

“Consenti, o pia, ch’in lagrimosi carmi ...:” Birgitta in the Verse, Thought, and Artistic Commissions of Angelo Grillo

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Birgitta as Holy Muse

A verse collection published in Venice in 1607 by the Benedictine intellectual and poet Angelo Grillo (1557–1629), *Christo flagellato et le sue essequie* (*The Flagellation and the Exequies of Christ*) opens with a bold metaliterary prefatory sequence outlining the author’s spiritual poetics.¹ Grillo presents his verse as richly embodied and affective, crafted from the corporeal materials of Christ’s passion and the Virgin’s sorrow – a confection of sinews, blood, and tears, designed to wreak powerful empathetic effects on the most obdurate sinner’s heart. Grillo’s conceits in the sequence are as arresting as those of his Baroque contemporaries – or, better, his Baroque followers, in that his religious verse of the 1590s is now increasingly recognized as formative for the Baroque poetic turn.² In the first sonnet, weeping over Christ’s flagellation, the poet defines himself a “Siren of tears on a sea of blood.”³ In the second, he is a

1 Angelo Grillo, *Christo flagellato et le sue essequie, celebrate co ’l Pianto di Maria Vergine* (Venice: 1607), 1–3 (Sonnets 1–111). The two works are presented separately, with their own title pages. I will refer to them henceforth by the short titles *Christo flagellato* and *Le essequie di Christo*. Both sequences were republished in later collections of Grillo’s religious verse, entitled *Pietosi affetti*, and they can be found in the modern edition by Myriam Chiarla (Lecce: 2013). For critical discussion of the two works, see Francesco Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario: Angelo Grillo e la poesia dei benedettini cassinesi* (Bologna: 2012), 333–40.

2 Influential early studies of Grillo as religious poet were Giulia Raboni, “Il madrigalista genovese Livio Celiano e il benedettino Angelo Grillo. In margine a una recente monografia,” *Studi secenteschi* 32 (1991), 137–88, and Marc Föcking, *Rime sacre und die Genese des barocken Stils. Untersuchungen zur Stilgeschichte geistlicher Lyrik in Italien, 1536–1614* (Stuttgart: 1994), 156–250. More recent scholarship takes its cue from Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, and the work of Myriam Chiarla (see, for example, “I *Pietosi affetti* d’Angelo Grillo: prime investigazioni sulle fonti patristiche, teologiche, e spirituali,” *Sacra doctrina*, 56/2 (2011), 93–118). Further bibliography is cited in the notes to this chapter.

3 (“Sol Sirena di pianto in mar di sangue.”) Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, [1] (Sonnet 1); cfr. *Pietosi affetti*, ed. Chiarla, 471 (no. 731, III.1). On siren imagery in Grillo, see Shannon McHugh, “Devotion, Desire, and Masculinity in the Spiritual Verse of Angelo Grillo,” in *Innovation in*

new spiritual Hercules, erector not of pillars to waymark mortal journeys, but rather of the salvific column of Christ.

In these first two poems, mythological references apart, the personae of the sonnets are reduced to the most essential: Christ and his tormentors, the Virgin, the poet, the reader. In the third sonnet, however, a new figure unexpectedly presents herself: none other than Saint Birgitta, presented in a privileged role as poetic and theological muse.

You who, as you emended your soul in the mirror
of the great suffering blood, received high counsels,
venerable Brigida; you who saw reflected there,
as His mother herself once saw, Christ pierced,
and the cruel assaults and the terrible strife,
and the wounds and the deaths and the piteous trophies
you witnessed through the tears of Mary
and wrote them with your own tears on eternal pages –
consent, O pious one, that in weeping lays,
your bountiful cares and revealed light
I may piously gather up and reverently adore,
that I may learn from your lofty and famous volume
to rise up to Heaven on your holy wings,
and honor my weaving with your threads.⁴

Although the sonnet is characteristically complex in its syntax and imagery, Grillo’s message is clear. Birgitta’s great volume, identified in the caption of the sonnet as her *Revelations*, will serve the poet in the same way as the “mirror of Christ’s blood” served Birgitta herself. Just as Birgitta saw in the mirror of contemplation, aided by grace, the piteous spectacle of Christ’s Passion that Mary herself had witnessed, so too the poet, reading Birgitta, and using her text as a prompt for his own meditations, will empathetically envision and recreate

Counter-Reformation Culture, ed. Shannon McHugh and Anna Wainwright (Newark, DE: 2020), 158–59.

4 (“Tu ch’a lo specchio del gran sangue afflito, / l’alma emendendo alti consigli havesti, / Brigida veneranda; e ’n lui vedesti, / come la Madre già Christo trafitto: / e gli aspri assalti, e l’horrido conflitto / et le piaghe, e le morti, e i trofei mesti, / nel pianto di Maria presenti havesti, / et co’l tuo proprio in carte eterne hai scritto. / Consenti, o pia, ch’in lagrimosi carmi / l’alme tue cure, e ’l rivelato lume / pietoso accolga, e riverente adori, / et con l’ali tue sante al Cielo alzarmi, / impari dal tuo chiaro alto volume, / e di tue fila lo mio stame honori.”) Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 3 (Sonnet III); cfr. *Pietosi affetti*, ed. Chiarla, 472 (no. 734, III. 3). All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

these same scenes in his verse. Birgitta's inspiration will empower him both as poet, and, more importantly, as believer. He will weave with her threads and learn from her writings to fly to Heaven on her wings.

Grillo's sonnet constitutes an exceptional tribute to Birgitta's *Revelations*, of special interest when we consider that the poem appeared in print only a year after the first published edition of the *Revelations* for over half a century: that of Consalvo Durante, a learned protégé of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, the dedicatee of the work.⁵ The caption that heads the poem in Grillo's *Christo flagellato* defines the status of the *Revelations* as Grillo sees them. (Although the captions in Grillo's religious works are mainly attributed to his collaborator Pietro Colelli, there are reasons to consider this one Grillo's own.)⁶

To the blessed Santa Brigida, with the thought that, as with all the other mysteries of the life of Christ and the Virgin Mary, so too in this [the poet will] draw on her most holy Revelations, which, even if they do not have the authority of the Gospels, have papal ratification and confirmation by [Church] councils, and marvelous piety [*pietà maravigliosa*].⁷

The language here is worth noting. The *Revelations* possess *pietà*; Birgitta herself, in the sonnet, is *pia*; the poet – again in the sonnet – is *pietoso*. Grillo's religious verse was published under the title *Pietosi affetti* (*Pious affects*) from 1595 onwards, and the formula became a kind of trademark; the editor of *Christo flagellato* augurs that the empathetic *pietà* with which Grillo has envisaged the Passion will awaken the reader's *affetti* in equal part.⁸ The words *pietà* / *pietoso* fold together piety and pity, devotion and compassion: a very precise

5 *Revelationes Sanctae Brigittae ... a Consalvo Durante a Sancto Angelo in Vado presbytero et sacrae theologiae professore notis illustratae* (Rome: 1606). The previous edition was that of Olaus Magnus in 1557, like Durante's edition, published in Birgitta's house in Palazzo Farnese. For details of both see the *Legacy of Birgitta of Sweden* database <https://birgitta.hf.uio.no/printedbooks/15/> (consulted 29 November 2022). On Durante and his edition, see also Gian Ludovico Masetti Zannini, "Il vescovo di Montefeltro Consalvo Durante (1567–1643) e le edizioni delle opere di Santa Brigida di Svezia," *Studi montefeltrani* 21 (2001), 106–09, 114–17.

6 See Ferretti, *Le muse del Cavario*, 201–5, for discussion of the likelihood of Grillo's input in certain of the captions.

7 ("Alla beata Santa Brigida: pensando così in questo, come in tutti gli altri misteri della vita di Christo, & di Maria Vergine, valersi delle sue santissime rivelationi, le quali, se ben non hanno autorità evangelica, han però testimonizana pontificia, & fermezza di concilij, & pietà maravigliosa.") Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 3.

8 Pietro Petracci, letter to the reader in Grillo, *Christo flagellato* (unnumbered). See also Petracci's dedicatory letter to Grillo, *Le essequie di Christo*, which describes the two works as a *pietosa lettura* ("pious reading matter").

encapsulation of the type of deeply affective religiosity, rooted in pitying meditation on Christ’s and the Virgin’s suffering, that finds expression in Grillo’s verse.⁹ Sonnet 3 of the *Christo flagellato* sequence identifies Birgitta as the matrix of this spiritual *habitus*.¹⁰

Theologies Soft and Dry

A key document for understanding the context and import of Grillo’s sonnet to Birgitta is a published letter of his, addressed to his maternal uncle Nicolò Spinola, which appeared in print in 1608 (and subsequently in 1612 and 1616). As literary historians now recognize, Grillo was an important and innovative epistolographer as well as a poet. His witty, polished letters, published manual-style under thematic headings (consolation, congratulation, news, admonishment, advice, etc.) offer a striking panorama of religious and cultural life in Italy in the early 17th century, framed through an attractively mercurial and distinctive authorial voice.¹¹ Like many early modern letter collections, Grillo’s letters are presented as rhetorical models more than as historical record (dates are omitted, for example, leaving indications of place as the principal means of dating the texts). The Spinola letter is written “from Praglia” – i.e. from the great abbey of Santa Maria di Praglia, near Padua, one of the foundational sites of Grillo’s congregation, the Cassinesi. This allows us to date the letter

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- 9 The Crusca dictionary of 1612 defines *pietoso* as signifying purely “compassionate,” “pitying,” but Tasso’s use of the adjective in the first line of the *Gersusalemme liberata* in the sense of “religious” or “pious” helped consolidate this alternative sense of the word. John Florio’s less prescriptive 1611 *World of Words* records both senses for *pietà* (“pietie, devotion, godly affection, righteousness, true zeale. Also ... pittie, mercie, ruth, compassion, or compunction of anothers harme.”) On the significance of the term *affetti* in Grillo’s title, see Chiarla, “I *Pietosi affetti*,” 99–102.
- 10 Birgitta’s importance as a source for Grillo has not previously been the object of sustained discussion, though see Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, 335–36; Raboni, “Il madrigalista,” 171–72; Chiarla, “I *Pietosi affetti*,” 115–16 for brief remarks.
- 11 The thematic organization (“per capi”) is an innovation of the 1608 edition (Grillo’s letters had previously been published in 1602, 1603, and 1604). A recent study of Grillo as epistolographer is Myriam Chiarla, “L’epistolario di Angelo Grillo nel dialogo culturale cinque-secentesco e primi raffronti con le lettere manoscritte,” in *Per uno studio delle corrispondenze letterarie di età moderna*, ed. Clizia Carminati, Paolo Procaccioli, Emilio Russo, and Corrado Viola (Verona: 2016), 321–32. For further bibliography, see Francesco Rossini, “Corrispondenti strozziani (Magliabechiano VIII, 1399): le lettere di Angelo Grillo,” in “*Testimoni dell’ingegno. Reti epistolari e libri di lettere nel Cinquecento e nel Seicento*,” ed. Clizia Carminati (Sarnico (BG): 2019), 198n21. On the editorial history of the letters, see Chiarla, “L’epistolario,” 322–24.

to a period of around a year in 1607–08. It hence coincides closely with the period of composition and publication of *Christo flagellato* and *Le essequie di Christo*, the dedicatory letters to which are respectively dated December and November 1607.¹² The collection of *Lettere* in which the Spinola letter was published may be dated by its dedication to around April of the following year.¹³

Grillo's letter to Spinola presents itself as written in response to an anonymous critic who had questioned the orthodoxy of seven passages in *Christo flagellato*. This may be the truth; certainly, there are instances in this period of printed works being denounced in this way, and of writers presenting defenses, either in manuscript or print.¹⁴ It is also possible, however, that this very long and closely reasoned letter was composed as a justification of Grillo's religious poetics more generally and that the tale of the anonymous denunciation is a pretext. Grillo all but admits to this at the end of the letter, when he concedes that the letter might be described as a *discorso*, rather than a *difesa*, and presents it as a pre-emptive response to potential criticisms that might be levelled at his *Pietosi affetti* more generally.¹⁵ Grillo's genre definition in the letter is reinforced by the work's placement in the volume, in the sub-section of letters defined as "[di] discorso."

Grillo's letter to Spinola deserves close study as a whole, as a statement of post-Tridentine religious poetics.¹⁶ I will concentrate here, however, on a specific passage, in which Grillo defends details in *Christo flagellato* not found in the Gospels (which mention the scourging of Christ while giving no descriptive detail whatsoever – "very drily" in Grillo's own words).¹⁷ The extra-evangelical details Grillo points to in the letter – very graphic ones – are those of Christ's

12 Grillo's movements may be traced using Elio Durante and Anna Martellotti's excellent biography, *Don Angelo Grillo, o. s. b., alias Livio Celiano, poeta per musica* (Florence: 1989). See 225–34 generally on his time in Praglia and 230–31 on the immediate context of *Christo flagellato* and *Le essequie di Christo*.

13 Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 231.

14 A well-known instance is that of Sperone Speroni, whose *Apologia de' dialoghi* (*Apologia for his Dialogues*) was written in response to a reader's report (*avvertimento*) dating to the early 1570s, which probably led to his dialogues being included in the Index of Prohibited Books in the following decade. See Jennifer Helm, *Poetry and Censorship in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Leiden: 2015), 292–98. In Speroni's case, the complaint related to works first published much earlier, in the 1530s, but there are cases of works being denounced prior to publication or immediately following it. See, for example, Clara Stella, "La dichiarazione di Cristoforo Bronzini in difesa del *Dialogo della dignità e nobiltà delle donne* (1622)," *LaborHistórico*, 8.3 (2022): 237–56.

15 *Delle Lettere del Reverendo Padre Abate D. Angelo Grillo*, 2 vols (Venice: 1616), Vol. 1, 554.

16 See the discussions in Chiarla, "I *Pietosi affetti*," 112–18; Morando and Chiarla, "La Bibbia," 73–74; Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, 157–61.

17 ("assai seccamente.") Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.549.



FIGURE 9.1 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Christ after the Flagellation*, after 1665. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Ernest Wadsworth Longfellow Fund
 PHOTOGRAPH © 2022 MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

groping around for his clothes following the scourging, and the bloody traces (or footprints – *vestigia*) that he leaves as he does so. These are details we find occasionally in Spanish 17th-century painting, for example in Murillo’s *Christ after the Flagellation* (post-1665), in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.¹⁸ The passage to which Grillo represents his “opponent” (*opponitore*) as objecting, specifically, is a stanza in a long narrative canzone, or canzonetta, placed immediately after the three initial framing sonnets (incipit, “Occhi de l’alma mia”), so that it constitutes a kind of *narratio*, following the *exordium*, to use rhetorical terms. The stanza describes Christ, cut free of his bonds, “treading his blood, / as he went seeking for his scattered garments.” The following stanza speaks of “his bleeding feet” leaving “bleeding traces” wherever they go.¹⁹

18 For discussion, see John F. Moffit, “The Meaning of ‘Christ After the Flagellation’ in Siglo de Oro Sevillian Painting,” *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, 53 (1992), 139–54.

19 (“E’ l suo sangue calcando /sue sparse spoglie andò Giesù cercando.” // “Vestigi sanguinosi / ovunque ei move il piè sanguigno imprime.”) Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 18.

While Grillo freely admits that these narrative particulars do not derive from the Bible, he defends himself by showing that they do derive from respectable and ratified sources – from Birgitta’s *Revelations* in the case of the bloody footprints, and from Saint Pedro de Alcántara (1499–1562) in the case of Christ searching for his clothes. Where Birgitta is concerned, Grillo cites Durante’s recent edition, mentioning that it appeared under the patronage of Pope Paul v (Camillo Borghese). He also names a work by Daniele Mallonio, dedicated to Pope Paul, which cites Birgitta as an authority in its chapter on the flagellation. The title Grillo gives, *Jesu Christi crucifixi stigmata*, allows us to identify the work cited as a 1606 Latin edition of a treatise by Alfonso Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, on the Turin Shroud, which had been first published in the vernacular in 1598. Mallonio, a Hieronymite and professor of theology at Bologna University, contributed copious annotations to the Latin edition of Paleotti’s work, in which he cites Birgitta extensively on the subject of the flagellation, including the detail cited by Grillo.²⁰

Grillo’s most immediate point in this passage is that he is using recognized authorities for his Passion narrative. He is not inventing things from his own “capriccio,” as he says at the end of the letter; nor is he drawing them from “the naivety of the people” or “the tender nonsense and foolishness of gossiping women.”²¹ Rather, he is drawing on sources that other contemporary clerics have validated as respectable, explicitly or implicitly: Durante, Birgitta’s recent editor, a bishop by the time of Grillo’s writing; Daniele Mallonio, an academic theologian; and ultimately, in both cases, the current pope.²² Grillo’s strategy in the letter is a pared-down version of that of Durante’s edition of the *Revelations*, which, like other printed editions, prefaces the text with an impressive series of paratexts documenting the key stages in Birgitta’s legitimation as religious authority (the defense written by Birgitta’s confessor Matthias of Linköping; Boniface IX’s canonization bull of 1391; Cardinal Juan de Torquemada’s defense of the *Revelations*, written for the Council of Basel in

20 *Jesu Christi crucifixi stigmata Sacrae Sindoni impressa, ab Alphonsi Paleotti ... explicata* (Venice: 1606). Mallonio’s notes on the Flagellation are found at 59–71. The discussion of Christ’s bloody footprints, from Rev. 1: 10.19, is found at 70. Mallonio’s treatise was known in Spain and may be the source for this motif in Spanish painting: see Moffit, “The Meaning of ‘Christ After the Flagellation’”, 152, n. 3. Birgitta’s direct and indirect influence on scenes of the Flagellation in European art is briefly discussed in Émile Mâle, *L’art religieux après le Concile de Trente. Étude sur l’iconographie de la fin du XVI^e siècle, du XVII^e, du XVIII^e siècle: Italie – France – Espagne – Flandres* (Paris: 1932), 265–67.

21 (“la semplicità della plebe;” “le tenere sciocchezze, ò ... li idiotismi delle donniciuole.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 1. 548. The allusion to the author’s “capriccio” is at 550.

22 Durante was created bishop of Montefeltro, in the Marche, in February 1607 (Masetti Zannini, “Il vescovo di Montefeltro,” 109–10).

the 1430s), along with a page of clerical testimonials, reaching down to a contemporary like the Jesuit Martin Delrio (1551–1608). Grillo implicitly refers to this apparatus in his formula that Birgitta’s revelations have “papal ratification and confirmation by councils,” as well as “marvelous piety” (a passage in the letter to Spinola uses exactly the phraseology we saw earlier in the caption to Grillo’s sonnet on Birgitta).²³

Grillo’s more general point in this argument, which he draws from Mallonio, is that, despite their rightly exalted status, the Gospels may not be taken as the sole legitimate record of Christ’s life and passion. They give only the barest details of these events, perhaps because the evangelists were so close to the events described that they could not bear to revisit their cruel details.²⁴ In later ages, God has supplemented this sparse record by granting revelations to chosen pious subjects like Birgitta and Pedro de Alcántara. These revelations flesh out the gospel narrative, enabling the faithful to envisage it more completely. They are ratified by the Holy Church, and “not only do they not repugn the Gospel history, but they help elucidate it.”²⁵ The verb I have translated as “elucidate” is *dichiarare* – to make clear or manifest. It was often used in the 16th century in the sense of “to comment on,” as a commentary may expand on and make more accessible a cryptic or allusive original text.

Although Grillo isolates a sole borrowing from Birgitta in his letter to Spinola, he is being somewhat evasive in so doing. The canzonetta “Occhi de l’alma mia”, and indeed the whole sequence of *Cristo flagellato*, are saturated with reminiscences of Birgitta’s account of the Passion: not merely the details of Christ’s bloody footprints, but also important particulars such as Christ’s nakedness, emphasized both in the canzone and in the sonnet that follows.²⁶ The “bleeding footprints” stanza of the opening canzonetta, to which Grillo’s anonymous *opponitore* is said to have objected, also contains the concluding lines of an entire micro-episode not found in the Gospels but present in the *Revelations*. This shows Christ’s scourging interrupted by “someone” (*unus*) speaking up, “aroused in his spirit,” and demanding of Christ’s tormentors

23 Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.548.

24 Grillo intriguingly compares the suppression of pathetic details by the “grieving evangelists” to a famous anecdote concerning the ancient Greek painter Timanthes, who represented Agamemnon’s sacrifice of Iphigenia with the onlookers showing strong emotion, but Agamemnon himself with his face veiled. Grillo’s source is Mallonio’s commentary on Paleotti, *Jesu Christi crucifixi stigmata*, 10b, which attributes the comparison to the religious writer and Lateran Canon Cesare Calderari (d. 1588).

25 (“non solo non repugnano all’Historia Evangelica, ma la dichiarano.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.549.

26 On Christ’s nakedness in Birgitta, see Corine Schlieff, “Christ Bared. Problems of Viewing and Powers of Exposing,” in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C.M. Lindquist (Farnham: 2012), 263–64.

“are you going to kill him thus without sentence?”²⁷ This mysterious figure is then said to have cut Christ free from his bonds (*et statim secuit vincula eius*).²⁸ Grillo’s version of the episode dramatically expands the unnamed agent’s speech, while remarking that he seems motivated “by justice far more than *pietate*.”²⁹ The episode hence serves to underline the difference between pagan and Christian attitudes to the “atrocious spectacle” of Christ’s torment: the former concerned with human justice, the latter with the deeper providential justice of redemption.³⁰ In keeping with this point, Birgitta’s chain-cutting figure was identified as a Roman soldier in Pilate’s service by preachers of the time who cited the episode.³¹

This detail in Grillo is of interest not least in light of the Venetian publication context of *Christo flagellato*. Representations of this episode in Birgitta’s *Revelations* are found in a painting by Domenico Tintoretto in the Capitoline museums probably dating to the early 1590s, and in another by the same artist which sold at Sotheby’s in New York in May 2022.³² Tintoretto was, of course, Venetian, the son and collaborator of the famous Jacopo Tintoretto, and the context of the commissions was presumably also Venetian, even if the Capitoline painting was first recorded in Rome, in an inventory of 1689. It is striking that two images of this rarely depicted scene should have coincided so closely in its geographical and temporal context with Grillo’s rare poetic reimagining of the scene in *Christo flagellato*.³³ Both Tintoretto paintings have inscriptions identifying the source of their iconography as Birgitta’s *Revelations*, suggesting that the images may initially have perplexed viewers unfamiliar with the text.

It is possible that investigation of Grillo’s Venetian connections might yield hints of potential patronage contexts for the two Tintoretto images. Prior to his

27 Rev. 1: 10. *The Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with an introduction and notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: 2006–15), Vol. 1, 68. Cfr. *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 18a (*Nunquid interficietis eum sic iniudicatum?*) The episode is also found in Rev. IV: 70.5 (*Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. 2, 126), where the man is identified as one of Christ’s enemies: cfr. *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 309a (“*unus inimicorum eius.*”).

28 *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 18a.

29 (di giustizia vie più, che di pietate). Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 18.

30 (l’atroce / spettacolo). Ibid.

31 Francesco Saracino, “Domenico Tintoretto e una visione di Brigida di Svezia,” *Venezia Cinquecento*, 42. 2 (2011), 141–42.

32 On the Capitoline painting, see Francesco Saracino, “Domenico Tintoretto.” For the Sotheby’s painting, see <https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2022/master-paintings/the-vision-of-saint-bridget> (consulted on 21 November 2022).

33 Saracino, “Domenico Tintoretto,” 139, remarks on the coincidence, but he does not explore it.

sojourn in Praglia in 1607–08, Grillo had made several visits to Venice, including a six-month stay at the Cassinese monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore in 1598, when he seems to have engaged enthusiastically with Venetian literary and musical circles. The same sojourn must have familiarized him with the works that Jacopo and Domenico Tintoretto had painted at San Giorgio in the earlier 1590s, the *Last Supper*, *Gathering of Manna*, and *Entombment of Christ*.³⁴ Either at this time or during his later stay at Praglia, Grillo made the acquaintance of the dedicatee of *Christo flagellato*, Luigi Veniero (1542–1617), whom the writer of the dedicatory letter, Grillo’s long-term collaborator Pietro Petracci, describes as a “close friend” (*stretto amico*) of Grillo’s and an admirer of his work.³⁵ It seems likely that Veniero, a nephew of the poet Domenico Veniero was Grillo’s choice as dedicatee, rather than Petracci’s, and we might further conjecture that he was someone whom Grillo felt would be in sympathy with the work’s distinctive, Birgittine-inflected spirituality. It is easy to imagine that one or both of Domenico Tintoretto’s representations of the *Revelations* episode may have been painted for individuals or institutions, such as *scuole*, within Veniero’s circle. Veniero and Tintoretto shared at least one acquaintance: the poet Celio Magno, whose portrait Tintoretto painted in 1597.³⁶ Another possibility is offered by patrons with connections to San Giorgio Maggiore: a monastery much frequented by clerical and lay visitors, including the doge and his retinue, who visited each year for the vigil and feast of Saint Stephen.³⁷ The Cassinesi had particular links with the cult of Birgitta, for reasons explored later in this essay.

The most striking passage in Grillo’s letter-apologia to Spinola is one that follows his justification of the detail of Christ groping for his clothes. His

34 Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 178–80. On Jacopo and Domenico’s work at San Giorgio Maggiore, see Tom Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity*, 2nd edition (London: 2015), 289–95.

35 Petracci describes the friendship between Grillo and Veniero as having blossomed “in a short time” (*brieve tempo*), perhaps suggesting that the two only met during Grillo’s time at Praglia. See Petracci, dedicatory letter (unnumbered) in Grillo, *Christo flagellato*.

36 See Barbara Mazza Boccazzi, “*Ut pictura poesis*: Domenico Tintoretto for Celio Magno,” *Venezia Cinquecento* 11 (2001), 167–75. For Veniero’s acquaintance with Magno, see the unnumbered dedicatory letter of *Edipo tiranno di Sofocle tragedia in lingua volgare ridotta dal clariss[imo] Signor Orsatto Giustiniano* (Venice: 1585).

37 On sociability at San Giorgio Maggiore, see Tracey E. Cooper, “Un modo per la riforma cattolica: la scelta di Paolo Veronese per il refettorio di San Giorgio Maggiore,” in *Crisi e rinnovamenti nell’autunno del Rinascimento a Venezia*, ed. Vittore Branca and Carlo Ossola (Venice: 1991), 280–81, 290. On the doge’s visit, see eadem, “*Locus meditandi et orandi*: Architecture, Liturgy, and Identity at San Giorgio Maggiore,” in *Musica, scienza, e idee nella Serenissima durante il Seicento*, ed. Francesco Passadore and Franco Rossi (Venice: 1996), 87–88.

source here, as noted, is the Discalced Franciscan Pedro de Alcántara, and specifically Pedro's *Tratado de la oración y meditación*. The passage Grillo cites – in Italian – comes from Pedro's meditation for Wednesdays: "Consider that, as soon as the scourging was over, the Redeemer of the World had to go through that Praetorium seeking his clothes, in the presence of those cruel torturers."³⁸ Following this quotation, Grillo embarks on an affectionate paean to "little books" (*piccioli libretti*) like that of the Spanish mystic ("little," perhaps, in a literal sense, in that the Venetian editions of Alcántara are small popular prints in duodecimo or sextodecimo).³⁹ The passage deserves to be quoted in full:

These little books, *Signor mio*, are as effective in inflaming the will of the devout Christian as big books are in nurturing the intellect of the subtle speculative; and perhaps, since they swell us less, and keep us lower, in a state of humility, they make it easier for us to enter *per angustam portam, quae ducit ad vitam* [through that narrow gate that leads to [eternal] life; Matthew 7:13–14, abridged].⁴⁰

It is this type of "humble" devotional thinking and imagining that Grillo captures with his term *pío* (we have already heard of Birgitta's *pietà maravigliosa*, and Alcántara is also defined as *piùssimo Theologo*). In a passage following that just cited, he describes this model of religious thought as "softened theology" ("Theologia rammorbidita"), by contrast with dry, intellectualizing "pulverized" – or "ground" – "Theology" ("Theologia polverizzata in herba") – presumably, the theology of the Schools. In the closing lines of the letter, Grillo characterizes potential critics of his work as "pure and simple speculative scholastics," who "know better how to subtly dispute than how to piously [*pietosamente*] love our eternal, passionate love, Jesus Christ, and his Most

38 ("Considera incontinente doppo l'esser finite queste battiture, come il Redentor del Mondo doveva gir per tutto quel Pretorio cercando i suoi panni, in presenza di quei crudeli Carnefici.") Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.550.

39 Similarly diminutive (duodecimo) is the 1600 Rome edition, which frames the work with more ambitious paratexts and presented itself as edited by the Carmelite Fra Angelo Minicucci. The version of the text cited suggests, however, that Grillo used one of the Venetian editions: see, for example, *Trattato dell'oratione e meditatione composto per il R.P.F. Pietro di Alcantara, Frate Minore dell'ordine di S. Francesco* (Venice: 1588), 48r.

40 ("Questi piccioli libretti, Sig. mio, accendono altrettanto la volontà del divoto Christiano, quanto que' grandi pascono l'intelletto del sottile speculativo; e forse gonfiandone meno, e tenendone più bassi nell'humiltà, ne fanno più facili ad entrare *per angustam portam, quae ducit ad vitam*.") Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.550.

Holy Mother.”⁴¹ Summarizing, Grillo’s letter counterposes a desiccated, intellectualistic, potentially swollen-headed scholastic theology with an affective, pious, “softened,” humble, low theology. In addition to Birgitta and Pedro de Alcántara, Grillo names as exponents of the latter school Saints Bernard, Bonaventure, and Augustine, and “many other contemplatives and devout Theologians.”⁴² (*Divoto* is a further key term in Grillo’s approved spiritual lexicon.) It is on the authority of such thinkers that “the frail [or weak] poems of the *Pietosi affetti* are founded.”⁴³

Although Grillo’s letter to Spinola is careful to attribute extra-evangelical details in his account of the Passion to recognized and ratified sources (Birgitta, Saint Bernard), there is a hint in the letter that others – even simple present-day readers with no claim to visionary insight – may lay claim to the same licence in reimagining the Gospel story. In his defence of the details of Christ’s bleeding footprints and his groping for his clothes, Grillo cites, or half-cites, a passage from a religious work by the German Carthusian Johannes Justus Lanspergius (1489–1539), which asserts the right of the pious reader to imagine Christ’s Passion in any way he chooses, within reason. Lanspergius, like Grillo, notes the brevity with which the Gospels narrate the Passion, and he speculates that God provided the faithful only with this austere account in order to offer them an opportunity, or a spur, to imaginative meditation (*occasio meditandi*).⁴⁴ He then continues to specify – in a phrase that Grillo recalls

41 (“puri, e semplici scolastici speculativi ... sanno più sottilmente quistionare, che pietosamente amare l’eterno, & sviscerato Amor nostro Giesù Christo, e la sua Santissima Madre.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.554.

42 (“Theologia rammorbida con le tenerezze de’ Santi Dottori, Bernardo, Bonaventura, Agostino, e di molti altri contemplativi; e divoti Theologi.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 588. Further on Bernard’s and Augustine’s place within Grillo’s spiritual pantheon, see Myriam Chiarla, “Son talhor con le Muse, et spesso co’ Padri antichi.” Intrecci biblici, patristici, e devozionali nei *Pietosi affetti* di Angelo Grillo’, in *Benedettini in Europa. Cultura e committenze, restauri e nuove funzioni*, ed. Sonia Cavicchioli and Vincenzo Vandelli (Modena: 2017), 17, 20.

43 (“sopra l’autorità de’ quali son fondate le deboli Poesie de’ Pietosi Affetti.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.550. The captions of *Christo flagellato* are consistent with the letter to Spinola, in that the only non-biblical authorities they cite, in addition to Birgitta, are Saint Bernard (36) and “some devout contemplatives” (*alcuni devoti contemplativi*) (70). A sonnet to Saint Thomas Aquinas at the end of the *Essequie di Christo* seems not to have been part of the original sequence; see Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 230, n. 128.

44 Grillo’s likely source is Mallonio’s commentary on Paleotti, *Jesu Christi crucifixi stigmata*, 10b, the same passage from which he drew Calderari’s comparison of the Evangelists to Timanthes, cited above in n. 24. The original passage of Lanspergius’s may be found in *D. Ioannis Justi Lanspergii Cartusiani opera omnia*, 5 vols (Monsterolli: 1888–90), 3.282a.

without quoting it, only as “and what follows” (*e quel che segue*) [282a] – that, regarding details not found in Scripture, when there is nothing in Scripture to contradict them and the Church has not pronounced an opinion, it is permissible “without danger” (*absque periculo*) to imagine whatever can enhance a reader’s compassion or devotion. Grillo himself takes this licence in recounting the episode of Christ feeling for his clothes following the flagellation, when he has the poetic “I” of “Occhi de l’alma mia” – perhaps best read not as the poet himself, but a penitent everyman – speculate that Mary herself may have intervened to help her shattered Son perform this pitiful task.⁴⁵

Contexts: Gender, Censorship, the Cassinese Tradition

One point about Grillo’s “softened theology” that deserves to be underlined in the present context concerns gender. Grillo’s “soft” authorities are one female, Birgitta, and one male, the future saint Pedro d’Alcántara.⁴⁶ Alcántara’s qualifications, however, as presented by Grillo, prominently include his mentorship of the figure whom Grillo warmly refers to as “my own blessed Mother Theresa [of Ávila], founder of the Discalced Carmelites, whose canonization is now going forward in Rome.”⁴⁷ One striking difference between Grillo’s “soft” theology and his “dry” scholastic theology is that, where the latter is strictly male, the former embraces both female and male authorities: Birgitta and Teresa of Ávila on the one hand, Pedro de Alcántara and Saint Bernard on the other. This is consistent with the sympathetic interest in women’s intellectuality and spirituality that Grillo manifests more generally in his verse and letters. Of special relevance here is his poetic and epistolary correspondence with the Lucchese poet and dramatist Leonora Bernardi (1559–1616), who spent the final decade or so of her life in religious retirement. Grillo hailed Bernardi in a sonnet of the late 1580s for her Marian poetry, characterized in terms very close to those we have been seeing; her words are “devout” (*devote*), her praying to the Virgin is “pious” (*pio*), and she herself is “more impassioned and pure” (*affettuosa e pura*) than any other woman.⁴⁸ In a letter to a mutual friend on hearing of Leonora’s spiritual retreat, Grillo exclaims “What have women not done in the

45 Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 18 (“Forse Maria v’accorse / el [= e ’l] flagellato suo mesta soccorse.”).

46 Alcántara was beatified in 1622 and canonized in 1669.

47 (“la mia beata Madre Teresa, fondatrice degli Scalzi Carmelitani, [la] cui canonizzazione hoggi si tratta in Roma.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 588. Teresa was canonized in 1622.

48 The text of the sonnet and of Bernardi’s reply may be found in Section 3.1 of *Poetry, Drama, and Music in Late-Renaissance Italy: the Life and Works of Leonora Bernardi*, ed.

way of the spirit? There is no reading that moves me more than that of holy women, who have left a path behind them for us to follow.”⁴⁹ This perception of “holy women” as embodying an exemplary model of piety is certainly of relevance to Grillo’s choice of Birgitta as theological muse to the poetry of *Christo flagellato*, and it should perhaps be seen as more generally relevant to Birgitta’s fortunes and reputation in this era.⁵⁰

Further contexts may also be fruitfully considered for Grillo’s attention to Birgitta in his writings. One, the more general, regards the history of literature and censorship in this period. From 1559 onwards, the Church had exerted a strict control on translations of the bible, and, to a lesser extent, vernacular reworkings of biblical texts and narratives. The Clementine Index of 1596 represented a kind of high-water mark of that censorship, although it was mitigated somewhat in 1605.⁵¹ Grillo insists in his letter to Spinola that he is confident in his orthodoxy and happy to submit his work for approval by the censors, but he is clearly interested in trying to open a safe space for pious literature on the fringes of biblical narrative. Hence his interest, as poet, in episodes in the life and passion of Christ that owed more to subsequent elaboration than to the Gospels themselves (aside from the flagellation and Mary’s lament over the dead Christ, the subject of *Le essequie di Christo*, he also authored sequences on the nativity and the circumcision of the Christ Child). It is here that a figure like Birgitta could be invaluable as a source, in that her revelations might lay claim to a quasi-evangelical status, without being subject to the protective strictures that affected the Gospels themselves at this time.

Another context we might profitably consider is the history of Grillo’s congregation, the Cassinesi, and their distinctive traditions of cultural production. This highly intellectual, reformed Benedictine order, founded in 1408 as the Congregation of Santa Giustina, had a very interesting, bisected history in the 16th century. For the first two thirds of the century, down to the late 1560s, Cassinesi monks were at the forefront of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew biblical

Virginia Cox and Lisa Sampson (London: 2023). On Grillo’s relationship with Bernardi, see Section 1 of the same volume.

49 (“Che non hanno fatto le Donne per la via dello spirito? Io non leggo letione, che mi muova più, che quella delle sante Donne, che dopo di loro han lasciata la via di seguirle.”) Grillo, *Lettere*, 2.288.

50 Further on the model of Counter-Reformation “pro-feminist” culture that Grillo embodies, see Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women’s Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: 2011), 21–30; McHugh, “Devotion, Desire,” 155–60.

51 On the 1596 ban and its subsequent retraction, see Gigliola Fragnito, *La bibbia al rogo: La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura (1471–1605)* (Bologna: 1997), 204–10, 302–03; eadem, *Proibito capire: La Chiesa e il volgare nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: 2005), 117–31.

scholarship, and they were notable for the boldness of their theological speculations, especially regarding soteriology.⁵² As is well known, they elaborated a theological position not dissimilar from the Protestant position on salvation *sola fide*, and they were close in many ways to the thinking of the so-called *spirituali*. Their list of cardinal protectors in the first half of the 16th century constitutes a virtual “who’s who” of the Catholic Reform movement (Gasparo Contarini, Pietro Bembo, Reginald Pole, Giovanni Morone).

As the post-Tridentine Church tightened its mechanisms of control, the Cassinesi fell more and more under suspicion, and in the late 1560s, they were investigated by the Inquisition for allowing heretical texts to circulate in their monasteries (and specifically the writings of the Cassinese Giorgio Siculo, who had been executed for heresy in 1551).⁵³ The ancient Cassinese privilege of exercising internal discipline within their own monasteries was revoked, and the Inquisition was given oversight. The decades that followed this saw a relative marginalization of the Cassinesi, at least in institutional terms (for example, in terms of appointments to the College of Cardinals and to important offices within the Church). At the same time, however, in the last decades of the 16th century, Cassinese authors played a key role in the formation of a new, sophisticated and influential model of vernacular religious imaginative literature, both narrative and lyric, very different in character from their earlier production. In addition to Grillo, important figures in this tradition are the narrative poets Felice Passero and Lucillo Martinengo, and the lyric and narrative poet Benedetto Dell’Uva.⁵⁴

Grillo’s letter to Spinola and the manifesto it contains may be usefully located in this context. In its retreat from the “pulverized” world of speculative theology into the softer and humbler – and safer – world of pietistic pathos, it may be seen as recapitulating, and rationalizing, the recent history of the Cassinese Congregation. In that sense, it might be seen as an admission of defeat. Less pessimistically, however, it is also possible to point to continuities with the earlier Cassinese tradition, in Grillo’s cautious defense of a theological

52 I am following here the authoritative reconstruction in Massimo Zaggia, *Tra Mantova e la Sicilia nel Cinquecento* (Florence: 2003), 399–701 (“La congregazione benedettina cassinese nel Cinquecento.”) See also, on Cassinese theology and its relation to Reformation thought, Barry Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation* (Oxford: 1985).

53 Adriano Proserpi, *L’eresia del libro grande. Storia di Giorgio Siculo e della sua setta* (Milan: 2011).

54 On Cassinese literature of the later 16th century, see Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*; Marco Cavarzere, “Percorsi della letteratura benedettina nel Cinquecento,” in *Cinquecento monastico italiano. Atti del XI Convegno di studi storici sull’Italia benedettina*, ed. Giovanni Spinelli (Cesena: 2013), 197–209.

tradition not based on institutionalized intellectual labor (the scholastic tradition), but on an alternative theology of revelations granted to individuals, lay and clerical, male and female, on the basis of their piety. We are hardly back here in the world of salvation *sola fide*, but Grillo’s “softened theology” of piety certainly allows for – and perhaps even privileges – the unmediated communication of the individual worshipper with God. The diffidence that Grillo manifests in the face of “speculative scholastics” also has long roots within the Cassinese tradition, which had characteristically rejected scholasticism in favor of patristic and biblical sources.⁵⁵ Scholarship on Grillo’s religious verse has also emphasized the formative importance for Cassinese spirituality of northern European influences developing out of the 14th-century *devotio moderna*, such as Lanspergius, who, as we have seen, emphasized practices of private devotional meditation and imaginative engagement with Scripture.⁵⁶ It seems appropriate to recall at this point that one of the 16th century’s most exuberant and free expansions on Scripture, Paolo Veronese’s *Marriage Feast at Cana* (1562–63), now in the Louvre, was painted for the Cassinese monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, and was praised in verse by the monk-poet Benedetto Guidi (d. 1590), a beloved mentor of Grillo’s and an important bridge between the two phases of Cassinese history noted above.⁵⁷

In any case, it would be misleading to represent Grillo’s *Pietosi affetti* as lacking theological engagement, even if his concerns are not those of his more audacious Cassinese forebears. One thing that may have attracted him to Birgitta’s *Revelations* is her “fervent attachment” to the Virgin Mary, and her bold presentation of Mary as coredemptrix alongside Christ.⁵⁸ This notion is powerfully expressed in the first book of the *Revelations*, in words attributed to Mary herself: “Just as Adam and Eve sold the world for one single apple, you might say that my Son and I bought the world back with a single heart”

55 Zaggia, *Tra Mantova*, 413, 479–80; Prosperi, “L’eresia,” 29.

56 On Grillo’s devotional influences, see Ferretti, *Le muse del Cavario*, 149–63, summarizing earlier work on this by Raboni and Föcking.

57 On Guidi’s poems on Veronese’s painting, see Cooper, “Un modo per la riforma,” 277–79. On Grillo’s friendship with him, see Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 84–5, 90, 151n. 57 bis, 154. Guidi had played a role in the Giorgio Siculo scandal in the 1560s; see Prosperi, *L’eresia*, 377.

58 The phrase “fervent attachment” is found in Claire L. Sahlin, “His Heart Was My Heart: Birgitta of Sweden’s Devotion to the Heart of Mary,” in *Heliga Birgitta – budskapet och förebilden*, ed. Alf Härdelin and Mereth Lindgren (Stockholm: 1993), 213. On Mary as coredemptrix in Birgitta, see Kari Elisabeth Børresen, “Scripture in Birgitta’s *Revelations*,” in *The High Middle Ages* (“Bible and Women,” 6), ed. Kari Elisabeth Børresen and Adriana Valerio (Atlanta, GA: 2015), 261.

(Rev. 1: 35.7).⁵⁹ A late madrigal of Grillo's, first published in 1620, "Come per un sol pomo", offers an exact poetic paraphrase of the first of these passages: "Just as for a single apple / the first woman and the first man / blindly sold the world / to the cruel King of deep Tartarus / so my son and I / you might say with a single heart / bought it back from eternal horror."⁶⁰ The caption to the poem concisely summarises its content and points to its source: "The Virgin Mary companion to Christ in the redemption of the world, drawn from the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta."⁶¹

It is instructive to observe the caution with which Consalvo Durante, in his commentary on the *Revelations*, approaches this same phrase of Birgitta's. He attaches a spiritual "health warning" to the passage, clearly thinking this necessary even for the type of learned, Latin-literate readership at which the edition is pitched. "From these words," he counsels, "note that in no wise is it to be concluded that Mary redeemed the world properly speaking and satisfied the rigor of justice, as we can say of Christ."⁶² Mary, he goes on to explain, may at most be said to have been a "cooperator" (*cooperatrix*) in redemption, in that she gave birth to the Redeemer ("remote cooperation," in modern theological terms), and perhaps "even" (*etiam*) in that her maternal love for Christ led her to experience his suffering as her own ("immediate cooperation").⁶³ It is noteworthy that, by contrast, Grillo presents the madrigal "Come per un sol pomo" with no such careful framing, within a volume of verse in the vernacular that defines its target readership as "simple, devout souls" (*semplici devoti*).⁶⁴

Christo flagellato contains no explicit reference to Mary's role as coredemp-
trix, but it does include narrative details that could raise theological red flags.

59 *Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. 1, 112. For the Latin, see *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 56b: "Sicut enim Adam, et Eva venderunt mundum pro uno pomo, sic filius meus et ego redimimus mundum quasi cum uno corde." See also Extrav.: 35, in *Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. 4, 232 and Durante, *Revelationes*, 804a, for a revelation containing a restatement of this notion in the voice of Christ.

60 (Come per un sol pomo / e la donna primiera, e 'l primier'uomo / ciechi vendero il mondo / al crudo Re di Tartaro profondo, / così il mio figlio ed io, quasi con un sol core / il ricomprammo dal eterno orrore.) Grillo, *Pietosi affetti*, ed. Chiarla, 613–14 (no. 947).

61 (Maria Vergine compagna di Christo nella redentione del mondo, cavato dalle rivelationi di santa Brigida). Ibid.

62 *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 57a ("Ex verba praesentis nota nullatenus est colligendum Mariam Verginem proprie mundum redimisse, ac de rigore iustitia satisfacisse, sicut de Christo dicimus.")

63 For these terms, see Robert Fastiggi, "Mary in the Work of Redemption," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder (Oxford: 2019), 303.

64 *Pietosi affetti*, ed. Chiarla, 88. The context is a note to the reader by a supposed fellow Cassinese of Grillo's, Andrea Borelli, in fact a pseudonym for Grillo himself (Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, 136).

One such detail is Birgitta’s mention of the Virgin fainting when she witnesses Christ first struck during the flagellation (“I was standing nearby and, at the first lash, I fell down as if I were dead.”)⁶⁵ Grillo includes this episode in the canzonetta “Occhi de l’alma mia,” where he has the Virgin “fall” with the first “falling” of the “hoar” of Christ’s blood, struck as if by a lightning bolt of supreme sorrow.⁶⁶ This first swoon of the Virgin duplicates the later swoon, or *spasimo*, that many late-medieval Passion narratives represent the Virgin as having suffered at the foot of the Cross, and which became a symbolic encapsulation of the way in which Mary shared in Christ’s suffering though her own empathetic *compassio* and hence engaged with him in the work of redemption.⁶⁷ The *spasimo* had become a controversial element within Catholic culture by the later 16th century, since it had no Gospel authority. Indeed, it seemed to contradict John 19.25–26, which speaks of Mary “standing” by the Cross. The notion of Mary fainting was also perceived by some theologians as inappropriate, in that it detracted from the dignity of the mother of God to speak of her losing rational control of her senses as she witnessed the great redemptive mystery of Christ’s sacrifice, however powerful her grief. Durante’s commentary on the *Revelations* carefully rehearses the case against the *spasimo* made by the Dominican theologian and future cardinal Tommaso di Vio (Cajetan) in the early 16th century, which he presents as having gained the consensus of “almost all modern theologians” (*fere omnes theologos recentiores*).⁶⁸ He concludes, however, by making the case for Mary’s swoon on the basis of other thinkers, including Grillo’s prime medieval exponents of “softened theology,” Saints Bonaventure and Bernard, and one of his modern sources, Daniele Mallonio.⁶⁹

65 Rev. I: 10.17, in *Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. I, 67; cfr. *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 18a (“Ad primum igitur ictum, ego quae astabam propinquius cecidi quasi mortua.”).

66 Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 12: “Del primo colpo al suono, / Lassa, per render fù lo spiro estremo:/colpo a l’orecchie tuono / fulmine à l’alma di dolor supremo. / Fulmine, onde meschina / cade al cader de la sanguigna brina.”

67 Otto von Simson, “*Compassio* and *co-redemptio* in Rogier van der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross*,” *The Art Bulletin* 35.1 (1953), 9–16; Harvey E. Hamburg, “The Problem of *Lo Spasimo* in Cinquecento Paintings of the *Descent from the Cross*,” in *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 12.4 (1981), 45–75. I am grateful to Carlotta Moro for having shared with me a paper on the grieving Virgin in Moderata Fonte which alerted me to the theological complexities of the *spasimo* theme.

68 *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 310b–311a, glossing Birgitta’s second mention of her faint during Christ’s flagellation (Rev. IV: 70.4). The first mention, in Rev. I: 10.17, is glossed by a cross-reference to this note. On Cajetan’s contribution to the debate, see Hamburg, “The Problem,” 45–7.

69 *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 312b.

Once we become aware of the theological stakes of what can seem, at first sight, a simple pietistic poetic narrative, we can better appreciate the force and necessity of Grillo's self-defence in his letter to Spinola. The first passage in *Christo flagellato* to which Grillo's *opponentore* is said to have objected is a line in "Occhi de l'alma mia" that speaks of Mary, as she awakens from her faint at the flagellation, "comprehending the incomprehensible" as she watches her Son's silent suffering. For the *opponentore* this phrase implies that Mary understood the divine essence, which would make her the equal of God.⁷⁰ Grillo's rebuttal somewhat tetchily denies this intent, on the grounds that derogating from Christ's status was equally to derogate from Mary's, while still emphasizing the exceptional wisdom and supernatural insight that God conferred on Mary through grace and revelation. She was "privileged above all human creatures and possessed the gift of wisdom in its most perfect degree."⁷¹ While Grillo draws principally on Aquinas and Bonaventure as his principal authorities in arguing this case, an initial passage structured as an extended *praeteritio* reviews more ambitious claims that Grillo attributes generically to Marian treatises (*Mariali*): that Mary possessed perfect cognition of the Trinity, of the Incarnation and Redemption, of Heaven and earth, of angels and demons, and that she was capable of the infused "morning knowledge" (*cognitio matutina*) of the angels, infused directly in her by the Divine Word.⁷² The passage as a whole offers a concise demonstration of Grillo's rarely displayed, but extensive, theological erudition, in a way intended to bear out his statement that any seeming lapses of orthodoxy in his verse are not due to ignorance but represent precise and defensible choices. If he leans towards the "softened" theology of Birgitta or Bernard, it is not because he lacks the knowledge of "dry" theology to fight on the schoolmen's preferred ground.

The preceding argument does not intend to suggest that Grillo was unorthodox in his Mariology; simply that he tended, like Birgitta herself, to accord the greatest power and agency to the Virgin that the spectrum of orthodoxy permitted. She is the "greatest of contemplatives" (*summa contemplatrix*), endowed with a wisdom and spiritual insight beyond any other human being.⁷³ She is

70 Grillo, *Lettere*, 1.184 ("l'incomprensibile comprese", "dubitando non forse, ch'io volessi inferire che la Vergine Santissima avesse compreso la divina essenza, & in conseguenza non venissi à farla eguale a Dio medesimo.").

71 Grillo, *Lettere*, 1. 547: "se ben tengo che la Beata Virgine fosse la più privilegiata di tutte le creature, e che avesse in spetie il dono della sapientia perfettissimo."

72 Ibid. On the distinction between *cognitio matutina* and *vespertina* in angels, see Harm Goris, "Angelic Knowledge in Aquinas and Bonaventure," in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann (Leiden: 2012), 163–66.

73 On Mary as *summa contemplatrix* in late-medieval thought, see Fr. Simon Mary of the Cross, "Mary, *summa contemplatrix* in Denis the Carthusian," PhD dissertation, International Marian Research Institute, Dayton Ohio, 2021, esp. 208–16.

companion to Christ in the redemption of humanity in the most emphatic manner in which that role can be understood. Grillo aligns with Birgitta in representing Mary’s *compassio* as extending to a kind of mystical fusion with Christ, describing her, for example, in *Christo flagellato* as “Mary on the outside” and “the pierced Christ within.”⁷⁴ The extent to which Grillo’s inclination to an exalted, Birgittine vision of a Christ-like redemptive Mary reflected more general trends within post-Tridentine Cassinese culture lies outside the scope of this essay, but some evidence for this is offered by Tintoretto’s *Entombment* at San Giorgio Maggiore, in which the figure of the fainting Mary pointedly mirrors in her posture the languid cruciform of her dead Son.⁷⁵

His theological positions aside, it is also worth underlining that Grillo differs from many post-Tridentine clerics in his willingness to countenance the kind of free, imaginative engagement with Scripture that an early 16th-century monk like Lanspergius could advocate, even for laypeople. It is striking, in this connection, that he addresses his most important statement on the theology of the *Pietosi affetti* not to a fellow monk or a priest or bishop, but rather to his uncle, Niccolò Spinola, a layman engaged in the *vita activa* of law and government, similar in profile to Luigi Veniero and Servilio Treo, the dedicatees, respectively of *Christo flagellato* and *Le essequie di Christo*.⁷⁶ Still more striking is that Grillo places Spinola in the role of adjudicator in his dispute with his anonymous *opponitore*, praising him as a man capable of “speculatively disputing and theologically loving” (*speculativamente disputare, & theologicamente amare*).⁷⁷ The phrase imputes to Spinola the intellectual and spiritual capacities encapsulated in Grillo’s two definitions of “dry” and “softened” theology, implying that he is capable both of critically assessing the merits of the accusations leveled against *Christo flagellato* by arrogant “subtle speculatives” and of appreciating the merits of the loving, quasi-instinctual, empathetic piety of “devout contemplatives” like Birgitta.⁷⁸ In an era that sought to ringfence and discipline Scriptural study and contemplation, and to subordinate lay devotion

74 Grillo, *Christo flagellato*, 11: “ella è Giesù trafitto / dentro, et Maria di fuori.” Grillo also appears to have adhered to the widespread belief – not made dogma until the 19th century – of Mary’s freedom from original sin. See the madrigal “Già non ti fù de le sue gratie avara” in Angelo Grillo, *Pietosi affetti* (Venice: 1629), 600.

75 See Nichols, *Tintoretto*, 293 and plate 211.

76 Treo (1548–1622) was a Friulian lawyer and official in the service of the Venetian government. Other religious works of Grillo’s are addressed to aristocratic laywomen; see Cox, *The Prodigious Muse*, 25.

77 Grillo, *Lettere*, 1. 546.

78 Spinola’s expertise in the field of “scholastic and positive theology,” as well as his classical erudition and literary talent, are mentioned in the caption to a sonnet addressed to him by Grillo in *La prima parte delle rime* (Bergamo: 1589), unnumbered but ordered alphabetically by incipit (“Tu, che le Greche, e le Latine carte.”).

to clerical oversight, this may be seen in some ways as a “throwback” attitude, plausibly attributable to Grillo’s Cassinese background and distantly echoing the type of religious sociability characteristic of the Catholic Reform movement of the 1530s and 40s, for example in the cenacles of Juan de Valdés in Naples and Reginald Pole in Viterbo. That Grillo elected the laywoman Birgitta as the supreme inspiration and authority of *Christo flagellato* represents an important gesture on this score.⁷⁹

The Cult of Birgitta at San Paolo Fuori Le Mura

Grillo’s Cassinese affiliation is also relevant to his response to Birgitta in more specific ways. The Congregation’s chief Roman monastery was attached to the basilica of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura, one of the seven great pilgrimage churches of Rome. Grillo was abbot there between 1602/3 and 1607, just before his time in Praglia. He may even have composed *Christo flagellato* during his time at San Paolo, although his letters from Praglia represent his time in Rome as one of wearisome *negotium* rather than literary leisure.⁸⁰ The basilica had close associations with the cult of Birgitta, in that it was here, supposedly, towards the end of her life, in 1370, that a sculpted image of the crucified Christ turned his head and spoke to the future saint as she prayed or meditated before it.⁸¹

79 Further work on Grillo’s Mariology might profitably explore the potential influence of another important lay female religious writer, Vittoria Colonna, whose religious verse Grillo sometimes echoes (see Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, 237, and McHugh, “Devotion, Desire,” 156). Birgitta’s likely influence on Colonna’s representations of Mary is discussed in Unn Falkeid, “*Magistra apostolorum*: The Virgin Mary in Birgitta of Sweden and Vittoria Colonna,” in *Vittoria Colonna: Poetry, Religion, Art, Impact*, ed. Virginia Cox and Shannon McHugh (Amsterdam: 2022), 75–93.

80 The date of Grillo’s arrival in Rome is disputed. Durante and Martellotti, *Angelo Grillo*, 208–210, speak of him taking up his role as abbot in 1602, while Luca Ceriotti, *Contributo alla cronologia abbaziale dei monasteri cassinesi (1419–1810)* (Parma: 2019), 69 n.43, post-dates his assumption of the role to after March 1603. The contract for Lavinia Fontana’s *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen*, discussed below in the text, suggests that Grillo was already abbot there by February 1603 at the latest. That *Christo flagellato* may have been composed in Rome is suggested by allusions to the column of Christ’s scourging in several poems towards the end of the sequence (*Christo flagellato*, 95–96). These are likely to refer to the relic found in Santa Prassede, which had been brought to Rome from the Holy Land in 1222 by Cardinal Giovanni Colonna the Younger.

81 On the history of this miracle, see Claudia D’Alberto, “Il crocefisso parlante di Santa Brigida di Svezia nella basilica di San Paolo fuori le mura, e i crocefissi replicati, copiati, e riprodotti a Roma al tempo del papato avignonese,” *Studi medievali e moderni. Arte, letteratura, storia*, a. xv, fasc 1–2, n. 29 (2011), 235–37.

In the last decade of the 16th century, shortly before Grillo’s period of residence there, a new commemoration of the miracle was introduced into the fabric of the church, as part of a more general, highly ambitious restructuring of the transept and apse. The miraculous crucifix was relocated to a newly constructed altar on a pylon on the transverse wall, and a statue of Birgitta attributed to the sculptor Stefano Maderno, perhaps in collaboration with Silla Longhi da Viggìù, was placed diagonally opposite, at a lower level, in an open-air *confessio* beneath the main presbytery.⁸² The intent of this placement seems to have been to evoke the original, miraculous encounter between Christ and Birgitta. “The dramatically activated space between the two sculptures became a stage for the perpetual reperformance of a miracle that took place 250 years before.”⁸³

It is fascinating to recollect that this piece of performance art, or sculptural “enactment,”⁸⁴ was present at the time of Grillo’s time as abbot of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura. As a striking new work of art, and as a dramatic tribute to the “marvelous piety” of a saint he revered, it was well calculated to appeal to a man of Grillo’s artistic and spiritual sensibilities. Grillo’s interest in the visual arts (as also in music) is well documented in his letters and verse. Poems praising or evoking specific sacred works of art make up a recognizable microgenre within the *Pietosi affetti*, while, as Francesco Ferretti has suggestively argued, the whole collection may be seen as intrinsically pictorial, a “vast mental picture gallery” of intensely envisaged spiritual vignettes.⁸⁵ Where concrete

82 A *confessio*, in church architecture, is a type of crypt, designed for veneration, generally beneath the main altar. In my description of the original setting of Maderno’s statue of Birgitta, I am relying on the reconstructions in Harula Economopoulos, *Stefano Maderno scultore 1571 ca–1636: i maestri, la formazione, le opere giovanili* (Rome: 2015), 143–59, and Nicola Camerlenghi, *Saint Paul’s Outside the Walls: A Roman Basilica from Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: 2018), 196–208. Camerlenghi’s discussion includes illustrations that aid in visualizing the now-vanished configuration (see especially 6.9, reproduced here as Fig. 9.3., and 6.11. Camerlenghi’s illustrations are now available online at https://rcweb.dartmouth.edu/CamerlenghiN/VirtualBasilica/downloadableimages_page2.html). See also on the statue and its setting, Morgan Currie, “Sanctified Presence: Sculpture and Sainthood in Early Modern Italy,” PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2015, 59–61, 352–53.

83 Camerlenghi, *Saint Paul’s*, 200.

84 Currie, “Sanctified Presence,” 60.

85 (“una sorta di immane pinacoteca mentale”). See Francesco Ferretti, “Lecfrasi mistica negli *Pietosi affetti* di Angelo Grillo,” in *Tra norma e trasgressione: letteratura e immagini sacre in Italia nell’epoca della Controriforma*, ed. Andrea Campana, Fabio Giunta, and Edoardo Ripari (Città di Castello: 2019), 114. See also, on Grillo’s paintings inspired by sacred images, Simona Morando, “O che spettacolo miro, / di sangue, e di martirio: i ‘pietosi affetti’ di Angelo Grillo nell’opera dei pittori,” in *Il sacro nell’arte. La conoscenza del*



FIGURE 9.2 Stefano Maderno, *Statue of St. Bridget*, late 1590s. Basilica of San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome

IMAGE PROVIDED BY FONDAZIONE FEDERICO ZERI, UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

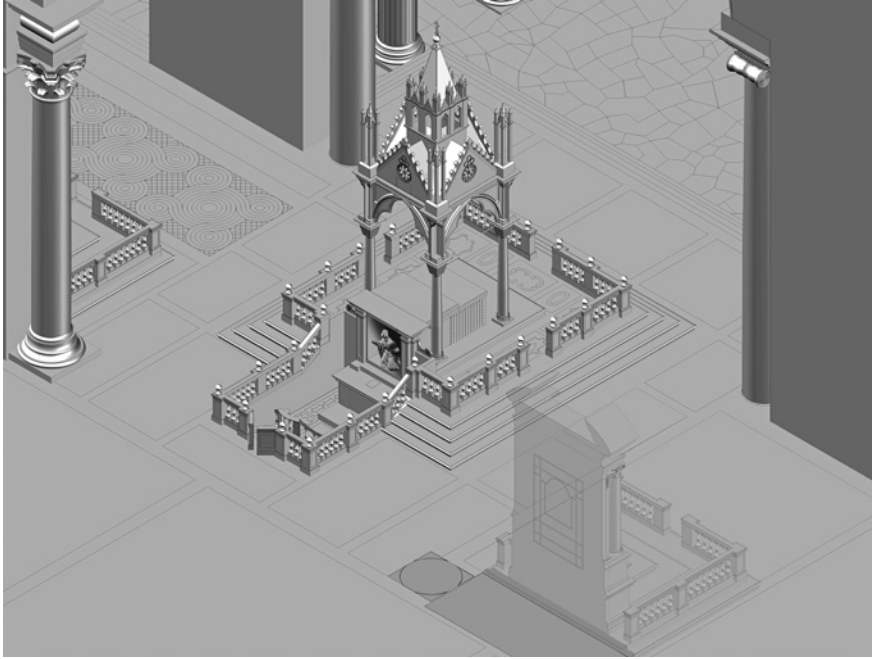


FIGURE 9.3 Evan Gallitelli, Reconstruction of the original site of Maderno's statue of Saint Birgitta in San Paolo Fuori le Mura. From Nicola Camerlenghi, *Saint Paul's Outside the Walls* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018), 197 (fig. 6. 9)

relations with artists are concerned, Grillo's verse documents his friendship with his Genoese compatriots Bernardo and Giovanni Battista Castello and his admiration of Sofonisba Anguissola who also resided in Genoa in the 1580s.⁸⁶ In 1586, he was responsible for introducing Bernardo Castello to Torquato Tasso, laying the groundwork for a famous 1590 edition of the *Gerusalemme Liberata* with illustrations to each canto by Castello.⁸⁷ Later in his career, as abbot of San Paolo d'Argon, near Bergamo, between 1617 and 1620, Grillo

divino attraverso i sensi tra xv e xviii secolo, ed. Laura Stagno (Genoa: 2009), 37–54. For an overview of the relationship of Grillo's religious verse to the visual arts and music, see Ferretti, *Le muse del Calvario*, 181–91. On Cassinese patronage of the visual arts generally, see *The Network of Cassinese Arts in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alessandro Nova and Giancarla Peretti (Rome: 2021).

86 Grillo's relationship with Bernardo Castello is documented in *Parte prima delle rime del Sign[or] Don Angelo Grillo* (Bergamo: 1589), 4r (Sonnets XII–XIII); 58r (Sonnet CXXV); 80r (Sonnet CLXXXIII). For Giovanni Battista Castello, see 80v–82v (Canzone XI); for Anguissola, *ivi*, 48v (Sonnet CIII). In each case, the poems must be read in conjunction with the entries in Giulio Guastavini's "Tavola" (unnumbered but ordered alphabetically by *incipit*). See also Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 146.

87 Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 135–36.

conducted an energetic campaign of restoration and embellishment of a local Marian church, Santa Maria d'Argon, installing new altars and commissioning altarpieces from local painters.⁸⁸

The religious-artistic context at San Paolo Fuori Le Mura is critical in considering Grillo's meditations on Birgitta and her place in Christian culture. In addition to his private – or semi-private – poetic activities, Grillo's "day job" as abbot of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura involved him in the custodianship of an important site for Birgitta's cult. The timing of the commission and installation of Maderno's sculpture strongly suggest that, as in the better-known case of Maderno's Saint Cecilia in Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, the work was put in place for the papal jubilee of 1600, which brought hundreds of thousands of pilgrims to the city. This serves to recall that, in addition to memorializing a particular historic miracle (Christ's response to the praying Birgitta), Maderno's installation also served to model the ideal relationship of worshipper to sacred image in the sculpted rapture of the kneeling saint. In a similar way, Grillo's *pietosi affetti*, taking Birgitta as model, served as mirrors and models for the reader's own devotional meditations on the Passion of Christ. Suggestive regarding the active role Grillo envisaged for his verse as spur to devout meditation is a copy of *Christo flagellato* in the National Library of Austria (19.F.73), presumably a variant edition. This contains among its prefatory matter, between Petracci's note to the reader and the first sonnet, a copy of Anton II Wierix's 1604 engraving ROSARIO DOLOROSO, which shows the five sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary against a background of thorns.⁸⁹

As well as reflecting on Maderno's image of Birgitta, it seems likely that Grillo himself commissioned a further artwork relating to Birgitta while at San Paolo: an altarpiece representing the miracle of the crucifix by the Tuscan artist Ludovico Cardi, known as Il Cigoli (1559–1613). Cigoli painted two altarpieces for San Paolo, both lost in a fire of 1823: the Birgitta altarpiece and a *Burial of*

88 See Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 274; Raboni, "Il madrigalista," 138; Giovanni Suardi, *Trescore e il suo distretto, memorie storiche* (Bergamo: 1853), 326–27. On Grillo's time at San Paolo d'Argon – a relatively ill-documented period in his career – see also Luca Ceriotti, "Don Valeriano e alcune lettere di minima importanza," in *Testimoni dell'ingegno*, ed. Carminati, 388.

89 See http://digital.onb.ac.at/OnbViewer/viewer.faces?doc=ABO_+Z155394907 (consulted on 21 November 2022). Further on Wierix's engravings, see Lisa Beaven, "The Early Modern Sensorium: The Rosary in Seventeenth-Century Rome," *Journal of Religious History*, 44.4 (December 2020), 457–60. The Wierix engraving is not mentioned in the only detailed bibliographical description of the 1607 edition that I have been able to find, that in the online catalogue of the Istituto Centrale del Catalogo Unico (ICCU), see <https://opac.sbn.it/en/advanced-search#1686919572326>. I am grateful to Jessica Goethals for calling my attention to the image in the Vienna copy.

Saint Paul, intended for the main altar.⁹⁰ Preparatory drawings suggest that he began to plan the *Burial of Saint Paul* from 1607, and its commission has been conjecturally dated to “between the spring of 1606 and the autumn of 1607.”⁹¹ The presence of drawings for both this and the Birgitta altarpiece on a single sheet in the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence suggests Cigoli’s initial work on the two projects proceeded hand-in-hand.⁹² *In situ* work on the paintings appears to have begun in the winter of 1608 and the following spring, after an earlier planned start in the spring of 1608 was postponed on account of Cigoli’s court duties in Florence.⁹³

Cigoli’s nephew and biographer Giovanni Battista Cardi speaks of the Birgitta altarpiece having been painted “for the Abbot” of San Paolo, and it seems reasonable to conjecture that the commission was due to Grillo, rather than his successor, Anastasio Casanico, of Carpendolo, near Brescia, who took office in the second half of 1607 or 1608.⁹⁴ In addition to more general factors that support this supposition (Grillo’s devotion to Birgitta, his interest in the visual arts), it seems quite likely that Grillo and Cigoli were personally acquainted. The two had mutual acquaintances in Florence, in the form of the poet Ottavio Rinuccini and the composer Giulio Caccini, and we know from Grillo’s letters that he visited Florence in the spring of 1600 and heard a performance there of a “beautiful pastoral” by Rinuccini – presumably either *Dafne* or *Euridice* – set to music by Caccini.⁹⁵ It is not improbable that Grillo met Cigoli on this visit, since Caccini’s son, Pompeo, was a member of his workshop, and Cigoli was involved as set designer for the performance of *Euridice*

90 For discussion, see Anna Matteoli, *Lodovico Cardi-Cigoli, pittore e architetto: fonti biografiche, catalogo delle opere, documenti, bibliografia, indici analitici* (Pisa: 1980), 211–13 (scheda 81); Miles L. Chappell, “Lodovico Cigoli’s Lost *Burial of Saint Paul*: Newly Discovered Drawings,” *Master Drawings*, 22.3 (1984), 287–94 and 335–45; idem, *Disegni di Lodovico Cigoli (1559–1613): Catalogo della mostra* (Florence: 1992), 168–70 (scheda 100). The *Burial of St Paul*, which Cigoli left slightly unfinished at his death in 1613, hung on the main altar until the 19th century.

91 Chappell, “Lodovico Cigoli’s Lost *Burial*,” 287. See also Matteoli, *Lodovico Cardi-Cigoli*, 213.

92 Chappell, “Lodovico Cigoli’s Lost *Burial*,” 292 and Plate 10.

93 See Matteoli, *Lodovico Cardi-Cigoli*, 29, 187, 212–13.

94 No exact dates are available for Casanico’s arrival or Grillo’s departure. See Ceriotti, *Contributo*, 69–70 nn. 43–44. Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 225–26 date Grillo’s departure from San Paolo to 1607, some time after Easter, when the Congregation met and he received his next assignment.

95 On Grillo’s visit to Florence in 1600 and his attendance of Rinuccini and Caccini’s pastoral, see, most recently and exhaustively, Tim Carter and Francesca Fantappiè, *Staging Euridice: Theatre, Sets, and Music in Late Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: 2021), 41–46. For the phrase “bella pastorale” (contained in a letter from Grillo to Caccini), see 44, n. 111.

planned for the wedding of Maria de' Medici with Henri IV of France.⁹⁶ Cigoli was also, more generally, well connected within the Florentine intellectual community, a theorist as well as a practitioner of painting and a member of several academies – precisely the model of educated “gentleman artist” with whom *letterati* like Grillo were most likely to mix.⁹⁷

The composition of Cigoli's Birgitta altarpiece is recorded in two Seicento sources: an engraving of the early 1620s by Matteo Greuter, from a drawing by Giovanni Maggi, representing the principal altarpieces of San Paolo (where Maderno's sculpture is also depicted), and a late 17th-century painted copy of the altarpiece in the museum of the Basilica, which has been attributed to Giuseppe Ghezzi.⁹⁸ (Figs. 9.4 and 9.5) The image shows Birgitta kneeling in a nun-like habit, a little behind and to one side of the crucifix. Her position enables the torsion of Christ's body, and the twisted position of his head, which are conspicuous features of the San Paolo crucifix, to be read as the effects of his turning to speak to the saint beside him. (This is particularly clear in the Greuter engraving.) Birgitta's stance in the painting echoes that in Maderno's sculpture in some regards, and it is not difficult to imagine that the relation between the two works may have been part of the commission's appeal for Cigoli, who had written on the *paragone* between painting and sculpture.⁹⁹ On the evidence of the Greuter engraving, Cigoli's altarpiece seems to have been placed on the altar of the chapel to the right of the high altar, now dedicated to San Lorenzo, so it would have been located relatively close to Maderno's statue.¹⁰⁰

The Cigoli altarpieces were not Grillo's only artistic commission for San Paolo, nor perhaps the only one with connections to Birgitta. In 1603, towards the beginning of his tenure as abbot, Grillo commissioned the Bolognese artist Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) to paint the martyrdom of Saint Stephen for one of the side chapels in the transept, probably following the advice of Cardinal Girolamo Bernerio (or Bernieri), who had earlier commissioned an altarpiece from Fontana for the Basilica of Santa Sabina. Grillo's agency in this commission has not been the object of much consideration. His identity as patron

96 See Timothy McGee, “Pompeo Caccini and *Euridice*: New Biographical Notes,” *Renaissance and Reformation*, n. s. 14.2 (1990), 84 and 95 (Document IV); Carter and Fantappiè, *Staging Euridice*, 25–37, 72–129.

97 Miles L. Chappell, “Cigoli, Galileo, and *Invidia*,” *The Art Bulletin*, 57.1 (1975), 91–98, offers a useful cultural profile of Cigoli.

98 The engraving is reproduced in Economopoulos, *Stefano Maderno*, 149–50, fig. 61 and in Camerlenghi, *St Paul's*, 208, fig. 6.19. The Cigoli altarpiece is second from the right in the top section. Ghezzi's painting is reproduced in Economopoulos, *Stefano Maderno*, 154, fig. 65 and in D'Alberto, “Il crocefisso,” 231, fig. 2.

99 See Miles L. Chappell, “Reform and Continuity in Later Florentine Drawing,” *Master Drawings*, 43.3 (2005), 341–42.

100 Matteoli, *Lodovico Cardi-Cigoli*, 185.



FIGURE 9.5 Giuseppe Ghezzi (attributed), *St. Bridget Talking to the Crucifix*, after a lost painting by Ludovico Cardi, called Cigoli, c.1683–1693. Museo of the Basilica di San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome

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was initially not recognised (the contract for the painting names him only as “Don Angelo da Genova”), and Bernerio, who was present at the signing of the contract, still tends to be presented as the effective patron or instigator of the work.¹⁰¹ Commissioned in February 1603, the work seems to have been completed in spring or summer of 1604, when Fontana is documented as working on the vast canvas in the *palazzo* of Cardinal Alessandro d’Este.¹⁰² It presumably met with Grillo’s satisfaction, as a warmly appreciative letter of 1606 attests that Fontana painted his portrait at this time.¹⁰³

Seen through the lens of Grillo’s interests, and the context of San Paolo, it cannot be excluded that Fontana’s painting has Birgittine inflections. It is quite possible that the composition reflects personal input on Grillo’s part; certainly, the contract for the painting envisages an explicit directive role for the “Reverend Father Abbot,” who, so he may “know what this altarpiece is to be,” must see a cartoon (*disegno*) in advance, which he will have the right to “alter in any way he chooses.”¹⁰⁴ Fontana’s altarpiece was lost in the same fire that destroyed Cigoli’s *Saint Birgitta*, but it is clear from an engraving by Jacques Callot’s of 1607–11 that a notable feature of the composition was the role given to the figure of Saul of Tarsus – the future Saint Paul – in the foreground, turning to engage with the viewer and indicating the martyrdom of the saint. Although a passage of the Acts of the Apostles (7.58–8.1) places Saul at the martyrdom of Stephen, and although Raphael and Giulio Romano had already had Saul figure prominently in their versions of the episode, Fontana’s placing of this figure, and the gesture she gives to him, are nonetheless distinctive enough to deserve our notice.¹⁰⁵ This iconography may reflect a revelation

101 The hypothesis that Grillo was responsible for commissioning Fontana’s work was first made in Durante and Martellotti’s 1989 biography of Grillo (*Don Angelo Grillo*, 225). Earlier literature had strongly emphasized Bernerio’s role: see, for example, Angela Ghirardi, “Una pittrice bolognese nella Roma del Seicento,” *Il Carrobbio*, 10 (1984), 154 and Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese, “pittora singolare,” 1552–1614* (Milan: 1989), 208–209. Vera Fortunati, “Fontana, Lavinia,” in *DBI*, 48 (1997), 697, correctly identifies the “Angelo da Genova” of the contract with Grillo but she nonetheless emphasizes Bernerio’s leading role in the commission. The contract for the altarpiece is transcribed in Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 312 (doc. 5a.21). On Bernerio’s importance as an early patron of Fontana’s in Rome, see Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 14–15.

102 Ghirardi, “Una pittrice,” 154; Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 16, 209, and 313 (doc. 5a.22).

103 Durante and Martellotti, *Don Angelo Grillo*, 220–1.

104 Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 312 (“acciò che il M[ol]to Rev[erend]o p[ad]re Abb[at]e sappia che cosa habbia da essere la sud[ett]a pala obliga la sig[nor]a Lavinia a farli vedere il disegno che intende fare per la sud[ett]a pala, et che il sud[ett]o m[olt]o Rev[erend]o Padre Abb[at]e possi alterare il disegno secondo che li parerà.”).

105 Raphael’s and Giulio Romano’s versions of the *Martyrdom of Saint Stephen* are discussed in Jürg Meyer zur Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of his Paintings. Vol. II. The Roman Religious Paintings, ca. 1508–1520* (Landshut: 2005), 230–35.



FIGURE 9.6 Jacques Callot after Lavinia Fontana, *The Martyrdom of St. Stephen*, plate 1 from 'Les Tableaux de Rome, Les Eglises Jubilaires' (The Paintings of Rome, The Jubilee Churches), c. 1607–1611, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

of Birgitta’s (Rev. IV: 6), in which Paul appears to “show” to her (*ostendere*) the role of Stephen’s martyrdom in his conversion, both through the example Stephen provided of superhuman faith and courage, and through his dying prayer that his persecutors be pardoned (Acts 7.60: “lay not this sin to their charge”).¹⁰⁶ Consalvo Durante, in his edition of the *Revelationes*, notes that other authorities (Denis the Carthusian, Saint Ambrose) had previously suggested a connection between Stephen’s prayer and Paul’s conversion, yet he emphasizes that it is Paul’s own words, as reported by Birgitta, that confirm this connection.¹⁰⁷ As in the case of Christ’s blood-stained footprints in the wake of the flagellation, so here we see a clear example of how the *Revelations* could serve to “elucidate” Scripture, in this case by spelling out a causal connection that the text of the Bible does not make plain.

Written in Stone: Birgitta’s Words in an Age of Orthodoxy

A prominent detail that deserves notice in Cigoli’s Birgitta altarpiece is the open book besides Birgitta, to which she gestures with her right hand. The positioning of the object, and Birgitta’s emphatic gesture, serve to underline its mediatory role between the viewer and the sacred scene. The book bears an inscription from Psalm 30 [31], consisting of the second half of verse 15 and the whole of verse 16: in the King James Version, “... deliver me from the hand of mine enemies and from them that persecute me. // Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies’ sake.” (Fig. 9.7) Interestingly, the text has been adapted as if voiced by Birgitta (i.e. with relevant nouns and adjectives in the feminine form), and with the “illustra” of the Vulgate adapted to “inclina,” so that God is implored to turn his face to the speaker, rather than making it shine on her.¹⁰⁸ We are thus encouraged to read the text as an utterance of Birgitta’s in the course of her devotions before the crucifix, and one that bore immediate and miraculous results. The inclusion – and free adaptation – of a psalm text, and the use to which it is put, are reminiscent of Grillo’s own psalm

106 I am grateful to Unn Falkeid for pointing out the potential connection between this revelation and Fontana’s altarpiece.

107 *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 240. The text is found at *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 239; cfr. Rev. IV: 6, in *Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. 2, 35–36.

108 Matteoli, *Lodovico Cardi-Cigoli*, 186–87, transcribes the inscription from the Ghezzi copy of the painting as follows (with my italics marking out the adaptations): “[ERI]PE ME DE / [M]ANU INI- / [M]ICORUM / [ET A PE] RSE- / [QUENTIBUS] ME. // *INCLINA FACI-* / *EM TUA*[M] SUPER / *SERVAM TUAM* / *SALVAM ME FAC* / IN MISERICORD- / IA TUA D[OMI]NE.”



FIGURE 9.7

Giuseppe Ghezzi (attributed), Detail of *St. Bridget Talking to the Crucifix*, after a lost painting by Ludovico Cardi, called Cigoli, c.1683–1693. Museo of the Basilica di San Paolo fuori le mura, Rome

COURTESY OF THE PAPAL BASILICA OF SAN PAOLO FUORI LE MURA. PHOTO BY UNN FALKEID

text, *Le lagrime del penitente*, first published in 1593 and included in successive editions of the *Pietosi effetti*.¹⁰⁹ In this sequence, elegantly sidestepping the ban on direct vernacular adaptations of the bible, Grillo paraphrases each verse of the seven penitential psalms in a sonnet, adapting the voice from the biblical David to a modern everyman penitent. The movement is not dissimilar from that which we see in the Cigoli altarpiece inscription, which seems to dramatize Birgitta's adaptation, or appropriation, of a psalm text in her devotions, while serving at the same time – like Grillo's psalmic *lagrime* – as a prompt for the viewer's own prayers.

The presence of the displayed psalm text in Cigoli's altarpiece becomes especially interesting if we consider that the first written account of the miracle of the crucifix, dating to around half a century before Cigoli's commission, gives a parallel role in the episode to a very different text. Drawing on early popular beliefs, Olaus Magnus's life of Birgitta's daughter, St Katarina, published in 1553 alongside his biography of Birgitta, tells us that the crucifix spoke to Birgitta at a time when she was was "tearfully reading [or reciting] the fifteen prayers on Christ's Passion".¹¹⁰ The reference is to a work of Birgitta's now considered apocryphal: the *Fifteen Prayers* (*Quindecim orationes*), which circulated widely from the 15th century both in manuscript and in print and was presented in some sources as having apotropaic powers (in that reciting

109 On this text, see Francesco Ferretti, "L'ingegnoso penitente. Angelo Grillo e i *Salmi penitenziali*," in *La Bibbia in poesia. Volgarizzamenti dei Salmi e poesia religiosa in età moderna*, ed. Rosanna Alhaique Pettinelli, Rosanna Morace, Pietro Petteruti Pellegrino, and Ugo Vignuzzi (Rome: 2015), 151–68.

110 ("xv orationes de passione Christi lachrymose legenti.") D'Alberto, "Il crocefisso," 233, fig. 3.

the prayers over a stipulated period guaranteed precise salvific effects).¹¹¹ It is possible that the original setting of Maderno’s statue of Birgitta at San Paolo contained an allusion to this detail in Magnus’s narration. The Maggi-Greuter engraving cited above as a source for Cigoli’s lost altarpiece has an image of Maderno’s Birgitta with an open book lying by her knees – not foregrounded by a gesture, as in the Cigoli image, but in a role seemingly internal to the miracle narrative, lying as if discarded when the saint turned wonderingly to the crucifix as it spoke.¹¹² This iconography echoes that of woodcuts found in late 15th and early 16th-century editions of the *Quindecim orationes*, which show Birgitta before a crucifix with an open book beside her, presumably to be identified with the prayers.¹¹³

This possible substitution of an august biblical text (the *Psalms*) for one of more questionable status (the *Quindecim orationes*) prompts broader reflection on the material presented here. As this essay has demonstrated, the first decade of the 17th century in Italy was a remarkable period in the history of the reception of St Birgitta. It opened with a newly unveiled installation of the miracle of the crucifix being revealed to the vast crowds of pilgrims who visited the Basilica of San Paolo Fuori Le Mura in the jubilee year. Six years later, Durante published his edition of the *Revelations* – the first for fifty years, and a work whose reception is immediately attested in Mallonio’s re-edition of Paleotti’s treatise on the Turin shroud, as well as Grillo’s *Christo flagellato*, his letter to Spinola, and his commission of Cigoli’s Birgitta altarpiece. There is also some evidence that a new translation of the *Revelations*, based on Durante’s edition, was completed around this time, though it did not appear in print.¹¹⁴

Despite this enthusiasm, however, Grillo’s allusions to Birgitta in his writings betray an underlying wariness, brought out in his insistence on her ratification by popes and church councils, and her approbation by theologians and bishops. We may detect a similar impulse at work in the contract for Lavinia Fontana’s Saint Stephen altarpiece, when Grillo demands the right to amend Fontana’s *disegno* as he chooses – potentially, as we have seen, incorporating insights from Birgitta – while referring the final decision on the composition

111 For examples, see D’Alberto, “Il crocefisso,” 234–35; also 132–144 of Marco Faini’s chapter in this volume (“The Fifteen Prayers Attributed to Birgitta and Their Circulation in Italy: Private Devotion, Heterodoxy, and Censorship”).

112 The image is reproduced in Economopoulos, *Stefano Maderno*, 149–50, figs. 61 and 62 (detail).

113 Faini, “The fifteen prayers,” 129–154.

114 See Barnaba Vaerini, *Gli scrittori di Bergamo* (Bergamo: 1788), 199–200. The translator was a Capuchin friar, Bernardino da Bergamo.

to Cardinal Bernerio, a prince of the Church and pillar of the Inquisition.¹¹⁵ As Grillo must have been all too aware from his experiences at San Paolo, at more than two hundred years from her death and canonization, Birgitta had acquired a long and diverse tradition of veneration, among both learned and popular audiences. Her cult incorporated miracles (such as that of San Paolo) which had not been part of her canonization process, and texts (such as the *Quindecim orationes*) that stood on the margins of her corpus. These helped to foster the type of accessible, Christocentric, affective piety that Grillo advocated as an antidote to the desiccated “subtlety” of the schools; yet, unchecked, they could veer close to the “popular naivety” or “tender nonsense and foolishness of gossiping women” which he repudiates in his letter to Spinola. Orthodoxy and rational defensibility on the one hand, affect and “wonder” on the other – these were the conflicting imperatives of Counter-Reformation art and devotion. As Grillo’s writings and his art commissions as abbot of San Paolo illustrate, Birgitta proved a fruitful terrain on which these dynamic tensions could play out.¹¹⁶

Acknowledgements

Warmest thanks to Marco Faini, Unn Falkeid, Jessica Goethals, and Louise Rice for their exceptionally insightful and productive comments on earlier versions of this essay.

115 See Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 312, where after the clause about Grillo’s right to intervene in the composition (see n. 104 above), it is stipulated that “principalmente sarà giudicato dall’Ill[ustrissi]mo sig[no]r Card[ina]le d’Ascoli [Bernerio].” On Bernerio’s involvement with the Inquisition, see Anon., “Bernieri, Girolamo,” in *DBI*, 9 (1967), 360–62.

116 In the interest of completeness, five late madrigals by Grillo not discussed here for which Birgitta’s *Revelations* are identified as the source should be mentioned. See *Pietosi affetti*, ed. Chiarla, 614–15 and 647–48 (nos. 949–51 and 1021–22). The first cluster of three poems embroiders a line in Rev. IV: 70.13: *Nec ipse me astantem cruci videre poterat, nisi sanguine expresso per ciliarum compressionum* (“He could not even see me standing there by the Cross without blinking to get rid of the blood”). See *Revelations*, trans. Searby, Vol. 2, 127; cfr. *Revelationes*, ed. Durante, 309b. The later two madrigals, on Mary’s supposed descent into Purgatory on her feast days to rescue souls and accompany them to Heaven may come from a more popular or apochryphal Birgittine source. A degree of distance is implied by the conjectural incipit of no. 1021: “S’egli è pur ver come per fama sona” (If it is indeed true what report tells us).