

# Disguised Identity and Recognition in the *Life of Gregory of Agrigento* (BHG 707)

Julie Van Pelt

THE *LIFE OF GREGORY OF AGRIGENTO* (BHG 707) is a lengthy hagiographical narrative about a historical character, Gregory, bishop of Agrigento (559–630 CE). Whether or not the text presents a trustworthy historical account of his life is debated. The text’s editor, Albrecht Berger, dates the *Life* to the turn of the ninth century and argues against the soundness of the historical framework of the narrative. He calls it a hagiographical novel because of its problematic chronology.<sup>1</sup> His views were contradicted more recently by the text’s translator, John Martyn, who argues that the author, who identifies himself as Leontius Presbyter of Rome, wrote in the late seventh century and personally met the saint when he was younger, and hence provided a much more historically accurate account of the bishop’s life than was claimed by Berger.<sup>2</sup> Martyn argues

<sup>1</sup> A. Berger, *Leontios Presbyteros von Rom, Das Leben des heiligen Gregorios von Agrigent* (Berlin 1995) 23: “Sie ist im wesentlichen ein hagiographischer Roman, der sich zwar um einen historischen Kern rankt, aber sonst über weite Strecken aus literarischen Versatzstücken verschiedener Art besteht.”

<sup>2</sup> Berger, *Leontios* 47–48, dates the *Life* to the turn of the ninth century based on the *Donatio Constantini* (mid-eighth century) as a *terminus post quem* and the Arab conquest of Sicily in 828 as a *terminus ante quem*. J. R. C. Martyn, *A Translation of Abbot Leontios’ Life of Saint Gregory, Bishop of Agrigento* (Lewiston 2004) argues, at 21, 23, and 103, that Leontius lived and wrote in the seventh century. At 23, he claims that “Leontios must have known younger friends and servants of the Pope and bishop Gregory himself when he was a young monk, and his personal links with Agrigento and the monastery of Saint Sabas in Rome, where the bishop also stayed, suggest that he was an eyewitness and a reliable reporter, even if he got a few names wrong.” Trans-

that the narrative is a solid source for history, but nonetheless willingly admits that the work “provides plenty of drama and dramatic irony” (12).

How far the *Life* is a faithful representation of historical facts is a question I leave to others. Whether Berger’s or Martyn’s views are closer to the truth, it is certain that the author fictionalized (i.e. shaped according to criteria other than historicity) the account to *some* extent, as hagiographers are wont to do.<sup>3</sup> The result of the fictionalizing process is a narrative whose ‘novel-like’, ‘romance-like’, or ‘dramatic’ character scholars have not failed to emphasize.<sup>4</sup> It is also not my intention to elaborate here on what labels such as ‘romance’ and ‘novel’ mean—labels which often prove problematic when examined closely. Rather, I want to disclose certain strategies of the hagiographer’s literary creativity which helped him to create a compelling and enjoyable narrative. In this article, I explore one way (among possible others) in which the author has ensured that his narrative (and specifically the first half of the *Life*) generates dramatic effects, such as dramatic irony and narrative suspense, i.e., effects that captivate the audience and arouse in them a continuous desire to find out more and go on reading (e.g. by giving them insight into information that is hidden for certain characters). As a result, the narrative can offer satisfaction when their

lations of the *Life of Gregory* in this article are taken from Martyn; the Greek is cited by chapter and line number of Berger’s edition.

<sup>3</sup> On the invention involved in the hagiographical process see P. Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity. A Study of Late Antique Spiritual Literature* (Burlington 2012), esp. 8–11; M. Hinterberger, “The Byzantine Hagiographer and his Text,” in S. Efthymiadis (ed.), *Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography* (Burlington 2011–2014) II 211–246, at 214–215; C. Messis, “Fiction and/or Novelisation in Byzantine Hagiography,” 313–342; J. Van Pelt, “The Hagiographer as Holy Fool? Fictionality in Saints’ Lives,” in C. Gray et al. (eds.), *The Hagiographical Experiment: Developing Discourses of Sainthood* (Leiden 2020) 63–92.

<sup>4</sup> See n.1 above for Berger’s assessment, “a hagiographical novel.” M. Re, “Italo-Greek Hagiography,” in *Ashgate Research Companion* I 227–258, at 233, also lists this text among other so-called “hagiographical romances.”

expectations for the further development or outcome of the story are met, or provide pleasure in case the outcome instead takes them by surprise. As I will argue, to achieve this goal the *Life* capitalizes on (standard) narrative structures shared with other hagiographical works and particularly the *Life of Euphrosyne of Alexandria* (BHG 625).

The *Life of Euphrosyne* has been dated to the sixth or seventh century.<sup>5</sup> Hence, whether we follow Berger's or Martyn's view on the date of the *Life of Gregory*, the latter is likely to post-date that text. The *Lives* of Gregory and Euphrosyne have occasionally been transmitted in the same manuscript, suggesting that the two tales belonged to the same literary context in medieval times and were perhaps perceived as closely related.<sup>6</sup>

The *Life of Euphrosyne* tells the story of a so-called 'transvestite saint' or 'cross-dresser', a young woman who flees her home to avoid marriage, cuts her hair, dresses as a man, and enters a male monastery. Euphrosyne reasons that her father Paphnoutius, who loves her very dearly, will never think to look for her there. When her father turns to that very monastery for comfort after discovering her disappearance, he is introduced to the monk Smaragdus—Euphrosyne in disguise—but does not recognize his child. After Paphnoutius has paid visits to his daughter in this way for years, at the end of the tale, Euphrosyne finally reveals her true identity, moments before dying. Unlike Gregory, Euphrosyne is believed to be non-historical.

At first glance, the *Lives* of Gregory and Euphrosyne may seem

<sup>5</sup> E. Patlagean, "L'histoire de la femme déguisée en moine et l'évolution de la sainteté féminine à Byzance," *StudMed* SER. III 17 (1976) 597–623, at 601.

<sup>6</sup> An example of such a manuscript is Dresden, *Sächsische Landesbibliothek, fonds principal*, A. 187. Moreover, a detail in the *Life of Gregory* points to a shared transmission history: at one point, a character is introduced by the name of Smaragdus (52.9). Strangely enough, the same character is later called Erasmus and in the rest of the narrative the name Smaragdus does not recur. According to Martyn (*Translation* 184 n.230), the mention of the first name, Smaragdus, is due to an error. Smaragdus is the masculine name that Euphrosyne chooses for herself during her male disguise. The mistake is plausible if the *Life of Euphrosyne*, called Smaragdus, somehow hovered in the mind of the copyist of the *Life of Gregory*.

very different. The protagonists are indeed very different saints: male and female, bishop and maiden, historical and non-historical, authoritative figure and cross-dresser. Nevertheless, the two stories have elements in common. The central motif in the *Life of Euphrosyne* is that of disguised identity, and this motif, even if it does not govern its overall plot, is an important narrative strand in the first half of the *Life of Gregory*. The story of Gregory as it is told in this text consists of two major parts, the first of which (1–50) recounts the saint’s separation from his parents after he secretly leaves home, his confrontation with his father, who fails to recognize him and whom Gregory deliberately keeps in the dark about his true identity, and his eventual recognition by and reunion with his parents.<sup>7</sup> The first half of the *Life* therefore features the kind of plot we also find in the *Life of Euphrosyne*. Furthermore, this plot is shared with other transvestite saints’ *Lives*,<sup>8</sup> such as the *Life and Martyrdom of Eugenia* (BHG 607w–608), and we can compare the *Life of John Kalyvites* (BHG 868) and the *Life of Alexis the Man of God* (BHG 51). The latter two *Lives* feature so-called ‘beggar saints’. Just as in the *Lives* of cross-dressers, disguised identity plays an important role in their plots (John and Alexis both run away from home and return to it in the guise of a beggar without being recognized by their own parents).<sup>9</sup> More-

<sup>7</sup> The second half of the tale (50–95) revolves around Gregory being falsely accused of sexual relations with a prostitute and standing trial in Rome.

<sup>8</sup> The Byzantine *Lives* of cross-dressers have been studied extensively. Key publications are M. Delcourt, “Le complexe de Diane dans l’hagiographie chrétienne,” *RHR* 153 (1958) 1–33; J. Anson, “The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism. The Origin and Development of a Motif,” *Viator* 5 (1974) 1–32; Patlagean, *StudMed* SER. III 17 (1976) 597–623; V. R. Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York/London 1996); S. J. Davis, “Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,” *J ECS* 10 (2002) 1–36; S. Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances. Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women* (Uppsala 2005); K. Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue, and Authority* (London/New York 2011); and C. L. Lubinsky, *Removing Masculine Layers to Reveal a Holy Womanhood. The Female Transvestite Monks of Late Antique Eastern Christianity* (Turnhout 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The *Lives* of John and Alexis are closely related: on their interdependence

over, like Euphrosyne, the protagonists of these tales are all believed to be non-historical, leaving much room to their hagiographers for fictionalization.<sup>10</sup>

I argue that Gregory's hagiographer took inspiration from stories about disguised saints, and specifically from the *Life of Euphrosyne*, to shape his own account and turn it into a compelling tale, both adopting from them certain standard narrative structures, which are shared with other (hagiographical) narratives, and borrowing more particular narrative elements, which are specifically connected to the theme of disguised identity and the way in which such commonplaces are put to use in *Lives* featuring this theme. In what follows, I will first discuss the similarities in plot between the *Life of Gregory* and the hagiographical tales featuring disguised identity.<sup>11</sup> Then I will point to more specific textual parallels between that *Life* and the *Life of Euphrosyne*.

1. *Disguised identity and the plot of separation and recognition: structural resemblances*

The dramatic storyline of the *Life of Gregory* begins to unfold when Gregory runs away from home in secret. Secret flight is a well-known *topos* in hagiographical narrative.<sup>12</sup> Found in many

see C. E. Stebbins, "Les origines de la légende de saint Alexis," *RBPhil* 51 (1973) 497–507, at 502–504.

<sup>10</sup> On the non-historicity of the transvestite saints see S. Insley, "Dressing up the Past: Fictional Narrative in the Life of Matrona of Perge," in P. Roilos (ed.), *Medieval Greek Storytelling. Fictionality and Narrative in Byzantium* (Wiesbaden 2014) 55–85, at 65–67. Matrona of Perge forms an exception. On the lack of historical records concerning John Kalyvites see P. Boulhol, *Anagnorismos. La scène de reconnaissance dans l'hagiographie antique et médiévale* (Aix-en-Provence 1996) 167. The Greek *Life of Alexis* was considered legendary already in the earliest studies of this text (see e.g. A. Amiaud, *La Légende syriaque de S. Alexis, l'Homme de Dieu* [Paris 1889] LVII).

<sup>11</sup> On the theme of deliberately disguised identity in Byzantine hagiography see J. Van Pelt, *Saints in Disguise: A Literary Analysis of Performance in Byzantine Hagiography* (diss. Gent 2019).

<sup>12</sup> This *topos* is connected to the hagiographic *topoi* of withdrawal or *anachoresis* and wandering or *apodemia*. See T. Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos. Griechische Heiligenwiten in mittelbyzantinischer Zeit* (Berlin/New York 2005) 136–

other hagiographical tales,<sup>13</sup> it also plays an important role in the *Lives* of the transvestite saints and of the beggar saints John Kalyvites and Alexis. The characteristic feature of the cross-dressers' secret flight is that they change their appearance in order to disguise their identities. The reason is usually that they wish to reduce the chances of being found by their loved ones. Gregory does not use a physical disguise to conceal his identity, but after he has successfully escaped,<sup>14</sup> he also continues to engage in dissimulation and stealth. For instance, he does not reveal his identity to the captain of the ship he boards, even when the man asks if he is not a runaway slave (5.11–12: μὴ ἄρα γε δοῦλος εἶ;). In response, Gregory creates confusion about his identity, denying that he is a slave but professing to be a slave of God (5.13: δουλὸς μὲν εἰμὶ Χριστοῦ, ἀνθρώπου δὲ οὐδαμῶς).<sup>15</sup> Subsequently, the saint is nearly sold into slavery by the captain, but saves himself unwittingly through his pious conduct, which inspires the captain to better his ways and desist from his plan.

The narrative's play on different forms of slavery (spiritual and worldly) focuses the reader's attention on Gregory's game of blurring his identity: it underlines the ambiguous relation between his self-presentation (the statement that Gregory is a slave of Christ but not of men), the concrete reality (his socio-economic status as a free/enslaved man) and deeper truth (spiritual servitude), and suggests that each may contribute to the construction of identity, which is thus presented as potentially slippery. Therefore, the narrative engages with issues that are at the core of the *Lives* of disguised saints such as cross-dressers and beggar saints; the cross-dressers use their self-presentation (their hair treatment and male attire) to provoke in their interlocutors expectations regarding their concrete reality (their sex) while it

140 and 147–159, for discussion and examples of *anachoresis/apodemia*.

<sup>13</sup> A. Kazhdan, *Authors and Texts in Byzantium* (Burlington 1993) 188–192, refers to Nikon Metanoëite and Euthymius the Younger.

<sup>14</sup> He manages to leave without anyone seeing him (5.3: μηδενὸς αὐτὸν ἰδόντος).

<sup>15</sup> The captain's response betrays his confusion: ὅστις ἐὰν ᾗ ... (14).

secretly helps them to construct a spiritual identity (they strive for spiritual manliness).<sup>16</sup> In the case of beggar saints, their self-presentation is in line with their concrete reality (they live from alms), yet it dissimulates the deeper truth of their highborn background and their conscious choice to reject it. Furthermore, by denying the captain of the ship any straightforward answers regarding his identity, Gregory makes sure, like those saints, that he will not be discovered by his relatives later on. Hence, the way the author constructs this scene contributes to the dramatic build-up of the dissimulation of the hero's identity, creating in the audience the expectation of later confrontations with his family and anticipating eventual recognitions.

After Gregory is safely restored to land, he meets the bishop of Carthage. This time the saint answers truthfully when asked who he is (he tells him his name is Gregory and that he comes from Agrigento: 7.9–11). His honesty should not be regarded as an inconsistency in his character but forms a part of the hagiographer's careful narrative design. It serves a meaningful purpose at plot-level and contributes to the narrative suspense created by the motif of obscured identity and secrecy: information about the saint's identity, acquired in Carthage, will reach his home in Sicily, where it creates a sort of recognition *in absentia* (21–25).<sup>17</sup>

Recognition scenes, especially between lost family members, are widespread in Byzantine hagiography.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, they are particularly important plot-devices for the creation of narrative tension and dramatic irony in tales about disguised saints. Gregory's hagiographer appears keen to exploit this dramatic device, as he uses it more than once. First, Gregory is 'recognized *in absentia*' by his parents (21–25); after that, as we shall see,

<sup>16</sup> On spiritual manliness see K. Aspegren, *The Male Woman: A Feminine Ideal in the Early Church* (Uppsala 1990).

<sup>17</sup> See also K. B. Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger. Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden/Boston 2008) 63, giving examples of recognitions *in absentia* in the ancient Greek novels, and Re, in *Ashgate Research Companion I* 246, on the use of *analepsis* in 19–25.

<sup>18</sup> See Boulhol, *Anagnorismos* (Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos*, does not discuss this motif).

he is recognized in person by his father (45) and later by his mother (50). The *Life of Gregory* therefore takes a plot-device that was common in Byzantine hagiographical tales and especially in highly fictionalized ones such as *Lives* of disguised saints, and repeats it several times in order to maximize the dramatic impact of the story about Gregory's departure from and reunion with his family.

Moreover, the scene in which Gregory is 'recognized *in absentia*' by his parents makes use of a complex plot-configuration that hinges on the knowledge of the different characters involved, and it triggers the audience's expectations by anticipating full recognition and a sense of narrative closure, offered at the end of part one. The first, partial, recognition occurs when the saint's parents, Chariton and Theodote, accidentally meet one of Gregory's former travelling companions, brother Mark. He met Gregory on his journey and became his guide, but has taken leave of Gregory in Constantinople to return to Rome. Making a stopover in Sicily, he chances on a commemorative parade held in Gregory's honor. The visual likeness between father and son allows Mark (who had learned of Gregory's identity in Carthage) to ascertain that Chariton and Theodote are indeed the parents of *his* Gregory. The current bishop of Agrigento, who knows Gregory's parents well, is also present at the scene, and the archdeacon, who was with Gregory the night he had a vision which inspired him to leave, is asked to join the group as well. The chance meeting of these characters in fact betrays a carefully plotted scheme: each character has access to a different piece of information regarding Gregory's life. The saint's parents and the bishop have knowledge concerning his childhood and early youth, i.e., all his life before his disappearance, the archdeacon has information about the saint's departure (which he concealed for fear of being accused of murder), and brother Mark knows what happened to the saint after his disappearance. Thus, each of these characters possesses one piece of the puzzle that is Gregory's story. They exchange what they know, and Gregory's parents, who have been mourning their son after his disappearance, learn that he is alive and well.



This first moment of recognition prefigures on a structural level the recognition scenes that are to follow.<sup>19</sup> The intricately plotted scene, revolving around Gregory's secret escape and the question of his identity, thus adds in important ways to the dramatic and entertaining aspects of the *Life*: it fulfills the audience's desire to see the parents of Gregory consoled—who wrongly believe their son to be dead, causing dramatic irony for the informed readers—and it stirs in the audience the hope of a successful family reunion later on.

Next, when Gregory arrives in Constantinople, he is summoned by the archbishop, who sends men during the night with an excuse to fetch him (29.12–13: ὡς ἐκείνου μὴ γνόντος, ὅτι ἐξ ἡμῶν ἀπεστάλησαν καὶ διὰ προφάσεως τινός). Here, dissimulation and ruse once again enter the narrative and drive the characters' actions, and this time not just those of the saint. When the archbishop asks Gregory who he is and where he comes from, Gregory speaks about the places he has visited on his journey and about his plans to go to Rome (elements related to his life after his departure from home), but he does not give away any clues concerning his identity as Gregory of Agrigento (32.19–22). The ambiguity surrounding his identity is further thematized when his fame in the city of Constantinople grows; people begin to wonder who he is, where he comes from, and refer to him as a “stranger” (36.8: οὗτος δέ, δέσποτα, ξένος ἐστίν).<sup>20</sup> By emphasizing the saint's wish to remain incognito and the fact that he instead grows more and more famous, the *Life of Gregory* uses a hagiographical *topos* that has been called the ‘*fama* effect’.<sup>21</sup> The *fama* effect grasps and communicates the paradox of sanctity itself, a state which is based on humility but

<sup>19</sup> This is also noted by F. Conca, “La narrazione nell’agiografia tardo greca,” in *Le trasformazioni della cultura nella tarda antichità II* (Rome 1985) 647–661, at 660. Conca at 657 provides a detailed overview of the structure of chapters 19–25.

<sup>20</sup> See also 35.10: πόθεν ἐστίν οὗτος ὁ ἀνὴρ; 36.3–4: πόθεν παραγέγονεν ὁ ἀνὴρ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὗτος ὁ νέος, ὁ τοιαύτη χάριτι καὶ τοσαύτη κατακεκοσμημένος σοφία;

<sup>21</sup> See Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity* 105–108, on this *topos*.

results in the opposite: fame and renown. In addition to the question of his humility, however, Gregory's retreat from society is specifically related to the fact that he wants to escape his relatives and hide his identity (not just his virtue). This is evident from the fact that he does not share his name and origin with the archbishop in Constantinople, and it will become even clearer in the events that follow, where he aims to avoid any encounter with people from his home front. That Gregory seeks isolation out of a desire to conceal his identity (rather than simply to avoid praise) aligns him with saints like Euphrosyne and the beggar saints. Moreover, like those saints, Gregory never fully succeeds in escaping his former life.

Gregory is forced, for instance, to reveal his identity when he is summoned by the emperor, who on hearing about the saint wants to know who he is (36.12–15). But Gregory then flees the city and eventually arrives in Rome, where he enters a monastery to hide (37.13–14: μηδενὸς γινώσκοντος). Nevertheless, his fame precedes him and reaches the Pope. Moreover, his efforts to conceal himself do not bear fruit, since the Pope receives a dream in which the location of the saint is revealed (40.1–6). A comparable event occurs in the *Life and Martyrdom of Eugenia*: bishop Helenos receives a divine dream in which he is informed of the true identity of Eugenia, before she presents herself to him as Eugenios.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, crucial information about the saint's true identity is similarly revealed to authoritative religious figures through divine dreams in other *Lives* of disguised saints, such as the *Life of Theodora*, the *Life of Matrona*, and the *Life of Mary called Marinos*.<sup>23</sup> The divine revelation of information contributes to the construction of a dramatic plot revolving around the saint's hidden identity, both in the *Lives* of cross-dressers and in the *Life of Gregory*. It highlights the dis-

<sup>22</sup> For the pre-metaphrastic *Life and Martyrdom of Eugenia* see S. Apserou, *To Αγιολογικό dossier της Αγίας Ευγενίας (BHG 607w-607z)* (diss. U. Ioannina 2017) 297 and 338; for the metaphrastic *Life* see S. Papaioannou, *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes* (Cambridge [Mass.]/London 2017) 200–203.

<sup>23</sup> For discussion see Van Pelt, *Saints in Disguise* 127–130.

connection between the actual events and what most people in the protagonist's environment know about him/her, it creates suspense by evoking the threat of discovery, and it paves the way towards recognition, the resolution of the dramatic plot.

In the *Life of Gregory*, this resolution is reached when chance once again brings together the different actors of the story in one location: the bishop of Agrigento dies and strife concerning his successor leads to the arrival of a Sicilian delegation—including Gregory's father—in the city of Rome, where Gregory is staying as well. As soon as he hears of the Sicilians' arrival, Gregory goes even more deeply into hiding (40.7–8: ἀπέδρα ἐκ τοῦ μοναστηρίου, ἐν ᾧ ἦν, καὶ κέκρυπται ἐν τῷ μοναστηρίῳ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἐράσμου). Nevertheless, he cannot stay hidden because of the Pope's divinely received knowledge of his whereabouts. The Pope sends men to fetch the saint, who clearly does not wish to be found (41.7–8, 11–12):

καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἐπέγνω τοὺς ἐπισκόπους, καὶ εἰσδραμὼν ἐκρύβη ἐν τῷ κήπῳ μέσον τῶν φυτῶν. [...] κατελθὼν δὲ ὁ ἡγούμενος ἐν τῷ κήπῳ εὗρεν αὐτὸν κεκρυμμένον μέσον τῶν λαχάνων.

Spotting them from a distance, Gregory recognized the bishops, and ran away and hid in the garden, in the middle of the bushes. [...] The abbot went down into the garden and found Gregory hidden in the middle of the vegetables.

Unable to hide any longer, Gregory is brought to the Pope. Upon hearing that his father is among the members of the Sicilian delegation, however, he wants to run away again but is stopped by his friend Mark (43.6–8).

While Gregory never wears a physical disguise, he energetically engages in the dissimulation of his identity, as the passage illustrates. As we saw, the elaborate narrative play on (lack of) knowledge concerning his identity, whether on the part of the characters or of the reader, further contributes to these dynamics. It marks this tale as different from, for instance, the *Lives* of Eustathius Placidus or Xenophon and Mary,<sup>24</sup> family romances in which separation, obscured identity, and subsequent recog-

<sup>24</sup> On which see Boulhol, *Anagnorismos*.

nitition are also important themes informing the plot, but where the concealment is not deliberate and where the recognition is delayed or brought about through (the removal of) external obstacles and not through the protagonists' own ploys. Gregory, on the other hand, displays a deliberate wish to be incognito and is therefore more akin to disguised saints like Euphrosyne and others.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, like those saints he goes even further than merely hiding when he deliberately holds off a recognition and a reunion with his family by pretending in their presence to be not himself.

During the gathering in Rome which will decide who should succeed the bishop of Agrigento, Gregory is chosen as the rightful candidate on the basis of a divine sign. None of the Sicilians, including his father, recognize him during these events (44.12–13). On a subsequent night, Gregory meets his father face to face when the latter visits him in his cell, yet Chariton still fails to recognize his son, a pattern familiar from the *Lives* of Euphrosyne, Eugenia (who stands trial before her own father after being falsely accused of sexual harassment), and John Kalyvites and Alexis. Moreover, like those saints, Gregory does not make himself known to his father but allows him to believe that he is not his son. For instance, he inquires after his mother while referring to himself (“your son”) in the third person (e.g. 45.13–14: λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος· τάδε σύ, κύριέ μου, ζῆ ἢ μήτηρ τοῦ παιδός, οὗ λέγεις, ὅτι ἀπολώλεν). This raises the narrative suspense of the scene and generates dramatic irony for the reader. Gregory's friend Mark is present as well. He knows both Gregory's story and Chariton's grief over his lost son, but does not expose Gregory's secret and plays along.<sup>26</sup> Thus, unevenly distributed knowledge about the saint's identity is again used to

<sup>25</sup> His conduct is therefore also comparable to Jesus' in the Gospel of John, as examined by Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger* 201; Jesus does not wear a disguise but he also does not reveal himself right away and speaks elusively, putting the observer, who fails to recognize him, to the test (e.g. the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, Mary Magdalene).

<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the Pope, who is informed by Mark that Chariton is Gregory's father, respects Gregory's secret (43.16–17).

create narrative tension. Mark's words to Chariton also contain much dramatic irony: he comforts Chariton concerning his son by assuring him that he will see him again one day, while Chariton is in the presence of his son at that very moment and looking at him without realizing it (45.5–7). The reader's expectation of a happy reunion between father and son is thus frustrated for a while, before it is finally granted satisfaction: after they have been conversing for some time in this way, Gregory reveals himself to his father. Although the rest of the Sicilian delegation still has no clue that he is Gregory—the lost son of Chariton and Theodote—they will soon find out when all travel home together, where the saint will be recognized by and reunited with his mother, providing final closure to the first of the two major sections of story.

## 2. *The Lives of Gregory and Euphrosyne: textual resemblances*

Thus far we have seen that the first half of the *Life of Gregory* contains a plot pattern that displays strong resemblances to *Lives* that feature deliberate disguise on the part of the saint, including the *Life of Euphrosyne*. In addition to these structural similarities, the *Life of Gregory* shows clear textual parallels with the *Life of Euphrosyne*, suggesting that the author may have found inspiration for shaping his account specifically in that narrative.

The lamentation monologue uttered by Gregory's mother in Agrigento, in which she deplors the loss of her child, shows textual resemblances to the monologue uttered by Paphnoutius, Euphrosyne's father, as he cries over his lost daughter (*Life of Euphrosyne* 12<sup>27</sup> / *Greg. Agr.* 21.5–11):

οἴμοι τέκνον μου γλυκύτατον!  
οἴμοι φῶς τῶν ἐμῶν ὀφθαλμῶν!  
οἴμοι παραμύθιον τῆς ἐμῆς  
ψυχῆς! τίς τὸν ἐμὸν θησαυρὸν  
ἀπεσύλησεν; τίς τὴν ἐμὴν οὐσίαν  
ἀφῆρπασε; τίς τὸν ἐμὸν πλουτοῦ

οἴμμοι, τέκνον ἐμὸν γλυκύτατον,  
πρὸς ὀλίγον σου μήτηρ ἐκλήθην  
καὶ ἐχάρην εἰς σέ, καὶ εἰς τὸ  
τάχος σου ἐχωρίσθην. οἴμμοι,  
τέκνον, τίς σε ἐθήρευσεν; ἄρα  
ποῖος λύκος τὸ ἐμὸν ἀφῆρπασεν

<sup>27</sup> A. Boucherie, "Vita Sanctae Euphrosynae," *AnalBoll* 2 (1883) 196–205, at 201.29–202.5.

ἔσκόρπισεν; τίς τὸν ἐμὸν λύχνον ἔσβεσεν; τίς τὰς ἐμὰς ἐλπίδας ἐχειρώσατο; τίς τοῦ ἐμοῦ οἴκου τὴν εὐπρέπειαν ἔλαβεν; ποῖος λύκος τὸ ἐμὸν ἐλυμήνατο πρόβατον; ποῖος τόπος τὸ ἠλιόμορφον ἐκεῖνο ἔκρυσσε κάλλος; ποῖον πέλαγος αἰχμάλωτον ἔχει τὸν βασιλικὸν χαρακτῆρα; ἐκεῖνη μου τοῦ γένους ἢ σύστασις, ἐκεῖνη τοῦ γήρωσ ἢ βακτηρία· ἐκεῖνη τῶν κακῶν ἢ λύσις, ἐκεῖνη τῶν ὀδυρμῶν ὁ κουφισμός. Γῆ, μὴ ἐπικαλύψης ἐφ' αἷματι σαρκός μου ἕως ἂν γνῶ τίς τὴν ἐμὴν Εὐφροσύνην πένθους πάρεργον ἐποίησεν.

ἀρνίον; ποῖος δὲ τόπος τὸ μονογενῆ μου ἀπέκρυσεν τέκνον; εἶπω θηριάλωτον αὐτὸ γεγονέναι· ἀλλ' ὁ τόπος θηρία οὐκ ἔχει. ἄρα γε μὴ τις αὐτὸν ἐν νυκτὶ ἀπέπνιξεν καὶ εἰς θάλασσαν ἔρριπεν; οὐκ οἶδα εἰπεῖν μὴ καὶ ἄλλως πῶς ἀπεκτάνθη, ὁ θεὸς μόνος ἐπίσταται.

In themselves, the verbal echoes in these speeches do not conclusively point to direct interdependence (for instance, they may be derived from a common source). However, these echoes are accompanied by other specific textual parallels between the *Lives* of Gregory and Euphrosyne, corroborating the possibility that the hagiographer of the former indeed built on the latter. First, when Mark tests Gregory's spiritual resolve by asking him whether he longs for his parents (9.14–16), the saint refers to a biblical verse about the renunciation of family for the love of God (Lk 14:26). The same verse is cited by the old man from Sketis who urges Euphrosyne to run away from home (p.199.18–20). Another connection can be seen when Mark consoles the saint's parents by saying that, if God does not reveal anything concerning their child, it means he is doing well, for otherwise God would not fail to provide a sign (*Greg.* 22.21–26). The same reasoning is provided by the abbot of the monastery in an attempt to console Paphnoutius (*Euphr.* p.202.22–28). Finally, the recognition scene between father and son in the *Life of Gregory* appears to be modelled specifically on that between father and daughter in the *Life of Euphrosyne*. In both tales the father converses with his lost child without realizing it when he visits the saint in his/her cell. Both fathers express their grief concerning

the person sitting in front of them, and in both tales, the child, who chooses to remain incognito for now, consoles the parent about that loss, speaking in the third person about him/herself.<sup>28</sup> In these highly similar conditions, both saints eventually choose to reveal themselves after all, using similar words (*Euphr.* p. 204.4–5 / *Greg.* 45.20–21):

βούλομαι λοιπὸν ἄλυπον εἶναι σε ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον χάριν τῆς θυ- γατρός σου Εὐφροσύνης. ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι ἢ ταπεινή.	βούλομαι σε ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης ἀμέριμνον εἶναι περὶ τοῦ τέκνου σου τοῦ ἔλεεινοῦ· ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰμί.
---	--

While these parallels, taken separately, may not definitively prove the interdependence of the two *Lives*, there are simply too many to be a coincidence: the significance of each parallel is enhanced by the presence of others in the same text. Therefore, the parallels, taken together, suggest that the author of the *Life of Gregory* may have deliberately followed the overall narrative pattern provided by the *Life of Euphrosyne* to flesh out the first half of his story (a pattern that this *Life* shares with several other saint's *Lives*, in particular those about disguised saints), while also adopting some of the phrases used in it. As we have seen, this modelling allows him to turn the first half of the narrative, which revolves around Gregory's separation from his family and his homecoming, into a compelling story, full of narrative suspense.

While medieval readers may certainly have noticed the parallels between Gregory's and Euphrosyne's *Lives* (as their common transmission perhaps suggests), it is difficult to determine whether Gregory's hagiographer *intended* for his audience to actively consider them. While it is possible that he did, it is equally possible that he rather wanted his readers to enjoy Gregory's narrative in itself, just as they would enjoy that of Euphrosyne or other disguised saints. In fact, comparison of the two narratives reveals that the recognition scene is handled much more elegantly in the *Life of Euphrosyne* than in the *Life of Gregory*, and this is likely not something the hagiographer wanted to convey. In

<sup>28</sup> *Greg.* 45.5, 13–18 / *Euphr.* p.203.32–33 (μὴ λυποῦ μηδὲ δάκρυε, ὁ γὰρ Θεὸς ὡς ἔτι εἶ ὧδε πληροφοροεῖ σε ἕνεκεν αὐτῆς).

the cross-dresser's *Life*, the saint's self-revelation fits perfectly in the narrative's carefully constructed plot: Euphrosyne has been meeting with her father for over thirty-eight years while never giving a sign of her identity. When she senses that her death is near, she reveals her secret. If she had not done so, her father would indeed have grieved over her for the rest of his life, since no one else knew what had happened to her. By contrast, the saint's self-revealing in the *Life of Gregory* comes somewhat out of the blue, and Gregory's decision to tell his ignorant father who he is feels much more arbitrary. At first, Gregory is portrayed keeping his father in the dark about his identity, and only moments later he suddenly falls at his feet, crying, and tells him who he is. The abruptness of this change of heart is handled by a meta-narrative comment: "Then, to put it briefly, the blessed Gregory stood up..." (45.18: εἶτα, ἵνα συντόμως εἶπω, ἀναστὰς ὁ μακάριος Γρηγόριος...). "To put it briefly" is the narrator's way of masking the lack of internal motivation for this turn in the plot.

What is further lacking, so to speak, is an explanation why Gregory is initially not recognized by his father: the text does not emphasize any changes in the saint's appearance, nor does it feature elements of physical disguise. That his parents have not seen him since his early youth could perhaps justify this failure on the part of Chariton. But the problem is that the likeness in appearance of father and son is so underlined in the tale: this is what allows Mark to recognize Chariton as Gregory's father, and later Gregory's mother is said to recognize her son from afar for the same reason.<sup>29</sup> We may imagine, then, that when Chariton meets Gregory, he is basically looking in a mirror.

Thus, certain narrative motifs and patterns belonging to the *Life of Euphrosyne* among others (secret flight, disguised identity, secrecy and ruse, recognition) have successfully been worked into the *Life*, but there are also limits to their application in the

<sup>29</sup> 50.14–15: διασκευασμένη αὐτὸν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν καὶ ἐπιγνοῦσα κατὰ τὸν χαρακτήρα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν· "Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱός μου, ὃν ἀπόλεσα." Cf. 43.17–18, where the physical likeness between father and son is again emphasized.



context of Gregory's tale. Seen from this perspective, the structural and textual parallels with the *Life of Euphrosyne* can be interpreted as a strategy to add suspense to Gregory's story and to embellish the narrative, while it is unsure whether they were meant to be picked up on as such. There are indeed no elements that explicitly signpost the hagiographer's literary use of Euphrosyne's tale. It is different, for instance, in the *Life and Martyrdom of Eugenia* or the *Life of Theoctiste of Lesbos* (BHG 1723). The former narrative builds up a meaningful intertextual relationship with the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, a choice that is explainable given Thecla's status as a strong female role model who masculinized herself in different ways according to the *Acts*.<sup>30</sup> The tenth-century *Life of Theoctiste* has been shown to rework the popular *Life of Mary of Egypt*.<sup>31</sup> In both cases, the use of the literary intertext is signaled to the reader by an overt reference; Eugenia converts after reading the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, according to several versions of her story, and the man who met Theoctiste of Lesbos is compared by her hagiographer to "the great Zosimas" (who encountered Mary of Egypt). Gregory's hagiographer, by contrast, appears to make use silently of the *Life of Euphrosyne*. Was the author in need of models and therefore happy to find these features in that text, or did he count on the readers' recognition of the borrowed traits? It is hard to provide a firm answer to this question, but I am inclined to think the former.

### Conclusions

We are all familiar with stories in which the identity of one of the characters (sometimes the villain, but often the hero) is hidden—thus, for instance, detective stories in which the hero operates undercover. The disguise of the hero usually provokes exciting narrative dynamics: (lack of) knowledge about the hero's identity may generate unexpected turns in the plot, dramatic irony, and the rise and fall of narrative suspense. Disguised identity and the recognition that usually follows are therefore useful

<sup>30</sup> See S. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity* (Oxford 2001) 141–143.

<sup>31</sup> K. Jazdzewska, "Hagiographic Invention and Imitation: Niketas' *Life of Theoktiste* and Its Literary Models," *GRBS* 49 (2009) 257–279.

devices to build a narrative arc that is both captivating and enjoyable.

From the structural resemblances and textual parallels, it appears that the hagiographer of the *Life of Gregory* found inspiration for this kind of narrative model in the *Life of Euphrosyne*. The first half of Gregory's narrative takes a particular plot pattern that is shared with Euphrosyne's tale—including secret flight, disguised identity, secrecy and ruse, chance encounters, failed recognition, and reunion—and applies it to the basic outline of Gregory's travels and his return home as Agrigento's bishop, fictionalizing the account. It is possible that the hagiographer knew and used other similar stories, since disguised identity was a popular theme in Byzantine hagiography to create compelling narratives, often about non-historical saints. As we have seen, the structural parallels shared with Euphrosyne's *Life* are also shared with a number of other saints' *Lives*. To some extent, they are standard narrative strategies for creating suspense and reading pleasure, applied widely in hagiographical and other types of narrative. At the same time, the way in which these are achieved in the *Life of Gregory* displays specific parallels with stories of disguised saints, for instance the narrative exploitation of the knowledge possessed by different characters and by the reader, and the deliberate choice on the part of the saint to remain incognito. In addition, concrete verbal parallels reveal textual borrowing, indicating that the hagiographer of the *Life of Gregory* built specifically on the *Life of Euphrosyne* to attain his goal of creating a compelling and enjoyable narrative through dramatic effects.<sup>32</sup>

January, 2020

Ghent University  
julie.vanpelt@ugent.be

<sup>32</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to Koen De Temmerman, Christian Høgel, and the reviewers of *GRBS* for their useful suggestions and comments on this article. This work was supported by the ERC Starting Grant 'Novel Saints' at Ghent University (Grant Agreement 337344) and was written during a fellowship of the FWO Flanders.