

The third elegy of the sixth century Latin elegist Maximianus describes the poet's childhood love affair with a young girl named Aquilina. Although the presence of some Christian phrasing has been remarked upon in the elegies – incorporated either subconsciously (Raby 1934) or as parody (Webster 1900; Schneider 2003) – the extended and specific link in this poem between the characterization of Aquilina and the literary and cultural phenomenon of Christian virgin martyr stories has not hitherto been explored by scholars. This paper develops those connections and then explores how this alignment of two literary types – elegiac *puella* and Christian virgin martyr – highlights their comparable textual construction of female identity within a male-centred discourse.

When Aquilina is beaten by her mother for talking to a boy, she celebrates her wounds as insignia of her love in a manner unmistakably reminiscent of virgin martyrs celebrating the wounds they have suffered for Christ. She expresses her physical suffering as a sacrifice for a greater good: “*Pro te susceptos iuvat*” inquit “*ferre dolores*”, she says at line 39. Her joy in suffering (*gaudens*, *El.* 3.38) recalls a familiar trope from martyr poetry, in which willing victims often disconcert – or convert – their oppressors through their elation in suffering. Textual parallels confirm the thematic parallel: Aquilina addresses the poet *visceribus...anhelis* (*El.* 3.33), a reminiscence of *pectus anhela Deo*, Prudentius' description of the 12-year old martyr St. Eulalia (*Per.* 3.34). Aquilina is not ashamed to memorialize (*memorare*, line 37) her suffering, an ironic nod to the hagiographical tradition (*memoria* was used to denote a monument to a martyr, e.g. *Aug. Civ. Dei* 26.5). The phrase *certa fides* in line 41 recalls the widespread use of the phrase in Christian literature as part of professions of faith (cf. Schneider 2003: 218). Line 42 is unequivocal: her suffering is a *passio*, a word used both of the death of the martyr and the account of the martyrdom as a whole. Finally, Aquilina's name also has significance for the themes of the poem: St. Aquilina was yet another 12-year-old virgin martyr, said to have been put to death by pagan oppressors in 293.

Such parallels can be seen as underlining the similarity in the textual creation of both the elegiac *puella* and the virgin martyr. If the elegiac female is a *scripta puella* (Wyke 1987), an effect of discourse, the virgin martyr is even more the creation of a particular cultural discourse. Her identity is predicated on her recirculation as a moral *exemplum*, in the same way that the ‘elegiac *puella*’ is an ‘identity’ predicated on a woman's inclusion in a masculine poetic tradition. By these parallels, and the poem's larger themes of speech and silence, Maximianus' third elegy becomes a meta-literary comment on two generic traditions.