

Golden Mouths and Speaking Bodies: John Chrysostom's Depiction of Christian Martyrs

Elena Martin (University of Durham)

Martyrdom is an inherently corporeal experience often involving horrific torture and directed towards the total annihilation of the human body.¹ Our earliest Christian martyrdom narratives, dating to the mid-second century C.E., focus on the specifically physical dimensions of persecution. The texts describe instruments of torture, the disfigurement of the martyred body, and the violation of the martyred corpse. The more time that passed after the historical moment of martyrdom, the more vivid the descriptions became. Towards the late-fourth century martyrdom narratives were progressively painted with the unreserved depiction of the physicality of torture. Martyr homilies of men like John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea, and the lyrical poems of Prudentius, describe martyrdom with vivid and visceral detail. Furthermore, the intensification of the cult of the saints promoted the collection, division, and translation of martyrs' relics: that is, their blood, bones, and ashes. Even physical items that had been in contact with the corpse were held in great esteem: dust scraped from graves, oil that had trickled over bones, or fabric that had been lowered into a tomb.

This concentration on the martyred body urges us to engage with those texts and to ask why Christian martyrdom narratives and homilies were so persistent in their focus on the suffering body and the physicality of persecution (Clark, 2004, p.43). This question has, on occasion, been answered rather negatively, as the thin line between corporeity and carnality has exposed early Christian interpretations of martyrdom, and especially female martyrdom, to the accusation of eroticising the suffering body with a

¹ I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council for the generous funding that has made this paper possible. I would also like to thank Carol Harrison for her helpful discussion, advice, and guidance.

curious and morbid attraction, rather than conveying the sense of awe and admiration that one might expect to accompany the veneration of the martyrs (Burrus, 1994, pp.27-51; Cooper, 1998, pp.147-57; Clark, 1998, pp.103-04). For example, one scholar has protested against these descriptions of martyrdom, declaring that ‘the vast majority of the later Passions are *tasteless affairs* and historically worthless, and some of them are *rather disgusting*’ (De Ste Croix cited in Grig, 2002, p.321, emphasis added). However, even if Christian interpretations of martyrdom are considered to be distasteful to a modern readership, we should refrain from passing moral judgement on the texts or their authors. Rather, we should search for the meaning that motivated these representations of martyrdom (Grig, 2002, p.322).

Our understanding of these body-centric representations of martyrdom may be illuminated by viewing martyrdom alongside early Christian attitudes towards creation and revelation. Martyrdom took place, was remembered, and was interpreted, within the context of what has been defined as ‘a material turn’, that is, ‘a shift in the late ancient religious sensibility regarding the signifying potential of the material world, a shift that reconfigured the relation between materiality and meaning in a positive direction’ (Miller, 2004, p.392). In this context, the martyred body is seen as a referential medium – an icon of spiritual truth – which expresses incorporeal truths through its very corporeality. The corporeal is closely associated with the incorporeal, the material with the spiritual. Thus the specifically physical, bodily, and tangible dimensions of suffering reveal a greater, transcendent reality. Consequently, far from being an insignificant skin to be shed on the way to salvation, the martyred body itself has substantial importance. By focusing on the physical dimensions of martyrdom, early Christian texts encourage their audiences – including

modern readers – to open their eyes and their ears to the messages communicated through the martyred body.

This paper takes the early Christian depiction of the communicative bodies of the martyrs as its subject. The range of texts that are relevant to this subject is vast. From the mid-second to late-fourth centuries we encounter a nascent Church attempting to define its existence in a hostile environment; an infant Church trying to make sense of localised and sporadic persecutions; a growing Church addressing ecclesiastical concerns in the midst of general and systematic persecution; and a blossoming Church determined to reconcile its persecuted past with its comparatively peaceful present. For this reason, the present paper focuses specifically on the depiction of the martyred body in select homilies of John Chrysostom (c.349-407 C.E.).

John Chrysostom is an intriguing figure for this discussion. Born into the urban centre that was Antioch, Chrysostom inherited the sacred ancestry of the local martyrs. He was active during the blossoming of the cult of the saints, and he enthusiastically encouraged other Christians towards public and private veneration of the martyrs. Perhaps most importantly, in terms of textual sources, he was renowned for his eloquent homilies preached in commemoration of the martyrs at their annual feast days. These sermons are valuable tools for providing insight into how the martyred body was remembered, interpreted, and depicted. Before turning towards these martyr homilies, it will be useful to outline some brief details of Chrysostom's life.

John Chrysostom: Golden Mouth

John Chrysostom was born in c.349 C.E. in the thriving city of Antioch. It is against this backdrop of a wealthy urban centre and intellectual hub that his life must be viewed. The facts about John's early education are incomplete and, at some points, we are left mainly to conjecture. However, we can safely assume that John, like many of the other Church fathers, received a

liberal education starting with elementary school (Kelly, 1995, p.6). After this, John studied rhetoric under the tutelage of Libanius, a famous orator and the official professor of rhetoric in Antioch at that time (Jones, 1953, p.171). John was baptised as a Christian around 368, one year after the completion of his rhetorical training. In 371 John became a lector. However, within a few years he abandoned city life to devote six years to a rigorous ascetic regime in monastic solitude while living in the mountains south of Antioch. He returned to Antioch in 379, due to the deterioration of his health, and was ordained as a deacon two years later. In 386 John was ordained as a priest in Antioch, where he remained until he was put forward to be ordained as the Bishop of Constantinople in 397/8. John encountered much hostility at Constantinople and was exiled in 403, immediately recalled, and then exiled again in 404 (Mayer and Allen, 2000, pp.9-11). He died in exile three years later.

John is remembered as the most famous and eloquent preacher of the early Church, hence his nickname ‘Chrysostom’ (Gk. *chrysostomos*), meaning ‘golden mouth’. It is important to remember that, prior to converting to Christianity, John lived in a thoroughly Hellenized city and received a classical rhetorical education. This pedagogical programme made a considerable impression on the development of his attitudes, beliefs, intellectual thought, and oratorical articulacy. Ingrained within his very self, this secular, classical education was not peeled away at baptism, but rather it continued to shape his mind and inform his views throughout his life as a Christian and a bishop. This is particularly evident in his verbal eloquence, the structure and content of his sermons, and the style that he uses to communicate Christian messages. John’s rhetorical education is especially apparent in his martyr homilies, in which he employs many rhetorical forms and devices, such as the *encomium*, a literary and rhetorical speech

composed to honour and glorify a particular person (Mayer and Allen, 2000, pp.27-28).

John Chrysostom is, therefore, an example of a Christian bishop who transcends the designations of ‘Christian’ or ‘Pagan’, representing a synthesis of Hellenistic culture and Christian faith.² The bishop cannot be detached from his life and times, and this must be remembered when we approach Chrysostom’s martyr homilies. The very words that John uses – the order he places them in, the contrasts and comparisons he draws, the metaphors he develops, the assumptions he presumes – reflect his Greco-Roman education.

Performing a *sermo corporis*

In order to understand John Chrysostom’s interpretation of martyrdom and the martyred body, we must first look to his rhetorical education. The idiom ‘actions speak louder than words’ is now such a familiar expression that it has become a cliché. However, in the context of ancient oratory, the body truly was believed to speak by action. Every gesture and deed served as a form of non-verbal communication that had the potential to convey or betray information about the individual. As part of their rhetorical education, young men would often study oratorical handbooks, such as Cicero’s *De Oratore* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*, which emphasise the importance of gesture and body language to communicate certain messages. Cicero (c.106-43 B.C.E.) is the most eminent orator of his age and the archetypal Roman rhetorician. In his *De Oratore*, Cicero propounds this notion of body language: *Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis*, roughly translated, ‘for by action the body talks’ (trans. Rackham, 1948, III.lix, p.179). Commenting on

² This paper focuses specifically on John Chrysostom and his Hellenistic context. It is equally true that we cannot clearly differentiate between ‘Christians’ and ‘Jews’ in the first centuries of Christianity, especially when talking about the development of the notion of martyrdom. While this is not the subject of the present paper, the reader is directed to Boyarin, 1999.

this statement, Quintilian observes in his *Institutio Oratoria*, ‘Cicero in one passage speaks of action as being a *form of speech*, and in another as being a *kind of physical eloquence*’ (trans. Butler, 1979, XI.III.1, p.243). Quintilian accepts this view, stating that parts of the body, and particularly the hands, ‘may almost be said to speak’ (XI.III.85, p.289).

In a recent study of ancient oratory, Erik Gunderson draws attention to this concept of the communicative body, ‘the motions of the body and modulations of the voice serve as their own sort of language, a *sermo corporis*’ (Gunderson, 2000, p.67). According to Gunderson, in the ancient world the human body was seen as a ‘linguistic body’, which communicates with a physical language (2000, p.70). The carriage of the body, the subconscious habits and twitches, and the gestures of the eyes and the hands, all constituted a somatic language. The observation of the body was so scrupulous that every part had the potential to convey messages and incite the emotions of the audience: the eyes, the neck, the head, the hands, and the feet. The body of the orator conveyed meaning through body language, as it was closely scrutinised as a public object. When giving a public speech, the orator employed a gestural language to complement their spoken words and communicate with their audiences more effectively (Aldrete, 1999, p.xix). As a result of this, immeasurable trust was placed on the significance of embodied action as a distinct physical language and the power of visual perception to read, decode, and translate that language.

Considering that orators were trained in the language of the body, as well as in declamation and vocal control, it is reasonable to suggest that John Chrysostom would also have been consciously aware of the communicative potential of the human body. When we look at Chrysostom’s homilies on the martyrs we find that the body is central to his interpretation of martyrdom. Alerting ourselves to Chrysostom’s own awareness of body language, we find that martyrdom, for Chrysostom, is

primarily a communication. We will now turn to the depiction of the martyred body in Chrysostom's homilies to explore how the martyred body communicated with its fourth century audience.

Butchered Bodies or Spiritual Sights?

John Chrysostom lived in a relatively peaceful period of early Christian history following Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. Yet during this time of religious toleration, the Church actively retained a link with its persecuted past. The rise of the cult of the saints in the mid-fourth century ensured that those Christian men and women who had been tortured and killed during times of persecution would be kept alive within the Christian memory. Annual feasts were celebrated on the martyr's *dies natalis*, the 'birthday' celebration which commemorated the day of a martyr's death on earth and rebirth in heaven. These events varied from place to place, but could include the procession of relics, public services at tombs, the reading of the martyr's *passio*, and the delivery of sermons. These were popular occasions that often drew in large and diverse crowds, including men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate (Mayer and Allen, 2000, p.38). It was on these occasions, and to these people, that Chrysostom preached on the martyrs.

Distanced from the historical moment of martyrdom – sometimes by three hundred years or so – it was John's role to recreate the memory of martyrdom through the words of his homilies. Attempting to arouse the emotions of his audience and inspire awe and admiration towards the martyrs, Chrysostom describes martyrdom in vivid detail. Using words to paint a scene within the mind of each individual in his audience, John describes the martyrs' bodies: flesh ploughed like soil, ribs pulled apart, intestines ripped out, spines shattered, blood flowing, flesh melting

(Chrysostom 2006d, 2, p.212; 2006e, 4, pp.221-22).³ And yet, alongside this graphic portrayal of human suffering, he poeticises and romanticises the martyred body: bloodied bodies shine like brilliant saffron rays of the morning sun (Chrysostom, 2006e, 5, p.222); martyrs lie on hot coals as if they were reclining on a soft bed of roses (2006e, 4, p.222); men who have had their tongues cut out speak with a more beautiful and spiritual language (2006f, pp.228-37).

This simultaneously graphic and romantic depiction of the martyred body is revealing. Firstly, John is intent on encouraging his audience to form a mental image of the martyred body. Secondly, John's combination of the brutal detail of human suffering and the poetic representation of the martyred body indicates that he believes that the martyred body communicates a greater spiritual message. The graphic descriptions affirm that the martyred body is a human body, just like the body of each member of John's audience, but this is certainly not the end of the story. The physicality of suffering is understood and depicted on a higher plane of meaning. While he describes the disfigured and distorted bodies of the martyrs in clinical detail, Chrysostom's poetic metaphors and similes encourage his audience to perceive martyrdom as an event that is spiritual, holy, and indeed beautiful.

The physicality and weakness of the martyred body reveals spiritual truths. Just like a painted icon, the bodies of the martyrs direct the eyes of their viewers towards the presence and power of Christ. The torture that the martyrs endured was indeed horrific and, Chrysostom assures us, the bodies of the martyrs were certainly not made of steel (2006b, 6, p.141). Although torture is sometimes described as having an analgesic effect, the martyrs suffered greatly and this suffering should not be underestimated or

³ References to Chrysostom's works are listed according to the date of the translations. See bibliography for further details of the texts and translations.

diminished. Yet, Chrysostom asserts, the very fact that the martyrs' weak bodies could endure such extreme afflictions points towards the indwelling presence of Christ, who, dwelling within the martyr's body, takes the suffering upon himself and relieves the martyrs of their great burden (2006g, 8, p.246). In this way, the martyrs are seen as spiritual icons, providing proof of Christ's continuing presence and power in the world.

Schoolrooms for the Soul

While martyrdom was of great theological value to Chrysostom, the feasts of the martyrs offered a perfect opportunity for John to provide instruction and guidance to large, socially diverse, and sometimes even morally wayward, audiences. The sermons that he preached on such occasions indicate an awareness of this fact. John's homilies are never simply intended to commemorate or glorify the martyrs, but also to instruct and edify his audience. On some occasions, the historical details of a certain celebrated martyr are treated simply as a catalyst for addressing more urgent matters within a particular community (Leemans et al., 2003, p.24). These less related but more pressing matters include the chastisement of Christians who exhibit inappropriate behaviour by visiting brothels, getting drunk in public houses, indulging in the immoderate and gluttonous consumption of food, taking part in Jewish festival celebrations, or attending the Roman games. In these cases, Chrysostom employs the memory of the martyrs to instruct his audiences towards ethical behaviour, to preach sermons of polemical warning, and to bolster the boundaries of the Christian community by affirming the distinctiveness and superiority of Christianity against competing beliefs and allegiances. On one such occasion, in a homily in praise of the young Antiochene martyr Pelagia, Chrysostom depicts her death as though it were a text requiring interpretation. Having related the account of Pelagia's martyrdom, Chrysostom interprets the event

on a moral level, elucidating a general lesson to encourage his audience to imitate her martyrdom with a disciplined lifestyle:

Let's copy her in so far as we can. She despised life; let us despise luxury, let us ridicule lavish expenditure, let us step away from drunkenness, let us flee from gluttony [...] retain a precise memory of both these comments and the rest of what I've said [...] demonstrate them all through what you do. (2003b, 3, p.155)

Martyr homilies, such as that on Pelagia, enabled John to abstract the martyr from their historical context and to present them as a moral exemplar, consciously cultivating the memory of martyrdom for the purpose of ethical instruction. The homily could compliment and elaborate upon passion narratives by revealing the different levels of meaning, glossing over less important details, and drawing attention to the lessons that could be learnt. Consequently, the edificatory value of martyrdom could have real relevance to John's different audiences with their varying concerns, addressing their specific needs at particular moments in time.

This process of abstraction, exaltation, and imitation is seen in the way that Chrysostom encourages his audience to form a mental image of martyrdom and to contemplate it like an icon of the mind. In a homily on the martyr Barlaam, Chrysostom incites his audience to do just this:

[L]et's all store the martyrs away in our minds, with the roasting pans, with the cauldrons, with the other tortures. And, just as painters wipe clean a painting that has often become dimmer with smoke and soot and time, so too you, beloved, use the memory of the holy martyrs. (2006c, 12, p.188)

Abstracted from time and place, and relocated within the individual mind, martyrdom becomes an ever-present event that speaks directly and immediately to individuals throughout the generations. With Neoplatonic undertones, Chrysostom exhorts his audience to internalise the image of the

martyr within the memory, and to view that image as an interiorised model of virtue. This internalisation of the martyr transforms the individual Christian into a fleshly shrine, a living tomb:

[E]ach of you who are present is that saint's tomb, a tomb that has life and soul. For, if I were to open up the conscience of each of you who are present, I would find this saint dwelling inside your mind (2006a, 3, p.54).

For Chrysostom, the memory of the martyrs is a mental 'painting' that provides 'a constant instruction in virtue' (2006c, 12, p.188). This depiction of martyrdom as a painting within the mind reflects an understanding of memory that was popular in late antiquity: memories are images drawn or impressed upon the mind as if on a tablet of wax (Carruthers, 1990, pp.21-24). Here, the significance of martyrdom is communicated through the remembrance and recollection of 'things', that is, the martyred body, methods of persecution, and instruments of torture, painted in the mind. The recollection of these vivid, dramatic, and evocative images is emotionally charged. The audience engages with the image, admitting the martyrs to their emotions, and allowing the recollection of the memory to shape their own self-understanding and moral judgement. For Chrysostom, commemoration of the martyrs is *necessary* because it restores the painting to its original splendour, preventing the memory from becoming blurred or erased by time. Moreover, commemoration of the martyrs is *useful*, constituting a form of practical ethical training and moral instruction. Chrysostom recommends that his congregation 'use the memory of the holy martyrs' (2006c, 12, p.188). The inference here is that Christians must 'use' the martyrs by imitating them, accepting them as models and mentors. Chrysostom exhorts, 'Let us imitate these saints [...] and, by walking the

same road as them, we shall attain the same crowns as them' (2006c, 12, pp.188-89).

If a martyr's feast day constitutes a schoolroom, and the sermon serves as an edificatory tool, then the martyrs are the teachers. The Christian audience stands at the martyr's tomb, presenting themselves at the feet of the martyr, just as a pupil would learn at the feet of their teacher. It is this that Chrysostom encourages. Referring to the familiar oratorical notion of body language, Chrysostom depicts the martyrs as unsurpassable teachers, philosophers of great wisdom, and preachers of faith. In a homily delivered in Antioch during the last decade of the fourth century, Chrysostom develops the notion of physical body language to describe martyrdom as a form of preaching:

[E]ven when silent, martyrs are louder in volume than we when we speak, when time after time many have preached to many others on the topic of virtue, they have achieved nothing; yet others, though silent, have achieved major successes through the splendour of their life. Consequently the martyrs have effected this to a greater degree, uttering voice not with their tongue, but with their deeds – a voice far superior to that which comes from the mouth. Through it they preach to humankind's whole nature. (2003a, 1 p.119)

Chrysostom juxtaposes the faith of the martyr with the verbosity of philosophical reasoning. Using rhetorical eloquence to oppose the rhetoric of philosophy, Chrysostom depicts the martyrs as supreme philosophers: the martyrs' silent examples are much more effective in encouraging virtue than the verbal arguments of philosophers. If rhetoric is the art of persuasive communication, then the martyrs are rhetoricians *par excellence*. The martyrs speak with their bodies and utter voice with their deeds. Moreover, the martyrs do not only speak, but they are also said to 'preach', thus conveying connotations of proclamation, sermonising, and moral instruction. The martyrs' actions constitute a nonverbal form of instruction

that is uninhibited by the barriers that affect verbal communication; for example, different languages, varying dialects, and educational background. This visual, kinesic form of communication enables the martyrs to speak to ‘humankind’s whole nature’, that is, not only those who have had the privilege of a classical education. Philosophers might employ complex and articulate arguments to encourage people towards a life of virtue, but the martyrs are more successful in encouraging virtue through the silent actions of their bodies.

In the same homily Chrysostom elaborates on how the martyrs preach a lesson of virtue through the performance of martyrdom. He starts by distinguishing between theoretical, verbal instruction and exemplary, nonverbal action:

If I say that torture is associated with nothing burdensome, I’m not convincing when I say it. After all, there’s nothing more irksome in offering philosophy like this in theory. But, when the martyrs give voice through their actions, no one can contradict them. (2003a, 2, p.119)

He then explains this distinction with a simile:

Indeed it’s the same as occurs inside the public baths, when the pool of hot water is bubbling away, and no one is confident about getting in. For as long as people sitting on the edge encourage each other with words, they rather convince no one. Yet when just one of them either sticks in a hand, or lowers a foot and then confidently dips in their entire body, in silence it is they who persuade those sitting up above to venture into the pool rather than the people who had a lot to say. It’s the same way too with the martyrs. (2003a, 2, pp.119-20)

Here Chrysostom uses an example from everyday life in order to illustrate his main assertion that the martyrs teach a lesson of virtue through their bodies. For Chrysostom, the martyred body truly is a communicative

medium. The martyr's body speaks, preaches, instructs, and gives proof more convincing than verbal argument:

[W]hen one of the martyrs lowers down not just a foot or a hand, but dips in their entire body, through their action they provide a proof more powerful than any counsel or advice, and banish the fear of those surrounding them. (2003a, 2, p.120)

The martyr's body is the instrument through which the lesson is silently communicated. Through their bodies, the martyrs encourage others towards imitation of their own actions with silent exhortation. The martyrs' example is extreme. The martyrs do not dip a toe into a hot pool, but immerse their whole bodies in the fire. Such extreme action requires a greater and more convincing form of preaching to encourage others to do the same. By actually doing what is required, the martyrs prove that such actions are possible and, therefore, banish all fear, and encourage imitation. Consequently, one is presented with a homily within a homily: Chrysostom's sermon depicts the martyrs preaching a *sermo corporis*, a sermon of the body, through the act of martyrdom.

Depicting martyrdom as an edificatory performance, Chrysostom encourages his congregation to visualise and contemplate the bodies of the martyrs. This urges Christians to identify with the martyrs and incites the individual to respond to the martyrs, to be transformed by their sufferings, and to imitate their faith in everyday life. In doing this, Chrysostom uses the figures of the martyrs to address specific and immediate concerns in his Christian communities. While Chrysostom's audiences were not likely to be persecuted for their faith, they were encouraged to take the example of the martyrs and to interpret that example within the context of their own everyday lives. Although the late-fourth century was not a period of persecution, Chrysostom consciously depicted his present moment as a time

of martyrdom. Christians may not experience external adversity and hostility but, for Chrysostom, they are constantly being persecuted by their own internal desires. He asserts, ‘while it isn’t a time of persecution, it is a time of martyrdom [...] You don’t see burning coals in front of you, but you do see desire’s flame kindled’ (2006c, 2, p.180).

Affirming that every time is a time of martyrdom, Chrysostom justifies his use of the martyrs as exemplary role models. The martyrs are paradigmatic figures who instruct and preach to all Christians through their bodies, establishing patterns for the continued expression of faith, contributing to the transformation of Christian piety, encouraging spirituality, and aiding individual devotion. Furthermore, by learning from the martyrs and imitating their example, individual Christians could themselves become martyrs. John encourages his audience to learn from the martyrs, to think with the martyrs, to live their lives in accordance with the martyrs, and, even, to *become* martyrs:

The martyrs had their ribs crushed. They saw executioners standing around. Do this to your conscience too. Seat your reason as a judge on the throne of your impartial mind, lead all the sins you’ve committed into the public eye [...] punish the inappropriate desires from which your sins arose, let them be crushed with considerable force. (2003a, 3, p.122)

With this move from spectator to martyr, from audience to actor, the individual Christian life is transformed. The image of the martyr could be taken into the mind and become visibly manifest in every action, shining through the body. Chrysostom describes: ‘the person returning from viewing martyrs should be recognisable to all [...] through their gaze, their appearance, their gait, their compunction, their composed thoughts’ (2000, 665, p.97). The person who venerated and imitated the martyrs should be ‘breathing fire, restrained, contrite, sober, vigilant – announcing the spiritual

life within through the movements of their body' (2000, 665, p.97). By internalising, contemplating, and imitating the martyrs, Christians enter onto the stage of the divine drama and transform their own bodies into living icons that declare and perform the Christian faith. While the martyrs are seen as teachers, preaching with a *sermo corporis*, the Christian community is encouraged to follow that example and preach their own *sermo corporis* in everyday life.

Conclusion: Remembering Martyrs

From the mid-second to late-fourth centuries, martyrs were produced and constructed through a process of post-event interpretation, commemoration, and representation (Castelli, 2004; Castelli, 2006; Grig, 2004). In the present paper we have focused on how John Chrysostom constructs the martyrs as ethical teachers and moral instructors who preach through their bodies. While John's portrayal of the martyrs is undoubtedly inspired by his faith in Christ, his depiction of the martyrs clearly serves a practical function. Through his homilies, Chrysostom effectively 're-writes' martyrdom narratives to present the martyrs as figures who directly address the needs and desires of his audience. This is not to claim that the martyrs are simply ventriloquists' dummies who passively mediate Chrysostom's concerns. It is, perhaps, more useful to think of Chrysostom employing the martyrs, rather than manipulating them, as the latter term unjustifiably conveys more negative connotations. Inevitably, when reflecting upon martyrdom, John understands and depicts the martyrs in relation to his own specific moment in time.

Constructing the memory of the martyrs through a process of abstraction, John effectively lifts the martyrs out from their historical location and relocates them within his present moment. Chrysostom does this by encouraging his audience to visualise martyrdom as an icon of the mind. Although the martyr may have died decades, or even centuries,

earlier, this mental icon ensures that the martyr remains immediately present in the Christian community at all times. Through this meaning-making activity, the martyrs increasingly come to be seen less as historical figures and more as spiritual models who speak directly to future generations of Christians.

However, despite this abstraction from historical time and place, martyrdom remains as a specifically physical memory. Encouraging his audience to focus on suffering bodies, bloody torments, and terrifying instruments of torture, Chrysostom incites the emotions of his audience and inspires them to search for a deeper meaning in martyrdom. According to Chrysostom, it is only by looking at the martyred body that we can discover the spiritual lessons and theological truths that are communicated through martyrdom. If out of sight is out of mind, the martyred body must be kept before the mind's eye at all times.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. H. Rackham, 1948. Loeb Classical Library.

London: Heinemann.

John Chrysostom, 2000. *A Homily on Martyrs*, trans. W. Mayer & P. Allen, *John Chrysostom. The Early Church Fathers*. London: Routledge, pp. 93-97.

- 2003a. *A Homily on the Holy Martyrs*, trans. W. Mayer, in J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen & B. Dehandschutter, 2003. *Let us Die that we May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)*. London: Routledge, pp.115-126.

- 2003b. *A Homily on Pelagia, Virgin and Martyr*, trans. W. Mayer, in J. Leemans, W. Mayer, P. Allen & B. Dehandschutter, 2003. *Let us*

- Die that we May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)*. London: Routledge, pp.148-157.
- 2006a. *On Saint Eustathius*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp.49-62.
 - 2006b. *Homily 1 on the Maccabees*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp.135-145.
 - 2006c. *On Saint Barlaam*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp. 177-189.
 - 2006d. *An Encomium on Egyptian Martyrs*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp. 209-216.
 - 2006e. *On the Holy Martyrs*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp.217-226.
 - 2006f. *On Saint Romanus*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp.227-237.
 - 2006g. *On All the Martyrs*, trans. W. Mayer, 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press, pp.239-255.
- Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H.E. Butler, 1979. Loeb Classical Library. London: Heinemann.

Secondary Sources

- Aldrete, G.S., 1999. *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome*. Ancient Society and History. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

- Burrus, V., 1994. 'Word and Flesh. The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 10, pp.27-51.
- Carruthers, M.J., 1990. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Castelli, E., 2006. 'The Ambivalent Legacy of Violence and Victimhood: Using Early Christian Martyrs to Think With', *Spiritus*, 6(1), pp. 1-24.
- Castelli, E., 2004. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. Gender, Theory and Religion. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Clark, G., 2004. *Christianity and Roman Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, G., 1998. 'Bodies and Blood. Late Antique Debate on Martyrdom, Virginity and Resurrection', in D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*. London: Routledge, pp.99-115.
- Cooper, K., 1998. 'The Voice of the Victim: Gender, Representation and Early Christian Martyrdom', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 80(1), pp.147-157.
- Grig, L., 2004. *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity*. London: Duckworth
- Grig, L., 2002. 'Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology', *Early Medieval Europe*, 2(4), pp.321-336.
- Gunderson, E., 2000. *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Jones, A.H.M., 1953. 'St. John Chrysostom's Parentage and Education', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 46(3), pp.171-73.
- Kelly, J.N.D., 1995. *Golden Mouth. The Story of John Chrysostom: Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop*. London: Duckworth.

- Leemans, J., W. Mayer, P. Allen & B. Dehandschutter, 2003. *Let us Die that we May Live: Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)*. London: Routledge.
- Mayer, W. & P. Allen, 2000. *John Chrysostom*, The Early Church Fathers. London: Routledge.
- Mayer, W., 2006. *The Cult of the Saints: St John Chrysostom*. Popular Patristics Series. New York: SVS Press.
- Miller, P.C., 2004. 'Visceral Seeing: The Holy Body in Late Ancient Christianity', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 12(4), pp.391-411.