanasius’ text (again: why else the blush?). The word for “endured,” \(\text{passus}\), is the perfect participle of the verb \(\text{patior}\). This verb, among its various uses, is used in a phrase that designates what a man experiences when he allows another man to penetrate him anally: \(\text{pati \ muliebria (lit. “to endure womanly things”)}\). This idiom, as previously noted, is alive

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\(^{99}\) The present infinitive Evagrius uses, \(\text{inserere}\), can be from either of these two Latin verbs: \(\text{insero-inserere-inserui-insertum (“to thrust into“)}\) and \(\text{insero-inserere-insevi-insitum (“to graft onto“)}\). For reasons detailed below, it is best that a reader keep both meanings in mind.
in late antiquity, and is likely to occur to a reader, especially in a context
detailing proper objects for sexual activities and the body’s walling off that
concretizes a fear of penetration.

The hypothesis coursing through both versions (Anonymous’ “just as
if he had endured the shame” representing Athanasius’ “while seeming to
blush”) provides an additional opportunity for interpretation. One way to
see the hypothetical nature of these statements is that they are a strategy
through which Antony’s penetration is rendered impossible in the homoso-
cial space of the erēmos. Both phrases’ embrace of unreality (they are hypo-
onthetical) underlines the greatness of Antony: facing down the Prince of
Darkness, he could never be defeated. There certainly seems to be no need
for, e.g., Pachomian rules that indirectly address the issue of disallowed
desire between adult males. However, Athanasian hyperbole, i.e., Antony
is more than enough for Satan!, raises questions at the point of reception.
Faith in the knowingness of Athanasius’ authority and readerly expecta-
tions about the realities of homosociality power a search for this desire’s
address. Anonymous’ use of passus to explain Athanasian hypothesis and
hyperbole provides evidence of one such search, as he converts a seeming
blush into imagined submission.

Anonymous’ word for shame, verecundia, is worth consideration too. In
a discussion of one of the words for shame in Latin, pudor—a word which
is synonymous with verecundia in the literature from the erēmos and often
elsewhere, and a derivative of which, pudicus, occurs nearby in Anonymous’
translation of the episode with the black boy100—Carlin Barton writes the
following:

[A]lthough shame [pudor] provided the restraint necessary for the pres-
ervation of all contracts and bonds, no Roman was credited with a sense
of shame unless he or she was also credited with the desire and means to
transgress those same contracts and bonds. In the words of Publilius Syrus:
“The highest praise that one can give a man is that he is capable of doing
harm but chooses not to” (397). “The good man wishes it to be remem-
bered that he spared when he could have destroyed” (Cicero, Pro Quinct.

For a Roman to convey the impression that his or her sense of shame was
operative, it had to be clear that they had the interest (successfully resisted)

100. In this passage, the Devil (as the black boy) exclaims, “I am called the Spirit of Fornication.
How many I have seduced who wanted to be chaste [=to be in possession of pudor/shame]!” (Anony-
mous, Vita Antonii 6: [S]piritus fornicationis appellor. Quantos volentes esse pudicos seduxi!).
and the wherewithal (not employed) to do what was forbidden. This particular quotation is not concerned with sexual matters, but Barton later connects this notion to the maintenance of chastity, noting that the chaste man or woman “in ancient Rome could never feel purely chaste. At the very least (or most), they always felt shame before themselves” (2001: 241), for they knew just what they were capable of should they allow themselves to do it.

Barton makes a distinction between pudor and verecundia. She sees the latter superseding the former over time, because of what she posits as the more purely inhibiting nature of verecundia; pudor, she says, tends toward denying that the desire for the forbidden thing even exists, while pudor acknowledges and then refuses such desire (2001: 282). It is not clear that this distinction between pudor and verecundia holds. It is easy enough to read them as synonyms at almost any time in the Roman Empire. In fact, they appear to be synonymous in Anonymous’ text, verecundia appearing in section five and a derivative of pudor (the adjective, pudicus) in section six. Even if Barton’s distinction between the pudor and verecundia

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101. At the end of the first century C.E., e.g., Quintilian uses both words in the same passage:

Greater disturbance will be present when someone lodges a complaint about things that must cause shame (pudenda), as in the case of stuprum [unlawful sexual penetration of a free person], especially in males, or over a debauched mouth . . . this sort of injury is more shameful (verecundius) for those who are have endured it (passis) to confess than it is for those who have dared to do it. (Institutio Oratoria 11.84–85)

illic maior aestus ubi quis pudenda queritur, ut stuprum, præcipue in maribus, aut os profanatum . . . hoc injuriae genus verecundius est <fateri> passis quam ausis.

102. Citing lines from one of Gregory Nazianzenus’ many poems, Barton (2001: 226) in any case does allow for shame, such as she defines it for earlier in the empire, to persist into the later empire. In this poem shame that knows what it wants and a blush that would not be out of place on a Roman face from centuries earlier is visible:

Heroic renown fell to the most dishonorable and dishonor to the best, and they were exchanging places with no justice. But plotting Evil did not escape the notice of God, the Lord; late to avenge, he spoke these words: “It is not right that there be the same glory for good and bad men; in this way evil will only become more widespread. I will therefore give to them a most excellent sign, so you may know well who is evil and who is good.” Having finished speaking, he reddened the cheeks of the good, making the blood flow beneath their skin when shame (aischeos) was provoked; especially for women he suffused more within, since they are weak in form and tender at heart. And he stiffened an inflexible something or other and placed this thing within evil persons, and that is why they are not in the least affected by shameful things (aischesia). (Gregory Nazianzenus, Poematia Moralia, PG 37.3 898–99)
is able to be contested for late antiquity, her idea on the nature of *pudor* is useful indeed. It enables perception of how the interpreting translators understand and change Athanasius’ meaning; in Athanasius’ text there seems to be no same-sex desire in the mind of Antony (his body is another matter), while in the translations, possibilities for such desire exist in mind and body.

Athanasius’ “while seeming to blush” may leave the impression that he sees Antony transcendent of the economy of *pudor* proposed by Barton. If he only seems to blush, then his ownership of this desire is denied: the blush is a lie, a mere seeming. From this angle, then, his seeming lack of relation to same-sex desire makes him fit well with the developing definition of *verecundia* that Barton sees coming with Christianity—except for the fact that he does have a vulnerability. For Athanasius, weakness resides in the body and the superhuman saint, though only seeming to blush, still has work to do. His body would betray him if his mind were not so excellent. It is here that Athanasius and the Latin authors part company.

Anonymous attenuates Antony’s hyperbolic mental mastery and depicts weakness in both body and mind. Anonymous has the provocation to uncleanness from the Devil affect Antony’s mind as though it were a shameful act. The invocation of shame (*verecundia* [=Barton’s *pudor*]), which indicates the presence of a desire (if only to be refused), points to susceptibility in Antony’s mind as well as his body. In contrast, deciding what Evagrius’ position on Antony’s mind might be is more challenging and may be best regarded as indeterminable. Depending on how his Latin is read, it is possible to see him positing either a total mental mastery in Antony of the kind Athanasius proposes or the attenuated mastery Anonymous suggests. Much depends on what the reader makes of the present infinitive that Evagrius uses in his translation. When Evagrius translates Athanasius’ ὑπέβαλε λογισμοὺς ῥυπαρούς (”[he] was thrusting filthy thoughts [into Antony’s mind]”) with *cogitationes sordidas conabatur inserere* (“[he] was trying to thrust/graft filthy thoughts [into/
onto Antony’s mind), inserere is rich in possibilities, as inserere is a present infinitive shared by two different verbs: insero-inserere-inserui-insertum (“to thrust into”) and insero-inserere-insi-evi-insitum (“to graft onto”). For the reader who knows the Greek text, the meaning of the first (“ thrusting”) will perhaps make the meaning of the second (“grafting”) come a distant second. But in the absence of the Greek translation, the second meaning of “grafting” is eminently possible, especially as this verb (in the perfect passive participle form) has a highly influential appearance in Virgil:

et saepe alterius ramos impune videmus
verte in alterius, mutatamque insita mala
ferre pirum et prunis lapidosa rubescere corna. (Virgil, Georgics 2.32–34)

And often we see the branches of one (tree) harmlessly turn into the branches of another, and the transformed pear bears apples that have been grafted onto it and the stony cornelcherries blush on the plum trees.

Awareness of the glamorous Virgil at the point of reception of Evagrius’ text makes the meaning of grafting a likely one, especially in the presence of paideia. The end result of these divergent meanings is that a reader who reads the Latin text as “thrust into” will be conceiving of Antony’s mind in substantially the terms (imperturbable, inviolate: the Devil’s efforts are successfully resisted) Athanasius envisions. Entertaining the notion of grafting suggests for Evagrius’ text a meaning closer to that of Anonymous’: the filthy thoughts the Devil introduces have something already there they can work and grow with.

All three versions of the life present the possibility of same-sex desire and pleasure with indirection (with Athanasius’ version the most indirect of all). But indirection at the point of the texts’ various receptions is consumed by knowledge of reality and faith in the knowingness of authority until temptation housed in mind and body (Anonymous), mind perhaps and body certainly (Evagrius), and body alone (Athanasius) is what remains. The Latin authors, and especially Anonymous through his invocation of shame, underline the status of this approach of the Devil as a temptation which can affect mind and body. Evagrius speaks of filthy thoughts (that may or may not have “grafted” purchase on Antony’s mind) and thrilling bodily sensations. Stereotypically Hellenic, Athanasius sees the danger as a function only of the body. The blush that only seems to be there suggests a mental incapability in Antony to submit in his mind. His body would be another matter, however (and hence temptation is present). Athanasius
burdens the body, evidently “born to be passive” (*pati natum*) and shifty, as the certain source of man’s desire for man in the *erēmos*.

Before moving on to discussion of the *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*, a final point. Within the small space of *Vita Antonii* 5, the pressure of not addressing same-sex desire and pleasure with at least a Pachomian indirectness arguably precipitates a complex of physical symptoms that are compensatory for same-sex desire and pleasure gone missing. The physicalities of itching, walls around a body, a dust storm, a coal that needs quenching, and a wrestling match (complete with shameful submission) make the case, *in bodily form*, that readers expect from omniscient authority. The late-ancient record has parallels for these physical phenomena that play a part in an argument: an *illustris* shines with light; Rome in *Collatio* 5.3 is the “mother of all virtues/manly excellences” (*virtutum omnium matrem*). A man whose *auctoritas* gleams and the eternal city giving birth to goodness and brave manhood have much in common with a manly itch whose scratching would be a diabolical triumph.

Making Antony’s body the source of same-sex desire is similar to what is seen in the *Contra Gentes* and *De Incarnatione*. In these two theological treatises from much earlier in his career, but conceptually of a piece with his thoughts on the body in the *vita*, Athanasius makes stark distinctions between the mind and the body and between the *logos* (rationality) and materiality. The place of sin is the body, and Athanasius forcefully associates the surrender to materiality, sin, and body with same-sex desire.

**TWO TREATISES**

Athanasius wrote the theological treatises *Contra Gentes* (*Gent.*) and *De Incarnatione* (*Inc.*) in 335 or 336 (Thomson 1971: xxiii). They consider respectively the false beliefs of the pagans and the nature of the embodiment of Christ (the *Logos*). The relation of the soul to the body and material world is a central concern in both. In these treatises, Athanasius sees same-sex desire as a signal material failing and something as far as can be from the *Logos* and the transcendent. This understanding of same-sex desire as an expression of corporeal nature is clearly related to Athanasius’ vision of Antony’s body as a site of danger that needs a rampart. This conception of same-sex desire also presupposes a transcendent that is the perfect expres-
sion of moralizing impulses on earth. Athanasius’ transcendental is therefore at odds with the late-Platonic one, which, as seen in the first chapter and introduction of this book, is a thing mysteriously existent, and precedent to and beyond earthbound logic and morals.

In the *Contra Gentes*, contemplation of God is the proper role of the mind and transcendence of the body is the goal:

For when the mind (*nous*/ νοῦς) of men does not consort with bodies and does not possess anything of desire from them from outside, but, whole, is above in communion with itself, as it was made in the beginning—then at that time transcending all sensations and mortal things, above, it is aloft, and, seeing, it perceives the Logos and the Father of the Logos in the Logos, being pleased in contemplation of him and enflamed by desire for him [i.e., the Father of the Logos]. (*Gent.* 2.21–27)

As Athanasius has occasion to say often in both treatises, the upper world, the place of God, is the eternal “existent entities” (*ta onta*/ τὰ ὄντα), and the material realm is the non-eternal “non-existent entities” (*ta ouk onta*/ τὰ οὐκ ὄντα), and it is most decidedly below. Along with the relative altitudes, Athanasius assigns moral value to these two realms, stating that “existent entities” are good and that “non-existent entities” are evil (*Gent.* 4.18; *Inc.* 4.23). The material world, because it was created from nothing, is corruptible and therefore not perfect and hence evil. The eternal *ta onta*, which by Athanasius’ definition are transcendent of this world, are comparable to an extent to, say, Iamblichus’ *ta theia*. But unlike the philosopher’s *ta theia*, Athanasius’ *ta onta* function as a perfect expression of earthbound moralizing impulses and do not have the mystery of Iamblichus’ “things divine.”

The *De Incarnatione* features a similar formulation. Mankind, provided it does not “look down” and away from the “eternal things” (*ta aiōnia*/ τὰ αἰώνια [= *ta onta*/ τὰ ὄντα]), will through the grace of God transcend its materiality:

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104. Ἡτα γὰρ οὐ συνομιλεῖ τοῖς σώμασιν ὁ νοῦς ὁ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οὐδὲ τῇ τῆς ἐκ τούτων ἐπιθυμίᾳ μεμιγμένον ἔξωθεν ἔχει, ἀλλὰ όλος ἐστὶ τῆς ἐκ τούτου ἐπιθυμίας μεμιγμένος ἐξανακαινιζόμενος ἐν τῷ πρὸς τοῦτον πόθῳ. Ἡδόμενος ἐπὶ τῇ τούτου θεωρίᾳ, καὶ ἀνακαινούμενος ἐπὶ τῷ πρὸς τοῦτον πόθῳ.

105. Ὅντα δὲ ἐστὶ τὰ καλά, οὐκ ὄντα δὲ τὰ φαῦλα.

106. Οὐκ ὄντα γάρ ἐστὶ τὰ κακά, ὄντα δὲ τὰ καλά.

107. Alvyn Pettersen (1990) points out that Athanasius also says that God is incapable of making a universe or body that is not good (5, 7) and that both are sustained by his grace (3, 8). Athanasius’ thought on these topics across his works does not make things easy for his exegetes.
For God not only made us out of what does not exist but he made us a gift of living according to God through the grace of the Logos. But men turning away from eternal things and, through the counsel of the Devil, turning to the things of corruption became responsible through themselves for corruption in death, being as I said before corruptible by nature, but fleeing away from that which is their nature through the grace of communion with the Logos, if they remained good. (Inc. 5.1–7)\textsuperscript{108}

Turning away from the eternal and preferring to look to the material and perishable world is the practice of a sort of somatology instead of a theology or envisioning of God. Alvyn Pettersen argues that Athanasius locates the origin of evil in the perverse exercise of free will; paying ruinous attention to embodied life here on earth, mankind “fail[s] to live theocentrically” and chooses instead to “liv[e] anthropocentrically” (1990: 22). Pettersen’s distinction is compelling to the extent that the decision to do evil is often presented in antiquity as a perverse investment in earthly things. The enormously influential Plato says this in a myriad of ways. Still, according to Athanasius, it is not just the will; the body is a key component in this regrettable sequence. When a man or woman does not look where they are supposed to, doing things with their body they should not, it is not a matter of an evil use of an intrinsically good creation; the materiality of the body, corruptible and bound to return to nothing, is morally suspect too. In a discussion of the De Incarnatione, Burrus notes that “Athanasius’s creator . . . fight[s] a losing battle in [his] repeated attempts to stabilize a fundamentally and indeed fatally shifty creation” (2000: 45). When all matter was created \textit{ex nihilo}, at that moment a divide between God’s divinity and matter was created. Matter ever wants to grow corrupt and return to nothing. Hence, the scandal of God “barely” able to “keep his handiwork from unraveling” and “the good cosmos seem[ingly] destined for a bad end” (Burrus 2000: 44). Indeed, elsewhere, Pettersen notes that Athanasius “ascrib[es] all Christ’s incarnate passions,” psychological and otherwise, “first and foremost to his assumed body” (1990: 27 [emphasis in original]). The body is not merely a tool to be used, it is the place from where evil comes.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed, it is such in the \textit{Vita Antonii} as far as the sainted Antony,

\textsuperscript{108} Ὅ μὲν γὰρ Θεός οὐ μόνον ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἡμᾶς πεποίηκεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ κατὰ Θεὸν ξύν ἡμῖν ἔχαρισα τῇ τοῦ Λόγου χάριτι. Οἱ δὲ ἄνθρωποι, ἀποστραφέντες τὰ αἰώνια, καὶ συμβουλίᾳ τοῦ διαβόλου εἰς τὰ τῆς φθορᾶς ἐπιστραφέντες, ἐαυτοῖς αἴτιοι τῆς ἐν τῷ βασιλείῳ φθορᾶς γεγονόσιν, ὄντες μὲν ὡς προεῖπον κατὰ φύσιν φθαρτοί, χάριτι δὲ τῆς τοῦ Λόγου μετουσίας τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ἐκφυγόντες, εἰ μεμενήκειαν καλοὶ.

\textsuperscript{109} Pettersen’s representation of Athanasius’ view of the body as an entity to be used either for good or bad (1990: 23) disregards the status of materiality and, hence, the body as problematic entities in Athanasius’ thought.
whose will is so much more virtuous than the average person’s, is concerned; he cannot help but exercise his will for good, and it is his body that poses danger. His will must wall off his body as an itch promises perhaps only partially painful pleasure.

And so, as Athanasius continues, those who cease to gaze upon the deity allow their senses to tell them what is real and worthwhile. As these benighted people live *anthropocentrically*, things productive of pleasure take divinity’s place in misguided imaginations. Bodily desire (sarkikē epithumia) rules their souls:

[N]o longer does the soul see what is necessary for the soul to contemplate, but it is carried off in every direction, and it sees only those things that strike against it in sensation. Thereupon filled with all manner of bodily desire and in the opinions of them confused, it fashioned for itself God, whom it had forgotten in its own mind, through bodily and sensible things, applying the name of God to things that are visible and thinking reasonable only those things that it liked and what it saw as pleasurable. (*Gent. 8.12–18*).

This turning away enmeshes the soul in sensation and desire and, in short order, realizes idolatry. Athanasius elsewhere elaborates this idea of making God out of sensible things. In the following quotation about idolatry, Athanasius also anticipates his Antony of perfect will with an absolutizing claim about holy men (hagioi) lacking sin altogether:

Sin was not present in the beginning. For it is not now present among the holy men (en tois hagiois/ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις), and it is completely non-existent according to their example. But men began to think of it and to model it for themselves from themselves. Thereupon they fashioned for themselves the contrivance of idols, supposing that the non-existent was existent. (*Gent. 2.1–6*).

And so, a false notion about the universe is formed as the soul allows itself to be utterly involved in the body:

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110. οὐκέτι μὲν ὁρᾷ ἃ δεῖ ψυχὴν νοεῖν· παντὶ δὲ περιφέρεται, καὶ μόνα ἐκεῖνα ὁρᾷ τὰ τῇ αἰσθήσει προοπτίτοντα. Ὅθεν δὴ πάσης σαρκικῆς ἐπιθυμίας γέμουσα, καὶ ἐν ταῖς τούτων δόξαις ταραττομένη, λοιπὸν, ὅπως ἐπελάθετο τῇ διανοίᾳ Θεόν, τοῦτον ἐν σωματικοῖς καὶ αἰσθητοῖς ἀναπλάττεται, τοῖς φαινομένοις τὴν Θεοῦ προσηγορίαν ἀνατιθεῖσα, καὶ μόνα ταῦτα δοξάζουσα ἀπερ αὐτὴ βουλεταί, καὶ ὡς ἤδεα ὁρᾷ.

111. Ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὲν οὐκ ἦν κακία· οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ νῦν ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐστίν, οὐδ᾿ ῥῆψις κατ᾿ αὐτοὺς ὑπάρχει αὐτὴ ἀνθρώπων ἐν ταύτῃ ὑποστήριξι ἐπινοεῖν ἠρέαστο, καὶ καθ᾿ ἑαυτῶν ἀνατυπούθαι ὤθεν δὴ καὶ τὴν τῶν εἰδώλων ἐπίνοιαν ἐαυτοῖς ἀνεπιλάσαστο, τὰ οὐκ ὑπάρκει ὡς ὑπάρκει λογιζόμενοι.
Having turned away from contemplation of things intelligible/celestial (tōn noētōn/τῶν νοητῶν) and misusing the faculties of individual parts of the body and taking pleasure in the contemplation of the body and perceiving its own pleasure to be the good, having erred, it [the soul] misused the name of the good and supposed that pleasure (hēdonēn/ἡδονήν) was the real/eternal good. (Gent. 4.1–5)\textsuperscript{112}

Besottedness with the body, and there is strong implication of the sexual here, creates false values. People imprisoned their souls in pleasures and their souls, disoriented, were fouled by desires (Gent. 3.11–12). Idolatry, the practice that comes out of these false values and directs attention away from God and the transcendent, mightily exercises Athanasius in the Contra Gentes.

At Contra Gentes 9, people continued to such an extent in impiety that they made gods of the things which caused this separation from God in the first place: pleasure and desire (tēn hēdonēn kai tēn epithumian/τὴν ἡδονὴν καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν).\textsuperscript{113} From this primal error come the gods Eros and Aphrodite (Gent. 9.31–34). Section nine concludes revealingly when he speaks of a more recent deification that occurred on account of pleasure and desire, the deification of Hadrian’s beloved, Antinous:

[And now the Roman emperor Hadrian’s boy-love (paidikos/παιδικός), Antinous [compels worship]. Although they know he was a mortal and not honorable but filled with lewdness (aselgeias/ἀσελγείας), they give him worship on account of their fear of the one ordering it. For when Hadrian was staying in Egypt, Antinous the servant of his (sexual) pleasure (hēdonēn/ἡδονήν) died, and he decreed that he should be worshipped, for he loved the boy (paidos/παιδός) even after his death. Nevertheless, he offered up condemnation for himself and proof as regards all idolatry that it was invented by men for no other reason than the desire (epithumian/ἐπιθυμίαν) of those who made (the idols), just as the Wisdom of God has previously witnessed, saying: “The devising of idols was the beginning of fornication” [Wisd. 14:12]. (Gent. 9.39–48)\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} Ἀποστᾶσα τῆς τῶν νοητῶν θεωρίας, καὶ ταῖς κατὰ μέρος τοῦ σώματος ἐνεργείαις καταχρωμένη, καὶ ἤθελθα τῇ τοῦ σώματος θεωρίᾳ καὶ ἰδοῦσα καλὸν ἑαυτῇ εἶναι τὴν ἡδονήν, πλανηθεῖσα κατεχρήσατο τῷ τοῦ καλοῦ ὄνοματι, καὶ ἐνόμισεν εἶναι τὴν ἡδονήν αὐτοῦ τὸ ὄντως καλὸν.

\textsuperscript{113} ἔπιτείνοντες δὲ τὴν ἀσελγείαν ἔτεροι, τὴν πρόφασιν τῆς τούτων εὑρέσεως καὶ τῆς ἕαυτῶν κακίας τῆς ἡδονὴν καὶ τῆς ἐπιθυμίαν θεοποιῆσαντες προσκυνοῦσιν.

\textsuperscript{114} καὶ οὗ τὸν ᾿Αδριανοῦ τοῦ ῾Ρωμαίων βασιλέως παιδικὸς ᾿Αντίνοος, ὅν καὶ περι εἰδώτες ἀνθρώπον, καὶ ἀνθρώπον οὗ σεμνόν, ἀλλ’ ἀσελγείας ἐμπλέων, διὰ φόβου τοῦ προσταξάμοντος σέβου-
In this particular case it surely is a matter of fornication bringing about an idol (and Athanasius is at odds with his tag from Wisdom), but insistence on proper sequence is probably misguided as he wants to burden the idols with as much “disgusting” sexual sin as possible, and, hence, is more concerned with invective than consistent logic. Speaking more generally of idolatry elsewhere, Athanasius observes the sequence from Wisdom. Idols will be worshipped, the actual material images as well as the perverse gods for which they stand. These are idols of gods who are adulterers, murderers, lovers of boys, and castrators of their fathers, and they become exemplars to be imitated:

[F]rom Zeus they learned the ruin of boys and adultery, from Aphrodite fornication, from Rhea lewdness, from Ares murder, and from other gods similar things, which the law punishes and which every temperate man avoids. (Gent. 26.15–19)\textsuperscript{115}

Sexual sins are tied up in the long depressing history of mankind’s turn away from God toward the worship of false gods. Same-sex desire (and in particular a desire in a man to be penetrated) makes an appearance, though, and corollary to its representation in the \textit{vita}, its portrayal in the \textit{Contra Gentes} is indirect.

The \textit{Galli}, the self-castrating priests of Magna Mater or Rhea—and she, just mentioned, is the one who teaches lewdness/\textit{asēleia}/\textit{ἀσέλγεια}, which was the abiding sin of Antinous—honor her through cultivating the \textit{mores} of women:

And the men, refusing their nature and no longer wishing to be men, fashion for themselves the nature of women, making out of these activities sweet gifts and honor for the one whom they call the Mother of the Gods. (Gent. 26.4–7)\textsuperscript{116}
The perception surely was that these activities included allowing penetration (and not only effeminate dress/mannerisms and castration) because in words immediately after these, Athanasius quotes Romans 1:26–27:

And all together live in the basest ways and compete with each other in ever more evil activities; and as the holy servant of Christ, Paul, said, “For their women changed the natural use of the female to one that was against nature. Likewise did the men, leaving behind the natural use of women, burn in their desire for each other, men practicing shamelessness in men.”

(Gent. 26.7–13)\textsuperscript{117}

A key point about the genesis of same-sex desire is its indirection. Other sins arise through clear mimesis of gods by men. Child sacrifice, violence against fathers, pederasty, adultery, found on Olympus, are imported to earth. Same-sex desire/pleasure that is age-consonant, i.e., non-pederastic, is different. Mimesis is displaced by an ideal of men’s homage to a goddess.\textsuperscript{118} It of course did not have to be this way. There was a minor tradition of a god who, as an adult male, was sexually passive: Bacchus.\textsuperscript{119} But that is not how Athanasius presents it. For him, this desire issues from inside the men, and the desire to be sexually penetrated is part of a personal transformation meant to honor a goddess. The actual penetration, initially unspoken and veiled by cross-dressing and transgender behavior, is eventually unveiled by the quotation from Romans. It also is not a simple sin: connected to traditional religious rites, it is a direct turning away from God.

This desire and pleasure also play an important role in remarks on the evil of involvement in corporeal things in the \textit{De Incarnatione}. The appearance of same-sex desire (again the passage from Romans [1:26–27]) consti-

\textsuperscript{117} Πάντες δὲ ὁμοῦ τοῖς αἰσχίστοις βιοῦσι, καὶ τοῖς χείροσιν ἑαυτοῖς ἁμιλλῶνται· καὶ ὡς εἶπεν ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ διάκονος Παῦλος· “Αἵ τε γὰρ θήλειαι αὐτῶν μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν. Ὅμοιας δὲ καὶ οἱ ἄρρενες, ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας, ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ἀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀρρενεῖς ἐν ἀρρεσίᾳ τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι.”

\textsuperscript{118} The emphasis on indirection complicates Brakke’s thesis that male worshippers of a goddess become more like the object of their devotion (1995a: 168, cf. 2006: 207). To be sure, the cross-dressing and passive sexuality Athanasius imagines among the male worshippers do show some similarities to the supposed life and sexual activities of a goddess. But the mimesis is less direct than when a man takes up adultery or pederasty in imitation of Zeus/Jove. The persona of the \textit{Gallus} also has a greater degree of complexity than his exemplar, Rhea.

\textsuperscript{119} Clement of Alexandria, \textit{Protrepticus} 2.34.3–5 (late second-century); Arnobius, \textit{Adversus Gentiles} 5.28 (late third-/early fourth-century); Firmicus Maternus, \textit{De Errore Profanarum Religionum} 12.4 (mid-fourth-century); Gregory Nazianzenus, \textit{Or.} 5 (at 32) and “To Nemesios” 1572.11–1573.13 (in \textit{Carmina quae spectant ad alios} [TLG]) (mid-fourth-century).
tutes a climax to man's fall into excessive involvement in the material world, a fall which begins with excessive focus on the self. Humans embrace death and corruption “to their own measure” (καθ’ ἑαυτῶν), and it goes downhill from there:

They advanced into excess, from the beginning having become the discoverers of sin and to their own measure (καθ’ ἑαυτῶν) having called to themselves death and corruption. And later, having turned to unrighteousness and exceeding all lawlessness and not stopping at one evil but devising all manner of new ones through novel activities, they became insatiable as regards sinning. For there were adulterers and thieves everywhere, and the whole world was full of murders and depredations and, amid corruption and unrighteousness, there was no thought of law. But all sins individual and communal were perpetrated by all—cities warred against cities, peoples were mustered against peoples and the whole world was demolished by revolutions and battles, with each [person] loving to compete in doing wrong. That those things that are against nature be a great distance from them—this was not the case, but as the witness of Christ, the apostle, said, “For their women changed the natural use of the female to one that was against nature. Likewise did the men, leaving behind the natural use of women, burn in their desire for each other, men practicing shamelessness in men and receiving in themselves the repercussion that was due for this error.” (Inc. 5.16–34)

Involved in the activities of earth, people are not looking where they are supposed to. The things on which the mind (νοῦς) ought to focus its attention are apart from and above the material world. In a passage from the Contra Gentes previously discussed, Athanasius states this directly:

[A]bove it is aloft, and, seeing, it perceives the Logos and the Father of the

120. εἰς ἄμετρον ἐληλύθασιν, εξ ἀρχῆς μὲν εὑρεταὶ τῆς κακίας γενόμενοι, καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτῶν τόν θάνατον προκαλεσάμενοι καὶ τήν φθοράν· ὕστερον δὲ εἰς ἀδίκιαν ἐκτραπέντες καὶ παρανομίαν πάσαν ὑπερβαλόντες, καὶ μὴ ἐνι αὐτῶν ἑισάμενοι, ἀλλὰ πάντα κατα κατὰ κακίαν ἑπισυνεύόμενοι, ἀκόρε-στοι περὶ τὸ ἀμαρτάνειν γεγόνασι. Μοιχεῖαι μὲν γάρ ἦσαν καὶ κλοπαί πανταξύνοι, φόνων δὲ καὶ ἄρπαγών πλήρης ἦν ἡ σύμπασις γῆς. Καὶ νόμου μὲν οὐκ ἦν φροντίς περί φθοράς καὶ ἀδίκιας· πάντα δὲ τὰ κακὰ καθ’ ἑαυτὰ καὶ κοινὰ παρὰ τῶν ἑπάττετο. Πόλεις μὲν κατὰ πόλεις ἑπίστρεφον καὶ ἐθυμε-κατὰ ἑαυτῶν ἑγερέμειον διήρητος ἐν πᾶσα ὑποκουμενή καταστασιματεῖ καὶ μάχαις ἐκαστοῦ πυλοικοῦντος ἐν τῷ παρανομεῖν. Οὐκ ἦν δὲ τούτων μεκράν υἱὸν τὸ παρὰ φύσιν, ἀλλ’ ὡς εἶπεν ὁ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μάρτυς Ἀπόστολος· ὁ τε γάρ ἥλιος αὐτῶν μετηλλευσάρ τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν. Ὅμως ἦν καὶ οἱ ἄρρενες, ἀράνεις τὴν φυσικὴν χρήσιν τῆς δηλευσάρ, ἑκατέρασαν εἰς τῇ ὁρείξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους, ἀράνεις ἐν ἀράνει τῇ ἀσχημοσύνῃ κατεργαζόμενοι, καὶ τὴν ἀντιμισθίαν ἦν ἐκεῖ τῆς ἑνίας αὐτῶν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἀπολαμβάνοντες."
Logos in [the Logos], being pleased in contemplation of him and enflamed by desire for him [the Father of the Logos]. (2.24–27)

In a motion that recalls the focus fostered by sexual desire, but whose objects could hardly be more different, the mind should make its way to Christ in his guise as the Logos and toward God himself. As did many Christian theologians, Athanasius Platonizes here and he changes the objective of Plato’s sublimating “ladder of love” from “The Good” to God and the Logos. So, in the context of this prescription for the mind, what could be a more perfectly perverse valuing of the material than to desire, in a solipsistic downward-looking gape (vid. Inc. 5.17–18: kath’ heautōn/καθ’ ἑαυτῶν), physical copulation with a body that mirrors one’s own? And all the more when it is recalled how different Athanasius’ transcendent is from the mysterious existent one proposed by the late Platonists. Mystery is not present in his celestial cosmos; his heaven is taken up utterly by the Logos and the Father of the Logos, whose connection to the moral order on earth is never in doubt. According to Athanasius, mystery is here on earth instead. He packs the body with mysteries that are the objects of celestial solicitude, even though body and its demonic puzzlements are destined to pass away, created ex nihilo.

So then, man’s desire for man appears in Contra Gentes as an indicative failure to value the transcendent over the material—a failure that replays in the here and now the primal failure of humanity to “look” where it was supposed to and the consequent development of idolatry. In the De Incarnatione, same-sex desire and pleasure function as a metaphor for the origin of sin and a symbol of the worst things that sin can be. In addition, the stigmatization of the body that occurs when Antony has to wall off his body is seen in these earlier treatises too. Composed of fascinating matter, the surrender to which same-sex eroticism provides a one-stop archaeology and summation, the body possesses an indicative relationship to same-sex eroticism because the body is a material thing. The sheer force of Athanasius’ argumentation against same-sex eroticism, which makes it a yielding of great significance to matter, renders the body itself uniquely connected to such desire, a condition to which Antony’s wall attests.

CONCLUSION

A vision of late-Roman manhood in which same-sex desire and pleasure played important roles in the portrayal and penetrative power of masculine
authority was presented in the introduction and chapter one of this book. A man’s admirability could be emphasized via a metaphor that made him an object of sexual regard; the corporeal intensity of such a metaphor made it a favored mode to portray a man’s worthiness. An important friendship between men could also be depicted via carnal metaphors, whose immediacy told all that this friendship was special. Knowledge of same-sex desire and pleasure also made masculine authority more powerful. Demonstration of this knowledge was an authorizing demonstration of power’s reach. There was nowhere that this authority could not go, even if the possession of such knowledge was possibly a dubious thing for a manly man to possess.

A reader of the *vita* would have every reason to believe that the authoritative Athanasius would be well-versed enough in the realities of this world to account for same-sex desire. Indeed, a major portion of this chapter was dedicated to showing how the reader’s faith in Athanasius’ powers of perception brings an accounting for this desire into focus. Where the *vita* and literature of the erēmos part company from much of the evidence in the introduction and first chapter of this book is in their avoidance of same-sex sexual attractiveness as a way to metaphorize masculine grandeur. This demurrer was partially on account of the homosocial nature of withdrawal to the erēmos. But it also had a basis, at least in the case of Athanasius, in larger thoughts about the nature of this world and the next. Athanasius’ thoughts about matter and divinity and body and soul entailed a decisive separation of things of this earth from the transcendent. At the same time, however, Athanasius understood the next world (with some irony) in terms that made it a perfect reflection and realization of earthbound norms. Athanasius saw the propensity to “misbehave” as a function of material bodies. Indeed, rather than a possible metaphor for masculine authority, same-sex desire and pleasure were instead examples of the worst thing sin could be. Athanasius did not have dispassion about things that exist and indicted the world as a fatally flawed entity.

The next chapter leaves the erēmos for the center of the imperial court and the person of the emperor as he appears in Ammianus Marcellinus’ *Res Gestae*. Although Ammianus wants his emperor to be awesomely transcendent of the world, he is concerned about the autocratic excess which the grand Constantius II displays. This concern causes the old discourse of tyrannical effeminacy to attach to Constantius, while, in contrast, emperor Julian’s civility is praised as moral and faulted for not being grand enough. Ammianus is also conflicted about same-sex sexual attractiveness. It emerges as a positive attribute of Julian, while Constantius is slandered as effeminate.
and passive in his sexual desires. This conflict also plays out in Ammianus’
depiction of the transcendent: he both wants it grandly different from this
world (as embodied by Constantius II) and, yet, responsive to this world
and looking rather Athanasian.