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Résumé de l'article

Les recherches portant sur les images miraculeuses ont montré que les dévots croyaient que celles-ci possédaient un pouvoir en vertu de leur ressemblance véritable avec les figures des saints qu'elles étaient censées représenter. Un portrait ressemblant du Christ, par exemple, possédait son pouvoir, en toute apparence infini. S'appuyant sur le cas de figure que représente la peinture miraculeuse de l'Annonciation dans la basilique de la Santissima Annunziata à Florence, cet article cherche à déterminer dans quelle mesure le pouvoir d'une image était effectivement illimité. Fondé sur l'analyse de divers écrits hagiographiques consacrés au sanctuaire et datant de la Contre-Réforme, en particulier la Scelta d'alcuni miracoli della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze d'Angelo Lottini, cet article suggère que certains miracles étaient attribués aux origines de l'image. À la lumière de la théorie de la magie sympathique proposée par James Frazer et de la théorie plus récente d'Alfred Gell portant sur l'art et l'agentivité, cet article soutient que ces écrits post-tridentins définissent le pouvoir de l'image de la Santissima Annunziata en fonction des circonstances dans lesquelles elle avait vu le jour. C'est ce qui rendait cette image particulièrement puissante pour tout ce qui avait trait, directement ou conceptuellement, à l'esprit, à l'imagination et aux yeux, sans s'y limiter.

The Origins and Agency of the Miraculous Annunciation at the Santissima Annunziata in Counter-Reformation Florence

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Research on miracle-working images has shown that devotees attributed their power to the authentic likeness of the holy people these images possessed. An authentic likenss of Christ, for instance, possessed his seemingly infinite agency. Using the miraculous painting of the Annunciation at the Santissima (SS.) Annunziata in Florence as a case study, this article questions whether an image's agency was indeed limitless. Based on an examination of various hagiographical writings on the shrine written during the Counter-Reformation period, in particular Angelo Lottini's Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze*, this article proposes that certain miracles were connected with the image's origins. In light of James Frazer's theory of sympathetic magic, and Alfred Gell's more recent theory of art and agency, this article argues that these post-Tridentine writings define the Annunziata image's agency by the circumstances of its origins, which made it especially (though not exclusively) powerful over problems relating directly or conceptually to the mind, imagination, and eyes.*

Les recherches portant sur les images miraculeuses ont montré que les dévots croyaient que celles-ci possédaient un pouvoir en vertu de leur ressemblance véritable avec les figures des saints qu'elles étaient censées représenter. Un portrait ressemblant du Christ, par exemple, possédait son pouvoir, en toute apparence infini. S'appuyant sur le cas de figure que représente la peinture miraculeuse de l'Annonciation dans la basilique de la Santissima Annunziata à Florence, cet article cherche à déterminer dans quelle mesure le pouvoir d'une image était effectivement illimité. Fondé sur l'analyse de divers écrits hagiographiques consacrés au sanctuaire et datant de la Contre-Réforme, en particulier la Scelta d'alcuni miracoli della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze *d'Angelo Lottini, cet article suggère que certains miracles étaient attribués aux origines de l'image. À la lumière de la théorie de la magie sympathique proposée par James Frazer et de la théorie plus récente d'Alfred Gell portant sur l'art et l'agentivité, cet article soutient que ces écrits post-tridentins définissent le pouvoir de l'image de la Santissima Annunziata en fonction des circonstances dans lesquelles elle avait vu le jour. C'est ce qui rendait cette image particulièrement puissante pour tout ce qui avait trait, directement ou conceptuellement, à l'esprit, à l'imagination et aux yeux, sans s'y limiter.*

In the early modern period, devotees believed that certain images—usually paintings or sculptures of the Madonna and Child or Christ—were capable of responding to their prayers through the performance of miraculous interventions, a phenomenon once largely ignored by art historians, though now studied in greater depth. Italian Renaissance art historians, for example,

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have revealed the widespread proliferation of these miracle-working images and the cultural beliefs that shaped the perception of their agency.[1] Despite the many insights of their analyses, however, relatively little has been said about the range of miracles an image could perform: Why was an image petitioned for help with certain problems and not others, and what can this tell us about its agency? These questions are explored in this article using the miraculous image of the SS. Annunziata in Florence (Fig. 1) as a case study, as well as various hagiographical writings on the painting from the Counter-Reformation period. While the image responded to many prayers, by examining books on the shrine printed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, focusing particularly on Giovanni Angelo Lottini's 1619 *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* (Fig. 2), I will explore how certain frequently published miracles connect thematically with the fresco's origins by emphasizing the painting's agency over issues involving the mind and imagination, the head, and the eyes.[2] In examining this connection, I argue not that this was the exclusive specialization of the image, but rather that the relationship between origins and several key miracles would have been intelligible to readers in the Counter-Reformation era since it closely resembled the auxiliary patronage of saints, whose intercessory powers were related to their lived experiences. In identifying the possible relationship a reader may have drawn between agency and origins, we obtain a deeper understanding of the power of the SS. Annunziata.

The face of the Virgin Mary in the fresco of the Annunciation at the Servite church in Florence is reputed to have been painted miraculously by an angel. The image is traditionally dated to 1252 in hagiographical sources, though art historians place it in the mid-fourteenth century (perhaps the 1340s) and attribute it possibly to Jacopo di Cione.[3] On the inside wall of the church

1. See, for example, Holmes, *Miraculous Image*; Bacci, *Pro remedio animae*; Maniura, "Ex Votos"; Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*. Among the earlier explorations of miracle-working images, see Freedberg, *Power of Images*; Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience"; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*.

2. Many versions of Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli* are available for consultation in digital format on the internet. I mainly consulted the version accessible through Google Books, but the digital edition available from the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg was used for all illustrations appearing in this article.

3. Holmes, "Elusive Origins"; Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 80–83, 239–47; Oen, "Origins of a Miraculous Image," 6–7. For the Servite perspective, see Cassalini, "La Santissima Annunziata." On the attribution

facade, the fresco depicts a conventional representation of the Annunciation. On the right-hand side, Mary sits on a bench in an interior setting and is visited by Gabriel, kneeling on the left. On the bench between them rests a book upon a pillow, and the floor is covered with a carpet. In the upper left-hand corner, God the Father can be seen through an open doorway, and from his direction the Holy Spirit descends toward the Virgin along a path of golden light.

Fig. 1. Anonymous Florentine (Jacopo di Cione?), *The Annunciation of the Virgin* (traditionally dated to 1252, now believed to be from the second half of the fourteenth century). Santissima Annunziata, Florence. Photo credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

to Jacopo di Cione, see Wazbinski, "L'Annunciazione della Vergine," 545n7.

Fig. 2. Jacques Callot, after Matteo Rosselli. "Scelta d'acluni miracoli e grazie della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze" (Selection of miracles of the Santissima Nunziata of Florence). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, title page. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0007.

The cult of this image is thought to have gathered momentum at the end of the fourteenth century, perhaps when it gained a reputation for healing—especially pertinent in times of plague.[4] What drew Florentines to this particular image is unknown, though Megan Holmes has speculated that its popularity may derive in part from the appearance of the Virgin: she is shown in three-quarter view, looking up and appearing to speak the words "Ecce Anccilla Domini" (Behold the handmaid of the Lord)—written as if emerging from her lips—directly to God. Unlike other contemporary images, which usually show the Virgin with a demurer posture, Holmes suggests that this image "strikes a balance between […] feminine containment […] and an impassioned devout response."[5]

Whether or not its visual qualities inspired devotion, the prestige of the painting is clearly visible through the votive offerings collected around it. Through the patronage of the Medici family, for instance, a large marble tabernacle was commissioned to stand in front of the fresco and completed in 1449.[6] Sometime later, a metal frame was placed around the image, which was covered in glass, and various other ornaments were also attached, notably the large crown on the Virgin's head.[7] Even today, many ex-votos continue to be displayed around the fresco, testifying to the tradition of gifting tokens of thanks to the image, a practice for which the shrine was famous (Fig. 3).[8] The cult of the SS. Annunziata is an example of an image whose miraculous reputation was reinforced by the devotions it received.[9]

4. Holmes, "Elusive Origins," 110–11; Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 80–81.

5. Holmes, "Elusive Origins," 116.

6. On the tabernacle, see Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 240. On Medici patronage, see Zervas, "Quos volent"; Fantoni, "Il culto."

7. Holmes writes that the frame and glass are seventeenth century and suggests the crown may be from the image's coronation in 1852 (Holmes, "Elusive Origins," 104). On the crowns given to the image, see Andreuci, *Il fiorentino istruito*, 96.

8. On inventories of votives, see Cassalini, "Un inventario inedito"; Dina, "Da un inventario"; Bemporad and Cattarossi, *Grati a Maria*.

9. See, for example, comments on ornamentation in Trexler, "Being and Non-Being," 19–21.

Fig. 3. Interior of Santissima Annunziata, Florence, showing *The Annunciation of the Virgin*. Photo by author, 2016.

Early modern writings documenting and promoting the painting's miracles help us to comprehend the scope of the image's agency and are the principal sources analyzed in this article. Servite convent records, as well as books and manuscripts pertaining to other shrines, have also been consulted. While the cult around this image originated in the fourteenth century (as noted above), the textual sources under consideration here date from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, during the Counter-Reformation. As will be seen, the evocation of the painting's agency in these sources is coloured by concerns of this period. While this means that the conclusions of this article cannot be broadly applied to the entire history of the image, they nonetheless underscore a central theme of this study: that hagiographical writings evoke the image's agency in ways that connect meaningfully with cultural beliefs. As such, the stories recounted in these books are not simply recitations of "typical" miracles that could be interchanged with one another.

The specific period under study is the span of a few decades beginning in the late sixteenth century, during which time several books were published

in Florence honouring the Annunziata image including Francesco Bocchi's *Sopra l'immagine miracolosa della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* (1592); Luca Ferrini's *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli della Nunziata di Firenze* (1593); Pagolo Baroni's *La corona della Vergine fatta di sessantatre miracoli più celebri della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* (1614); and Giovanni Angelo Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli della Santissima Nunziata di Firenze* (1619).[10] The texts written by Ferrini and Lottini, both Servite friars, are particularly useful for this study since they consist mainly of accounts of the image's most notable miracles.[11]

Sara Matthews-Grieco, who has studied the multiple publications on the Annunziata fresco that appeared toward the end of the sixteenth century, has observed that these books did not arise out of nowhere: prior to their printing, miracle stories were preserved in manuscripts, some of which were drawn from ex-votos actually installed in the church. In fact, one extant manuscript from 1511 appears to be the source for several miracles in Ferrini's text.[12] The books also responded to timely concerns. As Matthews-Grieco posits, the texts and their images served to bolster the reputation of the shrine first locally and then, in the case of Lottini's book, internationally at a time when miracle-working images were increasingly promoted in publications.[13]

The aims of these texts and their printed images, Matthews-Grieco further argues, were also in line with Counter-Reformation aims to reaffirm and instil correct forms of devotion to sacred art.[14] The Council of Trent had decreed that images of Christ and Mary were to be "retained particularly in temples, and that due honour and veneration are to be given them."[15] While the Council went on to state that devotees should not believe that "any divinity, or virtue"

10. On these publications, see Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory." See also Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, chs. 1, 4; Frangenberg, "Style of the Divine Hand"; Holmes, "Elusive Origins."

11. Baroni's text is an abbreviation of Ferrini's book in verse, and Bocchi's treatise elaborates on art theory. On Ferrini and Lottini, see Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 274, 281. On Bocchi, see Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, ch. 1; Frangenberg, "Style of the Divine Hand."

12. See Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 275.

13. Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 282, 284.

14. Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 274.

15. Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees,* 234. See also Hsia, *World of Catholic Renewal*, 10–25, 159–71. For a discussion of the historiography of art and the Counter-Reformation, see Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, 252n8. For a discussion of the Council of Trent and miracle-working images, see Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 34–42.

resides in these image, miracle-working images continued to be venerated during the Counter-Reformation.[16] One writer who promoted the Tridentine decrees, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, even argued that they were a distinct form of sacred image; for instance, in his 1582 art treatise expanding on the Council's decrees, the cardinal made *acheiropoietos* images—that is, those "made not by human hands but invisibly, by divine action"[17]—their own distinct category, as well as pictures through which "God manifestly worked signs and miracles."[18] Therefore, the directives of Trent, while discouraging idolatry, were nonetheless construed to sanction miraculous images.

The apparently contradictory condemnation of idolatry and simultaneous celebration of miraculous images might in part be explained by the Council's affirmation of devotion to Mary, to the saints, and to their miracles, all of which had also sustained attacks during the Protestant Reformation.[19] For instance, at Trent it was maintained that "it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke [the saints] […] through which (bodies) many benefits are bestowed by God on men," and also that "they who affirm that veneration and honour are not due to the relics of saints […] are wholly to be condemned."[20] Although the Council of Trent did not explicitly link the miracles performed by images to the favours bestowed by saints and their relics, the grouping of these decrees may have encrouaged this association. Devotional books honouring the Annunziata image therefore reinforced Tridentine directives by documenting people who had worshiped and received miracles from the Virgin.

Beyond simply reinforcing devotion to saints and images in the most general way, the themes of these books seem also to relate to more specific concerns raised in Counter-Reformation literature. As will be discussed below, these books indicate that the Annunziata image had power over visual, imaginative, and mental faculties and, in this way, connect to Tridentine

16. Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees,* 234.

17. Paleotti, *Discourse*, 100. "cioè non fatta per le mani d'uomini, ma invisibilmente per opera divina"; Paleotti, "Discorso," 198.

18. Paleotti, *Discourse*, 100. "perché Iddio abbia operato manifestamente segni e miracoli in tale imagine"; Paleotti, "Discorso," 198.

19. Devotions to Mary and the saints were defended in the same Tridentine article. On Protestant attacks on Marian devotion, see Graef, *Mary*, 2:1–43. On Protestant objections to miracles, see Hillebrand, s.v. "Miracles."

20. Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees,* 234.

concerns over appropriate devotion to images and saints. The Council's decrees sanctioned "vocally or *mentally*" (my emphasis) supplicating to the saints, though it specified that when praying to an image, such devotions were "referred to the prototypes which those images represent."[21] This implied that the devotee understood the image to be one thing and the saint another.[22] The mental operation of separating the image and its referrent was in fact discussed in detail by Paleotti, who explored the different kinds of thoughts an image could inspire, such as on the material of the image, the form given to the material, and the prototype of which the image is a similitude.[23] When considering the third aspect, Paleotti described how a sensory, visual experience engaged the mind inwardly: "When in fact we look with our eyes at an image, our minds fix themselves on that which is represented" (and not, therefore, the image itself).[24] Thus, the theme of the mind's visualization—which, as will be seen arises prominently in these books—resonates with the wider issue of sanctioning and promoting mental devotion to saints during the Counter-Reformation. Naturally, using images to support mental devotion had been a fundatmental part of Christian worship for centuries. The appearance of this theme in Counter-Reformation writings does not therefore indicate an entirely new phenomenon, although further research might reveal how post-Tridentine writers envisioned mental engagement with images differently.

These books seem also to relate to Medici patronage of the Annunziata shrine and the desire to promote an image that, by the end of the sixteenth century, after successive generations of Medici patronage dating back to the fifteenth century, had become very closely aligned with Grand Ducal Medici power.[25] Francesco Bocchi's book, for instance, which stands somewhat apart from the others by mixing devotional praise of the image with art theory, might

21. Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees,* 234, 235.

22. Others have suggested that Counter-Reformation attitudes stressed intellectual rather than emotional engagements with images; see Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 38–39, citing Niccoli.

23. Paleotti, "Discorso," 254–55.

24. This and all subsequent translations are my own unless otherwise noted. "riguardando noi con gli occhi corporali nella imagine, la mente si fissa nella cosa rappresentata"; Paleotti, "Discorso," 255. For a full discussion of this passage, see Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, 253–62.

25. As noted above, on Medici patronage, see Zervas, "Quos volent"; Fantoni, "Il culto"; Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory." See also Sanger, *Art, Gender, and Religious Devotion*, especially 94–98. For an overview of Medici patronage, see Iarocci, "Santissima Annunziata," 25–36.

be connected to his earlier efforts to attach himself to the circle of Cardinal Ferdinando I de' Medici in Rome, who, at the time Bocchi's book was published, had recently been made Grand Duke of Florence.[26] Luca Ferrini, the prior of the Servite convent in Prato, ostensibly writes his book as a votive offering to the image itself, but the text also included a printer's dedication by Giorgio Marescotti to Christine de Lorraine, then Grand Duchess of Tuscany and wife of Ferdinando I de' Medici.[27] Giovanni Angelo Lottini, a Servite friar known for his literary accomplishments, also dedicated his book to Christine de Lorraine, then Dowager Grand Duchess.[28] In their dedications, both books mention her special devotion to this image, which I return to below, as well as Medici patronage of this shrine more broadly.[29]

The publication of these books, therefore, has been situated amid efforts to promote the Servite shrine in line with ideals of the Counter-Reformation, while also supporting an image that was closely aligned with Medici power. I will return to these issues below, though the true focus of this article is not the ends to which these books were published (to flatter the Medici or promote the cult) but rather the means through which the agency of the image is established.

When historians consult such books, it is often for historical evidence regarding the cult's inception.[30] These books can also reveal the authors' desire to establish a shrine's legitimacy and provide insight on the political contexts surrounding a cult.[31] More generally, the miracles are thought to reflect cultural preoccupations to which devotees were sensitive.[32] To the best of my knowledge, however, art historians have not studied such texts to investigate what the

26. See Fantoni, "Il culto," 780–81; Menchi, "Francesco Bocchi."

27. See Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 274–76; Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, *4r–*5r.

28. See Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 281. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, a1r–a4v.

29. See Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, *4v: "a la quelle V. A. porte une si grande & ardente devotion" (for whom your highness has such a great and ardent devotion). See also Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, a1v.

30. See, for example, Holmes, "Elusive Origins."

31. On the "sanitized" account of an image, see Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 79, and on competing interests around cults, see Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, ch. 2. Matthews-Grieco argues that Lottini's book promoted the prestige of the cult, and that paintings of its miracles (later engraved in Lottini's book) respond to Counter-Reformation concerns (Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 280).

32. For a recent example, see Meneghin, "Miracles."

kinds of miracles the image performed—either their range or the patterns and repetitions that appear—can tell us about the nature of the image's agency.

This oversight may be due to the assumption that, though these books reveal devotees' concerns, they seemingly do not demonstrate much about the Virgin's agency other than her infinite power. Lottini, in the preface to his *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, in fact confirms that the range of the Virgin's miracles illustrates her power. While humbly stating he is unworthy to write his book, he claims that just as no one can comprehend the entirety of the Virgin's eminence, so it is true that "no one could be found who could become the writer of all her miracles."[33] On the following page, however, Lottini breaks down her miracles into various categories, demonstrating that they are not beyond analysis. They can be divided into four kinds, he writes: "of benefit, of true knowledge, of admonition, and of vendetta."[34] Most of the miracles in his book are of the first category, he writes, in which God gives "sight to the blind, speech to the mute, and life to cadavers."[35] He goes on to say that the effect of reading about such miracles is great, and as a result one "feels inside […] the highest vigor benignly instilling itself."[36] Despite the range of the Virgin's miracles, Lottini believed it was reasonable to analyze them, and indeed he states he has done so to ensure his selection will move the reader. Clearly, the published miracles could shape readers' perceptions of the Annunziata fresco, and it is therefore pertinent to ask what they can tell us about the painting's power. The question of how successfully these books molded the public view of the painting—or how closely they reflect the broadly held devotional beliefs of their readers—will be addressed below.

This article begins by investigating prevailing beliefs about the agency of miracle-working images and considers how these theories can help us understand the power of the Annunziata fresco. I pay special attention to the theories of agency proposed by Alfred Gell, who has brought renewed attention to the theory of sympathetic magic. I do not propose to explain all the miracles attributed to the shrine, but I do aim to elucidate some unifying

33. "persona alcuna trovar non puossi, che di tutti li Miracoli di lei si facci Scrittore"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 2.

34. "di giovamento, di verace notizia, di ammonizione, e di vendetta"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 3.

35. "porgendo il veder a' ciechi, la favella a' mutoli, e la vita a' cadaveri"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 5.

36. "dentro di se non sento […] gli altissimi vigori benignamente infondersi"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 5.

themes that may have shaped beliefs about the image's agency. In so doing, I am not suggesting that the image had a single "specialization," which can be proven by a statistical study of its miracles (though the issue of statistics is taken up in more depth toward the end of the article). Rather, I am proposing how certain themes within these texts, particularly within Lottini's book, may have come together according to pre-established devotional ideas.

Agency and likeness

The question driving much research into miracle-working images is this: How can viewers believe an inanimate object possesses supernatural agency? This section discusses theories about the source of a miraculous image's agency to assess how this might be related to the acts the image later accomplishes.

An early analysis of the phenomenon, invoked at times by art historians, is James George Frazer's discussion of sympathetic magic. In a cross-cultural study, he posited that through the sympathetic magic of likeness or contagion, actors are believed to have power over people and things through objects and images they resemble or have touched.[37] For example, Frazer asserts that a belief in sympathetic magic might lead to the conviction that a person can be harmed if their image is destroyed because the visual similarity linking the person to their image creates a pathway upon which to exert agency.

A similar phenomenon is discussed by Alfred Gell in his exploration of idolatry in *Art and Agency*, a book that stirred renewed interest in sympathetic magic.[38] Gell proposes that within human networks, otherwise inanimate art objects become imbued with what he calls "seconday agency."[39] According to his theory, images are not actually able to perform acts; rather, viewers attribute to images the power to accomplish things according to cultural beliefs.[40] In Gell's system, for example, a miracle-working image would be thought to

37. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, ch. 3. See also Freedberg, *Power of Images*, ch. 11.

38. See especially Gell, *Art and Agency*, ch. 7.

39. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 19–21.

40. Gell describes different cultural beliefs, focusing specifically on a viewer's ability to "abduct" agency from works of art (Gell, *Art and Agency*, 14–16).

possess agency because of various beliefs about its sacred power; the image aquires agency within the network of human beliefs surrounding it.[41]

Looking at a cross-cultural selection of examples, Gell explores the cultural beliefs that might lead viewers to believe an image has life or consciousness of some kind dwelling within it; this is the section of his theory of idolatry that is most applicable to miracle-working images, since devotees clearly believe a miraculous image could in some way perceive or respond to their prayers.[42] Drawing on Frazer, he proposes that idolatry may be a form of sympathetic magic, wherein viewers believe the power of a person or deity flows through their likeness. He suggests, for instance, that when a culture idolizes a fertility stone, it does so because the stone is believed to "objectify growth […] because it is […] something produced by that growth"—that is, because it is a product of nature.[43] Because the stone "objectifies" or represents the fertility of nature, it has the agency to create fertility. In this theory, therefore, a miracle-working image possess agency because it "distributes" the personhood of the holy figure it represents: for example, if an icon has the appearance of the Virgin, it can thus disseminate her power.

Art historians have also argued that beliefs in the power of a miracle-working image originate with the likeness it bears. In his influential book, *Likeness and Presence*, Belting writes that the "image derives its authority […] from the authentic appearance of a holy person,"[44] a statement which has found consensus among art historians.[45] The origin legends of several early miracle-working images affirm their status as true likenesses: many images of the Virgin and Child were believed to have been painted by St. Luke, making them both contact relics of Luke and authentic likenesses of the Virgin.[46] Even the Annunziata image was once said to have been painted by the apostle.[47]

41. See, for instance, Gell, *Art and Agency*, 21–22 on agency as relational and existing only if the "patient" (the person on whom the agency is exerted) perceives it.

42. Gell, *Art and Agency*, ch. 7.

43. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 108.

44. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 30.

45. Bacci, *Pro remedio animae*, ch. 1; Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 30–32; Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 25–26.

46. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 57–59.

47. Holmes, "Elusive Origins," 103; Oen, "Origins of a Miraculous Image," 9. On Michelangelo's authentication of the image's divine nature, see Frangenberg, "Style of the Divine Hand," 139.

The transformative power of likeness can be illustrated by the experiences of visitors to the Annunziata image. In his book on the fresco, Francesco Bocchi describes how pilgrims made "ardent sighs" and were "lifted by a divine vigor" when the painting was unveiled, as though seeing the image was miraculous in itself.[48] Such experiences recall the powers of medieval saints, whose appearance could sometimes cause immediate conversion.[49] In these cases, in which sight has a visceral, transformative effect, the power of an authentic likeness might also be compared to the sympathetic magic of contagion, in which objects have agency over things they have touched. Gell argues that likeness and contagion might in fact be closely related in believers' minds because seeing something, or a likeness of it, is to come into sensuous contact with that thing, much in the way that viewers were transformed by viewing the Annunziata image.[50]

Despite agreeing on the importance of likeness, scholars do not generally connect miraculous images to sympathetic magic, nor are they in accord on the relevance of Gell's or Frazer's analysis to Renaissance art. While some Renaissance historians invoke Gell, others take issue with the universalizing nature of his theory and find it fits awkwardly with the early modern context.[51]

48. "con ardenti sospiri […] come pare da vigor divino sollevato"; Bocchi, *Sopra l'immagine*, 53. Also see Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, 42; Frangenberg, "Style of the Divine Hand," 137.

49. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 435.

50. Gell, *Art and Agency*, 105. It is difficult to assess to what degree contemporary viewers were reacting to the actual visual qualities of the fresco (i.e., to what degree the image was actually perceived as a compelling illusion of the Virgin's presence), and to what extent viewers had been conditioned to perceive the image differently as a result of stories claiming it was an authentic likeness. The complicated relationship between likeness, illusion, and "presence" has been considered by Maniura and Shepherd in the introduction to *Presence*, where they observe how presence can be manifest through objects that are not visually similar to their referent. While some scholars might strive to locate the visual quality that aroused the devotion of Annunziata viewers, the boundary between the visual appearance of the fresco and its mythology was blurred by being literally covered and enframed by ornaments that visually reinforced the legends told about it. The work of dissecting how appearances and discourse intersect to create the experience of presence is beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to note how even the apparently simple claim that the image was an authentic likeness of the Virgin was the result of the complex cultural practices of reacting to the image's visual qualities, as well as the generated responses it received in both words and material offerings.

51. For example, Megan Holmes objects to Gell's theory of art objects having a mind/body duality (Holmes, "Miraculous Images"), and Garnett and Rosser criticize Gell's theory for universalism (Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 19). In favor of Gell, see van Eck, *Art, Agency and Living Presence*; Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, ch. 4.

Frazer's theories have equally been criticised, so if we connect the magic of likeness to the power of miracle-working images, as I am suggesting we might, some qualifications must be made.[52]

Scholars have objected, for instance, to the fact that Frazer's theory does not explain why people believe in magic so much as assert that it is a primitive technology based on mistaken beliefs about the natural world.[53] Despite the validity of this criticism, others have found that it does not negate the descriptive value of his analysis. For example, after his lengthy criticism of Frazer, Edward Evans-Pritchard asserts that "Frazer's division of magic into 'homeopathic' and 'contagious' […] serves as a basis for still further analysis of the symbolism of magic."[54] The potential usefulness of Frazer's categories is further supported by the fact that at least one scholar of miracle-working images has found it hard to avoid mentioning him when describing devotional practices: writing about rituals performed with prints of a miraculous image, Robert Maniura concedes that the practices "inevitably recall James Frazer's treatment of magic," which, though imperfect, is "undeniably felicitous in descriptive terms."[55] We might ask, therefore, what we can learn from the fact that early modern acts of devotion are so often reminiscent of Frazer's categories, even if we do not wish to adopt his view of sympathetic magic as a failed technology.

It is on these grounds that I make use of Gell's and Frazer's theories: not to propose that early modern beliefs can be explained by them, but to use them as descriptive tools that may help identify patterns of belief around miraculous images. My approach is guided by Evans-Pritchard, who, in critiquing Frazer, argues that scholars should interrogate the social context in which likeness and contagion become ritually significant. "It is the social situation which gives them [associations of likeness and contagion] meaning," Evans-Pritchard wrote, "which even gives them the possibilities of expression."[56] What might be learned, therefore, by examining connections between the likeness of the image

52. Criticisms have been laid out succinctly in Evans-Pritchard, *History of Anthropological Thought*, 132–52.

53. Drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein's criticisms of Frazer, see Maniura, "Absent Saint," 651. Maniura also considers magic as expression, first discussed by John Beattie (see Beattie, "Ritual and Social Change," 68). See also Maniura, "Ex Votos"; Evans-Pritchard, *History of Anthropological Thought*.

54. Evans-Pritchard, *History of Anthropological Thought*, 152.

55. Maniura, "Absent Saint," 650.

56. Evans-Pritchard, *History of Anthropological Thought*, 150.

and the acts it performs? Is there any relationship between what the image shows and that over which it has power? By invoking Frazer's theory here, I do not mean to take on his entire argument about magic as a failed technology, but only the descriptive terms he uses that correlate the agency of inanimate objects with their likeness in certain circumstances. I therefore ask what we can learn about the agency of the miraculous image of the Annunciation by examining the stories told about it during the Counter-Reformation through the lens of Frazer's descriptive terms.

While art historians in general do not correlate a specific power with the Annunziata image's likeness, there are instances when the subject of the fresco has a close relationship to the miracle it produces. For example, in Machiavelli's comedy *La mandragola*, set in 1504 Florence, a young wife, Lucrezia, is instructed to make devotions at the SS. Annunziata to help conceive a child. Her husband reports that "when a neighbour told her that she would become pregnant if she made a pledge to hear the first mass of the Servite Friars every morning for forty days, she did so."[57] Since the miraculous image is mentioned in the play, it is reasonable to assume the SS. Annunziata was chosen so that Lucrezia could be near the famous painting.[58]

Considering the theory of sympathetic magic, an image of the Virgin's miraculous pregnancy is a logical icon for prayers for fertility. But how can we be certain that devotees connected the subject of fertility in this image with their prayers for their children? Is the "likeness" meaningful in this context, as Evans-Pritchard might ask? We know, for instance, that the relic of the Virgin's girdle, preserved in Prato, was associated with devotions around pregnancy, suggesting that close contact with Mary's miraculous womb had imbued the relic with special power,[59] but was the Annunziata image percieved in a similar way? In fact, there is considerable evidence that the painting was frequently petitioned for fertility—if we take fertility to mean "reproductive success" broadly speaking, encompassing the conception, gestation, and delivery of a healthy heir. For instance, inventories of ex-votos left at the shrine list several

57. Machiavelli, "La Mandragola," 89–90.

58. Machiavelli, "La Mandragola," 110. See also Haas, *Renaissance Man,* 31.

59. See Rosa, "Dalla 'religione civica.'"

in the form of babies, strongly suggesting gratitude for fertility, safe childbirth, or the cure of infant illness.[60]

Marcello Fantoni has also argued that the devotions of the Medici family—who were primary patrons of the miraculous image since the mid-fifteenth century—emphasized their dynastic concerns,[61] and convent records reveal examples of devotions for their reproductive success. In 1578, Duke Francesco I de' Medici presented an ex-voto to the shrine representing his first son Filippo, who had been ill following his birth.[62] Friars prayed before the unveiled image in 1590 when the wife of Ferdinando I de' Medici, Christine de Lorraine (to whom, as we saw, two of the books on the Annunziata are dedicated), was delivering her first child.[63] Moreover, several documents attest to Christine's devotion to this image for fertility and reproductive success: in 1593, before her third confinement, the Duchess prayed to the image for a healthy male child,[64] and then, not long after the birth of her son Carlo, she made devotions to the chapel on the feast day of the Annunciation, 25 March 1595, offering, among other things, a gold brocade cloth.[65] Finally, after his son, Cosimo II, recovered from an illness, Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici donated a silver *paliotto* to the shrine.[66]

Three published stories also demonstrate the Virgin's help to infants and parents. In one, Lottini relates how Lorenzo de' Medici and Clarice Orsini were in great distress when their first-born son Piero became ill a few days after being born.[67] They prayed to the Annunziata image and vowed that if

60. See Dina, "Da un inventario," 264, 268, 276, 281, 284.

61. See Fantoni, "Il culto."

62. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual*, 146. The archival source is Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Corporazioni Religiose Soppresse dal Governo Francese (henceforth ASF, CRSGF), 119, 53, 124v.

63. The devotions were evidently answered since the Duchess was not in labour for long. ASF, CRSGF, 119, 53, 184r.

64. Sanger, *Art, Gender, and Religious Devotion*, 45, citing a document in the ASF. On Christine's broader devotion to the SS. Annunziata, see Sanger, *Art, Gender, and Religious Devotion*, 95.

65. ASF, CRSGF, 119, 53, 239v. Note that if the painting enjoyed a reputation for helping pregnant mothers, this might have been strengthened by being so near the foundling hospital and orphanage in the same piazza.

66. See Iarocci, "Santissima Annunziata," 27, citing Tonini, *Guida Storico-Illustrativa,* 93; the relevant document is reproduced at 298–99.

67. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 63–65. Lottini names the mother Clarice Orsina and the son Pietro.

Piero should return to health, they would offer the shrine a silver statue of his weight.[68] Another story involving fertility concerns the Duchess of Mantua; even though the tale is more precisely about an illness she suffers, Lottini stresses it prevented her from conceiving a child.[69]

The most elaborate published miracle relating to childbirth is neither about a sterile couple, nor the healing of an ill child. Rather, it is the miracle of a woman whose child is born with dark skin, leading her husband to suspect she has committed adultery with a dark-skinned servant. As proof of the mother's fidelity and innocence, however, the Virgin miraculously changes the infant's skin from dark to light.[70] As Holmes has shown, before being attributed to the Annunziata image, a similar story circulated in manuscripts and printed books of the Virgin's miracles.[71] In the story attributed to the Annunziata fresco, the husband suspects the wife of adultery with a Moor servant and, in his rage, suffocates the child and forces his wife to drink poison; after the wife prays to the Virgin, however, the child is discovered alive and white, and the couple reconcile.[72]

Though it is not a typical childbirth story, this narrative does concern pregnancy, and the miracle performed ensures the reproductive success of the father, since the child is saved, and the child's identity as a legitimate heir becomes known. The story can also be linked to the reproductive hopes of real Florentines: in the accounts of both Ferrini and Lottini, the story is connected to Francesco I de' Medici, who is said to have repeated this tale frequently.[73] Ferrini published his claim that the story was particularly dear to Francesco's heart in 1593, during the early years of the reign of his brother, Ferdinando I de' Medici. On one level, this anecdote serves to legitimize the miracle by

68. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 65. The equivalency between the weight of the child and the statue was common and is another instance of likeness connecting the prototype to its image. Although it had once been standard to offer the child itself to the monastery, it became more common to offer a precious material of the same weight. Maniura, "Absent Saint," 629–30. See also Freedberg, *Power of Images*, ch. 7; Hoeniger, "Child Miracles," 323, citing Finucane, *Rescue of the Innocents*.

69. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 52ff.

70. Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, 118r; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 21.

71. Holmes, "How a Woman"; Gripkey, "Mary Legends," 40. The miracle can be found, for example, in chapter 30 of *Li miracoli della Madonna* (Venice, 1490).

72. Holmes, "How a Woman," 341ff.

73. Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, 122r. See also Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 25.

Fig. 4. Jacques Callot, after Matteo Rosselli. "Una Gentildonna, volendo suo Marito per sospetto di rotta fede che ella morisse; si raccomanda alla NUNZIATA, e il Bambino da le partorito nero, divien biano" (A gentlewoman, whose husband wanted her to die because he suspected she had been unfaithful, appeals to the Nunziata). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 20. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0036.

tracing its antiquity to a manuscript owned by a prominent individual; as others have noted, the verification of miracles was an important concern during the Counter-Reformation.[74] The inclusion of this story may also have been calculated to resonate with contemporary Medici issues: both Ferrini and Lottini's books were clearly published with the Medici in mind since, as noted above, both include dedications to Christine de Lorraine, wife of Ferdinando I de' Medici.[75] Most obviously, readers in Florence would likely have known that Francesco died in 1587 without a legitimate heir, thus allowing his brother to succeed him. Although Francesco was survived by a son, he was born of the Duke's mistress Bianca Cappello (though she later became his wife).[76] While it is only speculation, the assertion that Francesco meditated on a story about the birth of a male heir might have resonated with public perceptions of him.

In Lottini's book, this story is one of the longest, and also the first illustrated miracle after the origin tale, suggesting perhaps a conscious desire to shape perception of the image around this miracle (Fig. 4). Could early readers of this story have interpreted it as a miracle about fertility? Though at first glance it appears to concern fidelity more than fertility, it in fact relates to well-known beliefs about pregnancy. The miracle of the Black child is clearly a reimagining of a story from Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*, which expressed the widely held belief that visual species apprehended through the eyes could impress themselves upon expectant mothers' souls and shape their unborn foetuses.[77] In *La comare o ricoglitrice*, for instance, the sixteenth-century doctor Scipione Mercurio discusses this story, describing how the "beautiful youth Charikleia was born from a black father and mother"[78] because her mother looked at pictures "of white men and women," particularly an image of Andromeda that pleased her

74. See, for example, Waterworth, *Canons and Decrees,* 236: "No new miracles are to be acknowledged, or new relics recognized, unless the said bishop has taken cognizance and approved thereof." Garnett and Rosser discuss an example of the legitimization of a miracle-working image (Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 73–80).

75. See Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 281.

76. See Benzoni, "Francesco I de' Medici." It was believed by some that this son was not in fact truly Francesco's offspring—a belief that benefitted Ferdinando by diminishing competing claims for title of Grand Duke; see Cantagalli, "Bianca Cappello."

77. See Gélis, *History of Childbirth*, 53–56.

78. "bellissima giovane Charichia nacque bianca di padre, e madre negri"; Mercurio, *La comare o ricoglitrice*, 46. See also Doniger, "Black and White Babies."

so much "she became pregnant with a daughter similar to her."[79] Mercurio lists reiterations of this story and draws the general rule that "a strong imagination, and the fixed thought of the woman has the power to form the body of the creature in the similitude and image of the desired thing."[80] Childbirth trays, given to wives while pregnant, and which picture harmonious birthing rooms and healthy baby boys, are evidence of the popularity of the theory of parental imagination. Scholars suggest that the imagery was meant to both reassure the wife and induce the successful delivery of a male heir (the images have also been compared to Frazer's views on magical thinking).[81]

In his account of the story, Ferrini confirms that the miracle of the Black child must be understood through the theory of parental imagination. He states that adultery is not the only thing that can produce offspring with different skin colour: the thoughts of the mother, he writes, can also be the cause since, "when she is in the last stages of pregnancy thinking of something," these thoughts can impress themselves "on the conceived creature of her womb."[82] Therefore, while fidelity is a prominent theme in the story, it is perhaps more pointedly about common beliefs regarding pregnancy.

As noted, Lottini emphasizes the story of the Black child both by making it one of the longest and the first illustrated miracle following the origin tale; this may have been calculated to please the Medici, but could also be because the story is in fact an archetypical example of the SS. Annunziata image's power. In the late sixteenth century, the belief linking conception and imagination underpinned broader beliefs about the value of sacred art in Counter-Reformation Italy. The cardinal (turned art theorist) Gabriele Paleotti, for instance, in a book aimed at expanding upon the Council of Trent's decrees on images, argued that an image could shape the soul of a viewer, remarking that "such strong impressions may be made on our fantasy by the various concepts it apprehends out of the forms of things, [and] that those forms leave alterations

79. "erano dipinte molte attioni d'huomini, e di donne bianche […] che restò gravida d'una fanciulla simile a lei"; Mercurio, *La comare o ricoglitrice*, 46.

80. "la forte imagination, & il fisso pensiero della donna ha forza di segnare nel corpo della creatura la somiglianza, e l'imagine della cosa desiderata"; Mercurio, *La comare o ricoglitrice*, 47.

81. Musacchio, *Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 140.

82. "Ma anco dal pensiero della donna, quando si trova in quelli ultimi termini del parto pensando à qualche cose, il cui pensiero […] s'imprime talmente nella concetta creatura del ventre suo." Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, 121r.

and striking signs on the bodies of persons."[83] Things seen impress upon and change the soul, Paleotti argued, which he interpreted as a directive for artists to create clear and morally and spiritually edifying images as decided at Trent. In his roughly contemporaneous treatise on Donatello's sculpture of St. George, Francesco Bocchi defended a similar view by recalling a variation on the story of parental imagination. The power of images, he wrote, is evident in a story of a woman who "held in her *fantasia* the image of an Ethiopian [man, and] […] gave birth little afterward to a […] black child."[84] Bocchi reiterated this belief in his later treatise on the Annunziata image, in which he stated that the image could impress itself on viewers' souls and memories "not for only many days, nor even many years, but in all [viewers] lives forever a desire shining […] with divine thoughts."[85] The miracle of the Black child is therefore both a miracle of child-saving, and also emblematic of the Annunziata's power to convert by being seen: Because she can transform viewers by impressing herself on their souls, what better icon to reverse the impressions of a pregnant mother on her child?

A story about the resemblance of an offspring to its parent might also have recalled certain Counter-Reformation beliefs regarding the legitimacy of images. Bernice Iarocci has noted that in Arcangelo Giani's 1604 biography of the Servite Filippo Benizi (discussed further below), the similarity between the Annunziata image and a painting of Christ said to be from the time of St. Peter was discussed to establish the authenticity of the Florentine fresco; the family resemblance between the images proved the fresco had been created by a supernatural force.[86] Iarocci connects this story with ideas promoted by Counter-Reformation authors such as Federico Borromeo, who noted it was proper in images to make the Virgin resemble her son; she further suggests that by emphasizing Mary's closeness to Christ, the resemblance between mother and son may also have buttressed Catholic defenses of Marian devotion against

83. Paleotti, *Discourse*, 120. "viene affirmato da' filosofi e medici, dicendo che, secondo i varii concetti che apprende la nostra fantasia dalle forme delle cose, si fanno in essa così salde impressioni, che da quelle ne derivano alterazioni e segni notabili nei corpi"; Paleotti, "Discorso," 230.

84. "tenendo in sua fantasia l'imagine di uno Etiopo […] partorì poco appresso un bambino tutto a quello simile e tutto nero"; Bocchi, "Eccellenza," 148.

85. "dura […] non dirò molti giorni, ne molti anni, ma & vive sempre in tutti una voglia accesa di divini pensieri, & che arde insiememente"; Bocchi, *Sopra l'immagine*, 20.

86. See Iarocci, "Santissima Annunziata," 22–23.

Protestan objections.[87] It may therefore have been pertinent to open a collection of miracles with a story about family resemblance, since it recalls the similitude Mary shares with her own son, Christ.

The likeness between the Virgin and Christ and the accused mother of the story and her infant did not end there. The young infant, for example, is made to go three days without food, wrapped in a cloth, a detail that may recall the enshrouding and entombment of Christ's body for three days.[88] Also, when the mother heard the cries of her son, Lottini writes that it caused a stinging knife to pierce her heart, an image that likewise mirrors Mary's sorrow at Christ's crucifixion.[89] By connecting the mother and her son to Christ and Mary, the reader sees again how the power of the image replicates the experience of the Virgin and connects to devotional ideas circulating after the Council of Trent.

While the great variety of miracles performed by the Annunziata image would seem to indicate there was no logic connecting the image with the kinds of prayers it answered, there is evidence suggesting miracles relating to childbirth and fertility were connected to the image's likeness. The following section thus investigates the possibility that the painting had a reputation for "specialization" in more depth by looking at the cult of the saints, some of whom were believed to specialize in certain forms of intercession.

Agency and origins

Scholars have often considered the cult of the saints and their relics as adjacent to the phenomenon of miraculous images, noting that both were objects of similar forms of devotion and pilgrimage; some have even proposed that images

87. See Iarocci, "Santissima Annunziata," 72–75. On Catholic responses to Protestant objections to the Virgin's status, Iarocci cites Graef, *Mary*, 2:17–30; see, in particular, Graef's discussion of Lawrence of Brindisi (Graef, *Mary*, 2:27–30).

88. "e sotto ad un pannaccio coperto, senza latte quasi due giorni […] Ma già nel terzo dì […]" (and covered beneath a rag, without milk nearly two days […] And on the third day […]); Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 23.

89. "E quante volte ella piagnere il sentiva; tante da pungente coltello passasi il cuore sentivasi" (And as many times as she heard his tears; so she felt her heart struck by a pricking knife). Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 23.

increasingly absorbed reverence to relics in the Renaissance.[90] A miraculous image could also be considered a relic if a saint had created it; likewise, an image created miraculously—an *acheiropoieton*, or an image *non-manufactum*, not made by human hands—could be considered the relic of a miraculous event. Such was the case, as noted above, with the Annunziata image, which according to legend was completed by an angel while the painter slept. While some scholars draw attention to the independent traditions of veneration surrounding images and relics, few would deny that they intersect.[91] When considering whether miraculous images had specialized agency, it is therefore instructive to look to the cult of the saints, where there is a history of specialized intercession.

The patronage of saints for specific forms of intercession, sometimes called "auxiliary patronage," arose at the end of the Middle Ages, Ottó Gecser suggests, becoming more prominent after the thirteenth century.[92] In contrast to earlier forms of patronage, largely constructed around a "territorial logic of patronage," auxiliary patronage focused "on problems instead of social affiliations."[93] So, St. Anthony could help sufferers of St. Anthony's fire, St. Margaret could help with childbirth, St. Sebastian with plague, and so on.

It is not entirely clear what brought about auxiliary patronage. One theory holds that St. Sebastian, for instance, was invoked against plague because he was shot with arrows, which in the Old Testament were, as Louise Marshall notes, symbols of "sudden, divinely-inflicted misfortune, disease and death."[94] Sebastian, however, was healed of his wounds and survived his initial martyrdom, which may have aroused the idea he had the power to heal others.

In the early sixteenth century, Martin Luther wrote a critique of auxiliary veneration in which he unwittingly supported the belief that saints' specialized

90. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 301–3. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 35ff. For an opposing view, see Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 48.

91. Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 48.

92. Gecser, "Holy Helpers," 200. I am not referring to the cult of the fourteen Holy Helpers, which, as Gecser shows, did not seem to originate "in the phenomenon of auxiliary patronage nor to have been particularly representative of its late medieval scope" (Gecser, "Holy Helpers," 193). See also Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 353ff.

93. Gecser, "Holy Helpers," 176, 200, referring to Brown, *Cult of the Saints*, 41.

94. See Marshall, "Manipulating the Sacred," 488, 493. See also Gecser, "Intercession and Specialization," 79.

powers should reflect their life experiences.[95] He wrote, "Sebastian [is called] 'Sanct Pastian' [or *Bastian*, which sounds like 'Pestian' from *Pest*] as if he worked against the plague alone, while nothing can be read about pestilence in his Life."[96] While Luther opposed auxiliary patronage, he appears to say that, had Sebastian actually survived the plague, his power over illness would be more logical. Thomas More also criticized the belief in 1531, writing that "St. Roche we set to see to the great sickness [i.e., the plague] because he had a sore," thereby also equating the saint's intercessory powers with his illness.[97] While both writers disapproved of auxiliary patronage, they nonetheless connect the saints' specialized powers to their lived experiences.

The power of auxiliary patronage, therefore, often reflects the origins or experiences of the saint in question. This phenomenon can also be described in terms of sympathetic magic: the saint has power over situations that resemble their own experience, or perhaps devotees seek contact with saints who have experienced miracles relevant to their needs. Whether viewed through the lens of Frazer's theory of sympathetic magic or not, the descriptive terms of origin and contact appear relevant to early modern devotion. Contact relics are created by being touched to primary relics, thereby contagiously spreading their *virtus*.[98] The power of miracle-working images could also be spread this way; for instance, when the Annunziata image was reproduced for Carlo Borromeo, it was copied by placing a page directly over the image, as though touching the original fresco would create not only an accurate copy but also a more powerful one.[99]

Authentic likenesses were clearly so valued in part because they allowed contact with an original source of agency. Jane Garnett and Gervase Rosser, for instance, have discussed how visual qualities could convey sacred or prestigious origins, writing that "nothing recommended an image for cult status as much as a reputation of an Eastern origin," explaining that this "lent them religious

95. Gecser, "Holy Helpers," 184.

96. Gecser, "Holy Helpers," 184. "Sic et Sebastianus 'sanct pastian' quasi pro peste idem valeat solus, cum nihil in eius vita de pestilentia legatur." Luther, "Decem praecepta," 412.

97. More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 226–27 (modernized), quoted in Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 354.

98. Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 244.

99. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 54.

authority."[100] Holmes has likewise discussed how the apparent "archaic" or "antique" qualities of an image could become "a signifier for a venerable tradition, lending prestige to the cult."[101] While Holmes cautions that age was "just one dimension," she nonetheless provides evidence that it was important to caretakers of the Annunziata image, who gave the fresco an earlier date, perhaps to augment its authority.[102]

If a saint's life experience conferred specialized agency upon them, could the origin of an image do the same? There is some evidence this may be the case. The Madonna of Impruneta, for instance, was what Trexler called Florence's "Rain Image."[103] It was called into the city in a ritual procession when Florence was threatened by too much or too little rain. While it is true the city appealed to the image for other reasons as well—generally those that threatened the population as a whole—chronicles attest to the fact it was brought into the city specially to safeguard against weather that threatened crops.[104] Matteo Villani, for instance, wrote that a procession in 1354 was organized when Florentines feared "losing the fruits of the earth."[105] Since the image had special agency over the land, it is perhaps appropriate that the panel was found in the earth. The people of Impruneta, wanting to build a church, asked God to indicate the appropriate location; they then began digging in the place where oxen carrying building stones had stopped, discovering the painting buried there in the earth.[106]

The hagiographical book of 1643, recounting the miracles of the Madonna of Madia, an icon in the city of Monopoli in Apulia, illustrates a similar relationship between origins and agency. The image's origins begin with the rebuilding of the cathedral, which remained unfinished for lack of wood.[107] The Virgin appeared in a vision to a citizen, saying the desired wood could be found

100. Garnett and Rosser, *Spectacular Miracles*, 28.

101. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 159ff.

102. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 161.

103. Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience," 11.

104. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 121, 127.

105. "temendo di perdere i frutti della terra"; Villani, *Croniche di Giovanni*, 125, quoted in Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience," 14. See also Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 119.

106. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 121. The legend is found in Guasti, *Capitoli della Compagnia*, 10–11.

107. Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 100ff. Note that this book has pagination errors; citations refer to the numbers printed on the pages. Tripputi indicates the date of the image's discovery was 1117 (Tripputi, "Le tavolette votive").

at the port, where it was soon discovered in the form of a raft with the image of the Virgin and Child on top.[108] Various themes in this story then reappear in the image's subsequent miracles. Of the book's nine miraculous events, for instance, four are directly related to water, especially floating on or being saved from it.[109] A study of later ex-voto tablets given to the shrine also indicates that many represent shipwrecks, suggesting again a relationship between the image's watery origins and its subsequent agency.[110] While these are isolated examples, considering the evidence of auxiliary patronage, it is reasonable to ask whether an image's agency might be connected with its origins.

Can the origin story of the SS. Annunziata image help us to understand the scope of her miracles? While there were numerous versions of the origin story (including the suggestion that it was painted by St. Luke, noted above), the stories published by Ferrini and Lottini share similar features: The painter, often described as pious or simple, is overwhelmed when he begins painting the face of the Virgin, and so goes to confession and communion to clear his conscience.[111] Returning to work, he still fails to complete the image and falls asleep in front of his work, only to awaken finding it has been completed by God, or an angel. In Lottini's version of this story, it is clear the painter has problems translating his imagined picture of the Virgin to the wall (Fig. 5). Lottini asks how it would be possible for the painter to render his imaginings: How could he create an image

> which was conceived in his thoughts to be so much beyond the limits of all beauty? And with what majesty could he paint with a brush the face of

108. "i travi erano di numero crenta [sic] uno contesti, e posti in forma di Nave" (the beams [of wood] were thirty-one in number arranged and placed in the form of a ship); Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 104.

109. Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 123. Two are about people falling into a well; in one, the victim is found floating over the water when he is rescued: "e trovò, che il giovanetto cascato sedeva sopra l'acque" (and he found that the fallen youth sat on the water); Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 125. For the other well miracle, see Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 129. A further miracle relates how the city was relieved from a drought when a downpour came after prayers were made (Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 127ff.), and a fourth story involves a sailor caught in a storm (Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 131). Of the other five miracles, one mentions a storm and another involves thunder bolts, continuing the link between water, storms, and weather events (Glianes, *Historia e miracoli*, 130, 126).

110. Tripputi, "Le tavolette votive," 76.

111. Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, 195–217. On earlier versions of the origin story, see Holmes, "Elusive Origins."

> the great woman, elected to generate the true Salvation; or, really, with his hand to reach the high place of his devoted fantasies. Finally, […] [he] remained on thoughts of the great subject […] and fell asleep.[112]

While at first glance the origin story seems unrelated to the childbirth miracle examined above, Lottini in fact contrasts the Virgin's power to "generate" the Son of God with the painter's difficulties creating the image he has "conceived" in his thoughts, thus drawing a parallel between visualization and reproduction. Even though the painter can imagine the Virgin's beauty, the task of reproducing it is as impossible as generating Christ. The origin story also revolves around issues of sight and imagination, which, as seen above, are pertinent to beliefs about reproduction.

The relationship between the image's origins and its reputation for ensuring successful reproduction can be appreciated by examining another fertility miracle attributed to the Virgin more generally, rather than to a specific image, recorded in two Italian manuscripts.[113] In this tale, a Venetian woman is "very upset and melancholy" because her husband keeps "many female friends to be able to have children, since his wife was not able."[114] One day, having "tried all the medicines there are in the world,"[115] she decides to pray to the Virgin for a child:

112. "E di vero, come stato sofficiente sarebb' egli a cotanta cosa condurre, quanta nel suo pensiero, oltr'ogni termine bellissima conceputa si era? E di qual maestà effigiar co' pennelli potea la faccia della gran Donna, eletta a generar la vera Salute; o vero con la mano aggiugnere, dov'alzate si erano sue divote fantasie? Al fine, […] in se stesso recatosi, e sù'l pensiero del gran soggetto fermatosi […] si addormentò." Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 13.

113. Gripkey, "Mary Legends, Part II," 33ff. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale Firenze (henceforth BNCF), Panciatichiano XL, fols. 86–89; BCNF, Palatino LXXIII, fols. 212–15.

114. "suo maritto teneva molte amiche per potere avere figliuoli inpercio che di questa sua donna none poteva avere niuno e questa sua donna sisenedava molta ira emolta manichonia"; BNCF, Palatino LXXIII, fol. 212r.

115. "provatto quante medicine sono almondo […] voglio richorrere alla madre di miserichordia"; BNCF, Palatino LXXIII, fol. 212r.

Fig. 5. Jacques Callot. "Nel muro dove Bartolomeo dipinse la NUNZIATA nel MCCLII, il santo Volto da mano divina fu effigiato" (On the wall where Bartolomeo paints the Nunziata in 1252, the holy face was painted by a divine hand). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 10. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0026.

> She cried very hard, since faithfully and with pure heart she said these words in front of the image and figure of the glorious Virgin Mary with her blessed son Jesus Christ. Remaining in such a prayer, she fell asleep, and sleeping she dreamed that she saw a beautiful cage that was filled with birds, among which there was one with golden feathers […].[116]

A saintly man later interprets the vision, informing her that "the bird that had the feathers of gold will be your son, which the Queen of Paradise will give to you."[117]

As in the origin story of the Annunziata image, this tale involves longing for something that is out of reach. The Venetian wife—who suffers from melancholy, often associated with the imagination[118]—longs for a child, just as the painter strains to produce a painting of his internal imagination. Both the wife and the painter engage in acts of prayer and purification, after which they are overcome by sleep. While the painter wakes up to find the painting complete, the wife receives a vision of her child in her sleep. Although the dream vision does not "make" the woman pregnant, it is in some ways the fulfilment of her prayer.

A fertility miracle similar to this story appears in the environment of the Annunziata image, if not directly attributed to it. It occurs in the aforementioned 1604 biography of St. Filippo Benizi, the Servite friar who reportedly had a vision in front of the miraculous image, and whose parents, Iacopo and Albaverde, had difficulty conceiving a child. They had "no hope of succession, and turned to prayer with warm affection, praying to the lord, that for his mercy he deigns to concede them at least one son, and many vows,

116. "e mentre che questa imaginazione levenne silagrimava molto forte inpercio che fedelemente e chonpuro chuore diceva quello parole dinanzialla imagine e figura della grolisa vergine maria chollo suo figliuolo benedetto giesu xpo estando lei chosi inorazione edella sadormento edormendo ella edella sogniava che della vedeva fatta una molta bella ghabbia laquale era tutta piena dighalli tra quale venavea uno cholle penne delloro." BNCF, Palatino LXXIII, fol. 212r.

117. "la ghabbia che voi vedesti nella vostra visione significha che voi facciate delle vostre richezze uno munistiero di monaci e di romiti […] quello ghallo lo quale avea quelle penne doro sara lo vostro figliuolo chella reina di paradiso vidaro che sara santo huomo." BNCF, Palatino LXXIII, fol. 212v.

118. Melancholy artists, for instance, were frequently searching after what they could not visualize, like Paolo Uccello straining after perspectival inventions, or Leonardo trying to paint the perfect face of Christ. Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, 204.

particularly to the mother of God, were made by Albaverde."[119] Once pregnant, Albaverde also has visions that she would "give birth to a great flame."[120] After strenuous prayers, a miraculous pregnancy occurs, bringing visions of the child. Holmes has speculated that the Annunziata image's reputation for healing may in part stem from the fact that Filippo Benizi was a doctor; if the reputation of the saint and the image intersect, we might also expect the image's reputation to be connected to Filippo's miraculous birth.[121] In recent times, in fact, children have been blessed at the SS. Annunziata in the chapel of Fillippo Benizi, again pointing to a lingering relationship between this site, St. Filippo, and childbirth.[122]

Visual perceptions and internal visualizations were fundamental to the reproductive process. As has been seen, women were thought capable of shaping the foetus through their imagination. In ancient and early modern medicine, the male seed was also associated with the visual stimulus that ignites procreation. In his obstetrical text *La commare*, Scipione Mercurio explains that there is a direct link between the generative process and vision:

> They have much sympathy, and concord together, like all other faculties that generate man, no matter how far the distance is between them, that is, the fantasia in the head and the generativa in the testicles […] when the spermatic vessels are filled with seed, there arises from this the imagination of discharging and emptying them, and desiring a woman forms a libidinous imagination; and in the counter [direction], when the thought and the imagination turn with the mind to an amorous thing, then almost instantly (as happens particularly with youths) the genitals

119. "senza alcuna speranza di successione, e ricorrendo con caldo affetto alla orazione pregavano il Signore, che per sua pietà si degnasse conceder loro almeno un Figliuolo, e molti voti particolarmente alla Madre d'Iddio ne fece Albaverde"; Giani, 6.

120. "parve alla Madre […] di partorire una gran Fiamma"; Giani, *Della Historia*, 6.

121. Holmes, *Miraculous Image*, 80.

122. A sign in the church, observed June 2017, notes that the saint "è stato sempre venerato nella sua Firenze per la protezione dell' infanzia" (has always been venerated in his [city of] Florence for his protection of infancy), and that "La Benedizione comunitaria dei bambini viene impartita il 23 di ogni mese, in questa cappella del Santo" (the communal blessing of children is given on the 23rd of every month, in this chapel of the saint).

> enlarge […] and this is that sympathy that there is between one and the other power.[123]

The "concord" Mercurio describes between vision and procreation can be related to the belief that semen flows through the brain. In book 2, chapter 7 of *Generation of Animals*, for instance, Aristotle asserts that "the region about the eyes is, of all the head, the most seminal part; a proof of this is that it alone is visibly changed in sexual intercourse, and those who indulge too much in this are seen to have their eyes sunken in."[124] Albert the Great also wrote that the "whiteness, softness and moistness [of the brain] corresponded to that of semen,"[125] leading naturally to the conclusion that "coitus drains, above all, the brain."[126] This link between the brain and semen was known to Leonardo da Vinci, who in an early anatomical drawing (between 1480 and 1492) illustrated the seminal duct of the penis attached to the mind via the spinal cord.[127]

Given the links between vision, the imagination, and reproduction, it is fitting that a miracle of fertility should be so similar to the origin of the Annunziata image. In fact, Fredrika Jacobs connects conception and painting in her study of the prejudices facing early modern female artists.[128] Jacobs posits that female artists were disadvantaged by the Aristotelian belief that man is the active cause of conception, leading to the notion that women were unable to create the mental images necessary for art, just as they were unable to create semen. Therefore, when the Annunziata painting miraculously

123. "hanno molta simpathia, e convenienza insieme; come tutte l'altre facoltà, che generano l'huomo, quantunque siano di luogo distanti, cioè la Fantasia nella testa, e la generative ne i testicoli; […] e però quando i vasi spermatici sono pieni di seme, sorge da questi l'imaginatione di scaricarli, e di vuotarli, e desiderando la donna, forma una imagination libidinosa; & all'incontro quando il pensiero, e la imagination rivolge cose amorose per la mente, allhora quasi in un subito (come adviene particolarmente ne i giovanni) le parti genital si gonfiano, […] e questa è quella simpathia, che è tra l'una, è l'altra potenza." Mercurio, *La comare o ricoglitrice*, 50. See also Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 83. I discuss the relationship between sight, sexuality, and images in more depth in Stowell, "Purging the Eye."

124. On this passage, see Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 56. See also Stowell, "Purging the Eye," 212–13.

125. Quoted in Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 55.

126. Quoted in Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 56.

127. Noble, DiFrancesco, and Zancani argue that Leonardo later corrected this mistake in a subsequent drawing (Noble, Dario, and Zancani, "Leonardo da Vinci").

128. Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create."

appears—materializing what a male painter struggled to create—it is not unlike a barren woman giving birth. The tale of the birth of the Black child, discussed in the previous section, reiterates this connection by being emphatically about both childbirth and the imagination.

Lottini's book therefore introduces the image to its readers in a very particular way: It shows the image of the Virgin's pregnancy appearing miraculously by overcoming the limitations of the painter's imagination. Likewise, it shows the painting intervening in the pregnancy of a devotee, specifically by reversing the effects of the mother's imaginations. A reader attuned to wider cultural beliefs about the specialized patronage of saints may have understood that when the angel brought out of the painter's imagination what his skill could not produce, the miraculous image obtained special agency over the imagination and other things mediated by it.

Varieties of agency

As noted at the beginning of this article, I do not argue that the Annunziata painting only had agency over fertility and the imagination; the diversity of miracles in these books makes it evident that this was not the case. Nor is my intention to prove that this was the primary "specialization" of the painting. The Annunziata image, which was the object of rich and varied devotions for over two centuries by the time these books were written, must have resonated with devotees in manifold ways. For instance, while arguing that Medici used the image as a focus for devotion around events such as marriage and birth, Fantoni mentions that many of the miracles in Lottini's text relate to battles against Muslims, which may have resonated, for instance, with the famous equestrian statue of Duke Ferdinando in the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata, made with metals obtained from Turkish canons.[129] Thus, Fantoni assumes that one image can have more than one special patronage, and that the image could mean different things at different times. This is not to say, however, that no coherent themes emerge in the devotional literature. To identify one theme does not mean that no others appear in Lottini's text. With this in mind, in the final section of this article I explore how the interlinked themes of fertility and the imagination may have resonated with other miracles in Lottini's *Scelta*

129. Fantoni, "Il culto," 776–77.

d'alcuni miracoli, creating a prominent though not singular theme throughout the book.

Beyond the origin story and the tale of the Black child, the interrelated themes of sight and imagination reappear throughout Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, arguably the most elaborate account of the Annunziata's miracles. Lottini's text shows the fresco's special agency over the area of the mind and imagination including the head as a whole, the eyes and vision specifically, but also mental afflictions. While naturally there are other themes that also appear throughout the text, given the prominence of these issues at strategic points in the book, and given the devotional phenomenon of correlating a saint's biography with their agency (e.g., in the cult of the saints), I propose the text encourages readers to interpret many of the image's miracles as iterations of its origins.

The eighty miracles in Lottini's book cover a considerable range including healing from illness, rescue from attack, liberation from imprisonment, and survival of execution. Cutting across these categories, however, issues relating to the mind, the head, and the eyes are prominent: as discussed in more depth below, there are twenty-five miracles converging around these themes—just over 30 percent of the collection. Again, this is not to say that the area of the mind and imagination is the sole or even principal concern of the text, but merely that it constitutes a significant theme. From the beginning of Lottini's book these themes are emphasized in multiple ways, particularly in longer stories that feature a full-page illustration.[130] For instance, following the origin story, the first illustrated miracle is the tale of the birth of the Black child; the second concerns a man whose head is miraculously reattached after his decapitation (Fig. 6); and the third concerns a man saved from decapitation when his executioner is paralyzed (Fig. 7).

130. On the illustrations, see Matthews-Grieco, "Media, Memory," 281.

Fig. 6. Jacques Callot, after Arsenius Mascagnius (Donato Mascagni). "Ad Antonio, tagliata la testa; miracolosamente si riunisce al busto" (Antonio, whose head has been cut off; miraculously it is reattached to his torso). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 28. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0044.

Fig. 7. Jacques Callot, after Arsenius Mascagnius (Donato Mascagni). "Pietro, in atto per esser decollato, per miracolo apparso nel Carnefice, scampa da morte" (Pietro, about to be decapitated, escapes death by a miracle that appears in the executioner). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 34. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0050.

Fig. 8. Jacques Callot, after Matteo Rosselli. "Libero Niccoló dal ferro, nel quale tenne oppressa la vita in poter de Turchi, passa per lo paese loro, senza che alcun ne faccia motto" (Niccoló freed from the iron [chains] in which his life was held captive in possession of Turkish people, moves through their country without anyone commenting on it). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 90. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0106.

Later in the book, the story of Iacopo and Niccolò, two brothers captured at sea and kept as slaves by a man named Bascià (Fig. 8), introduces the theme of sight in an unusual manner that in many ways resembles the story of the Black child. Niccolò becomes servant to the women of Bascià's house and is soon "held dear by them";[131] in jealousy, Bascià commands him to be enchained.[132] As in the story of the birth of the Black child, this miracle involves a foreign person being made a slave to a woman, which elicits sexual jealousy in the master. Also, in both stories the Virgin intervenes into the physiology of sight. After praying to the Virgin, Niccolò's chains open and he escapes, walking into a room where Bascià is entertaining guests. Miraculously, none "of the invited people […] spoke a word [about Niccolò's appearance]. Only Iacopo his brother, *fixing his eyes* on this happening, without any fear […] accompanied him" (my emphasis).[133] Although Bascià is not blind, the Virgin prevents him from seeing Niccolò, removing his sight much as she did in the story of the Black child, when she removed the mother's accumulated visual impressions on her child's skin. The thematic links between the story of Iacopo and Niccolò and the story of parental imagination is also suggested at the very outset of Lottini's book: the very first unillustrated (and shorter) miracle of the book, which precedes the story of paternal imagination, is a story that is very similar to the tale of Iacopo and Niccolò, thus priming the reader to appreciate the connections between the chapters about the wife accused of adultery and the men taken as slaves.[134]

The miracle of the Queen of Cyprus (Caterina Corner), in which the queen requests to be cleansed of her sexual desire (Fig. 9), can also be correlated within the nexus of sight and the mind.[135] Caterina, Lottini writes, was plagued by sexual urges—"appetite della carne"—that were irresistible.[136] Recognizing the error of her ways, the queen recalled the Annunziata image and asked the

131. "caro da esse tenuto"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 92.

132. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 92.

133. "ne alcuno de' Convitati vi ebbe, e de' Serventi similmente, che di ciò facesse parola. Solo Iacopo suo fratello; affissando pur gli occhi a quel fatto, senza tema alcuna (che pur di gran maraviglia à) seco accompagnandosi, & al medesimo scampo mettendosi"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 94.

134. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 17.

135. The miracle is striking for associating lascivious desires with a known public figure, the Venetian noblewoman Caterina Corner. Even though Caterina's family name is never given, a recent biographer concludes that the story refers to her. See Hurlburt, *Daughter of Venice*, 48.

136. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 55.

Virgin for relief from her desires, promising to make offerings to the shrine. She was then cleansed of her desires, the image "miraculously lifting from the flesh" her lust and "extinguishing vice" with "celestial thoughts".[137]

The miracle relates to the origin story, since early modern medicine characterized unwanted sexual urges as a form of lovesickness (also known as heroic love), in which erotic images stick in the mind: since visual stimulus sets arousal in motion, obsessive urges were characterized as images trapped in the mind.[138] Mary Frances Wack has shown, for instance, that "the principle cause of lovesickness is a pleasurable object imprinting its species on the imagination and the estimation."[139]

Therefore, to cure the Queen of Cyprus of lust, the Virgin had to purge her mind of sexually stimulating images. Her ability to do so recalls Ferrini's account of the fresco's origins, when the painter's mind was bombarded by unwanted images: "there came to [the painter's] memory many and infinite designs," which eventually "rained" on and "flooded" his imagination by "thousands."[140] In Ferrini's version, the painting originates by miraculously overcoming the overcrowded imagination of the artist, just as for Caterina, the fresco expels unwanted thoughts.

The purgative quality of the Annunziata painting is also emphasized as a central quality of the image in Bocchi's treatise. He states that the viewer "is enraptured/abducted outside of itself"[141] by the fresco, and that "vice flees from the marvellous [painting] […] purging the errors of the soul."[142] Finally, the image "takes hold of tears and sighs" from viewers, suggesting an outward flow from the body.[143] As I have noted elsewhere, the tears of compunction that Bocchi describes were culturally associated with the cleansing and purging of the soul.[144]

137. "levar miracolosamente della Carne"; "estintolesi il vizio"; "celesti avvisi." Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 56.

138. Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine*, 84.

139. Wack, "Mental Faculties," 15. See also Stowell, "Purging the Eye," 217–18.

140. "Anzi venedogli à memoria molti, & infiniti disegni"; "dalle migliaia […] piovessero, e se dir'posso diluviassero i disegni"; Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, 3r.

141. "fuori di se stesso è rapito"; Bocchi, *Sopra l'immagine*, 68.

142. "fugge il vizio dalla mirabile effigie […] purgando di errori l'animo"; Bocchi, *Sopra l'immagine*, 55.

143. "così rara vista egli si da di piglio alle lagrime, & a'sospiri"; Bocchi, *Sopra l'immagine*, 69.

144. See Stowell, *Spiritual Language*, ch. 1. Bocchi also references Aristotle's theory of catharsis; see Williams, "Treatise by Francesco Bocchi"; Schröder, *Der kluge Blick*.

Fig. 9. Jacques Callot, after Arsenius Mascagnius (Donato Mascagni). "Una Regina di Cipri, per grazia ottenuta dalla NUNZIATA, si reduce à castissima vita" (A queen of Cyprus, by a miracle obtained from the Nunziata, returns to a chaste life). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 54. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0070.

The painting's ability to exorcize demons is another example of its purgative power. Demons were sometimes held responsible for maliciously inseminating the mind with sexual thoughts, as the writers of a fifteenth-century text on demonology, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, make clear: demons inspire sexual fixations by infiltrating the mind and manipulating visual sensory impressions, persuading people to feel lust.[145] As we would expect, the Annunziata image is able to exorcize demons just as it is able to purge sexual thoughts. One such tale in Lottini's book recounts how a girl named Agnola was possessed by demons, so that her "judgment was imperfect; her desires were unstable, and her actions were confused."[146] When, in a moment of tranquillity, she formulates the desire to see the Annunziata image, the painting triumphs over the demons by having "awoken […] the vital spirits in her brain [so that] […] all those evil and tormenting [spirits] were thrown away."[147] Another story recounts how a mother, her two daughters, and a niece, all possessed by demons, were taken to see the Annunziata image, whereupon "such horrible voices [were] […] pushed from their chests," indicating the purging of evil spirits from their souls.[148] The engraved image accompanying this story illustrates the purgation explicitly, showing the women kneeling before the Annunziata image with demon-like creatures flying toward the painting (Fig. 10). Taken together with the miracle of chastity, these stories expose how the miracle-working image had the quality of an expellant, with the ability to drive unwanted things out of the mind.

145. Institoris and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 50.

146. "che imperfetto aveva il giudicio, instabili le voglie, e confuse, e spaventevoli, e noiosissimi gli atti, ora pazzamente bramando, ora rifiutando"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 243.

147. "posciache sollevati in lei gli spiriti vitali nel cervello, e più vivaci tornati gli spiriti naturali nelle membra; tutti que' malvagi, e tormentosi se ne tolsero via"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 244.

148. "cotanto orribili voci spinsero fuor del petto"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 250.

Fig. 10. Jacques Callot, after Matteo Rosselli. "Quattro Donne, travagliate da Spiriti d'infernale dannazione, nella Cappella della NUNZIATA vengon liberate" (Four women, tormented by spirits of infernal damnation, are liberated in the chapel of the Nunziata). In Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 248. Florence, 1619. Photo credit: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.26516#0264.

This sampling of stories illustrates how the themes of sight and imagination are developed across several miracles in Lottini's book. Many stories also emphasize the mind and imagination of the votary, regardless of the petition being made. For instance, in the story of the man who is decapitated, the victim holds "his mind fixed" on the Annunziata image at the crucial moment.[149] Similarly, in the fourth illustrated story, a knight about to be burned in flames "fortifies his mind."[150] The emphasis on the mind is also exemplified in a story of unjust imprisonment, in which the supplicant repeatedly imagines the Annunziata image:

> He turned with the shield of innocence to the Holy Mother […] having seen and contemplated the many, many graces [i.e., the votives at the shrine] conferred by her in the first days of his arrival in Florence; and the images offered in the temple of the Nunziata conserved in his fantasy. He remained many hours of the day and night in devout contemplation […].[151]

People in crisis often appeal mentally to images in miracle stories, but here the description of repeated visualization underscores the emphasis on the imagination in this text: devotees accustomed to the auxiliary patronage of saints would be primed to connect this theme to the image's origins.

In Ferrini's account of this same miracle, however, the issue of contemplation and imagination is not explicitly raised, even though this telling of the story is longer overall and includes more detail. Rather, in Ferrini's account, the unjustly imprisoned man simply vocalizes his devotion to the Virgin: "with all of his heart he turned to the Glorious Annunziata of Florence, *saying* 'Glorious Queen […]'" (my emphasis).[152] The spoken appeal aligns with

149. "tenendo fissa la mente"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 29.

150. "fortificata dunque la mente"; Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 43.

151. "ricorse con lo scudo dell'innocenzia alla Santissima Genitrice della vera salute, avendo egli molte, e molte concesse grazie vedute e contemplate di lei ne'primi dì del suo arrivo in Firenze; e le offerte Immagine nel Tempio della Nunziata in sua fantasia riservate. Stando costui così molt'ore del giorno, e molte della notte nel divoto pensamente." Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, 73.

152. "col cuore si voltò tutto alla Gloriosa Nunziata di Firenze dicendo. Gloriosa Regina de' Cieli […]"; Ferrini, *Corona di sessanta tre miracoli*, 20v. At the end of this speech, in case there is any doubt that these words were vocalized internally or externally, Ferrini underlines, "Il che detto, […] si spezzorono le manette […]" (Once said, […] the handcuffs broke).

André Vauchez's claim that appeals to saints in the Middle Ages were vocalized, usually before a witness.[153] The emphasis on internal visualization in Lottini's text, on the other hand, suggests again that this was a consciously integrated theme meant to convey specific ideas. While readers may have connected the focus on imagination to the image's origins, this focus also underscored Bocchi's claim that the image is a particularly memorable stimulus for interior contemplation, and thus the story aligns with beliefs of Catholic reformers such as Paleotti, who, as noted above, argued that sacred images were meant for intellectual contemplation. To reiterate, Paleotti emphasizes how images engage the viewer in intellectual contemplation of the prototype (i.e., the saints), thereby underlining Counter-Reformation decrees against idolatry and devotions to the physical, material image itself. Thus, the Annunziata fresco's power over sight and imagination, which stands out as a key aspect of Lottini's text, is in harmony with principals promoted by members of the Counter-Reformation, who emphasized the mental experience of images. While it is true that internal, mental appeals to images were far from unusual, the fact that Lottini revises Ferrini's account of this miracle to emphasize the intellectual quality of the prayer is strongly in line with Tridentine concerns.[154]

It is difficult to ascertain to what degree the portrait of the Annunziata's agency described in Lottini's text correlates with the actual, broadly held beliefs of the image's devotees. Was the Annunziata image widely believed to aid with fertility, and by extension the imagination? And was this linked in votaries' minds with the image's origin story (as in the specialized patronage of saints)? Or does Lottini's text constitute only one author's elaborate literary evocation of the image's agency, meant to shape readers' perceptions of the image in line with the concerns of its primary patrons, the Medici, as well as Counter-Reformation principles? Without further evidence of the popular devotions made to the image, it is difficult to speculate. With regard to the link between the image and fertility, it seems possible that the patronage of the Medici described above may have in part popularized this devotion; the evidence of Machiavelli's *La mandragola* certainly supports the possibility that this was not an isolated phenomenon. The broader connections between sight and imagination in Lottini's text, however, may not have been as widely relevant to devotees, although it is impossible to know. But what this article

153. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 453.

154. On appeals to images at a distance, see Nygren, "Metonymic Agency."

hopes to demonstrate nonetheless is that Lottini evoked the nature of the Annunziata's agency by drawing a connection between the origins of the image and its subsequent miraculous acts, a form of devotion hitherto only observed by scholars within the cult of the saints.

Comparative analysis and conclusion

While I have repeatedly underlined that the purpose of this article is not to argue that the Annunziata image only had agency over the mind and other connected issues, it is nonetheless relevant to ask how broadly the themes explored in this article appear in the collection as a whole, and also how this compares to other books of the period. As stated above, just over 30 percent of the collection can be correlated in some way with this theme: there are seventeen stories (21 percent) that specifically mention harm to the eyes, the head, or the brain, and three more that specify injury to the neck.[155] Added to this are the stories noted above: the miracle of the Queen of Cyprus, the two miracles of demonic possession, the miracle of the captive slaves escaping without being seen, and the story of the Black child.

Does this comprise a greater than usual emphasis on these themes? It is difficult to gage the relevance of these statistics in relationship to other books on miracle-working images since there are as of yet no statistical studies of the miracles performed by images.[156] Studies from the 1970s and 1980s on miracles worked by medieval saints may, however, provide a useful point of comparison, though the comparison is not perfect since earlier research examined the frequency of specific miraculous acts rather than the themes that arise across different kinds of miracles.[157] A study of canonization processes by Vauchez, for instance, shows that in the fourteenth century the rate of both blindness and deaf-mutism miracles together was 11.7 percent.[158] Using this as a baseline, we find the Annunziata's miracles appear consistent, since there are four

155. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, chs. 33, 43, 45, 71 on the eyes; chs. 5, 7, 11, 30, 32, 34, 35, 39, 40, 55, 59, 65, 67 on the head, mouth, and face; chs. 51, 57, 66 on the throat and neck.

156. Nygren's study of vows made in front of or at a distance from miracle-working images is a recent exception (Nygen, "Metonymic Agency").

157. Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 342.

158. Vauchez, *Sainthood*, 468. See also Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 352ff.

blindness miracles in Lottini's book (5 percent).[159] Although we do not know the proportional split between the blindness and deaf-mutism miracles in Vauchez's study, if we ascribe half to blindness, it is pretty near the rate in Lottini's text.

By contrast, Lottini's book contains more blindness stories than some contemporaneous books on miracle-working images, as seen by examining chapter titles in these books. In *Cronichetta della Gloriosa Madonna di San Luca*, the rate is 3 percent,[160] and in *Miracoli piu segnalati fatti* […] *nel celebre Tempio di S. Maria Maggiore*, the rate is 2 percent.[161] Similarly, *Corona ammirabile de miracoli* […] *dalla* […] *Madonna della Quercia* contains a huge number of miracles, but only 2 percent appear to concern blindness.[162] While one could argue that Lottini's emphasis on blindness is marginal, I argue rather that it is one factor in a larger constellation of features, all of which taken together create a portrait of the image's agency. For instance, the twenty-four miracles dealing with injury from attack in Lottini's text are indicative of the emphasis on the area of the head.[163] Nine stories in the group—just over 40 percent—specify injury to the head, the eyes, or the mouth, and one deals with the throat; no other body part is specified with the same frequency.[164] Three miracles mention the thigh, and two specify the chest and the stomach, but the rest simply state that the person was injured.

Looking at how frequently blindness miracles appear in other books therefore underscores the fact that these texts have unique characteristics and cannot easily be compared. The heterogenous nature of these books reinforces the claim that they have been carefully selected to convey something to the reader about the nature of the image's agency, as Lottini claims in the preface to his book. Each book has its own unique selection, and each thus merits being

159. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, chs. 33, 43, 45, 71; ch. 59, involving a musket shot to the face, is possibly a blindness miracle as well.

160. Two of sixty miracles concern blindness. See Alberti, *Cronichetta*, 58, 156.

161. Two of ninety-two miracles concern blindness. See Guidoni, *Miracoli più segnalati*, 15, 33.

162. There are 121 individual chapters, though chapter headings often specify two or three separate miraculous events. A conservative estimate of the total miracles mentioned in chapter titles is 240, though only five are of blindness. Bandoni, *Corona ammirabile*, chs. 4 (two blindness miracles), 32, 63, 108.

163. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, chs. 4, 11, 13, 20, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 38, 39, 42, 59, 60, 64, 65, 66, 69, 71, 73, 75.

164. Lottini, *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli*, chs. 11, 30, 32, 33, 34, 39, 59, 65, 66, 71.

read with an attention to the themes it develops, as other literary texts would be. Unlike the canonization processes studied by Vauchez, for instance, which might benefit from statistical analysis, I argue that as texts crafted by authors, the hagiographical writings on the Annunziata can evoke thematic emphasis through their literary qualitities, and not only by the statistical occurance of certain kinds of miracles.

The texts written about the Annunziata image attest to many things: Medici patronage, the Servite desire to establish the reputation of the image with a broad public, and the typical concerns of early modern people. Among these, the Lottini text tells readers something about the power of this image—that is, what it can do. While at first glance it may simply appear to convey that the image can do a great number of things, by looking more deeply into key miracles, historical beliefs regarding cause and effect, and the phenomena of devotion in the broader field of the cult of the saints, Lottini's *Scelta d'alcuni miracoli* conveys that the image's miracles cohere especially, though not exclusively, around issues related to its origins. This emphasis appears to have served the purposes of both Counter-Reformers who were eager to establish that devotees should engage intellectually with images, and also the Medici patrons, who had long devoted themselves to the image for fertility. The key miracle in Lottini's text of paternal imagination strategically combines both of these concerns while at the same time connecting to the origins of the image itself. Though the growing body of literature on miracle-working images has so far largely ignored the scope of miracles performed by images, the evidence of the Annunziata shrine suggests the fresco's agency was not simply a chaos of random acts; rather, the miracles reveal underlying beliefs about how objects obtain agency.

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