SAINTLY ASCETICISM AND THE LITERARY MACHINE: THE MANY LIVES OF SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to provide an appreciation of the aesthetic profile of medieval hagiography, grounded in an understanding of its contribution to literary culture both medieval and modern. Centering analysis on the crucial figure of Saint Anthony the Great, I shall demonstrate that Anthony and the narrative tradition of his life are not only foundational to medieval hagiographical writing but also highly representative of the role of saintliness in French literary history from the Middle Ages to the modern period.

Part I, “Ab eo omnes”, examines the impact of Anthony’s model of sanctity over the course of the medieval period. Chapter I discusses the role of the Late Antique tradition of Saint Anthony in medieval France, arguing that this legend broke the pattern of Christological mimesis on which hagiography had previously depended. Chapter II discusses the breakdown this caused in textual believability, claiming that it effectively and metatextually enacted the impossibility of the hagiographical task, that is to say, the representation of an unrepresentable God.

The second part of this dissertation, “The Literary Machine” examines the impact of the Anthony tradition on subsequent saintly narratives, both medieval and modern. Chapter III explores the mutation of the story of Saint Anthony over the course of the Middle Ages, describing the prioritization this caused of aesthetic over accuracy as well as the disappearance of this value-system in religious literature over the course of the sixteenth century. Chapter IV explores its uncanny reappearance in Flaubert’s 1874 Tentation de Saint Antoine.

I conclude with a consideration of the significant impact that Flaubert’s Tentation had on the secular arts over the course of the late nineteenth century. Finally, I draw together the strands developed over the course of the dissertation, in order to demonstrate the debt that modern understandings of literary transcendence owe to medieval hagiographical methods.
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[...] il faut que le moine confie [...] le nombre de pas qu’il fait et le nombre de gouttes d’eau qu’il boit dans sa cellule, pour savoir si en cela il ne se trompe pas.

- Attributed to Saint Anthony the Great

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1 Paroles des pères du desert. Apophtegmes des pères du desert 22.
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INTRODUCTION

...your names in the flesh [...] will vanis[h]. But if a man knows his true name he will also perceive the name of Truth.
   - Saint Anthony the Great²

The Sublime Power of the Word

Without the contributions of Saint Augustine of Hippo, the trajectory of ecclesiastical and even Western history would probably have unfolded differently. This is a widely accepted position across academic disciplines.³ However, there would be no Saint Augustine, no De doctrina christiana and especially no Confessions, without the crucial influence of a far more unsung hero of the early Church: Saint Anthony the Great.

In the eighth book of his Confessions, as Augustine famously hesitates to adapt his intellectual acceptance of Christian beliefs into a way of life, he receives a visit from a certain Ponticianus. Upon discovering that Augustine shares his Christian faith, Ponticianus, tells him the story of Saint Anthony an influential anchorite who had been active in the Egyptian desert until his death in 355. Augustine particularly remembers Ponticianus’ description of the influence of texts both on Anthony and on his followers. Anthony’s own revolutionary eremitical practice was inspired by a reading from the Gospel of Saint Matthew (19:21) which Anthony heard by chance at a church service, and spent the rest of his life following to the letter. A similar power to that of the Gospel also moves through the written life of Anthony himself. As Ponticianus tells it, two men of his acquaintance, while out walking in the woods one day, came

² Letter III, 206.
³ Augustine’s contribution to Western culture is at least the subject of another dissertation. For an appreciation of his contribution to Christian philosophy, see Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self. Its argument is succinctly outlined in Cary 3-4. For a more complete discussion of Augustine’s life and legacy, it is difficult to imagine a single source as comprehensive as Peter Brown’s biography.
upon a copy of the *Life of Anthony*, a highly influential hagiography written about a year after Anthony’s death by Saint Athanasius, the then bishop of Alexandria. Upon reading this text, Ponticianus’ *bon vivant* pagan friends instantly convert not just to Christianity but to a strict ascetic lifestyle of poverty and chastity.

Augustine walks away from his first narrative encounter with Anthony unconvinced of the merits of the bare life. But God has other plans. It is not long after listening to Anthony’s life story before Augustine hears the disembodied voice of a child chanting: “Tolle, lege! Tolle lege!” (VIII. xii. 29) [Pick up and read! Pick up and read!] (152). This is the sign from God that Augustine has needed all along. He is only able to recognize it, though, because he has heard the story of Saint Anthony. Remembering how Anthony came to his practice by following the precepts of a scriptural passage, serendipitously encountered, Augustine understands that he must, in Anthony’s image, open the Bible at random and follow its teaching to the letter. Augustine lands on the thirteenth chapter of Romans where he reads, “[…] not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision of the flesh, to [fulfill] the lusts [thereof]” (13-14). With this, Augustine is at last ready to be made chaste. He, like Anthony applies the Word fully to his life and embraces the saintly identity with which God has imbued him.

The story of Augustine’s conversion offers invaluable insight into the history of hagiographical practice. As Duncan Robertson has noted, it typifies one of the essential underpinnings of the saintly tradition: the dependence of newer saints on their older models, practically mediated through the edifying applications of hagiographical texts (17). Although saintliness is essentially a state of messianic imitation, each new saint is—through this shared mimetic goal—beholden to replicate the story of every other saint who has preceded him (80).
Augustine’s conversion story is important because it provides an illustration of the specific mechanics through which this chain of replication is built, both in text and in life. Augustine does not merely copy the spirit of Anthony’s saintly intentions; he reanimates the narrative of Anthony’s life and reshapes it both through his mortal existence and through his textual corpus. Augustine’s first act upon embracing a Christian life is to bring the Bible to his friend and fellow ambivalent Christian, Alypius (the future Saint Alypius of Thagaste) to tell him of the miracle that has just befallen him. When Alypius finishes listening to Augustine’s narrative, he immediately asks to see the text (petit videre quid legissem) (VIII. xii. 30). Alypius opens the Bible to the place that Augustine has marked but his eyes alight on a different passage: “Him that is weak in faith receive ye” (Romans 14:1). Like Anthony and Augustine before him, Alypius understands that this verse was sent for him; God wants Alypius to be strengthened by Augustine’s newly exemplary faith and so, Alypius follows his friend into the chaste life of religious service. The implication of this scene is that Augustine’s narrative has the same power over Alypius as Anthony’s narrative had over Augustine. Through this power, Augustine’s personal conversion is an enactment of his autobiography’s literary conversion. It is a theorization of the tradition of sanctity according to a model of interpersonal imitation and an induction of the Confessions into an analogous literary heritage; just as Augustine transitions from secular life to religious life by imitating Anthony, his work crosses the parallel threshold from individual autobiography to intertextually connected hagiography by imitating Anthony’s Life.

This view of hagiographical writing was not entirely Augustine’s own invention, though. It reflects a significant shift in understandings of saintliness that took place over the course of the
fourth century, a shift that began with Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*. It is no mistake that the erudite Augustine chose Anthony as the starting point for his model of sanctity. The *Life of Anthony* was a stylistically and semantically revolutionary work of literature. Written around 356, approximately forty years prior to the *Confessions*, the *Life of Anthony* is the first major hagiographical text to depict saintliness outside of the tradition of martyrdom. At a time when the systematic execution of Christians had essentially come to a halt, the *Life of Anthony* altered the quality of saintliness, protracting the scope of Christological mimesis beyond the single moment of death to encompass a whole saintly lifetime. In doing so, it also broke the documentary system that had previously underpinned hagiographical writing. Prior to the *Life of Anthony*, hagiographical texts were largely comprised of eye-witness accounts and various other *pièces de conviction* (Barnes 151). The *Life of Anthony*, on the contrary, depended not on observable events but on a long series of experiences that no one but Anthony himself could have known in their entirety. Thus, Athanasius as author was specifically not attempting to provide a perfectly literal depiction of Anthony’s life but rather to create a reading of Anthony’s sanctity phrased both in terms of measurable fact and in the hermeneutic language of metaphorical expression (Robertson 83). Anthony’s years of solitude in the desert, his encounters with demons, his conversations with God, were all—indepen dent of their historical veracity—

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4 David Brakke provides a particularly good synthesis of Athanasius’ adaptation of his own religious belief system into the *Life of Anthony* (216-245). He demonstrates that the narrative structure of the text absorbs Athanasius’ philosophical discourse into what he calls the “…mythical story of the incarnate Word” (217).

5 For a discussion of the history of martyrdom and its place in the saintly institution, see Barnes 97-98, for an appreciation of its impact on written hagiography, particularly as it is mediated through the *Life of Anthony*, see Barnes 151 and following. This will also be discussed in detail in Chapter I of this dissertation.

6 It is worth noting that Athanasius’ model of sanctity did not appear out of thin air. Naturally it owed a debt to the preexisting tradition of hagiography. The lives of martyr saints had previously been transformed into narrative formats. Robertson cites as examples, Pontius’ *Life of Cyprian* and Pionius’ *Life of Polycarp* (78) which no doubt provided formal inspiration to Athanasius.
symbolic tropes designed to translate the mystery of his divine connection into text. Consequently, the *Life of Anthony* had the profound impact of simultaneously narrativizing hagiographical expression, while paradoxically undercutting the ontological importance of the literal narrative itself.

This is very much the vision of hagiography offered by Augustine in the *Confessions*. Augustine’s, and later Alypius’s, engagement with Anthony’s story is a very active kind of reading. After all, they do not follow Anthony’s still thriving community into the Egyptian desert, although they well could have. Instead, their immediate conversions and very different saintly paths exemplify a deep undersigning of the divine Truth hidden within the *Life of Anthony*’s hermeneutic forms. For the characters of the *Confessions*—and even more so for later readers aware of Augustine’s and Alypius’ eventual canonizations—Anthony is at the beginning of a chain of sanctity, one that is indirectly responsible for the *Confessions* themselves. He is the exemplar for an infinitely replicable transformation of God’s Word into new manifestations of Christ’s teachings, that is to say, new saintly incarnations. This is not just a chain from one man to another; it is a chain from one *text* to another. With the point of origin in the transcendent word of the Bible, the narrative rendering of each saintly conversion story begets a new saintly conversion, and consequently a new saintly life. It is as though the divine power caught up in the Scripture were somehow permeating not just the lives but the *stories* of the saints. According to this view, hagiography is not just a narration of fact; it is a potent and mystical writing, each individual text acting like a cog in a great literary machine\(^7\) through which the Word can again become flesh, and the saintly flesh can in its turn become divinely powerful word. Seen in this light, hagiography is an act of replicable impossibility. It is a translation of a single and

\(^7\) The term *literary machine*, discussed in detail hereafter, is borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari, who first introduced this concept in *A Thousand Plateaus* (4).
unrepresentable God\textsuperscript{8} into multiple mortal forms and a distillation of this awesome divine power into humanly authored text. It is, in this sense, quite literally, a miracle of human creativity.

Augustine’s reading of and relationship to the *Life of Anthony* is more than just one man’s interpretation of the quality of sanctity. It outlines a series of circumstances that have shaped the notion of saintliness and its place in the world of textual expression throughout literary history. The *Life of Anthony* and its transitioning of saintly representation from literal description to metaphorical *topoi* produced an implicit expectation of saintly replication, both in practice and in text, that would come to dominate and even *define* hagiographical expression in the Middle Ages. Unlike the rest of the long ecclesiastical tradition of hagiographical writing that has followed in its wake, medieval hagiography was animated by a mystical blending of human workmanship and divine transcendence. The promise this held of an almost transubstantiatory magic is largely responsible for the unique importance that this tradition sustained within the medieval literary landscape. However it is also the legacy that medieval hagiographical writing has left to the modern literary arts. The rising tide of empiricism and the division of the Christian institution over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries forever altered the Church-sanctioned practice of hagiographical writing, tying its success once again to a version of historical accuracy that had not been dominant in this tradition since before the first *Life of Anthony*.\textsuperscript{9} Nonetheless, the literary magic translated by medieval saintly stories managed to survive, if not within the confines of the Church, in the much more volatile world of the secular

\textsuperscript{8} For a relevant discussion of the nature of God as invisible, inconceivable and omnipotent, see Isidore’s *Etymologiae* VII.i, 1-38.

\textsuperscript{9} This transition is a major concern of Chapter III of this dissertation. However, a succinct and essentially representative summery of the philosophical changes that vehicled the reversion of hagiographical writing to empiricist methods can be found in Collins’ consideration of the “last medieval canonization” (see esp. 3-9). The continuation of this trend is well supported by the history of the *Acta Sanctorum* into the seventeenth century (Joassart 1-4).
arts and letters. In France, this rose to a crescendo during the first forty years of the Third Republic (1870-1940) when the saints and especially their medieval stories suddenly became fabulously popular in French culture, touching realms of non-religious life as diverse as literature, painting and even medicine (Emery Introduction 1-7).

Through it all, Saint Anthony the Great has remained strikingly central to the practice of saintly representation, lucidly emblematic of the hagiographical phenomenon as it has developed in both religious and profane contexts over the course of French history. Anthony did not merely found the ethos of hagiographical representation that would characterize the medieval saintly phenomenon, he is also the figure responsible for the saints’ unexpected return to mainstream culture in the rapidly secularizing context of Third Republic France. Although in many ways the saints did not go anywhere between the Middle Ages and modern period, the 1874 publication of the first version of Flaubert’s generically ambiguous masterwork, the Tentation de Saint Antoine, brought the medieval aesthetic of hagiographical representation back to the cutting edge of literary culture. In the following pages, I shall study the various forms and identities that Anthony and his story have taken from Late Antiquity to the modern period, with special emphasis on the two peak moments of hagiographical production in French history: the

10 The return of the saints to French culture at this particular moment was puzzling to nineteenth-century readers (see Emery, Introduction, 1) and in modern scholarship has typically been indistinctly linked to the rising cult of the nation in the place once occupied by the Church (Emery, Conclusion, 230).
11 The Church’s centrality in French society was more or less continues, not withstanding the de-Christianization of France between 1789 and 1801 or the deistic religious movements of the Revolution. For general background, see Robinet 5-6, for greater analysis of the secular religions of this time period, see 511-560.
12 The Tentation de Saint Antoine takes the outward form of a play with lines and stage directions. It was, in fact, most commonly referred to by Flaubert himself as a mystère (see Orr Flaubert’s Tentation 117). However, the impossibility for such a work to be staged, especially in the technological world of the mid-to-late nineteenth century (discussed in Chapter IV) very rapidly lead to the designation of this work as a prose poem. See for example, Lafitte 335.
Middle Ages and the first four decades of the Third Republic. Although cosmetically disparate and historically distant, the dialogue between these periods will provide a wide-reaching account of the medieval hagiographical phenomenon, of its impact on modern thought, and of its place in French literary studies today.

Medieval Hagiography and Saint Anthony the Great

The written accounts of the lives of the saints provided what may well have been the single most important narrative tradition into which medieval readers were plunged. In the largely Catholic context of medieval France, the saints were everywhere. Churches bearing their names provided important landmarks in the geography of Europe’s growing cities; saints’ feast days punctuated the year with mirth as much as with religious solemnity, and even organized the more mundane aspects of life, such as structured debt repayment. In these ways, saints were the pillars upholding medieval thought on everything from geography to time. They were not merely signposts, however. The stories of their lives shadowed their omnipresent names throughout medieval France. Saints’ narratives were prominent in the physical space of towns and cities, where they were frequently detailed in the internal and external art of church buildings. In sermons they were used as *exempla*; they provided the basis for private devotion; in mystery

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13 Although examples are, of course, too numerous to list Thomas Aquinas’ use of the story of Saint Martin in his *Beatus Vir* sermon provides an excellent illustration of this practice (313-326).
14 Jocelyn Wogan-Browne provides an important appreciation of the private didactic uses of hagiographical text among Anglo-Norman women, focusing on the “[…] pervasiveness of virginity as a cultural ideal and form of exemplary biography for women” (3). *Legendaria* such as the fabulously popular *Legenda aurea* also allowed a more generalized medieval public to practice their faith through meditation on the stories of the saints. For comments on the popularity of this text, see Reames 197.
plays they were harnessed for the purposes of education and recreation alike. The stories of the saints were the multi-purpose narrative *par excellence* of medieval France. They inspired the authors of romance and poetry as much as they informed the production of scholars and teachers. They crossed societal thresholds from peasantry to nobility in ways that other literary traditions almost certainly did not. Indeed, the earliest written text to survive in a French vernacular is the life of a saint, the short verse telling of the story of the virgin martyr Eulalia in the so-called *Séquence de Sainte Eulalie*. Nevertheless, the place of the saints in the field of literary studies has remained curiously ambiguous.

As Emma Campbell has recently pointed out, this critical ambivalence is largely a product of the striking and, by modern standards, baffling amount of repetition both within and among medieval hagiographical texts (7-8). James Earl bluntly described the effect of this feature of medieval hagiography by saying that “[…] when you’ve read one saint’s life you’ve

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15 For a discussion of the wealth of social and didactic functions performed by medieval mystery plays, see Hamblin 1-23.
16 The relationship between hagiography and the secular literary tradition has been the subject of a great deal of literary scholarship. Peter Dembowsky gives a concise appreciation of these relationships (“Literary Problems” 119-121). For more comments on a possible transmission of literary methods and motifs *from* hagiography into romance, see Hurley 60-70; for more general comments, see Salter 58-68.
17 The role of the saints in universal cosmology plays a tangible role, for example in Pierre Abélard’s *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian*. See for example, 139-140; 146-147; 156.
18 Clearly, it is problematic to make any sweeping generalizations about the many-faced tradition modern scholars have come to know as *romance* and just as difficult to place it in opposition to *hagiography* due, among other factors, to the idiosyncrasy of the manuscript tradition as well as the frequent intersections between the two traditions (see, for example Dembowsky “Literary Problems” 119-121). However, it seems clear that romance was, generally speaking tied more specifically to the courtly context both in content (Kay, *Courts* 81-94) and in material culture (Krueger 3-4) whereas hagiographers, even those writing in the most novelistic fashion often worked with the specific purpose of allowing their stories to reach across social barriers as Wace claims to do in his prologue to the *Vie de Saint Nicolas* (vv. 36-44).
19 In his article “Qu’est-ce que la literature? France 1100-1600.”, Daniel Poirion fails to make mention of hagiography. Michel Zink’s 1990 *Le Moyen Âge: littérature française* makes the same omission.
read them all”. While Earl almost certainly overstates the case, it is without doubt that within this literary tradition, repetition is salient both as a stylistic feature and a semantic one.

Testifying to this, modern scholarship is replete with typological analyses of medieval hagiography, detailing the progression of predictable tropes into veritable recipes for saintly stories. Until the second half of the last century, this charge of repetitiveness was widely leveled as a condemnation of medieval hagiographical methods. In recent years, scholars have become substantially more generous with regard to the intellectual merits of these texts.

Nevertheless, consensus on the purpose of this repetition has remained elusive. Brigitte Cazelles, for example, cites repetitiveness as proof of the lack of authorial creativity that characterized this tradition (5). Alison Godard Elliott, on the other hand, sees it, as the revelation of an auctorial hand creating and manipulating the events of the text (7-8). These differing interpretations have lead to diametrically opposed visions of the fundamental purpose of hagiographical literature. Whereas Cazelles claims that “…French hagiographers grounded the value of their narratives in ‘historical’ truth…” (5) Elliott states quite simply that “[h]agiography is not history”, arguing instead that it is an aestheticized representation of fundamental, if not factual, truths (7). This debate goes straight to the heart of Hippolyte Delehaye’s 1921 depiction of medieval saints’ lives

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20 This comment is made in an unpublished dissertation and is cited by Alison Godard Elliott (2), Emma Campbell (8), and Duncan Robertson (25).

21 Delehaye’s treatment of passiones, that is lives of martyrs, operates under the assumption that these texts are formulaic (Passions 182-226). For a commentary on the distinction between passiones and vitae (lives of confessors), see Altman 1-9. For a more general typology, see Boyer 27-36.

22 Hippolyte Delehaye, one of the most important hagiographic scholars of the last century influentially aired his objection to the repetitiveness of medieval saints’ stories saying of their authors that “[ils] ne se contentaient pas d’imiter quelques modèles, mais qu’ils se pillent les uns les autres” (Passions 222).

23 In 1976, near the beginning of this shift in scholarly appreciations of medieval hagiography, for example, Peter Dembowski opens an article on “Literary Problems of Hagiography in Old French” with an explicit call for scholars to recognize the literary merits this tradition (117).
as plagiaristic (222). On the one hand, the aesthetic of repetition that develops across saintly stories visibly eschews the pretention of factual accuracy. How, then can these texts be seen as serious depictions of real events in the eyes of their readers, and even more problematically, in the eyes of their writers? On the other hand, repetition is codified, ritualized and distilled into a devotional experience that readers clearly understood as a serious textual encounter with some of the most important figures in Christian history (Campbell 7). How, then, can these texts be thought of as anything but the depiction of real events?

The interpretative problem posed by this debate does not lie in its lack of resolution, but rather in the disquieting inappropriateness of such a resolution. Hesitation between fact and fancy is part and parcel of the hagiographical experience (Robertson 13). Saintliness was profoundly an imitation of the life and death of Christ (25). However, this *imitatio Christi* was not intended to be a perfect replication of Christ’s story. It was based instead on a sort of creative reimagining of Christ’s sacrifice and a respectful reinterpretation of His suffering. Christ did not face the threat of sexual assault as Saint Catherine did; He was not a reformed sinner, constantly practicing penitence as Saint Gregory was; He was not flayed like Bartholomew or thrown into the ocean like Christine and He did not live under his parents’ staircase like Alexis. These various torments and their depiction in medieval hagiographies are metaphorical representations of the mysterious and divine love that Christ brought to mankind through his willing death. Saintliness, then, was a sort of hybridization of human and divine potency, the saint transforming his or her mortal life into a symbolic testament to God’s true presence in the universe. Likewise, the use of repetitive tropes in the hagiographical tradition establishes the weight of God’s word within individual texts. The reappearance of the same signs and symbols over and over links hagiographies to one another through the kinship of their shared language and eventually, to the
Bible, whose tropes—the never-ending desert of Moses’ exile, the constant suffering of Job’s torments, the pain of Christ’s martyrdom—they share and imbue with new meaning. This draws a direct line from the repeated metaphors of hagiography to the source of their power, and for that matter, all textually incarnate divinity: the Holy Scripture. However, the possibility for this power to become translated into text depends on the hagiographer who, through his own imagination, develops new and unique ways of deploying the aesthetic of saintly repetition into innovative literary entities.

The seeming liminality this cultivates between human creation and divine truth was probably not as jarring to medieval readers as it has sometimes been to modern scholars. Considerable work over the last forty years has revealed the relative nonintersection in medieval literary culture between truth and factual accuracy. However, the tension between human and divine authorship in hagiographical writing is neither accidental nor is it a standard component of medieval text. Sarah Kay has convincingly argued that the frequently repeated tropes of twelfth-century passiones work to locate the saint for the duration of the narrative in an exceptional space between life and death, a space she discusses in terms of the lacanian sublime (216-231). Expanded to the hagiographical field more broadly, this argument supports the contention that the mimetic tropes of saintly stories allow the prosaic object that is the text itself to conjure within its non-dit an unrepresentable divinity. The repetitiveness of hagiographical texts, then, serves two purposes. First, it draws attention to the artifice inherent in the narrative rendering of the saintly story. Second, and seemingly conversely, it creates a depth of authority, based on the

24 The truthfulness of text depended, according to current scholarly understandings, on an idiosyncratic and individualized process of interpreting the symbolic meaning of literary signs and comparing them to the meaning of God’s inherently symbolic creation. For discussion of truth in Medieval text, see Morse – her Introduction particularly gives a succinct overview (esp. 1-2). For a discussion of the role of literary symbolism and textual truth see Beer 9-11. For an appreciation of the symbolism of God’s world, see Ladner 225-228.
reincarnated authorship of both previous hagiographies and Holy Scripture, which in turn imbues the individually created text with a power other than that of its single human author. This constant and simultaneous revelation and atomization of individual authorship is the factor that best distinguishes hagiography from rest of its contemporary literary field; hagiography uniquely foregrounded a patina of human creativity (the mimetic language of tropes) in order to contain an inhuman, eternal, and otherwise inconceivable force (the Christian God).

This dependence of both sanctity as an institution and hagiography as a tradition on the combination of human imagination and divine exemplum was not always a part of Christian understandings of saintliness, however. As long as saints were defined by their moment of death, their special status was tied to a much simpler form of Christological mimesis. It was not until the Life of Anthony that the creative reimagining of divine presence became a significant part of either saintliness or of its written rendering. The fact that Anthony was the first major saint, or at least the subject of the first major text depicting a saint, whose special status was achieved through saintly life as opposed to saintly death meant that his connection to God was a protracted affair, extending beyond the single and incontrovertible proof of martyrdom and instead filling every moment of his very long life. The written portrait of Anthony’s sanctity took on this challenge by altering the modalities through which hagiography could be established. For

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25 Hagiography knew a boom in production around the same time as secular fictions such as romance and lays became popular (see Robertson 11-12 for comments on the popularity of hagiography, see Krueger 1-2 or Baumgartner and Méla 83 for comments on popularity of romance). However, romance, for its many semantic, formal and artistic collisions with hagiography clearly prioritizes the exclusive authorial work of human creation. While in some ways this assertion is problematic, given the frequent difficulty of identifying authors, and misattribution of authorship (see Gaunt and Kay 8-9), even the misattribution of texts speaks to a belief in a human authorial figure whether or not it is not connected with what modern sensibilities would consider to be a particular historical subjectivity.
Athanasius, the hagiographer’s task was, for the first time, not merely a question of witnessing and reporting but rather one of imagining and creating.

Born in Egypt around 251 AD, Anthony was the son of well-to-do Christian parents. When, as a young adult, he was bereaved of both mother and father, Anthony assumed care of his younger sister and, while grieving the loss, began to seek solace in the Church. One day, he happened on a service where he heard a reading from the book of Matthew that would change his life. In it, Christ is instructing a follower on the perfect practice of Christian faith: “[…] go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor […] and come follow Me […]” (19.21). Anthony took this as a personal call to action and immediately sold his belongings and sent his sister to live among a community of pious virgins. With these worldly obligations attended to, Anthony took to the desert where he carved out a life for himself in total solitude and ascetic rigor. The perfection of his faith was such that it soon angered the devil, who began mercilessly to torment him. But Anthony, steadfast in his practice only ventured further into the desert, eventually taking refuge in a cave, where he faced and conquered ever more terrifying torments. For twenty years he did not leave this makeshift dwelling, but dispensed his wisdom instead without ever showing his face to a growing base of followers that journeyed regularly to his cave. Finally, one day, as though ready to take on his next great challenge, Anthony emerged and undertook the task that would leave the greatest mark on his legacy and on Christendom in general. He began working to organize the growing number of ascetics in the Egyptian desert into sustainable communities. In so doing, Anthony became like a father to this expanding monastic world, thereby cementing his reputation as the first abbot in Christian history. Anthony lived to the ripe old age of one hundred and five and died peacefully of natural causes surrounded by his closest friends, and
leaving behind a loyal community of followers to carry on his name and continue his admirable monastic practice.

This is, in its broad lines, the story of Saint Anthony the Great as it was first recorded by Athanasius of Alexandria. The Life of Anthony was so popular in the Late Antique world that Athanasius’ version of Anthony soon overtook the historical Anthony himself. An influential personality and an author in his own right, Anthony’s writings would not even begin to be rediscovered on a broad scale until the early sixteenth century.\(^{26}\) In many respects, the historical Anthony, now an important presence in scholarly considerations of the early Church,\(^{27}\) would remain under the thumb of Athanasius’ life well into the twentieth century.\(^{28}\) Although now largely questioned as an historical source (Rubenson 145) the literary tradition that grew out of Athanasius’ Life vehicled Anthony, as a cultural touchstone, throughout the Late Antique, medieval and, in many respects, modern worlds. It is primarily this literary Anthony, as opposed to the historical one, that this dissertation will consider.

For the first time, with the *Life of Anthony*, the work of the hagiographer and that of the saint were of concomitant importance in the elaboration of the hagiographical unit. This is largely because Athanasius’ revolutionary decision to represent sanctity as achieved through saintly life rather than saintly death puts his own authorial practice under an unprecedented

\(^{26}\) Anthony’s own letters were not available in Latin until 1475 and not easily available until 1516 after which point they only gained popularity, having been reprinted eleven times between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Rubenson 19).

\(^{27}\) Samuel Rubenson’s book is certainly among the most important examples as is David Brakke’s *Athanasius and Asceticism*, which contains a significant treatment of the historical Anthony as opposed to that depicted in the *Life* (201-265). Most recently, Peter Görg has produced an appreciation of the historical Anthony in the creation of the monastic tradition (see esp. 3-76).

\(^{28}\) In his study and translation of Anthony’s letters, originally published in 1981, Samuel Rubenson cites still *growing* suspicion regarding the trustworthiness of the Athanasius’ original *vita* (145).
spotlight. It is for this reason that the language of metaphor was of particular use to him. The *Life of Anthony* is a nominally prescriptive work; Athanasius tells his readers to think of it as a sort of *de facto* monastic rule (29). However he does not provide any actual behavioral prescriptions. Strictly speaking, Athanasius is in no place to be handing down such a rule; he knew Anthony, but was not a member of his community. Therefore, he sealed the practicum of Anthony’s life within the hermeneutic forms with his ostensibly invented narrative. For example, to understand the steadfastness of Anthony’s faith, the reader must understand the desert not merely as the saint’s home but also as the symbolic representation of the boundless and frightening divine to which Anthony abandons personal control. Thus, for this text to be used to fulfill its stated purpose, the reader must pass consciously through the aesthetic surface of Athanasius’ creation in order to arrive at an understanding of Anthony’s exceptionality.

The necessity this generated for readers to knowingly contemplate Athanasius’ production paired Anthony’s contribution to Christendom indelibly with the process of its literary representation. This, coupled with the newness of Athanasius’ model of sanctity, meant that alongside providing the necessary information for readers to emulate Anthony and his revolutionary practice, Athanasius also left a roadmap for future hagiographers. Athanasius himself demonstrates some concern for this kind of continuation, encouraging his readership to be engaged in adding to and perfecting what was already, by contemporary standards, the very long hagiographical text that is the *Life of Anthony* (30). Athanasius almost certainly could not have predicted the extent to which this call would be heeded, though. Within fifty years, of the initial publication of the *Life of Anthony*, the saint and his story had become the basis for a veritable avalanche of hagiographical production. From Saint Jerome’s *Vita Paulii primi eremitae* (also known as the *Vita Beati Pauli Monachi Thebaei*) and *Vita Hilarionis*, which not
only depict ascetic saints but feature Anthony himself as a character, to the aphoristic wisdom literature of the *Apophtegmata Patrum*, to the anonymous *Life of Paul the Simple*, Anthony and his eremitical life were imitated by monks and future saints just as Athanasius’ textual model was reused by the writers who documented their lives. The format and tradition of hagiographical expression that followed this example was of such great importance to Late Antique Christians that before one hundred years had gone by, the stories of desert ascetics were being collected and read together not as individual texts but as interlocking pieces of a single narrative.²⁹

Anthony’s written *Life*, much like his personal legacy, was not just about a single man or a single text. It was tied to the creation a community of texts, just as Anthony’s practice had been caught up in the creation of a community of monks. As Duncan Robertson points out, the popularity of Athanasius’ model of sanctity was not only instrumental in establishing the Late Antique textual corpus associated with eremitical sanctity; it also provided the symbolic palette of record for medieval authors of hagiographical text (83). Knowing what is known about the repetitive tropes of medieval hagiography, it is particularly significant that it is the metaphorical nature of the *Life of Anthony*, which gave subsequent writers the means to recreate it. The metaphorical hermeneutics of the *Life of Anthony*, their replication into alternate saintly stories, like the lives of Paul and Hilarion, and the collection these stories into compendia establishing a single saintly history provides the basis for the aesthetic of repetition that would come to characterize medieval hagiography more generally.

²⁹ Examples of such texts include the *Apophtegmata Patrum* in which Anthony regularly appears as a character dispensing advice to younger monks (see Rubenson 145-165) and the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, which contains some passing references to Anthony but focuses mostly on his disciples (177-178).
In this respect, the *Life of Anthony* is the defining moment in the establishment of the medieval hagiographical tradition. Although many events could be cited as the beginning of hagiography,\(^{30}\) it is with the publication of the *Life of Anthony* that the very particular hybridization of authority between individual and collective that characterized its *medieval* configuration came to light. Anthony’s *Life* transformed the saintly condition from the product of measurable and observable action into a state requiring protracted narrative. In so doing, it called upon an external authorial figure to imagine a sequence through which this long story could take accurate if not historical shape. The shift this required from literal documentation to figurative representation promoted the redefinition of sanctity, and of its textual representation, as a quality caught up in the invisible space of the symbolic form, the tacit meaningfulness of metaphorical representation standing in for the saint’s special connection to God. Just as Anthony’s story inspires Augustine, the tropes repeated in the narrative of each saintly life link the *Confessions* to the *Life of Anthony*, creating not only a literary tradition but making each saint and each story interlocking elements of a single textual organism, a literary machine that, as evinced by Alypius’ conversion, can operate just as well in concert as they can separately, generating through their narrative experience both new saints and new hagiographies.

**The Literary Machine: Hagiography, Transcendence and the Occultism of Literature**

The conceptual tool of machinery, as I have invoked it, was first developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their 1972 book, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Here, Deleuze and Guattari explore the machine through the lens of what they call *desiring*-

\(^{30}\) One might go as far back as the writing of the Gospels, to the extent that all saintliness a kind of Christological mimesis, or even to pre-Christian folklore (Doble 321-333).
machines. Although this notion is sufficiently flexible to accommodate any number of real-life phenomena, the human being provides them with their prime example:

It is at work everywhere, functioning smoothly at times, at other times in fits and starts […] Everywhere it is machines – real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines, with all the necessary couplings and connections. An organ machine is plugged into an energy-source machine: the one produces a flow that the other interrupts. The breast is a machine that produces milk, and the mouth a machine coupled to it (1).

The desiring-machine that is the human organism, then, is formed by many smaller machines (the mind, the breath, the muscles, the libido) all in constant motion. Through their interaction, conflict and convergence, these smaller machines produce an output. However, this output is idiosyncratic. Any part of the human machine is susceptible to breakdown. “The mouth of the anorexic”, they point out, “waves between several functions: its possessor is uncertain as to whether it is an eating-machine, an anal machine, a talking-machine, or a breathing machine” (1). The misfiring, then, of any one smaller machine (the mouth) within the greater human machine (the organism) alters the output of the whole being. If the mouth of the anorexic will not eat, the body becomes emaciated, and if the breakdown lasts long enough, the machinery of his or her organs will shut down. And so, the Deleuzian/Guattarian concept of the machine is that of an entity that, through its continual failure, is always in a process of self-transformation, altered by its own operation and therefore a sort of multiple and ever evolving version of itself.

This conceptual framework has proved itself very useful to subsequent scholars. Most recently, Giorgio Agamben has developed it into an understanding of the idiosyncratic ways in which meaning is made through disciplinary knowledge, a theoretical unit he refers to as the anthropological machine (33-38). More relevant to the present study, Jeffrey J. Cohen took the step some years ago of transposing the concept of the Deleuzian/Guattarian machine onto the world of medieval text. In his examination of the eighth-century ascetic, Saint Guthlac and his
medieval vitae, for example, Cohen maps the various external forces that intrude upon the saint’s solitude into the single identity-machine of Guthlac’s subjectivity, a literary procedure that Cohen sees as being repeated very much as is one thousand years later in Michel Foucault’s interpretation of the life of Pierre Rivière (116-153). This identity machine, though, is only a secondary component of the vast machinery that makes up the medieval hagiographical tradition.

Saintliness was, in the Middle Ages, and remains in the present day, a kind of machine unto itself. We might think of it broadly as a theophany-machine. The saint imitates Christ in an attempt to bring the divine incarnation back into the earthly realm. However, as long as sanctity is mediated exclusively through martyrdom the potential for multiple break-downs remains relatively limited. With the Life of Anthony, though, the pattern of strict Christological mimeses that had previously dominated notions of sanctity was short-circuited. In its place, a new pattern of saintly repetition emerged with Anthony and not Christ at its textual and ideological center. The placement of this human figure at the center of the saintly institution not only cleared space for human creativity in the practice of sanctity, it thereby ensured the continual breakdown and transformation of the hagiographical machine through the intermediary of human idiosyncrasy.

This is not simply the case of sanctity itself, but also of its written depiction. Deleuze and Guattari distanced themselves from the automated nature of their original formulation of the machine some years after the publication of Anti-Oedipus. In their following book, A Thousand Plateaus, they nuance the mechanistic operations of their original machinery into a process they call assemblage (4 and following). In so doing, they arrive at a formulation that has been—and will remain—most crucial to the present discussion: the literary machine. For Deleuze and Guattari, the assemblage of this literary machine operates in two directions: toward unity,
internal cohesion, and singular subjectivity on the one hand, and toward authorial and narrative self-destruction on the other:

One side of machinic assemblage [in the case of the book machine] faces the strata, which doubtless make it a kind of organism or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a body without organs, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or, circulate and attributing to itself subjects that it leaves with nothing more than a name to trace its identity (4)

The literary machine and the product of its operation are at once the contained process of textual creation, contained that is to an individual authorial subjectivity and the infinitely open product of creative cacophony, shared by an author, the author’s culture of origin, the books he or she has read, and so on.

For Deleuze and Guattari this pulling of the literary object in opposite directions is detrimental to texts’ ability to represent either object or subject; to ascribe any such specificity to the text, they say, would be “… to fabricate a beneficent God” (3). Although in their eyes, this kind of divine fabulation would be a critical fallacy, to the hagiographical author, the creation of this kind of Godly incarnation in the mind of the reader was precisely the goal. And so, the breakdown of the saintly machine through which Anthony’s creative powers came to stand in for the divine person enabled a parallel breakdown in the literary modalities through which this saintly machine found form; like Deleuze and Guattari’s literary machine, hagiographical writing is a pulling of the textual unit both toward individual specificity and intertextual creation. In this way, although each new hagiography represents a sort of dismantling of previous text and reunassembling of its constitutive aesthetic components, it is the intertextual communion that this process implies that is also most generative of the implicit presence of an organizing divinity, authorizing even permeating the plurality of narrative universes that it produces.
It is important to note that, while the literary machine may have initially evolved in tandem with the model of sanctity pioneered by Saint Anthony, it rapidly overtook the saintly tradition in importance. By the Middle Ages the literary machine had become the major force driving popular understandings of sanctity and not the other way around. One is hard-pressed to think of a more convincing example than that of Saint James the Apostle. Martyred, according to the Bible itself, by Herod Agrippa in the year 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2), James’ medieval lives protract his story to include the translation of his relics to Spain as well as the miracles they performed after his death. In this way James’ newer hagiographies enacted the upheaval of their older counterparts and built their authority on this breakdown. In the *Legenda aurea*, the expansion upon the Biblical material takes up more than half of the text (531-537). This new and broadened account, in turn, was of such importance that it transformed Santiago de Compostela, the resting place of James’ relics, into one of the most important pilgrimage destinations in medieval Europe (Dunn and Davidson 3-4).

Looked at in this way, the far-reaching impact of medieval hagiography becomes easily visible. This tradition, based on the conjoining of idiosyncratic human creation and supreme transcendence is far more aesthetically complex than has previously been recognized. In fact, hagiography intersects more, or at least more systematically, with modern understandings of the literary phenomenon than any other area of the medieval literary field.31 Lisa Cooper has convincingly argued that, for medieval writers, the concept of artisanry frequently provided an

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31 Clearly it would be reductive to suggest that a writer active at any time or in any tradition would somehow not have access to the notion of writing as an activity that could transcend the text itself. See, for example, Bruckner’s concise and compelling comments on medieval fiction (1-11). However, the success of this relationship in a great deal of literature, including fiction, is often dependent on the quality, aims and depth of the work. In hagiography, it is a built in condition.
important surface through which to conceptualize the authorial task.\textsuperscript{32} The work of the hagiographer fits in some respects very well into this understanding of the literary process, transforming the abstract notion of divinity into physical text.\textsuperscript{33} However, the hagiographical task did not simply consist of making the invisible visible. It was just as important for medieval hagiographers to provide a visible surface capable of leading the reader back into invisibility, into the mysterious space of eternal salvation.\textsuperscript{34} The hagiographical writer, then, is a Sybille as much as an artisan, dealing in invisible magic as much as in material craft.

This understanding of narrative creation is strikingly similar to modern discourse on the literary arts. As Nietzsche so influentially explained it in his 1872 \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, art, including literature has two major components: a plastic exterior, what he refers to as the \textit{Apollonian}, and a profound core of ontological transcendence, what he refers to as the \textit{Dionysian}. The \textit{Apollonian} aspect of a work of art is, like the desert in the \textit{Life of Anthony}, a mimetic borrowing of the physical forms of the universe for the purposes of both intelligibility and aesthetic effect, while the \textit{Dionysian} is, like the desert’s ability to represent God, a mystical force which is, for all intents and purposes a sort of religious experience, a path within the text to the “[…] Mother of Being, to the innermost core of things […]” (Nietzsche 86). In practical terms, then, the text requires both forces; it is through its \textit{Apollonian} appearance that a work of

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{32} This contention is examined over the course of her book, \textit{Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late Medieval England}, but a very concise summer of her argument can be found in the Conclusion, see especially 188-189.

\textsuperscript{33} This argument is particularly well developed by Cooper in her Introduction (see esp. 3).

\textsuperscript{34} This is the stated goal of a number of medieval hagiographical texts. Examples particularly relevant to this study are provided by the prologues of the Old French \textit{Vies des Pères} discussed in detail at the end of Chapter I (see BNF MS Fr. 1038 Fol. 4 of the fist series and BNF MS. NAF 23686 Fol. 81\textsuperscript{v}).
\end{quote}
text is vehicled to its human recipients because its Dionysian meanings, like the Christian God, are too mighty to be contemplated by the mortal mind.\textsuperscript{35}

When discussed in these terms, the New Age valences of Nietzsche’s position appear alienating. However, The Birth of Tragedy is an expression of what is possibly the most widely accepted understanding of the literary phenomenon to emerge over the last hundred and fifty years. The notion that literature does, or at least ought to have the power to bring forth an experience of the unknown Beyond is almost a cliché of modern letters. “C’est à la fois par la poésie et à travers la poésie […] que l’âme entrevoit les splendeurs situées derrière le tombeau” wrote Baudelaire in 1857.\textsuperscript{36} Even today this position is strikingly mainstream. In 2010, Yves Bonnefoy was quoted in the French popular media saying much the same thing: “[la poésie] tente de réveiller ces présences dormant sous les concepts, ce qui nous rend présents à nous-mêmes, qui alors ne sommes plus dans l’espace de la matière mais dans un lieu, elle substitue ce lieu au dehors du monde, elle fait de ce dehors une terre” (cited by Delaroche and Liger). Even the most analytical studies of the literary phenomenon agree on this point, if no other: the literarity of a text is situated somewhere in its non-dit, and most especially in the ability of this non-dit to cross into a world beyond the sphere of representability.\textsuperscript{37}

The literary machine of medieval hagiography, then, is caught up with some of the most important questions, not just of modern literary study but also, of modern literary production. Medieval hagiographers situate the value of their product in a liminal space between textual form

\begin{footnotes}
\item[35] Nietzsche warns, for example, that if an artist were able to “[…] allow one’s imagination free rein […] when the multitudes kneel down awestruck in the dust[,] then one might come close to an idea of the Dionysian” (22).
\item[36] Notes Nouvelles sur Edgar Poe, IV 334.
\item[37] Roland Barthes situates the literarity of the alloyed acts of reading and writing in the experience of a de-intellectualized jouissance (see, for example, 25-26). Even Sartre, as he champions the cause of littérature engagée is forced to acknowledge that the text must transcend itself in order to be truly literary (see for example, 195-196).
\end{footnotes}
and textual meaning, much as modern philosophers understand the literary quality of a work to be the fruit of such hesitation between aesthetic surface and unquantifiable content. The relationship that this establishes between medieval letters and modern ones is most clearly visible when studied through the lens of the hagiographical tradition itself.

Representations of the saints in written form did not disappear with the Middle Ages; it is the mystical collaboration that medieval hagiographers foregrounded between human and divine that did. Over the course of the Early Modern period, the saints became the fodder of a rapidly growing culture of empirical study, as individual creativity was exiled in no uncertain terms from their written stories. However, the literary machine formed by the medieval tradition did not, as a result of this breakdown, cease to exist; instead it continued to operate, as Deleuze and Guattari’s theory suggests it should, in a slightly a different form. The special brand of human and divine collaboration that supported medieval hagiography jumped, so to speak, from religious literature to secular literature – a transition that was made possible largely through the increased codification of written text according to a typology of fact versus fancy. The relative permeability of the categories of secular versus religious and true versus fictional in the Middle Ages played a significant role in the ecclesiastical decision to repudiate medieval hagiography at the beginning of the Renaissance (Reames 29-31). As Protestantism threatened the unity of the Catholic Church and particularly the cult of the saints, it was too risky for *vitae* to flout the rapidly growing notion of literal and objective historical truth. However, over the course of the eighteenth century, a codified conceptual incompatibility emerged between literary and historical writing. As this segregation of the literary field crystallized over the course of the nineteenth

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38 For comments on the rise of empiricism in academic thought and its impact on the disciplinary specificity of writing, see Morse 2 and Gossman 3.
century, the disgraced aesthetics of medieval sanctity were able to find a new home in the rapidly solidifying world of literary fiction.

There is, of course, no time in French history when the saints have been utterly absent from secular culture. However, they became especially visible, even trendy, at the end of the nineteenth century. Although it may be serendipity, it is particularly interesting for the purposes of this study that the dividing line—as much as there can be such a thing—between the secular saintly stories that had always been a part of French literature and the significant trend that came at the end of the nineteenth century is the 1874 publication of Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. This text is now less central to Flaubert scholarship than *Madame Bovary* or *L’Éducation sentimentale*, but it was enormously popular among the artistic elite of its immediate historical milieu. In direct and frequently explicit imitation of Flaubert’s Anthony, secular works depicting Catholic saints began to spring up in all sectors of society, from Anatole France’s heavily philosophical novel, *Thaïs* (1890), to Zola’s pastoral *Le Rêve* (1888) and its operatic adaptation by Alfred Bruneau (1891) to the shadow plays of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1887) and *Sainte Geneviève de Paris* (1893), to the new-age Catholicism of Huysmans’

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39 See Gossman 227-284 for an exceptionally clear discussion of the nuances of this process.
40 Hagiographical aesthetics were very much present throughout the sixteenth century. Although she does not focus on the French context, Julia Lupton provides a transnational analysis of the role of hagiographical representation in Renaissance arts, especially literature. For an overview of her argument, see (xvii–xxxii). In the following centuries, one might think of such examples as Jean Rotrou’s 1647 play, *Le Véritable Saint Genest* or such politicized deployments of the hagiographical phenomenon as Voltaire’s unfinished 1733, “La Pucelle d’Olréans” (although Joan of Arc would not be officially canonized until 1920).
41 On the occasion of its fragmentary publication in *L’Artiste*, during the winter of 1856-1857, Baudelaire wrote to request the complete manuscript. See Claude Pichois’ notes to the critique of *Madame Bovary* in *Oeuvres Complètes* (1124). Baudelaire himself even concludes his study of *Madame Bovary* with the claim that the *Tentation* is of superior quality (85-86). Flaubert’s text also inspired a series of lithographs by Odilon Redon (see Larson 47-79), and was very likely the impetus behind Georges Méliès’ 1898 short film, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* as well as paintings by Paul Cézanne (1877) and Félicien Rops (1878). This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV as well as the Conclusion.
Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam (1901) and Les Foules de Lourdes (1906). Interestingly, this process is clustered around one of the most important periods of secularization in French history. Republican government was restored four years prior to the publication of the Tentation de Saint Antoine after, with the exception of the short-lived Second Republic (1848-1852), nearly seventy years of totalitarian rule. And, as writers recreated the decidedly medieval aesthetics of Flaubert’s text in the years leading up to the First World War, censorship was lifted (1881) and Catholicism was disestablished as the official state religion (1905). In spite of these cultural changes which saw the Church disenfranchised, the proliferation of social liberalism, and a new blow to the medieval tradition of monarchist rule, the first forty years of the Third Republic (1870-1914) saw what is, without doubt, the most significant production of hagiographical texts outside of the strictly ecclesiastical context since the Middle Ages.\footnote{This claim will be discussed in great detail in the Conclusion. For a concise summery of the supporting scholarship, see Emery Introduction 1-2.}

Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this renewed interest in the saints, served a number of purposes from the overtly blasphemous (Anatole France’s Thaïs, for example, sends the noted anchorite, Saint Paphnutius, to Hell) to the fervently religious (Huysmans’ Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam depicts a Catholic figure to which the author himself had a special devotion).\footnote{Elizabeth Emery develops a typology that, although like all such exercises, runs the risk of simplification, is also a very useful tool in grasping this often overlooked literary movement (Golden 85).} However, more often than not, these texts served to challenge the status quo of the Catholic institution. This is obvious in the case of Thaïs but it is interesting to remark that the religious beliefs disseminated in Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam were considered blasphemous by the Church and that the titular saint, Lydwine, is not a saint at all.\footnote{For details on Huysmans’ religious beliefs and Lydwine’s status, see Postlewate 121; 126-127}

The constant intrusions of the supernatural in these texts, then, do not correspond, strictly
speaking, to a recreation of an overriding Christian cosmology. Considered all together, the saintly figures of this hagiographical renaissance belong more obviously to a kind of indistinct occult than they do to the Catholic institution. Philippe Muray has suggested that this kind of generalized occultism was one of the most powerful forces in shaping the social, political and intellectual development of the nineteenth-century. For Muray, this force is necessarily neurotic, produced by an uneasy multiplication of possible transcendences (11-12). Significantly, if the group of texts written on saints in the first half of the Third Republic can be said to do anything in concert, it is this: fracture the unity of the single transcendence of the Christian God presented in their medieval models. The saintly tradition and its special access to the divine provided modern authors, in other words, with a narrative and symbolic repertory through which to easily introduce, problematize and question the concept of transcendence according to their own agendas.

In this respect, these modern texts are very much a part of the literary machine of hagiography; in spite of their excision of the reliable expectation of the Christian God, they continue to embody a space of uncertainty within the obviously man-made context of literary repetition. Without the power of divinity consistently underpinning the aesthetic surface of these works, though, only the fruit of human creation is left visible. However, this does not undermine the link observed in medieval sources between artistic aesthetic and the notion of transcendence. Modern saintly texts exploit the ostensible absence of the kind of divinity that their models implicitly invoke in order to develop the medieval relationship between hagiographical writing and divine revelation into a specific understanding of the literary phenomenon as transcendence.

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45 He suggests specifically that the nineteenth century is impacted by a kind of progressivism he refers to consistently as socialisme and the concomitant force that is occultisme: “L’occulte est une progressisme qui n’arrive pas à s’avouer ce qu’il cherche. Le socialisme est un occultisme qui préfère ne pas trop réfléchir à sa propre fondation” (11).
This does not so much threaten the medieval model of saintly representation as it alters its implications, the very existence of this modern tradition attesting to the operation of the medieval literary machine of hagiography, which has been able, as these modern texts show, to withstand even the most serious breakdown of all: the removal of the stable legitimizing force of divinity from the saintly narrative.

In the following four chapters, I explore the evolution of the literary machine of hagiography that developed following the model of Saint Anthony. I do so in order to support the broad claim that a literary tradition begun in Late Antiquity with the Life of Anthony came to dominate medieval hagiography, and that it thus contributed significantly to modern understandings of textual art. In order to accomplish this, I also make a restrained argument about the corpus of texts associated with a single saint. This approach is not without its limitations. Most especially, to speak of hagiography, even the restrained world of medieval hagiography, is to invoke a particularly unwieldy collection of texts (Elliott 11). Not all hagiographies are the same in content, in quality or in form. I do not account in great detail for these differences here; I am working under the assumption that there is such a thing as a hagiographical mode and that this mode unites literary expression from vitae to passiones, from mystery plays to summas, from verse texts to prose ones. Evidence of this assumption, vertiginous as it may be, exists in medieval thought. It is also the supporting assumption of the notion that medieval hagiography might have entered into the modern world as a trend, responding in its totality to a series of affinities between a variety of medieval texts.

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46 The hagiographical mode was often employed in order to control the reception of secular fiction. Simon Gaunt, for example, cites Chrétien de Troyes’ Chevalier de la Charette, which employs a hagiographical mode in depicting Lancelot’s suffering in order to allow his love for Guinevere to take on a transcendent quality (52-53).
The scope of this corpus calls for a note on periodization. When I speak of medieval hagiography, I am deliberately broad in my terms. There is only a very small extant collection of vernacular hagiography from before 1050 (Robertson 23), nevertheless, during this time period, we can be relatively sure that Late Antique stories continued to be copied. Although the medieval texts discussed in this dissertation date roughly from 1200 through to the early sixteenth century, I do not intend to exclude previous hagiographical texts from my discussion. It is merely an accident of the manuscript tradition that it should remain essentially unrepresented. It is my intention to provide elements of a theory of the hagiographical phenomenon that might be applied to medieval French literature from the ninth century to the early sixteenth. I therefore remain sensitive to the questions of mouvance germane to the works discussed. My study of the modern period focuses most especially, as I have indicated, on the first forty years of the Third Republic. Due to the sheer volume of saintly rewritings produced during this time, I do not attempt to transform this dissertation into a compete catalogue, nor do I make it my aim to reconstruct the full history of this trend. Instead, I provide an apercu of its implications as they are mediated through the literary flash point that is the publication of Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine* in 1874 (Chapter IV).

**Organization of this Dissertation**

With all of this in mind, I have chosen to divide my dissertation into two major parts: (1) *Ab eo omnes* and (2) *The Literary Machine*. This will allow me to deal separately (and

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47 This is a task that has not yet been fulfilled in current scholarship. Elizabeth Emery and Laurie Postlewate have come closest in their collection of essays, *Medieval Saints in Nineteenth-Century France*. Janine Dakyns’ book, although more general in scope, also provides an important treatment of the saints in nineteenth-century literature.
respectively) with the medieval tradition of Saint Anthony on the one hand and the afterlife of this tradition, as it is reinterpreted in both medieval and modern saintly stories, on the other.

Part I proceeds in two movements, detailing the establishment and importance of the story of Saint Anthony as it crossed from the Late Antique world to the medieval context. The first chapter provides a detailed consideration of the major fourth-century texts that established the legend of Saint Anthony: Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* and Saint Jerome’s *Vita Pauli*. In addition to interpreting these documents individually and in relation to one another, this chapter also explores the methods through which they were disseminated in medieval France as authoritative sources for the story of Saint Anthony. The second chapter focuses on the role that Anthony played in the medieval imagination by studying the extant corpus of rewritten versions of the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* produced between 1200 and 1503. This will bring to light Anthony’s importance in the literary and devotional culture of medieval France even as it demonstrates the methods through which individual authorial creativity was able to assert itself in medieval hagiography. In its entirety, then, Part I provides an understanding of the remarkable intricacy of the Anthony corpus as a prototype of medieval sanctity. It advances my contention that Anthony is both foundational and exemplary of the medieval hagiographical tradition and provides an appreciation of the modalities through which his written tradition developed from Late Antiquity to the early sixteenth century.

Part II is divided into two chapters and presents an understanding of the hagiographical phenomenon as a literary machine emanating from the tradition of Saint Anthony the Great. I begin in Chapter III with a discussion of the impact that the stories of Saint Anthony, discussed in Part I, had on medieval hagiography more broadly. Focusing most especially on the Old French lives of Mary the Egyptian, I argue that hagiographies produced throughout the medieval period
prioritized the demonstration of belonging to a saintly community over the expression of factually accurate narrative. I then consider the fate of medieval hagiography as the Middle Ages came to a close, charting the emergence and solidification of historicist methods of hagiographical writing in the early modern and modern periods. Chapter IV proceeds to discuses the important reemergence of medieval methods of hagiographical representation outside of the religious sphere with the Tentation de Saint Antoine. Together, these two chapters detail the hagiographical tradition that grew out of the narrative of Saint Anthony and situate its impact within the broader context of French literary expression.

I conclude with an exploration of the way in which the return of the saints to the French literary landscape, following the example set by Flaubert’s Anthony, replicated the medieval machinery of imitatio antonii that had set the literary machine of hagiography in motion in the first place. The end result will be the recognition of an intertextual literary network of saints running from the third century all the way to the twentieth. In light of this, my conclusion will also provide an appraisal of the implications of this transtemporal exchange of ideas between medieval and modern writers. This will allow me finally to contend that the literary machine of hagiography is still with us and, thanks to the authors discussed in this dissertation, continues to develop into the present day.
Part I: *Ab Eo Omnes*
Introduction: Saint Anthony and the Invention of a Medieval Genre

Saint Anthony stands at the threshold of a decisive moment in the early history of hagiography. Up until the composition of the first *Life of Anthony* by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, around the year 356, saints’ lives had been very different both in form and in content from the narrative style most commonly recognizable to modern literary scholars. Starting shortly after the Fire of Rome in 64 AD and running essentially until the end of the Great Persecution in 313, the threat of martyrdom loomed large for all Christians living under the Roman Empire such that dying for the faith was a central part of the Christian experience. The imperative for Christians to die willingly in the name of their beliefs became so crucial to the narrative fabric of the new religion that for a time, it was by this act and this act alone that an individual could earn the rank of “saint.” Consequently, the material that made up early *vitae* was often comprised of legal documents, journals or eyewitness testimony that is still considered by modern historians to provide useful and in many respects reliable information (Barnes 151).

At the time of Anthony's death in 356, though, the moment for a new direction in hagiography was ripe. The systematic persecution of Christians had come to a stop and the

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48 “He did not come before all others so much as he provided the necessary stimulus to all others” my trans, from Saint Jerome 144.
49 This date is broadly promoted by an overarching narrative of Christian history. However, historians have suggested that it might reflect a self-serving amendment to the actual series of events by the emperor Constantine. Specifically, Constantine might have promoted a version of events that allowed his role in ending these persecutions to appear greater than it actually was (Barnes 97-98).
50 For a discussion of the importance of death to the Late Antique conception of sanctity, see Brown *Cult* 1-22.
institution of saintliness was at a crossroads (McGinn 49). Without martyrdom where were new saints going to come from? Anthony provided the answer (Robertson 76). He was an innovative kind of saint who demonstrated his special status not by willingness to die in the name of Christ but rather through an uncommonly Christian life, what would come to be known as a *confessor saint*. Whether or not Anthony actually was the first confessor depends on who and when one asks. Processes of canonization were not even nominally codified until the end of the twelfth century, which regularly leads to hiccups in the history of saintliness when it is considered across time. However, it is without doubt that Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* is the first major hagiographical text to depict saintliness as being achieved through means other than martyrdom; it is also the first major *vita sancti* to step outside of the documentary model of writing that had previously dominated hagiographical expression. In this respect it is, as Timothy Barnes has put it, the first instance of “fictitious hagiography” (151 and following). What makes a hagiography “fictitious” in Barnes’ terms is not simply the narrative form that it takes but also the implicit suggestion that the narrative it recounts was *imagined* by an extra-textual author rather than observed by a contemporary.

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51 As Duncan Robertson points out, the title of *confessor* had previously been applied to those who, during the persecutions, managed to survive their trials. Anthony and his life, though, brought about the “redefinition of the title” (78) according to the form it would take according to medieval sensibilities, i.e. saintly life followed by natural death.

52 Time and study have uncovered ascetic saints that have come to be recognized by the Church as being historically anterior to Anthony. One might think particularly of Mary Magdalene whose life was widely transmitted in hagiographical form throughout the French Middle Ages (collected recently into a single volume by Collet and Messerli). Moreover, as I shall discuss in greater detail hereafter, this succession was immediately challenged by the composition of Saint Jerome's *Vita Pauli* some twenty years after Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* which inserts Paul of Thebes, a saint for which there is no prior historical record, explicitly ahead of Anthony. Anthony is the first inasmuch as his story marks the beginning of the narrative tradition in hagiographical text.

53 This is widely agreed upon by scholars. See, for example, Altman 4; Barnes 160; Brakke 1; Dijkstra and Van Dijk 1-2; Rubenson 126.
This chapter will address the crucial role that the story of Saint Anthony played in transitioning the hagiographical tradition from documentary to narrative formats, bringing about the fundamental shift that would characterize medieval relationships to and representations of sanctity. In order to do this, I will begin with an analysis of the relationship between Athanasius’ original telling of the story of Saint Anthony (ca. 356) and the reappropriation of this narrative less than twenty years later in Saint Jerome’s *Vita Pauli primi eremita* (ca. 375). The narrative couple formed by these two texts constitutes the legend of Saint Anthony the Great as it was best known to medieval Christians.\(^5\) I will argue that, together, these texts bring about two important developments in hagiographical expression that defined medieval saints’ lives with respect to that which had preceded them: (1) the presence of a strong external authorial figure disposing the saintly narrative as he sees fit and (2) the possibility of doubting the factual accuracy of the narrative as it is disposed by this author. The *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* were, as I shall go on to discuss popular among medieval readers, having been transmitted both in Latin and the vernacular through various compendia. An examination of the material conditions of their transmission will allow me, in the final part of this chapter, to trace the codification of the innovations brought about by the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* in the medieval world.

**Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*: the Importance of the Origin**

Compared to other Catholic saints popular in the Middle Ages, Anthony is among a restrained number whose story can be easily traced back to a single text of known authorial provenance. Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* was instantly popular and garnered a wide readership

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\(^5\) As Chapter II will show, these two individual narratives are collapsed together in all extant vernacular tellings of the story of Saint Anthony produced in French between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries.
within Athanasius’ own lifetime. It was almost immediately translated from the original Greek to the much more widely accessible Latin in not one as is frequently contended, but two individual versions. The earliest survives in only one manuscript dated to the tenth or eleventh century. It is erroneously attributed to Saint Jerome which may account for its rare invocations in critical works on Athanasius. The second is the far more popular translation by Evagrius of Antioch produced around the year 370 and it is largely in this form that the Life of Anthony would have been read by a medieval audience (Barnes 161). These two almost immediate translations attest to the importance of Anthony in Late Antique Christian culture and also foreshadow the authority of this text for its medieval readership.

The shift in the tone and style brought about by the Life of Anthony was not without signs of narrative trauma. Indeed, there is some very real tension surrounding Athanasius’ new prototype of sanctity. The author clearly states that the narrative conveyed in the Life of Anthony is meant to provide inspiration to a community of monks living in imitation of Anthony’s model of self-denial. The Life, he says, should have such important real world implications that it will be enough all by itself not only to provide a monastic rule guiding all sectors of daily life for the brothers but also to help their practice excel that of all other monks with whom they are locked in a “[…] fine contest […] to measure up to or even to surpass them in [their] discipline and virtue” (Athanasius 29). However, while the monks may genuinely be inspired by the Life, it is certainly not a monastic rule and does not expend a great deal of energy exploring Anthony’s

55 Vatican library Capitulum Sancti Petre A2, fol 69 r. incipit vita sancti antonii monachi edita a sancto Hieronymo presbytero.
56 This version was so widely disseminated that it would be impossible to list all manuscripts containing it in whole or in part. It is most easily accessed through the Vitae Patrum in the Patrologia Latina (vol. 73).
57 For comments on the wide distribution and authority of the Life of Anthony see Frazier 27; Robertson 76.
time as an abbot. Rather, it focuses on Anthony’s rejection of the social aspects of community and monastic life, depicting him as a young child unwilling to go to school with the other boys, and as a man assailed by demons in the extreme isolation of his various desert dwellings.

The suggestion within the first few paragraphs of the text that the monks who commissioned the Life ought to be able to deduce a practical set of precepts from a relatively unrelated narrative points the finger almost immediately at the metaphorical nature of the story. It is not necessarily the series of events but what they represent that is important. To that point, Athanasius is careful to explicitly eschew the notion of complete historical accuracy. He quickly tells his readership that the Life of Anthony was composed in something of a rush:

> It was my hope, when I received your letter, to send for some of the monks who were more accustomed to being near him, so that after learning something more, I might send you a fuller narrative. But since the season for sailing was coming to a close, and the letter-bearer was eager – for this reason, what I myself know […] I have hastened to write to your piety (30).

In other words, Athanasius feels his readers should know that his Life of Anthony is not adequately researched. This may be the mobilization of a modesty topos. However, it seems more likely to be a pointed disavowal of the commitment to the type of hard fact that hagiography had previously embodied. Athanasius goes on to say that in the absence of adequate time he has substituted rigorous research with his own personal experience of Anthony whom he says he knew quite well. In this way, Athanasius rests his creative authority on his own ability to relate a set of representative, if not completely historically accurate, events. This is a very different authorial persona from that more typically seen in the work of the influential church
father\textsuperscript{58} and may well be the source of the critical confusion that has led many to question his authorship of this text.\textsuperscript{59}

In the \textit{Life of Anthony}, Athanasius demonstrates an acute consciousness of the fact that he is breaking a mold and he works to build a bridge between an older version of sanctity and the new one he is proposing. He makes a point of telling the reader that Anthony lived to an exceedingly old age. In spite of his relatively recent death at the time of composition, he was old enough according to Athanasius, to have lived through the Great Persecution. This allows Anthony’s sanctity to initially manifest itself in the traditional manner: that is to say, he becomes willing to die for the faith. To that end, Athanasius makes certain to depict Anthony going to Alexandria in order to fulfill a burning desire to join the martyrs being killed under Maximian. In spite of his best attempts, however, Anthony is sent away from Alexandria alive and well by the presiding judge. Almost as though anticipating resistance to the notion that a failed martyr might in reality be a saint, Athanasius finishes the passage on Anthony’s fruitless attempt to bear witness by explaining that:

\[\ldots\] the Lord was protecting him to benefit us and others, so that he might be a teacher to many in the discipline that he had learned from the Scriptures. For simply by seeing his conduct, many aspired to become imitators of his way of life (66).

It is as though the original notion of saintliness were remodeled here so that the reader might contemplate its true source: closeness to God. The same God who saw fit to inspire the martyrs to lay down their lives created a situation whereby Anthony might survive in order to continue, not only to teach, but also to exist as a living exemplar of sanctity.

\textsuperscript{58} This is particularly in contrast with his more theologically-oriented writings such as \textit{Against the Heathen} and \textit{The Incarnation of the Word of God}, in which Athanasius presents his argument as fact in a self-assured tone that is missing from the \textit{Life of Anthony}.

\textsuperscript{59} Schaff and Wace provide a review of some of this criticism (189) although they conclude that attempts to argue against Athanasius’ authorship have proven largely unsuccessful.
It is significant that Anthony’s sanctity manifests itself through projected imitation. This mechanism is crucial to both the development of the confessor saint as a figure in Christian thought and the progress of the Anthony legend as a written text over time. We might even conceive of the task of the narrative hagiographer, as it is first undertaken by Athanasius, as a creative reworking of Anthony’s practice of ascetic saintliness. This assessment seems particularly likely in the context of medieval France, where Anthony and his story are intimately tied to the fate of Athanasius as a popular devotional figure. Throughout the Middle Ages, Athanasius’ name is mentioned at the beginning of Anthony lives with great regularity. It appears, in versions of the Latin life, usually transmitted through the Late Antique compendium referred to as the *Vitae Patrum*[^60] and much later, in the *Legenda aurea*[^61] as well as one of the two translated versions of the *Vitae Patrum*, often referred to as the *Vies des Pères*.[^62] In a period where individual authorship was an emerging notion to begin with,[^63] insistence on crediting Athanasius with writing the *Life* ought to draw attention to the importance for medieval readers, of the relationship between the story of Anthony and its textual point of origin in Athanasius.

This does not seem to be simply because of the influence of Athanasius as a patristic author. Athanasius was the bishop of Alexandria from June of 238 until his death in 373. He was

[^60]: In the Latin language *Vitae Patrum* Evagrius’ translation makes Athanasius’ authorship of the document very prominent by highlighting its epistolic nature, prefacing the translation with “*Athanasius episcopus ad peregrinos frateres*” (*Patrologia Latina* vol. 73 col. 0126).
[^61]: He is named as author in the opening etymology (128).
[^62]: For example, the *Vies des Pères* in MS. Fr. 1038 credits the “…evque de la cite d’Aleixandre qui avoit a non Athenases …” (fol. 4 of the second series) with writing the first *Life of Anthony*.
[^63]: In her article, “Did the twelfth century invent the individual?”, Caroline Walker Bynum provides an excellent summery of the major criticism surrounding this issue. In spite of some suggestions to the contrary, her conclusions seem to me the most believable. Specifically, although a version of individuality was accessible in the Middle Ages, it was still emergent and based largely on types. So, it would have been more important for an author who wished to provide his readership with a representation of himself to produce an author *type* rather than a version of himself as a specific human being.
a prolific theologian who is remembered largely for his defense of Trinitarianism against Arianism. His works had a profound effect on the church fathers that followed him but, with the exception of the *Life of Anthony*, they were aimed at the most erudite members of the Christian community. In fact, Athanasius’ role in medieval devotion does not appear to have been commensurate with that of those saints more commonly enshrined in hagiography. Although credited until the seventeenth century with the creation of the *Athanasian Creed*, Athanasius is not featured in the *Legenda aurea* other than as the cited source of the Anthony entry, nor do there appear to be any extant vernacular *vitae* of Athanasius in circulation in France. Aside from the Anthony life, Athanasius’ legacy is very much a practical one, caught up in doctrinal issues and various church practices. For the many Christians *not* participating in complex theological debate, Athanasius as a character would likely have been tied up with the story of Anthony himself, both as disciple and as hagiographer of this better-known saint.

The way for this authorial legacy is prepared by Athanasius himself. He makes it very clear, for example that Anthony is illiterate. This illiteracy is tied intimately to his special status. It is because of an aversion to the company of other boys that Anthony does not participate in the schooling given to most children of his rank. This is the first hint of his future contribution to the institution of Christendom and foreshadows the innovation of his anchoritic practice. As a result of Anthony’s inability to read Holy Scripture and implicit need to know the Word of God, Anthony is transformed into a walking, talking book. When, late in his life, he is challenged by a group of philosophers he meets in the mountains, they question how he can be a teacher and a holy example if his knowledge of scripture does not come from an experience of reading. Anthony answers, ending the philosophers’ objections: “Which is first, mind or letters? And which is the cause of which - mind of letters, or letters of mind?” (84). Anthony’s own mind is
described before this incident as so keenly attuned to any scripture he heard that it remains with him in its entirety such that “[…] in him, memory took the place of books” (32). In a sense, Anthony becomes a sort of metaphorical text that has no actual first-degree relationship to the written word.

That is not to say that the written word has no real presence in the Life of Anthony. On the contrary, this is a work that otherwise fetishizes the textual mode of representation. Scripture, of course, is the prime example and accordingly, the beginning of Anthony’s ascetic life is directly inspired by a passage from the Gospel of Saint Matthew that Anthony hears read out at church. Text is also necessary for Anthony’s saintliness to have its full impact. When Anthony performs a healing on a girl too sick to make the journey herself, Archelaus, the man who comes on her behalf, records the date and time of the healing so that the miracle may be verified when Archelaus returns home. When he arrives in his town he produces “[…] the sheet on which he had marked the time of the prayer. And checking it, he at once showed the writing on the paper, and everyone was astonished to realize that the Lord had freed [the sick girl] from her pains just when Anthony was praying […]” (77). Although the girl is healed instantly, the miracle is not complete until the written account is produced and read aloud so that it may bolster the faith of those who hear it. This incident does not simply represent an explicit intertwining of the written word with the story of Anthony but it is also a mise en abyme of the projected goals of the Life of Anthony as a written work in its own right. In the absence of Saint Anthony, the Life must take on the role of teacher previously occupied by the saint. By relating the miracles Anthony performed, the text allows his life mission of teaching by example to be completed. In this way,

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64 “If thou wouldest be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor; and come follow Me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (Matt. 19:21).
Athanasius and his role as hagiographer become an extension of the work of Saint Anthony himself.

This coupling of Anthony’s life and Athanasius writing is all the more striking given that, in spite of Athanasius’ vociferous protests, the historical Anthony was an author in his own right. He apparently wrote (or dictated) seven letters, which survive to this day\(^{65}\) in a variety of forms and languages.\(^{66}\) Even if these letters were dictated and not written by his own hand, Anthony demonstrates great insight into the philosophical and rhetorical traditions of his day (Vivian 6) suggesting literacy if not outright erudition. If these letters were known to a medieval audience at all—and it seems to me highly doubtful that they were—it would have been a very restrained audience indeed.\(^{67}\) It is not out of the question, however, for someone as close to Anthony and his work as Athanasius was to have known about them, nor is it impossible to think that the monks for whom the *Life* was originally written might have been familiar with the letters as well. As such, Athanasius’ implicit claim to give voice to Anthony’s saintly mission may in itself have been conceived of in order to highlight Athanasius’ creative role in transforming Anthony’s lived experience into a written text.

This imaginative take to hagiographical writing may seem unlikely given that prior to writing the *Life of Anthony*, Athanasius’ concept of hagiography would have been, like that of his contemporaries, largely based on first hand documentation and *pièces de convictions*.

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\(^{65}\) Available in English through Samuel Rubenson’s edition.\(^{66}\) See Rubenson’s exhaustive study of this issue esp. pp. 15-33.\(^{67}\) A version was produced in Latin in 1475 by Valerio de Sarasio based on a Greek manuscript he claims to have found in the Vatican library. It was published for the first time in 1516 by Symphorianus Champerius in *Epistolae Sanctissimorum* and reprinted eleven times between the 16\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) centuries (see Rubenson 19). This does not account for its location between the 10\(^{th}\) century Georgian version and this Latin one disseminated only at the end of the medieval period. An Arabic version existed that may have been translated around 1270 or 1271 (20) but this does not allow us to situate it among a wide readership in France. Functionally, I am inclined to agree with Tim Vivian when he suggests that they were lost entirely to a medieval public (6).
However, Athanasius goes out of his way to supplement his auctorial relationship to Anthony’s story with a distinct mark of authorship, almost a signature. As Anthony is dying, he instructs his attendants on how to divide his meager property (a cloak, two sheepskins and a hair garment). Among Anthony’s three beneficiaries, Athanasius is the only person to receive more than one article. He is given both the cloak and one of the sheepskins. The sheepskin is something of a generic gift. Anthony gives the other to Serapion, another prominent Bishop. This can easily be read in line with Athanasius’ major goals of protecting the faith from heresy, as a gesture designed to indicate Anthony’s respect for institutional orthodoxy. The cloak, on the other hand, is a garment with its own story. It was originally a gift from Athanasius to Anthony and Anthony so prized it that he has all but worn it out. Still, he would like it restored to its original owner. The gifting and re-gifting of the cloak clearly demonstrates a relationship of Christian love between the two men during Anthony’s lifetime but it also demonstrates how, in death, Anthony designates Athanasius as special compared to his other followers; it is Athanasius and no one else, that will have the privilege of safeguarding a garment so well worn that it can almost be read as a synecdoche for the long life that reduced it to tatters. Athanasius does not leave the reception of this metaphor to chance. He tells his reader outright that the garments, have a special power: “For even seeing these is like beholding Anthony, and wearing them is like bearing his admonitions with joy” (98). If Anthony’s material bequest to Athanasius represents the entrustment of the younger man with his spiritual legacy of his elder, the cloak in particular is a way for Anthony to pass his life story to Athanasius. This explicates the sharing of the hagiographical burden: Anthony lives a holy life worthy of imitation and Athanasius continues

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68 For a discussion of the important role of Church politics in the Life of Anthony, see for example “The Spirituality and Politics of the Life of Anthony” in David Brakke’s book Athanasius and Asceticism (201-265).
this mission by transforming it into a template for others to lead such holy lives. One might go so far as to say that the cloak is a representation of the written vita as much as it is of Anthony’s lived experience.

For a medieval audience, the relationship between the garments and the act of writing is likely to have been even more important than Athanasius would have predicted. Although parchment was used in the Late Antique world, papyrus seems to have remained the major writing surface until after Athanasius’ death, especially in Egypt.\textsuperscript{69} Thanks to the ubiquity of parchment in medieval manuscripts, however, the medieval reader would have been primed to take the sheepskin as a \textit{mise en abyme} of the very text he is reading.\textsuperscript{70} Specifically, a medieval reader of the \textit{Life of Anthony} would almost certainly have learned of Anthony’s bequeathment of sheepskins to Serapion and Athanasius by encountering the story copied onto an actual animal skin.\textsuperscript{71} The proximity of the intradiegetic sheepskin and the extradiegetic folium creates a conduit for the important role of writing in accomplishing Athanasius’ task of transmitting Anthony’s story. On parchment, the skin and the cloak together become a very convincing representation of the book object itself. If the cloak continues to embody the story of Anthony, the sheepskin becomes the actual material source that contains it. From this perspective Athanasius’ authority over the transmission of Anthony’s life is linked concretely to its transmission through text for a medieval readership.

\textsuperscript{69} For comments on the transition from papyrus to parchment in the fourth century, see Bischoff 8.
\textsuperscript{70} For more on the relationships between intra-diegetic skins and the parchment of medieval manuscripts, see Sarah Kay’s article “Original Skin: Flaying, Reading and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works”.
\textsuperscript{71} It is worth noting at least in passing that medieval manuscripts were frequently copied onto parchment made of sheepskin. I do not linger on this point because it seems unlikely to me that the majority of medieval readers would stop to ask themselves if the book they held in their hands had once been a sheep instead of a goat or a cow any more than a modern reader wonders if his or her books are printed on maple rather than birch or oak.
However, while Athanasius is careful to establish his individual authorship he does so while simultaneously promoting a brand of creativity that undercuts his narrative authority. He begins the *Life* with a concession to the possible additions that will or already have been made to his story, thus preparing the way for other writers to add to the legend:

Do not be incredulous about what you hear of [Anthony] from those who make reports. Consider, rather, that from them only a few of his feats have been learned, for these hardly gave full description of so much. And even, if persuaded by you, I sent as much as I could convey through the letter, recalling a few of the things about him, do not fail to put questions to those who sail from here. For perhaps after each tells what he knows the account concerning him would still scarcely do him justice (29-30).

The *Life of Anthony* sends a double message regarding its projected role in the world of hagiographical representation. On the one hand, it is authoritative, unique and the work of a single writer: Athanasius – the person that Anthony himself chose for the task. On the other, it is simultaneously imperfect, elastic and able to be modified by others. As a self-conscious first in the new hagiographical tradition, the *Life of Anthony* leaves us with food for thought on the manner in which a narrative life might operate. Clearly, we are dealing with a text that is willing to step outside of the relatively empirical principles of contemporary historical method.  

Athanasius goes so far as to suggest that the specific elements that constitute the story are not necessarily the most important parts of the *narrative* hagiography that he is offering to his reader. While this initially seems counterintuitive, disavowing the primacy of historical fact opens this kind of hagiography to innovation through imitation. Instead of simply repeating a single story as the early martyr imitated Christ, the devotional act was now to consist of interactive participation in the narrative reimagining of a life just as Anthony himself reimagined the traditional mode of saintly living.

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72 For a succinct discussion of Classical understandings of the relationship between factual accuracy and historical writing, see Gossman 228; 231-233.
Saint Jerome and the Aesthetic of Rewriting

The built-in malleability of the *Life of Anthony* was seized on very quickly and became codified even when the tradition of Anthony's sanctity was quite young. As early as 375, Saint Jerome's *Vita Pauli primi hermeticae* appears as a prequel to Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*. Jerome probably knew Athanasius' text through the intermediary of Evagrius' translation (Barnes 161) and uses his life of Paul to work backwards from Athanasius' narrative in order to create a mentor for Anthony, in a sense subordinating the *Life of Anthony* to a new externally established teleology. Jerome begins his text with the acknowledgment of a contemporary controversy:

“Inter multos saepe dubitatum est a quo potissimum monachorum eremus habitari coepta sit” (144) [Many have often wondered which monk was the very first to inhabit the desert]. After some discussion, Jerome reveals that most people think of Anthony as that venerable first ascetic monk. But, he says, these people are all wrong. It was not Anthony but a certain Paul of Thebes with whom the tradition originated. Jerome will therefore endeavor to provide what he admits to be a limited view of Paul's life as a complement to the abundant literature available on Saint Anthony.

In spite of its name, the *Vita Pauli* is not particularly concerned with the details of Paul's life. Although it develops some facts surrounding Paul’s childhood and vocation, this only takes up about one third of the total work. The remaining two thirds focus narration largely through Saint Anthony's perspective. At ninety years old Anthony has been in isolation for many years

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73 All translations from Saint Jerome’s hagiographical texts are my own but owe an enormous debt to Pierre Leclerc and his French translation of Edgardo Morales’ Latin Edition.
74 “…pauc a de Pauli principio et fine scribere disposui… Quomodo autem in media aetate uixerit, aut quas Satanae pertulerit insidias, nulli hominum compertum habetur.” (146) [I have decided to write a little about Paul’s childhood and death […] But how he lived in the middle of his life, or the assaults of Satan he endured, no one knows]
and like most of his peers, believes that he is the first and only hermit to have taken up an anchoritic practice in the desert. One day, God sends him a vision of Paul, a one hundred and thirteen year old hermit who, unbeknownst to all, had preceded Anthony in the eremitical lifestyle. Anthony, chastened by the realization that he has an estimable predecessor, sets out to find Paul in the hopes that he might learn from him. After a grueling journey (discussed in detail in Chapter II) Anthony finds Paul and is admitted to his cell. The two greet each other like old friends and, after spending a day together, Paul tells Anthony that he expects to die very soon. Anthony is despondent at the prospect of losing his new friend but promises to return to bury him after accomplishing Paul's last wishes. After doing Paul’s bidding and committing the older hermit to the ground with the help of two friendly lions, Anthony returns to his community where he celebrates Easter and relates Paul's story to his disciples.

It can be stated with reasonable confidence that Jerome's *Vita Pauli* is written in response to Athanasius' *Life of Anthony* and not another manifestation of this story. In spite of Jerome's early invocation of an anonymous multiplicity of texts dealing with the story of Anthony, a particularly elegant detail developed at some length in this text reveals that the relationship that Jerome wished to establish between the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* is one that takes careful account of Athanasius’ role as author. The cloak given to Anthony by Athanasius and subsequently willed back to Athanasius at the time of Anthony’s death reappears in the *Vita Pauli* carefully adjusted to accommodate Jerome’s new narrative synchrony. In the *Life of Anthony*, the cloak is depicted first as Anthony’s make-shift deathbed and then as Athanasius’ treasured link to Anthony. The *Vita Pauli* rewrites the timeline in such a way as to render these

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75 “[…] de Antonio tam Graeco quam Romano stilo diligenter memoriae traditum est […]” (146) […both Greek and Roman writers have handed down careful accounts of Anthony]. There is no record that these accounts constitute anything other than Athanasius’ original *Life* and Evagrius’ Latin translation.
physical locations impossible. Here, as Paul prepares to die, he makes a request of Anthony:

“Quamobrem, perge, quaeso, nisi molestum est, et pallium quod tibi Athanasius episcopus dedit, ad obuoluendum corpusculum meum, defer” (170) [Therefore, go, I beg you, if it is not a hardship, and bring me the cloak that Athanasius the bishop gave to you, and wrap my body in it”]. Anthony is stunned that Paul knows of the cloak but he obliges Paul’s request and after returning to his own cell to fetch the cloak buries it with Paul. On the one hand, this bestows some of Athanasius’ own authority on Jerome and his new hermit, as though by having Paul wrapped in a cloak that originally belonged to Athanasius, Jerome were conferring the older author’s blessing on this new and in many ways disruptive narrative. On the other hand, according to Saint Jerome’s rewritten order of asceticism, the final pages of the Life of Anthony could not have taken place. In this new teleology, the all-important cloak that represents Anthony’s life and Athanasius’ authority is in the ground with Paul fifteen years before Anthony’s death, making it impossible for him to will it to Athanasius. So, by repositioning the cloak with his own character, Jerome also wrests narrative control away from Athanasius. It might be most economical to say that Jerome undoes Athanasius’ signature in order to reappropriate it and thereby assert authorial control over the narrative of saintly asceticism that he intends to develop over both his Vita Pauli and Athanasius’ Life of Anthony (Robertson 91-92).

This does not mean that Jerome is encouraging his readers to imagine that Athanasius is an apostate or that Anthony died without a cloak to lie on or a legacy to leave his friends. On the contrary, he is careful to highlight the fact that Anthony finds something new to wear. After spending a night near Paul’s grave, Anthony prepares to go on his way but he first takes Paul’s tunic as the just reward of a spiritual heir (“haeres pius”) (178). I do not find it unreasonable to
think that Jerome would have his readers believe that instead of spending the rest of his mortal life in a cloak given to him by Athanasius, Anthony spends at least part of his mortal life in the tunic of Paul. I do not find it any less likely that Jerome is encouraging his readers to believe that Paul’s tunic is the garment eventually bequeathed to Athanasius at the end of the narrative recounted in the Life of Anthony. By burying the cloak of Athanasius, Jerome also buries the authority of the earlier hagiographer. The suggestion is that the implicit placement of Anthony, and Athanasius after him, in the garments of Paul, enacts Jerome’s creative power over the preexisting tradition, as though he were demonstrating the mechanics of his own rewriting process even as he is telling the revised history of asceticism.

The abrupt insertion of the character of Saint Paul into the eremitical narrative is tightly interwoven with the possible representations of Jerome's own authorial profile. Modern historians believe that no historical Paul ever existed, pointing out that prior to the Vita Pauli there is no evidence of any hermit named Paul living in or around Thebes (Barnes 161). It is most likely that Jerome invented Paul just as he appears to have invented the narrative of Malchus the loyal monk (176). For the modern reader this knowledge is sufficient to transform Paul and his vita into signifiers of Jerome's creativity. From the medieval perspective, however, the possibility of doubting Jerome's account was not available in the same way. Jerome was a widely cited source not only of ecclesiastical authority but also, as I explore in detail hereafter, literary truth.76 And, Paul like Malchus was thought of as a particularly venerable historical figure due to his landmark role in the development of the Christian institution, a fact that is

76 A translation of the Vitae Patrum, commonly referred to as the champenois translation of the Vies des Pères insists that in contrast to the evils of such romances as Cligès and Perceval, “Jeromes dit que cuers entiers / N’ot pas menconge volontiers” [Jerome says that honest hearts do not allow lies.] (MS. Fr. 1038 fol. 4v of the first series). This passage is also quoted below in a close reading of this prologue.
demonstrated by the inclusion of both Paul and Malchus in the *Vitae Patrum*. However, even when the potential fictionality of Paul and his eremitical practice are not acknowledged the strangeness with which his life story is introduced casts doubt on the factual importance of the narrative before it even begins.

If the *Vita Pauli* opens with Jerome's thoughts on the identity of the first saintly hermit, it rapidly becomes clear that for Jerome, it is not important whether it was Anthony or anyone else; what matters is the impact of a hermit’s good works on the Christian world and not his primacy or lack thereof. Of Anthony’s role in the eremitical institution, Jerome writes: “non enim tam ipse ante omnes fuit, quam ab eo omnium incitata sunt studia” (144) [he did not come before all others so much as he provided the necessary stimulus to all others]. In other words, although Paul came before Anthony and was respected as an elder by Anthony, Jerome frames his *Vita* in such a way that Paul has no practical bearing on the development of an eremitical tradition. Rather, Jerome preemptively rejects the usefulness of the very teleology that the story of Paul at least cosmetically seeks to reinstate. This creates an ethos for both the *Vita Pauli* and the *Life of Anthony* that replaces the potential importance of historical order with an aesthetic of imitation that allows God’s saints, seen or unseen, known or unknown to engage in different versions of the same struggle. As though it were responding to Athanasius' call for additions to the story of Anthony, the *Vita Pauli* does not merely provide new details on Anthony’s life but also expands the creative elasticity of saintly representation first hinted at in the *Life of Anthony*.

The development this implies in modes of hagiographical writing is significant. The *Vita Pauli* does not merely provide new material to the narrative unit that is the *Life of Saint Anthony*; it does so by supplying the reader with a saint created in Anthony’s image according to the

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77 Emphasis mine.
model of his original vita. In this sense, Paul is a sort of perversion, or better, a reinterpretation of Anthony just as the Vita Pauli is a rewriting of the Life of Anthony. This quite literally gives body to Athanasius’ indistinct call for narrative expansion, proposing a mechanism of saintly replication to serve this purpose. Even for readers unaware of the fact that the Life of Anthony was written prior to the Vita Pauli, Jerome’s disavowal of the teleological tradition with which he seems to engage brings about an ethos of hagiographical composition that is based on an infinite possibility, not of creating new saintly narratives, but of rewriting a single saintly model regardless of the individual identity of the saint in question or of the historical moment of his earthly life.

It is interesting, then, that much of the traction Anthony gained in Late Antique and medieval literary culture is thanks to the Vita Pauli or more specifically, the aesthetic of creative rewriting it engendered. Following the example set in this text, the character of Saint Anthony becomes something of a staple in the lives of various saints, usually as a source of guidance. He inspires the conversion of Saint Hilarion in Saint Jerome’s Vita Hilarionis; he is transformed by engaging with the effortless piety of Paul the simple in the anonymous Life of Paul the Simple, and he is regularly invoked as either a character or a source of inspiration in the Apophthegmata Patrum, a collection of wisdom literature that would be known to a francophone readership during the Middle Ages through Henri d’Arci’s translation, titled, like translations of the Vitae Patrum, the Vies des Pères. As anchoritic sanctity caught on and narrative hagiography gained ground Anthony began to provide a stamp of approval to the stories of new hermits. This calls attention not only to the fact that the younger saints are imitating his venerable example but also to the fact that the writers of these new narrative lives are following in the footsteps of Athanasius. These texts, like the Vita Pauli heed the call to add to, and even change, Anthony’s
story. This is true because new saints are as much in need of Anthony’s approval as new
hagiographers find strength in Athanasius’ aesthetic and ecclesiastical clout. However it is also
ture because the lives of new ascetics, like the *Vita Pauli*, frequently added new and
unprecedented material to the story of Saint Anthony. It is as though the figure of Saint Anthony,
the story of his life, and, in a way, the whole eremitical discipline depend upon the distortion of
Athanasius’ original *Life of Anthony* according to the model set by Jerome’s *Vita Pauli*. As new
saints followed Anthony’s discipline and new writers explored the limits of creativity, the
literary couple created by the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* propelled both Anthony’s
legend and the narrative format it pioneered into an important and discernable tradition.

**Making Connections and Bridging Gaps : Anthony in the Old French *Vies des Pères***

The similarities between Anthony and the desert ascetics that followed his real and
literary examples were of such importance to contemporary Christians that, before Anthony had
been dead one hundred years, the lives of desert hermits were being collected into compendia
designed to celebrate the ascetic saint as a recognizable type. This includes Rufinus of Aquileia’s
fifth century *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* and Palladius’ Greek *Apophthegmata Patrum*,
which were often combined with original lives like the *Vita Pauli*, the *Vita Hilarionis*, and the
*Life of Anthony* into Latin language compendia known as the *Vitae Patrum*. Consequently, it was
very natural for a medieval readership to encounter the *Life of Anthony* alongside the lives of the
various hermits that Anthony had inspired. In the thirteenth century, the *Vitae Patrum* began to
be translated into the vernacular under the title, the *Vies des Pères*. *Vies des Pères* texts are,
generally speaking, made up of either loose or faithful translations of Late Antique compendia,
often with a strong accent on Rufinus’ *Historia Monachorum*. To this material are often added
translations of newer texts such as excerpts from the dialogues of Gregory the Great as is seen in
the Bibliothèque de Carpentras MS 473 and the life of Saint Francis as is seen in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS Fr. 430 and 9760.\textsuperscript{78}

Among the group of texts that goes by the title, \textit{Vies des Pères}, two near contemporary although entirely unaffiliated versions provide us with the earliest extant examples of vernacular Anthony \textit{vita}e produced in France.\textsuperscript{79} The most commonly thought to be the earliest is a work typically dated to 1212 containing Wauchier de Denain's prose translations from the \textit{Historia Monachorum} and survives in any complete manner in only one manuscript (Bibliothèque de Carpentras MS 473), with the loss of a some folia at the end of the \textit{Life of Saint Anthony}. However, excerpts of Wauchier's translations are scattered through a number of known manuscripts including the Bibliothèque d'Arras 307, Dublin Trinity College B.28 and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS NAF 23686. The other version of the \textit{Vie des Pères} was produced by an anonymous author for Blanche de Champagne and is generally dated to the first half of the thirteenth century although it could in reality have been produced any time between 1199 and 1229.\textsuperscript{80} With its oft-quoted verse prologue, it is usually referred to as the \textit{champenois} version. Complete manuscripts survive in good condition for this text at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (MS. Fr. 1038) and at the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon (MS. No.773).

In spite of some notable differences between these two versions, a particularly telling constant illuminates a key element of the reception of the Late Antique sources of the legend of Saint Anthony. The disposition of the lives of the early hermits in both Wauchier's version and

\textsuperscript{78} For full details on the collection of texts that go by the title, \textit{Vies des Pères}, as well as their contents, see Meyer 254-327.
\textsuperscript{79} An earlier vernacular translation of the \textit{Life of Anthony}, dating from some time in the twelfth century appears to have been undertaken by a certain Alfrid for Baudoin II, the count of Guines and Ardres (Morawski 68) but is only known through the passing reference to the text by the chronicler Lambert d’Ardres and has either been lost or destroyed.
\textsuperscript{80} These are the dates that Blanche lived in Champagne. Since the prologue interpolates her using this name, it is conceivable that the text was compiled at any time during this range (Meyer 295).
the *champenois* version respects the original order at least for the first two narratives; Saint Jerome's *Vita Pauli* is first, followed by Athanasius' *Life of Anthony*. Whether this was the work of the authors or of the manuscript organizers is, of course, impossible to discern positively. However it is quite clear that an explicit choice is being made at some stage in the medieval book-making process since there is neither a complete acquiescence to tradition across the two texts nor is there an utter abandonment of it.\(^{81}\) The desire to create a coherent and teleological progression in the development of eremitical sanctity was a preoccupation that medieval thinkers shared with their Late Antique counterparts. By cobbling individual lives together into a cohesive unit, the narrative *glissement* observed in the *Vita Pauli* is reinforced by the chronological ordering of the *Vie de Saint Pol* and the *Vie de Saint Antoine* in the *Vies des Pères*. In other words, if Jerome intended to have his readers think of the *Vita Pauli* as a narrative addition to the *Life of Anthony*, he had succeeded. The physical coupling of the two texts in the *Vies des Pères* insures that they be received as parts of a single story. One might go so far as to say that the aesthetic of saintly rewriting, first created by Jerome for the *Vita Pauli*, is the principle that supports the very existence of such volumes as the *Vies des Pères*. This work builds individual stories into a single narrative of sanctity based on the repetitive discipline that links one saint to the next. The intertextual joining together of multiple hermits exemplifies Jerome’s aesthetic of creative rewriting, as the boundaries that separate stories from one another blur and a single narrative tradition emerges. From the medieval perspective, then, the kind of imitation that originally underpinned the development of the legend of Saint Anthony in the Late

\(^{81}\) The only complete surviving version of Wauchier’s *Vies des Pères* adheres to tradition by book-ending Anthony’s life between the life of Paul, his mentor, and Hilarion, his student, while the *champenois Vies des Pères* in MS Fr. 1038 replaces Hilarion with a certain *Jeahns li Hermites* (11v of the second series).
Antique world was by no means experimental; it had become a canonical manner of performing and representing the saintly institution.

Where Wauchier’s version diverges from its *champenois* counterpart is also particularly telling. Wauchier’s translation leans even further into the example set by the *Vita Pauli*, refusing to distinguish the authorship of the translated lives of Paul and Anthony. Instead, Waucher attributes both stories to Saint Jerome. The particular version housed in BNF NAF 23686 goes so far as to place both lives under a single rubric: “Ci commence la vie Sai[n]t Antoine” [Here begins the Life of Saint Anthony] (fol. 80r).\(^\text{82}\) In this manuscript, the texts are separated from one another only by historiated initials at the beginning of each narrative (fol. 81r and fol. 83r). However, both images depict Anthony, and not Paul, as their protagonists, reinforcing the notion that both stories constitute a single *vita*. Little is known about Wauchier. If nothing else, however, we can be relatively sure of his erudition.\(^\text{83}\) This makes his claim to be translating from the Latin (fol 81v) a believable one, which, in turn, supports the possibility that the decision to provide only one author for both the story of Paul and the story of Anthony was Wauchier’s own. This editorial initiative speaks to the penetration of Jerome’s aesthetic of rewriting in the medieval world, providing a foretaste of a trend that extends well beyond Wauchier de Denain’s *Vies des Pères*. As Chapter II will reveal, the full collapsing of both saints’ stories under the single title of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* became a mainstay of medieval Anthony narratives. This tradition of narrative melting ensured that the practice of eremitical sanctity was received during the medieval period as one of replication, as readers encounter the story of Paul’s invention of

\(^{82}\) All transcriptions of Wauchier de Denain’s *Vies des Pères* are taken from BNF MS NAF. 23686. Translation from Old French is my own throughout this dissertation unless otherwise indicated.

\(^{83}\) He is the author of one of the continuations of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Conte du Graal*, translator of a version of the *Dialogues of Gregory the Great* and presumed to be the author of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu’à César*. **
the ascetic discipline within the story of Anthony’s *reinvention* of this same discipline. However, the case of Wauchier’s translations in particular—quite possibly the first vernacular merging of the *Vita Pauli* and the *Life of Anthony*—also speaks to Wauchier’s understanding and acceptance of the role of creative authorship in disposing the events of saintly stories, here enacting his authority not just over the depiction of the intradegetic saints but their authorial counterparts as well.

The translation done for Blanche de Champagne, on the other hand, is careful to preserve markers of original authorship, crediting Jerome on the one hand for the *Vie de Saint Pol* and Athanasius on the other for the *Vie de Saint Antoine*. Although the *champenois* translator does smooth over certain intricacies in the interest of simplicity, the fact that the foundational texts of the eremitical tradition were written by two different authors is meticulously maintained in spite of the impulse, similar to Wauchier’s, of placing the lives of Paul and Anthony one after the next in the chronological order established by the *Vita Pauli*. This preserves the cyclical nature of hagiographical authorship, capable of being shared by more than one writer in more than one narrative, alongside the imitational nature of saintliness itself.

While, at first glance, this may appear to convey a different ethos of hagiographical writing than that promoted by Wauchier, it ultimately serves the same purpose: that of setting a new authorial persona in a hereditary position with respect to the story of Saint Anthony the Great. Whereas Wauchier alters original authorship in order to promote his own, the *champenois* translator adds a lengthy prologue to his collection of translations in which he discusses the role he sees himself occupying in the contemporary literary world. It begins in the way that many

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84 Chapter II will address the merging of Anthony and Paul’s stories in the Latin-language texts, *De nugis curialium* (late twelfth or early thirteenth century) and *Otia imperialia* (early thirteenth century)
religious texts do, by extolling the virtue of Christian literature and those who write it: “Ceus qui ont sens et savoir / qu’il enseignent si con il doivent/ car cil qui l’amour Dieu recoivent /s’il ne l’emploient et aprennent / l’escriture dit qu’il meprennent” [May those who have good sense and education teach as it is fitting, because those who receive the love of God must use it or, according to Scripture, they are in error].

The champenois translator goes on to somewhat predictably link himself explicitly with those qui ont sens et savoir and proposes that the text he has prepared is just such an instance of laudable religious instruction: “Par vous [Blanche] encomencai ceste euvre/ pour cuers de Crestiens esmeuvre /a bien penser et a bien faire /et pour eus de pechie retraire” [Through your intermediary, I have begun this work so that it may move the hearts of Christians to think and do good and to pull them away from sin]. As is the case in similar prologues produced throughout the Middle Ages the writer uses this moment in order to establish his authority. Modesty topoi and the demonstrations of deference to the author’s patron are practical necessities of this rhetoric and can be largely pushed to the side. The translator is using this opportunity to remind the readership of his personal role in composition and of the usefulness of this contribution. In short, translation or otherwise, as long as we are in this textual universe, we are in a world that the translator is careful to claim as his own creation.

The champenois translator goes further into detail than many of his peers do about the role that he sees his text playing in the literary world of his day. “Leissez Cligès et Perceval qui les cuers tue et met a mal!” [Forget Cligès and Perceval who slaughter and torment good hearts] (fol. 4v. of the first series) he tells his readers. Romance and other secular stories, he warns, are

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85 Transcriptions from the champenois Vie des Pères are taken from BNF MS. Fr. 1038. Translation and editing are my own.
86 The translator has just finished praising Blanche for asking him to write this book.
87 See the Anglo-Norman lives of Saint Catherine (vv. 1-50) and Saint Lawrence (vv. 1-74); Wace’s prologues Life of Saint Nicolas (vv.1-44) and Simund de Freine’s Vie de Saint Georges (vv. 1-24) for a few examples.
not true literature but a mere simulacrum of such useful texts because “…si font mençonges rimer” [they rhyme lies with lies] (fol. 4r of the first series) and lies are not the matter of a real literature. After all, he goes on to say, “Jeromes dit que cuers entiers / N’ot pas menconge volntiers.” [Jerome says that honest hearts do not allow lies.] (fol. 4v of the first series). By this standard, the Vie des Pères, a text that opens with a translation of Saint Jerome could hardly be truer and this, all thanks to the author’s own virtue in bringing it to his readers. A somewhat torturous set of propositions can be gleaned from this prologue that come down to opposing texts of which Jerome would have disapproved (romance) with texts that he would have wholeheartedly accepted (the Vie des Pères). By setting up the equation of romance with falsehood and his own version of the Vie des Pères with truth, the champenois translator demonstrates his creative task to be not only a worthwhile pursuit but a specific extension of Jerome’s work of creative rewriting. By positioning this prologue such that it gives way to Jerome’s own narration of the Vie de Saint Pol and allowing this in turn to cede its place to Athanasius’ voice in the Vie de Saint Antoine, the translator reminds his reader that it is his influence that has filtered the two narratives together into a novel literary entity.

Both versions of the Vies des Pères, then, marshal the Late Antique texts they translate into new iterations of the life story of Saint Anthony the Great by integrating it, to a greater or lesser extent, with the eremitical tradition he created alongside Saint Paul. More importantly, they alloy the creative power of the translators with that of Saint Jerome, the first rewriter of the Anthony tradition. It is this ability to imitate Jerome that is cited by both Wauchier and the champenois translator as the legitimizing source of their texts. While the Vies des Pères, like other medieval legendaria, provides an appearance of what in modern terms we might think of as a historicist mission, that of cataloguing the saints and their exploits, the champenois translator
gives voice to a deeper concern that these works share: that of providing a text capable of transcending the telling of events to quite literally change the fate of the reader’s mortal soul. Wauchier himself expresses much the same desire in his much shorter and decidedly more prosaic prologue, citing the *Vies des Pères* as a source of information that will help the sincere reader to understand the “œuvres par laquelle l’en puett parvenir en la haute misericorde de Dieu” (81v) [works through which one may reach the great mercy of God] which he adds is equal to nothing less consequential than “la vie parmenable” (81v) [eternal life].

Significantly, neither Wauchier nor the *champenois* translator attempts to accomplish this goal by returning to the documentary model of hagiography that preceded *The Life of Anthony*. Instead they both continue to depend on the kind of saintly imitation and reinvention first observed in the *Vita Palui*. While the teleologizing of the eremitical tradition in the *Vies des Pères* creates movement toward what might be thought of as a normative approach to saintliness, it does not so much unify a saintly history as it fragments the voices through which this single narrative can be carried, to include, depending on the text and manuscript, Athanasius, Jerome and, above all, the translator himself. The result is not so much a representation of the facts of saintly history as it is a many-voiced rehearsal of an aesthetic of saintliness. As translators call upon the authority of their Antique source material they create a sort of catalogue of tropes of sanctity that can be and, as Chapter II will discuss, regularly are called upon by future writers in the service of new hagiographical production.

**Conclusion**

As medieval thinkers took on the Saint Anthony material, they recreated both Athanasius’ belief in authorial control and Jerome’s aesthetic of respectful rewriting. From this,
a narrative tradition began to emerge that prized these two elements as aesthetic tools just as highly as it did their ability to pursue the representation of facts. This focus on representing the spirit of the truth as opposed to factually accurate events has been put forward time and again as the dominant model of medieval representations of textual veracity. However, in the case of hagiography, there is something almost subversive about this ethos of truthfulness.

Prior to the *Life of Anthony*, the hagiographical tradition had been based on first degree *Imitatio Christi*. In this sense, saintliness was a performance of Godliness. Athanasius’ creation of a narrative arc in which only holy life was a factor in sanctity short-circuited the hagiographical tradition’s dependency on Christological mimesis. In the tradition that stems from the *Life of Anthony*, Anthony’s whole life story becomes a sort of structural stand-in for the figure of Christ in more traditional saintly models. Not only does this place a mortal at the core of the new pattern of saintly repetition but the *story* of that mortal’s life becomes a synecdoche for the man himself. Consequently, the arc of the narrative as a representational tool takes precedence over the bare facts of the individual life. And it is, as this chapter has demonstrated, through the rewriting of this narrative, that is to say the imitation of the textual model of Anthony, that the tradition of eremitical sanctity moved with great fluidity through the Late Antique and medieval worlds.

This leaves us with a set of data that may be difficult to reconcile. The amount of freedom allowed to hagiographers and the authorial influence provided even to translators of works like the *Vies des Pères* betrays an amount of fancy inconsistent with certain tenants of

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88 See especially Suzanne Fleischman’s article “History and Fiction in the Middle Ages” in *History and Theory*. For more detailed commentary on the importance and use of tropes in the depiction of truth, see Beer 9-11; Morse 1-13; 138-157.
medieval Christianity. The need for the question of representational truth to be brought up explicitly by the champenois translator of the *Vies des Pères* and alluded to by Wauchier de Denain speaks to the uneasiness of the relationship between human imagination and devotional representation in the hagiographical context. Medieval hagiography as it is presented in the *Vies des Pères* stands with disquieting purpose at the brink of a great divide between tradition and innovation, between teleology and cyclicity. The saints are inscribed in the forward progression of humanity from the Creation to the End of Days. However, transmission of their stories through the revisiting of old texts causes this tradition simultaneously to bend back upon itself. For a hagiographical text to be particularly useful, as the champenois translator and Wauchier claim their texts to be, it must somehow improve on, or at the very least bring original insight to, older more authoritative texts without disrupting the source of that original authority. This is, in fact, the explicit claim made by a number of hagiographers throughout the medieval period.

Hagiographical writing, then, is a balancing act, almost an act of prestidigitation. And, the subjectivity inherent in determining its success opens the way for saintly stories to experience a sort of crisis of believability. Chapter II will visit this breakdown in the mechanics of hagiographical representation in greater detail by examining the original Latin and vernacular reinterpretations of the Late Antique Anthony narratives translated in the *Vies des Pères*. New additions to the story of Saint Anthony over the course of the medieval period allow this figure

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89 Unity of fact was a very serious issue in the Christian context. Doctrinal debates, for example attest to a genuine belief in the ability, even the necessity, to interpret texts and events in the single correct manner intended by God. Less than two hundred years prior to Wauchier’s translation, dispute over the Filioque doctrine played an instrumental role in the East-West Schism (see Siecienski 63) and although belief systems varied widely, heresy was clearly regarded as a mistaken or self-interested perversion of doctrine in the French context as the Middle Ages progressed. For an example, see Jean Leclerq’s remarks on Bernard de Clairvaux’s view of heresy.

90 See, for example, Clemence of Barking’s *Life of Saint Catherine* (vv. 31-51) or the anonymous Anglo-Norman *Life of Saint Lawrence* (vv. 54-64).
to become frightening and often less than saintly. The following chapter discusses the strategies employed in order to tame and in many ways, harness this failure of credibility in order to continue the foreword progress of Anthony and the tradition he inspired.
Chapter II: Translatio Antonii
Writing Beyond Translation 1200-1503

Je ne vous expose pas en françois ces oroysons et ses versés, ce dit le translateur, pour ce que telle chose requiert foy […]
- Jean d’Antioche, Le Livre de grand délit

Introduction: Rewritings, Translations and Narrative Tension

Over the course of the medieval period, the fictitious format of hagiographical writing engendered by the Late Antique depictions of Anthony studied in the previous chapter would come to dominate representations of saintliness from legendaria to mystery plays, as hagiographies expanded to include not only the story of a saint’s full life, often starting in childhood, but also specific details that could not possibly have been part of the first hand experience of a single witness. In fact, whether dealing with martyr saints or confessor saints, medieval conceptions of sanctity depended upon the vast narrative scope afforded by Athanasius’ fictitious model.

The kind of text discussed in Chapter I does not account for the whole of the medieval hagiographical field, however. These works are embodiments of the authoritative Late Antique roots of Anthony’s story, and their entry into the vernacular is facilitated by a process of translation that is to say, a procedure grounded in mimetic fidelity to a definitive source. Meanwhile, the Middle Ages saw the flourishing of another form of hagiographical production based more on imagination than on imitation. These texts—what I shall refer to, following Goullet

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91 Jean d’Antioche’s translation of Otia Imperialia (XClII. 17-20, 342) [I do not reveal these prayers and these verses in French, so says the translator, because such things require faith…]
92 The Legenda aurea’s telling of the Life of Saint Bernard begins even before the saint’s birth with an account of the prophetic dreams sent to his mother during her pregnancy (657).
93 The intertwining lives of Saint Thaïs and Saint Paphnutius in Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim’s mystery play, Paphnutius, depict moments from the lives of both Paphnutius and Thaïs that would not have been known to any one character in the play. For example, it depicts Paphnutius’ exchange with his abbot (Saint Anthony) to which only he and Anthony are privy (138-140), as well as Thaïs’s private exchanges with her lovers (125-127).
and Heinzelmann—as hagiographical *rewritings*\(^\text{94}\) are often inspired by older written sources such as those collected in the *Vies des Père*.\(^\text{95}\) However, they afford their authors a consequential increase in creative freedom relative to that allowed to hagiographical translators. The line between translation and rewriting is often fine, finer than modern understandings of these terms might lead one to suspect and at times, the two may even blur together.\(^\text{96}\) Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction, generally speaking, between the authorial process taken on in translation and that taken on in rewriting. Specifically, whereas medieval translators generally strove for fidelity to their sources within the parameters of meter and cultural intelligibility, rewriters were open to the alteration not only of aesthetic components of the legends they engaged with but narrative ones as well. One might think for example, of the contrast between the translated texts that make up the tradition of Saint Eustace and the selection of creative rewritings contained within the tradition of Saint Julian the Hospitaller.\(^\text{97}\)

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\(^{94}\) Goullet and Heinzelmann speak, to be precise about *réécriture hagiographique*. For their useful description of the phenomenon and contextualization within current scholarship, see 7-14.

\(^{95}\) It is, of course, impossible to make any sweeping generalizations with regard to original sources given that not all saints have the single and authoritative *Life* that Anthony does, such is the case, for example of Saint Julian the Hospitaller (Swan 1-2). This is also not accounting for more recently canonized saints such as Saint Francis of Assisi who died in 1226, was canonized 1228, and developed a significant hagiographical profile before the middle of the thirteenth century (see Boureau, Collomb, Goullet, Moulinier and Mula’s notes to the *Legenda aurea* “Life of Saint Francis” 1408-1410) or Bernard de Clairvaux who died in 1153, was canonized in 1174 and whose hagiographical tradition began to take off ten years before his death (1349-1350).

\(^{96}\) For a brief summary of the issues and scholarship related to the question of *translatio studii et imperii* see, Campbell and Mills 1-4. For a specific consideration of the many and often overlaid meanings of *translatio* in the case of religious writing, see Campbell’s chapter on Rutebeuf’s *Miracle de Théophile* 107-124.

\(^{97}\) Although Eustace’s lives changed cosmetically as they adapted to the needs of verse or prose text, they remained remarkably stable in the narratives they reproduced from Greek and Latin sources (Petersen 54-84). So much so that Jessie Murray has suggested in his edition of a thirteenth-century verse *Vie de Saint Eustace* that the inconsistencies between the French translation and the Latin source are “…dues à des erreurs de lecture du traducteur […] ou à des erreurs d’interprétation” (vi). The thirteenth-century verse and prose lives of Saint Julian the Hospitaller, on the other hand, contain significant variations not only in style but in also in plot,
The corpus of texts associated with Saint Anthony the Great is particularly interesting when looked at through the framework of translation versus rewriting. In addition to the important and authoritative translations discussed in the previous chapter, there is evidence of a thriving tradition of creative rewriting in Anthony’s legend. This has now boiled down to four extant works: Walter Map’s *De nugis curialium*, Gervase of Tilbury’s *Otia imperialia*, an anonymous Old French *vita* known simply as the *Vie de Saint Antoine*, and a Briançonnais mystery play, christened by its first and only editor, Paul Guillaume, as the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*. In spite of this meager collection of texts, though, there is reason to believe that the tradition to which it bears testament was much more important during the medieval period itself. Anthony’s devotional profile in translated *vitae* was quite robust. Aside from the *Vies des Pères*, an abridged version of Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* is included in Jean de Mailly’s mid thirteenth-century *legendarium*, the *Gestis et miraculis sanctorum* (106-110). 98 Jacobus of Voragine’s *Legenda aurea*, first published in 1260 and translated into French in the fourteenth century, also features abridgments not only of the *Life of Anthony* (128-132) but also the *Vita Pauli* (116-118). It would stand to reason, then, for the rewritten tradition to mirror the importance of its translated counterparts.

In fact, the four extant rewritings are suggestive of a long and widespread tradition of intertextual exchange. *De nugis curialium* was probably composed near the end of the twelfth

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98 Although the latter part also contains additions from the *Apothegmata Patrum* (109-110).
century or the beginning of the thirteenth by Walter Map, an author possibly of Welsh origin, who was internationally active and well known throughout Europe, including France.\textsuperscript{99} *Otia imperialia* was written in the early thirteenth century by Gervase of Tilbury, a subject of the English crown who was at the time of writing in the employ of the Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV and living in Arles.\textsuperscript{100} The text itself was, like *De nugis curialium*, accessible to a certain swath of French society due to its composition in Latin. *Otia imperialia*, was also subsequently translated into French, the first time by Jean d’Antioche around 1290 under the title *Le Livre de grand délit* and the second time by Jean de Vignay around 1320 under the title *Les Oisivitez des emperieres*. The *Vie de Saint Antoine*, unlike the previous two texts, was composed in a northern French vernacular around the middle of the fourteenth century (Morawski 32) somewhere between Paris, Rouen and Saint-Quentin (41). Finally, the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès* was written in the Dauphiné Viennois region of France in the local vernacular language of Briançonnais, (Guillaume xvii-xvix). Although it was copied into the only extant manuscript version at the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was more than likely composed over the course of the fifteenth.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{99} For comments on dating of the text, see James xxiv-xxvi; for discussion of Walter Map’s national origins, see xi-xiv. Walter Map’s profile in France is attested to by his crediting with the authorship of the prose Lancelot cycle in the prologue of the *Mort Artu* (“Apres cou que maistres Gautiers Map ot portraitie des auentures del Graal asses…”(1) [After master Walter Map had related enough of the Grail adventures…]). This is now largely believed to be incorrect, however (James xx).

\textsuperscript{100} For dating of *Otia imperialia*, see Banks and Binns xxix-xl. For Gervase’s national origins, see xxv and for his employment at the time of writing, see xxxvii-xl.

\textsuperscript{101} The only remaining manuscript copy of this text is almost miraculously precise in its dating (“…copiata anno Domini millesimo quingentesimo tertio, die nona frebruarii” (1) […copied in the year of our Lord 1503, on the ninth day of February]). However, Paul Guillaume believes that this is the last remaining extant copy of a play, previously thought have been lost, that was recorded as having been performed in Compiègne in 1457 (x).
The breadth of geographical, cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts represented by these texts is suggestive of a wide interest in the rewriting of Anthony’s story throughout—and beyond—the territory covered by modern-day France. This is especially clear given that each of the four texts, in spite of a number of cosmetic and semantic differences, shares an idiosyncratic set of consistencies. Most particularly, all four appropriate a narrative moment from Saint Jerome’s *Vita Pauli* and blend it with the narrative material typically associated with Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*. This moment, originally involving an encounter between Anthony and the mythical creatures of a centaur and a satyr, alters the dynamics of credibility associated with this saint’s story. And yet, the necessity for each of the four authors—individuals of different geographical, cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds—to wrestle with its implications, suggests a network of texts transmitting this problematic scene in the context of Anthony’s life from at least the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century. Over and above this narrative affinity, the popularity of Anthony rewritings is hinted at by the considerable traces left by a now lost collection of medieval texts. Aside from Baudoin’s lost translation of the *Life of Anthony*, mentioned in Chapter I, there are two sixteenth-century histories of Anthony’s cult, which refer to anterior sorties relating the translation of Anthony’s relics from the Holy Land into France. Although no source has ever been found for these narratives, the dating of the histories themselves suggests the existence of a medieval model for these additions to Anthony’s story.

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102 These separate textual associations are preserved in such popular and important reading material as the *Legenda aurea* (See 116-118; 128-132) suggesting that the melding of the two texts would have been a noticeable change to the authoritative tradition for a considerable number of medieval readers.
103 See Morawski 68.
104 Amyrus Falco describes one such narrative in his 1533 history of the cult of Saint Anthony, *Compendium Antoniae historiae* (*Secunda Pars* 35°-38°). A narrative is also presented in a sixteenth-century catalogue of all Anthony’s *postmorte* exploits (BNF MS. NAF. 10721 19°-26°). The *Vie de Saint Antoine* may provide a partial source to the latter text but does not account for all of it.
Gervase of Tilbury also claims to have written a life of Anthony (I. xvii, 98), which likewise is no longer known to modern scholars. It is fair to imagine, in short, that the rewritten story of Saint Anthony the Great was both widely transmitted and widely read throughout medieval France, much more so than the small number of extant examples might lead one to guess.

This chapter will focus on the corpus of four texts made up by *De nugis curialium*, *Otia imperialia*, the *Vie de Saint Antoine*, and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*, exploring its impact as a representative skeleton of the medieval tradition of Anthony rewritings. As I shall demonstrate, the dynamics of hagiographical rewriting were profoundly caught up in the appropriation of a saintly narrative and its transformation in order to serve the aims of an individual writer. In the case of Saint Anthony, two particular tropes related to the poetics of physical migration, were mobilized over and over in order to embody the saint’s liberation from his previous textual sources. The first, the depiction of Anthony’s relics and their travels after his death, was commonplace in medieval hagiography. The second, the depiction of Anthony’s journey through desert and encounter with the centaur and the satyr, is specific to Anthony himself. Close examination of these textual moments will reveal the tension cultivated by medieval rewriters between their own versions of Anthony’s story and the Late Antique sources to which they nevertheless allude. This treatment of the hagiographical field by medieval rewriters pulled Anthony’s tradition in two different and incompatible directions: toward the continuity and normativity of Late Antique textual authority on the one hand and toward the disjointedness and deregulation of continual reinterpretaition on the other. Short of seeking resolution for this essentially untenable situation, medieval rewriters exploited the conceptual breakdown it fostered. This chapter will examine the consequences of the implicit intertextual

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105 See, for example, in the *Legenda aurea*, the lives of Mark the Evangelist (esp. 323-327), James the Apostle (esp. 531-533) and Bartholomew the Apostle (esp. 679-680).
pressure that this tension put on the tradition of Saint Anthony the Great. Starting with an appreciation of the fissures that rewriting crystallized in Anthony’s cult, I shall move on to discuss the dangers that these disagreements posed to the integrity of Anthony’s sanctity as they threatened the practical relationship between written text and Christian devotion.

Out of Egypt: *Postmortem* Peregrinations and Their Consequences

Over the course of the medieval period, canonization became increasingly codified through the institutional clearing-house of the Catholic Church. Through this process, the quality of saintliness came to rely more and more upon the *postmortem* continuation of saintly activity. In this sense, by the first years of the thirteenth century, the institution of sanctity had become practically and doctrinally tied to the structure of protracted narrative originally championed by the *Life of Anthony*. Short of being limited to the moment of death, saintliness was now reliant not only on a whole life but on the series of saintly events—healings, miracles, answered prayers, and so on—that were expected to continue in perpetuity from beyond the grave. Written hagiography needed to move in step with these changes and while some saints like Alexis, got their miracles out of the way before they were even buried, many others, like Bartholomew, did not get a chance to perform this part of their saintly identity until well after

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106 Although some process of review was required for saints in Late Antiquity, it was not until 993 that the Holy See began to intervene and not until 1200 that the decision to canonize individuals was to fall entirely under the pope’s purview. This history is succinctly covered in Woodward 62-73. See also Pernoud 267-271.
107 Much of the early debate on pontifical control of the institution of sanctity revolved around the believability of miracles worked by saints’ remains. In fact, these *postmortem* interventions received considerably more energy than the examination of the events of saints’ mortal lives (Finucane 14).
their deaths. The possibility for hagiographical authors to exist outside of the physical and temporal worlds of their subjects, then, was paramount to the successful practice of hagiographical writing; without this flexibility, texts risked losing their clout with respect to the increasingly robust authority of the Holy See.

This institutional change to canonization closely followed a sort of saintly mass-migration from the Holy Land into Europe. The description of these physical translations often provided the material basis for hagiographies to be rewritten, the change in geographical circumstances justifying the need for new hagiographical material to be added to the old. In the case of Saint Anthony, the reputed transfer of the saint’s relics from the Holy Land to the Dauphiné Viennois at the end of the eleventh century had a crucial impact on the devotional culture associated with this figure. The most common version of the story, at least among modern scholars, is told in its first extant form by Amyrus Falco in his 1533 history of Anthony’s life and afterlife, *Compendium Antoniae Historiae*. According to Falco, around the year 1095 a certain nobleman named Jocelin undertook a pilgrimage to the Holy Land on behalf of his ailing father. When Jocelin took a fall in the mountains of the Jura, he fell into a coma and his companions, believing him to be dead, brought his seemingly lifeless body to a church where they began making plans for his funeral. Meanwhile, Jocelin, on the very edge of death was

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108 Alexis’s body is depicted, for example, as performing many healings the same day that he dies (vv.551-560). Bartholomew, on the other hand begins his *postmortem* work only after his body is transferred from Armenia to Sicily, or so is the story recounted in the *Legenda aurea* goes (680).

109 Morawski notes the example of Saint Nicholas who was transferred from Myra to Bari in 1087 (62). We might also think of Saint Mark who was reputedly brought from Alexandria to Venice in 828 or of Saint Bartholomew who was moved in the fifth century from the Holy Land to Lipari or even Athanasius who, like Mark, was transported from Alexandria to Venice.

110 No record of an historical Jocelin has ever been found. It seems most likely that he is a conglomerate figure, representing a variety of noblemen active in the Dauphiné in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries (Morawski 47).
having a terrifying vision; devils were beating him and trying to drag his soul into Hell. Jocelin was about to succumb to his tormentors when Saint Anthony appeared, frightening the demons away and saving Jocelin’s life and immortal soul. As repayment for this help, Anthony requested that Jocelin make a special stop on the way home. Specifically he asked him to go to Constantinople, the current resting place of his relics, and bring them back to France with him. Jocelin, of course, obliged and ever since that time, Anthony’s relics have had a home in La-Motte-Saint-Didier, known as of Anthony’s eleventh-century arrival as Saint-Antoine-L’Abbey in the present day Isère region of France.¹¹¹

From the time of his reputed entry into the French context, Anthony’s popularity began to spread rapidly throughout Western Europe. The local nobility—Jocelin according to Falco—undertook plans to replace the small parish church with a much larger one in anticipation of the pilgrims that would certainly want to pray before Anthony’s relics (Dijon 13-14). Luckily, or perhaps unluckily, for the people of Saint-Antoine-L’Abbey, Anthony soon developed just the kind of reputation that would draw such a crowd (Sandell-Dupeley 85). Anthony’s arrival in France very nearly coincided with an outbreak of ergotism, a life-threatening disease contracted by ingesting contaminated grain, especially rye (Devalette 45). At this time, a local nobleman named Gaston de Valloire (or Gaston de La Valloire) purportedly went to the Saint-Antoine-L’Abbey to pray over Anthony’s relics for the speedy recovery of his son, a boy named Guérin who had become afflicted with the disease. When, against all hope, Guérin regained his health, Gaston became convinced that Saint Anthony was responsible for the miracle and founded a lay

¹¹¹ The original source of this story is impossible to track. The first extant text is Amyrus Falco’s 1533 history of the life and exploits of Saint Anthony, Compendium Antoniae Historiae (Secunda Pars fols 35v-38v). Although it is reproduced by historians of Saint-Antoine-L’Abbey from the sixteenth century onward (Dassy 15-22; Dijon 7-9) no source is ever cited. It seems likely that this was part of a now long forgotten medieval tradition.
order, The Hospital Brothers of Saint Anthony or the Antonines, as a demonstration of his gratitude (Morawski 46). The Antonines would become very influential in France and throughout Europe as the Middle Ages wore on, providing hospice care to those afflicted with a variety of potentially mortal illnesses, and most famously ergotism (Sandell-Dupeley 89-90).

Although it is difficult to estimate the number of cases or fatalities that resulted from the ergotic contamination of grain in the Middle Ages, it is clear that ergotism had a devastating effect on France as epidemics swept through the country in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Devalette 45-46). Anthony’s reported ability to cure this much-feared disease through miracles as well as through the mediation of the Antonines not only earned him the reputation as patron saint of skin diseases—ergotism includes a variety of gangrenous symptoms—but also earned ergotism a new name: “Saint Anthony’s fire”.

The physical translation of Anthony’s relics, then, had not merely brought the saint into the orbit of French Catholics; it had also caused his story to shift out of the unknown space of the Egyptian desert and to collide with the every-day experiences, or at least the every-day fears of European believers. Naturally, the life-and-death importance of Anthony’s contribution to the well-being of the faithful brought about a heightened awareness in hagiographical text of the saint’s more recent and—especially from the perspective of the French layperson—more relevant exploits. The unavoidable problem posed by this historical removal between author and subject, however, was the magnification of human idiosyncrasy in the narration of his story. The inclusion of more recent details in accounts of Anthony’s afterlife brought new focus to the centuries-old understanding of his life, as the saint’s physical proximity to French believers provided rewriters with the authority they needed to override what were by then the out of date accounts by Athanasius and Jerome.
The visible patch-working this required of old and new narratives had the potential to create a certain amount of implicit and even explicit dissonance within the Anthony tradition. The *Vie de Saint Antoine* provides a good illustration of this potential discord. While relatively faithful to the Late Antique source material of Anthony’s story in the first three quarters of the text (vv.1-220), the *Vie de Saint Antoine* devotes the whole final quarter of the work to an original description of Anthony’s afterlife (vv. 227-316). As though to mark a definitive break between past and present, the author adds a crucial new scene between the first part and the second part of the text (vv. 221-226). Here, he describes Anthony’s apotheosis and face-to-face meeting with God, a detail not present in either Athanasius’ or Jerome’s account. Athanasius *does* depict a verbal exchange between God and Anthony, which would remain important enough throughout the Middle Ages to provide the epigraph, two centuries later, to the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès.* The author of the *Vie de Saint Antoine*, however, strategically omits this moment of divine connection from the first part of the text, replacing God’s voice, in the scene otherwise taken from Athanasius, with a host of luminescent angels (v.117). This not only allows the author of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* to appropriate the moment of saintly plenitude embodied by divine communion, wresting it away from the portion of his text devoted to imitation of Athanasius; it does so in such a way as to incarnate the threshold between life and afterlife that organizes the authorial procedures at play in this work. This prepares the reader to cross the parallel and implicit boarder between the events of the past and the events of the

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112 After a full night of torture at the hands of devils, Anthony hears the voice of God praising him for his strength and promising to make him strong throughout his life and make his name known throughout the world (39). These divine words of encouragement are partially quoted, a little idiosyncratically, at the beginning of the *Mystère* (“Faciam te in toto orbe nominari et in tota Ecclesia Xpitianorum pronuntiari” (1)) and are important enough to this author to be repeated in the Briançonnais text of the play itself (vv. 3073-3083).
present just as it links these temporal associations with Late Antique narratives on the one hand and modern innovation on the other.

The decision to mark this transition through the seizure of Anthony’s moment of connection with the unfathomable divine allows the author of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* to assert his control over the whole literary unit that is his textual creation. This is a particularly important point given that the depiction of Anthony’s *postmortem* journey into France was a relatively contentious undertaking. A saint’s relics were valuable artifacts not just from a monetary perspective but from a border economic and political standpoint as well. To control a saint’s relics was to control the saint’s destiny, a fact that could bolster regional identity or even spell the success of a town’s infrastructure (Bell and Dale 602-603). It is not surprising, then, that the location of a saint’s relics could be a hotly contested topic. This was certainly the case of Saint Anthony. In spite of the confidence with which Falco—and no doubt his medieval sources—related the story of Anthony’s translation to Saint-Antoine-L’Abbaye, competing accounts existed. For example a disagreement arose in the late thirteenth century between the Antonines and the Benedictines of Montmajour (Morawski 51-52). There are also reports of the relics being brought to Toulouse and housed at the Abbaye de Saint-Pierre-de-Lézat (52) and still others of it having been taken to Île-de-France and housed at the Abbaye de Saint-Antoine-des-Champs-lez-Paris (58) now the twelfth arrondissement of Paris. Depicting Anthony’s location, then, was not just a mobilization of a set of variable tropes designed to demonstrate connectedness to an unfathomable divine; it was taking a side in a current debate, a debate that some people had reason to feel very strongly about.\(^{113}\)

\(^{113}\) This is attested to by the disagreement between the only sixteenth-century accounts we have. Aside from Falco’s history there is, as noted above, a lesser-known sixteenth-century history which can be found in Paris, BNF MS. NAF 10721 Incipit: “C’est comme le corps monseigneur
The author of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* argues in favor of a multiplicity of resting places for Anthony: “A du corps saint Anthoine en .iii. lieus pour certain” (v. 297) [There is part of Anthony’s body in three places for certain], he states. The first is Saint-Antoine-L’Abbaye, where the monks transporting the body stop on the way home (vv.267-289). The second is Saint-Pierre-de-Lézat, since the monks transporting Anthony are *toulousains* and originally requested Anthony’s relics with the specific intention of bringing them home (vv. 290-294). Finally, the author states without explanation that part of Anthony’s body is at the abbey at Saint-Antoine-lez-Paris (vv. 295-296). This seemingly noncommittal depiction of Anthony’s location ought not to be thought of as complacency with regard to the saint’s role in modern life, however. The *Vie de Saint Antoine* was ostensibly written during an outbreak of Saint Anthony’s fire (Morawski 42). Therefore, its major concern is not with excluding paths to Saint Anthony’s good will, but rather, multiplying them. This is stressed in the following stanza, which turns from the listing of viable pilgrimage sites into a closing prayer. The prayer brings the promise of tangible relief from ergotism whether one goes on pilgrimage or not (vv. 301-304). In this sense, it is a displacement of the *theoretical* pilgrimage proposed by the description of Anthony’s relics into the verbal power of the text itself. This is not to say that the location of Anthony’s remains does not matter, but rather that the text itself is able to substitute these physical locations with a spiritual one. In the desperation of an ergotism outbreak, the *Vie de Saint Antoine* is the most complete or at least the most practical road to Anthony. As the author explains in his prologue: “Or entendes sa vie, que Dieu vous doing santé / Et vous vueille garder de mortel pestilance / Qui regne maintenant, on le voit en presence” (vv. 20-22) [Now listen to his life so that God may

Saint Anthoine fut translate des desertz à Constantinoble, et de Constantinoble en France […].” (Fols. 19’-26’). This version, although not identical to that presented in the *Vie de Saint Antoine* is closer in content, presenting Anthony’s journey as one aided by monks and ending in Saint-Antoine-lez-Paris (now the Faubourg Saint Antoine).
grant you health / And may keep you safe from [the] deadly disease / Which reigns in our time, we can see its manifestations]. This text allows the reader to mentally travel into the spiritual locus of saintly intercession, much as it allows Anthony, through his apotheosis, to travel into the physical space of the divine.

This author’s focus on Anthony’s ability to cure ergotism, particularly an outbreak of ergotism that was an immediate danger to his original readership, subordinates the first part of the text, the part in which the traditional story of Saint Anthony is repeated, to the second part, the part in which the author exposes the newly minted narrative of Anthony’s afterlife. This differential balancing of textual power between the two parts of the *vita* is reflected in the author’s treatment of the Late Antique material that he integrates into the first three quarters of the text. Only two major modifications occur in his handling of Athanasius’ account.\(^{114}\) One, the alteration of Anthony’s divine encounter, allows the author to establish his own creative supremacy over that of his sources. The other is aimed specifically at linking the Late Antique material represented in the first part of the text to his practical goals in the modern world. Early in the *Vie de Saint Antoine* the author adds a scene in which Anthony must prove his faith by rejecting the sexual advances of a devil who has gained access to his cell by assuming the form of a beautiful woman (vv. 69-96). In order to escape this temptation, Anthony takes refuge inside of a roaring fire, surviving this otherwise dangerous situation thanks to his faith in God (vv. 94-95). This event has no precedent in any other extant French or Latin account of Anthony’s life and appears instead to be the creation of this writer in particular.\(^{115}\) Anthony’s body, engulfed in

\(^{114}\) This is not withstanding the insertion of the passage from Jerome’s *Vita Pauli* which, as the next section will reveal contains a third modification of the Late Antique material: the transformation of the centaur and the satyr into a single she wolf.

\(^{115}\) Anthony’s temptation by devils disguised as beautiful women would become an increasingly common trope from this point onward, as Chapter IV will reveal. By the Early Modern period, it
flames and preserved by God’s grace, is strikingly similar to the ergotic body of the projected reader, devoured by illness and yet preserved by Anthony’s intercession. This injects the narrative of Anthony’s life, the first part of the text, with the image of his afterlife, the second part of the text, allowing the author’s modern aims to graft themselves onto the Late Antique narrative, almost as though they had been a part of it all along. It is significant that the bridge this creates between the Late Antique and medieval portions of the text should be based on a moment of visible authorial innovation. It is even more significant that this innovation is enclosed within what is theoretically the most mimetic component of the vita. This gives the author a means of establishing the importance of the Vie de Saint Antoine as an individual text within the larger tradition of Saint Anthony the Great, alloying the specific authorial creativity that called it into being with the very source of its most important contribution to Christendom: the harnessing of Anthony’s power to fight ergotism.

The artificial separation of the first and second parts of this text was of such importance to the author of the Vie de Saint Antoine that he goes out of his way to eschew the possibility of eliding the two. The prologue insists on clearing up what appears to be some potential for confusion: “Comment que le saint soit de Viennois nommé, / voir, il n’i nasqui mie; en Egypte fu né…” (vv. 17-18) [Although the saint is called of Viennois / He was not born there; he was born in Egypt]. This comment, which comes with no particular explanation for its presence in the text ensures that the reader not mistake the foreign beginnings of Anthony’s story, the Late Antique portion, with its European continuation, the medieval portion. After all, it is this author’s special

was making important inroads in the world of visual art. One might think particularly of the depictions of the Temptation of Saint Anthony by Joachim Patinir (1520-1524), Jan Brughel the Elder (1594), David Ryckaert (1650), Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1734). However, in the fourteenth century, this was a new addition to the story of Saint Anthony either with this particular vita or some time before its composition. This is probably the result of conflation between the Life of Anthony and subsequent vitae such as Jerome’s Vita Hilarionis.
ability to bring the two together that allows this text to execute its hagiographical mandate in the first place. However, the phenomenon that the author of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* is reacting to was very real. Anthony’s relocation to the Dauphiné Viennois, according to the story repeated by Falco, was of such importance in medieval France that Anthony of Egypt was indeed known to many as Anthony of Viennois. The *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès* presents an excellent example of just how far this could go.

This play, written in a local vernacular of the Dauphiné Viennois, was so invested in the legendary situation of Anthony’s body in Saint-Antoine-L’Abbaye that it completely excises Anthony’s life story from the original Egyptian context. This startling change manifests itself in several ways including the more or less official changing of Anthony’s name. In this text he is referred to either as “Anthoni de Bonafe” (v. 1994) [Anthony of Good-faith], which occurs only once, and, more frequently, “Anthoni de Vianes” [Anthony of Viennois] (v. 2268, v.2689). This second moniker is not simply a name given to Anthony, though; the play is very clear on this point. The whole of Anthony’s life takes place in the familiar alpine setting of the Briançonnais canton. When Anthony first makes his desire to become an ascetic known to his family, for example, they advise him to avoid “… en el bosc istar” (v. 1453) [living in the woods]. And when he meets Paul the hermit, he finds him not in a sandy wasteland but instead in a “bocage” (v. 3114) [a wooded area]. Should there be any doubt as to the geographical location of these strikingly un-desert-like woodlands, the author is careful to provide at least one clear geographical marker. When Anthony journeys to sell his personal property before taking up his eremitical practice, he meets his buyer at, a tavern called the “Chival-Blanc”\footnote{sic.} (v. 2260) [White Horse], in Montpellier. This is about two hundred miles from the rough location of the text’s
presumed composition\textsuperscript{117} – a long way for a horse ride, no doubt, but still much closer and more accessible to its original audience than Alexandria, or for that matter, Paris.

At first glance, the re-situation of Anthony’s life story in the home region of the late medieval author may appear quaint, even naïve.\textsuperscript{118} However, there is every reason to believe that this change to Athanasius’ original account of Anthony’s life was taken on with purpose. The author of the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès was, by all indications, a highly educated individual who possessed detailed knowledge of the hagiographical tradition in which his text participated. He intricately intertwines Anthony’s story, for example, with that of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, another Egyptian saint, such that the two form a sort of hypothetical saintly couple.\textsuperscript{119} He also demonstrates acute consciousness of the history of the saintly tradition and Anthony’s place in it, alluding to no fewer than eight other saints over the course of the play.\textsuperscript{120} The first seven (Matthew, Peter, Paul the Apostle, Catherine, Pancrace, John the Evangelist, and Paul the Hermit) are mentioned by characters of the play, that is to say Anthony and his peers. Each of these saints is historically anterior to Anthony, making the characters’ knowledge of

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\textsuperscript{117} For comments on the original location of composition, which is never specified beyond the Briançon region, see Guillaume x, xvii-xxiii.

\textsuperscript{118} This certainly is the opinion supplied by Gaston Tuaillon, the play’s only translator, who, in a rare study of the text treats this change of setting as a sort of non-event (143).

\textsuperscript{119} An elaborate parallelism is developed between Anthony’s sister and Saint Catherine. Anthony tells the story of Catherine’s life to his sister in order to inspire her monastic vocation (vv. 1606-1612). Anthony’s own departure from society is foreshadowed by the mass that marks the beginning of his sister’s monastic life, simulated in the play by a hymn from the Mass of Saint Catherine: Caterine colaudemus (between v. 1860 and v. 1861).

\textsuperscript{120} Saint Matthew the Evangelist is paraphrased after Anthony’s initial conversion at v. 1598; Peter and Paul the Apostle are mentioned at v. 1605; Saint Catherine of Alexandria’s life story is summarized by Anthony himself between vv.1606-1612 and bolstered by the singing of “Caterina colaudemus”, a hymn from the mass of Saint Catherine after his sister’s entry into a convent at v. 1860; Saint Pancrace is mentioned at v. 2196; John the Evangelist is quoted at v. 2416; Peter comes up again in a reference to his epistles at v. 2456; the story of Paul the Hermit takes up vv. 3138-3230 and vv. 3417-3384; finally Saint Léger is referred to in the concluding envoi at v. 3948.
their cults perfectly natural. The only departure from this rule is the final saintly reference, which is to the seventh century martyr Saint Léger (Leodagar). This, however, does not impact upon the internal chronology of the text because it is spoken by an extradiegetic narrator. In fact, it places the narrative unit represented by the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni* into its rightful historical place, calling on Léger to act as guarantor not only of this particular version of Anthony’s story but also of its author’s good will to change it if it might be improved upon in the future (vv.3940-3949). This great care to avoid anachronism suggests that the author of the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni* was invested in inscribing his play into a historically accurate saintly tradition. It also supports the interpretation that this writer was more than erudite enough to have read the authoritative Late Antique sources of his play. This would mean that the idiosyncratic setting in southern France was his own decision, one intended to stand at odds with his sources.

It is just as probable that this intertextual incongruity was meant to be noticed by the play’s spectators. The proximity of Anthony’s relics to the presumable location of the play’s representation would make the story, not only of his life, but of his *postmortem* travels especially well-known. In fact, the nearness of Anthony’s final resting place has the odd effect of making Anthony seem, at any given performance, to stand up out of his grave and act out the story of his life for the benefit of the faithful. However, given the linguistic specificity of the text and the date of its most recent reproduction (a full four hundred years after Anthony’s reputed arrival in France), this was probably not done to drum up business for the local shrine; Anthony was by then a well-established regional presence and not in need much publicity. Instead, the repercussions of this change are essentially on the level of the narrative itself.

If Anthony is to be resurrected into the world of the play’s spectators, he cannot live a completely foreign existence. This regional modification, then, empowers its author to take the
story of Saint Anthony into his own hands. Most importantly, he expands the role played by Anthony’s family from the two paragraphs it occupies in Athanasius’ account (30-31) to a little more than half of the text (vv. 1-2770). This exposition and emplotment of Anthony’s home life is complex, almost a narrative unto itself, intertwined with congresses in hell, biblical exegeses and liturgical music. It is also particularly mundane, presumably conforming to the daily experiences of many of the plays’ original spectators. It opens, for example, as Anthony’s family—his aunt, his uncle, his cousin and his sister—get ready to go to Church fretting about what they will wear and what the neighbors will say if they arrive late. Although, from a structural point of view, the family serves a number of purposes—providing expositional detail, comic relief, and in many ways an intradiegetic surrogate for the reader or audience member—their most important function is as a barrier to Anthony’s sanctity. They, like many family members in medieval saints’ lives, do not want their beloved nephew, son or brother to take on the difficult and dangerous life of an ascetic. Their protests and their well-meaning love become Anthony’s first and greatest temptation, drawing out the point of his conversion to saintly life such that it becomes the single most important struggle the saint will face.

In this sense, the family both enacts and personifies an important narrative threshold in the plot line of this text, that is, the threshold between Anthony’s secular life and his saintly life. The creation of this border does not serve an exclusively narrative function, though; it produces a sort of metatextual division of the play as well. The family’s influence in this work, much like the scene of apotheosis in the *Vie de Saint Antoine*, allows the text to split itself neatly into two

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121 The list of saints opposed by their parents is very long. One might think, for example of Saint Alexis’ parents in the *Vie de Saint Alexis*, who work (fruitlessly) to convince him that marriage is the most Christian course of all in order to keep him from the difficult ascetic life he desires to pursue (vv. 66-71) or of Saint Perpeuta’s father’s pleas that his daughter renounce her Christian faith in order to avoid martyrdom (112).
halves, organized not merely by the metrics of secular versus saintly but by the procedure of 
authorial creation. The first half of this text, the part that depicts Anthony’s family, has no 
literary precedent—at least in hagiographical depictions of Anthony. The second half of the text, 
however, the part from which Anthony’s family is absent, is an imitation of Athanasius’ and 
Jerome’s representations of Anthony’s story, so faithful that it very nearly translates its epigraph, 
taken directly from the Latin version of Athanasius’ Life of Anthony, into the Briançonnais 
dialogue of the play.\(^\text{122}\) The division of the action into Anthony’s pre- and post-saintly lives, 
then, corresponds to two different styles of authorial process: original creation on the one and 
respectful imitation on the other.

As was the case of the Vie de Saint Antoine, then, the author of the Mystère de Sant  
Anthoni de Viennès is able to parlay a strikingly modern connection to Saint Anthony into the 
justification for his written depiction of the saint’s story. In this case, however, it is not a public 
health crisis that produces the author’s newfound authority but a kind of shared patrimoine 
between hagiographer and saint. This author shares a homeland and, through the prayers of his 
compatriots, a language, with Anthony himself. By this logic, he has an ability, even a 
responsibility, to represent the saint within the physical seat of Anthony’s medieval power. This 
seems particularly likely given that the feud over Anthony’s body between the Antonines of the 
Viennois and Benedictines of Montmajour heated up around the time that this play would have 
been composed.\(^\text{123}\) By shifting the location and action of the narrative into a clearly Viennois 
context, the author of the Mystère de Sant Anthoni, like the author of the Vie de Saint Antoine, 
manages to place Athanasius’ and Jerome’s narratives under the aegis of his own. The landscape

\(^{122}\) For the epigraph, see Guillaume 1, for its translation into Briançonnais, see vv. 3073-3083. 
\(^{123}\) In 1491, the Benedictines publicly claimed to bestow the relics, to which the Viennois-based 
Antonines believed they had sole claim, to the Church of Saint-Julien in Arles. See Morawski 
51-52
of the Viennois, in other words, allows the author to map his authority onto the Late Antique sources of his text. It is important here, as in the Vie de Saint Antoine, that the internal parallelism this creates between original production and mimetic echoing should be established through a clear example of the author’s own narrative craft. In this way, he is able to manipulate the existing Anthony tradition into serving the latter-day purposes of his text, the confirmation of Anthony’s true home in the Viennois rather than Montmajour or elsewhere.

The similarities that link the authorial process taken on in the Vie de Saint Antoine and the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès are conspicuous. Each text marshals a noticeable gap in narrated time and space into a visible textual threshold. In the Vie de Saint Antoine, it is a threshold between life and afterlife, in the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès, it is a portal between secular life and saintly life. In each case, the division of the narrative that this enables produces an authorial splitting of the text – but not an equitable one. In the Vie de Saint Antoine, the author manipulates the Late Antique source material into agreeing with his understanding of Anthony’s cult. In the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès, the decision to move the story into the locus of the saint’s postmortem activity brings the full weight of Anthony’s tradition into the region that the text works to establish as the saint’s sole resting place. In other words, each text appropriates the Late Antique source material of the legend of Saint Anthony demonstrating not so much a dialogue between old and new as an eclipsing not only of the Late Antique texts by their medieval rewritings but also of the mimetic style of hagiographical production with a more creative approach.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that these rewritings, as much as their authors might have wanted them to, did not actually cancel out the Late Antique tradition of Saint Anthony the Great. As noted above, Athanasius’ and Jerome’s accounts of Anthony’s life
remained as popular as ever as the Middle Ages progressed, appearing in only slightly altered forms in the *Gestis et miraculis sanctorum* the *Legenda aurea*. The *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*, then, do not wipe out their literary competition. Instead, to borrow Athanasius’ words, they enter into or rather *create* “a fine contest” (29) with their sources, deliberately challenging their authority and attempting to replace it with their own. These methods constrained the readers of Anthony rewritings to make a choice: *which* Anthony narrative were they going to believe? This was not simply a balkanization of the hagiographical field into modern and ancient. Rewritings also posed a threat to *one another*. One could not, for example, accept both the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès* because Anthony’s relics could not be both in three separate places (as in the *Vie de Saint Antoine*) and only one (as in the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni*). So, while the authors of these texts probably intended to promote Anthony’s cult, they also undermined it, creating a situation in which some hagiographies had to be false in order for others to be true.

The Saint, the Centaur, and the Satyr: Finding the Limits of Hagiographical Imagination

How medieval readers reacted to the narrative cacophony created by this fracturing of the hagiographical field is a question best addressed through what is perhaps the most prominent feature of the medieval Anthony rewritings, that is, the saint’s encounter with the centaur and the satyr. Each of the four medieval rewritings of Saint Anthony’s story grapples in a different way with this particularly strange incident originally depicted in Saint Jerome’s *Vita Pauli*. The centaur and the satyr present a set of practical concerns, even in Jerome’s eyes, and raise substantial problems not only in the *Vita Pauli* but the legend of Saint Anthony more generally.
In the *Vita Pauli*, Anthony’s first encounter is with the centaur, the least humanoid and most obviously worrying of the two mythological creatures:

… conspicatur hominem equo mixtum, cui opinio poetarum Centauro uocabulum indidit. Quo uiso, salutaris impressione signi armat frontem, et “heus tu, inquit, quanam in parte Dei servus hic habitat?” At ille barbarum nescio quid infrendens, et frangens potius uerba quam proloquens inter horrentia ora, satis blandum quaesiuit adloquium. Et cum dexterae manus protensione cupitum indicat iter, ac sic patentes campos uolucris transmittens fuga, ex oculis mirantis euanuit. Verum hoc utrum diabolus ad terrendum eum simulauerit, an, ut solet, eremus monstruosorum ferax animalium istam quoque gignat bestiam, incertum habemus (158).

[Anthony] saw a man who was half horse, what the poets according to their beliefs call a Centaur. Seeing this, he protected himself by making the sign of salvation on his forehead. “You there”, he said, “where does the servant of God live?”. But the other, mumbling something unintelligible and grumbling rather than articulating the words he spoke, tried to emit adequately soft speech from his bristled lips. And stretching out his right arm, he indicated the desired path and then, across the immense plain he fled swiftly and vanished from sight. Whether the devil took this shape to terrify him or the whether the desert, so often full of monstrous beasts, also produced this one, we cannot be sure.

The certainty with which the centaur, both as a word and as a concept, is given to pagan poets creates a strangely porous moment in the saint’s story as Anthony quite literally comes face to face with the representation of pagan mythology. This moment of encounter is complicated by Jerome’s assertion that even he does not know how to interpret it. This authorial denial of elucidative responsibility leaves the reader, much like Anthony, in a kind of metaphorical wilderness with nothing but his or her individual powers of reasoning to sort out the meaning of this moment: is the centaur diabolical or a natural part of God’s creation? The answer is unclear. On the one hand, the centaur’s advice will lead Anthony to Paul much as his indication of the road with his right hand (as opposed to his left) suggests divine inspiration. On the other, Jerome proposes in no uncertain terms that the centaur has every chance of being a demonic apparition, a
possibility that is perfectly consonant with the majority of the material on Anthony’s life available to medieval readers.\textsuperscript{124}

At first glance, Anthony’s encounter with the satyr, which occurs in the very next sentence, appears to resolve the problems posed by the centaur. The satyr is more genteel than the brutish centaur. He offers Anthony provisions and is even able to speak, responding clearly to Anthony’s questioning of his identity:

\begin{quote}
“Mortalis ego sum, et unus ex accolis eremi, quos uario delusa errore gentilatis Faunos, Satyrosque et Incubos colit. Legatione fungor gregis mei. Precamur ut pro nobis communem Dominum deprecis; salutem mundi olim uenisse cognouimus, et in uniuersam terram exiit sonus eius.” (160)
\end{quote}

“I am mortal and one of the inhabitants of the desert that the pagans, deluded by many errors, honor with the name of Faun, Satyr and Incubus. I am the ambassador of my flock. We beseech you to pray to our common Lord. We know that He came at one time for the salvation of the world and that the sound of His glory has gone out to all the earth.”

The satyr is in many ways an extension of the centaur. Where the centaur can only struggle with language, the satyr masters it; where the centaur depends on the narrator to explain his relationship to pagan poetics, the satyr is able to do so himself. And what he says ought to be supremely reassuring to the Christian reader of this text. He may be known under a pagan name but his true identity is that of a servant of God. It is reasonable to imagine, then, that this explanation might also be extended to the centaur given his interest in helping Anthony reach his destination. However this does not ultimately alter the uncertainty that comes from the author’s doubts regarding the provenance of the centaur. Indeed, just because the satyr can speak does not

\textsuperscript{124} The \textit{Life of Anthony} is not only filled with demonic apparitions in the desert (see 33-35; 37-39; 80), it is also devoid of the kind of friendly apparitions that the centaur and satyr may (or may not) be. The \textit{Vie de Saint Antoine} similarly foregrounds demonic trickery as with the incident of the devil that takes the shape of a seductive woman (vv. 69-96) and the \textit{Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès} is riddled with long and scenes in hell of demons forming elaborate plans for Anthony’s destruction. See for example, vv. 562-1102.
indemnify him from suspicion. Perhaps the parallelism between the centaur and the satyr ought to be used to cast aspersions on the gloss of Christian piety provided by the satyr instead of justifying the centaur’s indistinct speech; perhaps the satyr’s ability to guess Anthony’s thoughts is the sign of an even greater satanic danger. The *Vita Pauli* does not provide any answer to this problem but simply lets it sit at the chronological center of the text, moving on very quickly to recount the friendship between Anthony and Paul.

It is in this spirit of uncertainty that medieval readers appear to have understood this moment. This is, at the very least, the picture that is painted throughout the extant tradition of rewritten stories of Saint Anthony. As the previous chapter indicated, the blurring together of the material contained in the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* rapidly became a canonical part of the medieval tradition of Saint Anthony the Great. This is the case of both the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*, which give over significant portions of their narrative universes to this sequence. While narration of the story originally related in the *Vita Pauli* is in each case extremely faithful to the source—more faithful than the transposition of the *Life of Anthony*—both authors suppress the centaur and the satyr. The *Vie de Saint Antoine*, for example, replaces both of these figures and with a kindly she wolf:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{[Antoine]} & \vita \text{ venir u} \text{ne louve qui ne sambloit pas fiere} \\
& \text{Qui se mist a ses pies par moult simple maniere.} \\
& \text{Puis le prist par sa gonne, qui n’estoiet pas trop chiere,} \\
& \text{Et li fist tant de signes, que Dieu li enseigna,} \\
& \text{Que droit a l’ermitage ou saint Pol demoura,} \\
& \text{Qui molst estoit bon homme, saint Antoine mena. (vv. 170-175)}
\end{align*}\]

\[\begin{align*}
\text{[Anthony] saw a she wolf coming toward him who did not seem dangerous} \\
& \text{Who lay down at his feet in a very humble way} \\
& \text{Then took him by [the hem of] his garment which was not too expensive,} \\
& \text{And made so many signs that God inspired in her} \\
& \text{That straight to the hermitage where Saint Paul} \\
& \text{(Who was a very good man) lived she brought Saint Anthony.}
\end{align*}\]
In addition to being an animal very much a part of a French reader’s real-life surroundings, the she wolf is strikingly more benign and more civilized in her behavior than the either of Jerome’s mythical beasts. The centaur struggles to make himself understood and the satyr, after making his speech, runs away into the desert like a wild animal. The wolf, although she is not humanoid like Jerome’s characters, is also not monstrous. Her care for Anthony and her ability to act unambiguously as God’s agent make her a safer option than the mythical creatures. Moreover, her manifest plausibility, as compared to the centaur and satyr, tame the association with pagan fiction present in Jerome’s Vita Paul, much as the author’s confidence that the wolf is following the will of God removes the potentially problematic suggestion that Anthony’s relationship with Paul might have been mediated by diabolical trickery.

Likewise, the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès replaces the centaur and the satyr with a more recognizable character, a man referred to in the stage directions as the “home imperfect” [cripple]. The home imperfect appears in Anthony’s path as he journeys to meet Paul, producing a comical but very strange digression in the play. As it turns out, he is not only imperfect of body but also of spirit. He explains this to Anthony himself:

Helas my! valent segnor!
Que de Dios seyes servitor.
Ayas pietà de ceto creaturo
Que es deformas en sa naturu,
Car yo ay comes ung pechà.
[...]
Et non l’ay encaro confèsà (vv. 3084-3092)

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125 The presence and danger of wolves in France, prior to the nineteenth century is a well-documented phenomenon. For comments on wolves in France from the eleventh through the early sixteenth centuries, see Moriceau 72-80.
Woe is me! Noble sir, [you] who are the servant of God
Take pity on this [poor] creature
Who is deformed by nature
Since I have committed a sin
[...]
And I have not yet made my confession.

Anthony, not wishing to see any creature live outside of God’s grace, takes the home imperfect’s confession. However, he cannot think of a proper penance. Nevertheless, he absolves the home imperfect, promising to return with a penance once he has spoken to Paul (v. 3114).

Unfortunately Anthony never does return and the state of the home imperfect’s immortal soul remains indefinitely in suspense. In this respect, the figure chosen to replace the centaur and the satyr is utterly mundane, a character that would have been perfectly recognizable to the play’s original spectators as a part of their regular surroundings. The home imperfect may not be a perfect Christian but he is definitely not a demon and his actions, which are crucial both to Anthony’s successful journey and to the plot of the text, go a long way in dissipating any initial questions regarding his trustworthiness.

It is telling that the authors of both the Vie de Saint Antoine and the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès see fit to remove the centaur and the satyr from their depictions of Anthony’s journey, replacing them with the recognizable figures of a wolf and a cripple. This suggests that in each of their readings of the Vita Pauli, the authors of the Vie de Saint Antoine and the Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès, saw the pagan associations of these creatures as a real threat to the devotional integrity of their works. This interpretation is supported by each author’s independent selection of somewhat upsetting figures to take their place; wolves could and

126 “Et qual penitentio poryes-tu fayre, / De set tant grant horrible pechâ? / Ya non ho say, per verità” (vv. 3106-3108) [And what penance might you do, / For this so immensely horrible sin? / In truth, I do not yet know.]
regularly did wreck havoc on farmers’ livelihoods and could even pose a threat to human life, while an unabsolved sinner, as the *home imperfect* clearly is when he meets Anthony, and as he may remain depending on the audience’s understanding of his partial confession, certainly posed a spiritual threat to a Christian community. Taken together, the removal of the centaur and the satyr in the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*, and their replacement with the potentially dangerous figures of the wolf and the *home imperfect* allow us to understand that these mythological beasts, as they appeared in the *Vita Pauli*, were legitimately uncomfortable from the standpoint of medieval Christians.

There is reason to believe, in fact, that medieval readers were primed to receive Jerome’s insistence on the relationship between these monstrous figures and the blasphemy of the pagan poets as markers of a kind of fictionality. While it is somewhat unclear just how much mythical creatures like centaurs and satyrs were believed to be real in the Middle Ages, there is sufficient evidence that these animals were viewed with considerable skepticism. Isidore of Seville explains in his *Etymologiae* that the centaur is among a group of *imaginary* animals (XI.iii.39), a category of creatures that he carefully explains as “[…] hominum fabulosa portenta, quae non sunt, sed ficta in causis rerum interprantur […]” (XI.iii.28) [fabulous human monstrosities […] which do not exist but are concocted to interpret the cause of things] (245). Although the satyr is not, in the *Etymologiae*, a part of this category of animal, it is not an enormous leap to suppose that it might have been understood by some readers and writers in a similar light. In fact,

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127 Strangely, this does not stop Isidore from mentioning Anthony’s encounter with the satyr earlier in the same chapter on portentous beings (*De portentis*), describing its meaning as though it were a real creature and quoting at some length from the *Vita Pauli* (XI.iii.21). If nothing else this is a testament to the ambiguity with which the *Vita Pauli* was received.
the metaphorical value of both of these beasts often overwhelmed the suggestion of their literal existence in medieval literature.  

It is fair to imagine, then, that the centaur-satyr sequence in the *Vita Pauli* represented a kind of literary threshold to its medieval readers as Anthony, the delegate of a serious Christian textual universe quite literally comes face to face with the representation of secular fiction, a tradition that many medieval hagiographers thought of as the literary antithesis of their works. 

Although it is difficult to imagine that Saint Jerome would have intentionally endangered the integrity of the *Vita Pauli*, the centaur and the satyr bring about a sort of theoretical splitting of the text’s message from its means of transmission. These creatures are metaphorical signs that, through their clear relationship to pagan poetics rather than Christian ones, cannot be confused with the depiction of real events. In other words, they allow the human creation of the text to become suddenly transparent. The *Vita Pauli* and the centaur-satyr sequence that it bequeaths to the rest of the Anthony tradition becomes a sort of reminder of the human fallibility inherent in the act of representation itself. It is almost as though, by enclosing these figures at the core of this important text, the *Vita Pauli* were incorporating the seeds of its own destruction into its narrative universe, reminding the reader that the transposition of divine events into humanly authored narrative is necessarily doomed to failure. The threat that this poses to the integrity of Anthony’s narrative tradition is minimized by the treatment of the centaur and the satyr in the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès.* However, *De nugis curialium*

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128 For comments on the centaur in medieval thought, see Brumble 66-67; for comments on the satyr, see 304.  
129 As Chapter I demonstrates, this was a major concern for the *champenois* translator of the *Vies des Pères.* This consideration for defining hagiography on the basis of its not being secular fiction was relatively common as Emma Campbell has demonstrated (*Saints* 6-7).
and *Otia imperialia*, short of suppressing Anthony’s mythological encounters, devote their
treatment of Anthony’s story entirely to the saint’s meeting with these creatures.

*De nugis curialium* situates the Anthony story in the second part of the text (*distinctio
secunda*) which is largely given over to encounter between the human world and the diabolical
(or at least sinister) beyond. It contains two stories, for example, of knights who take fairy brides
(154-163) and concludes with two vampire stories and a ghost story (204-207). The Anthony
narrative itself is immediately preceded by a tale of demonic infanticide (160-163), priming the
reader to absorb the more troubling valences of the encounter between the saint and the
representatives of pagan myth. In spite of this context, which departs ostensibly from that of the
*Legenda aurea* or the *Vies des Pères*, the text remains faithful to its source, faithful that is, up
until the moment of Anthony’s encounter with the satyr. Although the creature’s appearance is
the same as it is in the Late Antique text, his identity has changed substantially:

[…] huiusmodi autem Pana dicunt antiqui; *pan* autem interpretatur omne, unde
tocius in se mundi formam habere dicitur. Hic uerbis discretis uiam docuit,
questiusque quis esset, respondit se angelorum unum qui eicti cum Lucifero
dispersi sunt per orbem singuli secundum merita superbie sue (164).

[…] such was Pan as described by the ancients, and the meaning of *pan* is all,
signifying that he has in him the form of all nature. This creature told Anthony the
way in distinct speech, and when asked who he was replied that he was of the
angels who were cast out with Lucifer, and were scattered throughout the world,
each one according to the deserts of his pride (165).

So, Walter Map’s solution to the problem of the satyr’s ambivalence is not to resolve it but
rather to codify it, giving the satyr, in this case Pan, an identity within the Christian cosmos that
is both divine and diabolical. As a fallen angel, the satyr is an innately celestial being who must
nevertheless have chosen a path of wickedness since he only arrived in the desert as punishment
for his alignment with the satanic revolt. His role as structural double for the centaur, who sends
Anthony on the path toward Paul, suggests that the whole sequence ought to be thought of as a kind of unholy collaboration between divine forces and diabolical ones.

The passage cited above provides the final two sentences of the Anthony narrative as it is recounted in *De nugis curialium*. Therefore, it omits the satyr’s declaration of faith as it appears in the *Vita Pauli* and replaces it with a description of the creature’s ability, both through his name and through his garment, to contain a representation of the whole universe. This symbolic function is strikingly similar to the mission of *De nugis curialium* as a whole. This text takes the form of a series of anecdotes representing a wide cross section of spaces, from real to imaginary, from public to private, from past to present, on earth and beyond. Robert Edwards sees this as producing a metatextual analysis of the practice and purpose of writing and authorship (275 and following) couched in what is more obviously a reading of society through the narratives that shape it. Walther Map, then, removes the pious valences from the story of Anthony’s travels—at least as much as is possible in the case of a saint—and replaces them with a *mise en abyme* of his own text. Interestingly he alloys this text with the monstrous figure of a fallen angel. This suggests that the story of Saint Anthony and its divine associations are being deliberately perverted here in order for Walter Map to align both the narrative of Saint Anthony and *De nugis curialium* as a whole with a world of secular fiction. This interpretation is confirmed less than twenty pages later as the prologue to the third part (*distinctio tertia*) is essentially written in the praise of fiction (210-211).

The Anthony sequence in *Otia imperialia* is longer than that featured in *De nugis curialium* but it depicts the centaur and satyr in a similarly worrying light. This passage contains more transcription of the *Vita Pauli* than Walter Map’s version does but it includes a preliminary

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130 The opening and closing passages, which are both comparisons of royal courts to Hell and its inhabitants, demonstrate this in a particularly succinct manner (1-12; 499-513).
gloss that contextualizes the ambiguities of Jerome’s text in the possibly folkloric tradition of a kind of ghost that Gervase calls a “follet”:

[…] domos simplicium rusticorum inhabitant, et nec aqua nec exorcismis artantur, et quia non uidentur, ingredientes lapidibus, lignis, et domestica suppelectile affligunt […] De istis pleraque miracula memini me in Vita abbreuiata et miraculis beatissimi Antonii dictitasse (98)

These inhabit the homes of simple peasants, and they are not deterred either by holy water or exorcisms. Taking advantage of their invisibility, they pelt anyone who comes in with sticks and stones and household utensils […] I recall including many miracles involving them in my Short Account of the Life and Miracles of the Blessed Anthony (99)

These ghosts, which Gervaise says he included in a stand-alone version of Anthony’s vita, are his own personal addition to the story, and an odd one at that. While these annoying but essentially benign spirits correspond somewhat to the devils that beat Anthony in Athanasius’ account, Gervase of Tilbury would be the first and only author to depict them as harmless nuisances instead of real dangers. This invocation of an otherwise unknown component of the story of Saint Anthony is followed by the introduction of the sequence directly transcribed from the Vita Pauli: “Sunt et alii spiritus nescio dixerim an corporeas et siluestres bestias, qui fauni et satiri dicuntur, de quibus in Vita beati Pauli primi heremite ita narrat Ieronimus […]” (98) [There are still other spirits, or they may actually be corporeal wild beasts, called fauns and satyrs. With reference to these, Jerome in his Life of the Blessed Paul the First Hermit, tells the following story…] (99). Although Gervase is only going to transcribe from this point onward, he uses this introduction to further complicate the possibility of identifying the centaur and the satyr. Gervase’s suggestion that these figures may or may not be ghosts echoes Jerome’s own assertion about the dubious identity of these creatures. However, the placement of this assertion, in apposition to the suggestion that follets appear in the Life of Anthony, brings forth the
possibility that, in Gervase’s hands, both the centaur and the satyr are nothing more than a kind of pesky spirit.

This transformation of the Christian supernatural into the ghostly considerably alters the religious *gravitas* of the story. Whether Gervase actually wrote a Saint Anthony *vita* or not, the invocation of such a story erodes the devotional impact of this work of literature, sight unseen. The intertextual interpolation of this text, in turn, maps its hypothetical defrocking of the saint’s story onto the universe of *Otia imperialia*. The new spectral identity this creates for the centaur and the satyr dismisses the potential for these creatures to incarnate a demonic power. However, in so doing, it also subtracts them from the Christian context that would lead to such an interpretation in the first place. It simultaneously pushes the reader away from the conclusion that they are, as Jerome suggests, merely normal beasts that inhabit the desert. The result here, very much as it is in *De nugis curialium*, is the manifest fictionalization of the centaur-satyr sequence. This is an important condition of its inclusion in *Otia imperialia*, which, like *De nugis curialium*, collects anecdotes from history, folktale, the natural world, and the supernatural beyond into a reimagined version of the Christian cosmos. Indeed, while this text certainly bespeaks its author’s understating of Church politics, what knowledge it imparts to its reader lies largely subjacent under a patina of fiction. The first part of the work, for example, is structured according to the textual production of a parallel universe in which there are two heavens and two hells (94-97). In *Otia imperialia*, then, the centaur and the satyr again become the characters of a fictional narrative, working to complicate the serious religious implications of the story of Saint Anthony.

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131 See, for example, Banks and Binns liii
In short, both Gervase of Tilbury and Walter Map take the story of Anthony’s encounter with the centaur and satyr and modernize its potential to represent the aesthetic surface of fictional text. Walter Map transforms the satyr into an intra-textual manifestation of the fictional work in which it appears while Gervase of Tilbury exchanges the fodder of the ancient pagan poets for the stuff of popular folklore. The effect that this has on the figure of Saint Anthony is not to be understated.  

In both *De nugis curialium* and *Otia imperialia*, it is Anthony that negotiates the manifestly fictional interventions of the centaur and the satyr. It is Anthony’s journey that brings the reader into contact with these beasts, and his queries that give them voice. He acts, in this respect, as a stand-in for the authors of the works in question, disposing the mythological characters according to the fanciful aims, not of the Christian God, but of their human creator. This does not go so far as to transform the eminent anchorite into some kind of poltergeist. However, it does transform and expand his sphere of saintly activity. Whereas Anthony usually brings God’s mysteries to common mortals, in these texts, he also mediates the equally mysterious world of aesthetic representation. This develops Anthony’s powers beyond the practical business of devotion such that he becomes a player not only within the diegetic universe of his written story but also in its transposition into written form.

While *De nugis curialium* and *Otia imperialia* certainly allow the saintly narrative to collide with the aesthetic world of fictionality, this could not be said of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès*; metaphorical as these texts may be, they go out of their way to avoid being thought of as fiction. However, the kind of adversarial relationship that their intertextual variation displays was instrumental in shaping the hagiographical field such that

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132 Philippe Walter sees the intrusions of these characters as an opening of the saint’s story into the world of the *carnavalesque* (131). Although he is rather distracted by the astrological position of Sagittarius at the moment of Mardi Gras, there can be little doubt that these mythological figures impact the role of the saint considerably.
works like *De nugis curialium* and *Otia imperialia* might become possible. The *Vie de Saint Antoine* and *Mystère de Sant Anthoni* bespeak a broader tradition in which readers were compelled to see the corpus of texts associated with Anthony’s life as being made up of some true stories and some stories that were only *disguised* as truth. The implicit existence of false hagiographies meant that readers had to be on their guard, even when reading stories of the saints, for texts whose moral impact would have had much more in common with the *mençonges* evoked by the *champenois* translator of the *Vies des Pères*, than with serious hagiographical text. The particular dating of the four extant Anthony rewritings discussed in this chapter may not lend itself well to such a causal argument. However, it is a near certainty that the kinds of rewritings transmitted by the *Vie de Saint Antoine* and the *Mystère de Sant Anthoni de Viennès* existed both before and between the copying of these works. This allows us to suppose that the necessary skepticism that this tradition of rewriting imposed on its readers also allowed authors like Walter Map and Gervase of Tilbury to go even further, threatening the veracity of the saintly story itself. In other words, the tradition of rewriting distorted the potential unity of the hagiographical tradition thereby allowing the solemn saint of the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli* to step through the moments of wonderment present in the Late Antique tradition and become the servant of a potentially fictional world.

Conclusion

It has frequently been contended that because of their importance to medieval Christians hagiographical texts were somehow immune from doubt. However, the narrative plasticity of

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133 This passage of the *Vies des Pères* is in BNF MS Fr. 1038 fol. 4 of the first series; it is discussed in detail in Chapter I.
134 See, for example, Cazelles 5; Campbell *Saints* 8-9.
medieval hagiography clearly brought the internal coherence of this tradition to a point of breakdown. One might go so far as to say that, as Anthony’s tradition expanded to accommodate the infinite reinterperitability codified in the fourth century by the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli*, it became a tradition in perpetual crisis. The creative license invited by Athanasius and Jerome was deliberately harnessed by medieval authors in order to draw fault lines within Anthony’s written corpus. While it was through these conflicts that new iterations of Anthony’s story were able to come into existence, the intertextual animosity they engendered brought with them the implication that some hagiographical texts ought to be doubted. So, even as the Late Antique aesthetic of respectful reimagination thrived in Anthony’s rewritten corpus, it pushed the continuity of this tradition towards theoretical failure.

This chapter has demonstrated that the practical realities of this breakdown in narrative integrity manifested themselves through the multiplication of possible understandings of Anthony’s life and legacy. This helps account for one of the most perplexing components of Anthony’s medieval profile. In addition to being a source of comfort to those suffering from ergotism and a conduit to divine help, Anthony was also widely feared due to the popular belief, not sanctioned by the Church, that he was able to inflict ergotism on unsuspecting human targets (Morawski 149). The copyist of the *Vie de Saint Antoine* may have been in this frame of mind when he wrote in the margin of the text: “Prions li qu’il nous gart de son135 mal vilain” (217) [Let us pray to him that he keep us safe from his evil disease]. This view of Anthony’s powers likely grew out of the narrative corpus itself, or, to be more precise, the possibility for its creative reinterpretation. It is easy to see how Anthony might have developed an association with ergotism, even beyond his famous miracle for Guérin de Valloire; the terrifying demonic

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135 Emphasis mine.
apparitions and brutal beatings he endures resemble the hallucinatory and gangrenous symptoms of the disease. However, this particular understanding of Anthony’s story is in many ways even more problematic than the fictionalization promoted by Walter Map and Gervase de Tilbury. It causes Anthony to lose his structural affinity with the human sufferer of ergotism and gain affinity instead with the devils who abuse him. This conflation of the saint with the satanic may well be the greatest breakdown that the narrative integrity of a tradition based on establishing closeness between Anthony and God could possibly endure.

And yet, somehow, it did endure. The literary machine of hagiography was vehicled by the kind of tension that such improbable interpretations of saintly stories could produce. This is the natural consequence of the model of fictitious hagiography that the stories of Anthony and Paul originally created and it is the sheer multiplicity of possibilities facilitated by this model that caused it to gain such importance in the medieval world. This narrative freedom enabled the transformation of Anthony’s life story, not only into new, creative and sometimes blasphemous interpretations, but also into new and different saintly identities. As the following chapter will explore, the interpretative elasticity afforded by the fictitious model allowed Anthony’s story to become the basis for the depiction of saints of all shapes and sizes throughout the medieval period.

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136 This similarity was reportedly noted by a certain medieval pilgrim named Guillaume according to a story of particularly specious origin, recounted (although not cited) by Renée Sandell-Dupeley (151-153).
PART II: *THE LITERARY MACHINE*
CHAPTER III: THE JOURNEY OF HAGIOGRAPHY FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

A chaque minute, je défaille! Que ne suis-je un de ceux dont l’âme est toujours intrépide et l’esprit ferme, – comme le grand Athanase, par exemple.
- Saint Anthony, in the words of Gustave Flaubert

Introduction: Beyond the Middle Ages

Present-day medieval literature curricula typically provide students with a few hagiographical texts as exempla of the medieval literary tradition. However, saints’ lives tend to disappear from reading lists as study shifts away from the Middle Ages and toward the early modern period. The rhetoric that has most commonly characterized modern thought on the Middle Ages has had the tendency to paint medieval intellectual culture as stilted by the influence of the Church. Although largely disavowed by present-day medieval scholars, the persistence of this view might lead one to suspect that the prevalence of medieval saints’ lives in the French literary canon and the relative absence of their early modern and modern counterparts is a sign of the poverty of the secular literature of medieval France. Nothing could be further from the truth. Especially now, as digitization is bringing an increasing number medieval texts to

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137 La Tentation de Saint Antoine, 1874-1880 version (88).
138 Duncan Robertson makes a similar observation of literary history manuals, see 12 for more discussion.
139 The Enlightenment was particularly harsh on the Middle Ages. In the Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers D’Alembert uses his entry on “Érudition” to build a narrative around modern scholarship’s rescue of truth out of the jaws of “[...] ces temps barbares et ténébreux qu’on appelle le moyen âge” (915) while Voltaire in the entry for “Histoire” writes that “Au démembrement de l’empire romain en Occident commence un nouvel ordre des chose, et c’est ce qu’on appelle l’histoire du moyen âge; histoire barbare de peuples barbares qui devenus chrétiens, n’en deviennent pas meilleurs” (223). This notion that the shadows of medieval ignorance were somehow responsible for both distant and more recent troubles of French society remained entrenched in scholarly rhetoric. Over a century after the publication of the first volumes of the Encyclopédie, Michelet wrote in the Bible de l’humanité: “Il faut faire volte-face, et vivement, franchement tourner le dos au moyen âge à ce passé morbide, qui, même quand il n’agit pas, influe terriblement par la contagion de la mort” (283).
140 Bloch and Nichols cite the importance of moving on from these largely nineteenth and early twentieth century views of the Middle Ages as a component of their “New Medievalism” (2-3).
scholarly attention, hagiography would be easy to avoid. The fact that it is not bespeaks an important, if essentially tacit, consensus that medieval hagiographies are distinct in their literary value, distinct, that is, from the early modern and modern traditions of hagiographical writing that have followed in their wake.

Exactly how medieval hagiography asserts this special status with respect to its successors is another matter. After all, the saints have been an important part of Catholic devotion without interruption from Late Antiquity to the present day and hagiographical writing has never failed to accompany them. So what exactly does make medieval hagiographies so profoundly different from their modern counterparts? And how did the transition between medieval and modern come about? In this chapter, I will address these far too rarely asked questions. By studying medieval hagiography in the context of the expansive textual tradition that it inspired, I will provide a basic theory of both medieval and modern hagiographical methods as well as an outline of their relationship to one another. This will prepare the way for Chapter IV, in which I will discuss the return of medieval hagiographical aesthetics to world of modern saintly representation.

In imitatio Antonii: The Literary Machine Revisited

Throughout the first part of this dissertation, I have maintained that medieval hagiography is characterized by a harnessing of human artfulness through the creative deployment of a set of recognizable and replicable tropes. Saint Anthony was instrumental in enabling this aesthetic to take hold. However his was not the only story that it touched. When Athanasius first depicted Anthony achieving sanctity while defying martyrdom, Anthony stood out within the hagiographical tradition as the first and only saint of his kind. However, from the
time that Saint Jerome first appropriated Athanasius’ narrative style, not to mention Anthony’s identity, for his *Vita Pauli*, Anthony had begun a journey into the background of a community of saints, and saintly stories, all created to a greater or lesser extent in his image. Anthony’s story, then, is part of a deeply interconnected network of hagiographies all linked together by a common artistic language and a shared representational goal.

In order to fully comprehend the implications of this claim, it is informative to return to the foundational example of intertextual dialogue in medieval hagiography, the relationship of respectful reimagination established in of the fourth century by the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Pauli*. The blurring of the diegetic boundaries between these two texts in Late Antiquity and to a greater extent in the Middle Ages is, as the previous two chapters have demonstrated, a significant concern of Anthony’s medieval profile, even becoming a thematic element of his rewritten lives between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. The procedure of saintly imitation encouraged by this aesthetic was of such great importance to medieval hagiographers that it frequently spilled beyond the story of Saint Anthony to become a stylistic feature of other hagiographical narratives as well.

The story of Saint Mary the Egyptian, one of the most popular hagiographical narratives both among medieval readers and modern critics, provides an excellent example. Mary’s hagiographies consistently depict her conversion from prolific prostitute to extreme ascetic as being intertwined with the life of another saint, Zosiums of Palestine. Remarkably the

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141 The popularity of Mary’s medieval lives is addressed by Peter Dembowski in the preface to his edition of the Old and Middle French versions of this text (9-10). The story of Mary the Egyptian, which can be traced to a Greek original, written by Sophronios around 638 was subsequently translated into Latin which provided the major point of contact between the first vita and the Christian West. For more details, see Dembowski, *Marie* 13-14.

142 Zosimus is now venerated principally in the Eastern Church. However, medieval hagiographers active in France frequently described him as saintly. He is, for example, referred
encounter between the two saints and their prolonged collaboration does not take place until well after Mary’s conversion. When Mary realizes the grievousness of her sins, she takes to the desert in order to expiate her past wrongs through a combination of extreme starvation and brazen exposure to the elements. The T version of the *Vie de Sainte Marie L’Égyptienne* describes this asceticism in characteristically colorful terms. Mary eats so little, the narrator tells us, that her flesh practically withers away and she remains naked in such harsh weather conditions that her skin becomes completely black. By the time Zosimus arrives on the scene, Mary has so chastised her flesh that he does not initially believe she is human. Zosimus’ role in Mary’s life is not that of bringing about her conversion. Mary and Zosimus come face to face as peers in sanctity. Zosimus’ place, then, is not simply to support Mary’s special connection to God but more importantly, to provide Mary with a saintly counterpart, an interlocutor within the text and a double on the stylistic level. Zosimus, as a priest, is able to offer Mary confession and thus a much-needed source of absolution. This aids her passage from Earth to Heaven, bypassing purgatory, a condition of sanctity. But Mary, far more innovative and far more extreme in her devotional style, also impacts Zosimus’ saintly practice. She inspires him to become a better Christian and a better member of his community. The *Vie de Sainte Marie l’Égyptienne*, then, although it belongs principally to Mary depicts the two saints as a unit, sharing a single saintly

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143 “Li chars de li mua coulor / Qui ains ert blance comme flor / Que par yver, que par esté / Tout li noircirient li costé […] Et avoit tant noir le menton, / Comme s’il fust taint de carbon / […] N’avoit plus char en ses traians […]” (vv. 625-6643).

144 In T: “Cuida que fust encantemet, / Reclama Diu omnipotent, / Ke le deffende de Felon / Et de male temptation” (vv. 833-836). This is a relatively common description of the initial encounter, for comparison, see X: “[...] cuidast que se feüst enchantement ou fantosme” (122).
It is significant that this sharing of the saintly work depicted in this text should be accomplished by a parallel splitting of the hagiographical narrative. Mary, through her confession, narrates the part of her life during which Zosimus was not present. Zosimus in turn creates a narrative out of these confidences, combining them with his own lived experience of Mary’s faith and, after her death, recounts this story to the monks of his community. This allows the hagiographical unit not only to represent *itself* but also to contain the representation of its own continuation. By taking on Mary’s story and transforming it into an aspect of his own path to Heaven, Zosimus is in a sense *becoming* Mary, or his life is at least becoming a *representation* of hers. Zosimus gives new form to Mary’s faith by practicing his own in the spirit of her devotional perfection. He thereby physically reanimates her sanctity. Meanwhile, he operationalizes her story in order to provide others with the same opportunity to follow in Mary’s and now also Zosimus’ footsteps. In this way, the *Vie de Sainte Marie* is able to embody its relationship to past and future hagiographical writing. In a tradition in which saints and hagiographers alike worked to recreate the narratives of their predecessors, Zosimus’ appropriation of Mary’s story becomes a powerful intertextual *mise en abyme* projecting the future uses of this text even as it harkens back to those that have come before it.¹⁴⁵

In fact, the major trope through which this *mise en abyme* is created, the encounter between a monastic saint and an solitary ascetic, reaches transparently back to the first

¹⁴⁵ It is worth noting, that Mary’s moment of conversion, which is depicted as being inspired by the Virgin Mary is not only depicted throughout the lives of Mary the Egyptian (In T, for example, see vv. 414-560) but also in texts dedicated to the Virgin Mary (see, for example, Kjellman’s collection of Anglo-Norman *Miracles de la Sainte Vièrge* 47-60), thereby enacting within the hagiographical tradition itself, the link between past and future sanctity.
intertextual pairing of the medieval hagiographical tradition, that between Anthony and Paul.

Just like Zosimus, Anthony, is depicted in the *Vita Pauli* as a continuation of the mentor. Before Zosimus reincarnated Mary, Anthony carried the burden of Paul’s saintly identity both physically (through the renewal of his own Christian zeal) and verbally (through the intradiagetic narration of Paul’s life to the brothers of his community). As though to make this intertext perfectly clear, the *Vie de Sainte Marie l’Égyptienne* depicts a miracle at the end of Mary’s life which is nearly identical to the one employed in the *Vita Pauli* following the death of Saint Paul. When, after a period of separation, Zosimus returns to Mary’s side, he finds her dead and must fulfill a promise made earlier in their friendship to give her a Christian burial. When he is too weak to make a proper grave, a gentle lion appears to help him with his work. This is a mirror image of the final pages of the *Vita Pauli* in which Anthony returns to Paul’s hermitage after a short absence only to find Paul dead and is then helped by, in this case, *two* divinely-inspired lions in burying the body of his mentor (175-181). One might go so far as to say that Zosimus is not just a representation of Mary; he is also a reincarnation of Anthony and, through this parallelism a representation of Paul as well. It is as though every saint in this group of four could simply melt into any of the others, as though they were all different manifestations of a single entity.

In this respect, the *Vie de Saint Mary L’Égyptienne* is a narrative deeply aware of its place in the larger hagiographical world. This is not simply manifested by its imitation of the *Vita Pauli*. The flexibility of the saintly identities it presents is a veritable operation of the literary machine of medieval hagiography, allowing the reader to observe each saintly identity breaking down into the next. Interestingly enough, this complex procedure of saintly doubling (or tripling or quadrupling) was not uncommon in medieval saintly stories. An almost identical
pairing to that of the *Vie de Sainte Marie l’Égyptienne* can be observed, for example in the story of Saint Thaïs, the reformed courtesan and that of her savior, Saint Paphnutius as well as certain tellings of the story of Mary Magdalene and her confessor, Saint Maximin of Aix. Whether purposefully or by chance, this narrative echoing allows the saints depicted in each text to lose their individuality not only by providing a double to their intra-textual homologue but by undisguisedly enacting a sort of saintly script shared across textual universes. Saintly replication is not just a *depiction* of literary machinery; it is an enactment of it.

Although to the modern reader, this potential for the eclipsing of personal identity may seem unlikely, there is considerable evidence to support its prevalence in medieval hagiography. The issue of saintly homonymy, that is to say the existence of saints with the same first name, illustrates the very real practical effects of identitarian blurring on the world of devotional text. The possibility for confusion inherent in the phenomenon of saintly homonymy was not always avoided by medieval hagiographers as a modern reader might expect. Instead, it was regularly embraced. Duncan Robertson, for example, has highlighted the conflation of the story of Saint Denis of Paris with that of Saint Denis the Areopagite and Saint Denis the Pseudo-Areopagite, a process that Robertson argues, was devised in order to create a narrative that would serve the particular needs of the abbey of Saint-Denis (15).

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146 This story seems first to have appeared in a different form in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* featuring an unnamed courtesan and the bishop Serapion, the other beneficiary, incidentally, of Anthony’s will in the *Life of Anthony* (see Kuehne 18). Written narratives of Thaïs’ life sometimes feature her as the titular saint, as is the case, for example in the *Legenda aurea*, while they sometimes feature Paphnutius as the titular saint, as in the case of Hrotsvitha’s *Paphnutius*. Overlap in the case Thaïs and Paphnutius with the story of Saint Anthony is particularly striking. Anthony is Paphnutius’ abbot in *Paphnutius* and in the *Legenda aurea* and Thaïs is honored with a vision that the monks initially believe to be reserved for Anthony (840).

147 The corpus of texts associated with Mary Magdalene has survived particularly well, and so I will not provide a complete inventory here. Suffice to say that this detail is present in the N version which is also the earliest (Collet and Messerli 60-79), the *Abbreviatio de gestis et miraculis sanctorum* (see for example 103-112) and the *Legenda aurea* (509-521).
This disregard for saintly individuality is even more emphatically demonstrated by the case of Saint Julian. As Boureau, Gouillet, Collomb, Moulinier and Mula point out in their notes to the *Legenda aurea*, the Roman martyrology makes mention of no fewer than thirty-five saints named Julian (1142). Jacobus of Voargine, however, pared this number down for his *Legenda Aurea* to five, only four of which are actually saints: Julian of le Mans, Julian of Brioude, Julian the bishop, Julian the Hospitaller and the strikingly non-saintly but aptly-named Julian the Apostate. However Jacobus, short of acknowledging the omission of over twenty Julians from his catalogue, appears more concerned with using his text in order to alter the totality of saintly subjectivities that fit under this rubric. For instance, he appropriates various incidents from the omitted Julian stories and assigns them instead to one of his Julians (1143). Furthermore, the Julian entry itself works to agglomerate each of the five Julians into a sort of single saintly subjectivity, hardly marking the passage from one Julian to the next. In fact the inclusion of the practically diabolical Julian the Apostate at the end of an entry on Saint Julian almost seems to cancel out the narrative purpose of the entry itself, transforming the largely undifferentiated series of Julian characters into a kind of theoretical identitarian spectrum named Julian that runs the gamut from supremely good to exceptionally evil.

This cherry picking of different saintly stories suggests not merely calculating practicality on the part of medieval hagiographers, but also the belief that the deliberate borrowing and appropriation of differing saintly identities was both acceptable and devotionally useful. The

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148 Although they estimate that this actually corresponds to twenty-nine historical individuals (1142).

149 It is indicated each time with the short phrase: “Il y eut encore un autre Julien” (172), a detail that could easily be missed by an inattentive reader and that, especially given the inclusion of Julian the Apostate, could have disastrous consequences.

150 The practical value of saintly interchangeability is reflected in the medieval calendar. Saints regularly shared double billing. Saint Patrick, for example, shared a feast day (March 17) with
plasticity that this implies in medieval understandings of saintly identities allows the fluidity of saintly selfhood observed in the stories of Mary the Egyptian, Thaïs, Mary Magdalene, Anthony, and Paul to take on a more concrete plausibility. Saint Anthony was himself sometimes confused with his namesakes. The translator of the *champenois* *Vies des Pères*, for instance, follows up the portion of the text devoted to Late Antique vitae with a translation of what he identifies as a description of the “[...] voiages que saint Antoine fist en la terre d’outremer” (MS. Fr. 1038 fol. 110r).^{151} This text, usually known according to its Latin title as *Itinerarium Antonini martyr* was not widely thought to be the work of Anthony the Great, but was instead attributed at the time to Saint Antoninus of Piacenza.^{152} However the *champenois* translator transforms the name of both the text and of its narrator such that conflation with Saint Anthony the Great, whose story is omnipresent throughout the first part of the *Vies des Pères*, becomes not only possible but likely.

Paul Meyer has suggested that the translator made a mistake, genuinely believing that the text he calls the *Voiages que Saint Antoine fist en la terre d’outremer* was authored by none other than fourth century anchorite himself. For Meyer, this is especially plausible given the placement of the travel narrative immediately following the exposition of the saintly tradition that Anthony inspired (312). This is somewhat difficult to imagine. Meyer fails to note that the Joseph of Arimathea while Saint Agnes the virgin martyr shared her feast (July 22), to particularly intriguing effect, with the original holy harlot, Mary Magdalene. Meanwhile, some saints appeared twice on the calendar like Saint Martin of Tours, who was celebrated in spring and again in late fall, or one of Flaubert’s personal favorites, Saint Polycarp, who was celebrated on January 26 and also on April 27.

^{151} According to Meyer, this is likely the work of the translator and not the manuscript organizer given that it is included in the same position in BNF MS Fr. 1038, as well as the Lyon and Saint Petersburg manuscripts (312). See Chapter I for further discussion of *Vies des Pères* manuscript tradition.

^{152} Today it is no longer believed to be the work of Saint Antoninus. Although for some time it was credited to a non-saintly Antonino di Piacenza, it is now considered to be the work of an anonymous pilgrim (Milani 34).
narrator of the *Voiages* speaks specifically about visiting various cites mentioned in the *Vies des Pères*, including most problematically, the home of Saint Anthony the Great (fol. 113v), a fact that would certainly have been noticed by the translator when he transposed this passage from the Latin. It is more likely, that the translator, short of being taken in by a case of saintly homonymy was actually creating one. An inattentive reader could easily fall into the trap of believing that the *Voiages* is the work of Saint Anthony the Great. An attentive reader, on the other hand, would be struck by the saintly replication produced by the narrator’s devotional visit to his namesake’s home. In either case, though, the *Voiages* allows the reader to contemplate the textual interconnectedness of Anthony’s saintly story. If the reader believes the narrator to be Anthony the Great, his travel through the Holy Land to the sites of Christ’s life becomes a representation of the saintly internalization of Holy Scripture. If the reader believes the narrator to be a different Saint Anthony, his journey into the physical space of the *Vies des Pères* becomes a symbolic occupation of Anthony’s own skin. Significantly, though, the translator is not compelled to address this ambiguity. The various possible identities of his narrator are left open.

It is important to bear in mind that this play with homonymy is not the product of authorial carelessness. Nor is it a testament to the intellectual simplicity of medieval hagiography. The importance of saintly replication both within and between hagiographies, coupled with the constant possibility for saintly homonymy to blur the boundaries between saintly identities compellingly suggests that medieval hagiographical writing prioritized the demonstration of belonging to a community of saints over the depiction of factual events. As Duncan Robertson has put it, “[m]edieval readers serenely subordinated the saint’s individuality

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153 “En celle maisme cité gist […] saint Antoine” [In this same city […] lies Saint Anthony.]
to his trans-personal identity as a saint” (25). More than this, medieval hagiography worked against the establishment of an historical timeline of sanctity, encouraging readers to think of saintliness in terms of a cosmic ebb and flow of energy rather than a succession of individual people and measurable events. Antoninus, through his journey becomes a kind of Anthony. Mary the Egyptian, through her asceticism is a kind of Zosimus who in his turn is a kind of Mary who is a kind of Paul the Hermit, who is a kind of Anthony the Great who is a kind of Zosimus, who is a kind of Paphnutius…. This exercise of genealogical equivalencies among saints could go on almost interminably. In many ways that is the point; for medieval hagiographers, sanctity was not so much a quality earned by different individuals through different sets of accomplishments as it was a transtemporal union of individuals able to manifest a single mystical power. Antoninus’ pilgrimage, Mary’s self-denial, Zosimus’ obedience, and Anthony’s resistance to temptation are all bridges between their human forms and the hidden world of God to which they have special access. Obtaining entry to this divine world was the saint’s only real purpose. In this sense, all saints worked in concert toward a single mystical task: the linking the material world of human existence with the invisible and unfathomable world of God.

Hagiographers, in partial imitation of their subjects, had the weighty task of translating this transcendent quality of sanctity into the materiality of written text; this was the single task shared by all hagiographies. In order to do this, writers exploited the unity of the communion of the saints. Hagiographies like those of Mary the Egyptian, Thaïs and Mary Magdalene utilize the doubling of their titular characters in order to situate the core of saintly exceptionality outside of the narrated events of the text locating them instead on a sort of invisible plane that, because it is in between the activities of two individuals, is beyond the possibility of narration. The importance and prevalence of hagiographies in which this procedure occurs attests to the reality
of this kind of saintly oneness in the minds of the faithful. Medieval sanctity was a quality that, in its most important form, was expected to transcend and even obliterate individuality – both personal and textual. In this sense, the metaphorical nature of medieval hagiographies is not confined to the use of symbolic tropes in the narration of saintly exploits. The saints themselves are repeated and repeatable metaphors, providing an intelligible exterior to unknowable divine truths.

To say that medieval readers took this for granted, simply accepting the saints as stylistic figures in the mystical writing of God’s universe, would be to overlook the fate of medieval hagiography. Medieval people may have believed in prioritizing poetic truths over factual ones; they may have seen saints as metaphorical representations of an invisible God. But it is clear that they also saw the saints as people, individual, people with individual identities and individual life stories. Saints allowed the faithful to access the divine not just as an absolute unknown but in practical ways as well, very often through the specificity of their stories. Anthony’s patronage of ergotism (see Chapter II) makes no sense without the singular specificity of his story. The resemblance between the disease and Anthony’s own suffering, his miraculous cure of Guérin de Valloire, his protection of the Antonine order, all lend credence to the contention that Anthony had the special power to cure ergotism as opposed, for example, to headaches or arthritis.

Medieval devotion to the cult of the saints, then, was characterized by a need for saintly specificity even as the narrative tradition denied it. The Vie de Saint Antoine, for example, is careful to situate Anthony’s story within the practical context of epidemic prevention by depicting him surviving a burning fire in parallel to the believer’s suffering. At the same time, though, it blends his saintly identity with that of Paul the hermit, spending over fifty verses of this short text describing the encounter and exchange between the two men (157-208), a
sequence which ends in a deliberately ambiguous description of Anthony’s narration of a combination of his and Paul’s life stories.154

The tension this created between identity and conformity in the lives of the saints is at least analogous, if not a contributing factor, to the crisis of believability awakened by competing accounts of a saint’s rewritten stories (as discussed in Chapter II). In this case, however contradictions arise, not on the level of the narrative but rather on the level of the narrative tradition. There is an impasse between the intellectual significance of hagiography as a conduit between man and God and its practical purpose as a sort of matching service between devotional client and saintly favors. Although this kind of breakdown is at the heart of the medieval hagiographical tradition, fueling the continued rewriting of saintly stories according to different and ever-evolving social and authorial needs, the saints could not remain indefinitely in suspension. A growing outcry for these figures to become fixed entities, clearly defined both by their written lives and by the ecclesiastical tradition they supported, emerged over the course of the sixteenth-century.

154 “Adonques Saint Antoine le corps [tost] enterra, / Chascun des .ii. lions mieus qu’il pot luy aida; / Puis après se tournèrenet, et le saint s’en ala / Tout droit en s’abaïe, ou les moynes trouva. […] / Leur monstra la maniere, par predicacion, / Comment vivre devotement et en contemplacion / Pour accomplir la voie de leur sauvacion” (vv. 201-208). [And then Saint Anthony soon buried the body, / Each of the two liens helped as best as he could / Then afterwards they left, and the saint went on his way / Straight to his abbey where he found the monks. […] / He showed them the way through his teaching / To live in devotion and in contemplation / In order to achieve the road to their salvation]. The proximity of the moment at which Anthony recounts his life story to moment of Paul’s death, a part of Anthony’s life story, allows the two saintly narratives to blur together, especially since Anthony’s story-telling is a replication of the same kind of teaching that Paul provided to Anthony before his own death.
The End of Medieval Hagiography

On the one hand, it is clearly artificial to cordon off the Middle Ages from the rest of history as though a visible border existed separating this period from those that followed. However, in doing so here, I am merely mimicking the intellectual shift that originally brought about the conceptual creation of the Middle Ages by an equally self-styled Renaissance. The term *media tempestas*, which has become our “Middle Ages” was first coined in the second half of the fifteenth century in order to designate the medieval past as fundamentally other with respect to the present.\(^\text{155}\) While the absolute utility of this ironclad distinction between historical time periods is clearly questionable,\(^\text{156}\) the fact that it has been so widely embraced throughout the early modern and modern periods has contributed in very real ways to the disavowal of medieval hagiographical methods in favor of new ones, more in line with humanist and later empiricist values. Therefore, although I do not intend to draw a hard and fast line between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, I will maintain that such a line exists and that it was progressively, indiosyncratically and differently crossed such that, as Robert Bartlett has phrased it, the world of 1550 would have been in many ways unrecognizable to people of even one hundred years earlier.\(^\text{157}\)

A driving factor in this cultural shift was the Protestant Reformation (1517-1648). As Cummings and Simpson have put it “[…] the Reformation gave ideological exactitude and

\(^{155}\) It seems to have been used for the first time in 1469 by Giovanni Andrea de’Bussi in his edition of Apulius’ writings (Cummings and Simpson 4). It responds to a view that had been current in Italy for at least a hundred years, which characterized the recent past as a time of barbarism. This understanding of the period we know call the “Middle Ages” crystallized over the course of the late fifteenth century as Italian humanists began proposing readings of the present as a “bridge to the culture of the past, an age of renewal of the glories of the antique” (4).

\(^{156}\) It is difficult to imagine a more nuanced discussion of the issues inherent in periodization than that provided by Cumings and Simpson. See esp. 2-3.

\(^{157}\) For a concise discussion of this transition, see “The End of the Middle Ages in Bartlett’s book, *Medieval Panorama* esp. 258-260.
political compulsion to emerging prejudices [against the Middle Ages]” (5). Given the extent to which this situates the motor of cultural change specifically within a core questioning of the religious beliefs promoted by the medieval Church, it should not be surprising that saintliness was among the most powerfully impacted institutions in these years of upheaval. Reformation or no Reformation, the cult of the saints, as it had been inherited from the Middle Ages, was rapidly becoming incompatible with modern understandings of both literary and devotional norms. Although Vatican control of canonization had risen steadily from the late twelfth-century onward the increasingly specific set of rules laid out by the Church was not uniformly observed until well into the seventeenth century. In fact, in defiance of ecclesiastical attempts at regulation, the communion of the saints expanded between 1200 and 1500 to accommodate the greatest number of saintly individuals the Western Church would ever know, many of whom had not passed through any process of institutional control or approval (Woodward 68).

Particularly damaging to the medieval hagiographical tradition, which often placed the lives of these “unofficial” saints side by side with the lives of officially canonized ones, the sixteenth century experienced a generalized change in expectations of literary veracity. Whereas medieval readers did not come to hagiographical texts, or any other texts for that matter, with a clear expectation of factual accuracy, by the early sixteenth century, the popularization of classical aesthetics had brought a more aggressive and more regulated separation between history

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158 In no way do I pretend to provide a complete appreciation of these complex issues. For a detailed discussion of the social, economic, and religious changes in the Church during this time period, see Todd, especially Chapters 1-4 (1-239) or Delumeau, esp 45-76.

159 In 1170 Alexander III forbade devotion to saints not approved by the papacy, in 1234, Gregory IX asserted the absolute power of the Holy See over the declaration of sanctity and over the course of the fourteenth century, particularly during the Avignon Papacy (1309-1377), the invention and refinement of a set of codified stops in the canonization process created the basic trial structure that would dominate canonization until 1983. For detailed discussion see Vauchez 70-120; For description of the canonization process as it stood by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries see Finucane 24-32.
and fiction back to the fore (see Gossman 227-228). Thus the existence of hagiographies depicting saints that had not passed through the steps of canonization became problematic to the Catholic orthodoxy.

Reformers saw this bloating of the saintly institution as evidence of the secular deregulation of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther, in his 1520 treatise on “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church” takes great exception to the cult of the saints as it had impacted belief up until that point: “[Catholic pontiffs] not only fail to reserve, but actually teach and approve things which are against the service of God, against faith and the chief commandments – such as their running about on pilgrimages, the perverse worship of the saints, the lying saints’ legends […] Yet in all of these faith in God is extinguished and idolatry is fostered […]” (213). For Luther, the problem is not merely that hagiographies written up until this point were not historically true – although he clearly concedes that this lack of veracity is problematic. The chief concern with these texts lies in the fact that they exhibit a fatal penchant for aesthetic over substance which permeates not just the written lives but the whole medieval cult of the saints. Written hagiographies, then, translate false stories that, worse than simply finessing facts in the service of an important message, lead to an illusory equivalency between saintliness and divinity that results in blasphemous idolatry. According to Luther’s view it is specifically the metaphorical nature of medieval saints’ stories, which leads to the mistaken belief whereby the

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160 Naturally this discussion of changes in expectations of literary truthfulness between the Middle Ages and Renaissance passes over a great deal of nuance. The issue of literary truthfulness in medieval text is extremely intricate and is treated in greater detail in the Introduction and Chapter I of this dissertation. For an appreciation of the equal complexities that emerge in the Renaissance, Jesse Lander’s discussion of Early Modern historiography highlights the increasing awareness of competing understandings of history that emerged in the wake of the Reformation (58). His focus particularly on English history plays contributes to the delicateness of this picture, underscoring the polemical and imaginative readings of history accepted and encouraged during (and beyond) the sixteenth century (56-73).
saint takes on the proportions of the divine. If this understanding of hagiography is to be embraced, the metaphorical character of the saint, and of his life, can no longer be understood as a path to divine communion but must instead be seen as a road to perdition.

Significantly, Catholic confession was no failsafe against this view of hagiographical writing. In 1543 Claude d’Espence, a theologian and a professor at the Université de Paris gave voice to what had long been a sentiment among French Catholics. During Lent of that year, he delivered a series of public sermons in which he accused the *Legenda aurea* of inaccuracy and of narrative excess, most famously calling it a “Legende [sic] de fer” (cited by Nicéron 186). This does not appear to be based solely on the potential fictionality of some of the saints honored within this volume. Based on what precious little is left of Espence’s original text, it is clear that one of the major problems he saw in the hagiographical tradition was its ability to act as a devotional surrogate for the divine: “Dieu n’est point content si notre oraison n’est premièremen taicte à luy” (Cited by Haag and Haag, col. 99). In other words, Espence like Luther, took issue with the metaphorical nature of saintliness that had been so important to medieval believers. For Espence, addressing devotion to a saint was not in and of itself a path to God; saints did not represent God, they were entirely separate entities. It would not be a stretch to imagine that this was the major source of his discomfort with the *Legenda aurea*. If, for Espence, saints were not metaphorical incarnations of God, hagiographers certainly were not authorized to proffer their narrativized rendering of saints’ stories as acts of literary transcendence.

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161 There is no remaining version of the sermons delivered by Espence in 1543, merely descriptions of them. Reames provides a short but very useful summary in the second chapter of her history of the *Legenda aurea* (see esp. 29-31; 50-51). Jean-Pierre Nicéron’s 1730 remarks on Espence’s life and career (183-209) provide a particularly enlightening view of the rapidity and zeal with which his views of the *Legenda aurea* were accepted by early modern Catholics (see esp. 184-187).
Epence’s Lenten sermons caused a stir shortly after they were pronounced and Espence was compelled to publicly retract some of his original statements. However, his comments on the *Legenda aurea* were not particularly radical. The popularity of the *Legenda aurea*, the uncontested giant of hagiographical writing from its first publication in the mid thirteenth century, began to decline rapidly in the early 1490’s, not long after the first coining of the term *media tempestas*. Between 1481 and 1490, the *Legenda aurea* was published in forty-one editions throughout Europe. In the following decade, however, this number went down dramatically, shrinking by almost half to only twenty-three editions between 1491 and 1500 (Reames 28). Unsurprisingly this decline happened with greater celerity in countries that would undergo a reform of state religion than it did in France. Nonetheless, French readership of the *Legenda aurea* also began to recede at the turn of the sixteenth century with the number of editions of Jean de Vignay’s popular translation falling from seven between 1470 and 1490 to five between 1491 and 1499 to only one between 1500 and 1510 and finally coming to a complete stop with the last four editions being printed between 1536 and 1554. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that the rejection of medieval hagiographical methods embodied in Espence’s sermons had been gaining traction on the societal level long before Espence stepped into the pulpit in the late winter of 1543.

This contention is supported by the official Church reaction to the Reformation. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) maintained the importance of saints to the Catholic faith but it also cut the names of a less-than negligible number of saints venerated in the Middle Ages from the

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162 See Reames 29-31 for a finely nuanced view of reactions to Espence’s sermons and the implications of contemporary reactions to them.
163 See Reames’ comments on England, Germany and the Netherlands as compared to France (28-29).
164 For a catalogue of manuscripts containing Jean de Vignay’s vernacular translation of the *Legenda aurea*, see Knowles 380-381. For discussion of this catalogue, see Reames 28.
calendar. This decision implicitly upheld the popular diagnosis of their hagiographical fictionality and, by extension, sent the message that human creativity had no place in the world of future hagiographical writing. Following this pruning of the community of saints, the Church became increasingly strict in implementing canonization procedures. As early as 1588, Pope Sixtus V created the Congregation of Rites to oversee the process of canonization. Within fifty years, Urban VIII took what are often considered to be the most important steps in solidifying papal control over the saintly institution, setting down in Caelestis Jerusalem the clearest terms ever for the process of canonization in 1634 (Pernoud 271) and forbidding devotion to any saint that had not first undergone either formal canonization or been deemed among a number whose cults dated from “[…] time immemorial” (cited by Woodward 75).

The Modern Hagiographical Tradition

After a hiatus in canonizations between 1523 and 1588, the Church resumed the process of saint-making with new and increasingly rigid procedures in place. With this, the production of new hagiographies again became a concern. Alongside changes to canonization, hagiography also underwent a parallel metamorphosis, becoming more dependant on historicist methods of inquiry and the depiction of verifiable facts. This understanding of hagiographical writing was not merely a norm required of new texts, however, but was also applied retroactively to the lives of those saints whose names and stories had survived the Council of Trent. Following the

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165 See Woodward 75.
166 Ronald Finucane considers that five particular saints—Bonaventure (cd. 1482), Leopold of Austria (cd. 1485), Francis of Paola (cd. 1419), Antoninus of Florence (cd. 1523), and Benno of Meissen (cd. 1523)—can be considered as the “last medieval canonizations” based on the fundamental change in spirit taken by the proceedings after this period. Among other things, the Church took a sixty-five year hiatus in canonization, not making any new saints until 1588, and after this time, was more cautious than it had been previously, taking extra measures to ensure that all deponents were of Catholic confession, for example (253-254).
Renaissance rejection of medieval hagiography, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the birth and solidification of a renewed hagiographical tradition, placed under the aegis of academic study rather than that of literary imagination. The most significant first step toward this change was taken in the early years of the seventeenth century when a young Jesuit priest by the name of Heribert Rosweyde, troubled by the blatant inaccuracies present in the lives of the saints that he and his peers were compelled to engage with in their breviaries, undertook the project to correct and annotate these texts as part of what he hoped to become an eighteen-volume *magnum opus*.

Rosweyde died in 1629, leaving this project unfinished. However, he completed a collection of texts that, following Late Antique and medieval tradition, he called the *Vitae Patrum*. This ten-volume work is much more expansive than its pre-modern predecessors, grouping together not only the lives of the desert fathers, but also the complete *Historia monachorum*, the complete the *Apophthegmata partum*, Palladius *Lausiac History*, Theodoret’s *De Vitis Patrum*, and *The Spiritual Meadow of Moschus*. Rosweyde’s *Vitae Patrum* is not just more exhaustive than the previous compendia bearing this name, though; it is also the first serious *édition scientifique* of hagiographical text. Each volume contains an introduction written by Rosweyde and, across its ten tomes, presents no fewer than twenty-six prolegomena transmitting detailed information on authorship, translation, previous editions, doctrinal usefulness, extant manuscripts, abundant notes and a glossary to boot.\(^{167}\)

This scholarly transformation of the hagiographical tradition did not end with Rosweyde. His project was of such importance to the Church that, upon his death, the Vatican called upon another young Jesuit, a man by the name of Jean Bolland, to continue the research that Rosweyde had left unfinished. Bolland believed deeply in his predecessor’s mission, so much so

\(^{167}\) For more detailed but still succinct discussion of Rosewyde’s work, see Joassart 4-6.
that he decided to expand its aims; Bolland was going to use Rosweyde’s methods in order to create a universal catalog of critical hagiography, a historical account of the life of every saint that had ever existed.\textsuperscript{168} Bolland lived long enough to oversee production of the first five books of this project, called in its entirety, the \textit{Acta sanctorum}. However, the traction gained by the academic method of hagiographical writing practiced by Rosewyde and Bolland had, by this time, reached a critical threshold. After Bolland’s death in 1665, the historicisation of hagiography had become ubiquitously recognized as a worthy endeavor and the production of the \textit{Acta sanctorum} went on without Bolland’s oversight, or that of any single editor, to become the most important hagiographical compendium in both Catholic and academic traditions.\textsuperscript{169} Published over the course of one hundred and fifty years, it takes up fifty-three volumes and is among the most widely cited sources in hagiographical scholarship based on both medieval and modern traditions.

The significance of the \textit{Acta sanctorum} goes beyond the reception of the text itself. Even after the publication of the final volume, Bolland’s methods of hagiographical study continued to inspire an important volume of scholarly production in the ecclesiastical context. Most importantly, this included the creation of an association known as the \textit{Bollandists}, that has since its founding been dedicated to the study of hagiography and the cult of the saints following Bolland’s practices.\textsuperscript{170} Like Athanasius’ development of \textit{fictitious} hagiography, then, the \textit{Acta sanctorum} represent a watershed moment in the history of saintly representation. The combined work of Roweyde and Bolland is in this way, much like the combined efforts of Athanasius and

\textsuperscript{168} For comments on Bolland’s work see Joassart 7-44.
\textsuperscript{169} In the twentieth century, Hippolyte Delehaye still considered the \textit{Acta sanctorum} to be “[…] le plus illustre représentant de la critique hagiographique” (Bollandistes 2).
\textsuperscript{170} For more on the history of the Bollandists, Delehaye’s \textit{A travers trios siècles: L’oeuvre des Bollandistes 1615-1915}, written on the occasion of the tercentennial anniversary, is unsurpassed.
Jerome; it created and codified an ethos of hagiographical writing that would provide formal and philosophical guidance to all future hagiographers.\textsuperscript{171}

This historical view of saintly representation has dominated institutional and popular understandings of saints’ stories well into the modern period. Although simplified versions of these narratives have certainly persisted through such popular media as holy cards,\textsuperscript{172} the necessity for all Catholics to keep sight of the historicity of the saints’ stories has remained paramount. In the late nineteenth century, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux called the faithful to bear this in mind. “We must see [the saints’] real, and not their imagined lives”, she wrote (cited by Gaucher 2). It is this devotional necessity to incorporate historical methods of academic inquiry into the practice of faith that has played the most instrumental role in organizing Catholic interactions with the saints on all levels of society. There is hardly a more convincing example than the case of Joan of Arc whose canonization—possibly the most important contribution of nineteenth-century French Catholicism to the communion of the saints—is the direct result of a particularly fruitful dialogue that took place on a societal level between historical study and religious belief.

\textsuperscript{171} Although I will not attempt to make anything of this coincidence, it worth pausing to note that the academic transformation of hagiography featured the story of Saint Antony the Great at its absolute cutting edge. The first volume of the \textit{Vitae Patrum}, which was subsequently integrated into the \textit{Acta sanctorum}, began with the \textit{Vita Pauli} and Evagrius’ translation of the \textit{Life of Anthony}. And the subsequent volumes, which feature the \textit{Historia monachorum} and \textit{Apothegmata Patrum} keep Anthony’s character as well as his contribution to Christendom at the front line. Anthony and Paul were even featured as the centerpiece of the \textit{Vitae Patrum}’s original cover art (reproduced in Joassart 9).

\textsuperscript{172} Although holy cards had existed in different forms since the Middle Ages, the invention of lithography at the end of the eighteenth allowed these objects to be produced in greater numbers than ever and during the religious revival of the nineteenth century, they gained unprecedented popularity in post-Napoleonic France (Emery \textit{Introduction} 4). For discussion of the relationship between these artifacts, devotional literacy and saintly narratives, see George and Salvatori 251-279.
In the years following her death, Joan was almost completely forgotten, except in Orléans where she remained the subject of some ambiguous popular devotion. However, over the course of the nineteenth century, her story was revived in French culture through the medium of secular history. Philippe-Alexandre Le Brun de Charmette’s landmark analysis of Joan’s life, *Histoire de Jeanne d’Arc surnommée la Pucelle d’Orléans*, based largely on fifteenth-century documentation, appeared in 1817. The voluminous trial documents themselves were made public for the first time in the vernacular in the 1840’s and shortly thereafter, Michelet added his *Jeanne d’Arc* (1841) to the *Histoire de la France*. These historical texts were principally responsible for reenergizing interest in Joan’s life and story (Taylor 237). Although this may not have been among Le Brun de Charmette’s or Michelet’s intentions, the enthusiasm that they generated for the so-called Maid of Orléans spurred a popular movement both among churchmen and the laity to recognize Joan’s sanctity (237). This, in its turn, brought about real changes to the Catholic institution, which was finally prompted in 1897 to open an official canonization proceeding. The sequence of Joan’s return from obscurity and ascension to sanctity confirms the extent to which Rosweyde and Bolland’s historical methods had become integrated into understandings of the cult of the saints over the course of the early modern period. Reactions to Joan’s story in nineteenth-century France suggest specifically that by the end of the eighteenth century, history and hagiography had become essentially fused. For a modern believer, Joan was a saint based on the real virtues of her life. To accurately recount these virtues was necessarily to depict her sanctity, provided of course, that the reader believed in sanctity.

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173 The official proceedings of canonization took place between 1897 and 1920. However, the initial process was spearheaded as of the late 1840’s by Félix Dupanloup, the bishop of Orléans, who managed to instigate the beginning of beatification proceedings in 1869.

174 Naturally no history is immune from bias or even necessarily from artfulness. Michelet’s transformation of a quasi-mythical Joan into the soul of the French nation is a particularly
Conclusion

It is realistic to characterize the journey of hagiography from medieval to modern as a shifting of readers’ relationships to the potential for doubt translated by individual texts. Medieval hagiographies cultivated textual moments that might lead readers to question the factual veracity of any given narrative. However, the hagiographical corpus as a whole, worked through the ensuing polemics toward a single trans-textual goal: the representation of an invisible God. This was made possible by the presumption manifest throughout these texts that God, his saints, and the righteousness of the Catholic Church were real.\textsuperscript{175} As the Reformation and the rising culture of empiricism shifted doubt from individual textual universes to the culture surrounding their reception, hagiographies needed to become committed to defying readers’ projected hesitation by grounding narrated events in essentially verifiable realities. This brought about the transition of hagiographical truths from the metaphorical methods favored by medieval writers to the literal ones favored by their early modern and modern counterparts.

The uniqueness of medieval hagiography, then, although it could be described in a number of ways, is at is core, characterized by the intertextual dialogue of the literary machine. Medieval hagiographies put the literal level of the narrative in service of their shared goal: the impossible incarnation of divinity. This trans-textual intention, allowed writers to prioritize their own creative processes since it was through the text’s aesthetic choices and not the verifiability

\textsuperscript{175} That is not to say that no medieval person questioned the existence of God. Compelling work in recent years has illuminated the skepticism inherent in medieval culture. See Lagerlund’s “Introduction” for a cogent overview (1-28). However, it should be reasonably clear from the first two chapters of this dissertation that the narrative universes of medieval saints’ lives are not fertile ground for such skepticism.

compelling example of this creative adeptness. More recently, this symbolism has become a branch of historical inquiry unto itself (see Balladur 7-15). However both Michelet and Le Brun de Charmette ground their work more than nominally in a desire to reconstitute the facts of Joan’s existence.
of its events that divine mystery was mediated into the written word. It is no accident that this should represent the exact inverse of modern hagiographical methods. Modern understandings of saints and their stories developed as a rejection of their medieval predecessors, targeted particularly at the disavowal of the symbolic function of the saint prioritized during the Middle Ages. As the early modern Church reacted to medieval hagiography, writers reinvented its methods in order to create a tradition that explicitly and exclusively valued accuracy, uniformity and codification.

By virtue of this evolution, medieval hagiographical aesthetics fell necessarily under the purview of literary fiction. One might go so far as to say that the difference between medieval and modern hagiography is tantamount to the distinction, according to modern sensibilities, between “fiction” and “non-fiction”. The deliberate renewal, then, of medieval hagiographical methods was for modern writers an inevitably subversive undertaking. Although medieval hagiography was disgraced in intellectual circles, both religious and secular, from the sixteenth-century onward, starting with Flaubert’s lifelong project, the Tentation de Saint Antoine, medieval hagiographical aesthetics would once again provide a metaphorical tool with which authors might engage a world of mysterious transcendence. The following chapter will explore the mechanics of this return of medieval hagiography to the literary realm as well as the transformation of the societal function of these textual methods according to the changing needs of a rapidly secularizing France.
CHAPTER IV: ANTHONY EX MACHINA
HOW FLAUBERT’S TENTATION SAVED MEDIEVAL HAGIOGRAPHY

Ma tentation? mais vous la connaissez aussi bien que moi, ma tentation [...] Vos mamans, à coup sûr, vous ont menés voir au Luxembourg [...] mon pauvre ermitage tel qu’il est ici [...] - Saint Anthony, in the words of Paul Arène

Introduction: Anthony Through the Ages

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the modern tendency to treat hagiography as history had created a relatively rigid corpus of vitae sanctorum within the ecclesiastical context. However, the codification of a corpus of acceptable hagiographical narratives within the Church over the course of the early modern and modern periods did not put a complete stop to the production of unofficial saintly stories outside of the Church. As discussed in the previous chapter, for example, Joan of Arc became a recognizable presence in historical writing over the course of the nineteenth century, a trend that extended beyond the very particular case of Joan to include individuals that were already a part of the official communion of saints. In addition to these historicized representations of the saints, however, new saintly narratives also continued to be produced throughout the early modern and modern periods. In the case of Saint Anthony, the temptation in particular provided the subject matter for a number of more or less secular texts over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Morawski 140). In the late eighteenth century, the temptation of Saint Anthony was the subject of a short operetta. Under the

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176 “La Vraie Tentation du Grand Saint Antoine” (6-7).
177 For discussion of the modern-day organization of the dossier of a candidate for canonization including the creation of a vita see Woodward 223.
178 One might think, for example, of the Baron de Nilinse’s 1847 Vie de Saint Adélaide Impératrice.
179 The libretto by Michel-Jean Sedaine is available under the title La Tentation de S. Antoine, ornée de figures et de musiques. A portion of the libretto (“Messieurs les démons, laissez-moi donc / Messieurs les démons, laissez-moi donc [6]) is featured in the 1849 manuscript of Flaubert’s Tentation de Saint Antoine as epigraph to the text (205). There is some indistinct suggestion it may provide the basis for the marionette shows of the Anthony story that were
Revolution, it was featured in at least one of an increasingly popular corpus of vaudevilles designed to ridicule the clergy and the Catholic faith. Later, it provided the thematic basis for Mérimée’s short play, *Une Femme est un diable*, which appears in his farcical 1825 collection of dramatic texts, *Le Théâtre de Clara Gazoul*. It was represented in puppet shows throughout the nineteenth century (Larson 49) and, as generations of Flaubert scholars have steadfastly pointed out, a temptation of Saint Anthony was annually represented at the puppet theater in Rouen where it may or may not have been taken in by a young Gustave Flaubert (see, for example, Foucault 16; Gothot-Mersch 9; Lapierre 10).

While these essentially secular narratives enjoyed greater leeway than their ecclesiastical counterparts, however, they are not, generally speaking, *creative* with respect to Anthony’s official story (that is to say, Evagrius’ translation of the *Life of Anthony*, enshrined since the seventeenth century in the *Acta sanctorum*). The operatic *Tentation*, for example, while capitalizing on the more spectacular elements of the legend is essentially respectful of the religious figure of Saint Anthony the Great. The vaudevillian approach taken under the Terreur initially appears different, modifying Anthony’s story such that his sanctity becomes the
d'Estree speaks of a satirical *Tentation de Saint Antoine* being performed under the Terreur in an effort to undermine the church (347-349). Morawski believes this may be the same work as a *Tentation de Saint Antoine* known to have been performed at the Théâtre de la Montagne in Bordeaux on the 2 Nivôse in Revolutionary year II (140).

This would be open to the interpretation of individual casts or conductors since the libretto, while it presents many more serious moments, does sometimes veer off into a farcical and even raunchy tone. For example, when Anthony, attempting to flee temptation finds a beautiful she-devil in his bed he experiences an unfortunate loss of his powers of articulation, developing a temporary stutter as he attempts to express fear and surprise: “Joli con con con / Joli cu cu cu / Joli con / Joli cu / Jolie concubine” (7).
object of ridicule. However, while this satirical approach certainly undermines the seriousness of
the saint’s role in devotional culture, it also tacitly regards the official saintly narrative as a
separate entity, one to be made fun of but not modified. Even Mérimée in his unmistakable
disdain for the Church (Gerould 125) does not take on the story of Saint Anthony as such but
rather represents it, in Une Femme est un diable, via a transparent and implicit parallelism
between the traditional narrative of the notable anchorite and the primary subject matter of the
text: the temptation of an overzealous Spanish inquisitor named Antonio, nicknamed Saint
Antoine by his less devout colleagues. For all its anticlerical sentiment then, far from modifying
the legend of Saint Anthony the Great, Une Femme est un diable, like the vaudevilles of the
Terreur, depends upon the coherency of the traditional narrative in order to make Antonio and
the libidinous absurdity of his behavior its foil.

The transition of hagiographical writing, from creative methods in the Middle Ages to
historicist ones in the modern period, did not just affect narratives transmitted through
ecclesiastical channels, nor did it keep its impact contained to the world of historical study; it
extended to the treatment of the saintly figures in the world of secular arts and letters as well.
The unprecedented narrative control excreted by the Catholic institution over the cult of the
saints following the Reformation constrained European thinkers, by and large, to regard saintly
narratives as to being immutable accounts of historical events. Consequently, authors active
throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries generally respected the inviolable unity
of the hagiographical text as it was promoted and deployed by the Church. Thus, those who
respected the Catholic institution remained essentially mimetic in their transposition of saintly
stories while even those writers who rejected the hegemony of the Church treated the implicitly
invoked ecclesiastical vitae as impenetrable units; like modern day sketch comedy, they could
not change the past reality of their object of satire, they could only mock it by placing it in opposition to their own clearly fictionalized narrative universes.

This is what makes Flaubert’s *magnum opus*, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* so important; it is the first major text since the Middle Ages to depict the life of Anthony or of any other saint for that matter, as a malleable quantity, open, through the aesthetic revisions of a particular human author, to translating new and important philosophical truths. The *Tentation*, takes on the traditional narrative of Saint Anthony the Great in no uncertain terms by engaging explicitly with Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*. However, while meticulously imitating this source, it also carefully pulls Anthony’s story away from the devotional narrative promoted by the Church. Importantly, unlike previous post-medieval incarnations of secular saintly stories, though, it does so without historicizing, and without satirizing.182

This chapter will explore the crucial contribution made by Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine* to the tradition of saintly representation. By first studying the characteristically medieval aesthetics employed by Flaubert in order to create his thoroughly modern saintly story, I will move on to address Flaubert’s profoundly problematized alteration of the traditional understanding of divinity and transcendence promoted by earlier saintly stories. This will allow me to conclude with a discussion of the transformation that the figure of Saint Anthony underwent, thanks to the immense popularity of Flaubert’s text.

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182 For remarks on the revolutionary quality of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* within the early modern and modern literary traditions based on its ability to rewrite without satirizing, see Foucault 11.
The *Tentation de Saint Antoine*: Legendary Sources and the Aesthetic of Rewriting

The *Tentation de Saint Antoine* was, at least for Flaubert himself, the most important project of his career. “C’est l’œuvre de toute ma vie” (385), he wrote in 1872 to Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie. While he was clearly referring to the fact that, by this point in time, he had been working with the thematic framework of the Anthony legend for over twenty-five years, this statement takes on a figurative meaning to the modern reader that Flaubert himself could perhaps not have fully appreciated when he wrote these words. The *Tentation de Saint Antoine* was first published in its entirety in 1874. However, Flaubert devised the plan to make Anthony the subject of a literary narrative in 1845 when, on a trip to Genoa, he saw a painting that he believed to be Pieter Bruegel’s “Temptation of Saint Anthony”.

183 “Jeai vu un tableau de Bruegel représentant la Tentation de Saint Antoine” he wrote to his friend Alfred le Poittevin on May 13 of that same year, “qui m’a fait penser à arranger pour le théâtre *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Mais cela demanderait un autre gaillard que moi” (173). In spite of the hesitation expressed in his letter to Alfred le Poittevin, a then twenty-four year old Flaubert had already been perfecting the tropes of eremitical sanctity and demonic temptation for the better part of ten years.

184 Whatever apprehensions had caused Flaubert to imagine deferring the production of a theatrical *Tentation de Saint Antoine* to another author, he overcame them with some celerity. Beginning work in May of 1848, Flaubert finished the first version of his *Tentation* in September

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183 This painting attributed at the time to Pieter Bruegel the younger is now thought to be the work of Jan Mandyn (c. 1570). See Davenport 298-299.
184 Most notably, he wrote a play in 1839 at the age of eighteen, entitled *Smarh, vieux mystère* which bears considerable formal and narrative similarities to the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* (Seznec *Dieux* 12). There are also similarities between another play written a year prior to *Smarh*, the *Danse des morts*, and the fourth and fifth tableaux of the *Tentation* in which Anthony confronts a series of dead philosophers and gods (12). For a list and analysis of what Bruneau refers to as Flaubert’s early *oeuvres mystiques* as well a discussion of their possible relationships to the *Tentation*, see 189-219.
of 1849. In a scene made famous, if not infamous, by Maxime Du Camp’s *Souvenirs littéraires*, Flaubert read his newly finished text aloud to Du Camp and another friend, Louis-Hyacinthe Bouilhet, over the course of four days (313). When Flaubert had finished reading, his two friends, dumbfounded, advised him to destroy the text: “Nous pensons qu’il faut jeter cela au feu et n’en jamais reparer” wrote Du Camp (315). Possibly because of this icy reception it took seven years before Flaubert was ready to bring the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* to press. Even at that, this text’s first exposure to a public audience was a tentative one; Flaubert published only fragments in the popular literary review *L’Artiste*, between December 21, 1856 and February 1, 1857. In spite of a glowing reception, however Flaubert remained unsatisfied and continued revisions for almost twenty more years before finally publishing the first complete *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, substantially changed from its earlier iterations, in 1874. The 1874 version is more or less definitive. However, Flaubert would continue to pick at the text, republishing it on four separate occasions, in 1874, 1875, 1878 and finally, in the year of his death, 1880, incorporating minor changes each time (Gothot-Mersch 245). It is not a stretch to imagine that, if Flaubert had lived longer, the *Tentation* would have continued its evolution in kind.

The literary entity that is the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, then, is a particularly slippery one, especially by modern standards, displaying a kind of *mouvance* that is in some ways more characteristic of its medieval predecessors than it is of contemporary literature.

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185 The 1849 version contains Flaubert’s note that the text was finished “[…] mercredi 12 septembre 1849, 3 heures 20 de l’après-midi, temps de soleil et de vent. commencé [sic] le mercredi 24 mai 1848, à 3 heures un quart” (496) to be precise.

186 Baudelaire’s enthusiasm for the 1856-1857 *Tentation* is discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. See Baudelaire, *Madame Bovary* (85-86); Pichois (1124).

187 Naturally, the preservation of drafts in the case of more recent literary production, has given scholars the ability to assess the genesis of published texts in a way that is not possible in the case of their medieval or counterparts. However, the multiple published forms taken by the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* create a narrative and aesthetic plurality in the finished product that,
Anthony character and the major themes of the text remain relatively stable from one iteration to the next, the aesthetic and narrative differences between the published versions are remarkable. Comparing the fragmentary 1856-57 version to the 1874 and following versions, two different pictures emerge. In *L’Artiste*, Anthony’s subjectivity is fragmented as the saint is doubled, first by a false Anthony (*Faux Antoine*) whose nearly homicidal behavior the real Anthony is forced to observe (67-73), and later by one of his traditional attributes, a pig, whose torments and desires unfold in parallel to Anthony’s own (114-118). The 1874 and later versions omit both the false Anthony and the pig and replace these minor figures with a very important character who is not so much a double of Anthony as he is an exteriorization of the 1856-57 Anthony’s self-destructive drives: Hilarion, Anthony’s student, originally depicted in Saint Jerome’s *Vita Hilarionis* (ca. 390). This difference between the 1856-57 and 1874 and following versions, then, is a consequential one. The false Anthony and the pig maintain the temptation squarely within Anthony’s own subjectivity as though the phantasmagorical visions that parade before the saint are creations of his own mind. Hilarion, on the other hand, allows the narrative of saintly temptation to take on a life of its own as he, like a sinister Virgil to Anthony’s Dante, guides Anthony through and even appears to conjure up some of the temptations, eventually going so far as to provide the intermediary between the saint and the devil himself.

These and other aesthetic differences between the earlier series of published fragments and the later integral incarnations of the *Tentation*, however, do not have an enormous impact on the overall story of the saint. In spite of the more-than-cosmetic nature of such symbolic and narrative disparities, each textual grouping paints an essentially equivalent picture of Anthony’s temptation, moving from resistance in the face of desires of the flesh to increasing weakness as

while certainly not unheard of—the various versions of *Les Fleurs du mal* that resulted from their 1857 censorship provide a good example—is also not entirely common.
the temptations become more intellectual. In fact most of the specific challenges represented in the fragments remain present in the later versions.\textsuperscript{188} The differences between the published versions of the \textit{Tentation}, then, do not accomplish a fundamental alteration of Anthony’s story or identity but rather enact a bifurcation of this story’s major subtext: the metatextual account of the written sources of the Anthony legend.

The pig is an element of popular culture that developed in the Middle Ages after Anthony’s relics were brought to France.\textsuperscript{189} Therefore, it is not a part of any Late Antique text and also remains absent from the largely derivative medieval tradition of written hagiography, although it was a component of medieval folklore and was crystallized as a part of Anthony’s iconographical profile through a thriving tradition of visual art during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{190} The pig, then, is a link to the Anthony legend that comes filtered through a viewpoint anchored solidly \textit{outside} of the authoritative narrative promoted in the \textit{Acta sanctorum}. It is a feature of a devotional and artistic corpus that, while it has remained within the bounds of Christian piety, has been transmitted essentially through a secular--as opposed to Church-sanctioned--collection

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\textsuperscript{188} The first fragment (39-40) features a lusty interaction between Anthony and the Queen of Sheba which persists in almost identical form in later versions (19-22); the second (39-40) is an intellectual debate between Anthony on the one hand and the pagan philosopher, Apollonius and his disciple, Damis on the other, which is also essentially preserved in later versions (139-159); the third (67-73) is an exchange observed by Anthony between Greek mythological characters Demonassa and Lampito (possibly the Lampito of \textit{Lysistrata}) which is subsequently suppressed; finally, the fourth fragment depicts Anthony’s encounter with a series of mythological creatures--a unicorn, a griffin, a basilisk--followed by his witnessing of the emergence of the \textit{bêtes de la mer} and then his removal from Earth by the devil, all of which are present in subsequent versions in a slightly different order. The order and significance of these events in the 1874 and subsequent versions will be discussed in detail hereafter.

\textsuperscript{189} It seems this was a result of the Antoinine order’s keeping of pigs. For details, see Morawski’s discussion of Anthony’s attributes and associated folklore 163-168.

\textsuperscript{190} Among the most influential examples is Hieronymus Bosch’s 1490 \textit{Temptation of Saint Anthony}. 
of hagiographical texts. By prioritizing the role of the pig, the 1856-57 fragments selectively engage the Catholic tradition of Saint Anthony through the marginal elements of his devotional profile. This is a particularly powerful decision given that the fragments all but reject the tradition of Saint Anthony the Great as it is transmitted in the Acta sanctorum, exclusively depicting moments, during which Anthony, as an emissary of the Catholic literary tradition, is forced to engage—to particularly blasphemous effect—with the representatives of textual traditions like Greek mythology and pagan philosophy. This transforms the unique literary entity formed by the 1856-1857 publication of Tentation de Saint Antoine into a reading of the Anthony tradition built on establishing the saint’s role in secular literature. The placement of Anthony’s narrative in the borrowed fictional universes of pagan mythology is reinforced by Flaubert’s careful allusion to components of the Anthony tradition not represented in the Church-sanctioned vita. This forces the reader, following in Anthony’s footsteps, to reconstruct the traditional framework of sanctity such that it lies, for this text and for this Anthony, outside of its usual ecclesiastical framework.

The figure of Saint Hilarion, on the other hand, in the 1874 and following versions of the Tentation is an important part of the official narrative of eremitical sanctity. Hilarion’s first written vita was composed, like the Vita Pauli, by Saint Jerome at the end of the fourth century. The Vita Hilarionis was almost always displayed, in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, in compendia like the Historia monachorum and Vies des Pères, a fact that is reflected in the

191 Paul Arène’s 1880 children’s story, “La Vraie Tentation du grand Saint Antoine”, provides a short description of the typical puppet show staging of the Saint Anthony story indicating the usual presence of a pig (7). This is reflected in the artwork that the 1781 edition of Sedaine’s libretto, although not specified in the text, where the pig is depicted both on the cover page (2) and as an accompaniment to the text itself (6; 18).
192 It is worth noting that Hilarion is absent from the Legenda aurea, suggesting that his popularity might have waned over the course of the thirteenth century.
modern-day *Acta sanctorum*. The foregrounding, then, of Hilarion, in the 1874 and following versions of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* places the intertextual relationship between Flaubert’s Anthony and the Late Antique sources of the legend in the spotlight. This focuses the reader’s understanding of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* through lens of an unbroken and authoritative tradition of eremitical sanctity. This Hilarion, however, is not who he was in the *Vita Hilarionis*. As I shall discuss in greater detail hereafter, Flaubert’s Hilarion is *disguised* as Jerome’s Hilarion, telling Anthony that he is the young monk that he remembers mentoring so many years ago. He is in actual fact a personification of the secularizing forces that would undo Anthony’s faith, coaxing and coercing him into philosophical exchange with representatives of other religious movements from heretics like Valentinius, to spiritual leaders like the Buddha, to pagan gods like Jupiter and Minerva. It is as though Hilarion’s creation of a transhistorical conglomeration of religious belief systems were a kind of transposition of the concept of faith into an historicized study, as though the philosophers and gods he conjures up brought to life not the faith of their followers but rather the pages of an encyclopedia.

In this sense, Hilarion’s diegetic function in the *Tentation* mirrors his meta-textual one: he embodies the modern-day possibility for the profanation of saintly narrative. His encounter with Anthony is one that forces the titular character to face this fact, much as Anthony’s medieval meetings with the centaur and satyr brought him and his narrative universe to the edge of the world of fiction. As Chapter II discusses, the reception and reimagination of this

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193 For a detailed discussion of the *Vies des Pères* and Anthony’s place in it, see Chapter I of this dissertation. See *Acta sanctorum*, col. 0043E.
194 Flaubert almost certainly knew the *Vita Pauli*, in which these mythological encounters first occur. Based only on his reading list, he probably encountered a version of it in the *Legenda aurea* (cited in his reading list 277) and would have been primed to think of the two hermits together based on Le Nain de Tillemont’s treatment of these two figures (for example 709) cited in his reading list 279. Hilarion himself refers to the friendship between these two men within the
moment throughout the medieval period had the impact of bringing Anthony face to face with the world of pagan poetics. Here, Anthony’s encounter with Hilarion goes even further. Flaubert’s Hilarion is in many ways a version of his Anthony, that is to say an anchoritic saint whose life has been rewritten according to the needs of a modern fictional narrative. Moreover, Anthony does not simply encounter Hilarion; he is guided through his own story by this strangely reinterpreted representative of his own literary tradition. The incontestable secularization of Flaubert’s Hilarion speaks to the authorial practices at play in Tentation more generally, especially where the substantially more ambiguous character of Anthony is concerned. The appropriation and secularization of the Late Antique Hilarion and his subsequent ability to lead Anthony, his fellow representative of the Late Antique hagiographical tradition, through a series of temptations, suggests a kind of chain reaction of literary profanation: Flaubert subverts Hilarion’s sanctity and Hilarion, acting as an authorial surrogate, subverts Anthony’s in his turn.

This focus, in the later published versions of the Tentation, on including and altering the Late Antique tradition of which Saint Anthony was such a crucial part has the effect, especially when compared to the 1856-57 fragments of engaging the text in the literary evolution of Saint Anthony the Great. Whereas the fragmentary representation of Anthony in L’Artiste is both creative and subversive with respect to the ecclesiastical understanding of this figure, it largely sidesteps the written tradition that supported his development in religious and historical sectors of contemporary culture. This has the tendency to restrain the text’s potential to engage not only Late Antique and medieval but also early modern and modern understandings of Anthony; the 1856-57 Anthony is a literary unicum, practically unconnected to his textual forbearers. The 1874 and following, Tentation, on the other hand situates Anthony and his story at the heart of text (88). Although the narrative he suggests is not perfectly in line with tradition, it would not be the first or most important detail of the tradition to be altered by Flaubert.
the ecclesiastical and historical traditions of eremitical sanctity, daring to modify a narrative that would be regarded by many of Flaubert’s contemporaries as essentially immutable. This allows Flaubert not only to expand the theoretical implications of his narrative but also to claim a place for the post-1874 Anthony, although not all readers were liable to accept such a proposition, at the end of a long progression of saintly exceptionality, a kind of surprise ending, so to speak, to an old tradition.

This means that if a nineteenth-century reader were to interact with both published versions of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*—and there is reason to believe that some did—they encountered a narrative of Saint Anthony that contained a kind of literary echo of itself. This potential for internal narrative variation has only grown. Today, with full manuscripts of the 1849 and 1856 versions of the text edited and readily available, accidentally encountering two or more versions of Flaubert’s Anthony is as easy as mistaking a single letter of a library call number. This constantly lurking possibility of discovering the single story of Anthony’s temptation, translated in destabilizingly divergent and sometimes incompatible symbolic tropes has the inadvertent effect of recreating, on a much smaller scale, the narrative cacophony that characterized the medieval hagiographical tradition. Indeed, although this narrative and symbolic polyphony across versions of the *Tentation* is almost certainly accidental, the aesthetic of literary multiplicity that it produces is transmitted just as efficiently within the diegetic confines of the *Tentation* itself. Focusing, as the balance of this chapter will, on the 1874-1880 versions,

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195 Given the wide circulation and cultural importance of *L’Artiste* and the popularity of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* among the artistic elite of its day, it is hardly a stretch to imagine that some of the more prominent readers of this text might have read both versions. This is important given their own additions to this cacophony as they recreated the story of Anthony.

196 This will be the focus of most of this chapter given that these “complete” published versions of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* were and continue to be encountered by a more significant number of readers. The edition of reference used in this dissertation is that edited by Claudine
rapidly becomes apparent that Flaubert’s meticulous research process in preparing for the
*Tentation de Saint Antoine,*\(^{197}\) is actively telegraphed to the reader through a complex poetic of
intertextual dialogue. The text, divided into six interconnected *tableaux,* opens with a traditional
exposition of Anthony’s lifestyle in the bareness of his desert home. Anthony, in the solitude of
his hut watches the sun set and thinks back on his life so far. This scene provides the reader not
only with the contextual details necessary to understand the saintly narrative, which may not be
well known to all readers and which, in any case, has picked up *in medias res:* it also situates the
text within the narrative tradition to which it is responding (Orr, *Flaubert’s Tentation,* 57-58).

Anthony begins by remembering his retreat into solitude. He describes his first dwelling
in an abandoned tomb and his later flight even further into the desert where he was tormented by
demons: “La nuit j’étais déchiré par des griffes, mordu par des becs, frôlé par des ailes molles; et
d’énormes démons, hurlant dans mes oreilles, me renversaient par terre” (53). He recalls
his creation of a monastic community, his desire to be martyred among those persecuted under
Diocletian,\(^{198}\) and his failure to achieve this goal (54). This ought to be recognizable as a
summary of the major events of the first thirteen chapters of Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* (29-39).

Suddenly, though, after essentially rehashing his traditional story, over the course of several

\(^{197}\) Flaubert appears to have kept his own list, which begins “J’ai lu pour *La Tentation de Saint
Antoine* les ouvrages suivants”. The original list was transcribed and edited by Louis Bertrand in
the appendix to his edition of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine.* It is reproduced from this source by
Claudeine Gothot-Mersch 273-285. However the original source no longer exists and therefore
the authenticity of such a list cannot absolutely be verified.

\(^{198}\) Athanasius’ account states that the emperor under whose reign Anthony attempted martyrdom
was Maximian (65), a fact which is reflected in Chapter I. Flaubert was not mistaken in his
history, though; Maximian was the emperor of the Western Empire while Diocletian was the
emperor of the Eastern Empire.
pages (52-54), Anthony cannot go on. He rubs his face with his hands: “Non! non! Je ne veux pas y penser!” (54). He turns instead to think of how unbearable his solitude has become: “Une autre fois Athanase m’appela pour le soutenir contre les Ariens […] Où est-il maintenant? je n’en sais rien! On s’inquiète si peu de me donner des nouvelles. Tous mes disciples mont quitté […]” (54). This invocation of Athanasius has an ambivalent effect. On the one hand it allows the narrative recounted by Anthony, now adjacent to its original author’s name, to represent a kind of interiorization of the Life of Anthony. However, this nod to Athanasius’ creation of Anthony’s story is rapidly subordinated to his painful absence from this textual universe. Athanasius is gone and Anthony cannot go on recounting his story, as originally set out by his absent friend. The Anthony that will survive this monologue thus marks himself as other with respect to the character depicted in the Life of Anthony.

Flaubert’s Anthony is, in fact, a very different person from the saint that the reader may have encountered in other versions of his story. Unlike any other Anthony before him, Flaubert’s Anthony is wavering in his faith. Without friends, without Athanasius, Anthony cannot seem to carry the weight of his own narrative destiny. “D’où vient mon obstination à continuer une vie pareille?”(55) he wonders, as he contemplates the existence that he could have enjoyed as a parish priest (55), as a philosopher (56), or even a merchant with a wife and children (56). It is as though, with the loss of Athanasius, the saintly hermit has forgotten who he is. Flaubert’s Anthony is, from this point on, a character in search of an author. As though to drive this point home, Flaubert is certain to make Anthony’s next act after expressing his distaste for asceticism, that of attempting to find one. Anthony hurries to his hut where he frantically takes the only step he can imagine to dispel his doubts: he decides to read the hagiographical account of the Lives of
Just as Augustine does in his *Confessions*, Anthony opens the book at random in the hopes that the literary example of sanctity will set him back on the straight and narrow path. However, this book, so prominently displayed within the fictional universe, does not bring Anthony comfort. Instead the act of reading simply initiates the terrifying series of demonic temptations that make up the balance—and the vast majority—of Flaubert’s very particular account of the life of Saint Anthony.

As Anthony finishes reading, from the *Lives of the Apostles*, the first supernatural event of the text occurs: “[…] les deux ombres dessinés derrière [Antoine] par les bras de la croix se projettent en avant. Elles font come deux grandes cornes” (60). With this, all Hell quite literally breaks loose. After the hermit is induced into a kind of delirious sleep, the devil appears, leaning against the roof of Anthony’s hut and carrying the personified Seven Deadly Sins (65). It is this ominous moment that Flaubert has chosen to reintegrate Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony* into the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Anthony awakes from his delirium and goes out into the night. As he moves around his usual surroundings, he trips over an object: a golden cup. This cup soon fills with coins, and the riches begin to multiply such that Anthony is almost buried in them. Overcome by the desire for material comfort Anthony throws down the torch he has been carrying in an attempt to pick up his newfound wealth by the armful. As soon as he does, though,

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199 This is unambiguously the title of a book. However, the actual source referenced as the *Vies des Apôtres* is not entirely clear. It does not appear in Flaubert’s reading list for the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and although Anthony reads aloud from it (58-59), these passages are all Biblical. See Gothot-Mersch 293. It might correspond to a book, now very rare, that was published in 1838 by Mame et Compagnie entitled *Les Vies des apôtres, SS. André, Barnabé, Barthélémy, Jacques, Jude, Mathias, Philippe, Simon, Thomas*.

200 “Il entre dans sa cabane, découvre un charbon enfoui, allume une torche et la plante sur la stèle de bois, de façon à éclairer le gros livre” (57). Gisèle Séginger provides a short but provocative discussion of the book object in the *Tentation* versus the books implicitly evoked by Flaubert’s studies in preparation for this project (131-132).
He falls flat on his chest; the gold has disappeared (Flaubert 68-69). This is the first temptation Flaubert’s Anthony will face; his failure to resist is striking to say the least.

The allure of material riches is a trope lifted from the original Life of Anthony. Athanasius depicts the saint on two separate occasions rejecting the appeal of gold conjured in his path by the devil (40, 61). Flaubert’s account then, in which Anthony instantly gives in to temptation constitutes a fundamental perversion not only of Athanasius’ story but also its original message. For Athanasius, Anthony’s disinterest in the creature comforts afforded by wealth is a fundamental building block of Anthony’s sanctity. As the first non-martyr saint to appear in a written vita, Anthony needed to represent moral perfection in life in order to make up for his potentially startling failure to do so through death. Flaubert undoes this moral perfection in a single stroke and within the first quarter of the text. In so doing, he rejects the Athanasian universe of Anthony’s story, asserting his own authorial control over the narrative of saintly temptation. It is almost as though the first part of this text were being fought over by two competing authors: Athanasius and Flaubert. With the ejection of Athanasius from the diegetic world of the Tentation, though Flaubert is able, between the end of the first tableau and the beginning of the second to emerge the victorious. Anthony’s almost immediate weakness in the face of temptation is proof. In this sense, one might say that the reading of the Lives of the Apostles was a kind of last-ditch attempt to rescue Athanasius’ Anthony and his perfect faith. Its failure to do so, though, is, in this context, not a failure at all. This obviously exhibited book is not as Anthony believes it to be, a concretization of the literary object that will become the Life of Anthony. Instead, it is a representation of the text that will become the Tentation de Saint Antoine.
In its represented disintegration in the face of Flaubert’s newly-claimed authority, the presence of Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*, both by means of metatextual allusion and through Anthony’s own implicit expectations of the Christian trajectory of his life, allow this clearly conflicting narrative to remain a textually incarnate presence in Flaubert’s work even as he endeavors to rewrite it. In fact, it is this ambivalence toward the Late Antique tradition that undergirds the important role played in this text by Anthony’s former student, Hilarion. As Anthony laments the absence of his friends, including Athanasius, he particularly expresses sadness at the departure of his enthusiastic young protégé, Hilarion (54). This reference to Hilarion, within only a few lines of the first reference to Athanasius allows Flaubert to subtly invoke the other major authorial contributor to Anthony’s traditional legend, Saint Jerome. Jerome participated actively, as Chapters I and II explore, in the creation of Anthony’s story as it was transmitted to Late Antique, medieval, and, through the *Acta sanctorum*, eventually modern readers. Jerome’s influence on Anthony’s story was exerted principally through his *Vita Pauli*, which provides a prequel to the *Life of Anthony*, thereby creating the mechanical relationship of idiosyncratic mimesis that would come to characterize medieval hagiography in general. However Jerome also contributed to the foreword motion of the literary machine of hagiographical writing. Fifteen years after the publication of the *Vita Pauli*, the *Vita Hilarionis* was added as a sequel in what, following Jerome’s intervention, bears every appearance of a founding trilogy of eremitical sanctity. The *Vita Hilarionis* and its depiction of Anthony’s influence on the young Hilarion is a veritable prototype for Saint Augustine’s conversion in the eighth book of the *Confessions*. Hilarion, according to Jerome’s account, devises the plan to

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201 See the Introduction of this dissertation for details on the relationship between Augustine and Anthony.
become a monk upon hearing Anthony’s story and follows through on this plan the second he sets eyes on the eminent anchorite. Hilarion goes on to become Anthony’s double, founding the first order of Palestinian monks as a parallel to Anthony’s Egyptian order. In other words, Hilarion hears Anthony’s story, takes it in and then embodies it by slightly modifying its formal structure, thus he is a reimagined Anthony just as his vita is a rewriting of the Life of Anthony.

In this respect, Flaubert’s selection of Hilarion as the spirit guide to his Anthony is particularly sensitive to the intricacies of Anthony’s Late Antique narrative tradition as well as its transmission through the important aesthetic respectful reimagination. The version of Hilarion that appears in the Tentation de Saint Antoine, though, clearly represents a different entity than that incarnated by Late Antique hagiographical tradition. Not long after the devil appears, leaning against Anthony’s hut, a visitor arrives: “[…] un enfant […] petit comme un nain et pourtant trapu comme un Cabire, contourné, d’aspect misérable. Des cheveux blancs couvrent sa tête prodigieusement grosse […]” (86). It is this goblin-like creature that claims to be Hilarion. To his credit, Anthony is initially suspicious and his interrogation of this character provides the reader with additional sources of apprehension as to his true identity. “Cependant” says Anthony “sa figure était brillante comme l’aurore, candide, joyeuse. Celle-là est toute sombre et vieille” (87). Hilarion blames hard work and age. But Anthony persists: “La voix est aussi différente.

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202 “Audiens autem tunc celebre nomen Antonii, quod per omes Aegypti populos ferebatur, incensus uisendi eius studio perrexit ad eremum” (216) [At the time that he heard the famous name of Anthony, which was being related by all the people of Egypt, he burned with the desire to see him and he set out for the desert]

203 “Et statim ut eum uidit, mutato pristino habitu, duobus fere mensibus iuxta eum mansit, contemplans ordinem uitae eius morumque grauitatem […]” (216) [And no sooner had he seen him [Anthony], he [Hilarion] changed his former habits and lived with him for two months, contemplating his way of life and the severity of his morals].

204 “Habebat Dominus Iesus in Aegypto senem Antonium, habebat in Palestina Hilarionem iuniorem” (236) [In Egypt, the Lord Jesus had the aged Anthony and in Palestine, He had the young Hilarion].
Elle a un timbre qui vous glace” (87). Hilarion unconvincingly blames his diet of bitter food. There would be something comical about this scene if it were not so disturbing. The character that calls himself “Hilarion” is obviously not Hilarion. Hilarion is in Anthony’s memory, as he is in the *Vita Hilarionis*, a positive presence, a dutiful student, a devout Christian and, more than anything else, a human being. This creature is none of these things.

And yet, strangely, just as the reader’s mistrust of this seemingly false Hilarion begins to reach a crescendo, Anthony starts entertaining the possibility that this supernaturally hideous man-child may in fact be his old friend. The interaction between Anthony and the character that calls himself “Hilarion” occupies the core of this text (84-206) during which time, the false Hilarion is consistently referred to both by characters and by the authorial figure as “Hilarion”. This creates a sort of prolonged impasse at the center of the *Tentation* as the plotline seems obstinately to refuse the conclusion to which it so carefully guides the reader. There is, in this sense, a bifurcation of the text according to the understanding of the false Hilarion’s relationship to the character of the *Vita Hilarionis*. Within the diegesis, the Hilarion character is treated as an extension of figure that appeared in Saint Jerome’s text; without, he is an absolute creation of the Flaubert’s imagination, bearing no tangible relationship to the real Hilarion, no relationship, that is, other than his transparently feigned appropriation of this saintly figure’s name and life story. The textual failure to resolve the issue of Hilarion’s identity relative to the Late Antique sources of his legend provides Flaubert with a manner in which to drive a further wedge between the Late Antique origins of the Anthony story and his own creative intentions.

The character that calls himself “Hilarion”, then, much like the narrative overtures made by the *Tentation’s* early plotline to Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*, simultaneously engages the Late Antique tradition of Saint Anthony the Great even as it denies the ability of this tradition to
impact materially on the *Tentation* itself. The hesitation this creates between text and source supports the development of two important features of the aesthetic universe of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. First, it provides this text with an opportunity to showcase its literary sources, allowing the authoritative fourth-century hagiographies upon which it is ostensibly based to become parallel entities to the *Tentation* itself, neither fully integrated into Flaubert’s fledgling reimagining of the Anthony legend nor completely succumbing to the internal coherence of the framework it provides. This recreates within the single work that is the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, the suggestion of narrative multiplicity that had been such an important a part of the medieval hagiographical world. Flaubert’s engagement with, and obvious modification of, his sources, in other words, ensures that all readers, even those unfamiliar with the hagiographical corpus of Saint Anthony the Great, would be aware not only of the *Tentation*’s participation in a broader narrative tradition but also of its unique contribution to this tradition, competing with its literary predecessors even as it borrows from them.

Second, the ambivalence of the relationship between the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* and its sources ensures that the dialogue between the two remain in a continual state of logical breakdown. The traditional story of Saint Anthony the Great provides the necessary background through which the character manipulated by Flaubert takes on meaning. Without the initial context of Atahasius’ *Life*, this Anthony would be an eremitical saint like any other; it is his Late Antique legend that sets him apart as special. Likewise, without the guidance of the strange creature that calls himself “Hilarion”, his temptations would not progress very quickly. The false Hilarion is a very real conduit through which Anthony’s illicit desires are able to become real threats to his faith. At the same time, allusion to both the *Life of Anthony* and the *Vita Hilarionis* almost immediately disappoint the natural expectation of imitation. Instead, they resist
assimilation to Flaubert’s narrative just as the Tentation refuses to cede to their authority. Much like its medieval predecessors, then, Flaubert’s Tentation locks itself, through allusion to Athanasius and Jerome, into a kind perpetual failure to either connect fully with the literary tradition in which it participates or to break free of its influence.

Whether or not Flaubert was aware of the extent to which this treatment of Athanasius and Jerome was a recreation of the particular modalities of medieval hagiography is impossible to say for certain. Although at first glance, the medieval tradition does not appear to be foremost in the author’s mind, there can be little doubt that Flaubert remained committed to the medieval resonances of hagiographical writing. He closed the first version of the Tentation in 1849 with the characteristically medieval explicit: “Cy finit la Tentation de Saint Antoine” (496) as though at the end Flaubert’s creation, the story were intended to fade into the backdrop of some medieval legendarium. This interest in the saints’ medieval profile is further attested to by a parallel but more sophisticated procedure employed at the end of his 1877 short story, the “Légende de Saint Julien l’Hospitalier”, where instead of providing pastiche of medieval codicological convention, Flaubert fades out from his own narration into an ekphrastic evocation of his source of inspiration: “[…] un vitrail d’église de mon pays” (131). The possibility that this recreation of medieval aesthetics in the Tentation de Saint Antoine might have been intentional is further supported by the breadth of Flaubert’s interest in a hagiographical tradition that, although not in itself medieval, was certainly available to medieval readers and subject to

205 Although this position has been convincingly contested (See Bart and Cook 81), there is some reason to believe that Flaubert’s inspiration for this text came at least in part from vernacular medieval texts given the remarkable similarity in plot to each of these, the brevity and relative confusion of the Legenda aurea version (discussed in Chapter III) and the relative non-intersection, in spite of Flaubert’s long study of this work of art (Bloom 19-20), of the story told in the vitrail d’église and the one recounted in the actual text (see Call 87). Even if he did not, his research on the Middle Ages for the “Légende”, which he may also have called upon for the Tentation, was extensive (Giraud 88).
medieval concepts of hagiographic machinery.\textsuperscript{206} However, it is in many ways immaterial whether medieval hagiography was present in Flaubert’s mind or not. The \textit{Tentation de Saint Antoine} clearly embodies a reaction to the early hagiographical tradition that accurately mimics the intertextual machinery of medieval hagiographical writing. Moreover it reintegrates the work of the creative author into the practice of saintly representation for the first time since the Middle Ages. This time, though, the text is not merely fictitious it is fictional.

\textbf{The Saint Without God?}

The stance that this text takes toward the Late Antique sources of its inspiration not only establishes an aesthetic mix of imitation and creativity; it also removes Anthony’s story from the highly historicized context of ecclesiastical hagiography. If the \textit{Tentation de Saint Antoine} is not a text in the religious tradition, though, what is the purpose of the now secularized narrative of saintly temptation? Although at first glance, it might appear that Flaubert is making light of the traditional story of Saint Anthony, there is also far more at stake here than a simple satire. The complex work of literary art that is the \textit{Tentation de Saint Antoine} is not just reacting to a preexisting tradition; it is participating in the development of this antique tradition into a new one. Consequently, it does not work to deny the existence of God simply because the Late Antique sources of Anthony’s story depended upon it. Instead, the \textit{Tentation} endeavors to replace the divine forces upon which its predecessors established their ontological foundation.

\textsuperscript{206} The other two short stories that make up \textit{Trois Contes}, “Un Coeur simple” and “Hérodi"as” are based respectively on the \textit{Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis} and the biblical martyrdom of John the Baptist, each represented for medieval readers in the \textit{Legenda aurea} (The Perpetua and Felicity story takes up, in a particular machinic way, most of the entry on Saint Saturnin 985-987 while John gets his own entry 708-717). Flaubert also appears to have had something of a secular devotion to Saint Polycarp (Lapierre 38-40), citing him in two letters, both to Louise Colet, as a mirror of the self, one in 1853 (312) and the other 1854 (32).
with a secularized equivalent. In so doing, Flaubert hijacks the metaphorical language that had once allowed hagiography to give form to an unseeable God in order to incarnate, within the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, a different understanding transcendence.

What exactly Flaubert chooses to place at the height of the *Tentation*’s cosmological universe, though, is not easily ascertained. It is important to bear in mind when approaching this issue that the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* does not exclusively engage with Christian texts. Rather, it works its way through a broad set of literary, philosophical, and narrative traditions, forcing both the *Tentation* as a literary unit, and Anthony, as a character within it, to situate themselves with respect to a variety potentially incompatible worldviews. There is a discernable boundary, in fact, between the portion of the *Tentation* rooted in the Christian tradition and that based on the narrative and philosophical production of non-Christian thinkers: that is, the explicit problematization of Scriptural truth.

Shortly after his appearance Hilarion takes the metaphorical aesthetic of Christian writing to task. In response to Anthony’s statement that “[…] il faut croire l’Écriture!” (94), Hilarion raises some very legitimate objections in response to his interlocutor’s blind faith in such an imperfect work as the Bible:

Saint Paul, Origène et bien d’autres ne l’entendaient pas littéralement mais si on l’explique par des allégories, elle devient le partage d’un petit nombre et l’évidence de la vérité disparaît […] Cependant, l’ange annonciateur, dans Matthieu apparaît à Joseph, tandis que dans Luc, c’est à Marie […] Le breuvage qu’on […] offre [à Jésus] sur la croix, c’est dans Mathieu, du vinaigre avec du fiel, dans Marc du vin et de la myrrhe (94).

As Hilarion goes on, listing one scriptural inconsistency after the next, he is in essence, acting from a modern empirical episteme, highlighting the very mystery that has made not only Holy Scripture but also hagiography, difficult at times for modern readers to appreciate. If a story changes each time it is interpreted by a different writer, Hilarion seems to be saying, then what
truth any individual textual incarnation of this story contains cannot be said to be entirely factual; and if textual truth is translated by allegory, this truth cannot be an absolute or even stable quantity, but rather one that is idiosyncratic and liable to change from one interpretative subjectivity to the next.

For Anthony, this discussion is devastating. On a metatextual level, it clearly separates him from the source of his story’s original authority. On a narrative level, it makes space for doubt at the heart of the textual tradition upon which he has based his entire system of belief. This effectively marks the point of transition from the first half of the Tentation, in which the principal intertext is with the Life of Anthony, and the second half, in which a broader literary world takes center stage. It is the desire to get to the bottom of the issue of scriptural truth, that leads both Anthony and the Tentation outside of the textual universe of Christianity. When asked by Hilarion if he would like solutions to the problems that their discussion has raised, Anthony is incapable of refusing. With this the two are transported to the magical space—an enormous basilica filled with light—in which Anthony will spend over one hundred pages (97-205) dialoguing with almost exclusively non-Christian and heretical philosophers and pagan gods. As Anthony pursues and is pursued in theological debate by what is almost transparently a living representation of Flaubert’s own reading list, Hilarion fades into the background. It becomes apparent, however, as discussion of divinity gives way to the representation of divinity, that while Anthony may be encountering a series of concepts or philosophies embodied in the forms of the various pagan gods, they ought not to impact on his overall worldview; these gods are dead and the mystical basilica is a kind holding cell for discarded divinities.207 Anthony’s journey through their midst, then, is both an intellectual history of divinity and a reification of its

207 They speak of times that they used to be worshiped: “Moi aussi l’on m’honora jadis. On me faisait des libations. Je fus un Dieu” (203).
conceptual utility. The gods talk about the past, nostalgic for a time when they were worshiped until they all disappear into the ether. Finally a last disembodied voice speaks to Anthony: “J’étais le Dieu des armées, le Seigneur, le Seigneur Dieu” (204, reprise 205). Jarring at the end of a procession of Gods like Isis, Juno and Hercules that the average French reader will have been taught to think of as fictional, this voice is clearly a reference to the Judeo-Christian God, Anthony’s God, almost certainly the reader’s God. And yet, He is, just like the other gods that inhabit this otherworld, somewhere between fictional and dead. It seems, then, that Anthony’s willingness to doubt in the metaphorical power of the written Word and his subsequent exposure to a substantially more empirical view of religious thought have lead him to a troubling discovery: the Christian literary tradition is a sham.

While the represented disappearance of the Judeo-Christian God leaves Anthony, and the Tentation, momentarily in a kind of philosophical no man’s land, the conceptual gap produced by this erasure the divine person is soon filled by another force: knowledge. In a sequence strange enough to be worth quoting in its entirety, the textual complicity with Hilarion’s fraudulent self-identification finally seems to break down and his true identity is revealed:

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208 “Et les innombrables Dieux […] se dispersent de tous les côtés, – sous l’apparence d’énormes fourmis qui trottent ou de grands papillons qui s’envolent” (203).
209 See Seznec Dieux 182-191 for a discussion of the biblical allusions that make such an interpretation relatively unquestionable.
210 This based on the relatively safe presumption that many if not most late nineteenth-century readers of this text, if not practicing Catholics, had been brought up in the Church to at least to the extent of fulfilling certain social obligations (Christmas Mass, Easter Mass, First Communion, etc.) and that, for this reason, even the most virulent atheist would probably recognize this God as the one that he or she disbelieved in.
211 This is made especially clear by the 1849 incarnation of Tentation de Saint Antoine in which the death of the Gods including Anthony’s own is treated explicitly as the point of this sequence. For discussion of this sequence in the 1849 Tentation, see Séginger “La Tentation et les Savoirs”.

ANTOINE

Tous [les dieux] sont passés.

Il reste moi!

dit

QUELQU’UN

Et Hilarion est devant lui, – mais transfiguré, beau comme un archange, lumineux comme un soleil, – et tellement grand, que pour le voir

Se renverse la tête

Qui donc es-tu?

HILARION

Mon royaume est de la dimension de l’univers; et mon désir n’a pas de bornes. Je vais toujours affranchissant l’esprit et pesant les mondes, sans haine, sans peur, sans pitié, sans amour, et sans Dieu. On m’appelle la Science. (205-206)

Could it be that Hilarion, like the leper in the legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller, has secretly embodied the one true God all along? And could it be that the positivist force he represents is in actual fact the supreme transcendence that organizes the cosmological universe of the Tentation de Saint Antoine? The timing of this revelation certainly seems to suggest that this is the case.

Hilarion as a personified Knowledge, is the lone entity to survive the death of the gods, a collection of characters to which the interjection of “il reste moi” allows him to assimilate. In this sense, Hilarion, the allegorical representation of Science is a kind of God that surpasses the conceptual limitation demonstrated by the death of all the others. Hilarion is a force that

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212 This is certainly the position espoused by Thiher 84.
213 It is reasonable to assume that science here is meant to be heard both as knowledge–this was still, after all, the first definition provided by Littré in the 1872-77 Dictionnaire de la langue française–as well as the more common modern sense, corresponding to the English science (i.e. biology, physics, chemistry, etc.). Therefore, I use the terms Knowledge and Science interchangeably to refer to Hilarion. This homonymy will be discussed in greater detail hereafter.
214 Ann Lilley has made a similar argument (see 20-21). However, while she certainly sees Hilarion as a lynchpin in the Tentation de Saint Antoine, she does not make the association between this figure and that of a modified conception of divinity so much as she sees Hilarion as a personification of Flaubert’s personal rejection of both religious and philosophical movements.
outlives the ephemeral and profoundly subjective concept of divinity, replacing it at the apex of
the *Tentation*’s universal order, with that which is really eternal: the truth.

This blurring of divine transcendence and secular *Science* is not simply confined to the
revelation of Hilarion’s identity; it is a central feature of the new cosmology that the *Tentation*
creates for the story of Saint Anthony. In many respects, this represents only a slight
probelmatization of the condition of sanctity as it was experienced by the medieval readers of
hagiography. After all, the special connection enjoyed by medieval saints with the unknowable
divine was nothing if not a form of privileged knowledge. Flaubert’s Anthony—although he
probably would not have described his goal as being *sans pitié, sans amour et sans Dieu*—is
motivated throughout his journey by a desire to experience the kind of intellectual union with
God that had defined medieval hagiography, that is to say, the obliteration of human subjectivity
and subsequent synthesis with the unfathomable source of universal truth. This ambition is the
fundamental purpose of his withdrawal from society; it the accomplishment of this desire that
keeps him in the desert, and it is the closing of the special conduit between saintly devotion and
divine union that leads Anthony to his fundamental dissatisfaction with the eremitical lifestyle.\(^{215}\)
Moreover, it is a desire to regain this special access to divine revelation that brings about
Anthony’s temptations.

The temptations themselves are, as the preceding discussion has already suggested,
transparently linked with the quest for knowledge. Anthony’s curiosity is what allows Hilarion to
bring him to the luminescent basilica where his debate and discussion with dead philosophers
and obsolete gods becomes a fast-paced deconstruction of a process of thinking, or perhaps more

\(^{215}\) He describes this satisfaction with his prayer and its eventual disappointment in his opening
monologue: “[…] priant les deux bras étendus je sentais comme une fontaine de miséricorde qui
s’épanchait du haut du ciel dans mon cœur. Elle s’est tarie maintenant. Pourquoi ?…” (52).
accurately, a process of reading, as Anthony enters into a literalized exchange with the
encyclopedic compendium of ideas, transcendences and philosophies represented by these
figures. The ancient form of knowledge-quest embodied by the literalized representation of
Anthony’s intertextual dialogue, rapidly gives way, through Hilarion’s mediation, to engagement
with an increasingly modern episteme, one grounded predominantly in scientific inquiry.
However, the implicit and rather cheap homonymy this creates between the knowledge revealed
to Anthony (science) and the supposedly transcendent force incarnated by Hilarion himself
(Science) allows the positivist connotations of Hilarion’s moment of self-revelation to become a
matter of some ambivalence.

Immediately following Hilarion’s unmasking as Science, the problem of his possible
transcendence in the image of God, takes on a new wrinkle. In response to Anthony’s accusation
that Hilarion “[…] dois être plutôt le Diable!” (206), Hilarion offers Anthony an opportunity to
increase his knowledge of the universe even further: “Veux-tu le voir?”. In a fit of curiosity,
Anthony accepts and is instantly whisked off the ground as the devil flies him ever higher into
the night sky. It is from this demonic source that Anthony receives the first knowledge that one
might properly call scientific. High above the earth, Anthony begins to look for “[…] les
montagnes où le soleil chaque soir va se coucher” (207). The devil, exasperated, tells him what
centuries of astronomical study would reveal only after Anthony’s death, “Jamais le soleil ne se
couche!” (207), going on to make fun of the saint’s amazement at the organization of the solar
system “[La Terre] ne fait donc pas le centre du monde? Orgueil de l’homme, humilié-toi !”
(208). This astronomy lesson goes on for the duration of the sixth tableau of the Tentation de
Saint Antoine as the devil explains to Anthony that the earth is round (207), that planetary

216 “[…] il est saisi par la curiosité du Diable. Sa terreur augmente, son envie devient démesurée”
(206).
motion does not produce music (208), and that the moon is devoid of life (208). Anthony is finally seduced: “Oui… Oui! mon intelligence l’embrasse […]” (209). With this, it seems that all is lost; the devil pulls Anthony from his back and prepares to swallow him whole. But a last-minute glimmer of hope saves Anthony’s immortal soul. He lifts his eyes toward heaven in an appeal to God’s divine mercy (215) and with this he falls to the ground.

Back in the desert now, for the final tableau of the text, Anthony seems to have reached the end of his temptations. Before all is said and done, though, there is a final vision: a group of sea creatures emerge into the desert and begin to morph before Anthony’s eyes as though evolving, in the Darwinian sense. And then the whole world begins to break down into its constituent parts:

Les végétaux ne se distinguent plus des animaux […] Des insectes n’ayant plus d’estomac continuent à manger […] Enfin [Antoine] aperçoit de petites masses globuleuses, grosse comme des têtes d’épingles et garnies de cils autour. Une vibration les agite. (236-237)

Anthony is overcome by the beauty of this apparition and falls into a profoundly manic state as though he wants to become the spectacle he has just witnessed:

[…] j’ai vu naître la vie […] le sang de mes veines bat si fort qu’il va les rompre. J’ai envie de voler, de nager, d’aboyer, de beugler, de hurler. Je voudrais avoir des ailes, une carapace, une écorce, souffler de la fumée, porter une trompe, tordre mon corps, me diviser partout, être en tout […] me blottir sur toutes les formes, pénétrer chaque atome, descendre jusqu’au fond de la matière, – être la matière (237).

While Anthony is in this state of jubilation, the sun finally rises and the face of Christ appears in the middle of it. Anthony, faith restored, makes the sign of the cross and returns to his prayer.

This strange vision, which so enthralls Anthony, is almost always interpreted as a conglomeration of modern and ancient scientific research and most especially the revelation of
the cellular basis of life. Like the previous demonic vision of the cosmos, this is a privileged disclosure of scientific discoveries that would not be made until hundreds of years after the historical Anthony’s death. And yet, this vision, while no more or less scientifically true than that just offered by the devil, seems to be the work of a Christian divinity. In fact, whereas Anthony’s acceptance of astronomical knowledge leads very nearly to his complete annihilation, this embracing of microbiological knowledge leads, on the contrary, to his salvation – at least when taken at face value. This creates a logical breakdown within the universe of the Tentation in the absolute value of knowledge: what is to be made of, Hilarion’s represented place at the top of the cosmological food chain when knowledge, especially scientific knowledge is represented as both destructive and creative, divine and diabolical?

It would be easiest to say that the representation of science as the source of both damnation and salvation upholds the claim that Science reigns supreme over Anthony’s fictional world; more transcendent even than the God of hagiography, knowledge can be both good and evil, it is God and the devil wrapped into one. Neatly-packaged as it may be though, this is not the picture painted by the Tentation de Saint Antoine. The astute reader will remember, when the face of Christ appears in the sun, that God was dead not forty pages ago. The reappearance of this God, according to Anthony’s own Trinitarian views, leaves open a multiplicity of competing interpretations. Michel Foucault expressed his own frustration at the interpretative opacity created by these final moments of the text: “Est-ce […] qu’il a triomphé des tentations, est-ce

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217 Séginger’s discussion in “Fiction et Transgression épistémologique” of the various ancient and modern scientific discoveries alluded to in this vision is particularly clear in its treatment of this extraordinarily complex sequence. See esp. 133-134.

218 Louis Bertrand was careful to note that Flaubert originally meant to include a death of Christ after the disappearance of the disembodied voice that represents the God of the Old Testament in the 1874 version but that he removed this scene for fear of offending his religious readership (275). This fragment is available in Bertrand 275-277 and Gothot-Mersch 271-272.
qu’il a été vaincu au contraire, et que pour sa punition le même cycle indéfiniment recommence? Ou est-ce qu’il a retrouvé la pureté à travers le mutisme de la matière, est-ce qu’il est réellement saint […]” (32). This vexation bespeaks a fundamental impasse in Flaubert’s representation of the transcendent forces at work within his text.

On the one hand, the appearance of Christ’s face in the last moments of the Tentation suggests that Flaubert may intend for his Anthony story, in spite of its considerable narrative and symbolic differences from the rest of the Anthony tradition, to adhere to the core truths presented in such time-honored textual forms as the Life of Anthony. In this case, although Flaubert’s Anthony has waivered in his faith, it is fair to interpret that he vanquishes his temptations. After demonstrating continued belief in God when face-to-face with the devil, Anthony receives the divine recompense for his exceptional bravery as God unveils to him the very knowledge that he so craved all along; the revelation of the source of physical Creation (the cell), coupled with the satisfyingly intelligible forms of Christian theophany (the face of Christ) become a single incarnation of divine presence in Anthony’s story. This reading of the final moments of the text has important implications for the rest of the narrative presented by the Tentation de Saint Antoine. Foremost among them, it means that God is not dead, as the vision mediated by Hilarion would lead Anthony to believe. God is alive and the colorful procession philosophers and gods, ending with the revelation of the supremacy of Science was nothing more than a trick, a temptation designed to make Anthony renounce his faith and take comfort instead in the positivist intelligibility of the universe. Following this understanding of the Tentation through its

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219 The appearance of Christ’s face in the sun as comfort from temptation is a feature of Matthias Grünwald’s so-called Isenheim Alterpiece (ca. 1512-1516), visible on the right-hand panel of the third open view. This is consonant with the moment from Athanasius’ text that both Flaubert and Grünwald represent in their own way in which God appears to Anthony, commends him for his courage and promises him his love and protection (Athanasius 39).
logical development, it would be fair to say that Flaubert’s interpretation of the legend of Saint Anthony is strikingly close to Athanasius’ own. Just as Athanasius’ God speaks to Anthony after his temptation is over to tell him that “[…] I will be your helper forever, and I will make you famous everywhere” (39), Flaubert’s God provides him with physical reassurance of His existence and the immediate restoral of his faith. It is as though Flaubert, in the medieval tradition, were simply modifying his predecessors’ metaphorical language in order to express a common saintly identity.

On the other hand, the homonymy suggested between Hilarion’s identity as Science and the scientific nature of the microbiological revelation of the cellular basis of life, cannot be so easily dismissed. If this play with puns is a cheap linguistic trick, its superficiality nevertheless draws attention to the similarity between the revelation of the cell and the demonic revelation of astronomical truths. These, like the procession of philosophers and gods before them, are forms of knowledge that make themselves available to Anthony after Hilarion’s appearance in the text. In this case, it is easy to read the seeming appearance Christ’s face as the real illusion. In fact, this moment of divine embodiment is an exact representation of the only thing that Anthony has ever truly wanted: a concrete manifestation of the pure truth that is the Christian God. According to this interpretation, it would make sense to read this final sequence as Anthony’s last and most insidious temptation, a test from the secular god of Science to see if he can tell the difference between truth and its effigy. After all, this revelation of scientific cells followed by a divine simulacrum is in many ways no more than a re-ordered version of the core of the text, which takes Anthony instead through the realm of the dead Gods first and into the revelation of Hilarion’s true identity afterwards. In this case, Science is still the supreme force in the universe
of the *Tentation* and Anthony, incapable of recognizing this, remains defeated, having chosen a forgery over the truth.\(^{220}\)

These two juxtaposing interpretations of the culminating moments of Anthony’s story support fundamentally incompatible understandings the sublime forces at work in this text. Anthony himself clearly believes that the Christian God has remained in control of the universe all along. And he may be right; it is perfectly plausible to imagine that the diegetic universe of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* is taken up, until the final pages, with the false reality of demonic temptation, dispelled at the last by the infinite power of the divine. However, it is just as easy to see this text as offering a positivist reading of the universe that, in the absence of a divine Creator, is infinitely knowable through the kind of secular inquiry that Hilarion illustrates to Anthony. The fact that the *Tentation* should phrase its dichotomization of transcendence in these terms is no accident. This polarization of the transcendental incarnates a societal debate that had been growing increasingly pressing in French culture since the Reformation and that, over the course of the nineteenth century, had risen to a fever pitch:\(^{221}\) was religion a force for good or was it a force for ill? The treatment of saints’ stories prior to the publication of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, either faithful to the Church or bitingly satirical of it, speaks to the starkness of this social divide, as one literary tradition argued for the existence and importance of God in the face of the other which explicitly worked to deny it. By taking on the story of Saint Anthony, Flaubert was situating himself in the center of this debate. This makes the ambiguity of the

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\(^{220}\) This understanding seems at least at one time during the writing process to have been shared by Flaubert himself. Edmond de Goncourt excitedly revealed in an 1871 journal entry that Flaubert had confided in him during a private conversation that “[…] la défaite du saint est due à la cellule, la cellule scientifique!” (839).

\(^{221}\) Mary Orr’s discussion of religion in Flaubert’s lifetime (*Flaubert’s Tentation* 34-45) efficiently fleshes out the nuances of this claim while clearly demonstrating the dialectical nature of the religious climate of nineteenth century France, pro-Catholic on the one hand and anti-clerical on the other.
particularly central question of transcendence especially striking. The fact that Flaubert should so manifestly frustrate the reader’s desire for resolution on this issue, providing both divine and secular, religious and humanist, mystical and positivist interpretations of the mechanics of the universe, allows him to do something truly innovative: he refuses comment, happy to allow the Catholic tradition of saintliness to coexist problematically with the positivism of modern science.

Flaubert’s *Tentation*, then, does not solicit *multiple* meanings so much as it defies meaning altogether. By occupying two mutually exclusive positions at the center of one of his culture’s fundamental existential questions, Flaubert works not toward interpretational polyphony but rather toward practical unintelligibility. In other words, both the Christian and the positivist undertakings of this text are necessarily cancelled out by the possibility of the other. The Christian God does not permit, as Anthony himself reminds the reader, the possibility for doubt;\(^{222}\) to doubt God is to lose God. Meanwhile, a positivist text would at least hold itself to the same standard of intelligibility that it claims for the universe. By extending Hlarion’s promise of infinite *knowability* as being interpretatively deadlocked with the promise of salvation proffered by the Christian God, this text enacts the failure of its own represented positivism, allowing the enormity of the universe to overwhelm the capacity for literary delineation.

The *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, then, short of inviting the reader to chose between Christian and positivist world views, simply sets up this philosophical gridlock as a patina of textual meaning only to disappoint its promise of epistemological satisfaction. The reader finds him or herself, at the end of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, much as Anthony did at the beginning: frustrated by the inaccessibility and incomprehensibility of the great Beyond. This is not to say that Flaubert denies the *existence* of the transcendental. On the contrary it is

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\(^{222}\)For example, he tells Hilarion “J’ai toujours besoin de l’adorer!” (96).
omnipresent in this text, if for no other reason than its constant problematization. However, it is carefully represented not in concrete form, but rather through its noticeable absence, making its presence felt through the invisible hesitation between the irreconcilable positions incarnated by Christ on the one hand and Hilarion on the other. In a very real way, then, the Tentation de Saint Antoine incarnates transcendence as a function of its conceptual impossibilities.

This evacuation from the Tentation’s subtext of the very kind of concrete epistemological functionality that its main character so craves does not make this text meaningless; it rather focuses the full impact of its message, not on the world outside of the fiction, but rather on the literary unit itself. This is most simply observed on the level of the text’s generic belongings. The theatrical format of the Tentation stands in stark contrast to the realistic possibility of staging such a production. Cast size and technological needs aside, many of the people, places and events represented in this text defy imagination let alone practical implementation. The opening descriptive passage makes this instantly clear: “[…] dans l’espace flotte une poudre d’or tellement menue qu’elle se confond avec la vibration de la lumière” (51-52). As these conceptual impossibilities multiply,223 the reader, as hypothetical spectator, is forced with each new page to contemplate the steadfast impossibility of the textual unit that he or she nevertheless holds between his or her hands. This formal hesitation is analogous to the semantic one incarnated by the philosophical breakdown between God and Science; it enacts the theoretical splitting of

223 The unrealizable and inconceivable moments in this text are too numerous to list. Another compelling example is provided by the moment that the devil whisks Anthony off the ground and his wings expand over the course of the tableau until finally “[…] elles couvrent l’espace” (214). Given that it is reasonable to imagine that l’espace here refers to the vast expanse of space in which all the planets and starts have become visible, it is difficult to visualize such a large space or wings covering it, let alone how one might convey this on stage with late nineteenth-century technology.
content from message. The *Tentation* is not a play but it nevertheless appears to be; it will not unveil transcendence but it nevertheless appears to search for it.

It is within this space of impossibility that the true power of the text resides. Just as the medieval hagiographical tradition had exploited moments of malfunction in the narrative tradition in order to incarnate the impossible divine through an ever-evolving language symbolic forms, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* creates a fundamental malfunction in the narrative of Saint Anthony in order to clear out, at the center of this intertextually-aware work, a space of silence, of true ineffability. In this sense, the literary unit itself becomes the transcendent force presented by the universe of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Disappointing the expectation of an allegorical message, which might emerge from within the diegetic universe itself, Flaubert instead displaces the magical quality of the text from the semantic meanings of the fictional universe to its aesthetic surface, its generic irreality and its epistemic impossibility. This is something of an inversion of medieval hagiographical methods, which used the implicit intertextual dialogue of saintly representation in order to incarnate an unknowable divine in the concrete form of the written text. Flaubert undoes the intelligibility of the privileged saintly relationship to the divine, thereby making the artistic creation the point unto itself. For medieval hagiographers, the creative reimagining of the symbolic language of sanctity had been a tool in allowing a supremely significant divinity to find form in the materiality of the written word; for Flaubert, the metaphorical language of sanctity had become a tool in asserting the magical supremacy of the written word itself.
Conclusion

The notion that the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* might represents an act of pure literary transcendence is one of the most important parts of this text’s legacy. In the concluding thoughts, to his 1964 essay, the “Bibliothèque fantastique”, Michel Foucault explains that the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* is “[…] le livre des livres” (27). For Foucault, this text surpasses the status of book, by so much that it is not just literary but meta-literary, too big for the single textual space designated by Flaubert as the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. Foucault ends his essay by turning away suddenly and almost inexplicably from the *Tentation*–the apparent subject of his essay–to discuss Flaubert’s unfinished novel, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (28-33). The final intrusion of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* into this essay is cosmetically destabilizing but it is also very telling. For Foucault, the *Tentation*’s resistance to interpretation is caused by the text’s unheard-of ability to contain within its bounds all of literature (11). The *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, then, is more, and in some ways less, than just a book; it is an active and aestheticized refusal of extratextual signification, put in the service of a raw vision of literariness. It is for this reason that Foucault’s sudden turn to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is, in its own way, natural. The *Tentation de Saint Antoine* is, among other books, a mystical event, a liberation of the spirit of literature from the bonds of something so down to earth as the single book object. Logically, then, it can only be understood if its magical literary essentialism is trapped within the confines of some other book; just as the medieval God had to be contained within symbolic language to be contemplated, for Foucault, the *Tentation* needs to be discussed in the forms of other books. Hence the turn to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is puzzling because this logical step is not particularly well signaled within the language of the essay.

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224 Resemblances between these two texts are considerable and they are often read as two sides of the same coin, a fact that Flaubert mentions himself in his correspondence with Maupassant. For discussion, see Gothot-Mersch 31. Foucault’s turn to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is puzzling because this logical step is not particularly well signaled within the language of the essay.
Pécuchet, which provides the terre-à-terre framework of discernable meaning that the Tentation, in all of its mystical momentum, lacks.

Naturally, this theory, seductive as it may be, would be difficult to prove in the sober light of day. Bouvard and Pécuchet, although incontestably more down-to-earth in their intellectual inquiry than Anthony, have at least as many intertextual and intellectual exchanges as the eminent anchorite. However, it is not in this analytical light that the subsequent literary tradition regarded Flaubert’s accomplishments in the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*. It is almost as though Flaubert’s *Tentation* became a literary equivalent to the religious charismatic that modern historians now imagine Anthony himself to have been (Brakke 203). In other words, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* inspired not only admiration but emulation. Just as Saint Augustine comes to live a Christian life after hearing the story of Saint Anthony’s life, Flaubert’s, peers after reading the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, also recreated Anthony’s story, reimagining Flaubert’s authorial role with respect to the saint as well as the once again interpretable malleability of Anthony’s story. As early as 1856, with the publication of the fragments of the *Tentation* in *L’Artiste*, Baudelaire appears to have rewritten a part of *Les Fleurs du mal* to accommodate imitation of Flaubert’s Anthony. Paul Arène’s 1880 children’s story depicts Anthony as a story-teller, providing a group of youngsters with a somewhat more playful story of demonic temptation while, they wait to be old enough to read “[...] à travers les vitres de la bibliothèque paternelle, [...] ces mots : « La tentation de saint Antoine, par M. Gustave Flaubert » ” (7). Maupassant’s 1883 short story “Saint-Antoine”, paints the Anthony figure as a

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225 This takes place over the course of Book VIII of the *Confessions*. This scene and its significance are discussed in detail in the Introduction of this dissertation.

226 That is, his poem, “Les Femmes damnées” (“comme un bétail pensif”) features Saint Anthony as an implicit surrogate figure for the poetic voice. (CXI. vv. 11-12, 114). The possibility that it was changed specifically in response to the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* is argued by Luigi de Nardis 167-187.
Norman petit-bourgeois living through the Franco-Prussian war. Huysmans’ 1884 *À Rebours* depicts its main character, Des Esseintes, as a sort of modern-day Anthony in the desert of his library (see Brunel 169-180). In 1887 Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine* was adapted into a script by Henri Rivière for what was to become a popular shadow play at the Théâtre du Chat Noir. In 1895 it inspired a ballet with music by Georges Auvray, and in 1898 it provided the subject matter for Méliès short film, the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*.

The list could go on. The point, however, is that whether or not Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, or any work of literature for that matter, has ever been capable of revealing the transcendent mystery of the written word, literary reactions to Flaubert’s Anthony make this question almost immaterial. Flaubert’s interpretation of the figure of Saint Anthony the Great recreates the medieval prototype of the saintliness-as-metaphor that Anthony’s original *Life* had been so instrumental in creating in the fourth century. With this, the saintly figure once again became a serious presence in the secular literary tradition as his now clearly symbolic valences multiplied in the works of Flaubert’s imitators. Anthony became part of a political commentary in Maupassant’s short story; he became a part of an allegory for friendship in Arène’s tale; he became an everyman in Rivière’s depiction, faltering in the face of an exhausting world of technological progress. The literary machine of hagiography was once again in motion; although clearly altered from its religious incarnations in the Middle Ages, the secular tradition of saintly representation that followed in Flaubert’s wake allowed Anthony and his story to become a literary trope again ripe for creative reimagination.

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227 For comments on the popularity of the Chat Noir’s representation of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, see Mukherjee 26.
CONCLUSION: THE DIVINE AUTHOR AND THE AUTHOR AS DIVINE

Il passa. Il allait bénissant. Le soleil, descendu à l’horizon, l’enveloppait d’une gloire, et son ombre, démesurément grandie par une faveur du ciel, se déroulait derrière lui comme un grand tapis sans fin, en signe du long souvenir que ce grand saint devait laisser parmi les hommes.228

- Anatole France on Saint Anthony

When I undertook this project, I expected to find that medieval saints’ lives had had a reasonably restrained impact on a selection of modern texts. I imagined that saintly stories were perhaps a small subgroup of the literary renaissance of the Middle Ages that took place over the course of the nineteenth century.229 The fact of the matter is that Flaubert’s Tentation de Saint Antoine was not simply the first of a small collection of modern saintly narratives. It transformed the way in which French literary culture engages with the concept of sanctity, transformed it that is, such that it became not more modern but more medieval.

If this epistemic shift in the literary arts back to medieval hagiographical methods can be demonstrated in only a few words, it is certainly through the example of Anatole France. Although now hardly read in the academic setting, Anatole France was one of the most important literary figures of his day (Booth 332-333). He was also one of the most vigorous promoters of the revived aesthetic of medieval hagiographical representation. Following the publication of the Tentation de Saint Antoine, France published three texts that made the rewriting of saintly narratives a primary concern230 and at least three others in which medieval hagiography was a

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228 Thaïs (337).
229 Of course, the so-called “Gothic Revival” goes back to the eighteenth century. However it was not until the nineteenth century that the Middle Ages truly returned to the forefront of European thought. See Daykins “Introduction” (xii-xiv) for a brief overview.
230 Thaïs (1890), L’Étui de nacre (1892) and La Vie de Jeanne d’Arc (1908). For greater study of these works, especially L’Étui de nacre, see Chabrier 163-186.
notable thematic preoccupation.\footnote{Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard (1881), Les Puits de Sainte Claire (1895) and L’Île des Pingouins (1908). Although not a part of the above count, it is worth noting that France, like Flaubert, was interested in saints from early in his literary career, having written a Légende de Sainte Radegonde in 1859 at age fifteen.} What is most striking when engaging with this collection of texts is the extent to which France not only recreates Flaubert’s complex assertion of the importance of literary aesthetic over social message,\footnote{He, like Flaubert, undermines the ability of the saintly story to translate any particular extratexual meaning, allowing Thaïs to go to heaven and damning Paphnutius instead to hell, essentially affirming a kind of relentless arbitrariness.} but his fascinating replication of the machine procedure of saintly interchangeability that medieval hagiographies displayed in their imitation of the Anthony model.

France’s 1890 novel Thaïs provides a particularly compelling example. This text imitates the Tentation de Saint Antoine so closely that it is nearly pastiche. Not only does it include Anthony as a character capable of passing judgment of the narrative universe (331-337) but it also depicts its protagonist, Saint Paphnutius, encountering heretics with whom he, like Flaubert’s Anthony in the mystical basilica, must debate theology. At one point it even goes so far as to abandon its otherwise novelistic format and melts instead into the very kind of impossible theatrical dialogue that Flaubert had so idiosyncratically used (179-215). Beyond this formal imitation of Flaubert’s Anthony, the story that France has selected for Thaïs is, of course that of the saintly couple of Thaïs and Paphnutius, which, for medieval readers had provided echoes of Anthony and Paul, Mary the Egyptian and Zosimus, and Mary Magdalene and Maximin. Anatole France takes this even further allowing Paphnutius not only to double Thaïs but to come literally into contact with Anthony and with Zosimus. As though to make sure that the interchangeability of the saintly identities in this text is fully visible, France even includes a significant digression in which Paphnutius’ traditional life story veers off its course and this
character comes somehow to inhabit the narrative of another desert ascetic, Saint Simeon Stylites (275-304).

In other words, *Thaïs* reads in many ways like a theorization of the literary machine of hagiography. France frames sanctity as a single subjectivity radiating from Flaubert’s *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, even as it links Flaubert, Athanasius, Zosimus, Paphnutius and many more into a single saintly narrative that has now come to include his own original text, *Thaïs*. As Flaubert’s Anthony morphed into other saintly subjectivities, then, over the course of the nineteenth century, the medieval machine of hagiography remained intact, almost astoundingly recreated for a modern readership. Although Anatole France was certainly among the most fastidious in ensuring the replication of this medieval tradition, the very existence of the trend in which it participated is, in a sense, proof enough of a literary framework moving the saintly tradition as a whole through modern fiction.

It is not until one looks as far forward as the postmodern period, though, that the avalanche of saintly stories that sprang up around the publication of the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* can be truly seen for what they are and not just a passing zeitgeist. In a recently published volume on saintliness in postmodern literature, Beth Sutherland has said of the mid-to-late twentieth century period much the same thing that I have said of the late nineteenth century: specifically, that writers during this time were uniquely primed to respond to the complexities inherent in the medieval tradition of sanctity that they had inherited (2). Postmodern writers, she explains, are able to understand sanctity “[…] variously as a hermeneutic, a metaphor, a style, a literary genre, a model for emulation, an aesthetic spectacle, a subversive practice, a practice to be subverted, a historical relic, an ethical pedagogy, a theological problem and an anthropological constant” (2). In this respect, Sutherland is correct;
postmodern thinkers have been able to approach sanctity as an inherently more polyvalent notion than their predecessors of any era. But this conceptual openness would not have been possible without the meticulous work of the nineteenth-century writers, Flaubert and his immediate imitators, who engaged the Late Antique and medieval traditions of hagiography in order to forge a secular identity for the saints.

Flaubert’s recreation of the story of Saint Anthony very rapidly became understood on a societal level as a re-conceptualization of sanctity as authorship. While the Tentation de Saint Antoine does not particularly highlight the authorial function of the Anthony character, the affinities that linked the hermit, alone in the desert to the writer, alone in Croisset, a resemblance that escaped Flaubert least of all, did not take long to establish themselves as part of a single mythology. As Nancy Davenport has put it: “[Anthony’s] psychological make-up was recreated to become that of Flaubert and the embattled nineteenth-century male artists and writers who lived through their trials and torments by either echoing Flaubert’s text or by independently painting, performing and writing the saint’s life as a metaphor for their own” (297). The new legend of Saint Anthony was the “legend” of Gustave Flaubert.

The Tentation itself prepares the way for this inasmuch as it links transcendence to literature; if the saint is the individual who brings transcendence to the mortal realm, the author must surely be the most saintly figure of all. However, long after the nineteenth century came to a close, this association between authorship and saintliness has proven key to the development of the literary machine of saintliness over time. The ideal example is provided by Sartre’s own saintly author, Jean Genet who in his 1943 novel, Notre Dame des Fleurs, depicts his narrator as an authorial double, composing the very text that the reader is holding between his or her hands,

233 He wrote to Louis Colet in 1852, for example, “J’ai été moi-même dans saint Antoine le saint Antoine […]” (362).
not in actual writing but rather in a masturbatory ecstasy that is modeled on both ascetic and visionary traditions of medieval sanctity.

It is perhaps for this reason that Sartre has seen fit to transform Genet himself, through the means of literary biography or perhaps better yet, *hagiography*, into the titular figure of *Saint Genet*. Two particular factors make Genet saintly in Sartre’s terms. First, he was defined, according to Sartre, by a role he played in what he calls a “liturgical drama” (1). This sacrosanct narrative, his transformation from child into “hoodlum” (2) is one that, according to Sartre, Genet will live over and over again, refashioning and rewriting it into different existences and different texts. Second, Genet’s saintliness is a function of his authorial prowess and most especially of his ability to act as a mediator between the common man and the mystical core of literary activity: “[…] his operation clearly falls into the category of poetic acts: it is the systematic pursuit of the impossible” (13). In short, for Sartre, two things make Genet a saint: the constant evolution of a single narrative moment and the power to transform this single narrative into a literary tool for the impossible transcendence of literature itself.

The facility with which the author becomes saintly, both within *Notre Dame des Fleurs* and in Sartre’s contemporary understanding of Genet’s own life is a testament to the enduring power of the legend of the *flaubertian* author, recreating the single narrative of the self and mediating it into a kind of secular transubstantiation through the supremacy of the literary text. However, there is nothing particularly postmodern or even modern about this authorial legend. Rather it is the output of a machine series of equivalences similar to that described in Chapter III. The saintly author that is *Saint Genet* is nothing more or less than a slightly altered version of Flaubert, who is in his turn a version of the Saint Anthony character that appears in the *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, who is a version of the Anthony that appears in the *Legenda aurea*, who is a
version of the Hilarion that appeared in the *Vita Hilarionis*, who is a version of Athanasius’ original Anthony. The popular notion of the saintly author in modern literary circles, then, is nothing more or less than the output of the literary machine of medieval hagiography. One might go so far as to say that the modern understandings of the literary phenomenon as an act of transcendence depend upon a saintly author whose conceptual roots rest deep within the medieval hagiographical world.

The hold that the medieval saintly tradition still has of the world of French letters is particularly well documented by Bernard Sichère’s 1999 book, *Le Dieu des Écrivains*. Without hesitation, Sichère proclaims that the saint as a concept is no more. The saint is now the *écrivain* (16). For Sichère the final secularization of saintliness has occurred and the identification is, or *ought to be*, complete; in an ever-less religious world, it is now completely up to the artist to translate the unseeable into the *oeuvre* (16). This is only one man’s opinion and as such, it impossible to prove or disprove. However, it demonstrates the important role that saintliness, as it was defined by medieval hagiographers, still has to play in ever most secular understandings of the literary phenomenon. The metaphorical nature of sanctity has begun to cross into the world of historical fact as a new elect, the authorial élite become canonized in their turn, through the narrative of biography.
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