

Questioning Starvation

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ABSTRACT By comparing early modern cases of self-starvation with current theories of anorexia nervosa, this article explores the framing of the starving body as a cultural product, and questions the implications of culture in the perception and representations of the refusal of food. This allows a consideration of self-starvation as both a product and reflection of cultural values attributed to consumption, gender, and the body.

The late twentieth-century emphasis on thinness is an expression of our pervading anxieties about diet and body shape. Healthy eating and exercise are not only signs of physical wholesomeness; they are also indications of the ways in which we as individuals are in control of our bodies. Food and the body represent important social indicators, hence, both eating and hunger function as powerful cultural metaphors for consumption, and the desire to consume, which characterise many Western societies.[1] Paradoxically, the need for consumption is naturalised in the thin bodies shown in glossy magazines or advertising campaigns. Pleasure and control are embodied in the allure of an image of corporeality which is excessive in its apparent denial of basic needs, yet desiring and desirable.

If the cultural emphasis on thinness seems to be related to the widespread growth of eating disorders, anorexia nervosa and bulimia equally betray that emphasis, being symptomatic of individual expression of willpower. Eating disorders are ambiguous manifestations of thinness, the over-thin body a complex projection of cultural assumptions and expectations. The starving body ostensibly becomes a cultural product and our perception of it illustrates alternative attitudes to the refusal of food. Through a consideration of early modern cases of prolonged abstinence, in particular that of Apollonia Schreier, I shall examine in this article the cultural features which shaped the perception and understanding of self-starvation in the Renaissance, and further relate them to current ideas about asceticism and anorexia nervosa, in an attempt to explore the complexities surrounding the refusal of food. Central to my discussion is the spectacularisation of the starving body, and the cultural anxieties contained in this spectacularisation.

Early modern accounts of self-starvation unfold a narrative which is telling of the modes in which the starving body was perceived and represented in the early modern period. Reports of prolonged abstinence are, in fact, characterised by striking similarities. They tell a story – always the same story – in which a young woman of the lower or middling classes, following a serious disease, gradually refuses cooked and warm foodstuffs, only eating small quantities of bread, fruit, or broth, and then denies food and drink completely. She may also temporarily suffer from dumbness, fits, or paralysis, yet her general physical condition is usually healthy: her body does not show excessive signs of emaciation, though the stomach and womb are said to touch her spine. This is usually the most evident sign of fasting. Also apparent is a general dryness of the body, and the complete absence of excrements and excretions identify the starving body as perfectly self-contained. Variations on this general narrative, which at one level serve to advertise self-starvation, present prolonged fasting as a wonder or miracle. Whilst demonstrating the ideological appropriation of this condition, they further reveal familial dynamics and forms of control within a small community.

Considered at the boundary between the preternatural and supernatural, the starving body was perceived with both suspicion and admiration. Scepticism and fear of deceit coexist with medical explanations of the possibility of surviving without food and belief in miracles, and, as in the case of other human oddities, the miracle shifts into a freak-show.[2] People visited the starving women to witness their fasting as an extraordinary phenomenon.[3] Claims upon the prodigious nature of prolonged abstinence contrast with attempts to explain the condition physiologically, linking it to that of animals such as the chameleon which, according to classical myth, was believed to live on air, or attributing the refusal of food to humoral imbalance.[4] Like other human deformities, the starving body provided a spectacle which blurred the boundaries between human and animal, natural and supernatural, rendering it a site of scientific and religious speculation, and of popular lore.

Questions of perception and representations are as significant to early modern cases of self-starvation as to our current understanding of eating disorders: they expose the modes by which cultural forces shape the various meanings attributed to the starving body and question the disparity between “the norm” and “the oddity”. The case of Apollonia Schreier, the miraculous maid of Ganz, as reported by the Swiss physician Paul Lentulus in his 1604 treatise on prodigious fasting, is indicative of this disparity.[5]

Apollonia Schreier lived in the small village of Ganz, near Bern. The fame of her fasting spread all over Europe, and in England in 1635, George Hakewill, in an apology of prodigious fasting, described her as a champion of the Protestant faith.[6] Following an illness, Apollonia had begun to feel repulsion for cooked food, eating only dry bread, apples, nuts and a few other fruits. She showed signs of oedema, eating increasingly less despite her parents’

attempts to force her. Apollonia's case rapidly reached notoriety and, in 1602, the Swiss physician, Paulus Lentulus, was asked to investigate her condition, since cases of prolonged fasting attracted great curiosity, drawing people to visit the faster, often bringing gifts. For this reason, civic authorities always called for an investigation to authenticate the wonder. In order to ascertain the authenticity of her fasting, Lentulus had Apollonia removed from her house, and observed continuously for two weeks by townswomen of sound reputation. During this time, no deceptive behaviour was discovered, though Apollonia deeply resented the separation from her mother. Like other miraculous maids, Apollonia's fasting was accompanied by the complete absence of bodily excrements and excretions, and by sleeplessness. A year later, in 1603, Lentulus visited Apollonia again. Now she showed evident signs of emaciation – loss of hair, swelling, and a slower pulse. On this occasion, Lentulus had her portrait drawn and obtained permission for an autopsy in case of her death. Lentulus visited Apollonia a third time, recording her unchanged condition.[7] Apollonia continued to live on, fasting for another ten years, then apparently resumed eating.

The title page of Paulus Lentulus's 1604 treatise also shows the engraved portrait of a reclining figure with the inscription "Vera Effigies Apolloniae Schreyerae" (Figure 1). Lying on a sheet, which half wraps her body, the naked figure of a woman is marked by the inflected curve which demarcates the abdomen. Dark traces suggest the ribs. One of the arms rests along the body, while the other appears from the folds of the sheet to cover one of the breasts; from the sheet, the smooth form of one of the hips is also revealed. The only visible breast is flattened on the chest to accentuate the cavity of the abdomen. This androgen flatness contrasts with a slight roundness of the hip; although the figure is not asexual, Apollonia's body seems ambiguously gendered. The figure produces uneasiness because Apollonia's body cannot be immediately decoded. Wavy hair frames an expressionless profile of the face, contributing to the monumental austerity of the portrait. The rigidity of the pose (even the folds of the sheets seem to open like the halves of a hard shell to reveal Apollonia's body) is reminiscent of a reclining figure on a tomb. Life and death visually merge, reproducing the indecipherable paradox of the possibility of living without food. As spectators, we are invited to look at Apollonia's half-naked body, which lies tilted towards us, as a site of examination and proof of her condition, and also as a strange spectacle. Yet, although we may explore the causes of Apollonia's condition, we cannot penetrate her mystery; she remains distant, her gaze is directed away from the viewer, further distancing the beholder, establishing an unbridgeable gap. The viewer is positioned as the norm, the starving woman an oddity, which, for an early modern viewer, exceeded the human.



Figure 1. The illustration of Apollonia Schreier is reproduced by permission of The British Library from Paulus Lentulus, *Historia Admiranda* 1038/1.2.

Although this portrait bears little resemblance to the glossy photographs of anorexic bodies familiar today, the implications of this representation are no less significant. What is striking about this image is the attention to detail, which, far from conferring realism on the picture, renders it emblematic and enigmatic.

We are not asked to acknowledge the verisimilitude of the portrait, but rather to consider its authenticity, since the picture appears as a visual counterpart to the early modern description of prolonged fasters. Apollonia's portrait stands for a synthesis of the cultural comprehension of the early modern understanding of prolonged fasting, since it matches Lentulus's medical report of her case, as well as the medical reports of other early modern miraculous maids – young women who fasted for prolonged periods of time – all of which contain the same description of the starving body.

Apollonia Schreier's portrait invites us to read the representation of her body as a text. This reading is historically determined and responds to the specific understanding of self-starvation in the Renaissance, when both miraculous and physiological explanations of prolonged fasting coexisted. Early modern reports of prolonged fasting echo religious and scientific controversies concerning the nature of the refusal of food – whether it was due to a supernatural intervention, as Lentulus suggests, or whether it was caused by a physiological imbalance – thus pointing to a broader reinterpretation of ascetic practices, in which religious and medical discourses interweave in redefining liminal behaviours. These accounts merge the medical observation of the starving body with the account of witnesses so that, as Simon Schaffer explains, “the relation between testimony, natural knowledge, deceit and the miracle was negotiated by learned physicians and their communities”.^[8] The faster as an individual with a personal story is not the focus of early modern accounts of self-starvation; instead, the body is a sign to be interpreted and culturally assessed. The case of Apollonia Schreier can thus be seen as exemplary of the early modern perception and representation of *inedia*.

Discussion of Apollonia's case also survives in a French broadsheet dated April 1606.^[9] The broadsheet describes her as a wonder: it reports the stages of her prolonged fasting and the results of Lentulus's investigation, together with a prayer in the form of a ballad, allegedly attributed to Apollonia herself. In it, the young woman laments the misery of her life, which dwindles away consumed by grief whilst her virtue dies and her spirit becomes accustomed to languishing.^[10] Although it is questionable whether Apollonia wrote the ballad – her parents were farmers and there is no indication of her literacy – her prayer, interestingly, stresses the desperation of her condition. The author sketches an image of moral and physical languishing. The ballad merges her physical and psychological states, suggesting that prolonged fasting is an extenuating process which blurs the boundaries between the outside and inside, between self-control, appropriate to religious fasting, and the psychosomatic imbalance due to melancholy – for which the refusal of food was a symptom. The starving body is thus presented as a sign of resistance, torment, isolation and self-consumption.

This is interesting since, in a ballad attributed to another renowned miraculous maid, Eva Fliegen, prolonged fasting is deployed as a sign of the

triumph of virtue over sensual desires and the temptation of sin: “My pure unspotted mind prevailed / according to my will, / And so my life preserved is / by smelling flower”.[11] The discrepancy between the two texts is telling of the antithetical readings of inedia which coexisted in the Renaissance. Both ballads emphasise willpower as crucial to the faster’s behaviour. Yet, whilst Eva’s story seems to draw on late medieval accounts of prolonged fasting, creating an imaginative narrative which juxtaposes vice with virtue, Apollonia’s version suggests a more complex picture in which the religious aspect of prodigious abstinence interweaves with the medical construction of it as a melancholic state. Fasting is seen as a more interiorised condition, which presupposes the faster’s wilfulness as an alternative form of desire. Although the ballad does not reveal the reasons for Apollonia’s fasting, it foreshadows the contradictions inherent in her condition as a distressing and tormented expression of self-definition.

If compared with other accounts of prolonged abstinence, Apollonia’s initial refusal of cooked food seems to mark a rift within her familial environment. Narratives of miraculous maids often show a strong attachment to their mothers; yet, by denying warm food, and with it the symbolic connection that a meal represents between the individual and society, they jeopardise their familial relations. This raises the question of whether miraculous maids were challenging established social roles for women through their fasting. Despite the fact that the refusal of food is an indication of resistance, it is difficult to assess the impact and reasons for prolonged abstinence.

Mothers, and women in general, were usually the principal witnesses and supervisors of miraculous maids’ inedia. In the early modern period, women were responsible for the health of their household through the preparation of food and the administration of medicaments when any member of the household became ill. It is therefore plausible that female relatives and neighbours were the first to observe the refusal of food and try to intervene. If male authorities – magistrates and physicians – monitored and attempted to explain these cases, their notoriety was built by word of mouth within small communities such as that of Ganz. Women, as principal witnesses, are the first to elaborate the narrative of miraculous maids’ accounts, by spreading the news of their fasting, and the wonder of living without food can be seen as a justification in the eyes of the community for the defiance which the refusal of food represented. The families of prolonged fasters, moreover, were sometimes discredited and accused of profiting economically from their daughters’ extraordinary condition – whether of divine or devilish origin. Yet, in both civic and medical accounts of prolonged abstinence, tensions are recognisable between the normality of the environment in which the faster lived and her “wanton and sullen” behaviour – to use the description of a 1597 account.[12] The refusal of food is perceived as socially disruptive, bordering on the

unnatural. It challenges cultural norms and scientific beliefs, rendering the starving body a site of enquiry and curiosity.

With the exception of a few male cases, the self-starved body is almost always a female body. Described as self-contained and visually identified by the inflected curve of the abdomen, as in Apollonia's portrait, these representations of women carry the Renaissance ideal of female self-restraint to extremes, comparable to the way in which anorexics today draw attention to the current desire for female thinness. Cultural attitudes to the female body, past and present, evidently underlie the refusal of food.

Throughout the centuries, woman's role in relation to food and the body has been of central significance, her physical capacity to breastfeed having been extended socially and culturally to include the preparation of meals and nursing the sick and infirm. From nurturer and carer of healthy and sick others, woman's own chaste appearance has also functioned as an outward sign of the propriety and purity of her own household. The control of appetite may thus be regarded as a means to establish further control of physical and emotional desires: to nurture others whilst curtailing their own needs and desires to indulge.[13] However, by refusing food, women also challenge social attitudes, interiorising and literalising some of the cultural tenets (i.e. charity, chastity, control, aesthetic values) which underpin the fashioning of femininity. As Joan Stratton observes of the perception of nineteenth-century cases of anorexia nervosa:

Anorexia nervosa combined the spectacularisation of the body, its context of a developing social preoccupation with the phallicised female body-look, and the day-to-day problems experienced by the bourgeois adolescent girl trying to negotiate familial, social, and personal demands. Amongst other things, the illness plays on the substitution of the desire for food in place of the desire for love. The metaphor which connects the two is, once again, consumption and its complex meanings.[14]

Since the refusal of food is inscribed in the cultural perception of food and the body, both the faster and the observer are engulfed in the meanings attributed to consumption and renunciation as gendered practices. Hence, the figure of the starving male becomes erased, or recast with feminine connotations. Through reports of prolonged fasting, the gendered construction of the starving body in the early modern period renders it ambivalent. To question the early modern notion of starvation, therefore, means to interrogate the friction inherent in the starving body as a cultural product open to alternative interpretations.

Current research on eating disorders helps us to read early modern accounts of prolonged abstinence as part of broader discourses. Equally, reflections on asceticism, in which the refusal of food is one practice, highlight the centrality of such behaviour as a mode of expression embedded in the structure of Western culture.[15] It is possible to investigate prolonged fasting in relation to the cultural system which contains it, in a continuous

renegotiation of practices, meanings and interpretations. The refusal of food appears both to reproduce cultural assumptions about order and, at the same time, to defile them, because of the radicalism which engenders defiance and anxiety. This ambiguity is equally central to the generation and perception of the starving body: the faster, as well as those who attempt to explain her behaviour, are entrapped in what appears as a puzzling product of culture. Yet, in order to explore the significance of the refusal of food in the early modern period, a few considerations are necessary about the validity of such an approach according to current theories on eating disorders. This draws further attention to the changing significance of ascetic practices in Western culture, and highlights the historical context in which early modern attitudes were rooted. The postulation of a transformative, culturally-bound syndrome for eating disorders, and considerations on the historical significance of asceticism, elicit some suggestions for charting the development of the negotiation between self-starvation and its understanding in the early modern period.

Because of the complex aetiology of eating disorders, numerous biomedical, psychological, psychodynamic and psychoanalytical approaches have been developed, which compound historical, ascetic, feminist, evolutionary and socio-economic models, and variously underline the role of cultural and of individual forces.[16] In the late 1950s, anorexia nervosa was recognised as a disorder affecting young upper- or middle-class women in Western capitalist societies. It could thus be regarded as a “culturally-bound syndrome” in a consumerist patriarchal society, a society which emphasises personal achievement, fitness and thinness, in which assumptions about gender and family relations were increasingly questioned. While historical research has examined cases of the refusal of food which preceded Lasague’s and Gull’s late nineteenth-century diagnosis of neurasthenia – commonly regarded as the precursor to anorexia nervosa [17] – studies of non-Western patients have reported cases of anorexia nervosa in eastern Europe, Asia (China and Japan), India and some African countries.[18] By drawing attention to the transcultural nature of self-starvation, these studies have stressed differences in the aetiology of the disorder, as well as the importance of the symbolism of food for the understanding of its symptomatology. They indicate how self-starvation can be differently encoded in cultural models of the body, in religious practices, in expressions of distress, and in the construction of the self. The broader focus of these studies highlights the central issue which informs an examination of early modern accounts of prolonged fasting: the tensions between the faster’s refusal of food, and the perception of her denial. It is therefore important to decode the meanings that self-starvation has for the faster, and to examine the elaboration of medical explanations and popular belief.

The preoccupation with body size and the distortion of the body’s image, considered symptomatic to anorexia nervosa, has, for example, been questioned in both Western and non-Western contexts. It has emerged that the pursuit of

thinness, though valued in the West, is not historically a cause of self-starvation, nor has it appeared in non-Western patients until recently. At the same time, research has shown that fat-phobia is becoming a concern in China as well as India, partially due to increasing processes of Westernisation and urbanisation in these countries, but also to the “imperceptible and yet powerful impact of biomedical diagnostic technology on Asian clinicians’ diagnostic practice”.^[19] Equally, religious renunciation, observed in non-Western cases and in historical accounts, has been suggested as an important factor for some American anorexics, inviting speculations about the relevance of asceticism in the aetiology of anorexia nervosa.^[20] Similar considerations further raise the question of anorexia nervosa as a gender-specific disorder. Though prevalent among women, anorexia nervosa is now also consistently diagnosed in homosexual men – a specification which seems to address cultural predicaments about sexual roles and social relations. As Sing Lee observes:

To the extent that culture and psychopathology are interdependent facets of a socially constructed world, psychiatric theory cannot deny its participation in the epistemology and social trajectory of the anorexic discourse, which articulates personal miseries as much as it does public concern.^[21]

The relativism and the complex understanding of self-starvation proposed by these studies are relevant for a cautious interpretation of early modern reports of prolonged abstinence, and question the religious, medical and popular discourses which constructed the perception of prolonged abstinence. Recognition of all these attitudes is essential for understanding the complexity of the refusal of food and the coexistence of multiple readings. The starving body is perceived as a wonder, a spectacle, and a site of medical enquiries. At the same time, the recognition of an ascetic connotation for prolonged fasting is also important in terms of historical transformations, not least in relation to the early modern interiorisation of fasting, which was viewed more critically after the Reformation.^[22] Asceticism, moreover, draws attention to the centrality of the body, not only as a site of denial, but also of resistance.

Ascetic behaviour can be seen as an attempt at transformation: to create a new subject by divesting the self of its social attributes and reducing it to its psycho-physiological elements.^[23] The challenge to dominant cultural habits that asceticism produces generates alternative behaviours and ways of relating through which the individual develops a new identity.^[24] Self-denial is thus not only a means of bodily mortification but also of enticement in the conscious resistance that asceticism imposes. In this respect, in the first centuries of the Church, fasting became an important form of religious practice and a powerful means of signification.^[25] Through fasting, praying and watching, the monks challenged the boundaries of their bodies, so that mortification was a means for experiencing physicality, rendering it an essential tool of spiritual transformation.^[26] In early Christian communities, however, extreme fasting

was especially important for women, as a sign of chastity and withdrawal from expected social roles. Even more than for men, “the body was for women the space of their physical and spiritual transformations in which the striving for a new life was mirrored in their distinctive behaviour”.^[27]

Although by the twelfth century fasting had shifted into a normative practice, partly reducing its religious significance to a form of social control, in its most extreme enactment it continued to represent an active form of religious piety, together with bodily mortification, illnesses, visions, divine signs, eucharistic devotion, distribution of food and the nursing of the sick. Especially for women, fasting maintained and possibly increased its distinctive importance in altering bodily and social habits in order to gain control of one’s own life.^[28] According to Caroline Walker Bynum, women tended to somatise religious experiences rendering mortification, fasting and nurturing significant expressions of piety, and of elevation rather than rejection of their physicality.^[29]

The alternative lifestyle that asceticism offered to medieval women also represented a negotiation of social roles, since it challenged conventions and familial or religious authorities. Prolonged fasting was strongly opposed as socially disruptive, and hagiographies of medieval fasters testify to their struggles of self-assertion.^[30] In Margaret Miles’s words, “asceticism, then, not only *expresses* desire; but also acts to resist socialisation. ... Asceticism is an alternative to the pleasure of assuming the roles and capabilities established by one’s own society”.^[31] In this respect, from religious fasters to sufferers of eating disorders, food has represented the concrete means and symbolic language for embodying and defying institutionalised social and gender roles, ethics of consumption, and bodily regulations. However, whether we put the emphasis on chastity or thinness, the pursuit of religious piety or self-definition, the challenge to patriarchy or to familial relations, moderation or dieting, the individual’s manipulation of food presents us with the contradiction of a behaviour which both resists and reproduces specific cultural values. As Bynum has observed of medieval mystics, despite their empowerment, they also “clearly internalised the negative value placed on them by the culture in which they lived”.^[32]

Similarly, eating disorders might be a form of social resistance which attempts to negotiate, and yet also to reproduce, the cultural assumptions about diet, gender, religion and social roles which regard the patient as much as the therapist.^[33] Cultural models, hence, interact with the medical and popular presentations of the disorder in portraying a dysfunctional image of femininity and of the female body. This results in an indirect confirmation of family values, sexual roles and notions of health.^[34] As in early modern reports of prolonged fasting, a dichotomy exists between the faster/anorexic’s expression of desire and her cultural reshaping, which tends to contain the disruption implied in the refusal of food in an image of dysfunction. Equally, as Susan Bordo has

observed, the media exploits of the anorexic body as a “side-show” are exposed by juxtaposing the “normality” of the audience to “those on view (“the freaks”). To the degree that the audience may nonetheless recognise themselves in the behaviour or reported experiences of those on stage, they confront themselves as “pathological” or “outside the norm”.[35] This is possible since the stress on health, youth and fitness set against the consumerist trend has rendered slenderness the site of female attractiveness: “Ultimately, the body ... is seen as demonstrating correct or incorrect attitudes toward the demands of normalising”, symbolically containing power and gender tensions.[36] Yet, the anorexic body also challenges this propensity, exceeding the norm of thinness itself. For Bordo, anorexics tend to experience hunger as feminine, identifying it with the need for assurance, affection and the tendency of being too openly emotional, commonly recognised in women.[37] Hence, self-starvation is a strategy to control the cultural negativity of femininity which the anorexic experiences as an acquisition of freedom and self-empowerment.

Whether we accept Bordo’s thesis, or leave open the question of the starver’s experience of her refusal of food as both specific and historically determined in time, the complexities and contradictions that current understandings of anorexia nervosa present seem, nonetheless, intrinsic to the cultural perception of the refusal of food. Today, as in the early modern period, the starving body attracts curiosity and is the focus of a spectacle in which the definition of normality is at stake. In particular, prolonged abstinence juxtaposes culturally accepted notions of order and correctness to the faster’s resistance to normalise by exceeding these same notions of order and correctness. What may still be relevant to our assessing of eating disorders are the cultural dynamics involved in the cultural definition/s of the starving body.

Early modern reports draw attention to the need to police a condition at the borderline of the natural or acceptable, one which was liable to conflicting interpretations. What becomes of paramount importance in early modern accounts is not so much the denial of food, or the reasons for this behaviour, but the possibility of perceiving and authenticating the act of rejection. This implies a cultural re-elaboration of the bewilderment generated by self-starvation into a coherent narrative. This narrative, as the story of Apollonia Schreier suggests, is meant to disavow the challenge generated by the refusal of food within the faster’s family and the community at large, and to appropriate the faster’s body by redefining it culturally.

If we can suppose that the body was, for miraculous maids, as for earlier and later starvers, the site of their resistance and self-definition, the portrait of Apollonia shows us the cultural perception of the starving body. It represents the questions, fears and expectations surrounding the starving body. Whilst the monumental rigidity of the engraving suggests the religious insight which prolonged fasting can stand for, the central focus of the representation is her abdominal area: a cavity touching the spine. The gendering of inedia, and also

the resistance expressed through the refusal of food, are encompassed in the visual assimilation of the stomach and womb in the image of an inflected abdomen as a statement of women's physiological inferiority, but also a puzzling enactment of willpower, even a challenging attempt at self-fashioning. In fact, although we cannot any longer read Apollonia's inedia, or that of other early modern miraculous maids, as merely an expression of mysticism, the manipulation of food and the disruption of her behaviour may represent a form of resistance, and possibly an attempt at self-definition.

Apollonia's body thus reproduces the concerns of surviving without food, displaying an image able to encompass the diversified readings of prolonged fasting. It states the cultural content which iconographically reproduces the body that medical and non-medical reports delineated for prolonged fasters. It replicates the cultural predicaments which persisted throughout the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries regarding the understandings, and consequently, the narratives of inedia within a tradition of hagiographies and writings about unnatural forms of eating. This further alerts us to the implications of cultural forces in our own perception and diagnosis of eating disorders.

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Notes

- [1] J. Stratton (1996) *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 145.
- [2] See P. Semonin (1996) "Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England", in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. R. Garland Thompson (New York: New York University Press), pp. 69-81.
- [3] Occasionally fasters also exhibited themselves publicly. The Dutch surgeon Fabricius Hildanus reports the case of Veitken Johan, who exhibited herself in an inn in Cologne. F. Hildanus (1652) *Wund Arzey* (Frankfurt), observation XL, sig. r1v-r2r.
- [4] Simone Portio (1551) *De puella germanica, quae fere biennium vixerat sine cibo, potuque* (Florence). Fortunius Licetus, in a treatise on prolonged fasting, extensively deals with the different explanations attempted for this condition. Fortunius Licetus (1612) *De his, qui diu vivunt sine alimento* (Padua), II, 19, 31.
- [5] P. Lentulus (1604) *Historia Admiranda de Prodigiosa Apolloniae Schreirae, Virginis in Argo Bernensi* (Bern).
- [6] G. Hakewill (1635) *An Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God* (London), book iv, ch. 7, sec. 9, sig. Oo4.r.-Oo5.v.
- [7] Lentulus, *Historia Admiranda*, sig. a1.r.- c5.r.

- [8] S. Shaffer (1996) "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence" in *Religio Medici: Medicine and Religion in Seventeenth Century England*, ed. O.P. Grell & A. Cunningham (Aldershot: Scholar Press), pp. 171-203 (p. 172).
- [9] Anonymous (Avril 1606) *Portrait au Naturel d'Apollonie Schreiere Agée de XXII. Ans, Vivant depuis Cinq Ans sans Boire ni Manger* (Paris). The broadsheet also contains an engraving of Apollonia lying on a bed next to which stand her parents, a physician and a magistrate. Her body is equally marked by the introflected curve of the abdomen.
- [10] "Ma vie en douleur se consume / Ma vertue dechet grandement / Mon ame a languir s'accostume", *Ibid.*, stanza III.
- [11] Andrew Clark (Ed.) (1907) *The Shirburn Ballads 1585-1616* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), ballad X, 54-59, stanza 5, 56.
- [12] B. Powell (1597) *The True and More Admirable newes, expressing the miraculous preservation of a young Maiden of the towne of Gabblich in the Dukedome of Gulishe* (London), sig. b1.v.
- [13] Male bulimics, for example, "tend to binge at mealtime and in public places, whereas women almost always eat minimally at meals and gorge later, in private. Even in our disorders (or perhaps especially in our disorders) we follow the gender rules" (S. Bordo, "Hunger as Ideology", in S. Bordo, *The Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993], pp. 99-134, 128-129).
- [14] Stratton, *The Desirable Body*, p. 157.
- [15] See M.G. Wilker & L.B. Cole (Eds) (1994) *The Good Body: Asceticism in Contemporary Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press).
- [16] See J.J. Brumberg (1988) *Fasting Girls: The Emergency of Anorexia Nervosa as a Modern Disease* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press); M. Muesen (1993) *Anorexic Bodies: A Feminist and Sociological Perspective on Anorexia Nervosa* (London: Routledge).
- [17] W. Gull (1873) Clinical Society of London, Friday, October 24th 1873. "Anorexia Hysterica (apepsia hysterica)", *British Medical Journal*, 2, pp. 527-529; C. Lasègue (1873) "De l'anorexie hystérique", *Archives générales de médecine*, 21, pp. 385-403.
- [18] S. Lee (1995) "Self-starvation in Context: Toward a Culturally Sensitive Understanding of Anorexia Nervosa", *Social Science and Medicine*, 41, pp. 25-36; S. Lee (1986) "Reconsidering the Status of Anorexia Nervosa as a Western Culture-bound Syndrome", *Social Science and Medicine*, 42, pp. 21-34.
- [19] Lee, "Reconsidering the Status of Anorexia Nervosa as a Western Culture-Bound Syndrome", p. 25. Referring to research on Indian groups, the author remarks that "the view that slimness was not a requisite for beauty in the Indian culture was an oversimplification, and stressed that some of their anorectic patients demonstrated fat phobia" (p. 23).
- [20] C.G. Banks (1992) "'Culture' in Culture-bound Syndromes: The Case of Anorexia Nervosa", *Social Science and Medicine*, 34, pp. 867-884.

- [21] Lee, "Reconsidering the Status of Anorexia Nervosa as a Western Culture-bound Syndrome", p. 29; see also H. Steiner (1993) "Anorexia Nervosa: Is It the Syndrome or the Theorist that is Culture and Gender-bound", *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 30, pp. 347-357.
- [22] Shaffer, "Piety, Physic and Prodigious Abstinence", pp. 171-203.
- [23] B. Molina (1995) "Pain, Power, and Personhood: Ascetic Behaviour in the Ancient Mediterranean", in *Asceticism*, ed. V.L. Wimbush & R. Valentatis (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 162-177 (p. 163).
- [24] R. Valentatis (1995) "A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism", in *Asceticism*, ed. V.L. Wimbush & R. Valentatis, pp. 544-552. Valentatis explains asceticism "as performances designed to inaugurate an alternative culture, to enable different social relations, and to create a new identity" through the "patterning of behaviours" (pp. 548-549).
- [25] P. Brown (1990) *The Body and Society: Men, Women and the Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 219.
- [26] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
- [27] *Ibid.*, pp. 235-240 (p. 238).
- [28] D. Weinstein & R. Bell (1982) *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), pp. 226-233.
- [29] C. Walker Bynum (1987) *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food in Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 289.
- [30] *Ibid.*, pp. 279-281.
- [31] M.R. Miles (1994) "Textual Harassment: Desire and the Female Body", in *The Good Body*, ed. M.G. Wilker & L.B. Cole, pp. 49-63 (p. 51).
- [32] Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp. 235-236. See also W.M. Davies (1985) "Epilogue", in Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 180-190 (p. 185).
- [33] S. Bordo (1990) "Reading the Slender Body", in *Body/ Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, ed. M. Jacobus, E.F. Keller & S. Shuttleworth (New York: Routledge), pp. 83-112. Bordo argues that the slender body can be both a sign of women's liberation from "domestic, reproductive destiny" and of male anxieties on the containment of female desire (p. 103). See also Susie Orbach, "Feeding Frenzy", *The Guardian*, 29 March 1997, p. 10. The article was occasioned by a legal injunction of force-feeding for an anorexic patient.
- [34] Elspeth Probyn (1988) "The Anorexic Body", in *Body Invaders: Sexuality and the Post-modern Condition*, ed. Arthur & Marilouise Kroker (Basingstoke: Macmillan), pp. 201-211 (p. 204).
- [35] Bordo, "Reading the Slender Body", p. 85.
- [36] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- [37] S. Bordo (1992) "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture", in *Cooking, Eating, Thinking: Transformative Philosophies of Food*, ed. D. Curtis & L. Heldke (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), pp. 28-55.